



boosting employee advocacy in a changing world



Yes, employee advocacy still works. And here are 10 key strategies to make sure your program is a roaring success.

times are **changing.** and employee advocacy still **matters.**

We live in fast-paced times. People use mobile devices on the go. New social media apps pop up while others fade. Online marketing trends seem to change every few months.

One thing that has not changed, however, is the importance of a strong employee advocacy program as part of any online marketing strategy.

At Sociabble, we understand the changing world of employee advocacy, because we've been part of it since the beginning. We've

deployed hundreds of employee advocacy programs in over 80 countries around the world over the last few years, helping improve employee engagement and influence for brands like Microsoft, Coca-Cola, BNP Paribas, Walt Disney, Groupe Renault, and L'Oréal.

We know what works and what doesn't.

And in this paper, we'll draw on that experience to explain how to get a new employee advocacy initiative off the ground, and how to give an existing employee advocacy program the boost it needs.



what does employee advocacy really mean?



Employee advocacy” has been a hot topic as of late, and with good reason, as there is considerable debate about how effective it can be as an online marketing strategy.

Some companies haven’t been able to achieve the results they want, while others have seen positive results, but want to take it to the next level. But before we address how to make an employee advocacy initiative actually work, it’s important to answer a more fundamental question: What is it, exactly?

Essentially, employee advocacy is what happens when employees use their own social networks or other information channels to generate positive brand awareness for their company.

By sharing content, liking updates, and even creating company-related content of their own, they become online ambassadors of the brand as thought leaders. Because this word-of-mouth publicity is more authentic and organic, potential consumers tend to trust it more.

After all, wouldn't you trust a friend's recommendation far more than an advertisement you saw online?

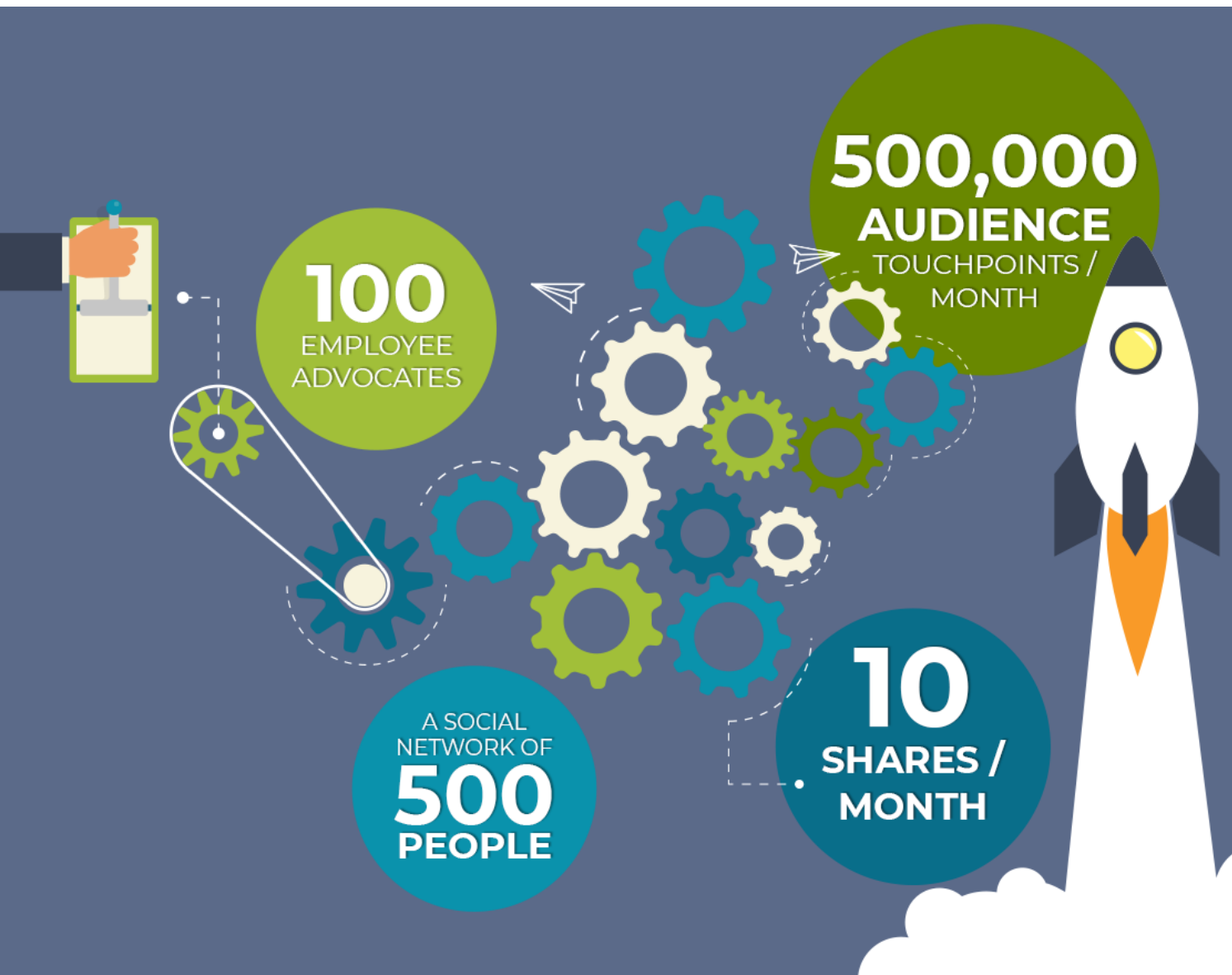
the truth?

employee advocacy is more necessary than ever.

here's why

At Sociabble, we've helped dozens of companies with similar concerns. And what we've found is that the issue is not with employee advocacy as a strategy, but with its execution. Because employee advocacy, if properly planned, launched, and maintained, can be extremely effective as part of a larger online marketing strategy.

**Here's why employee advocacy
is more important than ever.**



the question of reach.

The nature of social media means that even a relatively small number of online supporters can result in a tremendous amount of reach.

And if you get a substantial percentage of your workforce on board, the possibilities are endless. For example: if your company has 100 employee advocates with a social network of **500 people**, with just **10 shares a month**, you've already created **500,000 touchpoints**.

That potential for reach is why employee advocacy can be so effective, even if you start out relatively small. A little employee advocacy can go a long way when it comes to building brand awareness.

the magic of trust.

We live in an age when the general public doesn't always trust the messaging of corporate entities. But they do trust their friends. And when a recommendation comes via their own online social network, it truly means something.

According to a Nielsen study, **92% of social media users trust content shared by people they know**, versus only 36% for content used in social media ads.

And **90% of internet users consider consumer recommendations to be the most credible form of advertising**. The benefits are clear—people simply listen to and trust people they already know.



the change in algorithms.

To address recent issues with unreliable news feeds and the proliferation of bots, social networks have changed their algorithms. As a result, the public will see less content like posts from businesses, brands, and media.

This reemphasis on individuals and their interactions means that their voice will have more weight than ever. Their advocacy for brands they love will be amplified as well.

Which also means that having employees who actually believe in brands will make a huge difference in how those brands are perceived by the public.





the learning of content.

Employee advocacy is also a unique insight into what kind of content generates engagement—both for the workforce, and their larger networks.

These insights are extremely valuable. It's almost like an online focus group of sorts, when it comes to knowing how consumers perceive the brand and how to improve and enhance that perception.

Understanding this kind of concept allows companies to focus and tailor their marketing efforts. It lets them know what people really are interested in, and what they really want.

the need for authenticity.

The last, although perhaps most obvious reason, is that employee advocacy lends authenticity and helps humanize brands, which is crucial in the digital era.

As Jules Schroeder explains in Forbes, *“the content you share represents who you are and what you stand for – it is your digital footprint.”* And as stated by a recent article published in the Harvard Business Review, a key component of authentic brand credibility is employee advocacy. One study found that **only 19% of**

employees feel that their work experience is matched by how their companies promote themselves publicly.

And **only 12% of employees** put a lot of trust in what companies say about themselves. Those are hard numbers to go up against.

The best way to combat that natural distrust is to let employees build positive brand awareness in an authentic way, using their own online voices.



**but does
employee advocacy
actually work?**

YES!

**and here are
the numbers to **prove it.****

but what numbers?

If there's any doubt about the potential effectiveness of a well-executed employee advocacy initiative, there are some pretty convincing statistics that show just how much of a difference an EA program can make.

For example:

- Your employees are connected to **10x more people** than your brand. Which means when they share content, brand awareness sky-rockets. (*socialreport.com*)

- Companies with formal employee advocacy programs have a **26% increase** in year over year revenue. (*aberdeen.com*)

- Brand messages reach **561% further** when shared by employees vs. the same message being shared by the

brand's social channel. (*marketingadvisorynetwork.com*)

- Content shared by employees receives **8x more engagement** than content shared by brand channels. That means 8x as many likes, shares, and comments. (*socialmediatoday.com*)

- Just **1 person** who shares your message can result in more click-through activity than if your company adds **100 followers**. There's a tremendous amount of

potential in every single employee. (*writetarget.com*)

- **98% of employees** use at least one social media site for personal use, of which **50% are already posting about their company**. (*webershandwick.com*)

- **79% of firms** reported more online visibility once implementing a formal employee advocacy program. The data speaks for itself—an employee advocacy program is an extremely powerful tool! (*hingemarketing.com*)



**but some companies
still struggle to get
employee advocacy
off the ground because of
these pain points...**

Employee advocacy may have been a hot buzzword as of late, but some companies have found it difficult to get the most out of their own EA programs. In some cases, they're not even sure how to get their initiative off the ground.

And while there are numerous reasons for these sorts of problems, there are several common hurdles that seem to crop up again and again. These are the pain points that stand in the way of success for many employee advocacy initiatives.



Lack of Engagement

Employees just aren't interacting with the content that's presented; they're not sharing, commenting, or creating content of their own. Top management isn't getting involved.



Unsure of Return on Investment

Launching an employee advocacy program has costs associated with it, and the immediate return isn't always obvious. It's not always simple to attach a monetary value to things like positive brand awareness.



The Bot Effect

Some companies are concerned about the effect of having large numbers of employees posting identical content at the same time, giving the sharing of that content a robotic appearance. They are worried it won't feel natural and organic, but rather automatic and not thought out.



Lack of Urgency

Sometimes, employee advocacy simply isn't seen as a critical project. It's viewed as more of an optional bonus as opposed to a necessary part of an online marketing initiative.

these 10 strategies are the secret to overcoming those pain points.

and they work!

So we know why advocacy matters. But how can a company overcome the above pain points, and get it to take off? What can be done to ensure that employee advocacy is a roaring success instead of a question mark? After helping companies launch hundreds of successful employee advocacy initiatives all over the world, these are the secrets we've discovered to launching or upgrading an effective employee advocacy program.

If you're looking to kick-off an employee advocacy campaign, try to work these into your process. And if you already have an employee advocacy program in place that isn't quite cutting the mustard, see if incorporating these tips might add a little oomph.

Either way, when implemented together, they will address the obstacles of engagement, return on investment, the bot effect, and questions of urgency.

And we'll explain how.



#1

keep employees informed

Want to fight that lack of engagement? Well, a company can't ask its employees to become active brand ambassadors if they aren't properly informed. It's as simple as that. Ambassadors need to be completely in-tune both with what is happening within their company, and also within their sector as a whole. These are the key factors to ensure that they can get properly informed with the information they need:

Information needs to be regular, relevant, & shareable!

An employee's engagement level depends on offering a regular flow of content that matters to them, that's tailored to their needs, and that they have the opportunity to share parts of via their collective social media platforms.

And it has to be in one place.

Aggregation is key. Employees aren't going to wander all over the internet and intranets and various social networks to gather the information you want to give them. You have to aggregate it and make it accessible by merging it into a single, fluid stream. Employees need a single hub that they can come back to again and again as part of their daily routine.

#2

be “glocal,”
think both
globally & locally.

For international corporations with global and local communication streams, it is paramount to manage and curate the information so that relevance and clarity is maintained no matter where the employee is located. With this in mind, an effective employee communications platform needs to be dynamic, it needs to be able to segment and map users, and it needs to have these features:

Local & Global Administrators

Different tiers of administration mean that local offices can have two sets of channels of communication flowing at the same time, including local channels tailored to the employee and broader global channels, ensuring that crucial news at any office is always available, and never falls through the cracks.

For large global deployments affecting offices around the world, this could mean having an administrator

who manages the dispersal of global content, while also having regional and local administrators who determine which content should flow or not flow down to their own offices.

Real-Time Language Translation

An effective employee advocacy platform will also allow for real-time translation, as most local offices will be accustomed to receiving updates and information in their own language. Translation will also ensure that those who are not native-English

speakers don't miss out on global company news. This way, communication is kept seamless and relevant.

Local Social Network Integration

For an employee advocacy platform to perform on a global level, it has to work with social networks used in other countries—not just the ones popular worldwide. And whether it's Vkontakt in Russia, Xing in Germany, or WeChat in China, the platform needs to be able to integrate effectively.

#3

harness the full ecosystem & provide the right content mix (1/2)

The entire point of employee advocacy is to extend the reach and influence of employees into the larger online ecosystem, beyond the internal realm of company communications. And in order to reach this ecosystem, you have to understand it.

Here, we'll cover the areas of the ecosystem that can be fully harnessed to promote employee advocacy. All of these are crucial to helping employees become confident as thought leaders and experts in their field, and promoting them will have benefits for the company and its employees alike.

In order to encourage employees to engage and share information with their larger online ecosystem, however, you have to provide them with a rich and relevant variety of content. Third-party articles, competitive reports, industry updates, even company photos—you need to keep them informed with a single, steady stream of useful and interesting news. But how do you know which mix is best? At Sociabble, we often suggest using the Content Rule of Thirds to get the most out of the full ecosystem of information, including company, external, and user generated content:

#3

harness the full ecosystem & provide the right content mix (2/2)

1/3 Company Information Channels

Much of a company's communication is conducted via social media channels and websites. This information is highly relevant to employees, as it keeps them informed of what is happening within the company. And parts of it are easily shareable as well.

1/3 Industry News & Skills Development

This includes the latest breaking industry news, regardless of sector, as well as web and social media posts on topics deemed relevant at the departmental or team level. But it also goes beyond industry news, to involve information and tutorials on the soft skills employees need to succeed, like online management seminars, strategy exercises, etc.

1/3 CSR Activities

Show the human side of your brand with the latest events, charitable services, social actions, and job recruitment. Employer branded content and new employment opportunities are always things employees are proud to share, as they demonstrate that the company takes care of its workforce.

#4 get top management involved

Leadership starts at the top. And in order to ensure that an employee advocacy program has the direction, support, and budget it needs, it's crucial to get top management involved from the earliest stages. Company leaders will set an example, and having sponsors of your program will deal with issues that arise from a lack of urgency and managing expectations. With management on board, they will offer crucial support to the program, and offer an example for all other employees to follow. An executive sponsor of your program should:

- Get other company leaders on board
- Explain the importance of the initiative to employees
- Be an advocate when it comes to allocating budget
- Lead by example to drive employee engagement

#5

don't start small

While a pilot is not unusual, and some sponsors of your initiative may even request it, it's also crucial to remember that a small pilot will mean a small commitment. It will be difficult to get top management behind it, while the cost for engaging employees will remain the same. In our experience, larger launches tend to be more successful. And if a large-scale, company-wide launch isn't possible, then try to start with a larger unit—one entire country office, for example, or a larger department. This will make onboarding easier.

In our experience, small launches and pilots seldom work.

Try to go big from the get-go!

#6

stay top of mind: mobile, notifications, newsletters

Employee advocacy just doesn't work if the concept of sharing, commenting upon, and creating company content isn't on the minds of employees. Eventually, it can become second-nature, but this can't happen if the company isn't present in their daily online life. These are a few directions to consider:

Be Mobile-Friendly

Whatever platform you use, it has to work well on mobile devices. The truth is, **98% of employees** currently use at least one social media site for personal use.

And **71% of employees spend over 2 hours a week accessing company information on mobile devices.**

This is the new way employees receive and share information. If your initiative can't handle mobile, it's already lost.

Use Widgets & Notifications

You're definitely going to have rivals for your employees' attention. In order to compete, you have to give them reminders.

Intranet widgets can help keep your initiative in the forefront; push notifications can keep employees apprised of company events and publications, and also encourage them to engage with content.

Invest in a Social Media Wall

Some employees are not as avid users of social media, and others don't always spend as much time at their desks.

Having a social media wall in a public space like a lobby or a cafeteria can ensure that all employees stay informed and see the latest relevant content. It will keep employee advocacy top of mind, and present throughout the day.

#7

incorporate gamification

If there's one positive for gamification, it's this: it's universal, and it works in every industry. Adding the element of play to employee advocacy can give it a big boost. It can create a motivation for liking and spreading relevant company content for employees within their own online ecosystem.

But gamification isn't just about points for sharing, or a leaderboard. It also means having an award system that can be filtered by groups, a system for awarding points for events and launches, and badges corresponding to different levels of achievement, for activities like sharing content and taking actions on the platform. It means quizzes and polls that are easy to create and distribute, and even easier for employees to share with a click. In summary, a strong employee advocacy program should include:

→ Leaderboard with group filtering

→ Ability to award points for events and launches

→ Badges earned for training and performance

→ Interactive polls & quizzes

#8

get the most from performance tracking

In order to track KPIs and demonstrate that your initiative is a good investment, an ability to monitor performance can prove indispensable. Without data, you're essentially blind as to how the program is progressing, who is participating, and how the company is benefitting. If there is concern about return on investment for the employee advocacy program, this is one of the surest ways to present evidence of its success. With data monitoring, you can:

Adjust Shared Content According to Interest

By tracking the number of shares and comments, you can determine if the chosen content is appealing to employees

Reconfigure Newsletters to Increase Engagement

By determining the open rates of your company newsletter, you can decide if the content needs to be reconfigured or presented in a different way

Determine which Employees are Actively Engaging

It's possible some employees, and even some whole departments, might not engage with content as much as others. This will give you insights, and help you determine why.

#9

use the proper methodology

A strong employee advocacy platform can give a strong foundation for launching an initiative. But without the proper methodology to guide the launch and management of the employee advocacy program, there is a very good chance it will fail. An effective program needs guidance and planning, because the technology portion alone will not steer your initiative. Here are a few elements we've found to be helpful:

Have a Launch Calendar with Action Plan

Map out the roll-out of your initiative, and have specific tasks and goals set in advance. Ensure that everyone involved knows their role.

Incorporate Staff Training

Different departments are going to be needed at different times. It might make sense to have a representative from each who helps guide the launch and employee training sessions. Think of it as a change management project. You'll also need their help with a gap analysis to compare current and

desired behaviors within the various departments.

Each department will also have a different role, at different times, within the launch. This will likely include:

- *The Legal Team* for defining user terms & conditions
- *The IT Department* for single sign-on support and authentication
- *The Executive Sponsors* who will define the objectives
- *The Communication Team* to make sure the

program's goals are communicated

- *The Main Stakeholders* who organize content, explain value, and engage in platform training

Work with a CSM Team

Ideally, your platform should have a Customer Success Manager on call who can guide you through the launch, and answer any questions that crop up after.

The CSM team should provide you with a full methodology and offer best practices based on extensive experience with clients around the world.

All of these groups need to come in at the right time, and know exactly what their role is within the initiative for it to succeed.

#10 **find the right platform**

To get the most out of any employee advocacy initiative, you need a powerful platform. Something that can aggregate and curate content into a single accessible stream of information. It needs to have an intuitive and visually appealing interface, and should work equally well on any device, be it a mobile phone, a tablet, or a desktop.

In essence, it should incorporate the previous nine strategies as part of its functionality, including both local and global levels of administration, push notifications and widgets, gamification and polls & quizzes, and the ability to seamlessly collect and disseminate relevant information for employees to use.

And it has to be backed up by a methodology and continued support. The launch is crucial, and without the proper step-by-step guidance on how to effectively roll out your program, it could fail.

But how can you find a platform that can do all this?

meet Sociabble, a total employee advocacy solution.

When it comes to implementing the strategies described, Sociabble can do all of that, and so much more.

The Sociabble system offers a comprehensive, dynamic platform with top of the line mobile and desktop technology, designed to curate, aggregate, and distribute relevant content effortlessly, for your employees to then share.

So how does Sociabble address each of these steps, to overcome the major pain points companies face?



**We'll lay
it out
right
here.**

**This is
what
Sociabble
offers...**

To Keep Employees Engaged and Informed:

- An attractive, easy-to-use interface complete with mobile-native apps
- Ability to instantly share, comment, and create content effortlessly, on a single hub
- Gamification features for creating quizzes, polls, and award badges
- Third-party content curation with **Feedly** and **Scoop.it** integrations
- Global and Local administration capabilities
- Instant, real-time translation feature
- Automatic newsletter capabilities with ready-made templates
- Option to create widgets, notifications, and social media walls to stay top of mind

To Clearly Demonstrate a Return on Investment:

- Complete data tracking capabilities, with group segmentation
- Equivalent Paid Media feature so you know how much you've saved with employee advocacy
- Ability to track origins of social media leads
- Power to monitor performance of sellers vs. inactive users

To Overcome “The Bot Effect” and Create an Organic Feel:

- User segmentation and filtration to provide varied, relevant content
- Video and other media integrations for a rich content mix for sharing
- Ability to create User Generated Content for boosting authenticity
- Compatibility with varied foreign networks like Vkontakt (Russia), Xing (Germany), WeChat (China) etc.

To Create Urgency and Address Concerns:

- A proven methodology with a 3-month step-by-step launch plan
- Pre-prepared training materials and guided tours, to make onboarding easy for employees and management alike
- Comment filtering & share button options to address **compliance issues** within your industry
- Full CSM support, with a team that's ready to guide you through the entire process and address any issues that arise

how do we know **it will work?** because at sociabble, we have a **proven track record of success.**

At Sociabble, we've launched hundreds of employee advocacy and communication initiatives in over 80 countries around the world, working with top global brands in a variety of industries.

We've partnered with the best, and we've seen the results. Here are just a few of our clients—our track record speaks for itself.





If you'd like to learn more about how Sociabble can help employees become informed, engaged, and influential, reach out to us today.

We'd love to chat.

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*What
you*
LOVE



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