

One of the hottest buzzwords in marketing nowadays is *influencers*. Maybe you've heard that term, maybe not. But the basic idea and reality of influence marketing is not new at all! How about a couple of terms you've heard before: *celebrity endorsers* and *brand ambassadors*? Hey, how about taking a bit of a history tour now, looking at what's considered by some as a groundbreaking event for celebrity endorsements?

As England was prospering greatly due to the rise of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s, Josiah Wedgwood's family heritage was as rather ordinary potters. But Josiah elevated his game dramatically by apprenticing to the best and studying chemistry, and he ultimately sold his elegant work to Queen Charlotte, yes, the consort of King George of American Revolution fame! The story is that Josiah Wedgwood convinced Queen Charlotte to allow her pottery-style to be marketed affordably as "Queen's Ware"—a pioneering celebrity endorsement! And the rest is history...Wedgwood is considered an elite brand for English tableware to this very day, over 250 years later! Go look at the Wedgwood website!

But not so very long ago—five or six decades back, perhaps—some top Hollywood actors and professional sports athletes who were growing in broad public awareness had the reputation of being pretty reserved about lending their names to selling products or services for companies. Well, now, hasn't that changed?!

Some famous folks got moving, like when pro basketball legend Michael Jordan famously engaged with Nike for sneakers—a product directly associated as a tool of his trade. And boxer George Foreman was associated with the "Foreman Grill" named after him—'course grilling burgers and knocking people out in the boxing ring seem pretty unrelated! Still, George sold a whole lot of grills! And how about vocal artist and songwriter Taylor Swift hawking Coca-Cola! Also in the soft drink wars, how about Beyoncé and Pepsi?

So, nowadays, actors and pro athletes and retired politicians and other famous folks hawk everything from cars to perfume to clothing to whatever they can help sell! Whether they are called celebrity endorsers or brand ambassadors, literally tens of millions of dollars in compensation—even hundreds of millions of dollars—are at stake in endorsement deals...at least for achievers at the top end spectrum of fame. So, are those folks great influencers? Well, the companies paying them massive dollars believe it!

That brings us to the American Marketing Association's definition of "influencer marketing"—here we go: "Influencer marketing focuses on leveraging individuals who have influence over potential buyers and orienting activities around these individuals to drive a brand message to the larger market." So, did Queen Charlotte fit into that definition? Well, yeah! How about Michael Jordan, George Foreman, Taylor Swift, and Beyoncé? Yeah, all those work as very high influencers, too!

But now there's a relatively new genre in town in this influencer marketing category—and that genre is social media influencers! And boy, has that blown the influencer marketplace wide open! Some of these so-called "mega influencers" of over one million followers were already famous, like soccer pro Cristiano Ronaldo, who has, *get this*, over 400 million followers on Instagram at the time of this podcast! Even if a some of those are fake, that's wild! For *one* sponsored post, Ronaldo reportedly has earned \$1.6 million!

Now this influencer marketing has sometimes been segmented categorically further into three other slices according to size: macro influencers (100,000 to 1 million followers), micro influencers (10,000 to 100,000 followers), and nano influencers (1,000 to 10,000 followers). See, from a marketing perspective, it matters to the sponsoring organization that you can influence *particular people*—and an influencer of a smaller group may be exactly who the sponsoring organization is looking for. For example, if you were the CEO in charge of selling Rolls Royce automobiles which cost, say, over \$300,000 each, would you spend \$1.6 million on one post with Ronaldo because he has hundreds of millions of followers when very few, if any, will ever buy a new Rolls Royce...or would you sponsor a post with a nano influencer with just 1,000 followers who all own Rolls Royces? Surely the answer is the latter, because you would get incredibly specific targeting to your desired market! Accordingly, influencer-expertise niches where such targeting works well, like fitness and travel, have developed. Hey, we're no longer in the world of simply hoping that our targeted customer will read page 34 of the newspaper or watch a generic TV show at 9:30 pm!

That leads us to the FRED principle of influencer marketing. The FRED principle was coined by the renowned advertising agency of Young & Rubicam decades ago and stands for *familiarity, relevance, esteem, and differentiation*. Again, that's FRED. Familiarity. Relevance. Esteem. Differentiation. And let's test that for a minute with Nike and hoops superstar Michael Jordan. Jordan, a *familiar* name and face to countless millions. As to *relevance*, people are buying shoes anyway—then why not “be like Mike?” Then, *esteem plus differentiation*? Are you kidding, when it comes to basketball, Jordan is considered by many to be the GOAT—the Greatest Of All Time! Yep, that's pretty much a validation of FRED, right there!

But we now arrive at the *original, FRED-customized* influencer marketing, yeah, the astute marketing that was pretty much first on the scene for convincing people in many nations to make a great choice about the service offering placed before them! Yes, indeed, that's the witness for Christ and Him crucified, proclaiming the unique, powerful service offering of peaceful, eternal fellowship with God Himself!

Now, from your reading of Ephesians 4:11, you might want to think that evangelism, the proclaiming of the Good News, is supposed to be done just by “professional evangelists,” you know, like Billy Graham and others like him through the ages. Or you might want to think evangelism should mostly be done via TV programs or athletes and actors who are Christians. And, boy, do we need to see that from evangelists and famous people—macro influencers! But you would be wrong to think that evangelists and movie stars are where the main action is—at least, the main action for evangelism according to the Bible!

You see, *the vast bulk of influencer marketing for the Kingdom of God comes from ordinary believers who take Jesus's Great Commission seriously!* Just Google search the words “evangelists” and “ESV” and you will likely find that some lists of Bible verses returned for your review are mostly about ordinary believers! And those believers “do evangelism” in their unique daily roles, like parents, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers—as *key influencers with their own unique niches!* And yeah, we're all supposed to be poised to do so along the lines of the FRED principle. So, here we go with *you and your FRED-customized influence!*

Familiarity. That's right, in all those roles, our proximity to others gives us the entrée to impact others. We see our kids, our relatives, our neighbors, our work colleagues on a routine basis...yes, they have real commonality, real familiarity with us. And because we are friendly, winsome Christians, the familiarity has become *warmth*, right? Yeah, we are not distant evangelists—we are nearby, winsome evangelists!

Relevance. That's right, we share the same issues, the same problems, and the same victories with others nearby who we share life with...you know, family issues, neighborhood issues, school issues, weather issues, work issues. How we solve problems and work through life is very relevant to these people who we share life with. Yeah, we are *not* irrelevant evangelists—we *are* engaged, helpful evangelists!

Esteem. That's right, we are called to be great stewards in all our roles...as parents, relatives, neighbors, and co-workers. God expects us to be the most competent we can be, earning the esteem of those nearby. Yeah, we are not to be incompetence-hampered evangelists—we *are* competence-enhanced evangelists!

Differentiation. That's right, we are clearly differentiated from others because Christ has permeated every part of our lives! We *do love* on people as Christians...we *don't condemn* them like the world does! We are called to stand out as truly differentiated, as Galatians 5:22-23 in the ESV says, by the fruit of the Holy Spirit, you know, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

Here's the thing. The church really, truly grows due to FRED-customized influencer marketing by serious Christians in close proximity to unbelievers. Period. So, pick what brand *you* are ambassador for. Michael Jordan had Nike. George Foreman had grills. Actors have perfume, watches, fashion, insurance, whatever.

So, what do we little ol' Christians have? The good news of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God! Not bad news of political battles, culture wars, and condemnation of others. Hey, *you know* that God has uniquely positioned *you with your own FRED!* 2 Corinthians 5:20 reminds us: “...we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” OK, *you brand ambassadors for Christ: as Jesus urged us, go forth!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Does your workplace organization use more “distant” influencers like Ronaldo and more traditional celebrity endorsers on TV in its formal marketing approaches? Or does it rely more on word-of-mouth testimonials from its customers? Describe your workplace’s approaches and discuss the level of success of those approaches. Be specific.

2. List your top five influencers (like authors, public figures, etc.) you have never met and likely will not meet (and do not appear in the Bible). Then list your top five influencers you personally knew or know, like influencers from your family, your neighborhood, or your workplace. Now, start from there and list those ten from the top, in order, starting with the person the very most impactful on you and proceeding through the entire list of ten. Then reflect on and *articulate why each of these ten impactful people appear on the list exactly where they do.*

3. Personally, are you faithfully working—over time—to use your God-directed FRED status to effectively impact as an ambassador for Christ? Relate the results that you use to measure your impact.