

The Current State & Future of B2B Influencer Marketing

From The Influencers' Perspectives

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The future is looking brighter than ever for B2B influencer marketing with a large proportion of influencers having seen their influencer work increase since the pandemic. But this report highlights some weak points for us to improve as an industry. We need to better align opportunities, agree on business outcomes and work to professionalise the industry so that both influencers and marketers get maximum value from influencer collaborations.

Tim Williams, CEO, Onalytica

1. 2021: The year of B2B Influencer Marketing

In a world over-saturated with content and choice and with the power laying firmly in the customers' hands, it has becoming increasingly difficult for brands to control their narrative online and reach their target audience.

As a result, influencer marketing has become more central to B2B brands' marketing strategies and better integrated into their content and social media activities. Throw into the equation the global pandemic we are all currently faced with, this has further accelerated the shift to digital first.

Like any industry that experiences a boom, there are lessons to be learned and improvements to be made. In B2B, influencers come in all shapes and sizes with different skills, requirements and motivations and brands therefore need to collaborate and treat them accordingly.

B2C influencer marketing is largely focused around product marketing and driving product sales whereas in B2B, brands are leveraging influencers for everything from crisis comms & managing brand perception, thought leadership, consulting, to speaking at events and to test & launch products.

Our friends over at TopRank Marketing recently conducted an excellent survey aimed at B2B marketers to learn their perspectives on the state of B2B influencer marketing, but this is just one side of the coin. What do the influencers think and are they on the same page?

We reached out to **350 global B2B influencers** across sectors such as tech, finance, healthcare and energy to learn about their experience, motivations, preferences and predictions for influencer marketing in 2021 and beyond.

We've collated all of the best insights into this report so that marketers can go into 2021 with clear direction to help them meet their business goals and to ensure the influencer partnerships are as successful as they can be, from both sides.

> *"Influencer marketing is increasingly more important in B2B than in B2C, and brands will need to boost their B2B influencer marketing budgets in order to build a strong recovery from the pandemic, particularly because businesses can help each other to grow and to attract new customers through co-marketing campaigns -- ordinary people like to see businesses that support each other and thereby support their communities. B2B influencer engagement will do much more than a basket of B2C engagements to establish those ties and to grow business outcomes.*
>
> **Kirk Borne, Tech Influencer**

2. Key Findings & Takeaways:
B2B Influencer Marketing in 2021



Always-on campaigns are far more successful for both influencers and marketers compared with one-off campaigns.



Quality of outreach and research are very important and strongly linked to campaign success.



Influencers prefer to be contacted by Senior Execs and Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), highlighting the power of connecting influencer marketing and employee advocacy.



Influencer marketing should be a collaborative process – influencers who can edit briefs report higher success.



The brief is considered the most important factor for influencers when deciding to work with a brand or not.



The size of an influencer's audience and a brand's headcount & budget isn't important – the most important thing is alignment and an exciting opportunity.



There is room for improvement on better aligning opportunities with what influencers enjoy doing.



Influencers have different personas with different motivations for choosing to work with brands and should be treated accordingly.



The majority of influencers, regardless of audience size, are willing to do free work if they believe in the product/cause – influencer identification is key!



The need to professionalise the industry, particularly with payments and on-boarding.



Most industries have seen no changes or increased work being the key trend throughout the pandemic – highlighting the increasing need for influencers.

3. Getting brands and influencers on the same page

In order for brand and influencer partnerships to flourish, it is important that all parties are on the same page. Like anything, this requires lots of open communication right at the start to lay out expectations.

So what do influencers want?

68%

of influencers enjoy speaking at events

Regardless of whether influencers monetize their profiles, being defined as an "influencer" usually comes down to 2 things: having an audience and having something worthwhile to say.

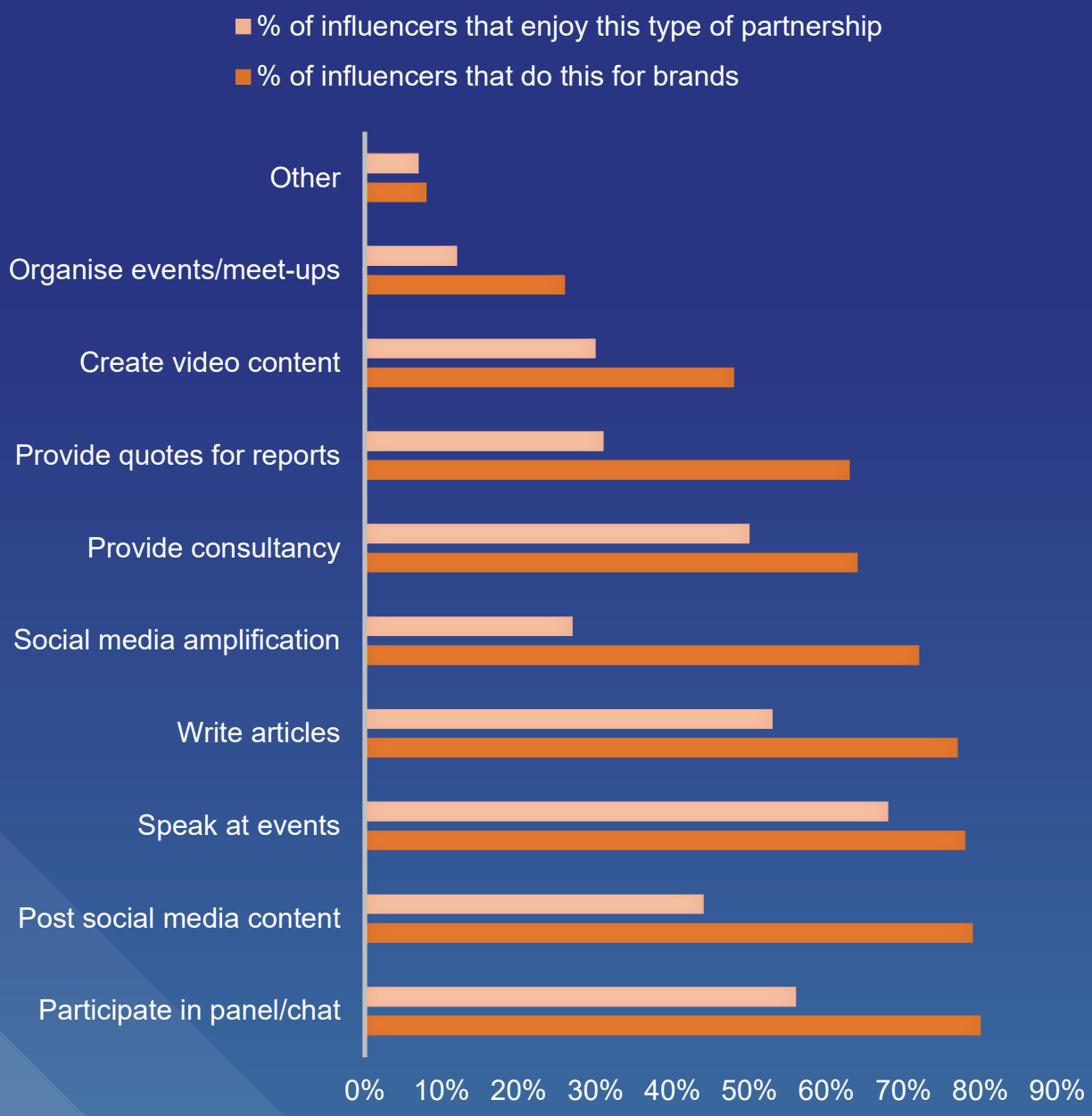
The most important aspect for influencers is the partnership opportunity itself, and ensuring that it is in-line with what they enjoy, what they're good at and their area of expertise. We asked influencers what activities they partner with brands on and which ones they enjoy the most; by comparing the two, we can see opportunities for better partnerships.

The most popular collaboration is posting social media content, with **79%** of influencers doing this for brands, but only **44%** of influencers enjoy this type of collaboration.

When it comes to what influencers enjoy the most, events are the most popular activity, with **68%** of influencers enjoying speaking at events and **56%** enjoying participating in a panel or chat.

Promisingly, this is an opportunity being provided to influencers by brands, with **78%** of influencers claiming they speak at events and **80%** speaking on panels. The key takeaway here is for marketers to take the time to get to know influencers so that they're creating partnership opportunities that suit the influencer.

TopRank Marketing's survey found that the most popular influencer activities amongst marketers were: collaborating on content (**87%**), promoting content (**82%**) and the most popular content types were: blog posts (**83%**) and recorded video (**67%**).



72%

of influencers would work with a brand for free

When it comes to receiving collaboration requests, **80%** of influencers are happy to receive collaboration requests and **72%** of influencers would work with a brand for free.

Influencers appear less likely to work with a brand for free when they have a larger audience, and also when they consider their campaigns to be successful. **39%** of influencers who reported "very successful" campaigns would not work with a brand

for free, compared with **24%** of influencers whose campaigns are “successful” and **14%** “somewhat successful”.

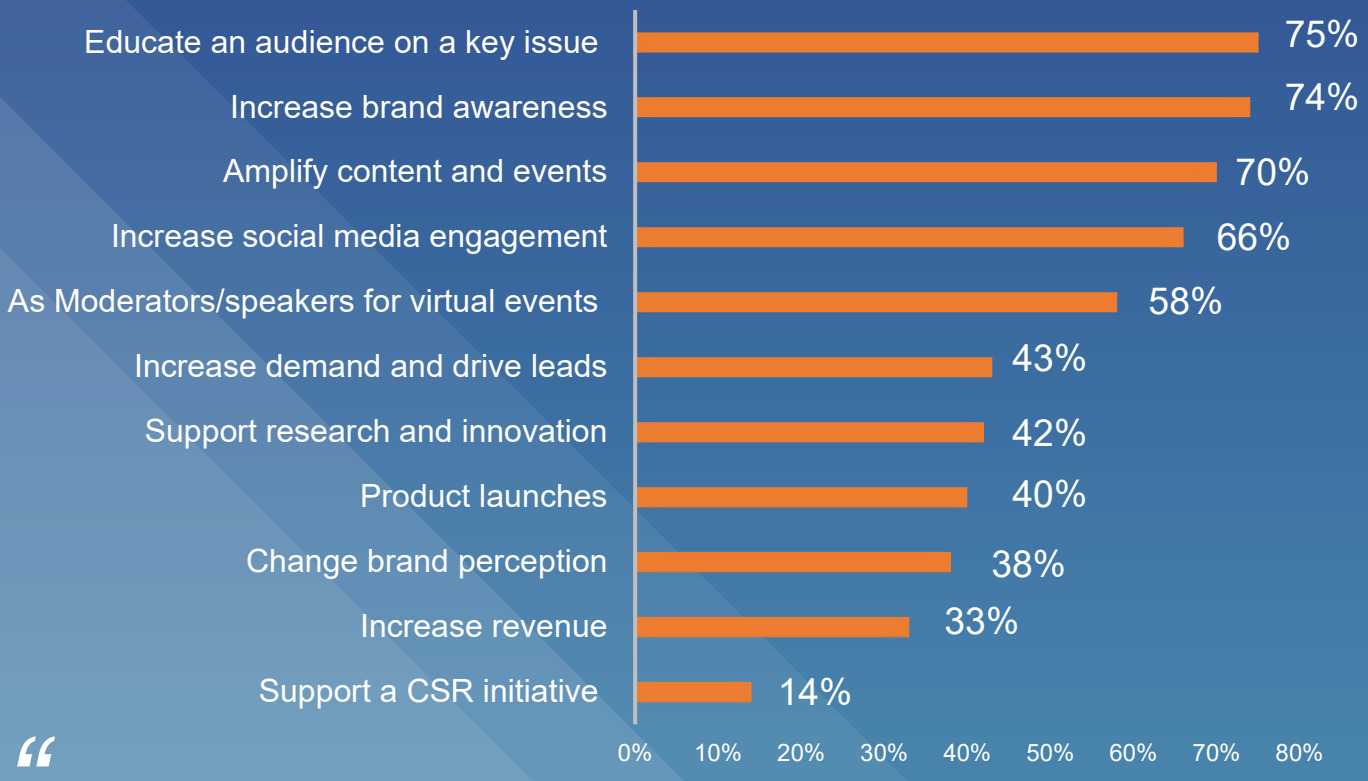
Brands and influencers working together towards a common goal

84% of brand marketers trust that working with influencers creates brand awareness, and **74%** of influencers believe the same.

The most common business outcome that influencers believe they are helping brands drive is educating an audience on a key issue (**75%**) and **70%** of influencers are helping brands amplify their content and events online.

When it comes to lead generation, **69%** of brand marketers count on influencers to help generate new leads, and **43%** of influencers believe that they are helping brands drive demand and leads. This discrepancy shows that better communication is needed between brands and influencers as to what business outcomes they are working towards.

With the rise in CSR initiatives, as we become more ethically conscious as consumers, and the clear value that influencers have when it comes to driving awareness, it is not surprising to see that **14%** of influencers are helping brands drive and support CSR initiatives – a trend we expect to increase going into 2021.



“

The value of influencer marketing has never been more prevalent. The way businesses choose to communicate their brand messages is continuing to evolve in this arena and I see exciting times ahead.

Sarah-Jayne Gratton, Tech Influencer

What are the most popular partnership types by sector?

When looking at the influencer responses across the different sectors, the picture doesn't vary too much but there are some key differences.

In general, posting social media content seems to be the most common partnership type and speaking at events in some capacity seems to be what they enjoy most. Interestingly, organising events and meet ups is in general the least popular - perhaps as this involves too much work from the influencer.

Sector	What they do the most	What they enjoy the most	What they enjoy the least
Finance	Post social media content (91%)	Speaking at events (65%)	Organise events/ meet ups (15%)
Tech	Post social media content (84%)	Speaking at events (66%)	Organise events/ meet ups (13%)
Healthcare	Speak at events (89%)	Speaking at events (73%)	Organise events/ meet ups (23%)
Pro Services	Participate in panel/chat & Write articles (85%)	Speaking at events (70%)	Organise events/ meet ups (15%)
Manufacturing	Write articles & post social media content (96%)	Speaking at events & provide consultancy (65%)	Organise events/ meet ups (19%)
Education	Post social media content (91%)	Speaking at events (74%)	Organise events/ meet ups (23%)
Environment	Post social media content (95%)	Speaking at events (65%)	Organise events/ meet ups (35%)
Energy	Write articles (92%)	Speaking at events (68%)	Organise events/ meet ups (20%)
Charity	Post social media content (94%)	Participate in panel/chat (67%)	Create video content (22%)

4. Marrying up opportunity with expectation

Another key aspect to helping brand and influencer partnerships flourish is understanding what influencers' expectations are and aligning partnership opportunities with these. A key part of this is appreciating how receptive and open influencers are to collaborating with brands and how much of their time they're willing to dedicate to partnerships.

This can vary quite a lot depending on the influencer persona – e.g. if they're a professional influencer or event speaker, a higher proportion of their earnings may come from influencer work, whereas an influential industry practitioner may not do paid work and wouldn't identify as an "influencer".

We asked influencers whether they currently partner with brands – **78%** do and **22%** do not– **43%** of which would like to get collaboration requests and **57%** would not.

When it comes to how frequently influencers actually collaborate with brands:

7% partner with brands less than once a year

11% partner with brands 2-3 times a year

8% partner with brands once a quarter

15% partner with brands once a month

20% partner with brands 2-3 times a month

Typically speaking, collaboration frequency seems to be in-line with influencers' audience size. **41%** of influencers with **>250k followers** do brand collaboration work at least once per week.

How willing are influencers to work for free?

To pay or not to pay is a topic that has repeatedly been up for debate over the last few years in the industry. The general consensus is that the majority of influencers, **72%**, would be willing to work with a brand for free, and **28%** would not.

The larger the influencer's audience, the less likely they are to work with a brand for free, with **35%** of influencers with an audience of **>250k** not willing to work with a brand for free, but **88%** of influencers with an audience of **1,000-10,000** would.

30%

of influencers who deem their campaigns to have been successful, wouldn't work with a brand for free

What we've also seen, is that influencers are less likely to work with a brand for free if they view that their campaigns have been successful. **30%** of influencers who deem their campaigns to have been either very successful or successful, wouldn't work with a brand for free, compared with only **14%** of influencers who deem their campaign somewhat successful.

What this comes down to, is the tipping point between the brand having more value to offer the influencer, or the influencer having more to offer the brand. In the case of an influencer having a large audience, or the influencer having great confidence in their campaigns being successful, the value they can offer a brand is indisputable and payment is more likely to be required.

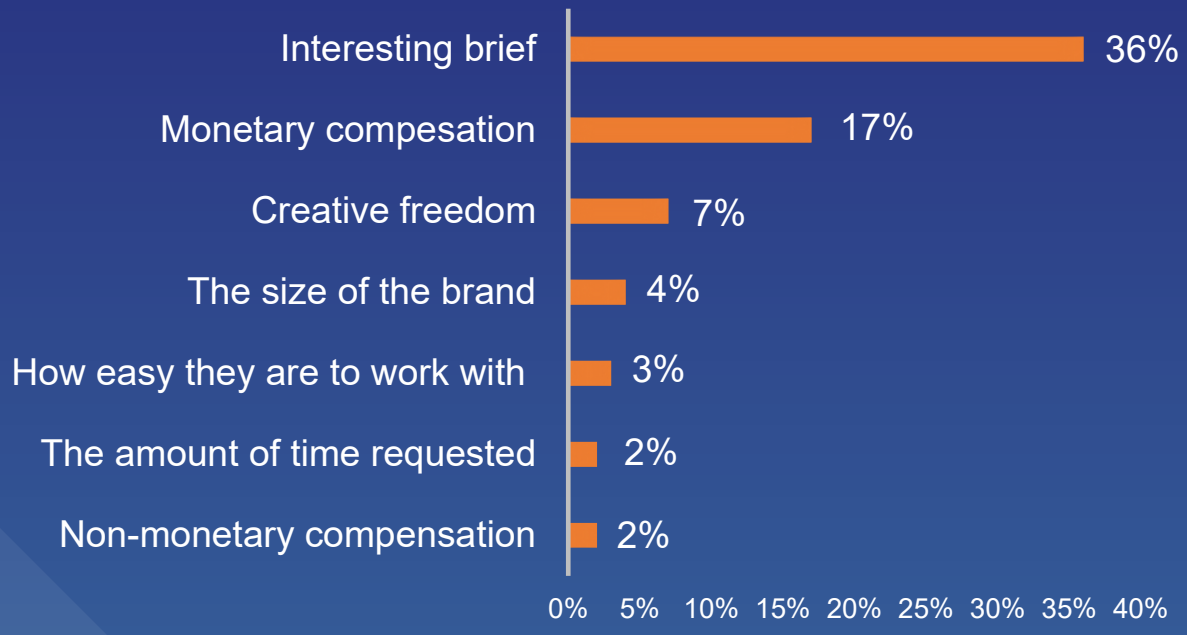


There is an expectation that influencers should engage for 'exposure'. In the vast majority of cases, the influencer is bringing significantly more to the table than the client from an exposure basis. This challenge is caused by people with influence undervaluing their worth and creating a market where brands get talent for free. Some of these 'influencers' believe that the more exposure they do, the more demand they may get and are hoping to get paid by becoming advisors with a piece of the start-up.

Jim Marous, Fintech Influencer

On the flip side, when an influencer has a smaller audience, or less confidence in their campaigns, they may be more open to talking about other value exchanges outside of monetary compensation.

This was further confirmed when we asked influencers what the most important factor is when deciding to work with a brand. Monetary compensation came in as the third most important, with **17%** of the vote.



What influencers actually value the most is the brand creating an interesting brief, with **36%** voting this as being the most important, followed by the reputation of the brand, with **29%** voting this as most important.

When it comes to how big a brand is, this is something that is low on influencers' priority list, with only **4%** of influencers rating this as most important, and only **3%** value how easy brands are to work with.

The story isn't so different for the brand marketers. The thing that brands value most when working with influencers: the influencer having a relevant audience (**91%**), followed by the influencer having relevant subject matter expertise (**79%**). What marketers value the least is the influencer's credentials (**30%**), followed by the size of an influencer's audience (**32%**).

What this tells us is that on both sides, the size of the influencer's audience or a brand's headcount is not important. What matters is reputation, relevancy and a collaboration that is aligned and exciting for both parties.

5. Always on beats sometimes off



Large brands/agencies must get better organized to use influencers more strategically, and less one-off/piecemeal, as they often do - one item at a time, instead of part of a program/thought leadership.

Dion Hinchclife, Tech Influencer

As the industry continues to mature, there is a shift towards an increasing preference for always-on campaigns, over one-off campaigns.

One-off campaigns can be great for building quick brand awareness and product sales, but when it comes to building trust and advocacy, longer-term, always-on partnerships are the way forward.

So what types of campaigns are influencers doing?

71% Do one-off campaigns

59% Do consultancy work

56% Are brand ambassadors

25% Work for brands on a retainer

Despite always-on being the least common, brands are getting the best results from this type of partnership.

Out of the influencers that are working with brands on one-off campaigns, **38%** deem their campaigns to be “very successful” whereas **49%** of influencers working with brands on an always-on basis deem their campaigns “very successful”. This highlights a great opportunity for brands to work with influencers on an always-on basis much more to improve results.

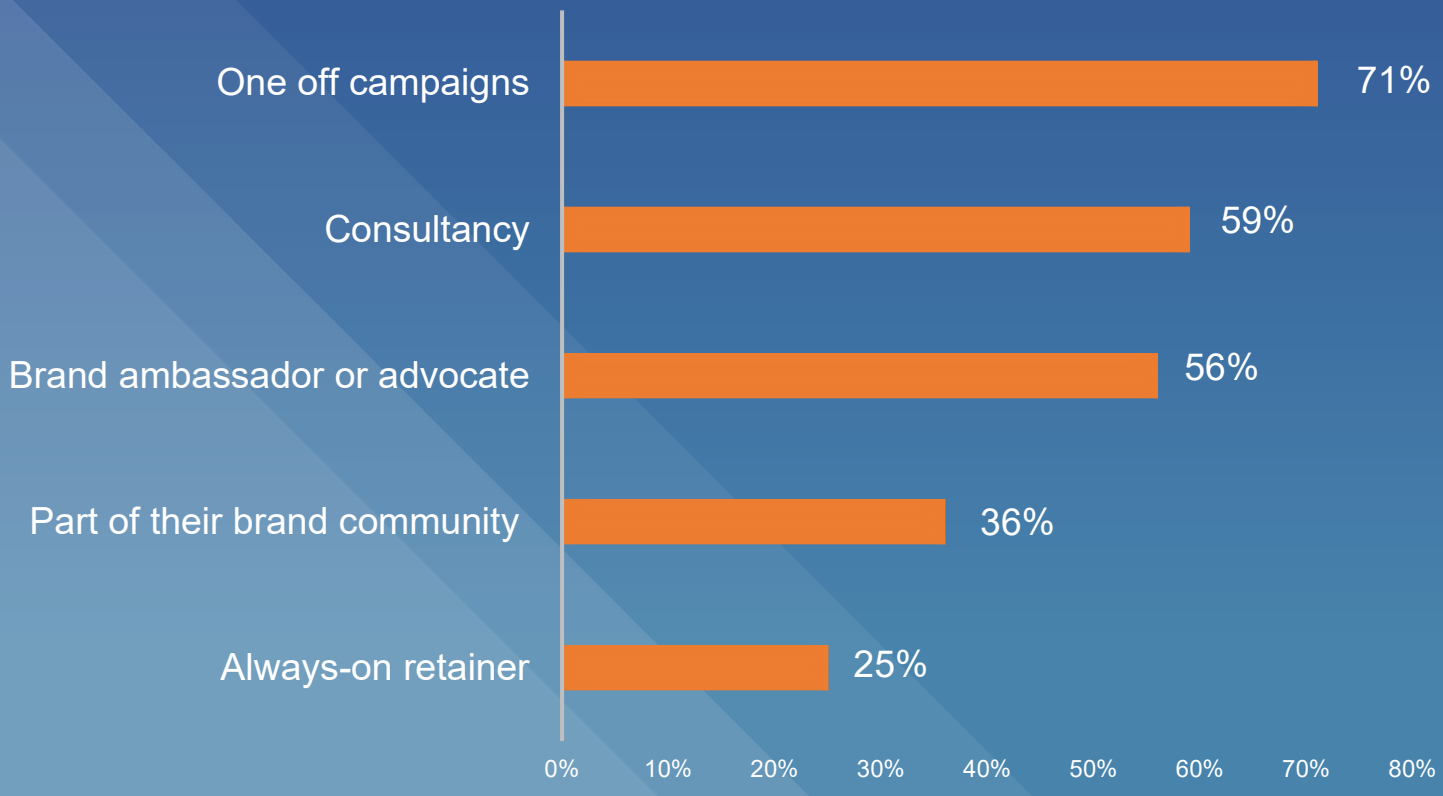
89%

of influencers who work for brands on a retainer deem their campaigns successful or very successful

The second most successful partnership type is being part of a brand community, with **43%** of influencers deeming their campaign “very successful”, followed by consultancy work with **42%** deeming their campaign very “successful”.

Once again, brand marketers feel the exact same, but to an even greater extent. Only **5%** of marketers who do periodic, one-off campaigns are very successful, versus **60%** of marketers who implement always-on influencer marketing progams.

> *“I hope that it becomes less “transactional” and more focused on genuine partnerships - while recognizing (and appreciating) the value-add that an independent voice and mindset can bring to a brand.*
>
> **Kathleen Kruse, Future of Work Influencer**



6. Make it or break it with outreach

When it comes to getting influencers on-board, nailing the influencer outreach is arguably the most important part, as well as a great chance to make a good first impression.

9%

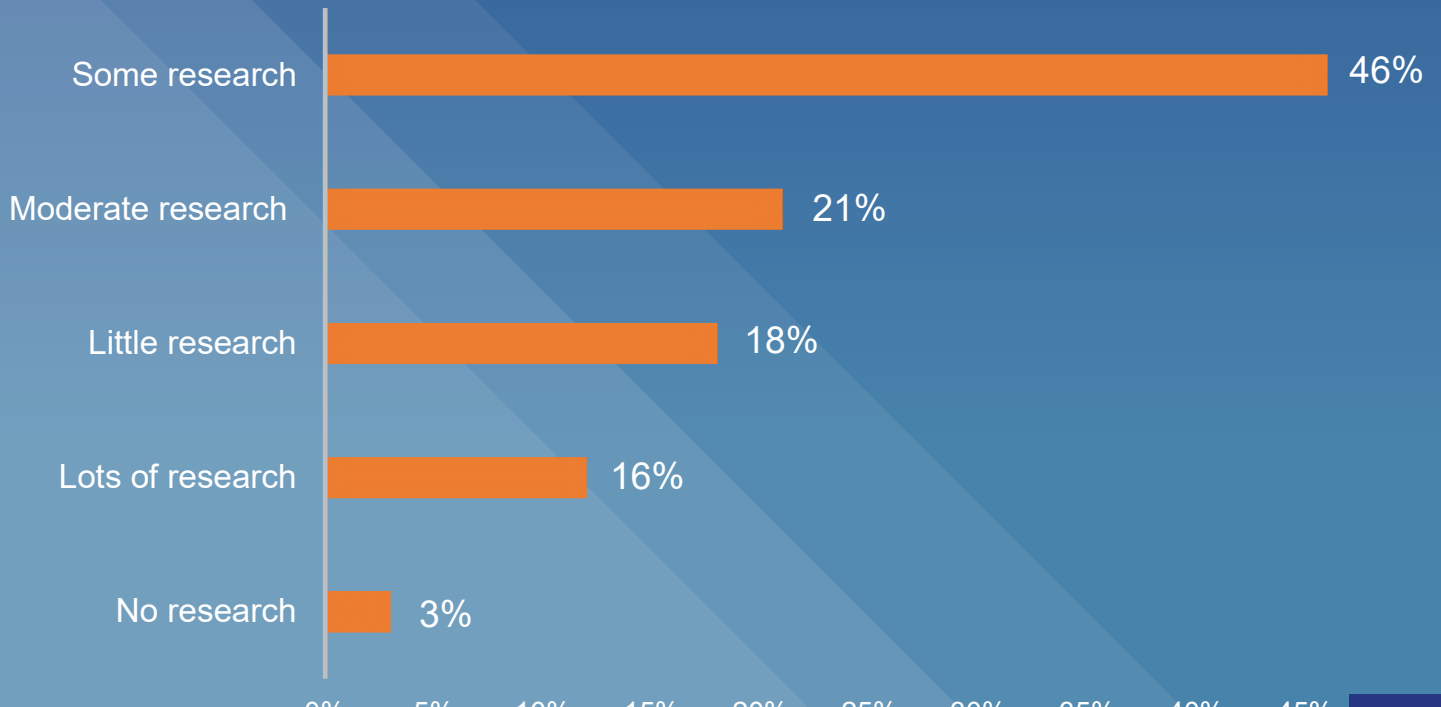
of influencers receive at least 1 collaboration request per day

Influencers receive an abundance of requests, so brands face a challenge to stand out and get noticed. **44%** receive between 1-5 collaboration requests per month, **20%** receive 6-10 per month, **10%** receive 11-20, **4%** receive 21-30 and **9%** more than 30 collaboration requests per month.

Research is key:

What we do know, is that influencers value an interesting brief the most, which requires the brand to carry out their due diligence prior to reaching out to the influencer. Carrying out research ensures that you understand an influencer, their expertise, their style of content and the ways in which they can be engaged, so that you do not reach out to them with an opportunity which is not aligned to them.

So how much research do influencers think brands do?



What we've also seen, is that the more research a brand does, the more successful the campaigns have been.

70%

of influencers who think brands do lots of research consider their campaigns to be very successful

14% of influencers who think brands do no research consider their campaigns to be very successful compared with **70%** of influencers who think brands do lots of research.

Amount of research	Somewhat successful	Successful	Very successful
No research	43%	43%	14%
Little research	33%	35%	33%
Some research	16%	56%	27%
Moderate research	6%	48%	46%
Lots of research	4%	26%	70%

There is also a strong correlation between the research carried out, and the overall quality of outreach.

93%

of influencers who think brands do lots of research rate their outreach as good or very good

0% of influencers who think brands do no research and **13%** of influencers who think brands do little research rate outreach as good or very good, compared with **93%** of influencers who think brands do lots of research.



Having engaged with a half dozen of Fortune 100 brands this year, I noticed the shift of how brands engage influencers. The due diligence they go through on influencer selection and on-boarding process is directly correlated to their success. Getting aligned on Brands' desired outcome and success measurement up front is critical. I invest time in learning about the brands I represent to ensure our shared value is carried through my engagement with their target audience. Brands also invest time in sharing with me on their key initiatives and target markets. This type of partnership allows us to maximize results.

Helen Yu, Tech Influencer

How much research?	Very poor	Poor	Ok	Good or very good
No research	14%	43%	43%	0%
Little research	3%	28%	58%	13%
Some research	1%	6%	52%	41%
Moderate research	2%	17%	40%	41%
Lots of research	0%	0%	7%	93%

Different messengers yield different results

Nailing outreach to influencers goes beyond the message, it's also about the messenger. We asked influencers who they prefer to be contacted by about brand collaboration work. **50%** of influencers have no strong preference over who they're contacted by.

Out of the remaining 50% who do have a preference, **68%** prefer to be contacted by a Senior Exec or Lead Subject Matter Expert, highlighting the increasing value that integrated employee advocacy and influencer marketing programs have.

28% of influencers with a preference like to be contacted by the brand's marketing or communications team and only **4%** like to be contacted by an agency.


4%
28%
68%
Someone from Marketing or Comms team
Senior Exec or Lead Subject Matter Expert
Agency

7. Unlocking the key to successful campaigns

The question on marketers' lips is, how can we drive success with our program? We've touched on many of these points in previous chapters, but let's summarise what's most important when it comes to campaign success.

83%

of influencers deem their campaigns to have been successful or very successful

16% of influencers deem their campaigns to have been somewhat successful and promisingly, **<1%** consider the campaigns they've worked on to not be successful. Marketers are largely in agreement, with **96%** of marketers considering their influencer programs to be successful.

There are **3 key things** that guarantee more successful results:



Always-on campaigns



Quality outreach



Collaborative campaigns

Always-on campaigns are more successful

71% of influencers do one-off campaigns and only **25%** work for brands on an always-on retainer. Despite always-on being the least common, brands are getting the best results from this type of partnership. From the influencers that are working with brands on one-off campaigns, **38%** deem their campaigns to be very successful where as **49%** of influencers working with brands on an always-on basis deem their campaigns very successful.

Better outreach, better results

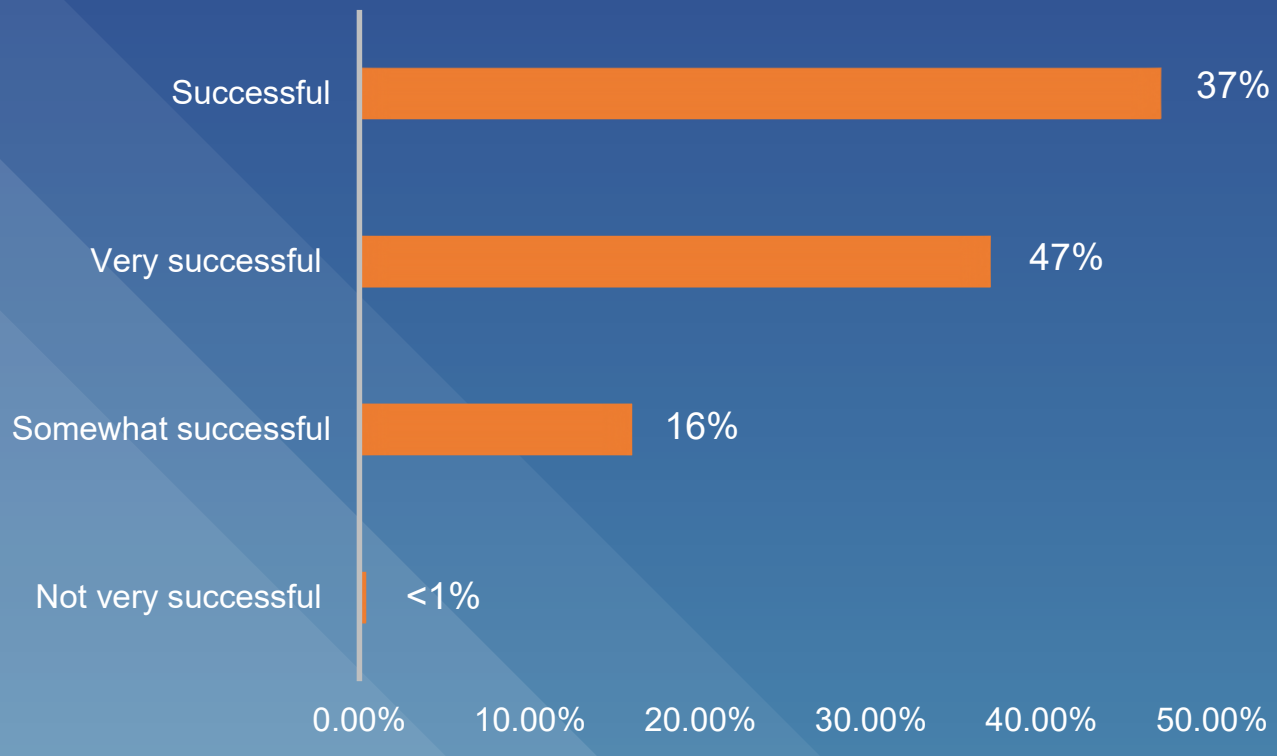
Out of the influencers that think brands do no research only **14%** deem their campaigns to have been very successful. Compare this with brands that do lots of research, **70%** deem their campaigns very successful.

Collaborative briefs yield better results

We've seen some interesting correlation between how much input an influencer can have with their campaign brief, with the success of the campaign.

5% of influencers have no input into the brand's brief, **18%** are able to make some slight small edits, **39%** are able to review and discuss the brief and **38%** are able to co-create the brief.

Only **14%** of influencers who had no input into the brand's brief deem their campaigns to be "very successful", compared with **70%** of influencers who had lots of input deeming their campaigns "very successful". Presumably, this is down to the brief being better aligned to business goals and the influencer's expertise when it is a collaborative process.



8. Understanding influencers' different motivations

When an influencer chooses to work with a brand they do so for a variety of reasons and it's vital that brands consider an influencer's motivations when outreaching to them. It's all about creating an Equal Value Partnership between the brand and the influencer so that both sides benefit from the collaboration.

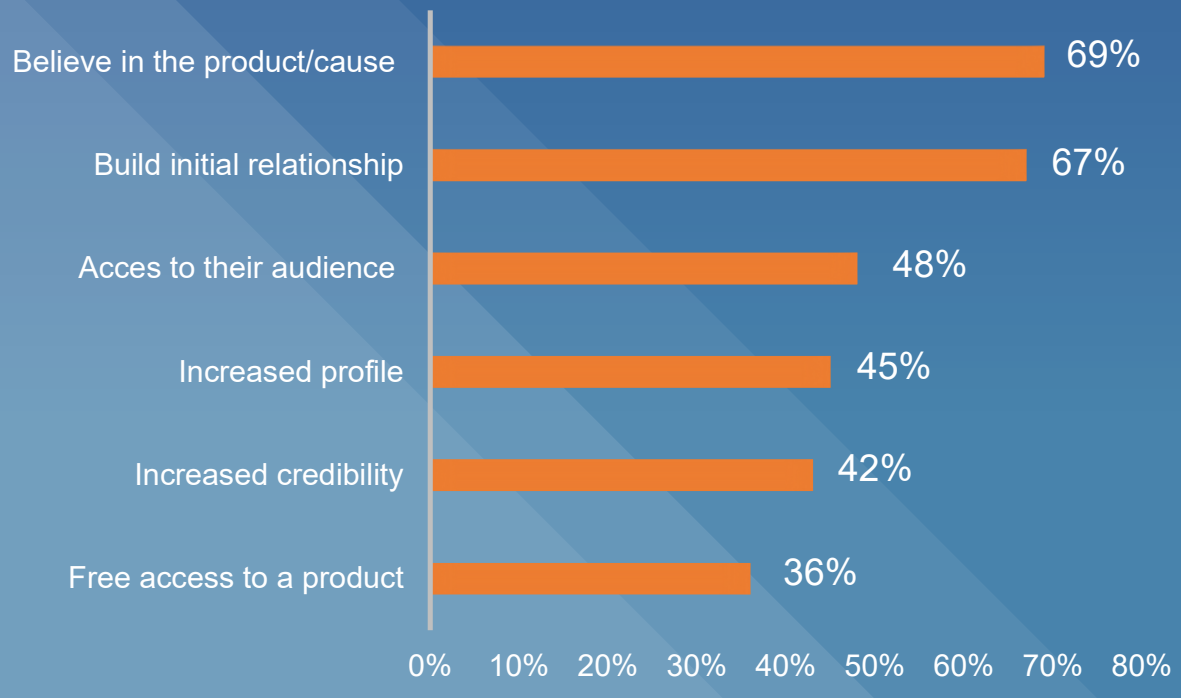
For many influencers working with brands is what pays the bills and they have often left senior positions in brands as analysts or executives to work as an independent consultant or have formed a small firm with other influencers.

Some of these influencers will mainly be delivering services like content creation (writing articles or video production) or event speaking to brands and should be compensated directly for these services. Other influencers mainly work as consultants or strategists for business or may have authored books. For these influencers greater exposure and association with top brands can help boost their profile as a consultant or drive sales of their books. Some influencers are still working at a brand as an advocate for that brand and raising the profile of their employer is the goal.

It's important for brand marketers to consider the different commercial models for how influencers run their affairs and offer meaningful returns for the influencer in any partnership.

When asked in our survey **28%** of influencers said they would not work with a brand for free and **72%** said they would.

Why would an influencer consider working for free?



Looking at the reasons why an influencer would consider working with a brand for free - **72%** said they would if they believe in the product/cause - highlighting the importance of getting influencer identification right. **70%** said they would to build an initial relationship, in other words – they will do some free work at the beginning but paid-for work would need to follow later.

51% said they would work for free to access to the brand's audience, **47%** for increased profile, **44%** increase credibility and **35%** free access to a product. This shows that influencers do have other non-monetary commercial objectives that brands can support.

Does this differ according to the influencer's persona?

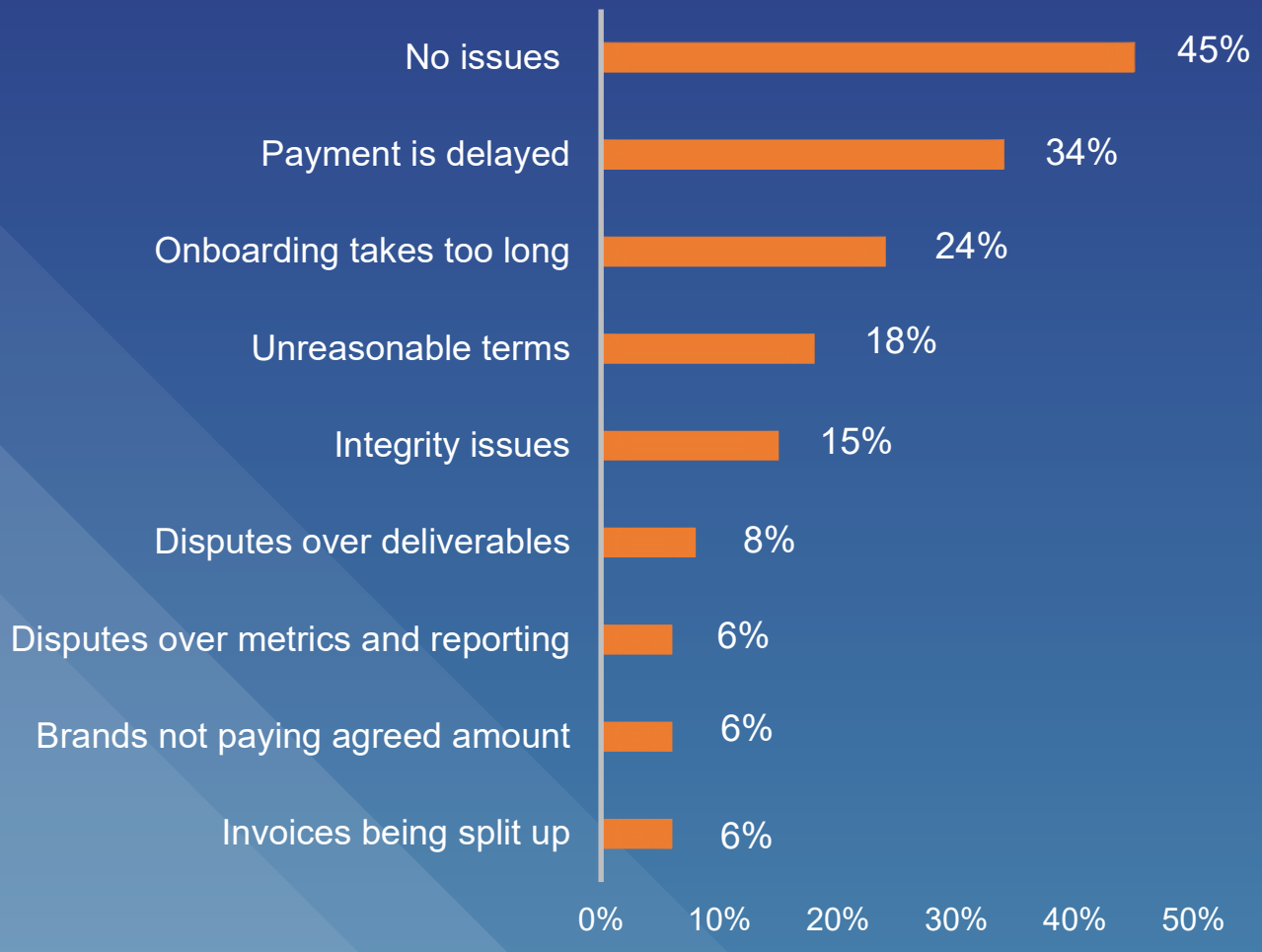
Persona	Reason to collaborate for free
Social Media Amplifier	Believe in product/cause (74%)
Professional Influencer	Build initial relationship and believe in product/cause (76%)
Industry Practitioner	Build initial relationships (70%)
Content Creator	Believe in product/cause (70%)
Event Speaker	Believe in product/cause (72%)
Independent Analyst	Build initial relationships (77%)
Industry Key Opinion Leader (KOL)	Believe in product/cause (72%)

9. Professionalising
B2B Influencer Marketing

While some brands have been working with influencers as a key component of their marketing activities for several years now, it is still a relatively new practice for many companies - even for some large global brands.

Like any industry that grows in popularity and becomes more mature, there is a need for defined processes and rules. For a long while both brands and influencers have been figuring it out and there have been mistakes made from both sides.

What are the top issues influencers face when working with brands?

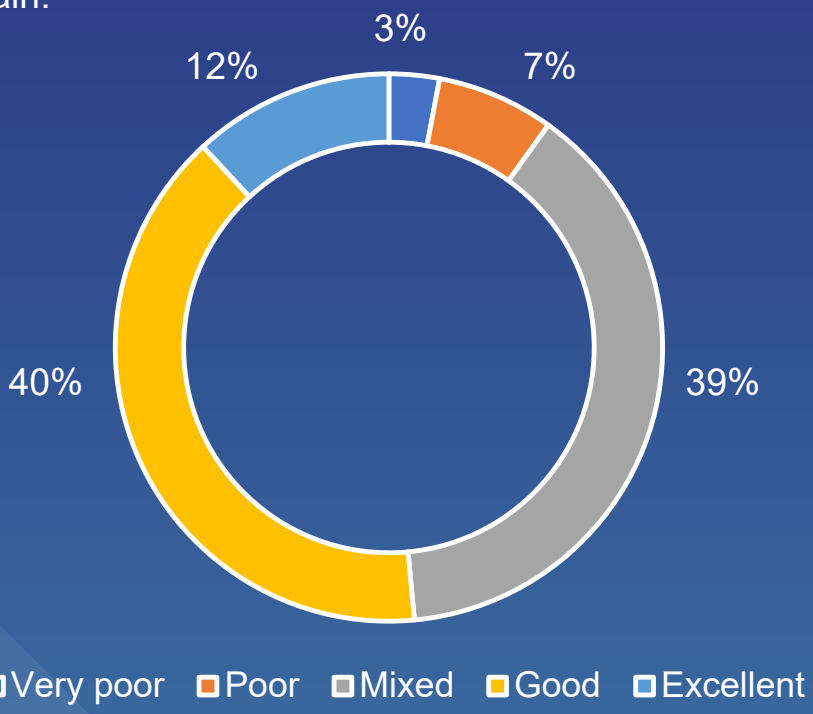


This is particularly felt by influencers when it comes to payments, as influencers typically have to be on-boarded by brands in the same way that a vendor would, which can cause delays in contracts and payment. However, when we asked influencers what their most common issue is when working with brands, the good news is that, in most cases (**45%**), influencers reported experiencing no or only minor issues.

55% of influencers report one or more problems when it comes to working with brands. The most common issue experienced by influencers is payment being delayed (**34%**), followed by on-boarding taking too long (**24%**) and unreasonable terms (**18%**)

A common tactic used by marketers to not delay payments, is to split payments out to remain below thresholds for procurement. Promisingly, Only **6%** reported that they had issues with invoices being split and **6%** said there were issues with disputes over metrics and reporting.

When it comes to getting paid, **40%** of influencers said they had a good experience and **12%** said their experience was excellent. **39%** reported a 'mixed' experience but **9%** said their experience was either poor or very poor and put them off working with the brand again.



Managing payments with an influencer should be the easy part but often internal, clunky procurement processes can make the exchange overly complicated. Brands need to remember that they are dealing with individuals here and that this is a main source of income for many influencers. Therefore, extra care should be taken to ensure that the process of paying an influencer is as streamlined and as quick as possible, especially when there are payment solutions and vendors who can help manage the process.

One recommendation to make to brands is to set aside budget in advance for influencer payments so the funds are ready for activations when they come up. We typically recommend that brands pay 50% up front and 50% once the work has been completed to the brand's satisfaction. Third parties can also help manage the payments process so internal procurement only needs to manage the payment to the third party who can then provide a detailed accounting back to the brand for all of the paid-for engagements.

10. COVID's Impact on B2B Influencer Marketing

49%

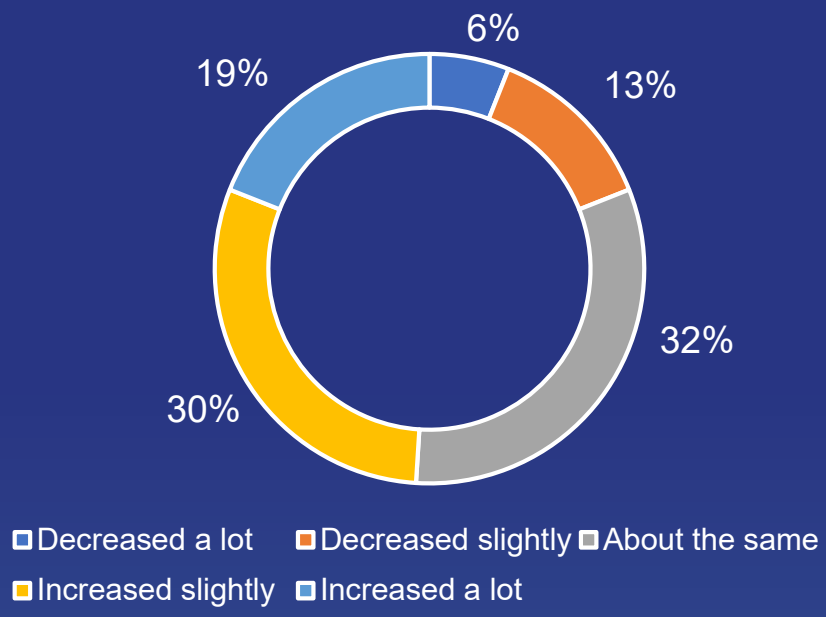
of influencers have seen their influencer work increase since the start of the pandemic

As with all sectors, B2B influencer marketing has been heavily disrupted by COVID-19. For many B2B influencers, participation in events has been a big part of their work with some of the top influencers attending physical events on a weekly basis, often traveling around the world to do so. Participation at events would usually involve speaking but could also involve video production or interviewing event participants. For B2B marketers too, events are a huge part of the marketing calendar and a source of lead generation. With physical events suddenly disappearing almost entirely for several months this has left a massive gap in the schedules of many influencers and has left a big hit on collaboration opportunities for pre- and post-event activities.

However, it's not all bad news. Many brands have had success in switching their event schedule to a virtual event or, in some cases, a hybrid event where a few delegates are able to attend in person with the rest joining virtually. Whilst these virtual and hybrid events aren't as impactful with delegates, compared to in-person events, they are significantly cheaper to run and have also allowed delegates to participate who might not have been able to join physical events previously. Virtual events have also created new opportunities to engage with participants before and after the event via digital channels as delegates who would not normally be using such channels are now suddenly having to get accustomed to them.

Another big change with COVID has been a significant uptake in people using social media platforms, perhaps due to more time being spent online due to remote working. LinkedIn reported a **50%** increase in engagement in March when lockdowns started to hit and engagement levels have remained high since then. This has created opportunity for B2B marketers to engage with people who previously were not as active on social channels. B2B influencers are experts at engaging on digital channels and it therefore should not be a surprise that brand marketers are looking to influencers to help them make the most of this opportunity.

Our survey showed that COVID has actually had a net positive impact on B2B influencers overall, with **49%** saying their work has increased slightly (**30%**) or a lot (**19%**) vs **19%** who said their work had decreased slightly (**13%**) or a lot (**6%**). **32%** of influencers say their work has stayed about the same.



This is a trend we expect to see continue in 2021 as brands look to reach their target audience online more effectively and to amplify their content and events.

Breaking this down by sector the figures are as follows:

Sector	Decreased	About the same	Increased
Finance	14%	29%	56%
Tech	20%	23%	57%
Healthcare	24%	34%	42%
Pro services	16%	33%	52%
Manufacturing	26%	13%	63%
Education	28%	26%	46%
Environment	50%	20%	30%
Energy	28%	16%	56%
Charity	17%	39%	44%

The finance sector saw the biggest net increase – perhaps reflecting the wider concerns about the financial impact of COVID and the need for expert opinion on what government interventions mean and how things might play out in future. Disappointingly though, the category that has seen the biggest decrease is Environment influencers – possibly a worrying indication that brands are not showing as much concern for Green causes during a time when economic and health concerns are taking centre stage?

Overall, the results reflect similar findings on the brand marketer side from a survey done by TopRank Marketing in August, which found that 90% of brand marketers expect their budget for influencer marketing to increase or stay the same.

11. Influencer Quotes & Predictions
B2B Influencer Marketing in 2021

In this virtual environment - it will only grow stronger and more prevalent
Fields Jackson, Diversity & Inclusion Influencer

More brands will want to get into influencer marketing in 2021, as in-person events continue to be limited. But only brands that approach influencer marketing strategically and who activate the right influencers to engage and be relevant to their audience (whether they are macro or micro-influencers) will break through the noise and achieve the results they are looking for.
Zontee Hou, Marketing influencer

B2B influencer marketing will become increasingly important in 2021 as we seek new ways to cut through the noise and win the attention of target audiences that are bombarded with too much content marketing.
Jay Palter, Marketing Influencer

We already see a shift from 'mass production' influencers towards amplification focused influencers with understanding of the topics. I am convinced this trend will continue.
Johannes Drooghaag, Tech Influencer

It will build in terms of importance and be a bigger pillar of the overall strategy to connect with target audiences, engage & drive business impact.
Danielle Guzman, Future of Work Influencer

From the brand side: brands will do much more due diligence when selecting influencers with which to work, and will be hesitant to commit to bigger campaigns until smaller ones are proven successful. Brands will also increase their online educational content in the form of streaming webinars, on-demand training, one-off campaigns. Brands are becoming more demanding of reaching KPIs, specifically traffic, leads and sales vs. just awareness. Plus, some brands will seek out more micro/nano influencers to integrate their product into everyday posts, e.g. I'm seeing Visa do this on Instagram lately. From the influencer side: Nano/micro influencers will continue to grow and proactively seek out opportunities. And, established macro/mega influencers and celebrities will need to dig in to deliver comprehensive value and not just 'check a box'.
Mari Smith, Marketing Influencer

Influencer marketing budget will increase. Brands are likely to spend $15 billion on influencer marketing campaigns by 2022, which produce better ROI than other marketing strategies. Engagement and audience matching will matter more than basic metrics like followers and reach. Marketers will make better decisions because of AI and ML. Video will be the key to delivering extraordinary marketing experiences. Instagram will remain the dominant force. Audio content will be utilized by influencers which is catered to an audience that is highly engaged. People listen to podcasts and it saves time. More influencers will be brought on board. Nano- and micro-influencers will be more effective in influencer marketing and brands will benefit from stronger partnerships built on trust and mutual interests.

Vladimer Botsvadze, Marketing Influencer

I believe that influence marketing will be the most effective form of advertising in 2021, but factors affecting its success are the quality of the content, the product/ service advertised, the material showcasing the product/service, and the way it is advertised. Influencers have the potential to accelerate marketing efforts especially if they already have an audience of followers who would be interested in the product.

Georgina Cosma, Tech Influencer

The value of influencer marketing has never been more prevalent. The way businesses choose to communicate their brand messages is continuing to evolve in this arena and I see exciting times ahead.

Sarah-Jayne Gratton, Tech Influencer

The number of new brands and entrepreneurs online has risen significantly; most have crossed over because of the effect of Covid19 and new regulations. As a result, vast numbers of businesses would be in search of B2B influencer marketing services.

Paula Piccard, Tech Influencer

In 2021, there will be an increased focus on internal influencers — making them into rock stars driving business impact.

Gerry Moran, Marketing Influencer

There is a demand for and expectation of authenticity by brands, especially when they attempt to align themselves with the movement for social justice. Anything that looks like trying to profit from, rather than sincerely work toward, the movement for social justice will hurt those brands. It's an old story made fresh by a global pandemic and civil strife. Pretty pictures of people on mountain peaks and lounging in front of waterfalls won't resonate the same way when people are trying to avoid a deadly disease and ensure under-represented communities finally get equity. Alliances with true stakeholders will be a must.

Jay Frost, Fundraising Influencer

For me, it is growing exponentially. Because sales forces are still working from home and live events are still on hold, the demand for content, affiliation, implied endorsement and engagement is beyond my ability to deliver. For instance, for sponsored webinars (a set quantity of one every other week), I am over 25% sold out for 2021.

Jim Marous, Fintech Influencer

Large brands/agencies must get better organized to use influencers more strategically, and less one-off/piecemeal, as they often do (one item at a time, instead of part of a program/thought leadership arc, etc.)

Dion Hinchcliffe, Tech Influencer

I hope that it becomes less "transactional" and more focused on genuine partnerships - while recognizing (and appreciating) the value-add that an independent voice and mindset can bring to a brand.

Kathleen Kruse, Future of Work Influencer

More focus on establishing and executing long term collaborations and engagement with specific metric targets shared and jointly monitored. This needs to be done under a fair monetary compensation agreement.

Kevin L. Jackson, Tech Influencer

It will grow as companies will need 'online' ambassadors given the implications COVID-19 will continue to place on events, travel etc,

Kevin O'Donovan, Tech Influencer

A potential growth of requests for online presence but also a slight contraction of the market and a better vetting. There should be a bigger emphasis put on expertise and thought leadership vs just amplification/promotion.

Samuel Pavin, Marketing Influencer

Brands must not only look at the sizes of the audiences, but the weight of the opinions and the relevance to their target market within their customer journey. Size of audience gets people excited, but large influencers (especially in B2B) may not be the people the audience will actually buy from.

Zontee Hou, Marketing Influencer

Brands must be focused on 1-3 key issues, and not try to be all things to all stakeholders. Be BRAVE, and pick a topic and dig in deeply, commit, be transparent about struggles to reach goals, with a leader being HONEST in his/her comments, content, social platform engagement. Consumers are done with the usual greenwashing/social washing.

Andrea Learned, Sustainability Influencer

I think brands need to be more agile and understand that the influencer too has a brand to maintain.

Natalie Zfat, Marketing Influencer

We need to stop trying to apply consumer influencer approaches and tools to B2B. It is not the same animal.

Patrick Foarde, PR & Comms Influencer

More selective use of influencers by brands. In B2B, it's a different approach than the consumer market - and that means targeted, knowledgeable, and impactful choices.

Barbara Soifer, Marketing Influencer

A shift from quantity towards quality - particularly for digital campaigns. A high level of traffic is good, but demonstrable engagement with the right audience is better.

Jonny Williamson, Tech Influencer

In 2021, there needs to be a better understanding of the differences in and different types of analysts, KOL, influencers, etc.

Jeff Kagan, Tech Influencer

Better strategic alignment between brands and Influencers - less short-termism, more co-creation.

Jim McClelland, Sustainability Influencer

Hopefully the attitudes will improve. Choosing influencers by researching their background. Respect for influencers is very important.

Marsha Collier, Tech Influencer

In my area -- teachers to teachers -- influencers are more important than ever but the scale is tipped massively in favor of teachers IN the classroom and not consultants in an office.

Vicki Davis, Education Influencer

Diversity. In my industry in particular, middle aged white guys are a dime a dozen. And they are not the only ones influential and knowledgeable about this industry. Women, women of color, BiPOC, that's what I'm hoping changes, especially as it relates to B2B influencer marketing in tech.

Shelly Kramer, Tech Influencer

Although some general influencer marketing rules and regulations to follow have been introduced by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), more comprehensive guidelines and regulations should be introduced. Not only would it provide all parties involved with a more trustworthy business partnership, but it would also earn the industry more credibility.

Paula Piccard, Tech Influencer

It's not nearly diverse enough. Too much attention is paid to the wrong metrics, like number of followers, rather than looking at who.

Sarah Willey, Fundraising Influencer

We have to find a better way to 'measure' and recognize what defines an influencer ... a real knowledge expert with 1000 followers with LOADS of engagement in a specific subject area has to be recognized over someone with 100,000 'followers' with a bot farm that 'amplifies' what they tweet, or an 'organized' network of buddy-buddy amplification.

Kevin O'Donovan, Tech Influencer

I believe that B2B brands need influencer thought leadership, credibility, and expertise now more than ever. I am seeing a 'slight' trend toward technology brands actually seeking out a woman (me) rather than my business partner (he), which I think is a good sign. That said, what I'm seeing is baby steps in the big scheme of things. I am hopefully this is the beginning of a trend for B2B influencer marketing moving forward.

Shelly Kramer, Tech Influencer

In 2021, B2B Influencer Marketing is going to improve its position and will become an industry by itself. 4Rs will come into action. Organizations will Recognize the influencers their business can Relate to and Remember the influencers who are Relevant to their businesses. Lots of noise will be cleared.

Shailendra Kumar, Tech Influencer

The stage is set for B2B Influencer Marketing for 2021 as digital engagement soars due to the pandemic and organic growth.

April Rudin, Wealth Management Influencer

Influencer marketing's prominence will increase in 2021 as brands have (likely) seen the pandemic as a need for more ambassadors in their field. Personal stories and the opinion of brand advocates go beyond a press release or product tear sheet and challenge the how and why companies do what they do - companies that are afraid to engage the market this way are missing an opportunity to learn from the experience of practitioners in their space.

Bradley Leimer, Fintech Influencer

11. Expert Quotes & Predictions
B2B Influencer Marketing in 2021

There's so much noise out there that it is really hard for brand marketers to break through. And yet, there are amazing examples of brands who have attracted massive audiences and delivered leads and sales from their marketing programs. What these brands do differently is they co-create content with influencers, employees, customers, and partners. That's why I predict influencer marketing to grow in importance for B2B brands.

Michael Brenner, Author, CMO influencer, and CEO of Marketing Insider Group

Covid has levelled the playing field in the influencer relations space and Employee Influencers are on the rise. This trend will require external influencers who charge companies money for their services to offer more in order to get their business. Additionally, companies will leverage these Employee Influencers to contact and forge relationships with external influencers vs their traditional reliance on influencer agencies.

Rani Mani, Head of Employee Advocacy at Adobe

There are three trends converging in 2021:

1. Brands no longer have a bias toward local talent, as remote work becomes the norm.

2. Influencers are looking for stability, as home life gets disrupted and revenue streams (i.e. paid speaking) becomes less certain.

3. Organic reach in social media remains low.

Put these together and you can easily imagine this hiring trend: influencers taking full-time roles. Why hire a social media marketer if you can hire a social media influencer? They bring reach and credibility. Brands that can afford it will find influencers who are interested. Some will jump at the chance for a steady pay cheque.

Brands get the social reach of a full-time ambassador; the influencer gets stability and peace of mind. The takeaway? 1) If you're a brand hiring for social media or PR, don't be afraid to reach out to the well known SMEs in your field, wherever they live. They may be excited to hear about the opportunity. 2) As an individual marketer, keep building your personal network and your social followings. It will make you more appealing to hiring managers down the road.

Andy Crestodina, Co-Founder & CMO Orbit Media Studios

B2B influencer relations have become quite sophisticated very quickly. I think there will be a movement to more long-term engagements as a relationship with an influencer comes to be regarded as a strategic asset.

Mark Schaefer, Keynote speaker & Author of Marketing Rebellion

Influencer marketing in 2021 will transition from: the transactional to the collaborative, the micro to the nano, the outsider to the customer, content amplification to content creation, campaign-based to an essential part of marketing.

Neal Schaffer, CEO, PDCA Social

As more B2B companies embrace influencers to gain reach and drive prospect behavior, we'll see a big uptake in 2021 in "overall" and "first look" agreements. Taking a page from the music, film, and television industries, companies will seek deeper, longer-lasting relationships with key influencers, making them closer to hybrid spokespeople. Correspondingly, we'll see a sizable increase in category/ industry exclusives, and competitor lockout clauses.

Jay Baer, Founder, Convince & Convert

2020 has been a tremendous challenge for everyone both personally and professionally. More than ever empathy and humanity is needed in all customer engagements. I think 2021 will see a rise in the use of influencers in account based management as we respond individually to the specific needs of customers. A key component of influencer marketing is relationship building and I can think of no better time to put this to best use and connect influencers and customers digitally to explore response, recovery and re-imagine to move forward with resilience.

Angela Lipscomb, Influencer Relations Manager, SAS

12. Brand Examples
The good, the bad & the ugly

In our survey we asked influencers to share their experiences of working with brands – good and bad.

On the whole – influencers reported positive experiences of working with brands. When asked what brands they liked working with we got a very wide range of responses but the common themes were that influencers most like working with brands that are innovative and/or are supporting good causes with several influencers mentioning they like working with charities even if that's not their focus area.

Influencers also said they like working with brands that had taken the time to find out a bit about them before making the initial contact – emphasising that first impressions really do matter. The experience of working with start-ups was mixed with some influencers saying they particularly enjoyed working with start-ups whilst others said they tried to avoid them.

Influencers did not report many bad experiences of working with brands and few specifically named brands they would avoid. Common negative feedback was that influencers do not like working with brands that see them as a 'bought' commodity like an ad, or when marketers are disorganised/uncommunicative, also when brands do not do enough to support diversity.

IBM was specifically mentioned by over **10%** of the influencers surveyed as a brand they liked working with. SAP, Huawei Microsoft, Adobe, Siemens were also commended by 10 or more influencers and Cisco, Salesforce, Lenovo, Google, HPE, BMW, Oracle and Samsung by 5 or more.

Several of the commended brands also had some influencers report negative experiences of working with them, but in much lower numbers. This suggests there is still room for improvement even for the brands that are generally engaging well.

With no specific brands standing out for criticism, the industry that had the most comments from influencers reporting negatives collaboration experiences was banks and traditional financial services firms.

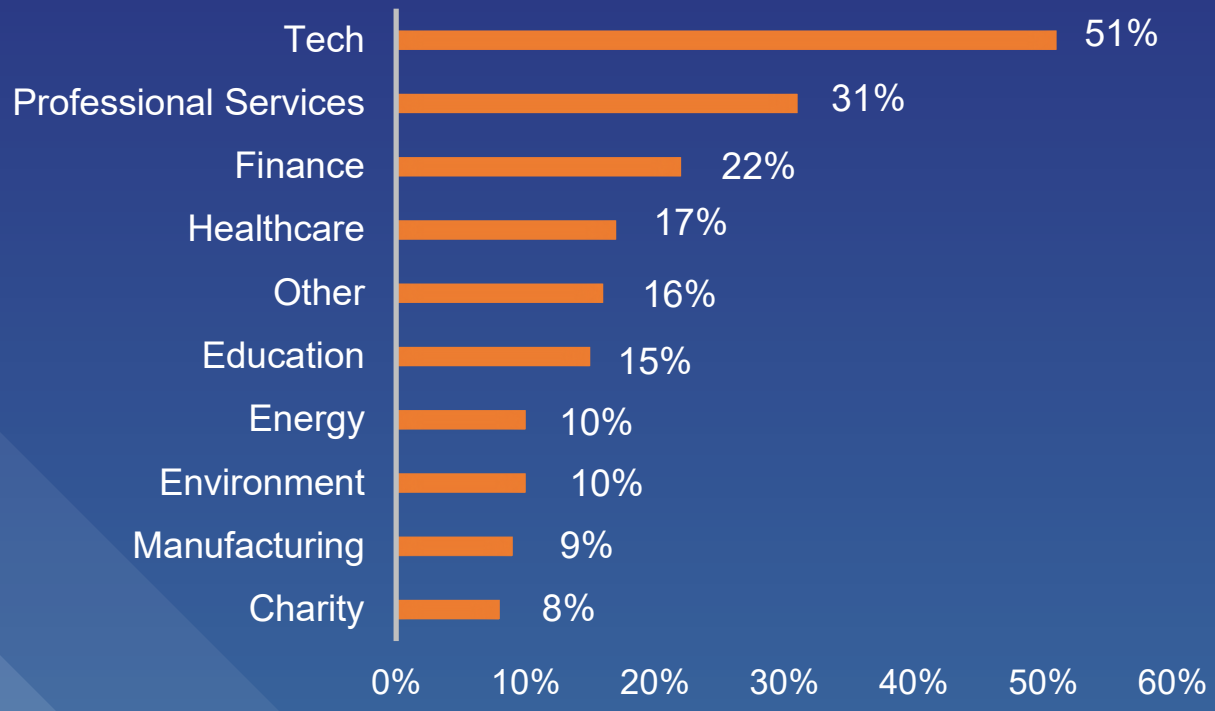
Several influencers reported that they frequently turn down brand collaboration requests because of a lack of alignment in messaging. For example, the influencer disagreed with some of the view points the brand had on key industry trends or there was a conflict on some other point of principle.

Perhaps surprisingly, payments or financial terms were barely mentioned as an area where influencers had bad experiences that would put them off working with a brand in future. From other parts of the survey we know that this is an area that needs improvement in the brand influencer exchange but from this part of the survey it seems that if there is a good alignment in other areas then problems dealing with the finances can be ironed out amicably.

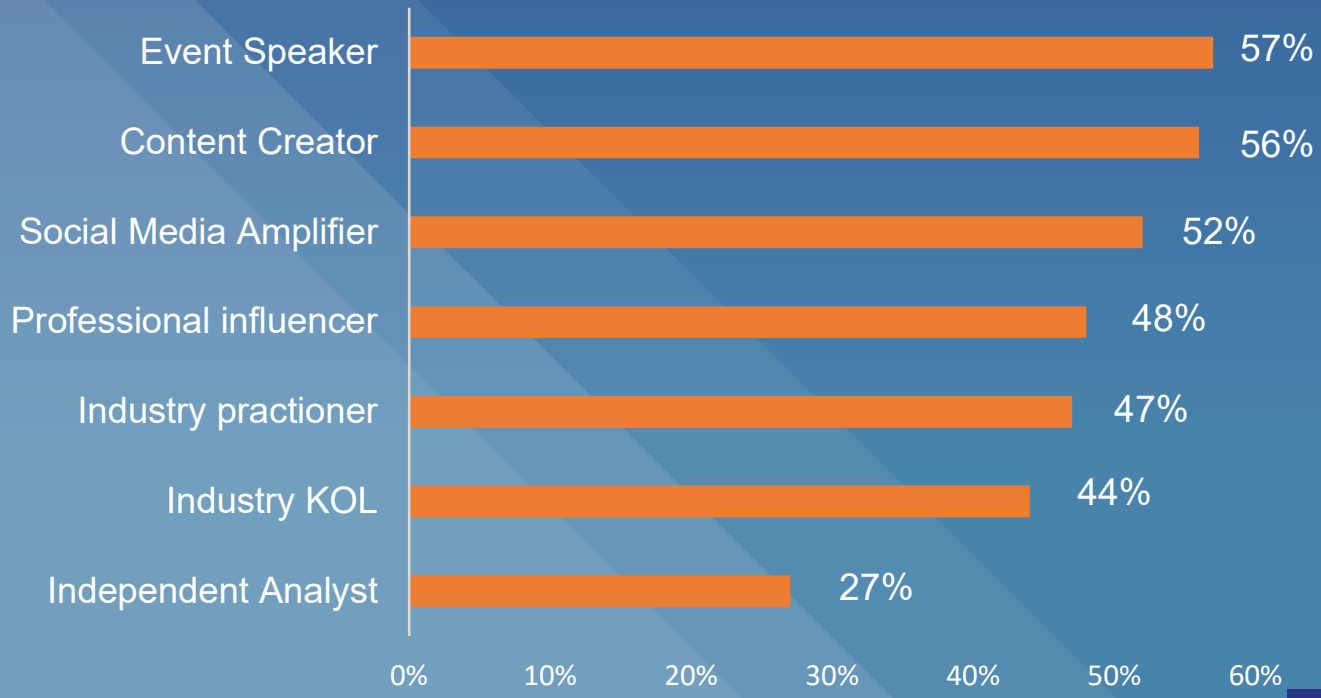
13. Methodology & Audience Overview

As part of this survey Onalytica, TopRank Marketing, Zeno Group & Thulium reached out to their B2B influencer networks to share their experience when partnering with brands. In total, circa. 350 influencers shared their experiences with us, across a broad range of industries, making this the most comprehensive survey of its kind, that is truly reflective of the B2B influencer marketing industry.

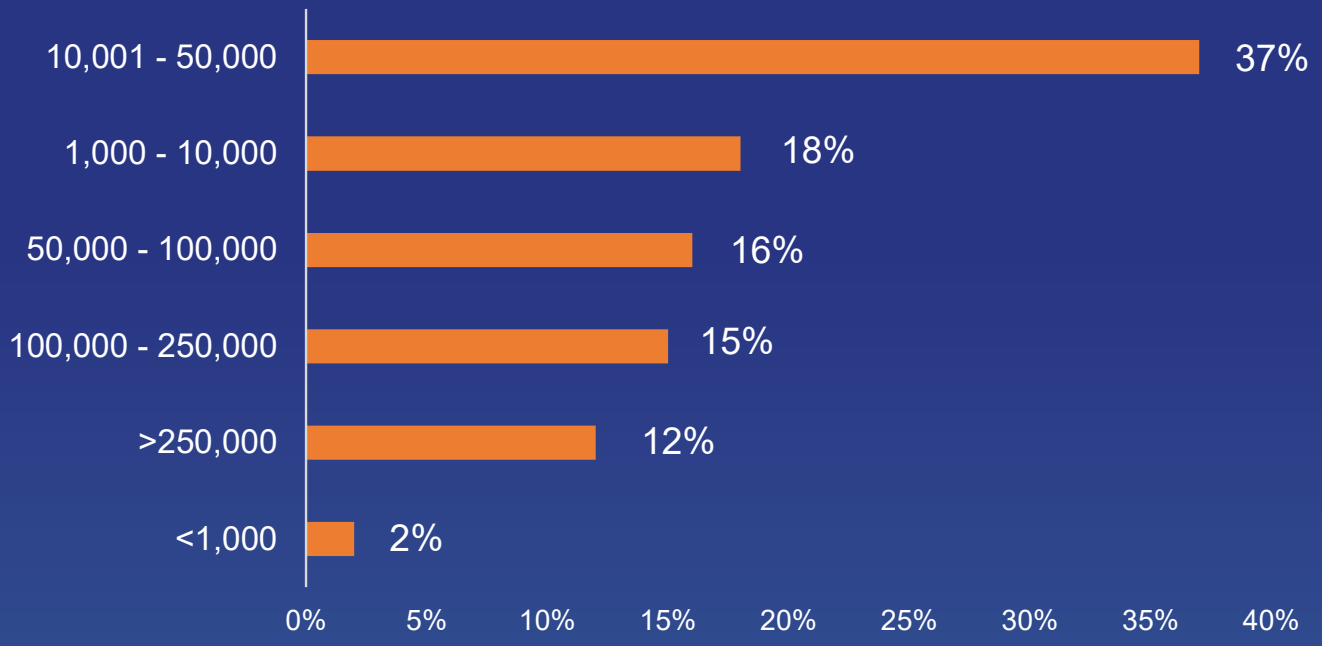
Industry overview:



Influencer personas:



Influencer audience sizes:



14. About the Authors



Alicia Russell
VP, Global Marketing, Onalytica

Alicia joined Onalytica back in 2016 and is now their VP Global Marketing. Alicia creates, executes and measures results of Onalytica's marketing strategy that centres largely around content marketing and influencer marketing. Understanding the common issues and struggles that marketers face today, she is passionate about producing content that can help as many marketers as possible to create influencer partnerships and content that benefit all parties, but most importantly, that helps hit business objectives. To date Alicia has authored 3 industry-leading eBooks and isn't set on stopping there.



Tamara McCleary
CEO, Thulium

Featured multiple times in Forbes for her pioneering influencer marketing strategies on social media for B2B and Enterprise, Tamara describes her career path as anything but ordinary. From helicopter trauma nurse in 1987 to cancer researcher in 1990 to bringing new medical technology to market in Silicon Valley since the mid-90s, Tamara McCleary is CEO of global tech company, Thulium, which harnesses artificial intelligence, and machine learning to drive smart social in the B2B and enterprise space. Tamara also serves as a unique advisor to leading global tech companies Amazon, Oracle, SAP, Cisco, Dell, IBM, Verizon, Mercer, Marsh & McLennan Companies, Citrix, and RSA Security.



Michael Brito
EVP, Zeno Group

Michael is a published author, TEDx speaker, adjunct professor, and avid 49ers and Lakers fan with over 20+ years' of experience helping organizations break through the clutter and reach their audience with game-changing marketing and communication programs. As an Executive Vice President at Zeno Group, I am responsible for helping clients reach their target audience with laser-focused precision the right story, at the right time, in the right channel and with the right media. This unique methodology requires a combination of audience intelligence, creative, editorial content, targeted paid media and rigorous integration with traditional public relations programs.



Lee Odden
CEO, TopRank Marketing

Lee Odden is CEO and co-founder of TopRank Marketing, a B2B marketing agency focused on content, influence and search for brands that include SAP, LinkedIn, and Dell. Cited by the Wall Street Journal, The Economist and Forbes for his marketing expertise, Lee is the author of the book Optimize, and has blogged about marketing for over 16 years. Lee has been named a top expert on influencer marketing by Onalytica and is the publisher of The State of B2B Influencer Marketing Research Report. After giving 200+ presentations in 18 different countries on innovative marketing strategies, he's now focused on how to create maximum value through virtual events and online engagement.

15. About Onalytica



"Connecting brands and influencer communities to create inspiring content."

Get in touch

Founded in 2009 and backed by Bebo founders Michael and Paul Birch, Onalytica is an award-winning influencer marketing software platform that connects brands with topical influencer communities and helps them to scale and structure influencer programs globally.

Influencer Marketing is still an emerging category with brands and influencers both figuring out how to best work together for mutual benefit in an environment with no rules. Onalytica provides the software, professional services and consultancy to help clients run successful influencer marketing programs and integrate influencer marketing into their wider social advocacy strategy.

Onalytica have run over 1,000 B2B influencer campaigns for brands like SAP, Microsoft, CocaCola, Barclays, IBM and British Airways.

Key questions we help solve

DISCOVER SOLUTIONS

- Who are my relevant influencers?
- How do I engage them and build relationships?
- What influencer generated content can I create?
- How do I measure success and ROI?
- How do I structure and scale my program?