INFLUENCER MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR AGENCIES

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WHAT IS INFLUENCER MARKETING?

Influencer Marketing is the idea of partnering with social content creators, those with key audiences on platforms like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, and Vine, to help satisfy the consumer’s insatiable appetite for stories and opinions about products they buy. The exploding industry is attracting millions of dollars from brands looking for solutions that help them scale the creation and distribution of trusted consumer content.

Web-savvy consumers now require greater engagement and information before making a purchase. Consumers want meaningful content and relevant information to help them make purchase decisions and they want opinions from people they trust. Consumers are having conversations with their peers online way before they make a purchase. Agencies need their brand to be part of that dialogue. One key way agencies are meeting the demand for interaction is to form relationships with key influencers online and partner with them to create relevant, quality content that is trusted by their readers.

“An influencer outreach program is quickly becoming indispensable to the modern digital marketing strategy. Influencers are more valuable to brands now than they’ve ever been for their ability to deliver on social chatter, earned media, and action.”

–Tessa Wegert, ClickZ
(RhythmOne, formerly Burst Media)

Influencer Marketing Program Distribution by Advertiser Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% of Programs</th>
<th>% of Paid Media</th>
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<td>Retailers &amp; Apparel</td>
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<td>Toys &amp; Games</td>
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RhythmOne, formerly Burst Media; 2014 Influencer Marketing Benchmarks Report
A 2014 study conducted by RhythmOne (formerly Burst Media) found that on average, marketers who implemented an Influencer Marketing program in 2014 received $6.85 in earned media value for every $1.00 of paid media.

**Product launches:**
Influencers can be powerful partners when brands want to get the word out about a new product. When products are new, consumers have little or no experience with them so it’s hard for them to be champions. Influencers who reach a target segment can help create buzz and awareness for something new. They can help a brand scale reach and engagement with a new product, flavor, service offering or branch location.

**Drive awareness for existing products:**
Influencers command devoted audiences, and a simple promotion could translate into an affinity for that brand. Influencers have the trust of their followers and care very much about providing authentic opinions that are valuable to their readers. Content creators that are influential on visual platforms like Pinterest, Instagram or YouTube can help amplify the introduction of a new product by sharing photos, videos, and recipes. Followers can then click, watch, like, tweet, share, and/or pin.

**Strengthen relationships with existing brand champions:**
Influencers can also be advocates. They have a deep affinity for a brand and share their passion with their followers, who often grow to be brand champions themselves. Brands can identify and nurture these relationships and as that brand/influencer relationship grows, so does the affinity of their followers.

**Build social media following:**
Brands often have customers that trend towards a particular social platform, and behaviors vary depending on platform. Pinterest is the #1 platform people go when they want to kill time, they go to Twitter to complain, Facebook for encouragement, blogs for recipes, and YouTube for instructions. Influencers can help create and attract attention and audiences to a platform that matters to a brand’s audience.

**Scale content creation:**
A common challenge for brands is creating content at the volume and pace that consumers want. Their appetite and need for content is very high. Influencers represent an “army of content creators” that can help brands and agencies amplify and distribute on platforms that matter like Pinterest, YouTube or even Google+.

Unlike traditional marketing categories like tradeshows or public relations that have clear budgets, brand budgets for a digital strategy will be spent with whatever organization or team helps them do it best. That could be an in-house team, their PR firm, ad agency, creative agency, or social team. This presents a huge opportunity for all agency types to step up and help thousands of clients develop and execute successful influencer marketing campaigns.
WHAT DO INFLUENCERS HAVE THAT BRANDS DON’T?

Influencers have some distinct advantages that brands do not, including large communities of followers, trust from consumers, authentic personal experience, and expertise on a variety of social networks. Social influencers are effective at starting, sharing and spreading online conversations, which is incredibly valuable to brands.

1. Influencers Are Trusted More Than Brands

When it comes to consumer spending, online content and social conversations have a significant impact on how consumers choose what to buy. While product information and brand-crafted messaging is valuable, consumers want information that comes from like-minded people they trust. Consumers want first-hand information about how others made purchase decisions and what their experience was with relevant products and services. People trust content that comes from third-party experts and their personal networks. In fact, they often trust that content more than they trust content from advertising or brand websites.

74% of consumers rely on social networks to guide purchase decisions.
– SproutSocial

2. Influencers Produce More Earned Media

Earned media is the most powerful type of media because of its influence on the buying cycle. A recommendation from a peer online about a product has more influence than a banner ad or product review on a brand’s website. Also, earned media tends to live on channels alive with consumer engagement. People aren’t chatting about holiday gift ideas on brand sites or in the sidebars, yet that is where most paid and owned content lives. Consumers are having these conversations on blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and community forums. Social media is where conversations are ignited and shared, and influencers with loyal followers have the power to significantly extend a brand’s reach across the web.
3. Influencers Reach A More Targeted Audience

What makes these social influencers even more powerful is the niche-based content they produce, which is often in a very specialized area. Millions of bloggers publish content in popular areas like parenting, food, fitness, fashion and entertainment. Influencers can be segmented further to reach specific consumers like parents of teens, pet lovers, marathon runners, tech fanatics and organic cooks. As the volume of data available increases online, the more consumers want specific information aligned with their unique needs. Working with influencers is a way for brands to reach people whose interests and demographics represent a highly qualified consumer.

Consumers are 71% more likely to make a purchase based on social media referrals.

– HubSpot

4. Social Influencers Distribute More Content Across The Web

One of the reasons social media has such an impact on marketing is that it is based on the idea that people like to share. People like to discover interesting ideas, music, food, and products and then pass them on to their followers. When social media users share steady streams of relevant content, their influence grows and followers are more likely to share with their own networks. By partnering with digital influencers who serve as brand champions on social platforms and online communities, brands increase their ability to reach more consumers by exponentially scaling how quickly and broadly content gets shared.
WHY BRANDS ARE TURNING TO AGENCIES FOR HELP WITH INFLUENCER MARKETING

Influencer marketing is shifting from experimental to a required component of any digital marketing strategy and brands need to get it right the first time. They have a choice to either figure it out on their own or work with agencies who have expertise and pattern recognition from years of working with hundreds of clients.

1. HELP THEM FOCUS ON FINDING THE RIGHT INFLUENCERS

Trust
Help them find people who have built an audience and gained their trust. Trust is difficult to earn via branded content. However helpful your content may be, the consumer understands its intent is to sell.

The more influential content that consumers discover organically comes from people just like them. For instance, new moms want to know what other new moms prefer. If you want to know what movie to see, you’re more likely to trust a movie blogger than the studio that made the film.

A targeted audience
Old-school marketers overvalue the size of an influencer’s audience. A more modern—and meaningful—approach is to focus on relevance. As the idiom goes, the riches are in the niches.

Real influence comes from those that produce highly targeted content. Consider a parenting blogger whose content broadly addresses popular parenting issues vs. a respected expert in raising triplets. If you were to have triplets, whose content would wield more sway?

Authenticity
Combine the two attributes above and you begin to recognize the power of authenticity. Someone who knows the subject matter because of his or her real life experience and interacts with people who have similar challenges can deliver more authentic advice.

Reach
Of course brands reach people through marketing, but not the way an influencer does. Influencers build their audiences on channels such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and others. Building relationships with their audience is what they do every day, all year round.

The active social media influencer is nimble. Content is generally delivered faster and cheaper. The influencer is dedicated to sharing the content and typically, their fans follow suit. Influencers form a content distribution army for you, which is the effective way to earn the type of reach you need.
2. HELP THEM MANAGE INFLUENCER RELATIONSHIPS

Once you’ve helped identify the right influencers, the next step is to build a business relationship with them. The goal is to help brands produce and publish great content with an army of content-creating partners.

**Share program goals**
Help influencers hit the mark with their content by being 100% clear about your goals and expectations. Make sure the influencers understand how you’d like readers to respond so they can include a useful call to action.

**Give them resources**
Make sure your influencer partners have everything they’ll need to create great content, including images and helpful reference materials. Answer any questions, and of course, share your brand style guide or any rules relevant to your industry, when needed.

**Let them tell the story**
While it’s important to set clear content requirements, it’s equally important to leave room for creativity. You’re not their editor. Respect their skills. Give them ample time to deliver first drafts and understand it’s their authentic voice that helped make them influential.

**Showcase the content**
Both you and your influencers should put in the effort to distribute and promote the content across the most relevant media channels. Consider Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube and any other social media where the conversations are taking place in your niche.

**Compensate them**
Pay your influencers fairly. While you’ll likely have a budget to consider, the strongest influencers may slip away if you try to negotiate aggressively. Some writers may accept non-cash payments, so you might try compensating some with products, services, access to events, or other attractive packages.

**Give attribution**
In any and all instances where you choose to republish the influencer’s work, take care to give them proper attribution. Also, understand as a brand compensating writers to publish works featuring mention of your product, it’s your responsibility to ensure they disclose the relationship in the publication.

3. HELP BRANDS CREATE GREAT CONTENT

Content for the sake of content does no good for the brand or the consumer. The secret to a great piece of content is the intersection of three key areas:

- **What are your audience’s interests?**
- **What is your brand’s story?**
- **What is the content creator’s unique perspective or content medium?**
4. HELP THEM MEASURE AND OPTIMIZE PROGRAMS

All things digital can be perpetually improved. The key is to examine meaningful metrics that deliver insights about your client’s program performance. While old school metrics reflecting reach may be useful, it’s important to recognize influence can be better analyzed by tracking actions.

Analytics efforts should be tailored to the objectives of the program, but for a starting point, here are the key metrics to measure that reflect progress through the consumer buyer journey.

### Awareness

*Impressions*—Page views are a practical starting point.

### Consideration

*Clicks*—A starting point for assessing engagement is clicks.

*Comments*—In addition to counting comments, you can mine the actual comments for insights into audience sentiment.

*And more*—Engagement metrics in this stage might include votes, entries, survey responses or any type of contribution from a reader.
Preference

*Shares*—It’s wise to look at social shares as an indication of potential brand affinity.

*Likes*—Likes and the derivatives of a “like” across social media are factored into preference.

*Opt-ins*—Downloads, subscription opt-ins and forms of registration are useful.

Purchase

*Clicks to e-commerce*—Measure conversion with click-throughs to purchase pages.

*User flow*—Various techniques can be called upon to track the visitor’s on-site activities and determine the effectiveness of conversion paths.

Loyalty

*Shares*—Sharing is a good proxy for a loyal customer.

*Referrals*—Look for comments containing referrals.

*User-generated content*—Users who care enough to offer content reflect loyalty to your brand.

The insights you gather should inform actions you take to continuously improve your ROI in influencer marketing.

Some of the optimization tactics likely to help drive improvements include:

*Tracking by influencer*—Track and record impressions and engagement by influencer to get a read on the value of the content.

*Views*—Examining views across your entire mix of media helps you understand which channels and media types deliver best.

*Total media value (TMV)*—Determine ROI in social content by placing a dollar value on the content, the audience reached, and engagement. Your formula for determining TMV will include: (1) costs for creation and distribution (2) views (3) engagement and social actions.

Enterprise brands are highly motivated to find success with Influencer Marketing and don’t always have the resources and bandwidth to execute internally. This presents a huge opportunity for agencies, whether they are digital, advertising, PR or creative, to build Influencer Marketing offerings within their suite of services.
NEXT STEPS

Brands are embracing Influencer Marketing, and they need help from agencies to get it right. This presents a huge opportunity for your agency.

Click here to get a personalized TapInfluence demo today.