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Brand Advocates:

Scaling Social Media Word-of-Mouth

Although a lot of people may “like” or follow brands on social media, a smaller group goes beyond this, recommending products and services on a regular basis—brand advocates. Brand advocacy is becoming a critical part of the social media marketing mix, and we hope this eMarketer report will help you leverage connections with these everyday influencers to amplify word-of-mouth online and increase engagement.

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Brand Advocates: Scaling Social Media Word-of-Mouth



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Executive Summary: Brand advocacy is becoming a critical part of the social media marketing mix.

Primary Reason that US Internet Users Recommend a Brand, Product or Service, Jan 2012

% of total

Good experiences with a product or service

50%

Want to help others (e.g., want my friends to make smarter purchase decisions)

37%

Recommend brands, products and services but only when I am asked my opinion

8%

Want others to know I'm knowledgeable about certain brands and types of products

3%

Get incentives and rewards (e.g., free products, discounts, cash, points) for recommending

1%

*Note: n=1,445 who recommend at least one brand, product or service per year; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Zuberance, "Three Surprising Findings About Brand Advocates" conducted by Loyalty Wins, March 5, 2012*

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Brand advocates are consumers who support specific brands and use in-person and online conversations to share their opinions, recommendations and thoughts about a company's products and services.

As social media gives average consumers a larger reach, brand advocates of all types and levels have emerged, including social media influencers, industry experts, brand employees, and consumers who use recommendations, blog posts and "likes" to gain discounts, deals and, in some cases, payments. For some of these consumers, recommending products and being an advocate is a new activity, and one that is growing as they participate in more social sites.

Industry experts and big-time social media influencers may seem attractive to marketers. But often, the regular Joe is the most powerful type of advocate out there and can have the greatest effect on their friends and family. By leveraging connections with these everyday influencers, brands can amplify word-of-mouth online and increase engagement.

Key Questions

- What are the characteristics of consumers who actively make recommendations on social media?
- How and why do these consumers use social media to talk about brands?
- How can marketers leverage and hold on to these advocates?

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Who Are Brand Advocates and Why Are They Important?

A lot of people “like” or follow brands on social media, but a smaller group goes beyond this, recommending products and services on a regular basis.

eMarketer defines this group as brand advocates, consumers who use social media to not only interact with brand pages, but also to actively promote the brands, products and services they love. This group also provides marketers with a volunteer army of supporters who disseminate recommendations to friends and family, and occasionally even to strangers.

“When the internet and then social media came into the picture, brand advocacy, which used to be a one-on-one thing, ended up becoming supercharged and the megaphone became much larger,” said Paul Rand, president and CEO of Zócalo Group, which has worked with clients including SUBWAY, Nissan and Frito-Lay on word-of-mouth marketing.

“Social represents the first time that companies can reach Super Bowl-sized audiences but have an authentic engagement with them,” said Erik Huddleston, EVP of products and CTO at Dachis Group. “This is different than advocacy seven or eight years ago. This is the Holy Grail: not just engagement but engagement at scale.”

In a September 2011 survey from Nielsen, 92% of internet users worldwide said they completely or somewhat trusted recommendations from people they knew, and 70% said the same of consumer opinions posted online.

Because the average consumer inherently trusts his or her friends and family, a person who is a brand advocate can be highly influential. And advocates are stepping up to that opportunity. Here’s what they are up to:

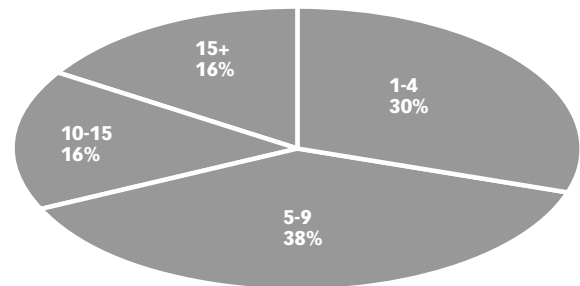
They recommend products and services—frequently.

Zuberance, which works with companies to determine who their brand advocates are, and how to engage with them and track results, defined brand advocates as internet users who recommend brands, products and services at least once a year, without being paid. They can do so in person, on social networks or elsewhere online—and they are doing it a lot.

Among that group, 38% told Zuberance they made a recommendation about once a month, and 12% said they did so several times a week.

Of the respondents in the Zuberance study, 70% had recommended at least five products and services a year, and 16% recommended at least 15 products or services during that span.

Number of Brands, Products and Services that US Internet Users Have Recommended*, Jan 2012 % of total



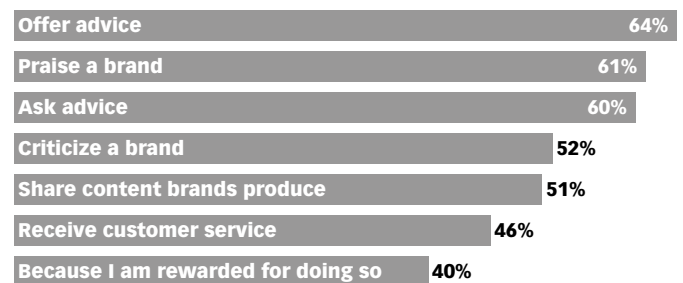
Note: n=1,445 who recommend at least one brand, product or service per year; *in one year
Source: Zuberance, “Three Surprising Findings About Brand Advocates” conducted by Loyalty Wins, March 5, 2012

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They educate other consumers. Market research company TNS spoke to consumers worldwide and found the No. 1 reason people wrote about brands online was to offer advice. Brand advocates’ desire to educate their friends and family can be both positive and negative for brands: 61% wrote to praise a brand, while 52% did so to criticize one, in both cases providing potentially valuable info to fellow consumers.

Reasons that Consumers Worldwide Write About Brands Online, 2011 % of respondents



Note: ages 16+
Source: TNS, “The Impact of Digital on Growth Strategies: CMO Imperatives for 2012,” Jan 19, 2012

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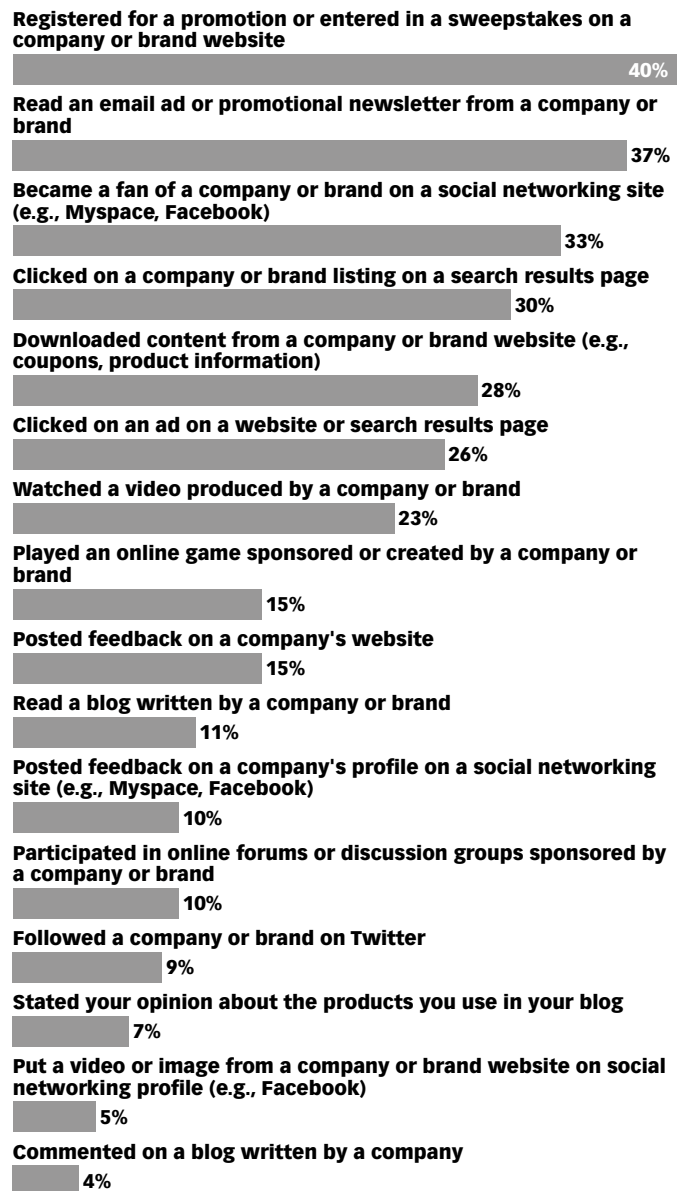
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Dennis O’Malley, CEO of ReadyPulse, which helps ecommerce companies segment their audiences and find their advocates, noted that hearing about a company or product from a friend, rather than someone who has a lot of clout on social media, has an effect on purchasing decisions. “There’s trustworthiness when somebody is putting something on a social network for people to see,” he said in an interview with eMarketer. “An influencer is less important than authenticity.”

They interact with brands and other consumers on brand pages. Consumers who are actively recommending products and services on social media don't stop there. They are often the same people who are most active on brand pages on Facebook and on Twitter, commenting, "liking" or re-tweeting.

In Q3 2011, Forrester Research asked US internet users how they had interacted with brands online during the three months prior to the survey. While 40% of respondents said they registered for a promotion or entered a sweepstakes, only 10% said they posted feedback on a company's social media page. Many more consumers were willing to participate in superficial brand activities, such as reading an email or entering a contest, but a smaller group of brand advocates engaged in more meaningful ways, including by putting branded content on their social media accounts.

Ways that US Internet Users Have Interacted Online with Companies/Brands, Q3 2011 % of respondents



Note: in the past 3 months

Source: Forrester Research "North American Technographics Online Benchmark Recontact Survey Q3 2011" as cited in "The New Messaging Mandate," Jan 9, 2012

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How to Recognize Brand Advocates

Many advocates on social media are younger, highly influential among their social circles, especially socially savvy and want to help others and provide advice. These characteristics make them predisposed to discussing products and services in general, but also inclined to doing so on social networks.

Each company must determine who their specific brand advocates are, and, as Rand said, “deliberately look at the types of criteria that we want in our brand fans, both against demographic, behavioral and attitudinal elements.”

Here are some key defining characteristics of brand advocates:

Brand Advocates Are Young

Younger consumers, particularly millennials, prefer to interact with brands and companies on social media rather than through more traditional channels. This preference for digital means younger consumers can become powerful advocates on social sites.

Overall, social network users are young. eMarketer forecasts that 52.7% of US social network users will be under the age of 35 in 2012.

“Millennials are highly aware of their influence on brands, and they view ‘likes’ and sharing across social media channels as a personal endorsement,” said Nick Fuller, senior director of marketing for Mr Youth. “These attitudes are going to be reflective of how they view and interact with brands as they get older.”

Additionally, these younger consumers are interacting online with brands more often.

In June 2011, integrated advertising agency Barkley spoke to more than 3,000 millennial and more than 600 non-millennial consumers to compare their thoughts and attitudes about brands on social media. Millennial consumers interacted with content from brands on Facebook more often than older consumers, the study found. More than a third (36.3%) of millennials interacted with brand content at least three times a week, compared to 26.4% of older respondents.

Frequency of Interacting with Content from a Brand They "Like" on Facebook According to US Millennial Consumers vs. Consumers Ages 35-74, June 2011 % of total

Multiple times per day (i.e., 7+ times per week)



Once a day (i.e., approximately 7 times per week)



3-6 times a week



1-2 times a week



2-3 times a month



Once a month



Less than once a month



Does not apply



■ 16-34

■ 35-74

Note: n=3,082 millennials ages 16-34; n=660 ages 35-74; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Barkley, "American Millennials: Deciphering the Enigma Generation" in partnership with Service Management Group and The Boston Consulting Group, Aug 18, 2011

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In September 2011, public relations firm Fleishman-Hillard and Hearst Magazines looked at the shopping and purchase decisions of US female internet users. Of millennials, 73% said they felt it was their responsibility to help friends and family make smart purchase decisions, compared to 69% of Generation X and 60% of baby boomers. Additionally, 61% of millennials said they regularly influenced friends and family to buy or not buy a particular product or service, a much higher percentage than Generation X (46%) and baby boomers (36%). This survey was only females, but it demonstrates that younger consumers are recommending products and services, and influencing their networks.

Because these younger consumers feel more positively about brands on social media, companies have an opportunity to leverage this attitude and encourage these consumers to use Facebook and Twitter to recommend and promote brands to their friends and family.

Quick-service restaurant chain SUBWAY, which for the last decade has focused on its health-focused "Eat Fresh" message, identified young women between the ages of 18 and 24 as its advocates for a month-long social media initiative in January 2012 centered on health and wellness.

SUBWAY hosted Fresh Fit Fridays, with weekly wellness tips posted on Facebook, and a live cross-platform chat on Facebook and Twitter with SUBWAY's fitness trainer, Monica Vazquez. SUBWAY CMO Tony Pace said he saw brand advocates "jump to our defense" during those conversations.

"In this particular program, our brand advocates served as content contributors and participants in the ongoing dialogue," Pace told eMarketer.

Fresh Fit Fridays reached more than 2 million people, saw a total of 320 comments and 4,186 "likes," according to Facebook Insights. For the one-hour chat with Vazquez, 440 consumers participated, and 926 comments were posted.

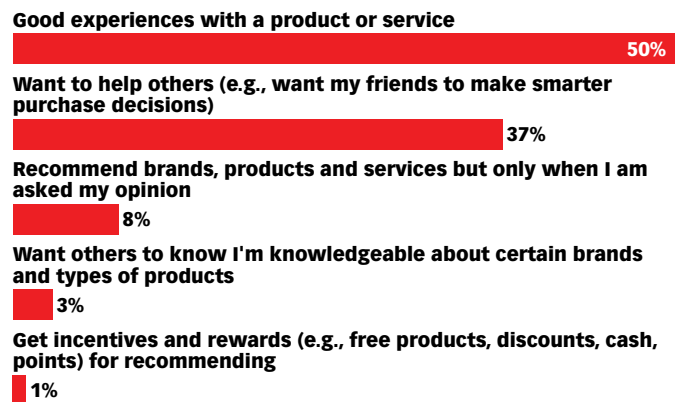
Brand Advocates Are Helpful to Others

Part of being a brand advocate includes a desire to be helpful. This group wants to share their experiences and provide their advice and opinions—both online and offline.

In the January 2012 Zuberance study, 50% of US internet users who recommend at least one brand, product or service a year said their primary reason for doing so was because they had had a good experience with a product or service. An additional 37% said they simply wanted to help others.

Primary Reason that US Internet Users Recommend a Brand, Product or Service, Jan 2012

% of total



Note: n=1,445 who recommend at least one brand, product or service per year; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Zuberance, "Three Surprising Findings About Brand Advocates" conducted by Loyalty Wins, March 5, 2012

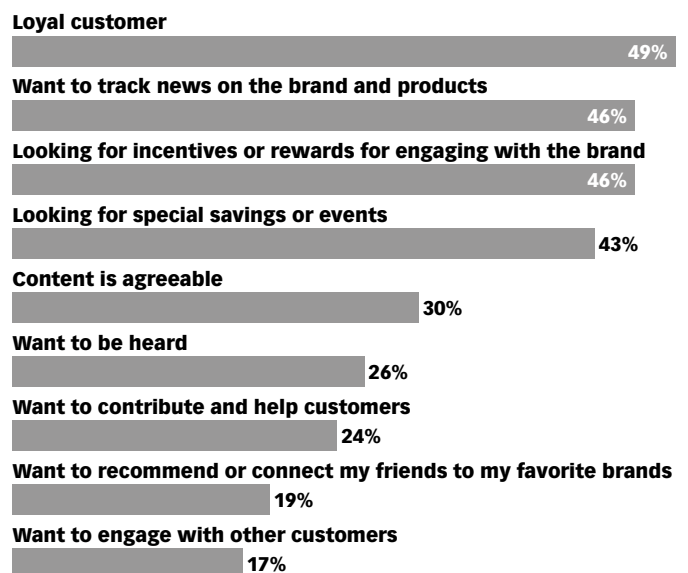
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In Q4 2011, the CMO Council found that 24% of Facebook users said they "like" brands on Facebook because they want to contribute and help customers, while an additional 19% said wanted to recommend or connect friends and family to their favorite brands.

Reasons that Facebook Users Worldwide "Like" Brands on Facebook, Q4 2011

% of respondents



Source: CMO Council, "Variance in the Social Brand Experience" in partnership with Lithium, Dec 8, 2011

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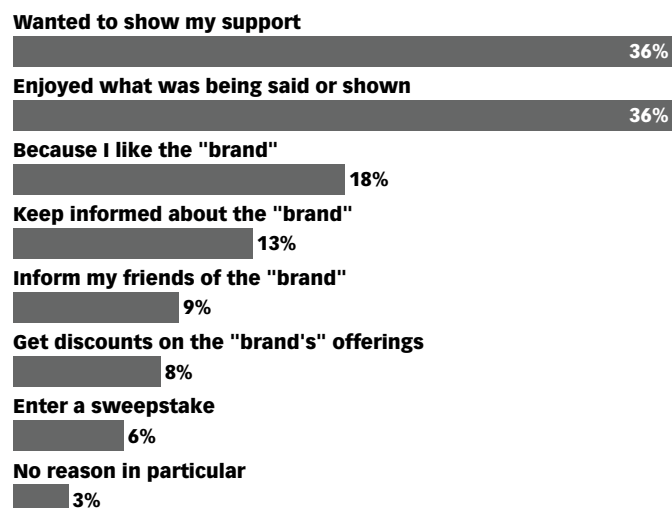
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Word-of-mouth agency BzzAgent works directly with consumers and allows them to try products and services, encouraging them to recommend the ones they like online. In a January 2011 study of these Agent Network participants who habitually recommend products and services, BzzAgent found that 54% of US brand advocates communicated about products online because they wanted to provide others with information, compared to only 29% of average internet users. Additionally, 51% of brand advocates did so to contribute to a pool of information, while only 26% of internet users said the same.

Brand Advocates Want to See Brands Succeed

At the same time, these consumers feel a strong need to help the brands they believe in. In June 2011, 36% of US Facebook users told Crowd Science that they "like" an item on Facebook because they want to show support.

Reasons that US Facebook Users "Like" Items on Facebook, June 2011 % of respondents



Source: Crowd Science, "Just Ask! Facebook 'Like' Buttons," Nov 8, 2011
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Additionally, the CMO Council found in Q4 2011 that 49% of Facebook users said they "like" brands on Facebook because they are a loyal customer.

"What's really been doing well for a number of brands is the whole idea of giving consumers a voice and a platform to talk, and leave that unrestricted and unedited, participating in that conversation at appropriate moments, and dealing with the positives and negatives," said Kara Trivunovic, global director strategy and market innovation at Strongmail, in a January 2012 interview with eMarketer. [Editor's Note: Trivunovic has since become the company's vice president of agency services.]

In May 2011, American Airlines invited its most vocal Facebook advocates on a trip to the Boeing manufacturing factory in Renton, WA. The event included a factory tour and a flight back to Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport via the new American Airlines 737-800, an aircraft that boasts a new ambient lighting concept called Boeing Sky Interior. The company then encouraged the advocates to tell their stories of the trip via social media.

"Now they have a direct line to us," said Jonathan Pierce, director of social media communications for the airline. "They will often email us privately to let us know how they are feeling or give feedback on promotions, announcements and news stories that are happening. It's deepened our relationship. They like to have a voice."

"For millennials in particular, if they like your brand and they're having a positive experience with it, then they want to see that brand succeed," explained Mr Youth's Fuller. "Giving that social endorsement and letting friends know is a way that they are able to promote your brand further and ensure its success. They want to be a part of that success."

But Dachis Group's Huddleston highlights one of the challenges when brand advocates love a particular brand so much: "They're not going to leave the brand, but they get overwhelmingly frustrated with what they perceive as the deficiencies in the brand."

Brand Advocates Are Active Offline, Too

Brand advocates' desire to be helpful also extends into their offline behavior. In its January 2011 study, BzzAgent did some research into this group, which it defines as people who habitually review products and share their opinions with others around them. The company found social media brand advocates were comfortable sharing their opinions and recommendations both on and offline, but social networks provided an easier way for them to spread their thoughts and experiences far and wide.

While harder to track than online recommendations and product mentions, this offline connection was also mentioned by other research firms, as well as several people interviewed by eMarketer.

According to Zuberance's "Three Surprising Findings about Brand Advocates" study from January 2012, "Brand Advocates who recommend online and offline use both methods fairly evenly. They recommend brands and products online on Facebook, Amazon.com, TripAdvisor and Yelp, plus offline (over coffee, dinner, while on the phone)."

"These are people who, if they are talking about a specific shoe that they are fanatical about, are probably engaging in offline behavior as well, telling their friends about it," Mark Cooper, co-founder and CMO of social media marketing company Offerpop, told eMarketer.

Brand Advocates Make Brands Part of Their Online Persona

In a society where so much happens online, many internet users are employing various social sites to create their online persona. Users turn to status updates on Facebook, quips on Twitter, professional knowledge on LinkedIn, and visual imagery on Pinterest and Instagram to showcase themselves online.

Brand advocates often become the go-to person among their friends and family when it comes to recommendations and advice about products and services—and they want that to be part of their online persona. Those consumers who are promoting and engaging with brands online are also making advocacy and helping brands part of their online identity.

In November 2010, Harris Interactive and Intelius asked US internet users about their online identities. Four-fifths of users said they strongly or somewhat agreed that their online identity was as important as their offline identity. Additionally, 78% said it was important to look up information about businesses online before deciding to interact with or do business with them, demonstrating that they were protective of how connecting with certain brands would reflect on them.

Mr Youth's Fuller noticed this trend, in particular, with younger, millennial consumers. "Ever since they were old enough to type, they've been building their own personal brands online and in social media. When they like a brand or they share a piece of content, it is a reflection of their own social persona."

ReadyPulse's O'Malley highlights Pinterest as a social site that allows this display of personality online. "Consumers can say, 'Hey, here's what I'm about. Here are the brands that define me,'" he said in an interview with eMarketer. "They are opting in and showing a connection with a brand because that's an expression of themselves."

Brand Advocates Use Social Media More than the Average Consumer

While a majority of US internet users are on social networks, brand advocates are using the sites more often in general, and more often to communicate about brands and products.

In 2011, 64% of social media marketers worldwide told Microsoft Advertising that it was a challenge to get people to talk about their goods or services on social media in a way that matched their desired brand attributes. Nearly 70% of respondents said it was a challenge to get people to talk about their goods and services on social media at all. This is where brand advocates come in, as they are active on social media and willing to talk about brands and products there.

Brand advocates tend to be the consumers who are commenting, "liking" and sharing brand content on various social sites the most. Fuller, of Mr Youth, said, "They vote their approval or disapproval through 'likes,' posts and purchases."

Both general consumers and brand advocates use social media to send and receive information about products and services, but a greater percentage of brand advocates use social to send information about products. The January 2011 study compared the behaviors of brand advocates who participated in BzzAgent's Agent Network to general online consumers. Only 27% of general internet users used social networks to send information about products, while 58% of brand advocates did.

Looking at how they received information about products, the percentages were closer, but overall, advocates were more likely to use blogs and video blogs, as well as microblogs like Twitter to tell others or send information about products.

Online Platforms Used by US Brand Advocates* and Internet Users to Send and Receive Information About Products, Jan 2011

% of respondents

	Send		Receive	
	Advocates	Internet users	Advocates	Internet users
Social networking site	58%	27%	62%	40%
Email	53%	39%	58%	56%
Ecommerce website	43%	22%	67%	56%
Online feedback mechanism	28%	7%	34%	16%
Discussion board or forum	27%	7%	36%	17%
Instant messaging	22%	11%	20%	14%
Microblog	19%	8%	19%	9%
Customer-created complaint site	16%	5%	22%	11%
Blog	16%	5%	19%	8%
Video blog	12%	5%	19%	14%

Note: ages 18+ who indicated they send and receive "very often"; includes products, brands, sales and stores; *members of BzzAgent's Agent network who habitually review products and share their opinions with others around them

Source: BzzAgent, "A Field Guide to Brand Advocates: Practical Insights for Marketers," May 5, 2011

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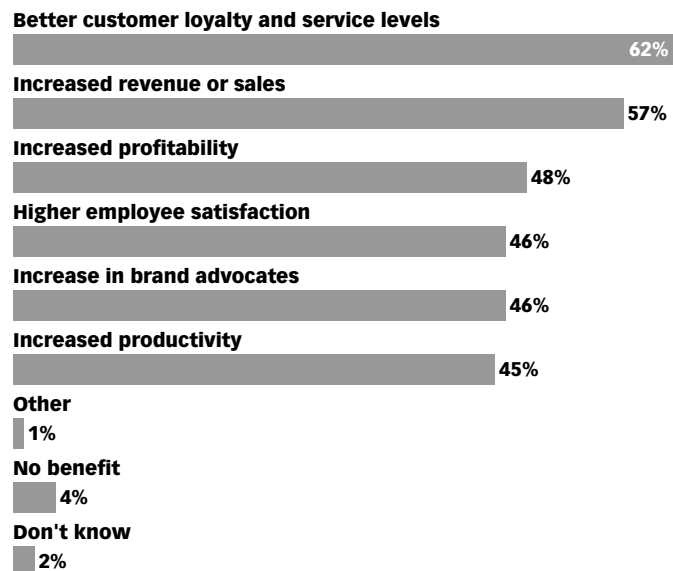
Brand Advocates Are Influenced by Social Media

While brand advocates are using social media to influence others' purchasing decisions, social media also influences them, how they form their opinions and their purchases.

Business executives know this as well. In a May 2011 study from Jive, 46% of US executives said that an increase in brand advocates was one of the benefits of a social media business strategy.

Benefits of a Social Media Business Strategy According to US Executives*, May 2011

% of respondents



Note: *manager-level or VP and above with final say or significant input on social business strategy
Source: Jive, "The Jive Social Business Index Survey, 1H 2011" conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland (PSB), June 29, 2011

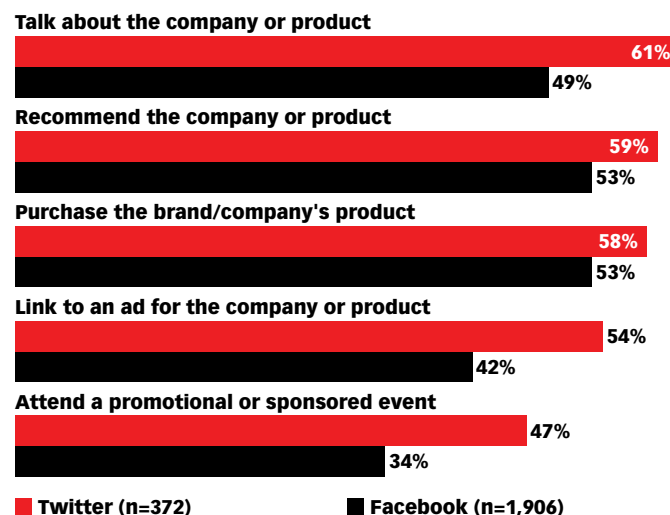
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By focusing on social media and working to gain fans, brands can cultivate more advocates. In an April 2011 study from ROI Research, 59% of US social network users said they were more likely to recommend a company's product or service after following a company on Twitter, and 53% said the same about "liking" a brand on Facebook.

Activities that US Social Network Users Are More Likely to Do After They Follow a Company/Product on Facebook or Twitter, April 2011

% of respondents



Note: ages 13+; among respondents who follow at least one company
Source: ROI Research Inc., "S-Net: The Impact of Social Media" sponsored by Performics, June 7, 2011

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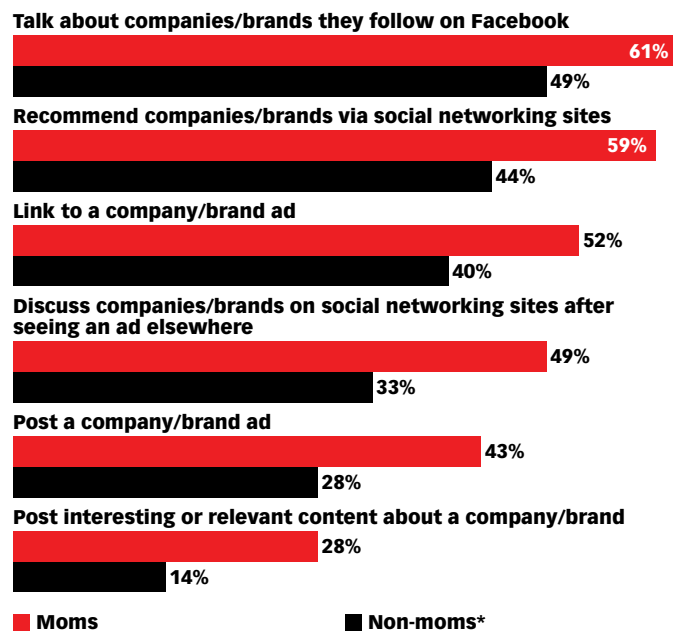
Brand Advocates Are Moms (and Dads)

Parents have proven to be impressive brand advocates for the products and services they favor. Overall, moms are a bit more active with discussing and recommending brands on social media, but dads can also be active on social media and come through as part of this group.

Looking just at US mom social network users, they are more active with brands on social sites than female social network users without children. According to a December 2011 study from Performics, 61% of US mom social network users talked about companies or brands they followed on Facebook and 59% said they recommended companies or brands via social networking sites. This was compared to 49% and 44% of other female social network users, respectively.

Ways US Mom Social Network Users vs. Non-Mom* Social Network Users Interact with Brands on Social Networks, Dec 2011

% of respondents in each group



Note: *females without children

Source: Performics, "S-Net: A Study in Social Media Usage and Behavior, 'Social Media Moms'," April 12, 2012

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China's Brand Advocates Provide an Example

As US marketers reach out to brand advocates, there are lessons to be learned from China, where, by and large, netizens are passionate brand advocates who enjoy engaging with marketers on social media platforms such as Sina Weibo, the microblogging site often referred to as the Chinese Twitter.

In China, 80% of internet users polled by brand experience agency Jack Morton Worldwide indicated that when they are passionate about a brand or brands, they become active advocates for them. This is a larger percentage than among internet users in the US, Brazil or India.

"Overall, Chinese netizens are more vocal and like to be in the know or be the expert among friends when it comes to recommendations," said Scarlett Lok, head of digital for agency TBWA\TEQUILA\Shanghai, in an email interview with eMarketer.

One major difference between the US and China, she added, is that advocates are very often paid for their support: "It's common knowledge with consumers that they are paid, so it's no less reputable than celebrity endorsements."

Among Western brands active in the country, Starbucks China has forged a unique bond with customers by offering them opportunities for engagement through promotions and special offers, as well as by simply asking for feedback. Consequently, the brand has secured a nearly 400,000-strong fan base on Sina Weibo, making it the No. 1 food and beverage brand on that platform.

"Our loyal fans who come to Starbucks every day feel an amazing connection to the brand," said Marie Han Silloway, CMO of Starbucks China, in an interview with eMarketer in February 2012. "They proactively tell us what they think. They also own a lot of Starbucks memorabilia. It struck me that this was serious emotional currency."

Prior to Christmas 2011, Starbucks China held a special holiday product preview sale that engendered brand advocacy. The chain invited top influencers in China to locations in key cities around the country to preview Starbucks' new Christmas beverages, snacks and holiday merchandise. Those who attended the event posted messages online in real time, commenting on the new items.

Dos and Don'ts for Engaging Brand Advocates

One way companies can make the most of their brand advocates is to figure out their expectations for brand interaction on social media—and then meet and exceed them.

Here are some expectations advocates have about connecting with brands:

Provide a Great Experience

Yes, offers and deals are still important. But brand advocates are often more swayed by the actual in-person experiences they have with a brand or company. For its “New Realities 2012” report, Jack Morton Worldwide spoke to US internet users and found that 79% of respondents only advocate brands when they have had great personal experiences with them.

Attitudes Toward Brand Advocacy Among Internet Users in Select Countries, Oct 2011

% of respondents

	US	Brazil	China	India	Total
I only advocate brands when I have had great personal experiences with them	79%	74%	78%	78%	76%
With all the media and information available to me, if a brand wants to get my attention it has to do something special	65%	71%	84%	78%	75%
I feel so strongly about a certain brand, or brands, I am an active advocate for them	62%	51%	80%	74%	66%

Note: ages 18+

Source: Jack Morton Worldwide, “New Realities 2012,” Jan 26, 2012

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In one notable example, Whirlpool Corp. reached out to mom brand advocates in a 2011 campaign for a new washer/dryer pair, The Duet. The company put the new products in 50 homes across the US between July and November 2011.

The brand advocates then “leveraged their blogs, Twitter and Facebook to talk about their experiences with the brand and The Duet laundry pair,” said Whirlpool’s senior manager of public relations and brand experience, Monica Teague, in an email with eMarketer. She added that 96% of participants said they were very likely to recommend Whirlpool appliances to friends and family as a result of the program.

Make Them Feel Special

If brand advocates are supporting a specific company, they are interested in that brand and its products and services. Exclusive content and sneak peeks help give advocates an extra boost.

In the Jack Morton chart above, 65% of US internet users said a brand must do something special to get their attention.

In April, Kraft Macaroni & Cheese took some steps to thank its Facebook fans. The company posted a status update that said “LIKE this post, and you never know what may happen.” After 4,600 fans “liked” the update, the company and its agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky created a music video, Likeapella, which mentioned each of the “likers” by name. The campaign was successful, gaining more than 320 likes of the video post in the first two weeks and getting buzz in the media.

Let Them “Geek Out”

Offerpop’s Cooper told eMarketer that sometimes brand advocates and fans just want to “geek out with a bunch of likeminded people,” who may or may not be their Facebook friends.

Offerpop recently launched Fan Profiles, a Facebook application that allows a company’s fans to create their own fan profiles on the company’s brand page. The fans can interact with other fans and get exclusive content, while the company can track who is most engaged and most influential on their page.

“It’s about recognition and engagement with the rest of the fan base,” said Cooper. “They are engaging with people who share their interests.”

Don’t Ignore Their Advice

In a Q4 2011 study from the CMO Council, 41% of Facebook users said they wanted to share their ideas for new products and features after “liking” a Facebook brand page.

In the US, companies such as Starbucks, Procter & Gamble and Dell have tapped into this insight with their own websites and campaigns. In Germany in February 2012, McDonald’s launched a campaign to let customers develop a new burger for the company’s 40th birthday. In addition to a website where users could create their own burgers, consumers could vote on various social sites for the winning “Mein Burger.” Social media can be an easy way to crowdsource ideas and learn from customers.

Don't Be a Robot

Be invested and interested in these customers. More than 75% of US internet users told Polaris Marketing Research in July 2011 they agreed that if a company has a Facebook page, it means they are interested in what consumers have to say. Prove them right.

Reasons that Facebook Users Worldwide "Like" Brands on Facebook, Q4 2011

% of respondents



Source: CMO Council, "Variance in the Social Brand Experience" in partnership with Lithium, Dec 8, 2011

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"At the end of the day, it comes down to honest, open human interactions, because that's what people like in communications with brands," said Lev Mazin, co-founder and CEO of AYTM Market Research. "When they feel that there is a human being on the other end, it makes them more loyal. It makes them more comfortable in using the brand."

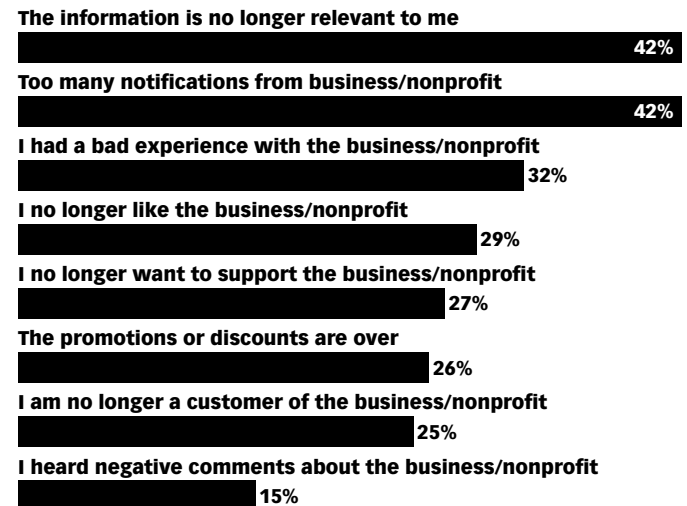
SUBWAY's Pace agreed: "Overall, brand advocates want brands to be honest, responsive and fair on social media. For us, it's all about creating a dialogue with our fans."

Don't Overwhelm Their Social Media Accounts

In a study from Chadwick Martin Bailey, 42% of US Facebook users said they would "unlike" a business or nonprofit on Facebook if they received too many notifications from that organization. Additionally, 32% said they would do so if they had a bad experience with the business or nonprofit.

Reasons US Facebook Users "Unlike" a Business or Nonprofit on Facebook, Q4 2011

% of respondents



Note: among those who have "liked" a business/nonprofit Facebook page
Source: Chadwick Martin Bailey and Constant Contact, "10 Facts About Why and How Consumers 'Like' and Subscribe," March 27, 2012

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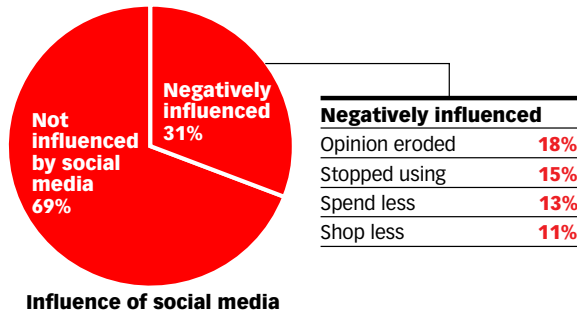
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Relevation Research surveyed more than 1,500 US internet users ages 16 and up and found that 16% reported having "unliked," unfollowed or unsubscribed from a company's brand page after originally following them.

Their reasons for doing so varied, but of those who "unliked," unfollowed or unsubscribed, 31% said that their decision to leave a brand page then negatively influenced offline behavior, including that they stopped using the brand's products and that their opinion of the brand eroded.

Influence of Social Media on US Internet Users Who Have Interacted Negatively* with a Company/Brand via Social Media, Dec 2011

% of respondents



Influence of social media

Note: * "unliked," unfollowed, unsubscribed

Source: Relevation Research, "Social Media Exploration," March 23, 2012

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It is important to make sure content and social media outreach is relevant and interesting to the fans and advocates participating on the brand page.

Have a Social Strategy for Advocates and Another for Average Consumers

Companies must have a plan for their social media strategy, including plans for the different ways they will reach out to advocates compared to average consumers.

After figuring out which consumers fall into this category and what they are doing on social media, it is then up to the company to activate and energize them, said Dachis Group's Huddleston. In April 2012, Dachis Group launched Advocate Insight, a software-as-a-service (SaaS) offering that identifies brands' advocates across social channels and measures each individual's brand impact.

Dachis Group's Huddleston said that brands must take the time to determine the best way to handle the various groups of consumers: the positive advocates, the advocates-turned-critics and the detractors.

He added that this can mean pulling a group into a specific community on a microsite or social network, asking for support in getting the word out about company news or allowing them to provide insight into products and services.

Don't Forget Critics and Detractors

Just because consumers have developed into brand advocates for a company does not mean they aren't also offering criticisms or other negative commentary. The challenge with allowing authentic recommendations and commentary on social media is that sometimes advocates will be more honest about the downsides of a brand's products or services.

Zuberance CEO Fuggetta noted that companies can work to change the opinions of detractors and critics by focusing on the product: "You can't push somebody to become an advocate but you can improve the customer experience, which will lead them to become an advocate."

Strongmail's Trivunovic offered simple advice: "Say thank you to your customers who are out there pointing out good things about your brand. It's amazing how important just the words 'thank you' can be to somebody."

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