**FAST OMPANY ADVERTISEMENT Al Decoded** HOW WILL AI CHANGE SOCIETY? | The most important news in Al delivered weekly SIGN UP FOR FREE 02-25-24 | 12:00 PM | LEADERSHIP NOW Why even CEOs should be influencers What's the difference between a thought leader and an influencer? And why does it matter? [Photo: MTStock Studio/Getty Images] BY KIM RITTBERG 4 MINUTE READ If you're reading this article, you're likely interested in gaining more visibility. Whether you're looking to bring in more leads, be seen as a thought leader in your field or, well, "influence" people, I am sorry to break it to you, but you may be an influencer. Or perhaps a wannabe influencer. When I started posting videos regularly to grow my on-camera videocoaching business, a friend said to me, "Are you trying to be an influencer?" I could feel my blood boil; I was greatly offended. But I lowered my temperature and reconsidered. I am trying to influence people. I want to influence them to communicate better, to make creative content, to help them be more visible, and land more sales and leads through content. THE STIGMA OF "INFLUENCERS" Why is there such a stigma from the word "influencer" when we all admit we want to have "influence"? Why is this noun so prickly? The word *influencer* was coined in the 1600s, but it's really the 21st century where the term has become associated with subtle negative connotations. I asked Neil Patel, founder of NP Digital, an award-winning marketing agency, who has amassed millions of followers if he's an influencer. He replied with "kinda." Why is that? "Because I don't really try to monetize any of my social profiles. So even though I have all these followers and yes, it helped my business make millions of dollars and I run a B2B company focused on large global 5000 companies, in most cases, someone's not gonna give you a multimillion-dollar contract because they saw a YouTube video or Instagram reel or a TikTok video." Patel agrees with my assessment that he's a thought leader. And to become a thought leader, he recommends you "speak at events and post content on social daily" for at least three years. IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A THOUGHT LEADER AND AN **INFLUENCER?** So, what's the difference between a thought leader and an influencer? And why does it matter? Jo Piazza, author and podcast host of *Under the Influence* who has become an influencer to promote her books including *The Sicilian Inheritance*, says, "I think of thought leaders as someone who wants to influence what you think and your ideas. Influencers want to influence how you live." Tara Clark is the creator of Modern Mom Probs, an Instagram account, podcast, and community with more than 800,000 social media followers. She considers herself a content creator and not an influencer because, "I think the difference between an influencer and a content creator is that influencers nowadays have a very set sort of lifestyle that they're promoting. They tend to have a certain look about them. It is different from a content creator who may be focused on comedy." However, Pat Flynn, founder of Smart Passive Income, has no issue with being called an influencer. Flynn says, "I think by definition I am an influencer because I am able to help people through the things that I do in the example that I set." He adds that he doesn't take that responsibility lightly. Flynn feels knowing people are watching, it's important to set a good example in your behavior. And if you're feeling imposter syndrome, Pat advises, "I tell people don't worry about being the number one expert, you can be an example; you have stories to share. You have the ability to empathize with those who you are serving because they're going through the same things you just did." **ADVERTISEMENT** Co.Design. **The Latest Innovations** in Design Brought to You **Every Weekday** Subscribe for Free SIGN UP HIDING FROM THE CAMERA IS HIDING FROM CLIENTS My concern as a marketer is that real business people who could gain a lot from social media are avoiding being zapped in a game of laser tag by the label "influencer" so much so that they're hiding entirely. Hiding from the camera is hiding from clients. We've all heard of celebrities being accused of "trying too hard" and getting mocked for it. And perhaps that's what's happening to business people as well, they feel sheepish about being too forward. I also worry that the stigma of "influencer" has seeped into peoples' consciousness in a way that is holding them back. But these worries are limiting your visibility and brand exposure—and in turn, your business. Remember why you are on social media to begin with. It's not called private media. If you're posting, you want visibility; you want to be a part of the conversation. A lot of people post press releases or re-share articles. Are they too scared to post anything that will make an impact? The one thing all these successful entrepreneurs have in common: They're showing up consistently, intentionally, and sharing their message. Call it what you will: thought leader, content creator or the mixed bag of influencer. But don't let a label block you from putting yourself out there. Because showing up on camera can be the most efficient and effective way to build credibility and leads online. Now accepting applications for Innovation by Design. *Apply by February 23 for your chance to be featured!* WORK SMARTER Work Smarter, not harder. Get our editors' tips and stories delivered weekly. **Privacy Policy** ABOUT THE AUTHOR Kim Rittberg is an award-winning Digital Marketer who helps professionals become thought leaders utilizing video and podcasts. She offers on-camera media training, public speaking and video and audio services and spent 15 years as a media executive before launching her own **EXPLORE TOPICS LEADERSHIP NOW** THOUGHT LEADERSHIP INFLUENCERS NEWS TECH **TECH NEWS** This healthcare partnership could be a How India's internet shutdowns are disrupting its economy—and creating fertile model for finding new patients—and ground for misinformation courting employers **TECH NEWS** America's return to the moon seeks to shed Screen Actors Guild Awards 2024: How to light on the universe's dark ages and solar stream live and why you can't watch it for wind free this year **TECH NEWS** I got all my news from TikTok for a week. 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