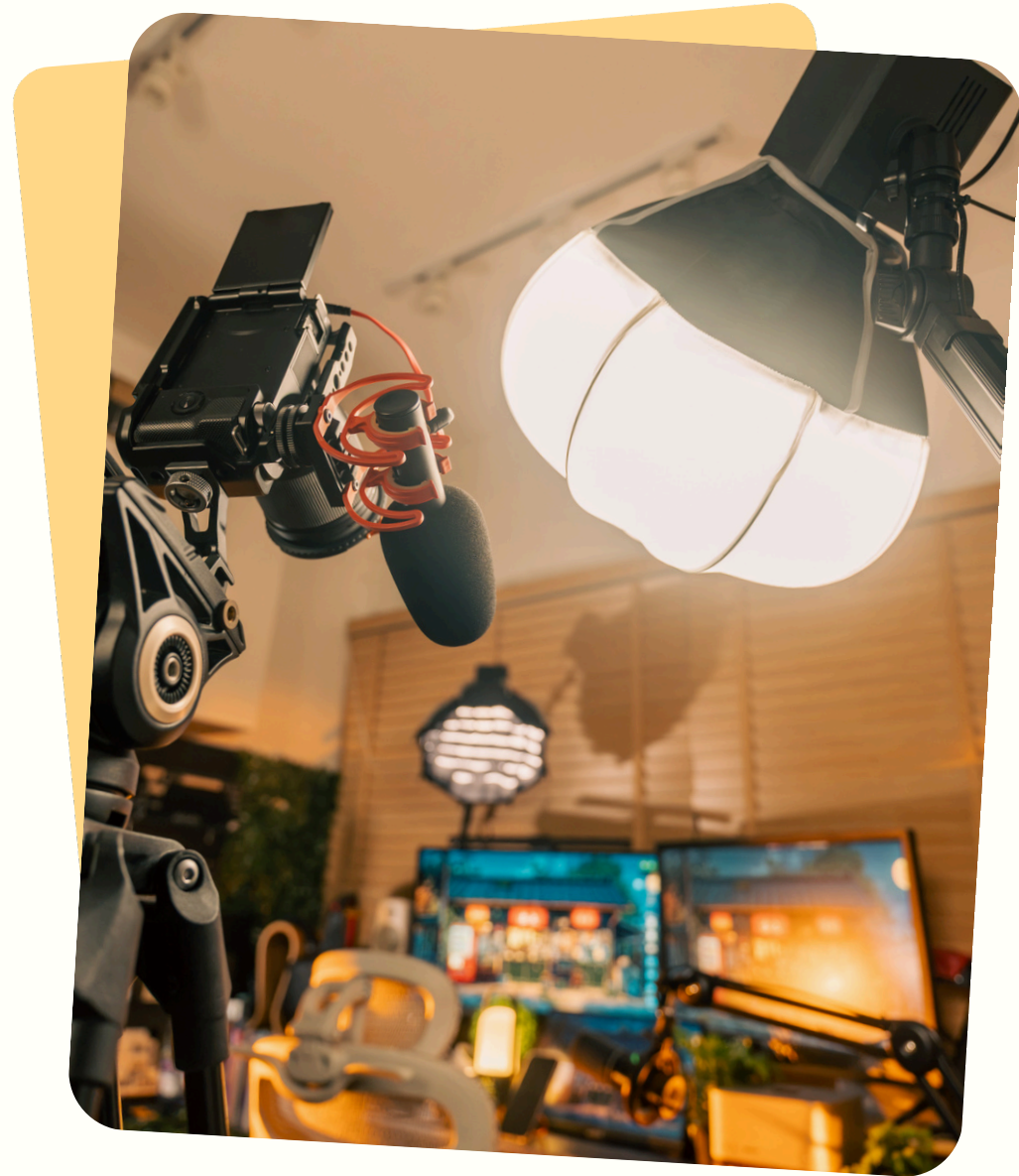


2027 Creator Economy Predictions

Five shifts reshaping how brands get discovered, work with creators and reach audiences beyond the feed.



Influence is becoming business infrastructure.



In 2027, the value of a creator partnership won't end when the content goes live. Its influence will extend into AI-powered discovery, future campaigns, audiences that follow creators beyond individual platforms, purchase decisions and paid media. As brands invest more heavily in creators, the opportunity is shifting from individual posts to lasting business impact.

The trends that follow explore where influence continues to create value, drawing on industry research, insights from sessions at Advertising Week New York, and IMG's firsthand experience executing creator campaigns in 2026.

01	The New Discovery Layer	AI is changing how consumers find brands. Creator content now keeps working in AI answers long after it's posted.
02	The Scale Paradox	Creator programs are outgrowing the campaign model. Scale needs structure, not sameness.
03	Audience Portability	Measuring the audience a creator can move, not just reach.
04	Social Escapes the Feed	Social now loops between screens, games, real life and the family. Gen Alpha shows it clearly.
05	Creator Content & Paid Media Merge	The best creator content keeps working as paid media. Budgets, rights and teams have to catch up.

TREND 01

The New Discovery Layer

How AI is reshaping brand discovery

KEY TAKEAWAY

As more consumers ask AI tools for recommendations, creator content now does two jobs. It engages audiences on social platforms today, and it becomes part of the information AI draws on when suggesting brands later, especially for questions like which product is best.

Because AI pulls from many sources to shape its answers, brands that partner with credible creators who address specific consumer questions will be better positioned to show up.

Heard at Advertising Week NY 2026

Content now has a second job.

Carla Hassan, Chief Marketing Officer at JPMorganChase, said content created through brand experiences now matters for more than the moment itself: "these pieces of content are incredibly important for the discoverability of your brand in the LLMs."



The shift

AI is becoming a regular step in how people shop.

74%

of shoppers use AI tools during product discovery
(NIQ, Aug 2026)

65%

say credible creator reviews increase their confidence in AI recommendations
(IAB, Sep 2026)

21%

believe a larger audience makes a creator trustworthy enough for AI models to rely on
(IAB, Sep 2026)

Why it matters to brands

Creators are already where discovery starts. Influencers are the top channel consumers use to explore new brands and products (BCG, 2025). As shoppers move that discovery into AI tools, they want the same voices there: 56% of AI shoppers prefer recommendations that draw on creators (IAB, Sep 2026). Brand sources still make up most AI citations (86%, Yext, 2025), so creators work alongside a strong website, not instead of it.

Credibility decides which creators count. Asked what makes a creator trustworthy enough for AI to rely on, nearly half cited a proven track record, 40% consistency, 36% expertise, 35% independence from brands and 34% sponsorship transparency (IAB, Sep 2026). In practice, a creator who has reviewed products in your category for three years can matter more to your AI visibility than a larger lifestyle creator posting once.

What we don't know yet. No study has shown a creator campaign directly changing what AI recommends. This is the gap to watch in 2027.

What brands should do in 2027

IMG'S POINT OF VIEW

Don't optimize for the algorithm. Earn the recommendation.

The mistake we see most: brands treat AI visibility as an SEO problem and leave creators out of it, or brief creators for a single moment instead of content that keeps answering questions for months. Brands can't control what AI recommends, but they can build the credible creator and third-party footprint it draws on.

01

Track how your brand shows up in AI. Ask AI tools the same category questions every few weeks, before and after creator programs.

02

Choose creators for credibility. Prioritize expertise, lived experience and a consistent niche.

03

Brief for usefulness, and make it easy to find. Favor reviews, comparisons, tutorials and demonstrations that answer the questions people ask before they know your brand, on platforms AI often draws from, such as YouTube and Reddit.

04

Keep owned basics strong. Keep your website, product pages and listings accurate and current.

IMG'S 2027 EXPECTATION

Brands will start briefing creators against the questions consumers ask AI, not just the moments they want to own.

LASTING SHIFT

AI as a regular step in discovery.

SHORT-LIVED TACTIC

Chasing whichever platform is rumored to be favored by LLMs.

TREND 02

The Scale Paradox

More creators shouldn't mean more sameness.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Smaller creators offer trust, targeted audiences and more efficient economics, making them increasingly attractive to brands looking to scale their creator programs.

But there's a paradox: as brands work with dozens or even hundreds of creators, operational complexity grows. Tight timelines, standardized briefs and rigid scripts can strip away the very individuality and authenticity that made those creators valuable.

That's the **scale paradox**: the more brands try to scale influence, the more they risk diluting what makes it effective.

The fix isn't a bigger roster. It's a better system: one that handles the admin, learns from every campaign and leaves judgment to the people who know the brand best.



From IMG's work

Scale without the script.

For a technology brand, IMG ran a 57-creator gifting program in the first half of 2026 with no scripts or mandatory posts. Creators who chose to post did it in their own voice, generating 47.3M views at a 10.8% engagement rate. The lesson: at scale, structure belongs in who you choose and how you track them, not in what creators say.

The shift

The money is moving toward smaller creators, and so is the workload.

45.5%

of influencer spend was projected to go to micro- and nano-creators in 2026
(eMarketer, 2026)

55%

of US brands work with nano-creators, alongside micro, mid-tier and celebrity talent
(IAB, 2025)

20%

of US brands rank scaling campaigns among their top three creator marketing challenges
(IAB, 2025)

Why it matters to brands

The answer is to standardize the operations, not the creativity.

More creators means more operational work. A few years ago, brands might work with only a handful of creators at a time; now programs have scaled, and teams are turning to AI just to keep up (eMarketer, 2025). 150 smaller creators can mean 150 outreach conversations, negotiations, contracts and sets of briefs, approvals, payments and data.

The bottleneck has moved from budget to systems. The #1 roadblock is now integrating creator data and workflows across systems (27%), followed by cross-team coordination and measurement (26% each). Budget and staffing fell to the bottom at 18% each (CreatorIQ, 2026).

The tension is already showing. 25% of US brands rank managing creator relationships among their top three challenges, and 25% cite controlling content quality (IAB, 2025). As brands expand their creator programs, the pressure to streamline operations grows. But over-standardize the creative process, and creators become interchangeable. Resist building scalable systems, and costs rise, timelines stretch and valuable campaign learnings are lost.

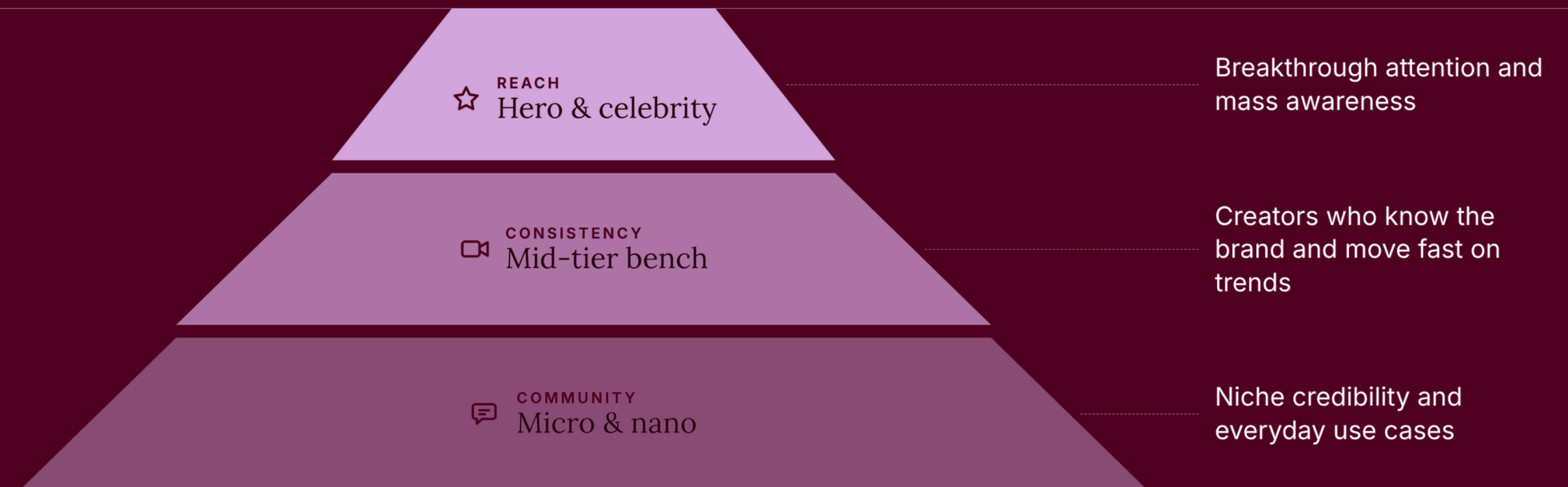
What brands should do in 2027

IMG'S POINT OF VIEW

Scale needs structure, not sameness.

We believe brands should lock down only what must stay consistent (claims, disclosure and core brand assets), free everything else and judge scale by what each campaign teaches the next. Brands reporting 5x ROI prioritize streamlining creator operations; brands at 1x are still focused on finding new creators (CreatorIQ, 2026).

- 01 Determine your program's definition of scale.** Choose breadth (many creators across many niches) or depth (fewer creators, deeper relationships).
- 02 Make every campaign feed the next.** Keep briefs, content, results and audience feedback in one place so learnings compound.
- 03 Build a creator portfolio.** Give each tier a job.



Tier model adapted from TRESemmé at Advertising Week NY 2026

IMG'S 2027 EXPECTATION

More brands will judge creator programs by what they learn and repeat, not by roster size.

LASTING SHIFT

Creator programs run as always-on systems, not one-off campaigns.

SHORT-LIVED TACTIC

Adding creators with no system to manage or learn from them.

TREND 03

Audience Portability

Will a creator's audience follow them somewhere new?

KEY TAKEAWAY

Follower count still measures potential reach, but it tells us little about the strength of a creator's relationship with their audience.

At IMG, we believe it's time to introduce another measure of creator value: **audience portability**.

Audience portability is a creator's demonstrated ability to bring an engaged community beyond the platform where the relationship began, into newsletters, memberships, live events, commerce and other experiences. As algorithms decide who sees what and platforms change the rules, the creators worth paying for are those whose audiences would follow them anywhere.

Reach tells us who saw it. Conversion tells us who acted. Audience portability tells us whether the relationship can travel.



Heard at Advertising Week NY 2026

Audiences follow the right creator.

Creators Cost n' Mayor spent a year developing their off-Broadway show *11 to Midnight* in public, sharing the journey on Substack and letting followers shape dances on TikTok and vote on set colors. By the time tickets went on sale, fans were buying into something they had helped create.

The shift

Follower count is losing credibility, but it still sets the price.

Why it matters to brands

Pay hasn't caught up. CreatorIQ's 2026 study of 5,095 creators found that follower counts had the strongest relationship with creator income. Follower count persists because it is visible, familiar and easy to compare.

Audience portability measures what it misses: whether a creator's relationships extend beyond a single platform.

72%

of creators are building owned audiences through newsletters, Discord and other direct channels
(Epidemic Sound, 2026)

8%

of brands named follower count as their top factor in choosing creators
(CreatorIQ, 2025)

56.5%

of the fraud and quality issues marketers encounter are fake or bot followers
(Influencer Marketing Hub, 2026)

WHAT BRANDS MEASURE TODAY

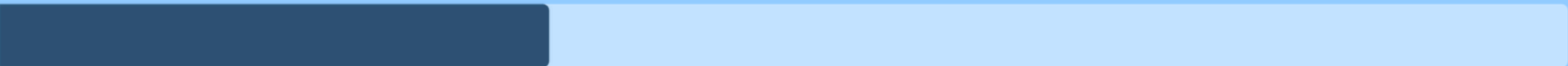
Measurement is stuck at the top of the funnel

Brand awareness



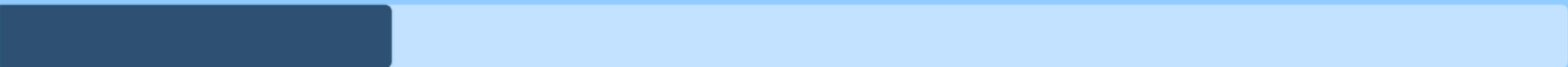
89%

Conversions



35%

Attributable revenue



25%

Audience portability



?

Among brands planning major creator budget increases

Influencer Marketing Hub, 2026

What brands should do in 2027

IMG'S POINT OF VIEW

Start measuring the audience a creator can move.

Brands that start testing portability now will choose better partners, pay for outcomes that last, and be less exposed to the next algorithm change.

- 01 Add portability to creator vetting.** Score creators on the four measures below.
- 02 Test portability with a trackable next step.** Give each creator's audience a unique link or code to sign up, RSVP or buy.
- 03 Build partnerships that can travel.** 72% of creators are building owned channels like newsletters and Discord; sponsor those, not just the feed. Then extend into community programming, product collaborations or live experiences.

Four measures of portability

THE IMG PORTABILITY FRAMEWORK



01

Owned audience

Newsletter size and click rates, memberships, subscriptions



02

Proven action

Past sell-through, sign-ups, event turnout and RSVPs



03

Access

Where the audience is, and whether they can show up or buy



04

Staying power

What happens after the campaign window closes

IMG'S 2027 EXPECTATION

The first creator contracts will pay off-platform actions such as sign-ups, RSVPs and community joins.

LASTING SHIFT

Creators building loyal audiences they own.

SHORT-LIVED TACTIC

Paying follower-count premiums for creators whose audiences don't act.

TREND 04

Social Escapes the Feed

Gen Alpha shows social loops between screens, games and real life

KEY TAKEAWAY

For years, marketers treated social media and social behavior as the same thing. For Gen Alpha, they've split. Discovery starts in a feed, but the conversation continues in games, group chats and stores, then carries into the household: 86% of parents say their child's opinions shift their decision-making on video games (DKC, 2026). And Gen Alpha doesn't just want to buy. 97% of kids surveyed want a say in how brands design their products and stores (MG2, Dec 2025).

Influence keeps working long after the post, in places feed metrics can't see. Brands that plan for the whole loop, with creators carrying the story from screen to store and parents in mind, will reach a generation that moves easily between online and offline worlds.



Heard at Advertising Week NY 2026

Engage kids and parents at the same time.

Tamara Connolly, Director and US Lead at Space Doctors, noted that "Gen Alpha and their parents are two different audiences, but they are so interlinked." Millennial parents carefully evaluate "what touches their skin, what goes into their bodies, and increasingly what their minds are exposed to." A creator who wins the kid but loses the parent hasn't won the sale.

The shift

Gen Alpha's social world extends beyond the feed and into gaming, group chats, stores and live events.

Why it matters to brands



74%

of older Gen Alpha teens own a gaming console
(Attest, 2025)

73%

of Gen Alpha kids surveyed prefer shopping in-store, where they can touch and test products
(MG2, Dec 2025)

43%

of older Gen Alpha teens game more than 3 hours a day
(Attest, 2025)

Gen Alpha shapes what the whole household buys. 90% of parents say they've changed their consumer behavior because of their Gen Alpha child's preferences, and 41% say all household spending decisions are affected (DKC, 2026).

The old targeting tools are closing. Governments are moving to age limits, which means less access to under-16 and under-18 audiences, tighter targeting and more scrutiny of youth-coded influencer partnerships (DAC Group, 2026).

Creators reach the family, not just the child. Nearly half of parents (49%) buy based on ads their child enjoys, and 47% avoid brands their children dislike (DKC, 2026). As youth targeting tightens, the opportunity is family-facing and compliant creator work.

Feed metrics miss much of the loop. At Advertising Week, Michelle Wong of Jazwares described collectibles kids find on social becoming something they buy, trade and share at school. None of that shows up in views. Influence keeps working after the post; the question is whether brands can see it.

What brands should do in 2027

IMG'S POINT OF VIEW

Ask where social behavior happens, not which platforms to be on.

The mistake we see most: kid-only campaigns that forget the parent is the buyer. We believe youth marketing now works as a family system: kids discover, parents approve and creators connect the two.

- 01 Map where social behavior happens, then choose.** Include games, communities and physical spaces, and commit to the few where the brand has a real role.
- 02 Brief creators to carry ideas across environments.** Give one story a role on social, in-game and in-store, rather than separate briefs for each.
- 03 Prepare for youth restrictions now.** Audit what relies on age-based targeting or youth-coded creative.
- 04 Connect social, retail and events.** Pair every exclusive experience with content for the people who weren't there.

IMG'S 2027 EXPECTATION

Brands will start measuring youth campaigns by what happens off the feed: in-game, in-store and at home.

LASTING SHIFT

Games and real-world spaces as social channels.

SHORT-LIVED TACTIC

Workarounds that keep youth targeting alive until rules tighten.

TREND 05

Creator Content & Paid Media Merge

The best creator content keeps working as paid media.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Too often, brands treat a creator post as the finished product. They pay to reach an audience, attention peaks and the moment fades.

We think that's a missed opportunity.

The organic post should be the audition. It's an opportunity to discover which creators, messages, and formats genuinely resonate with audiences. Paid media can then take the strongest-performing content further, reaching new audiences, extending its lifespan, and optimizing for business outcomes.

In 2027, the brands that get the most value from creator partnerships won't treat organic and paid as separate strategies. The post isn't the end of the campaign. It's the beginning of what that content can deliver.



Heard at Advertising Week NY 2026

Creator content replaced the TV spot.

ADT, working with Horizon Media and TikTok, stopped repurposing polished TV ads and shifted to creator-led content built for TikTok, which the speakers said outperformed its previous approach. ADT's CMO called giving creators that freedom a significant change for a brand built on trust.

The shift

Brands are starting to buy creator content as media, not just posts.

Why it matters to brands

Amplifying proven posts is where the return is. 38% of brands call boosting creator posts their highest-ROI creator activity, and 38% of brands with growing creator budgets now point to net-new funding, up from 33% (CreatorIQ, 2026).

44%

of paid creative is now creator content
(CreatorIQ, 2026)

77%

of US and UK paid media leaders say creator content outperforms traditional branded ads
(CreatorIQ, 2026)

10%

of European marketers call their influencer strategy fully integrated
(Kolsquare, 2026)

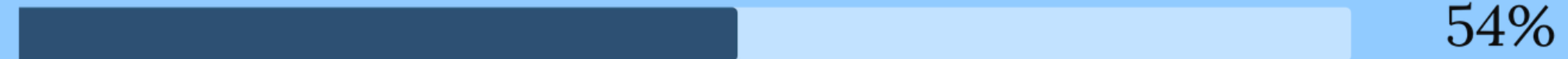
TOP BARRIERS FOR PAID MEDIA LEADERS

Rights and systems are the new barriers

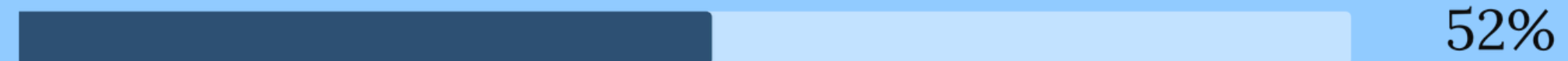
Measuring creator content separately from other paid creative



Securing usage rights



Connecting creator tools to paid media systems



Teams juggle an average of four tools

CreatorIQ, 2026

Measurement decides where the money goes. When creator content is measured apart from other paid creative, it can't compete for budget with the ads 77% of paid media leaders say it outperforms. Brands that measure it alongside the full media mix can prove its value.

What brands should do in 2027

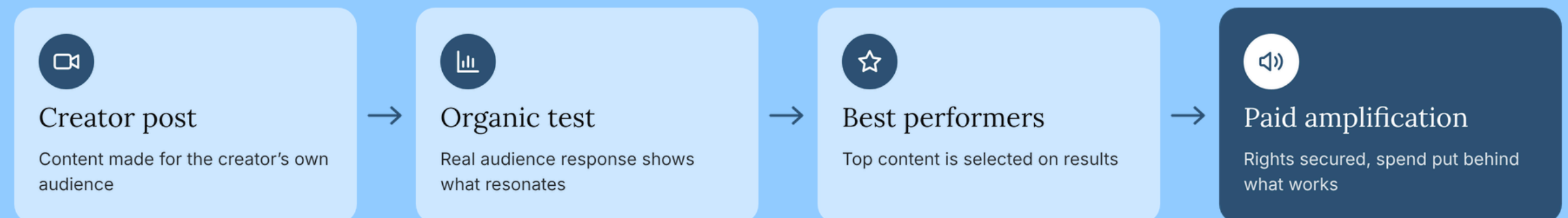
IMG'S POINT OF VIEW

Plan creator and paid as one story, then let performance decide where the money goes.

The mistake we see most: boosting creator content as an afterthought and negotiating rights only after a post performs. Treat it as a media asset from day one. It works as advertising because it doesn't feel like advertising, and that's worth protecting.

- 01 Plan creator, experiential and paid budgets together.** Set shared goals across social, retail and media teams.
- 02 Build usage rights into contracts from the start.** Agree paid distribution before content is made, so the best posts can travel without a second negotiation.
- 03 Set the audition rules before launch.** Agree which signals, such as saves, shares, watch time or clicks, earn a post paid support, and how quickly you'll decide.

FROM CREATOR FEED TO PAID MEDIA



IMG'S 2027 EXPECTATION

Usage rights will move from a negotiation after content performs to a standard term before it's made.

LASTING SHIFT

Creator posts planned as the start of a campaign.

SHORT-LIVED TACTIC

Judging paid creator content on clicks alone.

Where the industry is heading

Five shifts for 2027, and one conclusion: **influence is becoming business infrastructure.**

01

FROM

Content for the feed

TO

Content AI recommends

Credibility becomes a media asset.

As AI begins to carry sponsored placements, trusted voices become more valuable to own.

02

FROM

One-off campaigns

TO

Repeat partnerships

Campaigns become partnerships.

The best work comes from creators who shape the idea and return season after season.

03

FROM

Counting followers

TO

Measuring audience portability

Measurement moves to action.

Creator value increasingly depends on whether audiences follow, engage, and act beyond a single platform.

04

FROM

Marketing within feeds

TO

Connecting across experiences

Families become the audience.

Influence moves between screens, games, conversations, stores, and household decisions.

05

FROM

The post

TO

The campaign

Every post starts a campaign.

Organic content reveals what resonates. Paid media scales what works.

Brands that build for this will outgrow brands still buying one post at a time.

Influence is no longer a series of isolated campaigns.

It's an ongoing driver of discovery, trust, and growth.

At Intuition Media Group, we help brands turn creator relationships into measurable business impact through strategy, creative collaboration, paid amplification, and continuous optimization.

Ready to make influence work harder for your brand?

Let's talk.

Paula Bruno

Founder & CEO, Intuition Media Group

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intuitionmediagroup.com

img intuition
media group

Research & sources

Industry figures are cited on each slide.
IMG campaign results are shown without client names.

RESEARCH

Attest, The Gen Alpha Report: US Edition, October 2025

BCG, In Influencer Marketing, Precision Wins, April 2025

CreatorIQ, State of Creator Marketing 2026 (2,000 brand and agency marketers); State of Creators 2026 (5,095 creators); Creator-Powered Funnel Report 2026

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DKC, Gen Alpha survey of 1,000 US parents of 8- to 15-year-olds, May 2026

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Epidemic Sound, creator economy research, 2026

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IAB, 2025 Creator Economy Ad Spend & Strategy Report (453 US ad spend decision-makers), November 2025

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Kolsquare, The Future of Influencer Marketing 2026–2027 (1,123 decision-makers, seven European markets)

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NIQ, global AI and product discovery research, August 2026

Yext, analysis of 6.8 million AI citations, October 2025

IMG campaign data, 2026

ADVERTISING WEEK NEW YORK 2026 SESSIONS

Monday, Oct 5: Do You Even Lift? Inside the Relevance Barbell Era of Marketing

Tuesday, Oct 6: TikTok to Broadway: 11 to Midnight · Know Where Your Audience Is Going Next

Wednesday, Oct 7: The Digital Detox Paradox · What Content and Behavior Together Reveal About Gen Alpha’s Next Move

Thursday, Oct 8: Expanding Your Always-On Influencer Program: What Brands Should Know

Advertising Week insights reflect IMG’s notes from public sessions and are attributed to speakers in their professional capacity. Mention of a company or speaker does not imply endorsement of IMG.