



Social Influencers

How Optical Is Leveraging Followers, Clicks and Pics for Marketing



JAMIE WILSON / ASSOCIATE EDITOR AND STEPHANIE SENGWE / ASSISTANT EDITOR

NEW YORK—Social media influencers have become just as vital a part of marketing strategies as any traditional method. In addition to marketing campaigns and creating ads, eyewear companies today are also infusing social media campaigns and soliciting the help of social media influencers in order to promote their product. They help communicate to the consumer the practicality of eyewear as a medical device and also the functionality of eyewear as a fashion accessory.

According to Influencer Marketing Hub—a resource for influencer marketing platforms, agencies and case studies—an influencer is an individual who has a following in a particular niche, which

they engage with. Influencers have the power to affect purchase decisions of others because of their authority, knowledge, position or relationship with their audiences. For any type of personality, there is an influencer who appeals.

Instagram accounts such as the anonymous Diet Prada, cater to the hardcore fashionistas, who can point out copy-cat fashion collections in an instant; there are influencers such as Whitney White aka Naptural85 who specialize in natural haircare for black people; there's also Adam Gallagher and Marcel Floruss whose Instagram accounts are a haven for the dapper gentlemen's knack for travelling.

For independent ECPs, a brand's use of influencers can be a way to garner new customers. While the use of social media is beneficial as a means to connect with local communities on a personal level, ECPs carrying specific brands that use certain influencers can also leverage that to attract patients into their practice. "If done properly, influencers communicate a brand's message in authentic ways," stated Daniel Brunson, ABOC of Hicks Brunson Eyewear. "These are real people who use the products they are posting about. If they are posting pictures of themselves talking about how much they like their newest pair of glasses and the local eyecare provider where they came from, their followers are going to notice."

Continued on page 62

Conversing With Costa on Social

Social media, for Costa is a way to be more conversational with consumers. “Social is one of many touch points that Costa uses to meet and interact with consumers,” stated John Tegner, VP direct to consumer. “It’s somewhat casual and gives Costa a broad-based and informal means to communicate at any time with consumers, wherever they may be.”

Though social media is an informal way to reach customers, Costa still sees the need to be tailored and focused when it comes to the types of messages communicated on the various platforms. “Social media is a powerful channel for supporting Costa’s consumer acquisition and retention efforts. Through both organic and paid strategies, we develop and post consumer campaigns driving brand, product, technology, promotion and event messages to our fans and fu-



Costa uses the power of influencers for campaigns such as #OneCoast and #KickPlastic.

ture fans,” Tegner explained. “What we say and how we say it is critical and posting to social for the sake of posting is a strict no-no.”

For campaigns such as #OneCoast and #KickPlastic, Costa is able to create a larger impact with the help of celebrity influencers such as country star, Luke Bryan, who’s been a friend to the company for 10 years. By combining his reach and influence with their causes, Costa is able to create more momentum on social and reach a greater audience. “The market is full of influencer-based success stories. The challenge is to find the right influencers and then be prepared for the possibilities when you share ‘control’ of your messaging,” stated Tegner. “The dynamics and potential results are massive, and Costa is focused on continuing our long history of community and cause-based partnerships.”

Growing a Network Through Pics and Clicks

For independent British brand, Cutler and Gross, social media marketing permits a positive atmosphere of openness and inclusivity between brands and consumers—creating a space for the company to reach a greater audience and grow its network.

“Social media has blown up in recent years and continues to grow, so it’s definitely something that cannot be ignored by brands,” said Lillie Ayton, head of PR at Cutler and Gross. “Expanding our reach to work with others, i.e. influencers and other brands, allows us exposure to their followers and can help open us up to new markets and potential consumers but also simply helps us to share our brand’s message and image with a wider audience.”

While reaching a wider audience to build up a network is an integral aspect of social media and influencer marketing, crafting the right fit to cre-

ate a natural flow is key.

She explained that “Influencers are more transparent, allowing glimpses into their personal lives and often having open dialogue with their followers which helps to build a relationship and a level of trust between the two, whereas celebrity endorsements are often less relatable.”

Ayton continued, “This way, we’re able to give them the freedom to create their own authentic content that is also in keeping with our image.”

In addition to this, working with influencers is also an ideal way for Cutler and Gross to align themselves with like-minded brands. “As a luxury eyewear brand, we want to collaborate with other fashion and accessories brands that we feel complement ours and influencer work is an additional way of doing this, which can be mutually beneficial,” she said.



Influencer, Maximilian Hurd, wearing Cutler and Gross o822/S2 in an Instagram post.

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Social Influencers

Digital Brand Storytelling

The art of storytelling is an integral part of a brand, and in the age of digital, content is king. For Eastern States Eyewear (ESE), one of the important pieces that they look into when leveraging social media and influencer marketing is creating content to best tell their brand's story.

Social media is the new normal, and provides a complement to existing marketing methods. Jason Shyer, managing director at ESE said, "Social creates a longer lasting relationship with your audience. Through content, it is a brand's job to constantly intrigue and interest them."

Shyer explained that the company has learned greatly from its relationship with influencers, Coco and Breezy, with whom they also launched an eyewear collection, as well as with its early experiences in starting the @cazal_us platform on Instagram.

"Coco and Breezy, as individuals, do an amazing job sharing what makes them unique—their



Coco and Breezy pictured in their campaign for Eastern States Eyewear.

unique combination of being incredibly down to earth, optimistic people with a creative approach to design while also being these fabulous DJs/celebrities."

He continued, "When working with influencers, you want them to fit the mold of someone who fits your brand identity. Ideally, they are shouting out your page, or at the very least your product when they post a photo of themselves wearing it."

In addition to brand storytelling Shyer explains what Coco and Breezy refer to as the importance of "micro-influencers," or those who have a smaller yet hyper loyal following. "Such people obviously have a stronger effect than the less personal relationship your typical celebrity might have with their audience. That being said, having the appropriate celebrity who fits your brand's values wearing your product is obviously a helpful thing."

Getting Real With Kenmark

For Kenmark Eyewear, social media is a typical starting point for marketing campaigns because of its ability to reach the masses at a faster pace. "We usually start with social campaigns and move these onto our website and then translate them into traditional advertising," explained Kenmark Eyewear's marketing director, Marissa Cundiff.

"Our #kenmarkgetsreal campaign started on social as we connected with influencers and worked with them to share product of ours they love. From there, we shared these images through print advertising and connected the customer to these real people wearing our product."

The #kenmarkgetsreal social media initiative launched in 2016 and features influencers in order to showcase real people, in their everyday lives, wearing their favorite styles from various Kenmark brands. When choosing influencers for

the campaign, Kenmark took into consideration the person's style, quality of photography, demographic and overall aesthetic, Cundiff stated. KJ Pinc who represents kensie embodies the free spirit energy of the brand; while Lisa Dengler, Maddy Furlong and Eric Jess' glamorous, simplistic and vintage cool personalities compliment the Zac Posen brand.

Having an influencer is also beneficial because it keeps the company more open-minded, according to Cundiff. "Sometimes when having an influencer choose a style to wear, we're pleasantly surprised. It's interesting when you think you know what someone with a certain sense of style will go for, and then they end up choosing something totally different. It definitely helps us to keep an open mind because sometimes people choose what you'd least expect they'd be into."



KJ Pinc, wearing kensie's Inside Out for #KenmarkGetsReal.

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Social Influencers

An #InstantExperience for Polaroid's 80th Anniversary

In May 2017, Safilo's Polaroid brand celebrated its 80th year anniversary. In an effort to commemorate the feat, Safilo launched a global digital campaign involving 250 influencers in the fashion and lifestyle segments. "All brands need to have a presence on social media to be relevant and also to connect with people," stated Paolo Bizzotto, Safilo N.A. brand, commercial strategy and planning director – Mass Cool. "Since this is where the consumer is focusing their attention, it's critical that as brand marketers, we are there as well."

The campaign was carried out simultaneously in seven countries including Brazil, U.K., Norway, Germany, U.S., France and Italy—reaching more than 15 million users at the same time. New York City's Andrea Pion, Brazil's Adelson Stifler and Norway's Malin Mellow, were some of



Musician, Lion Babe, was one of five artists who were a part of Polaroid's Side Stories.

the influencers who participated in the Polaroid campaign. With the hashtags #InstantExperience and #PolaroidSun, not only were users able to follow the campaign in real time, but photos posted by influencers can still be found on Instagram today.

Another component of the Polaroid campaign was titled, Side Stories. For Side Stories, Safilo enlisted five artists coming from the worlds of music, fashion, street art, skateboarding and dance. "We saw these influencers as the 'Edwin Lands' of our time, represented through their art," Bizzotto stated. "Edwin Land, of course, the founder of the Polaroid Corporation was the man who changed the way we see the world and invented the first polarized lens filter among countless other important inventions."

Aiming for Inclusivity Over Influence

When it comes to notions of social media and influencers, I.a. Eyeworks doesn't subscribe to the traditional ways of approaching this marketing method.

"With our campaign portraiture and social media relationships, we have focused on interrogating notions of who can be a celebrity or an influencer," said Brent Zerger, director of communications for I.a. Eyeworks. "More often than not, our campaign subjects are suggestions of people we think should be influential or who are celebrities to us. Ideally, we want to work from a position of turning people on to something great, not reiterating a trend or appealing to a whim of fashion."

For the independent eyewear company, the most critical aspect of any partnership is forging authentic relationships with individuals who sync with their point of view.

Zerger explained, "Valuing authenticity and deeper brand connection, we have never really used the

word 'influencer' at I.a. Eyeworks nor have we focused on someone exclusively because of their reach. What's amazing is that social media has made visible a spectrum of communicators and communities that are vast, diverse and resonant. Perhaps that's what an influencer can accomplish versus a celebrity: speak in a very focused and relatable language to a specific community."

While there is no real hierarchy in the company's approach between social media marketing and more traditional methods, they acknowledge that time and resources always have limits, and the challenge is "finding commonalities in the marketing vocabulary that speak across the platforms without being dull and repetitive, or lost as 'non-native' content."

"The more precisely you know your message and hold to that point of view, the more effective you can be in your communication," Zerger said.



Los Angeles-based artist, Robert Vargas, for the Uncensored Visions campaign by I.a. Eyeworks.

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Social Influencers

Creating a Direct Customer Connection

Tapping into the vein of social media marketing provides a method of direct dialogue with STATE Optical Co.'s customers. This allows the Made in America eyewear company to adapt and create products and experiences to better serve its base.

"Influencers are able to show their followers how to use a product in an aspirational yet accessible way," said Carolyn Zazra, marketing director at STATE Optical Co. "It's not a stylized ad campaign; it's a real photo of a real person that's admired by their followers. In this way, it's easier for followers to imagine how that product can look in their own lives. Using influencers also allows us to experiment with venturing outside of our brand's voice and typical demographic to expand our reach and discover new customers."

She went on to explain that influencers carry



Portland-based blogger and photographer, Sam Landreth's Instagram post for STATE Optical Co.'s #NewOriginals project.

"incredible credibility" with their specific audiences that allow companies to break through to people in ways that traditional ads and marketing don't always do. "When influencers craft their own version of your brand's message, it's able to reach an audience that may not have engaged with traditional advertising."

Along with this facet, social media provides a fluidity that traditional advertising does not by allowing brands to tweak and test their creative messaging until they have created a campaign that resonates.

"Love them or hate them, social media influencers are powerful. While social media opens the door for brands to have conversations with people, it's still not the same as speaking person to person. Social media influencers offer word-of-mouth marketing on steroids," said Zazra.

Transitions Optical Enhances Brand Image

For Transitions Optical, social media is important because it is a way to communicate to consumers and eyecare professionals using language and imagery that resonates. "Social media allows our brand to connect with our audiences as though we are speaking directly to them, rather than to a larger and more general audience," stated Patience Cook, director of marketing, North America.

For example, Transitions posts images of Transitions Change Agents—a group of "sharp and stylish ECPs that advocate for the brand"—on the Transitions Lenses: Healthy Sight Professionals Facebook page. There, other ECPs are able to see and connect with their peers that are supporting the brand.

Last year, Transitions launched the Good Light Project, a new initiative that illustrated "the role changing light plays in shaping our days and nights, and some of our most memorable mo-

ments." For the campaign, the company worked with influencers such as Coco and Breezy, who are also recognized as optical entrepreneurs, travel bloggers Planet D and actress Jamie Chung, among others. These influencers were able to propel the Transitions message in their own voices, to their respective audiences, garnering millions of consumer media and social media impressions.

While traditional marketing methods will always be necessary, Transitions uses their influencers and social media networks to enhance brand image, share insights uncovered through research and explain the cutting-edge technology they offer. "The power of authentic advocates cannot be overstated," Cook stated. "Social listening can be a great way to discover new, authentic advocates for the brand—people who have tried the product themselves and have taken to social media to share."



Actress Jamie Chung for Transitions' The Good Light Project.

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Social Influencers

Reaching Target Demographics Through #ShowYourVogue

As a part of Luxottica's Vogue Eyewear brand, the company tapped influencer and model, Gigi Hadid, to collaborate on the Gigi Hadid Vogue Eyewear collections as well as the #ShowYourVogue campaign.

"Gigi Hadid's irresistible and adventurous personality reflects the Vogue Eyewear brand DNA and overall messaging," Chiara Bernardi, vice president of Marketing, Luxottica Wholesale North America said. "She helps to create a real dialogue with contemporary women through the #ShowYourVogue campaign inviting us to engage with a new concept of individual beauty that goes beyond the surface."

She continued, "Working with Gigi Hadid on the past two Gigi Hadid Vogue Eyewear collections reinforced the strong brand message that there is beauty beyond appearance. The most recent collection takes the #ShowYourVogue phi-



Gigi Hadid in the #ShowYourVogue campaign for the latest Gigi Hadid Vogue Eyewear collection.

losophy to a deeper level asking, what is your personal way to show your Vogue?"

Bernardi described the importance of social media marketing for target demographics such as Millennials and Gen Z who look to social for not only inspiration but because these groups also "weigh marketing from real people more heavily than traditional media and advertising."

She explained that Hadid's large social media following of like-minded fans who look to her for inspiration allows the company to enhance the reach of their marketing strategy.

"It has become more important to market directly to these demographics through social media. As more brands try to own the purchasing power of that key demographic, it is most important to reach them through their main source of information, Instagram, Facebook, Snap Chat and Twitter feeds," Bernardi said.

How Optical Is Leveraging Followers, Clicks and Pics for Marketing

Continued from page 54

The fact that many businesses are incorporating social media and social media influencers into their marketing strategies is evidence that they see the two as affecting the path-to-purchase. According to KPMG—a professional service company and one of the Big Four auditors—the old path-to-purchase was linear with consumers going through the stages of awareness where they see an ad of the product; consideration where they take into account when and where to buy the product; and then conversion where they actually make the purchase and evaluation where they share their experience with others.

With most people spending so much time on their digital devices, the path-to-purchase is no longer linear, but has evolved into more of a cycle in which an influencer at the evaluation stage

can directly affect the decision of his/her follower in the awareness or consideration stages.

"The importance of the social media influencer is huge in modern marketing," stated Brunson. "The *Huffington Post* just reported that Kylie Jenner caused Snapchat's stock price to drop by \$1.3 billion [in one day] simply by tweeting that she doesn't use it anymore. That's insane, but that's the power of the influencer in today's market."

According to Acorn: The Influence Company—a firm that offers specifically tailored campaign options—influencers not only create greater brand awareness, but their "participation in a campaign is seen as an authentic endorsement by their audience." Their promotion of a product differs from that of a celebrity because they are viewed as everyday people.

"Influencers have the ability to create a per-

sonality to a brand or product," said Roberts and Brown's Sheena Taff. "An influencer is like a muse, someone who embodies the spirit of the brand's message, in a way that comes across less as a paid spokesperson and more as a passionate user of the product."

With most social media sites adapting and expediting the path-to-purchase experience, influencers are also able to offer direct discounts and products that encourage consumers to buy certain products, according to Acorn. Instagram's shopping feature, for example, now gives users a preview of an item, its price and also a direct link to the product's webpage, allowing users to make purchasing decisions within minutes.

This article reflects a small compilation of some of the companies in the optical industry who are harnessing the power of influencers to market their product. ■

More →

Social Influencers

Celebrity Influencer

1.

Celebrity influencers have millions of followers.

2.

While they have a wide audience to create brand exposure, their followers are less targeted and therefore don't always forge a real brand connection.

3.

They are the most costly of the influencer groups.



Macro-Influencer

1.

Macro-influencers have followers in the hundreds of thousands to the millions.

2.

Macro-influencers usually have a strong connection within a certain focus such as fashion, beauty or lifestyle.

3.

Can garner more engagement per post than Celebrity influencers but don't have as concentrated of a following as Micro-influencers.



Micro-Influencer

1.

Micro-influencers have follower numbers in the thousands.

2.

They have a highly concentrated group of followers.

3.

A more affordable option, their pages give off a more “authentic” atmosphere and they can easily engage with audiences, boosting engagement.



Anatomy of an Influencer

The world of influencers isn't a one-size-fits-all marketing strategy. Influencers come with a range of followers, creating a unique distinction. These numbers and demographics play an integral role in who companies choose to tap for their marketing tactics.

“There are traditional influencers, like celebrities, and new-wave influencers, such as bloggers and social media stars,” said Chiara Bernardi, vice president of marketing, Luxottica Wholesale North America. “In short, celebrities are influencers in their own right. The key to any successful influencer partnership is choosing an individual who reflects a brand’s DNA.”

Celebrity influencers can be boiled down to celebrities who have Instagram accounts that boast millions of followers. Just think in terms of the Kardashians and the sponsored content that they promote.

Then there are macro-influencers who have followers in the hundreds of thousands to the millions. According to SocialMediaToday, a site that provides professionals with a view of the social media industry, they typically have a strong influence over a specific category such as beauty, fashion or lifestyle.

The next category would be the micro-influencers who make up the biggest group. The key to this influencer demographic is actually their smaller, more concentrated following. These accounts give brands a more authentic reach than accounts with larger followings. They are often more relatable to their audiences and better allow brands to engage with more distinct, target audiences.

“I think the advantage influencers have is that they are somewhat ‘more real’ than celebrities. Their followers are engaged and want to buy into their style, aesthetic and lifestyle of course because they like it, but also because it seems attainable,” said Lillie Ayton, head of PR at Cutler and Gross.

Sophia Visanji, OD, at OPTYX Eyecare believes that harnessing the power of social media and influencers is a key tool for the eyecare industry. “It’s 2018, everything is digital,” Visanji said. “It is imperative that ODs use this to their advantage as well. It is also far more cost effective than traditional methods, which is a huge plus when it comes to marketing budgets.”

She said, “I think along with using social media as a great way to market brands and services in the optometric world, it is becoming more and more important for all businesses to have a brand identity and a digital footprint. Using social media as a tool for brand recognition is equally as important as using it for marketing.” ■

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Social Influencers

Spotting a Fake

As everything seems to be with the internet, there are always dark corners of the digital world—and the phenomena of influencers isn't immune to it. While accounts might boast thousands, hundreds of thousands and even millions of followers, not all of them are legitimate. With personalities seeking validation through the number of followers they can claim, the rise of buying fake “bot” accounts to boost numbers has become a very real controversy for social media platforms. Known as the black market of social media, the *New York Times* recently published an investigative feature titled, “The Follower Factory,” which chronicled the occurrence of influencer accounts purchasing fake followers. ■

