
The Ultimate Guide to
**Content
Marketing
& Influencer
Strategy**

How to Build Relationships
& Create Content That Drive
Business Impact



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Foreword

In today's age of ubiquitous connectivity, marketers are challenged to stand out amongst the sheer volume of information confronting their target audience.

At the same time, information overload drives consumers to filter their choices to those few who are most trusted. Becoming “the best answer” for your domain of expertise wields incredible influence on the search and social web.

As a vehicle for influence, content is one of the most powerful tools in a marketer's mix to attract, engage and inspire action. Content is the currency for building relationships that can boost credibility, influence and commerce.

Investing in a content and influencer marketing strategy can be one of the most impactful actions a business can make. Incorporating influencers that can inspire relevant action with your content marketing efforts facilitates reaching new audiences with brand messages that are credible and trusted.

The Ultimate Guide to Content Marketing & Influencer Strategy from Traackr will provide you with the first steps in outlining your path to connecting with influencers and developing your own brand influence in a meaningful way.

Lee Odden

CEO, TopRank Online Marketing, Author of Optimize

Content & Influence

“An influencer is your lighthouse in a messy ocean of noise.”

 *Share this on Twitter*

Influencer marketing and content marketing can't exist without each other. Without influence, content you produce stays stealth and won't have impact. Without content, you don't have a way to participate and you won't have a voice to, in turn, be influential.

Whether you're orchestrating your influencer marketing and content marketing strategies consciously or implicitly, if you're doing either, you're doing both.

This guide shows you how these two digital marketing practices fit together. We'll cover how to harness your influencer strategy to inform your content marketing so you'll know which topics and conversations have the greatest impact on your objectives.

“Content is the currency of influence.”

 *Share this on Twitter*

You'll learn how to align your influencer and content strategies so your digital marketing initiatives attract and convert customers. Specifically, we'll cover how to:

- **Actively Listen to Influencers for Content Insights**
- **Collaboratively Produce Content with Influencers**
- **Get Started & Maintain Momentum**

Content Shows No Signs of Slowing

In the last 10 years, B2B and B2C organizations alike have quickly adopted content-driven strategies to attract, nurture, enable, inspire, educate and support their customers. Even as the platforms and tactics change, content as a strategy to reach audiences remains powerful and continues to grow.

The [Content Marketing Institute](#), in their annual studies, has shown that consumer- and business-facing marketers are spending more on content year after year.* B2B organizations currently spend on average 33% of their marketing budgets on content and nearly half plan to increase that number.*

The 2012 study by [Social Media Examiner](#) indicates that content is on the mind of the vast majority of marketers. Some 58% are already blogging and 62% of marketers surveyed want to know more about the practice. A whopping 69% want to do more via YouTube and video marketing.

Yet despite recognizing content is the way to be a digitally mature marketing organization, 88% of marketers struggle with building and engaging an audience and want to learn more.

Sources

2013 B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends
B2C Marketers Use, Invest Heavily in Content Marketing
2013 Social Media Marketing Industry Report

Actively Listen to Gain Insights

“Influencers give you super sonic hearing so you can find wisdom in the crowd.”

 *Share this on Twitter*

You can learn a lot by simply listening to your audience and influencers. To get the most juicy bits of insight though, you need to listen with a purpose because watching an endless stream of content roll down your screen will get you nowhere.

In this section, we'll cover how you can structure your listening activities to achieve five common content marketing objectives. You'll see how influencers can help you listen to:

- Get to Know Your Audience
- Conduct Content & Opportunity Audits
- Plan & Prepare Content
- Keep up with Top Stories
- Seize Real-time Opportunities

Know Your Target Audience

Your influencers can help you shape your content strategy by showing you what is most interesting and engaging to your target audience. Influencers also help you figure out where there are holes in a given conversation so you can fill them with relevant content.

By filtering content on the web by your influencers, you can better grasp trends, spot opportunities and determine what your audience wants. Listening through influencers prevents you from getting overwhelmed with too much information.

When you actively listen to your influencers, you'll be able to:

- Figure out where conversations are headed
- See what content works and what doesn't
- Figure out where the gaps are
- Formulate questions you can answer

Let's take a look at how listening to influencers can provide insights for every step of the editorial planning process from research to content preparation to real-time engagement.

Content and Opportunity Audit

An audit is typically something you do at the beginning of a project or at a key point during the lifecycle of your initiatives to evaluate trends. Depending on your goals and organization, you can spend several days to several months getting a feel for the conversations happening online, taking note of trends, noticing gaps where you can bring your brand's unique expertise to the table and gathering ideas for how to work with individual influencers based on the content they are already producing.

In this phase, you'll want to find out:

- General sentiment towards your topics
- What your competition is doing
- What motivates your influencers
- How your brand is perceived or not perceived
- How your brand can insert itself into the conversation

“Listening helps me understand influencers’ passions, network and even tone of voice or reactions to certain topics. This context helps inform key content decisions so that I can pursue a relationship with confidence.”

Sahana Jayaraman

Social Business Strategist, FleishmanHillard

Content Planning and Preparation

After your audit, you'll create a general content plan that includes the specific topics you want to cover and target influencers to engage. In this phase, you'll want to lay out the foundation for your editorial calendar.

If your project is a shorter-term campaign, you may want to approach specific influencers at this point with ideas for how you can work together on content.

The most successful content strategists will tell you a calendar is essential for executing a content plan. It's even more important when you involve influencers because now you're dealing with at least two people's schedules.

In our fast-paced digital world, it's a good rule of thumb to plan at least one month out so you can publish consistently. More sophisticated organizations may plan three months out, but the key is to have a solid plan for your content.

Keep in mind your calendar will probably not need to be set in stone and should be flexible enough to let you seize opportunities as they arise. With that said, you'll want some strategy in place (based on your customer and influencer research) so you have a barometer with which to judge opportunities.

Keeping Up With Top Stories

While your audit and content planning phases happen infrequently, you'll want to stay on top of content coming from your influencers on regular basis. Consider your influencers to be your personal content curators.

Influencers:

- point you to the most important articles
- are always on top of what's hot and;
- are clued in to what's coming next.

A good way to not just stay current, but get a feel for what's next is to look at who influences your influencers — these individuals may not be directly relevant to you and your content, but they help shape the opinions of the people who drive actions for you.

In your weekly reviews, your influencers are once again your filters. They help you see opportunities without getting lost or distracted. Remember, when it comes to staying ahead in the content game, you don't need to listen to everyone.

Focus on the people with the most relevant and engaged audiences so you're always in the know and coming to the table with fresh content that resonates.

Listening in Real-Time

For all the planning you do, real-time listening is the only way to find those perfect serendipitous moments to engage. Again, think of your influencers as your filters. Especially in the insanity of a real-time flow of tweets, blogs, videos and more, you can ground yourself by following your influencers.

When you listen in real-time, you'll uncover opportunities to insert your messages and your content into conversations that are actively shaping the opinions of your buyers and customers. Often you will find opportunities to answer questions and share content you've created over time. Increasingly people are crowd-sourcing content for their own publications by inviting the audience to participate via social channels -- you'll want to be there when these opportunities arise.

Real-time listening is also a great source of inspiration for content ideas. As you listen, you'll see different articles, interviews, infographics and more. By monitoring how content is received and what it inspires within a given community, you'll get ideas for what you can bring to the table.

“The foundation for social media success is employing effective techniques and technologies to convert conversations into lessons learned for a business.”

Danny Brown, Coauthor, Influence Marketing & Chief Technologist, ArCompany

The Many Faces of Influence

There's been a lot of misunderstanding about influence and who constitutes an influencer. Influence is certainly not popularity, nor is it a simple podium. While an influencer can be compensated for their work, influence can not be bought.

An influential person is someone who is recognized as a thought leader or expert on a topic. People listen to them when it comes to that topic. An influencer can change someone's behavior or inspire them to consider to new ideas.

Remember influencers come in many varieties and are motivated by different things. While no one fits in a box, it helps to understand influencer personas so you can get on their radar.



Explore more Faces of Influence with our handy deck of cards →

Collaborate to Produce Content

There are limitless ways to produce and share content with the help of your influencers. The goal here is to show you the range of possibilities and lay out some best practices for different approaches.

Each section also presents ideas to spur your own creative content. Real examples will show you the impact each type of content can have on a given business goal from awareness to lead generation to sales and advocacy.

Beginning with the least collaborative and moving towards the most collaborative content ideas, we'll cover how to:

- Get Inspired by Influencers' Content
- Curate Expert Content & Add Your Own Value Layer
- Involve Influencers in Your Content
- Support Your Influencers' Content Creation
- Co-Create Content

Get Inspired by Influencers' Content

By studying what your influencers are writing about you can get a number of ideas for your own content production. You can see what types of content and which subjects drive the most engagement on social channels.

Pay attention to the types of information influencers are sharing. Is it anchored on personal experiences or analysis of other's situations. Can your brand and publishing platforms help promote their work? Are there subject matter experts on your team who could engage with this person? Do you agree or disagree with them? How can you further the conversation they started?

Be voracious in consuming content from your influencers because it will give you so many more ideas. If ever you find yourself not knowing what to write about, glance through what they've written, ask them some questions in their comments. As you get yourself out there, the ideas will flow.



Write a review of your influencer's book or ebook.

Answer questions in the comments of your influencers' blogs.

Build off an idea your influencer started and link to their content.

Turn an influencers' tweet into a blog post.

B2B and B2C marketers should include influencers in their marketing efforts. Influencers hold valuable audiences that help build awareness of products, services and initiatives. But the key to success is to actually create something valuable. An influencer and his or her audiences most likely don't want to hear about minor improvements to a product or service. They want something that has utility, either educational, aspirational or inspirational.

Your content has to be worthy of being produced. There's a lot of noise and clutter as content and influencer marketing continue to rise as practices amongst marketing, brand and PR professionals. In order to define content relevance, I look at topics of conversation and consumer trends across any industry that may touch my clients' business and build from there. **We seek to lead, not follow the social trends.**

Macala Wright, Head Of Digital Innovation and Strategy, Group Partners



Curate Expert Content & Add Your Own Value Layer

It's difficult to curate good content from the general web because there is just so much of it out there. Your influencers on the other hand are by definition a smaller subset and easier to digest and analyze.

Curation is far more than pulling together a list of interesting posts from the week. By carefully selecting elements of your influencers' content and providing additional context, resources or insight on the topic, you are adding value to a larger discussion.

An added benefit of content curation is that you're publicly giving credit to your influencers and helping them perennialize their content, which adds value for your influencers. Further you are helping develop ideas and creating enjoyable experiences by making it easier for your audience to find the best content on your topics of interest.



Embed their tweets in your posts.

Record a weekly podcast roundup of industry happenings with your own analysis on top.

Showcase the best of an influencer's content.

Combine stats and figures from across your influencers' reports into one infographic.

Tell a story by pulling together the different ways your influencers talk about the same subject.

Involve Influencers in Your Content Creation

Finding creative ways to welcome your influencers into your content is a fantastic way to build a relationship with the people who matter most to your business. There are many ways to get their participation without asking for too much.

By involving your influencers in the content you produce, you are doing two important things: enriching the expertise you bring to the table and expanding your potential reach to a relevant audience of potential customers.

Remember to evaluate your influencers' audience closely so you can partner with influencers who speak to the right type of person you want at the right time. For example, if your goal is to get your wine on more dinner tables, be sure your influencers are reaching people who are browsing for recipes or planning dinner parties.



Poll a group of influencers and share the results.

Interview your influencers to give them a place to shine.

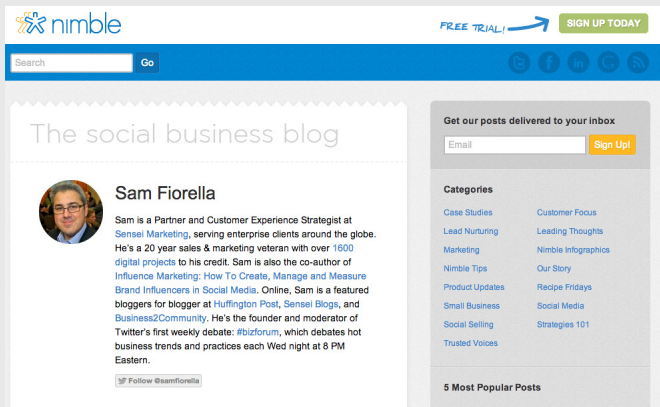
Share your influencers' creations on your own platforms.

Crowdsource ideas / insights for your content and give credit to participants in your final product.

Allow your influencers to vote on your content and help decide what gets prime time attention.

Diversify Your Voice & Expand Your Reach

Nimble, the smart relationship manager, established itself this year as a go-to source for social business tips and advice. By working with collaborators from across sectors, Nimble has built a blog that publishes a wide spectrum of voices on a daily basis.



“Our mission is to provide a platform that informs our audience and gives our influencers a place to shine. I consider all the contributors to be “voices in the choir.” We’ve hands-down grown traffic, awareness, and trust much faster than we could have alone.”

Alyson Stone
Director of Content Management, Nimble

Support Your Influencers’ Content

Remember content is the currency of influence. To become influential in the digital space, most people need to produce compelling content on a regular basis. Just like you, they are looking for ideas, inspiration and interesting stories to tell.

Providing resources or experiences that allow your influencers to create new and unique content is the fastest way to win their hearts. Not only are you supporting content creation that will ultimately support your business goals, you are nurturing relationships that will last much longer than a short-lived campaign.

One of the easiest ways to support your influencers’ content creation is to leverage your own expertise to do interesting, content-worthy things. For software companies, your data can inspire content. For consumer products, you can create notable experiences.



Use your data or expertise to help them tell a story.

Provide infographics for them to illustrate their own pieces.

Give your influencers tools to create unique images or other content.

Do industry surveys and provide the results in advance to your influencers.

Provide exclusive or tough-to-get content or experiences so they have something to write about.

Co-Create Content

Creating a piece of content with an influencer is the most collaborative and perhaps most challenging way to leverage influencer relations in your content strategy. To make this work, you'll need to find individuals who are highly relevant and who will also benefit from this work.

Given the effort required you will likely need to compensate the influencer for the time and expertise they bring to the table. In these cases, it's even more important than ever to find someone who is authentically passionate about your brand's story.

These types of content tend to be larger pieces involving more coordination and planning than the previous examples. While more challenging, they are incredibly engaging and have the potential to generate an enormous response.



Coauthor a white paper.

Invite them to be involved in product development.

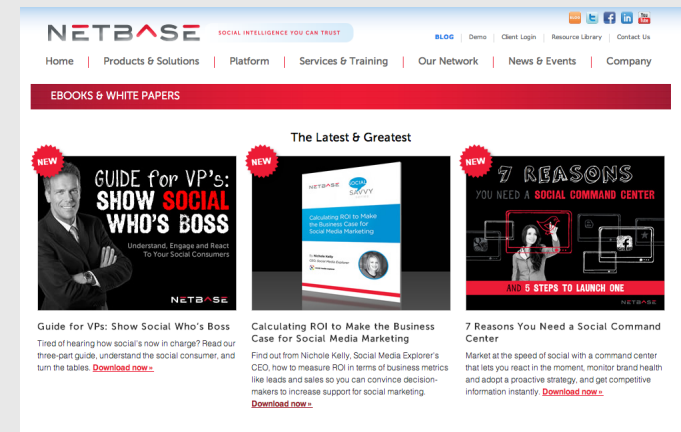
Co-host webinars & presentations.

Co-produce a web TV show.

Send them into space and document it :)

Invite Experts To Tell Your Story

NetBase, social intelligence provider to global brands and agencies, partners with influencers to create educational resources on timely and relevant topics to marketing executives. The NetBase library contains a number of ebooks, authored by or in conjunction with leading social media influencers.



Bottom-Line Benefit: NetBase boosts its credibility, expands its reach to potential customers by sharing sophisticated resources straight from the experts.

Pre-Requisites: Your product must be great. Authentic influencers will only associate their name with products they believe in.

Results: Highly qualified leads who opt in to your nurture streams because you've earned their trust by providing meaningful content and partnering with a known authority.

Get Started & Maintain Momentum

As with any initiative, the first step is often the most difficult, but once you get the ball rolling, things fall into place. Whether it's writing that holds you back or reaching out to influencers, here are eleven principles to help you get started and maintain momentum as you align your influencer strategy and content marketing.



Focus Is Essential

You simply can not do everything or be everywhere. Define what matters most to you and direct all of your attention to that topic.



Keep an Inspiration File

Ideas tend to show up on their own time so create a document where you can record ideas as they come to you.



Just Write It

There are countless resources for writer's block, but the bottom line is you just need to write it. Word by word.



Planning is Half the Battle

Set some realistic goals and create a plan to accomplish them. The plan will help you stay focused.



People Are Complicated

Not everyone will respond favorably to you. That's ok. Stay focused on the end goal, roll with the punches.



Know Their Motivations

The more you know about someone before you reach out, the better your chances of getting on their radar.



Make Participation Easy

Whatever you ask of someone, make it as easy for them as possible. Provide a draft, be clear and show respect for their time.



Time Box Your Writing Time

Limit how long you have to write, but do nothing but write during that time. You'll get more done than you thought possible.



Measure Only What Matters

When you are deciding what to measure, start with the end goal and seek out indicators that help you account for it.



Take Small Steps

You don't need an influencer program in place to start. Reach out to one person or write one post based on an influencer's content.



Iterate & Build

One post, comment or email will bloom into a relationship over time. Recognize you are building, not buzzing.

The Ultimate Guide to Content Marketing & Influencer Strategy was written by:



Evy Wilkins
VP Marketing, Traackr
@mainwilk

With the participation and contribution of:



Pierre-Loic Assayag
CEO, Traackr
@pierreloic



Danny Brown
Coauthor, Influence Marketing & Chief Technologist, ArCompany
@DannyBrown



Sahana Jayaraman
Social Business Strategist, FleishmanHillard
@hellosahana



Lee Odden
CEO, TopRank Online Marketing, Author, Optimize
@leeodden



Eva Papadimitriou
CXO, Traackr
@epapadim



Lisa Joy Rosner
CMO, NetBase
@lisajoyrosner



Alyson Stone
Director of Content Management, Nimble
@alyson2



Macala Wright
Head Of Digital Innovation and Strategy, Group Partners
@macala

About Traackr

Traackr is an influencer marketing platform that helps you get results with social media marketing by finding the right influencers and opportunities. Hundreds of leading companies and forward-thinking agencies have used Traackr to create and manage 1000s of influencer marketing projects.

You can explore some of the most common influencer marketing use cases including content marketing, lead generation and awareness-raising at www.traackr.com.