

THE CUSTOMER WITHIN: THE POWER OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND INSIDE-OUT MARKETING

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In this Whitepaper

- Why employee engagement is a necessity for Fortune 500 companies
- Cause marketing, wellness programs, workplace optimization, and social storytelling keep employees engaged, with internal & external impact
- A singular software platform is needed to bring these elements together

Forty percent of [the Fortune 500 businesses], unfortunately, will not exist in a meaningful way in 10 years[...] Either we disrupt [by going digital] or we get disrupted.

- John Chambers¹

Introduction

What if your firm could attract, retain, and engage the world's best talent? What if you could empower your workforce on every level, toward emotional, spiritual, physical, and professional growth? And what if your employees were inspired to become active brand evangelists reaching millions of people with just one click? Understanding these possibilities begins by defining employee engagement and cause marketing to identify their powerful nexus.

Companies already face roadblocks in managing and coordinating their efforts in marketing, human resources, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Given the additional lack of a cohesive strategy to get employees involved, they will never realize their employees' or their programs' potential. Traditionally, these efforts have been siloed, but if seen as intrinsically connected, new potential emerges. An employee engagement, wellness, communications and social sharing platform that places employees at the center of their firm's storytelling will greatly improve efficacy and bridge the gap between internal and external social change.

This paper explores the challenges and rewards of successful employee engagement programs and how employee engagement connects to other facets of the workplace. We believe that when companies approach employees as their first customer, purpose-driven productivity could take place that revolutionizes corporate marketing with an 'Inside-Out' approach.

¹ Bort, [Retiring Cisco CEO delivers dire prediction: 40% of companies will be dead in 10 years](#)

Defining Employee Engagement

Employee engagement definitions overlap. Thomas Otter defines it as “a blend of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement, and feelings of empowerment”.² According to CustomInsight, a provider of online HR assessment and development tools, employee engagement is “the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs, are committed to the organization, and put discretionary effort into their work.”³ And a Forbes article defines it as “the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals” and notes that this emotional commitment means “engaged employees...work on behalf of the organization’s goals.”⁴

There have been entire chapters dedicated to defining employee engagement and its evolution in the context of the digital revolution. But employee engagement can best be understood not just in what it is but also in what it does for companies, in terms of employees’ perception of the brand and their contribution to its purpose. In this regard, BusinessDictionary.com provides the following definition of employee engagement:

The emotional connection an employee feels toward his or her employment organization, which tends to influence his or her behaviors and level of effort in work related activities. The more engagement an employee has with his or her company, the more effort they put forth. Employee engagement also involves the nature of the job itself – if the employee feels mentally stimulated; the trust and communication between employees and management; ability of an employee to see how their own work contributes to the overall company performance; the opportunity of growth within the organization; and the level of pride an employee has about working or being associated with the company.

Despite the overlapping definitions, the idea boils down to this: a company’s first customer is their employees, making the significance of employee engagement clear:

- **Critical driver of business outcomes:** Organizations with highly engaged employees had an average 3-year revenue growth 2.3 times greater than those whose employees showed average engagement.⁵

² Otter, Reach Peak Performance through Employee Engagement

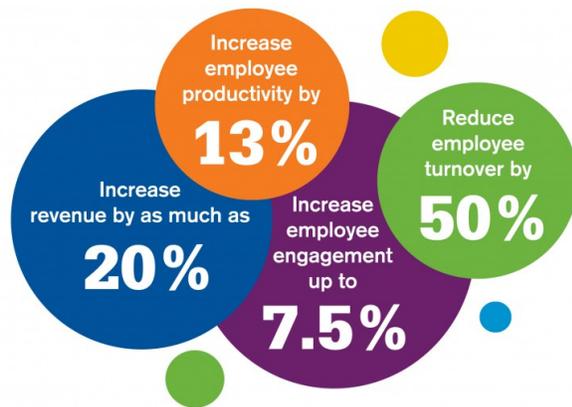
³ CustomInsight, [What is Employee Engagement?](#)

⁴ Kruse, [What Is Employee Engagement](#)

⁵ Schaufenbuel, K. (2013). Powering your bottom line through employee engagement. UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School.

- **Competitive advantage:** American businesses are losing productivity worth billions annually due to disengaged workers. Employee engagement can become a key competitive advantage or a primary weakness.⁶

Benefits of Employee Engagement to Companies



“A company is only as good as its employees. We are used to talking about a company as if the organization itself is a person. But an organization does not generate ideas, does not give service, and by itself is neither efficient nor productive. People make all of those things happen.”⁷ A company’s workforce creates sustainable competitive advantage, ROI, and long-term strength.⁸

Rather than being an afterthought, engaging employees should be planned and practiced at all levels of the business hierarchy and should be cultivated on a regular basis. Consider some of the most commonly referenced benefits of employee engagement:

- **Improved recruitment especially for millennials** – 79% of employees consider a company’s social and environmental commitments when deciding where to work.
- **Productivity** – Companies with engaged employees, according to Gallup, outperform those without by up to 202%.
- **Attendance rate** – By improving attendance rate, employee engagement reduces company expenses incurred by absenteeism.
- **Loyalty and retention** – Investing in employee engagement increases workforce retention, and according to the Bureau of National Affairs, \$11 billion is lost annually due to employee turnover.
- **Employee health and well-being** – Employee wellness and company financial health go hand in hand in terms of engagement.
- **Better customer service and customer loyalty** – Increased employee engagement results in a higher level of customer service, which leads to increased customer loyalty.

⁶ Ologbo, A.C., and Sofian, S (2012). Individual factors and work outcomes of employee engagement. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Science*.

⁷ Sage Software, [ROEI®: Return On Employee Investment®. Increase Competitiveness Through Your Biggest Asset](#), p.3-416

⁸ Dale Carnegie Training, [What Drives Employee Engagement and Why It Matters](#)

Employee engagement can make the difference between success and failure, as disengaged employees are estimated to cost the U.S. economy as much as \$350 billion per year in lost productivity, accidents, theft, and turnover.⁹ The benefits detailed above exist because increasing employee engagement correlates directly with a positive impact on key business metrics since engaged employees:¹⁰

- Work more effectively
- Find ways to improve
- Share information with colleagues
- Develop creative solutions
- Provide suggestions
- Speak up for the organization
- Try harder to meet customer needs

Why Purpose as The Central Theme of Employee Engagement Programs

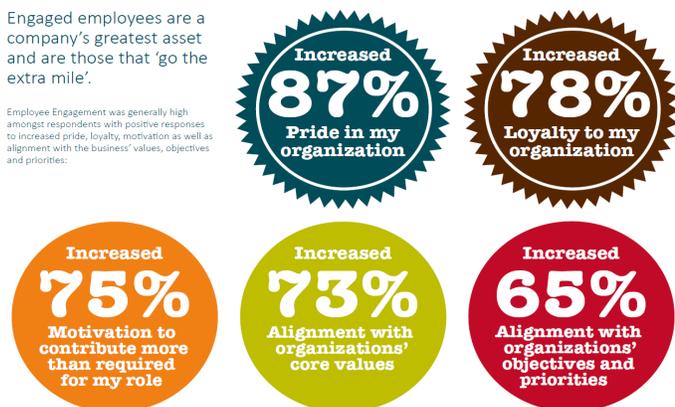
The employee engagement picture in America is not as bright as it could be. According to a June 2016 Gallup poll, only 32.6% of workers in the US feel engaged, while 50.7% were “not engaged” and 16.7% were “actively disengaged”.

One way to improve the participation rates of company-sponsored employee engagement programs is to establish cause and volunteering as core beliefs and to help employees to feel like stakeholders whose personal interests are aligned with their professional lives. Purpose-driven content and sponsored volunteer activities have proven to be the most effective means of increasing the emotional investment in their company’s CSR and thus, increase their inclination to share positive stories about their company and their fellow employees.

Employee Engagement

Engaged employees are a company’s greatest asset and are those that ‘go the extra mile’.

Employee Engagement was generally high amongst respondents with positive responses to increased pride, loyalty, motivation as well as alignment with the business’ values, objectives and priorities.



Equally important in the process is the willingness to allow and encourage employees to provide input about which types of CSR initiatives are important to them. In fact, companies that do CSR well are those that have it embedded in employees’ jobs. Because employee engagement through CSR involves aligning participation with personal values, it makes the workplace more meaningful and productive. Striking that emotional chord with employees is easy for companies if they have the digital tools to discover and

⁹ Sage Software, [ROEI®: Return On Employee Investment®. Increase Competitiveness Through Your Biggest Asset](#), p.4

¹⁰ Allan Schweyer, [The Economics of Engagement](#)

track emotional involvement in real-time. Creating work environments where people can be emotionally invested and authentic will enhance engagement and enable change.

“You must capture the heart of a supremely able man before his brain can do its best.”

- Andrew Carnegie

When employees exhibit passion toward a company cause, they also tend to take ownership of its marketing. Such organic cause marketing engages employees in a mission aligned with company values, and can result in a win-win-win scenario where the business, associated nonprofits or causes, and stakeholders (employees and customers) all benefit.

Cause marketing – also referred to as social marketing, charity marketing, social investment, and the like – uses marketing resources to support worthwhile causes while building the business. “Cause” as it pertains to CSR also extends beyond cause partners to cover sustainable business practices, community support, and any cause a company actively supports. It’s a highly effective way to build the brand and make CSR investment visible, and knows no boundaries in terms of industry, market, cause sector, or culture.¹¹

As marketers and fundraisers seek more effective ways to engage stakeholders, and as analytics tools create new targeting and tracking possibilities, interest in cause-related marketing programs is on the rise. Many studies are finding that purpose is driving consumer preference and loyalty, and helping brands gain trust and differentiate themselves:¹²

Cause marketing is profit plus purpose, and cause marketing programs are modern business practices that offer opportunities for companies to do well financially by doing good in society. Raising awareness, money and consumer engagement for social or environmental issues has become the new normal for organizations and brands, which are incorporating cause marketing into their overall toolkits.

Once practiced only by billion dollar mega-brands, more than 80% of Fortune 500 firms address cause marketing on their websites, with 61% of Americans willing to try a new brand or one unfamiliar to them when it supports a cause.¹³ Additionally, as government

¹¹ Sue Adkins, *Cause Related Marketing*

¹² Modern Marketing Partners, *Cause Marketing: Next Practices Guide*

¹³ Modern Marketing Partners, *Cause Marketing: Next Practices Guide*

Further study findings reveal that:

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72% of consumers have donated to charity at the register, with 65% feeling positively about the retailer after giving. Of the 28% who do not donate at the register, 44% say it was because they "don't know anything about the cause".



42% of North American respondents in a Nielsen study reported they would pay extra for products and services from companies committed to positive social and environmental impact.



A Forbes/Qualtrics study even found that Americans are 8.4% *less* likely to buy from companies that don't share their viewpoints on social issues.

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Millennial consumers in particular – those ages 26-35 – are 21% more likely to say they'll shop at a company whose sociopolitical stances mirror their own.

- **Proctor & Gamble**, through their Tide Loads of Hope program, has washed more than 58,000 loads of clothes for those affected by natural disasters. P&G continues to show up when hurricanes, tornados and wildfires impact communities, and has also spearheaded fundraising by selling t-shirts and giving a percentage of proceeds from Tide to affected areas.
- **Aetna Insurance and U.S. Healthcare** designated \$7 million to educate women about heart disease and stroke. This type of effort helps neutralize the common charge that insurance companies care more about their bottom line than about their policyholders.
- **The Walt Disney Company** and ASPCA entered into more than 100 merchandising agreements that the ASPCA claims will be worth many millions of dollars to the organization over time. The organization is able to fund its animal protection and welfare efforts, while Disney is able to list its support for a cause admired by its family audience.
- **Tom's of Maine** is known to its customers and employees as something more special than just another toothpaste company. The company gives 10% of its pretax profits to nonprofit organizations benefiting the environment, human need, arts, and education. Among the company's noteworthy grants is its \$500,000 contribution to the Nature Conservancy toward the acquisition and preservation of 185,000 acres along the Upper St. John River, the longest free-flowing river east of the Mississippi

However, as cause marketing becomes commonplace, it's likely to be less effective as consumers become desensitized to it. In fact, it's already suffering from criticism. A recent study by Traction says cause-driven consumers are experiencing cause fatigue: 41% somewhat agree that cause marketing is "just spin," and, according to the Havas Media Meaningful Brands Global Report, only 28% of consumers worldwide think that companies today are working hard to solve the big social and environmental challenges people care about.¹⁸

Companies need a new narrative to break through the noise, Edelman's 2012 goodpurpose® study states, something compelling that inspires stakeholders to engage, activate, and advocate for an organization. Rather than a fleeting sponsorship, a long-term commitment to a cause that supports a company's core values is needed – a commitment¹⁹ in which companies:

- Build stronger partnerships with cause partners in related fields
- Leverage partners' marketing capabilities to raise awareness about their program and brand
- Involve their whole team and help them feel positive about advancing change
- Deploy all their workforce and resources to create impact for worthy causes

¹⁸ Max Lenderman, [Doing It On Purpose: How Cause Is Reshaping Modern Marketing](#)

¹⁹ Ann Gynn, [Purpose-Driven Content Marketing: Brands That Give and Get](#)

Because of this, some believe the future for brands lies in *purpose*, or *cause-centered*, marketing rather than cause-related marketing. Purpose, beyond CSR, cause marketing, or altruism, is a core strategy for profit and growth based on tying a company's *raison d'être* with improving lives and impacting society, rather than just supporting an issue.

Additionally, purpose-led campaigns tend to focus on supporting something positive, rather than going against something negative, and better utilize “human-centric mediums” like social media and digital channels, which have uprooted traditional giving and are radically changing the way Americans interact with social issues.²⁰ Along with innovative experiential mediums (360° video, VR & AR), optimizing these channels inspires sharing, participation, and action.

What is needed is an ‘Inside-Out’ approach to marketing, guided by the belief that a company’s investment in making work more personally fulfilling and more socially purposeful will produce a sustainable future. The Inside-Out approach to employee engagement and CSR starts from within (a company’s talent, resources, customer relationships and distribution networks) and leverages these to reach its cause marketing goals through organic, authentic employee stories. Because of this, organizations need to create entertaining, yet deliberately transparent messaging with genuine engagement and laser-focus.

“When people go to work, they shouldn't have to leave their hearts at home.”

- Betty Bender

The Next Frontier for Employee Engagement: Executing a Holistic Strategy

In Fortune 500 companies, there are 27 million employees with an individual average social reach of 846 people via social media.²¹ Though Fortune 500 companies regularly invest in CSR, there is a common failure to integrate these efforts with critical employee engagement initiatives, such as corporate wellness programs, into a single program promoting holistic workforce well-being. The main reason this failure is widespread is because HR, CSR and Marketing departments lack an integrated technology infrastructure to be effective.

By persuading departmental stakeholders to forgo their silos and leading a company-wide buy-in including a devoted budget, adopting an Inside-Out corporate strategy marrying engaged, inspired employees to corporate marketing and messaging could be the greatest innovation of the 21st century:²²

²⁰ Cone Communications, [The 2014 Cone Communications Digital Activism Study](#)

²¹ Source: [Fortune](#) and [2015, Statista & DMR](#)

²² Sue Adkins, *Cause Related Marketing* p. 32

Whatever the form of the mission statement, it is important to bring the words and vision to life; to demonstrate the values through action, 'to walk the talk' and to ensure that all internal audiences and partners buy into and feel part of that vision, believe it and believe in it. Only then can a business hope to project this externally to all stakeholder groups.

Customized Platform to Engage Employees Through Their Passion

All of the employee engagement, CSR, and cause marketing needs we have highlighted suggest that highly specialized technology platforms regardless of functionality will not effectively move companies forward toward achieving their Inside-Out goals of employee advocacy. A powerful all-in-one employee engagement platform, representing holistic well-being for employees – emotionally, spiritually, physically, and professional growth – would put technology in service of companies and society in an organic way that engages and champions the individual as they build a socially-conscious, positive self-esteem.

Elements Critical to Success

Successful employee engagement depends upon robust participation. Based on this, these are the bare essential qualities a holistic employee engagement solution must include to be fully effective and inspiring for all employees:

- **Single Entry Point:** Ease of use is significant to improving participation. Whereas multiple portals each with their own logins can be confusing and lead to employee opt-out, an optimal employee engagement portal with a single sign-up and login can seamlessly integrate multiple corporate departments, improving coordination. This would include the capability to hook up to existing systems.
- **Cause-Driven:** As discussed, purpose-driven initiatives and sponsored volunteer activities have proven to be the most effective means of increasing employees' emotional investment in their company. Brands and corporations could integrate all their CSR & cause initiatives into one portal that provides employees with a searchable source of causes and ideas. The cause most likely to appeal to a given brand, informed by analytics, could be displayed as a video on the dashboard, which helps the brand build a more engaged team and gives the nonprofit the opportunity for exposure.

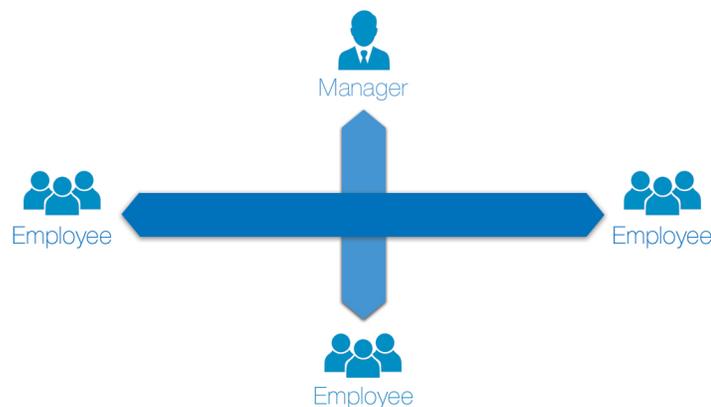
NPOs benefit from exposure on the platform so that brands and their employees can become familiar with causes and support them if they match the brand's mission. Employees wouldn't have to worry about where to have their donations matched, or what causes their company supports, and could track their individual, group, and

company social impact all in one place.

- **Content-Centric:** A company that provides purpose-driven, inspiring content can increase employee inclination to share positive stories about their company and their fellow employees. This can separate constructive communication from the ‘mundane message overflow’ of traditional corporate communication and provide an incisive method for building brand loyalty. An employee engagement portal should provide one-stop content distribution from across all company channels, and allow for content creation within the platform.

Video in particular is the most easily consumable and shareable form of media – it represents an increasing share of digital/mobile ad spending, with growth driven by a substantial increase in mobile video allocations.²³ *The latest VR, AR, and Google 360° advanced video techniques should be implemented for any truly holistic employee engagement campaign due to its potential to dramatically improve participation rates as well as enhance goal communication and content sharing both internally and externally.* When aimed toward company causes, a 360-degree view of the world stirs empathy and action, transporting the viewer across locations and causes. So content, particularly video and experiential content, must be a key part of any employee engagement and cause marketing hub.

- **Secure Bi-directional Communication Capabilities:** An all-in-one portal can only properly administrate company activities when there is direct, secure cross-company communication built in. Companies could integrate existing communications programs like Slack onto the portal, or rely solely on the portal’s system to discuss company matters. When we say “bidirectional,” we mean horizontally and vertically – horizontally to encourage peer-to-peer messaging and recognition, and vertically to support communications from management to reporting employees. This atmosphere of open, clear communication adds to a positive work environment.



- **Access to Wellness Resources & Experts:** When employees feel physically and mentally well, and also feel valued by their companies, they are more likely to be engaged in all aspects of work. While some employee engagement programs include employee wellness tracking, much like popular personal health & wellness apps, this

²³ Interactive Advertising Bureau, [2016 IAB Video Ad Spend Study](#)

method is mostly do-it-yourself. To be more effective in keeping employees at their best, companies need to provide resources for workers to find quality information, as well as experts and leaders in physical and mental health.

- **Authentic Storytelling Through Social Sharing:** The reach of online sharing by employees is growing as social media algorithms evolve. For example, Facebook's News Feed algorithm challenges companies to be smarter marketers and better storytellers to provide fans with content that matters to them. While employees are typically talented, smart, and knowledgeable about the company, Employee Generated Content (EGC) is an often overlooked marketing strategy, particularly for companies with a large employee base. Activating employees as co-narrators of the corporate message, giving them the social sharing tools and authority to tell the story behind company causes, fortifies internal reputation and enables staff to externally represent the brand. An individual employee sharing personally-created content deepens engagement for employees and their social networks. It is the most authentic and credible way to amplify a company's outreach efforts. A singular portal could offer an easy way to do this – with one-click social sharing, employees don't have to jump through hoops to get their stories out there.
- **Game Mechanics:** This feature, also referred to as gamification, is about engaging people on an emotional level and motivating them to achieve their goals. Increasingly used in business, it "add[s] value to product, to increase employee engagement and to drive crowdsourced innovation."²⁴ Extending to all facets of the platform, this would have a particularly strong impact on the cause-driven side – if employees can attribute earned value to causes, they'll be more likely to participate in them.

Upon signing up, employees can track their efforts and share their involvement socially so that the cause they love gets more support, as well as earn them points toward leaderboard status and rewards.

- **Administrative Dashboard & Reporting:** In contrast to fragmented solutions that track either one campaign or another, the portal could track multiple campaigns in real-time, allowing companies to systematically pursue engagement and social impact. Measurement of program effectiveness – in terms of participation and content popularity – makes it possible to glean actionable data and thereby optimize performance on both fronts.

Analytics on the platform enable measurement and optimization of employee efforts on all fronts, from hours volunteered, to miles run, to posts shared. The powerful software's predictive analytics could create comprehensive, segmentable reports to determine which employees deserve rewards fulfillment, which areas need improvement, which causes deserve more attention, and so on.

²⁴ Gartner, [Gartner Reveals How Gamification Drives Digital Business](#)

By merging the power of technology, cause, content storytelling, and wellness, a singular, powerful employee engagement platform has the potential to help companies turn holistic employee wellness into action and action into impact.

*“When people are financially invested, they want a return.
When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute.”*
- Simon Sinek

IMMINENT’s Solution: Employee360™

IMMINENT, the innovative employee engagement and marketing agency, has created such a platform that serves the needs addressed. Employee360™ is different from any other employee engagement offering because it is the only employee portal combining inside-out cause marketing & volunteering, human resources software, wellness tracking, and social sharing in one place, taking care of employees on all levels.

IMMINENT’s Employee360™ portal ties a company’s internal needs to its external ones, shown below. The formula is simple: **Giving + Habitat + Wellness + Social = Inspired™**.

Holistic Employee Engagement



Employee360™ turns internal engagement efforts into powerful external cause marketing campaigns that not only inspire action and change, but generate millions of impressions and engagements on all of the social networks – all through one sign-up and one-touch sharing. All aspects of CSR are done from the portal, and it does all of the CSR work for employees. It provides a user-friendly platform for your employees to tell your story where it matters most, builds on the authentic possibilities of storytelling, and creates analytics-informed video that celebrates a winning cause.

In brief, Employee360™:

- Enables efficient administration and tracking of all campaigns
- Makes it easy to scale up as your business and CSR program grow
- Gamifies employee efforts, encouraging them to increase participation
- Boosts employee morale, recruitment, and retention
- Transforms employees into evangelists for your company through peer-to-peer social media sharing
- Results in valuable earned media credited to employees

The cohesive strategy made possible by Employee360™ offers Fortune 500 companies the opportunity to make a real difference for their brands and communities through their greatest asset: their employees. Real change – and real engagement – happen inside-out, which shows that when employees are happy, when they feel they are valued and making a difference through their company? They share that happiness with the world.

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