CREATOR VETTING CHECKLIST

Creator Vetting Checklist: *is this audience real?*

How to check an audience is real before you pay for it — and what every word in the agreement actually means.

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DOCUMENT 1 OF 2 · THE RIGHTS GUIDE IS THE OTHER HALF

Part one — vetting: *is this audience real?*

Five checks, in order.

N°01 Engagement rate. Read the small print, not the number.

Almost every engagement figure you will be shown is uncomparable to the one next to it, because publishers divide by different things. Some divide by followers. Some divide by views. Some divide by impressions. For one creator, those three answers can differ by ten times.

WHAT IS DIVIDED BY WHAT	WHO DEFINES IT THIS WAY
Likes + comments ÷ **followers**	Socialinsider (Instagram), Rival IQ, CreatorIQ
Likes + comments + shares + saves ÷ **views**	Socialinsider (TikTok), HypeAuditor (TikTok)
Engagements ÷ **impressions**	Captiv8, via eMarketer (Instagram)

Ask the seller which denominator they used. If they cannot answer, the number is decoration.

Three publishers, three answers, one creator. The gap between them is not disagreement — it is arithmetic.

The most transparent public dataset we could find is Socialinsider's TikTok study — 2 million videos from 214,507 profiles active between January 2024 and December 2025, engagement measured per view.[1] Its finding is the useful one: across every follower band from 1,000 to a million, engagement sits between **3.75% and 4.40%**, and it does not fall steadily as accounts grow. On TikTok, the "small creators engage better" story mostly disappears once you stop dividing by followers.

On Instagram, measured per follower, engagement does fall as accounts grow — several publishers agree on the direction. **Nobody agrees on the size.** Published figures for the smallest tier include 2.19%, 4%, 4.8% and 6.23%, each measuring something different. Treat direction as real and magnitude as unknown.

⚠ DISTRUST ON SIGHT

One number to distrust on sight. A widely-copied vendor table lists an *average* Instagram engagement rate of **35.19%** for accounts under 10,000 followers, against a top-10% figure of 11.57% in the same row. An average cannot exceed its own top tenth. The cell has been wrong and live since September 2024. If a pitch deck shows you anything near 35%, that is the source.

The four checks you run *with your own eyes*

No tool required. About an hour.

N°02 Follower growth shape.

Chart followers over 12 months. Look for vertical jumps with no post, no press and no collaboration behind them, and for growth that stops dead afterwards. **Be honest about what this is:** it is a sensible heuristic, not a measured rule. We found **no published research with a disclosed sample that validates any specific spike threshold** — every "10% in a week means bought" figure in circulation traces to a vendor blog. Use it to raise a question, never to accuse.

N°03 Comment quality.

Read fifty comments on three recent posts. You are looking for comments that could only have been written by someone who watched: references to a moment, a question about the product, an in-joke. Generic praise and emoji strings at scale are the signal. **Also honest:** no credible public research measures how common bot comments are. This check works because you can see it, not because there is a benchmark.

N°04 Audience geography.

Ask for a screenshot of the creator's own analytics showing where their audience lives — not where the creator lives. If you sell in one country and 70% of the audience is somewhere else, the rate card is wrong even if every follower is real.

N°05 Brand-safety scan.

Read two years back. Look for: content that conflicts with your category, competitor deals still inside their exclusivity window, undisclosed past partnerships, and anything you would not want screenshotted beside your logo. Do this yourself. It takes an hour and it is the hour that saves the campaign.

What the platforms will not give you. Neither Meta nor TikTok publishes engagement benchmarks by follower size. Every tier figure in circulation is a third party's estimate from outside data. TikTok does publish enforcement volumes — it says it prevented over 15 billion fake follow requests in the first half of 2024[2] — but a total with no denominator tells you the problem is large, not whether *this* creator has it.

Checked, and *deliberately absent*

What we could not verify, named.

- × **Any engagement-rate figure by follower tier for Instagram from a source disclosing sample, date range and denominator all three.** Of fourteen publishers checked, exactly one — Socialinsider — disclosed all three on a free page, and only for TikTok. That is why this document publishes direction for Instagram and a range for TikTok, and refuses to print an Instagram tier table.
- × **Every 2026 "influencer fraud prevalence" statistic in circulation** — the 41.3%, the 37.2%, the 8.7 million audited profiles, the $4.8bn in losses. None traces to a publication by the vendor it is credited to. All excluded.
- × **Any validated threshold for spotting bought followers from a growth chart.** No methodology-disclosed research exists. This document says so rather than inventing a rule.
- × **Bot-comment prevalence.** The commonly quoted "about 40% of comments on sponsored posts" traces to a personal blog, not a study. Excluded.
- × **Gated reports we did not fill in a form to read:** HypeAuditor's 2026 report, CreatorIQ's tier benchmarks, Metricool's 2026 Instagram study, Emplifi, Aspire, and Statista's paywalled tables. Named as gated, never guessed at.
- × **Instagram fake-account prevalence.** Meta publishes this for Facebook only.

SOURCES

1. Socialinsider, *TikTok Benchmarks 2026* — 2M videos from 214,507 profiles, Jan 2024 – Dec 2025, engagement measured per view. Published 22 Apr 2026.
2. TikTok Newsroom, *How TikTok counters deceptive behaviour*, 9 Dec 2024 — global volumes, first half of 2024.

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