Make your mark
with B2B influencer marketing

Getting started with B2B influencer marketing

The burgeoning B2B influencer marketing niche

Nike's Michael Jordan sneakers are a well-established marketing success story. But Jordan's fame alone isn't what brings fans to the Nike brand; it's his intimate knowledge of what Nike is selling: athletic shoes. Jordan's work for Nike is an example of how influencer marketing goes beyond simple celebrity endorsement by tapping into domain expertise.

Influencer marketing today has evolved into a highly effective strategy for attracting audiences. And it's not limited to the B2C arena. Why? Because it's based on content and domain knowledge, two primary ingredients that drive B2B sales. Influencers in the B2C space draw people in by sharing knowledge and insights from a first-person point of view, based on an area of expertise. (Think celebrity chefs and kitchen knives.) This approach validates the influencer's information and makes it more accessible, because it's coming from a real person, not a disembodied brand voice.

By deploying similar tactics, B2B domain experts and brands can tap into the key elements that make influencer marketing so effective among consumers:

Relevance — Authenticity — Trust

In this e-book, we'll tell you about the types of influencers and programs best suited for B2B, and provide tips to help you build your own campaigns. You may even find that the most effective influencers for your brand are right under your nose within your own organization.

Use of ad blockers is growing

26.3%

of users block ads.

Use of ad blockers has jumped 34.4% since 2015.[1]

Questions emerge about marketing on Facebook

only
38%

of B2B marketers feel that their Facebook marketing is effective.

62% of all marketers either do not know or have seen a decline in Facebook traffic during the last 12 months.[2]

Content marketing results proving elusive

only
22%

of B2B marketers rate their overall content marketing approach as "successful" or "extremely successful."[2]

The elements of influence and why they matter

What makes an influencer influential? The fact is, there is no tried-and-true measurement, but there are certain elements to look for.

100%

of B2B buyers place a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of a source.

Relevance: A successful influencer occupies a clearly defined niche and stays on topic. Relevance matters because of its direct correlation to audience engagement: The more relevant an influencer's content is, the more shares, comments, and link clicks it's likely to generate.

Consistency: To build up online influence, you must keep at it. Successful influencers maintain a sustained level of effort, regularly publishing content on their channels. Your cadence will depend on your goals and the time and resources available, but your audience needs to be able to reliably find fresh content.

Originality: An effective influencer provides something audiences can't find anywhere else. Topics such as insider tips or industry insights—typically based on a long history of experience—attract an audience because they expand beyond the scope of traditional marketing content to provide a unique point of view.

Authenticity: Having exprience with a topic will validate an influencer's thought leadership, because an audience then knows it's based in truth. Showing some evidence of an influencer's real personality also helps to differentiate and make them more approachable.

Trust: If audiences know that they can depend on an influencer to consistently provide content and opinions that deliver real value, they'll start to trust that influencer. Establishing transparency also helps build trust, such as indicating when a brand is paying an influencer to review its products or disclosing that the influencer works for a specific company whose services they'll be discussing regularly.

Influence vs. popularity

A general goal of working with independent influencers is to reach an established audience, so it might be tempting to target influencers with the greatest possible number of followers or target follower growth as a primary KPI when developing your own influencers.

However, influence is only effective in its ability to sway an audience to act or to think about something differently, regardless of the size of that audience.

For example, a celebrity with a huge audience might have a lot of likes, whereas an influencer would have more shares, link clicks, or comments, which indicate higher engagement. So, don't always be seduced by a big audience. Strive for relevance when selecting or developing influencers. A smaller audience can be just as—if not more—valuable if it is highly engaged.

The elements of influence and why they matter

B2B buyers
seek a real
connection.

relevance

consistency

originality

authenticity
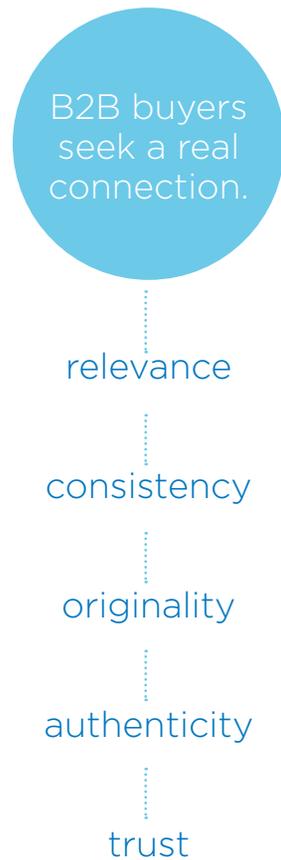
trust

Looking for a connection

The five elements of influence—relevance, consistency, originality, authenticity, and trust—are crucial, because B2B buyers are looking for more than product and service details when researching purchases. They're seeking a real connection.

Recent surveys indicate that without that connection, many B2B brands just don't stand out. A 2016 Gallup poll found that 60% of buyers are indifferent to B2B brands . A joint survey conducted by Google and CEB's Marketing Leadership Council found that 86% of B2B buyers either see no difference between suppliers or don't value the differences enough to pay for them. In fact, this same survey shows that buyers' perception of business value between B2B brands barely fluctuates—by a few percentage points at most.

Clearly, B2B brands need a better way to rise above the fray, and B2B buyers appear to want that, too. A LinkedIn survey measuring the B2B buying process found that two of the most important factors in buyers' willingness to engage with a vendor included whether the vendor :
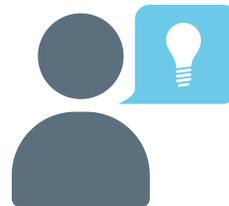
**Is a subject matter
expert/thought leader**

25%
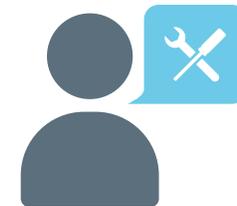
**Provides valuable consultation,
education, or tools**

25%

Buyers actively seek out what they consider reliable information

B2B buyers included these top three resources when researching a solution:

Web search: 68%
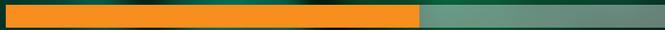
Peers/colleagues: 49%

Industry experts/analysts: 35%

Brands must establish stronger connections with buyers

Percentage of customers who see a real difference between vendors:

Yes: 14%

No: 86%

Thought leadership: A key B2B differentiator

The B2B market typically has a longer and more involved sales cycle than the B2C market. Buyers are looking for real information.

90% of B2B buyers prefer prescriptive content when researching a purchase ("7 steps to..." "3 tips for...").
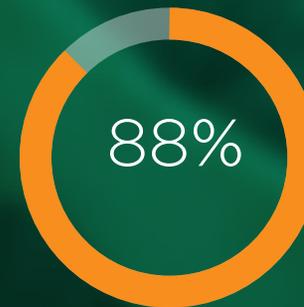
88% of B2B buyers prefer predictive content when researching a purchase (blueprints, toolkits).
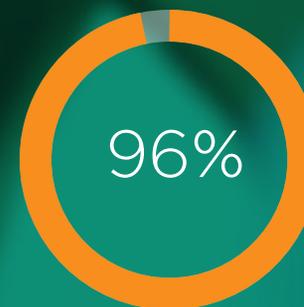
96% of B2B buyers want more insight from industry thought leaders/analysts.

The elements of influence and why they matter

Influence and the B2B buyer's journey

Gaining trust from your audience is more important than ever, because the B2B buyer's journey shows no signs of simplifying. Today's audiences access information on their own terms, and often augment or supplant information from traditional channels with social content. A 2016 B2B buyer's survey by Demand Gen Report found that, among B2B buyers:

80% spend more time researching purchases than in 2015
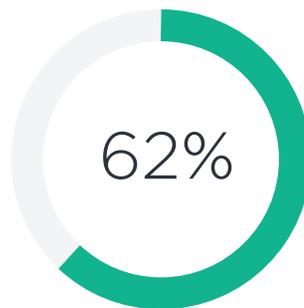
62% rely on peer recommendations.
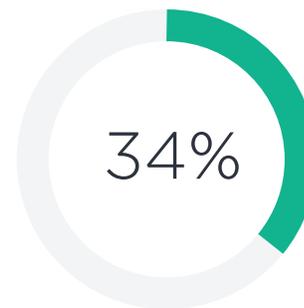
34% spend more time using social media to research vendors and solutions than in 2015.

B2B buyers are looking for information, filtering to sources they trust. Influencer marketing can provide these elements to create real connections with audiences and, ultimately, buyers.

Assembling your ideal B2B influencer program
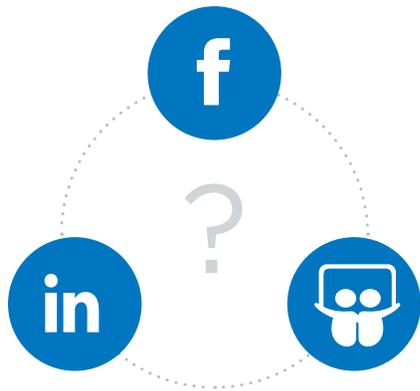
Facebook, LinkedIn, or SlideShare?
Record your goals so that you can pair them with the most effective program.

There's more than one type of influencer marketing. To figure out which program is right for you, start by examining your goals, resources, and timeline. Most initiatives are based on the idea of building long-term relationships between influencers and audiences, but some will support different metrics.

Typical influencer marketing goals pursued by our clients include:

- Raising an overall company or brand profile
- Accessing a specific audience for a product or service launch
- Establishing expertise in a specialization
- Promoting a specific conference, event, or webinar
- Communicating a change in brand messaging or direction
- Staking out a presence in a new industry or market
- Generating leads
- Supporting customer retention
- Increasing the reach of a campaign

Consider how best to match content vehicles and channels with thought-leadership formats. Some influencers specialize in video, others are skilled writers, and still others use imagery to tell great stories. For example, ask yourself whether the content would work best on Facebook, LinkedIn, or SlideShare. Then record your goals so you can pair them with the most effective program.

Following are three primary types of B2B influencer programs. You don't have to pick just one—you can mix and match to find the blend that meets your needs.

Independent influencer

An individual with an area of specialty who has developed an audience based on a personal brand but is not linked to a specific company. Audience size generally starts in the thousands. May work with multiple brands within their specialty area or none at all.

Brand influencer

An individual with an area of specialty who has developed an audience based on a personal brand and is linked to a specific company. Audience size generally starts in the thousands. Still functions as an independent thought leader, but only works with their company's brand.

Micro-influencer

An individual with a moderate to small following, generally under 2,000. Could be a regular consumer who is very active online and/or expresses a lot of opinions, or someone who focuses on a specific knowledge area either professionally or as a hobby. Employee advocacy programs can help develop micro-influencers within your organization.

Assembling your ideal B2B influencer program

Program 1:   Fostering independent influencer outreach

Ideal for:

• Short-term campaigns, such as supporting an event or launch

• Accessing niche audiences

• Increasing overall reach

Program summary:

This type of influencer marketing, common in the B2C arena, focuses on using category leaders with relevant expertise to drive your brand's message to a larger market, i.e., the influencer's audience. It's most effective for marketing initiatives with specific timelines, such as events or product launches, because an independent influencer is less likely to maintain a continued narrative around your brand.

For example, an influencer may impartially review your product or service, which you may have provided for free, or appear as a guest on your blog or webinar. To maintain audience trust, independent influencers should be transparent about payment to work with a brand (which most expect). If an influencer makes an endorsement or recommendation, it should be based on real opinion, not because of a payment.
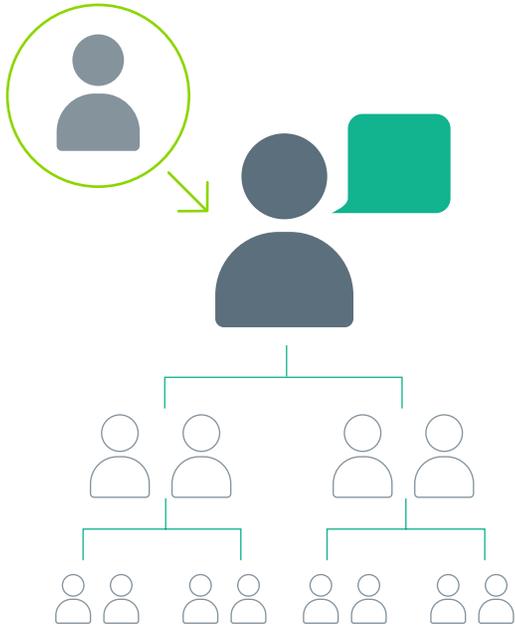
Assembling your ideal B2B influencer program

Program 2: Developing in-house brand influencers
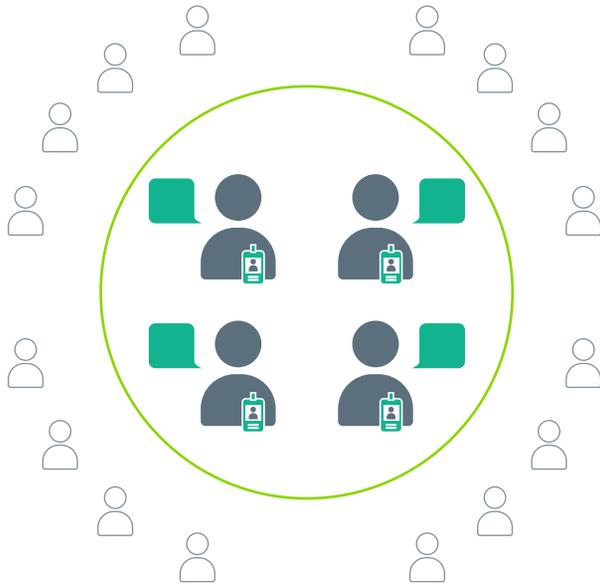
Ideal for:

- Nurturing long-term brand affinity and audience relationships

- Awareness building

- Customer retention

Program summary:
Developing an in-house or brand influencer is a good way of supporting a sustained brand narrative. By identifying thought leaders within your own organization and helping them develop an online presence, you can expand both their influence and that of your company. This approach is particularly effective for B2B companies that may have a smaller pool of independent industry influencers to draw upon or for those with a high level of in-house expertise, such as service providers.

Though transparent about being employed by their company, in-house influencers maintain an independent voice and provide objective thought leadership. For example, in-house influencers for an IT security firm might cover topics such as changes to the profession or top trends for the coming year. Mixed in with that might be a discussion of what their firm will be demoing at an upcoming industry event or how to troubleshoot updates to a solution released by their firm.

Many in-house influencers will need a support structure to aid their development, either due to time constraints or lack of familiarity with various content platforms. Support can range from simple tools to help plan and schedule content to a full-blown team to manage that manages the influencer's social account and creates content on their behalf. An effective support structure should transition an influencer toward greater self-sufficiency and engagement with the process, ideally reaching a point where the influencer creates at least some of their own content.

Assembling your ideal B2B influencer program

Program 3: Putting employee advocacy to work

Ideal for:

• Building awareness and increasing your brand's digital footprint

• Expanding reach and share of voice

• Increasing authenticity in your outreach

Program summary:

Employee advocacy is a specific flavor of in-house influencer outreach. Encouraging employees to hold real, organic conversations on social media can help build awareness of your brand and increase your brand's online footprint in a way that slickly designed campaign posts just can't match. If you're lucky, these micro-influencers are already talking about your brand online, either within the context of personal social media accounts or via separate professional personas that they're nurturing as part of a career-building effort.

A successful program calls for structure and processes so that employees are trained on how to interpret and apply campaign-related messaging, rather than just parroting the contents of a distributed social media package. Some of the more robust social media platforms, such as Sprinklr, include asset libraries that can help with distributing content broadly across your workforce.
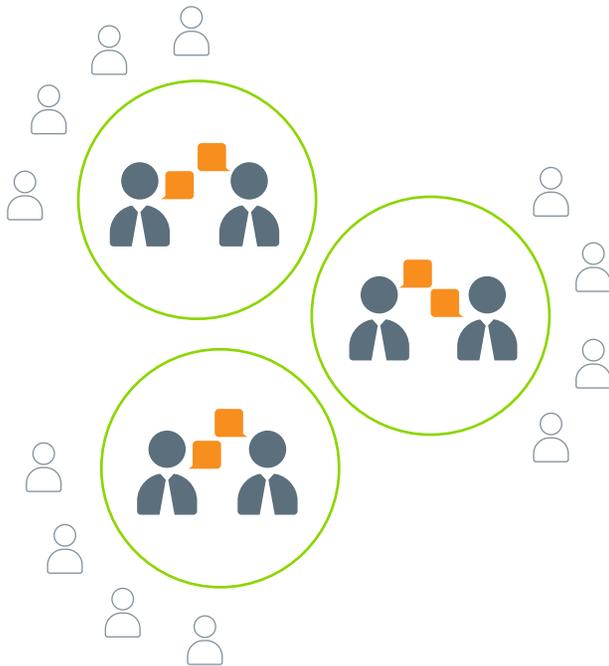
Mapping social media channels to goals

If you're initiating an independent influencer outreach program, your selection is limited to your influencers' channels. However, if you're building an owned program to which you're inviting other influencers, developing your own influencers, or using a combination of approaches, you should select your channels based on the goals you've identified, the thought leadership you have available, and the content types you expect to work with.

According to Demand Gen Report's 2016 Content Preferences Survey, the most popular channels for sharing business-related content include:

Channel	Percentage
Email – 97%	
LinkedIn – 85%	
Twitter – 62%	
Facebook – 38%	
SlideShare – 33%	
Google+ – 20%	
Pinterest – 11%	
Instagram – 10%	
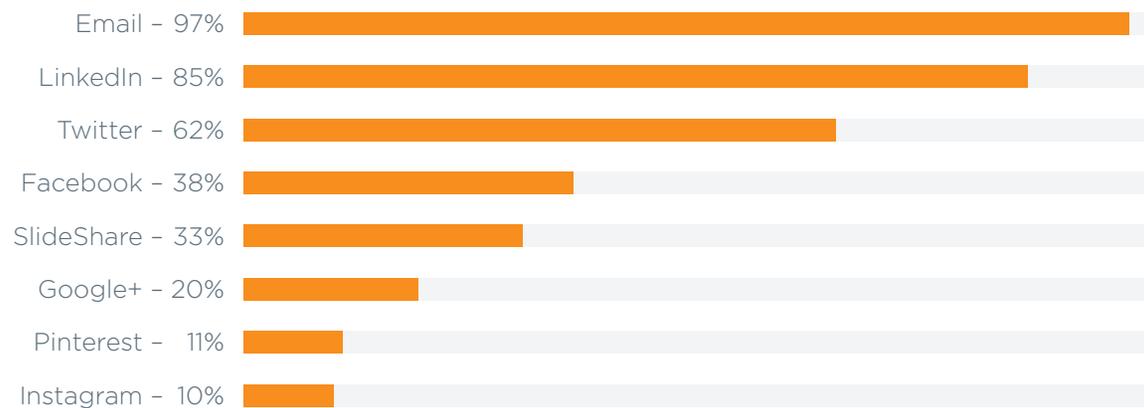
Email remains the perennial favorite, which tells us that any blogging program related to your influencer efforts should include an email newsletter component. For social media activity, LinkedIn and SlideShare are your best bet. Pinterest and Instagram work for some B2B use cases, but are still predominantly dedicated to the B2C market.

When and how should you use each channel within a B2B influencer marketing context? Here are our guidelines:

CHANNEL	BEST FOR	RECOMMENDED USES
in LinkedIn	**Engagement** – Ongoing, long-term audience relationship building and sharing in-depth thought leadership	• Participate in relevant discussions • Share thought leadership articles • Share events and/or initiatives in collaboration with independent influencers • Share and/or comment on relevant industry news and thought leadership articles
Twitter	**Broadcasting and engagement** – Ongoing promotion of influencer thought leadership; also general online presence and connecting with other influencers	• Share thought leadership articles • Share and comment on industry news articles • Share and comment on other influencers' content • Paid media campaigns
f Facebook	**Broadcasting and some engagement** – Ongoing promotion of influencer thought leadership and general online presence; some audience engagement, as this channel is more personal than Twitter	• Share thought leadership articles • Share and comment on industry news articles • Paid media campaigns
You Tube YouTube	**Engagement** – Ongoing, long-term audience relationship building and sharing in-depth thought leadership	• "Vlogs" featuring influencers expanding on relevant topics • Videos of influencers speaking at industry events

(continued)

CHANNEL	BEST FOR	RECOMMENDED USES
SlideShare	**Engagement** – Ongoing, long-term audience relationship building and sharing in-depth thought leadership	• Share influencer presentations, especially those associated with live events
Google +	**Engagement** – Ongoing, long-term audience relationship building and sharing in-depth thought leadership	• Create groups or discussions focused on specific topics • Participate in ongoing relevant discussions • Share thought leadership articles
Pinterest	**Broadcasting** – Share content and generate traffic; less relevant for B2B so use varies; get creative!	• Create a board of thought leadership blog posts, SlideShare presentations, influencer videos, etc.
Instagram	**Broadcasting** – Share content and generate traffic; less relevant for B2B so use varies; get creative!	• Images of influencers speaking at events or engaging in other relevant activities

Preparing your influencer marketing toolkit

Creating an influencer marketing program can be resource intensive, but many tools exist to help with automating or consolidating certain processes. The challenge is deciding which are right for you.

Before investing in any tool, create a list of the capabilities you're looking for, then rank your needs based on priority. You might find one or two single-function tools that do the trick, or you might be better off investing in a robust application that provides a full set of capabilities.

Influencer tool capabilities

1. Influencer Identification: If you're developing a program that relies on independent influencers to convey your brand message, identifying the right people is an important first step. You need influencers who are relevant to your brand, as well as effective enough in their space to make working with them a worthwhile investment.

An influencer identification tool can help you quickly build a list of possible contenders based on topic criteria that you enter, and then rank that list based on metrics such as audience size, engagement scores, and so on. Other tools use audience metrics to pinpoint popular content, which can then lead you to the influencers who created the content.

Some tools deliver results based on scraping information from the web, while others source from a marketplace that influencers sign up for themselves. High-ranking independent influencers are more likely to be in the fortunate position of waiting for brands to come to them, while developing influencers may join a marketplace to make themselves more accessible to brands. This doesn't mean a developing influencer won't be valuable to your brand—remember that it's all about relevance and your goals, not to mention your available resources.

Preparing your influencer marketing toolkit

2. Influencer outreach: If you have a short list of influencers you'd like to work with, a simple one-on-one email exchange might suffice. But with a large list of influencers, an influencer outreach tool can help by consolidating and simplifying your communications onto a single dashboard. Many outreach tools also combine identification capabilities, sometimes focused on a single social media platform or media type, such as Instagram or YouTube.

A second type of influencer outreach tool will allow you to identify popular content, then automate your outreach to the authors of that content by either sharing or liking it.

3. Content distribution: For brand influencer and employee advocacy programs, content distribution tools are particularly useful because they provide a centralized place to broadly publish content. For brand influencer programs, you'll want to be able to schedule your content ahead of time so that you or your influencer can continue doing your day jobs.

Content distribution tools also provide the benefit of being able to publish to multiple platforms at once, such as Twitter and Facebook, rather than having to log into different accounts separately.

Using a tool to distribute content internally to employees provides many efficiencies, allowing you to make changes to a piece of content without having to redistribute it, or set an expiration date to ensure content isn't used past its sell-by date. Some tools also allow you to track usage so you can see what is resonating and what isn't.

Content distribution is typically included as one of many functionalities within more robust tools.

4. Tracking and measurement: These days, most tools that have anything to do with content or social media include a metrics component, particularly content distribution tools. For brand influencer programs, you'll want—at the very least—to deploy the measurement tools that are included within your chosen social media platforms. We expand on tracking and measuring in more detail in the next section.

The most important thing to remember when evaluating tools: You can't automate authenticity. You don't want to trade convenience for the ability to make actual connections with your audience. For example, sending an automated message to a new follower is a nice touch. But if a particularly high-ranking influencer follows or interacts with you, a personalized response will be much more valuable.

Tools for influencer marketing

| TOOL		IDENTIFICATION	OUTREACH	DISTRIBUTION	MEASUREMENT
BuzzStream	Builds prospect lists and profiles based on web data, including contact info and social sites, and tracks conversations	●	●	○	○
BuzzSumo	Identifies popular content and authors, builds and maintains outreach lists, and centralizes individual influencer engagement	●	●	○	○
Contactually	Centralizes, organizes, and tracks your contacts, then sends automated custom reminders	○	●	○	○
Followerwonk	Analyzes, compares, and ranks your own and others' Twitter audience	●	○	○	●
GaggleAmp	Centralizes content assets specifically for employee engagement and measures content performance	○	○	●	●
HubSpot	Full marketing platform that, among many other functions, creates, optimizes, and measures all forms of online content	○	●	●	●
Little Bird	Looks at the people, companies, and associations that form a network around specific Twitter conversations	●	○	○	○
Onalytica	An end-to-end influencer marketing platform that allows you to create feeds, profiles, alerts, relationship maps, and more	●	●	○	●
Sendible	Consolidates social platforms and schedules, publishes, and measures social content	○	○	●	●
SocialBlade	Tracks user statistics for YouTube, Twitch, Instagram, and Twitter	●	○	○	●
Sprinklr	Provides listening and publishing tools for multiple social platforms and schedules, publishes, and measures social content	○	○	●	●
Traackr	Centralizes influencer contacts, tracks conversations, and measures content distribution and engagement	●	○	●	●

Tracking progress and measuring success

As with any content-based program, you'll need to employ a tracking and measurement framework to gauge your progress and effectiveness. We won't lie: It's going to be a challenge. A recent survey found that 78% of marketers say that determining the ROI of their programs is their biggest challenge within influencer marketing.[3]

What and how you measure will vary depending on the type of program that you're running and your specific goals, as well as the tools you've selected and the resources available to you.

For any type of program, differentiate and separately measure short-term vs. long-term goals. Generally, you'll measure short-term goals at a campaign level and long-term goals at a program level. Overall, you'll want to contextualize metrics based on outputs (what you're doing), outcomes (the results of what you're doing), and business impacts (ROI).

Here are basic frameworks to consider for each of the influencer program types summarized in this e-book.
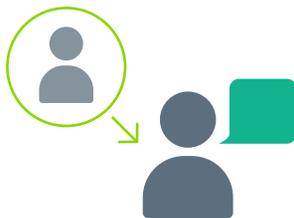
Independent influencer programs

Internal/brand influencer development programs

Employee advocacy programs

Tracking progress and measuring success

Measuring independent influencer programs

With an influencer outreach program, your basic goal is to get influencer(s) to mention or engage with your content, campaign, or brand in some way, such as covering it in a blog post or sharing or liking your content. The purpose of this goal is to then achieve reach and engage the influencers' audience. You should be measuring your progress and success based on these two primary vectors.

Influencer activity:

Number of times an influencer mentions your brand or campaign in their own content

Number of times an influencer engages with your content (likes, shares, comments)

Total number of influencers doing the above two activities

Influencer audience reaction:

Overall mentions of your brand or campaign

Overall reach of your brand, campaign, or content

Overall engagement with your content (likes, shares, comments)

Overall traffic to your website or campaign assets
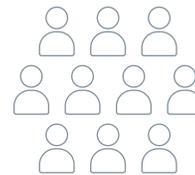
We suggest starting slow by focusing first on the influencer activity and ramping that up, followed by measuring and optimizing the influencer audience reactions based on how you're optimizing your content. Once you've developed some traction there, focus on business outcomes such as leads, conversions, and revenue generated by your program.

Tracking progress and measuring success

Measuring internal/brand influencer development programs

With an influencer development program, your basic goals are to build an audience to achieve reach and then engage that audience. As with the influencer outreach programs, start by focusing on metrics related to influencer activity, followed by audience reactions. You'll also want to evaluate content performance metrics to better calibrate your efforts to achieve optimal impact.

Influencer activity:

Frequency of your influencer posts

Frequency of your influencers' engagement with other influencers' content

Number of fans and followers

Influencer audience reaction:

Overall mentions of influencer

Overall mentions of brand or campaign

Overall traffic to influencer content

Overall traffic to brand or campaign content
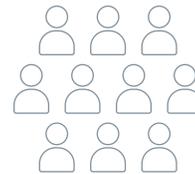
As you refine your program, build your audience, and perfect your content optimization, you'll want to start measuring aspects of business outcomes, such as leads, conversions, and revenue.

Tracking progress and measuring success

Measuring employee advocacy programs

When building overall brand influence through employee advocacy, you're looking to increase reach and achieve greater share of voice. But before you can do that, you must engage the first layer of your audience: your employees. You need to create content that they'll want to share on their own social networks. Start by evaluating your employees' engagement with the content, followed by overall brand metrics.

Employee activity:

Number of downloads/uses of brand or campaign content

Overall number of posts (by employees) of brand or campaign content
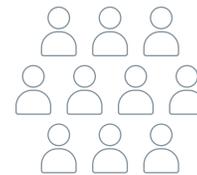
Brand content reaction:

Overall engagement with your brand content

Overall mentions of your brand or campaign

Overall traffic to your website or campaign assets

Overall share of voice of your brand

Overall reach of your brand

Bringing it all together

An influencer program can provide measurable results, but assembling and launching one takes a lot of focus and sustained effort. Before you even begin, be sure to make the upfront effort to identify and document the goals, strategies, and plans of your program. Assemble and develop your tools, processes, roles, and responsibilities at the outset to provide a clear picture of where you are and where you are going. Make sure you have the resources you'll need to achieve success, both in the short and long term. Scale and communicate your expectations accordingly. Once you've launched your program, be sure to measure progress along the way and adjust if necessary, like any content marketing effort.

Your partner in influence

Authenticity and trust are becoming essential ingredients to marketing success, and influencer programs, done correctly, can provide these. We at Tendo believe that B2B influencer marketing is on the verge of becoming the next big thing. We also believe that B2B marketers should start their outreach efforts now to catch the wave when it comes.

We created this e-book based on the insights and knowledge we've gained through working with our clients on a range of influencer programs. We've used the tools, tried the various strategies, celebrated wins, and learned from disappointments. We've also launched impactful influencer programs and developed loyal audiences for thought leaders across a variety of B2B industries. We can do this for you, too.

If you're thinking about starting a B2B influencer program and want guidance from a team that has been through it all before, **contact us**. We want to help you make your mark.

TENDO

www.tendocom.com