Employee Advocacy:
The Ultimate Guide to Launching a Social Media Advocacy Program

www.tribalimpact.com
@tribalimpact

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INTRODUCTION

Employee Advocacy is often defined as "the promotion of an organisation by its staff members" but, in reality, it goes a lot further than this with many tangible benefits for an organisation that embeds it into their culture.

At Tribal Impact, we believe that

Employee Advocacy is about transforming your engaged workforce and creating a credible narrative that's about so much more than just promotion and sales.

It elevates the social reputation of your internal subject matter experts into a position of thought leadership and influence.

Adopting a culture of advocacy has been proven to speed up the growth of businesses. In total, employees have an average of ten times as many social media connections as a standard brand account, which means ten times the sales opportunities.

Plus, the McKinsey Global Institute says that:

20-25% is the percentage productivity improves by in organisations with connected employees.

Employee Advocacy can also result in a higher proportion of referral-based hires. According to Jobvite these are converted 55% faster, cost less to recruit, are quicker to onboard and stay longer.

It also creates a more credible brand: buyers are far more trusting of family and friends (78%) than a company leader (44%), according to the Edelman Trust Barometer.

The fact that social media is a ubiquitous part of life means employee voices can be harnessed in a far more effective way. Some 39% of employees have already shared positive comments online about their employer (Weber Shandwick). This is a powerful resource that businesses would be mad to ignore.

WHY INVEST IN ADVOCACY?

When you consider the statistics related to employee advocacy, the question of investment changes from 'why' to 'why not'.

Employees who practice advocacy are better engaged, more productive and more likely to recommend their business for products and employment. In addition, a good advocacy culture will impact sales, customer retention and brand exposure.

There are three strands to the advocacy concept – a low-cost marketing resource with 10x more social media reach than sharing to only company branded channels - and each will individually create a positive return on investment, elevating content and digital marketing outcomes beyond those which can be achieved by a traditional paid marketing strategy.

50%
more engagement than company posts
[Source: Cisco]

7x
more leads generated by employee networks
[Source: IBM]

1.) REACH

Combined employee social media networks are typically at least 10x larger than those of corporate brands.
[Source: Cisco]

Leads generated by these networks convert 7x more frequently and, better still, user generated content receives 50% more engagement and a 5x greater click-through rate than brand content.
[Source: IBM]

The power of online word of mouth to increase brand awareness is clearly demonstrated in this article and, of course, the mutual benefit is there for the employee with around 86% of advocates saying that being involved in social media has positively impacted their career.

The simple fact is, today's consumers don't want to feel they are being sold to. Traditionally, brands sell and people build relationships. Hence, content posted by a brand will inevitably be shared less than that posted by an individual. Nowadays, 75% of B2B buyers admit to using social media to become more informed about vendors.

Although a brand should never force people to post their content, the more employees they can convert to advocates who will be engaged and inspired to share on their behalf, the more success they will have.

Authentic Marketing is about putting your employees in front of your logo and enabling them to become the authentic voice of your brand.

2.) AUTHENTICITY

In addition to doing their own research before engaging with a vendor, some 74% of buyers also admit to choosing the company that first added value to their buying decision.

This makes activating the collective voice of your employees an essential element of marketing today. No one brand can keep up with the level of social interaction needed to capture these opportunities.

The voice of the employee is powerful and credible. Employee-shared content is viewed as three times more authentic and typically sees a click-through rate that is twice as high as when the corporate mouthpiece shares the same information.
[Source: LinkedIn]

But it's important for brands to recognise that employees aren't there simply to broadcast their content. Advocacy isn't about volume of content or interactions; it's about quality. It's a case of connecting the dots across your business and putting people online in the context of their roles – and in a way that suits them personally. The consumer is too savvy for any other approach and sycophantic posting and sharing of the 'corporate line' will soon be called out.

3.) EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Showing your people that you value their opinions and will support their right to comment shows trust and transparency, not command and control, and the benefits are many and varied:

Benefits for the brand:

- Builds trust and credibility through people
- Showcases expert talent within the business
- Extends content reach
- Humanizes the brand
- Creates authentic content

Benefits for the employee:

- Strengthens employee credibility in market
- Deepens customer relationships
- Attracts opportunities
- Increases knowledge and value
- Builds network beyond fellow peers

The reticence of employees to take on the role of advocate is most often down to a lack of confidence. With a small amount of guidance, brands can educate their people and guide them in what to post. Let champions lead the way; these will be people who naturally take to sharing and creating content. In doing so, they will inspire others to follow.

Probably the most valuable benefit to employees is the opportunity for them to build their own professional brand at the same time as supporting the corporate brand.

Being considered an expert is a sought-after status in the age of social media and online networking. Statistics show that socially engaged companies are 58% more likely to attract top talent and 57% more likely to have increased sales leads.

[LinkedIn Altimeter Study]

Add to this, the fact that B2B buyers are 5x more likely to engage with known industry thought leaders and it follows that a social advocate can really impact upon their own targets as well as the corporate results.

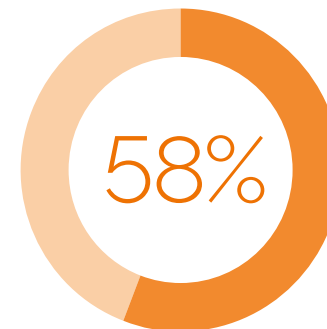Employee Advocacy Benefits for the Entire Organisation:

[Source: LinkedIn and Altimeter]
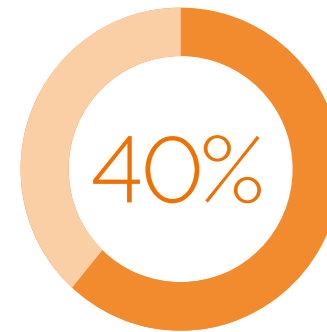
40% more likely to be perceived as competitive
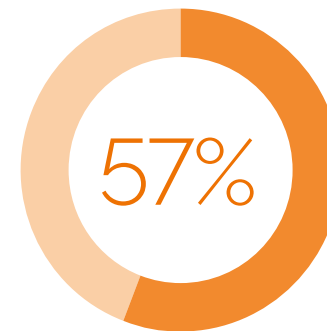
57% more likely to get increased sales and leads

58% more likely to attract top talent

SELLING TO LEADERSHIP

So, how do you convince your leadership team that it's the right thing to put their employees in front of their logo?

Given the continual evolution of social media, it's no surprise that your c-level executives might need some guidance.

Here are four important points that need to feature in your social business case – the key message being that the benefits of implementing an employee advocacy program are felt across the whole organisation:
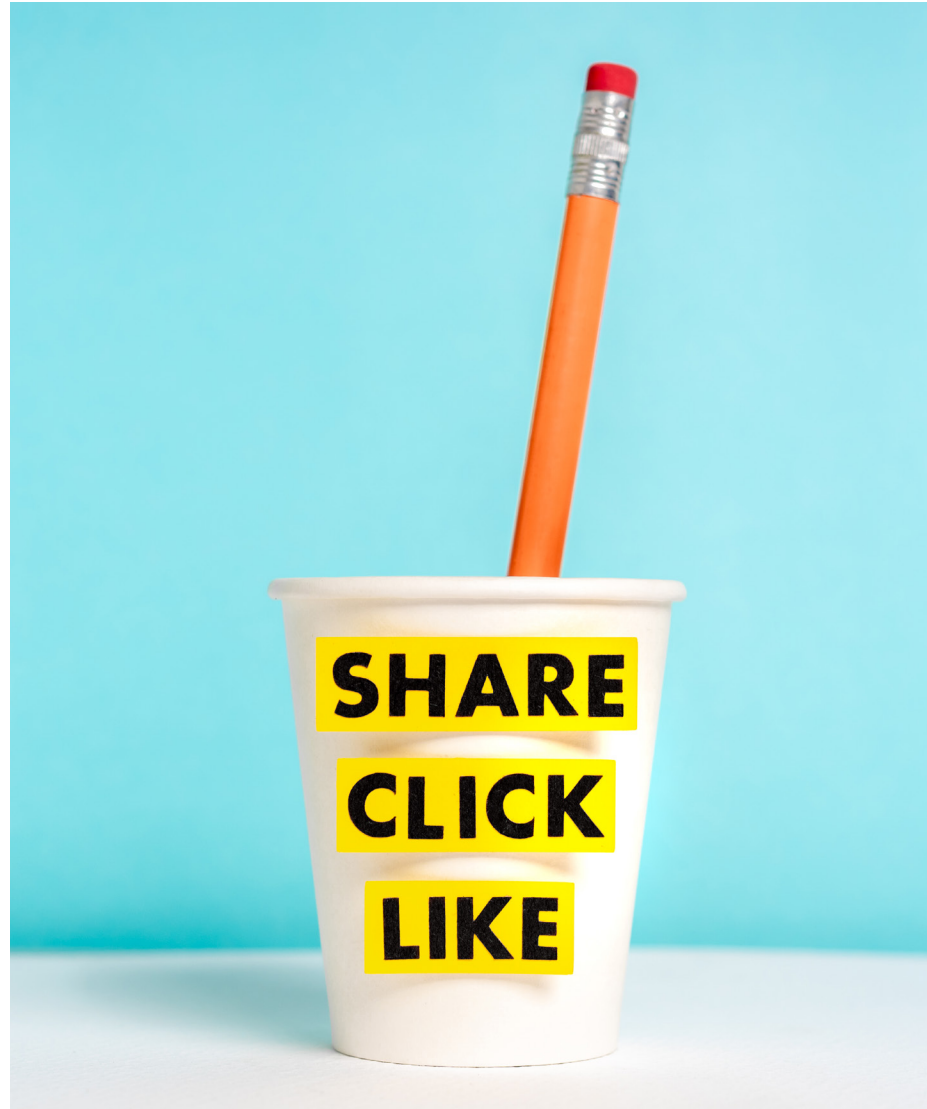
1. COMMUNICATIONS & EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT:

According to Gallup, 74% of employees feel that they're missing out on company information and news. Further research suggests that only 4 in 10 employees can confidently describe to others what their employer does. This scenario can quickly create disengaged employees and a lack of team spirit.

Employee Advocacy naturally impacts employee engagement positively and will improve your ability to communicate internally in the following ways:

Reach the disconnected workforce:

Often, one of the biggest issues when it comes to engagement scores is around manual or remote workers feeling isolated or identifying more with their local team than with the overall brand of the business. Advocacy gives these people the opportunity to get involved. After all, who doesn't have a smartphone or access to social media these days?

Opportunity to measure interaction:

Cascading messages has always been a challenge for internal communications teams. Does the message reach people in an undiluted form? Do people understand? According to

Google, this issue is huge, with a massive 80% of the global workforce (approx.. 3bn) performing work that doesn't require a desk on a daily basis. With an employee advocacy app, you can find out what people are reading and share your news on an easy-to-reach platform.

Identify your social champions:

By discovering those who will be early-adopters to the idea of brand advocacy, you can kick-start your employee advocacy program and understand where the gaps are between those who are social hero and those who are social zero. Identify where your employees are in their Social Media Maturity journey with our Social Media Impact Quiz.
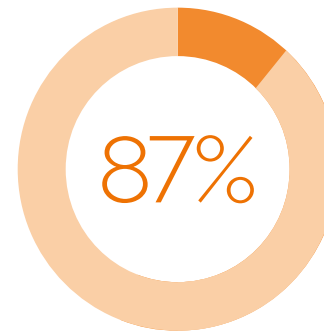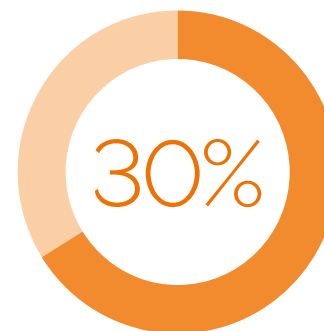
87% of employees today receive company news via email, intranet or in-person.

[Source: Mindshare]
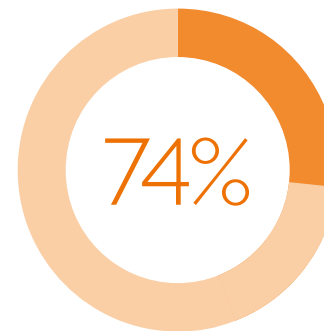
74% of employees feel like they miss out on employee news.

[Source: Gallup]

30% of employees ignore their emails.

[Source: APPise]

In addition to employee advocacy, internal communication also needs to move with the times. We live in an age where everyone is used to instantly accessing news and information... Our employee communication model needs to echo this cultural shift.

We live in an age where everyone is used to instantly accessing news and information. If we want to know more about something, we use review sites, comparison models and so on to do our research.

Our employee communication model needs to echo this cultural shift. In order to keep your workforce interested and engaged, your internal communications need to be:

Clear - High level announcements or confusing financial forecasts need to be tailored to the audience for which they are intended.

Inclusive – social media is highly interactive with gamification, discussions, shares and likes being the norm. Internal communication now needs to be smarter than posters and desk-drops in order to capture the enthusiasm of the audience.

Varied – by providing different ways to join the discussion, internal communications teams can create the choice and flexibility of external social media usage. This is about producing and sharing content that people feel will contribute to their own online brand.

Empowering – internal communications is no longer an area of business where people feel 'out of the loop' of company news. By contributing to the advocacy role of employees, this becomes an integral part of business development and growth. By simply spreading the word, you empower your employees to increase their knowledge and reach their goal of being industry experts.

2.) SALES & REVENUE GENERATION:

Social selling is fast replacing more traditional methods of engaging a customer. Good content powers social selling and creates expert influence across your audience network.

Leads developed via employee's social activity are seven times more likely to convert and customers referred by advocates have a 37% higher retention rate [Sources: IBM and Deloitte].

Companies who experience a 12% increase in brand advocacy typically generates twice the increase in revenue growth [Source: National Business Research Institute].

Are you activating the power of your employees?

1 in 3 people come to a brand through a recommendation.

37% Customers referred by loyal customers have 37% higher retention rate. [Source Deloitte]

3.) HR & TALENT ACQUISITION:

It's the age of the digitally native Millennial and this is changing the way that young up-and-coming talent views an organisation.

88% A massive 88% of major employers say that employee referrals are their number one source of top candidates [Source: Macleod/Clark].

20% Combine this with the fact that socially engaged companies are 20% more likely to retain top employees and there's a fairly compelling argument.

+50%

The majority of employers and recruiters also say that the recruiting process is shorter when candidates are referred and just over 50% say it's cheaper as well

[Source: Job Vite].

4.) MARKETING & INCREASED WEB CONVERSION:

Apart from harnessing the single largest asset they have in terms of influencer marketing, inbound businesses drive better conversion on their website, attract higher quality traffic and reduce their paid media spend.

Ultimately, a social advocacy program provides real value for money. Despite the fact that only 2-8% of employee social networks currently overlap with brand networks, content shared by employees receives an incredible 8 times more engagement and is shared 24 times more frequently than that which originates with the brand network
[Sources: Social Media Today and MSL Group].

The bottom line is that earned media marketing is increasingly seen as a reliable source of growth. Still largely described as 'free publicity largely from promotional efforts', earned media will also be attributable to employee advocacy.

24h

65%
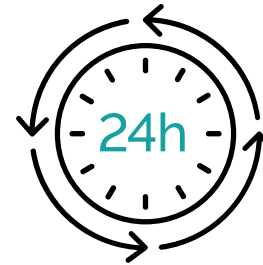
The presence of the internet and our social media culture is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it is far easier to get your message out but, on the other, the resulting noise is deafening. Brands and businesses are competing on a 24-hour stage across multiple channels, using a range of different media.

The only thing that has a chance of standing out is something refreshingly different. Statistics show that nearly 82% of buyers viewed between five and eight pieces of content from a winning vendor
[Source: Demand Gen Report].
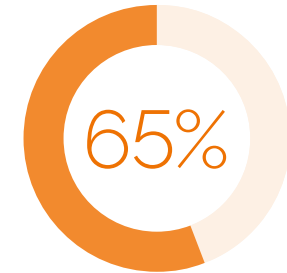
This indicates that potential customers aren't averse to seeing content, but the same report highlights that 65% of buyers feel a vendor's content has an impact on their final purchase decision. It is clear that the quality and credibility of content is more important than ever.

Getting the right amount of good quality, authentic and relevant content out there will ensure an earned media approach cuts through the noise of the old fashioned ways of direct selling.

BENEFITS TO EMPLOYEES

There are many benefits for your employees in building their personal and professional brands by becoming more active on social media.

Here's a high-level view of what's in it for them:

Higher social visibility:

Developing their online professional brand helps them to understand who they are. It also means opportunity can come knocking. And when their network – customers, vendors, press and partners – respond positively, they build confidence and credibility at the same time:

Relationships with people in the industry:

By establishing themselves as a go-to person in their industry, they can capitalise on the ability to share knowledge. And that's a two-way street. They get to showcase and share what they know and they also get increased opportunities to learn and experience other viewpoints on their specialist topics.
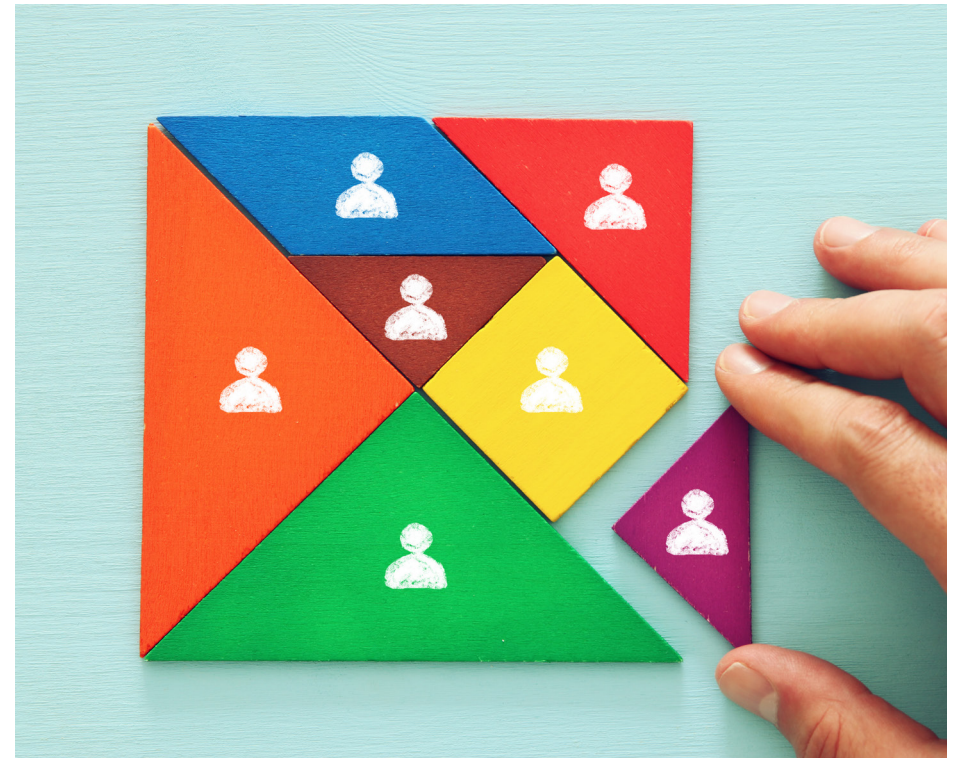
Make an Impact:

Whether it's generating or attracting new inbound leads, creating the best first impression through their rich and varied

digital footprint, or becoming a stand-out connection within their organisation, by meeting people and learning more, they will ultimately create a greater Impact in all areas of their life.

EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY TOOLS

Scaling advocacy can be difficult if you don't use a tool. Employee Advocacy tools are there to structure branded, and non-branded content, into a centralised platform. Employees can share this content from the platform.

Employee Advocacy tools are a great way to help tailor and streamline the content made available to employees for social sharing. It provides peace of mind to both the employee and company that the content is approved. It also provides the company with performance data that can be linked to CRM platforms to track conversion quality.

So what's available?
Here's a list we've collated in alphabetical order:

• Bambu by SproutSocial
• Dynamic Signal VoiceStorm
• Everyone Social
• Falcon
• GaggleAmp
• Grapevine6 Publish
• Hootsuite Amplify
• Influitive
• LinkedIn Elevate
• Peoplelinx
• PostBeyond
• SMARP
• SoAmpli
• Sociabble
• Social Chorus
• Sprinklr
• TrapIt
• Tremolo

Go check them out.
Most will offer a demo.

SELECTING THE RIGHT TOOL

There are seven areas in which you need to ensure the tool you choose is fit for purpose. Below is a high level checklist:

1. The user interface

Questions on interface should reflect three areas: flexibility, accessibility and the overall user experience.

Consider whether the product is mobile-friendly, available in different languages, has auto-scheduler options and whether it includes any gamification or incentives to promote user engagement.

2. Licensing

You need to get a full understanding of how charges work: pay per engagement, license-based or flat rate. Consider how scaling up works, either for additional employees in the future or even to add partners or customers. In addition, check contract conditions (sign up period, notice period) and, with regards to GDPR, what happens to your data.

3. Launching

- Is there scope for a pilot?

- Does the provider offer any support with a communications plan for launch?

- Does the product include time-saving features such as automated alerts for users; triggers and reminders for registration or re-engagement?

- How does the administration and permissions process work?

4. Analytics

- What reporting capabilities (including the ability to customize reports) does the product have?

- What are report frequencies, exporting options and tracking mechanisms?

5. Content

- Can you link RSS feeds?

- Is there AI learning capability (I.e will the product improve with use)?

- How is content categorised or prioritised?

You may need sight of workflows for content approval (especially if you are working in a highly regulated industry). You should also understand the processes for archiving and language filtering.

6. Compliance

- Is there a facility for flagging defined key words in the event that content is posted against policy?

- What is the data protection policy of the seller?

- Are there country-specific user agreements?

7. Integration and Support

- Does the product support integration with other programs such as SSO, CRM and marketing automation.

- Is training on offer as part of the package?

- Is there a support SLA and do help desk services exist?

- Is there centralised or local (in-country) support?

Finally, don't forget to ask for a reference customer who you can discuss the product with.

LAUNCHING SOCIAL ADVOCACY

So, it's all signed off. What next? Follow these steps to ensure your employee advocacy program is implemented effectively and fit-for-purpose from the start.

1. Establish your objectives

You need to consider who you want to reach.

- Are you doing this to increase brand awareness?
- Do you want to drive higher conversion on your website?
- Do you want to drive more traffic and leads?

- Do you aim to increase the positive perception towards your brand?
- Do you want to improve recruitment and candidate talent?
- Do you want to focus on customers (including potential customers)?

Don't forget the knowledge-sharing element of social advocacy: 62% of LinkedIn members engage with content on the platform because it's educational or informative and 50% of them say they are more likely to buy from a company they engage with on LinkedIn.

[Source: LinkedIn]

2. Content Strategy

Start by developing your content strategy. Ideally you should have a split of content between third party/industry related content (4 pieces), branded thought

leadership such as blogs (1 piece) and branded promotion (1 piece). This, unsurprisingly, is called the 4-1-1 rule.

Next, finalise the sources of your content:

- How will the content be categorised?
- Who will curate and review the content?

Content is king. If you get this wrong, not only will employees not bother to share, you may struggle to get them return to your advocacy program in future.

In a nutshell, employees won't share content that's too difficult – not easy to find a point or a good soundbite to quote; not relevant – too technical or too generic; product focused – too much 'brand' content will make them feel like a 'channel'; not new enough – keep your content supply fresh, otherwise there's no point in employees returning to check it out.

Before you launch your advocacy program, it's well worth taking the time to understand who your audiences are and the content they might want to consume.

Start by developing your content strategy. For inspiration on types of content your employees would like to share, check out our blog which goes into more detail on this list:

1. Industry news

2. Company news

3. Product innovation

4. Coffee corner

5. Thought leadership blogs

6. Job postings

7. #Lifeatyourcompany

8. Leadership & Lifestyle

9. Fun stuff

10. Partner content

Next, finalise the sources of your content. Will you invest in a bespoke employee advocacy tool or will you use an external platform? You can find a list of Employee Advocacy Platforms and their benefits here. Having a tool basically means it is easier for employees to find and share pre-approved content and, as an employer, you get to maintain control over the content and see the resulting analytics.

3. Train employees

Firstly, in order to help kick-start enthusiasm for your program, identify employees who can help achieve your goals. Perhaps target those already active on social media or who you know will be early adopters of the new culture . You can use Tribal Impact's Social Impact Quiz to find these existing advocates.

Take the time to ensure your people are aware of social media basics, how to use the tool and the sharing etiquette you wish to create (e.g. customising posts, sending the right quantity of posts based on the network being used, understanding the right type of content for each channel etc).

Next, create a training framework that best matches the employees' social media maturity level. Target their training to the right level of understanding and use a format most suitable for them, be that workshops, webinars or eLearning modules. Include training as part of your new starter on-boarding process.

4. Launch your program

Use your existing channels of communication to get things off the ground. Communicate the value you expect to see from the

program, for both the company and the employee. Identify a team member to manage your employee advocacy admin. Perhaps create a collaborative group on your Enterprise Social Network (ESN). Do not forget to involve your leadership in the launch.

5. Keep employees engaged

Make sure you reinforce the impact that employees are making, showcase best practices, encourage mobile use and refine your content strategy. Provide continued training for employees ready to move to the next step. You need to maintain engagement levels past the initial novelty factor period.

6. Measure your results

So, you've identified your objectives, your launch is complete and your program is finally underway. How's it going?

It's really important to be taking note of the measurements of success at an early stage. Being agile during the launch phase will enable you to increase your chances of success.

YOU SHOULD LOOK AT THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

Adoption Metrics:

- % mobile users v desktop use

- % adoption across the organisation

- % invited employees that have registered

- % active users (logged in or shared at least once per month)

User Metrics:

- Identify early adopters and highlight them

- Identify social spammers and educate them

- Identify least active sharers and encourage them

- Average number of articles shared per week per employee

Marketing Metrics:

Cost per click – check this out for paid social campaigns. Multiply the number of clicks by average cost and you'll get a quick hack for cost saved/value driven via advocacy.

Later in the program, perhaps after it's been running for around six months, you should look at optimising your content and revisit user training requirements to hone your model and maximise success.

Website:

- % volume traffic referred via social advocacy (use UTM tracking)

- % job posting views as a result of employee driven traffic

- % bounce rate of advocacy driven traffic vs other sources

- % conversion of advocacy driven traffic vs other sources

Content:

- Most shared content by category (what do your employees prefer sharing?)

- Content driving most clicks (what are your employee networks interested in reading?)

- Content driving most engagements (what type of content is engaging employee networks most?)

- Your most popular categories (is there a correlation between volume of content submitted to those categories)

- What patterns are emerging with high performance content?

- Are hashtags being used?

- Are employees mentioning influencers?

- What post types work well: How-to posts? List posts?

- Is your ratio of brand/non-brand content working?

Curator Performance:

- Who is submitting the most content to the platform?

- Who is submitting the most engaged-with content?

- Who is submitting the most clicked content?

- Which categories need more volume?

- Do you need more thought leadership?

Finally, you get to connect advocacy to revenue. It's that moment when Google Analytics is talking to your marketing automation system and your automation platform is connected to your Sales CRM platform. Identify patterns and look for correlations across data. Providing you have the tool stack connected and UTM tracking switched on, you can weave advocacy touched/influenced/generated attribution into your

model. In effect, you turn your workforce into a sales force, where potentially everyone can influence the buyer journey.

Overall, it's important to measure the performance of the tool but also to think more widely about how advocacy impacts the business metrics that already exist. For example, consider how employee

advocacy is impacting conversion on your website; is the talent you're attracting through your employer network saving on hiring costs; what is the impact on deepening customer relationships caused by sales keeping their networks informed about the latest innovations. Look beyond the obvious outcomes.

ADVOCACY MISTAKES

Not every business is the same so learning how Employee Advocacy works for your business is important. However, you can learn a lot by those who have launched programs before you by avoiding Employee Advocacy mistakes. These include:

1. Launching a Program when the Workforce is Disengaged:

Jay Baer, of convinceandconvert.com, sums it up brilliantly. "If your employees aren't your biggest fans, you've got problems WAY bigger than social media".

Employee advocacy cannot be forced. If you have unhappy workers the chances are that they're not likely to advocate your brand so you need to work with HR to set the scene initially.

2. Viewing Employees As Another Marketing Channel:

Your workforce is not another marketing channel. They are individuals who should be taught how to build their personal brand online by creating best-in-class profiles, sharing content around topics they are passionate about and even creating content such as blog posts. You want employees with social competency not robotic amplifiers for marketing.

Employees who advocate the brand can and will support your marketing effort but that should not be the driving force behind the program.

3. Forgetting to Structure Your Content:

There are a number reasons why your employee advocacy program may not reach the giddy heights you were expecting when you initially launched it, but the most common reason of all is content.

Before launching your employee advocacy software tool, take time think about the structure of your content. Divide it up into logical sections most relevant to your internal target audience e.g. make sure the HR folks only see content relevant to them and their networks. If you don't do this, you'll find adoption of the tool will decline over time as the content becomes irrelevant for users.

However, there's a balance to be struck. Be careful not to put people in boxes based on their function. You also need to consider their motivation: are they looking to become a thought-leader or are they focused on their sales performance? Content categories can be set up based on what will engage the employees as well as on what the brand wants to amplify.

Some employee advocacy tools allow users to import their own content feeds. By encouraging this approach, you will ensure the creation of a tribe of unique voices; something which is far better, and infinitely more credible, than an orchestrated chorus of parrots.

4. Brand First Approach:

Don't just share branded content with your employees. They will want to protect their personal brand and if they are only publishing branded content it impacts their credibility and authenticity. For example, importing and sharing trending articles that aren't brand related will help develop their online professional brands.

5. Measuring the Wrong Metrics:

Simply put, if you can't measure the impact of your Employee Advocacy journey you:

• Won't know if you're achieving the objectives you set

• Will limit your ability to adapt and enhance your program over time

• Find it hard to communicate return on investment to leadership

• Struggle to secure investment to renew tool licenses next year

As with any social program, there are so many things you can measure. Impressions, likes, comments, shares... the list goes on. Focus beyond some of the vanity metrics: employee advocacy costs money and no business will invest unless they see a return so you need to tie advocacy back to

the business. Start with a convincing, high-level fact: high performing firms with a formal employee advocacy program grow faster than those who don't have one. They also report other benefits, including a shorter sales cycle, improved social selling, better top talent retention and more.

The benefits are there to be realised but it's critical that the right metrics are identified at an early stage. They key to building a compelling business case is to look right across the business.

It's likely that many organisations are focused only on lead generation and conversion without realising that employee advocacy can affect many different departments and processes, which contribute directly to the bottom line.

DO'S AND DON'TS

Do

- Do encourage employees to build their professional brand

- Do provide training to help employees on their journey

- Do recognise and reward your social superstars

- Do on-board leaders early on to encourage employees to take part

Don't

- Don't encourage "shares win prizes" to incentivise spamming behaviour

- Don't mandate participation

- Don't just include branded content – mix it up with external industry content

- Don't forget to analyse performance, relating back to the wider business objectives

MEASURING ADVOCACY

By implementing a successful employee advocacy program, you effectively turn your workforce into a sales force, where potentially everyone can influence the buyer journey.

Here's a summary of ways to measure the success of your employee advocacy program. Don't forget to go back to your business cases and tie these to your desired outcomes:

User metrics:

- Percentage of employees participating in the program

- Who are your most active advocates?

- How frequently are users accessing the tool?

- Are they accessing via desktop or mobile? (Mobile users tend to share more consistently)

- Average click to share ratio – are employees sharing content that generates engagement?

Employee advocacy content measurements

- Overall reach – is employee advocacy increasing organic reach?

- Posts with highest reach

- Posts with highest clicks

- Posts with highest engagement

- Most popular category

- Most common type of content shared

Marketing measurements:

- Inbound traffic driven to website

- Conversion of employee generated traffic on the website

- Earned media value of clicks

- Brand sentiment – has your NPS score increased since program launch?

- Are brand social media channels attracting new audiences?

Measuring the impact of employee advocacy needs to be considered within the wider context of your business. Look at what your business is already measuring and then seek out correlations and comparisons based on the data you get within your employee advocacy tool.

With end-to-end attribution, there is no reason why you can't get to a position where you can confidently say "X number of customers closed as a result of advocacy generating X pipeline". This is possible today if you know how to build the framework to make it happen.

tribalimpact®

Tribal Impact specialises in social media advocacy. We work with B2B organisations that are frustrated because they can no longer cut through the digital noise to reach their audience. We do this by helping them join the dots between Social Selling, Social Media Marketing and Employee Advocacy.

Learn more at www.tribalimpact.com

Creating impact with...

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ca technologies / Automic	Wilmington plc	Panasonic	opentext	HITACHI Inspire the Next / ip solutions BORN IN THE CLOUD