4 Tips for Creating Brand Fanatics

Strong customer relationships are the single best thing that can happen to your bottom line.

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Entrepreneurs have heard millennials love experiences. The truth is that it’s not just millennials; it’s all of America. Research from last year’s Expedia-backed travel-industry report Generations on the Move found that 74 percent of Americans now prioritize experiences over material goods. Whether people genuinely want to try new things or just want to make their friends jealous via social media, today’s consumers would rather purchase fleeting moments (documented in pictures, of course) than forever objects.

What does that mean for how companies build fan bases? It calls for four tactics that engender loyalty.

1. Plan exclusive events.

To show fans that you value their business, go beyond the traditional (e.g. rewards-points offers and discounts) and treat them to truly special experiences. Provide early access to highly anticipated products, or let users beta test your latest inventions. Invite them to release parties and employee meet-and-greets. Even the most inexpensive offerings can make customers feel special if they involve elements of true exclusivity and insider-level brand engagement.

If a sizable portion of your company’s revenue comes from a few customers, host a one-night-only event filled with perks. Go big: Deluxe catering, live music and swag bags can create a VIP experience. American Express does this for its Centurion customers, who spend at least $250,000 per year on their cards. Take any chance you get to show top customers how much you appreciate their loyalty.

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2. Get granular with marketing.

When brands speak to everyone at once, they’re heard by no one. Longtime fans, in particular, can tell when companies skip segmentation and try to target everyone with a single set of talking points. Even products and services with clear-cut use cases have customers of different demographics and desires.

Although creating multiple versions of marketing assets costs more upfront, thinking about different audiences and personalization pays off. As an example, Molekule, a San Francisco-based clean air purification company, partnered with performance video company TubeScience to find new customers. They produced two Facebook campaigns with eight ad sets each. Leveraging the different types of content and testing into different campaign budget management strategies, Molekule was able to realize a 1.25-fold greater return on its ad spend and a 19 percent lower cost per purchase. Across a campaign, those savings more than make up for the additional video production costs.

3. Let users choose their communication channel.

Consumers live across multiple platforms. Many of them won’t put up with companies that only speak to their customers by

phone or through email. Worse, frustrated ones will take the opportunity to blast brands on the same channels they neglect.Even if only a dozen customers use a given platform, be on it. Enable mobile notifications so you can answer inquiries immediately. Design agency FreshSparks suggests brands only have an hour to respond on social sites before they risk losing the customer. Handle simple requests like, “What is the email address for your location near me?” in the comments. When someone asks a personal question (or uses accusatory language), invite them to continue the conversation in a private message.

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4. Allow them to buy bigger benefits.

National brands have figured out that fans will, in fact, pay for better perks. Amazon Prime is the most popular example, charging $119 per year for benefits that range from free two-day shipping to unlimited photo storage. Amazon isn’t the only brand that charges for premium experiences, though. For just $20, REI offers customers a lifetime membership to the REI Co-op program, which comes with a host of perks. Loyalists get 10 percent back in an annual dividend, as well as invitations for special offers, members-only event access and chances to take special classes and trips. The price is small, but members who join feel much closer to their favorite brand — and the value more than justifies the price.

Strong customer relationships are the single best thing that can happen to your bottom line. They lower your sales and marketing expenses, protect you from market downturns and provide unparalleled product insights. Speak straight to fans and give them the perks they want, and they’ll stick around, even if you slip up.

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