



Get Real! Influencer Marketing is Too Right to Risk Getting Wrong.

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Overview

Google searches for “influencer marketing” shot up by 325% in 2017, firmly establishing it as the most rapidly growing online customer acquisition technique of that year. This trend is expected to continue over the next few years, with a large majority of marketing teams looking to augment their influencer marketing budgets over time.

Naturally, brands are rushing to sign up popular social media personalities to promote them. In fact, the demand is so high that it’s created an entire industry of intermediary agencies just waiting to play Cupid between brands and their perfect influencers.

But in today’s world of online anonymity and mayhem, stop for a minute and ask yourself this question: How well do your customers relate with and trust these “influencers” when they’re considering buying from you?

This book walks you through the status quo of influencer marketing, and why there’s a burning need to get real with it. Packed with insights about how to identify and leverage the right influencers for your brand, it also tells you how to identify influencer fraud – so that you can stay the heck away from it.

Customers are wary of celebrity influencers

The *Association of National Advertisers (ANA)* has discovered that 75% of marketers currently leverage influencer marketing activities – but merely 36% regard them as effective and in fact, 19% actually acknowledged that they are “ineffective.”

Influencer marketing, which has been the blue-eyed baby of digital marketing plans, the world over for the past few years, has had a rough ride in 2018. For one, the entire approach to it has gone wrong – influencers today are closer to movie celebrities than they are to the real consumer. In fact, in a recent *Stackla report*, 60% of respondents revealed that it's family and friends' opinions that influenced their buying decisions.

Will the real influencer please stand up?

To make things worse, following the discovery of fake followers and engagement, influencer marketing has emerged as just another, more modern take on paid advertising – with the result that ROI has plummeted for many a brand.

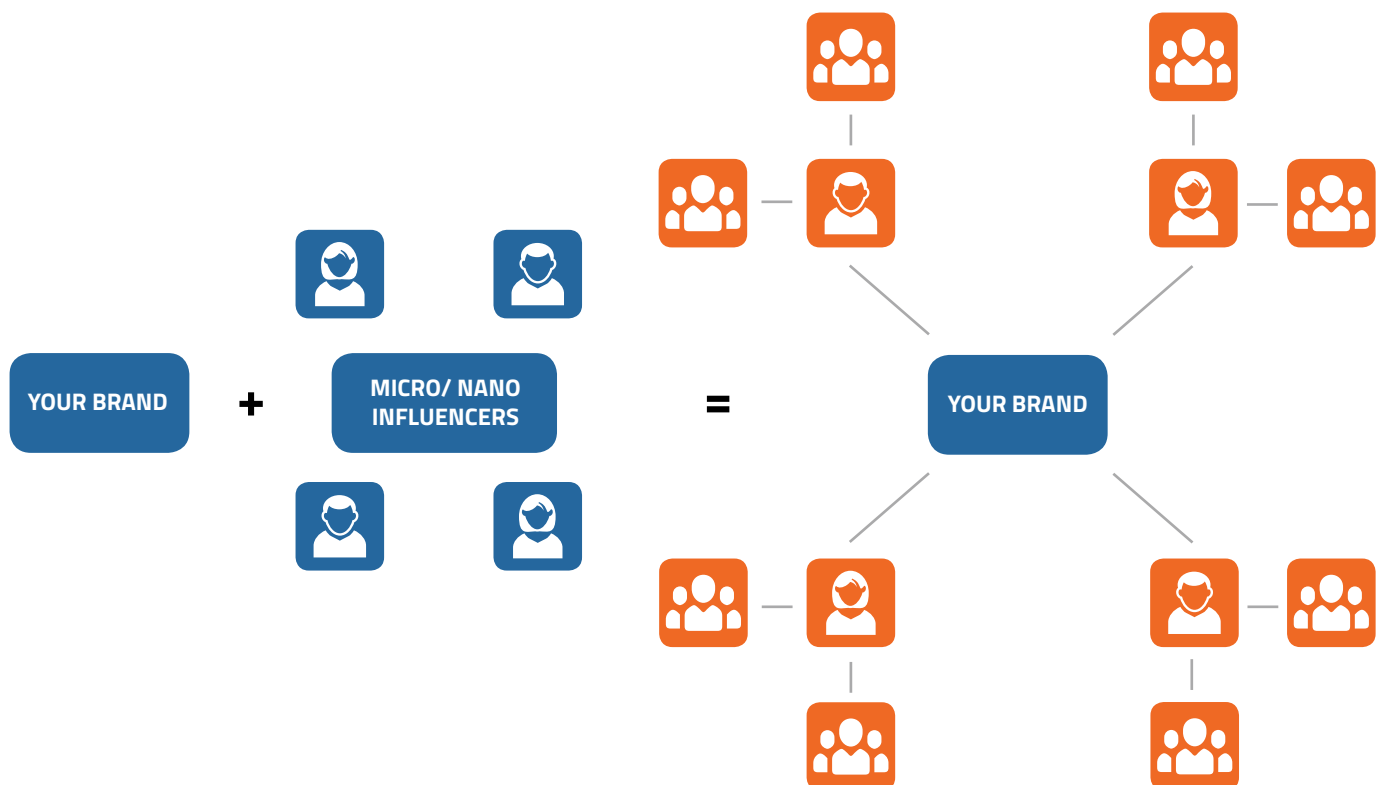
The truth is, influencer marketing fraud is all too common. As influencers emerged as people consumers turned to for advice, the perks of being in such a position drove many non-influencers to try and boost their social standing to appear more influential and attract more brands. Rogue influencers, in a bid to inflate their follower counts, turned to apps and bots – which in turn added fake likes or even hacked social media accounts.

A few fraudsters even paid for temporary post engagement to look that much more popular and influential. Many a large brand, including the likes of *P&G* and *Ritz-Carlton*, has fallen prey to fake influencer marketing, and the impact has been damning. *Unilever* made headlines last year when Chief Marketing Officer Keith Weed took a firm stance and called for greater transparency to combat influencer marketing fraud, insisting that there was an urgent need for action before trust was lost forever. Weed even rolled out a policy stating that the company would no longer work with influencers who bought followers.

The rise of the micro-influencer - more relatable, more real

Luckily, one of the biggest trends last year was also the emergence of the micro – and then nano – influencer. While both target focused, relevant market niches, the former has a follower base in the range of 10,000–100,000, and the latter is someone who has under 10,000 social followers. The reason for the excitement about this is simple. Influencers with smaller yet more “sticky” follower bases help brand marketers execute extremely effective campaigns targeted at specific audience profiles.

The statistics, too, are amazing – a research by *Experticity* has found that 82% of consumers are “highly likely” to follow a micro-influencer’s recommendation. Another study by *HelloSociety* has revealed that micro-influencer led campaigns drive 60% higher engagement rates than average campaigns.



So why exactly do micro and nano-influencers work so well?

✓ They're authentic and trustworthy

Micro-influencers lend an authentic voice to brand marketing via real advocacy. They're genuine fans of the brands they support, which means that when they talk about these brands, it results in word of mouth marketing. In the case of nano-influencers, this gets further intensified, with recommendations sounding like they're coming from a trusted acquaintance or even a friend.

✓ They're relatable and engaging

Since micro and nano-influencers aren't celebrities, they feel much closer to the average customer – which automatically amps up the trust and relatability quotients. Thus, you're setting a solid base to build and nurture a relationship based on trust. In addition, these influencers share similar interests with their followers, which automatically makes their communication more engaging.

✓ They're cost-effective, and less prone to PR debacles

Most importantly, micro and nano-influencers are highly economical to hire. There are no agency costs, campaign budgets, or celebrity endorsement charges to worry about. And the best part? In the odd case of an inadvertent error, you aren't left with a brand-damaging PR nightmare on your hands.

✓ They're easier to work with and track

On a practical note, the relatability factor also means that micro and nano-influencers are more grounded, making it easier to work with them toward achieving established objectives. There are also no handlers, PAs, or project managers to deal with – once the influencer has the offering, all they need to do is get started with spreading the word. . Finally, a network of a few thousands or even hundreds of thousands is far easier – and more meaningful – to track than one spanning millions. Thus, gauging reach and effectiveness, in addition to your competition's networks, is much more manageable.



Your brand's real influencers are closer to you than you think.

Across your desk. On the phone. On your website. Working with your brand already. They could be any of the four below:

1 Employees

The most effective and engaged nano-influencers for any brand are its employees. They have their skin in the game and are more often than not looking for an organized initiative to help them help you in your marketing efforts. Engaged and relevantly networked employees could be worth way more than any third party influencer you can buy.

2 Customers

You are running multiple marketing campaigns to get customers, keep customers and increase their share of wallet based on where they are in the customer lifecycle. You create and run loyalty programs for your customers so that they can engage with your brand and continue expanding their relationships with your business. Ever wondered how they could be leveraged for customer advocacy?

3 Channel Partners

In any business with a distribution set-up, channel partners employees are key to pushing sales. In fact, they are at times even more aggressive in their approach to generating and retaining business. These employees are your partner advocates, and champions of your brand.

4 Fans and communities

Does your brand already have a fan base? They are key to helping you spread their love for your brand, provided they are given the opportunity and organization to back them.



How do you make influencer marketing work for you?

The approach you take to adopting influencer marketing pretty much decides what you communicate with your audience. Keeping that in mind, here's our roundup of what we feel are the major points to consider when strategizing for influencer marketing:

✓ Know the right influencer for you.

One of the biggest challenges of effectively leveraging influencer marketing is finding the sweet spot with your customers – hitting the note that perfectly resonates with them.

We've already established that influencer marketing today isn't about just finding the most popular celebrity that your budget can afford.

A brand needs to find the perfect influencer to be able to execute effective campaigns. Too often, they select influencers based on how well they match the brand's demographic. While that's a smart approach, what would be even more effective is checking out the influencers' audiences. Great influencers are ones who can match audiences with their needs via the brands they represent.



✓ Evaluate their contextual engagement rates.

Any marketer worth his salt knows that influencer marketing isn't just about amplifying brand reach via follower counts. To be effective, it needs to engage potential customers via relevant conversations. At first glance, a micro-influencer may appear to have an impressive average engagement rate. However, if you take a second look, you'll find that this rate moves up or down based on posts around specific topics. Your perfect influencer should be able to sustain intelligent, interesting discussions on topics that are relevant to your brand for you to be able to run a successful campaign.

✓ Stick with your influencer's comfort zone.

Resist the urge to go OCD on your influencer's activities for your brand. Let them function like your customers when you're working with them. While you should clearly outline your campaign's goals and messaging, allow them as much free choice as is practically possible when identifying which products to feature. Don't make uber-specific requests for narrative angles or captions; this kills their inherent creativity and style – both factors that are responsible for their influencer status.

Remember, influencers are actually customers who've gained the trust of followers through their knowledge and discretion. Let them stick to the posts and style that drew their followers to them in the first place, and work their unique magic to bring you success. Also, if you support them as they create content that keeps their audience happy instead of you shoveling your own content down their throats, your influencers are more likely to consider working with you again in the future.

How to identify influencer fraud

How can a brand know if a particular influencer is resorting to fraudulent tactics? While there's obviously no foolproof way to know for sure, there are several telltale signs that you can look out for:

✓ **Shady/ non-existent background**

Do a thorough background check before partnering with any influencer. Vetting and verifying influencers before you work with them is the most effective way to protect your brand from ending up a victim of influencer fraud. What are the influencer's interests? Does he/ she have a long history of blogging and posting on social media, or did they pop out of nowhere?

✓ **Fake engagement**

The easiest way to check for fake engagement is to scrutinize an influencer's social media profile. Fake followership requires automation – and automated posts are easily distinguishable since they're not always spot on, and may also be repetitive.

Other identifiers include following to follower ratios, empty bio pages, lack of historical content, and other, deeper performance indicators such as bounce rates and conversion rates.

✓ **Suspicious behavior**

This is where using an influencer marketing platform helps. It can help you gain a lot of insights into an influencer – for instance, who they are and where they come from, how many followers he/ she has, how many followers have been gained or lost recently, and even how well they engage with their audience (or not). Most importantly, the platforms usually include a verification process that lets you make sure that the influencer posts get published exactly how you need them to be – the influencers don't get paid if everything doesn't work out according to the plan.



Wrapping up

Influencer marketing, when kept real, is one of the most powerful tools available for brands to reach and get noticed by today's technologically advanced customers. It should neither be expensive, nor misdirected due to the choice of irrelevant/ inauthentic influencers. The key to finding the perfect influencers is looking for individuals who are already invested in your industry/ brand. Remember, today's consumers are savvy and skeptical, and literally have a world of information available right at their fingertips – which means that they can see right through perfectly preened influencer posts.





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