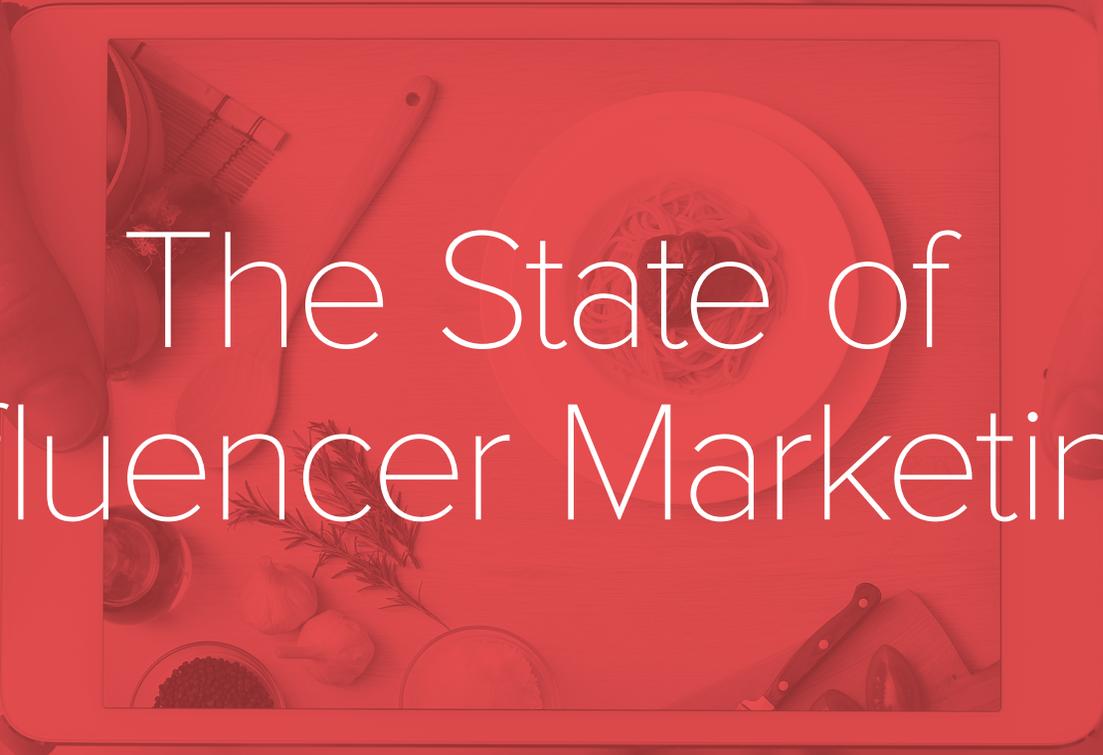


**crowdtap**

The People-Powered Marketing Platform



The State of  
Influencer Marketing

Best Practices for Brands Partnering with Today's Social Media Creators

## Call in the (Creator) Cavalry

75 percent of marketers are using influencer marketing to connect with targeted, relevant audiences at-scale — but brands remain challenged to navigate the complex and ever-changing creator landscape.\*

What began as a channel that was dominated by mommy bloggers in the early 2000s has evolved into a more robust branded content space that caters to nearly every demographic, topic and format. Short-form content, in particular, has surged as platforms like Instagram, Vine, Pinterest and Snapchat give way to a new generation of social media creators.

To help marketers modernize their approach to influencer marketing, Crowdtap interviewed more than fifty creators to capture their candid thoughts on the state of brand-creator partnerships. The results reveal actionable takeaways for brands and agencies working to capture consumer attention via influencer marketing.

*\*Source: Augure, 2015*

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## How Creators Vet Brand Partnerships

For creators, wading through the steady stream of brand pitches that populate their inboxes is simply part of the job. Roughly 41 percent of influencers we surveyed said they receive five to 15 unique pitches per week — and 10 percent of respondents said they receive more than 20!

To find out why creators respond to some pitches and not others, we asked creators to tell us which factors matter most when it comes to vetting brand opportunities. A sizeable share of influencers we surveyed — 44 percent — said the number one motivator for working with a brand is if the opportunity is relevant to their audience. The second most important factor, at 17 percent of the total, is that the opportunity grants them and/or their audience with an exclusive experience. It's noteworthy to point out that the top two reasons cited deal with providing a relevant and/or unique experience to the creators' audience.



In fact, only 14 percent of creators we surveyed said that their general affinity toward the brand was the most important factor when it comes to vetting brand partnerships. This underscores the fact that creators are business people first and foremost — above approaching partnerships as a “fan” of brands, they are primarily focused on delivering great experiences to their audiences and upholding their editorial reputations.

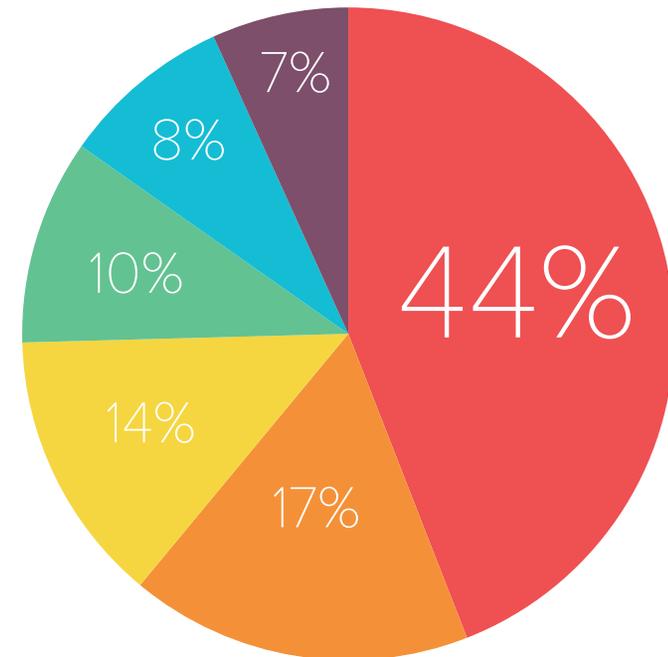
As we uncover macro trends, it’s important to not discount the individual opinions of the creators interviewed. Influencers are people, after all, and while best practices can be formulated based on generalized findings, each brand-creator partnership is unique. Additional responses within the “Other” category indicated that each of the factors plays an equal role when it comes to how they vet partnerships and that it helps if they believe in the brand’s values.

### Insights to Action:

Stand out in creators’ inboxes by presenting opportunities that are relevant to their unique audiences. Smaller brands can find success with smaller budgets by offering up exclusive opportunities.

### WE ASKED:

What most motivates you to work with a brand?



- The opportunity is relevant to my audience.
- The opportunity allows me to provide an exclusive or new experience for myself and/or my audience.
- I like the brand.
- The opportunity will help with my own promotion.
- I am an expert within the subject area of the campaign or brand.
- Other

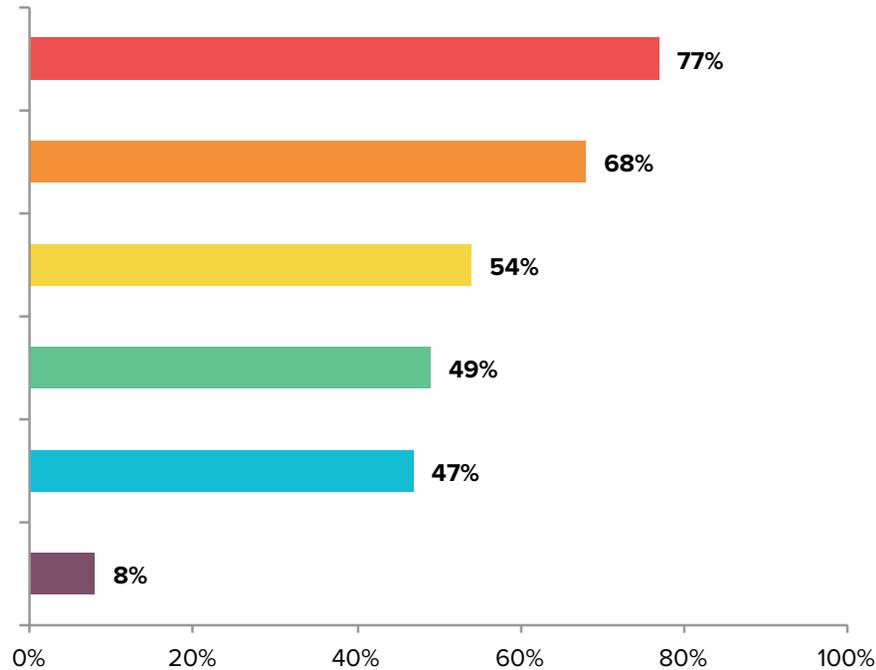
## The Keys to Building Sustainable Creator Partnerships

So, how do you get a second date? Beyond what goes into vetting initial brand partnerships, we wanted to find out what goes into building sustained, long-term relationships between brands and creators. The biggest finding here was the extent to which today's influencers value creative freedom. This was the most often cited reason for partnering with a brand more than once (77 percent), even ahead of competitive compensation (68 percent)!

Put another way, when asked what creators like *least* about partnering with brands on sponsored content, nearly half said "editorial guidelines that are too limiting or too strict."

**WE ASKED:**

What makes you likely to partner with a brand more than once?



- The brand grants me with creative freedom.
- The brand offers me competitive compensation.
- The brand respects me as they would any other publisher.
- The brand understands my interests and only approaches me with relevant opportunities.
- The brand's missions aligns with my own values.
- Other

Respect, or being treated as a professional publisher, is also a noteworthy factor when it comes to forming sustained partnerships with creators. As we uncover later in this report, marketers should treat creators with the same level of professionalism as any other media outlet.

Once again, the “Other” bucket captured some of the more nuanced, albeit still important, reasons why top creators partner with brands more than once. Responses in this category included “clear communication,” “being friendly and personable,” and cross-promoting content across a brand’s own channels.

**CREATOR VERBATIM**

“It’s important that brands allow content creators to personalize their experience and implement the product and/or brand in such a way that readers will relate with the content and not view it as merely an advertisement.”

## What Missteps are Brands Taking When Working with Creators?

In addition to learning what's working in the world of influencer marketing, we also wanted to uncover some of the pain points expressed by creators. Across the open-ended responses, four common themes emerged from the group — and each of them directly or indirectly spoke to a generalized lack of respect for creators' time and/or talents.

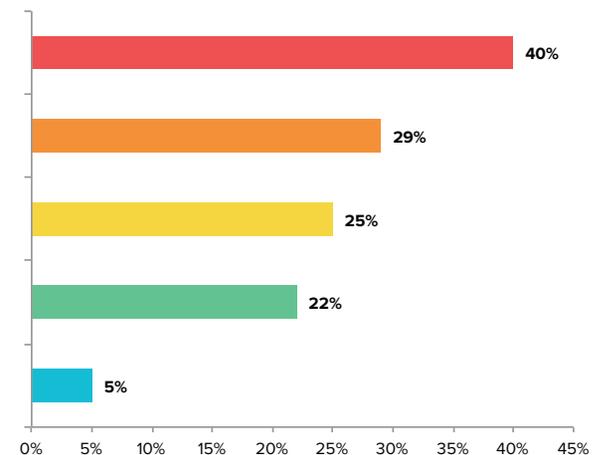
Forty percent of respondents, the largest group, said one of the biggest misconceptions brands have is that creators will work for free or for product samples alone. "Some brands think creating content isn't a legitimate profession worthy of legitimate pay," remarked one influencer. Another creator lamented that brands pay creators far less than they do celebrities, "despite the fact that creators have actual influence."

One notable finding from the "Other" category was that brands fail to fully understand the dynamic that exists between influencers and their audiences. Creators are wary to publish any form of content that will lessen the engagement they see within their communities, which is why relevance is such an important factor for vetting opportunities in the first place.

Another 29 percent said brands simply don't realize the amount of time that goes into creating premium content, and 25 percent stated that brands simply don't treat them as professionals. As one blogger put it, "Some marketers don't view us as professionals and think we can be shuffled around in terms of scheduling, or undercompensated relative to the ask."

### WE ASKED:

What misconceptions do brands have about working with creators?



- I will work for free or for samples alone.**
- Successful content takes minimal time and effort.**
- I don't need to be treated like other publishers.**
- I don't offer as much value as other channels.**
- Other**



Q&A WITH

## Michael Clark

Principal at Beeby Clark+Meyler

Michael Clark is Principal at Beeby Clark+Meyler, an award-winning digital marketing agency that counts brands like Schick, Marriott & AON among its client partners. We interviewed Michael to learn about his agency's approach to influencer marketing and hear his thoughts on what's changing in the world of digital content.

1

### How would you describe BCM's approach to partnering with content creators in social?

We seek authentic individuals that have a connection with their audience and that match the values of the brands that we represent. Influencers and content creators help us reach "light linear television viewers" efficiently while providing the added brand-building benefits associated with endorsement.

2

### Tell us about a successful partnership you've had with an influencer. Why'd it work?

We recently partnered with Harley Morenstein of Epic Meal Time on behalf of Schick Hydro. Harley has a highly engaged audience with the young male demographic that we are seeking to influence. If you have seen Harley's show on

3

### How significant is influencer marketing when it comes to the future of digital content?

Influencer marketing has been around since man crawled out of the slime. What's changed, obviously, is that media is more in control of consumers and the ability to produce very compelling "professional grade" content exists in everyone's pocket in the form of their iPhone camera. This permits new forms of influence to emerge in non-traditional ways. If you are a marketer attempting to influence light linear television viewers, observation of these trends will likely inform your approach to most media investments, not just creator-driven programs.

4

### From an agency perspective, what is the biggest challenge when it comes to navigating influencer partnerships?

The biggest challenge is seeding some creative control over to the creator, so that the content remains authentic and in the voice of the influencer. This can be overcome rather comfortably through research of your influencer to ensure that they match your brand values and a tight brief to ensure that the key points of the message are communicated.

YouTube, you know that Harley is very fond of his beard. We worked with Harley to create a long-form video featuring the shaving of his beloved beard with the fabulous Schick Hydro 5 Groomer. What made this specific project so successful is that the product itself was able to be the star. There was strong branding throughout the piece, but Harley was also encouraged to be consistent with his own voice and style.

## Influencer Marketing Success Stories, as Told by Creators

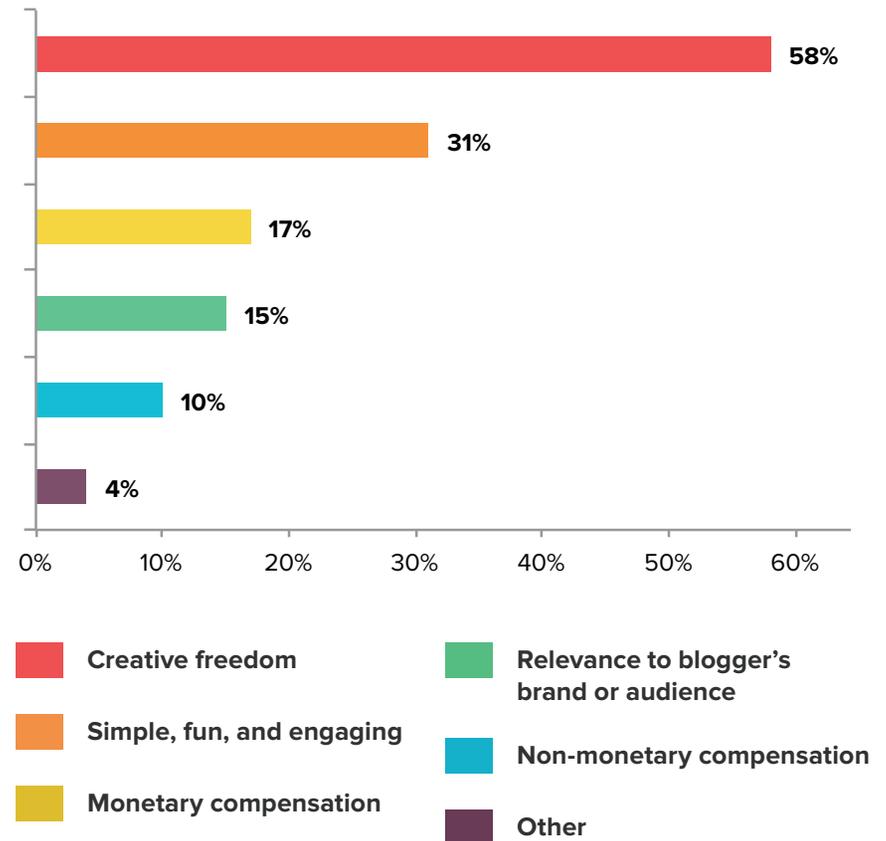
While some frustrations exist between creators and brands, it's not all doom and gloom for marketers. In fact, the influencers we interviewed enthusiastically spoke about their "favorite" brand projects and provided insight into why those partnerships were so successful.

In line with other findings from our survey, a majority of creators cited "creative freedom" as the high note of their favorite sponsored post to date. At the end of the day, influencers want to create something that offers something relevant and valuable to their audience and adheres to their own editorial vision.

As one blogger put it, the most successful opportunities offer "complete creative control and fit perfectly within my niche."

### WE ASKED:

How would you describe a "favorite" brand project?



### Insights to Action:

Let freedom ring. Give creators as much context as you can, along with the most essential and/or important brand guidelines, and then get out of the way. Marketers should trust creators as subject matter experts as well as experts on the tastes and interests of their own audiences.



THREE QUESTIONS WITH

Ry Doon

Comedian & Vine Celebrity

Ry Doon has more than three million followers on Vine and does a pretty mean Jay Z impression. We sat down with him to learn about how he approaches sponsored content creation, and how he feels about the state of brand-influencer relationships today.

1

### **In your opinion, what is the single biggest challenge creators have when it comes to creating content in partnership with brands?**

Some marketers simply don't respect the craft — and I don't mean that in a facetious way. I might spend six hours on a six second Vine, but some brands will email me and say things like, "Can you make ten Vines by tomorrow morning?" I think part of this is that some brands don't fully understand the platforms they are trying to play in — after all, they are relying on subject matter experts to reach audiences within those platforms — but this means that trust is paramount.

My advice to marketers? Trust creators as experts on their audiences and on the channels they have built those audiences in. And understand that micro-content can take just as long to produce produce as long-form content like blogs and vlogs.

2

### **How do you balance being funny with being brand safe?**

I've had to make some changes to my approach since I became "big enough" to work with brands. The most palpable change has been that I've cleaned up my language a bit. On the bright side, this has helped me mature my comedy. It's easy to make something funny by throwing a few curse words in there.

That said, while I get that cursing is not attractive to brands, marketers should aim to meet creators halfway. Creative freedom is huge for us, and it really does dictate who we choose to work with. Give influencers breathing room, and trust that we know how to produce content in a style that will generate greater engagement with our audiences. The bottom line: I'll stop cursing in my Vines if you stop mandating that I add twenty hashtags to every post.

3

### **How important are relationships to content creators?**

Some people think that we're out here shilling for brands, and we just want to make as much money as possible. While we are business people in many regards, we are much more creative than we are corporate. I like to work with partners whom I actually like and respect. Treat us like your buds!

I recognize that brands operate in a very transactional world, but relationships are extremely important to creators. Building that partnership means sticking to deadlines (don't mess with our editorial calendars, please!); coming to us with relevant opportunities; and offering compensation that's commensurate with the complexity of the ask and turnaround time.

*Ry Doon is a comedian and content creator who was one of the first individuals to amass a large following on Vine.*

*Today, Ry has 3.3 million followers and has partnered with brands like Comedy Central, The Travel Channel, Budweiser and others.*

## Understanding the Sponsored Content Puzzle

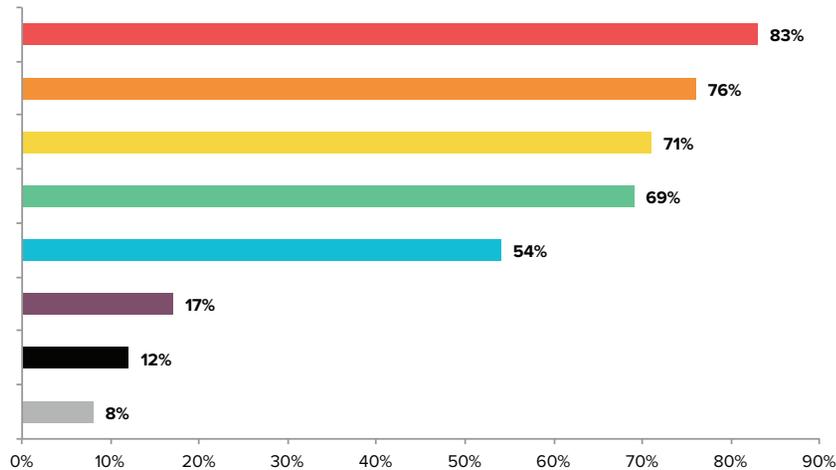
Today's bloggers and creators have turned their talents into businesses and expect to be compensated for their time and energy. That said, marketers don't always understand which forces influence the rate cards of these highly-skilled, in-demand creators.

We asked influencers to tell us which factors inform their pricing models for brands. The number one most-cited factor was the number of posts (83 percent), which reflects a shift in the former pay-per-post model. As micro-formats like Vine, Snapchat and Instagram rise in popularity, creators are developing multiple pieces of content for a given campaign, and — not surprisingly — expect to be compensated based on the volume of creative delivered.

Additional factors include the influencer's overall reach (76 percent said this played a role); turnaround time (71 percent) and the complexity of the ask (69 percent).

**WE ASKED:**

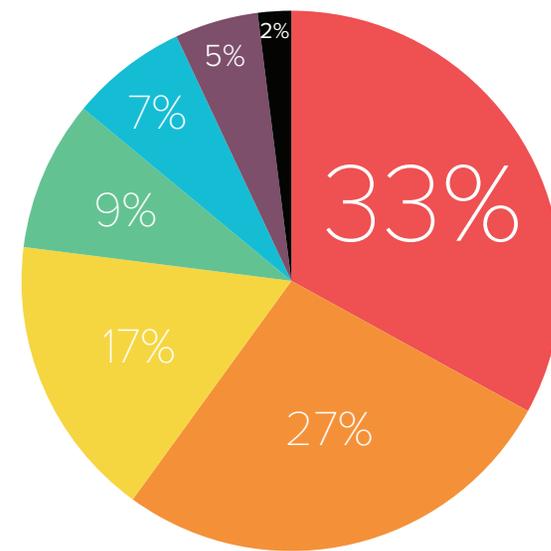
Which factors inform the rate card you provide to brands?



Digging into this question a bit deeper, we asked creators to tell us the most important factor that influences their rate card. When asked to select just one factor, respondents cited the complexity of creative ask above their own reach numbers.

**WE ASKED:**

Which factor most influences your rate card?



This is indicative of a broader trend in which marketers are investing in premium content and subject matter expertise — beyond sheer reach.

## Managers and Networks and Brands — Oh My!

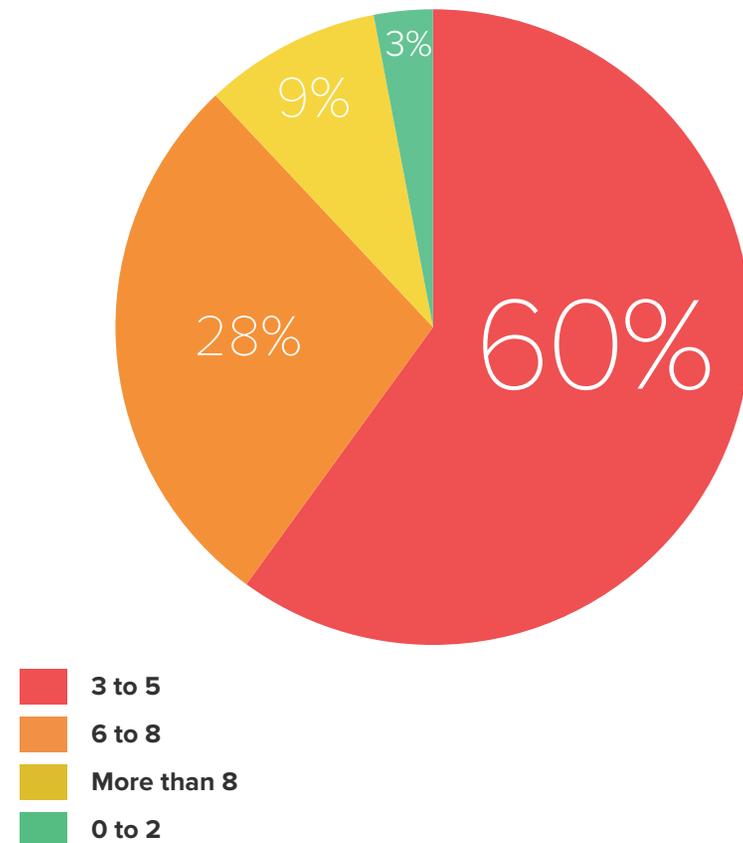
One of the more complex aspects of the influencer marketing landscape is the number of parties and personalities that can be involved in a single partnership. High-reach influencers are often managed by talent managers and/or agencies that specialize in social media celebrities. Aside from this group, influential content creators will join networks to increase their exposure to brands.

Our own survey explored a range of creator types, the vast majority of which said they do not currently work with a talent manager. Yet, 92 percent of creators we surveyed said they belong to anywhere from three to eight influencer networks.

Creators' membership in various networks is not an indicator that they are "shilling" for brands, but rather that they are astute marketers of their own right, eager to gain exposure to as many opportunities as possible.

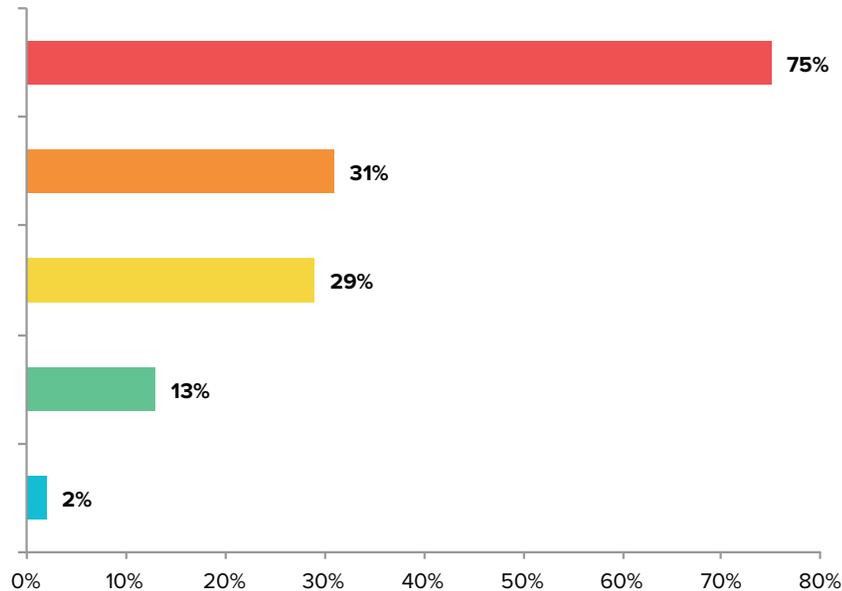
When asked what influences the networks they join, our respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the number one factor is the quality of brands or opportunities offered. In fact, this rationale was mentioned more than twice as often as compensation.

**WE ASKED:**  
To how many different influencer networks do you belong?



**WE ASKED:**

How do you determine which influencer networks you join?



- **Quality of brands & opportunities available**
- **Proper compensation**
- **Network experience (ease of use, service, etc.)**
- **Recommendations from peer creators**
- **Other**

Crowdtap itself is not an influencer network, as our member community spans the spectrum of influence. Our perspective is that peer influencers and high-reach subject matter experts alike have roles in today’s marketing landscape. For example, peer influencers — everyday consumers who create and share content as part of their daily routines — can be effective at seeding authentic ratings and reviews or generating content to produce buzz around a particular campaign or activation. Expert creators, on the other hand, should be utilized as trusted subject matter experts, providing not only reach to brands, but engagement and authority as well.

**Insights to Action:**

The influencer marketplace has become increasingly complex, with talent agencies, influencer networks and creators themselves all playing a role in creator-brand partnerships. Marketers should understand that influencers are more “creative than corporate,” as Vine creator Ry Doon puts it. What does this mean? Approach influencers with relevant opportunities and buttoned up budgets. After all, creators prefer to spend their time creating instead of negotiating deals all day.

# If You Remember Five Things...

## 1 Respect the craft.

Short-form doesn't necessarily mean short time investment. A six-second Vine can take six hours to produce. Consider what goes into creating compelling content as you determine the budget and timing of your project.

## 2 Content creators are business people and professionals.

Treat them with the same respect and professionalism as you would any other publisher. This means sticking to timelines and offering fair compensation.

## 3 Trust creators as experts on their own audiences.

Consider the audience before bringing an opportunity to the table. Just because you don't "get" a creator's editorial vision doesn't mean their audience doesn't.

## 4 Creative freedom is hugely important to today's influencers.

Provide brand guidelines but leave room for creators to make the content their own. Give them context, and then get out of the way.

## 5 Evolve your compensation structure with the times.

A flat pay-per-post approach doesn't account for the complexities of new media formats. Consider number of posts and turnaround time as you allocate budget to influencer marketing programs.

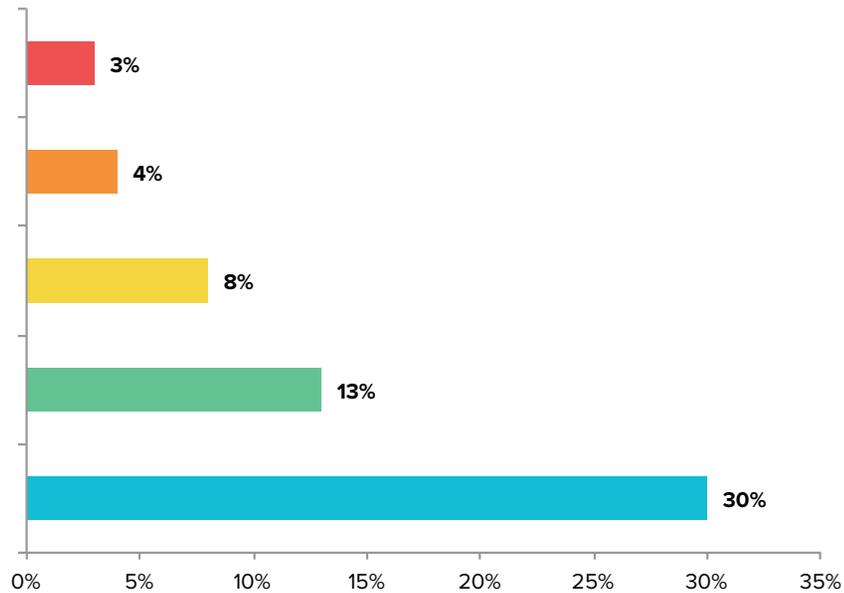
## Survey Methodology

Crowdtap interviewed 59 content creators in October 2015. Of these influencers, 81 percent were bloggers, 16 percent were short-form content creators (e.g. Vine, Snapchat, Instagram) and 3 percent were vloggers (long-form video creators). Among bloggers, the average aggregate social footprint among respondents was 248K.



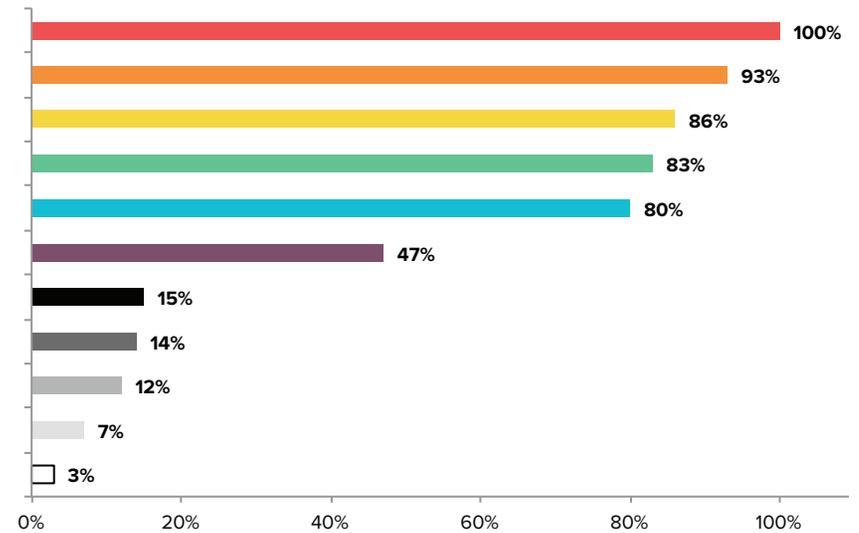
# Aggregate Social Footprint of Survey Respondents

## Aggregate Social Following



- 1M+
- 500,001 - 1M
- 100,001 - 500K
- 50,001 - 100K
- 0 - 50K

## Social Platforms Used by Survey Respondents



- Instagram
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Blog
- Pinterest
- Snapchat
- Vine
- Google+
- YouTube
- Periscope
- Other



By Claudia Page,  
VP of Product, Head of Creator  
Partnerships, Crowdtap

with

**Katie Perry**, Director of Marketing, Crowdtap

**Nitya Srikishen**, Marketing Manager, Crowdtap