

# How Has the Pandemic Changed Influencer Marketing?

A Q&A with Pierre-Loïc Assayag, CEO and co-founder of Traackr

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**T**he pandemic is changing how brands work with influencers. Not only is it accelerating existing industry trends, but it also presents new challenges and opportunities for influencer partnerships.

For our upcoming report “Influencer Marketing in the Age of COVID-19,” we spoke with Pierre-Loïc Assayag, CEO and co-founder of influencer marketing platform Traackr, about brand principles, the return on investment (ROI) of influencer campaigns and how industries are now leaning more heavily into influencer marketing.

## **How has the pandemic affected influencer marketing campaigns?**

In March and April, there was a significant slowdown of investments in partnerships across the board, with some sectors hit harder than others. In May and June, we saw partnerships begin to go back online, though, again, at a different pace depending on the industry and geography. We also noticed that [the partnerships] looked different than they did pre-pandemic.

## **In terms of content, what changed?**

Influencers and brands started to shift their communication more toward brand values and away from product. It is difficult to push merchandise in this economy, so the crisis moved the market toward relationship-based influencer marketing, rather than transaction-based. We've also seen brands significantly loosen their control over content, giving influencers much more leeway on the messaging.

## **Given this shift, how are advertisers measuring the success of influencer campaigns?**

When it comes to measuring success, there are two ends of the spectrum: brand purpose and brand values on one end, and an extreme focus on ecommerce and performance metrics on the other.

The answer is somewhere in between. If you're trying to measure the impact of an influencer campaign, you cannot just look at the direct sales that come from your affiliate, because they make up a very small chunk of the attribution. You need to look at metrics around engagement and then track it downstream to see if it generates any leads. It's not one-size-fits-all, and rebuilding the chain is really important.

## **What industries didn't invest heavily in influencer marketing pre-pandemic but are now leaning in?**

The one industry that we've seen turn to influencer marketing in the past six months is CPG [consumer packaged goods]. It's not that CPG companies weren't doing influencer marketing before, but it had been a sideshow. Now it's become part of their core strategy. And we're talking about companies and brands that write larger checks than anybody.

Gaming is another vertical that really stepped on the gas. With people staying at home, these companies have been overwhelmed with demand. Now influencer marketing has become a core tenet of the gaming company strategy.

## **TikTok was one of the social media success stories of the pandemic. How will this impact the influencer marketing**

**industry? *[Editor's Note: This interview was conducted prior to President Trump's announcement that he would move to ban the app in the US.]***

At a time when everything felt gloomy, TikTok had a different vibe—and that played a big part in its success. It wasn't about fake news or people bickering and fighting. Instead, TikTok enhanced creativity, and this made it a top-tier network very quickly.

Before TikTok, Facebook had a bit of a monopoly on the influencer world. Yes, there were Twitter and Twitch and other platforms, but when you look at the overall participation in influencer marketing, there was a huge bias toward Instagram. So, it's going to be really interesting to see how TikTok changes things, because it gives brands options and it gives influencers options, too.