



The Five Top Trends That Will Shape Influencer Marketing in 2018

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In 2017, influencer marketing successfully made the transition from being considered a passing fad to being allotted a well-deserved place in the modern marketing mix.

Interest in the topic increased 90-fold from 2013.

The success of influencer marketing lies in being able to break through the noise and content saturation in today's digital environments by harnessing the voices of trusted opinion leaders to spread a brand's message to the intended audience in the most authentic and natural way possible.

As we enter 2018, influencer marketing will continue to rapidly evolve both as the brands already using it look for ways to maximize the impact of their collaborations and as other brands give in to "peer pressure" and try it for the first time.

Here are five influencer marketing trends to look for in the new year.

1. A Sizable Shift to Influencer Marketing

In 2018, ad spending for brands will continue to shift from print and broadcast to digital and social media, and a considerable portion of marketing budgets will be allocated to influencers.

Influencer marketing will no longer revolve around one-off campaigns; it will instead become an always-on strategy. Those brands that tried it for the first time in 2017 and confirmed its value will be coming back with bigger budgets and more ambitious projects during 2018.

This year, the focus will be on building mutually beneficial long-term relationships with influencers. Collaborative partnerships will take center stage as brands move from a proofing stage to a perfecting stage; they will implement tactics that have previously proven successful, but they will take it up a notch and allow trusted influencers to lead the creative side.

2. All Eyes on Micro-Influencers

If 2017 demonstrated that marketers cannot ignore the importance of influencers, then 2018 will demonstrate the importance of micro-influencers: active users of social networks who have fewer than 10,000 followers and have an immense influence among their communities.

Micro-influencers typically have a particular interest and expertise that revolves around a specific niche, such as beauty, business, fitness, travel, and so on. Their enthusiasm for a specific subject allows them to dig deep and establish themselves as authorities, imprinting their own style and personal touch on the content that they publish on social media.

Brands are now more aware than ever of the advantages of amplifying messages among smaller, hyper-targeted audiences; accordingly, as more budget is progressively allocated to influencer marketing, many are looking beyond follower counts and focusing on actual engagement.

Micro-influencers deliver 60% higher campaign engagement rates; moreover, those campaigns are 6.7 times more efficient per engagement than those with influencers with larger followings. They also drive 22 times more conversations result each week regarding recommendations on what to buy by micro-influencers than by the average social media user.

Much of that level of engagement is due to the dialogue that occurs naturally between micro-influencers and their followers. Unlike what happens with macro-influencers and celebrities, the content that micro-influencers produce resonates with their audience because micro-influencers are relatable.

3. Video and More Video

YouTube gave us the first glimpse of the mass appeal of online video back in 2005 with its first viral video, "Lazy Sunday." Today, with livestreaming, looping, and ephemeral video apps, including Facebook Live, YouTube Live, Twitter Live, Snapchat, Instagram Stories, and Boomerang, we can see that video is the absolute king of the Internet.

The average daily amount of time that US adults spend consuming digital video content has nearly doubled since 2012, increasing from 35 minutes to 72 minutes across digital devices, with mobile leading the way.

New technologies have made video more accessible, immersive, and engaging than ever before. For video creators, this means a world of possibilities for creating and delivering unique content; for brands, it means new avenues of communication to reach their target audience and stay top of mind throughout a consumer's buying journey.

Although YouTube continues to lead the online video market, live-streaming video is gaining traction, with Facebook Live dominating and Instagram Stories following right behind in the short-lived video category as it wins over users from Snapchat.

Live-video viewership is consistently growing with one-third of online viewers saying they watch live video online. Among millennials, the numbers spike even higher: 63% say they have watched live content, and 42% say they have created it.

What people crave to see is not super-polished productions but real people being themselves on camera, hence the massive success of influencer live-streaming videos that provide that in-the-moment and behind-the-scenes look into their lives.

4. Focus on Data and Accountability

The influencer marketing space is still permeated by a lot of gray areas, and

measurability remains its Achilles' heel. In fact, determining the ROI of influencer marketing campaigns has been cited by most marketers as their top challenge year after year.

During the second half of 2017, several firms announced programs and algorithms that would allow for greater transparency and provide third-party verification to influencer marketing metrics. Such verification goes beyond validating follower count to making sure no bots are involved and to reviewing engagement metrics and actual reach.

In 2018, the tendency will be to move toward greater standardization both in analytics and compensation. More and more brands are now entering the influencer marketing space with clear and measurable goals. Views and impressions based on follower count will no longer be the main metric as brands focus on cost per engagement and determining how likes, retweets, comments, and clickthroughs are affecting the bottom line.

Many brands are already using individual, customized links to track performance and see which posts are driving traffic to their websites. Others are using promo codes and affiliate links to measure an influencer's impact on sales.

For brands and agencies, influencer marketing platforms and marketplaces will continue to be a go-to solution as they facilitate the monitoring and real-time data collection process with robust tracking and social media metrics capabilities. They will also be of great help when determining how to price campaigns, as there are still many questions surrounding how much to pay influencers and what criteria to use when establishing rates.

5. Rise of...

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