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## **A BHR Interview with Kendall McCreary, Influencer Marketing Strategist, bread & Butter**

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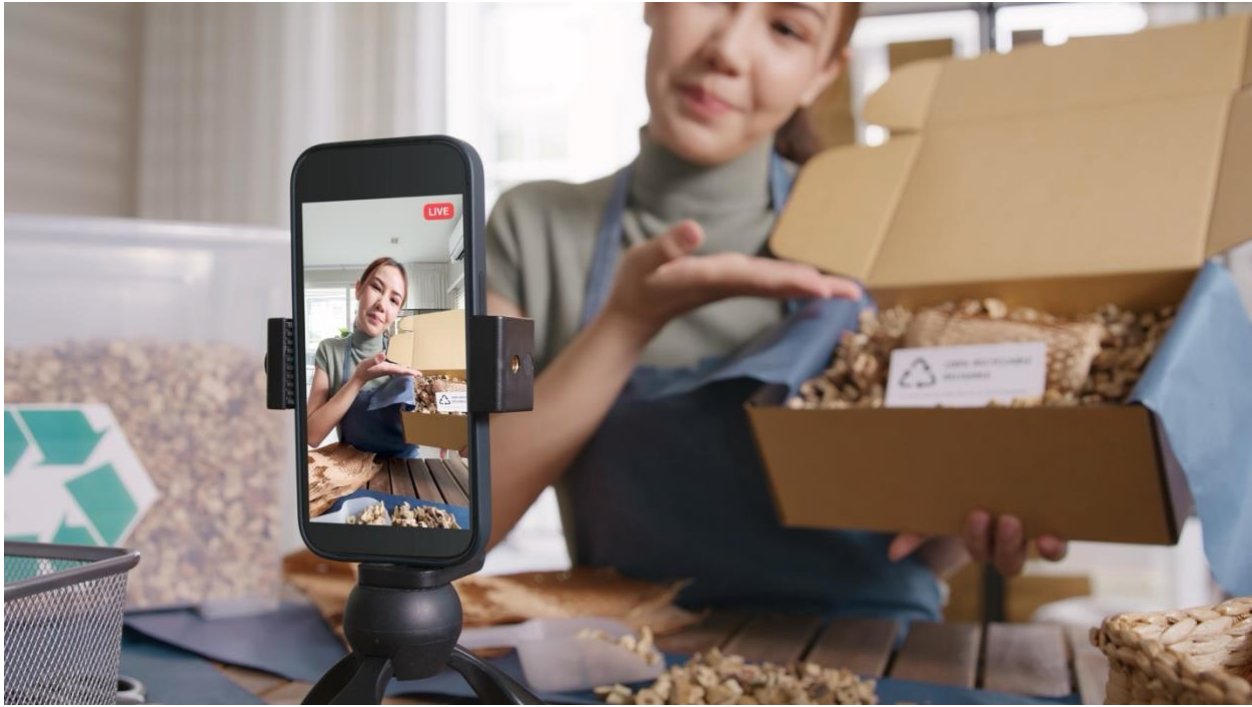
## About the Author



Originally from Scottsdale, Arizona, Kendall then studied Hospitality and Tourism at San Diego State University and launched her career in hotels at Omni San Diego and InterContinental San Diego. Following her time in hotels, Kendall freelanced for hotels and restaurants in San Diego in the social media and influencer space, before a move to New York landed her at bread & Butter as an Influencer Marketing Strategist, working with hotels, restaurants, and CPG brands across the East Coast.

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**Kendall, how important is influencer marketing in the work you do with hospitality or lifestyle brands? Why?**

Influencer Marketing is extremely important, as we continue to see its impact on how consumers make decisions. We are seeing TikTok beginning to be labeled as a “search engine,” as more and more people are going to TikTok before they go to Google to look for recommendations. For example, if you’re looking for “the best Happy Hour in your neighborhood,” hearing some recommendations from a video on TikTok that may show the food, give insider tips, and feels like a Facetime from a friend. It feels much more trustworthy than the first few results on a Google search engine results page. Influencer marketing is rooted in the strong relationships and trust between influencers and their followers, who will continue to seek and take recommendations for many of their consumer decisions, including in the hospitality industry.

**What is an AI influencer? How did this happen?**

AI Influencers are digital personalities that are completely fictional yet brought to life on social media. They can be a blend of AI images posted by people, or AI services that are promoted on Instagram, or fully powered by AI accounts such as @fit\_aitana, a

virtual influencer based in Barcelona, who even has brand deals with actual brands. With the progression of AI, this seemed to be a natural next step, but it is an interesting concept for them to have platforms on a channel such as Instagram alongside human users.

**Do you work with AI influencers? Should we? Who should?**

At this time, I do not currently work with any AI influencers, but I do see working with them in the future. I think there is more application for AI influencers for Consumer Product Goods and brands or online brands, though there may be a disconnect for the hospitality industry. Since the hospitality industry involves products and services that are experiential, I could see it being a bit more difficult to successfully utilize AI influencers in this space. But one never knows how that can change quickly.

**What are some of the advantages or disadvantages of working in a virtual reality space? What type of client is good for this?**

The biggest advantage I've experienced working in the VR medium is the creativity that could be implemented with AI influencer marketing. For example, you could promote a cookbook and have an AI create various tutorial videos quickly and efficiently for potential cookbook purchasers to tune in and try. The disadvantage is likely how it can earn the trust of the audience, since so much of influencer marketing is based on the trust and relationships developed with followers. It would need to be clear and transparent that the influencer is part of AI so there is no confusion that someone thinks they are being "tricked" by what they see.

**Do you consider this "innovative" influencer marketing? If so, why? If not, why not, and what would be innovative in this space?**

Yes. I absolutely think it is innovative influencer marketing and I am eager to see how this space continues to evolve. As someone who is admittedly lukewarm to the integrations of AI, I can see this used in cool and creative ways. The key to keeping it innovative and positive will be for brands utilizing AI creators to remain transparent in order to hold onto the trust of their customer base, while showcasing products in varied and new ways.