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What Strategies do Companies use to Transform Employees into Social Media Advocates?

Abstract

There is an overwhelming consensus among researchers that employees have the potential to become excellent social ambassadors for their company. Readers of social media sites believe employees to be credible representatives of their organization, and therefore positive employee social media posts can create the image of a gratifying work environment and attract valuable talent to a particular organization. To capitalize on that recruitment advantage, an organization must initiate a process that enables and encourages employees to speak about the positive aspects of their work environment on social media platforms.

Keywords

human resources, social media, social ambassadors, recruitment in social media, social media platforms

Comments

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Executive Summary

Research Question

What strategies do companies use to transform employees into social media advocates for their organizations? Specifically, how can an organization get its employees to portray a positive image of its workplace environment on social media so as to attract new talent to the organization?

Introduction

There is an overwhelming consensus among researchers that employees have the potential to become excellent social ambassadors for their company.^{1,4} Readers of social media sites believe employees to be credible representatives of their organization, and therefore positive employee social media posts can create the image of a gratifying work environment and attract valuable talent to a particular organization.³ To capitalize on that recruitment advantage, an organization must initiate a process that enables and encourages employees to speak about the positive aspects of their work environment on social media platforms.

Five Steps Towards Creating Employee Social Ambassadors

1) Establish a Social Media Policy: The establishment of a social media policy is fundamental because it will serve as a reference point for all employee social media issues. The purpose of the social media policy is to communicate organizational, legal, and regulatory rules, provide a clear understanding of appropriate social media use at the workplace, and demonstrate that the organization is operating a correct business environment.³ The policy must also cover the risks that employee social media usage poses for the company, and outline the disciplinary procedures for policy violations.³ Lastly, the policy should clarify how company representatives are expected to communicate and behave on-and-offline.³

2) Research Employee Social Media Usage: Research conducted with the objective of furthering employee social media use should focus on employee awareness/understanding of company social media policies and employee attitudes towards social media.² PepsiCo conducted extensive research to assess these factors, it found that a majority of employees were not aware that PepsiCo had a social media policy.⁸ In addition, while 70% of employees reported being asked about the company, these employees felt they did not have permission to speak about PepsiCo.⁸ Research on employee familiarity with company policy and social media use is critical because it highlights the gaps between the status quo and the transformation of employees into social ambassadors.

3) Create a Social Media Team: A social media team must be created to take on the responsibilities of executing the established social media policy and responding to the research conducted on employee social media use. Successfully handling such responsibilities requires the members of the team to be equipped with experience in social media technologies, management skills, and knowledge of an organization's culture.³ The existence of all these skillsets in a single type of employee is rare, and so the social media team should be cross-functional.⁴ After PepsiCo reviewed its research, it aligned its social media content with its legal, digital, HR, and compliance teams, who then worked together to develop the company's social media training program.⁸ Thus, the responsibility of progressing from the status quo towards the transformation of employees into social ambassadors is assigned to a specific entity through the creation of a social media team.

4) Develop a Social Media Training Program: The social media team can transform employees into social ambassadors by implementing a training program that raises employee awareness/understanding of the company social media policy and equips employees with skills that allow for easy navigation of social media channels. Awareness/understanding of the social media policy must first be addressed, as without them, employees will be hesitant to talk about their work via social media.⁸ As an example, Cisco's social media training program introduces employees to its social media policy and makes it clear that members of the Cisco community should be familiar with that policy.² After awareness/understanding are addressed, specific social networking skills must be taught so that social media communication is made easy. Cisco's training incorporates short on-demand courses, online chats, and one-on-one social media coaching to educate its employees about using tools like Facebook and LinkedIn.² The wide variety of training modules serve to keep Cisco employees engaged in their training.²

Once implementation of the training program is complete, the social media team must execute the program by motivating employees to participate in the training. In general, motivation is tied to a reward system.³ The business intelligence startup, Domo, Inc., encourages participation in social media training through a reward system that includes recognition, financial bonuses, and additional vacation days for completing certain training modules.³ What's more, Domo maintains a task and badge certification system that tracks the progress of all trainees.³ The advantage of the badge system is that it can be extended as needed along with the training program—the introduction of new badges motivates employees to further develop their social media skills.³ Thus, implementing and executing a social media training program produces a structure that can transform employees into competent social media users.

5) Expanding on Social Media Training: Once a training program has been executed, it is imperative to continue the conversation about social media with employees and to encourage them to tell the company's story through their social media posts.^{3, 8} Such a conversation will identify those employees with the potential to become brand champions that attract talent to the organization. Red Hat Software aggressively recruits talent by rewarding employees when they reference a candidate to the hiring system and that candidate gets hired.¹ Red Hat has expanded beyond incentivizing social media training to incentivizing usage of that training for recruitment purposes. Additionally, the social media team must continually seek feedback about its social media programs in order to enhance employee social media use.^{2, 3, 8} In surveying its social media training program graduates, PepsiCo learned that employees wanted the company to provide them with links to PepsiCo content that could be shared on the web.⁸ In turn, PepsiCo's social media team combed through company content and determined that 80% of it could be shared externally.⁸ For the articles that could be shared, PepsiCo provided the ability to post stories directly to social networking sites.⁸ Such enhancements make it easy for employees to speak about their organization via social media, and increase the chances of positive messages being circulated about the organization on social media sites.⁵

Conclusion

The widespread use of social media can provide a competitive advantage in the area of talent recruitment.¹ HR departments must seize that advantage by transforming employees into social ambassadors.³ By establishing a social media policy, researching employee social media use, creating a social media team, developing a social media training program, and then expanding on that training, HR can transform employees into social ambassadors. Such actions will set an organization on the path to success and demonstrate that it is prepared for the future of talent recruitment.

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