

MARKETING

## Influencers pave the way for successful digital branding

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*Ferragamo tapped creative influencers to promote its Viva ballet flat. Image credit: Salvatore Ferragamo*

By NORA HOWE

Sponsored influencer posts typically see higher engagement than traditional social media ads, according to *Vogue Business*, making influencers a crucial component of successful digital strategies.

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As trends and consumer behavior evolves, so will methods of influencer marketing. During a virtual session at the *Vogue Business* and TikTok inaugural **Technology Forum** on March 18, retail and marketing editor at *Vogue Business* Katie Chitrakorn spoke with leaders from both the brand and platform sides of the industry regarding how trends shape the way brands utilize content creators and interact with consumers.

"Our ability to speak and collaborate with influencers and content creators authentically has become our greatest strength as a brand," said Penelope Giraud, global general manager at **CeraVe**.

### Key takeaways

Platforms like TikTok and Twitch, which rose in popularity during the COVID-19 global lockdown, can provide an effective gateway between brand and consumer.

According to *Vogue Business*, 41 percent of Gen Z and 34 percent of millennial global internet users cited filling up spare time as a main reason for using social media, while 40 percent of Gen Z users and 35 percent of millennials said it was to find funny or entertaining content.

The most crucial elements to marketing in this new digital era is short-form video content and utilizing the influencer voice on new platforms designed specifically for creators, according to all panelists.

"We're seeing a significant demand for short-form video content, shifting away from YouTube and moving toward Instagram Reels and TikTok," said Michelle Phan, founder of **EM Cosmetics**. "Short-form, organic videos are easy to produce because literally anyone with a phone can shoot videos themselves.

"Consumers want to watch something short, and if something interests them they'll stop for a minute or so."

In the beauty and skincare space, specifically, brands have noticed consumers are dealing with especially irritated

skin from wearing masks for the past year. These consumers are needing much advice on how to care for their skin, and seek out answers to those concerns from a new generation of "skinfluencers" a term coined for skincare influencers.

"It's been a great year to connect with influencers, discussing our products in an organic and authentic way," said Ms. Giraud. "Influencers are coming to us, which is interesting because, in the past, brands would need to seek out their influencers.

"Now they seek out the brands they love and trust and want to work with, which fosters a natural partnership," she said. "Then you know the community will like and trust the product because they like and trust the influencer."

*TikTok influencer Charli D'Amelio tries CeraVe skincare with "skinfluencer" Hiram*

Brands are increasingly getting access and licensing rights to influencer-produced content to use as ads from their accounts.

"I produced some influencer content for one brand, and they requested to use it for a branded Facebook ad," said Ms. Phan. "Because it looks like user-generated content, the ad did extremely well.

"There is a greater return-on-investment with low-production content," she said. "That brand, in particular, was able to keep their customer acquisition costs way lower than if they had shot something in a studio."

Additionally, Facebook and Instagram are allowing brands to directly spend ad money through an influencer's account.

Social media is a deeply embedded tool within a consumer's purchase journey, especially in discovery and research. Social buying and live shopping are starting to make incremental gains, as all four panelists agreed they will continue to grow.

"There is a need in the market for a full ecommerce experience, whether that is on TikTok or other channels," said Arnaud Cabanis, managing director of global business solutions at TikTok France and Belgium. "Ecommerce and livestreaming are at the core of what we want to bring to market this year."

While "buy" buttons can help boost platform-based shopping, it may not be enough, as only 19 percent of TikTok users and 16 percent of Instagram users say a "buy" button on the platform would most induce them to buy a product.

Brands are asking influencers to act as on-air shopping anchors, as video shopping has risen in popularity.

"The focus for many brands now is bringing new experiences to consumers across all channels," said Virgile Ollivier, co-founder and CEO of Livescale. "Live shopping capabilities can deliver awareness, engagement and sales conversion in a creative, entertaining and effective way.

"As a brand, though, you must be true to your values and exhibit authenticity," he said. "Bring your audiences into the conversation."

2021 will be a crucial year for influencers to further monetize their content.

Last week, Facebook introduced new ways it plans to support content creators and diversify revenue on its platform. In order to provide them the support they need to thrive, the social media company plans to open monetization to more creators, making it possible for them to earn revenue from all video types and access fan support ([see story](#)).

*Prada invited Charli D'Amelio to Milan Fashion Week, where she documented her experience for her followers*

However, unlike Instagram and Facebook, platforms like TikTok, Reddit and Clubhouse continue to attract new consumers driven by a desire for authenticity who are looking for micro communities, away from public feeds.

"What I have enjoyed about Clubhouse is the sense of intimacy and privacy," Ms. Phan said. "The conversation is not broadcast everywhere, therefore it becomes a more authentic, humanized experience.

"There is something about the power of not having to worry about being on camera or making sure everything looks good," she said.

Brands and influencers have also begun stepping into the world of digital currencies, such as Bitcoin and non fungible tokens.

"These digital currencies should be treated as savings technology," Ms. Phan said. "Consult with people who understand the space and are not looking to just flip a quick dollar."

## Influencer voice

From accounts with less than 10,000 followers to major celebrities like Kim Kardashian, online influencers include a vast collection of people each speaking to a dedicated community of consumers. Brands have, and will continue, to leverage the influencer voice and spread their message.

Italian lingerie label La Perla launched its first washable silk "Dreamcatcher" collection through the use of influencer marketing. Ranging from 42,000 to 425,000 followers, Instagram influencers Iris Law, Julia Restoin Roitfeld, Sharon Alexie, Langley Fox, Quentin Jones and Marta Cygan each shared posts wearing the Dreamcatcher lingerie in unexpected situations.

The campaign aimed to encourage women to appreciate everyday luxuries ([see story](#)).

In 2019, French fashion label Louis Vuitton invited YouTube star and Instagram influencer Emma Chamberlain and model Karlie Kloss to its runway show at Paris Fashion Week. In the hopes of catering to younger affluent consumers, the brand extended its relationship with these young women through a series of videos following the show, one of which includes Ms. Kloss and Ms. Chamberlain mimicking the catwalk in their hotel rooms in Louis Vuitton ensembles ([see story](#)).

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