**Interviewee: Gina, 42 yo**

**Niche: Home Decor & DIY**

**Reach: 5.6 million followers (Instagram)**

**Q1. Please tell me a little about your work as a digital influencer, how it started, and how you have established yourself in your current niche.**

Oh, I'd totally love to dive into that! So, my journey as a digital influencer in home decor and DIY has been, like, quite the adventure. Contrary to what some might believe, my interest in architecture wasn't driven by my dad's influence. Sure, being Mark Staut’s daughter made me more aware of aesthetics and design, but to be fair, my dad never pressured me to pursue this field. In fact, he was actually quite resistant to the exposure and my career as a blogger; he preferred that I focus on my studies.

Well, it all kicked off a few years ago when I was, you know, knee-deep in a major room renovation at our family’s cozy Victorian house here in San Francisco, at Maple Street. My dad was involved in other projects abroad, and I wanted to do the makeover myself as a surprise. I was documenting everything on my personal blog and sharing tips and tricks. Back then, I had some help from my high school buddy Jenna Wills—she’s also pretty well-known on Instagram, though she’s more into culinary content. You should definitely check out her content; it’s amazing. Anyway, Jenna helped me get the blog up and running and figure out how to plan it since I had zero clue about those things. So basically, my blog was my way of staying motivated, like having milestones to hit for me and my readers.

Then one day, Jenna suggested I start an Instagram account to showcase the transformations and DIY projects I was working on. At first, it felt kinda daunting—I was really into the blog format and super comfortable with it. Starting a new platform was, like, totally outside my comfort zone and a bit intimidating. But I decided to give it a shot anyway. I began by posting before-and-after photos of rooms, detailing the steps I took to get those results, and even threw in a few short DIY videos featuring my cat, Whiskers, who always seemed to make a cameo. To my surprise, people started taking notice.

As my follower count grew, so did my commitment to creating high-quality, engaging content. I made sure to really delve into every aspect of home decor and DIY, from budget-friendly hacks to more elaborate design projects. I focused on finding a unique voice that resonated with people—one that was not only informative but also approachable and inspiring. I think one of the key things that helped me establish myself in this niche was my emphasis on authenticity. I made it a point to show both the successes and the inevitable challenges that come with DIY projects.

Another aspect that really helped was collaborating with other influencers and brands. Partnering with people who share similar passions allowed me to tap into their audiences and exchange ideas, which was incredibly enriching. I also engaged actively with my followers, listening to their feedback and incorporating their suggestions into my content. Building that community around my brand was essential.

Over time, my niche has evolved to include a wider range of topics—sustainable decor, small-space solutions, and even a bit of personal storytelling about how home projects impact my life and well-being, especially since moving into my new home in the charming town of Maplewood. It’s been amazing to see how this journey has grown from a simple passion project into a full-fledged career. I feel incredibly lucky to be able to share my love for home decor and DIY with so many people and to inspire others to create spaces they truly love.

So yeah, that’s a little peek into how it all started and how I’ve carved out my space in this vibrant, ever-evolving world of home decor and DIY!

**Q2. In what ways do you believe digital influencers shape consumer behavior? Could you share any examples?**

Oh, totally! There are a few things I’ve found work really well. For starters, I love doing honest reviews and demos. Like, when I was redoing my kitchen, I showed how a certain paint made a huge difference. I even talked about some hiccups I had, just to keep it real. I should say that my followers really appreciate when I’m upfront about stuff. For example, I reviewed this eco-friendly paint and showed the whole process—how it went on, how it held up. People seemed to trust my opinion more because I was genuine about it.

I try to mix in content that actually provides value. Like, I did a DIY series on creating a cozy reading nook and featured some cushions and throws I used. I made sure to show how they fit into the overall look and shared some tips. But there were times I tried to promote stuff just because it was trending, but it didn’t always fit with what I usually do. If it didn’t align with my style or my audience’s interests, it didn’t really take off. And of course…depending on my interaction with the brand or store goes, it can be hit or miss, and when they miss me…there is no turn back, and I spill the beans online, people need to know!

I recently had a rather frustrating experience with a store that I think is worth mentioning, just because it was such a letdown. The store in question is Home Haven, which, honestly, I initially thought would be a great place for unique decor items and DIY supplies. You know, it seemed like it had potential.

First off, the customer service was, well, less than stellar. I remember walking into the store and, despite wandering around for quite a while, I didn’t receive any help from the staff. It was kind of annoying. When I finally did ask for assistance, the responses I got were pretty dismissive, and it felt like the staff were more interested in chatting with each other than actually helping customers. It was just, you know, really frustrating.

The quality of some of their products was also, honestly, disappointing. I bought a set of shelving brackets that were advertised as high-quality, but after only a few weeks of use, they started to wobble and sag. I ended up having to replace them with items from a different store, which was just another hassle I didn’t need.

The returns process was yet another issue—long lines, confusing policies, and the staff seemed really disorganized. It was just a mess. And, to top it all off, the prices were often higher than other places I’ve shopped at, which made me wonder if they were even worth it. The overall selection seemed more focused on quantity rather than quality. There were plenty of items, but many felt like they were low-end or poorly made.

I was particularly let down by their paint section; the selection was limited, and the paints I tried didn’t live up to their claims, which led to uneven finishes and, frankly, more work for me.

Overall, while Home Haven might have some appealing items, my experience suggests that they could really use some improvements in customer service, product quality, and pricing. Anyways…I feel like I’m just rambling right now, and, I guess, complaining. I suppose I just needed to vent about it.

Also, I love engaging with my followers. For instance, when I did a DIY wall art project, I asked them to share their own creations and ask questions. It’s great because it makes the whole experience more interactive. There was a time when I wasn’t as quick to respond to comments and questions, and it felt like I was losing touch with my audience. Staying engaged and being responsive really makes a difference.

**Q3. What strategies would you say digital influencers typically use to increase sales of sponsored products and services? Which ones have you used? What worked and what did not work for you? Why?**

There are a few strategies that really work well, you know? For one, being honest in reviews and demos is key. For instance, when I recently showed off a smart light bulb, I went through its setup and how it looked in my home. People really appreciate that kind of transparency.

That approach has been pretty successful. You know, people like seeing how products actually perform in real life. For example, when I demonstrated some kitchen gadgets in action, it helped followers understand exactly what they were getting and definitely boosted their interest.

On the flip side, promoting products I wasn’t genuinely excited about didn’t go as well. Those reviews felt a bit forced and didn’t get much traction. If I’m not enthusiastic about something, it’s hard to make it feel authentic to my audience.

Creating useful content is another effective strategy. I once did a series on making the most of small spaces and featured products that fit those tips. It’s all about showing how these products can solve real problems or make life easier, you know? Mixing practical advice with product recommendations makes the content feel more like a helpful guide rather than just a sales pitch.

But there have been times when just listing products without giving much context or tips didn’t engage people effectively. It felt too much like an ad, and my audience prefers content that’s meaningful and practical.

Interacting with followers is also really important. I love chatting with them through comments or DMs. For example, during a DIY project, I asked them to share their own ideas or questions. This kind of engagement helps build a sense of community and makes people feel more invested.

When I’m actively engaging, my followers feel more connected and are more likely to trust my recommendations. A live Q&A about home decor, for instance, led to a lot more interest in the products I talked about.

Of course, there are challenges with staying engaged. There have been times when I wasn’t quick to respond to comments or questions, which made me realize how crucial it is to keep up with that. Consistent engagement is key to keeping followers connected.

Discounts and giveaways can also create a lot of excitement. I’ve teamed up with brands to offer exclusive deals or run giveaways, like one for throw pillows that really got people buzzing. But if there are too many promotions or giveaways, it can start to feel overwhelming. Finding the right balance between these and genuine content helps keep interest and excitement high.

**Q4. What do you see as key ethical responsibilities of digital influencers? In your opinion, how should these ethics apply to endorsements and recommendations? Are there any personal examples you could share?**

Yeah, that is a very good question! The biggest thing is honesty and transparency. For instance, I always make sure to let my followers know when a post is sponsored or if I’ve received a product for free. It’s all about being upfront so people know what’s genuine and what’s part of a partnership.

There was a time I worked with a brand on a home decor line. I was excited about it, but I made it clear that it was a sponsored post. My followers appreciated the transparency and it helped maintain their trust.

Authenticity is also key for me. I only promote products that I genuinely like and would use myself. For example, if I’m recommending a specific brand of paint, it’s because I’ve used it and seen real results. If it’s not something I’d use or recommend to a friend, it doesn’t make it to my feed.

I once had an opportunity to promote a product that didn’t quite fit with my usual style or content. I decided to pass on it because it wouldn’t have felt right or genuine. My followers would’ve seen through it, and I didn’t want to risk their trust.

Being responsible to my audience means making sure the content I put out is accurate and useful. Like when I reviewed a new cleaning product, I shared both the pros and cons because it didn’t work as well as advertised. My followers valued that honest feedback.

I also make sure to respect privacy and handle data carefully. I’m cautious about sharing personal information and choose tools and platforms that manage user data responsibly. If a tool has questionable privacy practices, I avoid using it.

A good example is when I was choosing a new platform for managing my email list. I found one that seemed great, but when I read their privacy policy, I realized they had some practices that didn’t sit right with me.

They were collecting more data than necessary and didn’t provide clear options for opting out. I decided to go with a different platform that had stronger privacy controls and more transparent policies.

It’s important to me that my followers’ data is protected and handled responsibly. I don’t want to be associated with any service that doesn’t prioritize data security. So, I always do my homework and choose tools that align with my values with respect to privacy.

So, you know, keeping everything transparent and genuine is crucial for building my digital community and maintaining trust with my viewers.