



nosto 

Travel is back. And so are the influencers!

Why organic
influencers are
the future of
travel marketing

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Introduction

Influencer marketing entered the scene as a promising brand strategy. In the digital evolution of celebrity endorsements, social media influencers presented new opportunities to gain exposure via built in, far reaching and highly engaged audiences. For brands, influencer marketing seemed like a goldmine. But the adage rings true: all that glitters isn't gold.

Traditional influencer marketing has been plagued by fraud and high-profile scandals that have soured many consumers and companies alike against it, fueling the desire for authentic content. This shift in consumer and brand perception have sparked a need to reimagine the industry as a whole.

The influencers of yesterday are not the influencers of today, and they certainly won't be the influencers of tomorrow—especially not when it comes to travel.

The fact of the matter is that while we look at influencers in awe and appreciation, the million dollar vacation house is not accessible to most of their followers. That's where organic influencers come in: the person taking their PTO, going on a backpacking trip, or renting a house with six other friends. People are looking to social media for experiences that reflect their own.

In this guide, we'll explore the evolution of influencer marketing and how travel brands can begin to reach and influence their broader target audiences by strengthening consumer trust, scaling authentic content experiences, and creating deeper, long term relationships with their customers—all by redefining the meaning of influencer marketing, and who should really hold that impact.

The Return of Travel and Rise of Influencer Marketing

The pandemic brought upon a cultural shift, and it's one we all face together as the world recovers. With every passing day that countries open back up, a new outlook on the nine to five work day, and an emphasis on curing burnout and visiting a place before you miss the opportunity—well, travel is back!

As we slowly ease into a sense of familiar normalcy from prepandemic times, there's been a noticeable spike in travel. At the end of 2021, Trivago notched \$6.36 million in net income, reversing a \$2.6 million loss a year earlier. Revenue jumped 129 percent to \$160.6 million, which made one thing clear: travel is on the upswing.

When it comes to influencer marketing, we can say the same.

In 2019, we saw a slow decline, but things have changed. Historically, people in the public eye have played the role of influencer. For celebrities, athletes, politicians and others of similar caliber, it was their ability to reach an audience that afforded them the power of influence. But, the rise of social media and the democratization of content have provided more people the ability to influence than ever before — and social audiences have continued to grow in tandem.

Today, social media influencers are people who can amass and influence a significant online presence. Macro-influencers can have enormous followings, with audience sizes consisting of hundreds of thousands to millions of followers. Micro-influencers, on the other hand, typically have smaller, but still significant, followings of 5,000 up to 100,000.

The rise in influencers can be credited in part to the shifting ways consumers use social media. Today, users not only leverage social platforms to build networks or post updates, but also as a tool to gather information and discover products.

According to the GlobalWebIndex (GWI), 27% of social media users around the world say they use social platforms to research and find products to buy. Of that number, Gen Zs and Millennials make up 68% of social media users for product discovery.

But these days, we have learned that reality sells and influencer's personal beliefs matter. 44% of influencer followers are more likely to trust something if they know their struggles, 35% say people who have a platform gave a duty to speak about injustice, and 32% think influencers should make it clear when they use filters on their photos.

This all points to a certain future: the highly edited and picture perfect social media posts, curated feed, and aesthetic lifestyle are on their way out.

Instead, consumers are searching for more authentic experiences and testimonies to fuel their motivation to purchase.

Marketing Budgets in Search of Solutions

With consumers spending more and more time online, brands have looked to capitalize on building awareness through influencer marketing strategies.

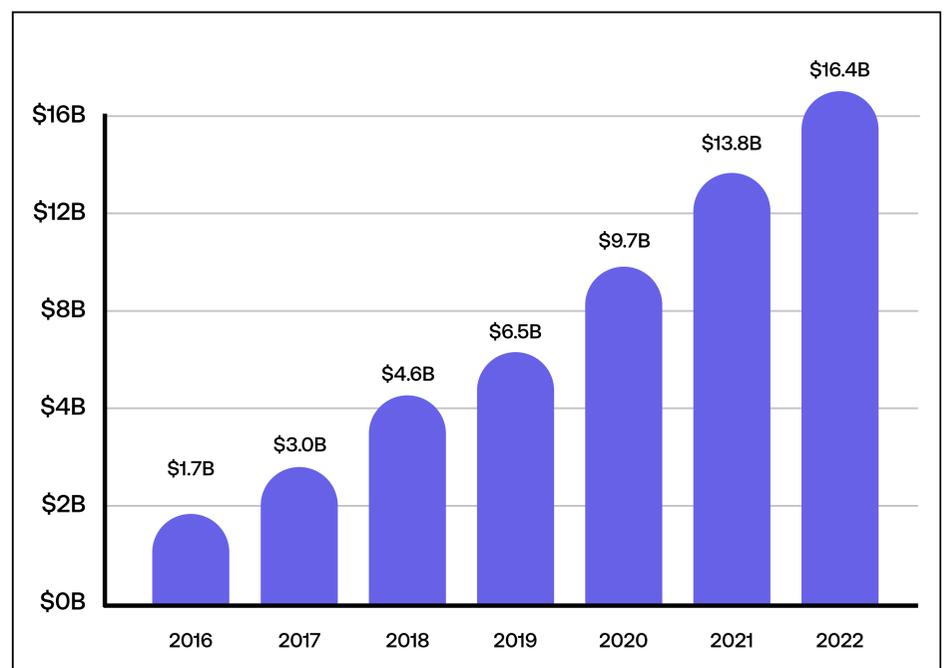
From 2016 to 2020, the influencer marketing strategy grew from \$1.7 billion to 8.7 billion. This growth only continued as it reached \$13.8 billion in 2021, and is projected to expand into a \$16.4 billion market.

As the influencer marketing industry continues to grow, so do influencer companies and services. In 2021, influencer marketing businesses increased by 26%—totaling in 18,900 worldwide.



So, marketers are investing heavily in influencer marketing, and people are active across social platforms. The influencer market continues to grow and surge, but now the focus has shifted entirely. While social influencers may have been able to deliver the initial eyeballs brands have sought, impressions don't equal purchases—and traditional social influencers are no longer the most influential people online.

A new brand of influencers are one the rise: the influencer who looks like an every day person.



Influencer Marketing Global Market Size

Out with the Lies, In with Transparency

As an industry, influencer marketing has become over saturated and beleaguered by a heavy barrage of high profile scandals and rampant reports of fraud.

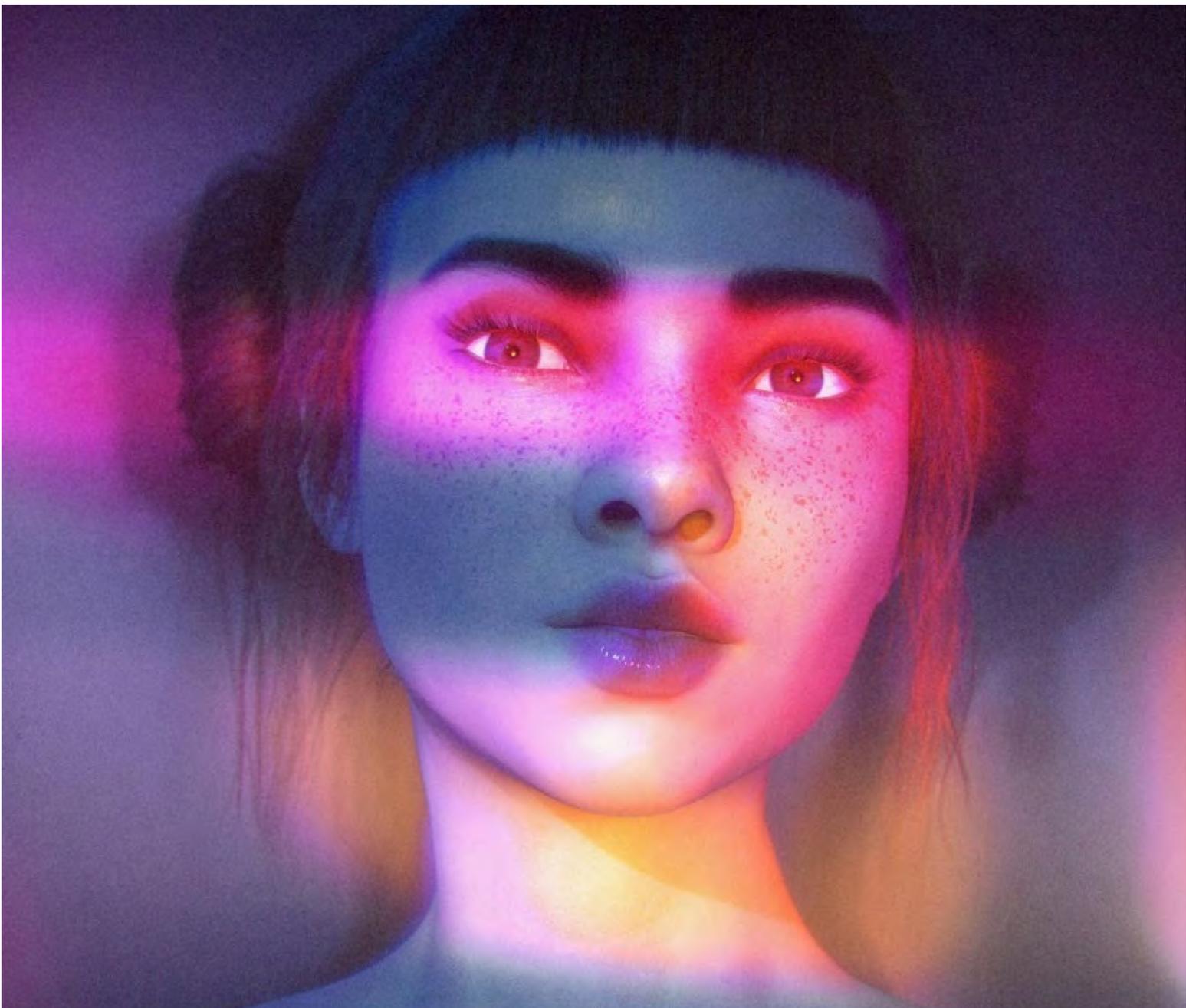
We've seen everything from reality TV stars accidentally posting brand instructions into their promotional posts, to a beloved social influencer admitting she's actually a CGI robot, to brands like Payless fooling influencers into paying \$640 for \$20 shoes and not one but two documentaries on the absolute dumpster fire that was (or wasn't) the Fyre Festival. And that's not to mention the numerous reports of influencers paying for fake followers or inflating engagement rates.

According to HYPR, 64% of influencers have admitted to buying "likes". CNBC reported that fake followers can cost brands \$1.3 billion in influencer campaigns.

Naturally, all of this led to a dramatic loss in consumer confidence, and only 4% of people trusted what influencers said online. Since trust is essential to establishing credibility, which is foundational to cultivating influence, there is cause for alarm.

Transparency, then, is what consumers are looking for. People want honest reviews and are more keen to fraud than ever. Follower count no longer correlates to trustworthiness, and 20% of customers are ready to stop following influencers who are not up-front about sponsorships and advertisements.

@lilmiquela "I am not a human being, I'm a robot."



Influencer Engagement Rates: Then and Now

Influencer marketing has not been without its ups and downs, and while we saw decreases in 2019, the pandemic changed the social media landscape and paved the way for a new type of “influencer” to emerge.

While influencers have always been held as a great way to drive engagement, studies showed that the engagement rate for influencer sponsored posts fell to 2.4% in Q1 2019 from 4% three years earlier, while the rate for nonsponsored influencer posts slid to 1.9% from 4.5% for the comparable periods.

During Covid, people were inside their homes and spending a lot more time online, which lends to the growth of influencer marketing. And with emerging platforms like TikTok becoming the epicenter of Gen Z media, more avenues of social media engagement continue to expand.

A lot has also changed in the past two years in all forms of social commerce. Over 75% of brand marketers intend to dedicate a budget to influencer marketing in 2022, and the growth of the industry was strongly impacted by an estimated 9% YoY increase in usage of ad blocking tools. In terms of compensation, brands actually increased their pay towards influencers, creating an equal split between monetary payment and receiving free products.

Brands clearly see the importance and pay off of having a strong influencer marketing strategy, especially as we look towards a postpandemic world where places are re-opening and people are traveling once again.

So the question is what direction is influencer marketing taking?

Well, let’s talk about the organic influencer.



Why Organic Influencers are the Future of Influencer Marketing

Organic influencers are the real people who already buy your products and services, and create content about your brand — they're your genuine brand advocates. They may have 5,000 Instagram followers, or they may have 50, but the size of their social followings aren't as important as their passion, authenticity, and collective influence.

Authenticity is King

Today's largest group of consumers—Millennials and Gen Z—prioritize authenticity above all else when choosing which brands they support, and their trust in traditional influencers is at an all time low. Nosto's Visual UGC study found that 90% of Millennials say authenticity is important when choosing which brands they like.

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So what kind of content do consumers find the most authentic? User-generated content (UGC).

The content that everyday people—organic influencers—post online about the brands they love is viewed as the most authentic form of content by consumers globally, with 58% of consumers agreeing.

When it comes to travel, is there anything really better than authentic content? Gone are the days where people readily give up anything more than a double-tap to beautiful, yet clearly curated vacation photos. While it keeps consumers living in envy on their Instagram feeds, it doesn't necessarily result in a conversion.

UGC, on the other hand, does. Whether it be a new bathing suit for the beach or a travel bag, 9 out of 10 customers read reviews before buying a product. Reviews are an essential part of the purchasing process and help consumers make better decisions. The way people look at hotel ratings is the same way people read product reviews—they're the social proof for new visitors. Organic influencers understand this. They travel with the products, let you know if things break, and can struggle, because rarely is any vacation truly picture perfect.

Beyond being seen as the most authentic, organic influencer content is also the most influential content consumers reference when making purchasing decisions. In comparison to branded posts, 60% marketers shared that influencer-generated content drives engagement.



Photo by @_imkiran

Real People = Real Influence

Now that social media has become the go-to place for people to not only share content and connect with friends but also discover, consider, and buy new products, visual social proof is more important than ever. Picture perfect influencer content rose to popularity with brands in large part for this reason. But it turns out, consumers value the real over the staged.

Our Nosto study found that people are 9.8x more likely to make take action after seeing a peer's social post, as opposed to that of a traditional social media influencer.

That's right, **79% of people say that user-generated content highly impacts their decisions, while only 8% say influencer-created content would do the same.**



The Quality of Content You Want with the Quantity of Content You Need

One of the reasons why influencer marketing has become so popular with marketers is that they need content. But not just any content, they need high quality content that fits within their brand aesthetic while also looking authentic, and social media influencers were a great way to get it.

Except that the minute you pay someone for content, it becomes inherently inauthentic, and influencers typically only create and share a small amount of photos per campaign.

With organic influencers, the content is earned, not paid, so you never lose that authenticity factor.

However, your travel brand advocates don't always naturally create the exact type of content you may be seeking. By inviting your advocates into an organic influencer community, you can not only cultivate a deeper, 1:1 connection with them, but you can also open the lines of communication to help guide the types of content that they post about your brand.

For example, you could ask your organic influencers to post some product-use images and videos in advance of a release. Want them to highlight a specific feature or take a selfie instead of a scenic shot? Ask and provide examples of the types of images you want.

Many of your advocates will be excited to have direct interactions with their favorite travel brand, and you'll have authentic, high-quality content to leverage in your marketing — just remember to get the rights to that content first. Plus, Nosto's research shows that over half of consumers would be more likely to continue engaging with and/or purchasing from a brand if it shared their photos in its marketing.

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By developing a passionate and engaged community of organic advocates, you can get the quality and quantity of visuals you need for all your marketing channels—not just social profiles.

Amplify Influence Beyond Social

An often ignored but critical fact of influencer marketing is that your brand doesn't own the influencer content.

Unless it's explicitly agreed to during contract negotiations, brands don't have the right to the content they just paid an influencer to create, and they can't use it outside of the third-party platform the influencer originally posted it in. Typically, if a brand wants to use the influencer's content outside of simply regramming or reposting it on their social channels, they need to license or purchase the copyright for that content from the influencer at an additional cost.

In today's omnichannel marketing environment, where **63% of marketers feel pressure to continually produce greater amounts of content at higher frequencies**, this is not a sustainable marketing strategy. Since modern marketers are already operating at a content deficit—every new channel, medium and niche audience requires a new set of relevant and compelling visuals—the scalability and reusability of content has become an increasingly important factor of long term success.

Instead of paying for just one post from a traditional influencer that can only live on Instagram, tapping into your travel brand's organic influencers can help you continually generate and gain the rights to a multitude of assets from a larger pool of authentic creators. Once you have permission to use your organic influencers' content, you can exponentially increase the reach and impact of that content by featuring it across all your marketing channels.

By putting that influential content to work at every point in the buyer's journey, you can improve all your conversion metrics, not just at the point of inspiration.



The Next Generation Influencer Marketing Solution

Here at Nosto, we've taken notice of this shift in the influencer marketing industry and built a tool to help marketers effectively implement a winning organic influencers strategy. Our next generation influencer marketing tool, Organic Influencers, allows you to turn your authentic advocates into a powerful community of influencers.

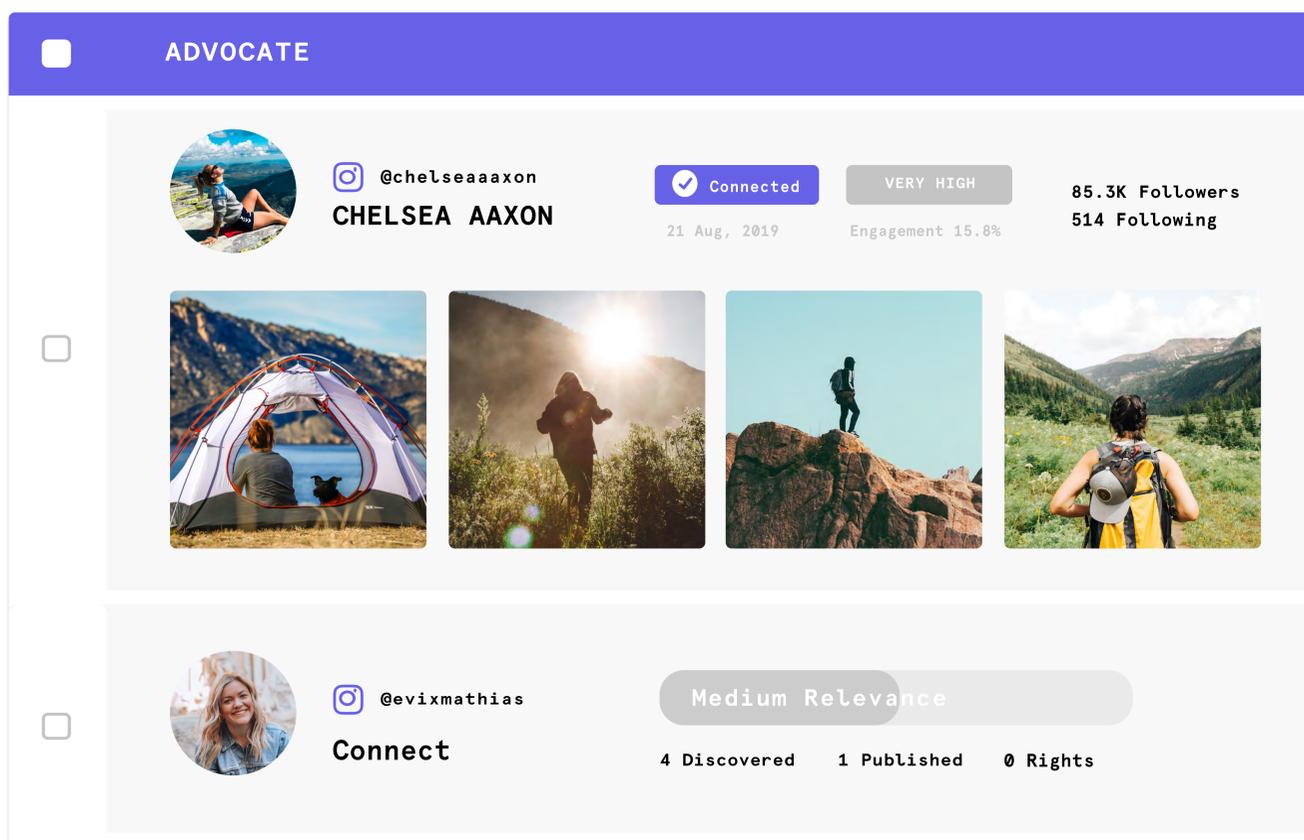
Build loyal communities and rich libraries of authentic, high quality content that delivers real ROI beyond social.

With Organic Influencers, you can easily find, engage, motivate and reward your best travel brand advocates to build loyal communities and rich libraries of authentic, high quality content that delivers real ROI beyond social.

Discover & Connect With Your Best Creators

Organic Influencers helps you easily find, rank and sort all the people who are organically creating content about your brand, then gives you a seamless way to directly reach out and invite them to your influencer or advocate community.

This is all done in a centralized dashboard, enabling you to manage all your advocate interactions and content rights in one place.



Manage Your Advocate Community

Organic Influencers offers brands a fully customizable creator portal that enables you to connect with your advocates through a branded external website where you can manage all of your community's content and interactions.

Distribute Content Briefs

Once people have agreed to join your influencer community, Organic Influencers enables you to develop and distribute customizable creative briefs to advocates via our private creator portal. Through this creator portal, you can outline for your community exactly what kind of content you'd like them to create—complete with brand guidelines and mood boards for structure and inspiration.

Upon joining the community, all advocates will be agreeing to your brand's specific Terms and Conditions. Therefore any content submitted to your brand via creative briefs will be automatically rights approved and sent directly to your Visual UGC Manager

Reward & Incentivize Advocates

It is through the creator portal that your advocates will receive every creative brief your brand invites them to participate in. If you want to help motivate your influencer community to continually produce and share the kind of content your brand is seeking, Organic Influencers allows you to attach your choice of rewards and incentives to each creative brief. Upon accepting content submitted by an advocate, that person will automatically gain access to whatever reward was attached to that specific brief.

For example, if you shared a creative brief with your influencer community looking for content featuring your hiking backpack in nature, you could set a 2 week time limit on that creative brief and offer a 50% off coupon for a pair of hiking boots to anyone whose content you accept. Once your brand has approved the photo John Smith submitted from his Yosemite hike wearing your brand's backpack, he'll receive the coupon you designated for that creative brief.

You get authentic, high-quality content, he gets a great deal on his next purchase as well as the opportunity to see his image featured throughout your marketing. Plus, the more merchandise he owns from your brand, the more opportunities he'll have to produce new, relevant content in exchange for continued rewards. Win, win.

Scale the Reach of Your Advocates' Influence

Once you have a bunch of authentic, relevant and rights approved visuals coming in from your community, Nosto Visual UGC enables you to put that content to work far beyond social media. The seamless scalability of this high quality, influential content is what really sets Organic Influencers apart from other influencer marketing platforms.

Instead of only featuring this content across third party social networks, Visual UGC allows you to seamlessly leverage this influential content across the rest of your omnichannel mix of owned and paid touchpoints—from your website and commerce pages to your emails and digital ads.



Conclusion

By redefining influencer programs to focus on organic advocates, brands can better reach and influence their target audiences, strengthen consumer trust, scale authentic content experiences and create deeper, long-term relationships with their customers.

About Nosto

[Nosto](#) enables online brands to deliver authentic, relevant, and personalized experiences at every touchpoint, across every device.

An AI-Powered Commerce Experience Platform (CXP) designed for ease of use, Nosto empowers brands to build, launch, and optimize 1:1 omnichannel marketing campaigns and digital experiences without the need for dedicated IT resources or a lengthy implementation process.

Leading brands in over 100 countries use Nosto to grow their business and delight their customers. Nosto supports its clients from its offices in New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Berlin, Stockholm and Helsinki.

Learn more at about Visual UGC [here](#)