Tails.Com

**Sammy Albon:** [00:00:00] Hello and welcome to the what they said podcast where each week we deep dive into all things influence marketing. We're joined by brands, influencers, other agencies, talent managers and real cross section of the creator economy. My name is Sammy. I am your host. I am influencer strategy lead at Pretty Green.

**Sammy Albon:** And I'm going to be joined by some industry titans that have far more to say about the industry than I do far more eloquently who are not reading off of a script. So in this podcast, we really want to create a safe space for everyone to have unfiltered conversations around the creative economy.

**Sammy Albon:** This week, I'm absolutely thrilled to be joined by two of my favourite people from the Creator Economy here in the UK. We've got Kezia Price and Sophie van der Beeken from Tails. com. Welcome, guys.

**Kezia Price:** Thanks. Thanks for having us.

**Sammy Albon:** What I do at the start of each one of these is read out a bio that I've written for you.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Okay.

**Sammy Albon:** You haven't seen this.

No. So

**Sammy Albon:** it is full of absolutely awful things.

Okay, fantastic.

**Sammy Albon:** Just kidding. So I'll read it out and if there's anything I've forgotten, just [00:01:00] jump in, tell me I'm wrong, and correct me. But we've had the absolute pleasure of working together a couple of times in the past and most recently towards the end of last year with some wonderful dog content.

**Sammy Albon:** Because obviously you're from towels. com. So towels. com is a real leading brand that offers tailor made kibble for all of us dog lovers out there. Not for us. for the dogs. So here's the bio. And again, tell me if I've got anything wrong. So Sophie, you are the affiliates partnership and influencer manager at towels.

**Sammy Albon:** com and you've been in the role for a few years now.

**Kezia Price:** Yeah. As a manager for about a year or a bit more. But I've been at deals. com for more than five years. So yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** A long, long time. Yeah. So Kezia, you are the PR and communications manager at towels. com and you've been in the role a few years now.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yes, I've been at tails. com for four years now which has blown by but yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** And the, the way both of you have worked with influencers over the past few years has really shifted. So we're going to get into that. But I also wanted to say a massive congrats and not to you as well, because tails. [00:02:00] com has recognized that the be creator awards for being one of the top brands for influencers to work.

**Sammy Albon:** with last year. So really testament to how you do trust influencers work with them. That must have been quite a, quite a great one for you guys.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah, we were so happy. Yeah. And there's some great

**Sammy Albon:** brands in the running for that.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah, like some really kind of established brands in the industry. I think we were really We're honoured that creators had nominated us for that award after really not, like, we, we've not been doing influence marketing for years upon years.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** So to be recognised after just a few was so amazing. Yeah.

**Kezia Price:** Yeah. We were just beaming when we sat at the awards. We're just both beaming of, yeah, with pride. So

**Sammy Albon:** definitely. Can you remember who else was in that category?

**Kezia Price:** It was like Disney. Fanzora, I think. Yeah. Gymshark, I think as well. So, some top, some

**Sammy Albon:** real names that have been working with influencers for like 10 years.

**Sammy Albon:** Yes. Pandora, Disney.

Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** And then to be amongst that is really great as well. Yeah. So, Towels. com offers tailor made kibble and [00:03:00] food blends that are perfect for any dog, whatever their needs. And Sophie van de Beeken is affiliate with Partnerships and influencer manager at towels. com and Kezia Price is PR and comms manager.

**Sammy Albon:** And you've worked extensively, extensively with creators in the UK so much so that you were recognized by being one of the top brands influencers want to work with in the UK with a nod at last year's big creator awards. Did I forget anything there?

No, I think so. Any more strings to your

**Sammy Albon:** bow that you would like to add to that?

No, not really. Yes, good.

**Sammy Albon:** Above all, you get to work with dogs as well. Yes. Could your job be any more perfect?

**Kezia Price:** Really? Yeah, and we've got each other as well.

**Sammy Albon:** You're so pleasant to your colleagues. I

can't stand mine.

**Sammy Albon:** Before we get into questions, we were discussing a moment ago off camera, off, off Mike about who we see as our sort of dog energy.

**Sammy Albon:** And I said, I see myself as golden retriever. And you both went, absolutely. Yes. Golden Retriever, [00:04:00] really vanilla, quite a boring breed, you know, like everyone likes them, no one loves them. Yes,

trustworthy, playful, fun. It's

**Sammy Albon:** like my star sign.

Yeah,

**Sophie Van der Veken:** there you go.

**Sammy Albon:** Kezia, your dog, what is it?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I said Red Setter. You said Red Setter, but before that, you said Border Collie.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. Both pleasant dogs. I would say Border Collies round people up, like sheep.

**Sammy Albon:** Organized.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Organized. Yes. That thing's

done. Motivated. Yes. Energetic. Apparently they're the most intelligent

**Sammy Albon:** dog breed.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Well,

thanks.

**Sammy Albon:** I'll take it. I will

**Sophie Van der Veken:** take that. Yeah, I'll go with that then.

**Sammy Albon:** You're saying I'm border collie?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. Sophie, what,

**Sammy Albon:** Diesel, your dog Diesel, bless him, 13 years old, he is young.

**Kezia Price:** He's young

at

**Kezia Price:** heart. Yeah, young at heart.

**Sammy Albon:** Well, he's a mix, isn't he?

**Kezia Price:** He's a mix between a toy poodle and an Australian cattle dog.

**Sammy Albon:** I do not see poodle in him at all when I look at him. No. At all.

**Kezia Price:** He's like his own [00:05:00] type of breed. A little sassy.

**Kezia Price:** A

**Sophie Van der Veken:** little sassy.

**Sammy Albon:** Unique.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I kind of like him to be fair. Really? Just a little sassy. Yeah, he's a good mix. You need a, I don't know what kind of dog breed, but something kind of direct, because you are. But it's

**Sammy Albon:** great. This

**Sophie Van der Veken:** is why we

**Sammy Albon:** got on.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** A direct.

**Sammy Albon:** And it needs to be something slightly more European. Yeah.

Yeah.

Paul Decaul

**Sammy Albon:** is very Scottish, very English.

Yeah. Oh, I don't know. We can

**Sammy Albon:** come back to this at the end. Yes. I want, I want you as we go through this not to prioritize this chat, but to be thinking in your mind, what dog breed would I be?

I will.

**Sammy Albon:** Anyway, onto the proper chat. Obviously we've worked together over the years.

**Sammy Albon:** And I think the way that tails. com has shown up in the creative economy, the way you've worked with influencers is really quite evolved. And I think Sophie, you can speak to your time as sort of a performance focused driving user acquisition, customer acquisition, and Kezia more from a PR and earn perspective as well.

**Sammy Albon:** So we've kind of got some questions I'd love to whittle through that actually all of the office fed into because obviously we've got good knowledge of towers. com. But Sophie, Kezia, on paper, your roles do seem [00:06:00] completely different. I think it's fair to say completely different remits from different realms.

**Sammy Albon:** One with a focus on driving those lower final metrics, conversion beyond consideration and really driving those advocates and Kezia brand building strategic PR campaigns and those PRable moments. I think a lot of people forget that influencer was born from PR in the first instance. I know we often see it as like a media buyer, but ultimately it came.

**Sammy Albon:** In my opinion, it came from PR, years and years ago, but if we track things back to their roots, do you find that your realms have been increasingly overlapping over the past few years?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. And I think, you know, having a joined up strategy, it makes, it just makes for better kind of full of funnel marketing, which is now what we've.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** moved into. And I think if you put in a combined effort and look across the business at how you can kind of maximize impact for influencers, it makes more

**Kezia Price:** sense.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** It does.

**Kezia Price:** So yeah, I think first when we started working on influencers at [00:07:00] tails. com, it was mostly Kezia doing it. Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** Yeah. So she

**Kezia Price:** started off like the OG, I would say working with influencers in the more organic way.

**Kezia Price:** But then when we were expanding partnerships within my team, we saw that there was definitely a gap in what we could do. Potential

**Sammy Albon:** for that focus?

**Kezia Price:** Yeah. To grow the channel and really make it a robust channel in our channel mix. Mm-Hmm. So I work like you say a lot with like, driving new customer acquisition with different, different digital channels@deals.com.

**Kezia Price:** I think when we joined forces, Kezia had done all of that, like brand building and building those relationships already. So we could utilize that to also then drive new customer acquisition. And like Kezia was saying yeah, just have full funnel marketing campaigns instead of just focusing on one part.

**Kezia Price:** Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** I feel like what's so interesting seeing how it's changed for towels. com is how you really embrace that integrated approach of like having [00:08:00] all the channel mix come together that holistic full funnel approach. So many brands are not only not investing in influencer, but then that conversation, that strategy piece is so far down the line.

**Sammy Albon:** So did it take a lot of work from you both? Cause obviously how you measure impact Sophie will probably differ hugely to how you would measure impact in PR and comms. So How do you, I guess, do you establish like a KPI framework that has it all on paper, like we've got the whole funnel tracked here, or are you having to do sort of a bodge job of putting it together so you can then sell it in internally and say, look, this works, we need to really knuckle down on it?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I think, Like what Sophie was saying, you know, I, we'd built up those kind of influencer relationships through like gifting organically. And then we utilize those relationships. And so actually we were saying to the business, well, we've already had really great success with minimal kind of minimal money being put into this channel, a lot of hard work.[00:09:00]

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Relationship building, but I love that. And here's how we can kind of elevate that and maximize the impact. There are obviously different ways of measuring what Sophie does and what I do. But I think as long as you recognize that then you can fly, you know, it's not like we're both trying to kind of mash everything together.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** We have different metrics. Like for me, obviously it's like the engagement and the positive comment sentiment and the sentiment. Yes, exactly. And then for Sophie, obviously she's looking at signups and she's looking at all those kinds of things. But I think as long as you recognize that they, you know, we need different things, but you can do it and make the most out of your budget.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. That's what, you know, then it's fine.

**Sammy Albon:** I was going to ask then. So. Maybe Sophie, from your side then, from a, we've, we've heard how that earned piece was really vital in establishing towers amongst creators and driving that love. From your side, Sophie, how important has it been, not just to focus on user acquisition, but I guess building [00:10:00] those relationships with influencers longer term as well.

**Sammy Albon:** So it's not just flash in the pan. It's more how we find those long term ambassadors.

**Kezia Price:** Yeah. I think that is having long term ambassadors for us is definitely key because we want those real authentic relationships with influencers because feeding your dog a certain type of dog food, you don't easily switch into a new dog food.

**Kezia Price:** So it is. Yeah. So for us having creators that we will work with long term will. Build authenticity and trust with their audiences, which is what we want

**Sammy Albon:** as well. It's so valuable. Yes. Variety of touch points throughout the year.

**Kezia Price:** Yeah, definitely. And I also think having brand ambassadors, it gives us a chance to work with them on different platforms as well.

**Kezia Price:** Which will then target different types of audiences and we'll have different goals linked to KPIs, which is very important for us because. How Kezia started out building all those [00:11:00] relationships and gifting, what I did on my end is how we were working separately a little bit by then is there's at tails.

**Kezia Price:** com, you have a testing budget, which when you put a case forward, you can that is Yeah. Has solid ground to maybe build a new channel. You can test with that. So what I started doing on my end is trying to get some of that budget to test bigger things with some, yeah, some money behind it. And then finally after I think a year or two years we got a set budget.

**Kezia Price:** So

**Sammy Albon:** it was multiple years to get to that point where you've done the testing.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. Yeah. And I think we were lucky in that we, we work for a company that really embraces testing new things and not afraid. I think it's that kind of startup mentality of like Mm-Hmm. If things don't go quite right, it's okay 'cause we can refine it.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. Or if it doesn't work, that's also okay. Mm-Hmm. Because there's more kind of flex. Yeah. So when we saw an opportunity and we want, wanted to kind of run with it, you know. They [00:12:00] ran with it with us, which is great. They

**Sammy Albon:** trusted you. Yeah.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. As we

**Sammy Albon:** say in a campaign rap, there's never failures. There's only learning.

Yes. Test and learn. Yes.

**Sammy Albon:** What I've always really loved, because I think I wish more brands did this, and it's something I've always advocated for, is that test and learn. Yeah. It's so important. You'll see brands like, say, sports brands, they've seen Gymshark. Saturate your niche with kind of a scattergun approach like such volume and that's really worked for them.

**Sammy Albon:** It's delivered great returns, but that wouldn't work for tails. com like you're trying to land like you said, Sophie, I really want to touch on the insights in a moment, but like changing dog food is a huge commitment. We saw that actually owners during the cost of living crisis are far more likely to sacrifice their own food versus that of their pets because we know how difficult bloody dogs can be with their diets.

**Sammy Albon:** Yeah.

Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** So. How important would you say it sounds though testing has been absolutely vital in establishing and rationalizing a consistent set budget? Like you said, what would be your advice to any other like brands [00:13:00] that are listening? How do they start testing? What is a good test budget? Is there any sort of advice you would give?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** So if you have So when I, when I, when I joined tails. com, there were, there was no influencer activity my back at all.

**Sammy Albon:** So you set it up. And

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I remember in my interview, I was like, guys, I can help you with this because my whole background was in bloggers and then influencers from like the beauty side of things.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** And I, It just as if you have no budget, we can do strategic gifting so we can find kind of we tapped into communities of people. So we really went after the interiors crowd because they had beautiful homes, beautiful dogs, and they had beautiful imagery. Tick, tick, tick.

**Sammy Albon:** They could produce the content that looked premium.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah, exactly. They already had the lovely set up and people would always ask them about their dogs. It was just a really engaged community. So we tapped into into them [00:14:00] kind of to start off with kind of veering away from maybe the obvious like dog fluencer. which was very oversaturated. And we had really great success.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** And I think if you're being strategic about that gifting, when you don't have much budget, you see which influences come back to you and talk about your product and love it, or talk about it with other people. And you get that kind of chatter building up. And then once you understand who's passionate about your brand, you can then build on that.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** And you can go right. They really liked us. We'll give them say three, six months free food. So they can really try us out instead of gifting like treats and toys and whatever. And then it's kind of kicking off like a snowball effect. So you don't have to be overwhelmed and intimidated about trying to come up with this huge strategy for a new channel.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** You can start small and you can just see where it goes. And as you said,

**Sammy Albon:** you did that yourself. So when you first joined, it was just you. One person. What sort of scale are we talking like when you first started? Maybe five, six influencers?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah, like [00:15:00] tiny. Yeah. And then it just kind of built up and then, you know, you got stuff, you got some stuff back from some earned kind of coverage back and then others would like not so keen.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** And then you just start to build a relationship, you know, it's

**Sammy Albon:** essentially a black book of creators that, you know, are really receptive to brand.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** Understand the positioning and love the product.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** A snowball of authenticity, if you will. Well, there

we go.

**Sammy Albon:** I said it. Sophie, from your side. Yes. So it's not completely different, the strategies.

**Sammy Albon:** Yes. Paying influences. You'll be, you'll be measured on CPAs. Yes. How are we driving acquisition customers? Obviously there's the one of customers, there's a long term customers, there's the customer value, it's a whole different piece, but I guess with brands watching, they're thinking, okay, influencer can be a viable customer acquisition channel.

**Sammy Albon:** How in the world do they start looking at that? What, where do we begin?

**Kezia Price:** Yes. I think where I. Look, that [00:16:00] first is what is important for the business to prove that it's driving value. So what you were just saying, driving new customers, the cost per new customer acquisition, how long do those customers stay with us?

**Kezia Price:** And we had. By when I started looking at influencers to drive new customer acquisition, we had some very established digital channels already. So one of those was paid ads. So I looked at how can we use influencers, which is more authentic to drive new customer acquisition in that channel. So taking

**Sammy Albon:** influencer content into the paid realm.

**Kezia Price:** Yes. So. How I did it is basically then have very open conversations with the influencers that Kezia lots of times already build a relationship with and said, this is the plan. What we want long term is to work with you guys as ambassadors. We want it to work for both you and us. And what we look at is the new cost per acquisition.

**Kezia Price:** [00:17:00] So what. That needs to be as low as possible for everyone. And the customer needs to stay as long as possible on our subscription. So you can, I would advise brands to look at different payment models. So do you pay a one off fee or do you pay one? Yeah. On an affiliate type model. And you can vary that as well.

**Kezia Price:** Like it can be both at the same time. If you have. A set budget is easier to pay flat fees. However, you can just look at the influencers that are maybe a bit smaller, but have great imagery because you can amplify and choose your audiences when you do that bait piece, which was essential for us.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Such a key point that it's finding those kinds of smaller creators with amazing quality imagery.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** And then. using that for the page size. We found really great. I

**Sammy Albon:** guess this is why, I mean, we've all seen it on a tick tock, like the rise of UGC creators. Have you lent into UGC creators much?

Yeah. Yeah. And for those that

**Sammy Albon:** [00:18:00] aren't aware who, who are listening essentially UGC creator is an influencer without following

someone making

**Sammy Albon:** content that looks really nice.

**Sammy Albon:** So have you seen that? Back to the question, I guess. Have you seen more of that coming into what you guys do?

**Kezia Price:** Yeah. Yeah. A hundred percent. Because what we look at more is, I think one of the biggest things for us is how is the relationship with the influencers? Cause like you can see we're a team of two.

**Kezia Price:** So having easy, like easygoing relationships, people that you can trust.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. That's a massive thing. Yeah.

**Kezia Price:** It's key for us. And we look at like the quality of the imagery. How that works in paid media as well, and then how, yeah, on the organic side of things, if that works for their audiences, because lots of times they will have very niche audience, audiences that you can tap into, which is great for us.

**Kezia Price:** Because people that follow these dogs with great imagery, they might have these dogs themselves and want advice on what kind of [00:19:00] food they need to feed them.

**Sammy Albon:** But I think this is what we're seeing more of a social, and I know what I'm doing it like whether it's house renovations or looking for a product to buy, I think we're all turning to social to really inspire our purchases.

**Sammy Albon:** And I read an interesting piece the other day around how sort of TikTok and Reels and online. social platforms have really just shaken up the funnel for Gen Z and Millennials. It's essentially non existent in the form that we knew it because we're being pushed to purchase so much quick, so much quicker than we were previously.

**Sammy Albon:** I wanted to talk about you touched on insights and as someone who loves a stat, I guess, how important is it for you that The influence of workstream is justified in the first place, so you perhaps I'll put it to you, I guess, is it always off the back of an insight or a research piece? Is there something that informs the strategy or you just like, okay, we know we need to take off influence.

**Sammy Albon:** So let's just. Go for it. Is there something that informs the strategy for you?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I think it depends. I think a lot of times [00:20:00] it can tie into like a PR campaign. Yes. And we, we're doing that a lot more now. I think kind of making the most of a campaign, stretching it across as many channels. So, and it's so seamless to include influence.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** It just makes

**Sammy Albon:** complete sense. But actually. I guess you've seen until now influencers so often shut out of

**Sophie Van der Veken:** that. Unfairly. I think that's, yeah. I mean, again, I just think you should, it just should be part of your PR campaign now because it's tapping into a huge audience that like sitting there waiting to, you know, I don't know.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I think it's really key. Yeah.

**Kezia Price:** Well, I'm thinking about as well is if as a brand you have a message that you want to get out there, right? And as consumers, if I think about a brand, like trying to put that message out there via its own channels, obviously you get a bit tired sometimes of seeing that because you see it.

**Kezia Price:** We'd roll out campaigns across meta. Across our own site, out of home [00:21:00] television. There's lots of different channels and it's always a similar message. Consumers get, I think, creative fatigue, right? Yeah. We get tired of seeing it, but if you use an influencer, not use. That was the wrong word. If you work together with an influencer, collaborate, collaborate, they can take your brand's messaging that you want to get across and tell it in the way that they want to tell it to different audiences probably.

**Kezia Price:** And those audiences will listen. Because they're engaged with the influencer

**Sammy Albon:** who knows their audience best.

**Kezia Price:** Yes. Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** This, do you know what this is? Actually, there's a question on this in a moment, but I'm just going to get to it now. You've just touched on brand messaging and we know working with influencers and influencers and they're working with brands.

**Sammy Albon:** There's a fight. There's a balancing act to be had, right? You want them to land. USP, brand messaging and a call to action. And the influencer's like, I know how to speak to my audience best. So to you both, how important [00:22:00] is it to find that balance and I guess, relinquish some control to the influencer?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** So I was, we've chatted about this so much. We think if you as a brand, if you are sending an influencer a script, a really, really prescriptive brief that is, it's a big

ick.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Mm. It it you're wasting your money.

Yeah.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Honestly, because the box of wine is your wasting money. Yes. You're wasting your money because you should be trusting that influencer to, for them to store about your brand in an authentic way that is relevant to their audience.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. If they're reading from a script that's just, what are you doing? You might as well hire an.

**Sammy Albon:** You

**Sophie Van der Veken:** may as well. Yeah, it's, it's just ridiculous. So we are very anti being prescriptive. Obviously we have things like you say, we need to kind of hit, hit and messaging, but there's, there's a line and I think if you're telling influencers what to do, you're not, you're not going about it in the right way.

**Sammy Albon:** Yeah. It's the perfect soundbite. In fact, I'm just using the trailer. Stop bloody telling [00:23:00] influencers exactly what to say. You're wasting your money.

**Kezia Price:** You're wasting your money. It's true though. We tested it, tried it, because when we started out, obviously the business is saying, this is what we expect from the channel.

**Kezia Price:** So we definitely tried. I'm going to be honest. I've definitely given it a try and it didn't work. And then I was thinking afterwards, is this on me or on the influencer? And it is on you as a brand, because you're telling them what to say to their audience that is not used to hearing this. It doesn't work that way,

**Sophie Van der Veken:** especially when it comes to someone's relationship with their dog that is so unique.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** That bond is so special and you have to honor it and actually tails. com and that feeding moment is part of that relationship. build that bond, but it was the

**Sammy Albon:** love between love.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Right. And I think that's where the emotive kind of storytelling really comes into play, you know? So we find that allowing, obviously allowing creators to do how go [00:24:00] about this, how they feel, you know, that piece of content including tales.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** com, but not making it the sole focus is totally our jam. And actually, we've actually had a lot of cases where, you know, Potentially kind of a newer influences that we've worked with have come back to us with much more focus on the product than we want. And we said, scale back a bit, because this is dial back the messaging.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** This is so Addy, we don't like this, we kind of want it, you know, we find ads the most engaging when you, You're like, hang on, was that an ad?

And

**Sophie Van der Veken:** you're like, God, that was so naturally woven in. And you're not suddenly like, okay, I'm switched off.

Yeah.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** And I think that's the, that's the kind of midpoint we've tried to hit.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** There's enough, not too much. Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** I, we had an instance, so just briefly touching on the campaign we did together last year. And it'd been quite a few months actually before, since we'd worked together and whole new team are pretty green and we're working on a poor astrology campaign. And. I think the first piece of [00:25:00] content came in and we were like, great.

**Sammy Albon:** They're hitting the messaging. But there was a real conversation moment between Crystal and our team and you where it was like, let's just dial back the messaging.

Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** And I was like, this is so refreshing. Wow.

Good.

**Sammy Albon:** Because you, you were just focusing on the storytelling, like you said, because it was around aligning star signs with dog types.

**Sammy Albon:** And I think we can all, we can all relate to that. But it was, it was really, really interesting to see. And actually it was to the It was a real boon to the campaign because the content just outperformed what we'd expect it to have done. Because like you said, Kezia, is this even an ad? Because it was seamlessly integrating, seamlessly integrating the brand into content that felt fun.

Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** Felt cool.

Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** And then there was like follow up messaging and additional content, but it was that. moment where I was like, this is why you guys were nominated for that award, which you should have won.

**Sammy Albon:** Around like, you know, balancing what creators want and more brands need to do it. It's definitely something that I would have valued as a [00:26:00] creator.

And there

**Sammy Albon:** were so many instances where my voice felt stripped away from me as an influencer, where I was like, okay, my audience is going to see the content and be like, okay, get that bag.

**Sammy Albon:** And then just like skip the ad,

you know, and you can just,

**Sammy Albon:** it just reeks of of poor partnership. So we've touched on, you know, advice to brands that are trying to get into the space. What about finding the right influencers? So you've worked extensively with dog fluencers, people with dogs, families with dogs, something with dogs,

**Sammy Albon:** And done a lot of testing, as we've established over the years from an awareness and consideration perspective, right down to that traffic and conversion.

**Sammy Albon:** Were there ever instances where the partnerships that you had executed worried stakeholders or cause concern? And how did you navigate that? And then could we touch on your kind of filter around talent? Cause I think it's really important that brands have a filter, like the line in the sand, if you will, of who they will or won't partner with, like have they spoken about gambling, tobacco, alcohol and things like that.[00:27:00]

**Sammy Albon:** Have there been instances where the partnership wasn't the right fit? And then how have you ensured moving forward that you find the right ones?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I, I do think we're quite lucky. We haven't had many partnerships that we've then looked back on and been like,

Oh

**Sophie Van der Veken:** God. In fact, I don't even know if we've had one.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Well, we've been like that didn't work that didn't align.

**Kezia Price:** And

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I think that is because at the heart of everything we do we want to work with happy, healthy dogs and that's the common thread. And obviously there has to be an emphasis on, you know, the person creating content, it's not the dog. But you know, I, I gen generally feel like if, if You know, we're working with creators who have beautiful, happy, healthy dogs, you know then usually it's, it works really well.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I think, Oh, this is really, it's a really interesting question. I think it's really hard for brands when they kind of look out at the sea of influences and they go. Where do I start?

**Sammy Albon:** There's so many.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. How do I, where do I even go? And I, I do think just [00:28:00] tapping into those kind of engaged communities

and we've

**Sophie Van der Veken:** tried, we've tested loads of different verticals you know, like kind of more comedic or lifestyle or yeah.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Home interiors, all of that kind of stuff. We've really been open. And I think. It's, I think, just be open. I think just be open to seeing what works for you. Again, test and learn. And don't be put off by the variety because I feel like people who are talking and have a niche and like talk about that niche usually where we've had, I would say the most kind of success.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah,

**Kezia Price:** true. I would say as well, if you work with an influencer It doesn't go as expected. I think there's always like learning opportunities and you can take that forward and next time you, yeah, pay more attention to it. For example, I wouldn't say like Kezia said that there have been instances where we're like, Ooh, that wasn't great.

**Kezia Price:** Maybe there have been, but I feel like it's [00:29:00] always been like test and learn. Same thing as we were saying previously, which has in the end benefited us and the influencer channel. So, yeah,

**Sammy Albon:** I guess then it all comes back to a test and learn approach where not only establishing like the channel, Yeah. As being viable, but also like the persona or type of influence that you're partnering with.

**Sammy Albon:** So even down to like the verticals, like you said, so I'm sure there's something you haven't tried. Like ASMR. Yeah. When I think verticals always come to ASMR and I think it says a lot about me but like dog mukbangs, that could be something, you know?

**Kezia Price:** One good tip actually, sorry for Brad, is When we started looking at influencers, especially from a paid point of view, I looked at the other channels that are already established at tails.

**Kezia Price:** com. What kind of verticals do they tap into? So what kind of audiences work for us on paid? What works for us out of home? Anything like that we took and then looked for those niches and [00:30:00] influencers and that has worked really well for us.

**Sammy Albon:** Yeah. So I could, I guess you could say you're looking for the perfect

**Sophie Van der Veken:** You could say that, Samuel.

**Sammy Albon:** Moving swiftly on. We've, we've kind of, I had my questions laid out. This conversation has flowed so naturally.

I feel we've touched

**Sammy Albon:** on most of them. I guess my, my final questions are kind of around, establishing the work streams in the first place. How important would you say, I guess this is a question for you in the first instance, and then Sophie about your build on that.

**Sammy Albon:** How important is earned and gifting as a relationship builder? And then I guess, how do you take it beyond that? Because obviously you should, I guess, pay influencers fairly for their time. So How important is earned and gifted? Influencers aren't obligated to post anything. So how do you nurture that relationship?

**Sammy Albon:** And then, Sophie, how do you build on that and take it to the next level for a paid partnership?

**Sophie Van der Veken:** So yeah, when I first joined tails. com, as I mentioned, there was [00:31:00] no influencer activity. So we started with earned and I think that The value of that continues. You know, moving on, like even now, absolutely.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Absolutely. You know, we've got new launches. They will get the new launch. If we, if we notice on Instagram that their dogs poorly or they've had an operation or, you know, there's something going on in their life and they need a bit of support. we're in there. We send the dog something to, you know, wish them well.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** And I think it's those little touch points that continue to kind of resonate. And you know, just a touch point to go, okay, the brand is still there. They still like value me as an influencer. They care about my dog. I think it's those little touch points that make you more human, more kind of like,

**Sammy Albon:** not just a brand, just

**Sophie Van der Veken:** a brand

**Sammy Albon:** person at the other end as

**Sophie Van der Veken:** well.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** So I think it's hugely important for, for maintaining. So obviously we don't, well, actually not obviously we don't, [00:32:00] we don't have the budget to consistently work with, you know, all of our favorite creators. We're still kind of developing that channel. So, and me and kind of coverage and gifting plays a huge, huge part.

**Sammy Albon:** Yeah. And then I guess Sophie and that you would identify perhaps influences you've worked with from an own perspective and thing actually. They've already got a great relationship. It's time we paid them because we're looking at include them in a paid media or we want them to be part of a fuller campaign experience.

**Kezia Price:** Yes. And

**Sammy Albon:** then I guess you'd then pick up again because you just stay in touch.

**Kezia Price:** Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** Is that fair?

**Kezia Price:** Yeah. Correct. So I would say on building on what Kezia has just said, when we sat down at the end of last year to build our influencer strategy for this year, Gifting is like core part of that because like I said, we don't have the budget to constantly run really big campaigns in between the moments that we don't have these big campaigns running.

**Kezia Price:** We can give them and say, we're [00:33:00] still engaged with you and then give them free food as well. So they can keep feeding tails. com because obviously otherwise it wouldn't make any sense. Yeah, that is a really key thing. Especially

**Sammy Albon:** when I think one of the key things is like you said at the start, people stick with their dog food for a long time.

**Sammy Albon:** So you want to be front of mind all throughout the year, even if you're just doing like a Christmas activation with them or like a Valentine's Day activation. So it's staying front of mind, I guess.

**Kezia Price:** Yeah, definitely. One thing that I wanted to touch upon as well is when we. So Kezia, all the groundwork on building those relationships and once we then started working with those influencers on a paid from a paid perspective, I think one thing that I'm very proud of from us is that we told each other we're going to pay each influencer at least this minimum fee.

**Kezia Price:** Yeah. Because even if they have five followers, but we believe in them as in we think their account can grow, they have the right imagery. We can work with them easily. We can use their assets [00:34:00] for paid and we can do something organic as well. And they're the right tone of voice for our brand. They should be paid fairly because they put so much time and effort in creating that content.

**Kezia Price:** So. that we have like a baseline and then obviously based on engagement rates, what kind of campaign we use them in, rates go up or down. Yeah. But yeah, that's a big one.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** And we've had instances where creators have come to us and they're kind of new and they've gone, okay, well, I would ask for this fee. And we've turned around and gone, you're underselling yourself.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Like this is not enough.

And

**Sophie Van der Veken:** they are so grateful because there isn't that transparency around pay. And we really believe. In opening up that conversation, and we're not, you know, I don't think it's fair for brands to sometimes abuse exploit that, exploit, that's the better word, exploit that naivety, a hundred percent.

**Sammy Albon:** I think and we've touched on this before, but I think one of the key things for us, and I'm so [00:35:00] happy that you do this We have our own DNI framework and a part based equitable pay and making sure that,

yeah,

**Sammy Albon:** Influencers, no matter what walk of life they're from, are paid fairly for their contribution.

**Sammy Albon:** There's been so many instances, particularly for like black creators that have undercharged and we've said, no, for illustration purposes, they've said 500 pounds for a post. And we said,

you're

**Sammy Albon:** getting a thousand because of X and, you know, explaining that. And I guess that kind of ties into my last question quite nicely.

**Sammy Albon:** Yeah. I touched on our DNI framework, but you work with a lot of different agencies for different, for different reasons. And including some to support influencer activity. Do you have any advice to brands who are looking to onboard the right agency partner? Hopefully, as is evident here, chemistry is really important, but what, is there a scorecard system?

**Sammy Albon:** Like, what should brands look out for when should they start looking at external resource and support?

**Kezia Price:** I'll start. So for us, it was very key to have someone support us because [00:36:00] we got a set budget now for influencer marketing. But what are we going to do with it? Cause it, we're a two person team. We can't do everything.

**Kezia Price:** And I'll also, we don't have all of that knowledge, right? So agencies can help you broaden the scope and really run bigger campaigns for you, where you get lots of learnings from also for your internal activity. So. One of the key points for me, obviously, we have our procurement team that has

**Sammy Albon:** scorecards.

**Sammy Albon:** Necessary step.

**Kezia Price:** Yes, a hundred percent. But also I think for us agencies are very much an extension of our team where we work with day on a day by day basis. So communication is key and you need to have that chemistry and you need to Want to work with them every day. And I think a key point for us as well is open communication because being honest and open.

**Kezia Price:** Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** Transparency. Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I

**Sammy Albon:** think [00:37:00] a big shift I've seen over the past few years is moving from a just being a supplier to being like you said, like one team.

Yeah. So

**Sammy Albon:** there is no value to be had in like a quick burst of activity where the agency's pulled the wool over your eyes and said, Oh, like we've taken.

**Sammy Albon:** That's 60 percent of, you know, fees. And it's like, where are we, where are we going with this? Like, what is the long term gain here? So communication is vital. Transparency, custom emojis on a Slack channel.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. Yes. Crucial.

**Sammy Albon:** Discussing these before angry frog. Enough said on that one. My

**Sophie Van der Veken:** colleagues are going to love that I've mentioned this.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** It's going to get HR and you're like, take this down. Remove

**Sammy Albon:** at 46 seconds, minutes, please. But on that point, I will, I will end on that we have got some quickfire questions that I want to run through. But also for Christmas, you sent our office some treats for our dogs. And I got a Jack Brussels.

Yes.

**Sammy Albon:** Now I want to float the idea of another toy that I know my dog would also love. A collie flower, [00:38:00] as in border collie.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Very cute. That's a very huge, I'll take commission

**Sammy Albon:** on that. Yeah. If you go any further with it. Perfect. You heard it here first , but we have got some quick fire questions. Yes.

**Sammy Albon:** And these are generally just fun ones that I think you all enjoy as dog lovers as well

**Kezia Price:** go. Right. But

**Sammy Albon:** Sophie, before I get into that, which dog did you decide

**Kezia Price:** is your I have been thinking about it. .

**Sammy Albon:** I can tell when I'm looking at you. It's turning in the back of your head. Yeah,

**Kezia Price:** it's turning.

**Sammy Albon:** Should we give you one?

**Kezia Price:** Yes, give me one. Cause I feel like people see you from a different perspective then.

**Sammy Albon:** Kesia, you know Sophie best. So I'm going to make, I'm going to put your relationship on

tender hooks

**Sammy Albon:** right now.

Sophie,

**Sammy Albon:** you said old English sheepdog earlier.

Yes.

**Sammy Albon:** I see it.

Yes. That would be cute. Yes.

**Sammy Albon:** But specifically the ones that have a little hair tie to stop the hair going in their eyes.

I see it. Yeah, that's a compliment. Loyal. Loyal.

**Sammy Albon:** I have a good gift at guessing people's Harry Potter houses and apparently dogs. Wow.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I have you

**Sammy Albon:** down as [00:39:00] Hufflepuff by the way and you as a Ravenclaw.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** I can see myself. I see this, yes. I'm Hufflepuff y though.

**Sammy Albon:** Or

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Gryffindor. Maybe, maybe Gryffindor. The hat did change his mind once.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yes. Remember

**Sammy Albon:** it's what you want to be.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** So I do see you as Gryffindor.

Same.

**Sammy Albon:** Main character energy like Harry. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah,

yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** Go on then, we're ready. TikToks or reals?

TikToks.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** TikToks.

**Sammy Albon:** Because I always get sent TikToks. TikToks that are then reels by people that are just behind the times.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yes, my husband sends me reels that I've already seen because they work on TikTok.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Cancel him. Cancel him. He's going to love that I mentioned that. He's aged him. I know.

**Sammy Albon:** Sorry, quick fire, continue.

Sorry.

**Sammy Albon:** Favorite dog breed?

Oh, Gorgie. Lab.

**Sammy Albon:** German Shepherd. Chat or Riz? I'm too old for this.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Meanie chap. Chap! I can't say Riz. You've got Riz. I'm not allowed. I can't. The sound ages, ages me. Oh,

**Sammy Albon:** cooking?

**Sammy Albon:** Oh. No. [00:40:00] Oh god, this

**Sophie Van der Veken:** is not quickfire, artful. Jeez. Painting.

**Sammy Albon:** Yeah. I

**Sophie Van der Veken:** think

**Sammy Albon:** drawing. Same, I'm

**Sophie Van der Veken:** rubbish at that actually, I'll take

**Sammy Albon:** it. Because we make

**Sophie Van der Veken:** money from that, can't we? Yeah,

**Kezia Price:** or content creator.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Content creator, yeah.

**Kezia Price:** Crocs and socks?

**Sammy Albon:** Depends.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** If you're in the house, that's alright.

**Sammy Albon:** Backdoor shoes.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah. Yes.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Yeah.

**Sammy Albon:** Crocs don't come for me.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Summer or winter?

**Sammy Albon:** Summer.

**Sophie Van der Veken:** Do

**Sammy Albon:** you

**Sophie Van der Veken:** believe in ghosts? I was going to say winter, sorry! Sorry, sorry, I'm going to go with winter. Do you believe in ghosts?

**Sammy Albon:** Cream. Some kind

**Sophie Van der Veken:** of. No. Texting.

**Sammy Albon:** I'm a millennial, I hate a phone

**Sophie Van der Veken:** call. I like a phone call, but I would always text over it.

**Sammy Albon:** Wait, you called me at one point, Sophie, and I was like, this is so not us.

**Sammy Albon:** Hang up![00:41:00]

**Sophie Van der Veken:** My own. Yeah, I have

**Sammy Albon:** to use my own now. Yeah,

**Sophie Van der Veken:** my husband's family has a family account. And so we're on that. And good for you. I don't know if we can leave this in. We're still on the family account. He knows about it. There's no, there's no drama here. We're all fully aware.

**Sammy Albon:** And on that note, thank you, George, for the questions.

**Sammy Albon:** Thank you. Produce George will be back next episode when we deep dive into the paranormal again.

**Sammy Albon:** Big thank you to both for joining me today. As ever, I love our chats. What can we expect this year from TALS? More influencer,

obviously, more influencer, more ambassadors, more creators. Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Ambassadors. Creators. Bigger cute dogs, better cute dogs at the heart, every the big and cute

**Sammy Albon:** dogs.

Yes, old

**Sammy Albon:** English sleep dogs with bows in their hair.

Fingers crossed and more

**Sammy Albon:** diesel if you wanna find more diesel content. In fact, you can follow Sophie over on LinkedIn, Sophie's

dog,

**Sammy Albon:** and also [00:42:00] Kesier on LinkedIn as well.

**Sammy Albon:** We both on LinkedIn.

Yes, of course,

**Sammy Albon:** of course. We are .

We're all

**Sammy Albon:** corporate professionals these days. Yes. Yep.

Corporate girlies, corporate.

**Sammy Albon:** It's,

that's a soundbite

**Sammy Albon:** teaser. Thank you so much for joining Sophie, Kezia and myself for this episode of the What They Said Influencer Marketing Podcast powered by Pretty Green, where we deep dive into everything to do with the creator economy and conversations that are definitely less had regarding influencers and all sorts of things.

**Sammy Albon:** Join us next time where we will lift the lid on more conversations you weren't expecting. And we'll see you again soon. Thank you very much.