



How creators can deliver deeper connections, full-funnel impact

Marketers want to partner with storytellers
who drive results, new research finds

Brands are spending more on creator marketing as marketers realize creators can help build strong connections to consumers. The majority (77.7%) of companies increased their creator economy budgets this year, according to new research by Spotter and EMARKETER.

Despite this growth, marketers face clear challenges: finding the right talent, building effective creative strategies, and proving value beyond social platforms. They want long-term partnerships rooted in creative strategy that authentically connect their brands to creator audiences, rather than sales pitches based

on cosmetic reach data. Furthermore, marketers want brand-building tactics to tie to lower-funnel outcomes, as evidenced by respondents saying they evaluate these partnerships by conversions and sales.

This report analyzes how smart creative strategy and access to like-minded creators deliver full-funnel marketing results. Conclusions are based on a survey of 139 US marketers conducted by EMARKETER that explores how they approach creator marketing and what they need to invest more confidently in the space.

Key survey takeaways:

- **Beyond one-off deals, marketers also want committed brand advocates.** They reject transactional relationships with influencers who promote competitors the next day and instead seek long-term partnerships that build creator loyalty.
- **Creator storytelling beats traditional ad reads.** Effective creator content cuts through crowded social feeds by telling authentic stories instead of delivering scripted endorsements.
- **Creative must convert.** Marketers demand both brand-building and performance. While they value upper-funnel awareness, they expect conversions and sales, too.
- **Creator content belongs everywhere.** Brands want creator assets that exist beyond social feeds to maximize their investment and break down marketing silos.

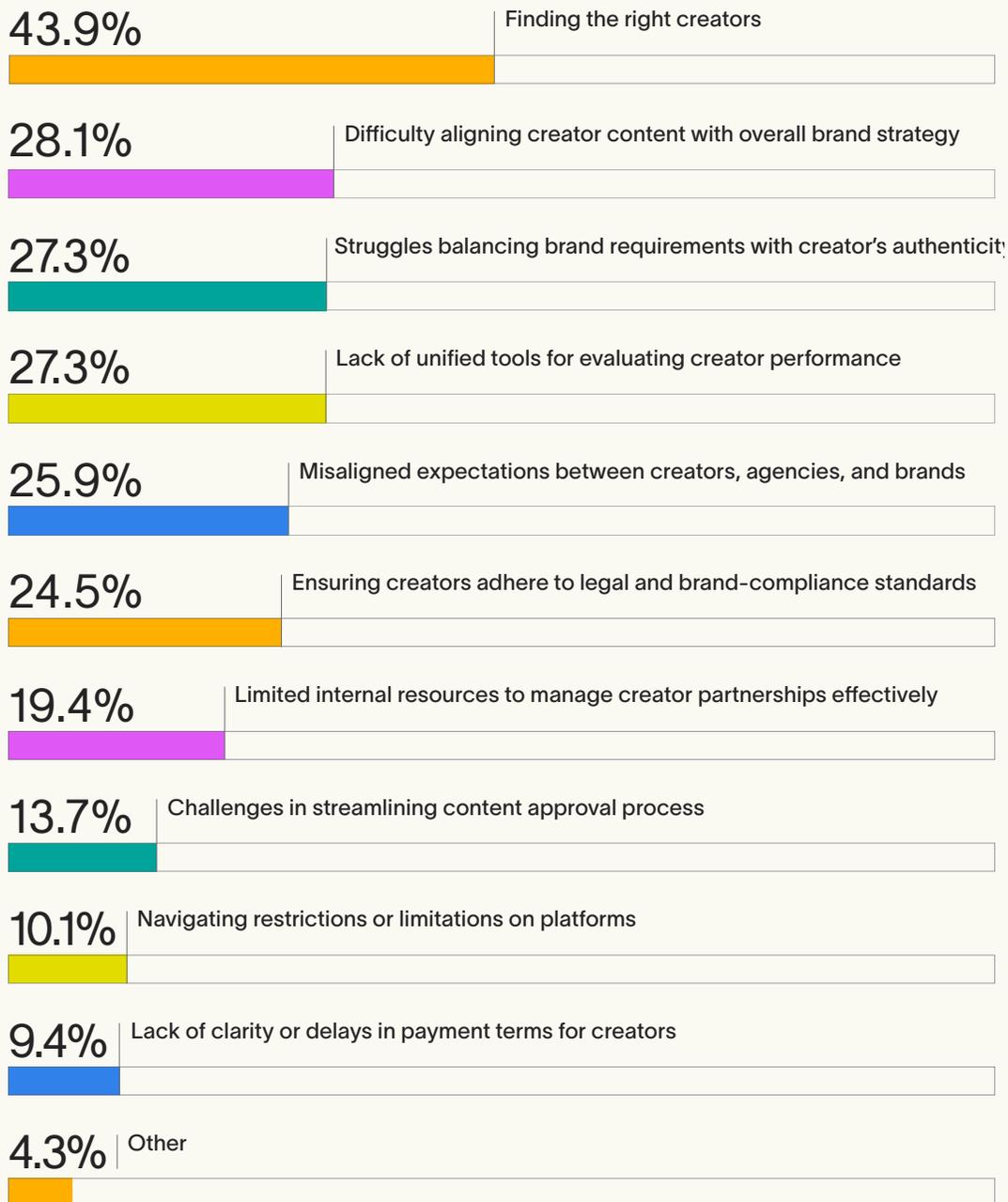
Marketers want stronger relationships with compatible creators

Finding the right creators tops marketers' list of challenges, with 43.9% of respondents naming it a hurdle. As the industry grows more crowded,

marketers are facing both the luxuries and the challenges that come with more choice, said EMARKETER principal analyst Jasmine Enberg.

What are your biggest challenges when working with creators?

Source: EMARKETER and Spotter "The Creator Opportunity Survey," January 2025. n=139. Note: Respondents could select up to three answers.



“Creator discovery has largely been solved, but identifying the right partners remains a top challenge,” Enberg said. “In an era of algorithmic social feeds and where ROI matters more than ever, relying on gut feeling or vanity metrics like follower counts just doesn’t cut it.”

Marketers are approaching creator compatibility by looking for partners with loyal fan bases. Engagement rates is their top factor when selecting creators to work with, followed by audience demographics, according to an August 2024 CreatorIQ study.

While considering engagement rates over follower counts is the right approach, brands can take this a step further by considering how access to each creator’s audience can benefit their brand, said Enberg.

“Marketers must take a more nuanced approach to creator identification, such as determining both the quantity and quality of engagement, to ensure that they are recruiting the right partners,” she said.

After identifying creators, brands are focused on maintaining relationships. Finding long-term creator partnerships and ambassadors was the most popular emerging tactic that brands are trying, selected by 37.4% of respondents to the survey.

Creator vs. Influencer: The Distinction Matters



- **Creators** build content to grow audiences and monetize across platforms. They operate as entertainment producers competing for attention alongside traditional media.
- **Influencers** leverage trust to sway purchasing decisions through authentic recommendations and endorsements.

Many professionals do both, but treating these roles as identical can cause brands to waste budget on pursuing partnerships with misaligned talent.



Mr. Beast

Compatibility matters most: 33.1% of marketers look for “creators that have strong contextual alignment with (their) brand” to justify continued investment. Rather than casting wide nets, brands benefit from cultivating a select group of dedicated partners who genuinely are fans of the brand.

Finding compatible partners who have the trust of a loyal audience makes creator marketing more than “just another online video channel in a large media mix,” said Vineet Pathak, vice president of ad sales research, insights, and measurement, at Spotter.

“Marketers are recognizing that creators aren’t just producing buzzworthy and high-value content,” said Pathak. “They are creating loyal and lasting fandom within their ecosystems.”

“Brands need to start thinking about creators and influencers as different consumer touchpoints,” said Pathak. “Creators are producing professionally made, long-form content that is typically viewed in a more attentive setting such as on a CTV [Connected TV] in your living room. Influencer content is more short-form, UGC-style content that is typically mobile-first. Creator content is therefore much better at driving deeper engagement with viewers whereas influencer content is more transactional and in the moment.”

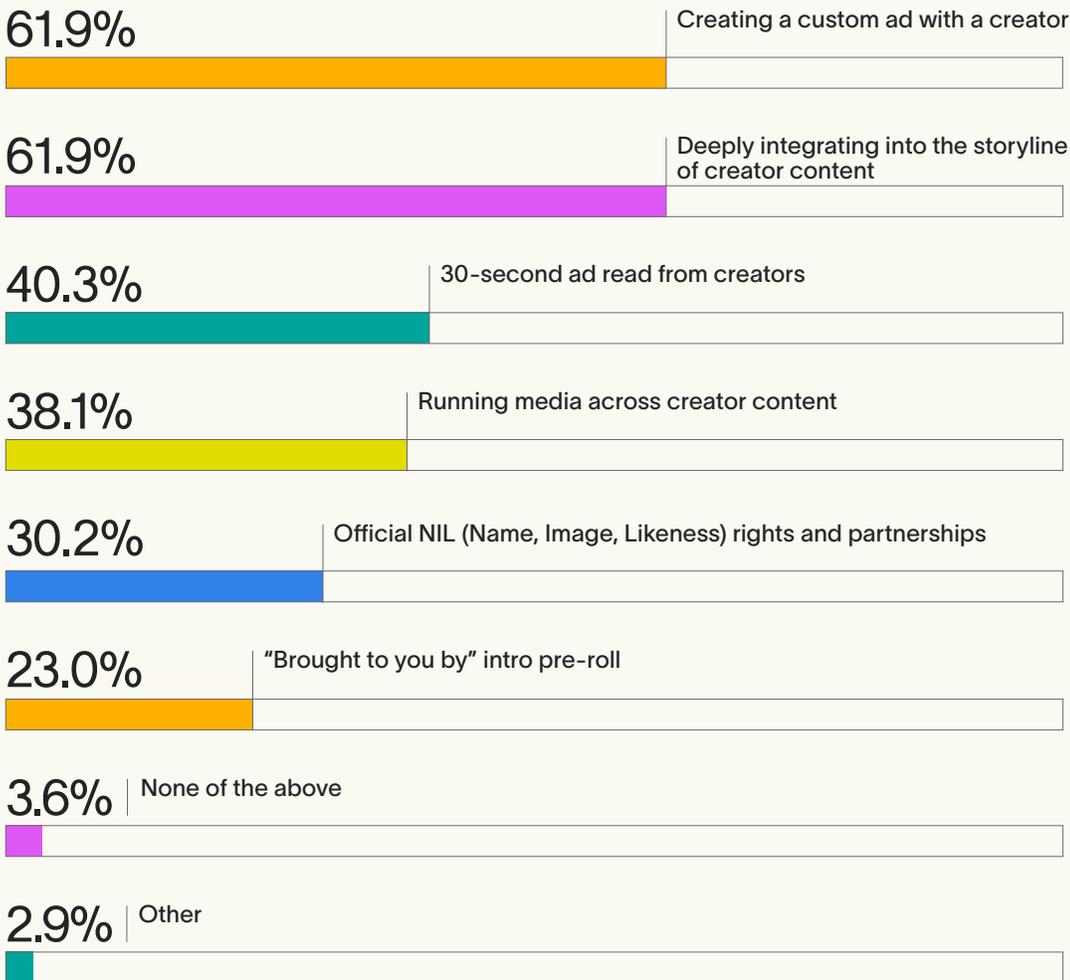
Creative content must stand out—and convert

Marketers want to work with partners who create engaging and memorable content for their brands. They view creator marketing as a valuable addition, rather than an interruption, to consumers' social feeds. Respondents define creator marketing as deeply integrating into the

storyline of creator content (61.9%) and creating a custom ad with a creator (61.9%). Furthermore, 38.13% view running paid media across creator content as creator marketing, giving marketers a complementary amplification strategy to organic creator marketing efforts.

Which of the following do you consider to be creator marketing?

Source: EMARKETER and Spotter
"The Creator Opportunity Survey,"
January 2025. n=139



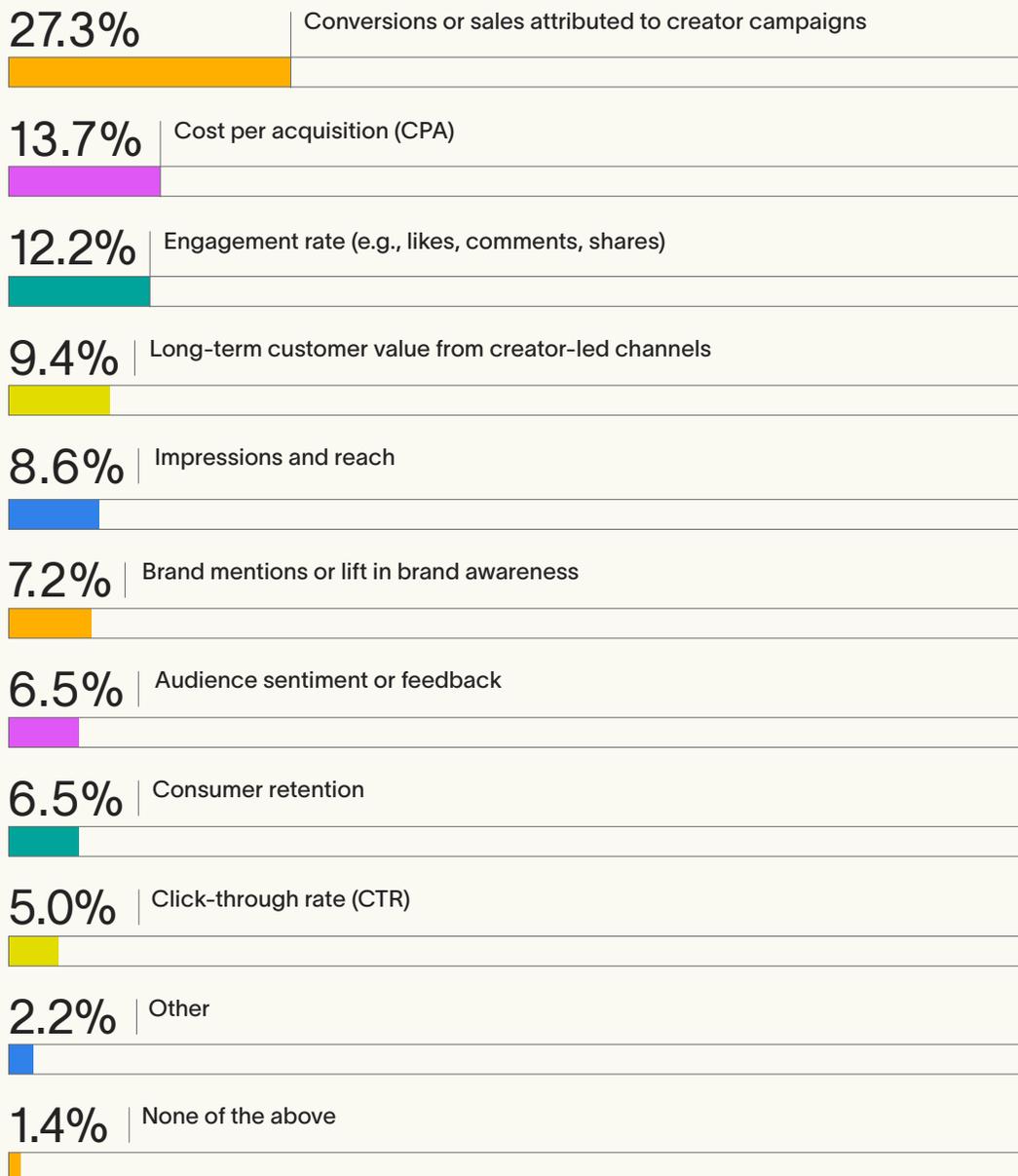
But good content isn't enough. Respondents (27.3%) most often determine the value of these partnerships through conversions and sales.

To achieve full-funnel results, brands must instead build a system that accounts for all of their objectives, said Enberg.

"The beauty of creator content is that it is one of the few forms of media that can drive everything from awareness to action," she said. "While every campaign can—and should—include a call to action, brands must be realistic about their expectations and set clear goals in advance."

Which metrics are most valuable in determining the value of a creator partnership?

Source: EMARKETER and Spotter
"The Creator Opportunity Survey,"
January 2025. n=139



Only 9.4% of marketers are interested in lower-funnel campaigns and social commerce. When focusing on conversions, marketers should remember the limitations of scripted testimonials. Even when brands are focused on lower-funnel tactics, creative freedom is key. "Honest product reviews of both pros and cons" is the top way creators influence shoppers' purchasing

decisions, according to a November 2024 Bazaarvoice survey. Creators can generate strong reach and awareness for brands expanding addressable markets and then move this audience down the marketing funnel into consideration and conversion. Audiences trust the creators they view and respond positively to contextually aligned brand messaging within that content.

Creator partnerships can't exist in silos

Marketing silos stand in the way of increasing creator marketing budgets, 18.0% of marketers said, and 28.1% of respondents identified "difficulty aligning creator content with overall brand strategy" as one of their top three challenges.

Those who are increasing their budget the least are struggling to imagine or execute a cross-channel strategy, which could be holding them back.

- For respondents increasing their budget by 0% to 10%, aligning creators with broader brand initiatives was their top priority (26.1%). That's compared with only 9.8% for those increasing their budget from 11% to 50%.

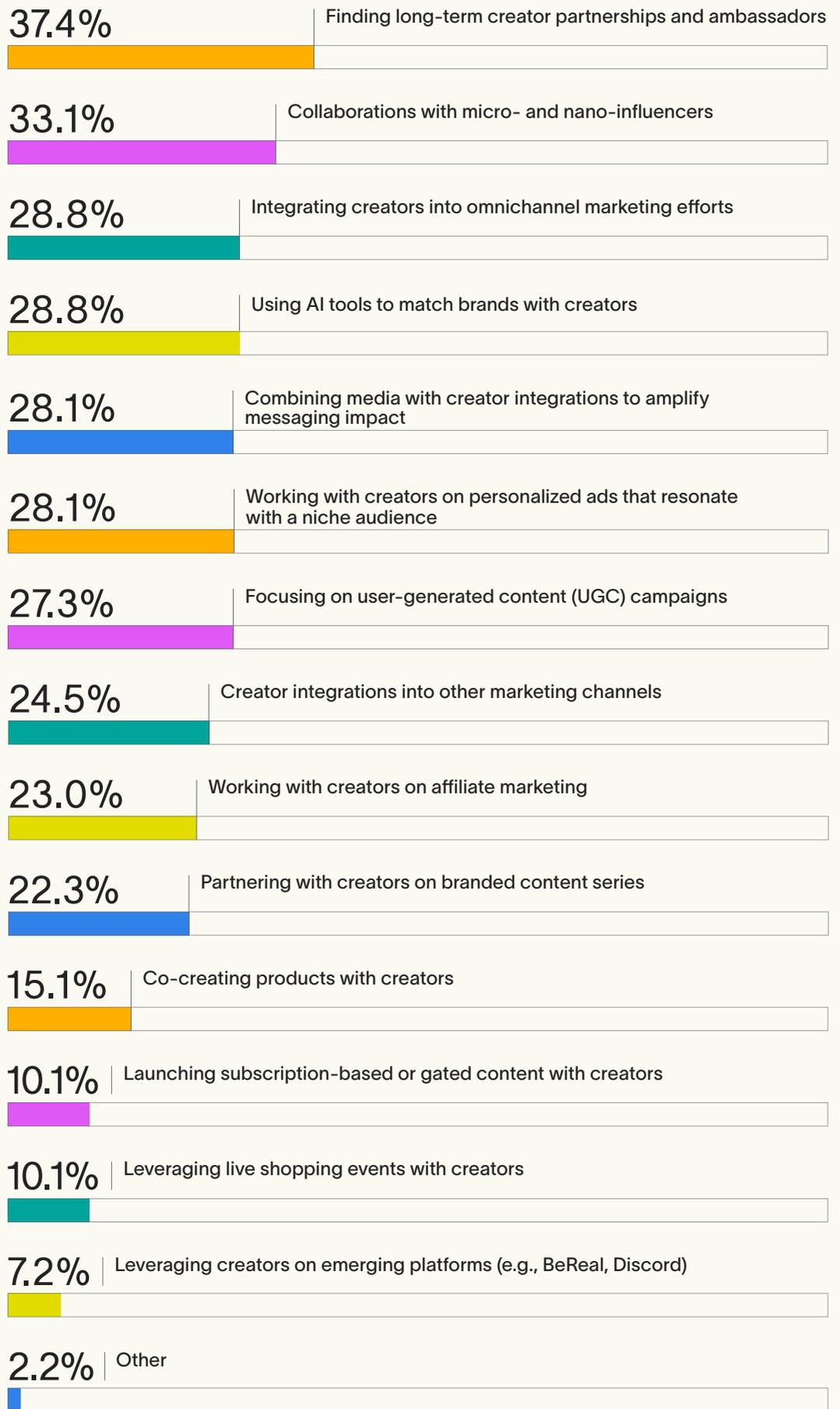
When marketers trust their creator partnerships, they envision regularly scheduled content with sustainable impact. Connecting creator marketing to an overarching strategy also increases visibility and proves value to stakeholders.

Connected TV (CTV) ad spend will increase 15.8% in 2025, EMARKETER forecasts, and YouTube beat out all streaming services in December with 11.1% of all TV watch time, Nielsen reports. This growth highlights the broader opportunities for creator partnerships beyond social feeds.

Expanding this content to new channels also deepens consumer trust. After seeing a creator out-of-home (OOH) endorsement, 49% of US adults would consider the brand high quality, and 48% trustworthy, according to a December 2024 Out of Home Advertising Association of America (OAAA) survey.

Which of the following emerging creator marketing tactics will bring the most value to your creator program this year?

Source: EMARKETER and Spotter "The Creator Opportunity Survey," January 2025. n=139. Note: Respondents could pick two answers.

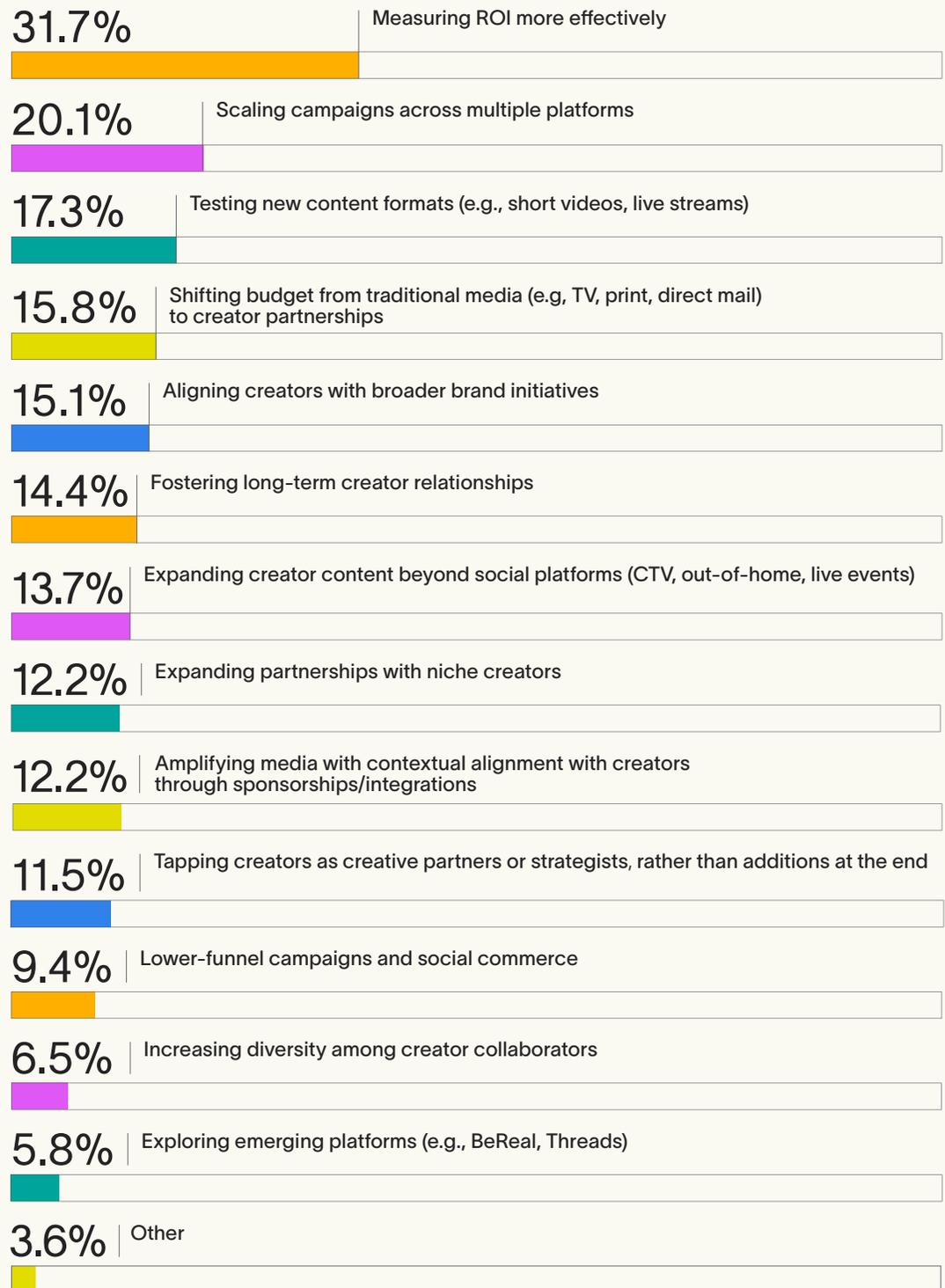


Creator marketing is making inroads with entertainment. At emerging upfronts-like events, creators can preview their content lineup for brand buy-in. This approach replaces ad-hoc brand integrations with long-term partnerships that can benefit marketers, said Enberg.

“Creators are more invested in the success of the partnership, while brands get a recognizable and trusted face for their campaigns,” she said.

What are your priorities for your creator marketing program this year?

Source: EMARKETER and Spotter
 “The Creator Opportunity Survey,”
 January 2025. n=139



The formula for success: Meaningful partnerships, full-funnel value, and omnichannel impact

When brands partner with aligned creators who produce distinctive content, they succeed across the entire marketing funnel. As partnerships and content strategies improve within social platforms, confidence grows to repurpose that content across all channels.

“Creators are no longer bound to social media, and their campaigns shouldn’t be either,” said EMARKETER’S Enberg. “Smart brands are now thinking creator-first, rather than platform-first, and building omnichannel strategies.”



About the survey

This survey of 22 questions was developed and fielded by EMARKETER in collaboration with Spotter in January and February 2025.

We surveyed 139 US marketers and agencies about their creator marketing strategies, including ad budgets, opportunities, and challenges.

About this report

Research for this report was compiled by members of the EMARKETER Studio team in partnership with Spotter, using reports, data, and research by EMARKETER on creator marketing, ad spend, and strategy.

Founded in 2019, **Spotter** connects brands with the world’s most influential creators, helping them break through by tapping into culture-defining voices and deeply engaged communities.

EMARKETER forecasts

Connected TV Ad Spending

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