INFLUENCER
MARKETING COUNCIL

FRAUD BEST PRACTICES & GUIDELINES

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INFLUENCER MARKETING, FRAUD BEST PRACTICES & GUIDELINES

On average, more than 11% of the engagement for influencer-sponsored posts on Instagram are generated by fraudulent accounts.

For influencer marketing to truly deliver on its transformative potential, marketers need a more concrete and reliable way to identify fake followers and engagement, compare their performance to industry benchmarks, and determine the real reach and impact of social media spend.

Content consumption has changed dramatically—and so has the way marketers reach their target audiences. Influencer marketing offers brands a way to achieve the kind of authentic, relevant impact that drives sales today, and they're rapidly shifting budget dollars to capitalize on its exciting potential. **But with this explosive growth comes the need for standardization, proper reporting, and measurement.**

When you're investing in an influencer campaign, **you want to know you're reaching and engaging with real people—not fake followers**. But brands often struggle to differentiate genuine engagement from automation, leaving them with little choice but to cross their fingers and hope for the best.

To help with this growing issue, the IMC has put together the following best practices to help guide marketers. These are areas/topics we suggest you research to be sure your talent partnerships aren't engaging in any fraudulent activity:

1 **FOLLOWER PATTERNS**

You can identify purchased followers by viewing historical follower count patterns, where any spikes (gain or loss) would signal the potential of fraudulent activity

2 ENGAGEMENT SPIKES

Now it's not just about purchasing followers, you can also purchase likes, impressions and even custom comments. Looking at an influencer's past engagement for any abnormal spikes is a common practice that should be employed for all campaigns. **Some warnings signs would be seeing their rate significantly higher on a single post, with no known reason why.** Some normal factors that can spike engagement would be a collaboration with a higher tiered influencer, making a big announcement or boosting the post through the social platform's paid program.

3 FOLLOWER TO ENGAGEMENT RATES

Does an Influencer's follower count and their engagement rate match up?
If an Influencer has a significant following but is receiving a low overall engagement, chances are a large chunk of their following are fake followers used to pad their social following. We also see the reverse happening. **There are a lot of on-the-rise influencers who have astronomically high engagement rates as a result of efforts to bolster engagement (see #2 above) through comment pods, purchased engagement, bot commenting, follow-for-follow activity** etc. Make sure the follower to engagement rate lines up with industry averages.

4 LOW ENGAGEMENT

If an Influencer has an alarmingly low engagement rate - it could mean that followers were bought and are fake. Compare the number of likes/comments to how many followers an Influencer has to make sure it is in line with industry benchmarks.

5 VIEW RATES / IMPRESSION RATES

It is important to check that there is a consistent growth rate of subscribers to views, for example anybody with a high follower count but their average views are low on YouTube, is an indicator they have fake followers.

Likewise on YouTube, Facebook & Instagram you should generally expect 20% of the impressions compared to the influencer's followers. Anything significantly above could give an indication of some sort of bot activity. Also the rate of likes and comments shouldn't be too off, if a post has 2k likes but less than 5 comments, there is a chance the likes are purchased.

6 **GENERIC ENGAGEMENT**

Pay attention to the quality and integrity of engagement. For example, look through comments to see if there are a significant amount of repeat or simply irrelevant comments. This is a basic but important indicator that their followers or engagement may have been purchased.

7 **AUDIENCE LOCATION VS ENGAGEMENT LOCATION**

Take note of the influencer's audience location and content. Example: If the majority of their audience resides in the US and some European countries yet you are seeing accounts engaging with the influencer based primarily outside of these geos, this could signal purchased engagement.

8 **COMMENTS**

Review the comments on a picture, if the comments seem generic, odd, or even somewhat off-putting, they could be created by a bot who is running a program in order to help grow the account.

9 **INCORRECT GRAMMAR**

If there are significant typos and/or spelling errors on multiple posts (i.e. written in English but doesn't make sense), this could signal bot or fraud activity.

10 **FALSE IDENTITY + STOLEN IMAGES**

Look out for accounts that are using a false identify by posting images as if they were their own or as if they are the person in the image. This can be checked by looking at the influencer's history of posts. Another indicator that this could be a case of stolen identity, is there are negative comments on the posts calling out the original photographer or model. These posts can be flagged and reported to Instagram to be taken down if there is a pattern of falsely claiming the rights to an image or likeness.

11 **FORCED FOLLOWERS/GIVEAWAYS**

It is common for influencers to collaborate with others in the form of a giveaway which requires entrants to follow all accounts in order to win which is considered legal. This type of 'forced following' is not considered to be a high level of value and often leads to a loss of followers after the giveaway ends. To avoid this from happening for a sponsored post, ensure this is discussed with the influencer and clearly laid out in the contract.

12 **INFLUENCER DIALOGUE**

And at the end of the day, make sure you have a conversation with influencers if you have any questions. They know their audience best and can provide helpful context for unusual patterns in the data. Ensuring you're getting their side of the story is important to establishing a healthy relationship.

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HAVE QUESTIONS?
WANT TO LEARN MORE?

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About IMC

The council was formed to bring the industry together to provide clarity on the type of disclosure that works best for consumers, as individual companies and creators have struggled to define these guidelines, as well as provide best practices on a platform by platform basis for the industry.

For more information, visit www.theimc.co