From Likes to Leverage:
How Lifestyle Creators Can Build Real Revenue Beyond Algorithms

ThriveCart

Executive summary

Jules Dudko spent years building a 250,000-follower fashion audience on Instagram. “I used to be a capital-I 'influencer,' running a lifestyle and fashion blog in the 2010s called Society Grl, which at its height had a following of 250,000,” she writes in Newsweek. It was all going exceptionally well.

But then the algorithm changed, her engagement totally collapsed, and she faced a choice: keep chasing on-platform success or build something she owned. She chose ownership, pivoting from influencer to agency founder and turning her hard-won expertise into a business that doesn’t depend on any algorithmic whim or change.

Jules’ story isn’t unique. It reflects a broader shift. Across fashion, beauty, fitness, home, and wellness, lifestyle creators are discovering that **the old playbook has stopped delivering**. Posts that once generated thousands of likes now struggle to reach triple-digit numbers. Brand deals that seemed automatic now require endless pitching. The audience they spent years building feels increasingly unreachable.

The numbers confirm what creators are feeling. Instagram engagement has dropped 28% year-over-year (Social Insider). Over half of all new internet content is now AI-generated (Graphite). Consumer spending growth across Western markets has slowed sharply, constraining discretionary budgets. The old playbook – grow a following, post aspirational content, sit back and wait for brand deals – has stopped delivering.

Yet within this shift, a different pattern is emerging. The opportunity isn’t disappearing. It’s concentrating **around creators who own their audiences and sell outcomes, not just content.**

Creators who transform broad lifestyle tips into specific, outcome-driven guidance are earning 3-5x what generalists make (ThriveCart). The markets driving this premium are **massive and growing**: the creator economy is projected to reach $1,34 trillion by 2033, growing at a CAGR of 23.3% from 2025 to 2033 (Grand View Research). Within that, beauty ecommerce is expected to exceed $44 billion by 2027 (GRIN via Net Influencer), and the longevity and wellness market is poised to grow from $21 billion to $63 billion by 2035 (Market Research Future). These are markets that reward expertise over volume, authenticity over AI-generated content, and owned businesses over platform dependency.

Projected growth

$1.34 trillion by 2033

Creator economy

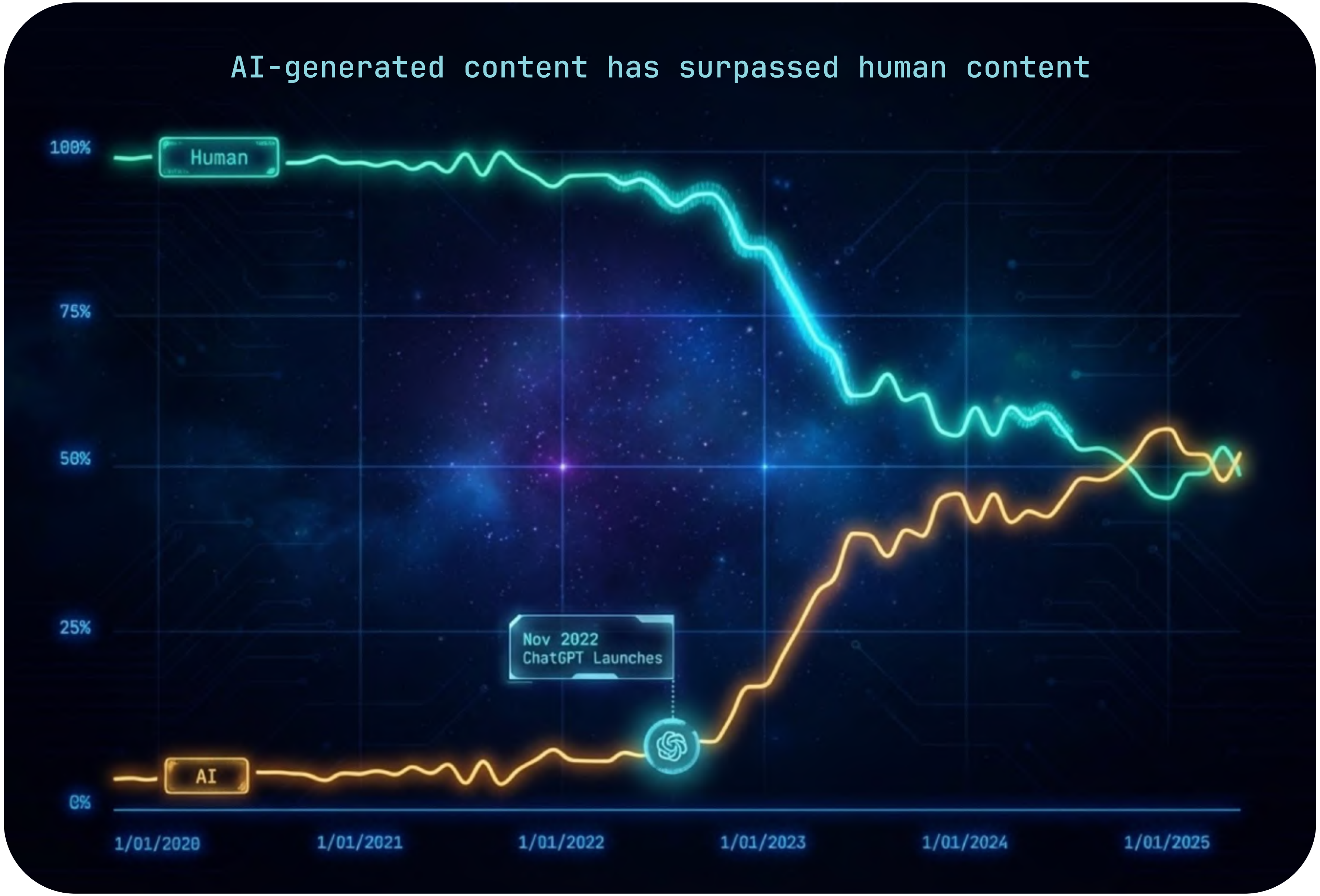
$44 billion by 2027

Beauty ecommerce

$63 billion by 2035

Longevity and wellness market

Sources I Grand View Research, GRIN via Net Influencer & Market Research Future



Source I Graphite

The lifestyle creator crossroads

If you're a lifestyle creator working in fashion, beauty, home, fitness, food, travel, or wellness, you've probably already felt it: the ground shifting beneath your feet.

The metrics that once validated your work have become unreliable. The platforms you built your business on keep changing the rules. And the pressure to stay visible has blurred every boundary between your work and your life.

Lifestyle creator challenges

"The entitlement people feel to comment or participate in your life. Followers and trolls alike feel like they can just say anything about anyone in your life — partner, family members, children — and in reality, it's none of their business. There is virtually no privacy for creators unless they set their own boundaries."

Vanessa Wachtmeister, @wanderonwards

You're not imagining it. Every metric that once defined lifestyle creator success has changed.

The shift reshaping lifestyle creation

When budgets tighten, lifestyle goes first

Consumer spending growth has slowed across every major Western market, and the effects are rippling through the creator economy in ways that aren't immediately visible.

In the U.S., consumer spending growth is cooling – from 5.7% in 2024 to a projected 3.7% in 2025 and 2.9% in 2026 (Morgan Stanley). The picture is similar across the Atlantic, where the UK is seeing just 1% growth, revised down from earlier projections of 1.5% due to an increase in people saving their money (Baringa). Canada presents a mixed picture: TD card spending growth rose slightly to 5.4% in 2025, up from 4.9% in 2024, buoyed by lower interest rates. However, real personal consumption is forecast to slow sharply – from 2.5% in 2025 to just 1.2% in 2026 (TD Economics). Roughly two-thirds of Canadian consumers still expect a recession over the next 12 months." Meanwhile, Eurozone household consumption is expected to continue to crawl along at just 0.8% to 1.3% annually as we head towards 2027 (ECB).

The picture is more varied across Asia. In China, consumer confidence remains subdued at 86.2, well below the 100-point neutral threshold, and households have stockpiled a record ¥152 trillion ($21 trillion) in savings, up 85% since 2019 (CKGSB Knowledge). Japan is even more cautious: only 7% of consumers express optimism, a 30-point drop over the past year, with 67% citing rising prices as their top concern (McKinsey). Thailand's consumer confidence has fallen to its lowest point since December 2022 (Trading Economics). India, however, stands apart. Some 76% of consumers remain optimistic (McKinsey), and private consumption has nearly doubled to $2.1 trillion (Deloitte India/RAI via IBEF).

What does this mean for lifestyle creators?

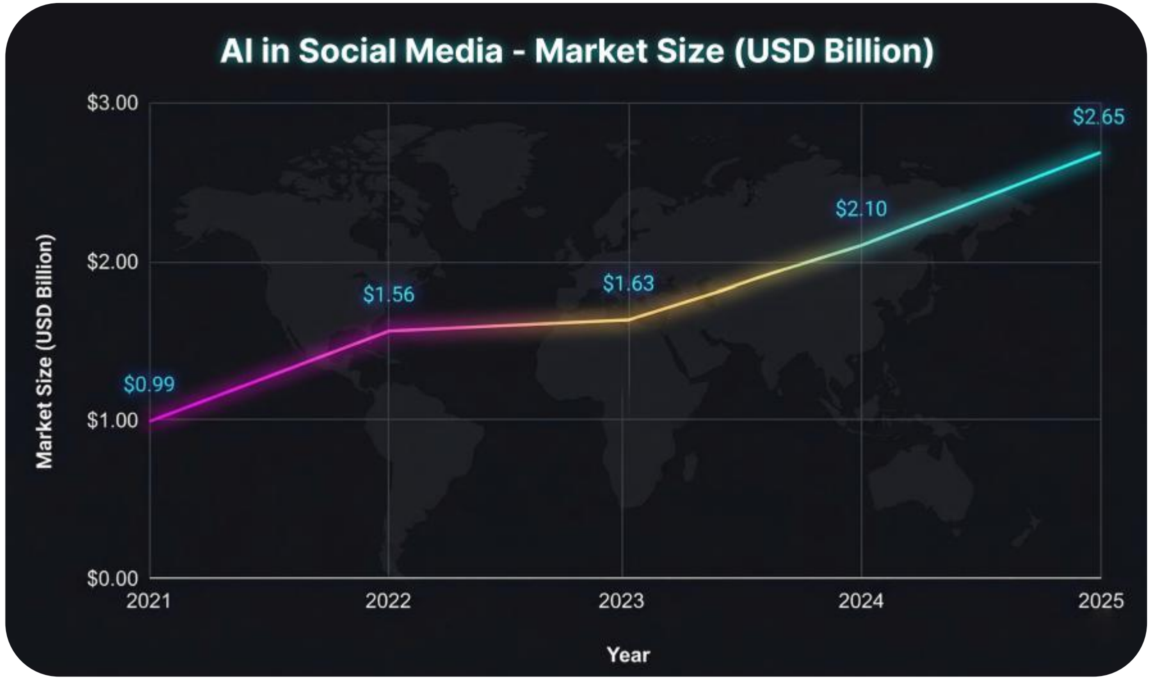
Your audience has potentially less discretionary income. They're more selective about purchases. The impulse buy that once followed a compelling Instagram post now faces budget scrutiny. When consumers tighten their belts, lifestyle purchases are often the first to go.

The content flood

There's also the sheer volume of content being produced that has overwhelmed every major platform. Over 52% of new internet articles are now AI-generated (Graphite). On Facebook, 41% of long-form posts come from AI, a 4.3x increase since ChatGPT launched (Originality.AI via Stan Ventures).

Medium and Quora have reached 37% and 38% AI-generated content, respectively (Arvix). YouTube announced in July 2025 that it would stop monetizing "mass-produced, repetitive, or inauthentic" content lacking originality – a move widely seen as targeting AI slop (TechCrunch).

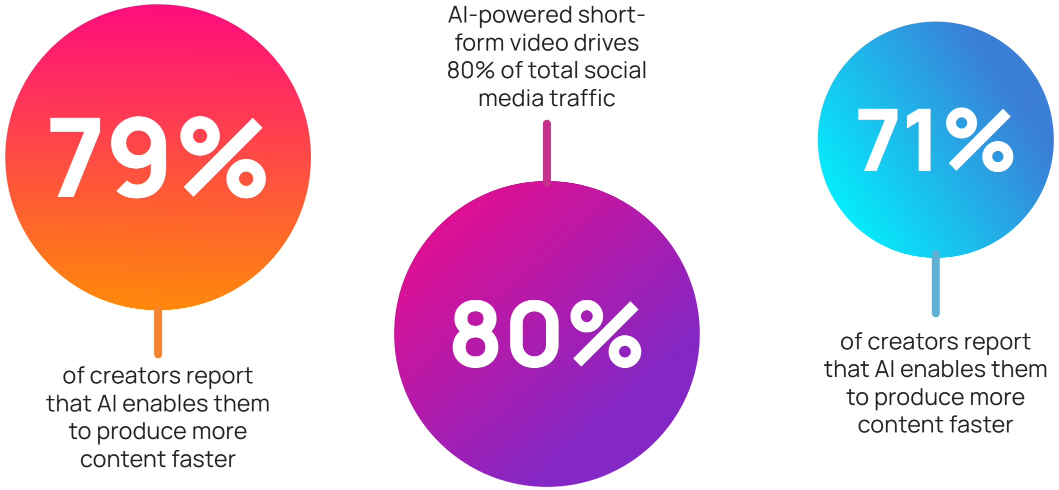
83% of consumers believe AI content will make their feeds more saturated (Sprout Social). Meanwhile, 65% of creators now rely on AI for at least half their posts (Drainpipe). **The math doesn't work: everyone's creating more while audiences engage less.**



Source I Drainpipe.io

Natalia Stanusch of AI Forensics captures the deeper problem: "The idea of authenticity has long been at the center of the social media promise, for audiences and content creators alike. But a lot of AI-generated content is not following that logic. With this flood of content made using generative AI, there is a threat of social media becoming less social" (Newsweek).

AI in social media goes viral



Source I Drainpipe.io

The flood is real, but it's also creating a clarity that didn't exist before. When feeds are full of generic, AI-generated content, the creators with genuine expertise and authentic perspective don't just stand out—they become essential.

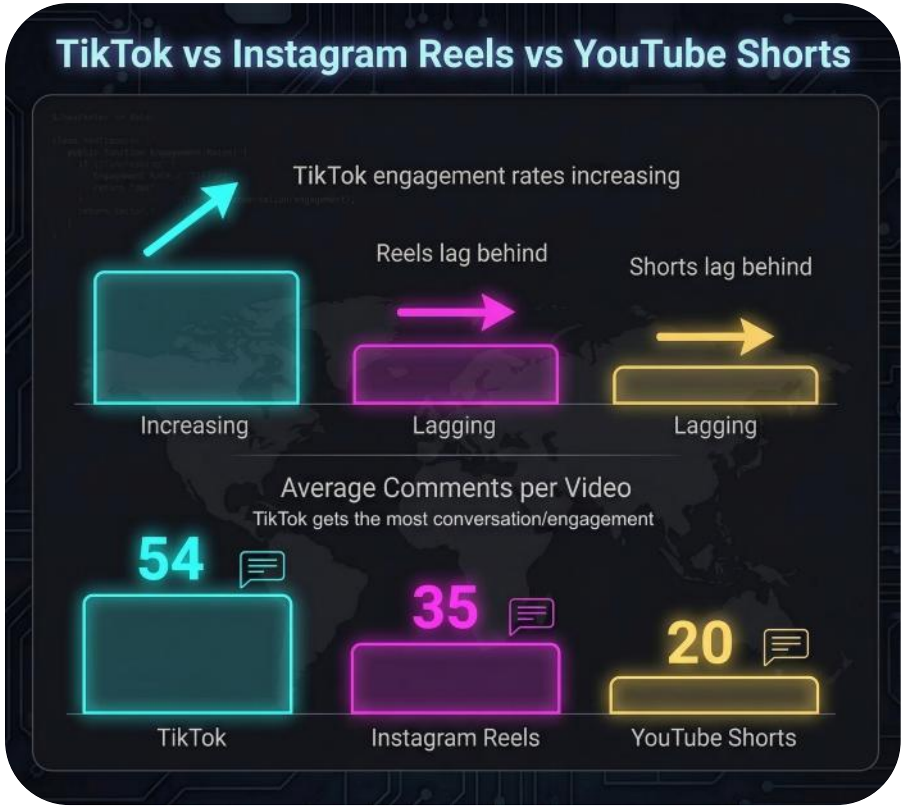
Why performance metrics no longer tell the full story

Instagram's average engagement rate has dropped 28% year-over-year to just 0.50% (Social Insider). By June 2025, it had eroded further to 0.45%. Retail brands are seeing engagement down over 50% (Rival IQ). Organic reach has fallen approximately 18% year-over-year (Stack Influence). For lifestyle creators who built their businesses on Instagram's promise of organic discovery, these declines represent an existential threat.

The beauty sector, long a stronghold for lifestyle creators, has been hit especially hard. Earned media value on Instagram dropped 28% in Q1 2025 compared to Q1 2024, from $1.18 billion to $847.6 million (nss Magazine). The declines cut across every category: haircare content saw a 48% drop, skincare fell 36%, and even makeup, the category most associated with Instagram influence, declined 19%. The "Get Ready With Me" format that once drove massive engagement is losing steam, with video views and interactions dropping across the board (Traackr).

Nathan Allebach, Creative Director at Allebach Communications, puts it bluntly: "We're moving toward peak inundation. It's hard to say how much of it is the saturation versus the lack of content novelty" (Sprout Social). As nss G-Club noted: "Content feels repetitive, formats stale, and communities feel more like targets than spaces for genuine exchange. This fuels a sense of saturation and fatigue that Instagram, with its static nature compared to TikTok, struggles to shake off."

TikTok offers a partial refuge. Its engagement rate of 2.50% is five times higher than Instagram's (Social Insider). Comments increased 73% year-over-year, and shares more than doubled from 72 to 170 per post. But even TikTok rewards specialists over generalists: smaller accounts consistently outperform larger ones in engagement, and nano creators, those with the smallest but most dedicated followings, generate the most interaction per view (Social Insider). The platform advantage goes to creators with focused, specific expertise, not broad lifestyle content.



Source | Socialinsider

The commodity trap: Why lifestyle content is losing value

Here's the uncomfortable truth: generalized, run-of-the-mill lifestyle advice has become a commodity. Anyone can post outfit inspiration, morning routines, or home organization tips. AI tools can generate this content at scale. When supply is infinite and differentiation is minimal, value tends to collapse.

Technology has commoditized what once felt exclusive. Virtual try-on and AR features are now standard in beauty and fashion apps from Google to L'Oréal. Automated recommendations are replacing human consultation. AI-generated design is flooding every market, from interior design to fashion styling. The "Get Ready With Me" format, which once felt intimate and authentic, is now produced by the thousands daily – and increasingly by AI-generated personas that blur the line between human and machine.

Becky Owen, former head of creator innovations at Meta, warns:

"Without robust safeguards, platforms risk amplifying false narratives through these AI-driven accounts... Unlike human creators, these AI personas don't have lived experiences, emotions, or the same capacity for relatability" (Financial Times via Futurism).

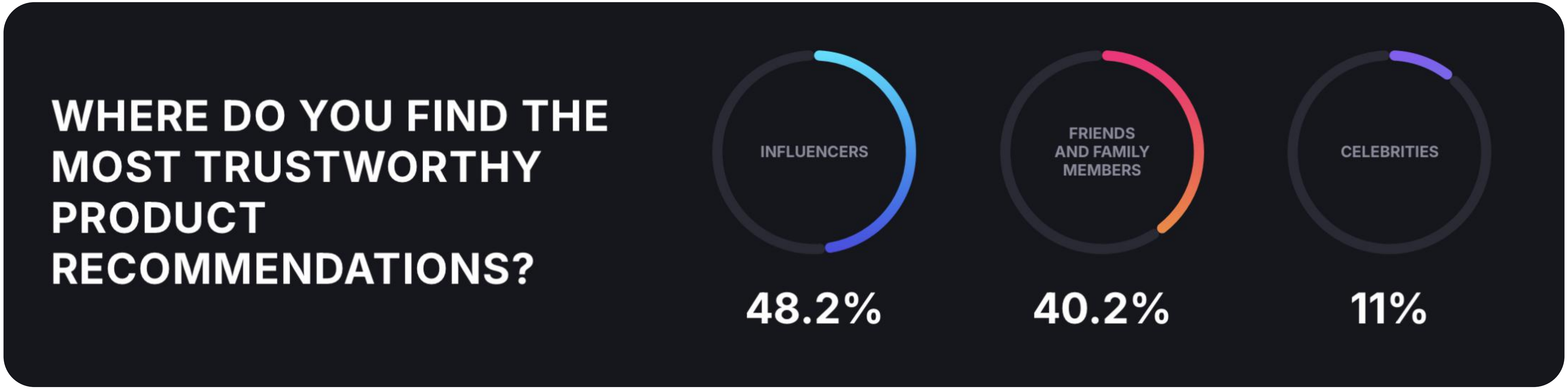
Only 23% of Americans trust how AI is being used on social media (EMARKETER), yet AI content continues to proliferate. Generic advice and motivational content can no longer sustain a business. Audiences can get generic tips anywhere. What they can't get from AI, and what they'll pay premium prices for, is personalized guidance from someone who has actually done what they're trying to do.

The 39% of workplace skills that are predicted to change by 2030 (World Economic Forum) represents not just a challenge but an opportunity. As demand surges for AI literacy, cybersecurity, creative thinking, and leadership, creators who can teach these skills through real-world experience rather than recycled tips will command premium prices.

Personalization premiums: The one area still growing

While generic lifestyle content becomes increasingly interchangeable and less valuable, trust in authentic creators is actually increasing. Among Gen Z and Millennials, 48.2% now say influencers are their most trustworthy source for beauty recommendations, surpassing friends and family at 40.2% and celebrities at just 11% (GRIN via Net Influencer).

The key factor driving this trust? "Lifestyle alignment" ranks as the top trust driver at 48.4%. Audiences don't just want expertise. They want expertise from someone whose life looks like the one they're trying to build.



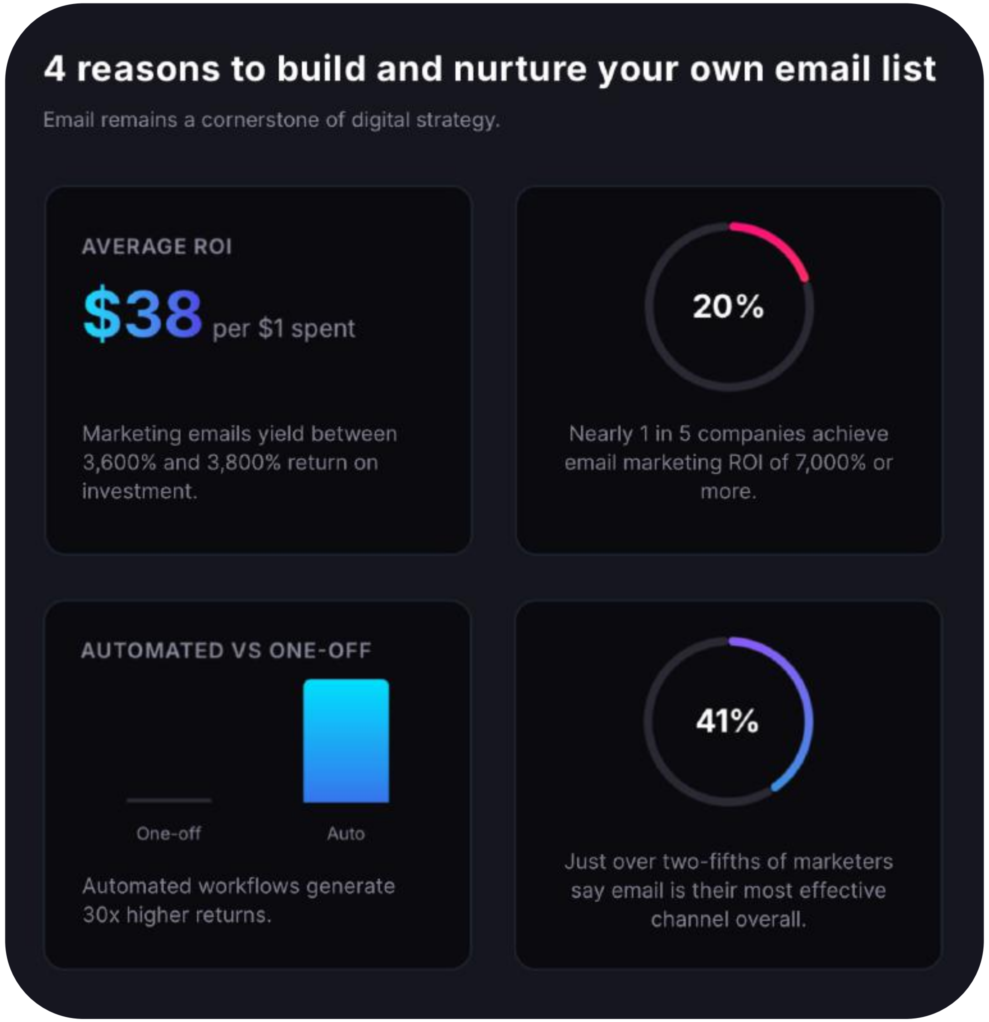
Source I Net Influencer

This creates a paradox: audiences trust creators more than ever, but only when that creator demonstrates genuine expertise and personal alignment. Generic content fails this test. Specialized content passes it.

The markets where personalization commands premiums are growing rapidly. Beauty ecommerce reached $33.9 billion in 2024, up 14% year-over-year, and is projected to exceed $44 billion by 2027 (GRIN via NetInfluencer). The global longevity market is set to expand from $21.3 billion in 2024 to $63 billion by 2035, a 10.4% compound annual growth rate (Market Research Future). By 2050, the global population aged 60+ will double to 2.1 billion, creating massive demand for specialized wellness guidance (WHO). These aren't niche markets. They're massive opportunities for creators with specialized expertise.

Specialists can earn significantly more than generalists. TikTok's Specialized Rewards Program offers up to 3× earnings multipliers for creators in focused categories like film and TV, auto, learning, and sports (TikTok). The platform is literally paying more for expertise.

Kayla Itsines built her nine-figure fitness empire not by chasing trends, but by solving a specific problem for a specific audience: accessible 28-minute workouts for women with a focus on HIIT, pilates, yoga, cardio, and strength workouts. Starting with PDF guides sold online from Adelaide, Australia, she expanded into the Sweat app, which became the highest-grossing fitness app in the world in 2016 and has been downloaded more than 30 million times. In 2021, she sold the business for a reported $400 million. Her success came from owned products and direct customer relationships – not platform dependency.



Source I EmailMonday

The lifestyle creators who're now thriving share three characteristics that separate them from those struggling with declining engagement and content that AI can easily replicate.

1) They own their audience, not rent it

Platform algorithms change without warning. New social platforms launch while others fall out of favor. Engagement metrics shift overnight. The only audience you truly own is the one that's given you permission to reach them directly: through email lists, membership communities, or owned products. Private communities and "dark social" are becoming primary engagement channels for smart creators who recognize the risks of platform dependency.

Jackie Aina spent a decade as a beauty creator before launching FORVR MOOD, her fragrance and self-care brand (NewBeauty). The result? Six months of pre-inventory sold out in minutes, with a 45,000-person waitlist (Glossy). But Aina didn't stop at her initial launch products (candles, pillowcases, and headbands). FORVR MOOD expanded into fragrances and secured a Sephora partnership, while she maintains her content revenue and brand collaborations. Her platform following wasn't just an audience. It was a customer base funding multiple revenue streams through a brand she owned.

Renting platform attention creates fragile businesses, while owning customer relationships builds sustainable ones.

Source I RadiumOne via Salesforce

2) They sell outcomes, not content

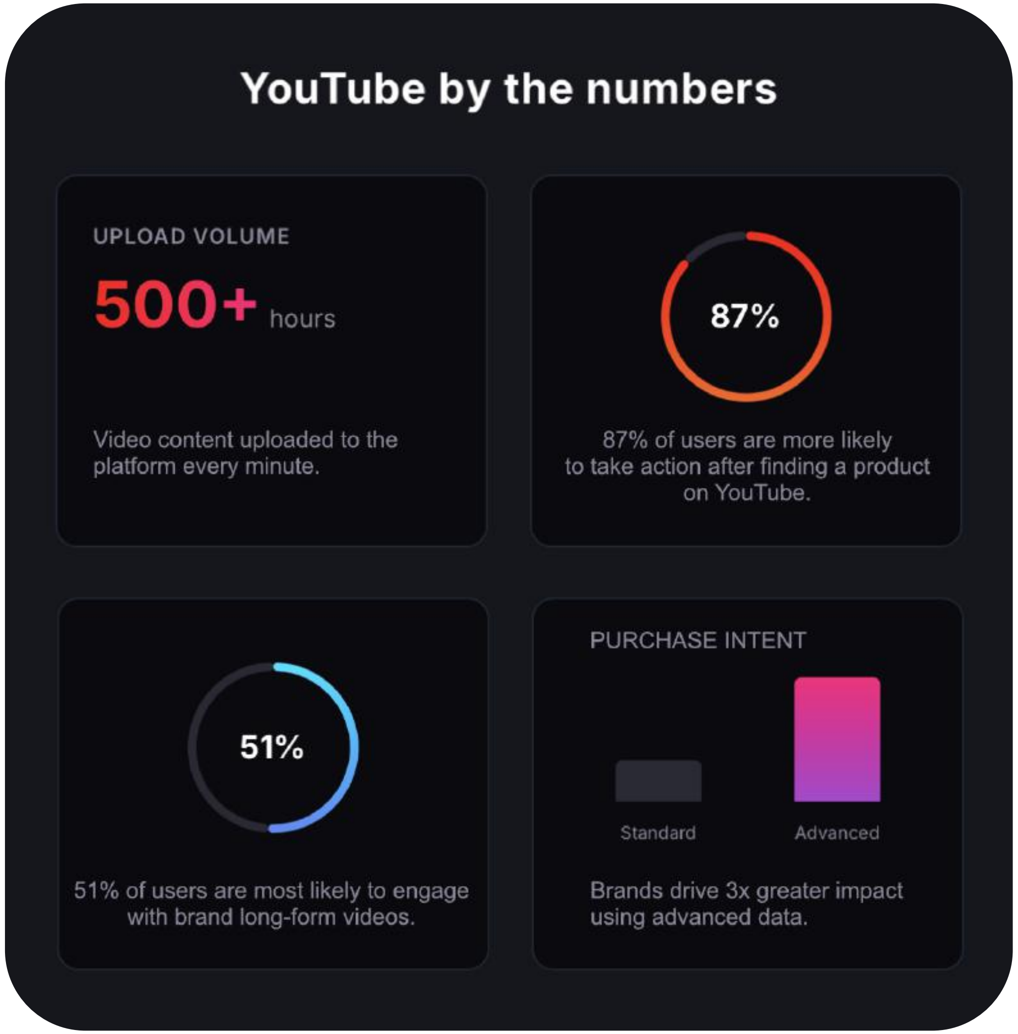
Free content attracts followers. Paid products transform them into customers. The shift requires repositioning your expertise around specific outcomes people will pay for.

Don't sell "fitness content." Sell a 12-week program that helps busy parents lose 15 pounds. Don't sell "style tips." Sell a capsule wardrobe system that saves two hours of morning decisions weekly. The expertise is identical. The framing determines whether you're competing with free AI content or commanding premium prices. When it comes to video, long-form content engagement is up 19% (TheIndustry.beauty), suggesting audiences are willing to invest time and attention in substantive, outcome-focused material.

3) They specialize relentlessly

Broad lifestyle content competes with everyone. Narrow expertise competes with almost no one. Max La Manna built a following of over 1,000,000 around low-waste cooking – not general food content, but a specific philosophy with specific techniques for a specific audience. That focus earned him the World's Best Vegan Cookbook award and Digital Creator of the Year at the Fortnum & Mason Food and Drink Awards (Country & Town House).

When 80% of beauty brands report customers are more experimental than ever, switching based on trends and TikTok recommendations – even when they're happy with a product – (Evolut Agency), the creators who win are those with clear, differentiated positioning.



Source I Ipsos via YouTube Advertising, Sprout Social & Statista

Emerging micro-niche trends

Several micro-niches are showing particularly strong growth potential for lifestyle creators who specialize deeply:

- **Longevity and biohacking:** The $63 billion longevity market (Market Research Future) is creating demand for creators who translate complex wellness science into accessible guidance. With wearables, fitness tracking, and AI-powered health platforms driving consumer interest, creators bridging the gap between scientific research and practical application are well-positioned for success.
- **Experience-focused lifestyle:** 90% of Gen Z say they prefer to spend money on experiences over possessions, with 66% saving for experiences or travel rather than long-term assets like a house or car (Mediaweek). Creators helping audiences design meaningful experiences, not just acquire products, are capturing this shift in consumer priorities.
- **Community-centered wellness:** With 82% of UK adults reporting they have experienced loneliness at some point (Ipsos) and 8% of EU residents reporting no close friends (OECD via Euronews), creators building genuine communities around wellness practices are fulfilling a deep unmet need. The value isn't just the content; it's the connection.
- **Sustainable and ethical living:** Not broad sustainability content, but specific expertise: zero-waste cooking, ethical fashion sourcing, sustainable travel planning. The specificity is what creates value in a market flooded with generic eco-friendly messaging.

The pattern across all these niches is the same: broad categories are commoditized, but specific expertise within them commands attention and premium pricing.

Niche content creation's impact on monetization

Niche creators tend to earn more than non-niche/generalized creators.
7% make over $100,000 a year, compared to the 5% of general creators who earn that much.

CHANNELS THAT EARN CREATORS REVENUE	NICHE CREATORS	NON-NICHE CREATORS
Premium newsletters	3%	2%
E-courses	10%	3%
Paid downloadable resources	10%	5%
Affiliate marketing (excl. Amazon)	15%	10%
Ads	13%	9%
Influencer marketing	14%	9%
Own physical products	23%	18%

Source | Linktree

From lifestyle influencer to lifestyle strategist

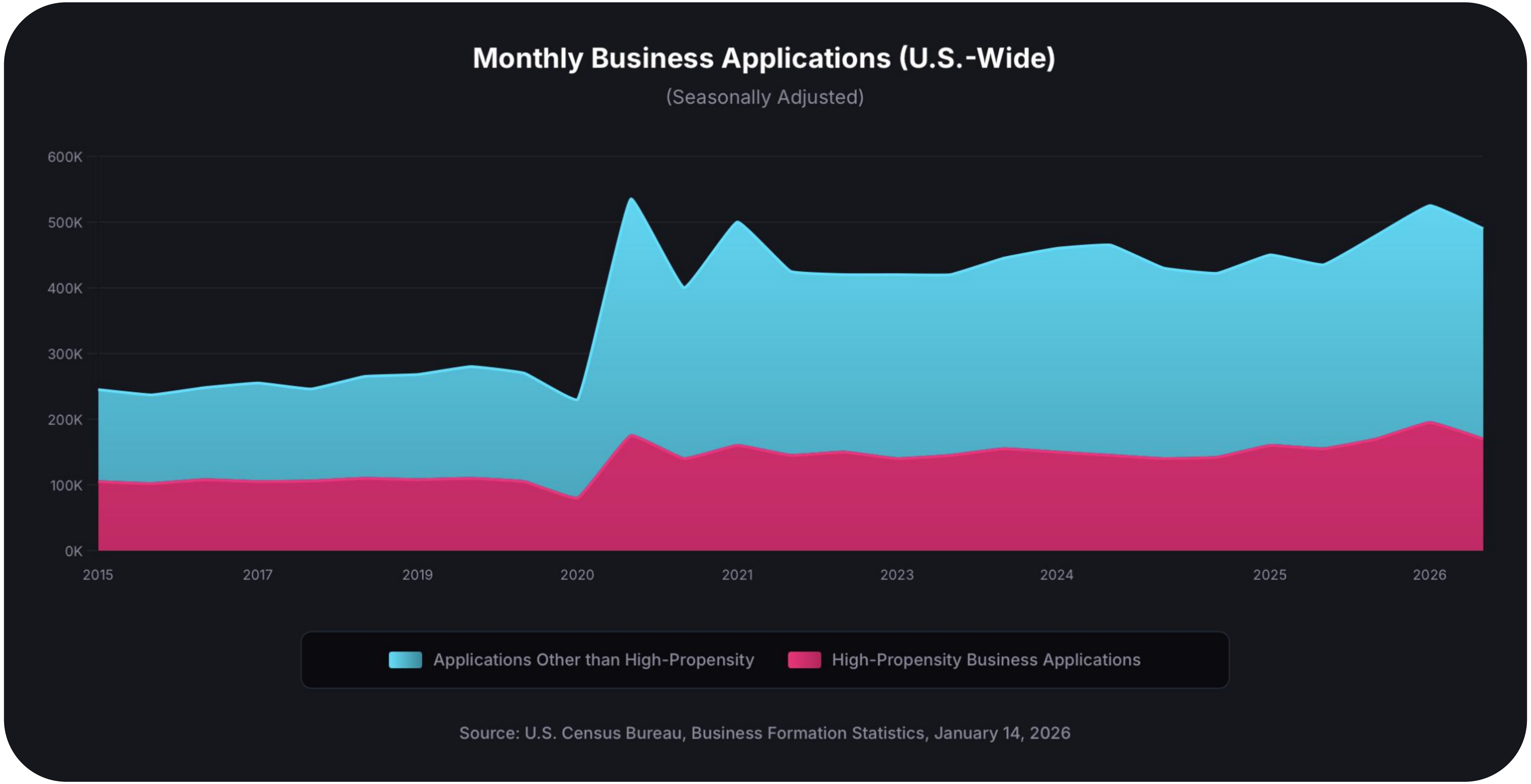
The creators staying competitive are making a fundamental shift: from content producers to transformation specialists. Three patterns define this transition.

They're defining specific transformations, not general topics. Not "wellness tips" but helping overwhelmed professionals establish sustainable morning routines that stick. Not "style advice" but helping women over 40 build confidence through strategic wardrobe choices. The more specific the transformation, the more valuable the offering – and the harder it is for AI to replicate.

They're solving problems people pay to fix. Free content solves problems people didn't know they had. Paid products solve problems people are actively trying to address. The creators succeeding here have identified the pain points their audiences are already spending money on, then position their expertise as the solution.

They're leaning into what AI cannot replicate. Lived experience. A specific journey. The ability to provide personalized guidance based on real understanding. The same content that AI can easily generate becomes irreplaceable when delivered through authentic, lived expertise and genuine connection.

The around 500,000 new business applications filed monthly in the U.S. alone (United States Census Bureau) include countless creators making this exact transition: from platform-dependent influencers to business owners with products, communities, and revenue streams they control. The infrastructure has never been more accessible.



Source | United States Census Bureau

Looking ahead: The 5 structural shifts that define what comes next

The lifestyle creator economy isn't dying. It's restructuring. The creators who thrive won't just adapt to these changes. They'll build around five structural shifts now reshaping the category.

1. Specialization becomes mandatory. Lifestyle generalists who create fashion, beauty, home, and travel posts interchangeably are no longer competitive. The future belongs to hyper-specific positioning that solves particular problems for particular people. The narrower the focus, the stronger the connection.

2. Measurable outcomes replace vague inspiration. Platforms and audiences now reward precise value. Creators must tie content to transformation, routines, systems, and measurable improvement, not just aesthetic appeal.

3. Multi-revenue models replace platform dependency. As lifestyle partnerships and influencer economics stagnate, creators need layered income: digital products, services, community subscriptions, and owned brands working together.

4. Direct audience ownership becomes critical. Email lists, private communities, and subscription models aren't optional extras. They're the foundation of a sustainable creator business.

5. The winners build outside algorithms. The future of lifestyle creation is owned, precise, and personal. Creators who combine niche expertise, direct distribution, value-led content, and off-platform monetization won't just survive the restructuring. They'll define what comes next.

You've already built the hard part: an audience that trusts you. The opportunity now is turning that trust into something you control – and build sustainable revenue from.

The tools exist. The market is there. The rest is execution.

Discover how to build a $100k course in just 60 days, with real-world advice (the flops as well as the successes) from entrepreneur and coach, Jenni Maroney.

Watch the video

Choose your path forward:

Ready to join the platform that supports 75,000+ creators, 4 million courses, and 12 million students? ThriveCart offers secure global checkouts and payments, configurable landing pages and funnels, easy subscription and affiliate management, reporting and analytics, and a learning management system (LMS) for content creation and hosting. All in a single business-in-a-box platform.

New to the creator space? Looking for more revenue-generating ideas? Or simply keen to dive deeper into everything that being a creator entails? Explore more with our Creator Economy Industry Report.

Sign me up for ThriveCart

I want the white paper

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