Smaller-Scale Influencer Activations



Influencer Activations Prove Key to Building Strong Relationships

From Revolve's three-day Coachella extravaganza to Tarte's lavish #TrippinWithTarte getaway series, top-earning beauty, fashion, and lifestyle brands continue to rely on branded activations to bolster their relationships with influencer squads and encourage high-engagement content creation. However, these glitzy events and high-profile guest lists beg the question: how can smaller brands play in the space and inspire sustained enthusiasm from their supporters?



Brand-sponsored influencer activations serve three primary purposes:

- Activations and events encourage influencers to develop stronger, more emotional relationships to a brand. They offer influencers an opportunity to connect with a brand, and the people behind the brand, in a fun and engaging way. These deepened attachments can sustain content creation beyond the event itself.

- Events provide influencers with Insta-worthy experiences that they can share on their social media channels. By supporting influencers as content creators, brands can further demonstrate their respect for, and appreciation of, their blogger squads.

- Finally, bringing together a brand's influencer family helps promote relationships within the brand's squad, often resulting in more engaging content creation.

Thankfully, impactful activations do not have to come with huge price tags. We have seen a wide range of smaller, more accessible influencer events from both top 10 and lesser-known brands.

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Lesser-Known Brands, Particularly Skincare, Reap Rewards of Small-Scale Activations



Derma E Takes Influencers on Instagram Tour of LA

To celebrate Galentine's Day in Q1 2018, Derma E gathered a crew of smaller-scale and mid-tier bloggers including Yesenia Hipolito (@yeshipolito on Instagram, 168.6k followers), Manon Edwards (@chicwithcurves, 105.7k followers), Sherita Rankins (@sheritajanielle, 28.9k followers), Cicily Boone (@cicilyboone, 8.5k followers), and Jacqueline Codish (@makeupjackyluvv, 61.5k followers) for a tour of LA's most Insta-worthy murals, followed by an aerial yoga class. The activation spurred a flurry of content creation, with several ambassadors posting group photos from the event. Derma E re-engaged Manon later in the month for its #BodyPositiveSpaDay ($13.1k EMV), a spa retreat celebrating women who identify as plus-size. The five Galentine's Day attendees drove an average of $26.5k EMV across 15.6 posts each, significantly higher than the $4.5k and 3.4 posts per ambassador averaged by the brand's wider community.



Vichy Co-Hosts Latte Art Event With Marie Claire

Vichy achieved $3.1M EMV in Q3 2017, bolstered by content surrounding its Minéral 89 Hyaluronic Acid Face Moisturizer ($488.8k). In August, the brand celebrated the moisturizer with a breakfast jointly hosted with Marie Claire magazine in NYC's Hearst Tower. Influencers and industry insiders got to mingle, test Vichy skincare products, and sip coffee with personalized latte art by Instagram-famous barista Michael Breach (@baristart). A wide range of content creators, including blogger Joyce Park (@teawithmd), called attention to the Minéral 89 moisturizer in their posts and thanked Vichy for their invitation to the get-together. Joyce enthused about the event in an Instagram Boomerang: "We got to play with different Vichy #skincare products including the #vichy89, talk about my favorite topic (#skincare, what else?!) ... and hang out with people way cooler than me like @jenn_edit!" Following the event, Joyce increased her posting frequency from four brand mentions in Q3 2017 to 13 posts in Q4.



Almay Encourages Content Creation With Visit to Interactive Museum

In Q4 2017, Almay hosted a party at interactive art exhibit Happy Place in LA to celebrate its ongoing #AlmayReveal ($52.1k EMV) campaign. The brand invited a bevy of mid-tier bloggers and micro-influencers, including Nicolette Mason (@nicolettemason, 160.7k followers), Ravayna Coe (@ravayna, 156.2k followers), and Candy Washington (@candywashington, 60.2k followers), who Instagrammed the eye-catching art installations alongside previews of Almay products. In part due to the brand's concerted effort to engage mid-tier ambassadors and micro-influencers who had not spoken about Almay in 2017 prior to Q4, the brand saw QoQ growth in these two subsets. Mid-tier influencers made up 16% of Almay's total Q4 ambassador community, representing a 39% growth from Q3 2017. Similarly, micro-influencers accounted for 64% of the brand's Q4 ambassadors, a 2% QoQ uptick. In all, Almay collected $952.3k EMV in Q4.

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International Teams of Global Brands Often Host Intimate Events



IT Cosmetics UK Hosts International Women's Day Brunch

IT Cosmetics kept its UK influencer family engaged throughout Q1 2018, hosting a brunch in honor of #InternationalWomensDay ($77.1k EMV). The brunch included a discussion on self-love in which the attendees shared things they love about themselves with the group, inspiring effusive content from bloggers including Megan Gilbride (@wonderful_u on Instagram), Elle McNamara (@bambidoesbeauty), and Mary Forester (@this_girlslife). Megan called it a "beautiful afternoon celebrating confidence and being a woman with @itcosmetics and some seriously wonderful ladies," while Mary thanked the brand for a "truly inspiring afternoon." These three bloggers generated an average of $16.0k EMV across 7.0 posts each in Q1, higher than IT Cosmetics' average $11.7k ambassador potency and 4.1 posts per ambassador across its entire influencer community.



Huda Beauty UK Invites Influencers for Tea With Brand Founders

Huda Beauty broke into the U.K.'s top 10 beauty brands in Q2 2017 with $7.0M EMV. In May, brand founder Huda Kattan and her sister Mona Kattan invited a small group of influencers, including Rachel Leary (@rachleary on Instagram) and CC Clarke (CC Clarke Beauty on YouTube), to an intimate afternoon at London's Sketch tea room. A visibly giddy CC expressed gratitude for the chance to meet the Kattan sisters in her "HUDA BEAUTY INVITED ME TO TEA!?" vlog before providing an in-depth review and tutorial of the recently launched 3D Highlighter Palette. Rachel and CC drove a respective $162.2k and $179.6k EMV across 11 and 15 posts in Q2. Following the event, Rachel and CC increased their posting frequency, creating a respective 16 and 18 pieces of content in Q3 2017 that suggested increased enthusiasm about the brand. Rachel continued her momentum in Q4 2017, authoring 20 posts about Huda Beauty, while CC mentioned the brand 15 times.



NYX Germany Celebrates Pride With Influencer Family

NYX Professional Makeup garnered $6.8M EMV in Q3 2017, bolstered by content surrounding multiple Berlin-based activations. In July, the brand invited several bloggers, including Diana zur Löwen (@dianazurloewen on Instagram) and Kisu Nguyen (@kisu) to its Berlin Pride Parade event, where attendees shared photos of themselves posing in the parade. Diana gushed that she was so excited to celebrate Pride Day with her friends and the NYX Germany family, while hashtags tied to Berlin Pride—#CSD2017, #CSDBerlin, #pride, and #GayPride—drove a combined $221.0k EMV. Diana and Kisu respectively generated $124.2k and $40.6k EMV across nine posts each in Q3 2017, significantly outpacing the $15.3k and 5.5 posts per ambassador averaged by the wider NYX community.

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Top Brands Supplement Large-Scale Activations With Personalized Outreach

Top-performing brands are known for their blockbuster events; however, these brands often also scatter smaller, more personalized activations among their larger-scale productions. These intimate, personalized activations promote genuine, emotional relationships between influencers and brands that might otherwise be seen as “too big to care.”



Jo Malone Hosts Influencers #JustBecause
Jo Malone, which has consistently ranked as the top EMV-grossing fragrance brand, routinely engages its influencer family with various events, including intimate dinners and get-togethers. In Q1 2017, #JustBecause, the tag associated with many of these influencer events, drove $217.8k EMV for the brand. In fact, blogger Rosie Fortescue (@rosiefortescue on Instagram) was invited to the Jo Malone Townhouse so often that she joked, “The @jomalone Townhouse now feels like home. Please can I move in?” Because these #JustBecause events were centered around influencer appreciation, rather than product launches, they helped evoke strong emotional responses from the Jo Malone influencer family, deepening their relationships with the brand.



Ouai Parties With Influencer Squad
In Q4 2016, Ouai invited influencer squad Katy DeGroot (@lustrelux on Instagram), Karen Gonzalez (@iluvsarahii), Desi Perkins (@desiperkins), and Shayla Mitchell (@makeupshayla) to Kanye West’s Saint Pablo Tour in LA. Prior to the concert, the influencers were styled by the Ouai team at the Andy Lecompte Salon in West Hollywood, where they sipped White Girl Rosé and broadcast the experience on their social channels. Karen and Desi have posted about Ouai every quarter since this Q4 2016 activation, while Katy has posted every quarter except Q3 2017 and Shayla has posted every quarter except Q1 2017 and Q1 2018, suggesting strong brand loyalty among these influencers.

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Conclusion & Best Practices

The best activations deepen influencers' connections to a brand while simultaneously promoting content creation. However, even when an activation does not yield high EMV returns, strengthening brand-influencer relationships through intimate events can result in more consistent EMV generation over time. For lesser-known brands, smaller-scale activations can introduce influencers to a brand in a meaningful way. For more established brands, these activations can reinforce to influencers that their relationship to the brand is not transactional—rather, the brand truly knows and cares about its influencer supporters.

Ways to Activate

- Brands can host activations at established events instead of building experiences from the ground up. The event also does not have to be a three-day Coachella excursion: Almay used the setting of an interactive museum, which in itself promotes content creation, while Ouai built off the excitement of a Kanye West concert.

- Flying 15 influencers to a remote island for four days comes with a big price tag. Instead, brands can source local influencers who are enthusiastic about their brand for short, single-day excursions like Derma E's LA Instagram tour. These activations can be as simple as a group exercise or yoga class or an intimate dinner with the brand —any venue where relationships can be built is ripe for opportunity!

- Some of the most effective relationship-building activations are also the most accessible. The power of a handwritten note that references a touchpoint in the influencer's personal life gained from engaging with their content is significant. Feeling seen, heard, and respected by a brand that an influencer cares deeply about can engender loyalty in just the same way as a lavish event.

@sheritajanielle via Instagram



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