



How To Influence Others, Dermatology Practice-Style



Influence means “to have an effect on the behavior of someone or something.”

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

>> Around this time last year, we provided an introduction to the world of influencer marketing. If the year has gotten away from you and you have yet to make inroads on this front, there is no better time than now to seize the opportunity presented by this of-the-moment corner of the marketing universe. At the very least, do not ignore influencer momentum. At best, prioritize influencer-related communications strategies. As an industry, they collectively have only grown in influence during the past 12 months. In fact, much of global firm HootSuite’s most recent social marketing trends report revolved around the power of influential creators.

We also remind our readers that, sometimes, you must take a step back to move forward. The capacity to leverage others to drive your practice’s growth is seemingly limitless. Do not “settle” for marketing and communications that fit within a constrained box or trendy notion of what influencers are, as the best advocacy (as a vehicle to build your loyal patient base) is a sum of many different parts. That is one of the beautiful things about the nature of influencers as opposed to earlier-generation forms of advertising and promotions.

INFLUENCER-BASED MARKETING DOMINATES

In its 2023 benchmark report, Influencer Marketing Hub (IMH) surveyed 3,500-plus agencies, brands, and professionals on the state of this relatively new and explosive industry. The provider of niche resources for influencers noted the following highlights:

- The industry is set to grow by nearly \$16.4 billion to \$21.1 billion between 2022 and 2023.
- For an even more dramatic comparison, between 2016 and 2022, the industry grew from \$1.7 billion to \$16.4 billion.
- More than 83% of those diverse respondents surveyed confirmed that influencer marketing is “effective,” with

these positive responses never falling under 80% since IMH’s first survey in 2017.

- In all, 82% of respondents confirmed that they are setting aside a “dedicated budget” for influencer content—up from 77% percent in last year’s report and considerably up from findings in 2017 (when only 37% of respondents were budgeting for such content marketing).
- Of particular interest to us, the most popular “vertical” isolated by IMH was, once again, “fashion and beauty.” And 25% of this year’s respondents represent this sector. Much of what we do lends itself very well to beauty, aesthetics, and often visual channels and platforms frequented and leveraged by the most influential of influencers.

EXPERIMENT, BUT DON’T REINVENT THE WHEEL

We can glean much from the research to apply to our own practices and to grow our credibility and business. We urge you to think beyond the “conventional” and not fall prey to what you think you know about influencer marketing.

As is the case with dermatology communications, the information “out there” for consumption varies greatly in terms of quality, accuracy, and integrity. Here again, quantifiable figures help us better discern what is happening in this ever-evolving sector and corner of social advertising and shopping.

Some key takeaways:

- Bigger is not always better when it comes to influencers and their perceived power and value, especially in the healthcare realm. In fact, the above report underscored the preference for working with so-called “nano-influencers” and “micro-influencers,” with the majority (69%) working with individuals characterized as such. These influencers have 1,000 to 10,000 followers and 10,000 to 100,000 followers, respectively. It is important



to think beyond the celebrity and “macro” influencing giants and to avoid getting caught up with the size of their audiences, especially when your desired “audience” will not hear them in the first place.

- The previous point represents much more than a practical cost consideration, with those public figures boasting several hundred thousand (if not many millions) of followers naturally commanding a hefty price. It is absolutely essential to align your influencer pool with your ideal demographics. Celebs and other “most-followed” faces may not represent the community and followers that you seek. Ultimately, more important than the “followed” is the “follower.”
- Be sure to think and act locally, too. Some figures may be recognized in your community but not in other parts of your state, let alone on a national or global scale. For instance, a beloved local TV personality or figure can have considerable influence when building your community of loyal “followers.” They also provide opportunities for memorable, visual, and logistically feasible content that also happens to be a great value and return on the investment.
- Apply some of the timeless marketing, promotions, and advertising characteristics when assessing the best influencer partners for your practice. You have always been careful about the ad “spots,” publications, and copy your practice invests in, and accordingly exercise the same care and scrutiny when selecting and partnering with high-profile individuals. It is more important to be “high-profile” within a smaller yet relevant or ideal pool rather than to be universally recognized. Know and account for your target healthcare consumer.
- When returning to the basics, do not be afraid to consider and leverage all the understated “influencers” around you. There are likely associates and members of your staff that are particularly social media-savvy and may have their own community of followers.
- Secure their expertise and passion in given areas; for instance, they may be particularly skilled at certain types of procedures. Encourage them to further build out their influence and authority in given services. In doing so, this approach has the added benefit of boosting team engagement and workplace morale.
- When considering influencers around you, we go back to the timeless qualities of existing patients as your biggest “fans” and ambassadors. There are no doubt particularly active social influencers among them who are enthusiastic about singing your praises to their many followers. All it takes is an ask.
- Be introspective. Consider those peers, thought leaders, authorities, and sources of inspiration you admire most.

This is a great stepping-off point because ideally, you know these individuals in some way—perhaps through conferences or continuing education—and in all likelihood their follows represent your ideal demos.

- Beyond identifying your community of influence, consider how you will further use these “brand advocates.” Bear in mind that TikTok remains the most popular “channel” for influencer marketers, with 55.5% of brands reportedly leveraging this platform for their most influential voices. However, be mindful of the demographic nuances here. TikTok and Instagram are largely “home” to up-and-coming consumers and younger prospective patients (Zoomers and junior Millennials).
- And, while not as visual and, thusly, not as popular among the influencer crowd, Facebook continues to be relevant—particularly among those “geriatric” Millennials, Gen Xers, and Boomers whose skin is changing and may be searching for the first time for cosmetic services to address signs of aging.
- In fact, IMH noted that Facebook’s popularity among influencers had grown in 2022, with half of all brands using this granddaddy of social marketing. This year, its popularity fell back a bit (to around 42%) of respondents using Facebook. Yet, it remains a force to be reckoned with, likely more so for our practices due to the nature of our services and expertise.

We cannot overstate this: dermatology is extremely well-suited to the very active, seeing-is-believing nature of influencer marketing and their most buzzy channels. So, it can be a perfectly natural transition to take the before-and-after photos and videos of patient transformations and update them for our influencer-heavy environment.

Furthermore, by inventorying the communities and potential sources of influence all around you, opportunities may be presented to refine or adjust the fundamental aspects of how you deliver care. You may even identify gaps in certain skill sets, soft skills, or technologies that need to be addressed. After all, with these actions, you are organically growing patient loyalty and attracting new patients while also supporting those patient influencers who will sing your praises. This phenomenon supports a positive snowball effect, with satisfied patients begetting many more patient-brand ambassadors.

You already have so much influence within your community. Recognize and maximize the results of your hard work to sustain the health of your practice well into the future and face of whatever tomorrow may bring! ■

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Mr. Arulrajah reports no relevant financial disclosures.