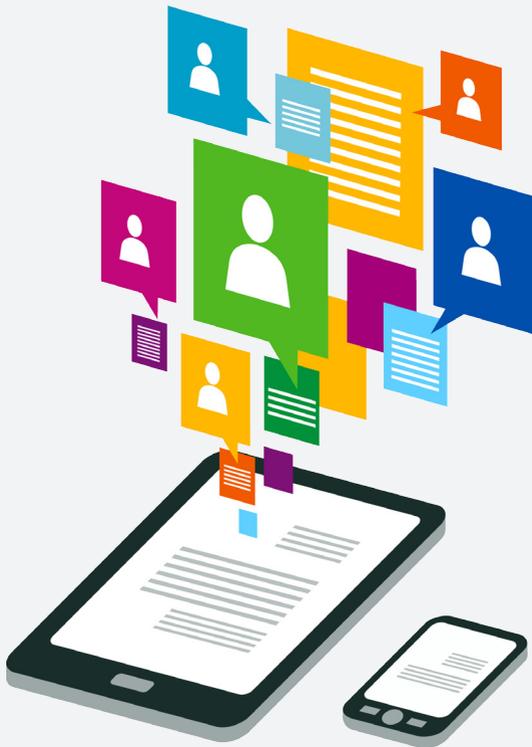


# A GUIDE TO EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY





# 1. Employee advocacy is the new buzzword in 2015, but what does it mean?

Do you have your own social media account? Unless you've been living under a rock for the better part of the past decade, chances are the answer is yes. Whether your choice of networking is through Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn, you may use social media to communicate with family and friends, business acquaintances, or followers in general. With text, photos and video content, you can easily connect with loved ones about the things you like, find thought provoking, or even the occasional cat video!

As a business owner, don't you want to have this kind of close connection with your customers on social media? This can help you grow your brand by earning the loyalty of your customers. But how do you establish this kind of interaction? People don't like to interact with a faceless brand; they want someone authentic and trustworthy to interact with, just how your friends and family see you.

Luckily, there's a way to build a persona around your brand! Look to your employees and encourage them to become advocates for your company. As we start off with this topic, we will explore the principles behind it, and why employee advocacy can provide returns for your business.

## Customers going online call for a change of strategy

Let's take a look at how customers shop around these days. With information easily accessible online, a person can easily tap away on a computer or a mobile device about something he/she wants to purchase.

Say, they were considering buying a coffee maker. There are different product catalogues online for them to browse, as well as reviews to learn more about previous customer interactions with each product. Aside from this, social media is another source of information. Your Facebook friend recently posted a status update about a Nespresso machine they liked using. Chances are, that's where you'll look first.

Your friend's post offers an authentic and credible source of information about the product, rather than a flyer or an ad that presents the benefits of owning it. It has been tried by someone you know and trust; thus making you more invested in the offering.



The same principle operates behind employee advocacy. Before people take notice of your brand, they are likely to come across someone who has had a positive or negative experience with it. Ask yourself, who has firsthand experience of your company?

That's right - your employees! People view employees as more reliable sources of information than executives. So, whenever your employees share their experience with your product, services or your daily operations, they give the world a reliable story of what your company is really all about. Their experiences provide others a glimpse into your organisation's values and objectives, which can influence them to try out your products and/or services.

Your marketing strategy can gain much when your employees become advocates of your brand. Through them, your audience are encouraged to do business with your company. But how do you get your employees to become advocates for you?

### **Learn how their work motivates them**

Most of the time, a person may see a job as a way to pay the bills and earn more money, period. As an employer, however, you can encourage your employees to depart from this perspective and achieve a sense of fulfilment within the company. Share with them how much you appreciate their work, and how they are making a direct contribution to the organisation's mission and objectives. This will give them a sense of pride in what they are doing, and encourage them to speak about your brand on social media.

There are many ways to show your gratitude for your employees' work, and motivate them in the workplace. Raises can be good, but there are non-monetary ways to extend appreciation. For instance, you can recognise their performance in a company newsletter, or select an "Employee of the Month" to show that you are grateful for their dedication.

Aside from these, you can also encourage your employees to share their ideas on how to improve the workflow, operations and other processes of the company. You can provide them with a 'growth plan' that highlights training and development opportunities for them. These gestures show them that they are an important part of the business. As a result, they become more passionate to work for you and support the company's initiatives, which can include social media advocacy.



## **2. The marketing behind employee advocacy that puts your business in front of the consumer...**

In the previous section, we talked about employee advocacy in the light of the internet and social media. Now, let's discuss it from a marketing viewpoint, and how it can bolster the following for your brand. Below are the advantages of employee advocacy, and you will be amazed by just how much it can contribute to your marketing strategy.

1. Employee advocacy lends authenticity to your marketing – When your employees discuss your brand online, they provide people with an authentic source of insight about your company. Let's face it: when we write ads, whether print or virtual ones, we aim to make them compelling enough to persuade the customer to do business with us. Over time and as a result of being continually exposed to advertising, people have developed the tendency to tune out ads because they know we are trying to convince them to buy a product or service. On the other hand, posts and statuses shared by your employees provide an honest insight into your company. Whether their posts contain information about a new project, a corporate activity or their experiences; they testify about your brand, your company values and your workplace. For your customers, these bits of information are trustworthy because they know that your employees have firsthand experience of your daily operations.

2. Employee advocacy expands your social media strategy for less – Outside of the workplace, your employees belong to an assortment of social networks where they interact with friends, family and connections on a regular basis. When you implement an employee advocacy program, you are able to reach these people and inform them about your brand. For instance, if you have 50 employees, you are multiplying your reach by 50 times on just one social network. Chances are, your employees are active on more than just one social network, extending your social media presence even further! You're starting to get the idea? With your employees' participation, you will amplify your social media efforts while saving on time and expenses that would otherwise be put into traditional marketing efforts.

3. Employee advocacy increases traffic and sales – Since employee advocates can expand the reach of your marketing strategy, they are able to reach more people and encourage them to consider your products or services. Following the point above, a business with 1,000 employee advocates is capable of reaching one million



customers— imagine how many potential sales your company could make with that kind of reach? Once your employees become familiar with your social media advocacy program, you can even improve their potential by training them to create content related to your business. A fine example of this is Julieanne Kost, who works at Adobe as “Principal Photoshop and Lightroom Evangelist.” Kost began to create a blog of her Photoshop tutorials, and eventually posted them on her personal Twitter account. Over time, her Twitter account drove more subscriptions to the company’s Creative Cloud than Adobe’s Photoshop account on Twitter.

With these points in mind, we can see that employee advocacy on social media can bring returns for your business. When your employees talk about your company, your products or your workplace on social media, people see a “personal side” to your brand they are likely to connect with, as compared to a traditional ad. This will open up their interest, and encourage them to interact with your business; beginning a fruitful relationship! The more employees involved, the bigger the reach and the higher the conversion rates you are likely to see.



### 3. Now, where to start with an employee advocacy program?

We've talked about what an employee advocacy program is and its advantages for your marketing strategy. We can now move on to how the actual process unfolds. As a business owner, how do you begin implementing an employee advocacy program?

Before anything else, you need to have policies in place to ensure that the advocacy program will be properly managed. These rules should guide employees on the use of social media, to minimise erroneous posting. For instance, posting confidential information about the company's products should be clearly prohibited. There should be a proper training process for your existing employees, as well as an onboarding period that would discuss social media advocacy for your new hires. This will be helpful in maintaining the participation on your social media advocacy program throughout your organisation.

Here's an example of a social media policy:

1. Respect your audience. Avoid the use of ethnic slurs, obscenity and personal insults that would have been unacceptable if we were present in our actual workplace. Furthermore, you should also show proper consideration for others privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory (like religion or politics). When you are participating in social media, envision that you are interacting with a potential customer that just came through our door, and treat them with respect.

2. Think about the consequences of your posts. Nowadays, it's easy to find information online. What may be an online rant about a bad day at the office can put potential clients off and sideline a big business deal that you were working on. To avoid this, think clearly first before posting or before responding to other posts online. Social media is visible and accessible to the public, so avoid complaining about your employer, work, colleagues or your customers on various social media platforms.

3. Exercise transparency. If you have noticed that you've stretched the facts a little bit, acknowledge your mistake, and do something to rectify it. For instance, you wrote a blog about a client, and you misstated some details. Get these items right and state the error that was done below the post.

4. Please respect the work of others. Whenever you plan to use a material from clients, partners or suppliers, ask their permission first



before proceeding. Make sure that you link back properly to the source whenever you use any article or design that belongs to others. These are the output of the person's creative process, so exercise respect whenever you are using it. If a certain material has a copyright, refrain from using it.

5. Remember that how you carry yourself on social media reflects on your profession and on your employer. Please ensure that your Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media accounts where you identify your employer show related and consistent content; and would maintain your professional image among clients and colleagues.

To expand the knowledge of your workforce, you should also provide them with resources that discuss about employee advocacy. When they have questions, you need to appoint someone who can respond to their queries. This person should be passionate on encouraging employees to become brand ambassadors, and should be approachable for everyone.

Aside from policies, you may also need to use software to support your employee advocacy program. Social media advocacy tools help your employees to share content easily on their social media accounts, and track the overall performance of your initiative. Keep in mind that when you select a social media advocacy tool, you need to train your employees first on how to use it before making it a part of your program. To guide employees accordingly, create a manual or a document that provides a step-by-step process of how to use the software you have chosen.

### **How does social media advocacy software work?**

A social media advocacy tool essentially helps users to create posts on different social media platforms. For employees participating in social media advocacy, using social media advocacy software enables them to reach prospects that are active in various social media networks.

Your employees may post something about the day-to-day work life in your company, or a new project they are excited about, and share it on social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter. They might have agreed with a certain article about their work or their industry, and wanted to let their friends and family more about their profession. With a social media advocacy tool, your employees can share this information to different social media networks with just one click.



## **NewzSocial; a social media advocacy platform**

At Curate Bee, we use social media advocacy platform known as NewzSocial. With this application, we can post articles related to our work on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Before using this platform, our employees decide whether they want to connect their Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn to NewzSocial.

Once they have their social media account linked to NewzSocial, they can begin to share articles on their social media networks. What makes NewzSocial convenient is that it is able to search brand-related articles, and sort them on these neat, little categories known as "channels."

### **Content Channels**

These channels cover an assorted range of topics – from education, business, lifestyle, science and more! Say, you clicked on the 'education' channel. From here you can see an assortment of topics that talk about education such as saving for college, information about tests or glimpses about the MBA Life. If you select "College Admissions," you can access different articles that are related to it. These can be how to secure a student loan, how to handle stress in school or study tips that work. When you select one, NewzSocial can share it for you on the social media account(s) that you have linked to the platform.

Now, what if you wanted to share articles from your own website? Maybe you have written blogs that you wanted to promote. Through the 'Pipe It!' function in NewzSocial, you can share your own content in Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn without breaking a sweat.

### **Automated Sharing**

With this system, NewzSocial can provide your employees a structured system on sharing content and becoming ambassadors for your brand. In providing them channels to choose from, they can easily find a brand-related article, instead of having to search for it online. And then, they can share it easily on their social media accounts through NewzSocial. With this procedure, you will be able to implement your social media advocacy efficiently. Furthermore, NewzSocial can help you track your company's performance through its analytics functions; which tracks the likes, comments and shares on your employee's posts. Simply put, the platform provides a system for implementation, as well as for monitoring the program.



## **Enrich your knowledge**

In organising articles into different categories or channels, NewzSocial allows you to access content from various industries, which can contribute in enriching your business knowledge operations. Let's say you own a retail store. Through the technology channel, you can learn how to integrate your customer's mobile devices in the purchasing process. Since NewzSocial has several other channels, you will be able to locate articles about different topics that can contribute either to your company or enhance your personal knowledge. And this advantage extends to your employees as well! They can also access and share content that can be helpful for their personal growth. For those who are aiming to advance in their career, they can find articles that discuss about leadership and management. With this in mind, using NewzSocial can be a win-win for you and your employees.

## **Wider social media reach**

In addition, this employee advocacy platform offers great potential to connect people from different backgrounds. As mentioned above, you and your employees can use NewzSocial to share content to Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Your employees might have various connections at each social media platform. They might use Facebook to connect with their family and friends. With LinkedIn, they network with their colleagues or contacts that can expand their knowledge about their career. Meanwhile, they might use Twitter to communicate with people who hold the same political, social or religious beliefs. Imagine how many people can be reached through your employee advocacy program. Through NewzSocial, you can get people from diverse backgrounds discovering your brand and talking about it! Once they know your brand, they can become your customers; which is beneficial for your business.

Are you ready to boost your sales with employee advocacy? Establish neat guidelines, select a tool that works for you and train your employees in sharing content. Soon, you will be gaining customers for your business.



## 4. Employee advocacy takes the 'work' out of the daily grind

In Section II, we have discussed the benefits of employee advocacy on your marketing strategy and on your business. Before you go ahead with this program, you must not forget a vital part of the equation: your employees. How can your employees benefit from this initiative? Since you would like them to talk about your business in their personal network, you need to consider how social media advocacy program might affect them.

Perhaps, you know a lot of people that dislike their job. For them, their work is just a means to pay the bills and get by. After the 9-5 grind, they leave the office and pursue the things that they love on their free time. Maybe you even had the chance to glimpse online posts about "I love Fridays" and "I hate Mondays" as people look forward to the weekends; while dreading the days where they would have to go to work. Well, these sentiments can't be avoided for all of us who are working, but wouldn't you want employees who are invested in your business? How can you encourage them to stick around?

One way you can make your employees feel invested in their work is through employee advocacy. When you encourage them to talk about your brand on their social media network, they would feel that they are an important part of the company. As a result, they will feel motivated to improve their performance, which can help strengthen your business. Furthermore, your employees will feel that the company trusts them, and in return they will be inspired to develop a deep sense of respect for the organisation.

In addition, an employee advocacy program provides a vehicle of self-expression for your employees whenever they talk about their job, your brand, or the industry in general. They will cultivate this sense of ownership for what they do. Through employee advocacy, they are also given the opportunity to develop their personal brand whenever they discuss their career and their company online. Thus, they become more invested with their job, and are less likely to leave your company.

Meghan Biro, CEO and Founder of TalentCulture Consulting Group summarises this point very well: *"It's not just hiring the best, it's retaining them, too. And what's the best way to get them to stick around? Turn them into employee advocates."*

When your employees feel instrumental for the company and have a sense of ownership for their job, they will like coming to work every



day and help the organisation in accomplishing its objectives. Here's how an engaged employee can benefit your business:

1. Increased Productivity – Engaged employees are essentially driven to perform better. They know how their job fits into the bigger picture and they strive to help the company achieve its objectives. As such, they are able to formulate some of the best ideas to help the business improve. Having an engaged workforce helps companies achieve higher earnings per share as compared to indifferent employees, according to a 2012 meta-analysis from Gallup.

2. Better Workplace relationships – Employees that are vested in their work are also more likely to build healthy relationships with their colleagues. This can help boost morale in the workplace, as well as improve teamwork. An engaged employee would also tend to look after the concerns of others, which can cultivate a culture of caring in the workplace. Eventually, this can enhance the overall job satisfaction of your other employees in your company.

3. Improved customer service – Since they are dedicated to their job, engaged employees are also driven to provide better customer service. They are known to be more attentive toward customer needs, as compared to their disinterested counterparts. And of course, your customers will notice the difference! Engaged employees would essentially attract more customers to your company, thereby helping your business grow.

4. Recruitment – The passion that your employees show for their job can be contagious even for people outside of your company. When they see that your employees are satisfied with their work, they will be encouraged to join your organisation. This makes it easier for you to source talent for your company and improve its overall performance.

In sum, implementing an employee advocacy program can be a win-win for your company and your employees. By enabling them to discuss their work and your company online, they become more invested in what they are doing. They develop a sense of ownership on their job, and become motivated to enhance their performance. As they participate in your social media advocacy, they begin to understand how their job fits in the larger picture and become engaged with their work. An engaged workforce is a great asset for your company, as they will be driven to perform well and provide a high quality of customer service; helping your business achieve growth. Through employee advocacy, you can build a highly-motivated workforce, and ensure that your company is poised for long-term growth.



## 5. Companies that made employee advocacy work

To give you some encouragement to take the next step with your organisation, let's have a glimpse at some companies that have achieved success in their own employee advocacy programs.

### Why employee advocacy made sense for Adobe

As head of Adobe's Social Media Centre for Excellence, Cory Edwards was brainstorming how the company could leverage social media to boost sales. Unfortunately, encouraging the company's executives to become active on social media was just impossible. It was then, that Edwards discovered the Edelman Trust Barometer report – where it was found that people see regular employees as more credible than CEOs. This ultimately led him to see employees as potential brand ambassadors for the company. When he looked at the participation of Adobe employees on social media, he noticed that they were already promoting the brand on Twitter by including it on their social media profiles.

After this revelation, Edwards worked to encourage employees to become actual ambassadors for the brand. To empower them to share content, the company rolled out a training program known as "Social Shift" to educate employees about sharing brand content on their social media network. This program has different levels or "gears" for those who wanted to improve further their skills for social media advocacy. When employees wanted to share stories or photos about their work environment, the company encourages them to use the hashtag #Adobelife to give the world a glimpse of what it feels like working for Adobe. Eventually, the company observed more engagement from its customers with more employees agreeing to become advocates for the brand. In LinkedIn, about 91% of the users at the site interacted with Adobe's content through the employees' individual profiles. Aside from this, Adobe has over 300,000 followers in Twitter, more than 500,000 followers in Google+ and almost 300,000 followers on Facebook. In fact, social media has driven 20% of the subscriptions to Adobe's Creative Cloud.

Through the employees' participation in social media, Adobe has been able to drive sales for some of its products. As more employees get on board with its social media advocacy program, the company is expected to enjoy better results in the future.



## **IBM saved thousands from social media expenses thanks to employee advocacy**

When the Internet gained popularity, most companies wanted to restrict their employees' access to the Web. Unlike others, IBM did not ban its employees from the Internet, and this became very useful when it started its employee advocacy program. IBM encouraged its employees to use the Internet, to spread its message to the wider public. In its social computing guidelines, the company believes that employee advocacy is transforming corporate communications – from mass communications to masses of communicators.

Following this approach on Internet use, IBM Corporate previously tried employee advocacy after testing an employee advocacy platform known as VoiceStorm as part of an individual project. However, the idea of an employee advocacy program gradually caught on with the whole organisation thanks to the 2014 IBM Smarter Commerce Global Summit; where employees learned about 'always-on' marketing. Amy Tennison, project leader of the company's employee advocacy program, was able to get 60 to 70 employees to participate in the initiative at that time. They were trained how to use VoiceStorm, and how to share content based on their own experiences in IBM. In the first three days of the program, the participants were able to attract more than 25,000 clicks to shared content.

As the program rolled out, it was noticed that there were variations on the number of 'reactions' that each shared content generated. Some employees were apparently less confident to share content online, as compared to their other colleagues. Hence, the company undertook a campaign that encouraged them to improve their approach on social media. To track their progress, their efforts were assigned a numerical score. Obtaining a Klout score of 50 and above shows their confidence and effectiveness in sharing content.

Eventually, IBM's employee advocacy initiative reaped results. There are now 6,000 employees participating in its initiative across the company, and 300 "extremely active" members, according to Amber Armstrong, Program Director of IBM's Social Business Team. As of the moment, its employee advocacy campaign brings about half a million clicks through calls-to-action. This helps the company save between USD 300,000 to USD 1.2 million on media expenses, she said.

Having an employee advocacy program helped IBM take conversations about its brand to a new level. In enabling employees to talk about their brand online, the company is more likely to reach influencers – or people who have massive social networks. These



influencers can see the content that your employee has shared, and discuss it with their followers. As a result, the reach of IBM's brand is amplified many times over through each of the employee's social media accounts. This would have been difficult to accomplish with a traditional marketing strategy!

These success stories may revolve around big companies. For smaller businesses, you might think, "Can I do this?" Even if they were large companies, Adobe and IBM had to start from scratch. They had to encourage and train their employees first, before they achieved success. Whether you're a small- or a medium-sized business, you too can learn how to implement an employee advocacy program in social media.

To learn about employee advocacy, please get in touch with us at **hello@curatebee.com**. We will help you and guide you in implementing your own social media advocacy program.

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