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Trends Report 2024

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Affiliate Summit West Creator Economy Live

Affiliate Summit West is the performance marketing industry's annual gathering for thousands of publishers, advertisers, networks, and technology suppliers worldwide, and the largest affiliate marketing event globally. Creator Economy Live aligns seamlessly with this event, emphasizing the integral integration of influencer and performance marketing.

The agendas of both ASW24 and CEL24 addressed the prevailing trends, insights, and innovative technologies influencing the affiliate marketing and creator landscape. To capture the events' zeitgeist, CJ deployed our many thought leaders to observe every session at ASW and CEL this year. Our objective: to distill the essential insights poised to shape the industry in 2024.

Here's CJ's roundup of the most important trends from these valuable affiliate and creator focused events.



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Angela Ballard

DIRECTOR, PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

Better Tracking: The Industry's Favorite Group Project

The question of how to create more accurate tracking in our industry was a key theme of ASW24. In discussions about the deprecation of third-party cookies, the handling of fraud, or measuring performance, **taking ownership** and **being accountable** came up time and again.

For affiliate marketers, taking ownership of tracking means you're accurately promoting brands, accurately paying partners, and accurately measuring performance. Accountability involves understanding how your tracking works, continually working to make it better, and working together with your partners toward these goals.

When it comes to successful marketing partnerships, **resilient and robust tracking** is as important as setting campaign goals and requires diligence from all parties to maintain and improve it.



Better Tracking: The Industry's Favorite Group Project

BRANDS, NETWORKS, & PARTNERS MUST EACH DO THEIR PART

In performance marketing, tracking is how we capture data that allows us to measure performance. While networks bear the responsibility to build the right tracking solutions and push for adoption, tracking should be part of ongoing partnership discussions as it can make or break the success of a partnership. For brands, taking ownership of how your tracking works is critical to growing your business in the channel and being a strong partner to your publishers. It's imperative that brands are well-versed on how their tracking works, understand what can potentially impact it, and commit to monitoring it closely. Publishers should do the same, and make sure they're using the most updated tracking solutions and link types recommended by each network.

ACT NOW TO PROTECT REVENUE

[Chrome is deprecating third-party cookies this year](#), following suit behind Safari and other major browsers, causing major publishers like [TopCashback](#) to flag this cookie loss as a massive revenue risk. Protecting revenue correlated to Chrome's third-party cookies is one of many reasons to make sure your tracking is resilient to browser changes like third-party cookie deprecation. Keeping up with the changes that are coming and working with your affiliate network to use their recommended best-in-class solutions is key.

BEST IN CLASS INTEGRATIONS

Having [a robust and accurate tracking integration](#) will allow you to better gauge what works and what doesn't, and to measure critical KPIs, like [incrementality](#). It's also important to understand the tracking and measurement landscape outside of performance marketing and take accountability for understanding how your organization measures the performance of all marketing channels. Understanding your internal analytics will allow you to better use data to prove the success of this channel. Tracking is critical to measurement, and measurement is critical to advocating for budgets and growth.





Owen Kauppila

ACCOUNT DIRECTOR, PUBLISHER DEVELOPMENT

Commerce Content That Builds Community

Within the buzzing walls of ASW24, a common thread quickly emerged across meetings, keynote conversations, and panel sessions: Commerce content is best poised for continued success when **meaningful connections** and **quality interactions** are the priority for both brands and publishers. Arguably one of the more transformative channels for affiliate revenue in recent years, commerce content continues to unlock unique opportunities to bridge the gap between brands and publishers' highly coveted audiences.

With micro-influencer campaigns, celebrity endorsements, and mass media publications reaching millions worldwide, commerce content showcases what's possible when authentic **community connections** take center stage.



Commerce Content That Builds Community

BUILD COMMUNITY INTERNALLY & EXTERNALLY

Numerous ASW24 session presenters touched on the importance of a 'community first' mindset as the core of successful commerce content efforts. Publishers have organized their internal departments and operations with a focus on cross-team collaboration, rather than competing for growth and success in a siloed manner. Externally, publishers and brands agreed that storytelling and establishing strong relationships with consumers and content creators leads to the most meaningful impact.

Authentic engagement with target audiences has helped build trust and loyalty across the channel and allowed organic interactions to thrive. Brands have continued to break down barriers and bolster community development through customized events and industry-centric networking opportunities. Bryan Reisberg of [Little Chonk](#) enthusiastically advocated for developing approachable content in which you address your audience as if they're family: "We wouldn't be here" without our consumers and we should listen closely to their feedback, following it like breadcrumbs through the purchase journey.

CONTENT THAT MEETS CUSTOMER NEEDS

The instinct to move quickly sometimes ends with low-quality outputs, but publishers emphasized that high-caliber content with an authentic, relatable human 'voice' connects most to their audiences. Individual consumers see hundreds of brand messages every day, and the 'quality over quantity' mantra continues to prove most valuable to meaningful conversions. To take things a step further—taking best-in-class commerce content and personalizing it to the wants and needs of consumers has shown to increase engagement within the channel overall. Brands have found that when publishers test, trial, or review their products, the final content has more substance and more insight, helping to guide consumers through the decision-making phase more effectively.

TRY, FAIL, AND TRY AGAIN

Agility in the commerce content space is critical to scaling business and growing revenue over time. For both publishers and brands, ensuring that teams are open to quick shifts in strategy allows for a higher level of testing and the ability to align with the most successful outcomes. It's okay to start small and grow your approach from there, but any expansion in commerce content strategy should remain highly data-centric and supported by historical performance. Due to commerce content's wide range of promotional traffic sources (desktop, mobile, social, email, etc.), diversifying partnerships and leaning on the vast data provided through affiliate networks helps teams to make educated, informed judgments on how to progress.





Lindsay Alesso

DIRECTOR, CJ INFLUENCE

Desperately Seeking the ROI of Creator Marketing

We're seeing social networks evolving into de facto search engines and consumer purchase decisions becoming more and more intertwined with viral social trends. While it's clear the industry recognizes the growing impact creators have on consumer behavior, marketers are still grappling with **how to measure their creator marketing** efforts to ensure they're driving return on investment.

To bridge the gap between consumer trends and internal measurement, marketing experts are moving to leverage multi-faceted plans that:

- Evaluate a creator's impact on consumer journeys across marketing channels
- Incorporate paid strategies
- Consider **user-generated content** (UGC) as a measurable value proposition
- Ensure proper alignment to KPIs through comprehensive campaign briefs and working with a **data-driven platform**



Key Takeaways

Desperately Seeking the ROI of Creator Marketing

SUCCESS STARTS WITH STRATEGY

There are many factors to the success of a campaign and marketers must ensure they're making informed, data-driven decisions at the very start of a campaign when defining a strategy. Consider consumer trends across media platforms, how ad types contribute to reaching KPIs and strategies for connecting with customers along their shopping journeys. There is also an element of bespoke design involved as the best strategic plans are ones that are tailored to fit an individual creator's strengths.

CREATORS HAVE IMPACT ACROSS THE PURCHASING JOURNEY

Marketers agree that a prohibitive view of creators—where they only contribute to top of funnel—is outdated. With influencers playing a role throughout the customer journey and making a considerable impact on a brand's marketing ecosystem, the need to measure and track influencer outcomes has never been greater. While some brands are using Media Mix Modeling/Multi-Touch Attribution and affiliate technologies, others are facing challenges with accurate data collection and should consider [platform solutions](#) to capture end-to-end results.

CONSIDER THE ROLE OF UGC & PAID MEDIA

When tasked with finding budget to scale influencer programs many look to user generated content (UGC) which serves as a cost-effective way to generate creative when compared to alternative production methods. Not only are brands like [Mattel](#) and [Brooklinen](#) finding UGC cost-effective, but many agreed that it was more successful in owned and paid channels than in-house creative. Paid media also remains a critical factor to driving success against measurable KPIs in both commerce and brand outcomes and should be contemplated when building strategies and defining campaign budgets.

THE ONUS FOR CONVERSION SITS WITH BRANDS

When sales or actions are the primary objective, brands will see better outcomes when they take the time to consider what tools they can provide creators to facilitate conversion. Consider compelling or timebound CTAs, [clickless tracking](#), and evaluating the on-site conversion experience for the consumer when building creator briefs and defining the path to purchase.





Alexander Higson

SENIOR DIRECTOR, CJ LEADS

Lead Gen: Deep into the Marketing Funnel

As the cookie deprecation era unfolds, a gold rush of **first-party data** is emerging, particularly through lead gen campaigns. While lead generation is generally used as a strategic method to reach a target audience at the top of the marketing funnel, it's more important than ever for marketers to understand the entire **journey to conversion** and make the first contact as relevant as possible. In a world in which phone calls from "unknown number" go unanswered, marketers are striving to prove value to consumers at the point of entry or sign-up. In modern lead gen, deeper funnel engagement is being leveraged for strategic and **personalized** messaging, as well as exploring varied conversion paths in the customer journey such as social media, SMS, and direct mail.



Lead Gen: Deep into the Marketing Funnel

A FAIR VALUE PROPOSITION FOR CONSUMERS

Within lead gen's evolving landscape, including new [FCC consent regulations](#), businesses that rely on leads to fuel customer pipelines are doubling down on offering value in exchange for a customer email or phone number. For B2B brands, this takes the form of market-specific data or insights, and for a B2C customer a time-sensitive discount or promotion. The underlying concept is the same—performance improves when there's a fair exchange between businesses and consumers—and the content needs to reflect whatever the user signed-up for at the point of entry. In lead gen today, businesses need to consider: What do you offer that's valuable enough for a site visitor to give you a piece of information?

PERSONALIZATION IN DEEP FUNNEL ENGAGEMENT

Deep funnel personalization has become a key driver for conversion success through strategic messaging. Utilizing CRM systems and [optimization technologies](#), brands can now track on-site experiences to identify distractions that prevent conversion and then use that data to improve message variety, value proposition, and timing. Understanding the entire journey to conversion—beyond top-of-funnel lead strategies—should lead to improvements in marketing spend and lead quality.

CHANNEL DIVERSITY BOOSTS CONVERSIONS

Exploring newer channels, like TikTok, SMS, and YouTube has allowed marketers to continue to meet potential customers in the channels they find engaging and diversify the number of channels delivering converting leads. It's important to know where an intended audience demographic can be found. For example, direct mail, which is often underestimated, remains a powerful tool when aligned with the demographic profile. Evaluating performance data, and then refining and adapting your strategy are key as marketing lead gen channels can each play a different role along the path toward conversion.





Shatay Trigère
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

The Future of Marketing is Blended

Affiliate, or partnership marketing, is leaving its insular space to enable and drive monetization and measurement in increasingly blended budgets and programs that drive stronger **integrated marketing power and trusted results**. Having flexed our relationship-building for 25+ years, the affiliate industry is poised to assume a greater role in meeting cross-organizational marketing goals. CMOs continue to desire one “holistic view” of their marketing spend across the brand and customer engagement map. Getting closer to the elusive one view using partnership media fuels a transparent customer experience, cross-channel tracking, and areas for efficiency gain, resulting in the **ability to measure incremental revenue** and adjust the marketing mix over time.

Partnership media, with its vast and diverse network and tried and true technology can have a more **prominent voice and role to play** from performance marketing to brand marketing (and back again!) grounded in a media and tech platform that is trusted to perform across the customer journey and across channels. Some of the ways we’re seeing affiliate manifest beyond are in hot, new players like partnership-enabled retail media, shoppable TV, and AI-generated personalized content delivered at immense scale.



Key Takeaways

The Future of Marketing is Blended

INTEGRATED MARKETING POWER

The shift to merge brand and performance budgets has been growing, with publishers like CNN and CNET noting the increased integration of display with affiliate marketing, influencer collaborations with affiliate strategies, and sponsored content utilizing affiliate links for monetization. Marketers should consider the benefit of having more of their spend "powered by affiliate/partnership marketing," to keep the customer journey in full view, reach across and amplify various channels, and emphasize trackability, measurability, and turnkey solutions.

MEASURABILITY + SOLUTIONS = CHANNEL EXPANSION

Emphasizing the [measurement of incrementality](#) captures the attention of CMOs, as the domains of attribution, marketing mix, and general trust in media effectiveness remain elusive. The ability to measure incremental revenue, especially in large-scale or blended partnership programs, continues to move away from a reliance on the last click and returns the focus to the influence of media and its tangible outcomes. It's crucial to recognize that partnership media provides unique, diverse, and ever evolving reach at an immense scale, with the added benefits of being trackable and measurable in a truly incremental manner across the full customer journey.

PREDICTIONS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Fueled by publisher innovation, affiliates will be the connector for multimodal, cross-organizational marketing: Traditional affiliate, content, creators, AND retail media (on-site and off-site) will monetize even more channels to create efficient monetization at a global scale via the vast partnership-based media network.

Adoption of shoppable TV content will grow, monetized by affiliate/partnership marketing. Watching a favorite show and being able to buy an actor's outfit in two clicks, while continuing to enjoy the show, will be very 2024.

AI, in its many forms will fuel automation, increase efficiency, and reduce compliance and quality issues for the channel, while helping us create many more types and larger volume of content. AI will add value to our expanding world and the human experience.





Brent Scott
DIRECTOR, CJ INFLUENCE

Influencers as AOR: Shaping the Future of Brand Messaging

In the evolving landscape of marketing where trust in brands is low, influencers play a crucial role: 82% of consumers trust what influencers say about brands more than what those same brands say about themselves. Brands can leverage influencers' **"trust equity"** to connect with skeptical audiences—some forward-thinking marketers even think of influencers as the new **Agency of Record (AOR)**. However, authenticity is paramount, and marketers must adapt their strategies to align with creators' values.

Marketers looking to invest in creators to build brand trust should:

- Find the **right fit of influencers** whose values, interest, and target audience align with the brand
- Lean into authenticity with content strategies
- Deepen their creator relationships



Key Takeaways

Influencers as AOR: Shaping the Future of Brand Messaging

ALIGNING INFLUENCERS WITH THE BRAND

Influencers are more protective than ever of their own personal brands, and more selective with the brands they align themselves with. The best creators, those with the highest degree of influence over their followers, prioritize the long-term value of their credibility and authenticity over a paycheck from a brand that doesn't align with their personal values. Brands face their own challenge of maintaining authenticity and trust. Savvy brands embrace an open-minded approach to content creation and partnership dynamics. By adapting to the changing landscape and working collaboratively with influencers, brands can build powerful connections and maintain the flow of trust equity with their target audiences.

LEAN INTO AUTHENTICITY WITH CONTENT STRATEGIES

Audiences favor raw, transparent, and relatable content from influencers over polished brand content. Forward-thinking marketers recognize influencers as the new Agency of Record (AOR) and prefer their authentic, low-fi content. At the same time, the quality gap between influencer and agency-produced content is narrowing. In 2024, even "low-fi" content is professional content. Creator-generated content consistently outperforms brand-produced content, emphasizing the need for brands to embrace authenticity in messaging.

DEEPEN CREATOR RELATIONSHIPS

In response to the authenticity demand, some brands extend influencer partnerships beyond content creation, involving influencers in product and branding decisions. An example is [Victoria's Secret](#) partnering with [Remi Bader](#), a size-inclusivity advocate, not just for content creation but as a strategic partner. This deeper involvement enhances the authenticity and integrity of the collaborations. Brands must be open to challenging influencer partnership norms and adapting to the evolving dynamics of the creator economy. In sum, if you want your influencer partnerships to be unquestionably authentic, you need to give your partners a true seat at the brand table.





Kristi Romero
VP, CLIENT DEVELOPMENT

Telling the FULL story of Affiliate in the Marketing Mix

A forthcoming industry study by Forrester reveals a significant insight among senior marketing executives: While 92% of senior marketers reported that the affiliate channel is “effective,” only 7% expect to prioritize affiliate for budget allocation. To bridge this gap, our industry needs to better educate the C-suite on the affiliate channel’s ability to scale and support a brand’s full-funnel performance marketing strategy alongside other paid channels.

Three key aspects emerged in the discussions at ASW as critical to executing a cohesive and effective full-funnel performance marketing strategy: **measurement, collaboration, and investment**. Navigating these fundamentals effectively will unlock additional opportunities for brands to engage with shoppers in meaningful ways as they fluctuate between awareness and purchase in the increasingly competitive ecommerce landscape.



Telling the FULL story of Affiliate in the Marketing Mix

EFFECTIVE CROSS-CHANNEL MEASUREMENT IS ESSENTIAL

The demand for demonstrating the full impact of marketing campaigns has never been stronger. Brands need to understand how every single marketing channel tactic contributes to consumers' propensity to convert by looking at full-funnel KPIs, from upper funnel engagement and impressions through to conversion (or acquisition). Connecting these tactics from engagement to outcome by leveraging data, such as CJ's [Cross Channel Customer Journey analysis](#), allows marketers to see cross channel and consumer journey insights.

Ironically, measurement models often do a poor job of representing the affiliate channel's contribution to the marketing mix, including many mixed media models and [GA4](#). This is not conducive to the full-funnel measurement that marketers seek and will continue to be a challenge for the affiliate industry in 2024.

COLLABORATE ACROSS CHANNELS

Effective collaboration across an organization not only ensures consistent brand messaging and engagement with users, but also unlocks opportunities for cross-channel learnings and the introduction of new collaboration opportunities. We're starting to see this through PR agencies (like [LaRue PR](#) and [Dreamday](#)) actively promoting "Performance PR" as marketing that combines the storytelling of PR with affiliate marketing's transparency and tracking. This channel collaboration is introducing new buyer audiences within organizations (i.e., the PR teams and social teams) to the affiliate channel and [unlocking additional performance metrics](#) for PR to demonstrate their value beyond engagement metrics.

MAXIMIZE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

With accurate full-funnel measurement and increased cross-channel collaboration, brands are setting themselves up to invest in tactics that will most effectively support their business KPIs and maximize efficiency across their total marketing spend. This leads to better business performance and a stronger narrative for incremental investment among channel leads when communicating with CMOs and executive leaders within the organization.





Marin Sarbulescu

VP, ENGINEERING

The Rise of GenAI in Multimodal Content Generation

In the past year, there's been a surge in user-friendly AI tools that focus on **creating, customizing, and automating** content. Publishers and advertisers could make personalized content on a large scale without significant costs, maintaining quality and publishing capabilities. Generative AI, initially limited to text, has now broadened its scope to create multimodal content, including dynamic stories and visually appealing multimedia.

These advanced systems can now tailor content with exceptional precision. **Hyper-personalized content** experiences, where generative AI uses complex algorithms to understand individual preferences, is on the rise. This shift towards customization goes beyond just text, affecting various media formats and changing how users interact with information.

Looking ahead to 2024 and beyond, we anticipate a consolidation of these advancements, leading to comprehensive solutions that provide end-to-end AI-driven content management.



The Rise of GenAI in Multimodal Content Generation

AI THAT KNOWS YOUR CUSTOMERS

Creating top-notch, unique content is a challenging job that demands full-time dedication. AI has become a valuable partner in this task, capable of producing diverse and engaging content with minimal input. It achieves this by learning from simple prompts or extracting knowledge from existing copy, stock images, or music, resulting in the creation of rich and nuanced materials. AI doesn't stop there; it also excels in improving existing content, enhancing delivery methods, and boosting conversion rates. The ability of AI to [seamlessly turn written content into natural speech](#) or mimic your voice opens new possibilities for innovative advertising and social media content creation. Looking ahead to 2024, AI is expected to generate revenue for marketers by delivering the right message at precisely the right moment, amplifying the impact of AI-generated content.

"AUTHENTIC" DIGITAL CLONES

Content customization and personalization can expand audiences, but in a landscape marked by diversity in ethnicity, cultures, and languages, creating unique content that caters to each can be a challenge. GenAI that mimics voice and synchronizes lip movements seamlessly to create [dynamic digital personas](#) may present solutions—language barriers are no longer barriers when AI can translate and dub videos to create multi-language content at scale. This inevitably will lead to questions about authenticity. In the meantime, marketers in this brave new world will be creating the illusion of delivering fresh content with each iteration.

SCALING CONTENT PRODUCTION

Optimizing content for various platforms to make it easily accessible and engaging for audiences is the next practical way marketers will harness AI. For example, you can now turn any content into a podcast, condense complex reports into actionable takeaways and, with a tool like [Opus Clip](#), you can easily repurpose long-form videos into shorter, more digestible, SEO-optimized clips. When applied to content production, GenAI will play an important role in solving content scalability issues for the industry.





From helping to invent the affiliate industry, to performance marketing and what comes next, we've earned a reputation for maintaining the largest, most reliable partnership-based platform and sterling service with a personal touch. Founded in Santa Barbara, California in 1998, CJ (formerly Commission Junction), leads the industry as the most established name in global performance marketing, specializing in affiliate marketing technology.

We're the platform of choice for driving profitable growth for over 3,800 global brands around the world across all verticals including retail, travel, finance, and network & home services. Our technology powers a partnership ecosystem where publishers and brands engage billions of consumers worldwide.

As part of Publicis Groupe, aligned with Publicis Media, we leverage unparalleled data, technology, and strategic expertise to bring a truly customer-centric approach to performance marketing. In an industry with much uncharted territory, trust a steady hand.

CJ AFFILIATE

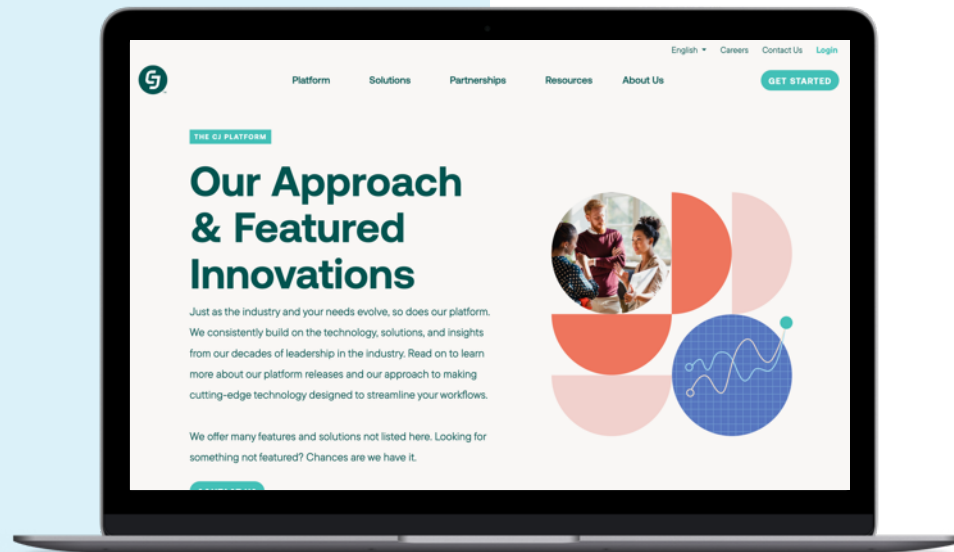
The world's largest affiliate marketing solution drives \$16B+ in annual sales by facilitating partnerships for publishers and brands across all verticals, including Retail, Fashion, Travel, Finance, B2B, Software, Home and Garden, and more.

CJ LEADS

CJ Leads has raised the bar for lead generation worldwide, consistently delivering unparalleled transparency, scale, and compliance. We help hundreds of brands drive millions of leads, with response rates 20+% above industry standards.

CJ INFLUENCE

CJ Influence is changing the face of creator-led marketing by uniting social and performance marketing best practices and measurement. We help hundreds of brands deliver impact at the intersection of branding and performance with a network of 25M+ global influencers.



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