



FRIGHTS TO INSIGHTS:

The Magic Behind Successful Influencer Collaborations

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Scan the QR code (or follow the link if you are one of those Android people) to submit questions during the presentation.

Please don't forget to fill in your name so I can see you.

You should get a link from Austin or someone organizing things that will allow you to download this presentation along with all of my cheat sheet notes.

I have a bunch of cards too if any of you would like those. Happy to answer questions or chat later on about this stuff.



From Kentucky

College in Lexington. Worked for Fire Dept. as a FF/Paramedic after undergrad.

Moved Nashville for Grad School at Vanderbilt

Worked as a Research Biologist developing breast cancer therapeutics

Found myself needing a creative outlet because labs are pretty dull.

Started blog in 2013 (10 year blog birthday in December).

Morphed into a full time business ~6 years ago.

Started a commercial food photography studio and still maintain the blog and its social outlets. Great overlap between the two.



Couldn't not include these --

Big Halloween fan, so the theme of the conference lured me in.

Basically a crazy cat lady -- Georgie, Alfie -- British shorthair brothers that I adopted this year.

Blanche is a Persian that could not care less about anyone or anything. I'm lucky when she looks at me whereas the other two are driving me absolutely mad.

Love to Travel (which is mostly a food thing) and sometimes I fly around in a little plane.

WHAT is *influencer* MARKETING?

Influencer marketing is all about tapping into someone with a bewitching presence in the digital world. By partnering, you can carve out a niche and make your brand's message echo eerily well with their audience.

What is Influencer marketing?

So to start off and define influencer marketing, we will just define it as tapping into someone else's established community that trusts and values the opinions of the creator. Nothing groundbreaking there.



A lot to process on this slide, but
A survey of over 3,500 marketing agencies globally...

63% of brands admit to having a standalone budget for content marketing - 68% are increasing that budget this year.

83% of brands have some sort of DEDICATED influencer spend in their budget.

Over 83% of the survey respondents believe influencer marketing is an effective form of marketing.

This is down a bit from last year, but still the highest level of efficacy when compared to other methods and outlets.

Lots of other facts here including the preference for smaller outlets over the huge ones.

I love numbers, if you can't tell. It's the scientist in me still.

DURING A TIME WHEN CONSUMERS ARE BEING MORE ECONOMICALLY CONSCIOUS, MARKETING IS NOT OPTIONAL — IT'S **ESSENTIAL**.

Marketers received \$6.85 in earned media value for every \$1 spent on influencer marketing.
— *AdWeek, Feb 2023*

Harvard Business Review

How to Market in a Downturn

Reprint: R0904D Because no two recessions are exactly alike, marketers must use their own judgment to decide how to respond. But there are some common themes.

Consumer Segments' Changing Behavior

	RISK OF SALES DOWNTURN				BEHAVIOR CHANGE
	ESSENTIALS	TREATS	POSTPONABLES	EXPENSIBLES	
Slam-on-the-Brakes	Will seek lower-cost product and brand substitutes such as private labels	Will deeply reduce or eliminate treats or seek lower-cost substitutes	Will put off all durable purchases unless forced to make emergency replacements; will delay repairs and personal services, such as dental cleanings	Will eliminate purchases in this category	HIGH
Pained-but-Patient	Will seek out favorite brands at lower prices but settle for cheaper, less-preferred alternatives; will stock up on good deals	Will cut back somewhat on frequency and quantity and emphasize value	Will delay major purchases, repair rather than replace, seek value and low ownership costs rather than extra features, and negotiate at point of sale	Will deeply curtail expenditures	
Comfortably Well-Off	Will continue to buy favorite brands at prerecession levels	Will be more selective in purchasing luxuries	Will seek better quality for the price; will negotiate harder at point of sale	Rarely regards any purchase as unjustifiable but may reduce the most conspicuous consumption in this category	
Live-for-Today	Will continue to buy favorite brands at prerecession levels	Will continue to buy favorite brands at prerecession levels	May buy if there is a great deal; otherwise may postpone	Is reluctant to regard any customary purchase as unjustifiable; may not want to expand consumption to new types of purchases	

When consumers are spending less as many are right now, it is important to stretch every marketing dollar and get the most bang for your buck.

Fortunately, influencer marketing has proven to be incredible return on investment.

Pretty wild but the average ROI for every \$1 spent on influencer marketing is \$6.85

Harvard Business Review wrote about eroding confidence in a lot of consumers and how influencer marketing has managed to mostly avoid that reduction in confidence.

So, basically the trust that consumers have in influencers is still overwhelmingly positive and translates to returns.



Why has influencer marketing continued to grow as the preferred outlet of spend?

Influencer marketing is viewed as much more authentic when compared to direct advertising.

Influencers provide the social proof that consumers demand.

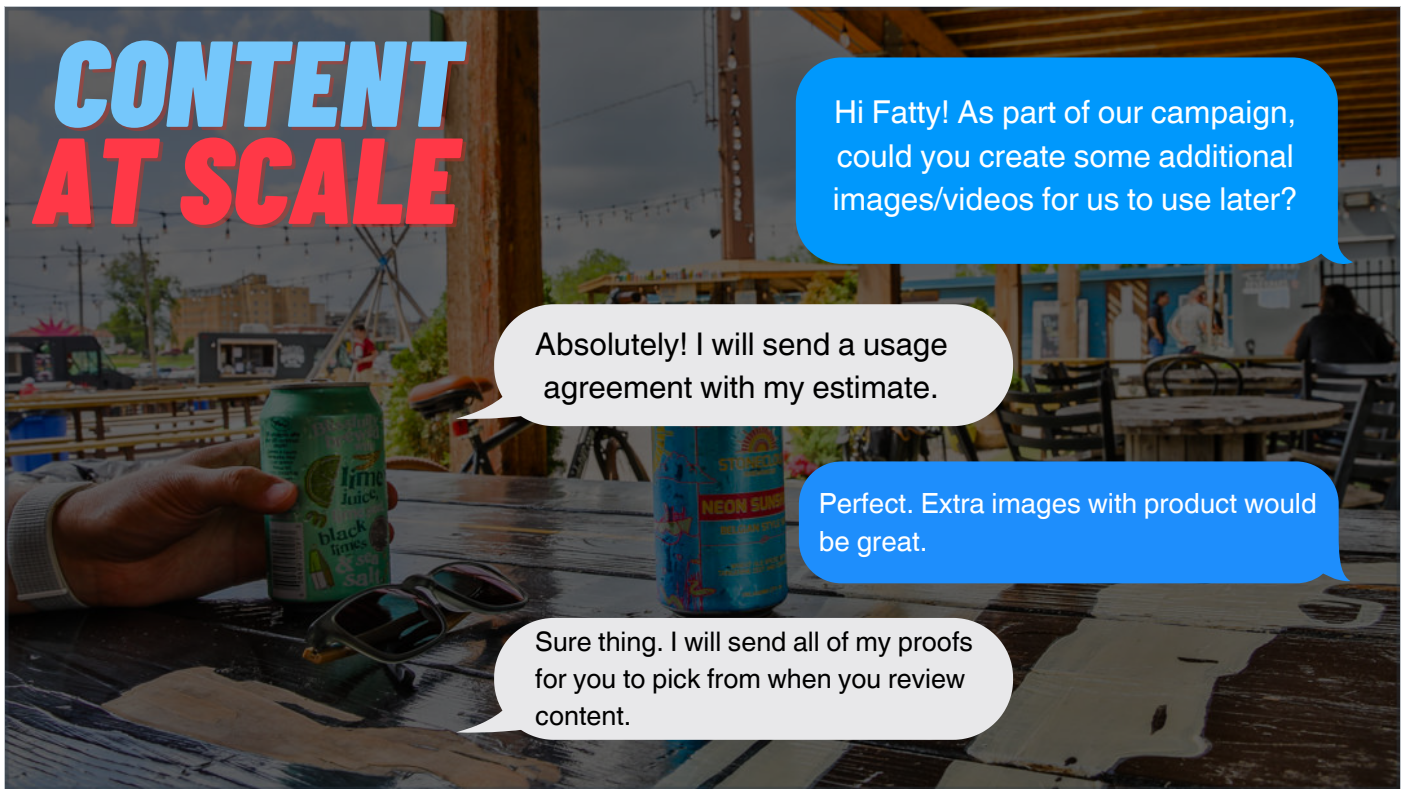


eCommerce worth 6.7 TRILLION (with a T) in 2024.

To grab a piece of the ecommerce pie in this saturated market, brands need to lean into social commerce to keep touch-points with consumers throughout the entire buyer's journey for a collective experience.

Good influencers can uniquely integrate content to do this seamlessly.

Influencers create content at scale without a need for a studio. This one I am going to highlight, because I think it is one of the biggest benefits to brands.



Hi Fatty! As part of our campaign, could you create some additional images/videos for us to use later?

Absolutely! I will send a usage agreement with my estimate.

Perfect. Extra images with product would be great.

Sure thing. I will send all of my proofs for you to pick from when you review content.

Content at scale. What I mean by this is that you have a wonderful opportunity to have organic content created at the same time as a campaign ask that can be used elsewhere.

Think of these creators as tiny studios. They're often skilled in photography, videography, editing, creative concepts, and much more.

I always ask brands if they would like my to create extra content for them to consider and it is very rare that they are not interested. Obviously that is great for me, since I charge for that content and can more easily create a handful of extra images when I am already shooting content, but it is also a cheaper option for the brand than a commercial shoot.

They get high quality assets that are from a consumer perspective. As a lot of you already know, it isn't as easy as you'd think to create that type of content with a lot of variety and variation in a studio setting.



Finding the RIGHT influencers for your brand:

So everything I just said about influencers being little studios doesn't mean that they are all good at it. You have to have due diligence to get good results.

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STEP 1:

Find well-aligned creators who are true brand fans.

Creators have dedicated audiences, oftentimes in a specialty niche, that trust their recommendations, opinions, and experiences.

STEP 2:

Unlock the power of the creator economy...

by activating these creators to lead the conversation. The partnership can take several forms: creators can showcase before-and-after shots of using your product, provide an honest review or testimonial about your brand, walk through a tutorial of how they apply your product to their everyday life — the possibilities are endless.

STEP 3:

Metrics.

Important to review the success of a campaign. We will talk about that more in a minute.

STEP 4:

Potential after campaign.

Such as re-purpose your highest-performing content into shoppable ads, future campaigns, and more.

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Let's break these down.



**Find well-aligned
creators who are true fans.**
already

NEAT PICKS

Distilling the digital darlings...

CLEARLY TRANSPARENT | \$1.50

Hashtags, simple search, current influencer followers

THYME TO TURN UP | \$4.00

Platforms, YOUR website, positive reviews, non-competitor analysis, forum sites (such as Reddit)

RYE'D OR DIE | \$6.90

Hosting challenges/competitions, crowdsourcing, employee advocates, art platforms (Behance, Dribbble, Deviant, Twitch streamers / unexpected platforms

How to find the right influencers?

Obvious ways -- hashtags, simple search, etc. Not going to waste your time with explaining that. It works, but I would recommend it as a starting point before these other ways...

Beyond that, plenty of platforms for marketing connections. I would recommend using these to narrow down prospects, but be cautious as in my experience a lot of these have very outdated information on their partners.

Your own brand website should have an easy way for interested influencers to reach out. I know this may sound like a miserable idea from your side of the table, but let these go to a mailbox even if you have an auto-reply that says thanks we will add you to our database and reach out if we see a good campaign. It's surprisingly effective at connecting quality partnerships in my experience, even if you have to wade through some discards.

Worth looking at non-competing brands in your industry to see who's influencing their audiences. This can provide insights into influencer crossovers that you might not have considered.

You'll see I have Reddit on here. Your boss may ask why you are roaming forums, but you would be shocked at how the niche forums share their favorite creators.

Example being I found people sharing a recipe of mine for mirror glazed cakes on Reddit, I commented, and a pastry supply company found me and we ended up partnering on sponsored

recipe content linking to their glucose syrup on Amazon. It was a perfect fit for us both.

Platforms may include:

Buzzsumo

Followerwonk

Findyourinfluence

Izea

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More unique, and often great ways to find influencers could be:

- Hosting competitions
- Crowdsourcing. Ask your own audience what influencers they like.
- Search for brand-inspired art



Let's talk a bit about the platforms for your campaigns...

You can probably guess, but the top graphic is what budget is spent on this year ; the bottom is what brands are deciding to utilize less.

I could have mentioned this earlier but I think it is more relevant to finding your influencers than to the general trajectory of social campaigns.

The survey results of this one might surprise some of you. Instagram is still the dominant platform of choice for influencer marketing.

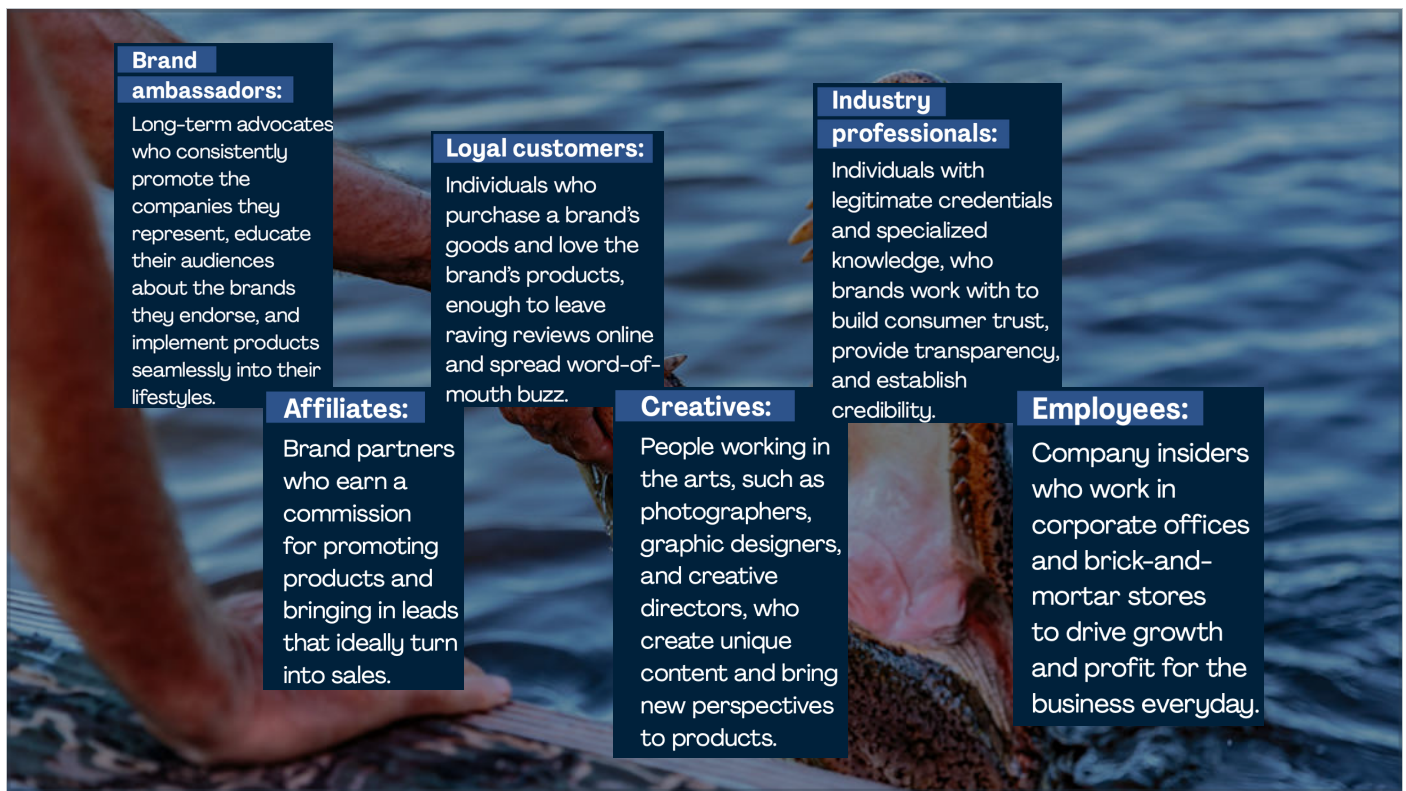
TikTok has absolutely increased (it was 12% 4 years ago...), but has declined a bit this year. I personally think that it really depends on what you are promoting and your audience. It's certainly a younger crowd (yes I feel old saying that out loud).

Facebook and YouTube are still quite relevant, but tend to suit themselves to longer format promotion or reviews in regard to YouTube and a more middle-age audience on Facebook. Twitter or X now has stayed quite low. I do repost my content to Twitter still, but don't give it much more attention.

Overall bang for your buck is still clearly on Instagram.

Blogs are not listed here, but have a nearly 80% trustworthiness rating with consumers. That's

higher than social outlets. They are still very relevant to reach a more informed audience.



Beyond traditional social media influencers...

Some overlap as influencers may also be affiliates and loyal customers, etc., but there are opportunities to incorporate others into your marketing plan as well.

Including employees, loyal customers can be low cost with great overall impact to brand identity and reach.

BUILD LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS.

70% of creators say long-term campaigns are their favorite way to work with brands, marketers need to focus on cultivating deeper relationships with their brand partners and turn them into ambassadors. This will elevate not only your brand's relationship with your creators, but also their relationships with their audience — allowing partnerships to be perceived as much more authentic.



Long term influencer relationships benefit both sides GREATLY.

Forming these long-term partnerships is probably the most important change you can make if you are not investing in them already.

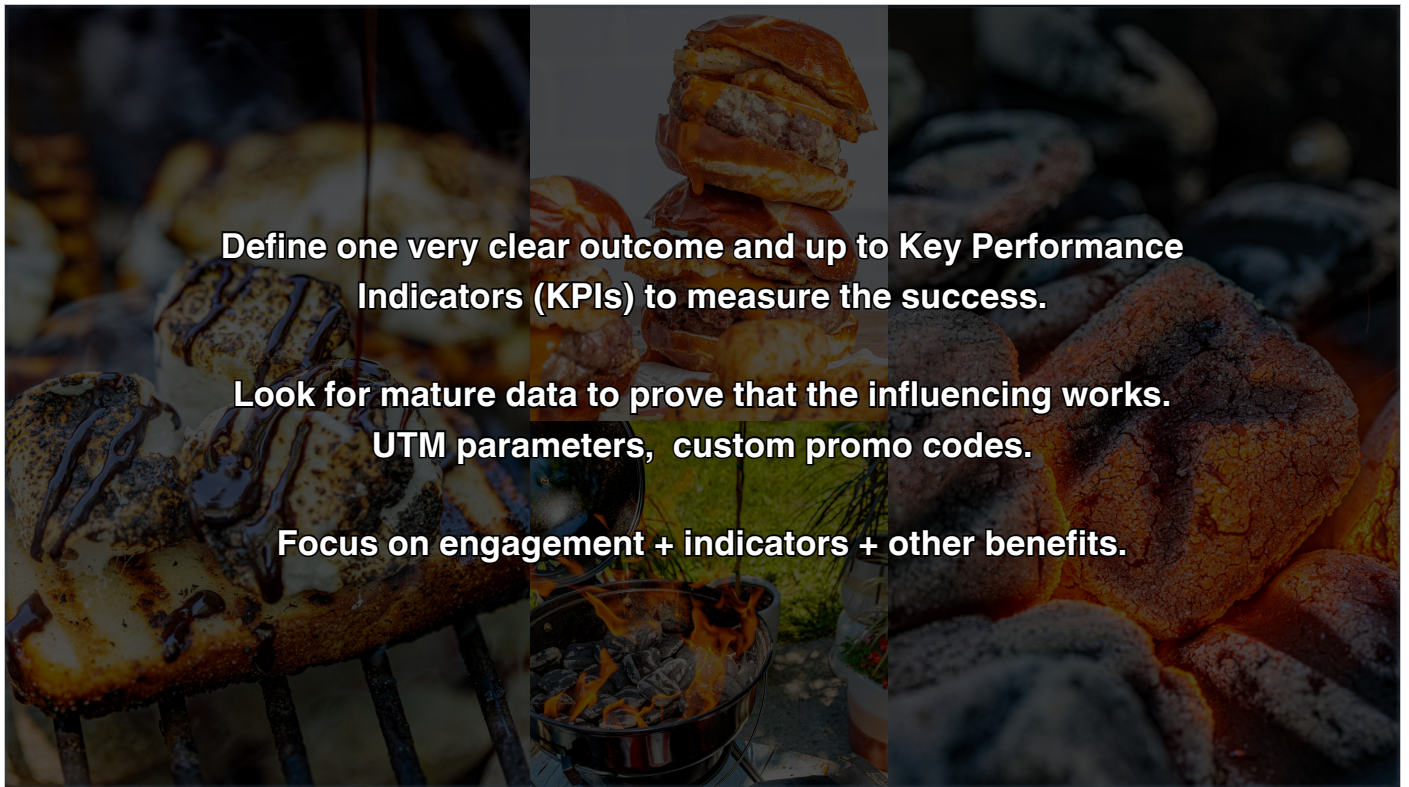


These are long term partnership examples from my own blog.

When I say long-term, I typically mean at least an annual commitment. Some of these, like Kroger, Knob Creek, Goo Goo have been several years.

Obviously, every single one of these brands are producing products that I truly enjoy (sometimes too much) and the fit is natural.

Kroger and Goo Goo have become more than social and blog partnerships, expanding to product photography that they use on their own. I did one social campaign for the Kroger branded ice cream and ended up creating a series of these action shots that they used for marketing materials.



Define one very clear outcome and up to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the success.

**Look for mature data to prove that the influencing works.
UTM parameters, custom promo codes.**

Focus on engagement + indicators + other benefits.

METRICS

We'll get to the actual content itself in a minute, but quickly let's look at metrics.

I would recommend that you focus and outline a main outcome goal for a campaign. This might be :

- Increase brand awareness
- Promote a product/service
- Improve your brand's reputation
- Community growth
- Generate sales or leads

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From there, measure Key Performance Indicators for every campaign.

KPIs may be:

- reactions, likes, comments, shares
- website views
- UTM parameters should be used. This stands for Urchin Tracking Module, which sounds like a Little Mermaid character. Basically it is a tracking link. I used these for every link I make, including

link in profile Instagram links, blog links, Amazon product recommendations whether the brand asks for them or not. If a brand provides links, I will pass them through my own tracking links before.

All of this is so I can report the campaign success.

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Side note...

Difficult to spend marketing budget when some of the biggest benefits aren't manageable by black and white statistics.

Great way to sell this to those in charge that may have concerns is by also trying to estimate how much time you save by outsourcing the content creation.

Combined with as many metrics as you can, you can get a pretty good picture.

Be clear before a campaign as to what you expect to see after the run. Better yet, provide a folder to upload screenshots and a spreadsheet for the influencer to fill in.

I can send any of you an example of what I provide to sponsors. It includes memorable comments, numbers for reach, tracked clicks, etc.

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From here, use the metrics available to continue the content growth.

Don't just report it and move onto the next one. Re-post the content, run a promotion based off of what has been a crowd favorite.

This is where potential for exponential growth comes in and really delivers the best value.



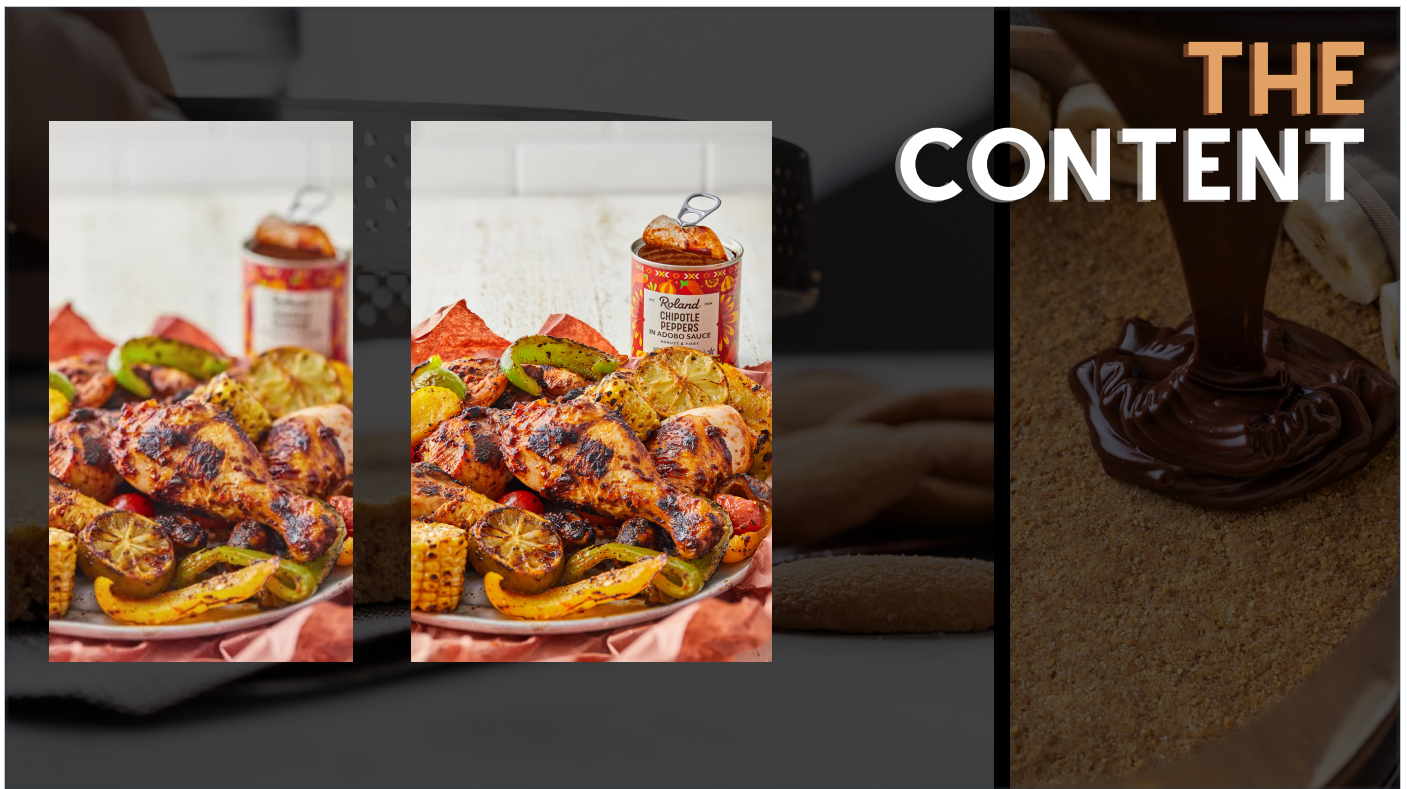
Let's talk about the actual content.

One of the biggest frustrations that I have as the content creator is when brands push back on content.

A good example of this that happens a lot is with product in photos. I often prefer to have product in the background of a picture or video. When a brand has decided to work with me, I assume they have done a little bit of research into my content and have seen this first hand.

It is more common than I'd like for brands to push back on proofs and ask for their bottle to be center focus.

I'll be transparent and show you what I mean...



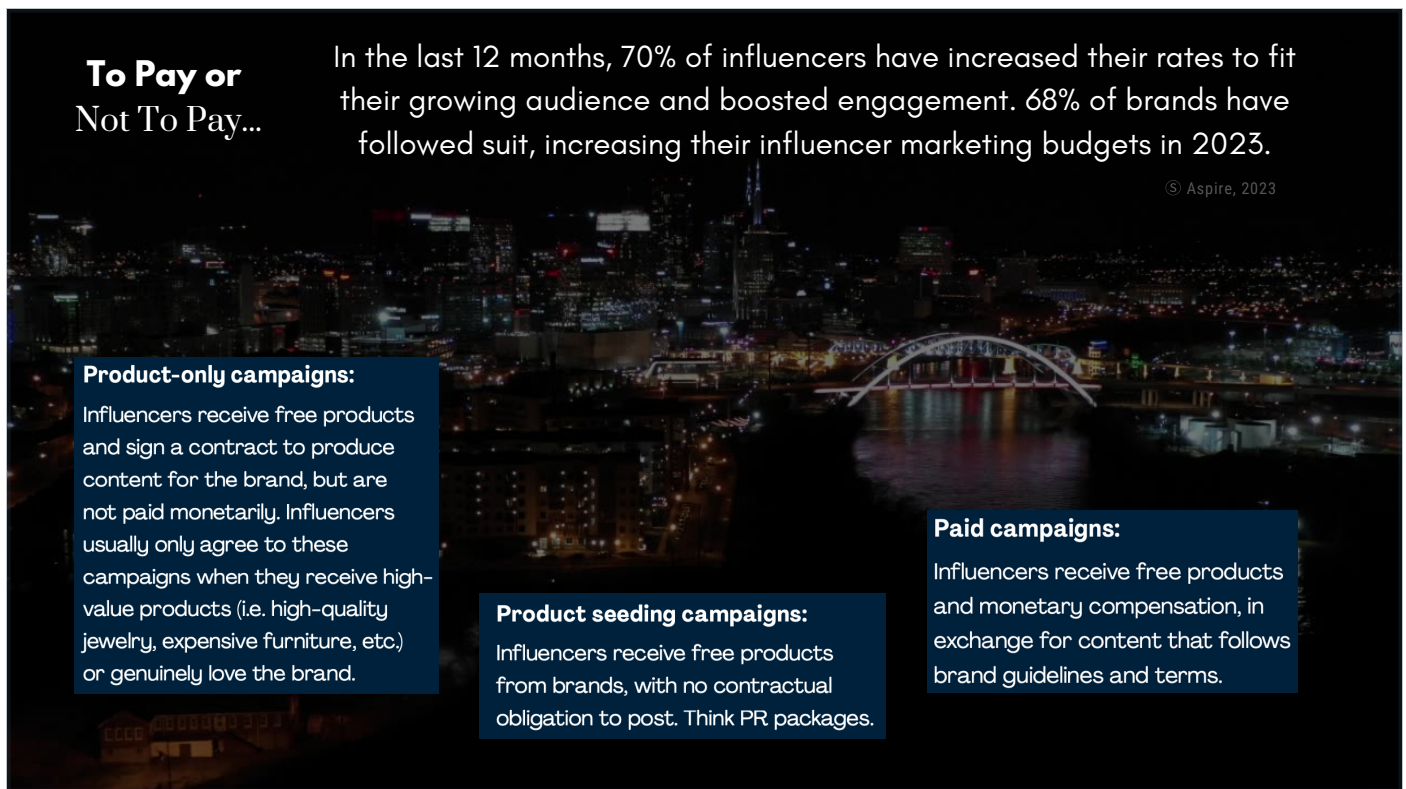
This video was rejected by the brand because the product wasn't visible during the entire playback.

I understand brand presence from the marketing perspective is critical. My recommendation from years of testing what works and doesn't work for my outlet is EXACTLY THAT.

If you are entrusting a creator for a campaign, give them plenty of freedom to make content in a way that they know will resonate with their own audience. The creator knows their followers much better than you will.

Obviously there are limits to that freedom, but if you have taken care during the most important steps of choosing your influencers, it shouldn't be a problem.

I ended up posting the video in Stories, so it wasn't wasted, but couldn't convince the brand that I knew it would have performed better than the image on the right for the primary posting. Engagement was lower than I would have liked.



To Pay or Not To Pay...

Set the scene. Almost 10 years ago when I started out, I was over the moon about getting a box of olive oil shipped to me in exchange for posting a blog recipe and social content with it.

I am obviously going to be a bit biased about this, but now... I rarely accept in-kind product for posting asks.

NOW... I said asks. I understand that there may not be budget at the brand, they may be very small and looking for exposure, a brand may not see any reason to pay.

There are a LOT of influencers that will post in exchange for product. I actually think that this relationship has a place for some. If you are not seeking to compensate for a campaign, be clear up front.

I get tons of emails with a pitch for a campaign with no details about whether they have a set rate, want an estimate, or don't plan to compensate at all.

To be honest.... a lot of those emails get ignored, where I will discuss with any pitch that is detailed. Even ones that initially offer something much lower than my usual rate if they have provided the details.

To Pay or Not To Pay...

In the last 12 months, 70% of influencers have increased their rates to fit their growing audience and boosted engagement. 68% of brands have followed suit, increasing their influencer marketing budgets in 2023.

© Aspire, 2023

While short-term product seeding campaigns are a great way to create initial touch-points and get your products in the hands of influencers you really want to work with, avoiding influencer payment in the long-term can tarnish your brand's reputation. It's not uncommon for brands to be publicly called out if they're not compensating influencers fairly. Also... Influencers talk to each other. A LOT.

I expect some questions or comments to pop up. I know this topic can be pretty interesting...

With my approach, I do still accept products, cookbooks to review, etc. if it is a good fit. WHAT I do thought it make sure I am super clear when I respond to an email request that if they wish to send product or a PR package, great. BUT I may or may not post about it. I wont agree to specific asks such as -- get this and post this, this, and this--.

Maybe it turns out that it isn't a good fit, I hate it, or the restaurant was terrible. I'm not going to post negative content, but I'm absolutely not going to post positive content unless it's true either.

Most brands are totally fine with this approach. I can probably count on my hands how many times I haven't made some Stories for product reviews. BUT, that is how I feel I can maintain long term trust with my audience. I don't think I would have been around for nearly 10 years if I didn't hold strictly to that. Most bloggers that are still around and doing well have that approach, I think.

Creating content is hard work when it is done correctly, and building an audience is even harder. Communicate with as many details as you can in that initial contact.



I talked about the potential of the creator economy. -- It was the last box after the arrows and squiggles flowchart thing.

I'm putting these pictures up here before all of these images were used well after my campaigns.

Oklahoma City Tourism utilized some of the images after my visit for other events they hosted...

Pier Park bought usage rights to a lot of food-related photos.

Opry in Nashville has used images from a campaign I did with them for their own ad buys through Music City Tourism.

Some of these had included unlimited usage of assets as part of their campaign with me.

Others asked for additional usage rights later on.

Both provide great opportunity for both the influencers and the brands. It's usually much easier for you all to send a quick email to get images for something than to go out and create new ones.

So... LOTS of evergreen (is that still a buzzword) usage for influencer content.



There are my 2 cents on how to best work with all of us diva influencers.

Thanks to Austin and everyone else for having me.

Before I jump into some questions, I have cards here. Feel free to email or message me if you have more questions later on.

You should get a link to download this mess along with my notes.

Please take home some of these Koozies if you'd like. Figured this would be a good opportunity to pawn them off on you all.

Thanks again. QUESTIONS?

Toss them to me by scanning the code here.