

# When does a blogger become an influencer?



By [Kerry Botha](#)

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Blogging on a significant scale, certainly in South Africa, is relatively new, generally poorly understood, ignored by many and definitely underrated in terms of its actual and potential influence in the world of mass communication.

What cannot be denied is that blogging is out there on the Internet in a big way, driven by seriously smart people with original, modern thoughts and insights on every subject under the sun.

And blogging is rapidly becoming something marketing people should not ignore.

The question for business and marketing is this: can a blogger become an important influencer in the marketplace?

Pleiades Media recently hosted its first Pleiades+ event, a get-together of prominent bloggers who, nourished by gluhwein and chocolate brownies, shared their thoughts and experiences and attempted to answer the key question: when does a blogger become an influencer?



Image by Phillip Santos

At stake was more than just academic conjecture; many very influential brands are actively engaged with bloggers. However will blogging, thanks to the reach and broad accessibility of Internet, cause people to engage, take note, and even change their behaviour? Will the measurability inherent in the Internet improve marketers' success in their search for the holy grail of advertising - realistic measurability of their marketing spend?

On the panel were respected Jo'burg bloggers Jessica Franks - [jesska.co.za](#), who covers food and travel; Ryan Enslin - My

Lime Boots, which covers men's fashion and life issues; Sam Wright - Tech Girl, dedicated to gadgets, games and giggles, and Anne Dolinschek - Anneversations, which covers lifestyle and fashion, specifically for women. Also at the event were Megan Bernstein from Under5foot.co.za and Ayanda Sepamia, who contributes to Under5foot's Working Gal column.

All these bloggers have worked incredibly hard to establish niche, fiercely loyal audiences. They are already influencers in their spheres and all are interacting with businesses that supply the products they report on.

The conclusions reached in the discussions were both unanimous and interesting, pointing to an increasingly relevant role for blogging in the marketing mix. It was clear from the discussion that blogging is entrenched and increasing in relevance. Blogs can and do influence buyer behaviour. But credibility is key. Bloggers have small, niche and dedicated audiences that follow them religiously, content and opinions therefore need to be informed by expert knowledge and strict independence.

The nature of the content on an influencer's blog is critical but difficult to define. According to Sam Wright\*: "The content created is not 'news' in the traditional sense, nor 'advertorial'. It's a whole new world of original content that needs to be redefined. Influencers are not producing advertorial. If they are, they're bad at what they do."

One of the key strengths of blogging in the marketing context is its measurability. Details of the visitors in terms of numbers, duration of visits, location, click-ons, etc, can be accurately and rapidly measured.



Ryan Eslin, Anne Dolinschek & Jessica Franks. Image by Phillip Santos

An area of difficulty for the bloggers is their relationship with companies that supply products discussed in their blogs. For Sam it is tech products, for Jessica, restaurants, Ryan looks at men's fashions and Anne at women's fashion, amongst other things.

How then do bloggers integrate their fiercely independent and expert opinions with the marketing objectives of product suppliers?

In two words: "with difficulty".

The use of paid-for advertorials, reviews and advertisements (and the payment for these) can be in conflict with the blogger's strict status as an independent influencer. Our panel was adamant that payment is for the blogger's time, expertise and access to their networks - but not for their opinion.

Having said that, it was clear that this is a work in progress: bloggers need commercial support to become financially viable, while companies can successfully tap into bloggers' networks and loyal support base. It is a relationship that can and will be worked out in time.

What are the challenges facing bloggers? Barriers to entry are low, meaning that the blogging space is likely to become crowded, hence relevance and credibility are paramount. Blogs also need to be visually attractive, with first-rate copy and great images. Given new technologies available to bloggers, immediacy is another important factor going forward. Technology is also changing at mind-numbing speed and bloggers need to be at the forefront of these changes to remain

relevant and credible.

In her article\*\*, Ivana Taylor sums up the situation: "You must blog if you want to be an authority. You ... must provide valuable content that is congruent with ... your area of expertise. Blogging is a full page advertisement for who you are and what you promise. Use it well."

## Source articles

\*Sam Wright: ["You're Not Buying My Opinion"](#)

\*\*Ivana Taylor: ["Your 14-step Roadmap to Becoming an Influencer"](#)

## ABOUT KERRY BOTHA

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