

# HFMA Bulletin

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## Influencers: marketing gold or regulatory nightmare?

With a clear seven years since the introduction of the Nutrition and Health Claims regulation, it's fair to say that the vast majority of companies operating in the health and wellness space can understand right from wrong when it comes to claims. While regulations on packaging, advertising and marketing (to both consumers and health experts) is easier for brands in our industry to manage, things become murkier as new platforms develop and grow in popularity.

The advent of influencer marketing in the natural health industry has been a positive and proactive way to engage a younger audience with an appetite for innovation and new product development. Many brands have found they've been able to successfully harness trends, to reach a potential audience of millions in a relatable and accessible way.

But in a world which values precision, authenticity and trust when it comes to promoting often complex products, just how helpful are these figures?

A recent study showed that, unfortunately, 90% of influencers are sharing inaccurate health information across their channels, particularly in the area of weight management. The study, led by the University of Glasgow, also found that in longer-form blogs, when ten of the top nutrition blogs were tested earlier this year, only one was found to be distributing correct information.

And it's not just academics who have noted the trend in incorrect information

distribution. The Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) recently banned Instagram promotions from Lauren Goodger and Katie Price for their flagrant abuse of health claims and deliberately misleading 'before and after' images when advertising a range of weight management products.

While the Google Medic algorithm update sought to minimize health misinformation across the web, unfortunately this move doesn't yet stretch to Instagram and Facebook, meaning that the ASA, along with CAP, has the mountainous job of keeping tabs on the hundreds of sponsored posts which appear every day for natural health products.

If done correctly, Instagram marketing can be a hugely powerful tool; influencers in long-term partnerships with brands have acted as a helpful guide for consumers to separate fact from fiction and demystify often dense scientific information.

But for this to be done right, it's essential that brands treat Instagram with the same legal and regulatory lens as traditional advertising. The HFMA's CLEAR CHECK service can help brands who are unsure where the regulations lie on this platform.

This industry has an exceptional record of high standards when it comes to educating consumers in a responsible and ethical way and sticking to the right side of the law on new and emerging platforms will help us continue to lead the way.

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The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) is the voice of the natural health industry. For further information, advice or details about membership, visit [www.hfma.co.uk](http://www.hfma.co.uk)