

Get to Know the 3 Types of Influencers

February 18, 2021 8 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

*The following is an excerpt from Jason Falls' Winfluence: Reframing Influencer Marketing to Ignite Your Brand, which will be released Feb. 23 via Entrepreneur Press. Pre-order your copy now via **Amazon** | **Barnes & Noble** | **IndieBound** | **Bookshop***

In my experience, the average Joe or Jane Consumer breaks down who they are influenced by into three main buckets:

1. People they know.
2. People who are like them.
3. People who are trying to convince them.

The “people they know” group includes family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and anyone else they identify with in their personal and professional life. These are individuals they have a real-world relationship with and trust intimately.

I don't know my mayor or Oprah personally. They belong in the next group. “People who are like them” can mean they live in the same town; are similar in age, gender or another demographic; or share a common trait like supporting a certain sports team, musician or even product. This group can also apply to celebrities, politicians, media members or other notable individuals they identify with. The trust factor here derives from their sense of identity. They might trust a

product recommendation or news, opinions or ideas they share, but they wouldn't necessarily invite these people to dinner.

"People who are trying to convince them" includes anyone who doesn't belong in the first two groups and is trying to sell, persuade, convince or otherwise influence them. Trust is hard to come by here. In fact, I would argue that if a consumer develops trust in someone from this group, that person or entity automatically moves into the second group. This is where your business starts from when approaching prospective customers. The trick, then, is to move into one of the first two groups. That's a rudimentary explanation of what influence marketing is all about.

Let's assume that you and your brand won't get into group one. You can certainly stay in group three and settle for interrupting their day to force a transaction down their throat. While advertising can certainly be effective, it is often transactional and costly. But your influence marketing focus should be to make your way to the second group.

This is a powerful reminder that perhaps the most important step in the marketing process is to know your audience. You need to know what people, organizations, businesses or brands they identify with, have an affinity for and trust – and why. That knowledge will be a potent component of your success in achieving that group-two status.

Related: HBO's 'Fake Famous' Documentary Gets Influencer Marketing All Wrong

How to align with people like them

What are the possible paths of affinity and trust? If you break down the various people, organizations, businesses and brands consumers tend to trust, you will get a sense of where to find your people with influence. Just as you visualized circles of influence around your brand, look at your target

consumers and their circles of trust. According to Jay Baer and Daniel Lemin's "Chatter Matters: The 2018 Word of Mouth Report," the following resources are typically considered most trusted:

1. Yourself.
2. Brands you are familiar with.
3. Friends and family.
4. Online reviews.
5. Expert reviews.
6. Discounts or coupons.
7. The media.
8. Advertisements.
9. Friends' posts in social media.
10. Brands' posts in social media.

The only caveat is that those answers derived from a question about who people trust for advice and insight when making significant purchases. Even the vaunted Edelman Trust Barometer is biased toward looking at the trust in employers and brands. What we want to understand is who or what resources consumers trust in general.

My hypothesis is that a consumer's circle of trust starts with our family and friends. We trust them for product recommendations, but we also trust them to babysit our children.

Next, we have peer groups. This might be our classmates at school, the people in our bridge club or even fellow members of a professional LinkedIn or Facebook Group. They have earned our trust over time through conversations and connections.

The next circle out is community members. That could be someone who lives in the same town – you know them, or you know of them – but it could also be fellow professionals in your industry whom you may have met at trade shows or conferences. These people share a set of experiences or values, so they have valuable advice for you. Next come experts and service professionals. This includes your doctor, lawyer, accountant, thought leaders in your industry, speakers at a conference and others with a high perceived level of expertise in the topic at hand. You may not know them personally, but you respect their experience and opinion on specific matters.

Beyond subject-matter experts, you look to trusted members of the media, which I argue also includes people with online influence. Note that I'm not referring to celebrities, who have their own ring further out on our circle of trust. I'm talking about reporters, critics, reviewers and even niche-topic entertainers, whose content we seek out to inform our lives. So if you stumble across Gordon Ramsay cooking a recipe on TV and are influenced by that, he's more likely categorized as a celebrity. But if you proactively follow Ramsay and all his content online, he would fall more into this category of trusted media and online influencers.

This ring is also where you typically find bloggers and marketing experts trying to subdivide people with influence into smaller groups, like "micro" or "nano." But remember, with Winfluence you are looking at influence from a broader perspective, not just those who have it on social networks. Don't get caught up in the classification game. Brands come next in the circle of trust. The goal of that term I dislike – "influencer marketing" – is usually to borrow the trust consumers have in online influencers until you can become one yourself. However, many brands have already earned their customers' trust through great customer service, solid products, or engaging and useful content, so I've given them a

ring of their own.

Consumers trust some brands, but they have a harder time trusting the next level: advertisements and what I call “professional persuaders.” Professional persuaders are salesmen, government lobbyists, affiliate marketers and similar individuals whose only job is to persuade you to buy some product or idea. They are not interested in you as anything other than a potential customer.

Celebrities fall outside this ring simply because you wouldn’t trust most of them for qualified opinions on product recommendations and other issues. Research on ads using celebrity spokespeople consistently shows that ads with them are less effective than ads without. Valerie O’Regan, a Cal State Fullerton political science professor who studies the impact of celebrity endorsements on politics, wrote in a 2014 paper that young adults are more apt to listen to non-celebrity individuals when deciding how to vote, for example.

Finally, the outermost ring is for strangers. Few of us would trust a stranger to watch our purse or backpack while we went to the bathroom in a restaurant, but we might choose to try KFC’s new concoction on their recommendation. This underlines an important stipulation about the consumer’s circle of trust: The circles for one person may be different for someone else. Some individuals trust celebrities far more than they trust the media, for example. Some don’t trust brands at all, meaning those wouldn’t even appear on their chart. And, yes, in some circumstances even our own circles change, as the stranger in front of us at the convenience store may just persuade us to buy a ticket for the Powerball that day.

Related: Why Consumers Care About Influencers, and Why You Should Too

The line between the media and online influencers circle and the celebrities circle can also blur, as we alluded to with

the Gordon Ramsay example earlier. So remember that the circles may shift or vary, depending on the specific audience or audience member. This categorization, though, is my attempt at a general view. Also remember these are all subcategories in the larger "People Like Them" category. These are the people who have influence over your audience. The more impact you can have closer to their inner circle of family and friends, the more effective your influence marketing efforts will be.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/365607>