

MARKETING

Influencer marketing should take right tone during pandemic

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"What Covid-19 means for influencer marketing" report by Influencer Intelligence. Image courtesy of Influencer Intelligence

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Brands have an opportunity to connect with affluent homebound consumers in lockdown by working with social media influencers, but the messaging must have the right tone.

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A [new report from Influencer Intelligence](#) found that brands are proceeding cautiously and rethinking marketing strategies to be more in tune with the current global context. As consumers are tuning in online even more than ever, brands are looking to strike the right tone so as not to seem to be profiting from the crisis.

"There are still very much vast amounts of opportunities existing for influencer campaigns during coronavirus shutdowns," said Sarah Penny, head of content at Influencer Intelligence and Fashion & Beauty Monitor, London.

"As people take a step back from the busy days of normal everyday life and are restricted on their activities, we've found that consumers are even more receptive to social content as most have more time on their hands," she said.

"This has been reflected in surges in social traffic, particularly to influencer channels across platforms."



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Tuning into mood

There are, however, factors that really need to be taken into consideration when working with influencers at this time.

These are not new principles, but at the heart of best practice within influencer marketing and rising to the top of the priorities list in the current climate.

"The priority has to be that influencer marketing has to be practiced as marketing and not advertising," Ms. Penny said.

"Marketing's effectiveness comes from powerful storytelling and this has never been more critical," she said.

"During economic uncertainty and social upheaval, consumers are increasingly skeptical and cold to being overtly sold to, so a post that is clearly trying to push product and that alone is not going to be viewed favorably."

Instead, brands can be effective by working with influencers to craft compelling content that means something to viewers.

For instance, that could include teaching a new skill, sharing useful information, and offering entertainment or content that helps consumers sooth their anxiety with yoga or meditation classes.

"Due to the climate, now is not necessarily the time that you are going to see the greatest effectiveness for direct sales as a result of a campaign, but in a time of need, brands can really focus on their long-term strategy and create brand allegiance, which will be super beneficial in the long run," Ms. Penny said.

"Any messaging needs to be relevant and sensitive, and the balance needs to be spot-on," she said.

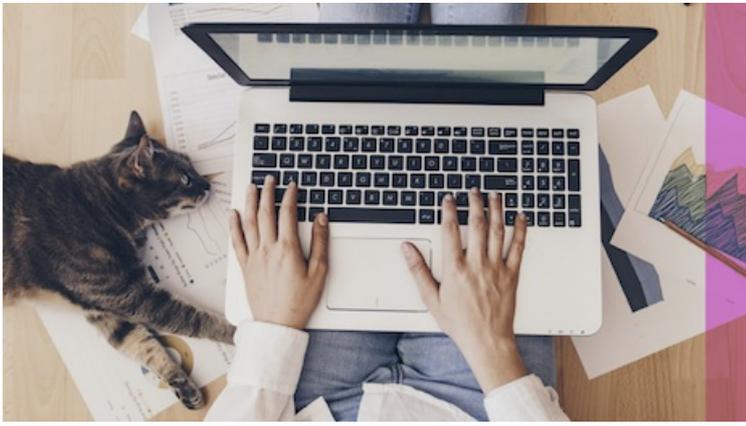
"Whilst brands need to be particularly careful to not appear that they are using COVID-19 as an opportunity by jumping on a hashtag, for example, it's had such a huge impact, that it seems a little odd when brands don't nod to it all."

Luxury brands have been stepping up to help out by donating money or turning their factories into production centers for needed medical supplies.

These companies have an opportunity to tell these stories through their social influencer partners, but it must be done with modesty and dignity.

"Consumers are definitely looking for more information to help the situation, whether that's when brands are contributing to purpose-led campaigns such as helping manufacture equipment, to more trivial help such as providing entertainment through self-isolation, content needs to have a cause," Ms. Penny said.

"With this cause, all language needs to be sensitive and showing humanity also feels appropriate in the current, very vulnerable climate," she said.



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Risk of backlash

There is a definitely a huge need for all brands to readdress their tone of messaging and interrogate suitability at all costs.

The report highlighted one example of what not to do.

Gwyneth Paltrow's site Goop took a hit on social media a few days ago when the site owner created a tone-deaf post in which the actress/CEO wore a pair of \$425 Alexandre Birman sneakers to promote a campaign between the publication and the brand. The post was deleted after users called her out for flaunting luxury during a time when many people have lost their jobs.

"We're going through an unprecedented time of both personal upheaval and economic uncertainty," Ms. Penny said. "That means that sensitivity needs to be paramount."

The report identified an increasing trend, particularly among Gen Z consumers, for brands to be more accountable. This behavior has become magnified amidst the pandemic.

"The situation itself, coupled with economic uncertainty, means that we all feel very vulnerable at the moment, and being involved with a situation of global gravitas means that there is a universal need for sensitivity," Ms. Penny said.

"We've all taken a bit of time to step back," she said. "Even everyday communication between individuals tends to be a lot more caring."

"It's not necessarily a new concept, but because people are reflecting on behaviors, this tone is being recognized as how we should be communicating with each other, and this carries over to brand communications."

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