

FROM CUSTOMER TO CHAMPION: THE BRAND ADVOCACY CONTINUUM

Mark Pearson, Vice President Loyalty, Customer Engagement Group,
BI WORLDWIDE



Amplification in the Customer Lifecycle

The amplification stage is focused on social engagement and advocacy. Ideally, customers who reach this stage are loyal from both transactional and relational perspectives. They have completed the development stage, by becoming regular and profitable customers, as well as the retention phase, by establishing an emotional connection with your brand. Now it's time to engage these loyal customers in a social dialogue about their experiences with your brand. The ultimate goal in this stage is to elevate loyal customers into advocates who will share, contribute, evangelize, defend and refer on behalf of your brand.

While social engagement is particularly important to the amplification stage, it can be effective at all stages and should be a strategic component of your overall lifecycle marketing strategy.

Amplification Behaviors

These behaviors generally fall into three categories: affinity, collaboration and advocacy.

Affinity focuses on getting loyal customers to engage socially with each other and with consumers who may be interested in the brand, product or service. Specific behaviors include the full spectrum of social media activity — like, follow, pin, tweet, connect, vote, poll, rate, post and review — that occurs within social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube. But don't limit yourself to open communities like these. When it comes to loyalty and lifecycle marketing, social engagement via closed communities (often within the loyalty program website) can be particularly effective. A closed community offers several compelling advantages:

- **Increased relevance, deeper engagement and a more open dialogue**
- **Easier to moderate and control**
- **Isolated from your competition**
- **Traceable, measureable and actionable data and information**

collaboration
advocacy

Collaboration focuses on evolving loyal customer social engagement from passive to more active activities and behaviors. This includes leveraging loyal customers as a resource multiplier for marketing and PR via crowd-sourcing or user-generated content.

Advocacy is the ultimate goal of lifecycle marketing. This includes leveraging loyal customers for referrals to drive acquisition and close the loop on the customer lifecycle. However, advocacy is so much more than just referrals. Specific advocacy behaviors include:

- **Viral Engagement – Share/Forward**
- **Earned Media – Advocate Content**
- **Endorsement & Testimonial**
- **Referral**
- **Evangelizing & Defending**

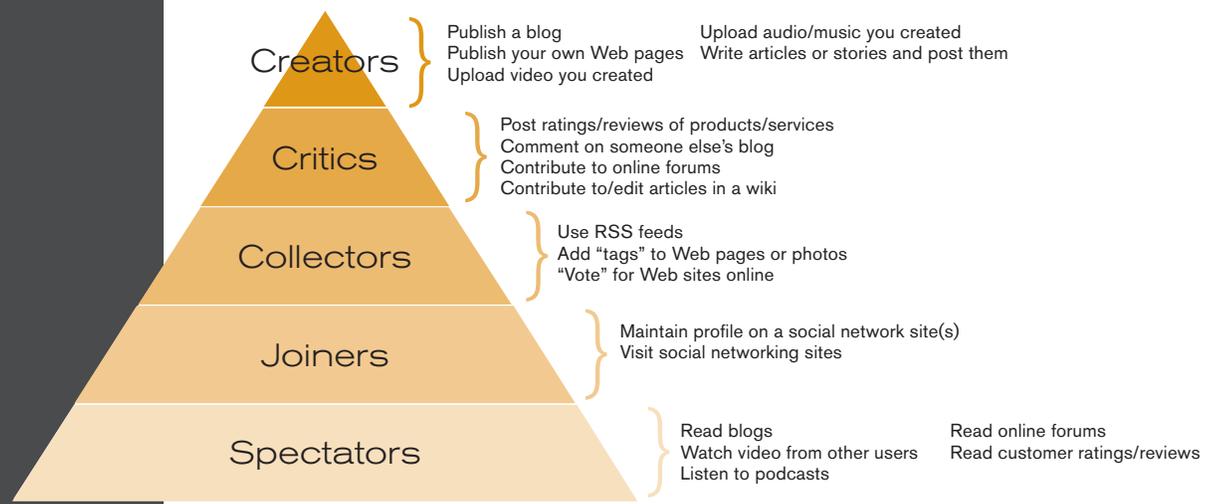
The Road to Advocacy

The Progression

Advocacy is the end game — the result of successful customer progression across the lifecycle. Creating advocates requires nurturing, discipline and patience as customers evolve from passive to active social engagement. Here are some guidelines for effective advocacy development and marketing:

- Set **realistic expectations** with respect to the progressive nature of advocacy — don't ask for too much, too early. Inviting new customers to be advocates prematurely can damage the relationship and stall further progression.
- Support your advocacy development with **customer-centric marketing communications**. Earn the time and attention of your audience by being relevant and focused. Ensure a balanced, fair relationship through appropriate motivators and compelling rewards.
- Increase the degree of advocacy by designing programs that progress from lower-effort to higher-effort activities and behaviors. For example, if you want to maximize earned media, provide customers with a **structured framework** where they can build and expand their content. Start by asking for feedback and ratings; then solicit comments and posts; and finally request testimonials and endorsements.
- Optimize marketing resource allocation by ensuring that **measurement and KPIs** consider both quality and quantity.

set realistic expectations
customer-centric marketing communications
a structured framework
measurement and KPIs



*Source: The Impact of Emerging Technology On Consumer Behavior and Marketing Strategy - Forrester

The Continuum

It's also important to acknowledge that advocacy is a continuum. Ideally, all customers would become advocates. Realistically, only a small percentage of customers reach the highest level of advocacy in most cases. However, any degree of evolution across the lifecycle is positive regardless of how far the customer ultimately progresses. As a result, if you respect and appreciate advocacy at any level, you can learn how to leverage the different advocate types and realize significant benefits. On the other hand, if you push customers beyond their limit, you risk damaging the relationship.

As a starting point, be realistic about the degree of advocacy you can expect in your unique situation (industry, product or service, competitive environment, etc.). While the degree of advocacy can definitely be influenced by marketing and development efforts, some factors are beyond your control. For example, some products, services and industries garner more innate brand affinity than others. Similarly, some competitive environments are more conducive to advocacy than others.

Ignoring the progressive nature of advocacy — or failing to acknowledge the advocate continuum — reduces program participation/response rates and ultimately erodes ROI. More importantly, it can damage or put the entire customer relationship at risk. On the other hand, taking the time to develop advocacy and leverage the various advocate types will yield numerous significant benefits. Most notably, you can deepen relationships with loyal customers and create relationships with new ones, bringing the customer lifecycle full circle, back to acquisition.

To learn more about BIWORLDWIDE and how we can help engage your customers in every stage of the lifecycle, visit: BIWORLDWIDE.com or email info@BIWORLDWIDE.com.

