

@shelbywert, @lovereesele, @rocky\_barnes, @caraloren, @Xandrapohl, @Victoria\_Fuller, @Aaronfrancis, @rachaelproctor



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# The CMO's Creator Guide 2026

LTK & Northwestern University  
Brand Study



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# | Speakers



**Rodney Mason**  
Head of Marketing,  
Brand Partnerships, LTK



**Frank Dudley**  
Professor, Integrated Marketing,  
Northwestern University



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Full Funnel Scale

350k Curated Creators

40M Users On Platform

Top 38% Of Gen Z & Millennials

\$6B Annual GMV

55k Campaigns Annually

Most Data in Industry

AI Powered Decisioning

Follow Creators Near Me

Follow Users I Know

Follow Brands I Love

Full Funnel Scale



# LTK Brand Platform

All-in-1 Creator Marketing



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LTk All-in-1

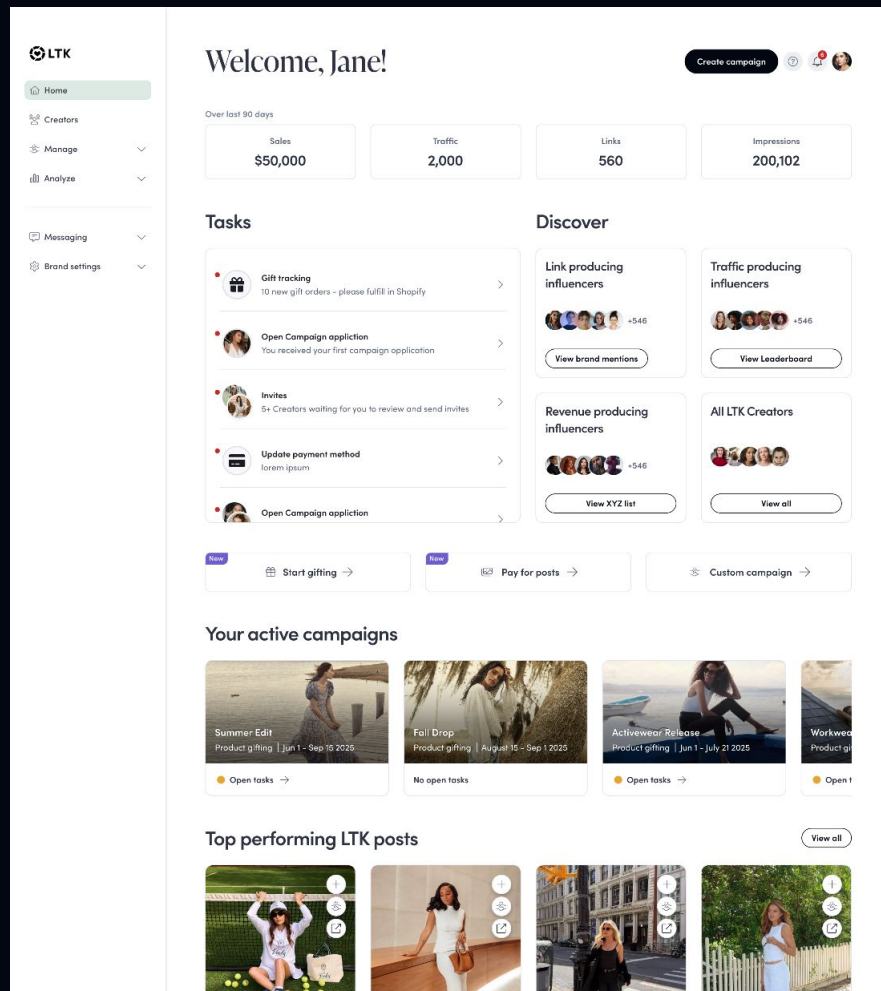
COMING SOON

# LTK Brand Platform

All-in-1 Creator Marketing

LTK's new brand platform will soon be FREE for brands to:

- Discover Creators
- Access LTK content library
- Message Creators
- Gift and Code
- Collaborate
- Analyze content + performance to scale top performers

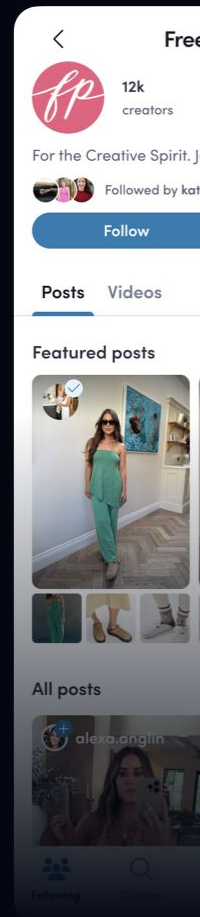
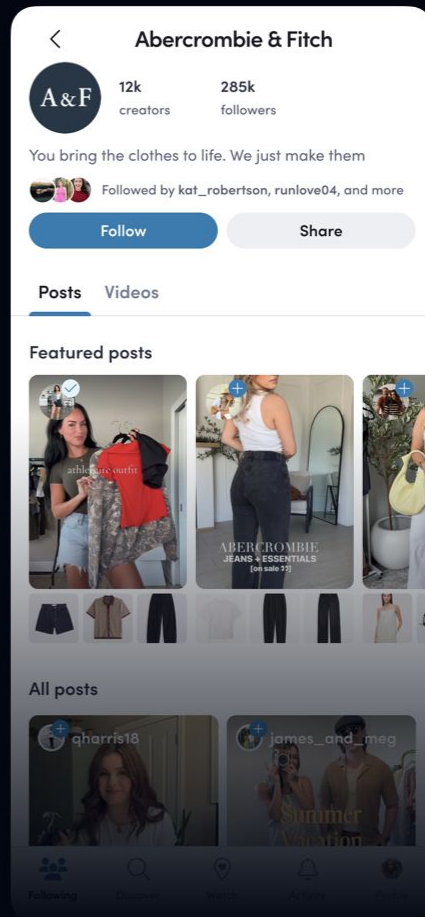
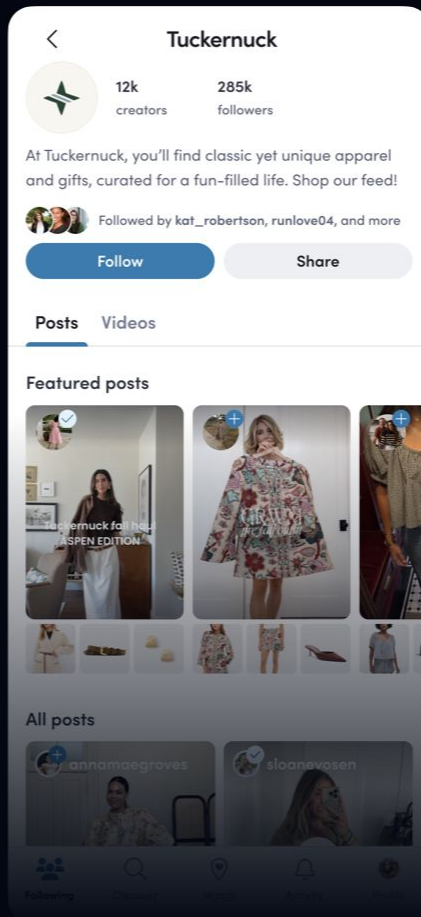


NEW

# Brand Profiles

A new brand home on LTK where our 40M active monthly users can find, explore, and engage with your Creator content—all in one place.

20% of searches on LTK start with a brand name and your brand profile will enhance this search.



# Get an LTK Brand Profile to drive more sales

LTK Brand Profiles are currently invite-only. Sign up for the wait list to be one of the first on the platform.



[company.shopltk.com/ltk-brand-profile](https://company.shopltk.com/ltk-brand-profile)



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# LTK Brand Advisory Board

Be a part of shaping the future  
of All-in-1 Creator Marketing.

Scan to join



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# LTK & Northwestern 2025 CMO Study

## Methodology

A survey was conducted in July 2025 with 204 top level marketing professionals, 87% ultimate decision makers. Participants represent organizations with \$10M+ in revenue and majority with \$100M+ in revenue that have used Creator marketing in the last year. A prescreen survey identified the percent of marketers that have used Creator marketing in the last year.



@tanica\_sarin, @kitkeenar, @cranberrytantrums, @thesaltyblonde, @michelejalene





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# 90% of brands use Creator Marketing

Creator is consuming marketing budgets  
across the enterprise





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# CMOs say consumers trust Creators most

Creator is the **#1** trusted source for product recommendations, ranked above social media and celebrities.

Creators

Social Media Ads

Celebrities





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# Creator is the #1 place CMOs are investing more

97% of Creator marketers say Creator will take more budget or an increased role in their marketing.

## Where CMOs are investing more





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## CMOs are building Creator armies

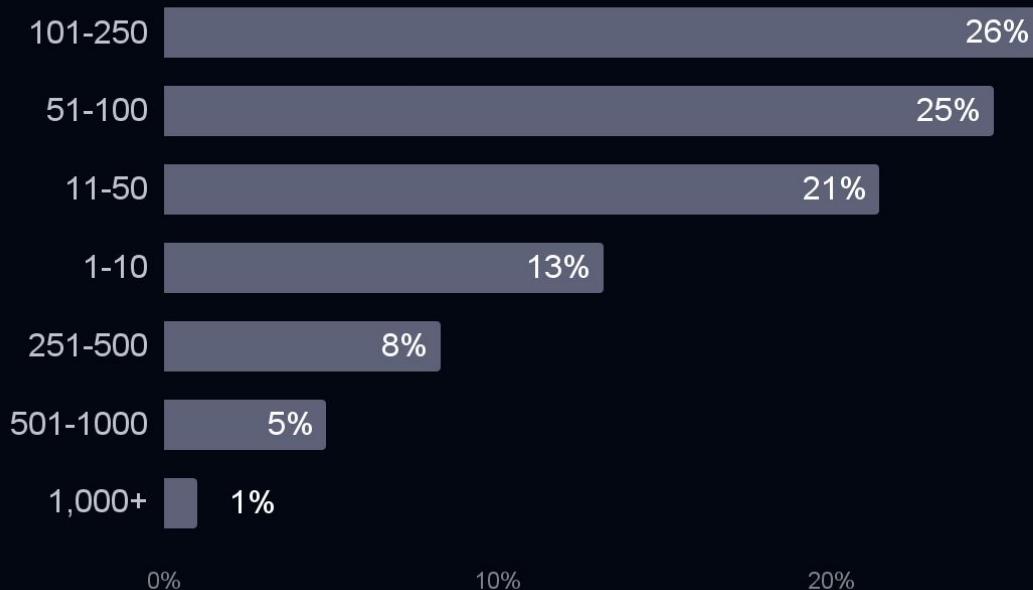
65%

of CMOs worked  
with 50+ Creators

41%

of CMOs worked  
with 100+ Creators

Large Creator armies indicate  
always-on strategy is prevalent.

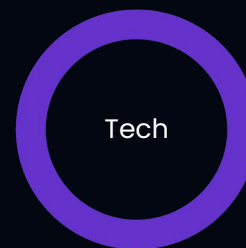
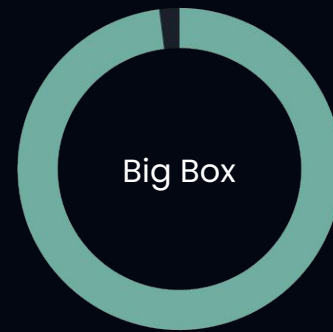
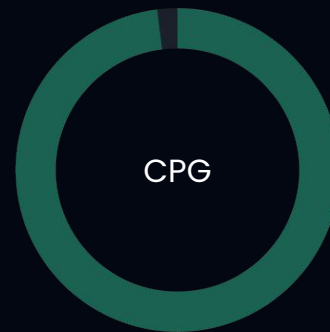




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# Creator is the #1 place CMOs are investing more in 2026

Creator taking more budget and  
increased role across all categories.

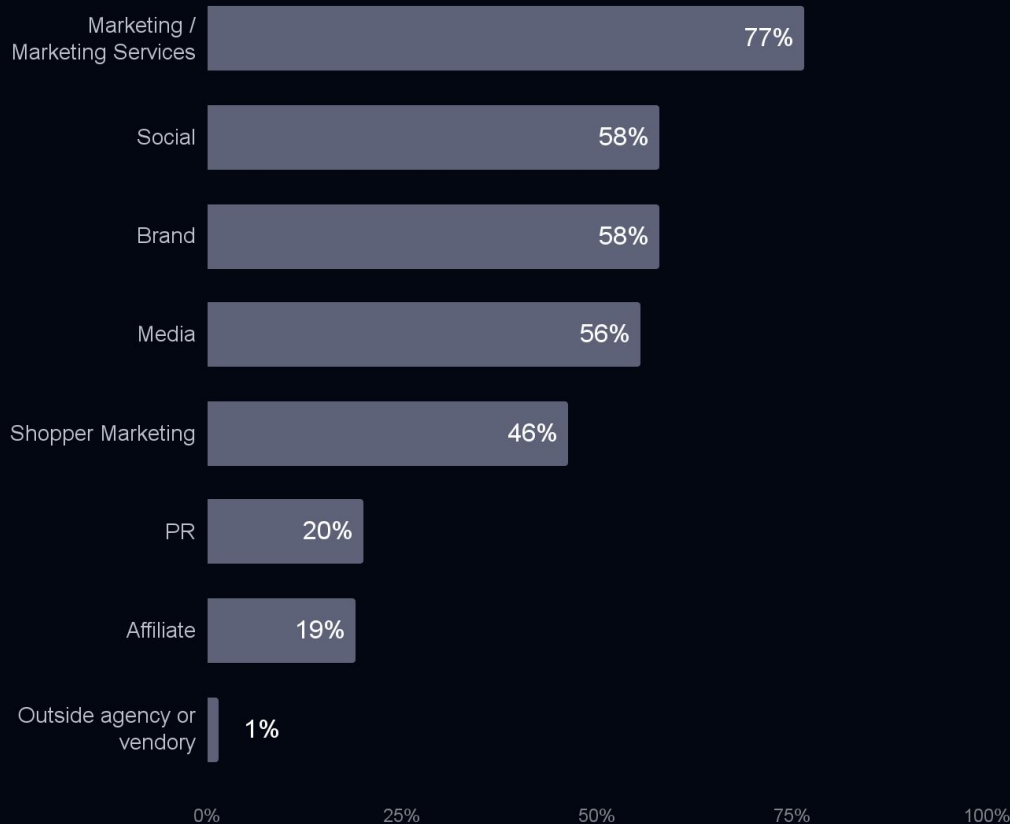




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# Creator content used across all marketing departments

Friction from multiple Creator sources  
not working together across marketing  
departments







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# Creators are a necessity for social

92%

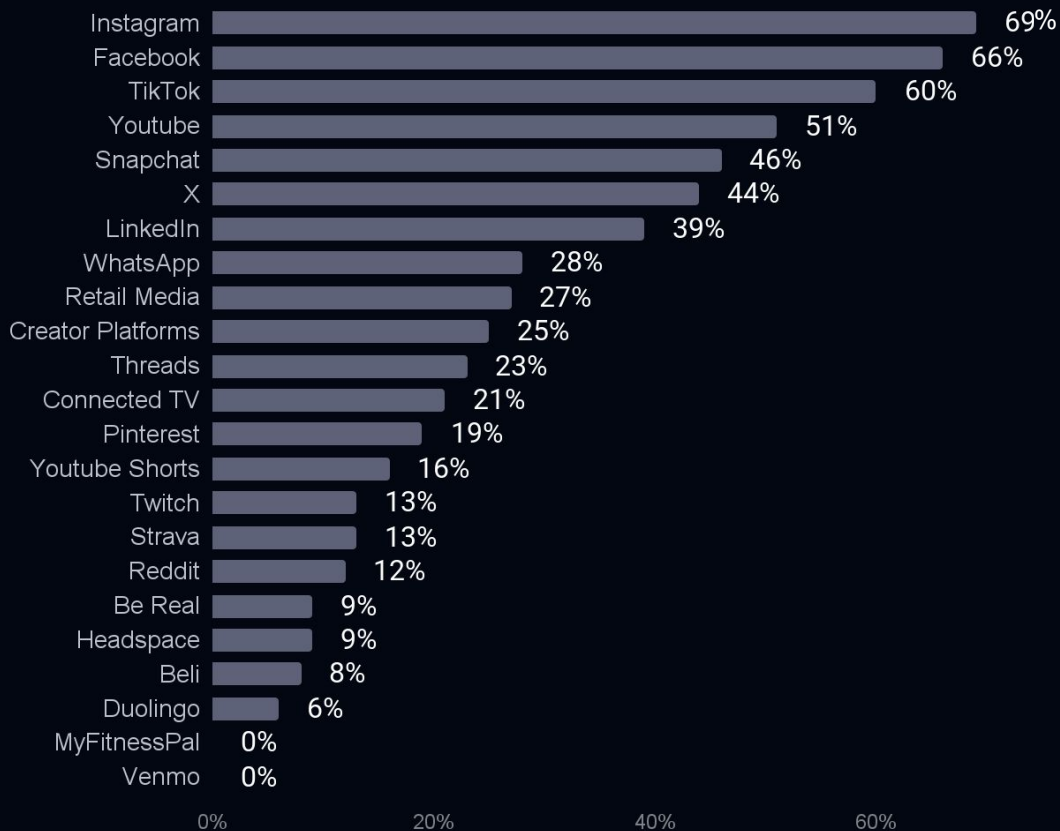
use Creator content  
in social media ads

20%

of budget goes  
to boosting

## Creator content boosted most on

1. Instagram
2. Facebook
3. TikTok
4. YouTube
5. Snapchat





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# Scale with LTK boosting

Significant growth for brands using LTK Boost on social media vs. brands that have not used LTK Boost.

**20%** of Creator budget  
goes to boosting



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## 2.1X

Program Click Growth  
YoY vs. Brand's  
Competitor Programs  
with no LTK Boost

## 1.4X

Program Sales Growth  
YoY vs. Brand's  
Competitor Programs  
with no LTK Boost

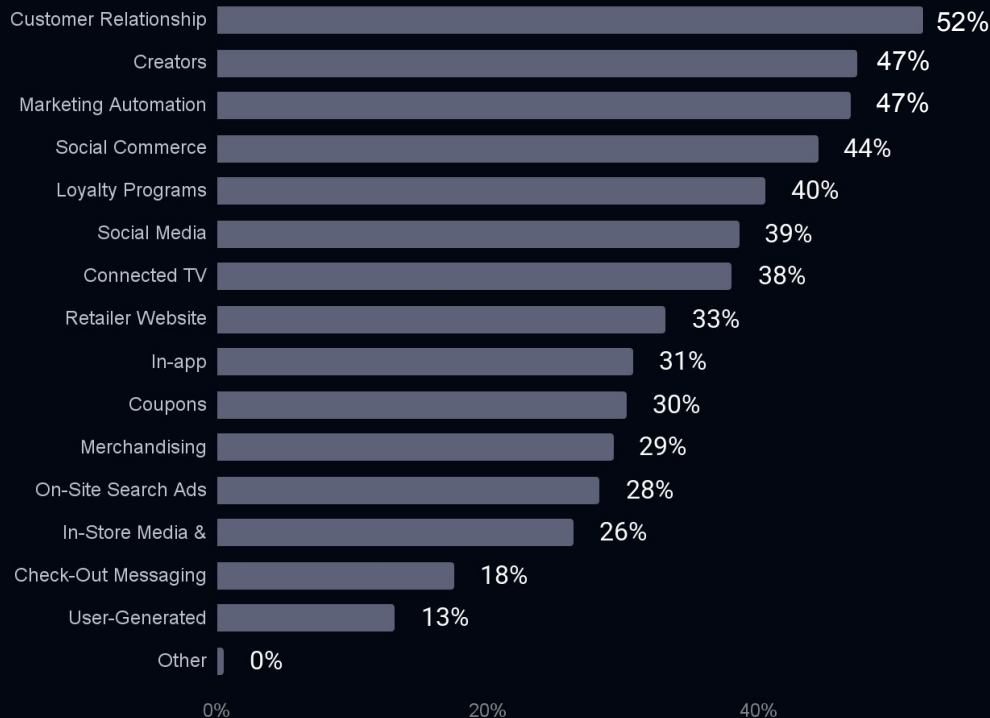


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# Creator is the #2 investment for RMN

Creator continues to grow as an RMN  
investment, climbing up from #3 in 2024.

## CMOs' planned investments for Retail Media Networks in 2025





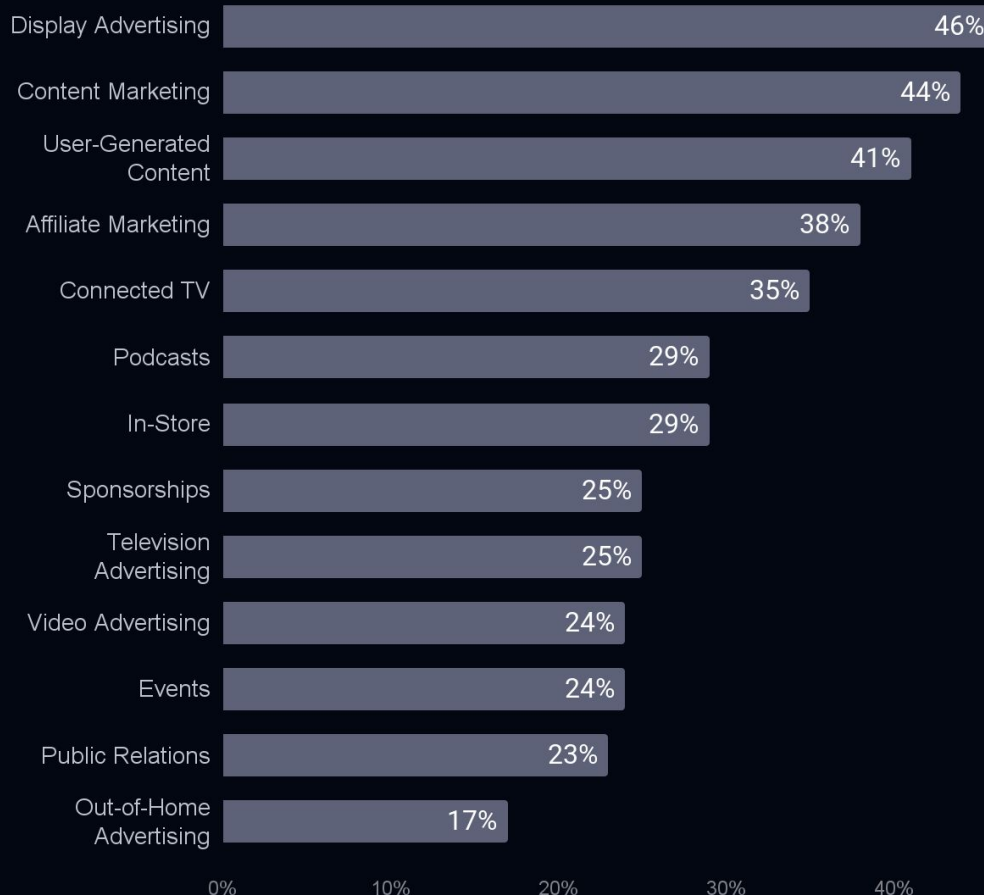
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# Creator marketing beyond social media

Creator marketers utilize at least one channel outside of social media.

## Most common applications of Creator

1. Display advertising
2. Content marketing
3. User generated content
4. Affiliate marketing
5. Connected TV

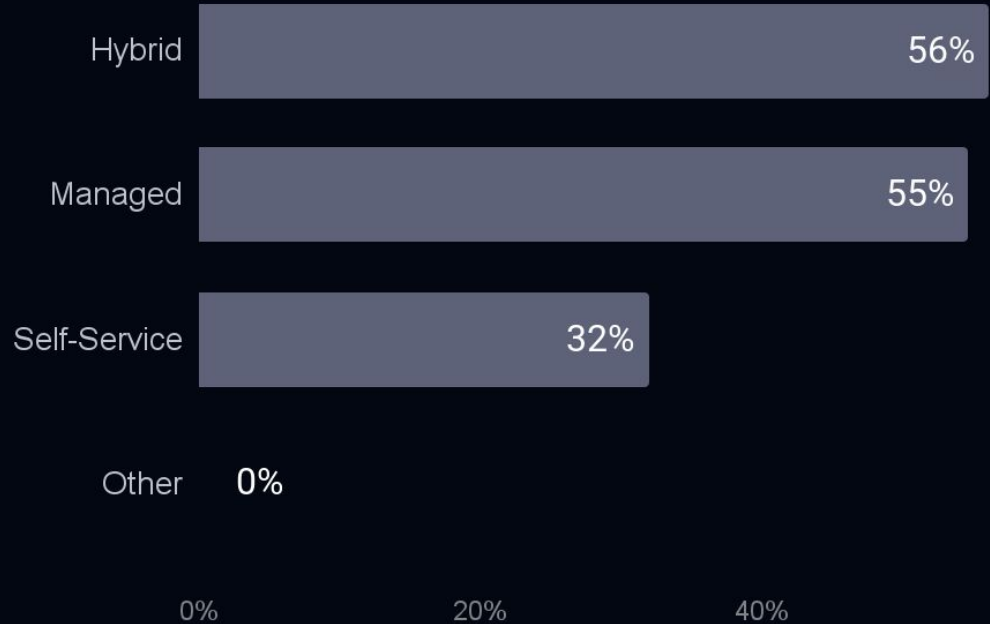




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# Hybrid model is most preferred

Hybrid = a mix of managed and self  
service through one platform





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# Preferred model for platform relationship

All verticals but Fashion and Services  
prefer Hybrid over Managed services.

Preferred model	All Verticals	Beauty & Personal Care	Big Box	CPG
Hybrid	56%	73%	59%	62%
Managed	55%	48%	45%	52%
Self-Service	32%	15%	38%	21%

Preferred model	Fashion	Health, Wellness & Fitness	Services	Tech
Hybrid	48%	50%	55%	65%
Managed	54%	33%	77%	47%
Self-Service	48%	33%	23%	24%

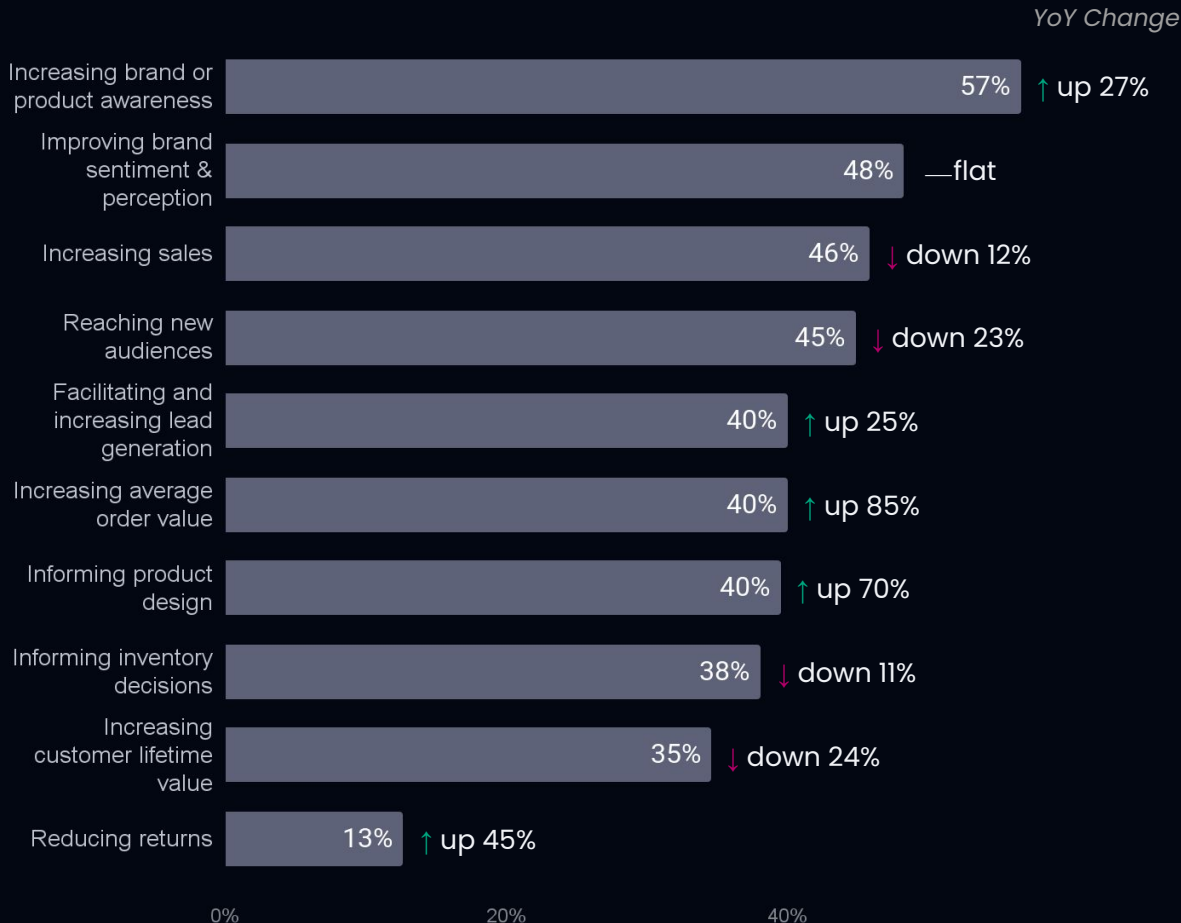


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# Most important impact Creator delivers

The most important impact  
Creator delivers for CMOs:

1. Awareness
2. Sentiment
3. Sales
4. New audiences
5. Lead generation



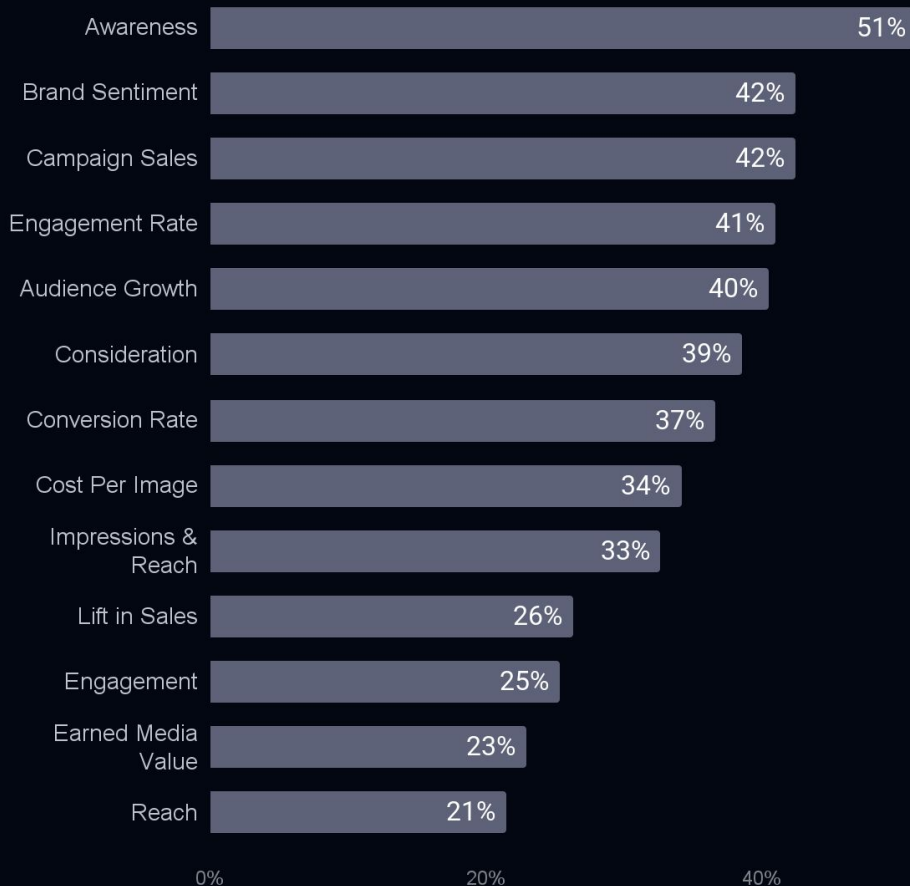




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# Most important metrics from Creator

1. Awareness
2. Brand sentiment
3. Campaign sales
4. Engagement rate
5. Audience growth
6. Consideration
7. Conversion rate
8. Cost per image
9. Impressions & reach
10. Lift in sales

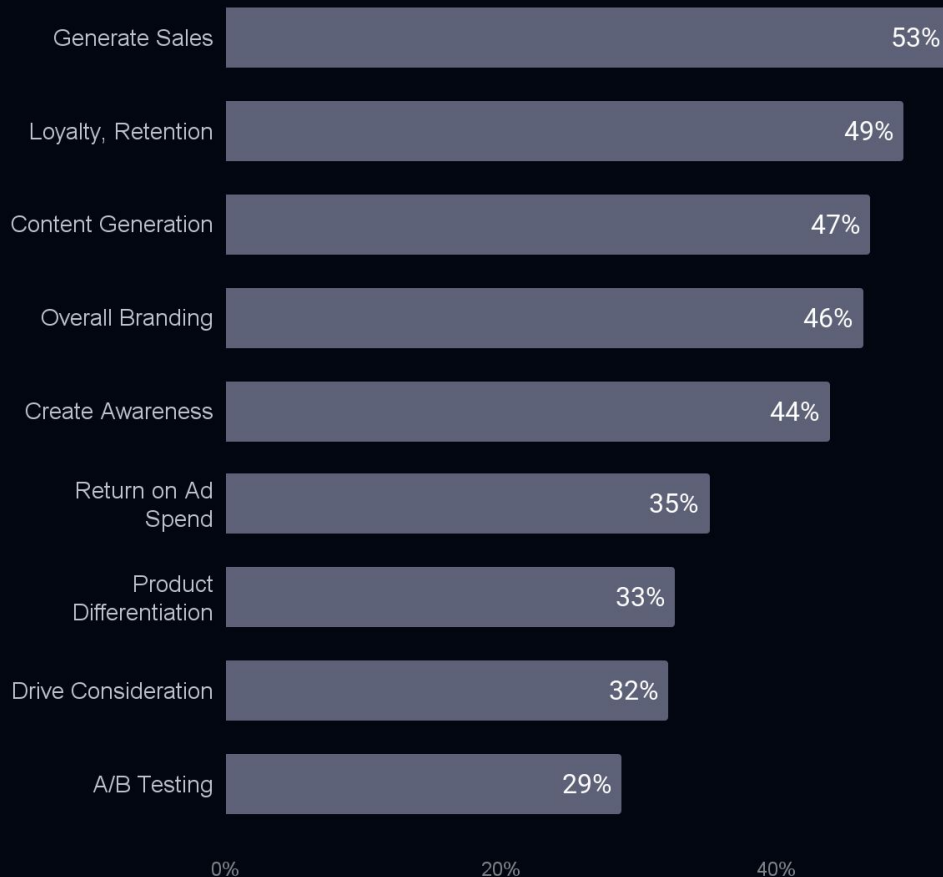




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# Top goals for Creator campaigns

1. Generate sales
2. Loyalty, retention
3. Content generation
4. Overall branding
5. Create awareness
6. Return on ad spend
7. Product differentiation
8. Drive consideration
9. A/B testing

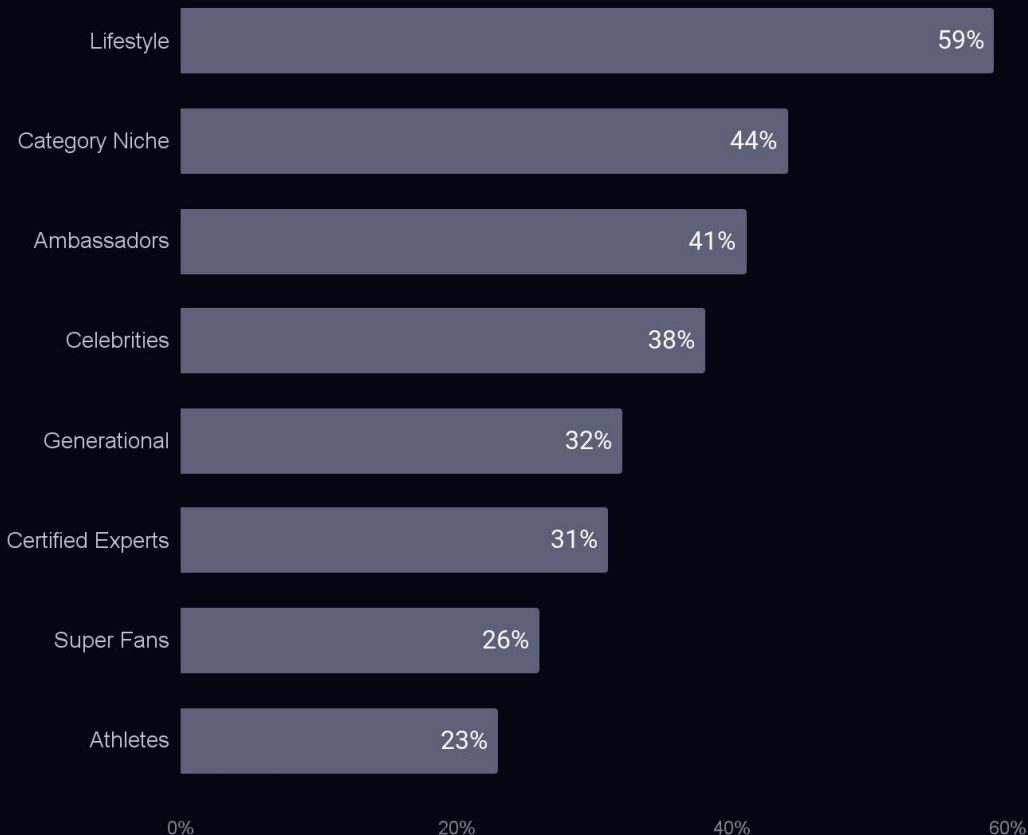




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# Lifestyle is the most important Creator type for brands

1. Lifestyle
2. Category niche
3. Ambassadors
4. Celebrities
5. Generational
6. Certified experts
7. Super fans
8. Athletes





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# Most important Creator types by vertical

Category	All Verticals	Beauty & Personal Care	Big Box	CPG	Fashion	Health, Wellness & Fitness	Services	Tech
Lifestyle	59%	55%	52%	60%	63%	75%	41%	47%
Category Niche	44%	45%	45%	40%	54%	50%	36%	35%
Ambassadors	41%	48%	41%	31%	31%	42%	9%	41%
Celebrities	38%	42%	38%	33%	48%	33%	41%	41%
Generational	32%	42%	34%	33%	31%	33%	32%	24%
Certified Experts	31%	39%	38%	45%	35%	17%	50%	41%
Super Fans	26%	21%	28%	36%	40%	42%	18%	24%
Athletes	23%	21%	29%	38%	25%	17%	32%	18%





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# Providing guidance to Creators

## Brands are not overly prescriptive.

How do you provide guidance to your Creators?

- Nearly  $\frac{2}{3}$  of brands start by providing general brand guidelines.
- Channel-specific guidelines are less common.
- Brands are not overly prescriptive to Creators.

Type of guidance	All Verticals
Give general brand guidelines (i.e. tone, key messages) but leave interpretation to the Creator	62%
Adapt guidance based on Creator tier or content type	51%
Provide a formal creative brief outlining campaign objectives and content direction	47%
Co-create content ideas collaboratively with creators	45%
Allow full creative freedom with no formal guidance	38%
Offer channel-specific guidelines (i.e. different expectations for TikTok vs. Instagram)	30%





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# Providing guidance to Creators

Type of guidance	All Verticals	Beauty & Personal Care	Big Box	CPG	Fashion	Health, Wellness & Fitness	Services	Tech
Give general brand guidelines (i.e. tone, key messages) but leave interpretation to the Creator	62%	61%	57%	52%	52%	67%	41%	47%
Adapt guidance based on Creator tier or content type	51%	52%	52%	52%	42%	42%	32%	35%
Provide a formal creative brief outlining campaign objectives and content direction	47%	55%	48%	43%	60%	67%	36%	41%
Co-create content ideas collaboratively with Creators	45%	55%	43%	50%	40%	42%	36%	41%
Allow full creative freedom with no formal guidance	38%	42%	33%	40%	27%	42%	27%	47%
Offer channel-specific guidelines (i.e. different expectations for TikTok vs. Instagram)	30%	30%	41%	55%	44%	17%	41%	41%





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## | CMOs said:



- 01 Consumers trust Creators more than ads or celebs
- 02 Creator is #1 in growth investment across all marketing, and #2 in RMN
- 03 CMOs building Creator armies indicating always-on strategy
- 04 Creator is used across display ads, UGC, CTV, boosting on
- 05 social. 20% of Creator budget goes to boosting
- 06 Creator content is used across all marketing departments and multiple platforms, creating friction
- 07 Hybrid (Managed and Self-Service) is most preferred model
- 08 Greatest value Creators deliver is Awareness, Sentiment and Sales, but want complete full funnel reporting
- 09 Lifestyle Creators are most preferred
- 10 Brief Creators, but don't script them



# Thank you!



**LTK BRAND CENTRAL**

**For additional research  
and insights**

[company.shopltk.com/brand-central](https://company.shopltk.com/brand-central)



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**Contact us**

[company.shopltk.com/contact-us](https://company.shopltk.com/contact-us)

[rodney.mason@rewardstyle.com](mailto:rodney.mason@rewardstyle.com)



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## Creator is the #2 platform spend for Creator marketers

Creator users ranked top 5 social  
media platforms by relative spend.

1. Facebook
2. Creator platforms
3. YouTube
4. Instagram
5. TikTok / YouTube Shorts (*tie*)

