

BUYER'S GUIDE FOR REFERRAL MARKETING PLATFORMS



Partnering with a Technology Provider to Power Refer-a-Friend

Whether you're starting from scratch or replacing an existing referral program, selecting a technology provider to power your refer-a-friend program will save you time, effort and dollars. The following sections describe some of the key criteria for selecting the best technology and partner.

Experience and Strength of Vision

When evaluating a technology provider, you're always looking for industry experience. It can also be helpful to look for experience beyond your industry. For example, retailers benefit from a provider who also serves financial services brands. A richness of ideas from more nimble categories catering to fast-changing consumer habits will help you keep up and stay modern. And since your partnership is likely to be a long-term one, make sure your provider has a vision for the future and thoughts about how referral, advocacy, and customer engagement will evolve. You want to partner with a leader.

Security and Compliance

Making sure that your provider takes privacy and security as seriously as you do is paramount. Your vendor will need to be able to demonstrate thorough and complete security, privacy, and operational policies and procedures. ISO27001 certification is a plus, and make sure that regulatory compliance is built-in to the provider's platform including for ADA, CAN-SPAM, CCPA and GDPR.

Integration Breadth

Consider your provider's preferred and alternative integration approaches looking specifically at options for desktop web, mobile web, mobile app, call center, and in-store/in-branch integration. While your program may not initially cover each and every one of these important customer touch-points, it's important to make sure that it can when the time comes. Have a coordinated roadmap that allows for flexibility and adaptability.

Customer Experience and Journey

The customer experience of your referral program should be simple. Ensure the journey has as few steps as possible, is on-brand (with the ability to customize images and URLs to match your business), and includes all the creative necessary for a complete customer experience. As your program grows and matures, you'll find it necessary to track and reward every event that matters (i.e. application, approval, funding, disbursement, transaction). Customers should have as many sharing channels as possible and as permitted by compliance including email, SMS, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and personal share link.

The experience of referred friends must be effective and streamlined. This aspect of refer-a-friend is often overlooked and needs particular attention. Your provider should be able to provide benchmark data for every step in the referral journey so that your actual performance can be optimized and you can evolve your program for maximum impact. For example, if referred friends are clicking on links but not converting, your provider should be able to step in and provide guidance on how to increase your conversion rate.

Analytics & A/B Testing

Your provider must offer analytics that are rich and complete, and they need to be readily available in dashboards and via API. In addition, you will likely require some element of custom reporting to reflect your business's unique measurement and analytics infrastructure. It's important to be open-

minded about data and results as Refer-a-Friend consists of a two-sided funnel (advocates and friends), vs more traditional one-sided marketing channels (i.e. paid media).

A main purpose of rich analytics and benchmarking is to focus activity where it can most improve program performance. A key capability therefore is A/B testing. Look for the ability to test share experience capabilities, as well as offers, journeys, rules/limitations, and marketing placements.

Customer Segmentation & Targeting

Most brands start their refer-a-friend journey with a one-size fits all approach to their program. However, one of the great opportunities for your enterprise grade approach is the ability to offer different rewards and experiences to different customer segments. For example, your platinum card members should be treated and rewarded differently than your student card holders. Treat referral like a benefit to membership, not a promotion.

When evaluating a referral technology provider, determine whether their technology can simultaneously target different experiences to specific audiences, localize language as necessary, identify interesting segments of advocates, and reward different audiences or segments.

Capabilities for Your Call Center

When an advocate calls your call center asking about an unreceived reward, you need to be able to provide a fast and accurate response. Look at your providers customer care screens and resolution capabilities to make sure that this important part of the referral experience isn't overlooked but, rather, is a strength. Your customers and CSRs will all benefit.

Furthermore, if your call center is involved in the signup process for new customers, part of the process may be asking whether he or she was referred so that referrals can be captured manually in order to trigger appropriate rewards. The call center is an easily overlooked part of the customer journey.

Breadth of Rewards and Reward Rules

Standard rewards for retailers are coupon codes, account credits, and loyalty points. Most banks and financial institutions use points or account credits. Thoroughly evaluate all of these possibilities but also the ability to offer custom rewards and even gift cards. As your program grows and expands, having these options will be increasingly important. Get feedback from your customers as you diversify and test your rewards. Ensure that your reward is competitive in the market as well as against other active promotions.

Protecting against Fraud and Gaming

The best referral programs will have rules in place to detect fraud as it happens. While actions like self-referral may take place, it is important to understand the intentions of your customer and to learn from how they are interacting with your program. Are these people only looking for rewards or are they “deal-seekers” searching for the best offer. The best referral providers will have experience with fraud controls and prevention that consider customer intent will be able to generate program optimization plans accordingly.

Professional Services and Support Desk

Finally, it's essential that your provider offer professional services that can contribute actively to the growth of your program. Make sure your provider can give data-backed best practices consulting, data analysis services, creative services, technical services, program strategy, and support desk level troubleshooting.

About Extole

Brands companies use Extole to turn customers into advocates. Our enterprise technology and team of experts create powerful advocate and referral programs, so brands can harness the power of personal recommendations and sharing to the benefit of their bottom line. Extole enables marketers to engage thousands of advocates, scaling word-of-mouth to acquire new customers and increase loyalty using their greatest competitive advantage: their customers.

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