

MULTICHANNEL

Building enduring partnerships with social influencers

March 27, 2014



By JOE MCCARTHY

SAN FRANCISCO - As the role of social influencers has expanded over the past few years, brands have developed sophisticated methods of vetting potential partnerships, according to panelists at a session March 26 at ad:tech San Francisco 2014.

Panelists of the "Inside the Mind of a Social Influencer" session stressed that the key to harnessing a successful social influencer is understanding that a partnership rather than a one-sided recruitment is taking place. Indeed, social influencers often vet brands to a degree tantamount to how brands vet them.

[Sign up now](#)

[Luxury Daily](#)

"While it's tempting to think that product reviews are this holy grail, when you put your products in the hands of influencers, they make stories that are 10 times more interesting," said Holly Hamann, chief marketing officer and co-founder of [TapInfluence](#), Boulder, CO.

"There's never been a better time to be a social content creator," she said. "There's so many benefits that influencers create that brands can't create themselves."

All that minutiae

As the social function of each major platform continues to splinter, brands have to understand

how and where to reach consumers.

Consumers turn to different platforms to complain, get support, get an expert opinion, buy something, find a discount, get instructions and for many other reasons. Tuning a brand message to satisfy each of these pursuits can be tricky.

Social influencers can help to solve this dilemma for a few reasons.



Image from blogger A Merry Mishap for St. Regis' Family Traditions campaign

First, they tend to have a keen sense of the advantages posed by each platform, meaning that they cleanly adapt their content when shifting to another area.

Secondly, they have cultivated communities that trust their opinions and are likely to act upon their recommendations. Finally, they tend to create compelling content.

Traditionally, brands have given agencies money to craft a campaign every now and then that, in turn, generates interest for a period of time before expiring. Social influencers are able to keep that interest going for a longer period of time by producing a continual stream of content.

"Social influencers are storytellers," said Danielle Smith, digital correspondent for [DanielleSmithMedia](#), St. Louis. "The goal is to create a community that they trust and that trusts them."

Finding the right voice

Brands take many things into consideration when looking for a social influencer.

The purpose of the relationship first has to be established. A brand may want an influencer to travel to an event to act as a spokesperson, build an Instagram community or propagate a new brand message.

For instance, Dave Peck, global head of social media of [PayPal](#), said that the payment platform prefers Instagram because it humanizes the company and lets influencers take over its channel for most of the year.

Next, the brand has to locate an influencer that exudes an identity that meshes with the brand.

Marcy Massura, the North American digital lead of [MSL group](#), said that she relies on a system that analyzes up to 36 criteria when finding a suitable influencer for a brand.

Luxury brands consistently leverage popular bloggers and other social media figures.

For example, Precision-cut crystal maker Swarovski is increasing its global appeal through a month-long interactive partnership with four international fashion bloggers to show off the brand's jewelry collection for spring.

Swarovski's [#SwarovskiLook](#) initiative includes tutorialized videos produced by the fashion bloggers, user-generated content on Instagram and a contest. Over the four weeks of the digital competition, the participating fashion bloggers will each be assigned a week to present content to keep the effort fresh ([sees story](#)).

Also, Italian fashion brand Salvatore Ferragamo teamed up with fashion bloggers on a photo series featuring the label's apparel and accessories.

The week-long Ferragamo Essentials series was posted across Ferragamo's Twitter and Instagram accounts, as well as on the photographers' blogs. Partnering with these bloggers gives Ferragamo new audiences, helping the brand spread awareness ([see story](#)).

An audience member raised an important question: Will fans not feel duped when they see that their favorite social media figure is promoting products?

Ms. Smith said that social influencers normally elect to work with brands that do not compromise their values. Influencers also look at how much content is expected, the timing of the campaign and other variables.

After all, they have a brand image to uphold as well. Plus, all content created through the partnership is made explicit in a disclosure, thus defusing the notion that fans are being misled.

"When I'm sharing content, I want them to turn around and share it with other people," DanielleSmithMedia's Ms. Smith said.

Final take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

Embedded Video: [//www.youtube.com/embed/ms1OgwKsGDo](https://www.youtube.com/embed/ms1OgwKsGDo)

