Chapter 1

Influencer Marketing 101

In This Chapter

- Getting the lay of the land
- Approaching social media platforms like a pro
- Redefining "influence"
- Knowing what your business needs to launch successful programs

Congratulations! You've arrived at the era of influencer marketing: an exciting, interesting, fresh, ever-changing, and *seriously fun* time to be a marketer! You're gonna love it here.

What makes influencer marketing so compelling? For one thing, it simply couldn't have existed before now. Influencer marketing brings together age-old concepts but gives them a modern, social media twist, and then distributes them across platforms that change almost daily. And the results are stunning.

We believe that influencer marketing is unprecedented and truly differentiates itself from the old marketing practices. In fact, it challenges most of them. This new medium pushes traditional boundaries — and that's a good thing! Consumers (the folks we're marketing to) are savvier than ever. It's our job to keep up.

In this chapter, we give you an overview of what influencer marketing is and why it matters to you — whether you know it or not!

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Defining Influencer Marketing

So, what is influencer marketing exactly, and why are we so darn excited about it? *Influencer marketing* is the art and science of engaging people who are influential online to share brand messaging with their audiences in the form of sponsored content.

Advertisers have always used celebrity endorsements as a way to increase awareness and improve perception of a brand, because people tend to trust celebrities they admire, and sometimes aspire to be like them. Influencer marketing is similar in concept, but it has ushered in a new way to define *celebrity.* In addition to TV and movie stars, pro athletes, and musicians, celebrities of the social media world exist now, too. People can build big, engaged audiences on social media, such as blogs or Instagram. And those *social media influencers* wield influence over their audiences, akin to celebrity influence. Brands then work with these social media influencers to create a new kind of celebrity endorsement.

For example, maybe a new energy drink has just come out, and they want to market themselves as a "perfect boost for busy women." They decide that — in addition to email blasts, online display ads, and in-person events — they're going to reach out to influential female bloggers who write about their busy lives (and include information about the new energy drink). To engage these influencers, the energy drink's marketing team will

- Find bloggers who meet their target demographic.
- Reach out to the bloggers in an effective and professional way so that both parties are happy with and clear about their upcoming partnership.
- Send the bloggers samples of the drink.
- Enjoy the results of a fantastic social media campaign! The bloggers' readers are thrilled to have learned about their favorite online friend's good experiences with this energy drink, and they comment that they're going to try it themselves.

Of course, influencer marketing is not quite that simple, and these are actually quite time-consuming and involved (which is why we've written a whole book about them!), but the idea is sound.

So why a whole book about influencer marketing? What makes it so impossible to have done before and so hot right now?

- Social media today gives access to anyone to become an influencer; anyone who builds an audience can influence that audience. This means there's a huge pool of influencers available for brands to work with.
- There are more tools than ever before to help brands find and engage with influencers. There are resources for turnkey influencer programs now that simply didn't exist a year ago.
- Influencers exist on any channel or platform; they aren't limited to one format or another.

- Consumers have little trust in advertising. No one clicks banner ads anymore! But consumers *do* trust their friends and family when it comes to product recommendations and purchasing decisions — and consumers consider social media acquaintances to be friends.
- When executed well, influencer marketing programs have proven to be one of the most cost-effective and powerful tools in a marketer's arsenal.

Identifying the Primary Influencer Platforms

There are a slew of social media platforms out there, but in this book, we focus on the six big ones. The ones we've selected are

- **The most established:** Programs on these platforms are replicable and scalable based on years of data and case studies.
- **The most marketing-friendly:** Marketers know they can expect good results from programs on these platforms. The Snapchats of the world are fun, but they haven't yet proven to yield demonstrable results for most businesses.

Regardless of how many new tools emerge, when you've mastered the basics of these six platforms, you can manage influencers *anywhere*.

Blogs

Blogs were arguably the first form of user-generated content that attracted advertisers. When the web evolved from *top-down editorial content* (content that was published on websites, much like magazines and newspapers were published, without any way for audiences to interact or respond to that content), bloggers were the first people to attract true, measurable, engaged audiences. Blogs allowed for commenters, which meant bloggers (publishers) were interacting with their audiences. This two-way communication was revolutionary, and entire communities formed around blogs. Advertisers followed.

Over the last 15 years, blogs have evolved from being primarily text-heavy outlets for sharing opinion and personal stories, to a dizzying world of highly visual, readily shared content.

Blogs are still a mainstay of influencer programs. Here's why:

- There are popular blogs for every topic under the sun.
- Traffic and activity from blogs (page views, visits, time on site, and so on) are easy to measure.
- Influential bloggers can create gorgeous content and tell beautiful, true stories in a way that brands simply can't.
- The "evergreen" nature of blog content means sponsored posts will be discovered long after programs have been completed.

Instagram

No other social media tool has enjoyed Instagram's meteoric rise to prominence. People of all ages (especially under the age of 34) love perusing and sharing snapshots of people's lives, whether they know them IRL (in real life) or not. Instagram is fun and easy to use, and though marketers were once hesitant to believe that fleeting photos on Instagram could do much for brands, nearly 95 percent of retailers are now on Instagram!

Working with influencers on Instagram is fabulous because

- Users want visual content that's easy to digest, which is why Instagram is so popular. Engaging Instagram influencers to ensure that brand content is prominent on Instagram is a no-brainer!
- Simple photos are a great way to bring your product to life, for others to see it in action. A picture really is worth a thousand words.
- Many tools are available to track Instagram programs simply by using a unique hashtag, so measuring program success is easy (and some of these tools are even free!).
- Instagram's audience is broad, and often different from the audiences who are reading story-based blogs. Instagram offers a fantastic additional channel to get sponsored content in front of as many people as possible.

Twitter

Twitter has changed the news cycle, and the way social media-savvy users consume news. Any event will be discussed and shared as it unfolds in real-time on Twitter. Twitter is the platform for the world's social commentary, whether it's serving as a political megaphone for citizens reporting live from the trenches, or a humorous collection of ongoing reactions to this season's *Bachelor* finale.

Facebook is where social media users check in and check up on family and friends (mostly people they know in real life). Twitter is where users go to find out — or share — what's happening in the world at large with thousands of users they (mostly) don't know. Therefore, Twitter is great for

- Hosting chats or "parties" with a wide cross-section of people who have a common interest.
- Disseminating information about a new product launch or anything newsworthy.
- Brands that are interested in actively engaging with users. Facebook is more passive — comments may go unanswered for long periods of time, for example. Twitter users expect responses quickly. As a brand, if you can't engage in near real-time conversations with followers, working with influencers who can do it on your behalf is a fantastic option.

Facebook

Although Facebook isn't quite as popular as it once was among the under-25 crowd, millions of Americans check Facebook daily. Marketers have to be there! But being there can be tricky. Facebook changes its algorithms, policies, and ad serving regularly — what worked today may not work tomorrow. It's tough — but critical — to keep up.

For that reason, when it comes to Facebook, working with influencers is fantastic. Here's why:

- People who are popular on Facebook know how to navigate the tool to ensure that their posts are seen as widely as possible. Working with influencers means working with experts.
- If you've already created branded content and you just want to disseminate it, engaging Facebook influencers is your perfect solution. Facebook is incredibly powerful for sharing brief, to-the-point messages, such as coupons, in-store sale info, or branded images or videos.



Running a company Facebook page is completely different from engaging influencers to post sponsored content to Facebook.

Pinterest

After soaring onto the scene a few years ago, fueled by users who couldn't get enough of the beautiful, educational, and aspirational tool, Pinterest has established itself as an absolute must for any product-based brand. Pinterest drives more traffic to online retailers than any other site.

Here's why Pinterest is great for influencer marketing:

- Influencers love to create beautiful content and post it to Pinterest. The more beautiful the content, the more extensive the pin's reach will be.
- Working Pinterest into an influencer marketing program means thinking about the brand in a visual way, which ultimately makes the program more successful. For example, how do you make a child's plastic bucket visually beautiful and pinworthy? By adjusting the program content to work for Pinterest — for example, images of sand castles that influencers made with the plastic bucket or by posting a list of 13 outdoor activities for kids under 5 (and all you need is a bucket!).
- Unlike other platforms, pins tend to live on and on and on, because they're are pinned and repinned in perpetuity.

Video

Video influencers are, in some ways, the holy grail of social media influencers. In some cases, their videos reach millions of adoring viewers who can't wait for the next installment — and to be told what products to try. A popular beauty expert who makes a video about the perfect bronzer will directly affect sales of that bronzer.

In the influencer marketing world, video is its own special entity. The most popular video influencers are often quickly scooped up by agents or agencies, which makes it difficult for brands to work directly with them. Popular video influencers can also command much higher compensation than other types of influencers, especially if they have six- and seven-figure followings.

The good news is, as video production tools continue to become more ubiquitous, more affordable, and easier to use, there are more up-and-coming video influencers than ever before. Now that you can film nearly theater-quality movies with your camera, more and more people are entering the video influencer world and amassing thousands of viewers who aren't necessarily reading blogs, checking Pinterest, or using Twitter or Facebook. And when done well, a sponsored video can be as beautiful as a TV ad, while being more authentic and compelling to viewers.



To make the most of video influencer programs,

- **Don't focus too narrowly on YouTube stars.** There is video talent everywhere! For example, there are thousands of Vine users, who have tremendous followings even though their videos are only seconds long.
- **Keep your eyes open for new talent.** When a video talent is discovered by the masses, she's less likely to work one-on-one with brands or marketers.

- **Allow influencers great creative freedom.** Building up a video audience isn't easy to do, and the influencer knows her audience best. If you want her to incorporate brand product or messaging into her work, you have to be willing to allow her the flexibility to do it her way.

  If you're working with highly inexperienced and less popular video influencers, be willing to offer help — from editing resources to script ideas — and expect more back-and-forth communication throughout the process.

Engaging Stellar Influencers

You may have the most creative, most stupendous ideas for an influencer program. Hooray! But your fabulous ideas won't make a lick of difference if you don't know which influencers to engage or how to engage them. In this section, we give you the seven keys to engaging stellar influencers.

Start with women

Women influence up to 90 percent of purchasing decisions in U.S. households. So, it almost doesn't matter what you're selling — appealing to women simply makes sense.

This doesn't mean you should ignore male influencers in favor of working with female ones. It just means that it makes sense to start by identifying female influencers. The good news here is that women use every social media platform as much as (if not more than) men, share more product information online than men, and make a greater number of purchases as a direct result of social sharing than men do. (See Chapter 3 for details.)

Find people who create great content

Search for influencers who create great content that is (at least somewhat) related to your brand and who demonstrate engagement with their audiences — as evidenced by comments; followers on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter; and social shares per post.

Beyond engagement, relevancy is critical. It seems perfectly reasonable and logical for a marketer to want to go after the "biggest" influencers they can find, but big doesn't mean relevant. For instance, say we have a client who is

launching a new gluten-free protein bar, ideal for people who are fit and athletically inclined. At the outset, it might seem like a great idea to try to work with a prominent gluten-free food blogger on this program. But what if that blogger never writes about fitness and never recommends packaged products? She may have 300,000 monthly blog visitors, but it's not likely that any of them care about prepackaged fitness foods, even if they're gluten-free.

Compare that to a blogger who may only have 25,000 monthly visitors, but whose stories are focusing on her new gluten-free lifestyle as she trains for a marathon. In this case, you'd be better off working with the smaller blog. Even if the numbers won't look as great in some reports, we know the program will gain more traction with the smaller blog's audience.



If you're tempted to find the biggest influencers, keep this in mind:

- Relevancy of a blog or influencer content is more important than size.
- Prominent influencers often command much higher compensation.
- Popular influencers are routinely inundated with brand offers. Your offer needs to be compelling. Even then, you must be willing to be treated as though you're doing the influencer a favor. (This isn't always true, but we want you to know it happens often!)
- The audience of prominent influencers who do a lot of sponsored work get fatigued by sponsored messages and start tuning them out.

If you're a marketer and you need to show impressive numbers in your program report, keep in mind that there's a lot of ways to make a dollar. If your program goal is to meet a million social impressions, you can get there with one prominent influencer whose blog garners a million monthly visitors. But you could also get there with four bloggers, each of whom gets 250,000 visitors a month — or, better yet, with 100 bloggers, each of whom has 25,000 visitors per month. At the end of the program, the 1 million number would look the same, but you'd have 100 different pieces of content from 100 different perspectives and 100 different audiences.

Perfect your pickup

Influencers are human beings. You want to approach working with influencers professionally, but not so professionally that you come across as a robot (or worse, a spambot).

As we explain in Chapter 4, reaching out to influencers to ask them to work for you is not as simple as sending a mass PR mailing. Outreach should be personal, thoughtful, and tell the influencer what's in it for them. Putting in the time to craft customized outreach is time-consuming, but it will always yield better results than a spray-and-pray approach.

Sign a contract

This may sound like a small, tactical concern, but it's not. Bringing a contract into your influencer relationship makes sense for myriad reasons:

- **You're emphasizing that this is a professional relationship between the influencer and your brand.**
- **You want the influencer to create authentic content that will resonate with her audience, but you don't have to lose complete control of the entire creative process.** Use a contract to provide some rules of the road for the influencer about what she can and can't say, do, or post with respect to your brand.
- **You're not leaving deliverables up to chance.** The "old" influencer model — where, say, a company would send product to influencers with no note at all, in the hopes that the influencer would write, well, *anything* about the product — is dead. As a brand you have every right to spell out exactly what coverage you expect (a blog post, a Facebook post, three Instagram images, and so on) and by a set deadline.
- **A contract ensures there is no ambiguity about compensation.** Include what the compensation is, how it will be delivered, and by what date.

Pay influencers for their time and effort

When influencer marketing was still a new phenomenon in the social media sphere, brands that compensated influencers for their work were considered shady. By the old public relations standards, that's not how things were supposed to work. As we explain in Chapter 2, brands would simply send publications information or products in the hopes that the publications would feature them. PR folks applied the same approach with bloggers.

The industry has moved past this. Influencers expect to receive compensation in return for their work. Plus, compensation should reflect that the influencers are doing work on behalf of brands regardless of how the content "performs." If an influencer goes to the store, buys a new salad dressing, creates a beautiful dinner featuring that salad and salad dressing, blogs her salad recipe, and features gorgeous photos of the salad, all her work deserves compensation regardless of how many comments her blog post receives.

When it comes to compensation, cash is almost always preferred by influencers. It may be acceptable for a brand to offer products or services instead of cash, as long as those products or services have a monetary value equal

to or greater than the cash equivalent; even then, some influencers may take offense at being offered "payment" that won't actually pay the bills. "Paying" influencers in "blog traffic" by featuring them on a brand site is not acceptable.

Outsource your influencer marketing to a marketing firm

Much like social media marketing in general, influencer marketing takes time, resources, and strategy. If your brand hands off influencer marketing to the intern, chances are, your programs won't gain much traction. You may also run the risk of a PR crisis or backlash if an inexperienced person is running the show and doesn't truly understand protocol.

Influencer marketing isn't something you can automate, either. Although there are many tools on the market now to help brands manage their influencer marketing programs, any successful program still requires a lot of planning, and — when it comes down to it — a lot of hand-holding of the influencers. Influencers are people; the more personal your interaction with them, the more personal the content they're creating for you will be, and the more it will resonate with their readers.

If your brand doesn't have the resources needed to truly manage influencer marketing, we recommend you outsource to an agency that specializes in it until you do. As we outline in Chapter 5, there are many ways to partner with influencer agencies to ensure your efforts are successful and cost-effective.

Measure the right stuff

Measuring the right stuff doesn't just help your influencer marketing programs; it helps you recruit the right kind of influencers.

Never, ever begin an influencer program before you can answer the question, "What will success look like?" If you don't know how you'll measure success, how will you know if you got there? And if you don't know what your goals are, how will you know what to measure?

We devote Part IV of this book to dealing with metrics and return on investment (ROI) of influencer programs, but here are some guidelines to consider:

- You can only truly measure ROI if you take the cost of your entire marketing program and its effect on sales into consideration. What percentage of budget that was allocated for influencer marketing? How does that budget compare to sales results?

- "Success" can be measured in sales results, but linking purchases back to a series of blog posts is incredibly difficult. How can you track someone who saw a tweet about a new mascara, went to the blog post about it, took down the name of the mascara in her phone, and then purchased it the next time she was in her corner drugstore weeks later? Our ability to use technology to track these purchase paths is improving, but we're not there yet. (This is why we have to estimate ROI as a percentage of sales compared to percentage of budget.)
- "Success" can be measured in ways other than sales results, including the amount of content created, increases in a brand's social followings (Facebook, Instagram, and so on), site traffic, coupon downloads, engagement (comments, shares, and so on), overall share of voice before and after a program, overall social mentions, and brand sentiment.

An effective approach to measuring a program's efficacy matters to influencers because it guides what they need to do. If you're clear on what you're trying to achieve, you can be clear about which influencers you need, and what you'll ask them to produce. (Trust us, influencers don't want to create useless content any more than you want it created!)

Being upfront with influencers about what you're trying to achieve makes your offer more compelling, and helps the influencers feel that they're in a true partnership with you.

Making Influencer Marketing Work for You

No matter what size business you have or what kind of marketing or PR background you come from, you can make influencer marketing work for your business — as long as you keep in mind what influencer marketing can and cannot do! The various approaches outlined in this section can serve as the foundation for the influencer programs you'll build.

If you're an established consumer brand

If you represent a large, established brand and you're looking to launch or enhance your influencer marketing programs, you likely have the experience, resources, and budget to regularly run large-scale programs.

Leveraging your advantages

If you're an established brand, you've obviously been successful with your marketing and PR programs. Way to go! You have systems and processes in place for your marketing efforts, you know what works, and you have a budget in place for ensuring your campaigns are successful. You should be able to implement all our tips and tricks in your influencer marketing efforts. Use your scale and experience to your advantage!

You probably already have access to more data and metrics for influencer marketing than you realize. Many social media metrics tools — the ones you're already using to monitor your social media programs — have add-ons for measuring influencer activity. Research what your current tools can already do to help save budget while ensuring you're measuring your programs' successes.

Speaking of measuring success, according to a 2015 study performed by influencer marketing agency Tomason, businesses are, on average, making $6.50 for each $1 spent on influencer marketing. That's quite a statistic! Data like these support influencer marketing ROI figures and should make an easy case for diverting more marketing budget to influencer marketing.

Given the demonstrable ROI, hiring a dedicated person to oversee influencer marketing makes sense. Just as businesses were once reluctant to hire full-time social media resources and now have entire social media teams *and* agencies, influencer marketing is deserving of full-time strategizing and implementation.



Think of influencer marketing as an addition to your current programs, not a standalone effort. Start with your overall marketing plan: What are your goals? Your key messages? Your key milestones? Your social media efforts will be coordinated with your more traditional tactics (digital, print, TV, radio, and so on). There's no reason for influencer marketing to be any different. Influencers should amplify your efforts, not compete with them!

As an established brand, the best reason to use influencer marketing is to help give your brand a fresh perspective. Allowing influencers to tell your story lets other consumers see your brand through their eyes. Handing over the "storytelling keys" to influencers breathes new life and personality into brands that may otherwise feel too staid to consumers.

Avoiding common mistakes



Larger brands with bigger budgets and teams can run into trouble with influencer marketing by taking too much of a "hands-off" approach. There are, of course, ways to scale influencer marketing programs, but avoid rushing to automation! Don't fall into one of these traps:

- **Even if you build your own internal pool of influencers, or outsource your programs to an influencer agency, don't underestimate the amount of work that goes into making influencer campaigns successful.** The very reason influencer marketing works is because influencers are real, live human beings — not display ads. There are ways to scale your programs, but influencer marketing is not programmatic. Don't approach it as though it were.
- **Don't under-budget!** You're working with individuals (not machines or ad exchanges). No matter how sophisticated your process or tools may be, every influencer campaign will be different, and each will require a larger investment of time and resources than a campaign that only involves "flipping a switch."
- **Don't try to control everything.** More established brands frequently have a more rigid way of doing things, and are often used to owning — and controlling — their own media. Yes, an influencer campaign would be more automated and controlled if a company simply provided the influencers the exact copy they were supposed to publish — except that's not influencer marketing. Don't try to control the messages in the name of efficiency or fear of losing control. Otherwise, you're just forcing a different kind of display advertising into a medium where it will fall flat. (Bloggers' audiences don't want to read a prewritten press release!)
- **Treat your influencers like individuals.** The more impersonally you treat your influencers (something that's easy to do when you're a large organization), the less personal and less effective their work will be.

Finding an approach that works for you

As a large and (we're going to assume) sophisticated company, you have greater flexibility to really leverage influencer marketing and make it work for you. Here's how:

- **Your overall marketing initiatives can lay the foundation for hugely successful influencer marketing campaigns.** You can use influencer marketing to supplement, enhance, and amplify your existing efforts. For example, say you've created a two-minute ad spot but only 30 seconds of it will air on TV. Use influencers to showcase the full video across social channels, while everyone uses the same hashtag.
- **Don't limit your perception of influencer marketing to "something someone else creates over there."** Use and repurpose the amazing content you worked so hard with your influencers to create! Spend the time, energy, and budget to create large, high-quality influencer programs. We're talking about the kind of programs where the writing and photos and captions and posts are striking, where influencers clearly can and do produce outstanding content for you. And then repurpose that content all day long! Use it in display ads, via social media channels, on your website, even on TV. Be sure to build content usage terms into your influencer contracts.



Influencer marketing works in two directions: We mostly focus on how influencers do a great job of introducing *their* readers to a new brand or product — to grow brand awareness, purchase intent, and (ultimately) purchase. But influencer marketing also works well for consumers who are already in the purchasing intent phase. For instance, a guy who's looking to buy a new vacuum cleaner is going to start by searching online for something like "best family vacuum cleaners." Imagine how compelling it would be for him to stumble upon a series of blog posts written about a specific vacuum cleaner, especially if those posts were balanced and visually attractive. He's never heard of these bloggers before, but this demonstrates the long-term impact of influencer marketing programs.

What's more, this man may then further investigate the vacuum he's read about by going to an online retailer and looking up the model to read reviews. It's extra powerful to have influencers write reviews directly on retail sites (with full disclosures that they're being paid for their reviews) to help move the customer from intent to purchase.

If you're a small to midsize consumer brand

You don't have all the experience and budget of the major brands, but that doesn't mean you can't rock influencer marketing! In some ways, you're actually more likely to be able to enjoy success with this new marketing medium *because* you're more nimble and better able to try new things. You can absolutely use your size and lesser-known brand name to your advantage!

Leveraging your advantages

What you may lack in resources (budget and human capital) will impact the size and length of your influencer programs — you simply won't have the ability to run giant programs again and again.



Instead of breadth of programs, focus on depth of relationships. In other words, do more with less. Spend time upfront identifying influencers who really embody your brand, and develop true, one-on-one working relationships with them. If you can't pay them in cash, "pay" them with valuable products, insider information, and attention. Treat them as extensions of your workforce. Consider developing brand ambassador programs that span several months.

If you have a lesser-known brand, you have more creative freedom. The social media influencer sphere is attracted to innovation and self-expression. The less forced influencer marketing is (that is, the less a brand insists on

stringent brand and editorial guidelines when working with influencers), the more likely the program will be to garner users' attention. Take chances and let your influencers get creative with their assignments!

As you're working to create more awareness of your brand, you're building out your social media presence. Influencer marketing is especially useful at helping companies build their social media followings on Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, and so on.



Focusing your influencer marketing goals on shorter-term wins, such as building up your social media following, means you'll be better able to track successes. "Brand awareness" is a good goal, but it's tricky to measure and expensive to achieve on a broad, national scale. Influencer marketing goals need to be realistic and achievable, especially if your resources are constrained.

Avoiding common mistakes



Some approaches to influencer marketing simply won't work, regardless of the size of the company trying to implement them. But we've found a disappointing pattern among small to midsize organizations trying to implement influencer marketing for the first time. Don't fall into these traps:

- **Don't underestimate the cost of running influencer marketing programs.** Too many companies turn to influencer marketing because they mistakenly think it's a cheap, easy alternative to other marketing tactics. It's not! Producing amazing and demonstrably valuable campaigns takes dedicated time and resources. That doesn't mean you can't get great bang for your buck (as we outline in this book), but don't approach influencer marketing as though it's a quick fix for marketing ails.
- **Ensure that influencer marketing is only a portion of your marketing budget.** We recommend no more than 20 percent of your total marketing budget for smaller organizations. ***Remember:*** Influencer marketing amplifies traditional marketing efforts, but it doesn't replace them.
- **Think about what your success metrics are going to be and how you'll get there.** Are you tracking sentiment, brand lift, coupon distribution, social media followers? With what tools and benchmarks? Whatever your goals, start with a small, in-house program with a handful of influencers and let them serve as your benchmark. Too many organizations throw together influencer programs with unrealistic expectations ("Our hashtag will go *viral!*") and no way to measure success.

Finding an approach that works for you

You want to get the most out of your investment, especially since your marketing dollars are likely to be spread thin. Keep these tips in mind as you approach influencer marketing:

- **Given your more limited resources, focus on influencer marketing programs that truly amplify your other marketing efforts rather than programs that operate completely independently from them.** If you have a product promo code or sale, use influencers to get that code spread far and wide. If you're launching a product in stores, coordinate your influencer efforts to launch at the same time. Do you have TV, YouTube, radio, or podcast content you're proud of? Work with influencers to share that content with their audience.
- **Use influencer marketing to increase awareness of and followers to your social media channels or to increase your email marketing list.** This is easier to do if your influencers have one simple, clear, and consistent message.
- **Keep your goals realistic, measurable, and short term.**
- **Nurture the relationships you develop with your influencers.** You want them to become vocal advocates for your brand — both online and off — even when they aren't being paid to do so.
- **Reuse the content that your influencers create!** Their content can populate your other social channels and resonate with your audience because the content came from users and not just the brand. This is especially true for Facebook, where you're constantly searching for new content that will engage your readers; posting images and blog links is fast and easy, and very relatable.

If you're a startup brand

Being a startup is tough in every way. You're struggling to build something great internally, while ensuring that potential customers know you exist. Often startups turn to influencer marketing because they think it's a fast, cheap (read: free) way to get a lot of traction with brand awareness. And although that's not exactly true, there are ways to make influencer marketing work for startups.

Leveraging your advantages

The very best advantage you have as a startup is that you're new and fresh. Maybe you want to be first to market with a cool new concept. Maybe you can do something no one has seen before!

Find influencers who care about being trendy and who want to know, see, or do things before their peers, and appeal to this desire — you've got something no one else has. If you can't pay them, offer them first looks, tours of your workspace, beta versions of products before they're on the market, or stock/equity in your company.

Be creative! As you're trying to get your brand name out there, you have tons of freedom to try new things. PR "stunts" are safer to try. Consider collaborating with potential influencers to do something radical!



You don't have to limit your influencer activity to writing reviews of your product. Consider reaching out to influencers and using them as beta testers. Bloggers can make amazing virtual focus groups. Sometimes, early feedback makes all the difference between a startup succeeding or failing. If you don't have the resources to pay an influencer to write a public-facing review, the influencer may still be willing to work with you to give you private feedback.

Avoiding common mistakes

Startups tend to make the following mistakes when it comes to influencer marketing. Avoid doing the following:

- **Assuming influencer marketing is quick or cheap:** Influencer marketing takes a lot of time and resources, two things most startups don't often have. Unless there is a clear strategic marketing goal that influencers can help you achieve (such as beta testing), don't waste your startup energy.
- **Trying influencer marketing if your product is an app:** If you're promoting an app, you may want to reconsider influencer marketing. Yes, it can be a fabulous tool for long-term boosts in searches — if you engage a handful of bloggers to include your app as part of a blog series on "perfect apps for kindergarteners," you can be sure that parents who search for "kindergarten apps" will discover those posts. But you won't see a surge of downloads directly from blog posts. Don't max out your marketing budget hiring 50 bloggers to write about your app thinking you'll see thousands and thousands of downloads as a result. Influencer marketing is not direct response — it will never convert at the rate a startup app needs.

Finding an approach that works for you

If you're limited in resources and budget, be very deliberate in how to leverage influencers and know exactly what you're going to get out of a program before you start one.