

TRUST MATTERS

The Role of Influencers
in Cybersecurity Marketing

Foreword.

Cybersecurity leaders face a problem. They must deploy the best tools to protect their organizations, but assessing a product's true efficacy is inherently difficult. Security tools defend against evolving and often unknown threats, but no one tool can fully prove the absence of a breach.

In place of certainty, security leaders are forced to rely on the next best factor: **trust**. This, in turn, is shaped by social proof: a psychological tendency to follow the judgements of those we view as credible. For marketing leaders, understanding who security decision-makers trust – and why – is increasingly essential.

Our research is among the first to examine the relationship between cybersecurity influencers and security leaders and practitioners. It measures the extent to which influencers shape opinions, how they compare with traditional sources like analysts and trade media, and where they fit into the broader marketing landscape.

The findings are clear. Cybersecurity influencers play a growing role in building trust and brand favorability. As AI accelerates content production and heightens information overload, voices perceived as credible and independent will matter more than ever.

Simply put, any vendor ignoring influencer engagement in 2025 is ceding ground to savvier rivals.

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What's in this ebook?

To create this report, "Trust Matters: The Role of Influencers in Cybersecurity Marketing," Code Red and Merritt Group partnered with Sapio Research to survey 200 IT security practitioners and leaders from the US and UK.

The survey included questions to garner insights into who security leaders trust and understand the role that influencers play in their decision making processes.



1

TOPLINE SURVEY FINDINGS: WHY INFLUENCERS MATTER

But first: What is a cybersecurity influencer anyway?

The term “influencer” tends to conjure images of celebrities endorsing products on social media. But in the world of cybersecurity – technical and highly specialized influence is earned, not bought.

Most cybersecurity influencers are working practitioners. They remain on the front lines, dealing with the same threats as their audience. Their credibility stems not from follower counts, but from domain expertise, professional integrity and community respect.



They are passionately connected to the industry and our shared ambition to protect the digital future.

This is a sector where personal reputation matters – and travels fast. Financial incentives may exist, but influencers who abandon objectivity risk eroding the very trust they rely on.

In cybersecurity, true ‘influencers’ aren’t influencers at all, **they’re practitioners with battle scars and deep experience who happen to have earned attention by sharing what they’re interested in.**

The thing to remember is that trust in this industry isn’t manufactured through polished content. Trust is earned and accepted through technical credibility and honest communication.

- *Mike Privette,*
Founder & Cybersecurity Economist,
Return on Security





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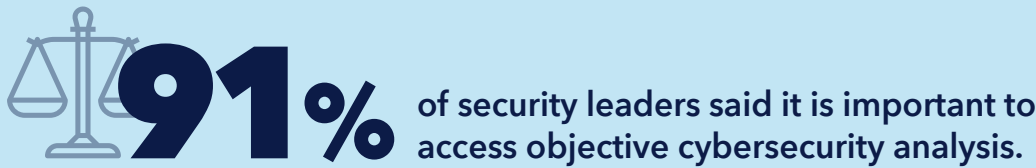
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The relationship between security leaders and influencers

Relationships matter. In an industry built on risk mitigation and trust, the perceived credibility of a source is just as important as the content they share. Security leaders rely on a mix of peer discussions, trade media, industry analysts reports and influencer content to stay current in a fast-moving, high-stakes environment.



Influencers are trusted because they are perceived as objective, informed, and experienced. The data supports this:



This trust isn’t built overnight. It’s tied to the characteristics that matter most to security leaders.

Our survey asked leaders to select the top traits they value in cybersecurity influencers. The top three responses all centered on the trust security leaders place in influencers:



Knowledge of industry trends



Subject matter expertise



Personal reputation & industry credibility

The high level of credibility that influencers have means they sit alongside other established sources such as journalists and analysts.

Illustrating the growing demand for credibility and trust, **91%** of security leaders reported regularly engaging with influencer content. Additionally, **91%** reported using analyst reports to shortlist suppliers, and **57%** reported using trade media for industry news.

Getting your brand and narrative into these channels not only allows you to help shape the industry, but it also ensures that security leaders are more likely to enter conversations with your sales teams.

In fact, **83%** of respondents said they’re more inclined to consider working with a cybersecurity vendor if they are already familiar with their brand.



Security buyers are skeptical by nature. A trusted voice can get them to listen when a sales deck never will. The right influencer is a practitioner who can translate complex tech into what buyers actually care about.

- **Matt Johansen**,
Founder,
Vulnerable U



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What content works?

Security leaders consume a variety of content types and it is important that any relationship with an influencer factors this in when agreeing on the content plan.

“What forms of influencer content do you engage with?”
The content types they care about most are:



Product reviews



Webinars



Opinion / commentary on industry trends



4 White papers / eBooks



8 Blogs



5 Shortform video



9 Subscription newsletters



6 Social media posts



10 Longform video / podcasts



7 'How-to' guides

Working with a cybersecurity influencer is a way to reach their audiences through their trusted voice. Your product or service can reach professionals who may not be familiar with your brand.

Influencers are skilled in content creation and communication. *They know what is important to them as security professionals and communicate it in a more relatable way.*

- Phillip Wylie,
Host, The Phillip Wylie Show



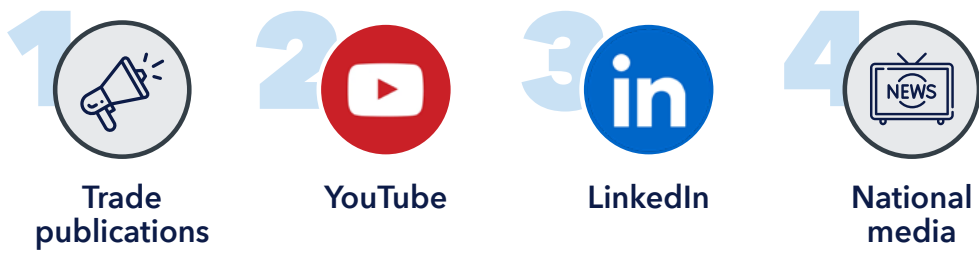
Remember: you should use a mix of different content channels to reach your audience in the best way.

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Channels of influence

Multiple channels are used to source news and information, with the top four being:



Nearly 1/3 of security leaders subscribe to influencer newsletters.

While email content can go under the radar when compared to more public social media channels, it is important to understand an influencer’s subscriber base, as this could be a highly effective way to get regular, non-spammy content through to key target audiences.

Ultimately, security leaders are selective about who they follow. While **74%** of participants often discover influencers while researching specific issues they are dealing with, **81%** stated that they only follow and focus on those who have an established reputation in the industry.

Trust is the ultimate currency and the main separator for truly connecting with your intended audience. Content volume or quality are no longer major separators due to the increase in AI-generated content.

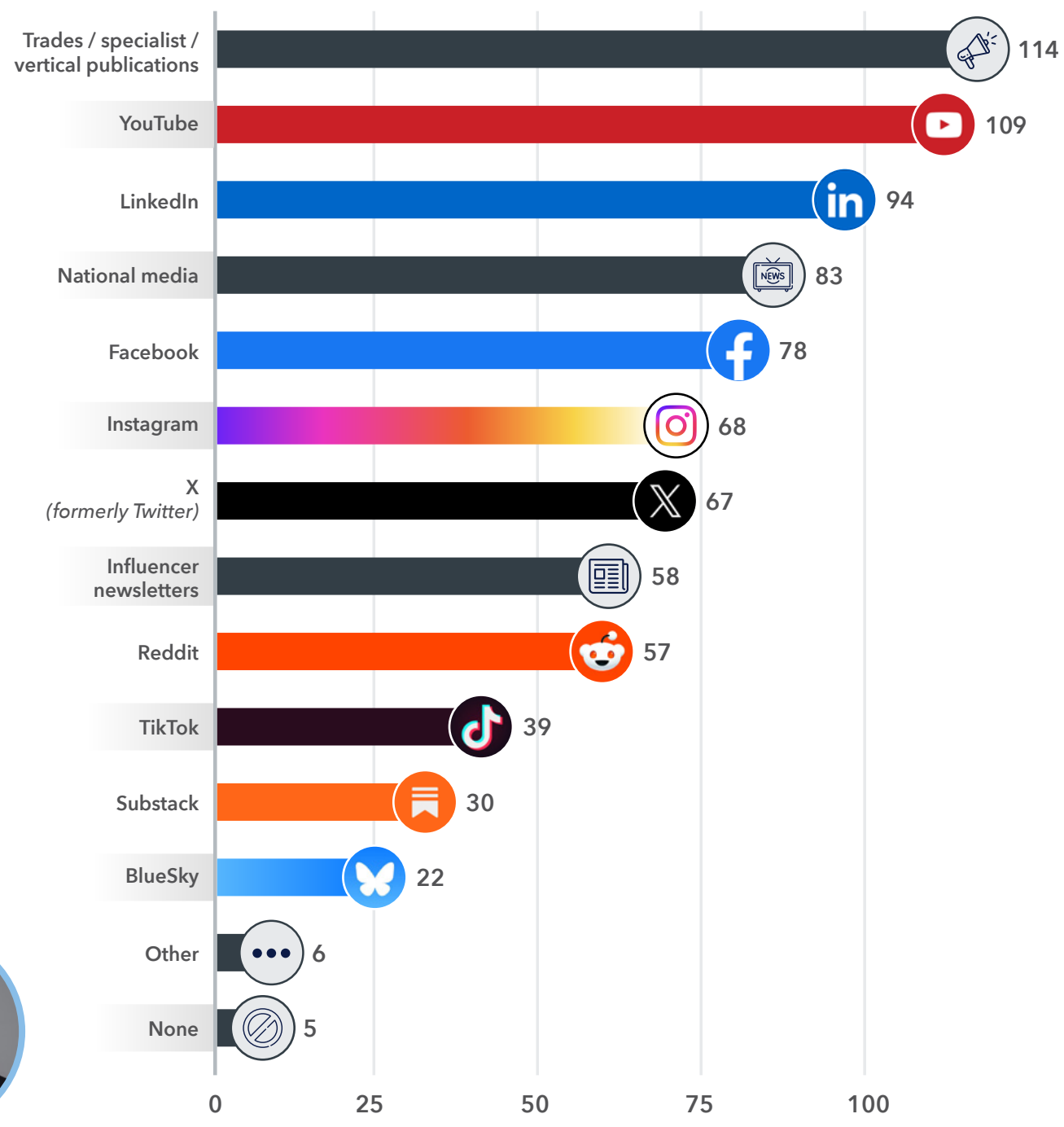
Partnering with trusted voices in the security community is a streamlined way for brands to build lasting relationships with their intended audience while standing out in today’s hypercompetitive cybersecurity landscape.

- Darwin Salazar,
Founder, The Cybersecurity Pulse



“Which of the following do you use to source news / information on the cybersecurity industry?”

Our survey participants were asked to select all options that applied to them:



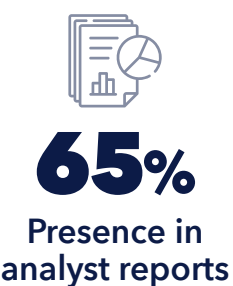
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What makes vendors trusted?

Trust is the currency of the cybersecurity industry. Having it is the only way to cut through the noise with thousands of vendors. But what are the ingredients to earn this trust and where do influencers play their part?

Influencers carry the same weight as analysts and journalists in building a positive perception within the community. When asked what **significantly contributes** to this, respondents said:



A successful marketing campaign incorporates as many of these points as possible, magnifying them in all communication.

Earning trust and credibility goes much further though. In fact, those surveyed said that customer references, the reputation of advisory board members and views of peers were the most significant factors influencing trust.

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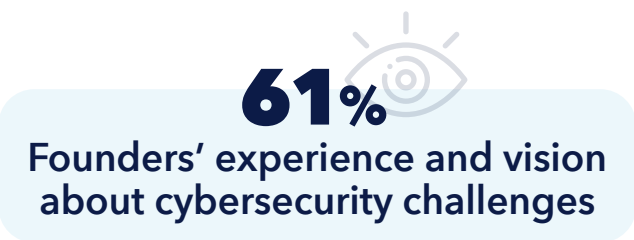
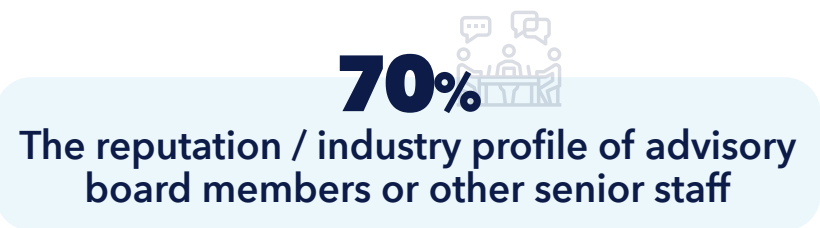
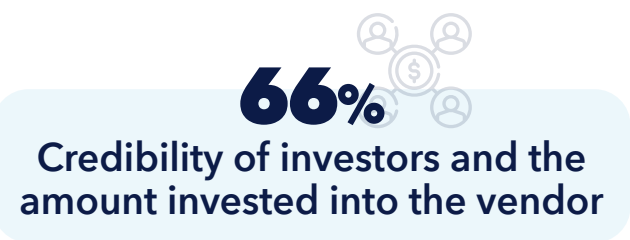
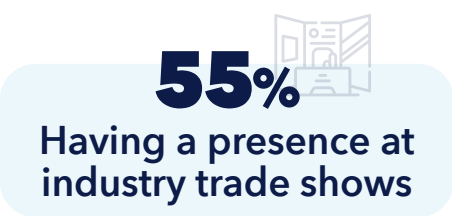
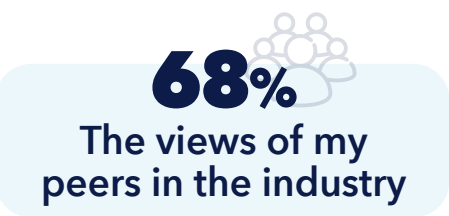
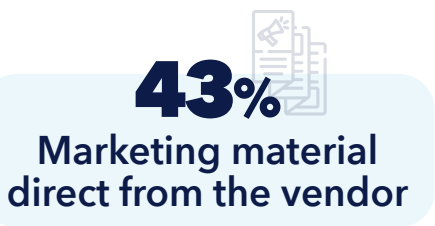
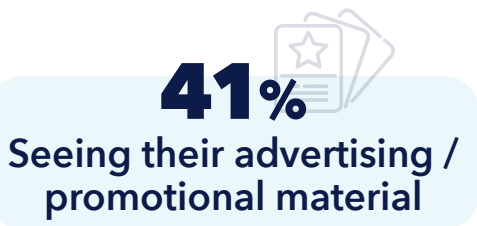
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“How much do the following factors create a positive perception of cybersecurity vendors?”

Respondents consider the following either **significantly or extremely important** in creating that positive perception:





2

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING INFLUENCERS

Ten principles for engaging cybersecurity influencers

The cybersecurity influencer ecosystem offers a valuable path to building trust with key decision makers.

But to be effective, influencer engagement requires the same strategic discipline typically reserved for media and analyst programs.

1

Prioritize expertise over reach

Influencer effectiveness in cybersecurity depends on credibility, not visibility. A niche expert with deep knowledge will have greater sway than a generalist with a large but disengaged following.

6

Understand the difference

Influencers are not analysts or journalists – but they complement them. Their frontline experience offers a practical lens that traditional media often lacks. Just don’t expect them to behave like the press.

2

Remember, authenticity matters

Influencers earn their reputations through honesty and independence. Imposing rigid messaging will undermine that. The most effective collaborations respect the influencer’s voice and editorial style.

7

Measure what matters

Influencer activity should be tracked like any other marketing effort. Use UTM links, monitor engagement, and define clear KPIs based on reach, resonance, or conversions.

3

Collaborate, don’t control

Treat influencers as partners, not mouthpieces. Brief them with context and let them decide how best to speak to their audience. Influence is strongest when it feels natural.

8

Use real-world examples

Influencers are most persuasive when content is grounded in practice. Highlighting case studies or real deployments is more effective than promoting product features in isolation.

4

Play the long game

Enduring partnerships outperform one-off campaigns. Sustained engagement builds familiarity and trust – two critical ingredients in shaping CISO perceptions.

9

Discover through networks, not databases

Cybersecurity influencers are often found via industry communities, not influencer marketplaces. Monitor who your customers follow, and consider working with agencies that specialize in this space.

5

Be transparent

Paid engagements should be disclosed. Transparency protects the credibility of the influencer and, by extension, the vendor.

10

Integrate with the wider campaign

Influencer content is most effective when aligned with broader PR and marketing efforts. Use it to amplify launches, support analyst relations, and reinforce messaging across all channels.

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**SO, WHO ARE THE
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Ones to watch in 2025

The cybersecurity industry is filled with many proven and well-respected thought leaders who have contributed so much to building this great community.

For this list, we purposefully chose very niche cybersecurity creators and influencers who are known as **THE** go-to experts in their respective areas of security. Having built their own podcasts, newsletters, blogs, YouTube videos and more, with loyal followers and readers, the influencers below are quickly gaining ground on traditional media outlets due to their growing audience base.

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Naomi Buckwalter
Founder, The Cybersecurity Gatebreakers Foundation


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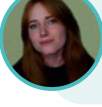
Jane Frankland
Owner & CEO, KnewStart


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Francis Odum
Founder, Software Analyst Cyber Research


- 

Mike Privette
Cyber Economist, Return on Security


- 

Cybr3rMaddy (Maddy)
Founder & CEO: HiveMind Security


- 

Clint Gibler
Founder, tl;dr sec


- 

Ashish Rajan
Host, Cloud Security Podcast & Co-Host, AI Cybersecurity Podcast


- 

Jackie Singh
Investigative Writer, Hacking, But Legal


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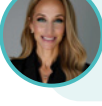
Darwin Salazar
Founder, The Cybersecurity Pulse


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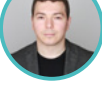
Matt Johansen
Founder, Vulnerable U


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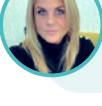
John Hammond
Cyber Security Content Creator, Just Hacking Training


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Shira Rubinoff
CEO, The CyberSphere Group


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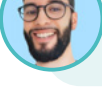
Ross Haleliuk
Blogger, Venture in Security


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Lisa Forte
Co-Host, Cyber Sisters Podcast


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Sarah Armstrong Smith
Co-Host, Cyber Sisters Podcast


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Ayoub Fandi
Host/Writer, GRC Engineer


- 

James Berthoty
Founder & Analyst, Latio Tech


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Rachel Tobac
CEO, SocialProof Security


- 

Phillip Wylie
Host, The Phillip Wylie Show


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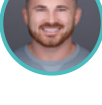
Dr. Anmol Agarwal
International Speaker, Expert in Cyber, AI/ML, 5G, 6G


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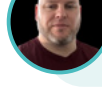
Ben Sadeghipour (NahamSec)
Co-Founder & CEO, HackingHub


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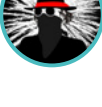
Chris Glanden
Founder, Cyber Circus Network (CCN)


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Chris Hughes
Host, The Resilient Cyber Podcast


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Daniel Miessler
Founder, Unsupervised Learning


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Jack Rhysider
Creator, DarkNet Diaries Podcast



Conclusion.

The cybersecurity landscape is crowded, complex and ever-changing. Decision-makers are hungry for clarity. Influencers, when credible and relevant, offer a trusted signal to those deciding which vendors to work with.

Vendors that partner strategically with the right influencers will gain visibility, trust and ultimately, market share. Those that ignore this shift risk falling behind and ceding this important channel to their competitors.

If you're interested in learning more about influencer marketing programs and how to effectively implement them, contact:

MerrittGROUP



Michelle Schafer
Partner, Merritt Group

[Email Michelle](#)

[Merritt Group's Website](#)

CODE RED



Robin Campbell-Burt
CEO, Code Red

[Email Robin](#)

[Code Red's Website](#)

Additional resources: Code Red and Merritt Group hosted the "Why Influencers Will Shape Cybersecurity Marketing in 2025" webinar. Check it out [HERE](#) for more insight on the future of influencers in the cybersecurity landscape.