Influencer marketing isn’t a new concept. Getting the right people excited, engaged, and talking about your brand has always been one of the best ways to improve brand recognition, expand your customer base, and ultimately drive more sales. After all, word of mouth is the most trusted way for a potential customer to hear about your product.

What has changed is that social media has made word of mouth global and immediate. Someone talking positively about your brand and products on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Pinterest or any other social media platform can have a powerful and far-reaching influence. That’s made building relationships with these online influencers more important than ever. In the 2013 Influencer Marketing Survey conducted by Sensei Marketing, 74% of respondents said they plan to deploy influencer marketing strategies during the next 12 months, and over half said they use influencer marketing as part of their campaigns.

Odds are influencer marketing is already part of your game plan. The ability it gives you to tap into a network trusted by consumers, turn fans into advocates, and generate both insights and leads makes it a necessary part of any marketing plan. The question is: how can you maximize your return on investment? Here are 6 best practices used by marketers to influence the influencers and produce real results.
THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

FIND INFLUENCERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE BOX

It’s common sense to use Google searches and Twitter searches to find people who are already interested in your industry or in your target demographic. Dig deeper.

People talking about your brand and your competitors’ brands are your first tier of influencers, but savvy marketers are looking outside those areas. For example, marketers at an interior decor company also check out fashion blogs, DIY blogs and construction blogs—looking for interesting overlaps.

With tools like Klout and Kred you can determine who has the biggest, broadest reach across social networks. But the size of someone’s network doesn’t necessarily correlate to the extent of their influence. You want to uncover the relevant people leading conversations and shaping opinions about your company or brand, even if those influencers are leading smaller social groups. Heartbeat, powered by Sysomos, identifies influencers and their authority, helping you identify, engage and build relationships with the right people.

Marketers are naturally interested in bringing big-name influencers in their industry into their network, but it’s a smart strategy to also target up-and-comers, who will have more incentive to be the first to mention something new and cool. The competitors of must-have influencers are usually also good bets to add to your network.

Your current network will naturally lead you to other influencers. To build a good Twitter network many marketers practice the rule of following ten new people every day. Although not all of them may turn out to be particularly helpful influencers, enough will make it worth the effort.

According to Technorati Media’s 2013 Digital Influence Report, 54% of consumers agree that the smaller the network the greater the influence, so make sure cultivating influencers with a smaller reach is part of your strategy.
USE MEASUREMENT TO CULTIVATE FROM WITHIN

Many marketers find that their best influencers are already in their network—people who pay attention to their social media presence and know who they are.

While it can be incredibly beneficial to get a mention from a celebrity, customers are actually most influenced by what their friends and family do and like, followed by people they consider "like them"—their friends-of-friends network, and people with similar demographics. Your network is no doubt already full of people who can be minor influencers by speaking to their friends and family about your product.

Tools like Heartbeat can help you identify these conversations so you can add the influencers to your social networks and begin reaching out to them.

The 2013 Digital Influence Report found that the top reasons consumers cite for following brands on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other social media platforms are to keep up with a company’s activities and learn about new products and services. These interested followers are prime candidates to become brand advocates.

RECOGNIZE AND REWARD INFLUENCERS

Everyone likes to feel special and in-the-know—to be that friend who’s always able to recommend the next new thing. Social media influencers are no exception.

An effective outreach strategy includes tactics for recognizing and rewarding important players in your social media circle. This typically includes creating an influencer network whose members get first crack at special content, deals, offers and news as well as free demos of your product or service. Savvy marketers may also tap particularly dedicated influencers for feedback about new
6 BEST PRACTICES FOR INFLUENCER MARKETING

**TIP 3**

products or services—brand loyalists love to feel like they’ve had an impact. Another common approach is to ask followers to re-tweet or “Like” something posted for a contest entry or coupon. It’s a good way to get a lot of quick mentions, although many of these people may fade away after the initial excitement. To keep influencers engaged, it’s important to keep giving them topical, timely rewards and information.

Big social media blitzes are good for sharing big news, but the strategy shouldn’t end after the first burst of interest.

According to the 2013 *Digital Influence Report*, most influencers receive close to 10 opportunities to work with brands a week. This makes offering the right incentives crucial to your brand’s success.

**BE PERSONAL**

As marketers we know the value of creating personal connections. Engaging a social influencer, especially one with a big readership, is a lot like reaching out to a journalist.

Influencers are deeply passionate about their topics and probably know more about your market than you do. They will ask tough questions, and you have to be prepared to answer them.

The most effective approach is to learn about the interests of these influencers and engage with them on their turf and on their terms. A social media monitoring tool with historical archives will not only inform you about what topics these influencers posted or commented on but will also tell you how long they have been discussing the topics. This information will help you build relationships that make it possible to start putting your product in front of these influencers and asking them to promote it.

Of course, influence online is a two-way street, and the savviest marketers strengthen their relationships with influencers who talk up their products by giving them a mention in return. A good practice is to pick three to ten influencers a week and link to them on your blog or other social media platform. Feature influencers with a range of reaches—your smaller influencers will be thrilled to be mentioned with the big names.

To effectively build an influencer relationship, show that you know what’s important to your influencer, make sure your brand is relevant to him or her, and personally tailor your approach to his or her interests.
TAILOR THE TACTIC TO THE PLATFORM

Influencer behavior on Twitter doesn’t look the same as on Facebook, Google+, Quora, or any of a hundred blogs and social platforms. Twitter’s reach is at its best with short, pithy updates that can be re-tweeted.

Many marketers make it a rule to update their Twitter feeds no more than once an hour (except to carry on conversations), and no less than once every business day.

Facebook users update less often and influencers are much less likely to share something purely commercial for fear of losing readers. Facebook is a great place for games and shareable experiences, and especially socially conscious initiatives like donation programs. Dr. Pepper’s Tuition Giveaway is a great example that combines a contest with a shareable social good—everyone knows a family with a college student.

Other social media sites reward different tactics. For example, they share great blog posts (with their comments) on their Twitter feeds, and share great Facebook photos on Pinterest.

92% of influencers use Facebook, 88% Twitter, 76% LinkedIn, 74% YouTube and Google+, says the 2013 Digital Influence Report. Most post to more than one social platform.

KEEP UP WITH THE SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATION

Brands are finding interesting ways to become an integral part of the social media conversation and get influencers talking about them organically.

JetBlue, for instance, is an engaging presence in the Twitter conversation between frequent flyers and other travel companies. Its Twitter updates are youthful and cheeky, just like its brand, and JetBlue is not afraid to say something a little sassy.

77% of buyers say they are more likely to buy from a company whose CEO uses social media; 94% said C-suite social media participation enhances a brand image; and 82% of employees say they trust a company more when the CEO and leadership team communicate via social media. [Source: eMarketer].

Obviously that sort of personality isn’t right for every brand, but every brand can benefit from being part of the conversation.

Share industry news, your reaction to it, and what you think it means for the future. If a competitor does something impressive, give them a compliment. That’s what keeps people thinking and talking about you.
Social media presents an enormous potential for brand building. The vast majority of global executives know it’s no longer a question of whether to socialize their brands but how best to do it. They know that the quality of their organizations’ online presence is a key contributor to its overall reputation and success.

Tapping into the social web’s tremendous opportunities takes enterprise-wide commitment. Use these tips as a starting point for developing your own “world-class” practices and creating an authentically social brand.

Sysomos brings business intelligence to social media, providing instant and unlimited access to all social media conversations to quickly see what’s happening, why it’s happening, and who’s driving the conversations. Through the use of contextual text analytics and data mining technology, Sysomos collects data from blogs, Twitter, social networks, forums, video sites and major new sources.

Our products give you the ability to quickly discover the tone of the conversations and identify sentiment by gender, age and location.

**ADDITIONAL READING**

- X2013 Influencer Marketing Survey (Sensai Marketing)
- Enfluence: Social Influencer Marketing Report (Engauge)
- 2013 Digital Influence Report (Technorati Media)
- Influencer marketing case study: 4-year-olds + NASCAR (WOMMA Blog)
- Influence marketing: What’s next? (Businesses Grow, a blog by Mark Schaefer)
- Why influencer marketing isn’t about the “influencers” (AdAge)
- The Basics of Influence Marketing (eBook)
- Building an Influencer Marketing Program (The Lean Marketer)
- Social Influence Marketing is About to Change Your Business: Author of ‘Return On Influence’ (CNBC, guest post from Mark Schaefer)
- Will Influencer Marketing Build or Break Brand Trust? (Branding Magazine)