

YOU CAN'T MANUFACTURE TRUST.

How B2B brands can build credibility
with buyers by co-creating, rather than
controlling what advocates share.

BRANDS2
LIFE

A PARITEE AGENCY



BRANDS ARE CONTROLLING THE VOICES OF OWNED AND INFLUENCER CONTENT.

Buyers are wary of this. They know if a voice is authentic or manufactured by marketers and they're less trusting when it doesn't feel credible.

When advocates (think employees, partners, customers and influencers with experience of your brand) are empowered to become co-creators of brand storytelling, then we start to see trust grow at scale.

In this report, we explore how brands can safely leverage real, authentic voices from an advocacy network and influence the people who matter most.



Research methodology

This report is based largely on survey data from two panels of 2,000 UK workers commissioned by Brands2Life and conducted by research agency Opinium in August 2025 and February 2026.

Quotes are sourced from analysis of a custom audience panel of 5,000 English-speaking B2B marketers, working in businesses ranging from 500-10k+ employees, across the US and UK on LinkedIn.

Data is also included from the LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report (2026) and LinkedIn's Global B2B Marketing Outlook research, conducted by Censuswide with 7,000 B2B marketers (2025).

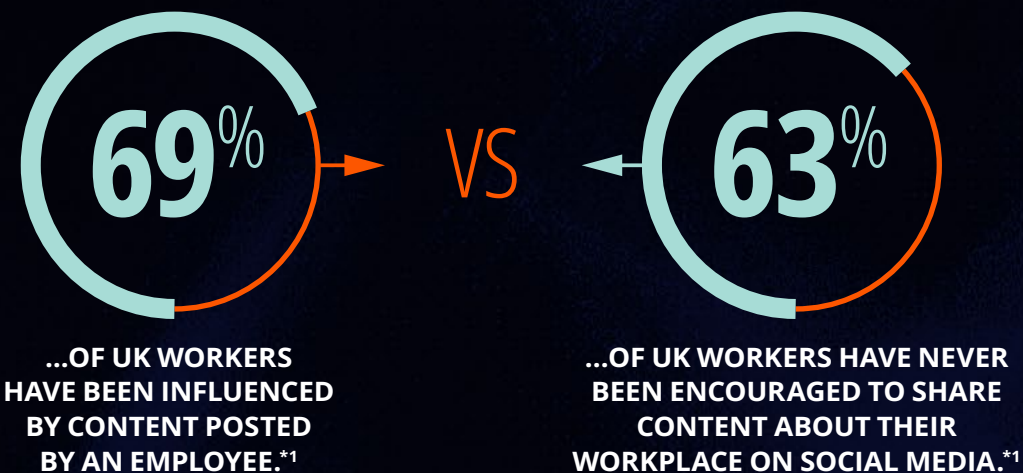
1

THE EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY GAP

2026

Employees can be your most influential voices, but most workers have never been encouraged to post.

If influence comes from authentic experiences of your brand, then consider this: no one is closer to your organisation than your employees.





ONLY
7%

**...OF UK WORKERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO
SHARE CONTENT ABOUT THEIR WORKPLACE
ON SOCIAL MEDIA AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH.*1**

.....

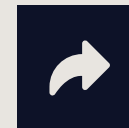
When encouragement does exist, it often fades. Employee advocacy programmes are rarely sustained, resulting in a system where content sharing becomes inconsistent.

40%

...OF UK WORKERS
SAY THEY WOULD NEVER
FEEL COMFORTABLE
POSTING ABOUT
THEIR WORK
PLACE.*1

Advocacy starts when a brand recognises and addresses the hesitation of its employees.

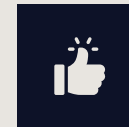
Employees may:



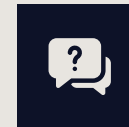
BE UNAWARE THAT SHARING
ON SOCIAL MEDIA IS ENCOURAGED
BY MANAGERS



FEAR THE REPERCUSSIONS OF
POSTING THE WRONG THING



NOT UNDERSTAND THE BENEFITS
OF PARTICIPATING ON SOCIAL MEDIA



FEEL WARY OF WHY THEIR COMPANY
HAS AN INTEREST IN THEIR PERSONAL
SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY

Source

*1 – Brands2Life Opinion Survey, Feb 2026

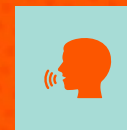
51%

...OF UK WORKERS
ARE OPEN TO
SHARING, BUT
ONLY UNDER SPECIFIC
CIRCUMSTANCES.*1

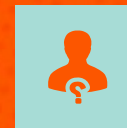
Employee participation is all about
autonomy and authenticity. And this is
where many organisations miss the point.



IF IT REFLECTED MY
GENUINE EXPERIENCE



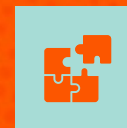
IF I HAD FULL CONTROL
OVER WHAT I SAY



IF IT WAS OPTIONAL,
BUT NOT EXPECTED



IF IT BENEFITTED
MY CAREER



IF IT RELATED TO WORK I WAS
SPECIFICALLY INVOLVED IN

With over half of employees open to sharing workplace content, what conditions are needed?

01. OWNERSHIP

If employees are to engage, they need genuine input into what they share. That's why costly advocacy tools distributing uniform, pre-set content often gather dust.

02. BENEFITS

If programmes are to be successful, employees need to understand the value participation can bring to their own careers.

03. PARTICIPATION

Advocacy can't be prescribed. When employees feel they have free rein to contribute in their own way, they're more likely to take part.



HIGHER REVENUE GROWTH IN COMPANIES WITH EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY PROGRAMMES*¹



INCREASE IN SOCIAL SELLING SUCCESS RATES THROUGH EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY.*¹



The connection employees have to hiring, product moments, and culture is compelling for external audiences. But many companies treat employee-led content and storytelling like an afterthought, with little investment and low priority.

Ryan Lytle

GLOBAL HEAD OF EMPLOYEE
BRAND & CONTENT STRATEGY



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR B2B MARKETERS...





Show employees the value for them

- ✓ Educate employees on the benefits of sharing professional content for their own career aspirations
- ✓ Invest in specialist training to equip employees with an understanding of what to post

Change starts at the top

- ✓ Ensure leaders and senior team members are clear on the benefits of participating and the guardrails of messaging

Remove the friction to participation

- ✓ Upskill employees to create their own content
- ✓ Set clear messaging guidance on sensitive topics and legal requirements
- ✓ Establish advocacy champions for employees who need extra reassurance
- ✓ Use existing tools and channels to weave content creation into everyday work
- ✓ Start weekly content challenges for employees to take the lead on execution

2

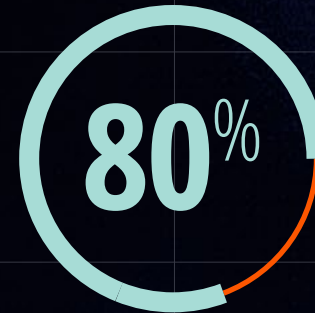
EXTEND YOUR ADVOCACY NETWORK

2026

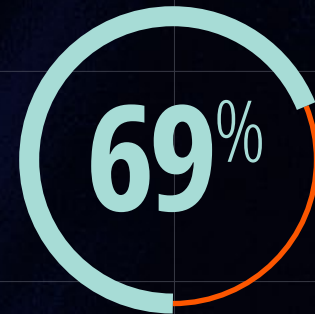
While employees are a valuable part of a brand's advocacy network, they're not the only group you should involve.

B2B influencers and subject matter experts can still build brand trust through independent authority and recommendations.

Most UK professionals have already been influenced by them. Whether they were prompted to dig deeper into products or services, consider a job opportunity or recommend the company to others, the influence of influencers sells.



...OF MARKETING LEADERS SAY TRUSTED CREATORS ARE NOW ESSENTIAL TO EARNING CREDIBILITY WITH YOUNGER BUYERS.*¹



...OF UK WORKERS HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY CONTENT POSTED BY AN INDUSTRY INFLUENCER OR EXPERT.*²

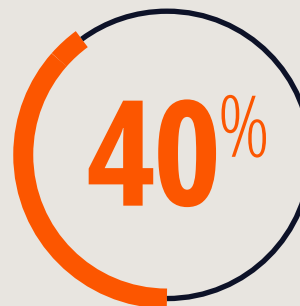


As B2B influencer marketing explodes, being an influencer isn't enough. Your brand needs to pick the right influencers to continue building trust.



...OF UK WORKERS FIND CONTENT CREATORS WITH LARGE FOLLOWINGS THE MOST TRUSTWORTHY SOURCE FOR PRODUCT AND SERVICE RECOMMENDATIONS.*¹

Buyers have wised up to B2B influencer partnerships. They're becoming more sceptical and demanding deeper credibility. A strong, relevant social following isn't enough of a qualifying factor anymore.



...OF UK WORKERS FIND POSTS SHARED BY AN INFLUENCER LESS TRUSTWORTHY WHEN THEY KNOW THE INFLUENCER HAS BEEN PAID.*²

Buyers trust influencers more when they're embedded in a brand, and not just a paid endorser.

The most credible influencers are a bit like your employees. They have a clear point of view and authentic relationship with the brand.

They don't broadcast a set message. They're actually part of the journey, helping to create the campaign and messaging you take to market.



...OF UK WORKERS TRUST BUSINESS CONTENT MORE WHEN IT HAS A CLEAR OPINION OR POINT OF VIEW.*1

Rather than one-off activations and transactional relationships, smart brands are starting long-term content partnerships with subject matter experts. Beyond content, each influencer's knowledge and expertise can be used in product cycles as beta testers, as advisory board members – even creative directors. Their recommendations work because they're credible, having lived the product or service experience first-hand.



...OF UK WORKERS TRUST CONTENT POSTED ABOUT A COMPANY MORE WHEN IT IS BASED ON REAL, FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE.*2

But watch out. Credibility can collapse the moment a marketing team tightly controls co-creation. Brands need to set the narrative and the guardrails. That much is true. But guardrails should empower subject matter experts to share their experiences in their words. Rather than being so prescriptive that they limit the point of view and creativity. It's their story, so let them tell it.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR B2B MARKETERS...





Invite influencers to experience, not amplify

- ✓ Have influencers use your product, test features or participate in events
- ✓ Integrate influencers into other parts of your business beyond content, so they can truly advocate for you

Move from reach to relevance

- ✓ Look to work with niche creators, technical practitioners and industry specialists with smaller but highly engaged audiences

Be in it for the long haul

- ✓ Move from transactional to long-term relationships with influencers to build your community
- ✓ Rather than spreading investment over multiple short-term sponsored posts, concentrate spend on fewer, longer-term partnerships
- ✓ When measuring impact, move past impressions and surface engagement. Measure indicators of authority and quality interaction

3

THE AUTHENTICITY FILTER

2026

In today's B2B marketplace, buyer journeys are longer and more complex than ever – and buying groups are larger, too. More stakeholders mean more touchpoints, more conflicting priorities and more on and offline conversations in disparate platforms.

If you want to continue influencing those conversations, you need to foster ongoing relationships with decision makers to stay top of mind, always.

272 DAYS

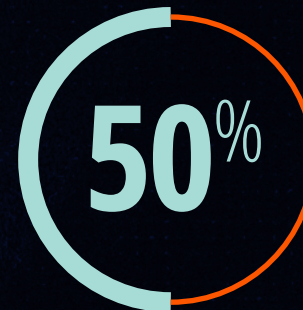
...the average length of a standard B2B customer journey.*¹

88 TOUCHPOINTS

...the average number of interactions that shape a buyer decision.*¹

10 STAKEHOLDERS

...the average number of stakeholders within a buyer group – up from 6.8 in 2024.*¹



...OF UK WORKERS WHO RESEARCH BUSINESS PRODUCTS OR SERVICES HAVE STOPPED FOLLOWING OR UNSUBSCRIBED FROM A B2B BUSINESS BECAUSE OF THEIR CONTENT. *²

Social media has the potential to help B2B brands break through long, complex buying cycles by creating relationships with buyers.

It only works when content is actually authentic. If a brand fails to land authenticity, they don't drive conversation and the buyer looks elsewhere.



**...MOST TRUSTED SOURCE FOR PROFESSIONALS
ISN'T AI OR SEARCH ENGINES. IT'S THEIR
PROFESSIONAL NETWORK.*¹**



**...SAY THAT WHEN THEY RESEARCH PRODUCTS
FOR WORK, THEY ARE MOST LIKELY TO TRUST
AND ACT ON A POST FROM THE BRAND'S
OFFICIAL SOCIAL CHANNEL.*²**

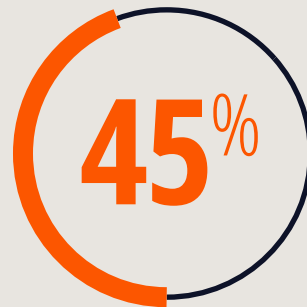
What does authenticity really look like?

B2B brands have already recognised the potential of people-led storytelling. But it's raised the bar for what credible opinions and recommendations look like.

Real credibility is only earned when content shows independent opinions, lived experience and authentic expression. To achieve this, B2B brands must shift to co-creating content.



...OF UK WORKERS SAY THEY ARE MORE TRUSTING WHEN SOCIAL CONTENT ABOUT A BRAND IS BASED ON REAL, FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE.*1



...OF UK WORKERS SAY THEY ARE LESS TRUSTING WHEN A POST FEELS SCRIPTED OR DIFFERENT TO THE PERSON'S USUAL VOICE.*1

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR B2B MARKETERS...





Create in open conversations. Not behind closed doors

- ✓ Turn real conversations from your audience, employees and creators into content
- ✓ Respond to your audience's most pressing needs – not fleeting trends

Think in relationships. Not transactions

- ✓ Don't focus on pushing product in your content
- ✓ Co-create a steady stream of authentic content with employees, subject matter experts and influencers

Provide guardrails. Not restrictive guidelines

- ✓ Refrain from using templates that undermine authenticity
- ✓ Define a cohesive narrative for your advocacy network
- ✓ Provide clear guidance only when it's needed – for restricted topics and legal requirements

Unlock the value of your
advocacy network:



SET THE NARRATIVE, BUT DON'T
COMPLETELY CONTROL IT



CO-CREATE REAL STORIES
TO BUILD CREDIBILITY



UNCOVER THE SILENT
INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEES
BY LEADING FROM THE TOP



CHOOSE INFLUENCERS WITH
REAL, EARNED EXPERIENCE
OF THE BRAND



ESTABLISH GUARDRAILS, NOT
GUIDELINES FOR SENSITIVE
AREAS OR TOPICS

BRIDGING THE CREDIBILITY GAP

Buyers aren't buying your content anymore,
and they're scrutinising influencer-brand
partnerships more than ever.

Brands need long-term, authentic relationships
with buyers to stay visible and trusted
continuously. For that, look to your advocacy
network and bring on board the people
who can really lend you credibility.



EMAIL OUR TEAM



FIND OUT MORE

The future of B2B belongs to the organisations that embrace their advocacy network as true partners.

Don't just tell stories to your community. Build stories with them.

Want to unlock the value of your advocacy network?

Get in touch

digital@brands2life.com

THE AGENCY FOR THE BRANDS TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD



A PARITEE AGENCY