

# Influencer marketing to enhance social commerce

By [Nicola Ashe](#), issued by [TDMC](#)

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Influencer marketing is not new, but the role that influencers - large and small - can play for brands has shifted since the onset of the pandemic. Therefore it is important for brands to relook at their influencer strategies - and why, if they haven't got one, they need to put one in place.



Source: © George Milton [pexels](#)

The digital landscape in South Africa, and particularly e-commerce, has changed significantly over the past three years.

According to the Digital 2022 Global Overview Report, 66% of South Africans are internet users. But more than that, we spend the most time on the internet globally – a remarkable 10.46 hours online a day.

Coupled with this, the report shows that 45% of South Africans actively use social media, South Africans place sixth worldwide in terms of willingness to follow influencers on social media, plus we rank fifth globally in terms of daily time spent on social media platforms.

At the same time – spurred on by the Covid-19 pandemic and an increase in access to advanced digital technology – there has been a significant 66% growth in e-commerce, with a study by Deloitte showing that more than 70% of South Africans are now shopping online.

## Online e-commerce market growing

Data from the FNB Merchant Services shows that the South African online e-commerce market is currently sitting at just under R200bn per annum and is expected to exceed R400bn by 2025 off the back of more than one billion transactions per annum.

Along with all of these changes, in the past three years we've also seen a significant shift in the role influencers play in marketing, specifically in the e-commerce space.

The most important thing for brands to note is the evolving definition of 'influence'. The influencer landscape has changed and the role is no longer reserved just for celebrities and social media personalities with millions of followers.

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### Size doesn't matter

Thanks to social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, everyone can now have their 15 minutes of fame and having a large social media following is not necessarily a prerequisite for influencing peer purchasing behaviour.

While consumers initially flocked to social media platforms for entertainment, they're now using these channels to discover new products and make purchasing decisions.

The users who can leverage their social presence by sharing their thoughts and opinions, preferences and experiences with their online community are really the ones who have the most influence – regardless of how many followers they have.

Brands need to recognise and value the fact that anyone with a voice online has the potential to influence.

There is a massive move towards commerce being driven by peer-to-peer communication. Everyone can have influence – whether to thousands of their followers or to just a small circle of friends.”

### Building an authentic connection

Regardless of the scale of influence, the most significant takeout for brands right now is the importance of building real, long-term relationships with brand ambassadors, affiliates, industry professionals, creatives and loyal customers.

By building authentic connections, brands are investing in long-term ROI, where the impact of influencer marketing is felt long after a campaign bursts.

In this way, future sales are generated because of the affinity being built for the brand over time through evergreen influencer campaigns.

### How to get it right

Identifying the objectives for your brand is imperative and applying a full-funnel, long-term approach to influencer marketing is essential to maximise ROI.

The overriding objective should be visibility, where a brand kickstarts the buyer journey with top funnel awareness campaigns to attract new potential customers and make them aware of the brand or product.

You want them to become familiar with the brand so that when it comes to the point of consideration, they feel a certain amount of trust toward it. Simply put, you want to increase the chances of generating leads and conversions.

At TDMC, we consider most post engagement metrics as ego metrics, as the number of likes and comments a post gets most often does not correlate to how many sales were made, especially in a climate where influencers are buying likes and followers and using tools and community pods to drive these up in an inauthentic way.

What influencers don't realise, is that by doing this, they're damaging the reach of their content to real followers, which is what brands actually want. The ROI of engagement should only be measured by how many people took considered action that resulted in purchase intent.

Brands who work with smaller niche influencers can leverage their highly engaged audiences and low-cost engagement when consumers are in the consideration phase of the funnel, encouraging them to save posts, or sign up for email newsletters or loyalty programmes.



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Despite a slight lag in South Africa, we can expect to see more brands working with affiliates and brand ambassadors, especially as platforms like Instagram and TikTok ramp up in-app shopping features, enabling product to be sold directly to consumers on social media.

This is known as social commerce, whereby the entire shopping experience – from product discovery and research to checkout – takes place on social media.

As social commerce becoming more accessible, it's imperative for e-commerce brands to embrace the power of digital communities led by influencers if they want to create a hype for their products, provide social proof and drive conversions.

These online communities provide a space for authentic brand conversations and peer product feedback, influencing purchasing decisions from the start of the buying journey right through to checkout.

Influencer marketing, along with social media and the digital customer journey, is ever-evolving.

For brands to remain relevant and ahead of the curve, they need to ensure that they are meeting their customers at multiple touchpoints online, remaining top of mind when it comes to brand love and purchasing decisions. Influencer marketing remains a key way to ensure this.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brand strategist Nicola Ashe is the director and partner at The Digital Media Collective (TDMC).

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