

**THE
ECOMMERCE
GUIDE TO
INFLUENCER
MARKETING**



CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

2-3. DEFINITION OF INFLUENCERS

4. WHERE TO FIND THEM

5. HOW TO IDENTIFY THE RIGHT INFLUENCER FOR YOUR BRAND

6-7. HOW TO WORK WITH THEM

8. TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

9. HOW TO MEASURE RESULTS

10. CONCLUSION



INTRODUCTION

Influence is defined as:

The capacity to have an effect on others or their behavior. In retail, the bottom line is driven by influencing consumers to purchase. What drives those purchase decisions? Often it's a need, or an underlying desire for a product. Other times, it can be the influence of well, an influencer.

In today's retail landscape, influencer marketing is more powerful than ever. Brands are turning to celebrities, social media stars, and other influential creators to promote their products, and it's working. In 2017, **86% of marketers** used influencers in their campaigns, and according to a [study done by Tomoson](#), businesses make **\$6.50 for every \$1 spent** on influencer marketing.

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Despite influencer marketing's exponential growth in recent years, there is still some uncertainty around the best approach to take when utilizing it. We've put together a definitive guide on the current state of influencer marketing and how retailers can make this strategy work for them.



DEFINITION OF INFLUENCERS

Even in recent years the definition of 'influencer' in the marketing sense has changed. Word-of-mouth marketing has evolved, and influencer marketing has largely taken its place. Influencers are not only content creators with over a million followers on Instagram.

They are:



Employees



Customers



Celebrities



Content Creators

Your employees serve as your best source of influencer marketing. They should be following your accounts on social media, and consistently sharing your content and advocating for you online and in person.



DEFINITION OF INFLUENCERS

Your next tier of influencers is your customers. Loyal, repeat customers who are true fans of your products will often share your products with their friends and family, on social media, their own blogs, or in person. One way to identify these brand advocates is by tracking your brand mentions online—reaching out to these cheerleaders directly and thanking them for your support can go a long way in building a loyal customer base. Another way to seek out these influencers is through ratings and reviews on your eCommerce site. Customers leaving positive reviews are creating the perfect marketing content for you, free of charge. Sharing those reviews boosts your SEO (search engines love user-generated content), increases customer satisfaction, and encourages other consumers to follow suit and leave valuable feedback. With a ratings and reviews platform like [Revere](#), retailers can easily monitor UGC from customers, and even tag certain keywords to trigger alerts to customer service teams. Your customers are your best source of content and feedback, so make sure you are making the most of this channel.



Aside from the traditional 'influencer' who has a large presence on a blog or social media, retailers are also finding increasing success with micro-influencers. They often have as few as 10K followers, but their following is loyal and highly engaged. These influencers may appear more authentic to consumers, because they appear less like celebrities and more like peers. Their content is authentic and relatable to their audience, and they choose their sponsorships wisely, rather than inundating their feeds with branded content. **For brands just starting out with influencer marketing, micro-influencers are a smart first step.**

In addition to these three options, brands can always turn to larger influencers and celebrities, but they often come at a much higher price and may risk alienating your customers if the content appears forced.



WHERE TO FIND THEM

To find influencers to promote your brand, there are a variety of channels to explore. On social media, the best channel for your brand will depend on your products. Historically, Instagram has been one of the highest-growth platforms for brands, as well as YouTube. Brands that sell apparel, makeup, and skincare products will likely find success on these platforms. Consumers are already interacting with influencers on these platforms, so branded content appears more native and authentic.

To find the right channel to promote your products, consider where your customers already are.

For brands selling more specialized items, Facebook can be a good option, particularly for an older demographic. Tech and gadgets often perform well on Twitter and LinkedIn. To find the right channel to promote your products,

consider where your customers already are. Where do you see the most engagement with your brand? Where do customers reach out to ask questions or provide feedback? That's the first place you should look.

For brands just starting out with influencer marketing, platforms like Virid Partner **BrandBacker** are a cost-effective way to connect directly with influencers who are interested in promoting your products. If your brand is well-seasoned in influencer marketing, consider creating a formal ambassador program, where influencers of all calibers (everyone from college students to full-time bloggers) can sign up to help you promote and sell your products.



HOW TO IDENTIFY THE RIGHT INFLUENCER FOR YOUR BRAND

To find the right influencer to work with, brands should identify their target audience and then match the influencer that's right for that audience.

- What is the demographic of your ideal customer?**
- What are their interests?**
- What is their comfort level on social media?**

This will dictate which channels you should be looking at to find the right influencers. If your customer base is highly active on Facebook but hardly ever watches YouTube, you would be better off avoiding daily vloggers and finding an influencer with a compelling Facebook page. Meeting your customers where they are is a key step in influencer marketing.

The next step is to identify a list of influencers that matches your core brand values, from their tone and personal brand, to the demographic of their followers, to the type of content they share. A Mommy blogger with a loyal following who posts about her favorite baby products may not be the perfect fit for a footwear company, but an avid hiker who shares her must-haves (granola bars, water bottles, and the perfect hiking shoes) might be.

Once you've narrowed down your search to a core list of influencers, take a look beyond the number of followers—followers can be bought, but engagement is harder to fake. Look at the ratio of how many followers an influencer has to how many likes, reposts, or comments they have on each post. Look at their content and the type of topics they post about. And also look at the feedback under each post—are people sharing positive comments that align with your brand? This should help you narrow down your list even further. The next step? Reach out to them where they are most comfortable—on social media! Send them a direct message to start building a connection.



HOW TO WORK WITH THEM

Despite being a fairly new development in digital marketing, influencer marketing already has stringent guidelines surrounding it, especially when it comes to social media.

Make sure you are following the FTC's guidelines for sharing sponsored posts. Each social channel has its own format for marking a post as sponsored, included using branded hashtags or a small 'Sponsored' stamp at the top of a post. Also, don't be afraid to think outside the traditional pay-to-post relationship. Build a rapport with the influencers that suit your brand well, and try to find opportunities for them to engage your audience outside of a traditional post. For example, have an influencer attend a brand event or share their content to your website. Also, as aforementioned, expanding your definition of influencer to include fans of your brand that post about your products online is a key to success. These micro-influencers can also be a valuable source of customer feedback. Request reviews from satisfied customers post-purchase to increase the amount of social proof on your product pages, and drive traffic back to your site.

When it comes to developing your influencer content strategy, keep in mind why influencer marketing works. Customers trust their favorite influencers because they feel like they are a part of their lives. Influencers that created seemingly unedited, highly authentic content are more likely to capture your consumers' attention and earn their trust.

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HOW TO WORK WITH THEM

Also, keep in mind that there are multiple ways to work with influencers. Sending free product to influencers in exchange for promotion is a great way for smaller brands to build up their own following. Having influencers shoutout your company on social media or tag you in their posts is also a great way to increase brand awareness. If you have a long-term relationship with a certain influencer, inviting them to do a 'social media takeover' of your account for a day and post on your behalf is a fun way to engage consumers. Providing affiliate links or discount codes to influencers is also a great way to reward them for sending traffic back to your site.

Additionally, social selling has risen in popularity in recent years. Technologies like Virid Partner [Curalate's Like2Buy](#) allow your brand to create shoppable Instagram posts, meaning that sales are just a few taps away for consumers. Influencers can also create shoppable posts that direct their followers back to your site, meaning that their fans can become your fans.





TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

When working with influencers, there are a number of technological considerations that retailers should take into account. When one Virid client was featured on Oprah, site traffic surged overnight. Virid's marketAgility eCommerce platform was able to handle the sudden influx of traffic without any site downtime or delays for customers. Driving more traffic to your site through a robust marketing program can increase conversions and sales, but it can also slow down your site if your tech infrastructure is not prepared to handle it.

Partnering with an experienced eCommerce team that builds on an in-house platform and manages all integrations allows you to respond quickly and efficiently to any changes in your business, avoiding any surprises along the way.

If you choose to use additional software to manage your influencer marketing campaign such as BrandBacker or a social media tool, work with your eCommerce platform to see what types of integrations they can support. Managing your merchandise and marketing campaigns all in one place can save your eCommerce team time and money in the long run.



HOW TO MEASURE RESULTS

Depending on what your end goal is with implementing influencer marketing, there are a variety of ways to measure success. For example, if your goal is to increase brand awareness, measuring increases in your social media following, unique pageviews on your website, or the appearance of your brand name or certain keywords in search engine results is a good place to start.

If your goal is simply to increase sales, try to create as controlled an environment as possible to track your results.

If you are running multiple sales and additional ad campaigns over the same month that an influencer is posting about your brand, it can be hard to directly attribute that revenue to one source. Creating a unique link or landing page for influencers to send traffic to allows you to see exactly what is driving conversions on your site.



CONCLUSION

Influencer marketing has evolved in the last decade, and so has the eCommerce landscape. Connecting brands with consumers now requires more creativity and newer technologies, and eCommerce teams will need to adapt to thrive in this new environment. When implementing new marketing programs, make sure your eCommerce site can handle the changes. Partner with vendors that understand the technology behind your business, and value your customer experience.

For more information on how Virid can help you grow your eCommerce business, contact sales@virid.com.

