Michael Phelps and Allison Schmitt discuss the importance of children’s mental health and share their own experiences at Awareness Day 2017.

The Importance of Engaging Social Media Influencers

You might have a few hundred social media followers, but have you established a connection with them? If your audience is not interested in what your organization has to say or is doing, they likely won’t support your efforts. The more passionate your followers are about your organization, the more likely they are to share your work and advocate for you.

One way to spread the word about what you do is through social media ads. Another way is to identify and engage celebrities or social media influencers who have a connection to your mission. Influencer “endorsements are a powerful and useful tool that magnifies the effect of a campaign.”

Before you identify influencers for potential partnerships, determine your goal for doing so. Are you working on a local campaign with a goal of raising awareness in your community? If so, maybe local influencers such as a morning news anchor, firefighter, or your mayor are the right fit. Are you working on a statewide initiative or a project that you hope will have a national reach? Maybe your state’s governor or a musician who grew up in your state and is passionate about your cause can help. Being realistic and targeted in outreach is important. For example, Oprah and others like her get hundreds of requests each day and cannot do them all.

Did you know? According to a Nielsen study, 92% of consumers take suggestions from friends and family more seriously than they do advertising.


Identifying Cause-Driven Celebrities and Social Media Influencers

With so many celebrities and social media influencers out there, how do you identify who will work best for your organization?

- **Determine a list of keywords or terms** that help describe what your organization does (e.g., mental health, mental illness, substance use, addiction).
- **Find people you would follow online.** Using the keywords you listed, identify individuals who talk about these topics on social media. Then, look at what they are posting, the quality of their posts, and their reach and engagement.
- **Review and prioritize your list.** Be realistic about who you target with your outreach. Dream big, but make sure that the influencer you engage has the level of influence you need, whether within your community, across your state, or on a national level. Sometimes it is best to start local.
- **Research your influencers.** Once you have potential influencers in mind, do additional research to ensure their values align with your organization and that they aren’t caught up in any controversies.

Now it is time to reach out and ask potential celebrity partners if they would be interested in working with your organization as part of their charity work or for compensation (if your budget allows). Successful outreach typically occurs via email or directly on social media, depending on the individual. If reaching out to someone local, talk with your staff or your board to see if anyone has a personal connection that can help get your foot in the door.

Getting in contact with an influencer can be difficult. There’s no guarantee that your communication will actually reach the individual, or that you will get a response, so you should always have a list of people to fall back on.

If you want to reach out to a celebrity or an influencer and cannot offer compensation, appeal to their philanthropic side. Your best bet for engaging someone for free often will be to start with their publicist, who is responsible for promoting the individual and their image and can encourage their client to do charity work. Be sure that your pitch makes direct connections to the individual’s work. How will partnering with your organization or event benefit the influencer?

**Engaging Celebrities and Social Media Influencers**

You’ve identified the influencer you want to engage, you’ve reached out, and the influencer has agreed to support your organization. Now what?

- **Make the most of the investment.** Work closely with the influencer to determine how they can promote the issue, perhaps by discussing a personal connection or showcasing stories from your organization.
- **Give them content.** Provide talking points about your organization or campaign and offer to conduct a short phone briefing. Share sample social media messages, graphics, and a suggested placement schedule.
- **Manage expectations and eliminate surprises.** Ensure that you and the influencer or their management team have discussed all requests and expectations. If they are participating in an event you are hosting, provide a detailed agenda at least a week in advance.
- **Follow up.** After their participation is complete, send a thank-you note and keep them in mind for future events and engagements; try to touch base with their team at least once a year, if possible.

“Celebrity” can be seen as a term of disrespect for those who have spent a lifetime honing their skills, whether in acting, music, art, sports, or another field. Instead, refer to high-profile individuals by their profession (e.g., artist, actor, athlete, author).

**Outreach Resources**

- **FIND INFLUENCERS YOUR AUDIENCE TRUSTS:** Social Bakers’ free Instagram influencer search tool.
- **Subscription-based tools to access contact information for celebrities’ agents, managers, and publicists:**
  - **IMDB PRO:** Information related to films, television programs, video games, and internet streams.
  - **WHO REPRESENTS:** Information related to actors, musicians, and athletes.
- **MAKING THE MOST OF CELEBRITY-CAUSE RELATIONSHIPS:** Vanguard Communications’ blog post with tips for maximizing these partnerships.
- **TOP INFLUENCER MARKETING PLATFORMS TO BOOST YOUR CAMPAIGNS [2019]:** Influencer Marketing Hub’s list of platforms that can help you identify influencers.
- **INFLUENCER MARKETING IN 2019: HOW TO WORK WITH SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS:** Hootsuite’s 2019 guide to influencer marketing.