

The background of the header is a photograph of several people wearing dark sunglasses, looking towards the camera. The image is slightly blurred and has a warm, golden-brown color palette.

Promotion vs. Persuasion: The new rules of Influencer Marketing

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BY NICK BURCHER, HEAD OF SOCIAL MEDIA, MEDIACOM EMEA 24 NOV 2016

Platforms like YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram are dominated by a new breed of ‘stars’ and ‘influencers’: people like you and me, who have managed to amass huge followings. But how did this happen? And what are the best ways of working with them?

User generated content has been on the rise since 2005 when sites like Flickr became popular and news outlets like CNN and the BBC began encouraging contributions from readers. Towards the end of 2005, it really took off as thousands of spectacular user generated photos powered the news reports.

Social media platforms helped capture this content. Instead of sending photos to news

organisations, for the first time people could publish content themselves, share with friends, and find their own global audience. The best example of this shifting emphasis was [Janis Krums](#)' Twitter 'TwitPic' picture of the New York Hudson River plane crash that led news front pages across the world.

Today, we're all effectively media outlets. Platforms like YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram are now dominated by new 'stars' and 'influencers' – regular people – and they look very different to the publishers that advertisers have traditionally been used to dealing with.

What this means for advertisers

Advertisers have long sought to position themselves in relevant environments to improve receptivity and recall – advertisers such as the fashion house wanting to appear in Vogue, the new cosmetics brand wanting to appear in the health and beauty section, the beer advertiser wanting to appear in the football broadcast – and today the concept of the message benefiting from the medium is now more important than ever.

Brands can now work with influencers (aka 'social media stars') on creative *and* distribution. If executed well this sort of activity can increase the authenticity of the advertiser's content and open up new audiences. Indeed, [a study by Jeetendr Sehdev](#), professor of marketing at USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, showed that 'teens perceive YouTube stars to be 90% more genuine, 17 times more engaging and 11 times more extraordinary than mainstream celebrities.'

How to run effective influencer marketing

If your brand is looking to get started with influencer marketing there are a few things you should consider. First, you need to clarify what Sir John Hegarty described as the difference between promotion (reaching people) and persuasion (moving them to action).

Although it has been widely adopted, the word 'influencer' can be misleading. I looked into the science behind how influence works and how messages spread in my book [Paid Owned Earned](#), and reach does not necessarily lead to influence (just as influence does not

necessarily lead to reach).

It's therefore important to approach influencer marketing with the same strategic considerations you would apply to any other channel. Once your overall campaign objectives and KPIs have been established, you need to define how influencer activity will fit within your wider communications system and agree the role that it will play. That raises three questions:

1. Are you using influencers to widen the distribution and reach of your message? (Awareness)
2. Are you asking influencers to make content for your campaigns? (Production)
3. Or are you aiming to develop a longer term loyalty program influencing your desired audience through collaboration and content? (Distribution + Production + Advocacy)

There is no right or wrong answer to the above questions, but you need to be clear from the start about the role that influencer activity will play in your wider content and connections strategy.

Having very clear objectives at the beginning enables your influencer identification process to run more effectively, project management to run more smoothly, and appropriate success measures to be set accordingly.

Putting the numbers into context

It's also important to note that the authenticity of influencer channels comes from the fact that (in some cases) the content made for them is more raw and edgy than anything you would expect to see on traditional TV.

When embarking on influencer activity it's therefore not just about targeting those with the highest numbers; context is important too. It's about credibly getting your brand into an

environment that will enhance your message through association and integration – and many channels are run by creators who are excited to be able to work with an advertiser.

For influencer marketing activity, at MediaCom we look at qualitative aspects like “fit”, safety and credibility as well as the numbers – and this is even more critical in a world where more and more of this type of content is Live and unedited through platforms like Periscope and Facebook Live.

Keeping sight of the wider system

So Influencer marketing takes many forms and works on a range of different platforms. [LinkedIn's Influencer program](#) sees prominent business people sharing their thoughts through text and (increasingly) through video, but this is very different to a fashion brand trying to engage with an Instagram celebrity or an FMCG brand trying to work with a YouTube star.

It's a complicated world out there and whilst influencer software is helpful for identification and program management (including problematic areas such as billing and payment), it can still only do part of the job – brands also need expert eyes to assess the more qualitative criteria. That's where your media agency can help.

A well planned and well-structured approach is critical and the integration of influencer activity into the wider marketing communications system (cross-channel promotion, cookie pool development for retargeting, creative repurposing etc.) is what really drives results.

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