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Everyone Is Oprah

How cultural cache became free, distribution became rented, and conversion became the whole game.

Every empire needed three things. Today only one is still hard to get.

	OPRAH	MARTHA	GAINESES	TODAY'S CREATOR
CULTURAL AUTHORITY	25 yrs syndicated talk show	Cookbook, column, magazine, network	HGTV, 8-year build	**FREE (table stakes)**
OWNED DISTRIBUTION	Harpo Productions (kept the IP)	MSLO — NYSE 1999 IPO, $1.73B	Magnolia Network + real estate	**RENTED (YouTube, TikTok, Meta)**
PROVEN CONVERSION	Book Club → print runs reordered	Kmart contract, SI Swimsuit brand	Target retail, Magnolia hotel	**UNCLAIMED (the whole game)**

Note: Oprah signed a multi-year Amazon licensing deal in April 2026 — still building the same playbook 25 years in.

SO WHAT FOR MARKETERS

The empire-building playbook hasn't changed. What's changed is which parts are free and which parts are up for grabs.

[1] NYT · Apr 27 2026 (Oprah/Amazon) [2] Washington Post archive · Oct 20 1999 (MSLO IPO)

The market flooded at the low end. Money keeps chasing it anyway.

200M+

creators worldwide, up from ~50M in 2020

≈ 50M professional · 50% earn < $15K/yr · only 4% clear $100K/yr[3]

$480B

creator economy TAM projected by 2027

Goldman Sachs Research, 2023 report[1]

97% of CMOs plan to increase creator budgets in 2026 — naming creators their top investment priority.[2]

The differentiator (cultural authority) has become table stakes. Something else has to matter more. Nobody has said what.

SO WHAT FOR MARKETERS

Cultural authority is no longer a moat. It's a floor. Marketers keep pouring money at the moat.

[1] Goldman Sachs Research (2023) [2] LTK / Northwestern CMO survey (2025) [3] LTK Creator Journey report (2024)

The platforms won last decade. The creators are renting from them.

$60B+
YouTube 2025 revenue
(first-ever disclosure)

$70B
paid to creators
over last 3 years[1]

$15.82B
TikTok Shop US GMV
+108% YoY[2]

$3B
Meta payouts to creators
2025, +35% YoY[3]

THE CREATOR'S STACK — WHAT THEY OWN VS WHAT THEY RENT

CONTENT	AUDIENCE DATA	ALGORITHM	AD STACK	SHOPPING
OWNED BY: The creator	OWNED BY: Platform	OWNED BY: Platform	OWNED BY: Platform	OWNED BY: Platform

The creator owns the content. Everything else is rented. Change the recommendation algorithm on Tuesday, the empire is gone Friday.

SO WHAT FOR MARKETERS

Reach is real. Reach is cheap. The distribution premium Oprah, Martha and the Gaineses had to build is now table stakes — and it isn't the creator's.

[1] Alphabet Q4 2025 earnings [2] TikTok Shop US 2025 (Digiday reporting) [3] Meta annual creator report

The pattern is already visible — if you know what to look for.

ALEX COOPER

Unwell Network

Podcast → media network + creative agency + beverage line.
SiriusXM $125M deal.

Unwell Creative Agency has closed a Google partnership.

KELCE BROTHERS

New Heights

$100M+ Amazon/Wondery deal.

Bought into Garage Beer (Jun 2024). $200M valuation in 2025 institutional round.

SMARTLESS

Bateman · Hayes · Arnett

Podcast → wireless carrier.

SmartLess Mobile launched Jun 2025 as an MVNO on T-Mobile. $15–$30/month plans.

MRBEAST

Beast Industries

CPG holding co. subsidizing content.

Feastables 2024: $250M rev, $20M profit.
Beast Industries valued $5.2B (late 2025).

MEL ROBBINS

Personal-brand ecosystem

11M weekly listeners across 194 countries. Let Them Theory: 10M copies.

SiriusXM ad partner. Coaching, licensing, corporate speaking.

MEL ROBBINS, ON WHAT CREATORS ACTUALLY OWN:

"The only thing you actually own is your newsletter list. If something were to happen with the platforms, there's so much interesting tech, you just relaunch it yourself using different tech."

These are messy in-flight builds, not victory laps. Cooper's Unwell shed 20+ staff and cancelled shows in 2025-2026. Beast Industries had public workplace culture issues. That's the point — the ones who solve the operational + measurement layers are the ones who make it stick.

SO WHAT FOR MARKETERS

Different verticals, different structures, same instinct: own the layer between attention and commerce.

Sources: Digiday, NYT, Bloomberg, Variety, Ad Age — details on Slide 12

The content isn't the business. The content is the marketing engine for something else that is.

FEASTABLES · 2024

$250M

revenue

$20M

profit

MRBEAST CONTENT · 2024

$246M

revenue

-$80M

loss

BEAST INDUSTRIES · LATE 2025 VALUATION: $5.2 BILLION

CEO Jeff Housenbold, former SoftBank Vision Fund managing partner. Compare: MSLO first-day market cap 10/19/1999 was $1.73B. Different era, same shape.

SO WHAT FOR MARKETERS

The chocolate subsidizes the videos. Beast Industries is building the intelligence layer nobody else is building.

Feastables/Beast financials via public reporting (Anish Moonka / Bloomberg / Yahoo Finance) · MSLO IPO: Washington Post Oct 20 1999

Everyone is building the layer creators should own.

CONSUMER-FACING INFRASTRUCTURE

LTK

$6B annual retail sales · 150K+ creators · 7,000 retailers

SHOPMY

$1B+ annual sales · $1.5B valuation (Oct 2025 raise)

COLLECTIVE VOICE

Wound down December 2025 after serving 140K creators, 22K brands.

AGENCY-SIDE OPERATIONAL LAYER

ACCENTURE SONG / WHALAR

$500M+ (July 2026) · "largest creator economy transaction"

PUBLICIS / INFLUENTIAL

2024 acquisition, similar order of magnitude.

BRYAN YASKO, MANAGING DIRECTOR, ACCENTURE SONG:

"Accenture didn't buy Whalar for its creator relationships. It bought the operational layer that makes those relationships tangible and sellable — the sourcing, vetting and campaign execution that turns individual creators into something an advertiser can plan and budget around."

SO WHAT FOR MARKETERS

The market is consolidating with incumbents on both sides. Creators use this infrastructure. They don't own it. That's the fight.

Digiday · Jul 20 2026 (Accenture/Whalar) · Forbes / PR Newswire · Nov 2025 (ShopMy) · Sacra report (Collective Voice)

The industry has decided creators are performance media.

KENNY GOLD · CHIEF CREATOR OFFICER, EDELMAN · JULY 2026

"We are still not bringing in creators early enough."

"We are still treating them like media channels."

THE ONE SPECIFIC THING CREATORS CAN PROVE: TRUST TRANSFER

62%

of consumers who already trust a food/lifestyle influencer say that influencer's endorsement would make them trust or consider trusting a food company they otherwise distrust.
(Financial services parallel: 57%.)

SO WHAT FOR MARKETERS

That's a real, decision-relevant number. It's also not what the industry is selling.

Campaign US · July 6 2026 (Kenny Gold interview) · Edelman 2026 Trust Barometer, p. 34 (base: 48% of general population trust a food/lifestyle influencer they follow)

The numbers say the category calling itself performance is measuring the wrong thing.

60% of brands say measuring ROI is their #1 challenge with influencer campaigns

50% of brands cannot prove ROI on creator spend at all

2/3 of TikTok creator selection is driven by follower count alone

HOW MARKETERS ACTUALLY MEASURE CREATOR SUCCESS · RANKED

1 Engagement & clicks

2 Content type

3 Views & reach

4 Direct sales

SO WHAT FOR MARKETERS

The category calling itself performance media ranks sales last. This isn't performance media. This is reach media with a new coat of paint.

Influencer Marketing Hub Benchmark Report 2025 (n = 1,000+ brand-side marketers)

No single data source proves a creator's business impact. The composite does.

PLATFORM DATA

Views, watch time, engagement — the ceiling of what most creators share.

AFFILIATE & ATTRIBUTION

LTK, ShopMy, promo codes — click-to-purchase, the first real signal.

COMMUNITY DATA

Email, Discord, storefront — first-party signal from owned audience.

BRAND-SIDE DATA

Traffic, search lift, sales lift — what the brand shares back.

COMPOSITE OUTPUT

A lift number the creator can hand to a brand.

Decision-ready. Sales-attributable. Defensible in front of a CFO. What Oprah's producers could hand a publisher the week after a book club episode — and what today's creator can't yet hand to a brand.

SO WHAT FOR MARKETERS

This is the seat nobody has filled. Whoever builds the composite decides who captures value in the next decade of the creator economy.

Cultural authority is free.
Distribution is rented.
Conversion is up for grabs.

The creators who build the layer between attention and commerce become the next Harpo.

The rest become inventory.

Stop buying reach and hoping.

Ask creators what they can prove.

Build the composite before the buy, not after.

Wayne Street Consulting

Helps small brands and independent agencies build the measurement layer creators can't build for themselves — and evaluate the ones who can. A fractional analytics lead at the wheel of your creator strategy, without a full-time hire.

waynestreetconsulting.com · Chicago

SOURCES

1 Goldman Sachs Research (2023). "Music in the Air" and creator economy TAM projections.

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3 LTK. "The Creator Journey™ 2024" report.

4 Alphabet. Q4 2025 earnings disclosure — YouTube $60B+ standalone revenue.

5 Digiday coverage of TikTok Shop US GMV, Meta creator payouts, YouTube creator payments (2024–2026).

6 Variety (Aug 2024). Alex Cooper $125M SiriusXM deal. Ad Age (Jun 2026). Unwell Creative Agency at Cannes Lions.

7 Variety (Aug 2024). Kelce brothers $100M+ Amazon Wondery deal. Sportico + Forbes (2024). Garage Beer investment. Forbes (Sep 2025) $200M valuation.

8 Bloomberg (Jun 2025). SmartLess Mobile launch.

9 Digiday (Jul 7 2026). Mel Robbins Cannes interview — 11M weekly listeners, Let Them Theory 10M copies, newsletter-list ownership quote.

10 Femfounded case study + industry reporting. Feastables 2024 revenue/profit; MrBeast content revenue/loss.

11 Yahoo Finance (2025). Beast Industries $5.2B late-2025 valuation. Jeff Housenbold CEO.

12 Campaign US (Jul 6 2026). Kenny Gold interview — Edelman Chief Creator Officer, "still treating them like media channels".

13 Edelman 2026 Trust Barometer Global Report, p. 34. 62% food/lifestyle influencer trust-transfer stat.

14 Digiday (Jul 20 2026). Accenture Song / Whalar acquisition. Yasko + Harman interview. Publicis / Influential 2024 comp.

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17 The Washington Post archive (Oct 20 1999). Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia IPO.