

2017 KEY INFLUENCERS:

Future Marketing Trends



WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

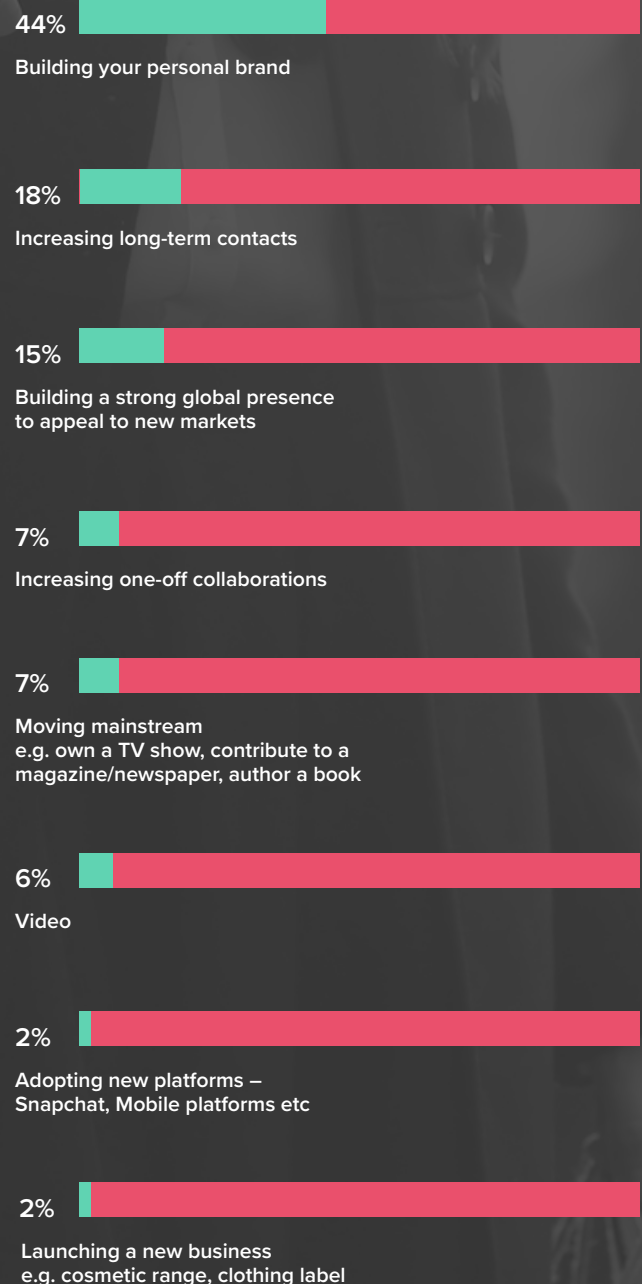
Influencer marketing is in an exciting place, and there's much research to show that it's the fastest-growing marketing channel at present. As the relationship of trust strengthens between brand and influencer, it seems likely that 2017 will be the year that brands will gain more confidence in handing over creative freedom and narrative control. This is the point where quality will win out over quantity, and no doubt brands and influencer alike will be more selective than ever about who they choose to work with.

The emphasis on personal brand will prevail in 2017

Fashion and Beauty Monitor's 'The Voice of the Influencer' research report found that in 2017 the focus on building a personal brand will continue to be the main area of focus for 44% of all fashion and beauty influencers surveyed. This will be achieved by influencers staying true to themselves, and only partnering with brands that offer a really good fit, and are of specific relevance to their audience.

Additionally, building long-term sustainable relationships with brands is the second biggest priority, for 18% of influencers. The finding shows that while one-off endorsements dominated the collaborative space in 2016, clearly this year, influencers would like to be forging more meaningful partnerships. An interesting discovery is that for 15% of influencers, building a strong global presence, which appeals to new markets, will be a top priority this year.

IN 2017, WHAT IS YOUR MAIN AREA OF FOCUS?



EXPERT INTERVIEWS

The expert interviews carried out for this report helped to shed additional light on emerging future trends.

The rise of ‘influencer’ squads

Influencer squads can be a savvy marketing move by brands, enabling them to widen their circle of engagement by piggy-backing off the connections and social following of the influencers they have a relationship with. Additionally, the diversity of the ‘squad’ brings added value to the brand campaign, providing they align with the brand values and operate in the same market.

Influencer squads are where you really begin to tell the same story from many different angles, and you see different opinions but all on the same story. This is particularly true with celebrity influencers. Look at Taylor Swift’s 4th July party, for example, which had so many celebrities there all Instagramming their moments from the party. Suddenly you have quite a unique story taking shape, because of her squad.

“Bring together a group of likeminded people, create a story and figure out how they’re going to tell it, as people pick up on that and that’s when it becomes really interesting. You begin entering a bit more of an experience.”

Emma Gregson, Director of ITB

“It’s our preference to work with smaller, up and coming influencers, as they tend to have more impact with their audience. When they are new and emerging this can lead to better relationships with brands in the long term.”

Allyson Griffiths, Strategy Director at iCrossing

The rise of mid-tier influencers

The “magic middle” is a term originally defined by **David Sifry**, founder of Technorati, and has also been widely used by industry thought leader Brian Solis. It refers to an untapped genre of influence, providing the ideal alternative or complement to A-list influencer outreach. In many ways, these mid-tier influencers are the ones the general public aspire to more than Hollywood celebrities or super models, for example, as they’re more within their reach. It’s with the mid-tier that brands can start to engage on a much more personable level with consumers, and talk of a lifestyle they can aspire to.

For example, yoga instructor Patrick Beach had just a few thousand followers on Instagram, but H&M Sport recognised that they were highly engaged bunch of followers who cared deeply about what he had to say, owing to his passion and commitment to his subject. The high street fashion brand approached him with a partnership opportunity, which over a short period of time, has proved itself to be incredibly successful for both parties. Fundamentally, it has brought Patrick a new respected fan base, and he now boasts over 300,000 followers.

A layered approach

Influencers and agencies agree that brands need to be thinking beyond product reviews and gifting, taking a more interesting, layered approach to influencer marketing.

Savvy consumers want insider access, behind the scenes previews and insight into the lives of the brand and its people. For example, Benefit Cosmetics' Lisa Potter-Dixon, head make up and trend artist, shares tips, tricks, product previews and demos, as well as backstage shots at Fashion Week and QVC. Not only this, she also often helps with out-of-hours customer service across Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat, as well as featuring the brand on her own YouTube channel. Not only does this help raise the profile for the brand, but positions Lisa as an influential figure in the industry, and in turn offers the brand even more exposure.

A smarter approach to research and identification

Interviews with influencers confirmed that even in the digital age, it remains surprisingly difficult to seek out and establish relevant brand partnerships. In the majority of cases influencers are sitting back and waiting to be contacted, but then they say that more than half of the brand approaches they receive are generally poorly researched and untargeted, and not relevant to them and their audience. It's an inefficient way of working, and moving forward, brands will be required to find better tools and methods to identify suitable influencers to work with, who they can establish a more meaningful relationship with long-term.

Video will prevail

Video provides brands with greater scope to be creative, while offering a broader storytelling arc. It's also the format consumers are demonstrating an insatiable appetite for right now, as if done well, it allows them to access a lifestyle, rather than just a moment via an Instagram image, for example.

A tighter legal framework

Contracts have formalised the influencer marketing industry, to a degree. Influencers interviewed for the report said increasingly, they are being asked to sign contracts for paid collaborations, so that everyone is clear on what's expected of them. Since many influencers lack management or agents, it's important the contracts are short and easily digestible.

To clear up any remaining confusion around disclosure rules, it seems inevitable that moving forwards, brands will begin including these requirements within their contracts, if they aren't doing so already. For this reason, it's crucial that brands keep up-to-date on the regulations specific to their country, which inevitably will tighten up further as the industry matures.

When it comes to posting from the influencer, brands will tend to get a lot more traction if they ask them to post the behind the scenes film, for example. Just posting the main campaign ad isn't so exciting to people anymore, as they want the truth and the depth. They want to feel like they've understood what someone has gone through in making something. I think natural organic content is much more relatable to people nowadays, and there is a massive shift towards that, and a challenge to brands as to how they use their traditional 30 second spot. People still love ads and always will, but when it comes to influencers, you almost need to create a second layer to the campaign that is much more organic in its feeling."

Emma Gregson, Director of ITB

EXPERT VIEW

“Around half of the PR or brand approaches I receive are relevant. I continue to be approached with fashion opportunities, but I’ve never written about fashion. I don’t even respond to these emails anymore.

Of the ones that are relevant and beauty related, I probably only say ‘yes’ to 5% to 10% of those, just because I’m so picky about which brands I work with and which messages I feel are a good fit for my personal brand and audience. I really want the paid pieces to fit well within content that I’m writing on my own organically. I always say to myself, if I was a reader of my blog, would this make any sense?

I don’t want to ever come across as having sold out. Once I start having to think hard about what would I write, suddenly the money becomes a lot less appealing!”

Christine Mikesell, Author of 15 Minute Beauty