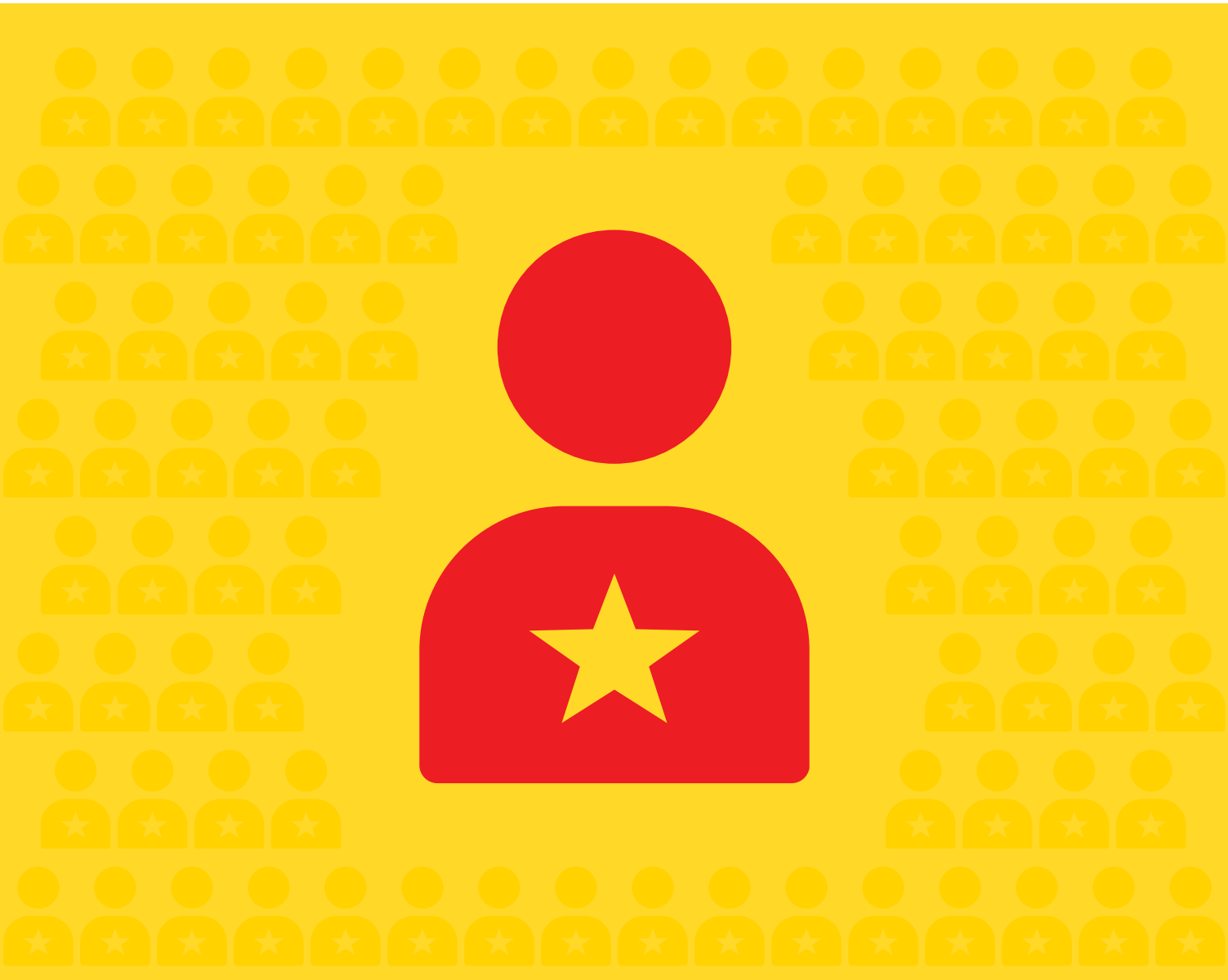
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How To Build An Army Of Customer Advocates With Lifecycle Marketing



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Advocates are a powerful marketing tool. Recruiting them through social media is a cost-effective marketing strategy - but what are the considerations? And what does success look like?



In this age of social media, advocates have never been more important – or more powerful. Advocates have been shown to drive ten times more action than that of paid-for impressions, proving that not only are social sharers a powerful marketing force to be reckoned with, but that they are also extremely cost effective.

What drives people to become advocates?

Most internet users will tend towards the casual end of the advocacy scale. These are the people who like a Facebook post or retweet a tweet. At the other end of the scale are the super fans, who are evangelical about products or services.

Super advocates are different to regular web users. They create and share more content online and are happy to discuss the products they use because they find it enjoyable and want to help others.

Super fans are also much more social media savvy than average consumers – they're two and a half times more likely to use social media sites to increase their social circles than non-advocates, showing how important a media it is for them.

Making the most of your advocates on social media

1. Define your brand evangelists



Who are these special customers? And more importantly, where are they talking about you? It's no good tweeting every day if your main advocacy base is on Facebook.

Using social media tools can help you identify your key influencers - they can also help monitor sentiment. This is particularly key in finding the passionate advocate who will use strong, positive words to describe your brand.



2. Discover what engages them most

There may well be an element of trial and error involved in discovering what works for your advocates. It will certainly require some analytics on your part. What posts on Facebook are they most likely to share? What gets the most retweets?

When it comes to key advocates, research has found that practicality eclipses emotion. They are more likely to talk about features of a product - for example, the body lotion that was quickly absorbed into their skin - than they are the benefits of customer service or how it made them feel.

Remember that any mention of your brand on social media deserves a response - no-one likes to be ignored!

3. Enable advocacy



Enable your advocates by making it easy for them to spread the word about your brand.

Make sure your online content is easy to find and share. Videos should be embeddable, add social media share buttons to all content and always include links to any of your official social media pages.

To build true passion in your advocates, use all your marketing channels, whether that's your weekly email newsletter or internal employee communications.

Making it easy for advocates to engage with you on social media will quickly increase the amount of customers sharing positive things about your business. Yes, these might just be 'casual' advocates, but if you engage with them correctly, you could convert them into super fans.

Once you've got your super fans, you can start learning from them to help you with this conversion. Look at what makes your passionate customers share more or use more positive terms about you. Take these learnings and apply them to your more laidback advocates.

4. Publicly recognise your advocates

Your biggest advocates are not the same as your usual customers. While helping others is one reason they like to share, they also have a strong drive to be recognised by the brands they mention. These people not only want to know they are being helpful to other consumers, but also to the brands they discuss.

Even though it's something they enjoy doing, it is time consuming and they want to be recognised for this.



The best way to do this is to involve them in your marketing campaigns. Ask them for feedback on a new advertising campaign you're thinking of running. Send them new, not seen by the public, products to review on You Tube. Get them to submit new product ideas via Facebook.

It might seem strange relinquishing some control over your marketing campaigns, but remember, this is not 'Joe Public'. These guys already love your brand and, unless you do something spectacularly awful to annoy them, they are highly unlikely to start bad-mouthing you or trying to ruin your campaigns.

What you shouldn't do is bribe them with special discounts or products. Most advocates do not want to feel like you're forcing them to write fantastic things about you. They want the freedom to voice their concerns as well.



5. Your employees are your biggest advocates

Some of your biggest advocates could come from inside your company. If your employees are passionate about what your company offers, they'll work hard to ensure your customers feel the same way.

Don't just limit your employee advocates to those within your marketing department. Your accountant or HR manager may have genuine - and quite different - reasons why they love your brand. Get them involved in the conversation and you've got a higher chance that you'll convert customers to advocates.

It's also a great way to add some personality to your brand, which will only help recruit more advocates.

How do you measure the success of advocacy?

Anything that involves sentiment and word-of-mouth is always difficult to track and measure.

That doesn't mean you should ignore your business objectives before starting an advocacy programme. Wanting to drive actual sales by a certain percentage will need a different style of campaign than a desire to increase your brand awareness will. Once you've figured that out, you can decide on the best approach and technologies to use.

There are lots of tools and companies out there that will measure various statistics on social media sites, but the following are some metrics your brand could employ:

- **The reach of brand/product related conversations.**
- **Sales generated.**
- **Changes in sentiment expressed or customer satisfaction.**
- **The increase in fans or followers.**
- **The amount of likes or retweets for posts.**
- **How many people have embedded a video.**
- **The amount of generic content that has been created and shared.**

You should keep in mind that word-of-mouth campaigns take time to see real results. For example, you may not immediately see a direct correlation between an advocacy campaign and sales generated, but this kind of marketing has an influence on long-term customer relationships, so is more valuable than something that will yield instant, yet flighty, customers.

Takeaways

To recap, driving brand advocacy via social media is straightforward, as long as you:

- Listen to your passionate advocates.
- Join in the conversation.
- Enable advocates to easily spread the word about your company.
- Recognise and utilise your 'super' fans to their full advantage.
- Encourage employees to become your biggest advocates.
- Are specific about business objectives and metrics.

For more ideas on engaging customers online, download our eGuide What Is Lifecycle Marketing?

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