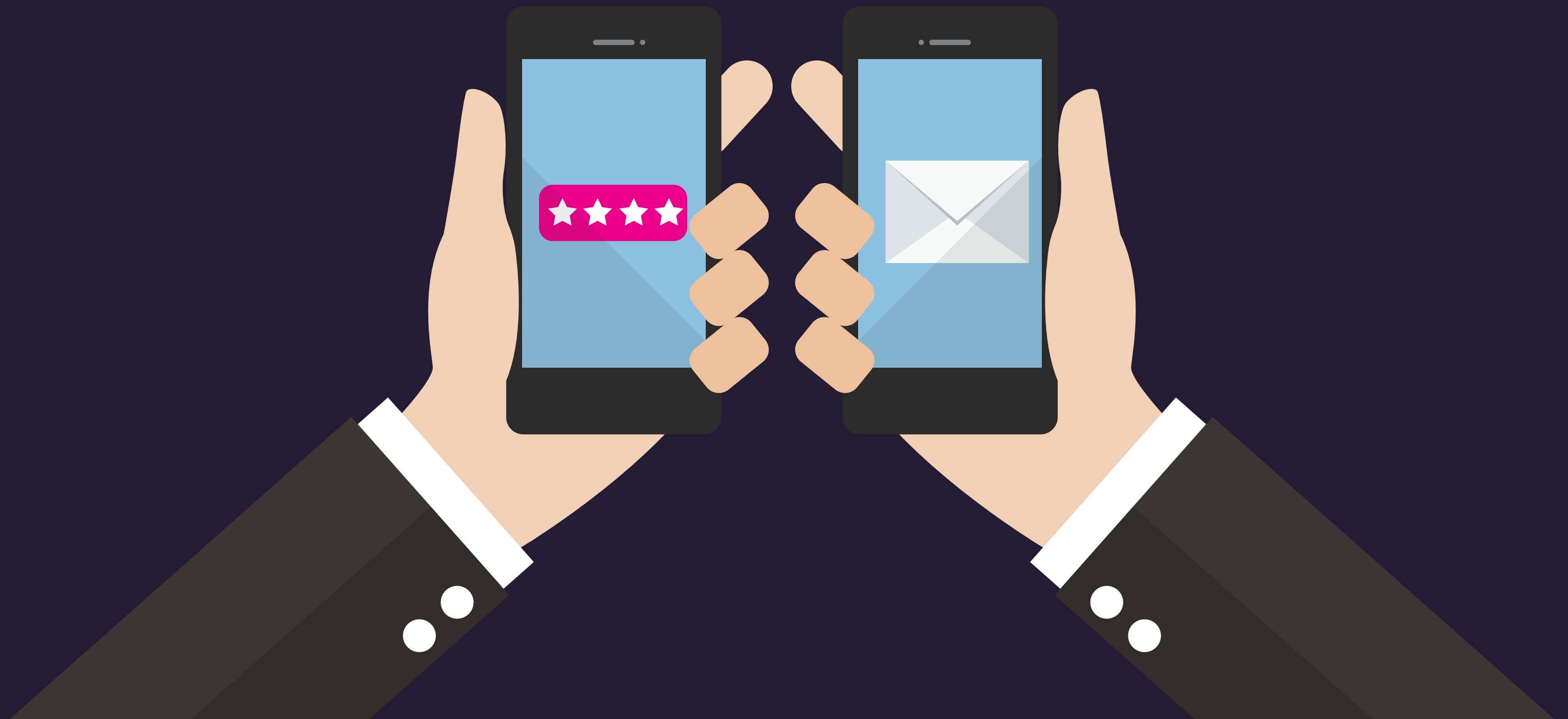


**BEST PRACTICE GUIDE**



# UGC and email: the perfect pairing



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# 01 Introduction

Building and nurturing a relationship of trust with your customers is super important. In terms of retention, 53% of customers rank 'trusting the brand' as the second most crucial factor when deciding to buy from a new brand. Trust is a key factor for customer loyalty too, with 75% of people saying they will shop again with a brand they trust, even if it's not the cheapest option. Trust is also a precursor for brand advocacy as 78% of customers say they'll likely share, repost, or recommend a brand they trust, and even defend it against criticism.

**Once you've earned your customers' trust, you've most likely earned their custom, and their loyalty too.**

Trust is earned in a few different ways, and in terms of your email content, user-generated content (UGC) is the star of the show. UGC, is a super authentic form of advertising.

In essence it is content that your customers create themselves, which promotes your brand's product. Brands can then utilize this content, sharing it to their audience, to create a campaign that feels legitimate. It's real customers demonstrating to potential customers, the benefits of your product. Think of it as 'straight from the horses mouth'. This is a similar psychology to influencer marketing, but even more authentic. Consumers like to see people like them enjoying a product, it's less polished, and therefore it feels genuine.

**Let's explore different types of UGC, and how you can use it to make your email marketing campaigns more successful.**





## 02 UGC and social proof

Ever ummed and ahed over which restaurant to choose, before opting for the one with the most people dining inside?

Whether you were aware of it or not, you made your decision based on social proof: the psychological circumstance in which we all reference the behaviors of others, in order to guide our own decision-making. In the past, it's motivated social change, fueled mass brand boycotts, and made lives easier for many indecisive diners. And now companies are able to leverage social proof, in the form of user-generated content (UGC), to bolster their digital marketing messages. It makes total sense.

Social proof is not a newfound phenomenon, but the opportunities for consumers to both access and create UGC have exploded in the digital age. From personal blogs, to independent online review communities, and now largely social media, it's never been easier for a customer to get the lowdown on a product or service before they make a purchase.



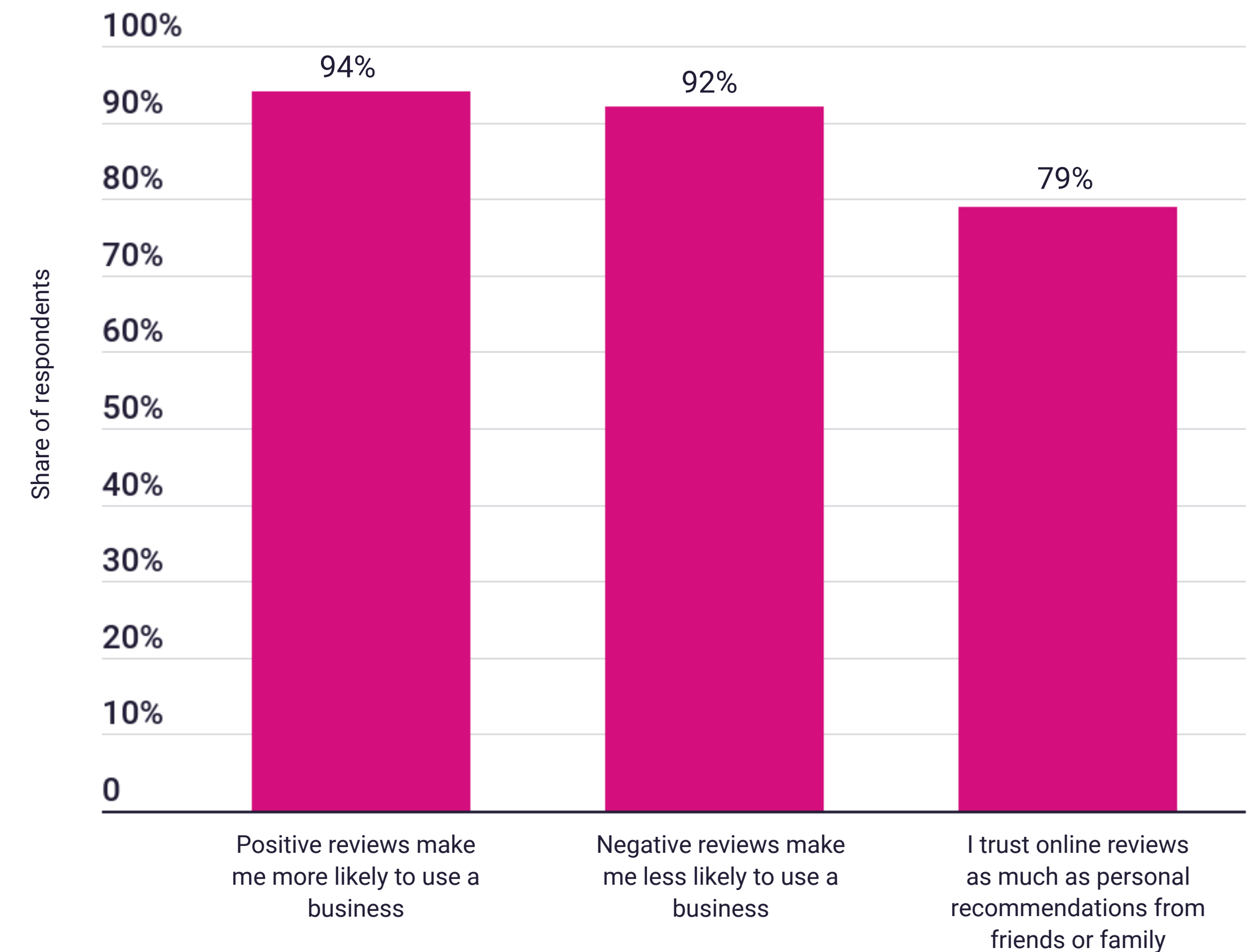
Online reviews fall under UGC, reviews are something we know to be an incredibly important factor in consumers' decision making. In a study about online customer reviews it was proven that positive reviews are incredibly valuable to brands, whilst negative reviews are equally damaging.

As the spotlight of scrutiny sharpens on brands who fail to deliver on customer experience (CX), it's more important than ever to recruit brand ambassadors that consumers can trust. With many customers now turning to social media for product inspiration, recommendations, and reviews, harnessing this content for your own marketing is a great initiative.

A positive review from a satisfied customer provides scalable, low cost, evergreen content to bolster your campaigns and trumpet your successes. In terms of what makes a customer recommend your product, our recent [report](#) found that 41% of customers say they'll recommend a brand to friends and family if "products/services are good value for money".

Reviews and referrals have always been a staple in business, and UGC is the modern equivalent to word of mouth recommendations.

How do online customer reviews affect your opinion of a local business?



**Source**  
BrightLocal  
Statista 2022

**Additional Information:**  
United States; December 2020; 1,013 respondents

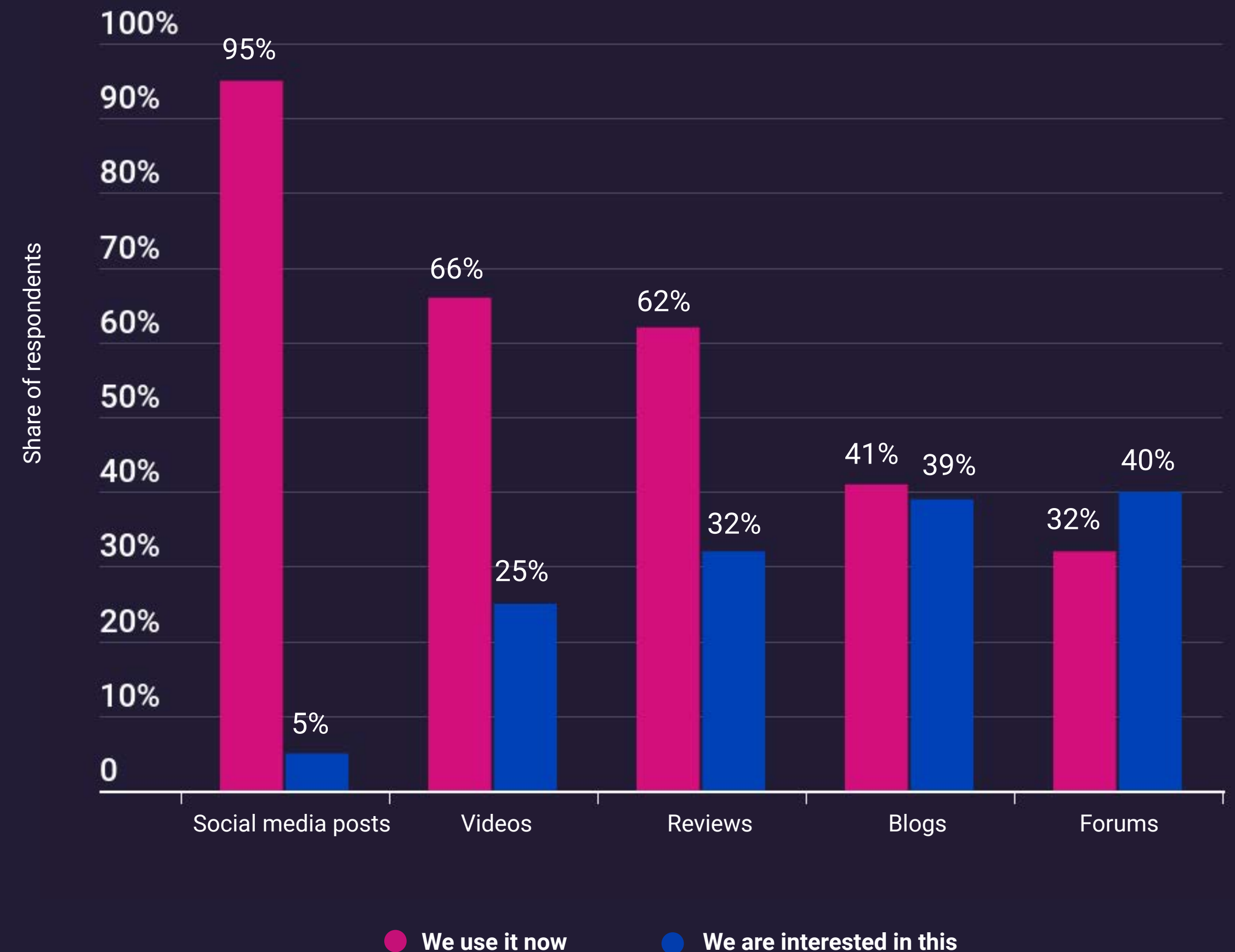
## 03 What is UGC, and how can you collect it?

UGC is any form of content created by one of your consumers or end-users. It's intended for the public domain, and is a great free asset for your brand. Some typical examples of UGC might include:

- Social media posts
- Blogs and vlogs
- Discussion forum posts
- Product reviews
- Images of your products taken by customers
- Podcasts

During a 2020 survey carried out among leaders of largest ecommerce retailers in Europe, 95 percent of respondents stated they were already using social media posts as part of their content strategy and five percent said they were interested in that.

Types of user-generated content (UGC) used in marketing according to e-commerce retailers in Europe in 2020



**Source**  
WBR Insights; Yotpo  
Statista 2021

**Additional Information:**  
Europe; WBR Insights; Yotpo; early 2020; 100 respondents;  
among leaders of largest ecommerce retailers



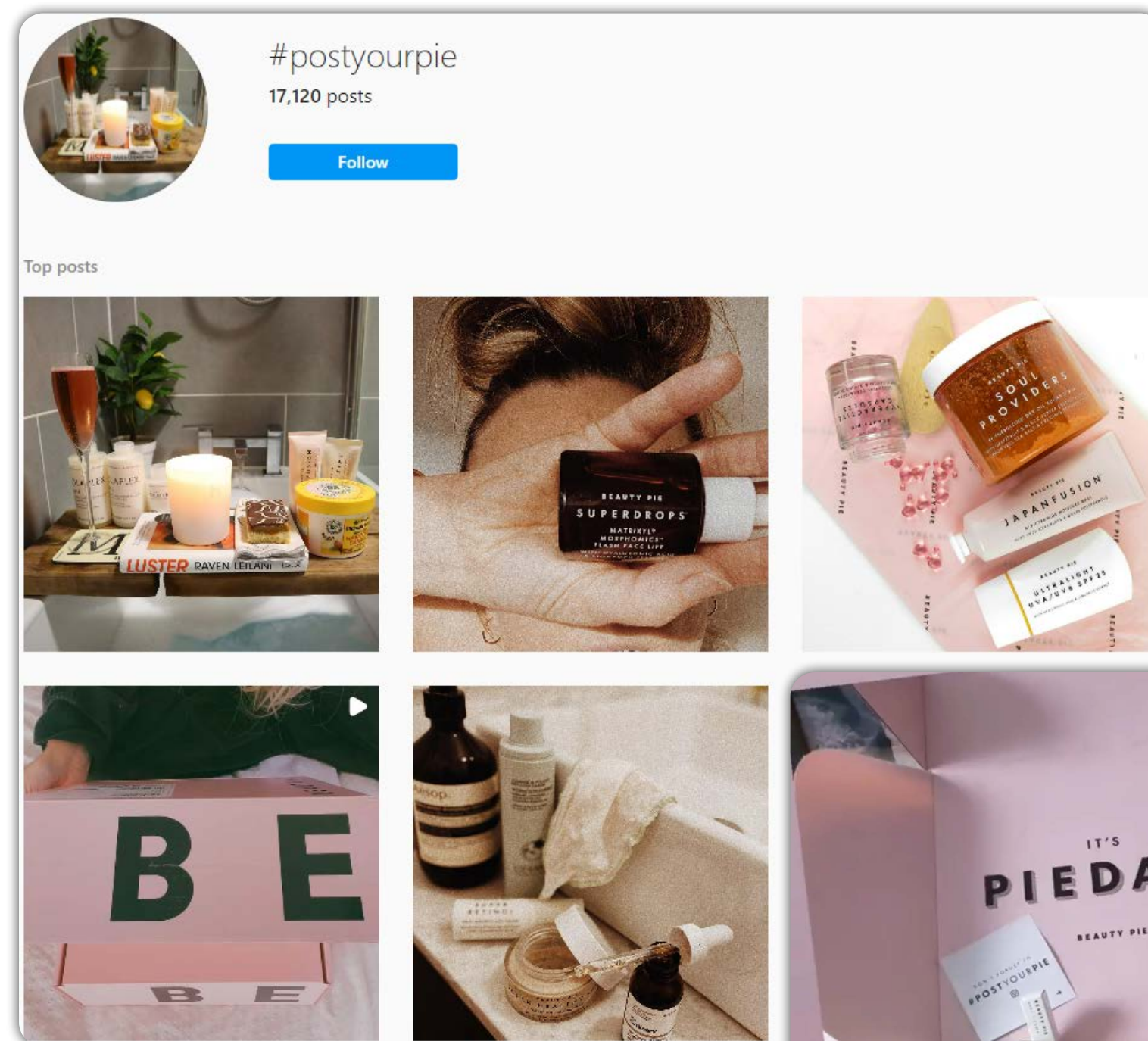
It's important to note that this is not a definitive list of UGC. All businesses are different, and your company's particular makeup may provide alternative instances of customer-created content which you can use to build brand advocacy. Keep an open mind and keep on the lookout for opportunities to engage users across all of your channels.

The authentic nature of UGC makes it a unique tool for you to use. Trust building with your customers is one of the most important things you can do. UGC naturally builds trust, as this content is coming from customers themselves, there's no hidden agenda, and the content feels genuine.

If this is something new to your brand, you may be unsure of your customers appetite for creating and sharing UGC. Our recent [report](#) found that respondents visited and/or engaged with the brands they're subscribed to on social media more frequently than they visited the brand's website, with 31% selecting doing so every day and 57% doing so at least once a week. This indicates that many brands' customers are active on social media, so with a little encouragement, you could soon find your groove.







Beauty brand Beauty Pie do a great job at generating UGC. Including a post-it note in all packages reminding customers to #PostYourPie means the brand is regularly getting a stream of UGC from their followers on Instagram. When searching the hashtag on Instagram, there are over seventeen thousand posts, with a following of just over three hundred thousand people, this is a UGC rate of 5.2% - not bad, and this isn't including Instagram story shares of which there are plenty. You may be surprised by the quality of the UGC your customers create too, with smart phone camera improvements over recent years, and most people being social media savvy, you can get some great content in this way - and it won't cost you a penny.



## Here are some ways you can collect organic UGC to use in your email marketing:

### **Run email and social competitions to reward customers for creating content.**

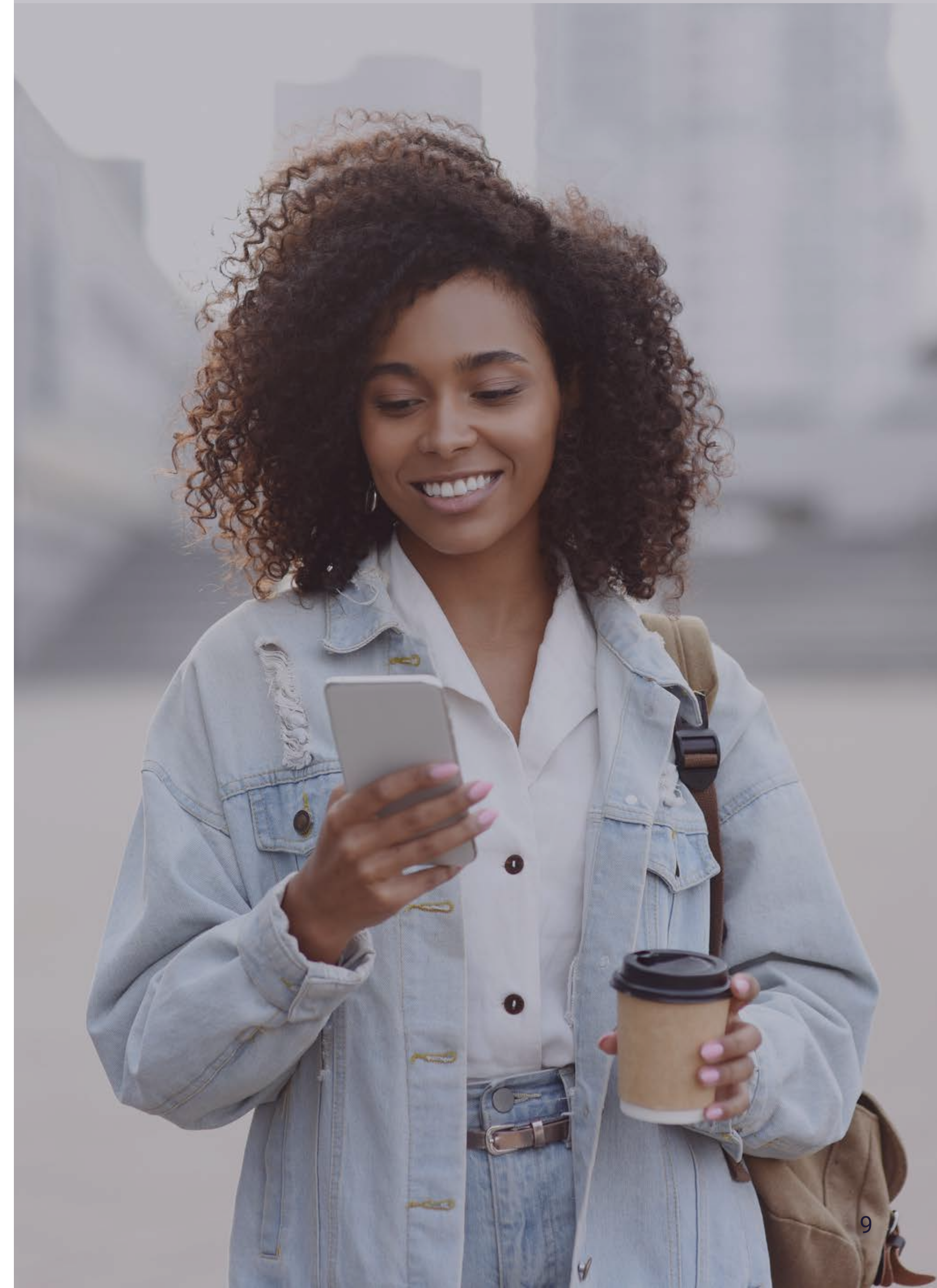
Encourage your customers to share UGC content. Some people will create content simply because they enjoy it, others because they will enjoy being reposted by your brand, and others will need more of an incentive. Running a competition can help encourage those who would otherwise stay quiet. An example could be a fashion ecommerce site asking customers to post pictures in their new clothes on social media, and in return five lucky winners will receive a voucher.

### **Encourage the use of dedicated hashtags across channels so that you can collate any UGC.**

Having a hashtag is a great way to keep your UGC organized, social media can be a busy place after all. Having a clear brand-identifiable hashtag will make it easier for customers to share their content and will also help prospective customers locate the most recent content. If you're a global brand, remember to ensure that all hashtags are internationally translatable.

### **Provide platforms for customers to share stories around their experiences with your brand and service.**

Make it easy for your customers to share their content with you. Not everyone is on social media, so don't cut out a lot of your potential content. This could be a message-board on your ecommerce store, a landing page with a form that's dedicated to collecting customers' feedback, or a specific email address for people to send their content to.

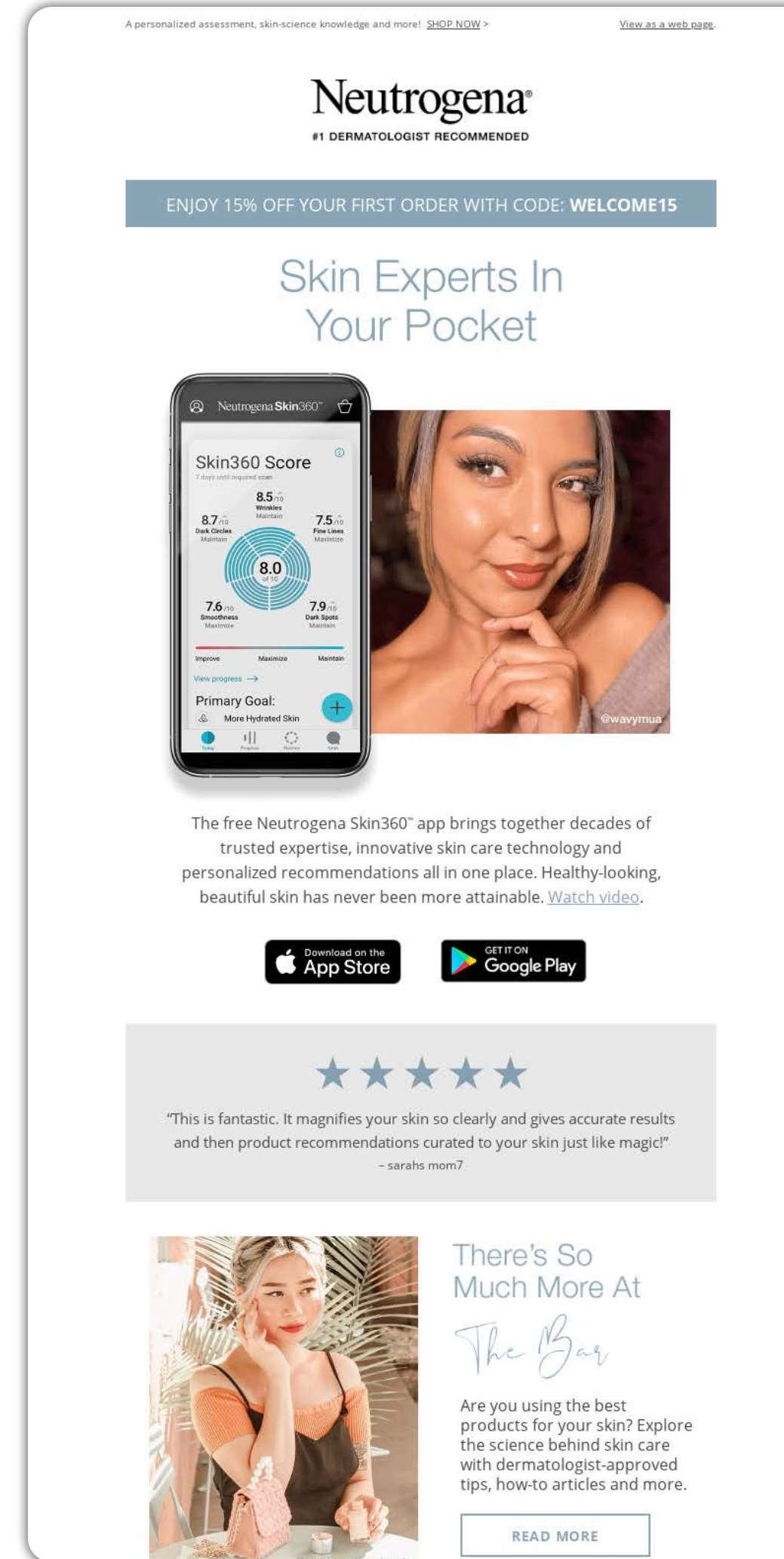




## 04 Nominate email to deliver your UGC strategy

Email is consistently proven as the number one brand communication channel for customers and marketers alike. Utilize it to unlock the ROI potential with UGC by creating personalized, targeted campaigns that build brand reputation, and drive sales.

Providing customers with a handpicked selection of review content straight to their inbox, you can tailor their social proof experience. We've put together a list of UGC email marketing examples to give you some inspiration:

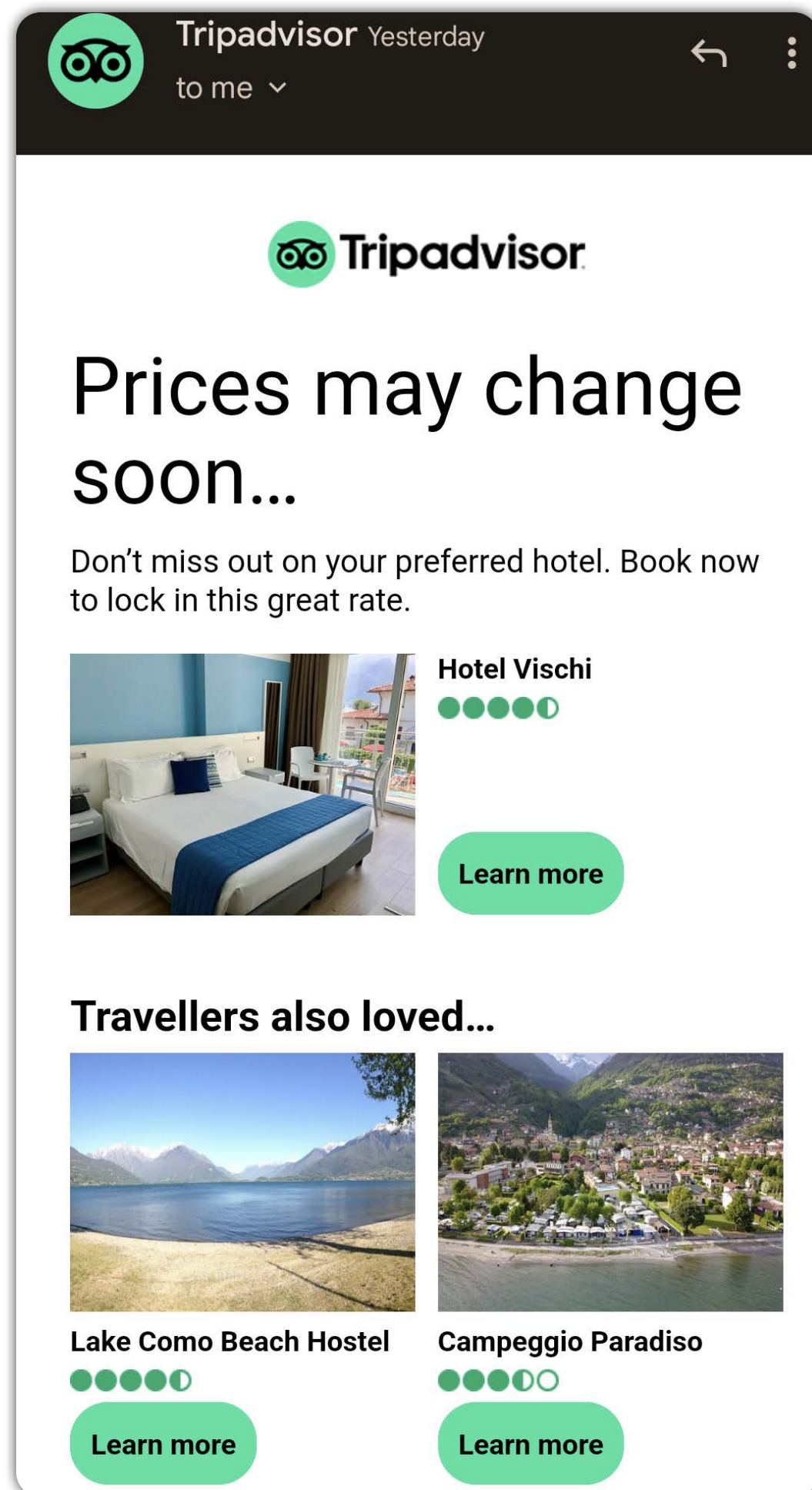


### Welcome series

You can utilize UGC right from the beginning. Including it in your welcome series will provide instant reassurance and authenticity to your brand story. As humans, we are naturally drawn to experiences where we see other like-minded people. Using some UGC content such as an Instagram image and caption from a happy customer, will add some authenticity to your campaign, and give customers an insight into what they can expect from your brand.

In this welcome email from Neutrogena they include a customer review to demonstrate to new customers that the products are loved by their customers. They also utilize an Instagram image from a customer in the campaign, this helps build the sense of community and demonstrates the product in-situ, which also functions as social proof.

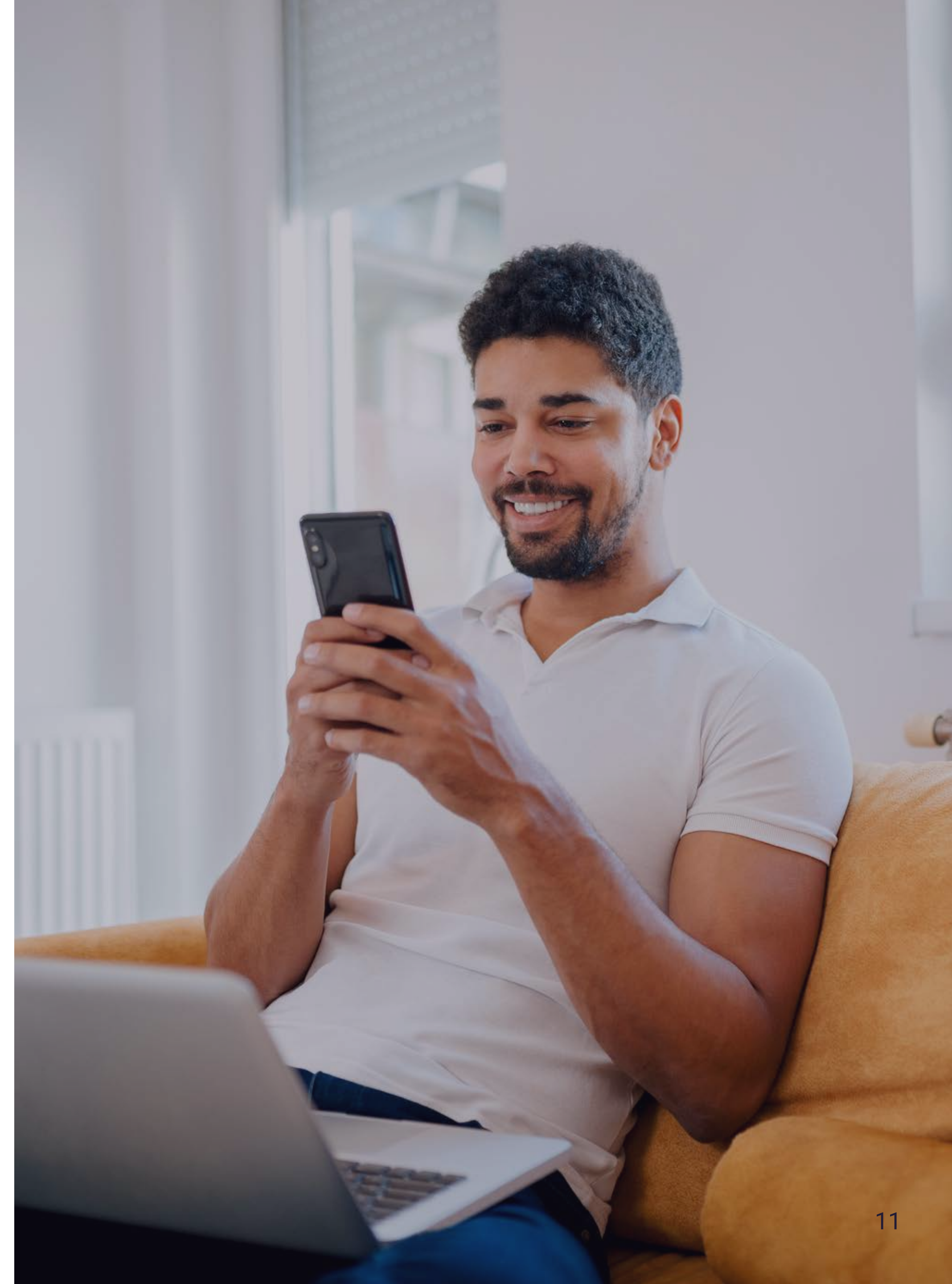




## Abandoned bag and browse

UGC is equally powerful when used in abandoned browse and abandoned cart automation programs. UGC acts as social proof, subconsciously or consciously confirming to people that the product is genuine and worth purchasing. Couple this with the fact that email allows you to personalize your communications to the individual, if you have a lot of UGC available to choose from, you can show customers social proof relating to the exact product or service they have shown interest in, and nurture them into a conversion.

This abandoned browse email from Tripadvisor creates urgency, and it includes customer review ratings to add a UGC element of social proof, to encourage the reader to book. The campaign also includes recommendations based on similar customers' behavior which is another way of using social proof to encourage a conversion.









# ELEMIS

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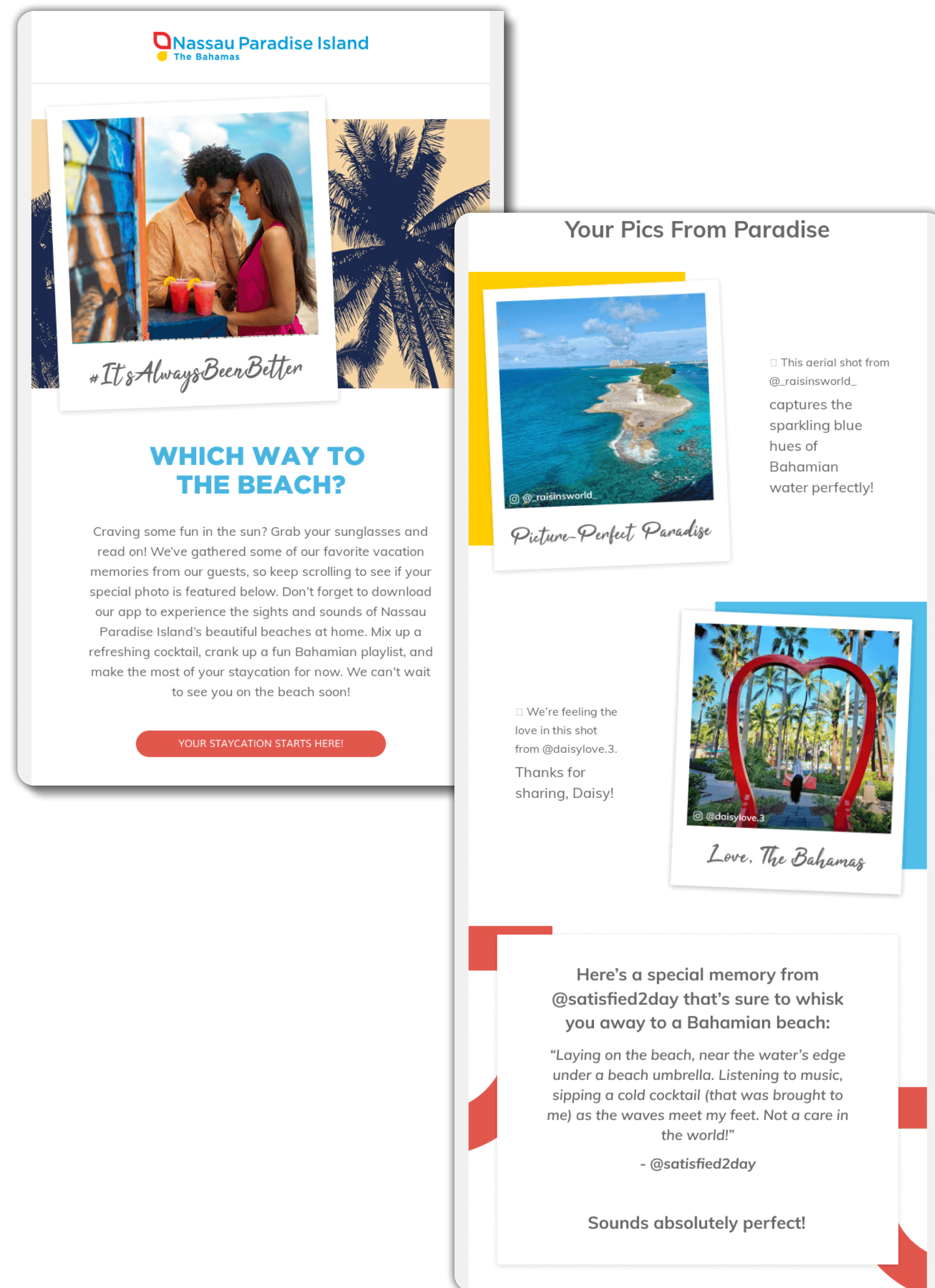
Pro-Collagen Marine Cream  
£80.00  
[SHOP NOW >](#)

## Product reviews

Reinforce your salability by teaming product-focused emails with relevant reviews. Team a photo of the item with a well-placed, positive comment left on your website by a satisfied customer.

As seen in this email content block from the British skincare brand, ELEMIS. This email is part of the company's best-seller marketing series, and we love the way UGC is used to corroborate the product's industry accolades. The chosen review packs a multiple punch: it emphasizes the CTA, puts a personal name to a recommendation that the recipient can trust, and highlights a unique bonus feature of the product.



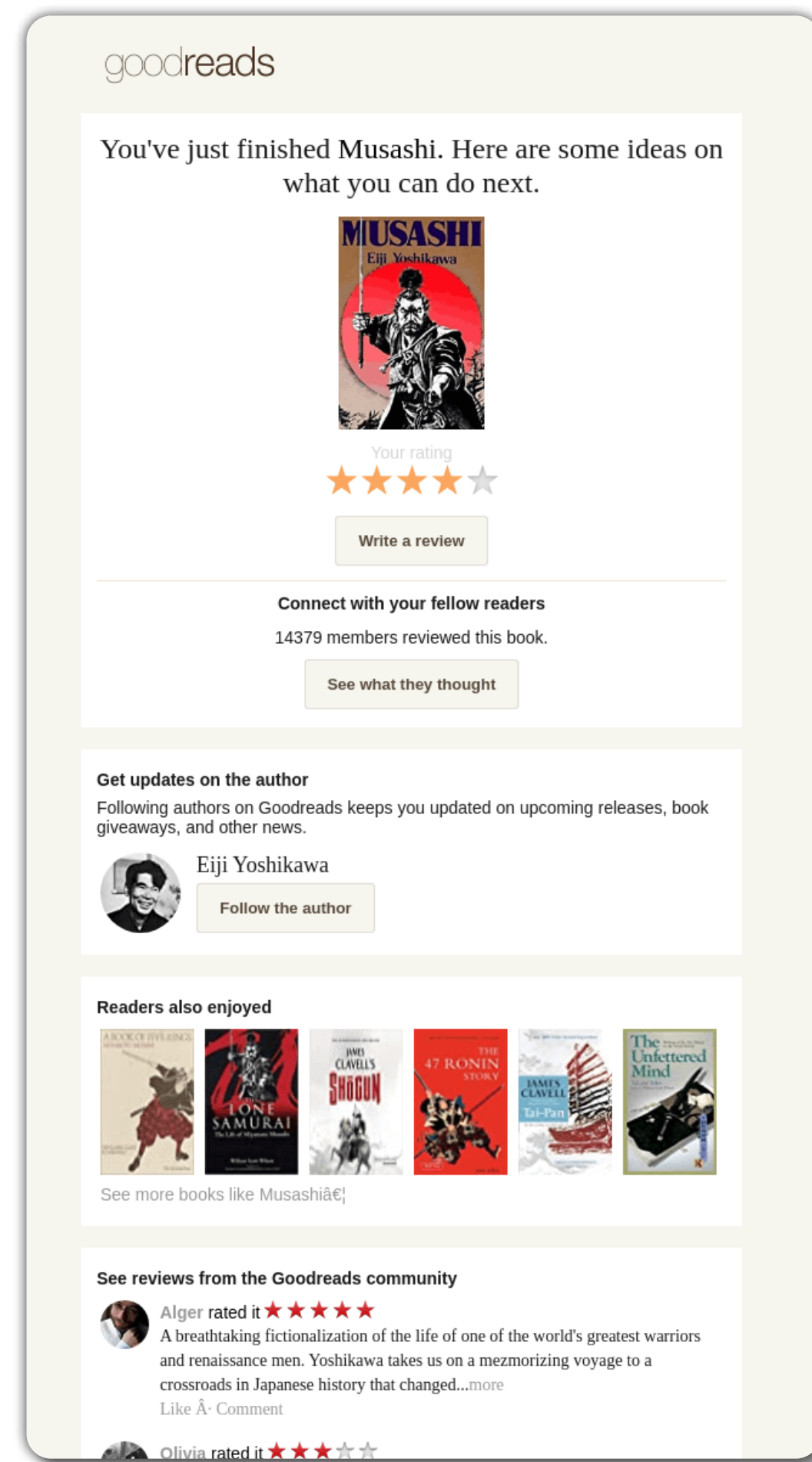


## UGC creative campaigns

Building email campaigns based entirely around UGC is a great way to shake up the inbox status quo and give customers a break from offer-driven marketing. Think about how you can build this kind of content into your brand's messaging style. A B2B business or charity could benefit from imparting personal narratives such as 'Hear Dan's story', to drive brand loyalty. In ecommerce you can connect customers and push sales by using UGC to build a sense of community. A campaign based around 'Products you and our customers love' encourages social proof and simultaneously drives a sense of kinship between your customer base. Powerful stuff.

This campaign from Nassau Paradise Island uses travelers' pictures to bring the campaign, and the product, to life. They also include their Instagram handles in the image, which could encourage others to also share their images in the hope of being featured.





## “Smart UGC”

Here’s where you can get flashy. If you’re building up profiles of your customer base from buying and web behavior, you can use data on individuals’ interests to target them with super-relevant UGC. This isn’t as tricky as it sounds – all kinds of data elements can be used to better target your customer base, from purchase category to geographical region: ‘Hey Dan, here’s what other people in your area thought about your item’.

Goodreads demonstrate this in an email triggered when a user has finished a book, by recommending books similar readers enjoyed. The campaign also includes customer reviews, adding in this UGC to build the community feel and social proof. By using data in this way, to benefit the customer, you’re demonstrating a value exchange, the user is getting personalized recommendations in exchange for sharing their data. This is another great way to build trust with your audience.



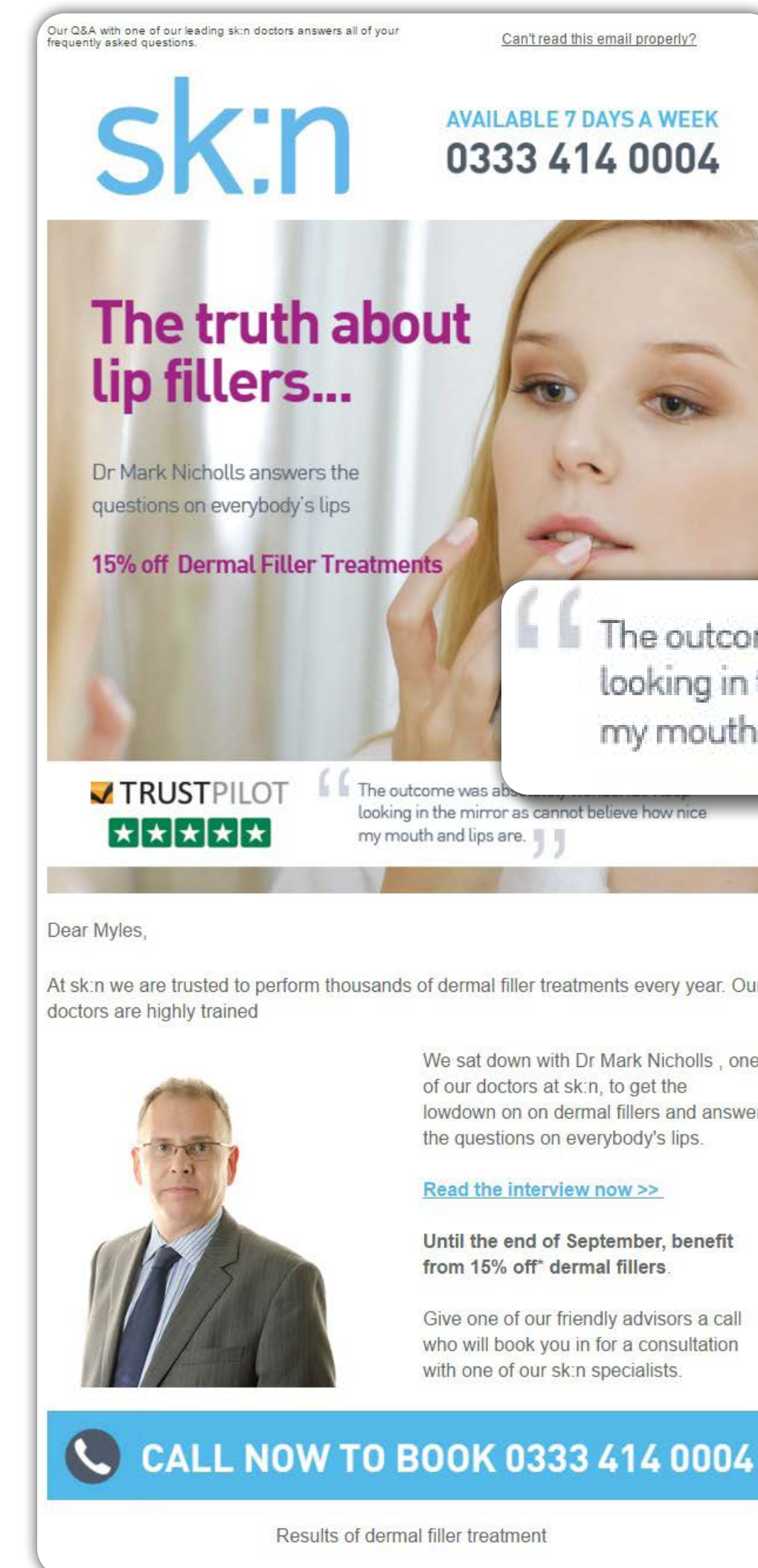
## 05 Get help from the most complementary tools in tech

When it comes to social proof, it pays to have support from nonpartisan review communities. Using independently collated ratings and reviews in your email marketing helps new customers place trust in your brand from the off, and retains business from repeat purchasers. Ask your customers to leave reviews on independent sites such as Trustpilot, Feefo, etc.

Once you have customer reviews, utilize these by including them in your email campaigns. Showcasing your independent reviews in this way gives your email campaigns a hit of social proof from the global online review community.

At Dotdigital we offer integrations to make this process seamless. An example of this is our integration with Reviews.io which allows you to pull through reviews, and set up automations such as sending all positive reviews submitted on Reviews.io through to your Dotdigital account. Reviews.io also offers a **Social Proof Editor** to turn your reviews into ready to use graphics, and push them straight to your Dotdigital image library. Genius.

Check out this eye-catching example from the UK's leading skin clinic group, sk:n. In a booming industry like cosmetic services, businesses benefit from an authentic testimonial and Trustpilot is widely recognized as a reliable source.





## 06 Conclusion

Customers face a plethora of choice in today's market. As consumers are wising up to marketing tactics and influencers are being challenged to become more transparent, social proof in the form of UGC is a marketers trump card.

Email marketers need to be using strategies to leverage social proof if they want to be top of the pile. Luckily, you should have some fans out there that want to help, loyal customers, brand advocates, and social media savvy customers are a real asset to your brand. User-generated content puts the power of your customers' voices in your hands, and allows you to show this to those customers who need a bit of nurturing across the line.

UGC is also a great insight into what your customers are thinking and feeling. You can get to know the things reviewers like about your brand, service, and product, and then shout about them in email campaigns - and of course work on addressing the cause of any negative reviews behind the scenes.

Ultimately, UGC is a low-cost, but extremely valuable asset which used correctly will help you build trust with your customers and evoke feelings of brand authenticity, which as a result will increase conversions. You can utilize UGC across your email strategy to strengthen a customer's relationship with your brand, no matter where they are in your customer journey.





## Create compelling email campaigns with Dotdigital.

Dotdigital gives you the tools to create email campaigns that convert. Our easy to use platform allows you to create visually compelling emails, full of dynamic, personalized content, with intelligent UGC plugins and automation functionality, you can be sure that your campaigns will make an impact.

**Watch a demo**

