

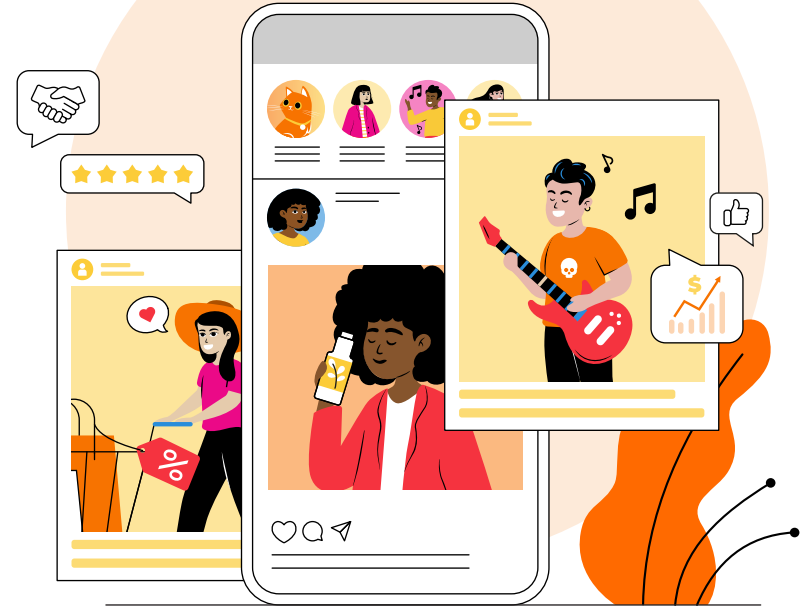
What brands want: building successful creator partnerships in 2023

Marketing leaders share insights on how
creators can grow their business



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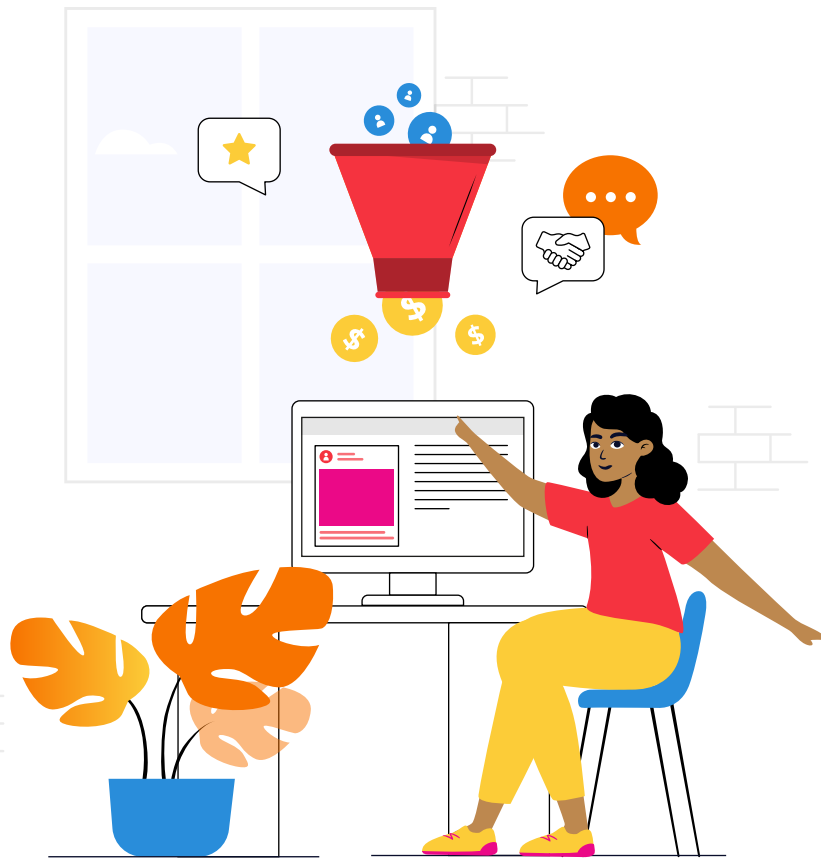


Introduction

In 2023, being a creator can be a lucrative side hustle or a full-time career. As the demand for influencer marketing surges, creators of all levels have more opportunities than ever before to build prosperous partnerships with brands. Data tells us [nearly half of all influencers already make a living creating content.](#)

Still, many creators are challenged with securing long-term brand partnerships. Without clear guidelines on what brands expect, creators often question how to approach and partner with new brands. This uncertainty can create a disconnect between the actions influencers take vs what their brand partners may want. Some creators can even become intimidated and reluctant to reach out to brands they admire.

That's why we asked brands all the hard questions to help you get started. In this guide, you'll learn what brands really want from influencers and how you can start building long-term partnerships today.



Key takeaways



Brands are investing more in creator programs

2 in 3 brands plan to expand their creator programs in the next year

71% of brands planning to expand their creator programs started working with creators less than a year ago

83% of brands expanding their programs plan to onboard more creators in 2024



Brands want creators to start the conversation

Brands report that their top challenge is finding a creator that fits well with their brand

42% of brands say less than 5 creators on average approach them in a week

Creators mostly reach out to brands for collaboration via DMs on social media and emails, aligning with brand preference



Brands want to build long-term creator relationships

58% of brands say the quality of the creator's work is most important when considering a long-term partnership

1 in 3 brands say prompt and professional communication is a top consideration when choosing a creator partner

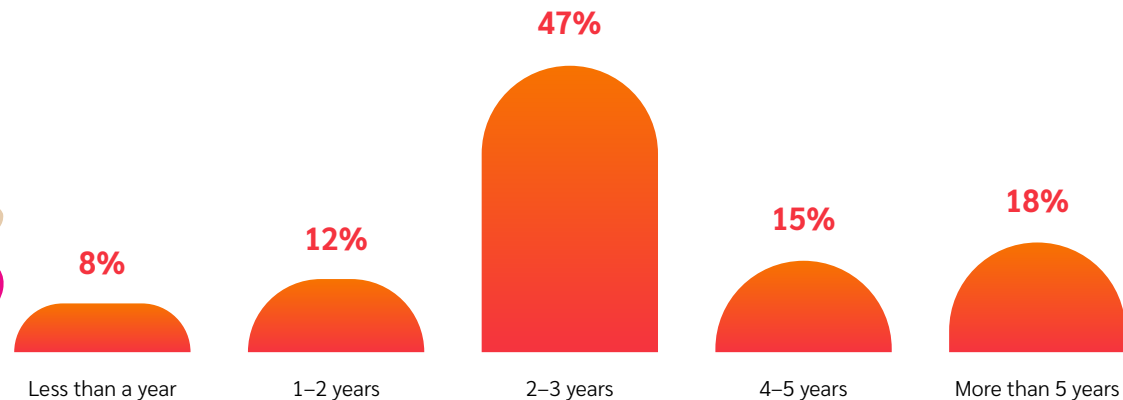
86% of brands are prioritizing long-term relationships with creators within the next year

Who we talked to

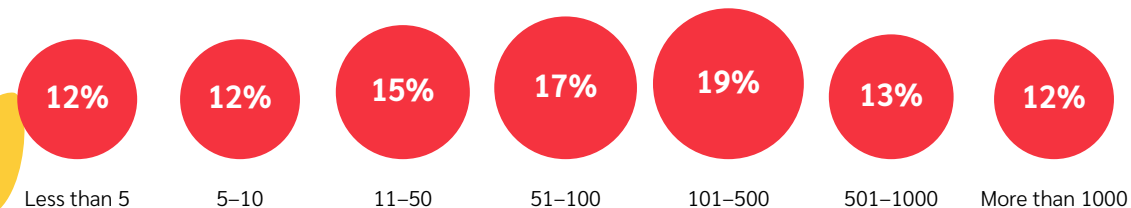
We talked to more than **250 marketers** from the United States and Canada involved in the decision-making for recruiting creators. These marketers represent brands that have partnered with and paid creators in the last 6 months.

Responses collected between April 27 and May 2, 2023

These brands have worked with influencers for



Company size



Brands have more buy-in as creator marketing programs expand

Nearly

2 in 3 brands plan to expand creator programs next year



Customer acquisition costs (CAC) have increased by **222% in the last eight years**, pushing brands to find affordable alternatives to paid advertising strategies. In a time when budgets are under intense scrutiny, influencer marketing can level the playing field for brands of all sizes so they aren't operating at the whims of expensive and unpredictable advertising platforms.

Brands and creators are **aligning on payment models**—opting for hybrid compensation, coined “PostPlus” (flat fees combined with commission-based payouts). This alignment and direct feedback on campaigns are key factors in building long-term partnerships as brands allocate more to creator marketing budgets.

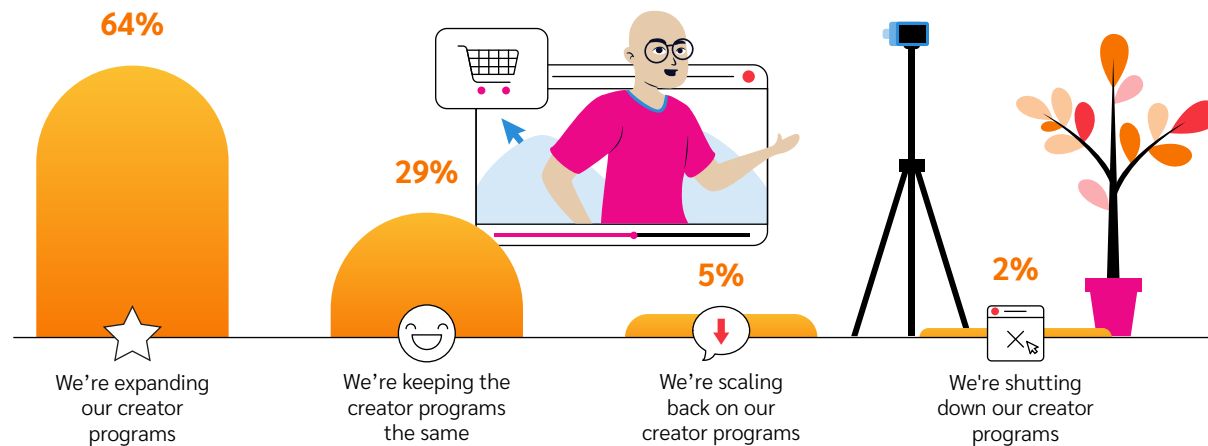
Working with influencers has given brands new access to the voice of their customer. Creator partnerships can help brands overcome the consumers' distrust of advertising. At the same time, brands can create content consumers trust and leverage influencer followings to reach new customer bases.

66 89%

of consumers trust personal recommendations over any other channel. The creator industry's explosive growth has made it impossible to ignore. You as a brand should know, like, and trust the creators that you're working with to facilitate the best partnerships possible.

— David A. Yovanno, Chief Executive Officer at [impact.com](#) [iPX 2023]

What is your plan for your creator programs in the next year?



More brands than ever before are working with influencers, giving creators a great opportunity to diversify their brand partnerships.

Budgets are shifting toward influencer partnerships

Flexible payment options have made influencer marketing a strong alternative to traditional advertising when budgets are squeezed. **Nearly 2 in 3 brands are increasing their budget for influencer marketing in the coming year, and 40% of brands prefer to pay their existing creators with PostPlus** — a flat fee and a performance-based commission or bonus. As hybrid payment methods become more popular, brands are more comfortable expanding their influencer programs, knowing they'll get a return on their investment (ROI).

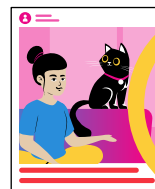
A bigger budget means brands can take risks and experiment with campaigns and new creators, too. Now, many brands are starting creator relationships with one-off projects to

test the waters. These projects allow creators to gain visibility, showcase their skills, and provide valuable feedback that helps them build relationships with marketing leaders.



Partner with brands that understand creators:
88% of brands with programs older than 5 years are looking to onboard new creators in 2024.

Brands' creator expansion plans for the next year



86%

We're focusing on long-term partnerships with creators

83%

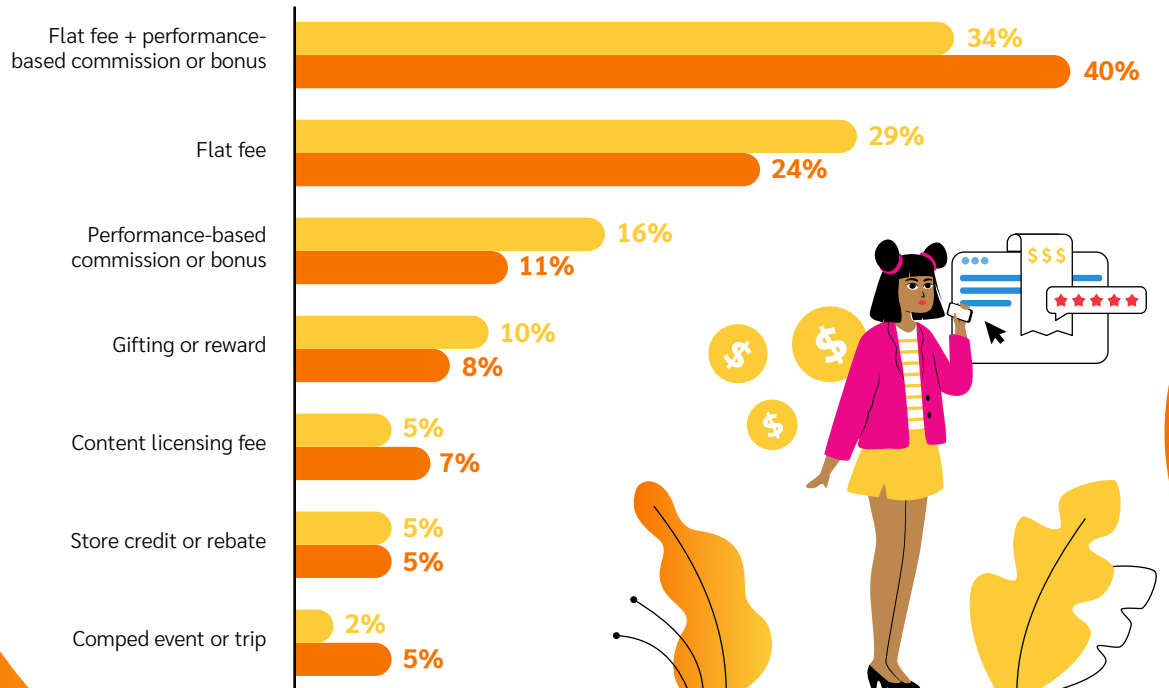
We're onboarding more creators

63

% of brands have higher influencer marketing budgets in 2024

Preferred payment methods

● When working with new creator partners ● When working with a creator partner with whom you have an established relationship



Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding



Try before you buy:

As a way to trial the partnership before committing to a longer-term partnership, 68% of brands are planning to leverage creators for smaller or one-off projects.

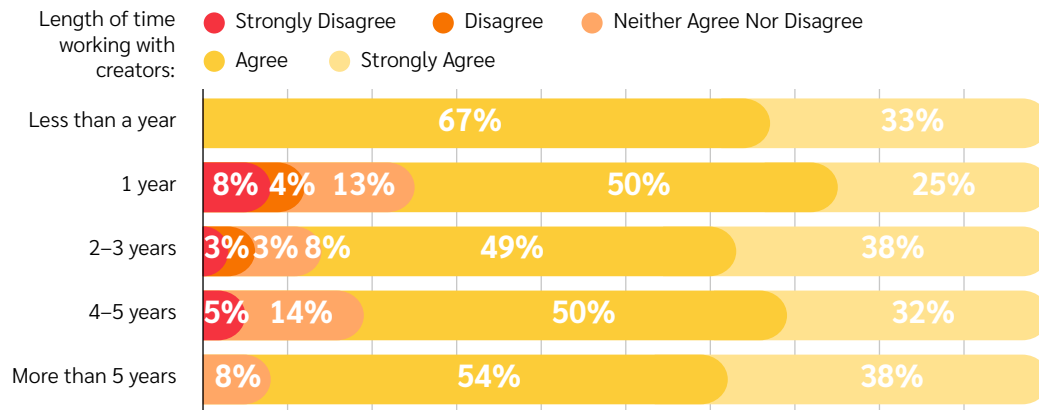
Brands want long-term relationships with influencers

Of the brands planning to expand, **86% are focusing on growing long-term partnerships with creators next year.** Up until now, brands have maintained fewer consistent partnerships, leveraging multiple creators to expand their reach and build awareness. But, as brands start to see more sales and conversions through this channel, 67% are investing in creating more content with their existing creator partners. This bodes well for creators, who can now generate more reliable income through established brand partnerships.

It may seem easier to gain a foothold with a larger brand that works with more creators. Since these brands often clearly define their application process, creators may feel more comfortable reaching out because they know what to expect. However, that often means creators get lost in a sea of applications and struggle to get a foot in the door.

74% of brands partner with 5 or fewer creators. This means brands get more face time with their creator partners—helping them to align and see improved results over time.

We're focusing on long-term partnerships with creators



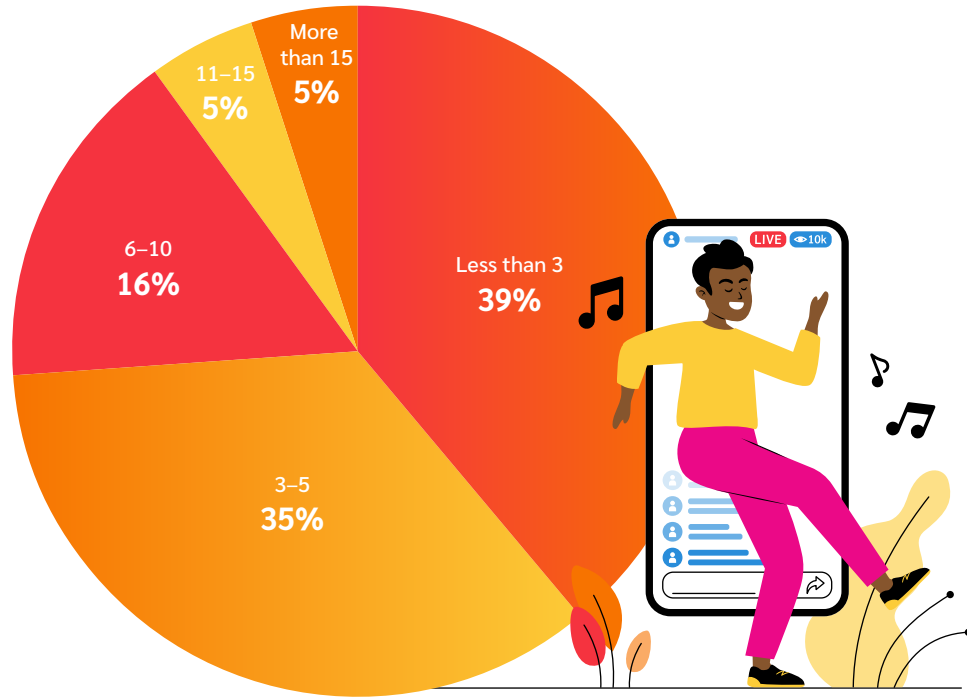
Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

As more organizations expand their influencer marketing programs, creators can bypass the competition and have a better chance of establishing a partnership.

Every brand we spoke with that began working with influencers within the last year is searching for long-term cornerstone creators to partner with. Currently, over 80% of brands that have worked with influencers for less than a year work with fewer than three influencers at a time.

Meanwhile, brands with more mature influencer marketing programs succeed with a larger creator pool, with nearly 20% of these brands working with over 15 influencers at a time. Unsurprisingly, brands with larger influencer pools also tend to be larger companies, which may have more formalized processes and management to support their influencer marketing campaigns.

On average, how many creators do you work with at a time?



Brands want creators to start the conversation

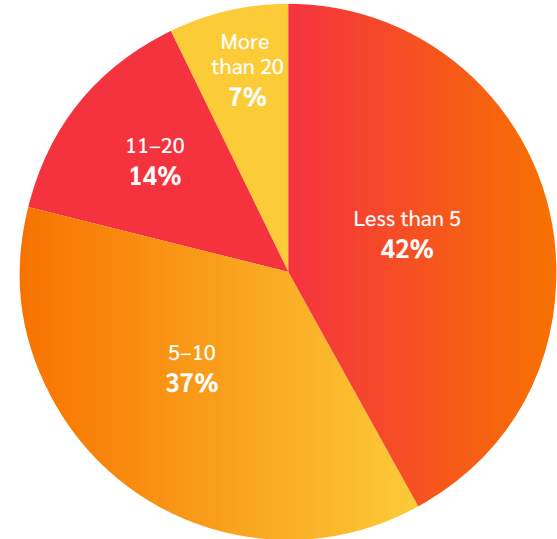
Despite a desire to onboard new creators, only 5% of brands want to source and recruit the creators they want to work with.



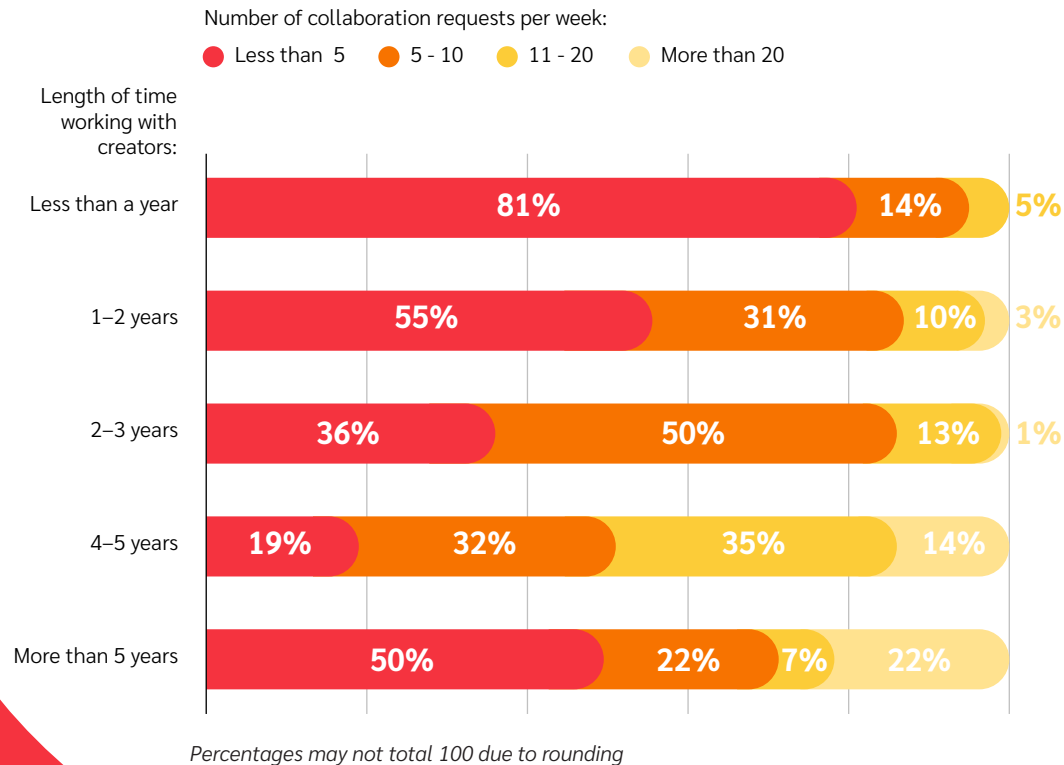
Brands aren't scouring social media to find the right creators. As brands wait for influencers to approach them, these creators have a unique opportunity to land partnerships by finding and initiating outreach to brands that align with their audience. For many creators, that means partnering with brands they already love and products they actually use. This authenticity comes through to consumers, which establishes trust, and typically increases the success of the campaign.

42% of the brands claim that fewer than five creators approach them in a week (81% for programs less than a year old). Smaller brands receive the fewest outreach messages, so creators may have an easier time pursuing a partnership with them.

How many creators approach your brand for collaboration opportunities on average each week?



How many creators approach your brand for collaboration opportunities on average each week?



“Brands often struggle to find the right creators to work with, and then can have a difficult time reaching out to recruit them. Creators can bridge this gap by contacting their favorite brands directly with a well-researched pitch.”

— Cristy Garcia, Chief Marketing Officer at impact.com

Make the partnership easy for brands

Brands prefer creators to start the conversation. But creators expect to hear from brands first. Unsurprisingly, a brand's biggest challenge is finding creators that fit their brand. This is particularly true for brands with newer influencer programs less than a year old, where nearly half report struggling to find an influencer that's a good fit.



Creator tip:

Study a brand and then tailor your media kit along with a personalized message to align with their brand values and style. This way you'll demonstrate your alignment with their branding and make your application more compelling.

Brands' greatest challenges when working with creators





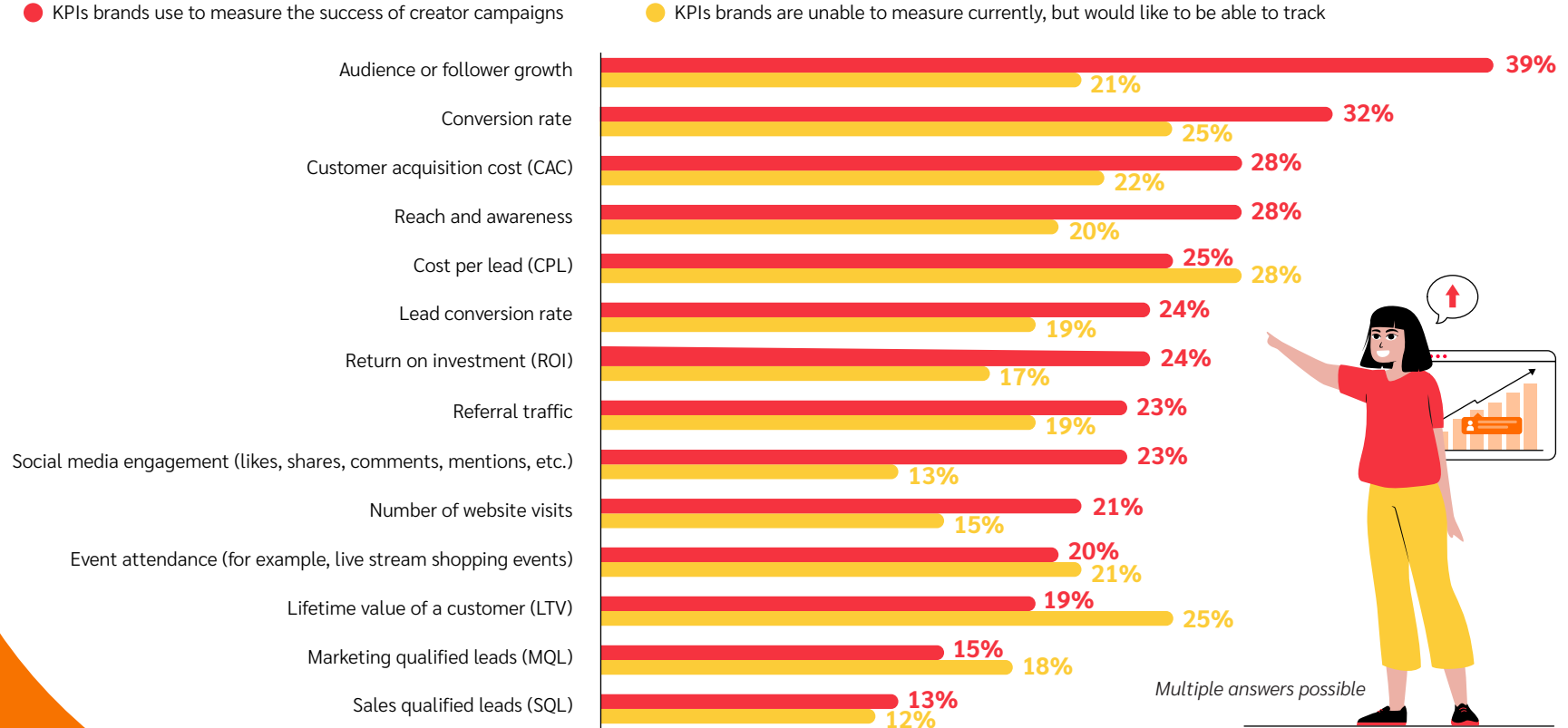
Brands face different challenges with different levels of maturity. 48% of brands with programs less than a year old struggle to find creators that fit their brand, while 32% of brands with 4-5 year old programs struggle with producing creative content within the brand guidelines. 30% of brands with 5+ year old programs struggle most with measuring campaign success.

Meanwhile, brands with more mature influencer marketing programs face challenges with consistently measuring the success of their campaigns. Some key performance indicators (KPIs)—like follower count, engagement, post reach, or event attendance—are easy for creators to track with social media analytics tools. **Creators who demonstrate that they measure and track these KPIs will look more appealing to marketing leaders.**

Other KPIs—like cost per lead (CPL), conversion rate, or customer lifetime value (CLV)—aren't things creators can measure, so they rely on brands to share this information. But suppose brands don't have the right tools or capabilities to measure their campaign performance. In that case, it's difficult for them to prove their influencer marketing campaigns' ROI and justify their budget. When brands don't know the true value creators offer, they may be less inclined to create long-term partnerships or even work with them again. Plus, creators may feel short-changed when these KPIs impact their commission payments.

Brands also face challenges working with contracted influencers. **Reliability around deadlines, unresponsiveness, and fee inflation make partnerships more difficult for brands and compromise the success of their campaigns.**

How brands measure the success of their creator campaigns



Professional communication sets influencers apart

1 in 3 brands ranked professionalism and responsiveness as one of their top 3 considerations when partnering with an influencer



Contacting brands for collaborations [top 5 ways]

● How creators contact brands most often for brand collaborations

● How brands prefer creators to contact them for brand collaborations

Direct message the brand on social media



Reach out via email



Reach out to a PR or marketing contact on social media such as LinkedIn

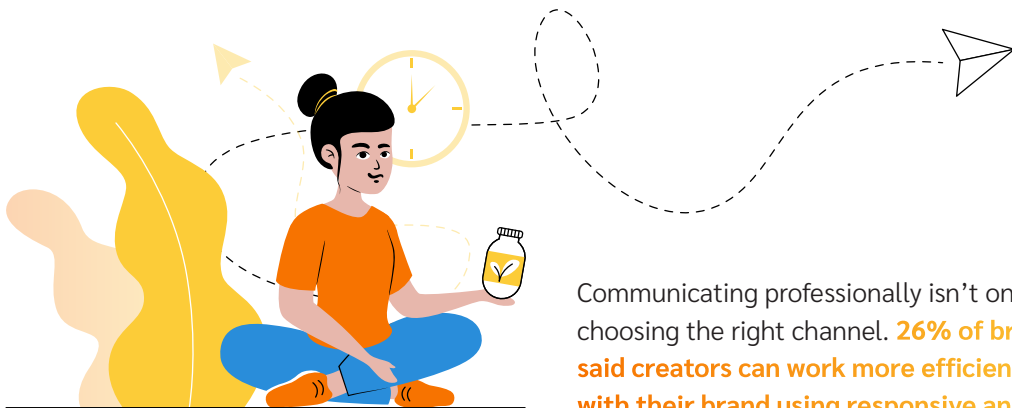


Apply through brand website



Contact the CEO via social media such as LinkedIn





Creators mostly reach out to brands for collaborations via DMs on social media and email, which aligns with the brand's preference.

Communicating professionally isn't only about choosing the right channel. **26% of brands said creators can work more efficiently with their brand using responsive and timely communication.** Creators becoming unresponsive (ghosting) is an increasingly common problem for brands, which gives creators who respond promptly an instant lift over other creators.

43 % of brands _____
would commit to a long-term partnership with a creator who prioritizes prompt, professional communication

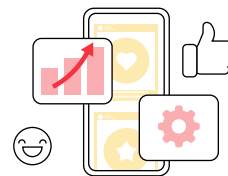


Creator tip:

Searching LinkedIn for brand marketing professionals is a good first step to establishing a relationship (42% of brands prefer this method), but leveraging a creator platform with a marketplace can give creators a leg up on the competition by having the correct contacts right there. 26% of brands prefer creators to apply through their brand website.

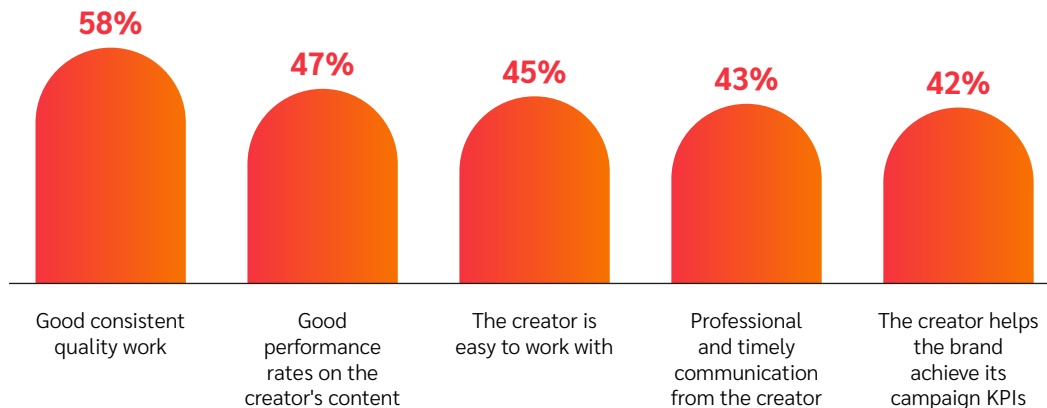
Brands look for high-quality work first

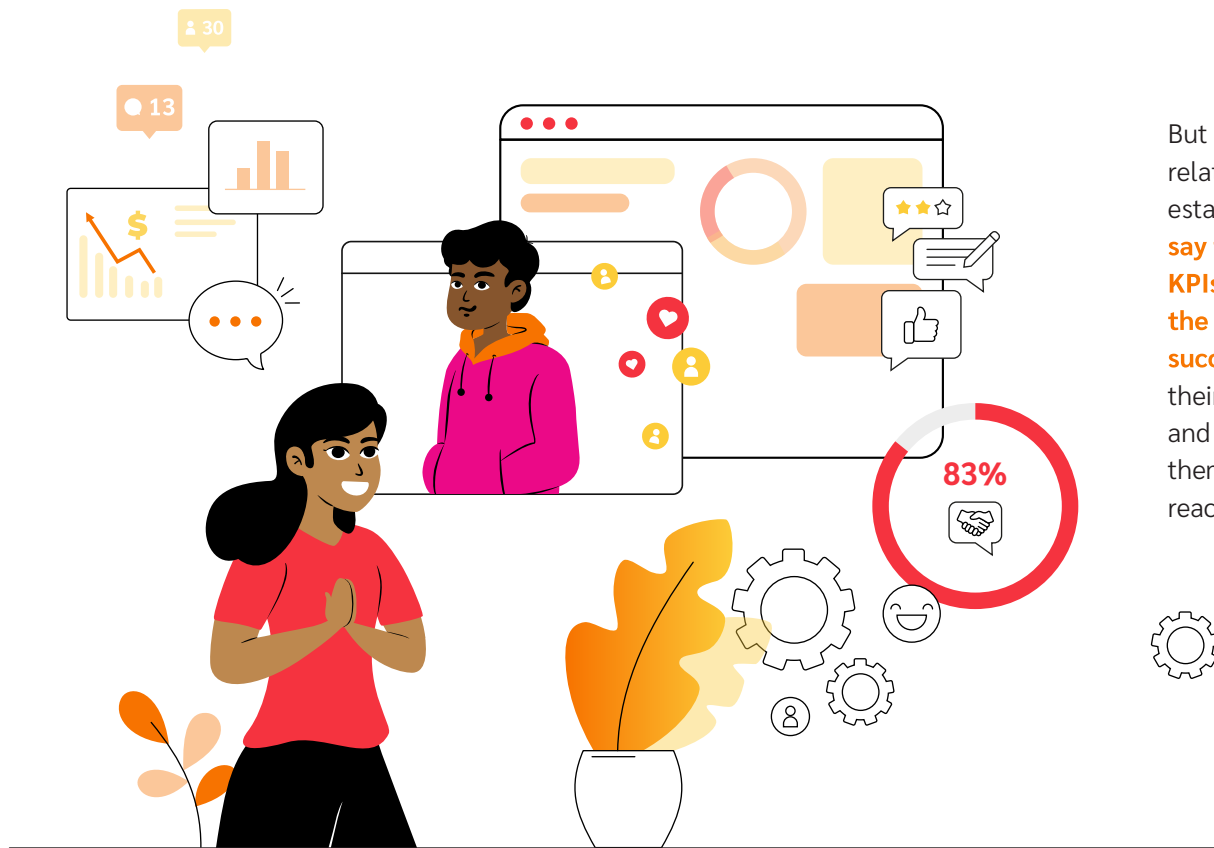
58 % of brands rank delivering good, consistent quality work as the number one factor that would inspire them to establish a long-term partnership



Today's influencers are creators first, and strong performance rates on their content is a top factor that will drive brands to commit to a long-term partnership. 35% of marketing leaders say creating consistent, quality content is the primary way influencers can work more efficiently with brands. Similarly, **46% of companies will end their relationship with an influencer if they're unhappy with their work quality.**

Top 5 factors that would make brands commit to a long-term partnership with a creator



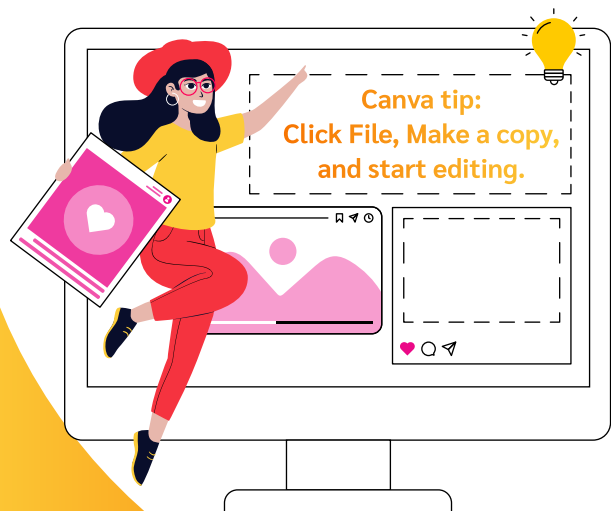


But what can creators do to improve their relationship with brands after they've established a relationship? **83% of brands say that delivering on the campaign's KPIs (for example, helping them achieve the ROI they're aiming for) solidifies a successful partnership.** As creators build their relationships with brands, requesting and applying feedback is critical to help them create quality work that gets great reach and drives conversions.



Brands want to get pitched with creator media kits

A creator's media kit is like a résumé—it helps the brand understand what a creator is capable of and what results they've produced. Follow this chart and [download our template](#) to create a concise media kit that wows brands.



Do ✓

Showcase your best work with high-quality visuals and work samples

Demonstrate that your brand and values align with the brand you're pitching

Focus on your audience demographics, follower size, and past clients

Detail performance results from past campaigns

Include your contact information and links to your social media accounts

Don't ✗

Describe your past work in long paragraphs

Overemphasize the look and feel of your branding

Focus on yourself by including a photo, lengthy bio, and a list of topics you discuss

List your platform's performance metrics

Include your services and rate card with your initial media kit



5 ways to grow as a professional content creator [at any stage]

1. Create a media kit to showcase your skills and results

Brands want to see your best work before they work with you, and **your media kit offers a great opportunity to show brands why they should work with you.** Many brands like a concise media kit, but have a longer option ready, too. This can include your rate card, bio, and platform performance metrics. Both versions of your media kit should include high-quality work samples front and center.

2. Reach out to brands you love and use, even if they don't have big influencer programs

83% of brands see a deep love and understanding of their brand as indicative of a successful partnership. So reach out to only those brands that you and your audience will align with and share a passion for. It's the perfect way to kick off a great relationship.

Brands with less mature creator programs often get fewer messages from prospective influencers. This offers a good opportunity for newer creators to get a foot in the door.

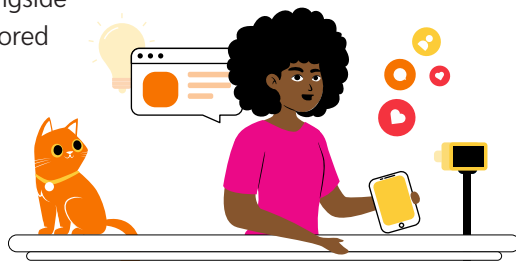


However, before assuming a smaller brand has a less mature influencer program, check their website for a preexisting affiliate or creator page.

3. Suggest different ways to collaborate and build longevity with your content

Use your strengths by suggesting different types of campaigns. While brands with mature programs may have fixed campaigns they want to work on, **brands with newer programs may appreciate suggestions for one-off projects and campaigns that complement your skills.** For example, creators could suggest hosting a product pre-release campaign or giveaway alongside regularly-scheduled sponsored social media posts.

These discussions can also include initial payment terms. Most brands prefer to pay a flat fee, a performance-based commission, or—most commonly—a combination of the two. However, they may prefer gifting products or store rebates to new creators. **Remember that payment styles can change as your partnership grows.**



4. Communicate clearly and often



Prompt, professional communication can give brands more peace of mind about working with you. **Also, delivering high-quality work on a deadline that aligns with the brief can put you on the fast track to becoming a trusted long-term partner.**

5. Analyze campaign performance to see better results

Work with your brand partners to better understand how your content performs against your campaign goals. **Review your content's performance regularly on your analytics channels and compare that data with your client's results.** This can help you

learn how to collaborate more strategically with brands and create campaigns that resonate with them.

Get the right technology to grow your creator business

[impact.com / creator](https://impact.com/creator) offers many perks for creators, including the fastest payouts in the industry, the only platform to offer flexible payment models, access to top global brands, and much more!

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