

A Guide to implementing a great
EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY
Program

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Introduction to Employee Advocacy

Contrary to popular belief, an organization's biggest assets are not its products, services or the several brands it owns, but in fact its people, which includes employees, stakeholders, partners and customers.

When employees take initiative to promote their company, they transform into employee advocates. The act of promoting an organization through employees is known as

employee advocacy, wherein they share company news, events, updates and other exciting content on their personal social media pages.

Employees know their organization best because they understand the nuances of the company's workplace culture and day-to-day challenges, and thus are more likely to spread positive word-of-mouth to uplift the organization's image.

Employee Engagement

Now the question that arises is, why would employees agree to become brand ambassadors for their organization? Here is where the issue of employee engagement comes into play. Engaged employees make natural brand advocates because they feel a sense of pride for the organization they work for.

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One in five employees (21%) is estimated to be an employee advocate, and another 33% have high potential to be employee advocates. - Weber

Shandwick & KRC Research

”

- Weber Shandwick & KRC Research

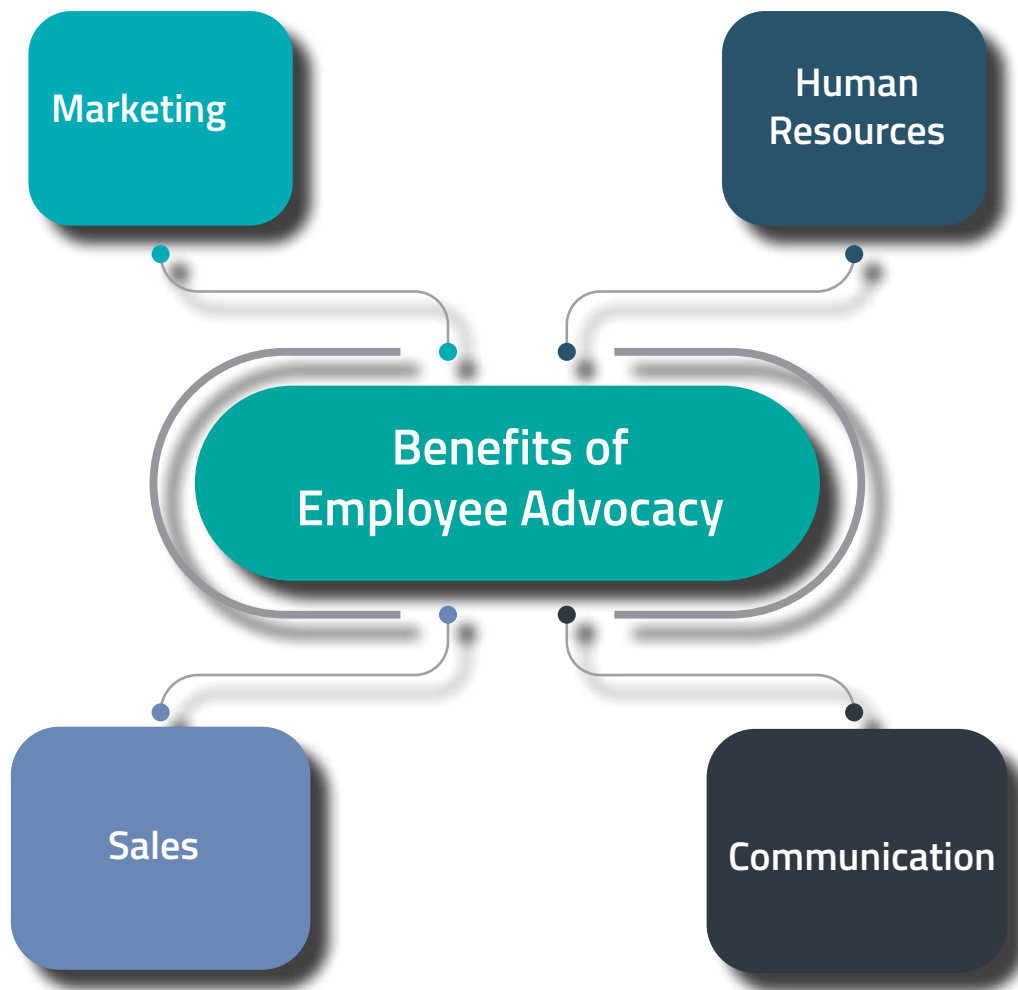
Thus, if organizations wish to harness the power of employee advocacy, they must first take remedial measures to ensure that their employees are being actively engaged with their work, the company and its core values, culture, mission and long-term goals. Once employees feel integrated with the organization, they will voluntarily advocate for the brand they represent.





2

Benefits of Employee Advocacy



Marketing

- Enables enterprises to promote their brand, marketing campaigns and launches on social media
- Improves brand awareness, visibility and reach
- Humanizes the brand because employees communicate on behalf of the brand
- Unifies the organization's marketing efforts
- Transforms employees into micro-influencers



— Human Resources

- Enables enterprises to promote their brand, marketing campaigns and launches on social media
- Improves employee engagement
- Shortens the hiring cycle by selecting qualified applicants through employee referrals
- Minimizes recruitment expenses



— Sales

- Increases organic web traffic
- Increases lead generation
- Reduces paid marketing spend
- Empowers prospects in decision-making in the buying cycle



— Communication

- Connects with employees on the advocacy platform and mobile app
- Manages company communication to improve employee contentment and retention
- Communicates the organization's vision, mission, culture and goals with its people
- Encourages brand advocates to build the brand's online reputation
- Facilitates user-generated content and brand advocacy for better organic reach





Amplify Brand Reach

“Content shared by employees receives 8x more engagement than content shared by brand channels.”

- Social Media Today

According to a report by Hinge Marketing, firms with formal employee advocacy programs in place tend to grow faster. With just 3000 shares, brands can get millions of impressions, reach and new connections online through their employee social network.

Employees can promote brand content and drive organic traffic into the brand's website and social media page, thereby, generating greater social reach than ever before.

Increased Earned Media Value

Additionally, the cost per thousand (CPM) for an advertising campaign or the cost to reach 1,000 people on social media is comparatively more cost-effective than other media channels such as direct mail, magazines and billboards.

Boost Brand Trustworthiness

“ 92% of consumers trust referrals from people they know. ”
- Nielsen

Consumer behavior across channels has one common pattern – they are more receptive to recommendations given by known sources such as family and friends. Consumers trust referrals over paid promotions and marketing



messages, and are thus, more likely to consider the recommendations about a brand's value offerings from their social media friends and known connections. Therefore, a marketing communication when promoted by employees tend to be received more positively, in contrast to if the brand promoted it independently.

Leverage Social Selling

Since most potential customers and clients are active online, social media has become the go-to platform for social sellers. Employee advocacy enables social selling by providing employee advocates with appropriate brand content.

Secondly, it's a lot easier to build one's sales network online by connecting with mutual connections and expanding the network through LinkedIn and Facebook invites, in-mails and messages. Once the initial communication yields results, social sellers can work on developing client relationships further by understanding the needs of potential customers and clients, and customize value offerings accordingly.



3

What's in It for Employees?

Content for Social Sellers

A formal employee advocacy platform ensures that the organization's social sellers are always armed with appropriate company content to pitch to their clients. With company-approved sales content at hand, the sales team is equipped to answer questions that may be thrown at them during the relationship-building and sales cycle. Secondly, decks of sales content can be prepared that are exclusively meant to be shared with potential customers and clients during the social selling process.

“ According to Aberdeen Group – 72.6% of salespeople using social selling as part of their sales process outperformed their sales peers and exceeded quota 23% more often. ”

Outperform Competition

Going by these findings, sales persons who adopt social media as a sales technique tend to outperform colleagues who are yet to adopt social selling tactics. The end results being, social sellers contribute to ROI, gain more leads, convert leads efficiently, exceed sales targets and generate greater revenue for the organization.





Become a Thought Leader

When employees share quality content on their personal social media pages, they steadily increase their credibility within their own social circle. Thought leadership of this kind can be developed by writing articles and blogs on subjects that are relevant to the company, its brand and industry.

Secondly, original user-generated content contributed by employee brand advocates tend to be information-rich and work domain-specific. This first-hand information can enrich colleagues and social network contacts, thereby making them proactively seek the views of such employee thought leaders.

Outperform Competition

Expand Your Social Network

Social media and business are similar because both require networking. When the two worlds merge, it opens opportunities to expand one's professional network. For instance, LinkedIn, twitter and Facebook have become hotspots for small and large-scale businesses, employees and individual entrepreneurs to connect and collaborate with others.

Employee advocacy platforms are not just about content creation and sharing. If executed well, these platforms can be used for keeping employees engaged through gamification, leaderboard ranking that inspires friendly competition between colleagues, redeemable points and rewards such as movie tickets, all-expenses-paid meals at restaurants, shopping vouchers and much more!



4

Getting Started with Employee Advocacy – Tips & Best Practices



If there's one thing that separates a good brand from a great one, is how well it can create a special connection with its employees. The best advocacy programs empower employees to speak their minds, and keep brands on their toes. This keeps employees engaged and motivates them to

share the good word about their brand, resulting in multiple promotional conversations.

For a brand, it can be scary to give employees full control of their image. But if you look at the power social media has today, employees are going to talk one way or the other. So why not harness your employee talk to positively impact your brand?

Here's a step by step guide on how you can make it happen!

Onboard

1. Set Goals

The first step to onboarding your employees is to set business-appropriate goals. Whether you're looking to hire new employees, boost brand awareness or generate organic leads, defining your goals is crucial.

Go ahead and break it into monthly, quarterly and half-yearly milestones to start with. You can always review and revise them as time proceeds. This will set the tone and pace of your advocacy program.

2. Identify Socially Active Employees

It's not easy to get employees to begin promoting your brand on social media. Identify those that are already active on their personal accounts and target them as your demo group for the program. Encourage them to talk about the company openly, setting live examples for the rest of your workforce to begin sharing.



3. Pick an Advocacy Champion



For any program to be successful, you've got to pick a leader who will see it through from the nascent stage to its launch.

Every department can participate and derive real benefits from advocacy programs and garner support from department heads, C-level executives and subject matter experts (SMEs)

across the company. Empower them to become your internal sponsor/social champions so that step by step, you can empower the entire workforce.

4. Brand Your Advocacy Program

How you choose to brand your advocacy program is integral to the branding process of your company itself. Create an internal branding strategy that aligns your employee advocacy program with your company culture, and compliments the other significantly. If you get your branding right, the foundation of your program is set rock solid.



Communicate

1. Create a Content Strategy

Even the best content strategy requires employee advocacy, so think about types of content that resonate well with your overall objectives. It's not enough to have a single type of content and stick to traditional content marketing strategies. It's the age to experiment and try new things. Remember, your employees will always share content that makes them proud of their company. So, keep it light, simple and catchy as can be.

2. Impart Training

Most of your employees are either already active on social media or they can pick it up quickly. The trick however, is to integrate their personal usage into your employee advocacy program, and to encourage rather than instruct. This requires some amount of orientation and training, especially regarding proper usage of the platform.



3. Prepare a Communication Plan

Employee Advocacy Programs are crafted to be long-term and continuous, with regular communication at various intervals. Devise a communication plan that pushes engaging content to your advocates on a timely basis, to

ensure consistency and stability in your program. Remember, good content will always be shared by your employees. While quantity is important, make sure you do not compromise on quality.

Gamify

Rewards and Recognition

Your employees' word can go a long way in generating positive word-of-mouth about your brand, so why not give back a little something? Engage, entertain and reward your employee advocates using gamification techniques and leaderboards.

These measures will not only motivate them to share more, but also create a healthy atmosphere at the workplace. Employee advocacy platforms are ideal for such sharing, with integrated rewards and coupons that allow employees to accumulate points and redeem them on food, beverage, retail etc., at some of their favorite stores.



Launch

It's Launch Time!

When you're launching an employee advocacy program, it's crucial that you create a buzz around it before setting it in motion. Prepare a plan with the relevant resources and support, and work towards launching the program on the scheduled date. There's nothing worse than delaying or keeping your audience waiting!



Analyze

Measure Your Results

The last step to creating an effective employee advocacy program is to measure and communicate tangible results of the program you've run. Employee advocacy programs that come with analytics dashboard give you a range of insights, whether it's social media metrics or lead generation from the website.

Create a comprehensive report that tracks the goals and mission you began with and how the employee advocacy program has fared over time. It is important to evaluate and revise your program based on these results, so you can adjust your methods for future programs.

So, are you ready to set up an employee advocacy program at your workplace?



5.

Content & Social Strategies for Adopting Employee Advocacy

Think about it. Can you imagine communicating your brand's message without quality content?

To ensure that your message is effectively and efficiently delivered to your target audience, it is imperative to have a well-framed content marketing strategy in place. Your company's content and social media strategy is determined by the scale and deployment of your employee advocacy program. Without a content strategy, it is likely that your marketing efforts will fail to yield expected results. Thus, it is essential to integrate employee advocacy plans with the company's short- and long-term communication goals.

Here are some simple employee advocacy tactics to consider while creating a content strategy for your employee advocacy program:

Decide the Communication Objective

What does your brand want to convey to its audience?

Create content buckets that segregate your brand messages into logical categories. Decide on the type of content you would like to make available to your employee advocates in order to reach out to your larger audience online.



Create Shared Content

Your content strategy must involve all employee teams. The easiest way to achieve this is by providing your employees with interesting company-specific and third-party content that they would gladly share on their personal social media pages. The company's employee advocacy

platform must enable employees to easily access and engage with your brand's content, through likes, comments and shares. **However, the greatest value is created through 'User Generated Content', wherein, employees contribute content that has been authored by them.** This

enables employees to gradually transform into thought leaders within their organization and online community.

Make Content Accessible and Always-On

An employee advocacy program must be App-enabled so that brand advocates are able to access and share content on-the-go and engage remotely.

The process of employee engagement should be an active and ongoing process – which means that brand advocates should be able to engage with your brand even on weekends. Similarly, your globally scattered workforce should also feel connected with your brand and stay engaged.

Make Use of Metrics

Measure the results of your content marketing tactics through metrics from social media and website analytics. Activities carried out through your company's employee advocacy platform can be measured easily and should be used for taking corrective measures. Advocacy apps help gather analytics from all social

channels on which employees are actively sharing, thereby giving a deeper insight into the performance of your social media content strategy.

Reach and Engagement

The success of an employee advocacy program can be gauged from the reach and engagement generated by posts being shared by brand advocates on their social media pages. Additionally, steps must be taken to increase engagement within the organization, to reflect the same enthusiasm on various online platforms.



A vibrant photograph of a crowd at a concert or festival. In the foreground, a young man with blonde, wavy hair looks upwards with an open mouth, wearing a red and black plaid shirt. Behind him, another man with a beard and glasses also looks up, with his right arm raised in a 'rock on' hand gesture. To the right, a person wearing a black baseball cap and glasses looks towards the camera. In the background, another person's arm is raised, holding a small white object. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or stage lighting. The background shows the curved, metallic structure of a large stadium or arena.

6. Steps to Sustain Your Employee Advocacy Program

Building a Relationship

Your advocates need to feel important in the organization. To do so, you need to build a relationship of trust and support with your employees. But as the organization grows, it may not be possible to connect at an interpersonal level. Which is why, it is necessary that you empathize and systemize a way to always stay connected with your advocates.

Connecting with Global Followers

As your organization grows, you would want to spread the word globally too. Your advocates can reach out to their network but to build a global community, you need to connect with them on a larger scale. To give the global audience an appropriate experience, you need to empower regional advocates to take responsibility and spread the word about your brand.





Finding Reliable Advocates

It can't be denied that employees of any company go through ups and downs. Their career aspirations can differ and as they move-on, other things can occupy their time on the internet. As an organization, you need to recognize the right candidates who can lead the brand advocacy platform. You need to provide valid reasons to empower and motivate them to share your content.

Making Brand Advocacy Valuable

Launching a brand advocacy platform can have its challenges but making it valuable is critical to your brand's success. Advocacy programs can enable you to measure your brand's ROI and take corrective measures to improve returns and the relationship with your workforce.

Provide the Right Tools

Though your employees would want to be advocates for your organization, if spreading the message is a tedious task, it can discourage them. You can make advocacy easier by providing simplified tools to reduce their effort of sharing across all social media channels. When the process of sharing is simplified, your employees would be encouraged to share more often.

An engaged workforce is not only beneficial for the employers but also the employees. In a recent **'Hinge Research Institute and Social Media Today' survey of over 550 professionals, 79.1% of respondents reported increased brand visibility when they had an employee advocacy program. Further, 65% saw improved brand recognition and 33.7% had better brand loyalty.**





Socxo believes that brands must invest in their own people in order to transform them into powerful micro-influencers - Employee Advocacy is the perfect medium to enable greater employee engagement.

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