



How To Connect With Influencers

BY TOM WARD

In the last couple of months I've interviewed Kate Hudson, Demi Lovato, Jake Paul, Shane Dawson, Fuck Jerry, and just about every big influencer out there right now. And wait till you see the ones I've got coming up!

Probably the question I get asked the most is, "How do you connect with these people? How do you get interviews with all of these people? I want to work with them too!"

I'm here to break it all down for you.

First of all you've got to determine what kind of influencer you're trying to reach. I'm sure there will be a standard classification for influencers in some marketing textbook someday, but until then let's use mine. Basically you've got five different types:

Celebrities

Thought Leaders

The Press

Micro Influencers

Offline Influencers

Celebrities

A lot of people break this category down, but not me. They say there are traditional celebs, like athletes and actors, and then there are social media stars. But to me there's no difference between a musician, like Demi Lovato, and a social media star, like Lele Pons. Everyone knows who they are, they're rich and famous, and they've got a zillion followers on social. Sure, there's still a pecking order, but guess what? They're all at the same party.

Thought Leaders

A little nerdier than the celebrities, but sometimes they're more famous. Think of people like Tony Robbins, Tim Ferriss, Gary Vaynerchuk, etc. They're experts in a certain field, have notoriety, they've written books, consult, coach, have podcasts, appear on TV, etc.

The Press

Writers, TV personalities, podcasters, etc. Most of the time, the publication or channel that the journalist works for *is* the influencer. For me associating with *Forbes* gives me instant credibility. If I were just writing for a small blog, it would be much harder to get Kate Hudson to sit down with me. Kate is sitting down with *Forbes*, not necessarily Tom Ward.

Micro-Influencers

This is a buzzword these days and technically we're all micro-influencers. We all influence behavior on a small scale, whether it's recommending your favorite deli to a friend or telling your little brother what sneakers he should buy. In the social media world, I'd say anyone with fewer than 500k followers is a micro-influencer. Some say it's those with under 10k followers, but it's just too hard to find people that small.

Offline Influencers

Johnny Depp, David Geffen and Jimmy Iovine. Pretty big names, right? They're not on social media so does that mean they're not influencers? Hell no. They influence a lot of people's behaviors. This group always gets forgotten because we're so focused on followers, engagement and all these other marketing stats. You can't measure these guys, which is part of the beauty of working with them.

Celebrity Influencers

These are the sexiest ones to work with, so guess what? Everyone wants to work with them and they are the hardest ones to reach.

Why do you want to connect with them anyway? Do you want to pitch them a product or find out how much they charge for a promoted post? Well, these questions can all be answered by their business manager or agent. Do you want to interview them? Their publicist or PR person would handle that. Or do you really just want them to follow you on Instagram? Haha. Good luck with that.

You're never going to reach the celebrity, until you can prove to several people on their team why they should meet with you.

Celebrities are incredibly insulated people. They have a team around them to protect them from everyone who is trying to get a piece of them. They're no different than the owner of a small business, who has their secretary screen all of their calls.

You also need to prove that you belong at the party.

Everyone wants to work with Michael Jordan. He's arguably the greatest basketball player of all time, everyone loves him, he's a great pitcher, etc.

But you're never going to get past his gatekeepers if you've never done business with someone as big as him. You have to work your way up to Mike.

This is a common mistake that people make. They think they belong at the party and just assume that their invitation got lost in the mail. That's because most people are idiots and aren't self aware, but that's for another story.

Let me share an example.

I started writing at *Forbes* two years ago and covered marketing stuff. About a year ago, I became obsessed with influencers and wanted to interview some. I knew someone at an influencer agency and he put me in touch with Marissa Rachel, a big YouTuber. Shout out to Marissa!

I [interviewed her](#) and it went really well. Her manager introduced me to Mariale Marreo, who was much bigger, and I [interviewed her](#) too. Because that article did extremely well, it led to interviews with even bigger influencers like Jake Paul, Perez Hilton and Shane Dawson.

But I never would have gotten those interviews without Marissa Rachel. She invited me to the party.

So start small. If you've never done an influencer marketing campaign before, it's best to start with micro-influencers. They're more bang for the buck and much easier to work with.

An influencer agency is great because they already have relationships with influencers. Plus, they'll help select the right influencer for you. Just because you think that a YouTuber is funny doesn't mean that they're the right fit for you. An agency has the data that will tell you which influencer will help you reach your target demo.

But if you want to do it by yourself, reach out to their manager, publicist or agent. Usually they'll have some contact information in their bio.

But remember, you need to carefully craft your email.

DON'T CUT AND PASTE AN EMAIL AND SEND IT TO A MILLION INFLUENCERS

Just because an influencer makes their living by promoting products, doesn't mean that they're going to promote yours. Influencers pass on most products that they're pitched.

The main reason is because the product doesn't align with their brand. Really spend some time looking at the influencer's posts, videos, etc. to see what products they rep, what kind of content they're creating, etc.

And don't forget that you're not the only person trying to work with them. Every day they're getting dozens of proposals from other companies. You have to convince them why working with you will help their career. This is true whether you're trying to get them to sell your product or trying to get an interview with them.

Thought Leaders

Sometimes these people are celebrities in their own right. The reason I put them in a separate category is because the “celebrity” category is usually for entertainers.

There is a pecking order in this world too. The top ones, like Tim Ferriss or Arianna Huffington, will appear on the same TV talk shows as Hollywood actors. But most are known to only people in their industry. They are the experts in their field.

They're much easier to reach than their celebrity counterparts. Most of them write somewhere, so you can reach out to them there. Most likely it'll be their blog or Linked In.

Social is also a great way to reach them. They're all active on social and use it to promote their business. They'll also probably have their contact info in their social profiles or on their websites.

If you want to connect, make sure you tailor your message specifically for them. And don't just go on Tweeting frenzy because this looks so bad:

.@tonyrobbins: Check out my new product, I'd love to talk about it with you.

.@timferriss: Hey I got a new product I think you'd like. Hmu

.@richardbranson: Check out my product, I'd love to chat about it.

Speaking of Twitter, I think that's the best social platform to reach out to thought leaders: They all have active accounts, it doesn't allow you a lot of space to ramble, and they can immediately vet you.

Are you verified? Why not? You should be.

You want to sit at the cool kids table? Guess what? They've all got blue checks next to their name. You need to have a blue check too. Check out my article on how I got verified [here](#).

Another good way to connect with thought leaders is to work for them for free. If you always wanted to meet a thought leader in your focus area, offer to write an article for their blog. Creating content takes up a significant part of any influencer's day. If you can offer to write a couple of good, relevant articles for their site, they'll definitely be interested in talking with you.

One of the best ways to get credibility in a field is to associate yourself with people more successful than you. Forming a relationship with a thought leader can do that for you. But never forget that there's really not much in it for them, so be respectful and grateful for their time.

The Press

I could write a whole book on this. Chances are, if you want to reach someone in the media, you want some sort of promotion. It could be for your product, your customer, or maybe you.

Guess what? Everyone else wants good press too.

I'm a paid contributor, who writes five articles a month, yet I get dozens of emails a week asking me to write about some nonsense.

It's not that hard to get a hold of someone in the media, which is why I get all these bad pitches.

There are sites, like [MuckRack](#), that lists all of the people that cover a particular beat, or all of the writers for a publication. The problem is that everyone does the same thing: They write a standard email and blast it to everyone that comes up on their search.

I can't think of a less effective way to pitch someone.

Media types, especially writers, are super susceptible to flattery. Most writers don't make much money. I did a quick search on Glassdoor to see what writers at major publications were making, and the average was about \$65,000 a year. Not much to live on in New York or LA.

Also, most writers don't get any accolades. So, if you reach out to a writer, cite a particular story and say a kind word, it'll go a long way.

Finally, make sure you're pitching the right person. Are you sending a pitch about a business leader to everyone at *Forbes*? Why? There are writers who cover entertainment, marketing, finance, etc. Why should they get your pitch?

Micro-Influencers

More and more brands are looking to micro-influencers to partner with because they're less expensive, easier to work with, and have much higher engagement rates than the bigger influencers.

But it's much harder to find them. I have a friend who's starting a clothing company aimed at minority, teen nerds in the LA area. Now how the heck is he supposed to find micro-influencers in that world?

The easiest way is to use a self-serve agency, like [Famebit](#) or [Speakr](#). They're basically a giant classifieds section where brands and influencers can connect. To use this service, an influencer needs to have at least 10,000 followers. They have proprietary software that tracks engagement, posting frequency, subject matter, etc. Then you can search for whatever you're looking for or post campaigns that influencers will apply for.

To do it on your own is going to be harder.

The first place to start is with your followers. Who is following your brand on social? Who's engaging with you? Start following them and monitoring their online activity. How many followers do they have, are they engaged, do they post frequently, what platforms are they most active on?

These fans are the best influencers to work with because they already like your product. You don't have to sell them.

Since a lot of micro-influencer campaigns are local brands trying to grow their following, doing a Google search for local bloggers in your area is a great way to identify potential influencers. Bloggers are often forgotten about in the age of social media, but if they have a good following and strong email subscriber list, they can actually be more valuable than an Instagrammer.

Doing a hash tag search is another great way to connect with micro-influencers. My friend, who's starting the clothing company, could do a search for #NerdCulture or #LAGamers on Google and it will list the top posts on Instagram and Twitter. Then, he can scroll down and search through the posts and users until he finds someone that he likes.

Offline Influencers

These off-line influencers are usually off-line for a reason. Maybe they just don't want to be bothered, maybe they're private people, or it could be because they're smart and have learned from all the people who have ruined their careers on social media.

But just because they don't have an Instagram account doesn't mean that they're not an influencer. Take David Geffen. He's one of the most successful agents, record executives, and entertainment moguls of all time. He can pick up the phone and get a hold of anyone. But he isn't on social media. Most CEOs and top execs aren't on social media either.

So how do you get a hold of these people?

These are the hardest to reach, because they are so private and because they usually have many gatekeepers.

The first thing you need to do is to play the Kevin Bacon game. Remember that? Every actor can be linked back to a Kevin Bacon movie in like 6 steps or less.

I can probably link to David Geffen in less than six steps too.

So can you.

Examine your social network and look for people in the same industry or company as your off-line influencer. Or maybe someone that has worked with them in the past.

If you don't know anyone that has had any contact with him or her, go to LinkedIn. Chances are that you have a friend that has a connection to someone at their organization. Send them a note or ask your friend to make an introduction.

Or you can just shell out the money for LinkedIn Premium and start sending them notes. But before you do that, you need to ask yourself why you're trying to reach that person.

Remember my tip to reaching out to social media stars? You need to start small. You can't just start out at the top. Same thing with connecting with off-line influencers.

Why do you need to talk to David Geffen? I'm sure there are lower level executives that can get you what you need.

Unless there is something in it for them, you'll never get their attention. This applies to all influencers.

So, whether you're trying to get the attention of a micro-influencer with 10,000 followers or Johnny Depp, who's off the grid, you need to show them why working with you will benefit them. It doesn't have to be monetary. It could mean free merchandise for them, good press, or the feeling of pride from someone asking their opinion. All good business relationships benefit both parties. A good influencer relationship does the same.

About Me

I'm a New Jersey native living in Los Angeles with my wife and toddler.

I'm a sales guy by trade but I also write about influencer marketing for Forbes and other publications.

Thanks for stopping by! If there's anything I can do for you, hmu. I respond to each and every email. Even the trolls!