Danone Is Redefining the Influencer Marketing Playbook

At a time when culture moves quickly and content is ubiquitous, Danone is redefining the marketing playbook along with Linqia, its agency of record and one of the largest influencer agencies in the world.

Linqia's chief strategy officer, Keith Bendes, sat down with Danone's chief marketing officer, Linda Bethea, and executive creative director, Eric Flinn, at ADWEEK's 2025 Social Media Week in May to discuss their ever-evolving marketing strategy and philosophy.

For Danone, creator marketing is an important part of its current strategy because the path to purchase for younger consumers has changed.

"The traditional linear marketing funnel is dead," Bethea said, calling brand engagement a "continuous loop of discovery" thanks to the rise of social media and influencers.

Bethea sees her job as making sure the consumers are targeted throughout the whole loop: "I need to make sure that our content and our brands are engaging with them at the right moment, at the right time, in the right place."

Embracing failure in creator marketing

Interestingly, part of Danone's influencer marketing playbook is trial and error, which includes failure. But Bethea doesn't see it that way.

"We believe that you have to take risks to get rewards," she said. "You should be just as proud of the [content] that sucks

because you learn from them and do better next time.”

“It’s probably the only space in the company where there’s more appetite for failure, in social,” Flinn agreed.

In embracing the possibility of failure, Danone has created a system to turn creative risk into an advantage.

“We have a system of green, yellow, red—like what are the things that make [content] more risky,” Flinn said. “That way, when the moments pop up and things are timely, it’s easier to make those [decisions] based on some frameworks and guardrails.”

Finding the right creator

Being nimble and able to respond in the moment means that Danone seeks influencer partnerships that are organic and authentic.

“We have a portfolio of over 20 brands, and it’s important that we understand the brand purpose, the brand positioning, and the target audience for each,” Bethea said.

By doing so, Danone can bring a brand to life in an authentic way.

One example of this was partnering Oikos, a Greek yogurt brand, with powerlifter influencer Anatoly. In the video, Anatoly pretends to be a lowly janitor cleaning a gym, but after eating just a spoonful of Oikos, he’s able to lift more than the gym’s beefiest guys.

“Oikos is a brand known for strength,” Bethea said. “So, this absolutely made sense for this brand.”

Flinn welcomes the rise of non-celebrity influencers, and Linqia helps Danone keep track of under-the-radar creators so they can move quickly. When there’s a cultural moment to be

capitalized on, they already know who the right creators are to respond.

“You have to move very fast,” Flinn said.

An evolution in sampling

Digital creator marketing is also changing how sampling is done, and Danone is already thinking ahead. Flinn remembered that they used to do a “sampling tour” at a brick-and-mortar location, but now they make it content.

In several “person on the street”-style videos, influencers ask random people about several Danone products. It’s charming and fun, and Flinn sees this as gamifying sampling by creating a human connection, rather than traditional sampling methods.

Even Bendes of Linqia chimed in, saying there’s been a high level of engagement with those styles of content: “It just looks different, feels different, stops the scroll.”

“Why not bring efficiency to everything we do,” Flinn said, agreeing. “And it’s authentic because it’s out there in real life, not just produced behind the camera.”

It’s clear Danone is changing with the times, staying ahead of the curve to bring world-class marketing to its family of brands. But it comes down to a simple idea, according to Bethea.

“It goes back to understanding the role of social and influencers in your overarching marketing strategy, because everything is playing a specific role,” Bethea said.

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