

Influencer Marketing Report:

Best Practices and Innovation



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Background:

In our hyper-socialized society, many people within our society have become accustomed to seeing advertisements made by big businesses such as Chipotle, Amazon, and Starbucks. However, what most people don't realize is that many businesses are moving away from original marketing strategies in favor of a new phenomenon, influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy that relies on businesses customers to post social media posts in reference to the business' product (Woods, 2016). Normally there are two distinct types of influencer marketing, sponsored and non-sponsored. For example, sponsored content is when a business pays a popular social media figure to endorse their products by posting about them on their page. On the contrary, when a friend of yours posts a photo of his Jamba Juice drink, that is also considered to be influencer marketing. The reason behind this ever-growing trend is because Nielsen conducted a study and the results showed that 92% of consumers believe that recommendations from friends and family are more reliable than ones through all other types of marketing (Woods, 2016). The results of this type of marketing speak for themselves. According to a research study, influencer marketing has the ability to trigger 11 times more R.O.I than all other types of traditional marketing techniques (Woods, 2016). However, this phenomenon is not just about influencers promoting a business' products. According to eMarketer, 66% of marketers reported using influencers for content promotion and 59% said they use influencers for product launch and collaboration (Woods, 2016).

The origins of influencers came through the combination of supply and demand. During the social media boom where companies like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook became uber popular, many businesses realized that they were not reaching their targeted audiences because their audiences do not go on social media for their content (Woods, 2016).

Best Practices:

Before targeting specific influencers to promote your brand, there are a few things that we must keep in mind. The first thing we must consider is the expertise of the potential

influencer. The content of the campaign has to match the content that the influencer is known for in order for it to work effectively. Lindsey Carlin of Littlebits reported that “It means a lot more coming from somebody who already has a fanbase and is loyal. They believe in their message, so that has a stronger impact than if it comes directly from the brand itself.” Try not to be over promotional so that people are engaging with your content organically.

The second thing we must consider is the reach of the influencer. More specifically, does the influencer have reach on the platform where your audience spends its time? It is especially important that we know the demographics of our target audience to ensure that we are picking influencers that reach that particular segment. According to Lindsey Carlin, Vice President of Marketing at Littlebits, this includes knowing your customer persona and the media they consume. The last thing we must consider is the notoriety of the influencer. We want a person of mass appeal so that we aren't necessarily alienating potential customers. Sperry did a phenomenal job at this by identifying fans of its brands who were already posting high-quality photos of its product and inviting them to develop visual content for its Instagram.

Aside from those things previously mentioned, other best practices for Influencer Marketing include looking for long term partnerships. This allows for a more authentic and consistent story that can be portrayed to an influencer's audience over time. Another thing you want to do, and probably the most important, is to create content that people want to share. In a paper titled “What Makes Online Content Go Viral”, it was discovered that content that possessed high emotional arousal, stirred up strong feelings of joy or strong feelings of anger, were more likely to be shared.



Example: This is an example of viral, shareable content. "Wear Yellow for Seth" is the name of the campaign. At the time, Seth was a 5-year-old boy who didn't have an immune system due to a rare condition. The family produced videos and a blog encouraging people to wear yellow to show the little boy that they were thinking of him. It ended up getting 28 million views.

Using an influencer marketplace to find influencers is also a best practice that can be used. Within these marketplaces, Influencers are actively looking for projects and campaigns to work on. Not only does this make finding influencers much easier, but it's also very budget friendly since you can actively negotiate with influencers. This also provides a place for networking with other influencers which Lindsey Carlin, Vice President of Marketing at Littlebits, described as being very important. Another way you can find influencers according to Lorne Chan, Content Assignments Manager at Spurs Sports & Entertainment, is to reach out to those that are posting about you and generating a lot of traction from your personal channel.

Working with micro influencers will give you better rates of engagement. These people are more personable and are therefore more trustworthy. AdWeek pointed out that Instagram influencers with a follower count between 1,000 and 9,999 tended to have engagement rates

around 7.4 percent which is 5% higher than influencers with 100,000 followers or more. It is also less expensive to use micro influencers.

Amplifying your content and participating in the conversation around your brand is also important. You want to encourage your influencers to share each other's content with their followers. Don't be afraid to jump into the conversation using your brand. Some ways you can do this is by responding to questions and liking positive reviews and feedback. You can also share some of the engaged user's posts on your brand's own social media profiles. Lorne Chan, Content Assignments Manager at Spurs Sports & Entertainment, suggests allowing your influencers to do an Instagram takeover. With this, he reports that the amount of engagement received almost tripled compared to their normal Instagram posts.



Example: This is an example of a repost. This makes sharing other people's photos and videos simpler.

Be sure to research appropriate hashtags and use them wisely. Also, make sure you are posting consistently during optimal times. Early on the weekdays tends to be the best time for user engagement. Overall, the highest engagement rates occur on Wednesday at 3 P.M., Thursday at 5 A.M., 11 A.M., and 3 P.M. to 4 P.M., and Friday at 5 A.M. The lowest

engagement rates happen on Sundays. One thing to consider according to Kyle Dawson, Assistant General Manager, Vice President Community Engagement, & Marketing at Sugar Land Skeeters, is that people don't usually buy tickets until two weeks leading up to an event. There's no reason to spend money outside of that peak buying period.

Last, but not least, include a call to action. Ask the audience to tag other people so that way awareness of your brand is spread. You can also do this by asking questions and inviting your audience to tell you something. This makes your brand more personable and makes people comfortable interacting with it. This may include things such as data capturing with "Enter Now" to win this super cool prize- VIP experience.

Practitioner Interviews:

Ani Acopian - Content Creator

1. Can you briefly explain what influencing/social media marketing means to you as an influencer?
 - a. Ani is not an influencer she works on the cutting edge of social media marketing as a one-person production company. She explained what she does and how it differs from influencing as this "Influencers create work that promotes a product or brand using their own personal brand to promote it. Although I will sometime post content that I created to promote brands on my account I work as a production company creating content for brands to use on their own accounts without my name needing to be attached to it."
2. Briefly explain how you got into IG influencing/content creator? Do companies reach out to you or you reach out to them?
 - a. Ani got her start in this industry by being creative. After going to school for film at Wesleyan University she started sharing her work online. She had many internships including ones with Larry King Now and Snapchat. Ani explains how

she gets her jobs this way “About a year ago after having posted consistently on Instagram jobs started rolling in, for example from Red Bull, after this I started just making connections and those connections let to other jobs which then let to more connections. So at this point, I get most of my jobs because of recommendation and word of mouth connection. But about 95% of jobs companies reach out to me but if there are companies I really want to work with I have no issue reaching out to them and asking for an introduction.”

3. As an influencer/content creator, how do you see the market growing? Do you see the influencer/content creator becoming more or less valuable as the market grows?
 - a. “It is obvious that the market is oversaturated. This is a good thing and a bad thing though, although there is more competition there are more. Agencies are starting to catch up to the market and marketing budgets are growing to either support social or to more and more of the media budget are going to social media advertising as it becomes the primary ways to get eyes on the ad. Instagram is starting to get too curated. I don't spend too much time on Instagram because it is my job and it is not as creatively stimulating anymore. Instagram will continue to be an important place in the future because it is an established platform and it is an important tool to use when looking at trends and it will be important to know how you feel when on it.”
4. Outside of IG what other platforms do you find good for social media marketing?
 - a. “I love Twitter! It's very personable which is why I'm attracted to it. Twitter is the only platform left where your image doesn't have to be curated you can bond over personality alone” This is interesting since Instagram is thought of an insight into someone's life, since it is picture based, but really it's a view into a curated world, or someone's “best life” not “real line”.
5. How do you usually get compensated for your work?

- a. "I get paid in money. Offering exposure or experience has worked in the past as compensation for newcomers and when the market was new, but now if you don't offer creators money it's disrespectful. People make a living off of creating and posting to social media to pay them."

Lorne Chan - Content Assignments Manager at Spurs Sports & Entertainment:

1. Have you used influencers within your marketing approach and if so, why?
 - a. Yes, even though the Spurs have a large following and brand, we are still always going to try to reach more people.
 - b. We reached out to Austin Mahone. His fanbase is not your typical Spurs fan base bc it's mostly 14-year-old girls. To us, this was not a demographic that we were reaching. Austin Mahone has 10.1 million followers on Instagram. Why would we let this go unnoticed if we were a half decent company?
 - i. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3bxbYXsspo>
 - ii. <https://twitter.com/spurs/status/1040625386030194688?lang=en>
 - c. With the Rampage, we don't have that same market penetration. We are just trying to educate and let people know even if you don't like hockey it can still be a fun experience. Next week we are having these podcasters/vloggers called Veen and Cheese, who are very atypical hockey fans, and they're going to come in and learn the game. They will also post something and get fans excited for the last game of the month.
 - i. They are producing content through us, but also on their platforms as well
2. What kind of information did you first research/hear about the influencer market that made you want to use influencers?
 - a. Living in this world, there is an understanding of the importance of influencers in society. If you have a phone, you are most likely connected to influencers whether you like to or not. People are now looking for this one to one contact and they feel like they get it from influencers.
3. What type of influencers do you typically seek out?

- a. We knew Austin Mahones was a Spurs fan. You can't just force an influencer. We're not the type of company to give an influencer a ton of money to post. We still want authenticity.
 - b. When you look at the rampage, a lot of people think you have to be a really big fan of hockey to go, but a lot of people go just because it's a lot of fun and a big party. We were trying to spread the message that people go to Rampage games just because they want to go have fun.
4. Which platforms did you see being the most successful for you?
 - a. To us, it's more about the influencers, but as it involves it will probably become more about specific platforms. An Instagram influencer is probably at the peak of it right now, just because they have more of a direct connection and access than Facebook or Twitter. Twitter, your posts are kind of fleeting. And Facebook, many have argued that it has impacted our society negatively so it's just its own problem in itself.
5. Stories, or does it matter if it's original content/posts?
 - a. Stories are cool, one example is that we had Nothing More, which is a local rock band who did the Rampage opening video. We had them do an Instagram story takeover for a game and those numbers actually tripled the numbers that our normal posts have. They actually have a larger number of followers than the Rampage. So, fans of them were coming to our Instagram story just to see what they were posting. You're watching Instagram stories to see what the person is seeing.
6. What's the biggest difference between a brand ambassador and an influencer?
 - a. The passion and persistence. A brand ambassador is someone who is devoted to it while an influencer is someone who is following a lot of things. An ambassador is a fan and an influencer as an endorser. Austin Mahones is an influencer. The obsessive Spurs fans are brand ambassadors
7. What are some positives to look for when looking for influencers?

- a. The biggest thing to look for in an influencer is seeing if their fans are engaging with the posts. Sharing is also a key indicator versus people just liking it and moving on. Comments to see if other people are tagging others.
8. Where should we look for influencers?
 - a. On your personal channel. If you see people posting about you and those posts are generating a lot of traction. Reach out.
9. How should we reach out to Influencers to get a response? What language?
 - a. That's a loaded question because it depends on what kind of response you're trying to get. You could ask for a broad response or a very specific response. The whole point of social media is that you can make it as personal as you want.
10. Would you start the conversation specific or broadly?
 - a. Very broadly. If there is an influencer that is heavily involved then you want it to be specific. If it is someone not as invested, you want it to be broad. You need to have the threads there, you can't just create the threads
11. How do we track the success of what we are doing? Measurables?
 - a. Engagement. Social media analytics. You could put a link up to join fan clubs or post ticket referral links so they can swipe up.
12. What are the benefits of running an influencer marketing campaign?
 - a. It's reaching people who don't know you exist. Influencer is defined differently by a lot of people.
 - b. Nano influencers are getting free stuff from companies and getting engagement. Mom blogs. A mom blogger might get 300 views, but it's a club of moms sharing thoughts and ideas.

Kyle Dawson - Assistant General Manager, Vice President Community

Engagement & Marketing at Sugar Land Skeeters:

1. Have you used influencers within your marketing approach? If so, why?
 - a. Yeah, absolutely. We find and target people who want to be entertained. Especially with theme nights, we can go target specific markets. Not everybody

likes baseball, but we do stuff that is entertaining. We will put on a post-game concert and look at where they played last in order to get fans of that band to buy tickets to our games.

- b. We do a paid and organic marketing level. We have a marketing firm that will do the paid social media ads.
 - c. One of the things that we're targeting is newcomer guides. Just so they know that we're here and available for entertainment.
 - d. We reached out to Jack Ingram on social media and asked for him to shoutout that he will be at constellation field to his influencers.
 - e. For VTO, I would look at community impact newspaper, where they can do social media on their end and target those communities that are waiting
 - f. Stay within your radius, we scaled back our radius from 70 miles to 35 miles. Because we could put more money in the spend instead of being a half inch deep a mile wide. 90% of our tickets bought are zip codes within 35 miles wide. Nitro circus is coming in so we are targeting major metropolitan areas because we are the only ones in the state of Texas to have them. So, we might open up that radius if the data shows something specifically.
 - g. We look at google analytics to find the measurables. Our marketing firm will track those ads. One of the big things we had a problem with was where do we lose people. They were able to put tracking codes to see where people are opting out of the buying process. Were there too many steps? We knew for a fact that we were losing a lot of sales on our mobile site just because it wasn't compatible with Apple users.
 - h. One of the big things that we found out. People don't buy tickets til two weeks in. There's no reason to spend money outside of that peak buying ads. We will put a little feeler out there before that, but we will spend the majoring of our money during those two weeks.
2. Which platforms did you see being the most successful for you?

- a. For us, Facebook. The user and buyer are older, so they use a lot of Facebook. When you post things, you post them on all three platforms at one time. We have 55,000 Facebook compared to 9 or 8 thousand on Instagram and Twitter. We are in that range of 30-45 who have kids living in a middle-class home.
- b. We're trying to grow a lot more with the younger marker. We are going to push our thirsty Thursdays with a DJ at the game to attract that generation.
3. What compensation asks from the influencers can we expect?
 - a. We give them tickets. If we ask an artist to do something, they're more than likely do it just because it's an audience for them. But ticket giveaway, team signed ball, swag pack is what we do. We just don't have the budget to pay these influencers.
4. What are some red flags when looking for influencers?
 - a. We are wholesome, family fun, so something that's not a little too edgy. We want somebody who's going to fit into the environment. Know who you are and what you're trying to accomplish.
5. How do we track the success of what we are doing? Measurables?
 - a. Google analytics. Have a call to action on whatever you're doing. Whether it's a click to your site. We will put an A or B action out and see which one performs better. We will work one week and then the other another week to see which one to run with from there out. A may be a buy one get one with a meal voucher and B would save 10% if you buy today. Which one is most visibly appealing to the consumer? People's preferences change quite a bit. It might be something as simple as a white background with a black letter might not get it while an add with a lot of coloring. If you could do something around data capturing with "Enter Now" to win this super cool prize- VIP experience. Buy your tickets now and you'll be refunded your money. Then you know you have them interested so then go retarget them. Our open rate is 15-18% while the industry standard is 8-10%.
6. What are the benefits of running an influencer marketing campaign?

- a. There's no better way to tell a story than have somebody tell it for you. We live in an age where everybody's waiting to see what you're doing.

Lindsey Carlin - Vice President of Marketing at Littlebits

1. Have you used influencers within your marketing approach? If so, why?
 - a. Yes, I've used them on several occasions. It is a dynamic way to get products and brand exposure digitally in a credible way. It means a lot more coming from somebody who already has a fanbase and is loyal. They believe in their message, so that has a stronger impact than if it comes directly from the brand itself.
2. What kind of information did you first research/hear about the influencer market that made you want to use influencers?
 - a. I was in the industry when it was all getting started. Youtube was becoming a thing. I first heard about it with Mom influencers back in 2007 and 2008. I was working for a PR agency and I had some corporate tech and consumer clients. We needed to quickly establish our brand and product across the nation. So, when you googled it, a blog post popped up from a mom with her kids having a party. Everybody in the industry started leveraging their dollars online. The people I was already reaching out to on the blogging, started doing video. One of my first influencer campaigns was around Halloween and we created this gift box. We had recipe ideas, games, and HEX Bug products and sent them to 250 families. We got to pick the age of the mom and the age of the kids. This was right when mom blogs were becoming a thing. The NY Times wrote about how big it was getting. The first few were cool and underground, but once they got exposed everybody had to say this post was sponsored.
3. What's the difference between a brand ambassador and an influencer?
 - a. A brand ambassador has to check a lot more boxes for a company. With ambassadors, you are representing the brand. At hexbug, we had 25 ambassadors. These are people you have a special relationship with. An influencer, you're using them for their audience. It's less investment from the company.

4. What type of influencers do you typically seek out?
 - a. Totally depends on the industry, the company, and the campaign. For the girl power initiative, I sought out girl influencers who were into hacking and STEM. These girls showed that it was okay to make mistakes and that you didn't have to be perfect.
 - b. We were trying to launch a new brand in schools, so I sought out people that had posted a lot about lego. And then I worked to convert them. Lego is big, so they couldn't have the same personalization.
 - c. You need to look at what you are trying to accomplish. First, start with a persona. Create a mock sketch of an audience. Then look for influencers to fit this created persona
5. Which channel did you see being the most successful for you?
 - a. It depends on your audience, so you have to go back to your customer persona and what type of media do they consume. For moms, I would go to Instagram. If you're trying to find a techy dad, then that's going to be a lot different. If it's a video, Youtube is very helpful. If you're out for just pure numbers then Facebook is the place to go.
 - b. You also have to budget for promoting the content that the influencers produce
 - c. I've never targeted influencers on Reddit, but I've engaged and polled on Reddit to see the underground conversations.
6. What are micro influencers?
 - a. I have not engaged in micro influencers. That's more of a recent trend. Littlebits tried micro influencers last year, but that was a big waste of money. I wasn't here, so I don't know what to attribute that to.
7. What compensation asks from the influencers can we expect?
 - a. It depends on whom you pick. I worked with a huge person because she makes robots. I reached out personally to her agent. It depends on what you ask. I strictly wanted her to use our products in her videos, not asking for any callouts or anything in return. Now she does charge other people, but she does not charge

me. Influencers are getting savvier, so they are attaching themselves to agents. They're still human and willing to work around that if they feel passionate about the cause. It comes back to the authenticity of the ask. Compensation could be anything: product, product and a visit, product, and a visit and a backstage pass to \$1,200 to \$100,000. The game is really big. One idea is providing a space for them to network with each other.

8. What are some red flags when looking for influencers?
 - a. When you engage with one of these people, you want to make sure their past posts align with your values. If you're curing a lot, not a great fit. Another one is overly promotional because consumers are savvier than ever. To me, that's a waste of eyeballs because then they're not organic audiences. Another one is if there is no work around the money or agent.
9. How do we track the success of what we are doing? Measurables?
 - a. You have to think about what the larger goal of the initiative is. What is the business perspective? What are the marketing goals? Within that, what are the KPIs (Key performance indicators)? It's tougher when you don't have any money to spend. When there is no money to spend then nothing is guaranteed. Since it is a pilot, you should try to see if this is a viable option if you did it again. Is it scalable? I would look at comments or shares. I would set goals like: I want to get 5 influencers and each one of them to have 5 comments. Then do a Net Performance Score to get feedback on how likely they would be to do it again. Or you could do a bigger survey to gain insight into the experience. Are you able to show them marketing dollars so that they could do some fun stuff (KPI)? Did you learn more about whom you are targeting through these posts? Maybe VTO thought your customer persona was XYZ but it's actually ZYX.
10. What are the benefits of running an influencer marketing campaign?
 - a. Having your ear to the ground is the best. Having a younger person there with fresh ideas who is willing to take risks.

Future Industry Analysis:

As influencer marketing becomes more commonplace and understood by consumers, there is a lot of shifts in how it is practiced that will become factors in the near future. First and foremost, there is going to be a huge increase in participation. According to AdAge, only 43% of companies are exploring influencer marketing and this is on an experimental basis. (Marx, 2017). While another 20% of companies are employing these strategies on a tactical basis, the large majority is hardly taking advantage of this growing trend. The same study also showed that the average company is investing less than 100,000 dollars per year to influencer marketing. (Marx, 2017). This is a tiny part of the marketing budget for companies that are consistently spending millions of dollars to market their products or services. While this may just be an expanded version of "word of mouth" marketing, the growth of technology in the next decade is going to be one that sends influencer marketing to a new standard.

One factor that is going to continue to expand this realm is virtual reality. As technology allows for more user-friendly access to VR, influencers will have really unique opportunities to market for their companies. (Mastorakis, 2018). Already, there has been a movement from picture influence into video influence. This is because of tools like "Boomerang" via Instagram stories and Snapchat stories, which are highly popular among consumers. Now that you can live stream from your phone directly to followers on many of the major social networking platforms, influencer marketers have the ability to interact in real time with consumers. This has the technology for consumers to ask questions or make comments about the live stream, which continues the development of the influencer/customer relationship. The company that takes advantage of this the most is Instagram. According to Lorne Chan, Instagram is the "future" platform of influencer marketing. This is because of how well they are utilizing this video content. Specifically for the virtual reality technology, soon followers will have the ability to tune in to a 360-degree view of the influencer event. These are relationships with consumers that companies would not have dreamed possible a decade ago.

Because of the intimate nature of new technology for influencers, there is also growth to the standards for acquiring an influencer. In the past, quantitative measures, like follower counts

or page views, were the ideal selling points for finding an influencer. Moving into the future, consumers are reacting more to authentic content, and do not wish to be “sold” a product in their social feeds. (DeMers, 2018). A qualitative measure will start to become commonplace, as companies are more interested in the ways influencers interact with their followers than their actual page views. While these are still important, a high-profile influencer who is just posting advertisements will be less successful than strategic and sincere marketing efforts.

Along with the huge expansion of participation among influencers, there are going to be new barriers to entry and regulations. First, you have the rise in participation. Companies are swarming the most popular influencers for their business, and in the same way, influencers are seeing the need for their services and beginning to join the influencer marketing world. Because of this, there is heavy competition among both companies and influencers to participate in the business. According to Forbes, this will start to develop "cliques" of mainstream influencers and a tiered system. (DeMers, 2018). Prominent influencers will be able to connect with their peers who have a similar following and it is predicted that this will such a developed relationship that it can be mapped. A top tier influencer will have many lower tiered influencers whom they can collaborate with or even pass off the business to. According to Lindsey Carlin, these are called "nano influencers" and we expect them to play a huge role in the future influencer business. This is very similar to the AdAge research which stated: "Influencer Marketing is being used for one-offs, not strategically." (Marx, 2017). Companies are currently going after the "big deal" through influencers like Kim Kardashian at the highest tier to push a product. This is no different than having them as a spokesperson for the company. The future of influencer marketing is branching away from these transactions to developing influencer relationships among multiple tiers of prominence. This way, these relationships will have diverse customer groups and growth or influence success can be tracked quantitatively, unlike the "one-off" methods that are done by most of the current influencer marketing.

The final element of the increased participation is regulatory changes. These can already be seen on major social media platforms, but the FTC is actively targeting influencer/company relationships. While this marketing is allowed, the relationships need to be actively disclosed to the public. There have been several warnings to influencers from the FTC, but the idea is that the

government wants to prevent undisclosed partnerships or sponsorship agreements. (DeMers, 2018). This push for authenticity coincides with the consumers' demand for authentic content. In response to this, Instagram/Facebook has provided the ability to disclose these relationships. Under the picture or video content, the influencer may add an alert that says "Paid partnership with: ____". This is a strong first step for promoting transparency, but as the trend of influencer marketing grows this is likely just the first step in discussions with the FTC.



(See above the caption: "Paid partnership with danielwellington")

Conclusion:

While this new way of marketing has many upsides for both the influencers and the businesses, it is still in its infancy and needs time to develop as a formal practice instead of the trendy tool of today's marketers. That being said, the lack of formal scholarly research means that its ability to be effective in the years to come is unknown. In the present, however, this practice has proven to be very effective given the rise of social media in our society. Taking all of this into consideration, we believe the blend of sports, specifically the PGA Tour, and social media influencers, has the ability to create more diversity within the Valero Texas Open attendee demographic landscape.

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