Putting Social to Work for Your Business

Organizational Models for Scaling Social

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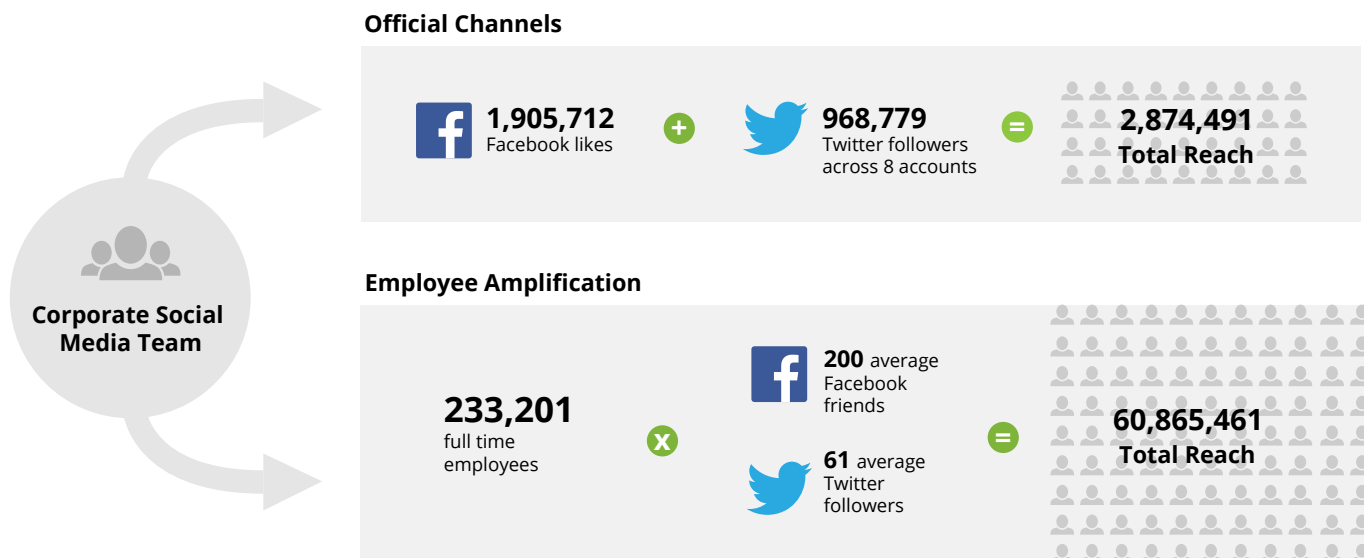
Anatomy of a Brand Advocate

In social media, nothing is more powerful than someone advocating for your brand. Advocates give their friends, family, and colleagues trusted advice that is far more credible than any source of advertising. They defend a business against negative messaging in countless small interactions, and volunteer ideas for product and service improvements. And they do it all for free.

It's no wonder, then, that just about everyone is looking for advocates. Companies are executing deliberate social media programs to find, activate, and maintain these vital assets. Understandably, current engagement efforts focus on making evangelists out of customers, widely considered the most authentic and valuable spokespeople. But while enterprises reach out to external constituents, the best potential advocates hide in plain sight—their own employees.

Employees Are Your Best Advocates

While not without its challenges, widespread employee advocacy is the surest, least expensive way to increase an enterprise's social media reach. Rather than growing customer advocacy through incremental investments in social media teams, an enterprise can magnify its reach at very little cost by activating a broad cross-section of its existing workforce. The following illustration compares the maximum achievable social audience of one of the largest banks in the US to the maximum achievable social audience of its employees, provided that they are active on social media. [1]

How One of the Largest US Banks Increased Social Reach by Over 2000%

Corporate Social Media Team

Official Channels

1,905,712 Facebook likes + **968,779** Twitter followers across 8 accounts = **2,874,491** Total Reach

Employee Amplification

233,201 full time employees x **200** average Facebook friends / **61** average Twitter followers = **60,865,461** Total Reach

The aggregate figures do not represent unique followers because corporate accounts have overlapping audiences, and employees have a number of social contacts in common with other employees. But in the case of employees, this overlap, or "network density", is less significant than you might expect. Pew Internet found that on Facebook, for example, "people's friends lists are only moderately interconnected", with a network density "low in comparison to studies of people's overall personal networks."[2] Your employees' Facebook networks aren't echo chambers, but viral gateways.

Each employee can be the first link in a long chain of intimate, person-to-person shares. By increasing the number of starting points for social sharing, a company greatly improves its chances of viral marketing success. Although many advertisers have sought the support of highly connected "influentials" to initiate viral marketing campaigns, research indicates that the most likely path to virality is a "big seed" strategy. In this approach, viral ideas are seeded by a large selection of first-generation sharers rather than a relatively small number of highly connected people.

Big-seed theory emerged from the computer simulations of sociologist Duncan Watts, but it has real-world evidence to back it up.[3] A combined study of billions of page views by popular culture websites Buzzfeed and StumbledUpon found that "stories go viral when lots of people engage with their normal-sized circles to share content."[4] Marketing researcher Yuping Liu-Thompkins has also determined that when seeding content, "it is better to have a large number of easily influenced individuals than to have a few highly connected hubs in a social network."[5]

Don't Keep Your Thought Leaders Hidden

Follower and friend counts are only part of the story. When the impact of their social messaging is considered, employee advocates look like marketing powerhouses. The Edelman Trust Barometer reveals that 50 percent of the international public consider employees either extremely credible or very credible, just one percentage point less than an academic expert.[6]

Enterprises strengthen their brands enormously by activating these internal thought leaders on social media. Employee blogs and social media profiles allow workers to build personal brands online and form public records of expertise that also reflect well on their employer. Hewlett Packard, for example, has leveraged the vast knowledge base of its employees by encouraging them to share thoughts about computing and other topics on personal accounts. These thought leaders aren't necessarily executives or project leaders, but people from all areas of the enterprise.

Today's workers see social media as a basic way to communicate, so they don't miss a beat when companies introduce internal social tools like Yammer or Hootsuite to help them collaborate and amplify external messaging on behalf of their brands. Corporate education programs can accelerate the workforce transition and turn typical employees into social media power users.

Engaged Employees Engage Your Customers

A desire to see the company succeed is crucial for advocates, and this cannot be created by corporate mandate. Compulsory advocacy negates the entire point of bringing employees onto social media—creating a transparent and authentic business environment that resonates with customers.

> If an employee feels personally rewarded by the work environment, it's natural to transfer that engagement to customers.

So, what motivates an employee to become a company advocate? The simple answer is engagement. If an employee feels personally rewarded by the work environment, it's natural to transfer that engagement to customers. In Germany, Gallup found that 81 percent of engaged workers are willing to provide positive recommendations of their employer's products and services, compared to 18 percent of actively disengaged workers.[7]

Within a social network generation, more CEOs are using social media, and in doing so, can not only close the trust gap with customers, but engage employees. A large majority of US and UK employee respondents to BRANDfog's 2014 CEO, Social Media & Leadership Survey believe that CEOs can use social media channels to build better connections with customers, employees,

and investors (83 percent). Their visible leadership is critical to the success of social initiatives, whether customer-facing or internal.[8]

Social media use for internal collaboration engages employees and makes them feel like true stakeholders in their own company's brand. Therefore, any strategy for employee advocacy on external networks should take into account how the psychological conditions for advocacy are created on internal networks. Internal networks also directly support external employee messaging. For example, Hootsuite helps amplify employees' reach and impact on social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

81 percent of executives surveyed by the Economist Intelligence Unit agree that social engagement has tangible benefits, but only 17 percent have responsibility distributed throughout the organization.

This dovetailing of internal and external social tools is accelerating the creation of the "extended enterprise," a business with blurry organizational boundaries. Networking technologies not only bring employees closer to customers, but connect them to business contacts in the enterprise's extended value chain, including suppliers, vendors, and agencies. In this light, the distinction between business-to-consumer and business-to-business marketing starts to recede, and employee advocacy looks a lot like internal branding. Organizational permeability presents challenges and opportunities that each enterprise has to weigh as it formulates a social strategy.

Most companies have work to do in activating their employees as social advocates. The vast majority (81 percent) of executives surveyed by the Economist Intelligence Unit agree that social engagement has tangible benefits, but only 17 percent have responsibility distributed throughout the organization.[9] The good news for any executive at the beginning stages of social media implementation is that two strategic models of adoption have emerged from the experiences of early adopters.

How Companies are Scaling Up: Two Models for Broad Social Adoption

Early corporate ventures in social media typically began as organic experiments by separate teams in Marketing, Public Relations, or Customer Service. Leading social businesses, however, have evolved toward holistic social media strategies that bring the activities of disparate social teams together. This amalgamation of strategic planning ensures that social media programs have direction and purpose, but it doesn't abrogate the need for broad social participation across the workforce. In fact, one of the key benefits of an enterprise-wide social strategy is that it enables greater advocacy by employees outside of dedicated social media teams. But how can companies ensure that these employees are being supported properly to avoid mistakes, miscommunication, and misinformation?

The Empowerment and Containment models are two different approaches to the same goal of bringing more employees onto social media on behalf of the company. Each model makes a set of trade-offs between freedom and safety, and initiative and supervision. These enterprise-wide frameworks require C-level support, and both have a place for centralized social media resources. In addition, both models depend on having educated employees who understand social media.

Model 1: Empowerment

In the empowerment model, employees are encouraged to take initiative on social media, but aren't left to go it alone. They are given support to help achieve maximum impact. This support begins with the visible enthusiasm of executive leadership, setting the tone for widespread participation. It continues with the activities of social media managers and network administrators who maintain technical and procedural infrastructure, as well as education and training.

The 5 Foundations of Empowerment
1. Collaboration
There is simply no way to align an entire enterprise around a social strategy unless its people are able to share ideas. Employees need to be able to react to customer messaging, rally around opportunities for content sharing, and coordinate their efforts. They should also be able to collaborate at multiple levels, across the organization or within teams.

An integral step toward enterprise-wide social strategy adoption is to create a social business Center of Excellence (COE). This is an advisory council or governance committee of social leaders in an organization that sets social media policies and processes, and provides best practices and training for colleagues. A successful Center of Excellence also creates scale and efficiencies while enabling multiple business areas to tailor social strategies and tactics to their unique audiences.

2. Content

Employee advocates need support from the Marketing department and other official content sources within the organization. It's vital that advocates are aware of media-rich content for social sharing, and of official company positioning during a public relations incident. The enterprise needs to create efficient conduits for this material.

3. Localization

The platform should give employee advocates the ability to listen and speak at a local level. This humanizes their interactions and allows them to match content with context. With these tools, empowered employees can decide when and how to advocate on behalf of the brand, but still act in harmony with company-wide social initiatives.

4. Culture

The best technology only empowers employees who actually feel comfortable and willing to contribute ideas. Therefore, corporate culture is an integral part of the Empowerment model. If a company doesn't have a work environment in which employees feel respected, the necessary cultural changes are likely going to be more difficult to achieve than any technological or procedural adjustments. However, if a nucleus of engaged employees exists, and senior management is serious about developing the company's human capital, collaborative social tools can help spark cultural change and ultimately drive employee advocacy outside the enterprise.

5. Brand

For empowered employees to properly advocate a brand, they must be able to express what differentiates it from the competition. Even the most gifted technical experts can be helpless when it comes to concisely explaining their company's key value proposition. Gallup found that only 41 percent of employees strongly agreed with the statement, "I know what my company stands for and what makes our brand(s) different from our competitors."[10]

Basic social media education in an Empowerment model needs to ensure that employees are consistent when representing the brand. Even though they can be very credible advocates when describing the enterprise in their own words, their messaging should convey commonalities. In an empowered social business, employees may collaborate to refine the brand, and even facilitate customer influence over the brand, but they should always know the brand.

Model 2: Containment

Not all enterprises can afford to let employees speak freely about their work on external social media networks. Financial services and other regulated industries must ensure that employee messaging is compliant with the law, so they have created social media strategies based on the Containment model. In this model, technological platforms and business procedures value security and control over participation. However, employee participation can be scaled up over time if the right strategy is put in place. For enterprises with complicated legal considerations and sensitive data, Containment is the surest path to social media success.

Formal social media training programs bring new practitioners up to speed and centralized control of corporate profiles keeps messaging compliant and aligned with objectives.

The 3 Foundations of Containment

1. Security

Security is the foundation of Containment. This comes from a social relationship platform that includes centralized control of corporate profiles, multi-layered permissions, secure single sign-in procedures, and an encryption protocol, such as https. Compliance might also necessitate automatic archiving of both internal and public social messaging.

2. Engagement Guidelines

The next level of Containment is a clear policy that lays out the rules of engagement for all employees. This document is aligned with the company's guidelines for email, text messaging, and all other communications with clients and the public. Since social media management is part of the company's overall security and compliance policies, the Chief Information Officer and Chief Risk Officer may be involved.

Once solutions are in place, the enterprise can broaden its approach to social engagement, bringing more departments or local branches online. Formal social media training programs bring new practitioners up to speed and centralized control of corporate profiles keeps messaging compliant and aligned with objectives. Continuous archiving of all incoming and outgoing messages, along with granular reporting and analytics, lets administrators see who's saying what.

3. Internal Collaboration

Containment of external social messaging does not preclude internal collaboration. In fact, teams at large financial firms are using social tools to dramatically increase their internal productivity. Canada's TD Bank Group is proving that financial organizations can scale collaborative tools up to ambitious levels without compromising security. Its enterprise social network has more than 4,000 communities and thousands of blogs and wikis, giving employees access to expert colleagues from across the 85,000-person enterprise. District leaders can communicate naturally with their customer service teams without having to filter their messages through branch managers. All of this happens privately within a secure network that was mapped to fit TD's organization.[11]

Advocacy is Built on Authenticity

Employee advocacy on social media raises questions about the "proper" use of tools that are not even a decade old. Is it appropriate to promote an employer on Facebook? If an employee advocates her company's brand on her Twitter profile, is she an official spokesperson? And what do companies do when employees who use offensive language through the same personal profiles that they use to advocate?

Social media is a disruptive technology that's putting existing customs, laws, and business practices to the test. But while the scope of digital communication is unprecedented, the current conflation of the personal and professional is not. Businesses looking to broaden social media participation in the workforce are actually rejoining the historical mainstream; for most of history, employees were deeply engaged with customers, in intimate social relationships that didn't require media at all.

On the positive side, employees and employers can both prosper in today's universal social setting. Year after year, the Global Workforce study has identified work/life balance as a driver of engagement. Balance, however, does not mean segregation. If individuals need to act more professionally in social media, companies need to reciprocate by engaging their employees, as well as their customers. Above all, they must aspire to openness and authenticity. Since people trust sincere voices, acting more like ourselves can only be good for business.

Endnotes

1. The number of employees at the US financial institution noted in the article as of June 30, 2014 is 233,201 full-time employees: http://newsroom.bankofamerica.com/press-releases/corporate-and-financial-news/bank-america-reports-second-quarter-2014-net-income-23-b

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6. Edelman, "2012 Edelman Trust Barometer", 2012.

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8. BRANDfog, "The Global Social CEO Survey", 2014. http://www.brandfog.com/CEOSocialMediaSurvey/BRANDfog_2014_CEO_Survey.pdf

9. Pulsepoint Group, "The Economics of the Socially Engaged Enterprise", 2012.

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11. McKinsey Global Institute, "The Social Economy", 2012.

About Hootsuite Enterprise

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Social Selling

Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era. As the world's most widely used social relationship platform, Hootsuite Enterprise enables global businesses to scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and business units. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of technology integrations, allowing businesses to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

We help organizations create deeper relationships with customers and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help businesses pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through education and professional services.

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