

The new rules of influence: Why offline events are winning for brands

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, June 19, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The most powerful brand moments of the past year have not happened on a feed. They have happened in a room.

Across industries, brands are shifting how they use [influencer](#) partnerships, moving away from content output towards something harder to manufacture: genuine community. The brands getting it right are taking their strategies offline.

The data behind the shift

This is not a vague cultural feeling. The Influencer Marketing Factory's 2025 Creators IRL survey of 1,000 social media users found 41% had attended an in-person influencer event in the past year, with two-thirds of non-attendees open to attending one. StubHub data shows creators, podcasters, and authors sold 500% more event tickets in 2025 than the year before.

A 2025 Business of Fashion and McKinsey survey found 68% of shoppers are frustrated by the volume of sponsored content on social media. As digital trust erodes, the appetite for in-person connection grows to fill the gap.

From the attention economy to the connection economy

dcdx founder Andrew Roth, whose firm launched a first-of-its-kind agency in 2025 dedicated to connecting brands with IRL communities, frames it as a fundamental shift: "Influencer marketing created a movement within the attention economy, helping brands capture attention worldwide. Now, a post-COVID movement centred around human connection has emerged."

As third spaces declined, new communities formed around shared interests rather than shared places, run clubs, book clubs, creative collectives, wellness circles, offering something brands have struggled to manufacture online: genuine belonging. EMARKETER found over 84% of Gen Z and Millennials value brands that blend technological and physical experiences. The appetite for IRL signals a demand for balance.

The evolution of the influencer event

Not all influencer events are created equal. The large-scale brand party, the stacked goodie bag,

the attendance fee, none of that has disappeared, but it no longer represents best practice. Consumers, and increasingly the creators they invite, can spot events that exist purely as content generation exercises.

REFY Beauty illustrates what has replaced it: rather than a traditional influencer trip, REFY selected participants for a Mallorca getaway from its Instagram Broadcast Channel community, inviting loyal customers to experience events alongside their favourite creators. The approach generated coverage in Vogue, Business of Fashion, and Cosmopolitan, because the concept was genuinely new. Co-founder Jenna Meek: "REFY has built its reputation as an influencer-led brand, but recently, we've seen a shift: our customers have become the new influencers."

The principle holds regardless of category. When [Brandnation](#) launched MERIT Beauty to UK and Irish audiences, the starting point was recognition rather than reach: tastemakers chosen for their authority in clean beauty, gathered around the brand's "less is more" philosophy, generating 70+ pieces of content reaching a combined following of 3.21 million.

Niche communities and the depth of offline engagement

Today's most effective creator events are not built for everyone. They are built for exactly the right people, carrying high engagement, high trust, and a shared identity passive scrolling cannot replicate.

The Bellissima Salon Tours show what this looks like done well. Italian haircare brand Bellissima wanted to build genuine authority in the curl community, long underserved by mainstream haircare. Brandnation took the brand into curl-specialist salons across London and Manchester, now rolling out to three further UK cities, welcoming members of The Curl Collective, Bellissima's creator community, for one-on-one styling sessions showcasing the brand's Diffon Supreme in an educational rather than promotional context. One creator's video alone reached over 400,000 views and 40,000 likes; across the campaign, 95 pieces of content reached 1.51 million people with 39,000 engagements.

Merrell's Destination Hackney shows the same principle in motion: launching the Agility Peak 6 trail shoe in a way that meant something to London's running community via an 80km ultra-relay race through UK trails, threading five teams of five into East London. As Merrell spokesperson Simon Sweeney put it, the ambition was to "tear up the racing rulebook and do something that felt genuinely alive." The race generated over 300,000 organic social views and 240+ pieces of media coverage, with an afterparty at Netil360 extending the reach further.

Harriet Poole, Influencer Account Director at Brandnation, has seen this play out across campaigns: "The brands getting the best results from offline community work are the ones treating events as genuine experiences rather than content shoots. When a creator hosts something they actually believe in, the quality of everything that follows is completely different. You cannot manufacture that energy. You have to earn it."

The content opportunity that lives beyond the room

The content that performs best from IRL activations is content no brand could have scripted: an unplanned moment, a genuine reaction, a conversation captured on someone's phone. Audiences can feel the difference between something that happened and something staged. The strongest activations extend that content lifecycle well beyond the room, generating buzz, content, and conversion in one place, while creators bring engaged audiences with them.

The brands winning in this space share a common approach: prioritising depth over reach, giving creators genuine creative freedom, and building experiences attendees actually want to talk about. The shift is from campaign briefs to co-created spaces, where the brand adds value rather than buying a presence. In a landscape where digital trust is harder than ever to earn, that is a genuine competitive advantage.

Want to build influence beyond the feed?

Brandnation helps brands create culturally relevant IRL experiences that communities actually want to be part of. Get in touch to find out more.

Brandnation is an award-winning integrated creative marketing and communications agency headquartered in London, named by PRWeek as one of the UK's fastest-growing consultancies.

With 25 years of experience across sports, beauty, lifestyle and beyond, Brandnation powers global consumer and corporate brands through its signature Creativity. Multiplied. philosophy: informed creative ideas, integrated and amplified across PR, influencer marketing, social media, experiential and performance marketing for maximum impact.

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