

A close-up photograph of a bartender's hands pouring beer from a metal shaker into a glass. The beer is being filtered through a fine mesh strainer. The bartender is wearing a dark shirt and has a beard. The background is blurred, showing a bar setting with greenery.

 A CIRKLE REPORT

TRADING UP

How to use influencers
to boost B2B
campaigns

TRICKS

OF THE TRADE



Trust in institutions is at a low ebb: businesses are doing best in the eyes of consumers, trusted by 62% internationally, but it's a low bar with only 50% having faith in governments. For news media the figure is just 42%.

Against this backdrop, brands are seeking to shore up trust among their target audiences. Engagement is a key first step - and that requires budget.

The good news is that according to a LinkedIn study, six out of 10 B2B marketing leaders say their budgets have increased in the past year, with a further two-thirds believing they'll rise again in 2024.

That's a positive outlook for trade campaigns. The trick now, for marketers who oversee them, is to understand the powerful breadth of options at their disposal.

One strategy often overlooked is the use of trade PR influencers. Consumer PR made the case for influencers long ago: it's said to add up to 60% more revenue than traditional advertising. What's more, the value of consumer influencer marketing was set to reach more than \$21bn globally in 2023.

Consumer and professional media consumption is blurring, so campaigns must reflect that change or brands will miss out on the opportunities trade PR provides. Cirkle is a keen advocate of influencer-led trade PR campaigns, so we set out to discover the attitudes and actions of trade marketing teams, in a bid to bust some of the myths and incite confidence in the art of advocacy.

We also spoke to a range of brand marketers for their communications campaigns set to target B2B audiences.

Our research shines a light on current beliefs about the use of influencer advocacy - and makes the case for adding it to the range of powerful tactics already available to trade marketers as they seek to run more successful campaigns.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted by Censuswide, between 27.06.2023 and 07.07.2023, among 100 UK respondents with the following job titles:

Marketing Director	Head of Marketing	Communications Director
Head of Communications	Head of Trade	Trade Communications
Shopper Marketing	Brand Director	Head of Brand

Respondents work in retail, hospitality and built environment businesses.

Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society, which is based on the ESOMAR principles and is a member of The British Polling Council.

TRADE PR MOVES BEYOND COLUMN INCHES

Most marketers are aware of trade PR: the vast majority (95%) surveyed say they recognise it is a part of marketing campaigns. But how much do they know about the nuts and bolts of the discipline and all the available levers to hand?



Half of those polled believe their organisation's trade PR strategy is well-established. This rises to 56% of marketers at retail firms.

This is hugely encouraging. Marketers clearly value trade PR, understanding that without harnessing its ability to make more customers aware of brand and product activity even the most successful consumer marketing campaign can fall flat. If retailers aren't stocking an item, for instance, consumers who've seen the product advertised will struggle to find it.

92% of respondents believe trade PR is an integral part of their marketing strategy

Britvic's Head of Trade Engagement, Vicky Gregory, says: "Trade PR is an essential communications tool for businesses like ours. If your customers don't have a direct relationship with you, and don't know what you're doing, you can't build a relationship.

"It also offers invaluable category insight. And overall, it demonstrates our commitment to supporting the trade, and getting them excited about our products."

Meanwhile, 42% of businesses overall say their strategy is currently in the embryonic stages of development, while fewer than one in 10 (8%) have either considered, but not yet begun, to develop trade PR or have no plans to use it.

That leaves almost half of brands in the hospitality, retail and built environment sectors pondering how to construct their future trade PR initiatives. Britvic's Vicky Gregory adds: "Being consistently present and visible is key: don't be sporadic, longer-term plans make a difference."

There's no shortage of enthusiasm for trade PR: 92% of respondents believe it is an integral part of their marketing strategy. More than half (53%) feel it's very important.

Catherine Hinchcliff, Head of Corporate Marketing and Insight at leading UK foodservice wholesaler Bidfood, states: "One of our biggest campaigns is the Food and Drink Trends report based on our exclusive research. It's regularly at the top of Google's UK rankings, which we're very proud of. We amplify it through channels including online PR, social media and an interactive trade guide video."

As Catherine indicates, brands are experimenting with a range of channels.

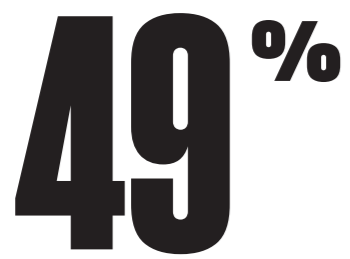
What channels do you currently use for trade PR?



SOCIAL MEDIA



TRADITIONAL PRINT & BROADCAST MEDIA



TRADE SHOWS/ EVENTS



INFLUENCER MARKETING



NONE

INFLUENCING INSIGHT

It's interesting to note that more than one in five (22%) marketers polled say they lack a clear understanding of trade PR - and it's an exciting opportunity for them to explore further. Trade PR is moving past the narrow confines of column inch-only strategies. Well-written articles and paid campaigns still have their place, of course, but strategies now offer so much more.

If you're planning to repeat, revive or try trade PR for the first time, it's worth appraising the wide range of tactics available. Britvic's Vicky Gregory says: "We place a high value on trade PR and are focused on doing more in this area finding the right balance between trade and consumer marketing. You need this right balance to optimise success."

Part of that balance is the growing trend for B2B influencer marketing - a technique that exemplifies the reach and engagement that an authentic peer-to-peer campaign can drive.





THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF TRADE PERSONALITIES

Several factors are bringing influencer marketing to the fore for B2B:

- The ability to directly align success to commercial KPIs via access to operators' EPOS data; driving test and evaluate at a sales impact level
- The sheer scale of B2C influencer marketing makes it hard to ignore for B2B marketers
- The blurring of lines between our lives as consumers and professionals - often the same campaigns reach us in both settings. As Bidfood's Catherine Hinchcliff explains, "Our buyers are also consumers. That's why we've expanded beyond traditional trade PR editorial and branched out into broadcast where they'll also notice us." Peer-to-peer trade endorsement can become part of their daily consumption too
- More sophisticated trade PR techniques being applied to B2B influencer strategies, improving success rates
- B2B influencer marketing is seen as one cost-effective option available and growing in use during a period of campaign cost inflation, according to 40% of respondents
- The ability to sidestep consumer scepticism - trade influencers offer an authentic voice to their peers, credibly recommending products in a way many brands can't. By integrating trade influencers with wider campaigns - from ideation through to evaluation - the discipline can have a positive impact on many brand teams: sales case studies; innovation input for R&D; promotional strategies. Field sales teams have been shrinking or consolidating across some suppliers.

“From a trade perspective, peer-to-peer is so important”

Summarising the strength of B2B influencer marketing, Britvic's Vicky Gregory says: "From a trade perspective, peer-to-peer is so important. People in hospitality and retail are well-respected and experienced. If you choose the right person, people trust their advice. When a bartender uses and highlights your product it's natural and genuine, trusted and engaging."

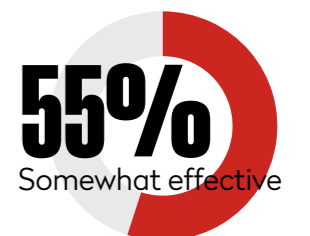
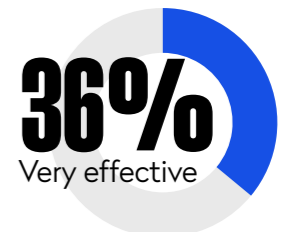
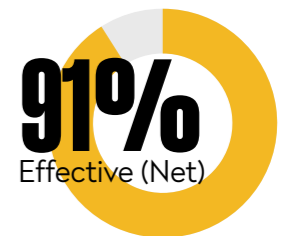
Rebecca Orton, Trade Communications Marketing Manager, AkzoNobel - which owns Dulux - comments: "Putting seasoned decorators at the heart of our campaigns transcends traditional brand messaging by infusing genuine experiences and peer-to-peer validation. This approach creates a resonance that goes beyond a mere brand proclamation, harnessing the real-world expertise of industry professionals to authentically endorse and elevate our products, forging stronger, more trusted relationships with our customers."

What's more, B2B influencers can have a huge reach across both trade and consumer markets: retailer Rajvin23 has 2.8 million followers and counting on TikTok; painter/decorator Justin Bailly has a following of 25,000+ on YouTube; and former Yummy Pub owner Tim Foster has 3,000 connections on LinkedIn.

That's why a strategy that integrates influencers over both consumer and trade audiences, to extend and maximise reach, works best.

Many of our survey respondents understand the power of trade influencers. More than four in 10 (42%) currently use them in their campaigns. A further 35% have previously used them. Meanwhile, around one in seven (14%) say they will consider influencers for future trade PR initiatives.

How effective would you rate the impact of B2B influencers for trade PR success?



WHO'S USING TRADE INFLUENCERS?	42%	35%	14%
	currently use in their campaigns	have previously used	will consider using for future trade PR initiatives

INFLUENCING INSIGHT

A majority of marketers have already bought into trade influencer campaigns - and many are scoring successes by using this important tool in their kit.

There's no reason why B2B influencer marketing can't propel trade brands to the extent that consumer businesses have benefitted from high-profile support.

Trade influencers endorse brands and products, spreading the word so their trade peers purchase and stock or use them.

A pub might run a case study highlighting a specific cider brand that helped it increase sales by 20% thanks to the recommended core range being available. Following this approach, other pubs are keen to add the brand to their beverage range - or increase stock if they already offer it to customers - and make enquiries about the brand with the supplier.

Or, in retail, a store owner trials a new Tango flavour; this is followed up with a trade press case study showcasing the spike in sales over a certain time period, and positive shopper feedback. Rival retailers want a piece of the action and contact Britvic to get it onto their shelves.

Perhaps a painter and decorator is used for a peer-to-peer campaign to provide their authentic views on why they choose to use the Dulux Heritage range. This builds credibility and trust among their audience - persuading other tradespeople to use the brand too.

Calls to action vary greatly in campaigns. Enquiries from new stores or pubs to stock a specific product highlighted by the influencer leads to measurable results. Alternatively, if the customer buys the product from wholesale - making it harder to track unit sales - understanding brand sentiment pre- and post-campaign can make all the difference when it comes to future intent.



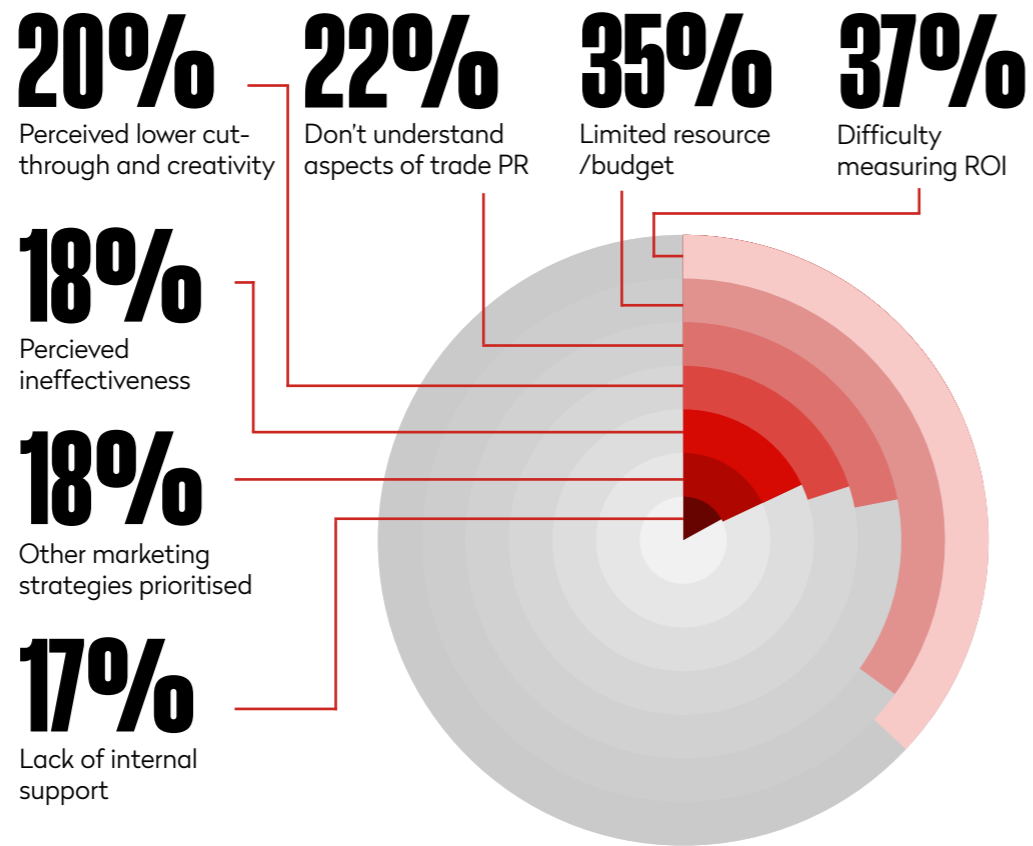


MEASURE OF SUCCESS

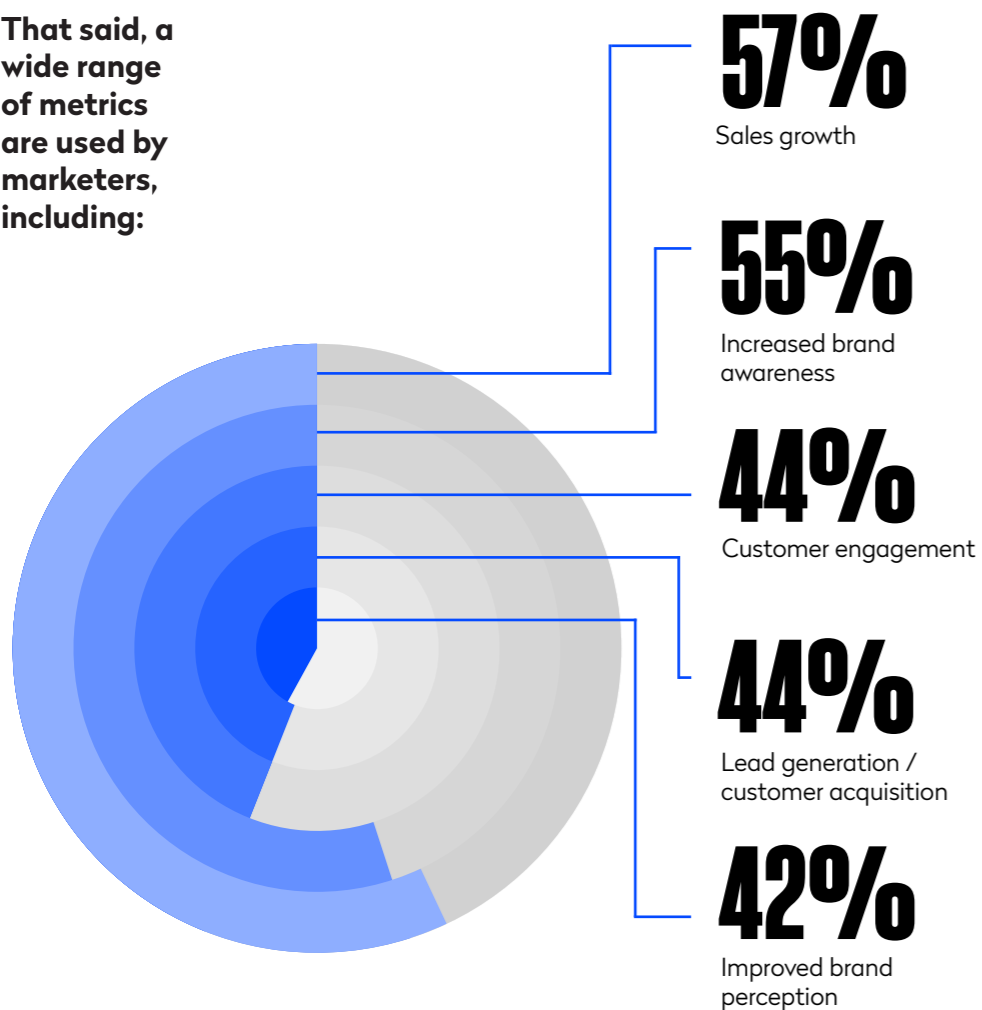
HOW TRADE MARKETERS PIN DOWN ROI

More than a third (37%) of trade marketers say they have difficulty measuring campaign ROI. In fact, it's the top challenge they face in running trade PR initiatives - even ahead of resource and budget. But these challenges are overcome by the direct attribution of commercial KPIs to trade PR - when campaigns are run right.

What challenges have you faced implementing trade PR?



That said, a wide range of metrics are used by marketers, including:



Our brand interviewees have their own thoughts on metrics and measurement. For Bidfood's Catherine Hinchcliff, "These days, digital metrics are better than standalone coverage stats. However, it's possible to combine data such as clicks, views and opens with OTS to get to a useful figure."

Sentiment monitoring is also key, states Britvic's Vicky Gregory: "We have spent time shifting teams to understanding that sentiment and reputation analysis is important. We track and analyse spikes and blips. Understanding earned media performance - landing key messages and gaining fair share of voice - is also crucial."

INFLUENCING INSIGHT

While measuring ROI leaves some marketers scratching their heads, proven metrics can be called on to assess the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of campaigns. As marketers know only too well, proving success is key to getting budget renewed or even increased. In fact, they name it as the second most important component of trade PR strategies (31%) in their opinion, behind targeted audience outreach (40%).

In B2B influencer marketing specifically, sentiment analysis is key. Going beyond traditional trade PR metrics like column inches and opportunities to see, examining sentiment can give a clearer picture of whether the campaign has shifted behaviour as intended: for instance, is the retailer stocking more of the product being promoted? This can be measured with pre- and post-campaign surveys among a sample of trade customers, to capture the effect of the influencer activity.

The direct correlation between trade influencer marketing and sales is unique: it really can be shown to boost distribution and sales by analysing sales peaks. Many brands also have dedicated trade-facing websites. They can capture data, which can then be used to build communities and drive further activity, such as direct mail campaigns.

Circle constructs and carries out measurement strategies for clients across trade sectors including retail, hospitality and built environment, as part of end-to-end campaign planning and execution.

It's how we can prove that trade PR, whether in a discrete channel or through a potent combination of tactics, more than pays its way.





Cirkle trade team members with the Retailer Inner Circle founding store owners and PepsiCo's Head of Wholesale

RETAILER INNER CIRCLE

Our groundbreaking, dedicated trade influencer group has come to fruition after in-depth conversations between Cirkle, clients and retailers over several years. The collective is an added-value service for all of our clients - and the door is open for more to join in.

All about putting the customer first, our Retailer Inner Circle panel is now live to make it even easier for clients to reach some of the most influential convenience store operators in the channel. It's a unique service for Cirkle clients that allows brands to trial ideas, feed insight into new product development, promotions, formats - and more. "When retailers and suppliers come together there's something

really positive in the making," says Bobby Singh of BB Featherstone Superstore & Post Office. "It's a brilliant experience, giving us an opportunity to promote products on our shelves."

Mike Chapman, PepsiCo Head of Wholesale, adds: "We value working with credible, successful retailers like Bobby and others on the panel, to listen, understand the retail convenience community and drive growth together."

Aman Uppal, One Stop Mount Nod, comments: "Cirkle brings retailers and brands together in a way I haven't seen before. We get to work with large household brands from PepsiCo to Premier Foods. It's a chance to gain insight and be at the forefront of launches."

“Cirkle brings retailers and brands together in a way I haven't seen before”



In its second year of launch, Cirkle was tasked with continuing to drive mass awareness and consideration of the Dulux Heritage range with painters & decorators – positioning it as the only range to deliver both desirable colours in luxury finishes that consumers can't help but want, as well as a range that decorators want to 'sell' with pride.

Our campaign was built on two clear insights:

1. HUMAN TRUTH: Labour now and in the future is the number one concern raised by decorators and contractor and the UK decorating population is in decline. 66% of UK decorators will retire within 10 years and the average age of a decorator is 50.

2. PRODUCT TRUTH: The Premium Aesthetics category has grown significantly over the past 12 months, particularly in trade channels (via specialist decorating merchants to painting professionals or homeowners), but is largely dominated by competitor brands.

Cirkle's campaign had two pillars:

1) Peer-to-peer storytelling and product in practice showcasing to build credible and reliable advocacy. Using the power of peer-to-peer endorsement, we entered a long-term strategic

partnership with three painters & decorators – our Dulux Heritage Heroes – to show (not tell) our audiences why they should be proud to recommend Dulux Heritage to their customers.

2) A national search for our next Heritage Hero. The word Heritage is intrinsically linked to stories and experiences from the past that make up the present. Linking authentically to our 'Promote the Profession' campaign, we used the power of storytelling to launch a national search to find our next Dulux Heritage Hero. The next hero would join our Heritage Heroes line-up for next year and would also receive a professional photoshoot and key Dulux Heritage products.

Our PR campaign contributed to the brand's overall objectives to drive awareness and consideration.

Year-on-year sales were significantly up in comparison to the same period last year.

The PR campaign launched alongside a halo campaign spanning marketing engagement, radio partnerships with Radio X and sampling and we worked closely with our interagency campaign to optimise activation timings.

Angela Hegarty, Senior Brand Manager, Dulux Trade, said: "Cirkle have demonstrated a true understanding of the brand ambitions along with strong audience insight, allowing the development of a really strong PR plan to complement our other communications activities and activation in store. It has been great to extend the Dulux Trade team. We have been so pleased at how well the campaign has performed and been received in market, whilst offering great successes and learnings around trade influencer marketing for us to continue to take forward."



CONCLUSION

Trade PR's breadth of tactics and impact are often misunderstood. But there's clearly an appetite for going 'beyond column inches' - important though that remains - to try newer techniques.

One of those is partnering with trade influencers to boost product take-up and sales. Just like consumer marketing influencers, using the faces of retail, hospitality and more can be a powerful way to attract attention for your brand.

AkzoNobel's Rebecca Orton concludes: "The future of B2B PR will continue to see an evolution towards fostering deeper connections, not just transactions. Our focus remains on amplifying authentic narratives that resonate within the trade community. It's not solely about product promotion; it's about meaningful engagement, knowledge sharing and partnerships that enrich the professional landscape."

As our report has shown, trade influencers are becoming an essential, impactful and measurable part of the b2b PR armoury. Isn't it time you traded up to boost your campaigns?

CONTACT DETAILS

Amy Searle, Managing Director Retail Trade, Cirkle
Amy.searle@cirkle.com



cirkle