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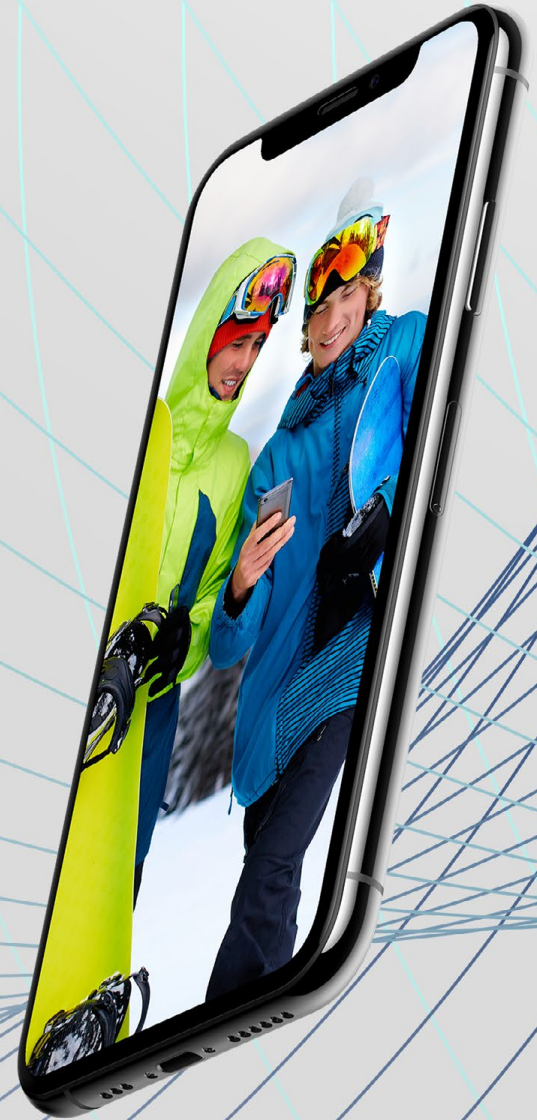
# UNLOCK THE POWER OF YOUR BRAND AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

## FIVE KEYS TO NEXT-LEVEL BUSINESS IMPACT

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# Introduction

The era of top-down branding is over.

Your brand message is now controlled by your customers, and as your reliance on paid advertising fades, building human, personal connections to your brand with your ambassadors is the way forward.

The power that brand ambassadors wield on social media and other digital channels is undeniable. Ambassador programs are a rapidly growing marketing strategy for top brands, especially as the accelerated jump to digital-first has permanently changed consumer behavior.

- **Social media is the new frontline for brand engagement.**
- **Discussions are increasingly happening in private digital groups — where brands aren't allowed.**
- **Brands aren't in control of their messages anymore…consumers are.**
- **The effectiveness of paid advertising (especially social ads) is diminishing.**
- **Consumers crave to connect at a human level — even online.**

Brand ambassador programs fuel brand love. They build awareness, drive loyalty and increase revenue. And ambassadors have an especially large influence when they implicitly or explicitly recommend a product.

If you're reading this, you've established an ambassador program and you're seeing success. Taking that program to the next level of impact, however, is especially challenging. Ambassador programs are inherently difficult to scale and hard to manage efficiently with busy, remote advocates.

Fortunately, this new age of ambassadors has also brought solutions to help marketing teams. Let's examine why optimizing your brand ambassador program is so critical, and how you can clear the five most difficult hurdles in the race to make that happen.

# Why Ambassador Programs Work

Consumers have almost completely shifted to digital-first interactions. Social media networks are hubs of community connection; ensuring your brand is part of the discussions there is critical to success. The programs that work to build brand awareness and value on social are all grown from the same simple concept: advocacy marketing.
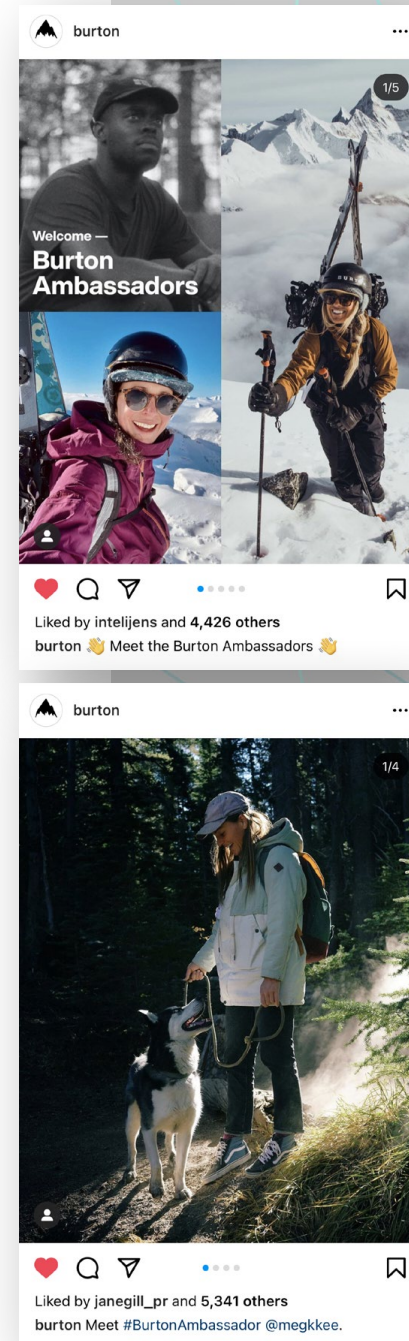
> **Advocacy marketing is a discipline for activating a brand's advocates with unprecedented scale over the social Web.**

When advocacy marketing is enabled through thoughtful programs, advocate stories, endorsements and recommendations are organically amplified to potentially millions of people.

Ambassadors can come in many forms: Celebrities or athletes with product endorsements. Superfans who are your most passionate customers. Creators with large social audiences. Or employees and contractors representing your brand at events.

Their power is sharing personal, word-of-mouth recommendations and telling engaging stories to their friends and followers. Their love of your brand organically boosts reach, awareness, engagement and revenue. And they're self-motivated to build their personal brand, simultaneously creating affinity for the brands they love and support.

Innovative brand teams have structured their programs to reinforce and capitalize on this intrinsic motivation. They provide the software tools and media needed to help advocates build their personal brand, benefiting directly in the process. This positive support helps the brand build a culture that's stronger, bigger and more authentic than the largest ad budget can buy.

Image Sources: @burton. Instagram. March 2, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CL7czVmnbQw/
@burton. Instagram. April 5, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CNS5fBVnGNt/

# Ambassadors Are Your Best Advocates

As organic reach declines across social platforms, ambassadors provide reach far beyond owned "official" brand channels. When the brand can't be part of the discussion, ambassadors can sway consumer opinion like no other marketing toolkit strategy.

> **71% of marketers cite 'ongoing ambassadorships' as the most effective form of influencer marketing.**

It's important to remember that ambassadors aren't the same as paid influencers. They're much better in every way.

They influence consumer perceptions on social media, but ambassadors aren't compensated on a pay-per-transaction model. Ambassadors have long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with the brand and a personal interest in its success — providing organic and authentic endorsements that paid influencers simply can't.

Great ambassadors are aligned with a brand's values and support it credibly through the social media they create and share — helping fill a content void many brands struggle to address through generic, inauthentic stock photos. As ambassadors support their favorite organizations, their mutually beneficial promotion expands the reach and trust of both of their digital profiles. With efficiently managed ambassador programs, brands can eliminate their dependence on the diminishing organic reach of owned social channels. They can reduce advertising dependence and drive direct purchases through positive, authentic content.

It's simple math: By conducting an orchestra of authentic voices — each with their own unique audience — brands can reach and influence more new potential customers.
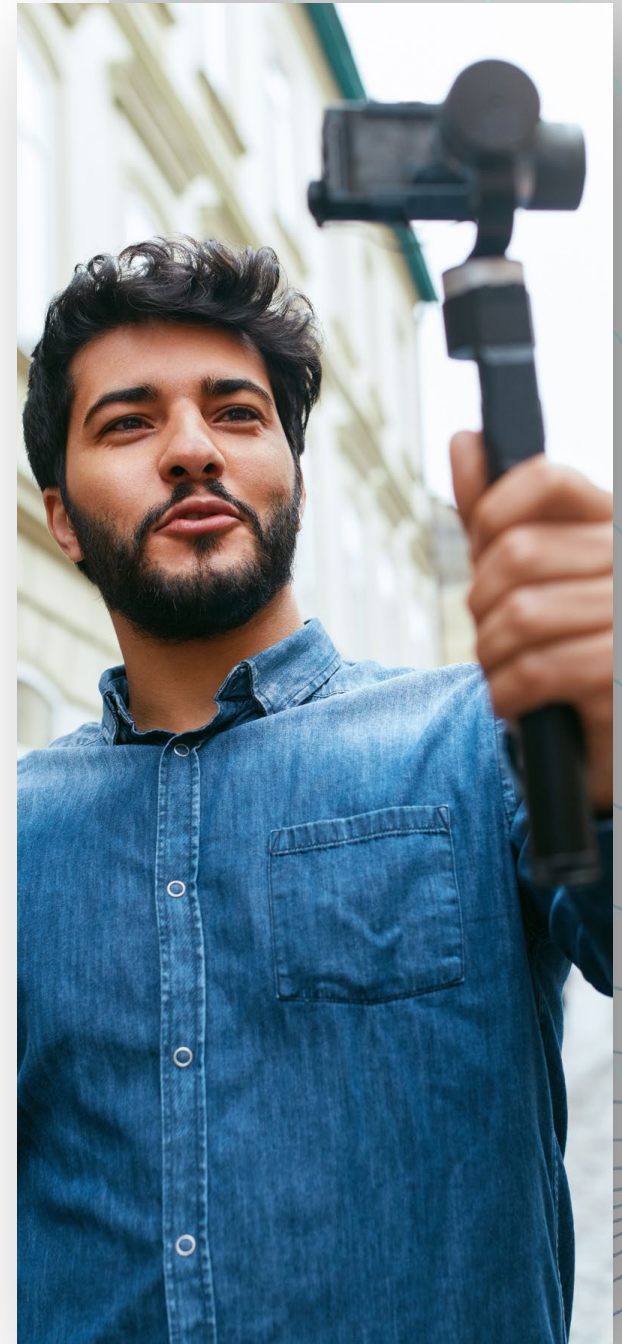
# Programs Built for Today — and Tomorrow

The world has become more physically disconnected, with fewer opportunities for marketers to meet consumers in person. The budgets needed to reach consumers through broadcast and digital ads are being re-evaluated in every industry. And commissioning the same slickly-produced content that used to work is the opposite of the personal, intimate engagement that consumers now crave. Cutting through the noise using personal, intimate and authentic content has become the key to winning customer affinity.

The last year has accelerated a number of key global trends:

- **Primary media consumption is now through social and digital media channels.**
- **Consumers demand more authenticity from their online relationships.**
- **Marketers have restricted access to studio-created photo and video content.**
- **Remote work and collaboration are here to stay.**

These shifts have permanently altered the way consumers perceive brands — and created new opportunities for marketers to respond. Retrofitting and reimagining existing or new brand executions for this era might work. However, ambassador programs, which directly address all of these new paradigms, should be a critical focus. Scaling your brand ambassador program has never been more important.

Ambassador programs are already more impactful than many other brand initiatives to reach consumers. They're also a great way to reduce marketing costs and improve efficiencies. But like anything worth having, these initiatives involve overcoming some inherent challenges to bring them fully to life.

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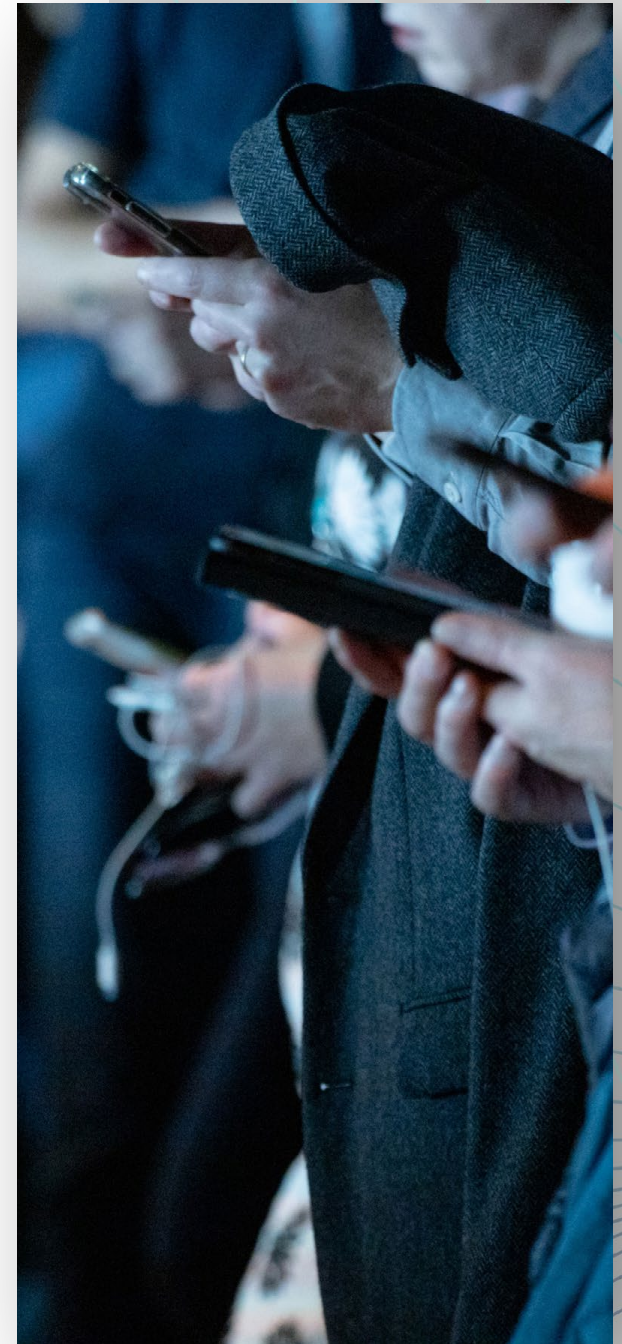
# Scaling Brand Ambassador Programs Is Hard

If advocacy marketing is so great, why aren't more brands expanding ambassador programs to influence even larger audiences?

Many are stuck with time-consuming manual workflows, inefficient back and forth communications, ambassador-created content that doesn't work, or never-ending cycles of activity tracking. With too much friction, even great programs may never reach their true potential. You may recognize or identify with some of these challenges:

> "I get one ambassador's videos to download from a Google Drive link, but another sends me their videos by SMS, and I can't use them because the quality degrades. Others will only use email, so I get assets with 50MB attachments.
>
> The media they create is really hard to use — even if it's great content."

If any of these situations sound familiar, you're not alone. The brands that are finding success and making the most of their programs have surmounted five critical obstacles to bring their program to the next level of effectiveness.

"Every time we add a new ambassador, it's tough getting them the most up-to-date photos and videos to share. And, we only send some assets to folks that were part of a particular campaign. With a small staff, it's hard to keep all of that organized."

"I've collected some content from high-profile ambassadors, but I have to get my legal department involved to determine if we can even use them."

"Every time I ask our ambassadors to share something on social, I have to go through every single social media account to see if they actually posted it. I just want to know it's done!"

"I really wish I could prove that the ambassador program is working. It's nearly impossible to track social metrics across each ambassador to know what impact they're making."

# Five Focus Areas for Program Success

Manual efforts and adding program staff only go so far. Many brands have seen their ambassador programs provide inversely proportional returns as they grow — delivering less value and impact as overhead increases. This is an unfortunate waste of word-of-mouth endorsement and goodwill and loss of brand value.

To efficiently manage and optimize how you work with ambassadors, you'll need to address these five material challenges that trip up even the most sophisticated programs:

1. Centralized Communications
2. Ambassador Requests
3. Media Creation and Collection
4. Activity Tracking
5. Program Measurement

Let's take them one by one.

# 1 Centralized Communications

An effective ambassador program begins with the spirit of collaboration and a streamlined, open dialogue. Many teams get stuck trying to work with ambassadors using personal communication tools like email, texts and Slack. One-to-one communication simply doesn't scale.

Larger programs typically adopt group-based communications tools. They may use cloud storage systems and folders (Box or Dropbox) to share and organize assets and group chat software (Whatsapp or Viber) to communicate. What Greenfly customers have discovered is that disparate, decentralized communications leave too much to chance, are easily ignored, and counteract scale. Many-to-many group communications are a headache, with 'Replies to All' or too many direct responses in one person's inbox (when ambassador contact information is confidential). Marketing teams can't share knowledge or even fill in for each other when a colleague is out of the office.

To centralize ambassador communications, focus everyone on a single channel or tool that has a mobile app designed for groups (and isn't email or SMS). This way, you can keep conversations shared between marketing team members using the same 'admin' alias while keeping individual ambassadors private. Even better, find a technology where communications and media exchange work together, so ambassadors have a single place to go for media, requests and communications.

Whether you're working with tens or thousands of advocates, chaotic communications can be the biggest drag on program effectiveness.

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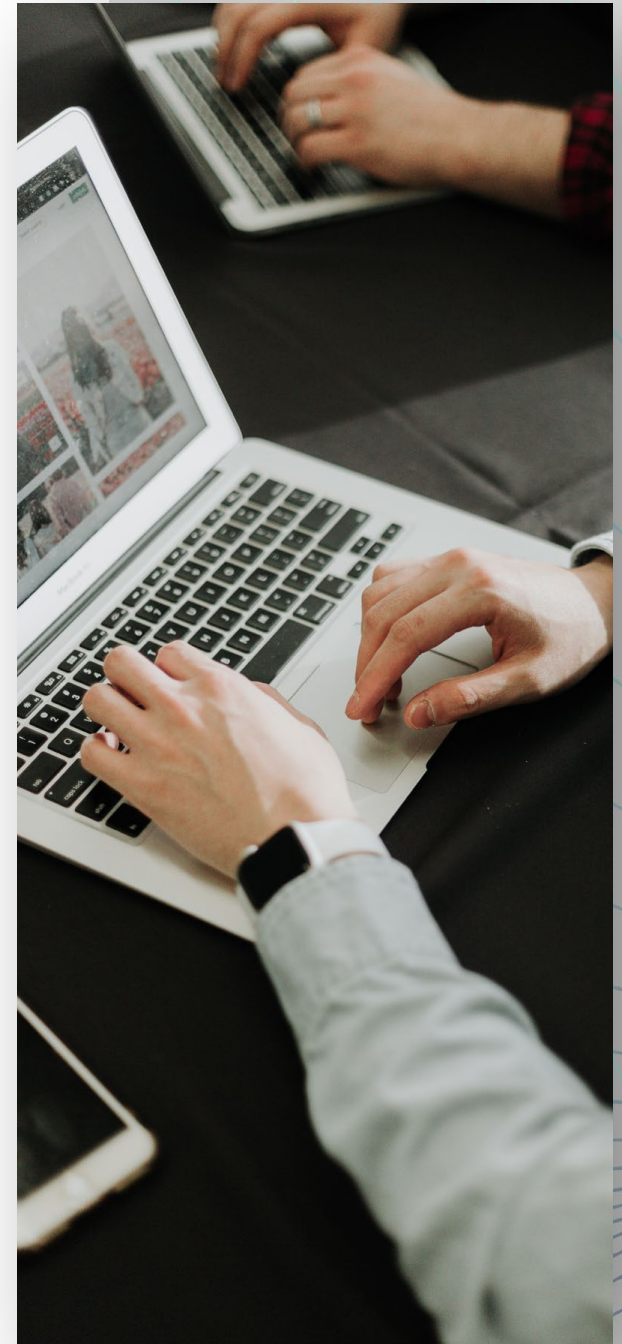
# **2** Ambassador Requests

One of the ways we leverage ambassadors is to ask them to do specific things. These requests range from providing feedback on a new product to sharing a photo on social media, creating a video endorsement, or capturing them 'in action' with a product.

Ambassador program managers who work with tens or hundreds of people know that the request can be easy, but organizing the myriad of responses is extremely challenging. You might use a spreadsheet to keep track of who was asked to do what, but actually ensuring they did what they committed to is a much different story.

If you've asked for a one-minute video, you'll get some responses, and media files will be sent through text, email, Whatsapp or even posted right to a social account — before you wanted it published. Depending on your delivery method (email being the most easily ignored,) you might only get 20% participation. Multiply that mixed response by the entire ambassador team, and you can lose entire days figuring out whether to say "Try harder, please" or "Thank you" after a request.

When asking for a social post, think of the time you could save if you know for sure that a photo or video was shared. How much social impact it made. Across every influencer, on all of their social platforms.
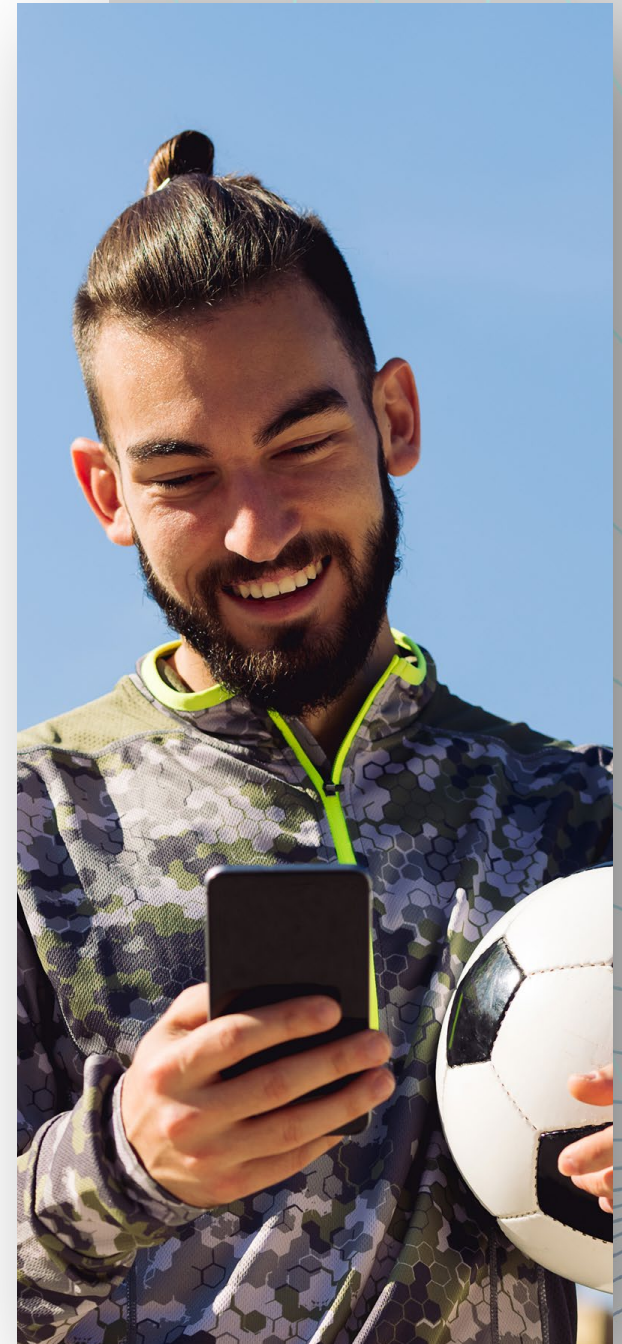
# 3 Media Creation and Collection

Gathering ambassadors' original photos and videos to use in brand promotions provides real authenticity and reduces the expense and hassle of professional shoots. Creating engaging, authentic content at any scale is challenging, so many brands depend on user-generated content (UGC) to provide the perception of authenticity. However, ambassador-created content is more effective at engaging audiences. It's purpose-built for the brand and It's promoted and endorsed by the advocate themselves — and their networks.

Imagine you send every ambassador an easy-to-use media brief including instructions, brand guidelines, prompts, a script, and examples. When they use their phone to fulfill the request, their device would ensure the media is captured in landscape or portrait mode and serves as a teleprompter as they film. And every photo or video would come back with explicit approval to use it royalty-free, in perpetuity.

The reality is, briefs are usually sent via email with attachments, with or without script and examples. The ambassador is left to determine the format and length needed and gets little or late, disparate feedback and direction.

Ambassadors can create some of the most powerful content a brand could ever want, but without giving them the tools to make it easy, it's a battle every time. More straightforward requests directly correlate with the volume and quality of the media you'll collect.

The engaging and intimate media you can "co-create" with your ambassadors is limitless.

Image Source: Nick Bratanek on Unsplash

# 4   Activity Tracking

It can be maddening to monitor the basic activities of ambassadors, keep track of campaigns, and ensure things get completed. When managing with spreadsheets, program teams rarely know what's been completed or the end result until days later.

- **Activity tracking — Who posted what to social and when?**
- **Approval tracking — Who approved what content and when?**
- **Content tracking — What content worked and what didn't?**
- **Social tracking — Which platforms bring the most engagement?**

If you request your team of ambassadors to create a social post showcasing a new product, someone on your team needs to go through each ambassador's 4 to 12 social media profiles just to see if that post was actually made. Unless that ambassador is thoughtful enough to send you the links. Manual tracking is better than nothing, but with 20 ambassadors, you'll have to look through 80+ social profiles to see what was actually published. And that's just one activity. Scaling your ambassador program past 30 creators can require a team just to track activities.

A detailed dashboard or feed with visibility into tasks and outcomes is paramount for understanding what's happening with your program. Knowing what's working well and what's not is the only way to optimize your content, reward top performers, or cut the lowest performers from the program. Having automated tracking in place means teams can pivot quickly, and the program keeps growing.

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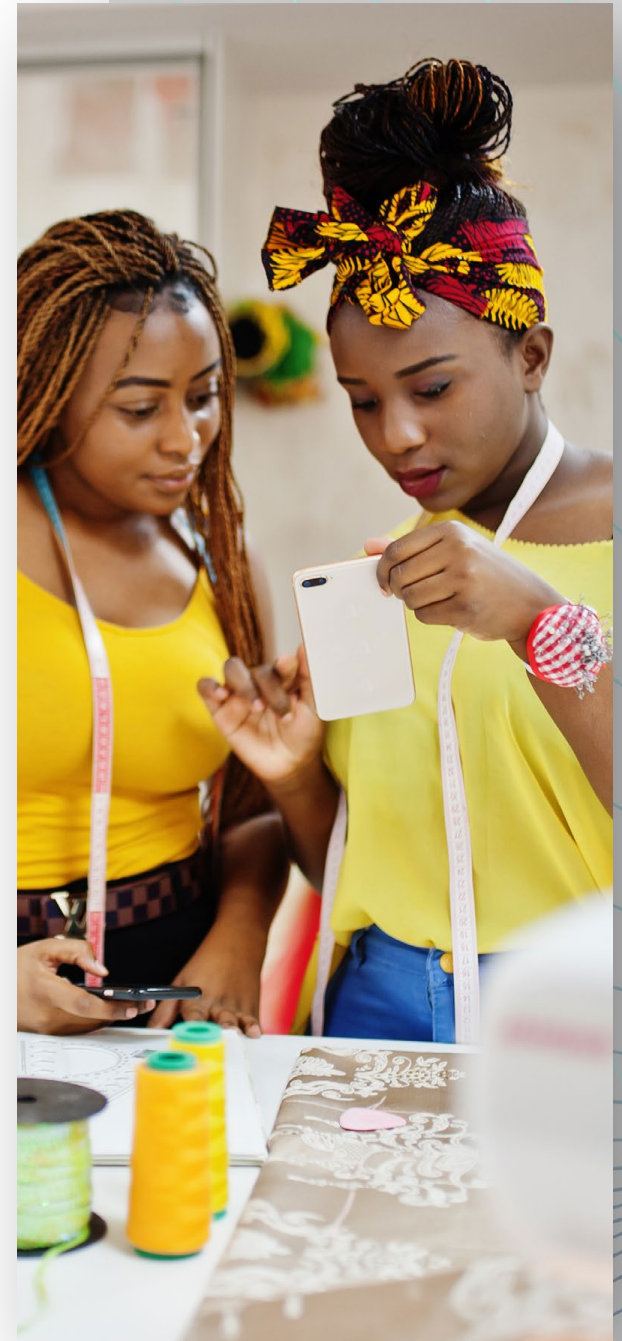
# 5 Program Measurement

You think your ambassador program is working, and you're seeing positive comments and watching higher social engagement. How do you know the program is positively impacting the brand?  Is it helping reach revenue or loyalty goals?  How much is it increasing brand awareness?

Those are the questions your boss and her boss (and maybe even his boss) want to know. One of the main reasons ambassador programs don't scale is the inability to demonstrate brand impact and justify the program budget. If you can't measure it, how do you know it's worth the effort and expense?

If 20 ambassadors each have a Twitter, Facebook and Instagram audience of 50,000 followers, that's potentially a million new customers who probably aren't following your official brand accounts. Measuring addressable audience is the first step in showing how ambassadors can increase reach far beyond a "traditional" social media program. What about social sharing? If 20 ambassadors post about a new product, how many more views, likes, comments and re-shares are you getting? Never mind tracking which ambassador posted on what platform — tracking social media metrics like this will give you the impressions, reach and engagement metrics you need to show impact.

Measuring the program's contribution to brand reach and engagement will give you and your boss (and their boss) the data to prove the program is making an impact, month after month.

# Ambassador Programs at Scale

At Greenfly, we know how effective brand ambassador programs can be. Our customers have grown programs of just a few ambassadors texting back and forth with a single marketer in her part time. They've also scaled programs that harness the power of thousands of ambassadors using a program team, well-defined processes, and purpose-built technologies to communicate, create content and distribute digital media.

Whether you're starting small or are on your way to a global ambassador program, scaling a program requires software, expertise and continuous learning and optimization.

**Synchronizing activities, enabling personalization, and continuously focusing on simplifying things for ambassadors will drive increased success.**

In the same way the introduction of CRM systems empowered sales teams, ambassador programs can benefit from "ambassador relationship management." If you're serious about reducing work, it's time to look for technologies that can help you effectively orchestrate people and media and quantify activity fulfillment.

# Looking Forward

Many of the challenges that brands have with making their ambassador programs more effective are due to manual processes and additional staff requirements. Automation technology enables program managers to do more with less, add more ambassadors without adding more work, and measure the program's impact on the bottom line.

As consumers continue to move across digital and social platforms, organic reach decreases, and authentic content becomes more important, the time to invest in automation is now. A healthy, growing and measurably successful program will keep you ahead of your competition and take up more space in the hearts and minds of younger consumers. Putting a few simple systems in place means your valued evangelists will become even more loyal to your brand and integral to your marketing success.

A number of top brands are using the Greenfly brand advocacy platform to power their growing initiatives globally. They're increasing consumer engagement by 3x to 5x through their most trusted supporters' personal reach and connections and watching their brand ambassador programs soar.

We hope that these tips will continue to inspire you and will help you take your ambassador program to the next level, with a continuous increase in brand value and returns for years to come.

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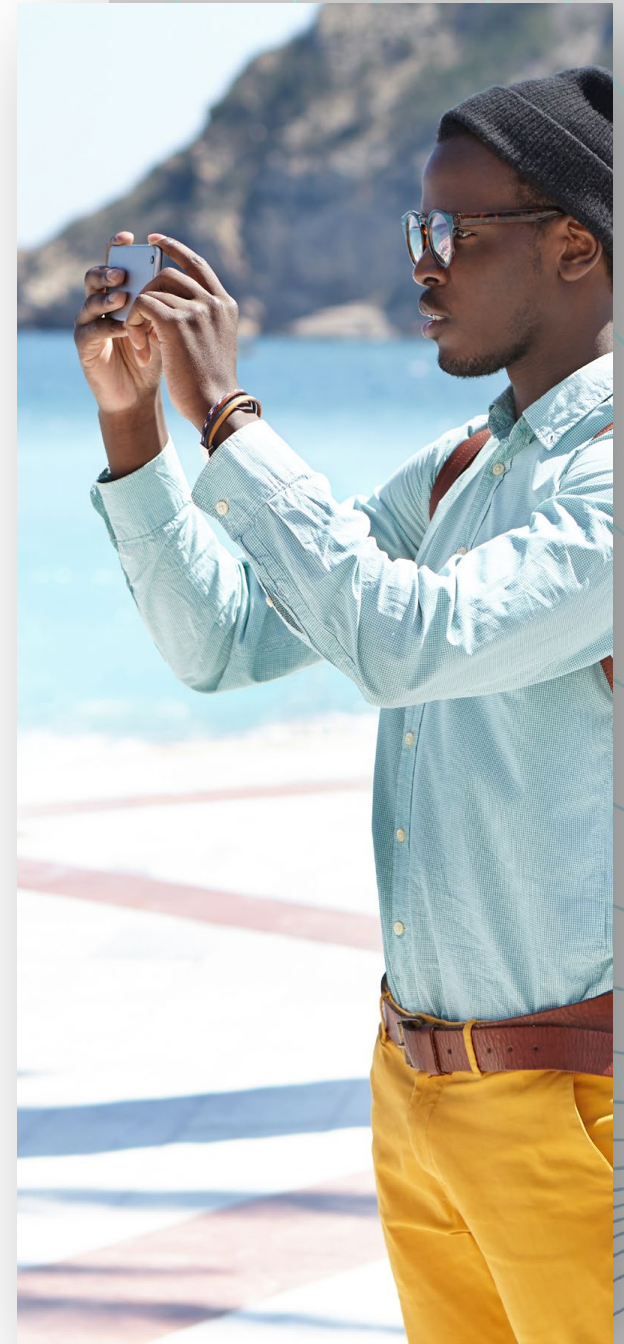
# Discover Greenfly

Greenfly, the leader in brand advocacy, enables brands of all types to harness the power of digital media to transform their advocates and ambassadors into brand builders.

Consumer services and product companies, sports organizations, media and entertainment companies, social causes, and multi-location businesses depend on Greenfly to share media and collect original photos and videos from their advocates. Advocacy marketing enables brands to build awareness and affinity and generate more revenue through the authentic endorsement of people that love and support their brand.

If scaling your brand ambassador program is a challenge, we're happy to help.

**hello@greenfly.com  |  +1 (310) 620-8565  |  www.greenfly.com**