A BRAND'S GUIDE TO

INFLUENCER MARKETING WITH ATHLETES



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Section 1

Defining Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a type of advertisement that focuses on one powerful individual in a certain market that usually has a large (and loyal) social media following. In fact, 92% of people trust recommendations from individuals (even if they don't know them) over brands (Click to Tweet). Influencers are a huge part of why that happens.

Brands have been flocking towards influencer marketing because it is cheaper, faster, and more effective.

Think about it, you can pay an advertising company X amount of dollars with little to no guaranteed results. Or you can pay one influencer (with over 100,000 followers on Instagram) far less money and have guaranteed results. You are guaranteed that person will garner you engagement in an oversaturated ad-world.

But we get it, you're still not convinced. In the next section, we cover some important reasons that might change your mind.



Section 2

9 Reasons To Use Athlete Influencer Marketing

Athletes were among the original influencers and now continue to have the broadest reach on social media. As success in their industry grows, so does their fan base, and as a result, their influence.

Their credibility extends beyond just their social media following as fans of athletes want to wear the same apparel as them, invest in the same brands as them, use the same services as them, do the same workouts as them, donate to the same causes as them, and beyond. Here are a few concrete reasons as to why your company should use influencer marketing.

Reason #1: Consumers do not want ads.

We already know that commercials and television ads are losing their effectiveness in driving purchase decisions. And now, digital ads are even being ignored by viewers. In fact, 47% of online consumers use ad blockers (Click to Tweet).

In other words, however much money you as a brand spend on advertising ... it's only seen by about half of its potential viewership. You're essentially wasting half your spend on digital advertising on viewers that will never even see your content.

Reason #2: ROE (Return on Exposure)

As a brand, you are guaranteed an ROE or Return on Exposure. To its core, social media collects impressions. People go on social media, follow people with similar interests as them, and take in all the information possible on that person. It's already been proven that influencer content generates 11x greater ROI than traditional advertising does (Click to Tweet).

INFLUENCER CONTENT GENERATES

11x GREATER ROI THAN TRADITIONAL ADVERTISING

Reason #3: Social Media Buying Power

Social media continues to be a destination where influencers can well, influence, purchase. Here's a number of stats on how people respond on the various channels:

- Nearly **40% of Twitter users** say they've made a purchase as a direct result of a tweet from an influencer.
- **60% of Instagram users** say they have learned about a product or service on Instagram.
- **19% of purchasing decisions** are influenced by posts on Facebook.

Pair these statistics with the wide and engaged reach of athlete influencers, and you're going to see some incredible results.

Reason #4: Athletes as Influencers

Yes, athletes as influencers is the entire point but we think it's important to stress. When many people think about influencer marketing, they automatically think of celebrities.

What we overlook is athletes, who make up a large percentage of influencers with their reach on social media and traditional media.

While sports sponsorship has been covered by TV, news, and radio ... now athletes have the ability to show more of their personal side and beliefs through social media accounts.

What's even better is that athletes have loyal followers who want to invest in the same habits, products, and services as them. More on that in the next reason.

Reason #5: Emotional Connection

Perhaps the biggest thing that sets athletes apart from influencers is the emotional connection people have to them. Whether it's the athlete themselves or the city they represent, people have deep emotional connections to sports, their athletes, and teams.

This is in direct contrast to traditional influencers, who live painfully curated lives in order to sell products on social media. They are aspirational, sure, but they aren't relatable. **Athletes are professionals in their craft, yet they generally lead lives that fans can relate to**. At the end of the day, athletes represent powerful things - hometown pride, hard work, dreams coming true. These are all things that people associate with athletes, and the brands who sponsor them.

Reason #6: Regional Marketing

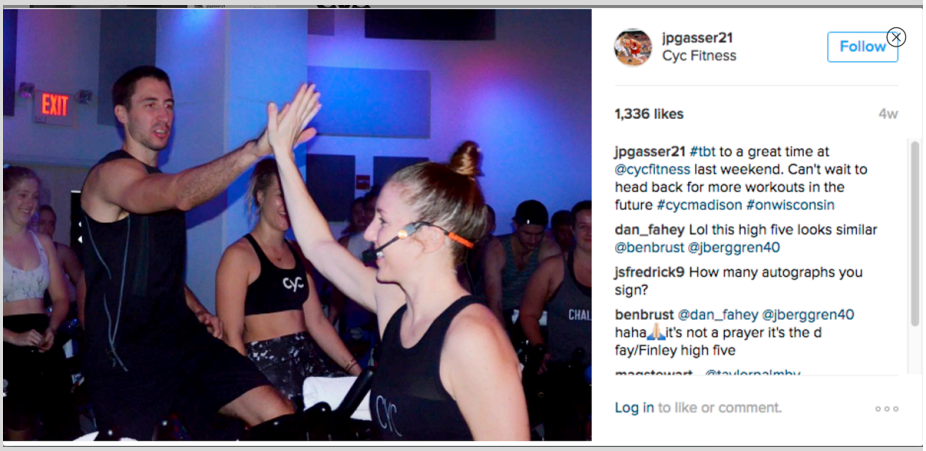
If you're not in New York or LA, it can be hard - if not impossible - to find influencers that make sense for your brand. However, even fans from small cities follow and identify with their state's sports teams and athletes.

That's why utilizing athletes is especially helpful for brands and events looking to make connections regionally. On average, **40% of our athletes' followings are fans from the cities they play in**. This alone makes athletes a much better fit than influencers for brands serving regional messaging.

Regional Athlete Example

When Cyc Fitness wanted to help generate awareness around their new location opening in Madison, Wisconsin … they were far more interested in an influencer who was widely-known in the college town. They offered free classes to athletes, and ended up working with Wisconsin basketball legend Josh Gasser.

Josh attended a class for free in exchange for sharing that'd he'd be attending that class on social media. This resulted in a sold out class and an increase in membership for that location.



Reason #7: Trustworthy Motivations

Since athletes have paychecks coming in from their teams, they don't really need to do any further promotions. Fans know this. So when they see an athlete backing a product or service, it has more meaning than an influencer doing so.

Anyone who watches *The Bachelor* knows that as soon as the season ends, the contestants will start peddling any wares that land them a nice check. This makes their messaging less powerful since the motivations behind their promotions are purely monetary. In turn, this makes **an athletes' message even more powerful since fans know they don't need this money**, so their endorsement is more genuine.

Reason #8: Wider Reach

Athletes have a much larger reach than bloggers and influencers. While influencers usually have one main demographic and focus (women who travel, for example), athletes typically have followings that reaches across demographic lines.

Even a rookie athlete has collegiate - and city - centric followings that cross stereotypical demographic borders. This is far more spanning than an influencer who only has one focus. Fans of athletes are sports fans - but they're also travelers, healthy eaters, moviegoers, college kids ... you get the point.

Reason #9: Testimonial Traction

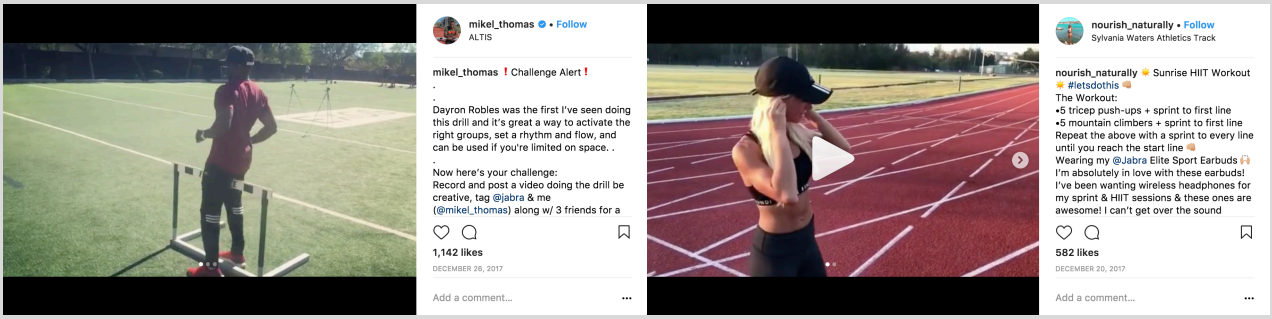
Who would you trust more when making a workout-related decision: Kerri W., an Instagram influencer, or Kerri W., a three-time Olympic gold medalist?

No offence to the influencer Kerri, but our money's on the Olympic gold medalist Kerri. The point is, athletes and their associations carry a lot of brand equity that's transferred to your brand! These associations make a lasting impression and its benefits last way longer than just a social post.

Influencers' testimonials, on the other hand, have a comparably low impact. Since their feeds are cluttered with testimonials, brands end up getting lost in the crowd. And, to the original point, Kerri W. the Instagram influencer is only relevant on the channels where she has a following. Whereas athletes are personalities that live on- and offline.

Athlete Testimonial Example

Jabra wanted to prove that their wireless headphones were trustworthy for any athlete to use while they train, no matter what sport you play. Despite only offering a free pair of headphones, Jabra maximized their exposure by closing deals with over 90 professional athletes across more than 40 different sports.



Section 3

How to Launch Your Athlete Influencer Marketing Campaign

At this point, the value of working with athletes is clear – let's also make sure that the first campaign you run is successful and valuable for your brand.

Step 1: Know where your target audience lives online.

While you may know your target audience offline, be sure you've taken the steps to understand where this audience lives online. Identifying the right audience will allow you to effectively complete step one, matching who your audience is with the audience of an influencer. Here are some quick ways to determine who your target audience is for your influencer strategy:

- **Google Analytics**: Under the Audience tab, you'll find stats on your current website traffic including demographics, interests, and geography.
- **Facebook Business Page Insights**: If your business has a Facebook business page, be sure to take advantage of the Insights tab to be able to get quick insight on who your current audience is.

If you plan on doing a Facebook campaign with an influencer, this is a great way to compare your Facebook audience to an influencer's audience and see if there's valuable overlap. If you plan on running any social media influencer campaign, then looking at analytics tools from Instagram, Twitter, and the like can all be helpful. This extra step will help ensure you're getting the best ROI to reach your goals.

Step 2: Actually choose your athlete influencers.

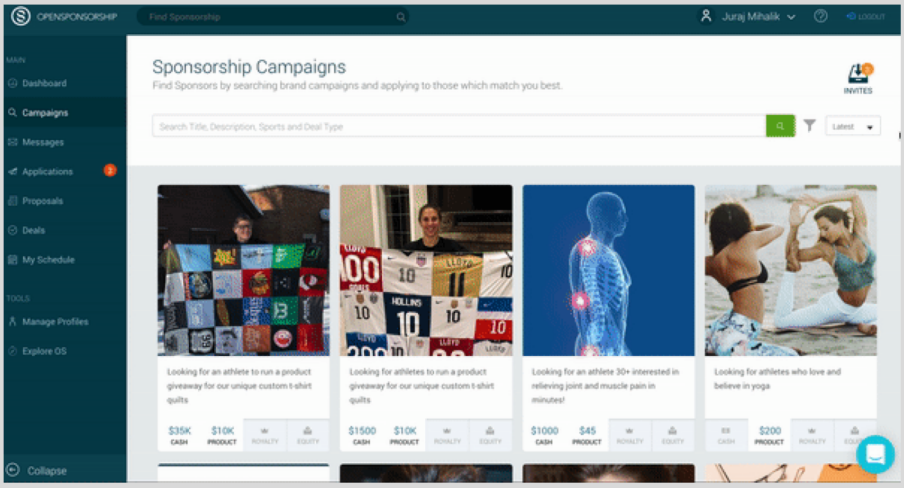
It sounds simple, yet for some reason it isn't. Many other influencer marketing companies exist where you pay money, hand over some copy, and let your previous product go wherever the wind takes it.

Unfortunately, this doesn't typically yield valuable outcomes. Just like a business, every influencer has his/her own audience. Influencers attract an audience due to some overlapping interests with their audience - whether those interests are fitness, diet, beauty, etc.

To run an influencer marketing campaign, you want to be able to vet a number of influencers to understand which one's audience matches up with your target demographic to yield the best results. You also want to be able to work directly with the influencers, rather than letting a third-party handle that communication.

Choose your athletes with OpenSponsorship.

With over 4,000+ athletes in our database, we bring influencers to you. All it takes is posting a campaign to our portal, and athletes will find and apply for the campaigns, giving you the ability to quickly vet who is right for your brand. [Click to try today.]



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Step 3: Set clear, achievable goals before each influencer marketing campaign.

You'd be surprised at how many brands are willing to just give companies their money without setting any achievable goals. (*Or maybe, savvy marketer, you aren't that surprised. Let's all take a collective calming breath to try and forget the last time your boss demanded sales numbers from a campaign you told them was about awareness. Okay. Let's continue*.)

We realize that many companies don't have budget that can be wasted, so before you launch a campaign, set some key goals with your team. This way, there are really trackable data points that your team can look back on to ensure that both you and your influencers are aligned on what's considered a successful campaign.

Generally, these goals fall into one of the following buckets:

- **Brand Awareness**: This goal is typically around how many impressions you can drive to increase awareness of your brand.
- **Traffic**: This goal is tied to an influencer driving a certain volume of traffic back to a particular site or landing page.
- **Sales**: Whether in leads or actual purchases, if you choose this goal you want to ensure your campaign is tied to some sort of cost-per-click.
- **Audience Growth**: This is typically tied to a campaign where you're looking to increase your social media following by having influencers recommend they follow your account.

Step 4: Set clear, achievable goals before each influencer marketing campaign.

This may sound obvious, but oftentimes brands look at influencers for their audience without regard for what would benefit that influencer. Think about it this way: When hiring a sales rep, you want to ensure that rep is excited about your product because at the end of the day, they are the ones selling it. By hiring an influencer, you're hiring someone to sell your brand, so you want them to be just as excited by the opportunity as you.

For some influencers, just receiving free product is enough, while others may want a cash guarantee for their work. The better your offer is tailored towards each influencer, the better their content is going to be on your behalf. It's worth it to put in the time to ensure that each influencer deal is going to be a positive experience for both parties.

Athlete Influencer Marketing Example

Trago wanted to showcase their cool and unique water bottles on social media, and came through OpenSponsorship to find the right professional athletes for their campaign. As a startup, they were only able to offer free product (no cash), but still found amazing pro athletes who wanted to get involved with their company!



Step 5: Track and measure your campaign.

The classic final step: Measuring your campaign. If you set a specific goal after step three, then you're already in good shape. Now it's just about ensuring you have the right tools to track and measure your influencer marketing campaign. Here's a few ways to make it happen:

1. Track with your own attribution.
The simplest and most overlooked step in tracking an influencer strategy is including tracking tokens in the links you have influencers share. Taking this additional step allows you to clearly see what traffic and conversions are actually being sent back your way from the influencers' campaign. Here's a guide to doing this correctly.

2. Track with OpenSponsorship.
Our platform not only helps brands connect with athletes for their influencer marketing campaigns, but we also provide tracking to help you see which campaigns are creating the best value for you. This also helps you evaluate which athletes to work with over time to be able to look back and see which ones led to the greatest ROI for your goals.

3. Track with a third-party tool.
While the above two should be enough, some companies opt to enlist tools specifically for tracking and measuring influencer marketing campaigns. This post goes into six different influencer marketing tracking tools you can try.

Follow these five steps, and we guarantee you'll begin to see the light when it comes to an influencer marketing strategy. Just like any other marketing tactic that seems overhyped, it's about executing correctly and matching your effort with what's best for your brand.

Section 4

Where to Find Athletes for Influencer Marketing

At OpenSponsorship, we don't want you wasting hours searching for athletes. Instead, we have athletes come to you by promoting your campaign to our database of 4,000+ athletes. These athletes can then directly apply for the campaigns you post.

Want to get started today? Request a demo, and once you do, our team will not only show you the infinite athletes you can access, but get you started on your first campaign.

CLICK TO SIGN UP FOR FREE DEMO