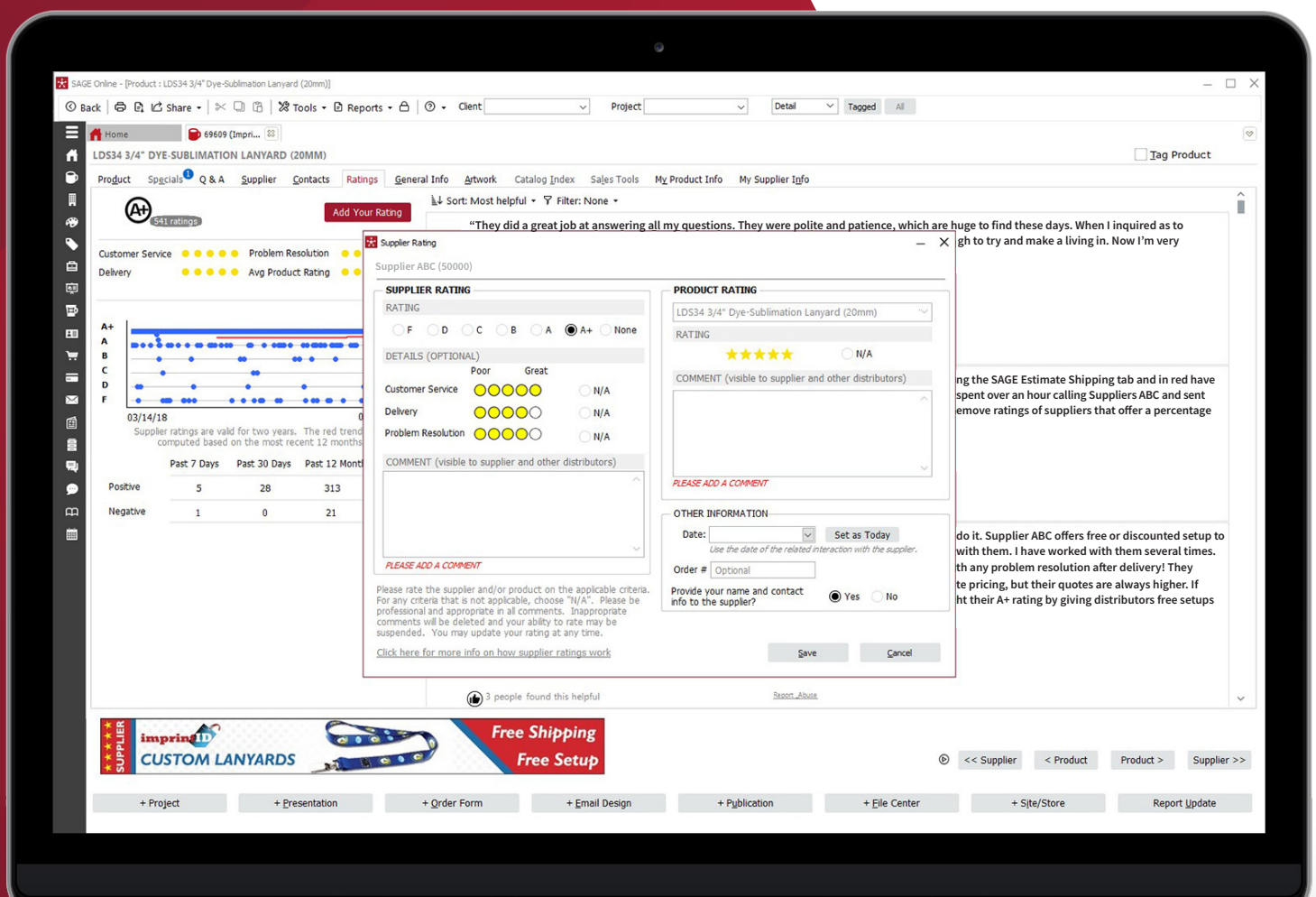


# Getting Started with the SAGE Supplier Rating System



SAGE®



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## Surviving in the age of growing competition

It's not easy being original in today's competitive landscape. When the line between risk and return gets alarmingly thin, sometimes it's wiser to take the well-traveled road, instead of reinventing the wheel. You surely wouldn't be the first to make that call. Just think of how many different versions of sleek tumblers and smartphone accessories there are on the market! As each popular new design spreads through the masses, suppliers must adapt to the popular demands, or seek out innovation elsewhere.

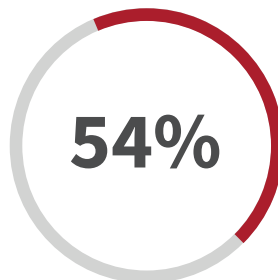
For many small to medium manufacturing companies that make up the majority of promotional products suppliers, the idea of innovating their current marketing strategy can be quite overwhelming. Being experts in promotional products, yet missing the opportunity to promote one's business is the ironic culprit of our industry. While there are many ways to grow your reputation and gain mindshare, only a few come without a price tag. That's where good old word-of-mouth marketing saves the day. It's still as relevant as ever and takes just a few business reviews to get the ball rolling.



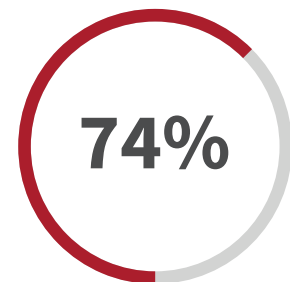
of B2B buyers are influenced by word-of-mouth when making their buying decision.

(USM)

Word-of-mouth has been shown to improve marketing effectiveness by up to



(Marketshare)



of consumers identify word-of-mouth as a key influencer in their purchasing decision.

(Ogilvy Cannes Study)

# Business reviews to the rescue

There's no better way to provide insight into your professionalism and reach new audiences than by letting your work speak for itself. When you let your customers be the medium through which you can show the industry the highlights of your organization, you open the doors to brand awareness, increased sales, and ultimately more opportunities.

## HERE ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST PERKS OF USER-GENERATED REVIEWS:

### 1 Competitive Edge

First and foremost, through reliable customer testimonials, you can easily verify your credibility, and let potential customers know you're open for business by getting your brand name out there.

### 2 Increased Sales

People are always much more likely to purchase a product that has already been recommended by others. The more business reviews you have, the more opportunities you get to broaden your audience and make more sales.

### 3 Free Marketing and Promotion

A handful of positive online reviews are sometimes worth more than an expensive marketing campaign. Customer testimonials are always in style and are literally priceless for their irreplaceable value.

### 4 Performance Evaluation

Relevant business reviews help you understand the good and the bad side of your business, allowing you to make necessary adjustments to better serve your customers in the future.

### 5 Audience Grasp

By gathering customer reviews over time, you can see a clearer picture of your target audience and why they love your business. Knowing this, you can create a unique value proposition that really resonates with your following.

*"We all need people who will give us feedback.  
That's how we improve."*

— Bill Gates, Co-founder of Microsoft



## The solution for the promo industry

In a society fueled by social-business platforms like Google My Business, Facebook, Amazon, or Yelp, we have all become revered critics, ready to lend our candid opinions to anyone in need. With that being said, it's important to understand that not all business review sites are created equal, some are geared toward a niche audience, and others are designed for specific industries. Being aware of each platform's customer segmentation and industry preferences can help you make sure that you're not wasting time on services that won't reach your client and prospect base.

This factor becomes particularly crucial for the promotional products industry, where relevant reviewing platforms are few and far between. That's why viral word-of-mouth marketing is considered somewhat of a new concept to many promotional products professionals that are looking to grow their customer lists.

The **SAGE Supplier Rating System** provides industry professionals with that exact medium – a simple and efficient way for distributors to share their experiences with supplier businesses. With the help of this platform, we can further strengthen the relationship between two of the largest players in the industry and aid them with the necessary solutions to succeed in a competitive environment.



92%

of today's consumers are now reading business reviews and using them to make purchasing decisions.

(BrightLocal)



## Understanding the SAGE Supplier Rating System

The SAGE Supplier Rating System is powered by supplier business reviews in SAGE Total Access, which over 45,000 distributor users use daily to research products and place orders. Distributors can submit their rating by going on the individual supplier profile page in SAGE Total Access, or via the “Rate Us Now” link that suppliers can provide to their customers to encourage more reviews.

Each review combines product and supplier ratings together on one screen. On the left side, distributors can rate a supplier by a letter grade with choices A+, A, B, C, D, and F. There are also three optional categories (customer service, delivery, and problem resolution), ranging from poor to great, that distributors can choose to rate. On the right side, distributors can rate the product with a 5-star scale. Both supplier ratings and product ratings include the ability to add comments, which will be publicly displayed on the rating tab of the supplier and product detail pages.

  
**Supplier  
Rating**

  
**Product  
Rating**

# Three ways the SAGE Supplier Rating System helps you

## 1 It's free for you

The SAGE Rating System is available to all suppliers that are listed in SAGE. The goal of this system is to promote collaboration in our industry by connecting qualified distributors to reputable suppliers.



*To learn more about the perks of listing your business in the SAGE database, call SAGE at 800.925.7243, email [info@sageworld.com](mailto:info@sageworld.com), or visit the website [www.sageworld.com](http://www.sageworld.com) today!*

## 2 You stay within the industry

Unlike Yelp or Google pages, the SAGE Rating System was designed by industry professionals who understand the unique interaction between suppliers and distributors. All the rating questions have been devised to address specific points of interaction before, during and after the usual transaction process.



*From “Pantone” to “EQP” only true industry professionals can understand the promo language.*

## 3 More exposure for your supplier business

When distributors look for products or suppliers in SAGE Total Access, they have the option of narrowing their search by selecting a supplier rating preference. This allows you to create more awareness for your brand by ensuring your business appears more often in product or supplier search results.



*You have a higher chance of showing up in searches simply by participating in the SAGE Supplier Rating System.*

# Three optional categories explained

## 1 Customer Service:

Refers to how the distributor would rate your overall customer service and communication.

## 2 Problem Resolution:

Refers to how aptly the supplier was able to mitigate any concerns raised during the transaction in question (only if applicable).

## 3 Delivery:

Refers to the distributor's impression of the delivery process. Were published or agreed upon shipping schedules met? Was packaging adequate?

### Rating Order:

When a distributor finds a review of your business helpful, it gets moved up in the sort order. Reviews submitted by verified purchasers (distributors who have placed an order with your business through SAGE Order Management) have a higher chance of showing up at the top of your review list.

*"I have had nothing but fantastic service with these guys. Great product, quick turn time, awesome customer service! They make me look like a rock star!"*



Customer Service: ●●●●●  
Problem Resolution: ●●●●●  
Delivery: ●●●●●

**VERIFIED**  
**PURCHASER**



1 person found this helpful

March 14, 2020

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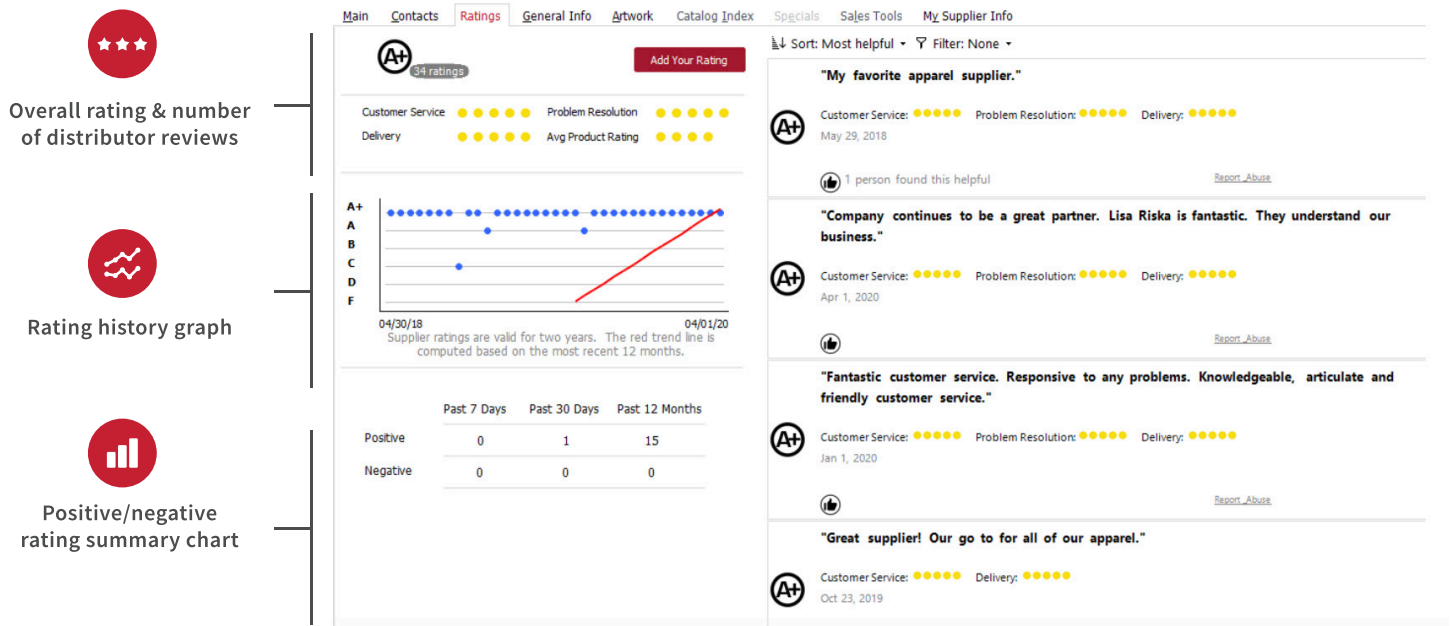
## You have a rating - what next?

Suppliers are sent a daily email of each rating made on their supplier profile page.

All distributor reviews are averaged to determine the overall rating for a supplier, reflected by their median letter grade. The number of distributor reviews the supplier has plays a part in evaluating the validity of each rating and are always displayed next to the overall supplier letter grade.

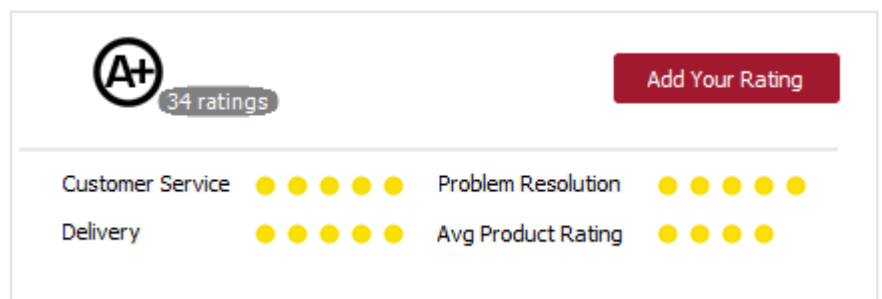
The Rating History Graph shows ratings over the span of 2 years, but displays a trend line of the most recent 12 months.

The Positive/Negative Rating Summary Chart tracks the number of positive versus negative reviews a supplier has received over the course of 7 days, 30 days, and 12 months. A+, A, and B are considered positive reviews, whereas C, D, and F are considered negative.



(Detailed Summary of Reviews)

An “Average Product Rating” has also been included under Supplier Ratings, allowing distributors to see a snapshot of the overall product quality.





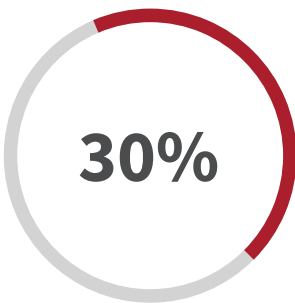
## How to deal with an unexpected review?

There is no way around it – unfavorable reviews happen. As your business grows and processes more orders in a shorter time frame, so does the probability that, here and there, you may receive a negative review.

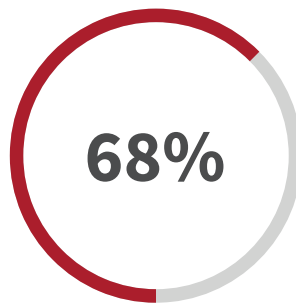
When you're faced with an unfavorable business review via the SAGE Supplier Rating System, it's important to understand that this platform is subjective in nature and is only based on distributors' opinions of their experiences with your business. However, as a reliable medium of communication, it's designed to protect both parties when a negative review has been placed.

All distributors must agree as part of their SAGE customer agreement that they will provide accurate and truthful information to the system. This serves as a moral reminder for distributors to rate the suppliers in good faith and helps prevent prejudiced reviews.

You can't please everyone all the time and sometimes things go wrong that may be outside of your control. However, how you handle and respond to the situation is what's important.



of consumers assume online reviews are fake if no negative reviews are posted.



of consumers trust in authentic reviews that include positive and negative feedback.



of customers suspect censorship of negative reviews when they only see positive scores.

*(BrightLocal)*

# Four steps to handling critical reviews

The first rule of dealing with unfavorable reviews is to embrace their existence and not take them personally. If your business is expanding, growing pains are expected, however, when you feel like the review is unnecessarily critical, here are a few steps you can take to mitigate a potential issue:

## 1 Communicate with distributors

Whether responding publicly or privately, it's always best to be diplomatic. If you are a SAGE Advantage Member, you can reply to the distributor via the SAGE Supplier Center and thank them for feedback, even if it wasn't entirely positive. By ensuring that you are quick to reply and offering a solution, other distributors will see how well you handled the situation.

## 2 Ask distributors to re-rate you

After addressing all your customer's concerns, you can ask the distributor to rate you by sending them the "Rate Us Now" link. The SAGE Rating System is updated in real-time and allows distributors to rate each supplier only once, so when a distributor changes their rating, it automatically replaces their original review and updates the supplier's overall rating.

## 3 Take the criticism constructively

Despite being unwanted, unfavorable reviews can help you understand where weaknesses lie and how you can improve on them. Try to find patterns in unfavorable reviews and check in with your team to see if there are any areas of improvement in the process.

## 4 Start an investigation with SAGE

If you'd like to dispute your rating, you may choose to start a formal SAGE investigation process. For this step, you would need to submit as much information as possible about your transaction and unfavorable review. Please review the SAGE Supplier Rating Dispute Reporting Information by visiting [go.sageworld.com/SAGEInvestigation](https://go.sageworld.com/SAGEInvestigation).

*"Unfortunately, we had hard time getting a hold of this supplier when we had some questions. Their product is amazing, however at the end of the day, the most important thing is communication."*

Customer Service: ●●  
Problem Resolution: ●●●  
Delivery: ●●●



### Supplier Response:

*"We're sorry to hear that you had some difficulties working with our company. We always aim to make sure our customers are happy. I'd love to take the time to personally talk to you about your experience and see where we can improve. Thank you for your feedback!"*

**Please note: All rating disputes are handled by the information services department. Our sales department cannot assist in resolving any ratings concerns.**



## Conclusion

Business reviews have changed the face of e-commerce, giving customers a medium through which they can voice their thoughts, recommendations, and praise for your business. Distributors know and recognize SAGE as an unprejudiced leader in the promotional products industry. By taking advantage of the SAGE Supplier Rating System, you show your commitment to enhancing the success of your customers' businesses and open doors to more profitable opportunities for your supplier business.

Contact your SAGE account executive today or reach out to our corporate office at the information below to learn more about the SAGE Supplier Rating System and the steps to becoming a SAGE Advantage Member.

## About SAGE

**Local Phone:**

214.631.6000

**Toll Free Phone:**

800.925.7243 (SAGE)

**Address:**

SAGE

16301 Quorum Drive, Ste. 200A

Addison, TX 75001

**Office Hours:**

8:00 am – 7:00 pm CT

**Email:**

info@sageworld.com

SAGE, based in Addison, Texas, is the leading provider of information, marketing and business management solutions to the promotional products industry. In addition to SAGE's flagship SAGE Online™, SAGE Web™, and SAGE Mobile™ research and business management services, SAGE also provides the industry with other research services, order management, website and email services, e-commerce solutions, end buyer catalogs, artwork services, payment processing, tradeshow, tradeshow management services, and lead retrieval software. SAGE is also the exclusive technology provider for members of the Promotional Products Association International (PPAI), the industry's non-for-profit association as well as Promotional Products Professionals of Canada (PPPC), Canada's non-for-profit association. For more information, please visit [www.sageworld.com](http://www.sageworld.com) or call 800.925.7243.



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