The Best Marketer For Your Business

Here is an interesting question that I got asked last week at a coffee shop chat with some small business CEOs. “Dean, based on what you have seen from businesses across the country and what you know about my business, who should I select to be my marketing person?”

WOW!! I had to pause on that question because I do know that CEO’s business and I wanted to give her a challenge to open up her searching for finding the “best marketer” for the business. Here’s what popped into my head. Who do you know that is best positioned to know your business and can carry your business’ message? OK, reader, don’t go any further right now. Think about my answer. Who would you pick?

A few years ago the Nielsen company came out with their Global Trust in Advertising report. One “take away” stuck in my head. It showed that people now rely more than ever on word of mouth when they make a purchasing decision.

Imagine that! Word of mouth is the oldest form of marketing, and it just keeps getting better. The report found that 92% of consumers trust “earned media” such as recommendations from friends and family above any other form of advertising, an increase of 18% since it last studied this. The second most valued type of product information is online consumer reviews, which are trusted by 70% of consumers, an increase of 15% in the previous five years.

“All about half of all business for small companies comes from word-of-mouth champions,” says Rob Fuggetta, founder of online brand-advocate platform Zuberance. “It’s just people telling other people, ‘Hey, check out this new restaurant, it’s awesome.”

Every business that’s not outright atrocious has at least some satisfied customers—and they can be leveraged to boost sales. The key is to make the most of recommendations by your advocates and broadcast them to the widest possible audience.

There are simple ways to do this. **Step one is to figure out who your advocates are.**

“This is actually very easy,” Fuggetta says. “You just have to ask them the ultimate question for customer loyalty: On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend us to your friends?”
You can ask this in many different ways: in person, via email, at your website. Anyone who answers with a 9 or 10 you should consider a brand advocate. Customers who answer with a 7 or 8 are less likely to endorse you, while “people who are 6 and under are your haters,” Fuggetta says.

Once you’ve identified your advocates, you have to make it easy for them to recommend you. Say you own a restaurant with a loyalty program. When a member of your program eats at your place, send an email to that customer asking how likely she is to recommend you to her friends. If she says 9 or 10, you can automatically present her with a review form that she can fill out and share on your favorite social media site.

Your next step is to grow your “army of advocates” through social channels by asking your 0-10 question at many different customer touchpoints. Every time you get a new customer, within a month or so ask your question. When someone upgrades an account or adds a new service, ask your question again.

Your goal is to marshal your advocates and amplify their voice. When you get a great review, share it.

When you see someone badmouthing your business, reach out to your advocates and tell them there’s a conversation about you at this or that blog or website. Ask your advocates to share their thoughts. Don’t tell them what to say, just point them in the right direction.

But, be careful here. You may be tempted to think “what could I do for them because they helped me?” Research shows that advocates are less likely to speak out for you if you reward them. “Never pay them off,” Fuggetta says. “A real advocate will recommend you without incentive.” In his research, Fuggetta has found that only 1% of advocates do what they do because they get something in return, like a coupon.

“If you do anything that benefits your advocates directly, then you get into the whole area of paying for recommendations, which the FTC does not like and you have to disclose by law,” Fuggetta says. “And it lessens the impact of the recommendation if you don’t keep it real.”

Studies show prospects are less likely to buy a recommended product if they know the recommender was given an incentive. If you need to pay someone for a recommendation, that’s a sign you should fix your product or service.
The more you know about these valuable customers, the more of them you can recruit—and the better your business will do. Spend your marketing funds on connecting with your customers in an effective manner.

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