

How to **measure** customer sentiment

Best Practice Guide for teams who want to understand what sits behind the score and turn it into action



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Introduction

In our previous guides we covered “**How to collect feedback**” and “**How to display feedback.**”

Now you have that feedback sitting in your dashboard – plenty of reviews, star ratings, and comments. The question is: what does it all mean?

Many businesses stop at the score. They see a 4.5-star average and move on. And while a strong rating might look reassuring, it doesn't tell you which customers are about to leave, which part of your service is failing, or where to invest next.

The score tells you what happened. Sentiment tells you why – and what to do about it.

This guide will help you:

- 1 Move from vanity to value:**
Why NPS matters as much as your star rating
- 2 Find the hidden signals:**
What customers who don't leave reviews are telling you
- 3 Scale with AI:**
Analyse thousands of comments in seconds and spot patterns you'd otherwise miss
- 4 Turn insight into action:**
Sector-specific blueprints to fix what's broken

Whatever sector you're in, when you understand sentiment, you stop guessing what your customers want. You remove confirmation bias and internal debates about "what to fix next" because your customers have already told you.

Ready? Let's dive in.

Why do businesses need to understand sentiment?

While the star rating is a good barometer of how your product or service is perceived, it's a one-dimensional metric. It only tells you that a specific experience at a specific time was judged as 4 stars.

Many businesses stop there. They see an average 4.5-star rating and assume that's good enough. But the real value lies in understanding what sits behind that score.



The score (quantitative):
Tells you what happened



The sentiment (qualitative):
Tells you why it happened and how to fix it

Sentiment reveals what needs to change. It gives you the information to enhance your service or prevent further customer dissatisfaction before it scales.

Relying on stars alone means you miss critical detail.

The 4-Star Trap

- **The score says:** Success - 4/5 stars
- **The sentiment says:** Your logistics partner could be doing better



Peter Jones



"Product is great, but no thanks to the delivery driver who threw it over the fence."

When you track customer sentiment alongside stars, you can catch operational issues before they transform to customer losses. Even if the product is perfect, catching that the logistics partner is offering a poor experience means you can focus on where to improve.

This can have a huge benefit – Zendesk data shows that **more than ½ of consumers will switch to a competitor after only 1 bad experience** – so doing everything you can to prevent that (or address it) demonstrates care and gives you a chance to save a customer relationships.

This is also why separating product and service reviews matters. The product might be perfect, but if your logistics partner is damaging trust, you won't be able to pinpoint it without asking customers about these separately.

Ratings remain important. They provide a barometer, while sentiment adds valuable colour. By analysing sentiment in your reviews, you're moving from 'collecting reviews' to 'mining insight'.

The ROI of listening

**heath
crawford**

Retention

Heath Crawford tracked their Net Promoter Score and achieved a world-class score of 86 against an industry average of 79. By monitoring customer sentiment and using those insights to maintain their service standards, they now maintain a 94% customer retention rate.

SYNERGY

Growth

Synergy Car Leasing used sentiment tracking to achieve an NPS of 94 – more than double the industry average of 40. Understanding what customers valued most about their service allowed them to double their web traffic over 12 months and increase conversions by over 60%.

To understand sentiment, you need to measure it properly; different metrics answer different business questions.

The three main metrics to consider are:

- Net Promoter Score (NPS)
- Customer Satisfaction (CSAT)
- Customer Effort Score (CES).



Measuring the right metrics

NPS (Net Promoter Score)



The question:

On a scale from 0 to 10, how likely is it that you would recommend us to a friend or colleague?



The formula:

% Promoters (9-10) minus % Detractors (0-6)

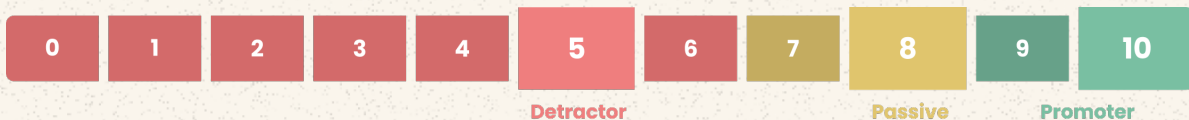


What it tells you:

Long-term loyalty and your potential for growth through word-of-mouth.

Net Promoter Score gives you a quick way to understand how customers perceive you overall – not tied to a specific transaction, but to the relationship as a whole.

The three groups



Detractors (0-6)

These customers have the potential to damage your brand. They're dissatisfied and unlikely to recommend you.

What to do:

Reach out directly. Ask what you could do to improve their experience or change their perception. This is damage control, but also an opportunity to recover trust.

Passives (7-8)

They're the dangerous middle ground. Content enough to stay for now, but they'll leave for a 10% discount elsewhere.

What to do:

Analyse their reviews to identify any trends that you can address. Make their experience worth the price. Shift them from "fine with it" to "wouldn't go anywhere else." A happy customer becomes a loyal customer.

Promoters (9-10)

These are your advocates. They're loyal and likely to recommend you to others.

What to do:

Reward their advocacy. Create a VIP loyalty path, offer them a referral incentive or engage them with a benefits programme that encourages them to keep recommending you.

CSAT (Customer Satisfaction)

The question:

How satisfied are you with your delivery experience?

Recommended scale: 1-5 stars or 1-5 rating (Very unsatisfied to very satisfied)



What it tells you: Short-term happiness. Whether a specific interaction met expectations.

The goal: Fix immediate friction. If CSAT drops on 'Checkout,' you have a UX problem, not a brand problem.

Customer satisfaction can be tracked on a per-experience basis. It allows you to understand immediate issues within the purchase process that can be solved quickly. By asking for a pulse check at key moments, you can build a robust picture of how various areas of your customer journey are performing.

This should be asked as part of the post-purchase review process.

CES (Customer Effort Score)

The question:

How easy was it to solve your issue?

Recommended scale: 1-5 stars or 1-5 rating (Very unsatisfied to very satisfied)







What it tells you: Operational efficiency. How much work the customer had to do.

The insight: In service interactions, ease is a better predictor of loyalty than delight. Customers would rather you be 'easy to deal with' than 'delightful but difficult.'

This should be used when a customer has had an interaction with your support team. You're aiming to understand how your team deals with day-to-day queries and complaints.

Quick Summary

|  Metric |  The question |  The goal |  Best for... |
|--|--|--|---|
| NPS (Net Promoter Score) | “How likely are you to recommend us?” | Long-term loyalty. Predicting future growth. | Relationship health check (Quarterly). |
| CSAT (Customer Satisfaction) | “How satisfied were you with your delivery?” | Short-term happiness. Fixing immediate friction. | Post-transaction (Support, Delivery) |
| CES (Customer Effort Score) | “How easy was it to solve your issue?” | Operational efficiency. Reducing friction. | After a support ticket or checkout. |

DISCOUNT COFFEE



Turning sentiment into action

The Challenge

When they transitioned from B2B wholesale to direct-to-consumer during the pandemic, Discount Coffee needed to build trust quickly with an entirely new customer base.

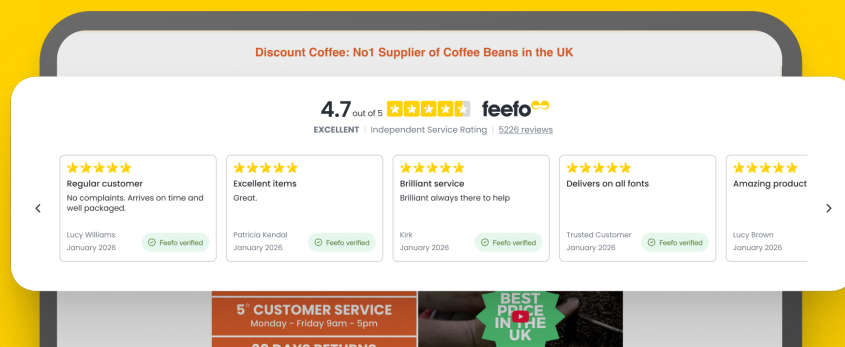
The Solution

They made sentiment analysis operational. Every week, the team reviews all feedback rated 3 stars or below and addresses issues immediately.

One wave of negative feedback highlighted problems with their courier service. Rather than treating these as isolated complaints, they tracked the sentiment pattern, identified the root cause, and switched courier providers.

The Result

Delivery complaints dropped immediately. By treating low sentiment as an actionable signal rather than individual complaints, they protected their customer retention and maintained service standards during rapid growth.



The importance of tagging

You can measure NPS, CSAT and CES to understand how customers feel. But when you're dealing with thousands of responses, you can't manually read every comment and track every theme.

That's where tagging comes in.

Tags allow you to categorise feedback into themes – delivery speed, product accuracy, price, ease of checkout. Now you can track patterns over time and spot emerging issues before they become widespread problems.

For example:

 Lucy Wang
 ⭐⭐⭐⭐

The service wasn't the best, staff took ages to bring us our food.

If "**customer service**" scores are consistently low on Mondays, you might need better weekend handover processes

 David Hemus
 ⭐⭐⭐⭐

I tried calling customer service twice today and couldn't get through?

If "**can't reach anyone**" appears repeatedly for a specific department or policy, you know which team needs more resource

 Jessica Cousins
 ⭐⭐⭐⭐

Love my new toaster but there was an excessive amount of packaging!

If mentions of "**packaging**" spike after a supplier change, you can investigate immediately

Tagging is easily accessible in most review platforms, with many offering advanced functionality to help auto-tag and provide quicker, more tangible insights.

Quality within quantity

Feedback fatigue is real. Ask too much, too often, and customers stop responding – or worse, they give you low-effort answers just to get through it.

In our "How to Collect Feedback" guide, we covered asking the right questions at the right time. The same principle applies to measurement: you cannot track everything at every stage.

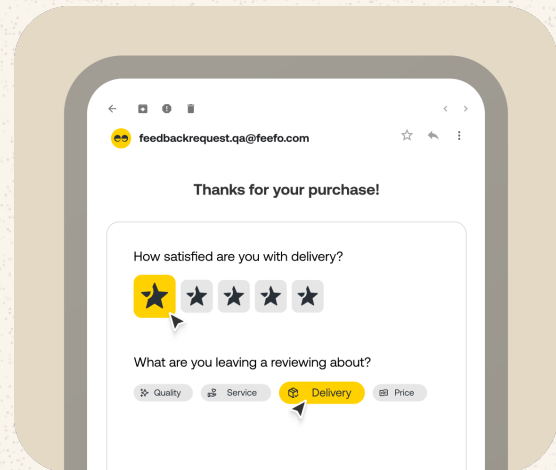
The key is matching what you measure to what actually matters for your business right now.

For example:

If delivery is a known pain point, ask a specific question: **"How satisfied were you with your delivery experience?"**, then tag responses under **"Delivery"** so you can track trends over time.

This gives you actionable data without overwhelming customers with generic questions.

By being strategic about what you measure – and when – you'll get more valuable feedback without seeing a drop-off in response rates.



Using trends to act fast

Measuring sentiment isn't just about identifying big operational fixes. Sometimes the data reveals quick wins – problems you can solve immediately without waiting for budget approval or product roadmaps.

Example:

Your tagged feedback shows customers repeatedly struggling with "coffee temperature" on your new machine. You don't need to wait two years for the next product iteration.

You can:

- ✓ Brief your marketing team to create a "How to adjust your temperature settings" guide
- ✓ Add the content to your FAQ and product page
- ✓ Address the query proactively in post-purchase emails

Or perhaps sentiment analysis reveals that "fast heating time" has the highest positive impact on satisfaction scores. Now you know what customers truly value – and you can lead with that in your next marketing campaign.

This solves the customer's problem now, demonstrates you're listening, and creates the kind of specific, helpful content that performs well in AI-powered search results.

The principle: Not every insight requires engineering time. Some just need clear communication. By tracking sentiment trends, you can identify these opportunities and act on them within days.

By surfacing what's most important to customers – what gets mentioned positively, frequently – you can also gain easy intelligence for marketing campaigns.

Research from Kantar

KANTAR

Shows the sweet spot is under 5 minutes for most feedback requests. This is about 3-5 questions.

Getting started with tags

You don't need a data science team. Most modern review platforms have sentiment analysis built in.

- 1 Map your tags. Choose 5-10 topics that matter to your business (e.g. delivery, quality, price, ease of use, customer service)
- 2 Let AI categorise incoming reviews automatically
- 3 Review your dashboard weekly – look for red flags
- 4 Act on what's broken immediately

Once you're comfortable, you can dig deeper – tracking sentiment by customer segment, region, product line, or season.

Scaling with AI

How to read 10,000 reviews in 10 seconds

Manual analysis doesn't scale. You cannot read every review, and even if you did, human bias would skew the results. AI doesn't get tired, and it doesn't get offended.

But not all AI sentiment analysis is created equal. The difference between platforms that build with AI versus those that bolt it on matters more than you might think.

Many legacy platforms add AI as a surface feature: a generic language model layered on top of outdated analytics tools. This leads to generic sentiment categories that don't match how your business actually operates.

Platforms that build on AI from the ground up work differently. The intelligence is woven into how your data is structured, not just added as an afterthought.

This means sentiment analysis aligns with how your business actually operates: your teams, your products, your reality.

That's the foundation that makes AI genuinely useful.

And when AI handles the tedious work of reading every review, you can focus on what matters: deciding what to fix first.

For example:

Review:



Lilly Jones



The boots are **beautiful** but the delivery **took two weeks**

A human might see this as a 3-star review and move on. AI spots two different stories:

Product: "Beautiful" →  Positive

Delivery: "Two weeks" →  Negative

Why this changes everything





Instead of just knowing "Our score is down," you can now say: **"Our product score is excellent, but our delivery performance is tanking in the South West."**

This allows you to:

- ✓ **Pinpoint the problem.** Know exactly where to focus resources
- ✓ **Track fixes in real-time.** See if operational changes actually improve scores
- ✓ **Prevent escalation.** Spot issues before they become widespread.

What AI unlocks (that manual reading can't)



-  **Speed:** Analyse thousands of comments in seconds.
-  **Consistency:** Every review gets assessed the same way. No bad days or blind spots.
-  **Early warning:** Spot emerging patterns before they're obvious. A small uptick in "slow response" mentions might not register to you, but AI flags it immediately.
-  **Scale across markets:** If you operate internationally, AI can analyse sentiment in multiple languages without needing separate teams.

What you still need humans for

AI is your radar – it scans the horizon and alerts you to storms.
But you're still the one steering the ship.

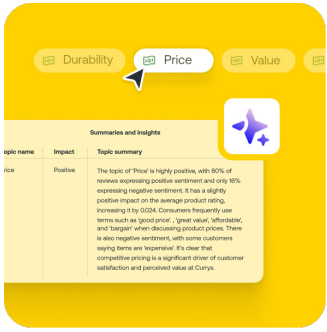
Humans are essential for:

- 1 Context and nuance.**
Sarcasm, local slang, and tone can still trip up AI.
- 2 Decision-making.**
AI tells you what is wrong and how badly. You decide the budget, timeline, and fix.
- 3 Closing the loop.**
Responding to customers and driving internal change requires your empathy and leadership.

Tag Analytics

Feefo's new Tag Analytics tool offers a means to easily understand your tags.

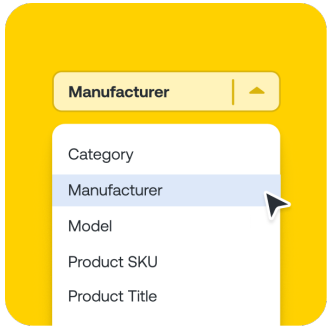
The feature



The screenshot shows a dashboard with three tags: Durability, Price, and Value. The 'Price' tag is selected, and a summary table is displayed. The table has columns for 'Topic name', 'Impact', and 'Topic summary'. The 'Price' row shows a 'Positive' impact. The summary text states: 'The topic of Price is highly positive, with 80% of reviews expressing positive sentiment and only 20% expressing negative sentiment. It has a slightly positive impact on the average product rating, increasing it by 0.024. Consumers frequently use terms such as 'good price', 'great value', 'affordable', and 'bargain' when discussing product price. There is also negative sentiment, with some customers saying items are 'expensive'. It's clear that competitive pricing is a significant driver of customer satisfaction and perceived value at Currys.'

Makes it tangible

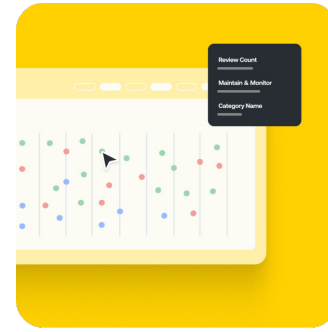
It explains how sentiment affects star rating – and what that means. (Boosting average rating by 0.1% can boost conversion by 25%)



The screenshot shows a dropdown menu for the 'Manufacturer' tag. The menu lists the following categories: Category, Manufacturer, Model, Product SKU, and Product Title. The 'Manufacturer' option is highlighted with a mouse cursor.

Operationalises your tags

Transforms your existing categories into actionable "Topics" with auto-generated summaries.



The screenshot shows a visual dashboard with a heatmap of data points in various colors (red, green, blue, yellow) on a grid. A legend in the top right corner includes 'Review Count', 'Maintain & Monitor', and 'Category Name'.

Provides an action matrix

A visual dashboard that shows where to focus your resources today.

TL;DR









- **Stop sifting, start acting:**
AI turns thousands of raw comments into a prioritised to-do list in seconds.
- **Measure the Impact:**
Don't just find "negative" reviews; find the ones that are actually tanking your average rating.
- **Evidence-based Decisions:**
Use quantified data to justify roadmap changes or supplier shifts to your stakeholders.

Sector-Specific Blueprints

What does "Good" look like in your industry?

Different industries have different signals. A "long wait" in a restaurant is 15 minutes; in an insurance claim, it's 15 days. Context matters.

What to listen for by sector



|  Sector |  Key questions to ask |  What negative sentiment reveals |  Where to focus |
|---|--|---|--|
|  Retail & E-commerce | Is product quality consistent? Are sizing guides accurate? Is packaging protecting items in transit? | Customers mention "wrong size," "arrived damaged" or "not as pictured" | Reduce returns. Audit product descriptions, sizing accuracy, and courier handling |
|  Travel & Hospitality | Do rooms match expectations? Is service fast enough during peak times? Are facilities clean? | Complaints about "room not as pictured," "breakfast cold," "long wait at check-in," | Operational fixes. Audit photography, staffing at peak times, and housekeeping standards. |
|  Finance & Insurance | Is the claims process clear? Are fees transparent? Can customers reach someone when they need help? | Complaints about "hidden fees," "claim rejected," "can't reach anyone," "too complicated" | Trust recovery. Simplify communications, improve app UX, and make pricing clearer upfront. |
|  B2B / Saas | Are support tickets resolved quickly? Is the platform stable? Do customers understand how to use it? | Mentions of "system down," "no response," "can't figure out how to..." | Churn prevention. Drops in stability or support sentiment predict cancellations months ahead. |

How to use this blueprint

1 Start with questions, not tags

Don't jump straight into creating sentiment categories. First ask: What would cause a customer to leave us? The answers become your focus areas.

For example:

-  **Retail:** "Would they return it?" → Track sentiment around sizing, quality, delivery condition.
-  **Insurance:** "Would they cancel?" → Track sentiment around pricing, customer service, policy changes.

2 Track sentiment on these themes over time

Whether you're using a review platform, spreadsheets, or just reading feedback manually, monitor how these themes trend week to week or month to month.

- Is "delivery" sentiment dropping?
- Is "customer service" improving?
- Are certain issues seasonal or tied to specific events (e.g., Black Friday)?

3 Set thresholds for action

Decide what constitutes a problem before you're in crisis mode.

Example thresholds:

- Any theme dropping below 70% positive sentiment: **Investigate**
- Any theme showing a 10% decline week-on-week: **Urgent action required**
- Any theme mentioned in 3+ negative reviews in one day: **Immediate review**

4 Connect themes to teams

Make it clear who owns what. When a theme flags red, the responsible team should know immediately.

Examples of ownership:

- "Delivery issues" → **Operations team**
- "Product quality" → **Buying/Product team**
- "Support response time" → **Customer service team**
- "App crashes" → **Tech team**

This removes ambiguity and speeds up fixes. This works even in smaller businesses with fewer teams.

Cross-sector patterns worth watching

Some sentiment signals matter regardless of industry. When you see these phrases, act fast:



Maria Perez

I did not have a great experience at Cafe Maple and **won't be back** Soon...

"Never again" / "Won't be back"

Genuine churn risk. These reviews drive rating decay hardest. Use this to trigger a recovery workflow.



Josh Shelbourne

Finally! have been waiting 2 weeks for my phone to be delivered!

"Finally" / "At last"

Process too slow. Customers are relieved, but only after frustration. Map your customer journey to find the delay and eliminate it.



Allysa Frampton

Wish I had known that the 'ocean view' rooms are at the top of a very steep hill...

"Should have known" / "Wish I'd been told"

Expectation gap. Your marketing or onboarding isn't matching reality. Audit your website copy, confirmation emails, and product descriptions against actual customer experience.



Fred Peters

Waiting one hours for my starter made the entire meal feel like a **waste of time.**

"Waste of time" / "Pointless"

High-effort, low-value. Strong churn predictor. Customers put in effort and got nothing back. Investigate what promised value didn't land.

TL;DR

- **Each sector has different pressure points.** What matters in retail doesn't matter in SaaS
- **Start with questions, not tools.** Ask "What would make a customer leave?" then track sentiment on those themes
- **Set clear thresholds.** Know when to investigate vs. escalate
- **Assign ownership.** Connect each theme to a team so fixes happen fast
- **Watch for universal warning signs.** Phrases like "never again" and "finally" signal urgent issues across all industries

Final thoughts from Feefo

Many companies collect feedback and let it sit. This guide offers a practical approach for how to turn that feedback into something actionable.

You now know the difference between a score and a story. You know how to spot the signals that predict churn before it happens. You know which questions to ask, which themes to track, and when to act on what you find.

The hard part is done. Now it's about momentum. When you understand sentiment, you stop guessing. You stop having internal debates about

priorities because your customers have already told you what matters most. You stop reacting to fires and start preventing them.

Your customers are already telling you what they value, what frustrates them, and what would make them loyal advocates. Whether you're using a simple NPS survey or advanced AI sentiment analysis, now you know how to hear them clearly.

The insight is there. The tools are available. **What will you fix first?**

The Sentiment Audit

Actionable checklist

You've collected the data. Now, are you actually understanding it? Use this checklist to audit your current maturity.

The setup

- Defined the metrics:** We know the difference between NPS (Loyalty), CSAT (Satisfaction), and CES (Effort) scores and when to use each one.
- Mapped the customer journey:** We know where we're asking for feedback (e.g., post-purchase vs. post-delivery vs. post-support).
- Separated product and service:** We collect product and service reviews separately to avoid muddled data.
- Set rating scales:** We're using consistent scales for CSAT (1-5) and CES (1-5 or 1-7) across all touchpoints.
- Chosen our tags:** We've identified 5-10 core themes that matter most to our business (e.g., delivery, price, quality, customer service).

The analysis

- Categorisation in place:** We're using AI tools to auto-detect sentiment themes, or we have a regular manual review process.
- Tracking trends over time:** We monitor sentiment weekly or monthly, not just as one-off snapshots.
- Segmented by context:** We know if sentiment differs by customer type (new vs. returning, high-value vs. low-value) or by region/product line.
- Benchmarked against our sector:** We know what "good" looks like in our industry (e.g., typical NPS scores, common pain points).
- Set action thresholds:** We've defined when to investigate (e.g., any theme below 70% positive) vs. when to escalate (e.g., 10% decline week-on-week).

Turning insight

- Assigned ownership:** Each sentiment theme has a clear owner (e.g., "Delivery" = Operations, "App crashes" = Tech team).
- Connected to operations:** Sentiment data is shared with Product, Operations, and Customer Service teams - not siloed in Marketing.
- Built a response plan for detractors:** We have a process to reach out to Detractors (0-6 NPS) within 24-48 hours.
- Tracking fixes:** We monitor whether operational changes (e.g., switching courier, updating product descriptions) actually improve sentiment scores.
- Closed the loop publicly:** We tell customers when we've fixed something based on their feedback (via website updates, emails, or social media).
- Celebrated wins internally:** Positive sentiment and team mentions are shared with staff to reinforce excellent service.

Where to start

This week

- Pick one metric (NPS is the easiest starting point)
- Identify your top 5 themes based on your sector blueprint
- Read your last 20 reviews and manually tag them to spot patterns

This month

- Set up automated sentiment tracking (most review platforms have this built in)
- Create a weekly sentiment review meeting with your team
- Define your action thresholds (e.g., any theme below 70% positive = investigate)

This quarter

- Assign clear ownership for each sentiment theme
- Build your first sentiment trend report
- Share a "You Said, We Did" update with customers showing how you've acted on feedback

About Feefo

Feefo is the world's largest purchaser-verified feedback and insights platform. We work with over **6,500 brands** and help millions of customers buy with confidence every day.

Feefo's suite of tools, combined with our technical solutions expertise, enables our clients to gain a deeper understanding of customer sentiment, behaviour and intent, empowering them with insights to make better business decisions and improve their return on investment.

Brands that care about authenticity, accuracy and integrity work with Feefo to build a long-term relationship with their genuine customers.

Feefo is the gold standard in customer reviews.

[Learn more about Feefo](#)



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