

Your Brand and the People who Love it.

The power of brand advocates.

The influence of recommendations

There's an old marketing adage that says the best tool in your advertising arsenal is word of mouth. That is, if you create loyal, satisfied customers, they'll spread the message about your brand and drive new business through recommendations to friends and family. History has proven the validity of this proverb, but in this age of social media sharing and review applications and sites like Yelp, Google and UrbanSpoon, the influence of word-of-mouth recommendations has become undeniable.

Recommendations are important, but even better is someone who will actively preach the gospel of your brand and seek out opportunities to share their love for your company. These super promoters are known as brand advocates.



OF ALL PURCHASES¹
ARE INFLUENCED
BY SOCIAL MEDIA



OF CONSUMERS TRUST²
RECOMMENDATIONS FROM
FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES



OF SHOPPERS SPEND³
MORE MONEY ONLINE
AFTER SEEING RECOMMENDATIONS

The power of brand advocates.

Brand advocates are more than just loyal customers. They identify with the values of their favorite brands and consider their buying choices part of their identities. They actively promote the brands they love and make a huge impact on the buying choices of their social circle. In fact, Rob Ruggetta, author of "Brand Advocates," found that they are 50% more influential than the average customer.⁴

Much of this influence is due to the prolific amount of information brand advocates create, particularly reviews and online recommendations. A study by Dr. Kathleen R. Ferris-Costa from the University of Rhode Island found that

brand advocates create and curate more than twice as much information about brands as the average web user. They are also 83% more likely to share information on a brand, with 58% regularly posting product information on social networks.⁵ With more and more shoppers turning to the internet as a research tool, this makes a huge marketing impact.

Finding and developing advocates.

Brand advocates are a powerful tool in promoting your organization, but they rarely appear without a concerted effort. In order to cultivate followers who will champion the benefits of your brand, you need to make a concerted effort to attract them.

Your most valuable resource: Internal advocates.

One of the most valuable assets any organization has is its staff. Engaged employees are a constant representation of your company's brand, even when they are off the clock. Because they interact directly with customers on a regular basis, there is no stronger advocate for your brand, but many companies don't actively encourage their employees to become external ambassadors. By encouraging them to identify what makes your brand valuable and encouraging them to live and breathe its values, you can harness a powerful marketing force that is literally right in front of you.

Harness the power of your staff:

1. Identify the core values of your company. Who you are, what you do and what you stand for? Identify the values of your organization and cultivate these values in your staff. Make employees feel rewarded, so they enjoy going to work, and they will spread that goodwill.

2. Actively seek out the socially-savvy members of your team. Find the members of your staff who regularly post to sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Encourage their social media interactions and communications. Allow them to distribute coupons or giveaways or simply express their happiness with your company. Having employees online talking about how much they love their work is a good thing.

3. Raise internal awareness. Let your staff know you value their contributions to your success and that you couldn't do it without them. Weekly e-newsletters about company achievements and goings-on will help foster a culture of achievement and connection.

4. Create a sense of belonging. Team-building exercises and social events are a great way to foster a sense of community. If your employees feel like they are part of something special, they will spread the word about to their social circles who will in turn, look on you in a favorable light.

5. Help them show their pride. Branded merchandise is a great way to cultivate goodwill and make countless impressions on everyone your team interacts with. Employees will wear company jackets with pride, or happily expound on your organization's virtue to anyone who notices them drinking from a branded coffee cup. A t-shirt with your organization's logo can make a big difference in making employees feel valued and appreciated.

Employees should be involved in your brand in every possible way. This not only creates an emotional connection, but it also encourages their belief in its promise. Their work should be tied directly to the brand, so they understand why what they do is important.

Fans of your brand: External advocates.

When the phrase brand advocate is used, the first image that comes to mind is usually external advocates, Apple-philes, with their intense loyalty to iPhones, iPads and all things Mac, or the fitness buff, clad head-to-toe in the latest Nike gear. They are top buyers who help market their favorite brands through repeated, highly-visible use and open recommendations of the products they love, both in person and on social media.

But external advocates are usually a bit trickier to develop than internal ones. To attract them, you need to create an emotional connection with your brand. Apple achieved this through high-quality products, an instantly recognizable aesthetic and forward-thinking leadership. Starbucks uses a consistent, comfortable ambiance and socially-conscious marketing like fair trade coffee and employee education programs.

With a little planning, you can do it, too:



1. Focus on the relationship.

Consumers don't become brand advocates because of advertising. They do it because they love your product or service. Create ongoing engagement by giving them more than expected every time.



2. Communicate openly and honestly.

Many companies ask their consumers for feedback. Far fewer actually act on that information. Create communication channels that are open and two-way. That way you can spot new opportunities, head off potential problems, and increase goodwill for your brand.



3. Build a community. It's human nature to seek out a sense of belonging, whether it's rooting for a sports team or in choice of mobile phones. Choose platforms that allow consumers to share content, enter contests, and play games. Generate feelings of exclusivity by rewarding top fans.



4. Help them show off their advocacy.

Branded items create a reference point about your organization. Promotional items allow your advocates to use their loyalty as a form of self-expression. Logoed apparel, accessories and more symbolize their endorsement of your brand and your values.

External brand advocates are not one-time customers. They're not people who are seeking recognition for their love of your offering. They are people who have recognized the value of your product or service, and want to share that with friends. They connect with your brand on an emotional level, and if you treat them well, they will reward you with continued loyalty.

Give fans a reason to love your brand.

Create a community to which they can belong, and provide them with promotional products to help share their love. In return, they will openly and passionately advocate for you. This advocacy will then reap continuing rewards, as they attract new followers and educate them on the wonders of your brand.

¹ <http://digitalintelligencetoday.com/speed-summary-wired-feb-2011-cover-story-on-social-commerce/>

² <http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/consumer/global-advertising-consumers-trust-real-friends-and-virtual-strangers-the-most/>

³ <http://www.bazaarvoice.com/research-and-insight/social-commerce-statistics/>

⁴ Brand Advocates: Turning Enthusiastic Customers into a Powerful Marketing Force; Fuggetta, Rob

⁵ <http://www.dunnhumby.com/advocacy>

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