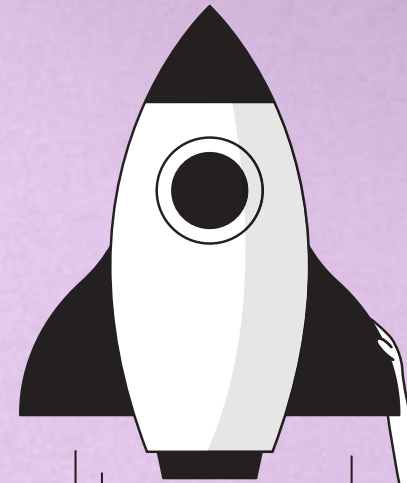
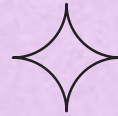


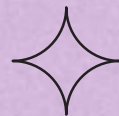
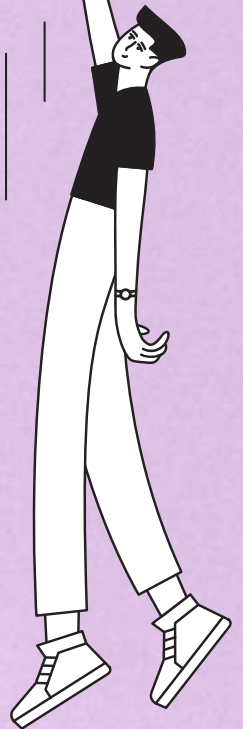
GHOSTED NO MORE:



THE SECRETS TO

Thriving Creator-Brand

PARTNERSHIPS

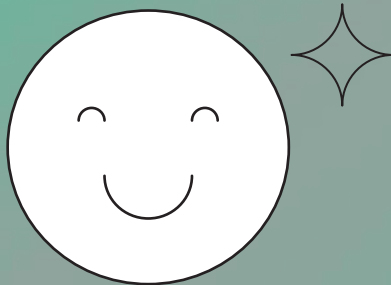




The Creator-Brand Relationship Can Be... Umm...Complicated



Talk to creators about their brand partners and you might think you've tuned in to a romantic comedy.



"I really liked them, but they never called back."

"They don't understand me."

"It turns out they weren't who they said they were."

Like many developing relationships, creators and brands go on a journey that begins when they "match" with each other, continues through some trials and tribulations, and hopefully reaches a happy ending. But sometimes there just isn't a

connection, there's no common ground or one party's behavior ruins things.

So how can these two get together?

There's little doubt that the rise of creators is disrupting marketing. Over the past few years, advertisers have noticed creators' innate ability to engage their audience, and influencer marketing has become a critical part of a successful marketing program. eMarketer estimates that spending on influencer marketing will exceed \$6 billion in 2023, growing at an annual rate of 23%.

For creators, this means that monetizing their following is key. While their primary motivations may be around sharing their passions or expressing their creativity, creators increasingly see their efforts as a means to earn an income. And that means partnering with brands.



But the creator-brand relationship isn't simple.

Brands have clear needs. They want to work with creators who represent their values and whose followings mirror their target audiences. They know that a creator's ability to start a conversation and generate buzz around their product or service can build credibility, expose them to new audiences and impact their bottom line. But there are tens of millions of creators out there, so how should brands discover, recruit and effectively partner with them?

Similarly, creators have needs. Hearing from interested brands is an exciting part of their job. They've worked hard to build their followings and are keenly aware that what they promote needs to feel authentic to their audience. Yet creators might receive outreach from dozens of brands a week, while not always knowing who those brands are, what they sell or what they stand for.

Additionally, brands aren't always clear about expectations or how much they're willing to pay.

When a creator-brand partnership works, it can have long-term benefits for both parties. But when it doesn't work out, both sides lose time and resources.

To get a more precise picture of the creator-brand relationship, Adweek Branded, in association with partnership management platform [impact.com](#), conducted an exclusive survey of U.S.-based creators to uncover what they like (and don't like) in brand partnerships.

The survey results reinforced the value that creators place on working with brands. That said, creators recognize that their audiences view their association with brands as a

direct reflection of their values and any endorsement could have a direct impact on their followers' trust. This is especially true for larger creators (those with followings topping 100,000 people).

However, many creators feel brands don't always take the time to understand their needs. Brands show up in their DMs and then fail to follow up. They send vague and rushed requests. They don't deliver on promises of compensation. Ultimately, the reward may not be worth the cost.

Great relationships take effort from both ends and mutually beneficial collaboration. Read on to uncover in-depth insights into what creators truly desire from their brand partners.





Key Findings

Creators want to expand their brand relationships

Brand relationships are critical to the creators surveyed, and the vast majority (86%) indicated that they desire to increase the number of brands they work with (although that figure drops to 68% for creators with more than 100,000 followers). However, creators hear from a breadth of brands, sometimes too many to filter through. In fact, 61% of respondents indicated that they get 5-10 brands reaching out about opportunities weekly. With that, 84% of creators agreed they get more requests than they can handle.

Creators are social-first

More than half (51%) said they prefer to receive communications via social media DMs during a collaboration. Likewise, creators' social-first nature extends to how they research a brand—when they hear from a brand they don't know, 39% first look to the brand's social presence.

Clarity is critical

When brands reach out to creators, they should be clear about their expectations for the partnership. While personalized communication and references to past posts certainly help, what's most important is explaining expectations and outlining compensation. Eight out of 10 respondents indicated that it's extremely or very important to be clear about compensation during initial outreach, and a similar percent reported the same about performance expectations. Compensation was ranked as the most important factor in evaluating a partnership.

Let creators make their case

A brand doesn't need to jump right in with an immediate partnership offer during initial outreach. Creators know that a good brand partnership requires a strong fit, and they're willing to make their case—64% of respondents prefer to apply for partnerships instead of just being offered the opportunity. It's all part of the courtship. As one creator pointed out, "I develop a relationship first and then get to partnerships."

Flat fee payments are table stakes

When it comes to getting paid, creators generally prefer a flat fee to a straight bonus/commission structure, although the majority want a mix of the two. Creators are more open to performance-based compensation once they have an entrenched relationship with a brand. For instance, 18% of creators want to be paid solely by commission/bonus from a new brand, compared to 33% once they have an established relationship. More than 4 out of 5 agreed that they like performance bonuses and commissions, but prefer for them to be in addition to a flat fee.

The foundation of a good relationship

What do creators find most satisfying in their relationships with brands? It depends. Larger creators (those with more than 100,000 followers) put their audience first—"engagement from my audience with my content" topped their list at 37%. Just 14% of smaller creators indicated the same as their top priority. For smaller creators, the most important factor was "the overall experience of working with the brand," cited by 30%.



Turn-ons and turn-offs

Regarding a great brand partnership experience, creators are more focused on what they're promoting and how they're getting compensated than on personalization or aligned values. The most important factors for a long-term brand-creator relationship are quality products (53%), high compensation (40%) and being granted creative freedom (39%). There are also apparent factors that tend to spoil a relationship. Creators will end the relationship if due dates are rushed (44%), compensation is too low (43%), or the brand just takes too long to kick off the project (41%).

METHODOLOGY

Adweek Branded, in association with impact.com, conducted an exclusive, online, self-reported survey of 150 U.S. creators to better understand how they approach brand partnerships.

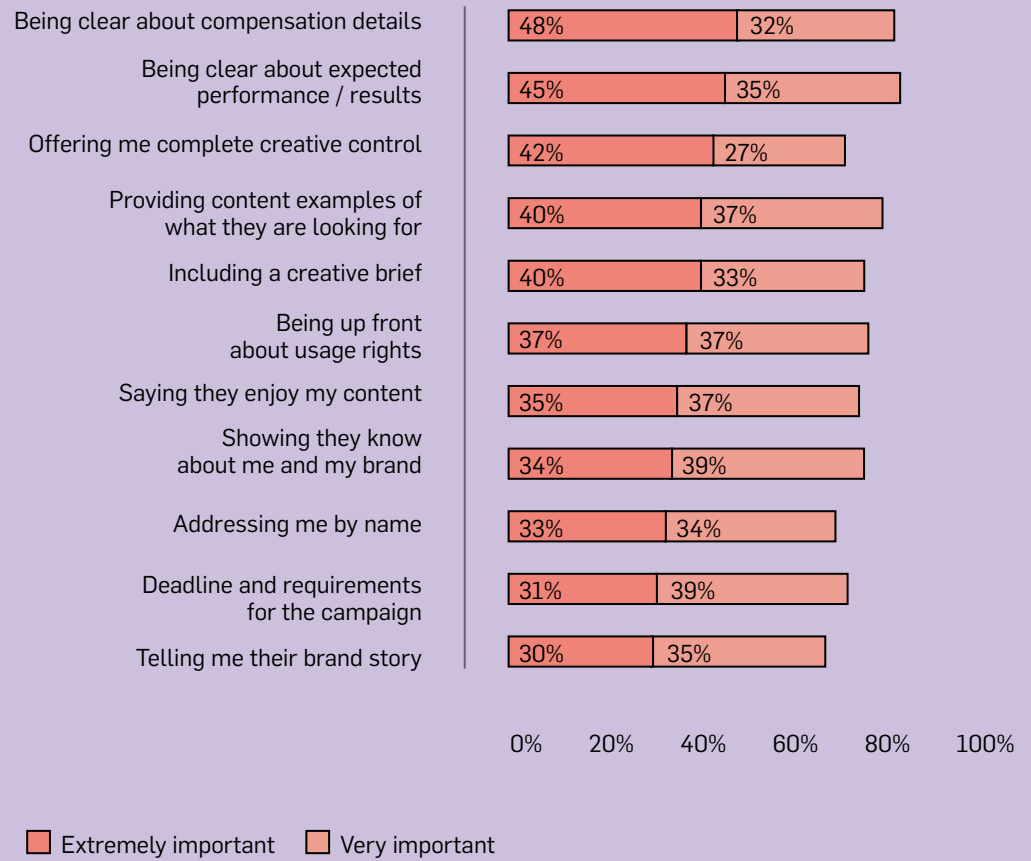
The survey was conducted during March and April 2023. All respondents self-identified as creators with a minimum of 5,000 followers and confirmed that they have existing relationships with brands in which they use, mention, promote or advertise a brand's products or services in exchange for compensation. The sample consisted of approximately 27% large-scale creators with more than 100,000 followers and 73% smaller creators with a following between 5,000 -100,000.

Unless otherwise cited, all figures and charts in this report are derived from this research.

Clarity counts from day one

When creators are getting barraged with partnership offers, they pay the closest attention to those brands with upfront, clear communication about compensation and performance expectations. It's not that other factors are unimportant, but "show me the money" is critical. It pays to speak to creators in a way that aligns with their priorities; note how "telling me their brand story" is at the bottom of the list. To quote one creator: "The pain point that is a deal breaker is overt narcissism by any brand owner."

When a brand reaches out to you for a potential partnership, how important are the following elements of its message to you?

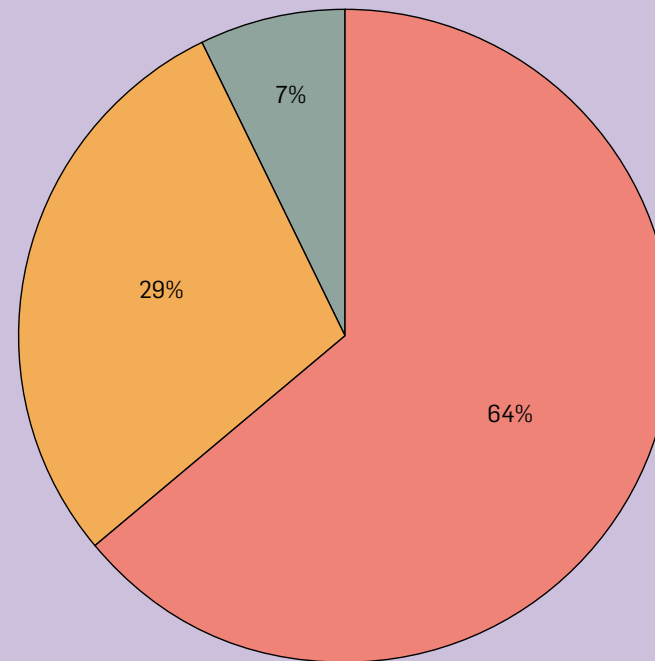


Make the invitation



A brand's initial outreach to a creator does not have to include an offer for a partnership. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of creators in the survey preferred to apply for partnerships instead of the vice versa. Therefore, focusing your outreach on the benefits of applying to your campaign can be beneficial, while emphasizing compensation and relevancy will garner interest from the creator.

Do you prefer to apply for brand partnership opportunities, or do you wait for those opportunities to come to you?

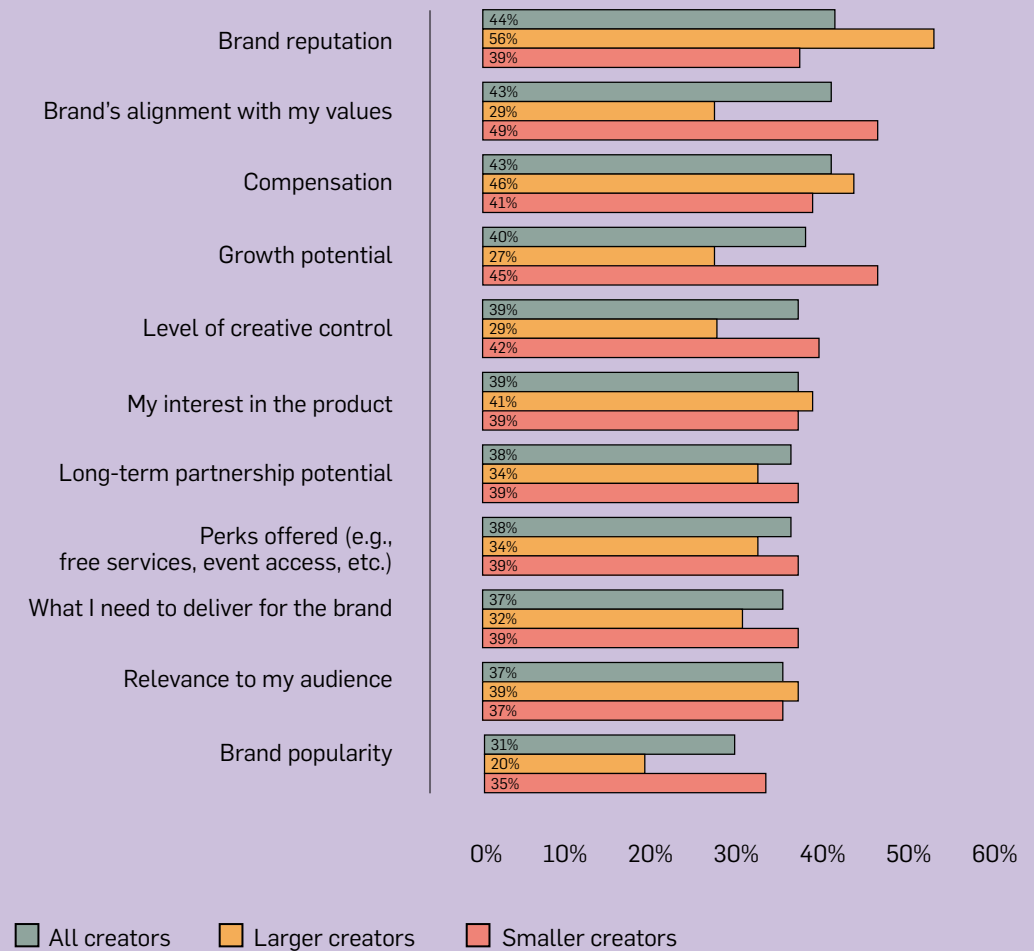


■ Prefer to apply ■ Prefer to have opportunities come to me ■ No preference

Aligning values in proposals

Creators try to keep their followers top of mind, an important consideration in how they evaluate a partnership proposal. As such, brand reputation and values take priority over brand popularity. Additionally, among larger creators (i.e., >100,000 followers), 56% said brand reputation was extremely important, compared to 39% of smaller creators. But 49% of smaller creators cited "alignment with my values" as extremely important, compared to 29% of larger creators

How important are the following factors when you're considering a proposal to work with a brand?
(% responding "extremely important")

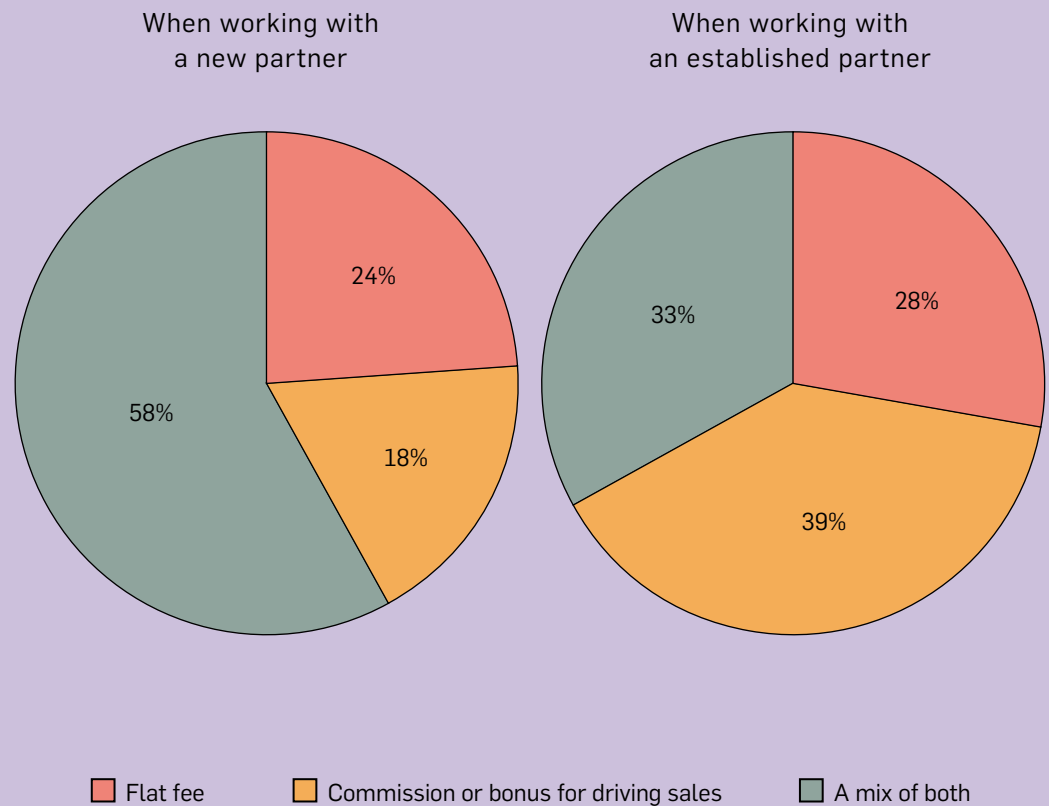


Compensation preferences

There's an ongoing debate about how creators want to be compensated. Do they prefer a flat fee or the opportunity for commissions and other performance bonuses? Most influencers surveyed said they favor a combination of the two, but they recognize that a flat fee provides guaranteed payment. In general, they're much more open to performance incentives once a relationship has been established. One thing to avoid is offering discounts instead of compensation. As one creator said: "Big turn off: discounted product/services vs. free and paid to promote."



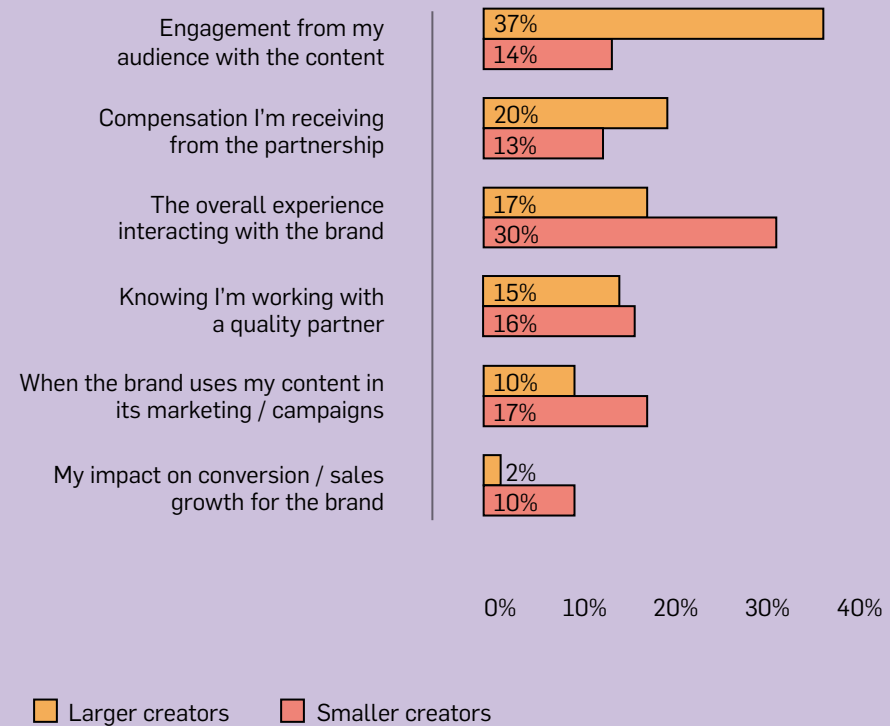
How do you prefer to be compensated?



Creator satisfaction

After working with a brand, what drives satisfaction most varies between larger and smaller creators. Larger creators zeroed in on their audience's engagement with the content they created for their brand sponsor. Smaller creators, who often have less experience working with brands, appreciate when brands repurpose their content. Conversions and sales growth received the lowest mentions for driving satisfaction.

After working with a brand, what drives satisfaction most for you?

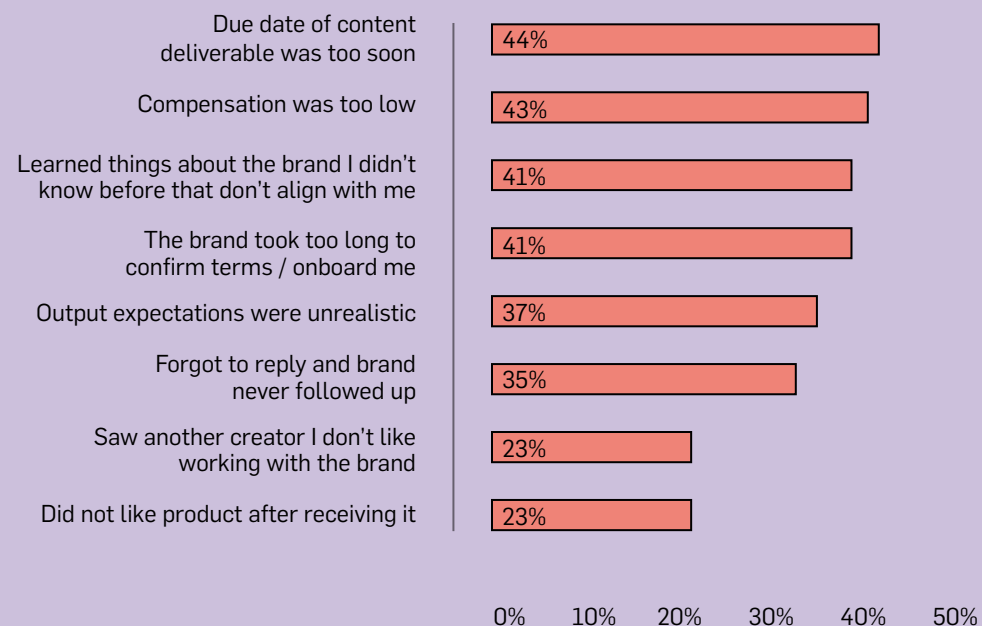


Turnoffs: No surprises

When working with creators, brands should remain true to their word. Asked why they'd break off a relationship with a brand, creators pointed to unexpected or unprofessional actions by brands—due dates that were too soon, compensation that didn't measure up, and poor or non-transparent communication. There were notable differences between larger and smaller creators. For those with more than 100,000 followers, the top turn-offs were low compensation (56%); "learned things about the brand I didn't know before that don't align with me" (46%); and "forgot to reply and the brand never followed up" (41%). Those with fewer than 100,000 followers cited the due date for the deliverable being too soon (46%); "brand took too long to confirm terms/onboard me" (41%); learned things about the brand (39%) and "output expectations were unrealistic" (39%).

To note, creators might simply stop communicating if these occur—43% admitted they'd ghost a brand during a collaboration.

What are some of the reasons you would break it off with a brand after agreeing to work with them?



Turn-ons: It's about quality

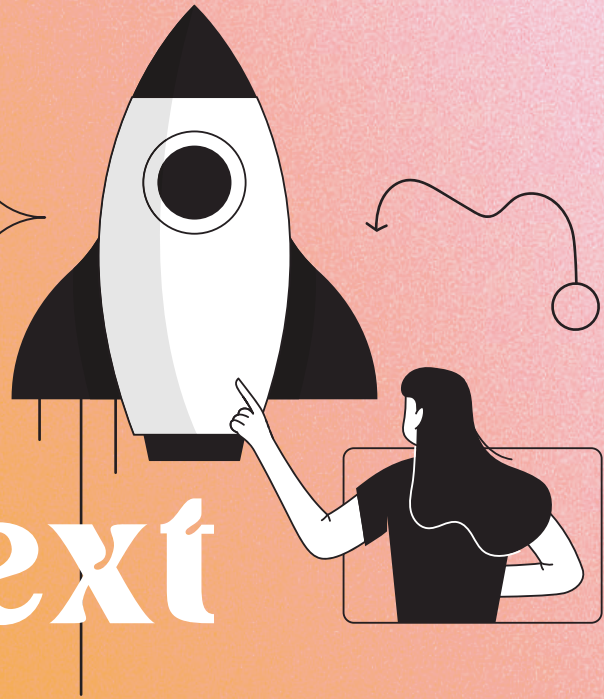


So, how can a brand convince a creator to commit to a long-term partnership? Start by offering a good quality product or service; after all, no creator wants to disappoint their audience when their authenticity is at stake. The following are some responses from creators: "It's very important that the brand provides excellent customer service. It's a nuisance when followers contact me for customer service (as has happened)." "Great experiences have been clear expectations, constant communication, creative freedom, high compensation, and much more collaborative efforts."

Which of these factors would make you want to commit to a long-term partnership with a brand?



What Brands Can Do Next



Show them the money

Creators are business people, and a growing number see their efforts as more than just a side hustle. Compensation is a key part of the creator-brand equation. For many creators, flat-fee pricing is predictable; that's critical for smaller creators when entering a new partnership. But performance models can also be layered on and can provide a creator with more incentive to deliver exceptional content. Don't just compensate based on "last click." Consider compensation models that reward creators for efforts across the funnel. Creators should get paid in passive income as well—meaning that if their links are live, they can continue to make commissions from any sales they drive.

Think about the audience

It's not just what a creator talks about but who they're reaching with their message. Think of a creator as you would a publisher and align your efforts around who is in an influencer's audience (aka their followers). The survey found clear differences between the partnership needs of smaller vs. larger creators. So, consider a tailored approach based on the relative size of a creator's audience, their style of communicating, the time they have, etc.

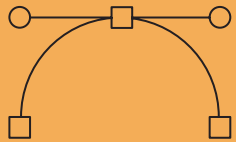
Focus on what matters

Like any outreach, focus your communication on what's important to your partner, not what's important to you. Sure, your goal for creator partnerships may be to increase revenue and build your brand. But that's not what all creators respond to. Understand what types of creators succeed in your market. Use social listening tools to gauge what's important to them and what their audiences respond to. Then build your communication around those insights.

Button up the process

Recruiting and onboarding influencers can be challenging. The most effective way to build your creator network is to use an end-to-end platform like [impact.com/creator](https://www.impact.com/creator) to manage your influencer marketing campaigns throughout the lifecycle. The platform can help you identify the right partners, recruit and onboard them, track their efforts, and pay them based on agreed-upon KPIs.

Ready to build a long-term, successful partnership with creators? **Here's how.**

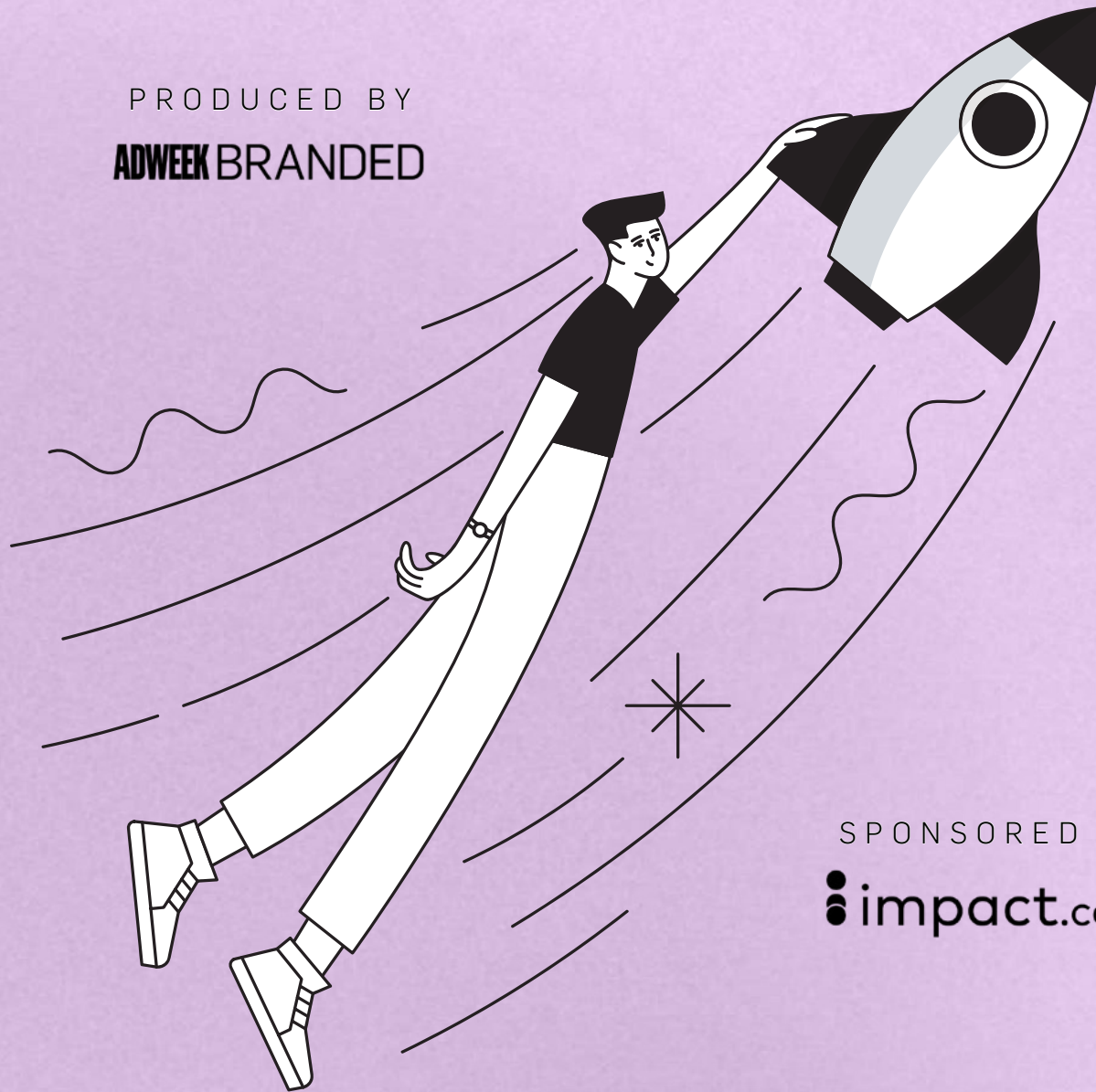


About impact.com



impact.com is a leading partnership management and influencer marketing platform, transforming the way businesses create and manage all types of partnerships—including with influencers and creators, commerce content publishers, other businesses, traditional rewards affiliates and more. The company's powerful, purpose-built platform makes it easy for businesses to create, manage, and scale an ecosystem of partnerships with the brands and communities that customers trust to make purchases, get information, and entertain themselves at home, at work, or on the go. Learn more at [impact.com](https://www.impact.com).

PRODUCED BY
ADWEEK BRANDED



SPONSORED BY
impact.com