

When you should focus on the advocacy section of the funnel & how it works

The advocacy stage often referred to as the last stage in the classic marketing funnel, is one of the most overlooked stages nowadays. However, it can be very profitable to focus on this stage at certain times. Let's take a deeper look at the advocacy funnel stage, by first introducing and explaining some basics about the marketing funnel.

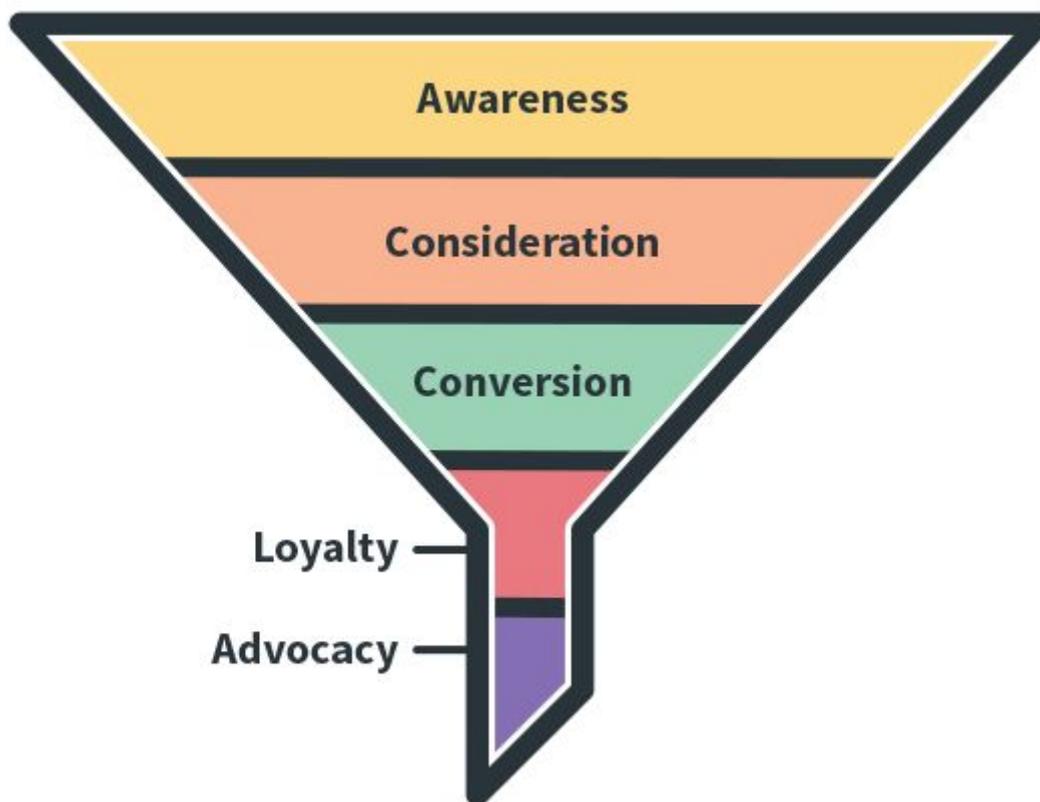
It's still an ongoing debate who actually "owns" the funnel - marketing or sales, but no matter who the owner is, the marketing funnel is still relevant to today's consumer buying processes.

About marketing funnels

The marketing funnel itself is a helpful tool to visualize the complex process of turning a lead into a potential customer. Analog to a broad net in a school of fish on the ocean, a marketer tries to get as many leads as possible into the broad top of the funnel. Next, he tries to slowly nurture these leads into becoming purchasing customers, narrowing down the number while going to each stage. Ideally, though, the funnel would be a cylinder: This would mean EVERY lead becomes a paying customer. Nice in theory, however, almost impossible in reality. It's the job of the marketer, though, to make the funnel as much of a cylinder as possible.

Funnels can have many stages

The exact number of stages in the funnel is not always clearly defined and can vary depending on the business and type of consumer, but to understand the advocacy section it's useful to at least have a basic understanding of all other sections.



Awareness

The topmost stage. Potential customers are brought here by advertisement, marketing campaigns, and direct outreach.

A relationship is built by using events, advertising, content (blog posts, infographics, etc.), direct mail, viral social media and more. The leads are then inserted into a lead management system (which can be a basic spreadsheet, too) and pulled further into the funnel

Interest

A lead will enter the interest stage, where they are nurtured with a lot of helpful information, targeted to the prospective customers' needs. Newsletters, reports, and articles can be helpful too.

Consideration

Leads have become “marketing qualified”, meaning they have been identified as actual prospective customers. More nurturing takes place.

Intent

If a lead shows interest in buying the product, they move to the intent stage. This is usually the right time to show off your unique selling points and make a strong case for your products.

Purchase

This is the stage everyone wants: the customer buys the product. This is not the end of the funnel, however, as there are more stages, and the advocacy section, which we will discuss in more detail, is AFTER the actual sale happened.

Repeat & Loyalty

Customers who repeatedly buy the product may begin to identify with it. Engagement of this “fan” behavior is very important. In short: make your customers so happy with their purchase that they not only purchase but refer friends to your product and do so repeatedly.

Advocacy

The king of the stages: If you turn your customers into an advocate you achieve the ultimate form of nurturing a customer. Evangelism is the name of the game, you want the customer to write product reviews, post about products, tell their friends, recommend it at work, etc. Don't confuse this stage with paid referrals from influencers; your customers become advocates because you deliver a top product and help them identify with your brand.

The importance of having advocates

Advocates are the ultimate form of marketing: They can post on social media and, if managed right, they can drive a never-ending stream of potential leads to your upper funnel stage. It's also the ultimate endorsement, coming from an external unconnected entity. It's not a new thing though, people want advice from others what to buy. Word of mouth has always been a good way to spread ideas.

When to focus on the advocacy stage

Focus on advocacy when you have a setup for the upper stages that have proven to work and know you can scale customer engagement and management as well as product delivery.

Some things to keep in mind

In order to get a nice crowd of advocates, you need to identify who your typical customers are, and then grow these people into advocates. You need experts, who know the field and who know how to express their thoughts to your target audience. Find the ones who like your brand the most and try to convert them into advocates. Don't focus on the ones who don't like your product - it's usually easier to spend the time converting the ones who already favor you.

You can easily start with a 2-way relationship: simply ask them for their feedback on a recent purchase. Reward good behavior, that is them giving feedback, by granting them things like special discounts, early access to new products, and vanity things like special status if you run a platform of some sort. Then invite them to share photos and videos as well as testimonials.

Once you have these soon-to-be brand advocates on your side, integrate their voice on as many places as possible: social media, your website, posts and emails. Let them create video testimonials and maybe even have dedicated staff helping them to do this; you can run it as a dedicated form of an affiliate partner program.

Make sure to find out how you can keep customers in the late stages of the funnel: target them with exciting cross and upsell offers, build rapport by sharing resources that help them make the best use of your products and work on your branding efforts. Branding is needed for customers to identify with you and your products.

Conclusion

Focusing on creating advocates can be a very powerful way of doing lead generation. If done right, it's a very scalable and sustainable way of achieving a stream of new leads for your funnel. Make sure your current funnel works like a charm before you start focusing on the advocacy stage.