



# Advocating to Zeal

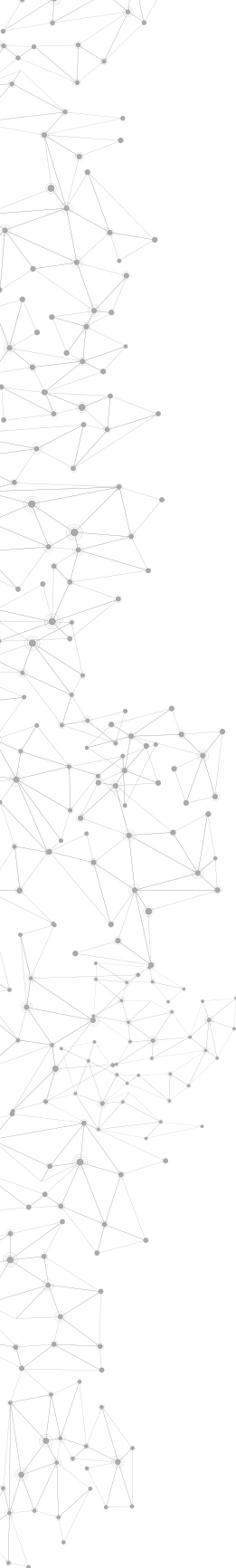
The A-Z Guide to Telling Your Brand Story  
To, Through, and With Influencers



In the 21st century, we  
have instant access to a  
24/7 global marketplace.

If there's a demand for a product or service,  
someone will sell it. And then a competitor will  
sell another thing almost identical to it.

**sysomos**



The infinite number of choices available to us is both a blessing and a curse: While we have the luxury to enjoy a wide range of options in every facet of our lives—from movies and music to news media and travel—the excess of choices can be paralyzing.

We have neither the time nor the patience to make choices blindly and without validation. There are only so many movies, meals, cars, or vacations we can consume in a lifetime, thus we must rely on the informed guidance of people who have already vetted the options.

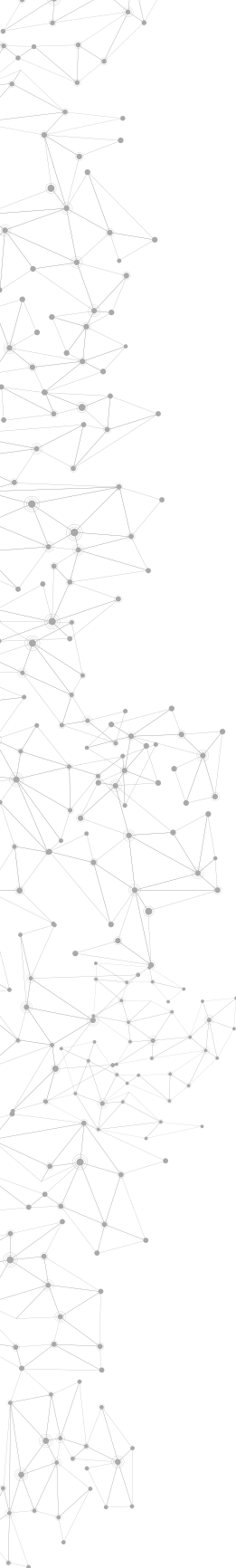
Today, these individuals are the called **influencers**: people with an online following and established credibility, those who use their share of voice to endorse, support, or decry products and services, often with a profound effect on the opinions and actions of their audiences.

While influencers have become more prevalent, consumers have grown increasingly savvy.

We pride ourselves on the ability to recognize a sales pitch, and see through the bias of branded marketing efforts. In fact, according to Nielsen,

**95%** of consumers trust recommendations from others—even people they don't know—over branded content.





That statistic alone supports the value in developing an influencer marketing program, but if you're like most marketers and agencies, the process of searching for and courting influencers may feel daunting. And you would be alone. According to Harvard Business Review,

**75%** of marketers consider finding the right influencers the most challenging aspect of any influencer strategy.

Thus, we've put together this handy A-Z Guide on Influencer Marketing to help you navigate the search, as well as provide you with guidance on how to grow, maintain, and maximize ROI from your influencer relationships. We'll also discuss some of the tools available to help you identify and build relationships with key influencers, as well as monitor the results of your efforts to make adjustments for increased engagement. Like any relationship, working with influencers is a balance give and take and requires work. But, when 81% of marketers say influencer marketing works, they must not be wrong.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Social Media Today



# Why influencer marketing?

For marketers and agencies, influencers are passionate, informed brand advocates that can help a company amplify its message. They share candid thoughts, opinions, and expertise across their social networks to directly connect with target audiences and their broader personal network.

## Why is this important?

To start, the average consumer encounters countless marketing messages every day and may receive those messages with a sense of cynicism:

*“Of course you like Product X.  
You make Product X.”*

In turn, consumers are more trusting of a third party than the company itself, meaning feedback from a trusted source can have a much greater impact on customers' purchase decisions than messages delivered via traditional marketing methods. And online, in our digitally connected world, the power of that feedback scales quickly.





Influencer marketing has  
three key benefits:

# 1. RELEVANCE

translates a brand's message for easy consumer consumption—influencers put messages in a context that's more relevant to the audience.

# 2. AUTHENTICITY

generates a valuable network built on trusted, two-way communication.

# 3. REACH

has an inherently multiplicative effect—influencers reach a targeted audience that is already receptive to their opinions and likely to share messages with their own networks.



Most importantly, influencer marketing generates proven results.



Marketing prompted consumer-to-consumer, word-of-mouth generates

**2X THE SALES**



of paid advertising<sup>2</sup>

Marketing-inspired word-of-mouth yields more than 2x the sales of paid advertising, and these customers have a

**37% higher retention rate<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Schlesinger Associates, 2015

<sup>2, 3</sup> Social Media Today, 2015

# How does influencer marketing help marketers?

Influencers glean valuable insights based on long-term, two-way communication with their audience, and marketers can partner with influencers to help shape a brand strategy based on those insights. Influencers acting as a brand advocate can also educate consumers about products and services, build authority through additional content development, and help counteract negative feedback by providing and responding with an authentic point of view.

Influencer marketing is also cost-effective and practical. Done well, it can directly increase sales and enhance the impact of existing marketing efforts without requiring the development of a completely new strategy.





# How does influencer marketing help agencies?



The rise of social media has forced agencies to continually innovate, developing new strategies that not only meet their client's goals, but reach audiences in a meaningful, authentic, and responsive way.

Doing so, however, starts with knowing your audience and whether you're a public relations, digital, advertising or marketing agency, clients today demand an understanding of who is talking about them, what they are saying, and who is listening.

What's more: While it's easy to calculate the number of Facebook likes and Twitter followers, it's difficult to quantify the value of these voices—a large following does not automatically create influence. What does? Relationships.

When agencies build and foster relationships with a trusted group of influencers—who can be partnered with a variety of clients in any given space—they strengthen their client offerings. The right influencer bench for agencies can be leveraged for internal client strategy, ideation of new campaigns, or even third-party validation in new business pitches.

# What Does Successful Influencer Marketing Look Like and How Is It Accomplished?

When influencer marketing is done well, it expands the reach of brand's key messages and introduces brands to new audiences, making it a cost-effective, scalable, trusted means of broadly sharing messages (not to mention offering brands new mediums and new voices for brand advocacy). It also has the potential to strengthen the relationship between influencers and brands, as the influencers are brought in “under the tent” of advocacy and seen as experts on a particular topic.



Identifying the right influencers—the ones who will resonate best with your desired audience—and building these relationships is difficult.

Smart influencer marketing uses a combination of data-based insights and analysis generated by real people with deep subject matter expertise to quickly identify potential influencers, a process that can be time-consuming and painful when done manually.

Tools designed to interpret and leverage the science of human networks make it simple to build lasting relationships and move beyond a casual conversation.



# Influencer marketing has three on-going hallmarks that are worth noting:

## 1. Product and Brand Affinity

When customers won't leave you, they'll live through the most trying times with you, and rejoice at every new release or product introduction, often choosing you over a superior competitive offering.

## 2. Conversation and Community

Influencers like to share and be heard. If you can engage in a conversation with them and get them to get involved in a third-party effort, you're on your way to success.

## 3. Price Insensitivity

Influencers who perceive that they are getting a "premium" experience, or conversely, an incredible value for the dollar, they'll be less likely to move for a lower price or more features added to a competitive offering.

# Identifying Your Influencers

It's important to think through the lens of your audience: What they care about, who they respect, how they communicate. Finding the appropriate influencer means diving deep into the minds of a brand's audience—and then taking a similar deep dive into the mind of the potential influencer.

An influencer's power is rooted in their reach, but for a brand's purpose, their sentiment on a topic or brand, consistency with brand image and connections within a target community are equally important. Before building that relationship, you must first identify each influencer's current position on the brand.



# How do you spell Influencer? Start with A and end with Z.

## A: Adversaries, Agnostics, and Advocates

There are three general types of influencer relationships:



### ADVERSARIES

Individuals who are openly hostile and can't seem to say anything nice about a brand



### AGNOSTICS

Those who may or may not have a strong opinion but keep their opinions to themselves (potentially the most "dangerous" because their ideas are not known to marketers)



### ADVOCATES

People who have a positive view of a brand and are willing to shout it from the rooftops

Ultimately, the goal of any influencer relationship is to create brand **advocates**. A brand advocate is genuine in their passion for a brand, and that sentiment will resonate with their established audiences. A recommendation or suggestion from a real person—not a brand—carries more weight.

## B: Build

“If you build it, they will come.” Hollywood’s best advice doesn’t just build a field of dreams, it can also be applied to building an effective relationship with an influencer.

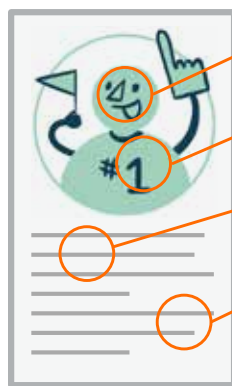
Start by identifying key influencers that your brand wants to target based on their content, audience, and authority. Once these individuals have been identified, look for opportunities for the brand to genuinely engage, gradually increasing interactions to build trust. Share their tweets, comment on their posts, or maybe reach out to invite them to meet up at an industry event.

Once the relationship has blossomed, brands should concentrate on building this relationship and working with the influencer on ways to amplify the brand’s messaging through the influencer’s existing channels.

## C: Credentials

A company would never hire an employee without first thoroughly checking their credentials. This same rigor should be applied to vetting potential influencers.

Take a look at their credentials and conduct a BETA test:



- **BUILT-IN:** Do they have a built-in audience and a strong social presence?
- **EXPERTISE:** Do they have the right industry knowledge and experience?
- **TRUSTED:** Are they seen as an authoritative and trusted voice with the audience you’re targeting?
- **ARTICULATE:** Are they able to articulate brand messaging while still keeping this trust and authority with their audience?

The more positive answers you get, the more likely that relationship is advantageous to a brand.



## D: Diligence

Being a good listener is one of the most valuable skills that you can have in any relationship, and when it comes to influencers, you need to be listening every single day. What are they doing on their social networks? What events are they attending? What are they talking about with their audience?

Keeping close tabs on influencers can help you develop the content and messaging that will best resonate with their audience (and yours), and keep your finger on the pulse of the news and trends you need to know about.

## E: Exchange

It doesn't matter how big or how famous your brand is: If you're not offering something of value to an influencer, you're not going to get much out of that relationship. Building a relationship with an influencer means understanding that they are motivated (at least somewhat) by self-interest, and offering something to them that they find valuable.

This exchange can take many forms—financial compensation, early access to products or services, a chance to connect with other influencers, or even a say in decision-making and strategy. Be scrupulously transparent about whatever exchange that occurs, and keep in mind relevant regulations and guidelines from the FCC. Nothing can sink an influencer's credibility—and yours—faster than not being up front about the exchange rate of your relationship.







## F: Feasibility

Don't let your eyes get bigger than your stomach. No project has inexhaustible resources, and while it can get frustrating for any team to have to downscale a wonderful idea, not being able to follow through on promises made to an influencer can irrevocably damage an influencer relationship forever.

Instead, choose a strategy that adheres to financial and resource realities. Through practice, you will find that choosing a feasible, manageable program with a few well-chosen, high-value influencers is much more meaningful than a low-resource, low-touch event with many different influencers.

## G: Guidance

The wise person understands that a good idea is a good idea, no matter where it comes from.

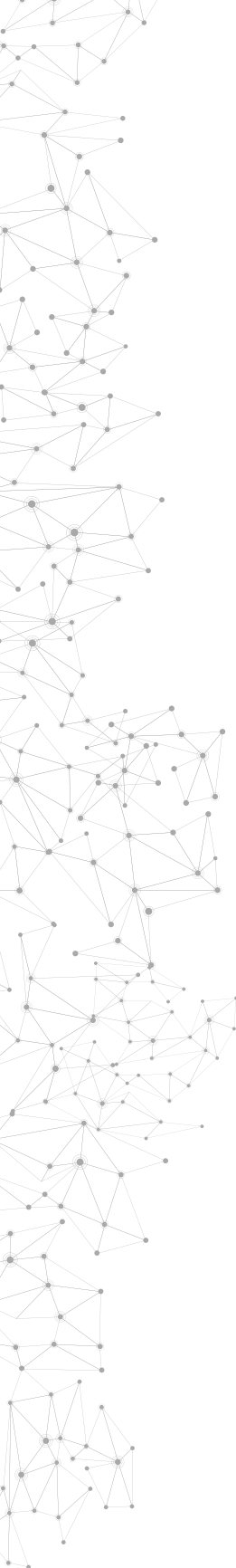
As you build strong relationships with influencers, it's worth remembering that these influencers have influence for a reason. Often, they're experts in the industry or field, and can offer well-informed insights into your brand's strategy, products and services, without the bias that can creep in when talking to those within your organization. Run your latest campaign idea by your influencer and ask for honest feedback and guidance. They can serve as a third-party validator for both your audience and your brand.

## H: Human

Between influencer relationship management tools, data analysis software, and content management systems, it's easy to think that managing influencer relationships is something that can be done primarily with technology.

While these tools are valuable and important, there's no





replacement for a living and breathing human being who can not only analyze data and make informed decisions, but also build the one-on-one relationships that are necessary for success. Robots and algorithms can't do that. (Yet.)

## I: Insights

Just as there are limitations with technology, there are also limits to what humans can accomplish on their own. If you're like most marketers or agencies, you are continually looking for tools and solutions to make your team smarter, more efficient and more effective at using limited resources.

Traditional and solely manual methods of influencer identification and evaluation are incredibly time consuming and often frustrating and unproductive. In order to best identify the influencers who are going to make a difference for your brand, you need to understand who is saying what, to whom, and why. Tools like Sysomos can give you the insights you need to understand those social conversations and set your brand on the right path forward.

## J: Jargon

Imagine you're at a bar with a friend, who—instead of saying the next round is on her—tells you she's going to leverage existing assets to make a purchasing decision because it provides value that will move the needle. Would you smile and nod, or would you ask her if she's feeling all right?

Keep in mind the language you're using to share your message. Technical or marketing jargon that might appeal to industry experts doesn't jibe well with consumer audiences and influencers. You can and should tailor your message, wording and language for the audience.



## K: KPIs

Every single plan, in marketing and in life, should have clearly-defined goals. Those plans should also have the flexibility to not only measure progress toward your goals, but also to refine and revise these goals based off the success—or lack of success—of the program.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) need to be in place long before an influencer relationship strategy begins, and be regularly refined and adjusted based off the results.



## L: Legality

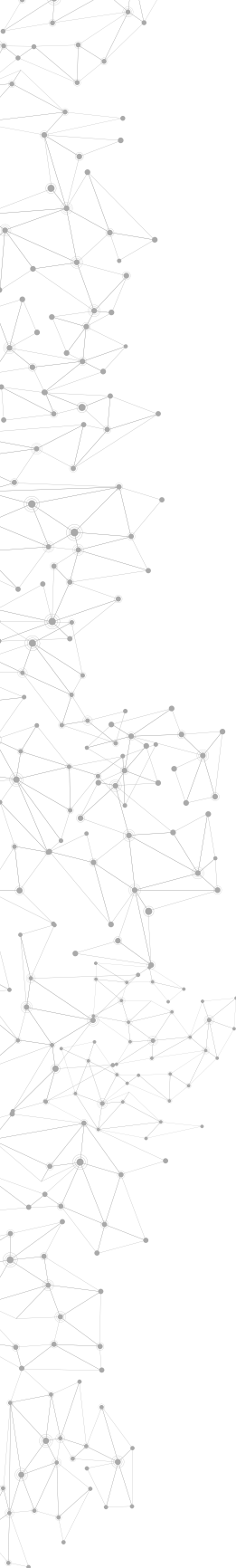
We don't have to tell you that you should follow the law. But it's imperative—no, it's double imperative—especially when it comes to influencers. You must follow disclosure laws when working with influencers (note: these vary depending on country and jurisdiction).

If you fail to disclose a relationship with an influencer who advocates for your brand, you can cause serious damage to the influencer's credibility and reputation—and to yours. Audiences today are growing comfortable with influencers' relationships with brands, as long as both parties are upfront.

## M: Maintenance

All long-term relationships need work to keep things interesting. Influencer relationship management is the same way. This isn't a short-term fling. It requires investment from both sides, with regular give-and-take. If a relationship isn't





working out, changes should quickly be made; if necessary, the relationship should be terminated.

These relationships need regular maintenance to get the most out of them—on both sides, even when you're not in the middle of an active campaign or engagement.

## N: New Voices

So you're doing everything right: You're putting in the work to maintain a relationship, you're measuring the results, but despite this, the program may not be producing your desired results.

If your needs have changed or you're not getting what you want out of the relationship, it might be time to move forward with new voices and new audiences. Tastes change, and no matter how well you're doing right now, it always pays to have a list of new voices available to engage with and identify as new influencer partners.

## O: Off-the-Record

It's not just for reporters anymore! Not all of the benefits of an influencer relationship are public—both influencers and brands are privy to valuable information that the other might find useful, whether that's what's happening in the market or the lowdown on an upcoming product or service. Sharing this information, even if not made available for public consumption, can deepen and strengthen an existing relationship, and generate greater trust and transparency between influencers and the brands they work with.





## P: Persistence

Today's consumer is savvy, smart—and naturally skeptical of brands' self-serving bias. Consumers are served advertisements constantly, and brands often lack tools to break through the noise and get through to their target audience. Losing sight of the importance of your influencer audience can kill even the best efforts. Stay tuned in to their conversations regularly or you may miss an emerging trend or change in view point.

Not so with influencers, however. **Word-of-mouth suggestions generate twice the sales of paid advertising**, per a 2015 Social Media Today study. Influencer marketing is one of the most cost-effective forms of marketing out there, and should be a key part of your communications toolbox.

## Q: Quantity vs. Quality

Not all influencers are created equal, and the same holds true for their audiences. While it can be tempting to immediately gravitate to influencers with the largest social media following, there's far more that goes into identifying the right influencers for your brand. For example, do they talk about the topics you do? What do they think about the topics that are important to your brand? Is their audience engaged and interested in those topics and what your brand is trying to accomplish? In order to get the most out of your influencer relationship strategy, remember that quality is almost always better than quantity when it comes to audience.

## R: Roster

Make like the Boy Scouts and be prepared. While some brands can get by with only one or two high-value influencers, larger brands and agencies should always have a full roster of influencers they can utilize, depending on need, audience and

the medium of communication.

This not only provides you with backup should an influencer not work out during a campaign, it also allows you to better tailor your message to the right audience, and agencies can bring on influencers who can engage with multiple clients.

## S: Silo

Yes, “silo” is a marketing term and we told you to ease up on jargon. But we felt it was important enough to break that rule to share this: Influencer relationships shouldn’t just be placed into a marketing silo and left there.

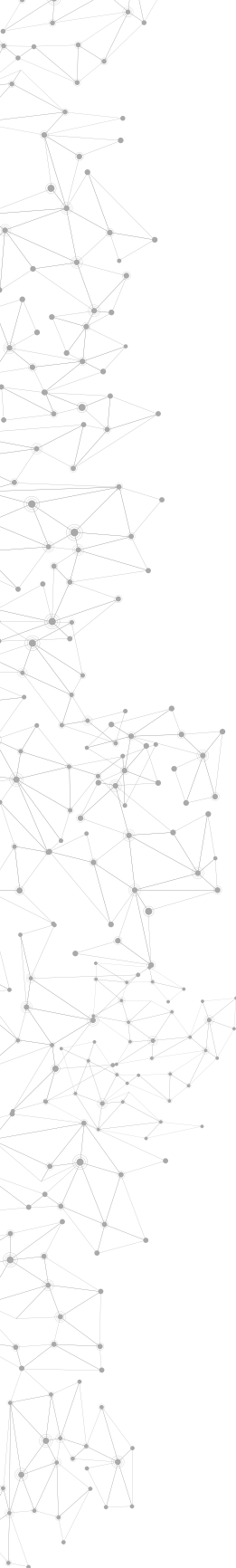
These relationships can be valuable across your entire organization; whether in R&D, sales, product development or other areas, influencers can offer guidance that helps you better connect with their audience, AKA your customer. Don’t let the insights from your industry’s most powerful voices stop in the marketing department.



## T: To & Through

For those of you who are already engaging influencers, ask yourself this: **Are you marketing to influencers, or through them? To be successful, you’ll need a little of both.**





Marketing to influencers can help demonstrate the brand's value and show an influencer why you should be partners, while marketing through influencers lets you work with them to share and amplify your message. This multi-tiered approach will get you the most value from your relationship, and the greatest impact from your marketing budget.

## U: Unique

Influencers are people, just like you. And like you, they like being treated like the unique individuals they are, not part of some anonymous collective. The lesson here: You shouldn't be treating all of your influencers the same. They come from different backgrounds, have different audiences, wants, hopes, desires and needs, and if you don't tailor your message to best resonate with them, it's very unlikely that they'll be interested in partnering with you. Treat your influencers like your valued colleagues, and allow your influencer relationship strategy to develop accordingly.

## V: Value & Volume

For marketers (and especially those with limited budgets), the name of the game is ROI. Getting the most out of every dollar spent is critical, and there are few tools in your arsenal with a higher value than influencer marketing.

While other tactics might reach a higher volume of people, influencer marketing is one of the best tactics you have to get past the veil of distrust or apathy that many consumers have for brands, and can allow your message to be communicated by a trusted, valuable ally to an audience that might not have been initially receptive to what you had to say.







## W: Win/Win

Remember when we were talking about exchanges, and how for a relationship to be successful, both parties need to get value out of the partnership? That's the definition of a win/win, and it's how you should approach relationship-building with influencers. If you want something of value, offer something of value to them.

## X: X-Factor

Watch sports? This term is usually applied to a player who can singlehandedly affect the outcome of the game. While this is a well-traveled sports cliché, x-factors exist in every situation, and for an influencer marketing program to be successful, you must identify them early on and address any issues that might negatively affect them.

Tools like Sysomos Influence and Sysomos Heartbeat can help you identify these x-factors in order to better identify relevant influencers, monitor their conversations and get the most value out of your program.

## Y: Yawn

This isn't a suggestion, but rather the reality for most marketing. The human attention span is less than ten seconds, and thinking that your brilliant new idea is going to cut through the noise of modern life and millions of years of evolution is a bit hopeful, at best.

Marketing is most successful when it is presented in a concise manner that's easy to understand, preferably from a trusted source. Influencer marketing is tailor-made for this, and can help engage consumers who might then be interested enough to interact with longer pieces of content (like your brilliant new idea).

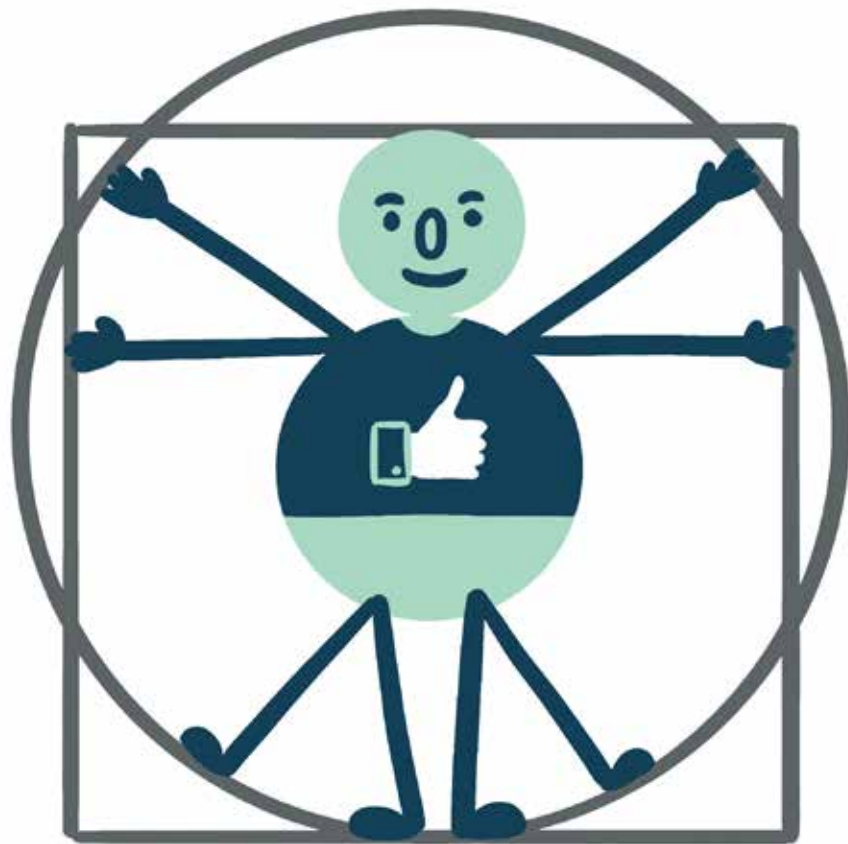




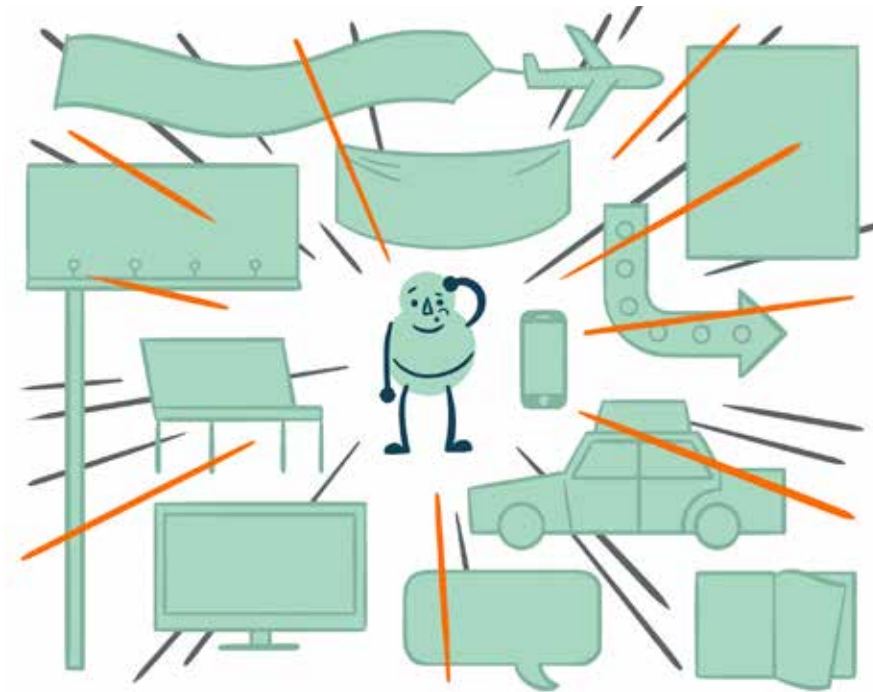
## Z: Zeal

Putting an exclamation point at the end of a sentence does not make for true zeal. After all, how many times have you seen something advertised with LOW PRICES! and immediately forgotten about it?

No, true zeal has passion and personality. This is often what attracts people to an influencer in the first place, and it's why the dry, technical language too many brands use ends up coming across as inauthentic or uncaring. **Use human language to express human emotions to solve human problems, and you can best showcase the brand to both influencers and consumers.**



# You made it through the alphabet. What now?



We understand that consumers regularly navigate an oversaturated landscape of marketing messages. We understand that, statistically, they're more likely to be affected by the personal recommendation of an authentic, trusted voice. Ultimately, influencers have what brands want: the ability to meaningfully move their desired audience.

Like any component of any campaign, influencer identification, monitoring and relationship building has to be done well to be truly effective. And by using the science of human networks, with the help of some of the best tools available, marketers can define their audiences and prioritize their influencers based on the value of conversations, the potential for further growth and the opportunities to develop content that resonates with key audiences.

Sysomos has the toolset to enable a successful influencer program—from identification to relationship monitoring to engagement:



Identify the most influential and authoritative voices on social media with [Sysomos MAP](#)



Monitor these influencers for relevant conversations, opinions and trending topics through [Sysomos Heartbeat](#)



Create detailed lists of influencers, and continuously monitor and engage in relevant, meaningful ways with [Sysomos Influence](#)

Understand entire communities, find key players driving conversations and gain insights on the connectors between communities with Sysomos Influence and Sysomos MAP's community capabilities



Better reach your targeted lists of Influencers with [Sysomos Optimize](#), enabling your brand to deliver campaigns that are relevant and engaging to your audience



Gather a comprehensive understanding of the reach, popularity and context of your brand through visual listening and analysis with [Sysomos Gaze](#)



Plan, manage, and publish your brand's most successful content with [Sysomos Expion](#) to ensure that your brand is regularly engaging with your target audience

How does influencer marketing—and Sysomos' suite of solutions—transform the effectiveness of your campaigns?

**Try it. You'll see.**

For more information on Influencer Marketing with Sysomos, please visit [sysomos.com/influencer-tryit](https://sysomos.com/influencer-tryit)

