



HOW TO CONVERT **CUSTOMERS** INTO ADVOCATES



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SOFFRONT



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HELLO THERE!



Preface

Competition for business in today's ultra-connected, global world is fierce. Each day, fresh ideas are formed and new companies are launched, and yet – 90% of startups fail.

Needless to say (or you wouldn't be here), you want to be in the 10% that succeed. One way to do that is to focus on more than just gaining customers. Instead, you need to identify ways to turn some of those customers into brand advocates.

HOW TO CONVERT CUSTOMERS INTO ADVOCATES



17 Great Ways to Convert Customers to Advocates

01. Find Your Advocates

Whatever you do – and no matter how hard you try – you won't be able to turn every single customer into an advocate. Some customers will arrive, make a single purchase, and leave. Some will become regular customers, but do little else to benefit your brand. And some – a handful, in fact – have the potential to become brand advocates.

Note the word “potential.” Customers don't become advocates without reason. They have to identify with and feel affiliated with your brand.

The rest of this post contains a mixture of tactics that will help you turn that handful of potential brand advocates into real, active advocates. Some of these tactics should be employed with every customer (see below for “offer awesome customer service”), while some might only be applicable to customers who you believe have the potential to become advocates.

This means that your first step is sorting your potential advocates from your average customers. Thankfully, there's a way you can do this with one quick question:

“On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to recommend us to your friends, family, or colleagues?”

The customers who answer a 9 or 10 are potential brand advocates – where possible, plow extra resources into building your relationships with these people (but not, of course, at the detriment of other customers).

02. Offer Awesome Customer Service

This one might seem obvious but, according to stats from CreditDonkey, 35.9% of customers at big businesses and 5.7% of customers at small businesses are disappointed with the service they receive, while many, many more only rate the service as adequate. Clearly, something's not quite right.

Adequate experiences don't stand out. The customer might not complain about you, but chances are, they won't be singing your praises, either. If you want to turn your customers into brand advocates, you can't just be meeting their expectations – you need to go above and beyond and exceed them.

03. Ask for Feedback

Asking customers for feedback is one of, if not the best way to gain insights into your business. After all, your customers are the end users of your product or service, so who better to tell you what you're getting right and where you're going wrong?

What's more, asking customers for feedback shows that you actually give a crap about what they think and intend to take action to improve what you offer them an important step in creating brand advocates.

In fact, research by Dr. Paul Dholakia and Dr. Vicki Morwitz found that simply asking customers for feedback is enough to encourage repeat business whether or not the customer actually answers any questions.

04. Remember Their Name

Many of us may not realize it, but we love to hear our own name. It affirms our worth and makes us feel wanted.

Simply using a customer's name isn't enough to turn them into a brand advocate, but it will help. It makes the customer feel like an individual, not a number, and it demonstrates that you care – both about the service you're offering them and about them as a person.

To help turn customers into advocates, address them by name whether you're talking to them over the phone, in an email, or in person. However, don't go overboard. Using somebody's name more often than necessary will often come across as creepy and desperate. Be natural.

05. Offer a Loyalty Program

It doesn't take a genius to figure out why loyalty programs work – if repeat business will earn the customer a bonus or reward, it makes sense to return to the same company instead of switching to a competitor. Simple.

Well, sort of.

Just because a customer joins a loyalty scheme doesn't necessarily mean they'll use it. The 2015 Colloquy Customer Loyalty Census found that although the average American household has memberships with 29 loyalty programs, they only actively use 12 of them.

Thankfully, there are steps you can take to increase the odds that your customers are actually loyal to your loyalty plan.

Keep it simple. If your loyalty program is points-based, make the conversions as simple as possible. Ideally, offer a straight points to cash conversion. This might mean, for example, offering 1 point for every dollar spent, and allocating each point a cash value of 1 cent. This works well in a shop environment where customers are likely to make frequent purchases of varying value.

Alternatively, offer a stamp system that awards the customer one stamp for each purchase. After they've collected a certain number of stamps, they get a reward. This kind of scheme suits companies that provide products or services of a relatively stable value (I'm thinking hair salons, coffee shops, etc.).

Charge a fee. Yes, I know how this sounds... Why would a customer pay a fee for the privilege of becoming a repeat customer? It sounds ridiculous.

But it works.

Take Amazon Prime. Customers pay a fee in return for special privileges – they enjoy the benefit of “free” super-quick delivery, while Amazon benefits from the increased customer loyalty that comes with paying to “commit” to a brand.

06. Supercharge Your Loyalty Program With Artificial Advancement

Stamps are a popular form of loyalty scheme. As I mentioned above, the premise is very simple: customers are awarded a stamp for each qualifying purchase. When they gain a certain number of stamps, they earn a reward of some sort or another.

Most of the time, stamp cards will be distributed looking something like this: However, what if I told you there was a way you could double the number of customers that would actually complete your loyalty cards?

A study from Nunes and Dreze managed to do exactly this.

They handed out two loyalty cards. The first had 8 slots, all of which had to be stamped before the customer would be able to earn their freebie.

You might expect the completion rate on the two cards to be very similar; both cards required 8 stamps in order to reach completion, after all. But you'd be wrong. The blank card resulted in a completion rate of 19%, while the card with two stamps already completed saw a completion rate of 34%.

Why? Because the second card offers a head start, albeit a false one. Customers feel like they're already part way to receiving their reward, so they're more likely to take the steps needed to gain it. Check out the "further reading" link below to find out more about this test and how artificial advancement works.

07. Offer a Referral Program

A successful referral scheme can help you achieve two key goals:

- Acquiring new customers
- Turning your existing customers into brand advocates

The premise is pretty simple: by offering your existing customers an incentive for sending a new customer your way, you encourage them to talk favorably about you to their friends and family.

What's more, studies have found that a referred customer is even more valuable than a customer acquired by other means. A study by Christophe Van den Bulte found that referred customers had higher profit margins, stayed longer, and had an overall higher customer lifetime value (LTV).

Here are a few quick tips for running a successful referral scheme

- Don't offer a referral right away – ensure each customer is given enough time to get fully acquainted with the features and benefits of your product or service before encouraging them to make a referral.
- Run a scheme that benefits both the referrer and the referee. This gives your existing customers more reason – and more confidence – to refer you to their friends and family.

- Make sure to say thank you (both to the referrer and the referee) every time a successful referral is completed. This is important both for nurturing a potential brand advocate and, consequently, boosting the odds of the referrer referring again.

08. Offer a Personalized Service

Personalized service helps to make your customers feel like VIPs. That feeling of being “special” really butters up customers’ egos and makes them want to come back for more.

Often, it’s the little things that make the difference: when a restaurant happily allows you to modify a dish to suit your tastes, or a bartender remembers your drink order.

Most products or services can be personalized to a degree. The only issue is that diversifying what you offer will come at a cost. Reduce this by limiting the level of personalization you offer and keeping things simple. Overcomplicate matters, and you’re more likely to drive customers away than turn them into brand advocates.

09. Surprise Them

One of the most effective means of making your customers happy (and turning them into brand advocates) is to surprise them.

Just receiving a freebie is great, but when it’s a complete surprise? Even better.

Think about the last time your partner or a family member gave you a gift on your birthday. It was nice, but you probably saw it coming – and you probably weren’t that excited about receiving it.

Now, think about a time someone just gave you a gift, completely out of the blue. Much more exciting, wasn’t it? And I’d guess that you felt far more grateful for it – simply because you had no expectation that it was coming.

The same principle applies in any situation, including business. Give your customers a (nice) surprise and they’re going to want to talk about that surprise and, more importantly, its sender.

This could entail many things, but a couple of uber-effective tactics that come to mind are: Upgrading a customer for free (if you offer SaaS this could mean bumping a customer up to a better package, or on an ecommerce site, could mean upgrading them to next-day- delivery).

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Literally sending your customer a surprise gift. I once had a friend rave to me about their phone provider because they had sent them a goodie basket in the mail. All it took to turn this person into a brand advocate was a bag of sweets (and a small one at that).

Send them a thank you note (more on this shortly...).

10. Give Out Free T-Shirts

T-shirts are an awesome way to promote your brand. In fact, it was one of Single Grain's key marketing tactics, pretty much since the company's launch.

If you're going to adopt this tactic yourself, start by ensuring you, and your staff, wear the t-shirts as much as possible. It's important to practice what you preach. Then, send the tees out to customers. This will:

11. Surprise them (which, as outlined above, offers its own benefits).

Improve brand awareness, simply by increasing the number of people that see your brand name and logo, and become familiar with it. And most importantly:

Help turn customers into brand advocates by increasing the exposure and affiliation they have with your company. It sounds simple, but the strategy was so successful that it helped me drive more than \$500k in revenue for Single Grain during my time as the company's owner.

12. Under-Promise and Over-Deliver

Have you ever told someone you'd do something for them, knowing full well that you'd struggle to deliver on your word (and then, in the end, let them down)? I know I have. It's natural – it's a part of wanting to please people. We don't want to disappoint – quite the opposite – which, of course, is our downfall.

Thankfully, the solution to this dilemma is pretty simple. We just have to under-promise and over-deliver.

Of course, you might be thinking "under-promising sounds like an awful way to run a business". I get it – it doesn't sound great. But it's not like you tell your customers what you're doing. And it's not like under-promising means promising a third-rate service.

I'm not saying, for example, that if you run an ecommerce company, you should offer a 1-month delivery window and then get your customers' orders to them the very next day.

I simply mean that you should promise on what you know you can deliver, without fail, and then, when possible, you should over-deliver on that promise.

It's as much about ensuring you never let your customers down as it is about surprising them with more than they bargained for.

13. Send Thank You Notes

Thank you notes are a fantastic, and very personal, way to surprise your customers. They show you care about their business – that they aren't simply a number and, likewise, that you aren't simply a faceless, money-hungry corporation.

HEX is one example of a very cool company that attributes a lot of their success to the handwritten notes they deliver with all purchases.

These notes are personalized – not just with the customer's name, but with a reference to their purchase, too. Each note is also written on a quality piece of "HEX" branded paper, a tactic that helps reinforce the notion that this is a quality purchase from a quality brand.

14. SKeep Your Customers in the Loop

Ordered a Domino's pizza recently? If so, you probably noticed their pizza tracker – a feature that tells you exactly what's happening with your order at that moment in time.

Even if you're more "mom and pop" than multi-national pizza chain, you've got to admit that this is a nifty little feature that creates a pretty effective reason-to-buy.

This principle can apply to every business – whatever type of company you run or however you implement the idea. Ecommerce companies can use a parcel tracking system. SaaS companies can talk to their customers about how to make better use of the service. Client-facing companies can ensure they're sending frequent, detailed reports, that are easy to understand.

By communicating with your customers, you're not only putting their mind at ease – you're reminding them what you're doing for them. This is especially important in client-facing companies, where, if you don't tell your clients what you're doing, they may well assume you're doing nothing at all.

15. Remember Special Occasions

Sending your customers a card or gift at Christmas or on their birthday shows you care and helps to cement their relationship with your brand.

If you work very closely with your customers, this tactic has even more potential. The better you know your customers, the more special occasions that you can potentially celebrate. How about anniversaries? Mother's Day or Father's Day?

This doesn't have to cost the world either – an ecard is better than no card, although a handwritten card and/or a gift will, without a doubt, resonate more strongly with your customers. Just think about the number of companies that send you an ecard on your birthday versus a card in the mail. Which gets more of your attention?

The key is to weigh the costs of recognizing a special occasion against the value of the customer. If you work closely with a small pool of clients, it makes sense to nurture those relationships by sending a card and a gift.

If you have thousands of customers, an ecard may be more appropriate. But if you can spare the funds to cover the cost of a real card, then do it. There are plenty of services that can help save you the legwork.

16. Be Up-Front and Honest With Your Customers

Nobody is perfect. No person. No business. Nobody. Customers know this. They understand that occasionally, every company will mess up. Of course, some customers will take a poor experience more to heart than others.

But most customers are pretty rational and understanding, and if, when something goes wrong (because despite all your best efforts, at some point, something will go wrong), you don't try to hide behind excuses and are simply up-front and honest with them, you'll have the chance to...

- Gain their trust
- Earn their respect, and potentially
- Turn them into a brand advocate.

15. Ask For (and Use) Customer Testimonials

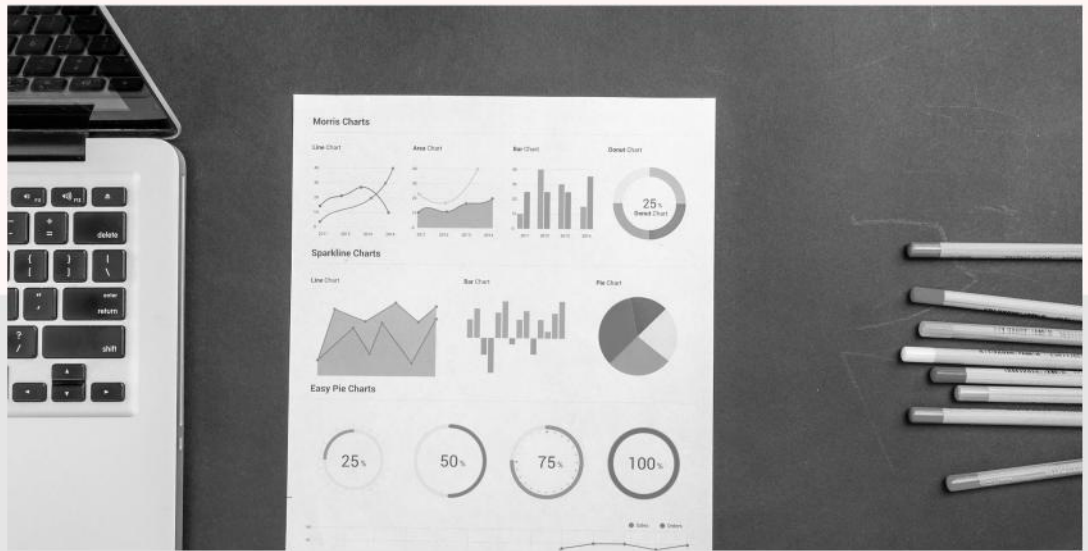
I love user-generated content, and customer testimonials are an excellent example of leveraging it to great effect. Encouraging your customers to talk about you (hopefully, positively!) and then displaying that content on your site achieves four things:

- Provides free content that you can use on your site
- Provides free content that acts as social proof and encourages other prospects to convert
- Validates the credibility of your existing testimonials (because if you're asking a customer for a testimonial, it makes sense that your other testimonials are real, too)
- Helps to turn the customer that wrote the testimonial into a brand advocate

A survey from Zendesk found that 90% of consumers were positively swayed by online reviews (testimonials), but that's not to say that any testimonial will have the desired effect.

Testimonials shouldn't just praise the product. "Awesome product, highly recommended" doesn't tell us much, nor is it very persuasive.

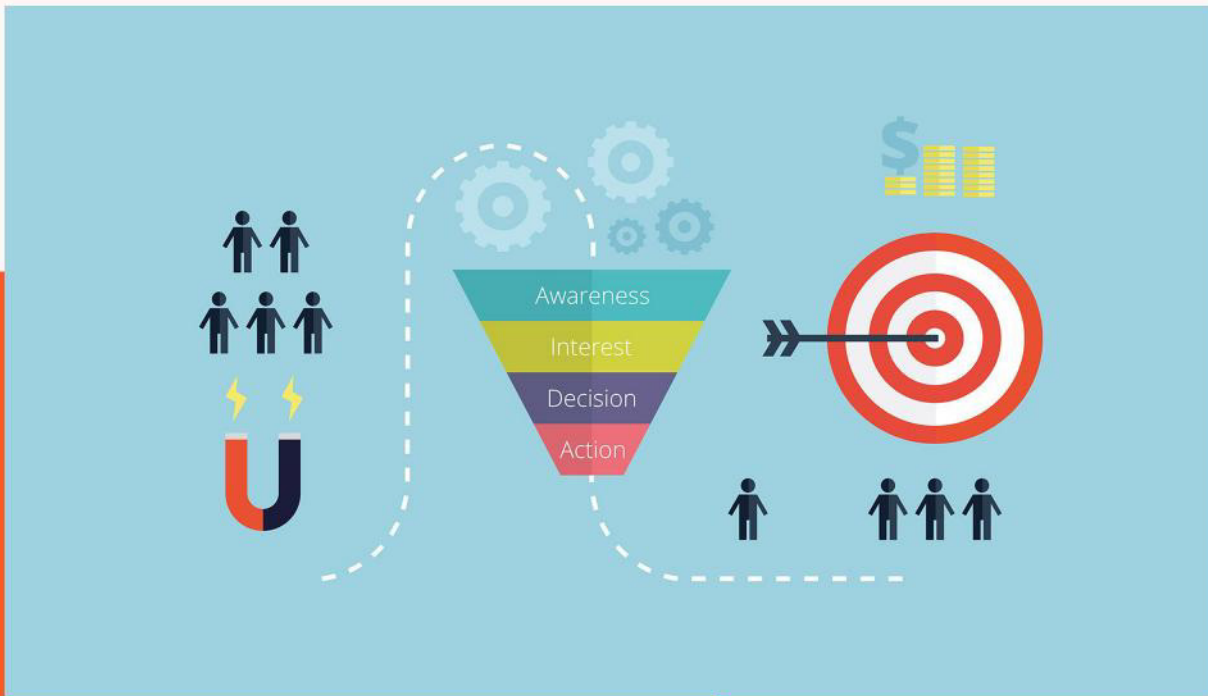
FINAL VERDICT!



Conclusion

I hope I was able to describe some of the aspects for turning customers into brand advocates. In the end, it is your good behavior and the percentage of value you are investing on a customer to make him loyal that matters.

ABOUT SOFFRONT CORPORATION



CEO of Soffront Corporation

Soffront was started by Manu Das in 1992 to introduce Customer Management or CRM Software when CRM was unknown to most businesses. When Manu introduced the Software at a conference in San Jose California, most people did not see a need. Today, CRM is an essential tool for all businesses, large and small.

Soffront offers most customizable cloud and on-premise CRM and Marketing Automation Software to small and large businesses in countries across the globe. Soffront offers complete training and implementation services. Soffront also offers Digital Marketing, Website Development and Lead Conversion Services. Using the US and APAC offices, Soffront provides round the clock support and services to it's customers.



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