

# G L O S S Y

## Beauty & Wellness Briefing: The always-on influencer strategies of 3 top beauty brands



*This week, I shine a light on the unsung hero of influencer marketing: the middle-funnel, always-on strategy. I examined the strategies of three brands —Ipsy, Maybelline and The Inkey List— including how they're formatted, what's driving them and how they've evolved as the beauty industry changes.*

Influencer marketing can be a mix of science and art, and perhaps a bit of alchemy, too.

According to a 2022 report from eMarketer, influencer marketing spending in the U.S. will reach \$7.14 billion in 2024, an increase of 15.9% from 2023. This type of growth also comes with substantial shifts in approaches and strategies and minor compounding changes that are equally significant. Take, for example, the shift from large-scale branded influencer events to smaller, more intimate ones. Conversations across the beauty industry have also indicated a change from the conversion-driven bottom-funnel focus that defined 2022 and 2023 to a broader, top-funnel focus, centered on earned media value and brand awareness, for 2024. Sitting in the heart of those two ends of the funnel is the always-on strategy, also called the middle funnel. It's the less sexy middle sibling within the marketing funnel, but its importance cannot be undervalued. Ultimately, when executed well, it allows brands to retain cultural relevancy and drive considerations to purchase.

As brands focus on topics like earned media value and fight for market share within the attention economy, the consistency of the always-on middle funnel becomes more critical. With that in mind, Glossy spoke with three brands to understand their approaches to middle-funnel influencer marketing.

## Ipsy

Ipsy works with about 20 paid influencers monthly, making up its top- and bottom-funnel strategies, and a dedicated internal team that manages those. Meanwhile, a separate team manages its middle-funnel influencer program, which contains 3,000 people. The program revolves around its seeding program: Non-paid influencers are sent gifted monthly subscription boxes and required to post at least once a quarter. The goal is that, every month, at least 70% of influencers will decide to post. The program, referred to by the Ipsy team as the “Incubator” program, has been around since the end of 2020. But Karen Chimal, director of creator partnerships at Ipsy, said it has “matured” over the last two quarters.

“The biggest hurdle is managing such a large program at scale,” said Chimal. “We want to make sure we keep engaging with the [creators] and keep them interested, especially if they’ve been in the program for a while. We want to find ways for them to connect with us more as people behind the brand and also offer peer-to-peer connections.”

Engaging this group has involved the soft reopening of Ipsy’s creator studio in Los Angeles in January — it first opened in 2019 before closing in 2020 amid the Covid-19 pandemic. A more formal relaunch is planned for May. The studio intends to provide a formal space for influencers to create content, whether for Ipsy or another partner. The studio is a way for Ipsy to show its support of emerging and growing influencers, said Chimal. Most influencers in the Incubator program are focused on Instagram, and about 70% of content produced through the Incubator program is posted to that platform, followed by TikTok and YouTube Shorts.

In addition, in Fall 2023, in conjunction with brands like Glow Recipe and Anastasia Beverly Hills, Ipsy began offering webinars for influencers based on makeup tutorials and new product launches, for example. These sessions allow for more one-on-one interactions that Ipsy may not otherwise be able to support because of the scale of the program. Approximately 200 creators attended the Anastasia Beverly Hills session in Oct. 2023, and 47% stayed for the entire hour-long event.

Lastly, Ipsy hosts influencer summits where attendees can view panel discussions, take part in workshops and network. Ipsy also plans to bring back its Ipsy Live beauty events, a casualty of Covid-19, at an unspecified time. The influencer-focused Ipsy Live events will be on a smaller scale, compared to the pre-2020 events, where thousands of people would attend. Like many other beauty brands, the company's du jour strategy focuses on intimacy versus scale.

“A big goal of ours [for events] is to create a community and a way for content creators to engage with each other, too,” said Chimal. “People want authentic connections, whether with their peers or brands. That is hard to achieve at a mass scale.”

Moving forward, Ipsy plans to build upon its “Accelerator” hybrid influencer program, which bridges the paid content creators and the Incubator program. Launched in Oct. 2023, the Accelerator program provides an undisclosed monthly stipend to influencers who can directly use it to help produce their content for Ipsy. To the 25 people in the program, Ipsy provides three briefs as options — they select the one they’d like to produce. Options may include holiday social campaigns, new products from Ipsy brand partners or content that will be used in digital advertisements, for example. When Ipsy opened up applications for influencers to apply to the Accelerator program, it received over 1,000. Ipsy formed a committee between its social, production and brand partnerships teams to go through every application, looking for people who are serious about growing their content creation careers and skilled in producing quality content. Ipsy will increase the program to 50 people by the end of the second quarter of 2024.

“The [middle-funnel influencer strategy] is about getting a lot of volume out there. It’s not specific, dedicated content that is direct response; it’s more about flooding the market, month after month,” said Chimal.

## Maybelline

There are three main strategies for Maybelline's middle-funnel influencer strategy: maintain an always-on pulse of content, support retail partners like Walmart and Target, and either stay on top of trends via influencer content that can be repurposed as UGC or insert Maybelline into culturally relevant trends. Maybelline works with about 300 influencers in its middle funnel who support monthly one-off campaigns, focus on a particular retailer and are part of its 3-year-old "Babelline" program. The Babelline program is at the heart of Maybelline's middle-funnel influencer strategy and consists of 22 paid influencers, including Lauren Kawano (@LaurenKawarano; 42,600 Instagram followers) and Justyn Gee (@JustynGee; 17,700 Instagram followers). Every month, a Babelline will have a required deliverable piece of content but more flexibility with a trend-focused second deliverable.

"What's great about mid-tier [size influencers] is that so many of these creators are both aspirational and relatable," said Sarah Shaker, avp of brand engagement for Maybelline. She added that, as one of the most significant heritage cosmetics brands, Maybelline is not looking to gain awareness but aims to instead find relevancy, and the middle-funnel influencer strategy is a key way to do that.

Shaker said that, this year, Maybelline aims to diversify the deliverable content it receives from influencers in the Babelline program. Two to three briefs for deliverable content are shared with influencers each month. For example, there may be a brief requesting a product reveal video, another requesting a full-face tutorial and a third prompting a get-ready-with-me-style piece. Overall, video content is the priority. Maybelline evaluates the program's success based on individual video views, the average video views for an influencer, cost per view and cost per engagement, as measured through Traackr. An area the team is exploring is evaluating the sentiment of viewers based on comments, but this is done manually, said Shaker.

“We love to see when there's positive sentiment about the brand or the content [an influencer] is creating for us on these posts because [it shows] it's resonating with their audience,” she said. “We even look at earned sentiment when there is a product launch, considering both the influencer's [community] and consumers talking about the products [on their own].”

## The Inkey List

Neil Brading, marketing director at The Inkey List, said the brand's middle funnel is the "heartland" of its influencer marketing. The 5-year-old brand has focused less on driving dollars and enlisting mega-influencers, in a typical brand awareness approach, and more on building more continuous conversations with macro- and micro-influencers. Typically, the brand works with up to 100 unpaid influencers in its middle-funnel strategy, but it doesn't have a formalized influencer program. In January, The Inkey List worked with over 150 influencers and was mentioned in 3,000 pieces of individual social content across paid, unpaid and organic posts. It reached approximately 500 million social media accounts, according to the company. The social platforms The Inkey List focuses on are TikTok and YouTube. Suited to long-form content, YouTube is the focus of the brand's current digital campaign called "Acne happens, this time it's personal."

"Long-form content enables us to tap into influencer voices and people within our community telling personal stories, which can really drive [purchase] consideration within the mid-funnel," he said. "As [our middle funnel] grows, [the focus] is on diversifying the platforms where we have conversations and engage our community."



The influencers comprising the brand's middle funnel approach are lifestyle and beauty influencers including makeup artists and dermatologists. This allows the brand to cover many interests and topics ranging from makeup prep to ingredient deep dives. Brading said that The Inkey List uses brand mentions as a key indicator for measuring the success of its middle funnel. Mentions are a component that often leads to something larger, like earned media value and general brand awareness, and they demonstrate how engaged and interested people are, he said. The brand also looks at click-through and social engagement rates to see how many current or potential customers are considering purchasing.

Over the last 15 months, another brand focus has been developing closer connections to influencers in the middle funnel via events. In 2023, The Inkey List held 16 community events in key markets across the U.S. and the U.K., including New York City, Miami, Dallas and Manchester, England. So far into 2024, it's hosted eight events.

"The [focus] is driving community and driving the number of people authentically talking about us, versus leveraging a single macro creator that kind of drives everything," said Colette Laxton, co-founder of The Inkey List.