

Afluencer
Lead-gen report
(Text-only version)

Fast Forward to Sold: Kickstarting Your Influencer Marketing Program

As marketing budgets shrink and buyers grow more skeptical of sales messaging, savvy retailers are embracing a surer path to consumer trust: influencer marketing. Viewed as relatable and aspirational, influencers are closer to customers than almost anyone, say Deloitte researchers, enabling brands to move, sway and sell at the speed of culture.¹

But how effective is influencer marketing, really? And how can retailers reduce risks and boost their chances of success? We'll answer those questions in this resource, arming you with what you need to know to kickstart an influencer marketing experiment — your first steps toward a profitable program.

The Opportunity: Understanding the Current Landscape

In 2022, 77% of surveyed brand marketers² have a dedicated budget for influencer marketing, and for good reason: Eight in 10 consumers say they've purchased, researched or considered a product or service they saw on social media, according to a survey by Matter Communications, a digital marketing firm.³ The sway of influencers is such that ROI has been found to be 11X greater than other digital marketing tactics, generating \$5.20 for every dollar spent, reports Shopify.⁴

Lead quality is another biggie: 77% of brand marketers report the quality of customers from influencer marketing campaigns exceeds that of other marketing tactics. It's another reason why four in five brand marketers are increasing their spend in influencer collabs over the next several months: "This is further proof that influencer marketing remains successful and shows no sign of disappearing or being a fad," writes the Influencer Marketing Hub.⁵

4 Notable Shifts Fueling Influencer Impact

» *The rise of micro-influencers*

As it happens, follower count doesn't always signal effectiveness, shares Brett Owens, founder of Afluencer — a searchable, matchmaking platform where brands and influencers find one another. Put simply, influence follows trust, and users don't necessarily trust celebrities with massive followings.

¹ [2022 Global Marketing Trends](#) | Deloitte

² [The State of Influencer Marketing 2022](#) | Influencer Marketing Hub

³ [Matter Survey Reveals Consumers Find Influencers More Helpful and Trustworthy than Brands During the Pandemic](#) | Matter

⁴ [30+ Influencer Marketing Statistics to Have on Your Radar \(2022\)](#) | Shopify

⁵ [The State of Influencer Marketing 2022](#) | Influencer Marketing Hub

Brand marketers have caught on to that, with 77% favoring micro-influencers (those with roughly 5,000 to 20,000 followers) over macro-influencers with much larger audiences.⁶

“The great thing about micro-influencers is that their content is really authentic and relatable,” said Katie Freiberg, head of growth marketing at ThirdLove, in a McKinsey podcast.⁷ Alessandra Sales, vice president of growth at Ipsy, agreed: “In the early days, companies were going after followers, and so they were mostly engaged with macro-influencers. But then what you see often is that it doesn’t pay off, because this audience might not be as engaged, might not relate to that particular influencer, the conversions are not really there. So companies started optimizing for quality over quantity,” she explained in the podcast.

There’s also the issue of affordability. Influencer A with 3,000 followers and Influencer B with 300,000 followers can both be successful partners, notes Owens, but one allows you to experiment for \$100, versus \$1,000.

» *The evolution from influencer to creator*

For years, Dr. Courtney Williamson sold back braces she’d designed for patients with neuromuscular disorders. During the pandemic, she decided to market her company, AbiliLife, to the general public, turning to influencer marketing to reach consumers struggling with back pain. “Influencers turned out content I would not have gotten in a studio,” she shares: “I was surprised by how knowledgeable and intuitive these creators are in relaying my brand message and making it compelling to users.”

More than reviewing or posing with products, social media content creators are poised to become the next iteration of the creative agency, writes Deloitte: “This means moving the relationship from ‘influencer’ to ‘creator’ and putting those individuals at the center of the brand to work on bigger-picture creative challenges.”⁸

Unsurprisingly, influencers increasingly crave creative control, with 83% regarding it as their priority.⁹ That’s a good thing: “Allowing influencers more control over their content is a win-win for brands and consumers looking for authenticity,” writes Sedge Beswick, Seen Connects founder, in an opinion piece for The Drum.¹⁰

» *The sway of short-form videos*

⁶ [30+ Influencer Marketing Statistics to Have on Your Radar \(2022\)](#) | Shopify

⁷ [Discussions in digital: Influencer marketing is ready for its close-up](#) | McKinsey

⁸ [2022 Global Marketing Trends](#) | Deloitte

⁹ [Key Influencer Marketing Statistics You Need to Know for 2022](#) | Influencer Marketing Hub

¹⁰ [Why influencers should be in the brainstorm, not just the briefing](#) | The Drum

TikTok. Reels. YouTube Shorts. Whatever you call it, short-form video has the highest ROI of any social media strategy, favored by 59% of marketers, reports HubSpot: “The platforms are increasingly prioritizing short-form video in their algorithms, and if you aren’t already exploring the use of this medium, now is the time to start,” writes Crystal King, social media professor at HubSpot.¹¹

Short-form videos can also exceed an influencer’s organic reach. “Having a good following helps, but it’s not like email marketing where your email list is your ceiling. With video, influencers can get a reach they couldn’t before,” Owens explains.

» ***Emerging demographics to watch***

What do influencers look like? Increasingly, they look like you, your child, your grandpa, or the immigrant next door, as diverse as consumers can be. Though younger consumers still make up the bulk of social media audiences, diverse influencer demographics and categories are on the rise.

A few notable examples:

- From cooking to menopause, life advice or health tips, creators aged 50 and older are building a strong following across generations.¹²
- Couples are emerging as a new wave of successful influencers, using their relationship to build a brand.¹³
- Foodie creators are adding their own creative spin on cuisine and inspiring followers to do the same.¹⁴
- New categories like financial influencers, skin care influencers and pet influencers are also gaining traction.¹⁵

It’s worth noting diversity comes in many flavors, from age to ethnicity, geographic location, cultural background, body shapes, and more. Looking ahead, Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) will become the new standard of influencer campaigns as consumers demand more inclusive spaces, representation and narratives.¹⁶

“Get as much content as you can, from many viewpoints,” says Dr. Williamson. “I know the type of aesthetic I go for, but I’m not my customer, so I have to step back and look at diversity,” she explains: “I don’t want to alienate someone who needs my product because they didn’t feel represented.”

¹¹ [State of Inbound Marketing Trends](#) | HubSpot

¹² [43 Social Media Influencers Over 50 Proving It’s Never Too Late to Try the Web](#) | Afluencer

¹³ [20 Surprising Influencer Marketing Statistics](#) | Digital Marketing Institute

¹⁴ [The Discover List](#) | TikTok

¹⁵ [Key Influencer Marketing Statistics You Need to Know for 2022](#) | Influencer Marketing Hub

¹⁶ [Key Influencer Marketing Statistics You Need to Know for 2022](#) | Influencer Marketing Hub

Piloting Your Influencer Marketing Program

Few marketing strategies are as easy and affordable to test as influencer marketing. Lucky for brands, getting started doesn't require hefty investments in time or money, nor does it require finely-tuned processes or having all the answers from the get-go.

Instead, astute marketers view influencer campaigns as experiments to be refined and recalibrated over time. It's ok (smart, even) to start small and adapt as you go, building on early wins.

The following steps will boost your chances of success from the very first collab.

» *Defining goals and success metrics*

As the adage goes, "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it." Successful influencer marketing campaigns start with a clear goal and performance metrics.

Marketers surveyed by the Influencer Marketing Hub reported sales (36.7%), brand awareness (35.7%), and building a library of user-generated content (27.6%) as their top objectives for influencer campaigns.¹⁷ Other campaign objectives might include reputation management, traffic generation, or amplification of other cross-channel tactics.

According to HubSpot, common performance metrics include:¹⁸

- sales (37%)
- likes/comments (33%)
- website traffic (33%)
- impressions/views (30%)
- clicks (27%)

It's fine to keep it simple, using metrics to help you steer the next iteration of your experiment.

» *Selecting your best-fit collaborators*

Once goals are defined, it's time to clarify expectations and your selection criteria for ideal influencers. "We take essential marketing principles and apply them here," Owens explains: "You want influencers whose followers and content themes are aligned with what you're selling, and with who's buying what you're selling."

Doug Allan grew and sold various brands before founding Calm Moment, a line of CBD-infused beverages. Aside from ensuring influencers are aligned with his target customers, Allan also reviews

¹⁷ [The State of Influencer Marketing 2022](#) | Influencer Marketing Hub

¹⁸ [State of Inbound Marketing Trends](#) | HubSpot

basic metrics: followers, engagement rates, number of comments, geographic location. “If it passes the sniff test, a \$100 experiment with a micro-influencer helps me to gauge if they’ll do well. If I lose that \$100, it’s no big deal,” he shares.

For Dr. Williamson, 1,000 followers tends to be the minimum she’d consider, though she’s learned to keep an open mind. “Sometimes influencers with a small following will turn out the most beautiful content; you’d be surprised. I’ve learned to prioritize authenticity over follower count,” she explains. To that end, she selects collaborators who seem genuine, joyful, and who can educate in a way that’s engaging. “I do shy away from accounts where every other post is an advertisement,” she notes.

» ***Considering compensation***

Historically, brands paying influencers with free samples outnumbered those offering monetary compensation. This is changing. In 2022, 34.4% of brands pay influencers, and 49% of payments entail a flat rate, reports the Influencer Marketing Hub. That’s still a relatively low percentage, the report notes.¹⁹

Owens agrees, adding that affiliate marketing is falling out of favor for the same reason: Experienced influencers excel at what they do, and expect to be compensated fairly for their effort and expertise, versus getting paid on some contingency they may not have any control over. “Offering pay upfront is a big help in securing quality collaborators,” he says.

It’s a lesson Allan has learned over the years. “Before influencer marketing existed, we did affiliate marketing. It was difficult to manage and find ROI. In recent years, influencers have become a heck of a lot more professional, and our approach to compensation has matured accordingly,” he shares.

Aside from targeted, one-on-one influencer pitches, brands using the Afluencer platform also make campaign offers searchable to influencers. “You detail your offer and expectations. You might include a rate range, or list one rate to micro-influencers and something different to higher-tier influencers, for example. Influencers who apply know what they’re getting into,” Owens explains. “And who knows? You might get someone who typically charges a lot more but they like your product and are willing to work with you for less” — he muses.

» ***Developing your pitch***

Pitching influencers is akin to pitching customers in the sense that you’re selling a benefit. You’ll want to highlight how the collab benefits them, with rewards including cash, free products, exclusive discounts, access to the brand’s audience, and more.

¹⁹ [The State of Influencer Marketing 2022](#) | Influencer Marketing Hub

You'll also want to clarify expectations, keeping requirements practical — not overwhelming. It's helpful to present your pitch on a landing page, mixing personalized outreaches with a "homebase" where influencers can learn more about your program, terms and conditions.

One way to get influencers' attention is to use a platform like Afluencer, which influencers already use and trust, versus cold-messaging via Instagram or TikTok. "Brands tell us that when they contact influencers randomly, that person may not know what they're doing in terms of promoting a product," Owens shares. For Dr. Williamson, the platform's built-in credibility also helps her build rapport with influencers who might have been burned by brands in the past.

To that end, Dr. Williamson is a big advocate of the golden rule: treating influencers the way you'd want to be treated. "Sunny," an influencer liaison with Sunny Bay who'd prefer to keep her name private, also subscribes to that philosophy: "I get personal. I treat my influencers like they're my customers. I try to anticipate their needs and alleviate their pains, so we tend to maintain good relationships."

» ***De-risking and accelerating campaign goals***

Reasonably, the success of any influencer marketing campaign hinges largely on the influencer doing the marketing. Traditionally, trying to find, vet and secure the right influencers could be a pain.

"How do you sort through millions of people? Years ago, you might start with who had the most followers, but then you also had to find attributes to match brand standards. You'd have this spreadsheet to help you navigate your options. It took a ton of time," Allan recalls.

No wonder many brands outsourced the whole *shebang*, with mixed results. "I once paid a company to manage our influencer marketing and it didn't go well. Many of our influencers weren't effective because we didn't choose them and had no control," Sunny shares.

The predicament sounds familiar, says Dr. Williamson: "I found a lot of overpriced agencies that promised me the world. But it made me nervous not to be in control; I like to connect one-on-one with my influencers." Afluencer bridged the gap to deliver easy control, she shares: "It's intuitive, and there's a sense of credibility on both ends."

For Owens, this is common feedback from brands who come to Afluencer. "Brand marketers are often surprised to learn that influencers are active, opt-in users of our platform. They want to be there," Owens explains. "Once there's a match, we set up a direct message. If you want to take the conversation to email, phone, whatever — we don't restrict that; we just make the introduction."

Taking the first step

“I regret not starting earlier,” says Dr. Williamson. “For founders, it can be scary to see beautifully manicured brands who are so far ahead, but those brands started somewhere. You need to start now.”

Brand leaders like Williamson, who’ve tested the impact of influencer marketing, continue to raise their investment. “After a few years of robust growth in influencer marketing, you might have anticipated marketing budgets to have shifted to the next big thing. However, that hasn’t happened. Brands and marketers recognize the effectiveness of influencer marketing and are not searching for something new,” reports the Influencer Marketing Hub.²⁰

Do set realistic expectations and be consistent, Allan advises: “No single post is going to set your brand on fire and change your future. You can’t afford a Kardashian.” Instead, find a variety of influencers who fit your criteria, and pay attention to your customers. “Experiment continuously, be patient and consistent,” Allan concludes: “You’re going to win more than you lose.”

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²⁰ [The State of Influencer Marketing 2022](#) | Influencer Marketing Hub