

Influencer Marketing Playbook 2026

How to run influencer & product-seeding campaigns that actually generate sales - for ecom founders on any budget. Velox Growth Marketing Course | Updated 2026

This is a **playbook, not a checklist** - work it in sequence. The strategy is built on four pillars, then executed in six phases. All templates you need (outreach messages, compensation tiers, research sheet, campaign planner, contract, brief) are inline below - no external tools required to start.

The big idea (Tarte Cosmetics, adapted for small brands)

The best beauty brands (Tarte Cosmetics is the textbook case) win influencer marketing through **memorable gestures + brand association + virality**, not just by paying for posts. Tarte sent influencers premium surprise gifts alongside the product, ran all-expenses viral trips with a branded hashtag, and folded influencers into their personal lives (concert seats, birthday gifts, flowers for milestones). The mechanism that scales down to your budget isn't the spend - it's the **thoughtfulness and the coordinated burst**. You replicate the *effect* with personalised themed mailers, micro-influencer clusters, and a tightly-timed launch, not a luxury flight.

The four pillars:

1. Get influencers to say yes.
 2. Build a launch plan with maximum impact and virality.
 3. Convert the buzz into actual revenue (£££).
 4. Keep momentum and make it repeatable.
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Influencer tiers (by follower count)

Tier	Followers	Strengths	Use when
Nano	1k-10k	Highest engagement, close-knit, trusted	Local/niche products, tight budget, seeding
Micro	10k-50k	Strong niche influence, affordable	The sweet spot for most small ecom brands
Macro	50k-500k	Larger reach, professional content	Brand awareness once you have budget
Mega	500k+	Celebrity reach, major impact	Rarely worth it for small brands

Default recommendation for a first campaign: 10 nano/micro influencers, not one big name. More audiences, more authentic, far cheaper, and you can test what works.

How to vet an influencer (the metrics that matter)

Pick educators, not entertainers. Someone who *explains* (ingredients, how-to, why-it-works) has a more trusting, higher-converting audience than a pure entertainer. Example: a skincare expert who teaches > a lifestyle influencer who only shows their routine. (Applies to any niche - a home-cook who explains technique > a generic foodie; a gear expert who tests kit > a lifestyle outdoors account.)

Engagement rate = (Total Likes + Comments) ÷ Followers × 100. Example: 10k followers, 500 likes + 50 comments avg = 5.5%. Vet on the **average of their 5 most recent posts, excluding outliers**. Minimum bar: 3–4%. Prioritise engagement over raw follower count, always.

Also check:

- **Follower count fits the goal** - niche product often does better with a smaller, engaged audience.
 - **Audience demographics match your target** - read their comments, see who likes their posts. Would *their* followers want *your* product? This is the make-or-break check.
 - **Content quality** - would you be happy with this on your own site/ads?
 - **Past brand collaborations** - proof they can deliver, and a signal of what they charge.
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Compensation guidelines (UK market estimate)

Use as a starting framework - adjust for your margins and their engagement. Affiliate fees apply on top in every tier.

Followers	Engagement	Typical pay (per post)	+ Product gift
1k–10k	any	Free product (+ affiliate)	-
10k–20k	4–5%	£50–£100	£50
10k–20k	5–7%	£100–£150	£50
10k–20k	7%+	£150–£200	£50
20k–50k	4–5%	£150–£200	product gift
20k–50k	5–7%	£200–£300	product gift
20k–50k	7%+	£300–£400	product gift

Principles: prioritise high engagement over high follower count; offer non-monetary comp (free product, exclusivity, exposure) to micro-influencers; **always use unique affiliate links/discount codes** so you can pay on performance and track ROI.

How to find good influencers

1. **Instagram search & hashtags** - start broad (e.g. #naturalbeauty), then niche down (#organicskincare). Add geo hashtags (#UKSkincare) for regional targeting. Watch

trending hashtags in your category. (*Swap in your own niche's hashtag ladder - the method is identical for apparel, food, home, fitness, etc.*)

2. **Research their followers** - influencers follow each other; their engaged followers are often influencers too.
 3. **Instagram Explore page** - engage with niche content so the algorithm surfaces similar creators. Use category tabs.
 4. **Influencer discovery platforms** - tools like Social Cat, AspireIQ, and Tribe; set your criteria (followers, engagement, niche) and browse AI-recommended creators.
 5. **Competitor collaborations** - who do similar brands work with? Check engagement on those posts to judge quality and likely impact.
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The four pillars (strategy)

Pillar 1 - Get influencers to say yes

- **Engage before outreach.** Like + thoughtfully comment on their posts for 7–10 days from your brand account first. Builds familiarity so your DM isn't cold.
- **Personalised outreach + themed mailer.** Show you did your homework; say *why them*. Offer a memorable on-budget package (see DM templates below).
- **Show the win-win.** Lead with what *they* get - exposure, new followers, being part of a promoted campaign.
- **Give creative freedom** within brand guidelines - authenticity converts.
- **Offer fair, competitive comp** - including a generous % of sales.

Pillar 2 - Launch plan for impact & virality

- **Joint contest giveaway** - partner 5–10 influencers on one giveaway; entrants must follow your brand + several influencers, like, tag friends. Ripple effect across all audiences.
- **Coordinated posting** - all posts within the same day/few days for a concentrated burst.
- **Viral content challenge** - e.g. a mystery-box unboxing, or a "20-second [use the product]" challenge followers can copy. Builds community + participation (TikTok excels here).
- **Trending audio** - ask influencers to use trending tunes on Reels to boost reach.

Pillar 3 - Generate £££ from the launch

- **Special promos** for anyone coming through influencers - "Buy 2 get 1 free", free gift over £X - to lift AOV + conversion. Unique code per influencer.
- **Flash sale** - limited-time offer toward the end of / day after the launch, riding the buzz.
- **Loyalty program** - start it *before* the launch so new buyers sign up for perks.

Pillar 4 - Keep momentum, make it repeatable

- **Personal touch** - periodic gifts/notes even after the campaign.
 - **Ongoing collaboration** - recurring offers to the same influencers build loyalty + consistency.
 - **Ask for feedback** - send new products for their thoughts (no posting required); makes them feel involved.
 - **Public shoutouts** - recognise them on your channels; builds goodwill and free continued promotion.
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Product seeding campaign - the 6-phase plan

Product seeding = send free product to selected influencers for honest review/promotion. Cheapest entry point; also generates UGC you can reuse on site/ads/email. Cons: no guaranteed post, variable quality, harder ROI tracking - which is why unique codes + a brief matter.

Phase 1 - Research & identify

Set selection criteria (followers 1k–50k, engagement $\geq 4\%$, your niche, audience demographics matching your target). Build a list of **at least 30** influencers - expect $\sim 25\%$ to say yes $\rightarrow$ 7–8 participants. Use the **Research Sheet** (Template 1). Confirm each is: educator not entertainer, on-niche, $\geq 3\%$ engagement, audience-matched, quality content, ideally with past collabs.

Phase 2 - Plan the campaign

Fill the **Campaign Planner** (Template 2; budget column £0 for pure seeding). Define responsibilities - you: guidelines, key messages, timely product delivery; them: create + post, tag brand, use hashtags, honest review + reply to followers. Schedule posts in a shared calendar within a 3–5 day window. Set budget (e.g. £50/influencer for product + shipping).

Phase 3 - Launch / execute

Send the **Contract** (Template 3, below) - sign via an e-signature tool like DocuSign or Adobe Sign. Send the **Influencer Brief** (Template 4, below) so content aligns. Ship products with a personalised note + product info. Try unique, thoughtful packaging - it drives the spontaneous shoutout.

Phase 4 - Monitor, retarget & optimise

Track every post, capture the content, retarget engaged audiences with ads, and note what worked for next time.

Phase 5 - Convert (apply Pillar 3)

Promos, unique codes, flash sale, loyalty signups - turn the reach into revenue.

Phase 6 - Retain (apply Pillar 4)

Keep the relationships warm so campaign 2 is faster and cheaper.

KPIs to track after the campaign

- **Engagement rate** (all posts and per influencer) = $(\text{Likes} + \text{Comments}) \div \text{Followers} \times 100$. Feed into future selection.
 - **Conversions** - sales/actions, tracked via unique discount code per influencer.
 - **ROI** = $(\text{Revenue} - \text{Cost}) \div \text{Cost} \times 100$. Example: £2,000 sales from £500 = 300% ROI.
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Templates (inline - copy & adapt)

Outreach DM / email templates

1. First touch (personalised + soft mailer offer)

"Hi [name], we love your post about [specific thing]! Your passion for [their niche] aligns perfectly with our [product line]. I'd love to send you a little something to your place if you're up for it?" *Themed mailer idea: a "[theme] night" package - your product + a small complementary item + a handwritten note.*

2. Win-win / exposure angle

"Our campaign will be heavily promoted with paid spend behind it, giving you significant exposure to new audiences alongside other creators."

3. Compensation offer

"We offer £[X] per post plus [Y]% of revenue generated through your unique link, and free product worth £[Z]."

4. Joint giveaway invite

"We're launching a collaborative giveaway and would love you as one of our select creators. It's built to maximise reach through a giveaway, exclusive discount codes, and paid promotion." *Contest copy for the post:* "To enter: follow our brand and 3 of the [N] participating creators, like this post, and tag 3 friends who'd love this."

5. Creative freedom + simplicity reassurance

"We value your style - showcase it in a way that resonates with your audience. We'll handle all logistics and give you clear guidelines and support throughout."

6. Transparent full offer (combined)

"This is a collaborative giveaway to grow brand awareness and sales. We offer £100 per post, free product worth £50, and 25% of all revenue through your link. All posts go live the same week to maximise impact."

7. Retention / feedback touch (post-campaign)

"Hey [name], I'd love your thoughts on a product we're developing - no need to promote it, I just want to send it over and hear your honest feedback!"

Template 1 & 2 - Research Sheet + Campaign Planner (spreadsheet)

Both live in one Excel file with two tabs. The Research Sheet works out engagement rate for you - you only type three numbers per influencer.

Download: [Influencer Campaign Templates \(Excel\)](#)

First step (do this once): open the file and **make your own copy** - File > Make a copy (Google Sheets) or Save As (Excel). The shared version is a master template; always work in your own copy so you don't overwrite it for other members.

How to use Tab 1 - Research Sheet (step by step)

This is where you build and qualify your shortlist of 30+ influencers, one row per influencer.

1. **Find an influencer** (use the "How to find good influencers" section above) and add a row.
2. **Fill the basics:** Influencer name (@handle), Platform (IG / TikTok / YouTube), Niche/category.
3. **Enter the three numbers** from the average of their last 5 posts (ignore any one viral outlier): **Follower count, Avg likes, Avg comments.**
4. **Engagement rate fills itself.** The column is a formula - $(\text{likes} + \text{comments}) \div \text{followers} \times 100$. You don't type anything here. Read it as your first filter: **aim for 3-4% minimum**; prioritise high engagement over a big follower count.
5. **Qualify the row:** Audience match (Y/N + a note on whether *their* followers fit your target), Educator or entertainer (prefer educator), Past brand collabs (who, and how good).
6. **Work the outreach:** add their Contact (DM/email), then keep the **Status** column current - *not contacted* → *contacted* → *agreed / declined* → *posted*. This column is how you see your pipeline at a glance.
7. **On agreement:** record Comp agreed (£ + % + product) and the Unique code/link you'll give them for tracking.

Tip: build the list to 30+ rows before you start outreach. At ~25% acceptance you'll land 7-8 active influencers, which is the right size for a first campaign.

How to use Tab 2 - Campaign Planner (step by step)

Once you have your agreed influencers, this tab turns the plan into one shared source of truth. It's laid out as Field / Example / Your value - you only fill the **Your value** column.

1. **Carry over your influencers** from the Research Sheet (the rows with Status = agreed) into "Participating influencers".
2. **Set the campaign basics:** name/theme, goal, and the posting Window - keep it a tight 3–5 day burst so all posts land together for maximum impact.
3. **Set the budget** per influencer (e.g. £50 for product + shipping; £0 cash for pure seeding).
4. **Define the content:** content type required (Reel / carousel / Story), the hashtags/mentions every influencer must include, and the unique code per influencer (copy these from the Research Sheet so they match).
5. **Plan the conversion levers:** the Promo for their audience (e.g. "Buy 2 get 1 free") and any Flash sale date + offer for the end of the burst.
6. **Assign ownership:** use Owner / next action so nothing stalls - who is chasing each influencer, shipping each product, checking each post went live.

Use this tab as your live checklist during the campaign - update it as products ship and posts go live.

Template 3 - Contract outline (plain-English)

1. **Parties** - brand + influencer (name, handle, contact).
2. **Deliverables** - exact posts (e.g. 1 Reel + 2 Stories), platform, required tags/hashtags, posting window.
3. **Compensation** - cash, product value, affiliate % and how it's tracked/paid, payment timing.
4. **Content rights / usage** - your right to repurpose their content on site, ads, email, and for how long.
5. **Disclosure** - influencer must follow advertising rules (e.g. #ad / paid partnership label).
6. **Exclusivity** (optional) - no competing brand within X days.
7. **Approval** - whether you review before posting (keep light to preserve authenticity).
8. **Term & termination** - dates, what happens if posts don't go live.
9. **Signatures** - both parties; sign via DocuSign/Adobe Sign.

Template 4 - Influencer Brief (send with the product)

- **About the brand** - 2–3 lines + your values.
- **The product** - what it is, key benefits, how to use, one "wow" detail to mention.
- **Campaign goal** - awareness / sales / UGC.
- **What to post** - format(s), how many, posting window.
- **Must-haves** - tag @brand, hashtags, mention the unique code, disclosure label.
- **Creative freedom** - "make it yours; here are the guardrails."

- **Don'ts** - claims to avoid, competitor mentions, etc.
 - **Your contact** - for questions + logistics.
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Need a hand?

Want the **actual outreach DMs or Reel/UGC scripts written for you**, or have a question on anything in this playbook? Just ask the **Velox AI assistant** in the chat - for example: "write 5 influencer outreach DMs for [your brand]", "script an unboxing Reel", or "how do I fill in the research sheet?"
