

Creator Impact Report



Executive Summary

**INFLUENCER MARKETING HAS
REACHED A TURNING POINT.**

For more than a decade, brands have invested in creator partnerships primarily for awareness and reach. But consumer behavior suggests something more significant is happening. Creator recommendations increasingly drive real purchasing decisions, shaping not only what audiences discover but what they ultimately buy.

This report analyzes the relationship between creator influence and consumer action using two data sources: a 1,050-person U.S. consumer survey conducted by Statista and an independent survey of 539 creators conducted by NeoReach.

The findings reveal a consistent pattern: creator marketing performs best when campaigns are structured around authenticity, repeated exposure, and strong alignment between creators and brands.

Understanding these dynamics is critical for brands seeking measurable returns from influencer marketing.

Executive Summary

55% of U.S. consumers have been influenced to take a real world action

Influencer marketing has crossed the threshold from awareness to action, but how do creators actually drive this behavior? It's a combination of which creators, what formats, and with what frequency.

45% of consumers buy at least one item per month based on creator recommendations.

Gen Z does so at a 69% rate, vs. 50% for Millennials and 24% for Gen X.

Creator-driven purchasing decisions are a monthly habit for almost half of consumers and the vast majority of Gen Z. Brands that haven't cracked the code on influencer marketing are leaving recurring revenue on the table.

AUTHENTICITY > PRODUCTION VALUE

The top ad styles that drive purchase intent:

31% authentic and relatable

30% shows how the product works

29% solves a specific problem

The trust that creators instill in their audiences by being authentic and true to themselves is why they drive higher action rates. **Over-produced, scripted ads underperform.** When brands give creators the freedom to show how a product fits their real life, it converts because their audience trusts them. **Investing more in creator selection and alignment** will help brands drive higher revenue and recoup their influencer budget.

Executive Summary

59%

of consumers said they would purchase based on a creator recommendation

22%

converted within a day of seeing the initial recommendation.

Posts that convert at a higher rate promote a deficit that consumers would fall into without buying quickly, for example, discount codes that only work for a limited time, and sales prices ending. It's important to reduce friction and capture intent quickly.

2-3

Most consumers need to see a product at least 2-3 times before buying. One-off activations do not drive the repetition required to convert.

One-off posts and campaigns are structurally inefficient. Brands that run always-on creator programs see better results due to multiple touch points. This allows creators to organically integrate the product over time as opposed to forcing it into a single piece of content.

So, do creators drive real, measurable action? Yes, more than most brands think.

Where should influencer budgets actually go? Towards creators that align with the brand and its values.

How can your influencer strategy be improved? Speed-to-purchase is real. Ensure your campaign gets consumers to buy now rather than later.

Methodology

THIS REPORT DRAWS ON TWO PRIMARY DATA SOURCES:

A 1,050-person U.S. consumer survey conducted by Statista and a 539-creator independent survey conducted by NeoReach.

Statista's Consumer Survey

The consumer data in this report survey was sourced in January of 2026 and includes responses from 1,050 U.S. adults distributed across four generations:

Gen Z
18-27

315

Millennials
28-43

350

Gen X
44-59

315

Baby Boomers
60-78

70

The consumer survey covered 10 questions across four themes:

- Creator influence and action-taking
- Purchase behavior
- Content discovery and platform usage
- Ad receptivity and conversion preferences

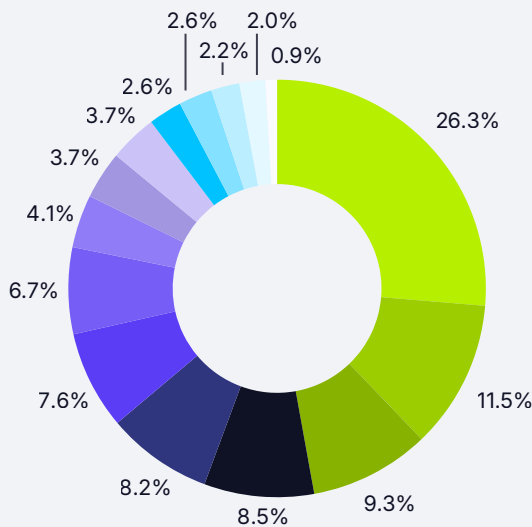
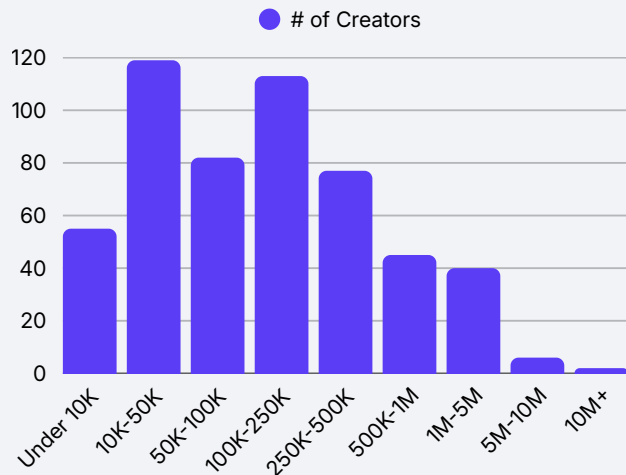
Questions used both single-pick and multi-pick formats. Multi-pick questions allow respondents to select more than one answer, meaning response rates across options may exceed 100%.

NeoReach's Creator Survey

The creator-facing data was collected through an independent survey administered by NeoReach between January 21 and March 2, 2026. A total of 539 creators responded across a range of platform types, follower sizes, and content niches.

THE SURVEY COVERED:

- Platform distribution
- Income composition from brand deals
- Factors that drive partnership decisions
- What support creators need from brands to produce better content
- What brands most commonly misunderstand about the creator-brand relationship

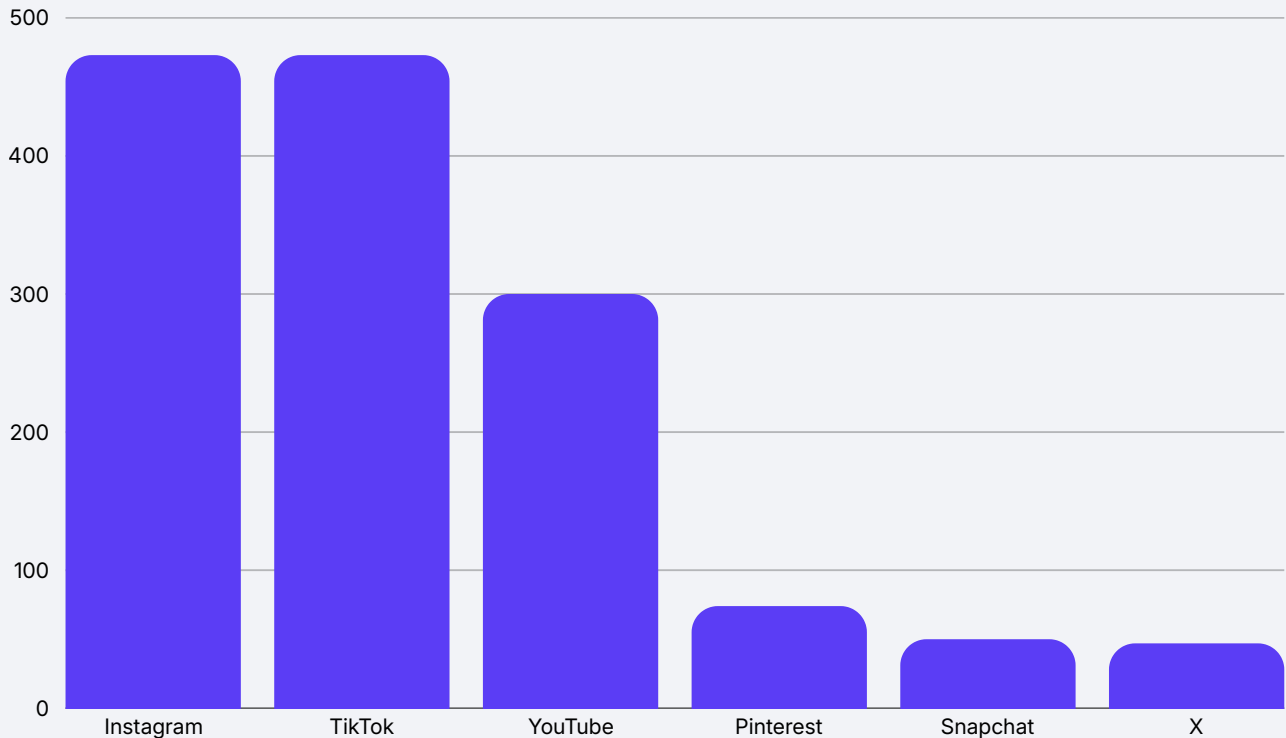


CREATOR SAMPLE BY CONTENT NICHE



NeoReach's Creator Survey

CREATOR SAMPLE BY PLATFORM



Note: this was a multi-pick question. Respondents could select multiple actions.

THE SURVEY COVERED:

- Platform distribution
- Income composition from brand deals
- Factors that drive partnership decisions
- The support creators need from brands to produce better content
- Brands' most common misunderstanding about the creator-brand relationship

Note: Creator survey data is directional. Aggregated response patterns are referenced throughout this report where they meaningfully contextualize the consumer findings.



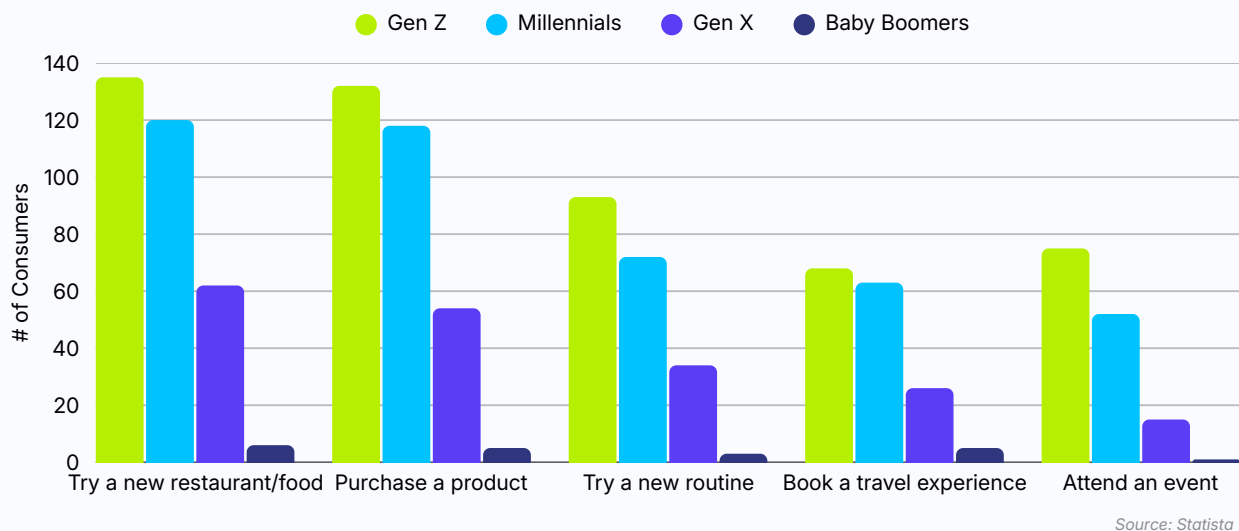
Encounters That Convert

As the creator economy continues to evolve, understanding the landscape of creator-consumer engagement is paramount. Learn about how:

- Consumers encounter creators
- What they do due to those encounters
- How these behaviors vary by generation

55% of Consumers Have Been Influenced to Take a Real-World Action

When asked what actions consumers have been influenced to take, 55% of respondents selected at least one option. Among those who were influenced, the top actions were:



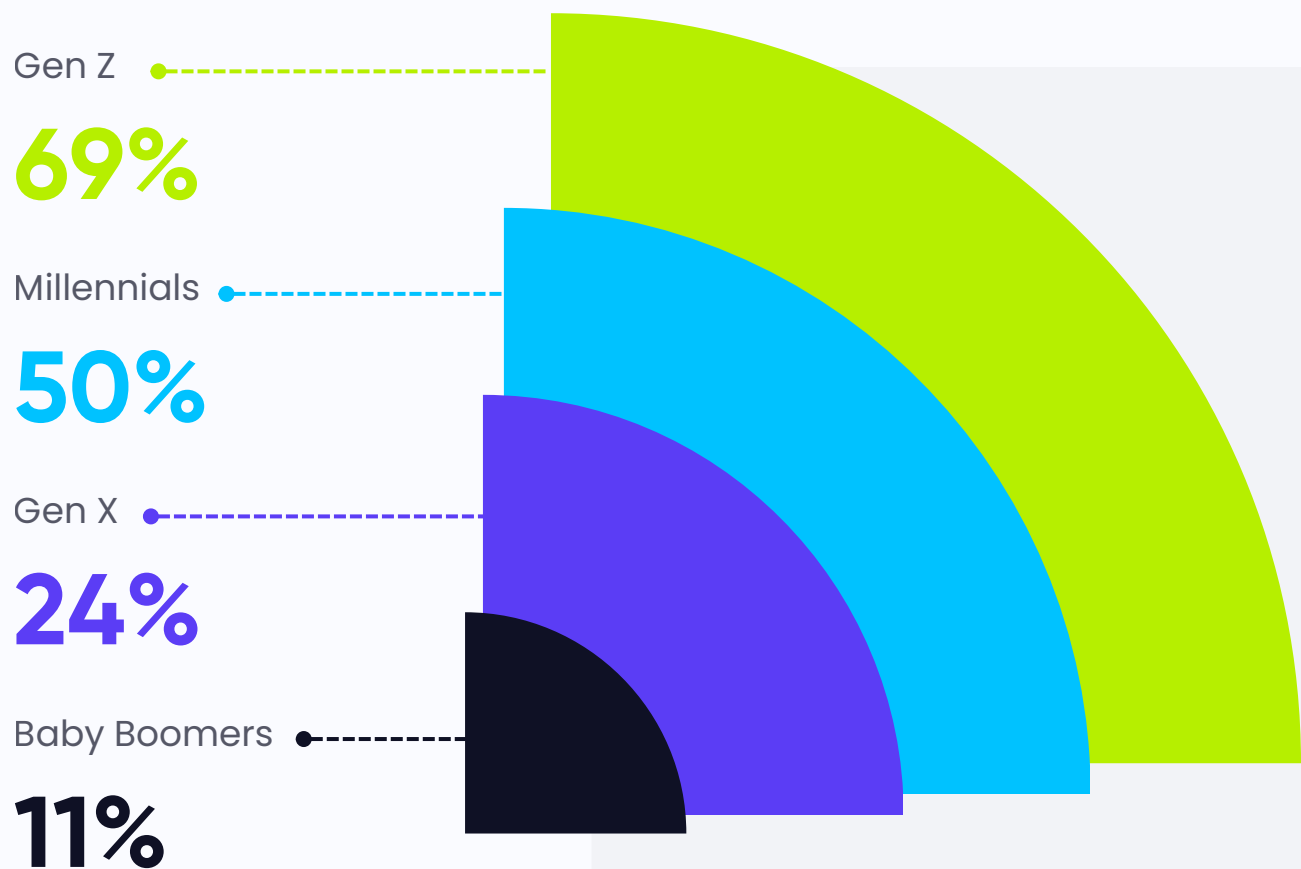
This data shows that creator influence clearly goes beyond e-commerce. Creators are making a meaningful impact on their audiences' lifestyles.

31%

of all respondents tried a new restaurant or food item based on a creator's recommendation, making it the number one influenced behavior.

The Generational Gap

The data reveals a sharp generational divide in creator receptivity. Gen Z and Millennials are highly engaged with creator content and convert at higher rates, while Gen X and Baby Boomers are more resistant.

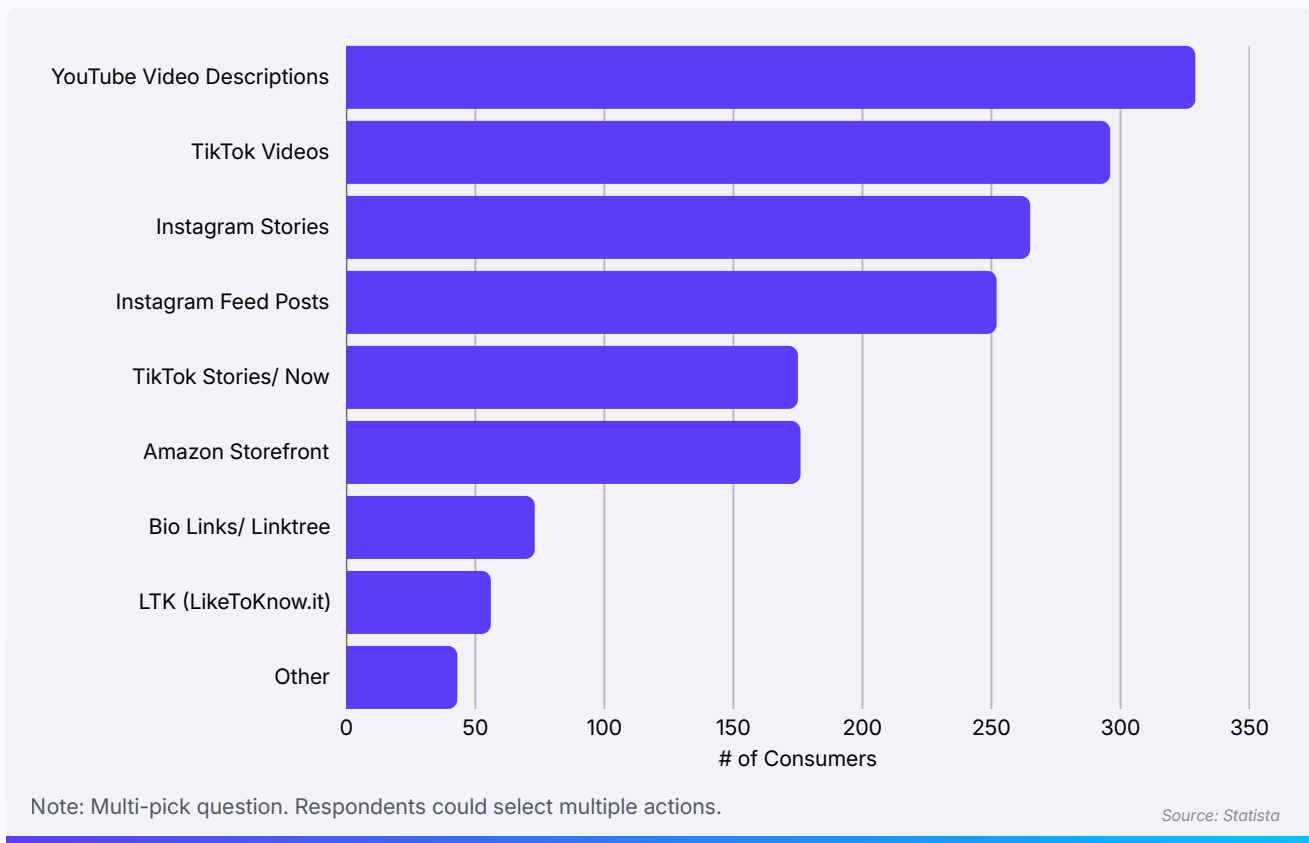


Brands targeting Gen Z and Millennials should use creator marketing as the primary driver of commerce; it clearly is.

Brands targeting older demographics should ensure their products remain relevant for awareness; however, to convert, they may need different calls-to-action and conversion mechanics.

Where Consumers Discover Creator-Recommended Products

Consumers were asked where they typically find products recommended by creators. They identified the following platforms and formats:



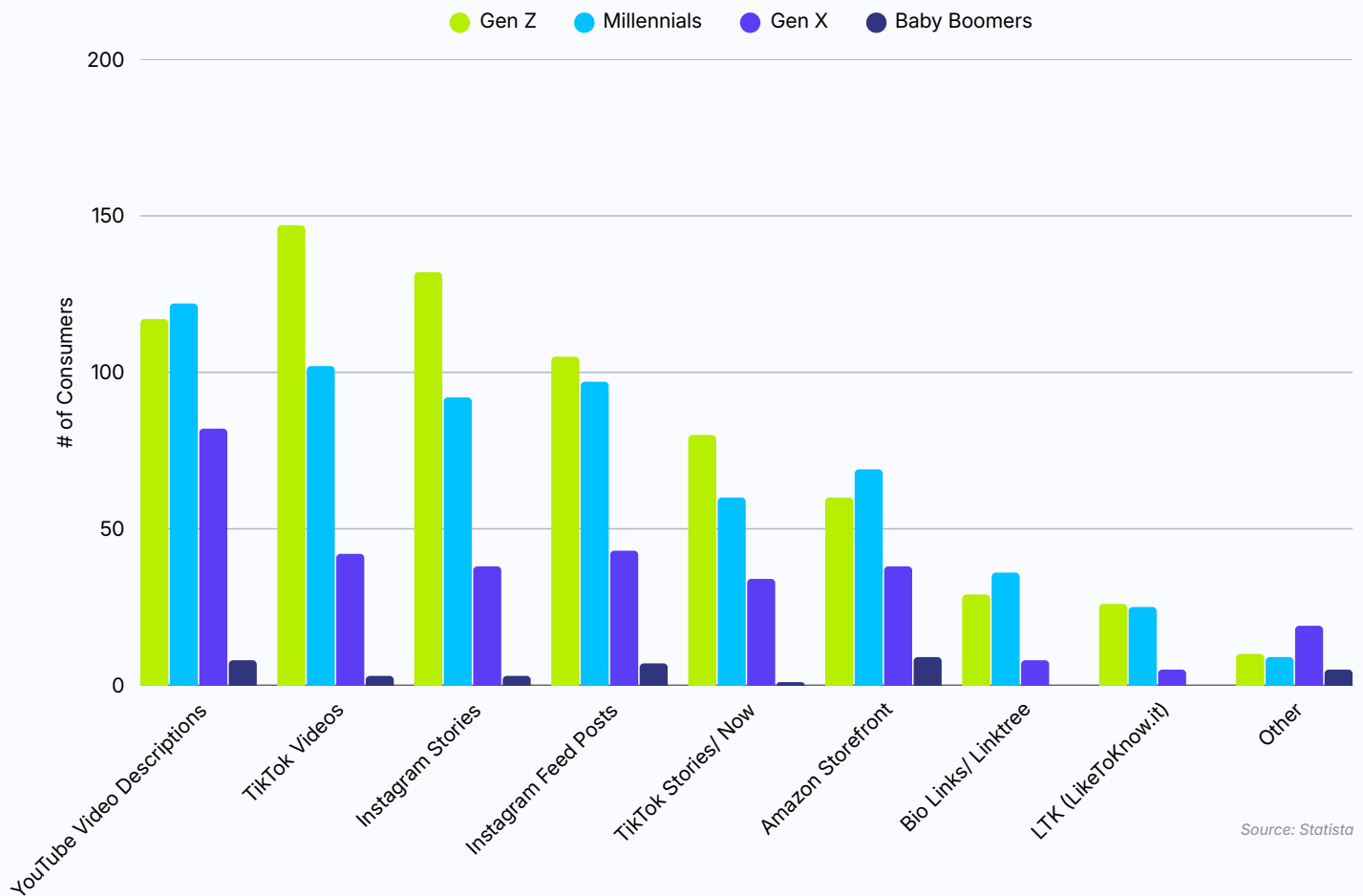
YouTube leads as the top discovery platform thanks to its detailed video content and clickable description links. TikTok and Instagram are close behind. The presence of Amazon Storefronts and various link-in-bio tools confirms that off-platform commerce is prevalent in the creator conversion funnel.

Brands should ensure creators have shoppable links, curated storefronts, and trackable codes active across all platforms. Discovery is multi-platform, and so should your conversion infrastructure.

Now, let's take a deeper look at platform use across the different generations.

The Generational Gap

NOTE: MULTI-PICK



DISCOVERY BEHAVIOR SHIFTS DRAMATICALLY ACROSS GENERATIONS.

Gen Z relies heavily on social discovery, particularly TikTok videos (47%) and Instagram Stories (42%). Millennials show a more balanced discovery pattern across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

Older demographics rely less on creator-driven discovery overall. Nearly half of Gen X consumers (47%) and two-thirds of Baby Boomers (67%) report discovering products through none of these creator channels.

This highlights the growing importance of creator marketing for brands targeting younger audiences.

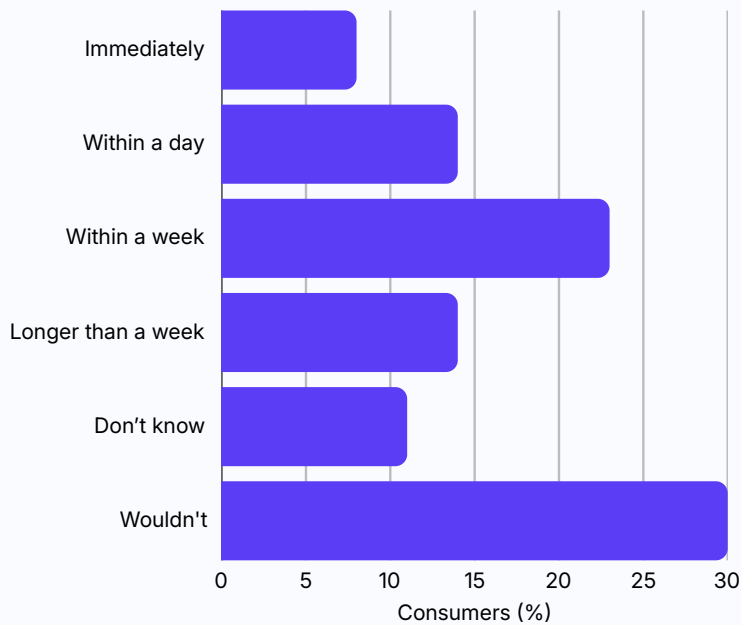
Driving Conversions:

FROM INFLUENCE TO ACTION

The core question that this report answers is whether creator influence translates to commercial outcomes. The data confirms that, yes, it does.

59% of Consumers Would Buy Based on a Creator Recommendation

When asked how soon after a recommendation consumers would make a purchase, 59% of respondents confidently indicated that they would by selecting one of the following timeframes:



A large majority of consumers indicated that they would make a purchase based on a creator recommendation, showing a 29% gap between those who would and those who would not.

A combined 22% convert within a day or immediately, underscoring the importance of ease of purchase at the moment of discovery.

59%

of consumers would purchase from a creator recommendation

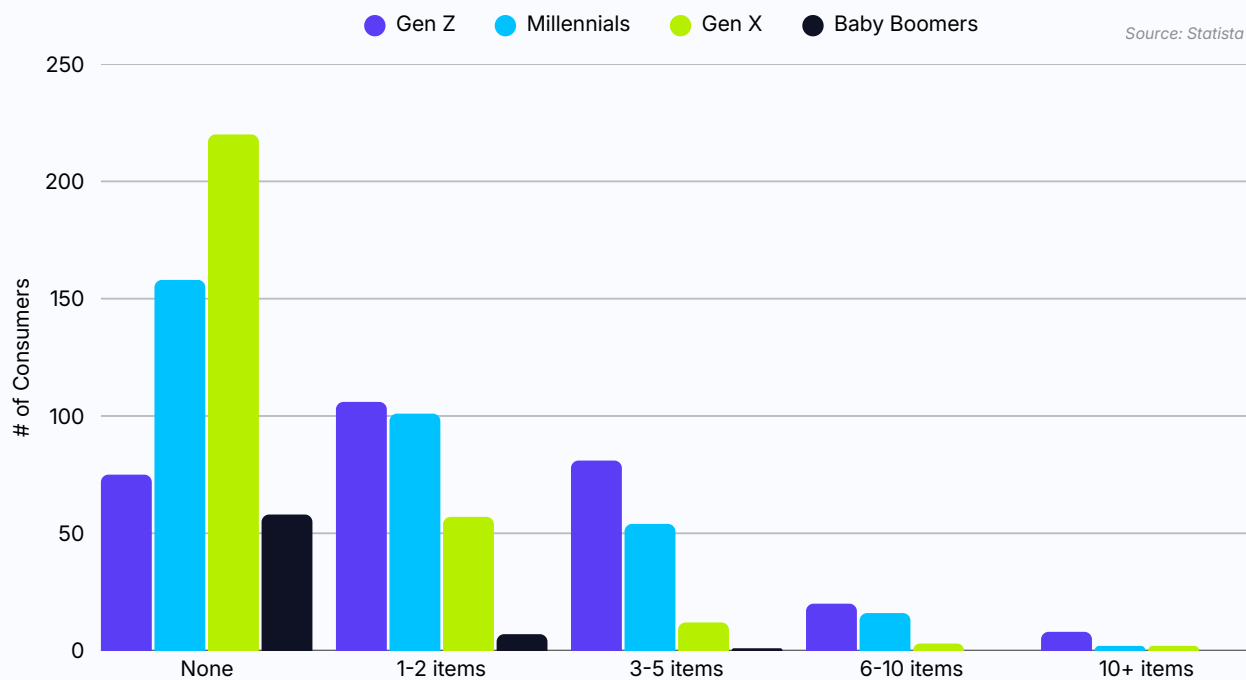
22%

of those buyers convert within 24 hours of discovery

Monthly Purchase Frequency:

CREATOR COMMERCE IS A HABIT

Creator-driven purchasing is not a one-time event for most consumers. Most consumers buy more than one item from creator recommendations each month.



69%

Gen Z is the clearest signal, with 69% purchasing at least one item per month based on creator recommendations.

For brands targeting Gen Z, creator marketing is not an awareness play, it is a recurring commerce channel.

26%

26% purchase 3-5 items monthly.



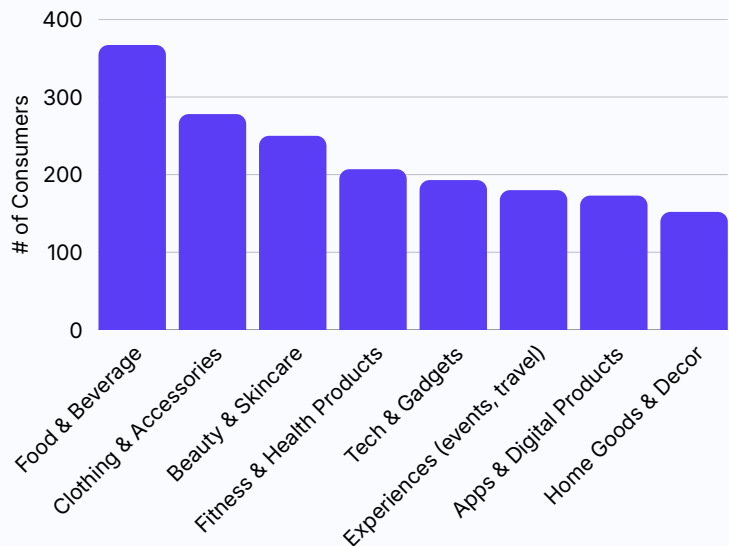
Source: Statista

Item Categories that Convert Best

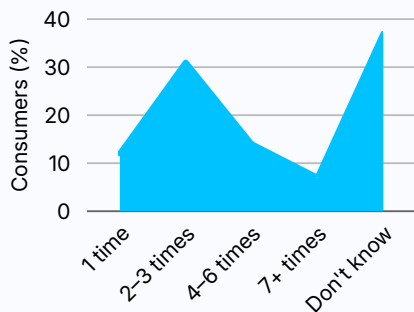
NOTE: MULTI-PICK.

Consumers were asked what type of item they are most likely to purchase from a creator recommendation.

Food & beverage leads by a wide margin; this is consistent with the finding that trying a new restaurant or food was the #1 action consumers take based on creator influence. Apparel and beauty round out the top three. Notably, experiences and apps (often lower-investment, low-friction categories) also appear, suggesting creator influence extends beyond physical goods.



Source: Statista



How Many Exposures to an Ad Does it Take?

One of the most significant findings in this report is the number of times consumers need to be exposed to a product before deciding to purchase.

This reinforces that creator marketing works through repeated exposure across multiple creators and formats, not through one-off posts.

Brands that run one-off creator activations are reaching audiences but not capturing intent. Only 12% of consumers might make a purchase from viewing the product once.

Campaign structure should be designed around repetition and exposure. A minimum of 2-3 touchpoints across platforms or time drive the most results.

DATA AGAINST SINGLE-POST CAMPAIGNS

31% of consumers require 2-3 exposures

14% need 4-6 exposures

Purchase Likelihood: Sponsored Posts

When asked how likely they are to purchase a product after seeing it in a sponsored creator post:

33% of consumers said they were 'likely' or 'extremely likely' to purchase from a sponsored post

49% of Gen Z specifically rated purchase intent as 'likely' or 'extremely likely'

Gen Z's 49% likelihood rate reinforces the generational gap.

Brands need to tailor campaign formats specifically to younger audiences to achieve higher conversion rates.



Creative that Converts:

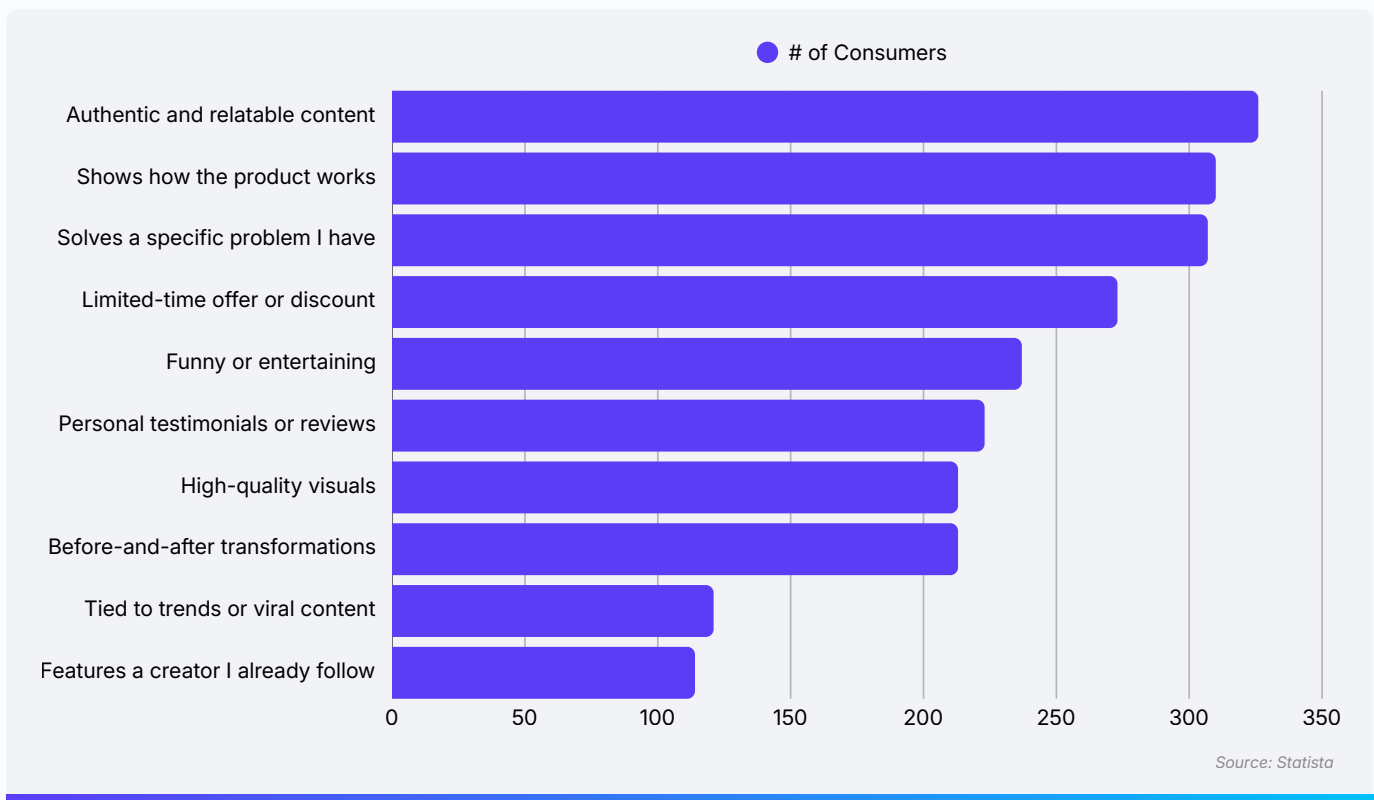
WHAT AUDIENCES ACTUALLY RESPOND TO

Understanding what drives purchase intent at the creative level is essential for writing effective creative briefs. The results are in, and **consumers have stated that authenticity, usefulness, and problem-solving are the ad styles that they respond to.**

The Ad Styles That Drive Conversions

Consumers were asked which ads are most likely to influence their purchase.

NOTE: MULTI-PICK.



The top three, authenticity, product demonstration, and problem-solution, are all technical. These ad styles driving consumers to purchase reflect their desire to see how a product or service would fit into their real lives.

The limited-time offer being in the top four reflects that the urgency mechanics work as a whole to drive consumers to purchase, lest they miss a good deal. Urgency mechanics layered on top of honest, authentic content make them work tenfold.

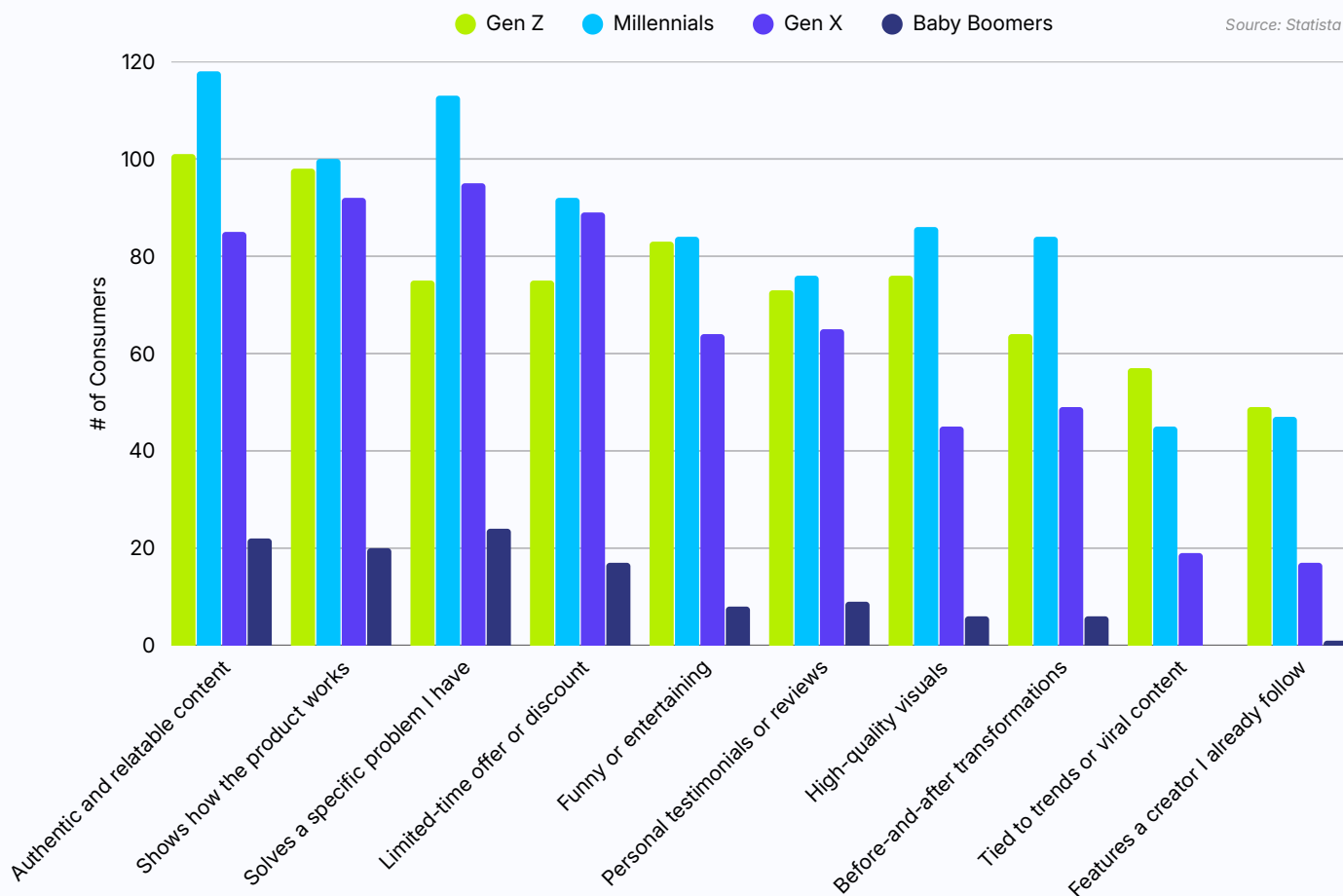
The underperformance of purchases driven by ads featuring a creator consumers are familiar with should help brands better understand creator selection. It suggests that creator familiarity alone is not sufficient to drive conversions. Content must include some value to consumers.

Briefs that specify how the product works in a real-use context, framed by a specific, relatable problem, are likely to outperform briefs that focus on brand messaging, aesthetics, or trend-chasing.

Consumers across generations respond to different creative triggers when making purchase decisions.

The Generation Gap

NOTE: MULTI-PICK.



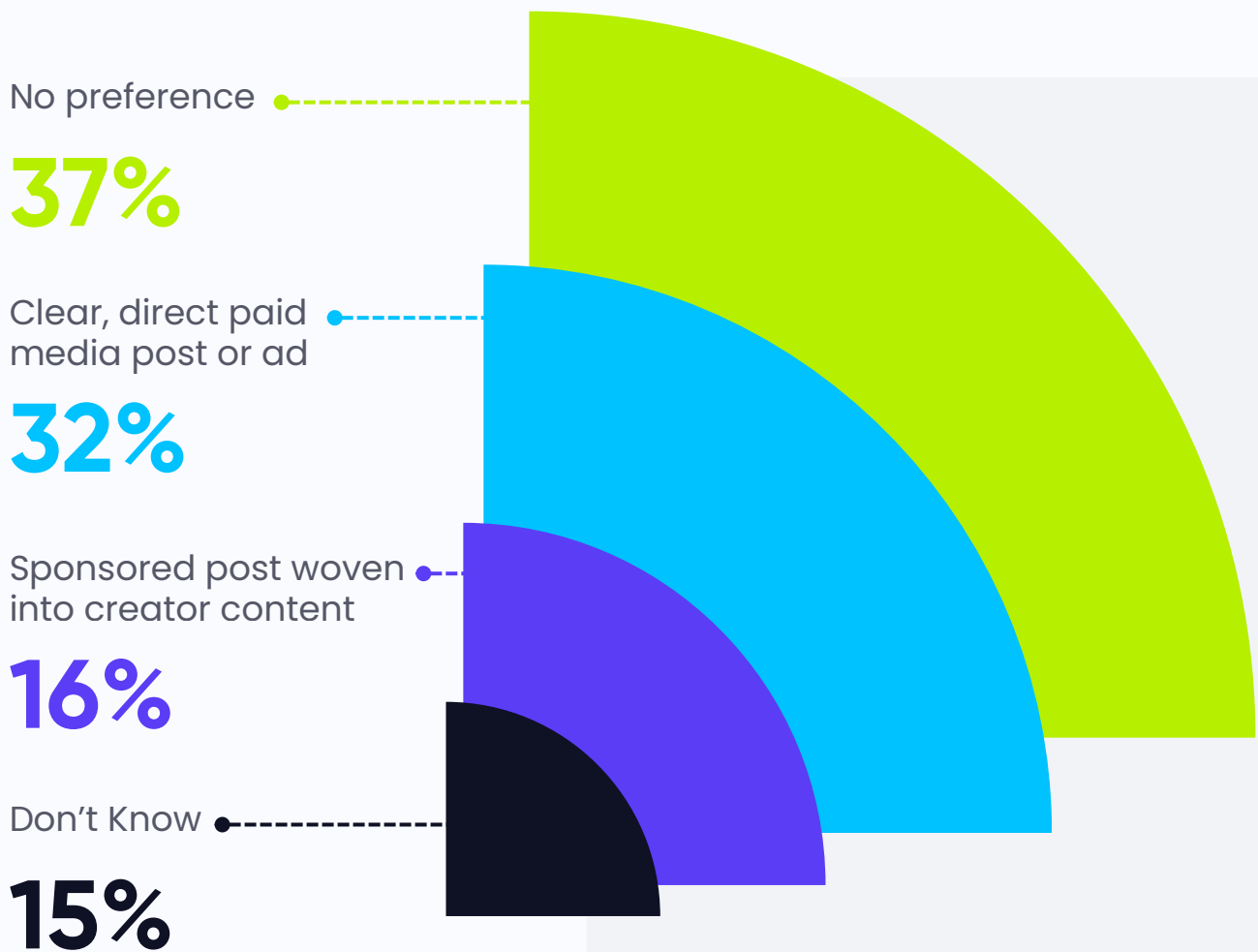
Source: Statista

Ad styles that drive purchase intent shift noticeably across generations. Gen Z and Millennials are more influenced by entertaining, trend-driven content and posts from creators they already follow.

Comparatively, Gen X and Baby Boomers respond more strongly to ads that clearly demonstrate how a product works or solve a specific problem. This suggests that creator campaigns should tailor creative formats to each target audience's priorities.

Sponsored Posts vs. Direct Paid Media

Should brands prioritize integrated creator content (where the ad is woven into organic content) or clearly labeled paid media (standalone ad creative)?



Among consumers who do express a preference, clear paid media significantly outperforms sponsored integration. This challenges the assumption among brand marketers that hidden or minimally disclosed sponsorships perform better.

Consumers are clearly not penalizing brands or creators for paid media transparency; in fact, they are more accurately rewarding transparency.

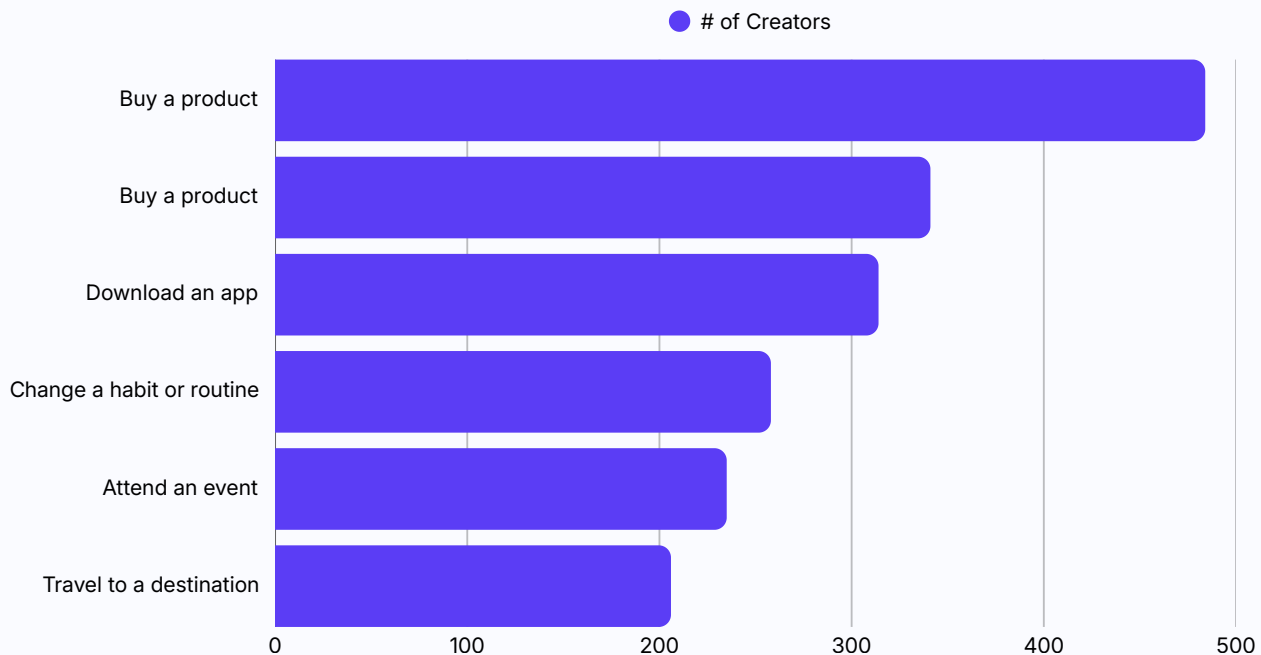


The Creator Perspective:

WHAT ACTUALLY DRIVES AUDIENCE ACTION

Have Creators Influenced Their Audience to Take Action?

NOTE: MULTI-PICK.



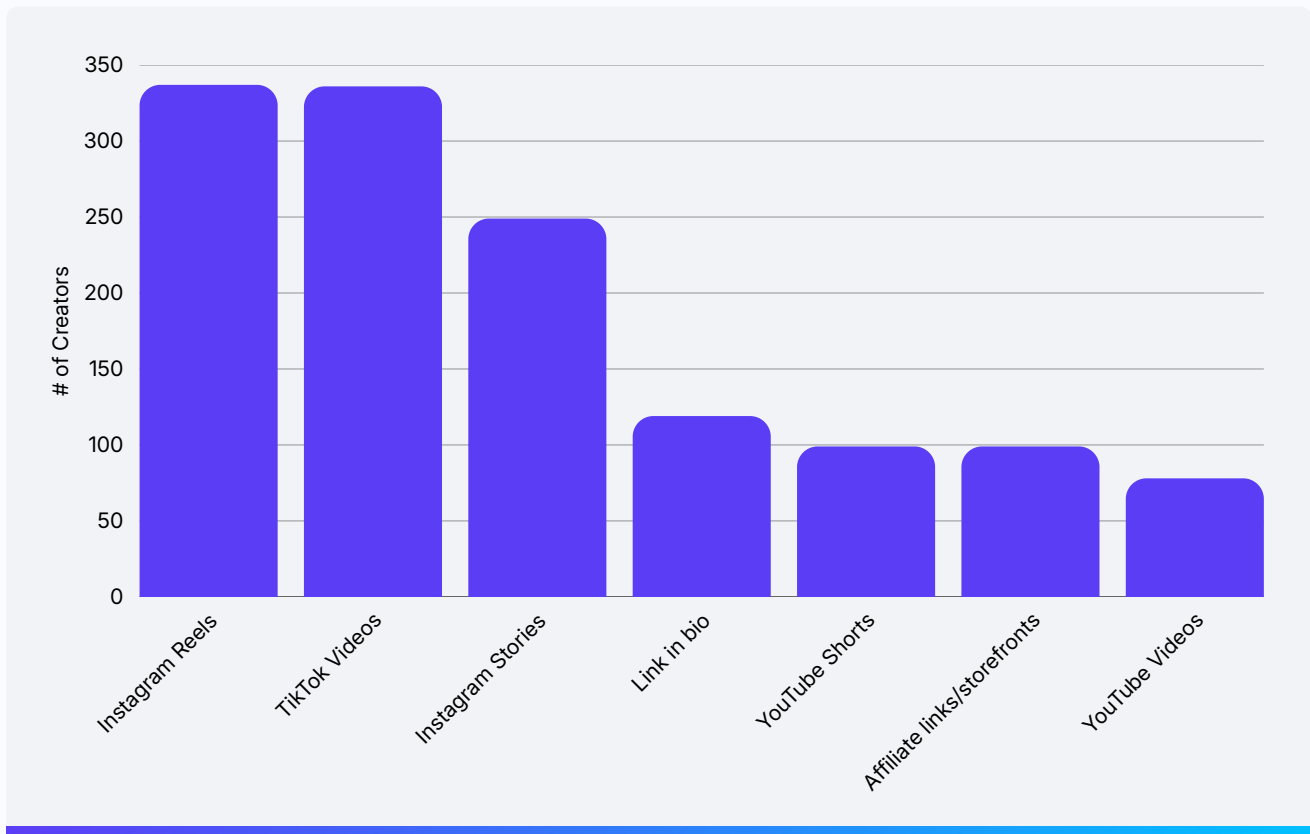
Creators overwhelmingly report influencing **real-world actions**, not just engagement.

Nearly **9 out of 10 creators** say they have driven **product purchases**, confirming that creator marketing extends well beyond awareness.

This mirrors the consumer survey findings that more than half of consumers have taken action based on creator recommendations.

Where Creators See the Strongest Conversion

NOTE: MULTI-PICK.



SHORT-FORM VIDEO DOMINATES CREATOR CONVERSION PERFORMANCE.

Reels and TikTok are virtually tied as the top-performing formats, while Stories remain one of the strongest drivers of direct action, likely due to link features and immediacy.

This aligns with the consumer survey's findings, which show strong influence from TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

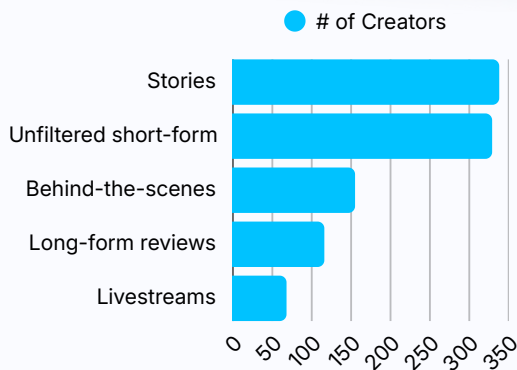
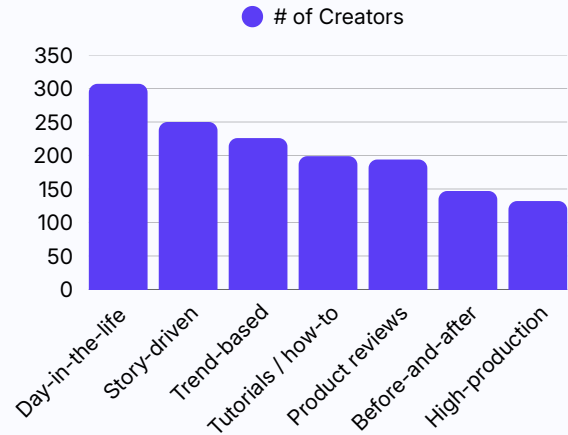


Content Types That Drive the Strongest Results

Creators report that authentic content formats consistently outperform highly produced content.

Day-in-the-life storytelling and narrative-driven posts lead performance, reinforcing the consumer data that audiences respond most strongly to relatable, useful content.

NOTE: MULTI-PICK.



Formats That Build the Most Trust

NOTE: MULTI-PICK.

Trust is built through casual, frequent formats rather than polished production.

Stories and unfiltered short-form content dominate, suggesting that audiences trust content that feels immediate, personal, and unscripted.

How Many Posts It Takes to Drive Action

32%
1 post

60%
2-3 posts

The majority of creators say they need 2-3 posts to generate meaningful audience action, reinforcing the consumer survey finding that most consumers require multiple exposures before purchasing.

7%
4-6 posts

1%
7+ posts

This strongly challenges the common brand practice of running single-post influencer campaigns.

TO DRAW COMPARISON:

Consumers say they need multiple exposures to buy.

Consumers say they respond to authentic content.


Consumers say they discover products on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

Creators say they need 2-3 posts to drive action.

Creators say day-in-the-life content works best.

Creators say those same platforms drive the strongest conversions.

When More Exposure Helps – and When it Hurts



Repetition is necessary for conversion, but repetition without trust produces fatigue. The data teeters on under-exposure, failing to convert, and over-saturation, eroding consumer trust.

Discount Mechanics

When consumers were asked what makes them more likely to buy from a brand in another multi-pick question, discounts and promotions ranked first by a significant margin:



Discounts are the single highest-leverage purchase driver across all demographics. This means that creator campaigns paired with promotional mechanics significantly outperform pure awareness-focused content.

Partnering with creators who audiences trust turned out to be one of the least important drivers of conversion. This reinforces the importance of creator selection. The chosen creator must deliver credible, useful content for the campaign, including an economic incentive.

45%

of consumers say discounts and promotions are the #1 thing that makes them more likely to buy from a brand

Multi-Creator vs. Single Creator Campaigns

Consumers surveyed supported a multi-creator strategy over exclusive, single-creator partnerships for most brand objectives. 52% of consumers need 2 or more exposures, 21% need 4 or more. No single creator, regardless of audience size, can produce the variety and cross-platform repetition needed to drive the level of saturation that enables consumers to make purchases efficiently.

What Creators Say They Need to Perform Better

Consumer data tells us what audiences respond to. The creator survey, 539 respondents across platforms, follower sizes, and niches, illuminates why many campaigns fail to deliver desired outcomes.

The Creator Perspective on Deal Decisions

Creators evaluate brand partnerships on several dimensions beyond compensation. Creators weigh the following categories when deciding whether to accept a brand deal:



The weighting of these factors, based on creator survey responses, reveals a common misalignment: brands typically lead negotiation conversations with pay rate and deliverables, while **creators prioritize brand alignment (53%) and creative freedom (34%) as gatekeeping criteria.**

A creator who declines a deal due to poor brand alignment cannot be enticed by a higher rate offer. Alignment is not a soft preference; it is the mechanism through which authentic content is produced. Brands that invest in finding well-aligned creators rather than high-reach ones will see better, more meaningful content output.

The Support Creators Need

When asked what support brands and agencies would help them create better-performing content, creators pointed to several recurring themes:

- Clearer product information and talking points - not scripts, but factual information on products
- Faster approval and feedback cycles
- More creative latitude - creative freedom to tell the brand story in their voice
- Earlier involvement in campaign concept - input before the brief is finalized
- Honest performance data - access to their metrics to actually understand what they can optimize

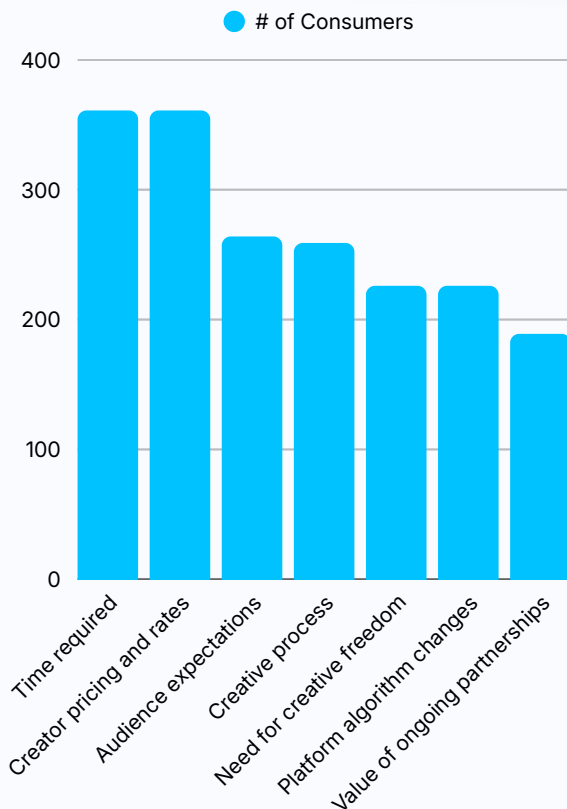
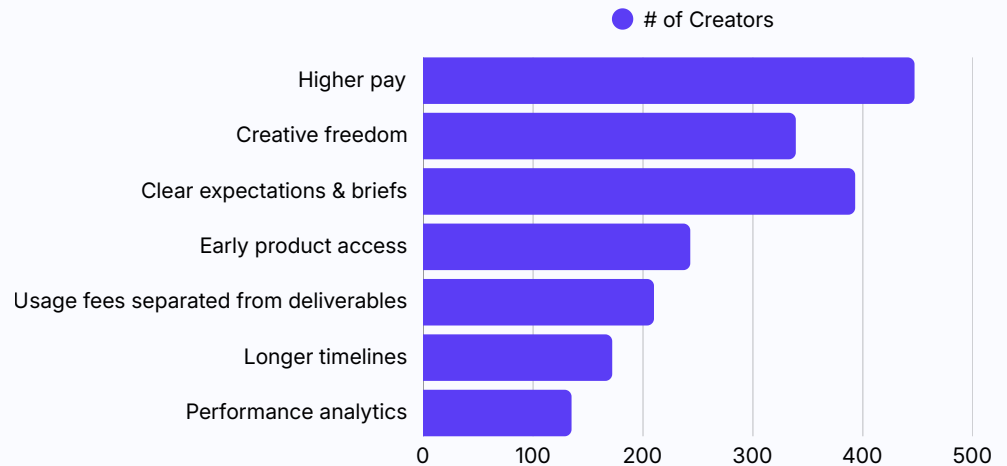
These responses mirror the consumer data. Consumers said authentic, problem-solving, product-demonstrating content converts best. Creators say they need the freedom and support to produce exactly that kind of content.



What Creators Need From Brands to Produce Better Content

Creators consistently point to structural support from brands as the key to producing better-performing content.

The most requested improvements combine clear direction with creative autonomy, indicating that creators perform best when brands provide strategic context but allow them to execute in their own voice.



What Brands Misunderstand About Creators

- The assumption that audience size predicts performance – Engagement rate and niche alignment matter more than follower count.
- The assumption that scripted content outperforms authentic content – When brands control every word, it comes out sounding like an ad, not a personal recommendation from the creator.
- The assumption that one post is enough – Consumers themselves said that most need to see something more than once before they trust it, and are willing to purchase.
- The creators are replaceable – Audience trust has emerged as one of the most important factors for conversions. Creators are unique, and their audience trust is unique as well.
- The assumption that fast timelines produce good content – Though higher-quality content does not convert as well as authentic content, great content still takes time. Rushed deliverables produce generic results.

The next steps of making structural improvements on creative campaigns are:

- Smarter creator selection based on alignment rather than follower count.
- Looser creative briefs with clear brand quadrails, but flexible execution.
- Campaign structures that allow for multiple touchpoints, not single-post deliverables.

How Creators Determine Their Rates

Time and effort required

77%

Past Brand Benchmarks

31%

Follower Count

52%

Market Demand

29%

Engagement Rate

48%

Creator pricing models also reveal a gap between how brands evaluate creators and how creators evaluate their own work.

While brands often anchor pricing discussions to audience size, 77% of creators say they price work primarily based on the time and effort required to produce the content.

Follower count and engagement rate remain important signals, but creators largely view brand partnerships as creative production work, not simply media distribution.

This reinforces that creator partnerships operate more closely to creative production than to media buying. Brands evaluating creators solely through CPM-style thinking risk underestimating the work required to produce high-performing content.

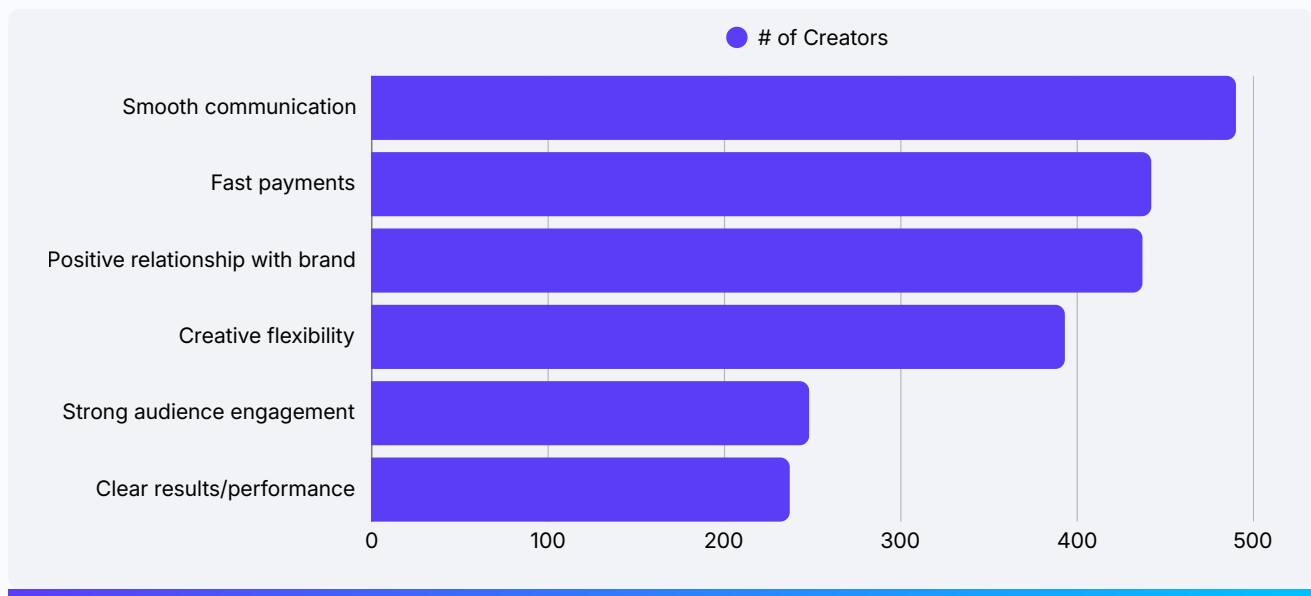
Why Long-Term Partnerships Win

The data across every section of this report points toward the same structural conclusion: long-term creator partnerships outperform one-off activations on every dimension that matters: trust, repetition, authenticity, and conversion.

What Creators Say Makes Them More Likely to Partner Again

NOTE: MULTI-PICK.

- The brand respected their creative process and did not over-script content.
- Payments were fair and delivered on time.
- The brand communicated clearly and was responsive throughout the campaign.
- The product genuinely resonated with their audience.
- The brand treated them as a strategic partner rather than a vendor.



91% of creators say smooth communication is the number one factor in working with a brand again. **74%** want creative freedom, and 73% want clearer briefs.

Creators don't just want creative freedom. They want creative freedom and clear expectations. They want to be able to create content in their voice without questioning whether it fits the brief.

These factors are entirely operational. These factors are not about budget size or contract terms. Long-term creator relationships are built through professional conduct and mutual respect, which costs brands nothing except intentionality.

The ROI Argument for Long-Term Partnerships

- Reduced sourcing and contracting costs
- Lower negotiation friction
- Higher content quality over time
- Better audience priming
- Organic brand affinity

The most efficient influencer marketing budgets are concentrated in fewer, longer relationships, not spread across one-off activations with dozens of creators. Treat your top-performing creator partners like a strategic channel, not a production vendor.

Brand Playbook:

HOW TO WIN WITH CREATORS IN 2026

✓ Platform Prioritization

Consumers said they discover products most often in YouTube video descriptions (31%), TikTok videos (28%), and Instagram Stories (25%).

YouTube and TikTok are the highest-priority platforms for most brands targeting adults under 45. Instagram remains essential for both awareness and conversion, particularly through Stories.

✓ Creator Selection Framework

Audience size is a weak proxy for performance. The data suggests brands should weigh the following factors more heavily:

- Niche alignment
- Audience demographic match
- Engagement rate and quality
- Prior brand work quality
- Platform-specific performance

✓ Creative Brief Standards

Effective creative briefs include:

- A clear problem or use case the product solves (not just product benefits)
- 3-5 non-negotiable brand guardrails (e.g., what cannot be said or shown)
- Approved talking points and accurate product claims but no scripts
- An explicit invitation for the creator to integrate the product into their own voice
- Performance benchmarks so the creator understands what success looks like

✓ Posting Cadence

Given the 2–3 exposure requirement for most consumers, campaign cadences should be designed to deliver:

- A minimum of 3 touchpoints per creator per campaign window
- Content spread across a 2-4 week window to allow for organic reach and algorithm distribution
- Cross-platform amplification to maximize unduplicated reach across the same core audience
- Retargeting of engaged users with paid amplification of top-performing organic creator posts

✓ Partnership Structures

High-performing influencer programs share several structural characteristics:

- Long-term agreements (6-12 months) with top-tier creators, not campaign-by-campaign renewals
- Creator-exclusive discount codes or affiliate links enable attribution and add purchase motivation
- Clear content approval processes with fast turnaround (under 72 hours) to maintain creator momentum
- Performance-based bonuses tied to measurable outcomes (sales, clicks, codes used)
- Regular check-ins with creator partners (treat them as a channel, not a vendor)

Key Takeaways for Brands:

WHAT TO STOP, START, AND DOUBLE DOWN ON

STOP:

Actions That Undermine Performance

- Running single-post, one-off activations: Most consumers need 2-3 exposures. One post cannot move the needle.
- Prioritizing creator audience size over alignment: Engagement and niche fit predict performance better than follower count.
- Over-scripting creator content: Scripted briefs are hard on the ear. Authentic content outperforms at every metric.
- Excluding discount codes or purchase incentives: Consumers cite promotions as the #1 purchase driver. Don't leave money on the table.
- Concentrating budgets on one platform: Consumers discover products across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Multi-platform coverage drives the repetition required.
- Using influencer marketing only for awareness: Consumers are already buying from creator recommendations monthly. Influencer marketing is a commerce channel.

START:

Approaches Supported by the Data

- Building always-on creator programs
- Briefing for problem-solving content
- Requiring creator storefronts and shoppable links
- Offering creator-exclusive discount codes
- Evaluating creators on alignment and engagement, not reach
- Treating creators as long-term partners

DOUBLE DOWN:

The Things that are Already Working

- YouTube and TikTok content
- Authentic, relatable content formats
- Gen Z targeting through creator channels
- Short-form video with clickable links
- Multi-creator, multi-platform campaign architecture
- Creator-led product demonstrations

Voices from the Creator Economy

EXPERT COMMENTARY ON HOW INFLUENCER MARKETING IS EVOLVING



The brands that will win in the next phase of the creator economy are the ones that stop thinking in campaigns and start thinking in systems. Long-term partnerships, multi-creator strategies, and integrated conversion infrastructure aren't optimizations, they're requirements. Anything less leaves performance on the table.

James Michalak
CEO, NEOREACH



Voices from the Creator Economy

EXPERT COMMENTARY ON HOW INFLUENCER MARKETING IS EVOLVING



The Convergence of Creators, Brands, and Media

The creator economy is moving toward a place where the word “creator” starts to fade because it is simply the norm. The lines between creator content, media content, and brand content are blurring into one unified system, where influence, distribution, and conversion are driven by those who understand audiences best, whether individuals, collectives, or companies. You can already see it happening. Some of the best creators are evolving into media companies and brands, while some of the best brands and media companies are learning to operate like creators.

Lindsey Gamble,
CREATOR ECONOMY EXPERT

Creator Partnerships Are Becoming Embedded Growth Engines

Creator partnerships are evolving into ongoing, embedded collaborations that span the entire business. Brands are partnering with creators far beyond content, building ecosystems where their talent and content appear across dozens of consumer touchpoints, from organic social to paid media, commerce, in-store, events, traditional search, AI search, and everything in between. By identifying all the ways creators can be integrated, from experiences to R&D, the full value of a creator can be unlocked, helping brands gain long-term growth, cultural relevance, and the type of influence most brands aspire to achieve.



Voices from the Creator Economy

EXPERT COMMENTARY ON HOW INFLUENCER MARKETING IS EVOLVING



We find that the brands who are willing to invest in a somewhat longer-term campaign with us to start are seeing better returns than just a one-off test piece, which makes sense because, it generally takes a large amount of touch points to get someone to conversion. On top of that, in our industry-- travel --, the consideration to booking phase can be months-long, so multiple brand mentions are needed to attempt to meet the viewer at the right time in their booking window. So if you find a creator or media property that has the right fit audience-wise, invest more in the initial campaign for more data and better results

Jessica Dante,
FOUNDER OF DANTE MEDIA



The bar has changed. Being a Creator used to be the goal and now it's just the starting point. The next phase will be defined by who can actually build: real IP, real businesses, real equity, and real community. This is the move from making content to building something with staying power.

RJ Larese,
PRESIDENT, SIXTEENTH US



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The Shift Toward Use-Case Driven Creator Marketing

The creator economy is moving toward “use case marketing” and away from “feature marketing”, That conversation is almost entirely focused on tech. The problem is that low-cost marketplaces and UGC platforms can't build compelling use cases because it requires real investment from the creator: live briefings, authentic real-world examples, and genuine trust between the brand and the creator. At Creator Match, we're seeing this firsthand working with leading tech brands. The ones winning are the ones willing to go deep, not broad.

Conversion Is a Journey, Not a Single Post

A single post is not a strategy. What actually drives conversion is a creator guiding their audience through a funnel: early posts build awareness, the middle builds consideration, and then you earn the conversion. Brands that expect ROI from one partnership post are skipping the most important part of the journey.

AJ Eckstein,
FOUNDER @ CREATOR MATCH



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Creator marketing didn't suddenly become a commerce channel — it always was. What's changed is attribution, and now brands can finally see the revenue creators were already driving. The bigger issue is that most brands aren't underinvesting — they're misallocating budget. Too much still goes into reach, production, and one-off campaigns, and not enough into frequency, creator fit, and long-term partnerships.

Follower count remains one of the weakest predictors of performance. What actually drives results is alignment, authenticity, and repeated exposure. And as AI floods platforms with content, trust becomes the real currency. Creators aren't just distribution, they're filters — and the brands building consistent, cross-platform presence will outperform those still optimised for campaigns.

Geekout Newsletter is the social media newsletter trusted by 30,000+ social media pros. A weekly round-up of the latest industry news, platform updates, viral content, and pro-tips. It's read by social teams at Disney, Netflix, and TikTok

Matt Navarra

SOCIAL MEDIA CONSULTANT, AUTHOR OF GEEKOUT NEWSLETTER



Summary

The path to influencer marketing ROI in 2026 is not more spending, it's a smarter structure.

Brands that win with creators in 2026 will do three things differently than their peers:

- They will select creators for alignment, not reach.
- They will design for repetition, not impressions
- They will build for trust, not transactions.

The consumer data clarifies the mechanism. The creator data shows how to support it. The brands that close the gap between what audiences respond to and how campaigns are built will capture the performance that influencer marketing has always promised, but rarely delivered at scale.