

MARKETING

Influencer marketing professionals looking for authenticity, accountability

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Marketers are looking for more authentic influencers. Image source: Talkwalker

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Less than a third of brands and agencies have an official influencer program in place, despite the field's rapid growth in recent years.

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According to a new report from social media analytics platform Talkwalker, authenticity and long-lasting influencer relationships are among the priorities for marketers. There is also a need for improved measurement frameworks to better gauge the effectiveness of influencer campaigns.

"In 2019, influencer marketing will face one major challenge: the quest for authenticity," said Todd Grossman, CEO of the Americas at **Talkwalker**, New York. "The high-profile fraud of the Fyre Festival and the luxury' campaign from Payless had deep impact.

"A new search for authenticity over appearance, and on quality over quantity, leads brands and agencies to look for long-lasting relationships with a few very specific influencers focus on smaller actors whose numbers and impact are easier to track," he said.

Talkwalker's report is based on a global survey of more than 800 marketing and public relations professionals.

Influencer investments

Sixty-one percent of respondents plan to increase the money they invest in influencer marketing this year.

Talkwalker found that less than 32 percent of respondents have an official influencer program, despite 30 percent listing influencer marketing as a top strategic priority. About three-quarters of these brands and agencies have at least one employee dedicated to identifying and managing influencers.



Bryan Boy leads a group of influencers working with Ferragamo. Image courtesy of Salvatore Ferragamo

One of the biggest challenges facing brands and agencies, as cited by 38.9 percent, is measuring the return on investment for influencer marketing.

To a lesser extent, marketers are also struggling to identify impactful influencers and find creative opportunities with them.

More than 62 percent of respondents do not use specific tools to detect, manage or measure the performance of influencer marketing initiatives.

"One astonishing fact is the stunning big gap we see between intent and impact," Mr. Grossman said. "While brands are eager to leverage the power of influencers, many of them haven't yet developed a reliable measurement and management strategy, which makes planning and tracking these types of campaigns more difficult."

According to 65.8 percent of respondents, the primary objective for influencer programs is to make brands more visible. Less than 17 percent were looking for lead generation or more purchases.

Brands and agencies are also moving away from making their marketing decisions based on an influencer's following and instead are looking to work with creators whose posts are already high-quality and cohesive with a brand's messaging. However, engagement rates and the size of an audience still remain important.



Influencer Anna Vitiello pitching Bucherer jewelry. Image credit: Anna Vitiello @annarvitiello

As marketers become more selective about which influencers they work with, these relationships are becoming more long-term.

The majority of influencer marketing professionals, 71 percent, currently work with rosters of 50 influencers or less.

Risks and opportunities

More brands are turning to influencers to authentically connect them to new audiences as influencer engagement increases, with more room to grow.

Influencers drive an overwhelming 72 percent of social media actions, according to a webinar presented by Shareablee.

In 2017, percent of social media engagement occurred with an influencer, numbering more than 122 billion. The 10 most popular influencers alone have more than 242.6 million followers and drove 1.2 billion social actions a like,

comment or share, depending on the platform ([see story](#)).

In particular, the growth of Instagram Stories usage from brands on influencer accounts can be attributed to the feature's ability to create a personal and close connection with followers, despite its temporary nature ([see story](#)).

However, as celebrities and influencers continue to face legal consequences over copyright infringement, luxury brands must be aware of the repercussions they could face due to improper sharing of intellectual property. On occasion, arrangements with social media influencers have led to complications for brands ([see story](#)).

"Relying on the right influencers to create positive emotions and the necessary premium aura around their brand DNA constitutes nowadays a must-have strategy and a clear competitive advantage for luxury brands," Talkwalker's Mr. Grossman said. "But the recent influencer marketing shams show that brands struggle with this challenge.

"Therefore, the luxury industry especially needs to use precise data and analytics to find the right influencers and measure their tangible impact on the brand's high-end image," he said.

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