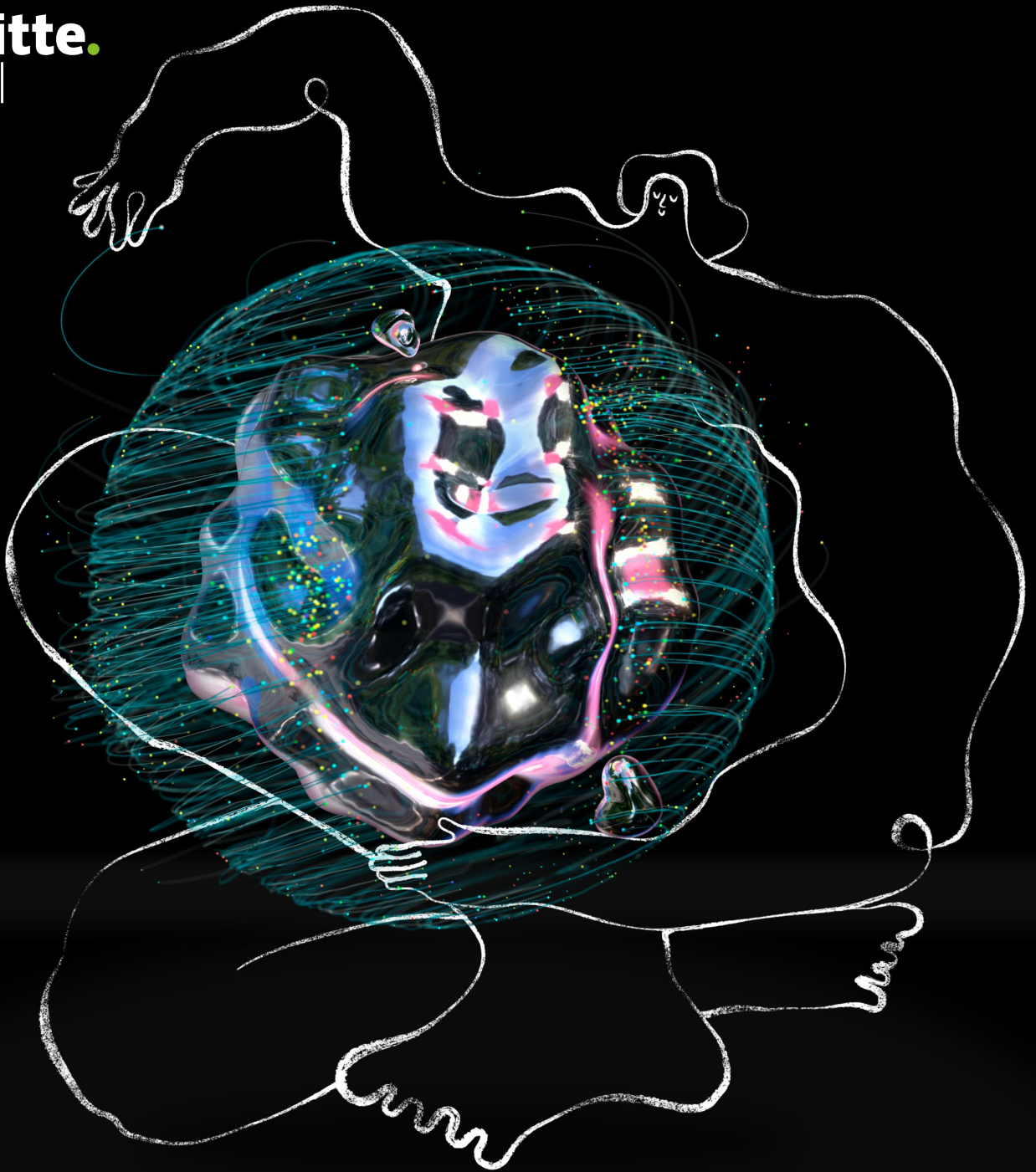


Deloitte.
Digital



Authentic Influence:
Deepen customer trust
through a smarter approach
to influencer marketing

In a digital world awash with ads and branded content promoting an array of often very similar offerings, consumers are looking for trustworthy voices that can help them cut through the clutter and find what suits them best.

That desire for authenticity and human connection has spawned the rise of **social media influencers**

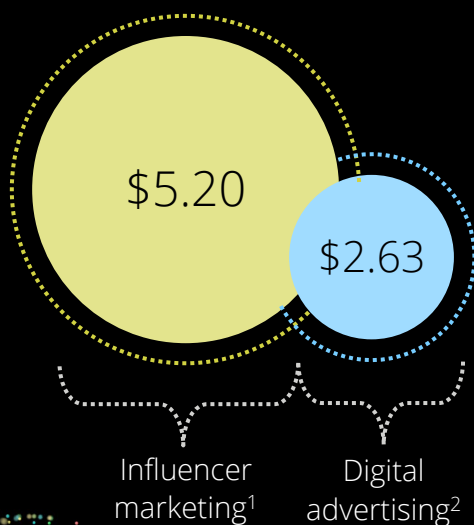
—and the parallel rise of influencer marketing. The social proof afforded to brands via influencers has helped drive awareness and sales across a range of consumer and business-to-business categories.

Yet brands too often leave bigger and more sustainable value on the table due to a short-sighted approach to influencer marketing. They treat influencers as tactics in campaigns rather than as cocreators of campaigns and ambassadors for brands. They engage influencers transactionally rather than relationally. They focus on follower count rather than the influencer's ability to change followers' behavior or perception toward a brand.

As a result, they miss out on the halo of authenticity-by-association—and revenues—that can be earned through a more integrated, collaborative, diversified and ongoing influencer marketing strategy.

Influencing growth

Average return on **\$1** spent by brands



In the early years of social media, brands followed traditional spokesperson models for their social campaigns—seeking out trusted and popular celebrities to serve as brand “influencers.”

As social and other online channels gained widespread adoption, brands expanded their approach to include a different type of engagement with a different type of content creator: **experts and everyday enthusiasts whose knowledge and zeal for a specific subject, activity or product category, combined with their engaging voices and platforms, give them credibility and trust among their audiences.**

These niche digital influencers may not always have the follower count or household name recognition of A-list celebrities; but among their devotees, they're often more passionately followed and more deeply trusted than their more famous counterparts.

Thanks in part to this more diversified approach, influencer marketing has rapidly grown into one of the most powerful and efficient tools in content marketing. An effective influencer strategy enables marketers to **connect with customers in ways that other forms of marketing and advertising cannot accomplish.**

1

Meet customers where they are

With consumers now spending more time engaging with digital media than traditional media³, and with digital ad blockers still posing a significant challenge for marketers⁴, influencers enable brands to connect with audiences beyond owned media and advertising, in the digital environments where they spend the most time.

2

Build social proof, trust and authenticity

Influencers garner a significant level of trust from their followers by being relatable, genuine and consistent over an extended period of time. When influencers show credible affinity for your brand and products, it can have powerful positive sway on the attitudes their audiences.

3

Connect with younger audiences

Seventy-two percent of Gen Z and Millennial consumers follow influencers, and 56% have purchased a product after seeing a post from someone they follow. In fact, Gen Z and Millennial women say influencers are how they most often learn about new products to buy⁵.

4

Drive social commerce

Direct purchasing via social media networks continues to grow by a double-digit annual growth rate—from an estimated \$36.6 billion in the U.S. in 2021, to \$79.6 billion by 2025⁶. It is increasingly important for brands to build strategies and campaigns to tap into this emerging avenue for growth—and influencers are key to success.

Creators of Authenticity

While influence over audiences is what all of these individuals provide to brands, it is important to recognize and engage them as *creators*.

It is the content that they produce and the ways that they understand and authentically engage with their audiences that matter to the people who follow them. That authenticity is key—both for creators and for brands. Ninety percent of customers mention authenticity as an important factor in deciding which brands they like⁷.

And 88% say authenticity is the key trait they want to see in the influencers they follow⁵.

That's why the most effective creator-brand partnerships provide creators broad control over scripting, presentation and other details. In a real sense, these brands are letting creators influence them by empowering each creator to translate brand messages into content that is more closely attuned to what the creator's audience would value.



This dynamic demands **trust**—not just between creators and their audiences, but between brands and the creators they engage.

Creator engagement use cases include:



Content Promotion



Content Creation



Product Launch



Event Mgmt.



Corporate Comms



Search Engine Optimization



Crisis Mgmt.

It also demands confidence that your products, services and values truly—authentically—meet the interests, standards and expectations of the creator's audience. Understanding the demographics and psychographics of audiences is every bit as important in creator marketing as it is in more traditional forms of advertising and marketing.



Finding your creator marketing **voice**

Beyond focusing on authenticity, the methods of selecting and engaging creators are different depending on the type of business and the goals of the business. Creators now exist within just about every interest area in pop culture and beyond. And they're relevant to both business-to-consumer and business-to-business companies.



B2C

For consumer-focused brands, creator marketing can provide value by helping consumers discover, learn about and even purchase products and services.

Especially as social commerce becomes more commonly adopted by consumers, it is important to focus on creators who can not only introduce consumers to products, but also drive direct sales.

B2B

Creators in the B2B space generally do not directly lead customers to the purchase step, but they can play a significant marketing role as advocates for the brand or product. For example, when it comes to flooring materials, the primary purchaser is typically not the end consumer. But building awareness of a flooring product's value via creators can sway consumers to ask businesses or contractors to stock or provide the flooring material—thus creating demand and increasing brand value.

From macro to micro

Marketers often focus on engaging creators with the highest number of followers. But the right creator talent is **so much more than just a follower count.**

Effective creator marketing is about focusing on follower connection and brand relevance. This can be assessed through:

The **creativity, quality and sincerity** of messages that creators can create on your brand's behalf.

The **trustworthiness** of the creator on subjects related to your industry, category and brand.

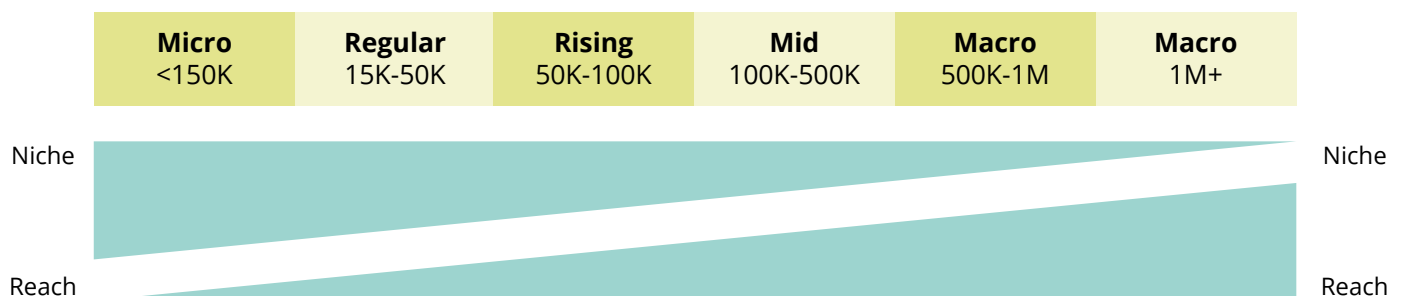
The creator's proven ability to **drive real behavior change** among audiences.

The **characteristics** of the creator's audience—not just scale of followers but also the qualities that make them a desirable audience for your brand's products and services.

Beyond those qualities, the most effective creator mix will vary depending on your creator strategy and brand goals.

Creators with the largest followings (reach) can be effective in broadcasting brand messages in ways that rapidly increase brand awareness. **Creators with smaller followings** (niche) can provide more targeted and cost-effective audience engagement—but your teams may need to manage a much larger number of niche creators in order to achieve the desired impact.

Manual processes for selecting, activating and managing creators can stand in the way of sustainable value—especially when working with niche creators. So it's important to maximize value from the creators you work with through an evolved creator marketing strategy, while leaning into new approaches to scale and automate your capabilities.



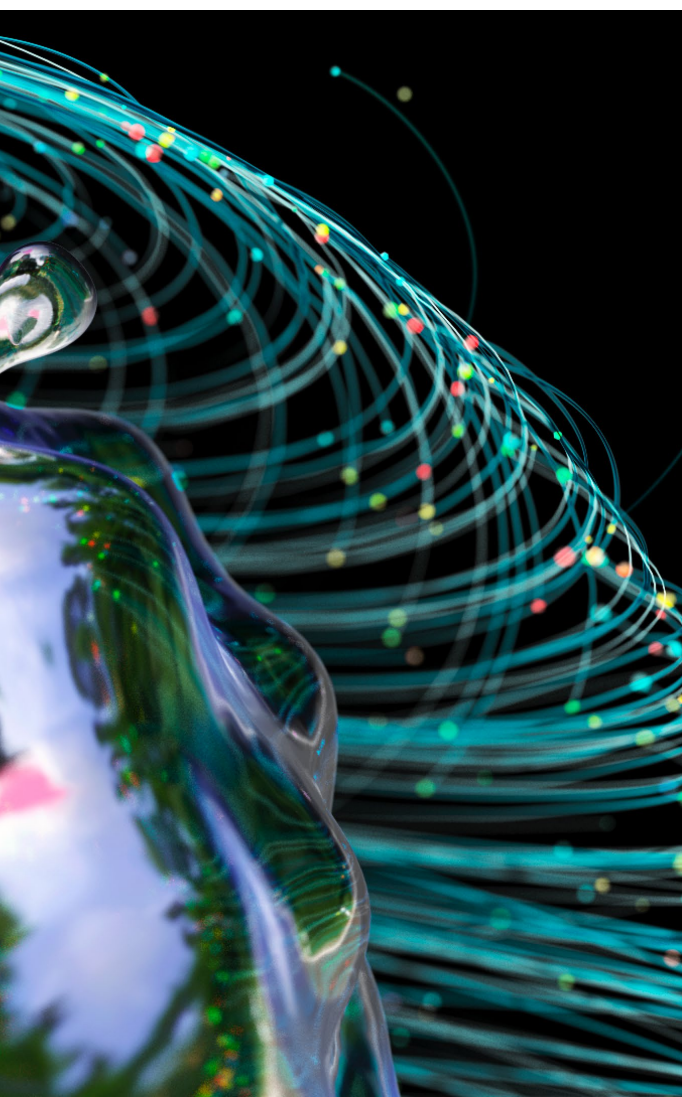
A full-funnel strategy for creator marketing.

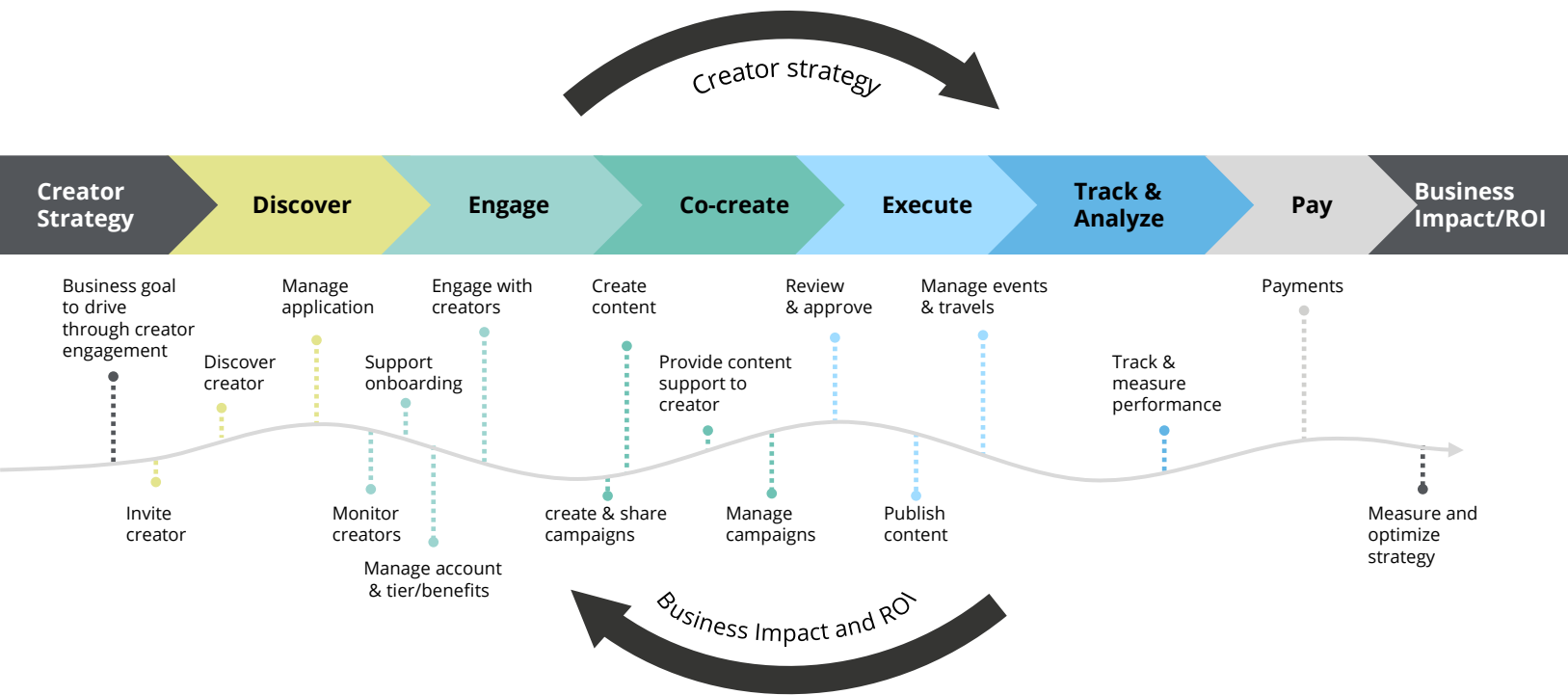
56% of marketers work with the **same influencers** across different campaigns. However, **only 33%** say they maintain **“always-on”** relationships with influencers¹.

It is common for marketers to deploy creators only during a pre-determined campaign’s execution. The result: tactical, brief engagements that are more akin to a traditional ad placement than to an authentic relationship. While this might work well in some cases to boost immediate sales, in most cases the impact of this approach is short-lived and doesn’t succeed in moving the dial to increase brand affinity.

Creators have a unique vantage point into the needs of their followers across the full customer lifecycle—from awareness and selection through purchase and use. That’s why **focusing on long term opportunities over of-the-moment trends is key to implementing an authentic and engaging creator strategy.**

Marketers should engage creators across all steps of the marketing process from strategic planning to measurement & attribution to align strategies, generate continuous brand engagement, and optimize the relationship that the brand builds with a given influencer. In so doing, brands can develop a more personal relationship with creator talent versus a transactional, inauthentic connection. This carries over to the consumer connection—helping build greater lifetime value, grow trust and inspire organic customer advocacy for the brand.





In the real world: Scaling a creator program

A leading video game distributor's influencer program was limited by its technology infrastructure and highly manual business processes. They found, however, that influencers were driving higher engagement and conversion than content posted on their own channels. Seeing this, they committed to building a program to increase the influencer community and reached out to Deloitte Digital to help.

Deloitte Digital stepped in to:

- ▶ Evaluate the entire creator engagement lifecycle with the lens of scalability and efficiency
- ▶ Design a next generation scalable enterprise-grade technology platform for continuous engagement
- ▶ Enable discovery of new Creators, engagement with Creators through gig-like opportunities and Creator payment across multiple currencies and tax jurisdictions
- ▶ Build an interactive and gamified environment that rewards Creators for engagement and growth

By introducing a continuous engagement platform designed to let creators focus on creativity rather than process, the company was able to drive higher marketing efficiency through key the KPIs, including:

- ▶ Increased creator satisfaction
- ▶ Improved traffic and CPC
- ▶ Improved cost per sale

Operationalizing

your creator marketing capability

Effective, full-funnel creator marketing depends on more than a great strategy and great creators.

It's important to build out your internal capabilities in ways that address needs for scalability, flexibility, effective governance and more. As with any modern digital marketing initiative, effective use of technology and automation is key. This will help you address:

Capabilities to scale

1

Marketers often execute influencer activations manually and repeat them for every campaign, amounting to a significant increase in logistical work. In order to free your marketing teams to focus on campaign strategies and product experiments, it is important to identify the right capabilities to ensure you are able to scale exponentially with minimal need for added resources or manual processes. This can be achieved by a combination of scaling existing technology solutions within the organization and acquiring niche technologies for creator marketing.

Creator content management

There are a range of unique content management activities that must be undertaken when working with creators. Realistically these activities cannot be accomplished in the same, manual ways that marketers typically work to develop and distribute content through agencies. Modern artificial intelligence and machine learning tools are necessary in order to put guardrails around creator content. Terms of content ownership need to be defined and enforced. And in order to maximize value from creators, brands should have a clear and well-developed omnichannel marketing strategy to leverage creator content.

2

Brand risks

Engaging with creators comes with higher risks compared to planned, tightly controlled campaigns on owned and directly managed channels. It is therefore important to establish clear expectations, as well as consistent and easily repeatable governance processes. Monitoring capabilities will need to be in place to ensure brand safety and to identify and mitigate risks quickly as they emerge.

3

Questions to ask yourself

Creator marketing isn't going away. Indeed, for many brands it will be a vital and growing part of future marketing success.

Ask yourself:

- Who are my brand advocates across different social media platforms?
- How important are Gen-Z and Millennial consumers to my brand? What is my most effective strategy to reach them?
- How can I engage creators across the full marketing funnel?
- Do I have the people, technologies and processes in place to automate and scale my creator marketing strategy?
- Am I able to effectively measure the impact of creators on the key performance indicators for my business—and adjust engagements and tactics on the fly depending on emerging challenges or opportunities?
- How can I better equip creators with the brand assets and knowledge to serve as better, more authentic ambassadors for my products, services and values?

1. The State of Influencer Marketing 2019: Benchmark Report [+ Infographic] (June 19th, 2021)
2. Benchmarking Return on Ad Spend: Media Type and Brand Size Matter (June 24th, 2016)
3. US adults will consume almost as much media in 2021, but TV viewing will backslide (June 6th, 2021)
4. 2021 PageFair Adblock Report (May 3, 2021)
5. The Influencer Report: Engaging Gen Z and Millennials (November 2019)
6. Social commerce surpasses \$30 billion in the US (July 7th, 2021)
7. Survey Reveals How Consumers Really Judge Brand Authenticity (and Influencers) (February 25th, 2019)

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