

The Future of the

*Creator*

**Economy**

Report 2026



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# *Introduction:*

## The sound of scale

### **The creator economy continues to grow and with it, *content creation*.**

In 2023, the creator economy market size was \$250 billion. Next year, it is expected to have doubled and hit \$480 billion<sup>1</sup>. By 2033, it could reach \$1.3 trillion<sup>2</sup>.

This economy is showing no signs of slowing down, with 100 million creators globally expected by 2030<sup>3</sup>. And it's not just the number of creators that's growing, but the scale of content creation.

This is down to how AI is reshaping the landscape. New research from Epidemic Sound that surveys 3,000 creators in the UK and US shows near-universal adoption, with 94% already using AI. Meanwhile 89% of creators feel some pressure to use it to keep up.



<sup>1</sup> Goldman Sachs Research, 'The creator economy could approach half-a-trillion dollars by 2027'.

<sup>2</sup>Grand View Research, 'Creator Economy Market' report.

<sup>3</sup>Goldman Sachs Research, 'Creator Economy' report.

Its role is only set to grow, with 72% expecting to increase their AI usage in the next 12 months. Scaling output, streamlining workflows, and supporting production, insights, and distribution; however it's used, AI is enabling creators to produce more, move faster, and adapt content across formats and audiences.

But as AI enables scale, human creativity is becoming the key differentiator. And 75% see human-created content becoming a premium in the AI era.

This has created a new dynamic: **AI drives volume, while human creativity defines value.**

Included in this is the question of creative control. Because while adoption is widespread, confidence in workflows, trust, and licensing is lagging behind. With more than a third of creators concerned about their content being used to train AI without permission.

In this report, we explore these changes, offering benchmarks for AI use and showing how human creativity remains central in the AI era. Giving creators the insights and advice to protect their IP, their earnings, and to ensure they benefit from an unstoppable economy.



**Sara Börsvik**

Interim CEO, Epidemic Sound

“The creator economy is one of the most powerful forces shaping culture, commerce, and society. AI is expanding what creators can do at scale and our report shows that they are embracing it. It also shows that creators believe that long-term and sustainable value still comes from human creativity, audience connection, and control over the work they create. The opportunity ahead is extraordinary for those who can use technology to scale without losing what makes their work distinctive and trusted.”

# Key *Findings*

We surveyed 3,000 creators in the UK and US to understand what the future of the creator economy looks like.

**94%** of creators are **using AI**

**83%** say **human-made sound** drives stronger emotional connection

**79%** of creators say music and sound directly **impact engagement and revenue**

**75%** say **AI disclosure** is essential for trust

**75%** see human-created content **becoming a premium**

**73%** of creators say **unclear licensing** could limit future business opportunities

# Chapter One:

## How creators are using AI

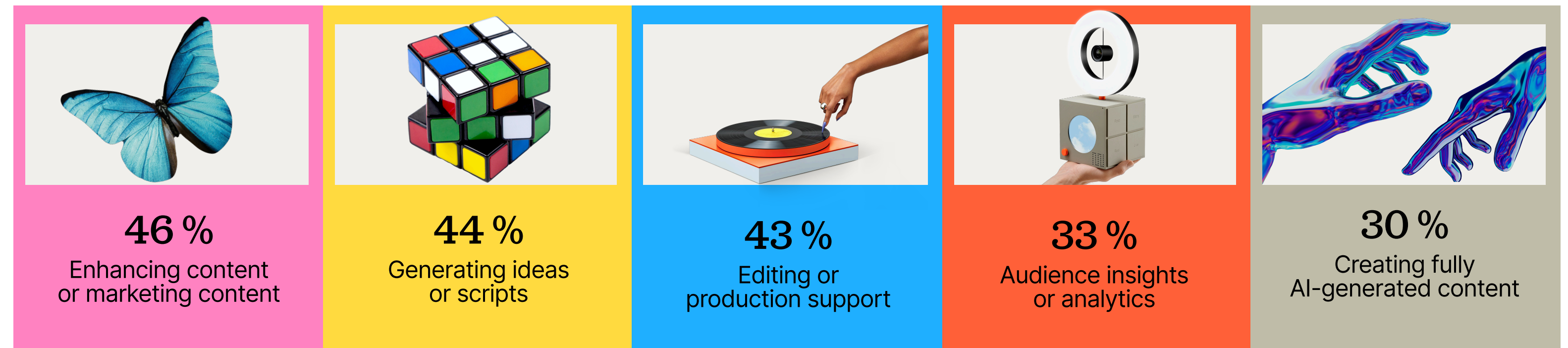
One of AI's strengths is making complex tasks and processes seamless and speedier. That's no different for creators who are leaning into it.

Creators are moving faster, expanding output, and experimenting more freely across formats and platforms. All so they can adapt in real time and create with greater flexibility.

But, crucially, this is a story of acceleration, not replacement.

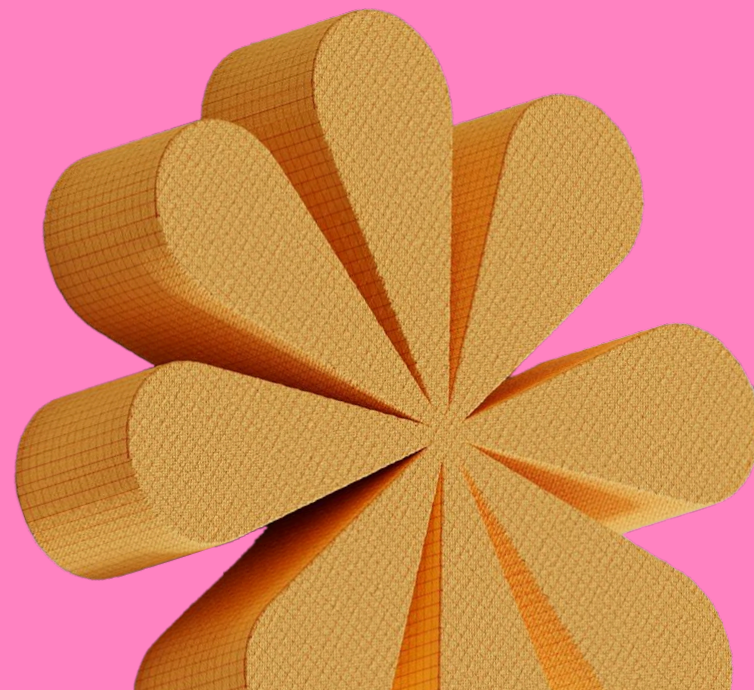
Creators are adopting AI across a wide range of tasks and expect this to increase further.

### 94% of creators already use AI tools



### 72% expect to increase AI usage in the next 12 months

“There’s been a real shift over the last couple of years. AI used to be the thing creators were nervous to talk about, now it’s one of the first things we discuss when planning what’s next. A great example is how creators are now using image and video generation tools to storyboard ideas and show clients a rough guide of how the content might look before they put the time in to actually produce it. It’s saved hours on the front end of every project and made the back and forth with brands so much smoother. More broadly, AI takes care of the repetitive parts of the workflow and lets creators focus on the bits that actually move the needle, the storytelling, the creative direction, and the relationship with their audience. The advice I give my talent is simple: use AI to give yourself more time to be the creative, not less.”




## Josh Saffer

Director, Connect Management  
& Manager, BrandonB



 @JoshSaffer | 4K subscribers

 @heyBrandonB | 16.2M subscribers

 @BrandonB | 4.9M followers



This increase is driven not only by improved output, but also by industry pressure to keep pace with growing demands for speed and scale.

Enhance, don't replace is the new creative contract, and most creators are using AI to support their work, not replace it.

This shift becomes more pronounced as creators grow, with larger creators showing higher confidence in AI tools and a greater emphasis on quality.

But this might shift as the next generation takes the wheel.

### How do creators feel about AI?

**89%** feel some *pressure* to use AI to keep up

**82%** say *AI enhances* creativity when used responsibly

### How are creators using AI?

**57%** use *workflow* AI

**28%** use fully *generative* AI

### The bigger the following, the more AI meets creative expectations

**60%** 10,000 followers or less

**69%** 10,001-50,000 followers

**71%** 50,001-500,000 followers

**74%** More than 500,000 followers

Bucking its digitally native label, younger creators aged 18-24 expresses more AI scepticism than older generations. While 75% of 35-44s expect to increase AI use in the next 12 months, only 57% of 18-24s expect the same.

**13%** of 18-24s don't use AI at all

**50%** of 18-24s agree AI increases opportunities

↑ **73%** of 35-44 year-olds

This could be because younger creators are simply not impressed with current AI output or how it enhances creativity.

Younger creators aged 18-24 are part of the first digital native generation, and is better placed to tell the slop from the good stuff.

The likelihood is that they are already AI native. Suggesting their hesitancy to use it is because they are looking for more than it currently offers.

**69%** of 35-44s say AI meets quality expectations



**49%** of 18-24s

**83%** of 35-44s say AI enhances creativity when used responsibly



**72%** of 18-24s agree

## *Chapter Two:*

# Human creativity is defining who stands out

It's not human creativity or AI. It's both.

In a world of AI slop and more content being distributed than ever before, distinctiveness becomes harder to achieve, meaning creativity, identity, and craft have become even more important.

### *Enter sound.*

Expectations around quality and originality are rising. And content with a direct link to human creativity resonates best.

This is why sound remains at the centre of the creative process, shaping how stories connect, perform, and resonate.

**83%** say human-made sound drives stronger *emotional connection*

**79%** of creators say music drives engagement and revenue

**78%** say it builds brand identity

**76%** say it can make or break content performance

“Music is one of the biggest storytelling tools in my videos. It sets the emotional tone before anything else, and plays a huge role in building a recognizable style and connection with my audience. The right song can completely change how a moment feels, which is why I’m really intentional about music choices and how they support the story I’m trying to tell.

I think audiences can tell when music is chosen with intention versus just filling space. My biggest advice to creators is to treat music as part of your voice and creative identity. There will always be tools to help speed up the process, but having a strong point of view and choosing music that genuinely reflects your style is what makes content feel memorable and authentic.”



**Kariza Santos**

Content Creator

@LifeofRiza



280K followers



1M subscribers



43K followers

To offer a premium in the AI era, it's clear what creators must do: double down on the human element of their content, and ensure that however much their workflow might change, their identity must shine through.

**75%** see human-created content becoming a premium

**81%** among larger creators (more than 500,000 followers)

**69%** among smaller creators (10,000 followers or less)



“As the internet gets flooded with automated content, people are naturally craving things that feel a little raw, a little personal, and most importantly, things that are undeniably human. Now finding your voice, your unique style, isn’t about having the most technically perfect video or piece of content; it’s about leaning into who you are, what you’re best at, what you find funny or interesting, and, above all else, your own point of view. That direct, authentic connection is what audiences value and are seeking most today.”



## Becca Farsace

Content Creator & Filmmaker

@BeccaFarsace



52K followers



203K subscribers



14K followers

# Chapter Three:

## Content creation is flourishing

Last year, 98% of creators said they had creative or business goals for the year ahead<sup>4</sup>. And it shows: today, they are more ambitious than ever.

When it comes to how they unlock their goals, creators are split between audience depth and reach.

### Creators are more intentional about long-term direction

**41%** say they want to build a sustainable independent business or grow into a media brand/creator studio

**27%** are focused on expanding their commercial opportunities through partnerships or launching products

Only **5%** describe themselves as still exploring their long-term goals

### How creators are prioritizing audiences

**37%** Building deep loyalty and engagement with a smaller audience

**33%** Reaching the widest possible audience

**28%** Trying to balance both

The majority of creators are actively building direct relationships with their audiences through channels such as newsletters and Discord — with bigger creators putting even more emphasis on this.

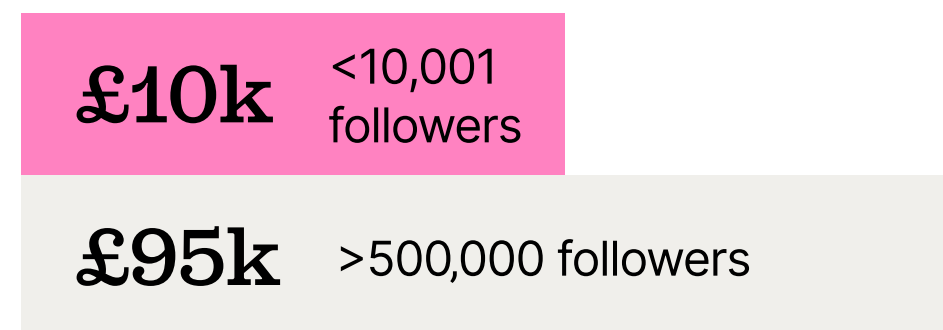
Meanwhile revenue continues to come from all directions, with the numbers growing year-on-year.

**Content creation is flourishing, and AI is helping creators keep pace.**

But getting the creative workflow balance right is only one challenge. For creators, they must also adapt to how their work and image is protected.

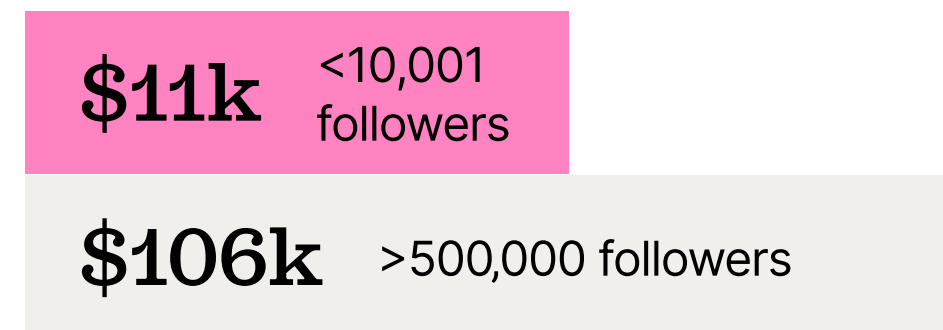
**Average annual earnings**

In the U.K.



vs.

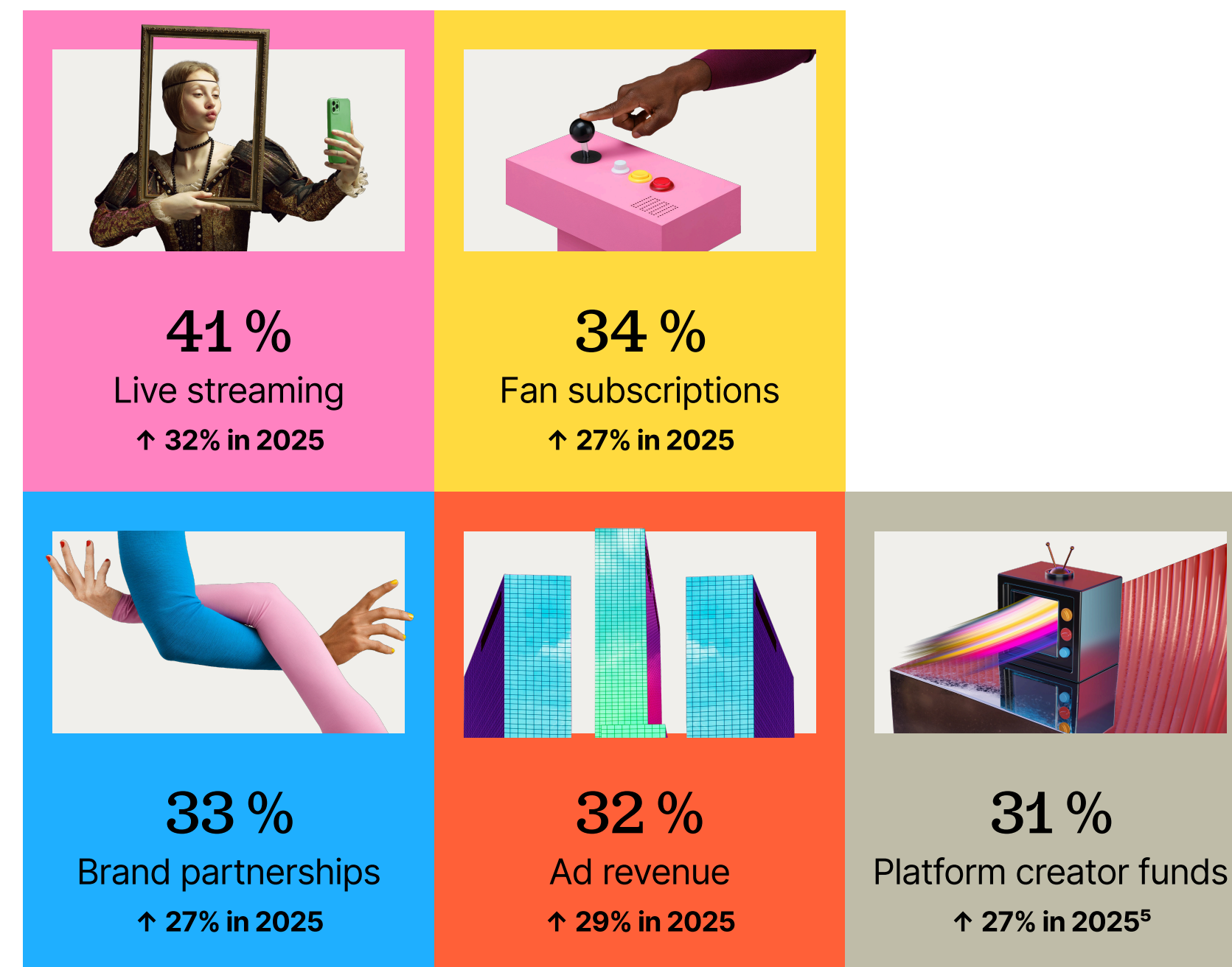
In the U.S.



**72% are actively developing owned audiences**

↑ 79% for those with 500k followers or more

**Top revenue streams for creators in 2026**



<sup>5</sup>The Future of the Creator Economy Report 2025

“I get messages every week from creators panicking because their views have dropped overnight. The algorithm shifted, and suddenly the thing they built their life on doesn’t work anymore. That’s why I always say: don’t build a business on social media. Use social media to build something you actually own.

I started my first business when I was homeless at 15. Nothing about that was glamorous, but it taught me one thing, the people who last are the ones who help others, not the ones chasing attention.

The creators I admire are the ones turning their audience into a community. Real products. Real businesses. Real help for real people. That’s what outlives any platform changes.

Creators need to stop asking “how do I get more views?” Start asking “how do I help more people?” That’s how you stop being just a creator and start building something that has lasting impact.”




## Simon Squibb

Content Creator and Founder of HelpBnk

@SimonSquibb

 5.6M followers

 2.4M subscribers

 8.6M followers

## *Chapter Four:*

# How creators can protect themselves in the age of AI

While AI allows scale and pace, creators must protect the trust they have built with audiences and the control they have over their brand and IP.

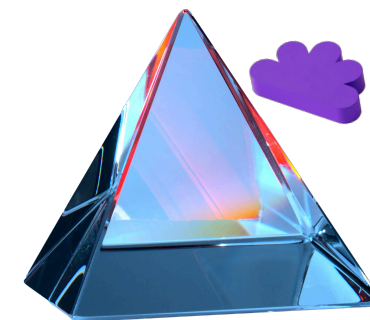
Creators recognize the need to become more informed, more proactive, and faster to adapt. Transparency is about more than disclosure. It's about preserving trust, authenticity, and audience connection.

Visibility into how content is created is increasingly shaping audience perception and engagement. And creators are setting the standards, defining what responsible use looks like in practice.

Attention is also shifting beyond disclosure to a deeper question: **control**.



**75%** of creators agree that disclosure about when AI is used in music, sound, or content is essential for trust



**72%** say transparency about AI involvement improves content performance

Creators are not only thinking about how they use AI, but how others are using it to copy their image, their likeness, and their brand. Especially as tools make this replication and redistribution easier at scale.

## 93% of creators say they associate AI with significant risks

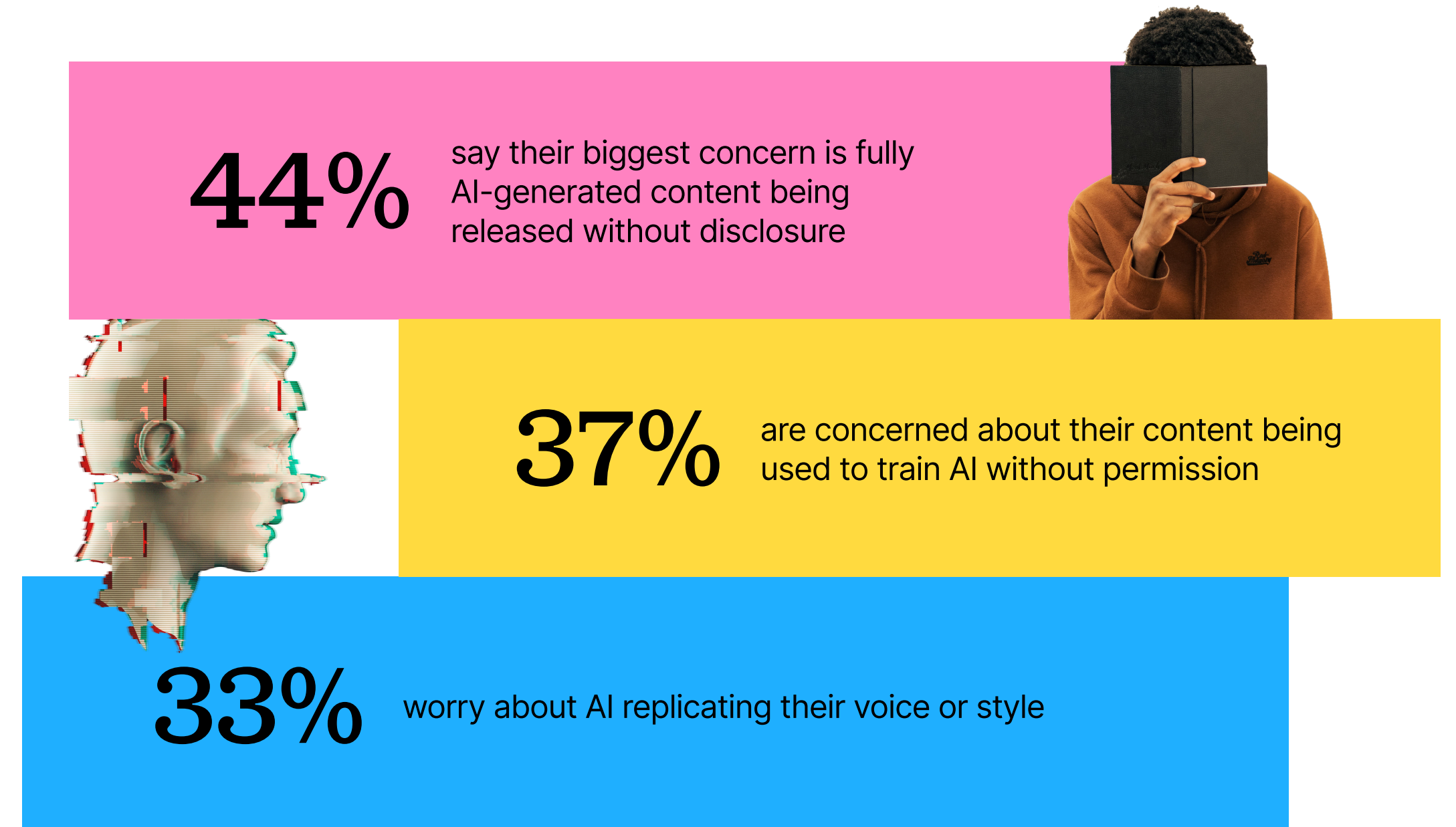
Much of this concern is tied to ownership and identity, meaning concerns about AI intensify as its capabilities edge closer to replicating the creators themselves.

AI avatars are a clear example. Platforms are simultaneously trying to protect creators (like YouTube's planned crackdown on deepfakes<sup>6</sup>) while enabling new formats (such as Shorts tools<sup>7</sup>) that let creators generate avatar-led content.

Creators are building audiences around a distinct identity, voice, and style. As AI makes these easier to copy, maintaining control over how they are used becomes critical.

<sup>6</sup>YouTube blog, 'The Next 20'.

<sup>7</sup>Tubefilter, 'YouTube just made a Shorts deepfake machine so creators don't have to be in their own videos'.



“The day a creator decides to sell their business is the day someone audits every license they ever signed. I have watched seven-figure exits collapse in diligence because a creator used a song without a proper license, or signed away their likeness too broadly, or let a contractor walk off with the IP. In an AI world where a creator's face can be cloned in under a minute and their voice in under a sentence, the only durable asset is the IP you can prove you own on paper. Content is King. IP is Queen. The Exit is the whole game. And the exit only happens if the IP underneath it holds up.”

## Tyler Chou

Founder & CEO of Tyler Chou  
Law for Creators



@thecreatorsattorney



21.6K followers



60.3K subscribers



18.6K followers

Creator expectations have changed. Visibility, ownership, and control are no longer optional. They have become essential to how content is created, used, and monetized.

But this isn't just on creators. **It's a structural problem.**

Licensing has become more complex and critical. But the level of understanding has not kept pace and knowledge of what type of licensing is needed is lagging.

**Only 13%** of creators say licensing or IP discipline is a key driver of success

Despite this impact, there's a clear gap between reality and behaviour. Licensing still isn't being treated as a priority.

**73%** of creators say unclear licensing could limit future business opportunities

**62%** have experienced copyright or licensing issues in the last 24 months

**53%** say these issues have already affected brand deals or opportunities




“Music is such an important part of storytelling on YouTube, but I definitely learned over time how important proper licensing is. Some of my older videos have since been demonetised because of the music I used (trendy, copyrighted songs), which is frustrating because videos can keep earning and building your brand for years.

My biggest advice is to think long-term from the beginning: use properly licensed music, be mindful of how you present yourself online, and only work with brands that feel super aligned. As a creator, your reputation really does compound, and one stupid moment can affect the opportunities and dream partnerships you’re able to build later on!”



## Maddie Borge

Content Creator, Founder & CEO

 @macerly | 1.1M subscribers

 @maddieborge | 400K followers

 @maddieborge | 439K followers

# *Conclusion:*

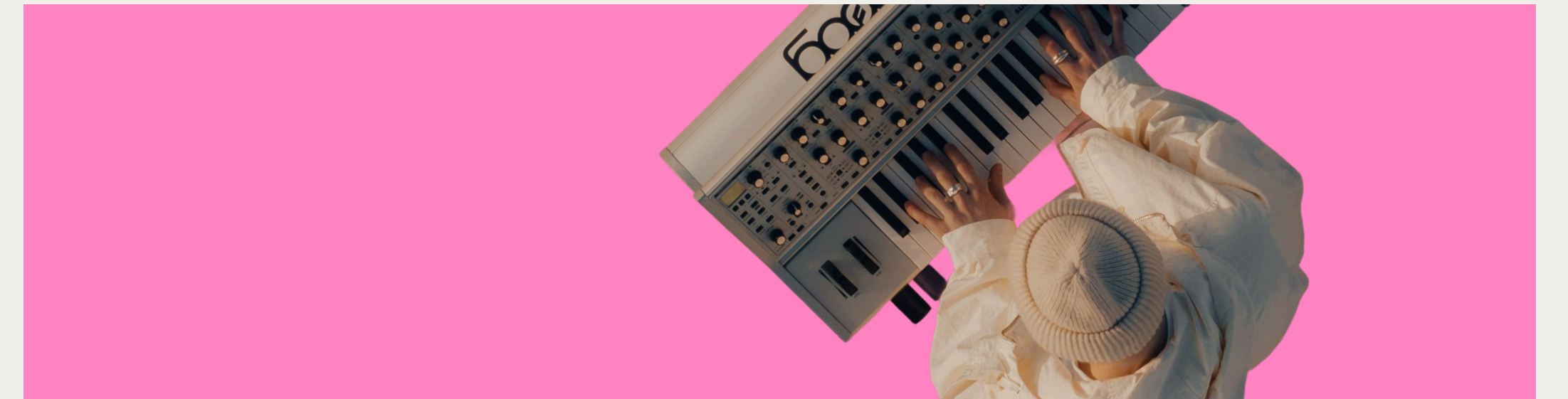
## Where human creativity goes next

Our fourth Future of the Creator Economy Report proves it: this space is not just growing, it is being fundamentally reshaped. AI is embedded, output is scaling, and the bar for what makes content worth watching has never been higher.

Today's creators are not just adapting to change. They are leading it. Building owned audiences, diversifying their businesses, and doubling down on human creativity.

But as AI makes it easier to replicate voices, styles, and identities, protecting IP and getting licensing right have become just as important as the content itself. The findings this year reveal a clear truth: in an era defined by scale and speed, authenticity, human connection, and creative control are becoming the most valuable currency in the creator economy.

At Epidemic Sound, we believe the future belongs to those who combine the power of AI with the irreplaceable depth of human creativity. That means not only building tools that support and enhance creative work, but providing the rights-cleared, worry-free foundation that allows creators and brands to scale with confidence. That is the vision we are building toward, together with the creators, brands, and artists shaping what comes next.



## Here are our *top tips* for creators in the year ahead

**1**

**Use AI to enhance, not replace, your creativity**

Integrate AI into workflows to improve efficiency, but prioritize human-made elements, especially sound, to retain emotional connection and audience engagement.

**2**

**Make transparency your advantage in the AI era**

Be clear about how and when AI is used. Openness strengthens audience trust and directly improves content performance.

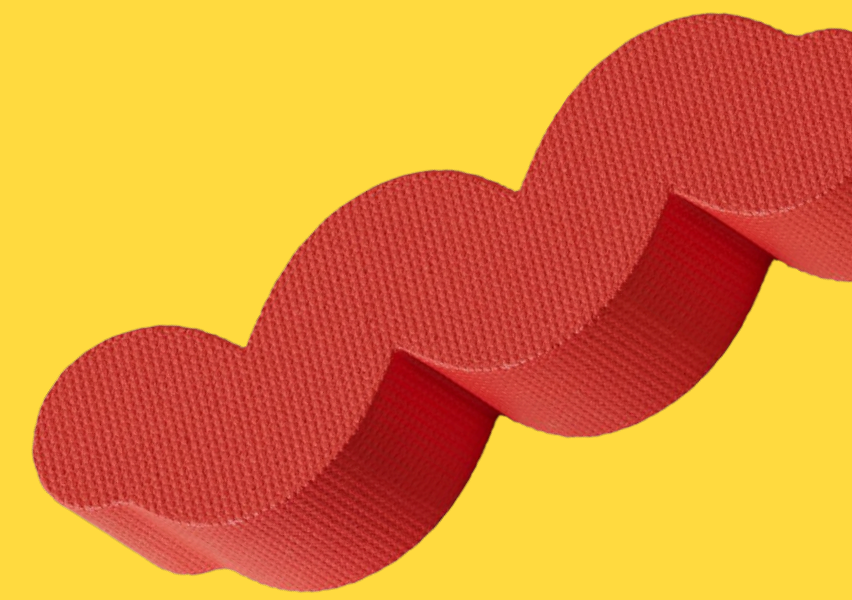
**3****Get ahead of licensing and ownership**

AI is making licensing and ownership more complex and more business-critical. So establish clear processes for rights, usage, and attribution early.

**4****Lead with what makes you, you**

Authenticity and human creativity have always been critical. In the age of AI, they are what will set you apart and keep audiences coming back.

# What Epidemic Sound *unlocks*



- ▶ A platform built for human-first AI, combining adaptive tools with high-quality music to scale content without losing creative impact. Designed to support the full storytelling workflow, from discovery to adaptation to final output.
- ▶ Transparency by design, giving creators and brands clarity over how sound is created, used, and how artists are compensated. Plus the confidence to publish at scale.
- ▶ A fully rights-cleared ecosystem that removes friction and enables content to scale safely and commercially. Including a clearly defined spectrum of choice, so creators can create and scale without legal ambiguity.

# Who is Epidemic *Sound*



Ready to find  
the perfect  
*soundtrack?*



[Get started now](#)

Epidemic Sound is the leading soundtracking platform for content creation, helping creators and brands take their content to the next level with world-class music, Hollywood-grade sound effects, and next generation AI-tools.

▶ **Over 3.5 billion**

average daily views of YouTube and TikTok videos soundtracked by Epidemic Sound music

▶ **Over 300,000**

tracks and sound effects

▶ **70%**

of the top 300 US YouTube channels use music from Epidemic Sound to elevate their content

▶ **Over 20 billion**

yearly streams

▶ **Nearly 200 hours**

of music downloaded per hour



## Methodology

### The Future of the Creator Economy Report 2026

The survey was conducted among 3,000 professional content creators aged 18+ across the UK and US. The interviews were conducted online by Sapio Research in March-April 2026 using an email invitation and an online survey.

Sapio Research is a B Corp Certified full-service market research agency. Sapio Research are an MRS Company Partner, and employs members of, and abides by, the MRS Code of Conduct and ESOMAR principles.

### The Future of the Creator Economy Report 2025

The research was conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 3,000 professional content creators aged 18+ across the UK and the US.

The data was collected between April-May 2025. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Censuswide is also a member of the British Polling Council.

