

HOW SUPERBRANDS BREED SUPERFANS: 6 BEST PRACTICES FOR 10X GREATER FAN GROWTH



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The marketing industry has always touted the importance of identifying and engaging a brand's most influential fans. These are the fans that not only advocate on behalf of your brand, but whose recommendations are also weighty enough to get friends and family to take action. How valuable is this type of fan, however? Can we quantify their impact?

Wildfire did an analysis to find out the statistics behind these advocates— how much and what kind of impact do they have for your brand over a “typical” fan. The data is based on an analysis of 10,000 social marketing campaigns that ran on Facebook over the past 9 months, of which the top performing 10%, belonging to just under 700 brands, were isolated and studied to ascertain what made them so successful. The key findings include:

- **Sharing of social media campaigns generates significant earned media.** Our data shows that campaign “sharers” and “advocates” (whose shares result in someone new engaging with the campaign) generated an average of 14 earned media impressions each. In other words, for each sharer, 14 additional people will learn about the campaign in their news feed.
- **Sharing has a large impact on page engagement.** Brands that are highly effective at engaging sharers and advocates, via campaigns, see three times more engagement on their page than average brands (in the form of user participation with custom applications, “likes,” shares, and comments).
- **Brand “advocates” bring in an average of 1.3 new people each.** For every 10 advocates a brand gets to join their social campaign, 13 entirely new people will engage with the brand's campaign through clicks, entries and other interactions.
- **Advocates can also impact fan growth.** Engaging triple the number of advocates in campaigns (as our top decile “superbrands” did in this study) correlated with a 13x higher annual fan growth relative to average-performing brands.

INTRODUCTION

“More is better.”

“Less is more.”

When you think about your social marketing strategy, which axiom do you prescribe for your brand’s success? A “less is more” approach recognizes quality interactions and values engagement over sheer quantity of fans. A “more is better” perspective recognizes and values the power of reach, and the importance of extending it by growing your brand’s audience.

In truth, either axiom can be a valid approach to defining social success— but it is their careful combination that can truly supercharge your brand’s success in the social marketing arena. How does this work?

We have found that, for any single social media initiative, participants fall into three camps: *joiners*, *sharers*, and *advocates*. The vast majority of participants in your social initiative, on average, are joiners (83%, more below). Having joiners in high quantity does not help generate earned media, extend the brand’s reach, or achieve brand lift with new users, though it is still an active community in its own right.

The remainder of a campaign’s participants are those “top quality” users— sharers and advocates that take the time to spread the word about your brand even after they’ve finished participating in the engagements you’ve created. It is these two types of users that generate all the earned media, high engagement, and strong word-of-mouth endorsements that help to achieve extended awareness. So how can your brand get more of what is typically the minority of a campaign’s audience? How can your brand consistently turn your fans into brand advocates, effectively supercharging your social media efforts?

We did a study to find out.

THE STUDY

The dataset includes 10,000 Facebook campaigns, such as sweepstakes, contests, trivia, quizzes, and more, all of which were run on the Wildfire platform. We sorted these campaigns into performance groups, and paid special attention to the top 10% of best performing brands. The 1,000 top performing Wildfire campaigns had the highest ratios of sharers and advocates relative to joiners. These 1,000 campaigns belonged to 689 different brands, brands that have successfully supercharged their social marketing, consistently activating brand advocates to pass along word-of-mouth, much of which converted new interactions. Throughout the paper, we will refer to this top-performing brand decile as “Superbrands.”

We wanted to understand the different types of social media users that participate in brand interactions, as well as these users’ relative values to the brands they interact with. We began by sorting users into three categories:

- **Joiners:** users who participate in your social campaign, but don’t spread the word about it beyond their own interaction, such as redeeming a coupon
- **Sharers:** users that participate with a branded campaign, then spread the word about that campaign by electing to share it with their network
- **Advocates:** users that participate with a branded campaign, share about it, and have enough clout within their network to influence friends to convert into participants as well

What is the impact of a crowd of “joiners” participating in your brand’s social media initiatives, as opposed to a group of “sharers?” How much greater of an impact does a “brand advocate” have on your social ROI, versus other types of participants? In order to find out, we ran an analysis of 10,000 social campaigns run on Facebook, powered by Wildfire, in the past 9 months.

In addition to calculating the average and top performing user population segments, we wanted to understand what it is that the world’s most-talked-about brands, these Superbrands, do with their social marketing to achieve such consistent success — not just in one lucky campaign but over and over again. Are they doing something differently from typical brands to supercharge their marketing efforts? We combed through a selection of these Superbrands and came up with six distinct best practices for supercharged social success.

THE BREAKDOWN

To understand the average breakdown in user types that participate in branded social initiatives, we parsed the 10,000 campaigns and calculated the average amount of Joiners, Sharers, and Advocates among them. The earned media created by “advocates” is more valuable than the earned media produced by sharers— although both waves of earned media create increased impressions and extend the reach of your brand, only advocates have enough influence over their friends to convert new users into participants.

Of the 10,000 campaign sample, the average user breakdown per campaign is:

Joiners	Sharers	Advocates
83%	15.4%	1.5%

However, once the top performing 10% of campaigns is isolated, these user breakdowns change remarkably.

Joiners	Sharers	Advocates
61%	34.3%	4.7%

The top decile of successful social marketers, our Superbrands, have more than triple the amount of advocates engaging with their social marketing campaigns. What is that worth to a brand? We backtracked and noted all the relevant page success metrics for the 4,272 brand pages associated with the full campaign data set over 9 months. On average, here is the page performance for brands at the start of the 9 month data collection period:

SEPT 2011 PERFORMANCE	Average Facebook Brand Page	Top Performing 10% of Pages
median "likes"	1,149	3,662
median comments	247	1,113
median posts	27	60
median fans at start of month	23,719	50,898
median fans at end of month	23,836	53,641
fan growth over month	0.5%	5%

You can see from the data that there are significant differences in engagement counts between average and Superbrands. Also impressive is the fan growth over the month— Superbrands saw their pages grow ten times faster by month's end than the average rate.

The data on the same set of pages from June of 2012 is also astounding:

JUNE 2012 PERFORMANCE	Average Facebook Brand Page	Top Performing 10% of Pages
median likes	1,476	6,231
median comments	185	934
median posts	28	63
median PTA	12,877	16,567
median fans start	24,955	65,621
median fans at end	25,069	69,094
fan growth over month	0.4%	5%

Superbrands saw more than five times as many likes and comments on page objects in June 2012, as compared to average page performance. When we annualized these growth trends, we saw that brand pages that are very effective at engaging advocates were three times more than engaging across the board and would grow 13 times more than the typical active Facebook page over a year long span.

Annualized Growth Trends	Average Page	90th Percentile Performer
fan growth	7.67%	79.58%
engagement growth	31.78%	90.2%

On a per campaign basis, brand advocates also make a huge impact in spreading earned media for fan pages over a year. In fact, brands in the top decile generated 264% more earned media impressions than an average performing brand. When 90% of internet users say that they find a recommendation from a friend trustworthy (Nielsen), brands want as much earned media as they can get.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

What do these numbers mean for your brand? How can you move the needle on your social engagement and earned media to perform like the top 10% , the "Superbrands?" We took a look at a wide swath of the top 689 brands to understand how they managed their social initiatives and if there were certain best practices that helped them activate more brand advocates. We found six best practices, including strategies for messaging, additions to status updates, and optimal setup for engagement applications. All the brands profiled as examples, to follow, are among the top decile performers list.

THE SIX BEST PRACTICES

Best Practice #1: Run multiple engagement applications at a constant rate. Give your users a variety of ways to engage with you and different things to do when they get to your social pages. This promotes time spent on the page as well as return activity (depending on the setup of your offer, content, or promotion.) While there is no limit to the amount of applications a brand can run on a Facebook page, only the first 12 tabs are visible on a page. Use that space to create multiple, fun interaction points for your users, as Lennar does.

[Lennar](#), one of the nation's leading home builders, maintains a steady program of engagement options for visitors to the fan page. Options for visiting fans to engage with include:

- an application that analyzes the housing market by region
- a sign-up form allowing visitors to subscribe to updates about Lennar's latest market features
- an engagement forum allowing visitors to enter into a

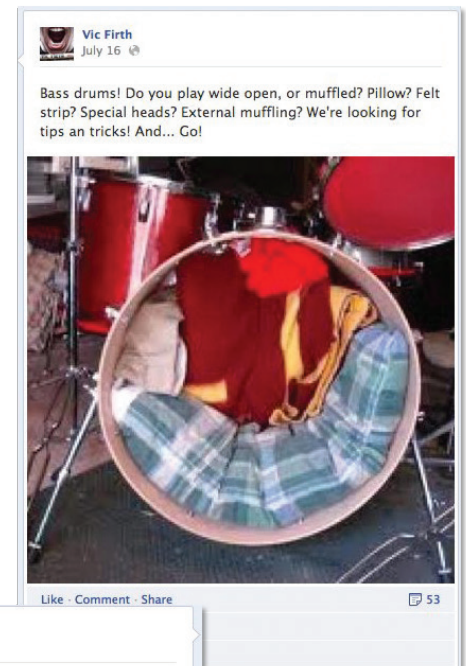
dialogue with Lennar in response to the question, “What do you love about Lennar?”

- a user portal of tools including a mortgage calculator and financing options
- a collection of media specifically created for first-time buyers
- a Lennar TV application containing industry specific video podcasts
- a “Project Dream Home” application with an interactive Lennar product guide
- a company careers page with constantly updated information about Lennar’s current job openings
- an integration with Lennar’s Pinterest profile, showing off the brand’s favorite kitchens and kitchen related objects from around the web, and
- a linked transition to Lennar’s company website “About Lennar”



Best Practice #2: Use every available opportunity to stimulate interactions with clear calls-to-action. Relying on users to

interact, “Like,” share, or comment on your brand’s page or with its apps, without expressly asking them to, produces wildly variable results— harness the potential outcomes for every single interaction your brand offers by instructing users on exactly how they should engage. In the examples from Vic Firth, an industry-leading designer and producer of drumsticks and mallets below, no news feed message is complete without a call-to-action. Whether sharing videos or asking for fans’ personal tips on style and technique, [Vic Firth](#) crafts their fan updates with a clear action, instruction or request, and stimulates readers into engagement.



Best Practice #3: Images, Images, Images! Facebook's Timeline really hinges on images—there is no other element that gets more real estate or exposure than pictures posted by users and brands. Take advantage of this opportunity to stand out in the news feed as well as within your Timeline by including images where possible, including in as many news feed posts as possible. [Nylabone](#), a leading pet supplies brand, takes every opportunity to inject bright, eye-catching imagery into its updates.

Best Practice #4: Keep your interactions seasonally relevant. One of the best things about social media is that it's so real-time. Within this format, content can get stale in days, not to mention weeks or months. Because of the 24/7 nature of the social media cycle, brands can enhance interactions with users around a theme of current events in meaningful and relevant ways. This grounds the brand in reality, a place and time to which users can relate.

With the Olympics being a very hot topic this summer, brands are communicating Olympics-related messaging. Other seasonally relevant topics include regional and national holidays, major political events, awards shows, etc. [JustFab](#), a popular online fashion retailer, uses this approach. In addition to promotional messaging around the Fourth of July holiday, JustFab also turns the much-buzzed-about premiere of "The Dark Knight Rises" into a chance to interact with fans.

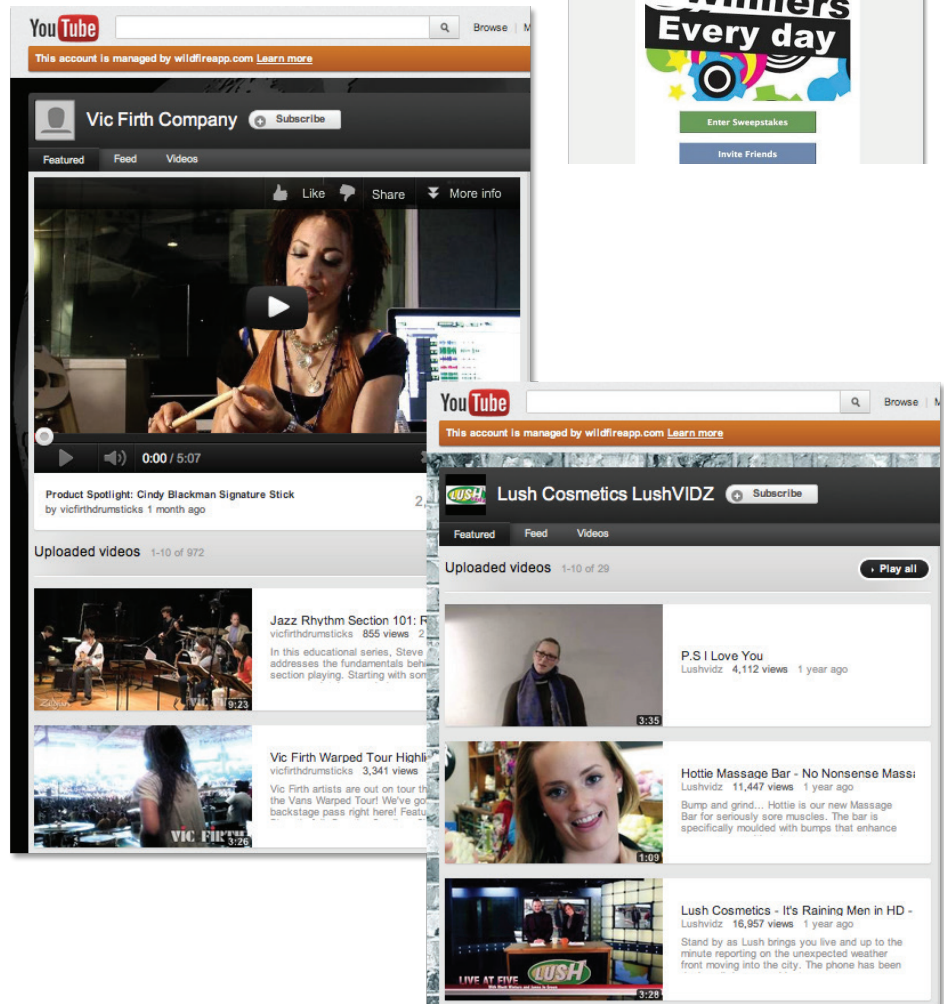
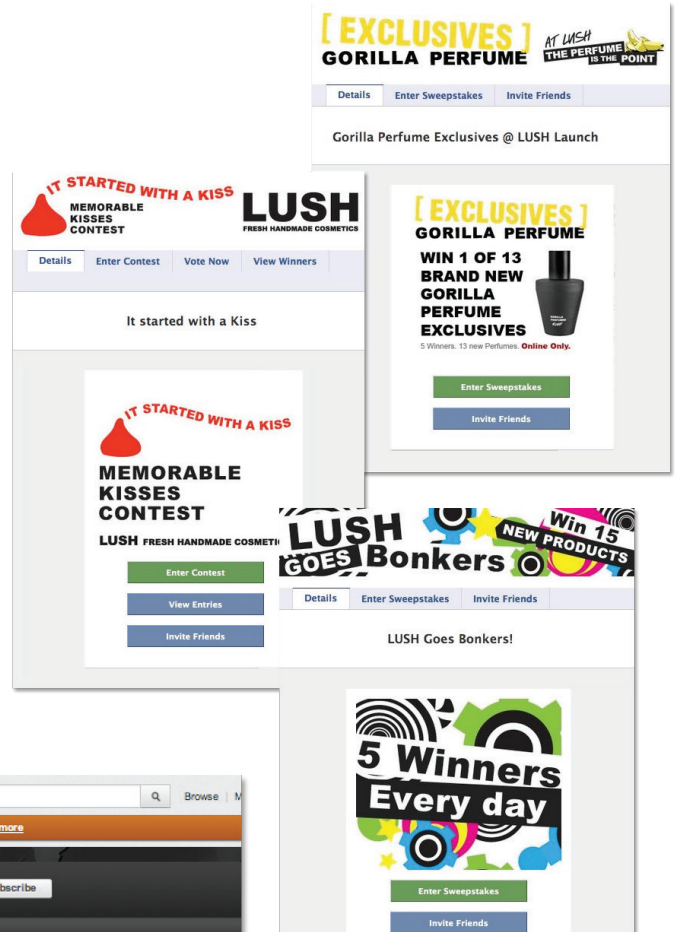
Best Practice #5: Mix campaign types and create new offers on a consistent basis. Certain marketing campaigns naturally inspire users to broadcast their interactions with a brand (like the ones discussed in our [Engagement Analysis](#) in May). We have found that the types of marketing campaigns that are most entered by users are not the same as the campaigns that are most heavily shared by users; in fact, the most shared campaign types— like quizzes and trivia or other types that showcase a user’s personality—don’t always get the highest participation or entry rates.

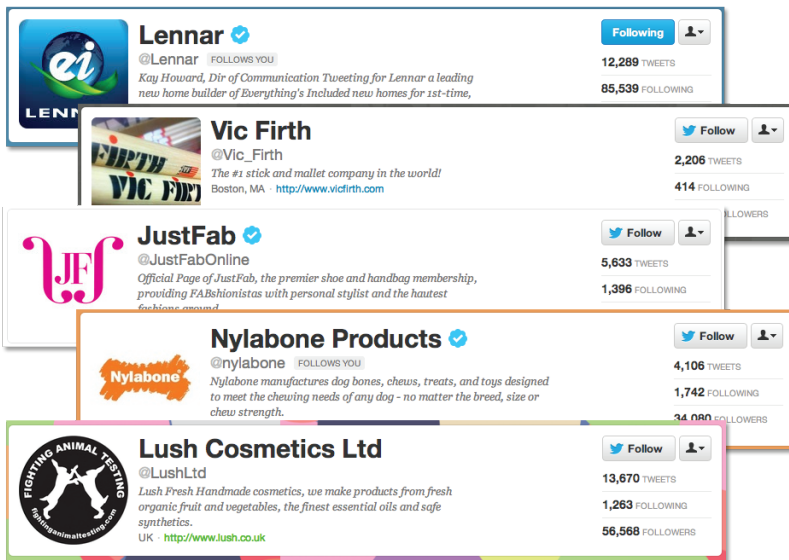
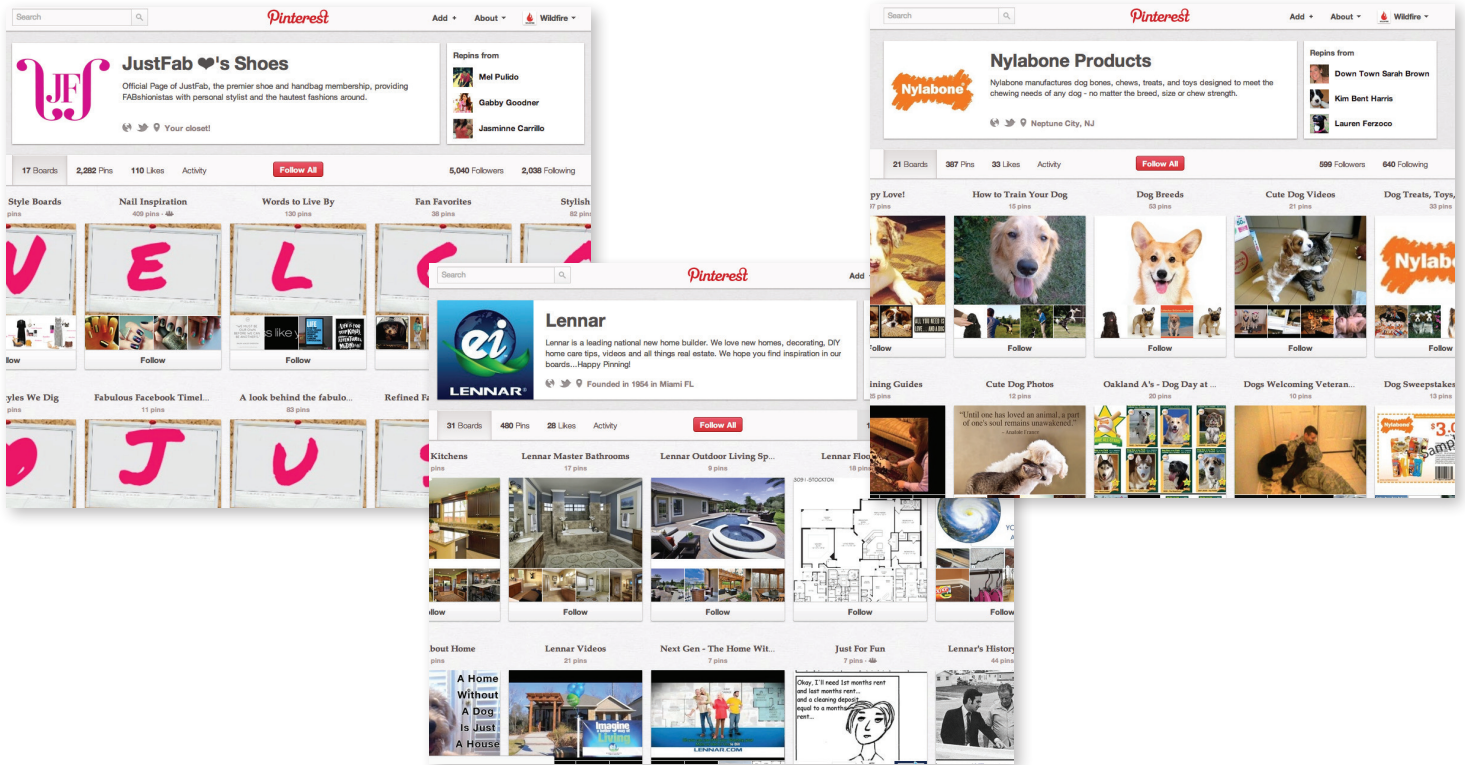
Popular campaigns like sweepstakes, giveaways and coupons are proven to get users to enter, but entrants are less likely, for example, to voluntarily share the fact that they just entered a sweepstakes. In other words, these campaign types generate less earned media from each entrant.

Just as paid media (ad) campaigns should be adapted to drive different types of user activity, so should custom content initiatives. A well-rounded social media marketing program includes a steady drip of varied applications and content designed to influence a range of user interactions. Below, [Lush](#) Cosmetics regularly offers up a variety of promotions, dishing out opportunities to win sweepstakes for high participation as well as opportunities to show off fan personalities with photo contests.

Best Practice #6: Extend your social communities across a variety of platforms. While the focus of this study was on data collected from social initiatives run on the Facebook platform, the world’s most talked-about brands don’t limit their presence to one social network. Rather, they take their engaging posts, fan interactions, and community presence to a variety of networks, courting fans and followers (and brand advocates) in all of the places they spend their time.

Among the five brands featured in this paper, for example, there is an enormous extension of reach and engagement with communities beyond Facebook.





CONCLUSION

Social media marketing can take two tracks: you can have communities of fans that are just joiners— they'll interact with your brand and, while that interaction is valuable, they will seldom spread the word to their networks, limiting your growth and reach.

Alternatively, you can activate a community of sharers and advocates— fans that are so engaged with your brand that they spread the word about it to their networks, increasing your reach and multiplying engagement. Brand advocates are highly valuable for a successful social media marketing program: pages with high populations of advocates enable brands to reach 234% more earned media impressions than communities of average fans. Over the course of a year, brands with high advocate engagement grow thirteen times faster than brands with an average fan base. Advocates also create three times as much engagement as typical fan bases.

Do you know which of your fans are advocates for your brand? The six best practices of the top performing social brands are the first step to catapulting your social presence into the league of superbrands. Catering your social strategy to activate more advocates is the path to supercharging your brand's social media profile.

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