

The Small Business influencer opportunity

Unless you've managed to steer completely clear of Instagram, you'll be well aware of the rise of influencer marketing over the last five years.

Our social feeds are now flooded with Love-Islanders, fitness fanatics, white toothed hunks and the Insta-story-philes trying to flog us things we neither want or need.

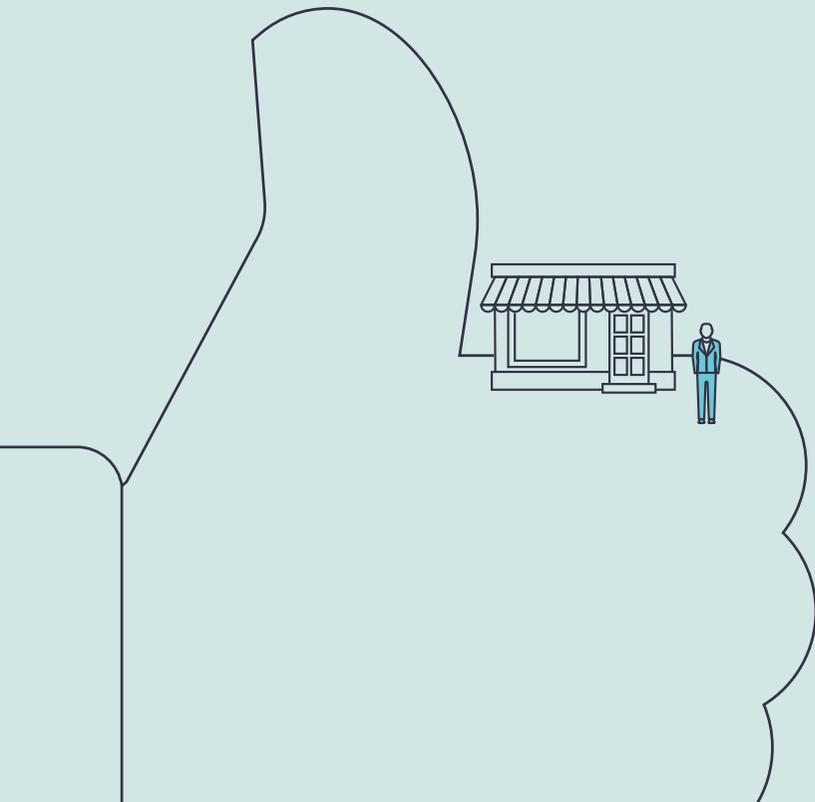
There is no doubt to the level of which these influencers have become a part of the advertising mix in B2C – 92% of CMOs say they find influencer marketing effective, 63% are set to increase their spending this year and over 50% say they are putting at least a fifth of their budgets into influencer campaigns.¹

But when it comes to B2B, marketing teams are lagging behind. Despite 77% of B2B-focused CMOs claiming influencer marketing is high on their strategic radar, only 15% of B2B influencer programmes are in a mature state.²

So why are we not keeping up? After all, business people are people too, so why shouldn't they find out about, and buy business products and services from online influencers in the same way they buy their beauty products?

I believe the biggest issue holding marketing teams in B2B organisations back is they just can't see where influencer marketing fits in. It all feels so out of sync with what they are selling – after all, no one's going to buy an HR system from Made in Chelsea's Jamie Laing, are they?

But I do think there is one place an influencer campaign fits in just perfectly – marketing to small businesses.



¹ *The State of Influencer Marketing 2019: Benchmark Report*

² *The Rise of Influencer Marketing in B2B Technology*

Why?

Well, when it comes to selling to small business, marketers have quite the problem on their hands – 90% of marketers say they struggle to connect with a small business audience.³

This could come down to the fact that marketers have a trust issue – 58% of business buyers say they don't trust vendor claims, 69% say they don't trust ads and 50% say the content they get from businesses is next to useless.⁴

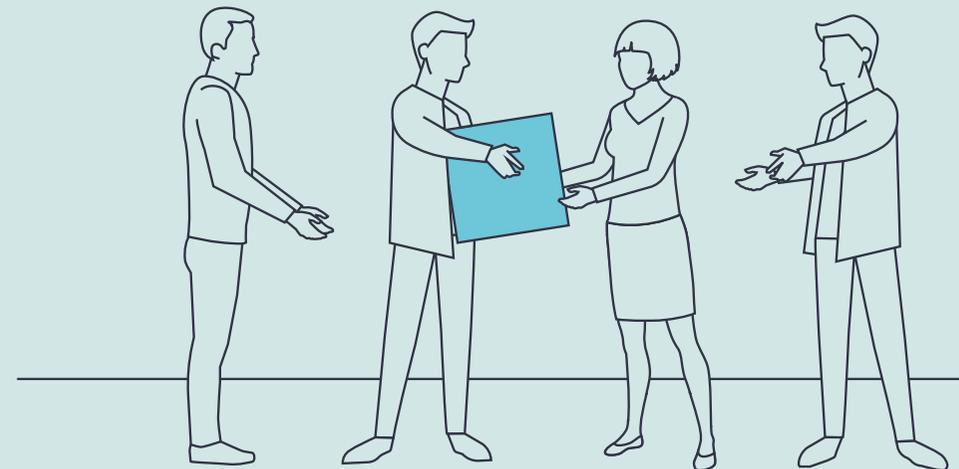
On the other hand, small business do like recommendations from their peers. We know that customer reviews have the biggest influence on 64% of buyers, and 49% of small businesses say recommendations from other small businesses is their top research resource when looking for new products and services⁵ – a sentiment that was echoed from small businesses we met on our journey around the UK to understand the hearts and minds of small business owners.

The simple fact is Small Business owners want to learn from, be inspired by and buy from other small businesses who are within their circle.

And this is where your influencer strategy comes into play. If you really want to connect with and sell to small businesses, you should be partnering with other influential small businesses in their industry or community to reach them – using their voice to get your message to a wider audience.

But if you want it to be a success, you will need to make sure you do these four simple things.

- ① Find the right small business influencers
- ② Make sure to build good relationships
- ③ Take time to educate them
- ④ Measure and learn



1

Find the right small business influencers

Finding the right influencers isn't just about doing a trawl for small businesses with the most followers on social media. Far from it. You should be looking to find influencers who are genuinely 'into' what you do – remember authenticity is the key to this game.

There are a number of different types of influencers you could look to engage – everyone from customer advocates to early adopters to higher profile commentators and content producers (like Deborah Meadon or Bruce Daisley).

So where do you find them?

A good place to start is in your current customer base – take time to work out who's using your services and who feels like a real advocate, and speak to your sales team and others within your business, as they may well know better than you who your fanboys are and who is best to approach.

Secondly, make sure to look around and speak to other small businesses about who in their community or industry has real clout and they would genuinely listen to – some may be very niche, some may be genuine celebrities, but it's worth getting a mix to test what works and what doesn't.

Finally, there are a number of tools you can use to find people with influence over small business owners, including the likes of BuzzSumo and Mention, which will help you uncover who could be a good brand advocate.

(Oh, and do some background checks to make sure they haven't done something that goes against your brand, because that could come back to bite you later.)

2

Make sure to build good relationships

Remember, you're not just getting these guys on board as part of a short term campaign to sell one product – using influencers is a long term game. So, you want to build a relationship where you really trust and learn from each other.

Importantly, don't be too controlling – you need to give your influencers the freedom to talk about you in a way that feels authentic to them. Sure, you might find this risky but it's the only way it'll work.

Also, to keep the relationship genuine you don't need to pay but you should offer some sort of value exchange – get them involved in co-creation and use them as a feedback filter from the wider small business community to help evolve your offering, offer them early access to new technology and services or even make them a big part of your hospitality offer (and make it of value to them).

3

Take time to educate them

Your small business influencers should be up to speed with your brand and product set if you want them to promote you in an authentic way.

Start by creating an easy to navigate dossier outlining what you want them to talk about and show the benefits for the small businesses they are talking to.

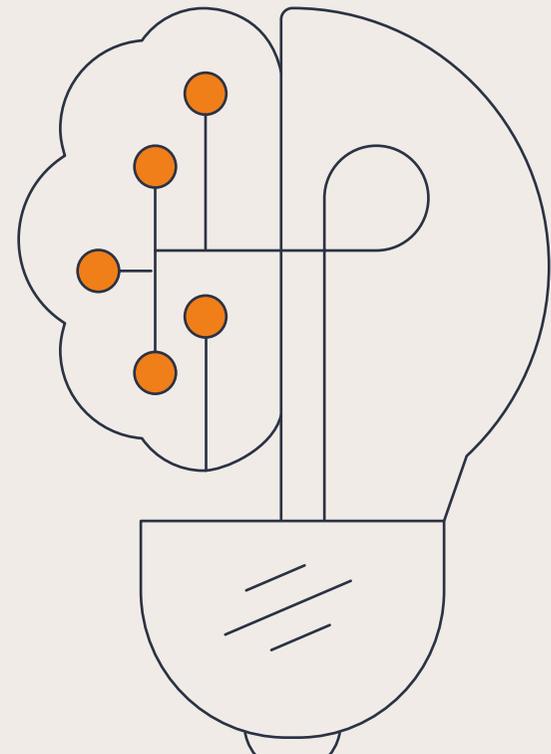
Then take it a step further – run influencer days in your office where they can meet your sales team and ask the questions other small businesses might be asking to give them a chance to learn what you're all about.

Most importantly, give them as much access to you as possible – make sure they are the first people to test new products, experience your services and have insight into what's coming around the corner so they can tell their audience about it.

4

Measure and learn

Just like any other marketing channel, you need to measure and adapt your small business influencer strategy as you go – be sure to see which influencers are getting the biggest share of voice. But, be clear of one thing – these are not an extended sales team so their success should not be measured on how much of your stuff they flog directly. Influencers in this space should be used as educators and advocates, helping build your brand and give you more klout.



It's high time B2B marketers upped their game when it comes to influencer marketing and using it in the mix of your next small business campaign is too good an opportunity to miss.

If you would like to speak to us about setting your B2B influencer strategy, get in touch and we can have a delicious coffee to talk about it.

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