

The Power of Creator and Brand Collaboration Put to the Test

This post was created in partnership with Inmar Media

Creator-led social content can add authenticity and reduce friction to keep audiences engaged, but it works best when there's brand collaboration.

A Social Media Week session co-hosted with Inmar Media put that notion to the test in front of a live audience. The unique interactive session featured a user-generated content (UGC) creator with two special guests working in real time to capture and edit the perfect social image based on an impromptu creative brief.

The creator economy, live onstage

The session began with Heather Riccobono, senior manager, social solution engineer with Inmar Media, making the case for creator-led branded content.

"We know that most content in the social space is creator-led," she said. "When it feels like it's from a creator, your attention shifts innately, authentically. It's not something that you have to pause and recognize."

Riccobono then shared findings from a client case study in which the sales lift metric doubled when creator-led content was added.

"It's not one or the other. They're both equally valid."

They're both equally important," Riccobono shared.

To test that hypothesis, Riccobono brought Hannah Lorsch, creator and photographer, to the stage and worked with the audience to put together a UGC brief. The plan: Have Lorsch plan, shoot, and edit the content, followed by a debrief, all in 25 minutes. The subject: A dog's tug toy.

Behind every successful asset is a smart content brief

With audience input, Riccobono and Lorsch prepped a creative brief with the following guidelines:

- The image needed to convey that the product was fun and safe.
- It should project a friendly and relatable tone.
- The content style would be a lifestyle shoot.

Riccobono also set some basic guardrails, including that the image couldn't make unverified claims, feature any competitor brands, or contain offensive imagery.

The perfect pose through a brand lens

And what better way to do a photoshoot for a puppy tug toy than to bring out an adorable puppy—and a special guest tug partner, Elias Weiss Friedman, creator and founder of The Dogist? Lorsch led the shoot, trying to set up a realistic-looking tug-of-war session between the pup and Elias while keeping the content brief's guidance in mind.

To capture the fun and relatable vibe the brand asked for, Elias worked to get the pup playfully tugging on the toy, while Lorsch coached Elias on where to look and how to achieve a realistic smile.

"If you fake laugh, it changes the facial structure, looks more authentic, and translates better," Lorsch explained.

Once Lorsch had a few images to work with, the audience helped her choose the best of the bunch. She then had nine minutes left in the session to edit the photo to meet the project specifications. After a few touch-ups, the audience was presented with the finished product.

That's a wrap

Riccobono reminded the audience that although the live demonstration was a condensed example of how the creative process works, it was the best way to answer the question of whether brand- or creator-led content is best.

"The real answer is it's not either/or," said Riccobono. "Brand content builds control, and creator content is what builds that trust and authenticity. So, the brands that win are the ones that really know how to do both together to drive performance."

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