



An IMRG Report

Authority, Buyability, Credibility

The ABC of a successful product content strategy.

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1.

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Introduction

Product, the whole raison d'être of retail, is central to both a retailers' proposition and the customers' requirements. For retailers and brands assessing their Product Content strategies, this report explores the role of content in driving sales, loyalty, and profitability. With expert insight from report supporters, Talkoot, and key data points from the IMRG Data Vault, we will also present some best practice actions for retailers to apply to their own commercial situations. This report answers two fundamental questions:

1. What is high quality product content?
2. How do I put a strategy in place to produce it?

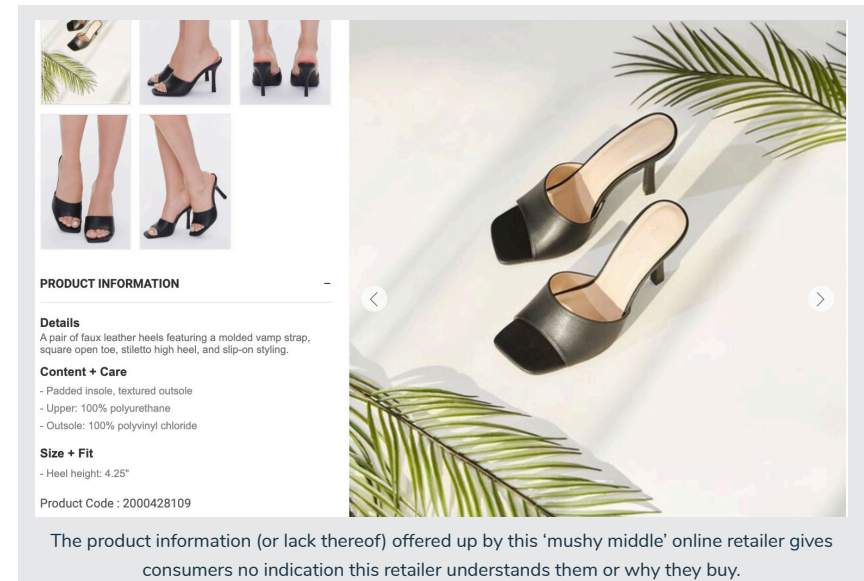
2. Overview

Thanks to the pandemic, the future of e-commerce arrived 10 years early. Brands hoping to sustain this level of selling online must quickly choose between the two dominant and divergent e-commerce experiences demanded by consumers:

- Convenience: Best represented by marketplaces like Amazon. This model optimises for convenience by selling the widest selection of products to the widest audience at the lowest possible prices (including shipping and returns).
- Community: Pioneered by digital native direct to consumer (DTC) brands like Rapha.cc, this model optimises for community by focusing on a curated selection of products and experiences perfectly tuned to a valuable, well-defined community who share common beliefs, values, and interests.

Brands that don't choose one of these two directions and single-mindedly optimise their customer experience around it will be caught in the "mushy middle." Lacking the ability to build community like a digital native brand or deliver the convenience of a marketplace, these brands will find it very difficult to attract customers and generate revenue.

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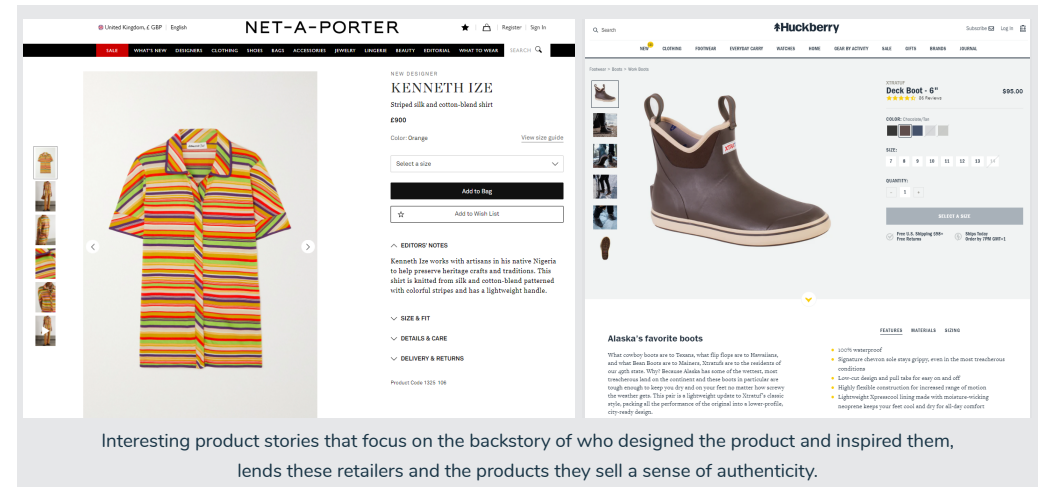


The product information (or lack thereof) offered up by this 'mushy middle' online retailer gives consumers no indication this retailer understands them or why they buy.

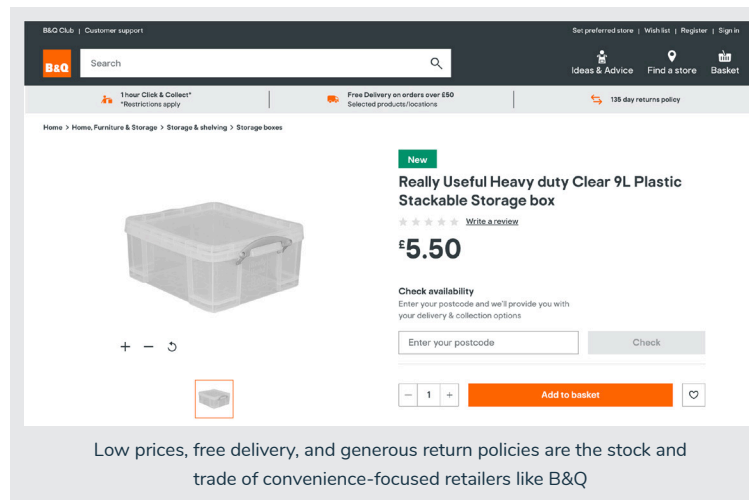
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Mind you, you do not need to be a digital native DTC brand to optimise for community and you don't have to be a marketplace to optimise for convenience.

Many online retailers have seen great success optimising for community. Both Net-a-porter.com and US-based Huckberry are two perfect examples non-DTC retailers that have seen great success by optimising for community.



Interesting product stories that focus on the backstory of who designed the product and inspired them, lends these retailers and the products they sell a sense of authenticity.



Low prices, free delivery, and generous return policies are the stock and trade of convenience-focused retailers like B&Q

Still other retailers, like Wayfair.com and B&Q, have seen success at optimising for convenience and dominating a specific product segment.

To succeed here, however, retailers need sufficient scale to operate at the thin margins needed to compete against the likes of Amazon. The key lesson here is trying to optimise for both is a losing proposition.

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For the purposes of this paper, we'll refer to these two models as 'marketplace' and 'specialty' respectively.

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| MARKETPLACE (Convenience) | vs | SPECIALTY (Community) |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driven by marketplaces • Customers shopping for products they already know and need • Product info is static/cold • Sells on price & delivery time • Product info must be complete, accurate & consistent • Largest players dominate | <p>The Mushy Middle</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driven by DTC / Specialty Digital Retailers • Customers motivated by higher-level interests (e.g., values, self-expression, lifestyle) • Deep customer intimacy • Aware of why customers buy • Sells on credibility & authority • Smaller players can do this well |


For both, ecommerce success hinges on high quality product information.

IMRG Quarterly Benchmarking data from Q4 2020 showed that 34% of site visitors started their journey at a product page, indicating that content on the product page is important for driving search traffic, natural and paid-for.

82%
of shoppers feel product descriptions are extremely or very influential to their purchasing decision.
(Source: Field Agent Digital Shopper Report)



20%
of the users who failed to successfully complete a purchase when asked to do so, attributed the reason of incomplete or unclear product information.
(Nielsen Norman Group)



“Detailed product descriptions are the most influential factor in the consumer purchase decision”
Clutch 2017 e-commerce website survey

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The role of content

Let's be clear about what is meant by 'content' in the ecommerce context; bearing in mind there is increasing cross-over to the physical store as well.

At a top level, content can be used to set the tone and feel of the brand. Whether it is short, snappy messaging or more in depth, aimed at developing an emotional connection with the consumer. Content also has a role in building out brand values, history, positions on areas such as sustainability or the value proposition.

"Product content is the most important factor [influencing purchase behaviour] following price and delivery time."¹

What is clear is that ecommerce success hinges on high quality product content. But what constitutes "high quality product content" differs greatly for marketplace sellers and specialty sellers.

3.1 Marketplace product content = Buyability

People shop on marketplaces for products they already know and want. They usually have low affinity to the brands they're purchasing. Product content focuses on "Buyability" (e.g., I have the information I need to buy this product).

Product information needs to be:

Complete: All the information the customers' need to make the purchase should be available on the Product Description Page (PDP)

Accurate: Accurate information leads to lower returns and higher customer satisfaction

Consistent: Consistent content across catalogue and channels allows consumers to comparison shop confidently knowing they're comparing apples to apples. Use the same phrases to describe the same benefits and features across your entire product line.

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3.2 Specialty product stories = Buyability + Credibility + Authority

Just as with marketplaces, consumers shop at online specialty retailers to buy what they know and want. Which is why Buyability is the foundation of quality content for specialty retailers as well. But consumers come to specialty retailers for more esoteric reasons like belonging, learning, self-improvement and identity reinforcement. Which is why product content must also convey a strong sense of Credibility and Authority.

Credibility: The product description must answer the question: Does this brand understand and make credible products for people like me? (e.g., competitive cyclists, fashion trend setters, environmentalists).

To convey a sense of credibility product copy should:

- ✓ **Use insider language:** The description uses language that shows the brand shares the beliefs, values and lifestyle of my community
- ✓ **Contextualise features & benefits:** Don't just describe features and benefits; place them in the context of how people actually use the product to let them know why those features and benefits matter.
- ✓ **Never fake it:** If you're not familiar with the community you sell into, hire writers who are or pivot to an audience you do understand. Authenticity is absolutely essential in specialty retail, online and off.

¹ <https://www.semrush.com/blog/content-is-king-for-your-conversion-rates/>

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Authority: Does this brand act and talk like an innovative industry leader? Brands that speak from a position of authority create more loyal followings and command higher price points. For this, the product content should:

- ✓ **Give social Proof:** People are more willing to buy products when people they admire are associated with it. Who designed it? Who uses it? This can be communicated in a number of ways: product copy, user generated content, reviews, pull quotes. The more the better.
- ✓ **Provide insight:** Product descriptions should cover the unique insight the product is built around. Providing a novel backstory to your products lets consumers know the brand creates trends rather than following them. The higher the price of the product, the more important it is to talk about the idea behind the product.

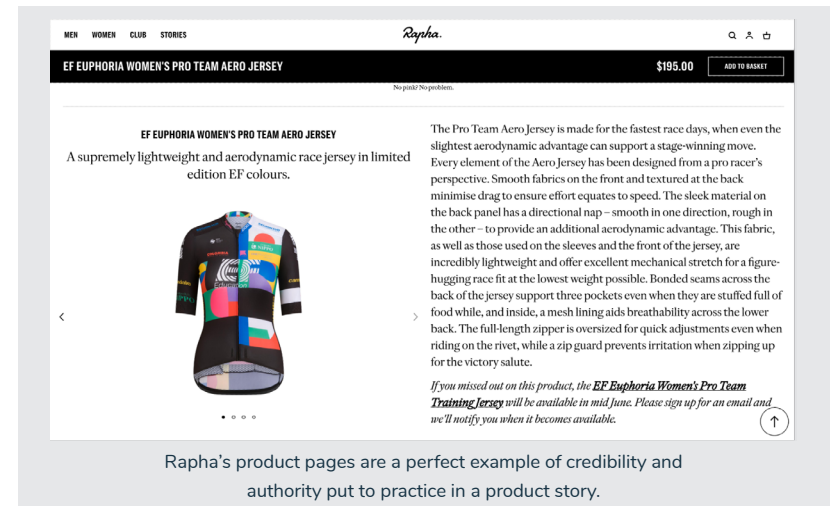
3.3 Product Stories vs. Product Descriptions

You only need look at the label on a fine wine or Malt Whisky to see the role stories play in building brand and customer loyalty. Wine merchants regale potential customers with stories of the family-owned vineyard whilst Whisky distillers invoke visions of misty moors and roaring seas to announce the complexity or depth of their golden liquor.

A study by Origin, the research division of advertising agency Hill Holiday, presented 3,000 US consumers with two variations of product pages – one with a “standard” description and another with a description containing some sort of story.

Consumers were 5% more likely to purchase from the product page with the winemaker’s story, and they were willing to pay 6% more for the same bottle of wine.

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Talkoot Comment:

Stories are how we humans create and share meaning. Is the chair you're selling a "cozy escape" or a "sculptural statement piece?" The story you choose to tell about a product will affect sell-through far more than the facts that support that story. You need to know who the product is designed for and what story is most meaningful to them, then use the facts you have to tell that story.

"Stories are remembered up to 22 times more than facts alone."²

² <https://womensleadership.stanford.edu/stories>

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Product Content Strategy - Putting into practice

For all but the largest online retailers, the goal of a successful product content strategy is to apply digital technology to scale the customer-centric experience of the small, specialty retailer to a global audience. The product page experience should—as closely as possible—duplicate the friendly, knowledgeable conversation customers would expect from an in-store salesperson. Which is why storytelling is so important. But, also like an knowledgeable in-person sales person, you should be adapting your product story based on the customer, the context and the product.

4.1 Product, Consumer, Context: The three levers of product content strategy


When most people think of the product page they think of product information. But product details are only one factor to consider when crafting a high-converting product story. To make sure you're telling the right product story to the right customer at the right time you must also consider 1) your target consumer and, 2) the purchase context. By leveraging all three—product, consumer and context—you're able to turn dry product descriptions that explain into interesting, relevant product stories that convert.

4.2 Product: Frame key features correctly to optimise conversion

Errors in product information are one of the most destructive results of set-it-and-forget-it product page content. Not only do errors depress your conversion rate by creating doubt at the moment of purchase; worse, they lead to costly returns and an erosion of customer trust.

With all the people and moving parts involved in the creation of a complex consumer product line, publishing error-free information to the product page is not an easy task. But with the right software and processes in place, you can easily detect and correct those errors once they appear.

And it's not just errors in the product information that drag down sales and increase returns. You can have all the details right, but still not put those details together into a story that describes the product adequately to convert the consumer.



All Del Dia products are made in the Philippines using fabric left over from other companies' large production runs. This keeps perfectly good materials out of the landfill, putting them into the hands of thoughtful adventurers like you.

Most outdoor brands tell a performance story on their PDP but for DTC brand Cotopaxi, sustainability is the story that inspires customers to buy.

When sales dip or returns spike, that could signal errors in the product story. Unfortunately, that data rarely finds its way back to the team able to adapt the product story in real time. The result is lost sales, excess inventory and easily avoidable end-of-season markdowns.

Key tactics

Brands need to put a process in place that allows you to monitor your site for low performing pages and alert the content team when changes to the product story are needed. In this way you can continuously optimise product content and recapture incremental revenue over the course of a season that would otherwise be lost to missing or flawed product information.

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4.3 Consumer: Make sure you're telling the right story to the right shopper

Different consumer types will buy the same product for very different reasons. And those differing reasons almost always require differing product stories. If you sell your products through your own channels as well as on Amazon, for example, you might find very little overlap between the customers who buy through those two channels.

Key tactics

To optimise content per customer segment you should:

1. Have a solid understanding of all your buying personas
2. Be sure to align personas to each product, or product category
3. Identify the channels in which each persona is most likely to shop

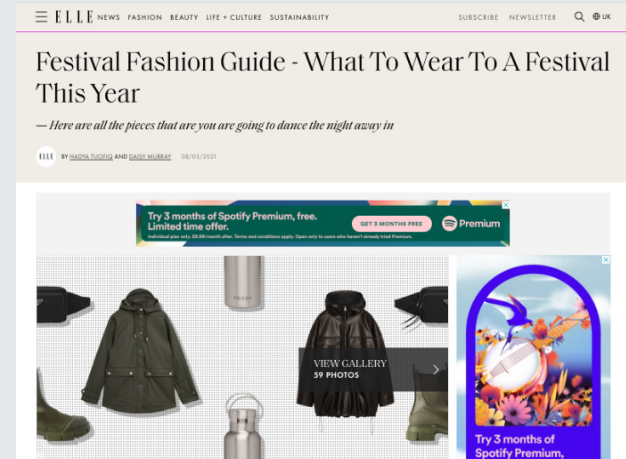
Finally, make sure your content creators have that information in front of them as they craft unique product stories tailored to each persona.

4.4 Context: Incorporate purchase context into your product story

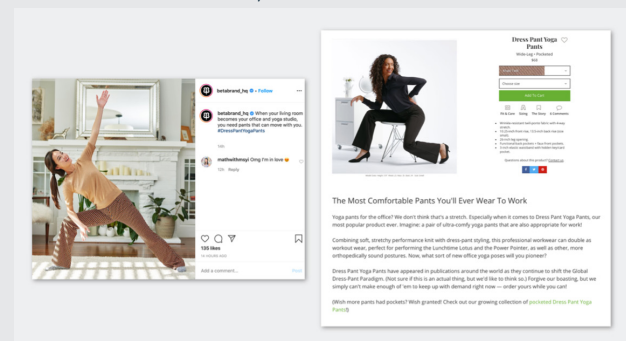
The easiest way to understand context is through the lens of seasonality: People buy hoodies all year long, but they buy them for different reasons at different times of year. They might buy it to wear on cool summer nights in July. But in December they might buy the same hoodie as a light baselayer under their waterproof shell.

A pandemic is another very good reason to refresh your product stories. So are sponsorships, collaborations, sporting events, concert seasons, celebrity snafus, holidays or any other trending cultural moment you can cleverly tie back to a reason to buy. Adapting your product stories to reflect customers' changing purchase intent is critical to closing the sale.

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Like Elle, you can see increased traffic and sell through by adapting your content to match buyer's search intent.



This brand's social team adapted their message during COVID to reflect the customers stay-at-home reality (left), but the Product Page continued with its description of a product designed for the world of office work that no longer exists (right) – will this suppress converted visits and weaken customer trust? Most likely.

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Key tactics

Optimizing for context is more art than science. The key to success is to generate a few hypotheses about what events throughout the year will have an impact on your customers' purchase behaviour (Spring break for swimwear, for instance). Then start doing some A/B testing with differing product stories to prove out the ROI.

There are reoccurring contextual cues like seasonality, holidays and events that are easier to plan for. Then there are the unexpected moments, like an election, run-away hit documentary or a global pandemic that aren't as easy to plan for. But it's these unexpected cultural moments that have the power to change a brand's destiny. You need to have the organizational trust and agility to take calculated risks on your product page. And, of course, the ability to measure the results.

4.5 Ensure your content is mobile-friendly

Whilst desktop still accounts for over a quarter of all visits to a site, IMRG Quarterly Benchmark data shows that 58% is coming via smartphone. When reviewing where the revenue is generated, smartphones still dominate at 42% share. However, Desktop still play a significant part of the journey. Often earlier browsing at work on mobile translates to purchasing on a desktop/laptop, particularly for considered purchases such as high-ticket items.

Short form content has previously been a standard on mobile platforms. While this might still hold true for lower-cost commodity products. For specialty sellers with highly engaged customers, short form content has been replaced with the concept of progressive reveal.

Different consumers require different levels of product details before they buy. Progressive reveal breaks content up into easily digestible chunks with corresponding visuals that allow customer to scroll and scan as much of the product story as they need without forcing every customer to read the entire product story.

Key tactics

Provide enough information to allow repeat customers to quickly confirm they've landed on the right product page. For customers who need to dig deeper, reveal product content in 1-2 sentence chunks that expand on each reason to buy as consumers scroll.

Progressive reveal lets you tell your full product story on the PDP without overwhelming visitors with a dense block of text covering their entire mobile screen.

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Talkoot Comment:

By adapting your product stories to be more in tune with your customer's current wants and needs, you're able to turn your product page into a much more responsive and effective sales tool.

For example, you'll convert far more shoppers if you were tracking features your customers highlight in their reviews and use those insights to craft more relevant product stories. The result? Steadily rising conversion rates and higher traffic across all your product pages.

4.6 Where to begin?

This might all seem a bit overwhelming but remember it's all about continuous improvement. Start where you are and make small changes over time, with the goal of always making your product page more and more customer-centric.

There are nearly endless ways to optimise your product page content to be more relevant and useful at the moment of purchase— most of which will have a corresponding uplift in your conversion rate.

The key is to experiment and to find what product content works for your brand and your shoppers. Higher conversion rates are a moving target and there is always room for improvement. What works for an outdoor brand won't work for a fashion brand. And what works this season, might not work next season.

Here's a quick overview of how to start experimenting to find the approach that works for your brand:

1. Start small and prove results

Identify a single collection or category where you can begin to prove out ROI. Starting small helps secure that early commitment from cross functional teams. A proven track record of success also makes further expansion easier.

2. Socialise your product content strategy and get 'buy-in'

Once you proven out the ROI, share those results with key stakeholders. Introducing a whole new product content strategy requires tight, cross-team collaboration. Content producers, merchandising, marketing and ecommerce all need to be on board to achieve the best results.

3. Put a clear process in place

Once you're confident in the power of agile product storytelling to produce bottom line results and you've convinced your team of its value, it's time to start building out an ongoing process to continually monitor and optimise your stories across the entire year.

If you have a large product line and need to narrow your focus, begin with 1) your halo products and, 2) volume drivers. Halo products are those products that might not bring in significant revenue, but do drive brand awareness, credibility and social buzz. Volume drivers are those products that, based on the sheer numbers sold, make up a significant share of the company's revenue. Concentrating your efforts on these two product types will have the greatest impact to your bottom line.

4. Incorporate product page content into your editorial calendar

Though most brands treat the product story on their PDP as a stand-alone piece of content, it's more useful to think of it as the tail end of a long conversation the consumer has been having with your brand across multiple channels. By bringing the PDP content into you're the overall editorial calendar, you'll ensure a more cohesive and trustworthy experience for the consumer all the way through the sales funnel.

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Conclusion

Your product page is the moment of truth when the consumer either clicks the buy button or bounces, and all the time and money you've invested to get them there is either rewarded or lost. With the product story being the most influential factor in online purchase decisions, the case is clear. Every company serious about establishing a strong and profitable digital channel needs to invest in processes and strategies that will ensure they're telling the most complete and impactful story they can about the products they create on every product page.

And with a steadily accelerating trend toward providing every customer with a personalised shopping experience—including personalised product content—the time to revisit, review and optimise your product content strategy is now.

IMRG Tips:

With SKU's running in to 000's, it can be a challenge to accommodate regular changes of messaging at the product level but systems and automation solutions are available.

- *Create a central resource that enables the various job functions to easily access the latest and relevant versions of content that are being used. Ensure this platform functionality allows for the constant management of the data and version control; updating or removing as required.*
- *Train teams to use this resource to improve efficiencies and the customer experience. This provides commercial benefit through improving conversion and operational efficiencies.*

Talkoot Tips:

As technology continues to improve a Brands ability to recognise who their customers are, where they live and why they buy, online retailers will need more and more product content to deliver the right story to the right consumer at the right time.

- *Invest in a streamlined process now so you can capitalise on new targeting technology as it comes online*
- *Incorporate product page content into your editorial calendar to make sure you're telling the right story on your PDP throughout the year*
- *Create a real-time data feedback loop—using customers' sales and return data, reviews—to continually optimise your product content for higher sales, lower returns and more repeat purchases.*

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About Talkoot

Choose an intuitive Product Information Management (PIM), designed for Humans.

Talkoot is a collaborative PIM focused on product storytelling. Like a traditional PIM, it stores all your static product information and features push-button syndication to most popular ecommerce platforms.

But what really sets Talkoot apart from the others is how it's built to help teams turn raw, unstructured product information into high-converting, consumer-facing product descriptions. Bring your entire team into one system, along with all the documents, details and images they need to craft accurate, credible and powerful product stories, together.

Xeau is partnered with Talkoot in Europe to bring its collaborative, cloud-based content production system to teams faced with producing large volumes of digital product content.

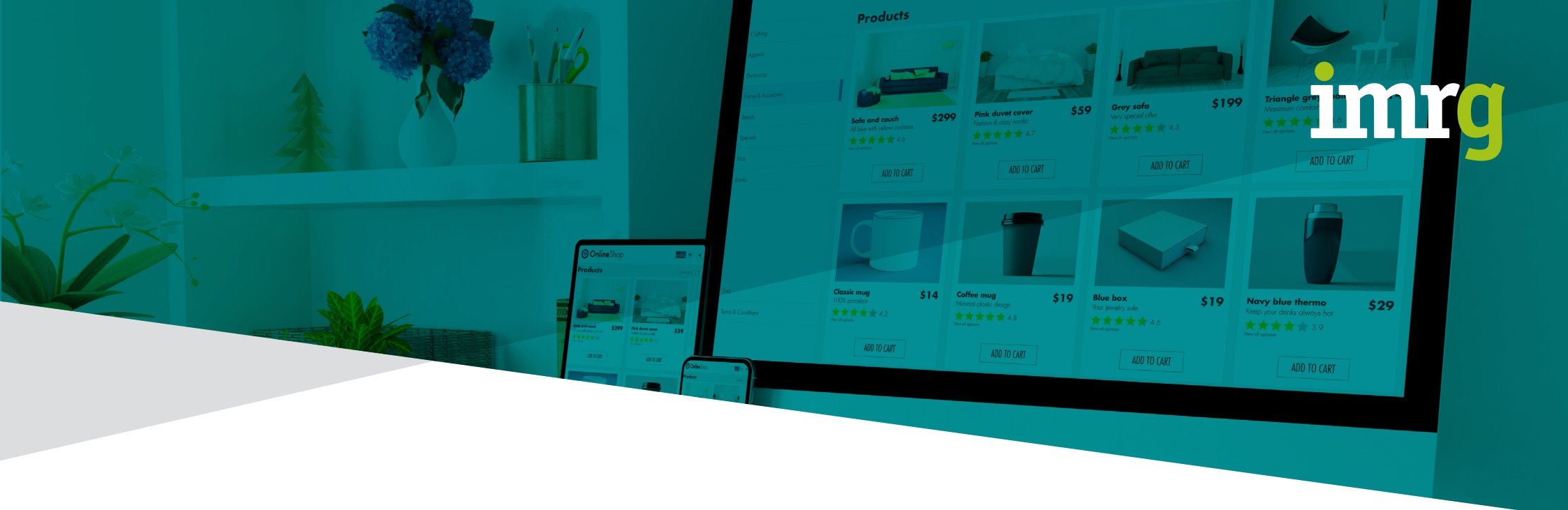


“We simply couldn’t produce the volume, speed and quality of product content our business demands without Talkoot.”

Marcus Linek
Senior Director Brand
Assets Creation



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