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TAPPING THE POWER OF INFLUENCE

How To Ace Influencer Marketing

Brand marketing is changing—and the only way for brands to keep their marketing relevant is by ensuring that it continues to shape the thinking and actions of their target audience. However, as we move toward a digital future where technology advances such as virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) are quickly becoming mainstays, capturing the imagination of a generation of “cord-cutters,” and “cord-nevers” will prove to be a big challenge for digital brands. But this is where “influencers” can make a big difference to your marketing efforts.



The rise of social media has given birth to a new kind of marketing called "influencer marketing."

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Influencers: Who Are They?

Upping the ante on the fun element of social use is a new breed of "celebrity status" individuals known as "influencers." With their explosive brand of content that is in parts quirky, informative, un-biased and hugely relatable, these social media darlings have amassed a massive social following by serving content that is either comedic, informative and/or entertaining. The rise of social media has brought "influencer marketing" into the digital marketing mix with videos, tweets, shares, traffic and even search engine authority coming into play.

Connecting with the Right Kind of Audience

According to *The YouTube Generation*

Study, commissioned by Google, four in 10 millennial YouTube subscribers say YouTube creators understand them better than their own friends.

Social influencers are well-positioned to reach millions of engaged followers through brand-sponsored content. They can use their uniquely interactive and intimate relationships with their fans to effectively increase brand awareness and drive sales.

The rise of YouTube and Instagram content creators with celebrity-like status has enabled many of the world's top companies like Maybelline, Toyota, and Macy's as well as a number of innovative startup brands like Blue Apron to get their marketing in front of the right kind of audience. By partnering

with social influencers, not only do these brands enjoy fantastic return on investments (ROIs) across current advertising options, but they also have effectively improved the organic growth of their brand channels.

Who Are The Influencers?

Consumers today look to their favorite YouTubers, Instagrammers, bloggers, and vloggers for motivation to indulge in any kind of brand engagement activity. If you are on YouTube, chances are you are already more than familiar with names such as PewDiePie, The Fine Bros, Zoella and Smosh, to name a few. These are people who have successfully spearheaded shortcuts to building brand affinity on their channels. People who

follow these influencers don't come to watch a commercial. They primarily subscribe to these channels for the entertainment factor. The big draw here is that influencers don't endorse brands with the core objective of selling.

Instead, it is about ensuring that their viewers get an honest and unbiased review of what the brand is offering and the kind of value it provides to consumers.

For brands, the gains come in the form of high-quality content, fantastic distribution, and highly influential brand ambassadors. If you can get a George Clooney or Jennifer Lawrence for your brand, that's great. But if you can't, then

the next best option is to partner with social influencers! Social audiences can interact with influencers on the same level, which builds relatability. And relatability is what builds trust in a brand.

Today's knowledge economy demands subject-matter experts. For audiences, social influencers are just that. Influencers motivate and engage their audiences as they are as much about educating their audiences and entertaining them. The important thing is, for a brand influencer to be effective and impactful, they don't have to have a social following of millions. Influence can be just as powerful within a little

tribe of happily engaged subscribers. *Here's what Influencers bring to the table:*

- They are viewed as authorities on specific topics of interest. Any mention about your spa brand within their niche community of influencers can easily transfer their audience's trust in your favor.
- Local influencers can be easily accessed. Because they are mostly local, they can be more successful in building relationships that are authentic and highly relatable.
- If your brand aligns with the influencers area of expertise, their following is already primed to receive

How to Find the Right Influencer for Your Brand

Partnering with influencers for your spa business needs to be a collaborative effort in the sense that you encourage them to provide feedback on how or what will make your content resonate with their audience. They know what works so their opinions will make a difference. Here are a few other things to keep in mind:

- Ensure that the influencer's brand aligns closely with your brand.
- If you are focusing on "niche" (specific product/service) marketing, make sure the influencer's niche is relevant to your brand.
- Be sure to check the influencer's website, blog and social following to see if your target audience and the audience of the influencer are on the same page. Don't go with an influencer simply because he has a social following of more than one million. High reach doesn't always result in high conversions.
- A small interactive community of engaged fans is much better than a big following of subscribers who are unresponsive or have little interest in your brand. An engaged audience will be enthusiastic about their comments, retweets and social shares—this is the kind of audience you want to engage.
- Collaborating with your influencer(s) will only work when you are willing to be consistent in your relationship-building efforts. Focus on consistently creating content that keeps your influencer's audience interested and engaged.
- Find out what kind of content, the kind of tone and messaging your influencer uses to create a buzz and style your content to match that format.



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content that focuses on a particular topic—in this case “spa experiences.” This makes it easy for local influencers to connect with target audiences who can be easily converted.

Partner with the Right Kind of Influencers

Social channels such as YouTube deliver a more personal brand experience than a department store consultation because the viewer knows that what they are watching is not a brand/sales pitch. This is why consumers are increasingly looking to social influencers for product and service information.

In a lot of instances, the community members will ask the influencer to create a video or write about a service or product that is of interest to the subscriber. This is the level of trust and honesty between influencers and their fans. So it makes sense for brands to collaborate with such consumer movers. However, you can expect to gain this kind of brand engagement traction only if you partner with the right kind of influencer.

Engaging with the right kind of influencer also matters when you consider audience demographics. Women will

respond readily to female influencers while male customers would most definitely prefer a male perspective on massages and manscaping. Age is another factor to take into account. A 22-year-old fashion blogger from New York and a 35-year-old mom from Massachusetts will vary in their interest and subscribe to a different content. So it makes sense to spread your net wider and focus on collaborating with a network of influencers.

Partner with influencers who not only align with your products and services but also look at how you can use their influence to talk about other topics that are of relevant interest to your customers. For example, if you have a customer coming in for facials and skin treatments, rope in your influencer network to talk about do-it-yourself skincare routines to build authority.

You don't always need to work with A-listers to build brand exposure. It is, however, important that you look at ways in which you can natively include your messaging with the content of the influencer so it sounds natural and authentic. Also, keep in mind that when you collaborate with less popular or lesser known influencers, the social-sharing potential of your brand messaging, while being smaller, will

yield higher conversions. This is because the interaction is more personalized, which means the audience will be more receptive to your content and branding.

Who's Doing it Right?

As an example of a company doing influencer marketing right, Sephora used its Beauty Talk initiative to encourage honest and genuine conversations about its products. Beauty Talk, which consists of a community of insiders, not only provide product reviews, but also share opinions and thoughts and help other consumers make decisions that best meets their needs. The company offers influencers free product samples in return for honest and unbiased reviews. In a time when consumers are actively avoiding in-your-face advertising, this kind of honest and transparent branding is what will grab their attention.

Campaigns such as these not only win-over brand advocates in the form of “almighty” influencers, but also extends brand influence in ways that primes consumers for conversion.

Have you reached out to leading influencers within your local market to promote your spa business? Do you have other strategies for getting your material shared by influencers? It's about time you do. ■



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