

BUILD A

SQUAD

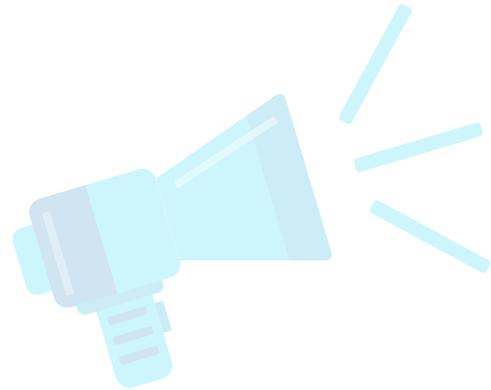
around your

BRAND

We all know that organizations with great brands stand out. They're the ones we admire and buy from again and again. Just think of companies like Apple, Slack, and Trader Joe's. What do these guys do so well that keeps us coming back?

A whole bunch...

Okay, fair enough. But let's focus on their brands for a second because they all do similar things. For starters, they talk to you like you're actually a real person, not an account number or frequent shopper ID. Not only that, they make you feel like you're a part of a community, which, let's be honest, is pretty unique for a company. And last, and perhaps most impressively, they've all figured out ways to make sure that the rest of us are always talking about them. Amazing stuff.



Whether it's industry influencers, advocates, or the folks working in your organization, they each have a role to play.

Admittedly, each of those tactics is pretty impressive on its own. But together they're a branding trifecta—the equivalent of a knockout punch that leaves their competitors starry-eyed and down for the count.

To become a heavy hitter in your own right, you've got to create a brand that your customers love just as much. Gulp. Okay, so that's not exactly easy. The good news, though, is that it's not as hard as you might think either, provided you've got the right people to help.

That's where this guide comes in. It's full of smart tips about how to use your brand voice to attract the right people to build a squad around your brand. That's right, you've got to build a brand squad!

And, as we'll see, that squad's going to be made up of lots of different people. Whether it's industry influencers, advocates, or the folks working in your organization, they each have a role to play. With their help, you'll be on your way to creating a killer brand in no time.

Sound good? Okay but hold up a sec, there's one more thing.

Before you can build a brand squad, you've got to figure out how to talk to these people (and your prospects and customers) in a way that works. And that means defining your brand voice. It's your company's rallying cry, anthem, and mantra rolled into one. It's how you talk and probably the most effective weapon in your arsenal to get your brand squad engaged and ready to take action.

Ready to learn more? Read on.

BRAND SQUAD BASICS

Attracting Your Audience with a Voice that's Bold and Brave

Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer at MarketingProfs, says a company's brand voice is the most powerful tool it has to engage other people. It's what makes your brand sound like your brand, gives it life, and makes it memorable. In other words, it's pretty much the key to everything.

So what exactly is brand voice?

Handley defines it as the words and phrases you use to communicate. **No matter what direction you take with your brand voice, it needs to communicate three things about you:**

1	Who you are
2	Why you do what you do
3	What you're like to deal with

A strong brand voice will reflect your culture and amplify your story. It'll also bring empathy to the people you want to reach. To make that happen, you can't settle for generic. Being satisfied sounding just like everyone else won't cut it. Instead, you've got to take risks and be really bold and brave with your communications.

To see what we mean, let's look at a few examples of companies with very distinct, engaging, and memorable brand voices.

B2C: Chubbies

Chubbies is a boutique online clothing store for men. They specialize in short shorts and colorful bathing suits, and they sell clothes with names like The Hotdoggers, The Uncle Sammies, and The Whistle Wetters. As soon as you come to the site, you're immediately struck by their snarky, frat-boy-like brand voice. You see it in their headlines and text, and even in their calls-to-action. Want to buy a pair of The Hotdoggers? The CTA you'll click on says "Hotdiggity." Want to sign up for their "mailing list awesomeness" (that's Chubbie-speak for newsletter)? No problem—just hit the button that says "boomshakalaka."

B2B: M+R Consulting

M+R Consulting helps non-profits leverage social media and digital tools to expand their footprint. Their website contains very clear messaging about who they are and what they do, and it's all communicated in a very distinctive brand voice. One favorite example is how they marketed an annual research report about online giving. Check out this great passage from the announcement email:

Q: *So, it's super, super nerdy, right?*

A: *Yes, and also no. Collecting and analyzing such a wealth of information warmed the cockles of our data-nerd hearts, because we are the kind of weirdos who get really excited about comparative metrics and nifty data trends, and also we like saying "cockles."*

It's obvious that For M+R, brand voice is more than just copywriting. Madeline Stanionis, the company's creative director, told Ann Handley: "It's who we are. It's how we do the work. If the label falls off, you know it's ours."



That's a great test for any company, by the way. If you removed the logo from your content, would it still stand out as uniquely yours, or could it just as easily be attributed to someone else? Seriously, go ahead and try it.

Agency: Quarry

Quarry is an agency in Ontario, Canada that helps businesses transform their brands. They've got a clever brand voice that talks to you, rather than *at* you, and entertains while it informs. Their Q&A-style team bios are a good example. In his, Mike Tennant, the company's senior content creator, responds to a question about his perfect workday like this:

"It begins with the terror of the insurmountable creative problem, evolves into collaboration with gifted, positive, equally-terrified people, then through a combination of heavy lifting, methodology, epiphany, and what seems like blind luck, ends in triumph. Off to a brilliant night's sleep, then—rinse and repeat—the promise of doing it all again tomorrow."

It may just be part of a simple bio, but it gives you the immediate sense that Quarry employs smart, creative people—exactly the kind of folks you'd want helping you revamp your brand. Well played, Quarry, well played.

According to Handley, the strength of these companies' brand voices helps carry them forward. They may not be for everyone, she points out, but that's okay. Your brand voice will resonate most with those who will wind up being your best customers.

It's also worth pointing out these companies all use their brand voice consistently. You won't only see it on their websites, but also on their social channels, emails, videos, and—in the case of M+R—even in Google search results that use the homepage title, "Hey there. We're M+R." That's an important ingredient in the recipe for a unified, deliciously satisfying, customer experience that keeps people coming back for more.



HOW TO CRAFT A KILLER BRAND VOICE

To create your brand voice, you need to know who you are as a company and what makes you unique. One way of doing that is by thinking about your brand values and whittling them down to their core.

Then, use your brand values as fertilizer for your brand voice. How do you express those values from a customer point-of-view?

Try to reduce them to a handful of words or phrases that communicate the main points we mentioned earlier: who you are, why you do what you do, and what you're like to deal with. Three or four should do it.

Here at MarketingProfs, our brand values are:

Super sharp (we follow trends so you don't have to)

Discerning (we work with only the best contributors and speakers)

Obsessed with experience (we want you to have fun learning)

If you're familiar with us, then hopefully you see the connection there, too. These brand values are the bedrock of our voice, which is:

1. Accessible. Clear language. Shorter sentences. Buzzword free. Simple but not simplistic.

We use jargon sparingly—only when it signals that we understand the market.

2. Personal and affiliative. You get a sense that a human is writing this. And because we market to marketers, we also signal that we are you. We get you.

We write to one person and use lots of “you” and “we” vs. the stand-offish “the company” or “customers” or “marketers.”

3. Smart. We don't dumb things down. But we don't overly complicate them either just so that we sound smart.

4. Fun. Relaxed and casual—more backyard BBQ than stuffy cocktail party. We use human language whenever possible—“people” or “customers” vs. “leads.”

Once you've **figured out what those three or four words are for your business** (and yes, it may take a while to nail them), write them down. Then go to great lengths to communicate them across your entire organization.

Everyone in your company should know what your brand voice is—not just the marketing team. That's because every customer touchpoint is a form of content, and to make those touchpoints consistent and effective, everyone needs to use your brand voice consistently.

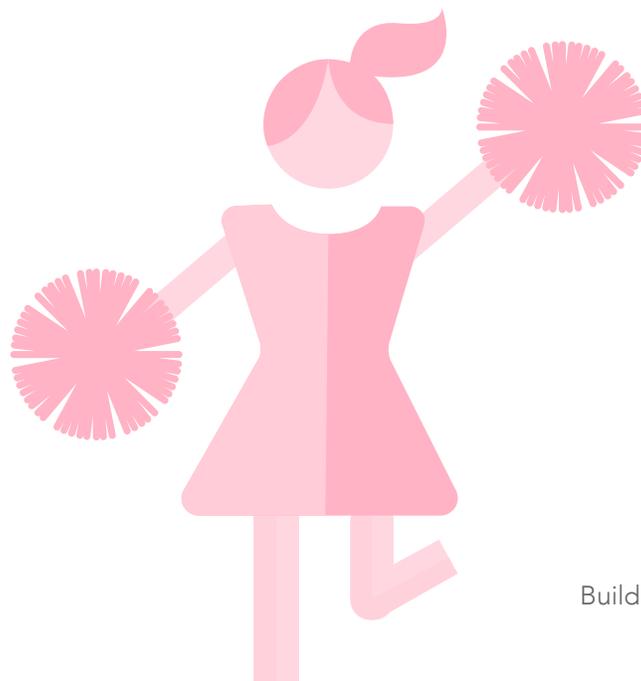
Admittedly that's easier said than done. Creating a tone of voice guide and sharing it with everyone can help. So can holding workshops with key stakeholders to train them up. You could even take the plunge and invest in the right content optimization software to help guarantee compliance.

Once you've got your brand voice down and everyone's on the same page, it's time to start using it and engaging your squad.

BRAND SQUAD UNITE!

Bringing Influencers, Advocates, and Employees Along on Your Brand Journey

Remember back a few pages ago when we talked about the three different types of people you'll need to build your brand squad? Let's take a closer look at each.



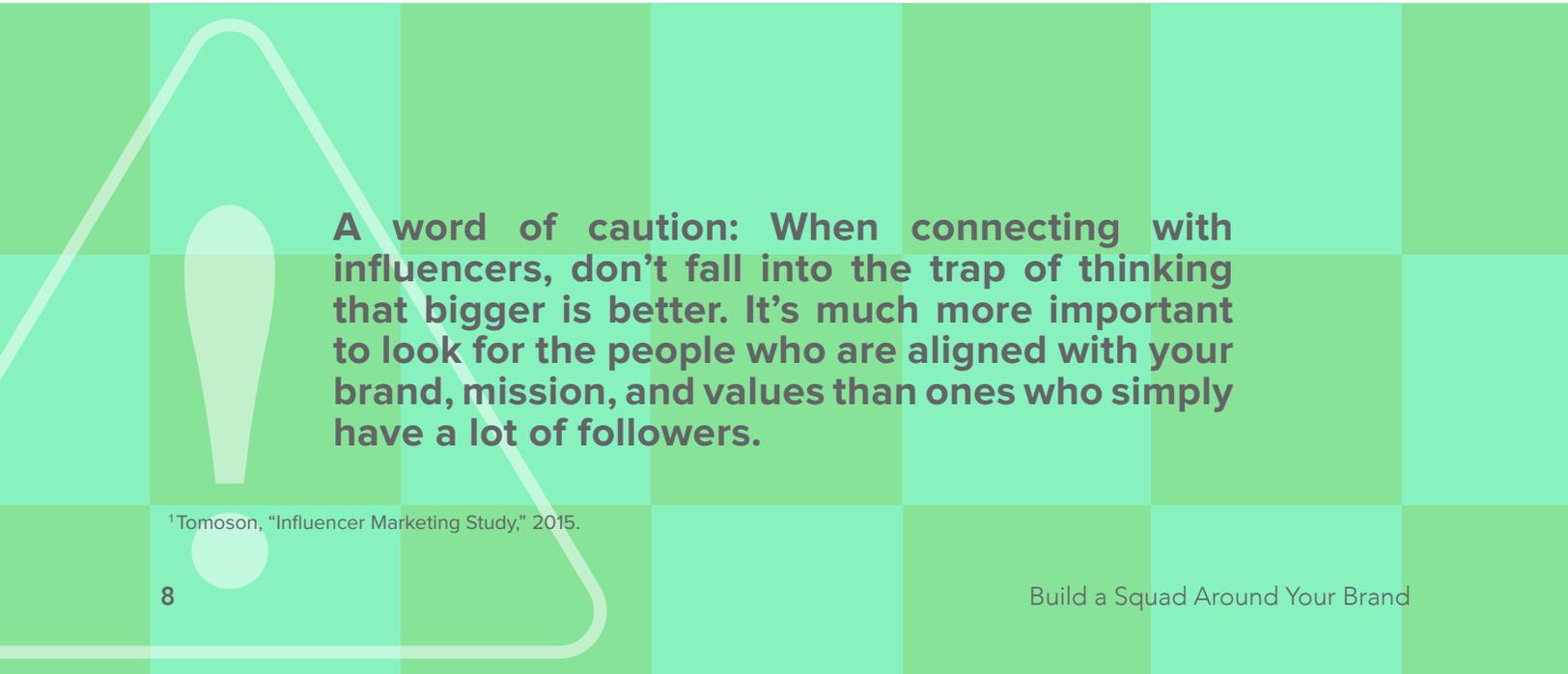
Industry influencers (aka the Brand Cred Spreaders)

Industry influencers are folks who can help shape how people view you, give you extra credibility, and expand your reach. They could be journalists, bloggers, industry analysts, social media pros, or recognized experts who talk about you, share your content, or do lots of other stuff that helps your brand. The idea is to nurture relationships with them over time that benefit you both.

Fact: Businesses make an average of \$6.50 for every \$1.00 they spend on influencer marketing.¹

The key is to attract influencers who are a natural fit for your brand and who have audiences that are sympathetic to yours. In other words, relevancy and alignment matter, so choose wisely.

Engaging influencers takes time. Handley says the mistake most people make is thinking about it in terms of what the influencer can do for them. In reality, it should be the other way around. She recommends starting off by thinking about how you can serve your influencers and not how they can serve you. After all, the more you give, the more you're going to get. So follow the 9+1 rule of thumb: Do nine things for influencers before asking them to do any one thing for you.



A word of caution: When connecting with influencers, don't fall into the trap of thinking that bigger is better. It's much more important to look for the people who are aligned with your brand, mission, and values than ones who simply have a lot of followers.

¹Tomoson, "Influencer Marketing Study," 2015.

If you're not sure what you can do for your influencers, the good news is that there's no shortage of options. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Offer them exclusives	Give them free access to your premium content
Share story ideas	Give them free trials of your service or free products
Make yourself available as a resource	Include them on your top lists (e.g., top 10 salespeople)
Share their content	Help them build their influence
Offer them exposure to your followers	Invite them to your events at no cost
Write comments, reviews, or testimonials for them	Create a speaking opportunity for them
	Offer to create content for them

Once you've made a connection with your influencers—and done things for them—you can ask them to return the favor. Maybe it's providing a quote for your content or being a guest on your next webinar or podcast. And like dating, just remember to take things slow and always make sure that the relationship isn't just all about you.

Advocates (aka the Fan Boys and Gals)

Your advocates are your biggest fans. They're your super-users—the people who always buy from you, who give you great feedback, and who refer other business to you. They may not have the same reach or reputation as industry influencers, but they do have lots of enthusiasm.

Fact: 92 percent of consumers rely on referrals from people they know above all else.²

As a marketer, your job is figure out how to tap into that enthusiasm by activating your advocates. That's something we're trying to do more of at MarketingProfs. To show you what we mean, here's a recent example.

² Tapinfluence and Influitive, "Influencers vs. Advocates: What's the Difference?" 2015

The MarketingProfs VIP Squad

Every year at MarketingProfs we hold our B2B Marketing Forum in Boston. (Side note: it's a great event that you should definitely check out.) At the end of each conference, there are always people who immediately sign up for the next year. We realized that these people are our advocates and figured out a way to make them part of our planning and process.

So we invited the first 50 of them to join a VIP Squad. As part of that, we created a private Slack group where they could share their feedback to help us make the next Forum even better. The idea was to make them feel special, get them invested in the success of the event, and make the most of their enthusiasm.

It worked! Inviting them to join the VIP Squad made them part of something exclusive. Setting up the Slack group was a great way to solicit their ideas, many of which we've put into action. Throughout the year, we've given them access to premium content and MarketingProfs team members, and even sent them small gifts to help keep them interested and engaged. Occasionally we've also asked for things in return, like promoting the Forum to their networks to help boost registrations.

It wound up being a balanced partnership that everyone seems really happy with.

Want to see another example? Check out theSkimm, a fantastic news site targeted toward millennial women. In addition to a stellar brand voice, they've got an amazing advocate marketing program. Their guide to becoming a Skimm'bassador lays out in humorous detail what becoming an advocate means, what you'll get from it, and how to get started. It's one of the best programs we've seen!

Advocates can be a powerful addition to your squad. By connecting with them on a personal level and showing them they're valued, you can build a strong relationship that's a win for everyone.

Employees (aka the Work Peeps)

The most important people to recruit into your squad may be the ones sitting around you every day. Your coworkers are a huge brand-building resource that's just waiting to be tapped. And bringing them into the fold is a smart move. Recent research from Edelman found that employees rank as the most trusted influencers when it comes to communicating about their company's engagement, integrity, and operations.³

To do so, you've got to both get them excited and give them the right tools and resources. That includes:

Telling them how they can help. There are lots of ways coworkers can help grow your brand. Whether by contributing content, adopting the company's brand voice in their communications, or promoting the company's content through their social networks, there's plenty for them to do. The key is making people aware and empowering them to do so.

Giving them the freedom and flexibility to participate. It's one thing to advocate that employees get involved and quite another to make it possible. Letting people access their social media accounts from work is one way to start. Giving them the time to get involved is another. Even just setting aside 10 minutes a week to rally the troops and give them time to post and share can help make a difference.

Making it easy for them. Everyone's busy. Your only chance at getting them to do extra stuff is to take the grunt work out of it. So the next time you want people to share a new whitepaper or report, summarize the key points for them. That way they'll know what it's about without having to read the whole thing. Then give them some suggestions for Tweets and LinkedIn shares so they don't have to come up with their own.

Gamifying the process. You know how your coworkers love the annual ping-pong tournament and always look forward to the basketball brackets and football pools? Appeal to their competitive nature by turning your brand-building efforts into a game. Keep track of who's contributing the most content, whose content is performing the best, or who's giving the company the most social love. Make that information widely known and acknowledge top performers. Done well, it can be a lot of fun.

³ Edelman, "2015 Edelman Trust Barometer – Employee Engagement Results," 2015.

With your co-workers' help, along with your industry influencers and advocates, creating a brand that people truly respond to will be a lot easier. Doing so will be a marathon and not a sprint, Handley cautions, but in the end it will be well worth the effort.

Build Your Squad, Build Your Brand

Your brand is your company's most precious asset. You've got to do everything you can to build it into something that people not only know, but also admire.

Before you do anything, however, make sure that you know what your end game is. It sounds so basic, but many companies don't know what their ultimate goals are for their brand. Whether you want to drive more sales, expand into new markets, or become a household name, have a clear purpose. Knowing what you're working toward will help shape everything else that you do.

With a strong brand voice and a brand squad, you'll be a force to be reckoned with.

Hungry for more?

The best place to not only build a squad, but also truly find your people, is to come to our **B2B Marketing Forum** in Boston this October. Learn from smart people, build your network, and have fun while doing it! 

MarketingProfs fuels your inner marketing genius by giving you how-to marketing information and training courses taught by the smartest people around. More than 600,000 marketers worldwide trust MarketingProfs as their top business resource. Join us today—[sign up here](#).