

UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Hinge[®] RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

in association with



SocialMediaToday



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social media plays an important role in business today. It is a convenient way businesses can create and share content, build engagement, and interact with their target audiences. Recently, firms have recognized an opportunity to leverage the personal social networks used by their employees, turning them into ambassadors for their brand. This practice is known as employee advocacy.

What is the current state of employee advocacy? What are the benefits? How can a firm build a successful employee advocacy program? Social Media Today and the Hinge Research Institute conducted a joint research study to answer these questions.

In this report, the results show:

- Firms with formal employee advocacy programs grow faster and see more benefits than those without them. Nearly 31% of high-growth firms have a formal employee advocacy program, more than double the average of all other firms.
- A formal employee advocacy program helps shorten the sales cycle. Nearly 64% of advocates in a formal program credited employee advocacy with attracting and developing new business, and nearly 45% attribute new revenue streams to employee advocacy.
- Benefits of employee advocacy extend beyond the firm and impact the advocates themselves in a positive way. Almost 86% of advocates in a formal program said that their involvement in social media had a positive impact on their career.
- The Millennial Generation recognizes that using social media can differentiate them from their peers, develop social media skills that are in high demand, and lead to more job opportunities.
- Implementing an employee advocacy program is not for the faint of heart. It requires proper training, a significant time investment, and the appropriate software tools. On average, nearly 60% of individuals in formal employee advocacy programs spend at least five hours per week using social media for business purposes.
- The most effective way to motivate employees to advocate the firm brand on social media is to explain why they are being asked to do so. Both managers and advocates agree that this communication is the biggest motivator, more so than gifts, monetary incentives, or public recognition of performance.

WHAT IS EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY?

Employee advocacy is the promotion of a firm's brand by its employees. But it goes much deeper than that. It's a culture of believing in the content a firm produces and seeking out opportunities to spark discussions on social networks with other individuals who share similar passions or interests. In short, employees become a firm's brand ambassadors in the digital marketplace.

Digital communications can be impersonal — people are naturally more inclined to trust a face than a logo. So being able to see an individual's name and picture on a social media message makes the interaction more human and appealing.

Employee advocacy has tremendous potential, but many firms worry about its possible downsides. That's why Social Media Today teamed up with the Hinge Research Institute — to explore the potential of employee advocacy so companies like yours can understand the marketplace and make well-informed decisions.

WHAT WERE THE TOPICS COVERED?

The study covered a range of topics. Key questions included:

- What is the current state of employee advocacy?
- How does employee advocacy impact my firm?
- How does employee advocacy impact the advocates?
- How can my firm build a successful employee advocacy program?

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY?

The Hinge Research Institute and Social Media Today conducted a comprehensive online survey of professionals who use social media for business purposes. Results were obtained from 588 study participants.

Questions took two forms:

1. Closed-ended "select all that apply" questions that included an array of possible choices. Since multiple responses were allowed, the cumulative total of responses typically exceeds 100%.
2. Questions answered with a rating scale (0-10, for instance).

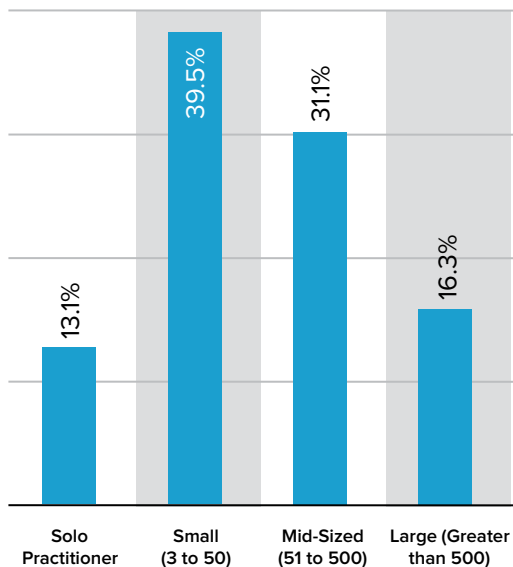
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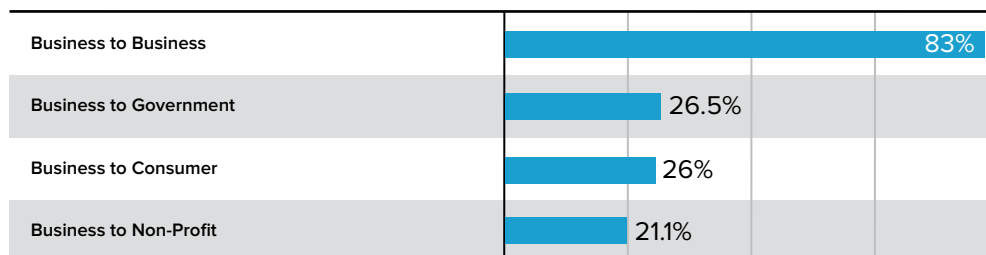
A LOOK AT THE MARKETPLACE

Sample Composition by Firm Size (Number of Employees)



We asked respondents to identify the type of market audiences they serve. Many firms do business with multiple audiences, with the most common type of respondents operating in the B2B space.

Sample Composition by Market Audience

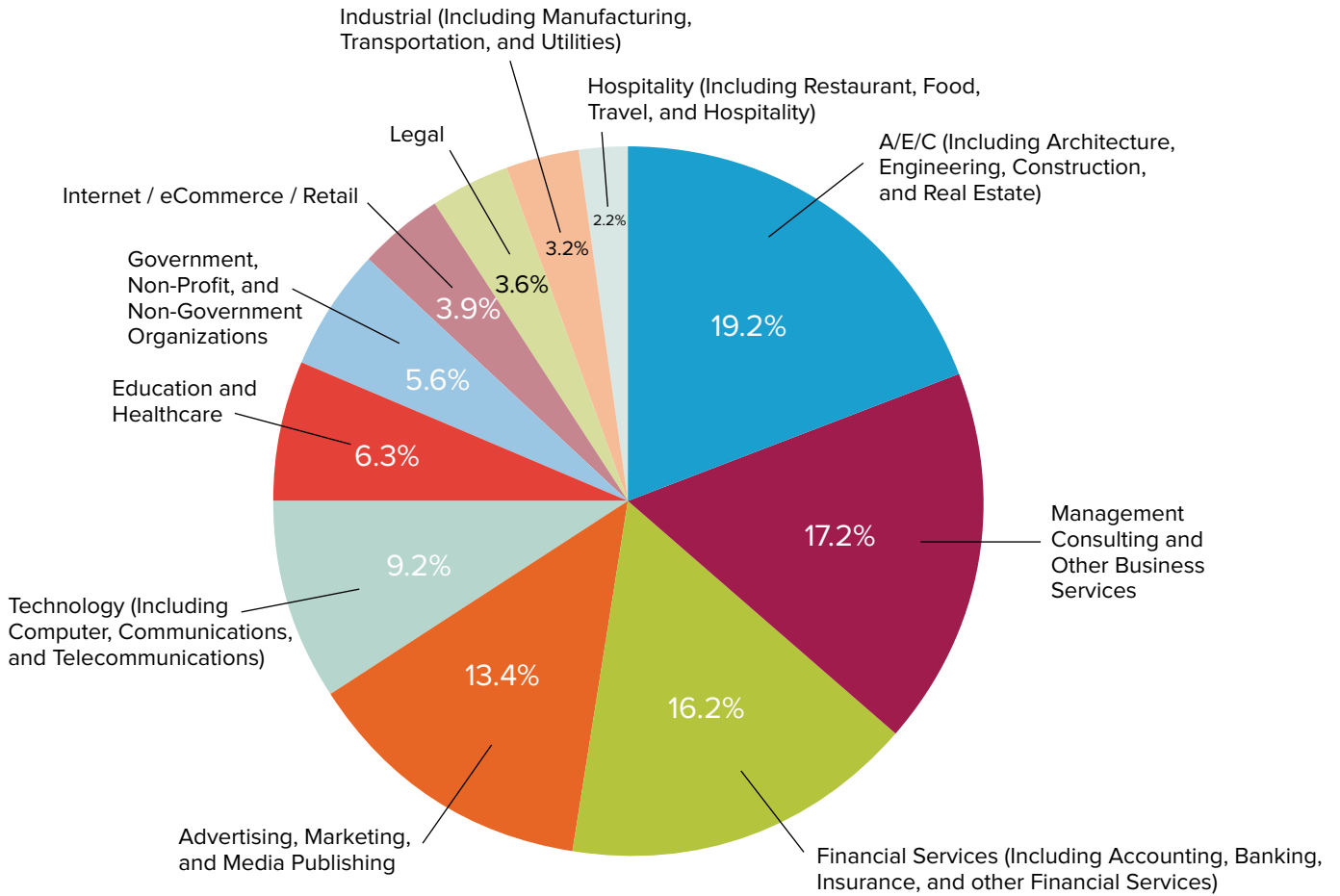


**Decimals were rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent. Grand totals may be affected.*

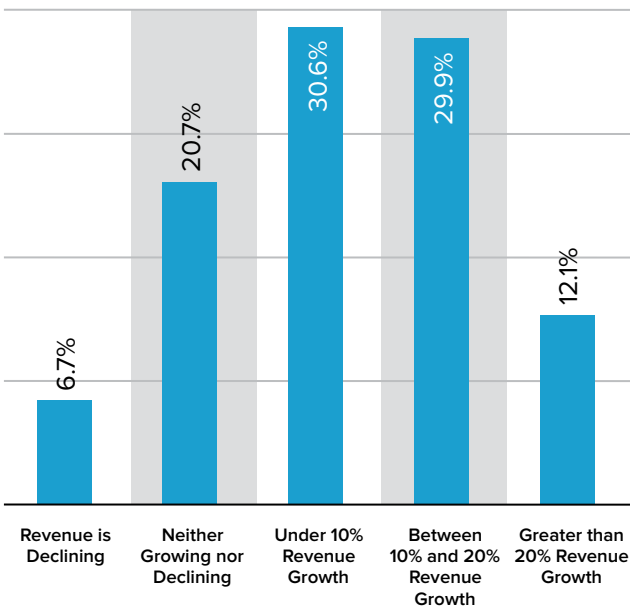


The chart below describes the industries of individual respondents.

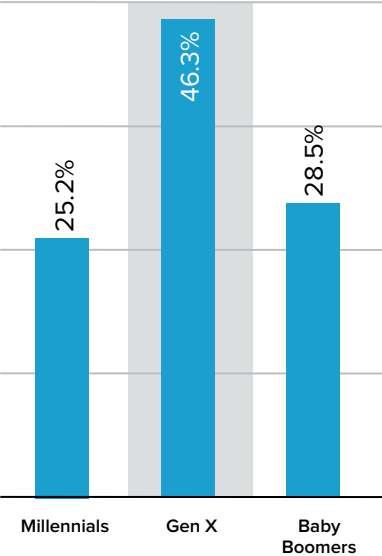
Sample Composition by Respondent Industry



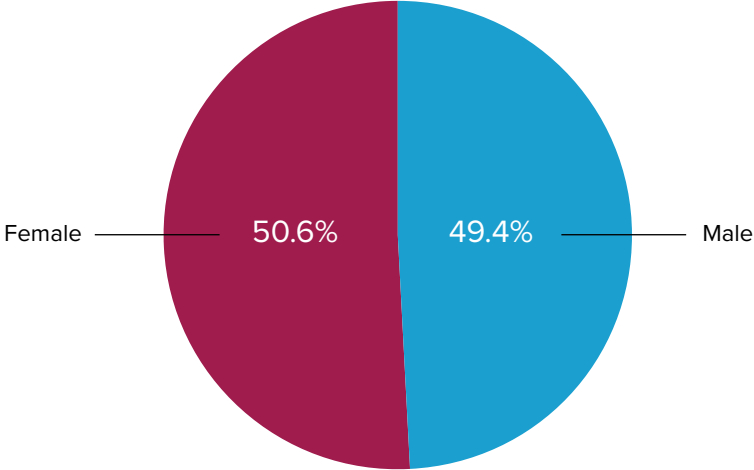
Sample Composition by Growth Rate



Sample Composition by Generation



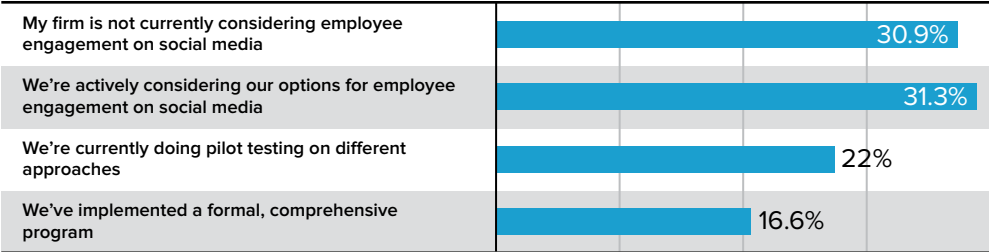
Sample Composition by Gender



CURRENT STATE OF EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY

How are firms approaching employee advocacy? We asked respondents to indicate the level of maturity of their employee advocacy program. We discovered a significant opportunity for forward-looking companies to be on the front lines of this trend in the marketplace. More than 80% of firms do not have a formal, comprehensive employee advocacy program.

Maturity Level of Employee Advocacy Programs



83%
have not launched an employee advocacy program

17%
have implemented a formal, comprehensive program

WHO OWNS EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY?

Employee advocacy is growing in the marketplace, so there is an increasing need for firms to manage it within their organizations. We asked respondents to identify their role in their social media advocacy program. We found that most managers of employee advocacy programs considered themselves managers as well as advocates. This suggests that management is leading by example, using their engagement on social media as a blueprint for others to follow.

Sample Composition by Role in Employee Advocacy

Both Management & Advocate	44.4%
Advocate Only	31.3%
Management Only	19.2%
None	5.1%

Overall, more than half of the respondents sampled said that the Marketing department manages employee engagement on social media, while over 25% said that no specific department owns it.

Owners of Employee Advocacy on Social Media

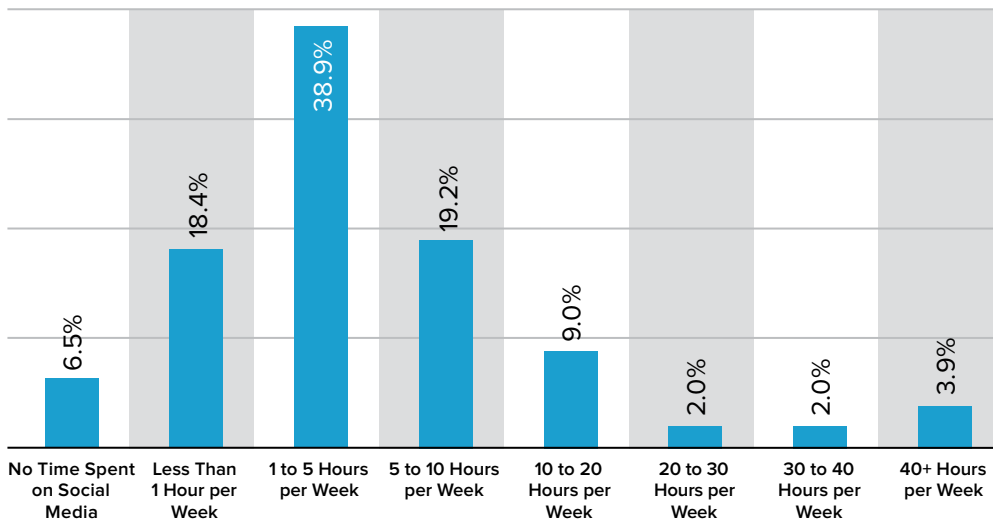
Marketing	51.7%
No Specific Department	25.7%
Senior Management	10.9%
The "Social Media" Department	8.7%
Human Resources	8.3%
Internal Communications	6.9%
Sales	4.9%
Customer Service	3.2%
Owner	1.7%
Public Relations	0.34%
Internet Department	0.17%
Operations	0.17%
We Don't Use Social Media	0.17%



HOW MUCH TIME DO EMPLOYEE-ADVOCATES SPEND ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

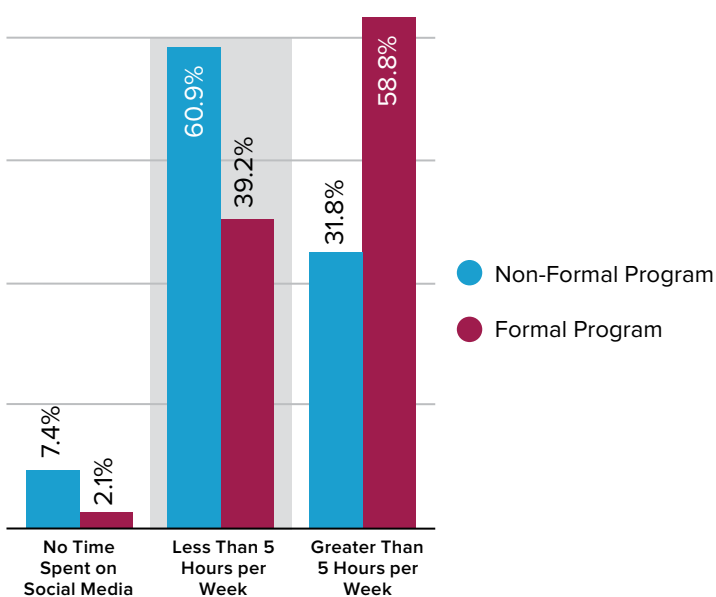
We asked respondents to indicate how much time they spend on social media for their business. Nearly 40% indicated that they spent 1 to 5 hours per week on business-related social media activities.

Time Spent on Social Media for Business Use



However, when we look only at individuals in formal employee advocacy programs, nearly 60% spend more than five hours each week on average on business-related social media activities.

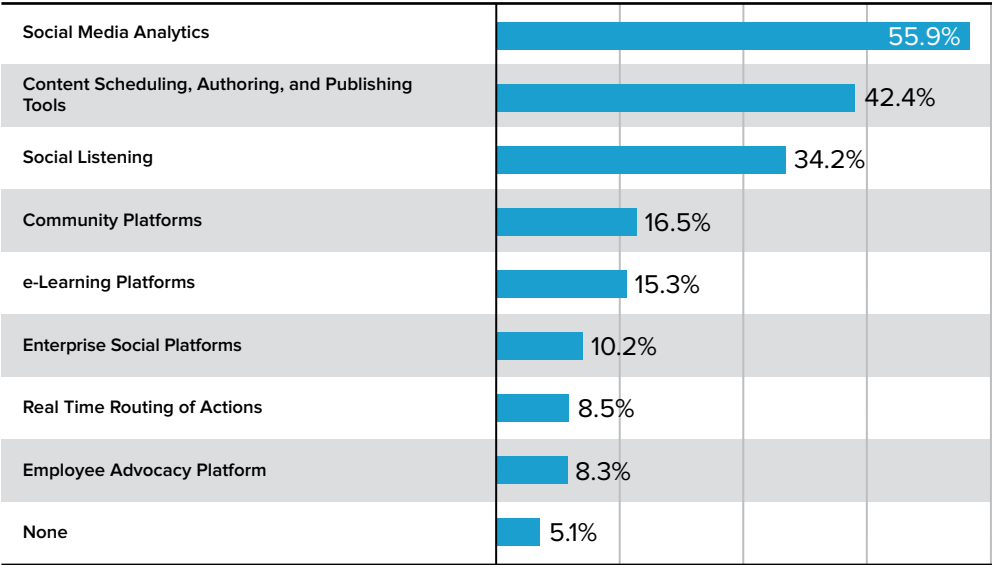
Time Spent on Social Media for Business Use



WHAT OTHER TOOLS ARE FIRMS USING?

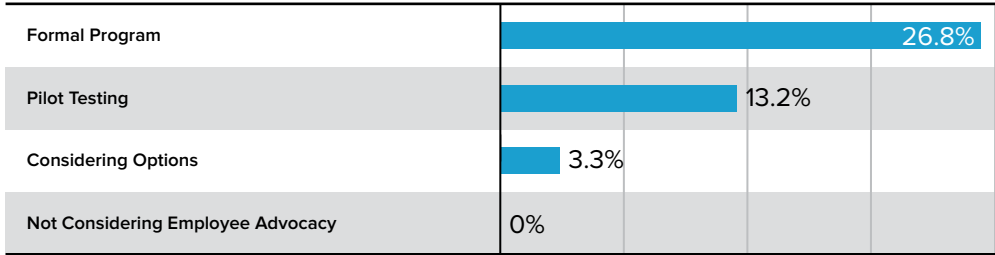
Next, we asked respondents to identify other tools they use to enhance their social media engagement. Social media analytics, content scheduling, authoring, and publishing tools, and social listening topped the list of popular tools.

Tools Used to Help with Engagement on Social Media



Firms that have a formal employee advocacy program have a higher use of employee advocacy platforms than firms without a formal program.

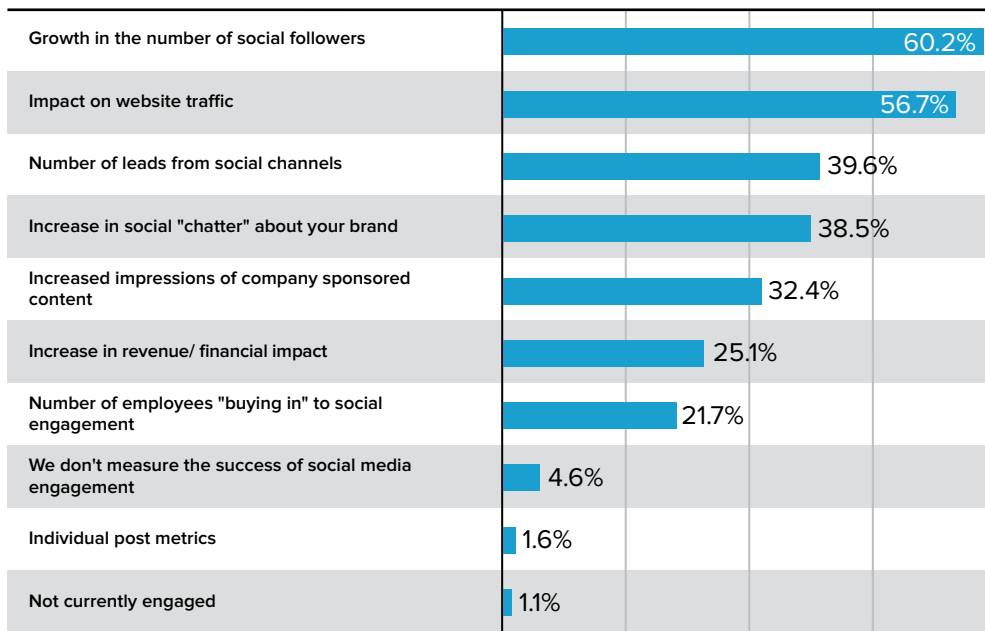
Use of Employee Advocacy Platforms



HOW ARE FIRMS MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY PROGRAMS?

Respondents identified an average of 3 ways of measuring the success of social media engagement. Growth in the number of social followers, impact on website traffic, and the number of leads from social channels were the top three ways that firms measure the success of employee advocacy on social media.

Measuring Success of Social Media Engagement



Respondents identified an average of **3** ways of measuring the success of social media engagement.

IMPACT ON YOUR FIRM

To better understand why employee advocacy on social media is beneficial, we asked respondents to identify the benefits to their firm from employee advocacy efforts. Over 96% of respondents identified benefits that they see from their engagement on social media. On average, respondents identified 4 different benefits that they receive from employee advocacy on social media.

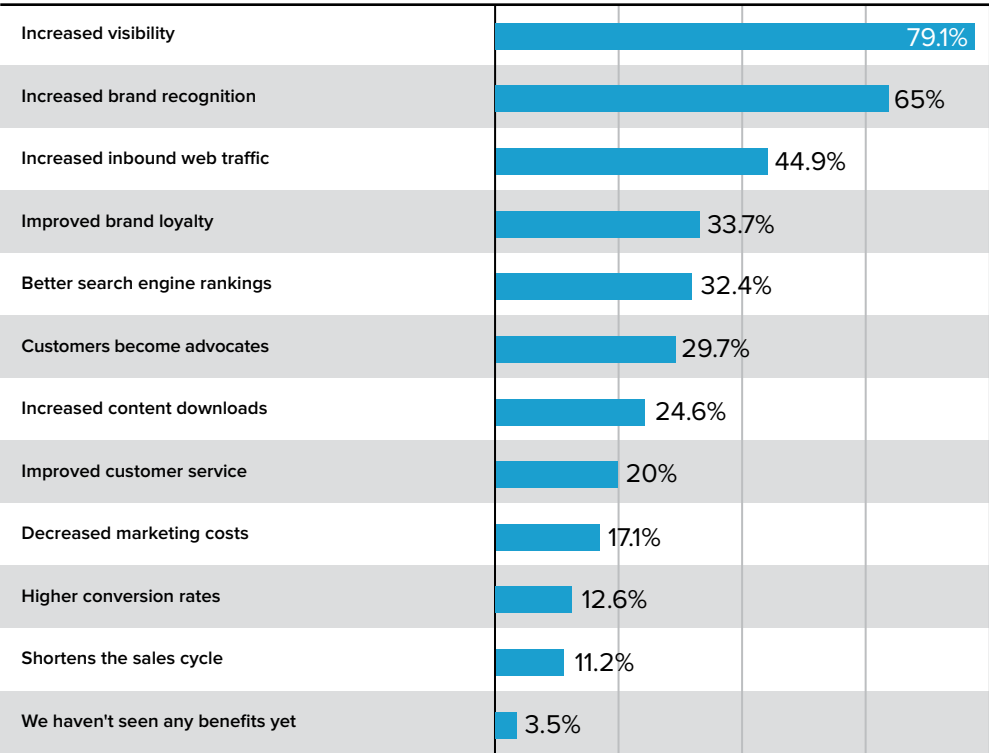
Over **96%** of respondents identified benefits that they see from their engagement on social media.



Increased visibility and brand recognition were the top two benefits that firms received from employee advocacy on social media. However, visibility and brand recognition can be difficult to measure. Firms also identified tangible, measurable benefits, including:

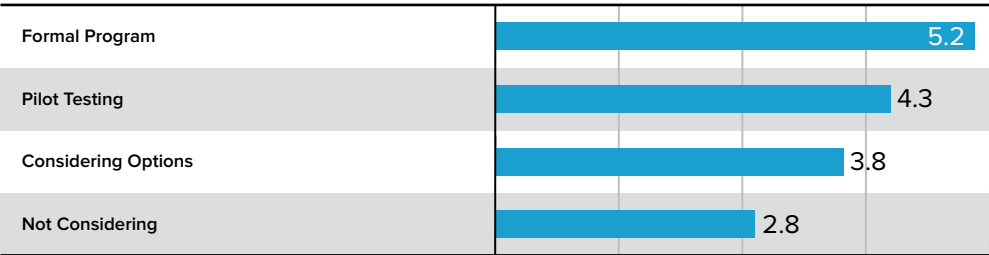
- Increased inbound web traffic
- Better search engine rankings
- Increased content downloads
- Decreased marketing costs

Benefits Firms Receive from Employee Advocacy



There is a correlation between the sophistication of employee advocacy programs and the number of benefits firms realize from their employee engagement on social media. Firms with a formal program identified five benefits on average. This compares to firms that are not considering employee advocacy programs, who reported only 2.8 benefits.

Number of Identified Benefits by Program Type

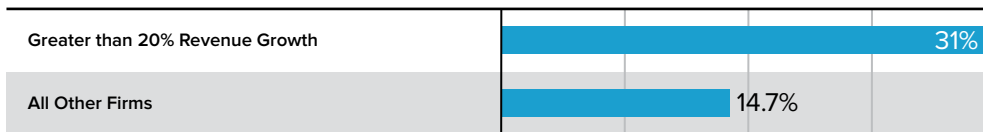


DOES EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY IMPACT GROWTH?

In any industry, high-growth firms are the envy of the marketplace. Do they approach social media in a different way? We've segmented respondents by growth rate to give us insight into how high-growth firms are approaching employee advocacy.

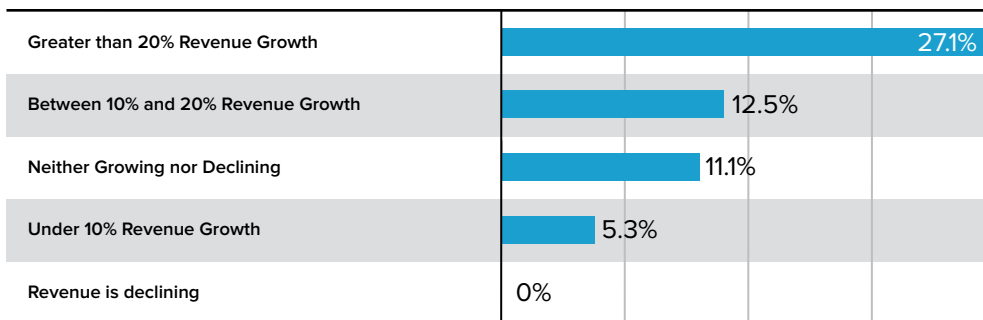
Firms with a formal program grow faster and see more benefits than those without a formal program. 31% of high-growth firms have a formal employee advocacy program, more than double the percentage of all other firms.

Firms with Formal Employee Advocacy Programs Grow Faster



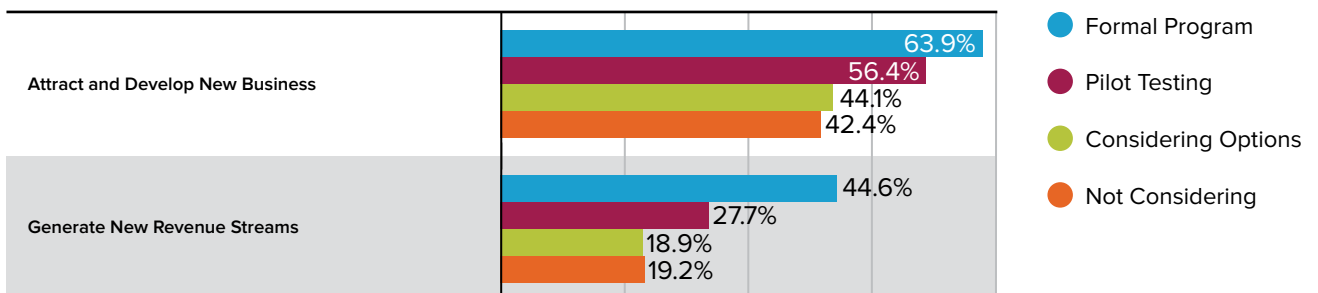
When asked to describe how employee engagement on social media has benefited their firms, 27% of high-growth firms reported a shortened sales cycle. This percentage was twice that of their slower growing counterparts. Firms whose revenue is declining did not see this as a benefit at all.

Shortens the Sales Cycle



Employee advocacy also contributes to a firm's bottom line. Advocates participating in formal employee advocacy programs noted two business development benefits. These benefits include: 1) attracting and developing new business, and 2) generating new revenue. This phenomenon is known as "social selling."

The Effect of Employee Advocacy on Social Selling

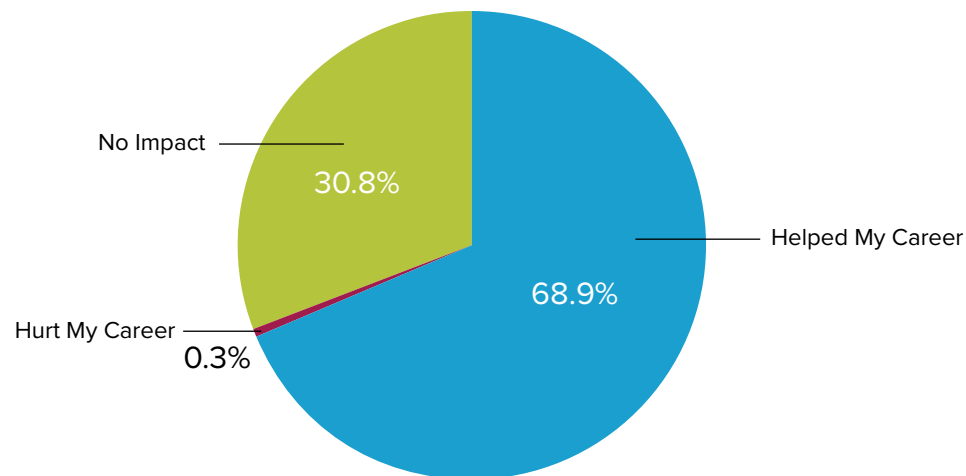


IMPACT ON ADVOCATES

Employee advocacy programs don't just benefit firms, they help the advocates, too.

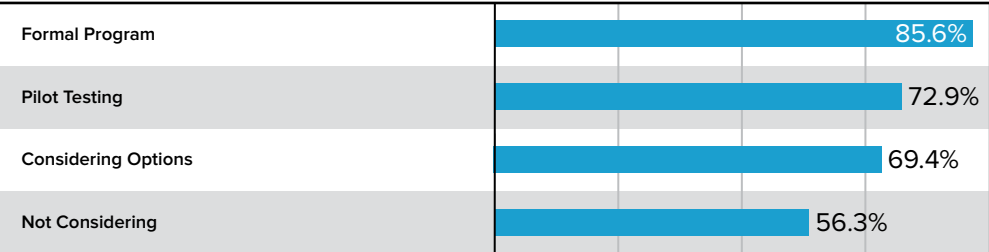
We asked respondents to indicate whether their involvement on social media for professional purposes has helped their career, hurt their career, or has had no impact on their career. We found that engaging on social media for professional purposes carries an enormous upside. A clear majority of respondents said that their professional engagement on social media has helped their career, while next to none said social media has hurt their career.

Impact of Social Media on Your Career



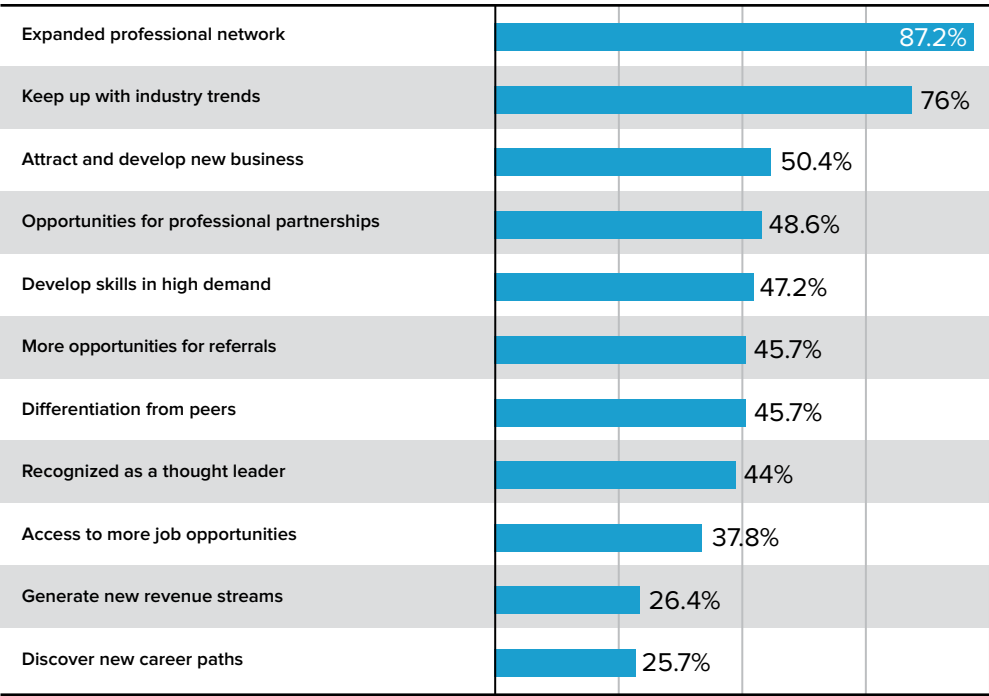
Compared to firms without formal programs, more respondents in firms with a formal employee advocacy program said that their engagement on social media has had a positive affect on their career.

Impact of Social Media on Your Career (Helped My Career)



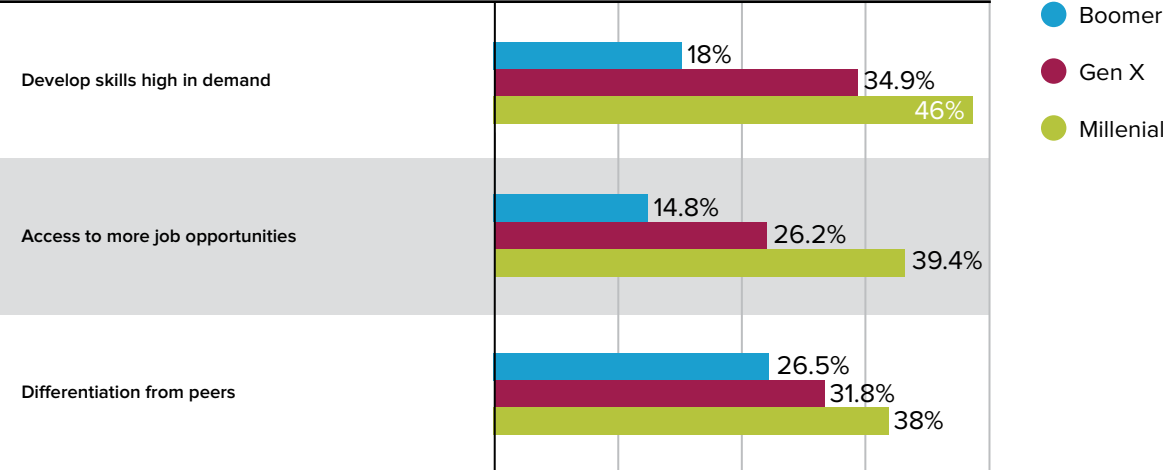
Expanding professional networks and keeping up with industry trends are the two most common benefits of employee involvement in social media.

Benefits Advocates Receive from Employee Advocacy



Looking through a generational lens, Millennials recognize how their involvement on social media can differentiate them from their peers, develop skills that are high in demand, and lead to more job opportunities.

Benefits of Employee Advocacy by Generation



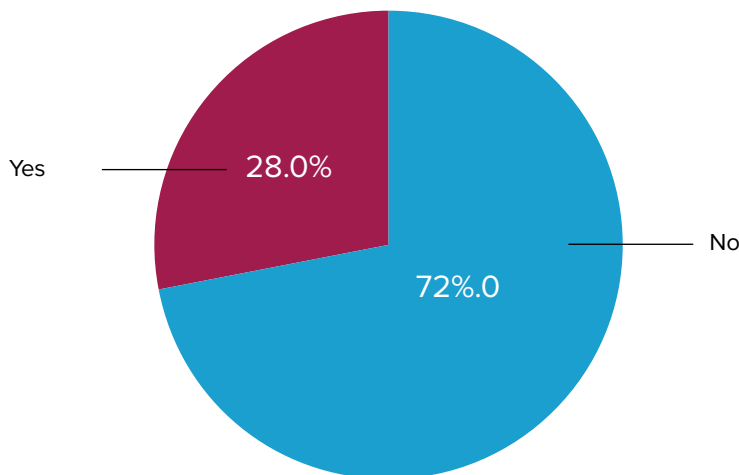
BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

TRAIN YOUR EMPLOYEES TO BE ADVOCATES

It's dangerous to assume that employees know how to use social media in a business setting.

We asked respondents to indicate whether or not they received social media training from their firms. 72% of respondents identified that they have not received any type of training from their firm. And 57% of respondents indicated that additional training on social media engagement would have a significant impact on employees within their firm.

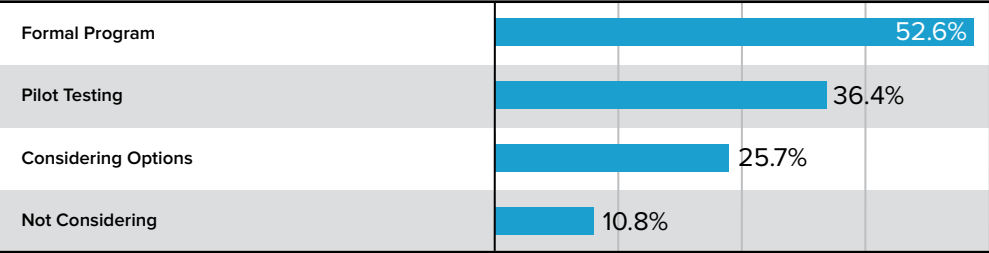
Have you received training from your firm for engagement on social media?



72% of respondents identified that they have not received any type of social media training from their firm.

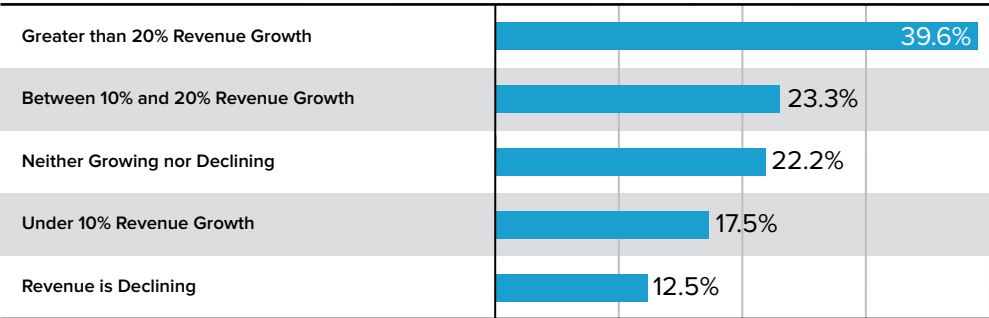
There is a relationship between the ratio of employees who have received training and the sophistication of a firm’s employee advocacy program. Over half of employees in firms with a formal program had received social media training. Just over 10% of employees in firms not considering a formal program had received training.

Individuals Who Have Received Social Media Training from Their Firm



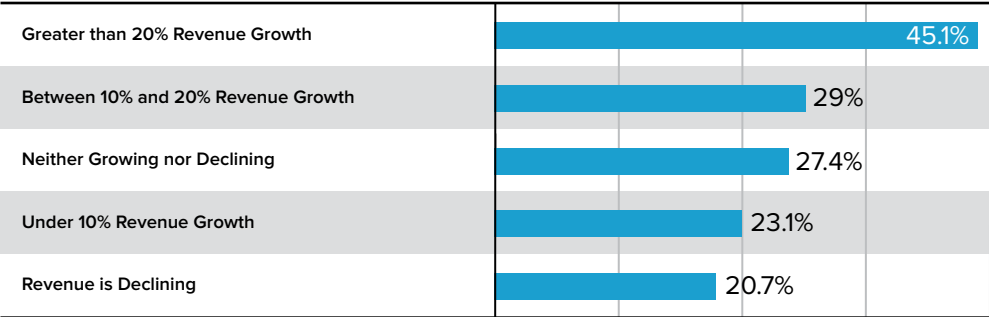
When measuring success, high-growth firms keep a closer eye on the number of employees that “buy-in” to social media engagement programs than do their slower growing counterparts. This emphasis on employee behavior contributes to a culture in which an employee advocacy program can be successful.

Measuring Success by the Number of Employees “Buying-In” to Social Engagement



High-growth firms also trained a higher ratio of their employees on social media engagement.

Individuals Who Have Received Social Media Training from Their Firm



PRIORITIZE YOUR TRAINING TOPICS

Next, we asked respondents to identify what additional training they would find most beneficial. On average, respondents selected 5 different training topics, suggesting there is an opportunity for firms to further educate their employees on social media engagement.

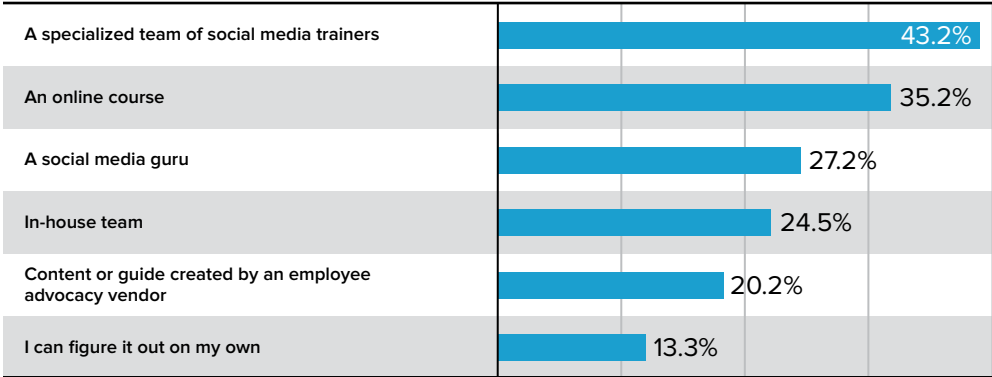
Additional Training Topics

Using social media to create engagement	53.6%
Social media training for a specific social channel (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.)	47.8%
Content marketing strategy for social media	47.6%
Motivating employees to be brand advocates on social media	45.8%
Generating and nurturing leads on social media	40.7%
Building communities on social media	39.3%
Brand advocacy strategies using social media	36.7%
Fundamentals of social media for SEO	35.7%
Targeting specific audience or buyer personas	34%
Social selling	32.7%
Publishing and engagement	32.3%
Integrating mobile into social media marketing	21.3%
None	1.5%

FIND THE BEST PERSON OR TEAM TO TRAIN YOUR STAFF

We asked respondents who they think would be best suited to provide the additional training topics they identified in the previous question. Overall, a specialized team of social media trainers was top of mind, followed by an online course.

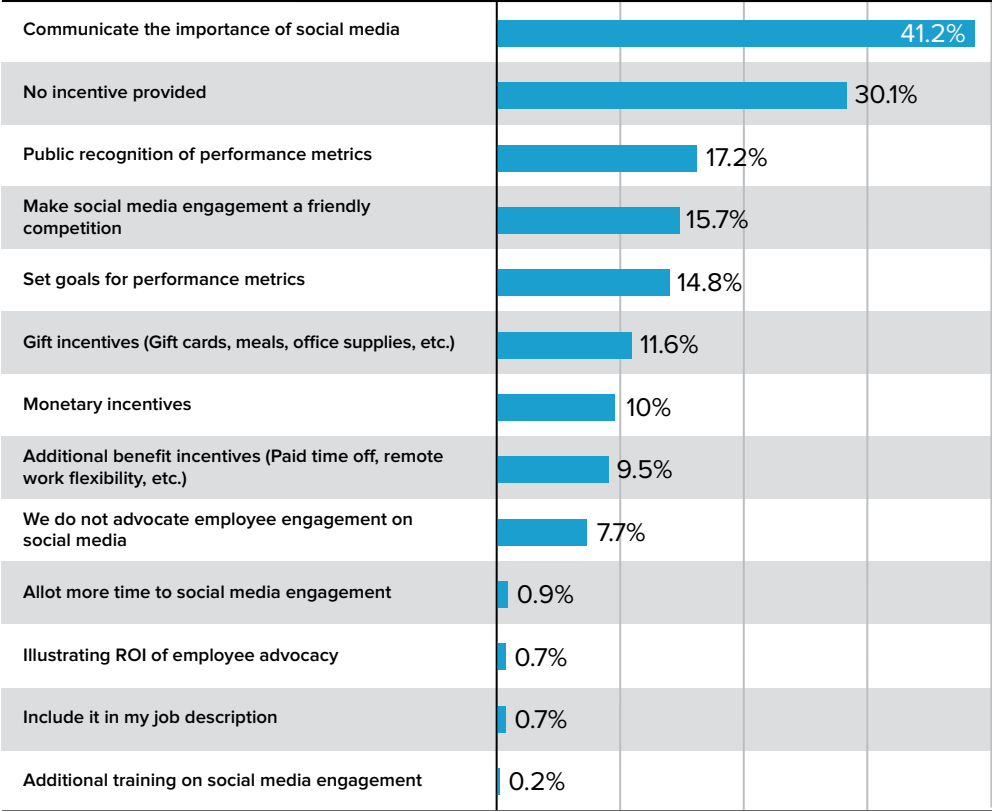
Who Would be Best Suited to Provide Additional Training?



PROPERLY MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES

To implement a successful employee advocacy program, the employees within your firm must be motivated. After all, employees need to know why they are being asked to be brand advocates. Respondents said communicating the importance of social media was the biggest incentive. Surprisingly, over 30% of respondents don't have any incentives for employee engagement on social media.

Motivating Employees to Become Advocates



ABOUT HINGE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The [Hinge Research Institute](#) is a division of Hinge dedicated to studying high-growth professional services firms and their clients. We collect data and analyze marketplace trends to discover why some firms grow much faster than average while spending less on marketing. Our mission is to share this knowledge so that every professional services firm can prosper.

We invite you to explore our full library of research reports, books, and other publications at: www.hingemarketing.com/library

For more information about the Hinge Research Institute, please contact:

Research Director

Lee W. Frederiksen, Ph.D.

lfrederiksen@hingemarketing.com

703 391 8870

ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA TODAY

Social Media Today is an independent online media and events company for professionals in marketing, social business, communication, customer experience, content marketing and digital strategy, or any other discipline where a thorough understanding of social media is mission-critical.

The Social Shake-Up conferences are global events that bring together the world's biggest brands and best thinkers to talk about the impact of social and global collaboration on today's business. SocialMediaToday.com is published by Social Media Today LLC.



HOW WE CAN HELP

Visible Expert® Program

Designed to help individuals cultivate an authoritative online presence in their area of expertise, the Visible Expert® Program delivers the tools and strategy required to build personal reputation and visibility in the marketplace. Based on extensive research, the Visible Expert® Program helps experts become recognized industry leaders.

Visible Firm® Program

Designed to deliver more referrals, higher profits, and faster growth, the Visible Firm® Program will build a powerful marketing platform to engage your audiences and build your visibility. Based on the most extensive research into high-growth firms ever conducted, the Visible Firm® Program will ground your marketing in science and leverage your firm's expertise to draw in the right audiences.

High Performance Website Program

The High Performance Website Program makes your website into a lead-generating machine — bundling a beautiful new site with a suite of powerful online tools. Designed from the ground up to attract the right visitors from search engines, a high performance site uses educational content, smart offers, and custom features to engage and convert qualified leads.

Branding Program

Our Branding Program is designed to carry your firm's reputation confidently into the marketplace by giving you a suite of powerful branding tools. Based on extensive research and analysis, our branding strategies increase your firm's credibility and visibility in your industry. The services will also differentiate your firm and provide clear, compelling messages for each of your target audiences.

For more information, call 703 391 8870 or email us at info@hingemarketing.com.

To find out how Hinge can help your professional services firm experience faster growth, contact us!

Hinge

1851 Alexander Bell Drive
Suite 350
Reston, VA 20191

703 391 8870
info@hingemarketing.com



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From step-by-step How-Tos to in-depth courses, Hinge University will give you the skills and know-how to elevate your brand.

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Need help?

Hinge offers a comprehensive suite of marketing and branding services to increase your visibility and grow your firm.

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