


# How Customer Review “Conversations” Strengthen **Buyer Intent for Software and Service Providers**





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Harvard Business Review

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## Introduction

In enterprise software and services, identifying and capturing buyer intent has never been more important. Even with access to big data and analytics, marketers often struggle to tap into buyer interest and leverage into a sale. As Harvard Business Review observed: “Buying complex solutions, such as enterprise software or manufacturing equipment, has never been easy. But with a wealth of data on any solution, a raft of stakeholders involved in each purchase, and an ever-expanding array of options, more and more deals bog down or even halt altogether.”<sup>1</sup> Given the complicated nature of B2B solution purchases, it’s important to maintain the strength of buyer intent throughout the process, and to engage in customer conversations to gain feedback and improve user experience.

For such conversations to occur, platforms and tools must give providers direct access to buyers with strong intent, as well as to their current customers. One of the most effective forums is a review site, where providers, users, and buyers can engage in dialogue about products and services. By interacting with reviews, both positive and negative, providers can both identify prospects and discover buyer intent, as well as foster loyalty among current customers.

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Toman, Brent Adamson, and Cristina Gomez, “The New Sales Imperative,” Harvard Business Review, March–April, 2017.

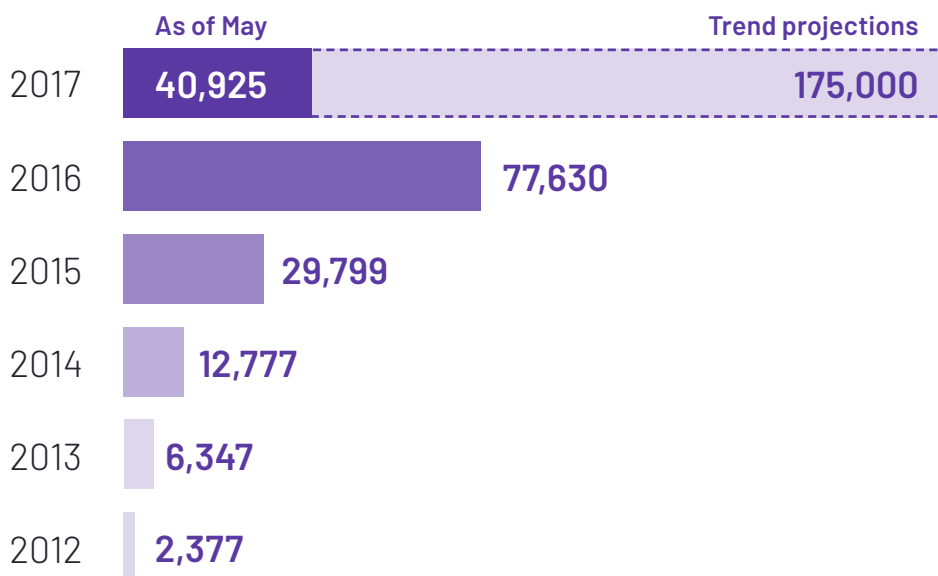
# The Buying Challenge

To capture buyer intent, providers must understand the complexity of the buying challenge. Buying enterprise software and other complex solutions is a decision to spend tens of thousands of dollars or more, which can overwhelm users, causing them to delay the process. An uninformed buying decision can be an expensive mistake. Not only is money wasted on a solution that does not fully address the customer's needs, but productivity can be impeded because the team (e.g., sales or customer support) still does not have the right solution. Having to then continue the search for an enterprise solution increases the expense and leads to heightened apprehension about potentially making another mistake.

As the purchase decision is delayed, there is a chance that buyer intent could diminish. Or else, the process could become overly complicated with too many people—as to relieve any one individual of consequences should the software or solution not work out. As Harvard Business Review noted, the number of people involved in B2B solutions purchases has climbed from an average of 5.4 two years ago to 6.8 today, and these stakeholders come from a lengthening roster of roles, functions, and geographies. The resulting divergence in personal and organizational priorities, it added, makes it difficult for buying groups to agree to anything more than “move cautiously,” “avoid risk,” and “save money.”<sup>2</sup>

In enterprise software and solutions, well-informed users are more likely to make a purchase. For the provider, that means offering education that goes beyond a sales pitch, which simply highlights the product's features or discusses how a provider differentiates itself from its competitors. Revealing buyer intent often requires targeted content about the overall product/service category in general, and engagement by the providers with customers reviews to establish a dialogue.

## Number of Reviews By Year



<sup>2</sup> N. Toman, B. Adamson & C. Gomex. (March-April 2017). The New Sales Imperative. Harvard Business Review.



# Customer Reviews as a Dialogue Tool

Today, customer reviews serve as more than just a scoring system to rank similar products and services; they also are a necessary tool for customer engagement and product improvement. Both positive and negative reviews provide insight into an array of customer experiences, which helps educate others as they engage in the purchasing decision. Even negative reviews about what a particular software or solution doesn't do well can be informative, such as pointing out common misconceptions about how a product works or what it's intended to do, or even informing the providers of potential areas of improvement.



Software providers, like other B2B and B2C companies, may offer customer reviews and testimonials on their sites. Unfortunately, there may be no guarantee that customer comments are, in fact, from customers; nor is there assurance that all reviews (both positive and negative) are posted. Objectivity is enhanced when feedback and commentary are found on a third-party platform.

Authenticated user reviews on G2 amplify the voice of the customer, whether users are praising a product or solution, or sharing their perspective about a problem they encountered. These comments educate other users and prospective buyers who are engaged in “comparison shopping” between two or more products. For providers, reviews yield invaluable marketplace feedback that affirms the unique features of their offerings, as well as the need to address user difficulties and fix bugs. Many providers find helpful feedback in review commentary about the desire for new features.

To make the most of this feedback, it is vital for providers to reply to user reviews. This creates a customer dialogue that engages prospective buyers with strong intent, educates users, and establishes the providers' reputation for being interactive and transparent. However, out of sample of 174,100 reviews on G2's review pages, only 7,438 of reviews have comments, amounting to about 4.2 percent. This lack of provider responses to customer reviews stresses a missed opportunity to engage in dialogue that will identify buyers with strong intent.



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## Conclusion

In the quest for identifying and capitalizing on buyer intent, customer reviews are readily available resource to providers—mostly untapped. With greater engagement through replies and comments, providers can forge a connection with current and prospective customers that strengthens interest into intent, and intent into a purchasing decision.



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