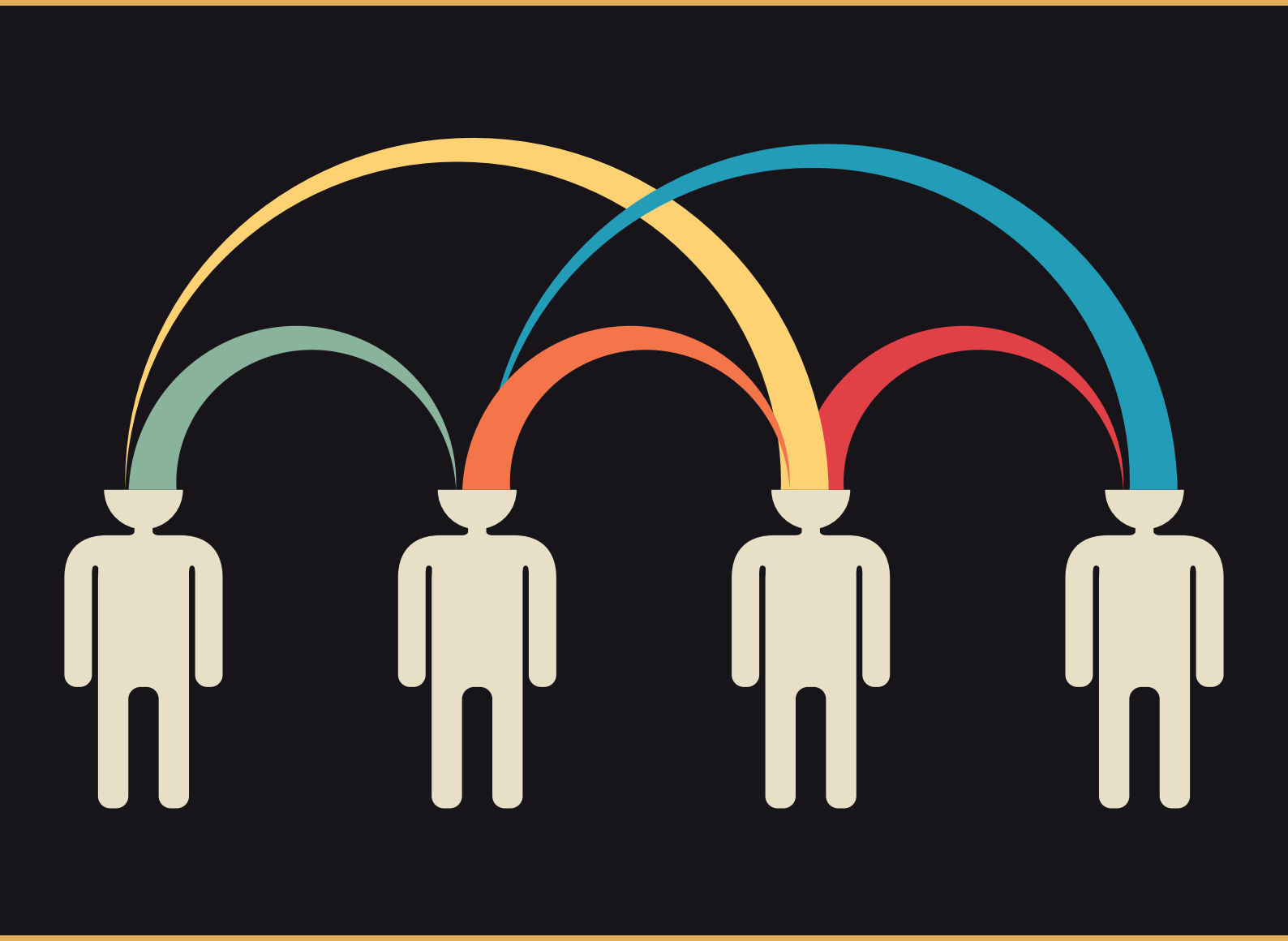
torpedo®

Building brand advocates through social media

Practical tips for B2B marketers



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Introduction

Social media has brought new opportunities and fresh challenges for companies looking to further connect with their audience. While word-of-mouth brand advocacy has always been important, its scope was previously limited to the people you connected with and interacted with on a regular basis. Social media has removed that limitation and given new power to consumers.

Today's savvy customers are greatly influenced by what they read and see online, as well as what their friends and professional network are commenting on and sharing. People are sharing the good, the bad, and the ugly with everyone they're connected with online. It is therefore critical for brands to be part of this conversation in order to control the sentiment of what is being shared.

This earned media is becoming the most powerful, and trusted, source of media because it refers to content that is created by others about a brand and strongly influences the consumer buying process.

This eBook provides practical tips for B2B marketers to attract the positive attention of prospects and customers, and convert them into brand advocates. In turn, they will promote the brand to new audiences and ultimately attract more customers.

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What is a brand advocate?

In marketing terms, a brand advocate is a person who talks favourably about a brand or product, and then passes on positive word-of-mouth messages about the brand to other people.

Let's also not confuse (genuine) advocates for those who have been remunerated or compensated to do so. Do we really believe that Kate Moss uses Rimmel? Of course not! Advocates are earned and genuine fans. They seek engagement from a brand, and are eager to support, promote and defend a brand in the long-term. More importantly, their recommendations also affect and influence others to take action.

All too often, marketers are focused too much on the quantity of online audiences, rather than the quality. Having a lot of followers or fans does not inherently equate to influence. It provides an audience and drives awareness; it isn't necessarily going to influence behaviour. An advocate, on the other hand, influences the opinions of others through the sharing of information and content.

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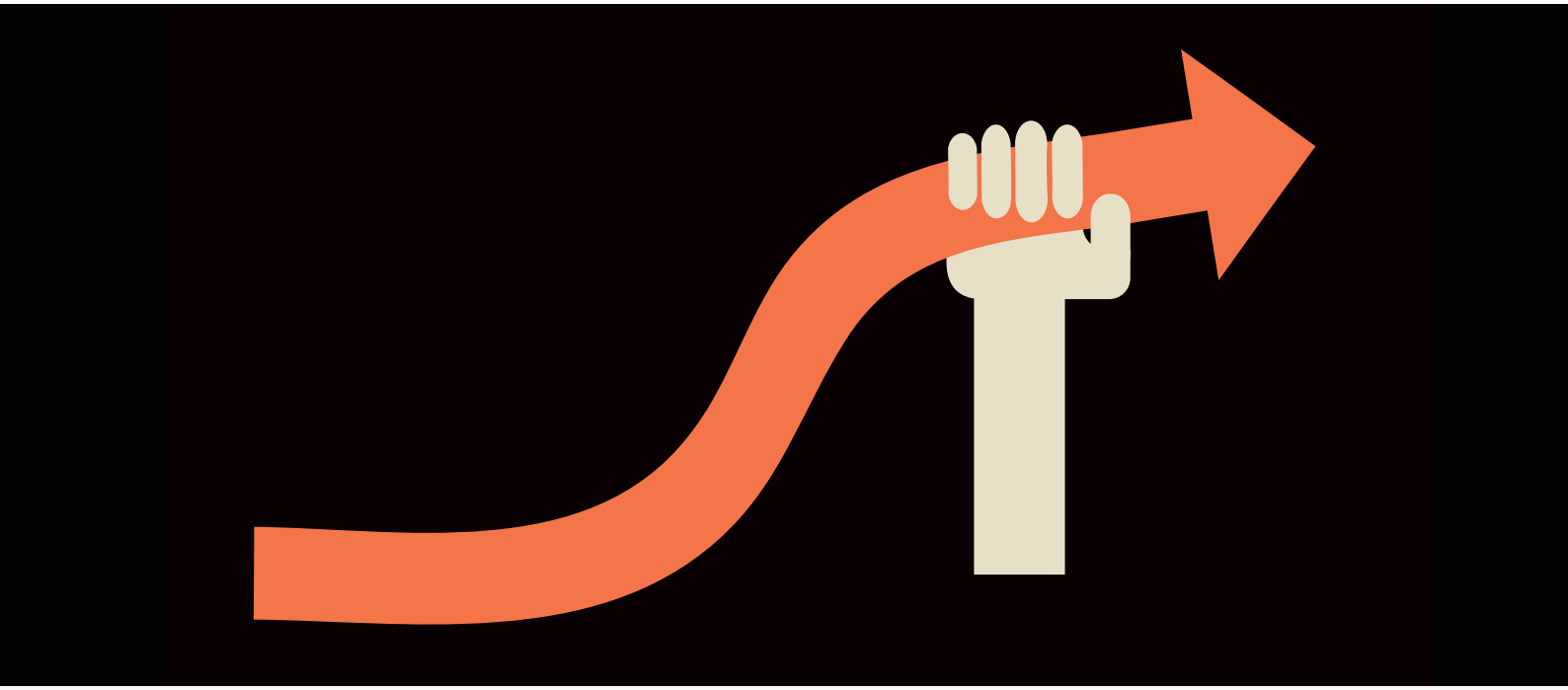
Why does a business need advocates?

We all trust recommendations from friends, family and colleagues far more than what a brand tells us. According to McKinsey, word-of-mouth is the primary factor behind 20-50% of all purchasing decisions. And it makes sense. With the gradual decline of outbound marketing, consumers have become far more self-sufficient to research a brand or product on their own terms – and this includes hearing about it from someone they trust.

Several studies have shown the value that an advocate can bring to a business, and the stats below show they're not something to be ignored:

- Consumer advocacy reduces the cost for acquiring new leads.
- A referred customer has a 16% higher lifetime value.
- Referral leads convert about 30% better than leads from other channels.
- Referral leads take less time to actually convert (less decision-making time on the part of the referred customers).
- 83% of satisfied customers are willing to recommend products and services; **however only 29% actually do.** This emphasises the need to develop and nurture a brand advocacy program. We'll be covering this later.

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The growth of social media

Social media continues to grow, and has played a pivotal role in the way in which information is used and shared:

- 46% of web users look towards social media when making a purchase. (Source: Nielson)
- 83% of B2B marketers invest in social media to increase brand exposure. (Source: Social Media Today)
- 74% of marketers who spend 40+ hours using social media per week earn new business through their efforts. (Source: Social Media Examiner)

What's driving the continued growth of social media?

Mobile

With greater connectivity, the time spent on mobile is increasing and affecting the way in which people use social media.

App usage now accounts for more than half of all time spent on mobile, and this is increasing. Social networking now generates more than 70% of its activity on mobile, and studies have shown that mobile users are nearly twice as likely to share content on social networks than desktop users.

Fragmentation

The growth of the social media ecosystem has caused channels to fragment. Audiences are now dispersed across multiple networks, providing both challenges and opportunities for B2B marketers to lure their audience's attention through contextual targeting.

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How to identify potential advocates

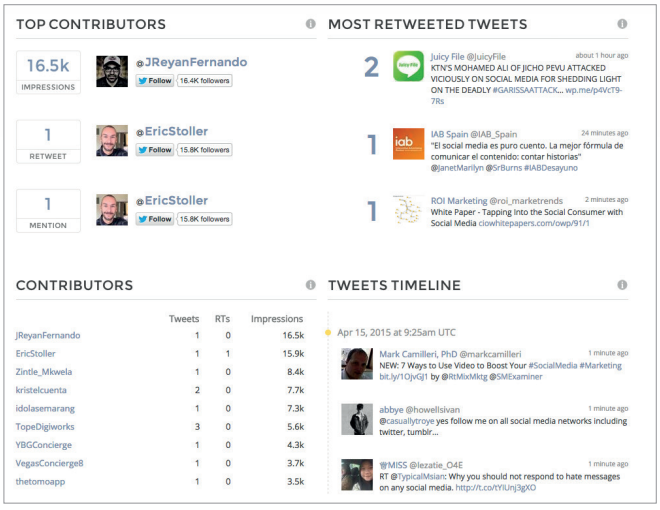
So how do you identify potential advocates, and then provide them with the right content, motivation and opportunities to enable them to act? Let's look at some of the characteristics of advocates and how you can reach them.

Brand advocates are satisfied and happy customers

Start with those who you already do business with. If you're doing a good job (presumably you are!), clients, partners and suppliers are probably already advocating your brand. By engaging and interacting with them on social media, you will encourage them to do the same.

Find out who is already sharing your content

TweetReach is a simple way to measure how far content can travel on Twitter. It helps to understand the reach of a particular tweet, as well as who the top contributors are for a particular keyword or hashtag.



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Google Alerts and Social Mention enable you to monitor any mentions of your brand online, so that you can then engage with these people via social channels. Klout and LinkedIn are also useful tools that will help you identify potential advocates.

Contributors who have a high level of social media activity are likely to be using social media networks as their primary channels to communicate. They'll spend a lot of time posting, researching, interacting and sharing in this space. These are the people who you want to be engaging with.

Target those who your audience would appreciate insight from

Who is considered an influencer in your industry? Influencers typically share the following attributes:

- A large following on social media.
- High engagement levels through shares, retweets, likes etc.
- Respect and admiration amongst their audience (people actively seek out their thoughts and opinions).
- Continually create fresh and new insight.
- Frequent mentions in the media.

Identifying and engaging with key influencers in your industry will provide you with another way to potentially reach a wider audience.

Engage with those you want as customers

Engaging with and interacting with those you aspire to have as customers will build trust and credibility for your brand. This process can take some time and effort, but it can pay dividends. Identify key decision-makers within the companies you want to target, and promote great thought leadership content and insight on topics that you think will be relevant to them.

Use employees as advocates

Enlist the help of your employees to share your content and help grow your presence online. They too want the brand to succeed and grow. They may have a larger following than your own, with interests in specialist areas. To encourage employees to share and mention your brand, you'll need to promote your content just as widely through internal channels as you do externally.

It also helps to have social media guidelines/policies in place to protect how your brand is communicated by employees.

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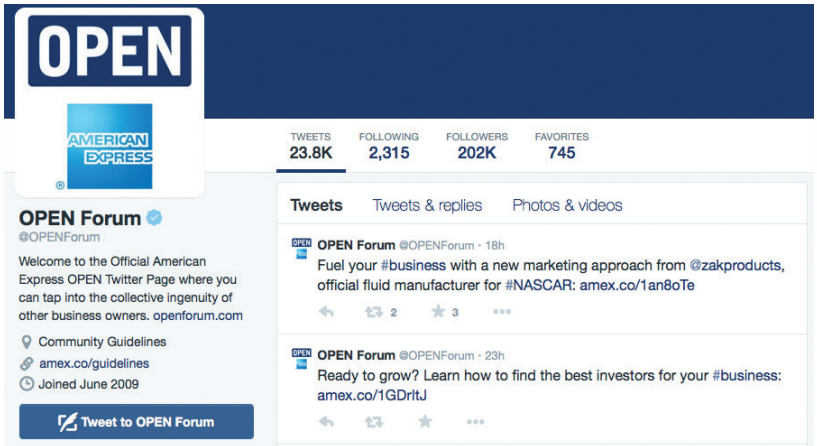
Show empathy

The ability to empathise with your community is crucial if you want to attract brand advocates. It means spending time developing long-term relationships with fans and followers in order to build customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. By showing that you care for and understand your social media community, you will create deeper and more meaningful connections.

Cisco created a social media listening centre that featured six interactive screens at their HQ showcasing real-time information about Cisco conversations in the social web. This was used to enhance how Cisco integrate and interact with the voice of the customer as well as increase internal adoption of social media listening throughout the organisation.



American Express' OPEN social media campaign focused on insights and tips to equip small business owners with the skills and knowledge to succeed. The success of this campaign was down to the fact that it was less about American Express and more about showing empathy with their customers by incorporating questions, links, quizzes and content to help foster and empathise with their community.



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The voice of the customer

Voice of the Customer (VoC) is the process of capturing customer feedback in order to enhance their customer experience and attract other customers with similar values.

Capitalising on customer feedback requires more than the occasional sending of surveys. It takes a proactive and highly targeted approach. Focus primarily on your most profitable customers and invite them to talk about your business, product or service. This interview can be filmed and turned into a valuable piece of content for your business to promote via social channels.

You could also consider hosting an event for clients and advocates to attend, discussing the latest trends in your industry. For example, Intel invites its digital savvy audience via social media to the Intel Developer Forum, where people can share and gather ideas about the latest Intel technology.

Adobe has created a successful VoC video campaign to promote Creative Cloud, to show how existing clients are using and benefiting from Adobe's products. See the videos here.

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Nurturing brand advocates on social media

An advocacy programme on social media is just like nurturing your prospects – and should be treated with a similar planned approach. Any relationship needs to be cultivated to encourage advocates to share information about your brand through their networks.

Recognise and reward

Advocates want to be known for their valuable insights. They like to advise people and are highly motivated by recognition. This is why social media works well for advocates as a platform to share information, because they can be seen sharing their opinions.

Make a point to understand your advocates; find out why they are involved, what motivates them and how each of them would want to be recognised and rewarded. Creating a dialogue with them to acknowledge and recognise their interest in your brand will motivate them to become even more involved with your community.

Exclusivity

Allow your advocates exclusive access to your content, before releasing it into the public domain. This will not only help them feel valued, it also allows them to think about who they might distribute it to, potentially providing you with powerful third party endorsement once it is finally released.

It's a two-way street

Social media isn't a broadcast channel. It's about conversations, community, connecting with an audience and building relationships - so be generous on social media. If your advocates are sharing a piece of content that you think your audience will also find useful, share it. Let people know why you're recommending the link, and how the content might help them.

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Choose who you reciprocate with

It is part of our make-up to reciprocate. We feel obliged to return favours, and treat others as they treat us. This is one of the reasons why social media works so well for businesses: because of the law of reciprocity. As you continue to create value for your audience, you are gradually EARNING recognition and promotion from members of your community.

Whilst it is important to include reciprocity in your social media strategy, don't feel that you have to follow everyone who follows you, or share their content just because they've shared yours. There are other ways to reciprocate. Keep your network to those who provide you with the most value, don't base it on reciprocity. Chris Brogan's blog on 'The great unfollow' is a fascinating read about what he learnt in the process of not reciprocating.

Sharing content

Make it as easy as possible for advocates to share information about your brand on social media:

- Have a consistent brand image across every social media channel you engage with.
- Place social media profile links prominently on your company website, as well as in your email signature, to make it easy for them to connect with your brand.
- Use social sharing buttons on your website content and 'Tweet this' against key information on blog posts or eBooks so your content is just one click away from being shared.
- Research hashtags that your target influencers are using – and use them when sharing your own, related content.

Engage personally

If someone is going to say great things about your brand, they deserve personal recognition for it. Something as simple as a tweet that says "Thanks for sharing our whitepaper @influencer. Have a great day" can do wonders.

If they send you a direct message via social media or a direct @mention, make a point to reply.

Real-time customer service

Just as social media has enabled real-time marketing, it has also necessitated real-time customer service and community management. Customers' expectations have increased too; whether to make a complaint or provide a suggestion, customers want to be heard no matter what channel they use to communicate. And, more and more, they expect companies to respond in a timely manner. Consumer brands need someone on hand 24/7 to deal with feedback and suggestions; this has been the case for some time. B2B brands are finding they now need to be more 'available' to their customers on social media within business hours.

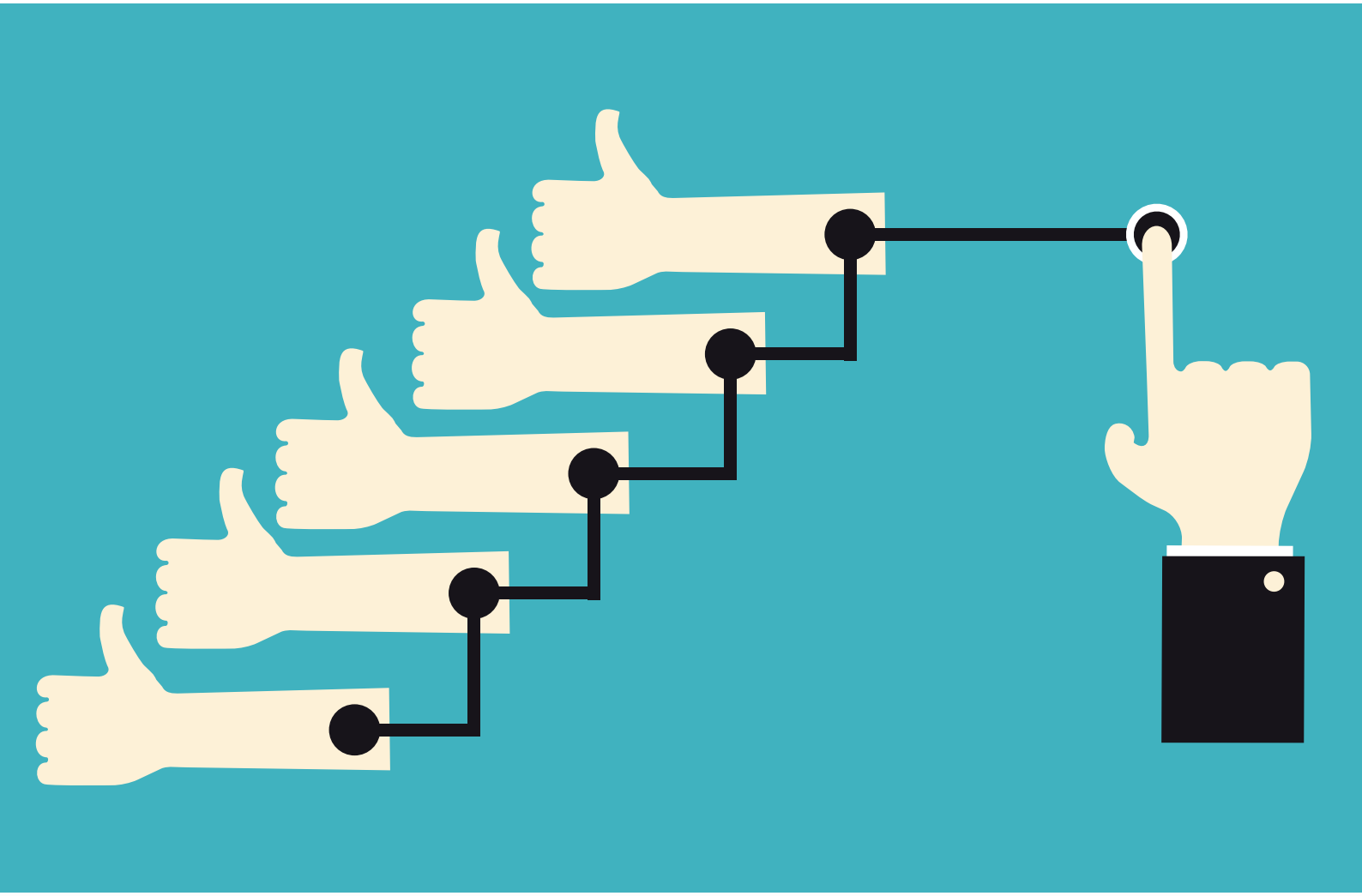
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Key takeaways

- Identify your brand advocates from your existing network on social media, and then plan a strategy to attract more of the same kind of people.
- Think like a publisher when it comes to sharing content. Research what your audience want, as well as what your advocates are likely to want to share.
- Start a relationship-building 'Company Advocacy Programme' to engage advocates.
- Advocates need personalised benefits so they are incentivised to continue to be your company's ambassadors. Small gestures can go a long way.
- Assign someone in your organisation to be responsible for monitoring and responding to comments and mentions via social media.
- Utilise your existing, known advocates, such as high profile/high value customers, as well as your own employees and partners.

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Conclusion

As we now live in the age of social media, brands need to put a little more effort into their social strategy and efforts. Part of this strategy should include getting your audience to play an active role in advocating and promoting your brand online.

The reality is, you no longer drive company and brand messaging – your customers do. Yet most businesses are missing opportunities to engage with their customers and build a positive community around what their brand stands for. Identifying and nurturing brand advocates will help to create deeper and more meaningful connections, and in turn, enable them to endorse your company, products and services to a far wider audience.

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About Torpedo

At Torpedo we create digitally driven, integrated marketing communications. We're the thinkers. The creators. The doers.

We make things happen and we get results. We believe in creative excellence to deliver a unified brand experience that engages and inspires your customers. Highly-visual creative design and digital expertise lie at the heart of Torpedo. We create brands, integrated campaigns, compelling content and cutting edge digital experiences. All underpinned by strategies that have been informed by customer insight, and driven by technology to help businesses challenge the way they market to their customers.

Torpedo has extensive experience working with businesses spanning a wide range of industry sectors, delivering marketing projects within the UK, EMEA and internationally. Our clients include Autodesk, Adobe, Epson, UCB Pharma, Agilent Technologies, Fujitsu, Nominet, Intel, BAE Systems, Novartis, Unipart, Emerson, Travelport, Stryker, PHS Group and Transport for London.

Our clients tell us they love our depth of thinking, the way we explore ideas and technologies to achieve the best solution, and our in-house digital team for web and app development which gives us greater project control, a resource that knows your brand and ultimately faster delivery times.

Talk to the team at Torpedo to find out more about how social media can help your business.

Sources:
Hubspot
Convince and Convert
Chris Brogan
McKinsey
Wharton school of business
Comscore

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