



Episode 27

Understanding Influencer Marketing with Laiza Cors



**Mirjam: [00:00]**

Hello, everybody. Welcome to the Designer Discussions Podcast. We are here today to talk about influencers and what it means to be an influencer and all the good things around it.

Intro: [00:10]

Welcome to the Designer Discussions podcast. Tune in each week where we discuss marketing, branding, PR and business advice for design professionals.

Mirjam: (00:25)

Our expert today is Laiza Cors. She is the founder of Embello Agency, the only influencer agency that focuses on home and lifestyle exclusively. So welcome, Laiza.

Laiza: (00:32)

Thank you so much for having me.

Mirjam: (00:40)

Yeah. Thank you for being here. To get started, why don't you just tell a little bit about yourself and what made you found an influencer marketing agency?

Laiza: (01:03)

Yeah. Well, I started my career in home really back in Chicago. That's where I'm from, working for the Home and Houseware Show, which has actually now been rebranded to the Inspired Home Show. It's the largest trade show for homeowners in the US. And so think everything from tabletop to square to organization cleaning. It's like a wedding registry on Steroids. It's amazing, kind of like markets.

Mirjam: (01:36)

I have been there a couple of times. It's very impressive.



Laiza: (01:43)

Yes. So we were the team behind it, and it was amazing. And really where I started my passion for home. And then I moved out to California, where I am now followed my now husband here, which we might actually head back to Chicago. We're headed back after we built our family. But here in California is really where I got more into the interior design community. And so that is where I started working with the design camp crew. I was their head of brand development there. And really what design campus was? We were a conference series that would happen at all the different markets. So more of, like the high point Atlanta, Vegas, going to those markets and doing a conference that really provided continued education for the interior design community. A lot of our speakers were those top tier designers that now we would consider them or are our influencers. And so, yeah, really just expanding my knowledge and love for the home and design industry. After that, I worked for barclay butera, who is a very well known interior designer in our industry, ran all of his marketing, social, digital and really, honestly, with Barkley, collaborating on what is missing in our industry. And we were looking at other industries like fashion and beauty who were already capitalizing on the influencer market and home, always being a little bit behind those industries in the various different categories. But influencer marketing was for sure. One of them. A lot of people didn't even really know what it was at that point. That's really where together with Barkley, he's actually a founding partner of Envelope and started Nalo just wanting to really provide a resources to brands in our industry to educate them on what influencer marketing is, but really help them through the entire workflow process.

**Laiza: (04:03)**

So we handle everything from beginning to end. Finding influencers strategy deliverables wrap ups from beginning to end. We sort of take it over for our brand clients.

Mirjam: (04:19)

And I have complete appreciation for how helpful that is, because when I was at Kohler, all the random requests would always be channeled through me. And it's a lot of work. And running those programs is a full time job. So it makes complete sense. And I love that you have the perspective from both the brand and the interior designer side. I think that's super valuable.

Laiza: (04:48)

It's super helpful to understand to communicate with our brands what they should expect from the influencer, but also the other way around. And so it's been incredibly helpful for us.

Mirjam: (05:02)

Amazing. Okay. I do think there's still a lot of vague information and misconceptions out there about what an influencer actually is. And you as an expert, why don't you enlighten us what to you is the definition of an influencer?

Laiza: (05:23)

Yeah. I mean, maybe people are still thinking you have to be a Kardashian, right. In order to be an influencer. Maybe that's what everyone's like. Oh, wait. I'm not at that kind of level. Or maybe it's just in that sort of category. And so I think there's a lot to kind of go into with this question. But really, it's thinking about who uses influencers. And so mostly companies use influencers. And why are they using them? So they're using influencers in order to spread their brand message. Right.



Laiza: (06:00)

And so instead of the brand going directly to the consumer saying purchase from us, they're going to a trusted source, right. Where people trust this person, whatever they say, whatever they're doing, wherever they're traveling, wherever they're wearing, whatever they're cooking with, whatever they're painting their walls with. And so trusting this person with that brand message to then relay it to their engaged audience. And so truly, anyone that has that engaged audience can be an influencer. There's influencers where we call them Nano influencers that are 5000 followers and less. I mean, it could be any of us if we use social media. I post something about a toy that I'm using with my son. I have friends that also have kids that might ask me where I receive that toy. And then there's everywhere from micro macro to mega influencers. And so of course, this is where people are intending this as their business. They're actively growing their social following their community. Usually it's targeted to a niche category. And so because we are focused into home, we do work with a variety of different categories of influencers. The professional interior design community is a big one that we work with. But then we also have more of the home bloggers, the lifestyle bloggers, mommy, bloggers, chefs, DIYers are huge in our community. So there's a lot of different categories when we talk about influencers, not just in their presence, but also when you dive into the different categories that they cater to, and then there's things like celebrity type spokespeople. Obviously, there's different platforms that influencers focus on, too. So really, within our industry, we find that Instagram is still number one for us.



Laiza: (08:19)

A lot of our clients are asking, is TikTok something? And really you have to think about, where is your client? Is your clients on TikTok? Don't just jump on TikTok because everybody else is right. But is the person who you're wanting to purchase from you there? And if not, maybe your demographic just isn't ready yet to be on there, right? I mean, they'll get older, they'll get there, right. And that's normally how it is with us. So Instagram Pinterest is huge. So there will be influencers that focus on specific social platforms more than others. Video is huge. Right now. You'll see through the algorithms that even the platforms are pushing the content creators to do more video. So it's interesting how that dynamic works. But yeah, to go back to your original question, really, anyone that can influence another person and really someone that's grown their community is a trusted source and someone that people want to go back to, perhaps on a daily basis and get inspired by.

Mirjam: (09:37)

Yeah, that's so much really good information. And actually a couple of my other questions, which it's all sort of wrapped into one. But I was wondering, what different types of influencers do you see specifically in the interior design industry and sort of what is the threshold, Barclay Butera obviously he's one of the top interior designers. But if you think about regular interior designers that are not super famous and there's a lot of ambition out there and a lot of talk about having passive income and doing something on the side, doing little influencer collaboration. And I love that you're laughing. And that's also one of my questions. I'm like, how realistic is that? And maybe let's talk a little bit about the typical deliverables. And I think at the end, maybe we can go into how you operate and what the actual processes of getting to these collaborations. But if you have an influencer collaboration with a brand, what are the typical deliverables? And what would you say is the amount of effort and time that you have to invest in it. And is that even possible for somebody who already have runs a full time interior design business?

**Laiza: (11:19)**

Yes. Okay. Lots of cover there to your first question, just regarding you mentioned Barkley Burra as an example. And I think it's very interesting because someone like Barclay, but has grown his business throughout the years. And he's been well known from licensing from PR, just doing a lot of variety oppressed projects. And someone like Berkeley might not have a huge social media presence. And so I think that's interesting because a lot of designers, maybe they aren't well known, and maybe they are doing press and things like that. But they can use social media in order to be well known. And so they are able to post their projects, they're able to grow their own following. And we've seen it happen a lot in our industry, people that maybe weren't well known. But they grew this really big social media following. And now they're getting other projects. They're being asked to speak on panels. They're being impressed because of that. Exactly. So it's almost the other way around now they've sort of built their own brand on their own. And now they're someone that people want to seek out as an expert. And we've even seen people that were blogging about home first, maybe weren't professional interior designers that became professional interior designers. And so we've seen a lot of that happen, which has been really cool to kind of see throughout the years. So I think there's a lot of different ways you can go about it. There's not always one path. You could be someone that is well known that you might need to build your social presence in order to actually work with some of the clients that we're working with. It's great that you have books, and you're a really well known designer. But if you're not bringing people to their social media or brands ultimately want results. And so that would be one thing that someone that is well known, not on social, might need a bill. And so what was your other question I was wondering about.

Mirjam: (13:44)

Basically the investment of time and effort.



Laiza: (13:51)

Yeah. So the whole side project thing really cracks me up. I barely even have time to do it. Right. And it's what I speak about talk about. We do on a daily basis. And it's a lot of work designers. And this is why there's such a huge difference with our professional interior design community that we work with and then are more home bloggers. This is what they do for a living. They write content, they shoot photography, they work on campaigns in order to make a living. This is how they make their money. Interior designers. They make money getting clients and doing their design business. And they need to also do this other full time, sometimes multiple full time job on the side. Right. I know this was a question that you were going to ask, but if a designer is seeing this happen, right. And they're seeing all their friends, maybe being on social and working on collaboration like, oh, we have to do it, too. Yes. I think social media is the best way that you can promote yourself. You really have control over how to build your brand, and it can drive you into a lot of different avenues. But you have to think about why you're doing it. Is it to get these partnerships to do these campaigns because it is a lot of work to create that content, not only shoot the photography, edit it, make sure you have a project that you can use it in, but also posting and then you don't just all of a sudden have 100,000 followers on your Instagram just because you have a beautiful project. I wish that's how it worked, but you have to work for all of those followers, and it's become harder and harder to do that. And so in order to do that, you have to continue to engage with your audience, engage with your audience, takes a lot of time, a lot of time. And that's what people don't always think about. They want to just be at a certain number. But even just we were talking before the starter with the podcast just kind of how it's growing organically, and that's how it needs to be on social, because it is organic. It should be authentic, but it takes time, and it takes a lot of resources.

**Laiza: (16:31)**

If you plan to do it yourself. You are a unicorn. I know people that do it. It's not impossible, but definitely I always recommend having someone that can help you at least lay out the content. There's platforms out there that can also help you do it as well. Obviously, you can't do everything. It's okay to get help with it.

Mirjam: (17:01)

So basically, what you're saying is this is intentional, right? And you have to you set the intention of being an influencer, and that's how you build your social media following and your engagement. And I know because Liza, you and I have already tried to work together on the brand side of things and brands care. They don't necessarily care about the following. They care about the engagement that they can get from the post, and how many of those people follow their account back and actually purchase the product. And Jason talks about this a lot, too. Social media following those are vanity numbers that really don't do anybody any good. And I think it's very enlightening because it's intentional. It's not accidental. You can't just say, oh, I think I'm going to do a little influencing on this side.

Laiza: (18:06)

The platforms make it a little harder now because they want you to be consistent in order for you to actually grow. So if you are starting, whether it's three times a week or every day, you post, it's being consistent. They want you to be also consistent with engaging with your community. And then also you'll probably notice even just scrolling through Instagram this weekend. I was like, wow, every single thing is a video. Every post was a video. I couldn't find one photo, even from my own friends. I was like, wow, everyone's creating video. And so it's almost the platforms are kind of driving you as to what kind of content you should be creating, because they're putting that at the forefront and what's getting the most engagement. So you do have to follow those trends as well. And that's what we have to do for our clients, too, and see how important video is. And those are the assets. Then that our clients need in order for them to be successful on social?

**Mirjam: (19:11)**

Yeah. Absolutely. So this is all great, great information. I love it that you make it so clear, like you can't be an accidental influencer.

Laiza: (19:36)

Maybe ten years ago, I totally agree. When there was a few people blogging and people were just kind of starting off, but not anymore. There's definitely a plan. There's always a strategy in place. Maria, come on.

Maria: (19:51)

We always like to point out that there's actually a difference between how interior designers professional interior designers that are working to get large client home design jobs versus how a lifestyle blogger is going to present themselves in social media. Is there some way that you think that those two companies can learn from each other? The two business styles can learn from each other? Or do you think they do need to stay super starkly different in the way that they present themselves?

Laiza: (20:25)

I mean, I think that they have to think about what they're looking to achieve out of social media. And so I think for some designers, social media has been a great place for them to get new clients. Now, maybe instead of going to their website to see their portfolio of projects, they're just going straight to their Instagram and scrolling down and saying, okay, this is exactly how I want my home to look like. And so I want to hire this designer. Whereas maybe a home blogger, maybe it's not so much about their home. Maybe it's about it just kind of also depends on what categories they cover. But really, a home blogger is also wanting to continue to grow their following in order to get more of those paid collaborations. Because again, that's how they make money. And so I think maybe more of that. And I'm calling them a home blogger to kind of just differentiate from the interior design community. But maybe that home blogger is recognizing how everyone is doing video. And so they need to shift and strategize on how to do video.

**Laiza: (21:36)**

Or maybe interior designer video could be great to show the space and design, and they can adapt. But maybe they don't need to shift as quickly because their goal isn't getting those campaigns and paid collaborations. Their goal is more interior design clients.

Maria: (21:51)

That makes a ton of sense.

Mirjam: (22:00)

I wanted to ask you like, if an interior designer is serious about pursuing the influencer route, then what would be your best advice for that person?

Laiza: (22:12)

Yeah. I would first take a second to really think about why you're doing it. What your intention is so that you can really make a strategic plan out of it and think about what you want to get out of it if it is to get more of the paid collaborations. Wonderful. How are you going to do that? Because in addition to that, just like you said when you were working at Kohler, there was a lot of outreach that goes into it. It's not like all of a sudden all these brands know that you've like, hey, I'm now open for business, like, here I am. So there's definitely building of that as well. Right. And that can get some momentum once you start working with other brand collaborations. But there's a lot of outreach, like putting together your media kit, really, knowing your numbers, like you mentioned how important engagement rate is to clients. That is how we present our media kit as well, because people want to know how many people are going to either be commenting, sharing, liking those posts. And so just understanding your numbers, understanding how to grow your numbers, understanding what platforms you want to be on, understanding your own voice, your own brand.

**Laiza: (23:36)**

And this is what you should probably be doing anyway for social. Some of that, like your own voice messaging, branding, strategic calendar for your social if you are looking to grow. But yeah, taking a step back as to why. And then also again, to my other point of just not feeling like you need to do it all. You don't need to edit all the photos. Perhaps someone can help you lay your photography out. You did the design. It's okay if you don't. Yeah. Get help. Get someone that can help you, someone that might actually be more of an expert. Just because you're an interior designer doesn't mean that you're all of a sudden an expert in social media, right. And know everything about it and what's going to do. Well, have someone that is going to help you. Just like you would hire someone to do your website, someone that's an expert. Go out and hire someone that really knows social media and can help you, maybe get to where you're looking to get a little quicker than you probably could.

Mirjam: (24:38)

Yeah. That's really great advice. Thank you so much. I'm so glad you enlightened us on what it means.

Laiza: (24:48)

No, I know you asked a question about just kind of like the minimum. And before we always tell our clients and influencers that want to work with our clients, there was that threshold of 10,000 followers, because that's really where you are able to swipe up links and just have more capabilities. Obviously, that's why a brand wants to work with an influencer so that you can either drive traffic to their social media or to their website. And so if you're not really able to drive to their website, then they probably aren't going to want to work with you.

**Laiza: (25:26)**

Not that your content isn't beautiful. It's just perhaps your numbers aren't there. Some brands, though, do want to work with more micro Nano influencers, and it's more about brand awareness. And so they'd rather work with more influencers than less. And so that's where they can be a good fit. But it's also kind of things are changing links and things are you have more capabilities with that now. And so that's also going to be changing as well. So that is what it used to be. So we'll see we kind of follow what that lead is and see how it goes. But that's pretty much the minimum that we would normally work with on our end.

Mirjam: (26:18)

Perfect. And so there may be people in the audience that have reached that threshold. So if they were interested in potentially working with you and anybody who would like to find out more information about you and Embello, where would you send them?

Laiza: (26:31)

Yeah. So you can go to Embello.Com, and it's absolutely free for influencers to sign up. Really. What it does is it allows you to be part of our network. And so when we work with various brands and we work with companies in the furniture industry, everything from accessories to more home pet mommy, really everything under the home umbrella. And with the past couple of years with the pandemic, that umbrella has grown because everyone has been at home a little bit more. And so things like wellness and have also kind of gone under our wing, which is wonderful. But that's how you're able to see all the different collaborations that we are working on. And you can apply to be part of the campaign. And it's absolutely free.

Mirjam: (27:23)

And it's a great way to to see what it looks like and what the types of requirements and opportunities are. Yes. So that would be a great idea for anybody who is interested to sign up.

**Laiza: (27:36)**

That's very true. I think, had mentioned before about deliverables for campaigns. And so sometimes those will be posted on the different opportunities, and you'll be able to see where it's kind of trending what the brands are interested in blogging. Are they still interested in that versus video or Pinterest Instagram TikTok? What are they kind of looking for? You mentioned the show house earlier. Yes, the Show house. I want to talk about that because this is actually another great kind of example of how maybe you don't want to work on those brand collaborations. Maybe you've decided it's too much work. I don't really want to have to deal with that. But I still want to grow my presence online on social. It helps with my brand doing that can get you different opportunities. And I mentioned, like speaking, there's various things that can happen at market that brands want to collaborate with designers on. So it doesn't have to just be that, like, product trade opportunity. But the show house is another really great example. And so we've actually partnered with Martha Stewart Living, and we are launching a virtual showhouse, The Living by Design. I know we're so excited. It's the Living by Design showhouse. If you go there, you can see all of the 20 designers who are part of it, and you'll recognize many, many names there. But that's another way that if you've grown your presence, we definitely have that influencer angle. So all of the designers are well known, but they also have a strong social following because that's an important part of the entire program. And so it's another opportunity that you could perhaps be part of. But it launches in March, and so that's when it'll go live and so just stay tuned for more on that. But we're super excited.

Mirjam: (29:38)

That's amazing. I know how much work those are so kudos to you and your team.

**Laiza: (29:46)**

A lot of work, but it's being virtual actually is amazing because we're working with an incredible 3D rendering animation company called UC, who brings it all to life. A lot of people were like, so is there an actual home? No. Everything about it is as if the house exists. The architect designed it. All. The designers are designing a room. All the product obviously is real, but there's no place you can go to. You're touring it virtually, which is great because you'll be able to see product there, get inspired and then see all the 20 creators that were part of it, too.

Mirjam: (30:08)

That's actually one of the positive outcomes of the pandemic. Right. The virtual show homes. It's a real innovation. I'm very excited to see it. So everybody hop over if you're interested to embellish dot com and sign up. I actually get your updates, and I love to just see what I'm not an influencer. I like to see what's in it and what's happening. It's good research, if nothing else, right. Thank you so much for coming on our podcast and sharing with us about influencers and the show home. We look forward to having you back soon and we'll see everybody else next week.

Laiza: (31:17)

Thanks so much.

Outro: (31:20)

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