



The Hidden Engine of Influence: Why Every Major Brand Is Rebuilding Creator Marketing From the Inside Out

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A blueprint for how leading brands are moving beyond influencer campaigns - and building creator capability as a core in-house function. This paper draws on the frontline experience of MASH operators embedded across major brands in Asia.



A System Held Together by Luck and Labour

Influencer marketing has never looked shinier than it does today. Scroll through any platform and you'll find immaculate creator content: perfectly lit frames, clever story arcs, personalities who know precisely how to hold your attention for seven seconds. But beneath that polished surface lies a less glamorous truth — one that every major brand is quietly wrestling with.

Creator marketing, in its current state, is held together by an improvised infrastructure of duct tape, bailing wire, good intentions, overextended teams, and a little bit of luck. Internal teams juggling spreadsheets, creators negotiating through DMs, vendors stacked on top of vendors, and campaign managers spending more time chasing information than shaping influence. Everyone is doing their best, but the system itself has never been fully built because the foundation was built on shifting sand.

And that's the challenge the industry can no longer ignore.



When Influence Stops Being a Channel

Creator marketing has become too important to operate on workarounds. Too consequential to be treated as a sidecar to paid media. Too central to culture, commerce, and brand relevance for brands to keep bolting it on, hoping it will hold.

The brands making real progress today have all arrived at the same conclusion: influence isn't a channel anymore — it's a capability. And it deserves the same rigor, governance, and operational backbone as any core marketing function.

They're learning that the real challenge isn't finding creators. It's building the engine that allows creators, platforms, brand teams, agencies, and internal stakeholders to move together — with clarity, speed, and trust.

It's the difference between running campaigns and running a system.



The Shift From Campaigns to Systems

During my conversations with experts shaping this shift, a pattern emerged. No matter the market or vertical, the people succeeding in creator marketing today aren't the ones chasing trends or stacking vendors. They're the ones who understand that influence operates on two planes at once: creative expression and operational architecture. And you cannot scale one without mastering the other.

"It's not about singular Creator campaigns, it's always about designing the engine that drives the creator economy."

That's how Singapore-based Kenny Chen, a former games journalist and Ad Creative turned Creator Marketing expert, who is supporting the creator programmes at Google APAC, frames it.

"At its best, creator marketing isn't an add-on. It's a full-funnel engine. But you need more than a creator list and the budget to boost the programmes," he told me.

You need people who understand Creators, their economy, and everything that happens in between, and all the elements that impact the go-to-market speed and quality: sales systems, feedback loops, brand tone, vibe checks with creators, contracting, and payments. That's what we're solving."

That distinction matters. Because for years, creator marketing grew faster than the muscle required to manage it. Brands plugged gaps with agencies, added vendors to fix other vendors, and retrofitted their internal teams with responsibilities that never belonged to them. The result is an industry that looks sophisticated on the outside, but often feels improvised on the inside.

Kenny works with some of the region's biggest brands to integrate creator content into broader media strategies – YT Shorts, long-form, even commerce-focused executions. But what stood out was his callout on hybrid talent: "The most valuable people in the space today? Not just strategists or operations folks. They're truly the multi-disciplinary ones who can bridge creative taste with operational rigour. They speak creator, brand, business, and sales."



The Foundation for Operational Excellence

Vu, MASH's Vietnam-based powerhouse, stands at the intersection of brand ambition, creator talent, and YouTube performance.

“Strategy without structure is chaos - and creativity without precision gets lost.”

A former Google Ads Manager turned Creator Lead for SEA, she brings a unique 360° understanding of the creator economy – from platform mechanics to brand storytelling to campaign performance.

“Knowing how YouTube works isn’t just about algorithms or ad formats,” Vu shares. “It’s about understanding what connects audiences, creators, and brands - and turning that into campaigns that actually perform.”

With strong partnerships across the largest MCN networks in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, Vu ensures MASH’s creator campaigns stay culturally relevant, commercially sound, and performance-driven.

Every campaign under her direction runs on a system that aligns time, output, tracking, and workflow into one consistent rhythm. The result: less chaos, more clarity – allowing her time to focus on what truly drives impact.

“When the process is seamless,” Vu says, “the space opens up for creativity, collaboration, and real influence to happen.”

In MASH’s creator ecosystem, Vu isn’t just part of the process – she’s the quiet architecture behind its success. A rare blend of platform expertise, brand empathy, and operational mastery, turning creative potential into measurable influence – again and again.



The Unseen Talent Architecture Powering Modern Influence

“There’s this misconception that influencer marketing is fluffy. It’s not,” says Shammie Ng, the MASHer who used to run the social media and influencer marketing infrastructure for Microsoft across 12 APAC countries. “It’s fast, it’s high-stakes, and it requires tight execution. The campaigns that really convert? They’re the ones that align creative, operations, and brand DNA from day one.”

In her role at MASH, Shammie designs processes that streamline communication, improve efficiency, and strengthen collaboration between brands and internal teams. Her work bridges creativity and clarity, ensuring every campaign delivers both artistic impact and operational precision.

“You can’t scale influence without trust. Our creator and agency relationships aren’t transactional – they’re built on years of credibility, shared wins, and deep respect for local nuance that meets global standards.”

Shammie sees creator marketing not as a creative problem but as a trust problem. Teams move faster when they trust their systems. Creators deliver better when they trust the brand. Stakeholders align when they trust the process. And that trust is engineered, not assumed.

Then there’s Kiki, whose background in broadcast journalism and global influencer management gives her an eye for fit and chemistry. Now leading the Creator Solutions programme for Google Thailand and other SEA markets, Kiki brings 12+ years of experience building and executing influencer marketing campaigns globally, having led go-to-market strategies for luxury brands and startups, and consistently brings it back to clarity, relationships, and structure.

Kiki points out “Our clients don’t want spreadsheets. They want curated chemistry – the right creator, in the right moment, with the right message. That’s where our real value lies: marrying global platform strategy with local cultural credibility through relationships that we’ve invested in and continue to nurture.”

That kind of creator matchmaking isn’t transactional. It’s a product of long-standing relationships, lived experience, and the credibility that comes from years of showing up consistently and with respect in the creator community.

A New Talent Architecture

Across every major brand we speak to, there is a quiet acknowledgement: the way they've been running creator marketing is no longer sustainable. Workloads are too large. Market complexity is too high. Brand safety expectations are too intense. And internal teams cannot carry the operational burden without burning out or breaking down.

That's why the most forward-moving brands are no longer looking for agencies to "run influencer campaigns." They've outgrown that model. They're looking for partners who can help them build an in-house creator capability—an internal engine powered by talent who understand creators, platforms, audiences, brand worlds, and operational discipline in equal measure.

People like Kenny, Vu, Shammie and Kiki, among others across the MASH network, are already supporting brands throughout Asia. They represent a new kind of operator—professionals who sit comfortably at the intersection of brand voice, creator culture, operational detail, market nuance, and commercial reality. People who move seamlessly from briefing to vibe checks, from platform mechanics to brand governance, from negotiation to performance insight, without dropping any of the threads.

They are the connective tissue that makes scale possible, the invisible architecture that turns influence from a chaotic channel into a coherent function. And this is precisely where the industry is heading: toward a talent model that blends creativity with precision, judgement with workflow, cultural sensitivity with consistency, and relationship-building with rigorous execution.

What brands are really asking for becomes evident once you listen closely. They want a system that protects the integrity of their brand while still giving creators the space to do their best work. They want a rhythm that respects creative expression without compromising operational clarity. They want internal workflows that feel empowering rather than exhausting, structures that can stretch across markets without collapsing under the weight of regional nuance, and a backbone that makes influence measurable, repeatable, and creatively excellent.

Put simply, they're ready to stop improvising and start building something durable.

And that is the work we do at MASH.





Building the Engine Inside the Brand

At MASH, we build the architecture — the talent, the systems, the operational spine — that allows creator marketing to operate not as a chaotic channel, but as a disciplined, resilient, high-performing function inside the brand.

Our specialists are not coordinators. They're operators. They're not managing spreadsheets. They're managing influence. They don't orbit the brand. They embed within it.

And when that happens, creator marketing stops being a burden and becomes what it was always meant to be: a source of cultural resonance, commercial performance, and creative momentum.

It stops being a peripheral tactic and becomes a capability—one that holds its own alongside paid media, brand strategy, and performance.

**“We’re not here to run campaigns.
We’re here to build the engine.”**

– Jolene Cornford, MASH General Manager.

That is where the industry is moving.

And the brands that build that engine now will be the ones who stay ahead in influence, creativity, and the culture that shapes both.

