

INFLUENCING THE INFLUENCERS

NAVIGATING A LANDSCAPE OF
MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES



KEA

by STEVE KLEBER

I could tell you precisely which influencer I'm reaching out to. I could tell you which platform will be a sure-fire hit today. But as soon as I gave you that exact advice, it would be irrelevant.

The content marketing landscape shifts too rapidly to give direction with certitude. So, therefore, this isn't a "how-to" manual. Instead, this is my advice on how to approach influencer marketing – all backed by my practical experience putting these ideas into action.

I'm taking you on a hypothetical journey of finding influencers and partnering with them to grow your brands. But what I really want to impress upon you... is how the details of the landscape are changing constantly.

Marketing is never a one-size-fits-all. Or set-it-and-forget-it process.

I've followed – and refined – my instincts, and kept an eye on the path so that I don't get lost in the metaphorical woods. Despite the state of near-constant change, I do think it's possible to predict some of the future if you look at the patterns of the past.

In my own past, there's a through-line that still propels me forward today. Way back when, I thought that I wanted to be a journalist ... and then a lawyer. On these journeys, I absorbed ideas that I turned into marketing fuel.

When I pursued journalism, Woodward and Bernstein were my heroes. I wanted to be just like them – personalities who built a reputation through investigative reporting, books and interviews. They had the power to sway the court of public opinion.

But Woodward and Bernstein's trajectory was impossible for me to emulate. The ideals of journalism at their level are difficult to sustain when the hours are so long and the pay is often so low. I realized I was interested in the truth. But I was even more interested in how it could be shared creatively.

When I pursued being a lawyer, I enjoyed consolidating evidence to sway a jury's opinion. But there were so many rules restricting the presentation of evidence in court. I had an abundance of creativity, which didn't fit within the restrictions of the courtroom.

My interests clicked together when I took a marketing class. It was the perfect vehicle for my creativity, ability to sell and interest in the court of public opinion.

As I grew my marketing and PR agency – K&A – the internet exploded. News started traveling for free. The standards and modes of credible news delivery twisted and turned. The way people consumed content shifted fundamentally. And, finally, these new platforms gave me the opportunity I had been looking for to unleash my marketing creativity.

User-generated content took over.

It used to be that there were three major TV networks in the United States: NBC, ABC and CBS – the “Big Three.” It was a big deal when Fox launched a fourth network in 1986 and edged into the established players’ market shares.

Back then, each new network had to have an FCC license to broadcast. Now, however, anyone with a phone in his or her pocket can be a broadcaster.

Today, we’re in a world of constantly expanding content chaos. YouTube emerged in 2005. Instagram launched in 2010. Vine – a short-form video platform – led the market in 2013 to 2015 with 200 million users. But Facebook bought Vine and then shut it down completely in 2016. TikTok didn’t reach the U.S. until 2018.

Rest assured that these platforms and media will continue to shift rapidly in the near and far term.

Sure, in this landscape, truth can be evasive. But creativity? It’s abundant.

All of this disruption was a fertile field for marketing innovation. These expansions motivated me, and – frankly – made me feel like a kid in a candy store.

Perpetual motion can’t exist in reality, because real machines encounter friction. But modern platforms and marketing opportunities have combined to create the ultimate in free messaging. Increasing margins and a frictionless internet are every bit as exciting as perpetual motion. This is the “promised land” for marketing.

I am a product of these changes in mass media. I remember being in the front seat of my mom’s car (no seatbelt, of course), hearing her gasp in reaction to the radio announcement of Kennedy’s assassination.

I’d watch Walter Cronkite deliver the news.

I was in high school, watching the Kent State massacre with horror.

Fast forward to 2022. When my college-aged son sees a war unfold on TikTok between dance videos and cooking tutorials, he doesn't bat an eye. Fifty years ago, Watergate was being televised at 2 p.m. Now congressional hearings are broadcast in prime time.

Today's audiences are bombarded with content – with marketing, news and entertainment overlapping – making the lines between them appear blurry.

As a marketer, I want to see the good in this changing landscape.

If you have enough information... even chaos forms a pattern. I've digested this past content landscape for you and consolidated the evidence. If I analyze the communication patterns of the last 50 years from today's vantage point, the changes seem inevitable. I can follow this pattern into the future, pattern-matching relevant information. I feel like a sculptor when I sift through chaotic content data points, removing the non-relevant information.

These new platforms offer customized user experiences. Audiences are able to surround themselves with people whom they relate to and trust. Sometimes, these strangers start to feel like friends.

We refer to these friendly strangers as “influencers.”

User-owned distribution models give individuals more power to connect. With the speed and range of modern tech, the power of these influencers to mobilize an audience is greater than ever before.

Word-of-mouth is an old marketing concept – selling something to audiences through a trusted authority or trendsetter. While it's an old idea, the word “influencer” is relatively new. It didn't enter the Merriam-Webster dictionary until 2019.

Influencers have assumed much of the space that was once occupied by editors. Influencers make decisions and help to determine which products and services are truly special.

They use, review, personalize and endorse products.

When it's done right, the experience feels organic and authentic. But, at its core, it's an adaptive marketing strategy – a particularly innovative and exciting one at that. It's also leading the way forward. Through these influencers, a marketer can tap into and essentially rent... a captive audience.

More than ever before, there are a greater number of ways to promote a brand. I'm inviting you to an all-you-can-eat buffet of marketing opportunities.

According to Nielsen¹, global marketers are increasing social spend by 53% in the next year, more than any other channel.

So, in these pages, I'm going to take you through the chaos of influencer marketing. How to find influencers, choose the ones that align with your brand, negotiate a contract, execute a campaign, and measure the campaign's success. I'll also share how I build strong brand ambassador relationships.

I use these ideas in my own company. It's like influencer marketing, but amped-up.

What follows aren't trend-driven rules for using influencers. We've been using these strategies since long before they became trendy. We've created the currency, executed the campaigns and honed our instincts. So the stories and guidelines here are springboards, adaptable strategies.

Because after all, influencer marketing is about relationships, not strict rules.

The marketing landscape has changed at the speed of light for the last 10 years. It makes the path of change over the 40 years before look like a snail's pace.

"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses."

– attributed to Henry Ford

He probably didn't say this, but it certainly feels like he could have. It helps me keep in mind how important it is to try to predict the future and stay connected to what's relevant in today's market. I don't want to be stuck making better buggy whips while cars are zooming past.

So I'm not writing this book because I'm self-important. I'm writing this book because I'm curious about the evolving role of communication, in business and in our lives. The playing field is expanding, and I want to evolve in this new terrain. It's akin to constantly exploring strange new worlds.

I'm sharing the approaches I use to adapt to a changing marketplace. I want to help brands plan for tomorrow.

I keep asking, *What's coming next? Where's the opportunity?*

Here's what sprouted up.

My experience is with PR and marketing for home and building products. So, that's where I'm drawing my examples of influencers and brands. It's an incredibly sustainable industry. So long as people are living in enclosed spaces, they'll need building products.

I've seen other niches go through massive fluctuations and regulations. Cigarettes require warning labels. Alcohol can be poured in an advertisement, but it can't be consumed. There are far fewer rules for marketing plywood and windows.

I'm referencing some campaigns that I have deployed, but I don't want to shamelessly self-promote. You likely don't know the flooring or concrete products I'm using as examples. But the size of the brands and the scope of my illustrations aren't the point.

I want to show that I've executed these ideas and refined them. I want to demonstrate my ideas and show the evidence backing them up. Feel free to research your own examples, especially if your niche is different from mine.

Wait, does influencer marketing really work?

Yes. Absolutely.

While conversations seem to move faster than light... influencer marketing is more direct, more nimble and faster than other marketing arms. Influencers can share their opinions faster, and farther, than ever before. They're a crucial tool in the modern marketer's arsenal.

THE METRICS

- Businesses generate an average of \$6.50 for every dollar invested in influencer marketing.²
- 81% of consumers are more likely to buy a product based on a social media reference.³
- 83% of buyers trust an individual recommendation over one from the brand.
- 57% of companies use influencers as part of their marketing strategies.⁴
- An additional 21% are also planning to add this strategy to their campaigns.⁴
- Influencer content outperforms branded content by 2.7x.⁵
- 88% of brands have a dedicated influencer marketing budget.⁶
- Most brands spend between \$50,000 and \$500,000 on influencer marketing per year.⁶

Don't believe me yet? Let's look at some case studies.



CARLISLE CASE STUDY

Carlisle Wide Plank Floors, a hand-crafted, fine flooring brand, chose K&A to expand its position as an industry innovator.

So we organized a media tour of Carlisle's latest collections. Our team visited Chicago editors and influencers in person. We showcased designers in each region of the country and their projects that featured Carlisle flooring. We secured a series of articles, blog posts, Pinterest boards and Instagram stories.

Many of the ensuing articles, blog posts, Instagram stories and Pinterest boards quoted Carlisle's marketing copy – “two dozen pairs of hands will touch each board during the production process.” But even better, each of the influencers personalized their relationship with flooring.

On the Coco Kelley Blog, Cassandra LaValle framed her journey with flooring as an adventure, where planks felt bolder as they got wider. On the prolific Remodelista blog, pictures of Carlisle flooring showcased a New York architect's tips for transitional design. On the Lark & Linen blog, Jacquelyn Clark wrote about her emotional state as a new mom – raved about the flooring – and then ended with, “I cannot wait to specify [Carlisle's] works of art to help bring that essential dose of soul, nature, warmth, comfort, and artistry into projects far and wide going forward.”

The Carlisle campaign reached more than 14 million consumers throughout the United States.

So the Carlisle campaign was an intense, months-long integrated effort that produced the desired results. Part of the attraction to influencer marketing is its speed and nimbleness.

Let's look at a case study where we had to move quickly.



INNOVATIVE STONE CASE STUDY

Innovative Stone thought it was in a strong position – it was the market leader in stone countertops, with operations on five continents. It was the number-one supplier of granite countertops to 2,000 The Home Depot locations.

And then the other shoe dropped – a viral *New York Times* headline shot across the internet: “*What’s lurking in your countertops?*”

Suddenly, countless articles and news stories claimed that granite products contain radioactive radon gas... which can cause lung cancer. Within hours, the story had spread to the Today show, regional newspapers, blogs and online forums.

At the time, granite countertops were the most sought-after item on most American homeowners' wish lists. And now a wildly exaggerated allegation threatened to upend an entire industry.

K&A represented Innovative Stone at the time, and our team jumped into action. Influencers are often experts in their fields, trusted authorities. We knew that celebrities without credentials wouldn't be effective in this situation. So we spent the weekend contacting EPA scientists, Harvard professors and Consumer Reports representatives. Our influencer experts – scientists – gathered hard data to counter the allegations.

Within 24 hours, we had launched a blog, drafted a corporate statement to Innovative Stone customers, contacted more than 20 industry specialists, and supplied fact sheets to the media.

Our scientist influencers used real science to respond to the junk science. They provided journalists with quotes and perspectives to prove that the allegations of danger were patently untrue.

L. L. Chyi, a Ph.D. and professor of geology and civil engineering at The University of Akron in Ohio, said, “Based on the testing results and EPA standards, we can conclude that the most popular granites used as countertop surfaces pose no health threat to homeowners.”

David Ropeick, author of the book Risk, said, “Compared to all the risks in people’s lives, the risk of radon exposure from granite countertops is as close to zero as you could hope to get.”

Dr. John McCarthy, of Environmental Health & Engineering, said, “To get even close to the type of dangerous levels of radon exposure that’s been reported in news articles recently, a consumer would have to completely seal off the room and stay in that room 24/7 – for 72 years.”

Soon, stories were being posted using factual information, and the EPA confirmed that stone countertops posed no significant health risks.

Innovative Stone didn’t lose a single order.

Because of this success, the Marble Institute of America approached K&A to develop a proactive awareness campaign for them. As a result, we launched *usenaturalstone.org*, a website where we engaged designers, journalists and architects – influencers – to advocate for the range, durability and beauty of natural stone.

Not every influencer deployment will be as dramatic as Innovative Stone’s radon saga.

However, influencers are a useful strategy for both a short-term PR crisis... and long-term brand building.

How Influencer Marketing Fits Within Your Overall PR and Marketing Strategy

K&A often refers to the PESO model, which was developed by social media expert Gini Dietrich of Arment Dietrich in Chicago. PESO stands for Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned media. It's a way to categorize the different classes of marketing content.

- **Paid Media.** Any media that you pay for. This may include social media ads, sponsored posts, online advertising and direct mail.
- **Earned Media.** Driven by what others say about your brand. This includes positive PR such as reviews, testimonials and referrals.
- **Shared Media.** This is similar to earned media – but it includes your social sites, video sharing and online forums.
- **Owned Media.** Content you create. The content is often first shared through a newsletter, and then lives on your website.



PESO gives you a complete picture of the available customer contact points. With this model, you can mix and match different classes to create a custom strategy for each brand. These different customer channels help ensure you're leaving no stone unturned.

The key to this strategy is creating a core message that can extend into each media area. To find this message, ask: "Who are we?" "What do we do?" "Who do we do it for?" and "Why do we do it?"

The Carlisle campaign leveraged every PESO category. It paid for sponsored blog posts, earned strong reviews, shared Pinterest boards and Instagram stories, and owned the Carlisle designer collaborations that were showcased on the articles and blogs.

A Linqia study said about influencers that "their images and videos are so compelling, they can be repurposed across other channels, across both paid and owned channels."

This versatility "is part of what makes influencer marketing so effective."

Influencer marketing can be a mix of every PESO category. Content can originate as Paid, Earned or Owned Media. But the goal is for this content to evolve into Shared Media – content that's spread organically – to grow a brand's reach across social platforms. New products can't be launched today without input from consumers and influencers.

I believe it is essential to combine online outreach — bloggers, web videos and user-generated content — with traditional marketing initiatives. In my experience, a mix of paid and unpaid media is the most effective approach.

If your company is only relying on Paid and Earned content, the important next step is to grow into Shared or Owned media. As a jumping-off point, I recommend using 25% of your total PR or marketing budget on influencers. Then, based on results, tweak the budget as you go.

Okay, I've talked a lot about influencers, but it feels like the definition keeps shifting. Influencers can be reviewers, journalists and architects, but who else?

Broadly, influencers are people who influence the beliefs and behaviors of their audiences. They have the power to affect the purchasing decisions of others because of their authority, knowledge, position or relationship with their audience. They focus on a distinct niche where they regularly engage with their audience.

Every industry depends on different types of influencers. For the building and remodeling industry, influencers are usually trusted designers, architects and trade industry channel experts.

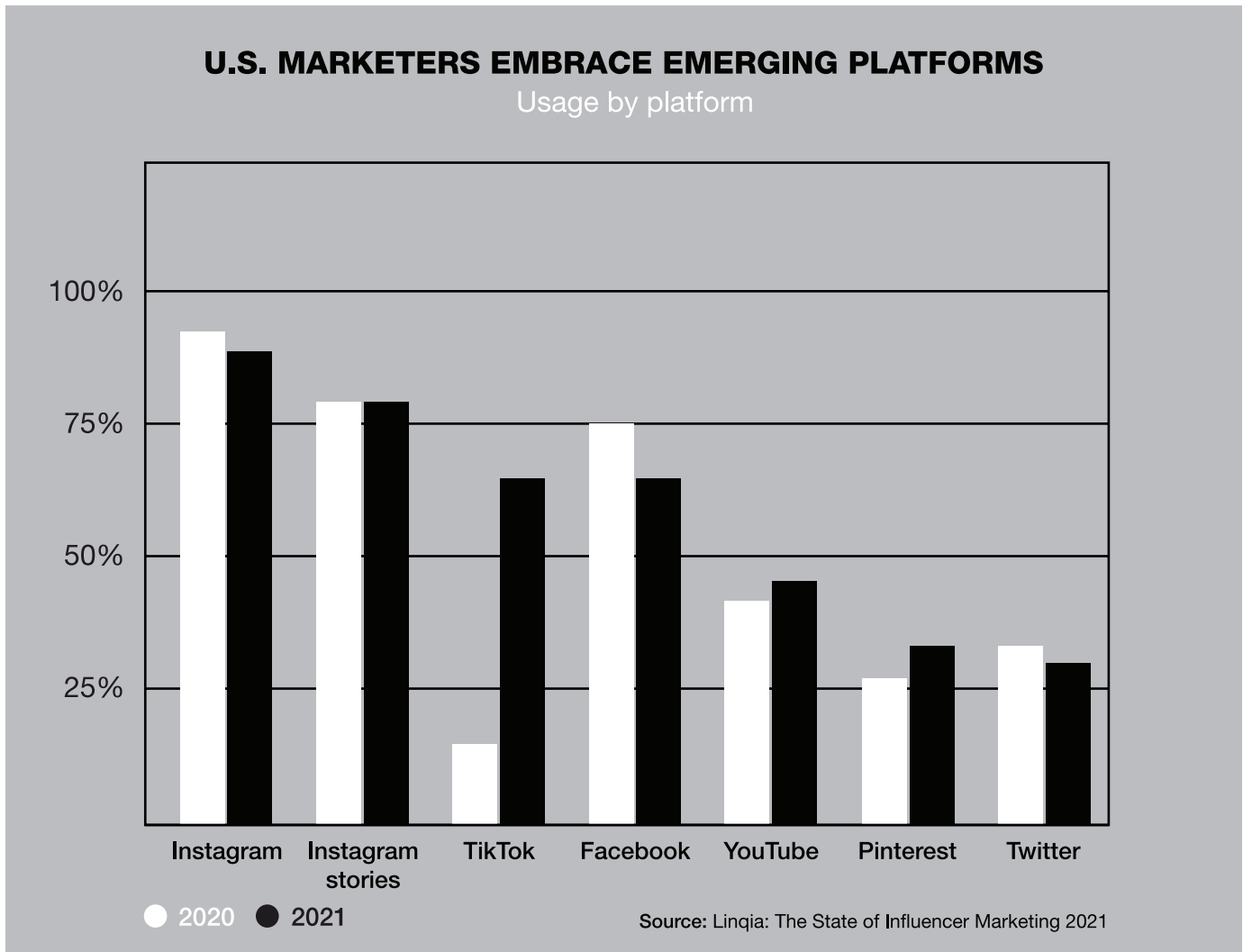
Of course, there are a wide range of potential influencers in the marketplace. The real trick comes in compiling a list of potential influencers for your brand, and vetting them thoroughly.

It's important to note that influencers are not just marketing tools. They're relationships that brands can borrow to help achieve their marketing objectives.

You're building relationships between these people and your brand, so that they can be a bridge to your target audience. As such, the relationship between your brand and an influencer matters more than any one post. Platforms are constantly fluctuating, and influencers often extend across more than one platform.

I'm emphasizing influencers over specific platforms and brands. Part of the reason for this is that influencers often have audiences that stretch over multiple platforms. A marketing team wants access to the entirety of their influencer's audience, instead of restricting their reach to a single platform.

It's risky to depend entirely on any one platform's popularity. Instagram and Instagram stories were the platforms of choice for marketers in 2021. But that's already changing. In early 2020, only 16% of marketers said they were planning to use TikTok in their influencer marketing. In this year's Linqia survey, that number exploded to 68% — a 325% increase.



When it comes to the social media landscape, it's survival of the social media fittest.

But don't discount an audience's loyalty toward less trendy platforms. A passionate Tumblr or Twitch user may not be reachable on larger platforms. It all depends on your brand's target audience.

Brands need influencers to personalize and diversify their message, and to connect to an audience in a personal, memorable way. This personalization comes from working with people.

And, while this approach may feel less stable than traditional marketing, it can also deliver more dynamic results.

BOB VILA SAGA

The rules governing the marketing arena have shifted dramatically over the last 20 years. I think of Bob Vila as an example of when traditional advertisements and an influencer's choices collided.

The story of Vila's firing illustrates perfectly how brands understood the power of influencer marketing, long before they had the terminology or protocol to execute it.

Vila was the original host of This Old House, a tremendously popular PBS home renovation show. In it, the show's cast of tradespeople would renovate one house over the course of a season.

As the host, Vila would explain the process in more detail and at a slower pace than most of today's home renovation programs. Vila was approachable and personable, and – as a former tradesman himself – had a thorough understanding of the processes that he explained to the audience.

But, after a decade of hosting this show successfully, Vila's show salary couldn't match his worth. Federal funding for PBS was cut relentlessly, putting pressure on its programs to operate on shoestring budgets. So, completely outside of the show, Vila took a job endorsing a now-defunct regional home improvement store called Rikel Home Centers.

PBS programming isn't meant to rely on overt brand sponsorships, but it does allow for a brand to underwrite a show. A brand underwriter provides a fraction of the overall budget for a show. The underwriter brand can be mentioned, but there are strict rules to ensure the mention doesn't feel like an ad – content must be technical, and cannot include an opinion, a call to action, and so on.

WGBH Boston, who produced This Old House, was so conscientious about these underwriting rules that their producers tried to hide the labels of the products being used in the renovations. Even when the brands were underwriting the show. Some brands, like Owens Corning, caught on and started making their labels impossible to hide.

By the late '90s, The Home Depot was underwriting This Old House – and assumed that this gave them control over the show's host. The Home Depot was offended that Vila was promoting a store that they saw as a competitor. As part of their underwriting agreement, they were paying for limited callouts during the show. But they still wanted to control Vila without a direct influencer agreement in place.

Through the show's producers, The Home Depot asked Vila to stop his endorsement deal with Rikel Home Centers – the very opportunity that provided most of his income. Vila refused to stop his endorsement, and was subsequently fired.

Soon after, Vila became a spokesperson for Sears – a much bigger competitor of The Home Depot. Eventually he was back hosting, this time for his own home renovation show, Bob Vila's Home Again on CBS.

Now that he was on commercial television, sponsorships and product placement became much more straightforward. In fact, I brokered some product placements on Home Again while it was still on the air.

This story isn't meant to undermine PBS' mission of being impartial. What I take from the Bob Vila story is how The Home Depot made the mistake of conflating an influencer with his platform.

I admire Vila's flexibility, and how he pivoted into new spaces. Audiences had such a strong attachment to his first public TV role that he was able to move that audience with him. In fact, Vila is such an icon that the main character in Home Improvement's Tool Time was modeled on him.

It's about the people, not the individual platform.

Ideally, a marketing relationship with an influencer will stretch out over multiple campaigns, and play out over years. So, as platforms fluctuate, a great influencer will be able to transition with these fluctuations, and bring their audience connections with them.

Levels of Influencers

So, what are the different levels of influencers? I categorize three broad levels of influencers, mostly organized by their audience size.

MEGA INFLUENCERS

Mega influencers are the highest-ranking category of social media influencer. Typically, they have more than one million followers on key social media platforms. There's potential for large-scale campaign results because of this large audience.

These influencers are often more famous than influential – they have a very diverse audience with wide-ranging interests.

Their audience is so big that they tend to have a lower cost per eyeball than the other influencer tiers.

Cost per eyeball is often referred to as CPM - cost per "mille" - or the cost of one thousand views.

However, mega influencers' relationships with their followers tend to be more distant.

And, while they can provide significant reach in a single post, mega influencers aren't necessarily experts in your niche.

Importantly, they can absorb a potentially large percentage of a marketing budget.

Mega influencers could be actors, models, editors, journalists or industry celebrities.

Examples – Reese Witherspoon, Miranda Kerr, Kathy Ireland, Chip & Joanna Gaines, the Property Brothers and Bob Vila

MACRO INFLUENCERS

Macro influencers also appeal to a large audience, but one that's more targeted. Typically, they have a follower count somewhere between 100,000 and one million followers.

Macro influencers usually found their fame through the internet. So they tend to be dependent on one or two major platforms. Their followers are interested in a certain niche – such as home and garden, decor or building products.

Generally, they offer sponsored posts... but at much more affordable costs than those by mega influencers.

Macro influencers can be found on blogs, Twitter, Instagram or TikTok.

Examples – Katrina Blair, French Country Cottage, Bigger Than the Three of Us, The Joshua Tree House, Renovation HusbandsManual Show and Guest House Renovation

MICRO INFLUENCERS

Micro influencers are social media users who have smaller, highly dedicated followings – typically less than 100,000 followers.

Micro influencers focus on a specific niche... and are generally regarded as industry experts.

They often have stronger relationships with their audience than other categories of influencers, which is driven by the perception that they are an opinion leader on a specific subject.

Per post, micro influencers usually cost much less than macro or mega influencers. But because of their smaller audience, the micro influencer cost per eyeball may be higher.

For the building industry, micro influencers could be architects, model merchandisers, designers, bloggers, social media specialists, renovators, carpenters and installers.

Examples – The Hip Hop Architect, Hey Wanderer, Cogitate Design, Cococozy, Kitchen Design Ideas and A Concord Carpenter

ORGANIC REVIEWERS

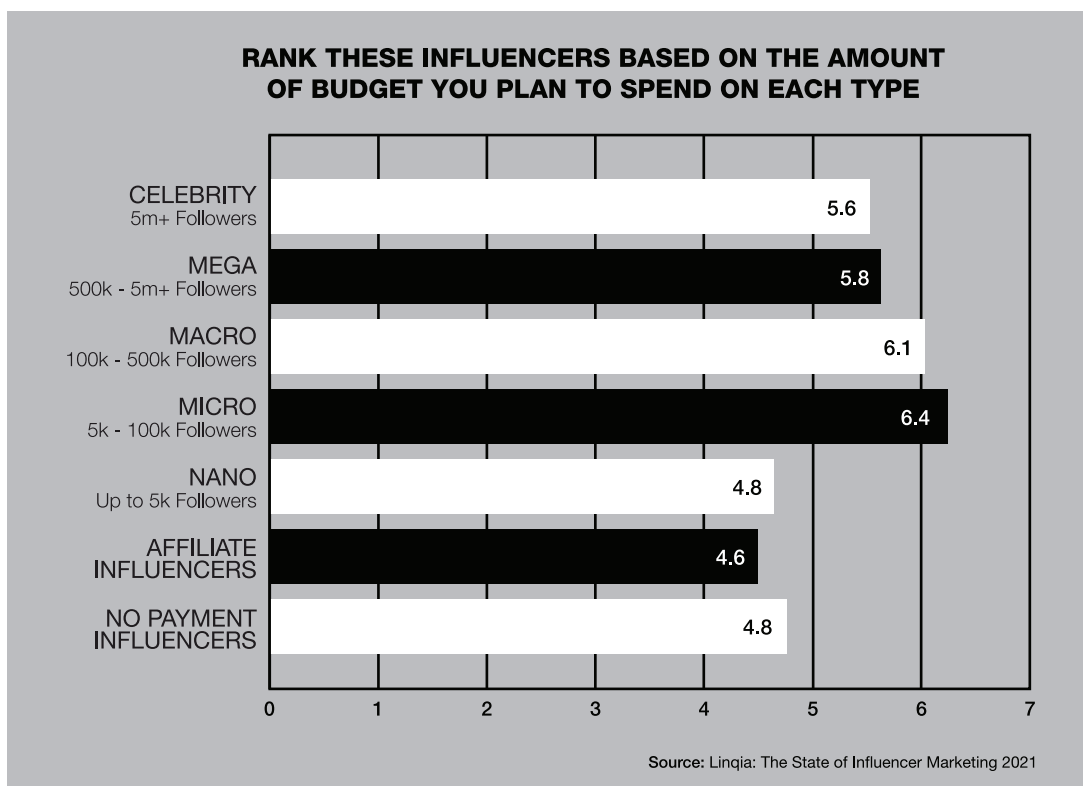
Organic reviewers are often just members of the general public. They're not paid influencers... so they're also referred to as No Payment Influencers.

Organic reviewers are powerful because of their authenticity. These independent reviewers could use your brand and tell people how much they love it. Of course, if organic reviewers are not impressed with your product or service, they don't mind revealing that as well.

The ultimate organic reviewer is Consumer Reports. Since the site doesn't rely on advertising, its good opinion can't be bought.

How to Choose the Right Level of Influencer

When Linqia⁷ surveyed marketing companies, here's how the companies ranked their influencers by budget.

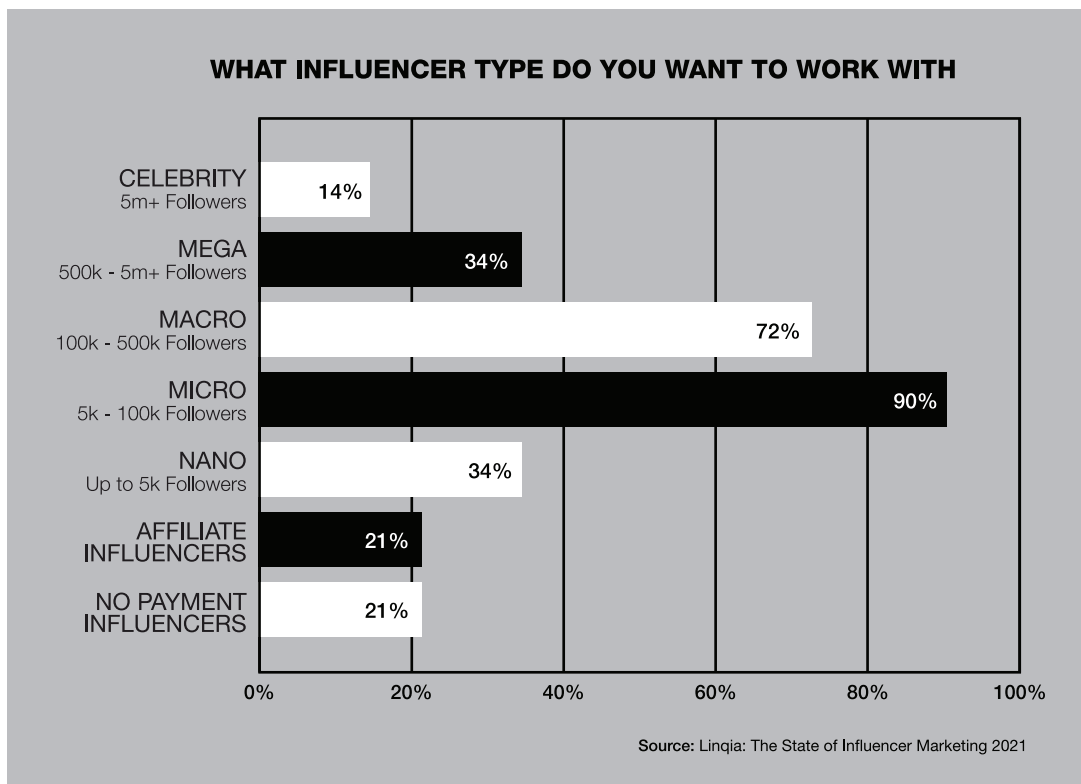


Remember that the larger audience of a mega influencer will cost much more than that of a macro or micro influencer. So a marketing department could spend the same amount on one mega influencer as they could spend on a handful of macro or micro influencers.

Keep in mind that the larger the audience, the less focused it is. Your campaign doesn't need to reach everyone... just the audience and industry specific to your brand.

I recommend partnering with macro and micro influencers because of their more targeted audience.

When Linqia asked marketing companies what level of influencer they wanted to work with, they overwhelmingly said macro and micro influencers.



Notably, in 2021, 91% of all sponsored post engagements were with content created by micro influencers.



Don't make the mistake of assuming that smaller is weaker.

“Influencers don't have to have a ton of followers to make an impact”

*– Elle H-Millard
Industry Relations Manager
National Kitchen & Bath Association*

Most markets are driven by brand loyalty and recognition. Micro influencers have loyal followers who connect to their opinions and advice. Because of their smaller audience, micro influencers tend to be more interactive and more trusted, with content that feels more personal.

Although a variety of marketing software platforms are available to help find and manage influencers, **be forewarned** – most deliver somewhat generic results.

To map a media landscape ...

Determine the top influencers in your niche. Look to see who the celebrities in your niche are interacting with. Who are they attending events with? Which accounts are they commenting on? And whom do they follow?

Often, celebrities align themselves with larger brands while influencers with smaller followings gravitate to innovative, smaller brands. These smaller influencers often represent up-and-coming trends and fresh views.

Identify your niche's biggest names on Twitter. Then look through their followers. Keep investigating and keeping track of follower counts and niches. It can feel like wandering. But you're getting the lay of the land. Start and keep a list of accounts that fit your niche. Twitter's Lists function can be really useful for this kind of research.

Research industry publications and look for who's being quoted or writing bylined stories. Some of these contacts are likely to have a blog, Instagram or YouTube channel.

Research industry podcasts and find out who's being interviewed. Interviewees typically are thought leaders or have substantial social reach.

Explore industry events and find out who's speaking. These influencers already have a level of credibility, or they wouldn't be asked to speak.

Also, see who has presented at past conferences. If possible, download their presentations to get familiar with the influencer's presentation style and area of expertise.

Members of **industry advisory councils** are also good potential influencers.

We all know how to search on the internet. But with these jumping-off points, you're no longer wandering – you're building a useful influencer landscape.



HOW TO GAUGE IF AN INFLUENCER ALIGNS WITH YOUR BRAND

So, you found influencers who look intriguing. But how do you know if they will fit your campaign?

Following are crucial elements to consider. You can discover some of these elements independently. Others, you will need to request from your prospective influencer.

Topic. Make sure the influencer is relevant to your products and services. It's easy to get caught up in charming, attractively displayed content. But a landscape designer's Instagram feed isn't going to fit your cabinet installation brand.

Reach. Look at followers, subscribers, monthly unique visitors, and number of views or listeners. Use Social Media Ranking to see a breakdown of traffic statistics. Make sure to review stats such as Domain Authority to see how likely it is that your influencer is going to show up in search results.

The number of followers is a useful assessment springboard. But this stat doesn't show the full picture on its own.

Engagement. Don't assume, "If they publish it, people will consume it." It's not just about the quantity of followers, but the quality of engagement.

A brand can assess the engagement of an influencer's audience by noting the number of likes or comments on their posts. If the influencer is at a local live event, note the number of attendees. If an influencer's followers aren't engaged, then the influencer's message is likely falling on deaf ears.

Audience characteristics. What's your brand's target audience? Does the audience overlap with the audience of the influencer you're considering? Use Social Media Ranking to review audience statistics.

An influencer campaign lets a brand take a ride in an influencer's content and borrow their audience. So keep your eye on the influencer's audience characteristics. If you're representing an affordable towel warmer brand, your audience would be broader. If you're representing an artisan wide plank wood floor company, your audience would be more affluent, with a higher end aesthetic – and narrower.

Take the platform's demographics into consideration when looking at an influencer's audience.

“When it comes to the demographic characteristics of their creators, social media platforms differ widely. While Instagram and TikTok are generally female-dominated platforms with a significantly younger audience, YouTube is highly dominated by male influencers—and has slightly more influencers who are older in age.”

– Nielsen

Generally, the construction and renovation industry is targeted at people who are buying houses. This tends to be people in two-income households who are in their child-bearing years. On the other hand, there are some great emerging markets for older audiences who are remodeling their homes for living-in-place. This older audience will be perfect if, for instance, you’re representing a brand of shower bars or heated towel racks.

Content. Review the influencer’s content to evaluate what they’re trying to communicate. Is their message connecting? An influencer’s social media posts should be interesting and informative. The audience wants to consume content without being overtly sold to.

Look at the theme of the influencer’s blog or show. Is it home and lifestyle-focused? DIY-focused? Food-oriented?

A DIY-on-a-budget or “mommy blog” might be great destinations if your brand is a lower-cost product like drawer organizers. But a luxury lighting brand might not be a good fit for the same blogs.

Frequency. An influencer should post content on a regular basis, which helps to ensure more return visits and increased loyalty. If they don’t post regularly, they’re likely not getting regular visitors to their site. If there are more than four weeks between posts, that’s a red flag.

Authenticity. The more credentials, the more authenticity an influencer appears to have. But authenticity isn’t just proven once. It should be consistent and clear within the influencer’s content.

Content won’t resonate if the influencer’s knowledge is limited, or if they just parrot marketing copy. If an influencer’s sponsored content feels like an ad or shameless self-

promotion, their audience won't trust their opinion... which can alienate your potential clients. You can't afford to partner with someone who could potentially negatively impact your brand's reputation.

It goes without saying that truly authentic content will feel personal. Ideally, an influencer will genuinely use the product they're promoting. It's like the used car salesman who says, "This is the car I use to drive myself to work." If the influencer uses and likes the product, then their audience is more likely to also.

For building products, it's crucial to see the products in action. If a building influencer is doing their own remodeling, they're also more credible. Authenticity skyrockets when influencers don't just have textbook knowledge, but practical experience – and demonstrate that experience with your product.

So, if Mike Holmes (former host of *Holmes on Homes*, current host of the *New Holmes Show*) has a series of charity renovation projects, a window brand could sponsor product integrations to use in these renovations. Holmes's pictures of the installations and final projects could then be reposted on the brand's social media feeds and included in a blog post and on the brand's website.

Citing when a post is sponsored is part of this authenticity. (It's also recommended by the FTC for a paid promotion.)

Jacquelyn Clark, on her Lark & Linen blog, wrote a post sponsored by Carlisle Flooring. She ends the post with, "*Thank you to Carlisle Wide Plank Flooring for partnering with me on this post, and thank YOU for supporting my partners. It means the world <3*" By being transparent, and framing the sponsorship in a sweet way, she retains her audience's trust.

Bottom line: Make sure the influencer makes an effort to be transparent and authentic.

Conflicts of interest. Check to make sure the influencer hasn't partnered with your competitors. Also sift through content to see if the influencer has opinions or associations that don't fit with your brand's culture.

Awareness. Influencers with a proven track record of generating awareness for other brands are likely to do the same for your brand.

For the next section, we're going to focus on bloggers.

My company prioritizes blogs – simply because typically, we're engaged by brands to provide “content marketing.” So, yes, we have a bias toward this medium. More importantly, however, the content-heavy nature of a blog makes it extra accessible for search engine optimization (SEO).

Whittling Down the List

The list of potential influencers who align with your brand usually presents a pretty large pool. In 2014, K&A wanted to build a list of the most influential bloggers for construction and building materials. With more than 75.8 million WordPress blogs on the web, our first step was narrowing our focus to the best blogs within our niche. Our original list was 5,000 bloggers.

At the time, we whittled this list down by using our own networking and the no-longer-in-existence Klout score and Alexa ranking. We then analyzed every blogger on our list again against our original alignment list.

We kept whittling down the list, carefully vetting each blogger. Our final list had more than 500 potential participants.

If you follow a similar exercise today using available analytics tools, the result will be similar. You will whittle down a large pool and compile a list of potential influencers.

After you determine which of these influencers you want to potentially work with, the next step is to contact them.



Here is K&A's checklist of materials to request from potential influencers.

Always request a media kit.

Review the aesthetics and tone of the blog or show (in the case of a video blog). Make sure all of the images used are high quality – crisp, high res, not pixelated. Fonts should be legible, and copy should be well written, with proper grammar and punctuation.

Determine monthly unique visitors (MUVs) by using sources such as [statshow.com](#)⁸ and [hypestat.com](#)⁹. In many cases, the numbers are quite different between the two sites. Typically, we suggest the higher number. Unfortunately, without direct access to a blog's Google Analytics, you have to go by these numbers or the media kit that the blogger sends.

Always confirm the numbers that the blogger provides in his/her media kit to make sure they're in line with the numbers one or both of these sites provides. For example, if a blogger claims they receive 100,000 MUVs – and both StatShow and Hype Stat say the number is closer to 25,000 MUVs – get further confirmation from the blogger to validate the number.

Demographics should always be requested, if they're not already included in the media kit. They should include:

- Percentage of male vs. female viewers
- Percentage of viewers according to age range
 - 25-34
 - 35-49
 - 50+
- Average household income (HHI)
- Percentage of U.S. vs. international readers or viewers (most blogs that originate in the U.S. will have a high proportion of U.S. readers relative to international readers)

Ensure the demographics align with the brand's target audience(s).

- If the brand is looking for consumers in the 35+ age range and 70% of the blog's readers are 25-34, the blog might not be a good fit... even if the blog has a large following.
- If the brand is trying to reach U.S. consumers and 50% of the blog's readers are based outside of the U.S., the blog might not be aligned. In this scenario, with strong MUVs, the location data can be used to try to negotiate down the cost of the post.

Social media metrics are important if a blogger under consideration is also going to do social media posts as part of the blogger agreement.

Social media can be a general barometer of a blogger's engagement. However, be mindful that a blogger could have, for example, 150,000 Instagram followers, but only 20,000 MUVs for their blog. Look at both social media followers and engagement (likes/comments/shares) to determine social media value.

- If a blogger has 500,000 Instagram followers, but only gets 40 likes and three comments per post, their engagement isn't strong.
- Alternatively, if a blogger has 5,000 Instagram followers and gets 40-50 likes and 10+ comments per post, their engagement would be considered much stronger.

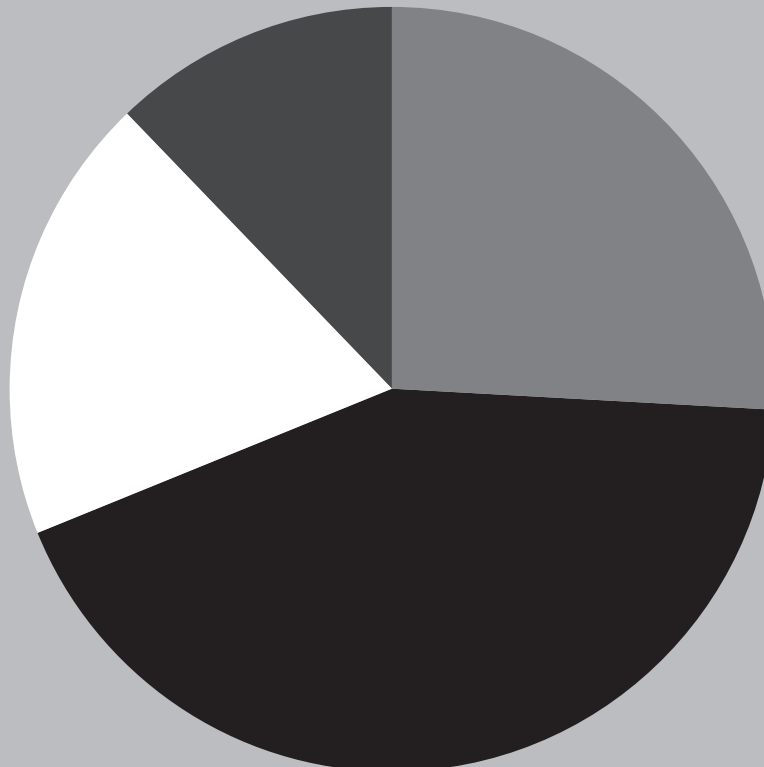
At K&A, we needed leverage to help ensure the best rates and value for our clients.

Therefore, we developed a unique compensation scale that could assign each blogger a fair market value score. Our value formula factors in web traffic, independent SEO/search rankings and social media stats... with a focus on engagement rates.

Within a campaign, I recommend diversifying among a handful of influencers at different levels.

When Linqia questioned marketing companies, 43% said they use an average of 5-10 influencers per campaign. The goal for your brand should be to establish diversity in your influencer portfolio. Within your brand's niche, you can find a range of influencers who connect to your target audience.

ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY INFLUENCERS DO YOU ACTIVATE ON A PROGRAM?



● 1-5 ● 5-10 ● 10-20 ● 20+

Source: Linqia: The State of Influencer Marketing 2021

So, ideally, you'll be allocating your influencer marketing budget between multiple influencers. Keep this in mind as you negotiate. And remember that your brand shouldn't depend on just one influencer.

When you sit down to create a campaign with individual influencers, there are several elements to consider.

The first is resources. Determine how much budget you have to invest in an influencer campaign. Compare this budget to the potential impact the influencer's campaign could have on sales. You've already gathered the analytics to help estimate this potential impact.

It's also important also to look at qualitative research, such as "trust," "authenticity" and "reputation".

Keep in mind that whenever you pay for an endorsement, the authenticity of the endorsement may be weakened. When money changes hands, there are FTC guidelines for how the transaction is disclosed. And it must be disclosed.

Negotiating an Influencer Campaign

Once you've reviewed the blogger's materials and stats – and have decided the blogger is a fit – determine whether the partnership will be for a single deliverable, or if it will extend for weeks or months. Confirm that the influencer will be available throughout the campaign window.

Next, present to the blogger what your brand is willing to pay the blogger for a sponsored blog post. Utilize your quantitative and qualitative data to determine an opening bid. And always request social media posts/shares and inclusion in the newsletter for the blog, if relevant.

Remember, this asking price is a starting point.

The blogger will likely ask for more money than your initial offer.

Cost Equivalence

If the blogger has an attractive site along with good engagement (e.g., multiple people comment on their blog posts, repeat visitors) and/or a strong demographic match to your target audience, they might still be a fit.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- At least 25,000 MUVs – \$500
- At least 50,000 MUVs – \$1,000
- At least 100,000 MUVs – \$1,500
- At least 150,000 MUVs – \$2,000 - \$2,500
- At least 200,000 MUVs – \$2,500 - \$3,500
- At least 250,000 MUVs – \$3,500+

What you're offering influencers (besides money)

Reciprocity. Doing something for the blogger/influencer in exchange for their outreach on your brand's behalf is key. You could offer product in kind (a product donation), or provide a product discount. Perhaps you could feature the influencer in a blog post on your website and include links to their website, a mention on social media, etc.

Shared Ownership. Don't just create content and ask an influencer to put their name on it. Instead, invite the influencer to collaborate and share ownership of the content. This will also contribute to authenticity.

Visibility. Giving the influencer the opportunity to connect with an expanded (new) audience can help the influencer grow their reach and exposure.

NOTE: *If the blogger's self-reported stats are lower than those your team uncovered, ask the blogger if they'd be willing to accept a reduced rate. The "openness" to a lower rate depends upon the blogger, and factors such as how in demand he/she is*

Not all bloggers are open to negotiation, but we've found that many macro and micro influencers will work with your budget if you approach the negotiation with goodwill.

While negotiations sometimes feel like a battle, you've done the research and calculations to back up your argument.

Chances are that the influencer's ask and your budget will meet somewhere in the middle.

Congratulations!

You've successfully negotiated on an influencer campaign.

You've survived the budget battle. Now, here comes the fun stuff. The substance of the campaign.

What will this partnership look like?

Working with an influencer is creative by its very nature. Set up a flexible system that allows your marketing team and the influencer to openly engage. Establish an editorial calendar to share ideas, create and edit content, and to provide a platform for brainstorming and collaboration.

Appoint someone on your team to act as a chief editor. This person will ensure that the brand voice is consistent. And the process is as efficient as possible.

Even in a highly collaborative environment, it can be challenging to create unique and fresh content consistently. When you need inspiration... don't be afraid to reach out to your influencer for ideas.

Campaign Wish List

Here is K&A's campaign wish list for a variety of influencers and platforms. Think of this as the car lot, full of vehicles available for influencer partnership. Take them for a test drive.

Product Integration

Since This Old House debuted on PBS in 1979, there have been countless TV shows built around home renovation, decoration and design, gardening, outdoor living and cooking.

When the HGTV Network launched in 1994, several critics wondered if it was too narrowly focused. The New York Times asked, "Is America ready for all-home TV?" But, today, HGTV is a "top-10" cable network... featuring shows like Property Brothers, Flip or Flop, House Hunters and Love It or List It.

Of course, HGTV isn't the only game in town for building materials marketers. Kitchen design products and appliances can also be integrated into programming on the Food Network and Cooking Channel. Then there's the DIY Network, The Learning Channel (TLC), and – of course – PBS.

Product integration works within news shows as well.

An Aside about Product Integration

Modern product integration feels “boundary-less” compared to previous decades. There used to be far more strict rules about the distinction between commercials and entertainment.

In the late '70s, sugary cereal ads often looked interchangeable with the cartoon shows they sponsored. As a result, the FCC ruled that children's programming must include a disclaimer like, “We'll be right back after these messages,” or “And now, a word from our sponsor.”

Modern TV and film brand sponsorships began with soap operas. In the 1920s, Procter and Gamble (P&G) sponsored daytime radio serial dramas, to advertise their products. These radio shows were also known as “washboard weepies,” because they were targeted at housewives doing chores.

P&G's popular radio show Ma Perkins made no effort to be subtle about its product ties. “The fifteen-minute show ran five days a week and mentioned Oxydol's name twenty to twenty-five times during each episode,” according to Soap Opera: The Inside Story of Procter & Gamble, by Alecia Swasy. P&G received 5,000 letters complaining about Ma Perkins within the first week. But after a month, Oxydol sales were up. By the end of the year, sales had doubled.

P&G-sponsored shows such as Perry Mason and The Red Skelton Show became long-running hits. P&G produced so many of these radio shows that they were dubbed “soap operas.”

They continued producing these serialized stories for TV, with shows like As the World Turns and Guiding Light. Characters continued to use and admire P&G products within their dramatic plots in obvious ways. In the 1950s, P&G had 13 soap operas on air.

The last P&G-produced soap opera ended in 2010. But the legacy of soap operas, and P&G's insistent, integrated advertisements can be seen in today's TV and film landscape.

Today, product placements are almost everywhere – from James Bond's Aston Martin, to Jane the Virgin's Target shopping bags.

Back to our regularly scheduled programming.

On a Fox and Friends segment titled “Supply chain issues...,” designer Chip Wade named, showed and demonstrated four different home products within a three-minute segment. For the last product – a towel warmer – Chip draped a freshly-warmed blanket on two small children who were reading a book.

These personal, creative choices keep the audience from feeling force-fed.

YouTube, TikTok and Instagram

Goals for a visually-driven brand can include:

- Receiving a positive mention in the influencer’s social posts
- Retweets or shares of a brand’s social media posts by the influencer
- Posts showing the influencer using a brand’s product

The variety of video lengths translate into different types of audience experiences.

YouTube users skew older than typical TikTok audiences. YouTube audiences settle in to watch videos for longer stretches of time. But TikTok audiences spend more time overall on the app.

When the aim is to attract older specifiers for a building product brand, generating longer-form videos and sharing them on YouTube may be a more effective approach.

To be successful on every channel — the content shared on each platform must be carefully crafted to meet the characteristics and expectations of specific target audiences.

Blog Posts

Blogger collaborations can include:

- Requesting a product review
- Sponsoring a paid blog post
- Getting the influencer to mention the brand in a blog post
- Securing a guest post on the influencer’s blog

***Remember:** Blog posts shouldn’t feel promotional. They can be elegant and feel organic. Like the carpenter’s blog post where he goes through the wish list of the client, before ultimately specifying the fire bowl he recommends.*

On Chip Wade's blog, he labels sponsored blog posts like this:

**Housekeeping Note: The products featured below are compensated placements and this post may contain affiliate links. We may earn a small commission when you make a purchase through one of our links at no additional cost to you. We only recommend products we have personally used and, while some of the pics and stats may come from the manufacturer, all of the tips and opinions are our own.*

With confident, firm phrasing, the sponsorship feels genuine, and Wade retains his audience's trust.

Articles

Build relationships with industry experts (designers, builders/remodelers, industry personalities) who can provide quotes for editorial opportunities such as articles, product profiles and case studies.

- This is a “win-win” situation for both brands and influencers – it provides your brand with additional credibility and gives the influencer valuable PR exposure.
- Confirm in advance that the influencers you have targeted are willing to provide testimonials, so you don't have to scramble to secure a quote at the last minute.
- Give an influencer as much advance notice as possible to provide a quote – if he/she is pressed for time, you can offer to draft a quote that the influencer can then edit.
- That said, it's always best to have the influencer write the quote so that it's in his/her own voice.

Radio and Podcasts

Radio and podcast interviews provide a great opportunity to demonstrate a brand's thought leadership.

A number of radio shows on home improvement are broadcast throughout the U.S., like Ask John & Dave and HomeTalk Radio. Podcasts such as Today's Homeowner, Money Pit, Speaking of Green, Floor Trends Podcast and the Fine Homebuilding Podcast get the word out about industry trends and developments.

Most radio broadcasts are recorded and can be re-posted. Podcasts are typically archived and can be leveraged on a brand's website, on social media feeds or in a newsletter.

Trade Show Appearances

Consider arranging for industry experts, celebrities or authors to make an appearance in your booth during key trade shows where your brand exhibits.

The influencer could:

- Perform a demonstration using your product
- Give a presentation on leading industry trends
- Participate in a Q&A hosted by a stakeholder of your brand, such as the president or director of product development
- Do a book signing
- Be available for a “meet-and-greet” or photo opportunity

Showhouses

Show homes offer a great way to get your brand's products in front of influencers and potential customers. It's also a great opportunity to illustrate your product's unique selling proposition (USP).

- Showhouses may be sponsored by consumer publications, trade magazines, industry associations, builders, designers and other industry-related organizations and professionals.
- In some cases, showhouses are also part of a charitable cause, which can provide a good opportunity for a brand to highlight its commitment to social responsibility.
- Showhouses are located in cities throughout the U.S. A brand can choose to participate in show homes based in cities or regions where they want to increase brand awareness, or to coincide with targeted regional campaigns.

Product Reviews

Studies show that approximately 90% of internet users check out online reviews prior to making a purchasing decision¹⁰. And 70% of consumers¹¹ say they look at multiple review sites before selecting a business.

Some trade publications, bloggers and online review websites will offer reviews of new products. Some of these opportunities are free, while others are paid.

Always ask the reviewer if you can see what they have written prior to publication. This way you can address any questions and ensure the review is as accurate as possible. Know going in that the reviewer may say no to your request and may publish their content without your approval.

Emerging platforms

New platforms can be exciting, but the influencer is also tasked with building a new audience from scratch. Or trying to move an existing audience across platforms. It isn't a sure-fire transition... even when influencers are up for the challenge.

Here's a current example: Amazon is recruiting TikTok influencers to review products on Amazon's own selling platform, Amazon Live. Amazon offers influencers \$2,000-\$9,000 per month, on top of a standard commission rate. But anonymous influencers reported that they had difficulty moving their audience to the new platform.

Television

Consider partnering with network and cable television shows with a strong following. For example, Today's Homeowner with Danny Lipford, Curb Appeal, Good Bones and Home Town.

Collaborations can include product donations, paid sponsorships or a combination of both.

The Percolation Stage

When your content lands in the community, it's important to let most of it simply percolate. The point of involving an influencer is to create organic buzz.

It's tempting to join in the influencer's conversation with his or her audience. However, responding to every online post or podcast where the influencer mentions your brand will diminish authenticity of the campaign. DON'T DO IT.

MEASURING THE ROI OF YOUR INFLUENCER MARKETING EFFORTS

Many top-tier marketers contend that, if you can't measure it, then it's not worth the time or effort to implement it.

Take the big box retailers, for example. They have their ordering, rotation and display techniques down to a science. Everything done is designed to maximize profit... using data as a guide.

Influencer marketing is no different. The results of these tactics are tangible. And can be measured, collected and used to drive your marketing efforts over time.

Influencer marketing provides an excellent return on investment. A survey from Tomoson showed that businesses made \$6.50 on average for every dollar they spent on influencer marketing.

At K&A, we use the following methods to measure the ROI of influencer marketing strategies over the course of a campaign.

Visibility. If you're launching a new product or service in a growth-oriented campaign, you might measure the number of impressions earned by a particular landing page that features an influencer. A quick look into Google Analytics – or another traffic measuring application – will provide page impressions, click-through rates and other valuable stats.

Engagement. With social media platforms like Facebook, the platform's business analytics features will provide cost-per-engagement (CPE) for campaigns. You can track actual sales and other engagement activities.

Content tracking. Measuring the reach of your content – particularly through email campaigns, landing page visits and information downloads – is an easy way to determine interest in your products or services.



For example:

- The number of “clicks” will show the level of interest your target audience has in your post.
- More “likes” will generate more buzz and boost your ranking.
- Facebook’s newest algorithm gives more weight to the “reactions” of your audience.
- More “shares” indicate higher quality – and a greater likelihood of a purchase.
- Brand “mentions” indicate that your content is being discussed and your brand is being amplified.

Conversions

Many brands will want to track the number of times people have completed a call-to-action. For example:

- Comments on the influencer’s blog post or social media posts that mention your brand, or sharing of the posts
- Visits to your brand’s website
- Sign-ups for an e-newsletter
- Downloading an e-book

Analyze the Origin of Sales

Generate and monitor affiliate links, promo codes and UTM parameters.

Keep in mind that data measurement is not the forte of every business. There are professionals and companies dedicated to collecting, processing and translating data and, thereby, tracking profitability.

If your brand lacks the resources to manage your customer data to the degree that you need, consider outsourcing those activities to a full-time marketing agency.

AN ASIDE ABOUT CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS

CEUs, or Continuing Education Units, are required courses for architects and designers to maintain their professional license. These courses can be sponsored by brands. While the coursework can't mention the brand directly, the course can cover the specs that fit a brand's exact product.

For example, if an architect wants some education on "sustainability," he or she could take a CEU course sponsored by your brand on specifying eco-friendly products. The course could cover FSC certification, recycled materials, ecological transportation costs, toxicity and raw materials.

The course could be designed to show the value of your brand's precise USP (unique selling prospect), without naming your brand outright. Armed with this information, the architect would likely seek out your eco-friendly brand's products and promote them to his or her clients.

CEU sponsorships are a way of educating professional, on-the-ground influencers about your building or home products, without contacting the influencers directly.

Think of brand ambassadors as amped-up influencers. Unlike influencers, who only represent a brand for a specific campaign... ambassadors have agreed to maintain an ongoing relationship with your brand.

Brand ambassadors are active users of your products. Who believe in your brand and want to share that enthusiasm with others. Not only do these ambassadors become an extension of your sales team, but they often grow as brand equity partners.

They're willing to pin their reputation on your product.

If the ambassador is a designer, he or she will recommend your product almost exclusively to clients. Because brand ambassadors are thought leaders in their community, they maintain engaged audiences who value their opinion and trust their judgment. Which is valuable for brands.

In turn, you provide your ambassadors with key product and campaign messaging, along with broad guidelines to follow when they reference your brand.

These ambassadors will help to spread the word about your brand through a variety of channels and tactics, including content creation, social media posts, interviews, CEU presentations, trade show participation and/or face-to-face interactions.

As a brand ambassador, designer Kerrie Kelly works on Sherman Williams' design council. "When we have the inside scoop on what that color mix is going to be, and we can share that with our client, it just helps us provide value as interior designers."

In 2007, Brizo faucets started collaborating with fashion designer Jason Wu on their products. Brizo would also fly bloggers to New York's Fashion Week to watch Jason Wu's runway show and preview Brizo's newest faucet collection before it was released to the public.

Brand ambassadors can participate in factory tours and share behind-the-scenes photos. They may be willing to provide video testimonials about their experiences, and can offer a fresh approach to using your products.

IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF BRAND AMBASSADORS

Brand ambassadors should be:

Passionate and connected. Recruit ambassadors who are regular users of your products. They need to feel a strong connection to the brand, company values, and the mission of your team.

Ask – do you truly use and specify our product?

If the answer is “no,” the partnership is unlikely to work. Kerrie Kelly says, “To come in off the street cold for a product you’d never use and ask a brand to partner with you ... I’ve seen that happen and fall flat for designers and influencers in our industry.”

Active and engaging on social media. Brand ambassadors can be crucial to a brand’s marketing. Kelley says, “Behind the scenes it’s really crafting messages and selecting imagery and capturing often that family story behind a brand.”

Professional and consistent. As the face of your brand, your ambassadors must understand that with representation comes responsibility. Make sure there are no posts on a potential ambassador’s personal social media accounts that could conflict with your company’s values.

Build Rapport with Ambassadors – and Keep Them Updated

In any long-term relationship, it’s important to maintain regular contact and to build and nurture trust. Keep the lines of communication open with your ambassadors and make sure they can easily reach you with any questions or suggestions.

A PR firm can work as the go-between the ambassador and the brand. The PR firm coordinates the ambassadorship’s long-term goals and schedules.

Here are several elements that are important in creating rapport with ambassadors.

Provide regular updates. Let ambassadors know about new campaigns and product launches along with updates on your company’s progress. Transparency builds trust. Ambassadors want to feel like they are aligned with your brand’s goals and objectives.

Solicit feedback. Ambassadors want to see your brand succeed. Ask them to give you candid feedback. They have unique perspectives that can help your campaigns and promotions better resonate with key audiences. You can also ask ambassadors to beta test campaign ideas and offer feedback on new product features.

Ambassadors can test product prototypes, provide feedback and tease upcoming products to their audience. Ambassadors become part of your research and development process and can play a vital role in innovation.

*“I can jump through the hoops first before sharing it on social media, or sharing that in person,” Kerrie Kelly says.
“I’ve been through it, so now let me take you through it.”*

Offer encouragement. Praise ambassadors for their successes. Encourage them and recognize their efforts. You could also offer constructive suggestions regarding ways in which they might better promote your brand.

Schedule check-in calls. Set up periodic check-in calls with ambassadors to touch base and address any concerns they may have. Keeping the lines of communication open will help to ensure ambassadors feel like they’re a valued part of your brand’s journey. For example, why not include them in an annual sales meeting?

A brand ambassadorship can be as short as a year, or last for over a decade. Kelly says that three years is the sweet spot, enough time to “really grow with a brand and evolve, that’s when you have those really deep relationships.”

A brand ambassador program can be a mutually-rewarding experience. And a cost-effective way to market your products and services... while building credibility and reaching potential customers.

“Long gone are the days of print ads,” says Elle H-Millard, interior designer and insider for the National Kitchen and Bath Association. She remarks that even attention for digital ads is waning.

While influencer marketing is definitely on the rise.

More than 50 million independent content creators and community builders drove the influencer marketing industry to \$13.8 billion in 2021, and this number is estimated to reach more than \$104 billion globally in 2022.

The approach I’ve outlined – working closely with creators and influencers – can be less expensive than traditional media and bring brands a more targeted direction to build trust and loyalty.

Fortunately, if you’ve made it this far, you don’t have to navigate influencer territory in the dark.

I’ve shared guidelines about how to find and evaluate influencers, how to negotiate a contract, implement a campaign and demonstrate your ROI.

You’ve been through the weeds of brand sponsorship contracts. You’ve taken tangents through marketing history... from Bob Vila’s saga to the history of selling soap in soap operas.

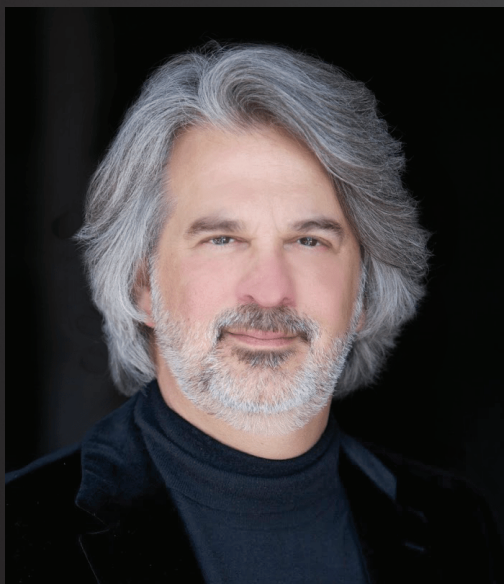
Hopefully, you’re already building influencer relationships that you can expand into a brand ambassadorship.

Or, if not, you’re ready to get started.

More than present a specific strategy, I want to express my awe at how quickly influencer marketing has changed – and will continue to change. It doesn’t end here.

Let’s keep going.

- 1: <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2022/getting-closer-influencers-help-brands-build-more-personal-consumer-connections/>
- 2: <https://www.convinceandconvert.com/digital-marketing/influencer-marketing-for-businesses/>
- 3: <https://www.nosto.com/blog/how-does-social-media-influence-customer-behavior/>
- 4: <https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/blog/20-influencer-marketing-statistics-that-will-surprise-you>
- 5: <https://www.linqia.com/insights/5-tips-to-use-influencer-content-in-paid-media/>
- 6: https://www.hubspot.com/hubfs/2022_State-of-Inbound-Marketing-Trends_71b.pdf
- 7: <https://www.linqia.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Linqia-The-State-of-Influencer-Marketing-2021.pdf>
- 8: <http://www.statshow.com/>
- 9: <https://hypestat.com/>
- 10: <https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/online-review-stats/>
- 11: <https://www.brightlocal.com/research/local-consumer-review-survey/>



by STEVE KLEBER

Steve Kleber is founder of Kleber & Associates (K&A), an integrated marketing and communications agency founded in 1987 with a focus on the home and building channel. He has a deep understanding of the residential and commercial building industry, and brings valuable insights on current market trends and innovations – frequently speaking at key industry events on the topics of sales & marketing alignment, wellness marketing, and how to grow brands and drive more revenue.

Steve is president of the National Remodeling Foundation and immediate past president of the National Kitchen & Bath Association’s Center for Kitchen and Bath Education and Research. He also serves on the Home Projects Council Board and National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) Global Opportunities Board, and was recently named by the NAHB as Global Innovation Awards Advisor to the National Sales & Marketing Council Awards and Recognition Subcommittee.



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