

# For Influencer Marketing at Amex, Authenticity Trumps Production Value

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**E**ven for some luxury brands, authenticity trumps production quality when it comes to influencer marketing. That's the case for American Express, which uses a mix of long- and short-term influencers to promote its products and services in a way that feels organic to the influencers' aesthetic.

Rather than create influencer content that matches the production quality of Amex's branded content, the financial services company wants its sponsored posts to mirror the content that appears on the influencers' feeds, living organically beside their nonbranded content without seeming out of place.

According to Walter Frye, vice president of global brand engagement at Amex, the brand takes a multichannel approach to influencer marketing: On the consumer side, Amex leans heavily on Instagram, uses YouTube for long-form content and complements its strategies on Twitter and Snapchat. Amex marketers also solicit influencers on LinkedIn to market to B2B customers.

We spoke to Frye to find out about the credit card company's approach to working with influencers.

**How do you select influencers to work with?**

It definitely depends on our message. With those longer-term influencer relationships, we're focused on leveraging the lifestyle. We work with people who have passions and whose audiences have passions that align with those of our customers—things like travel, entertainment, dining. It positions us to organically talk about the benefits we offer.

### **As a brand that aligns itself with luxury, does Amex focus more on producing higher-quality influencer content?**

We don't have a standard around production quality. The standard is around authenticity, and how do we ensure that our messages are showing up organically next to content that is equally compelling? If you take Hannah Bronfman or Cara Santana—influencers we've worked with for a number of years—we want anything that they produce for us to live organically beside anything that they're creating that's not for us. We want the production quality to mirror their other posts and in some cases that means they're talking into the camera. In other cases, it means leveraging B-roll that we might provide them from a videographer.

The reason we have longer-term relationships is so that we can have collaborative discussions and our posts are co-created. They're responding to a brief in terms of how they want to bring to life these benefits and these stories vs. any real strong parameters around production quality. It's case by case what feels right for each person and the audience. That said, we're a premium brand ... so when we think about content that we're creating that's living on brand channels then it's different, but when we're working with influencers we want to be authentic to their audiences.

### **Obviously in-feed images are important, but what other formats are also particularly successful for Amex?**

We're a credit card company, and we're focusing on the lifestyle benefits of our products and services, but it's really hard to convey that message in a photograph. I know they say a picture's worth a thousand words, but a video is exponentially more powerful in being able to tell stories around complex messages. We're definitely big on in-feed, and

stories are just a more organic version. They just more seamlessly integrated into consumer's consumption patterns with social media.

### **How does Amex think about content creation across social media channels?**

It's really important that brands not try to be everywhere in every single channel, but that they focus on the channels that are going to be most important for their design target, and then ensure that you're designing content that aligns to the user behavior of those channels. We are certainly on YouTube; I think it's still the best destination for long-form content. Right now, we're also really leaning into Instagram because we're finding it to be an effective channel in terms of where our design target is spending a lot of time, and there's still a lot of ways in there.

Our plans are typically complemented through Twitter and Snapchat, and also LinkedIn. Our customer is really a hybrid one, most are consumers but a significant area of focus is B2B. LinkedIn is a destination for both of those audiences, so we're super focused on how our content lives there and how we design content for that channel.

### **Are there any emerging channels that you're looking into?**

We have certainly explored IGTV, which I think will continue to grow. After IGTV was launched, we aired a live show with Ariana Grande that was around the release of her album, and we're continuing to showcase a number of our benefits and talent relationships on our organic channels. It's a great channel to organically insert our paid video message, which we think is important in terms of driving brand consideration. We definitely have our eyes on other platforms. TikTok is continuing to grow, continuing to make noise—it skews a bit younger than our designed target, so we haven't done a lot there, but we think it's important to keep an eye on those channels.

### **What about Facebook Watch and other platforms interested in promoting "premium content"?**

We have a history of pioneering in these spaces. We were an early partner when YouTube was expanding into Originals, and we were working very closely with those content producers on how to integrate

our brands and it's tricky. This is still a space where, even as they attract really premium A list production partners, it's still an infant space in terms of how many of those partners are working with brands. Facebook is still a great place for pre-roll and we've got pre-roll advertising in Facebook Watch, but we haven't gone deeper in those integrations yet.