WHAT IS INFLUENCER MARKETING?

Everything you need to know to launch a successful Influencer Marketing campaign for your company.
You’ve got a great product and you want the world to know about it. What’s the most effective way to get people to pay attention? These days, it’s influencer marketing.

In the simplest of terms, Influencer Marketing is using the clout of a popular figure or leader—usually someone with a significant social media following—to get the word out about your company or product.

Influencer marketing is similar to word-of-mouth advertising, but it’s not exactly the same thing. When your company depends on word-of-mouth marketing, it’s depending on current customers being so thrilled with your product that they are going to naturally want to tell all their friends and family about it.

When you work with an influencer, you ask him or her to promote your product for you. An influencer doesn’t have to be a current customer of your company, but it definitely helps if he or she has some interest in or connection to what you’re selling.

If you hire an influencer, what can you expect him or her to do for you? That really all depends. Influencer marketing can take several forms. It can be as simple as hiring someone to take an Instagram photo with your product. You can also hire an influencer to create a blog post reviewing your product. Some companies have success working with YouTubers, who create videos featuring a product.

The success or failure of an influencer marketing campaign depends largely on finding the right influencer and the right platform for your product.

**WHY USE INFLUENCER MARKETING?**

One of the biggest reasons why influencer marketing has really taken off in recent years has to do with trust. People don’t trust traditional ads. In fact, the 2016 Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute found that between 10 and 35 percent of people had some sort of ad-blocking software installed to keep those ads out of their lives.

A study conducted by Nielsen found that less than...
than half of people around the world trusted paid advertisements, such as those seen on TV or in the newspaper. Not only that, but consumer confidence in paid advertising fell by nearly a quarter every year since 2009.

92% OF PEOPLE PUT THEIR TRUST IN WORD-OF-MOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Meanwhile, that same study found that in the years between 2007 and 2012, trust in earned media, which includes word-of-mouth marketing and influencer marketing, increased by 18 percent.

An earlier study conducted by McKinsey made a similar finding. According to that study, word-of-mouth marketing can influence up to half of all purchasing decisions. Recommendations from friends and family have the most weight when a person is considering making an expensive purchase or is buying an item for the first time.

In response to the decrease in effectiveness of paid ads, influencer marketing has become more common. A study conducted by Schlesinger Associates in 2015 found that 84 percent of marketing professionals around the world planned on starting an influencer marketing campaign over the course of the next year. Of those that had already dipped their toes into influencer marketing, 81 percent believed their projects were successful.

Although people have traditionally trusted the opinions of friends and family over the opinions of strangers when looking for a product recommendation, the tide seems to be shifting towards trusting influencers.

A study conducted by social media network Twitter and Annalect, a data analytics firm, found that 40 percent of Twitter users ended up making a purchase after seeing a tweet from an influencer. While 56 percent of Twitter users still rely on recommendations from friends, 49 percent are now relying on recommendations from influencers when it comes to making a purchase.

People’s attitudes about influencers are also shifting. These days, it’s not the big-name
celebrities who are gaining trust and influence—according to Variety, it’s the lesser-known YouTube stars.

Only two “name brand” celebrities (Taylor Swift and Bruno Mars) made it to the list of the top 10 most popular brands on YouTube. The top three spots on the list went to YouTubers known for their video game reviews and commentary, while the other spots were filled by a mix of comedians and actors.

Of course, a discussion of the why of influencer marketing wouldn’t be complete without mentioning money. Why should you try working with an influencer? Because it pays.

The exact figure varies depending upon who you ask, but studies have shown that influencer marketing campaigns often have a return on investment of anywhere from $6.85 for every dollar spent to $11 for every dollar spent. Whether it’s $6 or $11, the amount your company can stand to gain from an influencer campaign is huge.

Plus, the amount influencers expect to be paid and the amount they earn per sponsored post is relatively low compared to the cost of a traditional advertisement.

**STEPS TO AN INFLUENCER MARKETING CAMPAIGN**

**Step One: Know Thyself**

The first step in a successful influencer marketing campaign is to know thyself—or at least thy customers.

Why? Because if you don’t know who your customers are, you won’t be able to choose an influencer who is going to speak to them in a way they can relate to. If your customers are mainly 30-something stay-at-home moms who read blogs, and you pick an influencer whose audience is mainly made up of teenagers watching YouTube videos, your influencer marketing project is going to go bust.

**Step Two: Put Yourself in Their Shoes**

Put yourself in the shoes of your customers. Ask yourself what they are trying to accomplish when they are looking for a product like the one your company offers. Consider what steps they take when researching and looking for products.

You don’t have to make guesses about what your customers want or how they go about getting information. If your company is already up and
running, you can reach out to past customers and ask them to share their thoughts or opinions with you.

If your company is in the process of launching, you can run focus groups to get a sense of what your expected customers are after and how they research products.

**Step Three: Find Influencers**

Once you know your customers, it’s time to start finding influencers. You can reach out to influencers on your own or work with an influencer talent agency or with an influencer marketplace. Influencer talent agencies are similar to traditional talent agencies, except that instead of actors or models, they manage a roster of social media and blogging stars. An influencer marketplace typically has a wide variety of vetted influencers and gives you the ability to search based on your requirements.

**Step Four: Vet Influencers**

It can be tempting to simply look at the size of an influencer’s following when choosing whom to work with. But likes, friends and followers aren’t everything. You need to also think about fit. It doesn’t matter if an influencer has one million followers—if those followers aren’t the demographic or customer base you’re trying to target, the influencer won’t be an effective marketing tool for your brand.

Subject matter is more important than follower size. Even so-called micro-influencers, people with fewer than 1,000 followers, can give your brand a boost if they typically post about things that are relevant to your company. One 2016 study found that people with under 1,000 followers tended to have a higher “like” rate on their posts compared to influencers with between 1,000 and 10,000 followers.

Ideally, your influencer will hit the sweet spot between having enough followers, getting those customers to act, and creating blogs and social media posts that are relevant for your company.

You also want to look at the influencer’s level of engagement before you decide to work with him or her. Social media does have its dark sides, and one of those dark sides is the practice of buying followers.

Although not every influencer does it, more than a few do. What’s wrong with an influencer buying followers? For one thing, those “followers” aren’t...
actually people the influencer engages with. They’re just numbers, meant to puff up and improve the appearance of a social media star. Fake followers don’t make purchase decisions and won’t be buying your product.

Often, fake followers are known as ghost followers. An Instagram or Twitter “ghost” is an account that exists, but that doesn’t have any activity. A ghost follower can be a real person who made an account, but never actually used it or it can be an account created by a bot, simply for the purposes of boosting an influencer’s follower number.

You can determine if an influencer’s following is largely fake or largely ghost followers by taking a look at some of the accounts that follow the influencer. A fake account usually has no followers and no posts, but follows a lot of other people. A ghost follower might not have a profile picture and won’t comment on or like other people’s posts.

Other account checking apps include Followerwonk, Untweeps and TwitterAudit, all of which are for Twitter accounts.

TOOLS LIKE FOLLOWERCHECK AND THE FAKERS APP CAN HELP YOU SEE HOW MANY OF AN INFLUENCER’S FOLLOWERS ARE LEGITIMATE AND HOW MANY ARE FAKE ACCOUNTS

Along with looking at the profiles of an influencer’s followers and using a tool to see if there are a lot of fake accounts, you can also check out how that following responds to each post the influencer makes.

If an influencer’s posts don’t get much engagement, that’s not a good sign. Even if the influencer’s followers are for real, if few people are liking or commenting on each post, the actual amount of influence that person has is minimal.

One way to simplify the process of finding legitimate influencers is to work with an influencer marketplace. The best marketplaces aren’t open to anyone with a social media account. Instead, influencers who sign up for one need to show that they’re the real deal, that they have at least a certain number of followers and that they have experience working on campaigns.

Once you’ve found a few influencers who look as though they’d be a great fit for your brand, the next
MAKING UNDERWEAR COOL (AND SEXY)

Some argue that Calvin Klein’s #mycalvins influencer marketing campaign is hands down the most successful Instagram influencer marketing campaign ever. Why? The campaign has it all: well-known models, up-and-coming Instagram stars and a connection to the underwear and denim brand’s controversial past.

The multi-year campaign has, according to Women’s Wear Daily (WWD), featured more than 600 influencers and generated more than 23.5 million interactions. Those involved with the campaign include pop star Justin Bieber, blogger Leandra Medine (of Man Repeller) and model Miranda Kerr.

The images used in the campaign, such as a denim-clad Justin Bieber entwined with scantily clad model Lara Stone, recalled past Calvin Klein ads, such as the one from 1992 featuring waif-like Kate Moss and jeans-wearing Mark Wahlberg (in his Marky Mark days). The ads also brought to mind the most controversial CK ad of all, the one from the early 1980s featuring a teenage Brooke Shields.

The #mycalvins campaign worked in part because it was a mix of paid influencer posts and user-generated content. Once they saw their favorite pop stars, models and bloggers posting their #mycalvins pics, lots of everyday social media users did the same. Getting people to take pictures in their underwear will only take a brand so far, though. The other part of the #mycalvins success lies in the number of people who started following the brand and the number of people who ended up buying its products.

After the start of the campaign, Calvin Klein’s Facebook followers increased by more than two million. It also gained more than one million Twitter followers and 1.8 million Instagram followers, according to Racked. Women’s styles ended up selling out on the company’s website in 2015. To capitalize on that, the brand posted the most popular of the #mycalvins posts to a dedicated, shoppable microsite.

step is to make the connection. There are a few ways to do this. The easiest way is to reach out to them using the marketplace. Doing so gives the influencers some peace of mind that you’re the real deal and not a spambot or flake.

You’ve vetted the influencers, and now it’s their turn to vet you. Their images are just as much at stake when they work with a company as yours is when you work with them.

Along with connecting to a potential influencer partner through a marketplace, it’s also helpful to engage with him or her on social media. Comment on a few posts and share or retweet relevant ones. Doing so will allow you see what the influencer’s posts are like and what his or her posting schedule is like in real time.

No matter what you do, when you make the first contact with the influencer through the marketplace or over social media, don’t be vague. Nothing seems more spammy than a random message from a company that says something like “we should work together,” even if the message comes through a legitimate marketplace.

Be specific in your messaging. Tell the influencer what you want him or her to do (e.g., a sponsored blog post, a series of Instagram posts featuring your product or a YouTube review of your product). Also outline what you’ll do for the influencer. Will you promote his or her account through your own channels? Will you pay him or her, and if so, how much?

Influencer marketing is all about tit for tat. You want something, and the influencer wants something too. Be clear that everyone knows what’s what before you get started.
INFLUENCER MARKETING DO’S & DON’TS

**DO**

**Pick Your Influencer Carefully**

It bears repeating: The strength of any influencer marketing campaign depends on the strength of the influencer. Someone who looks like a great fit because he or she has lots of engaged followers might actually be a terrible fit if the niche and target audience aren’t right.

Remember that influencer doesn’t have to equal celebrity. In fact, if you are working with or are a smaller company, choosing a less well-known but still highly respected and engaged influencer might be a better fit for your company than going after the Kendall Jenners, Justin Biebers or Oprahs of the social media world.

**Give Your Influencers Something**

As was seen in the case of Daniel Wellington, some influencers will work for free products. But depending on the size of your company and the clout of the influencer you want to work with, you might need to hand over more than a free product to get him or her to work with you.

Along with paying your influencers, you might also consider sharing a few of their posts with your followers. Establishing a relationship with your influencers is as important as making sure they are fairly compensated.

**Track Your Campaigns**

There’s no point in running influencer marketing campaigns if your company isn’t getting something out of them. Pay attention to metrics and return on investment for each influencer. If you work with an influencer agency, it will often have a variety of tools available to help you keep track of the impact each influencer is having.

You can also create a hashtag related to your campaign or create a special code or URL for each influencer, so you can see who’s generating the most traffic and sales for your company.

**DON’T**

**Give Your Influencers Content**

Part of the reason influencers are so effective is because audiences trust them. When you work with an influencer, he or she needs to create the content, using your product as a guide. You can have some say in what that content is (a review, a photo featuring your product or a sponsored blog post), but you need to give control over the final content to the actual influencer.

That doesn’t mean you can’t nix the project if you don’t like the finished product. In fact, you should vet the post before it goes lives to avoid a #socialmediafail, such as having your influencer include the directions for the post in the caption (we call that doing a Scott Disick). Giving the influencer the ability to create something authentic and genuine, which will resonate with an audience and allowing your company the ability to proofread the post before it goes up will allow you to have the greatest possible impact.

**Ignore FTC Rules**

The Federal Trade Commission has some pretty strict rules when it comes to social sponsorship and sponsored blog posts. Anytime you work with an influencer, make sure he or she is following the FTC’s disclosure rules in the post.

As of 2016, the FTC started to crack down on posts that don’t follow the disclosure rules. To qualify as a proper disclosure, the notice needs to be prominent and easy to understand.

Putting #ad or #sponsored at the beginning of an Instagram post is acceptable. Putting #sp at the end of the post isn’t, since it’s not clear to the average person what “sp” means. It’s also easy for a person to miss the hashtag if it’s the last one listed.
5 TIPS FOR RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL INFLUENCER MARKETING CAMPAIGN

1. CHOOSE YOUR PLATFORM CAREFULLY

Not every social media network is the best for influencer marketing. You want to choose the site that makes the most sense for your company, and that allows you to reach the greatest number of people.

As of 2016, Facebook and Instagram were at the top of the pile when it came to influencer marketing success. Facebook is a popular pick for influencer marketing in part because it has so many users. More than one billion people around the world use the site daily, according to company statistics.

Instagram is actually less popular than Facebook, according to a 2016 study, but is still the second most popular social media site for influencers. While it might have fewer users, a report by Bloglovin’ found that it was a preferred site for influencers, since they believed there was a higher level of audience engagement on Instagram compared to other sites. The industry you’re in also plays a role in choosing the right social media platform. For example, Instagram tends to be particularly popular with fashion and beauty brands.

2. KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A POPULAR PERSON AND AN INFLUENCER

There’s a difference between a person who’s popular on social media and a person who has actual influence. A popular person might have a lot of followers and get a lot of likes, but that person might not actually be able to get others to take action.

That’s why it’s so important to gauge a person’s actual engagement and influence before you decide to work with him or her. An influential person spurs people to action and has the ability to get people to purchase.

If there’s no evidence of a social media figure getting people to do something, you might want to reconsider partnering with him or her. Alternatively, you can create a concrete plan to get people to act after seeing a post (such as a clear call to action and custom promotional codes or URLs), then measure how much actual influence your influencer has.

3. KEEP IT AUTHENTIC

Trust comes from authenticity. Ideally, the influencers you work with will be people who are genuinely excited about your products, and who are able to share your products with their followers in a genuine and engaging way.

It can be tempting to want to pay the influencer with the greatest number of followers a lot of money to get him or her to push your product. But if you do that, you risk moving into the territory of traditional advertising, which today’s audiences are able to see through, ignore or block.

Admittedly, remaining authentic when working with influencers can be tricky, and there is a fine line between a post that’s genuine and a post that’s created to get clicks and generate sales. That’s why having a relationship with your influencers is so important. When you get to the point where you’re both in it just for the money, it might be time to re-evaluate what you’re doing.

4. ABC (ALWAYS BE COMMUNICATING)

Part of maintaining a good relationship with your influencers is remaining in close communication with them. But that doesn’t mean spamming their inboxes with message after message. It does, however, mean checking in during a campaign to see what an influencer thinks of the results, to get his or her opinion about what could be done differently next time and to see if there is any interest in continuing the partnership.

You also want to make sure your company is doing what it can to hold up its end of the bargain, and to make sure the influencer is happy with what he or she is getting from the partnership.
5. SET AND MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

An influencer marketing campaign is more likely to be successful if you go into it with a realistic set of expectations. Although it is possible for a campaign to have a considerable return on investment, it's still a good idea to confirm that what you expect to get from your campaign is realistic, based on past results.

Your influencer or the influencer marketing marketplace you work with can give you a decent idea of what type of ROI to expect, based on past similar campaigns.

You also want to provide the influencer with an idea of what his or her commitment will be to the project. You shouldn’t tell an influencer that you want one post from him or her when what you really want is one Instagram post, one blog post and several comments on your company’s social media profiles.

It’s also important to work out a budget with your influencers that is fair for everyone. How much an influencer can and should earn depends on the size of his or her reach.

Some influencers are happy to be paid in product, while others expect cold hard cash. An influencer who feels he or she is getting the short end of the stick in terms of compensation won’t want to continue working with you. This is where working with an influencer agency can come in handy, as you’ll have a third party to act as an intermediary between you and the influencer.

Let’s not forget deadlines. An influencer marketing campaign is going to be dead in the water if your influencer doesn’t deliver the post or video by the agreed-upon date.

Make sure your influencers are clear on when you need the posts. Because accidents do happen and life tends to throw curveballs into even the most well-planned projects, it’s a good idea to build some wiggle room into your deadlines, in case an influencer is late or something comes up on your end.

If you’ve been dragging your feet about starting an influencer marketing campaign, now’s the time to jump in. Working with a blogger or social media star can be exactly the push your company needs to boost its sales and move on to the next phase of growth.
RESOURCES

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