

Influencing the influencers - a key part of any digital media strategy

 By [Andre Steenekamp](#)

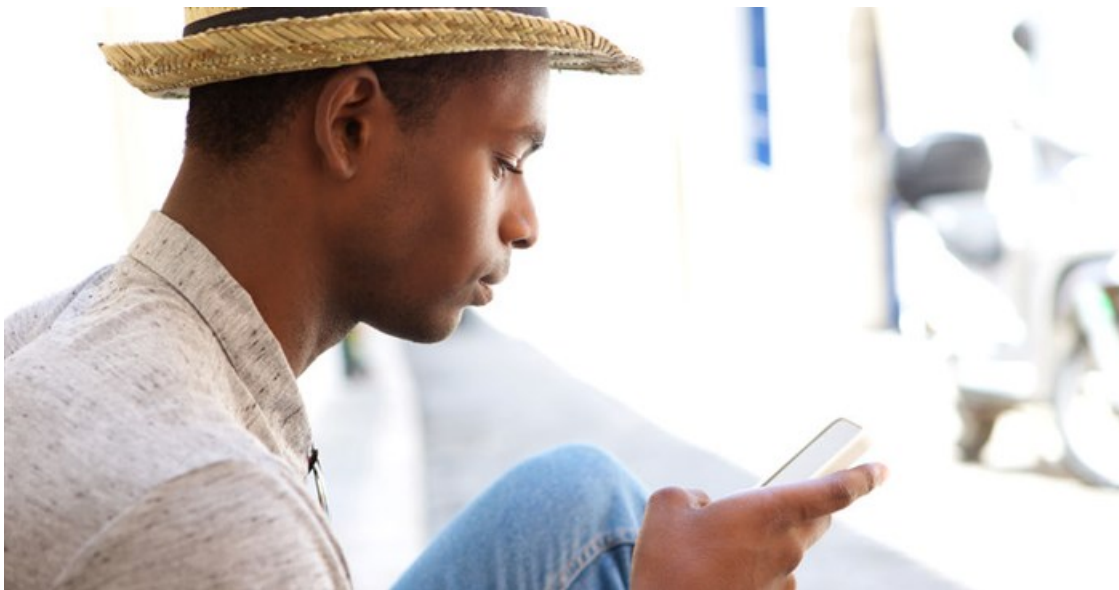
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Most savvy marketers today understand that perceptions of their brands are no longer being shaped only by their own marketing output, by professional media opinion and reporting. Today, people active on social media also have the ability to affect what other consumers think and how they feel about organisations and their products and services.

Some of these social media influencers might be media professionals active on social platforms; others might be media personalities like sport stars, businesspeople or entertainers. But increasingly, we are also seeing ordinary people become highly influential on social platforms simply because other people gravitate towards them for their wit, insight or expertise.

Media is not their day job, in most cases, but they may have large and significant followings on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or blogging platforms.

And they can be highly vocal in their opinions.



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As we shift towards real-time marketing, understanding influencers and trying to tap into their social networks is a key part of any digital campaign. It demands that we have the tools to listen to social media conversations and measure who is influencing the brand's image in the eyes of our prospects and customers.

The power of influencers

Tools such as Nuvi can be invaluable in analysing who a brand's influencers are and how much influence they hold. For example, a motoring brand might need to identify how petrol-heads who tweet actively or run motoring blogs in their spare time influence their social networks.

With the right tool in place, we can begin by tracking brand-relevant keywords to see which people on social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, etc.) actively discuss the brand's products or those of its competitors. Search terms and keywords used in digital advertising and marketing can inform this process.

From there, we can look at what they are saying about the brand to establish whether they are positive, negative or neutral in their influence. Do they occasionally talk about the brand or are they are constantly conversing about it? We can also establish the size of individual influencers' audience and its relevance to the market we are trying to reach.

In addition, it's also important to understand who the influencers are influencing to understand the network effect of their conversations about the brand. For example, you might find someone with a relatively small following on Twitter, but has key journalists in their follower base or many followers relevant to your market. With each like or retweet an influencer receives, his or her influence reaches into new networks, creating new opportunities or engagement.

Incentivise the positive, reverse the negative

The goal of influencer marketing is to amplify the positive sentiment while trying to get influencers who are negative about the brand (also known as 'detractors') to change their minds. There are a number of approaches to take here. Usually, positive reinforcement in the form of showing that you're listening and care is enough for people who like your brand enough to say positive things about it online in the first place.

The same recipe can also help to sway a detractor to your side; listening to influential detractors can also help you understand where you are going wrong in your marketing or product development.

But in some cases, tangible incentives – trial products, for example – can also help create a glow around your brand.

Once you're measuring social media sentiment in general and influencer sentiment in particular, you can also use the data to change the creative or tweak or optimise campaigns based on market sentiment. This is one reason it can be useful to ring-fence influence engagement around particular marketing campaigns.

Embedding influencers into your campaign strategy

We believe that your social media, campaign management, and influencer strategies needed to be aligned with each other to drive maximum value.

Together, they can help you understand what consumers want from you and help you to respond in a manner that delivers the maximum value to your business and to your customers.

ABOUT ANDRE STEENEKAMP

As CEO of 25AM, Andre Steenekamp leads the company's expansion in South Africa's fast-growing digital marketing and advertising space. His 25-year career has seen him work in a range of sales, marketing and management positions for leading traditional and digital publishers and agencies. Steenekamp was appointed to his current role following the acquisition of a 50%-stake in Acceleration Media by Times Media Limited.

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