

Get Excited About Your Business

Many business leaders have a real passion for their product or service. They're natural advocates, able to inspire anyone they talk to when they sit down for a face-to-face chat. But how can businesses get consumers to exude the same level of passion on a large scale?

Imagine your customers did your marketing for you. Wouldn't that be amazing? While this might seem like an impossible dream, it's actually already happening. Consumers use specific brand names in conversations 60 times per week, and over 80 percent of us ask for recommendations before making a purchase.

This word-of-mouth marketing is a powerful force that drives five times the sales of paid impression marketing. Why? Because people trust peer recommendations over ads. Companies that build successful referral programs see an average of 86 percent revenue growth over two years compared to competitors.

g a successful referral marketing campaign can be tricky. How can you take the brand passion you emote for your products or services and get everyday consumers to spread it?

Building a Successful Peer-to-Peer Campaign

While there isn't a particular formula for finding referral marketing success, there are some guidelines that can help enhance your efforts.

1. Find advocates hiding in plain sight.

You already have brand advocates, whether you realize it or not. Start by looking to internal employees who are already representing your brand to family and friends.

Generating excitement among those working for your brand—and rewarding them just as you would reward an outside advocate—can be a great way to get the ball rolling. According to Cassie Hughes and Gabrey Means of Grow Marketing, “When working with PepsiCo to launch a new campaign for one of their brands, we always activated an experience for employees and bottlers at their campuses first to generate excitement around and support for the initiative.”

Your CRM system or customer list is another tool that already contains advocates. Go through the list and identify anyone who has expressed positive feelings about your company. Use this list to generate testimonials and reviews or even to solicit referrals. Then reward these new advocates with a personal thank you, small gift, or invitation to your next company luncheon.

2. Inject fun into the customer experience.

No one likes boring requests that sound like work. Nearly all of the top downloaded apps are entertainment-based, and part of this comes from the viral spread of referrals. Even if your product isn't explicitly a game, adding an entertainment element to the customer experience can inspire advocacy without the need for an explicit referral program.

One company leading the way in this approach is Tophatter, a pioneering mobile discovery shopping site. Many consumers simply go online and hope for inspiration to strike, according to Tophatter COO Andrew Blachman. “We’ve seen this on Tophatter, where more than 90 percent of the three million purchases each month are ‘discovered,’ meaning there’s no search query before a purchase. The experience is more like a treasure hunt.”

3. Transform your brand into a great friend.

True friends have three main qualities: They’re great listeners; they are real human beings who can share values, viewpoints, and opinions with you; and they are there to help you when you need it. A brand that wants to build a great referral network needs to be these three things as well.

Find ways to truly listen to your target audience and provide the information, products, and tools they are asking for. Look for small and large opportunities to give back to loyal customers. Start conversations and find viewpoints that support your brand.

Even controversial viewpoints build loyalty for those who identify with them. “Sharing your opinion reveals your brand’s values and allows your audience either to agree or disagree with you,” says Sujan Patel, co-founder of Web Profits. “In this way, you find your true audience, the ones who will advocate for and believe in your brand.”

Most importantly, care about your customers and find ways to demonstrate that. From offering pop-up experiences to answering social media posts (good and bad), focus on creating authentic, caring interactions that people will remember, share, and talk about.

Companies will always have natural advocates, but those that can harness the power of consumer networking will thrive in our ever more marketing-saturated world. The proliferation of invasive advertising erodes consumers’ trust and increases the importance of their knowing someone who has tried your brand before. Make sure that someone had a stand-out experience, and you will reap the rewards of many referrals to come.

Source: Rhett Power, Inc.