



Jan 21, 2021, 08:10am EST | 14 views

# Beyond Referrals: 13 Effective Ways To Turn Customers Into Advocates

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There's no better marketing than organic word of mouth. Satisfied customers serve as references for the businesses they support, and this helps drive a company's sales. Beyond providing referrals, however, given the right tools and incentives, your most loyal customers can also go on to become advocates for your brand.

As an unofficial spokesperson for your company, a customer advocate's suggestions don't just present potential buyers with options. True advocates show other consumers why choosing your product or service will offer the most benefit, openly endorse and promote you within their networks and boost your brand's reach and visibility.

The key is to help customer advocates feel as if they are getting as much, if not more, out of the relationship as you and your company are. Below, 13 experts from [Forbes Communications Council](#) discuss the best ways to turn customer references into customer advocates.



Forbes Communications Council members discuss the best ways to turn customer references into customer advocates.

### **1. Lead With Authenticity And Purpose**

Authenticity and purpose are essential. People innately want to associate with others who share their values and are doing good in the world. Create an experience that is genuine to your brand and guided by purpose. - [Christa Reichhardt, Mitsubishi Power](#)

## **2. Establish A True Relationship**

It's about establishing a true relationship with customers, understanding their challenges and working together to help solve them, then working on the next challenge together. Once customers see you as a true partner who is in it for the long haul (and one who gets results), they are much more likely to be advocates. - [Kathy Sucich, Dimensional Insight](#)

## **3. Create Avenues For Advocacy**

Go beyond the product or service to create avenues for advocacy. Your customers must start seeing you as a facilitator of conversations, not just a provider of products. The way to create true customer advocates is by investing in their profession and domain, creating drinking wells for idea exchanges and being a champion for their careers. - [Ajit Ghuman, Narvar](#)

## **4. Think Of Them As Brand Champions**

Elevate your customer relationships by thinking of them more as brand champions and less like references or referrals. Build meaningful relationships that add value to their business, work or daily lives. A product alone is not enough; your mission and purpose must also connect. Marketers who collaborate with customers to champion their story will engage their audience and excite prospects. - [Marija Zivanovic-Smith, NCR Corporation](#)

## **5. Make It Worth Their Time**

Find ways to use customer advocates that benefit them, as well. Have them speak to the media so that their brand gets a mention; bring them up on stage at an event to give them airtime; or offer them something unique, such as one-on-one time with key executives. It's important to always remember that this

is a two-way relationship. It's not just about you and your brand. - [Becca Chambers, Ivanti](#)

## **6. Involve Them In Your Marketing Strategy**

Identify your true brand lovers and involve them in your marketing strategy and activities. Customers who are willing to refer you are also interested in engaging with you: from co-creating new products or services and designing your communication message to posting reviews online and talking to their friends and peers. Make sure you listen to them and value them, and they will become true brand advocates. - [Rafael Schwarz, TERRITORY Influence \(a Bertelsmann group company\)](#)

## **7. Make Them Feel Valued**

The way to convert customers into advocates is to go out of your way to advocate for them and to make them feel valued (versus just making another sale). For example, find the perfect product for them, secure the best lending terms for them and deliver on your promises. - [Anand Rao, AutoNation](#)

## **8. Create The Most Seamless Experience**

Creating the most seamless customer experience is key to building advocacy. Retail is in the midst of a transformation. Retailers have already begun responding to shifting demands, but with rapid digital adoption, these journeys must be taken to the next level. When the shopping experience is innovative and easy, it will speak for itself. Your customers will take notice and become your advocates. - [Lynn Kier, Diebold Nixdorf](#)

## **9. Leverage Proactive Listening And Engagement**

The only way to really know what your customers want is to listen to them. We've found that proactive listening and engagement throughout the entire customer life cycle, from the moment they buy to the moment they renew and beyond, allows us to help them achieve their desired business outcomes more successfully. And when outcomes are achieved, they are more likely to become invaluable advocates. - [Steve Cox, Cisco](#)

## **10. Focus On Delivering The Best Product And Service**

You don't transform customer references into customer advocates. Today's customers are savvier and better understand marketing practices. The best way to let them advocate is to deliver the best product and service to create meaningful value for them that aligns with their values. Brands don't create advocates. Today's customers make brands! - [Nadia Benaissa, BPC](#)

## **11. Build A Customer Rewards Program**

Build a customer rewards program that is really a referral program that allows them to receive credits, gift cards or actual gifts for each referral they send your way. Brand it as an "appreciation program" to emphasize the needs you have as a brand that they can help to meet. Make the customers feel important and as if they can get a piece of the cake, too, just by doing what they would do anyway. - [Kobi Ben-Meir, Edge](#)

## **12. Celebrate The Small Moments Together**

Remember the small moments and celebrate them with your customers. For example, when signing up or registering new customers, make note of their birthdays so that you can send them a personalized email or text, or even mail them a birthday card. It adds a special touch that will keep the customer a

loyal fan and vocal advocate for your brand. - [Maura Kennedy, Pond Lehocky, LLP](#)

### **13. Be A Strategic Partner, Not A Vendor**

Be a true strategic partner, not a vendor. When you solve a specific pain point, customers will love your service. When you help them solve pain points outside of your service offering, customers transform into true advocates. Customers don't exist in a silo; they are 3D human beings with multiple pain points. You don't need to have all the solutions, but you should know someone who does. - [Patrick Ward, Rootstrap](#)