



# Influencer Marketing: Why Influencers Are Important for Your Business and Brand

By Don Eberly

The term “influencer” has become so synonymous with successful marketing practices that the Cambridge Dictionary has added a new definition of the word:

“A person or group that has the ability to influence the behavior or opinions of others: The influencer is the individual or group whose effect on a purchase decision is in some way significant or authoritative.”

It is true. Much like in personal life, many in business are persuaded by others to change their thinking, opinions, practices, or decisions.

Why not? After all, gleaned new insight and information from trusted contacts who have either experienced the products or services of a business is a means to a credible reference.

For years, many A/E/C marketers have embraced the idea of word-of-mouth marketing. The concept has served its purpose of generating interest in brands and their products or services. But, for those who have noticed this mindset’s

recent shift, the positive impact of influencers on sales and marketing can be astounding.

## What Is Influencer Marketing?

Set aside the outdated approach to one-way marketing messages: Static messages about a business and what it sells, hoping the information resonates with the audience.

Now, think about interactive marketing based on the influence of others. Neither your marketing staff nor your sales team have the power to influence your clients like others do.

## Who Are These All-Important Influencers?

They are not you.

Influencers in marketing include reputable contacts who are not your personnel and have earned the trust of people within your target audience sectors. They are reliable third-party influencers who have built a fan base that is often swayed by their recommendations.

The list of possible influencers is long, and that’s good. Influencers who can benefit your brand include journalists, industry experts, analysts, and social media gurus.

Your desired influencers are those who possess the platform to endorse your marketing messages, boost your acclaim, or drive others to purchase your products or services. As you ponder your 2018 marketing budget allocations, consider these stats:

- 84 percent of marketers plan to implement influencer marketing programs within the next 12 months. ~eMarketer study
- From 2014 to 2016, traditional paid advertising has dropped in favor, whereas influencer marketing has grown. ~Nielsen finding
- Influencer marketing now requires public relations managers to interact with an increasing number of external contacts who have the power and platforms to advocate for or endorse a business. ~Eberly & Collard Public Relations focus group



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## Four Strategies To Build Relationships With Influencers

### Start with strategic content marketing.

To gain the endorsement of external influencers, define strategic marketing outreach and publicity goals. Uncover how your brand is perceived by others, and how you would like to enhance those perceptions. Develop brand-augmentation messaging points and innovative forms of self-published content.

Rather than informing your targets how to perceive your brand, offer them engaging and resourceful information so they view your business as an industry helpmate or supportive analyst. Self-publish this written and video content via your owned media channels—i.e., your website, blog, and social media, giving your customers and prospects a reason to keep your URLs in their feeds.

### Find and engage trusted influencers.

Research a diverse group of external contacts and influential connections affiliated with your field. Determine good influencers by studying their potential viability for being ambassadors. If they have an existing trust factor among your client-types, and they effectively persuade your targets, initiate an authentic relationship with them.

Look for influencers among popular social media enthusiasts, professional associations, conferences, online forums, trade publications, and anywhere communities have formed that could yield proactive, positive interactions. Engage with these influencers daily.

### Execute press and media relations.

Draft press releases, news briefs, product notices, completed project announcements, and other media narratives regarding your business, personnel, news, awards, and accomplishments.

Take time to uncover how and where your targets read their news, and customize your releases to these media outlets. As media outlets publish your news, they will act as influencers, which can lead your target audiences to your website or other ways of connecting. Media-endorsed information about your business is one of the surest ways to increase branding.

**Cultivate and maintain your brand influencers.** In your influencer marketing efforts, remain true to the brand standards your business holds sacred. Adhere to a set of guidelines that makes it possible for everyone within your organization to create and grow relationships with influencers.

As you develop content of interest to your audiences and invite the influencers to share it with the contacts who admire them, include key search words and URL links in subtle ways. Do not oversaturate the content with promotional or sales information. Your influencer campaign should form both inbound and outbound lead activity through non-sales language. Yet, it should have an attention-grabbing, informational tone.

As you proceed with cultivating relationships with influencers, think of them as allies for your brand. Provide mutually beneficial support to those willing and able to persuade, refer, or guide their followers toward you and your business.

Your business will become known for offering value, data, and insight. If well-planned, your content will be shared and re-shared by others, going viral and building new forms of outreach and impressions. Finally, your business will breed new relationships with significant, persuasive contacts paramount to your sales and marketing success. ■