

IAB DISCLOSURE TOOLKIT 2026

By: IAB SA Influencer
Marketing Council



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WHY DISCLOSURE MATTERS

Transparency starts with all of us: brand, agency, and creator. Disclosure isn't just a checkbox, it's a shared responsibility, and one of the clearest ways we show respect for our audiences/ consumers. When disclosure is done well, it protects trust, strengthens credibility, and keeps influencer marketing effective for everyone. If disclosure is done poorly (or not at all), it puts creators, brands, and agencies at legal and reputational risk, and it accelerates the damage of trust in the entire creator ecosystem.

BRANDS & AGENCIES

One of the most important responsibilities is making sure disclosure is planned, clear, and consistent. Every piece of paid or incentivised content needs to make the partnership obvious to audiences, because trust is the real currency in this space.

It's not enough to leave disclosure up to creators. It should be built into your briefs, contracts, and approval processes. When creators are empowered to disclose in a way that feels authentic to their voice, and brands support that with clear expectations, we build a healthier, more honest influencer ecosystem.

CREATORS

For creators, the rule is simple: if you're being paid, gifted, or compensated in any way to post about a product or service, you need to say so. Even if it's a one-off post. Your followers deserve to know when content is advertising.

Not disclosing doesn't just create risk, it can jeopardise future earnings and long-term audience trust.

Done right, disclosure doesn't weaken content, it strengthens connection with your audiences and consumers. This guide offers practical tips on when and how to disclose clearly, so together we can build a more trusted and professional creator economy in South Africa.

Read the IAB South African Content Creator Charter for more guidance **HERE**.

WHAT THE RULES SAY

ARB, Appendix “K” – Social Media

DECLARATION OF GOODS EXCHANGES

To ensure full transparency publishers and influencers are required to disclose if they were provided (permanently or on loan) with goods or services in return for media coverage (whether this is expressly stated or not). This helps reinforce publisher or influencer integrity while clearly allowing the consumer to make an informed opinion of the applicable content, product or service.

IMPORTANT:

The ARB guidance requires that paid social media advertising is “obviously identifiable” and that a clear identifier is included within the post content so consumers can reasonably understand it is paid advertising.

Read the full ARB appendix “K” **HERE**

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HOW TO APPLY IT (WHEN TO DISCLOSE)

As a brand, agency, or creator, if there's any kind of partnership or exchange of value behind a piece of content, it needs to be disclosed clearly and in a way that audiences can notice without hunting for it. Here's what that looks like:

- If a creator is paid, gifted, or incentivised in any way to talk about a product or service, it must be disclosed, even if they weren't specifically asked to post.
- Value doesn't always mean money. Free products, discounts, event invites, or exclusive access also count. If there's a benefit, there should be a disclosure.
- Even if a creator genuinely loves the brand or feels their review is unbiased, disclosure is still required.
The audience must be able to see the full context.
- Don't assume followers "already know" about the partnership. Always make it explicit.
- Brand mentions through likes, tags, pins, or shares can also be seen as endorsements, so it's important to apply the same level of transparency.

ADDITIONAL "MATERIAL CONNECTION" EXAMPLES:

Employment or contractor relationships (including employee advocacy / staff content)

If you work for a company (or consult for them), and you post about that company, its products, or its campaigns, that relationship should be disclosed. Why? Because your employment/ contract may create a real or perceived benefit (salary, bonuses, KPIs, performance reviews, commissions, incentives, or career advantage).

WHAT TO DO:

- Check your company's employee advocacy or social media guidelines first (some organisations have specific wording, approval steps, or restrictions).
- Disclose clearly at the start of your post:
 - "I work at ..."
 - "Posting as part of my role at..."
 - "I consult for..."

If you're in marketing/sales or your role is linked to brand performance, be extra clear because the incentive is more direct.



FAMILY, PERSONAL, OR CLOSE BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

If the brand is owned by a family member, close friend, partner, or someone you do business with, disclose it.

Even if you weren't paid to post, that relationship can still create a material benefit (supporting their business, strengthening the relationship, reciprocal favours, future opportunities, or indirect financial gain).



INVESTOR/OWNERSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

(including shares, partnerships, profit share, or affiliate earnings) If you own the brand, co-own it, hold shares, earn commission, receive affiliate income, or benefit financially when sales increase, that's a material connection and must be disclosed.

This is one of the clearest examples of "material benefit" because your post can directly impact your income or valuation.

WHAT TO DO:

- Be simple and honest:
 - "My sister owns this business..."
 - "A close friend of mine runs this brand..."
- If you also received product/ discounts/invites, disclose that too (e.g., gifted, invited, hosted).
- This isn't about over-explaining, it's about giving audiences the context you already have.

WHAT TO DO:

- Disclose the relationship upfront:
 - "I'm a founder/ co-founder of ..."
 - "I'm an investor in..."
- If you're using affiliate links or discount codes, be explicit (don't hide it in small print or a hashtag list).

If your relationship to the brand could influence how you speak about it, disclose it. When in doubt, disclose. It adds trust, protects you, and helps audiences make informed decisions.

CHEAT SHEET: HOW TO GET IT RIGHT

Transparency isn't just a legal requirement, it's a trust builder. Whether you're a brand, agency, or content creator, here's how to make sure everyone is protected and consumers and audiences stay informed.

WHAT COUNTS AS A "MATERIAL CONNECTION"?

A material connection is any kind of relationship or benefit that could influence how a product or brand is portrayed in content.

This includes:

- Payment or compensation (cash, vouchers, fees)
- Free products or services (even if not requested to post)
- Discounts or exclusive access
- Employment or formal role with the brand (including internal staff advocacy)
- Family, close personal, or business relationships with the brand
- Investor/shareholding status or other financial interest
- Participation in a campaign, event, or trip sponsored by the brand

If there's something to gain, even if it's not financial, it must be disclosed.



WHEN SHOULD DISCLOSURE HAPPEN?

- Every time a creator posts content that involves a brand partnership, even if the post wasn't directly requested.
- When reposting branded content or repurposing influencer content on brand-owned channels.
- When there's any brand mention that stems from a benefit or relationship, even in a story, tag, or pinned post.
- When influencer content is reshared across different platforms or repackaged into other formats.

DON'T ASSUME, ALWAYS DISCLOSE

- Don't assume people already know about the partnership, spell it out.
- Don't assume it's "obvious" just because the product is gifted or the creator is a known ambassador.
- Don't assume that honesty in tone removes the need for disclosure. It doesn't.
- If there's no relationship, you don't need to state that. But when in doubt, rather disclose.



HOW TO MAKE IT CLEAR (THE PRACTICAL RULES)

USE SIMPLE, CLEAR LABELS

Audiences need to immediately know it's an ad. The clearest options are:

#Ad, #Advert, #Advertisement, #Sponsored, #PaidPartnership, #BrandPartnership

Build trust with your audience, and disclose it:

- ✓ Include the disclosure in your caption, but don't bury it in a long paragraph or at the end of hashtags.
- ✓ Use platform "Paid Partnership/Branded Content" tools where available, but don't rely on them alone if the label isn't obvious.
- ✓ Video / Stories / Lives: Add a clear on-screen label early without forcing it into the creator's hook.

Avoid confusing terms (not clear enough on their own) these don't clearly tell people it's an ad, and should be avoided as the only disclosure:

- ✗ "Thanks to [brand]"
- ✗ "Supported by"
- ✗ "PR" / "Spon" / "Aff" / "Partnered with"
- ✗ "Collab" / "MyEdit"
- ✗ Brand tags without context

NOTE: "In partnership with..." can be unclear unless it is paired with #Ad/#Sponsored/#PaidPartnership or a platform label.

If the audience has to guess, it's not clear enough.



PLATFORM-SPECIFIC TIPS



Use the "Paid partnership" tag and include disclosure in your caption (e.g., "Ad / Sponsored").



Use the "Paid Partnership" toggle where available, include "Ad/Sponsored" in on-screen text, and disclose in the caption.



Since X doesn't offer a branded content tool, write "Ad", "Sponsored", or "Paid Partnership" clearly at the beginning of your post.



Include disclosure in the post text, don't rely on small tags or notes.



Use text overlay that's easy to read and appears early in the story.



If you're promoting a brand/product due to payment, gifting, employment, or any benefit, disclose clearly at the start of the post (e.g., "Ad / Sponsored / Paid partnership / I work with...") and keep it visible before "see more." Be clear if you're an employee – see notes above.



Mention it in the video within a reasonable time and include it clearly in the description near the top. Use "includes paid promotion" where available.

USE IN-APP TOOLS (BUT DON'T RELY ON THEM ALONE)



Use the "Paid Partnership" tag and add a clear "Ad" label in your caption.



Use "Paid Partnership", say "Ad" in your video (or on-screen text), and write it in the caption.



Write "Ad/Sponsored/Paid Partnership" at the beginning of your post..



Use the Branded Content tool, and make sure your caption also includes "Ad" or similar.



Use text overlays that say "Ad" early in the story, clearly and visibly.



Disclose before "see more" and be clear about the nature of the relationship (paid/employed/ incentivised).



Use "includes paid promotion" and say "Ad/Sponsored" in your video and description.

Reminder:

Even if the platform provides a disclosure tool, it may not be enough if it's not visible, early, and obvious. When in doubt, add an extra "Ad" label to be safe.

EXAMPLES OF CLEAR DISCLOSURES

Use language that's easy to understand, your audience shouldn't have to guess. Place it at the start of your post, not buried in hashtags or hidden in a caption.

- ✓ "Ad: Paid partnership with [Brand]"
- ✓ "Sponsored by [Brand]"
- ✓ "Gifted by [Brand] Ad" (use "Ad/Sponsored" if there is an expectation of coverage)
- ✓ "I was invited by [Brand] (paid trip) Ad"
- ✓ "I work with [Brand] (employment/consulting) sharing this as part of my role"
- ✓ "I have a relationship with [Brand] (e.g., investor/affiliate/family) disclosure"

Note:

Disclosure isn't just the creator's job, brands and agencies have a shared responsibility. Include disclosure guidelines in briefs and contracts and only approve content that has proper disclosure in place.

KEEPING DISCLOSURE CLEAR DURING LIVE CAMPAIGNS

In fast-paced campaigns like live events or product launches, creators often post a lot in a short space of time. Done well, disclosure doesn't interrupt the story or content.

Update the bio or name: Creators can add a short line to their profile like: "Partnering with @IAB for #IABcreatorEvent today" to give quick context.

Start with a clear post: Kick-off the campaign with a post that says: "Ad: Partnering with @IAB to go behind the scenes at #IABcreatorEvent. All thoughts are my own."

"Pin it to the feed or use it as the first post in a thread."

First post in a thread: If using threads or multiple updates, the first post should clearly state the brand partnership. Everything after is then covered by that initial disclosure.

Keep it natural: Encourage creators to weave in the partnership in a real way, like: "Excited to be at #IABcreatorEvent with @IAB today!"

**LIVE
STREAM**

COMPLIANCE MATTERS: WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DON'T DISCLOSE

If we don't disclose, there are real consequences for both the creator and the brand or agency involved. In South Africa, influencer content that isn't clearly labelled as advertising can be flagged as misleading. If a complaint is submitted, the Advertising Regulatory Board (ARB) will investigate. This can result in admin burden, reputational damage, and financial costs.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES INCLUDE:

Public Warnings: Creators and brands can be listed on the ARB's non-compliant register, affecting future brand deals and public trust.

Content Removal & Corrections: You may be asked to delete content and issue corrections (admin and reputational impact).

Fines: The ARB may fine the brand or agency. In some cases, creators may request additional compensation to update/remove posts.

Platform Sanctions: Platforms may remove content, limit reach/features, or suspend accounts.

Loss of Partnership Opportunities: Brands may stop working with repeated non-compliant creators/agencies.



BUILDING DISCLOSURE INTO OUR SYSTEM

When disclosure is built into our systems, not added as an afterthought, it protects everyone: the creator, the brand, the agency, and most importantly, the audience. Disclosure isn't just about getting posts right. It's about building a culture of transparency across the entire infl uencer ecosystem. Here are practical ways to make implementation smoother:

STAFF TRAINING & ONBOARDING

Make sure anyone who touches influencer marketing, from client service to legal and production, understands what disclosure looks like and why it matters. A short training session during onboarding can go a long way.

CREATOR CONTRACTS & BRIEFS

Link to the IAB SA Content Creator Charter in your contracts and campaign briefs and make it clear that you expect all creators to follow these principles. Setting the tone early makes disclosure conversations easier later.

CLIENT EDUCATION & CONTENT REVIEWS

Clients are essential, share the guidelines, explain the "why," and shift reviews from "style" to "substance." Ask: Is the partnership obvious? Would a consumer understand it's paid/ gifted without hunting?

AGENCY SUPPLIER CONTRACTS

If you work with third-party influencer suppliers or platforms, ensure they're aligned on disclosure requirements. Shared standards lead to smoother collaboration and stronger trust.



FAQS

Q DO I ALWAYS HAVE TO DISCLOSE IF I GENUINELY LOVE THE PRODUCT?

A Yes, if there's a benefit/relationship behind the post, disclosure is still required.

Q DOES A GIFTED PRODUCT COUNT EVEN IF I WASN'T ASKED TO POST?

A Yes, gifting is a material connection and should be disclosed if you post about it.

Q DO I HAVE TO DISCLOSE IN THE VIDEO AS WELL AS THE CAPTION?

A If the format allows a caption, disclosure should be clear and upfront in the caption. If the format does not (or the audience is unlikely to see the caption), include an on-screen/audio disclosure within a reasonable time.

Q WHAT ABOUT EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY?

A If you work for the brand or benefit from promoting it (role/KPIs/incentives), disclose that relationship.

Q IF THERE'S NO RELATIONSHIP, SHOULD I SAY, "NOT SPONSORED"?

A Not required, but optional if it helps clarity. The key is to avoid confusing audiences.

