

Influencer Marketing in the Age of AI: Authenticity That Performs

04.16.2026

IN A WORLD OF AI

Authenticity Is the Only Thing You Can't Fake

A man and a robot head are shown in profile, facing each other. The man is on the left, and the robot head is on the right. The background is a gradient of blue.

And in a crowded space, it's what makes people stop scrolling.

Meet Your Presenters



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*VP,
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01 WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

02 INFLUENCER IN YOUR MEDIA MIX

03 PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT

04 CREATIVE TODAY AND TOMORROW

05 KEY TAKEAWAYS & OPPORTUNITIES

Value to the Consumer



The Power of Trust-Driven Communities



Influencers build **loyal communities** rooted in who they are—not just what they post.



Built on Reliability



Creators offer what brands can't manufacture: **authentic relatability.**



Influence Has No Age Limit



Influencer marketing spans every **platform, niche, and demographic.**

You have a decision to make.

→ **A trip to plan**

You want somewhere real, not a listicle.



→ **A room to renovate**

You need a taste you can actually trust.



→ **A big purchase**

You want to get it right the first time.



So where do you go?

→ **AI**

Not a bad place to start. But an LLM is a pattern recognizer.



→ **Someone who actually gets you**

For most of us, that person already exists. Someone we trust to just tell us the truth.



AI Starts the Conversation. Humans Make the Call.

Consumers trust AI enough to research — but not enough to decide. That gap is where creators win.

→ STEP 1 – AI

The filter, not the answer

Consumers use AI to quickly narrow options — asking for product comparisons, category overviews, and shortlists. It's fast, useful, and impersonal.

ONLY
20%
fully trust AI to decide

THE
TRUST
GAP

→ STEP 2 – HUMAN

The reassurance that closes it

Before committing, consumers seek a real voice — a creator, reviewer, friend, or community member whose opinion they've come to trust over time.

Influencer Value: Trust Over Expertise

“Consumers don’t trust people just because they’re ‘experts.’ They trust people who sound like people.”

(Typeform, 2025)



People don’t follow influencers because they’re experts. They follow them because they trust their authentic opinions and relatable experiences.



People don't follow creators because they need something

They follow because they want to feel seen, understood, and part of something

01

The Friend Effect

→ Followers develop parasocial bonds — one-sided relationships that feel deeply personal.

02

Advice, Not Advertising

→ Influencer recommendations feel like a trusted friend's opinion, not a pitch.

03

Authenticity Drives Action

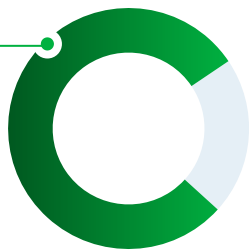
→ Influencer content turns genuine connections into measurable results, driving engagement and purchase decisions through trusted voices.

Audiences trust voices they can relate to

86%

of consumers make a purchase inspired by an influencer at least once a year.

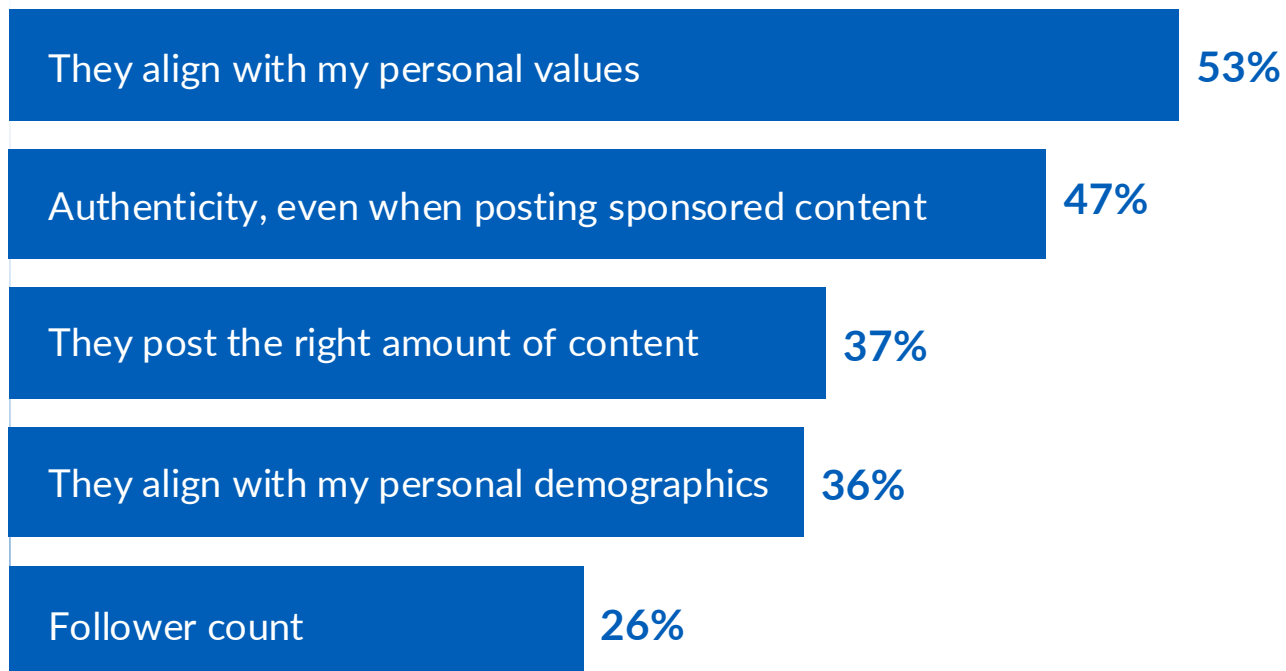
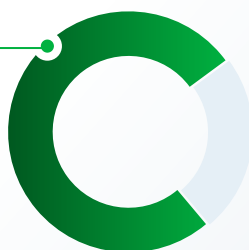
(Social Native, 2026)



76%

of consumers favor content created by influencers over professionally scripted ads

(IZEA, 2025)



Qualities consumers look for in influencers, eMarketer, Feb 2024

Relevance Across Generations

- ✓ YouTube and Facebook demonstrating broad cross-generational reach
- ✓ TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat skew younger, but adoption among 30–49 and even 50–64 audiences remains significant
- ✓ Social engagement is not confined to Gen-Z

Who uses each social media platform?

% of U.S. adults who say they use each platform

	Ages 18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
YouTube	95%	92%	85%	64%
Facebook	68%	80%	74%	57%
Instagram	80%	62%	40%	19%
TikTok	63%	44%	30%	12%
WhatsApp	37%	40%	30%	20%
Reddit	48%	35%	16%	6%
Snapchat	58%	31%	13%	4%
X (formerly Twitter)	33%	25%	16%	10%
Threads	15%	10%	6%	3%
Bluesky	6%	5%	3%	2%
Truth Social	1%	3%	5%	4%

Source: Pew Research Center, 2025

Note: Responders who did not give an answer are not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb 5-June 18, 2025

Trust and Human Connection in the Age of AI

AI Content Era



AI is accelerating content production.
But scale ≠ trust.

- ✓ AI increases efficiency and optimization
- ✓ Automated content is rising across channels
- ✓ Consumers are becoming more skeptical of brand messaging

The Human Advantage



Trust, voice, and authenticity
drive performance.

- ✓ Creators translate brand messages in ways other channels can't
- ✓ Audiences respond to human perspective over automation
- ✓ Authentic creator connection drives deeper engagement & action

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Value to the Brand



Harnessing Authenticity



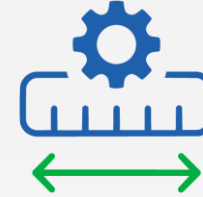
Creator marketing commands genuine, peer-level trust and **delivers one-to-many reach at broadcast scale** for the generation that skips the ads.



Evolving Role in the Funnel



With precise boosting and platform-native commerce, creators own **every stage** of the purchase journey.



Measure from Day One



Influencer spend becomes **defensible ROI** with a framework that guides creator selection and aligns **goals to metrics**.

Trust is the New Scarcity

As AI floods every channel with synthetic content, the rarest signal is a real human voice — and that's what earns trust.



What AI can't fake is exactly what audiences trust most.



People Sense What's Real

When content becomes infinite, audiences scroll past manufactured, pausing only for what feels like real human connection.

Emotional Depth is Where Creators Win

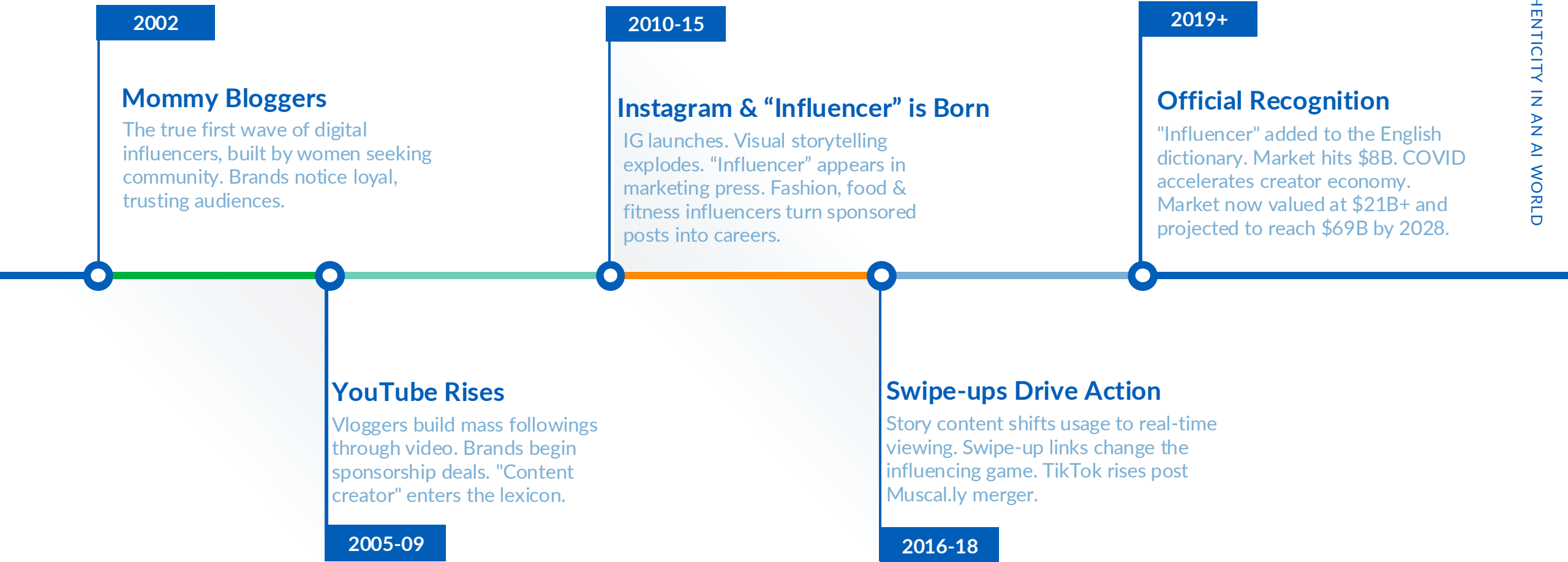
Unscripted creativity and community voices are trusted signals in digital marketing that can't be artificially replicated.

Creators Deliver Trust & Precise Reach at Scale

Influencers are one-to-many distribution engines with top creators commanding audiences that rival primetime viewership.

Where Did 'Influencer' Come From?

The Evolution of Creator Culture



Influencer Niches Span Culture, Identity, and Passion

Every audience has a creator they trust – across every topic, background, and interest.

Culture & Entertainment



Music, film, comedy, and pop culture creators reflect what audiences love and who they are.

Identity & Community



LGBTQ+, BIPOC, faith-based, and cultural heritage creators speak to audiences less represented in mainstream media.

Food, Health & Wellness



Nutrition, fitness, mental health, recipes; wellness creators build trust through consistency and personal stories.

Lifestyle & Life Stages



Parenting, travel, personal finance, and home creators reach audiences at every chapter of life.

Gaming & Tech



Gaming streamers and tech reviewers command loyal followings.

Value & Advocacy



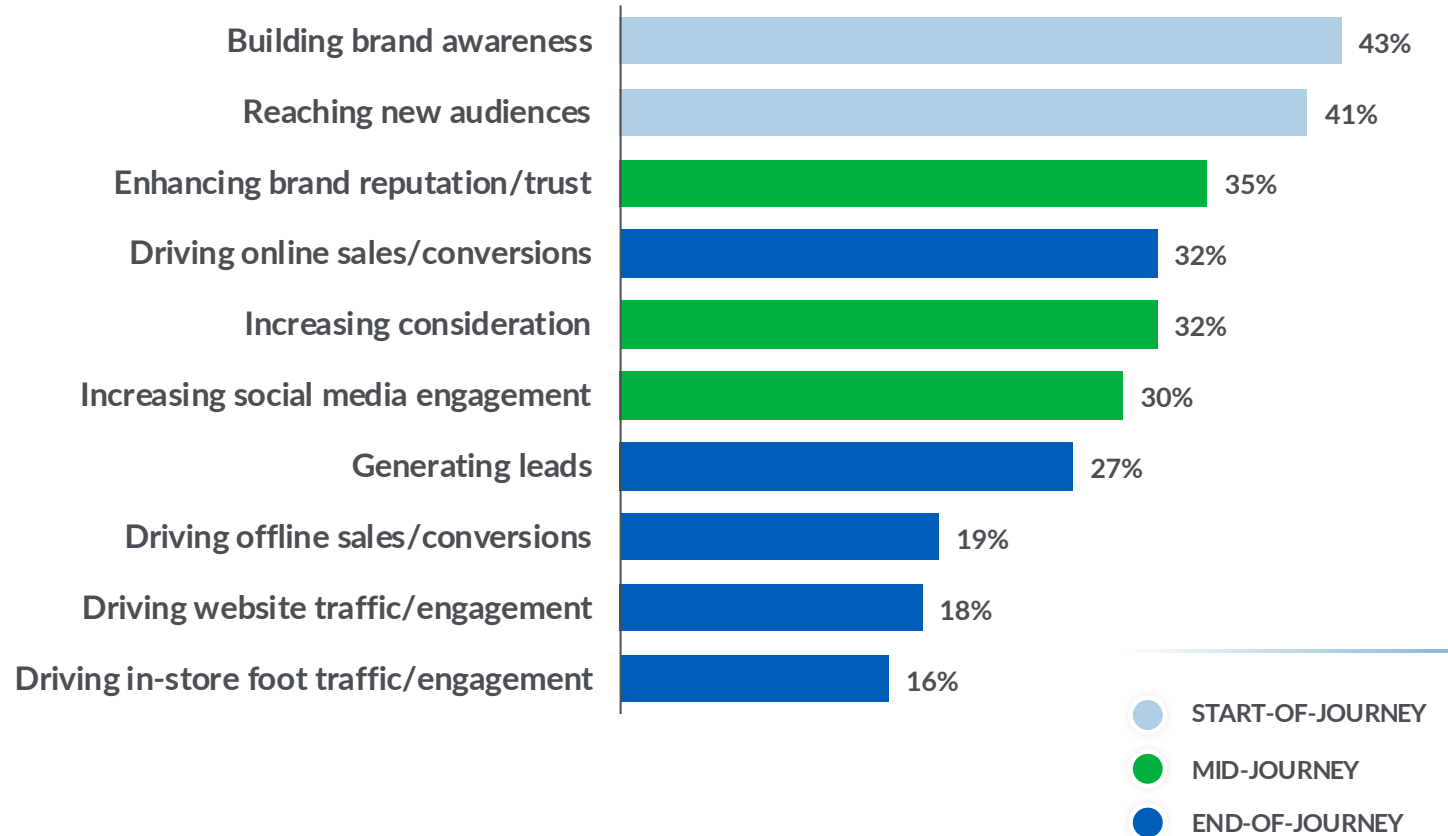
Sustainability, social justice, and cause-driven creators attract audiences who buy from brands who match their values.

Campaign Objectives Extend Beyond Awareness

Building brand awareness and reaching new audiences are still the top goals of creator marketing.

...but brands are increasingly relying on creators to drive lower-funnel actions like sales and generating leads.

Brands' Top Goals/Objectives for Creator Marketing % Selected As A Top 3 Goal/Objective



Influencer content meets consumers at every stage

AWARENESS
Discovery



→ Creator storytelling introduces a brand authentically & allows access to niche communities with built-in trust.

CONSIDERATION
Research Hub



→ Tutorials, comparisons & deep-dives build trust and educate buyers where they're already searching for recommendations.

CONVERSION
Decision

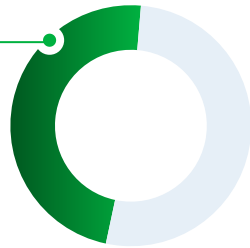


→ In-platform shopping, affiliate links, and strong CTAs empower buyers to make informed purchases.

The shift from standalone tactic to must-buy channel

48%

of ad spenders consider creators a 'must-buy'

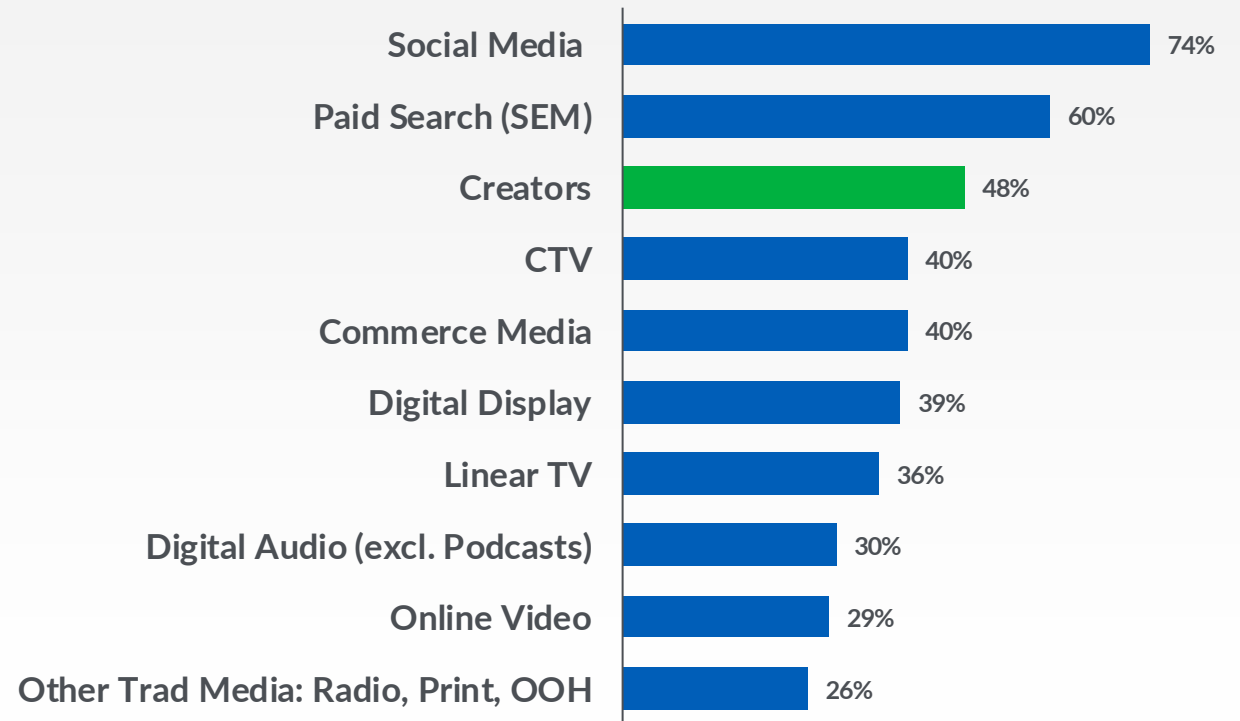


\$40B

expected creator ad spend in 2026



% of Brands that Consider the following a "Must Buy" *(i.e. Necessary for Media Plan)*



Source: IAB, Creator Economy 2025; eMarketer, 2025 US Creator Economy Ad Spending

Social Commerce Collapses the Traditional Funnel

Influencers are content creators, product reviewers, and sales drivers, simultaneously.

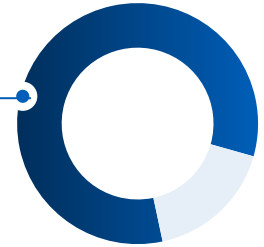
86%

of consumers search for product info on social media



67%

of consumers purchase directly through a social platform 1x/month



Consumers no longer leave the platform to buy.

The entire purchase journey – from first impression to last click – now lives inside the creator ecosystem.

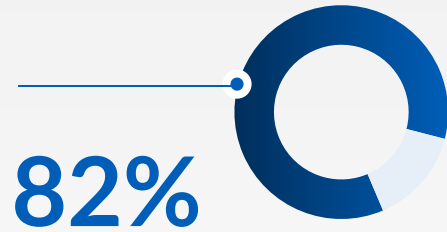
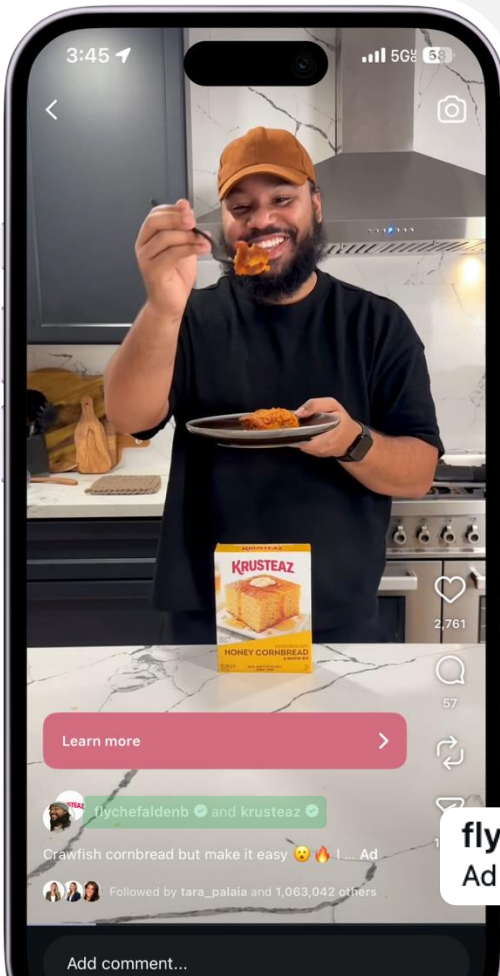
Source: GRIN, 2025 Power of Influence

Influencer Content in Your Media Plan Architecture

Business Objective		To maintain brand sales and profitability +X% YoY through generation of new users that will be measured by new account creations and leads	
Media Plan Objective		Increase awareness and drive consideration to maintain sales and position brand for long-term success.	
Business Target/Audience		A25-54	
Funnel Objective	Media Approach (by Funnel Stage)	Channel: Tactic	Tactical KPI / Optimization Metric
Awareness	Optimize campaigns towards Impressions and CPM to maximize visibility	Perion High-Impact CTV	Impressions/CPM
		Pinterest	Impressions/CPM
		Influencer – Organic Content (In-Feed)	Views
Consideration	Prioritize Landing Page Views and CPLPV to drive site traffic and encourage exploration to learn more about product	Meta Traffic	CPLPV/LPVR
		Pinterest	CPC/CTR
		Influencer – Organic Content (Stories)	Engagements/Clicks
Conversion	Drive Conversions while optimizing towards CPA to support business goals and drive sales	SEM	Conversion Rate/CPA
		Demand Gen	Conversion Rate/CPA BLS Responses
		Influencer – Meta Conversion (Boosting)	Conversion Rate/CPA
		Influencer – Affiliate Links	Acct Creations/Sample Orders/ Product Orders

Boosting

Extends reach & frequency of organic influencer content to reach even more users in our target audience



82%

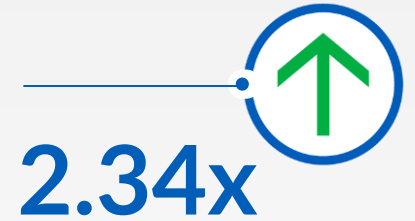
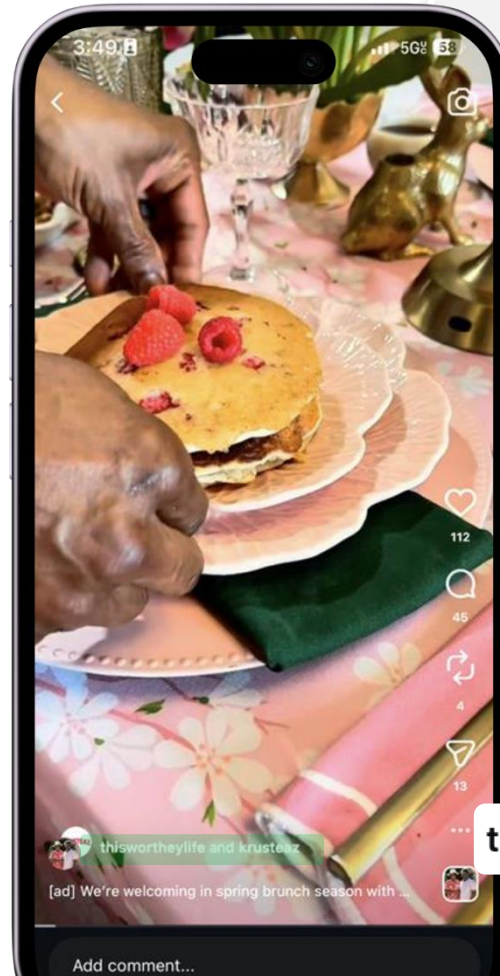
of brands feel that influencer marketing content generates **higher-quality customers** than other types of marketing, leading to more impactful results

Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024

flychefaldenb and krusteaz Ad

Collaboration Posts

Allows accounts to co-author posts, increasing **exposure** and **engagement**, contributing to **brand authenticity**, and **deepening** the community's **brand trust**.



2.34x

more interactions can be generated on posts featuring 1 additional collaborator vs. solo posts.

Emplifi, 2024

thiswortheylife and krusteaz

What Successful Brands Do Differently

Creator ad spend is projected to surpass **40 billion** in 2026, but measuring creator performance is the **#1** roadblock for **32%** of brands.



Common Challenges

Measurement is treated as an afterthought rather than incorporated from the start.

Campaign strategy is **built for awareness** but **gets evaluated on sales** – mismatched goals muddy results.

Platform inconsistencies and ever-changing algorithms make **cross-channel comparison unreliable**.



Best Practices

Lock in KPIs **pre-briefing** to guide smarter creator selection and goals up front.

Align content & goals to funnel stage. **Awareness** = reach, impressions. **Conversion** = engagements, clicks, sales.

Own the data: build internal benchmarks, standardize cross-platform definitions, and track performance vs. prior.

Red Lobster x Cheddar Bay Biscuit Mix

BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW

Reposition Cheddar Bay Biscuit mix as a versatile pantry staple – not just a side dish.

Target: W35-49, Married with kids, cooking-focused, value-conscious

GOAL

Drive awareness & increase sales for Red Lobster's at-home Cheddar Bay Biscuit mix. Measure success by maximizing reach and impressions while driving strong engagement through likes, comments, and shares.

SOLUTIONS



Partner with **6 creators** & generate **30 pieces of content** demonstrating ease of use and versatility through **relatable, family-friendly recipes** – reinforcing satisfying cravings & **enhancing familiar routines.**



Drive trial through creative culinary experiments, unexpected recipes + new meal occasions.



Ensure clear communication **during dual-brand approval process** without compromising message and content quality.

RESULTS



40%

Lift in sales during campaign period, largely attributed to organic, viral recipe post coinciding with market-wide sales.

ENGAGEMENT RATE

257%

ER increase VS. benchmark of 2.33%



ORGANIC VIEWS

3MM+

ORGANIC ENGAGEMENTS

248k+

Building a strong measurement framework

01

Set Goals Upfront

Quantitative: Reach, engagement rate, conversions, sales

Define all funnel objectives before creator briefing so that **goals drive creator selection, content strategy, and measurement.**

02

Take a Holistic Approach

Qualitative: Brand lift, SOV, creator quality

Pair quantitative data with qualitative signals for a complete ROI picture, avoiding reliance on one metric to tell the full story.

03

Standardize Internally

Process: Consistent metrics across all teams

Align all teams, platforms, and partners on the same definitions, avoiding distortion of comparisons over time.

04

Measure from Day One

Timing: Built in pre-launch

Treat measurement as a campaign input, not an output. Brands that own their data build a durable competitive advantage.

Measurement Toolbox

UPPER FUNNEL

GOAL: Awareness & Reach

CORE METRICS

- Reach
- Impressions
- Views

⊕ PLUS-UP

Brand Lift Study

Pre/post survey measuring awareness, message recall, favorability lift

MID-FUNNEL

GOAL: Engagement & Consideration

CORE METRICS

- Engagements
- Link Clicks & CTR
- Video Completion Rate

⊕ PLUS-UP

Custom Audience Build

Retarget users who engaged with creator content via paid social

LOWER FUNNEL

GOAL: Conversion & Sales

CORE METRICS

- Add-to-Carts, Leads
- Promo Code Redemptions
- Cost Per Acquisition (CPA)

⊕ PLUS-UP

Affiliate Program

Creator-specific affiliate links enable conversion tracking, revenue attribution, and performance-based payouts

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Value to Active Media Investment



Performance Enhancement



Use creator content throughout the plan arch to enhance performance on other channels.



Auction Economics



As paid efforts across digital platforms become more automated, creative is the most important lever to impact campaign performance.



Creative Advantage



Infusing UGC content into your current digital media campaigns is a sustainable way to improve results.

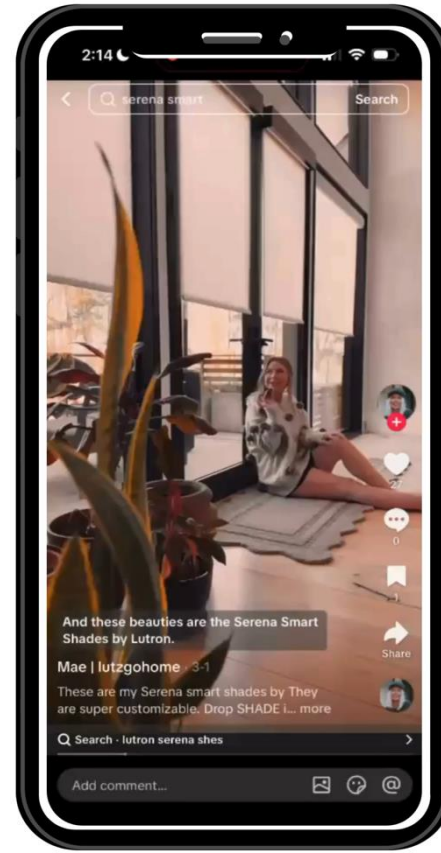
Authentic Content Lives Across Your Entire Digital Ecosystem



Instagram Reels



Instagram Carousel



TikTok



Pinterest



YouTube Shorts

Why Creative Matters



Auction Criteria

Maximizing Advertiser Value
(Objective + Audience)

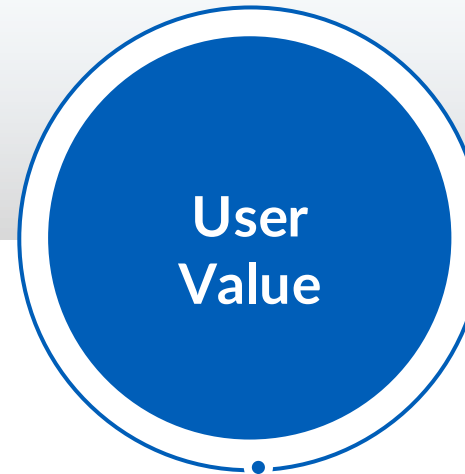


Bid for optimization goal/objective (desired result)

Likelihood impression shown to this person will lead to desired result



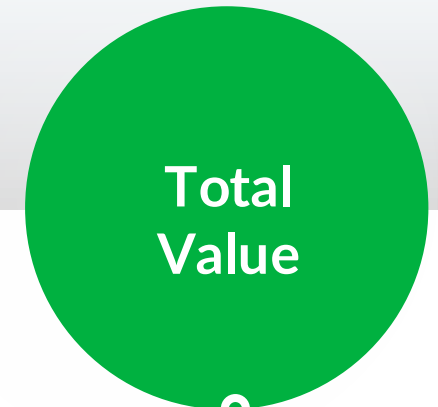
Optimizing Consumer Experience
(50% Creative Driven)



How interesting does the platform think the individual is going to find the ad



60% Of All Auction Outcomes Attributed to Creative



Ad with the highest value wins the auction

Optimal creative allows your ads to win the auction and achieve the best possible results.

The Main Ways to Diagnose and Elevate Creative



Fatigue

sets in when consumers become tired of seeing the same ad



Differentiation

via creative formats, placements, concepts, and tone



Creators

for direct response now listed on Meta's Performance 5

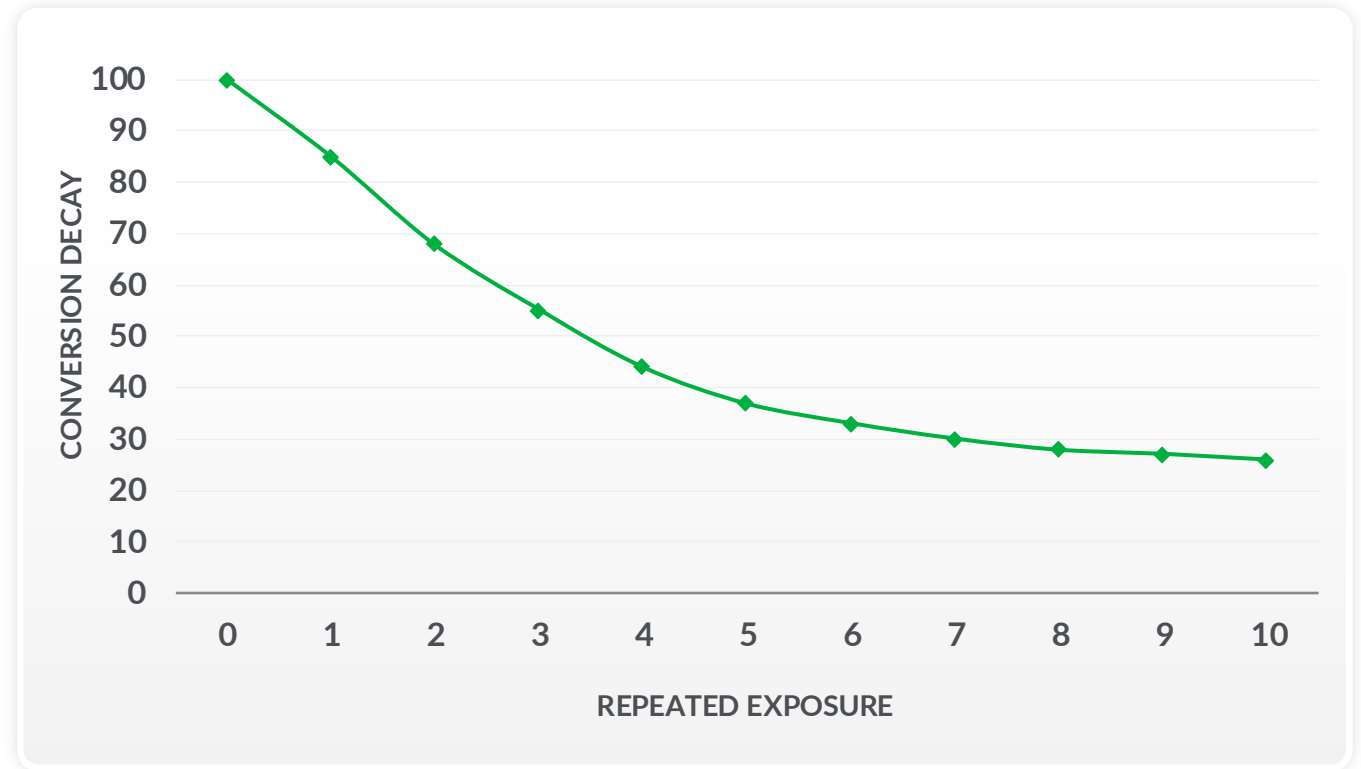


Increase the effectiveness of media dollars in the new machine learning environment

Creative fatigue can lead to degraded performance

At four repeat exposures, likely conversion decreases by about 60%.

This means there is a significant opportunity for fresh creative and to reach new audiences



60%

average drop in conversion rate after four repeated exposures



Building differentiated creative can help reach new audiences and boost ad performance

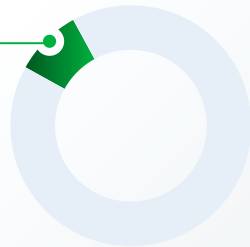
32%

improvement in CPA



9%

increase in incremental reach



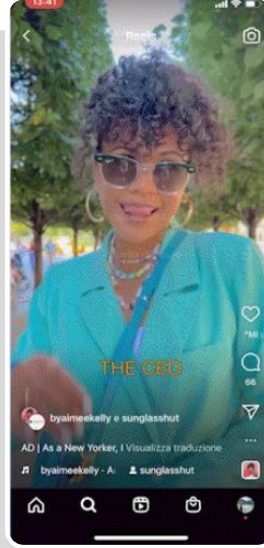
Source: Meta Creative Guide 2026

Examples of Differentiation

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Product and People	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Polished and Lo-Fi	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hero Product and Multi-Product
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Static and Video	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept and Message	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Creator Diversity

Infusing Creator Content Drives Impact Across Platforms & Placements

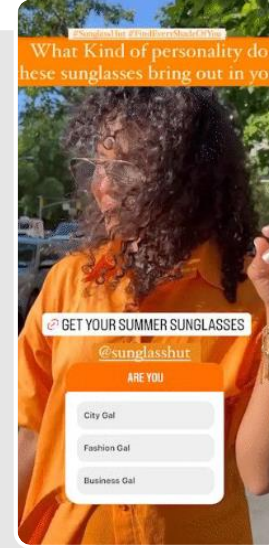
REELS



FEED



STORIES



STORIES



63%



of 18-35-year-olds trust what a creator says about a brand more than what the brand says about itself

58%



of people bought a new product or tried a new service in the past 6 months because of a creator's recommendation

92%



of consumers prefer the authenticity of user-created moments over polished ads

Diversify Your Techniques

Tailored, authentic, original content helps build connections with existing and new customers

#1 The Information



#2 Behind the scenes



#3 The product demo



#4 The comedy skit



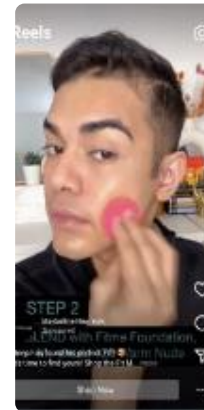
#5 The wardrobe sequence



#6 The before & after



#7 The listicle



#8 The tutorial



#9 The one-to-one



#5 The photodump

Not All Creator Content Is Built the Same

Content created by consumers or creators — not brands



Influencer Content



- ✓ Pay for audience reach
- ✓ Brand message is the priority
- ✓ Distributed to their following and can be used across paid media

User-Generated Content



- ✓ Pay for authentic content, not audience
- ✓ Feels organic and platform-native
- ✓ Built for use across paid media

Influencer = distribution UGC = performance

Traditional Creative Alone Is No Longer Enough

Brands need a new creative playbook.



Scroll-Past Risk

Polished ads are easy to skip right past



Creative Access Gap

No access to fresh assets to support ongoing campaigns



Creative Fatigue

Underperforming, plateauing, and outdated against current social best practices



Rising Media Costs

CPMs climbing, squeezing performance budgets

UGC is the Creative Advantage in an Automated Landscape



Authentic, platform-native creative

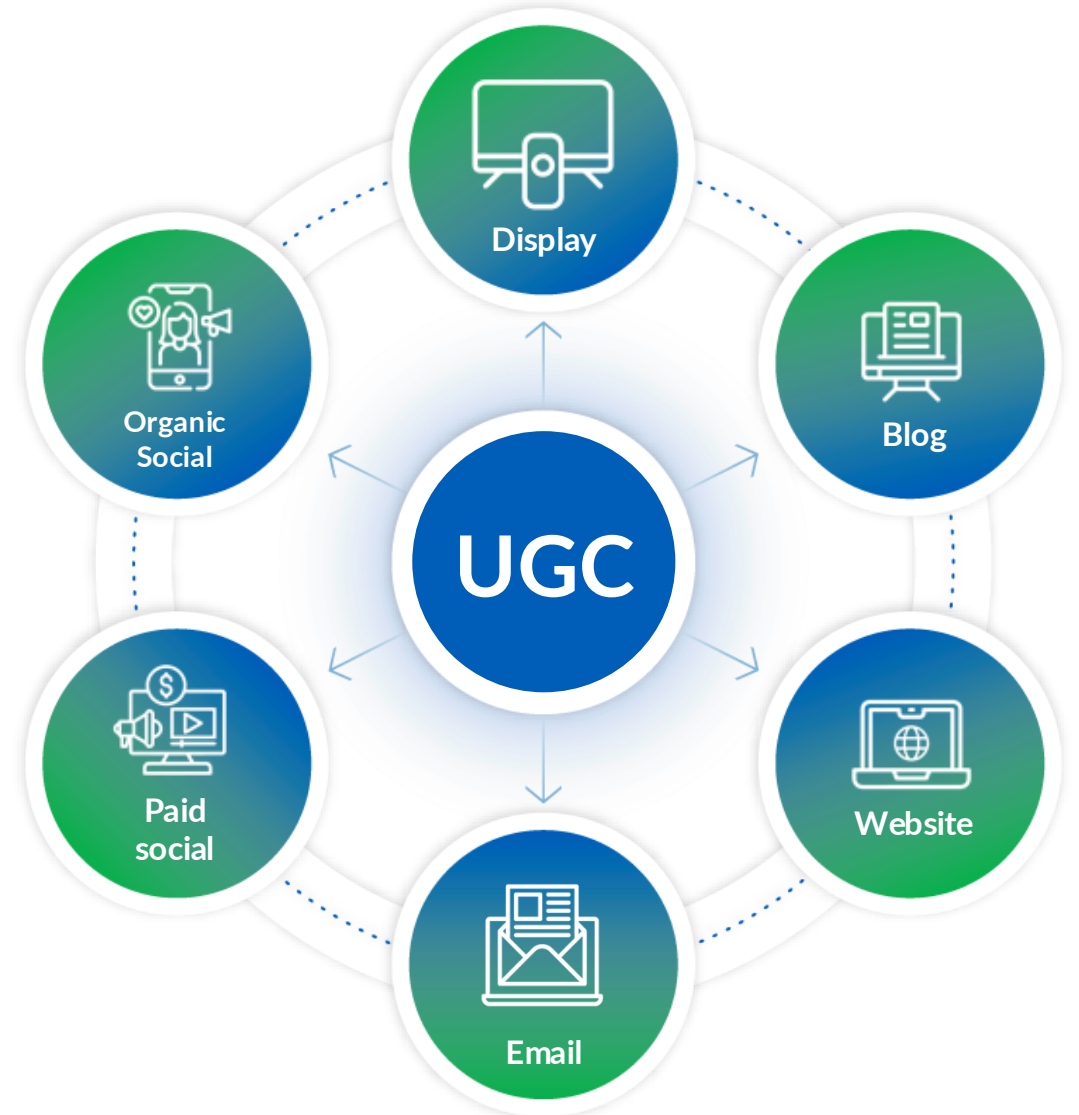


Scalable across every channel, not just social



Drives measurable performance results

UGC turns creative into a performance driver



UGC Drives Stronger Performance

Brand
Trust



93% of marketers say UGC outperforms brand content

Engagement &
Conversion Lift



UGC drives 6x more engagement and 29% higher conversions than brand content

Cost
Efficiency



UGC drives up to 4x CTR and 50% lower cost per click vs. traditional ads

UGC Delivers Across the Funnel

Awareness

Smart Home Technology

96%

of total impressions



Traffic

Grocery Retailer

11%

higher engagement rate vs. brand ads



Leads

Education

34%

lower cost per lead vs. brand ads

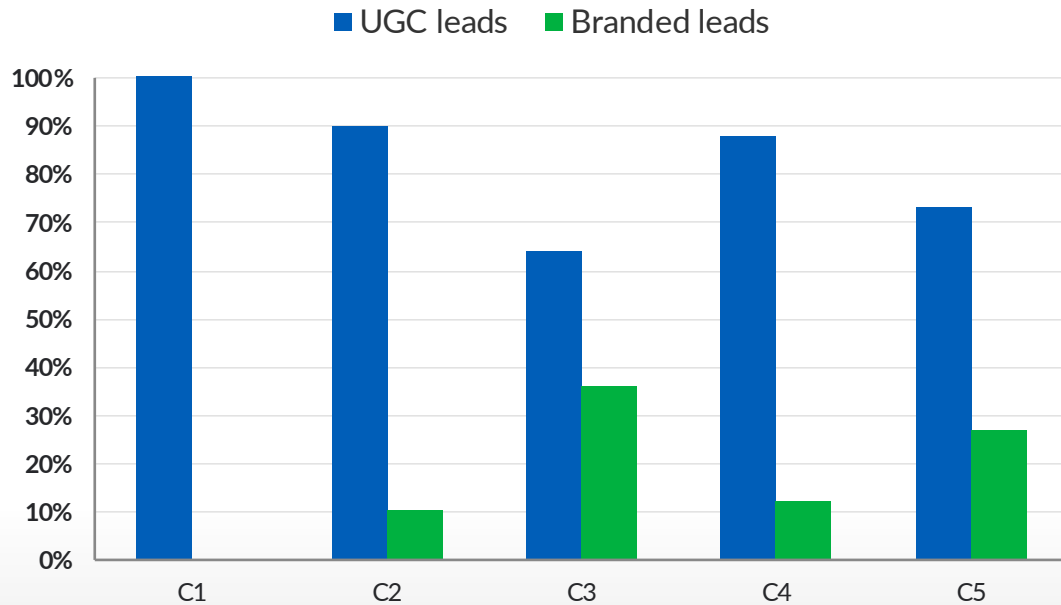


UGC as a Conversion Driver

OBJECTIVE

Evaluate if UGC video drives higher engagement and more efficient lead gen vs. branded assets

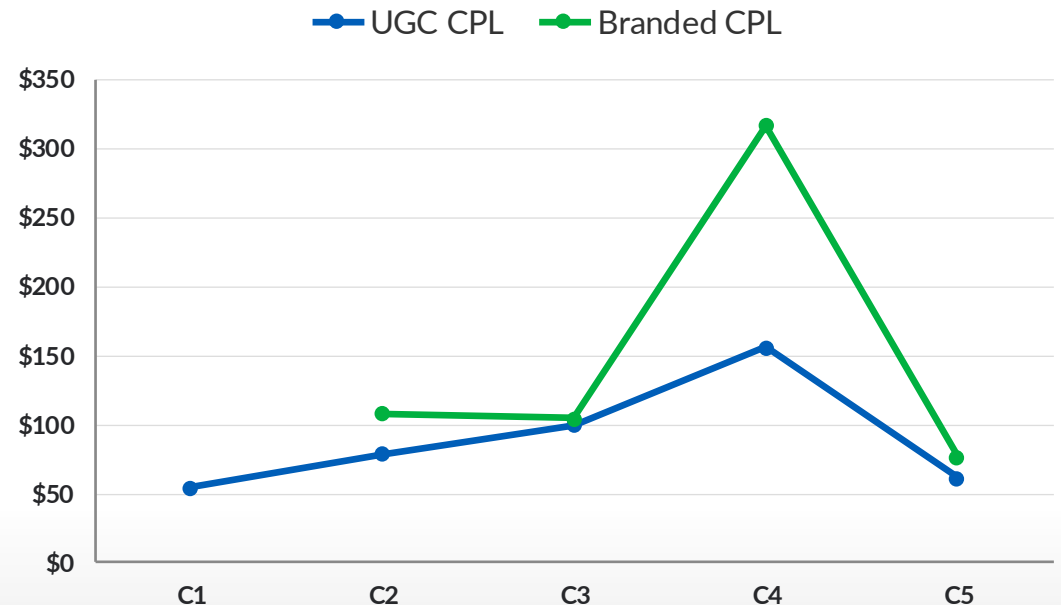
82% → of leads driven by UGC ads



STRATEGY

A/B test: branded (polished, brand-forward) vs. UGC (conversational, platform-native)

34% → more efficient cost per lead vs. branded



The Brands Winning Today Combine Both



Brand content drives reach. UGC drives trust. Together, they win — even in an AI-powered world.

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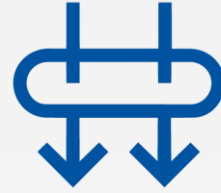
Value to Messaging



Understanding the creative spectrum



It is hard to predict the algorithms. Incorporate creative from across the spectrum.



AI infiltrating influencer



Even in the most authentic channels, use of automation tools is on the rise.

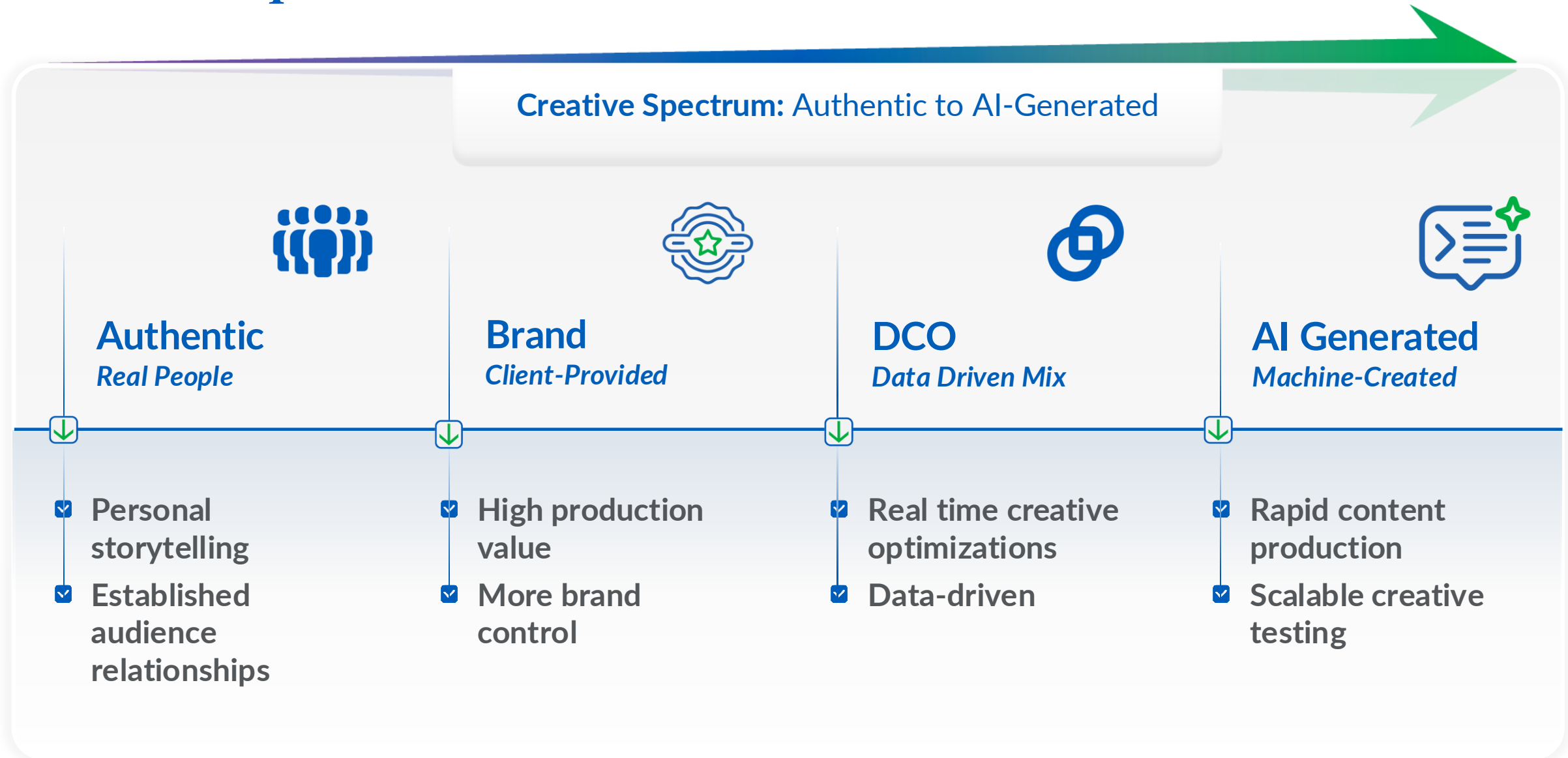


Creative mix today and tomorrow



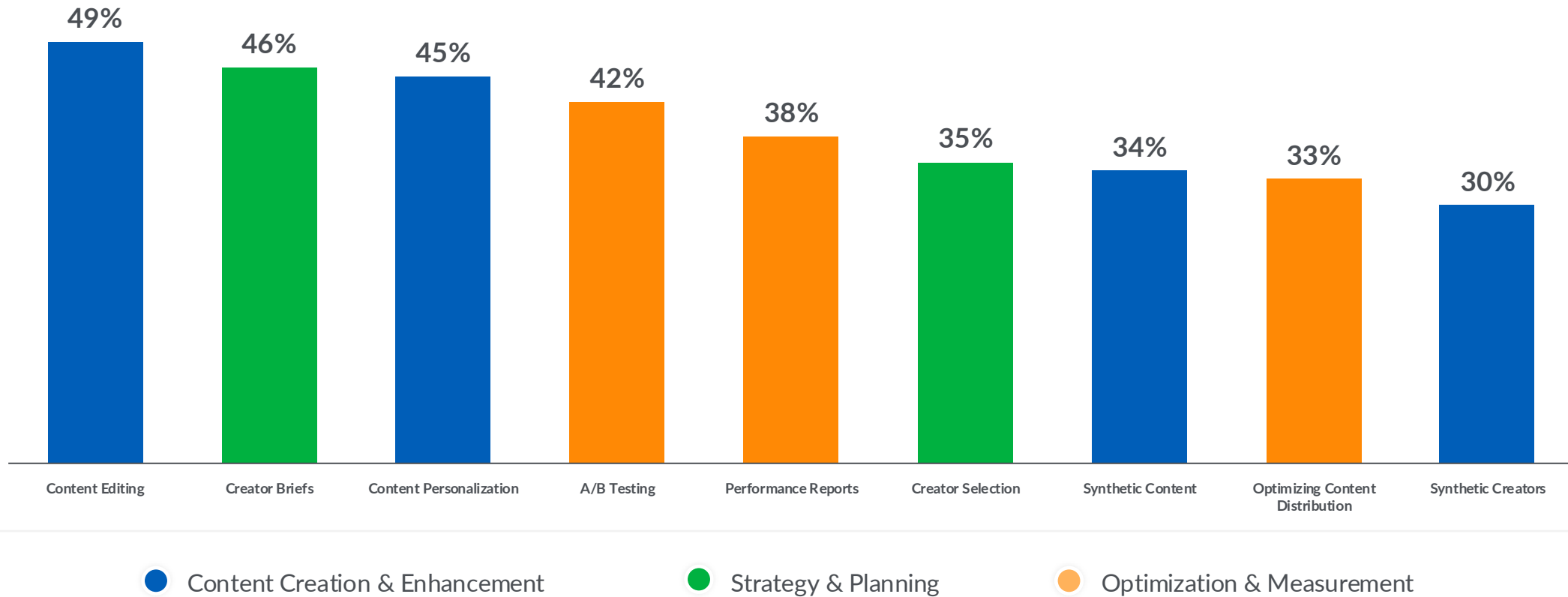
The creative mix of yesterday is no longer sufficient. The time to plan for this shift is now.

Creative Spectrum



The Rise of AI in the Creator Economy

% of Brands Using AI in Creator Campaigns by Task



Authenticity Remains the Biggest Concern in AI-Driven Creator Marketing

95%

of brands have concerns about
using AI in creator marketing overall



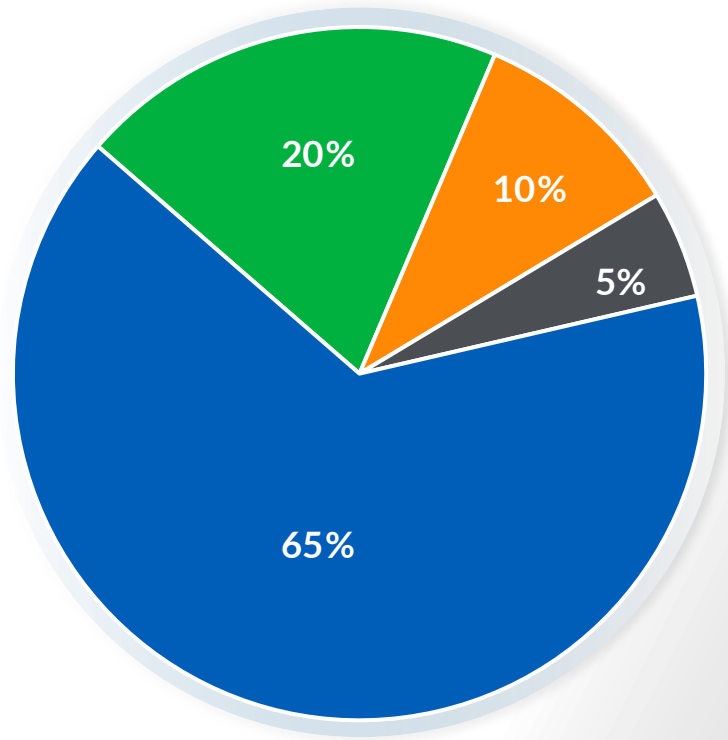
#1

concern brands have
about using AI for
creator marketing is
in removing the
human connection
throughout the
process

*AI can enhance creator marketing, but a human in the loop is
essential to get it right.*

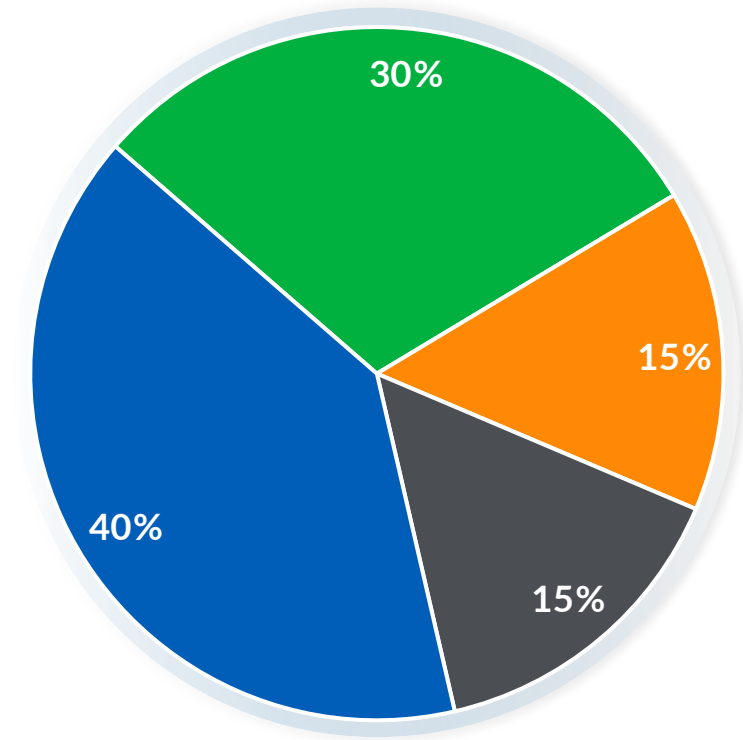
Creative mix in paid media today...and tomorrow

Digital Content Today



■ Influencer ■ UGC ■ Gen AI ■ Brand

Digital Content 2027



■ Influencer ■ UGC ■ Gen AI ■ Brand

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The Value of Real: Authentic Influence Wins Across the Board

Consumer



→ The unique strength of influencer marketing lies in trust, creator voice, and human connection—especially as AI accelerates.

Brand



→ Influencer plays a key role within the plan architecture as a scalable, one-to-many solution spanning the full funnel.

Other Media



→ Creator content strengthens other channels, driving performance and reinforcing the value of real, relatable content.

Your Message



→ AI-generated creative hasn't fully met the standard yet, as brands continue to question its authenticity and trust.

Come Talk to Us!



Influencer



Develop influencer concepts and creative thought starters tailored to your category

Create a sample roster of relevant influencers who fit your brand



UGC



Audit existing paid social campaigns for underperforming creative

Identify ads that have plateaued in platform or are facing fatigue



Affiliate



Audit how competitors are using affiliate and creator-driven commerce

Benchmark commission structures, program design, and creator incentives

Reach out to your Client Lead or mediatrends@harmelin.com to get started

About us



Harmelin Media specializes in strategic media solutions and has more than 40 years of experience helping clients navigate a rapidly changing media landscape across digital, traditional and lifestyle forms. The firm has grown with a diverse client roster including many Fortune 500 companies across an array of industries and is now one of the largest independent media service firms in the United States.

Harmelin's expertise is in managing the massive data sets that our clients and campaigns generate to develop strategic, channel-agnostic recommendations that generate business results and positive return on investment. We accomplish this while maintaining a long-term business focus, providing superior customer service and operating with 100% transparency in our operations. Our approach has resulted in unprecedented retention rates with both employees and clients.

Harmelin's current media billings exceed \$800 million across all digital and traditional channels on a local, national and international basis. We are a Google Premier Partner, Meta Business Partner and proud member of the ANA.

For more information, please contact info@harmelin.com or visit www.harmelin.com.



Outline

Opening Section – (2 Slides)

to connect. Original Word of Mouth.

Role of trust in the world; GO REALLY BIG – Emotions hit; Beyond Influencer – Human nature needs Authentic & Trust & Connection –

Why Authenticity Matters in an AI World (8-10)

Intent: The unique strength of this channel in current ecosystem; illustrate Influencers power (Value to consumer)

- The growing role of trust, creator voice, and human connection as AI-generated content accelerates
- Evolution - Where did Influencer come from? There wasn't a place for people. Mommy blogger? Timeline?
- Why influencers continue to resonate with consumers - They are not just sales people, people want their advice – Feel they know them; Strong relationship
- Moving past “what influencers are” to the real value they deliver
- How all ages uses influence for product discovery, validation, and decision-making
- Not just gen z

Influencer in your Media mix (8-10)

Intent: How does Influencer fit in/support your larger marketing efforts (Value to brand)

- Where influencer fits within the Plan Arch / media plan
- A true one-to-many solution with strengths similar to linear TV—but built for the next generation – already primed audience - aware
- The added advantage of digital precision, measurement, amplification, and asset reuse
- Influencer’s evolving role across the funnel, including its growing importance in affiliate marketing
- How this ties into solutions we already offer
- Krustez Case Study – use throughout – product sales grew and influencer was primary contributor

Performance enhancement (8-10)

Intent: Influencer strengthens other media channels – 3x your social! Investment working hard. (Value to Other Media)

- How influencer content strengthens performance across paid social, YouTube, and other channels
- Why investment here can unlock greater efficiency and impact elsewhere in the media mix – brainstorm
- The role of UGC today
- UGC Case Study
- Reiterate authenticity

Content Today and Tomorrow (3-4)

(Value to your message)

- AI Creative and why it doesn't meet the standard at this time
- Where we see creative AI entering the ecosystem on the opposite end of the spectrum (treading lightly)
- Creative Mix we see in the future

Key Takeaways & Actions (2-3 Slides)

- Invite clients to reach out to schedule a category-specific follow-up
- These sessions would include:
 - Competitive insights
 - Influencer activity within their category
 - Relevant case studies
 - Best practices and strategic opportunities

Panel Discussion

Amplifying Influence through Paid Social Boosting

Paid social boosting maximizes the impact of live influencer content by ensuring precise reach to even more consumers within your target audience.

Content



Quality custom content sharing brand messaging, optimized for the platform(s)



Platform



Served organically where the target audience consumes media for entertainment and education



Amplification



Paid social boosting extends reach & frequency of organic influencer content to reach even more in our target audience



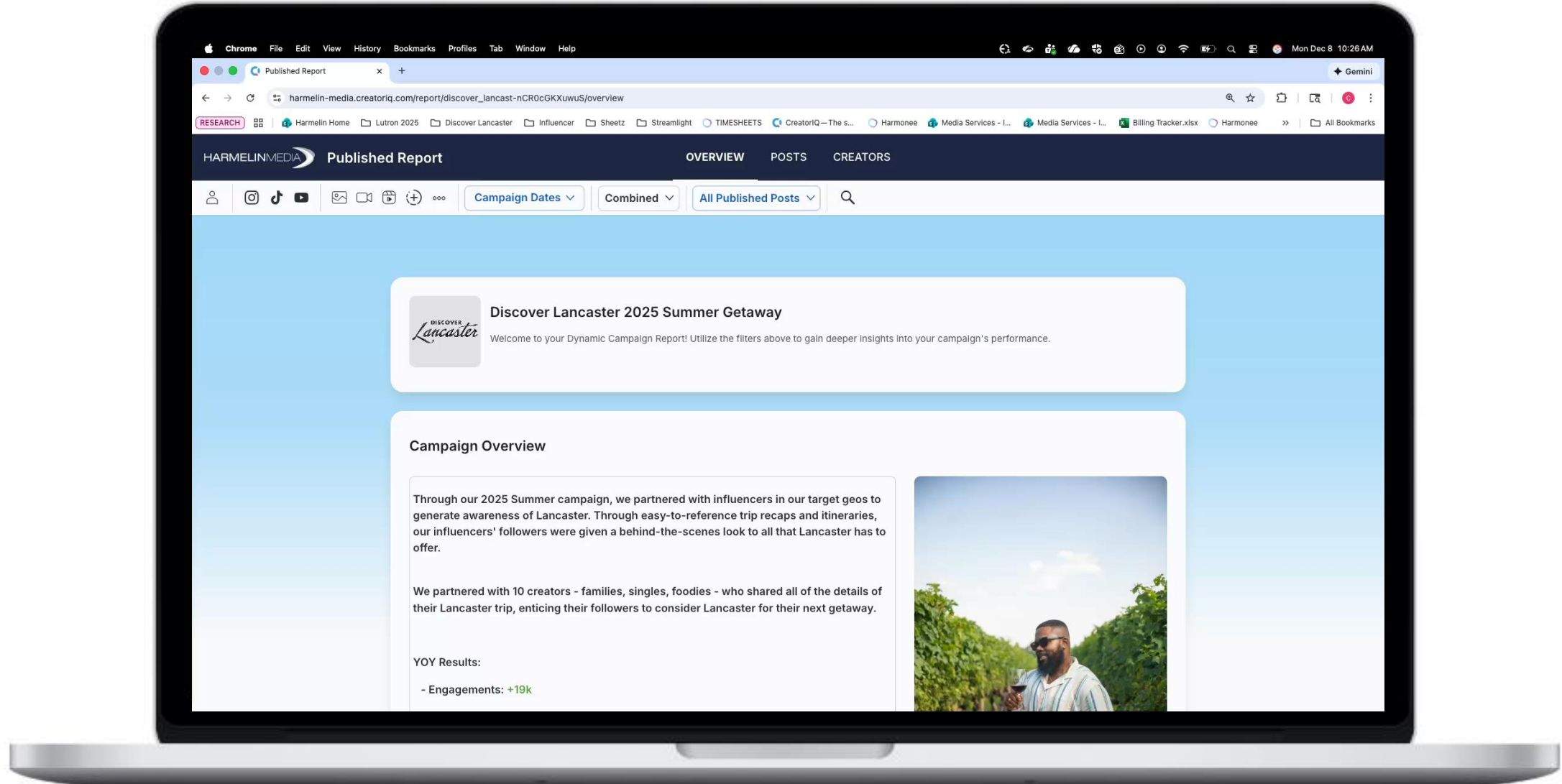
Highly Qualified Consumers



Update to more recent stat

82% of brands feel that influencer marketing campaigns generate **higher-quality customers** than other types of marketing, leading to more impactful results ([Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024](#))

Sample Reporting Dashboard



Influencer Marketing at Harmelin

We're an in-house team of experts building the right influencer relationships to drive results, reach your audience with precision, and amplify impact through organic content and paid social.

MEDIA MINDED

A performance agency by nature, we infuse Influencer Marketing into your media plan to solve business challenges and achieve KPIs.

INFLUENCE WITH PURPOSE

We design a customized plan that best reaches your target by determining platform(s), influencers, key messaging, and more.



CALCULATED INFLUENCE

Identifying influencers that best reach your target audience via organic content and paid social amplification, we accelerate your media & business objectives.



INVESTMENTS THAT LAST

Uncovering opportunities to integrate content into your media plan, we help to increase ROI on influencer content to ensure partnership benefits last beyond one campaign.

Cross-Category Expertise



Timeline & Evolution of the Influencer Industry

EXPERIMENTATION & PR-DRIVEN INFLUENCE

<p>2002 "Mommy Bloggers" first true influencers</p>	<p>2004 "Blog" = word of the year</p>	<p>2006 Twitch & Tumbler launch; fandom communities explode</p>	<p>2008 IM = PR; packages sent for reviews; payment rare, no briefs, SOWs</p>	<p>2009 FTC revises endorsement guide; blog endorsements focus</p>
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INSTAGRAM + YOUTUBE = THE BIRTH OF MODERN INFLUENCERS

<p>2010 Instagram launches, YouTube on the rise</p>	<p>2012 The term "influencer" appears in marketing press</p>	<p>2013 Sponsored posts & video content on IG</p>	<p>2014</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> IG hits 200MM users Brands shift from gifting > paid partnerships; creators professionalize 	<p>2015 FTC cracks down on non-disclosed social ads; brands adopt mandatory disclosures</p>	<p>2016</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stories launch on IG – massive shift toward real-time content Birth of Musical.ly (aka TikTok)
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Timeline & Evolution of the Influencer Industry

RISE OF CREATOR ECONOMY & THE PANDEMIC BOOM

2017

- Swipe-up link on IG
- IM = standard budget item

2018

TikTok rises post Musical.ly merger

2019

- FTC publishes “Disclosure 101 for Social Media Influencers”
- Long-term ambassadors rise

2020

- Social media usage increases dramatically
- Creators fill production gaps
- TikTok creators dominate culture
- Live shopping grows in US

2021

- IG collab posts
- TikTok Creator Marketplace
- YT Shorts
- “Creator Economy” = mainstream term; affiliate platforms surge

MATURITY, MEASUREMENT, MULTI-CHANNEL INTEGRATIONS

2022

- Creator content > studio-produced
- Short-form vertical video dominates
- Brands rely more on creators for paid social assets

2023

AI-generated content & virtual influencers

2024

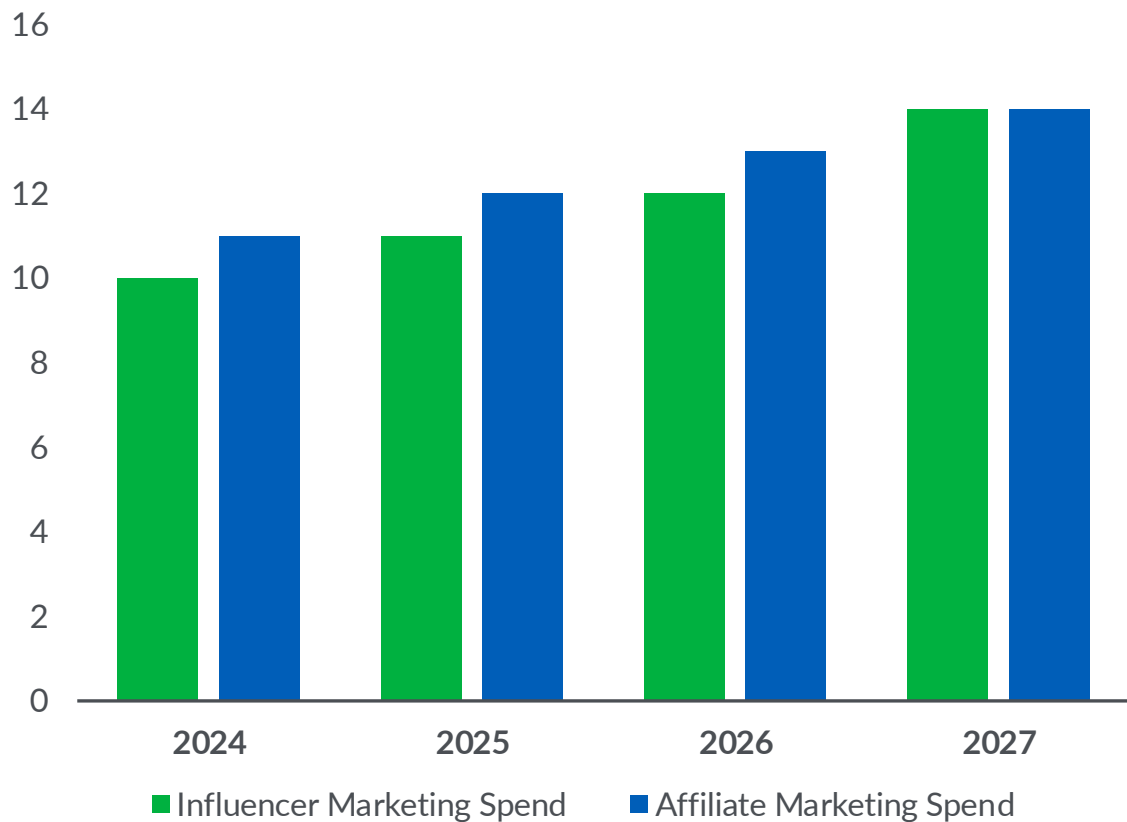
- Micro & mid-tier influencers deliver highest ROI
- Whitelisting fees, usage windows, reshoots, licensing = standard contract items

2025

- TikTok = Gen Z’s “google”
- Community-based creators gain power
- Agencies =creator production studios

Influencer and Affiliate Spending

Influencer/Affiliate Marketing Spend (Billions)



Sources: Influencer Marketing Measurement 2025, Influencer marketing set to surpass \$13 billion by 2027

In 2025, Influencer spend in the U.S. will hit 11 billion, seeing a 9% growth in spend from 2025 to 2026.

No longer just a campaign tactic, it's becoming part of the always-on brand strategy.

Affiliate will see an 8% increase in spend between 2025 and 2026

Affiliate finds the most success in enhancing customer loyalty, generating leads, and brand awareness

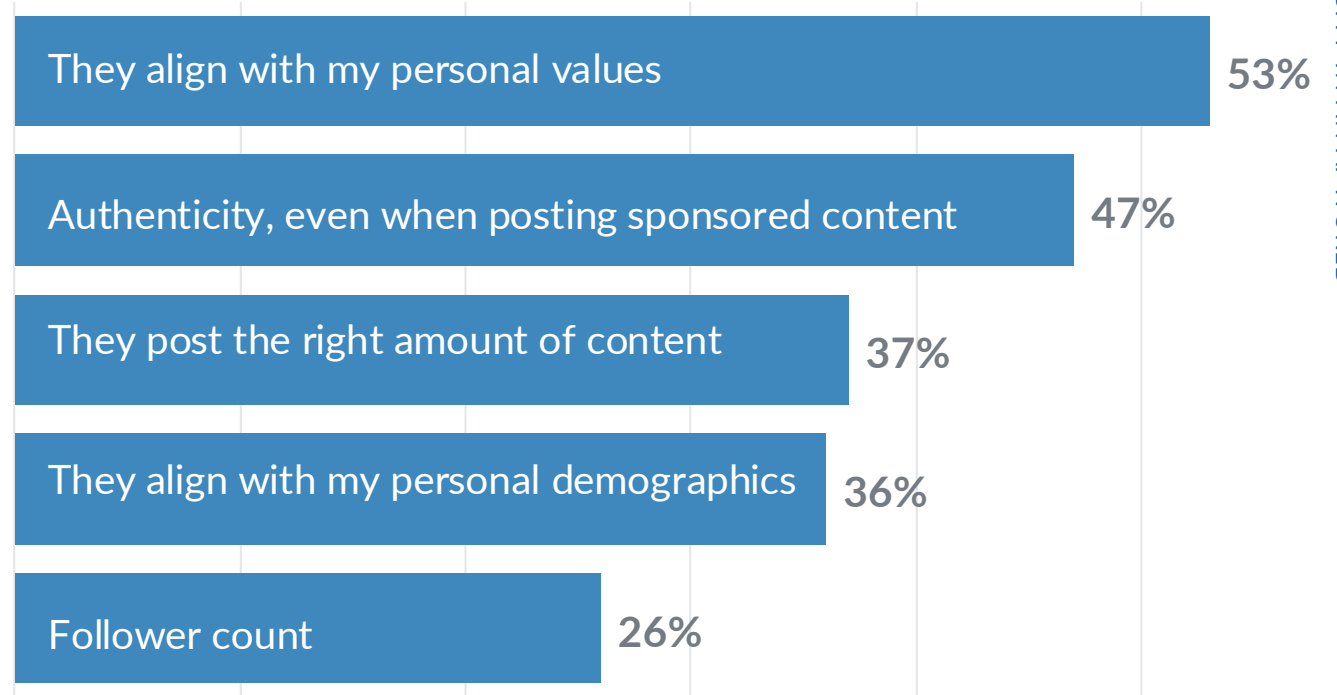
Audiences trust influencers they can relate to

Audiences are more likely to trust influencers that have a similar lifestyle – partnering with influencers who your audience sees as relatable is more likely to prove valuable.

76%

of Gen-Zers and 74% of millennials are more likely to purchase from a brand that partners with an influencer they like

(Sprout Social, 2025)



Qualities consumers look for in influencers, eMarketer, Feb 2024

Creator Campaign Costs are on the Rise

Influencer compensation is not one-size-fits-all. It depends on many factors, including:



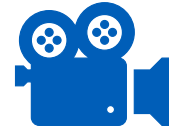
ENGAGEMENT VOLUME



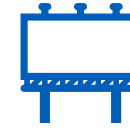
AUDIENCE SIZE



PLATFORM



PRODUCTION COST

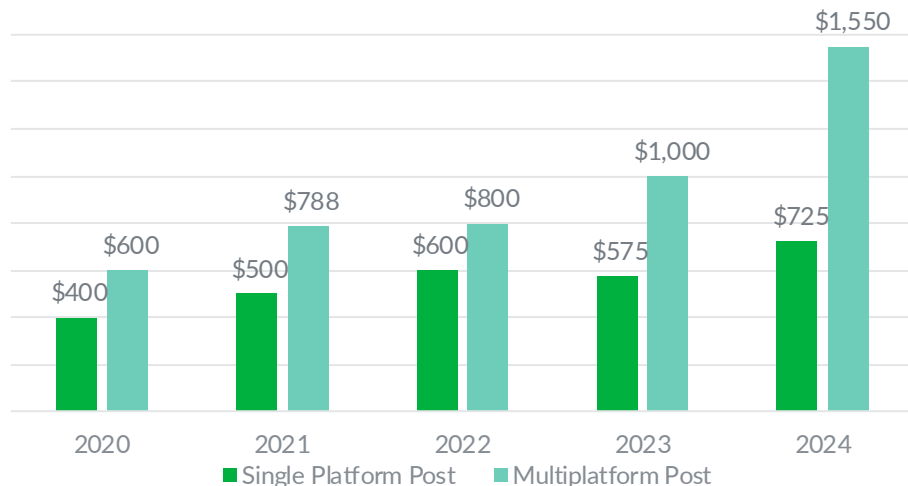


USAGE FEES



EXCLUSIVITY FEES

MEDIAN PRICE, CREATOR ENDORSEMENT DEALS 2020-2024



Median price of creator endorsement deals among Instagram and TikTok creators in north America by deal type, 2020 - 2024, FYPM 2024

AVERAGE COST PER POST ON INSTAGRAM, 2025

Nano	\$500 - \$2,000
Micro	\$2,000 - \$8,000
Mid-tier	\$8,000 - \$20,000
Macro	\$20,000 - \$45,000
Mega/Celeb	\$45,000+

Impact, 2025

Discover Lancaster: Winter Getaway

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The goal of this campaign was to drive awareness and increase visits to Lancaster through influencer partnerships showcasing curated getaways with one-of-a-kind seasonal experiences and local attractions from October to December.

STRATEGY

Partner with a diverse group of creators to showcase how they discover Lancaster, highlighting seasonal activities, new family traditions, shopping, food and drink, local traditions, and unique experiences that make Lancaster the perfect destination for fall and holiday getaways.

RESULTS

13 influencers created and shared Reels, Instagram Stories, and TikToks, showcasing Lancaster's seasonal events, local dining spots, unique accommodations, and more. Content highlighted Lancaster's mix of holiday magic and year-round experiences. Whether a family getaway or weekend with friends, Lancaster is the perfect destination for both seasonal festivities and anytime visits. This campaign generated...

226

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

17M

IMPRESSIONS (Organic & Paid)

747k

Link Clicks (Organic & Paid)

4.33%

ENGAGEMENT RATE (Organic & Paid)

DISCOVER Lancaster



Pennie: You're Worth Protecting

CAMPAIGN GOAL

This campaign aims to increase awareness and boost enrollment in Pennie's affordable health plans, focusing on uninsured, unemployed, and former Medicaid recipients during the 2025 Open Enrollment Period.

STRATEGY

Collaborate Pennsylvania-based creators to connect with eligible residents, highlighting Pennie's affordability, simplicity, and financial benefits.

RESULTS

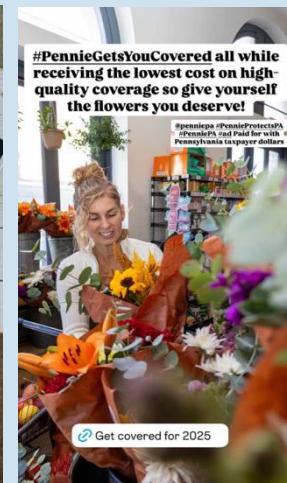
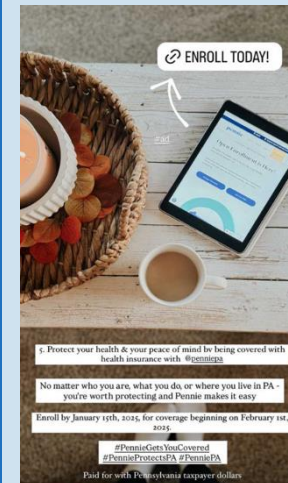
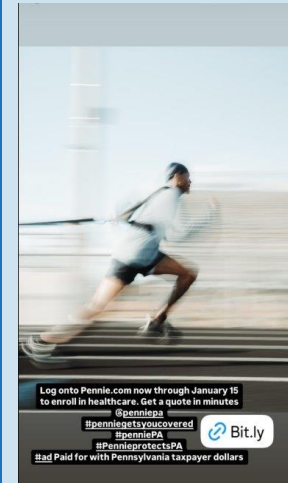
24 influencers helped promote Pennie's Open Enrollment period by highlighting its savings benefits and user-friendly experience, driving awareness and consideration ahead of the December and January deadlines. This generated...

166
PIECES OF ORIGINAL
CONTENT

35.8M
IMPRESSIONS
(Organic & Paid)

2.6M
ENGAGEMENTS
(Organic & Paid)

34.2K
TOTAL CLICKS
(Organic & Paid)



Krusteaz: Spring x Pancake Month

Influencers + BA

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The goal was to drive awareness and engagement around Krusteaz pancake mixes during February and March by positioning the brand as the go-to choice for joyful springtime gatherings. The campaign aimed to inspire audiences through relatable, creative content that showcased the versatility, convenience, and quality of Krusteaz products—while celebrating Pancake Month and key spring occasions.

STRATEGY

Partner with influencers on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, to create content in two seasonal waves—first celebrating Pancake Month through creative and cozy pancake moments, then shifting to spring-themed content tied to gatherings, fresh ingredients, and family occasions. The strategy focused on authentic storytelling, seasonal relevance, and amplification in key markets to maximize impact.

RESULTS

11 influencers successfully drove strong visibility and engagement through high-performing, influencer-led content that resonated with Krusteaz's target audience across key platforms and markets. This generated...

165

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

12.37M

IMPRESSIONS (Organic & Paid)

1.5M

ENGAGEMENTS (Organic & Paid)

12.12%

ENGAGEMENT RATE (Organic & Paid)



KRUSTEAZ



MARKETING MEDIA // AUTHENTICITY IN AN AI WORLD

SEPTA: SEPTA 2025

CAMPAIGN GOAL

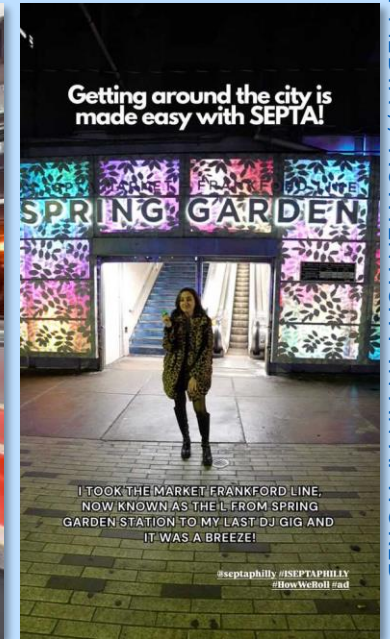
The goal was to drive awareness and engagement in the Greater Philadelphia area by positioning SEPTA as the smart, accessible way to navigate and experience the city. The campaign focused on showcasing the ease, reliability, and everyday utility of SEPTA’s transportation options—bus, metro, trolley, and regional rail—through authentic influencer content that emphasized commuting, entertainment, and city life.

STRATEGY

Partnered with a diverse group of local Philadelphia-based influencers on Instagram to produce content that authentically demonstrated how SEPTA fits into their daily routines and lifestyles. Creators highlighted key moments—from work and school commutes to nights out and family activities—while integrating brand messaging around accessibility, convenience, and seamless app features like contactless payment. Content was optimized for both organic visibility and strategic amplification across five target counties.

RESULTS

8 influencers delivered strong reach and engagement by sharing relatable and locally relevant content that reflected SEPTA’s core values and commuter-friendly features. Their storytelling helped spotlight various modes of transit and neighborhoods while reinforcing SEPTA’s role in empowering Philadelphians to move freely and confidently across the region.



40
PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

7M
IMPRESSIONS (Organic & Paid)

5.5K
Link Clicks (Organic & Paid)

10.7%
ENGAGEMENT RATE (Organic & Paid)

HARMONY MEDIA // AUTHENTICITY IN AN AI WORLD

UPMC: SportsMed

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The campaign aimed to enhance awareness and drive consideration of UPMC's Sports Medicine's expertise and services to help you train, prevent injuries, or treat common running injuries.

STRATEGY

The strategy involved collaborating with Western PA influencers to engage adults 25+. The campaign highlighted Running, Running-related Injuries, and Health and Wellness with the importance of prioritizing their health and encouraging them to trust UPMC SportsMed.

RESULTS

2 influencers were selected to produce authentic content across Reels, Instagram Stories, and TikTok's, highlighting running, marathon training, and the UPMC running assessment. Their content emphasized the importance of listening to your body and showcased how a UPMC SportsMed serves as a trusted partner, offering advanced treatments, diagnostics, and comprehensive care

25

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

1.7M

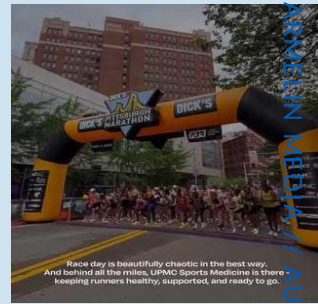
IMPRESSIONS (Organic & Paid)

2.8K

LINK CLICKS (Organic & Paid)

12.75%

ENGAGEMENT RATE (Organic & Paid)



Krusteaz: Buttons Bday Bonanza

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The goal was to drive awareness and engagement around Krusteaz Buttermilk Pancake Mix by making the product a central part of a joyful and unconventional moment—Buttons the cow’s first birthday. Running in June and July, the campaign aimed to entertain and inspire audiences with content that celebrated the fun, versatility, and quality of Krusteaz, showing that it can elevate even the most unexpected celebrations.

STRATEGY

Partner with creator Elias Herrera to celebrate his cow Buttons’ first birthday in a playful content series. Centered around Krusteaz Buttermilk Pancake Mix, the campaign used Elias’ humor and style to show how Krusteaz can make any occasion fun and memorable.

RESULTS

1 influencer delivered highly engaging, influencer-led content that resonated with Krusteaz’s target audience across key platforms. The campaign successfully reinforced Krusteaz’s positioning as a fun, creative, and versatile brand—creating scroll-stopping moments that left audiences smiling and craving pancakes which generated...

4

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

2.62M

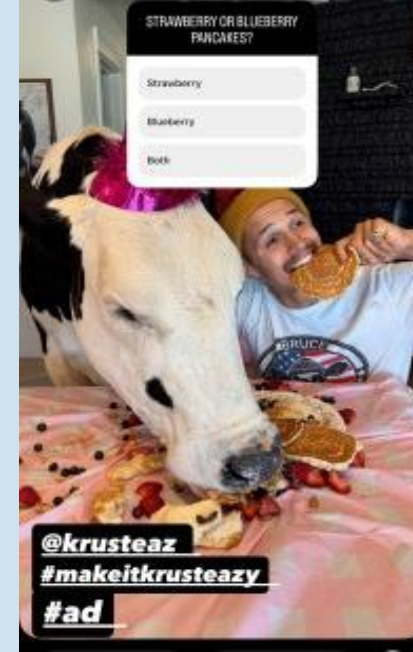
TOTAL ORGANIC IMPRESSIONS

49.96K

TOTAL ORGANIC ENGAGEMENTS

1.91%

ORGANIC ENGAGEMENT RATE



KRUSTEAZ

THE #1 INFLUENCER MEDIA // AUTHENTICITY IN AN A WORLD



Krusteaz: Summer Kickoff

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The goal was to drive awareness and engagement for Krusteaz during the spring and summer by positioning the brand in fun, seasonal recipes that inspire joyful gatherings and outdoor enjoyment. The campaign showcased the versatility, convenience, and quality of Krusteaz products through relatable, creative content that encouraged audiences to embrace the ease of baking while making the most of summertime fun.

STRATEGY

Partner with influencers on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to create two waves of content—spring themes like fresh flavors, picnics, and family gatherings, followed by summer content focused on fueling activities, effortless entertaining, and seasonal twists. The approach emphasized authentic storytelling, seasonal relevance, and creative recipe variations that aligned with Krusteaz’s daring, savvy, and genuine personality.

RESULTS

9 influencers successfully delivered engaging content that reinforced Krusteaz as a trusted, time-saving solution for seasonal celebrations, driving strong visibility and meaningful engagement. This generated...

86

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

21.4M

IMPRESSIONS (Organic & Paid)

50.1K

LINK CLICKS (Organic & Paid)

7.29%

ENGAGEMENT RATE (Organic & Paid)



Pennie: Specialty Enrollment Period

CAMPAIGN GOAL

This campaign aims to raise awareness and encourage Pennsylvanians who are uninsured or seeking high-quality health coverage to visit pennie.com during Pennie’s Special Enrollment Period. The goal is to help eligible residents enroll in health plans, take advantage of financial savings, and secure peace of mind with 2025 coverage.

STRATEGY

Partner with Pennsylvania-based creators to connect with eligible residents and share how Pennie provides an easy, trustworthy, and affordable way to calculate costs, apply, shop, and enroll in one place. Messaging highlights Pennie’s role as the state’s official health coverage marketplace and educates audiences on Qualifying Life Events that make them eligible for a Special Enrollment Period.

RESULTS

23 influencers helped spread awareness of Pennie’s Special Enrollment Period, driving impressions, clicks, and engagement among uninsured adults aged 19–64. Creators delivered supportive, conversational, and accessible content that inspired their audiences to explore coverage options at pennie.com—reinforcing that peace of mind starts with having the right health plan. This generated...

114
PIECES OF ORIGINAL
CONTENT

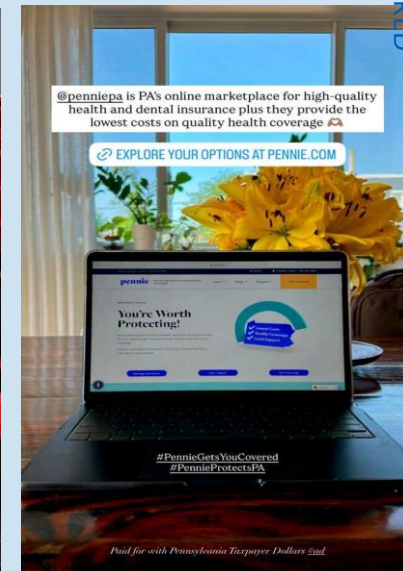
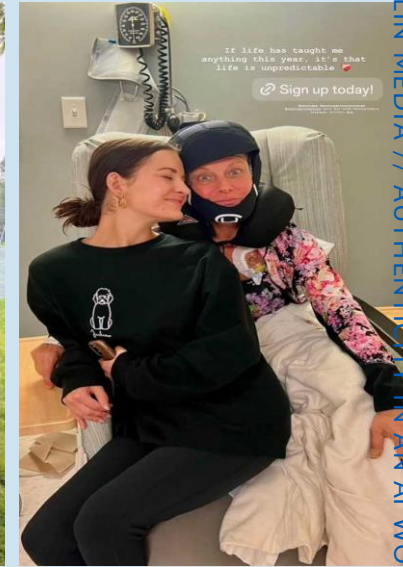
3.44M
IMPRESSIONS
(Organic)

81.27K
ENGAGEMENTS
(Organic)

2.37%
ENGAGEMENT RATE
(Organic)



HARMELIN MEDIA // AUTHENTICITY IN AN AI WORLD



Streamlight: 2025 Streamlight, Inc.

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The goal of the campaign was to generate awareness of Streamlight's high-performance flashlights, headlamps, and tactical lighting by partnering with influencers in the Industrial and Auto categories. The campaign aimed to highlight how Streamlight products fit seamlessly into professional and everyday use, keeping the brand top-of-mind with the audiences we most wanted to reach.

STRATEGY

Collaborate with influencers in the Auto and Industrial spaces including mechanics, shop owners, and utility workers to create educational content showcasing Streamlight's durability and reliability. Storytelling targeted A25 to 44 audiences, highlighting real-world use in auto repair and construction while guiding followers on where to access products.

RESULTS

4 influencers shared authentic and engaging content across Instagram and TikTok, including Reels, Stories, and tutorials that demonstrated how Streamlight enhances efficiency and reliability in everyday work. This approach effectively drove awareness within target segments by blending education with real-world use cases. The campaign's success was measured by strong engagement rates (primary KPI), with secondary performance metrics including impressions, engagements, and clicks that reinforced Streamlight's position as a trusted brand for industrial and auto audiences. This generated...

44

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

8M

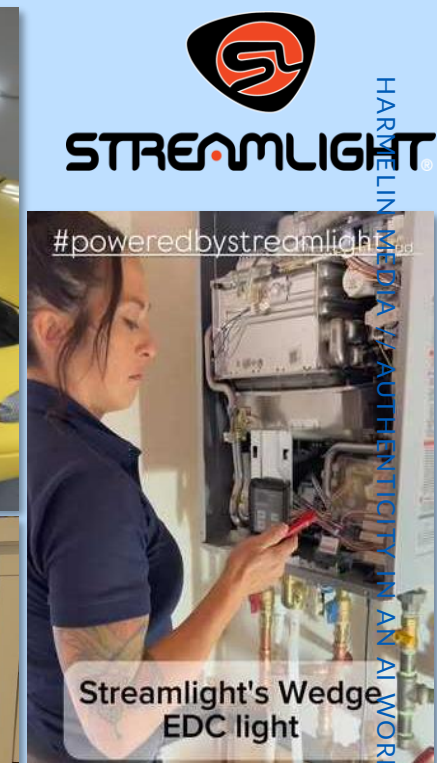
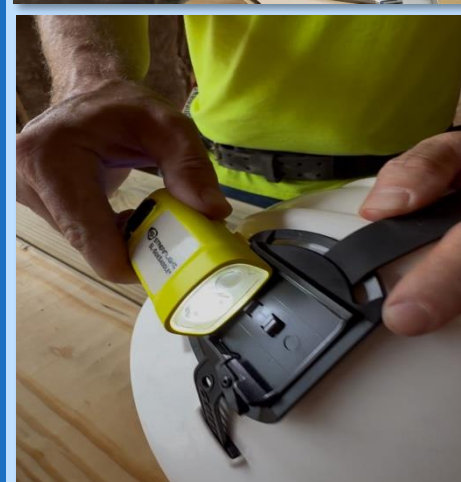
IMPRESSIONS (Organic & Paid)

2.9K

Link Clicks (Organic & Paid)

513.6K

ENGAGEMENTS (Organic & Paid)



STREAMLIGHT

HARMELIN MEDIA V AUTHENTICITY IN AN AI WORLD

UPMC: Health is the New Self-Care

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The campaign aimed to drive awareness and consideration of UPMC Primary Care among adults 18–26 by positioning primary care as an essential, accessible part of modern wellness. The initiative focused on reframing “self-care” to include establishing a relationship with a Primary Care Provider (PCP), completing routine check-ups, and taking proactive steps toward long-term health.

STRATEGY

The strategy involved partnering with lifestyle influencers across Western PA to authentically integrate primary care into everyday wellness routines. Influencers created content aligned with key themes such as “Health is the New Self-Care,” “Check In With You,” and “Care You Can Count On.” The campaign showcased UPMC Primary Care as modern, convenient, and supportive through relatable storytelling that emphasized wellness habits, accessible care options, and the importance of building consistent relationships with a trusted PCP.

RESULTS

4 influencers created Reels and TikTok's showcasing primary care visits, real wellness routines, and approachable experiences with UPMC providers. Their content reinforced key messaging around UPMC’s advanced network, convenient care options, and long-term PCP relationships. This authentic storytelling helped reframe primary care as an empowering form of self-care for young adults. This generated...

19

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

5.06M

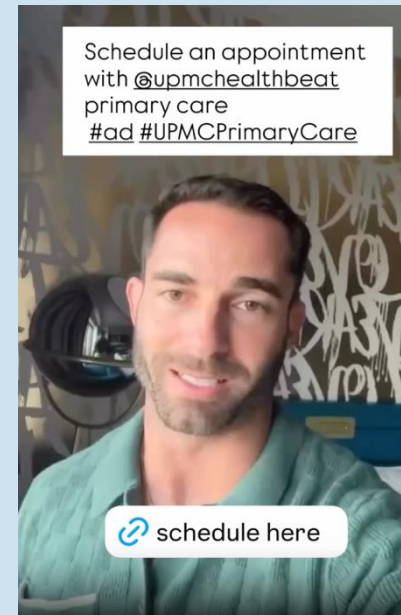
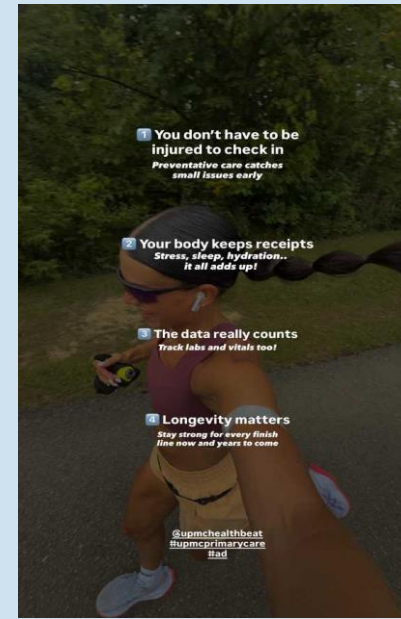
IMPRESSIONS (Organic & Paid)

7.6K

LINK CLICKS (Organic & Paid)

3.65%

ENGAGEMENT RATE (Organic & Paid)



Krusteaz: Back-To-School | FALL

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The campaign aimed to increase awareness and engagement by showcasing how Krusteaz products seamlessly fit into busy back-to-school routines and cozy fall traditions. Influencers highlighted how Krusteaz provides easy, delicious solutions that help parents simplify morning decisions, embrace comforting routines, and ensure kids are nourished and ready to thrive throughout the school year and fall season.

STRATEGY

The strategy centered on partnering with a diverse group of US-based creators including parents and students who could authentically integrate Krusteaz into their real-life routines. Content moved beyond traditional recipes, focusing instead on storytelling that reflected genuine back-to-school moments and fall rituals. Through video-first content across key social platforms, creators demonstrated how Krusteaz supports the transition from summer to structure while celebrating homemade comfort, ease, and creativity during the fall season.

RESULTS

14 creators produced relatable, engaging content across Reels, TikTok, Stories, and YouTube Shorts, highlighting Krusteaz as a trusted ally during both hectic school mornings and cozy fall moments. Content emphasized time-saving breakfasts, make-ahead solutions, after-school snacks, and seasonal baking traditions. The campaign successfully reinforced Krusteaz's role as an easy, high-quality solution that helps families stay nourished, connected, and confident throughout the back-to-school and fall seasons.

70

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

7.31M

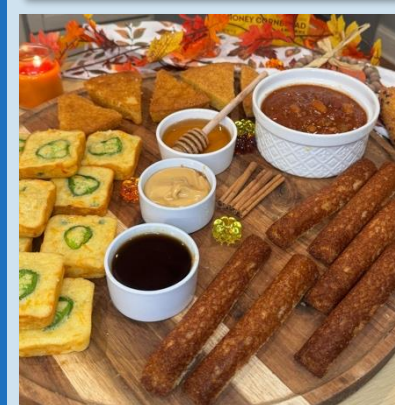
IMPRESSIONS (Organic)

519.9K

ENGAGEMENTS (Organic)

7.11%

ENGAGEMENT RATE (Organic)



KRUSTEAZ

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEXANDER WOODS

Red Lobster: Cheddar Bay Biscuits 2025

CAMPAIGN GOAL

The campaign aimed to drive awareness and consideration of Red Lobster Cheddar Bay Biscuit Mix by inspiring consumers to rethink how and when they use the product. Influencers were challenged to answer the question, “What else can you do with Cheddar Bay Biscuit Mix?” by showcasing its versatility across unexpected meals, occasions, and creative culinary moments.

STRATEGY

Partner with enthusiastic, US-based creators who authentically integrate the mix into everyday cooking. Content highlighted versatility beyond seafood, encouraging consumers to see Cheddar Bay Biscuits as an easy, crave-worthy addition to regular meal planning, entertaining, and family moments. All content was video-first and organically published on creators’ social channels, with a strong emphasis on tagging and linking to the Walmart PDP.

RESULTS

6 influencers produced engaging content across Reels, TikTok, Stories, and YouTube Shorts, showcasing Cheddar Bay Biscuits in unexpected recipes, family meals, entertaining hacks, and creative mash-ups. Content successfully challenged the perception that Cheddar Bay Biscuits are only for seafood occasions, reinforcing their ease, versatility, and crowd-pleasing appeal while driving awareness and engagement among a core family-focused audience.

30

PIECES OF ORIGINAL CONTENT

12.2M

IMPRESSIONS (Organic & Paid)

10K

LINK CLICKS (Organic & Paid)

10%

ENGAGEMENT RATE (Organic & Paid)



Resonating with the right audiences



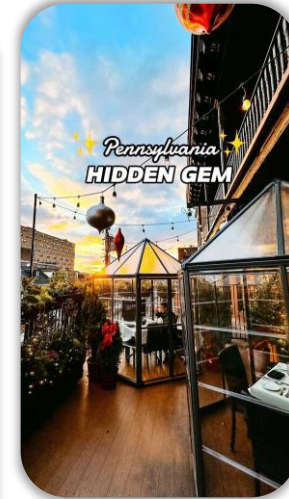
👁️ 1.67MM

VIRAL CONTENT



🔖 145.8K

PROOF OF FUTURE PLANNING VIA SAVES



Omg how cute is this?! Saving to do with Brian 🥰

Thanks for pronouncing Lancaster correctly!!! You will gladly be welcomed back!! BTW, Rachel's Crepes is a great spot for lunch!!

I just know I would love it here 🥰

This looks like the perfect weekend

Soo how much was the horseback riding? And is the stop Lancaster Pa?? I'm going to plan this same thing 🤔mainly for the horseback riding

Going in 3 weeks ! Probably most excited for Shady Maple 🤔 thanks for the recs ! ❤️

POSITIVE SENTIMENT