

How an Effective **Employee Advocacy Program** Can Help Your Employer Branding

Every organization should want to have a great employment brand. A great employment brand improves recruiting. It improves employee retention and engagement. It even boosts revenue and cuts costs—such as “average cost-per-hire,” which was recently estimated to be \$4,219 by the Society for Human Resource Management (some estimate the “total cost” of replacing a departed employee at one-and-a-half to two times the worker’s yearly salary).

If you don’t have a great employer brand, most candidates know your company only from the products you sell. Candidates are often unaware of your company’s perks, benefits, career opportunities, culture, and other aspects of working for you.

Employer branding offers an opportunity to reduce these hiring-related costs and position your organization as **the company** where top talent **wants to be**.

Like most things worth doing, building a great employment brand isn’t easy. It takes more than building a fancy employment website. Treating employees and candidates well isn’t enough either.

According to Dr. John Sullivan, an internationally known HR thought-leader:

“Employment branding is a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm. The strategy can be tuned to drive recruitment, retention, and productivity management efforts. It works by consistently putting forth an image surrounding managing and business practices that make your organization an attractive, good place to work.”

There are many components to employer branding, including the creation of an employer value proposition (EVP), consistently applying the EVP messaging to all talent sourcing and customer contact points and the ongoing development of content that supports the EVP. Once that content is created, having a stellar **employee advocacy program** in place is one of the most effective ways to communicate and promote your employer brand.

“

“Sixty-eight percent of the ‘World’s Most Attractive Employers’ have employer branding strategies in place as of 2017 and of those who do not, 76% plan to develop employer branding strategies.”

— ERE Employer Branding Now survey

Three Pillars of Employer Branding

Research

An effective employment branding strategy cannot happen without a thorough understanding of your culture and employee experience. Otherwise you are building your brand based on assumptions, and your investments in recruiting are less effective because of the disconnect between expectations and reality. Conduct research to learn the reality of your culture and employment experience. To the extent possible, do the same for your competitors.



Messaging (your Employment Brand)

Based on sound research, develop your employer brand messaging that clearly differentiates you from other employer brands. Then develop content that supports your brand messaging and positions your company as a great place to work.



Promote and Align

Apply and promote your brand messaging to all “customer” and “candidate” contact points and processes, not just your career sites. One small but highly effective employer branding tactic is employee advocacy.



What Exactly Is an Employee Advocacy Program?

Before we get into a discussion on employee advocacy and how it can be used to help promote your employer brand, we should review the terminology so we’re clear on what we’re talking about.

Employee advocacy is when employees of an organization speak positively about the organization. An employee advocacy program, meanwhile, is when an organization has a formal program that encourages and facilitates employee advocacy. The ultimate goal of an employee advocacy program is to promote the organization as a great place to work. This is how employee advocacy works as a subset of employer branding.

Don’t confuse employee advocacy with **brand** advocacy, which is when people, usually paid outside individuals, promote the company’s products.

Brand advocacy is a marketing initiative. **Employee advocacy uses marketing principles to sell an organization to current and prospective employees.**



Who owns Employer Branding? When asked which department primarily owns employer brand strategy development and activities, HR and recruitment were clearly favored over corporate brand/communication functions.

— [Employer Branding Now survey](#), Universum Global

Employer Focused

(primary goal is to sell the “company” as a great place to work)

Employer Branding: a term used to describe an organization’s reputation as an employer, and its value proposition to its employees.

Employee Advocacy: the promotion of an organization by its staff members and/or external stakeholders (e.g., customers, business partners). While social media is often the main promotional medium, other promotional tools include email, chat, forums and discussion boards.

Product Focused

(primary goal is to sell more product)

Brand Advocate: A person that talks favorably about a brand or product. Brand advocates can be unpaid (e.g., a customer), but typically are paid influencers that agree to communicate positive messages about a brand or product.

Brand Amplification: The marketing or promotion of a product through various verbal, visual or written communications.

Now that we're clear on terms, let's discuss employee advocacy programs in more detail. Specifically, let's examine why employee advocacy is powerful, the benefits of employee advocacy programs, strategies for success, and the ROI of investing in software that boosts and helps you manage an employee advocacy program.

Why Is Employee Advocacy So Powerful?

Employee advocacy is powerful for two reasons: trust and the power of numbers.

Trust: When an organization advocates itself as a great place to work, people are naturally skeptical. Any organization can say that. When an organization's employees serve as advocates, however, that makes people take notice. Few organizations' employees do that. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, employees rank highest as the most trusted and influential source of company news and information — outranking the company CEO, activist consumers and the media spokesperson. What does this mean? Travis Wright sums it up nicely in an Inc. Magazine article:

"This means that no matter how often your PR team is out there sharing the gospel or the CEO is on television.....nothing is more effective than the voice of your employees."

Power of numbers: Whether you have 10 employees or 10,000, each employee is a potential brand evangelist to help distribute and communicate positive information about your organization.

This includes word of mouth, but the primary difference-maker is **social media**. Through their various social media accounts, many employees have networks that reach hundreds or even thousands of people.

Imagine if 10% of your employees shared an important story about your brand on their social accounts. Now imagine if 50% did. Now imagine if every employee did.

An effective employee advocacy program drives participation, and can make a tremendous difference in your employment brand. Depending on the size of your employee population, your story could potentially reach millions of people who otherwise wouldn't have seen it.

What Are the Specific Benefits of Strong Employee Advocacy Programs?

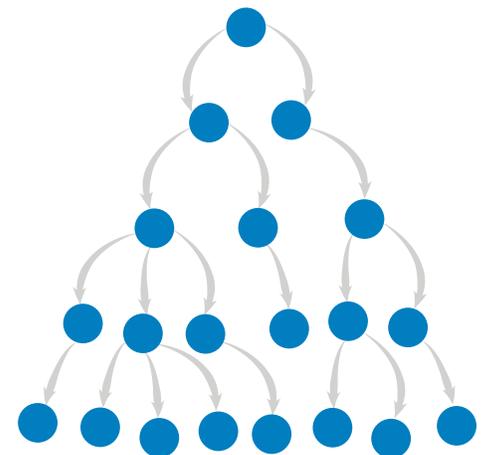
What can happen if your employees start regularly sharing important and positive news about your company? First and foremost, as we indicated earlier, employee advocacy benefits your employment brand. Not only does this boost your recruiting and retention efforts, but it also benefits your bottom line. Check out these eye-catching statistics:

- 69% of workers would not take a job with a company that had a bad reputation, even if they were unemployed. (Glassdoor)

“

The most common focus for increased employer brand marketing investment with every company, no matter their size, is **social media**.

— [Employer Branding Now survey](#),
Universum Global



- 84% of workers would consider leaving their current jobs if offered another role with a company that had an excellent corporate reputation. (Glassdoor)
- Employer branding can increase your stock prices by 36%. (Lippincott via LinkedIn)
- Employers with strong employment brands see a 43% decrease in cost per hire. (LinkedIn)

Other noteworthy benefits of effective employee advocacy programs include:

- **They Foster Faith and Loyalty Among Employees.** You're involving employees more deeply in the organization, and showing that you value them. This helps boost retention, and also supports employee engagement.
- **They Encourage Quality Management.** An organization that mistreats employees can't have an effective employee advocacy program. Having a goal of encouraging employee advocacy in turn encourages your organization to treat employees in a way that gives them a reason to advocate for you.
- **They Help You Reach New People.** Your employees' networks are likely significantly different and broader than your organization's networks.
- **They Help You Reach People in New Ways.** Potential customers and others may be exposed to your brand in new ways, supporting marketing and sales efforts.

What are Key Strategies for Success with Employee Advocacy Programs?

Getting employees to participate is the primary success driver for employee advocacy programs. But many organizations struggle to get employees to participate.

Getting Started with Employee Advocacy

1. **Get Buy-In:** Secure buy-in and solicit feedback from senior management and employees.
2. **Establish Guidelines:** Content is being shared on behalf of your brand so provide examples of appropriate content and what's acceptable.
3. **Identify Advocates:** People that are happy in their job with a large social network make the best advocates. But most importantly, advocates should want to participate and never be forced.
4. **Train Advocates:** Provide training to advocates and get them familiar and comfortable with sharing content.
5. **Create Content:** Great content that supports your employer value proposition is the foundation of an effective advocacy program.
6. **Push Content to Advocates:** Have a platform that makes it easy for employees to access and share content.
7. **Measure:** Make sure to identify your KPIs and be able to measure how the advocacy program supports employer branding goals.
8. **Reward:** Acknowledge advocates and consider rewarding them for participating, regardless of their sharing engagement (something they may not control).

“

Employers' social media strategies are not only becoming key to employer brand building, but also fast becoming one of the primary channels for sourcing and connecting with the best talent.

— [Employer Branding Now survey](#),
Universum Global

Employee Advocacy: Content is King!

The biggest problems:

- Way too many employers make the mistake of expecting employees to share content they don't want to share.
- Way too many employers mistakenly use "marketing" content in their employer branding campaigns.

We're sorry, but your employees aren't going to be motivated to share your latest recruiting technology white paper on their Facebook accounts. They won't share it, and shame on you for asking. Besides, your latest white paper has nothing to do with your employer brand.

You want, and need, employees to **voluntarily** share information about your organization. They will, and will be proud to do so—if the content, article, story is *meaningful* to them. This may require different content by channels (engineering versus customer service or marketing). Many companies enlist the help of employer branding specialists/consultants to get their stories just right. If you don't have enough content to support your employer branding initiatives or are unable to create employer branding content on an ongoing basis, [find a employer branding consultant to help](#).

Your employer branding content should explain the difference your company makes in the world and why your company is an awesome place to work. Check out these [examples of great employer branding](#).

The Gallup State of the Global Workplace Poll found that 40% of employees globally don't know how to talk about what their company does or what makes it unique. The same report states that just 13% of employees are engaged in their work. Not surprising! They don't understand why it matters.

Not only are employees more likely to share great content, but great content also will maximize engagement—clicks, likes, comments, reshares.

Below are examples of information employees might be delighted to share.

Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Charity event your company is sponsoring (e.g., Alzheimer's walk)
Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awards your organization receives (e.g., socially responsible employer)
Milestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Celebrating long-term employees (in their department) who achieve benchmark anniversaries or are recognized for their contributions at the company
Photos	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employee pets at work• Company events• Historic photos of your company (a major brewer shared pictures of their breweries around the world — a big success.)

“

"An employer branding strategy designed for Twitter might not be successful on Facebook, and vice versa. The content needs to be tailored to suit the nature of the channel as well as the user base."

– Claudia Tattaneli, Universum



Tip! Ask employees what traits they feel best describe your workplace? Hip and cool? Smart? Innovative? Socially responsible? Changing the world? This can help you better understand the types and messaging of the content to create.

Misc Consumer Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recipes (a restaurant chain encouraged their cooks to share their favorite recipes).
News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles that portray the company in a positive manner.
Rating Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests to “rate” the company on sites like Glassdoor, Yelp, etc.
Video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour of an interesting production facility • New product • Interviews with interesting staff members • Entertaining company commercial



Tip! Incorporate video content in your mix — engagement on videos is significantly higher than for any other type of content. This is likely because video is more easily consumed than text, especially on mobile, and video posts tend to stand out in a feed and attract attention.

Make sure your employer branding content is truthful about your workplace. A major reason why short-list candidates accept a position with another company before the interview process is completed is because the interview doesn’t match the promoted culture of the company.

Employee-Generated Content

In the above examples, the content that you are asking employees to share already exists. You can also ask employees to create content. Everyone wants to be part of a great team. Some ideas for employee inspired content:

1) Identify a department that is hard to source (e.g., engineering) and create a list of 5-10 questions that will show off why an engineer would want to work at your company. Then ask your engineering team to answer the questions, such as:

- Why did you join the company?
- What’s your technology stack?
- What’s a cool project that you recently worked on?
- What’s the best thing about working in [location]?
- What’s your favorite company perk?

Then, create a website page or blog to showcase the above content / stories and ask employees to share the posted content on their social networks.

2) Ask employees:

- To provide a fun photo or video of them at work doing something.
- What they do for fun at work.
- To describe a cool company event they’ve attended recently.
- How they bond outside of typical work activities.
- How they first heard about the company and what caught their interest and made them want to join.
- What some of the key reasons they decided to join the company were.

Once again, post the content on your company website or careers page and ask employees to share the posted content on their social networks.

“

Examples of great employer branding videos:

[General Electric: What If Millie Dresselhaus, Female Scientist, Was Treated Like A Celebrity](#)

[Apple: The Crazy Ones](#)

This is somewhat of a paradigm shift with regard to content marketing. Traditionally, organizations rely on marketing departments to create content. The resulting content is often product-focused, and is written for buyers and often technical. Content targeted at employees, on the other hand, should reflect employee pride. Frankly, most companies don't have content that's appropriate for employee advocacy. As a result, they don't fully leverage their workforce for employment branding, and miss out on the benefits.

The Importance of Advocacy "Groups"

If you're going to ask employees to share information about your company's brand, make the content relevant and emotionally appealing to the people you are asking to share it.

To do so, it's important to recognize that while some content might be relevant for all employees to share, other content may only be appropriate to employees in a certain region or department, like marketing. As a result, employment branding teams should align their content development strategy to various "groups" within the organization. This allows them to produce content that resonates and is emotionally appealing to these groups and their social networks—increasing the likelihood of employees sharing the content and of their networks engaging with the content.

Examples of Company Advocacy Groups:

- All Employees
- Location/region: [California] Employees
- Interest: [Technology]
- Affinity: [Pets at Work]
- Department [Marketing]
- Event: [Walk to End Alzheimer's or a Tradeshow]
- Outside Constituency: [Customers or Board Members]



Tip! Consider posting a public listing of your groups, and allow interested employees to join them.

The Role of Employee Advocacy Software

In order for employees to become advocates, they must first be informed. A recent study found that a majority (80%) of U.S. employees want to be kept up to speed on company news and happenings, but as much as a quarter of employees don't feel they're kept in the loop (Millennials citing the most frustration of all age groups). This same study found that nearly 40% of U.S. employees would be more likely to share company news on social media if they were informed of it. This is a missed opportunity to involve employees as brand advocates/ambassadors.

You can use email or other corporate communication systems already in place to ask employees to share information — e.g., sending one email per week to employees with some content ideas for the team to share. However, employee advocacy software is much more effective, and allows you more control and measurement.

Employee advocacy software can be used to:

- 1) make employee groups aware of new opportunities to share content; and
- 2) make it easy for employees to share the content on their social channels from their work computer or mobile device.

Employee advocacy software can help employer branding professionals...

- Find, manage and organize employer branding content
- Create and manage “groups” of advocates
- Find content to curate
- Send advocates content to share, people to connect with and messages
- Notify advocates of sharing opportunities (software allows for “one-click” sharing)
- Help advocates grow their social networks and build their thought leadership
- Create gamification to reward top advocates
- Access analytics: advocate activity, top content, reach, etc.
- Access employer branding resources: events, speaking opportunities, awards, consultants, content, etc.

Employee advocacy software — among other things — allows you to push relevant content to the right employees, and to track which employees have shared it. You can see what’s working and what’s not working, and make quality adjustments that help benefit your employee brand.

Common features of employee advocacy software:

- **Content Recommendations:** Not all content will be original content so it is important to have a steady stream of content for employees to share.
- **Dashboard:** A single mobile friendly page where advocates can view a list of content to share.
- **Groups:** The ability for employer branding departments to organize advocates into groups.
- **Social Network Integration:** Makes it easy for advocates to push content to their social channels.
- **Analytics:** Sharing analytics, leaderboards and gamification.

Measuring ROI of Employee Advocacy Software

Is employee advocacy software worth it? The software does help you accomplish an important job — promoting your company as a great place to work and helping your advocates grow their social networks and thought leadership — but how do you measure the ROI of the software itself? One way is to evaluate the investment by comparing the cost to advertising.



Tip! Remind your employees that their positive comments about your company on social media make life better for everyone.



Tip! Employees should never be forced to participate in an employee advocacy program. While some companies encourage all employees to participate, other might want to start by first identifying their social superstars — employees who are most likely to be successful and WANT to participate.

The average CPM for print advertising is around \$20. This means it costs you \$20 to reach 1,000 people. To reach 1 million people, you'd have to spend \$20,000 on a print advertisement. But an ad is impersonal and no match for word-of-mouth referrals or recommendations coming from friends, family and peers. If a friend shares a story about her company on Facebook, people are much more likely to see it, read it, remember it and do something with it (share with their network) than if they saw a mention of your company in a Facebook ad. So, dollar-for-dollar, this is why employee advocacy can provide a better return than advertising. Let's look at an example.

Let's assume you have 1,000 employees at your company and you've invested \$20,000 on an employee advocacy software platform. If every employee shared one piece of information with their network/connections, more than 1.6 million people would be reached with a CPM of about \$6, about 75% less expensive than an ad!

How do we figure this? The following chart breaks it down, using the average "connections" people have on various social media sites.

Social Network	Average connections per employee	The reach if 1,000 employees shared information about your company (one time)
Facebook 	340	340,000 (e.g., 340 X 1,000)
LinkedIn 	900	900,000
Twitter 	208	208,000
Instagram 	200	200,000
Total Reach		1,648,000

There's an important distinction here, however. With a \$20 CPM for advertising in a magazine, to reach 1 million people, you'd have to spend \$20,000 each time you wanted to reach another million people.

With employee advocacy software there is no incremental cost each time your employees share company content. Why? Because your \$20,000 investment in the software is a one-time annual cost. So if every employee in a 1,000-employee company were to share 10 stories about the company during the course of the year, 16.5 million people would theoretically be reached, and the CPM would drop from \$6 to just \$0.60.

Conclusion

We realize that not all employees will participate in an employee advocacy program, and that some employees may have smaller social networks. But the point is this:

Over time employee advocacy is more economical than advertising.

Top ways companies measure the quality of employer brand experience:

1. Employee engagement
2. Candidate satisfaction
3. New hire satisfaction
4. Employee turnover
5. Employer brand attribute scores (employer brand promises vs. experience)
6. Employee advocacy (e.g. net promoter score)

—Source: Employer Branding Now survey, Universum Global

And this is why many marketing experts say that advocacy is the future of marketing — because building an army of advocates to humanize your brand and share positive stories about your company is no longer a nice to have. It's essential.

To get started with your own employee advocacy, follow the steps summarized in the chart below.

1. Strategize	What do you want to accomplish? Awareness of the corporate brand. Set specific, measurable goals your program should accomplish.
2. Get Buy-in	Secure buy-in and solicit feedback from senior management and employees. Regardless of how many advocates you start with, let the whole company know what you're doing and why. Be sure to keep leadership involved as much as possible — employees should see that there's buy-in throughout the company. And keep enthusiasm up with notifications, reminders and regular feedback.
3. Establish guidelines	Content is being shared on behalf of your brand so provide examples of appropriate content and what's acceptable.
4. Identify Advocates	Some employers invite all employees to participate in their advocacy program while others identify their "social stars," employees who are likely to have early success with your program. You determine what's right for your culture. Either way, advocacy works best when it's not forced (e.g., requiring or paying people to share). But do keep this in mind — people who are happy in their jobs and have large social networks make the best advocates.
5. Train advocates	Provide training to advocates and get them familiar and comfortable with sharing content.
6. Create content	Great content that supports your EVP is the foundation of an effective advocacy program. Have a process in place to keep fresh content coming.
7. Push content to advocates	Invest in an employee advocacy software platform that makes it easy for employees to access and share content.
8. Measure	Make sure to identify your KPIs, and be able to measure how the advocacy program supports employer branding goals.
9. Reward	Acknowledge advocates and consider rewarding them for participating, regardless of their sharing engagement (something they may not control).
10. Consider HRmarketer	...as you evaluate advocacy software.

About HRmarketer

Founded in 2002, HRmarketer is what smart HR brands use to help their marketing and HR departments build awareness and interest in their products, brand and company. HRmarketer includes up-to-date listings for conferences, speaking and award opportunities, media outlets, journalists, analysts and influencers, combined with a social marketing and advocacy platform — built for HR. Learn more at HRmarketer.com.

Resources:

[Employer Brand Now Report from Universum Global](#)
[Employer Branding Podcast](#)

[HRmarketer Advocacy Software](#)
[List of Employer Branding Consultants](#)