HOW BRANDS SHOULD WORK WITH INFLUENCERS

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR RUNNING BEST-IN-CLASS INFLUENCER TRIPS & CAMPAIGNS



The Influencer Institute

Tap Influence determined that influencer marketing drove 11x the ROI of every other form of digital marketing. Beyond the intrinsic value they provide, influencers are a powerful tool to spread your message in an authentic way that resonates with your potential customers.

Many brands have dabbled in the influencer industry. But just as many don't know how to work with influencers, where to start, or aren't doing it right.

Are you working with influencers yet? Do you want to?

The influencer industry is not new yet it still feels like the Wild West. There are no standards in terms of experiences or rates, which means way too much time and planning goes into each individual campaign. Do you constantly feel like you're reinventing the wheel? So do we and it's exhausting. It's time to establish some consistency and guidelines that create a foundation for success for both parties. Every partnership should be a screaming success, not a crapshoot. Campaigns should run like clockwork, not feel like you're starting from the drawing board.

From logistics and itineraries to contract negotiations and deliverables, the Influencer Institute is here to shed some light on the ever-allusive influencer market and be your strategic campaign partner for success.

Are you ready to maximize your potential and start making influencer marketing work for you?

We'll share exactly what it takes to run a successful influencer campaign, how to coordinate an amazing trip and the do's and don'ts of working with social media personalities.

Throw everything you think you know about influencer marketing out the window because this is the no holds barred honest truth right from the horse's mouth.

Ready? Let's do this.

Step 1. Change Your Mindset about Influencers.
Influencers are not traditional journalists or bloggers. The most successful brands don't even think of them as social media personalities. Each influencer is an independent brand agency and media mogul. The best are triple and even quadruple threats - savvy business people who can produce content, distribute it and manage creative campaigns. We know what you're thinking: but couldn't anyone post on Instagram? Take a look at your own feed; are you the one producing content that converts? Unlikely. Each influencer is a photographer, writer, stylist, model, graphic designer, social media guru, and wears a million other hats. It's hard work, and yes, it is work.

Step 2. Recognize the Benefits of Working with Influencers.

For the most part, influencers are at the top/middle of the sales funnel. It's a branding and awareness play. They usually can't compete with publishers on reach so don't try to quantify them based on CPM or follower numbers alone. Similarly, don't expect them to drive massive amounts of sales. The value they add is engagement with loyal, trusting audiences hungry for their expert recommendations. Are their followers going to go right out and buy your product or plan a trip tomorrow? Probably not. But there are metrics like saves and shares that are valuable indicators of potential bookings or sales down the line. Embrace the mindset that an endorsement from an influencer is much more authentic and effective testimonial than a promotional message directly from the source.

Step 3. Develop an influencer Strategy for your Brand.
Some influencers are also bloggers, while others are only Instagrammers. Some are vloggers and produce kick-ass video, while others are professional photographers and drone pilots. Still others are killer storytellers with captions that draw people to compelling iPhone photos. The lesson is: not influencers were created equal.

Which ones provide the best value for you depends partially on what type of content you're looking to create, but also on your broader marketing strategy. What niche and demographics are you looking to target? Once you know this, only then you can begin to determine who the right person to spread that message is.

Are you only looking to market to your local area or are you looking to tap into a new region? Are you looking to attract luxury clientele or budget? Families or adventurers? There are influencers with every demographic and psychographic, it simply depends on what story you want to tell.

Need help identifying key influencers to partner with? Contact us for recommendations.

Step 4. Learn How to Find and Vet Quality Influencers.
Now that you've identified who you're looking for, how do you find them? You can try searching directly on Instagram or filtering by category and location on influence.co, but it's much easier to ask for recommendations. We have a network of highly reputable influencers across every niche and demographic and can match the best people to your project.

Looking to run a campaign with best-in-class influencers? Let's talk.

If an influencer approaches you directly with a potential partnership, consider their offer. Look at their follower and engagement numbers. Click into a few of their followers to see if their audience looks legitimate and interested in traveling. If they're a blogger, check their stats. Traffic is more of a vanity number; better performance indicators are KPIs like domain authority and engagement through comments and shares. Most importantly, assess if their audience and messaging align with yours. Are they the right person to tell your story? A city girl might not be

the best fit for an outdoor destination. A luxury blogger probably doesn't belong at a hostel, unless they propose a really unique angle or tie-in, which may provide the opportunity to reach an entirely new audience.

Step 5. Recognize an Influencer's Value and Compensate Them Appropriately. Everyone wants to feel valued and there's a general sense of brands taking advantage of influencers to create content for little to no money. Working with influencers is completely different than working with a journalist who may or may not get a story published. Influencer trips are not FAM trips. Influencer trips and campaigns have very clear, mutually agreed upon deliverables. You're paying for a guaranteed amount of exposure to their audience (although not always measured in CPMs or CPAs). Think of it more as an ad or content buy versus editorial or earned media. While influencer marketing is providing a positive brand lift, it's paid promotion, not PR.

If you're proactively reaching out to influencers, you should have a budget to offer beyond simply covering travel expenses. Professional photography and videography is expensive to produce and a highly in-demand skill. You wouldn't ask your lawyer, plumber, or accountant to work for free or for a trade. Influencers are professional content creators and hours and hours go into planning and styling each shoot.

There is no straightforward formula for determining what you should pay as influencers set their own rates just like any other creative professional. In terms of reach, $100 per 10K followers is somewhat standard, although that's dwindled a bit as the influencer market got more competitive and engagement decreased with algorithm changes. Some brands prefer to pay a day rate for content creation (like $250-500/day) instead of piecemeal per content.

Is it ever okay to offer a trade or comp? You can always offer it, but don't be surprised if the influencer counters back with their rates. It's more enticing if your product or destination sells itself. In this instance, remember that the payment is free travel so treat it as such and make the trip an enjoyable experience (closer to a vacation, and less of a work trip). New influencers who have less experience working with brands are more likely to accept trades as a way to gain exposure. If an influencer approaches you with a trade proposal, absolutely consider it.

Whenever you're considering a trade, make sure the value the potential influencer's content aligns with the cost of the experience you have to offer. It would be a pretty straightforward one for one trade if you offer a hotel room that costs $150-200 a night for an influencer with 20-25K followers to do one post. The same goes for gear or products valued at that amount. If a smaller influencer with 10K followers wants a room for two nights or your product, you might ask them to do two posts, or a post plus a blog or something else. If an influencer with 50k followers wants to stay for a few nights, consider providing them the comped room and something else, like a spa and dining package, to make the offer value closer to $500. For gear companies, up the offer to include a variety of your best selling products.

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THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN HOSTING INFLUENCERS



(THAT LIKELY HAVEN'T EVEN CROSSED YOUR MIND!)

After a string of influencer trips that left little to be desired, it became abundantly clear that there was a disconnect between what influencers need to be successful and what brands think they want.

It's scary to think that one person potentially has the ability to drive millions of impressions to your destination, but that's exactly what influencers do. You want to capitalize on their time in-market and make the experience as enjoyable as possible so they showcase your location in the best possible light.

Whether you host influencers frequently, sporadically, or you're just dipping your toes into influencer marketing here are some insider tips for maximizing the experience when an influencer is traveling to your destination.

1. Do not treat influencer trips like FAM trips or even blog trips – This is a big one. An influencer's primary goal is to capture beautiful photos and videos. They do not need to interview hotel managers or go on property tours or anything else you'd do with travel agents or traditional journalists (unless of course, it's an untapped photo angle). Everything in the influencer's schedule from the times and locations should be conducive to creating great content. Things you want to consider: scheduling popular attractions at off-peak hours (when the least amount of people will interfere with the shot), identifying great spots to capture sunsets and sunrises, and the possible effects of harsh mid-day lighting.

2. Cater to each influencer's audience – It's fine to host multiple influencers at one time, and most actually like collaborating with others (it's nice to have someone to help take photos), but it's important to ensure each individual's niche is considered. If you have food, adventure, and family influencers all coming at the same time, their itineraries should not be identical. There can be some crossover, but for the most part, tailor the experience to the influencer.

3. Communicate how hands-on you intend to be – If you're in the marketing or PR department, being someone's travel agent probably doesn't sound all that enticing when you have a million other responsibilities. That said, you know your destination better than anyone. Some brands want complete control over influencer itineraries and logistics, while others leave it completely up to the individual. A happy middle ground usually works best for both parties. You provide suggestions for incredible off the beaten path photo spots and must-see attractions and let the influencer fit them into a schedule.

When offering suggestions, try to think of your destination as a first-time visitor. Is something hard to find with no WiFi? Give me a heads up or directions. Know some lesser-known trails that are not on the website? Any insider intel makes the content that much better.

4. Be specific about your budget –We need to know exactly what you can and can't cover in order to craft a proposal. If you're not allowed to expense gratuity or

alcohol, this should be communicated up front. Your destination doesn't cover flights or onward travel from your market? This is also important as we're pricing out projects. Any details to know what costs are coming out of pocket eliminate surprises. It's also expected to pay a portion of the fee upfront as a retainer to cover travel expenses and the rest upon delivery.

5. Roll out the red carpet - Everyone wants to feel like a VIP. Hotels excel at going above and beyond with personalized welcome gifts. Local wines, surprise upgrades, it's great to feel wanted. One hotel even made a printed hardcover book of one particular influencer's blog posts and wrote his name in the sand outside his window. You know what that translates to? More goodwill for you as the principle of reciprocity comes into play. Think about all the ways you can surprise and delight influencers to show them they're appreciated.

It's pretty much expected to have some sort of welcome upon arrival. More often than not, it's a folder with press info and branded swag. Promo items are fine if they're useful - water bottles, bags, hats, chargers, etc. Even a few snacks and a handwritten note is a nice gesture if you don't have a large budget. Anything else is likely going in the trash. Sorry, but it's true. Companies send influencers free stuff all the time in hopes of promotion so if you're going to do something, make it impactful.

6. Scheduling and overscheduling - It's understandable you want to cram as many items as possible into the time we have together but appreciate your visitor's time. Driving hours between attractions to opposite ends of the city is exhausting. In an ideal world, you'd provide a list of places to highlight, and the influencer would tell you which sounds the most fitting for their audience. Together you'd craft an itinerary around those items, finding other things to showcase in the same region. Voila, less wasted time in the car.

Professional influencers understand they're not at your destination to relax and unwind, but build some breathing room into the schedule. This will allow time to stumble upon hidden gems and also ample time to post. And definitely plan around meal times – you don't want to leave anyone hangry.

7. Think long and hard about itinerary inclusions - Off the beaten path items are off the beaten path for a reason. It's understandable to want to show a different side of your country or city than what's been written about a million times before, but certain attractions are popular for a reason. While that famous spot might not be new, it's new to my audience and me. Influencers want to see the must-sees before going places no one's ever been (unless it's a completely amazing photo spot…see a pattern?).

That said if an influencer wants to do something that might not make sense for the season – give them a head's up. Not enough snow to snowshoe or snowmobile? Understandable. River water too high to go tubing? Let them know! Even if it's a last

minute change they can be flexible as long as they're prepared for potential variables.

8. Make their job as easy as possible – One of the best trips I ever went on, the PR rep said it only takes three things to make an influencer trip a success: WiFi, water, and a photographer. She was so right. Traveling solo is lonely - meet your influencers whenever you can or send someone to help take photos. A tripod and remote only go so far – the content will always be better with collaboration. Similarly, if they're contracted to post in real-time, WiFi is crucial (especially in a remote international destination where data is expensive). The more proactive destinations have personal hotspots available to borrow so connectivity is never an issue.

9. Make your destination as Instagram-friendly as possible - Want to really go above and beyond? Have a drone available to use. Or have props and accessories to borrow. Hats, floaties, balloons, Aztec blankets, round towels. Anything you think would improve photo opportunities. Influencers would absolutely love if destinations helped pre-plan and stage shots since you know the ins and outs of the landscape and what would look great there.

10. Assume that nothing will go according to plan –Places are unexpectedly closed, the weather doesn't cooperate, a flight was delayed, he or she forgot to tell you they're a vegetarian, you just never know. Be cool and roll with the punches. Always have a backup plan A, B, and C and we'll do the same.

Ready to start planning your campaign together? Let's brainstorm.

Produced by Lauren Monitz, Founder of the Influencer Institute. Lauren has worked on 50+ collaborations on both the brand side managing influencer campaigns and as an influencer herself with 180K followers in the adventure travel/outdoor/food space.

If you're offering a completely comped trip or influencer experience valued at a few thousand dollars with flights, accommodations, meals, and activities, determine the ARV of the experience and create a desirable package to pitch each influencer based on their audience size. This could include daily IG stories, a designated number of posts, blogs, account takeovers, etc. The same deliverables should not be used for an influencer with 10K and 100K as obviously one has a much more valuable audience than the other. While they both may accept the same terms proposed if they were unaware of the other, it'd leave a bad taste in their mouth if they feel they're being undervalued.

Step 6. Embrace Authenticity.

I get it; it's scary to give up complete control of your message. But no one knows what resonates with his or her audience better than the influencer themselves. That said, you can (and should) provide key messaging and relevant hashtags for each campaign. Examples of things to share: you're a great family, adventure, winter, couple's, whatever destination and highlights of the must-see places. Beyond that, let them share the gems they uncover. Remember, just because it's sponsored content, it's not an ad and promotion should sound natural. Loosen the reigns and let influencers be creative. It's okay to request to see and approve posts for accuracy before they go live, but make sure you're not changing their voice much. If you've properly vetted your influencers, they'll communicate your message effectively.