

STATE OF THE CREATOR ECONOMY 2022

PRESENTED BY  ConvertKit

The creator economy is on the move. Upward, that is.

\$800 million in venture capital has poured into it since October 2020, and Google Trends interest for the term quadrupled from March 2020 to today. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's zoom out.

As the creator marketing platform built for creators by creators, we believe the future belongs to creators. That's actually why we were so excited to put together this survey.

After 2,704 creators responded, we dove into the data to find some insightful pieces of information

that tell the story of who creators are, how they get the job done, what they're struggling with, and so much more.

A little disclaimer before we jump into all the beautiful details: The data doesn't represent a completely randomized section of creators at large. Since we sent this survey out to our audience, the majority of respondents were ConvertKit creators.

Now...onto the good stuff.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 04.** Chapter 1: What is the creator economy?
- 06.** Chapter 2: The people fueling the creator economy
- 17.** Chapter 3: Creators are gonna create (a little bit of everything)
- 25.** Chapter 4: An audience is a creator's most important asset
- 44.** Chapter 5: The creator economy middle class is growing
- 56.** Chapter 6: The creator lifestyle comes with challenges
- 66.** Chapter 7: Creator tool stack
- 68.** The Creator economy is just getting started
- 69.** Acknowledgements

01

**WHAT IS
THE CREATOR
ECONOMY?**

THE CREATOR ECONOMY IS A NETWORK OF CREATIVES, WRITERS, COACHES, INFLUENCERS, AND MORE WHO WANT TO EARN A LIVING ONLINE.

They use software and social media to share their perspectives, build an audience, and sell products and services.

Being a creator certainly isn't a new concept, and some full-time creators have been building an audience for over a decade. But a surge in new creators due to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought extra attention to the creator economy.

We wanted to know who these creators are, how they make money and what their plans are for the coming year. So we asked them.

This review of the Creator Economy in 2022 is the culmination of nearly 3,000 creators sharing their experiences. Together, these creators bring over 11,000 years of combined audience-building expertise and \$66 million in 2021 earnings.

They've shown us that the creator economy is vast and ready to grow.

02

***THE PEOPLE
FUELING
THE CREATOR
ECONOMY***

People are at the heart of the creator economy—it's even in the name. Before looking at what creators did this year, it's only fitting to learn who they are first.

NEARLY HALF OF CREATORS ARE FULL-TIME

If you've ever doubted whether it's possible to be a full-time creator, buckle up—it's not as rare as you might think. **Nearly half of the creators we surveyed indicated that being a creator is their full-time occupation.**

One in 10 creators are in it just for fun and label themselves as "hobbyist."

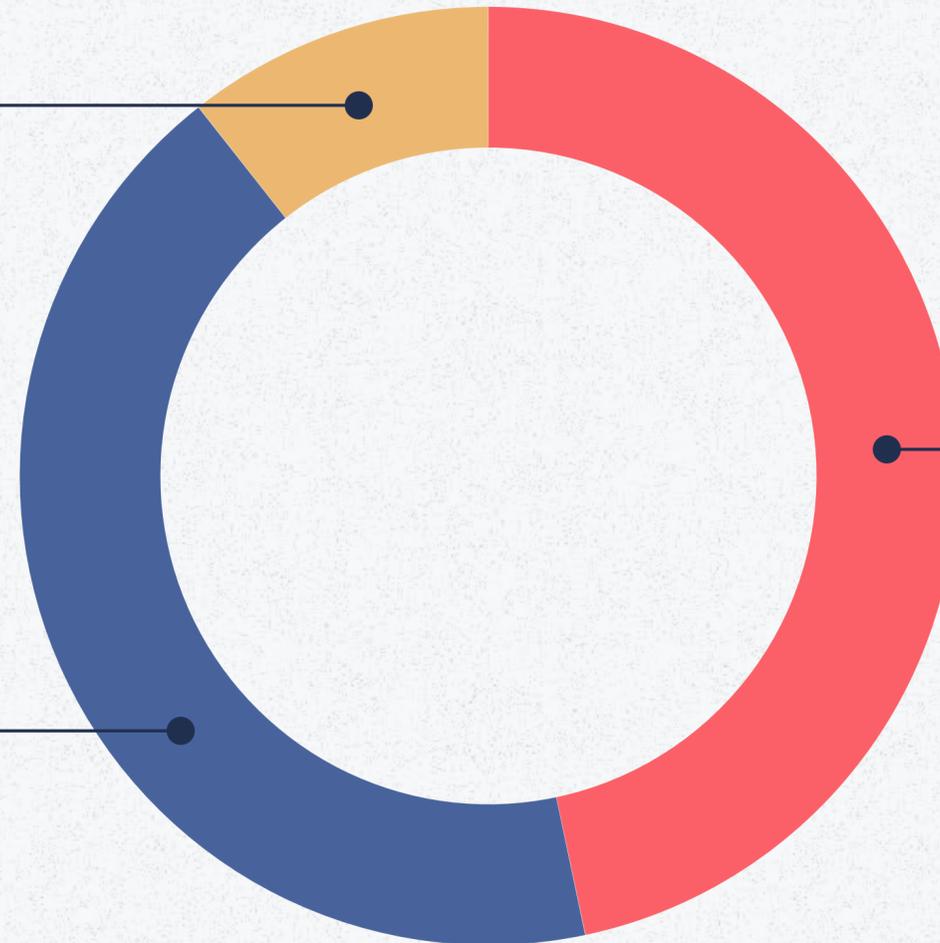
And 43% of people run their creator business on the side of another full or part-time job.

CREATOR STATUS

10.6%
HOBBYISTS

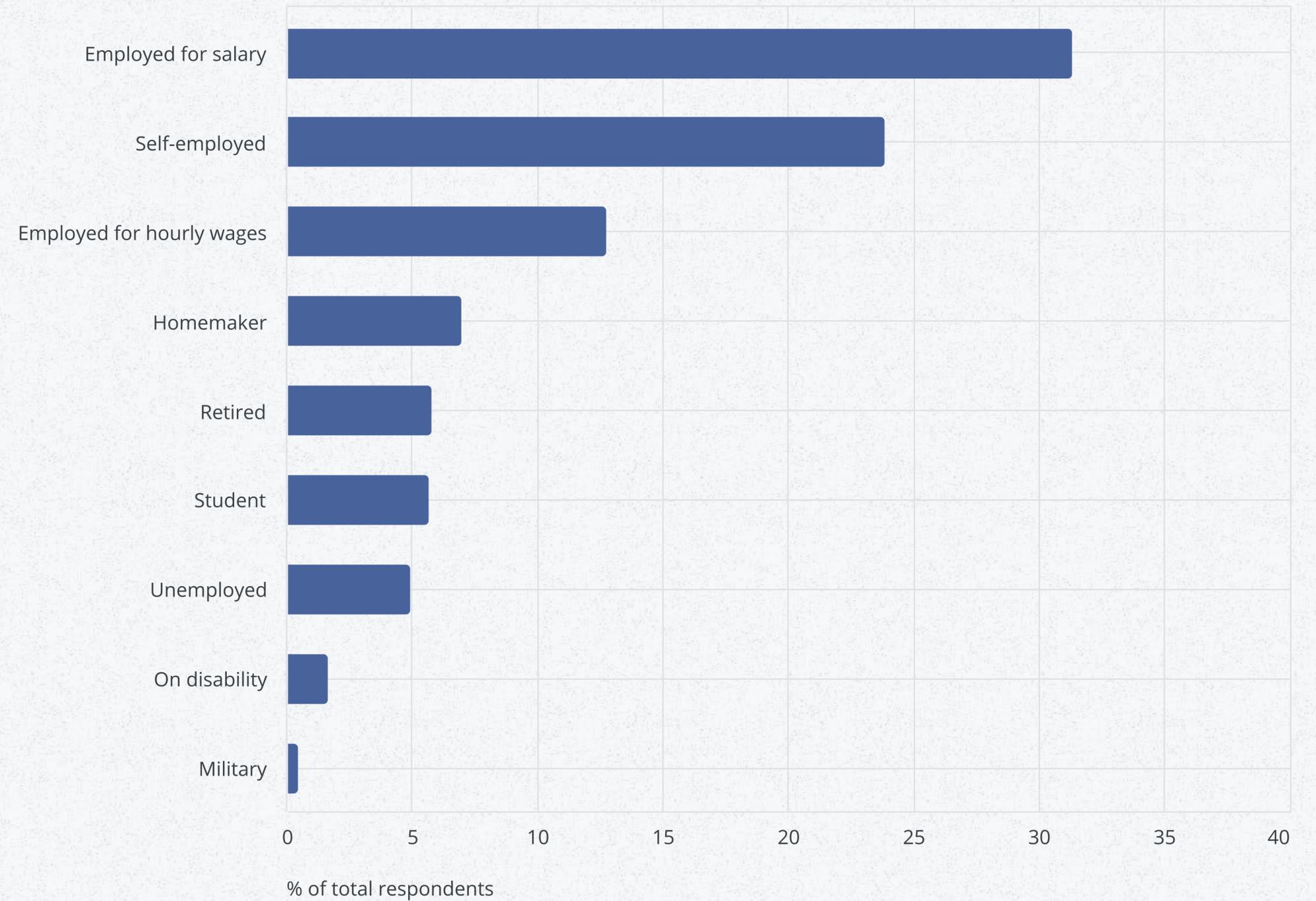
42.7%
PART-TIMERS

46.7%
FULL-TIMERS



The most common professional status of people who aren't full-time creators is salaried employees. To all the people working on their business in the evenings and on your weekends, we see you!

EMPLOYMENT STATUS FOR PART TIME CREATORS





Matt Ragland, a productivity expert and full-time creator, shared that he wanted to turn creating into his full-time job so his time matched his ambition. He said,

“One of the reasons I decided to be a full-time creator was because there were so many things I wanted to optimize and do that I would have never gotten to with just 10-ish hours of work a week. I was never going to stay even remotely consistent with it at that level.”

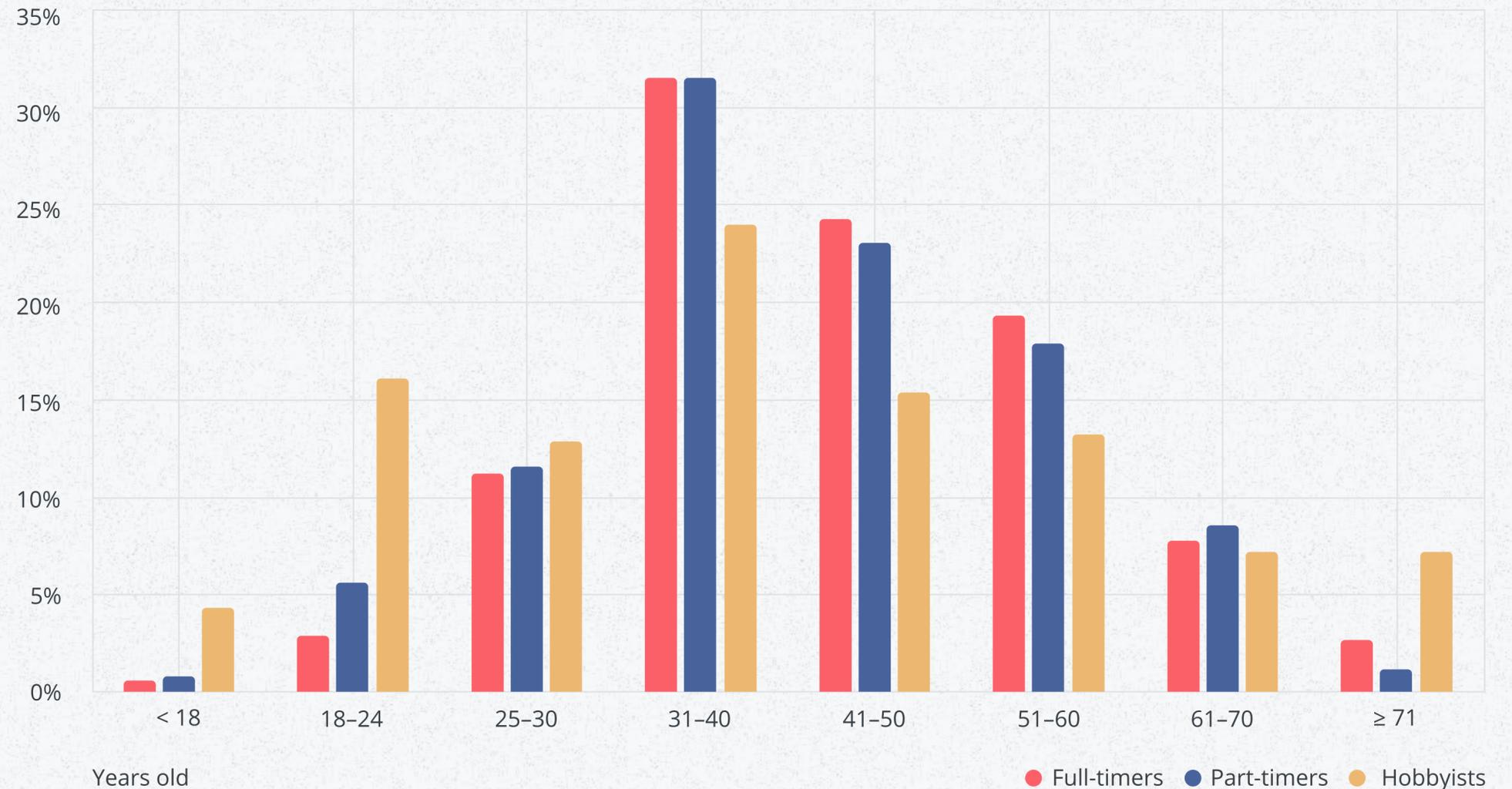
THERE'S NO "RIGHT" AGE TO BE A CREATOR

Would you have guessed that our survey encountered more creators over 71 years old than under 18? Or that every age range had creator representation? It can be easy to think of the creator economy as a young person's game since youthful faces dominate social media feeds. But that just isn't the case.

The single most popular age range for creators is 31-40 years old, with people in this category accounting for about a third of all creators.

People under 18 are more likely to be hobbyists than full-time creators, but we don't doubt that they'll catch up in time. If the 10% of full-time creators over the age of 61 are any indication, the next generation of creators can look forward to many more years of creating.

AGE DISTRIBUTION

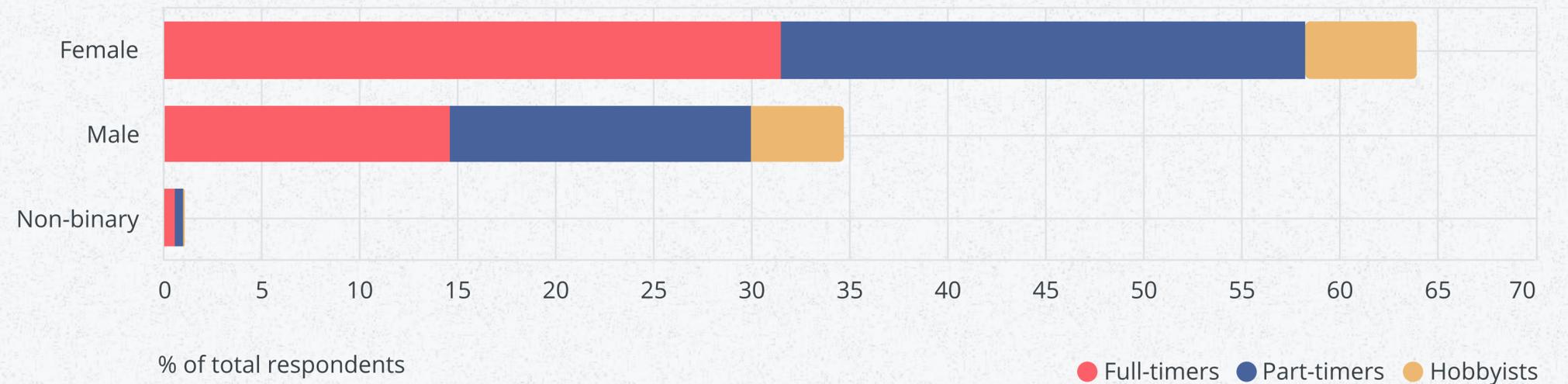


WOMEN OUTNUMBER MEN BY NEARLY 2:1

Female creators outnumber male creators... by a lot. **64% of survey respondents were women, versus 35% who were men.** 1% of creators identify as non-binary, and that percentage is consistent between both full-time and part-time creators.

The gap between the number of men and women creators increases when you focus on full-time creators, with 67% being women. The population of people who create as a hobby is closer to evenly split. However, women still come out ahead in representation.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION



We can only speculate, but we think there are a few leading causes of the gap.

First, being a creator is a flexible option for homemakers. 12% of part-time creators and 7% of hobbyists list homemaking as their other or primary occupation. This role was the 4th most common response for women and the 8th most selected for men.

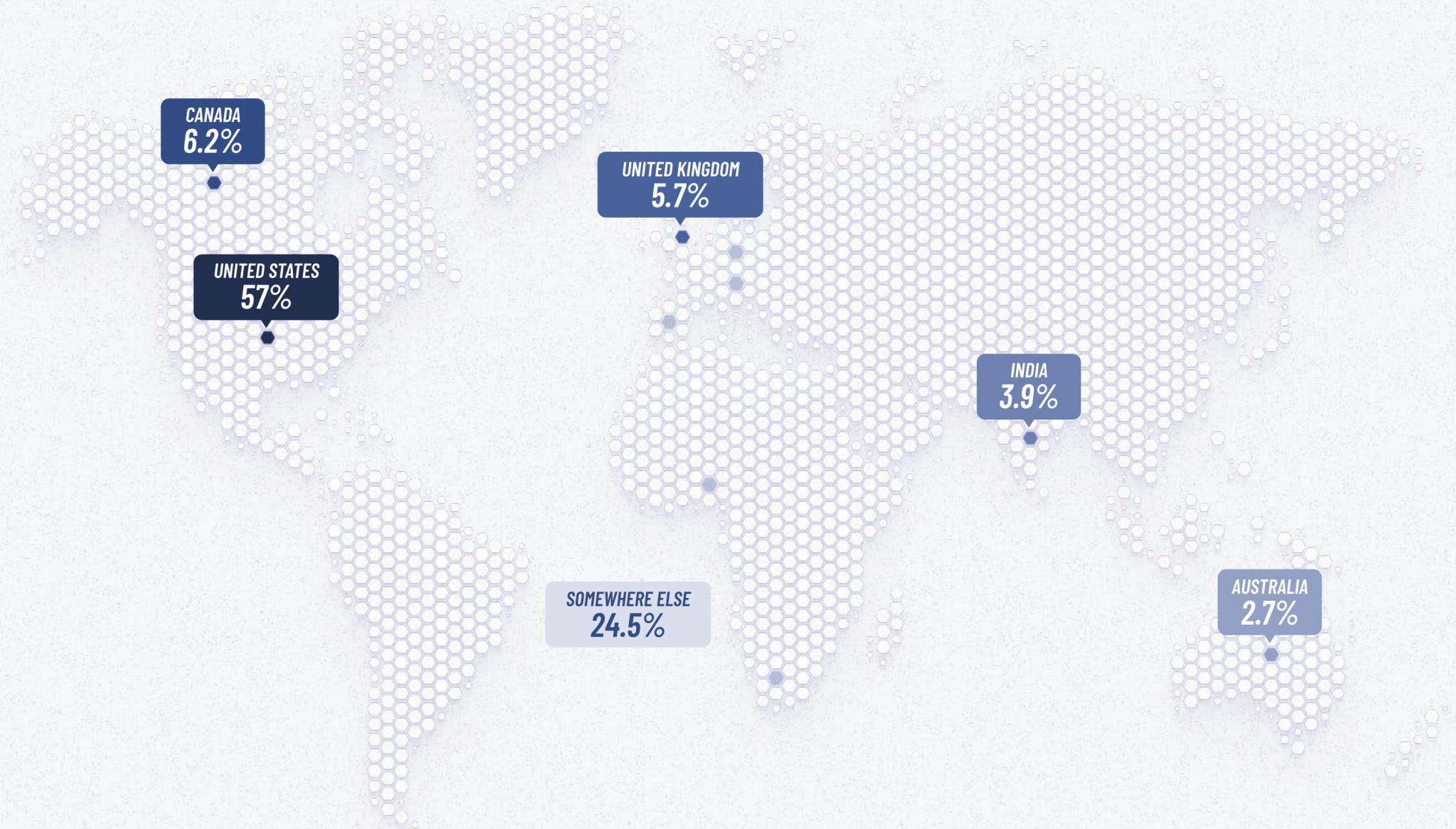
Second, data shows that women are unhappy in the workplace. There's still a gender pay gap, and

women are more likely to be burned out, exhausted, and chronically stressed than men. Plus, Black, LGBTQ+, and disabled women are more likely than others to have their judgment questioned. When women say "enough is enough," the creator economy is there waiting for them to take matters into their own hands.

MOST RESPONDENTS WERE IN THE UNITED STATES

The majority of ConvertKit's audience is in the United States, so this report is most indicative of North American creators. 57% of respondents live in the United States, 6% in Canada, 6% in the United Kingdom, 4% in India, and 3% in Australia.

We know the creator economy is global, though, so tell us where you're from!



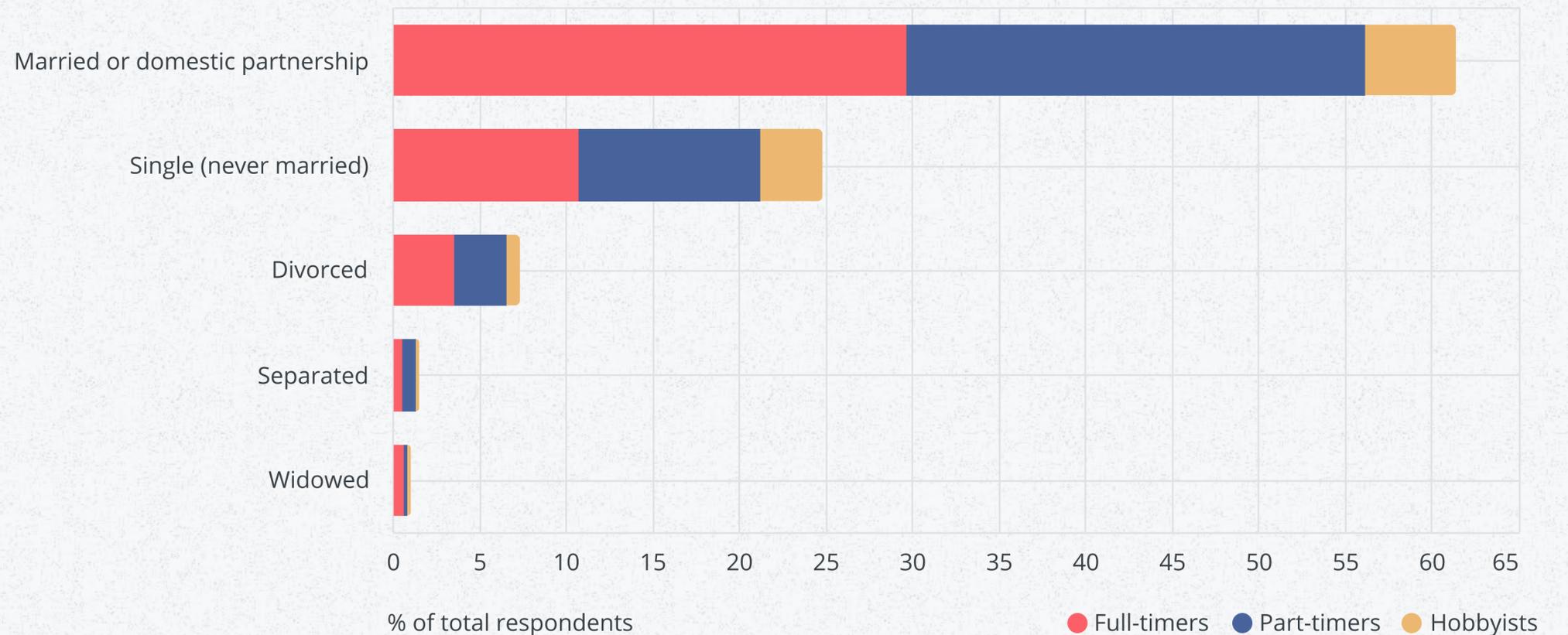
MOST MAKERS HAVE PARTNERS

Being a creator isn't easy, and a support system is invaluable for sharing your highs and lows. 61% of all creators are in a marriage or domestic partnership. We don't have the data to understand how this might impact creators, but we can guess.

Having someone to share responsibilities, finances, fears, and hopes with could make it easier to transition to being a full-time creator. **63% of full-time creators are married versus only 48% of hobbyists.**

There does seem to be an advantage to single life as a creator—free time! The highest concentration of single creators who have never been married is the hobbyist category. Maybe that intrepid group is putting the dating apps aside in exchange for a creative outlet. All we're saying is that if any of you single folks find the love of your life via your blog, we'd like a wedding invite.

MARITAL STATUS

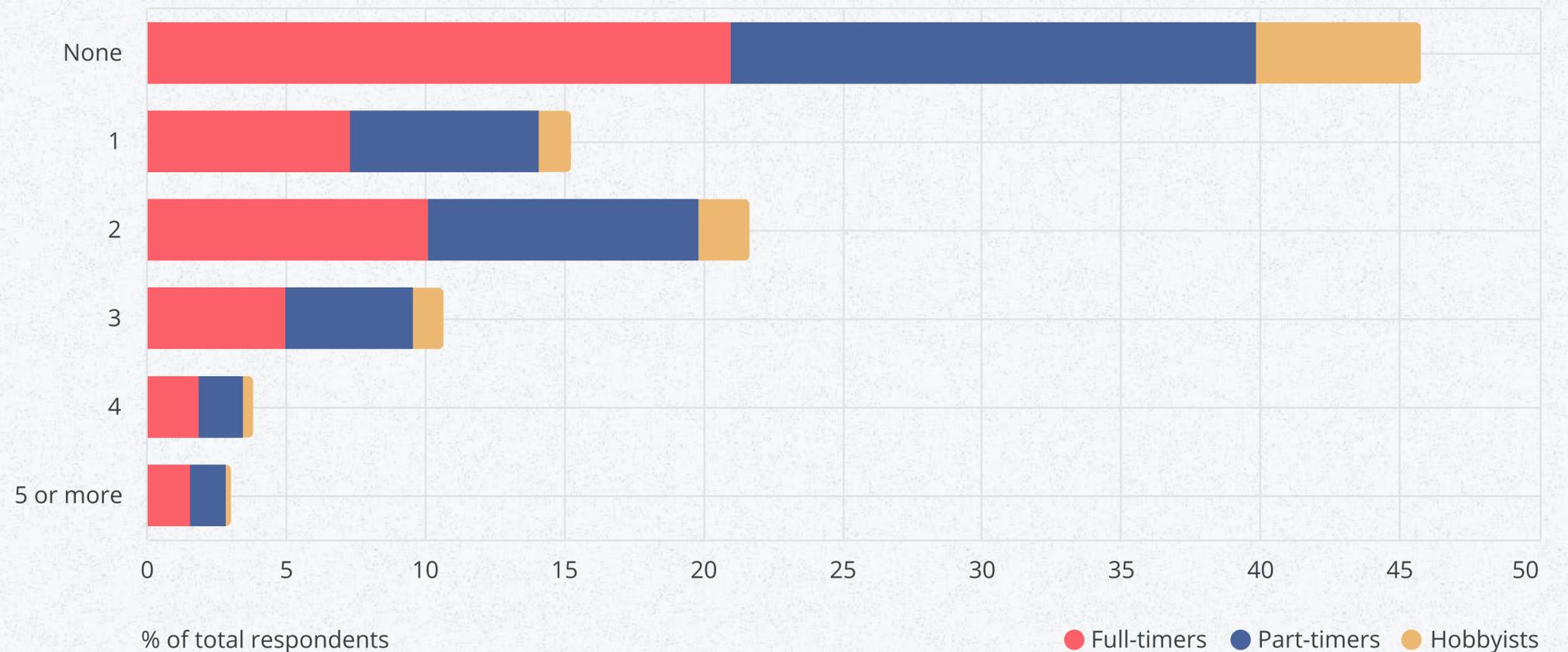


MOST FULL-TIME CREATORS ARE PARENTS, TOO

Speaking of family life, let's talk about creating as a parent. Our survey found that **55% of full-time creators have at least one kid, and that number is nearly the same for part-time creators.**

The only creator segment who are more likely not to have kids are hobbyists, which, if you'll recall, is also the group most likely to be single.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN



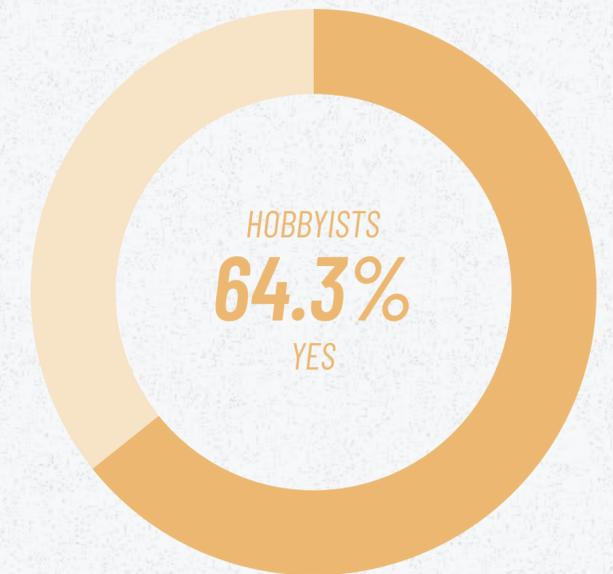
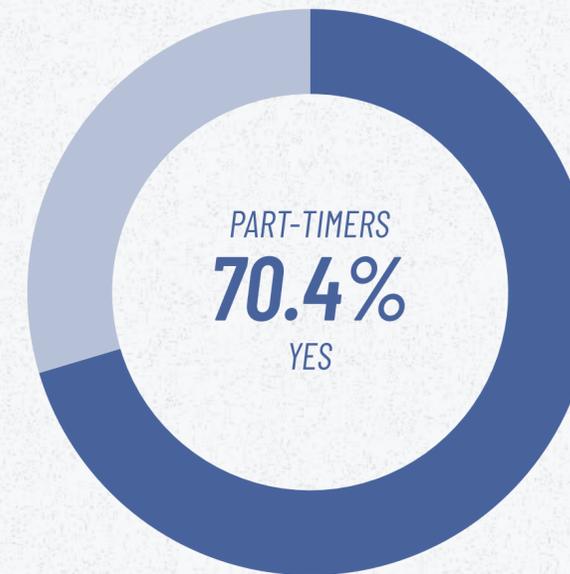
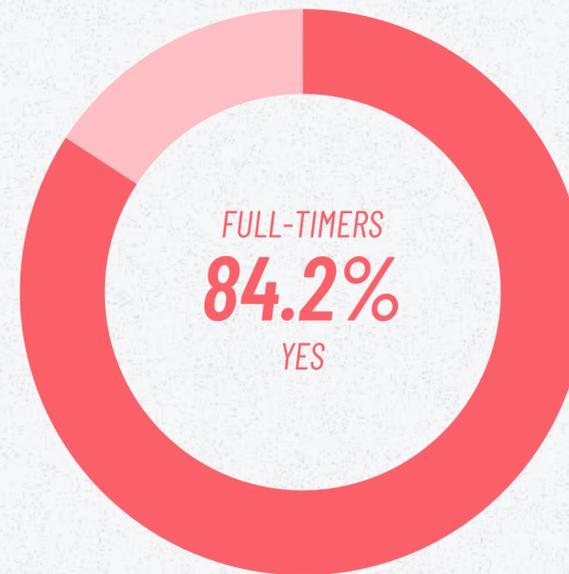


Nathan Barry, ConvertKit's Founder and CEO, commented on balancing family and a creator business:

"I think life with kids is easier as an established creator because you have more flexibility, freedom, etc. But the path to get there is much harder; full-time work + kids + trying to become a creator is so hard!"

COVID CAUSED A NEW WAVE OF CREATORS

WERE YOU A CREATOR BEFORE THE PANDEMIC STARTED?



Let's address the elephant in the creator economy; COVID-19. A third of the U.S. workforce switched to working from home in Spring 2020 because of the pandemic, and 20% were unable to work in May 2020 because their employer closed or lost business because of COVID-19.

As people grappled with each new wave of “unprecedented” events, global anxiety, and uncertainty, some turned to creating. **24% of creators who responded to our survey said they became creators during the pandemic.** That means that nearly one in four creators has only known creating during “the new normal.”

For many COVID creators, their business isn't a full-time gig (yet). Percentage-wise, double the amount of part-time and hobbyists started creating during the pandemic compared to full-timers.

03

CREATORS ARE GONNA CREATE (A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING)

There's no one type of person who becomes a creator, and there is most certainly not one type of content or niche they lean into. In 2021, creators addressed a seemingly endless number of topics ranging from home improvement, mental health, and fashion to robotics engineering, travel, and politics. They created social media posts, emails, courses, and more, often at the same time. While no two creator outputs are alike, one thing's for sure; creators are gonna create.

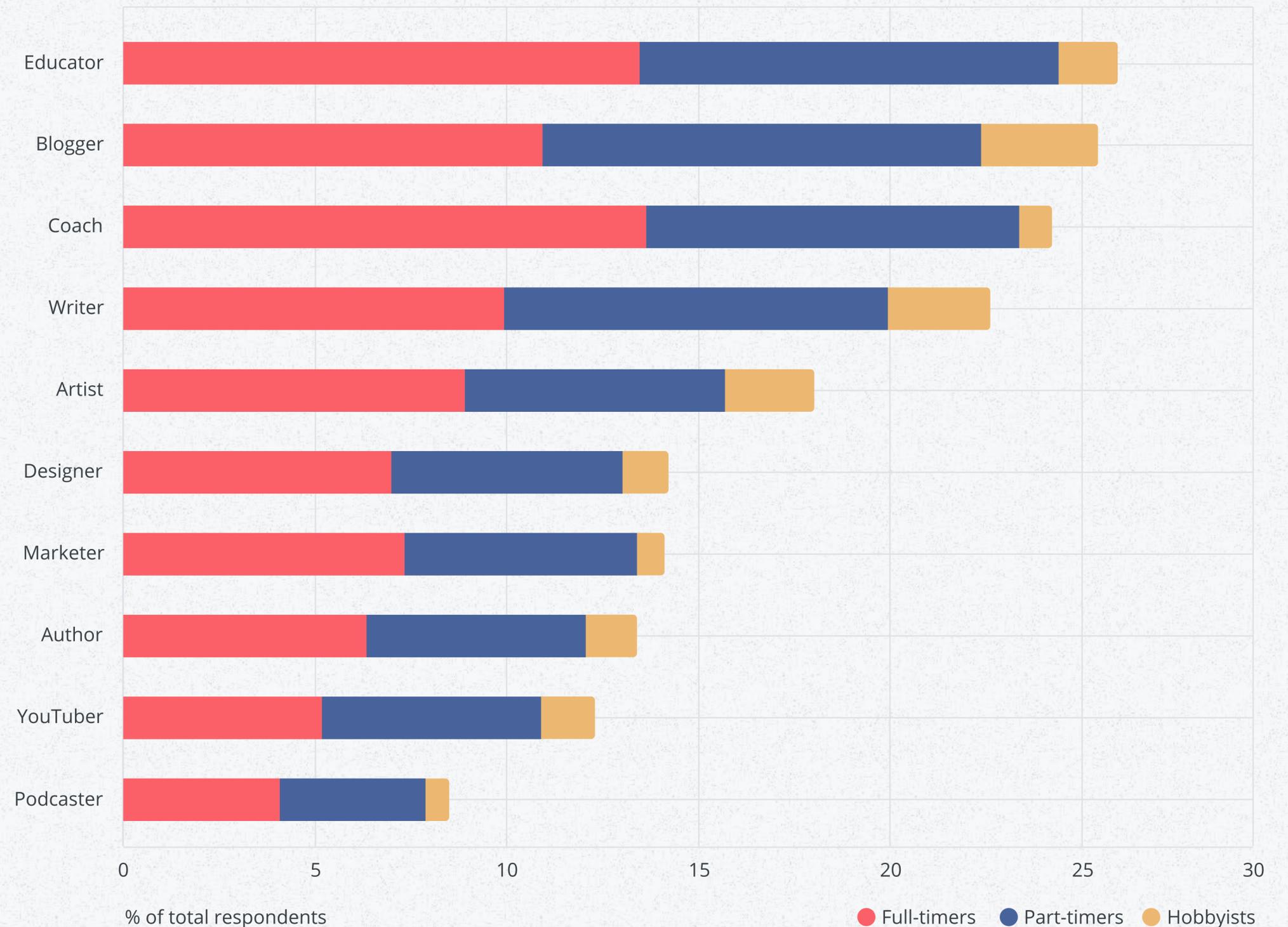
CREATORS COME IN ALL TYPES

When we think about what types of creators exist, it's helpful to group them by type. For example, coaches, artists, musicians, and developers can have different goals, preferred content types, and topics.

In 2021, **29% of full-time creators identified themselves as coaches, the single largest category.** Rounding out the top five were educators, bloggers, writers, and artists.

One prevailing trend across creator types was the affinity to be multi-hyphenate. Creators often don't label themselves as just a designer or filmmaker. They're "artists, authors, illustrators" or "musicians, photographers, writers." The whole point of being a creator is exploring and expressing your creativity and individuality, so don't box yourself in!

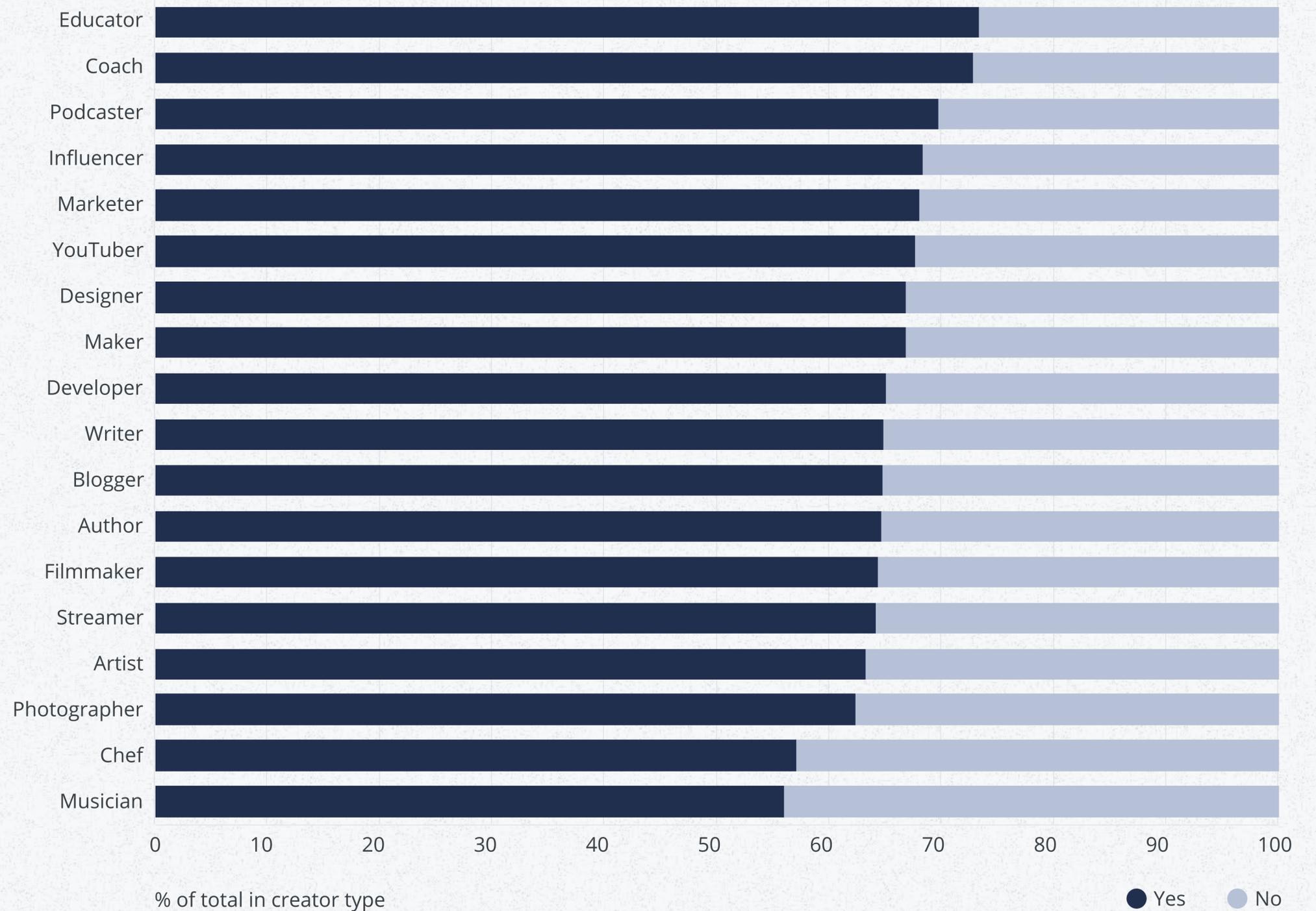
TOP 10 MOST COMMON CREATOR TYPES



TOP EARNING CREATORS

Educators were the most likely to have earned revenue in 2021, closely followed by coaches. This year, though, we should all go support a local band since musicians were the creator type least likely to have made money in 2021.

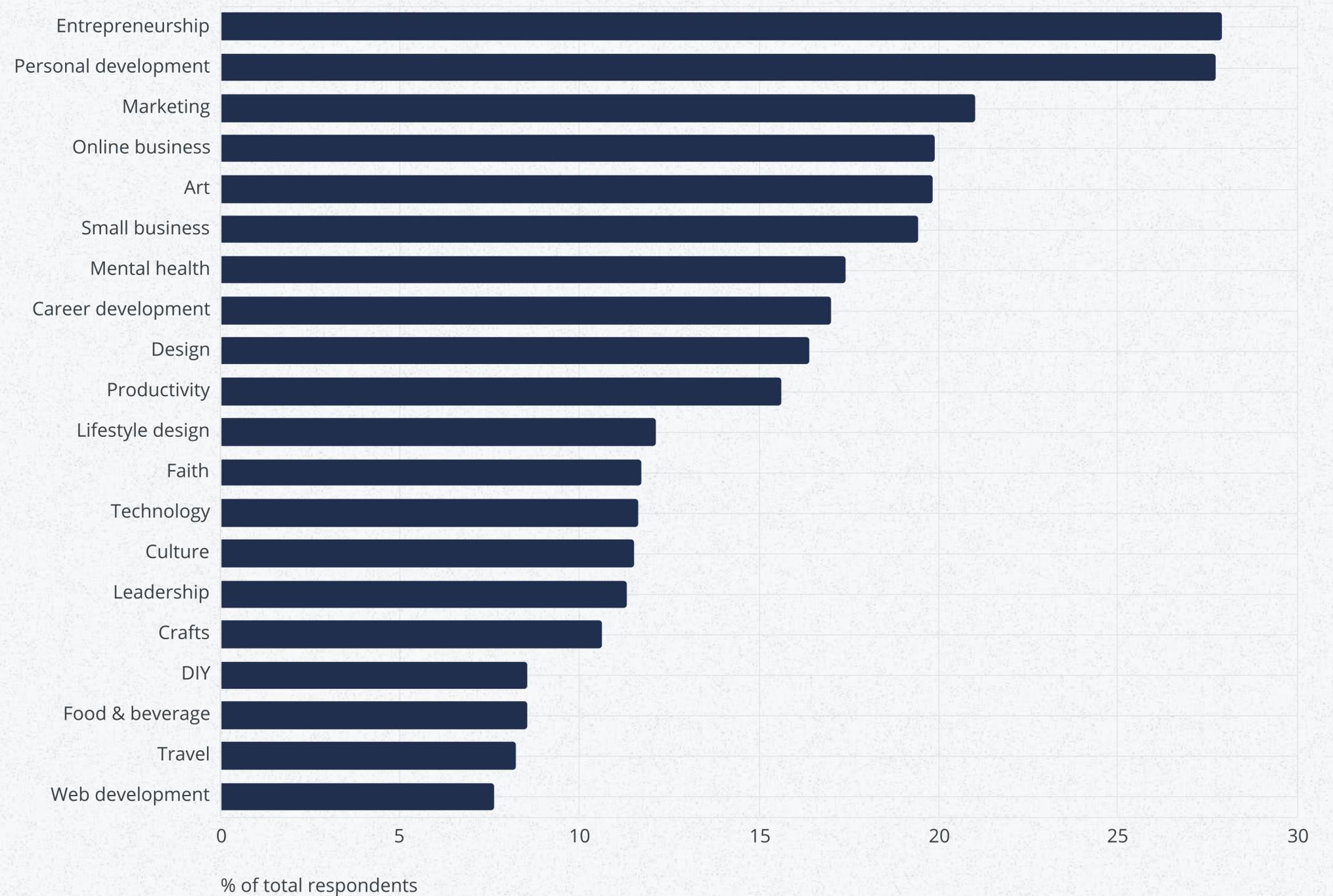
DID YOU EARN REVENUE IN 2022?



THERE'S A MARKET FOR EVERY TOPIC

If you've ever wondered if your interest is too niche, think again. We asked creators about the topics their content covered in 2021, and they told us, "oh, ya know, everything!" We tallied the top 20 most common topic responses, but if you don't see your interest on the list, don't worry. Plenty of unique themes like outdoor recreation, sustainability, and parenting are out there, too.

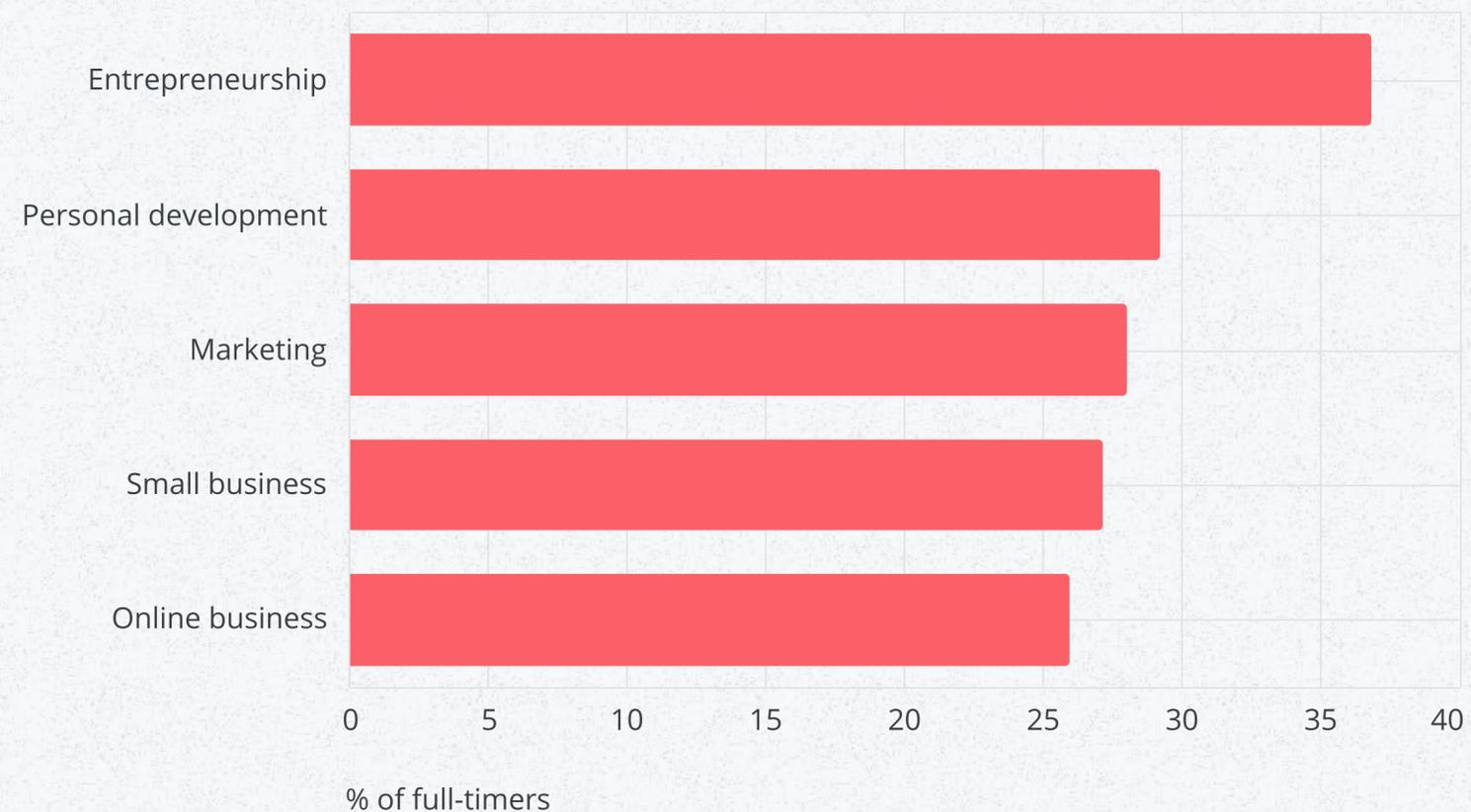
TOP 20 CONTENT TOPICS OVERALL



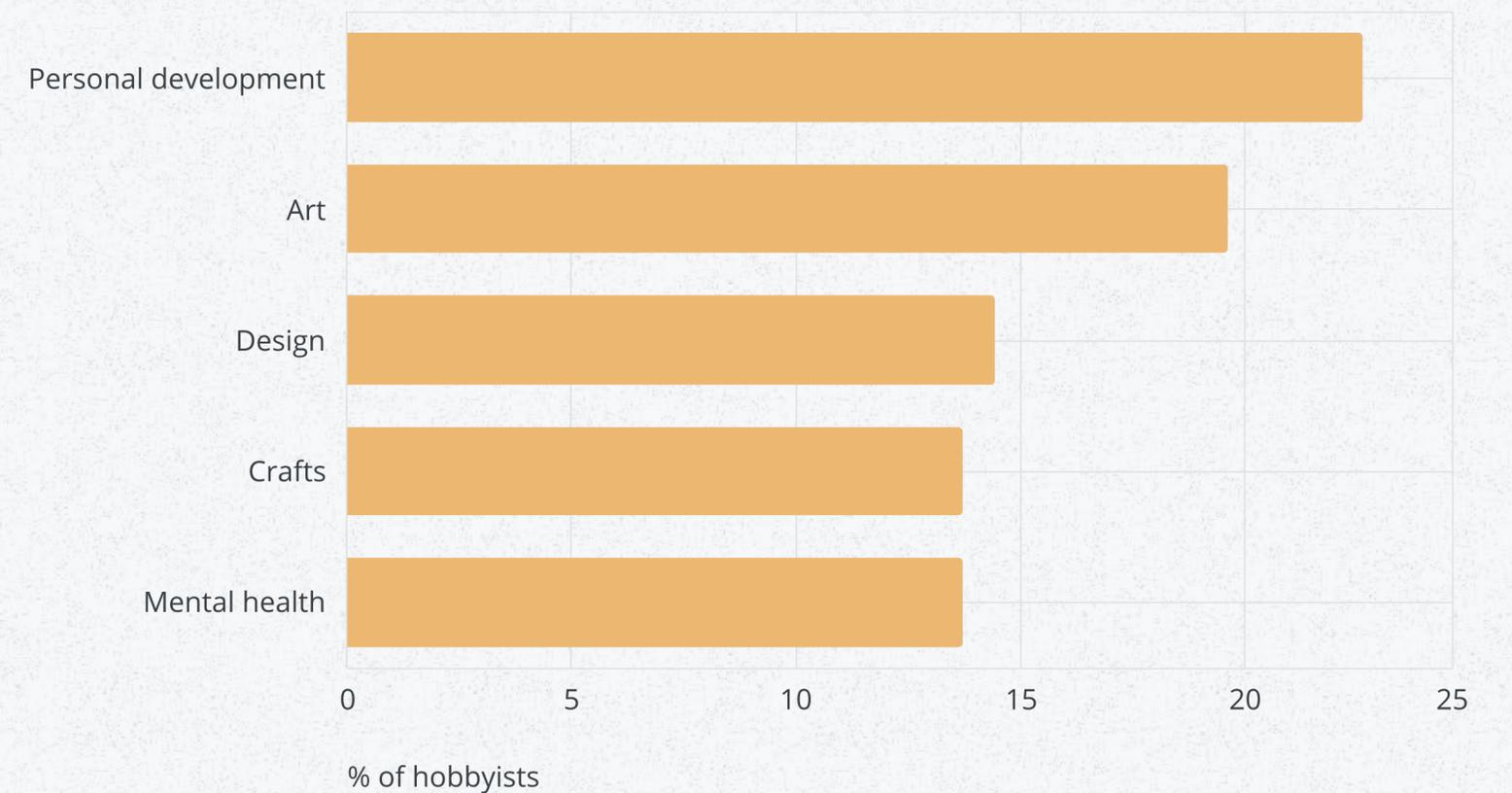
We did notice a compelling split between topics that full-time versus hobbyists cover. Professional creators are more likely to lean toward business and career-focused content, like entrepreneurship and marketing. At the same time, hobbyists favor topics sometimes deemed unable to make money, like art.

While it's possible, and somewhat likely, that the market for business topics is larger than creative pursuits, there may be something else at play. Most of us have heard from at least one well-meaning adult that some interests simply aren't "real jobs."

TOP 5 CONTENT TOPICS FOR FULL-TIME CREATORS



TOP 5 CONTENT TOPICS FOR HOBBYISTS





But guess what? The creator economy is carving out a place for people who want to commit their full attention to their passions. Take **Shelby Abrahamsen** as an example. She's an artist who shared:

“Society tells you that artists are starving, that they’re waiting tables, that they’re irresponsible, that they’re drug addicts. And then, of course, there’s people who make it. But for every successful artist, 10,000 hopefuls didn’t find their big break. I loved the idea of going into the arts, but I never felt like it was really an option.”

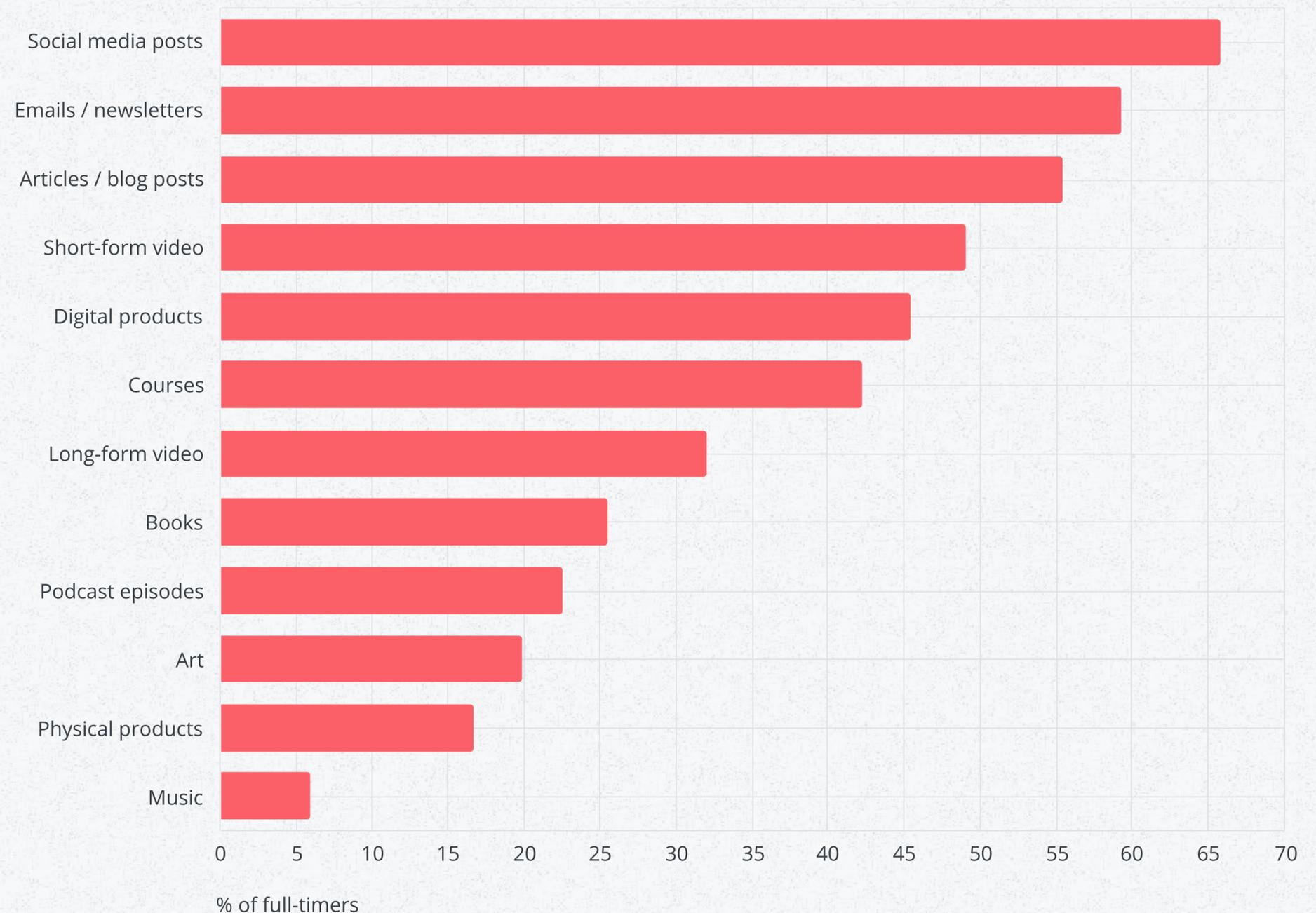
Fast forward to today, and Shelby is a full-time creator with more than 56,000 email subscribers and 330,000+ monthly page views. When you leverage digital tools to reach a worldwide audience, the realm of what’s possible vastly expands.

CREATORS MAKE MULTIPLE FORMS OF CONTENT

Creators did a lot of writing in 2021. The three most commonly created types of content for pros were social media posts, emails, and articles. That's likely because promoting your work and connecting with an audience is just part of being a creator. Communicating across platforms is practically non-negotiable.

Professional creators were also more likely than others to create a wide variety of content. While hobbyists generate an average of 2.4 types of content and part-timers average 3.4, **professional creators consistently put out an average of 4.4 content types.**

TYPES OF CONTENT CREATED IN 2021 BY FULL-TIME CREATORS



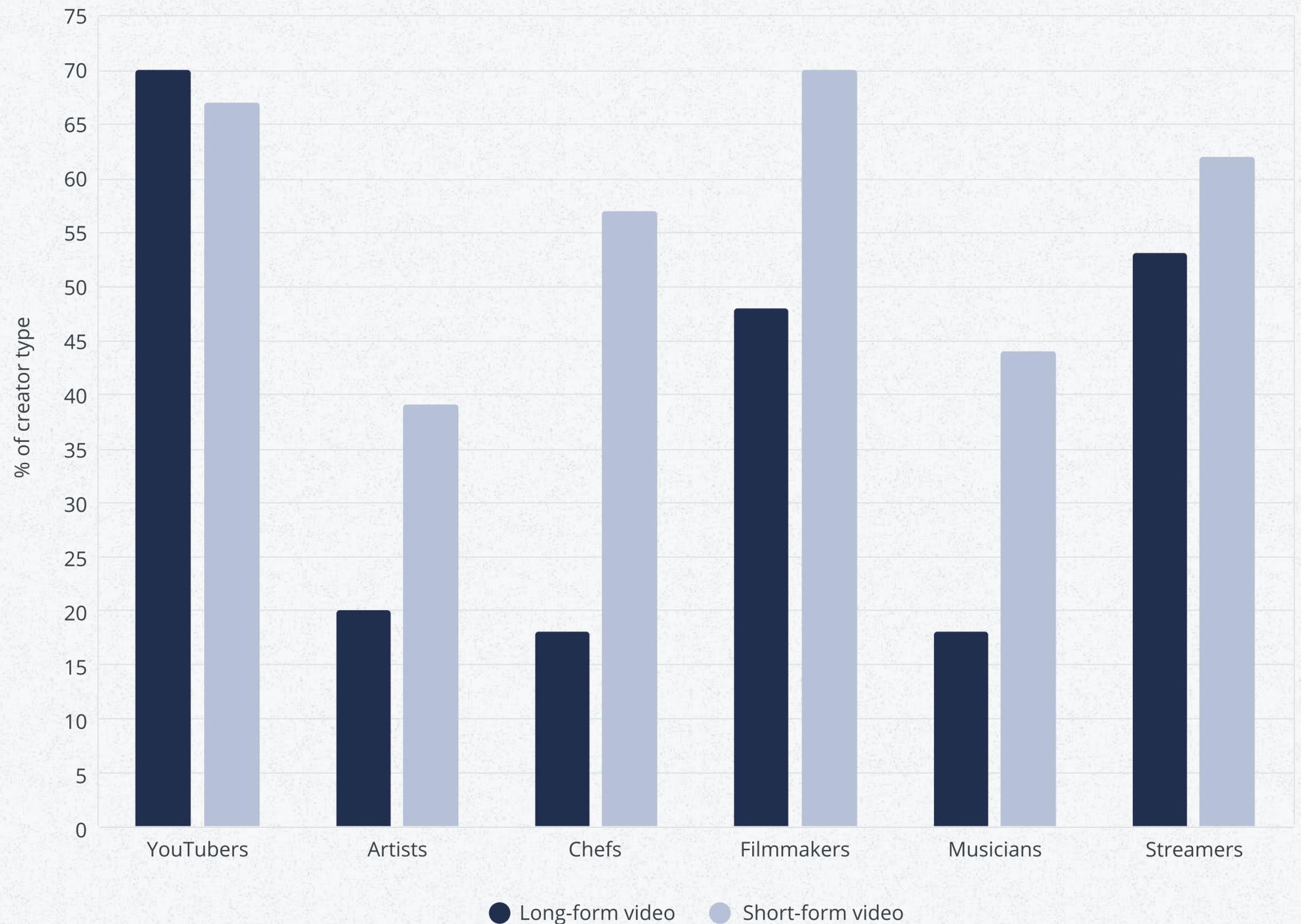
SHORT-FORM VIDEO IS ON THE RISE

Only one creator type was more likely to create long-form videos than short-form in 2021. Take a guess. Could it be filmmakers? Surprisingly, no. Filmmakers have embraced short-form video, with 69% choosing this option compared to just 48% who create long-form.

YouTubers were the only category who were more likely to prefer long videos, with 70% using long-form and 66% using short-form.

For the rest of the creator respondents, short-form videos on TikTok, Instagram Stories or Reels, and Facebook Stories were used more than long-forms videos. These quick clips are a way to connect with an audience that can range from simple “talking head” conversations to mini-movies with interesting transitions.

SHORT-FORM VS LONG-FORM VIDEO BY CREATOR TYPE



04

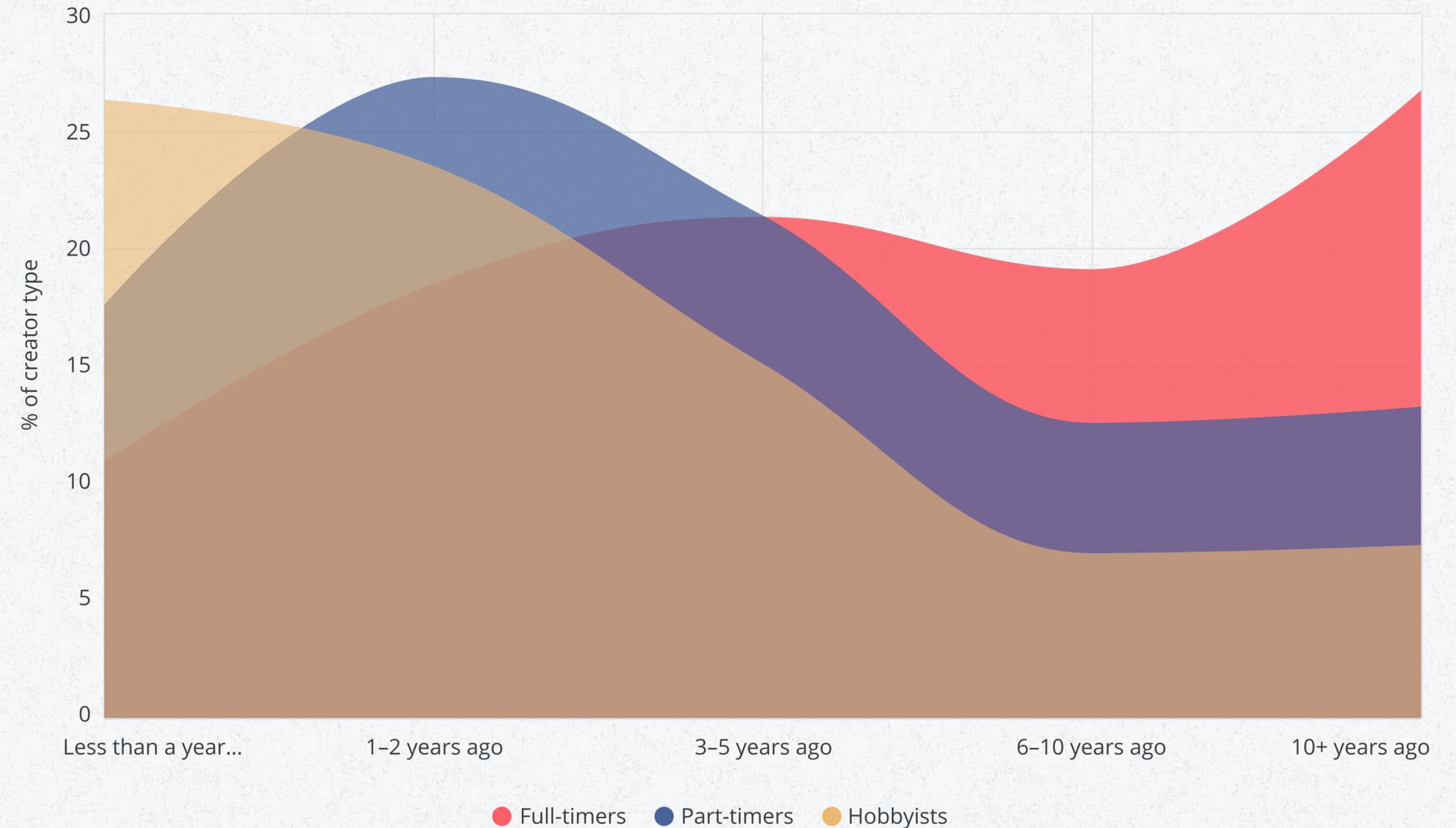
**AN AUDIENCE
IS A CREATOR'S
MOST IMPORTANT
ASSET**

Without an audience, being a creator is a bit like talking into a digital void. An engaged and excited audience is the difference between making it and walking away, but it takes time to build relationships. We found that full-time creators prefer email marketing for building an audience, and the top performers work smarter to automatically grow an audience with referrals and SEO.

CREATORS SPEND YEARS BUILDING THEIR AUDIENCE

Stories of YouTubers who go viral with their first video or influencers that seem to grow their audience at warp speed are exciting and inspiring. For most creators, though, building an audience is a marathon, not a sprint. **67% of full-time creators started more than three years ago, and just over a quarter began growing an audience a decade or more ago.**

HOW LONG AGO DID YOU START BUILDING AN AUDIENCE?



Musicians have been at it for the longest. This creator type has the highest concentration of creators who have spent 10+ years building an audience. On the other end of the spectrum, the relatively new designation of “streamer” has a newer creator base, with 64% starting within the last 5 years.

The next time you feel discouraged as you compare your journey to another creator’s, remember that things worth doing can take time. Everyone’s journey is different, but perseverance pays.

64%

*of streamers started in the **last 5 years***

37%

*of musicians have spent **10+ years** building an audience*

7%

*of creators **haven’t started** building their audience*

YOU DON'T NEED A HUGE AUDIENCE TO MAKE A LIVING

In the same way that attention is skewed toward stories of “overnight success,” it’s easy to be drawn to the idea of a massive email list. In reality, **most email lists have under 1,000 subscribers.** YouTube was the most likely platform for creators to have more than 500k followers, but only 1% of respondents are at that level.

LIST SIZE RANGE BY NUMBER OF SUBSCRIBERS NUMBER OF CREATORS IN RANGE

LIST SIZE RANGE BY NUMBER OF SUBSCRIBERS	NUMBER OF CREATORS IN RANGE
1-99	94,818
100-249	11,474
250-499	8,060
500-999	7,591
1000-2499	5,521
2500-4999	2,998
5000-9999	1,991

the **average** email list size is

645

53%

*of creators have **less than 1000 subscribers** on their email list*

1%

*of creators who responded have **over 500k subscribers** on YouTube*

9.1%

*have **more than 10k followers** on Instagram*

6.3%

*have **more than 10k followers** on Facebook*

6.3%

*have **more than 10k followers** on Twitter*

Luckily, creators don't need a huge audience to have a successful launch.



Corey Haines

made **\$7,000** during a course launch to an email list with 300 subscribers



Louis Nicholls

made **\$20,000** during pre-launch



Samar Owais

earned **\$15,000** from a course with a few hundred subscribers



Erin Flynn

turned a waitlist of 40 people into **\$10,000** in revenue

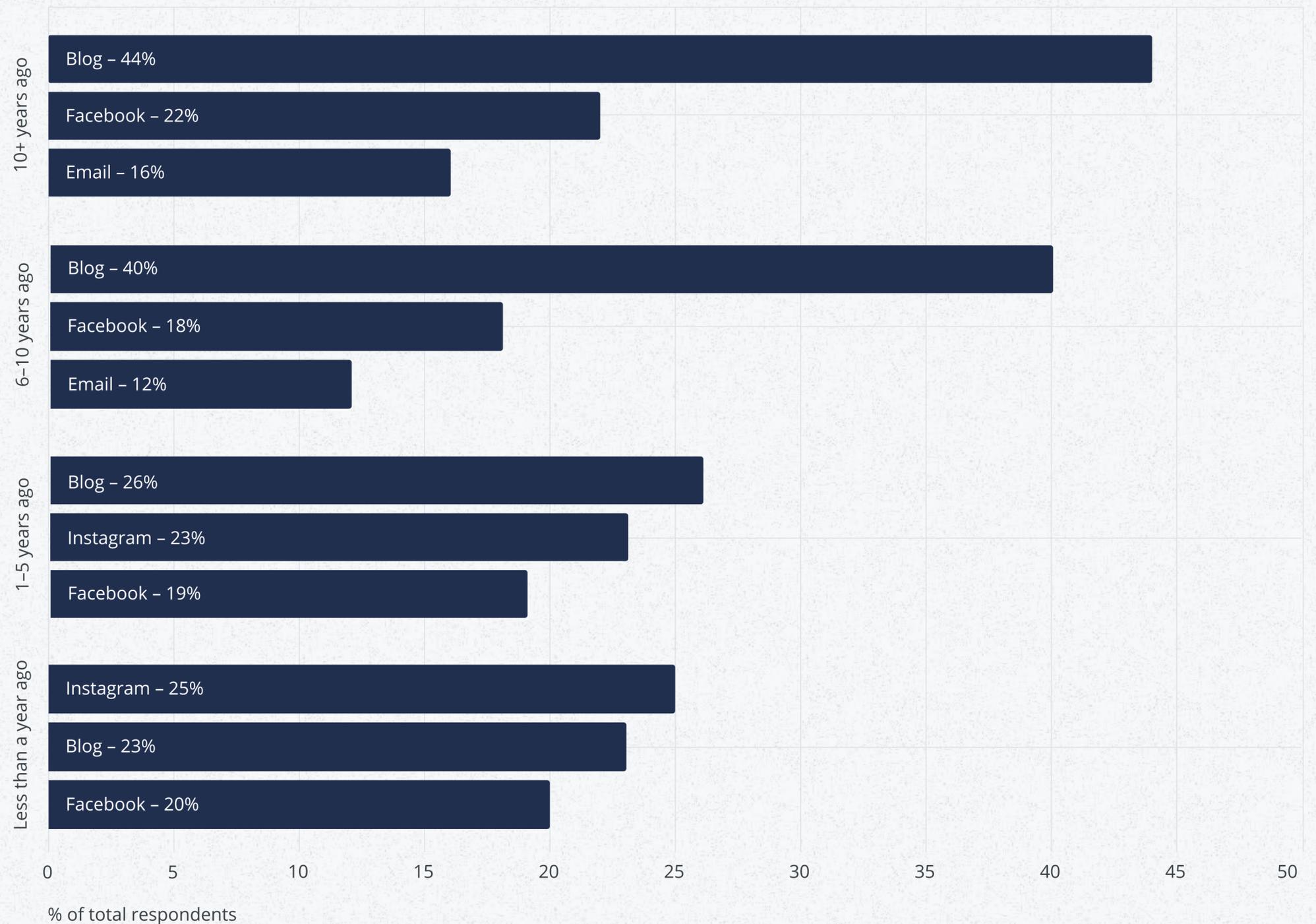
THE PLACE CREATORS START THEIR BUSINESS IS CHANGING

Five years ago, the blog was the most common creator launchpad. In 2021, Instagram took its place.

We asked creators where they first started building an audience, and noticed that when creators started impacted their response. The blog has been the primary channel for some time, since **44% of creators with 10 or more years of experience first started with a blog**. Most creators who began at least five years ago chose either a blog or Facebook to start with.

But when we looked at responses just from creators who began in the past year, Instagram was the most popular channel. Creating a blog or Facebook page for your new venture is still a popular choice, but we may continue to see other channels encroach on their throne.

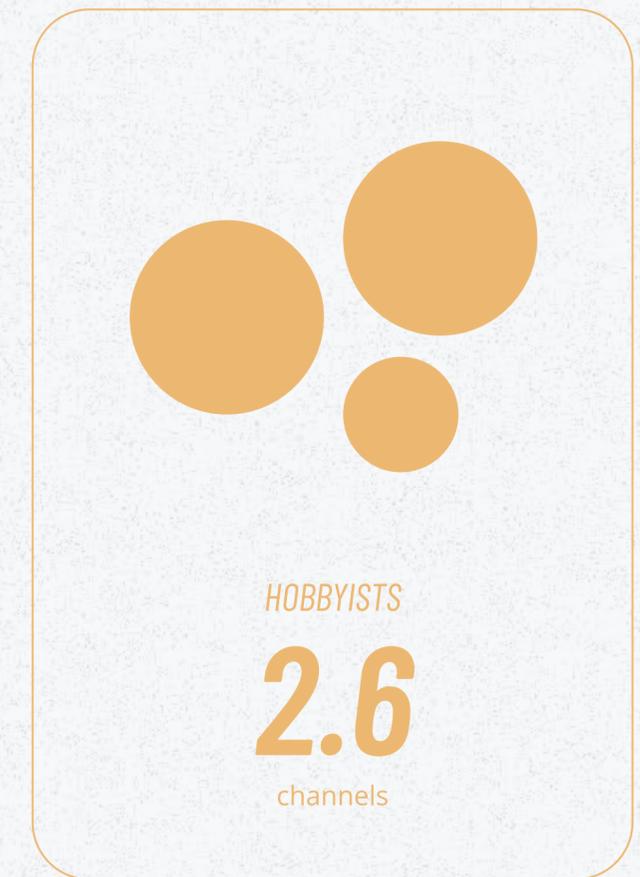
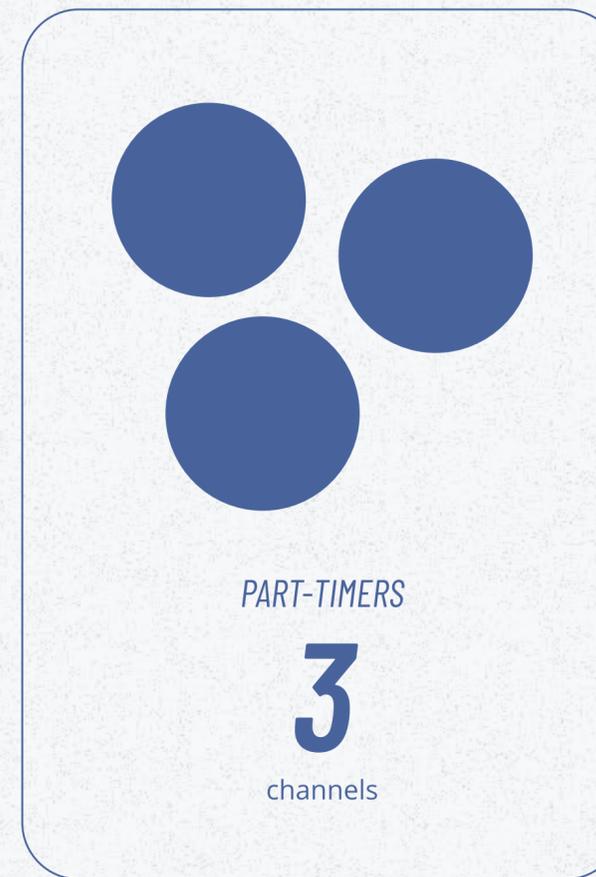
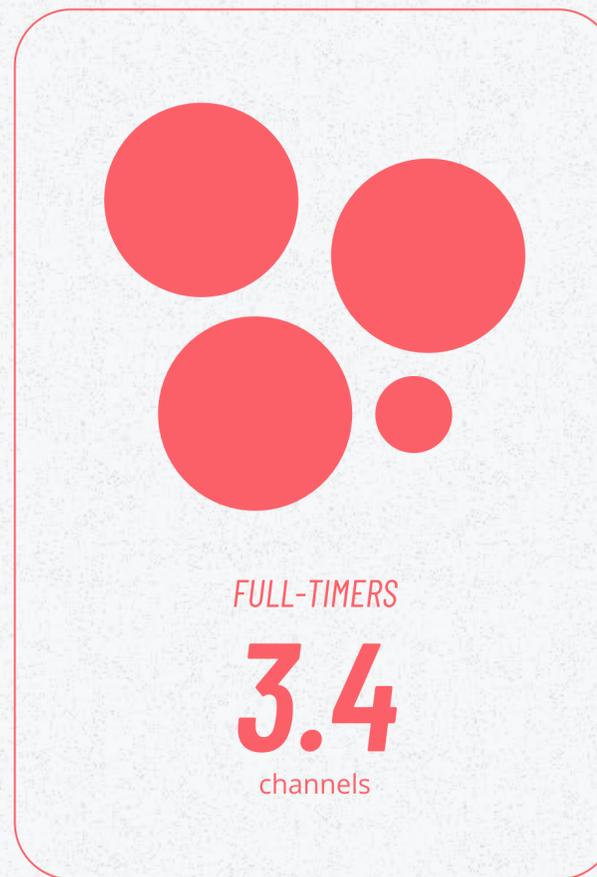
HOW THE PLACE A CREATOR STARTS BUILDING AN AUDIENCE HAS CHANGED OVER TIME



WHERE PROFESSIONAL CREATORS BUILT AN AUDIENCE THIS YEAR

We looked at where creators first grow an audience, but what were the professionals doing in 2021? **Full-time creators use an average of 3.4 channels for audience engagement and growth, which is more than part-timers and hobbyists.**

Email and Instagram tied for the most commonly used channel by professionals. Let's look at email first, though. While most full-time creators prioritized email, only a third of hobbyists felt the same. Making an effort to grow and nurture that audience pays off in the long run, as evidenced by the full-timers. Start your email list now, even if you feel like a small fish in a big pond.





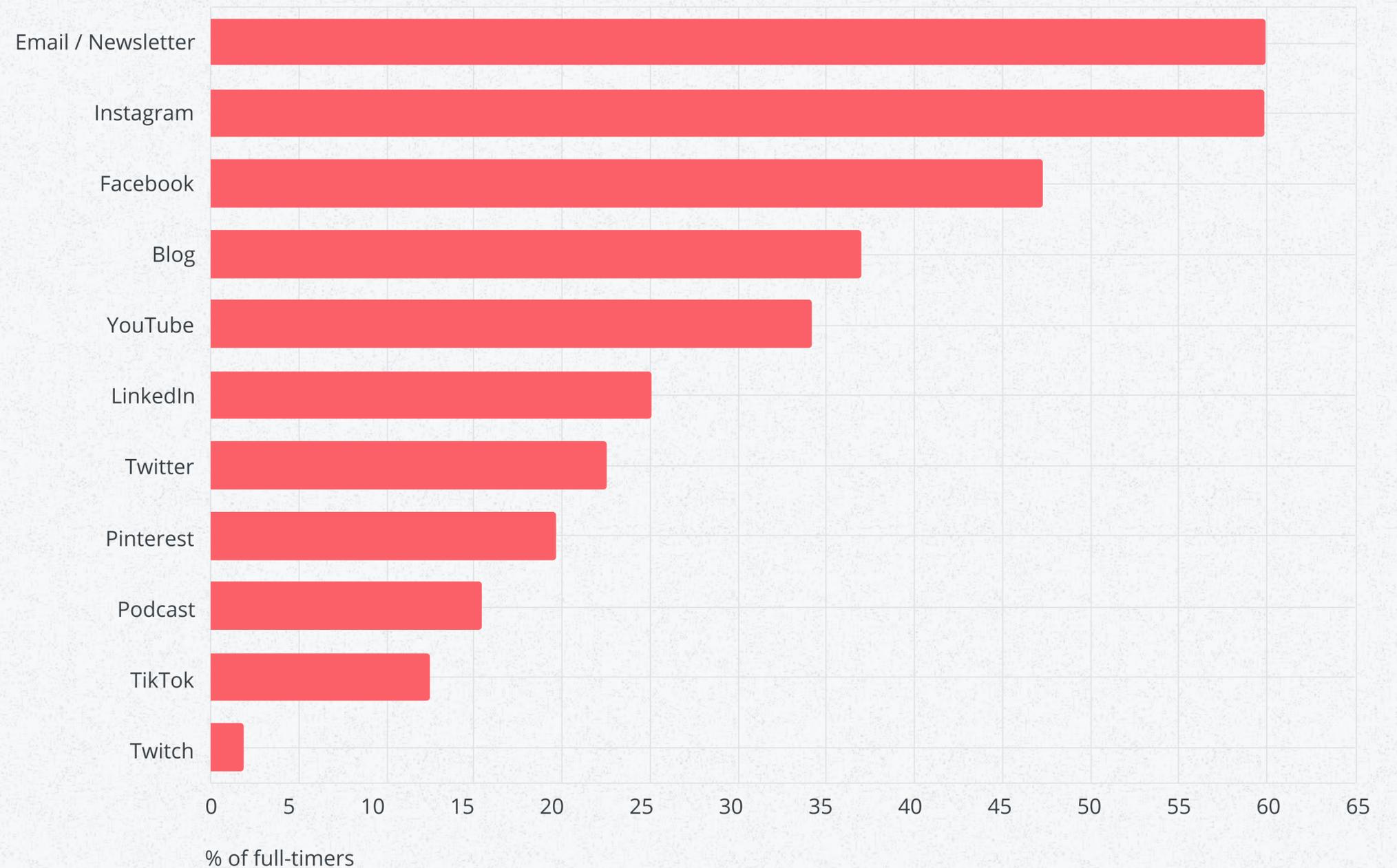
Gabby Beckford, a travel blogger, witnessed a noticeable change when she started investing time into email marketing. She shared that,

“The Instagram algorithm will change daily. TikTok came out of the blue, and suddenly you’ve got to learn that. Social media is so variable. It’s hard to rely on it as a source of income. Once I started doing my weekly newsletter, that’s when I saw consistent traffic to my blog. That’s when people began to respond to my emails, being like, ‘This is amazing.’”

Apart from knowing where creators connected with their audience, we wanted to gauge how they felt about those channels. **For 52% of creators, the platform they enjoyed creating on the most was also the one with the most engagement.** Hooray! We don't know whether high audience engagement makes the site more enjoyable or if having more fun on a platform leads to more engaged audiences.

Sadly, 20% of creators picked Facebook as their least enjoyable AND most engaged platform. Hopefully, this year those folks can transition their audience to another, more enjoyable channel.

WHERE FULL-TIME CREATORS GREW THEIR AUDIENCE IN 2021



Hot take: Instagram is a polarizing place for creators. Somehow, Instagram was simultaneously the platform creators most enjoyed creating on while also being the second most hated channel. It seems that for creators, you either love it or hate it. Of course, there could also be a segment who hate to love it since they feel pressured to use a channel they don't like but sees the most audience growth.

Feeling worn out by Instagram?

Find out why some creators are stepping away from the platform

[Read our Instagram article here](#) →

Most likely to have an active audience

Instagram

(As voted by 26% of full-timers)

Most likely to show growth

Instagram

(As voted by 38% of full-timers)

Favorite channel

Instagram

(As voted by 22% of full-timers)

Least favorite channel

Facebook

(As voted by 27% of full-timers)

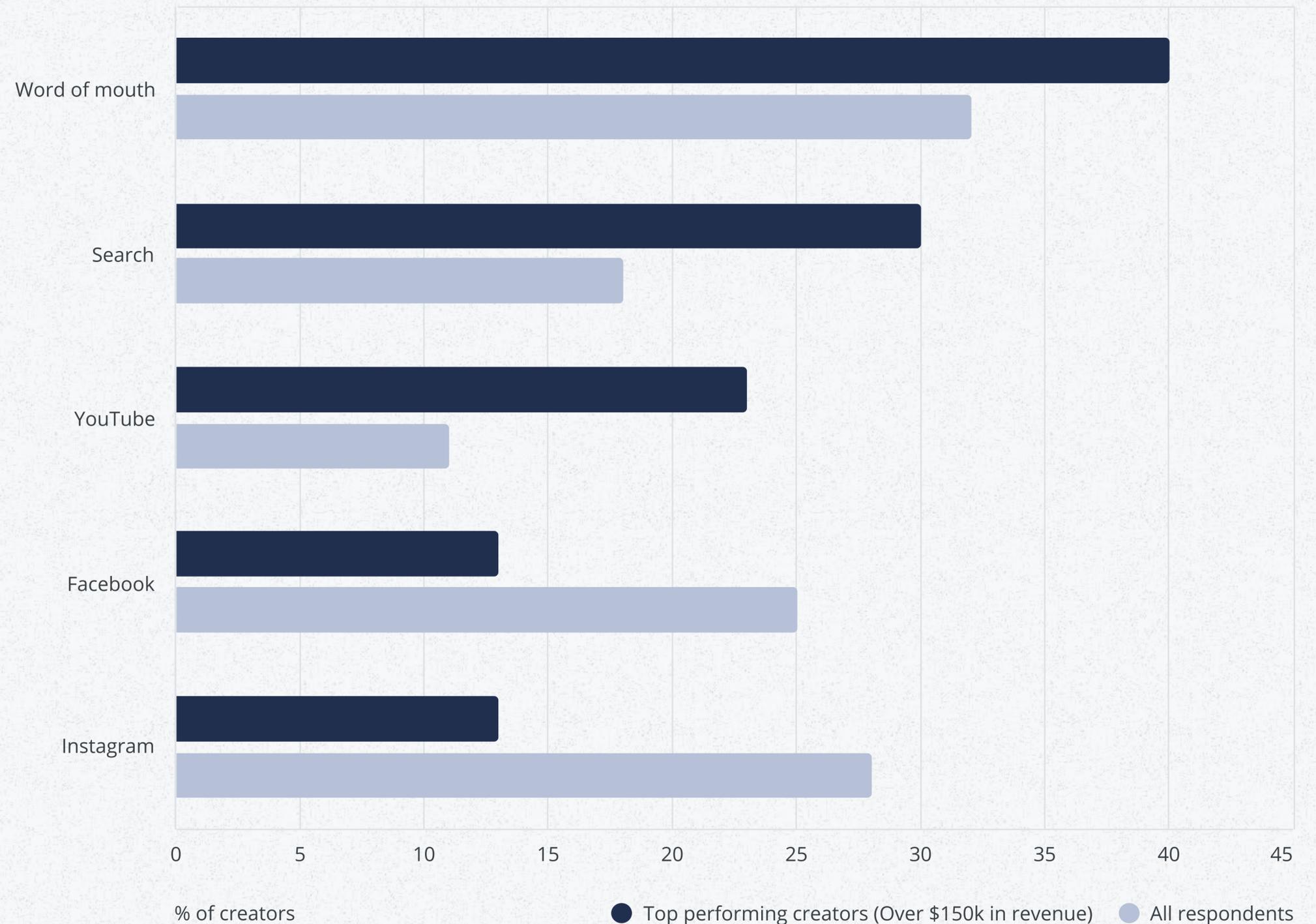
TOP CREATORS SET UP SYSTEMS TO HELP THE BUSINESS GROW ITSELF

There's a difference between how creators earning \$1,000 grow an audience vs. how those earning \$100,000 do. **Instagram is the top way to find an audience for newer creators with less revenue.**

This makes sense, given we just learned that Instagram is enjoyable for many creators and has good audience engagement.

But once creators turn pro and want to increase their income, the strategy changes. Instead of constantly creating content to grow, full-time creators set up systems to help the business grow itself. **The two most common ways creators who earn \$150,000 or more a year grow their audience is through word of mouth and SEO.**

HOW A CREATORS AUDIENCE FINDS THEM



SEO as a growth strategy takes time to come to fruition, but you can start leveraging word of mouth marketing today. Newsletter referral programs give creators a way to incentivize their audience to share their work. Creators who [use a newsletter referral program](#) grow faster, like [Nicholas Platt](#), who used one to grow to almost 50k subscribers in 5 months.

The secret to faster newsletter growth is already in your list.

Learn about newsletter referral programs in our guide.

[Read the referral program guide](#) →

10%

*of full-time creators count **email subscribers** as their primary metric of success*

VS

4%

*of full-time creators use **social media followers** as their primary success metric*

EMAIL MARKETING IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOLS FOR PROFESSIONAL CREATORS

We asked full-time creators how important email is to their business, and they ranked it 8.3/10. Spoiler alert for the upcoming sections—this rating means **professional creators think email is more important to their business than social media or paid ads**. Full-timers are also more likely to consider email subscribers a priority metric over social media followers. Perhaps this is because email is their most impactful promotional channel.

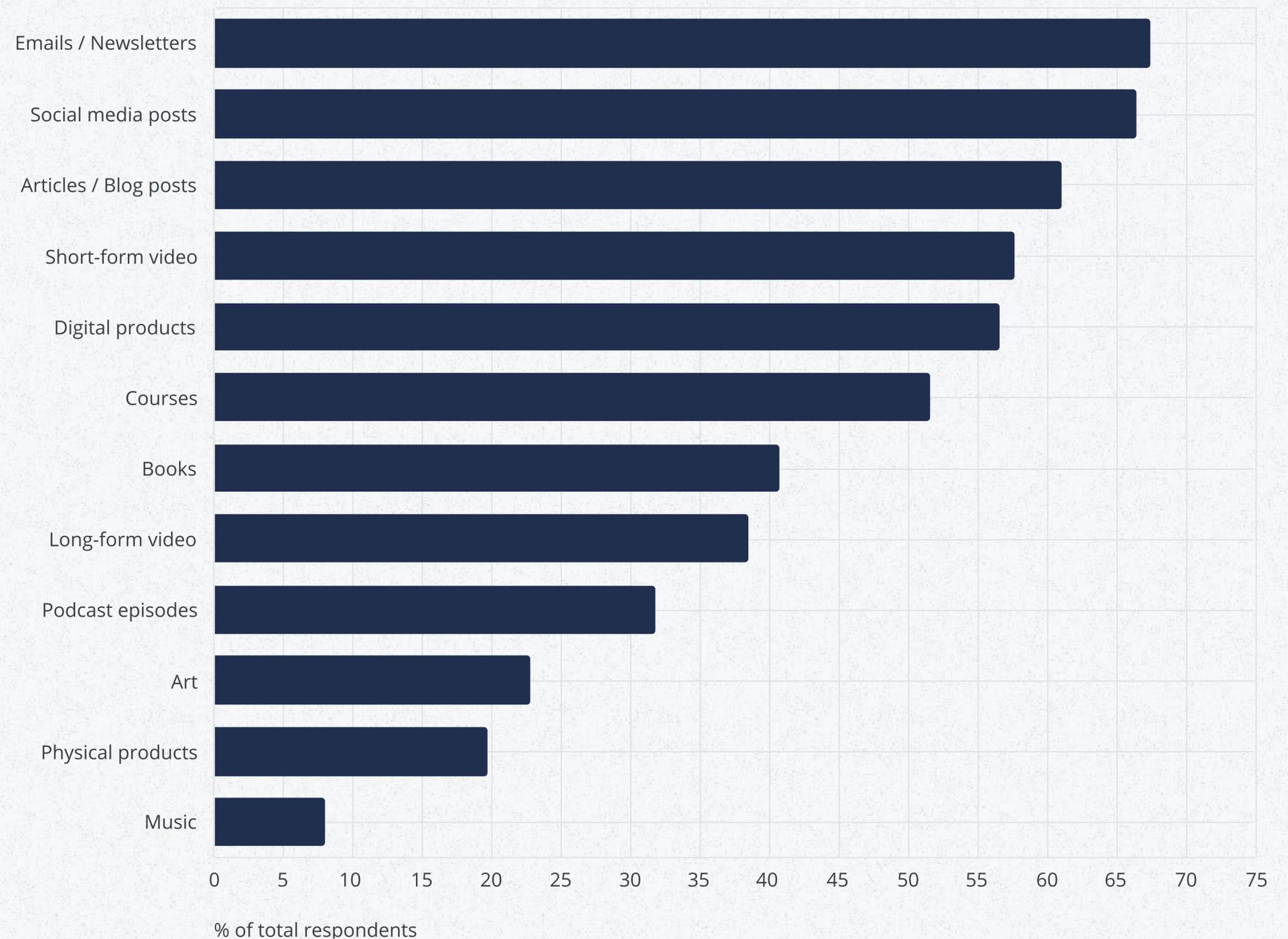
COMPARATIVE IMPORTANCE OF CHANNELS FOR CREATORS



Our internal data supports this idea because we witnessed creators send a lot of email in 2021. We don't mean "a sort of impressive amount of email"; we mean creators crafted a mountain of messages they sent to the masses. **In 2021, ConvertKit creators sent a total of 16,744,567,735 emails.** We'll save you some tough mental math; that's 530 emails a second.

All creators are gearing up for another big year in email, too. The number of creators using ConvertKit to send emails and sell digital products more than doubled from 2020 to 2021. Moving forward, **setting up an email newsletter is the most common thing creators are planning to create in 2022.** And if our survey is any indication, there will be about 400 new newsletters this year just from respondents alone.

WHAT WILL CREATORS CREATE IN 2022?



How-to: If you want to send emails like the pros, set a schedule. 66% of professionals with an email list send messages on a schedule, compared to 58% of part-timers and 51% of hobbyists. For those wondering, weekly emails are the most common. Once those emails hit inboxes, professional creators see an average email open rate of over 40%. A third of full-timers achieve a click rate between 2%-5%. Of all creators, full-timers were the most likely to have email click rates above 21%, which is way above average.

66% of full-time creators
58% of part-time creators
51% of hobbyists

} with an email list
send messages on
a schedule

Full-time creators see an **average email open rate** of over

40%

A third of full-timers achieve a **click rate** between

2-5%

Full-time creators are most likely to have above-average **email click rates** over

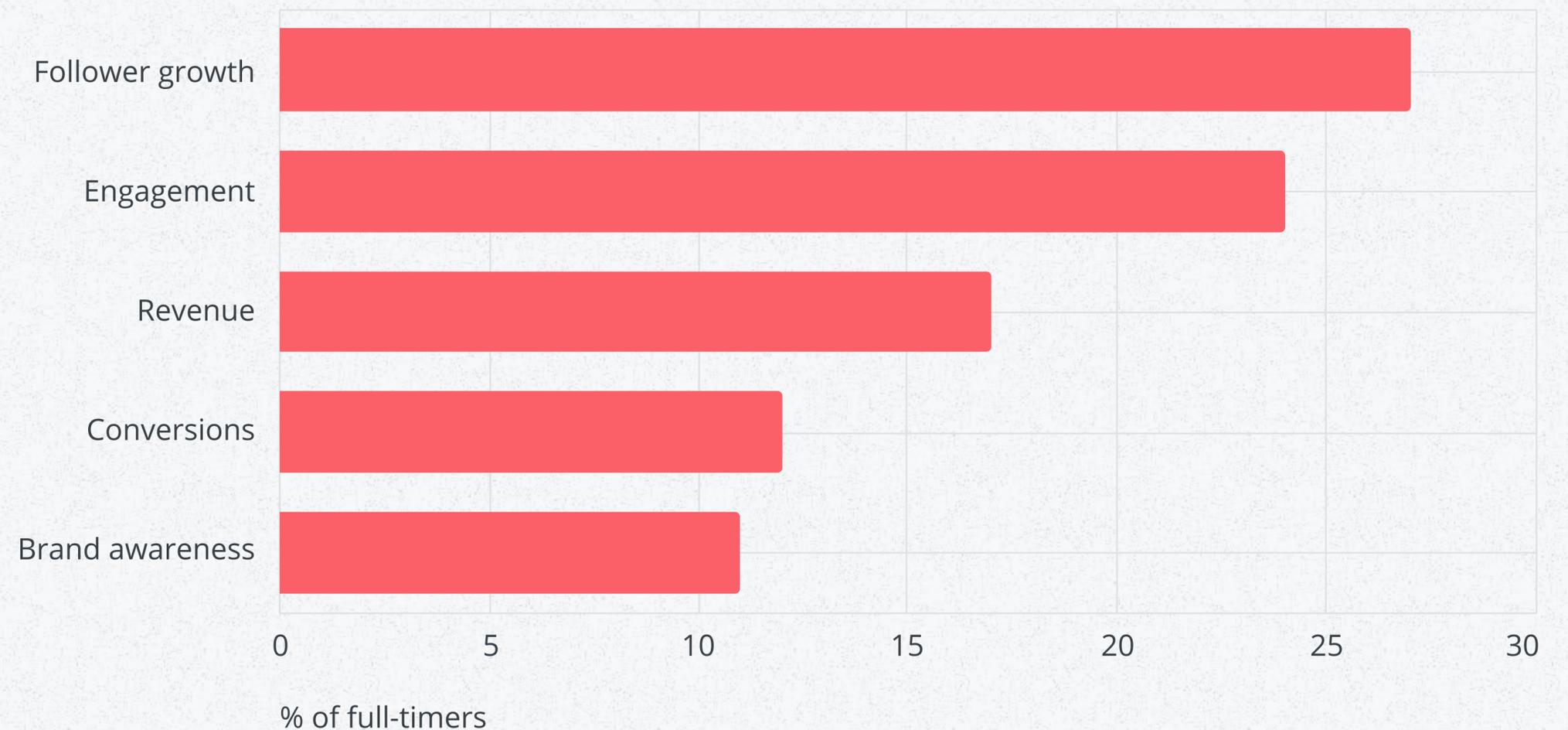
21%

CREATORS POST CONSISTENTLY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Full-time creators ranked social media's importance to their business at **7.4/10**, putting it just behind email marketing. Unsurprisingly, the key success metric for creators on social media is follower growth. Full-time creators ranked revenue as a higher goal on social media than part-time or hobby creators.

40% of full-time creators share on social media 2-5 times a week. Another 24% said that their frequency varies too much between sites to choose a single answer, though. Perhaps those creators lean heavily into one channel and post to others less frequently.

TOP 5 SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS METRICS FOR FULL-TIME CREATORS

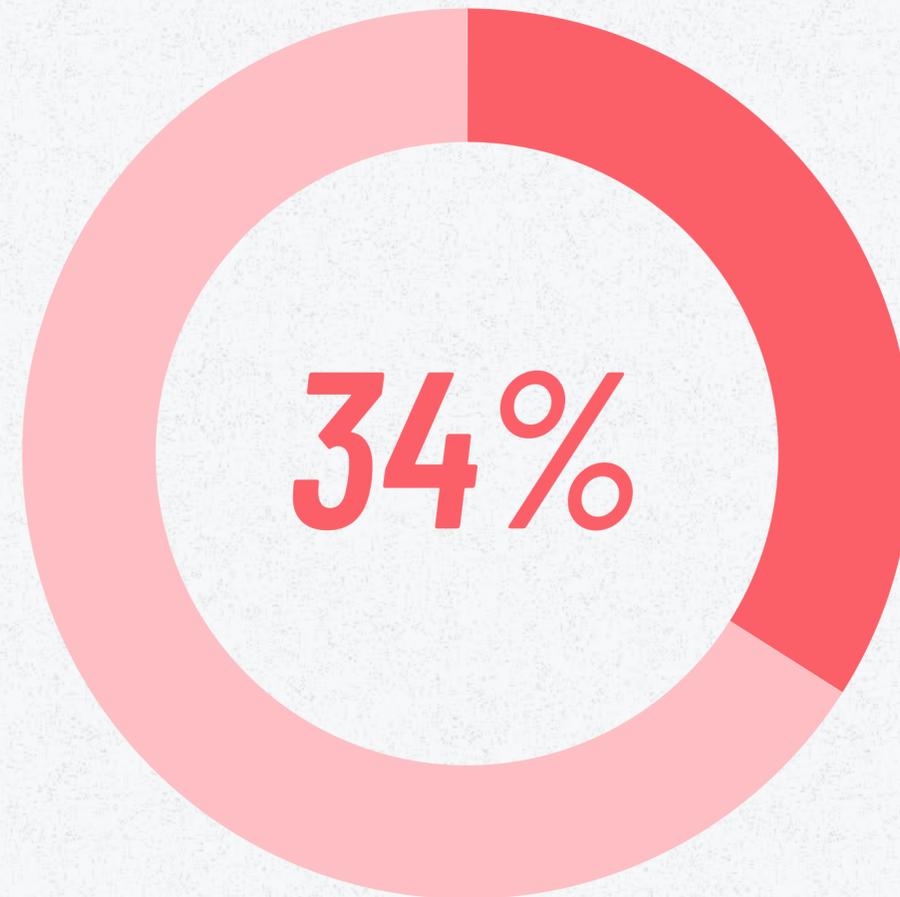


PROFESSIONAL CREATORS ARE MOST LIKELY TO USE PAID GROWTH

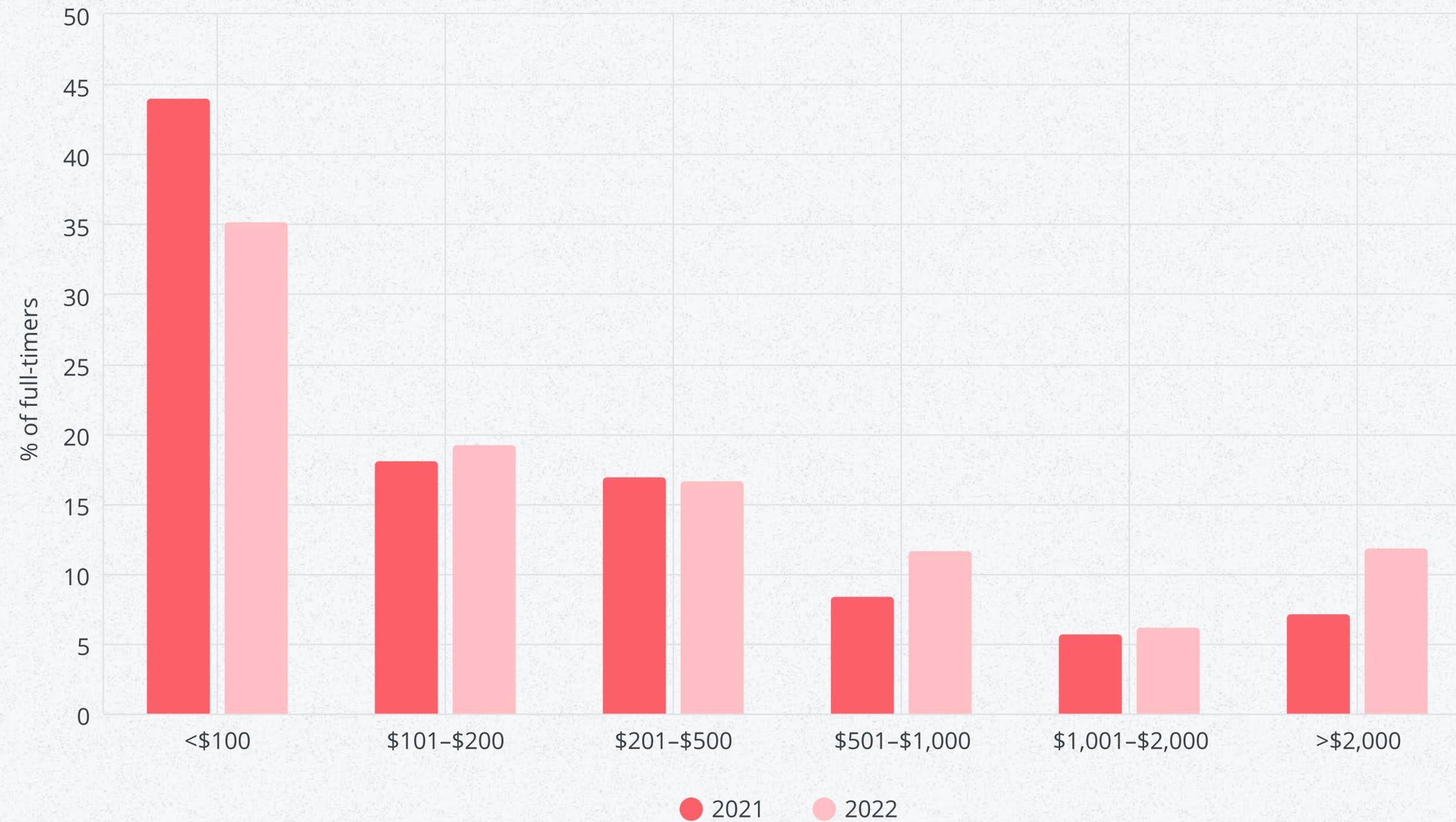
In 2021, 34% of full-time creators used paid ads. The pros rate this growth strategy as 6/10 in importance to their business, putting it behind email and social media. Since paid ads represent a greater cost investment than email or social media, it makes sense that full-timers leveraged the strategy more than part-timers or hobbyists.

While overall, the most common monthly budget for ads was less than \$100, the majority of professional creators who run ads are likely to spend more than \$100 a month on them. On the whole, creators are planning to increase their spending on ads in 2022, with 11% of professionals planning on spending more than \$2000 a month on paid ads, up from 7% that spent that amount in 2021.

FULL-TIME CREATORS WHO USE PAID ADS



BUDGET FOR PAID ADS 2021 VS 2022



05

***THE CREATOR
ECONOMY
MIDDLE CLASS
IS GROWING***

Now is the moment you've been secretly waiting for—answering the question, “How much money do creators make?”

MOST CREATORS MADE MONEY IN 2021

We're happy to report that **66% of all creators earned revenue in 2021**. It's not just full-time creators having all the fun, either. 61% of part-time creators and 23% of hobbyists made money, too.

The most common 2021 revenue was less than \$10,000, with 44% of respondents selecting that option. Most full-timers earn above that level, with 58% making \$25,000 or more from their creator business in 2021.

47% of all creators list revenue as their primary success metric. That number jumps to 61% when you only consider full-time creators.

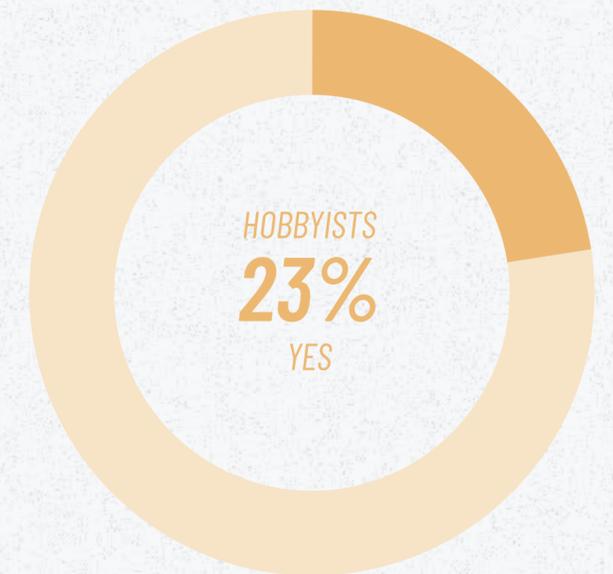
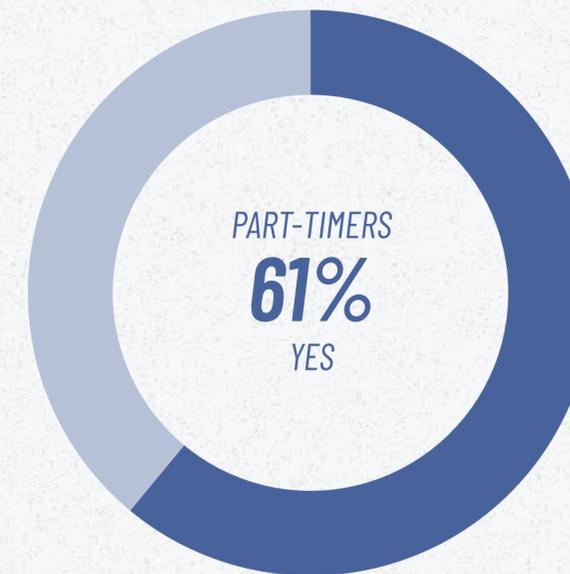
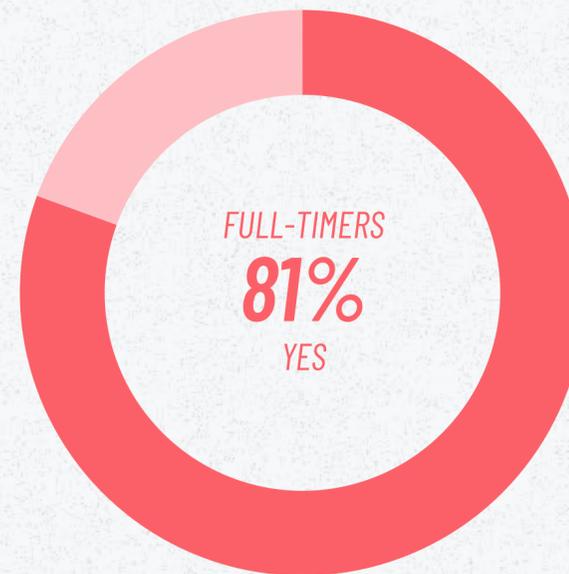
47%

of creators list **revenue** as their primary success metric

66%

of all creators **earned revenue** in 2021!

DID YOU EARN REVENUE IN 2021?



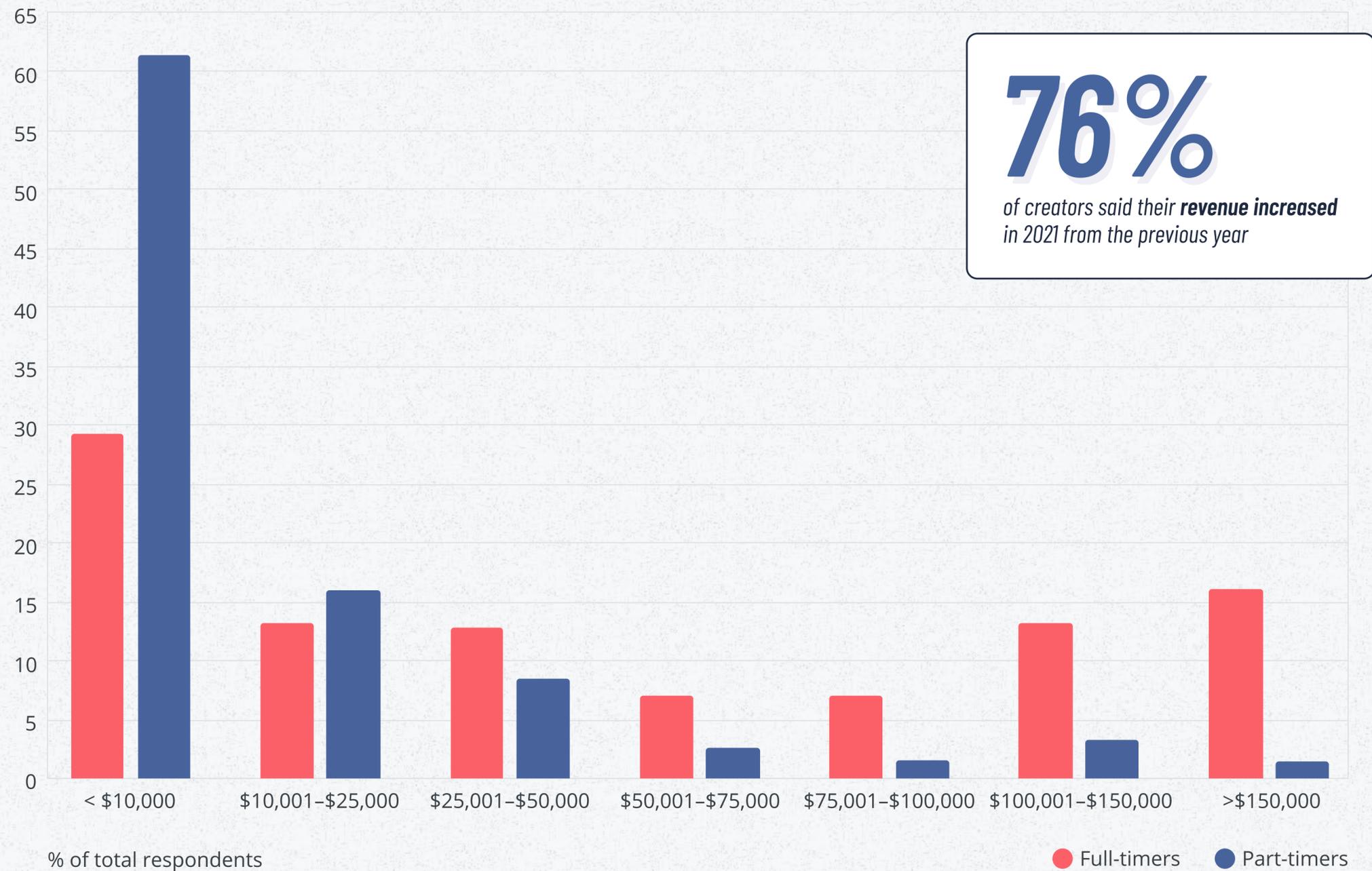
Some creators are making serious money moves, like [Ashley Massengill](#), who sold a million dollars worth of courses [in the first hour of launching](#). But there's also a growing group who fly under the radar; the [creator middle class](#).

If we categorize the middle class as earning annual revenue between \$50,000-\$150,000, 22% of full-time creators fall in that category.

This group is growing, too, with [Stripe](#) reporting that the number of creators earning a living wage increased 41% year over year.

76% of creators said their revenue increased in 2021 from the previous year, and **a staggering 88% expect to grow their income yet again in 2022**. Plus, 81% of creators who didn't earn income in 2021 expect to make money this year. To the 206 people who chose revenue as their primary success metric but didn't generate revenue in 2021, we're all rooting for you in 2022!

ANNUAL REVENUE FOR FULL-TIME CREATORS COMPARED TO PART-TIME CREATORS



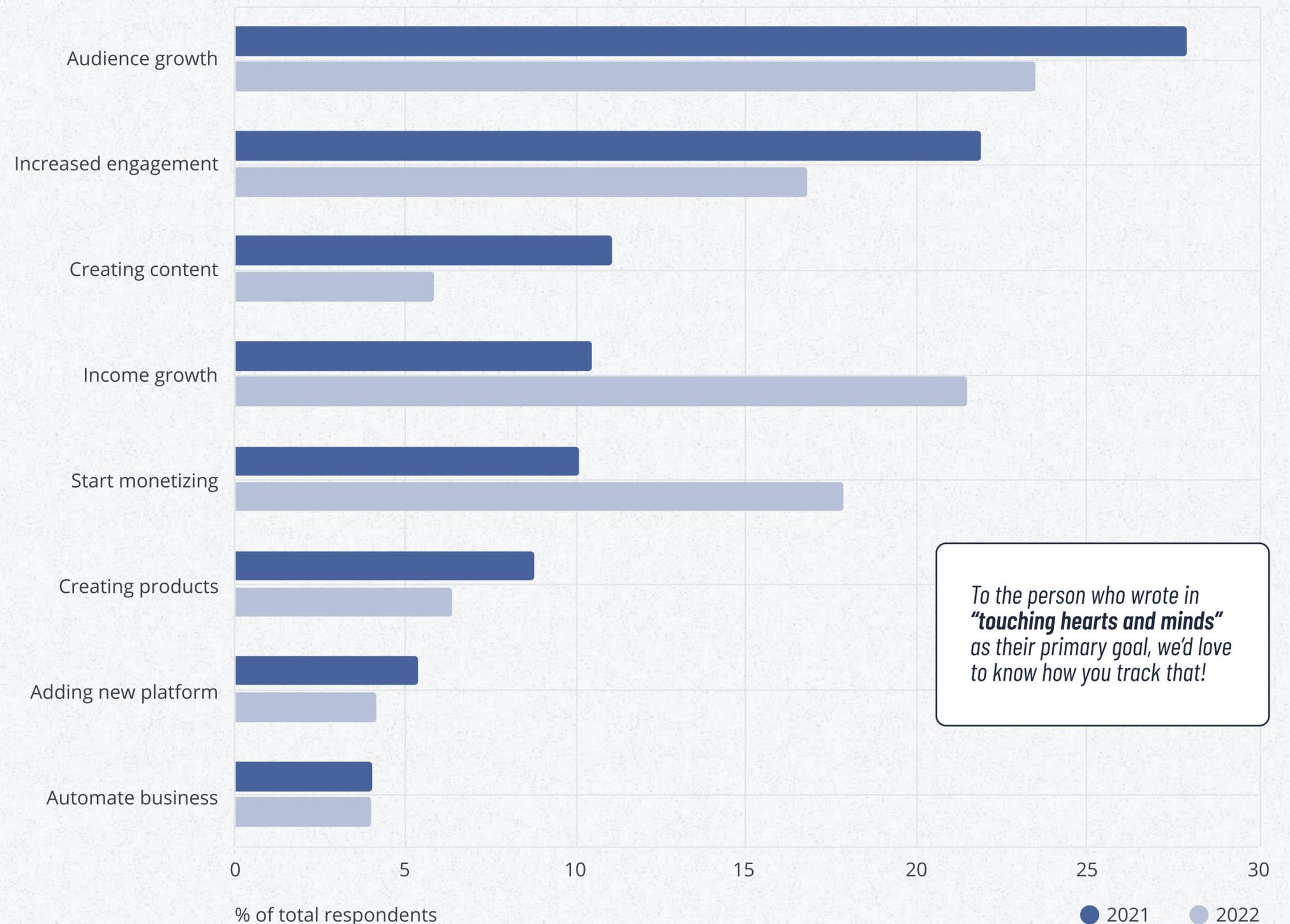
PART-TIME CREATORS ARE READY TO TAKE THEIR BUSINESS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

A creator's goals say a lot about where they've been and where they want to go. And our survey revealed that part-time creators are gearing up to go full-time in 2022.

In 2021, only 11% of part-time creators chose growing their income as their primary goal. But for 2022, that number nearly doubled to 20%. **Increasing revenue went from the fourth most common goal to second place in one year.**



TOP GOAL FOR PART-TIMERS IN 2021 COMPARED TO 2022



We saw a similar trend for part-time creators who want to start monetizing their content. 10% of part-time creators set their sights on earning their first digital dollars in 2021. 18% of that same group will focus on that goal for the year ahead.

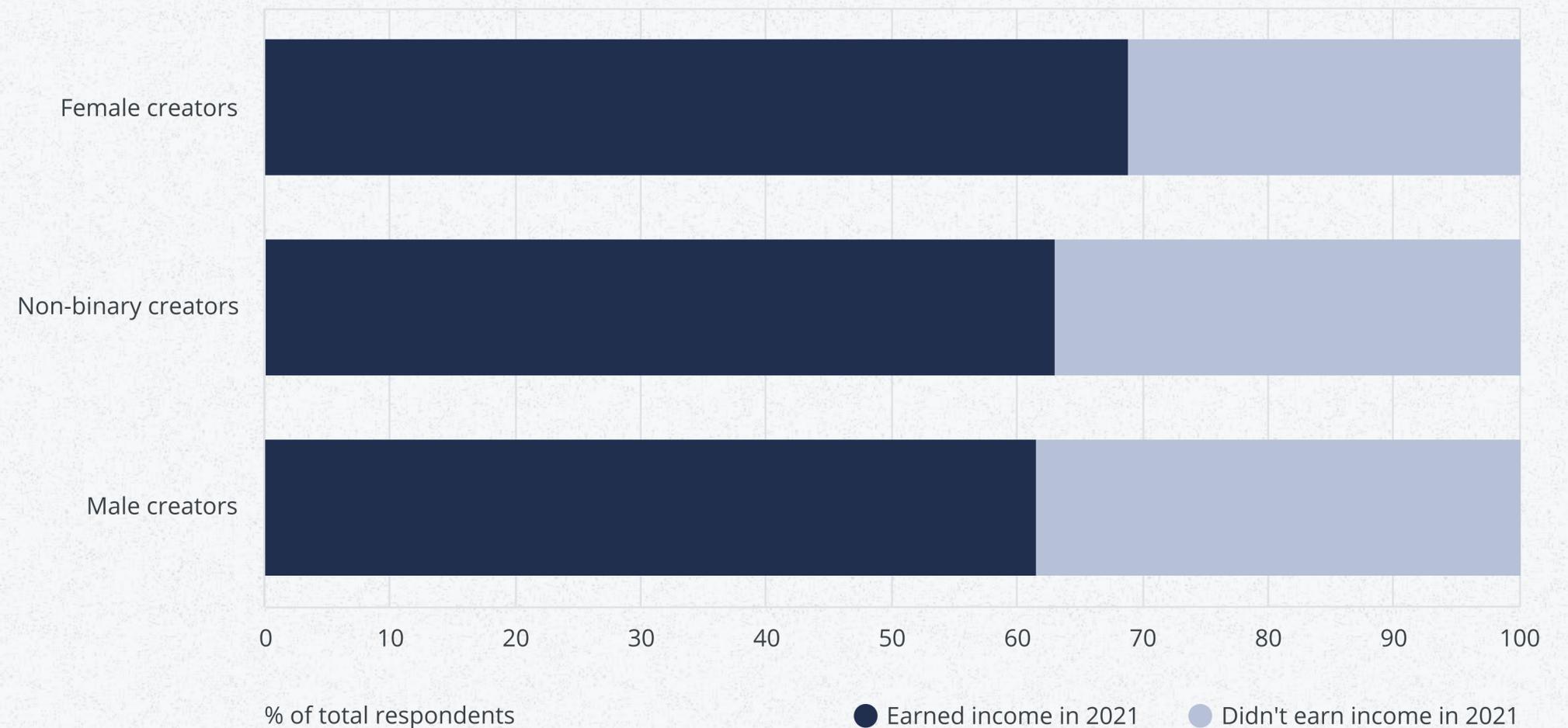
While growing an audience remains the top goal for part-time creators, the rising focus on earnings points to more part-time creators setting their sights on turning their side hustle into a day job.

THE CREATOR ECONOMY HAS A GENDER PAY GAP PROBLEM, TOO

Remember when we talked about how female creators outnumber male creators by nearly 2:1? We had some theories on what could make a creator business so enticing to women, so we wanted to dig deeper into how it's playing out for them.

As it turns out, **female creators were the most likely to have earned revenue in 2021**, with 69% of women reporting earnings. Non-binary creators were next, with 63% earning income, and men were the least likely, with 61% making money in 2021.

DID YOUR CREATOR BUSINESS EARN REVENUE IN 2021?



Yet the survey data still revealed a difference in earnings between the groups. Men were more than twice as likely to earn over \$150,000 annually than women, and overall, 35% of men earn over \$100,000 compared to just 19% of women. Plus, 41% of male creators who had brand sponsorships earned more than \$1k a month from sponsorships compared to 38% of female creators.

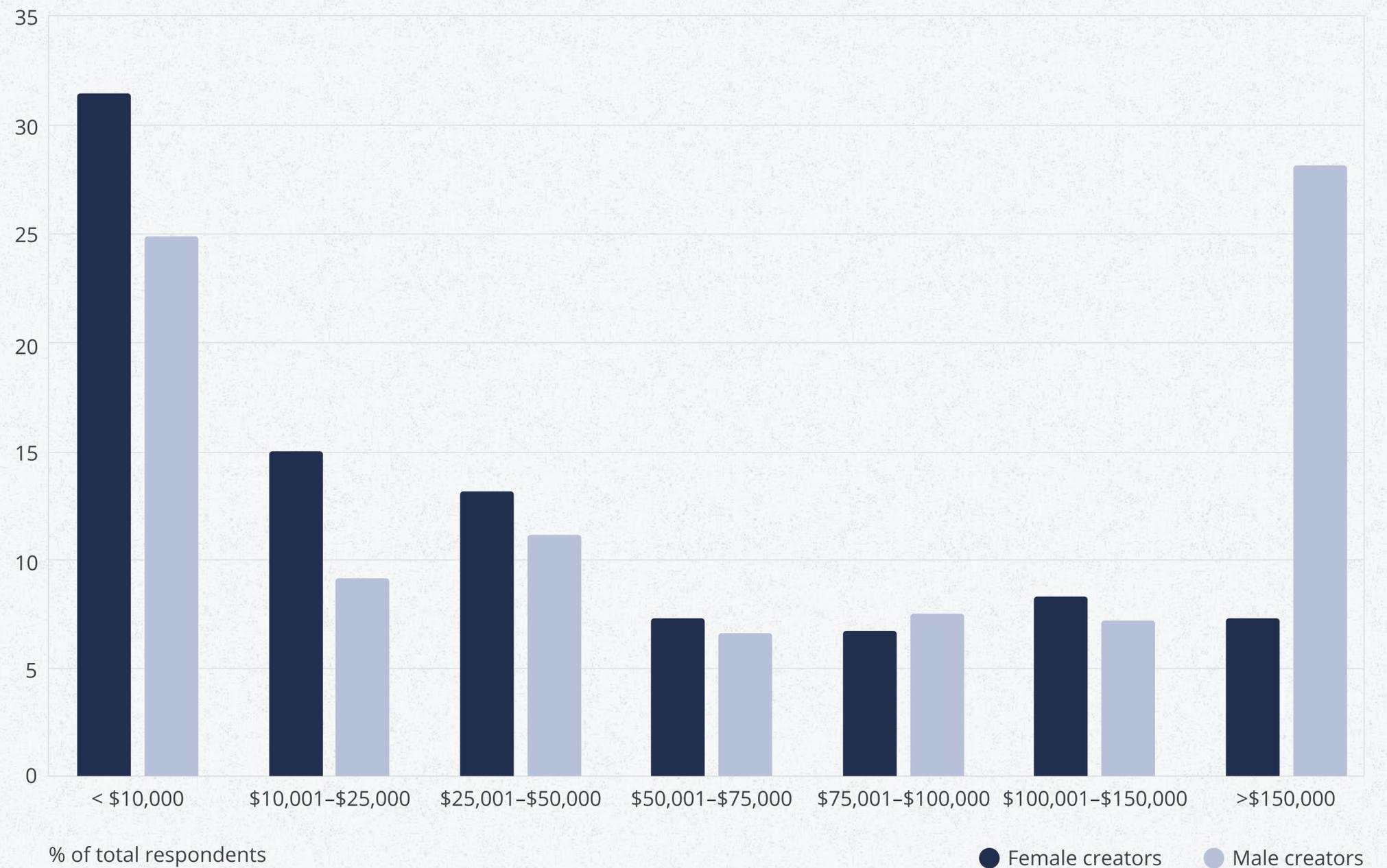
35%

of **men** earn over \$100,000, compared to

19%

of **women**

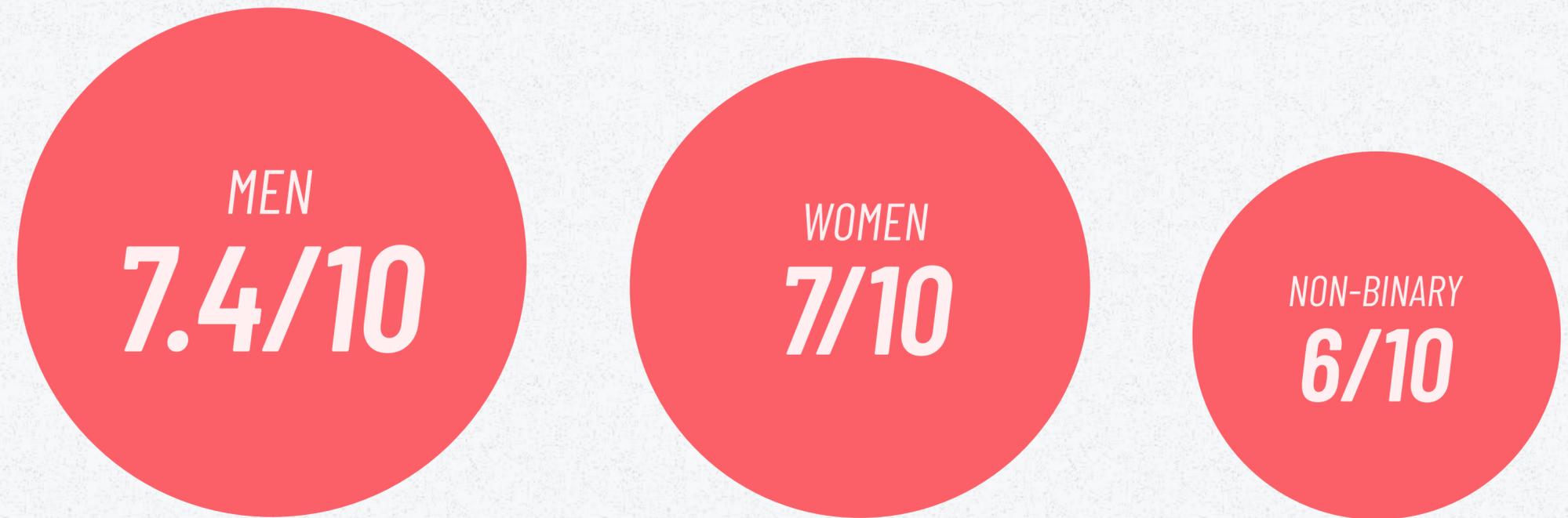
INCOME BRACKETS BY CREATOR GENDER



Since income is only part of the creator experience, we also asked respondents how happy they are with their work as a creator on a scale of 1-10. Sadly, both full-time and part-time women creators were overall unhappier than men. Non-binary folks reported the lowest average happiness scores, so we're sending virtual hugs to them.

While we're excited to see more women creators taking control of their earnings and work, there's still progress to be made. Men are overall happier and earning more, even if they do represent a smaller proportion of creators. Moving forward, we'd love to see women and non-binary creators feel happier with their work and match men's' earnings. Onward and upward!

HOW HAPPY ARE YOU WITH YOUR WORK AS A CREATOR RIGHT NOW?



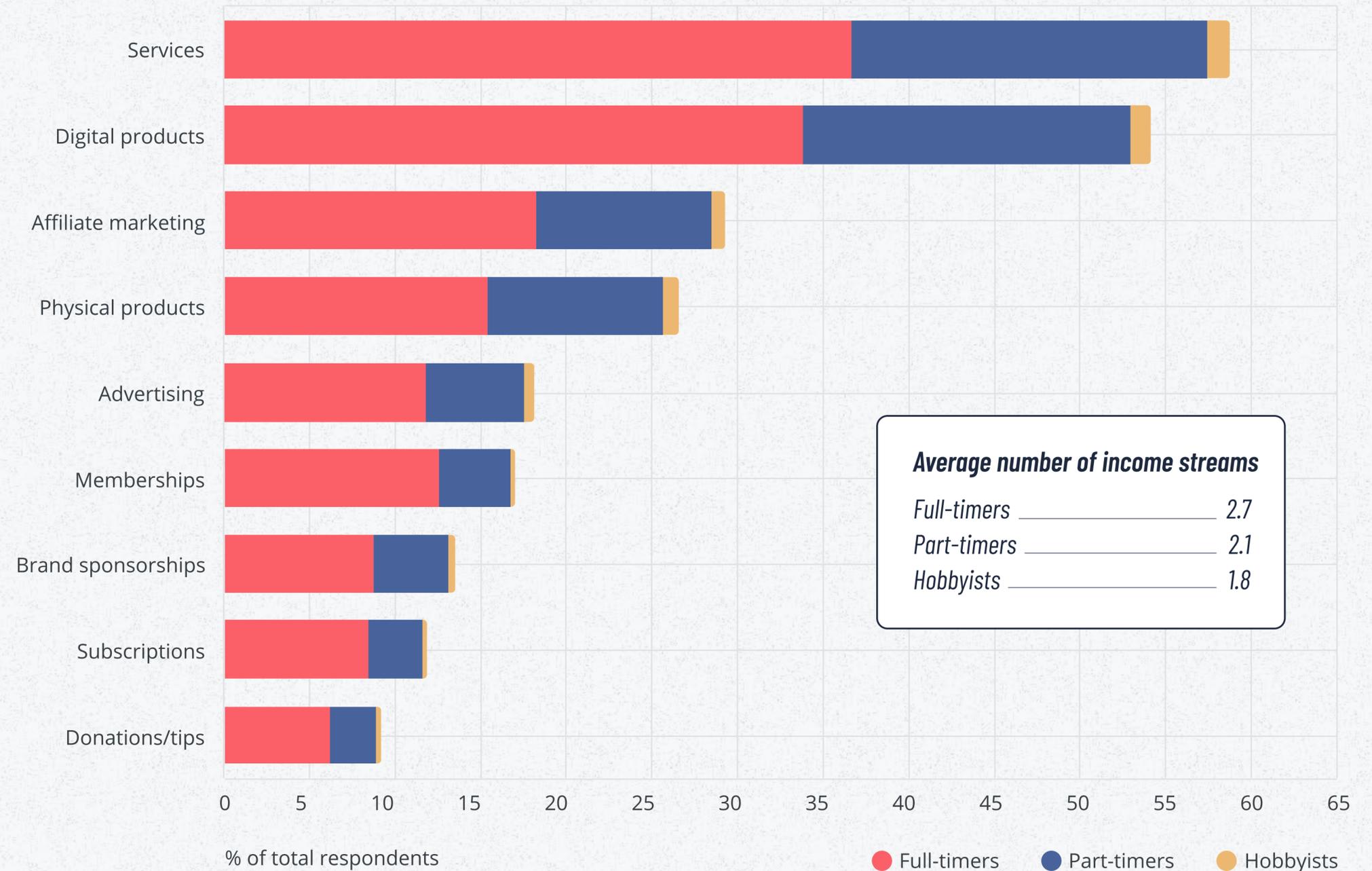
0 = Not happy at all 10 = extremely happy

FULL-TIME CREATORS LEVERAGE MULTIPLE INCOME STREAMS

The more income streams, the more income. Offering multiple products and services boosts earnings and smooths out the financial rollercoaster creators can find themselves on.

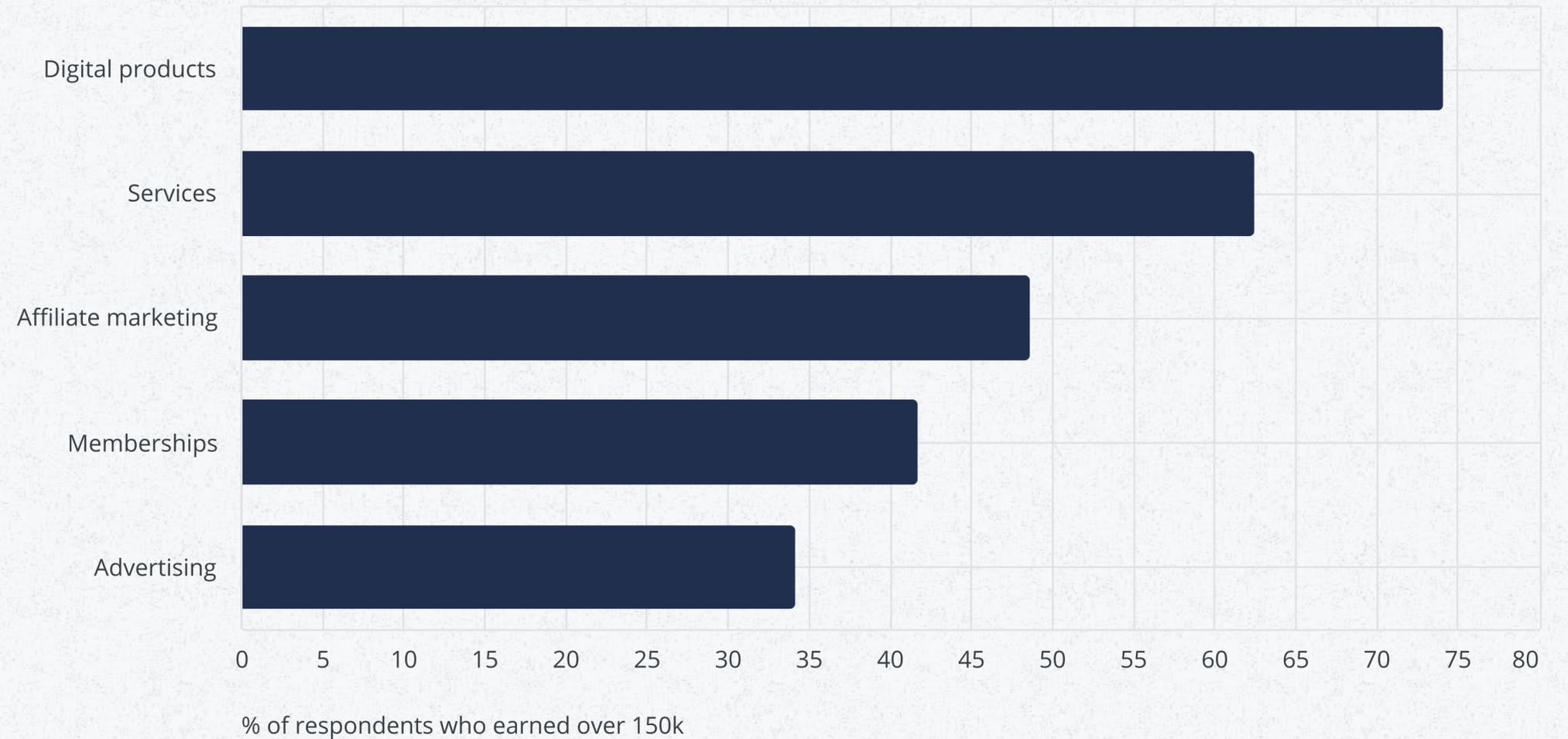
Full-time creators have an average of 2.7 income streams, which is more than part-timers or hobbyists.

INCOME STREAMS



Aside from the number of income streams, our survey also revealed preferences between full-time, part-time, and hobbyists. For example, full-time creators are more likely than part-timers to make money from recurring revenue streams like communities. On the flip side, hobbyists are most likely to leverage tip jars and donations. Since full-time creators have more time to dedicate to creating and updating additional income streams, it makes sense that they have more complex systems than other groups.

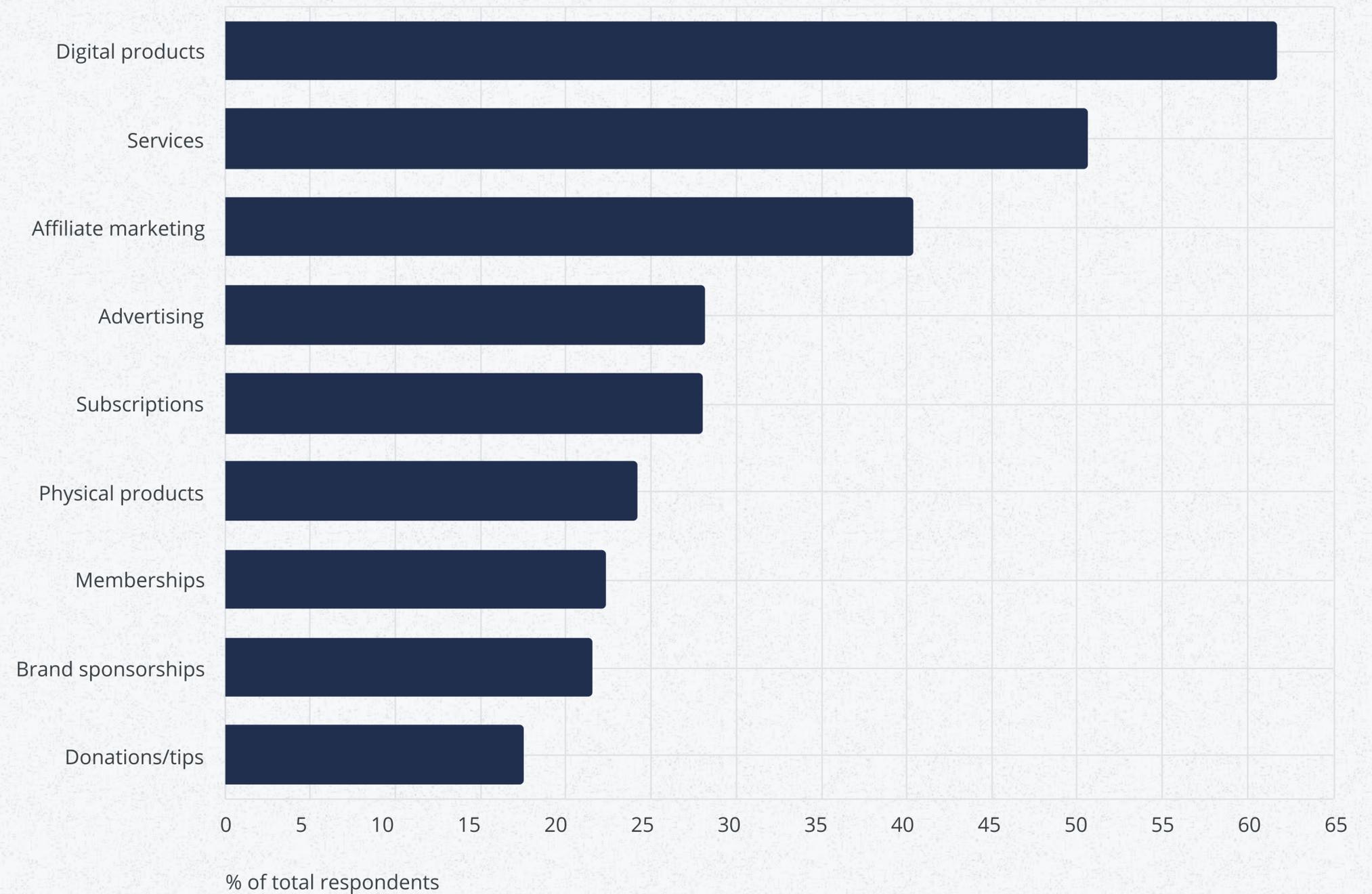
TOP 5 INCOME STREAMS FOR CREATORS WHO EARNED OVER \$150K IN 2021



The income stream creators are most excited to add to their lineup this year is digital products.

53% of full-time creators who earned income in 2021 are planning to add one or more new income streams in 2022 while 54% of part-timers and 40% of hobbitiest are planning for similar expansion. What an ambitious bunch!

NEW INCOME STREAMS CREATORS INTEND TO START IN 2022



When it comes to monetizable content, there are two leaders: digital products and courses. Both offer a way to scale your impact and turn a one-to-one service business into a one-to-many creator business.

However, one format doesn't beat the other, and different creators prefer each.

Hot take: NFTs will become more popular in the creator space. [Access NFTs](#) grant owners entry to exclusive communities or experiences, making them an exciting strategy for creators.

Want to grow your product lineup this year?

Check out the ins, outs, ups, downs, and everything in between of selling digital products in our guide.

[Read the digital product guide here](#) →

FULL-TIME CREATORS MOST LIKELY TO CREATE **DIGITAL PRODUCTS** (WITHIN THEIR CREATOR TYPE)

 **Educators**

 **Designers**

 **Developers**

 **Marketers**

 **Coaches**

FULL-TIME CREATORS MOST LIKELY TO CREATE **COURSES** (WITHIN THEIR CREATOR TYPE)

 **Coaches**

 **Educators**

 **Podcasters**

 **Marketers**

 **Authors**

06

THE CREATOR LIFESTYLE COMES WITH CHALLENGES

Creators are nothing if not resilient. In a time when **61% of creators faced burnout, and a third felt their earnings contract because of the COVID-19 pandemic**, they found solutions and forged on. Creators worked hard (often alone) from homes, offices, and coffee shops to create something from nothing. And they're ready to do it all again next year.

MONEY DOESN'T ALWAYS BUY HAPPINESS

Creating isn't always easy, but the positives outweigh everything else for most creators.

On average, creators rate their happiness with their work as a 6.6/10. Full-time creators are the happiest, but we were sad to see that hobbyists rate their satisfaction with creating at a 5.7/10, which is just over "indifferent." Here's hoping they can find more joy this year.

AVERAGE HAPPINESS LEVELS FOR...

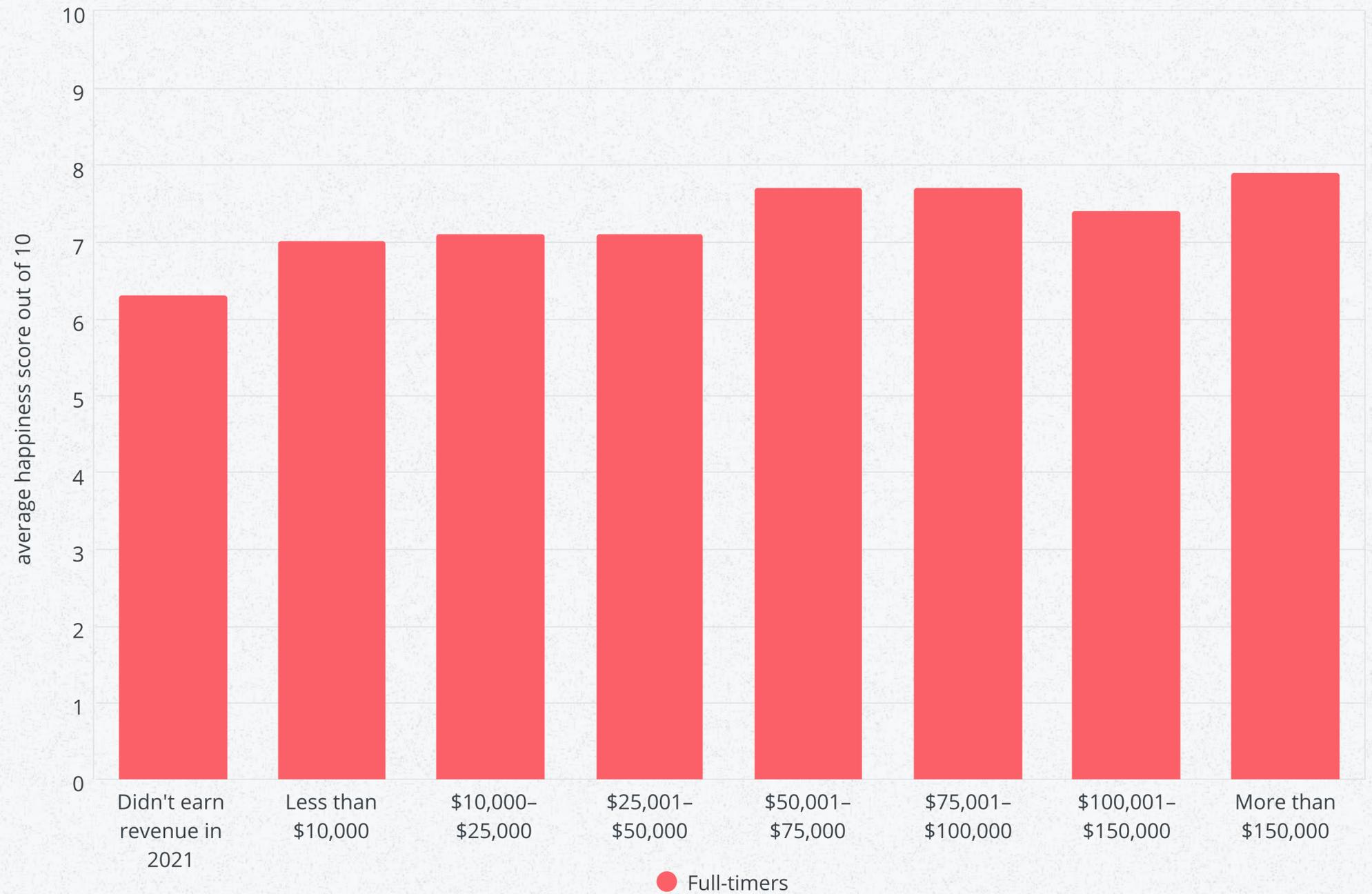


0 = Not happy at all 10 = extremely happy

If you've ever wondered if money buys happiness, it does... to an extent. Creators earning at least \$25,000 a year were happier than creators earning less.

And **pros who made more than \$150,000 in 2021 reported the highest happiness levels.** But, there wasn't much difference in happiness levels between creators who focused on income-based, audience-based, or creating-based goals. It seems that the goal creators aim for doesn't impact the way they feel about their work.

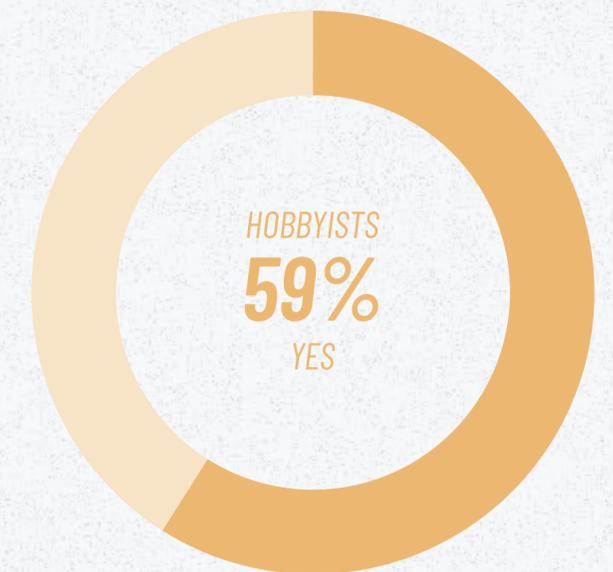
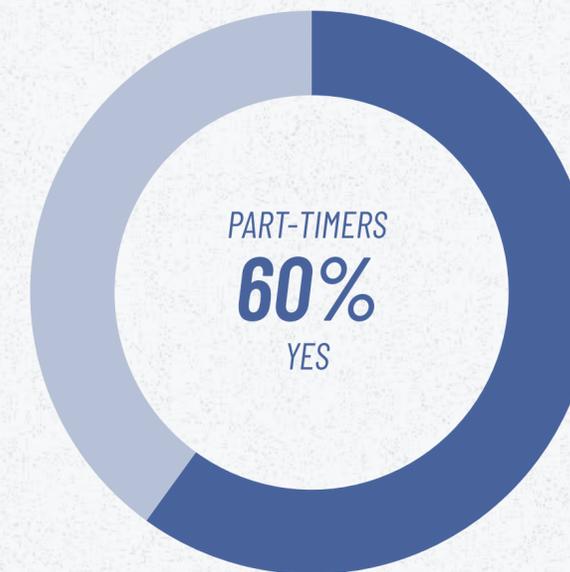
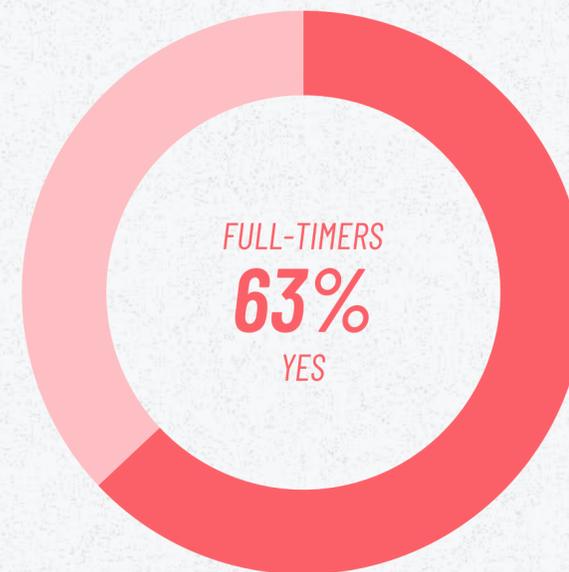
FULL-TIME CREATOR HAPPINESS BY INCOME BRACKET



CREATOR BURNOUT IS MORE COMMON THAN NOT

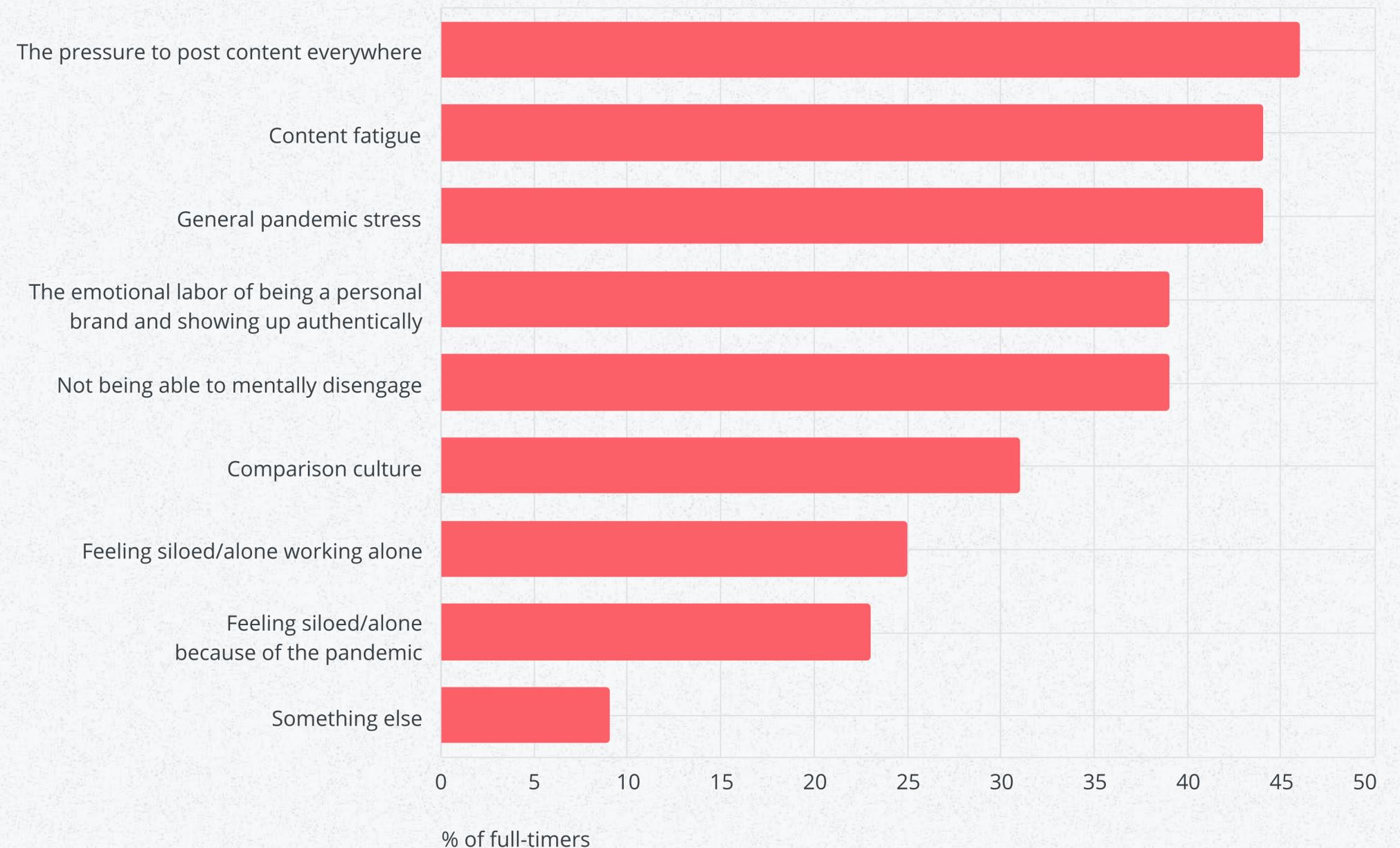
Let's talk about burnout. It manifests differently for everyone, but prolonged stress can spiral into mental exhaustion, apathy for your work, or a lack of motivation and creativity. And unfortunately, it's a prevalent enemy in the creator experience. **61% of creators experience burnout in 2021, and full-timers were the most likely group to contend with it.**

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED BURNOUT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?



Within the full-time community, some creator types felt burnout more than others. Those most likely to have experienced burnout in 2021 were streamers (76.02%), influencers (74.11%), and photographers (68.42%). Considering the leading cause of burnout was the pressure to post everywhere, it makes sense that niches with an expectation for constant new content felt the effects of burnout the most. Other common burnout causes were content fatigue, pandemic stress, and the emotional labor of maintaining a brand based on your personality.

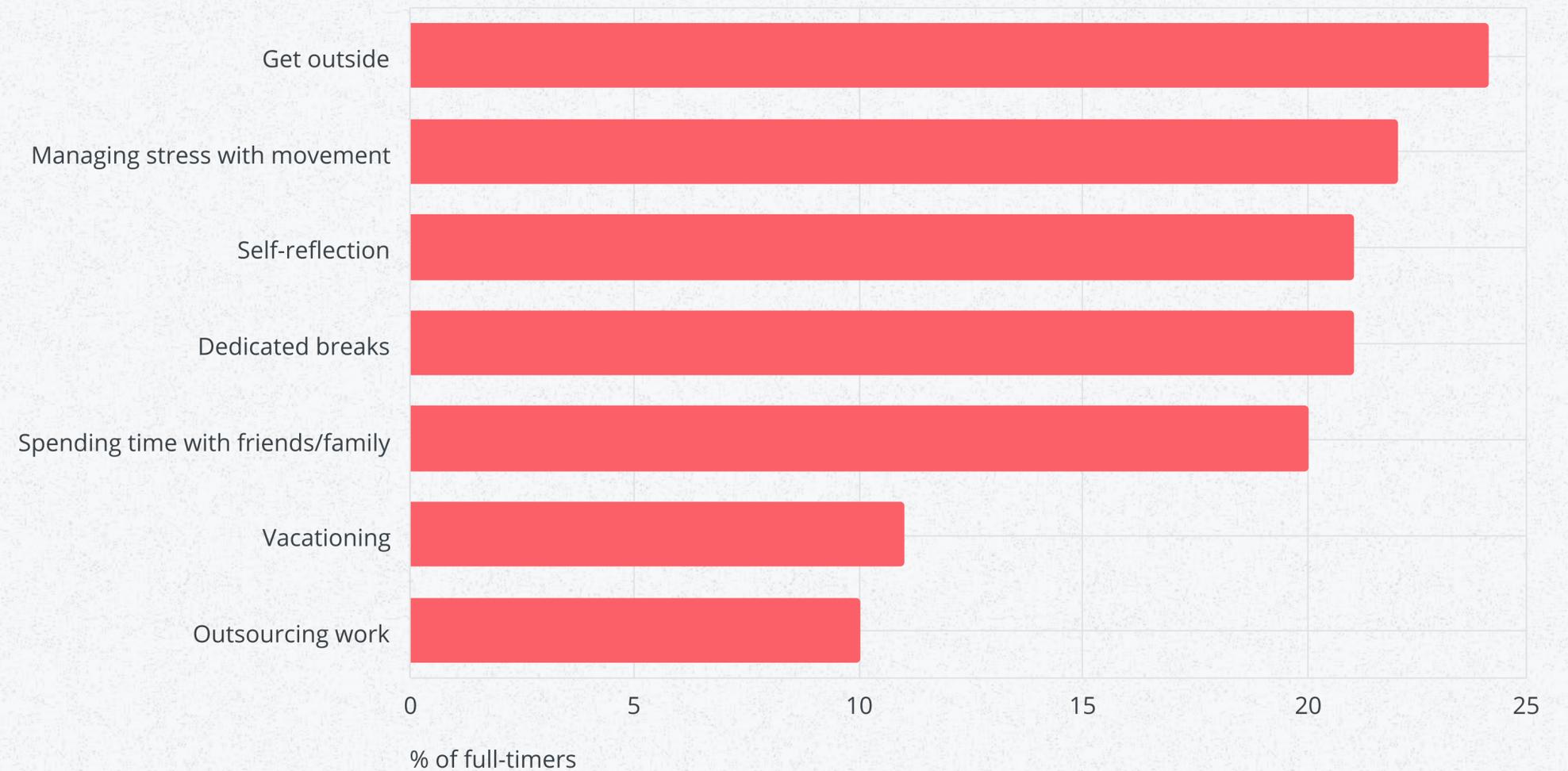
BURNOUT CAUSES FOR FULL-TIME CREATORS



Once burnout set in, it slowed down content production for 75% of creators. 69% of creators also said burnout made them feel less creative, which can be crushing when creation is what pays your bills. Thankfully, burnout only lasted a month or less for most creators. 33% of full-time creators bounced back in a few weeks, but 30% felt it for months, and 11% contended with burnout for the entirety of 2021.

Nobody wants to spend time feeling burnt out, so creators are taking steps to combat it. The most common ways full-time creators combated the burnout were getting outside, managing stress with movement and self-reflection through journaling or therapy.

WHAT FULL-TIME CREATORS DID TO COMBAT BURNOUT



THE DISTRIBUTION OF WORK

90% of professional creators worked on their business from home in 2021. This makes sense, considering the global pandemic. Most had a dedicated home office space, but 30% built their business from the kitchen table, couch, or wherever else they wanted to at home.

WHERE FULL-TIME CREATORS WORK MOST OFTEN



61.4%

HOME OFFICE



29.1%

AT HOME (BUT NOT IN A DEDICATED OFFICE SPACE)



5.4%

OFFICE SPACE AWAY FROM HOME



2.5%

COFFEE SHOP



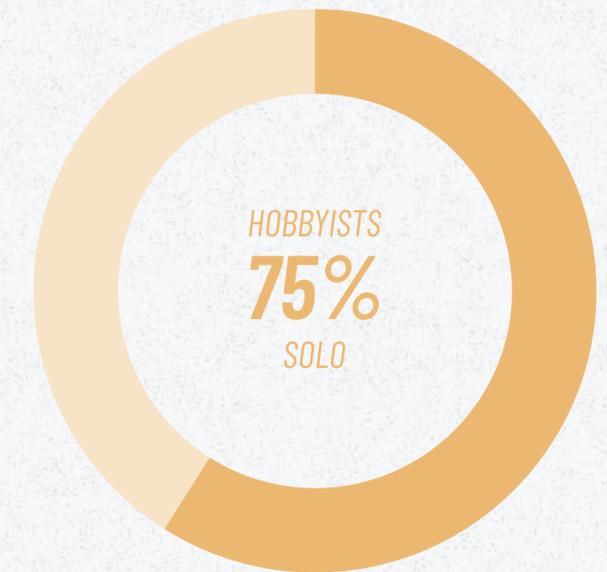
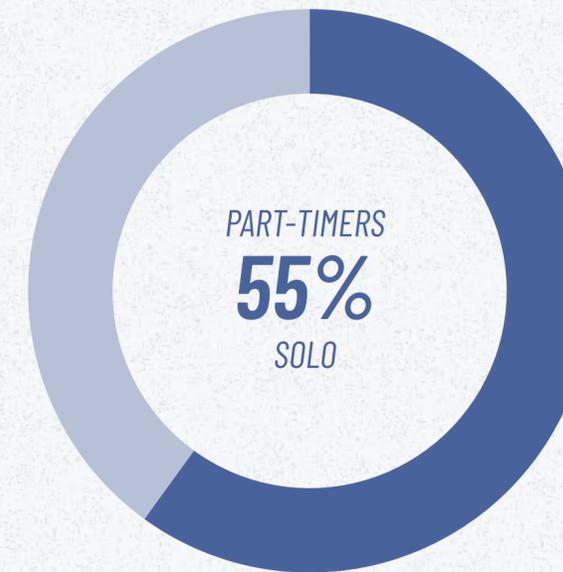
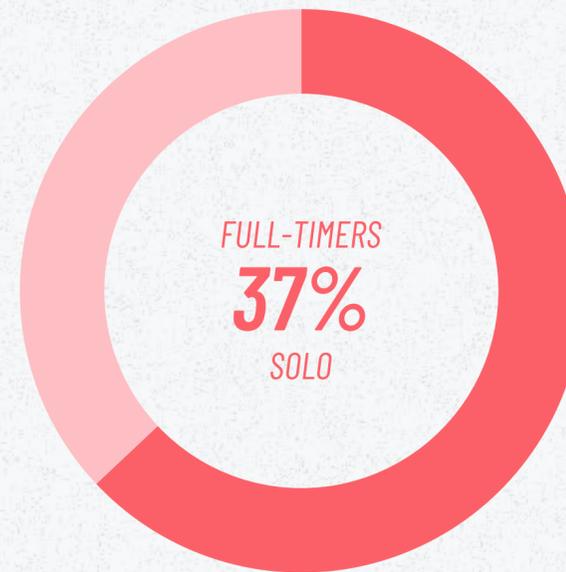
1.6%

COWORKING SPACE

A significant portion of full-time creators run their homegrown businesses completely solo. 37% of professional creators have no employees or contractors on the team whatsoever. If full-timers do have help, it's most likely from a contractor. 52% of full-timers work with contractors, as opposed to 30% who have part-time employees and 20% with at least one full-time team member.

Pro tip: find a community! Just because you work alone doesn't mean you have to work in a silo. 60% of professional creators often spend time connecting with fellow creators, which is a great way to check ideas, commiserate, and get inspired. The top three places to connect with fellow creators are Facebook groups, Instagram, and private memberships.

WORKING ALONE VS HIRING HELP



47%

of pros want to hire **more help** this year

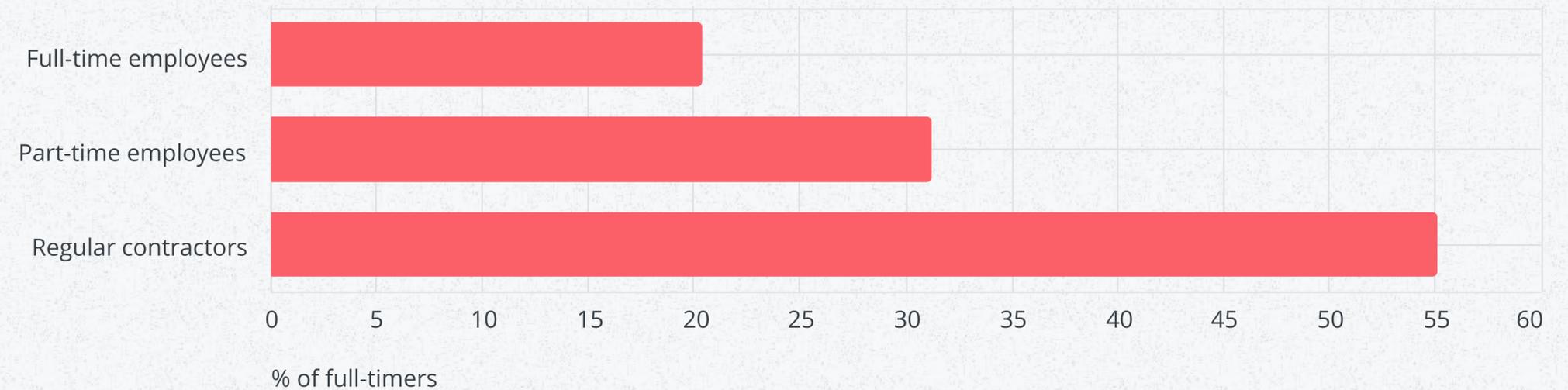
Many full-time creators don't plan on changing their current team status. 36% will remain solo in 2022, and 16% will keep their team as is. 47% of pros want to hire more help this year, and hiring contractors is the most popular way they plan to do that.

Hot take: If creators hired people to help with work, they could spend more time creating. Only 36% of creators spend more than half their time actually creating. That means most creators spend the majority of their time on business growth or admin tasks! Hiring help frees up time to work on creating new content, and outsourcing work is also how 10% of creators keep burnout at bay.

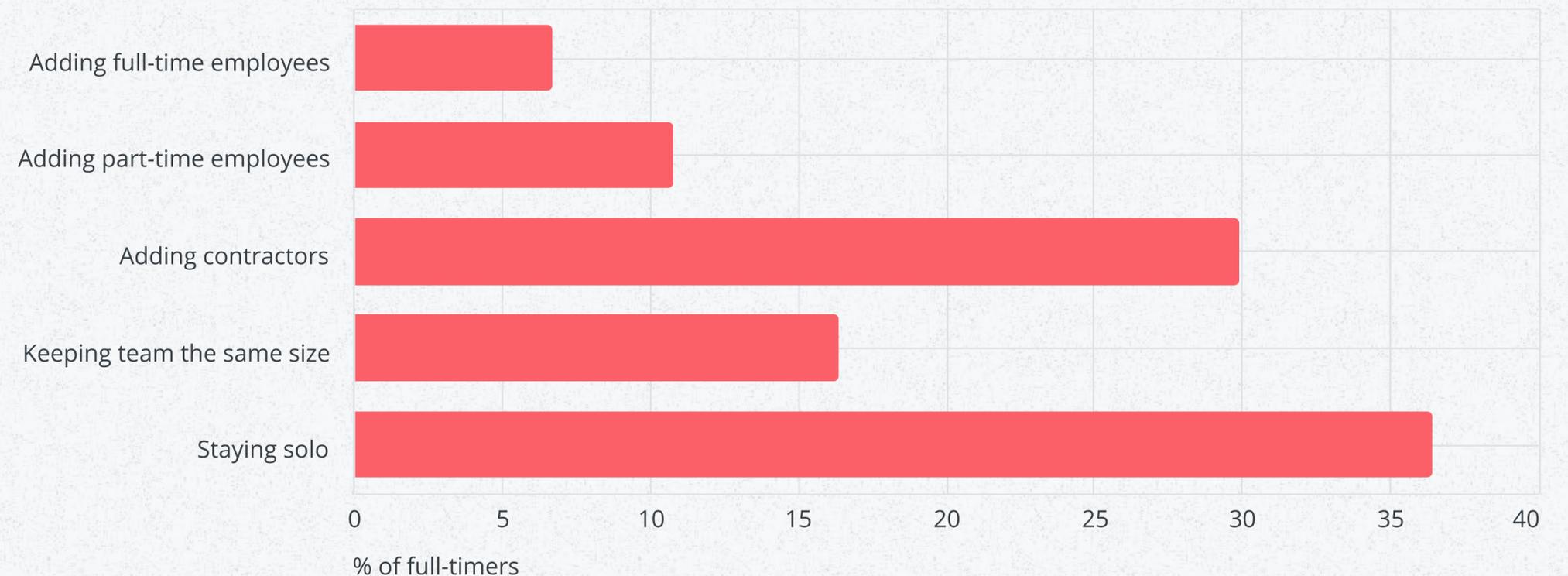
36%

*of creators spend more than half their time **actually creating***

TYPES OF PAID HELP THAT FULL-TIME CREATORS HAD IN 2021



HIRING PLANS FOR 2022

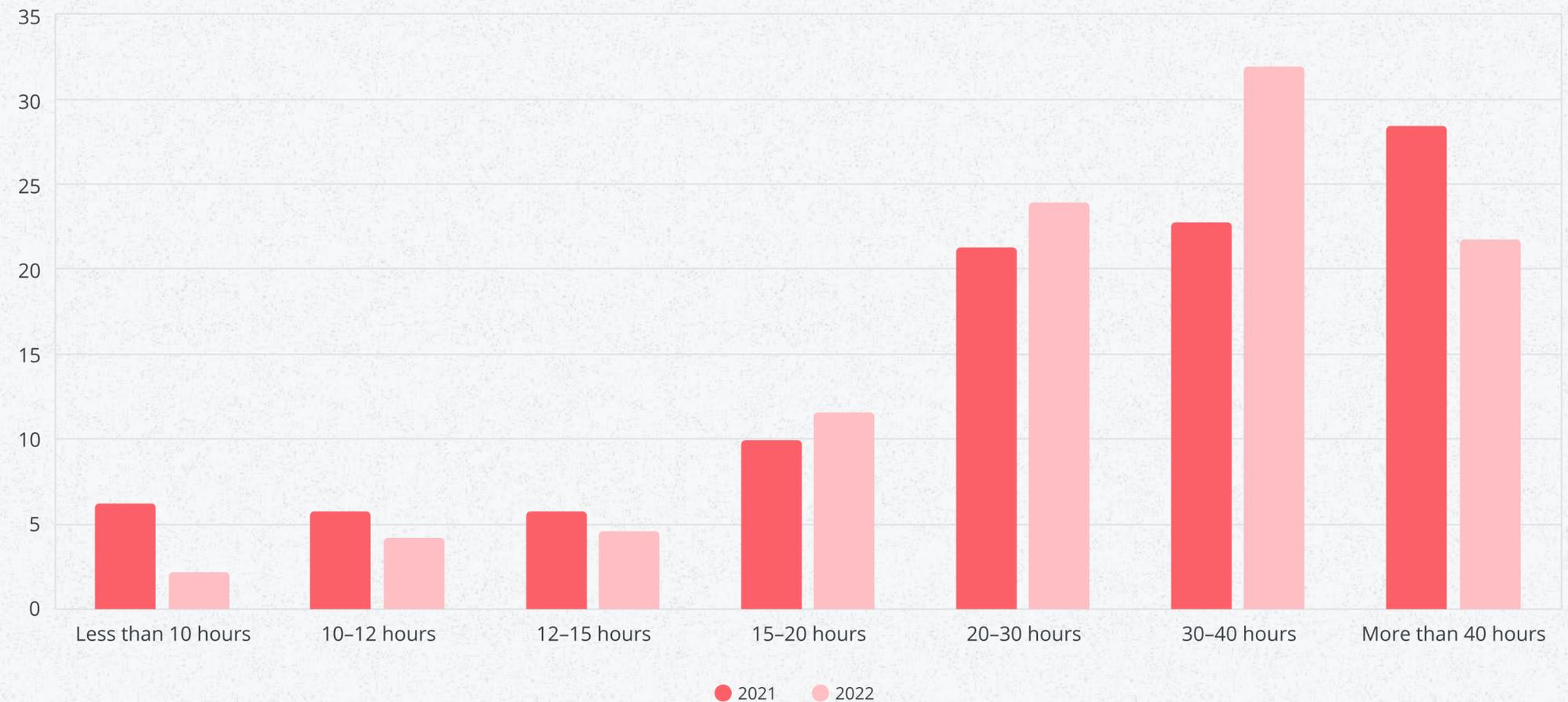


FULL-TIME CREATORS OFTEN WORK OVER 40 HOURS A WEEK

When you're your own boss, you can set your schedule. When you have big ideas, goals, and to-do lists, though, finding work/life balance can be tricky. **A 40+ hour workweek was the most common choice for full-time creators in 2021.** 28% of creators chose this option, followed by 23% of pros who work 30-40 hours and 21% who commit 20-30 hours a week.

It seems that the longest-working creators want to make a change this year. 32% plan to work 30-40 hours a week, which is the most common answer. Super long work weeks aren't the goal for full-time creators in 2022, and they don't have to be. Multiple "one to many" revenue streams, self-growing strategies like referral programs, and email automations can help you have a greater impact with less hands-on time.

HOURS WORKED PER WEEK IN 2021 VS PLANS FOR 2022



07

CREATOR TOOL STACK

Every industry has “tools of the trade,” and the creator economy is no different. **For more than half of full-time creators, the essential tech stack consists of a website, landing pages, a tool for selling products, email marketing, and community space.**

Curious what the pros use?
Here are the most popular full-time creator tools.

THE TOOLS THE PROS USE

Every industry has “tools of the trade,” and the creator economy is no different. For more than half of full-time creators, the essential tech stack consists of a website, landing pages, a tool for selling products, email marketing, and community space. When it comes to budget, more revenue leads to higher tool stack investments. 28% of full-time creators spend more than \$500 a month on tools, and 9% of top earners spend over \$5,000.

Curious what the pros use? Here are the most popular full-time creator tools.

SMS TEXT SERVICE

94% OF FULL-TIME CREATORS SAID THEY DON'T USE AN SMS TEXT SERVICE. EMAIL IS STILL THE PREFERRED WAY FOR THE PROS TO REACH THEIR AUDIENCE ONE ON ONE

SimpleTexting

TextMagic

klaviyo

ClickSend

smsbump

THE MOST COMMON TECH STACK TOOLS FOR PROFESSIONAL CREATORS

WEBSITE BUILDER

88% HAVE A WEBSITE

WordPress Squarespace

Shopify GoDaddy Webflow

EMAIL MARKETING TOOL

81% USE AN EMAIL MARKETING TOOL

ConvertKit Mailchimp Flodesk

ActiveCampaign Constant Contact

SALES TOOL

80% USE A TOOL TO SELL PRODUCTS & SERVICES

Teachable Squarespace

WooCommerce Shopify ConvertKit

LANDING PAGE

78% USE A LANDING PAGE TOOL

ConvertKit Linktree

Leadpages Click Funnels

COMMUNITY PLATFORM

55% HAVE A COMMUNITY BUILDING PLATFORM

Facebook Discord Slack

Mighty Networks Circle

COURSE TOOL

45% USE A COURSE TOOL

Teachable Thinkific Kajabi

Podia Mighty Networks

SOCIAL MEDIA SCHEDULER

34% USE A SOCIAL MEDIA SCHEDULER

Later Buffer Planoly

Hootsuite MeetEdgar

MEMBERSHIP MANAGER

ONLY 28% HAVE A MEMBERSHIP TOOL

Teachable Patreon Kajabi

Podia Thinkific

PATRONAGE & TIP JAR

ONLY 20% HAVE A WAY TO ACCEPT TIPS

Patreon Buy me a coffee ConvertKit

Ko-fi Kickstarter

THE CREATOR ECONOMY IS JUST GETTING STARTED

Being a creator isn't a new concept, but creator tools and a growing community of support are certainly changing what it means and gaining some serious steam. But if you're looking for a get-rich-quick path, being a creator isn't it.

Passionate people spend years building an audience. And for people wanting to take matters into their own hands or break away from traditional work, the reward can be great. Embracing

creativity, setting your own schedule, and earning a livable wage all contribute to a generally happy bunch of creators.

Whitney Manney, a fashion designer, talked to us about her creator journey. She said there were times when she considered how other routes would be easier, but in the end, she decided to persevere. She said,

“Even if it's 10 years from now, I can go teach, I can go be a third-grade art teacher. But 10 years from now, are you going to have the energy, the drive, the imagination to do what you're doing right now? I don't know if that's a chance I'm willing to take.”

As we move through 2022, full-timers and COVID creators alike will use email marketing, courses, social media, digital products, communities, and more to reach a global audience and earn a living online. Whether you want to replace your income or reach heights beyond your wildest dreams, there's a whole creator community working alongside you.

So, we ask you, what will you create this year?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to these creators and companies for sharing the survey with their audience. Your help in spreading the word made this research more of a reflection of different corners of the creator economy.

- 30X500 Academy
- Alignable
- Amy Porterfield
- Digital Deepak
- Ellen Mackenziee
- Food Blogger Pro
- Glo Atanmo
- Heather Rasban
- Indy Hall
- Jason Resnick
- Jay Clouse
- John Meese
- Katie Steckly
- Khe Hy
- Lucy Moon
- Justin Jackson
- Mindful Biz Club
- Planoly
- Rachel Rodgers
- Roberto Blake
- Sahil Bloom
- Sendible
- Shannon Mattern
- Shelly Rees
- Stacking the Bricks
- Steph Smith
- STORY
- Taha Khan
- Teachable
- Thinkific
- Tiago Forte
- Transistor FM
- WAHJobQueen
- Webflow



THANKS FOR READING