

Your complete, step-by-step guide to:

Building a successful B2B brand ambassador program



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Why you need a brand ambassador program

01



Why you need a brand ambassador program

What is a brand ambassador?

You may have heard or seen the concept of brand ambassadors referred to in a variety of different ways: evangelists, champions, advocates, super-fans and VIPs.

Whatever the label, for B2B marketers these terms refer to a singularly defined group of your customers who are the most effective at helping you market and sell your products and services.

91%

of B2B buyers are influenced by word-of-mouth when making their buying decision. [USM]

61%

of IT buyers report that colleague recommendations are the most important factor when making a purchase decision. [B to B Magazine]

56%

of B2B purchasers look to offline word-of-mouth as a source of information and advice, and this number jumps to 88 per cent when online word-of-mouth sources are included. [BaseOne]

What can a brand ambassador do for your business?

We know how the B2B purchase journey has changed: how the greater part of a prospect's journey is undertaken online, before they even make contact with you as a potential supplier.

One aspect of the purchase journey remains as critical for B2B sales and marketing professionals as ever – the establishment of trust between a potential new customer and your brand.

No one can help you establish trust in your brand, products, services and credentials like your enthusiastic and demonstrative existing customers can.

The very best of these are your brand ambassadors, and each of them can potentially:

- › Amplify your content marketing strategy
- › Counter negative social media sentiment
- › Provide social media endorsements
- › Grow your presence on user-generated review sites
- › Provide case studies/customer stories
- › Provide video client testimonials
- › Act as referees
- › Provide referrals
- › Create value for your brand
- › Build trust in your brand
- › Humanise your brand
- › Add credibility to your brand position and proposition
- › Reduce perceived risk and pre-purchase dissonance for new customers.

“

Awareness is fine, but advocacy will take your business to the next level

Joe Tripodi, CMO, The Coca-Cola Company

”

What is a brand ambassador program?

If brand ambassadors can bring your business so many tangible benefits, it makes sense to know who your potential (and current) ambassadors are, and to have a plan in place to get them actively delivering more of those benefits to your business.

The plan you put in place to achieve this, is your brand ambassador program.



Building your brand ambassador program – the step-by-step process

02

Building your brand ambassador program – the step-by-step process

Setting your objectives

Before you do anything, be clear about what you want your brand ambassador program to achieve.

Step one

Consider which measurable business goals you want this program to contribute to.

For example, a key business objective could be one of any of these goals:

- › Increasing your pipeline value
- › Increasing your number of corporate/enterprise-level/high ticket clients
- › Increasing your average order value
- › Increasing year one customer life-time value
- › Increasing sales team pitch win-rate
- › Increasing sales team MQL-to-sale conversion rate
- › Decreasing your cost per sale
- › Decreasing your customer cancellation / churn rate.

Step two

Make sure there's a number against the goal(s).

For example, if your goal is growing pipeline value, then how much do you plan to increase the pipeline value by? 5 per cent, 10 per cent, 24 per cent?

Step three

Consider the contribution your brand ambassador program can make to achieving these goals. What are the specific deliverables that will make a difference? What do you want your ambassadors to do for you?

For example, do you want:

- › An increase in social media exposure, eg. your number of Twitter followers, LinkedIn group members, blog reposts, shares?
- › A swing in positive social media sentiment towards your brand?
- › A target number of enterprise-level client case studies?
- › A target number of influential referees you can call in as part of a new business pitch process?

Step four

Make sure you have a number and timeframe against any target deliverables you set, i.e.:

- › How many case studies do you want to get and by when?
- › How many new Twitter followers do you want and by when?



Defining your resources

Having defined your objectives, you need to identify and define the resources you will allocate to achieve them.

There are a variety of resourcing elements you need to consider:

- › Who will manage the program?
- › How much time per day/week/month will they allocate to it?
- › What internal and external resources are available in your business to help them?
- › What will the size and extent of your program membership group be?
- › How much financial budget is potentially available to spend on the program, including the cost of the rewards program?

Step one

Define the scope of your program, based on the objectives you have set in Step four of 'Setting Your Objectives'.

For example, will you get the most value from hundreds of brand

ambassadors influencing across your entire social media space, from 30 targeted brand ambassadors sharing your content, or from just three or four brand ambassadors focussing your message on a small, niche, high-ticket audience?

Based on these considerations, define:

- › The size of the brand ambassador program membership group
- › The nature of the program – will it be a closed or open program (i.e. will you pick the members exclusively, or openly invite members to join?).

Step two

Identify human resources available – the people, their time, and the cost of their time.

NB: An open program with a large target membership is likely to require more human resource to manage than a small, closed program would. This is because a high level of activity will have to be undertaken simply to populate the membership group and maintain engagement.

Step three

Set a financial budget for your brand ambassador program based on the outcomes you aim to achieve (see Step two of Setting Your Objectives) and the scope and human resourcing you have identified in steps one and two above.

Think about the returns you are aiming to achieve.

For example, if your objective is to increase your pipeline value by 20 per cent and that increase equates to £250,000, then you could reasonably propose a budget of £20,000 for your brand ambassador program.

Remember: the size of your financial budget will directly impact what you can do in terms of outreach and rewards. Begin by setting a ball park budget at the start of your planning. Later, we'll see how that fits your activity plan.

Activity plan for a closed program

03

Activity plan for a closed program

Target program members

Assuming you have chosen to run a closed program, your next consideration is deciding who you want your brand ambassadors to be.

In short, you'll be looking for the best companies to nurture, and who within these companies are the best contacts to nurture.

Remember that members of your ambassador program may be at different stages of their relationship with your business, brand and team.

Some may already be close to where you'd like them to be as brand ambassadors, actively endorsing your products and services. Others may be less far down that road but have all the right indicators and profiles for ambassadorship potential.

To begin with, get them all into one single potential pool, based on the key criteria listed below.

Then you can refine the final membership group, based on the steps and criteria that follow.

Those who don't make the final group can go onto a reserves list for future attention.





As you work through the process of identifying current and potential ambassadors, think in terms of:

1. Who already loves your brand
2. Who is all set to fall in love with your brand – given some extra nurturing
3. Who you really want to love your brand – the best connected, the most social, the most influential brands and people in your customer base/client list.

Now identify members of your ambassador program membership group, based on their:

- › Transactional/purchase behaviour
- › Engagement behaviour
- › Demographics
- › Personality and attitude
- › Buyer persona (if available).

Step one

Identify your potential source pools:

- › Current clients/customers
- › Commercial partners
- › Other current advocates.

Step two

For each source pool, and with your program objectives firmly in mind, collect anecdotal feedback and evidence from your sales/account management, business development and customer support teams (and any other key customer facing teams) to identify companies and individuals who:

- › Are getting the most demonstrable value from your product/service
- › Have the most positive relationship with your team
- › Have an account contact of sufficient seniority and credibility,
- › Have a senior level account contact (eg. head of, or c-level) who is vocal, articulate, enthusiastic and influential
- › Have a known, trusted and respected brand in your marketplace
- › Have a story that supports your pitch, brand proposition or campaign message. For example, if you are aiming to collect client case studies, does the client have a compelling success story to tell from using your product/service?

Step three

From your customer database /CRM system, identify companies who have the highest:

- › Annual or upfront spend
- › Uptake of new products/services
- › Consumption of services/product
- › Uptake of specific high value products/services
- › Recency and/or frequency of purchase.

At this point, you may decide that you have your pool of ambassador program members identified and you don't need to do any further analysis.

Alternatively, you can choose to apply more criteria, either against the pool you now have, or against your original source pools, to either hone down your list more, or to include a wider selection of members.

If you decide to do that, then allow any or all of these next steps four to seven.



Step four

From your email and website reporting identify customer companies and individuals who have the highest:

- › Email engagement – click throughs
- › Website engagement – eg. visits, frequency, duration
- › Marketing content consumption – eg. whitepaper downloads, webinar registrations, free event registrations.

Step five

From social media engagement monitoring, identify the basics, i.e.:

- › Who are your most prolific content sharers on your key social media sites
- › Who are your most engaged customers socially – belonging to and contributing to your LinkedIn groups, engaging with you directly and positively on Twitter and Facebook etc.

Step six

Consider a deeper social media dive to identify who from the pool identified by step four, are your most connected and influential customers. Base your analysis on any or all of these key criteria:

Blogging

- › Use Alexa, Backlinks.com, and webmaster tools.
- › What level of commenting do their blog posts get?

- › Do they contribute regularly to their company blog, and if so how many backlinks does it have? What level of commenting do their posts get?
- › Do they make guest blog posts and comments within your industry sector and community? Google their name + 'blog' to find out.

Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn

- › How many Twitter followers do they or their company have?
- › How many tweets do they post per month?
- › How many retweets do they get?
- › How many FB fans does their company have?
- › How many LinkedIn connections do they have? How many groups do they or their company own and/or belong to? Connect with them and view their recent activity feed to find out.

Conversations

Is their social media dialogue consistent with or contradictory to your brand values?

Ranking

What is their social media ranking? Use tools like Klout, Peerindex and Kred to find out.

You aren't building a social media influencer marketing program here, so don't spend an undue amount

of time on this step, unless the objectives of your ambassador program are clearly focussed around building social reach and influence or achieving social media based goals.

Step seven

If you have detailed buyer personas applied to your customer base, then you should be able to use these as criteria for helping to identify your best current or potential brand ambassadors.

Step eight

Based on your analysis in steps one to three and then in steps four to seven (if you decided to trawl wider or refine further), you will now have a pool of the best companies and contacts in your customer base for nurturing into ambassadors.

You may have one key contact or multiple contacts at each company, depending on how well they fit your criteria.

Now go back to Step one in 'Defining Your Resources', check the target size of your program membership, and pick your final members based on all the criteria you have covered in this section.

Getting your brand ambassador program members to deliver on your objectives

04

Getting your brand ambassador program members to deliver on your objectives

The outreach and engagement plan

Step one

For each company and/or contact in your program:

- › Connect on LinkedIn
- › Ask permission to share their content
- › Follow on Twitter and Facebook
- › Subscribe to their blog/company blog
- › Research and draw up a profile bulleting their professional interests, the topics and challenges that get them talking, the key issues and topics for their industry sector and for their business.

Step two

Create an ongoing (daily/weekly/monthly) activity schedule. For each contact in the program:

- › Monitor and share their best content (across your social media sites eg. LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and your company blog)
- › Comment on their blogs and/or company blogs
- › Curate and share relevant content from your own content output with them, plus other trusted, quality sources of research that are of specific relevance and value to their industry. If you're sharing on Twitter, then DM them. If you're sharing on LinkedIn then InMail message them.
- › Alternatively, or additionally, send them a regular email with a roundup of all the best content you've shared with them in the last week/month/quarter.

Step three

Your objectives here are to:

- › Help to raise their professional profile
- › Build their personal online brand and recognition
- › Connect them to career-enhancing networks.

Initial engagement steps:

- › Invite them to guest blog on your company blog
- › Create a schedule of Twitter chats and ensure each of your ambassadors are invited to join the panel of at least one of the chats
- › Commission some crowd-sourced content and invite them to be a source and to share the article
- › Ramp up the engagement to include both online and offline events: invite them to take part in your events program, eg. as panellists, guest speakers, webcast hosts
- › Consider garnering their input on customer-facing business decisions, either online or at a dedicated face-to-face event.

“

If you do build a great experience, customers tell each other about that. Word of mouth is very powerful

Jeff Bezos, Amazon

”



Learn what makes your members happy

Alongside nurturing each ambassador program member online, a fundamental aspect of your ambassador plan is your rewards program.

What are the perks and rewards of being in your ambassador program? What's going to help make members feel even better about their relationship with your business and brand?

To answer these questions, you'll first need to learn more about your brand ambassadors, both personally and professionally.

The good news is that now you've begun engaging with and nurturing them, you're in a great position to proactively ask them for some specific and useful information about themselves that you can use to tailor their rewards experience.



Step one

Create a mini survey using a short data capture form, pushed out through personalised email, Twitter DMs and LinkedIn mails.

There are lots of useful personal things you can learn. For example, consider asking for:

- › Their birthday (you don't need the year, just the date)
- › Their favourite kind of restaurant (don't be afraid to say that this is in case you get a chance to take them for lunch)
- › Whether they prefer milk or plain chocolate
- › What their favourite tippie is
- › Whether they are an indoorsy or outdoorsy, more sporty or leisurely person.

On a professional level, ask:

- › What their preferences are when it comes to using resources you could provide to help them in their job and career
- › How they prefer to consume

information and guidance eg. via webinars, seminars, larger scale events, whitepapers, research reports or videos?

- › Which key topics, pain points and challenges they would most value free information, research and guidance on.

Keep all this information saved where you can access it and use it, whether that means contact attributes in your CRM system, custom fields in your email database or in a brand ambassadors program spreadsheet.

Once you have this information (or a plan and timetable for collecting it) you can break your rewards program down into three sections:

- › Corporate hospitality
- › Incentives and empowerment
- › Customer experience.



Corporate hospitality planning

Including targeted, well-thought-out hospitality in your ambassador rewards can have a hugely positive impact on achieving your objectives.

This part of the program is driven by what you know about your program members personally, whether through feedback from the sales and account management teams or data you have collected through your mini surveys.

There are considerations to cover first though.

Step one

Make sure it's okay

Some employers may have a strict ban on employees receiving any form of personal reward. So before you send your first reward, check with the recipient that they and their employers are okay about it.

A quick email should do the trick. Let your program members know that as a brand you like to invite valued customers to hospitality events and send out a bit of swag now and then. Ask them to let you know if they'd rather not be included in this.

Keep it reasonable

Corporate hospitality is included in the remit of both the Bribery Act 2010 and the FCPA, but only where it is deemed to be 'disproportionate' or 'lavish'.

So the rule of thumb is to keep things 'reasonable', 'proportionate' and not 'lavish'. You will know what these relative terms mean in relation to your industry, sector and market. Private jet holidays to the Seychelles for ambassadors are likely to be rewards that could be seen to cross the line. Lunches, small Christmas hampers and the odd goody bag would not.

Keep it targeted

It's smart to target your program rewards as much as possible, depending on the membership size of the program and your budget and resources. So if, for example, you know that half of your program members identify themselves as 'sporty' and 'outdoorsy' while the other half are more 'indoorsy', you could invite one half to a grouse shoot afternoon, and the other half to cheese and wine tasting.

Keep it on brand

Remember that your rewards program needs to reflect your

brand – its personality traits, values, tone and positioning.

Consider your brand keywords when you're working out a hospitality program. The following list of keywords shows how seven different brand values could lead to seven quite different hospitality experiences.

- › Aspirational
- › Creative
- › Quirky
- › Irreverent
- › Innovative
- › Cheeky
- › Traditional.

Keep it in budget

The cost of hospitality needs to be considered in section three - Resources. How much you are willing to invest should be set against how much value you place on achieving your ambassador program objectives.

If, for example, you expect the resulting war chest of case studies, client videos, and referrals to increase your corporate pipeline conversion value by around £100,000 in year one, then investing £20,000 of that in your rewards program is probably a wise idea.



Step two

Your calendar and plan

With all these considerations covered off, you are ready to draw up a hospitality plan and calendar. Your calendar will include the hospitality events you plan to invite members to and the rewards you plan to send out. For example:

- › Brand ambassador Christmas party. (Consider inviting not only your program members but also people you want to nurture as social influencers, key accounts, hot prospects and brands from your client wish list.
- › Christmas hamper

- › A quarterly lunch with their account manager
- › Private dining, with an informal presentation from a key industry figure
- › Easter egg chocolate gift
- › Summer party
- › A birthday message and gift (remember you'll have collected their birth date in your plan above)
- › Miscellaneous swag
- › Clocks going forward
- › Halloween.

Step three

Put a cost against each line and total up your planned hospitality costs, then refine or expand this to fit your allocated budget.



Incentives and empowerment

It's important that your ambassador program focuses on professional as well as (or if needs be, in place of) personal rewards.

Covering both bases means you can work around the rules of each member's organisation (see Considerations above) and connect with your program members on more than one level.

Once again, your program membership size and your available resources will help to inform what you are able to do here. If, for example, you have the resource and membership size that enables and justifies dedicated whitepapers, research papers or guides focused on program members' unique and specific needs, then include these in the plan.

If your budget or membership sizes are much smaller, then make sure any relevant content you release gets to your program members first as an exclusive preview.

Step one

Add rows to your hospitality plan and calendar for incentives.

For example, these may include:

- › Exclusive previews of new products, features or services
- › Exclusive, pre-launch free trials, beta tester access, or priority pre-order purchase opportunities for new product/feature/service launches
- › Exclusive previews of new value-add content: eg. whitepapers, research reports and guides, (before they are published on your website)
- › Exclusive webinars
- › Complimentary tickets to any paid-for-events you hold.



Customer experience

Of course all your customers should enjoy a great customer experience. But if any of them should get a truly outstanding customer experience, it's those in your ambassador program.

Single out each member and business for special treatment. Make sure their experience of your product and service is so great they can't help but proclaim you.

Step one

The customer experience is likely to impact multiple touchpoints in your business – from sales and account management, to finance, customer care, marketing and beyond.

First define each of these and the stakeholder responsible.

Step two

Define each of the criteria in your business, industry and marketplace that constitute great customer experience.

Map this to the touchpoints you have defined in step one, then define for each criterion how you are going to go the extra mile for your ambassador program members.

Step three

Define the role, expectations and KPIs of each of these business areas identified in steps one and two, and make it easy for everyone to clearly see what they are specifically expected to do in order to deliver the outstanding customer experience you want your brand ambassadors to receive.

**Your
communications
plan**

05

Your communications plan

Alongside your hospitality and incentives plan and calendar you will need a communications plan and calendar to ensure all your activities are communicated to your program members at the right time and through the right channels.

Step one

Draw up a brand ambassador program comms calendar,

listing each initiative then showing by date and channel the communications that will go out to promote the initiative.

Your communications may include, for example, a personalised invitation sent through the post, an email campaign, a personal email sent from an account manager, a DM through social media, or a combination of these.

Step two

Put a cost against each line.

Step three

Total up your marcomms plan cost and refine or expand this to fit your financial budget.



Tracking your success

06

Tracking your success

Tracking and measuring the return on your investment in your brand ambassador program is crucial.

The objectives you set in section one of this guide will define the outcomes you track and report on.

Step one

Track and report on the outcomes of your program against the objectives you set in step four of section one:

So if, for example, the specific objectives of your program are to deliver five enterprise-level client case studies by the end of the first six months of the program then hitting that target is your primary KPI achieved.

Use this formula to calculate your ROI.

$$\frac{\text{Campaign profit} - \text{marketing investment}}{\text{Marketing investment}}$$

Step two

Track and report on the impact of these achievements on the business objectives you set in step two of section one.

So if, for example, your business objective was to convert an additional £10,000+ upfront spend customers by the end of the calendar year, then hitting that target is your secondary KPI achieved.

Step three

These KPIs will enable you to provide an ROI figure, based on the budget you have invested and the returns achieved.

Track and report on the behaviour of your brand ambassadors, outside of your specific objectives.

This will help to give you a wider picture of how your program members have responded to all your

engagement and nurturing initiatives. It may be that they have become far more active on social media, sharing your content etc.

Don't forget to include anecdotal feedback from your sales or account management teams. It may be that one of your brand ambassadors did a stellar job at an event, recommending your products/services to high-value prospect. This kind of feedback needs to be recorded and reported on.

About B2B Marketing

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