

Freebies won't bribe most bloggers into positive reviews

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Bloggers may accept compensation and free products for reviews, but freebies do not necessarily lead to positive endorsements, according to a group of researchers.

In a study, most technology [bloggers](#) who have accepted [compensation](#), including free products, for reviews actually reported that they feel more empowered in their relationships with companies that pitched them products, rather than feeling indebted to them.

"We were concerned with how accepting compensation or products impacted how control mutuality—where both groups feel that they are winning from the relationship—was experienced by organizations and bloggers," said Marcia DiStaso, associate professor of [public relations](#), Penn State. "What we found is that we don't have an off-balance relationship, in fact, we actually found that the bloggers who accepted compensation tended to believe they have more control over the organization that provided the compensation."

The Federal Trade Commission revised product endorsement guidelines to cover online media in 2009. Since then, the commission requires blogs and social media outlets to disclose any compensation they might have received for online reviews and endorsements.

"Of course, the idea behind this is that if someone is paying you, or someone is giving you a really cool product, you may be more likely to write more positively about product," said DiStaso.

According to the researchers, who report their findings in a recent issue of the *Journal of Communication Management*, the new guidelines have not changed how bloggers acknowledge compensation. In fact, only 11 percent of the bloggers reported they made changes to conform to the FTC rules because many simply never reported accepting compensation.

"We found that a lot of bloggers don't think they are in the role of influencers, but they clearly are influencers," said DiStaso, who worked with Denise Bortree, associate professor of advertising and public relations, Penn State and Justin Walden, professor of communications, North Dakota State University.

Despite the lack of action on the guidelines, bloggers indicate they approach public relations representatives as sources for their stories, not as potential sources of income, DiStaso added. Likewise, public relations professionals appear to approach the relationship with bloggers as a way to get the word out about their products and services, not as a form of advertising.

"The bloggers want to write a review about a product and you can't do a review without the product," said DiStaso. "At some point there has to be a balancing of needs."

Bloggers also recognize that writing positive reviews for bad [products](#) would hurt their credibility with their followers and that might hurt their readership. Ethical public relations professionals would not enter into that type of agreement, according to DiStaso.

"Asking for a positive review for compensation would kill a relationship with a blogger," said DiStaso. "No one benefits when a relationship is entered into with the expectations of a positive review." The researchers sent a questionnaire to 173 technology bloggers, as identified by Technorati, one of the largest blog directories. Technology bloggers tend

to receive more compensation and review items than other bloggers.

"Of course, bloggers might receive a new iPhone, or whatever latest tool or product that's out there, and that's why they are writing about it," said DiStaso. "Technology is the most common area where this happens and that's why we looked at technology bloggers."

According to the researchers, 143 of the bloggers reported writing product reviews and 71 said they produced video [reviews](#).

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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