THE NEW RULES OF INFLUENCER RELATIONS

Developing an Effective Strategy
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The term influencer relations has various definitions depending on who you ask and where in the world they are from. Reaching online communities, government lobbying and connecting with the right analysts and media are just a few interpretations. Influencer relations covers all of this – and more. Put simply, it’s about identifying and engaging with people who matter to your brand and who will share your story with their communities.

What is an influencer? An influencer has the ability to change behaviors or impact purchase decisions in a given context. Influencers are the experts in a category and therefore have the most loyal and engaged following. This is why getting them to interact, engage and talk about your brand will have the greatest impact on your marketing and PR efforts.

Influencers are often found in the following groups:

- **Reporters and bloggers** writing and broadcasting for an audience
- **Academics** lecturing to students and organizations
- **Researchers** creating society-wide debate
- **Think tanks** calling for action
- **Analysts** briefing their clients
- **Government officials** talking to their citizens and peers

Three key developments are behind new thinking in influencer relations: Firstly, the changing media landscape. Secondly, the establishment of social media as de facto communication channels for many people. Thirdly, the recognition that organizations need to engage with new audiences, outside of their usual ecosystem.
A media landscape in constant change

As the media industry is changing – whether it’s the decline in print media, a shifting news agenda or the rise of digital journalism – communications professionals have to look at other channels through which to tell their story. A narrative that doesn’t have a fit in media might have a natural place amongst academics and think tanks because the debate is better aligned.

Social media for all

Social media has created unrivalled opportunities for everyone to be a commentator and new tools allow us to identify and follow influencers. Today, not only reporters and bloggers are influential in telling us about news and trends. Many other groups, such as analysts, think tanks, academics, policy makers and NGOs, have become established influential commentators. An effective communications strategy needs to have a narrative that considers all of these groups, with an integrated approach to influencer relations. When a story is created and communicated across marketing, sales and social, it also needs to be shared with target media and other influencers as part of an overall engagement plan. Only then can a brand ensure maximum, and targeted, reach.

The impact on organizations

As organizations take advantage of new ways to communicate their brands, influencer relations becomes imperative. Approached in the right way, it will enable organizations to identify new audiences, engage with them in efficient ways and measure the effectiveness of communications. All of these aspects are key ingredients to ensuring ROI and brand enhancement.
A new way of thinking

Influencer relations requires a different mindset than that of media relations. Engaging with reporters and bloggers is mainly based on short-term thinking as we expect quick results in terms of interviews and coverage. Establishing relationships with other influencers is the opposite. Meeting with think tanks or policy makers will most often see results further down the line: an invitation to a panel discussion, taking part in research or helping shape policy. To take full advantage of influencer relations, we need to adopt a new mindset: one that embraces both long-term and short-term thinking.

Influencing people who matter to your brand is not something new, but its approach needs debating in light of these new trends that are shaping the communications industry. This white paper will outline new ideas and arguments around critical areas, such as:

- Making a business case for influencer relations
- Measuring effectiveness
- The relationship with traditional PR
- New innovations and technologies that will further disrupt the status quo
MAKING A BUSINESS CASE FOR INFLUENCER RELATIONS
Arguably, the rise of influencer relations is the result of a shrinking media landscape. Technology, social media and, increasingly, big data provide greater understanding of the world around us than ever before. Once distant politicians, journalists and industry players are now more visible, and reachable, by individuals and brands alike. The renowned Kevin Bacon concept – a.k.a ‘six degrees of separation’ - no longer applies. The distance between any two people on the planet is more realistically two to three degrees. Anyone is reachable, if you really want to reach them.

So, with a world of influencers just a few contacts away, where should you start? The answer, as always, is building your business case with defined goals.

Before beginning, set expectations. Influencer relations is not a short-term activity. If senior management expects a massive increase in overnight sales following your first outreach, then you are headed for failure. Like any relationship it requires time, energy and dedication. Your plan needs to reflect this. You must have a strong case for changing what you are already doing.

Below are some recommended areas to cover in your business case. As always, these should map to your own business and goals:

**Strategic case**
According to the Pew Research ‘State of the News Media 2014’ annual report, print advertising revenue in the US alone is just 41 per cent of what it was in 2006, which is reflective of the steady global decline in print media. This is with a backdrop of huge growth across the social web. Facebook currently has over 1.23 billion members, Twitter has 243 million active users and Baidu Tieba stands at around 1 billion users. For many, this means the world is just a screen away.

The challenge is every other brand in the world has the same opportunity to reach the world as you do. There is noise everywhere. This is why influencer relations is so important. It isn’t trying to shout messages at everyone; it creates conversations with the few that matter. Your business case needs to define these few. So ask the following questions:
1. What is the ‘Zero Moment of Truth’ in your customers’ buying process - i.e. when do they make the decision they want to make a purchase and what combination of events and influencers impact this decision?

2. When and where are your customers most likely to be influenced by others?

3. Who influences your customers most? Is it press, friends, family, government?

4. What threats exist for your brand and the industry you work in? For example, changes in law or public perception of your industry.

5. What is your organizational vision? Do you have a clear view of future trends? Are you aware of threats from new competitors? Are other brands making you look out-of-touch?

6. How visible is your senior leadership team? Do they have sway over the industry you operate in? Are they aware of new legal frameworks? How much influence do they have over public perception?

**Economic case**

A more detailed look at return on investment (ROI) is provided later in this white paper, so let’s focus on the basics for now. The key points when looking at the economic case for influencer relations are:

1. Does the current spend on advertising activity build long-term results or spikes in awareness? Can you sustain this - i.e. are you focusing on short-term gain over long-term success and the costs this incurs?

2. Are there potential governmental, legal or directive initiatives that could cost your industry in the future - i.e. do you need to be part of the conversation to ensure your industry perspective is taken into account?

3. What is the cost of not building these relationships - i.e. if your competitors build relationships with key influencers first, what impact might that have on your brand or product awareness and perception?
4. How supportive are your shareholders going to be in the event of a crisis - i.e. how at risk are you if there are no supportive influencers should crisis strike?

**Commercial case**

The first question you may be asked is “will this activity impact the bottom line?”. The answer is invariably yes, but only if you plan your measures first. The questions you need to answer are:

1. At what points in the buying cycle can we measure the impact of influence?
2. Who needs to own the tracking of results?
3. How closely can you align your influencer relations activities with your sales goals - i.e. are there influencers that your sales teams respect and will benefit their activities?
4. Are your commercial measures based on quality or quantity - i.e. are your targets share of voice, market share or profit margins? Likely all three, but you need to decide how you will track these against your influencer relations activities.

**Management case**

When setting out your business case, be sure to take resources into account. Considerations include:

1. Will your influencer relations activity be delivered in-house or via a third party? If you choose an agency to deliver this, how will you ensure the relationships are with your team versus your supplier?
2. Who will ensure you are targeting the right influencers? Similar to traditional media relations, you need to have clear targets and put aside the right amount of time to deliver on these.
3. Does the management ‘get’ influencer relations - i.e. is training needed to ensure the difference between this activity and traditional methods are understood?
4. Have you invested properly in automated tools to support and monitor activities - i.e. do you receive regular updates on key influencer conversations, industry trends or ‘hot topics’?

The key goal when developing your business case is to recognize that it requires judgment. Trying to implement an influencer relations program via low budget methods with junior resources will not work. This is not about quantity but quality. Influencer relations requires an understanding of issues, the ability to have a face-to-face conversation with people who really know their subject area, and an ability to convince others.

Your business case needs to reflect these as part of a long-term approach. In doing so, you can develop a strong foundation that will support the business comprehensively.
NetClean: Why Influencer Relations Is Critical For Us

When you know your story and your audience, influencer relations is a vital strategy. It’s critical to get to those who matter - the people to whom your customers and other key stakeholders are listening. We have a very important narrative that has an impact on everyone in society: government, businesses and consumers. It’s about protecting children against sexual abuse. As such, we have to get our message through to the right people to make a difference.

Influencer relations helps us achieve our primary goals: to reach the right people with the right story at the right time, and being able to measure the effectiveness of that outreach. It’s part of our over-all channel strategy in communicating with key audiences. It’s very important that influencer relations takes an integrated approach – it can’t operate in a silo. This has to be ensured at the planning stage.

When you sit down and discuss the communication goals for the next year or quarter, you have to look at all available channels: sales, marketing, reseller, media and influencer relations. One message or activity can play equally well across all channels.

When we look at influencer relations audiences, they are all equally important; think tanks, academics, policy makers, bloggers etc. The key is to find the people within those groups who have the ear of your customers. That’s what matters.

Media relations is still very important to us. The difference between media relations and influencer relations is that once you get through to the right influencer, the relationship between the influencer and the customer is very close. As such, our message and narrative can reach our target audience in a much quicker and more effective way. If you get a piece of coverage in a magazine, website or newspaper, it’s not always guaranteed that it reaches our customer.

The main risk with influencer relations happens if you haven’t done your homework around who matters. If you start communicating a narrative to the wrong audience, it can backfire. The message needs to be clear and it’s critical that the influencers understand both the problem and the solution. Only then will the narrative make sense. If influencers don’t respond, you will most certainly have wasted your time and effort because they are not interested.

90 per cent of the work around influencer relations happens at research and planning stage. You get that right and the rest will follow naturally.

Fredrik Frejme, CMO

NetClean provides intelligence solutions to detect, block and analyse digital media to create a safer society. It is the leading developer of technical solutions to fight child sexual abuse material. NetClean’s solutions are being used worldwide by multinational companies, government agencies, internet service providers and law enforcement professionals.
THE BASICS OF INFLUENCER RELATIONS
The key to implementing an effective influencer relations program, as part of an integrated communications strategy, is adopting a long-term mindset. Cultivating relationships with key influencers over time can garner impactful results, but those results don’t happen overnight. We worked with the team at Traackr to identify the key elements of a successful influencer relations program.

1. Define your audience
Influencer relations starts by first identifying your target customer and other key stakeholders and understanding who impacts how they discover, evaluate, decide and buy.
Discover the influencers
Influence is contextual so you need to find people who produce and share content and voice opinions that can impact your business and your audience’s decision-making process. Thinking laterally is essential.

Understand their community
An influencer is influential because they have built an audience. Help them serve their audience. Ask yourself – how do I help them do their job better? Monitor your influencers’ activity and content to seek out opportunities.

Create experiences and tailor your strategy
Instead of pushing your news, create experiences for your influencers so they have something to react to and share. It’s vital that you tailor your approach based on the individual person and their interests and passions.

Take action and engage
Start building a relationship with simple actions (follow online profiles, share relevant content and interact on social media channels) and seek introductions via existing contacts.

Provide high value and build trust
Get to know your influencers, build trust, then plan initiatives that will allow you to collaborate. Find opportunities for your organization to enrich the work of your influencers. Invest in earning trust and sustaining connections and you will find that the value of your influencer relationship grows over time.

Measure your results
Keep track of the relationships you are building and how they translate into tangible results (visits, introductions, mentions, leads, invitations to take part in research or panel discussions). Learn and iterate. Find out more about how to measure your influencer relations activity in the next chapter.
MEASUREMENT: FROM ROI TO ROR
As brands start developing influencer programs, the question of measurement and ROI becomes critical when it comes to allocating marketing budgets.

What is influence? Can it be measured or forecasted? Is ROI an adequate measure for marketing programs? What would ROR (return on relationship) mean?

Influence: what do we really want to measure?

According to AMEC, influence happens when “you think in a way you wouldn’t otherwise have thought or do something you wouldn’t otherwise have done”.

Measuring influence, therefore, means measuring the evolution of opinions or behaviors throughout an “influence activity”. It is ultimately about delivering impact through relationships.

To maximize investment, organizations must focus on the relationships that will deliver the most impact to their business. Let’s focus on two key stages of influence measurement:

- Planning phase: how do I select the most important individuals?
- Tracking phase: how do I measure impact?

Measuring influence in your planning phase

The days of heavy spreadsheet work and handcrafted lists of influencers are gone. Brands require structured data points and methodology at the planning stage to understand who they should be engaging with and investing in.

There is no such thing as an ‘overall influencer’. Individuals are influential in context, and context is unique to each brand and to each program. For this reason social scores provided by most social scoring platforms are unable to support influencer programs.

Context will be defined in many ways: topic, target community, location and
language. Advocacy will probably be your driving criteria. Context is also defined by the objectives you are looking to achieve, or even the type of campaign content.

When one of our clients developed a specific content plan that used stop motion movies on Vine to boost website traffic they chose to engage with individuals that were familiar with that format. This was a key criterion for their selection. Another client, a famous fashion retailer, selected program members based on their social activity, and also the quality of content they produce and their affinity with the brand.

Once context is defined, dedicated influencer platforms will be able to provide you with the required analytics to establish your top influencer list. Here is an example shortlist of influencer criteria:

**Reach and Resonance** will measure the performance of influencers across all their social platforms. Relevance will assess their impact on specific themes or brands and give a clear understanding of the importance of an individual in a specific context.

**Engagement analysis** looks at the capability of influencers to generate conversations with their peers on Twitter. It provides a unique view on a community structure and is a great way to find new individuals that could be relevant to your campaigns.
The steps to successful measurement

Don’t let yourself be overwhelmed by the big ROI question. Set clear ‘Activity Outputs’ and budgets that can be measured and tracked back to your activity. Decide the requirements at planning level to drive forward your program; have a clear view of your context and your target audience.

Here’s a simple table that clarifies what should be measured for different types of marketing activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPIs</th>
<th>Planning Activity</th>
<th>Post activity</th>
<th>ROI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid Media</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>Click-throughs</td>
<td>Future marginal cash flows vs. investment and compared to the company cost of capital</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Expected audience</td>
<td>Impressions</td>
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<td>Socio-demographics</td>
<td>Views</td>
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<td>Owned Media</td>
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<td>Followers</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
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<td>Unique visitors</td>
<td>Recommendation</td>
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<td>Earned Media</td>
<td>Reach</td>
<td>Mentions</td>
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<td>Resonance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Share of Voice</td>
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<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Referral traffic</td>
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The next stage: Return on Relationships (ROR)

Measuring the impact of your program is key. Innovative companies are now starting to go one step further: measuring the impact of specific activities by individual and segmenting their influencer base to optimize their engagement. This will enable them to maximize their resources by offering each group of influencers engagement opportunities that are most relevant to them.

The ultimate evolution of this increasing segmentation process will deliver to those brands an understanding of the ‘Return on Relationships’ (ROR). That is the impact delivered by each of their influencers based on the optimized engagement. ROR is the ultimate measurement of influencer activities.

*by Nicolas Chabot, VP EMEA, Traackr*

Traackr is a powerful influencer analytics suite that supports successful influencer marketing strategies by giving organizations the knowledge they need to craft smart strategies and effective plans. Traackr helps organizations understand their audience and focus their attention on the most important people and content on the social web.

Over 140 enterprises and 40% of the top communications agencies use Traackr’s people discovery engine and influencer tools to drive their marketing and communications strategies.

Traackr is headquartered in San Francisco with offices in Boston, New York and London.
THE FUTURE OF INFLUENCER RELATIONS
As our media environment continually changes, there is an increasing need to focus on influencer relations as a ‘beyond media’ strategy for marketing communications going forward. The mass media are no longer seen as primary influencers and the online sphere has enabled the development of a whole ecosystem of individuals, groups and third party organizations, all of whom can publish their own content.

Furthermore, these people can create their own spheres of influence by engaging with others online, building alliances based on shared perspectives. As such, marketing and communications practitioners are increasingly expected to develop personalized outreach activities, with the focus on actually building a real-world relationship with that influencer. Although, it’s important to remember: influencers change. They might focus on a given company’s area of interest for a time - so much so that they become renowned for it - and then move on to another topic area as their own interests and career evolve. Therefore, building and nurturing strong relationships with these people is vital, as is the flexibility to recognize when influencers may be moving into - or out of – your areas of interest.

This means that for marketing and communications practitioners it is an exciting time. It involves a departure from business as usual - demanding that we all become digital natives, immersing ourselves in the plethora of social media platforms. It commands us to build relationships with new audiences - from think tanks, to regulators, to industry experts, special interest groups and others.

What’s more, these influencer relationships won’t only exist online. Taking them offline enables us to get to know the people behind the profiles. When we engage in relationship building programs with influencers, we ideally want to know how we can help these influencers do their jobs more effectively; give them a higher profile, help them promote what they do better or connect with people within our network.
Using this approach can create a ‘triple-win’ for brands, influencers and agency consultants as the facilitators of the relationship. Here are some examples of achievable outcomes as a result of moving towards a more influencer-focused model:

**First consideration: create awareness within new communities**

A brand may attract attention in the press and on social media from the general public, but what do politicians think of it? What legislation is being debated that may affect how the company conducts its business? Stepping back to think of these larger issues can help to elevate the purpose of your communications activity to more than sharing messages or increasing awareness with current consumers. Where appropriate, connecting with selected members of the political community, powerful lobby groups and think tanks can help broaden your influence and position your company as an important thought leader within the market.

**Shorter term: build your stakeholder network, educate them, discover new spheres of influence**

As part of the process of establishing these relationships, you can bring influencers within third party organizations closer to your brand by inviting them to contribute content to a company blog, attend a conference you are organizing, or to share a panel session. By giving influencers valuable opportunities to build their profile, an important product of this is that they will become more acquainted with your position in the market, what your views are and so on. It is often the case that analysts and investors are already being courted in this way. If so, the processes to onboard influencers onto a similar relationship-building program may already be in place. In connecting with these influencers and working with them, you may also discover untapped communities that may be receptive to your thinking and ideas.
Longer term: shape the conversation, create behavioral change, discover new customers

As these relationships mature, you will begin to see that some of your initial ‘long list’ of influencers become effective advocates for an idea in which those within your company believe. Instead of trying to get them to talk specifically about your products, focus on themes that are genuinely of as much interest to your influencers as they are to you. The more your spokespeople own those relationships with the influencers the better. This ‘depth of conviction’ in a shared vision for a given sector, or shared opinion on an emerging, disruptive market trend will travel further than endorsements of specific products.

A shared vision or opinion can also influence behaviors and opinions within online communities, especially if working with relevant ‘heavyweight’ influencers who are both popular and have their content shared regularly. It can also support inbound marketing efforts by drawing out potential customers and partners from within these untapped spheres of influence.
PR, and more specifically media relations, doesn’t exist in the same way it did five years ago. There is no longer a linear route to journalists. Not only has the environment we operate in changed, the way we approach relationships has been transformed. Social media has been a catalyst for this transformation. The potential connections have broadened. The voices have expanded and increased. For brands it is vital to identify those voices – they could be think tanks, academic institutions, policy makers, researchers, analysts, government officials, end-users or journalists – everyone can have an impact on your brand.

Influencer relations is the integrated and cohesive approach to building and maximizing these crucial relationships.

Using the data available to us via tools such as Traackr, we can pinpoint every relevant influencer – online and offline – who they are; where they are; how influential they are; and how they are connected to the brand and other stakeholders. This knowledge then informs the entire program. It can’t be used in isolation. Today’s PR programs must be executed in an integrated way, with influencer relations blending with other activity together to form a clear, integrated and consistent model.

Like any communication, an effective influencer relations program must start with a clear strategy - aligned with key business goals - and targets that can be measured and refined throughout the implementation process. Measurement tools help streamline the analysis and implementation, but it’s vital that an influencer relations program is managed with the right resources to ensure the emphasis is placed firmly on quality, not quantity.

The influencer relationships must be mutually beneficial and trust must be earned over a period of time to cultivate the relationship in order to achieve long-term results. Those results don’t happen overnight, but when they happen they matter.