



The Official Guide to

# Employee Advocacy for Marketers

**Best Practices for Building a Program to Dramatically Increase Your Performance**

## Introduction

**Employee advocacy**—empowering your employees to share smart, quality content with their social networks—is still a nascent concept. Sophisticated organizations know that by making it easy for employees to share content they are extending their content reach and engagement, and connecting more authentically with their audiences. That’s because, on average, employee networks have 10x more connections than a company has followers. Plus, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, people are 3x more likely to trust company information shared by an employee than that shared by a CEO. Analysis of LinkedIn network activity backs this up—the click-through rate (CTR) on a piece of content is 2x higher when shared by an employee versus when shared by the company itself.

Tapping into the power of employees reaps tremendous benefits for your company, such as increasing brand awareness and generating sales leads. Likewise, a strong advocacy program benefits employees as well, helping them build their professional reputations, grow their networks, and become more engaged with your company.

At the end of the day, measuring results is the best way to see the value of employee advocacy. While measuring engagement is important, you’ll also want to understand which audiences you are reaching, how the program impacts your key business metrics, and how your employees are growing their own networks and professional reputations.

In this e-book you’ll find everything you need to know about employee advocacy. Read on to learn more about the power of your employees’ networks, how to execute your own program, and best practices from companies who are doing this well today. By the end of this guide, you’ll be all set to begin seeing the benefits of employee advocacy for yourself!

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# Marketing

## Authentically Reach and Engage More of Your Audience

As a marketer, you need to reach and engage more of your target audience to ultimately drive business results. If you're not tapping into your colleagues' social networks, you are missing out on a huge opportunity to expand your reach and better engage prospective customers.

### Consider this:

While only 3% of employees share content about their company, those shares are responsible for driving a 30% increase in the total engagement a company sees.

Why is this so? First of all, employees' networks are huge --on average, at least 10x larger than a company's follower base. And, people are more likely to engage with content when it comes from someone they know. Our research shows that when employees share content, they typically see a click-through rate that is 2x higher than when their company shares the same content.

But don't just take our word for it. Here are real-world examples of the power of employee advocacy in action.



### Total Engagement with Company Content



3%  
of employees  
share content  
about their  
company, but  
they're  
responsible for  
driving a 30% ▲  
in the total  
engagement  
a company sees.



### How Visa Empowers Employees to Enhance the Visa Brand

Visa launched an employee advocacy program in partnership with LinkedIn Elevate to shine a light on the new and interesting things that are being done in local markets around the globe, and to position themselves and their employees as thought leaders. Since launching Elevate, Visa employees are sharing 6x more than before. Their shares have also influenced 4x more Company Page followers.



### How DLA Piper Boosts Brand Awareness

DLA Piper, a global multinational law firm, has been using Elevate to strengthen its lawyers', partners', and professionals' brands and increase awareness of the firm. Since they started using Elevate, DLA Piper's lawyers, partners, and professionals are sharing 6x more than before, and have influenced 3x as many Company Page followers and 4x as many Company Page views than before using Elevate.

**LinkedIn Elevate** provides marketers with demographic information about who has engaged with content—to help you understand whether what you're sharing is resonating with your target audience.

*“People consume information in many different ways, and it’s important to reach them in the way they want to be reached. With employees as busy as they are, if you can deliver approved company content in a way that’s interesting and engaging, you’re giving people an easy opportunity to share it in safe way.”*



**Lucas Mast**, Vice President Social Corporate Media, Visa

*“We have always had a strong content-driven culture. We recognized early on that people tend to engage more with content shared by individuals than employers. Elevate helps our people discover and share content that positions them as thought leaders, helps them connect with clients and prospects, and favorably positions our brand.”*



**Barbara Taylor**, CMO, DLA Piper

# How to Build an Employee Advocacy Program

So, you're all set to launch your own employee advocacy program. There are several steps to keep in mind before simply providing content for employees to share. First, it's important to realize that employees may need to be educated on how sharing impacts their personal brands. Second, employees are often unsure about what they should and shouldn't say about their company in social media channels. That's why you need a formal plan and program in place to empower employees to share content.



## Step 1

### Set Your Program Goals and Content Strategy

It's essential to get the foundations of your company's employee advocacy program right from the get-go. Start by defining your program goals.

*Here are some examples to get you started thinking about your organization's goals:*

- Reach and engage more of your target audience
- Increase brand awareness and followers
- Drive leads for sales

*“It’s really important to develop a solid content strategy before asking your employees to advocate for your brand. You need to identify curators who can create content that is both snackable and aligned to what sales reps want to talk about with prospective customers. This can change frequently, so you need to constantly get feedback and refine your approach.”*



**Zehra Zaidi**, Senior Marketing Communications Manager,  
CEB

In addition to program goals, you also want to set your content strategy. You need quality, relevant content that employees will be interested in discovering and sharing. Strive for a balance of company-related, industry-related, and general content. Here’s a proven formula for success: At most, make 25% of your content company-specific. Since your goal is to drive engagement with employees and their networks, you need to provide information that syncs with their interests—which extend beyond what is happening at your company.



## 4-1-1 Content Rule

*for every 6 pieces of content you share with employees, 4 should be third-party/curated, 1 should be owned/company-related, and 1 should be promotional.*



## Step 2

### Select Your Employee Audience

Once you have your goals in place, you'll want to identify which employee groups, departments, and functions within your company can help you achieve these goals. Ideally, every employee at your company will participate. But to start, focus your efforts on the employees who are already active on social media. As your program matures and grows, expand to include additional groups, using employees from this first group as ambassadors for those who aren't as socially savvy.

It's also important to secure leadership support before starting an employee advocacy program. When senior managers and executives lead by example, employees are more likely to see this as a priority and understand the importance of participating.

*LinkedIn Elevate helps you identify your existing social stars and which departments and functions have the most appetite for sharing, so you can roll out (and scale) successfully.*



*“While all workers understand to some extent what’s going on, they’re skeptical about adopting social tools and processes just for the sake of doing something new. All employees, but especially the incoming millennials, want to know why something is useful. Without this buy-in, adoption becomes costly and time-consuming.”*



**Cheryl Burgess**, Co-Founder and CEO of Blue Focus Marketing, and co-author of the best-selling book, *The Social Employee*

### Step 3

#### Demonstrate the Value to Employees

Your program and audience strategy are the foundation; now it’s time to educate employees on what’s in it for them. Outline why it’s important that they begin sharing content regularly.

Tell them they can:

- **Build their professional reputations.** Employees who share quality content regularly can build visibility and position themselves as thought leaders in their industry. They also get more LinkedIn profile views and are able to grow their networks more quickly.
- **Impact the business.** Employee sharing helps organizations be more successful. When employees share content, they help drive awareness of the brand, sales for the company and support future growth by attracting quality hires.

To make sure everyone understands the value of sharing content, hold social media 101 trainings such as lunch-and-learns, webinars, or short on-demand videos. Train employees on how to build a top-notch LinkedIn profile.

Clearly outline your social media guidelines to allay any concerns. No time to create a dos and don'ts list from scratch? Lift social media guidelines from your social media and corporate communications teams.

### Top 5 Tips for Building a Strong LinkedIn Profile

1. **Upload a professional photo.**

Profiles with photos receive a 40% higher InMail response rate.

2. **Write a descriptive headline.**

After the photo, the headline is the first thing people look at in a profile.

3. **Include a summary and experience.**

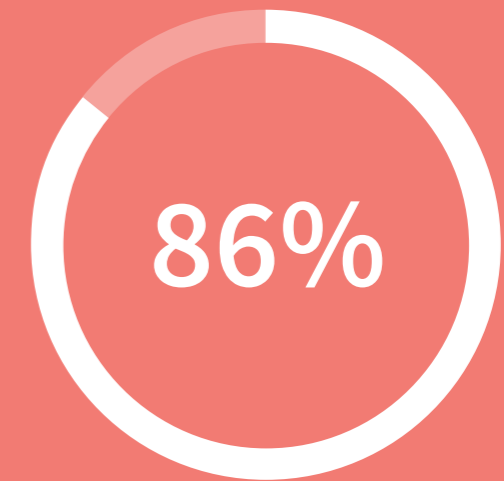
Employees should tell their story from the perspective of someone trying to determine whether or not they want to do business with the company or respond to an InMail.

4. **Personalize the LinkedIn web address.**

By creating a URL that closely matches their names, employees will be more easily found in search engine results.

5. **Share updates that prospects or customers will find insightful, useful, or provocative.**

In addition to providing links to the articles, employees should comment on what they share without being too self-promotional.



*of employees in a formal employee advocacy program said it has had a positive impact on their own careers. Plus, LinkedIn Elevate users grow their networks 3x faster and boost their profile views by 6x.*

## Step 4

### Launch Your Program

You've set your goals and educated your employees on the benefits. Now all that's left to do is launch! Here are three key elements to incorporate into your “go-live” plans:

#### 1. Tap into your existing communication channels.

This can include email, signs and posters, intranet postings, a town hall or similar event, or any other heavily used channel where you can engage a captive audience.

#### 2. Get leadership involved whenever you can.

Include senior executives across departments and arm them with materials to share with their groups. Also, encourage their ongoing participation so they serve as role models for employees.

#### Remember:

Employee advocacy is not a one-and-done exercise; it's a new way of engaging that requires sustainability for maximum impact.



## Step 5

### Keep Employees Engaged

Once you've launched your employee advocacy program, you need to keep the momentum going. You can do so by sharing regular reminders about the program and success your company and your employees are seeing.

#### **Regularly reinforce the impact employees are driving.**

Think of ways to recognize employees for sharing content and participating in the program. You might call out employees with the highest engagement rates by profiling them in your corporate newsletter.

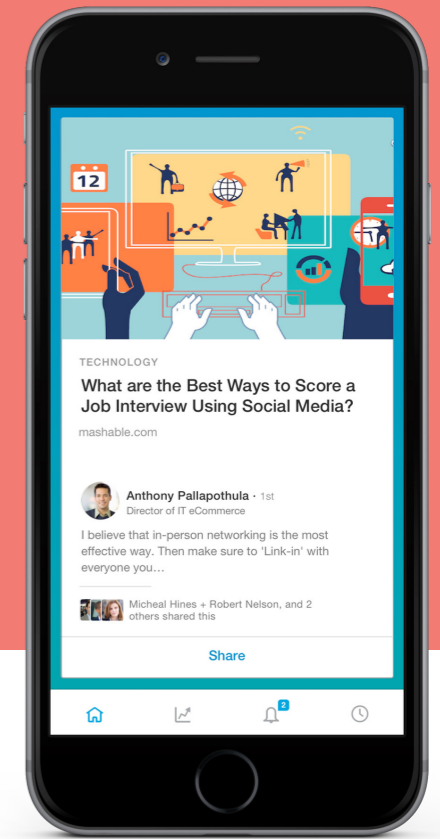
**Encourage mobile.** Our research shows that mobile users share more than non-mobile users.

**Refine your content strategy.** Since content relevance is crucial for inspiring employees to share, you should regularly review your content strategy analytics to understand how you're doing and tweak as needed.

### Motivate Employees from the Get-Go

The content of your launch communications is just as important as the channels you choose. A LinkedIn Elevate analysis shows that driving certain user activities during the first week can help you maintain strong sharing and activity rates over time. Encourage employees to download a mobile app, if available, and to share at least 2x in their first week.

*Through LinkedIn Elevate, you can take advantage of several built-in features that help keep employees engaged, including notifications and reputation metrics around profile views and engagements.*



## Step 6

### Measure Your Results

Remember those goals you set at the beginning? It's now time to track how your employee advocacy program is performing against those metrics.

At the most basic level, you'll want to see engagement rates on shared content. You also need insight into employee activity levels by tracking the number of active users, share rates, and engagement by content type.

And finally, you'll want to understand downstream outcomes such as demographics of those you've engaged, page views, and the impact on new followers. With the right platform, you will even be able to see how all this engagement has driven new site traffic, new hires, and additional sales.

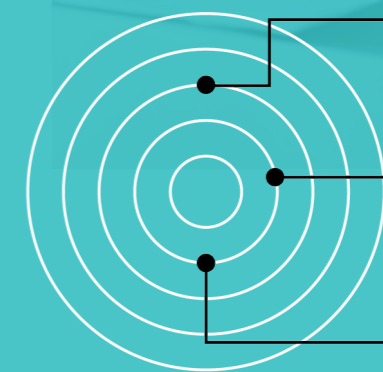


# How to Turbocharge Your Program with LinkedIn Elevate

LinkedIn Elevate helps companies empower their employees to share quality content that, in turn, drives hiring, marketing, and sales success. On average, LinkedIn Elevate users share 5x more than they did before and as a result influence 3x more Company Page views, 2x more Company Page followers, and 4x more job views. As the only employee advocacy provider that's also a social network and content platform, only LinkedIn Elevate provides the employee and content insights needed to successfully set up and optimize your program to maximize your performance and results.



LinkedIn Elevate users share **5x** more than they did before, resulting in



**3x**  
more Company  
Page views

**2x**  
more Company  
Page followers

**2x**  
higher  
engagement rate

## *LinkedIn Elevate in Action*

### *Here's How It Works:*



### 1. Curate

Suggest articles to employees.



### 2. Share

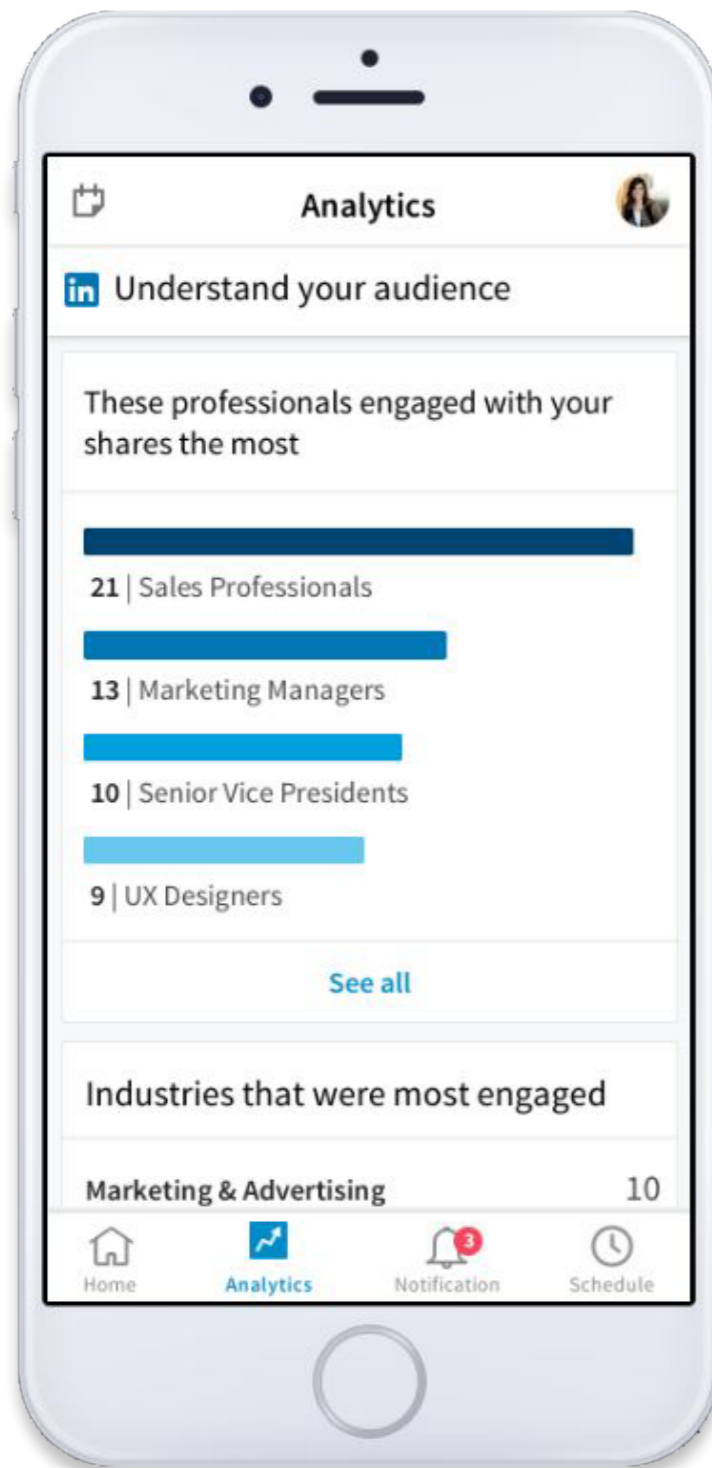
Employees share with their social networks.



### 3. Measure

Measure program performance.





### Maximize impact with high employee adoption and engagement

LinkedIn Elevate was built with employees in mind and leverages insights from the world's largest professional network to drive unparalleled engagement.

**Launch with your social stars.** Elevate knows which of your employees are most active on social today and can provide you with a list to help jump start your program.

**Drive adoption with the help of LinkedIn.** Elevate targets your employees across LinkedIn.com with feed updates, mobile promotions, and InMails to remind and engage employees.

**Drive regular engagement with reputation rewards.** Elevate reinforces the value of sharing to employees by helping them see how sharing is building their professional reputation. Users see metrics around the types of professionals, industries, and companies they've influenced, as well as how sharing has helped them grow their network.

## Optimize your program and deliver the right content with insights from LinkedIn.com

Elevate includes insights from LinkedIn.com to help companies curate successfully and see the business impact of their program.

### Curate with an advantage.

- Get daily suggestions of content that is resonating with your target audience to help you succeed before you start.
- Smart algorithms learn your employees' content preferences and prioritize recommendations based on their sharing behavior.

### Quantify your target influence.

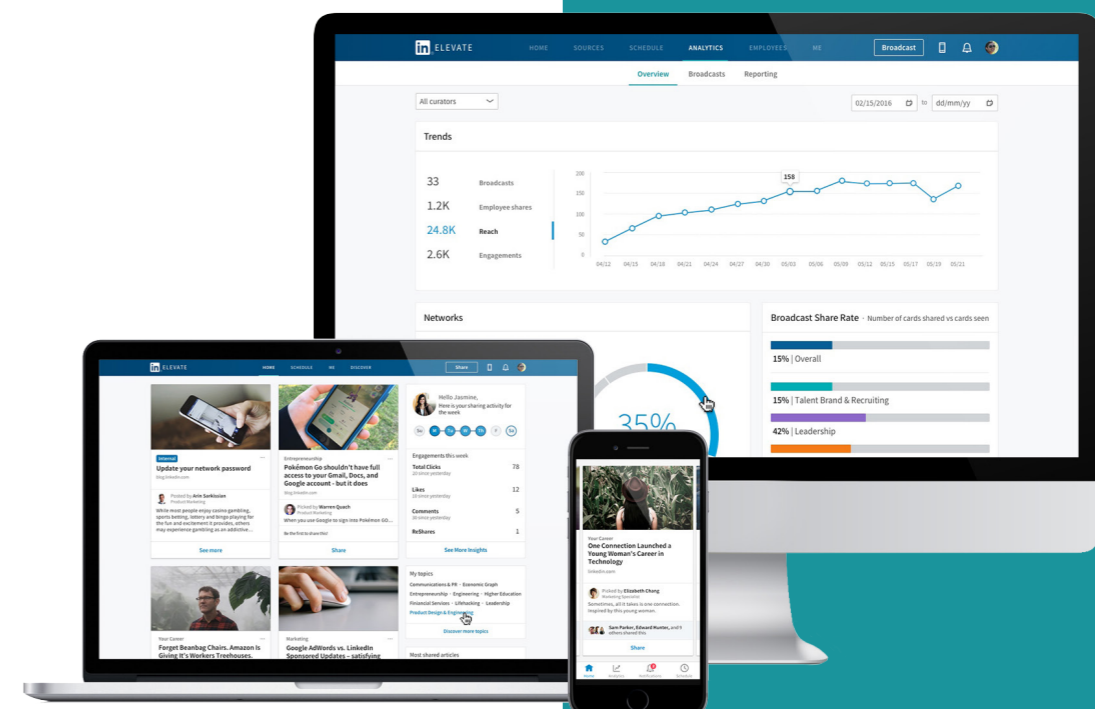
- Elevate shows you the industries, companies, and functions that are engaging with your employee's shares—to help you see how well you're engaging your target.

### Get the full picture of results.

- Get real impression data and actual engagement rates to help understand and optimize performance.
- See how Elevate sharing is driving impact—such as traffic to your website, followers of your company page, and even new hires.



*Elevate teaches employees to be social. More than 50% of Elevate users today had zero sharing activity in the 90 days prior to using Elevate.*



# Conclusion

## Mobilize Your Workforce to Become Brand Advocates

When your company empowers its employees to be social professionals, it doesn't just enhance your employees' professional reputations—it changes the trajectory of your business as well. Whether your company wants to improve content marketing, talent acquisition, or lead generation, your employees' authenticity and social engagement can help drive meaningful business results.

Ready to get your organization started down the path to better company and employee engagement? Put into play the best practices in this e-book, and call upon LinkedIn Elevate to power your employee advocacy strategy and program.



## *Jump-start employee advocacy in 3 easy steps:*

1

Identify a cross-functional group of employees who you want to regularly share content.

2

Educate employees on the benefits of sharing (building their professional reputations and making an impact to the company), and provide them with social media guidelines.

3

Make it easy for employees to share by providing them with relevant content in a weekly email digest, along with pre-populated comments to include in their posts.

## Ask the Experts



### Neal Schaffer

Social Media Speaker and Author of *Maximize Your Social: A One-Stop Guide to Building a Social Media Strategy for Marketing and Business Success*, and *Maximizing LinkedIn for Sales and Social Media Marketing*

#### **Q. How has the concept of employee advocacy evolved?**

**A.** When “employee advocacy” began to be used as a keyword, businesses were thinking very simplistically. For example, they’d think, “If each employee has 100 connections and we can get them to share a message with each one, we can really amplify our reach.” But we’ve come a long way since then.

When companies go full-on with employee advocacy and truly listen to their employees and make their employees a key part of the program, it has the potential to change the company culture in a lot of ways. As the program becomes bigger and encompasses more people, it becomes a very, very powerful presence.

#### **Q. What benefits can companies realize by implementing an employee advocacy program?**

**A.** The benefits span the organization. The marketing department sees an amplification of content and brand voice. There is very little overlap between the followers or fans of a brand and those of their employees’ networks. So, companies are able to tap into a brand new—and trusted—audience.

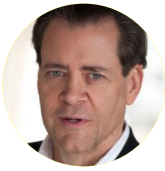
Another benefit is that it provides salespeople with the content they need to share for their own branding.

An advocacy program is also a great way to engage employees and keep or make them happy. People love to be part of bigger company initiatives and love to be heard.

#### **Q. What advice would you give a company embarking on an employee advocacy program?**

**A.** First, start small but recruit employees who are already savvy at using LinkedIn and other social media channels, so they will eventually evangelize your program. Second, educate and train employees on the value of the program and how to use the tools. Third, plug your employee advocacy program into the content that you share as a brand. Finally, use input from your employees to improve the employee advocacy program and all outward-facing marketing and PR activities.

## Ask the Experts



### Mark Burgess

President and Founder, Blue Focus Marketing and author of *The Social Employee*

#### **Q. How do you define employee advocacy?**

**A.** In the current social media climate, people don't want to talk to a brand. They want to talk to another person. With employee advocacy, brands empower their employees to represent both the brand and themselves in an authentic way. The goal is to create engagement—a rich, two-way dialogue that is very different from traditional, push-based branding efforts.

#### **Q. How have you seen this space evolve?**

**A.** We've been seeing more and more companies and brands becoming interested in having authentic conversations. But the biggest change we've seen is the thirst for the *how*. There are a lot of content and workshops around employee advocacy springing up, and we expect this trend to continue to grow. There are just too many benefits for employees and companies for employee advocacy to be ignored.

#### **Q. Why should companies consider investing in employee advocacy?**

**A.** When social employees connect with customers, they create new advocates. People love to talk about what products or services they're in love with online. All you need to do is give them a reason to do it. And according to Nielsen, earned media (or word-of-mouth advocacy) is one of the most effective ways to get your message across.

## Ask the Experts



### Sarah Goodall

Founder of Tribal Impact: Creating Social Businesses Via Employee Advocacy & Content Marketing

#### **Q. What are best practices when it comes to employee advocacy?**

**A.** Start thinking differently about your content and consider what would be interesting for your employees/colleagues to share. The goal is still to reach and engage decision-makers, but you need to think about doing that from a different angle. For example, even if you offer a high-tech product, what is the content your finance team might want to share with their networks? I advise my customers to gather all topic experts from different areas of the company once per quarter to review and discuss the results of their social listening study. This helps you narrow in on what's trending and topical and how it aligns with each department's view and the questions customers are asking. When you get the right people in the room to influence topic or content creation, you set yourself up to create relevant content that your customers will want to consume.

#### **Q. How can companies motivate their employees to participate in an employee advocacy program?**

**A.** What you need to recognize upfront with employee advocacy is that this is transformational change and a cultural shift. Historically businesses have said, "No, you mustn't say anything on social media. We have a PR team to manage this." So, it's quite a shift for employees to hear their employers saying, "Yeah, go out and spread some content!"

Employees are naturally skeptical and will wonder why their company is asking them to do this. So, companies have to be "employee-first." Rather than try to force this initiative through objectives or KPIs, invite interested employees to a one-hour social workshop, and let them explore why they should build a professional brand online. Maybe invite a local photographer to take professional photos of employees. The employees who volunteer to participate in the program become your early adopters. As you move people through a training program, the rest follow naturally. It happens over time in waves.

#### **Q. What is your advice to companies just embarking on an employee advocacy program?**

**A.** First, find an internal champion or sponsor from the leadership team that will put their weight behind this. A lot of employees will be skeptical unless they see somebody in a position of authority actually living what they are being told to do. Next, don't force it. Focus the program around employees and their development, not around pushing your content. Third, put as much attention into the content element as you do into the training and the tools because, without fresh, relevant content in a good format, your program won't fly.

## Ask the Experts



### Chris Boudreaux

Digital Marketing, CRM Advisory Executive at EY, and author of *The Most Powerful Brand On Earth: How to Transform Teams, Empower Employees, Integrate Partners and Mobilize Customers to Beat the Competition in Digital and Social Media*

#### **Q. How can employee advocacy benefit employees?**

**A.** That question is one of the most important, and overlooked, questions in building a program. And there are many potential benefits. You could help subject matter experts grow their personal audiences and their own ability to influence the online conversation. You could also engage employees in ways that help them feel better connected to the organization, customers, and other teams. This is especially true when your leaders participate actively. Employees tend to be less engaged when leaders are also less engaged.

#### **Q. Why is it important to segment employees as part of an employee advocacy program?**

**A.** Within any company, employee advocacy helps different groups in different ways. For example, it helps salespeople to establish a social media presence and to build trust with a target audience of buyers. With that kind of effort, salespeople need to establish some level of credibility about the product space and the product itself, so you would need to provide training, tools, and support that helps each seller build that credibility. On the other hand, the average employee usually does not need to be perceived

as a product expert, so each group requires different kinds of support from the organization. Segmenting employees gives you a structure to understand the various groups you want to support, and how you will support them, including the unique rewards and recognition you will provide.

#### **Q. What are proven ways for companies to succeed with their programs?**

**A.** First, segment your employees, because each group will have different interests and motivations. Second, clarify your objective for each employee segment, whether those are senior executives, salespeople, service staff who interact with customers on a daily basis, or employees in back-office operations. You will need to enable and empower each employee segment in different ways. It's about creating a thoughtful strategy for activating or engaging employees. Sure, you could just give everyone the same content at the same time and you might achieve some lift in that approach, but that type of one-size-fits-all approach usually achieves very low employee engagement within a few months after deployment.

As the world's largest professional network with over 450 million members, LinkedIn is the expert on engaging employees and building their professional brands. Let LinkedIn Elevate maximize the reach of your content and help you connect authentically with your audience.

For more information, visit [business.linkedin.com/elevate](https://business.linkedin.com/elevate).

