

Influencer Partnership Best Practices

Influencer marketing globally has [grown](#) YoY from \$1.7 billion in 2016 to \$21.1 billion in 2023. Platform algorithms favor creator-made content; influencer content circumvents ad blockers; and consumers often trust influencers more than advertisements. As such, influencer relations has become a critical component of public relations and marketing programs.

Below are guidelines and best practices to consider when incorporating influencer partnerships at the University of Miami:

Influencer landscape

Finding the right person to partner with on influencer relations requires an understanding of the different types of people who can help build third-party credibility. There are three main types of influencers:

1. **Celebrity influencer** reaches a large audience online and is capable of building brand awareness through organic social media posts to their own channel. This category encompasses people who are famous because of who they are, how they act, and what they think. There could be long-term brand reputation issues during a crisis based off the influencer's image and reputation.
2. **Subject matter expert** takes the subject matter expertise to the next level and has created a large online following built through consistent and credible leadership on a given topic. They are generally less influential but do have strong affinity audiences and credibility.
3. **Thought leader** has demonstrated a deep expertise in a particular field and can be trusted to provide a well-informed point of view about a topic.

They are often categorized into micro-influencers and macro-influencers.

1. **Micro-influencers** typically have a few thousand followers – usually an affinity audience interested in their niche. We see a better ROI (clicks, buys, etc.) with micro-influencers, as these campaigns are more action oriented.
2. **Macro-influencers** have hundreds of thousands to millions of followers. The macro-influencers are more expensive and are better at raising broad awareness and impressions.

They can be paid or unpaid. The difference between paid and unpaid influencer is nuanced and differs by category:

1. **Paid influencers** accept payment to create content and post to their followers on behalf of an organization. They usually create more non-paid content than paid to

maintain an engaged audience and authentic persona. They accept payment to market products and initiatives, regardless of personal opinions. However, it's common for these sponsored partnerships to align with the influencer's previous brand and content. Influencers typically use the size of their audience to drive the starting point in compensation negotiations.

2. **Unpaid influencers** usually do not accept payment because it's inappropriate in their profession. Unpaid influencers often accept products or samples and provide honest reviews of an organization's brand. Others are subject matter experts and will promote for free. Because they are unpaid, it can be difficult to determine which influencer is collaborating with a brand or simply curating content to support an initiative. Brands can not enforce approval requirements or see the content before it goes live.

Top influencer engagement rules

1. **Compensate, but don't overpay.** Influencers deserve to be compensated for their time and platform but be sure to align compensation to match the value you will receive as a brand. Consider a cost-per-engagement model to start negotiating from.
2. **Follow the rules.** Most countries now have disclosure requirements that must be upheld by both the influencer and brand.
3. **Protect authenticity.** Only pursue a partnership if the concept is authentic. Audiences are fiercely loyal and will call out disingenuous content partnerships, which hurt both the influencer and brand.
4. **Co-create, don't instruct.** Trust influencers to drive content forward in a way that feels authentic to them. Understand that using their platform means losing an element of creative control.

Framework to effectively leverage influencers

It can be tempting to engage with third-party influencers before determining how they fit into the broader communications strategy. Always follow these steps to engage influencers effectively:

1. **Understand** the overarching strategy and valuable outcome by answering the below questions at the outset.
 - a. How would an influencer approach fit into our strategy to help us achieve our goals?
 - b. How can we leverage existing influencers within our organization?
 - c. Would a third-party endorsement help in this situation?
 - d. What can we offer for a mutual benefit?
 - e. Would an influencer program achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for your organization *and* the influencer?
 - f. Will the campaign reach and engage priority audiences? What channels are necessary to reach those audiences?

- g. Would a thought leader, subject matter expert, or online influencer be the best messenger?
 - h. What are the meaningful KPIs we would assess to know whether influence has been achieved?
 - i. How are peers using influencers successfully?
 - 2. **Identify** the third-party voices that matter most to your audiences.
 - a. Conduct an extensive search of social media accounts related to the topic / themes you want to promote. Beyond desktop research, there are several tools that can help you identify the right influencers like TikTok Creator Marketplace or paid services (please contact Geisha Garcia (g.garcia11@miami.edu) at University Communications for guidance).
 - b. Be sure to vet against a unified set of criteria like reach, risk, relevance, resonance, research, and engagement.
 - c. Build a data-driven influencer map using the criteria above to compare influence and fit. Remember that you don't have to work with just one individual to achieve your communications objectives. Often working with several micro-influencers works better than choosing one higher-profile influencer.
 - 3. **Create** an engaging program that builds credibility.
 - a. First, plan the value exchange by determining a mutual benefit (i.e., access to information, events, money, etc.).
 - b. Then begin a conversation with the influencer to determine the level of interest. Arrange any meetings, briefings, previews, tours, or one-on-ones to build the relationship and manage expectations.
 - c. Establish regular two-way dialogue – this is critical for content co-creation.
 - d. Sign an influencer agreement. Points often outlined in these agreements include:
 - i. What type of content is needed (photos, video, stories, etc.)? Determine the format and how many pieces of content will be shared. Note if there are any specific hashtags to be used or a certain aesthetic / brand guidelines to be followed.
 - ii. Who has creative control over the campaign? Is the brand providing images and copy or is this left to the influencer?
 - iii. What is the length of the campaign? This should include a campaign schedule as well as any exclusivity period that refrains the influencer from working with competing brands.
 - iv. How and when will the influencer be compensated for their work? If working with an international influencer, determine which currency will be used.
 - v. Who declares ownership of the work, copyrights, and licenses?

- vi. Who will preview and approve of the content prior to posting?
 - vii. Who will handle comments and engagement on the campaign's posts? Certain comments may threaten a brand's or an influencer's reputation. The agreement should disclose who handles this PR.
 - viii. Standard contract clauses, such as names, dates, deliverables, descriptions of the work, cancellation clauses, an NDA to protect company information, and influencer terms and conditions should be included.
- 4. **Execute** and optimize to achieve the maximum impact.
 - a. Monitor sentiment and engagement surrounding the content launch. Consider ways to share engagement like a "Collab" on Instagram to track this seamlessly.
 - b. Integrate paid support to boost content where relevant.
 - c. Measure, learn, and reapply in the middle of and at the end of each engagement.
- 5. **Follow** FTC guidelines
 - a. The Federal Trade Commission has issued clear guidance for the use of influencer endorsements. Failure to disclose an existing material connection in social media content could result in legal action.
 - b. The FTC recommends placing disclosures like #Ad to the beginning of sponsored posts, though placing at the end is also legally acceptable.
 - c. The FTC regularly updates its guidance for influencers, which is available at its website:
https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/plain-language/1001a-influencer-guide-508_1.pdf

Dos and don'ts of influencer partnerships

Do...	Don't...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Clearly disclose when the brand has a financial relationship with an influencer.· Ensure the brand sponsorship disclosure is hard to miss.· Treat sponsored tags like any other endorsement.· Look at the overall branding and style of the influencer.· Familiarize influencers with the brand's values and ensure the influencer is aligned.· Make sure an influencer agreement / contract is signed, if possible.· Work with multiple influencers to increase reach and addressable audiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Assume followers know about the brand's relationships.○ Assume disclosures that are built into social media platforms are sufficient.○ Use ambiguous disclosures or rely on those that followers must click to view.○ Focus only on the numbers; be sure to think about the qualitative data like the quality of interactions and overall sentiment.○ Lose contact with influencers after their campaigns are complete.○ Forget about the channel; choose influencers who are experts in creating content for the platforms your target audience frequents (i.e., use LinkedIn for reaching mid-to-senior employees).

Have questions?

Geisha Garcia

Executive Director, Digital and Social Media

University Communications

305-582-7285

g.garcia11@miami.edu