

# Best Practices in Social Influencer Marketing

Social influencers have been around as long as society itself. A study on the 1940 U.S. Presidential election by sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz revealed that voters were more inclined to listen to the opinions of local leaders and political commentators than speeches made by the candidates themselves. In a subsequent book<sup>1</sup>, Lazarsfeld and Katz introduced a two-step communication model which shows that ideas flow from mass media to opinion leaders, and then to a wider population. The opinion leaders themselves gain their influence through more elite media, as opposed to mainstream mass media. Today's social media fits this model precisely.

For decades, retailers have seen increases in sales when trusted experts or celebrities endorse their products or services. Movies that get good reviews tend to sell more tickets than those with bad ones. Actors endorse beauty products, watches, clothing, more. Now, with social media woven into our daily lives, more and more business buyers and consumers are reading reviews, tweets, Facebook posts, and blog posts about products or services before they decide to buy.

## Online social influence is powerful

An endorsement from a respected voice can go a long way in raising awareness. For example, The Macallan single malt Scotch whisky distillery invited a group of well-known food, spirits, and lifestyle influencers to a free tasting introducing a new specialty whisky in a signature flask. They encouraged these influencers to write about the event afterwards, which they gladly did. By doing this, Macallan was able to spread its message to over 150,000 people for the price of one free tasting.

Influencer Marketing, as practiced in a commercial context, includes four main activities:

- **Identifying** influencers, and ranking them in order of importance.
- **Marketing to** influencers, to increase awareness of the firm within the influencer community.
- **Marketing through** influencers, using influencers to increase market awareness of the firm amongst target markets.
- **Marketing with** influencers, turning influencers into advocates of the firm.

Social influence has three core metrics:

- **Reach:** how many people an influencer reaches.
- **Resonance:** the extent to which people are influenced.
- **Relevance:** how relevant the influencer is to both the audience and the product or service.

In pure marketing terms, social media influencers deliver commentary that boils down to free publicity, enhanced by the authenticity of the known and trusted opinion maker. This can be a home run. But how do you make it happen? You'll need to take a measured approach to attracting social influencers in order to maximize your ROI.

<sup>1</sup> Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955), *Personal Influence*, New York: Free Press

## Choose the right influencers

Social influence is hard to measure. Platforms such as Klout and Peek Analytics attempt to quantify it by analyzing the number of people who interact with an influencer online through likes, comments, shares, and other interactions, but their results can be manipulated. For example, a would-be influencer could get a group of people to systematically retweet everything they say.

To be an effective influencer, the individual must have a distinctive view in a niche – without that, no one would pay attention to them in the first place. Tamsen Webster, Sr. VP at Boston-based agency Allen & Gerritsen, says there are four main types of influencers: Connected Catalysts, Passionate Publishers, Everyday Advocates, and Altruistic Activators.

- **Connected Catalysts** are celebrities and other recognizable figures. They gain massive exposure and generate immediate action. However, since they are often paid to appear in television and magazine ads, they are least likely to be deliberately pursued as social media influencers.
- **Passionate Publishers** generate buzz at the scale of their size. They generally are magazines and other publications dedicated to the analysis of their respective fields. They're less likely to be big players in the social media sphere, but it's important to recognize them because of the influence they have in traditional publishing.
- **Everyday Advocates** are customers who post reviews of products on websites such as Yelp and Consumer Reports. While their interactions with your company are usually limited to their experiences with your product or service, it's important to monitor their reviews. A negative review on Yelp can bury a small business; however, if your company can respond to the reviewer and fix their problem, it can turn negative publicity into positive attention and make you look both honest and heroic.
- **Altruistic Activators** should be your main target in your search for social media influencers. They are

"If you're at a cocktail party, you don't just rush up and jump in to a conversation. You listen. You try to add value, try to establish some level of credibility. I think the same is true when it comes to influence in the social sphere."

— Michael Troiano  
Chief Marketing Officer, Actifio

independent analysts whose opinions are valued by a large population of your target demographic. Because they are so trusted to deliver their objective personal opinions in an informal setting, they can be effective promoters of your products and services.

The number of potential customers the influencer can reach should also affect your choice. However, it's also important to consider what kind of an audience the influencer can reach. If your company develops mobile apps, you won't try to get Rihanna to write about them, even though she has thirty million followers on Twitter – this news isn't important to her audience. However, if you were to reach out to @BrianSolis, a prominent digital analyst and sociologist, about your new app, his endorsement would reach a relevant audience, and would resonate more with it, too.

In short, make sure the influencer:

- Has a unique, well-defined position within their field
- Is in an industry relevant for your goods or services
- Holds views are consistent with the services your product or service offers

## Attracting influencers to your product or service

After identifying the influencers who could help your business, attracting them is the next step. This is different from establishing a partnership with another company. You need to turn influencers on to your company, product, or service before you ask them to endorse it, or try to arrange circumstances so that they choose to endorse it without being asked.

- Don't badger social influencers. You want to build a relationship, not transact a deal. Influencers are human like everyone else. Your relationship will be stronger if you can attract them rather than pursue them. And nobody likes to be nagged.
- Rather than asking what social influencers can do for you, offer what you can do for them. Inform them first (and perhaps exclusively) of your hot new product or service, give them freebies, or propose interviews so they can get material for their personal works. Only after they enjoy your services should you start angling for their endorsements – if they haven't already done so of their own accord.
- One of the easiest ways to grease the wheels of this process is to build a relationship that emphasizes the respect you have for the influencer. Refer to them as the eminent voice in their field, ask them for their valuable insight, quote them in your content, or curate one of their posts. Let them know you take them seriously.
- Be subtle. If you try too hard to gain their favor, they may feel like they're being used. And while this doesn't make getting their endorsement impossible, it certainly makes it less likely.

## Incorporating social influencers into your greater social strategy

Attracting social influencers and being active on social media are two parts of a greater whole. Social media is an effective marketing tool for your product or services. It's also the best way find respected voices in your industry and position yourself to be “discovered” by them.

- **Twitter** is an especially easy tool to use. Searching for key terms in the Twitter search bar is a great way to identify possible targets to reach out to. Twitter lists compile groups of likeminded people, so if you find one influencer on a list, you're very likely to find a lot more in the same place.
- **LinkedIn** considers influencers so important that in October 2012 it launched an “Influencers” panel of business moguls, Internet bloggers, self-help

gurus, and entrepreneurs, inviting them to share their thoughts in blog posts. LinkedIn's editorial team uses an algorithm to identify candidates, then invites them to join the small, select influencer team. Influencer posts are highlighted on the home page and in LinkedIn's email outreach, and can be accessed under the Interests tab, grouped by channel. Current team members include Bill Gates, Jamie Dimon, Jeff Immelt, Richard Branson, and Tony Robbins.

- **Facebook** has relatively limited use as a B2B platform for social media influencers. For example, Chris Brogan, an author and entrepreneur known for his social media expertise, has over 230,000 followers on Twitter, but only has about 13,000 on Facebook. It's a somewhat different story for B2C. If you're targeting a consumer audience that spends a lot of time on Facebook, you might explore your options here. As an example, 40% of surveyed travelers used social media sites to research and plan their last trip, with 76% using Facebook for that purpose.
- **Google+** is becoming a more informal version of LinkedIn. Right now it's primarily used to create and share articles, creating a lot of potential for social media influencers. Additionally, it recently unveiled the new Ripple feature, which allows you to see how many people share your posts, and how people react to them. Depending on your location, Google+ may or may not be a priority for you. According to GlobalWebIndex data from Q2 2012, it had just 6% of U.S. internet users. (This is worth keeping track of, as social networks can be very volatile, exploding into popularity as the result of a single inflection point.) Worldwide, penetration goes much deeper, with 100 million users in China, more than 40 million in India, and more than 20 million each in Brazil and Indonesia. (eMarketer, May 2013)

There are literally hundreds more social networks and sites, so you have plenty of choices. The most important thing is to know where your customers and potential buyers spend their time, and concentrate your efforts there.

## What to do to become an influencer

Everyone is an influencer to some extent. Each time you interact with someone, you are influencing them in some way. However, there are ways to increase your influence in the online world.

Remember that to be an influencer, you need to have a unique point of view. You must also be authentic, and offer insights to your audience that feel fresh to them. Otherwise, you're just one more mouthpiece in the social media echo chamber.

An easy way to do this is to be in a position where you hear about things sooner than the general population. CEOs, reporters, and authors tend to have the biggest followings out of all online influencers, because they have the most up-to-date information. Don't worry if you don't fall into one of these categories, though; with the Internet, it's easier than ever both to find new information and to post your opinion on it.

- Make your voice heard. When you're just starting up in the influencing game, it's hard to stand out above everyone else's chatter. Include "share" icons and options for all your content, and ask your friends and colleagues to use them. Becoming an influencer is simply another form of viral marketing, only you're indirectly promoting yourself instead of your company.
- Start discussions, keep a blog, practice SEO. Good quality influencers post smart and post often. If you keep a consistent blog with good SEO, you'll attract and accrue followers naturally. One of the easiest ways to turn people on to your own thoughts is to start discussions. Invite readers to tell you what they think in the comments section.

People much prefer to be active participants than passive ones, and if they can tell that you value their opinions, they'll be more inclined to value yours.

## Conclusion

Social influencers are a cost-effective, efficient way to raise awareness about your company, product, or services. People trust information from opinion leaders more than they trust what comes from your marketing department, so a business that does well with social influencers has an edge over its competitors. Finally, it's important to remember that influencers are building their own reputation as they build yours. By giving them something to talk about that's a good fit for their audience, you're helping them remain interesting and relevant.

### About Act-On Software

Act-On Software's cloud-based marketing automation platform is the foundation of successful marketing campaigns everywhere – from small, simple and direct, to complex globally implemented programs.

Act-On's technology features an Instant-On™ database for accelerated campaign implementation; an easy, highly intuitive user interface; and a comprehensive, feature-rich solution set. This includes a best-in-class email engine with one-click integration to leading web conferencing and CRM solutions; tools for website visitor tracking, lead scoring, lead nurturing and social media prospecting; design tools for web forms, landing pages and emails; and more.

Act-On is headquartered in Beaverton, Oregon, with offices in Roseville and San Mateo, California, and Bangalore, India.

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