

# How to Collaborate Successfully with a Social Media Influencer

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Influencer marketing – when a brand collaborates with a trusted and admired content creator to generate interest, conversation and engagement around their brand – continues to rise in popularity, and when used strategically, to make a powerful impact for businesses. Picture this: Someone in your target market follows a local influencer on Instagram because she admires the influencer's content, personality and style. The follower looks forward to seeing what the influencer posts, and respects the influencer's opinions, from what is "on trend" to which brands to purchase. Buying decisions may well be influenced by the influencer's recommendations. Wouldn't it be great if the influencer recommended *your* brand – or one of your products – to that dedicated audience?

Influencer marketing is a modern form of word-of-mouth marketing – in other words, by its nature, it carries a great impact. According to Hootsuite, more than a third of daily Instagram users have purchased something because an influencer recommended it. Influencers' audiences are niche, highly engaged and responsive to the influencers' content. Their recommendations have strong influence on a consumer's buying decisions – more so than sponsored social media content. If you're ready to take your brand's social media marketing to the next level, it's time to consider collaborating with an influencer!

## Find the Right Person

The first step is to find an influencer who is compatible with your brand. There are hundreds of influencers out there, but not all of them will be the right fit for promoting your brand and

products. Influencers range from macro, like Kylie Jenner, to micro – like a prominent figure in your area.

Obviously, it would be next-to-impossible for a small business owner to get his brand on a Kardashian's radar, but that's okay! Micro-influencers – a.k.a.,

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local influences – are the perfect fit for promoting a small business's brand. Micro-influencers are people who typically have between 1,000 and 50,000 followers on a given social media platform – usually Instagram, where the majority of social media influencer marketing takes place – who specialize in a particular niche and have a highly specific audience.

A local influencer might be a trendy mom, who shares parenting advice and photos of her family; a style icon who showcases his or her outfits, with tips on how to shop for a dream wardrobe; a fitness coach or trainer who posts about his own workout routine and helps followers stay healthy and motivated. The possibilities are endless. Micro-influencers are influential in promoting small businesses because their audience trusts them, looks to them as role models, and thinks of them as "real people" to whom they can relate and whose lifestyle they can replicate in their own lives.

So, how do you find the perfect influencer for your first partnership?

## Start by Selecting Product

First, decide what you want to promote. Is it your new line of back-to-school shoes? Influencer mom might be the way to go. Do you want to highlight your trendiest shoes for the season? You're probably looking for a style icon

in your community. The influencer you choose to work with should be someone who can reach the target audience for the product you choose to promote.

Once you've decided what kind of influencer you're looking for, head to Instagram to do some research. You may already be following some influencers in your community, or they may be following you. Searching relevant hashtags can also help you find who you're looking for. For example, if you're a shoe store in Milwaukee, you might search #mkstyle, #mkemom or even #mkeinfluencer, to see which accounts are trending around these topics. A simple Google search of influencers in your area can also help reveal the perfect person with whom to work.

Make a list of influencers who seem promising, and then consider the following about each one:

> **How many followers do they have? Sure, anyone can *claim* to be an influencer, but does the community feel the same way? Someone with only 400 followers might not be making a big impact. Someone with 1,000 – or better yet, 5,000 – followers, who posts regular quality content and receives high levels**

## Transparency Is Key

The Federal Trade Commission requires influencers to be transparent when posting sponsored content. That means influencers must make it clear if a social media post is sponsored, and who the sponsor is. This may include tagging content as “#sponsored” or as “#ad,” or clearly stating that the influencer has partnered with a brand or business for this promotion. The admission should be easy to find, and not “buried” in a jumble of other hashtags. Marketers maintain the highest level of trust for their brand and products by making sure their influencers follow FTC protocols.

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> Does their content match your brand's tone and values? Is it up-to-par with the quality of your own content?

> Do they frequently post about anything that may offend your target audience or that clearly does not align with your brand?

Answering these questions simply by browsing an influencer's content will help you narrow down your list. Does it look like they've collaborated with other brands in the past? If so, do these sponsored posts have a lot of engagement? Do they naturally flow with the influencers' other content?

If you've gotten this far with potential influencers, reach out to answer the most important question: Will they reach your target audience? Introduce yourself and your brand, ask if they'd be interested in discussing a potential collaboration, and then ask for more information on their audience (which may include Instagram followers and blog readers). More experienced influencers might provide you with a media kit, including a summary of their audience – but if not, keep asking questions. They might have 20,000 followers, but what percent of them are in your area? Are a majority of the right gender? In the right age group? What is the average engagement rate on the influencers' posts?

## Make Your Offer

If the influencer feels like a good fit, ask them if they'd be willing to collaborate with you. Keep in mind that most influ-

encers won't work with *every* brand that makes them an offer. They're in business for themselves as well, and many will work only with brands they feel comfortable promoting – brands whose values and image align with their own.

If both parties agree to move forward with a partnership, it's time to outline the “campaign” you'll run together. What will the promotion look like? Will you send the influencer a few pairs of shoes in their size and let them try the shoes out? Will you give them a gift card to shop your store and pick out their favorites on their own? Let the influencer know what *specifically* you'd like promoted, whether it be a specific product or aspect of your business, **and then let them take the lead on creating content.** It can be difficult to hand over the reins, but their loyal followers follow them for a reason – their content-creation style has already proven to resonate with their audience. That's the beauty of working with influencers – they put a unique, personalized spin on your promotion, in a way that will speak naturally to their followers.

You'll also want to determine up front what “deliverables” the influencer will provide. Instagram posts? Instagram story posts? A blog post? Images? Can you use these images on your own social channels? If so, do you have to give the influencer credit? For what period of time will the influencer promote your brand on their channels? On what specific days? Let the influencer know that you'd like to approve every piece of content before it goes live (which

should help alleviate some of the nerves that come with letting someone else create promotions for your brand), so you can ensure that all information is correct. What will be the cost for these deliverables? Will you pay the influencer in product, a gift card, or money? When will payment be provided? Outlining all of these details at the start will eliminate any confusion while a promotion runs.

## An Investment in Marketing

You should look at working with influencers as a marketing investment, and treat it as such. What can you do to help the influencer's posts about your brand thrive? Perhaps you provide the influencer with X number of store gift cards to give followers who follow *both* the influencer's *and your business's* Instagram accounts throughout the promotion. Or set up a special promo code that the influencer's followers can use if they shop at your business during a specified period of time. During the promotion, make sure to tell your own social followers to keep an eye out for the influencer's posts, and share these posts on your own channels. If the influencer created a blog as part of the partnership, link to it in your Instagram bio. If you and the influencer work together to create a symbiotic marketing campaign, that “togetherness” can generate new customer interest and sales for your brand.

Finally, determine whether your partnership with the influencer was successful by measuring the results. Make note of how many followers you have on each of your social platforms before and after the campaign. Track the engagement delivered by any of your posts relating to the promotion. Ask the influencer for a report on key metrics, including post engagement, blog post views and comments, and feedback from followers. The numbers from the campaign will give you a clear picture of how influencer marketing can boost your brand! ■

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