

CUSTOMER EVIDENCE 101

Driving Sales & Marketing through Customer Success

Wings^{4U}

01 Introduction

Who should read this

A range of roles can benefit from this ebook - particularly if you are responsible for informing colleagues of the methodology behind an effective Customer Evidence Program. If you work in customer advocacy, marketing, or sales, this ebook can be very useful in helping you communicate your solution and how it leads to positive change for those who use it. No matter what your role is, if you want a scalable, effective customer reference solution to drive sales in your department or organization, this ebook is for you.



02

The impact of customer evidence

In a world packed with content, it is essential that businesses find convincing ways to stand out from the crowd. This is particularly true in B2B industries - especially when it comes to having authentic content that resonates with potential buyers.

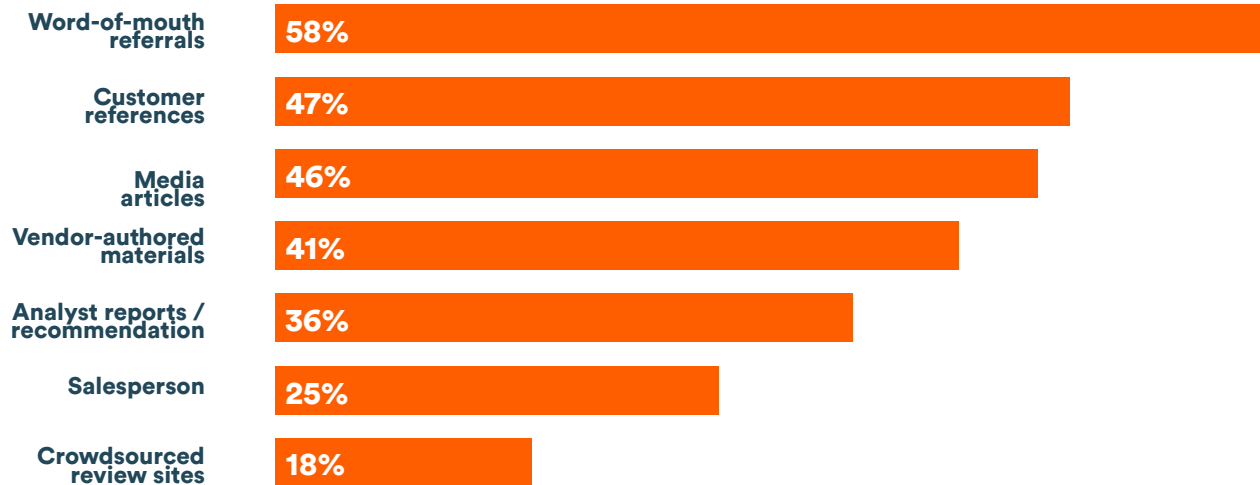
To overcome this challenge, businesses must keep in mind how B2B buyers make decisions. Today's consumers don't care what brands think and say about themselves. Global research indicated by Edelman's Trust Barometer* shows that consumers trust each other and view each other as viable sources for information far beyond employees, salespeople, or industry experts. This is further backed up by a 2016 study by Hubspot that found only 3% of people consider marketers trustworthy.** Since people value the opinions and testimonials of their peers who can attest to the effectiveness of your product or service, your happy customers can become your best salespeople.

Source:

*2017 Edelman Trust Barometer: www.edelman.com/trust2017/

**Hubspot - Salespeople perception problem: blog.hubspot.com/sales/salespeople-perception-problem

What **sources of information** do you rely on when making purchase decision for business software?



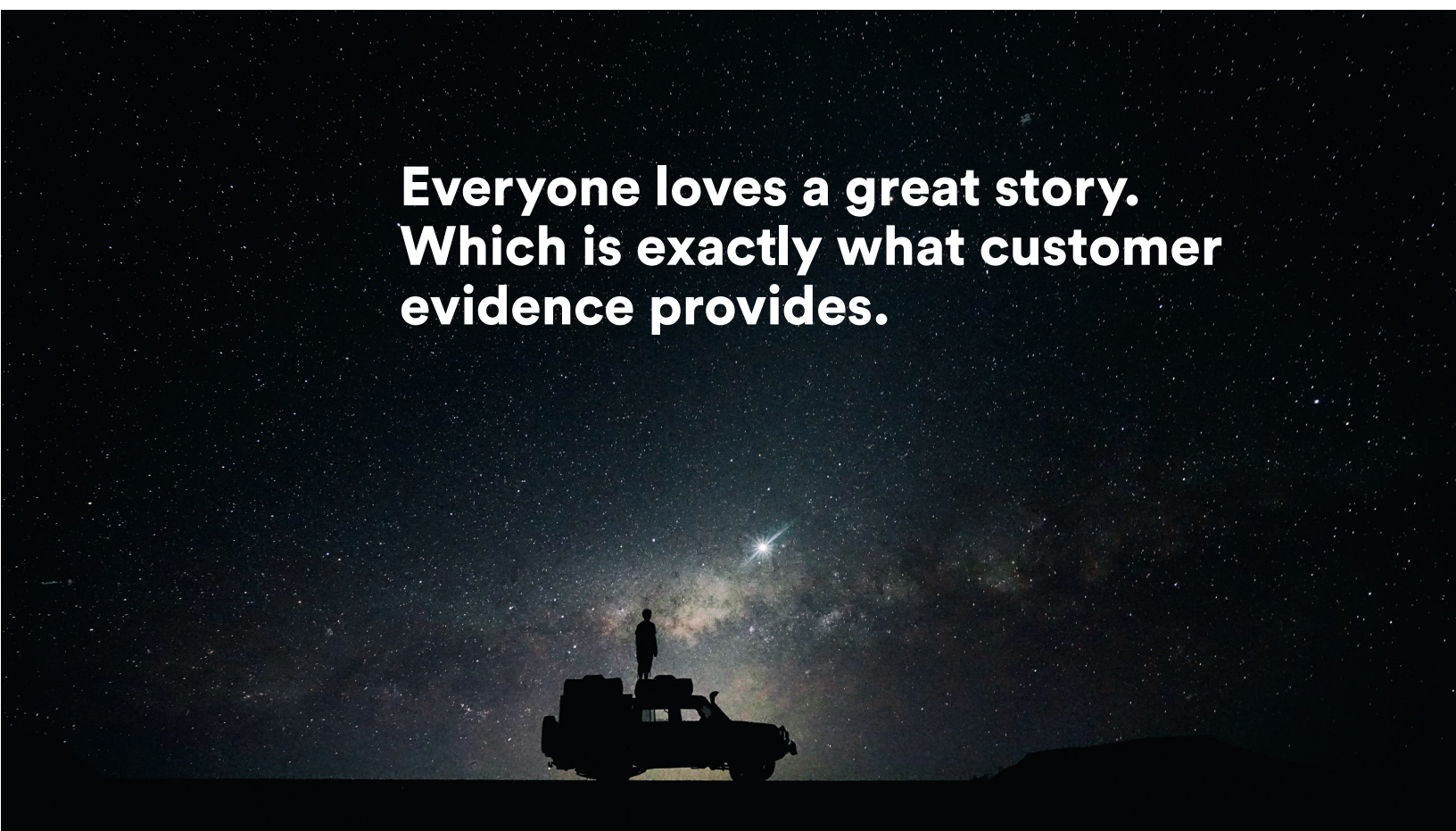
Source: Brian Halligan Presentation, INBOUND 2016

These findings have major implications for B2B brands wanting to connect and develop credibility with their prospective buyers - making it a long term tactic that all organizations can benefit from. By building a Customer Evidence Program (CEP), businesses can grow meaningful relationships and engage their most loyal customers to reach revenue goals.

Why does it work? Because it is versatile. Customers want to know before they even begin to speak to your sales team that your product or solution works. No matter where they may land in the sales cycle, your customer evidence asset demonstrates the value of your solution through the success of another.

And of course, everyone loves a great story; which is exactly what your customer evidence is - especially when it's told by someone that they know and trust. A Nielsen survey further backs this up, demonstrating that 92%* of buyers trust references and referrals from people they know - so why not give your best customers the tools they need to make it easy?

*Source: 2017, 17 Surprising Referral Marketing Statistics:
<https://www.referralsaasquatch.com/17-referral-marketing-statistics/>



**Everyone loves a great story.
Which is exactly what customer
evidence provides.**

03

What is a Customer Evidence Program?

The most important person selling your product or service is no longer you — it's your customer. Customer evidence is a positive story about a company's product or solution that can be shared by a happy customer and utilized for internal marketing and sales purposes.

These pieces help change the tone and conversation surrounding your organization by using your best customers to better engage new prospects at different stages in the buying process. Given that 70-90% of the buyer's journey is completed before even speaking with a salesperson, much of which comes from in the form of content - often from peers - the value of customer evidence should not be underestimated.* In order to scale up, increase credibility, and show commitment to customers, B2B businesses should cultivate a trusted community of advocates.

A Customer Evidence Program is a programmatic and structured approach that lets your marketing and sales team seize the positive energy and momentum surrounding happy customers, and use it to build effective and genuine marketing and sales assets.

* Source: Forrester

8 'must have' elements for setting up a Customer Evidence Program:

Goals – Clearly defined measurable and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant) goals for your program. **No matter what these may be, they need to be pragmatic and obtainable.** Whether the focus is on supporting sales with relevant content, or increasing lead generation by growing your library of resources, knowing these ahead of time and thoroughly defining them is key.

Metrics – Any successful marketing effort must be measurable against your goals. Metrics will help you do this. **Define these from the start; will your success be based on the volume of case studies produced? How many times are they viewed?** How many deals were enabled by customer evidence? How many press interactions happen? **Remember to gauge not only the results of your efforts, but also the processes that enable them, their overall efficiency and effectiveness.**

An understanding of the needs of your sales team – knowing exactly where your sales team feels like they need more content allows you to identify gaps and help provide them with the right tools. It may be that they need references using specific features of your product or from one particular industry.

A dedicated team – be sure to assign those who will manage the differing parts of the program and decide which parts should be done in-house or outsourced. This includes collaborating with sales, approaching customers, having experienced content production teams to produce case studies, video testimonials, and other assets.

A recruiting process for participants – it's important to have a recruitment strategy and pipeline for identifying and managing customers willing to be references. Remember, that as the types of activities and final content may vary, some customers may only be willing to participate in certain activities. **When building your customer evidence program, have an overall pipeline in mind and make sure it's moving forward, but don't neglect reaching out to new satisfied customers.**

Internal trainings and communication – any customer story requires the efforts of a wide range of people. Your customer evidence team should work closely with your sales team and their processes in order to ensure that everyone understands the benefits and how to achieve them.

Happy customers – taking steps to nurture and educate your customers on the benefits that they can gain from your customer story can be hugely helpful in encouraging participation. This, along with the positive relationship you've already grown via your successful product or solution means that customer will be happy to be your advocate now and in future.

Legal protection and guidance - this means having a process in place to be sure you are covered legally in terms of how you get and use the information in your evidence pieces.

What are the benefits of a Customer Evidence Program?

There are a few key reasons that your overall brand and business can benefit from the program:



1. **Create a network** of brand advocates
2. **Build a library** of evergreen content
3. **Build trust** and persuasion easier with large buying committees
4. **Shorten** sales cycles
5. **Demonstrate** a commitment to customer experience
6. **Improve** business outcomes
7. **Increase** customer retention and revenue
8. **Build deeper**, longer lasting customer relationships
9. **Networking** opportunities via better, warmer connections on both sides

04

How can it help my marketing team?

The benefits associated with Customer Evidence Program (CEP) for your marketing teams are huge and can lead to results that are then further amplified by the successes they enable in your sales team.

Content Marketing with credibility

Customer stories can have a huge impact on your content marketing. This is because speaking about the successes of your customers in a manner that allows their perspective to come through helps demonstrate the effectiveness of your solution in a credible way.

Many formats can be utilized for your customer stories and they often transition into useful and valuable pieces of evergreen content that can be repurposed later. Subsequently, you can be sure that you'll end up with content that resonates with your audience in whichever format they prefer. When deciding, be sure to keep in mind the audience and buyer's journey.

Buyer's journey

01

Strangers

Attract — Catch attention & engage:

- Visual and video social teasers
- Video quotes
- Visual and video testimonials Interviews
- Written customer stories
- Testimonials
- Email signature

02

Visitors

Convert — Explain & generate need:

- Industry trends report
- Longer case studies Reports
- Webinars with customers

03

Leads

Close — Prove your success:

- One sliders for sales presentation Video interviews
- Reference calls

04

Customers

Delight — Entrance relationships:

- Featuring customers in reports thought-leadership content Regular e-mail communication
- Exclusive knowledge toolkits, insights

05

Advocates

Digital Marketing and SEO benefits

Marketers already know that having high quality, evergreen content has huge SEO and paid search benefits. CEP content is particularly useful for these purposes because the keywords used have semantic relevance and potential to grow SEO traffic.

When these keywords are used properly, especially in terms of long tails, natural language can help guide those with similar problems to your solution. Achieving a word count of 2,350-2,425 and the inclusion of backlinks from credible domains can extend the reach of CEP content. Having your content shared on both your own and your customer's social networks can strengthen incoming organic traffic to your website while boosting overall brand awareness.

Source: 2017, The Perfect Blog Post Length and Publishing Frequency is Whiteboard Friday
<https://moz.com/blog/blog-post-length-frequency>



Customer Evidence Program content also benefits your SEO strategy because:

- ✓ Use of industry keywords
- ✓ More regular posting of content
- ✓ Internal links and backlinks from alternate industries

05

What are the benefits for my sales and customer success teams?

Customer evidence has benefits throughout the sales cycle when used correctly. In the early stages, it can help build credibility, whereas in the later stages it can act as a ‘proof’ for a customer in need of a nudge to sway their decision. In either situation, it demonstrates how others overcame the same challenges via the solution your business offers. These assets can also be extremely helpful in cross-selling or upselling with existing customers.

**Generate
power
of sales
cycle**



Some of the assets that can be utilized for sales or customer success teams are:

- ✓ Video customer stories
- ✓ Quotes and testimonials
- ✓ Infographics
- ✓ Video testimonials
- ✓ Success story sliders
- ✓ Written customer story

Where?

1:1 conversations, sales presentations, social media, website, blog

Paint your success in colours

Better leads for a better sales process

Having a lot of leads means nothing if they don't convert - especially if the reason for this is that they aren't the right buyers for your product. The leads and references gained through CEP content is particularly valuable for a few reasons:

- 1. Prospects already have a 'warm' outlook** towards your brand and hold a positive opinion derived from your content and from the perspective of your customer.
- 2. When prospects have arrived** at the point of considering different vendor options and reading relevant reviews, it indicates that they are at a later stage in the buying cycle.
- 3. Having someone within an industry** that can vouch for your product and its quality goes far in establishing trust and credibility.
- 4. CEP content actually helps prospects** to decide if your product will be the solution to their challenges, and can even guide their process. In some cases this can help prevent a mismatch between a lead and your brand - saving time, energy, and effort for all involved.

All these together ultimately mean that your sales process is smoother for prospects and salespeople, improving the odds that you'll both be satisfied with the outcome. For your prospect (soon to be customer), this means a product that seamlessly solved their problem without a stressful sales process, and for you, it means another customer that could potentially become an advocate and repeat the process.

The key takeaway is that having an effective CEP minimizes the time spent on leads, maximizes your conversion, and does so in a manner with benefits for your entire business.

Relationship Building: Changing your buyer's context

When you start including existing customers in your own internal processes as a partner, you open up an entirely new understanding for them of both your brand and your whole industry. You might even learn that your solution solves more problems than the ones it was created for!



With your prospects, the impact is a little different. Rather than seeing you as a brand that only exists to sell them something, you can have an asset that instead:

- ✓ Positions you as the supplier of a commodity
- ✓ Reinforces your role in helping them to get the job done, as a partner, rather than a vendor
- ✓ Engages the customer emotionally, strengthening loyalty and retention

Sales Enablement

One of the biggest benefits of CEP for sales is that over time it will give them an enormous library they can use to better connect with prospects. This full set of assets can help close the gap between 'maybe' and 'yes!'. By building a full set of materials that demonstrate the value of your product across a variety of industries and challenges, you are demonstrating that you are the solution to their problems because you've already managed to solve them elsewhere, without becoming 'salesy'.

06

Building your first Customer Evidence Program

Building your first Customer Evidence Program can feel intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. By following the tips and best practices outlined in this section, you can quickly be well on your way to an efficient, effective and enjoyable CEP.

A few questions that you should ask yourself to help determine if you are ready for customer evidence include:

- Do you have **SMART** goals? Ones that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timebound?
- Do your goals for the program align with the overall goals of your business?
- Do you know your target audience, who they are, what their challenges are and how your story could help in solving them?
- What channels and content formats does your audience prefer? Where should you communicate with them?
- If you are searching outside your home region, can your content be localized enough to have impact?

Once you can clearly answer these questions, then it is time to start building your structure:

- ✓ **Dedicated team to manage the program:** Build a dedicated team that will oversee and manage the entire process from start to finish, including choosing customers, suggesting formats, assisting in the creation of content, amplification and related tasks.
- ✓ **Budget and resources planned:** Depending on your internal resources and available budget, in some cases it may be easier to outsource your program to an experienced third party.
- ✓ **Process for nomination advocates set up:** Having a process that is programmatic and scalable from the start will create ease for all involved.
- ✓ **Content plan:** Know what kind of content you want, why you want it, and how and when you'll go about achieving it.
- ✓ **Templates ready:** Following a template that is readily available and easily followed ensures the consistency of your content and makes scaling your program easier over time.

- ✓ **Experienced writers and designers:** Having an experienced creative team for producing the content that can manage everything from interviewing the client, to turning it into an engaging asset. Storytelling is integral to ensuring that the final outcome portrays exactly the message you want.
- ✓ **Defining story development process (contacting, interviewing, reviews, publishing):** As with templates, having a process that you follow every time will make things easier in the end, making sure the process is scalable to other departments or regions of your organization.
- ✓ **Plan for training and education of internal teams and customers:** Both sides of the equation need to understand the value of content to them.
- ✓ **Plan for communication with program participants and rewards entailed:** Keeping your participants happy by not overtaxing them and making sure that the content has ongoing positive benefits for them will keep them participating.
- ✓ **Central point to manage the program:** Having a single point of contact that manages the program makes it easier when it comes to accountability and measuring success.
- ✓ **Metrics:** To measure success, it's important to have KPIs in place to gauge the effectiveness of content and how well your processes are working.

Conclusion:

The time to start is now

Customer Evidence Programs can be hugely beneficial on both the buying and selling side of the equation. By participating in your CEP, customers and internal teams can experience an evolution in their relationships that enables them to work better together. Additionally, the positive impact from assets in both sales and marketing means that your prospects' journey to 'problem solved' can be just that much easier.

Want to get started building your own customer evidence stories but aren't really sure where to begin?

[Contact us](#)

Wings^{4U}

Your digital gateway
to global markets

We're a B2B agency of storytellers and bridge builders, crafting digital and inbound marketing that brings businesses together. We peer beyond the logos to understand the brilliant idea makers inside a brand, and transform their thoughts into strategic content that sparks action.



Melis Hamurculu

With over 8 years of experience in Enterprise and Product Marketing, Melis possesses a unique and thorough understanding of what it takes to build a truly effective strategy and the campaigns necessary to execute it. She joined the W4U team following 7 years at Microsoft, which has given her the practical experience to help get the most from both client and agency. At Wings4U Melis supports and manages customer relationships as the Global Account Lead, empowering and helping clients make the right decisions with their customer evidence program needs.