



Influencer Marketing for Brands

What YouTube and Instagram
Can Teach You About the Future
of Digital Advertising

Aron Levin

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*To the creators that are changing the way
that we look at the world.*

*And to anyone that has ever been told
that they are a little bit different.*

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About the Author



With a passion for technology, marketing, and sales, **Aron Levin** co-founded Relatable to empower millions of content creators from all over the world. Clients include large consumer brands like Adobe, Google, Volvo, Ralph Lauren, Chiquita, and Heineken, but also brave direct-to-consumer start-ups like Lifesum, bioClarity, and MVMT Watches.

Aron is also known for his background at King Digital Entertainment (maker of Candy Crush and 100+ other games) where he led Advertising Operations and his role as Director, Growth at music-streaming service Spotify. He spends his time in Los Angeles, California, and Stockholm, Sweden, with his wife and two kids. He is also the author of *The Content Marketing Calendar* and the Relatable “Inner Circle” Newsletter that is published weekly to 100,000+ marketing professionals.

Introduction

Is influencer marketing dead? Effective? Worth it? Ethical? Sustainable? Content marketing? Paid media? PR? An overhyped fad? Better than digital ads?

The *autocomplete* feature from the most popular search engine in the world, with its corporate mission “to organize the world’s information...,”¹ offers a fascinating glimpse into what questions the world is asking about any topic, at any given time. These search suggestions, or predictions (in the beginning of this paragraph), made me think about the intricacies of the influencer marketing industry.

So many questions and so many different answers. There’s *no question*, however, that we live in a world where everything is getting more complex, where it’s impossible to keep up with all the information that is available at your fingertips—and knowledge alone just doesn’t cut it anymore. What we really need is synthesized wisdom, not additional information overload.

If you work with marketing (either for a brand or an agency), you’re probably reading this book because you believe that influencer marketing can play an important, perhaps even critical, role in your business. There’s a great chance that you’re a marketing professional, founder, or social media creator that has seen the rise of influencer marketing and how this new digital media landscape has transformed entire industries.

Savvy marketing teams at direct-to-consumer brands like Revolve, Gymshark, and Vanity Planet have played this transition to their advantage and spun up hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue by riding the influencer marketing wave. Art exhibitions (or *museums*, if you can call them that) like Color Factory, Museum of Ice Cream, and Egg House sell hundreds of thousands of tickets in days,² and there’s a 6-month waitlist to have your picture taken with a backdrop of giant cherries and marshmallow clouds. Even traditional brands like Adobe, Volvo, and Samsung are rapidly catching on to reconsider the distribution of their media mix to win their next generation of consumers.

¹<https://about.google/>

²www.wired.com/story/selfie-factories-instagram-museum/

While these companies, and many others, have certainly transformed entire industries and changed the way we think about marketing, their impeccable timing should not be mistaken for luck. They've had to overcome the same obstacles and challenges as everybody else, asking the very same questions that lead you to where you are at this very moment.

With this in mind, my goal over the next eight chapters is to deconstruct what makes influencer marketing really work, take you behind the scenes, and show you the precise methodology, structure, and strategies that have proven to be effective across thousands of collaborations between creators and brands—from start-ups with a handful of employees to the largest brands in the world.

10,000 hours of practice

Personally, I've always valued advice from those that practice what they preach. In that regard, it's noteworthy that everything you read and all the tactics to go along are based on firsthand experience. My company, Relatable, has done over 10,000 influencer marketing collaborations (reaching well over half a billion people), across 40 different countries, in every vertical³ that you can imagine.

Some of these insights are things that other agencies and industry experts probably would want to keep away from you. Proprietary tools of the trade, so to speak. It's not standard operating procedure to document everything you know only to give it away. Especially not if you believe that part of *your own* business offering is built on having access to that knowledge. I've even been accused of giving *too much* away, insinuating that it could lead to less business, instead of more. Obviously, I believe the very opposite to be true. Adding to this, there are lots of talks these days about the importance of transparency. Unfortunately, it's not practiced as frequently as it's preached. Instead, it's more common for brands to suffer from overpromise and industry jargon from partners that aren't educating them enough.

In times like these, the right thing to do is to share what you know that can hopefully be of value to others, with the intent of helping as many people as possible. And that's why you'll get nothing but full, radical transparency from here moving forward. These days, you win by sharing what you know with the world—not by keeping secrets. It'll accelerate the growth of our industry and help both creators and brands.

³If you've ever thought that influencer marketing was limited to fashion or beauty brands, you'll soon discover how deep the rabbit hole truly goes.

A blessing in disguise

The first iteration of *Influencer Marketing for Brands* (since then rewritten from scratch) was self-published and for sale on my company's website without any middlemen. I had full control over distribution, and it gave me unrestricted access to speak with every single book buyer, since I had their contact details.

This wasn't a strategic decision per se, but rather the consequence of not having a publishing deal in the first place. Strategic or not, it gave me an unparalleled opportunity to run my own research and speak with the many marketing teams that claimed a copy of the book, to understand exactly what kind of questions they had and the problems they were looking to solve.

Over time, no less than 5,000 marketing professionals actually helped shape the content of *this book*. Without their help, there'd be no way to know that 40% of readers struggle to identify creators and influencers that are aligned with their brand, that there's a greater chance than not (55%) that your manager is giving you a hard time about evaluating how effective your influencer marketing campaigns are, that it is very likely (76%, but who's counting!) that you're operating your influencer marketing campaigns manually, without any tools. I know that influencer marketing fraud, brand safety, and a disconnect between marketing objectives and key results all cause great concerns within your organization. See, you're not alone!

In addition to this, the research expands way beyond my own world and the experience within the company⁴ that I co-founded in 2015 to insights and research that have been published by other agencies, influencer marketing platforms, industry thought-leaders, and firsthand data from the social media platforms themselves.

So, what exactly can you expect to learn?

Each chapter comes with a set of key questions and core concepts, followed by a set of field-tested frameworks, strategies, tactics, tools, and insights.

We'll begin our journey together in *Chapter 1: Origins* by traveling to the year 1730 where you'll meet the father of affordable luxury and origin of influencer marketing. A fascinating tale of the English potter and entrepreneur Josiah Wedgwood—a Steve Jobs of the 17th century.

In *Chapter 2: People Are Media Companies*, we're back to present time, where we'll take a look at the state of the advertising industry, decentralization of attention, and how people became media companies.

⁴www.relatable.me

Then, in *Chapter 3: Influence Is an Outcome, Not a Profession*, we'll dissect the real and often misunderstood implication of influence. We'll break down the three key levers of influence; you'll learn how to find the right influencers and creators for your brand and why it's absolutely critical to own your talent pool.

It's been said that creative without strategy is art, and creative with strategy is called advertising. Personally, I'd like to believe that great advertising is part art, part science, and in *Chapter 4: The Art and Science of Creativity* you'll learn how to use a set of proven set of creative strategies for Instagram and YouTube to incorporate to build powerful campaigns. You'll learn about the seven principles of word of mouth and the secret to writing a perfect brief. It's a very practical chapter, with an equally practical, and powerful, toolbox. With many of the fundamentals in place, we dial things up a notch in *Chapter 5: Creator-Centric Strategies*. The concepts in the chapter are not necessarily more advanced, but they do offer an entirely new perspective to influencer marketing, namely, one entirely focused on what creators are looking for when collaborating with brands, rather than the other way around.

At this point, we've come far, and the many components and tactics that are essential for building out a successful influencer marketing program are beginning to fall in place. Unfortunately, it's also quite common for both brands and creators to suffer from the many constraints that arise when it's time to ramp up their campaigns. *Chapter 6: 1:1 Relationships at Scale* reveals seven powerful tactics that will reduce 80% of your overhead and eliminate the constraints that are holding you back. In *Chapter 7: The Four-Step Influencer Marketing Framework*, you'll get a step-by-step framework to transforming influencer marketing into a scalable media channel that is fully aligned with the rest of your marketing. The framework is a very powerful, especially if you're looking to compare your influencer marketing programs with other traditional advertising channels.

Finally, in *Chapter 8: Measuring What Matters*, you'll learn how to fight fraud, amplify your influencer marketing efforts with paid media, and two powerful concepts that will change the way you think about investing in digital advertising forever: The Untracked Majority and Longevity on YouTube.

To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail

Finally, before we move forward, there's something I'd like to address. As a marketer, you have a toolbox. One of the tools at your disposal is influencer marketing, but it's risky to pick out the tool (the channel) before you know what you're building (your marketing objective). This is a common mistake among marketing professionals. They'll decide that their goal is to run an

influencer marketing program before they identify what their actual marketing objective is.

As much as I'll advocate that you turn influencer marketing into your most valuable marketing channel, there are, unfortunately, no one-size-fits-all solutions. It's easy to get carried away and reason by analogy or the proxy of others, but don't make the mistake of picking out the tool before you know what you're building.

As such, a large part of this book is structured to help you understand why, how, and when the various ways you can apply influencer marketing to your media mix are applicable and relevant *for you* and when they are not.

Perhaps you've read statements like *"There's an 11x ROI on influencer marketing," "You'll make \$7.00 for every \$1.00 you spend on influencers,"* or *"Influencer marketing delivers better results than any other media channel."*

Those statements and promises are absolutely true. Someone, or even a large number of brands, absolutely got those results. But are they relevant or applicable to you? They certainly *could be*, but we shouldn't immediately assume that they are until you've assessed the situation. In fact, no strategy with substantial upside is entirely risk-free. You'll likely fail a few times before you win big, even if you're best in class. That's just a part of the game!

TO THE MANY FREELANCERS, CREATORS, AND INFLUENCERS READING THIS BOOK

In October 2017, Upwork and Freelancers Union published the results of their "Freelancing in America"⁵ study (conducted by independent research firm Edelman Intelligence) and found that more than 50% of all millennial workers have engaged in the economy with some kind of freelance work in the last 6 months.

If you are a designer, videographer, photographer, writer, artist, model, or the like, selling work or services by the hour, or project, rather than working for a single employer on a regular salary, you're a freelancer. If you create content for brands, on YouTube or Instagram, you're also participating in the rapidly growing global freelance economy. It's predicted that freelancers are expected to be the majority of the US workforce by 2027, based on current growth rates trajectory. In the very near future, the job title freelancer will be more popular than any other job, combined. But not only that. The study from Upwork also observed that almost half of working millennials (47%) are already freelance, a participation rate higher than any other generation.

⁵www.upwork.com/i/freelancing-in-america/

The bottom line: Your seemingly strange gig as a multitasking freelancing social media creator will soon be more common than getting a “real job.” If you belong to this group, the contents of this book will help you get a better understanding of what happens behind the scenes when you collaborate with a brand—and what their main challenges and problems are.

You’ll understand their point of view better than ever before and become more client oriented. Brands will love working with you, not only because you create the right type of content, with the right message, to the right audience but because you understand the entire process better than they’ve ever witnessed with anybody else.

You’ll become an invaluable partner, all while staying ahead of 10 million other content creators that are competing for a slice of the billion-dollar influencer marketing pie.

Origins

The Father of Affordable Luxury and Origin of Influencer Marketing

Beautiful forms and compositions are not made by chance.

—John Ruskin

The computer, jet engine, and World Wide Web were all British inventions.

As I'm typing this on a plane, en route from the United Kingdom to the United States (also, at one point, a British colonial territory), I realize that we owe a thing or two to the Britons. The engine outside my window seat, the laptop I'm typing on, and the `www://` that likely led you to discover *this book* can all be attributed to the British. Influencer marketing also has its origins in England. And it all started almost 300 years ago, in Staffordshire, England.

From changemaker to tastemaker

Born 1730 in Staffordshire, England, Josiah Wedgwood was an English potter and entrepreneur, credited with the industrialization of pottery manufacturing. Wedgwood has been described as both a magnetic and engaging individual, but also as an obsessive perfectionist. A Steve Jobs of the 17th century. He would walk his manufacturing floor with a wooden stick and smash the

ware that didn't reach his rigorous quality threshold, to make sure that his workers were working to his level of perfection. By marrying art, design, and technology, Wedgwood would transition a previously rude and uncultivated craft into a global industry—and create a company that, 260 years later, employs more than 3,000 people.

But this isn't a book about ceramics manufacturing or the Industrial Revolution.¹ This is a book about modern marketing. So what could a 17th-century ceramics manufacturer possibly have to do with present-day digital marketing?

Turns out that he was, to say the least, a little bit ahead of his time.

And as such, I'd like to share the marketing strategies that Wedgwood deployed to create the world's first "affordable luxury brand" and how he wrote the very first page in the playbook of influencer marketing, more than 250 years before Instagram saw the light of day. Not unlike Steve Jobs, Josiah Wedgwood's brilliance was not only technical but equally impressive in terms of marketing—and feeling the sense of where British consumer culture was going at the time. In ways, Wedgwood is actually credited as the inventor of modern marketing. He was an entrepreneur and marketer, ahead of his time, with a deep understanding of consumerism, culture, and how to leverage the right platforms and influential individuals to both build a brand and sell his products. Josiah Wedgwood was early to spot (and ride) the wave of the 17th-century Consumer Revolution, in ways similar to how you and other readers are likely to ride the present-tense wave of social media and influencer marketing.

Throughout this book, we'll focus on the present (and future), but first, we'll travel 300 years back in time to the very roots of influencer marketing, to understand what got us to where we are today.

Contextual relevance and aspirational lifestyle

The Royal Family, Queen, and...Tea. These are things that the Brits hold in high regard. But in the 1700s, tea drinking from expensive ceramics was an act reserved for nobility, royalty, and the upper class. Josiah Wedgwood had a deep understanding of manufacturing and industrialization—but if there was something he understood better than anything else, it would be consumer marketing. His expensive ceramic goods and teacups were in much demand from the nobility, and Queen Charlotte was so impressed by his quality threshold and perfectionism that she commissioned Wedgwood to create a range of cream-colored tableware.

¹ Pick up a copy of *Wedgwood: The First Tycoon* by Brian Dolan if you want to go down a deep rabbit hole of 17th-century pottery manufacturing.

In *Wedgwood: The First Tycoon*, historian Brian Dolan explains:

Josiah had been told that The Queen was much impressed with the service he had worked on so frantically. The pieces were finished in his unique cream color, with green and gold decorations as requested, but best of all, the engine-turned cups fitted the saucers and the lid fitted the pot. As promised, it was craftsmanship fit for a queen, and Charlotte was so satisfied with her new service that she bestowed a special privilege on Josiah.

We can't tell for sure, but the *special privilege* was very likely a suggestion by Mr. Josiah Wedgwood himself. To honor Her Majesty, Josiah offered to rename his creamware "Queen's Ware," linking its uniqueness and brilliance to the image of the Queen—in return for using her assent to gain credibility in the marketplace for fashionable goods. With the endorsement of Her Majesty, Queen Charlotte, the most influential individual during their time, Josiah had set a plan in motion that would lay the foundation of the world's very first affordable luxury brand. In a stroke of marketing genius, Josiah immediately began advertising in local newspapers announcing that "Mr. Josiah Wedgwood has had the honor of being appointed Potter to Her Majesty," promoting his new product line of Queen's Ware.

Chaos ensues in London

Shortly thereafter, Josiah opened an exclusive showroom in London where his work could be seen on display—to build additional hype by capitalizing on consumers' newfound aspiration to live like royalty.

Brian Dolan writes:

The showroom caused a sensation. Carriages created a roadblock on Greek Street, in Soho, and spectators crowded around to catch a glimpse of the exhibition through the storefront windows as much as to gaze at Wedgwood's aristocratic patrons, who included Queen Charlotte, the wife of King George III.

Picture that.

It's 1774, and Wedgwood engineered the biggest product launch of his time, through the use of newspaper advertising, fame, and word of mouth. Let's fast-forward to November 5, 2015, 240 years later.

Olivier Rousteing, Creative Director of the French fashion house Balmain, sets out to collaborate with H&M to launch their *Balmain x H&M Collection*. He teams up with Rihanna, Kylie Jenner, and Gigi Hadid to name a few, to build anticipation and hype on social media to their millions of followers. These are the Queen Charlottes of our time.

His goal? To bring exclusivity to the masses.

Roadblocks are established to keep crowds in order, and thousands of consumers are lined up for the anticipated launch. When H&M finally opens up the doors to their flagship store on Regent Street in London, just a short 10-minute walk from the Wedgwood showroom on Greek Street that opened up 240 years earlier, full chaos ensues as 3,000 desperate and excited fashion fans fight to get through the doors of the flagship store.

It would seem like history does, indeed, repeat itself.

I had the privilege of speaking with the Global Chief Marketing Officer of H&M around that time, and she couldn't believe what they had just witnessed. They'd never seen anything like it. The campaign and product launch and the power of influencer marketing were, to use her own words, "almost too effective." Little did she know that an event with striking resemblance took place just a few blocks west of their London flagship store, some 240 years earlier.

The Consumer Revolution

The showroom was just the starting point.

Josiah was early to notice how the taste and preference among aristocracy had begun to trickle down through the rest of society (what would later be referred to as the Consumer Revolution) and that it was only a matter of time before the masses would eventually aspire to own the line of products that initially were reserved for the upper class.

Tea was mainly consumed by royalty and upper classes, but the middle class had begun to embrace new ideas about luxury consumption driven by aspiration and not a pure necessity. As such, the tea industry was growing exponentially in England, and Josiah understood better than anyone else that no other individual than the Queen would have more influence in the market. The masses wanted to live like aristocrats, and Wedgwood quickly gained the upper hand by associating his Queen's Ware with luxury while mass-producing affordable products to the masses. He would proceed to expand his marketing efforts and pioneer direct mail, money-back guarantees, free delivery, buy one get one free, and illustrated catalogs. When he passed away in 1795, he was one of the wealthiest people in England.

Steve Jobs married art, design, and technology to revolutionize the way we think about both consumer electronics and brand marketing. Olivier Rousteing of Balmain brought luxury to the masses with his 1.6 million followers and a merry band of social media celebrities. And savvy modern social media-driven brands understand that influencer marketing can persuade consumers to shop out of aspiration and not just necessity.

But Josiah Wedgwood accomplished all of those things, ahead of his time, a good 250 years before Kevin Systrom and Mike Kriger set out to launch their photo-app, Instagram. To say that Josiah left an important legacy and played an important role in history would be somewhat of an understatement.

His daughter, Susannah Wedgwood, later gave birth to none other than Charles Darwin. Who would have guessed that the origin of influencer marketing is quite *literally* related to the author of *The Origin of Species*?