

The evolution of influencer marketing

These days the term influencers is synonymous with social media personalities, but the term isn't new. Before social media became mainstream, influencers have always played a significant role in shaping opinions and behaviours.

Up until the rise of the internet and digital platforms, the impact of an influencer was primarily confined to traditional platforms like television, print media, radio, and public speaking events. Though the mediums were different, the core idea was the same: influencers had the trust and attention of their audience, and brands or companies leveraged that trust to promote products, ideas, or trends to a wider public.

The rise of the B2B social influencer

In the last 20 years, online influencers have become a driving force in marketing and communications across industries. While traditionally associated with B2C (business-to-consumer) marketing, online influencers now inspire a range of B2B (business-to-business) audiences, including the investment community.

B2B online influencers often differ from their B2C counterparts in several ways. B2B influencers tend to be subject matters experts who are highly respected in their fields or business executives and c-level leaders who shape business strategies and decisions. LinkedIn, X (previously Twitter), YouTube, and professional blogs are preferred platforms for B2B, rather than visual-heavy channels like Instagram or TikTok.

Another significant difference is that social media follower counts tend to be lower in the B2B world, often falling within the 'nano' or 'micro' influencer range.

[Sprout Social](#) broadly categorises influencers into four main types based on their social media follower count:

- **Nano-influencers:** 1K–10K followers
- **Micro-influencers:** 10K–100K followers
- **Macro-influencers:** 100K–1M followers
- **Mega or celebrity influencers:** 1M+ followers

User fatigue and the preference for authentic content

Over the past few years there has been a significant shift across the B2C and B2B world in the types of content that resonates with audiences. Gone are the days when polished, highly curated social media content from a business or mega influencer reigned supreme. As people grow weary of the sheer amount of content and 'noise' on massive social media platforms, smaller, more intimate communities are gaining traction. These spaces feel more focused and connected, which is a major draw for users seeking deeper engagement.



With social media users seeking authenticity over perfection, nano and micro-influencers, with their smaller but highly engaged audiences, are also stepping in to fill this gap. Their content feels personal, human, and relatable - qualities that resonate with audiences tired of overly commercial or AI-generated posts.

In the B2B world, this trend has paved the way for subject matter experts or c-level leaders with a smaller follower base to become highly influential voices on social media.

Standout influencers

Institutional influencers such as BlackRock's Larry Fink command a huge social media following but c-level leaders with smaller follower bases are achieving significant reach levels on platforms such as LinkedIn. Many of these nano or micro-influencers emerge unintentionally. They don't post content or engage on social media with the aim of becoming influencers. Instead, they often remain unaware of the significant impact and influence they wield online.

More widely platforms like Reddit, X and YouTube have allowed influencers to reach wide audiences and even influence stock market behaviour. A famous example is the GameStock surge in early 2021 which was largely fuelled by retail investors following influencers on Reddit's WallStreetBets forum.

Journalism meets influencer culture

Another interesting trend is the rise of journalists as content creators. Most reporters from Bloomberg, Financial Times, City AM and WSJ post their stories on either LinkedIn, X (previously Twitter) or Bluesky. Independent journalists which broadcast using YouTube are also on the rise and have built up loyal followings by delivering content directly to their communities.

This shift highlights a broader trend: a move away from dominant, one-size-fits-all media outlets to smaller, more specialised voices. Smart brands will collaborate with these journalist-social media creators to engage audiences in ways that feel organic and credible.

What does this mean for the world of corporate communications and the investment community?

1. **Listen carefully.** All businesses should monitor what's being said about them and by whom. We use advanced social listening tools to analyse influencer audience demographics, content style, engagement levels, and overall impact within a specific industry or market.
2. **Develop an influencer map.** Identify and categorise the influencers that are important to your business or brand. Develop a map of known and emerging influencers your team might need to engage with or avoid.



3. **C-level influence.** If you haven't established your CEO and c-level team as a business influencer, you're at a disadvantage. Invest time in building your team's profile to gain the support of the public and the social media algorithms.
4. **Be transparent.** If you do enter into a paid partnership with an influencer, ensure compliance with disclosure regulations. Always make it clear that content is sponsored or part of a partnership.
5. **Engage authentically.** Whether by partnering with nano or micro-influencers, tapping into the LinkedIn ecosystem, or collaborating with journalist-creators, avoid partnerships that feel forced or inauthentic. A lack of authenticity could harm both your brand and the influencers' credibility. The future lies in cultivating loyal, niche audiences and offering content that's relatable to your business with a unique point of view.
6. **Invest for the long term.** Influencer marketing is about building trust and awareness, which takes time; avoid focusing solely on short-term gains.

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