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A definitive guide to Influencer Marketing

Everything that you need to know
as an education marketer

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Introduction

“Influencers – they’re the best thing since sliced bread. But forget bread; they’re selling like hot cakes. They’re creating huge returns, and they’re only set to keep growing.”

This is a handbook for ed Marketers that want to start - or extend their Influencer Marketing initiatives. We’ve compiled a list of some of the industry’s best practices to help you along your way. This guide explains the basics of influencer marketing and offers tips on how to discover influencers, collaborate with them, launch campaigns, and track your outcomes.

Despite the fact that you may already understand why you need an Influencer Marketing campaign, the impending deadline is looming.

The question remains, however: how do I even begin to construct one? So, regardless of your level of knowledge, we’re here to assist you in developing a controllable, quantifiable, and scalable program. Continue reading to discover more; we’re here to help!



What exactly is Influencer Marketing?

If you’ve never heard of Influencer Marketing, you might discount it as just another type of marketing strategy – or perhaps a passing trend. Influencer Marketing is more than that. It’s fast becoming an indispensable tool for promoting higher education through social media. Why? Because it is now the truest and most genuine kind of marketing.

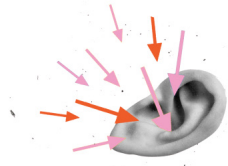
The phrase “Influencer Marketing” means exactly that. It indicates that businesses or institutions collaborate with influential people to assist them with their online marketing efforts.

Influencer Marketing tries to discover the key people who function as influencers in your industry so you can approach them about collaborating on brand promotion.

Celebrity marketing birthed Influencer Marketing. Celebrities have been endorsing brands for years—for a charge, of course. Although online celebrity marketing is still an example of influencer marketing, modern Influencer Marketing is much more than a movie or sports star promoting an unrelated product to his audience.

As the internet has evolved into a self-sustainable ecosystem, certain people have earned the title of “digital superstars.” Those people right there - are your influencers.

Making the case for Influencer Marketing



Although this seems similar to a brand ambassador, there are a few important differences. While a brand ambassador is most usually a present or former student, an influencer does not have to be. In addition, whereas a brand ambassador may serve as the face of your institution, an influencer has their own brand. Working with influencers entails essentially borrowing their audience. Because the message comes from someone they already trust or admire, that audience is more inclined to pay attention.

The word "trust" is important because it is what drives purchasing decisions. According to CivicScience, nearly 15% of respondents aged 18 to 24 have purchased something advised by an influencer six months prior to the study. This number reduces to 11% among millennials (ages 25-34) and continues to fall as they get older. Younger audiences have the highest level of trust in influencers. Most sceptics are those between the ages of 25 and 54. To quote a recent article published by Amanda Maksymiw, "As marketers are looking to turn up their content marketing efforts, many are turning to influencers to help take content to the next level.

Why? Influencers can lend credibility to a piece of content or brand. They can help amplify reach and awareness which, in turn, helps ensure that the desired target audience will consume the content. Companies can also piggyback on an influencer's brand to get a jump-start on developing their own brand preference and thought leadership in the market."

Influencer Marketing is the process of enlisting the support of influential people to boost your content marketing approach. When you think about it, it's a really simple concept:

- **Influencers have an already established** - and loyal audience who are receptive to their ideas, opinions and recommendations
- **Influencers are authentic** - which means that they already have the trust of their followers - one that's almost impossible for a brand to build alone. Influencers use these connections on your behalf - to benefit your cause
- **They know what content works** - and what doesn't, and they create this content on your behalf
- **By partnering with an influencer** - you're able to get your message heard by the right audience, on the right platform - at the right time

Who they are - and who they aren't

Celebs, politicians, and athletes are all known for having enormous social media followings (100K to 1 million+). But that doesn't mean they're all influencers because likability is an important factor.

Someone must regard you as an 'authentic peer' in order to value your opinion as highly as they would a friend's. You must appear approachable and authentic - as if you were a regular person!

On the other hand, no one in their social network of fewer than 100 individuals would describe a friend or family member as an "influencer."

There's actually a magic formula here!

The secret recipe here is a person with a larger-than-average following - let's say 1,000 or more - who yet seems relatable to their followers - and actively promotes products, services, and organizations. Anyone who has built a strong peer-like following and is sophisticated enough to use it qualifies under this description.



These individuals can be found in (higher) education as:

- Student-athletes
- Student governing-body representatives
- Club leaders
- Celebrity alumni
- Popular faculty or staff
- Epic administrators

Basically - anyone associated with your institution - who has a larger than average social media following - could be recruited into your Influencer Marketing campaign!

Understanding the different types of influencers



Yes - there is more than one.

As if it didn't seem complicated enough - we're here to throw a spanner in the works. Social media influencers aren't all made the same. There are in fact 5 types of influencers that you need to know about - before you even consider partnering with one.

The type of influencers in a nutshell

- Mega-influencers with more than a million followers (think celebrities)
- Macro-influencers with 500K to 1 million followers
- Mid-tier influencers with 50K to 500K followers
- Micro-influencers with 10K to 50K followers
- Nano-influencers with 1K to 10K followers

Let's break it down.



1 - Mega-influencers

Mega-influencers are highly prominent on social media due to their celebrity status, with over a million followers. They're quite active on social media channels where their target demographic hangs out, and they get a lot of interaction. This is what makes them appealing to brands, or institutions looking to use influencer marketing—and also why they are so pricey.



2 - Macro-influencers

Celebrities, TV personalities, athletes, and thought leaders are examples of macro-influencers, who have an audience of 500,000 to 1 million followers. Because they may use their celebrity to garner social media followers, brands should expect to pay a premium—though not as much as mega-influencers. With this type of influencer, institutions can still reach a wide audience, but they may not receive the engagement rate they desire. This is due to the previously mentioned follower-to-engagement ratio.



3 - Mid-tier Influencers

Despite the fact that mid-tier influencers do not have celebrity status, they are a powerful group of content creators that are trusted by their audiences. This category of influencer, with audiences of 50K to 500K, has a wider reach and slightly higher engagement than macro- or mega-influencers. Each post is authentic and relatable because the content is polished yet not out-of-touch.



4 - Micro-influencers

Micro-influencers have a significantly smaller following than mega-influencers, but brands believe this group to be far more effective in terms of engagement and trust. This is because micro-influencers have a close relationship with their fans and are more niche-focused. Consumers are 82% more likely to purchase a product, or service advised by a micro-influencer.

 1k - 10k

5 - Nano-influencers

Nano-influencers, with the lowest following, provide brands with a limited reach. What institutions lose in reach, they make up for in engagement- and authenticity rates. With an engagement rate of 8.8%, nano-influencers have the highest engagement rate of any influencer type. Because this type of influencer's content is hyper-authentic and customized for the audience, brands or institutions working with them are in for quite the experience.



89% of marketers report that ROI from Influencer Marketing is comparable to - or better than any other marketing channel



80% of marketers report that Influencer Marketing is effective



71% of marketers say the quality of customers and traffic derived from Influencer Marketing is better than other sources

What Influencer Marketing can do for you

The extent to which an influencer can assist you is determined by the type of working relationship you can develop with him or her. If you employ organic influencer outreach, you'll probably get less help from an influencer than if you pay them for a specific Influencer Marketing campaign. Of course, the price will be drastically different. Influencer outreach could result in a free favor from an influencer (or at most - the price of some free product). Depending on the influencer's star power, a formally sponsored Influencer Marketing campaign could cost a lot of money, but you'll get a lot more in return.

If you're looking at Influencer Marketing from an organic perspective, the type of help you could receive would include:

- Create a video, blog post - or standard feed post about your program or institution
- Sharing information that promotes your institution on their social accounts
- Giving you access to their website so that you can guest post

Influencers who are compensated will be (naturally) more proactive in promoting your institution. They could create content by writing or filming. They could share photos or videos of themselves at your campus on Instagram or YouTube. They aren't simply helping you because they have a relationship with you, or out of the goodness of their hearts in this case. They work for the money you give them.

Of course, you can't expect influencers to sing your praises without reservation. Because of their genuine connection with their audience, they are only influencers. If they don't like your program, your manifesto - or your campus culture, any actual influencer is unlikely to want to work with you.

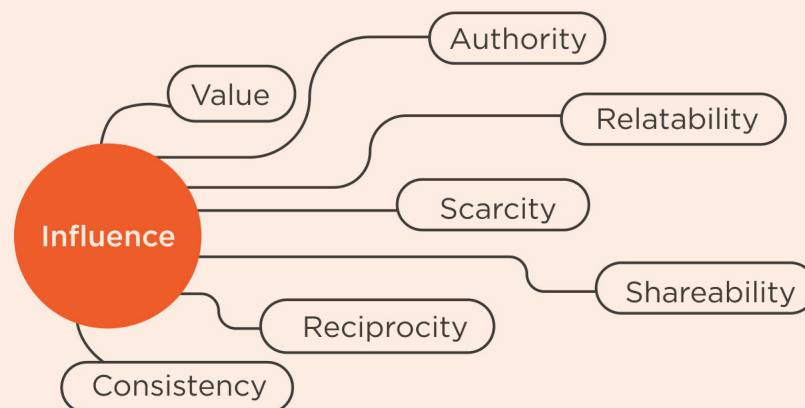
Pro Tip: Gen Z in particular places a really high value on sustainability and moral good-standing. In this case, and particularly where you are employing Influencer Marketing in your strategy - be sure to live up to your values! If you don't, your strategy could quickly backfire.

How to get started with Influencer Marketing

It's pointless to engage in Influencer Marketing just because you heard it was trending.

Your campaign must have a goal in mind. This is most likely similar to any other aspect of your institution. You must have high-quality content to be effective with Influencer Marketing. A 500-word blog post written to suit SEO requirements will struggle to capture the attention of an influencer. It must be visually appealing in order for people to notice it!

You really do need to provide value - your content needs to be 'save worthy'!



Here are the most common places where influencers establish their name:

You need to determine where prospective influencers with a following similar to your target audience have built their rapport.

- **Blogs:** Blogging influencers have invested time (sometimes years) in developing a profitable, popular blog that covers a topic that your target audience is interested in. You can work with high-quality bloggers in a variety of ways:
 - Guest blogging
 - Getting them to mention your institution in a post
 - Aim for a program, campus or institution review
 - Sponsor a paid blog post
- **Social:** Many influencers (including those who operate high-quality blogs) have large social media followings and engagement.

Recruiting Influencers

The most typical method of collaborating with influencers is to hire them. Professional influencers today recognize their worth and are not afraid to market their skills. They've set fees based on their reach, frequency of posts, and other aspects. With Influencer Marketing becoming more popular as a genuine side job, don't be surprised if some of the people you try to recruit answer with, "Here are my rates."

Offering alternative incentives, on the other hand, is more likely to attract influencers:

Students: You might be surprised to find out that some of your existing students are influencers themselves. Giving them the opportunity to build an attractive resume is one way to incentivize them to promote your institution - but throwing in some free merch, tickets, vouchers etc. will have some bearing too.

Faculty or staff: Although your team should be motivated by your cause - this might not always be the case. If you find that members of your team are influencers themselves (nano - or micro), you might be inclined to incentivize them by delegating some of their responsibilities so that they have more time to promote your institution on their accounts.

Alumni or business partners: May respond to honors, i.e. sponsorship of a major school event, or an agreement to promote a cause they represent, e.g. their favorite not-for-profit organization, in exchange for their cooperation.

Both hiring influencers and recruiting them through other means have advantages and disadvantages. In a sense - it could be said, "You get what you pay for" - or the age-old comparison of a professional versus an amateur. (However - when it comes to Influencers, some just know what they're doing - whether they're deemed a pro or a novice).

When you hire an influencer, you won't need to provide them with much guidance. All they have to do now is use their typical strategies to enhance the brand of your institution. Of course, such experience comes at a price, which you'll have to account for in your budget.

When you hire an influencer who has only done it "professionally" on a small scale, such as a few trade deals with local businesses, you'll need to teach them how to handle an institutional brand.

You'll save money (and gain time).



Identifying and setting goals for your Influencer Marketing campaign

The primary purpose of Influencer Marketing for education institutions is to reach new target audiences, potentially reaching an untapped market. This makes sense because an influencer campaign allows you to reach out to the person's following.

It's important to note that the purpose is merely to reach out to potential students, not necessarily to sign them up right off the bat. Influencer Marketing's third most prevalent purpose is to increase sales! Consider how your Influencer Marketing campaign will fit into your overall social media marketing plan, and set quantifiable objectives that you can track and report on.

But before you set your goals - you need to know your plan

1. Who are you trying to reach?

A successful Influencer Marketing plan necessitates speaking to the appropriate people with the proper tools and influencers. The first step is to figure out who your target audience will be for this campaign. Creating audience personas is an excellent technique to ensure that you know who you're attempting to target. Perhaps you're attempting to reach out to a larger portion of your present audience—or a completely new one.

2. Play by the rules.

It's critical to understand - and respect the regulations before diving into Influencer Marketing. Influencers must be able to identify sponsored posts. They do not, however, always do so. Alternatively, they may do so in such a way that the information is effectively obscured or incomprehensible. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in the United Kingdom, for example, investigated "hidden advertising" on Instagram and pressured parent company Facebook to agree to improvements that make disclosure easier and more transparent. The standards vary slightly by country, so be sure to check your jurisdiction's most recent requirements. Most of the time, all you need to do is be honest and transparent about whether or not content is sponsored.

3. Do your research - well

Examine what your potential influencers are saying on social media. How frequently do they post sponsored content? Their engagement rate may not last if they're currently bombarding followers with sponsored posts. To keep followers interested, excited, and engaged, look for plenty of organic, non-paid content. Keep this in mind as you consider what you'll ask the influencer to share. Requesting too many postings in a short period of time may make it difficult for the influencer to accept your offer, even if it comes with a large monetary reward.

You need a strategy for your Influencer Marketing program just as much as you do for your content marketing (especially when you consider how quickly the practice of Influencer Marketing is developing among your peers - and competitors).

Before you start your influencer campaign, you need to figure out — and document — what you want to achieve. In other words, how will your Influencer Marketing campaign help you in meeting your institution's objectives? These goals can (and should vary) depending on the program. For example, your objectives during a new Influencer Marketing campaign versus one in year two may be vastly different.

Here are some possible goals to think about or utilize as a starting point for your own list of objectives:

- Brand awareness
- Engagement
- Increased reach
- Lead generation
- Lead nurturing
- Boosted enrollments
- Student retention
- Student advocacy



Reaching out to influencers



Do you ever feel that your Influencer Marketing campaign is going down a rabbit hole? It's because there are so many possible paths to go, and the enormity of the potential pool of influencers to tap into might be intimidating. When a marketer is getting ready to launch a program like this, the following thoughts usually run through his or her head:

- Who do I reach out to?
- What do I say?
- How do I know if I am being conned?

These unknowns can be intimidating for any team, regardless of size or experience.

These are the next three steps we recommend taking when launching an influencer campaign, to help you get started.

- 1) Create a (limited) pool of potential partners and get to know them better
- 2) Start reaching out to influencers
- 3) Evaluate, test, and improve

After outlining your objectives and selecting the influencer "types" with whom you want to work, the first stage in building your pool of influencers is to sit back and listen. Although it may appear to be passive, taking the time to thoroughly grasp your potential influencer's focal areas will be critical in determining how you might collaborate.

Identifying potential influencers

Amanda Maksymiw and others have suggested steps for building your potential list of influencers:

- Use your listening tools to identify people talking about certain topics based on keywords
- Ask your students or others in your industry (never underestimate the power of word of mouth)
- Search on social media platforms, especially LinkedIn. Network like crazy. Attend events in different areas - get out of your bubble
- Talk to students, partners and sales. Ask peers in your marketing, product development or sales teams
- Ask other influencers. You'd be surprised as to how many of your top-tier influencers work together and recommend each other
- Get involved in the forums and discussion boards/groups discussing your content. Joining Twitter parties, webinars and even reading through the latest industry reports or blog posts can quickly make you aware of who the key players are in your space



Take a moment to evaluate the following after you've found a prospective pool of influencers and spent enough time going through their work to want to take the next step toward outreach:

- How will you reach out to this person?
- What can you offer that is valuable?
- What are you looking for from this relationship?

Sending a basic, impersonal request to a top-tier influencer may end up sounding rather condescending; all that time spent researching their work will pay off here.

Remember that this is a two-way street; gone are the days when brands could just toss money or freebies at bloggers and expect them to fawn over them. Influencers can be far pickier, and they expect to be appreciated for the talent (and audience) they bring to your efforts.

Making that first impression

There are a few ways you can start to make connections with the influencers that you want to work with.

- Give them some social media love, either through a reply, retweet, or mention
- Provide thoughtful comments on their blog posts
- Connect with them on LinkedIn, introducing yourself and why you'd like to connect
- Pop them an old-school introduction email

Just like your students - you need to nurture the relationship

After you've established relationships with your chosen influencers, you may feel more comfortable approaching them - and ultimately - offering to collaborate in various ways, such as:

- Requesting that they co-create content with you
- Requesting custom content created for your brand or even exclusively for your platforms
- Asking influencers to share your content on their platforms

When it comes down to footing the bill

When it comes to working with influencers, you shouldn't take a "one size fits all" approach to compensation. Keep in mind that no two influencers are paid equally. Discussing salary early on, and in a transparent manner, speeds up the process of getting individuals on board to work with you. Take into account an influencer's reach, content quality, style, rating, and brand fit, but don't be afraid, to be honest. Make it clear if you have a limited budget yet want to construct something long-term. Even if your funds are limited, the people who are most committed to your institution and its culture are likely to want to work with you in some form or another.

Developing your strategy



You'll need to decide what to do with your influencers once you've hired/recruited them. Working with a professional versus a non-professional will yield very different results.

A professional influencer will bring suggestions and maybe a playbook that can be easily adapted to your college or university.

Assume, though, that you're working with a newbie influencer. In that situation, it's up to you to figure out how you'll use this resource.

Align your Influencer Marketing strategy with your content marketing strategy

This essentially breaks down into three broad categories: recruitment and fundraising, with a few possible caveats.

- **Student influencers:** They're a terrific resource for driving new student recruitment because of their authentic perspectives on student life and their popularity among younger audiences.
- **Alumni influencers:** As social proof of outcomes and reach beyond influential society, they can be effective motivators for fundraising efforts as well as increased enrollments.

- **Team influencers:** As a result of the academic talent and reach among groups to which parents and graduates belong (churches, philanthropic organizations), both enrollment and fundraising could be boosted.

Now that you're ready to incorporate Influencer Marketing into your overall marketing strategy, it's time to start strategizing! Like any good marketing tactic, building a strategy can ensure that you're being thorough and methodical. You'll know exactly what you want to get from Influencer Marketing and you'll have a process for measuring it to see your progress along the way.

Pro Tip: Check out our blog on how to accurately measure the success of your Influencer Marketing campaign!



Creating content with your influencer



A social media influencer who has worked hard to create a following will likely not accept a deal that appears to be contradictory to their own personal brand.

Influencers, after all, are content creators. As a result, they prefer to be referred to as "creators." You'll get the most out of their job if you let them show off their abilities.

Of course, providing some guidelines about what you're looking for is a smart idea.

However, don't expect to be in charge of the entire campaign.

Clearly lay out your expectations

What exactly is it that you want your influencer to achieve?

From student takeovers to paid content - it's vital that you lay out the expectations right off the bat. This way, you'll know what you're managing - and whether or not your efforts are paying off.

You might want to put them on the social media channel(s) where they have the most followers and are most well-known. Consider adding more social media events, such as:

- Social media takeovers
- Live campus videos - think: moving day, finding the lecture hall - or meeting the professor
- Freaky Friday Instagram stories
- Pre-event posts - i.e. preparing for a graduation ceremony
- Live event videos
- Campus tours
- City tours

Of course, you may be covering some events yourself on your institution's platforms.

One strategy to avoid repetition is to cover it on one social media channel (for example, Facebook), while your influencer covers it on the channel where they have the most followers (e.g. Instagram).

When nothing extraordinary is going on, you'll also need to create some general expectations for post frequency and regular content. A single post per day? Three times a week? There are five in total, one of which has a video? Is it possible to have a weekly YouTube discussion show - or perhaps a Podcast?

You and your influencer's interests, gifts, resources and goals will determine how this appears.

Collaborating to create compelling content

How much autonomy should your chosen influencer have, and how involved should you be? (Or how involved do you want to be?)

This can be difficult. You want to give your influencer some direction on how to portray your organization, but you don't want to take away their authenticity.

It's critical that you remember that your influencer is the expert in their field. You've chosen them because of their experience and expertise, and the results that you have seen them deliver - that said, it's essential to let them maintain their own, original - and authentic work.

Ask questions about how they feel about your school. Make recommendations. That's quite useful. That said - don't go to the extent of scripting stuff, directing videos, framing shots, and so forth. Allow them to do their work - while you do yours!



The future of Influencer Marketing



Influencer Marketing is hot right now, and it's not a trend that is going away any time soon. In fact, it's far from finished growing. It will only pick up steam in the coming years, so now is the best time to learn about it and plan to implement it into your own marketing strategy.

- **There are more influencers than ever**

While it may appear that there are too many influencers in the world, this is not the case. As social platforms expand, new people will have greater opportunities to become influencers. Some will do it on purpose, while others will simply be speaking about their lives and happen to strike up a brand partnership in the process. In any case, there will be more people building niche audiences. This means you're more likely to find someone who speaks to your exact desired demographic and is a good fit for your institution.

- **Content options are on the rise**

Influencers started off by writing blog posts about their personal favorites. Then, as social media grew in popularity, the types of content that influencers created shifted. When it comes to advertising companies, video is likely the most popular type of content for influencers to create these days. The amazing potential of video has been demonstrated by Instagram and Facebook Live, IGTV, YouTube, and TikTok.

With the rising popularity of podcasts and the introduction of audio-only applications like Clubhouse, it's difficult to predict what the next major trend in influencer marketing will be. We may not know the answer, but we do know that it will inevitably evolve.

- **Authenticity is the word of the day**

Influencers are returning to their roots in different ways. People have been significantly more interested in seeing posts that aren't heavily censored in recent years. They don't want to listen to, learn from, or be advised by someone whose life appears to be completely out of reach. They would rather witness reality. They want to see influencers make mistakes and have terrible days, but they also want to see them pull themselves up and keep going. Because of this transparency, more people are embracing and following influencers, resulting in more people seeing and purchasing sponsored content.

When institutions partner with influencers, they may now reach even more people, especially if they're not only showcasing the beautiful, highly-filtered - or envy-worthy parts of their lives.

Leveraging Influencer Marketing for (higher) education

With the rise in graduate enrollment among Generation Z students, capturing their attention and directing them to your institution is more difficult than ever. Embracing Influencer Marketing for your higher education program, believe it or not, could be the answer.

If you're not seeing the conversion rates you want from your traditional marketing tactics—targeted emails, print flyers, or radio and newspaper ads—you might be wondering what you should do next.

Influencer Marketing involves influencing prospective students' final enrollment decisions through a cost-efficient and effective marketing strategy.

The benefits of Influencer Marketing to your institution

