

A full-page photograph of a woman with long brown hair, smiling and holding a small, scruffy tan dog. She is wearing a black long-sleeved top under a black and white checkered tweed dress, black tights, and black loafers. In the foreground, there are three pieces of vintage luggage: a brown leather suitcase, a smaller brown suitcase, and a large brown Louis Vuitton monogram bag with tan leather straps. A brown patterned umbrella with a wooden handle leans against the luggage. The background shows a train station platform with a stone wall and black lampposts.

Lauren Trzaska at the Barrington train station. Minnie is along for the journey courtesy of Tiffany Marshall. Props by Linda M. Barrett Photography.



Photos from Lauren Trzaska's @thelovelyltdown Instagram page.

The AGE of INFLUENCERS

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER LAUREN TRZASKA BRINGS HER FASHION AND MARKETING EXPERIENCE FROM NEW YORK CITY AND CHICAGO TO HER HOMETOWN

By [Lisa Stamos](#) | Photography by [Linda M. Barrett](#)
Ice House Mall location courtesy of [Eleanor and Jim Nelson](#)

Influencers have been around forever, displaying their unique take on personal style, approach, conquests, and attitudes for others to observe. Platforms for influencers started 73,000 years ago with rocky inner cave walls. Fast forward to modern times, and platforms were still limited to in-person audiences, television, print media, and movies—all which have controlled and somewhat finite distribution channels. And then came the internet and social media.

The first social media to reach a million monthly active users was MySpace, in 2004. By September 2016 with the launch of TikTok, a short-form video sharing app, its audience gathered half a billion users by 2018. Today, the app has 800 million followers. Facebook has 1.82 billion daily active users, and Instagram, one billion. In virtually limitless social cyberspace, how does one person make an impression? We found a local influencer to help answer that question.



All aboard! Lauren Trzaska poses by the iconic Chessie's train car inside the Ice House Mall in downtown Barrington.

“ ALWAYS STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF AND YOUR DREAMS. IF YOU CAN'T FIND YOUR DREAM JOB, YOU MIGHT JUST HAVE TO CREATE IT. ”

Q & A

LAUREN DECRAENE TRZASKA'S FAMILY moved to Barrington when she was 2. A Barrington High School alumna, Lauren has lived here except for her four years at Indiana University and five years in Chicago for work. Today, she combines her career experience, a love of fashion, and well-honed marketing smarts to build her social media influence (reaching 16,000 followers) and to help others who want to grow their brand and presence online. We caught up with Lauren before the holidays to learn more.

What were your family values growing up?

My parents have always instilled in me something my Grandpa said, “Impress your family first”. This is the biggest guiding principle throughout my life—that above all your family will always be there to support you and want the best for you, so do what they would be proud of. Values that fell under that mindset were to never give up, working hard for the things you want, being kind to others, learning from mistakes, having a sense of humor, showing up for others, and having a positive mindset. Every day when we left for school my mom would say, “Make it a great day!”

What was your first passion?

I've loved fashion since I could dress myself. My go-to outfit was a dress with ruffle socks, patent leather shoes, and a bow in my hair. My earliest memory of picking out outfits is when I was 5. I had a huge box of bows under my bed and I remember dragging it out every morning to find the perfect bow for my outfit, making sure it matched.

As I started to get older, I found that I loved writing. I was incredibly shy until I was about 16, so writing was the easiest way to express myself. I used to leave little notes for my parents and sisters on their beds, and I always did well on papers in school. I remember writing a paper about my Grandparents and realizing that I loved to tell stories and write. In high school, I was on the yearbook committee my senior year.

Where did you head after high school?

I have a Bachelor of Science degree from Indiana University–Bloomington with a Major in Journalism specializing in Public Relations, and a Minor in Apparel Merchandising. I studied abroad in Florence,

Italy for four months where I took a class on the History of Italian Fashion and a class on Visual Merchandising. I also took a Pairing Food & Wine class which is when my love for cooking and wine began.

Where did you intern in New York City and Chicago?

I interned in the marketing departments for Isaac Mizrahi, Teen Vogue, & Skoog Productions in Chicago. I conducted research for events and initiatives and tracked PR efforts at these internships. A few notable things I did included organizing the Isaac Mizrahi archives closet, and I wrote a blog for the company's website.

What were your take-aways from working in NYC and Chicago?

Always stay true to yourself and your dreams. If you can't find your dream job, you might just have to create it. My internships in New York were incredible experiences and I learned so much about the working world, the fashion and PR industries, and myself. Looking back, I'm proud of myself for having the guts to take those opportunities and follow my dreams with the help and support of my family and my Aunt Jody who have been amazing cheerleaders.

In Chicago, I learned that I have a strong intuition and started to trust my gut and look deep inside myself when I found myself asking "what's next?" I started to put that "never give up" mentality into play then and to this day.

I still wake up every day with new challenges and frustrations, things I want to change and different directions I want to go. It's important to continue fine-tuning your purpose and passions, but also make time to be content and happy with where you're at and how far you've come. Finding that balance is so important.

How did your career progress after college?

My first job out of college was at Skirt Public Relations. I worked as an account executive for a variety of fashion and lifestyle clients, managing up to seven regional and national accounts at one time. I managed partnerships, events and collaborations for clients such as Rent the Runway, Birchbox, Journelle, Westfield Malls, LaCroix, Peruvian Connection, and more. I then moved on to be part of the in-house marketing team for Starwood Retail

Partners that conceptualized and executed marketing campaigns at 28 regional malls across the country, including The Arboretum of South Barrington. I helped coordinate everything from digital marketing campaigns to seasonal initiatives and long-term programs at each property. Most recently, Willis Tower was in the midst of a \$500 million redevelopment and I was part of the marketing team that led the redevelopment and branding strategy for the new Willis Tower.

When did social media become part of your life?

With Instagram, I thought it was just an app to edit photos, which shows how far it has come. I remember starting to use it when I was interning at Isaac Mizrahi in New York to share what I was doing with my family back at home in Chicago.

What is a social media influencer, versus someone who just does a lot of social media?

The lines have blurred a lot. Just because you don't consider yourself an influencer doesn't mean you don't have an influence through social media. There are plenty of people on social media who do not consider themselves influencers that inspire me about new products and trends.

Technically speaking though, an influencer is someone who focuses on sharing their knowledge, expertise, or passion within in a specific niche to educate, inform, and inspire others. For me, there are a variety of ways I work with brands. Most of what is shared on my blog and Instagram can be shopped via my personalized links that give me a 5-20% commission on the sale. I also partner with brands that will send me products to try, and in

return I will share my thoughts or how I would style an item online. In these cases, the items are gifted to me and sometimes I make additional compensation for sharing. I always disclose this to my followers and offer my honest opinions!

What compelled you to become a social media influencer?

In my early career I worked with a lot of influencers, and fashion and lifestyle brands which helped to channel my love for fashion and gave me a



Lauren Trzaska sits in the dining car at Chessie's Restaurant in the Ice House Mall. Old Country Roses Royal Albert china, antique journal, and gold compact courtesy of Paris Market Antiques at the Ice House Mall.

creative outlet. Eventually I moved over to the commercial real estate world to work at Willis Tower. While it was an incredible opportunity and it offered a new kind of creative outlet, the fashion aspect that I've always loved was missing from my life, so I started a blog!

I was also already spending pretty much all my free time shopping online, reading about trends, and discovering new brands, so I figured why not create something with all that information and share it with others. I never set out to make it a full-time career. In fact, after giving it a shot as a full-time job for six months I realized that I prefer it as a hobby instead of a career.

Do you see positive or negative trends in social media influencing today?

It might just be who I've chosen to follow (and unfollow) but I do feel like the overly staged content is starting to fade and you're starting to see a little more of everyday life, but there's still a long way to go on that. It's the direction I hope to take my Instagram in the New Year.

The thing that concerns me is that some influencers have started to talk about topics they aren't trained in, or experts on (health and wellness, diet trends and products, mental health, etc.) and it can be harmful in many ways. It's important to be careful what advice or information you're taking from social influencers and media. Do your own research, talk to qualified professionals, and form your own opinions, values, and views.

Are there influencers who you admire? Why?

Mary Hafner (@maryahafner): She has a more down-to-earth

approach to social media that I appreciate and admire. I also love her sense of style. She has great taste and finds really unique things from fashion to home décor that I don't see everyone else posting.

Caitlin Fisher (@Caitlingeierfisher): I love her blog and discover so many pretty small shops and brands through her. She also has impeccable taste not just in fashion but also in home décor, entertaining and lifestyle in general.

Olivia Palermo (@oliviapalermo): She is not really an influencer, but more of a celebrity. She has the most amazing wardrobe and I love everything

she wears. I appreciate that she mixes a lot of high and low pieces. For example, she'll wear Zara with Oscar de la Renta.

How would you describe your influencer vibe and image?

I went from being a single girl in the city to a married woman in the suburbs, so it's changed a lot over time. I started as purely a fashion blogger and focused on a lot of fun clothes that you could wear to work or out for a night in the city. As my life has changed, I've found a lot of new interests and am working on shifting my blog to focus more on lifestyle content and

home décor. My fashion content now focuses more on casual style and investment pieces. My style is classic and feminine but approachable, and I love adding a fun, eclectic twist every once in a while!

Where does social media influencing go from here?

One of the most interesting quotes I recently heard is "Brands want to be more like people and people want to be more like brands" (Jamie O'Banion of Beauty Bio) and it's the basis of what's happening now. Brands are trying to be more human, and more emotional. Influencers are trying to establish their personal "brand" that their followers can identify with and they both kind of feed off each other. Companies rely on influencers to personify their brand for them and influencers build their "brands" based on the companies they associate with and what that says about who they are and what they stand for.

What are the dangers of social media influencers who create negative images for girls and young women?

This is such an important topic and one that continues to evolve and develop. I'm conflicted by it everyday as both an influencer and as a consumer of social media. Of course, there are the blaring dangers like body image, not feeling like you're enough, or that you don't measure up and the mental damage that comparing your life to others can cause. Based on my experience of being on both sides of the equation there are a few things that I'd like to remind young women of.

You are never getting the full story: No matter how real or open someone might seem on social media you are never getting the full story of what



Where will 2021 take us? Lauren Trzaska looks out through the dining car at Chessie's Restaurant.

is happening behind the scenes. Social media is not 100% real life and it never will be. It doesn't mean you can't enjoy social media though; you just have to remind yourself you're only getting a small fraction of the big picture.

Don't let social media influence every aspect of your life: These days with the constant social media comparison, it's easy to make decisions based on what you see other people doing. You can't let social media have an influence on the big things in life. It's great for finding a new recipe, learning a fun DIY activity, discovering a new brand, or getting fashion or home decor inspiration, but beyond that you can't look to social media for answers. I've found that when I'm making important decisions in my life, I turn social media off for a while to find clarity.

Do your own research: Back to the point I made regarding negative trends on social media. Just be careful about who you're taking what kind of advice from and do your own research on things that people are promoting, especially when things are sponsored.

Tell us about turning your influencer skills into a marketing business?

Being an influencer has taught me so much about consumers and the public. I love looking at my own analytics and trying to understand why people connect with some things more than others. I do a lot of research and have sought out information to better understand the social media and influencer world. I learn something new every day.

I taught myself everything when I started my blog from learning how to edit a website to graphic design and social media strategy. I used some of the things in my job at Willis Tower and vice versa, so the combination of the two set me up with a lot of knowledge and skills to help businesses with branding and social media.

What do you hope to accomplish with your marketing business?

I want to help small businesses elevate their brand by giving them the tools to maintain a consistent marketing strategy in-house. I know how costly marketing and branding can be and want to offer support to smaller businesses who don't have the means to hire a huge agency. In the long term, it would be cool to start a nonprofit that offers marketing support to philanthropic organizations.

What is your top brand rule?

Consistency! Your brand needs to be consistent from the look and feel to the tone of voice and messaging. You also need to show up consistently for your



Lauren Trzaska hops aboard the iconic Chessie's train car at the Ice House Mall.

customers. If you have a blog or Instagram, have a consistent schedule for when and how often you post.

What dreams do you hold dear?

My ultimate dream would be to launch my own handbag line. Now is not the time, but I have an inspiration board where I keep ideas and hope someday that I can bring that board to life. U

Follow Lauren Trzaska on social media @thelovelylodon, and thelovelylodon.com as well as on Facebook and Pinterest. She may also be reached at laurenmtrzaska@gmail.com.