

## ARE YOU READY TO BE MORE THAN LIKED?

FIND YOUR BRAND ADVOCATES – THE TRUE MAVENS OF YOUR BRAND

By Mary Kate Scott

SO, YOU’VE HIRED A SOCIAL MEDIA LIAISON. YOU HAVE A FACEBOOK PAGE, YOU TWEET, AND MAYBE YOU’VE EVEN DONE A Groupon. YOU ARE ALL OVER PINTEREST AND ENGAGE WITH GOOGLE+. YOU HAVE THOUSANDS OF FACEBOOK “LIKES,” BUT HAVE YOU REALLY EARNED ANY MORE BUSINESS? ANYONE CAN CLICK A BUTTON, ESPECIALLY IF YOU OFFER THEM A GIFT FOR THE CLICK. BUT HOW DO YOU REALLY ENGAGE THOSE FACEBOOK FANS AND TWITTER FOLLOWERS? HOW DO YOU TURN THOSE INTERESTED FANS INTO YOUR BRAND ADVOCATES, PEOPLE WHO REALLY VALUE YOUR PRODUCT AND WOULD TELL THEIR FRIENDS ABOUT IT?

A brand advocate isn’t passive. She doesn’t scroll through Facebook notifications looking for “Click ‘Like’ and enter to win an iPad.” She doesn’t accept every company’s friend invite so she can drive her numbers into the thousands. A *brand advocate is engaged with your product and loves it. Loves it enough, in fact, to tell people about it.*

enough, that they want to be a “maven” and know all about your product. Brand advocate “mavens” want to both *know and share*.

You probably have brand advocates out there, perhaps you don’t know it. To find them, learn from them, and enable them to work even harder for your brand, you need to know who they are, how to reach them, what they need to be an even louder voice and cultivate them.

*First, learn from great examples of successful, established advocate programs*

(Your casual fans are great too – more later on the potential for fans to be customer advisory panels).

The 4 Stage Process to Build Brand Advocacy



**How can you get started with a brand advocate program?** First, learn from great examples of successful, established

*Don't ever forget this is a relationship. These are friends. Treat them as friends*

advocate programs. The case studies below show

how brands have successfully engaged advocates and enabled their voice. Each company took a different tack, ranging from cultivating technical expertise to rewarding passion to just spreading around some fun. Some of the efforts were more complex (and expensive) than others, but all of the case studies can teach valuable lessons.

**Who are your advocates and how can you reach them?** Once you've read the case studies, think about how you might identify your brand advocates. When you want to know what's new, you don't talk—you listen, right? So if you already have social media strategies in place, start there—surveying your existing Facebook fans (the ones who clicked “Like”) is a simple way to find people who are willing to champion

*Get a sense of what's important or valuable to your fans, for your product and their lifestyle, what kinds of questions they're asking, wishes they seem to be expressing*

your product or service. Don't ever forget this is a relationship.

*These are friends. Treat them as friends.*

**Before you initiate contact, listen.**

Follow posts on Facebook, tweets on Twitter, blogs and comments, product reviews, shopping sites and so forth, taking note of who's posting the most and what they're saying. Read it all, positive and

negative. *Get a sense of what's important or valuable to your fans, for your product and their lifestyle, what kinds of questions they're asking, wishes they seem to be expressing.* Social media is a treasure trove of information for any business that wants to understand a customer base and their brand advocates.

**Develop a survey to understand your fans** (who might become potential customer advisory panelists or advocates).

Find out as much about what they think of your brand and product (and perhaps potential products),

what they use in your category and about them.

The feedback on what existing fans

think about your product and category, how they use products, what they like and what they would change is invaluable. Find out about these fans: do they post online, create product reviews, rate products, recommend products (doesn't have to be yours). You are seeking to find online talkers with large bases of fans or followers. Find out which fans read blogs, comment, forward, tweet and otherwise engage with others.

*... Separate the fans from a potential customer advisory panel and from this panel, find your smaller “maven” advocate group.*

**Ask them to become part of a customer advisory panel.**

From these responses, *separate the fans from a potential customer advisory panel and from this panel, find your smaller “maven” advocate group.* Listen a little more to these special fans (you're getting the hang of this relationship thing now ☺.) Customer Advisory Panels can advise you on products, packaging, competitors, pricing and more. These panels will talk to you, but they

usually don't talk (as much) to others, as your "maven" brand advocates. These panels are interested in your product, and can provide you with thoughtful advice, but don't necessarily aspire to be a "maven" with special information.

**From this panel, find your brand advocate "mavens" who want to advise you and share with others.**

From this customer advisory panel, *separate out those who are information seekers and sharers. This is your "maven" advocate group* and will likely be 5-10% of your advisory panel. Understand what is valuable to these "mavens", what do they believe, and what do they want to know. Remember they usually value "being in the know", being the first to know about a new product, first to see or critique a new campaign. They love to share, and usually want to give away samples to friends?

(Customer advisory panels will try a sample, but usually don't share samples. Ask each group. Do your research on this; it might be different for your category or product.) Sometimes advisory panels make better product testers as you don't want too much sharing about early ideas. Mavens are better with new information.

*From this customer advisory panel, separate out those who are information seekers and sharers. This is your "maven" advocate group*

How can you make it easy for them to talk about it? Part II to this article.

Don't ever forget this is a relationship. These are friends. Treat them as friends. Appreciate them. (Two words, lots of work, and worth all the effort).



## CASE STUDIES

### Prevacid (Novartis)



Novartis' Prevacid team had several challenges: launch a new heartburn treatment; get real people talking about heartburn to

generate content to use in marketing campaigns; create word of mouth among potential users by tapping into potential brand advocates.

Step 1 – find potential consumer panelists. Novartis had to source and identify clinically appropriate, influential frequent heartburn sufferers to participate in other PR, marketing, and consumer insight initiatives. They needed to find and cultivate this appropriate panel to try out and document their experiences and hopefully to evolve into brand advocates who could be used in product marketing. Novartis used online techniques to recruit potential advocates. Over 10,000 heartburn sufferers applied to be a part of the panel—2,000 were approved and 800 people became the advisory panel.

Step 2 – activate the panelists. Activated panelists spent an average of four hours on the Prevacid®24HR Panel over their two-week trial period including creating video diaries of their trial experiences and heartburn-related lifestyle conversations with other panelists.

Step 3 – generate content. Over 200 videos were recorded, thousands of text-testimonials were received, and Novartis selected multiple candidates for use in marketing webisodes, advertorials in print publications such as Southern Living, and more. Prevacid®24HR is now the #2 branded OTC heartburn treatment (source: IRI Actual Change in Dollar Sales VYA for 11/15/09-6/20/10).

Step 4 – find the advocate “mavens” who will continue to talk about Prevacid. From the consumer advisory panel, they developed insights into who might be a maven by looking at the content they generated for Novartis, their interest in the brand, the online reach through friends, and their propensity to engage online (across many topics/products).

Step 5 – understand these “mavens” and find out how the Prevacid team can help them continue to generate content and engage their audiences.

### Redwood Creek Wines

#### Consumer Advocacy Program



Blaze the Trail is a fun social platform that encourages consumers to explore Redwood Creek wines and engage around the

brand's positioning—the love of the great outdoors—while educating them about the brand and about the wine. Consumer advisory panels were provided with

samples, information, the option to for exclusive Q&A sessions with winemakers, and creating avenues for this panel to share content. From this panel, the team identified the active advocates and created specific programs to meet their needs. The platform has become an "anchor" of Redwood Creek's overall marketing mix, connecting on and offline marketing, PR, consumer insights, and direct consumer marketing.

**La Cense Beef -  
The Grass-fed Party Advocate  
Program**



La Cense Beef wanted to connect with, educate, and engage

environmentally conscious consumers about their 100% grass-fed beef products and ranching methods. The Grass-fed Party social platform started by reaching influential foodie bloggers, then expanded to smaller upcoming blogs by informing and educating them about industry trends, sustainable ranching, and the latest news on the grass-fed "moo-vement". The team then reached out to consumers, created advisory panels and selected and cultivated brand advocates.

**Barilla Pasta**



Barilla Pasta sought to strengthen their existing brand image

as well as reinforce their tradition and belief that the making—and the enjoyment—of

food is an art. Barilla invested in advocates by providing them with "Test Kitchen" packages containing product samples and information about Barilla. These consumers were provided flip phones, and were encouraged to create dishes, host dinner parties, and upload video or photos of their dishes for other members to comment on, rate, and share. These advocates were also encouraged to rate and share recipes and events created by other advocates. Feedback on consumers' pasta consumption habits, market research, and brand perception as also collected.

**Cingular - Cingular TrendForce**



Affinitive, in conjunction with Cingular's PR agency, created and launched TrendForce—a brand advocate/consumer

panel program that brought together passionate consumers in a private, members-only online social environment. TrendForce engaged, connected with, and rewarded participants for learning about Cingular's products and services, creating content, sharing information with peers, and providing Cingular with opinions, feedback, and valuable market research.



**Gillette - TAG™  
Body Spray**

Gillette wanted to reach and engage male college students on their

terms, encouraging them to promote the TAG brand within their social circles. In partnership with Gillette's youth marketing agency, Affinitive launched a brand ambassador program to bring the TAG brand into the lives of fraternities and sororities with a specific focus on consumer-generated media (CGM). The program included product sampling, parties, user-generated content (photos, videos and text), fraternity outreach, social networking, and research.

### Maker's Mark Brand Ambassadors



This program is all about the passion. Passion for a legendary brand in the world of bourbon. Passion for the fine art of crafting a classic.

Passion for enjoying it all one sip at a time. Maker's Mark created and heavily invested in a substantial brand advocacy program several years ago. It's now the subject of countless word of mouth marketing case studies, and deservedly so.

The Maker's Mark Ambassadors program gives members access to "The Embassy," a private online community loaded with everything from personalized business cards to hand out in bars to a picture of your name engraved on an actual barrel of the fine product—which you can visit in person if you like. VIP tasting events, special offers, great swag, exclusive gift shop products, direct contact with Bill who runs the program (a real guy by the way). Ambassadors are also armed with fun tools to help move product as well – among other things, the business cards, which help

individuals spread the word about the program and brand, and ways to tell the company about bars and restaurants they find who haven't quite gotten the Maker's Mark passion.

### Fiskateers (Fiskars)



Scrapbookers know Fiskars, the maker of fine scissors among other things. This company, with their great product and an interesting history, tapped into an incredibly passionate community to build engagement. Instead of pushing the product, Fiskars focused on the people, created a program for these advocates, and encouraged scrapbooking and crafting. The company recruited a few of the most vocal fans to start a group blog, and launched an ambassador program (called them Fiskateers) with taglines such as "Born to scrap!"

Among other things, the "Fiskateer" ambassadors had opportunities to attend exclusive meetup-style events and got invited into a private online community where they could connect with others who shared their passion for scrapbooking and Fiskars shears. This was also a way for the company to hear directly from their most committed customers, creating a two way dialogue that is the hallmark of smart ambassador programs that led to product development, and marketing campaigns. Full credit to the crew at Brains on Fire for making this idea a reality.

## Most Valuable Professional (Microsoft)



Microsoft MVPs like to let people know they are experts and share their expertise with others. Given how technical many of Microsoft's products are, there is a lot to be shared. Originally launched as part of Microsoft support teams, as a way to recognize, reward, and support the users who were most active on question and answer forums. This program evolved over the years into a marquee brand for these ambassadors and drove product development.

MVPs, who have to earn their award each year, show off the program logo on their blogs, profiles, and even resumes and business cards. Thousands of them make the annual trek to Microsoft's headquarters in Redmond, WA for the weeklong MVP Summit, a massive mix of celebration, recognition, connection making, education, and feedback directly with the company's executives and product teams. Probably the most structured program on this list, Microsoft MVP is also likely the oldest.

### ABOUT MARY KATE

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