

Transactional Trust in Social Commerce – Survey Findings

**Survey Conducted by Scott Allen, TheVirtualHandshake.com
Commissioned by Rupleaf**

Trust between individuals is something that is ordinarily developed over the course of the relationship – slow to gain and quick to lose. In most of our day-to-day commerce, we trust the individuals we deal with partly because we are generally a trusting society, but also largely because we trust the brands we deal with – we trust the controls put in place by organizations. The clerk at Wal-Mart won't short-change us because that would get detected and they'd be fired. The salesman at the Ford dealership won't rip us off because that would be bad for business – you would tell your friends, perhaps even a consumer watchdog at the local newspaper or TV station.

And yet millions of transactions take place every day between total strangers through newspaper and online classifieds, online auctions, and other “social commerce”. “Transactional trust” is a term ordinarily used to describe the trust created between a consumer and an e-commerce site. For established brands like Amazon or Best Buy, the brand's reputation is typically the largest factor, but what about between individuals, or between individuals and small businesses? How do people determine “transactional trust” that allows them to make large deals with complete strangers, all arranged usually without a face-to-face meeting?

That's the question this survey hopes to answer.

Survey Methodology

The survey was run from June 20 through July 11, 2006 and conducted using SurveyMonkey.com. Participants were self-selecting, not a random sample. An open invitation for participants was announced in The Virtual Handshake Blog (<http://TheVirtualHandshake.com/blog>) and several social networking sites (Ryze, Ecademy, Tribe, et al.) and mailing lists. Policies on eBay prevented announcing it directly within eBay, and community standards on craigslist prevented widespread or repetitive promotion there, however it was listed at least once in each of the 20 most active cities on craigslist.

285 people responded to the survey. However, due to the inevitable attrition rate and question skip rate on web-based surveys, most of the questions have responses from a smaller number of people. Given the nature and intent of the survey, though, there is no need to invalidate any responses, so the numbers reported in these findings are based on the actual totals.

The survey was divided into three sections: one just for buyers, one just for sellers, and one for everyone, whether they have ever bought or sold through these sites and services.

Part I: Recent Buying

202 respondents (71%) indicated that they had made at least one purchase via networking sites, online auctions, and other person-to-person or person-to-small business advertising means within the past year.

Participants were then asked which sites they had made purchases through, and how many within the past year in each site. The following table shows the number of people who made purchases on each site and the average number of sales for those who had made one or more purchases. Percentages shown are out of the 175 who responded to the question.

Table 1: Buyers by site

	# buyers	Avg. # of sales
eBay	144 (82%)	17.2*
craigslist	52 (30%)	4.1
Social networking site with classified ads	22 (13%)	2.9
Traditional newspaper print classifieds	20 (11%)	3.7
A newspaper's online classifieds	18 (10%)	8.7
Classified magazine – print	14 (8%)	2.0
Classified magazine's online site	8 (5%)	2.3
Other online-only classified site	18 (10%)	3.3

*It's worth noting that a number of "power buyers" skewed the eBay result. 10 respondents reported having made 50 or more purchases in the past year, with one respondent claiming 1,000 purchases (while extremely rare, that is not an outrageous claim).

Also, one respondent mentioned that they did a lot of person-to-person buying & selling via Usenet groups, which was not included in the list.

Buyers were next asked if they had ever researched a seller online, i.e., outside the classified site via a search engine or other means, before buying. Buyers were split, but the great majority said they had done it at least occasionally:

Table 2: Buyers' research of sellers

Always	33 (19%)
Frequently	36 (30%)
Occasionally	57 (33%)
Never	49 (28%)

The next question is the critical question of the survey – what factors do buyers use to determine their level of trust in the seller. In order to rank them, "very important" is assigned a score of 2, "somewhat important" a 1, and "not important" a score of 0. "Information unavailable" is not included in the calculations. They are listed in the following table based on the calculated order of importance, rather than in the order in which they were originally presented.

Table 3: Factors in determining buyer trust in sellers

	Score	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important at all	Information usually unavailable
Posted ratings of the seller	1.64	117 (67%)	43 (25%)	9 (5%)	6 (3%)
Reputation of the site or publication	1.61	110 (63%)	57 (33%)	5 (3%)	3 (2%)
Payment method you are using	1.38	82 (47%)	72 (41%)	17 (10%)	4 (2%)
Endorsements/testimonials	1.31	69 (39%)	77 (44%)	18 (10%)	11 (6%)
Intuition/gut-level reaction/prayer	1.28	73 (42%)	74 (42%)	25 (14%)	3 (2%)
Quality of the ad	1.27	58 (33%)	107 (61%)	10 (6%)	0 (0%)
E-mail or phone call with the seller	1.12	59 (34%)	74 (42%)	38 (22%)	4 (2%)
Outside research of the seller	0.98	37 (21%)	83 (47%)	41 (23%)	14 (8%)
Business seller vs. individual seller	0.84	22 (13%)	100 (57%)	49 (28%)	4 (2%)
Prior knowledge of the seller	0.79	33 (19%)	61 (35%)	67 (38%)	14 (8%)
Personal appearance of the seller	0.63	15 (9%)	61 (35%)	68 (39%)	31 (18%)

The fact that posted ratings are the #1 factor was a bit of a surprise, but it indicates that people do put a lot of faith in them, even though eBay's reputation system has a reputation of its own for being positively biased. As expected, the reputation of the site itself plays a major part, as it does in most transactional trust. Buyers trust that the controls put in place by the sites themselves will help maintain a high level of trust.

Respondents were then asked an open-ended question to comment on these factors or any other factors. 89 people provided responses. The following is a selection plus counts of recurring themes:

Responsiveness (12):

"Promptness of response in the transaction is vital; if I receive a response within two days of the transaction, my trust level soars; longer than that and they should let me know what took so long. Lack of a response means I won't purchase again, even if the shipping is prompt and the merchandise is perfect, although a note in the shipment earns them points in my book."

"Timeliness of the meeting or email response to mine. VERY important. Excuses given for no showing timely the first time. VERY important. Location to meet and when. Somewhat important."

"If I have a question I want an answer within a reasonable amount of time. If someone indicates in their ad that they will do X and they don't deliver X I am initially tolerant through a phone call, or email once. I've 'questioned' that a number of people I know suddenly get 'disconnected' from the person who is supposed to resolve their problem. They then have to wait in line (I HATE that "the estimated time before a customer representative will be with you is 10 minutes...")"

Previous experience, length of time in business (12):

"Things that are important to me: Ratio of time on the site to feedback (low:lots is questionable, it's hard to get a lot fast unless you're scamming)."

"If I purchase from an online seller - I prefer to do business with someone who has been online for at least a year."



“How many other successful transactions the seller has completed. In other words, they aren't a newbie. Although, I wouldn't count someone out for that, but it does help that someone has sold and done a great job for other buyers.”

Referrals (11):

“Recommendations of friends are very important. I would never act without this.”

“Biggest factor for me was the seller was known to friends thus the endorsement was, for me, the biggest deciding factor.”

“The tried and true word of mouth referral. If NUMEROUS trusted friends/colleagues/family members tell me, "Hey check out this site -- you should buy what they're offering," chances are I will. It comes down to the "T" word: Trust.”

Ad/site quality, especially grammar & spelling (10):

“If there are misspellings for example or if the ad or website is poorly worded or poorly designed that reflects extremely negatively.”

“The ad itself is important. The seller's use of grammar and choice of words make a difference in my buying decision.”

“Typos - this is not extremely important but it augments my view of the seller and how much effort/money they put into their website. If it appears that the site was just slapped together and not even edited, I won't buy anything from them and I'll get off of their website as soon as possible.”

“The overall professional nature of the website or the ad is very important to me. If there are misspellings for example or if the ad or website is poorly worded or poorly designed that reflects extremely negatively.”

Other recurring themes included:

- Verifiable contact info (phone and/or address)
- Personal contact via voice or face-to-face
- Level of risk (higher-priced purchases require more investigation)
- Over-hyped language vs. friendly/ethical language
- Relative price of the item (i.e., way below market value is a red flag)

Now, the burning question is, do these issues of trust just affect how people feel about their purchases, or do they actually have an impact on buying behavior? A whopping 71% of buyers indicated that at some point they had decided not do business with a seller because they didn't get a good sense of trust. Here are a few of the stories:

“For example on eBay a common practice that will turn me off to a seller is if they pad the shipping costs. I never buy from a seller who does not state the shipping costs in their ad and if their shipping cost is inflated I simply will not buy no matter how good a deal I'm getting for the simple reason that it infuriates me that the seller is attempting to trick me into buying something with a lower price by hiding a ridiculously high shipping cost.”



"I was to buy HIS item. He no-showed with little excuse twice. Someone was to buy MY item. She emailed a week later. Too bad."

"I buy from ebay sellers and I have learned to check their feedback ratings. If some had negative feedback then I look to see what the buyer AND what the seller said. If the buyer seems more reasonable than the seller then I decide not to buy because I don't want the hassle of trying to get a refund if I don't get my item."

"I tend to get a feel by the way they respond to my email or phone questions before the purchase. I also read feedback and skip a seller, not just because of negatives as I realise these are sometimes unwarranted, but more because of why they have negative feedback and also how they have responded to it. For local sales, I will not buy if they dont allow me to fully inspect the merchandise beforehand."

"Too many promises made that seemed impossible."

"After reading everything I kept getting the feeling that it was too good to be true. Sometimes it isn't what that is said but what isn't."

"On eBay, this person had a very high rating and was a Power Seller, however, I checked out there comments and noticed that over the past six months, their customer satisfaction had dropped immensely. I didn't buy the item and my boss did and he got burned."

"One case in particular, I read all the positive feedback (100's) on a seller and the product was not at all expensive. I just didn't feel right about doing business with this person, so I didn't. I went back to the site and the seller was no longer on the site."

"Even if happy with terms of specific purchase, the other activities of vendor will always be of importance. If they are involved in activities I have strong feelings against, I won't complete."

"I've seen items on eBay that I needed, but I didn't like the feedback left for the person; unprofessional looking sale pages, when the seller has been selling for a long time- that sloppiness gives me the impression that they don't care about anything but the sale; feedback that has been left by the seller that is always the same thing gives me a bad impression and I don't usually buy from them."

"With on-line purchases I tend to search the name of the seller and the word scam and feedback. I have eliminated a few companies that looked good on the surface but had some underlying problems with service and products. I have also made decision in favor of a seller when this search did not turn up any results."

We then asked if buyers had experienced any of the negative consequences of dealing with untrustworthy people (percentages are out of the 175 who responded to the buying section):

Table 4: Problems experienced by buyers

Product wasn't accurately described/pictured	51 (29%)
Product was defective	27 (15%)
Product/service never delivered	22 (13%)
Tried to switch price	6 (3%)
Fake money order / overpayment check / scam	5 (3%)
Flake (seller didn't show up on time or at all, etc.)	15 (9%)
Rudeness	24 (14%)
Harassment	9 (5%)
Other	23 (13%)

The freeform responses for "Other" included three mentions of shipping delays, but no other consistent trends.

Many respondents provided some in-depth stories of their experiences. The two recurring themes that sparked the most responses were products not being delivered as described or pictured and sellers becoming rude or angry.

"An eBay seller waited until the 10-day auction closed (I was the only bidder and essential was buying two products for less than the price of one), to tell me that there were many errors made in the posting by a secretary and that they would not honor the contract. I would have been okay and accepted the explanation, but the seller was extremely rude about it from the first email (a response to my PayPal payment that I made minutes after the close of the auction). I left negative feedback and let the seller know that she would be hearing from my lawyer (my husband is an attorney). After much thought I decided she wasn't worth the effort and dropped the issue. Ten months later, she sent me a harassing email because she hadn't heard from my attorney yet (I hadn't told her that my husband would do it until I responded to the harassing email). I haven't heard from her again."

"I have had an overwhelmingly positive experience shopping online in general and purchasing items via eBay and craigslist specifically. I did however have a very negative experience when a seller became irate when I emailed him for information on his item and then did not purchase his item immediately. He was extremely rude and vile. I'm just glad I didn't give him any of my money."

"I gave up on eBay after receiving a number of harassing and threatening e-mails from sellers on there. Made me feel like I was back in the wrong clique from high school."

"I purchased what I believed to be a 3/4 viola. When I received product it was actually a full size violin. Both are the same size. It was very obvious what this seller was doing and I called him on it. Seller became very irate and did not want to resolve issue to my satisfaction."

Part II: Recent Selling

120 respondents (47% of the 255 who made it this far in the survey) indicated that they had made at least one sale via networking sites, online auctions, and other person-to-person or person-to-small business advertising means within the past year, broken down by site as follows (note: only 115 respondents continued beyond this point regarding selling):

Table 5: Sellers by site

	# buyers	Avg. # of sales
eBay	73 (63%)	45.0*
Craigslist	38 (33%)	17.7
Social networking site with classified ads	24 (21%)	15.5
Traditional newspaper print classifieds	13 (11%)	19.5
A newspaper's online classifieds	10 (9%)	12.8
Classified magazine – print	11 (10%)	3.8
Classified magazine's online site	8 (7%)	2.4
Other online-only classified site	8 (7%)	85.1*

*As with buyers, a small number of high-volume sellers threw the curve.

Sellers were much less likely to investigate buyers online:

Table 6: Sellers' research of buyers

Always	14 (12%)
Frequently	17 (15%)
Occasionally	28 (24%)
Never	56 (49%)

If we score “Always” as a 3, “Frequently” as a 2, “Occasionally” as a 1, and “Never” as a 0, the weighted average of buyer investigation of sellers is 1.30, while seller investigation of buyers is 0.90.

Initially, this may seem intuitively obvious, as in auction sites, it is generally not possible to investigate the buyer prior to the deal being made – it is simply awarded to the highest bidder. Even in classified sites, the seller is often more easily researched. If they are a business seller, they may even provide links to their web site or other information in their ad. Buyers, on the other hand, are usually relatively anonymous.

However, a closer look at the results did not show any correlation between seller investigation of buyers and the site being used. Of the 14 people who answered “Always”, 8 were primarily eBay sellers, and the rest were scattered among the other sites. Only 3 of the people reporting “Always” had sold on a social networking site, where investigation of the buyer would be easier. 11 of 17 who answered “Frequently” had sold on eBay, with 7 of them being repeat sellers.

The other reason that could possibly explain it is that the deal is simply less risky for the seller than the buyer. Basically, either the money is good or it isn't. Certainly, it's a little more complicated than that, but there are a lot fewer reasons not to trust a buyer, as responses to later questions will show.

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Scott Allen, July 2006, Commissioned by Rapleaf

We then asked sellers to rate the following items in order of importance for determining their level of trust in the buyer. The same scoring methodology is used here as earlier (very important = 2, somewhat important = 1, not important = 0, unavailable not included in calculations)

Table 7: Factors in determining seller trust in buyers

	Score	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important at all	Information usually unavailable
Payment method you are using	1.29	51 (44%)	43 (37%)	18 (16%)	3 (3%)
Posted ratings of the buyer	1.28	44 (38%)	45 (39%)	15 (13%)	11 (10%)
Reputation of the site or publication	1.19	46 (40%)	37 (32%)	25 (22%)	7 (6%)
Intuition/gut-level reaction/prayer	1.18	40 (35%)	55 (48%)	19 (17%)	1 (1%)
E-mail or phone call with the buyer	1.14	40 (35%)	44 (38%)	25 (22%)	6 (5%)
Endorsements/testimonials	0.97	25 (22%)	46 (40%)	28 (24%)	16 (14%)
Prior knowledge of the buyer	0.68	16 (14%)	37 (32%)	49 (43%)	13 (11%)
Outside research of the buyer	0.71	15 (13%)	42 (37%)	45 (39%)	13 (11%)
Personal appearance of the buyer	0.42	5 (4%)	30 (26%)	60 (52%)	20 (17%)

As expected, the payment method is a key factor for sellers. More surprisingly, posted ratings (when available) are a close second, considerably ahead of direct communication with the buyer or researching them on the web, even when those are available.

Most of the free-form responses were just more detailed versions of the options above. The one recurring theme was getting the payment up front:

“This is not too important to me as long as the \$ is green and I don't let him/her see inside my house.”

“Getting the money in and cleared before sending the item.”

“Buyers unwilling to make any advance payments even after satisfactorily answering all their queries are suspect.”

“Obviously previous customers rank top if we have had smooth transactions. Otherwise, I treat each new buyer with caution until funds have cleared, although they would not be aware of that because I am always polite and professional. However, I always wait for the recommended 4 business days before shipping PayPal or Credit Card payments, and 7 business days for clearance of checks. If a money order is not issued by the postal service where I can immediately cash it, I deposit it and also wait the full 7 business days. Also, I do not trust buyers who try to circumvent customs or other regulations.”

As one would expect based on the other responses, trust issues have less impact on sellers' willingness to do business with buyers. Only 37% of sellers reported ever deciding not to do business with a buyer because they didn't get a good sense of trust, versus 71% of buyers.

The open-ended responses tend to focus mostly on payment issues:

“If a buyer won an auction on eBay and then did not pay for it and did not respond to my requests for payment or an explanation, I will block that person from bidding on future auctions.”

“Just everyday advance fee scams. They send you a bogus check for too much money, stating it is from a business transaction in the US, however, it is clearly posted in Africa. They want to mix methods of payment, such as giving me a check, then receiving 'change' by Western Union. This violates the common sense practiced in most retail businesses. You paid with a check, you get a check in return. You paid with CC, the credit goes on the CC. You paid with cash, you can have cash. Simple stuff like that.”

The other recurring theme was early indication of a difficult buyer:

“Tire kicker. Complainer. I pass. You can have this headache.”

“Someone sought my services and I felt he was just wasting my time. What he wanted was just too vague.”

“In renting the condo, one person came in and asked if they could do all sorts of changes.....I never did follow through with that person.”

“When email questions are rude, or give me a gut feeling the buyer is high risk (i.e. return candidate)”

The most common issues for buyers were flakey and/or rude buyers (percentages are out of the 115 people responding to this section)

Table 8: Problems experienced by sellers

Buyer refused to pay previously agreed price	15 (13%)
Bounced check	6 (5%)
Fake money order / overpayment check / other scam	6 (5%)
Flake (buyer didn't show up on time or at all, etc.)	26 (23%)
Rudeness	20 (17%)
Harassment	9 (8%)
Other	9 (8%)

Most of the free-form responses included comments or stories about flakes:

“For reasons I have not been able to understand there are a ton of flakes on Craigslist. Even when I was giving away free items I still had trouble getting people to come and pick up the free items that they claimed they were so excited to get. I have also had poor experiences with people I have attempted to hire through Craigslist to do freelance work. I receive quick, enthusiastic responses and then 90 percent of the respondents will flake out and either not respond or suddenly be unable to follow through.”

“I've encountered a couple of flakes. One wanted to buy a designer purse but couldn't drive (suspended license, perhaps?) so she had to wait for the weekend so her husband could drive her to town. She asked for my phone and said she'd call me before they left home to arrange a place to meet. She said she really wanted the purse and to hold it for her. She never called and never answered an email after that.”

“No show, no reschedule, no communication. A FLAKE!”

“Person agreed to service but then didn't follow through. I find a lot of 'tire kickers' who bolt.”

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Part III: Increasing Trust Between Buyers and Sellers

In the final question, all participants – buyers, sellers, and a few people who had done neither, were asked, “What one or two things do you feel could be done to best increase the trust between buyers and sellers that would make you feel more comfortable doing business via classifieds (both print and online), social networking sites, etc.?”

196 responses fell generally into several categories:

Table 9: Ways to improve trust

Ratings & feedback	61 (31%)
Complete contact info (verifiable street address/phone/web site)	30 (15%)
Better communication	16 (8%)
3rd-party validation/certification/bonding	12 (6%)
Escrow service	11 (6%)
Secure payment method	10 (5%)
Personal profiles, photos	9 (5%)
Time to get to know each other	7 (4%)
Guarantees, refund policy	6 (3%)
Validated identity	5 (3%)

Here are some of the more eloquent samples of the most popular issues:

Communication, contact info, verified identity:

“Have contact information or means readily available, a prominent link to the information or to a contact form is okay. Publish the seller's geographical location, "our offices are at ..." or a non-PO Box snail address.”

“Only thing I can think of is that the person must submit full information to agency. Address, home phone and real name. Many on-line places use profiles where you have limited access to real identities - even for owners, moderators.”

“Have all the right stuff on their site, such as testimonials, a real address (no P.O. box) phone number, pictures of themselves. Be easily accessible.”

“Having email or phone contact before the transaction is completed, whether I am the buyer or seller, frequently gives insight that I find very valuable.”

“Let both the buyers and sellers provide concrete proofs of their permanent address, tax deduction details and a free dependable third party certification to their standing and reputation in the online market place.”

“Having a permanent identity (like there is on email) perhaps linked to other info (webpages, social networking sites).”

Ratings & feedback:

“A persistent shared trust system most likely based on eBay's feedback system, with contributions to another user only by someone who has legitimately transacted with them. Using email address as a mostly unique identifier, just to make it a smidge harder to game.”

“Identify verification and reputation service which extended beyond a single auction or sales site, or a federated reputation service.”

“Reputations systems are important, and being able to understand a person's reputation across multiple sites would be a boon (in other words, to blend , say, MySpace ratings and eBay ratings).”

“A rating system like eBay has, or some other form of system to show that the buyer and seller in question has a verified reputation. If no such system is in place, you can only guess based on presentation if they seem legitimate.”

“I would like to see some sort of way of keeping up with all the bad buyers/sellers or scammers so that we don't try to buy or sell from them. That way we could avoid the hassle and time lost of not getting the wanted result.”

“Real ratings, rather than the fake ratings of eBay. eBay strongly discourages even a "neutral" rating because of how the system is set up.”

“I think track records could be left for new buyers or sellers to see to indicate past performance.”

“Use a trusted medium like PayPal for all online transactions with a rating system like eBay attached i think this would weed out all the flakes.”

“I like ebay's feedback concept, although I wish there was a centralized version of this, so I could see how their feedback looks from other places (Craigslist sales, Barnes and Nobles used book sales etc) and so people could take their feedback scores with them. Also, a "google me" link would be cool, although probably nowhere near as useful as it sounds.”

“Love the eBay use of feedback ratings. Sellers are very leery of getting negative feedback, so they are very willing to help the customer to avoid it.”

“eBay's feedback system is pretty good, provided they have a fairly long history. I like that Craigslist is so anonymous, but I also think it contributes to the flakiness of the people doing business.”

“Some sort of due diligence, much like eBay's rating system. I think also that it would be good to have some sort of overall trusted vendor rating for use on the entire internet.”

“I like eBay's ranking/rating system (when it's done correctly)- I wish there were a way to do this with other businesses. My only complaint about eBay's rating system is that so many people just have a canned response to their buyers, and it doesn't always help.”



Conclusions

Transactional trust appears to be much more important to buyers than to sellers in a social commerce setting. The top four issues for buyers to determine trust all ranked higher in importance than the number one issue for sellers (see Tables 3 and 7). The average of the top five issues was 1.44 (out of 2), versus 1.22 for sellers. Sellers are also less likely to research buyers prior to completing the transaction (see Tables 2 and 6). Only 37% of sellers have ever decided not to do business with someone due to a lack of trust, versus 71% of buyers.

This seems to have a good basis in fact. Only 43% of sellers reported ever having any actual trouble with buyers, while 61% of sellers reported experiencing an actual problem with the seller.

The ways in which buyers and sellers determine trust is very similar, though. Ranking the nine factors considered for both buyers and sellers, not one single factor varied by more than two ranks between buyers and sellers (note: buyer rank excludes the two items not relevant to sellers):

Table 10: Factors in determining trust compared between buyers and sellers

	Buyer rank	Seller rank
Posted ratings of the buyer	1	2
Reputation of the site or publication	2	3
Payment method you are using	3	1
Endorsements/testimonials	4	6
Intuition/gut-level reaction/prayer	5	4
E-mail or phone call with the buyer	6	5
Outside research of the buyer	7	8
Prior knowledge of the buyer	8	7
Personal appearance of the buyer	9	9

Payment – how the money is handled – is the highest priority for sellers. Recommended ways of improving payment trust included the use of PayPal, credit card or other secure payment method. For larger transactions in particular, many people wanted easier-to-use, more affordable escrow systems.

For buyers, relevant history – a track record, a reputation – is most important. Three of the top four issues for buyers are related to this (two related to the individual seller and one to the agent site handling the advertisement or transaction).

In the free-form responses as to what could best be done to improve transactional trust in social commerce, everything is centered on having a persistent, verifiable identity and history. While anonymity may feel safer for buyers and some sellers, it's not conducive to building trust. Ideally, buyers and sellers both want to see:

- Verified identity
- Valid contact information – street address, phone, web site and e-mail
- Online social presence
- Feedback from others you're done business with
- Ratings as a simple way to aggregate that feedback

If you're not prepared to provide all that, you may not be prepared for social commerce in the coming years.



About Scott Allen

Scott Allen is a marketing consultant, speaker and author based in Austin, Texas, and one of the world's top authorities on virtual business relationships and social software. He is coauthor with David Teten of *The Virtual Handshake: Opening Doors and Closing Deals Online* (American Management Association, 2005). He and his coauthor blog at TheVirtualHandshake.com and write a monthly column for *FastCompany.com* about virtual business relationships (<http://FastCompany.com/resources/networking/columns.html>).

He is also the Entrepreneurs Guide for About.com, one of the top ten websites in the world with over 37 million readers, and part of *The New York Times Company*. He offers current and future entrepreneurs guidance and resources to help them start and develop their new businesses. For more information, visit <http://Entrepreneurs.About.com>.

About Rampleaf

Rampleaf is a free portable reputation system for e-commerce that allows buyers and sellers to rate one another and leave comments and feedback. Getting rated and getting a Rampleaf score can help facilitate a greater level of trust among buyers and sellers.

To research or leave a comment about a buyer or seller, visit www.Rampleaf.com.

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