Transforming Employees into Advocates

8 STEPS TO LAUNCHING A SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYEE ADVOCATE PROGRAM
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With billions of people on social media, 1.1 billion on Facebook alone, leading marketers are quickly learning that they can’t engage in every brand conversation on every channel. While some brands have caught on and are empowering advocates to share stories on social channels, many brands are overlooking one of the most valuable types of advocates – their employees.

Empowering employees to become brand advocates is an essential part of any company’s marketing mix. Customers are turning to social media to discover new products and discuss their personal experiences with brands, making it essential for brands to have as large and positive a presence as possible.

“‘We ran an employee advocacy program and it was exceptionally powerful.’”

Scott Jaworski, Head of Buzz Marketing for New Business, Intel Corporation

Leading brands recognize the value in activating their employees and empowering them to participate in conversations on social channels and have jumped on this opportunity. These companies realize that their customers and prospective customers are active on social and recognize the importance of participating in conversation.

Enlisting employees to advocate on behalf of their employer is one of the best ways to take advantage of social channels because it expands the company’s social presence and allows them to have a much larger footprint than what the marketing or PR team is capable of reaching on their own. Plus, these employee advocates are more trusted because they have a more personal relationship with their audience. Employees are real people who want to help other people.

SocialChorus put together this step by step ‘how-to’ guide to help companies leverage some of their most valuable resources, their employees, to help spread the brand’s message. You will learn why employee programs are important and how you can run your own program. This guide has been informed by our experience running employee advocacy programs for the world’s leading brands, thoughtful research, and interviews with innovative marketers who are leading employee advocate initiatives everyday at companies like Dell, Juniper, and AT&T.
BENEFITS OF EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY

Employee programs are mutually beneficial for both employees and companies alike. There are many reasons to empower employees to be advocates, such as expanding brand awareness and building their personal brand. Allowing employees to participate in social media on behalf of the brand has huge benefits. It allows brands to participate in millions of additional conversations on social and employees are motivated brand advocates who know the product and want the company to succeed.

Only 8% overlap between employees’ Twitter followers and the brand’s Twitter followers

Reach new audiences. Empowering employee advocates in social channels benefits brands by expanding the brand’s social audience to include the networks, families, and friends of employees. Brand audiences overlap very minimally with the audiences of their employees – meaning employee advocates will deliver brand stories to new audiences. In fact, Dell found that there was only 8% overlap between employees’ Twitter followers and the brand’s Twitter followers.

Lower risk. Employee advocates are also generally a lower risk to the brand than external advocates because employees are already motivated to see the brand succeed and they know the brand better than anyone else. They are also likely to be more positive because they inherently believe in the brand. They understand the brand’s mission and values and want to support brand initiatives. Employees know brand guidelines and are likely to operate within guidelines – which means less risk for your brand.

More trusted. In a recent Gartner study, only 15 percent of people said that trust posts by companies or brands on social networking sites – a startling statistic when compared to the fact that the same study found 70 percent trust brand or product recommendations from friends and family. Employees are seen as experts on your brand and products, thus their opinions are extremely valuable and trusted by the people in their networks. Due to the more personal nature of employee networks, brand messages are shared eight times more by employees than when shared by the brand.

Personal brand & thought leadership. Empowering employees to become brand advocates helps them to build their personal brand and to be seen as thought leaders within their networks. By empowering employees to share thoughtful content and interesting news, they can establish a position of authority on the subject matter within their community.

8X

share rate of content when shared by employees compared to the same content from the brand page

In addition to the benefits that employee advocates bring for the brand, employee advocate programs benefit the employees themselves.
**Social media intelligence.** A successful employee advocacy program involves brand and social media training so that employees are armed with the right tools to be successful. Social media training, which can range from as basic as creating a profile, to as advanced as social data analytics, elevates employee social media intelligence. This training has a positive impact on their overall career because they are adding essential skills and knowledge to their repertoire. In fact, this is one of AT&T’s primary goals for their employee program in 2013 – amplifying social media intelligence and empowering employees to be successful in social.

**Foster a spirit of community within the company.** Participating in a company advocacy program gives employees a sense of belonging and community. It is human nature to want to feel a sense of belonging – and participating in a program helps employees achieve this level of fulfillment.

**Showcase commitment to organization.** Employees will advocate for the brand because it helps demonstrate their commitment and support to their employer. Participating in an advocate program is a way for employees to display their loyalty to the brand on a public scale.

How to Develop a Winning Advocacy Program

**Be a social company**

Company culture needs to reflect and support employee advocacy program goals. If the company wants to adopt an employee advocate program, it needs to be inherently social. It has to embrace social and rid itself of any social media taboos that may exist in the workplace. Social advocacy programs need to become a part of work life. Managers should not expect employees to only participate in their free time.

Because of this dedication to social, the entire organization needs to rally around the cause. The company not only needs to allow access social websites, but should also support employee usage. It is essential that the company culture match the program goal. In order for an employee program to be successful, the company needs to promote sharing in the workplace. If a company wants a social program it is essential that their values are social as well.

**Find executive support**

Executive buy-in is arguably one of the most important components to a successful employee advocacy program. Like any successful work-related program, without executive support the likelihood of the program’s success is extremely low. Employees have their own workload and enough on their plates so if there is no management buy-in, employees are very unlikely to activate and participate in the program.

This is one reason Dell’s employee advocacy program has been successful. Founder and CEO Michael Dell has been a supporter of social from the beginning and a huge proponent for implementing a company-wide social media program. Having this executive support amplifies the chances that employees will also buy into the program.
Finding a champion is essential. Your employee advocacy champion is the person who is going to spearhead this initiative company-wide. The champion either needs to be an executive or have executive sponsorship to ensure that they have the ‘pull’ to make things happen. This person will own and be responsible for the employee advocacy programs internally.

**Start small**

Rolling out an employee advocacy program may require company-wide change. This kind of organizational shift does not happen overnight – therefore, it’s best to start small.

Creating a Founders Club of socially savvy employees is one way to kick-off an employee program and make sure that it’s starting off on the right foot. These people will then be able to lead the charge for the rest of the organization once you are ready to roll out the program company-wide.

Rolling out a program to a smaller subset of the organization is a good way to start an employee program because it allows for the opportunity to optimize the program before rolling it out to the whole company.

**Roll out company-wide**

Although it is wise to start small, it’s important for the employee program to eventually be rolled out to the entire company and not silo-ed in any one department or organization.

One of the purposes of an employee program is to empower internal subject matter experts to share their stories, experiences, and most importantly expertise with their networks. Subject matter experts are most likely not going to be in the marketing department – they may be engineers, product managers, or even on the finance team.

One of the most interesting outcomes from rolling out employee advocacy programs to the entire company is discovering the most active participants.

“One of the main priorities for Dell is to activate as many employees as possible.”

Liz Bullock, Director Social Media & Community at Dell

Liz Bullock, formerly Director of Social Media and Community at Dell, who specializes in employee engagement, mentioned that one of the best things about enlisting all employees in this social effort is finding the “diamonds in the rough” – the unexpected employees who rise to the top.

**Train employees**

Before any program is started, companies need to arm employees with the proper training and resources that they need to be successful.

**Pre-program employee training**

Pre-program training is essential for a successful program. Employees will need to be briefed on the ins and outs of the program including the goals, measures of success, FTC guidelines, and potential incentives.

Employee training is not one-size-fits-all. Employees will require differing levels of training. Some may need basic social media training, including help setting up their profiles and instructions on how to tweet and post. Others may be social media experts and interested in more strategic, high-level trainings. Therefore, training programs need to reflect these differing needs and requirements and cater to each of them.

The best way to figure out what training employees need or want is to ask them. You will never know exactly what your employees need unless you ask. They may be more interested in company views and
strategy rather than tactical implementations or visa versa.

It is highly recommended that social media trainings are conducted in-person. While this is not always possible, it is definitely a best practice so employees can easily communicate with instructors if they have any problems.

Training programs provide mutual benefits for both the employer and the employee. For the company, educating employees means that the advocacy program will be more successful. The company can communicate their brand guidelines – exactly what is allowed.

**Ongoing training and office hours**

Like any advocacy program, it is essential that the brand continue to maintain and build relationships with their advocates.

Although the initial pre-launch training is important, it is equally important to hold on-going trainings, which continue to amplify employees’ social media knowledge. As they become more socially savvy, they will require more advanced training to stay engaged.

Holding regular office hours is another way to maintain an ongoing relationship with employee advocates and keep the dialog open.

Another best practice is to create a forum where employees can post questions they have about the program and social media in general. This creates an opportunity to converse and communicate with other employees about what is and isn’t working.

Ongoing training is important to ensure that the program is “always-on”. In order to gain the business value from an employee advocate program, it is important that employees are regularly engaging in these channels.

**Reward employees**

One of the benefits of working with internal, employee advocates is that they typically require less reward than external advocates. Employees are naturally motivated to participate in programs; however that doesn’t mean that you should neglect incentivizing and motivating them.

Rewards do not need to be monetary. In fact, monetary rewards are not the best form of incentive. Many studies have found that as incentives become more monetary, advocacy becomes less genuine. Some successful non-monetary rewards for employees include access to executives, access to exclusive conferences or events, and employee perks such as paid time off on birthdays.

**Make it easy**

For a program to be successful, it is essential that it is easy for employees to endorse. Providing great content that is easy to share ensures that employees will be more likely to participate.

Establishing a reliable schedule is also helpful for employees so that they know what program content is coming. A calendar sets expectations and allows employees to plan ahead and coordinate their schedules.

Allow employees to express creative freedom. Although it may be tempting to prescribe exact posts and tweets for employees, the best content is developed when employees are given creative freedom. This allows them to tell their personal brand stories within the confines of the company advocate program.

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“Be transparent! It’s crucial that all employees disclose that they work for the brand.”

Scott Jaworski, Head of Buzz Marketing for New Business, Intel Corporation
Measure success

As with any marketing program, it is essential that there are goals for the employee advocacy program and the ability to measure KPIs. The KPIs of an employee program are no different than any other advocate program.

The key metrics to monitor for employee programs are number of advocates, total endorsements and endorsements delivered. The number of advocates and the activation rate are important for an employee program because it’s important to enlist as many employees as possible. The total number of endorsements equals the total number of advocate actions plus the total number of audience actions, which is an indicator of advocate and audience engagement. The final metric to measure is endorsements delivered. This number represents the total possible audience reached. Once baseline metrics are in place, brands can start monitoring their performance against their benchmarks. Continuous improvement is key.

VALUE OF ENDORSEMENTS

One important thing to realize is that just as endorsements do not equal actions taken by the brand, endorsements delivered do not equate to reach. Endorsements are a signal by an individual in support of a brand. Because they are coming from trusted brand advocates, endorsements are more trusted than branded messages or any form of content that the brand pushes out, and thus much more valuable than an impression.

Endorsements increase consideration, preference, intent to purchase, and ultimately sales. In fact, according to a Nielsen study, 77% of consumers are more likely to buy a product when they hear about it from friends and family. Brands spend millions of dollars on advertising however; it is ultimately a positive recommendation or endorsement, which convinces people to buy.

“Companies need to understand the power they have in the people working there.”

Jason Eng, Senior Social Media Strategist, Sony Professional Solutions of America

77% of consumers are more likely to buy a product when they hear about it from friends and family
- Nielsen, 2013 Global New Products Report
CONCLUSION

Brands need to embrace employees on social media and empower them to spread the brand’s message. Employees are incredibly knowledgeable about their brand’s products and services and they are naturally motivated to support the company they work for. Turning employees into brand advocates on social channels creates huge opportunities for brands.

SocialChorus works with leading brands to create award-winning employee advocate programs and power their employees to participate in conversations on social channels. The SocialChorus solution combines the power of advocate marketing with the scale of social media to deliver millions of endorsements, creating measurable social ROI.

Our customers including 3M, Intel and PepsiCo and dozens of other leading brands, inspire advocates to deliver social endorsements across all social channels. SocialChorus programs are up-and-running in just days and deliver social ROI in weeks. Our cloud platform and expert services provide everything that a brand needs to deliver advocate marketing ROI including strategic planning, advocate identification and recruitment, content management and distribution, advocate management, and integrated ROI metrics and tracking.

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