

The truth about Influencer Marketing

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There are many myths muddying the waters of influencer marketing. Brands need to know the truth behind them to succeed, says Ana Thorsdottir, Influencer Marketing Associate Director at MediaCom.

Myths are powerful. They can change behaviour and stop us from seeing the truth. Up until recently, influencer marketing had survived unscathed. The space had moved from 'bloggers only' obscurity to mainstream marketing activity in just a few years.

In fact, in 2017, [75% of marketers allocated part of their budget](#) for influencers based on the understanding that [92% of consumers trust recommendations](#) from individuals they follow, even if they don't know them.

However, as with all new marketing methods, brands are still working out the rules of influencer marketing. Reports of fake followers and bots have prompted sceptics to liken the space to the ‘wild west’ – it cannot be controlled or regulated. But these criticisms are often unfair.

To help marketers learn more, we recently hosted an event at MediaCom, attended by over 200 people, to explain how many of these myths can be easily debunked. Here are five of the most common and the truth behind them...

Myth 1: “Bots and fraud cannot be avoided and influencers cannot be trusted”

As more stories surface of some influencers buying followers, brands are asking more and more questions about their legitimacy. Unilever’s Keith Weed, for example, has [called for the industry](#) to take “urgent action now to rebuild trust before it’s gone forever”.

But brands have more power than they think. Agencies have access to partners and tools that can help identify suspicious activity, including bought followers, irregular engagements, account growth and robotic language. They should be able to help brands spot (and steer clear) of suspicious activity.

Myth 2: “Influencer marketing cannot be measured”

With rising budgets comes greater accountability. ROI is the biggest challenge for influencer marketing but there are ways to measure impact. Sure, influencer marketing can be used as an effective tool in parts of the customer journey, but the real value lies with driving awareness, consideration, and purchase intent – and agencies are getting better at tracking this.

MediaCom uses bespoke econometrics models and brand uplift studies to compare influencer marketing with other channels. To track impact, we have also started collaborating with influencers on limited edition products and linking content to bespoke campaign landing pages to track direct sales. Some brands now turn off all other marketing during influencer activity. After seeing results, they no longer need to justify their budget splits.

Myth 3: “The bubble is going to burst”

Fact: influencer marketing is not going away. It’s evolving, growing rapidly, and catching up with the unpredictable demands and rules of social media platforms. According to [research](#) from the WFA, 65% of brands plan to increase their spend and use influencers to boost brand awareness (86%), reach new audiences (74%), and improve advocacy (69%).

As the space becomes saturated, some influencers may lose engagement and brand deals, but brands that choose their collaborations carefully will still enjoy success. Relevance is vital. If an audience is not aligned with your brand’s message you’re wasting your budget.

Myth 4: “Reach will always be the most important metric”

It’s easy to obsess about reach when choosing creators, but this isn’t the be all and end all. You can’t assume an influencer’s entire audience will see your brand collaboration. That will never happen. Instead, it makes more sense to think of followers as ‘potential reach’, and focus on engagements, impressions, and backend data. Brands should request access to this data as part of their contract.

Reach can still be measured, of course, but every brief and campaign should be looked at individually and success criteria agreed on a case-by-case basis. There is no ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to metrics for influencer marketing.

Myth 5: “Influencer marketing is only for beauty and fashion brands”

There is no denying beauty and fashion brands are big spenders in the influencer space. The nature of their products and the way they have been marketed has allowed them to shine and spend very little.

But they aren’t the only ones who can succeed. Some of the most crafty, creative, and award-winning campaigns come from brands you might not associate as natural partners for influencers. To change perceptions of its sustainable energy solutions, for example, Shell created an ‘Influencer Collective’, using authentic pop-science vloggers and bloggers to tell its story in a peer-to-peer way. This content achieved 113 million views on social platforms.

Influencer marketing lets brands tell their stories in a human way. All brands can benefit from influencers as long as they collaborate with the right ones to help them create content that connects with their audiences.

Yes, you need to be a little bit savvy in the selection process but ultimately that's where your agency team can help. They have access to tools and databases and are able to make qualified recommendations and help brands select influencers that will resonate with specific demographics.

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