

6 Ways to Create a “Cheerleading Squad”

Referrals have always been a key to business success, but the Internet, which is the greatest forum for word of mouth ever invented, ups the need to get your fans talking about you. Because online word-of-mouth is a powerful sales tool: 62 percent of consumers have checked out a product posted by one of their friends on Facebook, according to Sociable Labs' Social Impact Consumer Study.^[1]

Here are five ways you can turn your customers into cheerleaders and get them to help spread the word and generate sales or leads for you.

1. Find Out Who Your Fans Are

There are both simple and sophisticated ways to track people who are already interested in you. Consider Pinterest, a [pinboard-style](#), [photo-sharing](#) website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, and hobbies.

“You can find out [who your fans are] by watching individual email notifications about who has repinned or commented on your pins,” says Danny Maloney, CEO and co-founder of PinLeague, an analytics company. As you get more serious, you might use an analytics tool that automatically shows who’s pinning from your site, your top repinners over time, and your most influential followers.

“Don’t worry, many of the best such tools are free,” Maloney says.



2. Provide Amazing Customer Service

Cheers have to be earned and that starts with meeting and exceeding customer expectations. “This means answering the phone within three rings, expressing genuine interest in your customer, under-promising and over-delivering,” says Steve Curtin, author of *Delight Your Customers: 7 Simple Ways to Raise Your Customer Service from Ordinary to Extraordinary*.

Some companies assume it’s difficult to provide the hands-on touch when they do business online. However, an online retailer of handcrafted travel bags encloses a small, rose-scented sachet in every jewelry and lingerie bag sold, along with a handwritten thank-you note. Consider ways you can provide service that both surprises and delights—the word will spread fast.

3. Play Games with People

Forums and blogs give you the opportunity to create communities that your customers can participate in. Remember that social media marketing is, well, social. So even while you provide useful information about your product or service, find ways to make the experience fun, which is a sure way to develop fans.

“Use the concept of [gamification](#) to motivate customers to post content and help others with tailored advice and product recommendations,” says Joe Cothrel, chief community officer of Lithium, a social customer experience company. There are lots of ways you can do this. For example, hold a contest on a social media site like Facebook, Instagram, or Pinterest asking customers to show off their favorite product of yours in some way.

4. Honor Your Customers

“Invite those advocates to share their customer experience with you directly via email as well as on your social media channels,” says Jason Myers, spokesperson for The Alternative Board (TAB), a small business coaching firm. “When they do this, repackage their quote, along with a photo, if applicable, and publish this as a testimonial post tagging the customer’s social media accounts once you have their permission to do so. Follow up with them to let them know you valued their input so much that you published their endorsement. They now feel invested in your company as a representative.”

TAB takes this a step further and adds the best customer accounts to a [Business Case Studies](#) page on its homepage. “We’ve found that most people are so honored to be included in such a forum that they’re very likely to continue spreading the word by linking back to the page they’re quoted on in their own blogs and social media posts for their friends and associates to witness,” he adds. “The customers get their 15 minutes of fame, and you continue to build your brand loyalty message with the only exchange being the investment of time and good faith.”

5. Listen to the Squeaky Wheels

Negative word of mouth is both a warning and an opportunity to improve your small business marketing. Consider this example from [The 2013 LoyaltyOne Social Media Transaction Impact Study](#)^[2]: A whiskey company received a tremendous rebuke in social media when it lowered the alcohol content of its products.

However, by swiftly reversing the decision, the company might have actually increased sales, because listening and responding to critics turned them into fans. An important thing is to understand the emotion of the responses. The study found some customers may say they are disappointed or confused, while others express anger and possibly threaten to leave (a “hot-negative” response). You should concentrate on the most vocal commentators in your social marketing, because they are the people who care most about your products.

6. Celebrate Good News

When you develop a cheerleading squad, give them a megaphone—in other words, spread word about the praise you are getting from fans. “When customers give you and your staff good feedback, share it,” Kevin M. Stirtz, author of *The Amazing Service Guy*.

“Have a party! Let all your staff know about it. Show your employees how important it is. Post it where people will see it. Send emails.” But realize that social media is a two-way street, so you should be doing some cheerleading yourself.

“Many companies misuse social media as a broadcast channel,” Maloney says. “Don’t just talk about yourself. Thank people who support you. Make the effort to track what they’re up to and share in their big news as their own businesses grow. Treat them like a friend, and they’ll become one.”