

# Ava Lee and Michelle Kwak: Turning 15-Sec TikToks Into Lasting Creator Partnerships

Taylor Rodriguez:

You're listening to The Fast Traack podcast. Hear the stories, strategies, and insights for the changemakers and the creator industry. I'm Taylor Rodriguez, Global Head of Customer Success at Traackr, and I'm back with another great episode of The Fast Track. Today I got to sit down with two powerhouse business woman, Michelle Kwak, who was recently promoted to Director of Integrated Communications at Laneige US, and her longtime creator partner Ava Lee, who is also the founder and CEO of Skincare and Wellness brand by Ava. During this conversation, I learned how intertwined their lives are. Both Michelle and Ava have a deep connection to South Korea, and understand the importance of bringing K-Beauty to the US market. Both lean on their superpower of balancing creativity and strategy. And funnily enough, Ava even envisioned becoming the global marketing director of Amore Pacific when she applied to business school. But now she gets to closely work with the Amore Pacific team while also growing her own business.

What struck me most during this conversation was how the connectedness between Michelle and Ava creates a solid foundation for an organic and authentic long-term partnership. More and more we're seeing the industry rewarding these long-term relationships. So if you have any questions about how to actually achieve this for your influencer marketing strategy, just sit back and listen. Ava and Michelle will certainly answer your questions and explain how beneficial these types of partnerships are for both creators and brands. Enjoy.

Ava, welcome. We are so excited to have you on the podcast today. Maybe where we can start is, Michelle, can you introduce yourself to our audience and give us a quick overview of your career, how did you get to where you are now? And maybe you can also tell us a little bit about how you met Ava and then Ava, we'll turn it over to you.

Michelle Kwak:

Okay, lovely. Thank you so much. So I'm Michelle, Michelle Kwak, and I'm the Director of Integrated Communications at Laneige, which means I oversee all of our PR and social strategy, including influencer marketing, events, media relations, and overall content direction of all of our social channels. And then just to give you a little bit of background how I got here. I've been at Amore Pacific, which is Laneige's Parent Company for about five years now. And I've had quite a journey and lived many lives during my years at Amore Pacific I would always like to say. I actually started my career here as the assistant PR manager for Innisfree, which I believe is when I met Ava. And then at one point I was appointed as PR manager of all of our



brands at Amore Pacific, which includes Sulwhasoo, Laneige, Innisfree, and our namesake brand, Amore Pacific.

And because Laneige was growing so fast and becoming such a big brand in the US, they really needed a dedicated person to the brand. And that's when I was appointed as a director of integrated communications. And this is also when we decided to merge the PR and social departments for the first time ever. So we kind of created this first ever integrated communications division as I joined Laneige. So not did I only get to oversee PR for Laneige, but also social media for the brand, which has been really rewarding so far. We've grown so much every month across all of our platforms, and we just hit one million followers on Instagram earlier this year, which is a huge milestone for us.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Amazing.

Michelle Kwak:

Thank you. To go back a little bit more, I grew up most of my life in South Korea, which is the capital of beauty as you may all know. And growing up, skincare was just deeply ingrained in my culture. So I always like to think that my love for beauty comes from my upbringing there. And I moved to New York when I was in college, and then the first stop that I ever got out of college was at Makeup Forever in the PR department. That's where I learned everything about the foundations of influencer marketing. And this was also the golden age of OG Beauty YouTubers, and Makeup Forever was doing so many great things in this space at that time. I learned so much about the art of influencer marketing and understanding how to garner earned media through our influencer relations, which I think was really big through the rest of my career.

And then for a couple of years I moved on to my PR agency era, I would like to call it, where I worked at different agencies like Ogilvy, where I worked for a lot of non-beauty clients, like car brands and fashion and electronics. And then I kind of boomeranged back into beauty at Amore Pacific and here I am. So it's really exciting to see all of the K-Beauty brands that I grew up with kind of enter the American market, and that's just something that really excited me.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Amazing. And so how did you and Ava start working together? It sounds like it was quite a while ago.

Michelle Kwak:



Yeah, it's been a couple of years and maybe we have different versions, but at least from what I remember, I remember finding Ava on TikTok during the pandemic. I was really absorbed into our TikTok content. And during this time I was managing PR for Innisfree, which is where I started at Amore Pacific. And I was navigating this new world of TikTok during this time and how to make PR efforts truly digital as we face a pandemic and a lockdown.

I think we started working together on some content for Innisfree. And from there, as I grew into my role and started overseeing other brands in our portfolio like Sulwhasoo and Laneige, I was able to bring new partnerships to Ava as well. And personally, I've seen her following grow from like 40,000 followers to one million in the span of a few months during COVID, which I think is so incredible and I'm very proud of that. For me, even though I feel like K-Beauty was always big in the US, I still felt like K-Beauty was boxed into this idea that we just have cute products and there was not much conversation behind the amazing technology behind K-Beauty, that's so ahead of its time. So I didn't really feel like K-Beauty didn't have a strong singular face behind it. And Ava reaching one million plus followers was really that representation for us in K-Beauty. So it kind of felt like a win for the whole community when that happened.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Amazing. Ava, thank you for joining us. Let's learn a little bit about how you got to where you are now.

Ava Lee:

Yeah, thanks for having me on this podcast. My name is Ava Lee. I am the content creator behind Glow with Ava across all my channels, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. My journey to being a content creator was very accidental. It was a pretty big plot twist in my career. I, similar to Michelle was born in South Korea and I grew up in China for almost my entire life. The first time I ever even stepped foot in the US was for college. So I went to college in the Midwest at Notre Dame. It was one of the white schools where I was probably the only Asian in most of my classes. And from there, after four years, had a great four years there. I was like, I need to get into the city. I miss the big city life. That's when I interned in investment banking and I got a full-time offer to come to New York City.

So that's honestly what I was set to do, was always going to retire in finance. Did investment banking for a few years. I joined a hedge fund and then most recently a healthcare private equity firm. And that was when I started my Glow With Ava account on Instagram. This was before the pandemic. It was just going to be a very fun endeavor, side hustle in a way, not even in a hustle because I wasn't ever planning to make money from it. It was just more of a platform for me to post some of my skincare and guts and healing journey as my health was deteriorating during that phase. And it was a fun thing to do on the side in a very



male-dominated field because all you talk about all day is just Excel models, football and the same shebang. And it was honestly really fun for me.

And during that time period was also when K-Beauty really wasn't a thing. Maybe a couple of people knew about sheet masks, snail mucin, but it was kind of slowly on the rise. But what I figured was I grew up with a lot of these products and growing up in China, in Korea especially, it's like the beauty mecca of the world. You can't even walk five minutes without seeing a beauty store. That's how much beauty and skincare is ingrained in our culture. So to me, it was second nature, but when I realized in college, especially going to Notre Dame, a lot of my friends didn't even know what a toner moisturizer, heck, even, they didn't know that. So I was always kind of like the hidden unspoken ambassador of bringing Korean skincare products, lugging it across the world and giving it to them being that kind of spokesperson. So I just transferred what I was already doing in real life to my friends and people in my office to a much bigger audience.

I didn't think that audience was going to go beyond 50 people to be honest, but I just always had passion for sharing my journey when it comes to different skincare products as well as what you put into your body. And GLOW WITH AVA was born out of that. The glow aspect has always been the inner and the outer part of things as well. And I was taking time out of my busy schedule to post content, and at one point I realized I like this a little too much. No one should be spending this much time on something that isn't making them any money. So then that's when I decided that I wanted to actually change my career at one point.

And the only way that I could have done that was either through an MBA, so I actually decided I was going to go get an MBA and my dream company. In your application essays, you have to be kind of more clear about what you want to do after school. And in my business school applications, I wrote that I want to be the global marketing director for Amore Pacific one day.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Oh my gosh.

Ava Lee:

That is where Michelle has been there for five years.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Amazing.

Ava Lee:



But then I ended up never going to business school, never ended up working at Amore Pacific.

Taylor Rodriguez:

You didn't need to.

Ava Lee:

I didn't need to.

Taylor Rodriguez:

You knew everything that you already needed to know.

Ava Lee:

Yeah.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Subject matter expert. You had the finance background, nothing more needed.

Ava Lee:

Yeah, exactly. So I was doing that for a little bit, TikTok, and I've left finance for six years now I think. And I love every aspect of what I do right now. Sometimes I do miss the unlimited seamless meals, but besides that, I don't think I miss it. But if I had to do it all over again, I would still do the same path over again because I learned so much.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Of course, of course. Amazing. And I think the cool thing is that not everyone knows about how people get to these places. And so this is why we always ask this question because there's no path that's the same, and it's very cool to hear your story. So thank you guys for sharing. So moving on, we love to talk about superpowers because we think that in order to run effective influencer and creator programs, you need to have some superpowers in your back pocket. So Michelle, what are some of your superpowers that have allowed you to get to where you are today?

Michelle Kwak:

I think balancing creativity and strategy is truly something that I'd like to say a superpower. I wouldn't like to say, superpower's a little bit a big word, but I do think that people can tend to lean into the one side than the other. But in PR especially, you require a true balance of both in order to be successful in your field and one cannot be at the expense of the other. I also think having flexibility in every situation and every crisis that I face was helpful for me in navigating these ever-changing situations you face in PR and also in social where things are changing by



the minute, you always need to be prepared and come with at least three backup options in every scenario. So I think that flexibility and that combination of having creativity to have a true vision of what you want for your brand and having the right strategy in order to make that vision come true is I think it's really important.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Amazing. And Ava, what about you?

Ava Lee:

I would say in a very similar route where I do have that business background, but I also have that creative background, so I'm able to leverage both sides of it. Because I think being a content creator, yes, you have to be creative, but in order to be successful and make it the long run, you really also have to have the business side of things on how to work with different brands. What is your strategy? Are you going to make your own brand one day? There's so many different aspects that go into it beyond just creating a fifteen-second TikTok. So I have that aspect of developing relationships with brands and being very strategic about what post am I going to make at what point of time? I'm not going to post a random video if it's not on trend or what's going on in the political scheme, for example as well.

But at the same time, when it comes to the creative side of things, I think I do a good job of taking something that may be a little complicated for someone, but easing it down into a very succinct video that is able to reach a bigger audience in a very simplified form, if that makes sense.

Taylor Rodriguez:

It completely makes sense.

Ava Lee:

But at the same, there are times when something, I think I'm very good at the educational aspect of things. I don't dance on TikTok that I never have, but when it comes to education, how do I take it as trending audio or a trend and make that into a skincare skit per se, in a way that's not too cheesy, but it still delivers that same kind of information. And also knowing, hey, if we're doing a partnership with a brand sometimes, does this video, is it okay just to do a 15-second video or is this a video that's going to need 10-minute segment on it? Or is it going to be something that needs three different aspects of things? How do you lead up the excitement for your followers so that they don't think it's just a one-time thing, for example? So there's so much to think about. Every single partnership where you video that you post about. And I think I'm pretty good at just compartmentalizing everything in my head to be strategic about what I post.



Taylor Rodriguez:

So interesting, you mentioned trends, and I think one of the biggest challenges is that we do see a lot of trends in social, and I think there can oftentimes be a challenge between what trends do we want to jump on, what trends do we not jump on? Do we even engage in the trends? Does it even make sense? So I would love to get your perspective on trends. Can you share, and Ava, let's stick with you for a minute since you were sharing just a bit about this, but can you share just a little bit more about your thoughts on trends? Because obviously back in 2022 you went viral for the Jello skin. And so in some instances, trends can be super beneficial for creators. What are your thoughts?

Ava Lee:

I think trends are something that both creators and brands have to hop on, but not to an excessive level where if it's a trend that you try to do, but it just is so off, that can turn people off as well. I mean, I've done it and I've failed many, many times. So I don't think it's something that you have to be like, okay, you can never do it, but still try it out. And there's so many examples I can't even think about off the top of my head, but if it's something that's relevant, for example, a couple of years ago it was New York Fashion Week, so you see all these New York fashion people doing runway walks and showing off their fashion. But for me, that was, I wasn't doing fashion. So instead I was making a trend out of New York Fashion Week, but doing outfits with a different sheet mask or a different mask. So that was the color point, and me doing an outfit change was a different robe and a different mask. So making fashion a skincare trend, that also works as well.

So those are just examples of smaller trends that's ongoing in that week. And if you know TikTok, trends come and go literally within two days and you're like, okay, well I'm a little bit too late on that too, so how do you make sure that you're on top of a trend that would make the perfect sense for you in a way, for example, if there's another US Open going on, that US Open is a week worth where you want to capitalize on that, but if you can't, then it's over. You can't really post it after the fact.

Taylor Rodriguez:

It's too late.

Michelle Kwak:

Right.

Ava Lee:



Yeah, exactly. So trend goes both ways where it's a trending audio or an event, et cetera, et cetera. Then we have these bigger trends. For example, the Jello skin that you mentioned, right? That was something that I never really foresaw, it was always a part of me, but I never thought it would catch onto the level that it did. But I'm glad it did because it was the perfect term to describe everything that it was preaching and doing in real life.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Amazing. And Michelle, what are your thoughts? Because on the brand side, it can be sometimes difficult to move that quickly.

Michelle Kwak:

Mm-hmm. I agree with everything that Ava said. I think brands are becoming also more and more good at hopping on trends quickly. I don't know if it's as quick as a creator can be, but I have been seeing that trend. But I do think this can be a double-edged sword. And the big mistake that I see a lot of brands make is that they hop on every single trend or meme, even if it's not necessarily relevant to them. And then it becomes exhausting and kind of suffocating for the audience. It almost feels like, I would like to say an inflation in our culture where there's this huge surge in interest in a specific trend. And once the audience sees that brands are jumping in on it for the sake of relevancy or just to drive sales, then they're just not doing it right and the audience quickly loses interest and that's the end of the trend or meme's life cycle. And honestly, as much as I love Demure, this is how I see what happened to it.

And if you really want to go viral, in my opinion, you either have to really embody or become the trend or you should have your own spin on it. And at Laneige, like we really do a really careful job of not tapping into every single trend or meme that we see just for the sake of just being relevant. We're really careful about which ones we jump on. And if anything, we'll try to take our own spin on it.

So for example, when every brand was kind of like doing girl math at one point last year, we actually found a sub trend of girl physics, which is a little bit different from girl math, but it's its cousin, we created this video where the more beauty products you hold onto while you shop, like at Sephora is our version of girl physics. And I guess people really found that so relatable and that video went absolutely viral and it's probably one of our most engaged and most viewed video to date on our socials. And I think it's because no one was really paying attention to girl physics because everyone was so focused on girl math and we were able to find that sweet spot between a trend that's widely recognizable but different at the same time.

Taylor Rodriguez:





Well, and I think if I hear what you're saying correctly, what you're trying to say is you're finding something that's very true to the brand. You're aligning with the brand message, but you're also able to tap into a cultural moment, which can be a really fine balance to find.

Michelle Kwak:

Yeah, definitely. And I think it's a little different for brands than creators when it comes to these kinds of things because we just, we're in a position where we can, I think we're in a position where I feel like we can be more suffocating, I think, than a creator when it comes to these trends, and it can be cringey honestly. So we just want to find that right balance and just make sure that we're finding a connection to the audience rather than trying to just be something that we're not.

Taylor Rodriguez:

And Michelle, do you ever find that with some of these trends, you either have an idea about a creator who you could potentially work with and you can move quite quickly, or are the way that your partnerships existing today, does it typically require more lead time? Because it's very possible that Ava's got an amazing idea and you guys happen to come together and you're like, Hey, this would be perfect. Would you say that there's that level of flexibility right now with trends, or does it require an extra level of planning?

Michelle Kwak:

I wouldn't say that we've found the best way to work with creators on the spot because logistically it takes time. Even if you are able to ask a creator to turn around content the next day, there's still the briefing stage and there's contracts and there's a lot of logistical things that get in the way that will unfortunately delay the process. And who knows, by the time we're done with the contract, maybe the trend isn't relevant anymore. So I think what we've done is our social team does an amazing job at hopping on the trends at the right moment and turning content around right away.

When it comes to creators, I think we do have more long-term contracts with most creators, and we just ask them to tap into the trend that they think is relevant at that for a launch that we have. And it doesn't necessarily mean that we have to pick the trend. We really try to give the creators full freedom, full creativity, and full freedom in their work because they know their audience best. And I think that's something that led to a lot of success for us just as a brand in general.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Very cool. Makes sense. So let's talk a little bit about maybe some of the myths that may in the industry about how you can actually, I'm using air quotes here, but make it. So Michelle, what



do you think are some of the myths about what you need to make it successfully on the brand side? And maybe what do you think is not true or maybe what do you think is true? Because obviously you're well-established. You know the space extremely well. So what's your take on this?

Michelle Kwak:

I would say finding your niche is really important, but you don't always need to be boxed into one category. And I think the best influencers and brands in the space have one thing that they're known for. For example, at least for Laneige, our lip sleeping mask swirls with the whisks is something that we're known for, but we were able to branch out at one point and find niche segments within that category that are so relevant to our audience. I think that's really how you grow channels and retain your current audience and also acquire new audiences along the way. And I'm sure Ava can explain this so much better than I can, but in the beginning I've seen her talk a lot about K-Beauty in the beginning of her career, but she's now expanded to not only K-Beauty content, but about Korean culture and her travels. And I know she has a beautiful wellness brand right now, so I feel like she's a really great example of doing it right in that sense.

Taylor Rodriguez:

And Ava, what do you think, what does it take to make it as a creator and maybe what are some of the myths that you think exist today?

Ava Lee:

I agree 100% that you don't have to completely fit into one small niche. I start off doing a little bit more on the K-Beauty skincare side of things, but I never really wanted to be completely boxed into that either. And another myth is that you don't necessarily need to have a bajillion products to make it work. People think, especially when I started, a lot of people thought I need the entire skincare shelf to be able to showcase and show them what's my skincare routine. You can have one small routine with five, six products, and if it works for you, just hone in on that. I think even for fashion or other people, you don't need an entire wardrobe. You don't need an entire skincare shelf to be able to start, just start somewhere and you can actually make it work as well.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Very cool. Very cool. I love that. So let's move over to brand partnerships, Michelle. The notion of what brand creator partnerships has changed a lot over the past couple of years. The industry is evolving past and bold sponsor content placements. Can you talk a little bit more



about some of the creative ways that you worked with creators like Ava and what makes you most excited about these types of collaborations?

Michelle Kwak:

Yeah, so I think the idea of a brand creator collaboration has changed a lot over the past couple years because at one point I think the bubble burst and I think brands had to find a way to really meet creators in the middle. I think there was kind of this challenge where brands wanted to deliver their product messaging and education and claims and benefits like the before and afters. And then I think creators were kind of saying, well, why don't you give us more creativity and then freedom in it in order for us to deliver that message instead of just us banging out a script. So I think there was this challenge, and I think something that changed from our end is really releasing control and giving full trust and freedom to the creator. And I think I explained earlier that that's something that really widely led to success for us in general because the content seemed a lot more, it came off a lot more authentic, a lot more relatable, a lot more fun, which is the whole point of all of this.

So I think ultimately that's really what changed for us in the way we changed, sorry, in the way we work with creators. And I think before we were kind of in this mentality of especially starting out during the pandemic where we were transitioning fully all of our PR efforts into digital. So we had to really amp up our partnerships in general with influencers and creators alike. And I feel like a lot of the times we were kind of seeing things project by project or launch by launch. So we were doing a lot of one-off partnerships with creators rather than investing in the relationship further. And let's say now we have an ambassador program where we try to have more long-term contracts with each influencer so that it's not just a one-off kind of deal. And I think that's given a lot of longevity also to our brands and our creator relationships, and it's been really great for us that way.

Taylor Rodriguez:

And how do the creators get to know more about the Amore Pacific brands? Do you have a recipe for some of these longer term partnerships or what's the approach?

Michelle Kwak:

There isn't really one approach I would say. And a lot of the times these relationships come super organic. We really like to meet everybody in person. So whenever we do events in New York or LA or wherever it is, we try to see them as much as we can. And I think from there, the relationship builds from that. So I wouldn't say there's just one thing that we do to make this happen.

Taylor Rodriguez:



Amazing. Ava, how do you feel about these longer term partnerships? Because obviously you have been working with our team for quite a while.

Ava Lee:

Yeah, similar to what Michelle said, I have seen the change from three years ago to right now as well, and I think three, four years ago it was just more like a one-time thing with every single brand, but obviously that's fine, but when you want to be more as organic to your followers and everything, you want to be more like an ambassador to the brand where you're talking about the brand all the time instead of just talking about it when it's like a partnership opportunity. So I think Amore Pacific is a very good example, not just Laneige, but Sulwhasoo Innisfree. All the other brands that are under the Amore Pacific umbrella where for example, a good example is not only do I meet the team that when they're in New York, but I meet them when they're in Korea. And whenever I'm in Korea, I go to their offices.

I'm meeting not just the brands that are in the US but I'm also meeting with different brands that are just based in Korea that are still under the Amore Pacific brand. So you don't know, Amore Pacific, they own 15 other brands that are aside from what we were talking about, but I still love their products and I want to learn more about it and how to bring some of these amazing product formulations to the US as well.

So I kind of want to be that in between diplomat when it comes to seeing what is trending in Korea, what are the new innovations that's going on at Korean headquarters and bringing that back to the US. That's always been a goal of mine. So I love doing that. And these kinds of longer term partnerships that I have with Amore Pacific and brands like this really helps with that effort because I know I'm equally as invested in the growth of the company as I am to telling my followers about these amazing products and the innovations, et cetera. So I think it's a great example and I think more brands need to really help on that.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Yeah, it's interesting because as we have been talking to more and more brands, there definitely is a huge desire to bring creators even into learning about the products, but it's a huge investment for companies to be able to do that. And so for a company to be able to do it and to really find the right balance between how do we bring these creators in, learn about our brand, learn about our philosophy, the innovation or technology behind it. It's amazing if they can do that. And obviously Ava, you've found the right partnership. Okay. Ava, brand partnerships are a huge part of the pie for many creators, but it doesn't have to be everything. Can you talk through some of the other ventures that you've branched out to in your career? What advice would you give to other creators who are looking to do something similar?



Ava Lee:

I think it's something that is very important in a way as well, if you want to be in the space for the long term, not saying every creator has to do this or it's not a fit for everyone either. I personally never ever thought I was going to be an entrepreneur myself either. But I do think we out just your general everyday content and doing cool partnerships, whether that's a partnership, like a smoothie partnership with Laneige or doing your own little brand. I think there's a lot of different partnerships you can explore. Co-collabs are a really great opportunity, whether you're launching a jewelry collection, or a brand that you've supported for a long time. For me, I liked those, but those seemed a little bit more one time opportunities for me. For me, I wanted to really bring the inner beauty side of things to the US and I was waiting to be frank for other brands to do that, but I really wasn't seeing that.

So at one point I was like, okay, I have to be the person who brings us to the US because I really wanted to bring that lifestyle element into the skincare world. And it's something that we do see a lot more in Korea and Asia and the culture that I grew up in. So whatever I was ingrained in, I wanted to bring to the US and that's why byAVA, my brand was born where obviously I'm talking a lot about outer beauty skincare through a lot of the partnerships that I do and brands I just have supported for a long time. And I just didn't want to launch another skincare brand because there's so many great brands out there launching amazing products with really great formulators. I didn't think it was necessarily my place to come in and be like, okay, this is the next best cream when there's so many other better creams out there as well, maybe one day. But it really was not the right timing.

However, I really didn't know any company that was doing the tea elixirs and the collagen and superfood powders that I was concocting at home in my mom's kitchen all the time. So I wanted to bring the convenience and accessibility to the whole Jello skin lifestyle that I was preaching, and I thought it was the perfect fit. We're not growing at the pace that other companies are. It's just like my baby brand. But I'd kind of like to keep it that way right now because I'm still very much focused on Glow with Ava as a platform, but having something on the side just to explore a little bit and extension of my lifestyle makes it fun. It's not easy, but it is fun.

Taylor Rodriguez:

But I think it's also really well aligned with where, at least personally, where I'm seeing a lot of the industry move to. I think a lot of beauty has been focused on the external, the creams and everything, but there has been a much bigger shift, at least I've seen in my social with how you do supplements and what else you're putting in your body, right? Because that also affects you outwardly. So it's like, I don't want to call it a trend because I don't know if it's a trend. I just



think people are becoming more aware that there's a lot of different things that go into beauty and wellbeing beyond just your skincare regimen. So I love that.

Ava Lee:

Yep, exactly. Inside out beauty.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Very cool. Very cool. So we're going to do a couple of rapid fire questions. So Michelle, if you were given one million dollars for your influencer marketing budget tomorrow, what would you spend it on?

Michelle Kwak:

I mean, that's my dream. I would say there's a lot of excitement around the female athlete space and just sports in general. I think over the past couple of years, and especially what we've seen during the Olympics, I feel like with TikTok we get to actually get a true behind-the-scenes of what's going on at the Olympics. You can see their dorms, their lifestyle, and of course their achievements there at the Olympic games. But I do generally think female athletes are having their moment right now and we want to invest further in that space. And we just recently did a partnership with the Phoenix Mercury for the WNBA All-Star weekend a couple of months ago, and that was a really great starting point for our start in that space. And I would also say that there's so many great, I feel like there's been just so many amazing pop stars and new faces and fresher faces in music, and I would love to partner with more of those type of talent as well.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Amazing.

Ava Lee:

That's a good one.

Taylor Rodriguez:

It is a good one. It is a good one. I agree. It's interesting because I think we've seen more of this with brands trying to find how do we find good partners that also can help us tap into new audiences. And so I think finding the right balance can sometimes be a challenging thing, but again, it sounds like you guys keep knocking it out of the park in terms of finding the right brand match. And so Michelle, I would give you a million dollars if I could. Ava, if a brand came knocking on your door begging to work with you, which brand would you want it to be and how would you want to work with them?



Ava Lee:

I do think if anything, the long-term partnership is once again, the only kind of deals that I really want to do with a partner that I can talk about all year long without any one time things. So I think that'd be a cool one. And then I do have a wellness brand that is called byAVA and looking for more opportunities for this kind of inner and outer beauty collaboration that makes it all a 360 holistic approach with a brand. That would be really cool. For example, if there's an event, for example, or a juice shop in New York doing a Jello skin smoothie collab from the inside and out. So how do you make the ingredients that's already in the cream or moisturizer of this brand and also taking the hyaluronic acid and collagen that's in my supplement and integrating a little cool partnership like that. So I think that's something that I'm looking forward to.

Taylor Rodriguez:

Any specific brands that you want to put out into the universe? Because just to warn you, last time I asked this question on the podcast, the creator had a dream brand that she wanted to work with, and by the time we had produced and published the podcast, she had partnered with them and was able to create content with them. So any dream brands?

Ava Lee:

Laneige.

Michelle Kwak:

Love that answer. Of course we'll work with you. Of course, that's not even a question.

Taylor Rodriguez:

With her million-dollar budget.

Ava Lee:

Yes.

Michelle Kwak:

You can have the full million.

Ava Lee:

It's all I want.



Taylor Rodriguez:

Okay. And so Ava and Michelle, this is a question for both of you guys. Where do you think the creator industry is going next, and what predictions do you have?

Michelle Kwak:

I do think that there's a shift in the industry where I think things are becoming more community-based and focused around the idea of community more than ever it has before. So I feel like a lot of brands are investing in doing a lot of community-based activations, which is very different from I think, the big grandiose PR events that they might put out. I think consumers are the new influencers or creators, so to say. So I think the two worlds are going to overlap at one point, and I think us working with creators and tapping into their communities as well, since they're kind of the originator of the idea of communities and having a really niche audience, I think together they can really help brands reach their goals. And I think it is going to be a huge shift overall.

Taylor Rodriguez:

And Ava, what about you?

Ava Lee:

I think in the past couple of years, being a creator or influencer was this term that people were like, oh, that's so cringe. They didn't want to call themselves an influencer. What kind of influencer are you? Et cetera. But nowadays, I think it's becoming even people, teenagers, they're like, all I want to do is become an influencer after I graduate college, for example. Because to me, the term influencer never really was cringey because you are a person of influence. If I can influence you to wake up earlier, if I can influence you to buy a \$5 pair of jeans, that's still a form of influence. So I do think that when it comes to that, it is very powerful if I can influence you to get enough plane to go to Korea and go to Olive Young, which I have done for many, many, many, many people that is an influencer of some sort.

So I think before people were like, you can only be an influencer if you have great skin or if you're really pretty, if you're a model or if you have a big wardrobe. But I think we're going beyond that. And as earlier we mentioned any kind of athlete, they're beyond an athlete. These athletes and their girlfriends and their wives, they're becoming influencers of their sort. So from the US Open, I was seeing a lot of tennis wives or tennis girlfriends, and they have their own partnerships of get ready with me to go watch my boyfriend's match. And there was sneaky partnerships all throughout the videos, and I think that's very smart. And so it goes beyond just being like a TikToker who dances. It can truly be anyone who can become a creator in their own very unique way.





Taylor Rodriguez:

Yeah, I love that. Sometimes we struggle internally with saying, do we say influencer? Do we say creator? And I think if you've been in the marketing space, influencer marketing is what it's called. And I think we have made a very conscious shift to say creator instead of influencer. And I don't know if you noticed, but earlier in the conversation I was like influencer or creator. But it's interesting because you can really be any subject matter expert across anything in the world and technically be an influencer. So I love hearing that from you because I do also believe that that's true, and it's been an amazing conversation with you both. So thank you both for coming on the podcast today. I've truly enjoyed the conversation and learning a little bit more from you both, and I know our audience is going to be absolutely thrilled with hearing this. So thank you again for joining us.

Thanks for listening to this episode of The Fast Traack. I hope you enjoyed the conversation as much as I did. If you did in fact enjoy this episode, brighten someone's day by sharing this episode with a friend. And if you want to keep up to date on what's happening in the influencer marketing industry, follow Traackr on social. That's @T-R-A-A-C-K-R on any social platform. We're always sharing fresh insights and hosting exciting events aimed at connecting marketers and creators. Thanks again, and see you next time.

