

Later

2025 State of
Influencer Marketing

The Strategic Turning Point

How Systematic Influencer
Programs Create
Competitive Advantages



Brands leaning into systematic influencer approaches are building sustainable advantages, while those still in experimental mode have a valuable window to evolve before the gap widens further.

This report is designed as a roadmap: a guide for refining priorities, implementing proven frameworks, and building the infrastructure that secures long-term impact in a rapidly maturing industry.

2025 marked a turning point

Influencer marketing evolved from creative experimentation into business infrastructure throughout 2025, and the brands that systematized their creator partnerships began to pull ahead with measurable advantages in performance.

But experimentation didn't disappear. It delivered the most value when supported by systematic frameworks, with campaigns and always-on programs working in tandem. For organizations still operating ad hoc, the opportunity is clear: adopt strategic approaches now, and leadership remains within reach.

This comprehensive online survey was conducted by Later, in partnership with Centiment, in March 2025 with 214 respondents who were U.S. based marketers, from managers to executives.

What you'll learn in this report:



Investment priorities

How leading brands committed resources in ways that elevated influencer marketing from experimentation to infrastructure



AI enablement

How technology transformed manual processes into operational excellence and performance intelligence



Relationship-focused systems

Why long-term creator partnerships compounded results beyond campaign-by-campaign wins



Platform diversification

Why spreading focus across multiple platforms created resilience and precision at scale



The five-pillar framework

How these practices connected into a repeatable system that created lasting competitive advantages

The intelligence that separates market leaders from everyone else

This shift from experimentation to infrastructure created measurable differences in outcomes that any brand can learn from and apply.

**Strategic leaders
were 2x more likely**

to increase their influencer investment focus than scale it back.

61% of brands

elevated influencer marketing to strategic infrastructure status.

70% of leaders

transformed creator relationships into ongoing partnerships.

**92%
adoption of AI**

showed the shift from manual experimentation to systematic excellence.

22% of brands

cited UGC and affiliate programs as their top-performing tactics.

Build systems that scale

Brands that approached creator partnerships as infrastructure achieved stronger results, and their choices offer a blueprint for others to follow. Influencer marketing's evolution into business infrastructure was most clearly seen in how brands set their investment priorities. Campaigns remained valuable, but mature programs went further, treating influencer marketing as a core growth channel rather than a discretionary experiment.

47% of brands

increased their investment in influencer marketing in 2025.

What mattered most was strategic commitment. Even in challenging economic conditions, leaders continued to prioritize influencer marketing because they recognized its role in delivering core business outcomes, not just brand visibility.

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Marketing investment priorities signaled commitment

These numbers showed an infrastructure mindset in action: treating influencer marketing as a long-term business driver.

33%

maintained a strong commitment to influencer marketing despite economic uncertainty.

30%

directed 41–60% of their total marketing resources to influencer programs.

6%

committed more than 60% of their budgets to creator strategies.

Strategic execution multiplies investment

Systematic approaches, not just larger budgets, drive consistent results. Campaign frequency reveals which brands have built the operational capacity for sustained impact.

Among high investment brands (with \$500K+ budgets), nearly

40%

of programs include 10+ influencer activations annually.

Among emerging brands (with \$10K–\$50K budgets), only

17%

of programs include 10+ activations.

Notably,

38%

of sub-\$10K programs maintain always-on engagement strategies.



The most mature programs no longer saw influencer marketing as a series of campaigns. They built infrastructures that supported both ongoing creator relationships and amplified major initiatives. Campaigns remained critical, but their impact grew when layered onto trusted, long-term partnerships.



Scale faster with AI and automation

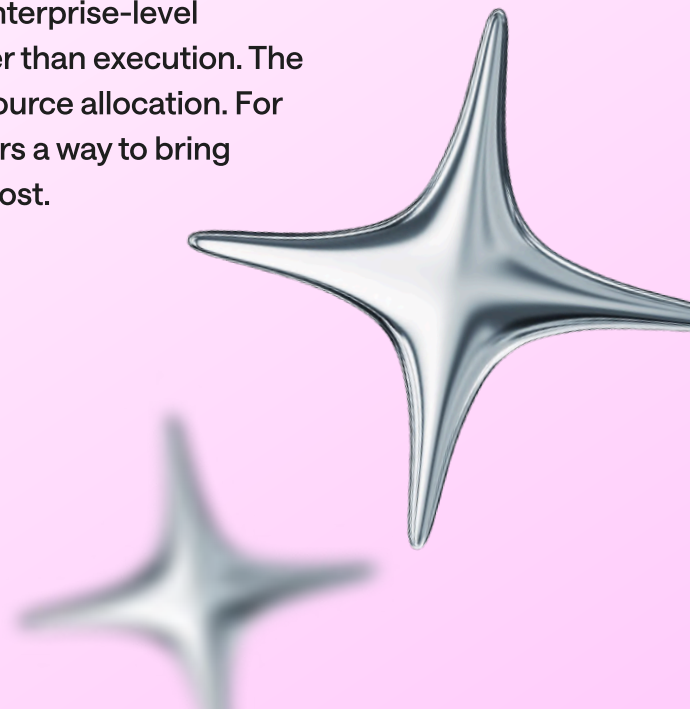
Influencer marketing outgrew manual management in 2025. Automation and AI became foundational infrastructure for brands scaling creator programs across multiple campaigns and platforms.

92%

of marketers used AI tools for creator vetting, performance analysis, and budget optimization.

AI tools amplified human judgment, giving small teams enterprise-level capacity and freeing marketers to focus on strategy rather than execution. The result: faster decisions, fewer bottlenecks, and better resource allocation. For brands still reliant on manual operations, automation offers a way to bring focus, speed, and consistency to the work that matters most.

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AI powered the entire creator lifecycle

The competitive advantage lies in the thoughtful integration across multiple stages—from strategy to selection to optimization—creating intelligence loops where each stage informs the next.

28%

used AI for concept development and strategy, elevating it from tactical support to strategic partner.

16%

used AI for content performance analysis, turning post-campaign learnings into pre-launch intelligence.

15%

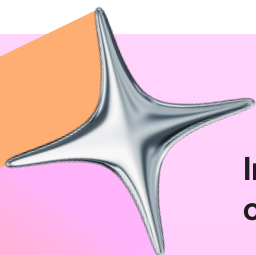
used AI for influencer selection, converting time-intensive manual research into systematic insights.



How operations evolved

AI accelerated change, but maturity depended on how teams and processes adapted.

From	→	To	What it means:
Execution-focused		Strategy-enhanced operations	AI handled operational complexity, allowing teams to focus on strategic innovation.
Manual decisions		Data-supported choices	Teams gained access to comprehensive performance data, audience insights, and predictive analytics.
Post-campaign analysis		Real-time optimization	Teams could adjust and improve campaigns while they're active.



In each case, AI removed complexity so people could focus on innovation and orchestration.

Mature influencer brands measured what matters

32%

tracked revenue
and sales metrics.

28%

focused on content
quality.

25%

measured website
traffic.

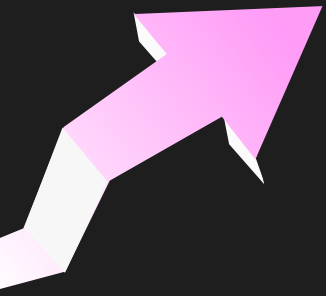
Measurement also scaled with company size:

Emerging companies (Sub-\$50M): Revenue/sales focus

Growth companies (\$50M-\$500M) : Content quality focus

Large enterprises (\$500M-\$1B): Click-through rate focus

Fortune 500 (\$1B+): Website traffic focus



This progression showed how operational sophistication developed in stages, aligning measurement maturity with organizational scale.

Systematic approaches solved industry challenges

Challenge 1:

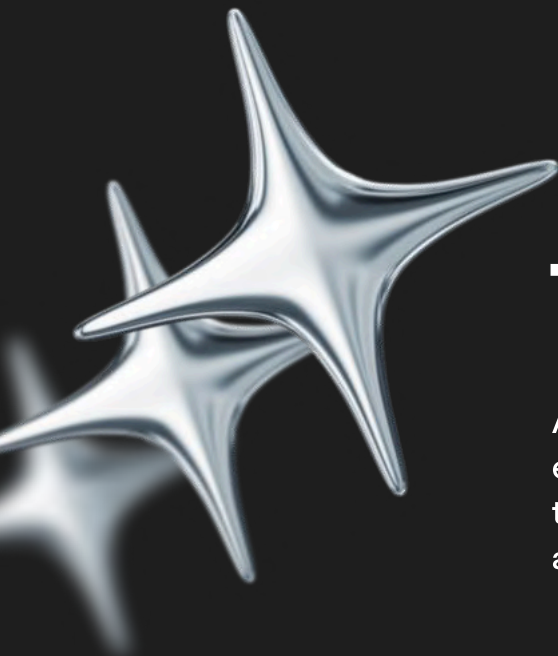
ROI measurement and attribution → AI and analytics provided real-time performance visibility

Challenge 2:

Finding the right creators → Tech-enabled insights strengthened selection, but human judgment ensured brand fit

Challenge 3:

Content approval delays → Workflow systems streamlined collaboration while teams maintained quality



The multiplier effect

AI was best understood as a multiplier. On its own, it improved efficiency. Paired with strong processes and well-structured teams, it enabled organizations to scale efficiently, adapt quickly, and create lasting advantages.

Build relationships rather than transactions

Influencer marketing matured when brands built systems around relationships. Campaigns delivered bursts of visibility, but their impact grew significantly when anchored in trusted, long-term creator partnerships.

For brands earlier in their journey, pairing campaigns with durable partnerships unlocked scale and efficiency. This shift from transactions to systems created a foundation where every campaign built momentum instead of starting from scratch.

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Always-on partnerships provided the foundation

Continuous collaboration with creators generated a steady flow of content and engagement. This consistency kept brands top-of-mind with audiences and built credibility over time.

70% of brands

prioritized ongoing creator partnerships over one-time activations. This relationship-first mindset enabled deeper brand integration and authentic advocacy that transactional approaches could not achieve.

82% worked strategically

with fewer than 20 creators per campaign. The focus on precision over volume showed that effective programs relied on depth, not just reach.

Large brands

(\$500M+ revenue) reported ambassador programs as their most successful tactic.

Creator team composition enabled deeper relationships

Leaders identified the sweet spot for building their creator rosters:

29%

achieved optimal performance with 10–19 creators per activation.

26%

focused on partnerships with 5–9 creators.

27%

leveraged precision approaches with 1–4 creators per campaign.



These models favored depth over volume, allowing for higher content quality, tighter alignment, and more authentic advocacy.

Mature influencer programs transformed relationships into results

Influencer programs that integrated creator partnerships directly with core business functions turned relationships into levers for growth.

41%

synchronized influencer activations with revenue-driving sales and discount events.

37%

amplified promotional and brand strategies through creator content.

36%

launched new products as part of their influencer strategy.

31%

aligned influencer strategies with seasonal moments like back-to-school.

25%

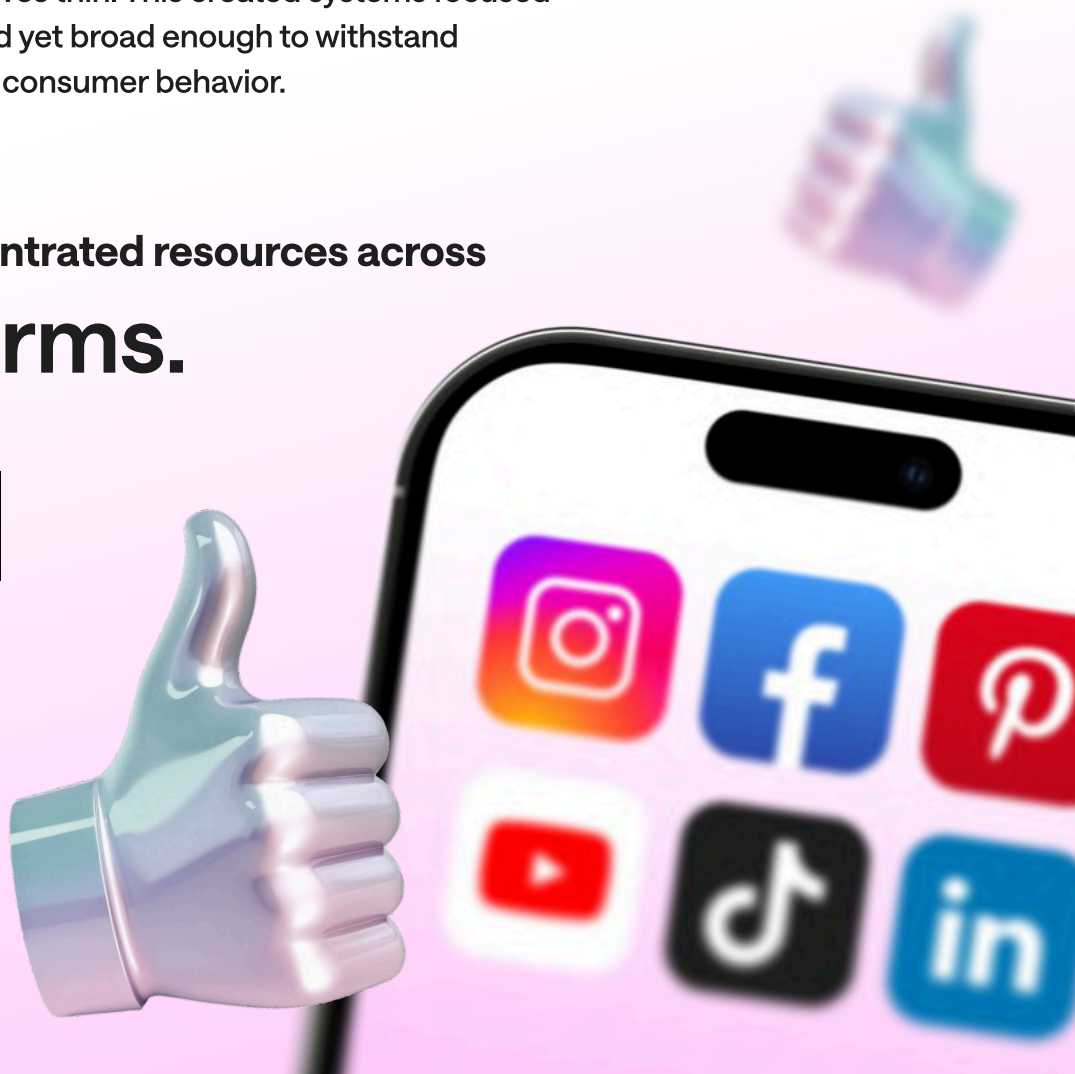
coordinated influencer marketing strategy with industry events.

Diversify deliberately to build resilience

Mature brands concentrated their efforts across a handful of platforms rather than spreading themselves thin. This created systems focused enough to drive excellence and yet broad enough to withstand algorithmic shifts or changing consumer behavior.

Leading brands concentrated resources across
3-4 platforms.

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Each platform strengthens the overall ecosystem to build a marketing infrastructure designed for stability and long-term growth, not just reach.



Best for: lifestyle, wellness, fashion, affiliate, beauty

→ **ROI driver:** visual storytelling that converts engagement into commerce



Best for: food & beverage, entertainment, ecommerce, beauty

→ **ROI driver:** viral amplification that accelerates awareness



Best for: education, tech, healthcare, B2B , beauty

→ **ROI driver:** authority-building content that generates qualified leads



Best for: home, parenting, lifestyle, beauty

→ **ROI driver:** discoverability that captures high-intent planners



Best for: local events, cause marketing, demographics, affiliate

→ **ROI driver:** precise reach with measurable cost control

Diversification was a marker of resilience

Leaders viewed platform diversification as a means to mitigate risk while expanding reach and adaptability. This balance was what separated mature programs from those still operating with single-channel vulnerability.

When algorithms changed, platforms faced regulatory challenges, or a channel slowed, diversified brands sustained performance through the strength of their broader ecosystem. The forced sale of TikTok's U.S. operations to American investors underscored how platform dependencies could shift overnight due to regulatory pressures.



Each additional platform built deeper relationships, richer content libraries, and more complete audience intelligence.

Five pillars that define high-performing organizations

The following framework transforms experimental initiatives into an infrastructure that delivers results. Any brand can adopt these pillars to build programs that adapt and grow with the business.

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Pillar 01

A smart
investment
approach

Mature programs treat investment as a driver of long-term advantage rather than a discretionary expense. Budgets are aligned to revenue objectives, sustained by always-on operations, and reinforced by multi-year creator partnerships. This ensures every dollar contributes to compounding returns rather than isolated wins.

Pillar 02

A focus on
relationships

Leading organizations build ecosystems of creators who grow with the brand. They prioritize depth over volume, streamline collaboration, and design partnerships that deliver ongoing value. These relationships amplify campaigns and ensure that every activation builds on an existing foundation.

Pillar 03

AI-powered
operations

Technology has become an operational multiplier. AI streamlines workflows, transforms manual processes into predictive intelligence, and enables smaller teams to operate with enterprise-level sophistication. Rather than replacing strategy, it frees teams to focus on innovation and building relationships.

Pillar 04

Multi-platform
mastery

Leaders concentrate resources across a focused mix of platforms, designing channel-specific strategies that maximize each one's unique strengths. Orchestrated together, these platforms create a resilient ecosystem that withstands algorithm changes and compounds performance over time. The result is reach and impact that no single-channel approach can match.

Pillar 05

Performance-
driven
measurement

Measurement systems evolve from reporting to steering. Leaders focus on metrics that tie directly to business outcomes, apply multi-touch attribution across the customer journey, and enable real-time course correction. This shifts measurement from a backward-looking report into a forward-looking growth engine.

Your implementation roadmap

This roadmap combines immediate actions with long-term initiatives to help organizations assess, refine, and scale influencer marketing programs.

Start immediately

- ☐ **Audit your current approach** against the five pillars. Identify operational gaps and prioritize areas for rapid improvement.
- ☐ **Implement AI tools** to streamline creator selection, performance analysis, and budget optimization. With adoption already widespread, this is the new baseline for participation.
- ☐ **Shift your thinking** from one-off campaigns to durable partnerships. Begin identifying creators for multi-year collaborations that strengthen over time.
- ☐ **Concentrate your resources** on 3–4 key platforms instead of chasing every new channel. Design channel-specific strategies that maximize each platform's strengths.

Build for the long term

- ☐ **Develop measurement frameworks** that connect creator activity to revenue, sales, and other business outcomes.
- ☐ **Design creator programs** that reward and retain them, turning partnerships into durable assets that competitors cannot easily replicate.
- ☐ **Evolve toward integrated channel ecosystems** where strategies, creators, and content reinforce one another across platforms.
- ☐ **Invest in tools and processes** that enable forecasting and real-time course correction, transforming performance management from reactive reporting to proactive steering.

Turn insights into action with Later

The insights from this report reveal more than trends. They highlight a path forward. Going into 2026, influencer marketing requires a systematic strategy supported by the right infrastructure. Later enables organizations to make that shift by turning research into actionable playbooks and technology-enabled execution.

The Later advantage:

01

Build an influencer strategy with data no one else has.

Our Later EdgeAI engine transforms billions of creator, commerce, and cultural signals into tailored strategies. From smarter creator matches to accurate forecasting, you'll get outcomes you can trust.

02

Run campaigns with top-converting creators.

It's not about the number of profiles—it's about the results. Our curated network of high-impact creators has proven experience driving engagement, brand lift, downloads, and sales.

03

See real insights, not vanity metrics.

Measure what matters—engagement, sentiment, brand lift, and sales—and watch results compound as our AI learns and optimizes with every campaign.



Enterprise brands and marketers: Ready to put strategy into motion?

Whether you're launching a first campaign or scaling across multiple regions, Later helps enterprise teams translate insight into execution. From strategy development to creator vetting to performance optimization, we partner with organizations to make sure the data drives results.

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