



AND THE ART OF LEGAL NETWORKING

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Two Tips for Identifying Influencers in Your Niche

BY LINDSAY GRIFFITHS ON JULY 12, 2016



If you produce content – for example, you write a blog, author articles, post tweets, create videos, write LinkedIn posts, etc. – you’ve probably heard or read at some point that it’s a good idea to connect with “influencers” in your industry to extend the reach of your content. “Influencers” are those who are perceived as leaders within your industry, and as such, have the power to affect what others are reading, watching, and talking about. In talking about what’s called “[influencer marketing](#),” Andrea Lehr of the Content Marketing Institute tells us that

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Influencers work hard to cultivate relationships and maintain their position as a leader within their niche. Partnering with influencers in your industry helps get your message in front of the right audience and accelerates conversions.”

Sounds great, right?

But how do you figure out who those influencers are?

In her article, Lehr talks about two pieces of advice, and a note of caution, to help you to identify the influencers in your area of expertise. She and her team focused on marketing when they undertook this exercise, but it will work for your area of expertise as well – note that where you focus will be impacted by what your content marketing goals are. So, for example, if your goal is to reach more clients and potential clients, then you’ll want to focus on the client profile when looking for influencers – if you’re a corporate lawyer who helps entrepreneurs, your influencers will be found among the entrepreneur community, not other corporate lawyers. But if your goal is to become a respected thought leader among corporate lawyers who help entrepreneurs, then your influencers will be found among other corporate lawyers. The more specific your goals are, the easier it will be to define your potential influencer pool.

Tip One: Find and follow as many experts as possible

It’s easier than ever these days to get assistance with identifying who the experts in your field are (throughout the remainder of this post, we’ll use the generic “your field” to reference the area that you’ll be seeking influencers in). As Lehr says:

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A ton of tools can help you identify the best individuals to target regardless of vertical or industry. Three of my favorites are BuzzSumo, Followerwonk, and individual social networks.”

We’ve talked about BuzzSumo here before, and using my own individual social networks is a favorite tactic of mine, but Followerwonk is entirely new to me. Let’s look at each of Lehr’s suggested tools and tips for using each to find experts.

BuzzSumo

Lehr sums this up perfectly:



With a tab devoted exclusively to ‘influencers,’ searchers can use keywords and discover the Twitter handles of accounts sharing similar keyword-related content. Filters allow users to sort influencers by reach, authority, influence, and engagement. An added bonus? When you’re done researching, you can easily export all the results for use in other platforms.”

If you’re new to this, all of that may sound like a bunch of mumbo jumbo, so let’s break it down a little bit. Before you even head over to BuzzSumo to test this out, you’ll need to identify the relevant keywords that are important to you. This is again going to depend on what’s important to you, based on your goals and your area of expertise. Make a list of the top 5-8 words or phrases that are most common when talking about your area of practice, either as they relate to the practice or the business, depending on your goals.

Those words/phrases are your “keywords.” Those will be the things that help you to identify who else is talking about the same things as you are, or the same things that you want to be talking about. If you’re already blogging a lot, it would be the same types of things you see coming up most often as your post tags. If you’re a heavy Twitter user, it’s likely the things you hashtag.

Once you’ve used those keywords in something like BuzzSumo to give you your list of influencers, Lehr tells us that you’re able to sort through them by a few key things: reach, authority, influence, and engagement.

- **Reach:** This measures how many people that an influencer comes into contact with, and depending on how it’s measured, can either mean directly (how many followers they have on a given social networking site) or indirectly (how many people will see their tweets based on both their followers, and the total retweets that their followers will give them). It’s a general measure of how many eyeballs they get on any one piece of content that they share.
- **Authority:** This is a measure of how someone is ranked by search engines, with respect to Moz.com, both in terms of their domain and their URL.
- **Influence:** This is a measure of how much someone’s audience interacts with their content – when they tweet or share something, is it being retweeted, shared, commented on, etc.?
- **Engagement:** This is a measure of how much an influencer interacts with those that follow and connect with them – do they retweet their posts? Do they respond to their messages?

Depending on the value that you would give to each of these metrics, you would then identify who the influencers from this group are that you might like to target.

Followerwonk

Followerwonk is from Moz (who we mentioned in the previous section is responsible for measuring search

engine authority). The tool is similar to that for BuzzSumo, offering a tab that allows you to look just for influencers. Where they differ seems to be a bit more of an in-depth look at influencer bios, the ability to compare influencers, and look at visualizations for keywords, which may help you to pick out the influencers you really want to align yourself with.

Individual Social Networks

This is probably my personal favorite tactic, mostly because it's what I use. Lehr says:

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Using social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn is a great way to find influencers through simple keyword searches while simultaneously letting you vet a potential influencer based on his or her connections and level of engagement. Keep in mind you'll also want to look at the type of conversations they're having, specifically if and how they talk about your industry and outreach.”

This one takes a little bit of extra time, because rather than getting a bunch of data to look at and identify influencers by number, you're getting a feel for them instead. But that's probably why I like it the best, and advocate for it the most. Influencer marketing requires you to ask someone to share your work with their followers. Because of that, it should be someone you both like and respect, and someone who will like and respect you – there will be some middle steps in there, but we'll get to those shortly. To find out whether you really want to align yourself with someone as an influencer, whether you choose them through a tool like BuzzSumo or Followerwonk, or find them through searches done on your own social media platforms, you'll want to start the process by following their social media profiles to get a feel for who they are, the types of content they share, the level of engagement they have, and the conversations they participate in.

And as Lehr says

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Regardless of what tool you use, though, the key is to find individuals who have an established voice and social presence. By following them, you can ensure that you're connected to stay on top of the latest trends to help your brand maximize every influencer relationship.”

I'd add to that that more than just an established voice and social presence, you also want someone who will match well with your voice and social presence.

Tip Two: Reciprocity is Essential

Influencer marketing will not work if you're in it for yourself. It's like joining a referral network for the purpose of getting referrals, instead of being able to better serve your clients – you will never be satisfied with the results.

Lehr tells us



The concept of reciprocity is simple: If someone does something for you, you naturally want to do something for them, and our study indicates that marketing influencers understand that value based on the sheer volume of content they're sharing directly from their colleagues.

In terms of your own strategy, this is a good time to remind you not to get so bogged down by traffic, leads, or any other metrics that you forget what really matters: the relationships. A blog post can become outdated and a tweet can be forgotten, but what will last are the genuine connections you create with influencers. Ensure high levels of reciprocity by understanding how you can contribute so that the relationship is mutually beneficial. In other words, ask yourself how you can bring value to the relationship and not just your brand. Some of my favorite ways to return the favor to influencers include the following:

- Exchange an email unrelated to any content you're promoting. For example, if you saw that their blog was nominated for an award, send a brief congratulations email.
- Thank the influencer in a tweet for any help they offered you that week.
- Offer to collaborate on projects so that they have more ownership of the content you want them to promote."

There's a lot of marketing-y type words in here, so let's just cut to the chase – the important part of what Lehr tells us here is that **it's about relationships** (and isn't it always?). Once you've identified the influencers that you want to follow in the first step, you're going to follow them, and then you're going to engage with them.

This engagement has to be genuine, and avoid going overboard – I've seen some people go nuts with thank yous and responding to every single tweet or post someone has, and that can be just as damaging as not responding at all. Strike a balance in cultivating the relationship instead – it all sounds very calculating when we lay it out like this, but really, it's about being natural with the progression of the online relationship;

you're just prioritizing the influencers because they're part of your marketing plan.

That's an additional reason that it's important that the influencers are people you align well with personally – if you can get along with them online, and develop relationships where you know, like and trust each other, these relationships are much more natural than some forced relationship where one of you has an ulterior agenda. As Lehr says

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Although every influencer is different, when developing these relationships, remember to be as authentic and personable as possible. Respect and genuine interest are what will make these valuable partnerships last.”

And finally, her word of caution about reach versus influence:

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Brands frequently fall into a trap of believing that the number of followers is the most important metric to consider when identifying influencers.”

The number of followers a person has actually has very little to do with their true influence. You can have thousands or millions of followers, but if no one is reading or engaging with the content, then it doesn't really mean much. Similarly, if all of those followers aren't real people, or they aren't the RIGHT people, then it doesn't matter if your content is being retweeted to a million followers. It's better to be shared by someone among the right ten people than it is to be shared among the wrong thousand.

Lehr offers some tips for how you can tell whether someone is actually influential, versus just popular:

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How can you measure influence? The following three-step process hasn't failed me yet when vetting a potential target:

- **Relevance:** Figure out whether the content already shared by the influencer connects with your brand. If the connection is a stretch, move elsewhere.
- **Engagement** – Take a look at some of the influencer's top posts (i.e., those which earned high

social shares) to get an idea of their overall engagement. The goal is to determine whether the influencer interacts with the audience (if yes, your chance of conversions from this influencer improves).

- **Quality - Get a feel for how often they post and what kind of content they're promoting. Are they spammy and posting just to post? A good indicator of quality is how an influencer's site ranks in search. A high ranking for particular keywords indicates that their blog has been deemed influential in that category by Google.**

Remember that each step is bringing you closer to an influencer's level of authority."

This is where spending some time engaging yourself with each of your potential influencers comes in handy. Let's say you've identified 5-8 potential influencers that you may want to approach at some point to collaborate on some content, or share your content directly with their audiences. First, you want to play the observation game to see if they're a good fit. You're already working on Tip Two, which is to share their content and engage with them, and that's going to help you with this last three step process too, because you're more invested in what they're putting out as well.

Because you're following them more closely, you'll see what content they're sharing, and whether it's similar to what you're sharing, or the type of things you want your audience to be thinking about. If you see their content, and it's on point, smart, thoughtful, and exactly the same type of thing that you're confident in sharing with your own audience and followers, then they're likely relevant to you.

Engagement is important too, as we've talked about. While there can be some value in using social media as a broadcast tool, that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about individuals who are the thought leaders for their industry. So they need to stay on the cutting edge of the trends and conversations happening around them – and not just in a "I'm up here, you're down there" sort of way, but in a "I'm willing to talk and discuss things with you" sort of way. So do they share others' work, and is that content also relevant to the topics that matter to you and to your audience? Do they talk to others and reply to the comments that people make on their posts, or is it only a one-way conversation?

And the final metric, quality. I think that's an easy one for all of you to judge – you don't have to go nuts looking for how someone's site ranks in search, but look at what they're posting, and how often. Is their content thoughtful? Do they post daily, but it's just for the sake of posting? Are they legitimately up to date on the latest trends and hot topics in the industry? Is their content more spammy than valuable? You can tell the difference between what's substantive, and what's flash.

Using all of the above, identify who the influencers are in your industry, and get to know them better. Create relationships with them, and start working together to share content and reach the goals that you've set forth!

What challenges have you found in influencer marketing? What else has worked for you in finding & engaging with influencers in your field?

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