

## 5 Creative Influencer Marketing Tactics for Airlines

A Digital Visitor eBook



“...influencer marketing is now truly maturing as a channel for brands in every industry.”



# 01

## Identification

Identifying relevant and impactful influencers is the first step in any campaign if you are to connect with the right audience for your brand.

# 03

## Blogger Trips

Hosting blogger trips to a destination is a key tactic for working effectively with influencers to generate brand coverage.

# 05

## Hashtag Strategy

Hashtag strategies are a powerful way to connect your brand with ongoing conversations in social media.

# 02

## Instagram Takeover

Having an influencer take over your channel can be an effective method for promoting any aspect of your airline.

# 04

## Top Tips

Top tips articles are an ideal way to create positive coverage without having to ferry influencers hither and thither.



Simon Quance  
Head of Strategy

A key trend of the past several years, influencer marketing is now truly maturing as a channel for brands in every industry. And the travel industry, with all the opportunity it presents for the use of compelling images, experiences and stories is a prime candidate to make use of its growing impact.

This eBook has been written with national and international airlines in mind, as they battle against the growing 'noise' of digital media. The five tactics described within have delivered proven results for airlines within the past few months.

Each tactic will provide its own set of results, though their true value will only be realised upon the adoption and implementation of a concerted influencer marketing strategy. Explored in depth, airline marketers will be given the guidance required to implement each tactic themselves, in-house. Each is scalable, measurable and effective.

Happy reading,

Simon Quance

# Introduction

In an increasingly connected world, influence is playing an ever greater role in our lives, and in the commercial future of brands. Influence can take many forms, from word of mouth to online recommendations and ratings. It's an incredibly powerful tool for brands to harness.

Indeed, influence can be the single most powerful and cost effective way for a brand to reach its audience. Yet, the delivery of marketing generally is becoming increasingly complex. The fracturing of the traditional media landscape is accelerating, meaning that multiple channels, formats, devices, preferences and behaviours must be considered before audiences can be targeted.

Trust is, therefore, a crucial factor in people's decision to book travel. In Nielsen's most recent 'Global Trust in Advertising' survey, more than eight-in-ten respondents said they trust the recommendations of friends and family. But trust in others isn't confined only to those closest to us. Two-thirds of respondents said that they trusted consumer opinions posted online.

Indeed, for travel brands the influence of trusted voices online – especially those in social media – can have a powerful effect on people's pre-booking behaviour. With the power and authority of traditional printed media fading fast, travel and airline marketers can no longer rely on the

impact of costly newspaper ads and editorial.

So, who is there to bridge the burgeoning gap between audiences and the ability of brands to communicate with authority?

Step forward the influencer.

## Who are travel influencers?

The word 'influencer' in the travel industry could refer to a number of online personalities; bloggers, vloggers, Instagrammers (Igers), community and forum managers, and Pinterest board curators. They span demographics, ages, relationships (single or with families) and travel preferences (Europe, or further afield).

Naturally, influencers are a lot like you or I. Where they differ is in their way with words, images, video and content creation. And because we can relate to them, influencers are compelling, engaging, trustworthy and convincing. They are gatekeepers to readers, viewers and community members.



**“True influence is the ability to generate a response - an action - from an audience.”**

### Influencer vs. popularity

Understanding the difference between true influence and popularity is essential. Someone who is popular doesn't necessarily enact influence. For instance, spending time building vanity numbers - followers and likes - on social profiles may give the appearance of influence, but it isn't an indicator of engagement.

True influence is the ability to generate a response - an action - from an audience. Yes, an influencer should have healthy audience numbers, but what we're interested in is their ability to generate comments, shares and actions. Therefore, influencers with smaller yet highly engaged followings - so called micro-influencers - are extraordinarily valuable.

As access to genuine influencers often comes at a cost, be mindful that a good influencer strategy should understand where a blogger, vlogger or Instagrammer is in the development of their audience. Careful research, planning and understanding of who has reached their full potential and who is still growing is essential.

### Working with influencers

To get the most from your work with influencers, it's key to work with campaign managers who understand how influence in a social context works. As such, PR agencies aren't often best placed to run influencer campaigns.

The true power of an influencer feature is its authenticity and relatability. It is therefore essential that they are allowed to create content in their own voice or style. A heavy-handed approach to influencer management is almost certain to be counterproductive, reducing the impact your product or

brand receives.

Specialist influencer campaign managers will also possess knowledge of the value of each of their influencers, and understand the value of paying for smaller, higher-quality audiences.

There are rules and regulations to be aware of as well. Not including the correct style of links (no follow) in a paid influencer campaign can, for instance, have severe and long-lasting implications for your own website's performance in search engines.

### Five tactics

Now you've got a better understanding of the why, what and who of influencer marketing, we've put together a series of practical tactics that you can use to implement and give direction to your own influencer marketing.

And for ease of use and understanding, we've summarised each tactic and provided a number of key steps. These steps are there to illustrate the actions you need to take in order to get your campaign underway, including a creative idea to provide you with a little inspiration.

Each step is eminently implementable in-house, but remember to adhere to the rules and seek an expert for help where required before you get stuck.

# Tactic 01

## Identification

Identifying relevant and impactful influencers is the first step in any campaign if you are to connect with the right audience for your brand.

### Macro vs. micro-influencers

Celebrity influencers (think Zoella) can deliver impressive results numerically, but they invariably come at a significant cost. Instead, look to truly influential micro-influencers over macro-influencers. The individual reach of these bloggers or vloggers may not be as large, but they are relatively more influential as their audience will be more engaged.

To illustrate our point, a recent report found that macro influencers with a followership between 1 and 10 million have, on average, an engagement rate of 1.66 percent. Whereas, those with between 1,000 and 10,000 followers experience an engagement rate in the order of 4%. And those with fewer than 1,000 regular readers engage 8% of their audience.

Additionally, followers of celebrities are far more likely to be wary of brand features or sponsored content as they know it's likely they are being paid big bucks. Micro-influencers are still paid - quite rightly - but they are also far more choosy about the content they produce. Choose to promote the wrong product and their authenticity and audience could be at stake.

To identify the genuine influencers in your list, apply the baseline number below. These will help you root out those who will truly contribute to your campaign.

**Facebook;** > 3,000 followers

**Twitter;** > 10,000 followers

**Instagram;** > 10,000 followers

Crucially, always be on the lookout for fake or bought followers, especially on Instagram and Twitter. Influencers have been known to purchase followers to bump their numbers up. A clear sign of this is high audience numbers with suspiciously low engagement levels - look to likes, shares and comments.

### List and contact

Keep a list while conducting your cursory research. Once complete, rank those on your list according to the influencers you'd like to work with.

Things to consider are your budget, and the ability of the influencer to deliver the exact blend of coverage you're looking for. For reference, to work with a blogger who receives in the region of 15,000 hits per month you can expect to pay around £100 per article.

Now you've organised your list of targets, start drafting a reach out note for each individual influencer. It's essential that this email is personal and not generic; you're looking to create a working relationship and not a simple exchange of services.

If it's not somebody you've spoken to recently, highlight a piece of content they've recently penned, and sell your campaign to them with compelling

reasons about why you want to work with them and what your expected outcomes are.

Don't be scared to be direct, but be friendly in requesting a prompt response. However, don't expect to receive an immediate reply; most bloggers have a life and job that takes up a chunk of their time. For that reason, a response could take days, or even longer, to materialise.

“Instagram is currently one of the most popular social media platforms. It’s particularly popular among travel and tourism brands.”

## Tactic 02

### Instagram Takeover

Instagram is currently one of the fastest growing and most popular social media platforms. For that reason and because of its potential for compelling image-led content, it’s particularly popular among travel and tourism brands.

If you have an existing presence on Instagram, consider having an influencer take over your channel. This approach can be an effective method for promoting any aspect of your airline; a newly available route, or specific destination campaign.

The concept here is to hand the management of your channel over to one, or more, selected Igers. This approach can deliver both quality content and connect you with their significant and relevant audiences for an agreed period of time. Just make sure that your plan is neatly aligned with your airline’s fundamental business objectives.

For maximum impact, make sure to announce the planned activity in advance with a post. Additionally, remember to change your profile copy to show normal users that an influencer is going to be running your channel for a while. Consider agreeing a hashtag to connect the activity to your broader marketing campaign (see tactic 5 for more information).

#### Key steps

1. Invite Instagrammers to fly with you to a destination and encourage them to share compelling content.
2. Use direct messaging to reach out to them. Alternatively, seek out an email address from their website.
3. Agree on a level of cross-promotion; e.g. two duplicated images on their feed announcing the takeover, and 10 images create for you with copy.
4. You retain final sign off on the images and post a selection following the trip.
5. Define themes for the influencer to adhere to, giving you an element of creative control.
6. Understand that authenticity counts, so be cautious if you have stringent controls on your brand image.

### Creative direction

The best way to maximise the impact of an Instagram takeover is to create a relationship with multiple influencers.

Once you've identified the right influencers to approach, plan and host an on-board event and ask them to share images and content from the day/evening.

Your event needn't be anything too complex, but should be of high-quality; perhaps a food tasting or other onboard experience that demonstrates what sets you apart from other airlines.

Additionally, consider letting your influencers explore your airport lounge and other facilities to give your audience a real feel for what it's like to fly with you.



“Visual media is as important to these stories as the words are.”

## Tactic 03

### Blogger Trips

Hosting trips to a destination is a key tactic for working effectively with influencers. The best bloggers pen wonderfully detailed stories about their experiences, making a series of posts that detail their experience with your airline a truly powerful tool when written from the perspective of a traveller.

Ensure you're receiving the agreed coverage by sourcing relevant influencers and providing thorough scopes, including images and, potentially, video content where relevant. Visual media is as important to these stories as the words are. A full agreement between the airline and blogger is vital to guarantee that any content produced is distributed through their own social channels.

#### Key steps

1. Create a targeted list of bloggers, populated only with those who are a good fit for your campaign. Misdirected outreach efforts waste a lot of time, and can damage a campaign.
2. Closely define your expectations at the very beginning of the process. Consider things like the number of blog posts you'd like, the length of each, the number of social media updates that should be posted, who should be tagged and how many follow up posts should be written.
3. Factor a 'plus one' into your budget.

Most bloggers don't like to take trips alone, so you'll need to be prepared to convey two people.

4. Cover reasonable expenses for the blogger, including food and other complementary activities.
5. Make sure the trip and itinerary you put together is interesting and compelling. You need to create something that bloggers want to be involved in, while also highlighting your brand values and USPs.
6. Reach out to partner brands - hotels, local attractions, restaurants, baggage providers - to maximise the reach of your campaign. Remember to broach the idea of cross-promotion.

#### Creative direction

As an airline, it's likely you'll have several target markets across countries and sectors. For that reason, it's prudent to consider working with a diverse range of bloggers from different communities and countries.

For instance, an influential fashion blogger writing about an airline or travel experience can be impactful. It disrupts the usual flow of content that blogger usually publishes, generating engagement and discussion around the topic. So, plan a campaign that enables you to access multiple additional audiences where possible.

# Tactic 04

## Top Tips

If you're working to a tight budget or want to test the waters, achieving success through influencer marketing does require some thought. The easiest way to keep a handle on the amount you're spending is to remove the travel element. And top tips articles - or similar - are an ideal way to create positive coverage without having to ferry influencers hither and thither.

Bring your campaign and brand values to life - even in support of broader influencer activity - with a variety of these articles. But be sure to work with each blogger to get the list exactly right, as such an approach will guarantee the best value coverage. Consider your campaign's main themes and collaborate to devise a strong creative direction.

### Key steps:

1. Allow the bloggers you choose to draw on their previous travel experiences. In the research phase, this could mean understanding where they have flown to or travelled around before.

2. Consider whether your influencers have already been to destinations you fly to. This will influence the content you ask them to produce; '5 Tips for Visiting Amsterdam', 'Surviving Long Haul Travel', or 'What to Pack When Visiting India'.

3. Provide each blogger with the creative freedom to pen an article that fits in with their existing content. It's important that what they write feels like a natural fit for their audience.

4. Scope out exactly what's required of each blogger, aiming for extensive promotion of the article(s) across their own social media channels. You could even experiment with providing extra budget for them to boost posts on their Facebook page, ensuring maximum reach to their fans.

5. Don't pitch for any coverage that comes across as overly salesy or pushy. Remember, this is pull messaging, not push marketing.

6. Encourage the bloggers to disclose the content as sponsored or as an advertisement. Transparency is vital, as savvy readers will already know that it's paid for. Using 'no-follow' links is a must, as overlooking this could damage your own search engine rankings.

**“Don't pitch for any coverage that comes across as overly salesy... this is pull messaging...”**



### Creative direction:

Pitch for inspirational content that prompts bloggers to write about their travel experiences in the context of your brand. This could look like an itinerary-style post for the perfect luxury weekend break. Such a piece would include travel with your airline as one of its key steps.

As an approach, this generates builds anticipation of what the whole experience might be like, driving consideration from the end user.

Also worthy of consideration are collaborative giveaways using social media friendly competition apps like Rafflecopter. These sit within the blogger's own blog and might include free flights or other travel-related prizes; special discount codes, for instance.

You can expect results to include awareness, social follows for your channels and new leads through data capture.

# Tactic 05

## Hashtag Strategy

Hashtag strategies - the practice of assigning a hashtag to a given campaign - are a powerful way to connect your brand with ongoing conversations in social media. Implemented effectively, a hashtag campaign can create a distinctive brand identity across social channels.

Twitter and Instagram are especially important to any hashtag strategy. Through these channels users regularly use and create hashtags to add their own content to existing streams about a huge number of topics. And while using hashtags in Facebook works as part of a wider campaign, it isn't best practice to make it the focal point of your campaign.

Ensure the success, and reach, of your hashtag strategy is maximised by promoting your chosen hashtag with advertising. And work closely with a handful of carefully selected influencers who can provide it with a platform. At the beginning of a campaign, this approach can give a hashtag legitimacy and reach.

### Key steps:

1. Research and create a branded hashtag unique to your business or campaign. This could include your brand name or marketing strapline.
2. Before rolling out a full strategy and working with influencers it's important to test your hashtag. Begin using it

and monitor popularity, uptake and effectiveness using an Instagram management tool like Iconosquare.

3. Once sure of your chosen hashtag, create relationships with a number of relevant and influential Igers/bloggers. Ask them to create a series of posts and share with your hashtag. You could even use one of the previous tactics detailed in this eBook, with an additional hashtag element included.
4. Develop and launch a gallery on your own website to display the best example of user content shared alongside your hashtag. Ensure you've gained permission to use any images in your terms and conditions.
5. Run a series of giveaways on Instagram and Twitter, encouraging followers to share inspirational travel content to with a holiday/flight/prize.
6. Make sure to engage proactively with those using the hashtag with comments, likes, feedback and sharing.
7. Go a step further by reaching out to Igers, asking if it's ok for you to regram their content. This is vital as user content will be seen as trustworthy and more authentic.
8. Retain a focus not only on generating UGC, but interacting with it and working to form a highly engaged community.

### Creative direction:

A hashtag strategy works best in conjunction with a wider campaign with influencers, or on a platform like Facebook. Consider leveraging interest in a wider event - an anniversary, or cultural event like the Olympics - to drive reach and awareness.

For instance, we recently worked with IHG to promote its loyalty scheme by running a campaign in conjunction with Eurostar to celebrate the 20th

anniversary of the Channel Tunnel. To promote the chosen hashtag - '#IHGselfie' - our team worked closely with a community of Instagrammers, taking them on photowalks in London and Paris.

Tying this all together, we also devised a cross-platform photo competition. All anyone had to do was upload a picture tagged #IHGselfie to Facebook, Instagram or IHG's brand new, purpose built landing page.



# Say Hello

If you'd like any more information about the tactics covered in this eBook, please get in touch.

You can also contact me to discuss anything about your social media strategy and how you can better engage your customers through social.

## Anthony Rawlins

Managing Director

[anthony@digitalvisitor.com](mailto:anthony@digitalvisitor.com)

+44 (0) 1179 111 420