



The Evolving Role of the Marketer in the Customer Journey

It's no secret that the farmer customer journey is evolving. We've heard this from organizations like Successful Farming, the National Farm Broadcasters Association and the Ag Media Council, who regularly survey farmer behavior. And we hear it firsthand when we talk with farmers. Farmers are increasingly looking to non-brand sources for information before making a purchase decision.

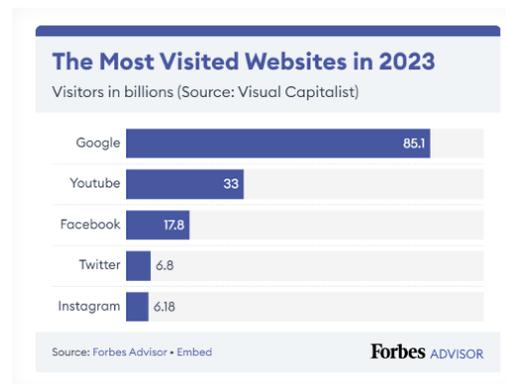
What does this mean for marketers? Keep reading as we walk through how ag brands must respond to reach audiences. We offer insight into what's driving the changing behavior, highlight a brand that is embracing this trend and offer tips for how to apply to your strategy.

THE RISE OF THE AG INFLUENCER IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

While farmers are open to initially learning about a new product or service from a manufacturer or provider and ultimately purchasing from them, farmers are increasingly ignoring or even actively avoiding their content during the consideration and evaluation stages. Instead, these farmers seek out information from trusted sources for advice. A growing subset of these trusted sources is the ag influencer.

The latest study from the Ag Media Council found that one in three farmers view content created by influencers. Ag influencer content, among which videos reign supreme, helps shape farmers' opinions and inform purchase decisions. In fact, YouTube video content from ag influencers has become a popular resource for farmers looking to learn more about a new product or service.

This chart from Visual Capitalist shows us that YouTube is the second most visited site on the internet, understandably. But *how* it is used and *by whom* may be more surprising. YouTube is considered the number one search engine for young adults, which includes next-gen farmers.



Grant Hilbert, who farms corn and soybeans near Ames, Iowa, told us that when he's considering a product YouTube is one of the first places he looks for information.

“I don't care if they're big or small YouTuber, I just want to see it. I want their opinions. It's like a debate going on, because other farmers will be like 'I love this.' And another will say they have an issue and so there I feel like I can see a pretty open form of opinions.”



The rise of ag influencers across platforms presents an easy-to-find, go-to source for more independent reviews and information. Farmers can find influencers with similar operations and challenges and even shared philosophies around evaluating and adopting new technology. Over time, farmers develop a strong sense of trust with these influencers and lean on them to help evaluate and ultimately inform decisions around new products and services.

Brand marketers need to lean into this trend and accept that despite our best efforts, our communications and content will always be viewed through a cautious lens. We can show performance data, highlight product features and benefits, and even provide testimonials, but farmers will approach any brand communication with skepticism. Collaborating with the right influencers can help build trust and bridge the gap, connecting brands with farmers in the middle of the funnel in an authentic way, as well as continue to move them towards a purchase decision.

Pro Tip:

Build Relationships with Niche Influencers Early

Give yourself enough time to vet micro-influencers and niche creators well before launching a campaign. Follow them, engage with their content and understand their style and audience preferences. Develop a connection and mutual understanding. This groundwork can ensure more authentic partnerships for the brand when it's time to collaborate.

Why it Works: Building trust with influencers mirrors the trust-building process between them and their followers. It ensures content and goal alignment and reduces friction in campaign execution.

A CASE STUDY: MOVING PAST THE MIDDLE STAGE

These are the issues that challenged the TYM marketing department for years. They decided to embrace and leverage the influencer trend and began connecting with respected social media influencers in the rural lifestyle category. TYM honed in on influencers who were well-established with a trusted community of followers. They also ensured these potential partners represented a range of geographies and terrain.

TYM then reached out to select influencers to offer a TYM tractor to use on their land for a year or two at no cost; just the promise of honest feedback about their experiences and the equipment. No talking points or approvals of videos ahead of release. Essentially, they told the partners to keep doing what they had been doing - use a new product, TYM tractors, and share honest opinions and thoughts.

See an example of a video created by a TYM user:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMSVGZO5mmo>



TYM had enough confidence in their product to be bold, and it paid off. A search of “TYM Tractors” on YouTube pulls a multitude of videos from influencers discussing their performance, dependability and value, as well as the occasional shortcoming, which adds to the credibility. The feedback on TYM has been overwhelmingly positive and the influencer content fills a much-needed information gap for potential customers, moving them past the middle stages of the customer journey. The audience who heard directly from trusted influencers about TYM tractors developed a positive perception of the product line and were ready to move to the decision-making stage.

Full Disclosure: We were not involved with this TYM campaign in any way. We just wanted to share it as a great example of a brand harnessing the power of these influencers without impacting their credibility.

Pro Tip:

Choose Influencers Who Mirror Your Customers

Collaborate with influencers whose operations, challenges and values align with your target audience. For example, if you’re targeting the rural lifestyle audience, work with influencers who maintain smaller herds of livestock or manage similar properties. Or, if you are looking to connect with farmers, look for influencers who live in a similar geography as your target audience. You can find more tips on working with influencers with our [tip sheet](#).

Why it Works: Audiences trust influencers they can relate to, making it easier to build trust and credibility for your product.

MARKETING IN A WORLD OF INFLUENCERS

The growing and diverse universe of influencers is an opportunity for brand marketers to:

- **Meet customers where they are:** Instead of trying to develop and distribute your own content to move customers through the buyer journey, meet them where they are with the content they are looking for
- **Show your product being used:** Find ways to showcase how your product is being used in the real world and discussed in an authentic way that resonates with your audience
- **Be more visible:** Ensure the content is easily discoverable with paid search, paid social or display campaigns

An example from our own body of work is when we partnered with the Indiana Soybean Alliance (ISA) and the Indiana Corn Marketing Council (ICMC) to increase awareness of farmers as leaders in sustainability among sustainability-minded consumers.

These audiences weren't already seeking out information about agriculture, so we partnered with community, food and lifestyle micro-influencers to create sustainability content. It included farm visits that took audiences behind the scenes of agriculture to see sustainable production right in their own backyards.

Paid ads helped boost content visibility and reach a larger share of the target audience. It worked. Not only did the campaign more than double client awareness goals, it created 1.79 million organic impressions from influencer posts, drove more than 10,000 site visits and earned nearly 9.5% average engagement rate. You can read the full story in [our blog post about working with influencers](#).

Pro Tip:

Use Paid Media to Amplify Influencer Content

After influencers create content, amplify it through paid search and social media campaigns. For example, run YouTube ads featuring influencer videos or boost high-performing posts on platforms like Facebook or Instagram.

Why it Works: Paid amplification drives more traffic to the content while maintaining its authentic, user-generated feel, ensuring a larger audience sees it.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MARKETERS?

Our value as marketers is less about making middle-funnel content ourselves. It's just as much about setting clear objectives and strategies and then seeking out the right influencers and channels to achieve them. As representatives of the brand, we can manage the initial relationship and communication with these influencers. The goal is to ensure they have the tools to speak factually and confidently about our products. Then once the user-generated content is live, find ways to bring it to even more consumers without risking its authenticity.

Once we know potential customers have seen this content, we can attempt to close the sale by delivering end-of-customer-journey content including:

- Lead generation campaigns
- Find-a-dealer tools
- Exclusive discounts or promotions
- ROI calculators
- E-commerce sites

Influencers are here to stay, so the customer journey has permanently evolved. Marketers who find a way to adapt to this new reality and work with it will have much more success than those who continue to resist change and compete for eyeballs with their own content.

If you need help establishing an influencer program, we would love to help. We are offering a free, 30-minute consultation to help you meet your business goals. Our promise is focus the time on talking about your goals and challenges. [Drop us a note](#) to get started or [schedule time with our team](#). We can't wait to hear from you.