

SPOTLIGHT

Guide to Peer Review Sites for Analyst Relations Professionals

With a Close Look at Gartner Peer Insights

June 2023



Guide to Peer Review Sites for Analyst Relations Professionals

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An AR Pro's Guide to Peer Review Sites

Peer Review sites in the B2B technology universe are growing exponentially. Analyst firms and venture-backed projects are investing heavily in the competition for both readers and reviewers, confusing and overwhelming software marketers and customer success professionals in the process. Analyst Relations professionals at software vendors are uniquely positioned to navigate the quagmire of credibility of peer review

sites, but often need to collaborate with counterparts in Sales, Customer Success, and Product Marketing to launch a programmatic approach to peer review sites.

Inside, we explore why these sites are important, why they are significant to AR, and how your company should consider managing this channel.

Key Takeaways

Peer review sites such as Peer Insights, G2, PeerSpot, TrustRadius, and SoftwareReviews, have demonstrable influence on enterprise buyers.

Gartner fully integrates its Peer Insights data with its flagship research. It plays a major role in the Magic Quadrant process, and Peer Insights data is available to all Gartner analysts for exploration and inspiration.

AR pros could face substantial organizational pressure to manage the reputational risks posed by these sites, especially since Peer Insights bears the Gartner brand. AR teams are rarely equipped with the ready resources or the organizational authority to proactively and comprehensively manage these sites. AR pros who are able to solve this challenge have an opportunity for a highly visible win. Success in this channel can not only improve AR engagements, but can also positively impact sales, marketing, and product.

CHAPTER 1

Why AR Must Champion the Channel

Peer review sites are not new, but buyers and vendors are paying significantly more attention to the channel with sites like Gartner Peer Insights, G2, PeerSpot, TrustRadius, and SoftwareReviews rising in popularity. In 2021 alone, Peer Insights grew both its total reviews (435,000) and total markets (416) by 20%. G2 announced a \$157 million Series D investment, and PeerSpot (formerly IT Central Station) received a \$30 million Series A investment.

AR should be a champion for this channel in their organization. But why is this our challenge, and why is it our challenge right now?



Peer review sites are highly discoverable

As we well know, enterprise buyers research online, now more than ever, for products that solve their problems. Because these peer review sites offer, for free, a curation of customer voices that tout the positive and negative aspects of B2B technologies, they have achieved remarkable SEO performance. In fact, Peer Insights traffic already outpaces Gartner's traditional .com offering. Moving forward, it's certain that B2B buyers will find peer review sites first when compiling their consideration sets.



Peer review sites target enterprise buyers traditionally served by industry analysts

While there are many peer review sites with varied audiences, a handful of these sites directly target enterprise buyers, including TrustRadius, PeerSpot, and Gartner Peer Insights. G2 and Gartner Digital Markets target both enterprise and small to mid-sized businesses. In the case of Gartner Peer Insights, while the public review data is available for exploration by any buyer, there is supplemental analysis on that data exclusively available to participating reviewers and vendor organizations engaging in the Gartner Peer Insights Customer First Program.

If you haven't already been asked about your company's presence on these sites, it's likely that questions are not too far off. As long as these peer review sites remain highly visible, and as long as Peer Insights has Gartner's name on it, analyst relations teams could potentially take the fall for poor outcomes.



Peer review sites influence traditional analysts

In 2021, Gartner replaced the Customer Reference portion of its Magic Quadrant (MQ) process with reviews submitted through Peer Insights. It is now mandatory for most MQs to use Peer Insights reviews in the scoring process (there are few exceptions): Additionally, Spotlight's independent research revealed:

- Some analysts use Peer Insights reviews to determine evaluation and inclusion criteria
- Some analysts use Peer Insights to 'break ties' for MQ inclusion
- Some analysts use Peer Insights reviews to score multiple categories

However, not all analysts are embracing this change. While most analysts are evolving to include Peer Reviews in their evaluations, some analysts are skeptical of Peer Insights data and use it as sparingly as possible. Skeptical analysts fear too much vendor involvement in the reviews and believe traditional customer reference interviews cannot be replaced. Unfortunately for these analysts, Peer Insights is unavoidable and is now formally embedded in the process.

Gartner Peer Insights is tightly integrated into the MQ publishing cycle

Gartner Peer Insights has a Voice of the Customer (VoC) report that ranks vendors within a category exclusively using data provided in customer reviews. This report is published in tandem with an associated Magic Quadrant. Gartner is working towards having an accompanying VoC report for every MQ and has expanded to now include Market Guide categories. These VoC reports are published four months after the MQ publishes.

CHAPTER 2

Peer Review Sites Landscape

While there are many peer review sites out there, we've highlighted five of the most relevant sites to AR professionals. We've chosen TrustRadius, PeerSpot, SoftwareReviews, and Peer Insights because of their direct overlap with our intended buyers; G2 because of its remarkable momentum; and Gartner Digital Markets because of its ownership by Gartner.



Publicly available resources and Michael Fauscete, Chief Research Officer



Gartner
peer insights™



Information sourced from publicly available resources



PeerSpot



Information sourced through written inquiry with Russell Rothstein, Founder and CEO, PeerSpot (formerly IT Central Station)



TrustRadius



Information sourced from publicly available resources



SoftwareReviews
A Division of Info-Tech Research Group



Information sourced from publicly available resources

Gartner Digital Markets

Capterra GetApp Software Advice



Gartner operates a Digital Markets group, comprised of three standalone brands. These sites are designed for customer reviews for software typically associated with small businesses, and in some cases are considered consumer technology. These sites are not considered in scope for enterprise software review programs, and therefore are not considered within this exercise.

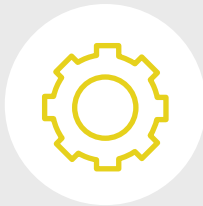


TOTAL REVIEWS	2,000,000+	515,000+	475,000+	Unknown	100,000+
PRODUCTS	145,000+	18,000 vendors	700 products 470 vendors	Unknown	2,500+
CATEGORIES	2,100+	400+	800+	271	314
MARKET EVALUATION RESEARCH INTEGRATION	N	Gartner MQ	Omdia Universe	N	N
BUYER INTENT DATA RESELLER	Y	N	N	Y	Y
LEAD GEN FOR VENDORS	Y	N	Y	Y	N
SELLS CONTENT SERVICES	Y	N	Y	Y	Y

Source: Spotlight research of publicly available information, as of 2023.



TOTAL REVIEWS	CATEGORIES	PRODUCTS	MARKET EVALUATION RESERCH INTEGRATION	LEAD GEN FOR VENDORS	BUYER INTEL DATA RESELLER	SELLS CONTENT SERVICES
2,000,000+	2,100+	145,000+	No	Yes	Yes	Yes



Important Attributes

Largest B2B software review site by reviews and categories.

SEO placement typically ranked higher than other sites.

Mature vendor approach, including account management team and portal tool.



Direct customer reviews to this site when

Reviewers speak to a product's core use cases and roles.

Quantity > Quality.

Reviewers are comfortable with video reviews.

Reviewers are capable of distilling wins into two sentences or less.



Revenue Model

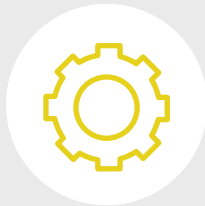
Sells Buyer Intent Data via integration with CRM and ABM.

Wide range of demand generation content services.

Sells subscriptions to proprietary research documents on buy-side markets.



TOTAL REVIEWS	CATEGORIES	PRODUCTS	MARKET EVALUATION RESEARCH INTEGRATION	LEAD GEN FOR VENDORS	BUYER INTEL DATA RESELLER	SELLS CONTENT SERVICES
515,000+	400+	18,000 vendors	Gartner MQ	No	No	No



Important Attributes

Direct connection to Gartner’s wider research efforts.

Each category corresponds to existing or future Gartner research.

Strict review approval process results in high rate of rejection.



Direct customer reviews to this site when

Reviewers who can serve as a customer reference within an evaluation report process (aka, those who would speak well with an analyst).

Reviewers who excel at capturing the big picture impact of the product on their wider enterprise.

Reviewers using the product in settings aligned to Gartner’s key audience, such as Government, Banking/Finance/Insurance, Manufacturing.



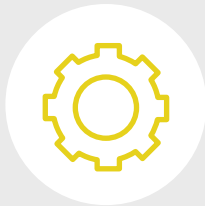
Revenue Model

Sells reprints to review data-based documents (i.e. Voice of the Customer).

Promotes Gartner subscription products.



TOTAL REVIEWS	CATEGORIES	PRODUCTS	MARKET EVALUATION RESEARCH INTEGRATION	LEAD GEN FOR VENDORS	BUYER INTEL DATA RESELLER	SELLS CONTENT SERVICES
475,000+	800+	700 products 470 vendors	Omdia Universe	Yes	No	Yes



Important Attributes

Overt focus on Pros/Cons in review experience.

Vendor enablement platform has advanced data features relative to others.



Direct customer reviews to this site when

Reviewers capable of recognizing and balancing pros/cons.

Reviewers with a preference for anonymity (TrustRadius does not disclose all reviewer names).

Reviewers using the product in setting aligned to Omdia’s key audience, including Telcos/CSPs and IT Services Providers, or those based in Europe.



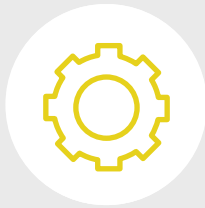
Revenue Model

Advanced data reselling via integration with CRM and ABM tools.

Proprietary tools for sales enablement that go beyond typical content services.



TOTAL REVIEWS	CATEGORIES	PRODUCTS	MARKET EVALUATION RESEARCH INTEGRATION	LEAD GEN FOR VENDORS	BUYER INTEL DATA RESELLER	SELLS CONTENT SERVICES
Unknown	271	Unknown	No	Yes	Yes	Yes



Important Attributes

Deliberately focused on creating a community of experts.

Heavy IT influence on category structure (low/no coverage on customerfacing technologies like MarTech or CX).



Direct customer reviews to this site when

Reviewers who write a lot (PeerSpot encourages lengthy reviews) or those who want to nurture a personal brand as a software expert.

Reviewers with titles like Consultant or Analyst, which may get rejected by other sites due to strict policies.



Revenue Model

Sells data sets of review materials as part of lead generation.

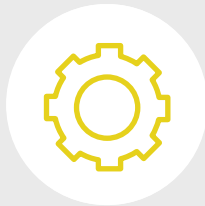
Offers content for vendors, including video reviews for evangelist customers.



SoftwareReviews

A Division of Info-Tech Research Group

TOTAL REVIEWS	CATEGORIES	PRODUCTS	MARKET EVALUATION RESEARCH INTEGRATION	LEAD GEN FOR VENDORS	BUYER INTEL DATA RESELLER	SELLS CONTENT SERVICES
100,000+	2,500+	314	No	No	Yes	Yes



Important Attributes

Reviews are not public. Review surveys are predominantly quantitative, and the resulting insights are aggregated.

Reviews feed an array of gated content offerings, including market landscapes, as well as sentiment generalizations.

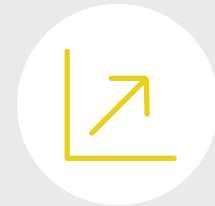


Direct customer reviews to this site when

Reviewers who may have had past reviews rejected by other sites.

Reviewers who struggle with writing lengthy reviews.

Reviewers who have purchased your product at multiple organizations (SoftwareReviews tracks retention).



Revenue Model

Extensive content library - vendors can expect several report types, including ranking/comparison, market demand, and sentiment reports.

SoftwareReviews is a lead generation tool for Info-Tech Research Group.

CHAPTER 3

A Closer Look at Gartner Peer Insights

Due to the momentum and integration of Gartner Peer Insights Voice of Customer (VoC) reports with Magic Quadrant cycles, it's critical for AR pros to know more about this product in order to prepare for inevitable questions (or even more so, the execution responsibilities) that will come from other departments within the organization. The information in this chapter reflects our understanding as of June 2023. For the most current news, check for updates published to the [Gartner Peer Insights blog](#).

Gartner will leverage Peer Insights as a tool to collect client reference data in the MQ process. In many cases, this means Peer Insights reviews will replace traditionally invited references. In these instances, your client references can now write one review that serves the MQ process and appears in Peer Insights.

Sourcing and Reviews

Peer Insights is trying to maintain review quality and authenticity while rapidly increasing the quantity of reviews. As such, Gartner is encouraging organic reviews and strongly discouraging vendors from only recruiting reviews from their raving fans.

Sourcing

Peer Insights denotes if reviews are vendor- or Gartner-sourced. Buyers will see the average score from one source compared to the other in order to see whether vendors have manipulated the scores.

For new vendors, Gartner offers \$25 gift cards to the first 50 buyers who leave a review. This incentive is not going away, but some

reviewers want more than money. Gartner now offers reviewers access to a Peer Insights Plus product in exchange for reviews. One review grants PI+ access for the following 3 months. PI+ includes enhanced browsing features, alerts, and access to select Gartner research. Starting in 2022, Gartner is allowing reviewers to select their own incentive method - whether that be a Gartner-funded gift card, a vendor-funded gift card, or a charitable donation.

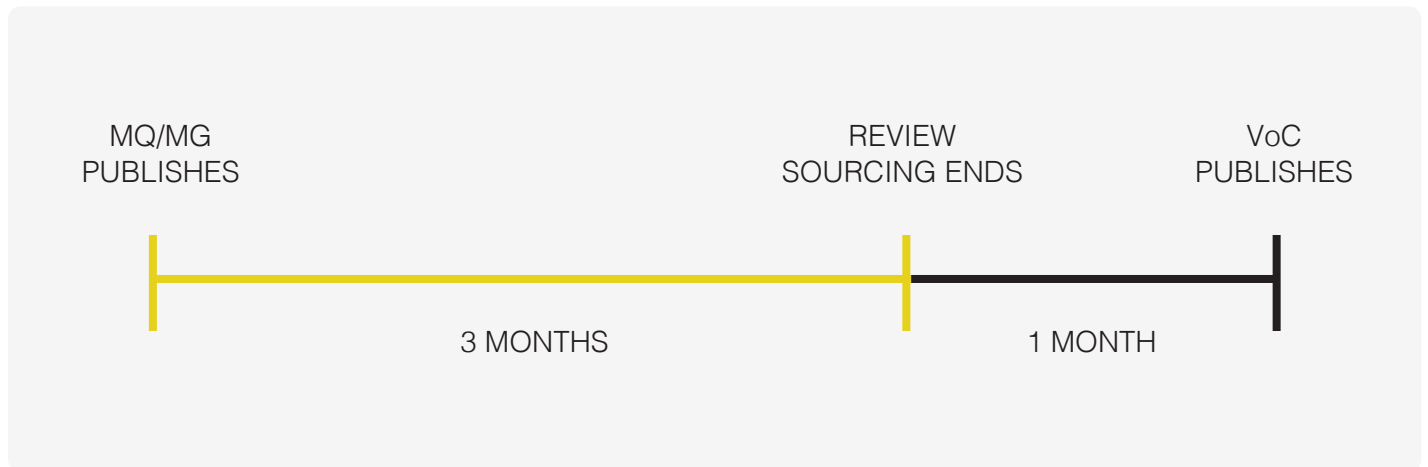
Reviews

Reviews are free to access online and anyone can compare vendors' reviews to see a competitive scorecard.

Peer Insights defaults to showing reviews from 'All Time' on its website. Reviews are rolebased to help buyers contextualize feedback. These role types are: User, Admin, Implementer, and Purchaser. Readers can now search for reviews from people like them, searching by company size, industry, and region within the search functionality of the site. The average time it takes a customer to complete a review is 15 minutes.

Voice of the Customer Report

Reviews are the basis for Peer Insights' Voice of the Customer report. The VoC report is a Gartner research document that uses peer review scores to plot qualified vendors on a 2x2 quadrant, similar to a Magic Quadrant. Those in the top right quadrant are given the Customers' Choice designation. This Voice of the Customer (VoC) report is gated for subscribers only.



In December 2019, Gartner piloted new graphics pre-filtered by industry, region, and firm sizes. These elements are now called 'Firmographics' and are a major criteria within the VoC methodology.

The minimum review requirement for inclusion in the VoC report is now 20 reviews. However, placement on the 2x2 quadrant is dependent on review quantity, score, and type.

MQ integration

Each VoC report complements a Magic Quadrant (MQ) or a Market Guide (MG) and aligns with the MQ/MG refresh schedule. The timelines of each VoC report have been updated. They no longer publish 3 months before and 3 months after an MQ/MG cycle. Now the VoC report is published roughly four months after an MQ/MG has published.

Starting in 2021, Gartner began using Peer Insights to collect customer reviews as an embedded part of its MQ process. MQ authors now use Peer Insights data to form criteria, determine inclusion, and score offerings throughout the evaluation process.

The VoC report methodology:

Gartner does not attribute authorship to VoC reports. The authors for each report are noted generally as peer contributors.

MQ authors now use Peer Insights data to form criteria, determine inclusion, and score offerings throughout the evaluation process.

X axis – User Interest & Adoption

Gartner debuted its new methodology for User Interest & Adoption in January 2021. This score compiles three elements: Review count; Willingness to Recommend; Firmographics. For review counts, Gartner requires a minimum of 20 reviews, but will use an ‘asymptotic function’ to normalize review scoring at a certain threshold. Willingness to Recommend is a new element as of 2021 and emphasizes a review survey question with a 10-point scale (very similar to the familiar NPS methodology). Firmographics are a calculation of review distribution across industries, geographic regions, and company size.

Y axis – Overall Rating

The placement on this axis is dependent on your average review rating score. For VoC reports, product review scores only include reviews from the last 18 months. The scores give full weight to the reviews submitted (or updated) within the last 12 months, and will give 50% weighting to those published in the first 6 months of the specified 18 month evaluation period.

Gartner published approximately 75 VoC reports in 2021, and is planning a similar level for 2022. Gartner continually updates their roadmap on which markets will be considered. [Download Gartner’s roadmap](#) to see if your market is being considered.

If you’re looking for information regarding timelines, criteria and dates for your market, browsing [Gartner’s Resources for Technology Providers](#) is a great place to start.

Customers’ Choice Distinction

Vendors with an overall rating equal to or higher than the mean rating for the market and with a User Interest & Adoption score equal to or higher than the median rating for that market will qualify.

Supplemental Reports for Buyers

Peer Lessons Learned

This report summarizes reviewers’ experiences for the buyers in a Lessons Learned format to help them know what the reviewers would have done differently if they could start over. It covers the key lessons as well as the recommendations that are listed on the Peer Insights page. The author listed on these reports are “Peer Contributors.” Peer Lessons Learned will remain unchanged but will also start scaling more rapidly across markets.

Vendor Dashboard

Gartner has improved the vendor dashboard as well, creating resources to ensure vendors have everything they need to be successful. Gartner published a new Vendor Success playbook and Success Stories repository as well as updated the experience on review sourcing.

Mascot Competition

Peer Insights’ official mascot Marley the Meerkat competes directly with Monty the Meerkat, G2’s bespeckled mammalian mascot.



CHAPTER 4

Why Proactive Management is Critical

Peer review sites want to maintain the integrity of their reviews. These sites want to ensure that reviews are provided by legitimate users of products and that those users aren't unduly influenced and/or compensated by the vendors. Some sites have gone so far as to express a preference for organic reviews where the vendor isn't involved at all. But as professionals in the reputation management business, you know that just leaving this highly visible channel to chance isn't really an option. How do you actively manage this channel while maintaining the integrity of these sites?

Gathering a large number of reviews takes work

While B2B buyers may consume peer reviews for their product research process just as voraciously as they would in their personal lives, they are much less likely to provide a review than they would on a B2C site like Yelp or Amazon. For those who are willing to do a B2B review, they will face more time-consuming review forms than their B2C counterparts.

Another challenge is the fact that, unlike in a typical B2C experience, no single reviewer could accurately and fairly describe a complex enterprise solution in totality. In fact, it's highly likely that the best person to evaluate the purchasing experience, the implementation experience, and the user experience will all have different roles and work in different parts of your client's organization.

If you combine the fact that B2B users have a low propensity to provide a review with the fact that many reviews from many perspectives are needed, there's almost no chance that your firm and products will be accurately and comprehensively represented if you do not actively recruit reviewers with different perspectives.

What are the fundamentals of proactive management?

Consider the following:



Picking and prioritizing sites

Not every review site matters to your organization equally. To be the most efficient and strategic in your review sourcing efforts, consider each site's audience, readership, business benefit, cost, and reputation.



Recruiting reviews

In order to satisfy Gartner Peer Insights' VoC report criteria, your team needs to ensure that your product is accurately represented by the right number of reviews in the right proportions across roles, firm sizes, geographies, and industries.

The process of inviting and incentivizing that many customers from various backgrounds can be one of the more challenging pieces to manage. Typically this is done by:

- Internally collaborating with account managers and customer success teams to recruit existing customers for reviews.

- Offering gift cards (from the peer review site itself) to customers who submit a review.
- Leveraging the outreach platforms offered by peer review sites that invite, manage, and draw in more of your customers.
- Capturing the enthusiasm at your customer events by setting up review booths.

Keep in mind, though, that there is a limit on gift cards and that those add-on services cost money.

>> **Monitoring reviews**

Keeping a close eye on your incoming and existing reviews will be critical to managing this channel. Each site reserves the right to reject reviews that your customers submit, so you'll need to work with them to clear up the disallowed reviews. Additionally, your competitors can file a complaint to have some of your published reviews removed. You'll need to work with each site to defend your published reviews.

>> **Keeping reviews fresh**

We expect that once the number of reviews reaches critical mass, review sites will begin to weigh recent reviews more heavily than older ones. Peer Insights VoC reports emphasize reviews provided in the last 12 months. So, you will need to have a process in place to ask reviewers to update their reviews and share their recent successes.

Where possible, reach out to detractors to hear and resolve their pains, and then ask them to update their reviews.

Updated reviews can override the once-negative review and improve your overall scores.

>> **Gathering and sharing feedback**

Even though individual reviews may not be comprehensive, together they can provide valuable insights back to the business. Where are complaints coming from? What strengths are being highlighted? Are you spotting some optimistic or troublesome trends? Valuable observations can be a big win for the program.

It will likely be a challenge

The activities associated with managing peer reviews are very different from the activities associated with traditional analyst relations. While AR pros are practiced at nurturing a handful of tight relationships, they alone likely don't have the tools or time to systemically recruit and manage hundreds of reviews. Managing these sites is different, and different is always hard.

When tackling this different and difficult challenge remember:

AR pros can't go at this alone, but analyst relations may be expected to lead the solution to this challenge.

For AR professionals, it will be challenging to take on peer review site management alone because very few have visibility into customer and user lists. Among those of you who do, even fewer have the authority to directly reach out to customers. This means that any program you establish will be run in conjunction with your brethren in sales, customer success, or account management. Additionally, you

will need to either secure the resources you need to win the channel or start setting the right expectations for a more bootstrapped approach.

We have seen AR pros play different roles in this channel. But, we think the winning recipe is a partnership with the customer success team actively managing peer review sites with AR pros providing input.

However, if customer success does not initiate participation in peer review sites and no one in the organization owns the channel, AR could be held accountable when senior leaders recognize the importance of customer reviews. We believe AR pros should act as the champion for the channel and educate their teams on how to approach managing the channel if this situation arises. If no one outside of AR is able to manage the channel, then AR pros need to take lead and do it themselves.

All that said, it's easy to see that you have some hard questions to answer before you get going. What does success look like? Where will funds come from? To whom will you report results? Who will own execution day-to-day? How will you all work together?

Peer review sites are too important to leave to chance.

What's the upside?

While there is no doubt that the management of this channel will take effort, the effort isn't without reward. The benefits of managing this channel well include:



Peer reviews influence market perceptions of products by providing verbatim testimony of the positives and negatives. Also, you can provide intel on your top competitors in the same areas to provide guidance and priority.



Peer reviews can enable sales by helping them extract the best quotes to surface in sales conversations. Plus, most sites have a complimentary report that can be used to close deals. You can also pay to access leads identified by each peer review site.



Peer reviews can fuel marketing by contributing content for their initiatives. There are reprint rights you'll need to consider, but pulling quotes, utilizing reports, and writing blogs on the material can amplify positive feelings from your existing customers.



Peer reviews can support analyst relations by using reviews as confirmation that investments are working and as evidence to overcome an analyst's negative perceptions.

Peer review sites are too important to leave to chance. The challenge is to diligently collect a wide range and fully representative set of customer opinions. To achieve a positive and accurate representation of your business, reviews need to be curated and updated. To run an integrated and supported program, you have to prioritize the right efforts and attack them with the right partners.

CHAPTER 5

A Closer Look at Gartner Peer Insights

While these peer review sites are gaining remarkable momentum, we don't believe these types of peer reviews will ever completely replace deep evaluation by expert industry analysts. We do believe, however, that these sites are here to stay. The implications they can have for analyst relations mean we need to actively manage this channel both internally and externally.

So, what should you do next?

- Audit peer review sites for current coverage - yours as well as your competitors'
- Communicate internally on this new challenge
- Find your allies and stakeholders
- Negotiate what success looks like in the face of this opportunity/risk
- Determine available capacity and win budget
- Set a plan and determine AR's role for managing this new channel

Adding this to the work already on our plates can feel daunting, but we have a huge opportunity if we do this right. This work may help dramatically elevate our business impact while significantly increasing visibility for AR.

We at Spotlight are keeping a close watch on peer review sites as they change and we plan on updating this body of knowledge as we learn more.

If you're interested in hiring us to solve this challenge with you, please reach out.

Contact us at info@spotlightar.com



SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight is a dedicated analyst relations firm offering a full range of AR services. We partner with those who need to support their teams with additional AR expertise, and we provide training and methodologies for those who need help establishing an AR practice.

We also offer our propriety AR platform, Spotlight Oz to all AR pros and teams.

We regularly publish thought leadership on AR. Check out our latest content at spotlightar.com/resources.

For more information about what we do and how we can help, please contact info@spotlightar.com.

