

## Mindful Marketing Ethics Challenge 2025

sponsored by the Messiah University Department of Business and  
the American Marketing Association of Central Pennsylvania

### Case & Competition Guidelines

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#### *Case: Influencer Marketing*

*\* Note that although the case context is real, the companies it describes are hypothetical and have no connection to any real organizations with similar names.*

Over the last decade, one of the biggest trends in marketing has been influencer marketing, which has enabled almost anyone with a significant social media following to become a product spokesperson.

A recent survey of 1,200 American consumers revealed that [79% of respondents](#) bought a product after seeing an influencer use it, and [77%](#) favored content created by influencers over professionally scripted ads.

In addition, the use of [AI for content creation, ideation, and analytics](#) seems poised to fuel continued influencer marketing growth.

However, even as influencers have proliferated in many consumer sectors, some analysts see influencers' effectiveness declining amid increasing ethical issues surrounding their tactics.

One firm wanting to use influencer marketing responsibly is *Wilderquest*, a relatively new manufacturer of moderately priced sporting apparel, footwear, and equipment. The company targets individuals in generations Z, Y, and X who enjoy outdoor activities like hiking, climbing, and camping and who value genuineness and authenticity. Wilderquest has been successful building its brand mainly through traditional paid media and its social media channels, which include Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and X. The firm has yet to employ paid influencers but is now looking to do so.

*Impact*, an influencer marketing agency, has approached Wilderquest, proposing to deliver the right mix of micro influencers to promote the company's brand. Impact's proposal outlines the following traits and behaviors for the influencers:

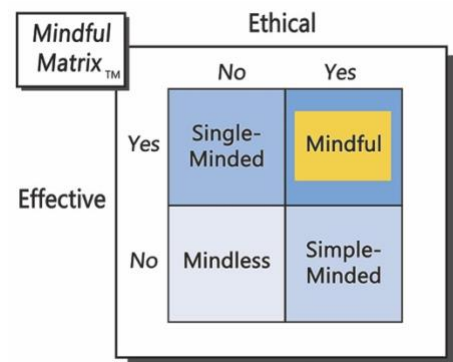
- Demographics
  - 18 - 60 years old
  - U.S. citizens
  - As a group, racially diverse and including both men and women
- Psychographics
  - Having a distinct persona and the *right look*
  - Being *relevant* – engaging, timely, meaningful
  - Having at least 10,000 followers, across multiple platforms
  - Not necessarily current Wilderquest customers
- Promotional Expectations
  - Post an average of once a day
  - Only post content that casts Wilderquest in a positive light.
  - Positively compare Wilderquests’ products to those of its competitors by diminishing the value of the latter.
  - Verbally embellish Wilderquest products’ features and benefits
  - Utilize technology to visually enhance photos and video
  - Not required to disclose that they received products for free or that they are being compensated for their recommendations in other ways
  - Required to have seen and held the Wilderquest products they promote but not required to have used them
  - Help consumers appreciate how their outdoor experiences and lives are lacking without Wilderquest
- Compensation
  - Receive for free the specific Wilderquest products they promote, which can range in retail price from \$20 to \$500.
  - Receive monetary payment in the form of affiliate commissions: 10% of each sale, made through the influencer’s unique link or code.

Wilderquest’s marketing team appreciates the thoroughness of Impact’s proposal. However, the team also has concerns that certain facets of the proposal might encourage the influencers to cross ethical lines and implicate Wilderquest for immoral behavior.

If Wilderquest were to move forward with Impact’s proposal, what aspects should be changed and why, and/or is there a different approach Wilderquest should take for enlisting influencers to ensure outcomes that are both *effective* and *ethical*? Below are descriptions of those two main Mindful Marketing criteria. Applications of the criteria to other ethical issues can be seen at [MindfulMarketing.org](http://MindfulMarketing.org).

- *Effectiveness*: the proposed solution represents good marketing strategy, e.g.,

- Informs, persuades, and reminds people about the brand's unique selling proposition, in order to attain a certain percentage increase in recognition among the population.
- Accomplishes AIDA by grabbing consumers' *attention*, keeping their *interest*, stimulating *desire*, and securing tangible *action* such as products sold.
- Ultimately, the marketing creates mutually beneficial exchange.
- **Ethicality:** the proposed solution upholds five universal values:
  - *Decency:* avoiding excessive violence, vulgarity, immodesty, sexual explicitness, and profanity
  - *Fairness:* treating people *equally*, based on their common humanity, recognizing different starting points via *equity*, and accounting for different inputs with *merit*
  - *Honesty:* upholding truth by not breaking it (lying) or blurring it (distortion)
  - *Respect:* affirming each person's inherent worth and holding them in esteem
  - *Responsibility:* responding to societal needs




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### Competition Guidelines

Written responses to the case must follow these instructions:

- Microsoft Word document (doc. or docx. extension)
- 12-point type; double-spaced
- 1,500 words maximum for main content (does not include front and end material such as title page)
- Include page numbers
- Any references can be hyperlinked
- Do not include authors' names or school in the document. Also, in Word choose File/Properties/Summary to remove author's name.
- The submission must be the team members' own work, not written by any other person(s) or by artificial intelligence.
- Upload the document via this [Qualtrics survey](#)
- Deadline is **5:00 pm, Friday September 19**

Additional requirements:

- Teams must consist **of three to six undergraduate** students who are all 18 years of age or older.
- **At least two team members must attend** the in-person event at which teams will present a brief oral summary of their response (about 5 minutes) to the panel of judges and other attendees. This event will be held at Messiah University on **Wednesday October 1, from 4:00 - 6:00 pm**. There also will be time for food and networking.
- Currently, the Ethics Challenge is limited to three teams per school. That number could increase or decrease depending on the total number of entrants. In any case, it will be up to faculty at each school to determine which teams from their institution advance to the larger competition.

The three teams with the highest combined scores for the competition's written and oral components will be awarded: \$500 for 1<sup>st</sup> place, \$300 for 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and \$200 for 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

For questions, please contact Dr. David Hagenbuch, [dhagenbu@messiah.edu](mailto:dhagenbu@messiah.edu)