

Building an Influencer Program from Ground Zero with Elena Suarez, Pierre Fabre USA

Claudia Leitch:

You're listening to The Fast Traack podcast. Hear the stories, strategies, and insights for the change makers in the influencer marketing industry. I'm Claudia Leitch, an influencer marketing consultant on Traackr's professional services team. I'm passionate about helping brands develop performance-driven influencer marketing strategies and learning from the best in the business, Traackr clients.

Today, I'm sitting down with Elena Suarez, who is the associate director of PR and influencer marketing at Pierre Fabre USA. We dig into how she built the influencer marketing program at Pierre Fabre from the ground up and cover all areas of her data-driven approach, from personalized seeding outreach to affiliate programs, budget concerns, goals, and measurement. Elena blew my mind with her ability to think about all areas of influencer marketing in tandem and her desire to continue growing and learning as a marketer each day. Here's my conversation with Elena.

Hi, Elena. Just to start us off here, can you introduce yourself for our audience and give us a bit of a five-minute trailer of your career, highs, lows, and general introduction?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you for having me. I'm very happy to be here. I actually graduated Montclair State University in 2012, and two weeks after graduating I landed a role as a PR association coordinator for intellectual property attorneys. That was very interesting because I was essentially doing PR for intellectual property attorneys. I was doing a lot of their marketing materials, their webinars, this huge judges' dinner. It was a great role fundamentally, but it made me realize that I definitely wanted to do PR for an industry that I was passionate about, which was either beauty or fashion.

Shortly after, I landed a role at Neiman Marcus as a PR coordinator. That was a really exciting role because I worked on over a hundred events. I did their internal communications and their external communications. It was just a holy grail of brands and products. I also worked on their charitable initiatives within the store and outside of the store. After that, I went ahead and took a role at Moroccan Oil. I was there for almost five years. I bridged over to the international side of PR and influencers, and I worked on North America, Europe, as well as Latin America. I

worked on all of their sponsorships, their PR events, their fashion weeks, and then also the influencer campaigns from start to finish.

After being there for almost five years, I was like, "Okay, I'm ready to accept my next challenge. What is this going to look like?" I took on this role that I'm currently in within Pierre Fabre. I oversee a portfolio of their brands, so that's Avène, Glytone, Klorane, and René Furterer. This role was particularly interesting because I was able to take all of my experience from my entire career and implemented it here, because there was no internal PR influencer department before I started. I really had to build everything from the ground up. All of the processes, all of the campaigns, I brought on a new PR agency, all of the influencer initiatives, and I brought it to where it is right now.

Claudia Leitch:

Yeah, it's astounding to me that I think you started at Pierre Fabre in around 2019, and it's such a large beauty brand to not have a PR department. It's astounding to me. We hear over and over that brands have big PR initiatives but they don't have influencer marketing yet. You really started from the bottom ground, which is really exciting and also a huge challenge.

I'm already curious based on what you have said so far, what did you feel like were the biggest differences between doing PR work with a US team and with US initiatives and then working within these international teams?

Elena Suarez:

I think with the US team, the trends and everything move a little bit more fast-paced. I would say when we were implementing things from the US to the international side, the international team was just a step behind, which in many ways was actually an advantage because we implemented it here and then went over to the international side. But I do think that you get more for your buck with international just influencers and strategies. I think that influencers are way more giving and agile internationally than on the US side.

It was very interesting because also each market was at a different speed. You'll see some influencers that were just on it with trends and getting creative with different video components, and then you had other influencers that were just like, "Here is the still image and that is what's going to work." It wasn't a copy-and-paste situation, each market was different, and then it was taking the successes from the US and implementing that internationally.

Claudia Leitch:

Yeah, you've already started to touch on this concept of how influencer marketing started to shift from still images to video and more creative types of marketing. When you were starting



to do influencer at Neiman Marcus, what did influencer marketing look like at the time and how has that shifted until now? Obviously, large transitions have occurred, but just paint us an image of what influencer marketing looked like back then.

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. It's so fascinating because when I started Neiman Marcus I feel like influencer marketing was just starting to really be taken seriously. I think even when I initially graduated, it was like, "Oh yeah, influencers are part of your PR strategy," and we were like, "yeah, sure, sure," and then they really started to evolve into that. When I was at Neiman's, the brand was more focused on growing their social following first. I was doing a lot of imagery within the store and then pushing it on their social. Then that shifted to start using models that were influencers within our events, so I was then working with scoping, okay, this is a beautiful model, but does she have a following and how can I make sure that then she's tagging Neiman Marcus within the events?

Then for our bigger ones, we would then start inviting them, and more for the cocktail hours and the social to see how can we get some social love. Then we also started working with some influencers that were stylists. They would come in and they would pull clothes and tag us. We would do a, "Yeah, we'll let you borrow these really expensive items as long as you bring them back, but you also have to give us credit for it." We grew with some of these red-carpet stylists and also their celebrity clientele.

Claudia Leitch:

So already the beginning of the professional influencer, you were actually touching that space back then, which is something that's so common within the discourse of influencer marketing today, is these influencers that have other careers. The reason that they seem authentic and have really engaged audiences is because they have that professional background. These stylists that you were working with, it sounds like it was already the beginning of that.

Elena Suarez:

Yeah, totally. I think so much of my learning of how important relationships are within influencer marketing stemmed from my interactions at Neiman Marcus. There were also salespeople within the store that had really high clientele that they also were influencers within their own space. I think an influencer, to many, can be someone who has a big following, but to some it's their neighbor that dresses really well and they're influencing them on what to purchase. Being able to really solidify those relationships and focus on, okay, we have this small group of people that are influential, how can we grow with them, really is something that I still implement today in all of my strategy and all of my relationships, all of my events.



Claudia Leitch:

That's so interesting. I'm excited to circle back to that, around this concept of growing with these influencers as a brand, but just a bit more on your career here. What is one thing that you are most proud of from your career and one thing that was the biggest learning moment or event activation that you did where you learned a lot?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. I think the biggest thing that I'm proud about is the fact that there's such a charitable component to just PR and influencers and giving back. There are so many ways that we can make a difference in partner. I think a lot of people look at the glitz and the cool campaigns and the end results, but I love giving back and making an impact. I think with beauty specifically when you provide someone with a product that is targeting a concern that they have, it just changes their life. Being able to do that is really heartwarming to me. I'm so passionate about how can I donate something, how can we partner with an organization that's making a difference.

I think my biggest learning within the industry perspective is that you truly never stop learning. I like to think that I am now forever a student of social media tools and influencer marketing because it's just every day is so different. My biggest learning curve was learning TikTok. I think that that platform totally came out of nowhere, no one understood it. We knew it worked, but figuring out how it worked was a very huge learning curve. Because up until then, I think you finally feel like you have a groove, you understand the strategy, there's like, "Okay, you shift this, that worked well, this didn't," and then out of nowhere, in the middle of a pandemic, here's this new tool that everyone's on and somehow you need to be on to.

Claudia Leitch:

For brands that have been around for a while, like Avène, René Furterer, any of these Pierre Fabre brands, to harness TikTok some say is even more challenging because it's a brand that many people know but don't know it in this spicy way that TikTok brands have grown. How have you navigated that challenge?

Elena Suarez:

I always like to use the fun example of trying to convince my chief marketing officer that derms dancing with products was okay. I think that there's just this professionalism to our brands, they have this deep-rooted heritage of French and pharmacy and being efficacious, and then it's like here's this TikTok trend that we want them to be a part of. But a lot of it was also test and learn, and I think once they started to see the comedic lens or seeing that, yes, a derm can dance with a product and still be a derm, I think that started to shift a bit of it.



I would say there were a lot of push and pull in terms of what we can do and can't. I think it's just a platform, I always like to say that it's watching a Superbowl ad, you want to make sure that it's entertaining and that you're placing your product, but that it's not super in your face. I think once they started to see the results, once they started to let go of the control, it started to resonate more with them and then they understood every platform has its purpose. TikTok is meant to be more playful and more comedian-like, whereas Instagram you can get a little bit more serious, or YouTube is a little bit more long form. It took a lot of educating versus being super passionate and saying, "We have to do this," it's like, "Okay, well, this is why each platform is going to have a different piece of content and this is why it'll work well."

Claudia Leitch:

It sounds like some of the skills that have gotten you far in this career are maybe curiosity, willingness to learn, patience working with your higher-ups, and comfortability with a test-and-learn environment. What would you say your other superpowers are that make you good at your job?

Elena Suarez:

I think it's so funny you said curiosity because that's, I think, one of my biggest, I believe I was that child that asked way too many questions about everything because I'm so curious. I love to learn. I love to dive into strategies and get into the thick of what is a brand's ethos, why do we want to do this, where is the gray space, and where do we have the opportunity.

I would say another big superpower of mine is that I am agile and flexible, which is absolutely needed in a profession where it's continuously evolving. It keeps you on your toes. I appreciate that I can have that flexibility. I think another one is just being creative. I think you do have to think outside the box. I love the light bulb moments where it's like, "Oh, this was a random idea that I was thinking about on my couch," and you see it come to life and then it works. The creativity component I think is definitely a superpower as well.

Claudia Leitch:

Yeah, to trust that instinct where you have that creative idea but you don't know if it's going to work or not, I think that's the hardest part. I come from a background of PR, and there are a lot of ideas thrown at the table and it's hard to tell which one is going to work.

Elena Suarez:

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's being okay with it not working, like, "Okay. We tried it and it didn't work, and that's okay too," which is also hard when it's your idea.

Claudia Leitch:

Obviously, you now have many years of experience in this industry and are in this amazing position where you have the ability to affect change. What would you say some myths are about getting into this industry or moving up into it, for any young people looking to get started in this industry?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. I think one of the myths in just influencer marketing in general is I think we just undervalue influencers in many ways. When you first start out, you think, "I'm just going to send them products and it's going to go well and they're just going to organically talk about us because they want the products." They're professionals as well, there's a lot of time and energy they take into creating this content and editing it, and so they should be paid. I think looking at influencers as your partners, they know what works well for their platform. I think on the brand side, sometimes we think that they're our spokespeople or just it's a brand video, and it's not meant to be that. Having some of that, again, agility and flexibility with allowing them to be creative within the guidelines that you provide them.

I think then counter to that, another myth is that paid is the only way. I think when you're looking into a strategy for influencers, there's so many little components that go into it. I like to think of it as an influencer ecosystem and paid is one component of that, you have organic and you have your affiliate. Always looking at it from a lens of strategy and seeing, okay, this influencer works well for this, but this influencer doesn't work well for that. Trust yourself in that creativity and that flexibility, because I do think with influencers, not all influencers are the same.

I think my last big myth, which goes back to the relationship component, is that it's all about transactions. Relationships are something that are going to go with you throughout your entire career. When you're speaking to an influencer, you don't know how big this person's going to become over time, you don't know what their successes are going to be. Be genuine in your outreach, look at their content, take the time in the beginning and it'll truly pay off at the end. Understand, okay, my brand can help them with this, they spoke about that, build that genuine relationship and it's going to follow you throughout your entire career in such a nice way that when you do move to a different position, you're like, "Okay, I remember this influencer that I spoke to, that I took out to lunch, that I met at this event, and she has shown me X, Y, Z organic. Let me now look at her from a paid capacity in this other role." I do think that sometimes we underestimate the power of relationships within influencer marketing.

Claudia Leitch:

Influencer marketing is such a combination of an art and a science. It must be one of the few careers you can have where you need such strong social skills and soft skills, as they call it, as well as quantitative skills, measurement, goal setting, budget setting, all these hard skills that



come along with it. I think that it used to be an industry where all of that wasn't as involved, but now influencer marketers have become these growth marketers, performance marketers, and it's really become this combination of both of those sides of the brain.

Elena Suarez:

Yeah, absolutely. I think of in the beginning when we were just using them in campaigns, we weren't measuring what the reach was. It's like, "Okay, they came in the campaign, they mentioned the brand, that's a win for us." Now everything is so data-driven, it's truly looking at all of the analytics, what's working, what's not, but they're not robots and not all of them are the same, so not losing that personable touch of being like, "Hey, how are you? I saw that you just got engaged. I saw that you just had a baby. Do you want these products? They're probably going to work well for you through your transition in this chapter of your life." It is very much still maintaining that personable touch.

Claudia Leitch:

Right, the reason it works is because these people are humans and therefore we need to be human back.

Elena Suarez:

Exactly, exactly.

Claudia Leitch:

You spoke a little bit about this multi-pronged strategy or the influencer marketing ecosystem. When you started up Pierre Fabre, there was no influencer marketing program. Of course, you can't start every part of that strategy at one time. What were the building blocks in building this influencer marketing program and what were the steps that you took?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. When I first started, I looked at all the brands and I was like, "Oh my gosh, there's like nothing to base anything off of. Where do I start?" I started with building personalities for each brand, if this was a human, what would their personality be? In that, it allowed me to make sure that each brand stood individually and that it wasn't a copy-and-paste situation brand over brand. Once I understood the personality, objectives, and what audience we can target, this one's for sensitive skin, this one can be used for tough to manage skin concerns, this one can be used for thinning hair, I started to build a directory. The directory is still my holy grail today that I am so proud of, this is my baby directory.

It started with a goal I set for myself, 15 influencers per brand, per week that I was researching, adding to the directory, outreaching, and sending products to. Over time, that group, every



week I would sit and do research, I would go into Traackr, I would look for lookalikes, I would pull lists, I would then go into holes of this friend tagged this friend so let me look at this friend. Once I had this list going, I had a rhythm with like, "Okay, here's my outreach. Did they respond? Did they receive the product? Let me follow up with them," true that nitty-gritty relationship, one on one.

Once that happened and upper management unlocked some funds for paid campaigns, I already had in mind who performed well, who genuinely was interested in the brand, who received product, who already had an understanding of the messaging, so I then took some of those influencers and activated them on the paid side while trickling in some bigger ones as well that we're then establishing our relationship through the paid side.

Then after that, I then started to funnel in all of the others, so continuing that organic, looking at wider seedings through our PR agency. Now we have a directory with over a thousand influencers, let's narrow that down to maybe a seeding of 150 that we know want to receive the product. That seeding then continued, and then after that I started to look at the affiliate side, because the affiliate to me is just such a happy in between of organic and paid. With that, it's very performance-based. So now we say, "Okay, we have the paid covered, we have the continuous additions going on in the directory, we have the seedings covered and we have the affiliate covered." That ecosystem now exists today, where we're looking at new product launches or we're looking at initiatives, it's like, "Okay, let's start with the organic. Who are we going out to? Who has received the product? Who has mentioned that they have the skin concern?" Now we're looking at a seeding, now let's build a campaign and messaging around that, and then how do we layer in the affiliate component as well?

Claudia Leitch:

You said so many things in there that I have follow-up questions for, but I guess to start here, you mentioned this idea of a friend tagging another friend and that's how you sometimes find influencers. That makes me think of this concept of community. One thing I've noticed is that there are some very successful campaigns that do just that, where an influencer tags another influencer, it creates this idea of community, but also, some of the most successful influencers are those that are really engaged with their audience and create a community in their following. Is that something that's part of your strategy? What are your thoughts on influencers that build community?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah, it absolutely is. It's even interesting because I've even played and did the idea of taking these influencers that are friends with one another and having them build content together. We see some now, it's very like, "Okay, let's tap into your following and we can cross-tag one another." How do we insert ourselves as a brand and have that conversation happen between



the two? From an eventing standpoint, when we do events where we have specific influencer moments, I think that you're way more excited to attend an event if you know your friend is going. Then you see the selfies, you see the activations, you have someone to take content with you. We've seen so much success with being like, "Okay, we know that these two are besties. Let's invite both of them and let's see."

They also then even recommend one another too. I did this fun idea where it was like, "We'll do a seeding and let's actually have you tag or send products to five of your influencer friends." Easy, they were so excited to send their friends packages of products. Then I'm like, "Oh, that's a win for me because now I know this is your influencer friend that you will send products to, which now is part of my directory."

Claudia Leitch:

What were the logistics around that? Did you pay for the shipping for them to send these packages to their friends? Was it just a note suggesting the idea?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. We sent an email out, made it super interactive with the email. We did it for BFF, it's National Best Friend Day, so National BFF Day. Then what we did is we covered all of the expense of sending the product, sent it directly from our office and wrote a note card to the friend, "This is from your friends, enjoy these products. She thought you may need it." The nice part about it is that it was a collection that had a concern around it. It was for thinning hair, so if you're sending this to your friend it's because your friend's hair thinning. Those are the type of then influencers that I want to partner with. I want to know that this collection is going to help them, and especially with thinning hair is something that can obviously be so vulnerable, so for them to feel so excited about helping a friend with this collection, it was such a win-win.

To the date, from a seeding perspective, it was one of the highest returns that we saw from engagement from this community of influencers that we were like, "Okay, let's make sure that we find another moment to do that," that it's not every year for BFF Day, but that it makes sense. With that it doesn't cost us a lot, it's going back to that relationship building. Now you're allowing us to go into your personal life with your friends and your influencer group and send them products. It's something that you're excited about and that we are too.

Claudia Leitch:

Yeah. I see this strategy work particularly well within the organic sphere. It's just one more incentive piece. I know that Glow Recipe, for example, had a few VIP influencers bring their roommate or partner on a recent influencer trip to Wyoming. Then I know in 2022, Tower 28 was a brand that often encouraged influencers to tag their friends, especially friends that are also in the AAPI community because that's a brand that fights for anti-Asian hate, so it was this

nice combination of purpose-driven influencer marketing, but also community initiatives. Yeah, I've seen that work.

Tell me a little bit more about your seeding strategy. How often is it successful? I think a lot of our clients are struggling right now with figuring out how to still make organic seeding work in this area where, as you said, people sometimes think that pay to play is the only way to do it.

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. I think that seedings are very interesting because they have shifted so much over time. When I first started, it was like, "Go far and wide, send as many products as you can, because if you send more products, you're going to get more results." That's not really true. I think a big part of it is making sure that you are sending products to those that actually want the product and that follow up is happening. I think seedings can become very expensive. Especially if you're looking at one of those boxes that it has all of the bells and whistles, those boxes quickly add up. Sometimes it's truly us going to the basics, what are the fundamentals that they need to receive? Do they need to receive this kitschy thing that's probably going to sit in their apartment? Probably not. Is it something that's useful to them? Then yes, it is something that we're going to seed. I know at one point every influencer had the headbands, the little puffy headband?

Claudia Leitch:

Or a cookie with their face on it.

Elena Suarez:

Exactly, exactly. It's those little things, where it's like what can they use to create their content or what can we give them as a prop to see it come live? I would say that I have now narrowed down my seedings to be more strategic. We're not doing a big seedings for every single campaign, that's a lot. Which campaigns are the ones that we can make the most flash with, and then where does the seeding sit within that strategy? If we are looking to do a seeding, we know it's going to cost us X amount of thousands of dollars for hundred, 200 people, but then we know, okay, this is going to impact our influencer paid campaign because now it's the same budget. Maybe it's us looking at it's 75 really, really solid influencers that we know will talk about us versus 300 that sit in an abyss and then we never see say anything about the brand. I think maybe fewer, bigger and more strategic versus more of the volume and how many.

Claudia Leitch:



What I'm hearing from that is that you're pretty careful about your seeding list and you're always revising it in terms of who posts about you, but I'm sure also who performs well. Is that correct?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah, and then we look at who's opted in. I have a directory, an ongoing bimonthly newsletter that we tap into our directory to send them products. Who's engaged with the brand at different touchpoints before? Who do we know is going to probably be responsive to it? I look at every single influencer that's going to get a product. I look at their analytics, I look at their audience. I also look at their content. There are specific influencers that do once a week unboxings. Great, that's the type of influencer I probably want to send product to, because even if it's an organic mention on their Stories, Stories does garner a lot of interest and a lot of engagement. That's always a great win. Obviously, we want to make sure we get on the feed, but we also need to be realistic with how much you will get for a seeding.

Versus looking at an influencer's page that is very beautiful but she talks nothing about anything beauty related. You never see anything in her highlights, you never see anything in her Stories, I would be more mindful of sending that influencer a product unless there's a bigger story behind it.

Claudia Leitch:

We've talked a little bit about the organic side then, and then when you were telling me about building up this influencer marketing program you mentioned that execs started to believe in influencer marketing and allow you to put budget towards paid. I'm curious to know what your experience was in convincing executives that your influencer marketing program was worth it, and how do you continue to do that, especially as presumably budgets need to increase as this industry gets bigger.

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. I tend to have my CFO's voice in the back of my head when I look at analytics, because I think of I'm going to be challenged with, "Why did we pay this influencer this amount and why did it work?" Analytics to me are truly, truly my best friend. I look at these KPIs that I set in the beginning of the campaign, which can be very alien talk to other people in cross-functional teams. I don't only just try to pull my KPIs, I then look at sales. During this timeframe that this campaign went live, whether it's a month, how do we track what the sales look like, and then what was the growth year over year? Last year we didn't have a campaign during this time, can we show the impact?

I provide trackable links to all of our influencers, because we're going to drive to a specific retailer where it's our own .com or a retailer partner, and we can then see the traffic that each

influencer drove to that. I provide them with discount codes, because some of these influencers, they have such an engaged following that their audience is purchasing. I also look at social following, because sometimes we measure success of, well, when this influencer went live, we saw a spike of following to the brand's page by X amount. That's a win for us because that following growth didn't happen two weeks before when there was no campaign going on. Then I look at the earned media value. We invested X amount in this campaign, we saw earned media value of this about, what was our ROI on that? Then that is truly how I sit and I convince them.

Then Traackr's benchmark tool is my absolute favorite because it allows me to see our competitors. Of course, as a brand, we want to know what are our competitors doing? How many people are they partnering with? I would take that benchmark report and be able to showcase, "Okay, this is where we stand competitively against X, Y, Z brands. If we want to really compete, the volume of influencers that they're activating, they're blowing us out of the park. In order for us to even want to become of their size or larger, we need to invest more because this is the number that we're up against."

I think when they're able to see that from a holistic perspective, okay, the sales were impacted in this way, we saw this many growth, we saw ROI of this, and then there's also these partners, these competitors that we know we want to compete against, then that they become convinced in that sense. I still do think there's challenges that come with it because you don't necessarily see the sales right away. You have your unicorn influencers that you're like, "Oh my gosh, this person just drove all of these people to our website," but sometimes it's a slow burn and that's okay too.

I think it's truly taking bits and pieces of different aspects and showcasing it as this is a holistic approach to all of the things that it impacts us on. Also, while I love the analytics, I don't try to get stuck in them either, because also influencer marketing is an awareness tool and we have to stick true to the fact that there is an awareness that's being built on the brand. That does take time, it takes a person a lot of different touchpoints to finally be convinced to purchase a product. Influencers are one of those touchpoints, so we also have to make sure that we're funneling into the other ones as well.

Claudia Leitch:

I love everything you just said, and they're really topics that my team and just Traackr, in general, is thinking a lot about right now. It sounds like you're measuring attribution in many different ways, which I think is critical here. Just what you were saying about loving the analytics but also not only relying on them, again, it reiterates this idea that it is an art and a science.



Can you tell me a little bit more about what you were saying in terms of tracking sales sessions or seeing a peak in sales? How comfortable would you say bringing that topic ... When you bring that topic to your execs, how comfortable are they with that storyline when you can't always show this direct attribution if you're thinking of influencer marketing as this awareness tool?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. I think they're comfortable with it. When there's a specific influencer campaign, I think the best-case scenario is when there's just the campaign going on and then there's a boost and we see that. Where it gets a little challenging is if you are driving to a retailer that's not your own because you are at the mercy of what they're willing to provide from a sales perspective. But we are able to showcase, okay, during this time, this product that was fifth in the store is now second in the store. That's a huge win because I'm like, "Okay, well there's nothing else happening aside from that campaign, so clearly these influencers drove that." Or there was one year when we did a National Dry Shampoo Day campaign and we were out of stock of the product within hours of the influencers going live, and we had a robust amount of influencers go live. That's always the best-case scenario.

I do think there's going to be some challenges, well, there was a marketing promo going on or there was this going on, and that's where it goes into, well, we're all working together and without the influencers driving that awareness would consumers then know about that or would they know to go to click on that. That's where all the other little components come in handy, like the trackable links, looking at their performance. It's hard, it's not an apples to apples scenario every single time.

I think there's still some mistrust in influencer marketing because it's not a one-for-one scenario, you're not going to see it right away. I like to make sure that I pull all of the analytics within the month of the campaign, and so I'm constantly going to my brand team to the sales team, like, "What was the performance of sale during this timeframe? What was the performance of the specific SKU that the influencer was talking about during this timeframe? Where do we look at that year over year?" If it is a campaign that historically I always do every year during that timeframe, then I challenge myself, "Okay, last year this is where we sit, where do we sit next this year?"

Thankfully, we just continue to grow because also the investment continues to grow. That's also even a nice story to tell, "Last year we were here with this investment and we did this. If you invest more, we will probably be able to activate more influencers, which is then going to give us a better impact." Time over time, that scenario has played out, where we do partner with more, you get a better result, and then you see more of that sales drive in. I've even gotten to



the point, which is fairly shocking, that at mid-year they're like, "Here's more budget." I'm like, "Okay, great," and then we're able to do more.

Claudia Leitch:

I'll take take it.

Elena Suarez:

I'll take it, thank you. But I still think it's something that, to executives, it's really challenging. To your point, it is an art and a science that if you're not in the thick of it's really hard to always convey we know it works, we know it's powerful, we know we need it, we need you to believe that, but they're not going to believe that without language that they're used to or the analytics that they're used to seeing.

Claudia Leitch:

I think it's really smart the way that you are taking the investment numbers that you had maybe three years ago and you grew your investment 20% and as a result our performance grew X percent, and if you were to do that again, this would be our strategy and we foresee that happening again, that's a very smart story to be telling. I also love that you're having such a close relationship with the sales numbers and whoever might be reporting that back to you. I think constantly asking those questions and finding as many data points as possible, even if you're not using all of them, is really strategic.

Out of curiosity, we're talking about these different areas of the marketing funnel and how there are your influencers that you use trackable links with, but some influencers tend to convert really well maybe on Instagram Stories or elsewhere and some influencers drive really high engagement and awareness. Would you say that you segment your influencer strategy based on those different micro-goals, or you're just hoping that they'll do one or the other and you're happy with any of those results?

Elena Suarez:

I think it's the first. I look at what each role the influencer would play. There are some influencers that we've partnered with before that you see that they have incredible Stories views or saves. I think it's really fascinating to see the evolution of saves because it really does still play into that touch point of a person is engaging with the product, they've saved it, they're going to go back to it at some point, let's continue to target them and talk to them. Those are the awareness drivers.



I've been able to see really well some of the influencers that convert because of the affiliate component, so being able to see how they're selling with their affiliate commission and taking them out at certain points of that affiliate and putting them into the paid knowing that I know that you performed well during this campaign because your audience looks at you and your recommendations and they purchase.

It's having the awareness drivers and then having the sales drivers within that is the happy marriage of the two, because there's different types of influencers for everything too. You have those influencers that are constantly sharing their storefronts and sharing their trackable links of where to purchase the things.

Then you still have the other ones that are just sharing what they like and people are Googling or going on Amazon or whatever to find whatever they're sharing. It's important that we target all of those. Something that's also huge is the expert. I think since COVID, Derm Talk has grown so much, I think consumers are now looking to experts to drive some of that understanding that education and that purchase for them. Even that sits within a specific layer, that it's like we have the expert, we have the awareness driver, we have the consumer, the e-commerce affiliate influencer in there as well, and then they're all working and going live around the same time. It's all these different types of influencers speaking to different audiences.

Claudia Leitch:

So many great tidbits here and just I'm learning so much. We talked a little bit about community marketing so we don't have to touch on this for too long, but out of curiosity, we ran this survey from Traackr and we found that, when asked, 81% of influencer marketing professionals rank finding the right influencer as one of the main hurdles to overcome when trying to build a successful influencer marketing program. But, of course, you can't grow your program, you can't grow your community of influencers if you're not also retaining the influencers that you have strong relationships with. What would you say your strategy of retention is? Is that something that you measure? What would be your advice for brands to improve ROI by increasing retention?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. I think when I first started looking at some of the influencer retention, it became really apparent to me that there's just some specific influencers that if there is no relationship with the brand beforehand or they genuinely look at it like a transaction, there's not going to be any retention. It's going to be a one-and-done, you're never going to hear them again. But I also think it's our role to make sure that we're continuing to engage with them at different touchpoints.



I do have this directory that I keep referring to. Once an influencer goes live within that campaign or moment, they then become part of our directory. Then I have different touch points and I'm still talking to them throughout. Are we sending them a newsletter that's bimonthly where they can opt in to receive products? Is there another moment that I can partner with them in a different capacity? Is there an affiliate program that I can put them into to entice them to continue speaking about the brand, or is there a discount code that I can provide them? I know they went live for this specific campaign, we have another moment where we're talking about the same concern, can I activate them in a different way?

I think when you're looking and taking the time to find these strategic partners and then you pay them or they go live, then retaining them is going to be up to your time and effort and strategy of finding different touch points to continue speaking about it. I also think, in general, when they're passionate about maybe it's an industry, like there's a lot of sensitive skin influencers or acne influencers, when they're truly passionate about what they're speaking to their audience and they find products that work for them, you're going to see some of that organic love continue, which is always great because that's what we would want, and then we partner with them again. I do think that-

Claudia Leitch:

So really strategic sourcing therefore helps the retention, because if you're being super smart with your sourcing and finding these influencers that are very passionate about sensitive skin and that your products work for sensitive skin, then you're more likely to retain those influencers after that first post.

Elena Suarez:

Exactly. I also think in many ways we all want to go viral. As an influencer marketer, if I can go viral every time my job will be amazing, it'll be done. I think with that, we just look at, okay, there are these big influencers and we need to go after them and they're the ones that we need to partner with. Yes, there's a space for those big influencers, but those are probably not the ones that you're going to retain. Making sure you're getting into the thick of research and looking at what their audience is, looking at their content, what do they talk about?, What are they passionate about, can they be passionate about my brand? If they can't, then most likely they're just going to take the paycheck and then not talk about us again. That's the reality of it. Of course, they're going to want to partner with a brand, but where is that relationship standpoint after they go live?

That's something that I also look closely in when I'm then going to activate influencers again. If I'm repeating a campaign partner, it's like, "Okay, well, did they give us any love from this campaign that happened last year until now?" They performed really well for us, but also I want



to make sure that they actually genuinely love the brand and are they still talking about it. I think that the best success I've had is in that, in looking at it, taking more time upfront because the research of it does take time, you do have to look into the weeds of it. When you're doing it for various brands at one time, it can just be very time-consuming, but maximizing the tools that we have at our disposal and really building that relationship, and again, that follow up in those different touch points after.

Claudia Leitch:

You've been painting this image of if there's a new campaign coming up and you're thinking about who to partner with, say it's November of 2023 and you're preparing for your December campaign, but you're also planning for 2024, how do you go about setting goals for a campaign and setting goals for your program overall?

Elena Suarez:

Yeah. Looking at first the timeframe of the year and then looking at the trends going on the platforms, there are specific times of the year, I know even last year engagement rates were down on specific platforms, and so when I look at what my goal ultimately is, it's like how am I going to get through this shuffle? I have to be realistic with how this is going to perform. Then I look at some of the competitors and what are some of the recent campaigns that they've been doing, where do we track against that? Setting myself then the KPIs that makes sense.

I know for sure if I go live in November or December, my campaigns, unless there's paid media spend behind it, may be tough because it's holiday time and everyone is activating around that time. How do we make sure that the content is going to be really impactful that people are going to want to engage with it? How do I make sure that it makes sense to our time? There have been moments where I've had to sit and say, "While I would love to run an influencer campaign, I don't think it's in our best interest. I think we should hold and maybe wait a month or two and then be able to have our products shine versus going through all this noise." With that, setting what makes sense for that time period, looking at the trends, looking at our competitors and looking at our historic campaigns and how they performed.

Claudia Leitch:

Yeah, I think that's really smart. A lot of our clients tend to measure their share of voice within whatever metric that they're looking at in influencer marketing, that might be engagements, video views, our VIT metric, but what I see is that so many brands tend to, especially for example skincare, they might do this big holiday activation in December, they might do something else in February, March about dry skin in the winter, and then they do another big activation in May, June around sunscreen. So many brands follow that schedule, but of course then your share of voice during that time period is going to be so much smaller when so many



other brands are doing it at exactly that time. It's really interesting that you're thinking about these things and you're saying maybe let's delay a little bit, there's no reason why we have to do it right now.

Elena Suarez:

Right, and finding those ownable moments. I think there are just so many ownable conversations that we don't tap into. If we find an ownable conversation during a maybe not so popular time of the month, we'll probably going to win because we're now executing that in a bigger way and we're not up against all of this noise constantly. Sometimes it's even like we know sunscreen is super important, one of the most important things, but do we need to talk about it in June? Why can't we talk about it in April or in May when you should be wearing it year round so let's also talk about it year round.

So owning that too, maybe we're the brand that we talk about sunscreen every single month and that is going to also resonate with the consumer because we're not just thinking it's a seasonal thing, it's a yearly thing.

Claudia Leitch:

Great. To wrap up here, can you share what you think the next biggest changes or challenges will emerge in the influencer marketing industry that folks should know about?

Elena Suarez:

I think it's going to be influencer inflation, honestly. I think that while it's super important to pay influencers for their content creation and the enormous work that goes behind their videos, I think the rates have been very high. While there are brands that can pay that, we see the amazing campaigns and the lavish trips, that's great, but I don't think that everyone can sustain that even from a ROI perspective. I think brands are really going to start looking into the nanos and the micros that they are more affordable, they still have great engagement rates, and they still give you really great exposure and you can go far and wide with them. Maybe it is going to look to micro, nanos, mid-tiers, a lot more of those that you can afford within your campaigns.

I also think that affiliate marketing is going to be a big thing. I think it's going to continue to grow because it is very performance-based. It's the in-between between organic and paid. Influencers do have to work hard to see some of that return, but you do have the e-commerce influencers that are killing it in that space. I think that's going to be really enticing to more influencers to join. Brands are going to start partnering with them in wider ways. I think a big part of it is we're constantly always challenged with our budgets and our spend, so how do we make sure that we're not spending all of our budgets in one influencer, but still getting really amazing results using various ones.



Claudia Leitch:

Great. That wraps us up here, but I think that everything you just said is likely. We see that reach is so much less of an inhibiting factor these days with algorithms pushing micros' content all the time. I certainly learned a lot here, so thank you so much.

Thanks for listening to this episode of The Fast Traack. If you're interested in connecting with Elena, you can find her LinkedIn or Instagram profile linked in the show notes. If you have someone in mind who would be perfect to come onto the show, email us at ft@traackr.com, that's ft@ T-R-A-A-C-K-R.com. We're always searching for more rock stars in the influencer marketing industry. If you enjoyed this episode, brighten someone's day by sharing it with a friend. Thanks again and see you next time.

