

Influencer 101: Influencer Collaboration Best Practices

The following are recommendations for vetting an influencer in question. Please keep in mind that each blogger, social media influencer and journalist will have a different audience, style and relationship with their following. These guidelines can be applied during the vetting process, but each influencer should be evaluated case-by-case.

Vetting Your Influencer: Are they the real deal?

- The influencer should have a strong following. While an exact number or benchmark is hard to pin-point, a safe bet for a minimum following is about 40k followers. With that said, it's important not to disregard influencers with even smaller followings. The number of followers is only the first step in investigating their scope of influence and the loyalty of their followers. Remember the rule of quality over quantity.
- Always comb through followers. Many influencers who are just starting out will often buy "likes" to make their channels appear more popular. While it can be time-consuming to sort through influencers with legitimate followers and those with purchased/spambot followings, a few dedicated minutes of spot checking followers can save you a lot of time and trouble in the long run.
- A few red flags to look out for when vetting an influencer and combing through their followers are:
 - If you notice many of their followers don't have profile pictures or have not made any posts to their accounts, they're more than likely a spambot. Egg profile pictures on Twitter are usually a sign of recently created accounts and a tell-tale sign of purchased followers. There are also many online tools that can help you get a better idea of how many of their followers are real.
 - Extremely close ratio of "likes" to followers. Ex: 2k – 5k "likes" per post for an account with 10k followers. While this may just seem like excellent engagement, this is an extreme number of "likes" for that amount of followers. A more realistic ratio would be something more like 3k – 6k "likes" regularly per 80k followers, possibly even less considering social platform algorithms.
- Reading comments is another good way to get a better understanding of whether their following is earned or bought. Look out for spammy comments, no comments at all in combination with a disproportionately large following, and comments that are irrelevant to the post as if they were copied and pasted across different posts.

Are They a Good Fit for Your Brand?

Once you've determined that they are a legitimate lead for you, you must determine if they are suitable for your brand and your goals. The following tips should help you raise questions to arrive at a conclusion.

- Find out what they are willing to provide and get it in writing. Social media and their influence is their livelihood and they are not likely to pitch in freebies once agreements have been made. It's important to sit down and discuss what they are willing to provide in exchange for free services or payment. Always remember it is a business transaction and should be treated as such with both parties holding each other accountable.
- Don't be afraid to ask them or their agent to meet to discuss how they can help you meet the goal of your campaign. A true influencer will be eager to sit down and discuss their strengths and achievements with you and answer any questions or concerns you may have.
- Ask for campaign recaps. While they don't need to provide in-depth reports, they should be willing to share some history about campaigns they've worked on that have been successful to help you discover what tactics might be suitable for you.
- Learn about their affiliations, what brands they've partnered with, what the agreement was, what kind of services were exchanged. Are they brands you could indirectly affiliate organization with through a connection with this influencer?
- Conduct a Google search for the influencer's name. Browse through results (images included) to ensure that there are no negative stories or personal history that might harm the reputation of your brand.
- Research their audience to find what kind of people they influence and if this is an audience that is suitable for your goals. While not everyone discloses their interests on their profiles, the fact that they follow this influencer is an indicator that they are interested in what they are "selling" and the best way to gauge if they are in fact interested in "buying," is by reading their interactions with the influencer.
- You won't always be able to apply all of these guidelines to the influencer you are vetting. Truly researching an influencer might require checking in on their pages several times a week for an extended period of time. This will help you get a better real-time glimpse of their dynamic and the dynamic of their audience.

Measuring Impact and ROI

One of the most important things to remember before employing the help of an influencer is that influencer marketing should be regarded as a tactic. Ask yourself what you're hoping to get out of this campaign. Is it to draw the attention of a new demographic? Increase the number of followers on your social media channels? Whatever it is, you'll need to set a goal that's measurable before you begin your search. Only then can you determine what type of influencer will be the best fit for you.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

Setting key performance indicators should be one of the first steps in your campaign planning process. KPI's can be any metrics that align with your goal like social media engagement and website visits.

- Social media is perhaps one of the most valuable and quantifiable tools that should be utilized to its full potential during an influencer marketing campaign. Its real-time nature and analytics can provide feedback on your campaign and help you determine what resonates with your audience and what might need improvement.
- The use of unique hashtags and vanity URL's are also great ways to determine if your call to action is yielding results.
- Increase in first-time visitors to your website can help you determine how well your campaign is being received, especially if you're able to track an uptick back to a specific market you targeted.
- Tracking pixels can be useful for tracking the origin of visitors and determining how many have come to your website as a direct result of your influencer initiative. These can be installed throughout your influencer's website, social media and ads to help you gain insight on referral traffic.
- If you're able to attain blog, social media and website analytics from your influencer, these can provide key insight about your campaign. A seasoned influencer can and should have access to numbers that can help you determine what their following looks like and if their demographics fit the audience you are targeting. Not all influencers might be willing to share this information after contracts have been established, however, so keep this in mind as you negotiate.