The prescribers gain ground in the Internet
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In electronic commerce the figure of the prescribers, who issue recommendations that influence the decision of other users to buy things, is becoming more and more relevant.

This is an agent: a person, company, sector association, chat, portal or virtual community that, both on and off the Internet, gives an opinion or feedback that influences the decision of other users to buy things or hire services.

Electronic commerce
This figure is particularly important in electronic commerce, where sales are based on three sequential phases: attraction (let them know and visit us), retention (let them return and become regular clients) and recommendation (let them be prescribers, telling everyone about their satisfaction).

In fact, access to the Internet is individual, but with a tribal attitude. For Glen L. Urban, professor of MIT, for whom the use of prescribers on the Internet is useful for gaining the confidence of consumers, but also for getting data of their unsatisfied needs, which is important information for the development of new products. Very often, the prescribers is our first contact with a new product or make on the Internet. In electronic commerce, as well as in the off-line environment, first impressions count.

Report
According to a report by the Institute for Knowledge Management (IKM), to convince the consumer it is crucial to clearly state who is sponsoring the page and the product. Many popular sites, like Amazon and eBay, even offer the possibility of reading the comments of independent inspectors. However, most Internet surfers rule them out as those comments are easily manipulated. In a study of more than 460 sites on the Internet, Consumers International, Consumer WebWatch and the University of Stanford concluded that 50% of the financial and health web sites do not offer complete information on the authority and beliefs of the prescribers.

In general, Internet users look for recommendations and support in virtual communities, usually connected for the shared challenge, such as living with a chronic illness or having a common hobby or interest. For this reason, people or companies that are well known and respected in the subject matter in question, or people who wish to know a subject in depth, are considered safe sources of prescribers. Therefore, it is essential for companies to create virtual communities around their products. Their aim is for consumers to widen their network of trusting prescribers.
Back in 1988, a study by Kulakarni & Singh showed that certain prescribers of different speakers (film stars, sports personalities or simply famous people) were effective and generally accepted if the celebrity doing them was recommending a product relevant to his field of work.

Moreover, it seems quite natural that different services or products require different prescribers: in a purchase where the risk objective is greater (as in a medical service), the consumer will be more demanding than in the purchase where the risk is less (as in buying a book), where the consumer could go further in his/her network of off-line and online prescribers.

The forecasts for the future point to a greater number of prescribers, who will also be more sophisticated: they will include Internet lists of evaluations of performance and bad practices of different companies, and the users and professionals that contribute more transparency to the markets will increase competition and will force down the prices on the Internet.

**Young people**

As far as new technologies are concerned, a new type of prescriber is emerging: young people. Generations Online, a study published by the AARP this year, explains how the adult generation increasingly recognises adolescents as prescriber in the fields of new technologies, use of computers and searches for information on the Internet.
Prestige is the key
José María Insúa, Director of Technology and Security at PwC
A condition *sine qua non* to act as a prescriber, on the Internet as well as in conventional environments, is to have prestige among consumers you wish to influence. Traditionally this role was played by the offer. However, the Internet has given much greater power to users, enabling the demand to act as a prescriber as well. The present online communities are an example of clients of a common product or service who advise each other and who can even influence the decision to buy something. Being aware of this, some manufacturers, like those in the automobile industry, have gathered the impressions of those users to improve their offer. Although this type of prescriber does not offer a guarantee in all the sectors (to act as a prescriber of a medicine, the public at large will, more than likely, demand a recognised degree), companies should keep this consideration of the new profile of the prescriber in mind.

A process to follow
Lluís Renart, IESE professor
Every prescription is based on confidence. This, in turn, depends on what is said, beyond any reasonable doubt, about the prescriber having technical capacity, sufficient knowledge of the subject and a sincere intention. That means that they provide their prescription wishing to be sincerely useful and good for the person who receives it. On the other hand, for the prescription to be credible there must be a guarantee that the knowledge was used according to the following process. Firstly, sufficient and relevant data must be taken. Then, there must be an analysis of the problem, a diagnosis of the deep-rooted causes and the consideration of possible alternative solutions. Lastly, there must be an issue of a suitable prescription for the problem and the person who suffers it. The prescriber online, just like offline, can have problems of credibility if he/she does not provide enough technical know-how, have an honest intention or be devoted in time and effort to carry out all the steps of the process.