

INFLUENCER MARKETING & CONTENT CREATION:

The New Rules of Consumer Engagement



INFLUENCER MARKETING — HOW QUICKLY IT'S GROWN UP. It seems that just a few years ago, marketers caught on to the power social media personalities and internet celebrities could lend their brands. Now, influencer marketing is entering its adolescence, and it's no longer the domain of trendy, youthful brands. Combined with content creation, these tactics represent the towering twins of the marketing world, multiplying impacts and moving businesses forward.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

The influencer phenomenon grew out of blogging culture, which was once a key forum for distributing marketing messages.

But with the rise of social media, content creators were freed from blogging's constraints. People now had a wide range of forums to share their ideas and art, whether that was through 140-character tweets, YouTube videos, or Snapchat Stories.

Suddenly, marketers moved from wanting to work with blogging networks to influencer networks that offered a much wider range of options and audiences.

Social media platforms don't have downtime; influencers can create, share, and engage audiences 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. With one-third of the world's population¹ using social media networks on a regular basis, this is a huge opportunity.

As was the case with blogging, influencer marketing and content creation go hand-in-hand. Because content has always been at the core of their success, influencers make natural partners for companies that want to amplify their messages. They can share brand content in ways that are organic and authentic for their audiences.

Authentic is the key word here. A brand can craft a meticulously researched ad campaign, but a trusted YouTube personality's opinion will likely still hold more sway over people's buying decisions. People trust other people more than they trust companies.

Of course, you need to partner with the right influencers.

In this whitepaper, we'll look at the different types of influencers out there and how you can find the perfect partner for your next campaign.

DID YOU KNOW?

40% of people surveyed by Twitter and Annalect **bought products** promoted by their favorite influencers.²

Influencer content drives **11 times the ROI**³ of other digital marketing platforms, in large part because **people trust influencers.**



THE INTERSECTION OF INFLUENCER MARKETING & CONTENT CREATION

Content is an essential tool in a marketer's arsenal. Opinion leaders can easily create and distribute valuable vlogs, articles, and other materials to attract and engage their audiences.

People crave their favorite influencers' latest updates and insights, and they take their opinions seriously. Savvy brands recognize the value of partnering with these online personalities to drive profitable customer action.

As we know, consumers are more inclined to trust influencers than traditional marketing messages. When people see corporate ads, their instinct is to be skeptical. They know the company is trying to sell them something, and they're wary of being misled. But when a trusted YouTube or Snapchat icon raves about a product, they let their guards down and are more receptive to the message — provided the message still feels authentic.

Although some brands focus solely on clicks and views, successful partnerships are built on more than that. You need to identify influencers who not only have considerable followings, but whose image and values align with your own. Campaigns should enhance the loyalty and trust that exist between influencers and their audiences, which, in turn, fosters a relationship between the audience and the brand.

If you view influencers solely as distribution channels, content alignment doesn't matter much. But when you're cultivating partnerships and trying to strike the right message for your desired audience, you want to work with people who serve as both content creators and distributors. Once you find the Holy Grail — a strong influencer with the right audience and who's also a good content creator — you really see growth in engagement.

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

Before choosing to partner with someone, take a close look at their followers.

Anyone can buy bots to boost their numbers, but if you dig into the types of people associated with their accounts, you can weed out fake influencers. Buying phony followers is extremely common, so be vigilant about vetting your partners.

It's important to note here that although influencer marketing intersects with both social media marketing and content marketing, the three are distinct. The content an influencer creates around your brand differs from the materials you develop in-house as part of your content strategy. And though social media provides powerful platforms for distributing in-house and influencer content, the strategies should not be combined.

However, all three tactics should align with your overall brand voice and messaging and feel like parts of a cohesive whole.

WHICH INFLUENCER SHOULD YOU TARGET?

As with any marketing initiative, you cannot approach influencer strategies from a one-size-fits-all perspective. Different types of influencers will be suited to different types of campaigns, so approach each initiative with fresh eyes. First, identify which audiences you want to reach. Look for influencers on the social media platforms where your ideal customer is most likely to be active. Does the influencer's audience reflect your ideal customer? If so, then connect with influencers who are trusted within those communities.

1 MICRO-INFLUENCERS: Micro-influencers tend to have under 100,000 followers. Micro-influencers are seen as passionate authorities in their areas of influence or in their hyper-local markets, and they drive 22.2 times more conversations than other users⁴ when it comes to purchase recommendations. Micro-influencers also charge lower rates than their better-known peers.

However, smaller followings come with a cost. Brands must often work with several micro-influencers to achieve the visibility and engagement they might get through one higher-profile personality. Depending on the type of image you're trying to craft, smaller is sometimes better. La Croix Sparkling Water,⁵ for example, deliberately targets Instagram users with small followings in order to convey "realness" to the Millennials it hopes to reach.

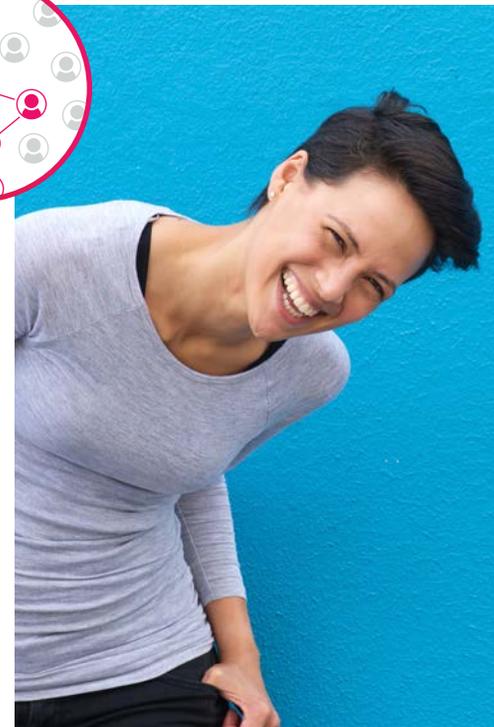


- < 100,000 followers
- Opinions carry authority
- Drive 22.2 times more conversations than other users
- Charge lower rates

2 MACRO-INFLUENCERS: Macro-influencers have up to a million followers and see 5 to 25 percent engagement⁶ on each of their posts. Their engagement rates are lower than those of micro-influencers, but they offer up to 10 times greater reach, significantly boosting your brand's exposure. But macro-influencers charge much more than micro-influencers, and the reduced engagement makes them a riskier bet. Despite their lower follower numbers, micro-influencers may be able to offer a better ROI.



- Up to 1 million followers
- Lower engagement rates but 10 times the reach of micro-influencers
- Charge higher rates



3 CELEBRITY: Having DJ Khaled promote your brand on social media may seem like a golden ticket. With millions of followers, he offers massive reach and engagement. What better way to raise your company's profile than to have a globally-recognized star sharing your products on Instagram and Twitter?

Unsurprisingly, however, mega-influencers come at a premium. Despite their wide reach, celebrity endorsements don't guarantee engagement, partly because your brand is not the only company they're promoting. If people think a promotion is just another paycheck for your influencer, they're likely to ignore the message.



- Millions of followers
- Massive reach and engagement
- Multiple promotions at one time
- Charge premium rates

4 BRAND AMBASSADORS: Although brand ambassadors were traditionally celebrities, this category now includes anyone you pay to promote your company. Ambassadors not only humanize your brand, but they also take an active role in amplifying your message, addressing negative customer feedback, and using their clout to boost word-of-mouth promotion.

As with any influencer, ambassadors' values and public personas should complement your brand. When the sportswear company Fila chose Paris Hilton as its ambassador, some people scratched their heads⁷ at the idea of a reality TV star and socialite serving as the face of an athletic brand.



- Anybody paid to promote your company
- Humanize your brand
- Amplify your message
- Should be chosen to complement your brand



BUILDING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

The best influencer partnerships are built on trust, authenticity, and mutual reward. Some companies make the mistake of getting hung up on the monetary aspect and “getting what they paid for.” But influencer marketing is about cultivating relationships and engagement, and providing a value exchange. The financial component is secondary. Influencer partnerships should benefit all parties, and they grow stronger with time.

Here are our top three tips for creative, powerful, and effective campaigns:

BELOW THE SURFACE

When assessing potential influencers, we conduct engagement reports to look beyond their surface impressions.

Number of views tells you little beyond how many followers someone has; what we look for is content engagement. How many comments, shares, and retweets do their posts earn? Those numbers indicate that people were interested enough to take action, and it's a good sign that the influencer will drive engagement.

1. Partner with people who understand your brand.

Selecting the right partners is critical to your campaign's success, which is why we created our Ripple platform. We work with carefully vetted influencers, which allows us to help clients find the perfect partners for their initiatives. Ideally, your partners will be genuinely enthusiastic about your products or retailer and that sincerity will come through in their content.

Our team takes a process-based approach to each influencer campaign, beginning with a discussion of your goals and KPIs. Whether you want to reach foodies, households with kids, beauty consumers, travelers, or couponers, we can connect you with influencers who have strong followings in these areas.

Not only does Ripple target by category, but also by location. Often, consumers are driven to action by content created and targeted to their own market or community. We also analyze audience demographics to ensure your potential partners are not only in the right field and have the right number of followers, but that they're also creating content that resonates with your target audience and aligns with your business objectives. Ripple is different because at Mitchell we know relevance means ROI with today's consumer.

Ripple

2. Be flexible in your messaging.

While you should offer some creative direction, you don't want to be heavy-handed because influencers know what content and platforms resonate with their audiences best. Being too controlling or demanding will lead to stiff, inauthentic, and ineffective content. As influencer Nikki Blackletter told *Forbes*,⁸ audiences don't want to feel that they're being sold to by trusted personalities. The drive to buy certain products should feel organic and self-motivated.

If you've chosen wisely, influencers will accurately broadcast your message. But they'll do it in their own voices and content styles — and that's a good thing because that's what attracted their followers in the first place.

3. Offer guidance and support.

While you don't want to micro-manage, don't give influencers too little to work with, either. Having someone regurgitate a press release does not make for compelling content. Send influencers fun facts or interesting product uses that will interest their audiences, and share updates about future brand offerings. Then, give them the creative freedom to apply that information to their content creation processes as they see fit.

At Mitchell, once we've identified and connected with those influencers, we go hands-on so brands can be hands-off. We work alongside influencers to inspire content from live video to photography to written posts. We know that giving influencers creative freedom opens the doors to authentic content and true brand ambassadorship.



THE LETTER OF THE LAW

You'll want to make sure influencers are versed in [FTC compliance](#)⁹ as well. In many cases, influencers are required to clearly disclose their brand relationships. They might do this through a written disclaimer or a hashtag noting that their post includes an ad or was inspired by a brand ambassador agreement.

Compliance is absolutely crucial, so make sure your influencers are clear on their responsibilities before you launch a campaign.

INFLUENCER MARKETING presents exciting new opportunities for marketers who know how to connect with the right people and leverage those relationships to drive results for your brand.

Through our Ripple platform, Mitchell is eager to help marketers do just that. If you'd like to get more information on Ripple, reach out to our team to schedule a consultation on how we can use influencer marketing to take your brand to the next level.



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