

Chapter 8



AUTHENTIC FAMESEEKERS



What's the Non-Obvious Trend?

A new generation of creators become authentic fameseekers – turning to social media to establish their brands, earn eyeballs and become the next big thing.

For more than a decade, Oprah Winfrey was one of the most influential media personalities in the world. Her daily talk show had legions of loyal viewers, and her empire was on the rise. Brands would pay to try and win her attention, because her endorsement was golden. Consumers trusted her advice so implicitly that whenever she recommended a product or service, millions of people would flock to it.

This happened with such predictable frequency that the marketing world even coined a term for it: the “Oprah Effect.”

The Oprah Effect sold millions of books, cosmetics, consumer products and food. It launched the careers of entrepreneurs, authors and innovators. Oprah Winfrey was the perfect example of what marketing people call an “influencer” – someone who can get people to act based on

their recommendations.

Today the definition of an influencer has changed.

Now the most common description of an influencer is anyone who seems to have any sort of audience – whether that audience is an engaged, devoted fan or an idle YouTube subscriber who clicked a button once three years ago and forgot about it.

This new definition of influencers includes a huge new category of *Authentic Fameseekers*, people who have achieved their influence by finding innovative ways to attract eyeballs on social media, often through creating highly personal and authentic content.

Sometimes they have real talent. Other times the question of whether or not their skill should even be called talent is the subject of debate – like the creator of the most popular YouTube channel on Earth.

The Curious Popularity Of PewDiePie

When 26 year old Swedish gamer Felix Kjellberg, created his first YouTube account in 2010 – he decided to name it after a combination of the sound that lasers in video games make (pew) and what you do after they fire (die). Then he forgot his password and was locked out – so he created another account adding one more three letter word to the end: “pie.”

This laughably silly backstory is the perfect introduction to the mind of the controversial creator of the popular YouTube channel “PewDiePie” – the number one most popular channel on YouTube with over 47 million subscribers (more than twice the population of Australia).

His videos are usually a combination of profanity tinged gameplay videos and politically incorrect jokes. His style has been described simultaneously by *Variety* editor Andrew Wallenstein as “aggressive stupidity,” and Yahoo! reporter Rob Walker as “raucous and crude.” Yet his appeal, according to Walker, might come from the fact that he “always comes across as genuine. He addresses his audience as a bunch of peer-like friends.”

Living up to this characterization, in a profile article from 2015 after news came out that Kjellberg makes approximately \$7.4 million, the YouTuber released a personable and honest video about how he sees money, why he’s not embarrassed and a simple explanation for his puzzling rise

to stardom: “many people see me as a friend they can chill with for 15 minutes a day. The loneliness in front of the computer screens brings us together. But I never set out to be a role model; I just want to invite them to come over to my place.”

Analyzing his success, journalist Ross Miller wrote, “love it or hate it, his success — like so many other YouTube personalities — isn’t just in playing games but actually connecting and talking directly to an audience. No agent, press release, or any other intermediary. He just hit record.”

This is the *Authentic Fameseeker* model of influence – where anyone can seek and achieve fame based primarily on his or her willingness to be authentic, flawed and human publicly in a way that respects and engages their audience.

For all his faults, PewDiePie clearly has a keen sense of how to build his own community of fans – whom he refers to as the “Bro Army.” His example is inspiring other creators to seek the same kind of fame for themselves – often on YouTube as well.

YouTube Entrepreneurs + Sponsors

In mid-2016, Google estimated that over 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute and there are nearly 5 billion videos viewed on the platform worldwide every day.

70% of the site’s users come from outside the U.S. and there are 10,113 videos that have generated over 1 billion views each. Those videos have paid out more than \$1 billion to rights holders since 2007.

The site is a well known discovery platform for talented young musicians and some of the biggest music stars of the past decade including Justin Bieber, Katy Perry, Ed Sheeran, 5 Seconds of Summer and dozens of others were all first discovered on the site. Their stories have inspired a new generation of aspiring musicians to use the site to upload their own cover versions of popular songs and create their own channels in the hopes of being discovered themselves.

This hope goes well beyond musicians.

About six years ago around the same time Oprah said goodbye to her long running talk show, a small startup conference called VidCon quietly

brought a few hundred of the most prolific video content creators on the Internet together. Wallenstein, the same *Variety* editor who panned PewDiePie, described that inaugural gathering of aspiring and current YouTube stars as “the next Comic-Con.”

In the six years since, the event has delivered on that prediction. The 7th annual edition this past June in Anaheim, California attracted over 400 creators and more than 30,000 attendees. The sessions at the event focused on topics such as “When Everyone Matters – The New Ecology of Fandom,” “How To Ask For Money From Your Audience,” and “How To Brand Your Channel.”

One of the biggest underlying beliefs of the event was the idea that anyone could be a creator, find their own fans, build a brand and make money on YouTube. This belief is so widespread that thousands of aspiring creators are trying to create channels for themselves and taking advantage of new learning opportunities to make connection in the industry with established video bloggers.

Over the past summer, there were several high profile camp experiences like “Creator Camp” in Wisconsin and 2bcamp for Spanish language speakers in Madrid which were hosted by popular video bloggers and designed to teach kids how to launch their own YouTube channels, build an audience and become a celebrity online themselves.

This quest for celebrity has extended to some of the hottest new social media platforms beyond YouTube as well.

All of these influencers flocking to YouTube has not gone unnoticed by brands either. For the past two years, P&G brand Tide detergent has partnered with popular YouTube stars to create a series of videos where all sorts of clothes are soiled in interesting ways. Then the stars use Tide and the clothing comes out perfectly clean.

Other brands like Coca-Cola, Samsung, L’Oreal and many others are all creating similar efforts to sponsor rising YouTubers. There are even platforms like Grapevine.com that help influencers get brand sponsorships by creating a marketplace where brands can “connect with the world’s best creators.”

Beyond YouTube

When former movie producer Amanda Micallef started her online network called ArsenicTV – the vision she landed on with co-Founder and former Creative Artists Agency agent Billy Hawkins was entirely based on Snapchat. The “network” would feature a rotating series of models who would control ArsenicTV’s account entirely during their shoots – editing and posting their own photos directly onto the account.

Micallef’s reasoning was simple: “There’s a nuance when you look at a picture of a girl when she’s feeling empowered and beautiful — her hair is the way she wants, she’s wearing what she wants, she’s standing the way she wants — that’s very different than when a guy is like ‘stand there, turn your cheek that way,’ and projecting what he thinks is sexy.”

The idea was risqué, unusual and highly successful. The site receives more than a thousand submissions each day from aspiring models and all of them agree to post their photos entirely for free simply for the chance to garner tens of thousands of new followers to their own social media platforms from the exposure. Meanwhile the channel has more than half a million people clicking every photo and video and has already turned down a buyout offer from Playboy Enterprises.

ArsenicTV is just one emerging example of a platform that is attracting a new kind of influencer and creator – but there are plenty of others for everything from infomercials to video gaming:

- Twitch is one of the biggest online networks where gamers stream themselves playing video games for an eager and often adoring audience. The site was acquired by Google.YouTube in 2014 and averages 60,000 to 70,000 concurrent viewers on each live cast.
- Smosh Games is another platform for gamers and has the fourth most subscribed-to YouTube channel in the world with close to 7 million subscribers and more than 2 billion video views.
- Mik Mak is a mobile video shopping network available on Instagram where comedians and other entertainers record 30

second infomercials for brands to sell all kinds of products from eye cream to hot sauce.

- Wattpad is a platform that encourages fans of celebrities and series to create fan fiction and the site has more than 250 million original story uploads from over 2 million creators.
- Operator.com is a community of advisors who help you discover and buy products and offers access to experts in categories from fashion to electronics and personal shopping advice.
- Facebook has invested heavily in its Live platform designed to let anyone (including influencers) share real time video.

Each of these sites offers an opportunity for the *Authentic Fameseekers*, to build a personal brand and use it to earn their own sponsorships or advertising revenues. Sometimes these new breed of fameseekers are overt in their desire to court brands. In other cases, the brands pursue them – simply following the eyeballs and attention they have earned from consumers.

Why It Matters:

It is a frequently heard criticism of Kim Kardashian (and by extension her entire family) that they are famous simply for being famous. After all, what *talent* do any of them really possess? But dismissing Kim Kardashian or her sisters merely as opportunists getting rich based on their good looks and willingness to pose for photos in various stages of undress misses an important point.

The underappreciated “talent” of the Kardashians is their ability to share the most intimate details of their own lives in a way that is mesmerizingly and authentically human. Even when you want to look away, you can’t help but sneak a glance in their direction. They are *Authentic Fameseekers*, and their example has shaped the ideal of fame for a new generation of creators ready to post videos on Instagram, live stream game play and create the next great YouTube channel with extreme authenticity themselves.

The ultimate skill, it seems, is a willingness to offer an extreme version of personality and authenticity directly to fans ... and then having the right business model and strategy to leverage this trend.

How To Use This Trend:

- ✓ **Embrace emerging influencers** - When companies think about influencers, it is easy to look for and be too directly guided by numbers. There are more influencers creating platforms every day, but their numbers are not always “viral.” Instead of chasing views or impressions, consider the emerging influencer who has built a small but loyal audience and engage them before they get big.
- ✓ **Think outside the platform** - One fascinating thing you will notice about the people creating their own audiences is that they tend to think in multi-channels. An Instagram star is also on Snapchat. YouTube stars will also use Twitter. The point is – there is a value in thinking about multiple platforms as a unified opportunity rather than setting up ideas to execute within each platform individually.
- ✓ **Do an authenticity audit** – What makes the Authentic Fameseeker so influential is the combination of creating something interesting and the underlying devotion to authenticity. This authenticity is something that companies need to uncover and use as well. It may seem difficult, but when I first wrote about this topic back in 2008 with my first book *Personality Not Included*, a critical first step came down to using the right process to create an “audit” of personality and authenticity. This approach lets you pinpoint exactly where you might be losing trust and how to build it back by changing how you communicate and also which influencers you choose to work with.