

This is what it takes to be a social media influencer

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The terms "influencer" or "social media influencer" is a term used by many - in almost every other conversation - almost every other day. In fact, the word influencer was only added to the English dictionary in March 2019.



Photo by Cristian Dina© from [Pexels](#).

However, the concept of brands associating with well-known individuals - and vice versa - dates back to the mid-1700s when Josiah Wedgwood made a tea set for Queen Charlotte of England and took the opportunity to brand his wares Royal-approved. A clever and strategic marketing tactic that's been in play ever since.

This association used to be called brand ambassadorship and was the realm of real celebrities but social media has democratised everything and pretty much anyone can do the job now called being an influencer....or can they really?

If you've watched the Netflix show *Emily in Paris*, it seems the answer is yes, anyone can become an influencer. If you haven't seen the show, the premise is that a young American arrives in Paris to work at a marketing agency. She can't speak a word of French and lacks that 'je ne sais quoi' the French are famous for, but with some pretty pictures and clever hashtags on her Instagram account, she bolsters her appeal – and ability to secure some pretty big deals at work – from 80-something followers to over 20,000 in 10 quick episodes.

Let's be frank, if you're not part of the Kardashian/Jenner clan, or already famous for something else like being a Grammy winner or saving the planet, it's not that easy to gain the levels of social appeal that we see on our TV sets.

Here are 5 tips to help social influencers succeed...

1. **Social capital is hard to create and even harder to maintain**

In my social media job, I like working with influencers. But I have my definition of whom these people are (it's not the Kardashians and others like them), and the value that I want them to bring to the brands we represent.

I'm not interested in who your family is, or how many millions of followers you have because we all know that followers can be bought. I'm more interested in you; what you represent and the benefit you could bring to my clients' brand by the way you use or represent it in your real life. So, if you're simply Sally or Sipho who thinks they have some sway, this is what I'm looking for from you.

2. **Find your niche**

Who are you and what do you stand for? You could be documenting a new adventure, or a lover of vegan food, or a collector of sneakers, or plastic picked-up off the beach. It doesn't matter what you stand for but stand for something that has meaning in your life that others can relate to.

3. **Build your community**

If your posts are authentic and honest and open a window into your life, you will attract a community of followers. But don't expect to gather the kind of momentum we saw with Emily. Iman Hariri-Kia recently blogged in [Bustle](#), about how she "was inspired to put Emily's egregious social media skills to the test", so she Instagrammed like Emily for a week.

The result? She says the experiment required a lot of extra work but resulted in very little benefit. Although she did end the week with a few dozen more followers, she didn't manage to go viral.

"Another seven days went by, and I remained an irrelevant writer. Nobody cared about my week of Instagram chaos because they were too busy worrying about the world imploding," wrote Hariri-Kia.

This result is not surprising; some people will find and follow you, but like with all marketing or advertising, you need to tell people where to find you and why to buy your product – or in this case, follow you. If you don't have the budget for targeted promoted posts, create a WhatsApp group and share your content there, telling everyone to follow you (with a direct link to your page) and encourage them to add like-minded members to the group. Those who like what you're sharing will do as requested.

4. **Engage with your community**

You cannot be a vegan foodie one day and a leather sneaker enthusiast the next. There is a reason why people decided to follow you and suddenly diverting away from your niche, will risk the authenticity and trust your community has put in you.

“ Social media is about two-way communication so communicate with your followers. So many influencers forget to community manage their content. Once you have posted, monitor how people respond, what they comment on,

and engage in conversation with them. ”

Consider a call to action, something along the lines of “Let me know in the comments section what you would like me to cook next”. This sparks a conversation, creates engagement, and gives you your next content topic and your community the inspiration they’re asking for.



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For me, engagement is a priority factor when looking for influencers to work with. If you have a million followers but your engagement rate is a simple 100 likes, this does not make you an influencer in my books. I’d rather work with someone who has 1,000 followers and can show me consistently high levels of engagement with them.

5. Consistent and quality content

Quality is not just the aesthetic appeal of your content; it’s also the knowledge and research behind the content. Adding depth to your content by doing your research and having an informed opinion, positions you as a thought leader within your community. Bring something new to the table, a new perspective with the content that you put in front of your audience.

Posting consistently is also important to keep your community by your side. Just like in the olden days when people knew their favourite TV show aired every Tuesday at 8pm, your community want to know what to expect from you, and when. Follow a weekly schedule and post the same kind of content on the same day; something like cooking lessons on Mondays, new recipes on Wednesdays and your thoughts on non-GMO foods of Fridays.

6. Know your platforms

Finally, please understand the platform that you’re on. You can be an influencer on one or many channels, but if you are going to be on more than one, make sure that you create specific content for each one; no one wants to watch your YouTube video that’s been poorly cropped for Instagram.

You can cross-market from one channel to another; something like posting a gorgeous image of your veg lasagne on Instagram with a link to the How-To video on YouTube, but your channels should be called the same thing, so they’re easy to find.

Your social accounts are your brand. Make sure they’re properly and professionally curated so that potential brand partners know that you know what you’re doing. Brands aren’t looking out for what they can do to boost the life of an influencer, they’re looking for high-impact partnerships that benefit them.

If you’re not prepared to put in the work to show that you’re an expert who can offer something valuable, then you’re not an influencer, you’re just a person on social media.

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