

# The Best Marketers Money Can't Buy

By Rob Fuggetta

Are you taking advantage of your most powerful marketing weapon?



**Y**our organization has a powerful, cost-free — and under-used — marketing weapon. It's more trusted and influential than advertising, search engine marketing, or any other tool or tactic.

“The response rate from advocates: 43 times higher than traditional marketing methods.”

This secret weapon is your advocate army — people who enthusiastically recommend your organization and its services to others without receiving payment or any other incentive to do so.

Advocates are your most loyal, engaged, and enthusiastic supporters. They don't just purchase your products and services or make donations. They get others to purchase and donate, serving as a powerful marketing force for your organization.

## Off-the-Charts Engagement

Are you systematically finding and activating your advocates? If not, you're missing a valuable marketing opportunity. Here are just a few of the things your advocates can do for you:

- **Give you referrals**, leads, and new prospects.
- **Write highly positive reviews** of your organization online.
- **Create glowing testimonials about their experiences** with your organization.
- **Share your organization's content** with their social networks.
- **Create better ads than the most high-priced ad agency** and more compelling copy than the most skilled wordsmith.
- **Boost donations**, and support fundraising.

- **Alert you to market opportunities** and threats.
- **Give you feedback**, insights, and new ideas.

Your advocates are the first to connect with you on Facebook or Twitter, attend your events and focus groups, and participate in your online communities. Need a case study, video testimonial, or reference for a hot prospect? Advocates are eager to help.

Research shows that advocates have between 200 to 450 people in their social networks. The social networks among advocates who recommend online are even larger (300-600 people). Harnessing this viral power can help you reach prospects you could never find on your own.

## Different from Fans and Followers

Many people use the terms “fan,” “follower,” and “advocate” interchangeably. But these are different types of people.

Fans and followers may like you, but not all of them recommend you. They have different motivations. The top reason people “like” an organization on Facebook is “to receive discounts and promotions,” according to one survey. Advocates, on the other hand, are motivated solely by their good experiences and desire to help others, so other people trust what they have to say.

## How One Nonprofit Energized Its Advocates

A leading nonprofit organization conducted a three-month pilot program to identify and energize its advocates. Here are the results:

- **Through an online survey, the organization asked the ultimate question in customer loyalty:** How likely are you to recommend the organization to a friend?
- **As a result of this survey, the organization identified 120,000 advocates** (those who said they were *highly likely* to recommend the organization to others).
- **The organization e-mailed these advocates** and asked them to help launch a positive word-of-mouth campaign.
- **The response rate from the advocates was 85%.** That's 43 times higher than the response to traditional marketing methods (typically 1-2%).
- **The word-of-mouth campaign elicited enormous results.** The advocates created over 10,000 glowing testimonials about their experiences with the organization. They also created over 2,400 positive reviews, boosting the organization's star ratings on Yelp and helping combat negative reviews on the site. They shared over 3,200 pieces of content from the organization, extending the organization's reach and generating over 2,700 highly-qualified referral clicks. And they continue to be a massive advocate army the organization can leverage in many ways over time.

“The single biggest reason why advocates are so effective is this: They're credible.”

Such trust is the guiding principle of advocate marketing. The single biggest reason why advocates are more effective than any other marketing is this: They're more credible. People trust them.

## Most Passionate Advocates

You can amplify the voices of your advocates by giving them tools to make it even easier for them to recommend you. For instance, give them places to write reviews and testimonials of your products and services. Encourage them to share your offers with their social networks. Ask for their feedback, ideas, and help in launching new services. When you engage your advocates, you've identified a marketing asset you can leverage for a lifetime.

Your advocates are ready to tell your story and bring you new prospects. Just make it simple for them to do so. They'll take it from there. 

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*Rob Fuggetta is the founder & CEO of Zuberance (zuberance.com), a social-media marketing company that provides social applications to help organizations identify and energize advocates. He is the author of Brand Advocates: Turning Enthusiastic Customers into a Powerful Marketing Force (wiley.com).*

## TOP TIPS FOR ADVOCATE SHARING

- **Give your advocates exclusive offers** to share with their social networks. Make them feel special.
- **Measure the content advocates share with their networks.** Optimize the types of content they tend to share most.
- **Use advanced sharing widgets** that make it easy for advocates to share content on social channels.
- **Give advocates a variety of ways and places** to share: Facebook, Twitter, Yelp, LinkedIn, Google+, e-mail, and so on.
- **Make sharing viral.** Make it easy for advocates' friends to forward content with their friends, too.

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