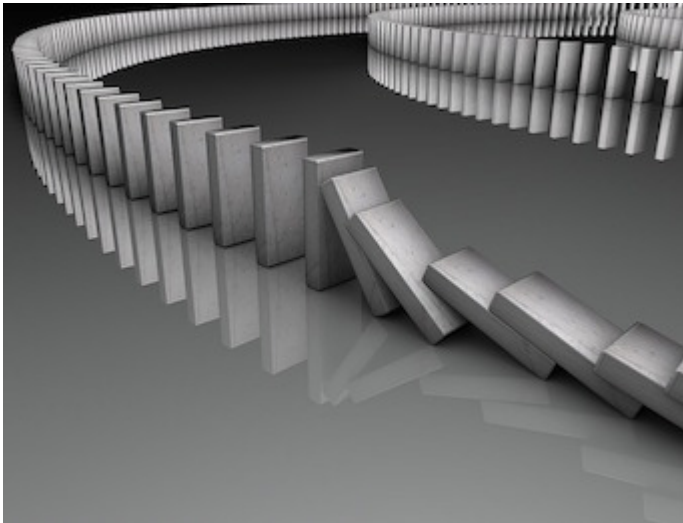


Understanding and Leveraging Influencer Marketing

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A single viral post can make or break a business. Loyal followers can expand your reach to a nearly unlimited audience. There is no denying the power of social media. The question is, how can you harness that power to build your brand and grow your veterinary practice? The answer lies in social influencers.

Who Are Influencers?

Influencers have large followings and a highly engaged audience, usually within a specific niche. They may be viewed as social media celebrities of sorts, but their power is not simply their popularity. They are regarded

as thought leaders, trend setters or experts in some way.

Influencers may blatantly promote products or services, often in exchange for payment, yet they are not advertisers. When someone sees an advertisement, there is an assumption that the publication would be willing to sell space to virtually anyone.

The advertiser and publisher have little, if any, relationship. Influencers, on the other hand, give the impression that they are excited to work with a company they love.

Successful social influencers have mastered the art of personal branding. Generally, they are quite selective in who they work with, because every business they associate with will help shape their image. The reverse is also true, so you should be equally selective. Look for an influencer whose audience reflects your target market and whose image aligns with your brand message.

Finding the Right Influencer

If you are new to influencer marketing, don't expect to launch your first campaign tomorrow. It can take some time, beginning with extensive research. You might find influencers in your own follower list, from social links on blogs or simply through keyword and hashtag searches on various networks.

When you identify potentials, evaluate their profiles:

- **Followers:** Look for someone with a sizable audience. Also check the demographics of his or her followers to ensure these are the people you want to reach.
- **Engagement:** Check recent posts. Have they been liked, shared and commented on? Are the reactions generally positive?
- **Content:** Spend some time viewing videos and reading posts. Offensive content, misinformation about animal care or controversial comments may reflect poorly in your practice.
- **Biography:** As you read, ask yourself whether an association with this person would benefit your image.
- **Links:** Check out any blogs or other websites the person recommends.
- **Online reputation:** Watch how the person interacts with followers and what people are saying about him or her.

Building a Successful Campaign

The ideal campaign revolves around content created by influencers telling their followers about your services. You want to build relationships with influencers and gain their loyalty. Start by following their social accounts, sharing their content and commenting on their blog posts.

It is entirely possible to catch the attention of some influential users without paying them. However, your campaign will be more successful if you offer some form of compensation. This can range from monetary payment to discounted services.

Because influencer endorsements lie somewhere between testimonials and advertisements, you need to be mindful of legalities. It is good ethical practice, and usually legally required, to disclose any compensation.

The final step is analyzing the results. Keep track of how many clicks and conversions you receive from an influencer, how many clients mention being recommended by that person and how much engagement the posts are garnering. Armed with this information and experience, you should find each campaign to be more successful than the last.

Naren Arulrajah is president and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education and the online reputations of veterinarians/practice owners. With a team of 140+ full time marketers, www.ekwa.com helps practice owners who know where they want to go get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.