



How to Use Your Customers (or Potential Customers) as Micro-Influencers

Today, 70 percent of consumers consult social media prior to making a purchase — but it's no longer just friends and family who are driving word-of-mouth marketing.

Enter: **Micro-Influencers**

As consumers become increasingly “ad allergic” (30 percent use ad-blocking technology), online influencers are emerging as a powerful tool to build brand affinity. Here’s why:

Micro-influencers are trusted.

82 percent of consumers are “very likely” to act on a micro-influencer’s recommendation.

92 percent regard them as “highly knowledgeable” and “authentic.”

Micro-influencers are engaging their audience.

Studies show that the greatest amount of engagement (likes and comments) takes place between 10K and 100K followers, with engagement lessening beyond 100K.

Micro-influencers are relatively low cost.

84 percent charge less than \$250 per Instagram post.

90 percent charge less than \$150 per Twitter post and \$250 per Facebook post.



Bloomberg reports that nearly \$255 million is spent on influencer marketing each month.

However, as studies reveal that follower quantity does not equal quality, more big brands are shifting their focus from macro to micro — and slashing their costs.



Example #1

e.l.f. Cosmetics

e.l.f., a beauty brand, invites their network of micro-influencers to mix, mingle, and experiment with new products via an exclusive, live-streamed beauty event called “Beautyscape.”

The virtual event features everything from keynote speakers to tutorials — all of which are accessed online by nearly 400 million users of YouCam, a webcam beauty app.

Example #2

Mezzetta

Mezzetta, a jarred foods company, invited food bloggers to develop new dishes using their products. The original recipes were posted by the bloggers and paired with a giveaway, which their followers could enter by filling out a survey.

In addition to capturing consumer insights (the survey had a 50 percent response rate), the campaign generated more than 13 million views, due in large part to the collective reach of the influencers.

The campaign also resulted in 7,500 pieces of original content, outperforming engagement expectations by 1,063 percent.





Example #3

LaCroix

LaCroix employs an entire community of micro-influencers to drive their #LiveLaCroix campaign, trading vouchers for posts that feature LaCroix products and the designated hashtag.

After adopting the grass-roots micro-influencer strategy, LaCroix's Instagram following jumped from 4,000 to 30,000 in just eight months. It now has a following of nearly 91,000.

Additionally, sales have nearly doubled during the past two years, coming in at a total of \$225.5 million — a spike that's been largely attributed to the millennial-focused social strategy.

A person in a plaid shirt is working on a blueprint with a ruler and pencil. A coffee cup is nearby.

While big brands have great success engaging micro-influencers, a big brand's budget isn't necessary to forge a successful influencer partnership.

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT — FOR BUSINESSES, BIG OR SMALL — IS FINDING THE RIGHT FIT.

Locating a partner within your following is ideal, but expanding the search outside of immediate fans also works. Try any of these simple tactics:

Begin with local bloggers

Google is a tried-and-true path. Plus, bloggers tend to form topic-specific communities that can be navigated with ease.

Sift through niche hashtags

For example, if you were to search #organicpetfood, top Twitter and Instagram results will point to posts (and thus users) with high engagement.

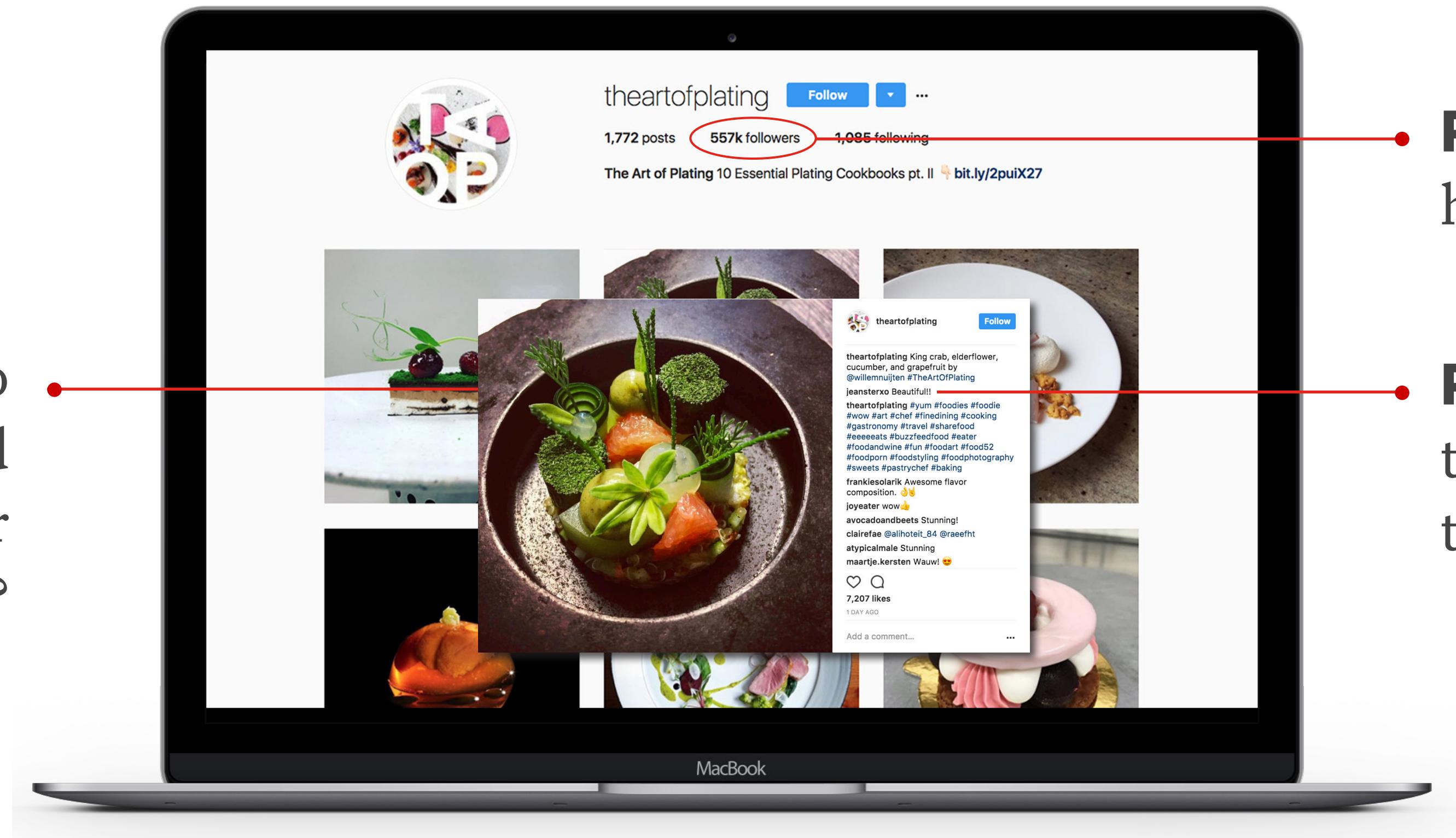
Tap into tools

BuzzSumo, GroupHigh, InkyBee and Followerwonk are all budget-friendly services that connect small businesses with relevant micro-influencers.

Identifying the right partner

Micro-influencers should always be evaluated according to:

Relevance: Do they have a vested interest in your product or service?



- **Reach:** Do they have it?
- **Resonance:** Does their content engage their audience?

Make sure potential partners check all the boxes, including:

- An authentic connection to your brand:** Do they complement your product or service, values and tone? This helps to ensure that you share a target audience.
- Consistency:** The most effective micro-influencers are always engaged and post quality content regularly — not in spurts.
- Geographic relevance:** This is especially important if your business is brick-and-mortar store and you're aiming for foot traffic.
- Selectivity:** Look for other past or current partnerships. The micro-influencer should be mindful about the brands they choose to work with, too.



While securing mentions is a simple and cost-effective method of working with micro-influencers, consumers are becoming wary of – and immune to – basic sponsored posts.

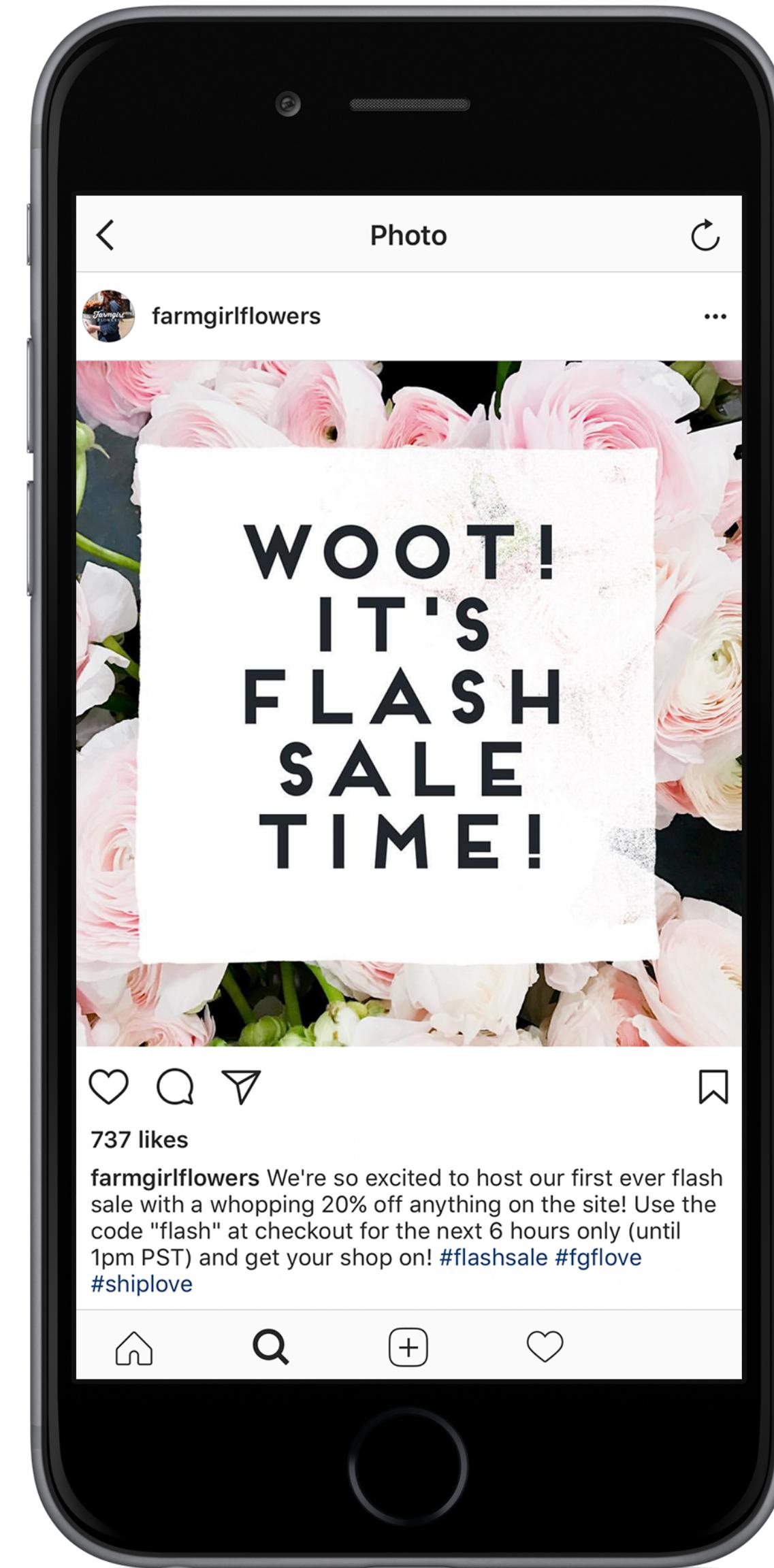
When investing in a micro-influencer, a little creativity (or an enticing offer) can go a long way to ensure that you're getting the most bang for your buck.

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Referral programs

Provide your micro-influencer with a promo code (paired with a photogenic freebie) that can be used by the influencer's audience to access your product or service at a discount.

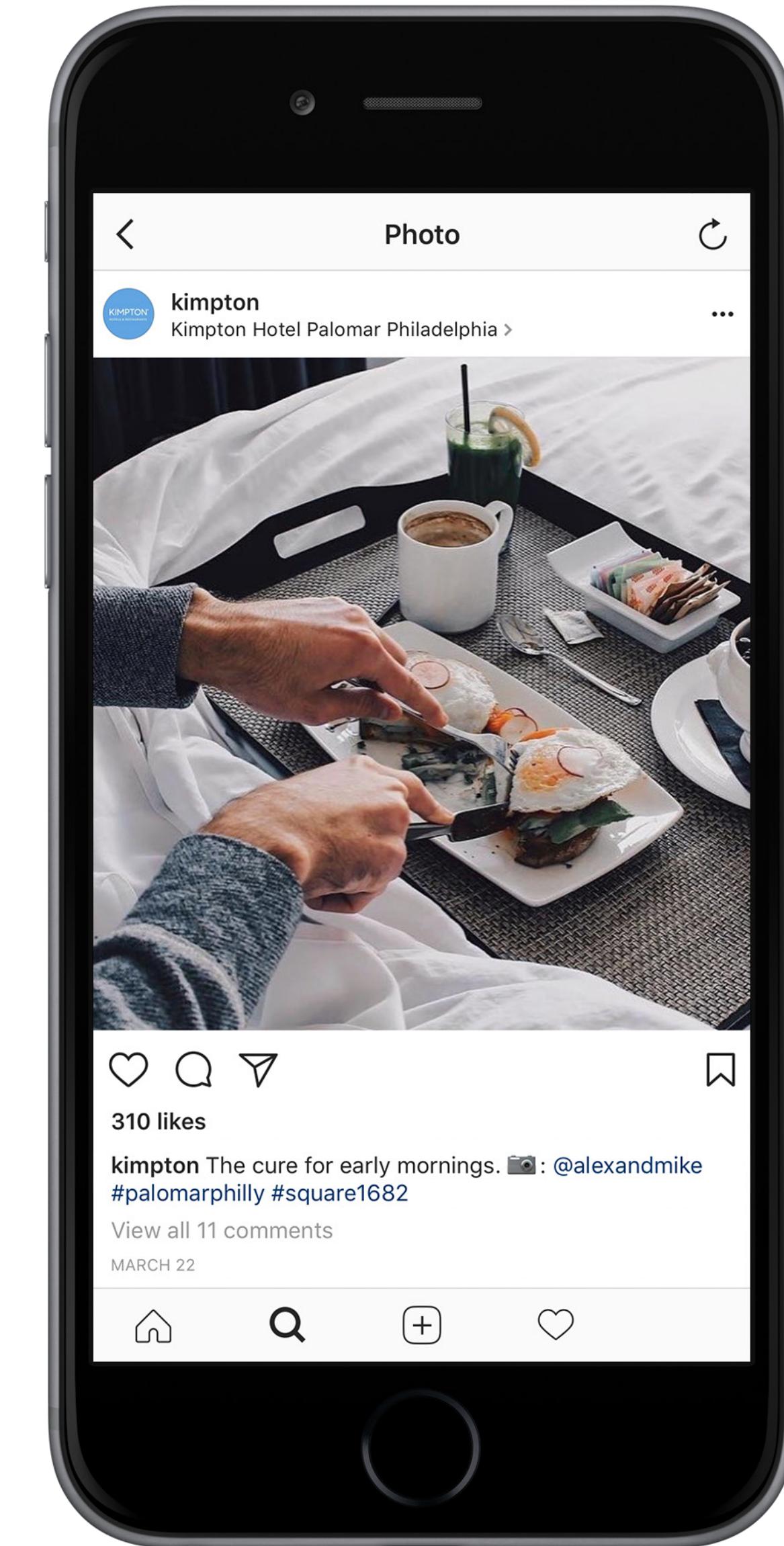
This approach works particularly well on Instagram, where beautiful product photos can be paired with captions including the code and a favorable review.



Account takeovers

Kimpton Hotels invites travel-savvy micro-influencers to “take over” their Instagram account for one day, sharing their free staycation with a highly engaged, travel-thirsty audience.

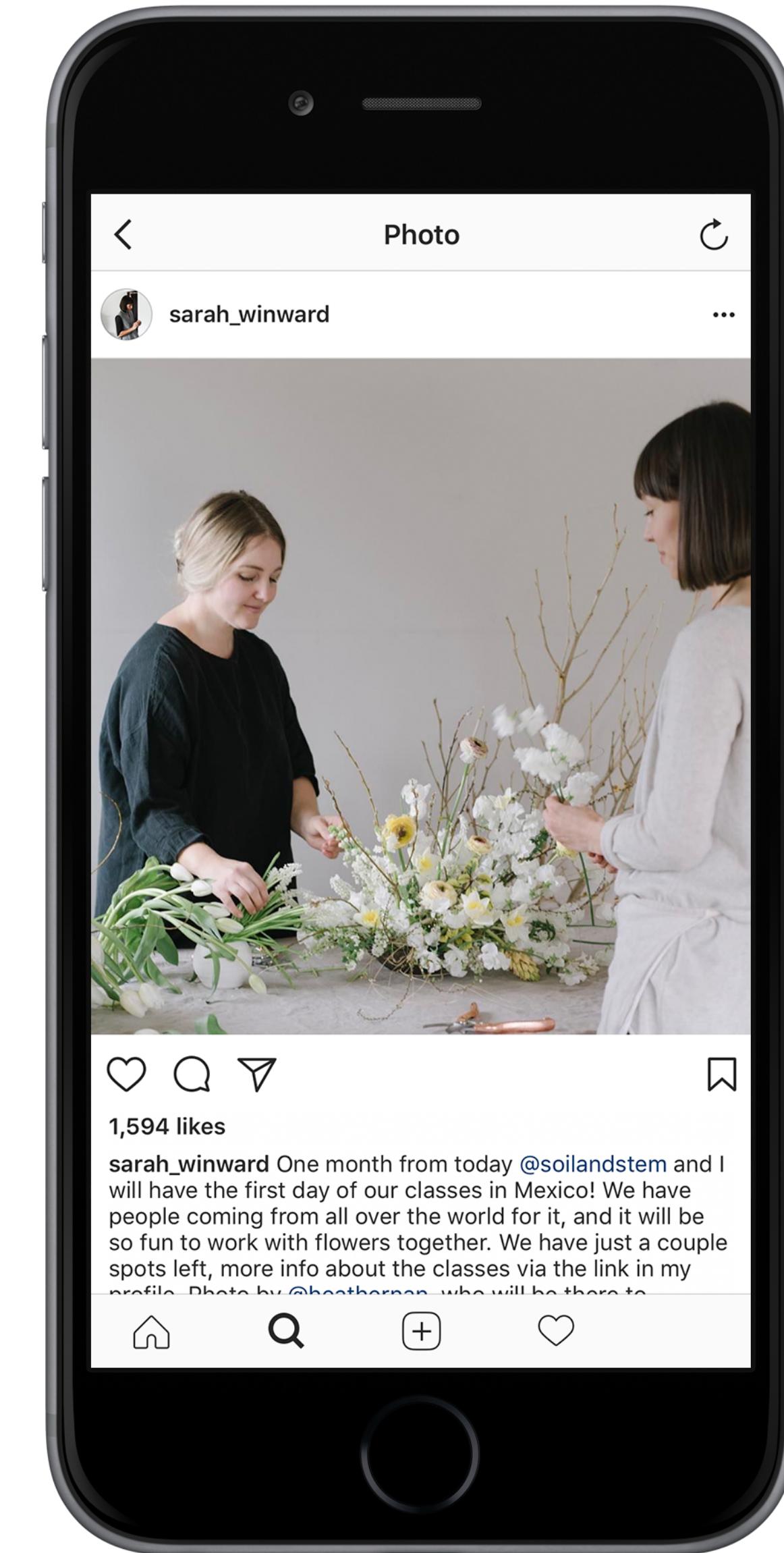
Invite a micro-influencer to put a personal spin on your posts or organize a branded experience. Thanks to cross-account posts, you can connect with their audience, too.



On-site workshops

Operating out of a storefront? Invite a micro-influencer to host a workshop, providing a space for them to connect with their fans and an opportunity for their fans to connect with you.

For example, a florist might invite an events-oriented micro-influencer to host a series of bouquet building workshops during wedding season to entice local brides-to-be.



How-to content

Consumers look to micro-influencers for creative solutions. Use this credibility as an opportunity to showcase your product's value to a larger audience.

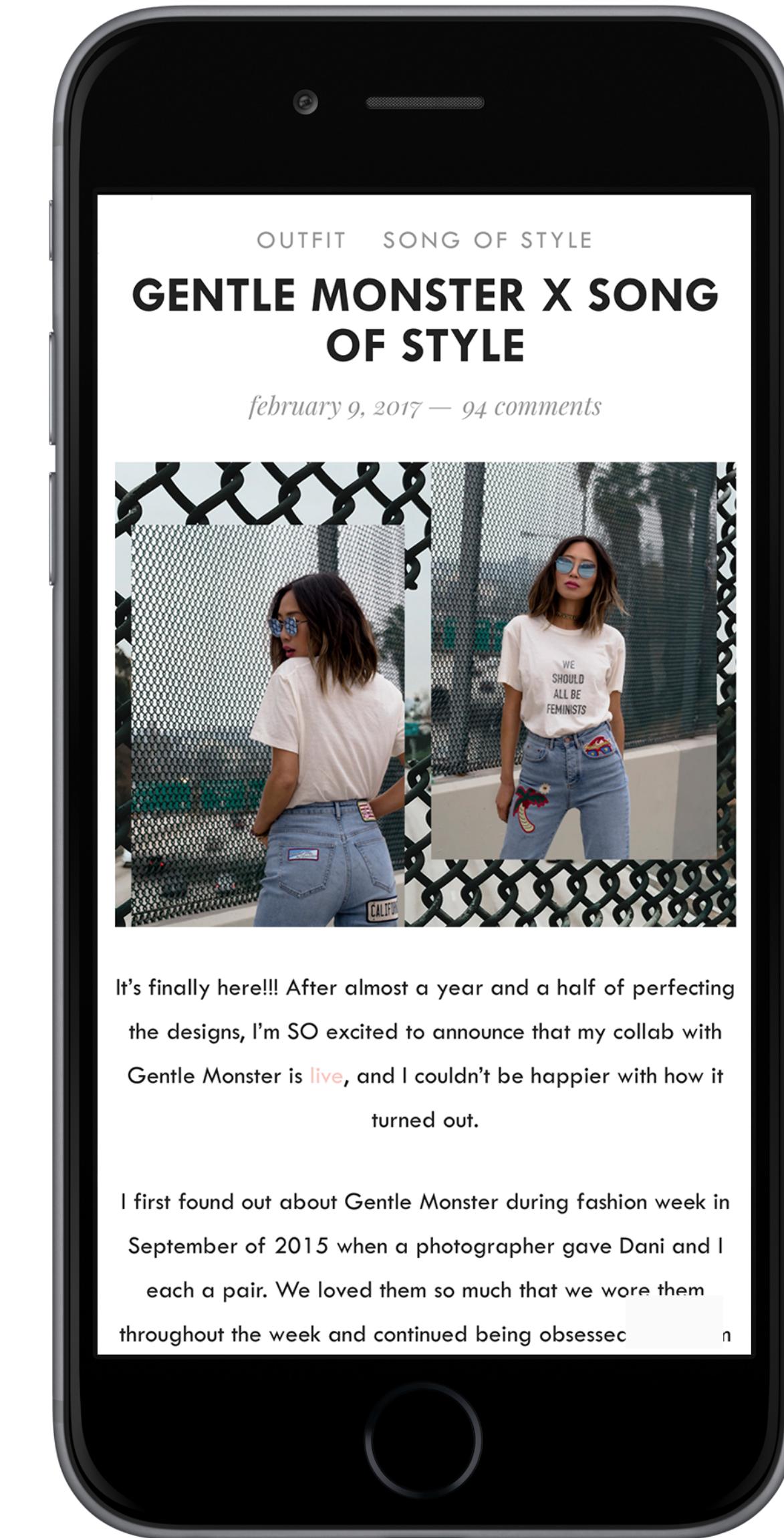
For example, Gap's "Styld.by" campaign commissioned micro-influencers to capture how they wear Gap, and encouraged conversion in posts by including an option to "shop the look."



Co-created collections

Consider inviting a micro-influencer to co-create a new product or collection. Their “endorsement” gives the new offering added weight and unique value.

For example, a subscription box brand might invite a micro-influencer to develop a special collection that features all of their favorite skin care products.





While every relationship between a micro-influencer and a brand is unique, it's important to keep in mind three best practices for optimal success:

- Appropriate incentives
- Creative freedom
- A long-term mentality



Offer appropriate incentives

Currency is flexible at the micro level. For example, a restaurant owner might offer a food blogger an exclusive meal in exchange for a review. Or a clothing brand may share free samples with a fashion photographer.

The two most important elements in the exchange are:

- **Value.** The exchange should benefit the micro-influencer.
- **Honesty.** The micro-influencer should truly appreciate your product or service.



Invite creative freedom

Micro-influencers cut through the clutter because they know how to communicate with their audience.

Collaborating with (rather than leading) your micro-influencer paves the way for seamless, authentic messaging. In short? Don't sound the ad alarm.



Invest in the long haul

When it comes to micro-influencers, one-off campaigns can do more harm than good.

Cultivating a long-term, collaborative relationship with a micro-influencer who is a true brand advocate is the best way to generate content that piques audience interest and confidence.

CONCLUSION

Across all industries, the average click-through rate for a display ad is just 0.35 percent. Compare this statistic to the success of Lord & Taylor, a retailer that asked 50 micro-influencers to upload a post wearing the same dress.

The dress sold out by the end of the weekend.



Consumers look to micro-influencers for purchasing guidance, and they listen. More important, they act.

Keep a sharp eye out for micro-influencers who share and support your passions. Supported by a mutually beneficial social strategy, a successful partnership provides your brand a powerful advocate, and by way of exposure, increased awareness, engagement and sales.

**For more tips on how to use your customers
(or potential customers) as micro-influencers,
visit the Staples Business Resource Center.**

