

Smarty Party

Guaranteed to Make
Your Head Explode



September 2026



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Letter from the Publisher

The Smarty Party is a monthly round-up of key opinion leaders in the advertising and marketing industry that is intended to make it a little easier, and a little more fun, to learn from each other in this new world of remote and independent work.

As I have been building Influence & Inspire Consulting over the last 7 years, I have relied on the smarts and generosity of my network to learn, grow and keep myself honest.

Being a consultant definitely takes a village.

I would love to build a bigger village for all of us and make remote work a little less solitary.

But most importantly, let's make it more of a party.

Kerry Perse



What's Inside?

- Meet this month's **Smarty Party**
- **Dear Smarty Party**. Advice column for new marketers.
- **Real brand connection** comes from satisfying people's post-pandemic need for **IRL experiences**
- **Connected TV** is the new front door to commerce
- Measuring **creator ROI** and effectiveness is...**complicated**
- **Party Snacks**. Bite-sized advice for **busy people**.



Meet This Month's *Smarty Party*



Kerry Perse

Founder & CEO
Influence & Inspire
NYC



Brandy Alexander

Principal, Managing Director
Tandemtide
Toledo



Brown Bartholomew

CEO & Co-Founder
CAPE
NYC



Natasha Ellis

Human Experiences
Enthusiast
Alive + Well Co.
NYC



Jackie Widrow Rosegarten

Founder & CEO
JWR Connect
NYC



Meet This Month's *Smarty Party*



Yuyu Chen

Principle Account
Executive
Tatari
NYC



Taylor VanAllen

Influencer Marketing
Executive
TVA Digital
NYC



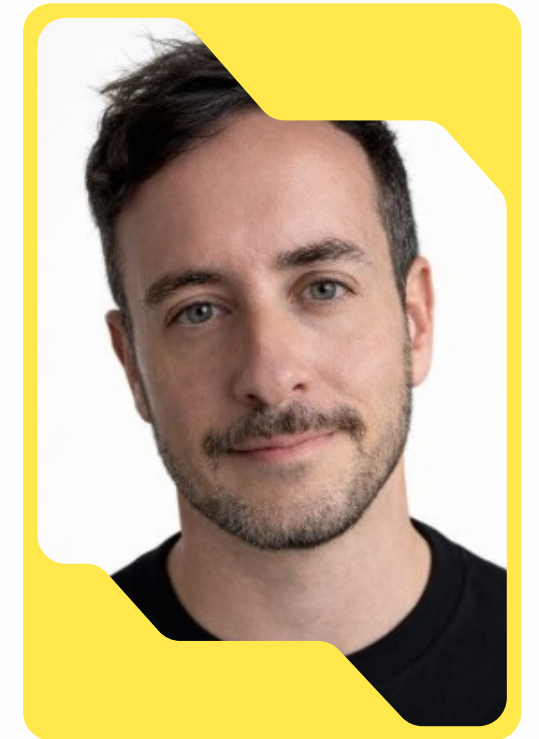
Talor Burns

Manager, Brand Creative
Harley-Davidson
Brooklyn



Lauren Barnett

VP Social & Influence
Strategy
Weber Shandwick
NYC



Amir Eldar

Chief Anti Officer
Anti Agency Group
Los Angeles



Dear *Smarty* *Party*

Advice Column for New Marketers
Answered by Old Folks.



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Dear Smarty Party,

Working remotely has made it hard to learn from senior leadership, can you share some of your best advice for new marketers?

“

Listen more than you contribute for a while. Make sure you're understanding the perspectives of both the folks in the room with you and your customers before you go into brainstorming mode to come up with new ideas. You've got to learn how the wheel works and which direction it's turning before you try to reinvent it!



Taylor Burns

Manager, Brand Creative
Harley-Davidson

“

**Your network is
your net worth.**



Brandy Alexander

Principal, Managing Director
Tandemtide

“

Stay curious. Learn something new every day, and don't just consume—form opinions. Great marketers aren't successful because they know every platform; they're successful because they have taste, curiosity, and a perspective that's uniquely their own.



Amir Eldar

Chief Anti Officer
Anti Agency Group

“



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Real brand connection comes from satisfying
people's post-pandemic need for IRL experiences

The Situation

- The long-term demand for experiences is clear. Between 2023 and 2025, the global experiences market grew 2.6%, similar to its pre-COVID-19 growth rate. Consumers consistently say that when choosing experiences, they prioritize factors such as spending quality time with others, relaxation, excitement, and learning.
- Roughly 83% of Gen Z say a physical retail or event presence makes a brand feel more authentic and trustworthy than digital-only ads and over 80% want to disconnect from screens, making offline spaces a rare and valued currency.
- Following the global pandemic, which prompted a collective search for deeper purpose, people are no longer satisfied with fleeting experiences; they want to grow and flourish. 88% of people globally want experiences that feel meaningful, not just entertaining, and 87% agree that "the best experiences leave me feeling changed in some way".



IMHO

How should brands use experiences to deliver both business and consumer value?

Brown Bartholomew, CEO & Co-Founder, CAPE

"If you're impatient like me, here's my answer: done right, experiences deliver what every brand is chasing now—relevance. By relevance, I mean being present in people's lives in a way that actually matters to them. And like everything in marketing, start with the audience.

Start with the people who love what you do and make them love it even more.

That was the philosophy I brought to Apple when iPhone came out. That's where real, authentic evangelism happens.

Experiences are especially good at this because they reward people for already caring. They deepen the relationship in a way another digital impression won't. People come, bring friends, post about it and, yes, talk to other people about it. The consumer gets something memorable; the brand turns a customer into a fan...





IMHO

How should brands use experiences to deliver both business and consumer value?

Brown Bartholomew, CEO & Co-Founder, CAPE

...Then be smart about creators.

No one reading this needs convincing that creators matter. But why limit creator marketing to content? You can spend \$250K on a creator campaign, or use it to build an amazing experience for customers and the right creators, who are always looking for something original to talk about. Much like a consumer, I love a 2-for. The future of marketing is creator-led experiential. You get the experience, the content, the audience and the word of mouth in one investment.

And don't stop when everyone goes home. Someone who showed up for something you made is exactly the customer you should want to know better. At CAPE, we built a tool that helps brands market to attendees before, during and after the experience, so the relationship keeps going. If you don't know how to do that yet, let me know."



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IMHO

How should brands use experiences to deliver both business and consumer value?

Natasha Ellis, Human Experiences Enthusiast, Alive + Well Co.

"POW. BAM. BOOM. Comics figured it out a long time ago.

Three words that don't explain anything, but they represent everything - Action. Energy. Aliveness. And that's what brands are rediscovering.

We're in times of great uncertainty and relentless digital noise. AI accelerating us toward a max-tech era: automation, personalization, synthetic content, more at extraordinary speed. As the technology mediates our lives, the more the pendulum will swing the other direction: toward reclaiming what makes us human.

Our senses. Our emotions. Our curiosity. Our need to connect, participate and belong.

Our sentient nature...



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IMHO

How should brands use experiences to deliver both business and consumer value?

Natasha Ellis, Human Experiences Enthusiast, Alive + Well Co.

...This is where experiential marketing becomes more than a marketing tactic. It becomes a way for brands to create human value in a highly mechanized world.

The best experiences don't put a brand in front of people. They bring people into the brand.

They create participation, emotion and memory, and give people something they want to talk about, share, remember, perhaps even feel changed.

If your business depends on creating value with your consumer, real-life marketing is the unrivaled (superhero) choice for deep connection, strong relationships, distinctiveness, loyalty and advocacy.

POW. BAM. BOOM"



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IMHO

How should brands use experiences to deliver both business and consumer value?

Jackie Widrow Rosegarten, Founder & CEO, JWR Connect

"Brands have gotten good at experiences, and now the bar for what actually resonates has moved with them. Post-COVID, brands are creating experiences daily: pop-ups, immersive drops, hybrid IRL/digital moments filling every feed, every week. Consumers have become fluent fast, and that fluency raises the bar for what resonates.

The best brands have adapted.

Experiences work now when they do two jobs at once, and the ones that stand out are designed for both from the start. Consumer value is still emotional at its core. People remember how something made them feel far longer than what it told them. In a crowded field, that feeling has to be earned through real cultural relevance or real utility. Business value is where the real opportunity lives. The most effective programs don't stop at a beautiful moment; they build in a mechanism to turn attention into pipeline: data capture, earned coverage, a sales/retail tie-in. With that in place, an experience becomes more than a moment; it becomes a business asset".





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Jackie Widrow Rosegarten, Founder & CEO, JWR Connect

The brands winning right now treat every experience as a three-layer platform, my three M's:

1. The **MOMENT**: built around a genuine need or desire.
2. The **MULTIPLIER**: content, creators, earned media, and storytelling that extend it far past whoever physically shows up. One event should fuel weeks of content.
3. The **MOVEMENT**: making the business case: data, retail, leads, a narrative that creates impact and can be repeated, over and over, building scale”.





Connected TV is the new front door to commerce

The Situation

- Connected TV now drives +15% higher return on ad spend (ROAS) than linear TV and +21% higher than shortform video, signaling TV's movement from a reach vehicle into a full funnel, results driven platform.
- The integration of independent creators into Connected TV has officially shifted from an experiment to a mainstream television standard. Commercials featuring creators now regularly integrate QR codes and direct product feeds. This allows the viewer to scan their TV screen mid-video and instantly complete a mobile purchase workflow synced to the creator's recommendation.
- Early data shows interactive CTV formats significantly outperform standard ads: single exposures deliver +36% unaided brand recall, dwell times increase +27%, and choice-based ads reach double-digit engagement. Also 81% of viewers say TV ads influence their shopping decisions, with nearly half making a purchase after exposure.



IMHO



What are the best opportunities for brands to use CTV to drive purchase behavior?

Brandy Alexander, Principal, Managing Director, Tandemtide

"CTV combines the big-screen impact of traditional TV with the precision of digital advertising, allowing brands to target specific audiences using data while connecting high-impact video storytelling to measurable purchase behavior.

To capitalize on a more commerce-forward approach, brands should view CTV as an extension of their social campaigns, bringing creator-led content built for today's attention economy onto the biggest screen in the home.

This reimagines how creator content can be delivered, combining authentic, engaging video with precise targeting and strong calls to action that move viewers from watching to shopping".

Free Advice

Brandy Alexander, Principal, Managing Director, Tandemtide



Negotiate Usage Rights Upfront

Plan for amplification before creators hit record. Negotiate usage rights upfront so content can extend beyond organic social into paid media, streaming and CTV. Secure clean source files and editing rights, and create assets with multiple formats and channels in mind. The days of negotiating for just organic reach are over!

Shoot With Multiple Screens in Mind

Creator content shouldn't be limited to the platform where it originated. Capture footage that can work vertically, horizontally and across different formats, giving brands the flexibility to transform one shoot into paid media for social, YouTube, streaming, CTV and other digital channels.

Optimize the Path to Purchase

A strong CTV campaign doesn't end with the ad or QR code. Think carefully about where viewers land and what you want them to do next. Create a fast, mobile-first landing experience that continues the story from the video, reinforces the offer and provides a clear, frictionless path to purchase. Fewer steps between scanning and shopping.



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IMHO

What are the best opportunities for brands to use CTV to drive purchase behavior?

Yuyu Chen, Principle Account Executive, Tatari

"The best CTV purchase-driving opportunities sit at the intersection of creative and media - most brands over-invest in one and neglect the other.

On creative: the instinct to bring broadcast-style, high-production spots to CTV needs to evolve. What drives action increasingly looks more like the raw, authentic content that performs on Reels and TikTok - real feeling over polish. And AI is opening fast, affordable storytelling formats that were impossible a year ago. There's no single winning format yet, so the brands pulling ahead are the ones running disciplined creative test-and-learn: multiple cuts, real performance reads, and iterating on what converts rather than what looks best in a review. CTV also carries its own creative approval standards, so what clears on social won't always clear on a network, so it is worth building in early...



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What are the best opportunities for brands to use CTV to drive purchase behavior?

Yuyu Chen, Principle Account Executive, Tatari

...**On media:** running CTV through a DSP isn't a strategy - it's an easy tactic as a starting point. The bigger opportunity is finding the most direct path to premium inventory, targeted to the right audience, with as few intermediaries between you and the publisher as possible - and inventory that can be measured in almost real time. That's where efficiency, quality, and performance live.

The unlock is connecting the two: measure which creative drives purchase behavior, next-day, and feed that back into both the creative and the buy. CTV becomes a performance channel only when creative testing and media precision operate as one loop".

Free Advice

Yuyu Chen, Principle Account Executive, Tatari



Your Social Feed is a CTV Creative Lab

Before you commit production dollars to CTV, let social do the vetting. Test messaging, creators, and story angles on Reels and TikTok - comparatively cheap, fast, and honest about what resonates. The winners tell you which hooks, ambassadors, and storyboards to scale into CTV assets, so you build on proof, not guesswork.

CTV Isn't a Synonym for Programmatic

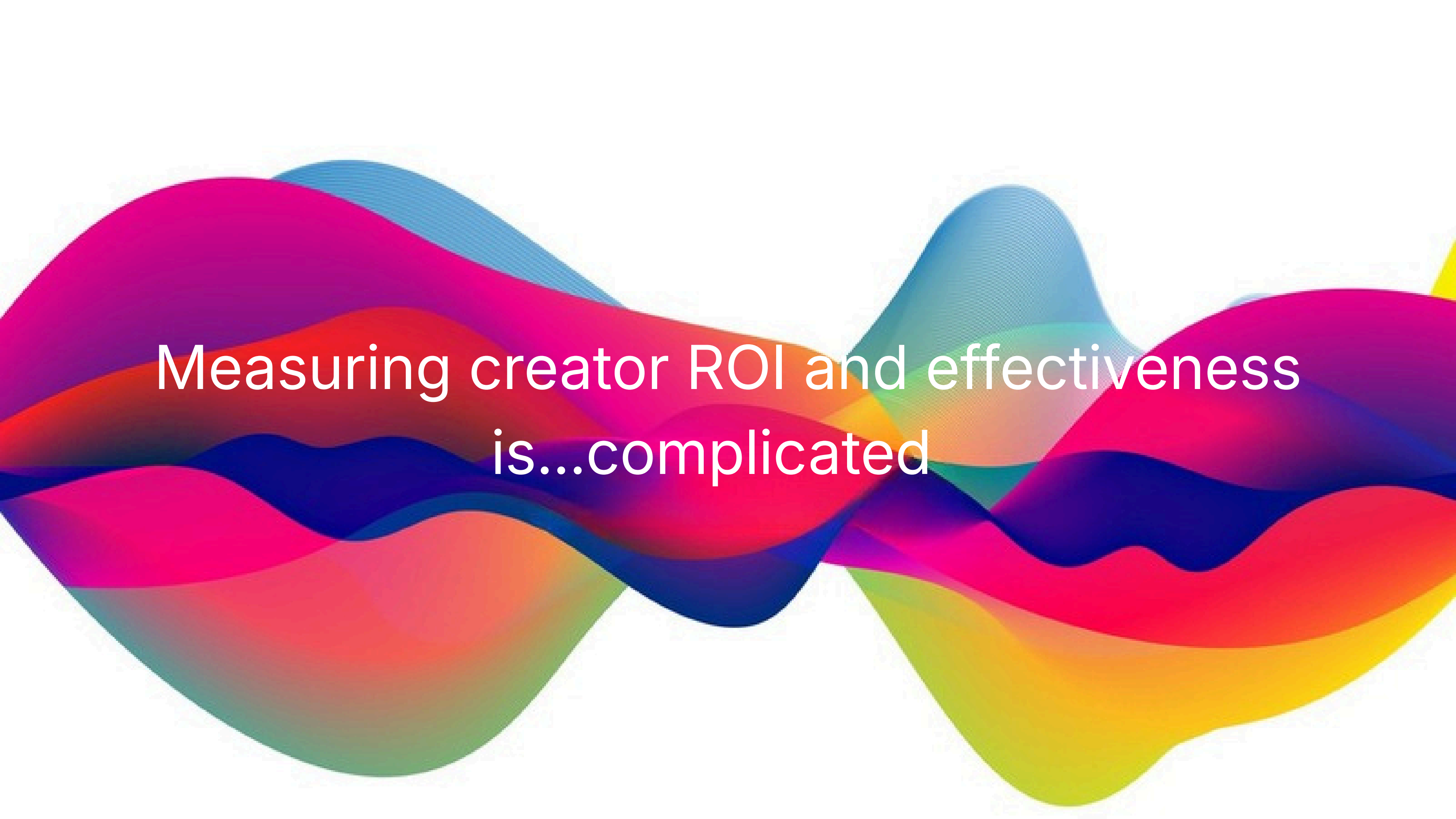
Running CTV through a DSP is one path - not the only one, and rarely the best. Direct publisher deals, curated inventory, and shorter supply chains often deliver better quality and efficiency. The space is shifting fast, so the real advantage is a partner who can navigate the routes beyond the exchange.

AI Belongs in the Loop, with a Human in it

Start using AI across creative and media now, with oversight. Most platforms already bake AI into planning and optimization, so on the media side it's low-risk upside. Creative is still the wild west: powerful, uneven, worth experimenting with. Move early, keep judgment in the loop, and treat this year and next as the test.



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Measuring creator ROI and effectiveness
is...complicated

The Situation

- 94% of marketers rate creator marketing as an effective strategy, and 86% of consumers say they've made an influencer-driven purchase in the past year.
- 72% of brands struggle with attribution, largely because they're using tools built for paid ads rather than organic influencer content. Multi-touch attribution is an ongoing challenge as customers interact with multiple creators before purchasing, cross-platform journeys complicate tracking, long consideration periods make immediate attribution difficult, and privacy changes continue to affect pixel-based tracking.
- Budget is rising faster than measurement maturity: 74% of marketers plan to increase their influencer marketing budgets in 2026, and in 2025 IAB projected creator-economy ad spend in the U.S. at \$37B, up from \$29.5B in 2024 and \$13.9B in 2021 — as budgets scale up, reporting can no longer stay at the level of a "good feeling".





IMHO

How can brands more accurately measure their creator marketing outcomes?

Lauren Barnett, VP Social & Influence Strategy, Weber Shandwick

"Get clear on the objective of the campaign in planning and how best to measure the impact for both immediate and longer term impact.

Measurement deserves the same strategic planning and rigorous scrutiny of creative upfront, but often what was measured for the last campaign is taken at face value. Getting specific in planning helps brands take advantage of agility when the best signals are supporting the direction of their goals".



Free Advice

Lauren Barnett, VP Social & Influence Strategy, Weber Shandwick



Measurement Protocols are your Navigation System

If set up properly to adequately measure business goals over time, a 'negative' or underperforming metric can be used just as informative as the KPIs that overdeliver. With data analysis faster than ever, incorporating time for strategic critical thinking can indicate whether a campaign's North Star is making the impact.

There is a Beyonce in Every Niche, Reach and Budget

So, get curious to figure out who the proverbial room is watching. Often we think of macros/celebrities as the talent making the biggest splash, but every audience has their own magnetic personalities swaying the trending swells of the community's behavior.

Authenticity isn't Always Genuine

Sometimes it's trendy. Align brand values to creators who demonstrate they're genuinely behind those values and promote a perspective that favors continuity over momentary consensus.





IMHO

How can brands more accurately measure their creator marketing outcomes?

Taylor VanAllen, Influencer Marketing Executive, TVA Digital

"The first step to better measurement has nothing to do with measurement; it's knowing what you want creator marketing to do for your brand. In other words, if you don't set clear and intentional brand goals, build your strategy around them, and engage the right creators, accurate outcome measurement is out the window.

Creator marketing is no longer an isolated social media tactic; it has taken its rightful place in the larger marketing mix, which is why it is critical to clearly define what your creator marketing efforts are working to achieve as brands measure their overall marketing ecosystem. Once brands understand the role it plays in the mix and what it does, they can measure more confidently and accurately, and understand what and how creator marketing actually moved for the brand....





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...This is not to say that influencer metrics don't tell a story; they certainly do, which is why it is important to choose the right influencers based on your goal – that's where you get the true story. Additionally, fostering these influencer relationships will expand the peek behind the curtain and provide deeper, richer insight, which is a crucial piece of the puzzle. In this world, numbers are not the full story.

There are so many ways to slice the pie and measure outcomes in creator marketing, and brands will and should use all available platforms, third-party measurement systems, tracking tools, systems, and beyond, but until measurement can keep pace with the rapid growth of the creator economy, focusing on brand goals and executing accordingly is a marketer's best path to accurate, large-scale measurement."





Free Advice

Taylor VanAllen, Influencer Marketing Executive, TVA Digital

Remember Real Consumer Behavior

Saves and shares are increasingly more important as we understand the consumer purchase journey. You have brought something new to the consumer that they want to save and revisit for consideration. These are powerful metrics.

Trust it!

Sure, creator marketing measurement isn't as sophisticated as brands would like it to be, but we know it works! Measure what you can, tell the story, and trust what you know as a marketer. If you feel like it's not showing what you know to be true, remember...brands still pour money into OOH, a channel relies on physical-world exposure.





IMHO

How can brands more accurately measure their creator marketing outcomes?

Kerry Perse, Founder & CEO, Influence & Inspire Consulting

"The most important place to start is with a shift in mindset - your creator measurement doesn't need to live in a vacuum. Just because there are plenty of data challenges stemming from platform fragmentation and the inconsistency with how performance metrics are reported, doesn't mean you need to quarantine your creator marketing measurement. You just need to get a little creative and don't let the tail wag the dog.

Start with how you measure everything else. Do you have an existing measurement framework that feeds your MMM? Use it. Map the metrics from your creator marketing programs that indicate you are impacting your broader business KPIs to each objective. If the metrics don't exist, use reasonable proxies.

Now, get organizational consensus. Do all key stakeholders agree with your metrics mapping? Explain the rationale, evolve the framework and identify measurement gaps...



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How can brands more accurately measure their creator marketing outcomes?

Kerry Perse, Founder & CEO, Influence & Inspire Consulting

...Now it's time to build your measurement stack. I would start by auditing all current 3rd party measurement tools and evaluate their capabilities through the creator lens. The smart money is on the fact that they might have more capabilities than you currently use or were even aware of at the time the agreement was made.

For all measurement gaps, develop a very specific RFP and send it to a shortlist of credible measurement platforms. For those who respond positively, get a free demo and try it out for yourself. The demo period could include using their interface and connecting to their API and customizing the outputs.

Don't buy before you try.



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Free Advice

Kerry Perse, Founder & CEO, Influence & Inspire Consulting

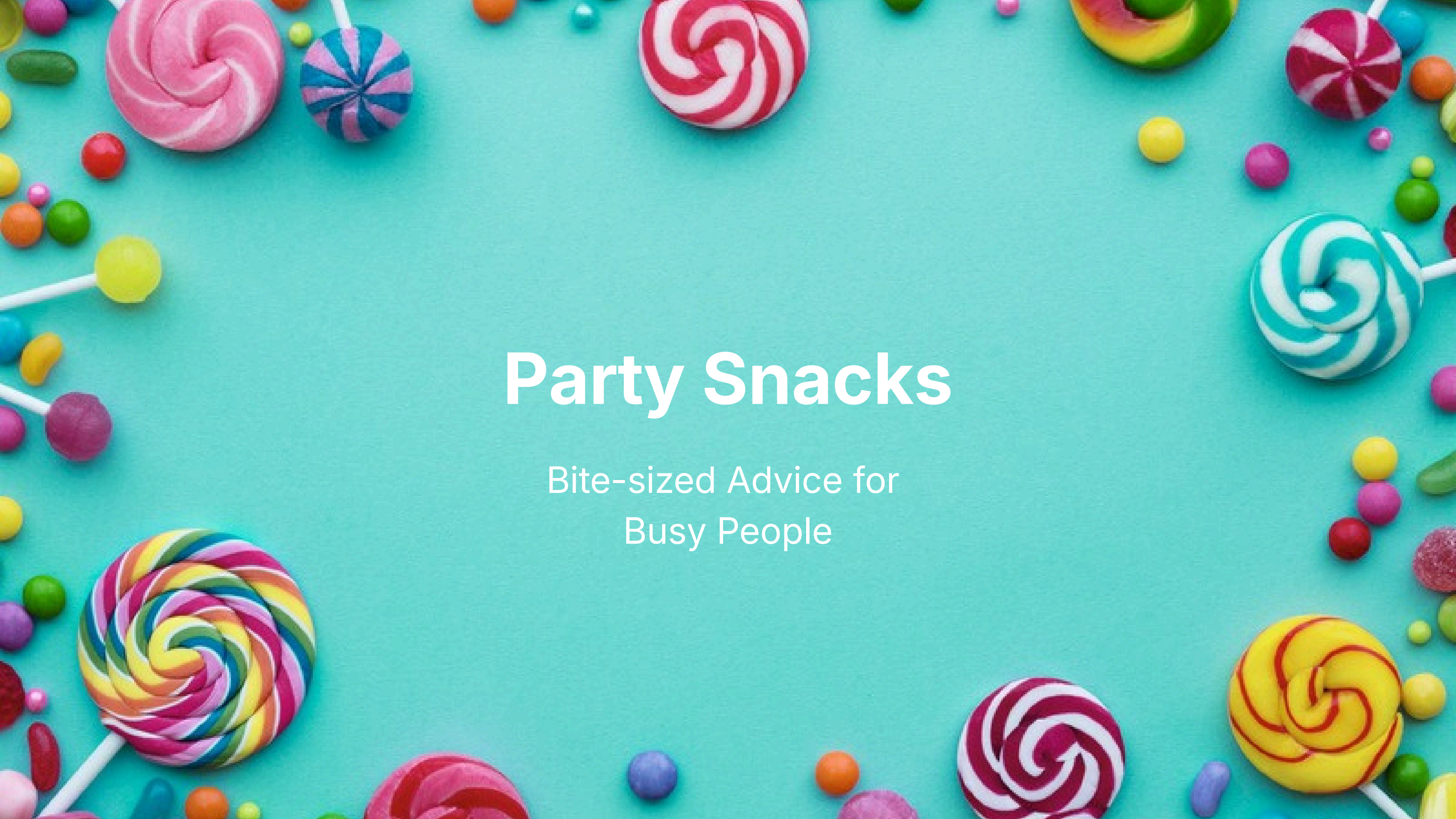
Paid Boosting is the Great Measurement Equalizer

You don't need to be envious of the paid media team. Boosting is not only the best way to get your content to the broadest audience but also to unlock more sophisticated measurement and attribution. This can include custom attitudinal measurement studies and closed loop attribution.

AI Makes Social Listening Actually Valuable

Once upon a time, there was something called the Twitter Firehose that was the primary source of data for social listening tools. Since more content and conversation were happening on other channels - it was only marginally useful. But now AI has unlocked the ability to index ALL public social content since the beginning of time.





Party Snacks

Bite-sized Advice for
Busy People

Party Snacks

Tools & Technology We Can't Live Without

The logo for AdYacht, featuring the word "AdYacht" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

AdYacht is the creator economy's answer to advertising. They help creators, brands and agencies turn video into cross-channel paid media with commerce at the center. They can take any existing video, create new video or transform creator-led content into advertising built for social, streaming, CTV, programmatic, retail media and more. From strategy and audience targeting to media buying and optimization, AdYacht bring it all together under one team, with no minimum ad spend requirements.



Stat Social helps transform niche observations or anecdotes of a client's target, adjacent audiences behaviors and interests into potential ways in for brands. With this supportive data, it's easier to bring these creative ways into clients with more confidence — fast enough to capture an emergent shift effectively.



Sean's Cultural Moments Encyclopedia 2026 is a free, public resource created by strategist Sean Choi that catalogs thousands of cultural moments, holidays, and observances for brand strategy and campaign planning. Everything you ever wanted to know about important events and dates all in one place.



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