

myweeklymarketing.

Janice Hostager: 0:04

I'm Janice Hostager. After three decades in the marketing business and many years of being an entrepreneur, I've learned a thing or two about marketing. Join me as we talk about marketing, small business and life in between. Welcome to My Weekly Marketing.

Janice Hostager: 0:33

Hey, hey, welcome back to My Weekly Marketing. Today's episode is a good one. If you've ever wondered what actually works when it comes to affiliate or influencer marketing, if you've even wondered if it's worth trying, you're going to love this episode. Listen, I know, when we say influencer marketing, your brain might picture million-dollar contracts or private jets or someone whose entire job is looking fabulous on Instagram. But the truth is that you don't need to hire the Kardashians to make influencer marketing work for your small business. In fact, partnering with micro-influencers, which are creators with smaller but super engaged audiences, is a way, more effective and affordable way to do this.

Janice Hostager: 1:14

Micro-influencers are people who have already had their audiences trust. So maybe it's parenting after 40, holistic wellness, career reinvention or quirky handmade gifts. Whatever it is, their followers listen to them. As a small business, you can offer free product, an affiliate commission, a bundle of services or even just a thoughtful partnership. It's not about throwing lots of money at reach. It's about building relationships with people who already talk to their customers that you're trying to reach, and when it's done well, that kind of word of mouth can snowball. So today, on this episode, I'm chatting with the brilliant Aya Saad. Aya is CEO of the Vivian Agency, which is an affiliate and influencer marketing agency. They help clients all around the world launch and manage affiliate and influencer marketing programs, even if the business is small like yours. So grab your copy, your notebook or both, unless you're driving of course and let's dive in. Good morning, Aya. Thank you for joining me today and welcome to My Weekly Marketing.

Aya Saad: 2:23

Thank you, and thank you for having me.

Janice Hostager: 2:27

So let's start with the basics. A lot of my customers are small business owners and they don't really even know where to start with influencer marketing, especially if they have a small budget. How do you recommend that people start out?

Aya Saad: 2:44

Yeah, I'd say the very first thing that any business owner should do is to do their research first. So, first of all, they need to do the research and come up with a strategy according to that research. Just because if you dive into affiliate and influencer marketing without a plan, you'll probably get lost. So you need to do your research. Look at your market, look at similar brands, look at your competitors. How they are collaborating with affiliates and influencers. What are they offering them in terms of commissions, in terms of value offering? Are they offering them free products? Are they offering them certain percentages of commission bonuses, incentives? And look at the industry range for commissions in your industry. Look at different collaboration types. So, for example, you can collaborate with nano and micro influencers through the affiliate program. So those influencers can become your affiliate and you don't have to have a big budget for that. All you have to do is have them join your affiliate program, send them a product, ask them to actually use the product, make content about it, and they will be compensated through commissions that come from sales, through their affiliate link or discount code. So this is a way to start. It might not work for the macro, mega and celebrity influencers when you don't have a big budget.

Aya Saad: 4:12

However, if you work with nano and micro influencers who have close-knit communities, who have high engagement rates with their audience, have done this before with other brands, you are very likely to find a lot of success when working with them and you don't have to invest a lot in advance.

Aya Saad: 4:29

You will just be investing the product that you give to them as a gift in order for them to try and share their own authentic experience, and you can actually get a lot from this. So you get a promotion on their social channel. You get lovely content that, if they tag you as a collaborator, for example, on your social media, it also shows up on your accounts. So you're getting user generated content from that. You could ask permission to reshare that content while giving them credit for it. So you get a lot of it by just building good relationships with those influencers and because they have a engaged audience and audience that really trust their recommendations, they are very likely to make sales for you and their audience is very likely to be convinced and influenced by their experience

with your product or services, and they definitely have the influence to get you those buyers and get you those new customers if you provide them with the tools and the value offering and your value offering does not have to be a big chunk of money in advance.

Janice Hostager: 5:40

Okay, so a couple of things that you mentioned that I have follow up questions on. First of all, how do you find out the information? Do you just reach out to the individuals and ask them about their commissions and that sort of thing?

Aya Saad: 5:51

So typically when you're doing your research, initially from similar brands in your industry and from your competitors, you can know the range of commissions their affiliate programs is offering, because most of the time it's publicly displayed on their affiliate program page. Or if you just do a simple google search about the industry standard, let's say, for a clothing brand, the industry standard is around maybe 10 to 20 percent. If it's not something that is super luxurious, it's just something for maybe daily wear or sportswear, something that's for daily use. So you'll probably find that the commission standard is between 10 and 20%. And then what you need to do is to structure that offer properly to provide the best value for your influencers and affiliates. So maybe you're not able to offer them the whole 20%, but you can offer them 10% commissions and then a 10% discount for their audience, and that way they're also extending the value to their audience as well, and it's very likely that an audience would buy using a discount code, even if it's a very small amount, rather than with no discount at all, especially with social media influencers, because it's so easy for people to grab, like the five, six letter discount code from the video description or if it's similar, let's say, to their social media username or something. It's super easy for people to grab that discount code and so you're able to track any sales that are coming from that influencer and also you'll be able to attribute commissions to them.

Aya Saad: 7:29

And in order for you to do that, you need to have a system in place, and there are a lot of affiliate softwares and platforms that you can use, depending on your website builder. So, for example, if somebody is on Shopify, there is, I'd say, over 100 SaaS products. There are so many of them. Some of them even offer free trials in the beginning. You can start with something that is very small and then scale and upgrade and get the fancy features later on when you have a more established affiliate program.

Aya Saad: 8:00

But you just need to start somewhere, even if it's small. You just need to have a place to track the sales and traffic coming from your affiliates and influencers. You need to identify the right affiliates and influencers for you. They need to be relevant and they need to relate to your product as well, because if they don't really relate to the product, then even if they agree to promote it, their audience is just not going to be convinced. If it's someone who never works out at all and then out of nowhere they start promoting a sportswear brand and this is not their style and they do not wear any sportswear at all. It's not going to be convincing to their audience, but if it's someone who's always in her leggings and sportswear, then it makes a lot of sense to the audience and they believe that she actually likes the product and they want to replicate that positive experience that the influencer has had with the brand.

Janice Hostager: 8:54

Gotcha and they really have to know their ideal customer to do that for sure.

Aya Saad: 8:59

Exactly, absolutely.

Janice Hostager: 9:01

So the other thing I was asking about a lot of my listeners have service-based businesses. Do you work with, or have you worked with, service-based businesses to set up influencer marketing campaigns?

Aya Saad: 9:14

Yeah, absolutely so. The concept of affiliate marketing in general is to have people who have reach to your target audience or to your target customers spread the word about you. So the concept is really applicable to any type of product, service, even sometimes B2B products as well, because everyone thinks that affiliate and influencer marketing is just for B2C. But no, actually even for services, even for B2B products, or even B2B services, it is a very valid concept. You just need to find the right people who are able to convey the right message about your product to the right audience. That's all.

Aya Saad: 9:58

It's all about being relevant. It's all about finding those thought leaders, those people that really relate to your service, even if they're not in the, I'd say, the typical sense of influencer that we see on social media, even if they're maybe someone who has like a Facebook group and a very tight-knit community that is interested in that specific service or in that specific product. It could be a thought leader or someone who is on

LinkedIn who is very influential. It doesn't always have to be the Instagram lifestyle influencer who posts about their daily life. You just need to find the right people in your niche, and the same concept would apply the more sales they refer to you, then they earn commissions from that, and that's it.

Janice Hostager: 10:44

Gotcha. So if I've never or my listeners have never used influencer marketing or affiliate marketing, how do you even well, let's just stick with influencer at this point. How do you know if it's a good fit for your business?

Aya Saad: 10:58

I would say how I know it's a good fit. I, to be honest, think that it applies to everyone. It can be applied if done right. It's something that I strongly believe in. If you find the right people, then it is applicable and it fits but in general if there are people who are in general interested in your product, obviously, or service, because you've launched that product, then there are people interested in it and this addresses a certain pain point for them. Then there's also someone who is talking about that, so you need to find the people who talk about it and then those are your affiliates and those are your influencers and those are the people who are spreading that word of mouth. So it's very similar to you maybe taking your customers and asking them to refer a friend, but instead this is someone who is more influential, someone who has a bigger community. It's the same exact concept of word of mouth, but you're using people who have more influence on their communities and they are more visible, and because of social media, this has become easier.

Aya Saad: 12:03

I'd say, so, instead of you getting a customer who would just might be inviting five or 10 of their friends or family members to try your service or product, then you're getting a ton more people just because that person reaches a lot more people through social media and again, it doesn't have to be Instagram and the typical concept. It could be that they're talking in conferences because they're very influential in that niche. It could be that they post on LinkedIn and they have a very engaged community. It could be that they even post on Reddit, post on Facebook.

Aya Saad: 12:38

It just depends on also where your target customers are, based on their demographics, based on their age. For example, it's very popular that TikTok has a much younger audience than the other social media platforms. So if your target audience maybe is

slightly older, then maybe you should be targeting other social media platforms like Instagram or Facebook. Another thing is that you need to be mindful of where your target audience are present online. So some services or some products might not even have that social media presence, but they might find their proper affiliates and influencers in forums and communities, sometimes even offline communities. But again, they are promoting and providing, maybe like a card with a QR code that takes people to the website link and then they can buy the service or the product from there. So even if it's an offline community, that would work as well. It just depends on finding the right people.

Janice Hostager: 13:48

100% Love that. So what about if you have a local business? Do you sort of, kind of brainstorm with me for a minute. Do you look at, maybe newscasters. I know you mentioned offline? Could it be like the leader of a local networking group or something like that? Or what else do you recommend for people who have local brick and mortar businesses?

Aya Saad: 14:06

Yeah, absolutely. It could be someone who is, let's say, you have a bakery and you have a local bakery. So you basically seek out the family and mom groups and the groups of residential areas that are around your bakery or areas that you may be delivering to throughout the city or county where your store is, and you either might have an e-commerce platform where you're able to take the orders from there, so you're able to set up an affiliate system and provide those influential people, the leaders of those groups or the admins of those groups with the link or maybe even a discount when people are referred by them to you. So it's a matter of finding those influential people and giving them the tools to promote you.

Janice Hostager: 14:56

Is it more effective to work with like a micro-influencer or look for somebody with a really large audience? Let's say that you have a bigger budget. Do you see any difference in terms of ROI or engagement depending on how big that influencer is or how many followers they have?

Aya Saad: 15:13

Yeah, so typically, if you have a bigger budget and you are looking to work with much bigger influencers, it's definitely a great investment because you're getting a lot more eyeballs on your product and your services.

Aya Saad: 15:26

So, even if it's not directly related to your sales immediately, but it is getting you the brand awareness. I think that typically, when influencers have a larger number of followers, then they're very likely to have a lower engagement rate, just because it's a math thing. When you have a larger audience, then it's very likely to have a smaller amount of them engaged. But if you don't have the budget, then focus on the nano and micro influencers under 50,000 followers who have really good engaged audience. And also, whenever you're working with bigger influencers, you need to take a look and analyze the authenticity of their followers, because at this point, followers can be bought. It could be just a number. So you need to ensure that there are actually people behind that big number of followers and people who are going to be engaged and actively engaged with that influencer throughout their posts.

Janice Hostager: 16:26

How do you tell if somebody has some bot followers or purchase followers?

Aya Saad: 16:32

So we typically use tools for that. So there are a lot of influencer analytic platforms that some of them are even available for free. Some of them are maybe a bit more advanced, so they are available at a different pricing. It depends. But you, every time you are investing a big amount of money, or even if it's not big, if you're investing money in advance with an influencer, you need to first ask them for their own analytics of their profile, but then also do your own research and analyze their profile outside using external tools to ensure that the numbers add up.

Aya Saad: 17:09

There is going to be some discrepancies depending on the point of time where those platforms would pick up the data. 100% that's going to happen, but it needs to be discrepancies that make sense also. So the influencer can't say like my views are 100,000 on every post, and then you look at their profile and you look at your tool and they're barely 1000 views per post, so it doesn't make a lot of sense. But if it's like 100,000, and then you find just a slightly smaller number, then okay, yeah, it's just a small discrepancy. It makes sense because it does happen that each platform would give you some discrepancies depending on the point of time where it grabbed the data.

Janice Hostager: 17:51

Are there any other red flags that people should look for when choosing an influencer or signing a contract?

Aya Saad: 17:59

I'd say if the influencer doesn't really show a lot of interest in your product and for them this is just another deal then I don't really recommend working with that influencer because your product is not gonna get the attention you want it to get from them. If your partnerships need to mean something, they need to mean something to the influencer and they need to mean something to you. So if you're investing money with an influencer, they need to be very aligned with your values. They need to be already a customer for your brand. They are the person that is gonna buy that brand anyways. Loves your brand genuinely does have that relationship with you, because otherwise it doesn't sound authentic and if you're just another deal on the table, you're just not gonna get that message properly out there, because people can sense when somebody really really likes something and when it's just the next promotion that they had to do...

Janice Hostager: 19:06

Right, right, yeah, so take us through the steps that you or a business small business owner would go through when setting up an influencer campaign. So what does it look like behind the scenes?

Aya Saad: 19:16

So behind the scenes for us, I'd say we always start with research, so getting to know the brand, their target, their market and their competitors to ensure that the strategy that we come up with is actually going to make them stand out. And then the second thing would be the strategy, and the strategy is determining who you want to have as your affiliates and influencers. What are you going to offer them? Because you need to have an offer in place. It doesn't have to be set in stone. It needs to also have some flexibility and room for negotiation. However, you need to have an outline of what you're able to offer on a minimum level and a maximum level. Those are your limits and how much exactly you could offer. Also, what are your expectations from those affiliates and influencers? Are you mainly focusing on the sales, so you want the influencers themselves to have a sales approach, or you want them to be the type of people who are after the brand awareness more, or you want a mix?

Aya Saad: 20:14

You need to also have certain expectations and what you are wanting to achieve from your affiliate and influencer marketing program.

Aya Saad: 20:23

You would also need to do a lot of research and picking people and go for quality over quantity. You need to be consistent with your outreach because many, many times you reach out to someone, it's not that they're not interested, it's not that they mean to ghost you, but these people also have lives and it just happens that your email fell through. You reached out to them at a really bad time in their life. These things happen and many times when we are very consistent with outreach and follow-up, of course without being spammy, but being consistent meaning letting them know that you have not forgotten about them and this deal is still on the table if they're willing to take it. Sometimes we've reached out to someone at month one never had a response from them, despite the follow-ups, and then we reach out six months later and they are so excited, can't believe we're actually reaching out to them. They've seen the product, they really love it and they want to be a part of it, and they actually never saw that first email we sent out.

Janice Hostager: 21:23

So consistency,

Aya Saad: 21:26

Yeah, absolutely.

Janice Hostager: 21:28

And then at that point it really becomes about the negotiation, and then you put together a contract, is that it? And then how long does a campaign typically run?

Aya Saad: 21:38

So I'd say for affiliate marketing, the campaign can be a lifetime campaign. So as long as they're promoting your product, they can earn commissions from that, because they're only earning as long as they're making the sale. So for affiliate marketing and when influencers are your affiliates, meaning earning on commission basis, then that's something that's very long term. It can be there as long as they want to be a part of the program and as long as you have that program live and running. However, with more specific influencer campaigns, the range depends. So it could be like a one-time thing that you reach out for maybe a specific campaign. Let's say you are doing a spring collection and you want influencers to be promoting that collection specifically, but that's it. So you're only running that promotion for the time that this collection is available.

Aya Saad: 22:29

However, if you or it could be maybe about a discount for a certain occasion, like a holiday discount or something like that, or it can be campaigns for different purposes. So you can run a campaign for one month and the objective of that campaign is this, and then another campaign for another month for a different objective. I wouldn't say there is like a minimum or a maximum. You can run those campaigns depending on your priorities and your needs. And also, of course, if you are doing something that is a fixed fee campaign that where you're paying influencer a fixed fee per content piece or per a certain amount of content pieces, you need to be very mindful of your budget and how you're able to split that budget between different influencers, because I don't recommend especially if you're still just testing things out, do not put all your eggs in one basket and invest all your budget into one influencer. It's better to have different influencers, different types of your customer personas, also people who are approaching your product from different angles of promotion, so you can see what has worked best.

Janice Hostager: 23:37

Interesting, it sounds like for a smaller business. Actually, an affiliate type of setup would work a little better, right? Because they're constantly promoting on their own schedule and they will just get a percentage of what they sell, correct?

Aya Saad: 23:56

Yeah, and within that affiliate program that you have long term. You can actually have campaigns running within that. So, for example, you can say, okay, everyone, for the rest of June if the best 10 videos would get an extra 5% commissions on all their sales. Or if you publish a video in the summer season, you will get a \$50 bonus, for example. You can do so many things and play around and we always recommend doing these things because it makes your affiliates stay engaged and stay excited about your product, excited about your program. Whenever you have a new product launch, select your top affiliates and send them that product before it's even live on the website. They would really appreciate that. It goes a long way for them and you will have your own like pre-launch campaigns without even having to ask for it. So it's also a great way to build those relationships, because if you build those relationships right with your affiliates, then you're going to have them promoting you long term.

Janice Hostager: 25:00

Love it, love it. So what's one piece of advice that you give to a business owner who's maybe still on the fence about this? Do you think they should give it a try? Do you think we should all give it a try and see what works? Or what's your best advice?

Aya Saad: 25:13

My advice would be just if you want to give it a try, you need to understand that it is a lot of work. It's not like ads. It's not something that's going to give you immediate results and you can see immediately if it's working or not. It's something that you need to work on. So you need to have the time to invest into that and you need to have a proper plan, because otherwise you would be unfair towards the concept of affiliate marketing if you decide that it's not working for you and you just haven't tried it properly.

Aya Saad: 25:45

So if you don't have the time to invest into it, seek support. If you don't have the budget for that, then maybe just table that for now, until you actually do have the time and the tools and everything to invest into it, because long term it can have amazing results on your business. It grows exponentially At some point. If you build those relationships correctly, you don't even have to reach out to people anymore. People are reaching out to you because they've seen all those influencers talking about your product and they want a bit of that too. So if you build those relationships right, at some point the affiliate program would become self-sufficient, actually.

Janice Hostager: 26:26

Love it, love it. So where can people learn more about you or affiliate marketing or your agency, or tell us how to get in touch with you?

Aya Saad: 26:34

Yeah, absolutely, my name is Aya. I'm CEO of Vivian Agency. You can reach us out at vivianagency.com. I believe Janice will have the links with the episode. Yeah, exactly, you can reach out to us via the website form. You can reach out to me directly at ayavivianagency.com or you can message me on LinkedIn and the show notes will also have that link.

Janice Hostager: 26:57

Absolutely. Thank you so much, Aya. We've learned a lot today about influencer marketing. I appreciate your time, thank you.

Aya Saad: 27:05

Thank you so much for having me.

Janice Hostager: 27:07

So are you ready to try out some affiliate marketing? For more information about anything we talked about today, visit myweeklymarketing.com. Forward slash 113. If this episode gave you ideas, I would love to hear about them. Screenshot the episode, tag me at Janice Hostager Marketing at Instagram and tell me one idea you're excited to try. And hey, if you want more behind the scenes tips and strategies like this one, make sure you're subscribed to My Weekly Marketing. Thanks so much for joining me today. See you next time. Bye for now.