

SHOULD YOU LET A YOUTUBER DO YOUR MARKETING?

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Influencer marketing, or the concept of getting a prominent online creator to sell your product to their audience, has a significant ROI potential if done well, but it can be difficult to get started. Check out some tips for trying out the strategy for your association.

It's never been about the number of followers you have—rather, it's always about who's listening, and why.

And, let's be honest with ourselves. Sometimes, our follower count, email lists, and audience don't match the audience we'd like to reach or sell to. Sure, you can spend months building out that audience or paying for solutions like [sourced traffic](#) or pay-per-click search **advertising**, but what if your best option would be to leverage someone who already has the audience you want?

That's where influencer **marketing** comes into play. To put it simply, it's the concept of putting the work of **advertising** directly into the hands of an individual with a wide audience, often a person with a big **Instagram** following, a popular email newsletter, or a **YouTube** channel.

These influencers tend to be regular people who have gained a reputation for being an authoritative voice on a certain topic, having a clever storytelling approach that can't easily be replicated, or of winning folks over through sheer personality. (Or, if you're lucky, they have a combination of the three.)

Problem is, it's not easy for these folks to raise money for their creative efforts through traditional means. Influencer **marketing**, as a result, helps them pay the bills.

On the advertiser front, such campaigns have a reputation for being very cost-effective if done properly. Two separate 2015 studies on the phenomenon, [covered by PR Newser](#), found that influencer **marketing** had a tendency to earn more than \$6.50 in return for every dollar spent.

The only problem? [As eMarketer notes](#), it's often hard to find a **YouTuber** or podcaster who matches your **brand**. A May 2015 study by Schlesinger Associates highlighted by the website found that identifying the right influencers was the most difficult part of influencer **marketing** (75

percent), with finding the right engagement tactics (69 percent) immediately behind.

So no, it's not as easy as throwing a banner ad into a programmatic system. But the end result might have a better shot of breaking through.

AN EXAMPLE OF INFLUENCER MAGIC

My favorite example of the potential of influencer **marketing** is the work of Casey Neistat, particularly a 2013 clip he created to promote the film [The Secret Life of Walter Mitty](#).

Neistat—known for his innovative filmmaking techniques, aggressive creativity, and [jet-setting lifestyle](#)—was offered \$25,000 by 20th Century Fox to create a clip that exemplified the value of chasing a dream, an on-**brand** message for the Ben Stiller film. But Neistat had other plans. Deeply concerned about the then-recent Typhoon Haiyan that had just hit the Philippines, he asked the company to instead give him that money to fund disaster relief, which he would then base his clip on.

<https://youtu.be/jU7rhVub0rU>

Shockingly, the studio agreed, and the resulting clip showed Neistat's efforts to fund homespun relief efforts in the country, with Neistat and fellow video creator Oscar Boyson launching a makeshift humanitarian aid effort with the budget they were given.

"It was complicated and at first improbable, but with the help of an extremely loving group of locals, all who were total strangers, we were able to stretch the production budget really far," he wrote in the video's **YouTube** description.

The film, which has received 5.6 million views since late 2013, has become one of Neistat's most famous **YouTube** clips. And while the approach veered significantly from what Fox was looking for, the unexpected humanitarian approach arguably gave *Mitty* much more of a boost than if Neistat had stuck to the script.

Most influencers won't be able to offer such a wild, unexpected creative twist on your **marketing** concept, but they will offer ideas—original ideas, far beyond what you might get from a banner ad or **social** post.

HOW CAN THIS TRANSLATE?

The power of influencer **marketing** is maximized when such **marketing** has a glove-like fit with the influencer in question. Let's say you run an industry group focused on textiles—for example, wool or cotton. It would be valuable for a fashion **YouTuber** to share a few examples of trendy outfits that are 100 percent wool or cotton. The secret is that they're hitting the kind of audience that you want to reach but might ignore you normally.

<https://youtu.be/ug-CyGXMaBg>

Another example: Earlier this month, **YouTube** Ben Heck dismantled a rare prototype Nintendo PlayStation ([look it up, it's actually a thing](#)), messed with the circuit board,[and got it working again](#). Throughout the clips, Heck promoted his employer, Element 14, but he could have just as easily been promoting an organization like IEEE with these clips—because the clips highlight how awesome electrical engineering is.

But what if you're in a space where the target audience is a bit more, sorry to say, square? Maybe, instead of aiming for a broad audience, you narrow your focus, working with a prominent independent industry voice, such as a guy who runs a closely read newsletter in your sector.

It's worth keeping in mind that the name of the game is ROI, but what seems like a modest **marketing** budget to your organization can be a major financial windfall to an influencer, and the fact that the costs are relatively low at this juncture makes now a good time to experiment within this space.

WORDS OF WARNING

But before you hop into the world of influencer **marketing**, it's important to note a few things:

Do your homework first: If you reach out to an influencer or a group of influencers, have a plan in mind. Maybe you'll have them attend one of your annual events, test out a new member benefit, or stop by a factory owned by one of your members. Figure out the logistics early, both to keep costs down and to nail down the creative strategy. But leave some wiggle room in there for the Casey Neistats of the world.

Vet your influencers. Just because an influencer seems cool and could be a great fit for your message doesn't mean that they'll ultimately make a good fit and won't flake on you. Don't be afraid to ask such influencers for references who can speak to their work. If they don't have any, start small and work your way up, in the same way you might approach work with an **advertising** agency.

<https://youtu.be/g-wdRroa4ms>

Be mindful of federal regulations: Despite the relative freshness of this approach, the Federal Trade Commission is keeping an eye out, with the goal of preventing misleading **marketing** to consumers. Earlier this month, [the FTC publicly rebuked Warner Bros.](#) after the company paid popular gamers on **YouTube**, most notably the 46-million-follower PewDiePie (shown above), to say positive things about the company's game *Middle Earth: Shadow of Mordor*. While the approach is legal, the problem is that there was little in the way of disclosure to go with the reviews, making them seem unbiased when they weren't. (PewDiePie, birth name Felix Kjellberg, [defended his approach](#), saying that he properly disclosed the company's sponsorship of the videos.) A vendor of Microsoft, Machinima Inc., [got in trouble for similar reasons](#) last year. If you do work with an influencer, make sure the final result is straightforward about the fact that the creator was compensated for their work.

And in the end, you might find that the best way to utilize influencer **marketing** is through underwriting or sponsorship. [It's not easy out there for a creator](#) these days,[even with things like Patreon](#) to help cover the bills.

But if a creator's approach generally represents your organization's values, it never hurts to ask. He or she might just be looking for such a nudge.

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