

2022

B2B Influencer Marketing

Research Report

TopRank® Marketing



B2B Marketing Gets Elevated with Influence

Without question, the pandemic has impacted all aspects of business including B2B marketing, with 74% of respondents in our survey saying they made adjustments to their go-to market strategies.

The good news is that many B2B marketers have emerged from the pandemic as confident: Nearly half of the marketers we surveyed consider their marketing very or extremely successful.

A lot of that confidence comes from a focus on what works, and 96% of marketers plan to keep some or most changes made in the past 2 years, including working with

influencers. In fact, 71% indicated influencer marketing became more important during the pandemic.

In times like these, the importance of Influence is critical for brands that need to connect authentically with their buyers and create meaningful experiences.

But what's next? What do digital-first B2B influencers look like? What are the best practices and technologies? How important is it for B2B brands to build influence with their employees? This report answers all of those questions and more including insights from some of the top B2B brands in the world.

B2B marketers have a unique opportunity in 2022 to create more authentic, trusted and meaningful experiences for their customers, and this report will show you how.



CEO & Co-Founder,
TopRank Marketing





Brian Solis

Digital Anthropologist, Futurist, Salesforce
@briansolis

FOREWORD:

Influence, Authenticity and Inspiration

When it comes to influence, the word of the year is authenticity. To find success within our current framework of constant uncertainty, brands need to remember that the main thing anyone wants is a genuine connection. The easiest way to foster those connections is by tapping into trust they've already developed — that's a unique benefit that B2B influencer marketing brings.

How do we foster those connections? By not just being a light alone in the dark, but a light among others who collaborate to create and share stories. We need to become like constellations. Lights in tandem, working together to guide individuals toward the solutions they're looking for. Crafting the enterprise of the future right now means bringing marketing, sales, and service together as well.

One thing to remember is that the sort of influencers who are authentic respond best to inquiries that are authentic. Build that authenticity from within by looking at your business and determining what you stand for. Elevate internal voices that have something new to say.

“ Crafting the enterprise of the future right now means bringing marketing, sales, and service together as well.

Brian Solis

“ Create content that inspires you in collaboration with individuals who inspire you.

Brian Solis



Foreword: Influence, Authenticity and Inspiration (continued)

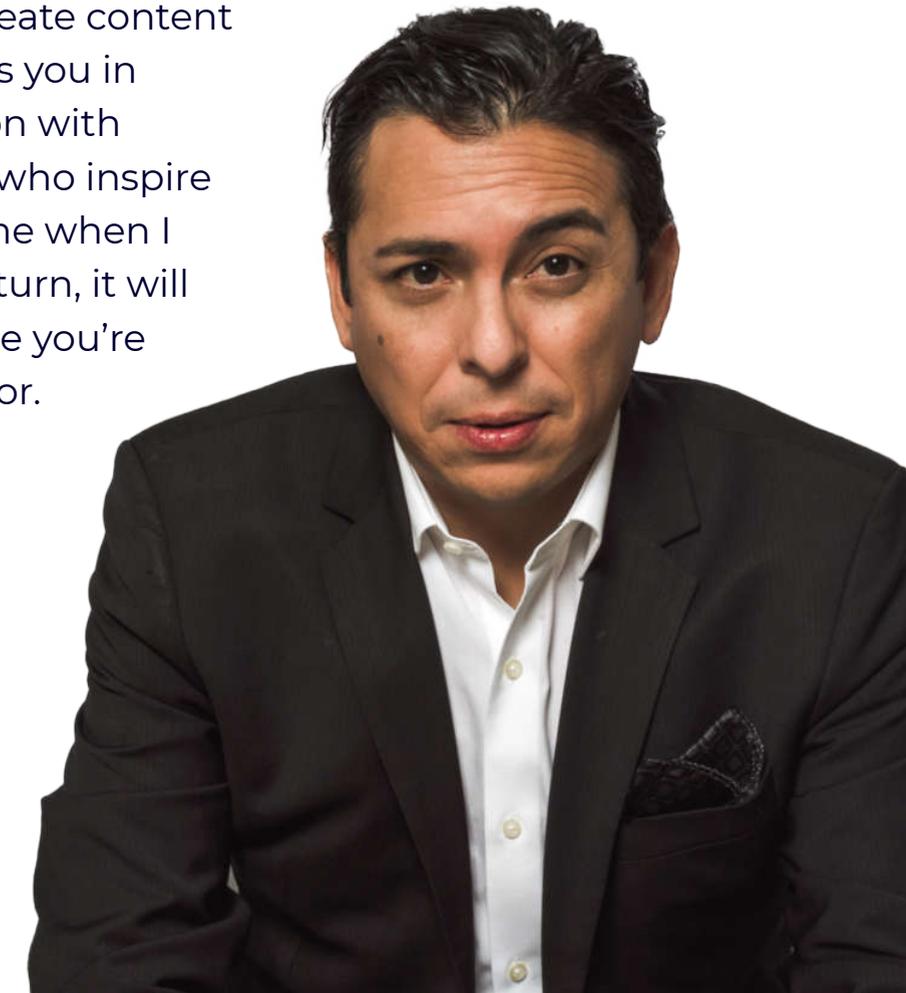
Think hard about how you want to serve, not just how you want to sell. A larger audience won't guarantee success, but a more engaged one will. The magic happens in the niche.

Put in the work to develop a brand identity that is truly your own so that you can connect with B2B influencers whose values align with yours. Experiment. Try new things. Never stop learning. Collaborate. Embrace uncertainty by acknowledging that there's no

set-in-stone playbook right now and you're being given the opportunity to create a new one — together, with your customers, your prospects, your team, and those in the industry who influence them.

When it comes to where B2B influencer marketing can take business in the next few years, I genuinely believe our only limitations are our imaginations. Work on establishing yourself as a genuine force for good in your

industry. Create content that inspires you in collaboration with individuals who inspire you. Trust me when I say that, in turn, it will inspire those you're creating it for.





Key Findings

Overall, B2B influencer marketing has matured since our 2020 report, with marketers taking a more strategic and intentional approach to nurturing influencer relationships. This rise in sophistication is leading to impressive results. However, marketers still struggle with a few common challenges as they strive for the next level of maturity.

86%

of B2B brands consider their influencer marketing successful

1/3

report influencer marketing has led to increased sales/revenue

65%

say internal executives have been effective at increasing the influence of the brand

85%

believe interest in working with influencers in the coming 12 months will increase



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B2B Influence Elevated

The arc of influencer marketing maturity is similar to how content marketing has evolved over the years. B2B marketers have seen the value of one-time engagements with influencers. Now, many are taking the practice to the next level, approaching it with the same strategic rigor as any other marketing tactic.

The data shows an increase in sophistication in the way influencers are chosen, what kind of content they are tapped to produce, and even how they are compensated.

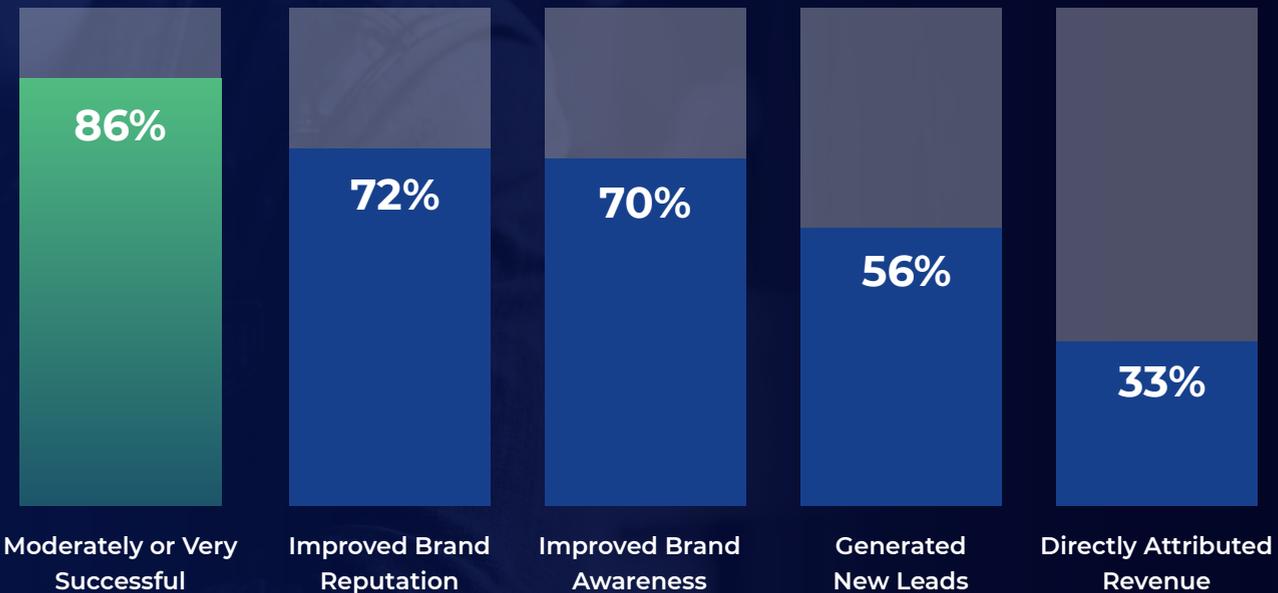
In this section, we'll explore the value of influencer marketing, the changing attitudes and perception of the practice, and challenges and opportunities that marketers are facing.

Does B2B Influencer Marketing Work?

We can also see that the pandemic increased interest in influencer marketing. **Over 70%** of those who changed strategies due to the pandemic said that influencer marketing became **more important**.

86%

of respondents say their programs are either moderately or very successful





Alexis Hall

VP of Client Accounts,
TopRank Marketing

The digital transformation of B2B marketing has happened more rapidly during the past 2 years than any time in history. As a result, new thinking is required about B2B marketing. It is no longer enough to produce status quo content marketing experiences.

B2B brands that have adapted to the challenges of transformation realize the increased importance of influence on content discovery, engagement and ROI. The centers of influence that inform and persuade B2B decision makers are not driven by ads but trusted voices in the industry.

Now is the time for B2B brands to invest in relationships with industry experts, thought leaders and creators to deliver elevated marketing experiences buyers can trust. Now is the time to elevate B2B marketing with influence.

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SECTION 01

Influence and Elevated B2B Marketing

Out of the challenges presented by the pandemic, international conflict and rising inflation, B2B marketers are looking for ways to grow reach, build trust and elevate customer experiences in ways that drive results.

For successful B2B marketers, influence is playing an increasingly important role. We found **70% of the marketers** with extremely successful marketing programs include influencer marketing in their mix. Of those marketers, **60% say influencer marketing** is their most successful tactic.



Over

70%

agree that their customers rely on advice from industry experts and insiders

Attitudes About Influencer Marketing

B2B marketers' opinions about influencer marketing confirm its effectiveness. **Over 70%** agree that their customers rely on advice from industry experts and insiders, while **62%** say their influencer engagements have improved their customers' brand experience.

Most marketers predict that influencer marketing's popularity will continue to grow, too: over **73%** report an increase in interest over the past year. Moreover, **80%** say they expect interest to continue to grow over the coming 12 months.



Influencer marketing has accelerated amongst B2B brands and we'll continue to see roles dedicated to influencer marketing especially since research shows buyers prefer to rely on industry experts. B2B companies that execute influencer marketing programs correctly will build long-term relationships with influencers along with prospects and customers.

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Justin Levy

Director, Social and Influencer Marketing, Demandbase

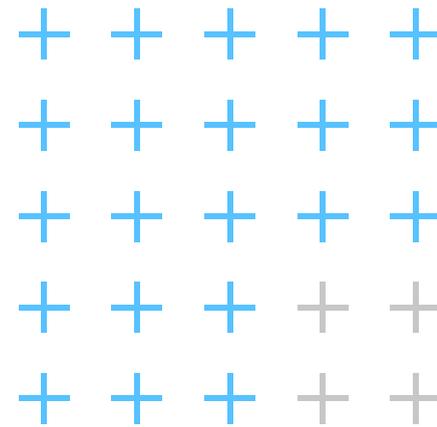
Top B2B Influence Challenges

As with any emerging practice, B2B influencer marketing is not without its growing pains. The top challenges are directly related to maturity and sophistication. Lack of a documented strategy is the number one challenge our respondents reported, indicating that many are still treating influencer marketing as a tactic, rather than a discipline to be approached strategically.

Other top difficulties include challenges in qualifying and activating influencers, and too much time spent on manual processes. As influencer marketing grows in popularity, these challenges increase, too. More people identifying as influencers make it harder to find the right ones for your project, and more marketers working with influencers means it can be harder to create

relationships with the most relevant people.

It's no surprise, then, that businesses who work with agencies rely on them to help identify influencers, manage relationships, and develop strategy. All of these relate directly to the top challenges our respondents reported.



80%

of B2B marketers say they expect interest in influencer marketing to grow over the coming 12 months

Top B2B Influence Opportunities

One thing this report's results have told us is that there is plenty of opportunity. Take a look:

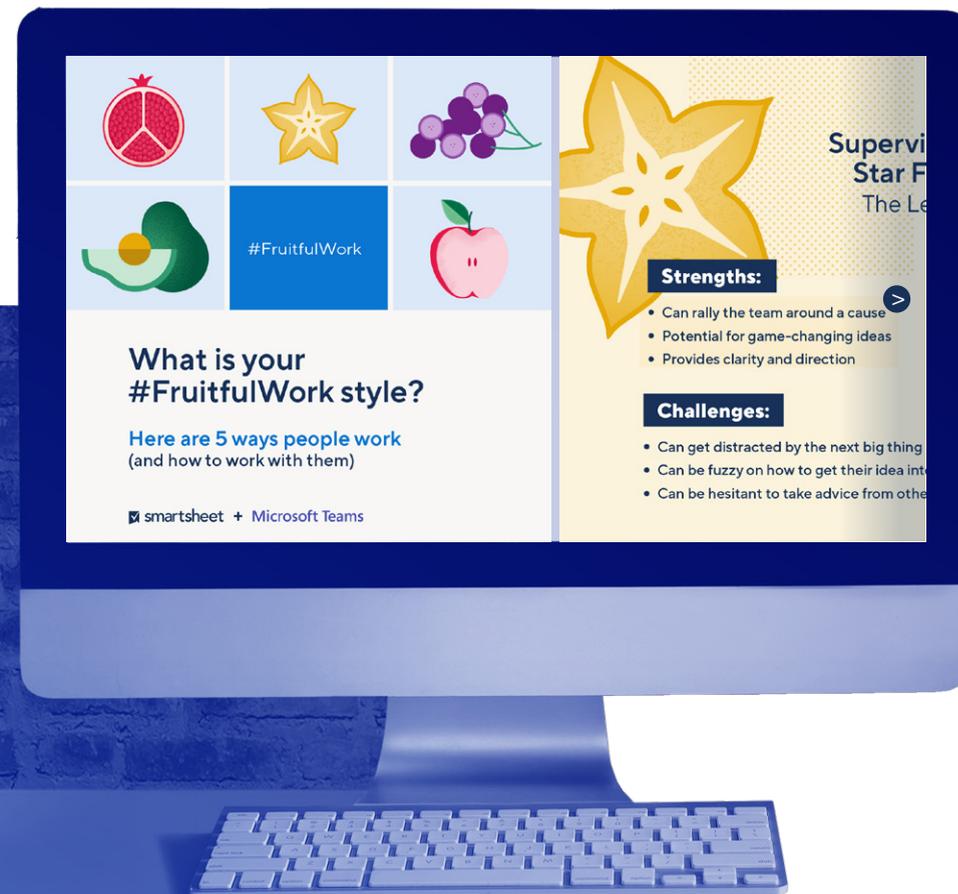
- **Less than half** of B2B marketers surveyed reported having a documented influencer strategy
- **28%** reported they have an undocumented, informal strategy
- **Nearly 25%** say they have no strategy at all

That leaves approximately 53% of B2B marketers with a chance to make strides using influencer strategy. With 40% of the report's respondents sharing that they used no influencer marketing tools as well, it begs the question of what could be achieved with the right strategy and technology.

No matter the tactics, everyone agrees: **interest in influencer marketing is on the rise.**

Case Study

How Smartsheet Drove Results with Creative Content & Influence



The easiest way to help teams collaborate successfully is by making communication easy. Smartsheet's integration with Microsoft Teams facilitates this functionality by providing a centralized place for planning, processes, documents, meetings, and real-time chat.

The challenge: A large portion of the user base was unaware of these benefits. The solution: Launch a campaign featuring a group of respected and visible experts to build awareness, cultivate community, and boost organic social reach.

Through a creative #FruitfulWork theme that aligned common work styles with popular fruits as a metaphor, Smartsheet identified and engaged relevant niche influencers and productivity experts alongside employee and client ambassadors to provide content and promotion.

To create engagement, Smartsheet then asked their community to share tips on how they collaborate with other fruit type work styles to be "better together."

Over 4 months, influencers drove awareness & engagement:

- **10,259** pageviews of campaign content
- **3.1%** average brand engagement on LinkedIn
- **2.6%** average brand engagement on Twitter

[See Full Case Study](#)

SECTION ONE

Summary



Influencer marketing is working for the vast majority of marketers. 86% report that their efforts are successful in reaching marketing goals. These goals span the entirety of the customer journey, from boosting brand awareness and reputation all the way to sales and revenue.



Interest in influencer marketing continues to grow. The pandemic increased influencer marketing's importance to 70% of those who changed their strategies as a result of the global crisis. In addition, 73% said they saw increased interest in the past year, and 80% expect to see more growth going forward.



There are clear opportunities to improve sophistication. Documenting strategy, employing technology, and engaging an agency to help with all of the above are all recommended next steps to build maturity.

[Learn to Elevate Your B2B Marketing with Influence](#)

[Find Out More](#)

02

Profile of a B2B Influencer

An influencer is a storyteller with the power to influence the behavior of people around a specific topic. It's not just about who has the biggest following. Likeability, relatability, and credibility are all part of what makes an influencer influential.

Anyone can have the opportunity to be an influencer representing a brand, cause or bigger purpose. Our data shows that marketers are moving beyond simple follower count to find influencers everywhere, including within the organization.

In this section, we'll explore how brands are identifying influencers, what essential qualities they're looking for, and what types of influencer are returning the most value.

SECTION 02

What Makes a B2B Influencer?

Some of the top challenges B2B marketers face with influencer marketing are understanding which are the right influencers to work with and how to effectively engage them. Most B2B marketers have evolved from simply looking at popularity metrics to being more data-informed about which individuals are the most relevant, capable content creators with audience relationships that match brand objectives.

While the number of influencers being paid for B2B brand collaboration has increased, influencer marketing is still a relationship business. As with successful relationships, communication and empathy play important roles. In the end, successful B2B marketers combine the science of data-informed selection with the art of persuasion and relationship building to find and activate influencer partners who can help drive business outcomes.



Ursula Ringham

Head of Global Influencer Marketing, SAP

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How do I know if an influencer is authentic, trustworthy, and credible to partner with for a campaign?

First, I figure out who they are as a person. And that is when I become a detective. I like to read, watch, and listen to their content. Is their content engaging, innovative, and does it tell a story in an interesting way? What separates them from other influencers?

Then I become part of their community. I discover who follows them and how those people engage. Does the influencer create an experience I want to continue to come back and learn from?

Finally, I like to take them out for coffee or set up a Zoom call. You can learn so much from this one-on-one interaction.”



Types of B2B Influencers

Even as professional influencers continue to rise in popularity, B2B marketers are looking for influence from a wider variety of sources. Less than half of respondents say they work with professional influencers.

By contrast, **77%** work with industry experts and analysts, **55%** with executives from their own company, **48%** with niche experts, and **47%** with customers. These results correspond with a growing emphasis on relevance and credibility versus sheer reach.

One clear opportunity stands out: Only **12%** say they work with prospects as part of their influence program. Co-creating an amazing piece of content that showcases a prospect's expertise is the perfect way to start a potentially profitable relationship.

PROFILE OF A B2B INFLUENCER:

Ann Handley*Chief Content Officer at MarketingProfs***How do you define influence in a B2B context?**

The root of the word influence is the Latin *influentem*, which means “flowing in.” It described the power and energy that was thought to flow from the stars. That visual isn’t unlike influence in a B2B context, when you think about it.

Influencers are thought to have a kind of star power.

But their real gift is ultimately in their ability to help their own audiences: Offering perspective. Shining insights into murky corners. Giving clarity to the complex.

All of that translates into action. (“Influence affects action,” as the Great Lee Odden says. 😊)

*(Side note: *Influentem* would also be a great pharmaceutical for wanna-be influencers who want to augment their... uh... follower counts LOL.)*

What makes you or anyone a great influencer?

If you asked 1,000 B2B marketers what the main attribute of an influencer is... they’d say trust.

Influencers aren’t influencers without credibility and trust — that’s a given.

But also they need more than that. They need also to:

- Have a rapport with an audience
- Feel accessible
- Be relatable
- Be likeable. (Do you listen to recommendations from people you don’t like? I don’t.)

What motivates you most to work with a B2B brand?

Six things. I have to:

- Use and/or respect the product.
- Feel rapport with the brand and with the people behind the brand.
- Have a sense that we see the world in a similar way. (Not exact, maybe. But similar.)
- See that our business values align.
- Relate to the people who work there.
- Like the people I work directly with.

Is that too much to expect?

I don’t think so. It’s your reputation on the line. Or mine. You know what I mean.

P.S. Notice how money doesn’t even make the initial list? That comes later.



PROFILE OF A B2B INFLUENCER:

Ann Handley

What has changed most with your brand engagements in the past 2 years?

Two things:

1. B2B brands are willing to have a little more fun and to think creatively. I love that. They're loosening up. They see influencer marketing as a path to show their personality and share their point of view.
2. B2B brands are more collaborative with influencers. A few years ago... influencer requests could feel like prescriptions to fill. I was the pharmacist giving the exact dosage the brand required.

Now brands are looking to collaborate more – to let the influencer guide the project instead of filling the order. It's more rewarding for both sides.

What do you wish B2B brands did more or less of with influencers?

More:

Share the strategy and goals of a project from the get-go.

Sometimes influencers are tapped to participate in projects without the benefit of that context. That can feel like you missed the first 10 minutes of Seinfeld: You can still laugh at the jokes, but they'd be funnier if you understood the setup.

Less:

Not respecting social media as a relationship builder.

As in:

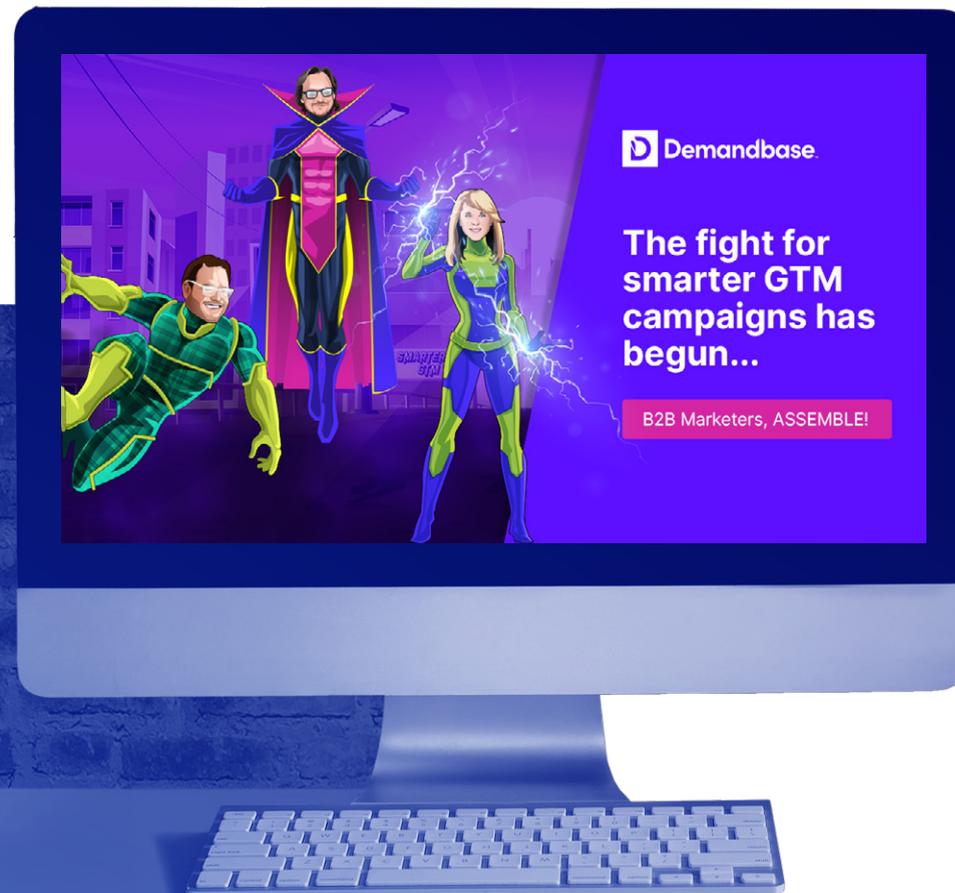
- It's never a good idea on Twitter to DM me out of nowhere to ask for a retweet.
- Don't make me regret connecting with you on LinkedIn by popping into my DMs and pushing your Calendly link aggressively in my face.

Just... no



Case Study

How Demandbase Transformed B2B Influencers into Superhero Storytellers



In combination with a company rebrand, Demandbase launched an evolved account-based marketing (ABM) solution to solve marketers' longstanding challenges with data silos and spammy marketing messages. The new brand and solution meant an opportunity to break through the noise of martech industry hype and reach customers their new product would help most.

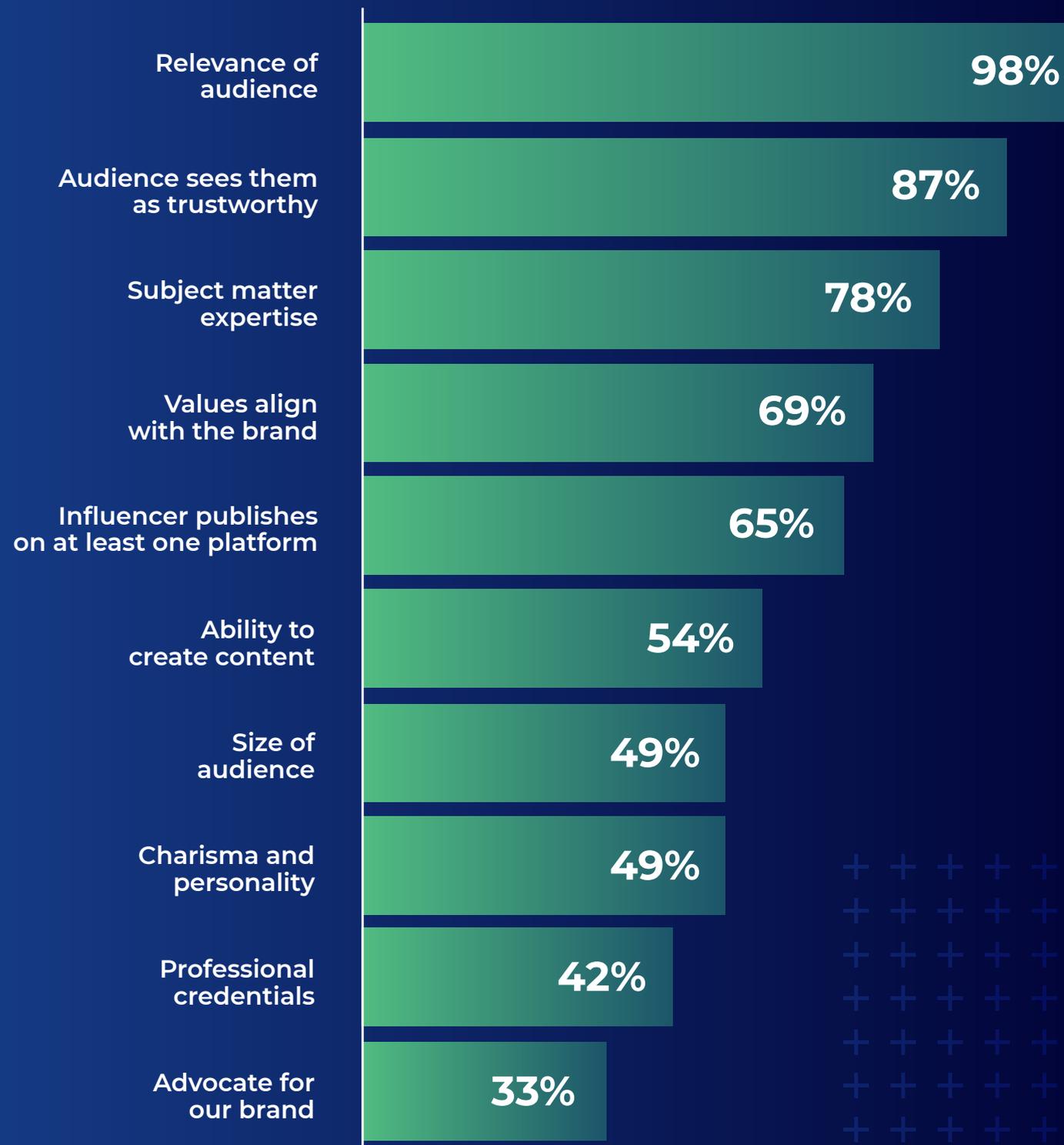
The solution? Elevated content with a compelling storyline, unique creative, and amplification by strategically selected thought leaders prospects already knew and trusted.

Through custom illustrations, well-known industry influencers were transformed into superheroes to save the B2B marketing world from human spam. Content featuring influencer superheroes was led by an interactive infographic and was amplified via a live launch event, influencer social sharing, blog posts, and brand social media.

Within two months this creative influencer campaign drove superhero results:

- **8.4M** in potential reach via active influencers
- **460+** engagements by industry influencers
- **800%** greater page views over the benchmark

[See Full Case Study](#)



Essential Qualities of B2B Influencers

We asked respondents to rank a list of qualities as *Essential*, *Nice to Have*, or *Not Important*. Having an audience's trust and having a relevant audience were tied for first place, with **87%** rating both as essential. This is getting to the heart of what a B2B influencer should be: Credible and meaningful to a specific audience.

Overall audience size is in the bottom half of the top 10, with only **49%** saying it is an essential quality. It's a clear indicator of growing sophistication that marketers are looking beyond follower count to find those who have true influence and authority with a specific audience.

Which ways of identifying influencers are most effective?

First ask, does the influencer fit your brand persona? Do your core values align? That doesn't mean the content the influencer is creating is in your branding, it means that the content is authentic to both the company and the influencer's audience. It is a win-win for both.

Srijana Angdemby

Director, Social Media & Influencer Marketing, Oracle
@srijanaa

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Asking Personal Connections



Asking Other Influencers for Recommendations



Working With an Agency to Source Influencers



Asking Our Audience



Identifying People our Competitors Use



Using Software



SECTION TWO

Summary



Audience size matters less than audience relevance. Sheer number of followers isn't as important to marketers as relevance, credibility and expertise. Those with a large audience can help with the reach of a campaign, but it's vital to include more influential people with smaller audiences.



Influencers can come from anywhere. Marketers are looking beyond professional influencers to tap industry and niche experts, their own employees and executives, and even customers and prospects.



Finding the right influencers is challenging. Many marketers are relying on intrinsically limited tactics like asking personal connections or getting recommendations from existing influencers. Working with an agency is a more effective way to find influencers and build relationships.

[Learn to Elevate Your B2B Marketing with Influence](#)

[Find Out More](#)

03

B2B Influence in Action

The term “influencer marketing” covers a wide range of activities and outcomes. On one end of the spectrum is endorsement, paying an influencer to advertise your product. On the other end is a community of influencers engaged in always-on collaboration and communication.

While endorsement is a valid tactic for some brands, we have found that the most successful brands in B2B influence are at the other end of the spectrum. Ongoing engagement and relationship-building creates a stronger program than a stop-and-start, transactional approach does.

In this section, we’ll look at how our respondents are pursuing next-level influencer marketing and what best practices are emerging.



Always-On vs. Periodic Influencer Engagement

There's a significant amount of overhead involved in launching an influencer campaign: designing the program architecture and strategy, identifying, contacting, and nurturing influencers — it all takes time. With an always-on approach

to influence, much of this start-up process can be eliminated.

Our results show there is significant opportunity for improvement here.

35% of respondents are currently running periodic campaigns. In the middle of the spectrum, **15%**

report they are running coordinated, ongoing campaigns. Only **21%** are practicing always-on influencer engagement.

There is a stark difference in outcomes for these groups.

How successful do you consider your organization's B2B marketing to be?

Periodic Campaign

19%

"Very successful"

55%

"Moderately successful"

24%

"Not successful"

Always-On

31%

"Very successful"

69%

"Moderately successful"



The most important thing for me isn't reach — it's authenticity. That's why I prefer working with what I call Subject Matter Experts with Influence. Thought leaders who may not have massive audiences, but are making great content that resonates with our audience.



Paul Leone

Integrated Marketing Consultant, working with brands including Smartsheet and Oracle

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Building a Community

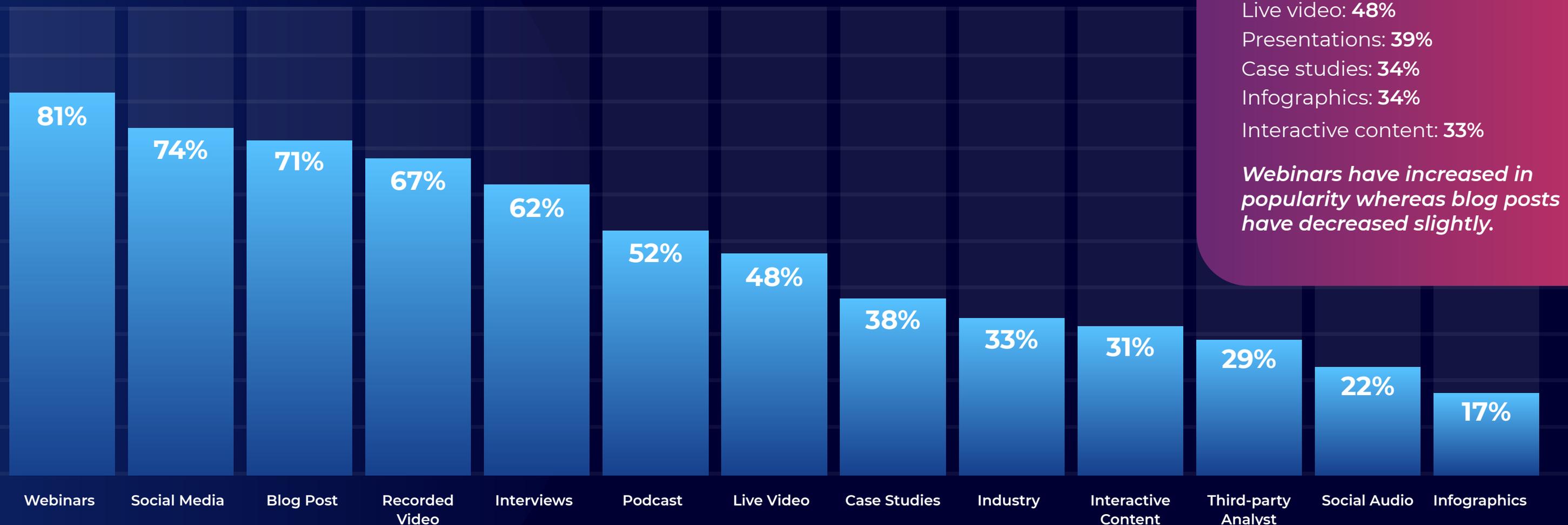
An active community can help influencers network with each other, get to know the brand and customers better, and co-create great content.

A fifth of our respondents said they maintain such a community, but an additional **50%** said they would like to do so.

For those who maintain a community, most **(76%)** say they provide a platform for connecting with the brand, and include influencers in communications between the brand and community. **Only 41%**, however, say they provide a platform or social outlet for influencers to connect with

each other. This is a substantial opportunity for improvement; helping influencers network is a major way for brands to offer value.

What types of content are favored in the current B2B influencer marketing climate?



2020 Report Comparison:

Blogs: 83%
 Recorded video: 67%
 Webinars: 64%
 Interviews: 59%
 Podcasts: 52%
 Live video: 48%
 Presentations: 39%
 Case studies: 34%
 Infographics: 34%
 Interactive content: 33%

Webinars have increased in popularity whereas blog posts have decreased slightly.

Types of Influencer Collaboration

Over half of respondents said the most effective collaboration opportunities were content creation and event participation. The latter is a rising opportunity for marketers, with the proliferation of virtual events.

The types of content our respondents find most effective show a trend towards interactive and multimedia collaboration. While blog posts topped the list in the last report, **webinars were the clear favorite in 2022, with video, podcasting, interviews, and social media content all topping the list.**

60%

say inviting influencers to participate in events is an effective type of collaboration.



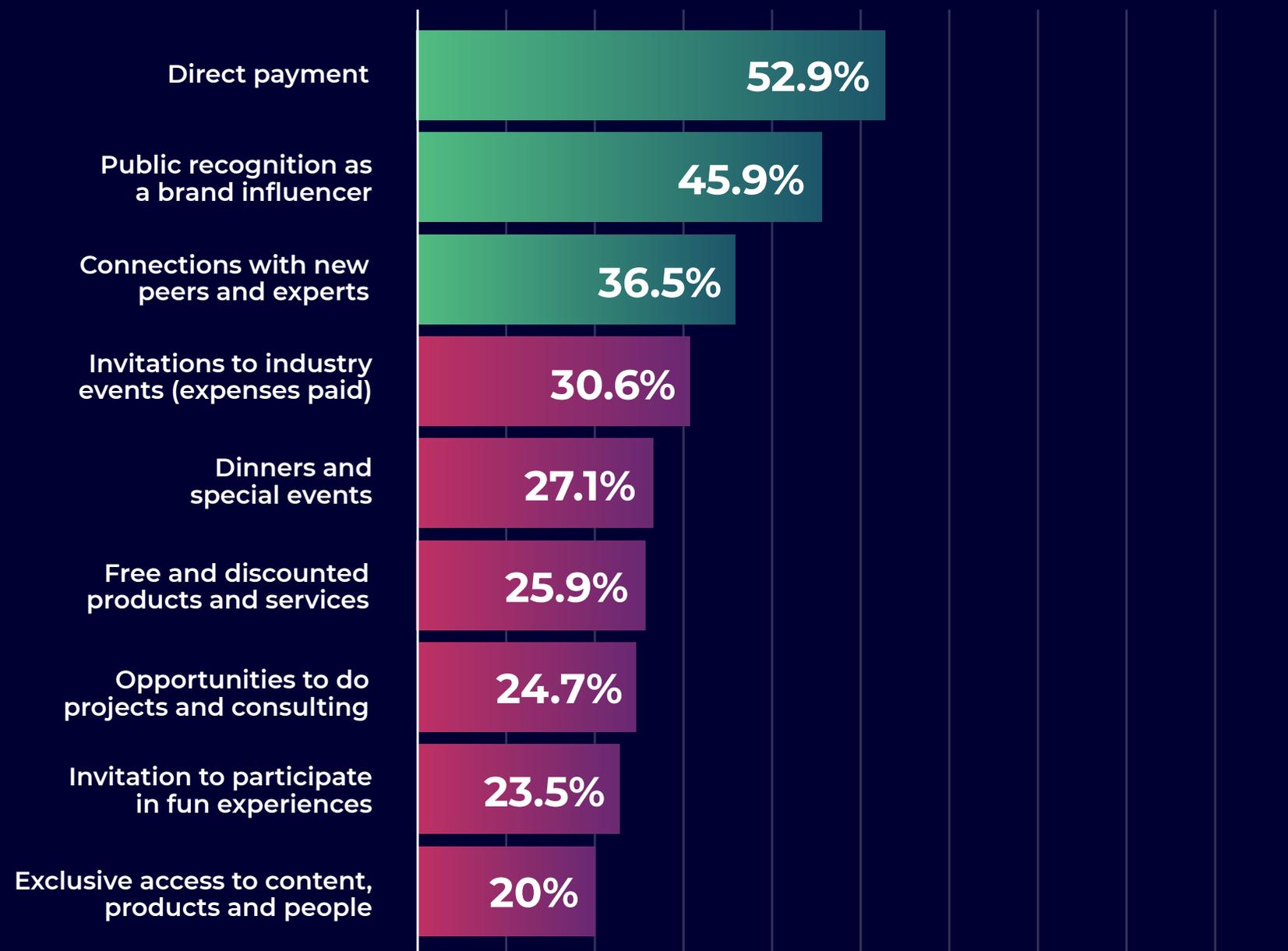
Compensation & Appreciation

As influencer marketing becomes more prevalent in the B2B space, more influencers are seeking financial compensation for their contributions. There's certainly nothing wrong with direct payment, but marketers should be wary of purely transactional relationships.

Ideally, influencers will collaborate on content primarily because they are excited about the topic and interested in bringing something of value to their audience. This type of enthusiasm is what keeps a collaboration — even a paid one — from feeling like a purely financial transaction.

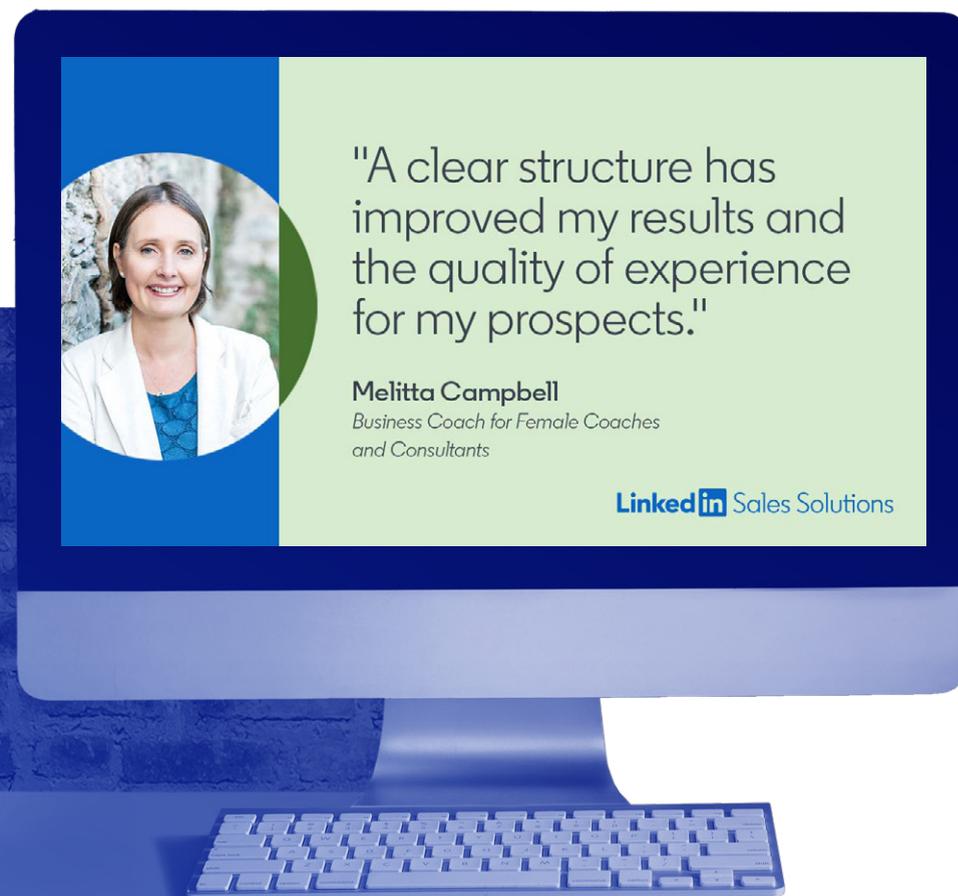
Whether influencers are paid or not, part of building the relationship is showing appreciation in a variety of ways: Invitations to events, public recognition from the brand, opportunities to network, and more.

How Does Your Organization Compensate or Show Appreciation for Influencers?



Case Study

How LinkedIn Elevated Brand Engagement with a Community of Influencers



Today's business customers can discover, engage and decide on information 24/7, 365 days a year. To be the most relevant solution in this environment, strong relationships with the most trusted voices in the industry are essential. The team at LinkedIn Sales Solutions understood that if they wanted to maintain and improve their brand impact, they needed a persistent approach.

The solution: Always-on influencer engagement. Building on the development of relationships with key marketing influencers, LinkedIn strengthened those connections and expanded their influencer community through ongoing social media engagement to the audiences of nearly 40 engaged advocates.

With a community of influencers, LinkedIn Sales Solutions was able to share brand stories that created mutual value for the brand and influencers alike by showcasing influence expertise and driving conversations on LinkedIn including a social-first campaign focused on the theme of Authenticity in Sales.

Over six weeks the Authenticity in Sales influencer campaign drove elevated results:

- **655,691** Estimated reach from niche influencer activation
- **167%+** benchmark LinkedIn engagement rate
- **160%+** benchmark Twitter engagement rate

[See Full Case Study](#)

When engaging with influencers I think there are many rules that should be followed but two of the most important practices a marketer should consider is firstly to be clear on your expectations with the influencer. This can include creative elements you would want included or the amount of posts agreed.

Secondly, I feel it is important to let the influencer have control of the creative. You are working with them for a reason, they know what their audiences want and engages with most. You have to trust them that they know what will drive the most engagement for your brand.

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Ricky Britton

Senior Brand Marketing Manager,
LinkedIn Marketing Solutions

SECTION 03

How to Best Work with Influencers

For many B2B marketers, the focus with influencer engagement is on what's in it for the brand. How can the brand use an influencer to get what they want with a particular campaign or asset?

This sort of one sided view of influencer engagement leaves much of the benefit from influencer collaboration unrealized. Telling an influencer they're special to persuade them and then treating them like a commodity is demotivating.

When B2B marketers consider influencer objectives, aspirations and goals, they can create more relevant and meaningful activation opportunities that better inspire influencers to make the collaboration a success.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Influence Advantage



Always-on is linked to a higher degree of success. 100% of those who reported an always-on program said it was successful, with 31% reporting “very successful.” This is one of the biggest opportunities for B2B marketers to increase their influencer marketing sophistication.



Influencer communities are rising in popularity. While only 20% currently have an influencer community, 50% are interested in developing one. Communities provide more opportunities for engagement for brands, influencers and audiences.



Multimedia content is increasing. Influencers are being tapped for webinars more than blog posts. Video (live and recorded), social media posts, and audio interviews are all high on the list.

Learn to Elevate Your B2B Marketing with Influence

Find Out More

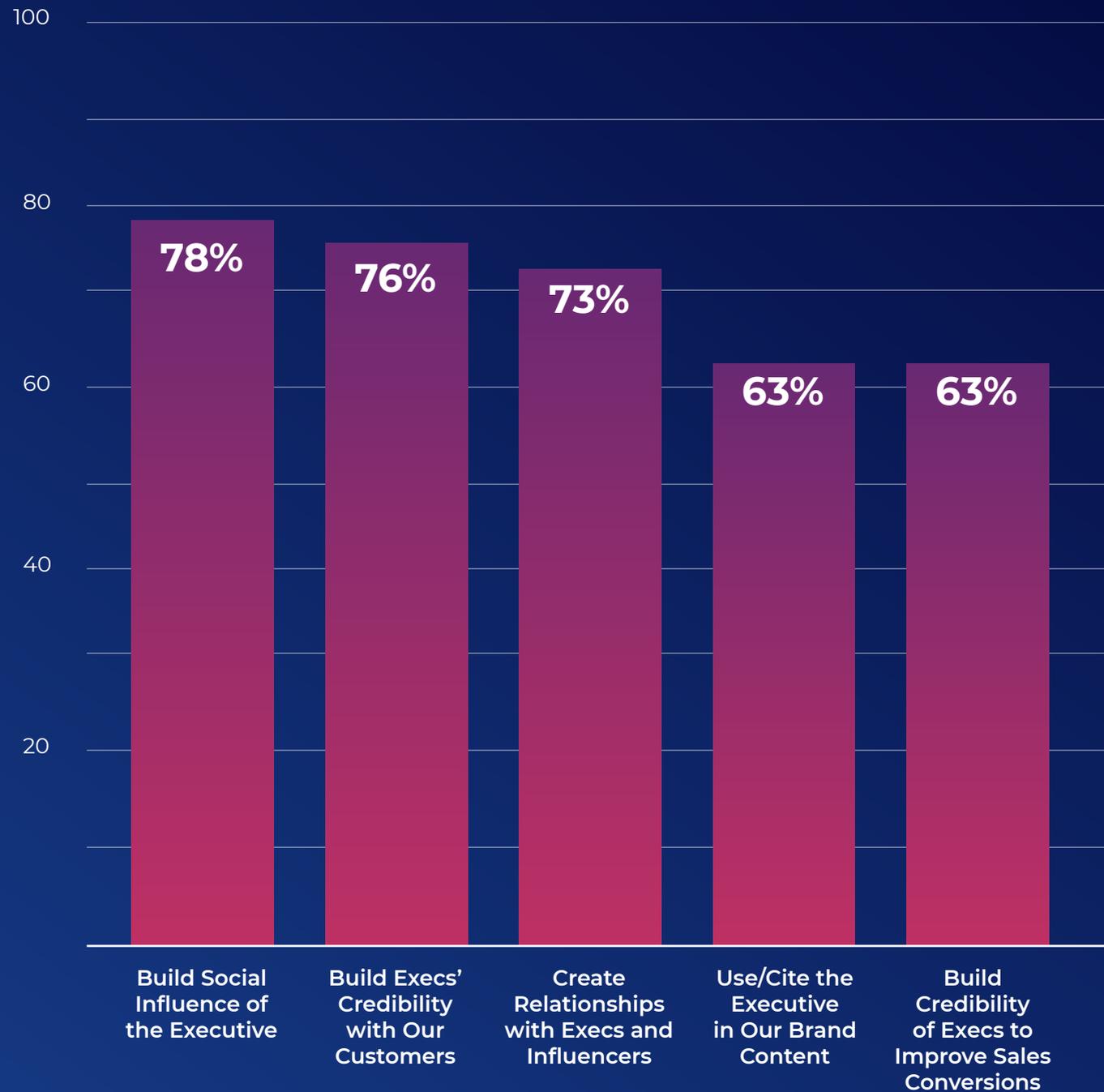
04

Growth of Influence From Within

When most people think of influencer marketing, they think of celebrities or thought leaders with thousands of followers and instant name recognition. For B2B, however, true influence is not always correlated with audience size or even high visibility. Some of your potential influencers are in your organization already.

On average, research suggests that employee content **sees 8X more engagement** than content shared through a brand's channel. Brand messages **reached 561% further** when shared by employees.

Executives can also be powerful influencers for building thought leadership, adding credibility and humanizing the brand. In this section, we'll look at how B2B marketers are leveraging internal influencers.



Why is executive influence a priority for your brand?

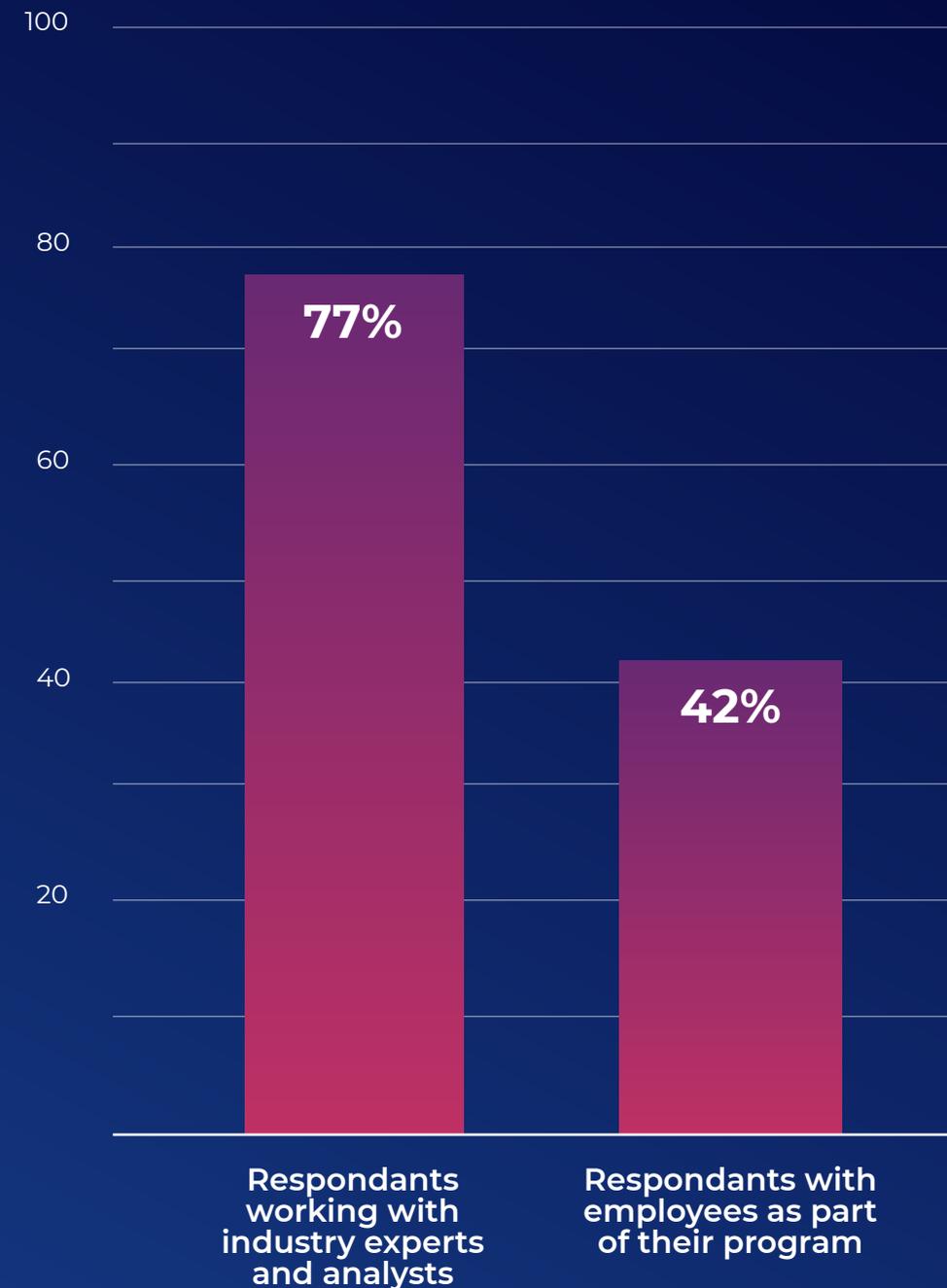


Employee Influence

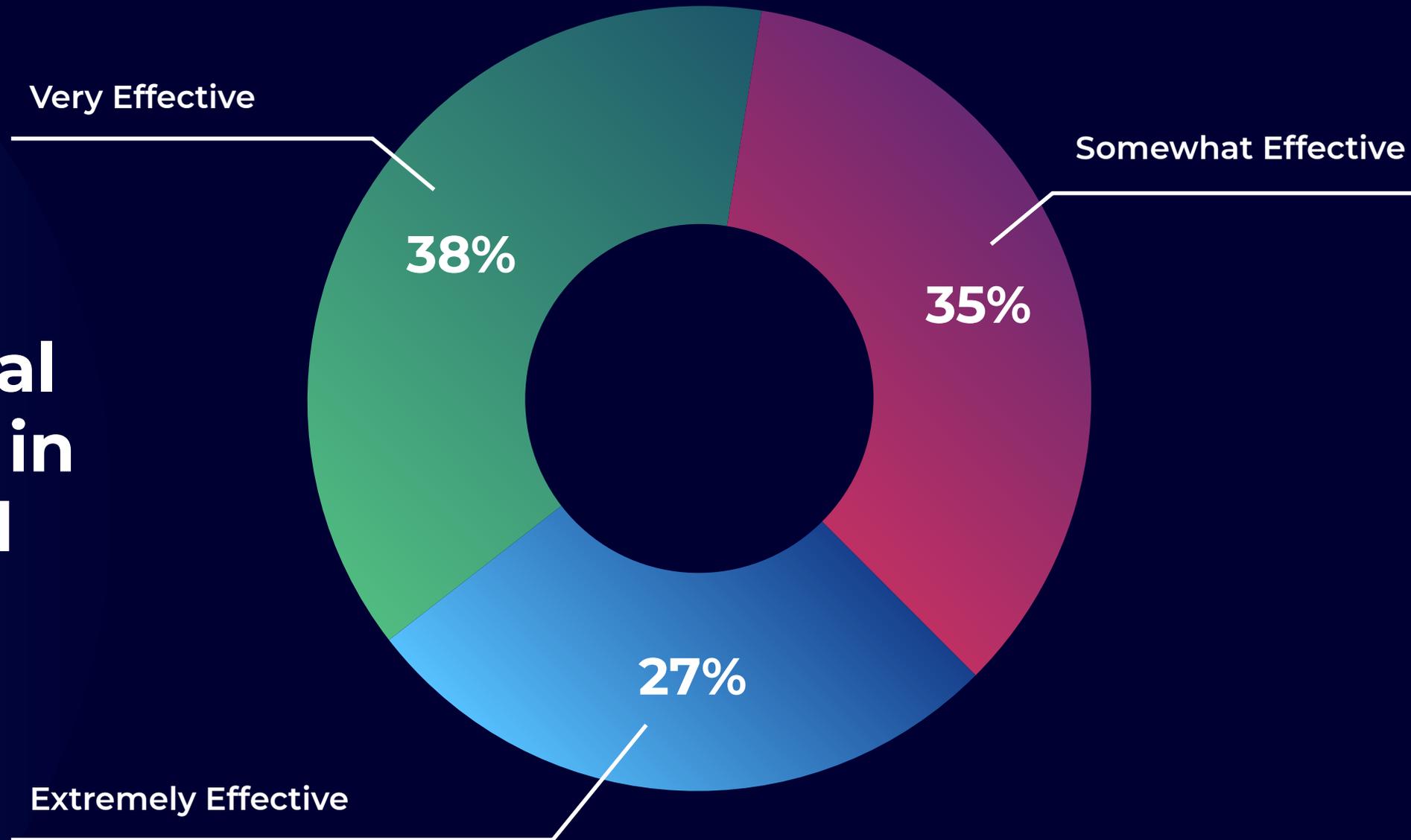
Our results show that employee influencers remain one of the great underutilized assets for B2B marketing. **Only 42%** of our respondents said they had employees as part of their program, compared to **77%** who are working with industry experts and analysts.

Working with employee influencers is cost effective and can improve a brand's reach substantially.

Moreover, in this age of authenticity and transparency, people are looking for genuine human voices rather than anonymous brand messaging. Employee advocates can add their voices to that chorus.



How effective have your internal executives been in increasing brand influence?



“ Reputation is built on perception. Pairing executives with influencers is a great way to elevate their platforms to a new audience, share relevant industry expertise and thus getting a ‘stamp of authority’ from the influencer and their community. The key to success here is to do it continually.

Janine Wegner

*Global Thought Leadership Strategy,
Content & Activation Manager, Dell*



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Over

60%

of respondents said they work with internal executives to grow their thought leadership and influence

Executive Influence

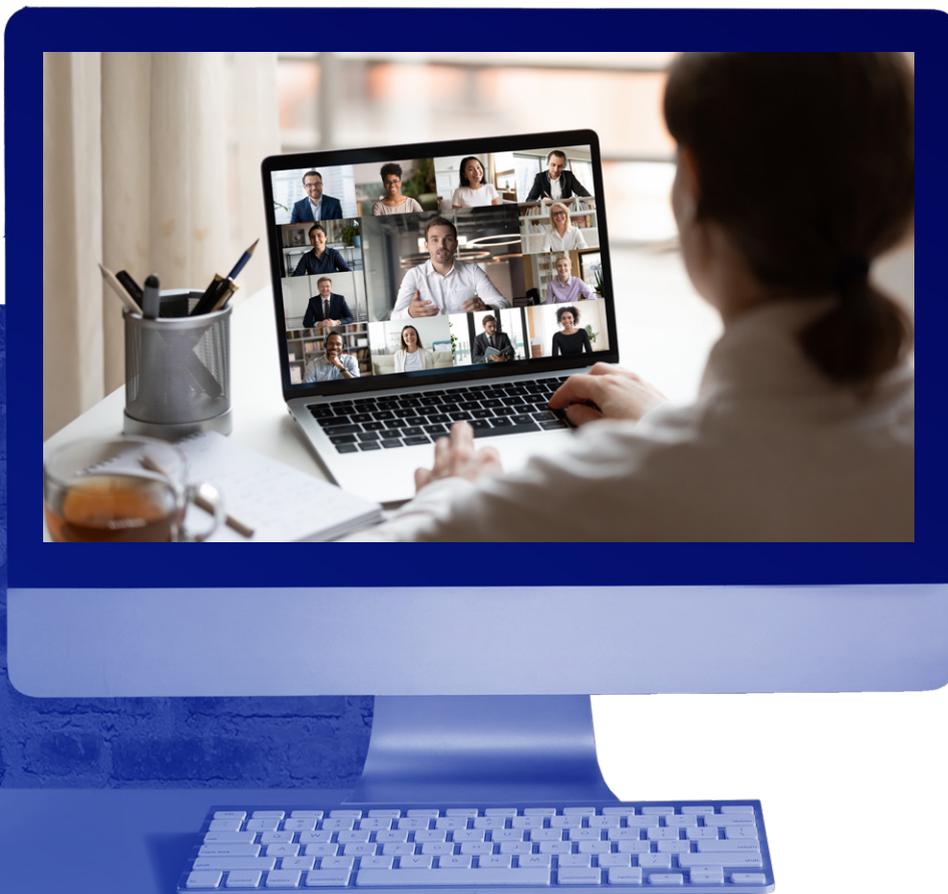
What's better than finding a great thought leader for your brand? Cultivating thought leaders within the brand. The most successful B2B companies strive to be trusted advisors to their potential buyers; executive influence is one way to develop that credibility.

Over 60% of respondents said they work with internal executives to grow their thought leadership and influence, and an additional **23%** said they would like to do so.

two-thirds of those who work with executives say their program has been very or extremely effective at increasing brand influence.

Case Study

How a Fortune 50 B2B Tech Brand Turned Top Executives into Trusted Influencers



Numerous studies reflect how consumers trust brands less but individuals more, including public-facing executives. One of the top global technology companies with a B2B division realized this and wanted to better humanize the brand and boost credibility.

With plenty of executives willing to participate, a strategically strong social media and influence development plan was essential to effectively position the executives as industry thought leaders.

The solution: A social engagement and influence development program tailored to each executive's unique voice. Results were achieved with a blend of optimized social content creation, always-on influencer relationship building, and creative collaboration achieving reach, credibility, and impact goals.

Beyond online thought leadership across social platforms, this approach to building executive influence delivered real-world relationships with influencer partners resulting in livestream event hosting and speaking at quarterly sales meetings.

This strategic and ongoing executive social influence development program drove results:

- **480%** over benchmark Twitter impressions
- **21%** increase in new Twitter followers month-over-month (MoM)
- **14% increase** in new LinkedIn connections MoM
- **Multiple Organic Features** in LinkedIn Newsfeed

[See Full Case Study](#)

SECTION 04

New Opportunities for B2B Brand Influence



Multiple studies have reported the growing issue of trust between buyers and brands. However, people do trust other people including employees and executives, especially when they are authentically active on social media.

Building executive presence and influence through social media is a real opportunity for B2B brands to engage with customers authentically. As part of improving thought leadership for the brand, 75% of B2B marketers already work with internal executives to grow their credibility with customers. 63% work with executives to build greater influence to improve sales conversations.

And it's working. 65% of B2B marketers say internal executives have been very or extremely effective at increasing the influence of the brand.



Alicia Dietsch

*SVP Business Marketing,
AT&T*

At its core, social media is about growing connections.

Customers are looking for brands to meet them where they are and nurture meaningful, emotional connections. For some companies, this means being generous with your expertise through thought leadership; for others it's about dialing in to the voice of the customer to adapt product and service approaches.

Regardless of the strategy, executives on social channels are uniquely positioned to connect with the human behind the prospect and deepen relationships with the brand.

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CHAPTER SUMMARY

Growth of Influence from Within



Employee influence is a growth opportunity. Employee shares tend to get 8x more engagement and 561% of the reach that brand messages do.



Executive influencers can boost brand credibility and thought leadership. Two thirds of respondents who work with executives said their program was very or extremely successful.



Executives can do more than share content. Our respondents said they tap executives to contribute to brand content, participate in interviews, and co-create content with other influencers.

Learn to Elevate Your B2B Marketing with Influence

Find Out More

05

B2B Influencer Marketing at Scale

We've seen that an always-on, engaged community of influencers is more likely to be successful than a periodic, campaign-based model. However, it can be challenging to scale up an influencer program in order to achieve the latter.

It takes smart investment in tools and skills to achieve influencer marketing at scale. That's doubly true for scaling up without losing the relationship-building and sense of community that makes influencers excited to work with your brand.

In this section, we'll look at how marketers are using their resources to build out their programs.



Budget vs. other challenges



48% said lack of a documented strategy



39.5% said difficulty identifying and activating influencers



38.3% said the process is too manual



32% said lack of budget

B2B Influencer Program Budgets

Influencer marketing doesn't necessarily require a massive budget. We found that over half of respondents are spending less than \$100,000 a year on their programs.

However, the data also shows a correlation between higher budget and likelihood of success. **73%** of those spending under \$50,000 said their influencer marketing was not successful, while **0%** of those spending over \$100,000 said the same.

It's interesting to note that "lack of budget" was a distant fourth place in the top challenges our respondents reported. Lack of a documented strategy, difficulty finding influencers, and manual processes were all more pressing concerns. It's not just about having the budget; success is tied to putting that budget to good use.

Technology and Tools

Influencer marketing technology can help with identifying influencers, nurturing relationships, negotiation, measurement and more. However, **nearly 40%** of respondents said they use no technology in their programs.

Investment in the right tools is essential for influencer marketing at scale. Many of these platforms can consolidate information and find insights far faster than any marketing team could do it manually. These platforms also help surface the data that marketers need to approach influencer marketing strategically, from planning all the way through measurement.

“ Ad hoc, unsustained and spreadsheet-based influencer marketing programs will end up being a big waste of time and money! To be successful, commit to a sustained strategy, leverage technology and/or agencies to drive the process, and measure the impact and adjust as you go.

Tom Treanor

CMO, Treasure Data

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40%

of respondents say they use no technology — a major opportunity for improvement



Working with an Agency

For B2B companies with
500 to 1,000 employees,

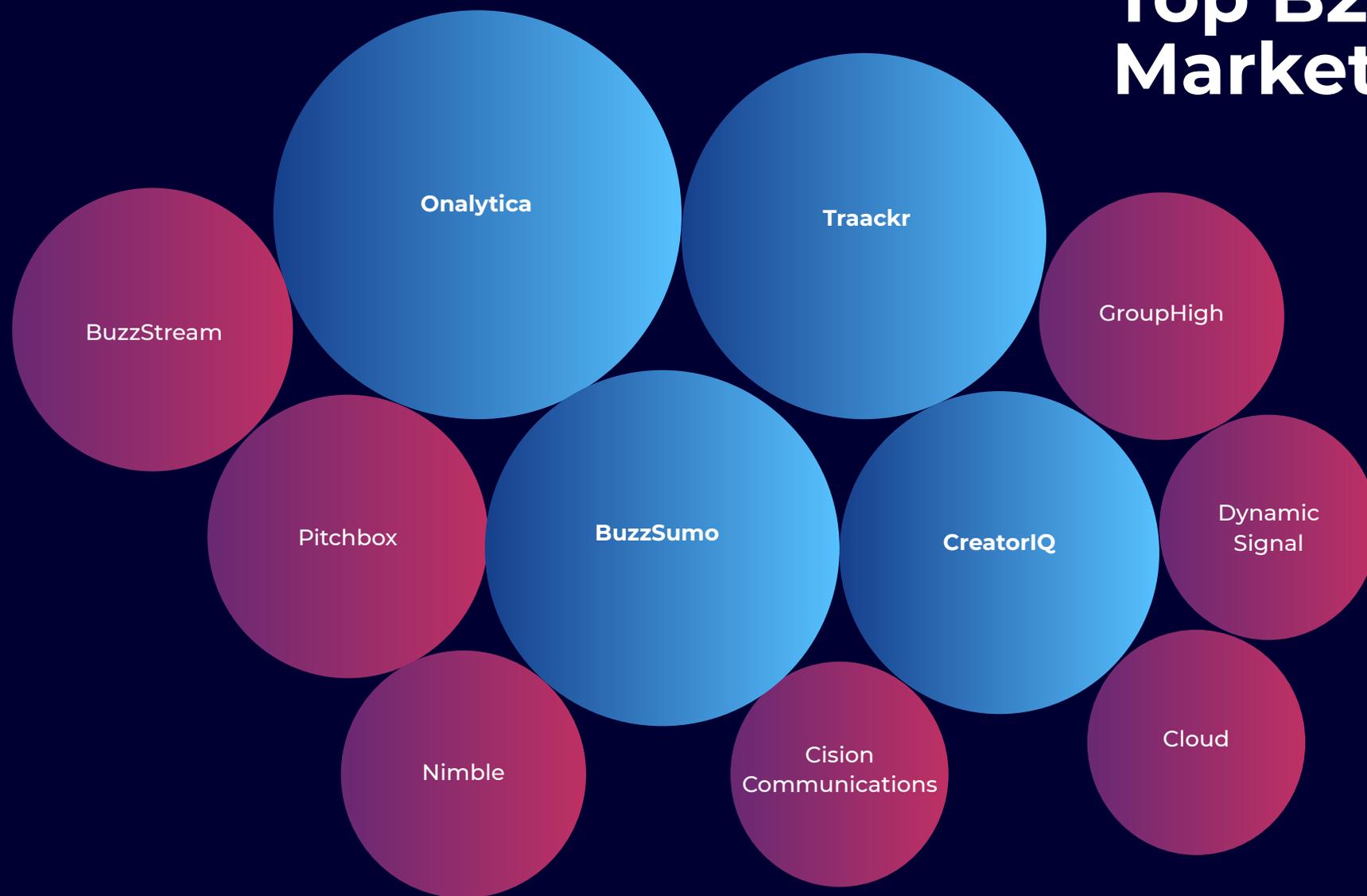
55%

indicated that working with an
agency to source influencers was
effective vs. 27% that used software

Many of the obstacles to influencer marketing at scale can be addressed with an agency partner. **Our respondents said they are challenged to find and engage influencers, and they get bogged down in manual processes.** These challenges map directly to an agency's strengths.

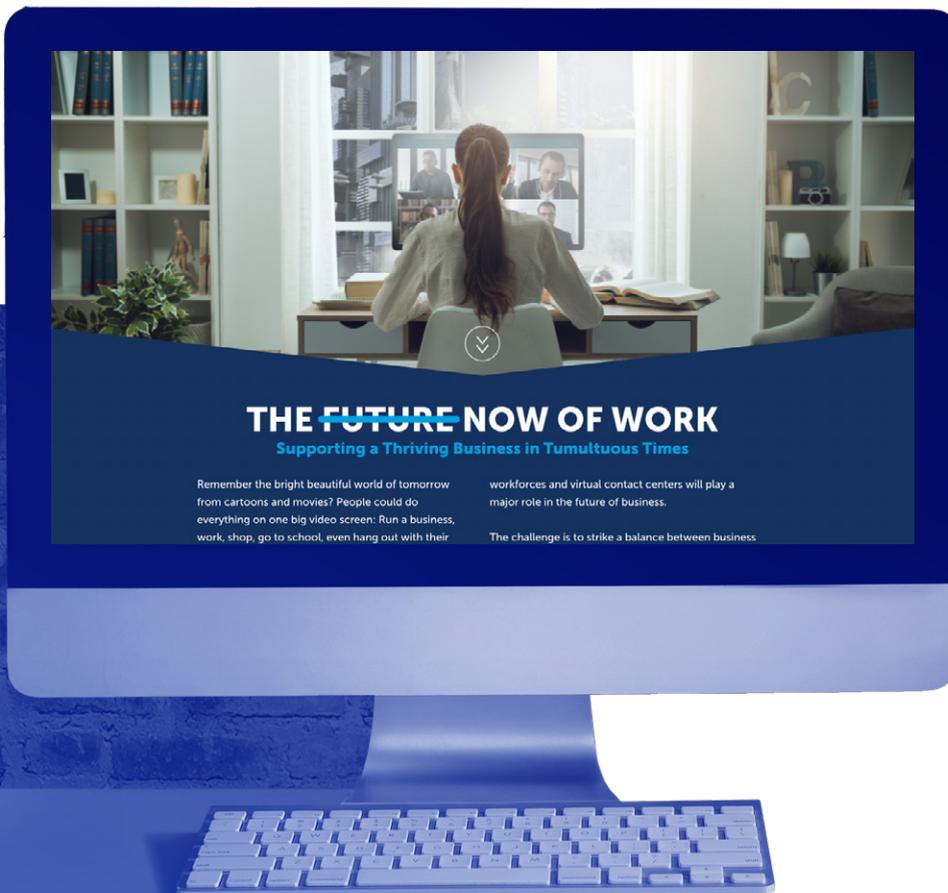
A B2B influencer marketing agency will have dedicated staff with experience in strategy, planning, outreach and beyond. They'll know the right tech and tools to get the job done with both effectiveness and efficiency.

Top B2B Influencer Marketing Platforms



Case Study

How Influencer Tech Helped Mitel Make Waves



Mitel had been testing influencer marketing in the business phone systems industry for years but kept facing the same challenge: driving consistent, scalable performance.

Without the right technology and strategic approach needed for a scalable effort, achieving a competitive advantage with influencer marketing in B2B can be an uphill battle. The solution: a strategic approach to influencer marketing process, technology and execution.

For Mitel, that approach included choosing the right influencer marketing platform. No tool fits every need, so it was important for Mitel to select a technology solution suitable for scalable enterprise-wide deployment to identify and engage influencers as well as provide deeper data analytics and insights.

With the right strategy and tools in place, Mitel established influencer sponsorships and content that helped accelerate product awareness, expand reach, and instill customer confidence.

With the right influencer marketing technology and processes in place, Mitel was able to achieve:

- **7.2M+** Reach
- **5000+** Visits to Landing Page
- **270%** increase in Influencer Placements

[See Full Case Study](#)

To be effective with your B2B influencer marketing program, you need to focus on two things.

First, leverage a platform partner that will help you build a program with a strong strategy and that can discover influencers at scale - not just on Twitter.

Second, that platform partner needs to deliver impactful insights into the audiences of the discovered influencers — line of business, interests, engagement, title. A micro-influencer with a smaller following likely engages with your target buyer, where a macro-influencer with a larger following may only drive impressions. And let's be real, impressions don't move the needle.

[Click to Tweet](#) 

Ryan Bares

Global Influencer & Advocacy Lead,
IBM

SECTION 05

Influencer Technology and Process

While many B2B marketers at the early stages of influencer marketing maturity are reliant on spreadsheets and task lists, the most successful B2B marketers invest in processes and platforms.

To help scale the success of influencer marketing, there are numerous influencer marketing technology partners to help identify the right influencers, manage communications and report on performance. Making use of these powerful platforms is aided by established processes and expertise.

Some B2B brands find they can jumpstart their influencer marketing by working with specialized agencies to provide proven processes and platform expertise in addition to established relationships with top influencers. Our research found that **31% of B2B marketers use software themselves** and **43% work with an agency** to source influencers.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Influencer Marketing Operations



Influencer budgets are increasing, but not the sole indicator of success. The majority of respondents have a budget under \$100,000 a year; but those spending more than \$100,00 were more likely to report success.



Technology and tools are underutilized. Nearly 40% said they use no tools for influencer marketing, despite the technology's potential to help mitigate top challenges like identifying influencers and measuring success.



Agencies can help bridge the gaps to scale up influencer marketing. From strategy to implementation to measurement, respondents who work with agencies find them an invaluable resource.

Learn to Elevate Your B2B Marketing with Influence

Find Out More

06

The Future of B2B Influence

What impact will the metaverse have on influence for B2B marketing? Will virtual influencers be a trend for businesses? How about the role of NFTs and creator crypto-currencies like Rally?

While it's tempting to chase technologies to be on the cutting edge in marketing, the future of influence in B2B is rooted more in human nature than tech.

Tech certainly plays a role and to dig deeper into the human drivers of B2B influence in 2022 and beyond, we reached out to 10 top B2B industry influencers themselves along with B2B marketers from major brands and influencer tech platform executives for their insights.



B2B Influencer Marketing Predictions

from Top Experts and Influencers



Tamara McCleary

CEO
Thulium
[@TamaraMcCleary](#)

“Skeptical of leadership, brands, and conventional authority, buyer perceptions have changed making relationships a critical piece of the marketing ROI equation. People make purchasing decisions based on recommendations and perceptions of people (not brands) they respect and trust. Influencers will be essential for humanizing B2B brands in 2022.”



Pierre-Loïc Assayag

Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Traackr
[@pierreloic](#)

“Rising costs of digital advertising and crowded markets make it more important for businesses to find more meaningful ways to market to their buyers. The future belongs to businesses who find creative, authentic, and transparent ways to partner with influencers to elevate their own brand and reach audiences where they want to be.”



Hana Benkirane

Senior Marketing Manager
LinkedIn Sales Solutions

“Influencer marketing will continue to play a critical role for B2B brands and their go-to-market strategies. The power lies in building authentic relationships with like-minded influencers who can amplify your brand’s message to existing and future customers.”



Jay Baer

Keynote Speaker, Best Selling
Author and Founder
Convince & Convert
[@jaybaer](#)

“With competition for influencers skyrocketing, brands will make longer term commitments to preferred influencers, working with them on comprehensive programs. In turn, influencers will make non-compete commitments to specific brands. The same way Matthew McConaughey cannot endorse Lincoln and Toyota, B2B influencers will need to tie their influence to one competitor per industry.”



Kevin Jackson

Best Selling Author and
Senior Vice President Channel Sales
Total Network Service
[@Kevin_Jackson](#)

“Like every other new business, the rapid and broad-based adoption of influencer marketing has demanded a much higher level of professionalism and innovation. Influencers must not only tailor their message to address their target audience’s primary business challenges, but they must also make themselves available for interactive exchanges via multiple social media communications channels.”

B2B Influencer Marketing Predictions

from Top Experts and Influencers



Amisha Gandhi

SVP Marketing
Tipalti
[@AmishaGandhi](#)

The future is all about integrated marketing and customer experience. Marketers will need to plug the influencer component into the complex process of B2B purchasing cycles across all the touch points (from blog content to gated experiences to ABM to advocacy) to drive engagement and ROI.



Angela Lipscomb

Influencer Relations Manager
SAS
[@AngelaLipscomb](#)

“B2B brands will start looking to new platforms to help reach a millennial and Gen Z audience. TikTok creators will join traditional technology influencers on the ‘influencer starting team.’ Influencer managers will need to learn the nuances of working with these creators, but the basics will always hold true of being authentic, collaborative and relationship-oriented.”



Theodora Lau

Author, Founder
Unconventional Ventures
[@psb_dc](#)

“I believe storytelling will gain prominence in B2B marketing as brands seek to connect to their audience in new and different ways; and we have a unique opportunity to help shape the stories through a lens of shared purpose and vision of the future.”



Jon Leiberman

Vice-President of Content, Social and
Influencer Marketing
Demandbase
[@reporterjon](#)

“Do you want people to actually pay attention? Then use video. Words spoken directly from the mouths of influencers resonate in a way that words on a screen do not. B2B will continue to more closely resemble B2C when it comes to using video as a tool for influence.”



Tim Williams

CEO
Analytica
[@williamstim](#)

“Influencer marketing is now an essential part of B2B marketing strategy yet influencers and brands are still working out the best ways to collaborate. Technology is now required to mature the industry by setting the engagement standards and streamlining influencer activation and management.”

The Future of Influencer Marketing: Relationships & Community

The popularity of influencer marketing is on the rise, with 85% of respondents expecting activity to increase over the next year. But success with influencer marketing isn't about quantity; it's about strategy. Our results show that B2B businesses who take an always-on, community-based approach are more likely to succeed. That will continue to hold true in the coming year and beyond.

Here are six key trends that B2B marketers should be aware of for 2022 and beyond.

1. Relationship Building As more B2B brands ramp up influencer marketing, top influencers in a given industry will be increasingly harder to secure. Brands will need to nurture relationships over time in order to keep influencers in their community.

2. Communities of Influencers One key way that brands can offer value to influencers is inviting them to a community of like-minded, influential people. The chance to network, share ideas, and collaborate with other influencers helps build brand affiliation.

3. Internal Influence Employee and executive influencers are still underutilized, but brands are starting to realize the potential. Internal influencers not only help control costs, they can also boost credibility, authenticity and reach.

4. More Multimedia Content Video, audio and interactive content are all gaining in popularity for content consumers, which means creators should take notice. Look for dynamic, multimedia content to rise in popularity while static assets have a harder time finding an audience.

5. More Tech for Influencer Identification and Nurturing These tools are essential for scaling influencer marketing in a strategic and sustainable way. We expect more marketers to make use of these tools, whether through direct subscription or retaining an agency with access to multiple solutions.

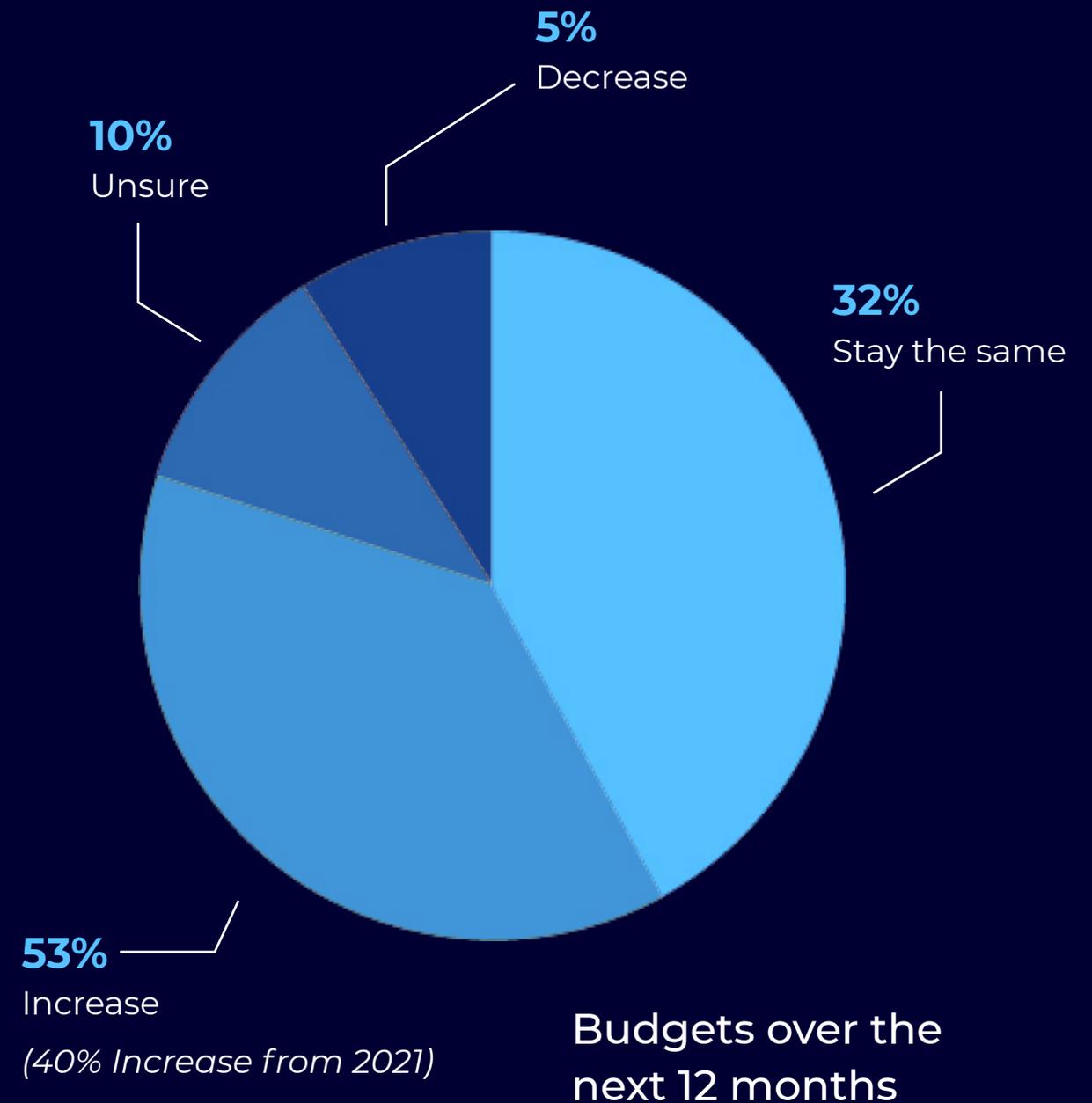
6. More Always-On Programs There is substantial overhead in starting a new influencer campaign. Identifying new influencers, making first contact, building relationships — if it all starts over for each campaign, it's not scalable. More marketers will be pursuing always-on programs that help eliminate that overhead.

B2B Influencer Marketing Spending

85% of influencer marketing budgets will increase or stay the same into 2023

While one of the top challenges B2B marketers face with influencer marketing has been lack of budget (32%), marketers are decidedly optimistic about the future. 32% expect budgets to remain the same over the next 12 months and 53% expect budgets to increase compared to only 38% planning an increase in our previous research.

Much of this spending optimism is warranted with 71% of marketers surveyed indicating influencer marketing became more important during the pandemic and 86% sharing their influencer marketing to be moderately or very successful.



The State of B2B Influencer Marketing 2022

The practice of B2B influencer marketing continues to grow in popularity year-over-year. More importantly, marketers are increasing their level of maturity and sophistication as they move toward always-on, relationship-based influencer communities. Those who have achieved a higher level of sophistication are more likely to report success with their program, a good indicator of what the future of the discipline looks like.

Consider these key insights from our research:

B2B influencer marketing is a proven success: 86% of B2B brands we surveyed consider their influencer marketing program to be successful. A third of respondents said influencer marketing directly contributes to sales and revenue, while over half said it helps with brand recognition, awareness, and lead generation.

Relevance and resonance are essential: 87% of respondents said that having an audience's trust and reaching a relevant audience were must-haves for their influencers. By contrast, only 49% said size of audience was an essential consideration.

Internal influence is a major opportunity:

Employees and executives alike can help your brand reach a new audience. Internal influencers are a cost-effective way to bring subject matter expertise and thought leadership to brand content.

Scalability requires technology and tools: The top challenges that B2B influencer marketers face include manual, repetitive processes, as well as difficulty qualifying, nurturing and activating influencers. Software solutions can help solve these challenges as marketers scale up their programs.

Always-on is highly correlated with success:

31% of brands with always-on programs rated their efforts *Very Successful*, while only 19% of those running periodic campaigns said the same. 0% of the always-on group reported they were *Not Successful*, compared to 24% of the group engaging periodically.

B2B influencer marketing is coming into its own as a practice distinct from its B2C counterpart, with its own best practices and benchmarks for sophistication. As marketers navigate the changing influencer landscape, an always-on, relationship-based strategy will be conducive to success.

20 Top B2B Influencer Marketing Experts to Follow



Ursula Ringham

Head of Global Influencer Marketing,
SAP
@ursularingham



Rani Mani

Head of Social Influencer Enablement,
Adobe
@ranimani0707



Vasudha Badri-Paul

Community/Marketing Head,
Intel
@VasudhaBPaul



Justin Levy

Director, Social and Influencer Marketing,
Demandbase
@justinlevy



Lina Forrestal

Influencer Marketing Program Manager,
Cisco
@linaroque



Amisha Gandhi

SVP Marketing,
Tipalti
@AmishaGandhi



Anton Shulke

Head of Influencer Marketing,
Duda
@anton_shulke



Kenny Gold

Managing Director, Head of Social,
Content and Influencer,
Deloitte Digital
@KRG



Srijana Angdembe

Director, Social Media & Influencer Marketing,
Oracle
@srijanaa



Angela Lipscomb

Influencer Relations Manager,
SAS
@AngelaLipscomb

20 Top B2B Influencer Marketing Experts to Follow



Drew Tambling

Director of Analyst & Influencer Relations,
Sprinklr
@drew_tambling



Evyenia Lyons

CMO,
Trackr
@evylyons



Leah Marshall

Director, Influencer Marketing,
ANA
@LeapCast



Lucinda Henry

Influencer Marketing Strategist,
HPE
@lucindarhenry1



Patrick Jones

Commercial Client Influencer Relations,
Dell Technologies
@whopjones



Paul Dobson

Senior Director, Social and Influencer Marketing,
Citrix
@svengelsk



Rob Hilsen

VP, Influence Marketing,
Genesys
@rhilsen



Treasa Dovander

Head of Social Media, Leadership Profiling & Influencer Engagement,
Ericsson Digital Services
@treasadovander



Ryan Bares

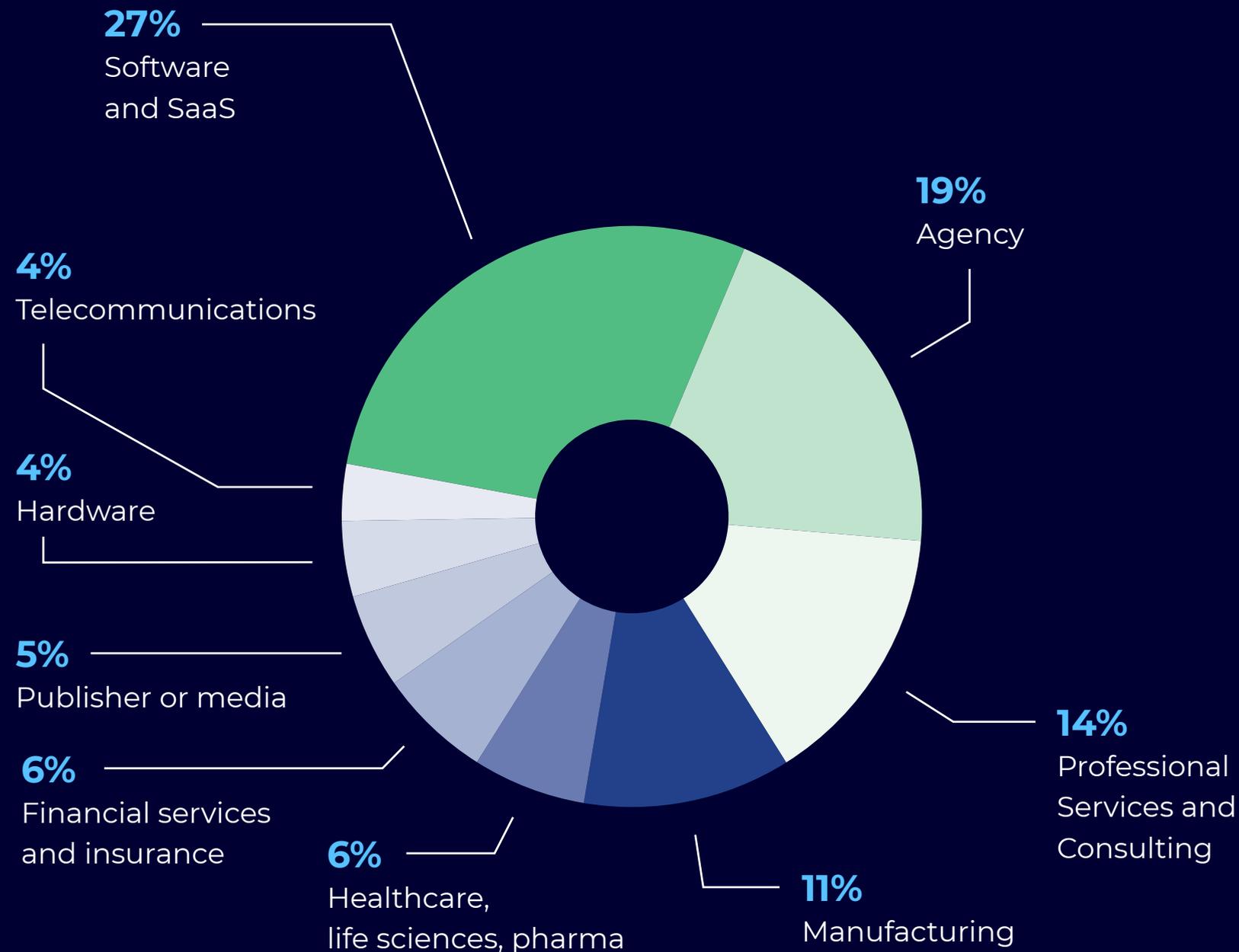
Global Influencer Marketing Lead,
IBM
@RyanBares



Ashley Zeckman

VP Strategy & Customer Success,
North America,
Analytica
@azeckman

Industries Represented in the Survey



Survey Methodology

For this 2022 report, TopRank Marketing partnered with Mantis Research to survey B2B marketing and communications professionals to understand the current and future role of influence for B2B marketing. The results in this report were drawn from an online survey fielded via email, organic outreach and invitations on our B2B marketing blog during mid 2021 and the first quarter of 2022.

Of the respondents, 78% work primarily in a marketing role, 75% of their organizations were exclusively B2B. 22% of respondents were at the Director level and 22% were Vice President or CMO. 36% have 1,000 or more employees and 67% were located in the United States

If you're interested in deeper influencer marketing insights from the team at TopRank Marketing, be sure to subscribe to our weekly blog or review our capabilities at [TopRankMarketing.com](https://www.TopRankMarketing.com)

About TopRank Marketing

Founded in 2001, TopRank Marketing has earned the reputation as a first choice marketing agency for B2B technology companies. With a mission to help elevate the B2B marketing industry, we're passionate about working with brands to create more authentic, inclusive and experiential marketing that inspires.

TopRank's ability to inspire B2B buyers comes from deep expertise at integrating content, influence and SEO to help B2B brands become the best answer for what their customers are looking for. With a network of hundreds of top B2B technology industry thought

leaders and an expert team of strategic, creative and analytical B2B marketers, we develop influencer optimized content that B2B brands can count on to improve thought leadership, grow customer engagement and impact the bottom line.

Cited by the Wall Street journal, The New York Times, Forbes, Forrester and The Economist and trusted by some of the top B2B brands in the world, TopRank Marketing is the leader in B2B influencer and content marketing.

Brands That Trust TopRank Marketing



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Elevate

Your B2B
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