

Are brand-led creator communities the next evolution of influencer marketing?

Article

To form deeper, more authentic relationships with consumers, brands like Claire's and Pacsun are launching their own creator communities to help them produce content, provide product

inspiration, and advise on marketing campaigns.

“Brands are looking to deepen relationships with influencers and creators to go beyond social posts,” said Keith Bendes, vice president strategy and partnerships at influencer marketing company Linqia. “This includes creative consulting, product testing, industry insight sourcing, and more.”

Young at heart: In tandem with its spring collection, Claire’s has launched The Collab, a group of rotating Gen Zalphas (born on the cusp of [Gen Z](#) and [Gen Alpha](#)) who will influence Claire’s content, communications, and activations.

- Members of the first iteration of The Collab range from 7-year-old Ayla Palmer, creator and designer of the AY fashion line, to 17-year-old Kaylee Foxhoven, a youth soccer player.
- Throughout the year, The Collab members will help style Claire’s photo shoots, create content, host events, and share their stories, with each member lending their own talents.
- For example, up-and-coming fashion designer Ashlyn So wears her own design in campaign photos while Maggie Sophie Brown, co-founder of the Pad Project and producer of an Academy Award-winning documentary, contributed to behind-the-scenes photography and film.

Getting creative: Pacsun has launched The Pacsun Collective, which calls on the brand’s community of content creators, photographers, videographers, stylists, designers, musicians, and digital artists to join its creative process and help shape campaigns and merchandise.

- Alongside Pacsun’s in-house creative team, the group helped co-create the retailer’s spring/summer 2024 campaign.
- The group will also help co-create store windows, events, and social media content.
- “Social is the primary catalyst of culture these days, and culture determines a brand’s relevance,” said Bendes. “So brands are quickly realizing that the people who understand social the most are the most valuable resources, hence these types of partnerships.”

The next phase: These new creator-led groups show how [influencer marketing](#) is evolving as brands recognize the many ways that creators can be leveraged, said Bendes.

“Many brands are creating different ‘buckets’ that their creators live within, some prioritizing them as distribution channels given their reach, some as production replacement given their

content skills, and some as consultative given their understanding of the category and core consumer.”

Bendes believes this trend will accelerate in the coming year as brands ramp up their creator-focused strategies.

- Over half (51%) of US brands and agencies said they would be somewhat or significantly more focused on creator/influencer ads and partnerships in 2024, per a November 2023 report from the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB).
- 44% of US advertisers expect to increase their investment in creator content in 2024, also per the IAB.

Creator collaborations could be especially helpful to brands that want to connect with younger consumers and stay on trend.

- Over half (52%) of US adults ages 18 to 28 say their purchase decisions are influenced by social media influencers somewhat or very often, according to a January 2024 YouGov survey.
- 31% of US Gen Z consumers say they engage with influencer marketing/brand collaborations at least once a week, per November 2023 data from Nfinite.
- “These groups offer brands an efficient way to find out about cultural trends, especially when it comes to beauty and fashion,” said Cristina Lawrence, executive vice president, content and consumer experience at marketing agency Razorfish. “Now you have a mechanism that you’ve built where you’re able to be more predictive and hear from your key consumers on the ground.”

This was originally featured in the Retail Daily newsletter. For more retail insights, statistics, and trends, [subscribe here](#).