Should Your Brand Be Using Affiliate Links? Here Are the Pros and Cons.

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In today's world of digital publications, online shopping and influencer recommendations, more media outlets are turning to affiliate marketing programs to make easy money. Essentially, these programs partner with editors and media outlets to promote your products in exchange for a percentage of commission. The affiliate program, and the outlets that partner with them, get a piece of the profits from purchases made through their links — in turn, your brand gets in front of bigger audiences.

On top of being a helpful sales tool for some companies, we're also starting to see more and more top-tier media outlets that *only* recommend brands with affiliate links. Brands that don't have them may miss out on some great coverage opportunities.

There are tons of programs to choose from, and you can expect them to take anywhere from 5% to as much as 30% of sales. Programs like Amazon, CJ Affiliate, GiddyUp and so many others can help your company get into high-performing articles in popular publications. So, the question is: to affiliate or not to affiliate?

Before you make a decision, it's important to review the facts. To help you know if this move is right for your company, let's talk about the pros and cons of signing up for affiliate links:

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Pros

The most noteworthy benefit of affiliate marketing is the increased press coverage, which hopefully results in higher sales. As a PR firm, we see our clients' opportunities increase significantly when they work with an affiliate program since outlets are much more incentivized to include them. It is an especially helpful advantage for brands in more competitive industries such as beauty, fashion and tech — where just a few great press placements can truly make or break your year.

Another benefit of affiliate marketing is that the coverage received is considered an earned media placement, which holds much more value in the eyes of consumers. Affiliate link articles are less conspicuous than traditional paid ads and appeal to viewers seeking authentic, trustworthy recommendations.

As experts in the communications field, we know that authenticity matters to audiences, with statistics consistently placing it high on the list of consumer values. One recent study showed that 88% of respondents desire to support brands that appear authentic in their marketing efforts. A well-crafted affiliate article reviewing and recommending your products just may be the perfect strategy to resonate with those buyers.

Affiliate programs provide great opportunities for marketing, brand awareness and potential sales. Before deciding if they are the right step for your brand, let's review some of the downsides to keep in mind.

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Cons

Before joining an affiliate program, consider whether or not your brand’s profit margins will comfortably allow for the percentage of commission to be paid. The sweet spot for affiliate marketing seems to be midsize-to-large companies that benefit from the press coverage and can afford the cost of it. Small brands need to take a look at their books and review all options when it comes to marketing strategies.

Consider working with an external agency that has the expertise to decipher if an affiliate program is a good fit for your brand. Our clients often ask us if affiliate marketing is right for them, and the truth is, it varies on a case-to-case basis.

In addition to knowing what your brand needs, an agency can help you review the various affiliate program parties and the differences in percentage commissions they take. For companies that are short on staff members, navigating the market for the best-fitting affiliate partnership, setting the account up, and monitoring the program can be too heavy of a lift. Don’t be afraid to ask the experts to step in.

If you’re unsure if your company can afford the cost and labor of managing an affiliate program, consult with an agency or public relations expert to learn more about your options. The right partnership just might offer the press coverage (and revenue) you’ve been looking for.

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