

Brand Advocates Are Here To Help

Contributed by eMarketer
 Tuesday, 29 May 2012
 Last Updated Tuesday, 29 May 2012

Many advocates frequently recommend products and services online and off

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. And brand advocacy is becoming a critical part of the social media marketing mix.

As social media gives average consumers a longer 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, being an advocate is a new activity, and one that will grow 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 his friends and family," said Kimberly Maul, eMarketer writer/analyst and author of the new report, "Brand Advocates: Scaling Social Media Word-of-Mouth." "By leveraging connections with these everyday influencers, brands can amplify word-of-mouth online and increase engagement."

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.

In January 2012, Zuberance polled that group and found that, in the US, 38% made a recommendation about once a month, and 12% said they did so several times a week. What's more, 70% recommended at least five products or services a year, and 16% recommended at least 15 products or services during that span.

"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," said Maul. "Companies can make the most of this by finding out their own brand advocates' expectations for interaction on social media sites—then meeting and exceeding them."

The full report, "Brand Advocates: Scaling Social Media Word-of-Mouth," also answers these 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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25 May 2012