

THINKIFIC

Online Learning Trends Report 2024



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State of the industry

This report could start with the same line every year: **it's an interesting time to be a Creator Educator**. In 2023, there was a ton of negative media around the creator economy. Topics like AI replacing creators and advertisers pulling back their sponsorship budgets dominated headlines. Yet, all the while, the creator economy continued to soar to new heights.



Investment banking company Goldman Sachs offered a deep dive into the creator economy and their own predictions for how it will evolve in the coming years, including:



The impact of the creator economy could approach half-a-trillion dollars by 2027



They expect the number of creators to grow between 10-20% per year compounding during the next five years

Why are they predicting so much growth? Well, there's really never been more opportunity to build a successful creator business. Despite rapid industry changes — like the apparent decline in Twitter/X usage — social networks like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube continue to thrive.

There are also more and more dedicated platforms for Creator Educators seeking to build sustainable businesses.



We surveyed more than 2,500 Americans on topics related to the creator economy and online education and more than half of people believe they have unique expertise that other people might be interested in learning. At the same time, only 28% have considered starting an online learning business to share that knowledge. As new technologies make this industry more accessible and your unique genius becomes easier to monetize, we're going to see the gap between those two statistics lessen significantly.

And despite all the talk of brands cutting creator budgets, Adobe found that more than half of non-professional creators are now monetizing their work. Of those, 48% say their content revenues make up more than half of their monthly income.

So, more people are becoming creators and more people are making money doing it. How is this specifically impacting online learning?



Creator Educator trends are mirroring the wider growth of the creator economy. We're seeing more educators emerge while the path to monetization is shortening.

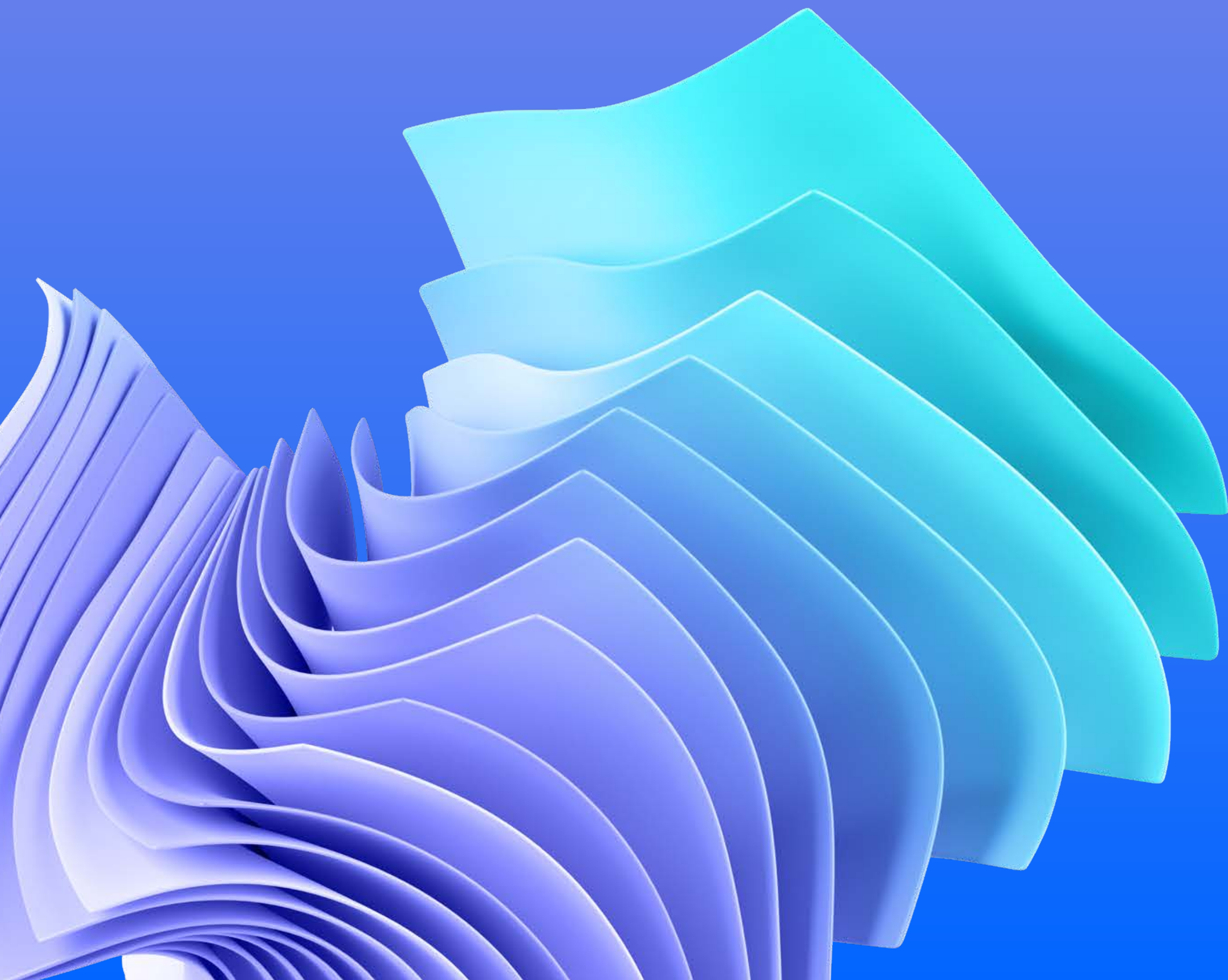
It feels like more people than ever are continuing their education online. Our survey found that **92% of people dedicate at least one hour per month to learning digitally** and 62% of people are or have been a member of an online community.

In this report, you'll discover why online learning won't be replaced by ChatGPT anytime soon, how to make your first dollar as an educator, and why this industry is really open to anyone willing to take the leap. Let's dive in.



TREND 1

AI isn't destroying
online education; it's
increasing creator
productivity



As trust in AI grows, Creator Educators use it to overcome blockers and produce more content

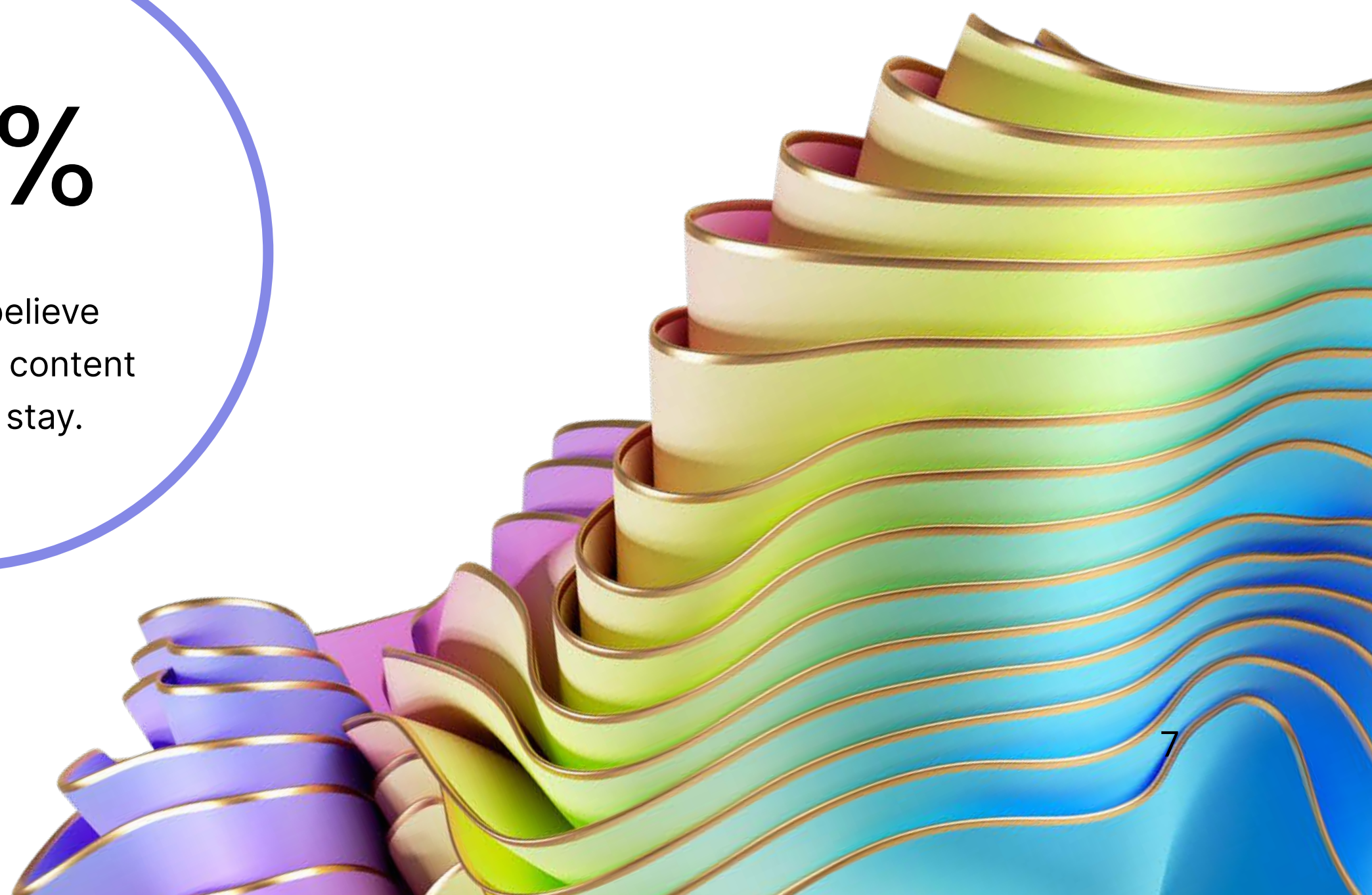
There's no denying that 2023 was the year AI kicked the creator economy's door down, like a big, robotic Kool-Aid man screaming "Oh Yooooo." No, that isn't a typo, it's a joke about AI getting the phrase slightly wrong. And that's kind of the story of AI, right? AI tools like ChatGPT are incredible, but just not quite as good as a human.

Still, for many people, it's already enough. In our survey, we found that 49% of people have or would consume content they knew was created by AI. And an impressive **78% of people believe AI-generated content is here to stay**. Heck, an MIT Sloan research study even found that people who didn't know the source of content would frequently prefer things that were AI-generated.



78%

of people believe
AI-generated content
is here to stay.



On the surface, this sounds like a doom and gloom story for creators. Nearly half of people are open to consuming AI content, and some even like it better! Does this mean twice as much competition for real creators trying to build a following and, ultimately, their livelihood?

Not quite. People might be okay with AI content, but they still prefer the human stuff. In that same MIT Sloan study, when people were told who created the content, they expressed “human favoritism.” Postdoctoral fellow Yunhao Zhang states, “There’s great benefit in knowing that humans are involved somewhere along the line — that their fingerprint is present.”

There’s a reason Merriam-Webster chose “authentic” as its 2023 Word of the Year. People still crave the human touch. This is great news for creators — especially Creator Educators. We tend to follow creators for who they are and what they bring to the table. Most people don’t want to follow or learn from an anonymous source; they want your unique genius — the culmination of your lifetime of work, knowledge, and passion.

But how can creators, as humans, compete with the almost limitless output of AI? By using it not to create — but to unblock.





“As a creator, it's really important that you use AI to enhance what you do rather than actually use it as a pure creation tool.”

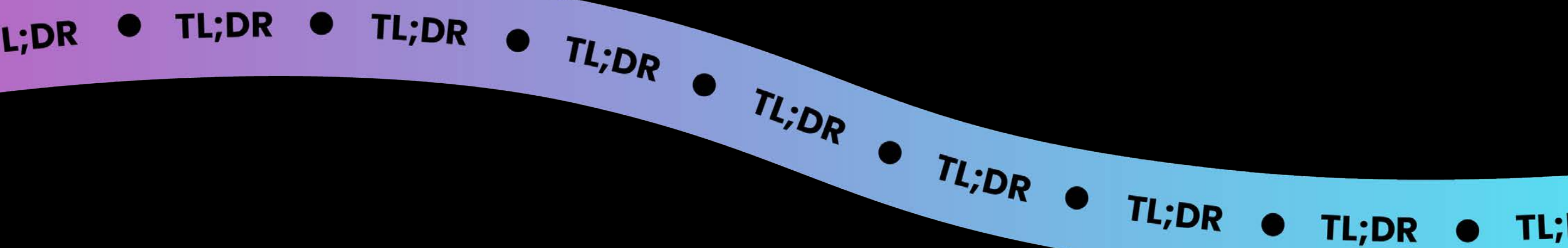
IAN RICHARDSON, CEO AT SCHUDIO

Because of the desire to be authentic, many creators have simply avoided AI altogether. In reality, AI can massively increase your productivity, allow you to expand your business, and fill in any gaps in your skill set.

Ian Richardson, the CEO of Schudio, suggested that AI's ultimate benefit is freeing up your time so you can focus on creating high-quality educational content and engaging with your followers and students. “AI can be really good at helping you with ideas and outlines, helping you draft content, helping to take what you've put in place already and improve it.”

Are you an expert in your field but not a strong marketer or salesperson? Use AI to quickly generate social media copy or sales funnels. Struggling to name your next educational offering? Why not see if AI can spark something? The point is, AI can help unblock your workflows and let you get back to the actual creating aspect of being a creator.

More than half of those we surveyed either already use or would consider using AI in their work. When it comes to creators, those who use AI for productivity will often have an advantage and be able to get ahead of their peers.



AI ISN'T DESTROYING ONLINE EDUCATION;
IT'S INCREASING CREATOR PRODUCTIVITY

What this means for you

01

While acceptance and consumption of AI content is growing, people still prefer the human touch (so there's little reason to worry about robots replacing you).

02

Your life experience and expertise are valuable and something AI cannot replace in the eyes of learners, so make sure it's referenced on your sales pages and in your content.

03

AI can massively increase your productivity. Use it to unblock yourself, extend your skillset, and grow your business so you can focus on content creation and customer engagement.

TREND 2

Downloadables emerge as the quickest path to creator monetization



Forget net new; your existing content has value

What's the one question most aspiring creators want an answer to?

“How do I start making money quickly?”

It's an obvious question that's really difficult that doesn't have an obvious answer. If you type that question into YouTube or Google, the top suggestions are almost always to build a big audience, monetize through social networks and other creator platforms, do brand deals, or maybe start your own newsletter.

None of these are easy to accomplish. None are quick to accomplish either.

In 2024, we believe a shift is coming. The path to monetization is going to become more straightforward. And we're already starting to see new and experienced creators monetize quickly by following a much simpler, much more attainable path: digital product sales.

What are digital products?



Guides



Ebooks



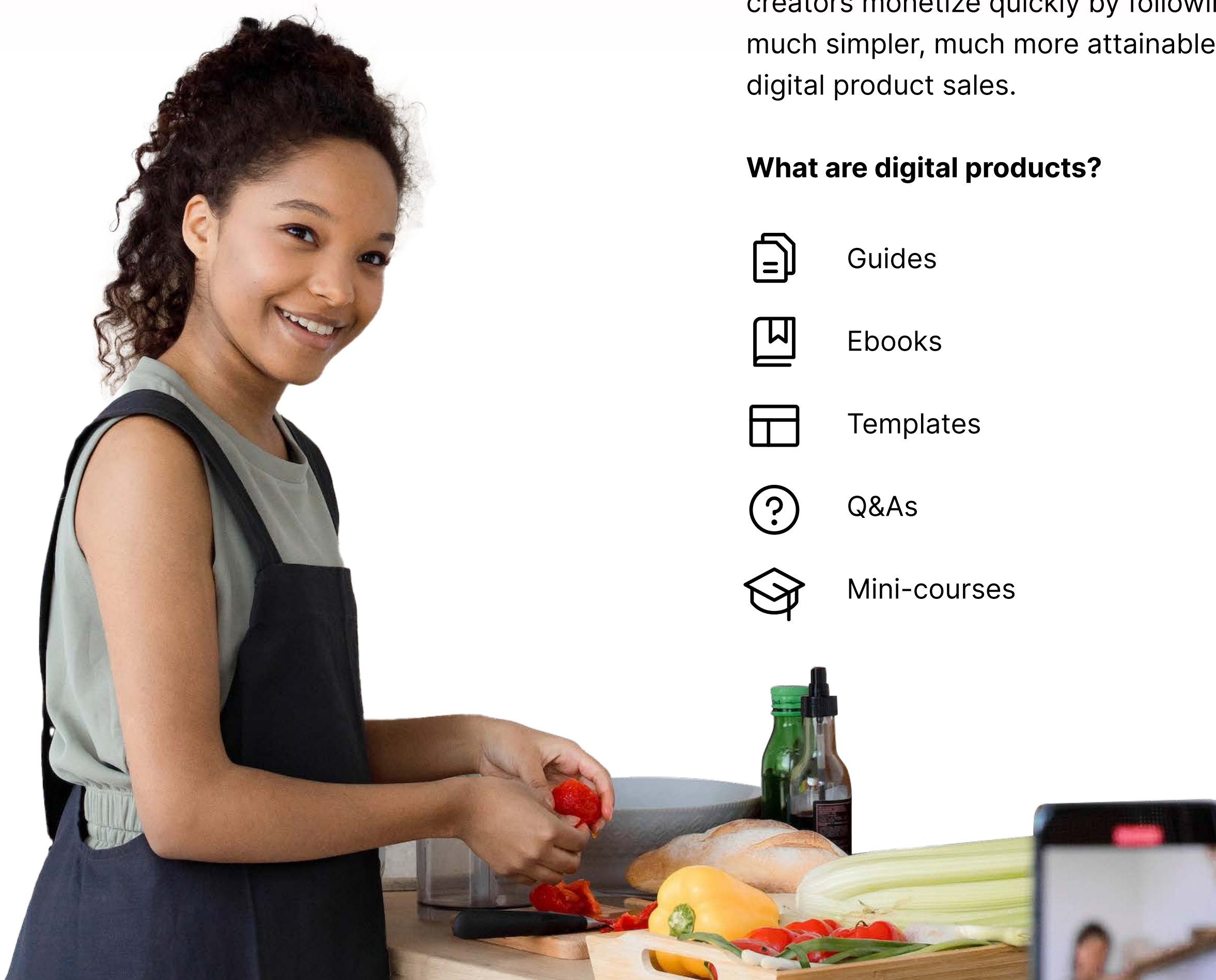
Templates



Q&As



Mini-courses



They're like the small Halloween candy bars of creator offerings. Nearly 3 out of every 5 people we surveyed have consumed downloadable content from someone they follow on social media.

"I decided to create digital downloads that people could purchase and keep for themselves. These downloads included guides, templates, and other resources based on my own experiences and insights. The response from my community was overwhelmingly positive, and many people commented on how helpful these resources are in their own work and businesses."

BARBIANA LIU, DESIGNER, CREATOR, AND FOUNDER OF LECHE STUDIOS



**Nearly 3 out
of every 5**

people we surveyed have
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from someone they follow on
social media.





"Digital products are one of the biggest reasons that I've been able to comfortably run my creator business as my full-time job. Without it, I would personally be relying solely on brand partnerships. Since those are so inconsistent, my digital products have been something to lean on so that my income is more stable."

KRISTEN BOUSQUET, CREATOR MONETIZATION COACH



Of course, you need to price your digital products to reflect the value they provide and the effort that went into them. A \$10 ebook might not seem like much income, but when you sell 50 or 100, you suddenly have a reliable second income stream and an engaged audience that trusts you — which will prove invaluable once you start rolling out more advanced (and expensive) offerings.

DOWNLOADABLES FOR MONETIZATION

What this means for you

01

Want to quickly monetize your knowledge in 2024? Use **digital products to start generating revenue** and to build a trusting audience that will be more likely to purchase future, higher-priced offerings.

02

Even if you already have an established course business, **downloadables offer a fresh income stream** that can generate leads for your established products.

03

Don't feel the need to build a bunch of new digital products from scratch. Your processes, templates, course handouts, and other **existing assets make perfect downloadables for your audience.**

TREND 3

All platforms become learning platforms

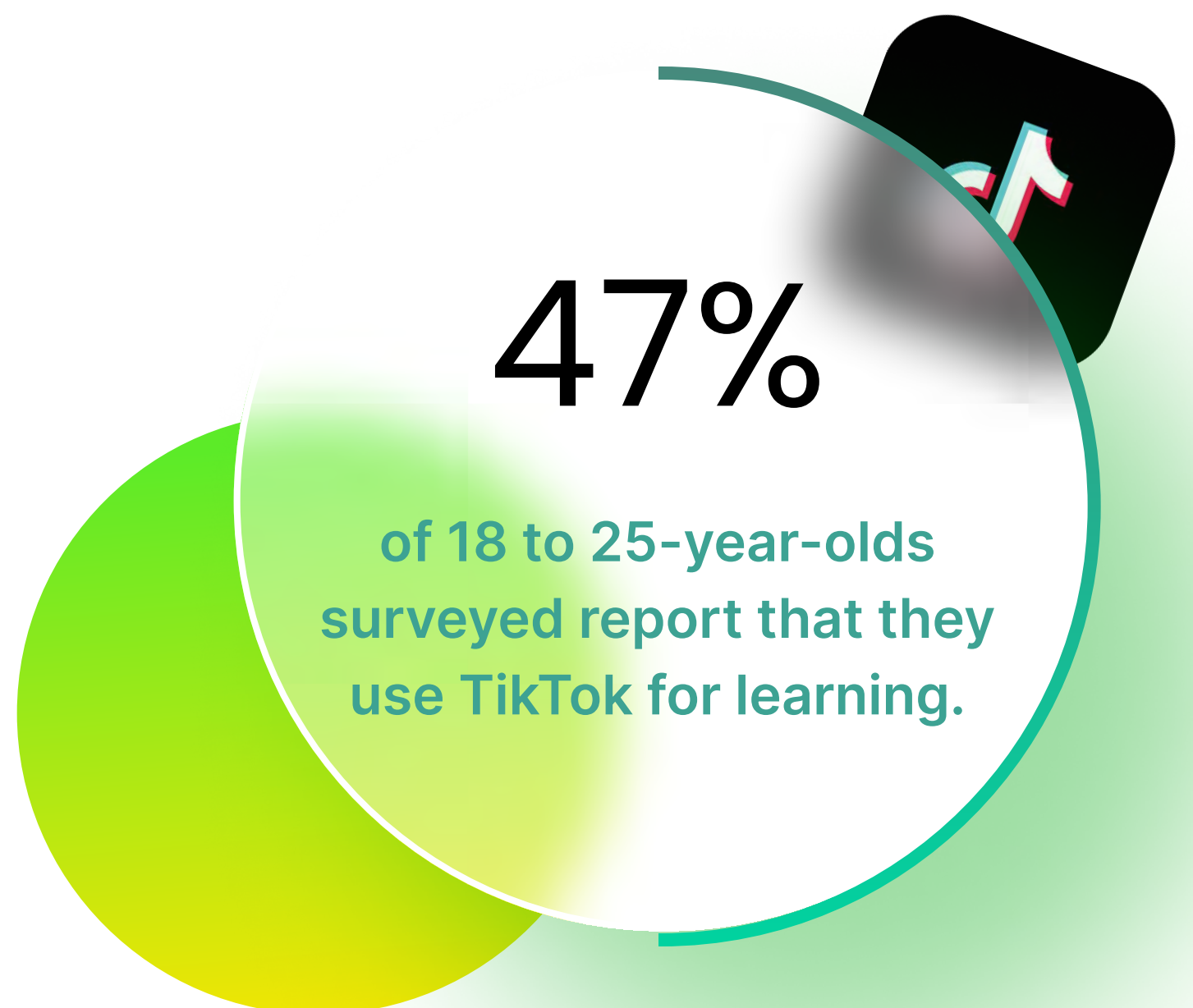


Audiences want to learn something new, but they don't care where they learn it

We got more than 150 unique answers when we asked our survey respondents what platforms they use the most to consume learning content online. People aren't limited to traditional learning institutions anymore, and they're looking for fresh ways (and places) to consume content.

Apps like TikTok or Instagram, which are primarily used for entertainment, are also used regularly as learning tools. In fact, Senior Vice President of Google Search, Prabhakar Raghavan, stated that 40% of young people are using TikTok or Instagram for search instead of Google. And our data shows that number is even higher! 47% of 18 to 25-year-olds surveyed report that they use TikTok for learning.

Thinkific creator Diamond Lee amassed most of her 330,000-strong audience on TikTok by providing a mix of educational and entertaining content (sometimes referred to as edutainment). Some examples of her content include Beginner Friendly Ways to Sell Digital Products w/ \$0 or Need an extra \$2-3k/week? This is what worked for me.



You could also look towards the success of YouTube as an educational platform. Accounts like Crash Course (15.1 million subscribers), Khan Academy (8.14 million subscribers), or AsapSCIENCE (10.4 million subscribers) provide high-quality educational content on their channels — and have amassed huge followings because of it.

Podcasts are another platform where educational and entertaining content attracts massive audiences. National Public Radio's Planet Money attracts approximately 1.4 million monthly listeners, and Stuff You Should Know is estimated to attract more than 500,000 monthly listeners. Both podcasts cover purely educational topics delivered in an engaging manner. For example, How Electoral Colleges Work, What is Fascism?, Indicator Exploder: Jobs and Inflation, and How to Fight a Patent Pirate.



“I expose people to the power of digital products and how transformative they are while getting you to laugh and open up,”

DIAMOND SAYS ABOUT HER TIKTOK STRATEGY.



Delivering interesting and engaging educational content on different platforms is clearly a viable audience-building strategy.

We predict that educational content will only keep growing on platforms that aren't traditionally made for learning. Platforms like YouTube and TikTok are already known for their learning content, while other platforms like Instagram or Audible have also started embracing learning content in the forms of infographics or podcasts. Based on our data, we predict we'll see more audio and video course content come out on all different kinds of platforms and apps in the coming year.

ALL PLATFORMS BECOME LEARNING PLATFORMS

What this means for you

01

It's time to explore different platforms for your learning content. The appetite for learning is there, so make sure you're embracing audiences in many different places.

02

Don't shy away from platforms that haven't been used for learning in the past. Who knows? You could be the next edutainment trailblazer!

TREND 4

Private communities provide a welcome respite from social media fatigue



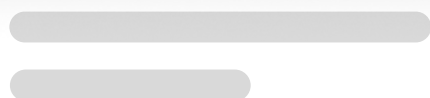
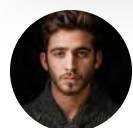
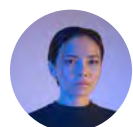
The internet can be as depressing as a birthday party where no one shows up

It's tough to be online. Between disturbing news footage, the latest body or beauty trends being shoved in our faces, and extremist rhetoric popping up everywhere, it's no wonder people report high levels of social media fatigue. In fact, according to our research, 69% of people believe that social media has more negative content now than it did five years ago.

What if we told you there's a way to be online in a way that actually makes your life better? Enter: exclusive communities.

Online communities aren't new. Facebook groups and subreddits have been around for years, functioning as niche areas for people with similar interests to chat online. Interestingly, 39% of consumers who use online communities say they do it to learn new things.

But public communities aren't cutting it anymore. More than half of the people we surveyed prefer private chats or communities to public ones.



Top creators are taking advantage of the demand for safe, private spaces. Just look at anti-racism consultant and Creator Educator Cicely Belle Blain. They saw the demand from leaders in the diversity, equity, and inclusion space for an online learning community and “...wondered if it would be possible to feel connected to people and feel a sense of warmth and learning virtually.”



“For me, a membership is more effective than a one-off course because every single month, I can check in with my students and watch them grow. Business has ups and downs, and it’s never going to be perfect. I want to be there for all of it.”

AMANDA SCHONBERG, BAKING FOR BUSINESS

They discovered it was possible through the creation of their cohort-based course, Living Room.

Students prefer education that comes with a real connection to their instructor, as well as to their peers. Successful Creator Educator Amanda Schonberg has seen this firsthand through her six-figure generating Entrepreneur Community for ambitious home bakers.



Hand-in-hand with private communities and safe spaces comes authentic connection and vulnerability. Top creators emphasize the importance of letting your audience connect with your vulnerable parts as well as your expertise.

For example, Diamond Lee of Her Design Media Co has served over 10,000 students with her digital income mastery online learning products. She swears by her authentic approach to both building new audiences and connecting with her existing audience members.

Creator coach Kristen Bousquet (and founder of Soucialmate) is also a big advocate both for private communities and for showing up authentically for her audience. She credits the supportive space of her community as one of the main drivers behind her students' success.



“Life is hard enough. We don’t need to make it harder on ourselves by creating this image that we’re so professional and rigid; no one can connect with that. We need to be personable and connect with our target audience because they’ll probably never meet you in person. I display my slip-ups, my setbacks, and my journey on every level because I’m still on a journey.”

DIAMOND LEE, HER DESIGN MEDIA CO





“We've gotten so much incredible feedback on our private creator membership, Soulcial Suite, because our members truly feel like they have a safe space to connect and lean on people who get it. I also spend a lot of time connecting one-on-one with my community members as well as potential new members via DMs. I want my members to know that they get me when they are in my community. I'm not just a robot running a business — I'm a real person who understands their struggles and feelings. We're able to connect on such a deeper level.”

KRISTEN BOUSQUET, SOULCIALMATE



“I don't create any content that makes myself look perfect,” he says. “I put out content to show what I've gone through, what I've done, and losses that I've taken recently.”

GEORGE PITTS



PRIVATE COMMUNITIES

What this means for you

01

Create a private community for your students and/or audience. Make sure you're providing value and connection for your members.

02

Show up authentically. Don't try to present a perfectly polished version of yourself. Audiences are looking for someone they can connect with, not another generic influencer trying to fit into a mold.

03

Want to kick it up a notch? Give your audience members the opportunity to connect one-on-one with you. Maybe that's via private chat, coaching sessions, or office hours. Always ensure you're getting value out of it as well with paid sessions or more expensive membership tiers.

TREND 5

The creator economy is no longer a young person's game



The foundations of effective leadership

Jodi Stubbs

PUBLISHED



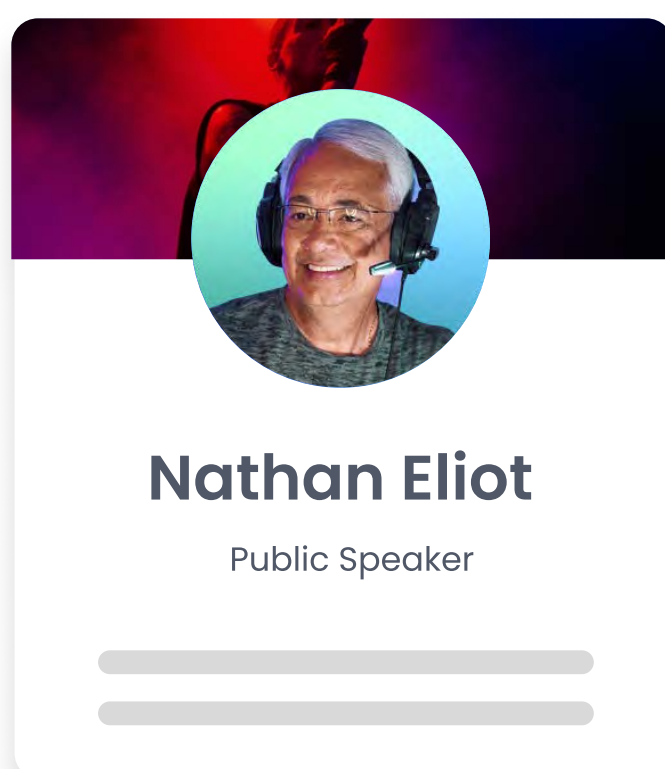
Life experience and expertise prove valuable in a Creator Educator market

There's an unfortunate, outdated, but persistent narrative around the creator economy that focuses on people above the age of 40-ish not understanding creators or at least not seeing it as a real job.

This perception is particularly frustrating since we've seen creators of all ages find massive success in recent years. Just look at [brunchwithbabs](#) and her 3.9 million followers! The New York Times also wrote about how [older TikTokers are in high demand among brands](#).

According to 2022 research by Adobe, the average creator is actually a 40-year-old millennial. And our own survey found that almost one out of every five people (19.2%) between the ages of 41-56 consider themselves digital creators, an increase of 16% since last year.

So what's behind this trend? Why is the creator economy no longer a young person's game?



First, the creator economy is shifting away from entertainers and towards educators. This was one of our key 2023 online learning trends and the data continues to back it up.



62%

This year's survey found that 62% of people are more interested in creators who make digital content for educational purposes than entertainment purposes

— up 5% from 57% in our last report. Adobe's research seems to back this up, finding that only 16% of creators in the US are influencers.

When it comes to educating people, life experience and expertise matter. Older generations usually have decades of skill-building that they can then share with an interested audience. This real-life experience is only increasing in importance with the emergence of AI as learners seek out reliable, trustworthy sources. Plus, when it comes to Creator Educators, small audiences can be very profitable. You don't need to be a massive social media star landing huge brand deals when you're selling \$2,500 courses.

The second reason the creator economy is becoming more evenly occupied across age brackets is that creator spaces are becoming more accessible. With the emergence of AI, the increased appetite for short-form video and learning (another one of our 2023 trends!), and the consistent advancement of software and social tools, you really don't need to be that tech-savvy to build online learning products. Most tools and apps provide simple onboarding experiences, and if you're ever in doubt, you can find another creator on YouTube who'll walk you through it. Remember: Millennials were the first generation of social media users and they're now entering their 40s.



Finally, the turbulent economy and rising inflation are impacting everyone. According to our survey, three-quarters of people have considered pursuing additional income streams as a result of the current economy. People 20 or 30 years into their careers are still looking for additional sources of income to combat rising costs of living and to save for rainy days or retirement.

Plus, many are so tired of job insecurity that they're considering making the leap to entrepreneurship.

As a result, 2024 will be the year that we remove ageism from the creator economy and foster new opportunities for creators of all ages.

TL;DR

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THE CREATOR ECONOMY IS NO LONGER A YOUNG PERSON'S GAME

What this means for you

01

Age and experience are valued among learners, meaning older Creator Educators are in high demand so there's no need to doubt your ability to succeed. This is no longer just a young person's game.

02

Make use of all of the increasingly accessible creator tech at your disposal to begin building your business

03

You can start creating as a side hustle! The wider economic downturn is driving people of all ages to start creating in the hopes of increasing their revenue streams, but you don't need to go all-in from day one.

More creator economy trends you should know, from expert Jon Youshaei



The rise of even shorter-form content

“Short form creators are nothing new — but with X, Threads, and LinkedIn, I predict we’ll see the rise of even shorter form creators. Right now, we know short-form as TikToks, Reels. But the truest short form is text and photo. Especially with the recent growth of LinkedIn, watch out for these micro-creators.”

The return of unedited content

“The past few years creators have learned how to truly optimize for the algorithm. Some called it the MrBeast-ification of YouTube. But in the next year, I predict the pendulum will swing back — with viewers yearning for personality based, un-polished content.”



The Rise of the “Creator COO”

“I predict more creators will move from seeking traditional external managers to hiring an internal manager of their own. As someone who previously had an external manager of my own, the economics didn’t make sense — and I’ve spoken with many creators who say the same. As creators build their businesses, it doesn’t make as much sense to give someone 15-20% if they aren’t involved in the day to day. Also the incentives for a traditional manager don’t always align. A manager is trying to grow their roster, transact more deals, and then move on.

Compare that to my business manager Amanda Marcvitch, who left her corporate jobs to lead our partnerships, operations, and more. She’s also my wife so there’s a lot of trust already built in. She’s my “Kris Jenner,” if you will. Amanda’s goal is to help build my business, ensure we deliver what we promise, and structure deals in a way that protects us long term. Not just push for a higher payout.”



How can Thinkific help?

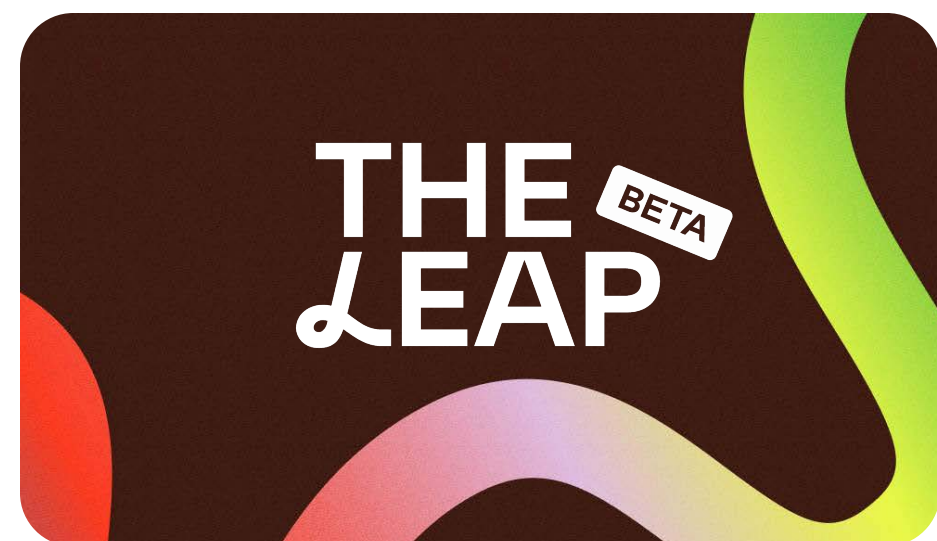




Want to use AI to overcome your blockers?

Thinkific's newest feature, Funnels, is a powerful tool that leverages AI to help you create and publish tailor-made journeys for your audience in minutes. Whether you are struggling to generate leads, make your first sale or grow your sales, we have a funnel ready to help you grow your business.

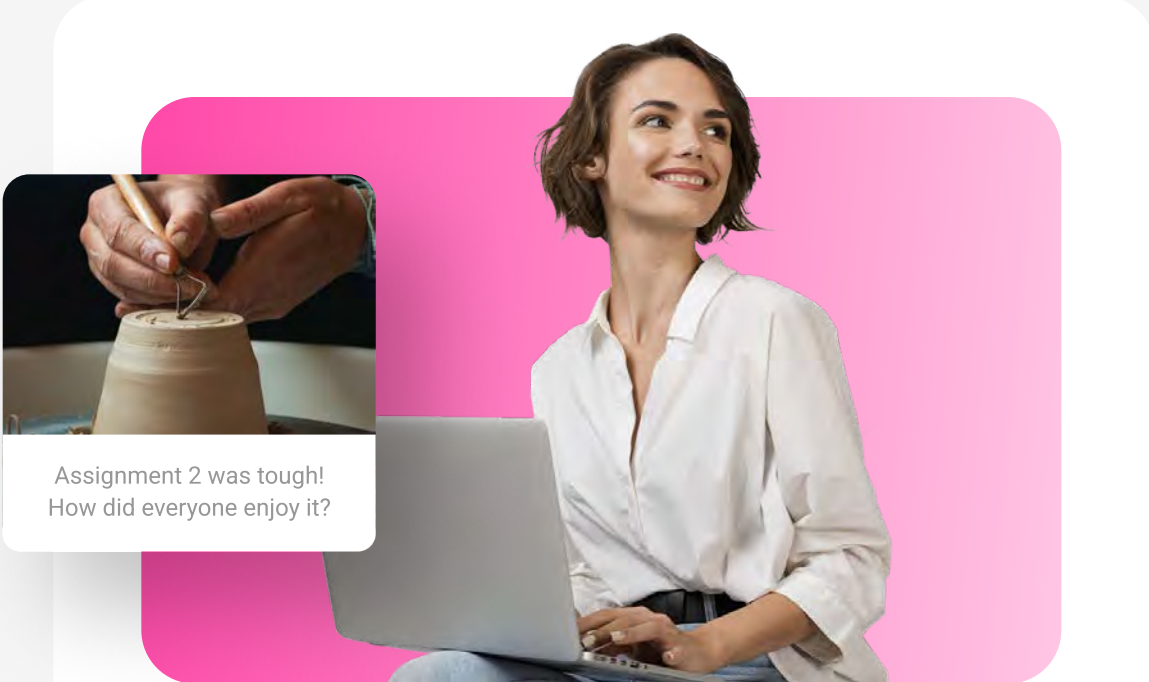
[Learn more about Thinkific Funnels](#)



Want an easy path to monetization through digital products?

The Leap by Thinkific offers AI-powered features and tools that let you create short-form digital products in a matter of minutes. Plus, you can easily sell to your audience with a link-in-bio storefront generator.

[Sign up for The Leap free](#)



Think a private community is right for your business?

Create a distraction-free place where students can share and connect with dedicated spaces for specific topics, trending posts, and live events. If you have an existing course, you can seamlessly connect it to a community to give your students an all-in-one collaborative learning experience.

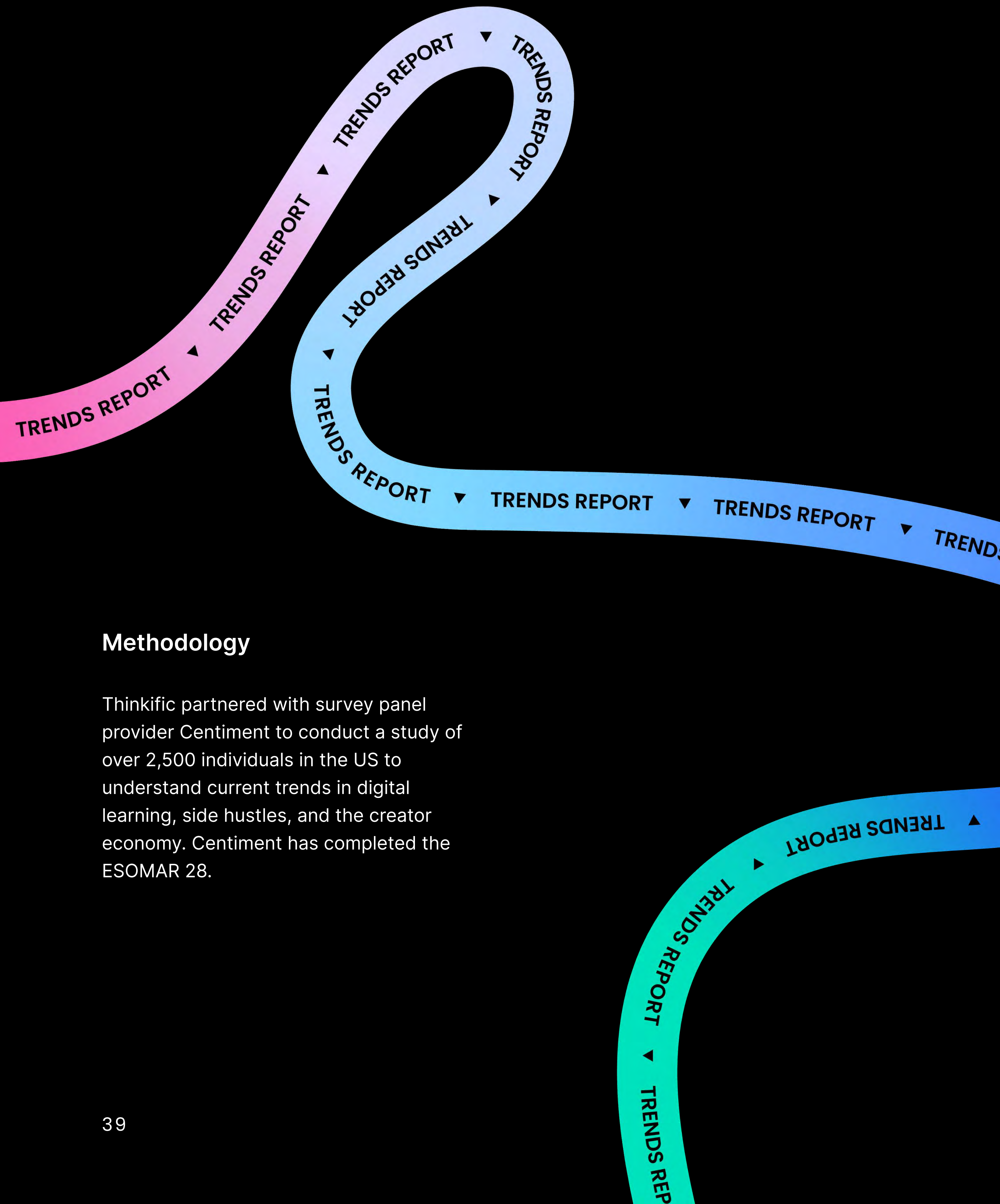
Build your private community



Are you an older creator looking for that extra push and support as you create and sell your online course?

Join the Thinkific Accelerator for weekly coaching and learning sessions with experts and access to a tight-knit community of like-minded creators. This 8-week program will help eliminate the guesswork and confusion as you start creating and selling an online course.

Join the Accelerator



Methodology

Thinkific partnered with survey panel provider Centiment to conduct a study of over 2,500 individuals in the US to understand current trends in digital learning, side hustles, and the creator economy. Centiment has completed the ESOMAR 28.

Forward Looking Statements

This report includes forward-looking statements and forward-looking information within the meaning of applicable Canadian securities laws (“forward-looking statements”). Often, but not always, forward-looking information can be identified by the use of words such as “trends”, “plans”, “is expected”, “expects”, “scheduled”, “intends”, “contemplates”, “anticipates”, “adoption rates”, “believes”, “proposes” or variations (including negative and grammatical variations) of such words and phrases, or state that certain actions, events or results “may”, “could”, “would”, “might” or “will” be taken, occur or be achieved. Forward-looking statements in this report include statements regarding industry trends; growing demand for online learning and digital products, growth in our industry; addressable markets for our solutions; capturing market share; advances in and expansion of our offered platform service and the anticipated benefits of Funnels and their features for Thinkific customers. Such statements and information are based on the current expectations of Thinkific’s management, and are based on assumptions and subject to risks and uncertainties. Although Thinkific’s management believes that the assumptions underlying these statements and information are reasonable, they may prove to be incorrect. A number of risks, uncertainties and other factors may cause actual results to differ materially from the forward-looking statements contained in this report, including, among other factors, the risk factors described in additional detail under “Risk Factors” in our most recent Annual Information Form, and in our other filings with the Canadian securities regulatory authorities, all of which are available under our profile on SEDAR at www.sedar.com. Except as required by applicable securities laws, forward-looking statements and information speak only as of the date on which they are made and Thinkific undertakes no obligation to publicly update or revise any forward-looking statement or information contained in the report, whether as a result of new information, future events or otherwise. The report should not be relied on and is not a substitute for the skill, judgment and experience of the user, its management, employees, advisors and/or clients when making purchase, investment and other business decisions. While Thinkific has obtained information from sources it believes to be reliable, Thinkific does not perform an audit and undertakes no duty of due diligence or independent verification of any information it receives.