

Who's Afraid of Fake Followers?

ARTICLE | **FEBRUARY 21, 2019**

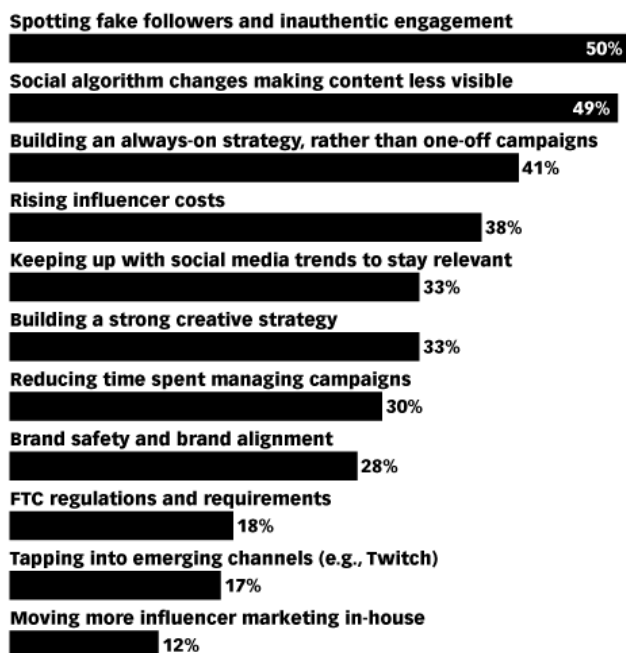
Blake Drosch

Despite [industrywide calls to combat fraud](#), fake followers are still the No. 1 concern among influencer marketers, according to Mediakix.

The media company's 2019 "[Influencer Marketing Survey](#)" found that 50% of marketers, primarily from the US, named spotting fake followers as a chief challenge of influencer marketing. And a survey from Econsultancy showed similar findings, with 42% of UK and US marketers calling fake followers their greatest concern relating to the marketing tactic.

Leading Influencer Marketing Challenges According to US Marketers, Jan 2019

% of respondents



Source: Mediakix, "Influencer Marketing 2019," Feb 14, 2019

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Here's what has marketers worried:

The fake follower scare is no witch hunt

Social media is rife with bots and fraudulent accounts, and some influencers purposely buy fake followers in order to fool marketers into working with them. Points North Group estimated that nearly 14% of US and Canadian marketers' Instagram influencer budgets were wasted on fake followers in 2018. And 63% of marketers and brands admitted to having personal experience with influencer fraud in past campaigns, according to 2019 data from Influencer Marketing Hub.

Can this problem be solved?

There sure are a lot of people willing to help. In its "State of Influencer Marketing 2019" report, Influencer Marketing Hub estimated that 550 new platforms and influencer marketing agencies opened in the past three years. Many of these platforms offer tools that connect brands with influencers—and they're using analytics that help identify fraud.

"It's really important to look at fake engagement," said Krishna Subramanian, co-founder of influencer marketing firm Captiv8. "We have a series of metrics that we leverage to do that, so we can provide risk scores to a brand and say, 'This influencer has a high, medium or low risk for any potential fraud.'"

But despite these new resources, companies like Unilever—**which has struggled to ditch fake followers**—have caused speculation that the fraud problem won't go away anytime soon.

"Do I think that there will be a day when we're going to be able to 100% know that every follow is real? I don't think so," said Noah Mallin, head of content and experience at Wavemaker. But Mallin has confidence that improved detection will be able to reduce fraud over time. "Even if some bad data or audience members slip through, we can keep it down to a percentage that's minimal," he said.

How will it impact influencer marketing?

This is the good news: While fake followers remain a challenge for influencer marketers, there is nothing to suggest it will slow the growth of this emerging practice.

According to Mediakix, nearly two-thirds of marketers will increase their influencer marketing budgets in 2019. And Influencer Marketing Hub found that 92% of its survey respondents believe that using influencers is an effective marketing method.

"Fraud is a concern of ours," said Tota Haba, senior vice president of global digital at Benefit Cosmetics. "But overall, I'd say it does not outweigh the effectiveness of the [influencer] marketing tactic in general."