



# CREATE DEEP CONNECTIONS WITH ANY AUDIENCE

**HARNESS THE POWER OF BRAND ADVOCATES**

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# Introduction

People are currently distributed and physically isolated in unprecedented ways. While many of us hit ‘pause’ on our daily activities and rely on digital connectivity for social interaction, organizations around the globe have been handed a golden opportunity to rethink their 2020 marketing strategies.

It’s time for marketers to recalibrate, to reconsider why people respond to brand messages today, and how great brands are engaging their customers. Then, fast forward to brand-building programs to address our true digital-first society—a virtual place where people still want genuine human connection.

It’s time to get back to basics, back to creating individual connections with people through authentic brand stories.

How? The answer lies with your brand advocates—the real people who love your brand and are proud to tell their friends and followers about it. They’re the (not-so) secret to creating deep brand connections with any audience.

Let’s take a look at why authentic content driven by true advocates is so critical to brands right now, how you can put these super-connectors into action today, and 12 recent success stories.

# Authenticity Always Wins

Why?

The answer is simple: Consumers, especially younger ones, are tired of advertising and rhetoric, and they're tired of manufactured brand messages. They can spot them a mile away. They want straight talk from real people—the people they trust.

Countless studies have proclaimed [word-of-mouth marketing](#) to be the best type of marketing...EVER. And no wonder: People don't build relationships with companies; they develop relationships with people. And the people who do word-of-mouth endorsement the best are brand advocates: The people most closely associated with your brand, directly or indirectly, who truly love it and proudly share that love with others.

In most cases, these first-degree evangelists—your staff, partners, customers, fans, and more—collectively have more followers on their social accounts than your brand itself. So, they have a unique ability to extend your brand reach both authentically and exponentially.



**Brand advocacy is a foundational marketing lever that starts with people.**



**People who identify with a brand may tell others about it.**



**People who love a brand will tell many others about it, endorse it, and stay loyal to it.**





[Brand advocates are 50% more likely to influence purchase decisions.](#) That makes sense, as nothing beats a genuine, personal recommendation about a brand. Nothing. In fact, nearly 75% of consumers say [personal recommendations are a critical influence](#) on their purchase decisions. People trust company, product and event recommendations from their closest circles: their friends, family, co-workers, and even celebrities and other notable people they admire.

These person-to-person interactions are now frequently conducted through digital and social channels, which offer consumers immediate access to recommendations. They check reviews, referrals and ratings, and ask people they trust—all within seconds. And they're [16x more likely to read a friend's post about a brand](#) than one from the brand itself. Recent GlobalWebIndex research highlighted the growing importance of brand advocates to virtual social recommendation circles. The firm found that while 38% of worldwide internet users follow brand accounts on social networks, there is a [large opportunity for brand advocates to extend social audience reach and engagement](#).

**51% follow people they know in real life**

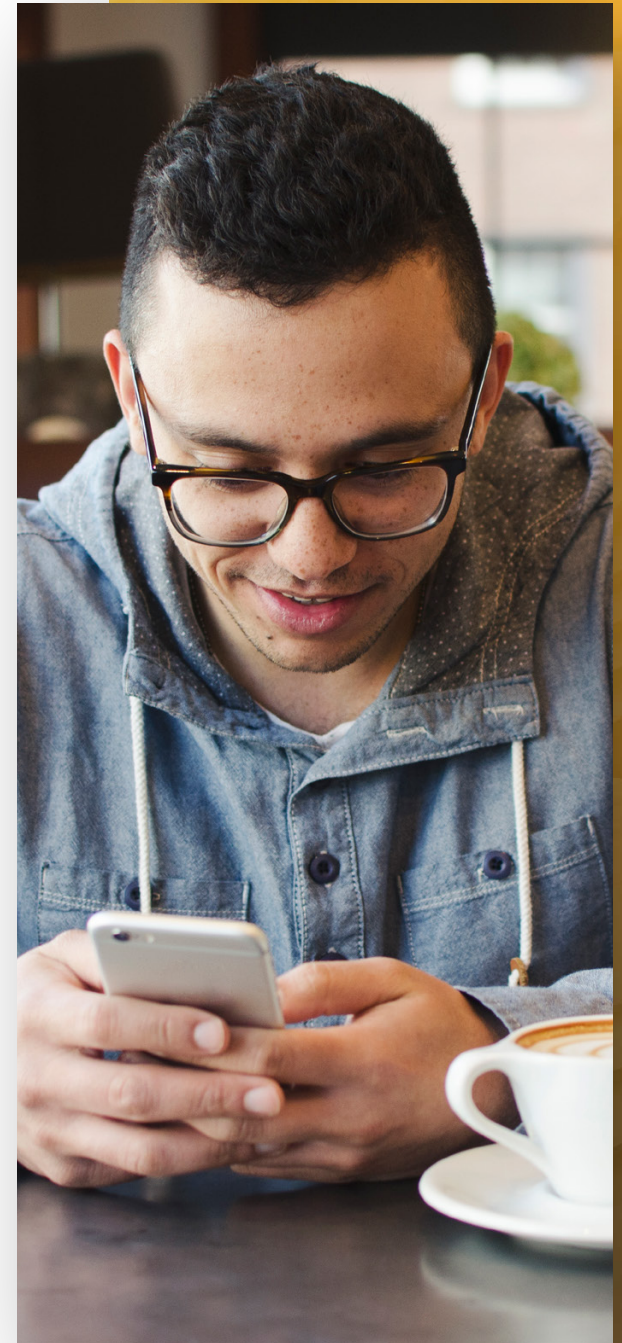
**33% follow actors**

**Nearly 1 in 4 follow sports stars**

Digital advertising has distracted many of us from remembering that WOMM and personal recommendations are core marketing concepts that are more relevant than ever.

[Consumers are ignoring ads](#) at a greater and greater pace, and social media has eroded the control a brand has on its personality, image and voice. It has also changed buying habits and put consumers in charge of determining how truthful and authentic brands are. 86% of people now say [authenticity is important when deciding what brands they like and support](#), particularly younger generations.

A brand's message is now firmly in the hands of individual voices, collectively more powerful than even the biggest brand budgets. Savvy marketers know that leveraging the right brand advocates on social can turn those individual voices into a roar from thousands, and proxies for these trustworthy people connectors can do more harm for your brand than good.



# Paid Influencers: Almost Authentic

These proxies—paid influencers—have cropped up across every social network with their knack for showcasing brands in ‘real life.’ They’ve promoted brands as if they were personally endorsing and recommending them to their often large follower bases, and bending the reality that they’re actually not.

**Paid influencers, however effective in the short term, aren’t authentic advocates.**

They generally don’t have a genuine interest in the brands they represent; they’re merely seeking a paycheck. And, they’ve saddled companies with issues ranging from brand damage and poor brand representation to declining levels of trust, transparency and brand lift. Plus, they’re not inexpensive, no matter the size of their follower counts. Tapping a [highly influential celebrity](#) can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars for a single post.

At the same time, consumers have become more sophisticated—they see through the advertorial veneer and recognize the ‘personal’ recommendations in paid influencer posts for what they really are: the straight-up brand advertising they’re avoiding. They’ve stopped trusting these messages; they’re tuning them out and seeking quality content and credible endorsements from their real connection points.





That's likely why [only 18 percent of people trust brand influencers these days, while 92 percent trust brand advocates](#). Consumers want less highly-produced, stylized brand content talking at them, and more intimate, honest conversations. That's what moves the needle to higher engagement, activation and conversion. Research has indicated that [consumers find this authentic content nearly 10x more impactful than influencer content](#) when making a purchasing decision.

**Real messages from real advocates spur the actions that audiences take and feel good about.**

Because the strongest brand advocates work with you in some way or are already customers, they have meaningful connections to your organization that shine through in their communication with others. Consumers are more open to engaging with them and more willing to act on their messages.

What better time than now to embrace authentic word-of-mouth endorsement through real brand advocates, and move away from inauthentic influencers as stand-ins for people that love your brand.



# Brand Advocates Are All Around You

To find your brand's own advocates, you don't have to look very far.

They're your best customers, your staff, your athletes if you're a sports brand, and your talent if you're in entertainment. They might be your field agents, franchise owners, or retail store managers. They might even be your team of close brand ambassadors. They're anyone who has an existing relationship with your organization and a personal interest in talking about it positively with others.

Advocates have the unique ability to create the organic and personal connections with brands that many marketers can only dream about.

As just one example, this athlete post saw over **3x the engagement that the brand did for the same content**. That's the power of brand advocates.



Image Source 1: @KStateMBB. "Take every day by itself, and have a big name for the program." Twitter, November 17, 2019, 5:23 p.m., <https://twitter.com/KStateMBB/status/1196237334439768064?s=20>

Image Source 2: @Monte\_Murphy. "#KStateMBB #CultureOfEffort Working every day because this is what I love." Twitter, November 17, 2019, 5:11 p.m., [https://twitter.com/Monte\\_Murphy/status/1196234330957373446?s=20](https://twitter.com/Monte_Murphy/status/1196234330957373446?s=20)



You could have tens, or hundreds or thousands of advocates right now, in two different groups or 20. Here are some thought-starters:

- **Sports** – your athletes, coaches, broadcasters, sponsors, mascots, venue partners, students, biggest fans, alumni, and staff
- **TV and Movies** – your talent, creative executives, production crews, fans, and staff
- **News and Media** – your on-air anchors, producers, editors, reporters, production teams, citizen reporters, subject matter experts, and staff
- **Non-profits, campaigns and social causes** – your supporters, volunteers, donors, service recipients, and program staff
- **Retail** – your customers, employees, brand partners, loyalty club members, and corporate staff
- **Enterprise** – your agents, employees, customers, and corporate staff
- **Franchises** – your franchise owners and managers, instructors, and local staff
- **Automotive** – your dealer network, regional marketing teams, field agents, and staff
- **Events** – your attendees, speakers, past speakers, sponsors, and staff



Luckily, every organization has at least one group of brand advocates in their arsenal. Advocates are on the ground, around the world, equipped with mobile phones, and ready to speak to their friends for you. They likely engage actively with your brand already on social media, so they're primed to tell your stories in original, creative and personal ways and build new relationships there. Their authentic voices matter—often more than your brand's best ads. And your customers—old and new—are ready to listen to them.

For many marketers, this army of brand advocates and their connected devices may be all you've got to maintain trust, relevance and engagement right now, while video and photo shoots are on hold, advertising and production budgets are tightened, and original brand content is in short supply.

These evangelists define authenticity and can provide strong connections to people through the stories and media they create and share for you. Plus, many of them are at home now and looking for opportunities to contribute to brands they care about and feel like part of your extended brand team. All you have to do is activate them, giving them the structure, motivation and direction they need to work on your behalf.

Welcome to your new marketing plan.



# Activate Your Advocates: Four Keys to Success

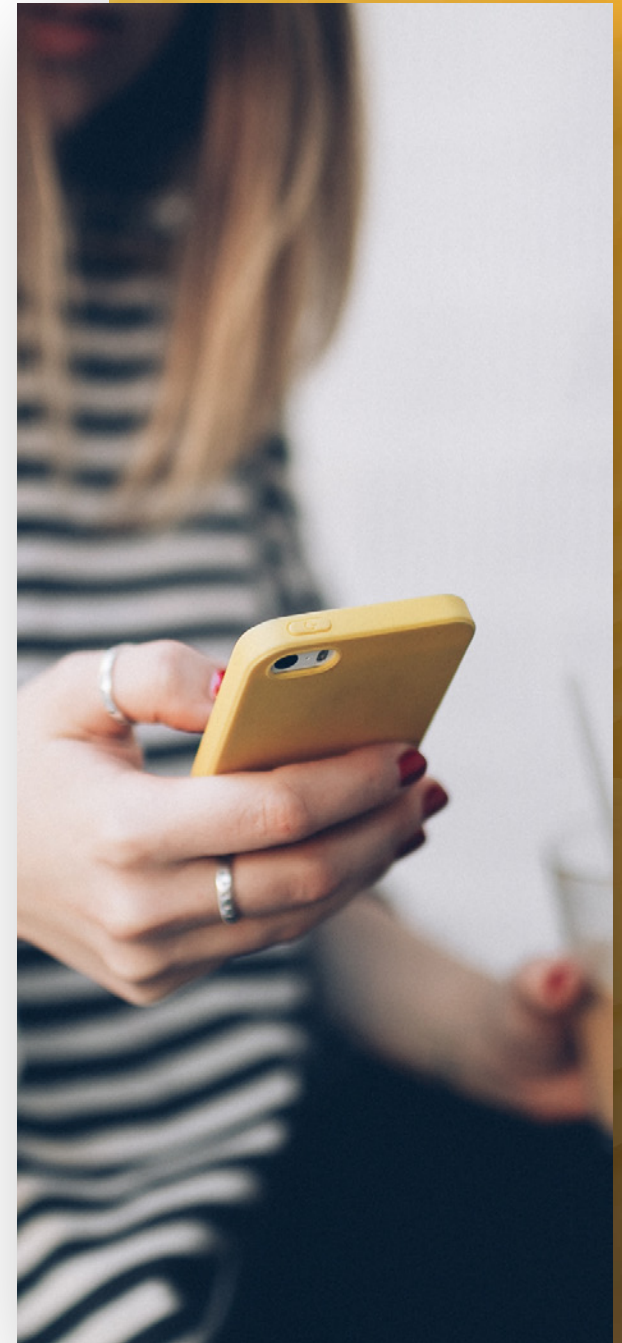
Having a successful brand advocacy program today means creating a structured, mutually-beneficial relationship with your assembled advocate network to harness their brand-building power on social media.

The current environment is optimal for activating your brand advocates: Customers are seeking authenticity, you have advocates ready to spread the word, and finally the technology now exists to leverage this network effectively.

These brand champions can be activated to share your content with their followers whenever you need them to disseminate it. Yet, it's when they record their own authentic stories about your brand that their true power shines through—and the full value of this relationship comes back to you (and them) many times over, as we'll see.

To ensure a thriving program and optimize how you work with your advocates, you'll need to put these four components into place:

1. Tangible advocate benefits
2. Intrinsic motivation
3. Private, two-way communication channel
4. Scalable system for content organization and curation





# Tangible Advocate Benefits

Advocates, like most people, want to build a personal brand on social media, just like you want to improve the value of your organization's brand. But in many cases, especially with athletes or talent, you have the one thing they don't have: stores of original content, featuring them. The content they want to use to grow their own social presence—photos, videos, GIFs, and more, is in your hands.

When your marketing or social media team distributes that content to them—either one piece at a time or from galleries of archives—they have the media they need to craft their own story, with very little time or effort on their part. They can post this high-quality media, build upon it by adding their personal commentary, maybe explain how they were feeling in that particular moment, or simply showcase something new.

The media you provide will delight their followers, friends and families when they post it on their social channels. It will improve their personal brand value. And, that new content most likely features some aspect of your brand: the organization, event, team, league, show, or sponsor is represented in some way. When an advocate posts your content to build their personal brand, they're implicitly endorsing the source, and your brand can reap immediate benefits.

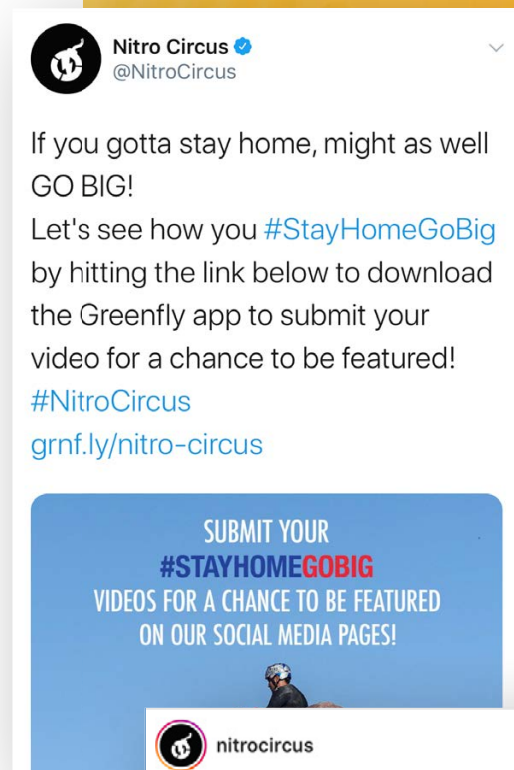


# Intrinsic Motivation

Delivering authentic content to an advocate is self-motivating—most advocates look at it as a gift, an opportunity to help themselves. They see it, build upon it, and share it to boost their image. And when an advocate recognizes the power of the content your organization delivers to them, they're more likely to give you content they create in return. This action keeps the virtuous cycle going and garners them opportunities to be featured on your brand channels and boost their image that way as well.

Your brand increases its reach, tapping a potential new audience of followers. The advocate feels supported and special—the recipient of a gift that helps them. And the advocate's audience feels more connected to them and the brand—all at the same time. Everybody wins.

The importance of intrinsic motivation can't be underscored enough—without a direct, personal benefit, advocates will generally not consistently help a brand. It's only when there's something in it for them that they will put out the right effort and endorse the brand on a long-term basis.

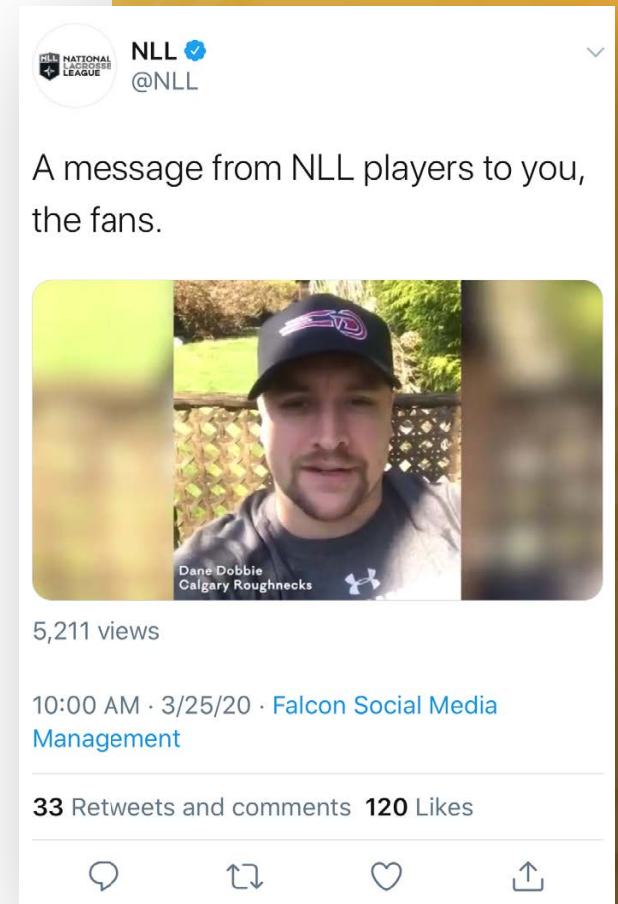


# Private, Two-Way Communication

Bi-directional communication is critical—you need to be able to offer your advocates guidance and instructions on the content they create and share for your brand to maintain controls, and keep them tuned in. But they also want to ask questions and have private dialogues, so a closed-loop communication process is needed. Private communications channels also help them feel appreciated, special and connected.

Similarly, two-way media exchange is vital—you need to deliver photo and video assets quickly and easily, and so do they. Email jumps to mind, as does texting, and Slack. But these tools are too open—they don't keep responses private, and they're just not optimized for sharing media—especially when that media is accompanied by meta information, instructions, descriptions, and hashtags.

Advocates feel special when they're part of a closed, elite group. So, invite them into your program—give them an exclusive invitation code to this private content network where they can get a sneak peek of something new to share or collaborate with friends to create. Message them with ideas or insights. Woo them into the 'inner circle' of your organization to help them develop the stories that make a real impact on your brand and theirs as well.





# Content Organization and Curation

Finally, a successful brand advocacy plan requires an efficient system for organizing and managing all of the media and content being sent to and collected from advocates—to keep everything running smoothly.

The system should allow brand, communication and marketing teams to easily sort and curate media assets. In this way, they will be able to collaborate internally, and streamline media collection and delivery activities with multiple advocate groups. This system should ensure they won't have to sift through long email or message chains, search multiple devices to find their content, find that one Dropbox link, or wonder how and when they should shoot it or share it. And, it should provide you with the data insights needed to continually improve advocate relationships over time.

But how do you enable your assembled advocate network to contribute to your brand if these people are homebound or scattered across the globe? In today's world, how do you put these four levers in motion to ensure brand advocacy success? Get yourself (and them) the right technology.



Brand advocacy software is direct-to-mobile, giving your advocates immediate access to the content they need to build their brand and help you grow yours. It supports personalized communication and reciprocal media exchanges between individuals or groups of advocates and your marketing team. And, it manages all of these activities, people and content assets in one centralized and simple-to-use management hub that automates many of today's tedious, time consuming, and error-prone processes.

Creating and distributing content through virtual collaboration can be done in a few simple taps, with little or no intervention from marketers or social media teams.

Content flowing through a brand advocacy software platform can be leveraged in multiple ways. A sports organization used the [Greenfly brand advocacy platform](#) to collect a coach's workout video. They shared that video on social and simultaneously requested fan workout videos to connect with them further and gather even more content to keep the cycle going.

Now let's take a look at how you can start working with your brand advocates today and some success stories from leading organizations who've tapped into these important boosters.

## Drive More Engagement With AGC

It's important to note that advocate-generated content (AGC) differs from user-generated content (UGC). AGC is high-quality, directed content that can support marketing teams specifically when and where they need it the most!

# How to Get Great Content From Your Advocates

To get your (and their) creative juices flowing, think first about what inspires you about the brand you represent. When you put together your marketing plans, what are the themes that are meaningful to you and keep you connected to the brand? They will likely spur similar feelings in your advocates and audiences.

Think about the stories you're telling already that motivate your audiences to engage—are they inspiring, entertaining, educational, or something else?

It's essential to look at your data on what content resonates with your audiences the most. Right now, think about the content that performs well when your organization is on hiatus, off-season, between campaigns, or when it has shot content remotely. It may be athlete or talent training regimens, stories of a product invention, or memories of past events. Are these stories more popular at different times and with different groups? Dig deep into the numbers, and you'll find a lot to explore.





Then, seek out the specific advocates you have that you think can best tell and share these stories. Take a look at what content those folks are already sharing on their social channels to confirm it aligns with your brand and particular objectives. Talk to them. You may find some natural storytellers and supporters you haven't considered for brand advocacy. All they need is some guidance from you.

Find out what strikes a chord with these advocates about your brand and give them some context around what you're looking to achieve. This objective could be new narratives that support a product strategy shift or adding their perspectives to your library content of milestone moments.

Great content springs from clear guided requests: Provide them with examples for creative inspiration, and personalized, suggested copy points with hashtags for trending or relevant topics. If you have a deadline to get their content back or a particular video length you need, let them know.

Then, sit back and watch your advocates spring into action to make the content you and your audiences need. Offer feedback and messages of appreciation to improve their content over time and grow your collaboration together.



# 12 Stories of Brand Advocacy Success

Organizations across the sports, entertainment, media, consumer brand, and non-profit industries have realized the impact of brand advocate-generated content on their audience engagement and customer affinity. Here are some of the many examples that Greenfly has helped put into action around the globe in the last few months to drive deeper audience connection and brand awareness.



## 12 Stories of Brand Advocacy Success

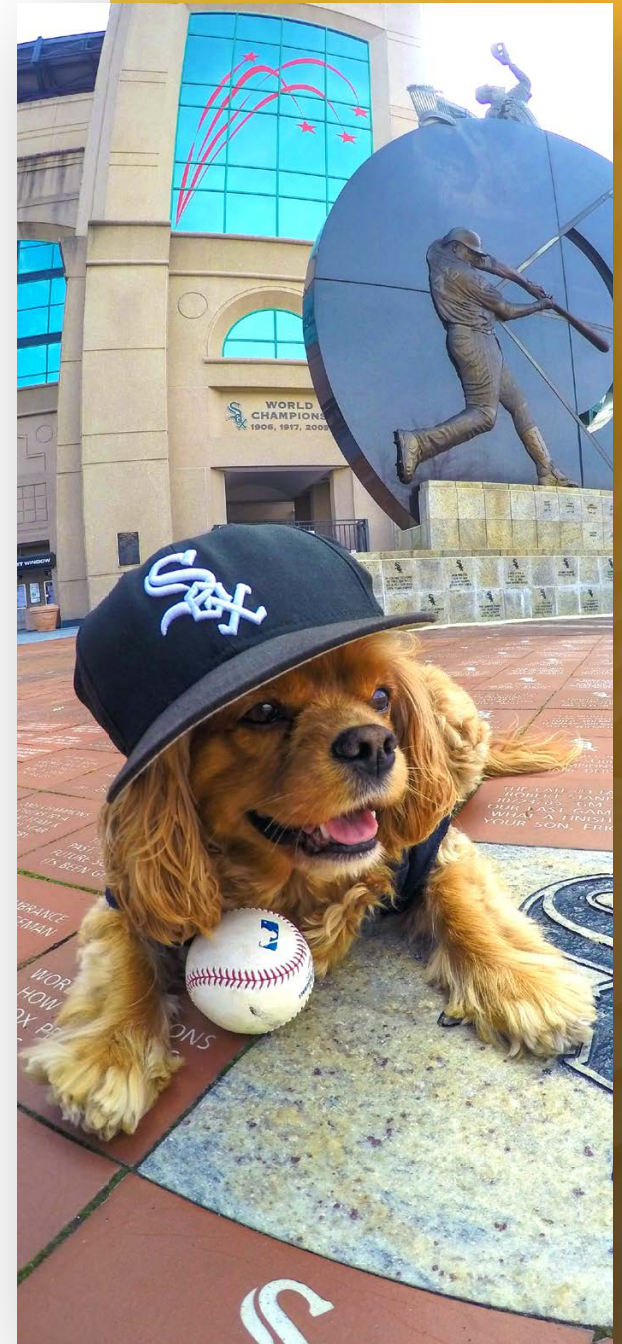
1. **Collect Stories From the Field:** A top relief NGO collected over 100 responses in the first week from volunteer and staff advocates on the ground. Their stories showcased ambulances in action, food deliveries, prep work, and more.
2. **Strengthen Position as a Role Model:** A major pro sports league requested videos of its athletes telling a story about their nicknames in 20 seconds—all while washing their hands.
3. **Increase Audience Engagement:** A popular cable TV network gathered PSA videos from its slate of top talent. These ran on social and broadcast channels and garnered double-digit engagement increases across almost every channel.
4. **Connect With Fans:** A pro sports league received over 50 content pieces in only a few days from players at home, including video PSA messages to fans and videos with their pets.
5. **Show How You Support Customers Virtually:** An insurance company collected videos from their agents on how they are supporting their clients virtually while at home.
6. **Find Engaging Types of Content:** A leading international sports media network got videos from on-air talent performing a fitness challenge, supplying fans with new, entertaining content.





## 12 Stories of Brand Advocacy Success (cont.)

7. **Celebrate Moments:** A pro sports team has kept its staff connection and camaraderie alive by asking them to send in photos of their pets for National Puppy Day, which the team posted to social media.
8. **Highlight Advocates Behind the Scenes:** A pro sports team has been chronicling the adventures of its mascot performing daily tasks at home—in costume—to satiate fan thirst for funny new content.
9. **Recognize Milestones:** A growing activist organization developed a special Snapchat filter for its advocates to mark a special anniversary, encouraging them to share those filtered messages with their followers to show their support. The organization collected nearly 200 unique content responses.
10. **Gather Clips for More Authentic Video Stories:** A fitness franchise celebrated a recent holiday with a montage video made from clips contributed by instructors at home.
11. **Repackage Your Archives:** A pro sports team requested videos from fans and mashed them together with archived footage into new videos celebrating special moments in the franchise's history.
12. **Showcase the People You Help:** A non-profit foundation has showcased the emotional, first-person stories of families it has helped. It added more donors as a result and increased the average level of donation by 45%.



# Looking Forward

It's time to get back to basics and build audience affinity and deep social connections with content created and delivered authentically by your brand advocates. Audiences are demanding it today. These valuable evangelists will undoubtedly lead the way for organizations this year as you emerge from this unprecedented period of change. With these tips and success stories at your fingertips, you're ready to get started activating your advocates for engaging content creation and collaboration.

Together, you can drive your business forward as it continues to offer even more new stories to tell.



# Discover Greenfly

Greenfly, the leader in brand advocacy, enables organizations to fuel brand love through authenticity. The company's brand advocacy platform and mobile apps enable organizations to transform their advocates into brand builders by harnessing the power of authentic content.

Sports, media, entertainment, social cause, and agent-driven organizations depend on Greenfly to both share media galleries as well as collect original photos and videos from advocates. This authentic content helps both the advocate and the brand build deeper, more personal connections with followers on social media.

If you're considering launching a brand advocacy program, reach out and let us know. We'll be happy to help!



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