



Utilizing Influencers as Part of Your Social Media Strategy

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REACH BEYOND MARKETING

Influencer marketing through social media platforms has become a very popular and effective method of reaching target audiences and potential clients/customers with powerful messages. As a matter of definition, an influencer is a credible source who carries influence over others, and in this case, would be done through social media. It is a similar concept to celebrity endorsements that we witness continually through other forms of advertising and marketing, but done within our current dominant digital media landscape. In essence, regular people, through blogs and social media platforms, have become online celebrities, often with large and engaged followers.

Like virtually any specific communication or marketing strategy, there is no silver bullet that will solve all problems or issues. Instead, think of influencer marketing as one very important piece in your overall plan, and be sure that it is in line with your brand and other integrated strategies.

Influencers allow your business, practice, or brand to develop content that others (with very large and engaged followings) will hopefully support or post on their own social media networks. This not only allows your message to reach many more people on social media, you also gain a tremendous amount of brand credibility by being associated (and in many ways endorsed) with the influencer. More and more evidence is showing that consumers trust recommendations and referrals online and increasingly distrust advertisements.

Interestingly, the influencers you choose to engage with don't necessarily need to have a large social following. What is most important is that they are interacting regularly with a specific audience that is important to your business and brand. In fact, influencers with less lofty follower totals often have higher retweet and share rates than those with huge followings. So you will want to find influencers like journalists who have deep reach within their specific platforms, or researchers that have great influence within their networks.

So what are the best ways to find, engage, and achieve help from an influencer in your field?

Find influencers that will best support your brand

There are many tools and online services that will help you find influencers that will best fit your specific audience and market, and there also is the manual method of searching social media

platforms with keywords and hashtags. In essence, the key is to find individuals who are involved where the action is taking place in the digital world – those who are using social media to discuss and share the most sought after content. Be sure to check exactly how many shares and retweets this individually getting with their posted content?

Do your homework

Now that you have identified some potential influencers for your brand, you will want to investigate all aspects of their social presence before making contact. Be sure they aren't selling or offering products or services that directly compete with yours. Targeting your eventual pitch to them specifically will raise your acceptance rates and begin the process of establishing a healthy and long-term relationship with your influencers.

Develop a relationship with influencers

After identifying and making an initial contact with influencers, remember that this is not the time to send a blast email or form letter to those you are interested in being an advocate for your products or services. You need to get to know the person you are approaching by reading through their social media posts and profiles and know the topics that are important to them. Follow, like, and engage with them on social media, and consider retweeting or sharing their content as a first attempt at developing a mutually beneficial relationship. This process should take a few months, and is similar to the way a salesperson develops a relationship before closing a deal, or a public relations professional builds rapport with the media before pitching stories.

Be Clear and Concise

Once you have developed a mutually beneficial relationship with a series of influencers, it is now time to reach out and pitch the idea of sharing content and commenting on your products or services. When you contact them with an offer to be involved with advocating for your brand, be brief and straight-forward. Bloggers and social influencers are normally very busy people, so you'll want to share with them enough information so they understand your business and program, but not overwhelm them so they won't even read your message. For those that accept or are interested, be sure you have thought through the details. How often and where are you hoping they will post? Are there specific topics you would like them to focus on as part of working together?

Plan Ahead

Rightfully so, influencers are very protective of their followers and readers, and they will not risk alienating or disappointing them with poorly planned or irrelevant content. In most circumstances, they have worked for years to build up their following and online credibility, and this is how many influencers earn a living. So it is crucial that your influencer campaign has defined objectives, specifics and requirements for posting, and a detailed editorial calendar or timeline. This organization of your influencer campaign will build influencer loyalty and encourage them and others to work with you in the future.

Payments and Disclosure

Most credible bloggers and influencers are compensated for their valuable work on behalf of your brand, and this may include direct payment or exchange of services or products. In addition, bloggers are required by the Federal Trade Commission to disclose on their site whether or not they have been paid for a product review or post related to your brand.

Evaluate Your Campaign

It is important during and after a social media influencer marketing campaign to measure the results. Those you engage with as influencers should readily supply you with reports and analytics related to their posting on your behalf. The most important measurement is determining engagement, mentions, or campaign related hashtags. But beyond the numbers is the importance of exceptional and interesting content shared by your influencers to a loyal and engaged following. This will lead to many meaningful conversations with potential customers and followers, build positive relationships online, and enhance your brand awareness and credibility.