

TECH

I spent a day following an Instagram influencer around New York City to see what her job was really like — and it was way more work than I expected

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Influencers have turned into household names in recent years, and the industry is now worth up to an estimated \$8 billion.

However, people still struggle to understand what the non-traditional career consists of, so I followed an influencer around New York City for a day to offer people a better idea.

In a day with style influencer Courtney Seamon — one of the two women behind Mimosas & Manhattan — I attended events for bedding and shoes, gained insight into how she makes a living, and learned what she does in her day-to-day life as a full-time influencer.

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When your entire career is based off of content on Instagram and social media, it's difficult for others to realize the full story that goes behind that one picture.

The wild world of influencers is still a relatively new industry that people struggle to understand, but that hasn't stopped it from growing into something worth an estimated \$8 billion in 2019. While it's not a typical 9-to-5 job, being an influencer is more than just posting a photo and watching the money roll in, says Courtney Seamon, a full-time influencer who runs the blog [Mimosas & Manhattan](#) and its associated Instagram account alongside her cousin.

It's why I decided to shadow Seamon for a day in her life. Like many entrepreneurs, Seamon is in charge of communicating with brands, organizing event appearances, and managing her own expense reports. We attended brand events and networked with public relations representatives, and recorded Instagram Stories and walked around New York City.

Here's what it was like.

This is Courtney Seamon, a 26-year-old who runs the Instagram account CourtandKelly alongside her cousin. Although their following of 62,000 puts them solidly in the category of "microinfluencers," Seamon runs the account and their blog, called Mimosas & Manhattan, as a full-time job.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Seamon originally comes from a small town in Indiana, but found herself in New York in the summer of 2013 working as an unpaid intern alongside her cousin, Kelly McFarland. On a whim, they bought the domain mimosasmanhattan.com and created a [matching Instagram account](#) to document all the various brunch places they went to that summer.

"Blogging was a thing. Instagram was just starting to make a splash," Seamon told me. "We were also 20 years old. We had to find places that didn't ID."

The Mimosas & Manhattan venture was short-lived at the beginning, as both had to return to their colleges. But after Seamon graduated in 2015 and moved back to New York for work, they started to gain traction. Seamon still remembers how they made their first dollar in January 2016, with a following of 15,000: a lip gloss campaign that netted them \$150 in exchange for one blog post and two Instagram photos.

It wasn't until September 2018 that Seamon figured out she could afford quit her job at Macy's and become an influencer full-time. That same year, McFarland got offered a job to move out to Los Angeles, and the duo rebranded their Instagram account to CourtandKelly to reflect their bi-coastal presence.

"We started at 0 followers. We weren't reality stars," Seamon said. "We've had to work our a---- off to get to this position ... You have to have those humble beginnings."

First up in Seamon's day is a breakfast at La Mercerie, a trendy restaurant in the just-as-trendy New York neighborhood of SoHo. The restaurant was flooded with light and is completely photo-ready, just like the influencers and magazine editors seated around us. In my normal work outfit of jeans and a t-shirt, I felt completely out of place.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

The event is hosted by Bed Bath & Beyond, a company Seamon says she has worked with before and that often works with influencers. That history of working with influencers is something that Seamon looks for in brands that reach out to her, explaining that there are many retailers and companies who don't quite understand the influencer industry and business model.

Seamon recognized a few of the women seated around us from past events and past interactions, pointing out a former "Bachelor" contestant and the two women behind the popular fitness Instagram, Sweats & the City.

We were seated at a long table filled with pastries, jams, and fruit, and were immediately offered a selection of espresso-based drinks and fresh juices. The breakfast selection was nothing short of a multi-course meal — something way different than the oatmeal Seamon said she usually eats for breakfast.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

While I may usually feel the need to sneak a photo of something like a menu at a restaurant, I was far from the only one snapping away at this breakfast. The photogenic influencers around me were carefully adjusting their place settings and thrusting their phones high in the air to capture the best bird's-eye image, posing with their drinks for photos across the table, and taking careful panorama videos of the scene — many, surely, to be posted in Instagram Stories.

Bed Bath & Beyond was hosting the breakfast to show off its sleep products, and had brought in its chief brand officer for a nearly half-hour presentation. Each attendee was given a trendy sleep mask reading "Wake up happy," and given a form to fill out to get a full set of sheets and blankets to be sent to them in the mail.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

The event yielded a copious of free products for attendees, especially considering Seamon is under no obligation to post anything online in exchange for the invite. Seamon said she gets invited to lots of events around New York, and decides which ones to actually go to by thinking about how it could positively impact her business.

Like any professional, not every move Seamon takes is for an immediate payoff. Some events are for showing face and making connections, and others are to work on longer-term campaigns and partnerships in the future.

"You have to think of everything as a business move," Seamon said. "You have to ask yourself, 'Is it going to pay off in the long run?'"

When we got the main dish of our breakfast, it was, as expected, picture-perfect.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

The dishes were served during the presentation, and the clank of silverware and clicks of cameras snapping shots of the \$22 crepe were clearly audible.

The rest of the event was spent mingling with other attendees, and guests were given the opportunity to ask questions about Bed Bath & Beyond's products. Seamon actually went around to each set-up to read up on the products, more than many of the other attendees.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Seamon seemed cognizant about going around and talking with nearly everyone at the event. She didn't shy away from sharing details about her life as she recounted stories and struck up conversation.

Seamon is responsible for promoting her brand, which is really just selling herself and her personality. Because of that, Seamon is open about who she is, both with me and her followers. While her blog posts revolve around fashion, style, and beauty, Seamon said some of the most popular posts are ones where she talks about mental health and the "bad days."

"Consumers understand when they're being fed s---," Seamon says. "They like that you're honest and when you're real."

After leaving the Bed Bath & Beyond event, we headed over to a nearby pop-up store for shoe designer Sarah Flint. Expectedly, the store was adorned in stylish patterns and flowers, an aesthetic meant to draw in passersby.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Sarah Flint is a relatively small online-only shoe designer, but the brand's claim to fame is being the regularly cited favorite shoe brand of Meghan Markle. The pop-up store in New York is the brand's first brick-and-mortar location, and an employee told me it's designed based off of Sarah Flint's "dream board."

At the store, Seamon met up for a one-on-one consultation to try on some of the shoes, with the prior understanding she was getting a free pair of shoes out of the event.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Seamon snapped photos of her shoes and other activities throughout the day, which she usually saves to post to her Instagram Stories later in the day after having a chance to edit them.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

When in a profession where aesthetic is everything, photos aren't posted without being carefully edited. Seamon's editing software of choice is Tezza, an app created by a fellow Instagram influencer. She pulled up the app on her phone in the Uber after the pop-up store to post her photos from this morning's activities.

Seamon is unique in that she actually shares her daily schedule with her followers each morning on her Instagram Story. Seamon says doing this offers transparency in her day-to-day life, something that many influencers don't share and most people don't understand.

We then took an Uber — free, thanks to a comped code from one of the morning events — over to Madison Square Park to meet up with her boyfriend, who she was having take pictures of her outfit during his lunch break. She had him meet us in front of a massive tree she had had her eye on for a while because its leaves are already changing colors for fall.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Seamon pulled out a DSLR camera from her bag and handed it to her boyfriend, who snapped photos from various angles and with different backdrops. He was obviously a pro, and confirmed to me that he had done this before for Seamon.

Hiring a professional photographer for her daily Instagram posts is out of the question for Seamon — she says that photographers in the influencer space can charge \$175 to \$200 an hour.

Instead, Seamon usually leaves the photo-taking to her friend and fellow Instagram influencer Lex Dieck. They met after getting seated next to each other at an influencer brunch event, and often travel around the city together to capture photos and help each other out.

"Influencers are like coworkers to me, because I don't have any," Seamon says. "There's none of those mean-girl situations. I do feel like I'm genuine friends with the girls."

Like any good Instagram boyfriend, Kyle knew the angles at which to capture the pictures that Seamon likes to post. The two spent around 20 minutes discussing placement, snapping photos, and checking that they got a shot good enough for Seamon's Instagram.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Seamon and her boyfriend, Kyle Moore, have been dating for four years now. Moore works at a sports betting startup near Madison Square Park and is currently experimenting with intermittent fasting, a trendy diet popular in Silicon Valley and startup culture.

Seamon's openness about her personal life continues to her relationship with her boyfriend. The two of them have a podcast where they bring on guests to discuss sex and relationships. They record the podcast right in the middle of the living room in their shared apartment, and Seamon said they spent close to \$800 on podcasting equipment.

While the podcast is a fun thing that the couple can do together, Seamon also said it opens up her work to "another avenue of revenue" beyond Instagram, which she says is "super saturated" with influencers already.

"The Instagram bubble won't be around forever," Seamon says. "If Instagram blows up tomorrow, it'll be hard to market yourself for a new job."

We next headed over to Seamon's midtown Manhattan apartment, where she said she spends the majority of her time. Like anyone who runs their own business — Mimosas & Manhattan has been turned into a registered LLC — Seamon has to take care of her own email, expense reports, invoices, and business deals for sponsorships and partnerships.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Seamon said that McFarland, her cousin and partner behind Mimosas & Manhattan, comes from a public relations background that proved vital when the two first started growing their presence as influencers. The two of them had to learn as they went to run their account like a business, which includes negotiating brand deals, pitching companies, tracking analytics, and writing up reports and invoices properly for taxes.

"There is no guidebook to do what we're doing," Seamon said. "There's no major on how to do it. We had to figure it out as we go."

Home is also where Seamon will post her blog posts and sponsored photos for Instagram. For @courtandkelly, they charge usually anywhere from \$800 to \$1,500 for an ad-sponsored Instagram post. To keep their feed feeling "authentic," Seamon aims to flood their Instagram with only about 20% sponsored posts, while the other 80% is "organic content" from their lives.

Fashion makes up the majority of what Mimosas & Manhattan posts on their blog and Instagram, and that's evident by Seamon's apartment. Her bedroom has two closets filled with her clothing, while her boyfriend's items are banished to the hallway closet.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

One of Seamon's biggest pet peeves is the mistaken assumption the breadwinner is her boyfriend, and that he's the reason they can afford her lifestyle and their nice apartment. Looking around her apartment, nearly half of the furniture was "gifted" thanks to Seamon's work: Allswell gave her the mattress and bedding; the couch was a result of a partnership; the rug and artwork were in exchange for blog and Instagram posts.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

"I have to be extremely open about my financials to make my friends take me seriously," Seamon says. "I've never asked my friend at Ernst & Young how much she makes. Nobody's coming from a mean place, people just don't understand."

Seamon declined to disclose exactly how much she makes, but said she makes more now than she did at her previous job as an associate product manager at Macy's — which, according to Glassdoor, makes an average of \$70,000 a year.

Before we left her apartment, Seamon laid out outfits for a video she was filming the next day for a blog post. Despite being so fashion-oriented, Seamon rarely buys clothes, and usually buys vintage and secondhand clothing when she does. She said she knows that her followers aren't spending thousands on clothes, and she wants her looks to resonate with them.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Her upcoming video is meant to show followers how to transition your closet from fall outfits to warmer winter wear. With five to six outfits selected, Seamon estimated it can take a few hours to produce a one-minute long video in the end, between set-up, makeup, multiple takes, and editing.

After Seamon changed into outfit No. 2, we then headed over to a trendy nail salon called Paintbox where Seamon was meeting two PR representatives who she had previously worked with on brand campaigns. We were immediately offered champagne flutes and lookbooks of intricate nail design options, with names like Post Malone and Tonya Harding.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

As everywhere else we had been that day, the nail salon oozed an aesthetic of modern and trendy. Paintbox looked more like a hip clothing store than a nail salon, and it got increasingly crowded as young people headed in after work hours.

This wasn't Seamon's first time at Paintbox — she was here for nail studio's event to celebrate the launch of its newest line of nail polish.

Talking over manicures was not a traditional meeting setup for me, and Seamon said it's not normal for her either — she'll usually meet over drinks or lunch with brand representatives. Over the course of the nail appointment, Seamon and the PR reps chatted mostly about their personal lives, as well as upcoming ad campaigns Seamon would fit well into.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Despite the style-oriented Instagram presence, Mimosas & Manhattan does partnerships that extend way beyond clothing and fashion. Given the blog's name, it's not surprising that their biggest campaigns come from alcohol brands like Bacardi and Angry Orchard. They've also worked with brands like McDonald's, Equinox, and Head & Shoulders, for which they filmed social media ads in their biggest campaign to date.

This past weekend, Seamon and her boyfriend took a trip to the Catskills in a Jeep, thanks a partnership with the car company. They've also taken free trips to Bermuda and Jamaica, and are soon heading to Puerto Rico.

Seamon and the two PR reps each got gel manicures, which go for \$60 to \$75 at Paintbox. Fittingly, the manicurist asked to take a picture of Seamon's nails for the Painbox Instagram.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

We then headed over to the nearby Crosby Hotel, where beauty and fashion brand Jill Stuart was holding an event for influencers. The event space was, as expected, beautiful and colorful, with a stocked open bar, hors d'oeuvre brought around on silver platters, and stylists offering free makeovers (Seamon declined and said it would be wasted on her because she was just heading home).

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

We stuck around the event long enough to grab a drink and few bites to eat, as well as some videos and pictures of the makeup that Seamon planned to post later on her Instagram Story. Seamon said that this is the type of event she would usually skip, since there was no event with company reps or little benefit to her brand.

Paige Leskin/Business Insider

Seamon and I left the event and parted ways around 6 p.m. I finished the day with lots of quotes, lots of photos, and even a cameo on the @courtandkelly Instagram Story.

Seamon told me she hoped this story will help others take her job more seriously, since she still finds herself and other influencers having to prove themselves on a daily bases.

"Nobody gets what we do," Seamon said. "They just see the pictures. But people don't know all the work that went into it."



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