

The science of B2B influence

B2B buyers have no friends...

If marketing campaigns are to be believed, B2B buyers are some of the most soulless human beings alive. People who spend their lives scrolling LinkedIn, listening to webinars, downloading reports, and reading their favourite trade publications.

They don't engage with influencers or quirky campaigns. They have no family, no friends, no circle of influence. They are business-minded robots, making calculated decisions based on facts and facts alone.

Bullshit.

B2B buyers are no different to anybody else. Their influences are broad, their thought processes non-linear, and their decisions emotionally led.

If brands find the right influences — and the right influencers — they can do so much more than a traditional B2B marketing campaign.

Yet when people think of influencer marketing, they rarely think of B2B brands.

Nobody's using Kylie Jenner to promote marketing software or Logan Paul to plug a new IT solution. Yet, in 2020 half of all B2B brands want to experiment with influencers. And with the right strategy in place, this could deliver big business impacts.

So what do you need to build your own B2B influencer campaign? This guide offers five steps to get started.

It's not a report without A FEW STATS

49%

of B2B marketers want to experiment with influencer relations

31%

of influencer relations campaigns are for B2B brands

94%

of marketers who have used influencers believe it's an effective tactic

57%

of marketers will integrate influencer relations into their activities by 2023

11x

the ROI of B2B digital marketing activities has been achieved by influencer relations

7%

of companies plan to invest over a million dollars in influencer marketing in 2020

Finding your niche

Think relevance, not reach. For many consumer brands, influencer relations is all about having the biggest social following.

But for B2B, reach isn't everything.

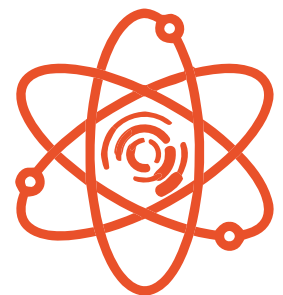
Influencers with a small, tight-knit audience can be far more effective advocates. In B2B, a niche following that both engages and trusts an influencer's expertise is much more valuable.

Social media is a good starting point to build an influencer list, but it isn't everything. Don't over-rely on Twitter or LinkedIn searches. Check out who's speaking at events, blogging, and writing in the trade press.

Most important of all, look for the people saying something controversial. So much of what's said in the B2B space is **BORING**, so people are naturally drawn to influencers who go against the grain.

Top tip

There are loads of great influencer auditing tools, with Onalytica being one of the most popular and powerful solutions for building a targeted audience list. If you're looking for a free option, check out Wildfire's influencer auditing tool at wildfirepr.com/labs





Getting noticed

Be seen before you're heard. B2B influencers build their reputations on trust, credibility and expertise.

This means they're unlikely to associate themselves with brands they don't recognise or respect. So before emailing influencers asking to be friends, take the time to get your brand in front of them.

A combination of social media stalking (research) and traditional media relations goes a long way.

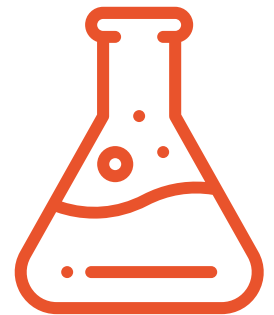
Find out which blogs and news sites they follow on social media and those they regularly quote, share and retweet.

Focusing your PR efforts on this media can make a big impact on your target influencers — especially if your content relates to their area of expertise.

A couple of months of this proactive scene-setting can really pay off. When you reach out to your influencers, you're not a stranger, but a trusted source.

Top tip

This scene-setting approach may sound slow but remember that B2B decisions are even slower. You're not looking for impulse buys; you want to build long-term credibility. Often a B2B influencer programme can take up to six months to deliver a real, meaningful return on investment.



Working together

Think expertise, not endorsements. These days, it's pretty common to pay influencers for endorsements — especially in the consumer space.

Some B2B influencers will take payment to post content and endorse brands, but it's rarely a good idea.

If you've got budget available, pay for the influencer's expertise. They could speak at your events or write a column on your company's blog.

The initial goal should be promoting the influencer on your channels — not getting your brand on theirs.

If they enjoy this process, they'll almost always share the resulting content. It helps them to promote their expert status, provides you with a credible endorsement, and drives links to your branded content.

Win, win, win.

Top tip

Don't try to tell B2B influencers what to say. They're the experts so use their expertise. Look for a dialogue not a monologue. An association with a B2B influencer is often endorsement enough.



Repurpose, reuse, recycle. Make the absolute most of the time you get with influencers.

If you have an opportunity to meet up, whether for an interview, a paid event, or even just a lunch, the goal should be to get as much out of it as possible.

Ask them about their upcoming projects, pick their brains on campaigns you're working on, tell them about your products and ask for their advice.

Not only does this get you valuable insights, it keeps you front of mind for their future projects, posts and content.

If an influencer is already engaged with your brand, make the most out of the content they provide. If they're speaking at your event, use it to create blogs, videos, Q&A posts, a customer reaction series, a photo story — whatever you can do with the time available.

Every bit of joint content produced is one more thing for your influencer to promote and share with their own networks.

Top tip

B2B influencers get bored of sharing thought leadership and are always on the lookout for something that breaks up their feeds. Look for opportunities to involve your influencer in unusual events or stunts. A creative or unusual picture can go long way with B2B audiences.



Creating Content

Staying in touch

Play the long game. There are no one-night stands in B2B influencer relations.

The secret to any successful influencer programme is to see it as a long-term relationship. That means staying in touch and keeping your brand (and your team) front of mind.

Something as simple as liking the occasional tweet or tagging influencers in an article you think they will enjoy can make all the difference.

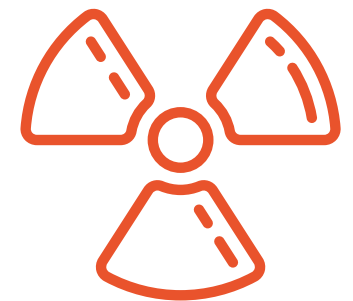
If you can, try to use personal accounts to build these relationships.

Rather than relying on brand channels, ask your senior team to connect with influencers directly. Then convert those online relationships into an excuse for drinks or meet ups.

Got a pub quiz coming up or an interesting event? Invite them along to say hi.

Top tip

Leadership teams don't always have time to nurture influencer relationships and like posts on Twitter. That's why Wildfire runs a digital exec programme to help brands manage this process. And yes, we know this is a shameless plug, not a "top tip", but what can you do?



Strategic thinking. Bold ideas.

Clearly this guide offers some great insights into influencer relations. But do you really have time to implement them? I mean come on, you're a busy highflying B2B businessperson.

Nobody succeeds by following a five-step guide. They succeed by hiring brilliant agencies that offer real-life, relevant expertise.

Agencies just like us.

At Wildfire we pride ourselves on **Thinking Bold**. Our influencer relations programmes combine strategic thinking with bold execution, delivering creative campaigns that make a real impact on B2B brands.

The next step...

Want to take the first step towards better, bolder influencer relations? Get in touch with Wildfire, or download our free influencer audit at wildfirepr.com/labs

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