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Employee Brand Advocates: Harnessing Employee Enthusiasm to Bolster Your Brand From the Inside Out

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by *Judy Thomas*

When you think about brand advocacy, your repeat, faithful customers who are vocal about their loyalty, probably come to mind.

But have you considered that you may be sharing a coffee machine with some of your biggest, most loyal fans? You know, the ones who live and work with your brand forty-plus hours a week, and have your logo printed across their pay check.

That's right – many of your employees probably share your enthusiasm for what your company does and what it stands for. It's probably what attracted them to work for your organization in the first place.

Your devoted employees are much more intimately involved and familiar with your brand than even your best customers, who are probably already talking about you, your products, and services (you hope!) on social media. So why not give your trained, in-house brand experts the tools they need to brag, share and tweet your news and accomplishments?

Still not convinced? It's understandable that some employers may be reticent to give their employees the green light to talk about the company online. We've all heard stories about social media that went wrong.

But this thinking is changing, according to LinkedIn's Rebecca Feldman, who says she's **noted a shift** in how employers view the professional social networking tool. Historically one of the most intimidating to employers, and seen as a threatening, job hunting tool, she says companies are now eager to leverage LinkedIn's power through their employees.

She recommends that employers communicate regularly to keep their employees in the know – giving them something to talk about, yet being clear about what news and information is appropriate for public consumption. They can also encourage their employees to follow, retweet, and share directly from official company social channels, she said, and provide training to interested employees so they can become savvy social media users and brand advocates.

This is a great place to start. We also suggest developing a robust corporate social media policy that will alleviate any additional concerns employers or employees may have. The policy should offer brand advocates some helpful guidelines, tips, and important restrictions to keep them on track so their social media activities truly benefit the company.

These policies can be as stringent, loose, or detailed as you want, dictated by your unique company and product regulations, preferences, and aligned with other internal policies and considerations. Because social media is constantly evolving as a medium, it is important to keep policies up to date, and to communicate these changes with staff as they occur – particularly when the company itself ventures into new social media territory.

Most importantly, this information should be shared across all departments, and, ideally, signed and dated by all employees for recordkeeping.

Additionally, internal brand advocates should also have a designated point person who can offer guidance and answer social media questions as they arise.

As with all things social media, social media brand advocacy should be an ongoing, interesting, and engaging conversation – but, most importantly, one that clearly offers a lot of benefit to a company and brand.

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