



# How to Transform Your B2B Customers into Advocates

The customer experience has become one of the most significant factors to help turn prospects into customers and customers into brand advocates.

An optimal customer experience, or how your customers feel before, during and after any transaction or interaction with your organization can help or hinder future sales.

While sales drive your business forward and help support organizational efforts, they can only be achieved through positive interactions and a thoughtful customer experience. Keep in mind that one sale does not equal a lifelong customer, and in the same vein, a customer does not always equal an advocate. An advocate is a customer that actively shares information about your company, product and/or services on an ongoing basis, as they engage with your company on social media, grooms other leads and/or keeps an eye on new developments in your company. Considering that 91% of customers say they'd provide referrals but only 11% of salespeople are actively asking for them, it's more likely than you think that some of your customers are ready to be converted into advocates for your business.

As you build your customer journey, consider these key concepts that help grow your customers into active advocates.

## CUSTOMERS ARE MORE THAN A SALE

Understanding your customer is crucial not only for a successful campaign but also to set the stage for eventually transforming your B2B leads into advocates. When developing a plan for reaching your target audience, consider that personalization has become increasingly popular, and for good reason. Epsilon reports that 80% of consumers are more likely to purchase from a personalized marketing experience. Even established brands need to convince potential audiences of their company's value.

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89% of highly recognized brands, including Coca-Cola, Fabletics, Netflix, Sephora, USAA and Wells Fargo, are investing in digital personalization to meet changing customer demands.

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This more targeted customer mapping combined with customer ingenuity and utilization of the internet and social media has virtually ended the days of the traditional one-way conversation and hard-sell. B2B

customers can utilize the internet to research products and price their needs instead of relying on information they received from a salesperson. As customers become savvier and more prepared, marketing personalization has become an industry norm.

Properly identifying your customer, their pain points and how you can solve their unique problems puts you in the ideal position to begin bringing in the right leads to transform into customers.

### MAKING THE LEAP FROM CUSTOMER TO ADVOCATE

A satisfied customer can bring in additional revenue in several ways. Happy customers have a higher likelihood of making repeat purchases. Additionally, when a customer feels that a business has gone above and beyond, they are more likely to recommend the company to a friend or colleague.

This is one reason why referrals are a trusted and valuable way to gain new business. In fact, 84% of B2B buyers begin as a referral. Even more astounding, 97% of IT professionals say they rely on peer recommendations and reviews to help inform their buying decisions. Plus, loyal customers are five times more likely to purchase again and four times more likely to refer a friend to the company. Companies that actively seek out a referral earn 4 to 5 times more than the ones that do not.

If you want to actively gauge how your customer experience is going, there are tools like the Net Promoter Score (NPS) that can help measure how likely your customers are to act as an advocate. The survey also gives you insight into how you are doing overall and across several customer focused areas. An NPS survey helps you proactively address and change areas that need improvement, as well as identify areas in which you are excelling and will want to use to your advantage going forward.

However, referrals usually happen because a customer was asked for a referral. Engaging customers in a more formal advocate role can turn one-off referrals into more active recurring engagements.

## 3 Fundamental Ways to Create Advocates

### 1. CULTIVATE COMMUNICATION AND TRUST

According to a Forrester Buyer Insight Study, only 13% of people believe that a salesperson can understand their distinct issues and needs. So how does one cultivate enough trust to flip potentially wary customers to advocates? A foundational best practice to start with is to create one-to-one marketing, personalized correspondence and targeted efforts based on a customer's profile. This is an excellent way to highlight your company's efforts to understand their unique requirements. To reduce friction that can breed detractors, ensure that each point along the customer's journey is part of a seamless flow. It's essential that everyone on your team has the same information and resources to share with customers. Transactions and conversations should leave the customer confident that you value their time, commitment and concerns, and that members of your staff are confident and knowledgeable.

Another way to appeal to customers is offering convenient ways to reach you as quickly as possible. If a customer tries to contact your business on numerous channels but doesn't hear back for several days, this can lead to distrust and frustration. Following up with customers and leads is vital, considering that 30-50% of sales go to the vendor that responds first with quality information.

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Companies that provide an emotional connection with customers outperform the sales growth of their competitors by 85%, while 49% of customers will leave if they feel unappreciated.

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Outstanding customer communication creates a vital connection with your customers, which is a foundation for advocacy.



## 2. BECOME SOCIAL SAVVY

Social media is an excellent and easy way for customers to advocate for your business, so it is important to have properly managed social media sites. Social media should be used in two ways to keep customers active, loyal and advocating for your organization: a sales strategy, since 78% of salespeople using social media outsell their peers, and a way to give customers a glimpse into your company.

Creating a strong social media presence starts with an engaging content calendar and social media strategy. If you are not sure where to start, there are excellent resources to help you get started. As you build out your strategy, share a good mix of pieces about your company or product/offering as well as content on industry news, trends, thought leadership and other industry think pieces. This way you are expanding your audience exposure by promoting other important industry content with which people can interact and engage.

Personal engagement with your social strategy is essential. A rule of thumb is to not just post content and leave. Interact with your audience, compliment them, ask them questions and answer their inquiries in a timely manner. If it feels like you are establishing a grounded and lasting relationship, that's because you are.

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## 3. RECOGNIZE AND REWARD LOYALTY

Rewarding your customers for their loyalty doesn't have to be reserved for B2C. While you probably won't be offering a free ice cream cone for their tenth visit, there are other ways you can acknowledge their business and any business they send your way.

Developing a customer onboarding program can be a crucial way to help customers feel valued and confident in their relationship with your company. If a customer does not see your value in the first week, 75% will drop off. A customer's journey should start with the first time they contact you, not when they make their first purchase from your company.

Other ways to reward customers is by featuring them in your content. Testimonials, case studies, social posts and more are great ways to give exposure to both yourself and your customer. Gathering customer quotes as you work with customers makes them feel valued and gives you vital and authentic testimony to the value of your product or service offering.

Finally, perks, like special discounts or exclusive first sneak peeks at new items, can help elevate a customer to think like an advocate. Offering a reward increases referral likelihood, but luckily, according to the American Marketing Association, the size of the reward does not appear to matter to most customers. In other words, it's the thought that counts. Leave your customer remembering that yours was the company that thought about them as a person and not as a number.

## Transforming Through Your Customer Journey

Reshaping and rethinking the way your customers experience your business will not only cultivate stronger relationships between your company and your customers, it will also help motivate current customers to active engagement and advocacy of your brand. Authentic and genuine customer recommendations and engagement are a strong indicator of how your business is delivering value to its intended audience. By using these steps as a jumping off point for remapping your customer experience journey, your organization will be better equipped to transform B2B customers into advocates.

