

3 Tips to Retool Your Influencer Marketing During COVID-19

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With lockdowns driving up social media engagement, and influencers still creating content from home, influencer marketing remains a resilient strategy. However, it's not business as usual. These tips can guide you through the reformulated world of influencer marketing during the pandemic.

Social media use among U.S. adults has risen significantly during COVID-19, with Kantar estimating that, in the later stages of the pandemic, social media engagement has increased by 61 percent over normal usage rates. With more time being spent on social, combined with the challenges of creative production, and a growing disdain for brands playing the role of messenger, influencer marketing has catapulted up the marketing food chain. However, we all know it is not just marketing as usual right now. So, what steps can marketers take to augment their influencer efforts and connect with a largely distressed and skeptical audience?

1) Recognize the variance

Part of the beauty of influencer marketing is that, with the right creators and amplification strategy, a brand's message can reach the masses through trusted couriers. That said, it is not exactly the ideal time for mass marketing and uniform communications. This pandemic is not impacting us all equally and our mindsets are far from homogenous. That's why our marketing campaigns shouldn't be either.

A perfect example is right around the corner. This year's "back to school" campaigns will be vastly different, depending

largely on the geographic impact of the virus and local rules. Does it really make sense to launch a blanket influencer campaign when our experiences will differ so greatly? Instead of blindly pushing forward in these situations, consider some alternatives that will help your influencer campaign truly resonate. For instance, rather than defaulting to your usual pool of creators, check out hyper-local influencers with concentrated followings to get your message out to a targeted audience in a more relatable way. Then, pull out the megaphone and amplify this localized content through social advertising in the appropriate geographies.

2) Move it on up

Every business needs to sell. However, what does it say about your brand if, during a pandemic, all of your influencer marketing is designed to fill up shopping carts? Amid this crisis, there is an opportunity for brands to move at least a portion of their influencer programs up-funnel – to instead use influencer marketing to strengthen connections, build trust and share its values. It seems like a simple move, but evoking emotion and building good will is far from easy.

Where I see clients fall down as they shift to upper-funnel objectives is misunderstanding their audience. Consumer mindsets, fears and motivations are changing weekly, and marketers need to guide influencers appropriately. Clients I've seen succeed with upper-funnel influencer programs are scouring their organization for new primary research on their consumers or have taken steps to create their own ongoing insight mechanism. Everything from a couple of poll questions in an email newsletter to quick consumer pulse surveys should inform more fluid programs that truly resonate. Just as important, they implement new measurement solutions to understand how these efforts are impacting consumer perceptions and their brand, and measure frequently to ensure they are on the right path.

3) Stay rooted in reality

We hear repeatedly about the importance of authenticity, but what does this really mean in terms of influencer marketing? As influencer marketing has matured, there's been a shift from celebrities to everyday people – messengers that individuals actually relate to. This is a time where many of us live in sweatpants, post up in our living rooms and have a less-than-rigid shower schedule. In the light of current events, do you really want your yogurt brand influencer with a face full of makeup and a carefully curated outfit dining on a parfait in her immaculate kitchen?

If they fall into the majority of brands focused on everyday items, marketers should be encouraging their influencers to keep it real. The isolation of the pandemic heightens our need to connect, and embracing the shared experiences of the moment amplifies the impact of influencer marketing. Let influencers know that perfection is actually the antithesis of what you are looking for. In doing so, brands can engender kinship that stems from the realities of everyday living in these abnormal times.



About the Author: Adam Rossow is a co-founder of Group RFZ, an influencer and content measurement firm based in Denver. He helps brand and agencies get past vanity metrics and understand exactly how their marketing programs are impacting the way consumers think, feel and act.

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