

WOMMA's Influencer Handbook

<http://womma.org/influencerhandbook/>

WOMMA has been working with its membership since Fall 2007 to take a stand and define the influencer marketing space. After many discussions with various opinions being presented, WOMMA felt influencer marketing required a clear delineation of functions and best practices by providing guidelines and ideas marketers can utilize when creating and sustaining an influencer program. WOMMA believes influencer marketing is real and here to stay. It is not a myth, or a passing fad, or the latest trend. It is just one component of successful word of mouth marketing programs.

The following guide was created by the WOMMA Influencer Council -- a cross-functional and diverse group of industry professionals experienced in identifying and developing standards for working with influencers.

The Influencer Handbook aims to provide practitioners with the following information:

- Definition of an influencer and influencer marketing
- Types of influencers
- Methods to engage and thank influencers
- Guidelines for influencer self-regulation
- Bibliography of influencer communication research and practice

Influencers - Defined

Definitions:

The Word of Mouth Marketing Association defines an influencer as:

√ A person who has a greater than average reach or impact through word of mouth in a relevant marketplace.

WOMMA defines influencer marketing as:

√ Influencer marketing is when a marketer identifies, seeks out, and engages with influencers in support of a business objective.

Types of Influencers

Academics and marketers have been talking about influencers for more than five decades, going back at least to 1955 when Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz wrote about a “two-step” communication process in their landmark work, *Personal Influence* (Free Press). Their concept, which has stood the test of time, is that some people have a disproportionate degree of influence on others and can be effective communications channels.

Like word of mouth marketing itself, influencer targeting can come in many forms -- differences in who they are, how they are reached, and what they are called. While it would probably be impossible to inventory every conceivable type or name, what follows is a framework that demonstrates the diversity of targeting options for influencer marketing. Whether aiming at the highest ranking, formal, or institutional leaders, prominent talking heads in the media, grassroots influencers on the internet, or influencers in your neighborhood, all types of influencers can provide the basis for an influencer marketing strategy.

In the table below, we identify five broad categories of influencers based on varying degrees of formal/institutional roles to less formal influencers whose value stems from more personal characteristics -- social networking, personality, and inclination to share opinions. Numerous researchers and marketers have developed names -- some trademarked -- for the various influencer types.

Category	Who they are	Channels of Influence	What they are called (Partial list)
Formal position of authority	Political/government leaders/staff Business leaders	Laws & regulations Decision & spending authority Top-down directives	Opinion Leaders Decision makers C-suite
Institutional/recognized subject matter experts & advocates	Academics/scientists Industry analysts NGO leaders Consumer activists	Academic journals Traditional media New media Social media	Experts Mavens Analysts Critics
Media elite	Journalists Commentators Talk show hosts	Traditional media New media Social media	Talking heads Columnists Politicos
Cultural elite	Celebrities Designers Artists Musicians	Traditional media New media New styles/products Social media	Trendsetters Fashionistas Taste makers Creators Starters
Socially connected	Neighborhood leaders Members of community groups Online networkers Business networkers	Personal relationships Email lists Social gatherings Social networking websites Social media	Mavens Starters Connectors Soccer moms Spreaders Hubs Alphas

Influencer Engagement Self Regulating Guidelines

The following is a set of guidelines assembled by the WOMMA Influencer Council. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a set of best practices for word of mouth programs that target or include influencers. These guidelines are written to include the principles and best practices found in WOMMA's Ethics Code. The Ethics Code can be found at <http://womma.org/ethics>. Although following these guidelines is not a requirement for WOMMA members, doing so will help to ensure program continuity, as well as positive results for both the brand and the customer.

1. Always abide by the WOMMA Honesty ROI when engaging influencers to participate in brand marketing activities.
2. Make an effort to listen to and understand an influencer's point of view about my brand before and during their engagement in a brand program or marketing activity or simply, in their role as a customer of my brand.
3. Understand the savvy nature of influencers and will commit to personalizing my invitations for brand participation. I pledge to respect the rights of influencers as individuals and agree to maintain a level of personalized or individualized interaction with them separate from automated or mass-customized communications. Furthermore, I understand that if an influencer does not reply to my request for participation, I will respect that individual's privacy and cease to solicit them. Finally, I agree not to share their personal information without their express permission.
4. Make an effort to build a respectful and open relationship with my brand's influencers, where collaboration (instead of expectation) is the guiding nature of communication. Additionally, I will communicate with influencers in a timely manner.
5. Ask influencers to transparently represent the source of their information when communicating about or representing my brand to others, whether on or offline. I will proactively provide influencers with guidelines for transparency and actively support this transparency within the company, media, and marketplace.
6. Invite and respect the opinion of participating influencers, even if this is contrary to the brand's position. I agree to share or make available these opinions throughout my organization as is appropriate. Furthermore, I will allow influencers to evolve or remix messaging so as to be relevant to how they communicate with their community.
7. Never ask influencers to falsify or "hype" any product claims, make usage claims without direct experience, or back claims that neither they nor the brand can substantiate. I will never request an influencer to undertake on my behalf a task that they are uncomfortable with or do not believe in.
8. Provide incentives for participation in brand programs, I will fully disclose the nature of the program so as not to give the appearance of a conflict of interest or shilling. I fully understand

that I am not establishing rewards as a payoff for opinions and am ensuring transparency of any marketing efforts.

9. Don't manipulate advertising or affiliate programs to impact influencer involvement or income derived by the brand from influencer programs. I will not falsely manipulate program findings or influencer opinions in any way, nor will I manipulate or falsely communicate a program's progress or result to any party internal or external.

10. Thank influencers who have participated in brand-initiated programs.

How To Work Effectively With Influencers

Influencer marketing is about change from marketing "at" consumers to marketing "with" people. It's about initiating a relationship based on both give and take, two-way conversations, and showing appreciation. Once you have identified appropriate influencers, it is necessary to establish a productive, two-way relationship. Key hallmarks of such a relationship include giving thanks and creating true engagement.

Let's differentiate an influencer program from a loyalty program as a key assumption. Loyalty programs serve an important role and can be a subset of a well-designed influencer program, but are by definition less comprehensive in their approach. Put simply, loyalty programs provide incentives (points, punch cards, miles, status) for frequent product/service use/affiliation, but typically lack comprehensive connection and feedback efforts. A loyalty program can be a good filter for influencer identification, but doesn't account for the connectedness of the user or their level of activity in influence behaviors. In order to maximize the influence effect, it's necessary for a brand to commit to a set of bi-directional relationships with influencers.

Given this prerequisite assumption, let's look a bit further at thanking influencers and engaging and enabling them.

Thanking Your Influencers:

Identification and segmentation of your influencers is just the first step in a three-step process recommended for influencer marketing. Step two is an opportunity for you and your brand to reach out and thank the influentials. As a starting point, "thanking" is about acknowledgement of their passion, contribution, and/or usage of your products/services and is designed to establish communication with the influencer and begin to develop a bi-directional connection between the influencer and the brand.

The following are recommended guidelines and suggestions based on a combination of industry practices:

- Influencers aren't doing what they do to help your brand; they are doing it to help other users. Thank them for helping other users instead of just for helping your brand.

- Respect privacy prerogatives. Whatever thanks you are providing, they should have the right to opt out. If they opt in, this is a good time to gather contact and sharing rights (share my recognition info with no one, share my contact info with the brand only, ok to share public, etc.).
- Be cautious about rewards and gifts. While modest gifts are great to share, a t-shirt will not build brand affinity and is no substitute for an ongoing, committed connection with the user (more on this in the engage section). More generous gifts may be construed in the wrong way, create a cost burden you can't sustain, a tax liability for the influencer, and/or public backlash for perception of rewarding positive reviews. In extreme cases, substantial rewards could create an implied co-employment risk with the influencers. Awards and gifts should only be for what influencers have done in the past, with no forward-looking expectations on the part of the brand. It's better to keep awards simple and relevant to your community objectives.
- Surprises work. Don't underestimate the power of doing something dramatic and/or unexpected. Creating legendary stories can be very powerful ways to both generate conversation and affinity.
- *Similar to surprises, moments of truth about product failures are important. If there is a recall, or you cancel flights - it's how your customer service responses in these moments that create "sticky memories" for you brand. Listening to your influencers and responding aggressively is key. The call to action here: ensure you've tuned your listening system to be especially alert to this audience.*
- Your best influencers may not always be positive about your product, company and/or services. In fact, your biggest fans may at times be your harshest critics. The fact they are sometimes negative will make them far more credible to their networks.

Engaging Your Influencers:

Now you've found them, and you've thanked them. It's time to engage them. Just knowing who your influencers are is a step ahead of most organizations today, but to maximize the value of their role in the network, you need to commit to an engagement model with them. This is the third, and perhaps the most critical, aspect of differentiating influencer programs from other loyalty efforts. Engagement can take a number of different forms depending on your industry, audience, and business objectives. What follows are some suggestions on how to get started with engagement.

- Consider engagement as a balance sheet. The relative benefits to you, the brand, and the influencers needs to be in balance with one another. If the balance is too much in your favor, your influencers will feel used and you'll ultimately alienate passionate users. If the balance is too much in the favor of your influencers, you'll lose interest over time, and your program will be a campaign instead of a multi-year, long-term commitment.
- Influencer programs are, by definition, long-term, multi-year commitments designed to build a relationship; they are not marketing campaigns. Campaigns can augment influencer efforts to

help find, activate, or engage influencers in particular activities (like a product launch), but influencer programs need to level out the roller coaster of connections provided by campaigns.

- Private access is an excellent way to engage your influencers. If they are passionate about your product or service, you can be reasonably sure they would be passionate about opportunities to connect behind-the-scenes in your company with the people who make the product or service. Private access can also be seen as a form of social currency within the influencer community; it gives them a sense of pride and connection to your brand or company.
- Likewise, influencers generally love to connect to one another. You can provide opportunities for private interaction amongst your influencers.
- Consider both online and offline connection opportunities. Online scales and connects more broadly, but offline creates more powerful and trusting relationships. Similarly, consider different connection modes: Meetings, conferences, online chats, webcast, concalls, etc. No one solution fits all or scales equally.
- Influencers are a great source of product feedback. Ideally, design your influencer marketing program such that you can close the loop back with your influencers on what you're doing with their feedback and suggestions. Falling short of closing the loop substantially diminishes the value of listening in the first place.
- Transparency. With the possible exception of analysts and partners, this is the audience you should be most transparent with. They can be your early warning system for both good ideas and bad ideas.
- Depending on your program and goals, consider a non-disclosure agreement as part of your process. Bringing influencers closer to your inner circle on longer-range product plans is key to building loyalty and affinity. It's reasonable, depending on your business, to consider a non-disclosure for some of those private discussions.

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