

Incentivizing mavens in the social world

In order to understand how to incentivize mavens, it is very important to understand how they are different from your spokesperson, brand ambassador and sales person. A spokesperson, brand ambassador or sales person is someone who works for a company. It's their job. They say awesome things about a brand or they recommend people to use a company's product primarily because they are paid to do that. Mavens on the other hand are the trusted experts in a field who seeks to pass knowledge on to others. These are the people who are contacted by others to find information in a field they command expertise. They do it just because they want to do this and are passionate about this.

The best incentives for mavens anywhere is recognition. One of the pioneers in this field is Microsoft. A big reason behind Microsoft's success as a platform is the big array of applications on it. The applications are developed by a community of developers. Microsoft incentivize developers using the Microsoft Most Valuable Professional program. Microsoft MVP program gives special recognition to the developers who are active in the Microsoft developers communities and forums answering questions, making suggestions and contributing to the product. Microsoft invites them special developers conferences, gives them gift coupons to buy Microsoft software and a special tag next to their name on Microsoft communities.

Another good example is Coca-Cola. As Facebook became a big deal and companies started to look at it as a marketing platform, Coca-Cola discovered that their fan page was already there. A couple of Coca-Cola fans created the Facebook fan page and actively managed it. These individuals were real soft drink mavens who vouched for Coca-Cola and took the initiative to help Coca-Cola fans engage with each other. Coca-Cola recognized that and instead of taking over the fan page encouraged these people to maintain it and provided them resources to do so. Over the years, unlike many Facebook fan pages, majority of content on Coca-Cola fan page is still generated by fans.

The most important thing to recognize while dealing with mavens is that you cannot manage them. What you can do is listen to them, engage with them and appreciate them so that they have the incentive to be part of your community and be the volunteers who act as your spokesperson, brand ambassador and sales person.

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