

A smart social media strategy

Influencer Marketing 101



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As buyers grow more skeptical of sales messaging and social media ads get more expensive, savvy retailers are embracing an affordable, surer path to consumer trust: influencer marketing.

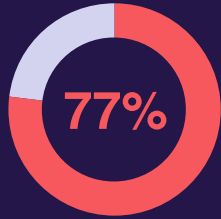
Creators and influencers are viewed as relatable and aspirational. They are closer to customers than almost anyone, say Deloitte researchers, enabling brands to move, sway and sell at the speed of culture.

And companies are sponsoring influencers for a fraction of what they are paying for ads. Great deal? Let's discuss.

How effective is influencer marketing, really? What are the risks, and how can retailers reduce them and boost their chances of success? We answer those questions in this resource, arming you with what you need to know to kickstart an influencer marketing experiment — your first steps toward a profitable program.



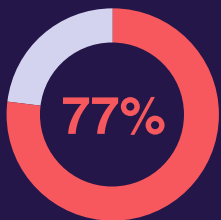
THE CURRENT INFLUENCER MARKETING LANDSCAPE



of surveyed brand marketers have a dedicated budget for influencer marketing



8 in 10 consumers say they've purchased, researched or considered a product or service they saw on social media



of brand marketers report the quality of customers from influencer marketing campaigns exceeds that of other marketing tactics

In 2022, 77% of surveyed brand marketers have a dedicated budget for influencer marketing, and for good reason: Eight in 10 consumers say they've purchased, researched or considered a product or service they saw on social media, according to a survey by Matter Communications, a digital marketing firm. The sway of influencers is such that ROI has been found to be 11 times greater than other digital marketing tactics, generating \$5.20 for every dollar spent, Shopify reports.

Lead quality is another biggie: 77% of brand marketers report the quality of customers from influencer marketing campaigns exceeds that of other marketing tactics. It's another reason why four in five brand marketers are increasing their spend in influencer collabs over the next several months: "This is further proof that influencer marketing remains successful and shows no sign of disappearing or being a fad," writes the Influencer Marketing Hub.

4 NOTABLE SHIFTS FUELING INFLUENCER IMPACT

1. THE RISE OF MICRO-INFLUENCERS

As it happens, follower count doesn't always signal effectiveness, says Brett Owens, founder of Afluencer, a searchable matchmaking platform where brands and influencers find one another. Put simply, influence follows trust, and users don't necessarily trust celebrities with massive followings.

Brand marketers have caught on to that, with 77% favoring micro-influencers (those with roughly 5,000 to 20,000 followers) over macro-influencers with much larger audiences.

"The great thing about micro-influencers is that their content is really authentic and relatable," said Katie Freiberg, head of growth marketing at ThirdLove, in a McKinsey podcast. Alessandra

Sales, vice president of growth at Ipsy, agreed: "In the early days, companies were going after followers, and so they were mostly engaged with macro-influencers. But then what you see often is that it doesn't pay off because this audience might not be as engaged, might not relate to that particular influencer, the conversions are not really there. So companies started optimizing for quality over quantity," she explained in the podcast.

There's also the issue of affordability. Influencer A with 3,000 followers and Influencer B with 300,000 followers can both be successful partners, Owens notes, but one allows you to experiment for \$100, and the other, \$1,000.

2.

THE EVOLUTION FROM INFLUENCER TO CREATOR

For years, Courtney Williamson, PhD sold back braces she'd designed for patients with neuromuscular disorders. During the pandemic, she decided to market her company, AbiliLife, to the general public, turning to influencer marketing to reach consumers struggling with back pain. "Influencers turned out content I would not have gotten in a studio," she says. "I was surprised by how knowledgeable and intuitive these creators are in relaying my brand message and making it compelling to users."

More than reviewing or posing with products, social media content creators are poised to become the next iteration of the creative agency, writes Deloitte: "This means moving the relationship from 'influencer' to 'creator' and putting those individuals at the center of the brand to work on bigger-picture creative challenges."

Unsurprisingly, influencers increasingly crave creative control, with 83% regarding it as their priority. That's a good thing: "Allowing influencers more control over their content is a win-win for brands and consumers looking for authenticity," writes Sedge Beswick, SEEN Connects founder and CEO, in an opinion piece for The Drum.

"INFLUENCERS TURNED OUT CONTENT I WOULD NOT HAVE GOTTEN IN A STUDIO"





SHORT-FORM VIDEO HAS THE HIGHEST ROI OF ANY SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

3.

THE SWAY OF SHORT-FORM VIDEOS

TikTok. Reels. YouTube Shorts. Whatever you call it, short-form video has the highest ROI of any social media strategy, favored by 59% of marketers, reports HubSpot: “The platforms are increasingly prioritizing short-form video in their algorithms, and if you aren’t already exploring the use of this medium, now is the time to start,” writes Crystal King, social media professor for HubSpot Academy.

Short-form videos can also exceed an influencer’s organic reach. “Having a good following helps, but it’s not like email marketing where your email list is your ceiling. With video, influencers can get a reach they couldn’t before,” Owens explains.

4.

EMERGING DEMOGRAPHICS TO WATCH

What do influencers look like? Increasingly, they look like you, your child, your grandpa, or the immigrant next door, as diverse as consumers can be. Though younger consumers still make up the bulk of social media audiences, diverse influencer demographics and categories are on the rise.

A few notable examples:

- From cooking to menopause, life advice or health tips, creators ages 50 and older are building a strong following across generations.
- Couples are emerging as a new wave of successful influencers, using their relationship to build a brand.
- Foodie creators are adding their own creative spin on cuisine and inspiring followers to do the same.
- New categories like finances, skin care and pets are also gaining traction.





It's worth noting diversity comes in many flavors, from age to ethnicity, geographic location, cultural background, body shape and more. Looking ahead, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) will become the new standard of influencer campaigns as consumers demand more inclusive spaces, representation and narratives.

"Get as much content as you can, from many viewpoints," Williamson says. "I know the type of aesthetic I go for, but I'm not my customer, so I have to step back and look at diversity," she explains. "I don't want to alienate someone who needs my product because they didn't feel represented."



PILOTING YOUR INFLUENCER MARKETING PROGRAM

Few marketing strategies are as easy and affordable to test as influencer marketing. Lucky for brands, getting started doesn't require hefty investments in time or money, nor does it require finely tuned processes or having all the answers from the get-go.

Instead, astute marketers view influencer campaigns as experiments to be refined and recalibrated over time. It's OK (smart, even) to start small and adapt as you go, building on early wins.

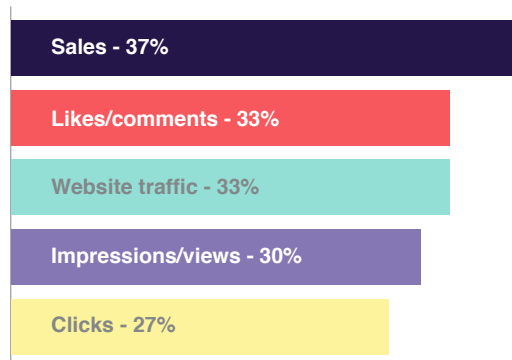
The following steps will boost your chances of success from the very first collab.

1. DEFINING GOALS AND SUCCESS METRICS

As the adage goes, “if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.” Successful influencer marketing campaigns start with a clear goal and performance metrics.

Marketers surveyed by the Influencer Marketing Hub said their top objectives for influencer campaigns were sales (36.7%), brand awareness (35.7%) and building a library of user-generated content (27.6%). Other campaign objectives might include reputation management, traffic generation or amplification of other cross-channel tactics.

According to HubSpot, common performance metrics include:



It's fine to keep it simple, using metrics to help you steer the next iteration of your experiment.

2.

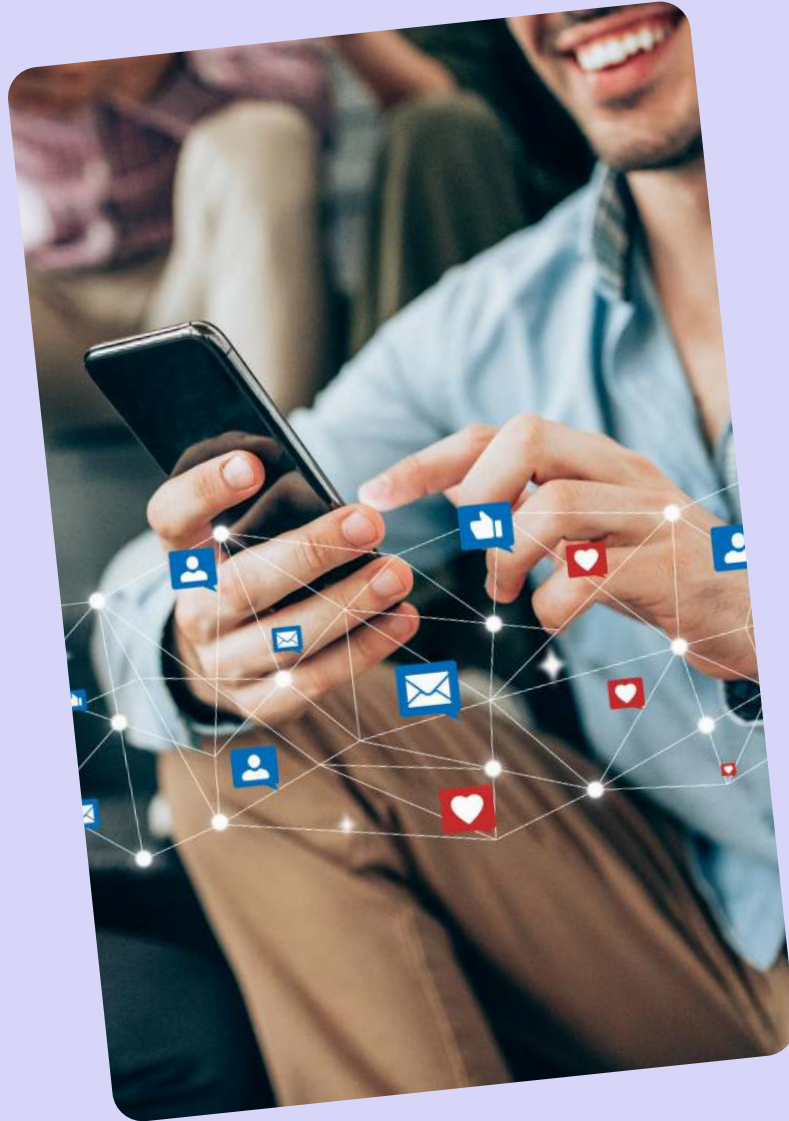
SELECTING YOUR BEST-FIT COLLABORATORS

Once you define goals, it's time to clarify expectations and your selection criteria for ideal influencers. "We take essential marketing principles and apply them here," Owens explains. "You want influencers whose followers and content themes are aligned with what you're selling, and with who's buying what you're selling."

Doug Allan grew and sold various brands before co-founding Calm Moment, a line of CBD-infused beverages. Aside from ensuring influencers are aligned with his target customers, Allan also reviews basic metrics: followers, engagement rates, number of comments, geographic location. "If it passes the sniff test, a \$100 experiment with a micro-influencer helps me to gauge if they'll do well. If I lose that \$100, it's no big deal," he shares.

For Williamson, 1,000 followers is the minimum she'll consider—though she's learned to keep an open mind. "Sometimes influencers with a small following will turn out the most beautiful content; you'd be surprised. I've learned to prioritize authenticity over follower count," she explains. To that end, she selects collaborators who seem genuine and joyful, and who can educate in a way that's engaging. "I do shy away from accounts where every other post is an advertisement," she notes.

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3.

CONSIDERING COMPENSATION

Historically, brands paying influencers with free samples outnumbered those offering monetary compensation. This is changing. In 2022, 34.4% of brands pay influencers, and 49% of payments entail a flat rate, reports the Influencer Marketing Hub. That's still a relatively low percentage, the report notes.

Owens agrees, adding that affiliate marketing is falling out of favor for the same reason: Experienced influencers excel at what they do and expect to be compensated fairly for their effort and expertise, rather than be paid on a contingency that may be out of their control. "Offering pay upfront is a big help in securing quality collaborators," he says.

It's a lesson Allan has learned over the years. "Before influencer marketing existed, we did affiliate marketing. It was difficult to manage and find ROI. In recent years, influencers have become a heck of a lot more professional, and our approach to compensation has matured accordingly," he says.

Aside from targeted, one-on-one influencer pitches, brands using the Afluencer platform also make campaign offers searchable to influencers. "You detail your offer and expectations. You might include a rate range, or list one rate to micro-influencers and something different to higher-tier influencers, for example. Influencers who apply know what they're getting into," Owens explains. "And who knows? You might get someone who typically charges a lot more but they like your product and are willing to work with you for less."



4. DEVELOPING YOUR PITCH

Pitching influencers is akin to pitching customers: You're selling a benefit. You'll want to highlight how the relationship benefits them, with rewards that include cash, free products, exclusive discounts, access to the brand's audience and more.

You'll also want to clarify expectations and keep requirements practical, not overwhelming. It's helpful to present your pitch on a landing page, mixing personalized outreaches with a "home base" where influencers can learn more about your program, terms and conditions.

One way to get influencers' attention is to use a platform like Afluencer, which influencers already use and trust, rather than

cold-messaging on Instagram or TikTok. "Brands tell us that when they contact influencers randomly, that person may not know what they're doing in terms of promoting a product," Owens says. For Williamson, the platform's built-in credibility also helps her build rapport with influencers who might have been burned by brands in the past.

To that end, Williamson is a big advocate of the golden rule: Treat influencers the way you'd want to be treated. "Sunny," an influencer liaison with Sunny Bay who'd prefer to keep her name private, also subscribes to that philosophy: "I get personal. I treat my influencers like they're my customers. I try to anticipate their needs and alleviate their pains, so we tend to maintain good relationships."

5.

DE-RISKING AND ACCELERATING CAMPAIGN GOALS

Reasonably, the success of any influencer marketing campaign hinges largely on the influencer doing the marketing. Traditionally, trying to find, vet and secure the right influencers could be a pain.

“How do you sort through millions of people? Years ago, you might start with who had the most followers, but then you also had to find attributes to match brand standards. You’d have this spreadsheet to help you navigate your options. It took a ton of time,” Allan recalls.

No wonder many brands outsourced the whole shebang, with mixed results. “I once paid a company to manage our influencer marketing and it didn’t go well. Many of our influencers weren’t effective because we didn’t choose them and had no control,” Sunny says.





The predicament sounds familiar, says Williamson: “I found a lot of overpriced agencies that promised me the world. But it made me nervous not to be in control; I like to connect one on one with my influencers.” Afluencer bridged the gap to deliver easy control: “It’s intuitive, and there’s a sense of credibility on both ends,” she says.

For Owens, this is common feedback from brands who come to Afluencer. “Brand marketers are often surprised to learn that influencers are active, opt-in users of our platform. They want to be there. Once there’s a match, we set up a direct message. If you want to take the conversation to email, phone, whatever, we don’t restrict that; we just make the introduction.”



TAKING THE FIRST STEP WITH INFLUENCERS

“I regret not starting earlier,” Williamson says. “For founders, it can be scary to see beautifully manicured brands who are so far ahead, but those brands started somewhere. You need to start now.”

Brand leaders like Williamson, who’ve tested the impact of influencer marketing, continue to raise their investment. “After a few years of robust growth in influencer marketing, you might have anticipated marketing budgets to have shifted to the next big thing. However, that hasn’t happened. Brands and marketers recognize the effectiveness of influencer marketing and are not searching for something new,” reports the Influencer Marketing Hub.

Do set realistic expectations and be consistent, Allan advises: “No single post is going to set your brand on fire and change your future. You can’t afford a Kardashian.” Instead, find a variety of influencers who fit your criteria, and pay attention to your customers. “Experiment continuously, be patient and consistent,” he says. “You’re going to win more than you lose.”





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