

A new app pays you for product recommendations

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Don't try to make money off my online behavior—unless, of course, I get a commission.

That's the idea behind San Diego tech startup Wildfire Systems, which launched an app Wednesday to help internet users make money from of conversations they're already having online. The company, founded by a former eBay executive, lets users earn commissions from recommendations they share on the internet, whether it's on social media, by email or through text messaging apps.

If, for example, a friend buys an Instant Pot after you raved about the pressure cooker on Instagram, the software would let you get a cut of the sale.

The idea is particularly timely considering the public outcry against tech giants like Facebook, which have been lambasted in recent months for making money off their users' activity and personal data.

Now, merchants are tripping over themselves to sign onto Wildfire's platform, which already has 20,000 retailers on board, including Expedia, Nordstrom's, REI and Walmart.

Wildfire CEO Jordan Glazier's new app, Wildlink, brings to mind the marketing tactics that bloggers use, in which they get kickbacks from brands for pitching products online.

In the industry, that is called "affiliate marketing," and it's a tool mostly used by people who have large followings on social media (collectively known as "influencers"). But it's not so easy to make money this way. People have to sign up for individual affiliate marketing programs depending on the brand or retailer and then jump through hoops for each one before they can start earning cash.

Glazier said it shouldn't be so hard to make money from your recommendations. And you shouldn't have to be internet-famous to get paid when you directly encourage a sale, he said.

"You don't have to be an influencer to have influence," Glazier said.

Warning bells may be ringing for the privacy-conscious. Will Wildfire now be reading my text messages, emails, and [social media](#) posts? Glazier says no. The software runs on your device, and it's only searching for brands that match with its database of merchants. And the user always has the option of generating a link or ignoring the software's suggestion.

But Wildfire may have to deal with other concerns. For example, will a friend's recommendation lose its power of influence if it's known that they're making a commission off the recommendation?

Miro Copic, a marketing professor at San Diego State University, says there's a big transition going on in the influencer space in which fans want transparency from the influencers they follow about their [economic incentives](#). Fans and followers want those individuals to be transparent about the economic incentives they're getting to pitch a product.

"The nuance here is disclosure," Copic said. "Not that your friend won't be your friend anymore, but they might question your motives if they find out you're being compensated for your suggestions."

Malcolm Bohm, CEO at a company called Liquid Grids in San Diego, has been working in a similar space for years. His company also uses [natural language processing](#) to understand what [internet users](#) are saying on health forums, and how it relates to brands.

Bohm says Wildfire could be on to something big, but it's critical that they maintain transparency along the way

"At the grass-roots level, this could be disruptive in terms of how brands get recommendations," Bohm said. "As long as they maintain authenticity, it could be really positive."

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