



HOW TO BUILD A COMMUNITY OF EVANGELISTS

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You can proactively bring a community into existence by implement these practices:

“Let 100 flowers blossom.”

This principle applies to evangelism as well as it does to rainmaking. Don't be picky about how evangelists help you. Let them help in any way they can. They will show you ways to market your product that you never would have developed yourself.

Assign tasks and expect them to get done.

Have you ever volunteered to help an organization and then it never took you up on your offer? If there's anything worse than being asked to do too much, it's not being asked to help at all. If evangelists have signed up for your cause, it's your obligation to make good use of them

Give them the tools to evangelize.

Make it easy for believers to help you by providing stacks of information and promotional material.

Respond to their requests.

You should revise your product to reflect the wishes of your evangelists for two reasons. First, they know what it takes to make your product better. Second, it demonstrates that you are listening to them, which fosters even greater loyalty and enthusiasm.

Give them stuff.

You would be amazed at the power of a free t-shirt, coffee mug, pen, or notepad. (At one point, Apple had a \$2 million-per-year t-shirt expense.) Evangelists love these goodies. It makes them feel as if they're part of the team and special. This is money well spent, but never give away anything that costs more than \$25, which is where the line between a gift and a bribe gets blurry.

Hire someone whose sole purpose is to foster a community.

An internal champion who looks after the needs of the community will both evangelize evangelists and lead the fight for the necessary resources. As you achieve success, build a department around this person to institutionalize community support.

Create a budget for supporting them.

You won't need much, and the intent is not for you to "buy" evangelists, but you'll still need a budget for travel, entertainment, meetings, and the "stuff" mentioned above.

Integrate evangelists into your sales, marketing, and online efforts.

The existence of evangelists is a proxy for quality and coolness—"The product is so successful that people have formed user groups for it." Thus, you should publicize this to both help you close sales and to provide an additional resource to your customers.

Host the community's efforts.

This means letting members use your building to hold meetings as well as providing digital assistance, such as a section of your website, hosting webinars, and hosting chats.

Hold a conference.

No one loves electronic communication more than I do, but face-to-face meetings are important for evangelism. At these conferences, evangelists can meet one another as well as interact with your employees.

Continue "fellowship."

The model for effective evangelism is the relationship between a good parent and child. Your kids will always be your kids—they never leave the nest. Evangelists are the same—they need frequent and perpetual lovin'.