INDUSTRY INSIGHTS · 2026

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

2026 digital marketing trends, tactics and best practices, backed by the latest data.

Social · Short-form video · Influencer · Paid ads · SEO & AI search · Email & SMS · Ecommerce



2026 AT A GLANCE

Attention moved. Budgets followed.

Social and video now drive the fastest growth in digital advertising, AI is rewriting search, and commerce is happening inside the feed. Here is what the data says, and what to do about it.

5.66B

social media user identities worldwide, 68.7% of the global population[1]

$294.6B

U.S. internet ad revenue in 2025, up 13.9% year over year[2]

8% vs 15%

of Google visits led to a result click with vs. without an AI summary[6]

17.1%

of U.S. retail sales were e-commerce in Q2 2026[9]

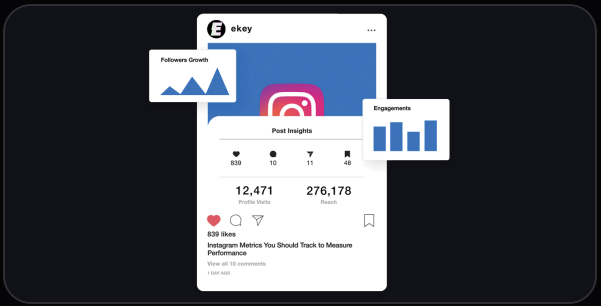
INSIDE THIS REPORT

Social media	03	Email & SMS	08
Short-form video	04	Ecommerce & social commerce	09
Influencer & creators	05	The 2026 playbook	10
Paid ads	06	How Ekey helps	11
SEO & AI search	07	Sources & notes	12

Superscripts refer to the numbered sources on page 12. 1 DataReportal / Kepios, Digital 2026 (2026). 2 IAB & PwC, Internet Advertising Revenue Report FY2025 (2026). 6 Pew Research Center (2025). 9 U.S. Census Bureau (2026).

Two in three people use social media.

Brands are concentrating where attention is highest. Instagram has overtaken Facebook as the platform brands use most, while TikTok keeps gaining on both usage and perceived ROI.



5.66B
active social media user identities, +4.8% YoY (259M added)[1]

70%
of brands use Instagram, now ahead of Facebook (69.6%)[3]

54.5%
of brands use TikTok as a marketing platform[3]

SHARE OF BRANDS USING EACH PLATFORM[3]

Instagram	70.0%
Facebook	69.6%
X	55.8%
TikTok	54.5%

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

- Build platform-native content for each channel instead of cross-posting the same asset everywhere.
- Prioritize Instagram and TikTok for discovery; use consistent posting and community replies to compound reach.
- Repurpose your best-performing posts into paid creative and email to extend their life.

1 DataReportal / Kepios, Digital 2026 Global Overview Report (2026; data to Oct 2025; "user identities" may not equal unique individuals). 3 HubSpot, 2026 State of Marketing (2026; X reported as "over 55.8%").

Short-form video is the ROI leader.



48.6%

of marketers rank short-form video in their top three formats for ROI, first among all formats[3]

91%

of businesses use video as a marketing tool, matching the all-time high[4]

85%

of people say they've been convinced to buy a product or service by watching a video[4]

$78.0B

U.S. digital video ad revenue in 2025, up 25.4%, the fastest-growing format[2]

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

- Hook in the first seconds: lead with motion, faces or a bold claim, and design for sound-off viewing with captions.
- Produce in volume and test variations. One shoot can yield many cuts for Reels, TikTok and YouTube Shorts.
- 63% of people would most like to learn about a product through a short video[4], so keep product demos short and specific.
- Put spend behind proven organic winners to scale reach efficiently.

2 IAB & PwC, Internet Advertising Revenue Report: Full Year 2025 (Apr 2026). 3 HubSpot, 2026 State of Marketing (2026). 4 Wyzowl, State of Video Marketing 2026 (survey of 266 respondents, late 2025).

Creators are now core media.

Influencer marketing has moved from experiment to essential line item. Budgets are rising fast, and the creator economy is a key driver of social ad growth.



$32.55B

estimated global influencer marketing industry size in 2025[5]

87.49%

of surveyed marketers expect their influencer budget to increase in 2026; only 5.55% expect a decrease[5]

+32.6%

growth in U.S. social ad revenue in 2025, which IAB attributes in part to the creator economy[2]

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

- Mix creator tiers: HubSpot's research finds micro-influencers (under 100K followers) deliver the highest ROI[3].
- Brief for outcomes, not scripts. Give creators the message and let them translate it natively.
- Whitelist and repurpose top creator content as paid ads (UGC-style) to extend performance.
- Track with unique links and codes so influencer impact shows up in revenue, not just reach.

2 IAB & PwC, Internet Advertising Revenue Report FY2025 (2026). 3 HubSpot, 2026 State of Marketing (2026). 5 Influencer Marketing Hub, Influencer Marketing Benchmark Reports 2025 (industry size) and 2026 (budget survey, 600+ marketers).

Social overtakes search in ad dollars.

U.S. internet advertising hit a record $294.6B in 2025. Social became the largest category, video grew fastest, and search growth slowed as AI reshapes discovery.

U.S. INTERNET AD REVENUE BY FORMAT, 2025 (YOY GROWTH)[2]



Categories overlap (e.g., social video counts in both social and video), so they do not sum to the total.

$162.4B

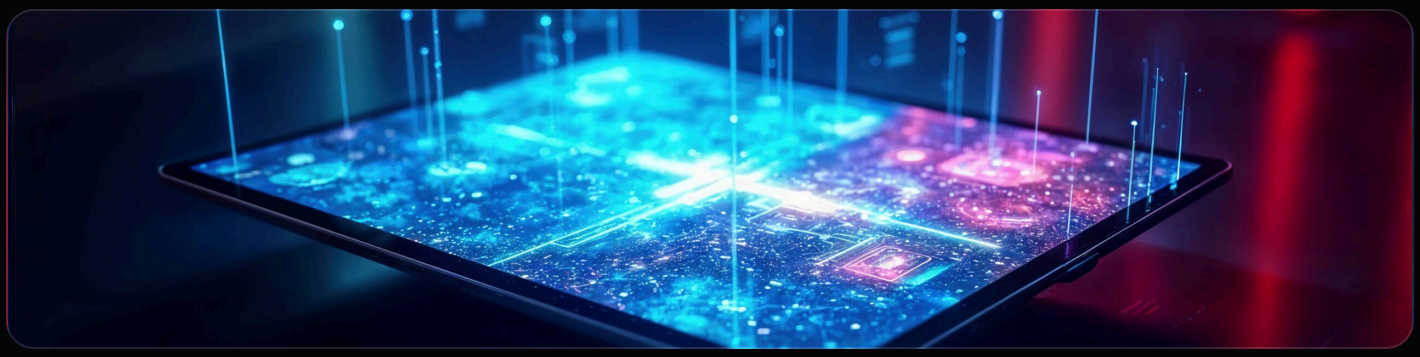
programmatic ad revenue in 2025, up 20.5%, as automated buying keeps scaling[2]

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

- Creative is the new targeting: refresh ad creative often and test hooks.
- Balance Meta, YouTube and TikTok with search, and follow incremental results.
- Measure blended ROAS and revenue: 33% of marketers say ROI measurement is their #1 challenge[3].

2 IAB & PwC, Internet Advertising Revenue Report: Full Year 2025 (April 2026). 3 HubSpot, 2026 State of Marketing (2026).

Search is becoming answers.



8%

of Google visits with an AI summary led to a result click, vs. 15% without one[6]

1%

of visits to pages with an AI summary resulted in a click on a source cited in it[6]

40.6%

of marketers are updating SEO for search changes in 2026[3]

Users were also more likely to end their browsing session after an AI summary (26% vs. 16%)[6]. Visitors who do reach your site arrive later in their journey, better informed and with higher intent[3].

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

- Answer real questions directly, in conversational language, near the top of each page.
- Structure content to be scannable: clear headings, lists, FAQs and schema markup.
- Build authority beyond your site. Reviews, PR, creator content and video all feed AI answers.
- Track branded search, assisted conversions and AI referrals, not just organic sessions.
- Make landing pages conversion-ready for high-intent visitors.

3 HubSpot, 2026 State of Marketing (2026). 6 Pew Research Center, "Google users are less likely to click on links when an AI summary appears in the results" (July 2025; browsing data of 900 U.S. adults, March 2025).

Owned channels, compounding returns.

Email and SMS turn the attention you earn on social into repeat revenue, especially when messages are triggered by behavior.

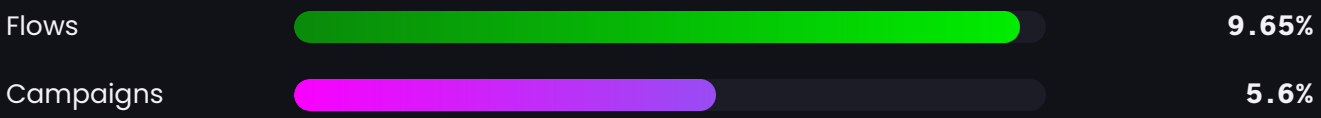
$36

average return for every $1 spent on email marketing[8]

45.2%

of SMS revenue comes from automated flows, which are just 7.6% of SMS sends[7]

SMS CLICK RATE: AUTOMATED FLOWS VS. CAMPAIGNS (2026)[7]



64.4% of SMS flow revenue comes from new buyers, and flows generate roughly 8x the revenue per recipient of campaigns[7].

EXAMPLE: A BEHAVIOR-TRIGGERED CART FLOW

TRIGGER	→	EMAIL · 1 HR	→	SMS · 24 HR	→	RESULT
Cart abandoned		**Reminder email**		**Short nudge**		**Order placed**
Shopper leaves checkout		"Still thinking it over?"		Link back to checkout		Then post-purchase flow

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

- Build the core flows first: welcome, browse and cart abandonment, post-purchase and win-back.
- Capture email and SMS consent everywhere: bios, landing pages and checkout.
- Segment by behavior and send fewer, better messages; reserve SMS for high-intent, time-sensitive moments.

7 Klaviyo, 2026 SMS Marketing Benchmarks (data from 183,000+ Klaviyo customers). 8 Litmus, State of Email Report (2023).

The feed is the storefront.

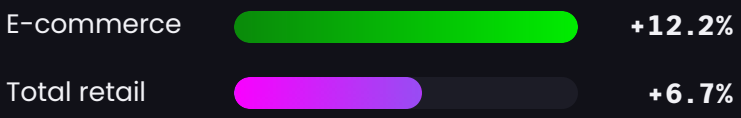
Online sales keep outgrowing retail overall, and a growing share now starts and ends inside social apps.

$340.2B
U.S. retail e-commerce sales in Q2 2026 (seasonally adjusted)[9]

17.1%
of total U.S. retail sales happened online in Q2 2026[9]

$100B+
U.S. social commerce sales forecast for 2026, the first time above $100B[10]

YEAR-OVER-YEAR GROWTH, Q2 2026[9]



51%
of U.S. social buyers are forecast to shop on TikTok in 2026[10]

FROM SCROLL TO CHECKOUT

DISCOVER	→	TAP	→	BUY	→	RETAIN
Video post		**Product tag**		**In-app checkout**		**Email & SMS**
Creator demo in the feed		Price and details in-app		No extra site visit needed		Post-purchase and win-back flows

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

- Shorten the path from content to checkout with shoppable posts and in-app shops.
- Pair launches with creators and short-form demos; social proof sells.
- Optimize product pages for speed, mobile and clear offers. Paid traffic is only as good as the page it lands on.
- Retarget engaged viewers and capture them into email and SMS flows.

9 U.S. Census Bureau, Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales, 2nd Quarter 2026 (released Aug 18, 2026). 10 EMARKETER, US Social Commerce Forecast 2026 (Jan 2026).

10 best practices for 2026.

01

Lead with short-form video

Make it the backbone of organic and paid.

02

Go platform-native

Tailor format, tone and pacing to each channel.

03

Treat creators as media

Always-on creator programs, not one-off posts.

04

Feed paid with proven creative

Scale what already works organically.

05

Optimize for answer engines

Direct answers, structure and authority.

06

Own your audience

Grow email and SMS lists from every touchpoint.

07

Automate the moments that matter

Behavior-triggered flows over blasts.

08

Make content shoppable

Remove every step between scroll and checkout.

09

Use AI with taste

AI for speed and personalization; humans for story.

10

Measure revenue, not vanity

Tie every channel back to ROAS and growth.

BOTTOM LINE

The winners in 2026 combine cinematic creative, creator distribution and disciplined paid media, then capture that attention in owned channels.

HOW EKEY HELPS

Turn these trends into growth.



Social & short-form video

Social Media Management, Content Creation and cinematic in-house production. 508M social audience.

Influencer & creators

Influencer Marketing and Personal Brand Growth, with native, trend-driven content.

Paid media

PPC, Facebook and YouTube Ads: over $5M in ad spend managed and a 4x average client ROAS.

Search & web

SEO, Web Design and Lead Generation built for high-intent visitors.

Owned channels

Email Marketing and SMS Marketing that compound revenue.

Commerce & reach

Ecommerce Product Development, Affiliate, PR, Outdoor, Music, App and Web3 marketing.

Ready to dominate your market?

Stop blending in. Let's build a marketing engine that actually works.

ekey.co/start-a-project

Start a Project →

Ekey figures as stated on ekey.co.

Sources

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10 EMARKETER: US Social Commerce Forecast 2026 (January 2026).
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NOTES

Statistics are reported as published by each source, accessed November 2026. Survey-based figures reflect respondents' answers and may not represent all businesses. Third-party figures are not Ekey results. Ekey figures (508M social audience, 354+ active clients, $5M+ ad spend managed, 54% average client revenue increase, 4x average client ROAS) are as stated on ekey.co.