

OCTOBER 2025 ISSUE

# FLUME DIGITAL DIARY



# DETECTIVE,

Strange things are happening in the digital underworld. The algorithms are like shifty shadows, platforms are whispering half-truths, and new technologies have crept onto the scene with motives we're only beginning to uncover.

October often knocks on our doors asking for a trick or treat, but this edition isn't a cute kid in a scary costume. As you unfold each page, you'll uncover another piece of evidence, getting you one step closer to finding out what's behind the masks and mischief.

Follow the trail, interrogate the suspects, and separate the pretenders from the real masterminds driving digital change.

It's time to crack the mystery of what's really happening online this month.



# QUICK RECAP

## WHAT IS OUR DIGITAL DIARY?

The Flume Digital Diary is a monthly roundup curated to keep you connected to what's happening in the ever-evolving world of digital marketing, creativity, and culture, both locally in South Africa and across the global stage.

Our goal is to cut through the noise and bring you the trends, tools, updates, and ideas that matter most to modern marketers, strategists, and brand builders. Each edition of the Flume Digital Diary covers platform updates, ad tech shifts, standout campaigns, influencer insights, and all the other good things you need to succeed in the marketing world, neatly packaged in a bite-sized, insightful download that sparks inspiration and encourages forward thinking.



### WE COVER

**Platform and policy updates** – so you know what's changing across Meta, Google, TikTok, and more.

**Noteworthy campaigns** – local and global examples that stand out for their creativity, innovation, or cultural relevance.

**Influencer and creator trends** – from how brands are partnering smarter to who's driving real engagement.

**Audience behaviour shifts** – what people are doing, watching, clicking, buying, and caring about online.

**Emerging tools and tactics** – the latest in AI, automation, targeting, and measurement.

**Local case studies** – grounded insights from South African brands and campaigns

**Flume Focus** – our strategic POV on what these shifts mean for brands right now

Stay informed, spark new ideas, and sharpen your digital edge with the monthly Flume Digital Diary:

**your companion for smarter, faster marketing.**



# CASE STUDY



# FANTA'S “WANTA FANTA” CAMPAIGN

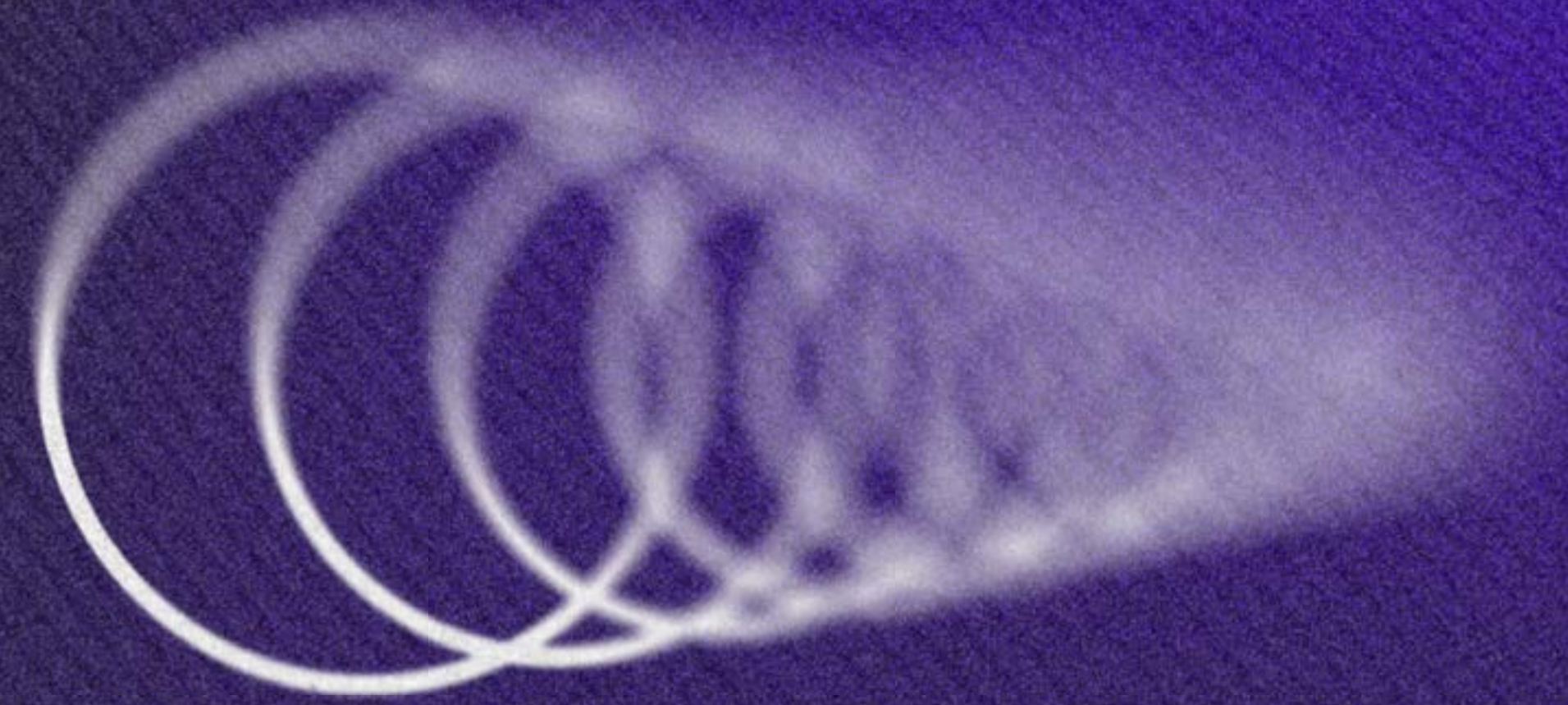
In April 2024, Fanta relaunched its nostalgic “Wanta Fanta” jingle in a modern campaign aimed at reconnecting with younger consumers. But this wasn’t just a remix, it was a full cultural activation designed to reignite brand love, especially among Gen Z and young millennials who crave fun, self-expression, and real-world joy.

Fanta didn’t stop at catchy tunes or traditional media they built a campaign that leaned heavily on creators, interactivity, and surprise moments that travelled across both screens and streets.





# KEY STRATEGY 1: KNOW YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE



## INSIGHTS

Fanta recognised that Gen Z is highly values-driven, responds to authenticity, and prefers to co-create rather than be sold to. This generation grew up on memes, TikTok trends, and community-based virality, not corporate slogans.

## WHAT FANTA DID

Resurfaced a nostalgic brand asset (the jingle) but gave it a TikTok-ready remix bridging past and present.

Created a #WantaFanta TikTok Challenge, inviting users to express what they "Wanta" in life an empowering, relatable prompt.

Partnered with authentic TikTok creators, not just polished influencers, to produce content that felt native to the platform.

## WHY IT WORKED

By tuning into what motivates its audience, joy, creativity, and community Fanta made the campaign feel like a movement, not a message.



# KEY STRATEGY 2: DIVERSIFY CHANNELS TO MAXIMISE REACH & RESONANCE

## INSIGHTS

Modern youth culture lives across platforms. What starts as a TikTok trend often ends up on Instagram Stories, in WhatsApp groups, or even broadcast media. A one-channel approach risks missing parts of the conversation.

## WHAT FANTA DID

**TikTok-first strategy:** Creator-led challenges and native short-form video

**Digital films:** Remixed jingle content served on Connected TV and YouTube

**Offline activations:** The “Wanta Mobile” experiential truck popped up at public spaces, delivering Fanta products and unexpected joy

**Retail integrations:** In-store visibility to close the loop from screen to shelf

## WHY IT WORKED

Each channel had a role, TikTok built hype, TV and digital video scaled reach, and in-person experiences brought emotional closeness. Consumers didn’t just watch the campaign they lived it,



# KEY STRATEGY 3: SURPRISE AND DELIGHT IN THE REAL WORLD



## INSIGHTS

While digital may dominate attention, physical experiences still drive emotion especially when unexpected and shareable. “Surprise and delight” activations give campaigns a soul.

## WHAT FANTA DID

Sent out the “Wanta Mobile” experiential truck to hand out Fanta and limited-edition merch

Creators amplified their real-life encounters, turning those moments into viral content

The mobile units became content generators, community hubs, and brand theatre all in one

## WHY IT WORKED

In a world of algorithmic sameness, surprise creates standout moments. Delight creates emotional memory. Together, they anchor digital buzz in real-life impact.

Fanta’s “Wanta Fanta” campaign wasn’t about chasing trends, it was about understanding people. By combining deep audience insight, a platform-fluid approach, and real-world joy, the brand didn’t just trend, it transcended. For South African brands thinking about how to land emotionally and digitally this is a playbook worth stealing.



# CHANNELS & PLATFORM SPECIFICS



# AI UPDATES

## CASE NOTE

AI Continues  
to Rear its  
Digital Vangs

### AI-POWERED PERSONALISATION BRINGS NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRANDS

Digital personalisation is entering a powerful new phase. Powered by AI and machine learning, brands can now personalise entire journeys in real time, across every channel. Impressive, yes, but also intimidating. The key, though, lies in how well you can consolidate and work with your data across API-driven platforms and AI.

### THE GENERATIVE AI PROPOSITION

With its knack for reading between the lines (and not just reading the lines), there's increasing consideration in how Generative AI could be used to improve contextual targeting. Unlike older systems that rely on simple keyword matching, generative AI can understand the actual meaning and intent behind content, which means reaching and speaking to people in a way that they can understand.

### FLUME FOCUS

Could Generative AI be the holy grail of ad relevance or just another overhyped algorithm with a shiny name? That's the billion-impression question. But one thing is certain, the powers of artificial intelligence has the potential to go beyond just the daunting images and videos one sees on social media, you need just the data and vision to do so.



# AI UPDATES



## FLUME FOCUS

### IS AEO/GEO THE NEW SEO?

#### AEO/GEO = ANSWER ENGINE OPTIMISATION/ GENERATIVE ENGINE OPTIMISATION

As AI answer engines like ChatGPT and Perplexity quietly snag 5.6% of desktop search traffic, the SEO game is getting flipped on its head. Instead of clicking through sites, people are getting quick, snappy answers straight from the bot's mouth, leaving publishers and SEO-reliant brands knocking on our door wondering where their traffic went.

SEO isn't confirmed dead, but how we've traditionally done it might be. People still search, but they're not always clicking, which means a need to start thinking beyond traditional SEO and optimising content for how AI reads and understands it, not just how Google crawls it. AEO is no longer a "nice-to-have" but is there a limit to how much engine optimisation a brand can do?





# SOCIAL MEDIA ROUND UP

FLUME DIGITAL DIARY



# SOCIAL MEDIA ROUND UP

AS THE INVESTIGATION WIDENS, A FEW SUSPICIOUS PATTERNS EMERGE ACROSS THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE. EACH CLUE RESHAPES HOW WE SHOW UP, CREATE, AND CONNECT. HERE'S WHAT THE EVIDENCE REVEALS THIS MONTH:

## CASE NOTE

Cross-Platform  
Trends & Shifts  
to Watch

## PERSONALISATION IS BACK (BUT MAKE IT SELECTIVE)

Platforms are favouring small, high-intent audiences over mass reach.

**Instagram** is pushing Close Friends as a content layer for exclusivity and loyalty.

**LinkedIn** posts that feel personal but still professional are outperforming templated thought leadership.

**YouTube** is letting creators go deep with longer-form storytelling, while Shorts pull people

## STRATEGIC CUE

Tailor for tiers. Create layered content strategies that reward closeness, not just visibility.

## CREATIVITY > POLISHED CONTENT

Low-fi, creator-first, real-time content is outperforming high-production assets.

**TikTok** continues to prioritise authenticity, humour, and niche storytelling.

**Meta** is doubling down on AI-generated creative, but it's still up to brands to make it feel human.

**Pinterest** trends (like "castlecore" and "soft spring") show people want to feel something, not just be sold to.

## STRATEGIC CUE

Ditch the polish. Focus on originality, emotion, and content that reflects how people really speak, scroll, and share.



# SOCIAL MEDIA ROUND UP

## EXPERIMENTATION IS THE EDGE

New tools and formats are giving brands room to test and learn – quickly.

**YouTube's** AI features (like “Dream Screen” and automated dubbing) help scale creative faster.

**Meta's** evolving campaign tools (like Advantage+) require new approaches to budgeting and optimisation.

**Threads, Bluesky, and X** continue to shift, proving that being adaptable matters more than being everywhere.

## STRATEGIC CUE

Use the quieter months to test new platforms, formats, and creator collabs. Build your 2025 playbook now.

**THIS MONTH'S  
VERDICT IS CLEAR:**

**NICHE OVER MASS,**

**REAL OVER POLISHED**

**PLAY OVER PERFECTION**

The crime scene confirms it: Those who test, explore, and stay nimble now will be the ones solving tomorrow's mysteries.



# INSTAGRAM

## CASE NOTE

The Familiar Face with New Secrets

## AI-GENERATED IMAGE LABELS ROLLING OUT

Instagram is testing automatic "Made with AI" tags on content suspected to be AI-generated. Even untagged posts may get flagged.

*What it means:* Transparency is becoming a trust signal, especially for branded visuals.

## CLOSE FRIENDS, CLOSER CONVERSIONS

The Close Friends feature is getting new life as creators and brands use it to share exclusive content, early drops, and VIP access.

*What it means:* A chance to build deeper loyalty through content that feels personal and premium.

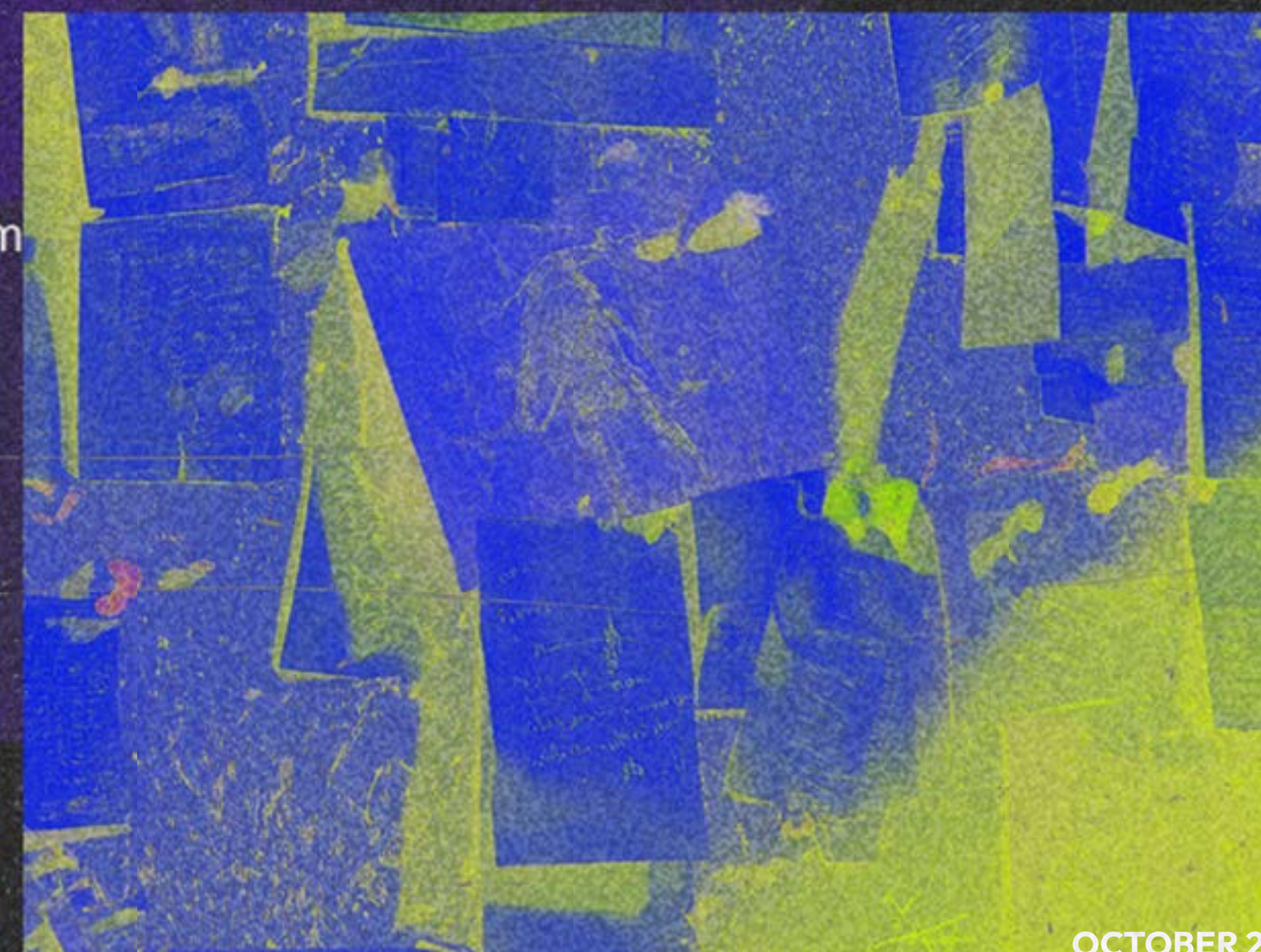
## THREADS INTEGRATION INCOMING

Meta is testing ways to link Threads and Instagram more closely through cross-posting and shared notifications.

*What it means:* Early adopters could benefit from increased visibility across platforms.

## FLUME FOCUS

Instagram is shifting from mass visibility to more meaningful engagement. The evidence suggests that intimacy, authenticity, and creator collaboration will carry more weight than sheer reach. Brands that learn to operate within this inner circle will crack the case of stronger loyalty.





# META

## CASE NOTE

The Mastermind  
with the Big  
Budget



## META CHANGES AD BILLING

Expect some changes when creating your next campaign as Meta makes some tweaks to its ad billing and Advantage+ budget settings:

*Billing: Advertisers will now be charged upfront when launching a campaign (not after spend hits a threshold) which means better upfront costs and spend control but also a possibility a need for more manual optimisation. Additional changes include a shift from min/max limits to an average spend cap, giving predictability but possibly reducing performance.*



## META PARTNERS WITH MID-JOURNEY TO IMPROVE VISUAL GENERATION ELEMENTS

Meta joins hands with Mid-journey in a creative conspiracy as it expands its AI superintelligence/AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) project. For advertisers, this means access to higher-quality images and video assets – a new weapon in the creative arsenal. But every shiny tool has a motive: Meta wants brands even more dependent on its ecosystem.

## FLUME FOCUS

As Meta is doubles down on AI for creative differentiation, while simultaneously tightening financial controls in ad management, advertisers benefit from better tools, but will also need to adapt to stricter budget mechanics.



# TIKTOK

## TIKTOK TESTS OUT RISKÉ AD FEATURE

TikTok is testing a new ad feature called 'Engaged Session,' which tracks what happens after a click, without the usual pixels. It's a little privacy-spicy, but if it launches, advertisers get a clearer view of who's actually sticking around versus bouncing right off and can use that data to retarget to prospects. For audiences, it feels a little like surveillance. The motive? Better retargeting, but the ethics of the method are still under question.

## NEW SCHEDULING TOOL HITS TIKTOK

TikTok just made hitting "post" less of a gamble. Now, you can schedule your content right from the app's composer, simply pick your date & time, and let the algorithm do the rest. Sure, scheduling isn't new (TikTok Studio and third-party tools have been around), but having it all in one place means a bit more convenience.

## CASE NOTE

The Entertainer  
with a Few  
Tricks up Its  
Sleeve

## FLUME FOCUS

Target smarter, tread softer. TikTok's evolving targeting tools could become a powerful asset for conversion-driven campaigns, giving advertisers sharper performance signals. But as we await official rollout, remember: just because you can target, doesn't mean you should. Align your approach with your audience's expectations and your ethical standards. Smart doesn't have to be sneaky.



# LINKEDIN

## BRANDS COSY UP TO TRUSTED VOICES: LINKEDIN'S BRANDLINK PUTS YOU WHERE PROFESSIONALS ACTUALLY LISTEN

LinkedIn is expanding BrandLink, letting brands place video ads alongside publishers, influencers, and its original shows, including partners like AT&T, IBM, SAP, and ServiceNow. With top media outlets like BBC Studios, TED, The Economist, and Vox Media added, BrandLink taps into professionals' preference for human insight over AI, helping brands align ads with trusted voices audiences actually engage with. Credibility by association, clever.

## CASE NOTE

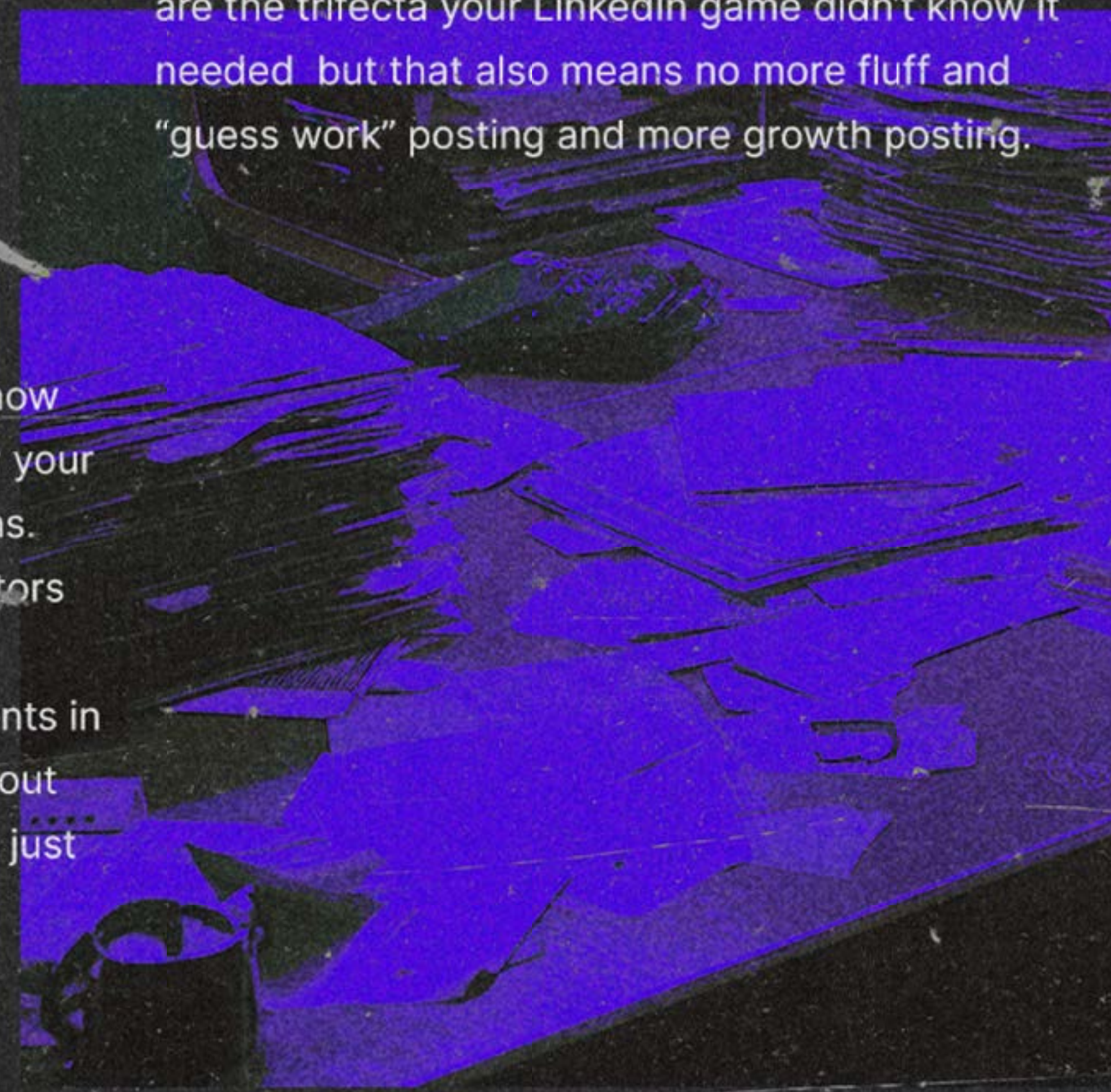
The Polished  
Professional  
with Insider  
Connections

## PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN: LINKEDIN ROLLS OUT REAL-TIME POST ALERTS

Curious who's lurking on your posts? LinkedIn now sends rolling notifications showing exactly how your content drives views, followers, and impressions. Hits appear at 3 and 7 days post, keeping creators in the loop without having to stalk their own analytics page. It's like getting witness statements in real time, giving marketers sharper insight without waiting for the full report. Engagement insights just got a little sneakier, and way more useful.

## FLUME FOCUS

Smarts, stats and strategic collabs - these updates are the trifecta your LinkedIn game didn't know it needed but that also means no more fluff and "guess work" posting and more growth posting.







## CASE NOTE

Unfiltered,  
Unstable,  
Still Evolving

### AD TOOLS ARE BEING REBUILT, SLOWLY

Since the Elon-era overhaul, many legacy ad tools and targeting capabilities were stripped back or broken. Now, X is gradually rebuilding features for brand safety, performance reporting, and targeting though progress is inconsistent.

*What it means:* Proceed with caution. X ads can work, but they require close monitoring and flexible budgets.

### CREATORS CAN MONETISE (BUT NOT EVERYONE'S WINNING)

X now offers ad revenue sharing and subscriptions for creators. While a few large accounts are seeing real payouts, smaller creators are struggling with inconsistent visibility and monetisation.

*What it means:* For brands working with creators on X, focus on engagement, not just follower counts.

### THE BRAND SUITABILITY CONVERSATION ISN'T OVER

Despite efforts to clean up content adjacency, X continues to face scrutiny from brands concerned about hate speech and misinformation. Some major advertisers have pulled back, while others are quietly testing again.

*What it means:* Context is everything. Think carefully about brand tone and audience mindset when activating on X.

### FLUME FOCUS

X isn't the "must-have" platform it once was. For brands with bold voices, real-time relevance, or cultural capital, it can still deliver impact, but only with eyes wide open.

*What it means:* Context is everything. Think carefully about brand tone and audience mindset when activating on X. Treat this witness as useful, but unpredictable.



# PINTEREST



## CASE NOTE

The Dreamer  
with a  
Nostalgic Alibi



## AESTHETIC ESCAPISM IS RISING

Gen Z is turning to nostalgic, personal, and sustainable aesthetics like “vintage fall,” thrifted decor, and ArtDeco revival, all aligning with their desire for authentic expression.

## VISUAL SEARCH GETS SMARTER

Pinterest just upgraded its visual search with AI-powered tools, like visual language models, that help users refine what they're looking for, especially when they struggle to describe it. Initially rolling out in the women's fashion category across the US, UK, and Canada, this feature uses generative AI to surface descriptive keywords when a Pin is tapped, offering deeper insight into personal preferences.

## FLUME FOCUS

As visual search continues to shift, where you place your pins and how they show up, matter. Optimise product visuals and explore “Shop the Look” placements for greater visibility. And with escapist aesthetics winning and Gen Z leading commerce, create nostalgic, design-led content that feels personal but also authentic enough that it catches your audiences eyes.



# BLUE SKY

## CASE NOTE

The Idealist  
Outsider,  
Slow-Building  
Case

### GROWTH IS SLOW BUT STEADY

Bluesky, the decentralised social platform backed by Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey, is gaining traction, especially among journalists, tech circles, and digital idealists. The platform recently opened sign-ups to the public and has passed 5 million users, but it's still far from mainstream.

*What it means:* A promising space for niche audiences and early adopter engagement but not yet a performance channel.

### NO ADS, NO ALGORITHMS (YET)

Bluesky remains ad-free and doesn't use engagement-based algorithms. Feeds are chronological, and users can choose from multiple moderation and algorithm models.

*What it means:* Discovery is harder, but trust is higher. Great for community building, not reach.

### CREATOR TOOLS ARE MINIMAL

Bluesky is still focused on infrastructure, like its open-source AT Protocol so creator features, content formats, and brand tools are limited.

*What it means:* Don't expect brand campaigns to run here (yet), but keep an eye on the dev roadmap if decentralised platforms are part of your long-term view.

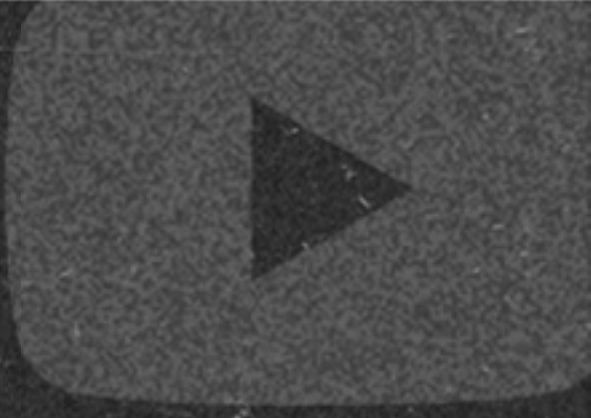
### FLUME FOCUS

Bluesky isn't about mass marketing, it's about values, transparency, and early community culture. It may not be where your audience is now, but it's a space worth watching if you're curious about what's next after algorithms.





# YOUTUBE



## CASE NOTE

The Veteran  
with a New  
Trick

### SHORTS ARE DOMINATING WATCH TIME

YouTube Shorts now average over 70 billion daily views, making it one of the platform's fastest-growing formats. Creators and brands alike are leaning into bite-sized storytelling to capture attention and drive engagement, especially with Gen Z.

*What it means:* If you're not repurposing content or briefing for Shorts, you're missing low-cost, high-impact real estate.

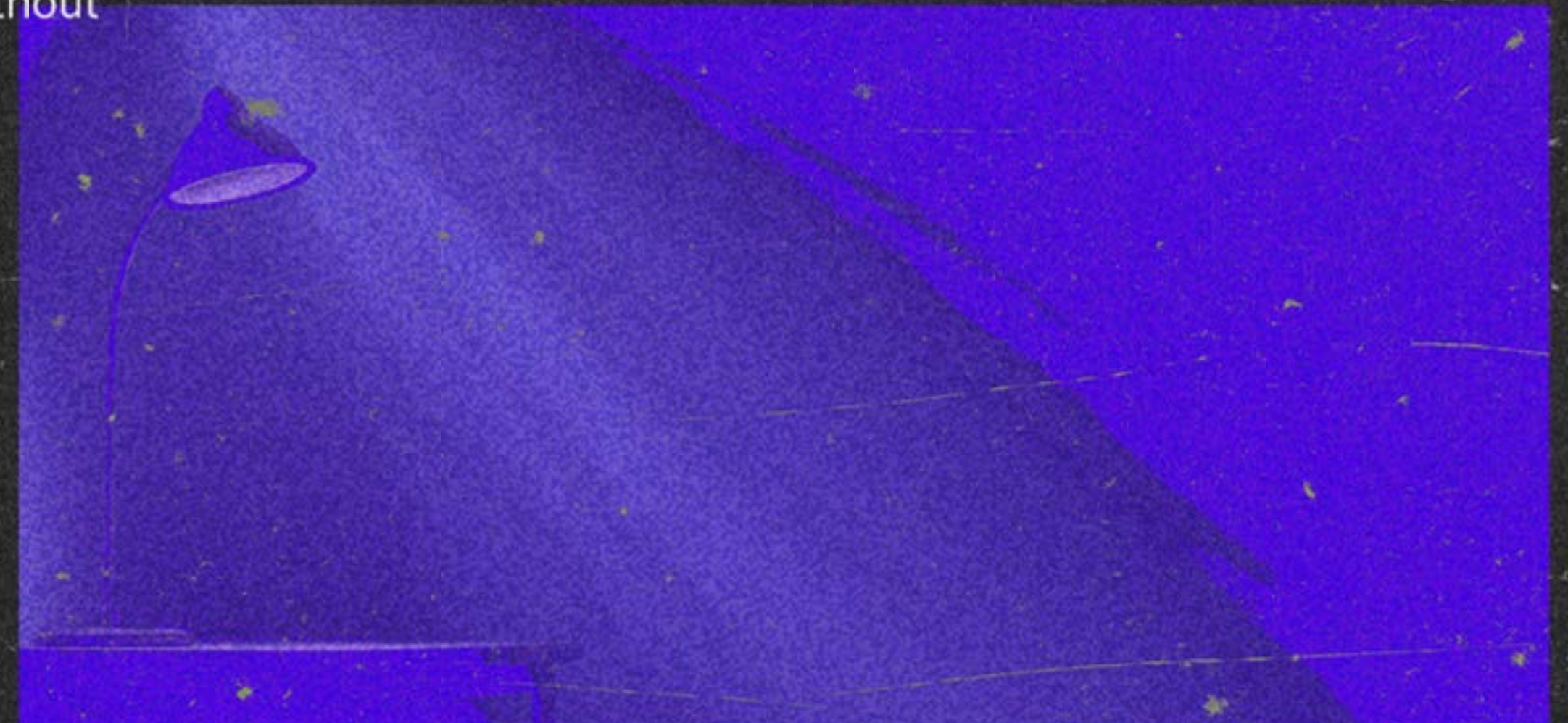
### AI TOOLS ARE EXPANDING

YouTube is testing new AI-powered features like automatic dubbing, idea prompts, music track generation, and even a "Dream Screen" tool that generates AI video backgrounds for Shorts.

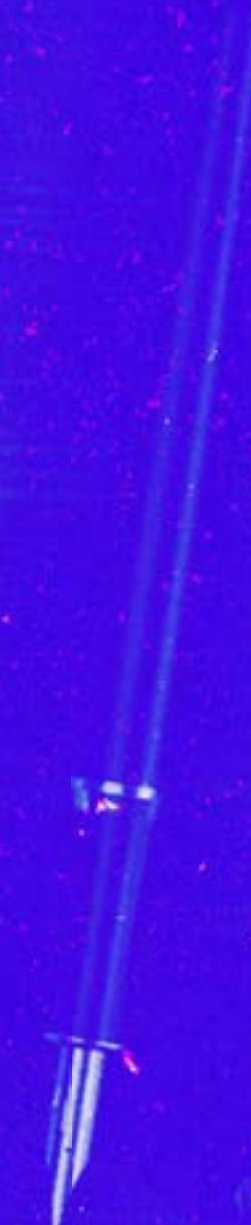
*What it means:* The barrier to entry for creators is dropping. Brands can now scale video content faster with less production time without compromising creativity.

### FLUME FOCUS

YouTube is no longer just long-form. It's a full-funnel ecosystem: awareness via Shorts, trust via long-form. Brands that show up with native, platform-first content not just repurposed ads will win both attention and action.







CASE NO. 092025

SUBJECT: SOCIAL DIGITAL UPDATES

DATE: 01 09 2025

STATUS: CLOSED

## THE VERDICT

After weeks of investigation, the evidence is undeniable. Pinterest is luring audiences into nostalgic escapes. YouTube is reshaping attention spans with Shorts. AI is rewriting the rules of search, leaving old SEO handbooks obsolete.

But the real crime is playing it safe.

This case proves that relevance doesn't belong to the cautious – it belongs to the curious. The detectives of digital are those who test, experiment, and show up with sharper ideas and stronger intent.

CASE: CLOSED

## FINAL VERDICT:

Follow the clues in culture.

Question every algorithm's alibi.

And never underestimate the power of showing up with purpose.