

Managing reputation with brand advocacy

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In the ever-expanding world of social media, it has never been easier for a single consumer to create mass chaos for the biggest brands. Never before have opinions, photos, or commentary been able to reach a mass audience and ruin a brand image built over dozens of years and millions of dollars of costly marketing in a matter of minutes.

But brands are far from defenseless. New technologies and techniques for managing a brand's advocates have equipped companies to succeed in a world of empowered consumers. They simply need to learn how to harness the earned media power of their most passionate advocates. This whitepaper aims to help brands get started on that journey.

A Kentucky Fried Crisis

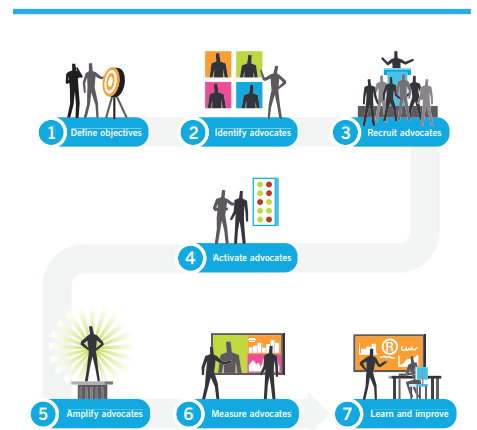
KFC started 2013 off on a bad note with the—now infamous—brain-shaped chicken nugget photo, seen around the world. All it took was one repulsed customer, the right hashtag, and you had the perfect social Molotov cocktail. Millions of advertising and marketing dollars down the drain, because of one single customer.

It's that easy.

But what if you had a group of devoted fans that could simultaneously help build brand in the best of times and combat unforeseen mishaps during the worst? A group that is trusted, authoritative, and authentic: advocates.

The power of advocacy

Our data platform, which tracks the social activity of 30,000 brands and 248,000 advocates, shows that while advocates make up just .001% of a brand's social subscribers, they're responsible for nearly 30% of the earned media impressions that a brand generates. That means a very small number of passionate people have the ability to create an outsized positive impact on the brands they care about. These advocates



We've included an overview infographic of the basics of advocacy on the last page of the whitepaper.



have an incredible amount of reach in the marketplace, but they have influence too. That influence is derived from the trusted position that advocates hold when it comes to brand conversations online.

In the past decade, there has been an enormous shift in trust. According to the annual Trust Barometer survey, 61% of people trust “A person like yourself” as credible spokespeople. That beats out traditional voices like financial or industry analysts, CEOs, and government officials by a very significant margin. This transformation coupled with the massive audiences available in real time on every social network has created an urgent need to change how brands build and manage their reputation.

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Case Study: DISH vs. AMC

Satellite provider, DISH, learned this lesson the hard way in 2012 when they abruptly cut cable channel AMC from their channel lineup. Dish justified their actions by blaming AMC for charging exorbitant fees for their “low-rated” content. In response, the channel asserted that their show *The Walking Dead* was the highest-rated scripted drama on TV and a great bargain for DISH to distribute.

The two parties quickly reached an impasse and that’s when AMC took to the World Wide Web and things got nasty. First, they went to their eleven AMC-branded social channels, blasting DISH network and encouraging customers to take action. Turns out “action” included everything from giving DISH a piece of their mind to switching cable providers. But why stop there?

AMC got creative and launched a video contest to source complaints from the most bitter DISH network subscribers. They also released a band of zombies on the streets of New York to protest as a visual spectacle perfect for Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. To finish their case, AMC offered a live stream of *The Walking Dead* season 3 premier to DISH customers, and still received killer ratings—completely overwhelming DISH’s “low-rated network” theory.

The conclusion? AMC, through the power of its advocates, was able to combat DISH in a completely new way. They capitalized on the passion of their advocates and used it



to their advantage in the heat of negotiations. Terms were never released, but the two brands finally reached an agreement, and episode 2 of The Walking Dead appeared on DISH network the next week. Game: AMC.

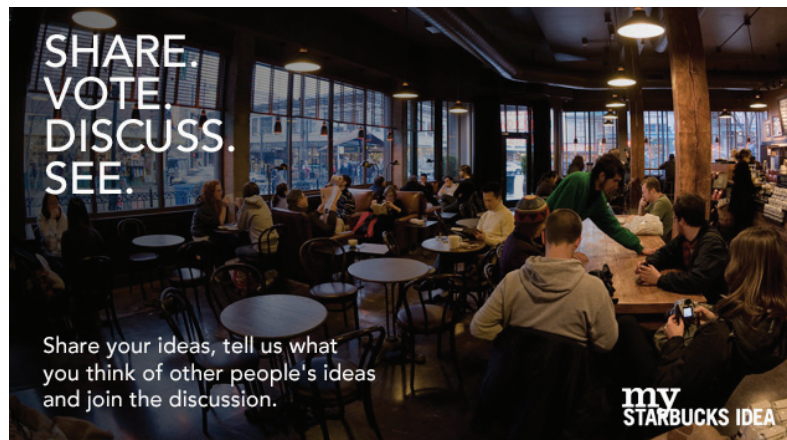
Establishing a foundation of advocacy

The AMC/DISH story is a powerful narrative for the value of advocacy, but advocates cannot just be conjured in a moment of crisis if they don't already exist in the world. The foundation has to be set well ahead of time so that those advocates are accessible and willing to assist. Too few brands have truly put in the time to get to know their customers, but those that have are the ones who will survive.

Case Study: Super Starbucks

Back in 2008, Starbucks felt like they had lost their footing in terms of customer experience. The brand was struggling to reconnect with customers who had left for competitors, or those who couldn't

quite justify spending \$3 for a cup of coffee during hard economic times. That's when the company introduced MyStarbucksIdea.com; Starbucks' very own social portal where brand advocates can make suggestions, have other customers comment and vote, and then



MyStarbucksIdea.com is a social portal where brand advocates can make suggestions, have other customers comment and vote. Starbucks then implements the best ideas.

have Starbucks implement the best ideas. You know those green splashguards that they introduced a couple of years back? You can thank a Starbucks advocate for that.

This inventive tool that Bloomberg Business Week hailed as “corporate democracy in action,” is exactly what brands must start doing if they are serious about genuinely listening to their customers. As it states on their website, “You know better than anyone else what you want from Starbucks.” This kind of attitude attracts and organizes advocates. It also enables a long-term relationship with them so that if the Starbucks brand every did get in trouble, they have a sense of who cares about them and who would support time in a time of distress.



Building reputation with advocacy

Accidents are bound to happen. You can't please every coffee drinker in the world, and there is always going to be that one disgusting nugget amongst the billions that your company sells everyday. The key is to be prepared and to recognize that if social media holds the power to undo millions of advertising dollars with a single photo, surely there's a flipside benefit that can generate (or save) millions.

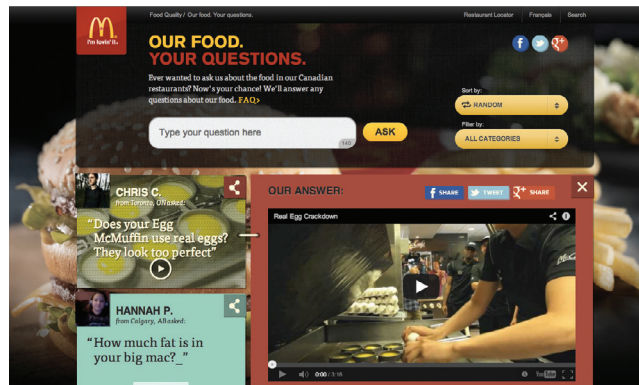
For KFC, unfortunately, the damage is done. A few million people have been thoroughly disgusted and some customers have been lost for good. There are many things that KFC could have done, and the most impactful hinge on the use of advocacy.

One approach to this problem would have been working with advocates to create and share transparent content about their business. McDonald's Canada offers a good lesson for the fast food industry with their "Our Food. Your Questions." This website, created in a response to claims that McDonalds beef was not real, is dedicated to answering questions and concerns in an open and engaging setting.

Questions like, "Does your Egg McMuffin use real eggs? They look too perfect," are answered with not just a written verbal response, but also an actual video of McDonald's employees making egg McMuffins. It's that kind of transparency that earns consumers trust, and it's that kind of content that equips advocates to defend a brand during a moment of crisis. [More info: http://yourquestions.mcdonalds.ca/questions/63](http://yourquestions.mcdonalds.ca/questions/63)

The release of this content through brand channels and targeted advocates could have been measured for its transmission across social networks and proclivity to generate earned media. It could have helped create a counter-narrative around the typical cleanliness and precision of the KFC supply chain. Instead, the brand was defenseless and even its most passionate advocates were unequipped to help combat the onslaught of negativity.

Yet another answer would have been to follow the lead of global charity LIVESTRONG.



McDonald's works with advocates on its "Our Food. Your Questions" site. It's a place to create and share transparent content about the business.



Case study: LIVESTRONG

The last few years have been hard on LIVESTRONG. Though the foundation had achieved many of its goals as the premiere destination for free cancer advice and assistance, it was also grappling with huge threats to its reputation. Lance Armstrong, LIVESTRONG's founder and the face of the charity, was banned from cycling following his infamous doping scandal. At the height of this controversy, he appeared on a global broadcast with Oprah where he admitted his wrongdoing. Consequently, countless influencers and mainstream journalists predicted the fall of LIVESTRONG as a prominent charity.

In the midst of this storm LIVESTRONG had to make a choice. To step back from the publicity, hoping it would blow over, or to step into the limelight and combat the negativity. Doug Ulman, LIVESTRONG'S President and CEO, chose to fight the negativity and his weapons of choice were transparency and advocacy.

LIVESTRONG took a simple but powerful approach. Rather than attempt to combat the negativity directly, they instead chose to highlight the real and tangible good they had done and would continue to do in the world. LIVESTRONG worked with cancer survivors and their families who had benefited from its services to create an extensive campaign highlighting the value the charity added to their lives. Videos and images featuring LIVESTRONG's biggest advocates were disseminated across physical and social channels, encouraging people to focus on the good works of the charity.

This effort to humanize LIVESTRONG and systematically make the people that benefited from its good work the face of the charity, instead of a single athlete, was hugely effective. Despite a media maelstrom and extensive negativity, LIVESTRONG saw only a small dip in charitable donations and is continuing on its mission. Its brand is no longer tied to a single athlete, but is instead tied to its advocates—a much safer place to be.

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Embracing advocacy in your organization

If these case studies resonate with your organization, then consider using Dachis Group's seven-stage maturity curve to guide your efforts.

1. DEFINE OBJECTIVES

You need to know the business outcomes you are trying to achieve, so that you know exactly who you are trying to influence. This way you have a clear strategy that will enable ongoing optimization.

2. IDENTIFY ADVOCATES

Advocates are all around you, even within the walls of your own company, the trick is finding them. Dachis Group offers SaaS applications called Advocate and Employee Insight that streamlines this process by helping organizations identify a pool of potential advocates based on big data processing of social activity.

3. RECRUIT ADVOCATES

The next challenge is turning this list of fans into an organized group of advocates. Careful and thoughtful outreach is critical. It's important to define the relationship early by setting expectations for both your organization and the advocates. Always remember that you want to harness the passion of your advocates, not incent them to behave in ways that are unnatural or inauthentic.

4. ACTIVATE ADVOCATES

It's time to get creative. Look for ways that advocates can support your plan objectives that are also fun and intrinsically rewarding for the advocates. AMC's most rabid Walking Dead fans had no problem creating anti-DISH content – they were upset anyway. This is a great example of activation that is satisfying to both parties.

5. AMPLIFY ADVOCATES

Advocates are a huge untapped resource for user-generated content that can then be amplified through social channels, or even paid media. Not only is this content cost effective, but also comes from a much more authentic and trusted source than typical brand content.

6. MEASURE ADVOCATES

Luckily, advocate activity is one of the most measurable contributors to business outcomes available to marketers, and is now at its easiest with tools like Dachis Group's Advocate Insight. Not only does this tool find you this group of advocates, but also tracks their contributions so that you know exactly what's working and what is not.

7. LEARN AND IMPROVE

Measure your objectives diligently and don't hesitate to ask your advocates for advice and feedback at each juncture of your program.



Conclusion

Advocates deliver an authentic, trusted and influential message, plus they scale larger and faster than any brand's social team could. Not only will your advocates be there to help in a time of crisis, but they will also act as an authentic representation of your brand in the social and real world. Creating relationships with advocates is not easy—identifying, recruiting, activating, amplifying, and learning from advocates requires entirely new skills that will be a learning curve for most organizations. Nonetheless, the value of advocacy has been proven many times over and brands must embrace it to succeed in the social era. ❖



Managing reputation with brand advocacy

At Dachis Group, we've broken down advocacy programs into a seven-stage maturity curve that allows for quick execution. Below, we've created a simple infographic outlining the steps.



Dachis Group's data-driven social marketing software and solutions enable the world's biggest brands to engage at scale with their customers, prospects, advocates, and influencers.