

# Under the influence

**You have a creative agency, a digital agency, a social media agency and a PR agency. And now your marketing director tells you it's time to engage an influencer agency too. What's going on? Carmel Allen and Jason A. Metz look at the business of influence, how it was, where it's at and where it's heading**

When I was an editor on glossy women's titles, back in the mid-Noughties, brands would woo us with carefully planned events. Stiff invitations were sent by post, cars sent to pick us up, champagne was served and products were 'unveiled'. Often we were flown to some glamorous destination too – being helicoptered into the launch of Dior's J'Adore in a private villa near Nice with naked waiters wearing nothing but gold paint and carefully draped loincloths comes to mind.

No editor would have dreamed of writing about the product before the release date – respecting embargoes went without saying. Three months later pictures would appear on your pages. The short-lead press would be given a presentation around that time too, and bloggers would be sent a press release. Bloggers weren't held in high regard back then. Why? Because companies didn't believe them to be influential. We, the editors, were –

as Malcolm Gladwell described us – the 'uber-influencers' and the term 'peer-influencers' hadn't yet been termed.

### The new order

So what's changed? "Now we still present to long-lead titles first," explains Ceylan Squier, the PR for Bobbi Brown cosmetics in the UK. "But the difference is many of the long-lead journalists work for their newsstand magazine, the online edition and many have their own blogs too. What frustrates us as a brand is that we time launches around the world for specific business and customer needs so it creates problems when journalists put product online in blogs and e-zines in the UK, say, and customers can't buy it in the stores yet. More frustrating still is that

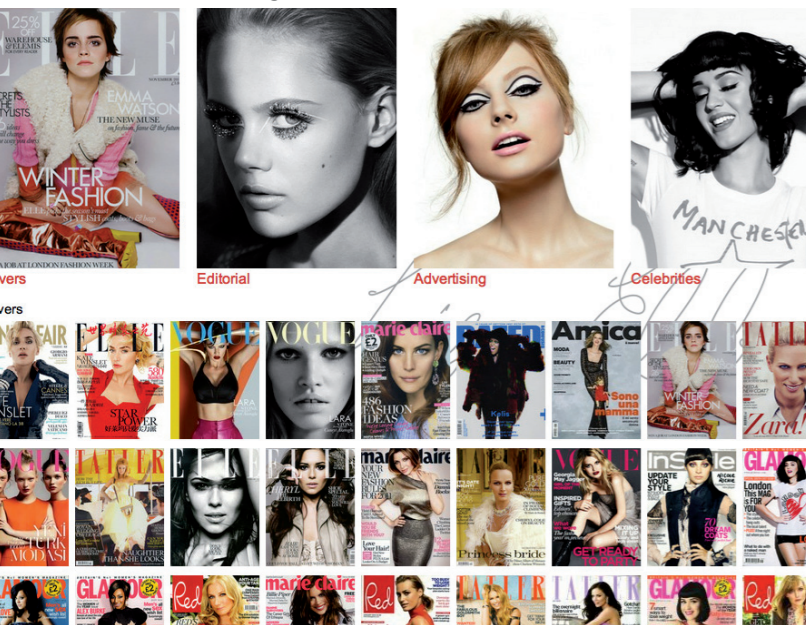
product may not be planned for launch in other countries for months so customers feel they are missing out."

So the real-time nature of the digital world doesn't respect release dates and embargoes – we want it now and we don't want to wait. At a recent Tom Ford perfume launch in London, journalists and bloggers were asked to sign an NDA before the launch but many of them broke it. What can the brand do? Not much. They don't want to get on the bad side of the people they need to promote their product – even if their timing breaks the old-school journalistic code of conduct.

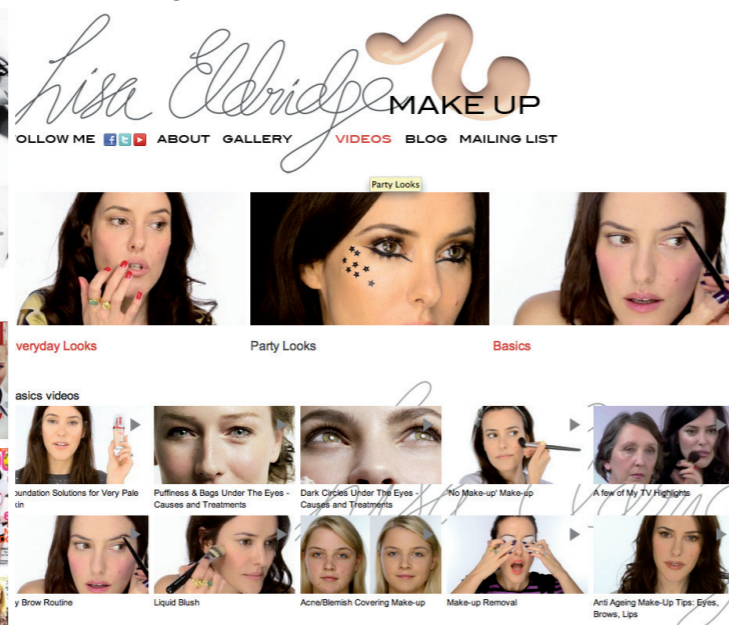
The other change is that brands have also seen how influential bloggers can be. It

“When make-up artist Lisa Eldridge showed Kathy Phillips' Perfect Legs Gradual Tan on her site, 300 were sold within a few days.”

Below: Lisa Eldridge's covers



Below: Lisa Eldridge's video tutorials



used to be that beauty brands would give their eye-teeth to be placed on Jo Fairley's beauty page in YOU magazine in the UK as it pretty much guaranteed a sell-out at the counter. The same was true of a mention in US *InStyle*. It still is, but there are also sites out there that have a similar effect: Kathy Phillips, former beauty director of British *Vogue* who founded her own beauty brand, This Works, told me how she'd given make-up artist Lisa Eldridge a sample of a new product, Perfect Legs Gradual Tan, and Lisa demonstrated it in one of her tutorial videos on her site. Within a few days, 300 were sold. Now that's influence in action.

Lisa built her reputation through print magazines where she is one of the most sought-after make-up artists for photo shoots. Her followers (50,000 on both Facebook and Twitter and more than that subscribing to her newsletter) are very responsive to her expertise and she marries it well with her participation in traditional media, always posting when a magazine featuring her work hits the newsstands. This prompts many of her followers to buy those magazines as well as the products she mentions.

### Editorialisation of the web

It's evident that what's changed since the early days of social media and blogging is that the 'traditional' journalists are often

now the most influential bloggers and social media wizards. In fact, many have gone on to edit websites: Net-A-Porter's Natalie Massenet was a fashion editor at *Tatler*, the former editor of *Elle* and *Grazia*'s editor in chief Fiona McIntosh is at *my-wardrobe.com*, *Esquire*'s Jeremy Langmead edits Mr Porter and *Harper's Bazaar* editor Lucy Yeomans has just announced she's leaving to go and head up content at Net-A-Porter worldwide.

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But also many of the PRs who were great BFB (before Facebook) are equally good at influencing through social media too. Millie Kendall MBE founded MKPR in the 90s representing Shu Uemura, Tweezerman and Aveda to name but a few of the brands.

She then went on to found Ruby & Millie, the make-up brand, and now has several companies and blogs, all with a beauty slant, and is launching a new store within Harvey Nichols this autumn called Beauty Mart that has its roots firmly in this trend.

"I've set up the company with Anna-Marie Solowij, who has been beauty director of *Elle* and *Vogue*," explains Kendall. "The

premise behind BeautyMART is that it's all about the edit. Between us we have over 20 years' experience in the industry, discovering, writing about, creating and selling the best products at all prices and we're now going to put that mix of products in one place, online and in-store. Customers won't feel they have to buy into a whole brand but will have the edited pick of their hero products all there for them. It's

about the trust and edit. In fact," she continues, "the editorialisation of the web is where it's at right now."

### The individual as the influencer

It's no surprise that the smart (adaptable) people who had clout in traditional media now have an exceptional Klout rating in social media – their influence remains, but in several formats rather than just one. But now the individual, the regular Jo or Joe who makes use of social media – Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, FourSquare, Spotify, etc – can be identified as an influencer of people through their profiles – and they are becoming increasingly important tools in the marketing and PR strategy. These >

Below: Beauty Mart Facebook page





'social influencers' are the passion of Jason A. Metz, one of the pioneers of Influencer Marketing who has set up a social intelligence, social monetization and influencer marketing agency, Brand Influencers, based in New York, and who has shown brands (including Forever 21, Porsche, A&E and MillerCoors) just how influential – and equally as important, how effective – these people can be in delivering results.

"We started as an experiential marketing company," explains Metz, "giving customers experiences that drove awareness and sales, and we observed how much they shared their experiences through social media. What's more, we observed so vividly that powerful offline experiences inevitably created powerful post-event viral amplification, with the most influential consumers having the ability to galvanize the largest online conversation following our experiential activations."

"So as an agency, we started connecting live experiences with digital conversation (pre and post) about five years ago. Yet most brands, for whatever reason, still do not harness the social power of consumers in the marketing and advertising, and instead look at social

media as nothing more than a new channel to promote their agenda – a platform to place the same ads they place in magazines or on TV. They might spend a fortune on a celebrity to endorse their product and buy influence that way but that's traditional marketing not influencer marketing; and certainly not savvy social media engagement. Simply slapping an ad on a Facebook page or

**“In social media the brand has to facilitate the conversation not dictate it. Consumers will post their sentiments whether a brand likes it or not.”**

paying for a Google ad buy is just not effective social media, and it doesn't even begin to leverage the power of social influencers.

"Many brands spend lots of money on digital agencies who create microsites, games or apps (which rarely impact bottom line sales but do win agencies awards) and often they pay a social media agency who has someone replying to comments and posts with 'thank you for your feedback'. This isn't engaging or having a meaningful conversation!"

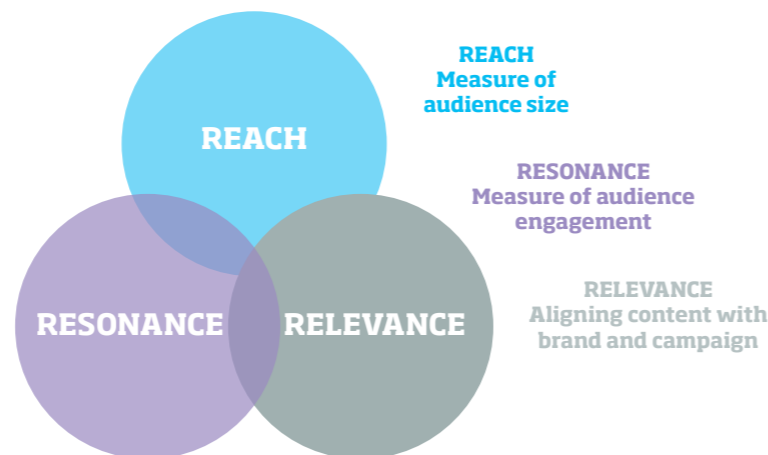
**Learning to listen**

Metz's approach takes the traditional social advertising model "and we flip it on its ass. The beauty of social media, at its core, is that if you bother listening to what your current and desired consumers

are saying online – the conversations they're having, the brands they love, the content that trends, the personality and tone with which they identify at a high level – you can effectively create a social infrastructure that provides the community and inspiration they so desperately seek, and in effect minimize marketing waste and maximize cost efficiencies.

"Social media allows savvy brands to foster perennial engagement built around what their consumer wants, targeting that elusive audience of one. And by building an army of influencers – true brand evangelists who love your brand and what it stands for, embody your brand's core ethos and represent the ideal consumer archetype you want to reach – brands have the ability to understand their consumers from the inside-out, to engage their consumers using fellow consumers, and to ultimately leverage the passion, credibility and authenticity that only true consumer influencers bring to the table."

But as Metz explains, "In social media the brand has to facilitate the conversation not dictate it. Consumers will post their sentiments through social whether a brand likes it or not, so



it's time for brands to relinquish a bit of control and in return listen to what consumers want and react accordingly."

**Social media and the millennials**

One brand Metz sees as getting its influencer strategy right is Mercedes, who have far more fans than they have people buying their cars. However, they are making sure that those who are too young, or who can't afford one yet, are talking with them now and will continue that conversation later, making sure Mercedes is at the forefront of their minds when the aspiring owner is ready to buy.

Metz explains: "Mercedes is planting its social flag exactly where its target future consumer lives – in fashion, film, entertainment, sports and lifestyle. They provide social fans with a daily glimpse of the aspirational lives they hope to live, and frankly none of their competitors are even close. If just 10% of those millennials engaging with Mercedes through social today end up buying their car in the next five years, Mercedes will achieve well over 10,000% ROI through today's social strategy. And that's just talking about millennials."

Another example is the project Brand Influencers worked on with the fashion brand Forever 21 to help launch their New York Times Square flagship store. Over the course of three months they filmed and broadcast the first live, social reality TV show, featuring six young female influencers vying to become the official Forever 21 launch model. Throughout that time, the six girls' journey was broadcast to the world through Facebook, ultimately driving 500,000 new fans, more than \$1.8 million in earned media, and a 700% ROI. And there are a dozen other programmes that prove the value – long-term and short-term alike – of influencer marketing and social optimization.

Metz says: "Ever since the advent of social ubiquity, consumers now own the conversation. Period. Brands can either pay attention and react accordingly, or suffer the consequences."

**The future – segmenting your followers**

"This is where things start to get really interesting," says Metz. "Through relatively simple social profile-scraping algorithms, we can extrapolate all personal social details of a brand's social fans and their friends into a segmented database, which we then search to build clusters of fans based on shared passion points. We glean demographic, psychographic and socio-graphic insights, as well as each fan's level of influence, plus all the same information about their friends. Then we create targeted messaging campaigns that compel these folks to action based not on the brand's standard advertising messaging but based on personal insights we now know about our fans and their friends, improving the likelihood that they react favourably by 50% or more."

"In most of our campaigns, that directly translates to an increase in sales and ROI of 50% or higher, because most of our segmentation campaign calls-to-action

include a purchase offer or incentive. When working with a leading natural cheese brand, for example, instead of creating a digital ad unit or mass email campaign offering all consumers the chance to purchase a product launch, we identify all yoga lovers within the brand's social fan base (and their friends) and craft messaging around their personal passion point, making the offer relevant to them and driving greater returns.

"The more you know about your consumer, the more you can affect their behaviour. This truth is at the core of our social listening and influencer marketing platform. By identifying all yoga fans within the brand's fan base and their friends who also love yoga but are not yet fans of the brand, we create a secondary message invite to yoga fans to share an opportunity with their friends who love yoga, bringing them to our community. This is the epitome of treating all fans as potential influencers, and recruiting new fans (and future revenue) from within, without spending a ton of money." ■

**An example of an influencer profile**

**Michael Johnson**

**Name:** Michael Johnson  
**Location:** St. Louis, MO  
**Country:** United States  
**Reach:** 83/100  
**Resonance:** 61/100  
**Relevance:** 97/100  
**Frequency Score:** 78/100  
**Personality Score:** 84/100  
**Keywords Match:** 14/20  
**BI SCORE:** 1660

**Biography**  
CEO of [xxx], Partner in [xxx], Hardcore sports fan, historically has provided great coverage of key sporting events and very influential in professional and amateur sports space.

**Keyword set**  
"London Olympics" - "Dream Team" - "2012 Olympics" - "Lebron James" - "ESPN" - "Michael Phelps" - "training camp" - "watching the game" - "Blowout Iverson" - "Chicago White Sox" - "Coors Light" - "sports bar"

- Friends: 3477. Fans: 43,000
- Connections: 1,200
- Readers: 1,212,450. Subscriber: 32,120
- Subscribers: 32,880. Views: 2,210,000
- Followers: 56,292. Mentions: 9,600. Tweets: 48,000
- Connections: 5,000. Recommendations: 12
- Friends: 48,970

**Influencer notes**  
Michael has come up in past searches as a potential influencer for [xxx] campaign. He's a huge basketball fan and talks about it often, but has a lot of diverse sports interests, from professional to amateur. His audience is diverse and they tend to engage with him at a higher level when he posts questions or calls to action rather than scores or news updates. His community respects his commentary and share his original posts at a very high level.

# 5 steps to a successful social influencer strategy

by Jason A. Metz

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## Before you begin

**REMEMBER...** Influencers come in all shapes and sizes - from tween girls to senior citizens, pizza lovers, sports commentators, physicians, fashionistas, firemen and furniture makers. Influencers are bloggers, they're promoters, and in some cases, they're simply really loud people who have somehow managed to garner a huge, loyal following. Some live on YouTube or Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, or any number of large or small social communities we've probably never heard of. But above all else, influencers are consumers - like you and me. Their voice is valued by a very specific audience, and their passion and authenticity are the key to their social media survival. Every brand either has influencers or could have influencers; it's a matter of identifying folk who fit the brand's archetype, enveloping them in the brand's goodwill and core ethos, and empowering them to engage others passionately, credibly and authentically.

### The author

Jason A. Metz has worked in marketing communications for 10 years, building campaigns for brands including Porsche, adidas, Procter & Gamble and Forever 21. In 2010 he founded



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Brand Influencers, a social intelligence, influencer marketing and social monetization agency based in New York. When he's not working, Jason enjoys weightlifting, watching sports, hanging out with family and friends, and building his modest real estate empire in Hoboken, New Jersey.

## 1 IDENTIFY

Although some technology companies want you to believe that simply scoring people based on some mysterious algorithm determines relative influence, the fact is you must be more precise to align consumer influencers with each brand. For us, there are three key criteria that determine level of influence - Reach, Resonance and Relevance. I want to know how large an influencer's social audience is, how capable they are of driving conversation among them, and most importantly how much they fit the brand's personality, tone and other key demographics, psychographics and socialographics. Identifying a brand's influencers is an art and a science: a combination of brilliant technology and brilliant human research and analysis. Just because a person has a huge Twitter following, for example, does not mean they're the ideal influencer for your brand. Klout and Technorati are not be relied upon because they largely discount a potential influencer's relevance to the brand and passion for that brand. We use our proprietary search algorithms and web crawlers, as well as our database of over 400,000 influencers, as our starting point, and then we confirm each potential influencer's viability based on all brand criteria through influencer monitoring across all social platforms.

## 5 ACTIVATE

The goal of all brands is to identify a core group of passionate influencers, envelop them in their brand ethos, monitor and analyse their social conversations, and empower them to engage their own communities around that brand's messaging. We don't hire influencers so we don't control what they say to their communities. All we can do is select wisely and invite influencers to take part in a mutually beneficial relationship. So our approach is one of 'push-pull': we want to invite influencers to push messaging, opportunities, calls to action, incentives and more to their communities, while inviting them to pull insights and opinions, to help shape the brand from the bottom up. In any given year there might be five or 10 campaigns for the brand where we might want to leverage the power of influencers; our job as an agency is to determine the best way to get them engaged, and incentivise them to spread the opportunity through their communities.

## 2 ENGAGE

Once we have identified the ideal influencers for a brand/campaign, the next step is to reach out and engage them. Our approach to influencer marketing is different to most - instead of hiring influencers for one-time campaigns, our goal is to create communities where our influencers become a part of the brand's family for the long term. Our belief is that what consumers want more than monetary remuneration (in many cases) is for their voices to be heard by the brands they love, and thus the ability to help shape how that brand goes to market. Before reaching out to potential influencers, we determine with the brand what potential incentives we want to offer for joining, for remaining involved, for amplifying our reach within their communities and more. These incentives include event invitations, exclusive content, free trials and product, sneak peeks and other rewards, as well as the opportunity to crowd-source with the brand throughout the year, providing their insights. Once the incentive structure has been crystallized, we engage each potential influencer personally - through Twitter, email, Facebook or phone - introduce ourselves, explain the value proposition and ask them if they'd like to opt in. Ideally, once influencers join a brand's community, they're in it for the long haul, and our job becomes that of community management.

## 3 MONITOR

Once we have opted in a brand's influencers, it is paramount that we monitor their social activity to track sentiment, keyword analysis, geo-targeting and amplification. Above all else, we want to know which tactics are galvanizing our influencers to engage their communities at the highest level, which campaigns throughout the year are resonating, and which aspects of the brands are creating the most positive or negative commentary. Through our monitoring and listening platform, we track and analyse all relevant conversations initiated by all influencers across all social platforms day after day. Beyond monitoring and analysing though, - as influencer community managers - we constantly react to our findings, re-engage those influencers whose output either declines or becomes negative, reward those who continue to advocate for the brand vociferously, and in some cases invite new influencers to join the community when appropriate. What brands need to understand is that one dissatisfied influencer can truly damage that brand's social equity, and it's our job to ensure we are in a position to avoid this at all times through constant monitoring and listening, and a sound engagement policy.

## 4 ANALYSE

Influencer profile tracking allows us to analyse everything from keyword and geo-targeting metrics to sentiment analysis, both on a global level (monitoring *all* influencers) and on a more granular level, monitoring every influencer conversation every day. By doing so, we are able to advise our clients as to which aspects of their messaging are generating the greatest traction. We can see which influencers are generating the greatest amplification and which are struggling, and make changes accordingly. We also extrapolate data beyond the influencers, and observe their communities, getting a fundamental understanding of key consumer archetypes as they engage our brand through social. We work year-round with our clients, constantly adjusting strategy and tactics based on analysis, with a constant focus on incremental improvements.

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