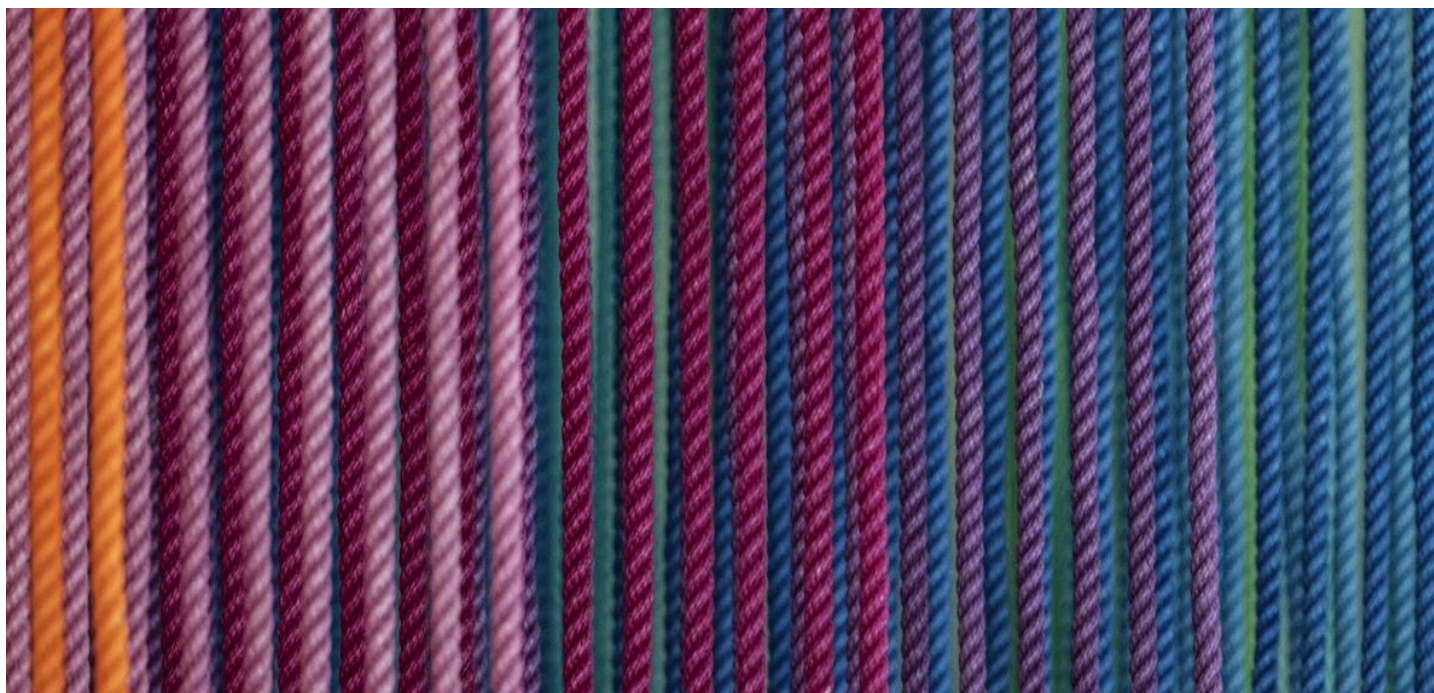




What's Hot?!

September 2025



As Inclusive Campaigns Take Plaudits, What Does Inclusivity in Advertising Mean?

New [research](#) has found 23 out of 32 Grand Prix campaigns at this year's Cannes Lions embedded inclusion in their work. It also found 96% of campaigns deemed to be inclusion-led 'drove real impact', with 22 winners creating 'tangible social or community benefits' – and all delivering ROI for the brand. But what does 'inclusive advertising' mean?

Inclusivity, by definition, means 'providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised.' This means equal opportunities to receive appropriate sales and marketing, to understand product and service options on the market, and to participate in the rich culture that advertising creates.

[Marginalised communities](#) such as the LGBTQ+ community, disabled people, BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of colour) people and [elderly people](#) are often under-represented or stereotyped in advertising. Further, little consideration is given for nuances of identity, intersectionality and the actual buying power these groups hold.

Inclusive advertising, therefore, accurately represents those it targets and does not exclude marginalised groups in its media, creative or strategy.

Grand Prix winners including [Channel 4's 'Considering what?' by 4Creative](#) and [Chicago Hearing Society and Rakish Entertainment's 'Caption with intention' by FCB Chicago](#) were all game-changing ads that encouraged recognition of challenges faced by minority groups. But creating truly inclusive ads and changing the advertising landscape will require commitment, investment, and a push past short-termism.

How can we put inclusivity on the agenda from brief to finished product as brands, agencies and studios?

Hire, consult and champion diverse talent: Ensure talent from a variety of backgrounds have a seat at the table and feel comfortable speaking up when decisions are being made. Consult experts from under-represented groups, cast with them in mind, and reach out to those best placed to represent these communities.

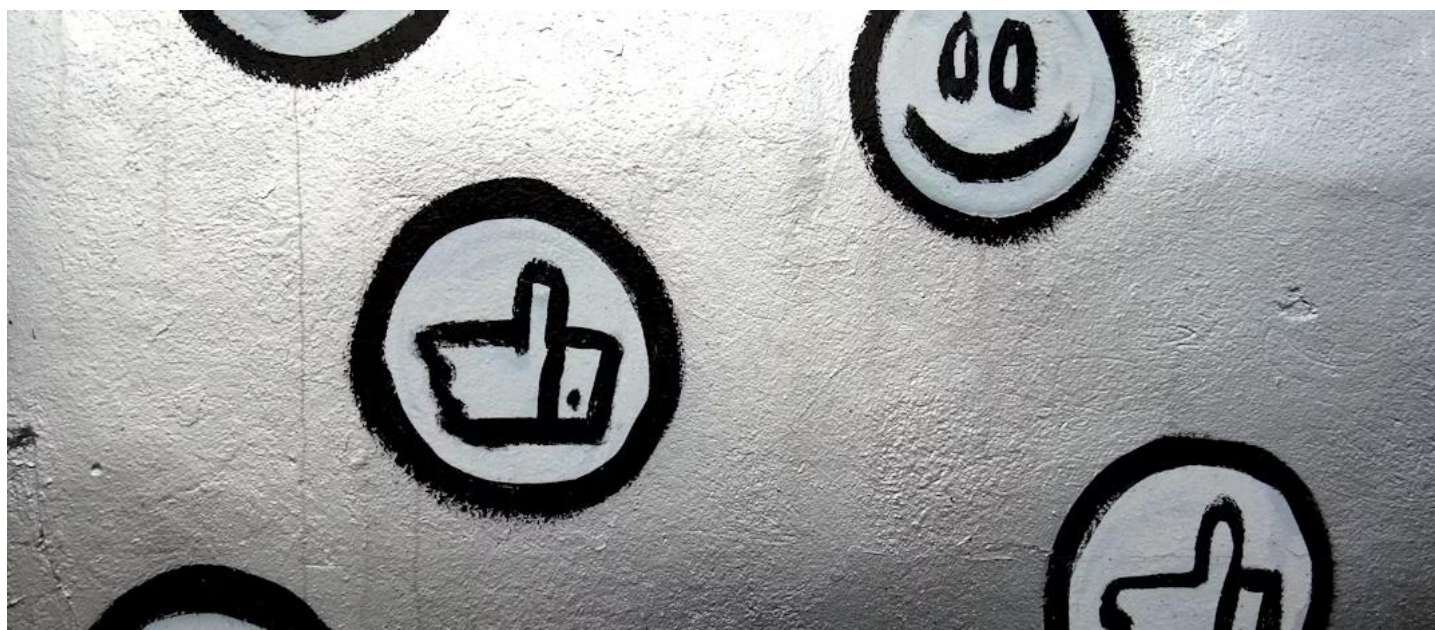
Make the business case clear: If there is reluctance to make ads more inclusive, cost may be the barrier. But a commercial case for inclusivity can be proven time and again.

At the IPA's Talent and Diversity Conference, Melda Simon, UK Lead at the Unstereotype Alliance, showed that inclusive advertising drives the bottom line. Analysis of 392 brands across 58 countries revealed that brands adopting more inclusive advertising practices, especially on gender, perform better commercially than those that do not. Inclusive advertising helps brands to grow and prosper.

Ask at every stage: There are many ways to push for more inclusive work. Call people in, not out. Encourage them to use creativity to represent audiences they are targeting with advertising, asking probing questions like: 'Why are we casting with that specific criteria?' and 'Are we using platforms accessible to people with hearing loss?' Challenge media stereotypes by placing people outside their comfort zones.

At the7stars, we aren't afraid to ask these tough questions. Our report, [The Misdefined Majority](#), spells out how Britain's working classes often feel unrepresented by media, while our recent exploration into [The Power of Words](#) makes the case for closed captioning in advertising – as both best practice and a driver of brand salience.

While inclusivity being high on the agenda at Cannes is a step in the right direction, inclusive media should not be reserved for the glitz of a Grand Prix – it should be the cornerstone of every campaign



Why are Influencers So In Demand?

Even in adland, which is constantly changing and innovating, the rise of influencer marketing has been rapid. In the last 12 months, we've seen consistent year-on-year growth in adspend on influencer marketing; 2024 saw the UK spend £930 million on this format while spend in 2025 is predicted to reach £975 million, according to Statista.

Several large players are betting big on influencer marketing. Earlier this year, Unilever announced a commitment of up to 50% of their annual marketing budget to influencers – even whilst 49% of brands are spending less than £10,000 on this channel. It is clear we are seeing more than a short-term trend here, but to assess 'why' this is happening we need to understand what unique qualities influencers bring to the table in a fragmented media landscape.

Influencers are a unique proposition, but they possess two specific selling points that, when combined, help to set them apart from more traditional media channels. The first has been widely known since the turn of the decade: their ability to target unique audiences large and small successfully.

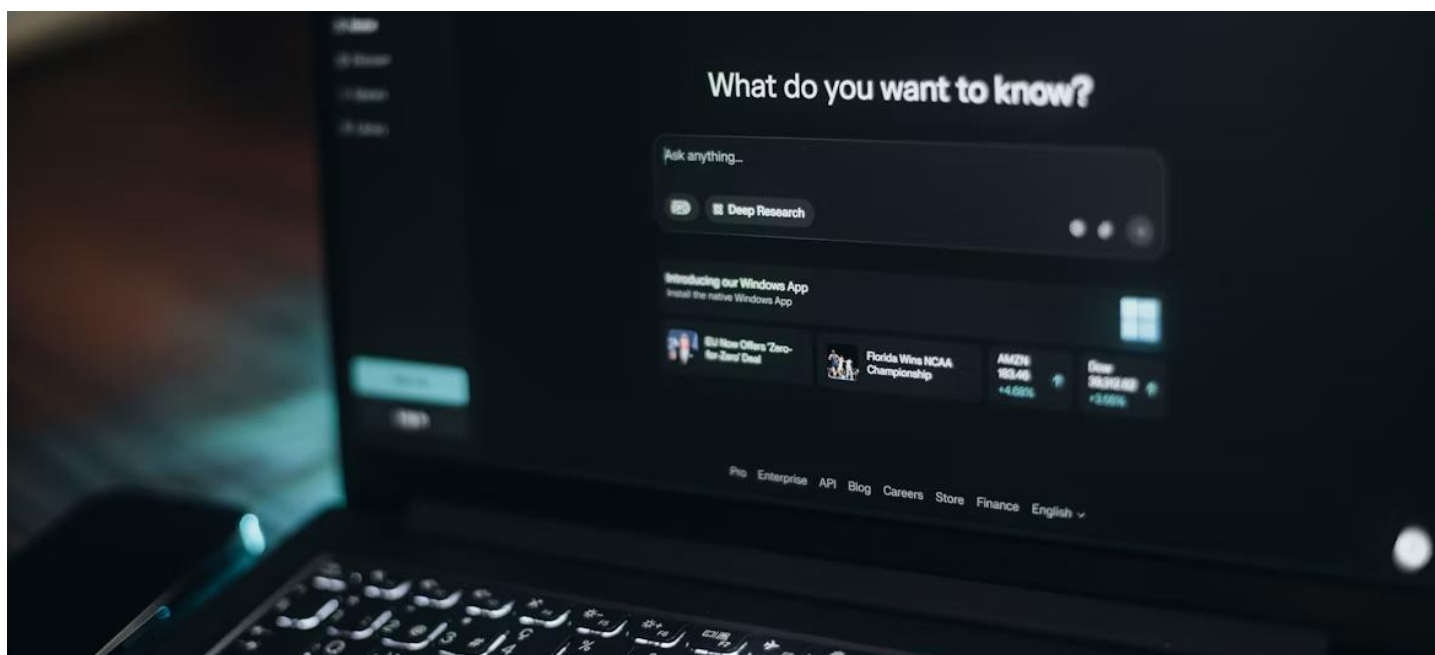
'Influencers' is a broad term. It encompasses macro-influencers (1 million+ followers), micro-influencers (100,000 to 1 million followers) and nano-influencers (sub 100,000 followers). This breadth can be a major boon, as potentially it allows brands to reach mass audiences or target niche sub-groups. Given influencers' audiences all share one thing in common – an interest in the influencer – such content partnerships offer the potential to reach large audiences with shared values, aligning with those of the brand.

Proponents of influencer marketing can point to an array of studies as evidence for their decision to divert investment from traditional media channels towards influencers. Research conducted by MTM found that influencer content triggered high emotional impact scores for all age groups, especially 18-34s, on a level comparable to iconic ad moments such as the John Lewis Christmas ads in the 2010s. This research also showed that the more relatable the content, the more memorable it proved, too.

But while influencer marketing is undoubtedly here to stay and has unique benefits to offer, we also must be cautious. Consistent, gold-standard measurement has so far remained elusive on this topic as, given its relative newness, the effectiveness infrastructure has not had time to develop. Equally, interplay between media channels, diversifying the types of content and imbuing creativity into the media plan are crucial elements of a successful marketing strategy.

While influencer marketing can provide a gateway for brands to high-value audiences, the channel is not a silver bullet. Even as the media landscape shifts, other channels, such as AV and OOH, continue to deliver strong results for fame-driving campaigns. A successful media mix should be exactly that – a balanced mix of channels working in tandem to drive long-term brand building and consistent business outcomes.

As Sabrina Francis, Strategy Partner at the7stars, notes, 'influencers should have a role in our plans. They just shouldn't be the plan'.



AI Search Has Changed the Game – Here's How Commerce Brands Adapt

Search is evolving faster than ever. AI-generated answers, shopping panels, and zero-click results are reshaping how customers discover and choose products.

For commerce brands, this isn't a challenge to fear but a huge opportunity to lead the way. The brands that adapt now will gain visibility in places competitors haven't even started to think about yet.

AI doesn't just search, it selects – make sure it chooses you

Consumers are increasingly leveraging AI tools to guide purchases in the UK. In fact, Adobe Analytics reports that traffic from generative AI sources to UK retail sites [has increased significantly](#). It reveals a 20% month-over-month jump between February and March 2025 and a staggering 790% increase since August 2024.

When a shopper asks for 'the best moisturiser under £30', AI isn't scrolling through endless results. It's selecting a smallset of trusted, well-structured options. Brands that enrich their product data, optimise feeds, and ensure AI fully understands their inventory will be the ones that consistently make the cut.

Technical SEO is more important than ever

Technical SEO has always been the backbone of visibility, but in an AI-driven search world, it's evolving into a growth engine. Schema markup helps AI recognise your products, prices, reviews, and availability with confidence. Optimised, real-time product feeds boost placement in shopping panels and recommendation carousels. Smart crawling and indexation management ensures no valuable SKU is missed.

This is no longer just about rankings; the challenge is being fully understood by machines that surface and recommend your products. The brands mastering this will gain a lasting competitive advantage.

Trust signals shape AI choices

AI doesn't just look at product data, it also weighs social proof and authority. Reviews, expert mentions, and consistent, trustworthy information across platforms all make it more likely that your products will be surfaced first. Brands investing in authentic reviews, brand reputation, and trusted citations are building visibility that goes way beyond keywords—it influences the AI decision-making process itself.

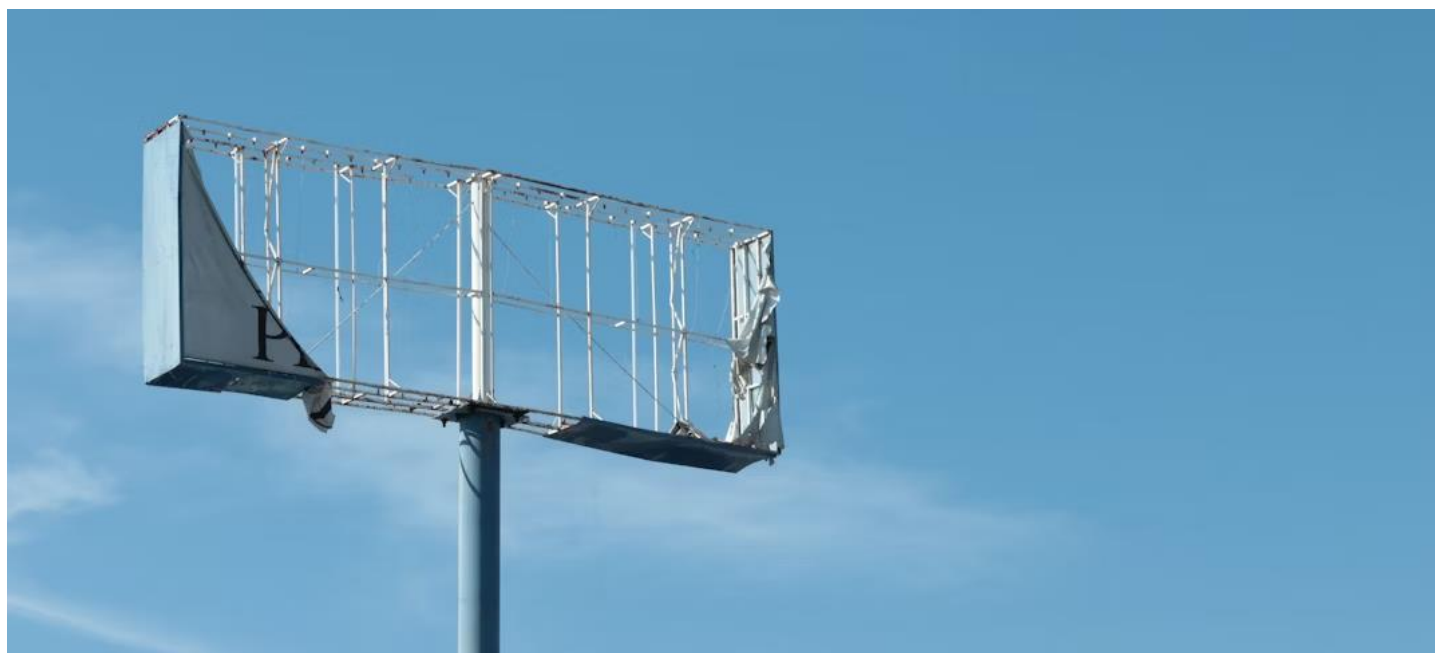
Agility wins in an AI-driven landscape

AI search evolves rapidly. New organic shopping formats and shifts in how AI interprets data mean static SEO strategies won't cut it anymore. Success comes from building real-time optimisation into workflows, testing and refining feeds, schema, and attributes regularly, and connecting SEO with paid search, CRO, and merchandising teams to respond fast and capture every opportunity.

The future of SEO is AI-ready, data-first, and full of opportunity

AI hasn't replaced SEO; it's redefined what great SEO looks like. Commerce brands should treat this moment as an opportunity to achieve three things: Strengthen data foundations across feeds, schema, and reviews; Optimise for AI-powered discovery in shopping panels and recommendation engines; and Build agile, connected search strategies across teams

AI is rewriting the rules of discovery. Commerce brands that optimise their data today will own the digital shelf tomorrow.



Recent Ad Bans Show the Importance of Self-Regulation

The Advertising Standards Authority's consumer awareness campaign returned this summer, using slogans from some of the UK's most recognisable brands to describe the important role they play within the industry. The use of slogans from 'Love it or hate it' to 'Every little helps' demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between the ASA and the advertising industry. This supports the ASA's aim of self-regulation and holding our industry to high standards.

Regulation has become a contentious issue in recent months, with differing opinions on how far restrictions should go. A balance must be struck between a laissez-faire approach to self-regulation and wider government intervention, to protect consumers from harm. Advertising bans have continued to be a hot topic, with categories ranging from gambling and alcohol to fast food and fossil fuels facing calls for tighter regulation, and even many of the most seasoned brands falling foul of ASA rulings.

In what could be interpreted as a show of the strength of industry self-regulation, the ASA has struck down several high-profile campaigns for regulatory breaches in recent months. Adverts by [M&S](#) and [Zara](#) have been banned by the ASA for using 'unhealthily thin' models to promote their clothing lines. Brewdog, one of advertising's serial pranksters, saw a campaign for its Wingman Beer [banned](#) for suggesting alcohol can help beat boredom, loneliness, or frustration.

Campaigns that lead with humour have not been spared from bans. Back in June, [Twix](#) saw its surreal 'Two is more than one' TVC banned for featuring dangerous driving that was 'likely to breach the legal requirements of the Highway Code'. Even an April Fool's joke [from Lipton](#), about their most popular flavour being discontinued, was struck down due to being misleading – though the brand did post the joke on March 18th, rather than on April Fool's Day itself.

From October, a new layer of restriction comes into force, with brands facing the government's new 'Less Healthy Food' restrictions for the first time. This legislation designates 13 food categories which fall under additional advertising restrictions. LHF will undoubtedly bring with it more high-profile ad bans.

It must be said that almost all brands facing the ban hammer do so without malicious intent, and navigating increasingly complicated restrictions will likely involve trial and error for some advertisers. For the true extent of the incoming regulation to become clear, brands will first have to test the waters of the LHF framework – by which some will ultimately come a cropper – to understand what is permissible and what is deemed harmful.

However, the existence of the ASA's regulatory framework is something we should all support, with responsible advertising ultimately being better for consumers, society and advertisers. The ASA states that its goal is to 'keep ads legal, decent, honest, and truthful'. This is a vital mission statement that makes our industry both fairer and more effective, cementing an honest relationship between brands and consumers.



Why Non-Gaming Brands Should Care About Gamers

This August, Gamescom, one of the largest entertainment conventions in the world and a calendar highlight for gamers and creators alike, was held in Cologne, Germany. At the annual event, publishers showcase upcoming releases and give fans the chance to play demos months before launch. But the event also underlines that gaming remains one of the biggest untapped opportunities for advertisers.

Gamescom makes clear that gaming has broken out of its silo. It now rivals film, TV and music as a cultural force. In Cologne, streaming giants competed for gamers' attention: Netflix recreated *Stranger Things* sets for fans to explore and share on social media, while Disney+ offered sneak peeks of its upcoming *Alien* series with exclusive merchandise. These brands are not just chasing reach; they are positioning themselves as part of gaming culture—because every hour spent gaming is an hour away from film or TV.

Gaming's influence also extends to other cultural touchpoints. Gamescom opened with a live *Witcher 3* concert, where an orchestra performed the game's iconic score to thousands of fans. Non-endemic brands are experimenting with authentic ways to connect too. In 2024, Uber Eats partnered with EA Sports FC to offer in-app rewards tied to gameplay and sponsored watch parties. Done well, these activations build brand love by enhancing the player experience.

As the7stars revealed in our 2023 whitepaper, [Level Up](#), gaming reaches most of the British public. As a channel, it rivals alternatives like live radio and subscription VOD in time spent. Publishers like Nintendo rival platforms like Snap for attention. Yet gaming remains a relatively rare sight on media plans, with prevailing wisdom suggesting that, because gaming was created without advertising, gamers will never be receptive to brand partnerships.

In 2025, events like Gamescom have proven this is not the case. Gaming is central to mainstream culture, with big-name partnerships—like those of Netflix and Disney—showing that gamers are now a must-reach audience. As gaming collides with other forms of media, this creates new opportunities for storytelling and partnerships. Brands that invest in gaming spaces now can build trust and loyalty with these highly engaged audiences.

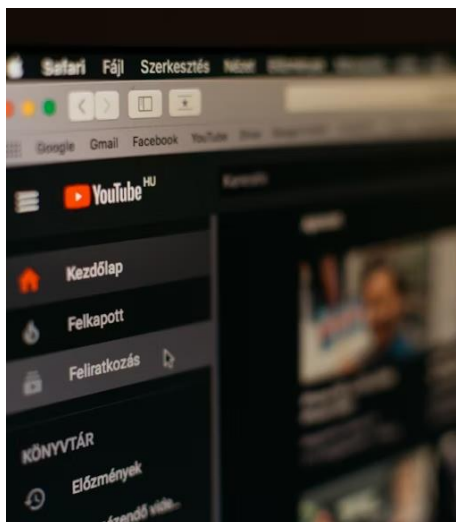
Authenticity is critical to any successful foray into gaming. Non-endemic brands looking to build their presence among gaming communities should consider the following:

Make experiences accessible: Cloud gaming lets players enjoy titles without expensive hardware. Non-endemic brands can do the same by offering trials, subscriptions, or interactive experiences that are easy to access.

Leverage AI for personalisation: Games are increasingly using AI to tailor experiences to individual players. Brands can use AI and data insights to deliver content, offers, and experiences which feel personal and relevant.

Build and nurture communities: Gaming thrives on community. Brands can build forums, social groups, or live events where audiences connect with each other and the brand. For example, a cosmetics brand could run live tutorials or challenges where customers post their looks. Through genuine interaction, brands can turn passive audiences into engaged communities, boosting loyalty.

For brands willing to experiment, gaming offers more than reach. Gamers are highly engaged and respond to experiences that feel authentic. Gamescom 2025 shows that brands can now shape the future of entertainment with experiences that are meaningful, interactive, and culturally relevant.



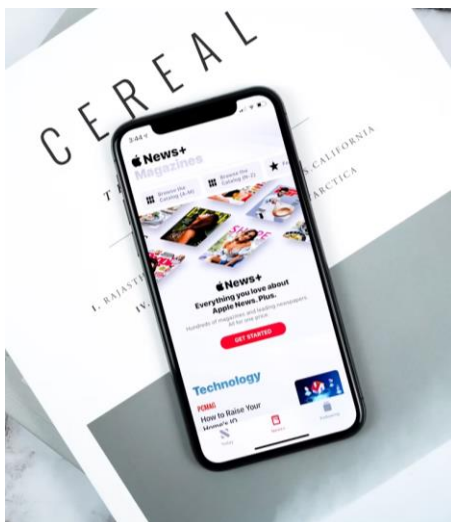
BARB Begins Reporting on YouTube Views Through TV

In a bid to bridge the gap between Wi-Fi-based viewing and TV set reporting for YouTube audiences, BARB, alongside research partner Kantar Media, has announced its new TV joint-industry measurement system – a first for the industry.

The 200 initial partners cover a variety of verticals including Sports, Kids' Content and Entertainment, featuring MrBeast, Bluey, FIFA, Fox News and Universal Pictures. These were selected in partnership with SeeViews, based on volume of viewers and brand safety adherence.

ACR (Automatic Content Recognition) detects and matches audio to any of the 200 channels when viewed, while Wi-Fi router meters detect channel URLs when accessed by BARB Panel members. BARB's new weekly YouTube report also contains a demographic profile per channel alongside the standard reach, minutes viewed and share of total identified viewing.

This further highlights the expanding world of 'TV', with set-top viewing of YouTube now reported in tandem with linear and video-on-demand content.



UK Adults Spend an Hour Each Day with Newsbrands

96% of the UK population consume newsbrands in some form, despite waning interest in the news as a whole, according to Ofcom's annual News Consumption report.

Although only 42% of UK adults say they are interested in news, the average adult spends 61 minutes per day consuming news content. For the first time, online news consumption (70% reach among all adults) has overtaken linear broadcast TV channels (63% reach) – with the majority of this digital consumption taking place through social media, news aggregators, or search engines, rather than directly from newsbrands. This varies greatly by demographic, however: three-quarters of 16-24-year-olds consume news through social media, compared to just one-fifth of those aged 75+.

Whilst news consumption shifts to digital sources, Brits continue to place greater trust in public service broadcasters – despite steady declines in reach for the BBC and other PSBs in recent years.



DCM Takes Over Omniplex, Growing to 85% Market Share

Digital Cinema Media has strengthened its position as the dominant player in cinema advertising in the UK, after [taking over](#) the Omniplex Cinemas chain from rival Pearl & Dean. This leaves DCM with 85% market share, up from 80% over the past decade.

DCM's dominance can be attributed to its handling of cinema advertising for the 'Big Three' chains in the UK. Jointly owned by Odeon and Cineworld, and with Vue a shareholder, DCM also serves Picturehouse and more than 160 independents as part of its portfolio.

Coinciding with the start of school summer holidays, July was the biggest month of 2025 for the UK box office so far, with almost 13 million cinema admissions across the month. Everyman, the UK's fourth biggest cinema operator and the largest handled by Pearl & Dean, [has seen](#) a 15% growth in ticket sales over the past year, fuelled by a series of blockbuster releases in recent months.