

WHY EVERY BRAND SHOULD BE USING INFLUENCERS IN 2018

How to harness the latest trends and integrate them with your comms strategy



SUMMARY

The influencer marketing industry has grown rapidly in 2017. In a series of interviews with industry leaders including YouTube star Caspar Lee, W's Sophie Raine and supercar vlogger Mr JWW, this white paper seeks to uncover the secrets of its success.

It also outlines five influencer marketing trends to watch in 2018, providing a clear vision for the future of the industry.

It looks at why targeted influencer partnerships can often deliver far greater results than mainstream media coverage on its own.

It also reveals how technology is helping brands capitalise on the biggest influencer marketing opportunities in the world today.

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INTRODUCTION

It's 2012, and Erin Deering has just decided to follow her dreams and start her own swimwear company.

She packs up her life and moves to Hong Kong with Craig, her fiancé. But with limited resources to put into traditional ad campaigns, she knows she'll have to get creative if she's going to make her venture a success.

So, she and Craig carefully package some of their signature styles and send them as gifts to a select group of hand-picked social influencers.

These influencers have three things in common. They're active on Instagram. They look great in swimwear. And they all know Kendall Jenner, an icon among Erin's target audience of 20-something millennials.

Her big break comes in 2013, when Kendall herself appears on Instagram wearing one of Erin's bikinis. From there, the online buzz around her products grows and grows – the rest is history.

Today, Erin's company – Triangl – is worth £34 million. She's one of the world's wealthiest Australians, and it's all thanks to influencer marketing.

Her story is the perfect example of what's possible when you identify the right influencers for your client or brand and use smart insights to craft campaigns that drive company revenue.

This white paper reveals how you can harness the latest influencer marketing trends to do just that in 2018 and beyond:

- You'll hear from industry leaders including YouTube star Caspar Lee, W deputy MD Sophie Raine and supercar vlogger Mr JWW about the key trends facing the industry in 2018.
- You'll see why, in today's media landscape, targeted partnerships with niche influencers can deliver far greater results than coverage in the mainstream press.
- You'll discover how new technology is helping brands develop profitable relationships and capitalise on the biggest opportunities in influencer marketing today.

At Cision, we believe every business should be leveraging influencers to share their story with potential customers.

After shooting to prominence in 2017, it's now one of the fastest growing PR disciplines, and with success stories like Triangl's it's easy to see why.

But in today's fast-changing media environment, it's vital to stay up-to-date with the latest influencer marketing trends if you want to make the most of it in your comms strategy.

So, read on to discover the key influencer marketing challenges and opportunities set to transform the comms industry in the coming months.



WHY NICHE INFLUENCERS CAN OUT-PERFORM TRADITIONAL MEDIA OUTLETS

With trust in traditional media and marketing channels plummeting, consumers are crying out for personalities they can trust. Micro influencers fill this void with authentic, original content.

Broadly speaking, a micro influencer is someone with fewer than 30,000 followers on social media. They tend to operate in very specialised niches and have passionate, highly engaged followers as a result.

That's why some of the UK's biggest brands are turning to influencer marketing to promote their products and services, like fashion brand ASOS has with its ASOS Insiders initiative.

By cultivating a community of fashion micro influencers, it has been able to widen its reach without spending money on big ad campaigns.

The strategy promotes long-term engagement by providing users with fashion tips and style advice, while also monetising this social engagement through links from influencer posts to ASOS product pages.

Approaches like this are smart because, in today's fragmented media environment, small influencers with loyal followings can be just as important as traditional publications.

THE FUTURE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ISN'T SMALL... IT'S MICRO

There was a time when getting coverage in a top tier publication was the ultimate measure of PR success. But that time has passed.

Although an article in The Daily Mail or The Sun can still potentially be seen by millions of people, targeting several smaller outlets whose audiences exactly match your target demographics can often yield better results.



Cision CMO Chris Lynch gives the example of a company looking to promote its new baby car seat to parents.

"If you look at the demographic of the Wall Street Journal, it trends a little bit male and it trends a little bit old," he explains. "So, in general, this is not the audience you would want to go after if you were taking a car seat to market."

By starting with your target audience and then seeking out influencers that can reach that audience, he argues, you can often find far better opportunities to publicise your goods or services. In this case, he gives the example of YouTube product reviewer The Baby Guy.

"What's interesting about someone like The Baby Guy is that, if you look at his overall following, it's not as big as what you get with a traditional media outlet," he says. "But it's still pretty substantial."

"More importantly, if you look at the saturation of the people who follow him, I can guarantee you it is within the right demographic."

Influencers like these provide communicators with a great alternative to targeting mainstream media coverage. And with new influencers taking off all the time, there have never been more ways to engage with your target audience.

But in today's constantly shifting media landscape, it can be tough to keep up-to-date with the best ways to leverage influencers for your brand. So, we've interviewed five industry leaders to help you identify the influencer marketing trends to watch in 2018.

FIVE INFLUENCER MARKETING TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2018

With new research from Twitter showing that people now trust influencers almost as much as their closest friends, there's no question that influencer marketing is here to stay.

All the experts we interviewed agree influencers will continue to be an important part of the marketing mix in the coming months.

But their responses also revealed a clear vision for the future of the industry, with an emphasis on building relationships, measuring performance and delivering sophisticated multi-channel campaigns.

At Cision, we're dedicated to helping communicators deliver world-class influencer campaigns. And in what follows, we'll reveal how new technology is making this vision of the future a reality.

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BRANDS WILL USE DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS TO IDENTIFY THE BEST INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIPS

Caspar Lee, the YouTube star and chief innovation officer at social media marketing agency Influencer, says brands must start using data to identify the best influencer partnerships.

“The biggest challenge in 2018 is going to be figuring out which influencers are cost-effective based on their current performance.

“Now that social media has been around for quite a bit of time, you have a lot of people who have been in the industry for ages. And, while these people might have a large follower base and might be pretty well established, they may no longer be as cost effective as people who are new or up-and-coming, but who may not be known yet.”

He adds that ensuring agencies are transparent and accountable for the performance of their campaigns will continue to be a challenge.

“It is also important to make sure that we have accountability for our campaigns and that the people and companies who work with us are given as much data as possible.

“We live in a world of fake followers, and of marketing companies boasting 10,000s of influencers on their books (even though only a handful of these will have been vetted for their legitimacy). And through all the noise, it's hard to figure out which influencers to work with.”

HOW TO IDENTIFY THE BEST INFLUENCERS FOR YOUR BRAND

To make the most out of influencer marketing, you need to be able to identify the relationships that are most cost-effective for your brand.

That's why measuring the performance of your influencer campaigns will be every bit as important as finding potential influencers to work with in the coming weeks and months.

“Influencer marketing needs to be given the same strategic weight as any other marketing channel,” explains Helen Cable, a senior digital consultant at Good Relations. “That means it needs to show ROI.”

At Cision, we know that money follows measurement. Ensuring marketing execs feel confident investing in earned media is the key to securing bigger budgets in the years ahead.

That's why we created the **Cision Communications Cloud™**. It gives you the tools to go beyond media monitoring and directly measure the returns and business contributions your campaigns deliver, so you can make the case for greater investment in PR and comms.

Not only does it show you which outlets are driving traffic to your website, it reveals the exact demand gen results and revenue your activities deliver. With it at your disposal, you'll be able to see how effectively your influencer campaigns are generating media coverage, increasing your share of voice and driving sales.



TRADITIONAL PR TECHNIQUES WILL HELP COMMUNICATORS GENERATE EARNED INFLUENCER COVERAGE

Sophie Raine, deputy managing director at W, sees a bright future for influencer marketing within the earned media sphere.

“In 2018, the main challenge around influencer marketing remains the same – it’s all about transparency.

“Using influencers to tell brand stories will continue to creep into the marketing mix next year. But agencies and brands need to be a lot smarter with how they engage with these channels to make any impact and reach increasingly savvy consumers.

“If the default is always to treat influencer marketing as a straight (and old-fashioned) media buy, then influencers become like robots, churning out disingenuous brand messages while consumers continue to tune out.”

She predicts that 2018 will see more PR pros deploying traditional techniques to turn influencers into brand advocates.

“The opportunity for brands in 2018 lies within earned influence. Ultimately, no amount of money can buy genuine advocacy. Brands looking to make an authentic impact need to turn the right influencers into ‘super consumers’, without the need to pay for their support.

“This means applying the same principles as traditional PR. After all, you’d never pay a journalist to run your story. That’s why PR agencies will continue to be best placed to deliver the most impactful influencer marketing campaigns throughout 2018.”

ENGAGE CONTACTS MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH SMART INSIGHTS

PR will always be about building relationships. But the best communicators use technology to enhance those relationships with key contacts.

This year’s Cision Social Journalism Study found that journalists are increasingly open to receiving pitches on social media, yet email is still far and away their favourite way to communicate with PR pros. However, journalists and influencers receive hundreds of emails every week, so it’s important to use every tool at your disposal to ensure your stories get picked up.

That’s why the **Cision Communications Cloud** gives you detailed analytics on every email and press release you send out, including open rates, clickthrough rates and link tracking.

With these insights, you’ll be able to see exactly who’s engaging with your content, which subject lines resonate with your contacts and who you should be following up with.

In short, this technology will give you the edge you need to engage with your contacts and maximise the impact of your outreach activities.

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BRANDS MUST WORK WITH INFLUENCERS TO CREATE CONTENT THAT INTEGRATES SEAMLESSLY INTO THEIR CHANNELS

Supercar vlogger Mr JWW says many brands are still struggling to get their heads around why influencer marketing works.

“For the last 50 years marketing has been a ‘push’ process – it operates on popping into your vision when you don’t want it and is 90% of the time very much a ‘look at me’ advert.

“What I am finding upon first consulting with a lot of brands and agencies is that the marketing teams are still adopting this push mentality, which in the influencer sphere is the single biggest ‘no-no.’”

He adds that ensuring your brand’s messaging is integrated authentically into an influencer’s channels is essential for the content to be effective.

“One of the primary challenges for marketers in 2018 is to understand how to organically integrate their message into influencer channels. It must feel a legitimate, natural fit to gain the most acceptance from the audience.

“Brands and agencies should also look to work closely with influencers to generate ideas together, and not just to pitch what they think they want. Work together to find a balance of what the brand wants versus what the audience will be receptive to.”

WHY THE BEST INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIPS WORK FOR EVERYONE

Consumer attitudes are changing. In today’s media landscape, paid and owned media have less control over a brand’s message. Influencers represent an opportunity for communicators because they can help brands reach consumers through channels they know and trust.

“The opportunity is the disproportionate value of the highly targeted exposure influencers can bring,” explains Mr JWW. “That is currently undervalued compared with traditional and mainstream media ads.”

But these partnerships only work if they are authentic. When a brand approaches him with a pitch, Mr JWW says he’ll often ask himself if the idea is strong enough that he’d do it for free.

“If it’s cool enough that I’d want to do it anyway the chances are it’s on brand enough for it to appear on the channel,” he says. “You have to think how legitimately you can integrate a brand into a video.

“And ultimately, if it isn’t going to provide value to the audience as well as your brand, it’s going to stand out like a sore thumb and devalue your credibility.”



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EXPECT TO SEE MORE INTEGRATED MULTI-CHANNEL INFLUENCER CAMPAIGNS

Nico Sarti, head of digital strategy at TVC Group, expects influencer campaigns to become more sophisticated in 2018.

“The sector is moving from a classic single-channel approach to a much more complex way of driving consumers through the marketing funnel. At TVC, we work with influencers in an open and collaborative way, incentivising their creativity about how to promote content for our clients.

“We have already seen micro-influencers becoming a more relevant way of building large-scale marketing programmes and we are certainly expecting this to become standard practice.”

But he says for multi-channel campaigns to work, you need to make sure all your influencers buy into your brand.

“Authenticity is certainly one of the main points of engagement for consumers. And the secret to creating successful branded content across micro-influencer platforms is to build a cohesive way of working.

“Micro-influencers are passionate individuals. And we need to brief them on our desired outcome while encouraging them to bring in their point of view.

“In the first stage of the planning, establish whether the micro-influencer you want to partner with would be interested in buying the product/service you are selling. If that’s the case, there’s no need to worry about authenticity, as this individual will be in the same shoes as the consumer.”

HOW TO ENGAGE AUDIENCES SEAMLESSLY ACROSS CHANNELS

As earned media campaigns grow more complex, how brands manage influencer programmes to ensure they’re delivering results will become increasingly important.

When engaging multiple influencers across a range of platforms, it’s important to be able to track your outreach from a single, centralised location.

With consumers engaging with content in real-time across print, digital and social channels, you need to be able to monitor and react to your earned media coverage in real-time.

That’s why many of the world’s biggest brands are turning to the **Cision Communications Cloud**.

Not only does it provide a single location to manage all your outreach and monitoring activities. It also lets you attribute activities to specific campaigns, making it easier than ever to measure the performance of your brand’s earned media initiatives.

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5 THE BEST BRANDS WILL BUILD LASTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CHOSEN INFLUENCERS

Helen Cable, senior digital consultant at Good Relations, says long-term partnerships will transform the relationship between influencers and brands in 2018.

“We will start to see more long-term influencer relationships with brands, rather than one-off collaborations.

“This highlights the need for authenticity, which is the biggest challenge, as these will become a bit like ambassadorial relationships. There’s a huge opportunity to leverage influencer advocacy, content co-creation and other areas of collaboration.”

She picks out the agency’s work with Subway as an example of how bringing together key opinion leaders can have real brand impact.

“For Subway, we brought together a “Subsquad™” of four influencers (Arron Crascall, Cian Twomey, Jahannah James and Scola Dondo) and created a YouTube series featuring the group undertaking different challenges.

“The weekly episodic content drove a huge reach and engagement. It’s far more than a media buy – bringing influencers together in this way has real brand impact.”

USING TECHNOLOGY TO BUILD LASTING INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIPS

In a constantly changing media environment, staying up to date with the best influencers for your brand can be tough.

W’s entertainment manager, Sinead Nelson works constantly with managers, agents and record labels to find the industry’s rising stars, and says:

“I have meetings almost every day with an agent or manager. They’ll talk me through their latest signings, priority acts for the upcoming year and who’s predicted for big things.”

But when it comes to matching brands with the right influencers, she says it’s best to start by defining your target audience and go from there.

“There’s a wealth of celebrities out there for brands to choose from, but that doesn’t mean they will all help you achieve your specific goals,” she explains. “It can’t be a one-size-fits-all approach.

“So, when it comes to matching brands with the right influencers, it’s best to go back to basics. I’ll look at our objectives as a brand and where we want to be to decide what set of influencers will be right.”

At Cision, we believe this approach is often the best way to find influencers that resonate with your audience. That’s why the **Cision Communications Cloud** lets you use audience insights to quickly identify relevant influencers from our database of 1.6 million media contacts, outlets and opportunities.

What’s more, its AI technology will even use smart insights to recommend new influencers you might otherwise have missed.

CONCLUSION

After a year of rapid growth, influencer marketing looks set to continue its meteoric rise into 2018 and beyond.

With thousands of influencers to choose from in niches as diverse as DIY, gaming, luxury fashion and finance, virtually every brand can benefit from the highly targeted coverage these emerging media channels provide.

But technology will play a key role in helping brands capitalise on the latest influencer marketing trends. And it's the communicators who stay ahead of the curve that will reap the greatest rewards.

The Cision Comms Cloud is tailor-made to help you do exactly that. It does the hard work to reveal the best influencers to work with. It streamlines your outreach activities by centralising them in one place. And it even helps you go beyond reach to measure the real business impact of your campaigns.

“With so many capabilities in one place,” says Cision Comms Cloud user Carrie Butler. “There is a tremendous amount of capacity for what can be done with this platform and lots of potential that I haven't even tapped into yet.”

Many of the world's biggest brands are already using it to enhance their earned media programmes – soon, you could join them.

Click the link below now or email uk.content@cision.com to contact our friendly team and see first-hand how Cision can transform your company's comms strategy today.

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Written by Solomon Radley, content marketing manager, Cision

Designed by Omar Baisar, graphic designer, Cision