how brands decide whose videos get paid

i'm the person on the other side of your submission. here's what i look at, what makes me hit approve, and why most videos get sent back, from someone who reviews creator videos for a living.

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before we start

most guides about getting paid as a creator are written by creators. this one isn't. i don't make the videos. i'm the one who receives them.

my job is running a creator program for a consumer brand. i write the briefs, i pick who gets the product, i watch every video that comes in, and i decide which ones get approved, which get sent back, and which go on to run as ads.

that means i've seen what gets a yes from the inside. and almost none of it is about how many followers you have, how nice your camera is or how long you spent editing.

so this is the other half of the story. what the person approving your video is actually looking for, in the order i look for it.

you don't need to be discovered. you need to make my job easy.

what my job actually looks like

a normal week for me is a lot of short videos and very little time per video.

- i write a brief: what the product is, who it's for, what we want people to feel, the one or two things a video has to show.
- creators apply or get invited. i look at their profile for a few seconds each.
- the ones who fit get the product in the mail.
- videos come in. i watch them, usually on my phone, the same way someone would see them in their feed.
- each one gets approved, sent back with a note, or passed on.
- approved videos go to the team that runs ads. some run for a day, some run for months.

the part creators never see is the pile. on a busy day i'm going through a lot of submissions back to back. i'm not looking for reasons to say no. i'm looking for the ones i can say yes to fast.

> everything in this guide comes from that seat. it's general patterns, not anything private about our creators or our numbers.

what this is called

when a brand pays regular people to make videos it uses in its own marketing, that's ugc: user-generated content. the user makes it, not the brand.

the important part: your video usually doesn't go on your feed. it runs as the brand's ad, on the brand's account, to people who've never heard of you. that's why your follower count matters so little to me. i'm not buying your audience. i'm buying a video that works.

FLAT FEE

the brand pays you once for the video and the right to use it. simple, predictable, and you're done when you hand it over.

PERFORMANCE

you're paid on how the video does, like a share of what the brand spends running it or of the sales it brings in. most videos earn a little. a few earn a lot. nobody, including me, can tell in advance which ones.

WHITELISTING

the brand runs the ad through your handle, so it shows your name. it still lives in the ad, not on your profile. read what you're agreeing to and for how long.

whatever the deal, the video has to clear the same person first. that's me. so let's talk about what i check.

the 7 things i check

01 your profile

02 the first two seconds

03 did you read the brief

04 the product, on screen

05 does it look like a real person

06 what happens after you submit

07 are you easy to work with

in that order. if you get the first three right, you're already ahead of most of the pile.

01
your profile

before you've made anything for me, i look at your profile. it's a few seconds, and i'm checking one thing: can you talk like a normal human on camera?

that's it. i'm not counting followers. i'm not judging your aesthetic. i want to see a face, hear a voice, and believe you'd be someone people would actually listen to about a product.

- a real photo of you, not a logo.
- one or two short videos of you talking. about anything. a product you love is perfect.
- a line that says what you make: "talking-head reviews for skincare and snacks" tells me more than "content creator ✨ ".

an empty profile gives me nothing to say yes to. even if you're great, i can't tell. fifteen minutes of setup is the highest-return thing you'll do.

02
the first two seconds

this is where most of my decision happens, and it's where most videos lose me.

i watch the way someone scrolling would. if the first two seconds are you saying "hey guys, so today i wanted to talk about...", the person scrolling is gone, and so is my reason to run it.

the openings i approve fastest do one of these:

- start in the middle of something: unboxing, biting, applying, mid-sentence.
- say the problem out loud: "i have never once finished a bag of chips without feeling gross."
- show the result first, then explain.
- ask the question the viewer is already thinking.

you don't need a clever line. you need the viewer to know, right away, why they should keep watching.

03
did you read the brief

every brief has one or two things the video has to do. show the product being used. mention the thing that makes it different. avoid a claim we're not allowed to make.

a surprising number of videos miss them. not because the creator isn't talented, but because they skimmed.

here's how to read a brief like the person who wrote it:

- find the must-haves and write them on a sticky note before you film.
- find the never-says. health claims, competitor names, "cures", "guaranteed". one wrong word and i legally can't run it.
- notice who it's for. a video for busy moms and a video for gym guys are different videos, even for the same product.

a great video that ignores the brief is a video i can't use.

04
the product, on screen

i'm paying for people to see the product. you'd be amazed how many videos are mostly a face and a quick flash of the box at the end.

- hold it close to the camera, label facing out, long enough to read.
- use it for real. open it, taste it, put it on. real use is the most convincing thing in the whole video.
- light it. stand facing a window. that's honestly enough.
- sound matters more than picture. film somewhere quiet, close to the phone. people forgive a slightly blurry video. they don't forgive one they can't hear.

all you need is a phone. i've approved plenty of videos filmed in a car, a kitchen or a bathroom. i've sent back expensive-looking ones that never showed the product.

05
does it look like a real person

this one surprises people. the videos that look the most "produced" are often the ones that do worst as ads.

people scroll past things that look like ads. they stop for things that look like a friend telling them about something they bought. that's the whole reason brands pay for ugc instead of making polished ads themselves.

- talk like you're facetiming a friend.
- cut the silences. add captions. that's usually all the editing a video needs.
- skip the stacked effects, the stock music swells and the five fonts.
- a script is fine. read it like you're telling a story, not reading a script. a teleprompter app helps.

you don't even have to show your face. product shots with a voiceover, or text over b-roll, get approved too. what matters is that it feels real.

06

what happens after you submit

your video lands with me as pending. then it gets one of three answers.

APPROVED

it goes to the ads team. some run within a day, some take longer, and a few approved videos never run at all. if it's been a while, a polite follow-up is fine.

REVISION

this is good news. it means i want to use it. the note tells you exactly what to change. do that, and only that, and send it back.

REJECTED

it happens to everyone, including creators i love working with. it usually comes with a reason. read it.

a rejection isn't a judgment on you. it's a test result. the brief, the hook, the product shot, the sound: one of them didn't land this time. fix that one thing and go again.

most programs don't limit how many videos you can submit. the creators who end up doing well are the ones who keep sending.

07
are you easy to work with

here's the part nobody tells creators. once i find someone reliable, i want to keep working with them. finding new creators takes time. a creator i can trust is worth a lot to me.

"easy to work with" is not complicated:

- you send what you said you'd send, when you said you'd send it.
- you take a revision note without a fight.
- you ask questions before you film, not after.
- you read the usage terms and ask if something's unclear.
- you name your files clearly and send the version i asked for.

talent gets you the first approval. being easy to work with gets you the next ten.

why i send videos back

the same handful of reasons, over and over. none of them are about talent.

- the first two seconds are an intro, not a hook.
- a must-have from the brief is missing.
- a claim we can't legally make.
- the product barely shows up.
- i can't hear you clearly.
- it's horizontal, or the captions run off the screen.
- it's a different product or flavor than the one we sent.
- it looks like an ad, so people will scroll past it like one.

every one of these is fixable in a reshoot. print this page and check your video against it before you hit submit.

what nobody tells you (from my side)

i can't tell which video will win either. i've watched videos i thought were perfect do nothing, and quick, slightly messy ones run for months. the people on my side of the inbox are guessing too. that's why brands want a lot of videos, and why volume is your friend.

most videos earn very little. that's the model working, not failing. it's true for the brand and it's true for you.

month one is small. anyone telling you otherwise is selling something. the creators who do well treat the first month as practice that happens to pay.

the product counts. you're getting things you'd have bought anyway. remember that when you look at your first payouts.

stop waiting until you're ready. better lighting, a better idea, more confidence. the videos that work look like a real person talking, and you already have everything you need for that.

start here this week

- set up your profile: a real photo and one 30-second video of you talking about something you own.
- pick three brands whose products you'd actually use.
- read each brief twice. write the must-haves and the never-says on a sticky note.
- film your first video with a hook in the first two seconds, the product in your hand and a window in front of you.
- check it against the "why i send videos back" page. then submit it.
- make the next one. and the next one.

done beats perfect. i'd rather approve your fifth video than wait forever for your first.

creator queen

want the whole route? creator queen is a course taught from the brand side: picking a niche brands pay for, hooks, phone-only filming, your portfolio, pitching and landing ongoing creator-program work.
joincreatorqueen.com

this guide is educational. it doesn't promise income. most people who try ugc earn little or nothing from it, and results depend on your effort, niche and market. stephanie's views are her own general experience, not the policies or results of any brand. nothing here is legal or tax advice.