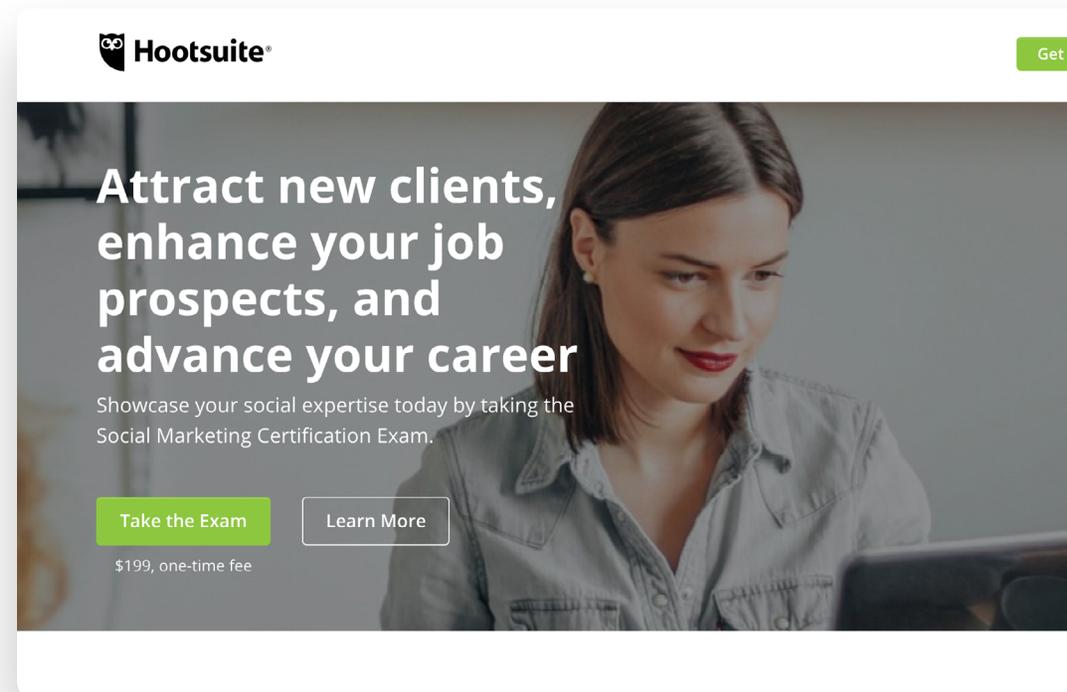


Thinkific Case Study

How **Hootsuite's Academy** became their most important tool for building brand advocacy and nurturing happy, successful customers

A screenshot of the Hootsuite Academy landing page. The page features a dark background with a woman looking at a laptop. The Hootsuite logo is in the top left corner. The main headline reads "Attract new clients, enhance your job prospects, and advance your career". Below the headline, it says "Showcase your social expertise today by taking the Social Marketing Certification Exam." There are two buttons: "Take the Exam" and "Learn More". The price "\$199, one-time fee" is displayed below the "Take the Exam" button. A "Get" button is partially visible in the top right corner.

Hootsuite

Get

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[Take the Exam](#) [Learn More](#)

\$199, one-time fee

The problem:

How do you provide product training to help 16 million users be successful?

Hootsuite. You've heard of it. It's the world's most widely used social media management platform with over 16 million users. This powerhouse company needed an efficient way to produce and distribute product training to their customers. The answer was Hootsuite Academy. The Academy began as a way to teach customers how to use the Hootsuite Dashboard, but quickly evolved once Hootsuite realized how many different ways they could leverage Academy training to help both their customers and their business thrive.

How do you ensure 16 million users have all the tools and training they need to both succeed on your platform, and then recommend you to their friends?



250,000+

students enrolled in Hootsuite Academy

45,000+

social media certifications

800+

universities integrated

Learn how online education became the key ingredient for Hootsuite to nurture happy, productive customers who become what every SaaS company looks for: true brand advocates.

Sarah Whyte, Hootsuite's Education Marketing Specialist, and Ryan Chynces, Hootsuite's Online Education Manager, sat down with Thinkific to talk about the success of Hootsuite Academy and why they chose Thinkific as their online course platform.

"In 10 years, we want every single one of our customers consuming Hootsuite Academy education content. And even beyond that, we want to become the world leader in social media education."

Sarah Whyte, Education Marketing Specialist, Hootsuite





“We get excited about educating the next generation of social media pros. Through integrating online learning into these higher education classrooms, students come out with a certification they can showcase...and land their dream job in social.”



Sarah Whyte, Education Marketing Specialist, Hootsuite

How Hootsuite Did It:

How to build brand advocates through education

Step 1: Take education beyond product training

The explosive success of Hootsuite Academy came about when the team realized the power of using online education not only as a means of product training for existing customers, but also as general social media education for anyone who wanted to learn. Sarah told us, “we started out with just wanting to train customers on how to use the Hootsuite Dashboard. From there it evolved into our customers needing to know how to use social more generally. Then we took it even further, beyond just our customers”. Hootsuite started building general social media education courses on social media marketing, social selling, and social advertising. The

company also began offering a social media certification program to help students walk away from their courses with a tangible certificate that they could display to future employers on their resumes and social media profiles. Since beginning an education program in 2011, Hootsuite and Hootsuite Academy have trained over 250,000 students. The social media certification program has been completed by over 45,000 people. The Academy’s student program, which works to partner with higher education institutions, has integrated Hootsuite Academy courseware into over 800 universities worldwide, teaching over 85,000 students.

“Lots of technology companies have some sort of educational material to help their customers understand the product. But what we did differently is reach out to social media professionals who may not even be customers yet, and offer the opportunity to learn for free.”



David Godsall, Director of Inbound and Education, Hootsuite



How to build brand advocates through education

Step 2: Care about teaching people who aren't your customers

As Hootsuite Academy's social media training courses spread into 800+ universities worldwide, the SaaS company began to see how educating the masses was a great way to turn Hootsuite Academy students into new (and already social media groomed!) Hootsuite users.

Building out general social media education is a great top of funnel strategy for Hootsuite, and it ultimately helped newcomers to social media see more value in Hootsuite's product. Ryan told us that many people start out, "intimidated

at the idea of using social media in a professional context". Many also don't understand at the beginning how Hootsuite could help their business grow. But strangers are future customers you just haven't educated yet!

Hootsuite Academy understood that it was crucial to help people build knowledge and confidence about social media FIRST. It would only be after they've acquired that knowledge that they could truly see the potential that Hootsuite offered.

“Education is how we ensure our users are successful, and that's how they become loyal Hootsuite customers.”

David Godsall, Director of Inbound and Education, Hootsuite



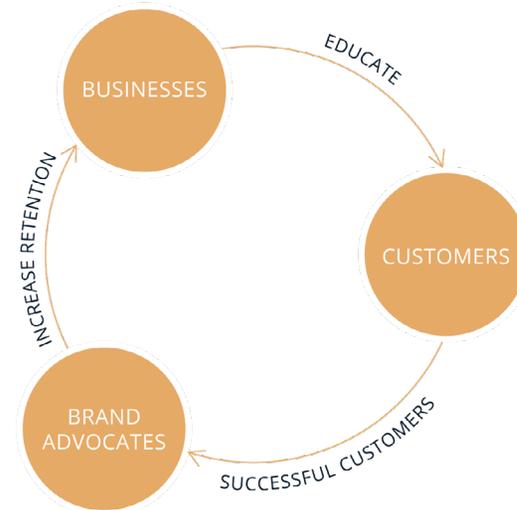
Ryan Chynces, Online Education Manager, Hootsuite

“We produced additional education to give people the best practices for doing social media marketing, social selling, social ads, etc., correctly. So then, when they master that, they can really get the most out of Hootsuite products and services.”



Step 2: Care about teaching people who aren't your customers

The education 'win-win' cycle



This practice of building education into your business to help customers see more value in your product is a perfect example of what we like to call the 'education win-win cycle' between a business and its customers. When a business invests the time and resources to educate their customers and build out proper training, those customers come away

with a better understanding of not just the product features, but also how to achieve success. As a result, they are less frustrated, do better in your platform, and stick around as a customer! Then you start seeing better retention, less churn, and have more resources to build out even better education. Win-win.

How to build brand advocates through education

Step 3: Build education into every stage of the customer journey

Every department at Hootsuite, from sales to product to marketing to support, uses Hootsuite Academy's education content to reach customers at different stages in the customer journey. **By having multiple education touchpoints throughout your product, your customers will feel more supported and become better brand advocates for you.**

Here's how different Hootsuite departments use Academy content:

Sales team:

Leverages Hootsuite Academy content to show customers how they'll be supported if they sign up for a Hootsuite plan or package.

Product team:

Integrates Academy videos directly in the Hootsuite Dashboard to provide help when and where customers need it.

Customer support/ success team:

Uses Academy videos to troubleshoot problems and help customers be more successful.

Marketing team:

Uses Hootsuite Academy content to support new product releases and educate audiences about a product roll-out.

How to build brand advocates through education

Step 4: Use education to reduce the anxiety of your existing customers

We've probably all experienced that feeling of signing up for a new product to be immediately 'dumped into the dark' upon sign in. We're left thinking: What is this product, and how do I best use it? If a SaaS company doesn't have a good source of onboarding training, as well as continued education for existing customers, you aren't building a long-term success path for your customers.

Since Hootsuite Academy's training material is almost entirely made up of video content, the Academy team leverages training videos in different places within Hootsuite's app. As customers navigate the Dashboard, Hootsuite Academy resources pop up at appropriate times to coach them

along, and preemptively answer any questions about what customers should do next.

Including consistent education throughout your platform also helps alleviate the anxiety of your existing customers. The Hootsuite Academy team told us that they saw confident feedback when they downloaded Thinkific's feedback spreadsheets on their courses. "Our students say that consuming Hootsuite Academy content really reduces their anxiety about using social media. Whether that means [the content] is reinforcing, 'yeah they are doing everything properly', or it's giving them the tools to go into their job the next day and apply [that learning] and be successful".



Ryan Chynces, Online Education Manager, Hootsuite

"By having Hootsuite Academy resources available, on demand, when people need it, customers really feel supported. So if they're in the product and they're struggling, they know that video content is there for them."



How to build brand advocates through education

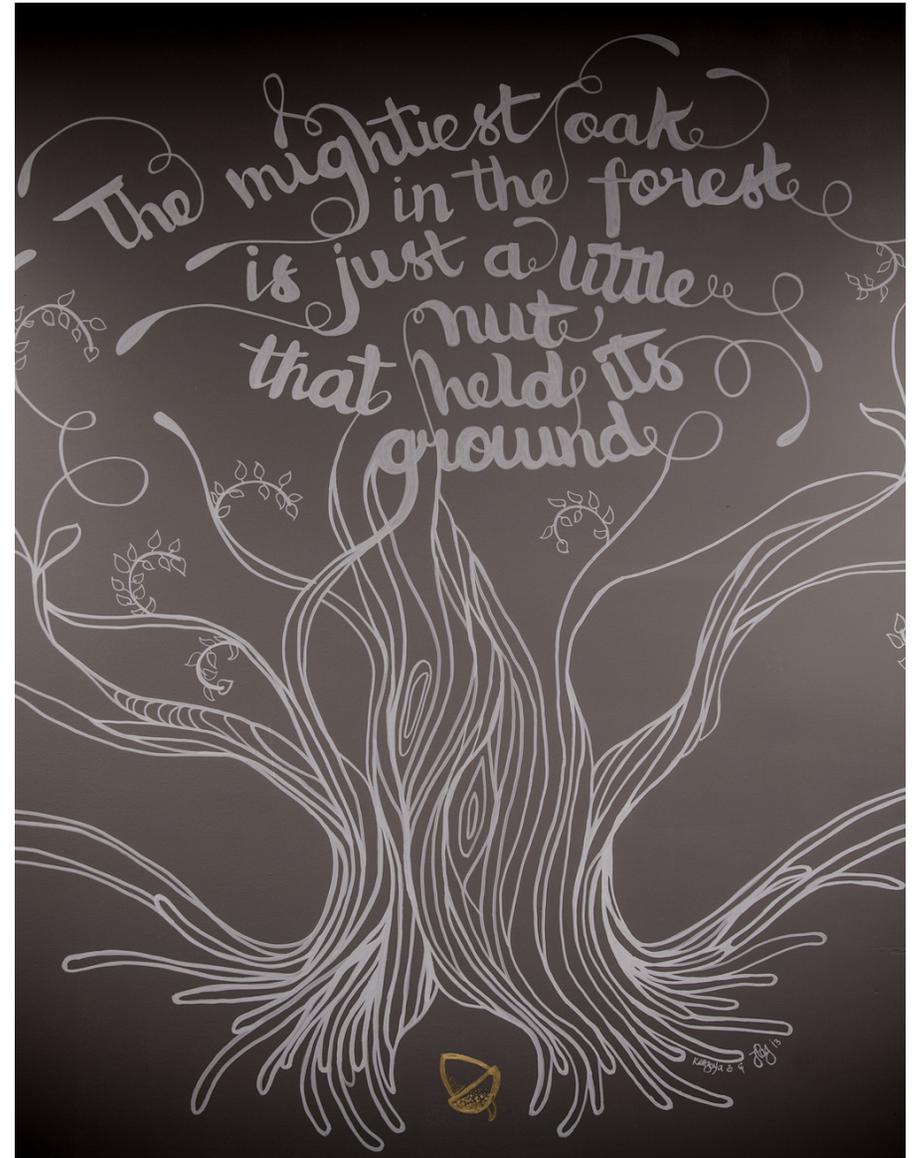
Step 5: Choose a top-notch course delivery platform

Why Hootsuite decided to go with online courses

Hootsuite experimented with different ways of delivering education, such as in-person training and webinars, before settling on video content within online courses. “We found that delivering our content through Hootsuite Academy is the most customer centric and scalable way to get that information to them”, said Ryan. Choosing an education format that’s scalable is key for any growing business. With Hootsuite’s 250,000 Academy students and 16 million product users, creating webinars and taking 1-1 calls wasn’t feasible for them. Online courses gave them the ability to deliver content quickly, and also to easily go back and update content.

“Hootsuite is a SaaS company...and we find that video content and Hootsuite Academy is one of the best ways to deliver education in that SaaS context to make our customers more successful.”

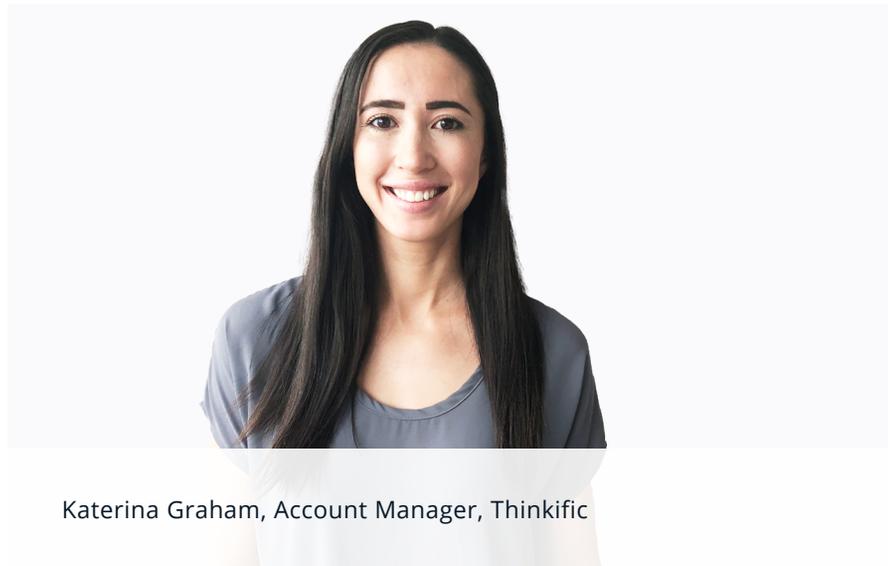
Ryan Chynces, Online Education Manager, Hootsuite



Choosing Thinkific as their course platform

“Thinkific offers the power and flexibility to help us achieve the business goals that we want. If we had started using Thinkific 1 or 2 years previously, we would have gotten to where we’re at now much faster.”

Ryan Chynces, Online Education Manager, Hootsuite



Katerina Graham, Account Manager, Thinkific

Thinkific fit their volume-driven business model

Hootsuite Academy needed to educate thousands of students at once (with 16 million users we can see why). The team found that Thinkific’s people and platform could easily manage Hootsuite’s high-volume needs. Ryan said, “One of the reasons we chose Thinkific in the first place is because we have a volume model--we invite students into our platform and give them social media education for free. [Because of that] we’re having lots of people come into our platform, and Thinkific can manage all that”.

It’s an easy to use platform for both big companies and small teams

“One of the things I really like about Thinkific is that we can build courses out fairly quickly and easily and have them look amazing. Hootsuite Academy looks like a big team, but in fact we only have six people on our team. So we really appreciate platforms that make it easy for us to build out courses.”

We also asked Ryan and Sarah about any feedback from students about learning inside the Thinkific platform. Ryan said, “The feedback I’ve gotten from students using Thinkific is that they find it very navigable. The clean interface helps them find what they’re looking for easily.”

Thinkific’s certificates help students showcase their skills

With Thinkific’s certificate feature, Hootsuite Academy is able to give their customers something tangible to showcase their social media success. Sarah said, “with our student program, students can learn within their classrooms... and then come out with a tangible certificate that shows they have the skills and knowledge to go out and land their first job in social media”.

The Thinkific support team cares about personal connections

Sarah and Ryan spoke about how appreciative they were with the helpfulness of the Thinkific Support and Account Management teams. “Thinkific’s customer support team has been very responsive for any of our feedback: especially Katerina, who worked really closely with us on a recent product launch. She listened to our feedback and came back to us with solutions”.

How to build brand advocates through education

Advice for other SaaS companies looking to build education into their business

We asked Ryan and Sarah to share a few words of wisdom for similar companies, big or small, looking to implement education into their business model.

01. Use video content, but don't underestimate how much time it takes to make it great

Ryan said, "I would recommend using video content. I think customers really like it, it's bite sized, and it doesn't take as much cognitive energy to process it." He warned other companies, however, that great video content takes a long time to build. "Don't underestimate how difficult it is to make video content really good... it's a really specialized skill set".

02. Plan your content well in advance (and plan everything!).

Sarah's advice to similar companies is to make sure to plan ahead when building out education content. "There is really no substitute for planning. Last year we launched five courses, including a fully localized course in Spanish. We had to have a plan and stick to that plan in order to deliver for the end of the year...and we've really seen all that planning rewarded within our results".

03. Make sure you're allocating time to keep your training content up to date

While creating great education content for your users is crucial, it's also important to make sure you're planning time to update that content. Ryan told us that, especially in a fast-changing industry like social media, they are constantly tweaking and updating. "One thing I would really advise for people building out content, is to really plan for how much work it takes to keep that content up to date". Ryan told us that in 2018, Hootsuite Academy's focus is going back through their courses and making sure all the content stays fresh and integral to the learning experience.

04. Add education to your business, and choose a top notch delivery platform to do it

Ryan shared, "Hootsuite Academy is probably one of the most powerful tools we have for reducing churn and increasing retention, both of which are preoccupations for most SaaS-based businesses. So, my advice to other SaaS-based businesses who have those concerns, would be to make the investments in video content and in a top-notch delivery system for that content, like Thinkific".



We were so happy to help Hootsuite Academy take steps towards their vision of educating millions of people. To learn more about how Thinkific can help add education to your business, visit our website:

www.thinkific.com