

A Guide to Influencer Marketing for Travel Brands

By

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On 11 July 2018, Flagship hosted an event titled: “How Travel and Leisure brands can build better strategies for influencer marketing”.

An expert panel investigated the navigation of influencer marketing campaigns, providing context and examples of influencer marketing best practice.

Panellists included:

- Belinda Hallworth – Account Director, Flagship Consulting**
- Dr Tim Drye – Data Analyst, Data Talk**
- Juliane Schitteck – Marketing Manager B2C Europe – Intrepid Travel**
- Julie Falconer – A Lady in London**
- Rosie Langton – Influencer and Outreach Manager, London&Partners**

Influencer marketing is growing up, its practitioners are professionalising, brands are learning best practices, serious academic research is being conducted and the best PR agencies are activating work that makes a difference to the bottom line.

“Search for people who cross different groups – Cuckoos – e.g. people who are trusted and who travel a lot and in different sectors, with a diverse audience – and nurture them, they can have an outsized influence in transmitting messages”
Dr. Tim Drye

“Get to know the influencers – spend time reading their posts, get other contacts to introduce you, attend blogger events, listen to their own goals and then negotiate a relationship – time spent making a meaningful connection up front will mean you can all stay on the same page as you work together”
Belinda Hallworth

“Research shows that if 25% of an audience changes their mind on something, the whole audience tends to shift that way. Micro-influencers are key in effecting behaviour change because of the number of groups they influence”
Dr Tim Drye

“Some tools are good for assessing reach and audience, to check their real influencer level. There are paid tools like Klear and unpaid like Social Blade that can provide vital intel”
Rosie Langton

“Brands must detail out exactly what is wanted – never assume the influencer knows, or will do what the last one did”
A Lady in London

“Check what your target influencer has recently worked on and who with”
Juliane Schitteck

“Prearrange permissions and bookings. Influencers need to be able to take photos, so think about lighting. Make meal reservations beside windows and don't sit them in a dimly lit corner – even if it is the best table in the room - natural light is best for showing off food”
A Lady in London

“Remember to ask the influencer for their own stats following a visit or trip – but let them know at the outset you want the data so it can be captured”
Belinda Hallworth

“Influencers know their audience best and will craft what works to get engagement”
Juliane Schitteck

“Each influencer is a bit like a start-up and each one is different. Don't assume it's all about the money – it might not be. If they are passionate about something this will impact any fees”
A Lady in London

1. Introduction to Influencer Marketing

Influencer Marketing has fast become one of the most popular marketing channels available to brands today. Whilst high-street consumer brands have been capitalising on this channel for a few years by monitoring and monetising it, the travel industry is only just starting to work with influencers in more powerful ways – ways that drive awareness and bookings.

It is true that traditional press still impacts decision making (long-tail influence) when it comes to holiday and destination choices and travellers are increasingly turning to peer-to-peer reviews for more targeted and personalised travel inspiration.

Influencers, however, are very different to traditional print journalists. They have different demands and motivations (different revenue models, content values, routes to audiences and so on) and as a result travel brands need to build distinct strategies to better tap into the powerful *Influencer Marketing* channel.

84% of millennials and 73% of non-millennials are likely or very likely to plan a trip based on someone else's holiday photos or social media updates.

2. Finding the right influencers for your brand

2.1 Taking a proactive approach to Influencer Marketing

Collaborations with YouTube creators are 4x more effective at driving lift in brand familiarity than those with celebrities.

Finding the right influencers is key to reaching the right audiences. Whilst you will be approached by many influencers for trips/visits/tickets/rides – not all of them will be right for your brand, offer or target audiences.

For the best results you must be proactive: create a target list of key influencers you feel is right for your brand; do your due diligence in making sure they have the traction and reach you need; have a clear understanding of what you can facilitate and have a clear strategy of the investment (time and/or money) you can make to develop the most fruitful relationships.

2.2 Measuring influence and authenticity

Once you have found the influencers that are the best fit for you, it is important to measure their influence and authenticity. Ask for media kits, spend time looking at engagement levels (using tools and human analysis), check out their domain authority and the authenticity of their follower-base (again using a blend of tools and human analysis).

2.3 Don't ignore the power of micro-influencers

A smart tactic for travel brands is to seek out, and work with, micro influencers. They are likely to already be or more likely to become strong advocates of the brand and can be a great mouthpiece for messages. They tend to straddle a number of communities and therefore can help to reach a more diverse audience.

Micro-influencers have 60% higher engagement than macro-influencers.

They can be harder to unearth, so be sure to ensure you regularly search on your own/related hashtags for niche/micro influencers as well as considering campaigns which deliberately seek to find them (a campaign on your own branded social channels, competitions, etc.).

3. Engaging Influencers

3.1 How to approach influencers

Once you have established your initial target list (one which will grow and develop over time), the next crucial step is approaching the names on it.

Before this happens, it is important to have a clear idea of what you want to offer them, and what is expected from them in return.

A key pitfall when working with influencers, and one which is surprisingly common, is not seeking content agreement prior to the trip taking place, and in some cases this means that there is no record of what has been committed to, leaving you in a weak position if the influencer fails to follow through.

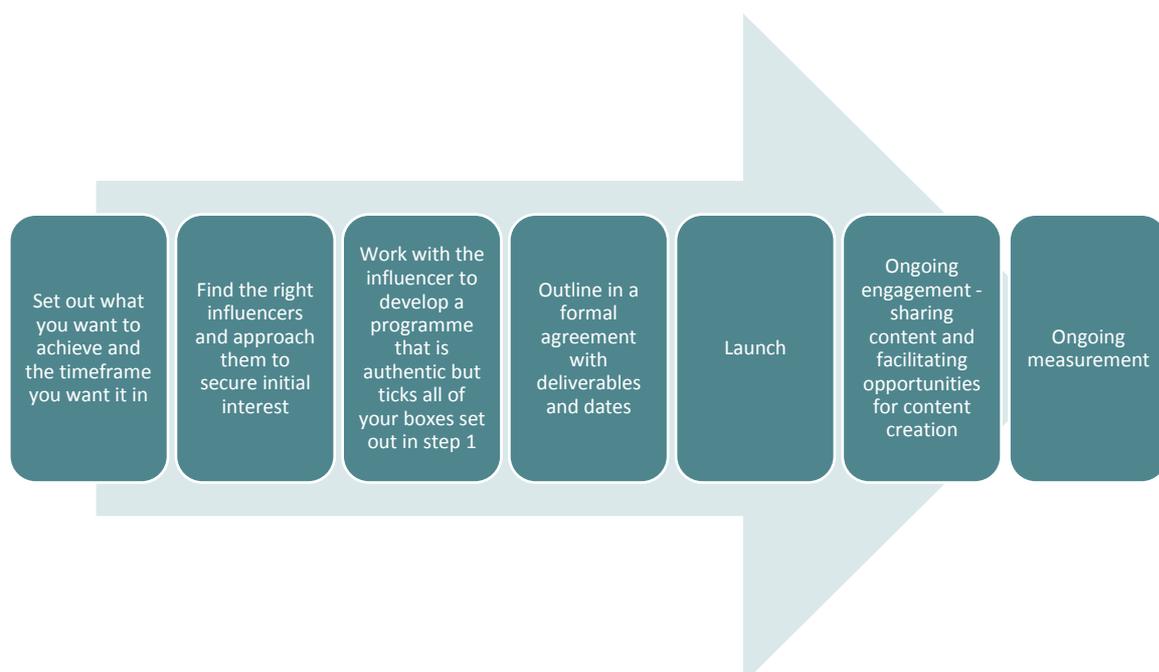
Agreeing to certain outputs over email is binding enough for a one off press trip. However, should you look to build lasting relationships, you may need to lay out expectations in a more formal contract that would be informed by legal input. It depends on the strategy you are adopting.

Don't be afraid to ask for delivery timescales – it is okay to ask when to expect to see posts go live online and the influencer should be able to give you an indication of this. If there is a specific date you would like to see it by just say, though it also might be worth mentioning this early on in discussions so that they know what is expected of them before the trip takes place.

3.2 Encouraging a lasting relationship

Longer term partnerships with the right influencers will provide more opportunities for audiences to see and engage with content and be persuaded to visit or try out your brand. Plus, by creating longer-term relationships it is more likely that you can arrange payment in kind rather than payment per blog or social post.

What are the best steps for creating lasting relationships with influencers?



Lasting relationships take work and commitment, and a constant review of the activity and the effectiveness of the campaign is vital to maximising the investment (whether monetary or not) in the influencer.

4. *It's all about content*

The main advantage of working with influencers over traditional print media journalists is that the resulting content can be a lot more creative and flexible. And this content comes in many guises, whether a blog post writing a review about a press trip, a photo gallery, social media competitions and polls, guest posts for your blog, video content or vox pop material.

When planning campaigns, think about what kind of content you would like to be created and then build your activity around that. By starting with your content goals you can make sure that the influencers are already proven to be good creators through their partnerships in the past, and are aware of the expectations of them during early discussions.

4.1 *Itinerary planning*

When proactively working with influencers over press trips you have a lot more control over what you want them to see and do. In the planning stages you will already have analysed their content and chosen them as a result of how well they fit with you and your brand values, and what they have produced for others before. This intelligence should be used in the itinerary planning process.

Things to think about include:

- Is there a theme for the trip?
- Is there a certain place/location/activity that you would like to be the focal point?
- Does the influencer have a particular focus (family, friends, culture, food, beauty, etc)?
- Have they been before? If so, consider new experiences (unless they visited at least 2 years ago and there have been significant changes or additions for them to review)
- Are there any exclusive or behind the scenes opportunities you can provide? Offering experiences that are not easily accessible is very attractive to influencers
- Is it possible to facilitate attendance of partners and families?
- What bookings and permissions do you need to make to provide the best experience?
- Is there any way to make the trip even more memorable e.g. goodie bags, branded treats?

And remember, make sure to give them plenty of free time to roam and explore on their own. Of course, you can provide suggestions or recommendations, but the more fluid the itinerary, the more variable the content that will be created.

4.2 *Sharing the love*

Influencers' main drive is to see their content shared and snowball, gaining recognition and traction. Never forget your role in harnessing this power of reciprocation. That might be sharing a link to the resulting blog or vlog post, or retweeting and regramming their social content. This will help to build stronger relationships over social media.

Make sure pre-trip you start following them over all channels and keep an eye on their feeds during the trips also so that retweeting and regramming is done in a timely fashion.

4.3 *Measuring campaign success rates*

There are a number of ways to measure the success of influencer campaigns:

- Number of posts – Measure how many blogs and social posts have been published over the course of the campaign.
- Reach – Once you know the number of posts and number of followers you can work out the total reach of the posts.
- Hashtag uses – Number of hashtag uses is a good metric for showing the attrition of the content. If the hashtags are used across multiple campaigns, the general use of them should continue to rise.
- Engagement metrics – As when doing research into which influencers to work with, look at the engagement on the posts about your brand to see what is resonating with their audiences and how they are responding to the content.
- Tracking links – If driving bookings and website traffic is important, it would be worth looking at setting up tracking links or affiliate booking codes/discount codes to share with the influencers and have them use. Then you can measure click-through rates to the website pages to which you want to drive traffic.
- Post campaign reports – Ask influencers if they can send a post-campaign report after their posts have been live and shared. This will give you analytics data you would not be able to secure without them telling you, which can be a good indicator as to the impact of the content. This can be especially useful when looking for data on disappearing content such as Instagram Stories.

5. *Top tips for influencer trip logistics*

On trip management

- Be as flexible as possible – plans will change and influencers may change their minds. If there is room for flexibility this will make managing press trips a little easier.
- Make sure there is free time – whilst it's great to have structure to a trip and ensure influencers see what you want them to see, free time is important for them to get a real feel for the destination.
- Things will go wrong – a calm head and solution-focused attitude will ensure that when they do go wrong, you ride the wave and turn it around.
- Always think about the end goal – amazing content! And ensure that experiences are provided to facilitate the creation of the desired content as much as possible.
- Have fun – don't forget that happiness is infectious. If you are seen to be having fun, the group will have fun also. And a fun trip means positive content.

Follow up

- Follow up post trip as quickly as possible – it means that you stay top of mind and content production stays top of their agenda (and you can quickly manage any issues – good or bad – that arose during the trip).
- Have assets and materials ready – although influencers typically take their own images, have a suite of imagery available in case they don't have all that they need (but be careful not to offer this unless they ask for it – you don't want to offend them!). Also make sure to have prices and fact box information to hand so that all questions can be answered.

To talk more about your influencer marketing campaigns, contact:

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