



What You Can Learn from Lady Gaga

Q: How do we turn customers into evangelists for our brand?

A: I've received this question from several people. And they are always surprised by my answer: follow Lady Gaga.

Yes, Lady Gaga, the larger-than-life pop icon. I realize she has nothing to do with fast food (although she did wear that meat dress to the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards!), but Lady Gaga is the foremost authority on how to amass throngs of loyal followers and unleash their power to create fame.

She has 22 million Twitter followers who constantly talk about, praise, promote, support, campaign, and advocate for her, not to mention 50 million people who have liked her on Facebook and 170 million views her videos have racked up on YouTube. Like her or not, Lady Gaga can teach business leaders a thing or two about fanning the flames of word-of-mouth marketing.

Lady Gaga's approach starts with whom she engages. She's very clear about who she is and what she believes, so she magnetically attracts certain types of people who are predisposed to be her evangelists. In the same way, you should shine the light of your brand identity and values clearly and strongly so you naturally attract customers who like you and who share your beliefs. These folks will not only want you to succeed, but they will also want to help you succeed.

Lady Gaga engages influential people and her fan sites are followed by legions of admirers. Videos of fans covering her songs attract thousands of views, and one got nearly 50 million hits. The influence of your fans will undoubtedly be less widespread, but you should seek out people who have large social networks or hold positions of leadership and influence in their communities.

Lady Gaga understands her fans. She knows they generally have three motivations for spreading the word about her: functional (they desire to obtain information, especially if it's insider or exclusive news, and they have a tendency to share it), social (they want to express their uniqueness and enhance their image by associating with someone they admire and feel an affinity with), and emotional (they enjoy sharing their emotions and experiences).

Fans of your business have similar motivations. Demonstrate that you understand what they're looking for by feeding their desires with some of Lady Gaga's best practices.

Foster a sense of belonging and exclusivity. Lady Gaga lovingly calls her fans "Little Monsters" and has written a manifesto for them. You might consider bestowing your fans with a special moniker or creating an invitation-only club. It will give them

something to brag about.

Thank and praise your fans. Lady Gaga always expresses her gratitude for her fans and their support. She validates their love for her music and personality and is always positive about them. Ensure your evangelists know how much you appreciate them by acknowledging them publicly. Be their biggest fans—offer sincere compliments and encouragements.

Make them the stars. One young Canadian fan became a hit when Lady Gaga invited him to perform with her on stage. You can shine the spotlight on special customers by naming a product after them or running a promotion using their name. Feature them on your website or give them a designated parking space at your store. They'll feel like a star and you'll get a powerful viral story.

Be personally involved. Unlike other stars, Lady Gaga writes her own tweets and shares pictures she takes of herself and others. This communicates authenticity and a commitment that endears people to her. Customers like having a direct relationship with the owners or managers of the restaurants they patronize, and they like telling people about that direct access.

Listen to them. It's clear Lady Gaga reads her fans' tweets, posts, and comments. You should, too. Enough said.

Be active. Rarely a day goes by that Lady Gaga isn't on Twitter. Frequent and timely communication makes people feel like they have a real connection and it keeps them plugged in. Stay on people's radar screens with active communication through multiple touch points. You don't want to be the talk of the town for just one day. The more people hear from you, the more their friends will hear from them about you.

Give away your secrets. Just like Lady Gaga releases exclusive songs and news to her fans, you should let your fans in on your business with exclusive offers and information. Give them a sneak peek at a new menu item, share the "secret" recipe for a popular menu item, offer behind-the-scenes experiences, or host invitation-only events. Build trust and your influence will grow.

Provide sharing tools. Lady Gaga recently launched a site specifically for her Little Monsters. The site lets users "pin" locations and items they like, and enables them to create and share their own content. Follow her lead and make your content easy to share with check-ins and posts via mobile apps, Twitter hash tags, and so on.

Of course, none of these word-of-mouth marketing tactics would work for Lady Gaga if she weren't such an extraordinary figure. The same goes for your business. The first—and best—way to create brand evangelists is to serve up extraordinary experiences to your guests every day. 