



DASH HUDSON

The 2021 Influencer Marketing Guide: How to Source, Optimize, and Measure Creator Content

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Influencer Marketing in 2021

If one thing is for certain right now, influencer marketing should be an integral part of any brand's digital marketing strategy. 8 out of 10 consumers have made a purchase based on a recommendation from an influencer. That's a powerful figure that showcases how the connection between social media and commerce is stronger than ever, and creator content is proven to bolster conversions. Influencer marketing has become so much more than relationship management. It has become a critical pillar of any brand's cross-channel marketing strategy and requires KPIs, innovative tools, and a fully-baked strategy in order to be successful.



8 out of 10 consumers have made a purchase based on a recommendation from an influencer

Source: TikTok for Business

Best practices are evolving and new trends continue to emerge in influencer marketing. However, one thing is clear: consumers are looking for content that feels real. A recent study showed that as high as 94% of marketers believe only authentic influencers drive results and 84% of millennials have been found to distrust traditional advertising, with Gen Z being even more skeptical. Millennial and Gen Z consumers have not only pushed brands to adopt new digital marketing channels, but at the same time

expect authenticity and transparency from the brands they interact with. Brands need to create a balanced strategy to meet the high expectation consumers hold for brands online, which is why influencer marketing is critical to brand growth.

Influencer marketing has shifted dramatically in the last few years from a supplementary part of a brand's strategy, to one of the initiatives with the highest ROI. In 2019, 17% of companies spent over half of their marketing budget on influencers, and 89% said ROI from influencer marketing is comparable to, or better than, other initiatives. Despite the push to an influencer-first model, brands are still struggling to source creators, measure their effectiveness, and maintain accurate data so that their influencer program can grow both in the short and long term.

In this guide, we'll cover:

- Why data-driven insights should guide influencer sourcing, measurement, and reporting
- Top recommendations for how to build your influencer marketing program around authenticity
- Why long-term relationships with creators are critical to generating real ROI
- The top metrics to track to measure success and understand performance over time
- How to conduct an audit of your influencer marketing program
- The latest trends, best practices, and tools in the influencer marketing space



Sourcing New Talent: Your Current Advocates are Your Biggest Asset

How do I choose the right influencers to work with? It all depends on your goals and objectives. If you're looking for growth in a new region, a mix of local creators can help to spread your reach and narrative fast. However if you're looking for sales, a longer-term partnership with influencers who are revered as experts in their fields—be it skincare, fashion, home design, and so on—and regularly educate their followers on their latest finds, gifts, or top products, will be a better option.

The best way to find ultra-effective creators is to tap into your user-generated content (UGC) and top fans. UGC has quickly become one of the best ways for brands to integrate content into their strategies that feels authentic and unpolished, and showcases products in unique and relatable ways. Combined with the fact that 90 percent of consumers trust UGC to influence their purchase decisions makes it an optimal starting point for sourcing influencers. Taco Bell harnesses the power of UGC to bring its signature brand to life on social media. By repurposing the best menu hacks and taco dates, the brand organically engages with micro influencers, helping to kickstart partnerships and encourage more content creation.

90% of consumers trust UGC to influence their purchase decisions

Source: Turnto



@erinaschow via @tacobell

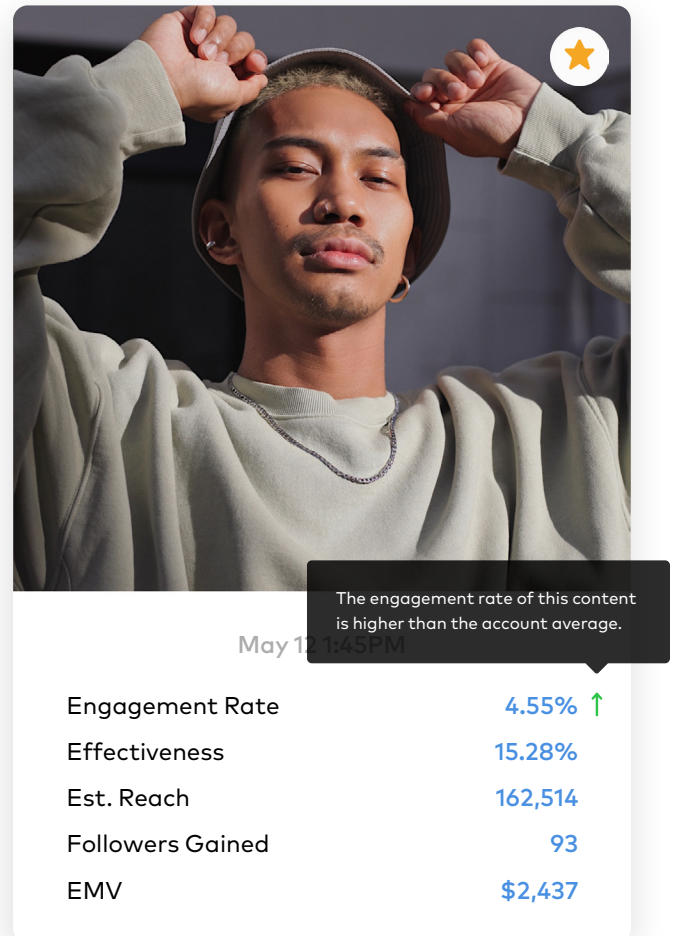


By partnering with creators who already use and love your brand, you're ensuring that your products are likely to resonate with their audience since creators tend to attract followers and community members who have similar interests. By reposting community-created content, retailer Madewell brings inclusivity, diversity, and authenticity to the forefront of its brand narrative. The company's approach aligns with the brand's values, while at the same time fuels community growth and engagement.

We know that community created content converts at a much higher rate than many traditional marketing mediums. So how do brands tap into this consumer desire for insightful, authentic, content at scale?

Look at visuals before metrics. Using Dash Hudson's [Visual IQ](#) technology, social media managers can see the most engaging UGC trends automatically segmented. Not only can they get an overall feel of how their community is visually communicating about their brand, but it's the perfect starting point for finding creators who are the most likely to produce top-performing content for your unique visual identity.

Benchmark the metrics that matter. Within Dash Hudson's [Relationships](#) tool, brands can compare the engagement rate of an influencer overall, against the engagement rate when the influencer mentions the brand, and in-feed vs Stories content. The sweet spot here is when the engagement rate is higher when the influencer features the brand than their engagement rate overall. This reveals that the influencer's audience resonates with the brand, and may be engaging with the content because the brand is featured—not just because it's from their favorite influencer. Brands can also keep a pulse on which format resonates with each influencer's audience the most. For instance, some creators might see higher engagement on Stories compared to in-feed content, which can help guide the strategic direction of your partnerships over time.



Top Tip:

Look to sister brands or brands under the same parent company for inspiration for who to work with. It's easy for teams to become siloed, but if an influencer is a great fit for one brand they likely are for a sister brand as well. You'll also be starting ahead since you'll already have a handle on what types of content tend to perform best, and how easy the creator is to work with.

Considerations When Building and Refining Your Program: Top Things to Keep in Mind for Long-term Growth

Brands often approach influencers with a campaign in mind or as a quick fix to increase follower growth, but in reality investing in long-term relationships is one of the most impactful ways to build your influencer marketing strategy. Long-term relationships allow you to not only spend less time sourcing new talent and more time working on impactful creative, but also build trust with a creator's audience.

Many mega brands are shifting from short contracts to much longer ones, often upwards of a year. These long-term partnerships give a robust view of how impactful the relationship is while opening doors for other collaborations—like co-branded products. Skincare brand TULA teamed up with influencer Courtney Shields to launch an exclusive product line. TULA attributes 50% of its revenue to influencer marketing, proving the power of these relationships.



50%

of TULA's revenue is generated through influencer marketing

Source: Glossy



The following best practices will help guide your influencer sourcing:

1. Ensure that your creators fit your brand ethos

Brands must ensure that everyone they work with fits their brand aesthetic, values, and general ethos. This seems obvious but is often overlooked, and can be detrimental to partnership success. A history of quality content is a good indicator of the type of content you can expect for your campaign. A paid partner is a direct representative of your brand and, while they must be given creative freedom—they know their audience best after all—they can quickly become a liability if they aren't appropriately vetted and re-evaluated over time.

Community is at the heart of Patagonia's influencer marketing program. Every piece of content Patagonia puts in front of its audience stays true to its values—and the brand's influencer partnerships follow the same notion. Partnering with like-minded adventurers helps Patagonia further its mission and build on its brand narrative.

2. Engagement is key

For influencers to drive sales for your brand they must have a high engagement rate. There's a common misconception that macro-influencers (100,000+ followers) are more effective than micro or mid-level influencers (10,000–100,000 followers). While large players have greater reach, smaller players tend to be more niche, have higher engagement rates, and are usually much cheaper. Macro-influencers most definitely have their place in influencer marketing, but it depends on the goals of your campaign. When you're tracking the success of a campaign, ensure you're comparing apples to apples. For example, reach likely won't show overall impact, but something like [earned media value \(EMV\)](#) will.

Lululemon strikes a balance between like-minded community leaders and local yoga instructors across the world to create a best-in-class ambassador program. The fitness brand has mastered the art of leveraging the reach of prominent fitness influencers and athletes to further its reach while building meaningful connections with micro influencers that live and breathe the brand's ethos. Anchoring its brand in community helps Lululemon translate its experiential influencer strategy into an impactful digital footprint in today's online social space.

3. Keep authenticity at the center of your influencer marketing program

For a creator to be effective, their audience needs to truly believe that the influencer genuinely likes and uses the product or service. There's nothing millennials and Gen Z are better at than sensing an inauthentic sponsorship. They'll also be less likely to trust that influencer's recommendations in the future. Putting authenticity at the forefront of your influencer marketing program will ensure that it's successful now, and in the future. That means working with influencers who genuinely love your products and your brand.



Vans embraces the unique styles of influencers and customers to curate a feed that truly represents the brand through the lens of its community. Giving influencers creative space to put their own twist on products equips Vans with content that resonates across diverse audiences. Meanwhile, The Honest Company employs an influencer strategy that centers around the realities and joys of motherhood. By partnering with real parents that share a passion for natural products for their little ones, the brand encapsulates authenticity in every piece of content it puts forward.

4. Navigate payments terms with class

Brands looking to partner with new creators many find the most productive route is to start with a gifting initiative to test the waters. This way the brand can see what the engagement is like, how the content is received by both the influencer's audience and the brand's audience, and also to review the quality of the content. From there, brands can make data-backed decisions on who they move into a paid relationship with. Gifting first also allows you to spread your testing further, and experiment with different influencers with different styles to see what works. Of course there are influencers who will not post unless paid to do so, and it's up to you as a brand to decide if that's right for you. Some brands, especially in the beauty sector, have found success trialling influencers' Stories first, as these positions are often cheaper due to the ephemeral nature.



The Importance of True Data: Using Insights to Constantly Improve Performance

One of the hardest parts of managing an influencer marketing program is getting access to the insights needed to make strategic decisions. Brands often rely on performance data obtained via screenshots sent directly from creators. This data is then managed in spreadsheets, with brands manually calculating top metrics. The manual data management process currently used by many brands is not only time consuming for marketing professionals, but can lead to poor data quality and reliability—both of which are crucial for making strategic decisions. If strategic decisions are made based on inaccurate data, it can cost the brand millions in lost sales and in opportunity cost.

To best guide the strategic direction of your influencer relationships, ensure that your partnerships include in-feed and Stories content. This will give you a complete view of their content and a benchmark to measure their performance over time and against other creators you work with.

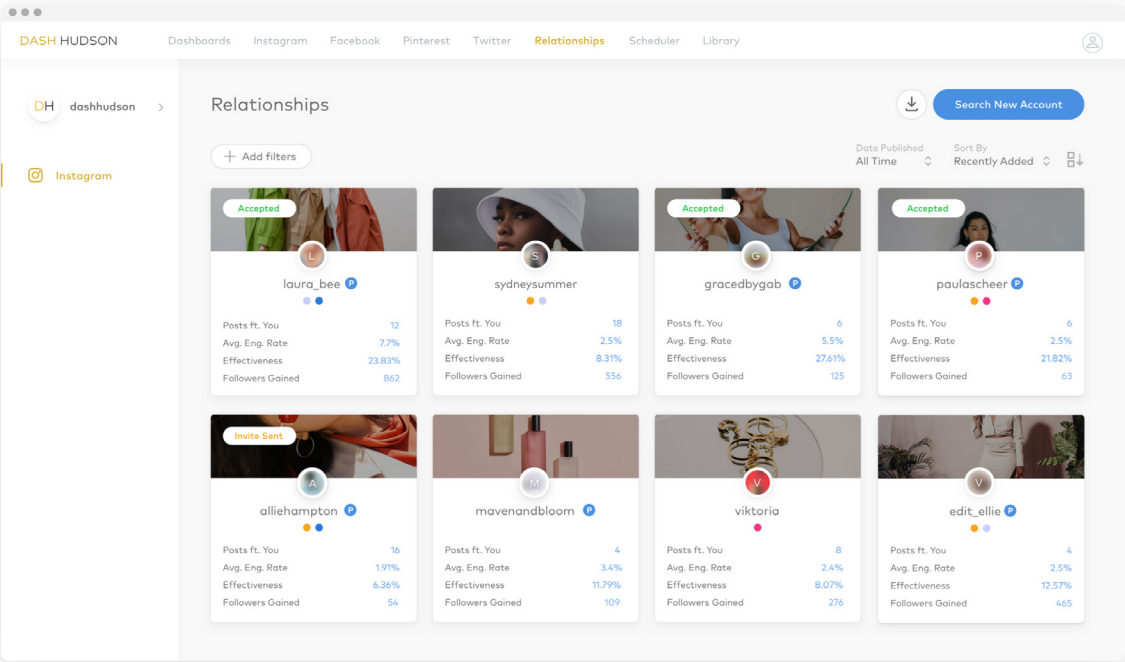
Strategic decisions rely on having access to data in real-time. Incorporating data-driven insights into every step of your influencer sourcing, tracking, and reporting will revolutionize the results you see from partnerships.

We've briefly discussed the importance of "true" data, but what does that mean in practice? It's important to remember that data integrity exists on a spectrum, from unreliable to very reliable. There are a few ways to get access to true data from influencers.

Set up a regular reporting cadence. If you're getting data directly from creators, experts recommend setting up a reporting cadence with regular updates. It's critical that marketers continue to measure the impact of influencer partnerships over time to benchmark success. Keep an eye on where post engagement typically peaks and use that to guide measurement for future campaigns. For example, you might notice that for Instagram posts there isn't much change after one week, and so it may not make sense to keep updating numbers on that post after a week. These reports should include precise posting time so you can do any analysis around followers gained.

Connect to an influencer analytics platform. Platforms which provide influencer analytics will be connected to the channel directly—such as the Facebook API. They're able to periodically (often hourly or daily) pull data directly from that source so they have a constant eye on changes to historical and current metrics.

Working with an influencer analytics platform does two things: firstly, it ensures that you have access to historical data at all times, and secondly, platforms will often calculate many of the key metrics for you, saving hours of work and allowing you to focus on strategic decisions. If it's important to your brand to metaphorically hold the keys to the kingdom (data storage), we recommend connecting to a platform and periodically downloading your data to save on your internal database. Dash Hudson's [Relationships](#) equips brands with true data so marketers know exactly which partnerships are providing the return expected, and which ones need to be reevaluated, saving brands from spending money on partnerships that aren't a fit. With access to an influencer's feed as well as stories your brand is featured in, brands have the information needed to understand the value of each relationship and which type of content they should be requesting more of.



Top Tip:

Always stick to platforms which are Facebook Marketing Partners. Working with a Facebook Marketing Partner like Dash Hudson ensures that you're relying on true data to build your strategy. With a verified Facebook Marketing Partner, brands never need to worry about losing access to their data or its authenticity.

Analyze. Iterate. Repeat: Top Metrics to Monitor Growth

Setting clear KPIs is crucial to evaluating influencer performance. Measuring influencer ROI is [cited](#) as a top challenge for marketers working with influencers. To understand success, benchmark results, and ultimately improve performance, there are three metrics to track:

Engagement

[75% of marketers](#) believe that engagement is the best metric for measuring influencer marketing success. The sweet spot is a campaign or post engagement rate that is equal to, or better than, the influencer's average engagement rate. It's also a great benchmark of ongoing performance. If a creator has a strong engagement on their feed but engagement on branded content is lower, it can be a leading indicator that the influencer isn't a good fit for your brand.

Followers gained

If the goal of an influencer campaign is to increase brand awareness and bolster your online community, measuring follower growth is an effective KPI. Dash Hudson has a built-in follower growth tool so you can see at a glance how many followers each post and influencer has gained for your brand—saving marketers valuable time.

Top Tip:

Brands will often see an initial spike in followers gained the first time they work with an influencer, with a lower follower growth rate for subsequent campaigns. If followers gained is a KPI it may be best to test shorter-term relationships with influencers so that you're hitting the sweet spot between authenticity and reaching new audiences.

EMV

EMV stands for "Earned Media Value" and is calculated based on reach, engagement, and follower growth. However, there's no industry standard for how to calculate EMV, and all platforms will weigh metrics differently, so be careful comparing across platforms. Instead, use it as a benchmark to compare one campaign or influencer vs another campaign or influencer (particularly macro vs micro) on a level playing field.

Top Tip:

Make sure your landing pages and UTM or affiliate codes are set up so you can monitor conversions and determine ROI. A custom landing page with a collection that the influencer has curated is a perfect way to track conversions and also add value to their audience. You could also create a standalone Spirit Gallery with a curated set of content from that influencer and track the click-throughs from repurposed influencer content in Dash Hudson's [LikeShop](#) tool.




The Importance of Building Regular Audits into Your Strategy

One of the most commonly overlooked elements of a brand's influencer strategy is the "iterate", or the component of the strategic cycle focused on learning from the past as a way to inform future decision making. Brands must focus on not only collaborating with new influencers, creating new content, and building high-value relationships, but also consistently auditing their current partners to ensure that they're contributing to the brand's overall growth strategy in a meaningful way.

Long-term ROI relies on recurring audits. That means constantly evaluating whether your influencers hit the goals you set as well as your team's KPIs. Even creators who've been successful in the past may drop off in effectiveness, whether it be due to an audience change on either side or another external factor.

Regularly auditing your influencer marketing program is important because it forces you to take time for the critical strategic decisions which will ultimately determine its success. It's easy to get stuck in the day-to-day legwork of running your influencer marketing program. We recommend designating specific time blocks to go over your data to ensure it's up to date and accurate, and conduct analysis of previous campaigns to make informed decisions for growth. By continually reviewing your set of content creators with fresh eyes, you'll be able to stay on the beat with the effectiveness of a relationship long past the vetting stage.

Accepted



L

laura_bee

P


Posts ft. You

Avg. Eng. Rate

Effectiveness

Followers Gained

Connected



G

gracedbygab

P


Posts ft. You6

Avg. Eng. Rate5.5%

Effectiveness27.61%

Followers Gained125

Invite Sent



S

sydneysummer

Posts ft. You18

Avg. Eng. Rate2.5%

Effectiveness8.31%

Followers Gained556

Conducting an influencer audit in 4 steps:

1. Gather data

You'll want to make a list of every single creator you're currently working with—and past creators if you can—as well as all of the campaigns you've done with that influencer. We recommend breaking it down post by post so you can dive into what works and what doesn't on a granular level. It's more time consuming but it's worth it. Once you have that, fill in your performance data.

2. Determine goals and success criteria

If you already had goals for previous and ongoing campaigns, now's the time to fill them in. If you didn't, now's the time to think about what you were trying to accomplish by working with that influencer. Followers gained and conversions are common goals for our brands. Brand awareness is great as well, but is much harder to measure.

3. Establish if the campaign was successful

Make notes on what went right and what went wrong. Were the metric results what you expected? How close were you? Were the goals realistic? Were there other factors that might have impacted success?

4. Use what you've learned to fuel future growth

Do a mini post-mortem. If the previous step is the "what", this is the "why" and "how".

Considerations:

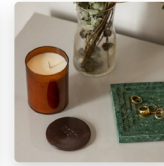
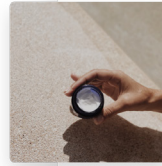
- Were you able to access the data you needed to make those conclusions? How can you access it in the future?
- Why do you think the campaign was successful or unsuccessful? Are growth metrics starting to plateau? Is this person still a good fit for your audience? Is it time to pause or end the influencer relationship, or expand it in the future?

This is also a chance to further segment your data.



alannarowe

Connected



Posts ft. You	12
Avg. Eng. Rate	7.72%
Effectiveness	22.83%
Followers Gained	862

Ask:

- What types of content are performing best?
- Is there a style that seems to work overall?
- What about for a particular creator?
- Is sharing their sponsored content on your feed effective?
- Should you test bigger/smaller/differently located creators?
- Is there another channel/medium you can/should test?
- Can you identify any visual trends?

Top Tip:

We recommend hosting informal audits regularly, and scheduling formal ones at least quarterly. The influencer landscape and best practices are changing regularly, as do social channels and business needs, so doing audits less than quarterly can leave you with outdated insights.

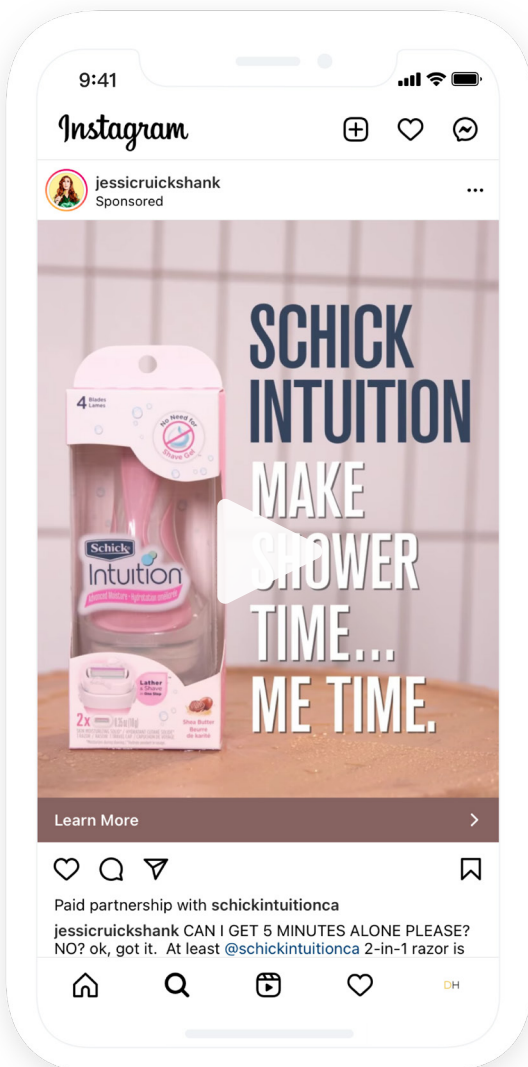
Dash Hudson has a set of tools that help you measure Influencer ROI by tracking effectiveness, EMV, and followers gained by post and overall, so you can ensure that every influencer relationship is directly contributing to your growth goals. We'll show you the performance of every post as well as the overall relationship's effectiveness, so the auditing process is as simple as looking at the metrics and making a decision.

The Latest Trends and Best Practices to Follow

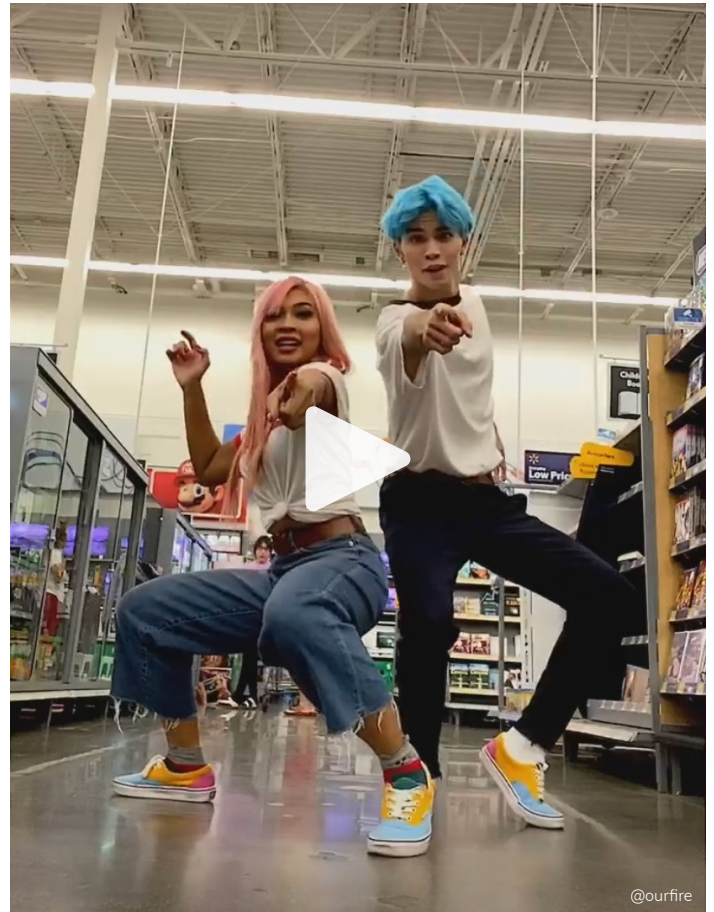
To stay ahead of the influencer landscape, agile strategies are critical. As social spaces become increasingly saturated, brands need to be able to quickly shift gears to capitalize on the latest trends, tools, and best practices. These are the influencer marketing trends to watch in 2021:

Influencer Whitelisting

Influencer Whitelisting allows brands to promote influencer content through the influencer's account on Facebook or Instagram. It means brands can run paid social campaigns from the influencer's profile. The creator grants the brand access to their Facebook Ads Manager, and once the two are connected, advertisers can create campaigns and put spend behind the influencer's posts. The ability for brands to put ad dollars behind their influencer's content takes this to a whole new level. Not only can the brand increase reach and brand awareness, so can the influencer, which means growth all around. Influencer whitelisting provides an opportunity for brands to multiply their return from influencer partnerships by allowing them to advertise to new and existing audiences with top-performing creator content.



@jessicruickshank



TikTok Creators

As the most downloaded app in 2020, TikTok's growth continues to skyrocket. TikTok quickly transitioned from a channel that brands experimented with to a pivotal medium for reaching new audiences and staying relevant in today's digital age—and influencer marketing has been key to many brands' growth on the channel. Top creators on TikTok have cultivated a loyal following with the channel's largely Gen Z audience and have mastered how to tap into TikTok's viral trends. Influencers can help brands launch challenges, support product launches, and kickstart their strategy.

Chipotle tapped creators Brittany Broski, Zach King, and Jiffpom to launch its annual #Boorito campaign on TikTok. The hashtag garnered 3.6 billion views, quickly proving the unprecedented reach opportunities that TikTok influencers can unlock. Walmart saw similar results from its #DealDropDance campaign. The retailer giant partnered with six creators to kickstart the campaign, which generated over 4.1 billion views.



Social Commerce

The number of social commerce buyers in the United States alone accelerated 25.2% to 80.1 million in 2020, and will continue to grow 12.9% to 90.4 million in 2021. At the same time, consumers are looking to people they trust, whether it's friends, family, or influencers, for recommendations. In a recent survey, 40% of consumers have purchased a product after seeing it promoted by an influencer.

40% of consumers purchased a product
after seeing an influencer promote it

Source: business2community

To help brands meet this new demand, Instagram continues to introduce new tools and features to create a frictionless shopping experience for users. These features make it easier for influencers to give their followers a direct path to the products they're promoting. Integrating shoppable posts and swipe-up links into influencer partnership is a not-to-be missed opportunity to increase ROI from your influencer marketing program.

In Summary

When you're building out your influencer marketing program, sourcing creators from accounts that are already engaging with your brand is a great basis for a long-term, profitable, partnership because their audience truly believes that they like and use the product, not just because they were paid to promote it. Continuing to iterate on your influencer program is just as critical as choosing the right creators in the first place—and to do that, brands need up-to-date, accurate, reliable data. Data management and integrity are one of the biggest challenges brands face as influencer marketing programs continue to mature. The key to a sophisticated influencer strategy is to ensure your brand has the insights it needs to scale, grow, and drive ROI for the business.

To learn more about how Dash Hudson's Relationships solution can help your brand take its influencer marketing strategy to the next level, [get a demo](#).