

# The Blogger Effect

According to data publisher eMarketer, the number of people reading blogs in the US reached 122.6 million in 2011, representing over 53% of internet users. This underpins the power of the blogger as a valuable provider of news and views. Accordingly, brands and retailers are taking strong measures to keep these influential online commentators happy, and encourage them to spread complimentary brand messages to their followers.

eMarketer estimates that advertising spend on blogs will reach over \$746 million by 2012. Brands expect extensive reach and impressive ROI from this method of advertising, but must compensate these word-of-mouth marketers correctly, through exposure, freebies or special services. Brands have been collaborating with bloggers for several years now. Not only to reward bloggers for their influence, but also to reach widespread consumers. From the British Heart Foundation charity shops to Macy's department store, retailers have called upon bloggers to dress their window displays. Co-creation initiatives between blogger and brand have also proved successful – US apparel brand Coach recently partnered with four fashion bloggers to produce a new line of luxury leather handbags.

Fashion and beauty bloggers, in particular, are reaping the rewards of brand endorsement, as well as the influential 'mommy blogger'. A 2010 survey by BlogHer and iVillage found that mums are most likely to write about brands and 75% of active online women rely on blogs for product information. In early 2011, General Motors took 15 families in the US on holiday in a car equipped with the latest gadgets, and Fisher Price regularly invites mums and their children to test out new toys. Many brands have found that the approval of mommy bloggers can stimulate sales. Going forward, P&G will display a Mumsnet logo on the packaging of select family friendly products. Mumsnet, an online community of media-savvy parents, is a trusted source of information for its 1.25m users, and licensed its logo in 2011 as a means of raising revenue from brands seeking their approval.

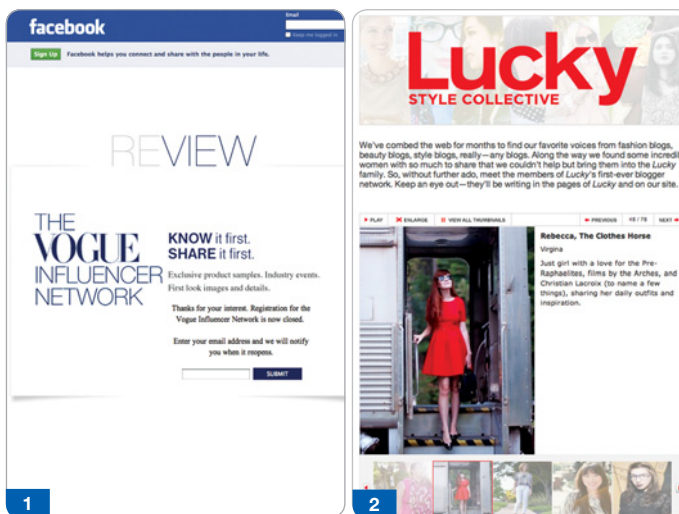
Monitoring bloggers' influence has become easier for brands and bloggers through new social media tracking tools. Online influence measuring company Klout (featured in GIR 42) provides an influence score, taking into account how many people follow you, and to what extent you influence them. Meanwhile, TweetGrader allows Twitter users to see how they compare in popularity with other tweeters in their geographic area and Twentyfeet – an 'ego tracking' site – provides aggregated stats of influence on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, bit.ly, Google Analytics, and Myspace.

In this issue's digital trends, we look into how brands are interacting with bloggers, and how bloggers are using their influence to access special products and services. Megan Berry, marketing manager of Klout, offers insight into how brands can harness digital influencers, and Cillian O'Connor, editor of male fashion blog Male Mode, provides a blogger's perspective on this phenomenon.



### Vogue Influencer Network (1 & 2)

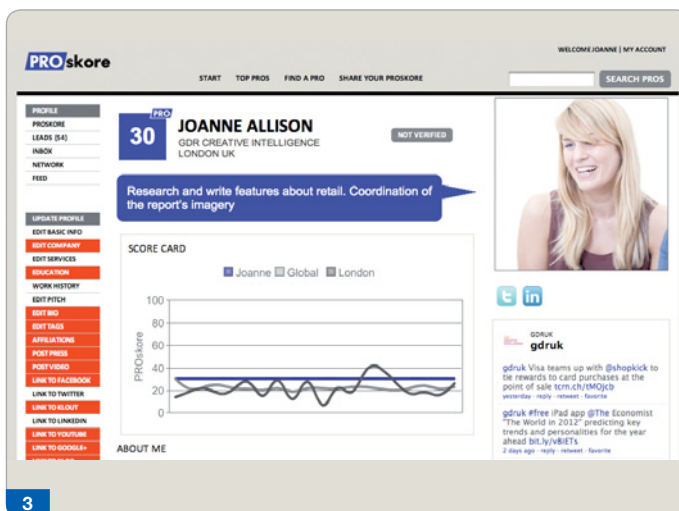
The Vogue Influencer Network is a Facebook platform that enables advertisers to spread the word about their products through bloggers. A panel of 1,000 women applied via Facebook to be part of the initiative, and were chosen based on their activity on various social networks, including fashion site Polyvore. Members were asked to give feedback on advertisers carried by *Vogue* magazine, about new products, fashion collections, and ideas for upcoming adverts. They were encouraged to talk about these products on social networks, raising awareness of the brands and *Vogue* itself. In return, they received products such as face creams and handbags to review and keep. Eight brands used the network as a focus group within the first month in July 2011. Registration for the Vogue Influencer Network is currently closed, but will reopen. US shopping magazine *Lucky* has undertaken a similar venture called the Lucky Style Collective, where 50 bloggers contribute to the magazine's editorial content and promote *Lucky* on their personal blogs.



### PROskore (3)

PROskore is a free social network that scores and ranks business professionals based on their levels of influence, professional history, and recommendations via the site. As with Klout, scores range from one to 100. However, PROskore also takes into account activity on the network and the user's real-world CV. To improve a score users must connect to other members in their region, receive recommendations and invite new users. To ensure an accurate score, the profile can be synced to other social media accounts such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Recruiters can consult PROskore as a quick measure of a potential employee's skill and social influence within a chosen profession. A month after its October 2011 launch, the network had 125,000 members worldwide. A good score is around 40, an average one is 25 and the top score is currently 96.

Website: [www.proskore.com](http://www.proskore.com)



### Fashion's Night Out @ Bal Harbour (4 & 5)

Luxury shopping mall Bal Harbour in Florida recognised its 100 Foursquare Mayors with a private cocktail event called The Mayor's Lounge. These individuals were given previews of new fashion lines and goodie bags. The lounge preceded the Klout Lounge, Bal Harbour's VIP area during a Fashion's Night Out event in 2011. It could only be entered if the attendee had a Klout score of 40 or more, which had to be proved on entry, ensuring that only the most socially engaged shoppers were included. The guest with the highest Klout score (a local Twitter enthusiast with a score of 65) was awarded a \$500 Bal Harbour gift certificate.

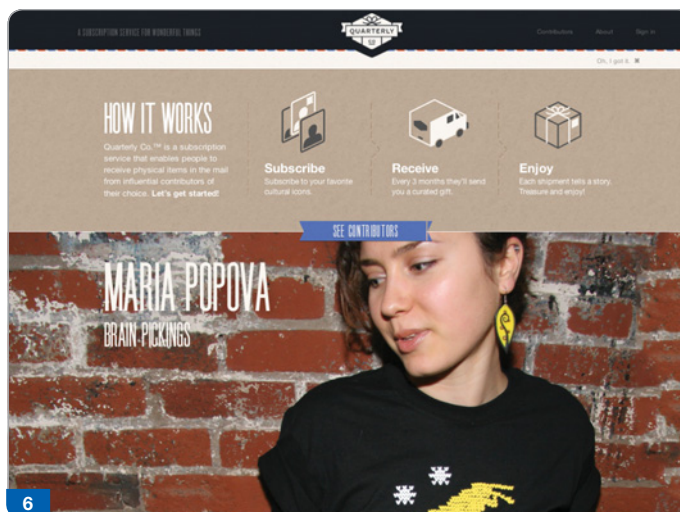


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### Quarterly Co (6)

Quarterly Co is a gifting service that offers users a new way of connecting with their favourite online personalities. Set up by *GOOD* magazine co-founder Zach Frechette, the site has a roster of contributors which includes online influencers, such as designers and scientists, who source gift items that reflect them and their work. Examples are the type of tea a musician drank while penning a new track, or the notebook an author used to plot a recent bestseller. Members can subscribe for \$25 per quarter to their favourite person and will receive one of their chosen gifts every three months, along with a letter explaining what the item means to them. The list of contributors includes bloggers such as Maria Popova from the Brain Pickings blog and Josh Rubin from design site Cool Hunting. Some influencers select consumer products, while others commission limited-edition items exclusively for Quarterly Co. New contributors are added every week, including food, music and entertainment bloggers. Quarterly Co hopes to become a platform that anyone can use to connect with fans, followers, friends and family. Quarterly Co is available worldwide.

Website: <http://quarterly.co>



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### Social Rewards at Palms Casino Resort (7)

The Palms Casino Resort in Las Vegas is rewarding customers for promoting events on social media sites. The hotel has partnered with social media platform Social Rewards, which offers its users points for promoting deals by participating brands. It then tracks how often a user shares a deal, and whether it results in any sales activity, highlighting the top brand advocates. At Palms, points are offered for promotion of new hotel deals, such as 35% off the price of a premium room. For each Tweet sent, 15 points are awarded and for each deal that is purchased as a result, the user earns 250 points. These can then be redeemed for perks at the hotel – 100 points buys two free drinks, and 5,000 a one-night stay in a deluxe room. Points are also awarded for Foursquare check-ins.

Website: <http://web.socialrewards.com>



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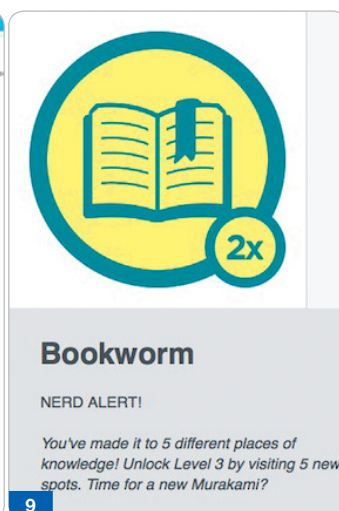
### Foursquare Expertise badges (8 & 9)

Foursquare has launched Expertise badges, which reward members according to their knowledge of different subjects and the consequent value of their suggestions to other users. There are 24 badges available, including Herbivore (an expert on vegetarian restaurants) and Bookworm (someone who visits bookstores). People earn the badges by frequently checking in to locations associated with each one – for instance, the Warhol badge for the Museum of Modern Art. Ten levels can be achieved – level one is reached by checking in five times to a category-specific location and users move up a level for every five subsequent places visited. They can also move up a level by influencing other members to visit a specific location. The badges launched in November 2011 and the platform plans to add more.

Website: <https://foursquare.com>



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### MAC Bloggers' Obsessions (10)

Cosmetics brand MAC recently chose nine beauty bloggers to collaborate on a new make-up collection. The bloggers included Wendy Lam, founder of fashion blog Nitrolicious, and Lily Nima of blog Beauty Maverick, who regularly post articles, how-to videos, and constructive comments about the brand's products online. They collaborated with MAC and produced their own make-up collection of eye shadow and 'lip-glass' high-shine lip gloss. Bloggers were given creative control over the colours and names of the products. Lianne Farbes from The Makeup Girl blog created a grey/pearl eye shadow called Hocus Pocus. Launched in July 2011, products were sold exclusively on the US MAC website.



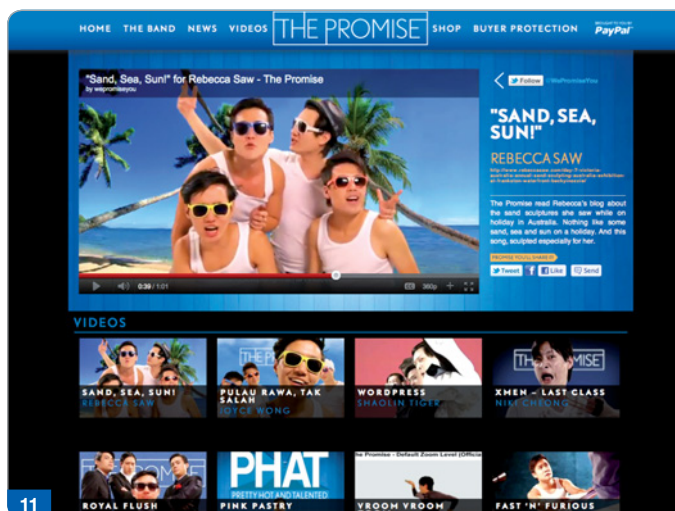
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### The Promise from PayPal (11)

To increase positive social noise about PayPal's Buyer Protection Policy (which protects buyers from online shopping fraud) in Singapore and Malaysia, the brand created a fake boy band. The group, called The Promise, wrote and recorded songs personalised for 20 different bloggers. These included food writer Rebecca Saw from the Nomad Gourmand blog, whose song referenced the sand sculptures she had written about. Every blogger's song ended with the line 'Nothing like a promise kept', PayPal's tagline for safe online shopping. The songs were sent to bloggers as YouTube links that they could post and share. Positive online conversations about PayPal reportedly doubled in both countries as a result of the initiative.

Website: <http://wepromiseyou.com>

Design: TSLA ([www.theseconcreteagency.com](http://www.theseconcreteagency.com))



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### Family Portraits by Hotpoint (12 & 13)

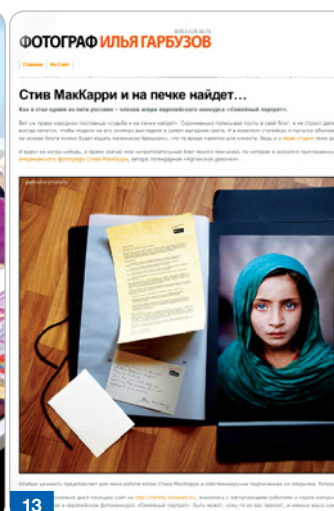
To spread the word about an online photography competition to its target audience, Hotpoint in Milan sent out personalised gifts to 'mommy bloggers'. Hotpoint launched the competition across Europe and Russia in June 2011, giving people the chance to win a professional family portrait and holiday. To drum up social noise about the campaign, the appliance brand sent customised packages to 60 mommy and photography bloggers, such as Maria Jose Ovalle from 'Mummy's Busy World' in the UK and irem Erdilek from the blog 'Sling o Mom' in Turkey. The parcels contained personal gifts for each recipient based on their blog content, such as a paint set for a blogger who had written about her daughter winning a painting competition. As a result, 8,300 pictures from 11 countries were uploaded to the competition website. A panel of photography bloggers created a shortlist, and Steve McCurry, a renowned photographer, chose the overall winner. The campaign resulted in 60,000 new fans on Hotpoint's Facebook Page.

Website: <http://family.hotpoint.eu>

Design: we are social (<http://wearesocial.it>)



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## A New Era of Influence

Many of our personal and professional relationships have moved online, making it possible to measure the level of influence that an individual holds. The number of fans, followers, friends, 're-tweets' and 'likes' all add up to demonstrate that influence. According to a study by Socialnomics, 78% of consumers trust peer recommendations. Add to that the fact that 6.2% of adults produce 80% of these posts, it is clearly crucial for brands and retailers to accrue a group of influencers who will spread brand awareness.

Here at Klout, we measure people's online influence, and give them a Klout Score based on their ability to drive sales by recommending products. The Score is a scale of one to 100, with 100 being the most influential. The average Klout Score is around 20 and the best way to increase it is to consistently create great content that people want to share and respond to. Klout uses data from 13 social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google+ in order to understand the reach and value of an individual's influence – how many people do they hold sway over and to what extent? Do people just read their posts, or do they buy the products recommended? Social media users can visit our website to calculate their score. Klout also identifies the top influencers within different fields, based on topics identified through keyword searches, to approach on behalf of advertisers and brands.

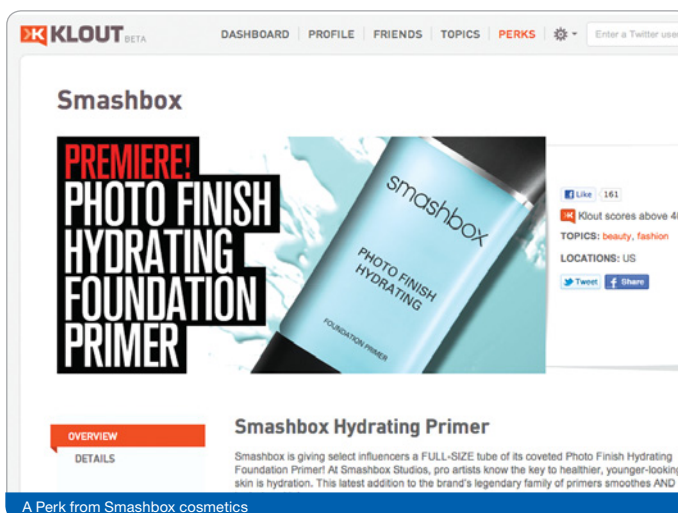
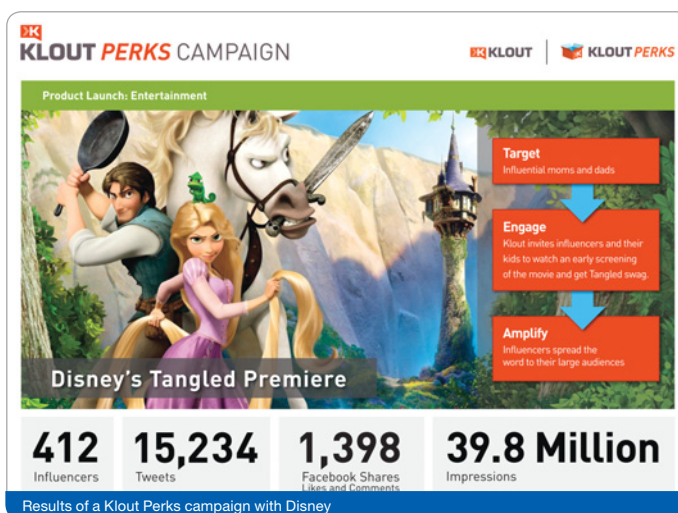
The Klout Perks programme helps brands engage influencers by offering them exclusive products and experiences, such as laptops or free flights. These gifts are sent to key influencers, who are targeted based on score, topic or location. As a result, Klout influencers can generate thousands of pieces of content, via promoted blog posts or tweets, which in turn creates millions of impressions (click-throughs) for that brand. Top brands have run Perks for their launches, allowing influencers to take a new Audi for a weekend-long test drive, go with their kids to an early screening of a Disney movie or take home a new HP laptop loaded with films.

Trust, relevance and authenticity are of paramount importance when engaging influencers. At Klout, we have a strict code of ethics surrounding our interactions. Influencers are never required to talk about any programme or Perk they are in and are always welcome to say whatever they like – good or bad. Brands should always reach out to influencers through a trusted party, such as Klout, so that the recipient understands the context in which they are being approached and how they got their information. Influencers have specific niches and interests, and brands must ensure they are targeting the right message to the right people. For example a premium food brand may target an individual who often tweets recipes or writes a food blog. If brands provide influential bloggers with an exciting new product or experience that they are happy to endorse, the end result is often a win for the influencer, audience and brand.

As Klout evolves we see influence becoming as important to people and businesses as a credit score and customer lifetime value, taking into account a consumer's ability to refer customers. We envision a future where you check into a hotel and get upgraded automatically based on your Klout and when you shop online they will make use of your recommendation and referral value as they decide what deals to show you.

Megan Berry is senior marketing manager for Klout, the online influence measuring company. She blogs about marketing, influence and social media strategy for the *Huffington Post* and *Mashable*, and speaks about online influence at numerous conferences.

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## Blogging for Business

Once considered a hobby, the practice of sharing one's thoughts with an online audience has become serious business, with successful bloggers gaining global renown. Male-Mode.com was launched in September 2007, initially as a means of interacting with other enthusiasts of men's style. Since then, the blog has generated press coverage worldwide and a growing fan base. Over 1,600 people subscribe to the feed and over 1,500 follow on Twitter.

Building a working relationship with a blogger can afford significant reach to brands, presenting the opportunity to share new product launches, store openings or discounts with loyal followers. This can be done in several ways, from affiliate advertising to paying a fee for a banner or text link in the blog itself. However, an increasingly popular method is the promoted post. Here, the blogger writes original editorial content that shines the spotlight on a particular brand or product. The rate for this varies from blogger to blogger. Such a post would generally include a link to the brand's website and product imagery. These images are either provided by the brand or taken by the blogger.

I receive emails daily from brands retailing everything from apparel and jewellery to health foods, asking me to write about them in return for some form of remuneration, be it a freebie, a fixed fee or the promise of directing traffic towards my blog. Brands have found Male Mode through searches for men's style blogs or through word of mouth. I have gladly accepted a pair of Ted Baker brogues, as this is a brand whose product fits with my blog's aesthetic. However, I have also declined offers. When deciding whether or not to write about a particular product, it is a case of judging whether the brand aesthetic, ethos, value for money and story fits with my personal taste, and whether or not I'm happy to endorse it.

Brands can also advertise directly on blogs. Those currently advertising on Male Mode include Topman, John Lewis, Gumtree, and Superdry. Banners and text links carry SEO benefits (search engine optimism), as they can be tracked and give brands a clear idea of ROI. But brands are not always interested in tracking ROI. More often their chief ambition is to be featured on a blog that is niche and has been around longer than a few months – two factors which Male Mode fulfils.

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