Advocacy Marketing: How to Get Loyal Customers Shouting About Your Brand

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Happy customers can be the most powerful advertising weapon in your armoury. And advocacy marketing is how you utilise them.

A study by Collective Bias found that 70% of millennial consumers are influenced by recommendations from their peers.

And another found that more than 80% of shoppers research online before buying, with the presence of brand advocates influencing their decision to make a purchase.

The problem?

Advocacy marketing is much easier said than done.

While people love talking about products they love, they don't necessarily talk about YOUR products. Sometimes you need to incentivise and encourage them to share their experiences.

So in this post we cover everything you need to know about advocacy marketing. We'll take a deep look at how to create brand advocates among your current customers, as well as examples of successful programs.

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What is advocacy marketing?

Advocacy marketing is all about getting customers to talk about your company and products. Meaning happy shoppers spread the word about your brand on social media or direct word-of-mouth, leading to people in their network potentially becoming customers too.

Why advocacy marketing is so powerful

Advocacy marketing isn't just buttering up customers for a few extra sales. The data shows it's a strategy that can make a consistent impact on your bottom line:

Advocacy marketing statistics

- 80% of all B2C and B2B purchases involve word-of-mouth recommendations during the buying cycle (Forrester).
- 65% of social media users use their networks to discover products and brands (Nielsen Social Media Report 2012).
- 92% of people trust word-of-mouth recommendations, making it a popular form of advertising (Nielsen).
- 76% of individuals trust content shared by "normal" people over that shared by brands (Adweek).

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- 84% of consumers completely or somewhat trust recommendations from family, colleagues and friends – making it one of the highest ranked sources for trustworthiness (Nielsen).
- A recommendation from a friend or family member is 50x more likely to trigger a sale (McKinsey & Co).
- Brands are making a 650% ROI on influencer and advocacy marketing (Tomoson).

How to create brand advocates

The numbers show that brand advocacy is one of the best marketing strategies that could boost your way to success.

But how do you get brand advocates? And how do you best incentivise them?

Here's what you need to know:

1) Encourage user-generated content

One way you can incentivise brand advocates is to encourage them to post user-generated content (UGC).

Meaning things like:

- Running competitions among customers who post selfies with your products.

Creating hashtag campaigns.

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- Sharing customer content on your company's social media – and making sure to credit them in your posts.

Studies show that user-generated photos are **5x more likely to convert** customers than non-UGC. Additionally, 47% of the top-performing content marketing teams rely extensively on UGC.

GoPro are a classic example of this. They share a 'Photo of the Day' from their users – encouraging people to show off the cameras' capabilities:

They even go as far as setting aside $5 million annually for their GoPro Awards program.

A winner for best visual content is chosen in various categories (motorsports, music, animals, travel) on a weekly basis. Victors then get $500 for outstanding photographs, $1,000 for raw video footage and $5,000 for edited clips:

Urban Outfitters even have a UO Community on their website that features UGC from customers' Instagram accounts.

The content is sorted through tags like #UOHome and #UOBeauty:

When viewers click a post they'll find product information and click a link to the online shop.

Not only does the company get free content, but customers feel empowered for the ability to post their outfits and promote their favourite products.

2) Ensure quality products and experience

Sometimes you just need to focus on improving your products and services to get more advocates.

A Global Web Index study found that 40% of 16-24 year-olds would endorse a brand they loved **without expecting any reward** – which is the kind of authentic advertising that many crave.

Patagonia has become a retail powerhouse thanks to its **high-quality products** that last for years.

Many brands go straight to pushing for more purchases when items break or are damaged. But Patagonia does the opposite.

They actively encourage customers to keep clothing in circulation longer by offering repair guides as well as a Worn Wear marketplace:

Those who don't have the time to fix their garments can get them repaired by the company. The brand has the largest garment repair facility in North America, completing over 40,000 individual repairs each year.

While Patagonia doesn't have a lot of marketing and influencer campaigns, their promise of high-quality and long-lasting products helps them generate brand advocates and launch brand-related conversations.

3) Encourage product reviews

Product reviews are one of the most essential elements on a product page.

After all, we all love to read about what people think and what they've experienced before buying a product.

In fact, Reevo found that having 50 or more reviews could result in a **4.6% increase in conversion rates.** Additionally, ReachLocal discovered that 89% of buyers will purchase a product within one week after reading reviews.

So how do you get more product reviews?

1. Ask (via automatic follow up emails); and
2. (if necessary) incentivise.

Zappos rewards customers with 100 points (or about $10 credit) for leaving a review:

4) Utilise branded entertainment

Branded entertainment blurs the lines between entertainment and advertisements.

It could be in the form of:

- Online films.
- Video games.
- Podcasts.
- Books.
- Or other media with opportunity for product placement.

But the key is that it **doesn't advertise in an overt way.** Instead, branded entertainment crafts a storyline that triggers an emotional response from the audience.

One example is Apple's 2018 holiday ad – which tells the story of a young professional named Sophia:

She uses MacBook pro as her tool to create, but that's the only thing we see featuring the brand. The advertising is subtle, but highlights the message that a MacBook is one of the best tools for creatives.

For branded content, entertainment is the main focus – while promotion is a secondary aspect. On the bright side, you can include the product in the frame.

Developing an advocacy marketing program

Thinking of starting your brand advocacy program, but don't know where to start? Here are the four steps you need to follow:

Step 1: Determine your target advocates

Define your community of brand advocates.

- Who are your top followers?
- What's the type of person that'll attract your target market?
- Who are the influencers that your customers will listen to?

You can look for brand advocates in your own pool of employees. You can also check out customers who regularly create UGC or comment on your posts.

Don't forget that your chosen brand advocates are also **representatives of your brand**, so get in touch with people who will deliver the right message.

Step 2: Show off your brand goals and values

The next step is to define your brand's core values.

This means looking at your brand as a whole – including your **purpose, personality and proposition.**

A brand value proposition highlights what differentiates your company from other businesses. It's used to determine a businesses' morals and goals.

Here's an infographic from Visual Capitalist that shows off the brand values of America's top tech firms:

Core Values of America's Top 7 Tech Firms by Market Cap

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Sources:

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Some companies highlight their values within the products and services they provide.

For instance:

Google and Microsoft showcase their value of openness by creating softwares or platforms that make information more accessible to the public. Other companies like Apple use product design to portray their brand's value of simplicity.

There are a lot of ways to show your brand's values – the trick is to be creative.

Step 3: Communicate with your brand advocates

Of course, you'll need to engage with your brand advocates if you want your marketing strategy to succeed.

Create a **community** for brand advocates – think things like Facebook groups or dedicated outreach emails. You can also connect with loyal customers or meet them in events, trade shows and meet-ups.

A good tip is to **listen to conversations in your DMs** and social media comments.

What are people saying about your brand? Don't just pay attention to the good stuff but take note of customer complaints too.

If you find out the main problems that customers have with your business, then you can create solutions and attract more customers in the long-run.

Step 4: Give customers a voice

The most obvious reason you want brand advocates is to get more voices.

You want people to speak up about your business. So ask for testimonials and reviews to get as many opinions as possible.

You can also create marketing campaigns that encourage customers to post or use a branded hashtag.

This might not seem like much but **every voice counts.** You want as many people talking about your businesses' merits, issues and benefits. The more conversations you generate, the more people you'll attract.

Examples of successful programs

So we've gone through how to find your brand advocates. And how to create an advocacy program for them.

Here are some example ideas from top brands to help get you started:

Tesla Advocacy Marketing

Tesla's advocacy strategy revolves around its referral program – giving a $1,000 discount to referrers and referred customers.

But they also run regular referral programs of varying natures. Like offering crazy

Secret Levels

- **Founders Series Roadster**: Discount off the base price will be displayed in the Loot Box. No deposit is required. Discounts will expire one year after the Roadster becomes available for order.
- **Amazing Adventures**: Winners who unlocked amazing adventures will receive further details at a future date.
  - **Drive an Electric Boring Machine**: Drive an electric tunnel boring machine with The Boring Company in Hawthorne, CA.
  - **Watch a SpaceX Rocket Launch**: Attend the launch of Falcon Heavy, the world's most powerful rocket, in Cape Canaveral, FL.
  - **Race the Tesla Semi**: Race a giant electric semi truck around our test track. There will be additional prizes and trophies for the best track times.
  - **Launch a Time Capsule into Space**: Launch a personal time capsule into deep space orbit for millions of years.

The key thing is that they know their target referrer. They know simply offering money off isn't that appealing to their more affluent and highly-ambitious target market.

Overall, the advocacy strategy worked because referrals are one of the most effective ways to make sales.

In fact, ReferralCandy found that 92% of customers trust recommendations from people they know. Additionally, they pay 2x more attention to recommendations from friends.

Coca Cola's Happiness Machine

Coca Cola's Happiness Machine campaign was viewed by over 15 million people:

In the video, the vending machine (AKA the Happiness Machine) dispenses an unlimited number of beverages to customers. Everyone is then encouraged to share with others around them.

The whole strategy is simply about inspiring others to engage with Coke's underlying philosophy – sharing.

The ad cost just $60,000 – and the results were phenomenal. Their 3.2 million followers on Twitter, and over 98 million followers on Facebook helped it go viral.

Final thoughts

The idea of advocacy marketing is to encourage customers to do one thing: **talk about your products.**

But don't expect to build a huge following overnight.

It can take time for your products and values to gain wide ranging recognition. But you can spark conversations through creative campaigns like Coca Cola to get people talking.

Just remember to think outside the box and consistently engage with your most loyal customers.

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