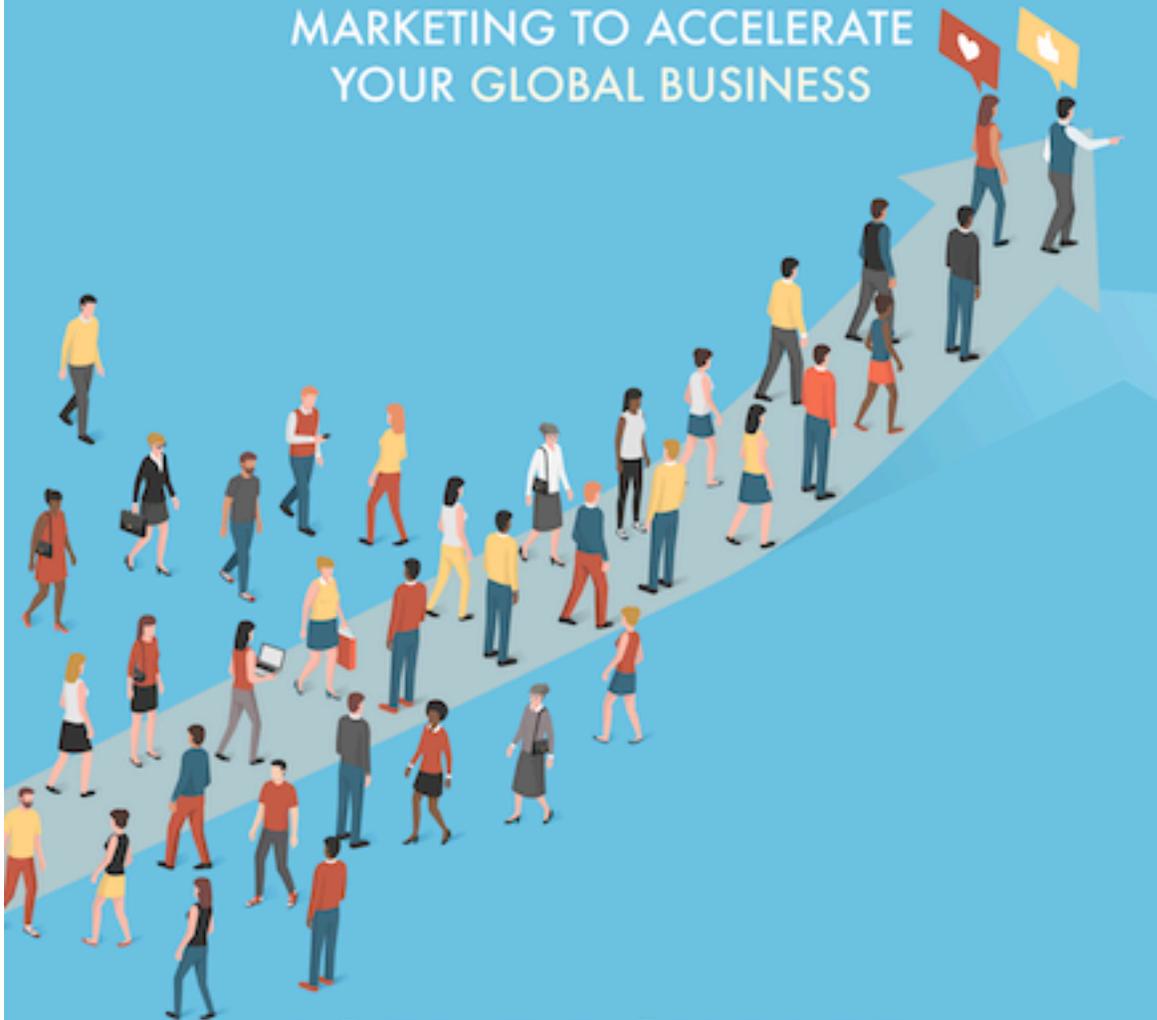# DIGITAL INFLUENCE

UNLEASH THE POWER OF INFLUENCER MARKETING TO ACCELERATE YOUR GLOBAL BUSINESS

JOEL BACKALER

Book Overview

This book brings order to the chaotic and rapidly evolving world of influencer marketing by providing readers with much needed context, frameworks, and best practices. Written for busy marketing professionals working in both domestic and international markets, it addresses these topics in a highly actionable and engaging manner.

Digital Influence covers everything from how to identify the right influencers and determine "level of influence" to collaborating with influencers and measuring ROI. It turns out, it's not all about paying online celebrities outrageous sums to post sponsored content. Backaler also provides much-needed context for why influencer marketing is flourishing today, and perspective into what a more technologically-enabled, globally-connected future will look like.

Ultimately, people want to learn from trusted peers, not faceless companies. Better than any corporate marketing function, influencers understand how to make best use of social media platforms and tailor content for their respective cultures to engage consumers in their home markets. Business leaders should arm themselves with Backaler's book to ensure they're not left behind.

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Praise for *Digital Influence*

"The ultimate professional's guide for understanding the business of influence. Joel Backaler offers an extremely actionable, fast-paced, and enjoyable read."
 - Aliza Licht, fashion marketing executive & the author of LEAVE YOUR MARK

"To compete for consumers today, brands must create disruptive and shareable experiences for the audiences that matter to them. In Digital Influence, Backaler delivers an insightful guide on how you can align with the right influencers to execute meaningful, differentiated experiences that resonate."
-David Roman, Chief Marketing Officer - LENOVO

"Influencers are relevant for businesses in their home country as well as in the international markets where they operate. Backaler's book highlights the global implications of this trend, and what brands need to be aware of."
-Bruna Scognamiglio, Vice-President Global Influencer Marketing - GUCCI BEAUTY

"The how-to book on influencer marketing the world has been waiting for!"
-Mark Schaefer, author of "Return On Influence" and "KNOWN"

"Digital Influence is highly actionable and well-researched – grounded in the first-hand experiences of brand executives, agencies and influencers from around the globe. Backaler's book is a must-read to understand how we got here, and more importantly where we're headed."
-Nick Friese, Chief Executive Officer - DIGIDAY

"Advocates/B2B influencers increase the number and reach of voices talking about you. Beyond quantity, advocate content and interactions are more valuable because buyers see them as authentic validation, not paid promotion. This is an incredibly important topic for executives to understand."
-Laura Ramos, Vice President and Principal Analyst, B2B Marketing - FORRESTER RESEARCH

"Influencers can help brands gain trust and authenticity with increasingly skeptical and hard-to-reach customers. Joel Backaler provides in-depth guidance in Digital Influence on how to achieve real results with influencer marketing globally. He gives specific how-to tactical advice with rich examples and detailed case histories, all based on his strong grasp of global marketing strategy."
-Charles Skuba, Professor of International Marketing - GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

SAMPLE - Book Foreword
By, Peter Shankman

Go Google a YouTube video called "Supa Hot Fire Rap Battle." It's a parody of the classic "drop the mic" rap battles of the 80s, featuring the star, our hero, who starts off every battle by announcing "I'm not a rapper," and then launches into, you guessed it, super hot fire raps, destroying his competition again and again. It's pretty funny.

I bring that up because meet anyone who considers themselves an influencer of any capacity, and the first thing they'll say to you is that they're not an influencer.

They'll tell you how much they hate that term. They'll explain that the term "influencer" is only used by people like Kim Kardashian, and OMFG, they're totally not like that.

Then they'll start talking about their audience, and you'll hear lots of numbers, some very high, some very low, all with an explanation for why that specific number is the best number.

Then they'll throw out some fun terms, like "activation," or "conversations" – they'll definitely include "engagement" – and they'd hate themselves if they didn't use the phrase "the number of (pick one: retweets/likes) my client got was higher than anything they've ever had before" at least three times.

Then, on the flip side one day, you might find yourself at an industry conference of some sort, listening to someone who has an impressive title at a mid-size company give a talk about how his company (under his direction, always under his direction,) successfully ran multiple influencer campaigns that only cost [the total budget of your next six years' worth of marketing spend]. Then the speaker will show a PowerPoint slide that includes some media coverage of said influencer campaign, and will smile, and smile, and smile, and somewhere else in the world, every time he smiles, a really cute animal is slaughtered.

Here's the thing, though, dramatic hyperbole aside: The one thing you'll almost never hear when it comes to influence and influencer marketing, whether from the influencer or the CMO talking about influence, is this – "how much money we made/product we sold/customers we acquired by doing what we did." That always seems to be a forgotten metric when it comes to any type of influence. And honestly? That's pretty sad.

You're about to dive into Joel's book for several reasons, but in the end, only two really matter: You want to find out what influencer marketing actually is, you want to see how you can use it for your business or company, and more importantly, you want to understand how it works, to learn how to stack the odds so that your investment in the world of social influence will generate a substantial return, time after time.

As I said, those are the only reasons that should matter.

Influencer marketing isn't new in the slightest, you know. Go back to high school. Remember the one popular kid who could come in wearing the most ridiculous outfit in the world (I'm thinking

"Hypercolor" shirts), but because that kid was the cool kid, the next day, 30 people would show up to homeroom attempting to perfectly copy that look? That's influence.

Fast forward to your first car. Whether you know it or not, you were influenced to purchase it a minimum of 50 times, at least.

The only thing "new" about influence is the speed at which it now permeates everything we do, thanks to the fluidity of the social sphere in which we all live, work, and play.

Because of that new level of speed, influencer marketing has never been more important than it is right now, and it's only going to become more of a staple of every marketing plan.

But whether you use the knowledge in the following pages to your advantage, or it simply becomes another unused arrow in corporate marketing quiver that's unable to keep up with the times, will be determined by how you utilize your influencers, your audience, your products, and your brand as a whole, and how you keep them working in a symbiotic, harmonious orbit, that focuses on an overall goal of higher revenue, growth, and sales, while making sure to never overstep that magic, yet often hard to see line known as "ugh, they're trying too hard."

Joel Backaler is in the unique position to cast a shining light on the world of influencer marketing, and illuminate for you what's working now, what will work in the future, and what will never work. Joel is an international marketing strategist, leading global marketing at Frontier Strategy Group, and is an award-winning blogger and Forbes columnist. He has lectured on this stuff around the world, and now he's ready to share it all with you. He's done this all in a down-to-earth, easy to understand style that will benefit any CMO or marketing decision maker at a company of any size.

And by the way: Why should you trust what I'm telling you? Well, I've started and sold three internet companies in the past 15 years, I'm a corporate consultant to mega-brands around the world, including global hotel chains, airlines, restaurant conglomerates, and I'm on the major news networks talking about this stuff at least once a week.

But the most important reason you should believe what I'm saying goes back to what I said in the beginning of this foreword: I understand that having an audience is a privilege, and not a right, and I've spent the past 20 years of my professional career growing, nurturing, and caring for my audience by being real, honest, and down to earth. But hey, don't take my word for it. Just ask them.

Enjoy the book. You're going to learn a ton.

SAMPLE - Book Introduction

Starting in 2011, with aggressive overseas acquisitions and offices opening around the world, Airbnb kicked off its international expansion. Fast-forward to 2018, and the company now operates in 15 countries and has enlisted more than 4 million people to host strangers in their homes.

So many American companies have previously failed to translate their success overseas. There's a variety of reason why brands fail to expand successfully, whether its failure to compete with local companies, an inability to tailor products for a new audience, or simply not doing the necessary upfront market research.

How did Airbnb do it? The right balance of global strategy and local implementation. Critical to success was the company's use of local influencers (individuals who can influence the actions/decisions of a loyal group of local online followers with regard to their particular area of expertise), to drive brand awareness through a series of cleverly designed campaigns. Some of the most memorable include:

>**"Local Lens Series" Paris**
>In early 2015, Airbnb launched an influencer content series featuring various thought leaders, creatives and experts in key cities sharing their views on must-see/must-try local experiences. For example, in Paris, Airbnb worked with local bilingual food and travel writer Clotilde Dusoulier to author a "Local Lens" blog post on "10 Perfect Food Experiences in Paris," offering recommendations for "where to splurge on dreamy pastries" and "Paris' best baguette."
>
>**"Night At" South Korea**
>In late 2015, as part of its "Night at" campaign and to support its expansion plans into South Korea, Airbnb worked with K-Pop sensation G-Dragon, holding a contest where lucky winners could spend two nights in his recording studio in the heart of Seoul. This led to a flurry of social media and traditional media attention, as well as a spike in Korean Airbnb user registrations.
>
>**"Don't Go There, Live There" London**
>In 2016, Airbnb's London team designed an exclusive experience townhouse in London, where visitors could come and experience local food and music. The purpose was to show travelers "the real London" not found in guidebooks. It enlisted 25 local influencers to amplify the event on social media – while 1,400 guests visited the townhouse over four days, several millions learned about it online as a result of the influencer engagement.

These local influencers – both celebrities and online personalities – opened the door for Airbnb in market after market across the globe. Why should Airbnb directly tell customers how great their service is? Better to leave it to local influencers who can speak with authenticity and authority.

Brian Chesky, co-founder and CEO of Airbnb explains, "By early 2011, we were primarily an American company. But it became very clear that international is really important. We're a travel company. Us not being international is like your phone not having email... So it became very clear that we had to be international – we had to be a GLOBAL travel network."

For Airbnb, local influencers made a foreign brand a local one. That's the difference.

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My day job is as an international marketing strategist at Frontier Strategy Group, where I help senior executives from many of the world's largest brands. Part of my job is to pay attention to major global trends, and every now and then I am captivated by something I am seeing in the marketplace and decide to write a book like this one. I dive deep, obsess over a million details, and attempt to synthesize what I have learned into actionable, executive-level findings.

If I have done my job, I will keep readers like you a step (or two) ahead of the next big thing. That was the point of my last book, *China Goes West*, which tells the story of Chinese brands expanding beyond China's borders to take on Western multinationals.

When I set out to write *Digital Influence*, I intended to tell a story that was primarily an international one, like the experience of Airbnb that begins this introduction. I thought the story would be about brands that found international growth by using local influencers to jumpstart their expansion.

When I started research, however, I discovered the international side of influencer marketing is only a small part of a much bigger story that demanded to be told. And when I started interviewing "influencer marketing insiders" like marketing executives, agencies, and influencers, things started to get messy...

Influencer marketing is young and unsettled. I found I needed to address many fundamental questions before I could consider introducing the international story.

What types of questions you may ask?

Take the most basic term, "influencer." It is highly disputed within the industry – in Peter's foreword, for example, he reveals that not even influencers like to actually be given that name. Instead, alternative terms get thrown around like "content creator," "talent," "KOL," "YouTuber," "blogger"... if you can read Chinese, there is even "网红".

Beyond a lack of standard terminology, there is also a lack of industry best practices across each phase of working with influencers:

- How do you identify the right influencers for your brand?
- What does it take to get an influencer to respond positively to your outreach?
- Which forms of brand-influencer collaborations are most effective?
- How do you measure ROI, and also make sure you can trust the data you're using for measurement?

One of the major points I make in the book is influencer marketing is a global phenomenon that is developing rapidly, and companies can tap into local influencers to advance their international strategy. But that is far from the only aspect of what you are about to learn.

In fact, you are about to get an in-depth look into a topic that is generally only written about at a surface level, with clickbait headlines about "How Many Thousands of Dollars Brand X Paid Influencer Y for a Post" or "The Top 10 Steps to Getting Instagrammers to Promote Your Brand."

I am going to take you from the basics, to the practice, to the global relevance. And ultimately, I will give you a peak at where we are headed.

You are not just learning from me. You will hear from more than 100 individuals I interviewed during the writing of this book, ranging from Fortune 500 executives to high-growth startup founders to agency leads to influencer software vendors to influencers from around the world.

There is a lot packed in here. I hope you find the insights valuable – both today when you think about how these case studies, frameworks, and methods can be applied to your business, and later on, when you use it as an ongoing resource to build (or re-build) your company's approach to influencer marketing.

A few final words before we begin our journey together:

Definitions for terms like "influencer" and "influencer marketing" vary from person to person – to make sure we are all on the same page, this book is intentionally written to explain concepts and define key terms early on that continue to be used in that manner throughout the book.

This book covers a wide-range of industries from fashion to enterprise software to insurance – keep an open mind about how examples from one industry could be applied to your business.

Influencers will only become more important to the way we engage our target audiences in the years to come. The days of "interruption marketing" through disruptive ads are ending – people want to learn from trusted peers, not faceless companies. Now is the time to bring some much-needed consistency and standardization to the practice. I aim to open your eyes to the broader global implications of how influencers can contribute to global growth, and share how your organization can unleash the potential of influencer marketing to accelerate your business.

Let's begin.

About the Author

Joel Backaler is passionate about identifying and interpreting how emerging global business and marketing trends will impact the lives of executives, investors and general audiences. By helping these individuals better understand the changing world around them, Backaler hopes to prepare them to seize new global opportunities and avoid getting caught off guard as potential risks emerge from other parts of the world.

An exploratory trip to China in July 2001 that coincided with Beijing's successful 2008 summer Olympics bid, sparked a passion for global business that has stayed with Joel throughout his career. After studying Economics and East Asian Studies at Connecticut College, he received a prestigious Fulbright Fellowship to travel and conduct research in Taiwan. He went on to spend several years living, studying and working in Asia - including Taipei, Beijing, Shanghai and Singapore.

When Joel returned to the US in 2011, he joined Frontier Strategy Group's management team in Washington, DC to build its global marketing function from the ground up. As a global marketing strategist, he started to look at cross-border trends from Asia which culminated in the release of his first book with Palgrave Macmillan titled China Goes West which examines the rise of Chinese brands on the international stage and won an Axiom business book award.

In September 2018, Backaler will release his second global marketing book, also published with Palgrave Macmillan called Digital Influence. Digital Influence explores how businesses and other organizations can incorporate influencer marketing into their global strategy by tapping into the voices of local key opinion leader and trendsetters to bring their products and services to market in an authentic, locally relevant manner.

His thought leadership has been featured in Forbes, BBC, and The Financial Times. He has worked with many of the world's top global brands, including: The Coca-Cola Company, Johnson & Johnson, Philips, Cisco, HP, and Danone. He has also advised companies from emerging markets on their globalization efforts.

Joel currently lives in Los Angeles with his wife Qian and son Henry.