



The Creator-Powered Funnel

How Brands Turn Creator Content Into Scalable Media Infrastructure

The traditional marketing funnel has collapsed. A creator-powered funnel has taken its place

The line between creator content, media ecosystems, and paid media is quickly disappearing. Social platforms are expanding their footprint. [TikTok and Issa Rae's production company HOORAE recently launched a micro-series](#) designed to pair creator-led storytelling with scaled distribution.

[AI-powered discovery](#) is also reshaping how consumers find brands and products. [Gartner predicts earned and PR budgets will double by 2027](#), signaling a broader shift away from traditional paid media dominance.

CreatorIQ's research also showed that [2/3 of increases in influencer marketing spend was reallocated from paid channels](#). However, paid and earned aren't the distinct functions they once were: 92% of paid media leaders and marketing executives use creator content in paid media and all of our respondents repurposed creator content across channels.

92% of paid media leaders and marketing executives use creator content in paid media

The traditional marketing funnel was built for a different internet. Today's consumer journey is nonlinear, creator-led, and shaped by thousands of trusted voices operating across social media, paid media, streaming, commerce, and AI discovery systems simultaneously.

The Marketing Funnel Is Creator-Powered

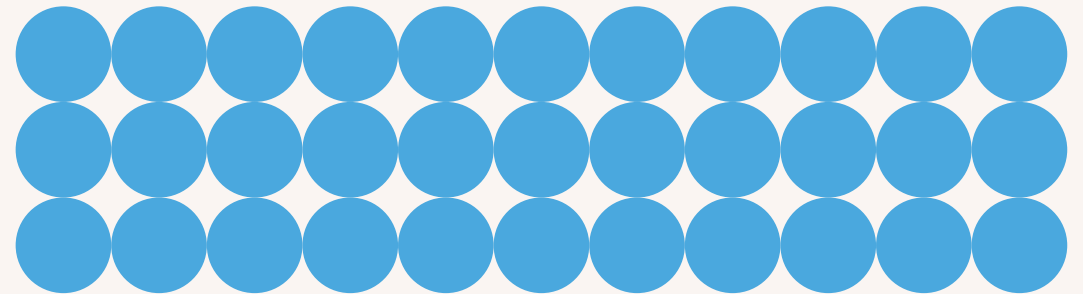
Fortune 100 Brands Owned Vs. Creator Post Count

TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, Jan–Aug 2025, U.S.

77k
Owned content



2.5M
Creator content



On average, creators produced **33 times more posts** than the highest-revenue brands generated on their owned channels

This report explores how enterprise brands can operationalize creator marketing across paid media, measurement, and performance to build a durable marketing infrastructure.

CreatorIQ set out to trace this new marketing funnel, surveying 100 paid media leaders and marketing executives to understand how to turn creator marketing into a scalable media and performance engine.

Respondent Roles

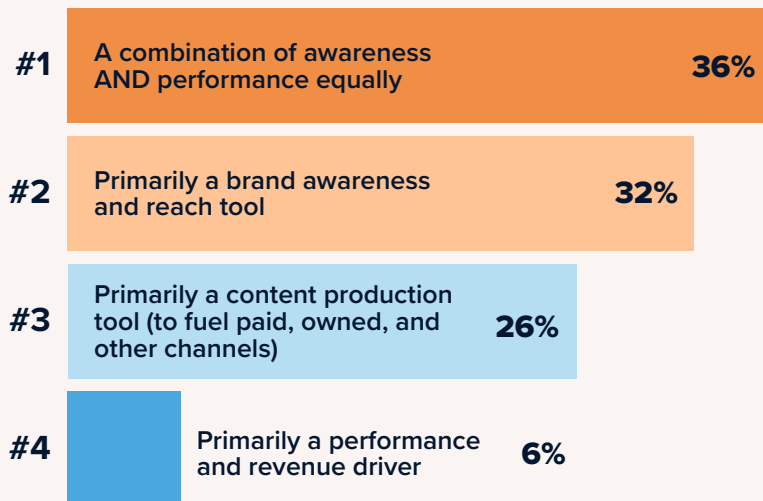
Senior Executive	30%
VP or Director	38%
Manager	32%

Awareness and performance are converging

Creator marketing has long been viewed as a top-of-funnel channel built primarily for awareness and brand lift. Among paid media managers and marketing execs, the narrative has shifted: respondents were most likely to describe creator marketing as equally valuable for awareness and performance (36%).

39% of respondents in paid media described creator as equally effective for awareness and performance compared to 30% of marketing executives. The closer marketers are to performance systems, the more they see the creator's dual role.

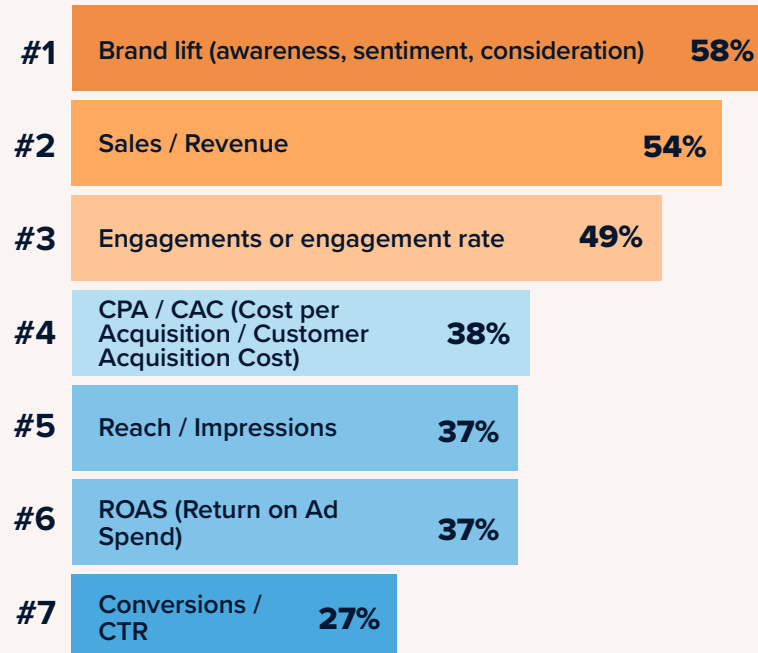
How Marketers Think About Creator Marketing Today



That shift is also reflected in how marketers evaluate success. When asked to select the top three ways to evaluate the success of a creator marketing campaign, respondents ranked brand lift and sales/revenue nearly equally (58% and 54%, respectively).

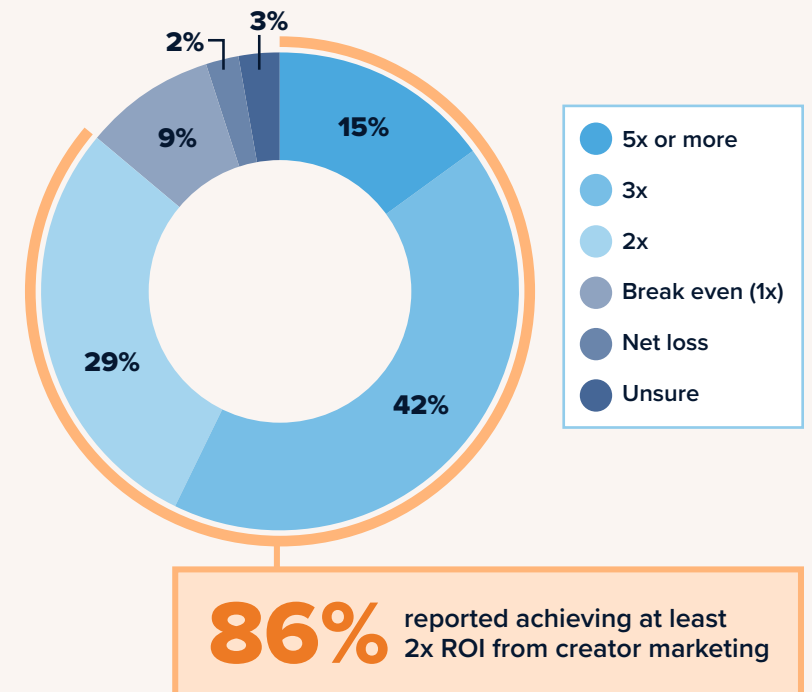
Marketing executives were especially likely to prioritize revenue impact, with 70% selecting sales/revenue compared to 47% of paid media respondents.

Metrics that matter most when evaluating success of a creator marketing campaign



As awareness and performance converge, marketers are increasingly evaluating creator marketing with the same business expectations as paid media. Regardless of whether respondents viewed creator as an awareness or revenue-driving channel, more than 8 out of 10 reported achieving at least 2x ROI from creator marketing.

What is the return on investment (ROI) of your creator marketing program?



Creator content is reshaping the paid media stack

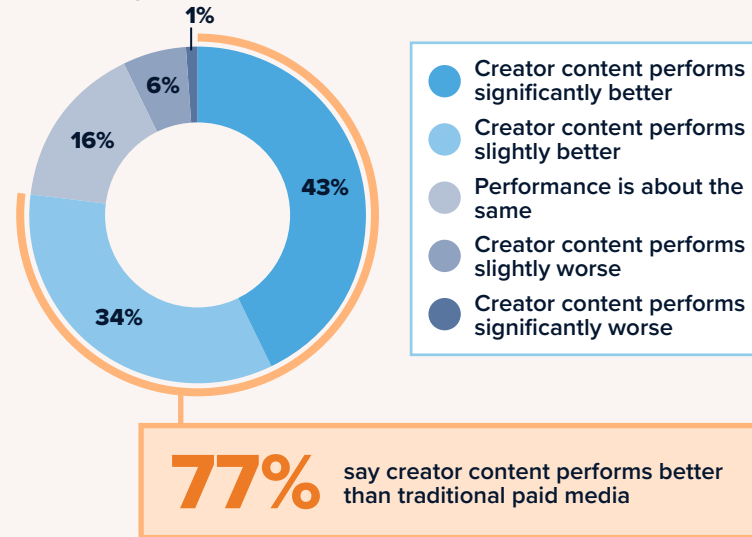
As creator marketing becomes more closely tied to performance outcomes, creator content is increasingly being integrated directly into paid media operations.

What began as a channel for awareness and engagement is evolving into a source of scalable creative built for performance environments. Creator content is functioning more like reusable media inventory, just as [paid media is predicted to surpass \\$1 trillion in market value](#).

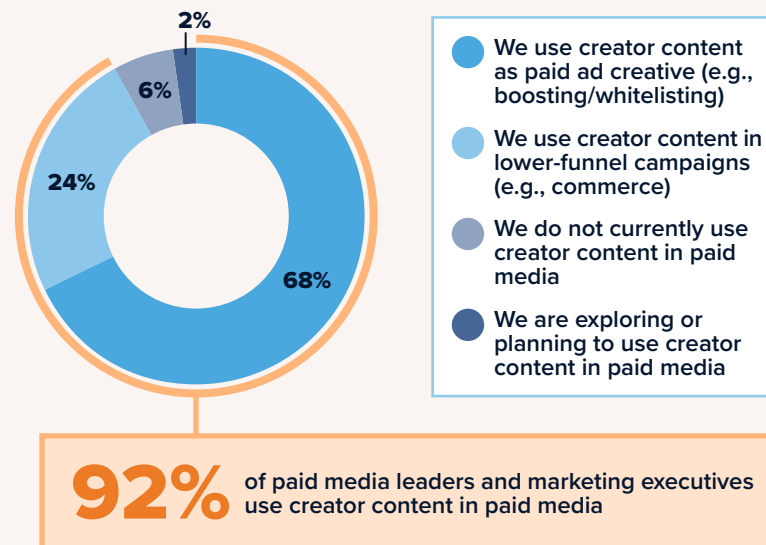
Among surveyed marketers, 92% reported using creator content in paid media in some capacity, with creator content accounting for 44% of paid media creative on average. 77% of respondents also reported that creator content outperforms traditional branded creative, with 43% saying creator content performs significantly better.

Creator content performs better than traditional paid media

In your paid media channels, how does creator content as an asset typically perform compared to brand-owned or studio-produced content?

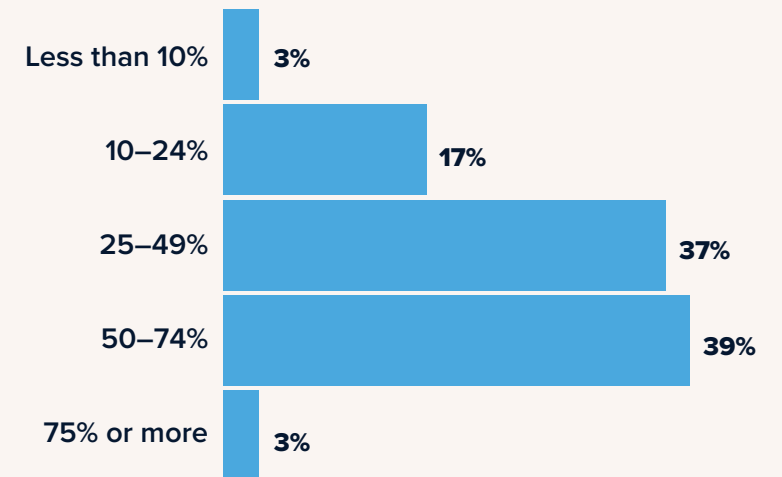


How organizations use creator content in paid media



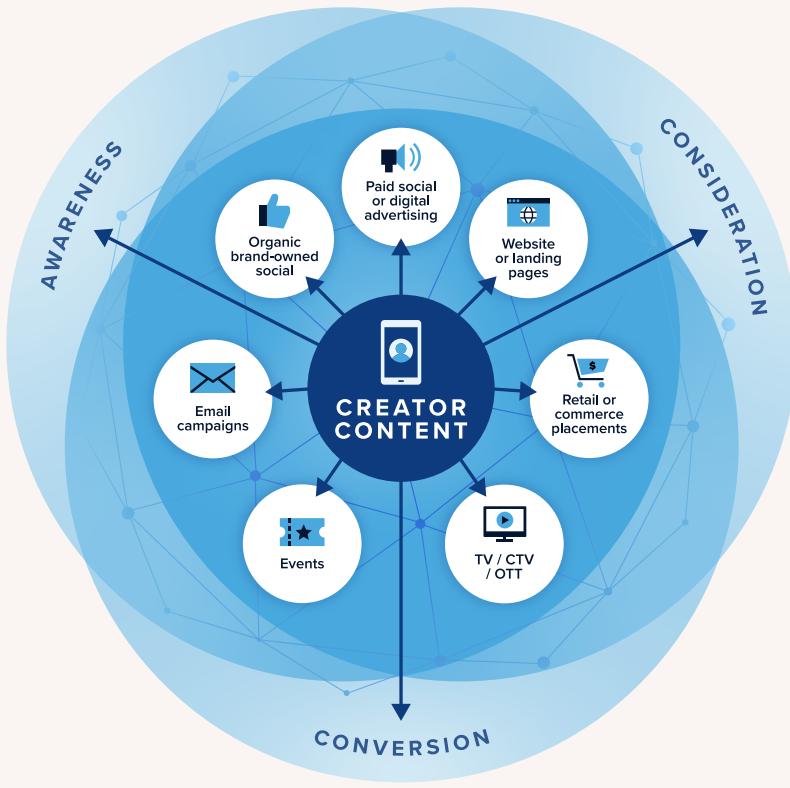
On average, 44% of paid media creative comes from creator content

What percentage of your paid media creative currently comes from creators (vs. studio-produced or brand-owned assets)?



Creator content is the connective tissue between awareness and conversion

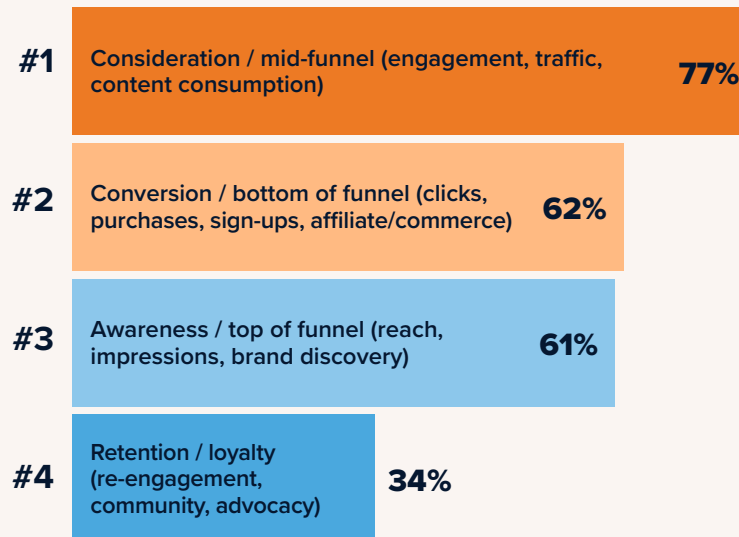
The traditional funnel may be less linear than it once was, but consumers still move through moments of discovery, evaluation, trust-building, and purchase intent. **Increasingly, creator content weaves those phases together.**



As targeting advantages erode and consumers grow more fatigued by polished advertising, marketers are turning to creator content as a more trusted and effective form of content. Creator content operates as a source of creative differentiation inside paid media systems, in part because of its versatility. Respondents reported using creator marketing across every stage of the customer journey, from awareness to conversion and retention.

77% of respondents see creator content as a consideration tool

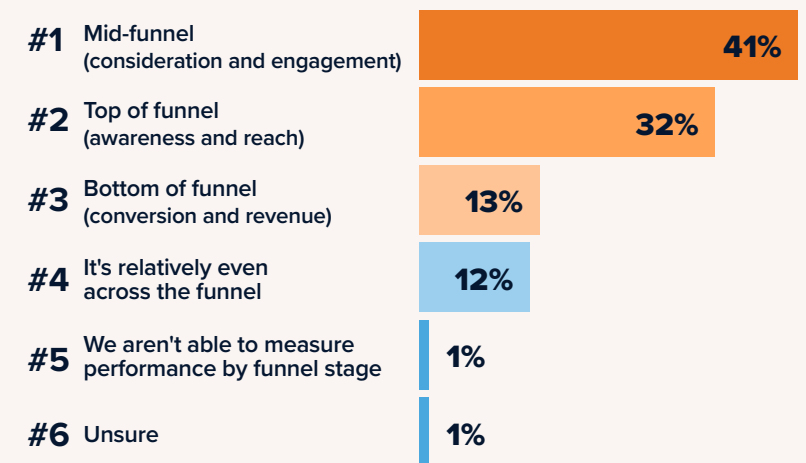
At which stage(s) of the marketing funnel does your organization actively use creator marketing?



Creator marketing was most likely to deliver the strongest measurable return during moments of consideration and engagement, with 41% of respondents identifying the mid-funnel as creator marketing's most effective stage.

Creator content drives the strongest return mid-funnel

Where does creator marketing currently deliver the strongest measurable return for your organization?



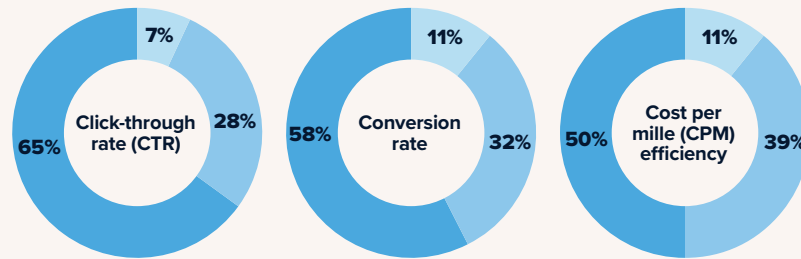
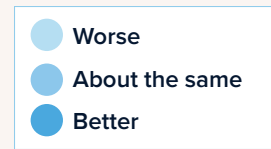
Rather than operating within a rigid funnel, creator content compresses discovery, evaluation, and conversion stages into interconnected experiences across social media, paid media, and commerce. The most common place where this performance audience reused creator content was paid social and digital advertising (65%).

Creator marketing demands fit-for-purpose measurement

If the creator-powered funnel is built around interconnected systems that intersect with creators, measurement becomes more complex.

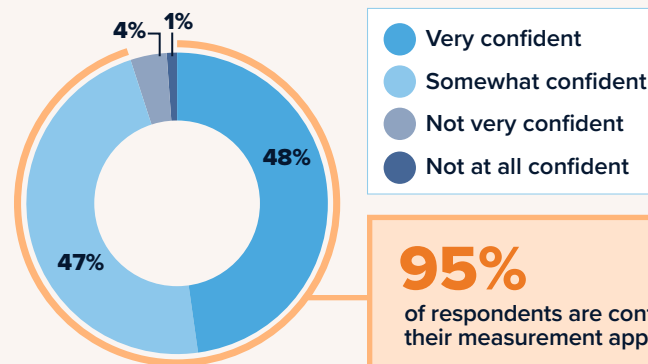
Marketers are increasingly evaluating creator programs with the same rigor as traditional media channels. Respondents reported stronger click-through and conversion performance from creator content compared to other paid media creative. Additionally, 95% said that they are either somewhat or very confident in their ability to measure creator marketing's revenue impact.

How creator content performs on paid media channels compared to other paid media creative



95% are confident their measurement captures the full revenue impact of their creator marketing program

How confident are you that your current measurement approach accurately captures the full revenue impact of your creator marketing program?



95% of respondents are confident in their measurement approach

While creator content can improve lower-funnel performance, its impact extends beyond what traditional dashboards can capture. Creator shapes trust, cultural relevance, and brand perception. Campaigns like Shea Moisture's viral [Silk Press in a Bottle campaign](#) or [Gap's recent revival of the power of dance](#) demonstrate how creator-driven cultural moments can shape consumer perception long before conversion occurs.

“On TikTok, creators bring a level of authenticity, trust, and cultural fluency that help brands connect with their audiences to drive lasting business impact. The most successful marketers are no longer thinking about creator content as a standalone tactic, but as an integrated part of their broader marketing strategy. Unlocking this opportunity requires the right technology, measurement, and workflows to understand what resonates and scale it effectively.”



Keiko Mori
Head of Creative Product Marketing, NA
TikTok

The tension between the cultural salience of campaigns and measuring the downstream effects of creator content exists elsewhere in the research: the most common barrier to scaling creator content in paid media was difficulty measuring the performance of creator-led assets vs. other creative assets, selected by 58% of respondents.

Evaluating the success of a program depends in large part on [who is evaluating and for what purpose](#). Brands now need clearer benchmarks for what effective creator investment looks like across industries and business models.

How brands maximize creator investments

Not all investments in creator content generate value the same way.

As enterprise teams increase creator spend, many are seeking more context around how creator partnerships contribute to broader marketing goals.

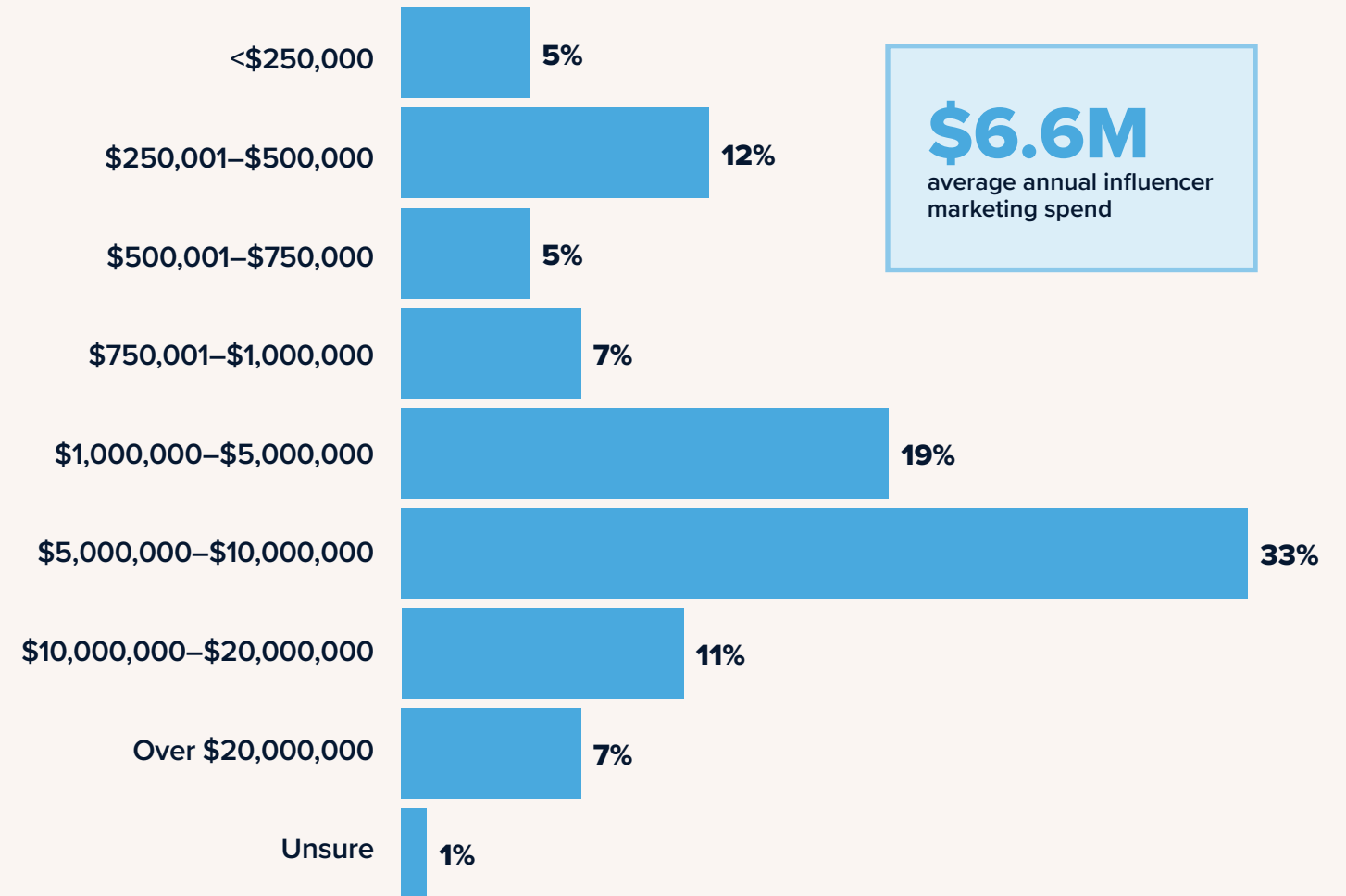
Many factors influence creator pay, including engagement rate, audience specialization, usage rights, platform, and category goals. Depending on the goals of a program, brands may evaluate creator investments through a combination of metrics including ROAS, Social Media Value (SMV), or Earned Media Value (EMV), or other metrics that capture return on creator.

“Forward-thinking brands extend the value of each creator partnership beyond the original post. Mature programs use benchmarks and performance data to inform creator selection, paid amplification, and investment.”

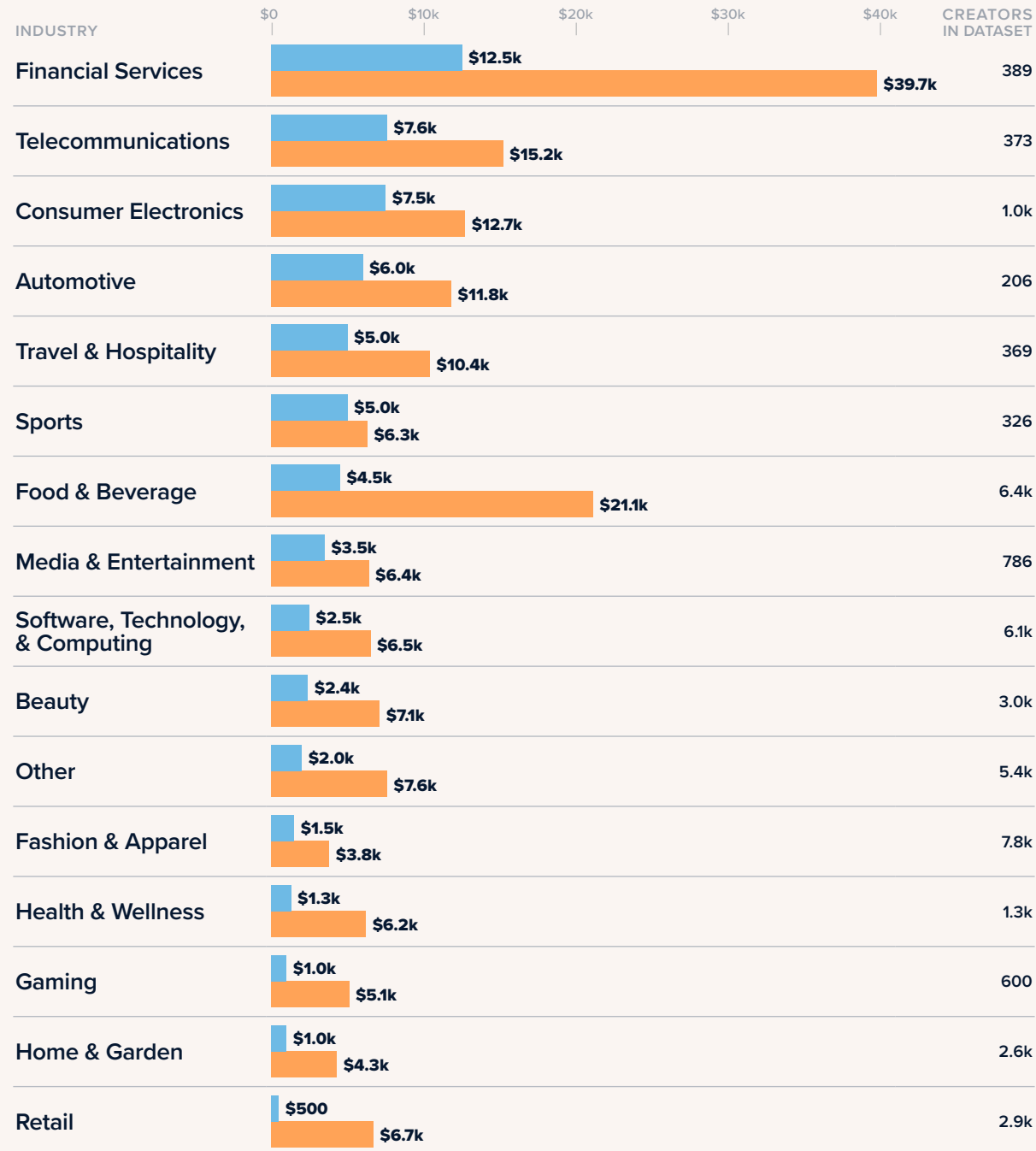


Michael Lambie
Head of Global Measurement & Insights
CreatorIQ

Average Annual Influencer Marketing Spend



Average and Median Creator Pay by Industry



Creator pay benchmarks are most useful when viewed as one signal within a broader measurement framework.

Understanding how creator investments compare to industry benchmarks can help brands identify which levers to adjust to get the most value, including whether they might benefit from a different strategy for creator selection, content reuse, paid amplification, or a long-term partnership.

We tracked 38.1k creators paid across 59.6k campaigns to understand approximately how much creators were being paid by industry. This data set includes aggregated and anonymized creator pay and self-reported pay made in USD. Outliers were removed.

Creator pay varied by industry, as well as follower tier. Industry creator pay is influenced by supply and demand: industries requiring specialized expertise tend to command premium rates. Higher costs don't necessarily signal ineffective investments. Rather, brands who pay more to partner with a creator would benefit from maximizing their creator investment by activating creator content beyond organic distribution.

Brands need to shift their mindset from paying for distribution to paying for content assets. That shift fundamentally changes how brands evaluate creator investments.

For brands seeking strong ROI from creator, the recourse isn't to pay creators less, but to extend the lifespan of creator content.

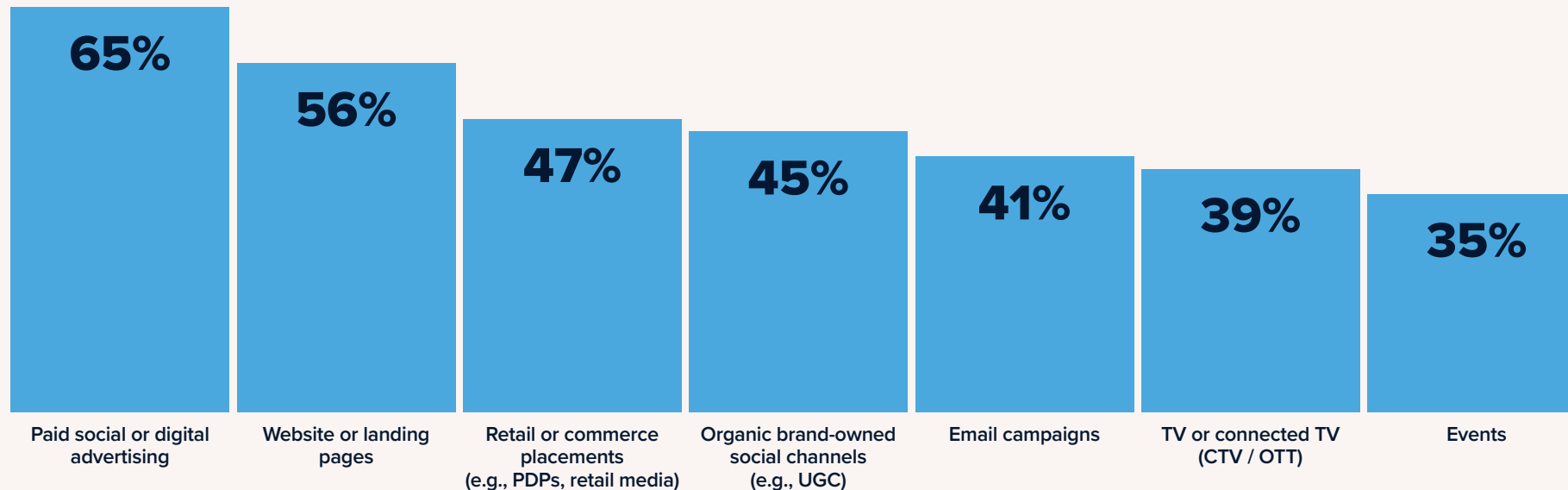
Mature programs leverage creator content across paid advertising, whitelisting and boosting, commerce, and owned channels to improve long-term return on creator spend. The more a brand invests in a creator partnership, the more important it becomes to get more utility from that content through paid strategies or long-term partnerships.

How a brand extends creator content depends on the economics of their industry. A creator partnership that underperforms on organic distribution alone may still deliver significant business value when reused across product pages, paid advertising, email campaigns, or connected TV.

Mature programs maximize the long-term value of creator assets, rather than evaluating creator investments based on the original sponsored post. As a result, creator content functions as a layer of media and creative that compounds in value over time.

Paid social or digital advertising is the No. 1 channel for repurposing creator content

Beyond the original creator post or asset, where does your organization repurpose or redeploy creator content?



Among surveyed marketers, creator content was most frequently repurposed for paid social and digital advertising (65%), followed by websites and landing pages (56%), and retail and commerce placements (47%).

The barrier to scale is operationalizing creator marketing

The market already believes creator marketing works. The challenge is **scaling it**.

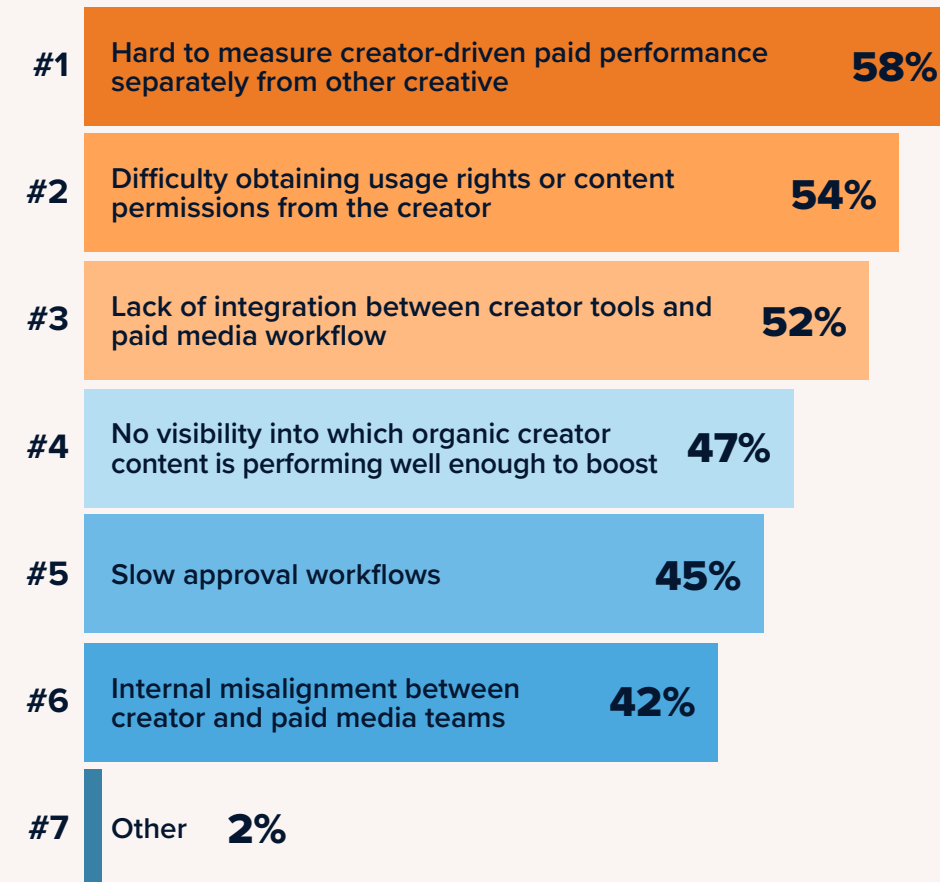
What was once a siloed channel now touches media buying, legal approvals, reporting systems, creative workflows, and brand governance simultaneously.

As creator content becomes more deeply embedded into paid media and performance workflows, operational complexity is one of the biggest barriers to growth.

Marketers pointed to difficulty isolating creator-led performance from other creative assets (58%), securing content rights and permissions (54%), and integrating creator workflows into paid media systems (52%) as their top barriers.

AI is making it easier to produce and distribute content at scale, but scale without coordination creates new inefficiencies. The next phase of creator marketing maturity will depend less on proving creator works and more on building the operational systems required to scale it effectively.

The biggest barriers to using more creator content in paid media



“The creator marketing conversation has moved well past ‘does this work’—brands already know it does. The harder question is whether their infrastructure can keep pace with how creator content actually moves through the funnel today. When creator data flows into the same environment as paid and organic signals, teams stop reconciling reports and start making decisions.”



Vivian Ly
Senior Product Manager
Sprinklr

Building durable infrastructure for the creator-powered era

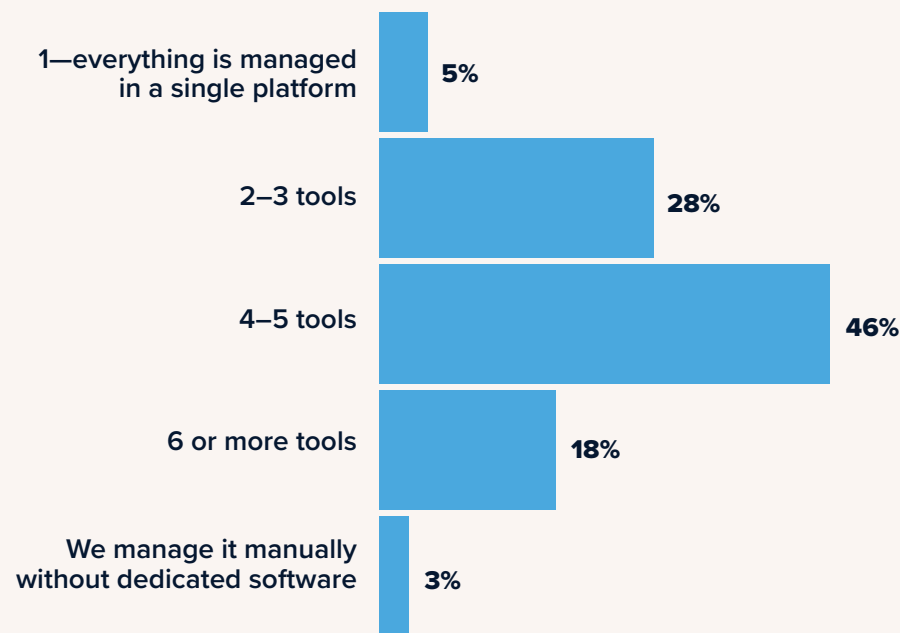
Most marketing systems were built for a different era of media, one shaped by institutions, celebrity endorsements, and predictable distribution.

Many organizations still manage creator marketing through fragmented workflows and disconnected systems that limit visibility and make it difficult to scale strategically. Brands average four tools for creator marketing alone.

The strongest programs are evolving beyond that model. 84% percent of respondents said AI has already improved the efficiency of their creator marketing programs.

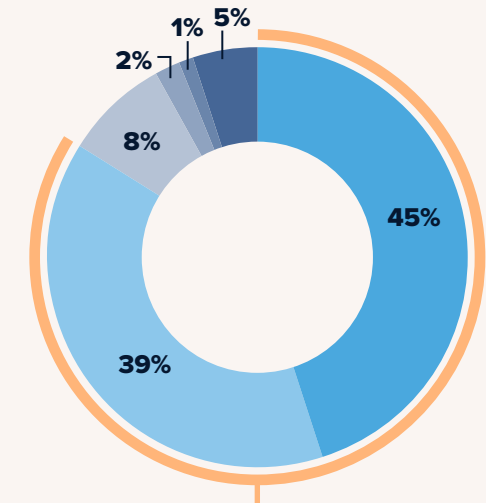
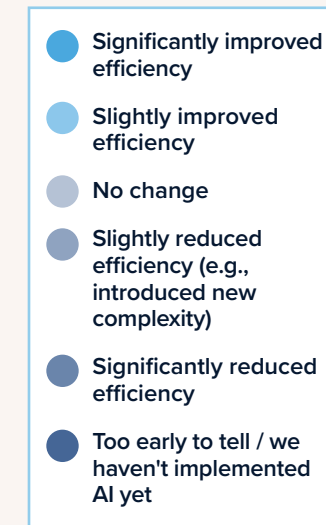
On average, marketers use 4 tools to manage their creator marketing workflow

How many separate tools or platforms does your team currently use to manage the end-to-end creator marketing workflow (e.g., discovery, contracts, content tracking, reporting)?



For 84%, AI has improved the efficiency of their creator marketing programs

How has AI impacted the efficiency of your creator marketing program?



84% say AI has improved the efficiency of their creator marketing programs

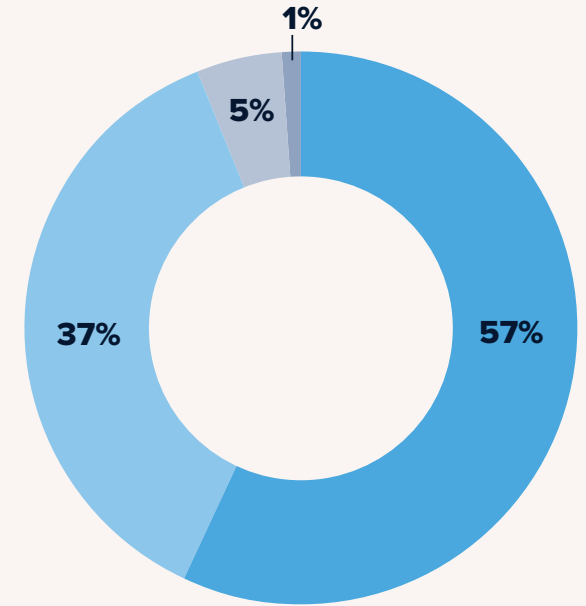
Knowing which content to amplify, where to distribute it, and how to measure its impact over time will set leading organizations apart.

More than half of surveyed marketers reported that creator marketing is already fully integrated into the same measurement frameworks as their broader paid media programs.

The majority of marketers integrate creator content into the same measurement framework as their paid media

Does your organization measure creator marketing performance using the same metrics and dashboards as your other paid media channels?

- Yes, fully integrated into the same measurement framework
- Partially — some metrics overlap but we use separate reporting systems
- No — creator marketing is measured separately with different metrics
- We don't formally measure creator marketing performance



The marketing funnel has already changed.

The brands that win will build durable infrastructure around creator content. These systems and workflows will support faster decision-making, stronger visibility, and more intelligent activation while still keeping human creativity at the center.

The future of marketing won't be organized around separate channels or linear processes. It will belong to organizations that can recognize what resonates, move with it quickly, and scale it intelligently across an increasingly interconnected media ecosystem.

About this survey

In partnership with CreatorIQ, Sapio Research conducted the market research for this report in May 2026, featuring a sample of 100 marketing leaders. 70% of them worked in paid media, while 30% were marketing executives.

CreatorIQ also conducted original research on industry creator spend benchmarks in May 2026, featuring 38.1k unique creators paid in USD across 59.6k campaigns from 2018 through early 2026.

The payment data reflects a set of campaigns executed through the CreatorIQ platform. Analysis is weighted toward the most recent three years to reflect current market conditions. Outliers were removed.

ORGANIZATION TYPE

Brand	50%
Agency	50%

TITLES

Director of Revenue Marketing	24%
Paid Media Manager	21%
Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)	19%
Director of Performance Marketing	18%
VP of Growth	7%
SVP of Marketing	5%
VP of Marketing	4%
Chief Growth Officer (CGO)	2%

ORGANIZATION SIZE

Fewer than 15 employees	3%
15–100 employees	8%
101–250 employees	10%
251–1,000 employees	22%
1,001–10,000 employees	31%
More than 10,000 employees	26%

REGION

United States	70%
United Kingdom	30%

INDUSTRY

Media & Entertainment	28%
Retail	11%
Business	8%
Financial Services	8%
Food & Beverage	8%
Fashion & Apparel	6%
Health & Wellness	6%
Automotive	4%
Telecommunications	4%
Beauty	3%
Consumer Electronics	3%
Education	3%
Software, Technology, & Computing	3%
Travel & Hospitality	2%
Other	2%
Sports	1%

CreatorIQ is doubling down on integrations to help you build a winning creator program



FEATURED INTEGRATIONS:



Sprinklr and CreatorIQ's partnership delivers a more connected operating model for enterprise marketing, linking creator intelligence, social media management, and paid amplification within a unified ecosystem.



CreatorIQ and CreativeX have developed, in collaboration with Nestlé, an industry-first integration to unify creator marketing and paid media workflows under one system.

Ready to build a durable creator marketing program?