



ITA GROUP EBOOK

Brand Advocacy and the Emotionally Connected Customer

*How Authentic, Lasting Emotional Connections
Create Powerful Brand Advocates*

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The New Loyalty Landscape

Why Product and Service Satisfaction Isn't Enough Anymore

As society becomes increasingly intertwined with technology, access to information grows. This gives customers more choices—and more power—than ever before. Now they can easily shop around, compare brands and product details, and consider peer reviews before making a purchasing decision.

But increased transparency also makes loyalty a moving target. Corporate distrust leads buyers to spread their spending around and even switch careers with ever-greater frequency.

That's why product and service satisfaction alone are no longer enough. To earn the trust of today's customers, brands must "get" them on a personal level.

The good news is, once it does, you get much more than traditional loyalty—you get passionate, engaged advocates of your business.





Drinking from a firehose leaves customers thirsty.

There's a wealth of information at their fingertips, but what customers crave are real, human connections. Social media partially feeds that need, and it's where many customers turn for recommendations and advice when researching a potential purchase. By joining the social conversation and engaging directly with customers, brands have the power to shape perception and showcase the real people behind their products and services.

The Era of the Emotionally Connected Customer

You're Competing for Their Attention—And Their Affection

It's true that connecting with customers on an emotional level isn't as simple as flipping a switch. You have to make a focused effort to engage them in meaningful ways. You have to show them you're a brand they can trust and grow with.

But, most importantly, you need to start doing it now.

If the competition is quicker to demonstrate its commitment to a relationship with your customers, you'll have a tough time winning them back.



Meaningful Encounters and the Multiplier Effect

Though it may take more effort to maintain a personal connection with customers, the bottom-line benefits are more than worth the investment.



**IT COSTS
4–6X AS MUCH**
to acquire a new customer
as it does to retain
existing customers.



Connecting with
customers offers
3X THE RETURN
of just satisfying them.



Loyal customers
SPEND 10x MORE
with your business
than new ones.



Don't wait to win them over.

Remember, customers *want* to connect. So when it comes to customer outreach, the first to engage has a distinct advantage. With the connection established, the focus can be on personalizing the experience and growing the relationship. Second place has a lot more to prove.

The Power of Brand Advocacy

Everyone Wins

The evolution of customer loyalty has led to the rise of customer advocacy. Advocates are those who go beyond traditional loyalty to become ardent brand ambassadors.

Besides staying with a brand longer and buying more products, advocates also extend your reach through word-of-mouth promotion, social sharing and referrals. This translates to greater market share and profitability while lowering cost to serve.

The best part is, everyone wins. Your customers get their emotional needs fulfilled, and you get satisfied, engaged advocates who are innately driven to spread the word about your brand.



**B2B brand advocacy
leaders grow**

4–8%

**above their
market's growth.**



Share the same voice.

Every brand interaction has the potential to reinforce or refute your customers' belief that you "get" them. If the rest of your organization isn't on the same page, you could be working against yourself. Socialize the importance of customer outreach to ensure the shift toward this new way of thinking—and acting—is company-wide. Consistency breeds credibility in a big way.

Building Trust to Inspire Action

Transform Your Customer Base Into a Marketing Machine

Customers expect to be treated as transactions, so they're delighted when you acknowledge them as complex beings with unique needs and desires. Personalizing the impersonal goes a long way toward building brand attachment, and brand attachment breeds advocacy—which can have an exponential impact.

For example, a study by Forrester Research revealed that 92% of consumers trust brand advocates, whereas only 20% trust online ads. This means every emotional connection you make with a customer has a ripple effect that extends to nearly their entire network. So not only are advocates more likely to recommend your brand; their friends and family are also more likely to embrace the recommendation.

Brand Advocacy Leaders Are:

- > On-trend
- > Relevant
- > Inspiring
- > Innovative
- > Community-centric
- > Engaging
- > Credible

Increased Customer Advocacy Translates To:



Less Price Sensitivity



More Recommendations



A Louder Voice

Brands That Click With Customers



The sharing-economy icon inspired locals to open their homes to travelers looking for a more personal way to experience new destinations. Based on principles of mutual trust and respect, Airbnb struck an emotional chord with customers, growing from a \$100-million venture to \$31 billion in just 6 years.



Starbucks represents more than a caffeine break for most customers. By creating a sense of community in its cafés, it has become a “third place” between home and work for many. Everything, from its baristas’ name games to curated music selections, is designed to deepen its connection with customers.



The socially responsible retailer connects with like-minded customers by supporting causes they care about. Its activist spirit is reflected in every aspect of the organization, from supply-chain logistics to fair wages. But it’s the organization’s commitment to transparency that resonates most strongly with customers.



They can tell if you're faking it.

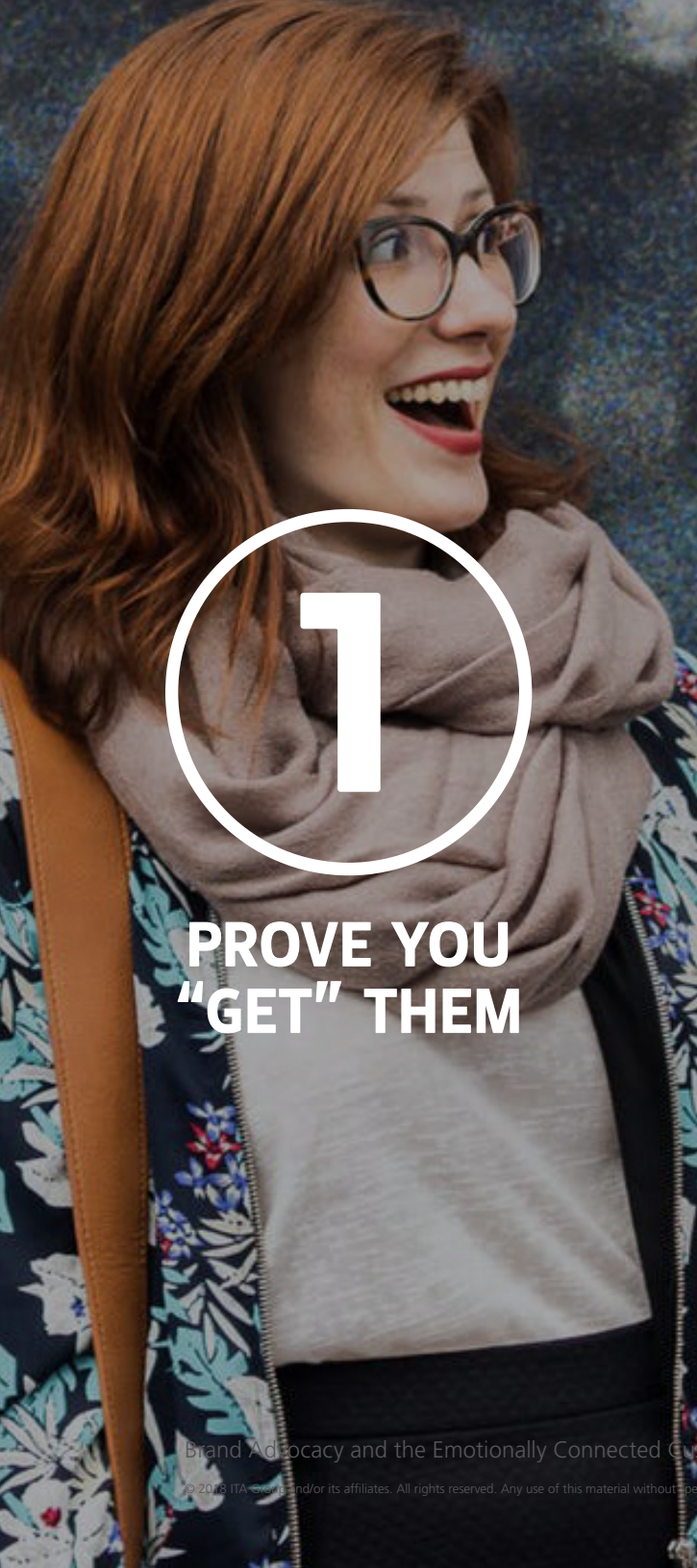
And if they doubt you're sincere, they'll dump you. Prioritize mutual trust and respect to create genuine connections—and focus on the experience, not the transaction. Great brands take their customer relationships further, incorporating traditions, practices and rituals that strengthen affinity and make the brand an integral part of customers' lives.

Translated: When you demonstrate willingness to fulfill their needs, they'll reward you with fierce loyalty.

How to Forge an Emotional Connection With Customers

4 Ways to Make Them Care About Your Brand





1

PROVE YOU "GET" THEM

That starts with knowing what motivates them. Maybe your customers want to stand out from the crowd, or maybe they just want to feel good about their future. Motivations change depending on the industry, brand, touch point and the customer's current position in the buying journey.

Once you've determined what makes your target audience tick, present a clear point of view that will attract those who are a strong fit for your brand. Be genuine at all times, and make sure your messaging and interactions consistently align with your brand's value proposition.

**You might be surprised by your customers' motivations.
Rely on data insights and analytics rather than blindly guessing.**



Emotionally connected
customers are

**2x as
valuable**

as highly satisfied
customers.



2

RALLY YOUR TRIBE

A strong community is a well-connected community—its members are connected to each other and share common goals and ideologies. As Seth Godin explains in his book “Tribes,” membership should be voluntary, dynamic, partisan and noisy. Mutual respect is essential.

Make it easy for your community to connect by giving them unique ways to communicate with you and each other. You can do so through online forums, polls and apps, but also consider organizing live gatherings and other experiential events. Proximity helps strengthen your tribe’s bonds.

Continuously engaging your brand community helps strengthen their sense of brand ownership. Make sure they know you hear them and respect what they have to say—and they’ll reciprocate.



9 out of 10
online customers say they
trust recommendations
from friends and family
members more than any
type of advertising.



3

ENCOURAGE EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY

Who knows your brand better than your own employees? Not only are they interacting with it on a daily basis, but they also see what you've got planned before the public does. Their exclusive access helps generate excitement within your organization, and it empowers employees to be brand advocates in their own right.

More than half of your employees are already either employee advocates or have significant potential to become one. Maximize their impact by creating opportunities for them to spread advocacy to customers as well.

Use incentives and structured change management to transform your internal culture and encourage employees to live your brand message. It not only helps establish a consistent brand voice, but also improves your credibility.



52%

of people see employees as "credible" or "very credible" sources of information about a business, according to Edelman.



4

MAKE IT IMMERSIVE

The human-to-human aspect of experiential marketing helps cut through the clutter that defines the digital age. Though live experiences require more resources and their impact can be tough to measure, there's no denying the fact that they bring people together. This alone is valuable. Creating a space where your tribe can network and connect helps establish trust and strengthens their bond with the brand.

Plus, live events offer opportunity for a two-way dialogue. In this way, attendees contribute to the brand story, deepening their emotional connection while offering valuable insight into what motivates them.

Design creative spaces that attract and delight attendees, then encourage brand interaction and sharing of experiences socially.



74%

of customers have a better opinion about a brand after attending an experiential marketing event.



Now more than ever, brands have the power to create authentic, lasting emotional connections. Show people why they should connect with you.

Connect with customers in more meaningful ways.

Contact us today to learn how.

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