

Why small creators win

The money in creator marketing has moved to the small end. Nano and micro creators now take roughly half of US creator spend, winning for a real reason: smaller audiences engage more and trust more. But here is the part most brands miss. Once you commit to small creators, your problem stops being finding them and becomes running hundreds of them. That is an operations problem, the place where programs quietly break. Here is the public data, cited.

49.9%

SHARE OF US CREATOR SPEND GOING TO NANO AND MICRO CREATORS

eMarketer

1K-5K

EMARKETER'S FOLLOWER RANGE FOR A NANO CREATOR

Falls

ENGAGEMENT RATE AS FOLLOWER COUNT RISES, EVERY CREDIBLE DATASET

Trust

THE REASON SMALL CREATORS CONVERT, PLUS THE THING FAKES FAKE

Throughput

THE REAL LIMITING FACTOR ONCE YOU SCALE SMALL CREATORS

Headline figures: eMarketer (US creator spend by tier and tier definitions); Influencer Marketing Hub 2026 benchmark (the throughput point). Full sources listed below.

The shift, then the catch

First the shift. eMarketer puts nano and micro creators at 49.9% of US creator spend, up from under a fifth a few years ago. Brands moved down-market because small creators deliver what large ones cannot: higher engagement and audiences that treat a recommendation like advice from a friend rather than an ad.

Now the catch. One macro creator is one relationship to manage. Half your budget in nano and micro means dozens or hundreds of relationships, each needing intake, vetting, a brief, compliance, usage rights and performance tracking. The Influencer Marketing Hub's 2026 benchmark says it

directly: if your growth comes from nano, micro and UGC creators, your limiting factor is not finding creators, it is throughput. You have to industrialize the workflow faster than the creator count grows.

Five things the public data shows.

1 Half of US creator spend is now in the smallest tiers.

eMarketer reports nano and micro creators at 49.9% of US creator spend, roughly double their share from a few years ago. The center of gravity in creator marketing has moved to the small end. (Source: eMarketer.)

2 Engagement falls as follower count rises.

Across every credible dataset for years, engagement rate drops as audiences grow, with the highest engagement concentrated among the smallest creators. This is the core reason brands pay for small creators: more interaction per follower, not less. (Source: industry engagement benchmarks, consistent across sources.)

3 Small creators win on trust, not just engagement.

Smaller, tighter communities treat a creator's recommendation as closer to peer advice than advertising. That trust is the conversion mechanism, precisely what a bought or bot audience cannot reproduce. The value of a small creator is the realness of the relationship. (Source: industry analysis, consistent across sources.)

4 The eMarketer tiers, so everyone means the same thing.

eMarketer defines nano as 1,000 to 4,999 followers, micro as 5,000 to 19,999, mid-tier as 20,000 to 99,999, macro as 100,000 to 999,999 and mega as 1 million or more. Tier talk is useless without shared definitions, so these are the ones we use. (Source: eMarketer forecast methodology.)

5**Scaling small creators is an operations problem, not a discovery problem.**

The Influencer Marketing Hub's 2026 benchmark is blunt: if growth comes from nano, micro and UGC creators, the limiting factor is throughput, not finding creators. Intake, vetting, briefing, compliance, usage rights and performance tagging all have to scale faster than creator volume. (Source: Influencer Marketing Hub 2026 benchmark.)

Why this is really a verification problem

Here is where the operations problem and the verification problem are the same problem. When you ran three macro creators, you could vet each by hand. When you run two hundred nano creators, hand-vetting collapses, so most brands stop doing it. That is the exact moment fake and misrepresented audiences slip into the roster, because nobody is checking at that volume. The shift to small creators does not reduce the verification burden, it multiplies it.

So the throughput you have to build is not just briefing and payments. It is verification at scale: confirming, for every creator you add, that the followers are real, the engagement is genuine and, for a US brand, the audience is actually in the US, without a human checking each one by hand. Get that right and small creators are the best value in marketing. Skip it and you have industrialized a roster you never verified.

Methodology and what this report is

WHAT THIS IS

An analysis that combines public tier and spend data with the operations reality of running small creators, plus our read on what that means for verification. The framing is ours. The numbers are not.

SOURCE STANDARD

We cite eMarketer for tier definitions and spend share, plus the Influencer Marketing Hub benchmark for the throughput finding. We excluded the many per-tier engagement and rate figures published by creator-marketing vendors, which are not independently verifiable.

A NOTE ON ENGAGEMENT NUMBERS

We state the direction that engagement falls as follower count rises, because it is consistent across sources, rather than citing a specific per-tier percentage, because those vary widely between vendor datasets and are not reliably comparable.

WHAT WE DID NOT DO

We used no private account data, nor did we generate any figure ourselves. Every statistic traces to a named public source you can check.

Sources

1. eMarketer, January 2026 creator forecast and methodology (nano and micro creators at 49.9% of US creator spend; tier definitions: nano 1,000 to 4,999, micro 5,000 to 19,999, mid-tier 20,000 to 99,999, macro 100,000 to 999,999, mega 1 million or more).
2. Influencer Marketing Hub, 2026 Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report (growth from nano, micro and UGC creators makes throughput the limiting factor, requiring brands to industrialize intake, vetting, briefing, compliance, usage rights and performance tracking).
3. Industry engagement benchmarks, 2025 to 2026 (consistent finding that engagement rate decreases as follower count increases, with the highest engagement among the smallest creators).

Figures are reported as published by the sources above as of June 2026. Per-tier engagement and rate figures vary widely between vendor datasets, so we cite the consistent direction rather than a single contested number. This page links to no competitor and reproduces no third-party report; it summarizes published figures with attribution for industry reference.

Go deeper

Verification at scale is the throughput most brands skip, which is the theme of [the creator verification gap](#). For the full market picture, see [The Verified Creator Report 2026](#).



About this content

Editorial, verification and review standards for this page.

PUBLISHER

VERIFICATION STANDARDS

Published by **KALO IQ**, the US influencer marketing platform headquartered in Beverly Hills, California. Founded December 2015.

Every creator on the **KALO IQ database** is hand-verified by our 15-person verification team before being listed. We exclude bots, fake-follower accounts and creators outside the US.

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