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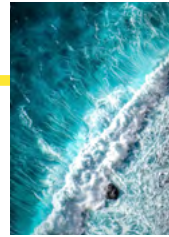
HOW TO WORK WITH INFLUENCERS FOR PURPOSE-DRIVEN MARKETING

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INTRODUCTION



Consumer desire to make the world a better place is booming, with issues such as climate change, zero waste, sustainability and ocean protection sitting front and centre. This in turn is placing pressure on brands to also demonstrate a greater purpose or commitment to a cause, beyond their raison d'être to make money.

A recent Cone/Porter Novelli Purpose Study found that "78% of Americans believe companies must do more than just make money; they must positively impact society as well".¹

As a result, more brands are committing themselves to social change than ever before. "If you're a brand that exists in 2020 and you don't know what your purpose is, I don't think you can have much of a future, or I don't think you're going to be delivering the best kind of results for your company, because it's now an expectation to have a purpose," says Rax Lakhani, Chair of the PRCA Diversity Network.

This shift in marketing priorities is having a significant impact on the influencer marketing space. At Influencer Intelligence, over the past 12 months, the number of brands submitting briefs relating to environmental or sustainability requests, for example, have grown exponentially. This thirst for influencers to support brands with their purpose-driven marketing, or at its most extreme, brand activism, is clearly apparent, and it appears to be an upwards trend.

Lucy Loveridge shares that as Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures, she is also noticing a similar shift of focus towards purpose-driven marketing. "We're certainly seeing a dramatic increase in briefs that include some element of purpose-driven marketing and I think that comes from a pressure from consumers who are wanting to do better, and they're making brands respond to that," she explains. "Increasingly brands don't have much of an option but to include a purpose-driven element within their marketing campaigns and as influencer marketing increases generally as a marketing solution for brands, we're finding that the briefs are reflecting that."

There is commercial reasoning for this shift towards purpose-driven marketing, too. According to a study by DoSomething Strategic, which surveyed 2,461 13- to 25-year-olds to discover what motivates their decisions to purchase, 76% of the Generation Z respondents said they have purchased or would consider purchasing a brand or product to show allegiance to the issues the brand supported.

Furthermore, 67% have stopped purchasing or would consider doing so if the company stood for something or behaved in a way that didn't align with their values. This is important because Generation Z will represent more than 40% of all shoppers in 2020.²

Influencer marketing seems to lend itself particularly well to purpose-driven marketing and activism: an observation that the experts interviewed for this report agreed with wholeheartedly. "Brands are looking at influencers as their way into the brand activism or purpose-driven marketing space; they see it as their way of communicating a real point of view and making a difference, and there is strong synergy between the two," shares Rahul Titus, Head of Influence at Ogilvy.

When the fit is right, and the brand is coming from a place of making positive change within their business or processes, promoting that in a meaningful way through influencers can be incredibly powerful and effective, according to the experts interviewed, as some brands have already demonstrated.

Furthermore, the social media platforms themselves are also seeming keen to demonstrate a greater sense of ethical responsibility, to counteract the damaging impact social media is accused of having upon mental health and body positivity, for example, and particularly among the younger generation.

William Soulier, CEO of Talent Village, explains: "We've seen reports of depression and insecurities rising as a result of people trying to showcase a version of their lives on social media that doesn't represent reality. As a result, there's been a recent upheaval against this by the social media platforms themselves, to eliminate such negativity. We've seen Instagram implement change, for instance, when it announced it would be removing likes from posts, to put the focus back on the content."

However, compared with the more general or commercial use of influencer marketing, brands are recognising that the stakes are far higher when the focus is to drive awareness around a cause or purpose. The experts interviewed for this report felt strongly that brands new to working with influencers for purpose-driven marketing should proceed with caution and ensure that the cause or issue they align themselves with is a good fit for the brand and its wider values.

Rahul Titus, Head of Influence at Ogilvy, explains: "In the context of purpose-driven marketing, the risks become much greater. If you're trying to play in a space that people genuinely care about, where you are talking about real topics such as feminism, body positivity, mental health, plastics, or climate change, for example, you really need to get it right. Brands must be extra cautious and make sure that they are doing the right thing and question whether they truly have a right to play in that space. It needs to be a long-term commitment and while influencers can give a brand a really nice way to open-up that conversation, they cannot be the only answer. The brand needs to be good enough."

Of course, purpose-driven marketing is nothing new, and the brands that do it right have a strong point of view that they've taken many years to establish.

The Body Shop is one of the earliest examples of a brand who has successfully championed an issue for many years, bringing about great change, and most recently through its collaborations with influencers who truly buy into the cause.

Rax Lakhani, digital strategist and Chair of the PRCA Diversity Network, argues: "When Anita Roddick set up The Body Shop in the late 70s it was one of the few examples of a brand that stood for not testing on animals: everybody knew that and its whole business model was based around it. It sold beautiful and trailblazing products, but more than that, it was disruptive with a purpose. The brand was quite belligerent and militant in its brand activism, and was outspoken, but it had the credibility to do so because anti-vivisection was sewn into every aspect of its DNA."

As brands such as The Body Shop have also helped to demonstrate, selecting the right influencer partners for purpose-driven marketing is critical.

As Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures, explains: "the fit has to be right across any influencer marketing campaign, but I think specifically with this type of activation the pressure on that fit being perfect is much greater and consumers will challenge it if it's not."

While brands have rightly seen, sometimes through trial and error, that for any influencer work due diligence is vital for finding the right individuals to work with, it becomes even more critical when purpose-driven marketing is the focus.



This report will explore the growth of purpose-driven marketing and brand activism, within the specific context of influencer marketing. It will look at how brands are collaborating with social influencers to help them champion or become advocates for social, economic, political or environmental change, or to raise awareness of a cause or issue.

It will also investigate examples of brands who have found success in their influencer partnerships, to drive purpose, and will also consider how and when things can go wrong.

It will look at the moral responsibility that brands and influencers alike have towards their audience to champion issues that they genuinely have a right to be talking about, rather than jumping on the latest ethical bandwagon.

Above all, it will seek to offer best practice advice on the delicate balance that brands and social activists must navigate when working together to support a cause.

Contributors

The report is based on desk research and qualitative interviews with a range of industry experts including agencies, consultants and influencers.

Influencer Intelligence would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this report:

- **Rax Lakhani**, digital strategist and Chair of the PRCA Diversity Network
- **Lucy Loveridge**, Global Head of Talent, Gleam Futures
- **William Soulier**, CEO, Talent Village
- **Rahul Titus**, Head of Influence, Ogilvy
- **Anna Whitehouse**, influencer, owner of Mother Pukka and writer at Shortlist Media

SELECTING A CAUSE OR 'PURPOSE'

According to Jim Stengel, former global marketing officer of Procter & Gamble and advocate for ideals-driven businesses, purpose-driven marketing is about “defining what a company does, beyond making money, and how it can make its customers’ lives better.”³

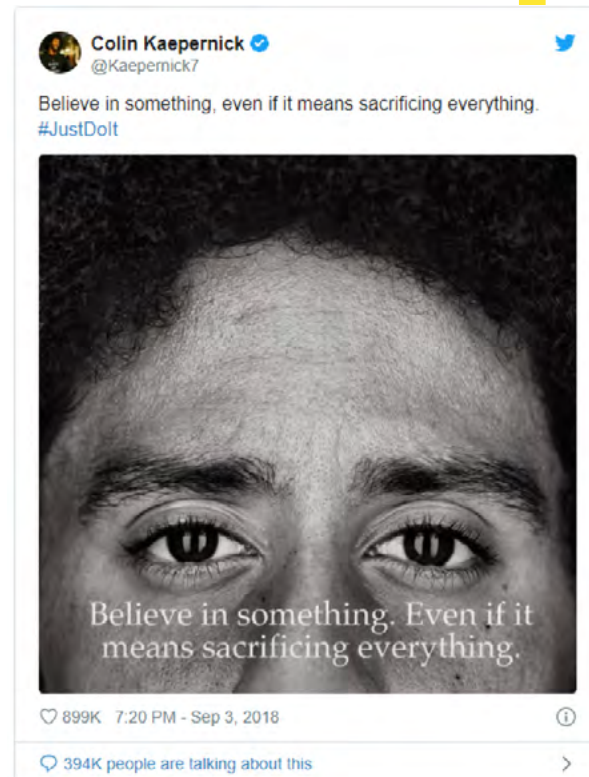
When it comes to executing purpose-driven marketing, or brand activism, within the context of influencer marketing, the brand is potentially more exposed to consumer critique and scrutiny than in any other channel.

It is therefore crucial that the brand can clearly demonstrate ‘a right to play’, and the only way this can be achieved is by creating an environment of trust, with the influencer, where both parties can speak with honesty, knowledge and authority on the subject.

Identifying a ‘purpose’ can be easier for some brands, than others. The ideal scenario is that the brand can credibly align itself with a purpose, which is already ingrained into the business, and always has been. “The brand needs to first look within their DNA and their values to understand where there really is a meaning for them,” advises William Soulier, CEO of Talent Village.

However, for some, such as fast-fashion and cosmetics brands, where ethical or sustainable business practice is sometimes difficult, this can seem an impossible task. “There are some brands who are probably frantically scrabbling away in their marketing team, thinking ‘What can we do?’, ‘What’s a positive issue that we can claim, because actually our brand isn’t necessarily doing anything for the greater good that we would want to shout about?’ I think in that scenario, it is a real challenge,” says Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures.

To add to this, it is critical that brands and influencers pick a cause or purpose that they truly believe in and are prepared to stand by, even amid controversy. The same must be said for the brand-influencer partnership.



Nike illustrated this perfectly in its alliance with former American football quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, known for kneeling during the pre-game national anthem, in protest against racial injustice and police brutality in the United States.

Nike had endorsed Kaepernick since 2011 and fully supported him through the controversy that ensued, which ultimately cost him his career. During the period, videos were uploaded to social media of people burning their Nike products, and there was much backlash among NFL fans, Republican politicians and even President Donald Trump spoke out.

Nike had not featured Kaepernick in campaigns since his departure from the NFL, but last year, chose him as the face of Nike for the 30th anniversary of its “Just Do It” motto. “We believe Colin is one of the most inspirational athletes of this generation, who has leveraged the power of sport to help move the world forward,” Nike executive Gino Fisanotti told ESPN. “We wanted to energise its meaning and introduce ‘Just Do It’ to a new generation of athletes.” The Nike advert with Kaepernick, titled ‘Dream Crazy’ won the award for outstanding commercial at the Creative Arts Emmys.⁴ It featured the slogan: “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything. Just do it.”

“Nike knew its audience well enough to take the risk, and it stood by the cause,” says digital strategist, Rax Lakhani. “It was an example of a very rich company practicing brand activism whilst people were calling it out, but it had credibility in the space, and ultimately it didn’t care.”

Promoting positive change

If a brand or business has gone out of its way to change business practice or production, in a significant way and for the greater good, this can often be a great way to approach purpose-driven marketing with influencers.

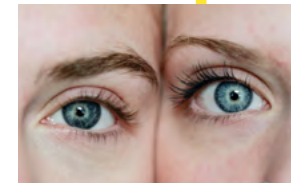
Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures, explains: “For brands where they have done something positive, or made a positive change and want to promote that, it can present them with a strong point of view that talent will also be happy to talk about.”

“As an example, we recently worked on a campaign for Carlsberg which was about the sustainability of its packaging. It had introduced Snap Pack, which replaces the plastic wrapping around six-packs with a solution that instead glues the cans together, and it wanted to promote the changes it had made. It was a great way of creating brand ‘purpose’.”

Most recently, Carlsberg has taken things a step further and unveiled the Green Fibre Bottle which is a “paper bottle” for beer. Made from sustainably sourced wood fibres, it is both 100% bio-based and recyclable, and demonstrates the beer company’s ongoing commitment to its sustainability programme called Together Towards ZERO.

According to Carlsberg, the company commits to zero carbon emissions at its breweries and a 30% reduction in its full-value-chain carbon footprint by 2030.

To raise awareness, Carlsberg partnered with social influencer, Jim Chapman, who at the start of 2019 pledged to become “a better human being to the planet” and has been documenting the changes that he has made in his life since, with his followers.



Coming clean on a controversial aspect of business

One of the many benefits of purpose-driven marketing is that in the right scenario, it can offer brands an opportunity to come clean about an aspect of their business, or business model, that they are less proud of.

Often, this will relate to historic events, possibly when awareness of plastics, carbon footprint or sustainability, for example, were much lower on the global agenda. Providing they are doing their best to tackle the issue now, irrespective of the stage they are at, their actions can provide an honest and authentic case for demonstrating ‘purpose’: a story that influencers might also like to help tell.

“Mothercare is a great example of a brand who was prepared to open up the conversation,” says influencer Anna Whitehouse, also known as Mother Pukka. “There was a lot of anger from new mothers who objected to its campaigns showing beautifully coiffed women strolling along with their buggies. It listened and its post-partum bodies campaign that followed was one of the most beautiful campaigns I’ve seen in a long time.”

The campaign, called Body Proud Mums, featured a series of 10 images that were displayed across London showing new mums and their ‘real’ post-natal bodies, including scars and stretch marks.

The campaign was shot by photographer Sophie Mayanne who had pledged to never digitally manipulate skin in her work, back in 2017. No big-name influencers were used: instead the creative focused on depicting real lives, and other mums were able to join the movement and offer their solidarity via the hashtag #bodyproudmums, sharing their own unedited images.

“Mothercare listened to its communities on Instagram and Facebook. There’s a real power in acknowledging that the people complaining are the ones that you want to engage with and working out how you can learn from that,” says Whitehouse.

LA MER



Luxury skincare and makeup brand La Mer has always relied on the active ingredients of a type of algae, only found in certain oceans around the world.

William Soulier, CEO of Talent Village, has supported the company's commitment to protect marine habitats across the globe. He explains *"La Mer has always taken inspiration from the ocean and its natural resources, since these hydrating qualities give its famed Crème de la Mer moisturiser its youth-restoring powers."*

La Mer wanted to focus on this brand story and use it as a talking point to service the environment, and to help bring purpose to its influencer work.

It put together an influencer programme that would help to tell the story of this integral ingredient in its products, balanced against the lengths it is going to, to help preserve the ocean's delicate ecosystem.

Although sea kelp is central to every La Mer formulation, marine preservation remains integral to the brand's core values. One of its major commitments is to ensure the sea kelp it uses is only harvested twice a year from protected waters, using a sustainable and gentle process at the water's surface, to support its sustainability. While it might have been tempting to partner with environmental and marine activists in the influencer space, La Mer took the decision to prioritise talent over and above that of influence.

Soulier shares, La Mer collaborated with agency-signed professionals such as make-up artists, dermatology experts and models who were naturally educated within this market and had real credibility.

As a result, the brand was better able to engage with its target market, since these advocates became an extension of La Mer's own identity.

"Ultimately, by working with talent who are more than just fans, brands are able to increase awareness, spark positive conversations and drive sales," says Soulier. *For authenticity sake, "the talent also needed to have one thing in common, which was that they used La Mer on a daily basis and loved it for the virtues it provides, compared to any other cream."*

For phase one of the project, La Mer commissioned an ocean specialist to talk to these carefully chosen influencer professionals, *"to educate them on what's actually happening in the world's oceans, and how fascinating and positive some of these algae can be,"* says Soulier. *"We were able to showcase to them, beyond their own industry, what impact pollution is having on the world that we live in today."*

The next stage involved taking the talent to the south of England where a plastic waste beach clean was organised. Each influencer was given a bag to fill with as much waste as they could within two hours, to help bring to life the immensity of the problem.

"At each step of the way talent were documenting the story through the lens of La Mer, helping to inspire and educate their audiences, raising awareness of why we need to be so conscious of what's happening in the oceans," says Soulier.

As a result, this co-created content gained twice as high engagement and enabled La Mer to receive a high-quality library which it could later purpose across its own social channels, as it continued to spread its message.



Avoiding forced brand purpose

When there is no clear purpose or cause for a brand to credibly align itself with, many of the experts interviewed agreed there is the danger that they might consider appropriating an issue.

The temptation to do so is arguably greater within the influencer marketing space, with influencers increasingly wanting to give their support and time to brands who are actively involved in championing big topics of the day such as zero waste and climate change.

Toshihiko Tanabe, Dentsu creative director and juror at Cannes Lions this year, speaking at Spikes Asia 2019, referenced the rise in superficial purpose-driven marketing campaigns. *"It is this kind of forced brand purpose that has led to such ill-thought-out campaigns as a beer brand offering a women's discount to make up for the gender pay gap and a soft-drinks company offering a \$1 donation to a diabetes foundation from every mega-jug of soda sold."*

Tanabe's speech was a warning for brands to avoid misrepresenting a cause, *"trying to save the world",* and particularly within the context of influencer marketing, where brands can very easily be called out for their mistake. *"Most of the time, most campaigns have nothing to do with what the brand stands for deep down,"* Tanabe added. *"It's going to cost us with the faith or the trust we've built over the years with the client who says: 'We've tried a purpose campaign. It didn't work.'"*⁵

The reality is that consumers can easily detect a superficial influencer collaboration, and although the issue of authenticity is a problem that has plagued the sector in general, it is becoming heightened when purpose or cause is the focus. *"If you're a brand on social media, consumers can now look under the bonnet and see exactly what's going on,"* says digital strategist Rax Lakhani. *"You have to be extremely naive or very arrogant as a brand to put yourself out there if you can't defend your position, and it's a mistake that a lot of big brands, such as Pepsi, have made in the past."*



Taking a consistent position

The experts agreed that there is nothing wrong with a brand identifying with a new cause, providing they do it carefully and understand the commitment required.

Rahul Titus, Head of Influence at Ogilvy, advises brands to *"take a step back and think about why they are doing it and how they are going to commit to the cause, so that it's not a short-term thing. If it is a new cause that is fine but brands need to put their money where their mouth is, back the cause properly and commit to it for several years. They will then have grounds to convince people that they are in it for the right reasons."*

Over the past couple of years, brands and influencers have come under increasing scrutiny for 'greenwashing' or 'rainbow-washing', or 'virtue-hustling' as it is sometimes called; jumping on the bandwagon of cool ethical issues, without enough evidence to do so.

This was particularly so during LGBT+ Pride Month this year with some brands updating their packaging and sponsoring events, and in some cases extending activity to their influencer marketing where it massively backfired. *"Listerine saw nothing wrong with slapping a rainbow on its product during the event, which was quite offensive to the LGBT+ community. There's just no link there, and brands have to understand the cultural nuances and historic or political detail behind these issues, or simply don't get involved,"* says digital strategist Rax Lakhani.



IDENTIFYING A MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIP

The experts interviewed for this report were asked if the influencer identification process differs between commercially driven work, and those where ‘purpose’ or activism is the focus. All agreed that the selection process is largely the same but were careful to stress that the pressure to find a “perfect fit” is far greater in purpose-driven collaborations, where the stakes are so much higher.

As a result, the due diligence process in purpose-driven influencer marketing is critical, and the experts suggested brands should go back a minimum of five years in an influencer’s history, in terms of their back catalogue of content and previous brand endorsements.

Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures, shares that “we go back to the very beginning of when the individual first started creating content. It is long and boring, but I do think it’s the best way that any brand can be sure that they’re working with the right person.”

Rahul Titus, Head of Influence at Ogilvy, agrees and says: “These days, there’s plenty of data to ensure you are making the right decision and vetting the influencer thoroughly which can make all the difference. We always go back five years and look at the influencer’s content. When we are talking about a long-term purpose-driven activation, the brand is buying into the talent and everything they stand for, which means that as an agency, we need to make sure that we are doing all the right checks to ensure the individual is 100 percent right for the brand.”

Meeting face to face

While it may not be essential for an Instagram product campaign, for example, it becomes more important for a brand and influencer to meet in person prior to collaborating on purpose-driven or activism work, to ensure there is enough synergy for a genuine relationship to be established.

“If you’re signing an ambassadorship or anything high-profile or long-term, the talent are so willing to invest time up front because they want to understand the brand better themselves in order to talk about the issue with confidence,” explains Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures. “I would advocate that for any influencer partnership, but particularly for when the relationship is purpose-driven, to meet the influencer and spend a lot of time with them and build a relationship, especially before you make somebody a spokesperson on an issue, so that if it comes to it, they are able to hold their own.”

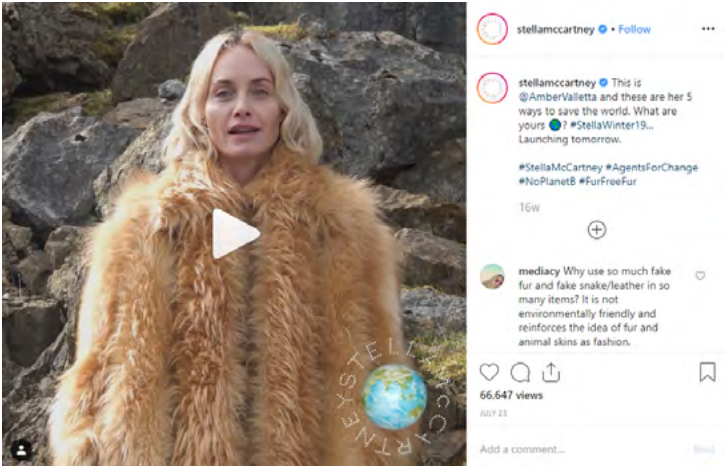


The rise of ‘provocative collaborations’

Furthermore, for a brand to be able to drive change and build a meaningful conversation around a zeitgeist issue such as climate change, ‘provocative collaborations’ are gradually on the rise within the influencer marketing space. For such a collaboration to be effective and go to plan, it is vital that a good rapport and dialogue has been established and tested between the brand and influencer beforehand, and even more so if there is potential for the issue to be met with controversy.

For example, Stella McCartney’s most recent “Agents of Change” campaign featured a mix of models and activists from the environmental group Extinction Rebellion and was intended to promote the brand’s more environmentally conscious clothes, while also calling for climate action.

The talent who took part were dressed in pastel colours and stood against a rugged natural landscape. In video shorts posted on Instagram, models including Amber Valletta shared different ways to save the world (“Get rid of all guns,” and “besides being kind and grateful, we should definitely make sure that we can feed everybody on this planet.”)



It was a bold partnership, and a leap of faith by Stella McCartney, but according to Rebecca Robins, global chief learning and culture officer at Interbrand, “it could have been a lot punchier. You’re looking for more of a call to action — something with a bit more grit and gumption”.

“The delicate treatment of a hot topic speaks to the fact that activism is often not an easy or comfortable line for brands to walk,” says Robbins. “Many brands have stumbled in their efforts to engage with the political zeitgeist, attracting ridicule and criticism, rather than stimulating debate.”⁶

However, if brands meet face-to-face with their influencers and have these conversations upfront, they will have a better understanding of how the relationship will hold up amid controversy or challenging dialogue.



CASE STUDY

L'ORÉAL®

Case study: L'Oréal cuts controversial influencers from its roster

L'Oréal famously fired black transgender model Munroe Bergdorf after she posted some controversial tweets about white privilege.

“It was a bad PR move on L'Oréal’s part, mainly because it should never have hired an openly controversial, outspoken ambassador if it wanted to maintain a safe brand position,” says Bronwyn Williams of Flux Trends.

The matter didn’t end there when L'Oréal made the same mistake shortly afterwards and hired a Muslim spokesperson, Amena Khan, and then fired her for anti-Israel tweets. “If you are going to pick religious representation for your brand, make sure you are sure of your choice. No company can be all things to all people,”⁷ says Williams.

Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures, believes the situation illustrates clearly the importance of meeting influencers face-to-face for purpose-driven collaborations. “It is about meeting and talking as much as possible and discussing the big topics, so had L'Oréal sat down with Munroe and discussed racism and white privilege beforehand, I think everyone would have felt comfortable with what unfolded.”

However, in a turn of events, British cosmetics company Illamasqua announced it had signed Bergdorf to front its new campaign based around gender fluidity soon after the L'Oréal firing.





Sharing core values

The reality is that brands and influencers will be at various stages of their purpose-driven or activism journey. While some may have been championing an issue for many years, others may be just beginning. *“As long as they’re honest, then that’s all they can be,”* says Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures. *“So, if they’ve just started doing one bit, changing one part of their life to be more sustainable, for example, then that’s great, providing they are not making out that they are the world’s greatest activist in that specific area.”*

What is important, however, is that the brand and influencer share the same core values and beliefs, and that the influencer has some natural affinity with the cause, even if ‘activist’ work is new to them, or vice versa. There is nothing wrong with the influencer leading the cause, and the brand being new to it, providing the partnership makes sense.

Rahul Titus, Head of Influence at Ogilvy, claims the collaboration between The Body Shop and model and influencer Felicity Hayward is a great example of a perfect match, due to their shared core values.

The Body Shop had teamed up with Bloody Good Period, a charitable project that provides menstrual supplies to asylum seekers, refugees and those who can’t afford them. Central to the cause is the belief that menstrual care is a basic human right and that no woman should have to face the distressing, monthly burden of not having access to sanitary products, due to their financial situation.

As part of the tie-up, The Body Shop placed Period Product Donation boxes in its stores to enable customers, supporters and likeminded activists to donate packs of unopened period pads, helping to make them more accessible for those in need.

To raise further awareness, The Body Shop enlisted the support of Felicity Hayward, recognised as one of the first plus-size pioneers in the UK promoting body diversity in many high-end fashion editorials such as Vogue. *“Felicity Hayward is a great role model and influencer who talks a lot about body positivity and mental health, and has done so for a long time,”* explains Titus. *“It is a really good partnership because you’ve got an influencer who absolutely cares about the cause and a brand that wants to do right, and them coming together works perfectly because you have a brand that has a right to play in that space and an influencer who plays in that space already.”*



The case for influencer versus activist

The focus of this report may suggest a trend towards brands working more with social media activists, however that isn’t necessarily the case. Although social activists are certainly rising in prominence and offering an interesting proposition for brands, along with a way for them to clearly differentiate their purpose-driven work from commercial objectives, there also remains the opportunity for brands to educate more mainstream digital talent who are open to being converted to a cause. This is a decision that brands must consider carefully, when selecting the best influencer to work with.

Social activists can represent an interesting option when the brand is very specific in wanting to champion a niche issue. For example, activist and author, Gina Martin, succeeded recently in making upskirting, the act of taking photos up someone’s skirt without consent, a crime in England and Wales. According to Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures, who represents Martin, *“because she is an activist first and foremost, she will get approached from brands who want to work with her because of her activism, because it’s specific. She’s not just talking about the obvious topics, as she’s got more niche passion.”*



Case study: Neat Burgers

Plant-based burger restaurant Neat Burgers recently opened its first location in London, with ambitious plans to open another 10 locations before the end of the year. Positioning itself as an ethical and sustainable business, it has partnered with Beyond Meat and The Eden Project, and for every product sold, a tree is planted. It also boasts some big-name investors such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Lewis Hamilton. *“Real superstars with great notoriety and influence are buying into this concept because of the positive impact that they can have,”* explains William Soulier, CEO of Talent Village.

To launch, it might have been tempting to partner with activists in the thriving vegan and sustainability space, however, Neat Burgers was keen to take an alternative approach. *“Instead, it wanted to activate people who are meat eaters and get them to try the Neat Burger, which genuinely tastes like a proper burger,”* says Soulier. *“So, they were tapping into an audience that isn’t yet convinced or still remains to be converted, to show them that actually, there is a way, where you’re not compromising on taste, while being able to contribute to the environment in a positive way.”*

When a brand is seeking to leverage awareness around an issue or cause, Neat Burgers proved the benefit of partnering with the least likely influencers, and instead, seeking to change opinion within a less obvious audience. *“It showed that brand activism is the most powerful when you’re talking to an audience that isn’t necessarily your core group, because the people that you want to reach and convert are not the ones that already believe in your cause,”* Soulier explains. *“If an influencer is already preaching about this issue on a daily basis, you can assume that their fan base is pretty much convinced already.”*





Be open to influencer approaches

In some cases, it is worth noting that the approach may occur the other way around, whereby the influencer approaches the brand, attracted by the ethical space or values they share.

For example, influencer Anna Whitehouse, also known as Mother Pukka, has built a reputation for championing the issue of flexible working through her 'Flex Appeal', since 2015. Rather than waiting for the right brands to approach her, she has made a concerted effort to enter conversations with brands who share a similar passion for the cause, or with brands who she believes could benefit from her knowledge and authority on the subject and are open to change.

"MotherPukka went to McDonald's and said I've got a campaign to talk about: you promote flexible working as part of your offering to your staff. Let's partner on this because we both care about the same thing," says Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures, who represents Whitehouse. "It's a good example of that happening the other way around."

The role of micro influencers and niche communities

In recent years, influencer marketing in general has warmed to the valuable role that micro influencers have to play, and these lessons are transferrable to the purpose-driven influencer space also. Many of the experts interviewed for this report recommended that brands should think about turning the search for talent inwards, considering their staff and customers as important influencers, who could potentially help to tell the brand's purpose-driven story more authentically than an outsider. John Lewis is an example of a brand who uses this approach very effectively and has always encouraged its staff or partners to back causes with them, which it shapes into successful brand storytelling within its purpose-driven marketing.

"If you're a brand that is actively trying to reduce plastic packaging, for example, instead of going with a big name Instagrammer with 500,000 followers, potentially you're better off running a great marketing campaign and then getting your customers or employees to engage with that content, or spark discussion, as micro influencers in their own right," says Rax Lakhani, digital strategist. "It becomes a lot more powerful that way."

Very often these sorts of collaborations can be mutually beneficial, whereby the brand collaborates with a type of influencer who is niche and different, and deemed more authentic by the audience, while the brand is also able to offer a platform for these individuals to really shine. In some cases, it gives niche or micro influencers an opportunity to create quality, meaningful content that might otherwise not have been possible.

Ethical US outdoor clothing brand United by Blue has done a great job of working with its customers as micro influencers and regularly invites them to be a part of the hands-on work it does. In doing so, the people, called the Blue Movement, become active participants in the company's mission, creating a more meaningful brand relationship. For every product purchased, United by Blue pledges to remove one pound of waste from our world's oceans and waterways, and it encourages its customers to volunteer to help it with its mission, also giving its consumers ways to turn their passions into action. These stories are told very organically via social media. The brand also publishes an impact report at the end of each year to help its micro influencers see the impact they have had.



MANAGING THE INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIP

Many of the lessons learnt from influencer marketing in general are applicable to managing an influencer partnership, where there is a purpose-driven or activism focus. However, the experts interviewed agreed that within purpose-driven marketing, there are some nuances that brands must be aware of. Above all, once a perfect match has been identified, it is critical that from the outset, both parties have a clear understanding of the expectations of the relationship and any differences of opinion have been resolved, so that the collaboration has strong potential to become long-term.

The briefing process

In any influencer partnership it is important the talent is fully briefed on the brand, however within purpose-driven collaborations, the briefing process is more critical with bigger issues being at stake, and so enough time must be allowed for this. Above all, the brand needs to ensure the influencer is sufficiently well-informed to answer tricky questions about the cause, and particularly if the brand's history in the area is less than squeaky clean. For example, if a cosmetics brand was known for previously testing on animals, possibly many years ago, the influencer must have full knowledge of that and be prepared to respond knowledgeably to comments about that. Likewise, if a fast fashion brand has been accused of modern-day slavery in the past but has changed its factories and supply chain since to eradicate that, the influencer must be confident to answer questions about the situation accurately. They need to be prepared to handle controversial dialogue, if the cause is a divisive one, and such scenarios would need to be handled very sensitively by the brand and influencer alike.

Likewise, if the influencer has been chosen because they have specialist authority or expertise relating to the cause, the brand should be open to learning as much as they can from the individual and allow them to guide the brief. *"If the influencer really knows their stuff, then the brand should be listening... if it's a true meeting of minds then it ought to be a more collaborative conversation, rather than the influencer being told what to do and say,"* says Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures.



Influencer Anna Whitehouse, or MotherPukka, also shares the importance of a brand getting to grips with a talent's core values and beliefs in a purpose-driven collaboration, during the briefing phase, to ensure they are understood properly and not compromised in any way. *"When brands want to work with me, they not only have to share my values — my first question is 'do you offer flexible working to your employees?' — but have to understand the importance of honesty in the way I engage with my audience,"* she explains. *"That is what is different when a brand engages someone with a true 'cause' and identity."*

Furthermore, during the briefing process, it is also important that the actual brand brief is closely scrutinised by all interested parties, including the brand and influencer, but additionally any agencies or consultants involved. *"If we get a brief that has a purpose-driven element to it, we question it vociferously to try and work out whether it's just a brand greenwashing, or whether the brand has actually made a positive change, because any influencer doesn't want to promote something that is disingenuous or slightly misleading,"* says Loveridge. *"We want to make sure that the facts and figures are there, along with the right actions, before the talent endorses anything. We need to ensure that there's not going to be any backlash for the influencer, but also that the campaign is meaningful."*

Ensuring brand monogamy

In the past, in a commercial context, influencers have been criticised for their promiscuity, flitting from one brand to the next. *"A classic example in the beauty space is an influencer talking about Estée Lauder today as their favourite product and then doing the exact same thing for L'Oréal the following day,"* says William Soulier, CEO of Talent Village. *"That's when influencer marketing, in all its forms, becomes really ineffective."*

In a purpose-driven context, brand monogamy is essential for the partnership to have meaning and worth. Arguably, it is also a prerequisite for a long-term, evolving relationship. Furthermore, brands may need to include some boundaries for the influencer's commercial collaborations moving forward. Soulier explains: *"if a brand is trying to amplify its messaging around zero plastic waste and they select an influencer who works for a brand like boohoo, for example, then there's going to be a bit of a disconnect because we know that a fast-fashion brand such as boohoo is currently contributing quite significantly to this carbon footprint. We really need to ensure that these narratives make sense and are all going in the same direction."*



The question of payment

There are many factors to be considered when it comes to the question of whether an influencer should be paid for collaborating with brands to raise awareness of a purpose or cause. The experts interviewed for this report were also a little divided on the subject, however all agreed that talent must be mindful of how a purpose-driven collaboration might impact their commercial interests moving forward, and factor that into the conversations they have with a brand regarding payment.

Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures, explains: *"As a talent it is key that you work commercially with brands that best represent your view. For example, Niomi Smart made a decision that she only wanted to feature brands that were vegan and cruelty-free, which meant ending some of her long-term partnerships with brands who didn't adhere to this."*

Many of the experts felt that there is a general acceptance that influencers need to pay the bills, and the influencer space is a combination of earned and paid media. Although in an ideal world, all purpose-driven collaborations would be unpaid, they felt that in some scenarios, this might be unrealistic, and particularly if a lot is being asked of the influencer.

"I think there are campaigns where it doesn't feel right to pay an influencer, and there are campaigns where due to the amount of work that will be involved, or how long the collaboration will last, the influencer deserves to be paid something for it," says Rahul Titus, Head of Influence at Ogilvy. *"This changes with purpose-driven marketing obviously...but that is a conversation that the brand and the influencer need to have and get it right, and it might involve payment, or it might not."*

In some situations, the brand may see investment in an individual as being particularly valuable, if they have recently changed direction on an issue and are relying on a chosen influencer to help them publicise that. However, in a purpose-driven context, the conversation should never open from a place of monetisation. If it does, it is a warning that the collaboration is fundamentally wrong in some way. *"It needs to come from a place of good and what needs to lead that conversation should not be money. It really should be how the two parties can work together to make the message stronger,"* says Titus.

Transparency and disclosure

Over the past couple of years, brands and influencers alike have become far better at disclosing their commercial interests, respecting the legal requirements within their territory. Industry bodies have also got better at regulating the space.

Experts interviewed for this report were keen to point out that the same disclosure guidelines and expectations must apply to purpose-driven work, with the reassurance that this shouldn't dilute the overall message.

"As long as the cause ends up the winner, I don't think consumers are going to look at a branded piece of content and let the disclosure dilute the messaging... I would rather know that something is a paid-for campaign," says Rahul Titus, Head of Influence at Ogilvy.

Additionally, since most purpose-driven work should have a long-term objective, it is important that the brand and influencer are honest about any commercial interest at the start, so that it doesn't come to light further down the line, which could have serious repercussions for both parties. Ultimately, where the message is a meaningful one, it's even more important that there should be no attempt to deceive the audience in any way.



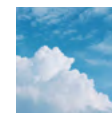
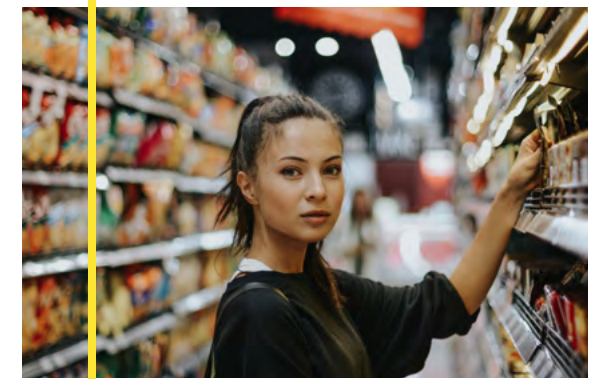
Handling controversy and negativity

Within purpose-driven marketing, depending on the cause, brands can sometimes be walking a tightrope between doing good, and acknowledging the error of their ways. It is almost to be expected that the influencer may encounter some tricky dialogue along the way. It is vital that brands are prepared for some controversy, and well educated in how to handle it, while also allowing the influencer to express themselves and their opinions authentically.

"For any topic that is at all interesting quite frankly, people will have something to say about it," says Lucy Loveridge, Global Head of Talent at Gleam Futures. *"Brands need to be aware this conversation will come and know that the influencer cannot necessarily answer all those questions themselves. Sometimes talent will feel comfortable answering the questions because they know the subject matter well. But if, for example, there's been some sort of controversial element or there's been a negative piece in the press about the brand and what they're doing in this space, then it is important that the brand is up for wading in on the comments and not just running away."*

The reality is that consumers are more aware, and far more ethically conscious, than ever before. Nowadays there are apps that tell a consumer how ethical a brand is, and the data is publicly available to scrutinise. With little difficulty, a consumer can research whether a brand is an equal opportunities employer, how many of their staff self-identify as LGBTQI+, their carbon footprint, the conditions their products are produced in and their modern-day slavery policy, among other things. With this in mind, controversy and criticism are almost to be expected, and the worst a brand and their influencer can do is to try and cover anything up.

"Brands can no longer hide, but they can tell a story. The worst thing is to try and fake it as a brand and get influencers to tell a different story; they will be called out within seconds. That disingenuousness is going to lose you money," warns digital strategist Rax Lakhani.



CONCLUSION

As we move into 2020, it seems very likely that marketing pounds will shift to purpose-driven influencer marketing. While once, a brand would have kept its cause-driven work private, more for the eyes of its shareholders, nowadays consumers want to see and hear what a brand cares about, for them to want to shop with them. Brands need to live their purpose from the inside out and there is no longer a place for newly created brands who don't fulfil this mission, from the outset.

With this mounting pressure for brands to take an ethical stance on an issue publicly, influencers present a great opportunity for brands who are making positive change, to talk about what they are doing. If they partner with an influencer whose voice resonates within this space already or has a right to enter the space and become involved in the cause, it can end up being a very mutually beneficial collaboration.

This shouldn't detract from a brand's other influencer work. There is ultimately no reason why a brand can't simultaneously be running purpose-driven collaborations alongside commercially focused influencer marketing. *"We're not trying to pull a fast one on the consumers. At the end of the day brands are businesses and they have products to sell,"* says Rahul Titus, Head of Influence at Ogilvy. *"But it is important that the cause remains the ultimate winner."*

Above all, it is crucial that the 'purpose' is deeply rooted in the brand, and that the brand is prepared to back the cause for a significant number of years. With the stakes being so much higher in purpose-driven influencer marketing, it is important the brand understands this and has a strong point of view. Finding the perfect match is critical for the collaboration to work and be sustainable. *"You have to get it right, or don't do it at all. It's not worth the cost,"* says Rahul Titus, Head of Influence at Ogilvy.

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