

HOW TO

WORK WITH

Travel Influencers





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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Who Should Use This Book
Terminology
Out of Scope

2. WHY WORK WITH INFLUENCERS?

3. HOW TO HANDLE INCOMING REQUESTS

Define Your Goals
Initial Assessment
Canned Email Responses
Google Forms & Spreadsheets

4. HOW TO EVALUATE INFLUENCERS

The Qualitative Evaluation
The Quantitative Evaluation

5. PROJECTS: PARTNERSHIP FOR SUCCESS

Running a Project
Determining Success: What is the ROI?

6. HOW TO FIND INFLUENCERS

Search Tips
Methods of Contact

7. TO PAY OR NOT TO PAY?

8. CONCLUSION

9. RESOURCES

About the Authors
Worksheet – Blog Evaluation
Worksheet – Project Details



The rapid expansion of blogging and social media as a force for influence has led to an explosion of possibilities.

01.

INTRO

It's Monday and you open your inbox to a series of new requests from influencers about working with your brand. Some are asking for free merchandise or services, some are asking for payment in addition to those comps, and others are decidedly vague and simply questioning if you work with influencers at all.

If this sounds familiar, you are not alone. The rapid expansion of blogging and social media as a force for influence has led to an explosion of possibilities. The questions many travel brands are asking themselves is, "what is the best way to decide who is suited to help promote our company" and "how can we effectively work together"?

This is where *How to Work with Travel Influencers* can help.

This book is for you, if you:

- Are a small to medium-sized travel brand with limited experience working with travel influencers;
- Have received multiple requests to work with influencers and aren't sure how to wade through them;
- Have limited time to handle these requests -- so maybe you say yes to everyone just to appease, or no because you really aren't sure what the benefit is. Or maybe you occasionally find the time and resources to say yes, but you are without a consistent strategy.

Because the barriers to entry are nearly insignificant, anyone can start a blog or Instagram account these days. And often they do! That is why blogs of all kinds number in the [hundreds of millions](#). For the purposes of this book we define a blog as being an online chronicle that is updated regularly, either by an individual or small group of people, and typically in a conversational or informal style. In the world of travel, typical blog posts can cover everything from travel gear to travel apps, as well as destinations visited and services used (hotels, tours, restaurants, etc.).

What this book will do is provide you with an efficient way to evaluate and work with influencers to help promote and grow your business.

We will focus intently on how to handle incoming requests from bloggers because in our experience with the industry, we know that this is where the biggest challenge lies.

In the pages that follow we'll also tell you why it is important to focus some efforts on vetting and hiring new media professionals. The bottom line is that in order to effectively grow your business, influencer marketing is no longer an option. It's a requirement.

This book will help you do it right.

A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

While reading this book, please note the following broad terms we use to describe our strategy for working with travel influencers:

- We use the term “brand” or “company” as an all-encompassing label for hotels, destinations, small tour operators, companies with travel related products, and general outfitters in the travel industry. Basically, if you run a company within the travel space, “brand” or “company” refers to you.
- We use the terms “blogger”, “influencer”, and “new media professional” mostly interchangeably, even though we do occasionally qualify “influencer” within a specific social media platform (i.e. an Instagram “influencer” is someone who has a large number of engaged followers on Instagram). The same qualification process should apply to all influencers, and within this book we offer criteria for all major social media platforms.
- We use the term “project” to describe any strategy undertaken between blogger and brand, no matter how big (a long-term promotional partnership) or small (a one-night hotel stay).

OUT OF SCOPE

This book does not discuss placing your existing written content on blogger’s sites (commonly known as “sponsored posts”). While this marketing and search engine optimization (SEO) tactic is still in use today and you will be able to find some bloggers to accept placing articles crafted externally (usually with payment), some bloggers will refuse.

There are several reasons for this refusal. First, given that the large majority of travel blogs are experiential in nature, travel bloggers reach out directly to gain first-hand experience with your brand in order to write about it for their audience. In addition, articles written organically about an experience or product naturally read more smoothly and will be in the same tone and style as the blogger’s existing body of work. And finally, pieces written by the blogger will provide the best results in the eyes of search engines and in the eyes of the blogger’s readers, who expect a consistency in content and prose.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands. The left hand holds a silver smartphone, and the right hand holds a clear glass filled with water and several slices of lemon. The background is dark and out of focus, showing the person's face and a patterned shirt. The overall mood is calm and focused.

**The right
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giving.**

02.

WHY WORK WITH INFLUENCERS?

The landscape for travel media has changed dramatically in the last decade. Travel magazines are struggling to stay afloat and big advertisers are [moving their dollars to digital](#). And all hail the almighty search engine, as brands continue to fight their way to the first page of Google, which currently garners [over 70% of the click throughs](#).

And then there is the world of travel influencers.

Travel influencers are entrepreneurs with a passion for travel who need only their laptop, camera, and mobile phone to operate around the world. Not only are they writers who seek to inspire people to explore the globe, but they are also often photographers. They also may be videographers, editors, Instagrammers, YouTube personalities, social media experts, and more.

Basically they are a one-stop-web-publishing shop with a passion for their craft and desire to see and share the world with their growing audiences. And they are offering their services up to you, the travel brand, as a new channel to connect your product, service, or destination with consumers more socially and directly.

The influence new media professionals can wield is [modern-day “word of mouth,”](#) the most trusted and valuable form of promotion, but on a larger scale. [A Tomoson study](#) notes that professionals rate “influencer marketing” as their fastest growing customer acquisition channel, and that blogs and Facebook dominate.

When a travel influencer has gained the trust of his or her community of readers, that influencer can provide a very important arm of promotion to brands that fit well with their tone and style.

Consider this quick comparison to “old media”: an established journalist is likely to write one piece that can be featured in a publication with high circulation numbers for a specific date or issue. Influencers not only produce evergreen content on their own sites in a timely fashion, but they also have the ability to promote in real-time (via social media), and continue to promote content well into the future.

Articles only grow stronger in the eyes of search engines the longer they are on the web, versus the standard publication, which is thrown away a week later. While it is true that standard publications generally have online websites these days, the connection with influencers as personalities is more robust in the eyes of the audience than that of a journalist for a publication. With the advent of blogs, readers can connect to an individual instead of a publication, feeling a sense of trust and vested interest that carries with it a lot of loyalty.

The right connection with the right influencer can be a very beautiful gift that keeps on giving.

More benefits of working with travel influencers:

- Modern consumers expect you to converse with them -- not just broadcast at them. Top influencers, in particular, are excellent facilitators in that regard. They don't simply post articles on their websites, but also cultivate impressive followings on relevant social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and more. If they make themselves accessible and communicate honestly to their audience, they earn their audience's trust. Building the right relationship with the right influencers, from a simple exchange of services to a full-blown ambassadorship, can do more for your brand than a simple magazine advertisement ever could. (And, has the potential to be [much more cost effective](#).)
- Many influencers also contribute to other publications (both online and in more traditional outlets) and will often push to have their stories told elsewhere.
- Influencers who do their job well should organically incorporate your brand as part of their overall story, making the "sell" seamless. From [research by MDG Advertising](#): "70% of consumers want to learn about products through content as opposed to traditional ad methods."
- Travel influencers often become a driving force in a pure numbers sense: they can funnel traffic to your site and your own social media channels. And ultimately, sales. Some examples from our own experiences as well as other influential new media professionals:

From a Hecktik Travels project with Visit Faroe Islands:



From Be My Travel Muse influencer Kristin Addis, after publishing about South Tyrol, Austria:



From Peanuts or Pretzels influencer Liz Smith:



HOME START HERE DESTINATIONS INTERESTS



Carlos

Posted at 18:51h, 02 November [REPLY](#)

Dear Liz:

Thank you for the awesome blogs, photos & info on Chichen-Itza, Valladolid & Cancun. We followed your guidance on a recent trip we just got back from, and you couldn't have been more right about everything! We rented from America Car Rentals, very easy and a good experience. We went to Valladolid, the Mayapan Distillery & stayed at Mayaland. All very awesome experiences! Truly magical! Waking up to the view of the Mayan Observatory every morning was out of this world. It was like we were living on a movie set — only real, and more breathtaking! Your wonderful advice, photos and information really helped us lock down the details of our trip. We were unsure about driving, but now feel like the worry was a bit unwarranted, as the toll roads are safe and easy. Valladolid was a gem, and while we didn't get much time there — we did do that distillery tour and took a bottle of Tequila Blanco with us for the road. I can't thank you enough for your help — from afar and over the interwebs! We can't wait to return!

- Working directly with respected influencers will garner organic links that will convey trust in the eyes of Google and its search results algorithm, often helping you rise in the ranks of search results. Be aware, however, that Google's advice to bloggers is to make links no-follow if derived from a partnership. This has less impact on the almighty 'trust' factor that would improve your search results. (Learn more about do-follow and no-follow links [here](#).)"

The benefits are clearly plentiful. But the key to the success of any influencer-driven initiative is to define your goals well and choose the right people to work with.

- The results are trackable. Do you know exactly how many people saw your ad in the local newspaper last month? Or how many people visited your site as a result? No. But an influencer can tell you exactly how many people visited their blog post and you can see how many clicked through to your website. Influencers can also tell you the exact reach on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and more. And the right influencer ought to do so as a matter of course.

If you choose the wrong influencers, you risk attaching your travel brand to an advocate that is not sufficiently trustworthy in the eyes of their community.

Choosing the right people takes work.

This means wading through the thousands that are out there to find those who are a good fit and set it up for success. Sound daunting? It doesn't need to be, and in the next chapter we're going to outline some tools to make the task less arduous.



One of the most important things you can do when approaching work with influencers is to have your own set of clearly defined goals.

HOW TO HANDLE INCOMING REQUESTS

At this very moment, you probably have several requests in your inbox from influencers who would like to collaborate in some way -- be it asking for a comped stay, tour, meal, or whatever you may have on offer -- in exchange for a review on their website or mentions on their social media channels. Perhaps these requests come in handfuls every day, streaming in at a rate that becomes so overwhelming that you consider tossing them all out entirely.

You're not alone.

Some brands have told us that they say yes to everything because they are unsure of how to properly handle the situation and don't want to risk offense. Then there are others who always say no for the exact same reason. Offering a blanket exchange of services to everyone isn't the answer (do they even hit your target markets?), nor is shutting them down completely (you could be missing out on some excellent opportunities). Sorting through the scores of email and data to find the right influencer doesn't have to be an arduous task if you have the right tools in place to do the work for you.

FIRST, YOU NEED TO DEFINE YOUR GOALS

- One of the most important things you can do when approaching work with influencers is to have your own set of clearly defined goals. For example:
 - Are you interested in growing your presence on Facebook or Instagram or both?
 - Are you focused on creating evergreen content that will attract customers?

Because each brand that reads this book will have different goals, we are covering a broad range of basis for evaluation in chapter four. Ultimately it will be up to you to decide on your primary goals and what is worth considering.

And remember that these goals may change over time or with each new phase of your brand's marketing plan. You should take a moment to think about your primary goals every time you invest in a new partnership with an influencer, and even before proceeding with evaluating incoming requests so that you know exactly what to hone in on.

Still need to develop your social media strategy? These articles will help you get started:

- [How to Create a Social Media Marketing Plan](#)
- [Essential Elements in Your Social Media Marketing Strategy](#)
- [How to Set Social Media Marketing Goals](#)

A QUICK ASSESSMENT OF AN INFLUENCER'S PITCH

The opening email from an influencer who is respectful of your time and doing their job correctly should contain several key elements:

- An introduction to themselves and their blog and/or social channels;
- A clearly stated pitch of what they are requesting from you;
- Details of what they are offering in return, and why that exchange would benefit your business or marketing strategy.

This is gut check time. Is the email riddled with mistakes? Is your name spelled wrong, or is your brand name spelled wrong? Does their pitch show a lack of primary research about your business? Is the influencer being too demanding? If red flags abound in the very first email, then chances are that problems will merely escalate as you continue with the working relationship.

It is okay to say no!

Even right out of the gate. Evaluate it as if you would a cover letter for an employee application -- if you wouldn't want that person working for you directly, then why consider him or her to represent your brand?

On the other hand, if that first email looks promising, then it's prudent to dig a little deeper. In the initial email, they may have also provided their "media kit" for your review. A media kit is basically a collection of an influencer's latest website and social media statistics, and maybe even some references, press clippings, and case studies. For an example, you can [download our media kit](#).

While a media kit will help you conceptualize the breadth of their audience, chances are it doesn't go deep enough. It will do a good job of displaying "vanity metrics", but it will not give specific enough data to conduct a diligent evaluation of the kind we discuss in this book.

Whether it's a quick no or a maybe, a reply is recommended.

USE CANNED EMAIL RESPONSES TO REPLY EASILY

Gmail provides the ability to create and [apply pre-written responses to any email](#) in your inbox with just a few clicks.

We understand that not all companies use Google Apps and Gmail, so in the alternative you can create a simple text document with the same optional responses and copy and paste them as you see fit.

Here are some examples:

If you want to say no, use this:

"Thank you for your interest in working with [BRAND]. We will have to pass at this time, but do appreciate you getting in touch with us.

Best regards,
[NAME]"

If you want to know more, use this:

“Thank you for your interest in working with [BRAND]. We are intrigued by your offer and would like to find out more.

To aid in our evaluation, we ask you to please follow this link [LINK] and complete the form in its entirety. Once we have all of your information in our database, we will assess and get back to you as soon as we can.

Best regards,
[NAME]”

GOOGLE FORMS AND SPREADSHEETS

Wait...what form? What database?

Meet your new best friend “Google Forms”, who is going to make this task infinitely easier.

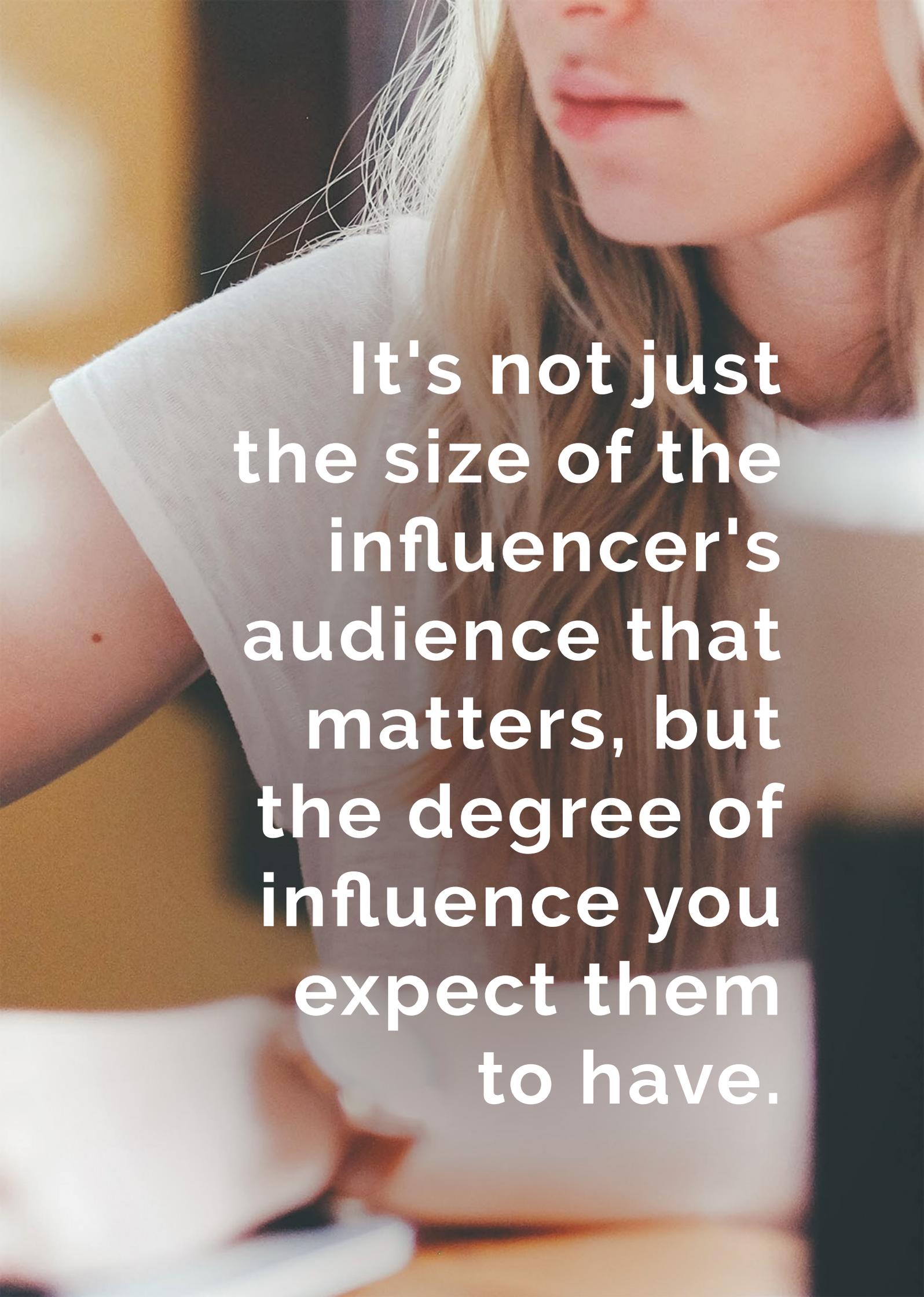
Google Forms are the quintessential way to effectively collect and organize large amounts of data. You simply create the form and send the link to whomever you'd like to collect information from, and that person's input will be added to a spreadsheet stored online for your reference at any time. Don't use Google Apps in your company? There are other online databases available ([here's one](#)), or consider having your company website developer create a form right on your company website.

We've created a sample for you to see here: <http://bit.ly/bloggerdatabase>

We'll explain the details of the database more thoroughly later. What is important to know is that this form took minutes to set up and, as with all Google Forms, will feed the results directly into a Google spreadsheet. It also puts the onus back on the influencer to provide you the exact information you need in order to make a proper quantitative evaluation. (Want to know more about how Google Forms work? Watch [this video](#)).

Not only will it aid you in efficiently reviewing influencers who approach you, but you also will have a list of influencers on hand if you want to reach out for future projects.

Perfect. Now you know how to efficiently respond to email requests using canned responses and how to organize the data you receive from influencers. But what do you do with it all? How do you analyze it? And, most important, how do you decide which influencers to choose?



**It's not just
the size of the
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04.

HOW TO EVALUATE INFLUENCERS

THE QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

After reading through our recommendations for setting up a form to capture an influencer's numbers, you might be asking yourself, "why do we place such importance on statistics?" The answer is that statistics are concrete numbers that we can evaluate, compare, and measure to simplify the decision-making process.

Even so, when it comes to selecting a new media influencer to partner with, it's not just the size of the audience that you need to make a value judgment on, but also the degree of influence you expect them to have.

And so much of that is based on things that can't be measured in numbers.

It's gut check time again.

We would advise that you spend some solid time perusing the influencer's website and social media channels, all the while considering your own goals.

Please do not skip this part of the analysis. We realize that it is not as easy as a simple number crunch, but it is an extremely important component to picking the influencer that is best for your business. We have seen influencers with excellent numbers fail with companies because the brand's due diligence did not include a deep dive into the tone, connection between influencer and audience, and trustworthiness within their industry.

To get you started, we suggest expanding on the following points for your qualitative analysis:

- **How well do they rank?** Do a quick online search on the influencer and see what comes up. Also, for those influencers who claim expertise in a specific area or niche, run a search for related keywords. If one of their articles does not show up on the first few pages, then their expertise may be overstated.

You can also plug the influencer's blog into a rank checker site like [Moz.com](https://moz.com) which will give you the site's Domain Authority. The higher the number, the easier a site will be able to rank in search results. Typically, blogs that have been around and active for more than a year are in the 20-30+ range and very established blogs typically run 45+. Remember: this is just a rule of thumb.

- **The quality of writing and style of delivery.** Check their last five to ten posts on their blog and all active social media platforms. Are they reasonably good writers? Would you be proud to have them write about you? If they are vloggers, watch their last few videos. Does their content align with your needs?

- **If they have a blog, how often do they post?** The gauge for what is acceptable can vary widely and people who write “long form” posts tend to blog less frequently, which their audience expects. Many others may post multiple times a week -- it is important to note that there is some sort of consistency to ensure that blogging is not just a random hobby. If there are big holes in their archives or several “I’m taking a break from my blog” posts, you might want to take note.

- **Is their personal touch true to your brand?** Are they humorous? Ironic? Emotive story-tellers or list churners? Most readers respond to an authentic and friendly voice -- does the influencer have that? As a part of the data collection we set up in the last chapter, links to previous comparable articles will be provided and you should review them in order to see how their style, formatting of the piece, and tone might fit with your brand. What works for one company might not for the other.

- **Design of the blog.** Is it easy to read? Not too cluttered? How does it look on your mobile? Readers will be easily turned off by a website that is not easily navigable or is difficult to read. Make sure that it has a search function, archives, and a good “about” page that gives a thorough overview about the influencer’s story and personality.

- **The visual.** Travel is often sold off of a simple photograph. Travel influencers who do not invest in improving their skills with a camera are often only telling part of the story. Good visuals will help draw the reader in, and thus compelling photographs are a necessary part of a professional blog. Even if the influencer is not a professional photographer, basics such as cropping, straightening and simple editing should be present. Take note, too, if the influencer is not utilizing their own photos and instead making use of Creative Commons images from 3rd parties. We recommend working with influencers who are able to supply their own photography to accompany a project.

- **Engagement, engagement, engagement.** Is there positive interaction in the comments and what are readers saying about the posts? Just as important as perusing the comments is noting where they are coming from: are they all from other travel influencers? By this we mean (1) are there links embedded within the comments?, (2) is the name one that includes a blog name (e.g. a comment by “Jane @ Jane Travels Awesomely”, (3) if you hover over the name of the commenter, does it indicate that the comment came from another blogger? While other influencers can present a significant potential audience for brands, it’s also a way to gauge if the blog is reaching beyond influencers and into average consumers.

Note: More and more bloggers are turning off comments on their website to combat spam issues and encouraging conversations to instead happen on their social media platforms.

- **Beyond the blog:** check social media channels. Are they just pushing out content or are they engaging in the conversation? Any distasteful rants or polarizing opinions shared that are not on point with your brand?

Also, engagement, engagement, engagement. As discussed in the next section, some of this metric is quantifiable. A quick look at their social media feeds will also demonstrate how much conversation the influencer is initiating and participating in versus a simple broadcast.

- **Match the brand to the niche.** Working with an influencer dedicated to promoting budget travel when you are an exclusive high-end resort does not make sense, as their audience will not be interested in the resulting coverage. Or, for a company that focuses on a family product, hiring an influencer who swears constantly or posts not-so-family-friendly photos on social media won't be a good fit no matter how good their writing might be.

- **Do they work with any competing brands?** It is worth doing a quick search on their site to see what they have done and said about your competitors. Use the search bar to discover articles surrounding keywords you are interested in.

- **Do they publish elsewhere?** Many influencers can be hired for freelance writing or they might syndicate their content to a third party site. Within the data collection form set up previously, there is a place for the influencers to indicate where they may place further media mentions about your brand. These may also be listed on their "About" or "Press/PR" pages, but be sure to check that they are current. These other outlets might figure into your marketing plan with the influencer in question.

This first review of an influencer's entire web presence may bring to light some non-starters that will warrant immediate dismissal. Consider completing this step even before issuing your initial canned response.

Some things, however, do not provide final answers at first glance. For example, some cultures are less apt to comment on blogs as others, no matter how strongly they may feel about the subject matter.

It is also worth noting that blog comments appear to be decreasing on the whole because of the incremental move to mobile traffic. So even if the comments aren't there en masse, the article still may be reaching the audience you desire. It is likely still a worthy process to have the blogger complete the data collection form so that you can see the whole picture and make a judgment call from there.

THE QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION

At first glance you might think, the more followers, the more influential, right? Not exactly. If those followers were purchased -- which occurs more often than you would like to believe -- or even if they were gained organically, they may not represent the particular audience that your brand is trying to reach. You will find many articles about why engagement is more important ([like this one by Scrunch.com](#)).

This is why instead of relying on external metrics, we encourage you to dig deeper on your own. This is much easier than you would believe, thanks to setting up the database as recommended earlier and putting the onus on the influencer to provide you with the exact information required to make an informed decision. Once you have that information in hand, along with your qualitative analysis, you can put the two results together for a good measure of future success.

This section will guide you through analysis of key statistics to gauge the fit of the influencer's audience with your brand. Note that no method of analysis is foolproof, and that the analytical information available can change on the whim of a platform at any time.

Although we will give you some insight into acceptable numbers based on our experience, it is difficult to set concrete benchmarks because what may be important to your company might not be as relevant to a different subset of the travel industry. Read through each recommendation with your own key goals in mind.

Let's get started.

FIRST, BEWARE THE GAMES

Do a quick search on Google or fiverr.com to see what \$5 will buy you.

- *A facebook page with minimum 1k to 5k organic followers!*
- *Gain 5,000+ Real Followers/mo that actively engages with your content!*
- *I will superfan your Twitter account!*

Even Facebook encourages a cheap and quick boost to follower numbers. It's possible for influencers to push their ads out to third world markets (e.g. Cambodia or the Philippines, etc.) to achieve new likes and follows for mere pennies, since Facebook adjusts the cost of exposure depending on the market.

And don't get us started on the follow/unfollow game played on Instagram or Twitter, where scores of random people are followed daily with the expectation that they'll follow the account back. There is even software that will do this automatically to accumulate thousands of (completely irrelevant) followers in mere days!

To be even clearer, the problem with vanity metrics is that they can be completely meaningless if no one is actually listening.

Need we go on? There are many, many ways for influencers to game the numbers that they are presenting to you. And while those numbers may look impressive (which is why we defined them above as "vanity metrics"), the influence is likely non-existent because they've skipped the process of building a loyal and engaged fan base of followers who genuinely want to hear and are likely to act on the influencer's recommendations.

We say this not to discourage you from working with travel influencers, but to help you correctly identify those who are hard working entrepreneurs and have organically built real and engaged audiences. And vanity metrics are certainly not limited to the travel industry! Regardless of industry, however, it can be difficult to tell the difference between real engagement and inflated stats. That is why we'll provide you with guidelines to show you where to look and what to ask for in order to better assess an influencer's actual degree of influence.

It is key to realize that most of these metrics are relative and only mean something when compared to others and over time. It's why we so fervently recommend developing a database to house the key statistics of those influencers who have reached out to you or those that you have discovered yourself.

One important note about the statistics we will review in this chapter: While it may seem impressive that an influencer's average reach on Instagram is over 10,000 per photo, or that a blog regularly receives over 100,000 pageviews per month, what does it all really mean?

Over time, as your database grows, you'll get a feel for what meaningful numbers are. Couple this with your qualitative analysis of their approach to blogging and social media, and you'll soon instinctively know which influencers are the best fit for you.

It's time to turn to the information you'll be collecting in your database and go through it according to platform. Note that some of the data will pertain to your qualitative evaluation, which we've already addressed. For now, let's focus on the numbers.

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Google Analytics is the industry standard for website statistics, and we are asking for five pieces of information from the influencers:

Provide the monthly average USERS to your blog, according to Google Analytics.*

Please average the last three months of data.

Provide the monthly average PAGEVIEWS of your blog, according to Google Analytics.*

Please average the last three months of data.

Provide the average PAGEVIEWS of your last five blog posts, according to Google Analytics.*

Please average the last three months of data.

Provide the top five countries of where your readers come from, according to Google Analytics*

Please provide your blog's BOUNCE RATE, according to Google Analytics.*

Users and Pageviews: Although these first two are typical “vanity metrics”, they are still useful comparative data, especially as you accumulate this data over time from numerous sites. However, they should not be considered on their own.

Why? A big monthly pageviews number can be impressive, but also very misleading. If there is one blog post on the site that does particularly well with Google or went viral on social media, that high pageview number may be short lived and will not give you any indication of how many people will actually see new posts on the site. A look at the average pageviews per blog post (question 3) will give a far more accurate snapshot of what you can expect for a post referencing your brand.

Please note that these only represent early pageviews, which may grow exponentially with more time. For example, a look back at some projects that we have done on our Hecktic Travels blog shows that many post pageviews grew by four times after six months, in comparison to the initial month after publishing.

Real life example: We were invited to participate in a campaign along with several other bloggers from North America. On behalf of this group of influencers, we were responsible for providing all of the upfront data and detailed results of the campaign for everyone.

At that point, our blog was still in its early stages and while it was growing fast, one of the other bloggers on our trip had four times the monthly pageviews we did at that point. Yet in compiling the campaign report, we discovered that we had bested his social media reach

Demographics: It is perhaps most important to know where the influencer’s readers and followers come from, which is why we also ask for the top countries. If your target market is a small area in the United Kingdom but the influencer is only influential in Brazil, then perhaps that influencer is not a great fit. Other intrinsic benefits should still be considered: SEO value, quality of social media audiences, and exposure to new audiences, before writing them off completely.

Bounce rate: Defined as the percentage of visitors to a particular website who navigate away from the site after viewing only one page, bounce rate can indicate how well the blog captures readers and inspires them to read more. The lower the bounce rate the better, although it is fair to consider that the reader only came looking for one piece of information, was satisfied, and left. For websites with more of a guide function or that rely heavily on search traffic, the bounce rate can be higher for that reason. Regardless, it is a common assumption that anything below 80% is a good bounce rate.

Be wary that it can also be TOO low. Some influencers, often completely by accident, will have Google Analytics installed incorrectly by including the tracking code more than once on their website. As such, each pageview is double counted. A bounce rate in the 20% range or lower is a surefire indicator of this problem. You can also test it yourself: right click on their home page, choose "View Page Source", then Ctrl-F (or Command-F for Mac users), to search for the letters "UA-". If the search results in more than one of the same 'UA-' number appearing, the influencer is (at a minimum) double counting their statistics.

The culprit often lies in SEO plugins that influencers install to help optimize their site, often after setting up Google Analytics manually. By re-entering their tracking code into the plugin, they install it a second time on the site, often without realizing it.

FACEBOOK

With 1.69 billion users and counting, Facebook remains the largest social media network. It also provides the best analytical data of any medium out there, which is why we are going to dig a bit deeper here than the other platforms.

Facebook page URL*

Current number of Facebook fans*

Provide the top five countries of where your Facebook fans are from.*

Current Facebook post reach*

Can be found in "Insights" for your page

Current Facebook engagement*

Can be found in "Insights" for your page

When Facebook advertising was introduced, a rash of influencers jumped on the bandwagon by pushing out ads for their blog page to the countries where they could get the cheapest likes (many in Southeast Asia, India, and other countries that Facebook priced very low on the sliding payment scale). Page "likes" thus ballooned with numbers that would otherwise have taken years to accumulate organically.

That process is the perfect definition of “vanity”. Unless you are a travel brand pushing your product or service into those markets, the fans engaging on those pages are less likely to buy your product or visit your destination. How to know then whether the influencer’s “likes” mesh with your marketing targets? Thankfully, Facebook Insights provides a breakdown of where users come from, and influencers can easily provide that to you.

Real life example: Feeling a bit of pressure back in those days (which was early for our blog), we too jumped on that “cheap likes” bandwagon, but only for a few hours. Our Facebook page racked up 400 likes from India rapidly, and for only a couple of dollars. We felt pretty icky about it, knowing that this was not our target audience, and so stopped quickly, instead choosing to focus primarily on organic growth with limited advertising in our primary target audience of North America. Our number of India followers (500) is now overshadowed by the United States (5,100), Canada (2,800), and the UK (900), and we are back to engaging with a majority representation of our desired audience.

While we’ve shown you a deeper dive into the overall Facebook number, most important is measuring (say it with us now!) the engagement, engagement, engagement. There is no use bragging about the number of organic page likes if no one is seeing or interacting with the posts!

The last two questions about reach and engagement are numbers the influencers can provide you from their Insights page (the below example is from our own page for Hecktik Travels):



Total Reach (the number of people who have seen the influencer’s posts in their news feeds over the past week): Although this is the number that many marketers obsess about, don’t overemphasize its importance. It can easily be affected by advertising. The number will skyrocket if boosting or post promotion is currently underway and Facebook is pushing it out to more people. Total reach is a good benchmark number for comparison to others over time, but not as valid as engagement.

Engagement (the number of likes, shares, comments, or clicks on posts over the past week): Engagement may be more indicative of [audience acknowledgement and interaction](#). “Every Like, share, comment, retweet on your status updates, photos, videos etc. means another opportunity for website conversion. Building a loyal, engaged following improves your ability to drive sales.”

Some marketers have suggested a very low metric for success (even at 2% of the total page likes), but because travel is very visual and enticing by nature, we suggest setting your own benchmark higher.

Facebook Live + Stories: With a focus on live and story content, influencers that have harnessed either of these features are worth consideration.

There are a few numbers you can request when analyzing an influencer's klout with these features. For Facebook Live, asking for total vies, peak live views, average completion and lifetime views of Live videos are a great way to see how engaged an influencer's audience is. For Stories asking for Stories published, unique opens, forward and backwards taps, reactions, shares, exits, and total engagements are all good measurements for engagement. A full list of available analytics can be found [here](#).

At the basic level, when considering an influencer that is pitching with either of these features, look at whether their audience seems to be reacting to them and whether the content actually aligns with your brand. Working with someone to utilize a cool, new feature or platform is irrelevant if the content they produce doesn't align with your brand and message.

Like the actual blogging platform itself, the best analysis may be qualitative. Spend a few minutes going through the influencer's Twitter stream. Are they sharing relevant information? Are people engaging (replying and retweeting) with their content?

TWITTER

Many marketers are turning away from Twitter as an effective tool, but there are still influencers who command quite an audience there and so it should not be overlooked. It is also one platform that is easily manipulated, and you can test how true the followers are with [this tool](#). Check suspect influencer's accounts and record the results next to the total follower number you collect in your database. (Or use the worksheet we've developed for you in the research section.)

Although not asked for in the form, it is possible to gain some insight via Twitter analytics. Unfortunately, "Impressions" is the only useful statistic Twitter currently provides. This is equivalent to "Facebook reach" and indicates how many people saw the post, which is not helpful on its own because it does address the most important metric: engagement, engagement, engagement. Thus, bloggers could be pushing out all kinds of tweets to increase impressions, but if no one is clicking through or engaging, then those numbers are worthless.

Note that engagement metrics are available, but only at the tweet level, and not via an aggregate or average measure. Acquiring that information would require some manual calculations. However, if Twitter is a main priority for your company, consider asking the influencer for a calculated average.

If so, and they can demonstrate a viable audience, then promotion for your brand via Twitter could be helpful.

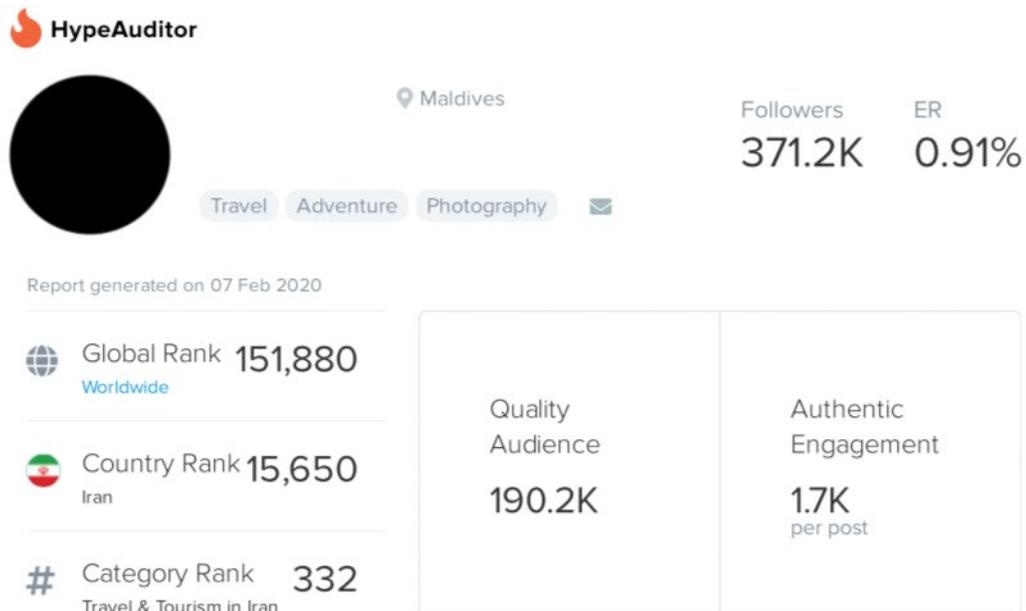
INSTAGRAM

This is currently one of the hottest platforms out there, touted as the one which [provides the best engagement overall](#).

It is also one that is famous for manipulation. Upon seeing friends and colleagues enjoying all-expense paid trips worldwide as part of coordinated Instagram campaigns, less-influential Instagrammers are looking for ways to [quickly ramp up their numbers](#) in order to garner similar opportunities.. Fortunately, Instagram is constantly [cracking down on these programs and tools](#) that Instagrammers are using to “game the system” or fake their following.

Luckily, available evaluation tools are getting better all the time. Our current favourite is Hype Auditor as it not only gives you the data about an influencer’s audience (including an authenticity evaluation) but also about their engagement.

The per-report price from Hype Auditor keeps climbing (it used to be \$3, but now is \$30), but if you are using it often, there are package deals available. The information provided in each report is also very worthwhile, especially if you are working with an influencer who is claiming a large reach on Instagram.



Audience Quality Score [?]

AQS is a 1 to 100 metric which combines audience quality (not number), engagement rate and it’s authenticity into one metric



The sample report is just the opening page of a [HypeAuditor](#) report with a summary Audience Quality Score. That score is good for a glance, but also fairly superficial and does not tap into the most important areas. The analysis inside the report is what we eagerly dive into. These are the sections we pay most attention to:

Audience. It is so important to know if an Instagrammer’s audience aligns with your target, and the Hype Auditor report breaks it down by country and city. Also note the graph under Audience Type and see what percentage are “Real People”. All accounts will naturally attract a good amount of bots and other followers that are not ideal, so we suggest a minimum of 60% “Real People” to be acceptable.

Authenticity. You’ll see this word used a couple of times in the report, specifically as it pertains to an evaluation of both audience and comment quality. Pay close attention to the comments there. As well, the Growth evaluation will report on authenticity as it pertains to how the influencer attained their followers.

Advertising Performance. One of the major selling points of working with influencers is that they should have such a natural connection with their audience such that posting about your destination/service/product doesn’t feel like a hard sell. And so, the rate of engagement rate for those marked #ad versus all others should be very close to the same (or better).”

Instagram Stories + Live:



Stories are one of the most popular channels for marketers as they are a great way to play out an entire experience for followers. They are often more unscripted and raw than an Instagram feed post, and can even encourage audience interaction, which devoted followers tend to love.

A plethora of statistics are also available, but not by a tool like Hype Auditor. Instead, ask the influencer directly for the Stories results from a recent campaign. You can ask for things like Impressions, Link Clicks, and even Sticker Taps to see how engaged their audience is and how well their marketing messages for other brands convert.

At the moment there is no way to track insights for Instagram Live, but creators will have an idea of what their average audience size is for a live broadcast and they should be able to provide insight for some data.

YOUTUBE

With over [2 billion monthly active users](#), YouTube presents another very useful opportunity for influencers who have a presence on this huge video sharing site. [In a recent study](#), 85% of millennials said they tried or purchased a product recommended by a YouTube content creator and video was the most memorable form of content for 21% of consumers and 29% of millennials.

Few travel influencers are dedicated vloggers who use YouTube as their primary outlet, but if an influencer with a valuable YouTube audience has approached you, they are worth considering. To determine if a YouTube influencer is a good fit, look at their style and content first and foremost. YouTube influencers become popular often because of their personalities and style; so if an influencer's style isn't on brand for you, it's best to not move forward.

There are metrics you can use to evaluate if an influencer is a good fit beyond just the content they produce: ask for (1) top five countries of viewership (2) average view duration (3) total likes, comments, and shares. These should all be considered together with the metrics of (4) subscribers, (5) total videos and (6) total overall views. At the basic level, the longer the average viewer is watching a video, the more interested and engaged they are with the content. Subscribers, # of videos and total overall videos are indicators of how serious the influencers is and how long they've been active on the platform; all things to be taken into account when deciding whether to work with an influencer or not.

OTHER

Blog age: Wooed by the headline of "travel the world for free!" and the low barrier to entry, new travel influencers pop up every day. A large majority of them disappear within a year as they realize how much work is actually required to maintain a successful travel blog.

As our close blogging friend from [AlexInWanderland.com](#) said in a Facebook forum: "I think of my first couple of years of blogging as a long unpaid internship/a self-made masters program/a hilarious experiment."

A minimum blog age of one year is a safer bet and will also have given the blogger some time to build up a viable audience. Some professionals we have spoken to have even set their minimum at two years.

As a brand, you can take a risk and become a part of the hilarious experiment of an up-and-coming blogger and do well if the blogger remains motivated, driven, and keeps at their blog for years to come. But it is also very plausible that any content related to your brand will sink into oblivion with the rest of the blog if the blogger decides to abandon ship. Those that have been at it longer understand the requirements, and after investing years of time and ample monetary expenses, are far more likely to continue long-term.

Always be wary of those who blog solely to record their limited gap year or round-the-world trip. While some will keep it up after they've returned home, most die off once the single burst of travel stops.

Domain Authority (DA) is a calculated metric for how well a given domain is likely to rank in Google's search results. While all 'link juice' from reputable sites is worthy, those that have a higher domain authority than your own will be most beneficial. Most of the top travel influencers who have been blogging for several years have a DA above 40. Learn more about DA and [how to check for it yourself here](#).

RSS/Email/Newsletter subscribers: This is a very valuable number to consider, because these subscribers have specifically opted into receiving the influencer's posts into their inbox or feed reader. This is the modern-day equivalent to inviting someone in past the front door. These are people who want to read everything that the blogger has to say.

Other social media networks: New platforms emerge and disappear all the time, and there are others who may be better suited to key segments within travel. For food, travel, clothing, and other visual segments, you may want to take a deeper look into a blogger who dedicates time to Pinterest. As a general note, Pinterest is a great driver of website traffic overall, with a [lengthy half-life of exposure](#) that crushes other platforms.

Snapchat and TikTok are relevant channels to consider using an influencer for if you are looking for significantly younger and more [highly engaged](#) audiences. Considering an influencer who is heavily invested in different platforms requires thoughtful consideration and current research, since the weight of new platforms change rapidly.

IN ADDITION

Consider asking for screenshots. If you have any doubt at all about the accuracy of the numbers provided in your form, you can ask for screenshots of Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, Twitter Analytics, or more.

Could an influencer STILL misrepresent their numbers? Sure they can, because Photoshop exists. But with the combination of quantitative analysis, qualitative measurements, and your trusty gut, you will be able to make an informed decision about working with a particular influencer.

Even more data is available, so don't be afraid to ask for it. For example, if you are marketing a product or service solely to women, some platforms can provide further demographic breakdowns. All major platforms now offer fairly deep insights including gender, age, and city. Make sure you have all of the information necessary to make an informed decision.

Set your own standards. Over time, with the accumulation of information in your database, you'll be able to set your own standards for what to look for. If you are finding the most traction comes from mentions on Facebook, pay closer attention to those audiences in the future. If improved SEO is your goal, set a minimum Domain Authority number for blogs you'll work with in the future.

In the beginning, some trial and error and experimentation with bloggers will set you up for bigger successes in the long run.

Hone in on key metrics in addition to your qualitative analysis, and you'll quickly get answers on what matters most to you. If an influencer refuses to provide any stats at all, you have an easy way to decide whether or not to partner with them.

Given the breadth of this quantitative analysis section, we have compiled the information in an easy one-pager evaluation worksheet that can be reviewed among colleagues. Head over to the [Resources](#) section to see our sample document.

We have given you a fairly exhaustive list of key questions and data to ask for, but keep in mind that it is also about balance.

SUMMING UP

While the last dozen or so pages may seem like they create a lot of work, we promise you that it gets easier with time. Once the initial investment of setting up the forms has been completed, your review and response times will shorten the more you grow your database. Soon, you will intuitively know which influencers will most likely provide the best value from just a few minutes of your valuable time.

Most importantly, that judgment call will be made thoughtfully, focusing on key metrics that will determine whether or not your work with influencers provides you real results.

It can be a glorious investment that pays off for years to come.

SO, YOU'VE MADE YOUR DECISION...

An influencer has contacted you directly and they've supplied all the information you've asked for. You've done a review and can move forward according to your needs:

If it's no...a personalized response is warranted, thanking them for their time and advising that even though they may not have been a fit right now, you will keep their information on hand should another opportunity arise.

If it's a yes...then let the planning begin. You need to address any gaps between what they are asking for and what your brand can provide, as well as between your goals and what they are offering in return. You also need to know how to build a strong foundation for your relationship -- one that will set it up for success!

Don't worry, the next chapter is going to guide you through all of that.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a silver smartphone. The phone's screen is lit up and displays a numeric dial pad. The text "Verizon" is visible at the top left of the screen, and "Try Again" is centered above the numbers. The background is a blurred office desk with a laptop and a glass of water. Overlaid on the right side of the image is white, bold, sans-serif text.

**Ignoring new
media is no
longer an option
-- so you might
as well do it
right!**

PROJECTS: PARTNERSHIP FOR SUCCESS

The influencer likes you, you like the influencer, and you've agreed to work together. What's next?

Whether you are hosting them for multiple nights at your hotel, inviting them out to one of your tours, or sending them a product to review, there are issues that should be addressed way ahead of the campaign.

BEFORE THE PROJECT BEGINS

First...what is a fair exchange? For example, what are a few nights in a hotel worth in social media coverage?

The variables behind this decision are both highly subjective and incredibly numerous. We cannot provide you with a definitive answer about what "fair" might be for you. Experimentation is key, and in the beginning a trusted influencer can help guide you through the process if they are willing to share what they have done in prior projects with other brands. Over time, what works for your company will become more and more clear.

Some influencers offer full reviews on their blogs, while others will only make mentions in longer blog posts about the destination. Some might have such influence that a single photo posted to one platform could surpass the reach and engagement of all others. Style, audience size, relevance, and platform -- all of these elements are factors that can alter the expectation of what you can provide and what they can deliver.

Once you have internally determined what you want to provide the influencer, it is important that all aspects and deliverables for the project are discussed in detail so that everyone knows what is expected. This includes the information that we detail below.

We recommend laying it all out in one final email, or use the template that we've developed for you in the Resources chapter.

Information you will want to provide the influencer:

- Product or location information including pamphlets, press releases, awards, and other relevant information;
- Highlights/blurbs about your brand you'd like included in the post/social media mentions;
- List of the brand's social media account handles as well as the accounts of any partners relevant to the project, and any hashtags you want the influencer to use;
- Tips for what they should bring/pack for the trip, if applicable; and
- Detailed itinerary, if applicable.

ITINERARY SPOTLIGHT

When hosting a influencer on a lengthy trip, providing a detailed itinerary is paramount to success. Not only will it help the influencer prepare for the trip, but it will serve as a useful reference for place names, applicable partner handles/hashtags, address, and website URLs, both during the trip and while the influencer is composing their posts. Exemplary itineraries will include:

- A timeline of key stops, including the location name, address, URL, applicable hashtags and social media handles, and point of contact.*
- Clear notes about expenses that will not be included in the trip, and/or those that you will require reimbursement for at a later date. These expenses might include parking fees, alcoholic beverages, laundry, gratuities, etc. Given that gratuities differ by country, it is helpful for an influencer to know in advance if gratuity is not covered so that he/she can be prepared, as well as the customary amount or percentage for a gratuity in your destination.*
- Transportation information.*
- Free time. Don't think of free time as wasted, but rather as an opportunity for the person to explore without a guide and allow time for them to craft good messages along the way. As influencers are also working online consistently, they need scheduled downtime to update their social media channels and promote the work they are doing for you!*
- For an example of a well-detailed itinerary, [click here](#).*

Clarify deliverables:

- How many brand mentions do you expect to make on their platform?
Number of pieces of content?
- Expected timeframe for content publication?
- Number and frequency of social media posts (by platform)?
- Reporting requirements? When the project is over, what kind of information about their blog post page views, social media reach, and/or any other statistics, will you want to see? (Please refer to the section on “Determining Success” for more details.)

Ask questions:

- Discuss any extraordinary things you wish the influencer to participate in. For example, an Instagram takeover to help increase your following and engagement, a Twitter chat to answer questions from potential consumers, or providing you content (photos, video, unique blog posts, etc.) to publish on your own platforms. Be aware that some of these can be considered “extras” and may come with an added fee. We discuss fees next.

- Does the influencer have a “bad experience” policy? Will they contact you if there is a problem and give you a fair opportunity to address the situation prior to writing about it on their site?
- What kind of disclosures does the influencer provide? Be aware that it is regulated for influencers to disclose the nature of their relationship with you in their social media mentions and blog posts. Check the USA rules [here](#), and the Canadian rules [here](#). Please consult your local government for clarification.

DURING THE PROJECT

Connectivity: Wi-Fi is like air for influencers -- they cannot live without it! If applicable, make sure that Wi-Fi, Mi-Fi or SIM cards are available so they have the ability to publish their experiences in real-time and stay in touch with their fans. Also, provide a contact email and mobile number where the influencer can reach you in case issues arise.

Social media in real time: Be active with your own social media accounts and share or re-share the influencer’s experiences with your followers when appropriate. Answer any questions that readers may have, or comment about how excited you are to have the blogger joining you over the week or using your product. This public acknowledgement will not only be appreciated by the influencer, but it will gain you some more exposure through their followers. It may also give you direct contact with a potential new customer, as with this example from our Hecktiv Travels [project with Maui Motorhomes](#).

Realize that it may still be “editorial”: However, if payment is exchanged (beyond a complimentary trip, product, or service), then it may also be considered a marketing (or “advertorial”) venture. Have an open conversation with the influencer of the messages that you want to get across, and it is even possible to ask for approval of their content before it goes live. Not every influencer is open to this, but if you are paying a healthy sum for their promotion, then it is not an unreasonable ask.

POST PROJECT

When the project is complete and/or after the content has been published, it is good practice to follow up with the influencer to discuss how the project unfolded. This will not only provide feedback about your company but it will help you establish additional questions you could potentially ask for future projects with other influencers.

During this stage, you can:

- Discuss how pleased (or not pleased) you were with their social media posts and which you believe added the most value.
- Go over the results presented by the influencer.

- If things go well, ask if they would consider returning or offering more if the opportunity presents itself. An on-going relationship could potentially lead to bigger partnerships in the future.
- If the project was a success, ask what other influencers they believe would be interested in a similar offering. First-hand referrals are generally trustworthy and will help simplify your ongoing search.

DETERMINING SUCCESS - WHAT IS THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT?

This is a tough one, and one of the more frequently asked questions in influencer marketing.

Consider the “Advertising Value Equivalency” (or “AVE”), the traditional method of valuing editorial coverage, by comparing it to the advertising cost for the same space on a page. AVE is a method that has been used for many years yet is still the subject of much debate given its imperfections. Some trade publications have even [predicted its ultimate death](#).

New media, still in its relative infancy, has no steadfast equivalent. What is an Instagram “heart” worth? Or a Facebook “like”?

And, most importantly: What is it going to mean to your bottom line?

This question is harder to answer because of the nature of travel purchases. Travel is not often a spontaneous purchase, such as a simple product. It is good to keep in mind that like with traditional media, a single article may not be the deciding factor for travel, but multiple sources will build on each other over time. If done well, coordinated coverage on blogs and/or other avenues of social media may bump up a destination on the consumer’s “consideration list” for their next holiday destination. Although, that consumer’s decision may not come for a year or more, depending on savings, planning, and other pre-existing factors, and thus will be difficult to attribute back to its initial source.

Given how amorphous measuring influence in the online travel world can be, we wanted to turn to members of the travel industry who have been working with influencers for many years and ask them: How do you define success when working in new media?

Eva - Visit Finland:

“For us success with new media initially comes down to raising awareness of Finland. We are still a very unknown destination so each time someone comments on a blog post, a Facebook post, a tweet, Instagram photo or a YouTube video that the post has made them consider Finland as a travel destination and has potentially booked

something already, it's a proof for us that working with digital influencers is worth it. As we are a national organization, success also means that our partners succeed and benefit from working with new media. This means good content for them to publish in their own channels and more knowledge and understanding of the field. Oftentimes influencers can provide insight and experiences that the businesses or brands otherwise might never have seen."

Andrew – Intrepid Group:

"Success when working with a blogger or bloggers depends on what our goal is for that particular campaign. Sometimes we may want to make some noise on social media. If we notice a dramatic spike in new followers on Instagram and higher engagement on Twitter while working with an influencer, we're happy campers. Perhaps the goal is to produce high quality content that will help our brand promote a destination or new product. When we see strong content come in and perform well online, it's a win for us. Finally, if it's all about booking/sales and we provide a blogger with a special code and it brings in sales, we're thrilled and will most likely plan to work with them again on more projects."

Compared to old media, it is possible to measure the engaged reach of a particular project when posted online. You cannot calculate how many people noticed your billboard other than via traffic estimates, or how many of the million magazine readers actually paused and considered your ad, but you can tell how many people clicked on a blog post, how many people liked it on Pinterest and Instagram, or how many clicked through to visit your website. All of these factors can lead to success in some form, and it's important to track these results and reflect on them over time, including their conversions to hard sales and/or sign ups for your newsletter, product list, or catalog.

Any influencer you work with should be willing to provide you with detailed results following a project.

The expectations for what those results should entail ought to be discussed before the project begins so that you and the influencer are on the same page, and so that the information can be collected and monitored over time.

While some influencers will offer post-project reports with relevant data ([here's an example](#) of one we produced for our work with Visit Finland), we do also suggest that you create another Google Form so that you can standardize the data that you receive. You will also be able to retain this information in a spreadsheet for future comparison.

Depending on the goals and size of your project, we suggest collecting the following data from the influencer after it ends:

Immediately following the project:

- # of Instagram posts, plus likes and comments;
- # of Facebook posts, plus likes, comments, shares and reach;
- # of Twitter posts, plus impressions and engagement;
- Any other initial social media stats from other applicable platforms.

After publishing to the influencer's key platform (i.e. blog or YouTube), we suggest allowing for a one-month minimum lapse following publication so that the blog posts can accumulate pageviews. For bigger campaigns, you may also want to ask for stats after six or twelve months of publishing. What you should ask for:

- Screenshots of key comments on any of the above that relate to influencing a reader's future travel decisions;
- Other social media stats, as applicable to individual influencer strengths and applicable platforms;
- # of Pageviews per blog post;
- # of Instagram posts, plus likes and comments (and impressions if the influencer has a business account);
- # of Facebook posts related to blog post, plus likes, comments, shares and reach;
- # of Twitter posts related to blog post, plus impressions and engagement;
- # of video views and impressions on YouTube or other channel (if applicable).

Another option is to use the [BuzzSumo](#) website to get an overview of the top-level metrics across each blog post. Although it cannot present deeper statistics such as pageviews or engagement on any of the social networks, it does offer at least the basics on some networks and a general overview of the virality of a particular post.

Having all of this data at your fingertips will undoubtedly lead you to conclusions about what is working or what is not in order to bring people through your doors and/or buy your product. Because the industry of new media is still relatively new, experimentation is key to emerging on the positive side of the value equation.

Simply ignoring it is no longer an option -- so you might as well do it right!

A close-up photograph of a man's hand holding a black smartphone. In the background, a woman with dark hair is looking towards the phone. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an indoor setting. The text is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**You will need
to invest
some time
and effort to
find a travel
influencer
who fits your
brand well.**

HOW TO FIND INFLUENCERS

Finding the right influencer is more than just a simple Google search for “travel blogger”. As with the other sections of this book, you will need to invest some time and effort to find a travel influencer who fits your brand well. As we have said elsewhere, the more you partake in these exercises, the easier they will become.

WHERE TO LOOK

- **Expand your search on Google:** Instead of just searching for “travel blogger”, enter more keywords into the query. Drill down further to find niche blogs about skiing, fine dining, or even those who blog in other languages. Go beyond the first page of Google and record any results that look interesting.
- **Use lists:** Find new blogs to investigate by searching for “top travel blogger” lists, although keeping in mind that as they are often a single curator’s own perspective, it is possible that some influential bloggers will be omitted. [Some brands publish lists](#) of those they like to work with, and it is also possible to find these lists by more specific [regions](#) or [niche](#).
- **Branch out:** It doesn’t always have to be about travel -- consider searching for influencers in different niches that fit your brand. For example: If your hotel has a compelling restaurant, consider reaching out to a local food blogger; or if your guesthouse has a yoga class, consider finding a fitness blogger. Hiring a more focused influencer can sometimes yield better results, especially if those ancillary components are big selling points for your brand.
- **Use your social platforms and listen in:** Twitter is a fantastic way to search for and connect with influencers. Monitor or participate in Twitter chats to get an idea of some blogs that are joining in or even hosting the chats ([here is a current list of travel related Twitter chats](#) to get you started). You can even create a list (private or public) within Twitter to keep track of those who look interesting.
- **Get out and meet them:** One way to determine if you want to work with someone is to meet them face-to-face. There are both meet-ups and conferences that provide networking opportunities for companies and influencers. [Travel Massive](#) is a monthly meet-up that connects brands and influencers in various cities around the world. If there is no meet-up scheduled in your locale, consider contacting your local tourism board and coordinating one.

Travel conferences are another good way to meet new media influencers. Check with your tourism board for local events, or schedule “speed date” appointments with international influencers at [ITB](#), [WTM](#), [TravMedia’s IMM Conferences](#) or more specific blogging conferences like [Travelcon](#) or [The Women In Travel Summit](#).

Talk to your community: Engage with your audience via your social networks and ask if they ever read travel blogs and whom they recommend. Your local or surrounding area destination marketing or tourism offices may also provide a hand in narrowing down the field and helping you select an influencer.

Get professional help: If these options are too time-consuming, you can pay someone to help you find the right influencer more quickly.

a. This is what we do at [HMI!](#) Not only do we have a vast network of trusted professionals to call on, but we are also well suited to search for those who would best fit your needs and manage multi-influencer campaigns

b. **Associations** - Many of the professional travel writing associations now also include bloggers (i.e. SATW and TMAC). Note that these associations are far from exhaustive, and thus you may miss some key influencers who may not be members.

c. **Collectives** - Some influencers have formed their own organizations centered around geographical location and/or niche. An example is the [Nordic Travel Bloggers](#).

MAKING THE CONNECTION

Once you have an idea of who you would like to experience your brand offering (hotel, product, destination), what comes next? The best first step is to reach out via email.

Make it personal. Take the time to find out the influencer(s) name(s) and address the message directly to them. All influencers will have a contact page somewhere on their website or profiles, and many set out specific contact requirements, such as indicating why this would be a good fit for the influencer's community. If there is no response, consider a follow-up message sent via a social media channel as a good way to further show your interest.

Be sure to include:

- How you found them;
- What you like about their blog or channel. By showing that you actually learned something about them and their blog, you are more likely to make a personal connection and get a response;
- What you would like to offer, and what you are looking for in return;
- Information and success stories about your company and any other important information that will encourage them to consider the offer;
- How to contact you; and
- The link to the form that will feed into your database (either in this initial email or your follow-up). Then return to chapter 4 for more evaluation!

Please avoid sending standard press releases or mass email. As influencers ourselves, we know that this is almost a surefire way to ensure that email makes it to the trash.

Finding the right influencers takes time and patience. This investment of time at the forefront has a much better chance of resulting in a successful marketing project than simply selecting the first influencer that turns up in a cursory search online.



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Influencers
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TO PAY OR NOT TO PAY?

If you are new to the world of working with new media, the fact that this section exists may come as a surprise. Hosting a journalist never means paying the journalist for their time -- they are either being paid by their outlet, or if they are a freelancer, by the magazine or paper that will eventually run their story. Currently, some bigger print outlets will still require that journalists accept no comps or freebies in order to preclude any suspicion of bias.

With the explosion of new media, the landscape has changed. Influencers are their own CEOs, and there is no outside outlet bankrolling their travel. Countless unpaid hours have gone into building their networks to the point where they warrant your attention in the first place. Some influencers thus require that in order to promote a product or brand to the influencer's audience, money will have to change hands. In the world of fashion, for example, influencers are often paid huge sums by a brand to wear a \$100 shirt in one of their photos.

But in travel, instead of a \$100 shirt, we're often talking about multiple-night hotel stays, tours, or even an extensive, all-expenses paid trip throughout a country. When the perceived value is that high, many influencers and brands see an exchange of goods/services as possessing equitable value. In some cases, brands will offer only a discount where the influencer's community is still small. Conversely, an especially effective influencer is in such demand that you may have no choice but to pay for their services. Simple "supply and demand" economics may come into effect, which differ from the traditional world of print journalism.

Given that there are so many variables, stating a clear you should pay or you shouldn't pay would not be prudent. The following are some scenarios where you can expect negotiations to go beyond a simple exchange of services.

Expect to pay if:

- **This project is a part of your bigger marketing plan.** If your company has a set expectation about what talking points should be communicated in the influencer's post(s) and/or shared across their platforms, then your transaction is no longer editorial and has crossed into advertorial and marketing.
- **You are asking for special services.** These services include but may not be limited to: hosting a Twitter chat, live-Periscoping an event, doing an Instagram account takeover, etc. Unless these additional variables were discussed and agreed upon as a part of the a bigger project at the outset, they are often considered add-ons.
- **You are asking for content to license for your own use.** For example, if the influencer is a talented photographer and you would like to license some of their high-resolution photos from the project for your marketing purposes, the influencer will expect to be compensated. Again, this precludes a situation where you have set out this requirement as part of the entire project.

Note: asking to license photographs should not be confused with sharing links to a influencer's published content on your own social media channels (i.e. sharing their Facebook posts or retweeting them). That kind of social media love is always welcomed and encouraged.

- The influencer has a set rate for working with brands. Don't discount negotiating if you believe a lower fee is warranted, but in some cases, bigger influencers may have a strict pay-to-play policy. It will be up to you to gauge if the value of that additional investment will be returned and the relationship is worth pursuing. Consider asking for references from brands that the influencer has worked with previously and ask for their perception of value for that influencer's work.

Real life example: In an interview, [Visit Britain](#) has published two scenarios explaining how they approach their work with influencers:

1. The influencer is considered a "journalist." In this case, they pay travel fees (everything or some parts), and wait for a minimum of posts (photos) and articles. This goal is fixed in advance and defined through a contract. They do not pay the influencers, as the influencers are treated as traditional journalists on a FAM (press) trip. Visit Britain's PR arm handles the entire trip.

2. The operation is considered not only a press trip, but also a marketing operation and is part of their overall promotion strategy for the brand. In that case, Visit Britain will pay the influencers and jointly define the plan of action for the breadth of the marketing objectives between the parties. The marketing team manages this operation instead of the PR department.

At the end of the day, it comes down to perceived value. If a relevant influencer sends an email asking for a night at your hotel in exchange for a review and you have availability, this may be a simple yes. If they are also asking you to pay them, then they had better be able to demonstrate their worth.

A photograph of two women from behind, standing in a field of daisies. The woman on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and has her right arm raised. The woman on the right is wearing a plaid shirt and has her left arm raised. The background is a soft-focus field of white daisies and green foliage. The text is overlaid in the center in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

**We've seen great
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IN CONCLUSION

We want to tell you why we wrote this book.

In 2011, we created our blog HeckticTravels.com with the goal of making a few extra dollars to help fund our travels around the globe. We never imagined the triumphs we would have, the wonderful connections we would make while growing our community of readers, nor that we would successfully launch another business committed to helping brands and influencers work together.

As a result, we've seen great opportunity not only for ourselves, but also for the travel brands we work with and the other entrepreneurial influencers who have succeeded in thoughtfully expanding their own little corners of the Internet. It is a very exciting time to be involved in this industry. Every few months we are pleasantly surprised by some progressive initiative where brands and new media professionals find ways to work together and demonstrate great success while leveraging their respective brands.

But we've also seen the struggles along the way. On one hand, there are the influencers with the best of intentions who can't seem to make it work or buy their way to success. On the other, the brands who partner with the first influencers they meet in an attempt to be more active online, but with no consideration to whether those influencers are the right fit in the first place. We've seen some big failures that didn't have to be.

We wrote this book because we have a vested interest in seeing influencers and brands work effectively together to ensure a strong future for the industry and their prospective communities. Our professional business background, entrepreneurial influencer know-how, and experience bringing brands and influencers together while overseeing successful campaigns gives us the ability to provide a unique, well-rounded perspective.

Depending on your experience working in new media, this book may have contained an overwhelming amount of information, or it might have just given you a few new tips. We hope, at the very least, we have helped and encouraged you to find quality influencers who will effectively increase the digital footprint of your brand.

Sometimes it may seem like the Wild West out there, but it doesn't have to be. Time, experience, and an arsenal of the right tools will always make things easier. And we can help too, if there's anything else you need.

Dalene and Pete Heck
Founders - HMI



Resources

RESOURCES

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

For starters, we are travel bloggers. Our names are Dalene and Pete Heck, and for the last five years we've grown our blog HeckticTravels.com organically, receiving numerous awards along the way, most notably being honored as [Travelers of the Year by National Geographic](#). As we have built up our blog, we have had many positive experiences working with brands and destinations around the globe, including most recently: Expedia, Visit Faroe Islands, Visit Finland, Travel Alberta, American Express, and many more. As travel bloggers go, we are not beginners, and we want to share some of what we have learned while building our site.

But we also sit on the other side of the table. We both possess business degrees and prior to our newer careers of travel blogging, we acquired decades of exceptional experience in project management and negotiation. Those skills served us well to start [HMI](#), a company designed to help travel brands make connections with the right bloggers. We are not only familiar with the behind-the-scenes functions of the travel blogging industry, but we also know who is doing it right and who is cutting corners. We've worked hard to continuously develop an exceptional network of influencers so that we can help connect them with travel brands worldwide. To date, HMI, has worked very successfully on close to two dozen campaigns with a popular mobile travel app, two destination tourism boards, and the biggest online marketplace on the planet.

We are not alone in this. We'd like to acknowledge the thoughtful efforts of some industry professionals who have given us valuable guidance in this book.

Eva Kiviranta

At the time of publication, Eva was in charge of Public Relations for Visit Finland. She worked with bloggers and other content creators continuously, and sent them out to explore all corners of Finland.

Andrew Hickey

Andrew was a former blogger turned full-time social media manager. He managed the social media efforts for Intrepid Group (Intrepid Travel, Peregrine Adventures, Geckos Adventures and Adventure.com). He has also worked for G Adventures and CheapOair.

Wendy Harvey

Blending her computer geekiness side with her social butterfly persona, Wendy Harvey combined her somewhat oxymoronic character traits into one career - Social Media Strategist. Through her company, Social Flutterby, Wendy has worked with travel bloggers on behalf of the visitors bureaus of Maui, Molokai, and Lanai including championing Maui Visitors and Convention Bureau's first ever SMTI (social media travel influencer) press trip in 2011.

WORKSHEET #1: BLOG EVALUATION

BLOG NAME

DATE OF REVIEW

NOTES ON BLOG QUALITY

(design, writing style, photography, levels of engagement, applicability of niche)

QUANTITATIVE REVIEW:

GOOGLE

Countries of influence

Average recent pageviews per post

Acceptable bounce rate? (>20%, <80%?) yes or no

FACEBOOK

Number of fans

Countries of influence

Current post reach

Acceptable engagement rate? (>2%) yes or no

WORKSHEET #1 CONT...

TWITTER

Number of followers

% of fake followers: (via <http://fakers.statuspeople.com/>)

% of inactive

% of real

INSTAGRAM

Number of followers

Average engagement per photo (determined from last 30 photos)

Average Stories views (If using IG Stories)

OTHER

Blog age

Domain authority

Subscribers

Notes on other social media platforms

WORKSHEET #2: PROJECT DETAILS

Note that this is a draft document to outline all of the details to be considered between brand and blogger. We do not suggest using this list as a binding legal document, though it can represent the general memorandum of understanding between you and the blogger in question. If this is a high valuation campaign or an ambassadorship role, we urge you to consult your lawyer and create a formal contract.

Because there is such a broad range of situations in which bloggers can work with brands, it is not possible to cover all scenarios in one checklist. We have built the following checklist based on the likely premise of a blogger being hosted by a destination, hotel, or tour group.

DATE(S) FOR HOSTING

WHAT IS BEING PROVIDED BY BRAND

(check if applicable and provide details)

Accommodation

Transportation

Meals

Additional excursions

Gratuities

Free access to Wi-Fi

Specific exclusions (alcohol, laundry, etc.)

WORKSHEET #2 CONT...

WHAT IS BEING PROVIDED BY INFLUENCER

(check if applicable and provide details)

Blog posts (number of posts and expected publication dates)

of Facebook mentions

of Twitter mentions

of Instagram mentions

Other social media exposure

Exclusive content for brand use

Specific exclusions (alcohol, etc.)

SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS OF BRAND TO BE TAGGED

Facebook

Pinterest

Twitter

YouTube

Instagram

Specific hashtag to use (and when)

REPORTING TO BE PROVIDED BY INFLUENCER FOLLOWING PROJECT

hmi

Let's share your story