MARKETING MINDSET IN MOTION

BONUS CHAPTER

Leora Halpern Lanz

THE STRATEGIST'S GUIDE TO INFLUENCER MARKETING (IM)

*A Bonus Chapter for *Marketing Mindset in Motion: Inspired by Hospitality**

By Leora Halpern Lanz & Alyssa Stevens

© 2026 Leora Halpern Lanz and Alyssa Stevens
All rights reserved. No part of this chapter may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the authors.

This bonus chapter is a companion to *Marketing Mindset in Motion: Inspired by Hospitality*.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Leora Halpern Lanz is a renowned hospitality marketer and premier voice in the industry who serves as an Associate Professor of the Practice at Boston University's School of Hospitality Administration. She is the author of *Developing Your Marketing Mindset: Real-World Lessons from Hospitality* and *Marketing Mindset in Motion: Inspired by Hospitality*. Her career has included executive roles in branding, communications, and strategy for global hotel companies. She is a frequent speaker and writer on the numerous approaches and perspectives of hospitality marketing.

Alyssa Stevens is a Boston-based social media and influencer strategist with more than 17 years of experience leading influencer marketing, content strategy, and digital storytelling for iconic brands. As the founder of Monarch, a PR, social, and influencer consultancy, she partners with lifestyle and hospitality companies to build cultural relevance through creator collaborations and integrated brand campaigns. Drawing on her background as a global agency leader, Alyssa also brings firsthand insight into the evolving creator–brand dynamic as the voice behind *The A-Lyst*, her blog and social platform.

With contributions from…

Florine Cagnat - a communications professional with over a decade of experience in public relations, with a strong focus on media relations and digital marketing. She has built an expertise in lifestyle and hospitality, blending traditional press outreach with influencer and celebrity collaborations to maximize visibility. Her career began between Los Angeles and Paris, where she gained valuable experience in event production, including award ceremonies and exclusive gatherings. This international background shaped her ability to design campaigns that resonate across cultures and platforms. Today, Florine is the Founder of Dix Louvois Paris, a Paris-based PR agency specializing in media relations, influencer and celebrity collaborations, and digital amplification.

Ashley Yeo Hye Chae - a beauty marketing professional with a background in Communication Design from Parsons School of Design in New York City, where she complemented her studies with coursework in branding and marketing. Beginning in her sophomore year, she gained hands-on experience through internships at Korean beauty brands before joining Amorepacific and Wishtrend as an IMC marketer. Based in Seoul today, Ashley continues her career as a beauty marketer while also creating content across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Having lived in both the U.S. and Korea, she brings a cross-cultural perspective to influencer marketing, shaped by her early experiences introducing K-beauty to international friends who were discovering it for the first time. What began as a passion project to share beauty tips has since grown into a career that bridges creative storytelling with data-driven marketing — giving her a dual perspective as both an influencer and a brand marketer.

Tina Nakashidze - a brand marketing professional with extensive experience in luxury hospitality and lifestyle sectors across the Middle East and Europe. Her expertise lies in 360° marketing, overseeing all aspects of brand strategy, from PR and digital to traditional marketing. Tina began her career with Four Seasons Dubai, managing marketing for two properties, before joining Raffles The Palm Dubai, part of Accor, one of the world's leading French hospitality groups, where she led large-scale campaigns and strategic brand initiatives. She now serves as Brand Marketing Manager at 7 Management, overseeing the marketing of the group's restaurants, bars and lifestyle venues across the UAE, Greece, Lebanon, Romania and Qatar.

Johanna Picciano - a senior communications leader with 17+ years of experience across the tech, government, and industrial sectors in Latin America. She currently serves as Director of Communications for Latin America at Deel, the leading global HR and payroll platform, where she oversees PR and external communications across Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. In this role, she drives both regional and global initiatives, including brand positioning, executive visibility, and media relations. Prior to joining Deel, Johanna was Head of Communications for Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay at Uber, and held key positions at Techint, the Buenos Aires City Government, HVS Global Hospitality Services, and Edelman. Her expertise spans crisis management, corporate communications, and both B2B and B2C strategies, always aligning communications with business objectives.

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

- The Evolution of "Civilian Journalism" and "Creator Economy"
- Consumer Behavior Shifts
- The Rise of Social Search: TikTok vs. Google Search
- Testimony

II. THE BUSINESS OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

- Influencer Categories: Mega, Macro, Micro, Nano
- Influencer vs. Creator: What's the Difference?
- Sourcing and Vetting Influencers
- Contracts and Compensation: How do you know what to pay the influencer?
- Ethical, Legal and Compliance Considerations
- Manager or Agent: Understanding their Roles
- Influencer Marketing or Affiliate Marketing
- Expectations of an Influencer Marketing Campaign on Social Media
- Measurement

III. INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

- International Perspectives
    - Ireland
    - France
    - Argentina
    - South Korea
    - Dubai

IV. **A LOOK AHEAD**

- REACH
- Bridging Verticals
- The Fascinating Rise of AI Influencers

V. **WRAP UP**

- Best Practices for Marketers
- Marketing Mantras
- Mindset in Motion
- References
- Stay Connected

I. INTRODUCTION

This bonus chapter explores the increasing relevance and power of Influencer Marketing (IM) in the hospitality and lifestyle sectors. *Marketing Mindset in Motion* focuses on experience-driven strategy and marketing activation, while this bonus chapter adds timely insight into a powerful, evolving channel that more and more hospitality brands are navigating for awareness and conversion campaigns.

Drawing from Alyssa Stevens' hands-on expertise working with influencers for brand collaborations in both North America and Europe, and Leora Halpern Lanz's decades of marketing experience in hospitality, this chapter highlights why influencer marketing has become a key player in today's marketing mix—and how it can build trust, awareness, and conversion when implemented strategically. We also aim to acknowledge the cultural nuances that exist within the global creator economy. As the industry continues to grow and evolve worldwide, influencer marketing remains in different stages of adoption outside the United States, reflecting diverse regional approaches and market readiness.

As the influencer marketing landscape continues to rapidly evolve, driven by advancements in social platforms, rising social media consumption, and a growing demand for authentic content, we hope these insights inspire readers to evaluate how influencer partnerships might meaningfully elevate their marketing strategies.

THE EVOLUTION OF 'CIVILIAN JOURNALISM' AND THE 'CREATOR ECONOMY'

The "Creator Economy" is young and rapidly expanding. Goldman Sachs estimates the global influencer economy is worth over $250 billion, with around 50 million creators worldwide (Goldman Sachs, 2025). Statista forecasts influencer marketing spend at $33 billion globally in 2025, up from about $24 billion in 2024 (Statista, 2025). Marketers and businesses must adapt to this burgeoning sector to remain relevant and proactive. It is important for marketers to capitalize on the power of influencers to support and promote brands, gain followers, and even generate measurable sales. This evolving aspect of marketing, in some cases, is replacing traditional press and advertising. To succeed, marketers need to monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to determine if an influencer strategy provides a meaningful Return on Investment (ROI), understanding the nuances from strategic management to contractual negotiation. Consequently, CEOs or CMOs must "learn enough to be dangerous" and speak and negotiate effectively in the language of content creators, influencers, and affiliate marketing.

With the advent of social media, the landscape of journalism underwent a significant transformation, giving rise to what Leora had years ago termed "civilian journalism." This phenomenon emerged as every individual with internet access gained the opportunity to share opinions, report events, and disseminate information - whether legitimate or false. Society began to value not only the insights of experts and authorities but also the voices of everyday individuals who leveraged digital platforms to express themselves and gain followers. Our definition of "civilian journalism" is the philosophy that each person could report based on personal criteria and spread information and ideas digitally.

As social media continued to expand, communities began to form on review sites like TripAdvisor and Yelp, where individuals trusted the opinions of strangers with similar interests over official business communications or corporate websites. The pandemic further accelerated this trend, as people spent more time online engaging in video content creation, indoor activities, and commentary, leading to a significant rise in social influence (*Smith, J. (2021). The Impact of Social Media on Public Opinion During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Journal of Digital Communication*).

Today, businesses striving to maintain their presence must navigate a landscape where prospective audiences increasingly follow influencers whose words carry weight. It is creating word-of-mouth marketing – at scale. These influencers range from celebrities and online personalities to musicians, political thought leaders, scientists, and experts in various fields. Living as an influencer does not require dedicating all energies to social media; it depends on the power of one's audience to render their voice influential. Even at the university level, individuals like the captain of a hockey team or the social media maven on the team, who consistently create engaging content, are also influencers.

Humans trust other people's opinions, and influencer marketing taps into this behavior - using social media to drive it at scale. Nearly 88% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations, and 92-93% report that such reviews influence their buying decisions (Testimonial, 2024). This is referred to as "social proof."

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR SHIFTS

Influencer marketing has proven to be a versatile and effective strategy for promoting products, services, and businesses that resonate with customers across all generations. Its effectiveness stems from the widespread use of social media platforms by diverse age groups, allowing brands to reach millennials, Gen Z, and baby boomers through tailored influencer partnerships. As of 2025, an estimated 63.9% of the global population—more than 5.2 billion people—actively use social media, spending an average of more than two hours per day across platforms. This widespread adoption underscores the immense potential for brands to connect with a diverse and highly engaged audience through social channels (DemandSage, 2025; Piktochart, 2025).

THE RISE OF SOCIAL SEARCH: TIKTOK VS GOOGLE

According to the *2025 Trust in Influencer Marketing Report* by IZEA Insights, released in November 2024, influencer content continues to gain appeal, with 77% of over 1,000 U.S.-based consumers finding it more compelling than traditional ads— the highest preference recorded to date.

In recent years, TikTok has rapidly emerged as a preferred search tool**,** especially among younger users. A 2025 survey found that among U.S. consumers aged 18–27, TikTok ranked second (23.2%) for product discovery**,** trailing only Instagram (30.4%) and surpassing Google (18.8%) (Search Engine Land, 2025). This trend illustrates a shift in how Gen Z gathers information—favoring visual, social-first platforms over traditional search engines.

This generational shift is backed by broader usage patterns. Approximately 41% of U.S. users reported using TikTok as a search engine in 2024**,** and nearly half of Gen Z users now prefer TikTok or Instagram over Google for finding information (Statista, 2024). More broadly, about 45–46% of Gen Z uses social media as their primary search tool, compared to just 24% across the general population (Hutchins, 2024).

This shift is fueled by three key factors: first, short-form video results on platforms like TikTok are more engaging and digestible than text-heavy search results. Second, users often trust peer-driven, creator-based content more than impersonal websites. Finally, TikTok's algorithmic relevance and personalization deliver highly tailored content, enhancing the discovery experience in ways static search engines cannot.

TESTIMONY

> *"Many business owners and marketing managers were initially skeptical of influencer marketing; they did not understand how paying for someone to dine at their restaurant or sending them free items would benefit their business; until their business suddenly 'went viral.' What I've seen in my work is that once companies enjoy a taste of a viral post, they see a clear return on their investment.*
>
> *"In my professional experience so far, we have seen an array of clients with varying perspectives on use of influencers. One example involved a recent project to launch a new cocktail book. We were tasked with securing product launch, gift guide, and recipe roundup press that was intended to garner*

exposure and not necessarily translate to direct sales of the books. We did a great job and secured placements in Forbes, WWD, InsideHook, Cheddar to name a few.

"But when we completed our assignment, we were told that any influencer work showed a direct spike in sales, which meant more to the client at the end of the day. Same goes for some of our restaurant work; the client is often more excited by a line out the door prompted by an influencer's viral video, than a listing as one of the best burgers in New York City, which may be an even better depiction of the restaurant and its quality. As we continue to navigate this world of influencer marketing, businesses and marketers are going to have to remain nimble and open-minded; it is certainly sticking around and evolving."

Jamie Weber, BU School of Hospitality, Class of 2020

II. THE BUSINESS OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

INFLUENCER CATEGORIES: MEGA, MACRO, MICRO, NANO

Recognizing the distinct categories of influencers -- mega, macro, micro, and nano -- is crucial for developing effective and strategic campaigns. These classifications provide a framework for brands to identify the most suitable influencers based on factors such as audience size, engagement rates, and niche relevance. Each category typically corresponds to different compensation models, as the value and reach of an influencer directly influence their partnership terms.

Influencers are segmented into four categories:

- NANO influencers have fewer than 10,000 followers.
- MICRO influencers have 10,000 to 100,000 followers.
- MACRO influencers have 100,000 to 1 million followers.
- MEGA influencers command 1 million+ followers.

When crafting an influencer marketing strategy, brands often face the choice between collaborating with mega influencers or opting for nano and micro influencers. While mega influencers boast vast follower counts and widespread visibility, partnering with nano and micro influencers often yields higher engagement and authenticity within niche communities tied to specific topics, interests, or geographic areas. These influencers tend to cultivate more intimate and interactive relationships with their audiences, leading to greater trust and more meaningful interactions. Unlike mega influencers, whose followers may feel more distant from them, nano and micro influencers often engage in two-way conversations.

Additionally, collaborating with nano and micro influencers is often more cost-effective, allowing brands to maximize their marketing budgets by partnering with multiple smaller influencers rather than a single high-cost mega influencer. These influencers are often more open to granting brands favorable usage rights to their content, which allows the brand to extend the life of the collaboration beyond that one social post in time.

This approach also diversifies the brand's reach across different segments and enhances targeted marketing efforts. Nano and micro influencers typically operate within specific niches, enabling brands to connect with highly relevant and engaged audiences that are more likely to convert into loyal customers. These influencers are perceived as more authentic and relatable, and as a result, they can significantly boost the credibility of brand endorsements.

INFLUENCER VS. CREATOR: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Though often used interchangeably, the terms *influencer* and *creator* represent distinct roles in the marketing ecosystem. Both can support a brand, but they do so in different ways. Understanding the nuances between them helps marketers decide how best to engage each one.

Influencers are primarily known for their ability to drive *audience reach and engagement.* They've built followings based on trust, relatability, or expertise in a specific niche. Their value lies in their power to shape opinions and encourage action—making them ideal for awareness campaigns, product launches, or brand advocacy.

Creators, on the other hand, are focused on *content production.* They bring a high level of creativity, visual skill, or storytelling talent, and are often hired to develop compelling assets that a brand can reuse across its own platforms. Even if they don't have large followings, their ability to produce high-quality content—videos, photos, reels, or written posts—makes them a valuable asset for brands that need fresh, on-brand material.

Savvy marketers often work with both, using influencers to amplify the message to target audiences while collaborating with creators to develop the content itself. Alternatively, they may find influencers who are also skilled at content creation and then negotiate favorable usage rights to leverage that content beyond the confines of the collaboration.

As social platforms continue to prioritize native, low-fi content, brands that historically relied on repurposing assets from other mediums, like broadcast, must now adapt their approach. While creators offer a viable path forward, some brands are turning inward, tapping employees to serve as social ambassadors and content creators. In 2023, Mintel research suggests that "One in five (19%) social media users consider themselves to be content creators (10%) or influencers (9%)," making it highly likely that many brands have untapped social talent within their own workforce (Mintel Group, Ltd., 2023).

A *New York Times* article that ran in July 2025 discusses this trend, noting that, “instead of relying on celebrities, brands are controlling the message by making their own social media videos.”

In other cases, companies are going a step further by creating dedicated in-house content roles responsible for consistently producing platform-specific content that aligns with the demands of evolving social algorithms. This approach can streamline approval processes, enabling brands to respond more quickly to emerging trends while also maintaining greater control over brand safety and content consistency.

SOURCING AND VETTING INFLUENCERS

The success of influencer marketing hinges on partnering with the right influencers who resonate with your brand values and target audience. It’s imperative to conduct thorough research to identify influencers whose content aligns with your brand's aesthetic, voice, and values. As the IM industry has grown, a number of tools and platforms have become available to aid marketers in their search for influencers. Platforms such as Later Influence or CreatorIQ offer advanced filters by keyword, topic, location, follower count, and engagement rate. While these platforms can be highly effective in identifying and managing creators at scale, brands seeking to connect with particularly niche personas may need to supplement with additional sourcing methods. This might include manual research through browsing hashtags and the pages of like-minded creators as well as reaching out to talent agents for access to curated rosters. Influencer sourcing can be a time-intensive process but is the first step in ensuring a successful and impactful collaboration for a brand.

Authenticity is paramount in influencer marketing. Encourage influencers to authentically integrate your brand into their content in a way that feels genuine and organic to their audience. Avoid overly promotional or scripted content that may come across as inauthentic and undermine trust with followers.

CONTRACTS AND COMPENSATION: HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO PAY THE INFLUENCER?

Brands often use a CPM (cost-per-mille) model to guide compensation, calculating the cost per 1,000 impressions by dividing total campaign spend by impressions and multiplying by 1,000. Many aim to keep CPM below $100, though actual rates vary based on engagement, conversions, follower count, and content relevance.

But payment isn’t always formulaic—it should align with the goal of the collaboration**.** Are you seeking access to the influencer’s audience? Their content creation skills? Reviewing their past performance, especially on similar sponsored campaigns, can help determine value and fair compensation.

Payment models can vary. Compensation may come in the form of cash, experiences, affiliate/referral commissions, or a combination—depending on what’s most meaningful to the influencer and most effective for the brand.

Marketers, take note: In the September 2023 *ehotelier* article, *Mastering Influencer Collaborations,* the author stresses the need for a contract to ensure a mutually agreeable relationship and to protect the interests of all parties. This contract should be well-written, clear, and signed by the influencer prior to any service rendered. It should "outline the scope of work, deliverables, compensation, usage rights and any other relevant terms and conditions." As the article points out, other significant items of note in such a contract are:

- *Ownership of Content:* Clarify that the content created by the influencer belongs to your hotel or business, granting you ownership rights.
- *License for Use of Image and Identity:* Include a provision that grants your property/business the necessary license to use the influencer's images, videos, and other content featuring your property.
- *Artistic Control***:** Specify that you retain the right to make reasonable edits, cuts, or decisions regarding the usage of the content provided by the influencer.
- *Termination of Agreement:* Clearly define the duration of the partnership and the conditions under which either party can terminate the agreement.
- *Compensation: C*learly state the agreed-upon compensation for the influencer's services, including payment terms and any additional incentives or benefits.
- *Relationship of Parties:* Clarify that the influencer is an independent contractor and not an employee or representative of your hotel.
- *Governing Law:* Specify the jurisdiction and laws that govern the agreement.
- *Confidentiality*: Include a confidentiality clause to protect any sensitive or proprietary information shared between the parties.

There are more points that should be included in a legal contract, so it is important to consult with your company's legal, marketing, or commercial teams to see if they have an approved format or a specialist who can assist.

ETHICAL, LEGAL AND COMPLIANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Maintaining ethical standards and adhering to legal requirements is crucial for building trust and credibility in IM. Avoid engaging in deceptive or manipulative practices, such as buying followers or engaging in fake engagement tactics, which can erode trust and damage brand reputation. Prioritize authenticity, transparency, and accountability to build enduring relationships with influencers and their audience.

Ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations governing influencer marketing, including disclosure requirements, intellectual property rights, data privacy regulations, and clearly labeling sponsored content to avoid misleading audiences. Consult legal counsel to draft comprehensive influencer agreements and contracts that protect your brand's interests and mitigate potential legal risks.

MANAGER OR AGENT? UNDERSTANDING THEIR ROLES

Agents and managers play an integral role in the influencer marketing ecosystem, particularly when working with mid- to top-tier talent.

Agents and managers can be helpful allies to marketers, helping to identify the right influencers for a campaign and serving as a liaison throughout the partnership. Their involvement is beneficial in making sure timelines, deliverables, and expectations are met accurately and efficiently. However, their participation can also introduce complexity. Agents and managers take a highly detailed approach to negotiations and contracts, aiming to maximize value for both their influencer talent and agency. As a result, the collaboration process can become more prolonged and, at times, more challenging to navigate. When working with established influencers, direct communication with the talent is often not an option, as agents and managers are typically a required part of the process. It's advisable for marketers to build additional time into campaign timelines to accommodate the extended back-and-forth that may occur during negotiations and approvals.

Understanding the difference between an agent and a manager is helpful for marketers in order to ensure partnerships run smoothly and effectively for all parties involved.

An agent's main role is to secure opportunities and negotiate deals that grow the influencer's income and exposure. Agents use their industry contacts to land brand partnerships, sponsorships, appearances, and speaking gigs, and they handle complex contracts and rates to get the best possible terms. They're paid by commission, aligning their success with the influencer's.

A manager, meanwhile, focuses on the bigger picture: shaping the influencer's long-term career, overseeing daily operations, managing content and schedules, and guiding their personal brand and strategy. Managers help with everything from crisis communication to brand development and typically earn a percentage of overall earnings or a set fee.

INFLUENCER MARKETING OR AFFILIATE MARKETING

Influencer Marketing is ideal for raising brand awareness, humanizing a product or service, and tapping into niche communities where an influencer holds meaningful sway. It focuses on building trust and credibility through authentic endorsements.

Affiliate Marketing, by contrast, works best for businesses aiming to maximize sales or lead generation through a low-risk, performance-driven model. It incentivizes influencers to drive measurable actions - sales, sign-ups, or conversions - through trackable referral links or special codes, often offering commission-based incentives or performance bonuses tied to specific conversion metrics.

Many companies adopt a hybrid approach: first leveraging influencer marketing to build trust and credibility and then rolling out affiliate links or codes to drive measurable sales impact. This combination can balance brand-building with direct, measurable sales outcomes.

EXPECTATIONS OF AN INFLUENCER MARKETING CAMPAIGN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Now that we've clarified who influencers are, how they work, and how they're contracted, it's essential for marketers to understand what to expect when bringing them on board — and how to manage the steps of a successful campaign from start to finish. Typical campaign expectations might include creating sponsored posts, sharing behind-the-scenes content, engaging with followers in real time, and delivering performance metrics to ensure the brand's goals are met.

- **Prepping & Planning:**
    - Understanding Influencer Linguistics and Categories: Identify the appropriate influencer type (mega, macro, micro, nano) based on your campaign goals and target audience.
    - Media Strategy: Decide between earned media, paid media, and affiliate marketing, or consider a hybrid approach to balance brand-building with measurable sales impact.
    - Niches and Demographics**:** Select influencers whose niches and audience demographics align with your brand's target market.
    - Tools and Platforms: Utilize analytics tools (e.g., Hootsuite, Sprout Social, Buffer), influencer marketing platforms (e.g., Later, IZEA, CreatorIQ), and social media management software to streamline campaign planning.
    - Payment: This could include cash compensation or some combination of an in-kind experience, exclusive access, complimentary product, and/or affiliate partnership.
    - Contractual Considerations**:** Determine deliverables, payment terms, desired usage rights, including both organic and paid usage, and timeline of campaign.

- **Execution:**
    - Relationship Building and Creative Briefs**:** Develop strong relationships with influencers and provide detailed creative briefs to ensure alignment with brand messaging.
    - Compliance and Legal Guidelines: Adhere to FTC guidelines and ensure all legal aspects are covered, including contracts and content ownership.
    - Content Creation and Funding: Manage invoicing, tax considerations, and creator payments. Support influencers with additional paid content amplification if needed.

- **Evaluation and Optimization:**
    - Performance Tracking: Monitor KPIs such as reach, engagement, conversions, and ROI to assess campaign effectiveness.

- Continuous Optimization**:** Use real-time data and feedback to refine strategies, identify top-performing influencers, and reallocate resources for maximum impact.
- Review and Future Planning**:** Evaluate whether campaign goals and milestones were achieved, decide on continuing partnerships, and explore working with different or additional influencers for future iterations.

MEASUREMENT

As we embrace the power of influencer marketing to boost reach and connect more authentically with audiences, it's just as important to step back and look at what's really working. Before measuring success, get clear on what you actually want to measure, and then tie that directly to your campaign goal. Are you trying to build awareness? Drive more traffic and bookings? Or weave influencer content into your paid social plan to create fresh, social-first assets that feel real and relatable?

Once you have clear goals and KPIs, take a close look at the results. The strongest influencer campaigns don't just focus on one outcome; they thoughtfully bring influencers and their content into different parts of the customer journey for bigger impact.

A single post might spark impressions and engagement, but using that same content in a paid social campaign can expand its reach way beyond the influencer's own followers. Adding that voice or point of view to your website or marketing materials can make the partnership even stronger. And remember tools such as referral codes. They help drive real conversions and give you clear data you can actually use.

It's smart to look past the obvious "likes" and "comments." Metrics including clicks, site traffic, and sales tied to influencer efforts matter just as much - if not more - when it comes to seeing what's actually working.

Building a solid measurement plan takes time, and it's worth it. The insights you gather will help you make smarter decisions and get the most out of your influencer marketing efforts.

III. INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

To broaden our view, it's worth taking a brief look at how influencer marketing operates outside the United States. Each country approaches influencer partnerships in ways that reflect its unique cultural, legal, and industry norms.

In hospitality and beyond, broadly speaking, France places strong emphasis on formal contracts, clear disclosure, and brand alignment in influencer partnerships (Fashion Law Watch, 2023; Dreyfus Review, 2024), while in Japan, brands often work with micro- and

nano-influencers who integrate subtle product placement and storytelling into lifestyle content to build authenticity and trust (Ezbuy Japan, 2025).

This brief glimpse is by no means exhaustive, but it reminds us that the nuances in language, culture, and local business practices matter greatly, and marketers must be respectful of them. Particularly in hospitality or with individual hotels, it's also worth noting that influencers are often compensated with complimentary stays or experiences rather than large fees, unlike in other sectors that may have bigger budgets for paid collaborations. Wherever we operate, understanding local expectations and audience behaviors is key to building genuine, effective partnerships.

***Ireland*:** In the spring of 2025, Alyssa traveled to Dublin, Ireland, to lead introductory influencer marketing sessions with top Irish brands across sectors including public transportation, utilities, government, and insurance. While there was a general understanding of influencer marketing, many brands primarily associated it with public figures—such as radio hosts and professional athletes—rather than with "everyday" creators or micro-influencers. This narrow view of influence can limit opportunities to build authentic connections by overlooking the power of real voices at every level of the influencer spectrum.

Therefore, marketers should consider diversifying their influencer partnerships beyond "traditional influencers" with large followings, and instead collaborate with industry experts, thought leaders, and micro-influencers from a range of backgrounds and industries. This approach can help tap into new audiences while boosting the brand's credibility.

Interestingly, many Irish brands were hesitant to use the word "influencer" when talking about these types of social media creators. Instead, the term "ambassador" was more common. Irish marketers explained that for some, the word "influencer" carries a negative connotation, often associated with social media personalities who promote anything and everything. On the other hand, "ambassador" felt more like an authentic, brand-aligned role—something more credible. This hesitation around language is pretty interesting and helpful to keep in mind when designing strategies for non-U.S. brands. While there are certainly influencers in the U.S. who may lack credibility, most are well-respected, and the term "influencer" is widely accepted by both marketers and consumers alike.

***France**:* In the spring of 2022, Leora had the wonderful opportunity to teach Boston University undergraduate students an "Introduction to Marketing" course in Paris, France. We explored the city's prestigious "Palace hotels" -- a special, government-recognized distinction awarded to select five-star hotels that meet exceptionally high standards of luxury, service, and historical or aesthetic significance. Notable among these are the Four Seasons Hotel George V, Hôtel le Bristol Paris, Hôtel Plaza Athénée, and the Hôtel le Crillon, A Rosewood Hotel. Visiting two other Palace hotels, Le Royal Monceau and Le Meurice, Leora observed the critical role of influencers in marketing these exceptional properties. As a matter of fact, the marketing directors at the hotels referred to their influencer approaches as "digital marketing," distinguishing Influencer Marketing as a part of overall digital strategy.

The takeaway? The Palace hotels of Paris are as reliant on their celebrity chefs and pastry accolades as they are on the exclusivity of their service and privacy of their guests. Influencers play a pivotal role in marketing these attributes, comparable to the reliance on Michelin stars for their culinary excellence. Influencers are clearly not just a U.S. anomaly. It's become a global priority in marketing.

For a deeper perspective on how these relationships work in hospitality and luxury marketing — particularly in France — our colleague Florine Cagnat of the Dixlouvois agency, a global public relations and digital communications agency based in Paris, shares how she connects brands with influencers and guides these partnerships in the French market.

> *"In France, especially in the hospitality sector, fully paid influencer collaborations are relatively rare. Unlike the U.S. model where compensation is expected, here many influencers work with hotels and restaurants primarily for the experience and exposure rather than a direct paycheck. These influencers and/or content creators often earn their income through fashion and beauty brand partnerships, but they look for hotel or gastronomy collaborations to boost their credibility and social media feeds – eagerly going on press trips and featuring exceptional properties on an unpaid basis. For example, I recently confirmed a weekday, one-night stay at a high-end property with ambitious deliverables for an American married couple of creators.Their agent reached out to me because they really wanted to feature my client's estate on their social media channels. The couple accepted with no budget requested because featuring that property elevated their own brand, even though I asked a lot of them. They actually went above and beyond and created more than initially requested.*
>
> *However, navigating these relationships isn't without challenges. Many influencers have agents who insist on paid deals only, which can cause them to pass up valuable organic collaborations. I've often found myself directly connecting influencers with my network of PR contacts for high-profile yet unpaid opportunities that agents might otherwise reject. Agents, of course, have a stake – they often take a large cut of any paid deal (commonly up to 30%) – so they're understandably less enthusiastic about projects with no fee, though it only serves them and not the influencer. I know a few influencers who, as a result, dropped their agents. In my view, the long-term credibility and exposure an influencer gains from a good unpaid partnership can far outweigh the lack of a paycheck in the short term.*
>
> *When choosing influencers, I've stopped focusing on profiles with an engagement rate of at least 3% as clients used to only want that. I focus on authenticity and audience relevance/credibility: I check that their followers are genuine (and based where I need them to be), I look at the age range and location of their audience, and I consider the positioning of brands the influencer has worked with before – do they align with my clients? If someone has a history of collaborations with reputable hotels or luxury brands that align with the one I represent, that track record tells me they have the credibility I'm looking for. Those factors – real audience quality and brand alignment – paint a far more meaningful picture than any, in my opinion, unnecessary engagement rate percentage. To explain: I've worked with influencers with a high engagement rate as requested by a client and the results were not good. When following my gut about choosing to work with*

a certain profile with a low engagement rate but a high credibility score and brand alignment, the result of the campaign was very positive.

We also distinguish different types of influence within the French market. Of course we have the standard social media influencers and content creators, but equally important are what we call KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) – very respected voices working at top luxury brands with a high-end following. They may only speak to a niche audience, but it's a very affluent and loyal niche that trusts their voice (heads of communications and marketing, heads of PR, CEOs etc.). And then we have celebrities as another category altogether. When creating campaigns, I take into account all these layers (creator vs. KOL vs. celebrity), because each plays a unique role in amplifying a brand. KOLs in particular might not bring huge follower numbers, but they bring high credibility and convert into sales. Influencers create an image and celebrities do both; they create an image and convert into sales."

Argentina: Johanna Picciano, a PR and Communications executive in Argentina with extensive experience supporting both B2B and B2C brands, explains how influencer marketing in the country is most effective when approached with tailored strategies that reflect the unique dynamics of each industry and audience.

During my time at Uber Argentina, we worked on several product launch campaigns that incorporated influencer strategies to drive adoption. Because these products had a broad consumer base, we partnered with mega-influencers. We always worked through influencer agencies, which offered us vetted profiles, audience metrics, and fee structures. In Argentina, despite the lack of regulation, influencers set their own rates depending on their reach — in other words, they can charge whatever they want. Agencies made the process much smoother compared to negotiating directly.

When selecting influencers, the key factors we looked at were the quality of their audience insights, engagement level (often more relevant than follower count), tone of voice, and overall alignment with the brand. While we respected each influencer's personal style, these campaigns were usually guided by advertising agencies that designed the narrative and creative assets. In this sense, the influencer often played the role of an "actor" within a curated campaign, with little room for improvisation.

In contrast, during my time as LATAM Comms Lead at Deel, I worked more with micro and nano-influencers. Deel is a leading HR and payroll platform. While it is a SaaS company, it also communicates directly with the individuals companies hire worldwide. A core part of its communications strategy is to shape conversations around the future of work and establish Deel as a trusted source of workforce data. With over 35,000 customers and 1.5 million contracts globally, Deel regularly publishes reports about hiring trends. Content creators then help us spread these insights.

Here the dynamic was entirely different: massive reach wasn't necessary. Instead, we sought key opinion leaders in niche areas, respected voices whose audiences valued their expertise. The principle was quality over quantity. These collaborations were informal and direct — no agency in the middle — but still compensated. The creators

received access to reports or raw data and were free to produce content in their own style, provided it aligned with Deel's tone of voice. Authenticity was the goal, not scripted delivery.

South Korea: Ashley Yeo Hye Chae, a beauty marketer and content creator based in Seoul, draws on her dual perspective as both an influencer and brand strategist to explain how influencer marketing in South Korea thrives on transparency, authenticity, and the country's unique digital ecosystem.

In South Korea, the perception of influencers has evolved from being seen as hobbyists or popular personalities to being recognized as legitimate professionals, especially among Gen Z. Beyond trendsetting, they are viewed as community builders, extending digital connections into meaningful relationships. Trust in influencers was shaken by "hidden advertising" scandals, but this controversy pushed the industry toward stricter disclosure norms and greater transparency. Today, hashtags such as #AD, #제품제공 ("gifted"), and #내돈내산 ("purchased with my own money") function as cultural signals of authenticity, reinforcing the idea that honesty is central to credibility.

The Korean market is also uniquely fast-moving, with platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels accelerating the viral spread of trends. Campaigns that succeed here balance aspirational aesthetics with relatable, everyday storytelling. For example, beauty creator LeoJ's collaboration with FILLIMILLI on a makeup brush not only sold 27,000 units on its pre-launch day but also underscored how influencers can lend credibility to a brand through co-creation.

Influencer marketing in Korea also extends beyond social platforms to Naver, the country's dominant search engine and digital hub. Long before TikTok and Instagram, the first generation of influencers were Naver bloggers, and they continue to play a critical role today. For example, partnering with Naver beauty bloggers to post honest reviews and well-photographed product images before a launch ensures that when consumers search for the product, they find authentic, detailed reviews that influence purchase decisions. This reliance on search visibility shows how Korean influencer marketing is deeply tied to local digital behavior.

From a marketer's perspective, Korean beauty brands rely heavily on micro and nano influencers to maximize authenticity and cost-effectiveness. For established corporations, smaller influencers often produce content without payment because of the prestige of association, while smaller companies must negotiate carefully to stretch limited budgets. Gifted collaborations dominate, with paid deals largely reserved for macro influencers, and usage rights remain a crucial negotiation point. Because there is no industry standard, rates vary widely by creator. Beyond Korea, this system has fueled

the global rise of K-beauty, with brands like Skin1004, Beauty of Joseon, and TirTir first building international recognition through influencer-driven buzz before gaining shelf space at Sephora and Ulta.

A helpful reminder from Ashley's dual perspective as both marketer and influencer…she has learned that while mass outreach may be efficient for brands, it often leaves influencers feeling like interchangeable vessels. Personalized communication and clear, actionable guidance foster a stronger sense of trust and lead to more authentic content.

Dubai: Tina Nakashidze, a hospitality and lifestyle marketing professional based in Dubai, shares how influencer marketing in the region thrives on intentionality, cultural fluency, and trust; values that distinguish Dubai's approach from many other global markets.

Based in Dubai, a global hub for luxury and innovation, I've seen how influencer marketing here operates with precision and purpose. Influence in Dubai is intentional — it's not about volume, but about saying the right thing, to the right people, in the right way.

I began working with influencers during my time at Four Seasons, where partnerships were designed to elevate brand positioning and drive international visibility. We collaborated with macro and mega-influencers, from Formula 1 drivers to models and actors, whose global reach and image aligned with the brand's aspirational tone. Every collaboration was curated carefully, emphasizing authenticity, exclusivity, and long-term alignment.

Now managing high-end restaurants and lifestyle concepts in Dubai, I've seen the market shift toward hyper-local and culturally fluent strategies. Creators here are multilingual, cross-category, and able to engage both expat and local audiences, making locally built campaigns more relevant and effective than international ones. They also understand brand sensitivity, from modesty to exclusivity, requiring minimal direction.

For driving footfall and conversion, micro and nano influencers are unmatched. Their loyal, community-driven audiences trust their recommendations. I work with them for launches and events, while reserving macro influencers for broader luxury positioning. TikTok has also transformed the space with spontaneous, relatable food content often outperforming curated Instagram posts. Experience-led collaborations, like private dinners or previews, still deliver strong ROI when the event feels truly worth sharing.

In the end, trust outweighs metrics. Smaller creators often drive the most tangible results because their audiences genuinely believe in them. In Dubai, influence isn't about the biggest following; it's about authenticity, alignment, and integrity.

IV. A LOOK AHEAD

REACH

Another example of how influencer culture is evolving can be seen in REACH — a college campus organization dedicated to developing students into professional influencers. Through mentorship, networking, and real-world brand collaborations, REACH equips students with the skills and industry connections they need to grow authentic followings and work with companies in meaningful, measurable ways.

REACH founder Dylan Huey shares a story of a successful influencer marketing initiative that boosted a brand's awareness and ultimately sales:

> "*Our collaboration with Hulu for the Self-Reliance movie premiere exemplifies the transformative power of Influencer Marketing. By carefully selecting influencers across various niches, we were able to craft a campaign that resonated across diverse audiences, generating excitement and engagement that traditional media could likely barely match. This strategic approach underscored the importance of integrity and alignment with brand values and influencer personas. This ensures that each post, story and interaction feels genuine to the audience*."

As this example shows, effective influencer marketing requires a clear understanding of your audience and authentic, two-way engagement. Local influencers and creators play a key role in translating brand experiences into credible recommendations that turn casual followers into loyal advocates.

BRIDGING VERTICALS

Influencer marketing's versatility extends beyond popular sectors like travel, hospitality, recreation, and the food and restaurant businesses to "less-sexy" industries such as finance, healthcare, education, technology, and real estate.

Several industries have embraced influencer marketing to connect with their specific audiences effectively:

- Automotive: Car enthusiasts and automotive reviewers highlight vehicle features and performance, aiding consumers in their purchasing decisions.
- Legal: Lawyers and legal experts offer advice and increase awareness about legal services, making the profession more approachable.
- Environmental: Eco-conscious influencers promote sustainability initiatives and green products, driving collective action towards environmental conservation.
- Manufacturing**:** Industry experts and trade influencers showcase processes and innovations, enhancing reputation and attracting potential clients.

- Agriculture: Farm influencers share best practices and promote agricultural products, reaching both consumers and industry stakeholders.
- Housewares and Appliances**:** Influencers market housewares, appliances, and cookware products, demonstrating their practicality and enhancing brand effectiveness.

These varying examples illustrate that influencer marketing is not confined to traditionally glamorous industries but is a powerful strategy adaptable to virtually any sector seeking to engage and expand its audience

THE FASCINATING RISE OF AI INFLUENCERS

One of the most intriguing developments in influencer marketing is the rise of AI influencers—digital personalities created entirely by artificial intelligence. These virtual figures, often seen on platforms like Instagram, are either partially human-curated with AI-enhanced imagery or entirely autonomous, powered by algorithms that generate content, personalities, and even audience engagement. Some, like @fit_aitana from Barcelona, have attracted real brand deals and built large followings—all without a human behind the lens.

While AI influencers are gaining traction in industries like consumer goods and tech, their role in hospitality marketing remains uncertain. Since travel and hospitality are so deeply rooted in human experience—sight, sound, feel, and emotion—the use of virtual influencers may seem counterintuitive. However, with the pace of digital innovation, even this may shift in the coming years.

The potential advantages of AI influencers include limitless creative flexibility, cost-efficiency, and the ability to rapidly produce content—such as tutorials, product spotlights, or branded imagery. Yet challenges remain. The absence of genuine human emotion can make authenticity harder to achieve, especially in industries where trust and relatability are key. For AI influencers to succeed long term, transparency will be essential. Audiences must clearly understand they're engaging with a digital persona, not a real individual.

Still, AI influencer marketing represents a bold new frontier. Brands willing to experiment in this space may uncover fresh ways to connect with digital-native audiences—so long as they balance innovation with honesty. As AI technology evolves, these virtual personalities will likely play a larger role in showcasing products interactively and creatively, offering brands more control, scalability, and lower reputational risk than traditional influencer partnerships.

V. WRAP UP

BEST PRACTICES FOR MARKETERS

To maximize the impact of your influencer collaborations, keep these best practices in mind:

1. Define Clear Objectives and Expectations: Establish specific goals for each influencer campaign — whether to boost brand awareness, generate content, drive sales, or reach a new audience. Clearly outline key performance indicators (KPIs), deliverables, timelines, and success metrics from the start.
2. Choose the Right Influencers: Select influencers whose audience, style, and values align with your brand.
3. Build Genuine Relationships**:** Invest time in fostering authentic, long-term partnerships. Engage with influencers' content, understand their creative process, and collaborate on ideas. Strong relationships lead to more sincere endorsements and lasting brand advocacy. Treat each collaboration as a strategic investment built on trust, transparency, and data — to get the best results and protect your brand.
4. Provide Creative Freedom: Empower influencers to bring your brand to life in their own voice and style. Give clear brand guidelines, but allow flexibility so content feels genuine and resonates with their audience.
5. Foster Trust and Compliance: Ensure all sponsored content is clearly disclosed and complies with local regulations in order to uphold ethical standards. Avoid manipulative or misleading practices. Act with integrity, maintain honest communication, and focus on building long-term trust with both influencers and their audiences.
6. Set Detailed Contracts and Legal Protections: Work with legal counsel to draft clear agreements covering deliverables, timelines, compensation, content usage, and disclosure obligations. Well-structured contracts safeguard your brand and strengthen mutual accountability.
7. Measure, Analyze, and Optimize: Track performance closely — monitor reach, engagement, conversions, and ROI. Use data to identify what works, refine strategies, and make informed decisions for future partnerships.
8. Encourage Audience Engagement: Collaborate with influencers who genuinely interact with their followers. Meaningful engagement — replying to comments, answering questions — helps build community and strengthens brand loyalty.
9. Leverage Multi-Platform Reach: Maximize visibility by working with influencers active on multiple platforms — Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter) — tailoring messaging and content formats to each audience and channel.
10. Host Experiences and Events: Organize exclusive launches, VIP events, or influencer meet-ups to deepen connections, generate buzz, and create shareable content that amplifies your brand story. This allows you to bring your social engagement with an influencer into the real world.

MARKETING MANTRAS

Keep these Marketing Mantras in mind to anchor your influencer strategies in authenticity, strategy, and sustainable impact.

1. Know Your Types: One Size Does Not Fit All: Understanding the distinctions between mega, macro, micro, and nano influencers is essential. Each brings different levels of reach, engagement, authenticity, and cost. So choose thoughtfully to match your goals and budget.
2. Influencer vs. Creator: Leverage Both Roles. Recognize the difference between influencers who amplify your message and creators who craft compelling content. Combining the reach of influencers with the skill of creators (or using hybrid talent) can maximize your marketing impact.
3. Authenticity Beats Flash: Genuine partnerships, transparent messaging, and relatable content drive stronger engagement than overtly scripted promotions. The most effective campaigns feel natural and trustworthy to followers.
4. Vet, Contract, and Protect: Thoroughly research influencers to ensure brand alignment. Use detailed contracts to define ownership, usage rights, compensation, and compliance. Legal clarity protects your investment and relationships.
5. Expand the Influence Mindset: Influencer marketing isn't just for travel and lifestyle brands; industries from finance to manufacturing can harness real voices to make connections. Tap unexpected verticals and overlooked voices, including in-house talent, to extend your reach.
6. Local Context Matters: Different countries have unique norms, languages, and compensation models. Always respect local customs and legal requirements. In hospitality especially, comped experiences may replace large fees, so know what's appropriate in each market.
7. Data Informs, Relationships Sustain: Use analytics to track ROI, optimize performance, and refine future campaigns. But remember: lasting success comes from cultivating meaningful, long-term partnerships — not just transactions.
8. Evolve with the Ecosystem: Stay open to innovation and explore emerging trends like in-house creators, AI influencers, and hybrid affiliate models. Be willing to adapt your strategies as platforms, audiences, and technologies change. Remember, while digital personalities can enhance creativity and scale, transparency about their artificial nature is essential to maintain trust.

MINDSET IN MOTION

Influencer marketing is a powerful tool that can elevate your brand's visibility and authenticity. Consider your favorite influencers; what qualities do they possess that resonate with you? How can you identify influencers whose values align with your brand’s mission? As you think about your own marketing strategies, explore how you can effectively collaborate with influencers to create authentic and engaging content. What steps will you take to ensure your influencer partnerships are not only successful but also ethically sound?

REFERENCES:

DemandSage. (2025). *How many people use social media 2025* [Usage statistics]. https://www.demandsage.com/social-media-users/

Dreyfus Review. (2024, October 1). *Review of the effectiveness of the French Law No. 2023-451 of 9 June 2023 regulating influencers after one year*. Dreyfus Review

Fashion Law Watch. (2023, October 18). *France's digital influencer regulation: Whether you like it or not—mandated contracts and compliance*. Fashion Law Watch

Ezbuy Japan. (2025, June 9). *Influencer marketing in Japan – a complete guide for brands & marketers*. Ezbuy Japan

Goldman Sachs. (2025, April 20). *Influencers take heat over lavish lifestyles.* Axios. https://www.axios.com/2025/04/20/tiktok-influencers-recession-backlash

Hutchins, B. (2024, September 18). *Gen Z's social search revolution: How TikTok and Instagram are challenging Google.* Medium. https://bobhutchins.medium.com/gen-zs-social-search-revolution-how-tiktok-and-instagram-are-challenging-google-005d9cb4a1b1

Mintel Group, Ltd. (2023, August 30). *One in five social media users consider themselves an influencer or content creator* [Press release]. PR Newswire. Retrieved July 23, 2025, from https://www.mintel.com/press-centre/one-in-five-social-media-users-consider-themselves-an-influencer-or-content-creator/

Piktochart. (2025). *How many people use social media? Statistics & facts.* https://piktochart.com/blog/how-many-people-use-social-media/

Search Engine Land. (2025, March 28). *Google losing ground to TikTok and Instagram among Gen Z shoppers.* https://searchengineland.com/google-tiktok-instagram-gen-z-shoppers-451625

Statista. (2024). *Share of users in the U.S. using TikTok as a search engine.* https://www.statista.com/statistics/1538165/tiktok-usage-as-search-engine-united-states/

Statista. (2025). *Global influencer marketing market size from 2016 to 2025.* https://www.statista.com/statistics/1092819/global-influencer-market-size/

Testimonial. (2024). *Top 12 social proof statistics for 2024.* https://testimonial.to/resources/social-proof-marketing

STAY CONNECTED:
Thank you for reading this bonus chapter. We hope it provided valuable insight into the evolving role of influencer marketing in hospitality and lifestyle branding.

We invite you to continue the conversation and follow our work online:
• Leora Halpern Lanz –www.linkedin.com/in/leoralanz/

• Alyssa Stevens – www.linkedin.com/in/alyssastevens/

We appreciate your readership and commitment to evolving your marketing mindset.