

The power of letting go: Social-first brands prioritize content co-creation.

Insights from our latest research on the power
of social business transformation.

March 2024

For decades, brands were accustomed to telling (and protecting) their own stories. Advertisements, celebrity endorsements, customer support scripts—these and other messages were carefully crafted to align with business goals, market positioning, and brand and risk standards. Media channels generally supported this one-way storytelling through tight control of brand-friendly content.

Social media has flipped the balance of control—and transformed the actions that brands need to take to earn share of culture and trust.

In social media's democratized spaces, today's creator and influencer content, user-generated content (UGC), and community conversations often have a far greater impact than brand-generated messages. While new advancements to algorithms play a big role in this evolution, it's in part due to the simple matter of exposure: According to Deloitte Digital's recent research, consumers follow an average of 14 creators on social media—but just seven brands. This makes it hard for any but the most shareable organic content to earn notice on social media.

Paid tactics can expand exposure—but not always impact: Even when a brand captures an audience's attention with valuable, brand-generated content, just 24% of surveyed consumers said they trust the brand more as a result. By contrast, 87% of consumers view the creators and influencers they follow as trusted sources of information.

Consumers also trust customer reviews over branded content. Just 30% said they're more likely to purchase from a brand when it posts valuable content, while 50% said they're more likely to make a purchase after reading a positive customer review on social media.

***SURVEYED BRANDS SAID
CREATOR / INFLUENCER
MARKETING HAD THE
GREATEST IMPACT
ON SOCIAL MEDIA
EFFECTIVENESS IN 2023.***



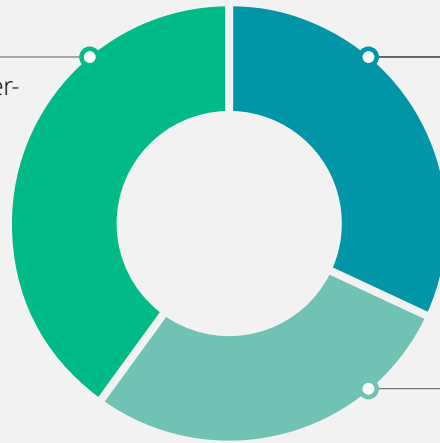
Given that surveyed brands cited improving customer trust as their No. 1 social media goal, it's no surprise many organizations are prioritizing active and intentional collaboration with creators and influencers, while also actively encouraging and promoting UGC on the brand's social and other owned digital channels.

Many surveyed leaders admit they're still struggling to turn those priorities into profits. For every breakout creator collaboration that generates cultural buzz, there are plenty that fall flat—and some that backfire. (See *Common missteps in creator marketing*, p. 4.) But social-first brands are figuring it out. Compared to low-maturity organizations in our research, they're nearly 10x as likely to report their creator / influencer strategy is extremely effective. Social-first brands that place a very high priority on creator marketing also attribute a 1.4x greater revenue increase to social strategies as compared to other brands.

PRIORITIZING CREATOR AND USER CONTENT.

40%

Creator- / influencer-created & UGC



32%

Brand-created (internal)

28%

Agency-created (external)

2 in 5 brands said creator and/or user-generated content was *most important* to their 2023 social strategies.

A NEW FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH.

In this series we explore how social-first brands are driving innovation and growth through a more comprehensive, connected approach to social media.

Part 1: Social means business. Serious business.

Part 2: Reclaim share of culture through a new approach to social communities.

Part 3: The power of letting go: Social-first brands prioritize content co-creation.

Part 4: The future of search—and commerce—is social.

DOWNLOAD THE FULL SERIES:

<https://response.deloittedigital.com/stateofsocial>

The insights in this series are based on Deloitte Digital's 2023 B2C survey of marketers and consumers (please see Methodology p. 5), in addition to other research and our client experience.



Letting audiences lead.

In our research and experience, social-first brands aren't just focused on working with creators and influencers. They also prioritize a wider variety of social media content types. Compared to low-maturity brands, they're ...

7x as likely to say virtual and/or augmented reality (VR/AR) content is a very high strategic priority

6.7x as likely to say live streaming is a very high priority

5.7x as likely to say UGC is a very high priority

3x as likely to say social audio / sound is a very high priority

Even when that content is created by the brand, it often differs from traditionally controlled, one-way messages. For example, AR photo filters do nothing unless applied to a user's own face or environment. Branded audio memes rarely get heard unless they are integrated into UGC.

Collaborative approaches to social media extend beyond marketing. For example, to help humanize and deepen online customer support resources, many of today's largest organizations have complemented brand-generated "frequently asked questions" with community forums where brand-accredited expert users answer concerns and questions from other users. Other brands have begun crowdsourcing ideas for product and service innovations—expanding on past celebrity collaborations by monitoring and engaging with audience and creator conversations around new

features or even entirely new offerings that can serve the needs of key segments.

Chipotle is a great example of how such strategies can produce business impact. In late 2022, popular food influencer Alexis Frost posted a video about a Chipotle "menu hack" she created by adding fajita vegetables to the restaurant's steak quesadilla. Another food influencer, Keith Lee, followed up with his own hack: Dip the new creation in a blend of the restaurant's Chipotle-Honey Vinaigrette dressing and sour cream. Within a week, videos about the two hacks were viewed more than 30 million times. Customers across the country began custom-ordering the dishes.

So Chipotle teamed up with the influencers, adding the "Keithadilla" to its app and website menus. At launch, the company enjoyed two of its top digital sales days of all time.¹



MAKING NOISE WITH AUDIO MEMES.

While many marketers focus on earning social virality through clever gifs, images and videos, social-first brands have also turned their attention to producing and disseminating bite-sized sounds and audio content. In so doing, they're turning reproducible units of sound into real cultural currency—with an assist from social users and creators.

In some cases, audio memes may be nothing more than a brand's audio signature or jingle, released for use in creators' own videos or other content. Other types of branded audio memes include phrases or noises borrowed from well-known ads or custom-created for social use, distinctive sounds made by the company's products, and quotes or songs produced in collaboration with popular creators that evoke the brand explicitly or implicitly.

Regardless of how they were created, effective audio memes can have a powerful impact by helping to reinforce and increase a brand's share of culture.

Co-create to connect.

Based on our research and client experience, here are some key moves that can help your brand achieve greater effectiveness from social media content and co-creation efforts.

PROCESS

- **Leverage social listening as a key data source:** Social listening is key to identifying creators whose audiences, interests and personal brands align with your brand's priorities and values. It is also how you can identify content that features your brand organically, and secure the rights to amplify that content through real-time partnerships with creators.

PROGRAM

- **Co-create with audiences, influencers and creators as an extension of your brand:** Being social-first means loosening ownership and control of your brand's creative. Social creators earn influence by understanding and connecting authentically with their audiences, so it's important to give them space to bring your brand and offerings into the conversation in ways that fit their context and audience insights. Beyond formal creator partnerships, consider ways to incentivize community engagement through sharing of user-generated reviews, "surprise and delight" moments, giveaways, etc.
- **Approach creators as partners:** Just because you're loosening control doesn't mean that you shouldn't have a plan when working with creators. A regular planning cadence and long-term partnership model are key underpinnings of successful collaboration. And don't shortchange what's possible by limiting your partnership to marketing-oriented content. Consider how to include creators and their followers in product development and feedback.

PEOPLE

- **Attract and retain social-first creative talent:** To ensure your brand is putting co-creation at the heart of content development, focus on finding and hiring employees who are already steeped in creator culture and communities. This could even mean hiring creators to be on staff.
- **Approach social as an enterprisewide investment:** Hiring talent with a social-first mindset can ensure that co-creation isn't just being applied to marketing, but to the entire company.



COMMON MISSTEPS IN CREATOR MARKETING.

Creator identification

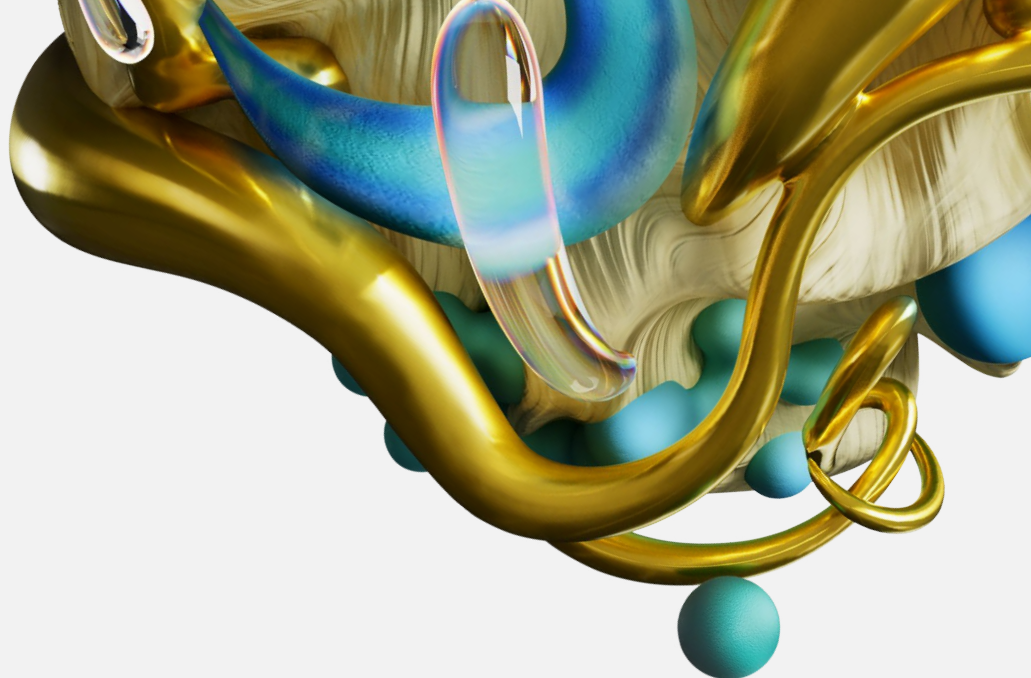
- Brand is not properly vetting creators, resulting in selection of noncredible creators
- Audiences, values and/or interests are misaligned between creator and brand

Campaign ideation

- Brand does not brief creator thoroughly on campaign objectives
- Creators are not given sufficient creative license in the ideation phase, resulting in the development of inauthentic content concepts that may not resonate with the creator's audience

Campaign activation

- Brand asks the creator to use overly branded messaging that is not adapted to the creator's own perspective / voice
- Insufficient support is given by the brand and/or creator to amplify the impact of the collaboration



METHODOLOGY

Original research results in this report are based on a blind survey conducted in May 2023 by Lawless Research on behalf of Deloitte Digital. Respondents included marketing leaders at 450 US business-to-consumer companies across a range of consumer industries and sectors, plus 1,000 US adult consumers. Building on this research Deloitte Digital developed a proprietary maturity framework to define and score social media effectiveness. In this series we refer to the most effective quartile of respondents as “social-first brands” and the least effective quartile as “low-maturity organizations.”

ENDNOTES

1. Chipotle, “It’s officially official: Chipotle to launch new fajita quesadilla inspired by viral TikTok trend on March 2,” press release, February 27, 2023, <https://newsroom.chipotle.com/2023-02-27-ITS-OFFICIALLY-OFFICIAL-CHIPOTLE-TO-LAUNCH-NEW-FAJITA-QUESADILLA-INSPIRED-BY-VIRAL-TIKTOK-TREND-ON-MARCH-2>, accessed February 23, 2024.

GET IN TOUCH

Kenny Gold

Managing Director
US Head of Social,
Content and Influencer
Deloitte Consulting LLP
kennygold@deloitte.com

Christina Kavalauskas

Senior Manager
US Group Strategy Director,
Social Innovation and Operations
Deloitte Consulting LLP
ckavalauskas@deloitte.com

About Deloitte

Deloitte refers to one or more of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited (DTTL), its global network of member firms, and their related entities (collectively, the “Deloitte organization”). DTTL (also referred to as “Deloitte Global”) and each of its member firms and related entities are legally separate and independent entities, which cannot obligate or bind each other in respect of third parties. DTTL and each DTTL member firm and related entity is liable only for its own acts and omissions, and not those of each other. DTTL does not provide services to clients. Please see www.deloitte.com/about to learn more.

Deloitte provides industry-leading audit and assurance, tax and related services, consulting, financial advisory, and risk advisory services to nearly 90% of the Fortune Global 500® and thousands of private companies. Our people deliver measurable and lasting results that help reinforce public trust in capital markets, enable clients to transform and thrive, and lead the way toward a stronger economy, a more equitable society, and a sustainable world. Building on its 175-plus year history, Deloitte spans more than 150 countries and territories. Learn how Deloitte’s approximately 457,000 people worldwide make an impact that matters at www.deloitte.com.

This publication contains general information only and Deloitte is not, by means of this publication, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This publication is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional advisor. Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this publication.

Copyright © 2024 Deloitte Development LLC. All rights reserved.