

2017

INFLUENCER MARKETER

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A **#HASHOFF**  
State of the Union Report



**Influencer marketing has never been more important.**

With **25% of internet users** employing some form of **ad blocking**, and consumers **continuing to trust word of mouth** over all other forms of marketing, brands are increasingly turning to influencers to help get their message across with more passion, creativity and authenticity.

From celebrities to the rising class of micro-influencers -- experts in a specific topic with smaller, but more highly engaged audiences -- influencers are emerging as a critical marketing tool for brands large and small. Influencers help brands grow awareness and consideration. Increasingly, they're also helping drive sales.

Here at **#HASHOFF**, we have a front row seat to the changing influencer marketing ecosystem, enabling brands and agencies to identify and activate the right influencers to share their brand messages organically and via paid promotion across any social platform.

Our platform has over 150,000 opt-in influencers who work hard to grow and maintain their audiences each and every day. In order to understand the changing face of influencer marketing, and gain valuable insight into where influencers are headed, we did something crazy: we decided to ask them!

In the pages that follow, you'll see what they had to say. Some of it confirms what we already knew (e.g., Instagram is growing its dominance), but much of it was surprising. At the report's conclusion, we'll summarize our findings -- and do our best to make them actionable for brands and influencers alike.

Read on and let us know what you think **@Hashoff1**.

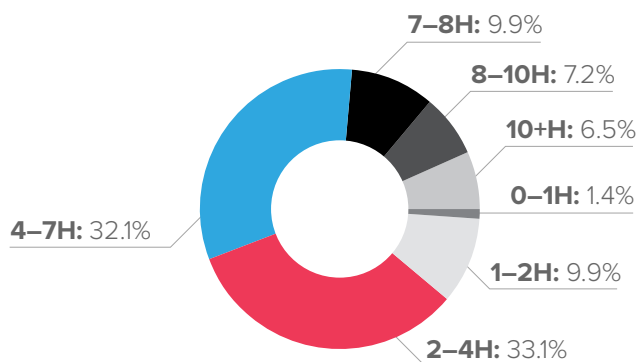
**The #HASHOFF Team**



## Influencers Spend a Lot of Time on Social Media

Social media is a channel that's always-on for consumers. It's perhaps no surprise then that influencers are rarely off the clock, either. We found that the majority (56%) of influencers surveyed spend at least **four hours per day** on social media, and more than 20% spend 7-8 hours or more.

### HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU SPEND ON SOCIAL MEDIA EACH DAY?



## And They Have Other Commitments

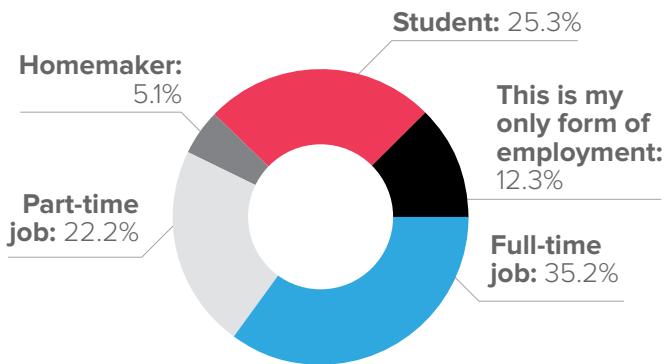
Only 12% of respondents said being an influencer is their only form of employment. "Working in social media allows me to enjoy life and not be confined to a desk," said influencer [@EarthFocus](#). "I am glad to be my own boss and to have the freedom of creating content," echoed [@EllalsAlwaysHere](#).

The majority (60%), however, have a full-time or part-time job in addition to working as an influencer, while the balance are homemakers or students. Much like Uber drivers, influencers are a for-contract workforce that tends to do this work "on the side," in addition to their other commitments.

"It's been tough to balance being an influencer and my day job...It would be a dream to have the influencer title 100% of the time. Instagram fuels my passion for photography, brand ambassadorships, and overall creative escape, said influencer [@EdiCaves](#)."

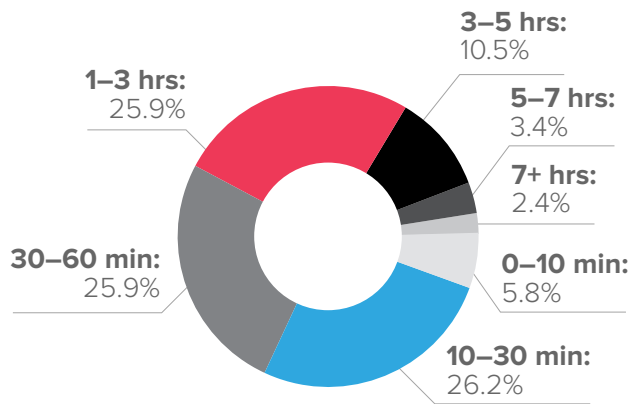
Still, they consider their work a job like any other, and wish to be compensated for their time and efforts. “This is our job and we cannot be working for free,” said influencer @majamalnar, a sentiment shared by many others.

### DO YOU HAVE ANOTHER FULL- OR PART-TIME GIG?



But their “work” goes well beyond creating the post. Beyond the time invested to create content, influencers invest significantly more time facilitating ongoing organic audience engagement and development. They say they are constantly monitoring their feeds outside of “work hours,” and see the payoff for this investment as a growing, loyal, responsive audience.

### HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE YOU TO CREATE YOUR BEST POSTS? (From ideation to publishing)



## They Spend a Lot of Time Crafting Posts

Even though they have other commitments, being an influencer is a time-intensive gig. While there is a widespread perception that influencers are merely “taking photos” or posting to their feeds carelessly or as an afterthought, the data tells a different, more creative story.

Influencers spend a great deal of time crafting their best posts, from ideation to creation and publication. As influencer @mikabowen said, the one thing brands don’t understand about influencer marketing is “how much time it really takes to integrate, promote, photograph and engage your audience organically.”

The majority of influencers (52%) spend between 30 minutes and 3 hours on their posts, and 15% spend even more time than that. The real-time nature of social media lets influencers engage and react in the moment, organically or with sponsored posts. After all, while a few hours spent crafting high-quality content may seem like a lot, it is miniscule when compared to the time it takes to develop and distribute creative assets on other channels (e.g., TV, print, display).

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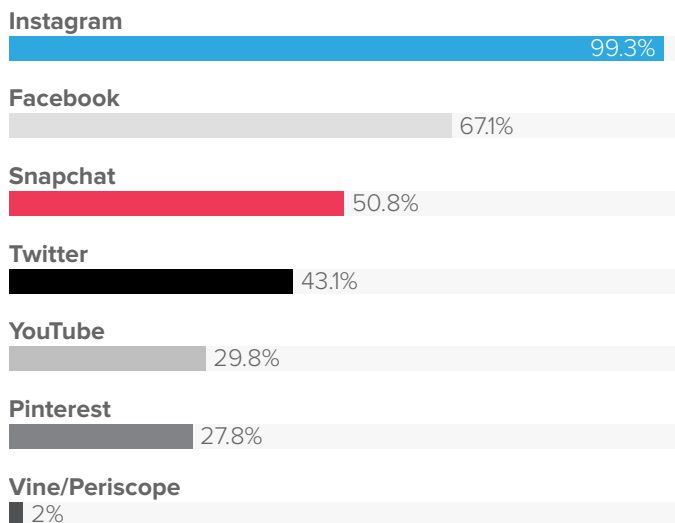
## It’s a Facebook/Instagram World...

When it comes to platforms, two clear winners emerge: Facebook and Instagram (which is owned by Facebook). While most respondents work across multiple platforms, nearly all respondents (92%) selected Instagram as their #1 platform of focus, followed by Facebook.

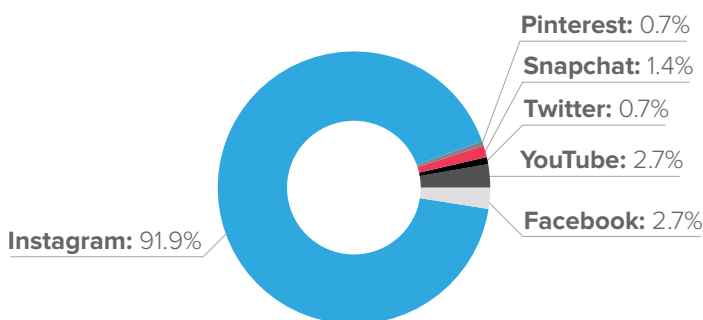
Most influencer respondents said they favor Instagram for the sense of immediacy and community it creates. “I love Instagram for the inspiration and creativity it offers and for the real friendships I’ve made through it!” influencer @ChrissyJPowers said. Echoed @EdiCaves,

“I love Instagram because of the community. Instagram allows me to connect with locals that I would have never met otherwise. As my following has grown, brands have begun to contact me about work.”

### WHAT PLATFORMS DO YOU WORK ON?



### WHAT IS YOUR #1 PLATFORM?



### ...And Will Likely Stay That Way

When we look at the platform of choice for influencers over time, another interesting story emerges. Last year, 80% of respondents said Instagram was #1, while this year, a full 92% cite Instagram as their top platform, a 13% point increase. A similar number of influencers (87%) predict Instagram will remain #1 for them next year.

Taken together, Facebook and Instagram are the 800-pound gorilla in the ecosystem. They are the #1 focus platform for nearly 95% of influencers; last year, they were the top focus for 87% of influencers.

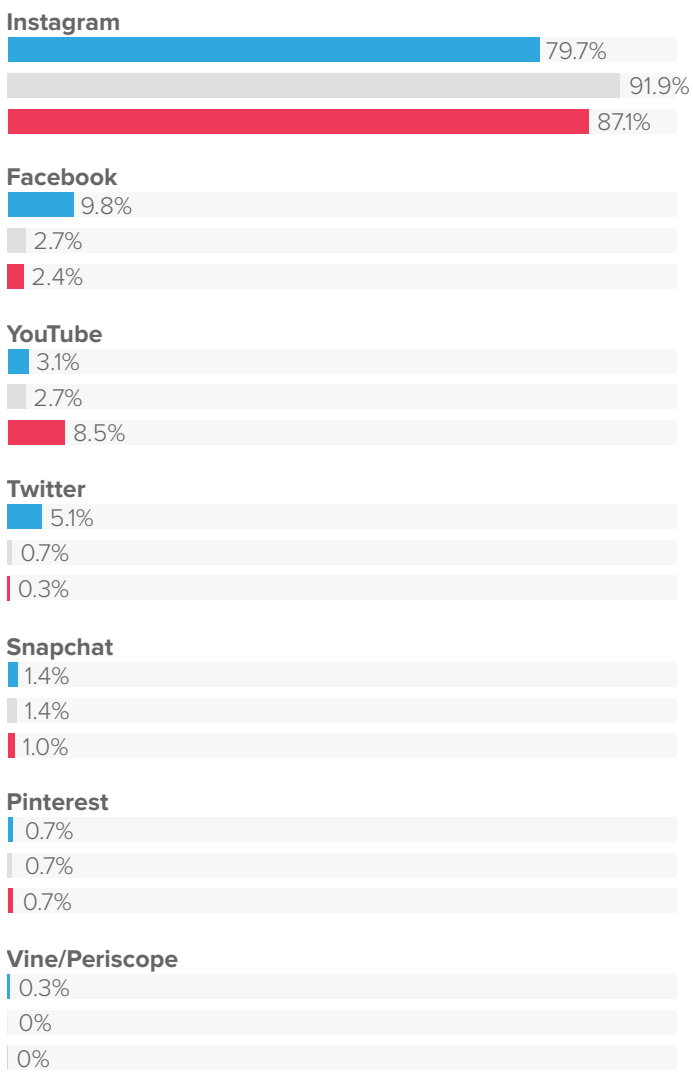
As influencer @Sir.Brendan summarized, “I love Instagram because of the community of creatives that it has built...It’s great to be able to build a relationship

with someone based on common interests...Instagram is the best way to connect to my passion [for photography] outside of family and my part-time job.”

Facebook and Instagram’s dominance comes at the expense of other platforms, especially Twitter and Snapchat. This year, only 2.4% of influencers combined cited Twitter, Snapchat, Vine or Pinterest as their platform of focus. Next year, influencers predict that small figure to decline even further.

The one bright spot is YouTube, to which influencers plan to devote more time next year than this year. Given recent advertiser concerns about brand safety on the platform, it will be interesting to see what transpires in the months to come.

### WHAT IS YOUR #1 PLATFORM TODAY? LAST YEAR? NEXT YEAR?





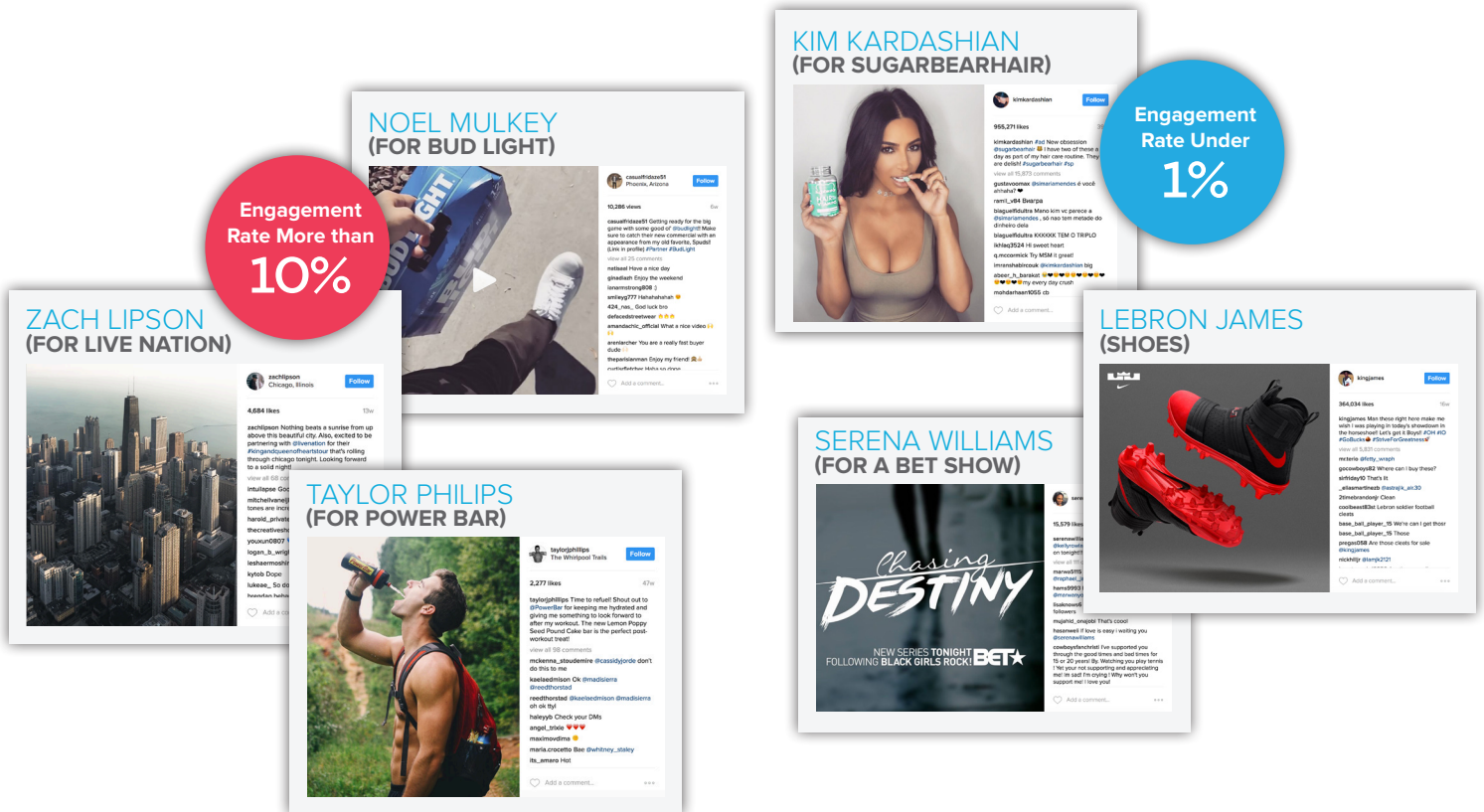
# The Rise of Micro-Influencers

While celebrities are still leveraged by brands to reach large followings en masse, brands are also ushering in the rise of “micro-influencers,” defined as highly creative individuals with expertise in a specific topic area, and a highly engaged audience of between 10,000 and 1,000,000 followers.

As one anonymous respondent commented, “Influencer marketing is effective because the influencer has established credibility and has built trust with an audience specific to the interest. Advertising through influencer marketing lets an advertiser target a specific niche already interested in related things.” Or, put more plainly by another: “The little guys don’t come off as advertising, just sharing product information.”

For many influencers, the size of the following is less important than the quality of the content shared. As one influencer said, “Just because some accounts have huge followings, doesn’t mean they do as well as smaller accounts. Many times smaller accounts put more effort and time into what they post and represent. And they usually have a community that they interact and deal with daily. So a lot of the time, they can have more success with a product than someone who has a larger following.”

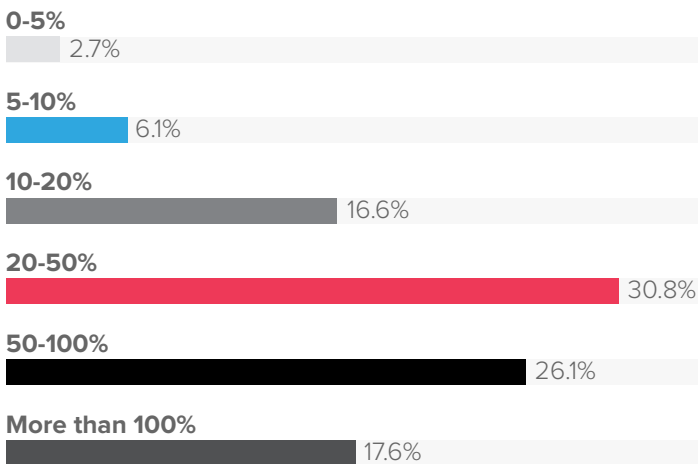
This view bears out in the data. On the #HASHOFF platform, for example, micro-influencers tend to drive engagement rates that are 10X those of celebrity sponsored posts.



Still, even these smaller audiences are growing. Nearly one-third of influencers have grown their audience by 20%-50% in the past year, while one-fourth have grown their audience by 50%-100%, and **17% have more than doubled** their audiences.

This may be a case of small numbers, where high growth on a small base is more readily achievable, but fewer than 10% of respondents said their audience had grown by 10% or less in the past year.

### HOW MUCH HAS YOUR SOCIAL FOLLOWING GROWN IN THE PAST YEAR?



## Measuring Success Is More Than Likes

The top metric by which influencers measure success remains the number of “likes” their posts receive, but the gap between likes and other success metrics is shrinking.

Views/Reach, Comments, and Overall Engagement Rate are each growing in relative importance for influencers -- and for the brands who work with them.

These metrics have now surpassed the importance of another “vanity metric” long considered of paramount importance: follower counts. “The number of followers has no relevance in this day and age, where followers and likes can be bought,” said influencer @AlishaMarie (despite having nearly 3M Instagram followers, 2.45M Twitter followers and 1.9 YouTube subscribers herself).

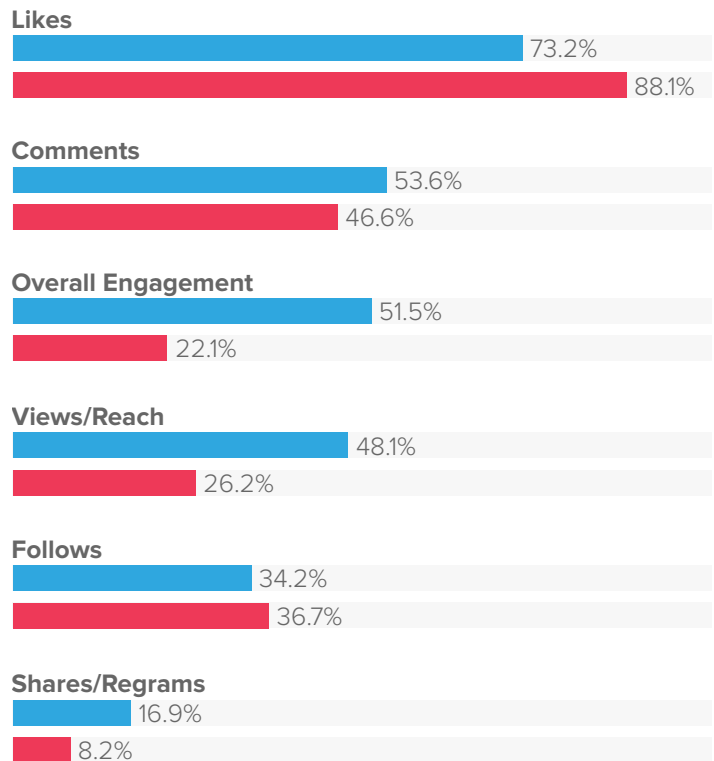
“Content should be king.”

This broader view of measuring success beyond vanity metrics (e.g., likes, follower counts) helps create a more robust picture of engagement for posts, both organic and branded. It also opens the door to a future in which post effectiveness might be measured in real metrics, like brand lift, consideration, and in-store or online purchase.

The new range of trackable metrics also lets brands have a more comprehensive view on the potential ROI of an influencer prior to engaging that influencer. Perhaps more important, the tight segmentation on offer from micro-influencers, in particular, promises to arm brands with an even more granular perspective: A local Charleston influencer’s impact will be far easier to track because of the distinct location and audience of that influencer.

“Influencer marketing grows brand,” said micro-influencer @throughjakeseyes. “Even influencers with fewer than 10K Instagram followers can still have a big impact on the brand and create ROI.”

### HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESS THIS YEAR? LAST YEAR?



2016 2017

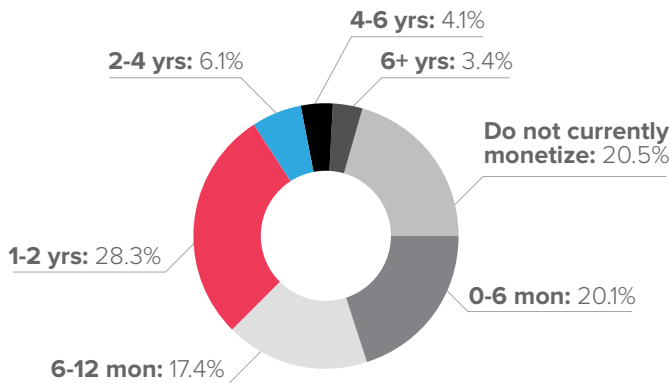
## Working With Brands Is Still New

Despite all the hype around influencer marketing, for the majority of influencers, working with brands is still a relatively new experience. Only 14% of influencers have been working with brands for more than two years; 29% have been monetizing their audiences for 1-2 years.

This presents a whitespace opportunity for brands. Influencers are fresh channels for brand communication, a new canvas unburdened by previous brand relationships or messages. In fact, nearly 20% of influencers have yet to start monetizing their audience.

Indeed, monetizing their efforts is increasingly important to influencers. “Brands don’t always understand that we work really hard for what we do,” said one influencer who wished to remain anonymous. “We can’t create content for free, or just in exchange for product.”

### HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN MONETIZING YOUR AUDIENCE/CONTENT?



## Original Authentic Content Is King

When influencers work with brands, they overwhelmingly prefer to create their own content relevant to a brand. Why? In a word, **authenticity**.

Many influencers surveyed spoke about creating content that matches their own brand and voice. In this way, influencers sound just like any mainstream media publisher creating editorial or native content. Below are a few sample responses when we asked influencers why they like producing their own content related to a brand partner:

“To stay organic and genuine with myself, my audience and my feed.”  
@MikoBowen

“I love to think of creative ways to share about a brand I love.”

**“Authenticity.”**

“Originality in content is the only way to compete in the influencer marketplace.”  
@SageGoldnik

“Because I put more time into them and strive to do a sponsored post that my audience would really like!”

“I am able to introduce the brand in an authentic way that will resonate with my audience.”  
@CaliVintage

“It’s more real and easier for my audience to relate.”  
EuKarolyi

“This allows me to maintain my ‘voice’ and integrity on my blog. My audience prefers first-hand experiences from me as they trust me to be authentic and honest.”  
@KaelahBee

“I find it resonates better with my audience”  
@mrbaker89

“It makes sense for me to stay true to myself and to introduce the product in my real lifestyle. I cherish my audience.”  
@YouCanCallMeJulian



# The Future of Influencer Marketing

As marketers continue to set and refine their social media and influencer marketing strategies, there are a number of key concepts and trends to keep in mind that became clear throughout the survey responses. We also asked our influencers point blank: “What’s the one thing brands don’t understand about influencer marketing?” Here are the top themes that emerged:

- **No marketing plan is complete without an influencer strategy.**

Whether it’s formal relationships and paid promotion or sending free product to your best fans, brands must have a plan for influencers. Word of mouth and peer-to-peer recommendations still outperform all other modes of advertising -- especially important in a world where ads are increasingly blocked.
- **It’s a Facebook/Instagram world.**

The vast majority of influencers are focused on Instagram and Facebook, and plan to be so for some time. Develop a strategy that includes those platforms.
- **It’s increasingly about quality, not quantity.**

Micro-influencers with smaller audiences tend to deliver higher engagement rates. As technologies help brands discover and aggregate and activate micro-influencers, marketers can rely on these smaller creators to deliver brand messages, authentically and at scale.
- **Influencers want creative freedom.**

The majority of influencers say they prefer to create content related to a brand or product, instead of simply posting branded content -- even though it requires significantly more time and effort on their part. Just like traditional publishers, they feel they know their audience best, and can create authentic, original content that will resonate with their particular audience.
- **They want to be paid.**

Most of the influencers surveyed said they wished brands knew how much time and effort goes into creating content, engaging their audience authentically, and helping brands achieve their goals. They say posting isn’t the last step, it’s the first, spurring downstream engagement that drives brand impact and sales. They want to be compensated for their efforts.
- **Measure real ROI, not vanity metrics.**

As influencer marketing becomes a more established marketing function, brands must start to track the impact of their investment -- not just on follower counts, but on brand lift metrics and, ultimately, sales.

## Methodology

The #HASHOFF team created a survey in Google Forms that was shared via email to a subset of #HASHOFF’s influencers. The survey was kept open over the course of two weeks, from March 15th through March 27th, 2017.

**N=300 respondents completed the survey, representing a 20% response rate.**

Responses were captured within Google Forms and are repackaged in this report alongside #HASHOFF proprietary internal data.



**#HASHOFF** is the pioneer of micro-influencer marketing for brands of all sizes and across all industries, with more than 150,000 influencers opted into the platform worldwide. The company's proprietary algorithms combine keywords, geography, interest and past campaign performance to identify and activate the best micro-influencers for each brand in any given moment.

By sourcing authentic influencers to create and distribute organic content on a brand's behalf, **#HASHOFF** helps brands create more meaningful relationships with consumers and drive brand engagement metrics that vastly outperform those of traditional social media marketing. The company's new product, **#HASHOFF Amplified**, combines the creative benefits of influencer marketing with the scale and measurement of paid media on Facebook and Instagram, helping brands get the most out of influencer campaigns.

Allowing brands more meaningful ways to evaluate their desired business outcomes like awareness, consideration, intent and event sales versus solely engagement. **#HASHOFF** is platform-agnostic, leveraging influencers across Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube to deliver the best results. Founded in 2014, the company is headquartered in Denver with offices in New York City and Los Angeles.

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For more information, visit [Hashoff.com](https://hashoff.com) or message us at [info@hashoff.com](mailto:info@hashoff.com).