

Hook & Hold

Marketing that grabs attention and keeps it.

COVER STORY

Ads just moved into ChatGPT. Now what?



SEO is dead?

Long live GEO

Influencers,

show me the receipts

Your next customer

might be a robot

Special report:

marketing the breeding
barn

Reddit

beats your website

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the first issue.

Marketing changed more in the last 18 months than in the decade before it. AI started answering questions, then started recommending brands, and now it's starting to shop. Ads moved into chat windows. Reddit became one of the most-quoted sources on the internet.

Most marketers are still running last year's playbook. That's the gap this magazine exists to close.

Hook & Hold has one rule: every article has to be useful by Monday morning. That means real numbers, real sources, and ideas you can test this week, whether you run a Fortune 500 brand or a one-person shop.

In Issue #1 we cover the eight shifts that matter most right now. Read the cover story first. Then pick one idea and try it.

Grab attention. Keep it. Let's go.

— Tommy, Editor-in-Chief

Ads Just Moved Into ChatGPT. Now What?

BY TOMMY

\$3-\$5

typical starting bid per click on ChatGPT ads

THE SHORT VERSION

ChatGPT now sells ads, anyone in the US can buy them, and almost nobody knows how to run them yet. That's the best kind of window a marketer can get.

How we got here

For 25 years, search worked the same way. You typed a few words, Google showed ten blue links, and advertisers paid to sit on top. Then people started asking AI instead. Not "best boots men" but "I ride horses on weekends and my feet hurt by noon. What boots should I get?"

That second question is a goldmine. It tells you who the person is, what they do, and what's wrong. Keyword ads were never built to catch it.

OpenAI announced it was [testing ads in ChatGPT](#) on February 9, 2026. It moved fast from there:

When	What happened
Feb 2026	Ads test announced in the US
Mar 2026	Pilot opens with a \$200K minimum
Apr 2026	Minimum drops to \$50K
May 5, 2026	Self-serve Ads Manager opens to all US businesses, no minimum

When	What happened
Mar–Aug 2026	Expansion to Canada, Australia, NZ, UK, Mexico, Brazil, Japan, South Korea

In about three months, ChatGPT ads went from "big brands only" to "anyone with a credit card."

How the ads actually work

This is not Google with a new paint job. Here are the rules, straight from [OpenAI](#):

- **Only some users see ads.** Free and Go users see them. Plus, Pro, Business, Enterprise and Education users don't.
- **Ads sit next to the answer, not inside it.** They're labeled "sponsored" and kept visually separate. OpenAI says ads don't change what ChatGPT recommends.
- **Targeting is by conversation topic, not keywords.** Advertisers never see anyone's chats.
- **Some topics are off-limits.** No ads on health, mental health, or politics, and none for users under 18.

That third point is the big one. You're not bidding on words. You're bidding on **intent in context**. Someone planning a trip, comparing tools, or fixing a problem.

What it costs

Early pricing data from performance marketers ([Flyweel](#)) looks like this:

- **CPC:** bids start around \$3–\$5 per click. Bids under \$3 often don't get shown.
- **CPM:** about \$25–\$60 per 1,000 impressions, down from a flat \$60 in the pilot.
- **Tracking:** a pixel and a Conversions API, so you can see what happens after the click.

For context, that CPC is higher than many Facebook campaigns. But you're paying to show up at the exact moment someone asked for help. That's a different kind of click.

The real insight: two games, not one

Here's what most marketers miss. There are now **two separate ways** to show up in ChatGPT:

- 1 **Paid:** the sponsored spot next to the answer. You buy it.
- 2 **Organic:** being *named in the answer itself*. You can't buy it. You earn it through reviews, clear product info, and being talked about in places AI trusts (more on that in our GEO and Reddit stories).

The brands that win will run both, and measure them separately. A paid ad next to an answer that recommends your competitor is an expensive way to lose.

5 moves to make this month

- 1 **Ask ChatGPT about your own category.** Type the questions your customers ask. Write down who gets recommended. That's your real competition now.
- 2 **Write prompts, not keywords.** List 20 full questions a customer might ask, in their words. That becomes your targeting brief.
- 3 **Start small on CPC.** Test with a few hundred dollars at \$3-\$5 bids. Don't jump to big budgets until the data talks.
- 4 **Install tracking on day one.** Set up the pixel and Conversions API before you spend a dollar. No tracking means no truth.
- 5 **Fix your landing page for "chat brains."** People coming from a conversation expect a direct answer. Lead with the solution, not your company history.

The bottom line

Every big ad platform had an early window when clicks were cheap and competition was thin. Google had it in the early 2000s. Facebook had it around 2012. ChatGPT is in that window right now.

It won't last. Test small, learn fast, and get your reps in before everyone else shows up.

Sources: OpenAI – Testing ads in ChatGPT · Flywheel – ChatGPT Ads Manager breakdown · ABC17/Stacker – Ads have arrived in ChatGPT

SEO Is Dead? Long Live GEO.

BY TOMMY

1% of searchers click a link inside Google's AI summary

THE SHORT VERSION

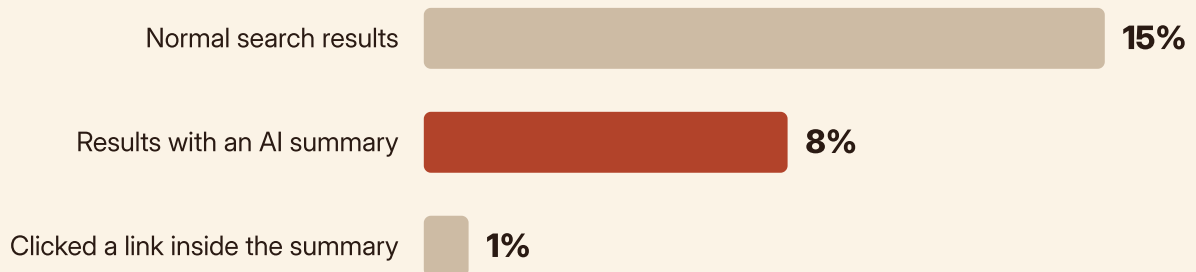
People are getting answers without clicking. If AI doesn't mention your brand in its answer, you're invisible. Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) is how you get mentioned.

The click is shrinking

In 2025, [Pew Research](#) tracked the real browsing of 900 US adults. Here's what happened when Google showed an AI summary at the top:

AI summaries cut link clicks nearly in half

Share of Google searches where the user clicked a link (900 US adults, 2025)



47% fewer clicks when an AI summary appears

Source: Pew Research Center, 2025, via 9to5Google

And **26%** of searches with a summary ended the session right there, versus 16% without one. Translation: the answer box is eating the click. And it's not just Google. ChatGPT has 800M+ weekly users, and eMarketer projects **31.3%** of the US population will use AI search in 2026 ([eMarketer](#)).

So is SEO dead?

No. Google still handles roughly 417 billion searches a month, compared to ChatGPT's roughly 72 billion messages ([eMarketer](#)). Search is still huge.

But the goal changed. Old SEO asked, "Do I rank?" GEO asks, "When someone asks AI about my category, does it say my name?"

And here's the twist that should get your attention: the AI traffic you *do* get is gold. The Washington Post found subscribers coming from AI platforms converted at **4–5x** the rate of regular search visitors. Fewer clicks, but they show up ready to buy.

How AI decides who to mention

Nobody outside the AI companies knows the exact recipe. But the patterns are clear:

- 1 **Third-party talk beats your own website.** Reddit, LinkedIn and YouTube are among the sources AI quotes most. What *others* say about you matters more than what you say about yourself.
- 2 **Mentions beat backlinks.** In old SEO, links were the currency. In GEO, being *named* in trusted places counts more.
- 3 **Answers up front win.** AI pulls content that answers the question in the first sentence or two. Long warm-ups get skipped.
- 4 **Fresh beats stale.** Updated content gets picked over old pages.
- 5 **It's a moving target.** 40–60% of the sources AI cites change month to month. You can't "rank #1" and coast.

The GEO playbook: 6 moves

- 1 **Run a "prompt audit."** Ask ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity and Claude the top 10 questions your customers ask. Log who gets mentioned. Repeat monthly, since the answers shift.
- 2 **Put the answer first.** Rewrite your key pages so the first two sentences answer the question directly. Save the story for later.
- 3 **Build an FAQ that sounds like real people.** Use the actual questions customers ask, word for word.
- 4 **Get talked about off your site.** Encourage reviews. Show up helpfully on Reddit and in industry forums. Pitch guest posts and podcasts.
- 5 **Make your facts easy to grab.** Clear pricing, specs, locations and hours. AI can't recommend what it can't understand.
- 6 **Update on a schedule.** Refresh your top 10 pages every quarter with new data and a new date.

How to measure it

You can't see prompt volumes or exactly why AI picked you. But you *can* track:

- How often you're cited across AI tools
- Your share of voice versus competitors
- Referral traffic from AI platforms
- Whether mentions are positive or negative

The bottom line

SEO taught us to win the click. GEO asks us to win the *recommendation*. The brands that get named by AI won't be the ones with the most keywords. They'll be the ones people actually talk about.

Sources: Pew Research via 9to5Google • eMarketer — FAQ on GEO and AEO

Your Next Customer Might Be a Robot

BY TOMMY

+393%

AI-driven traffic to US retail sites, Q1 2026
vs. a year earlier

THE SHORT VERSION

AI agents are starting to research, compare and even buy things for people. That means your product page now has two audiences: humans and machines. Most brands are only writing for one.

This is already happening

It sounds like sci-fi, but the numbers say otherwise. According to an [Elogic roundup](#) of Adobe, Salesforce and OpenAI data:

- ChatGPT handles about **50 million shopping questions a day**.
- AI-driven traffic to US retail sites grew **393%** year over year in Q1 2026 (Adobe).
- In March 2026, AI-referred shoppers converted **42% better** than everyone else. A year earlier, they converted 38% *worse*.
- Salesforce estimates AI agents drove about **20% of global orders** in the 2025 holiday season.

That conversion flip is the headline. A year ago AI shoppers were window-shopping. Now they show up ready to buy.

The plumbing is being built right now

The big players are racing to set the rules for how AI agents pay for things:

Protocol	Who's behind it	Launched
Agentic Commerce Protocol	OpenAI + Stripe (Etsy, Shopify, Walmart)	Sept 2025
Agent Pay	Mastercard	Apr 2025
Trusted Agent Protocol	Visa	Oct 2025
AP2	Google (Mastercard, PayPal, Amex)	Oct 2025
Universal Commerce Protocol	Google (Target, Wayfair, Gap)	Jan 2026

You don't need to understand the tech. Just know this: when Visa, Mastercard, Google, OpenAI and Shopify all build the same thing at once, it's not a fad.

How big could it get?

Forecasts for 2030 vary, but they all point the same way:

- **McKinsey:** \$3–5 trillion in agent-driven commerce worldwide
- **Morgan Stanley:** 10–20% of US e-commerce
- **J.P. Morgan:** up to 25% of US online sales

Even the cautious guess is a massive shift in how people buy.

The catch: people don't fully trust it yet

Here's the reality check. About **62%** of consumers use AI to compare products, but only **23–30%** trust it to finish a purchase on its own. People love AI as a research assistant. They're not ready to hand it their wallet.

That gap is your opportunity. The brands that feel safest to buy from, with clear prices, easy returns and strong reviews, will be the ones agents and humans both pick.

What "marketing to a robot" actually means

An AI agent doesn't care about your clever headline or your hero video. It cares about **clean, complete, consistent facts**. Think of it like a very picky buyer who reads every spec and trusts nothing vague. One stat to remember: pages with structured data (code that labels your price, rating, stock, etc.) were cited about **3.1x more often** in Google's AI Overviews.

6 moves to make your brand agent-ready

- 1 Fill out every product field.** Price, size, materials, shipping time, return policy. Blank fields make agents skip you.
- 2 Add structured data (schema markup).** Your web developer or a plugin can do this in an afternoon. It's the single highest-leverage fix.
- 3 Keep facts the same everywhere.** If your site says \$49 and Amazon says \$52, agents lose trust.
- 4 Make your policies dead simple.** "Free returns within 30 days" beats three paragraphs of legal text.
- 5 Stack up reviews.** Agents lean on social proof just like humans do.
- 6 Fix your tracking.** About **70%** of AI referral visits may not show up correctly in a standard GA4 setup. Set up custom channel groups for AI sources so you can see what's working.

The bottom line

For 100 years, marketing meant persuading people. Now part of the job is *informing machines*. The good news? What makes a page great for an AI agent (clear facts, honest pricing, real reviews) also makes it better for humans. Do it once, win twice.

Source: Elogic – ChatGPT Commerce & Agentic Shopping Statistics 2026 (compiling Adobe Analytics, Salesforce, OpenAI, McKinsey, Morgan Stanley and J.P. Morgan data)

Why Reddit Matters More Than Your Website

BY TOMMY

46.7% of Perplexity's top-10 cited sources come from Reddit

THE SHORT VERSION

When AI answers a question, it often quotes Reddit. That makes a bunch of strangers in a comment thread one of the most powerful marketing channels on earth. You can't buy your way in. You have to earn it.

The internet's most-quoted forum

When researchers look at which websites AI tools quote most, Reddit keeps landing at or near the top (QuickSEO):

AI tool	Reddit's share of top - 10 cited sources
Perplexity	46.7%
Google AI Overviews	21%
ChatGPT	11.3% (Wikipedia leads at 47.9%)
Gemini	\~3%

One cross-platform study found Reddit cited in **40.1%** of cases across the major engines, ahead of Wikipedia (26.3%) and YouTube (23.5%).

This didn't happen by accident. Google signed a deal with Reddit in February 2024, reported at about **\$60 million a year**, for access to its content. OpenAI signed its own deal in May 2024.

Why AI loves Reddit

Think about how you shop. You read the brand's website, then you search "[product] reddit" to find out what real people *actually* think. AI does the same thing, at scale.

Reddit has what brand websites don't: **unfiltered human experience**. "I've used these boots for two years on a ranch and the soles finally cracked" is worth more than any product description.

Warning: it's volatile

Don't bet the farm on one number. According to Semrush data, Reddit appeared in nearly **60%** of AI responses in early August 2025, then dropped to around **10%** by mid-September 2025 ([The State of Brand](#)). The AI companies keep adjusting their models.

The lesson: Reddit is a major input, but the weights shift. Play the long game.

The trap: faking it

When marketers smell opportunity, some try to game it. Agencies now sell packages of Reddit "mentions," around \$2,500 a month for 35–100 posts. This is a terrible idea, for three reasons:

- 1 **It's illegal if undisclosed.** The FTC's rule on fake reviews and testimonials has been enforceable since October 2024. Penalties can reach **\$53,088 per violation**.
- 2 **Moderators will catch you.** Subreddits have cracked down hard. Some limit self-promotion to once every 60 days. Others ban it outright.
- 3 **It backfires publicly.** When one jewelry brand's job posting for Reddit marketing leaked, moderators warned members and the story landed in the Wall Street Journal. That's the opposite of what they wanted.

Fake mentions also hurt the thing that makes Reddit valuable: authenticity. AI models are getting better at spotting it.

The honest Reddit playbook

- 1 **Listen first.** Search Reddit for your brand, your competitors and your category. Read what people complain about. That's free market research.
 - 2 **Join as a real person.** Use your own account. Say who you are: "I work at X, so I'm biased, but..."
 - 3 **Follow the 90/10 rule.** Nine helpful comments for every one that mentions your product.
 - 4 **Answer the question first.** Be the most useful reply in the thread, even when the answer isn't you.
 - 5 **Fix what people complain about.** The best way to change Reddit's opinion of you is to change your product.
 - 6 **Track it over time.** Check monthly what AI says about you and which threads it's pulling from.
-

The bottom line

Your website is what you say about yourself. Reddit is what everyone else says about you. AI trusts the second one more, and so do your customers. Be worth talking about, and show up as a real human when they do.

Sources: QuickSEO – How Reddit affects AI visibility in 2026 · The State of Brand – Reddit AI citations and brand risk · eMarketer – Creators, AI search and social

Small Crowds, Big Money

BY TOMMY

~40% of consumers trust micro-community tips as much as advice from people they know

THE SHORT VERSION

Big social feeds are crowded, noisy and run by algorithms you don't control. Smaller, tight-knit communities are where trust lives now. A room of 500 true fans can beat a feed of 50,000 strangers.

The feed is getting tired

Remember when you could post on Facebook and actually reach your followers? Those days are gone. Algorithms decide who sees what, and AI is flooding feeds with more content than ever.

So people are moving. Not off the internet, but into smaller rooms. Discord servers. Substack newsletters. Private Facebook groups. Group chats. Niche subreddits.

At Social Media Week, Discord's VP of sales put it simply: **"Community is the product"** ([Adweek](#)).

What the data says

[Kantar](#) named micro-communities one of its top marketing trends for 2026. Two numbers stand out:

- Nearly **40%** of consumers trust recommendations from micro-communities **as much as advice from people they know personally**.
- In China, brands using knowledge-sharing community platforms saw **25% higher marketing ROI**. (That market is ahead of the US on this, which makes it a useful preview.)

[eMarketer](#) reports the same shift: brands are moving focus from saturated main feeds to niche spaces on Discord, Substack and Medium, where an engaged audience is easier to manage.

Why small wins

Think of it like this. A billboard on the highway reaches thousands of people who don't care. A recommendation at the local feed store reaches ten people who are ready to buy.

Micro-communities work because of three things:

- 1 **Shared identity.** Members aren't just "users." They're runners, home bakers, horse breeders or golf nerds. They talk the same language.
- 2 **Peer trust.** A tip from someone who's "one of us" beats any ad.
- 3 **Real conversation.** People ask questions, share wins and complain honestly. That's both marketing *and* market research.

The mistakes brands make

- **Showing up to sell.** Walking into a community with a sales pitch is like walking into a party and handing out business cards. People leave.
- **Chasing size.** A community of 300 active people beats 30,000 who never post.
- **Going quiet.** Communities die without a regular rhythm. If you start one, show up every week.
- **Controlling everything.** The best communities belong to members, not the brand.

The micro-community playbook

- 1 **Find where your people already gather.** Before building anything, join the groups your customers are already in. Listen for a month.
 - 2 **Give more than you take.** Teach. Answer questions. Share behind-the-scenes info no one else has.
 - 3 **Start small and specific.** "Marketing for small businesses" is too broad. "Marketing for Oklahoma ranch and farm businesses" is a community.
 - 4 **Create rituals.** A weekly Q&A, a monthly challenge, a "win of the week" thread. Rhythm keeps people coming back.
 - 5 **Spotlight members.** Make your members the stars. People stick around when they feel seen.
 - 6 **Measure depth, not reach.** Track active members, replies, repeat buyers and referrals, not just member count.
-

The bottom line

The age of shouting at everyone is fading. The new edge is being deeply trusted by a specific few. Build the room, serve the people in it, and they'll do your marketing for you.

Sources: Kantar – Marketing Trends 2026 • Adweek – Discord, Substack say niche communities are the future • eMarketer – Creators, AI search and social

Influencers, Show Me the Receipts

BY TOMMY

27% of creator content ties strongly to the brand that paid for it

THE SHORT VERSION

Brands are pouring billions into creators, but most can't prove it's working. The party isn't over. The bouncer just started checking IDs. Creators who can prove results win. Everyone else gets cut.

The money is real

Creator marketing is one of the fastest-growing places ad dollars go. According to the [IAB](#):

- US creator ad spend hit **\$29.5 billion** in 2024, more than double 2021's \$13.9 billion.
- It was projected to reach **\$37 billion** in 2025, growing **26%**, about 4x faster than the media industry overall (5.7%).
- **48%** of advertisers now call creators a "must-buy," ranking only behind social media and paid search.

And [Kantar](#) found **61%** of marketers plan to spend *more* on creators in 2026.

The problem nobody wants to say out loud

Here's the awkward part. Most of that money is hard to track.

- **79%** of enterprise marketers say they struggle to measure influencer ROI ([Influencer Marketing Hub](#)).
- **48%** say attribution is their biggest gap.
- Only **27%** of creator content ties strongly to the brand that paid for it ([Kantar](#)).

Read that last one again. Nearly three out of four sponsored posts leave people unsure who the sponsor was. That's a lot of money spent making creators famous instead of brands.

Why it's happening

- 1 **One-off posts.** A single sponsored video is a sugar rush. People forget it in a day.
- 2 **Chasing big follower counts.** Followers don't equal influence. Many accounts have huge numbers and little trust.
- 3 **Over-scripting.** When brands force creators to read stiff talking points, audiences tune out.
- 4 **Measuring the wrong things.** Likes and views feel good but don't pay the bills.

What's changing

Smart brands are already adjusting:

- **Going smaller.** About **53%** plan to expand micro-creator deals and **51%** nano-creator deals. Smaller creators often have tighter, more trusting audiences.
- **Going longer.** Kantar recommends moving from one-off posts to "long-term creative platforms," meaning ongoing partnerships with the same creators.
- **Using guardrails, not scripts.** Kantar's advice: set clear guardrails, "then let creators do what they do best."
- **Demanding proof.** As eMarketer put it: creators who can prove they influence real humans will become premium inventory.

How to run creator deals that actually pay

- 1 **Pick fit over fame.** A creator with 8,000 followers who are *exactly* your customer beats 800,000 random ones.
 - 2 **Brand it early.** Show or say your brand in the first few seconds. Make it part of the story, not an ad stuck on the end.
 - 3 **Track everything.** Give each creator a unique link and discount code. No code, no proof.
 - 4 **Commit to a series.** Plan 3–6 posts over a few months instead of one big splash. Repetition builds memory.
 - 5 **Get usage rights.** Pay a little extra to run the creator's content as your own ads. Often the best-performing ads you'll have.
 - 6 **Judge by business results.** Sales, sign-ups, leads and cost per customer. Views are a bonus, not the goal.
-

The bottom line

Creators aren't going anywhere. If anything, they're becoming media companies. But the free-money era is ending. The winners will be the brands that treat creators like partners, measure like accountants, and get out of the way so the creativity can work.

Sources: IAB – Creator Economy Ad Spend 2025 · Kantar – Marketing Trends 2026 · Influencer Marketing Hub – Influencer marketing statistics · eMarketer – Creators, AI search and social

Anyone Can Make It. Can You Pick It?

BY TOMMY

78% of consumers prefer ads made by humans

THE SHORT VERSION

AI made content cheap. When everyone can make 100 ads in an hour, making stuff stops being the skill. *Knowing which one is good* becomes the skill. Taste is the new superpower.

Everyone's using AI. Customers noticed.

Canva's [State of Marketing and AI Report](#) (May 2026, 1,415 marketing leaders and 3,547 consumers in seven countries) shows a huge gap:

Marketers say	Consumers say
97% use AI in daily creative work	78% prefer ads made by humans, even if AI could make a "better" one
99% plan to spend more on AI	87% believe the best ads need human involvement
41% call "AI slop" a real challenge	70% say AI ads "feel like they're missing something"

Marketers are going all-in on AI. Customers are quietly asking for a human in the room.

The "slop" backlash is real

"AI slop" is the internet's name for low-effort, mass-produced AI content. And people are tired of it.

- Mentions of "AI slop" rose about **ninefold** in media monitoring (Canva).
- Consumers preferring AI-generated creator content over traditional creator content fell from **60% in 2023 to 26%** ([Digiday](#), citing Billion Dollar Boy).
- Some big brands, including Polaroid and Heineken, have even run "human-made" campaigns as a selling point ([Outlier Report](#)).

As one agency CMO told Digiday: *"AI can't replicate the messiness of human creativity. We crave that now, we crave imperfection."*

Wait, so should we stop using AI?

No. That's the wrong lesson. AI is an incredible tool for research, drafts, editing and testing ideas fast. Nearly every top marketer uses it.

The right lesson: **AI is the kitchen, not the chef**. It can make a hundred dishes. Someone still has to taste them and decide which one goes out to the customer.

That someone is you.

What "taste" actually means

Taste sounds fuzzy, but it's a real, learnable skill. It's the ability to quickly tell:

- **Clear vs. confusing.** Would a busy person get it in 3 seconds?
- **Specific vs. generic.** Does it sound like *this* brand, or like everyone?
- **True vs. fake.** Does it feel like a real person said it?
- **Surprising vs. expected.** Would anyone stop scrolling for it?

AI is great at "expected." Humans win at "specific," "true" and "surprising."

How to build your taste (on purpose)

- 1 **Build a swipe file.** Save every ad, email or post that makes you stop. Once a month, look for patterns in what you saved.
- 2 **Study the greats.** Read old ads from legendary copywriters. Good ideas age well. Gimmicks don't.
- 3 **Generate wide, pick narrow.** Use AI to make 20 versions. Then cut to the best 2. Picking is the skill you're training.
- 4 **Explain why.** For every choice, write one sentence on why it beats the others. If you can't explain it, you don't know it yet.
- 5 **Add the human fingerprint.** A real story, a real photo, a real customer quote, a little imperfection. That's what AI can't fake.

6 **Test it.** Taste is a guess. Data checks the guess. Run A/B tests and see if your instincts hold up.

The bottom line

When everyone has the same tools, the tools stop being the edge. The edge becomes judgment. The marketers who win the next five years won't be the fastest makers. They'll be the best pickers.

Sources: The Next Web – Canva State of Marketing and AI Report 2026 · Digiday – Authenticity and 'messiness' in high demand · Outlier Report – Anti-AI is the premium · Marketer Milk – 8 marketing trends in 2026

The Little Luxury Economy

BY TOMMY

62% of Americans buy themselves a small treat at least once a month

THE SHORT VERSION

Big dreams like a house feel out of reach for a lot of people. So they're buying small joys instead: a fancy coffee, a candle, a concert ticket. Marketers call it "treatonomics," and it's one of the most important consumer moods of the year.

Meet the "little treat"

You've seen it on social media: "I had a rough day, so I got a little treat." It's a joke, but it's also a real spending pattern.

A [SurveyMonkey study](#) of 2,038 US adults (February 2026) found:

- **62%** of Americans buy themselves a small treat at least once a month.
- **43%** do it daily or weekly.
- **52%** keep it to **\$25 or less** per treat.

[Kantar](#) calls it "the lipstick effect on steroids." The classic lipstick effect says that when times are tough, people skip big purchases but still buy small luxuries. Kantar also found **36%** of consumers are willing to take on short-term debt for things they enjoy.

What people are treating themselves to

Category	Share of treaters
Food and drinks	65%

Category	Share of treaters
Home and hobby	37%
Experiences and entertainment	36%
Clothes and accessories	31%
Beauty and self-care	29%

Food wins by a mile. But notice hobbies and experiences right behind. People aren't just buying *things*. They're buying *feelings*.

Why they do it

The reasons are the real gold for marketers:

- 1 **To stay motivated** toward bigger goals (35%)
- 2 **To cope** with stressful days or bad news (30%)
- 3 **To celebrate** personal wins (27%)

Gen Z and Millennials lead on all three. For younger buyers, a little treat is part reward, part therapy and part celebration.

The insight: sell the moment, not the product

Kantar's advice to brands is to create joy through **everyday moments** instead of big, aspirational dreams. Translation:

- Old message: "*Someday you'll have the life you want.*"
- New message: "*You earned this today.*"

That's a huge shift. Your product isn't just a coffee or a candle. It's a reward for getting through Tuesday.

A responsible word of caution

Here's the part most trend articles skip. The same study found **frequent treaters are nearly twice as likely** to say treat spending hurts their financial goals (30% vs. 16%). Millennials feel that pressure most. Good marketers don't exploit stress. The brands that last will make treats feel *good*, not *guilty*. Think fair prices, honest value and no pressure tactics. Trust is the real long-term treat.

The treatonomics playbook

- 1 Create a "treat-size" option.** A mini version, a sample pack or a single-serve product under \$25.
- 2 Name the moment.** "Friday reward," "Survived Monday," "Small win." Tie your product to a feeling and a time.
- 3 Make it easy to grab.** Treats are impulse buys. Checkout should take seconds.
- 4 Celebrate your customers' wins.** Birthday perks, milestone rewards, "you hit your goal" emails.
- 5 Sell experiences, too.** A workshop, a tasting, a behind-the-scenes visit. Memories are treats people love to share.
- 6 Keep it honest.** Never guilt or pressure. Make people feel good about the purchase after they buy it.

The bottom line

When big dreams feel far away, small joys feel essential. Brands that become someone's "little treat" earn something bigger than a sale: a place in their routine. Be the bright spot in someone's day, and price it fairly.

Sources: SurveyMonkey – 2026 Treatonomics Report • PPC Land – Kantar forecasts ten marketing trends for 2026 • Kantar – Marketing Trends 2026

The Hook & Hold Toolkit

Two tools you can use today. Copy them, fill them in, and run them again next month.

Tool 1: The AI Visibility Scorecard

Goes with: "SEO Is Dead? Long Live GEO" and "Why Reddit Matters More Than Your Website."

What it tells you: whether AI tools recommend your brand when customers ask for help.

How to use it:

- 1 Write 10 questions your customers really ask, in their own words. Use the starters below if you're stuck.
- 2 Ask each question in ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity and Google (check the AI summary at the top).
- 3 Score each answer: **2** = you're named and recommended, **1** = you're mentioned or linked as a source, **0** = you're not there.
- 4 In the last column, write which competitors got named.
- 5 Add up your score (max 80). Repeat monthly, since AI answers change often.

#	Customer question	ChatGPT	Gemini	Perplexity	Google AI	Competitors named
1	What's the best [product] for [type of person]?					
2	[Your brand] vs. [competitor]: which is better?					
3	Is [your brand] worth the price?					
4	How do I fix [problem you solve]?					
5	Best [service] near [your city]					
6	What do people say about [your brand]?					
7	Cheapest way to [goal your customer has]					

#	Customer question	ChatGPT	Gemini	Perplexity	Google AI	Competitors named
8	What should a beginner buy for [activity]?					
9						
10						
Total						

What your score means:

- **0–20: Invisible.** AI doesn't know you exist. Start with the GEO playbook: answers first, clear facts, more reviews.
- **21–50: On the radar.** You show up sometimes. Find the questions where competitors win and build content for those.
- **51–80: AI favorite.** Protect it. Keep content fresh and keep earning reviews and mentions.

Tool 2: The Creator ROI Calculator

Goes with: "Influencers, Show Me the Receipts."

What it tells you: whether a creator deal actually made you money.

How to use it: Fill in lines A–D from your creator's unique link and discount code. Then do the quick math for E–H. The example column shows a made-up deal so you can check your math.

Line	What to enter or calculate	Example deal	Your numbers
A	Total creator cost (fee + free product + usage rights)	\$1,500	
B	Clicks from the creator's unique link	2,400	
C	Sales or sign-ups using their link or code	60	
D	Average order value	\$85	
E	Revenue = C × D	\$5,100	
F	Cost per customer = A ÷ C	\$25	
G	Return on ad spend (ROAS) = E ÷ A	3.4x	

Line	What to enter or calculate	Example deal	Your numbers
H	Profit = (E × your profit margin) – A, here at 50% margin	\$1,050	

How to read it:

- **ROAS under 1x:** you lost money on direct sales. Rethink the creator, the offer or the audience fit.
- **Profit below zero but ROAS above 1x:** you made sales, but not enough to cover product costs. Negotiate the fee or raise the offer value.
- **Cost per customer:** compare it to your other channels, like Meta ads, Google ads or email. That's your real benchmark.
- **Don't forget the hidden value:** codes and links miss people who saw the post and bought later. eMarketer found **34%** of buyers who purchased after seeing creator content said it worked as a *reminder*, not as where they first discovered the product. Treat this calculator as your floor, not your ceiling.

BONUS FEATURE • SPECIAL REPORT

Marketing the Breeding Barn

Every issue, Hook & Hold takes the playbook into one specific industry. This issue: horse breeding, a business where products take years to make, buyers are emotional, and new technology badly needs better marketing. The lessons apply to any high-ticket, high-trust product.

In this report:

1. **Frozen Assets:** how to market a product people are afraid to try
2. **Every Foal Is a Four-Year Startup:** using marketing to shorten a long sales cycle
3. **ICSI:** how to sell a breakthrough technology nobody understands yet

Frozen Assets: Why Breeders Fear the Best Tech They Have

BY TOMMY

30–45% typical per-cycle pregnancy rate with frozen semen

THE SHORT VERSION

Frozen semen lets a mare owner in Oklahoma breed to a stallion in Ireland, Germany or a stallion that died ten years ago. It's one of the most powerful tools in horse breeding. And a lot of mare owners won't touch it. The problem isn't the science. It's the marketing.

What frozen semen makes possible

According to [Colorado State University's Equine Reproduction Laboratory](#), properly frozen semen can be stored in liquid nitrogen **indefinitely**. That means:

- **Worldwide access.** Ship genetics across oceans, not just across states.
- **Insurance.** If a stallion gets hurt, gets sick or dies, his bloodline doesn't end.
- **Flexibility.** No waiting on a collection schedule or a cooled shipment that arrives on a Sunday.
- **Registry-friendly.** Most major breed registries accept foals from frozen semen. The big exception is the Jockey Club (Thoroughbreds).

On paper, it's a no-brainer. So why the hesitation?

The numbers that scare people

Let's be honest about the data. Frozen semen generally has lower per-cycle pregnancy rates than fresh or cooled semen:

Semen type	Typical per-cycle pregnancy rate	Source
Fresh (bred at the stud)	~84%	Norwegian trotter study, 2006–2010
Cooled, shipped	~67%	Same study
Frozen	~30–45% (some stallions under 10%, some over 50%)	Colorado State ERL

These come from different studies and breeds, so treat them as ballpark comparisons, not a head-to-head trial. But the direction is clear.

Frozen also asks more of the mare owner. Britain's veterinary association ([BEVA](#)) recommends inseminating within about **12 hours before to 6 hours after ovulation**. That can mean ultrasound checks every 6–8 hours, or a carefully timed ovulation-inducing shot followed by exams at set intervals. More vet visits. More cost. More stress.

The real problem: loss aversion

Here's where marketing comes in. Psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky showed that people feel a loss about **twice as strongly** as an equal gain. It's called loss aversion.

Now picture the mare owner's brain:

- **The gain:** a better stallion, maybe a better foal, maybe a better sale price in three years.
- **The loss:** a missed cycle, a vet bill, a wasted straw, and maybe a lost season. Right now. In their wallet.

The loss is concrete and immediate. The gain is fuzzy and far away. Loss wins almost every time. That's why many owners default to "the stallion down the road on cooled semen," even when the frozen option is the better horse.

The fix: sell certainty, not semen

Stallion owners usually market frozen semen by talking about the stallion: bloodlines, scores, offspring. That's the *gain* side. It's not enough. To win, you have to shrink the *loss* side.

7 ways to market frozen semen better

- 1 **Publish the real numbers.** Share each stallion's per-cycle pregnancy rate with frozen semen, and how many doses per cycle you recommend. Hiding stats makes people assume the worst. Honest data builds trust.
- 2 **Show post-thaw quality.** Colorado State says at least **30% progressive motility** 10 minutes after thaw is the commercial standard. If your stallion beats that, say so with the lab report.

- 3 **Offer a guarantee that removes the fear.** Extra doses if the first cycle fails. A live foal guarantee. A partial refund. Each one turns a scary gamble into a safe bet.
- 4 **Build a "frozen-friendly" vet list.** The biggest hidden fear is "my vet isn't set up for this." A short list of experienced reproduction vets by region removes that fear in one step.
- 5 **Sell the protocol, not just the straws.** Include a simple one-page guide: when to scan, when to induce, when to breed. Confused buyers don't buy.
- 6 **Tell the success stories.** Foal photos, owner testimonials and "first-time frozen user" stories. Real proof beats any spec sheet.
- 7 **Frame the cost correctly.** Compare the total cost of frozen to the *value* of the foal, not to the price of cooled semen. A few hundred extra dollars for a dramatically better pedigree is a bargain when framed right.

The bottom line

Frozen semen is a modern technology with an old-fashioned marketing problem. Breeders don't fear the science. They fear losing. The stallion owners who win will be the ones who stop selling straws and start selling confidence: clear data, clear protocols and guarantees that make saying "yes" feel safe.

Sources: Colorado State University Equine Reproduction Laboratory – Freezing stallion semen · Acta Veterinaria Scandinavica – Fertility in Norwegian trotter mares (PMC) · BEVA – Frozen semen insemination guidance · Kahneman & Tversky, Prospect Theory (1979)

Every Foal Is a Four-Year Startup

BY TOMMY

\$15K–\$40K+ to raise a horse to age 3

THE SHORT VERSION

Breeding a horse isn't farming. It's venture capital. You put in thousands of dollars, wait years for revenue, and hope for one big win. Breeders who think like startup founders, with burn rate, runway and early revenue, stand a much better chance of making money.

The timeline nobody likes to talk about

A mare carries a foal for about **11 months**. Most horses aren't ready to ride until at least **2–3 years old** ([The Horse](#)). Add the months of choosing a stallion and getting the mare in foal, and you're looking at **3–4 years** from "let's breed" to a horse that can really prove its value. In startup language, that's a long time to "product-market fit."

The burn rate

Here's what it typically costs to get a horse to age 3 ([Horse Racing Sense, 2026](#)):

Stage	Low	Mid	High
Breeding and foaling	\$1,500–\$3,000	\$3,000–\$5,000	\$7,000+
First 90 days	\$500–\$1,000	\$1,000–\$2,000	\$3,000+
Year 1	\$2,500–\$4,000	\$5,000–\$8,000	\$10,000+
Years 2–3	\$3,000–\$5,000	\$6,000–\$9,000	\$12,000+

Total: roughly **\$15,000 to \$40,000+** to raise a horse to age 3. The Horse puts it bluntly: foals can cost **\$15,000–20,000 before you even know if they're an athlete.**

And getting the mare pregnant isn't a one-shot deal. The Horse estimates about a **60% conception rate per cycle**, so most mares need **2–3 cycles**, at roughly \$300–\$600+ in vet and insemination costs each.

The harsh math

Horse trainer and author Don Blazer shared a real example ([Northwest Horse Source](#)):

- Stud fee: \$4,000
- Care to age two: \$2,000
- Sale entry and commission: \$447
- **Total invested: \$6,447**
- **Sale price: \$2,100**
- **Loss: \$4,347**

His verdict: the chances of making money selling the foal are "slim and none" unless the mare is proven, the pedigree is strong and the market is clearly identified.

That's the startup reality: most ventures don't return their investment. The few that do pay for everything.

Think like a founder

Successful startups don't just build a product and hope. They manage four things. So should breeders:

- 1. Burn rate.** Know your monthly cost per horse, down to the dollar. Feed, board, farrier, vet, insurance. You can't improve what you don't track.
- 2. Runway.** How many years of costs can you carry before you *must* sell? If the answer is "not many," don't breed four mares this year.
- 3. Time to revenue.** The longer it takes to sell, the more you spend. Every month you shave off the sales timeline is money back in your pocket.
- 4. Portfolio thinking.** Venture capitalists expect most bets to fail and a few to win big. Breeders should plan the same way: not every foal will be a star, so price and plan for the average, not the dream.

Where marketing changes the math

This is the part most breeders miss. **Marketing isn't something you do when the horse is ready to sell. It's how you shorten the runway.**

- 1 Sell before birth.** Take deposits on in-utero foals from proven crosses. That's "pre-orders," and it turns future revenue into cash now.

- 2 **Sell weanlings with a story.** Document the foal from day one: birth video, first steps, growth updates. Buyers bond with a horse they've watched grow.
- 3 **Build a waitlist.** A list of interested buyers before foaling season means you're never starting a sale from zero.
- 4 **Market the program, not just the foal.** Show off older offspring, owner testimonials and competition results. Every successful horse you've bred makes the next one easier to sell.
- 5 **Use stallion incentive programs.** Many breed associations and stallions offer futurity or incentive eligibility that adds resale value. Point it out loud and early.
- 6 **Know your exit.** Decide *before* breeding: weanling, yearling, or started under saddle? Every year you hold costs money, so each extra year has to add more value than it costs.

The bottom line

A foal is a four-year startup with high costs, a long runway and no guaranteed exit. Breeders who treat it like a hobby often lose money. Breeders who treat it like a business, tracking costs, selling early and building a brand, give themselves a real shot at profit.

Sources: The Horse – Before you breed your horse: costs and considerations (2023) · Horse Racing Sense – The real cost to raise a horse (2026) · Northwest Horse Source – The true cost of raising a foal

ICSI: The IVF Revolution Breeders Haven't Heard Of

BY TOMMY

2x

average price of ICSI foals vs. the whole auction (Zangersheide, 2018)

THE SHORT VERSION

ICSI is basically IVF for horses. It can get foals from older mares that won't settle, from stallions that have died, and from just a tiny amount of frozen semen. The science has exploded in the last decade. The marketing hasn't caught up, and that's a huge opportunity.

What ICSI actually is (in plain English)

ICSI stands for **intracytoplasmic sperm injection**. Here's how it works, step by step ([Equine Medical Services](#)):

- 1 Collect the eggs.** A vet uses ultrasound to guide a needle and pull immature eggs (oocytes) from the mare's ovaries. This is called ovum pick-up, or OPU.
- 2 Mature them in the lab.** The eggs are cultured until they're ready.
- 3 Inject one sperm per egg.** Under a microscope, a single sperm cell is injected directly into each egg.
- 4 Grow the embryos.** After 7–10 days, the best ones reach the blastocyst stage.
- 5 Transfer or freeze.** Embryos go into a recipient mare, get shipped, or get frozen for later.

The key idea: **one sperm per egg**. That's why ICSI needs so little semen compared to regular breeding.

From science experiment to real-world tool

A review in the *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science* ([Stout, 2020](#)) shows how fast this field has improved:

Step	Then	Now (established programs)
Eggs recovered per follicle	under 25%	over 50%
Injected eggs that become blastocysts	under 10%	over 20%
Blastocysts per session	rare	more than 1 on average

Once an embryo is transferred, results are strong. Stout reports initial pregnancy rates of **55–80%**, and frozen embryos transferred on day 4 reaching **72% pregnancy and 60% foaling** rates. The review notes "rapid growth in demand" from sport horse breeders.

Who it's for

ICSI solves problems that used to end a breeding program:

- **The older mare** with great genes who keeps failing to get in foal.
- **The mare with reproductive damage**, like adhesions or cervical problems.
- **The deceased stallion** with only a few precious straws left.
- **The subfertile stallion** whose semen won't work with regular insemination.
- **The competing mare** whose owner doesn't want to pause her career.

One honest caveat: success drops as the donor mare gets older. ICSI helps older mares, but it isn't magic.

What it costs

Here's a real 2026 price list from one US clinic ([Equine Medical Services](#)):

Item	Price
Entry or nomination fee	\$1,000–\$1,350
Collection session (OPU)	\$625
Egg maturation	\$200
ICSI procedure	\$500
Per blastocyst produced	\$950
Embryo transfer	\$300

Item	Price
Recipient mare lease (at 30+ days pregnant)	\$4,850

Add it up and one embryo carried to a confirmed recipient pregnancy runs roughly **\$8,500–\$9,000** at this clinic, before your own vet, hauling and board. Prices and contract options vary by clinic.

That's not cheap. But compare it to losing a top mare's bloodline forever, or to a stallion's last straws sitting unused in a tank.

Why breeders haven't heard of it

The problem isn't the science. It's that ICSI is usually explained like a lab report. Words like "oocyte," "blastocyst" and "cytoplasm" make most horse owners' eyes glaze over. And when people don't understand something, they assume it's not for them, or that it's too expensive, risky or "unnatural."

How to market ICSI better

- 1 Lead with the problem, not the procedure.** "Is your best mare getting older?" beats "We offer OPU-ICSI." People search for solutions to their problem, not technical terms.
- 2 Use the IVF comparison.** Most people know someone who's done IVF. "It's IVF for horses" makes the idea click in five words.
- 3 Show the math on rare genetics.** One straw of a deceased stallion's frozen semen may only cover one or two regular inseminations. With ICSI, a tiny amount of semen can fertilize several eggs. Turn that into a simple visual.
- 4 Tell foal stories.** "This filly is out of a 22-year-old mare who hadn't had a foal in five years" is the most powerful ad you'll ever run. (Use real cases from your clinic with owner permission.)
- 5 Be upfront about price.** Publish a clear, all-in estimate. Hidden pricing feels like a trap. Clear pricing feels like confidence.
- 6 Partner with stallion owners.** Stallion owners with limited frozen semen can offer "ICSI-ready" doses. That opens a new product for them and a new client stream for clinics.
- 7 Educate the vets.** Many local vets don't refer clients because they're unsure about ICSI themselves. A simple referral guide for general practice vets can unlock a steady pipeline.

Deep Dive: How to Advertise ICSI

Knowing ICSI works is step one. Knowing **who to sell it to, what to say, and where to say it** is what fills a lab's calendar. Here's the full breakdown.

The industry at a glance

- **The market is growing.** The broader equine artificial insemination market was worth about **\$648 million in 2024** and is forecast to reach **\$1.08 billion by 2033**, growing about 5.9% a year ([Grand View Research](#)). ICSI is a small, fast-moving slice of that.
- **Sport horses drive demand.** Sport and racing horses make up about **60%** of that market, and North America is the largest region at about **33%**.
- **It's a two-part business.** A local vet or clinic collects the eggs (OPU). Then the eggs often ship overnight to a specialized ICSI lab, such as Texas A&M's, Avantea in Italy, or a clinic like Equine Medical Services in Missouri.
- **The price tag is real.** AQHA puts a typical ICSI effort at **\$5,000–\$10,000** ([AQHA](#)).
- **The payoff can be bigger.** At the 2018 Zangersheide foal auction in Belgium, 17 of 104 foals were ICSI foals. They averaged **€48,470**, versus **€22,340** for the auction overall, more than double ([Hippomundo](#)).

That last stat is your headline. **ICSI isn't a cost. In elite breeding, it's an investment with a track record.**

The rules shape the market

- **Thoroughbreds are out.** The Jockey Club requires live cover, so ICSI isn't an option for racing Thoroughbreds. Don't waste ad dollars there.
- **Quarter Horses are in, with a clock.** AQHA allows ICSI foals with a **\$200** fee and advance notice, plus DNA parentage checks. For stallions and mares born in 2015 or later, frozen semen and stored eggs or embryos can only be used for **two years** after death, gelding or spaying. Members voted to keep that rule in March 2025 ([Tri-State Livestock News](#)).
- **Sport horse registries are the most open**, which is why Europe's warmblood world adopted ICSI first.

The 5 best market segments

Segment	Who they are	What they care about	Ability to pay	Priority
1. Elite sport horse breeders	Warmblood jumper and dressage breeders, owners of competing mares	Resale value, bloodlines, keeping mares competing	High	Top
2. Western performance breeders	Cutting, reining, barrel and ranch horse breeders (AQHA, NCHA)	Maximizing star genetics, beating the 2-year rule	High	Top
3. Legacy owners	Owners of an aging, beloved mare or a deceased stallion	Not losing "the one"	Medium	Strong

Segment	Who they are	What they care about	Ability to pay	Priority
4. Stallion owners and semen banks	Owners with limited or irreplaceable frozen doses	Making every straw earn money	Medium–High	Strong (B2B)
5. General practice vets	Local vets who could refer clients	Looking competent, keeping clients happy	Referral partner	Essential channel

Segment 1: Elite sport horse breeders

Their mindset: They think like investors. Their best mares are often busy competing, and every year without a foal is lost genetic value.

Positioning: *"Keep her competing. Keep her bloodline growing."*

What resonates:

- Hard ROI. Lead with the Zangersheide auction data: ICSI foals sold for more than double the average.
- Prestige. Feature top-level mares and stallions with ICSI offspring.
- Minimal disruption. Stress that OPU doesn't stop a mare's competition schedule.

Tactics:

- 1 Sponsor or exhibit at major shows and breeding auctions.
- 2 Partner with sport horse stallion stations to offer "ICSI packages" with frozen doses.
- 3 Run Instagram and Facebook ads targeting warmblood breeders, dressage and show jumping followers.
- 4 Advertise in sport horse breeding media and auction catalogs.
- 5 Publish a yearly "ICSI results report" with blastocyst rates, pregnancies and foal sale results. This crowd respects data.

Segment 2: Western performance breeders

Their mindset: Embryo transfer is already normal for them. They want more foals from proven producers, and the AQHA two-year rule creates real urgency.

Positioning: *"Make every straw count, before the clock runs out."*

What resonates:

- Straw math. Show how a tiny amount of semen can fertilize several eggs.
- Urgency. Remind owners of stallions born 2015 or later that frozen semen has a two-year window after death or gelding.
- Cost per pregnancy. Practical people want the full all-in number up front.

Tactics:

- 1 Exhibit at cutting and reining futurities and major Western breeding sales.
- 2 Advertise in Western horse publications and ag radio.
- 3 Partner with Western stallion owners to bundle ICSI-ready doses.
- 4 Host a "Straw Math" seminar or webinar with a reproduction vet.
- 5 Use straight-talking video. Show the lab, the vet and the foal. No fluff.

Segment 3: Legacy owners

Their mindset: This is emotional. Their mare is 20 and hasn't foaled in years, or their favorite stallion died with a few straws left. They're afraid it's too late.

Positioning: *"It's not too late."*

What resonates:

- Real stories about "miracle foals" from older mares or late stallions.
- Honesty. Be clear that success drops with mare age. Trust matters more than hype here.
- A gentle, guided process. They want a hand to hold, not a price list.

Tactics:

- 1 Video testimonials from owners, with permission.
- 2 Facebook groups and breed communities, where these owners already talk.
- 3 Free "Is ICSI right for my mare?" consultation calls.
- 4 Referral programs through local vets who know these horses.
- 5 Simple, warm landing pages that answer the top 10 questions in plain English.

Segment 4: Stallion owners and semen banks (B2B)

Their mindset: They have frozen semen sitting in a tank. Every straw used for regular breeding might give one pregnancy. With ICSI, it can go much further.

Positioning: *"Turn your tank into revenue."*

What resonates:

- New income from limited doses.
- Protecting the stallion's legacy and brand.
- A done-for-you program with the lab handling the hard parts.

Tactics:

- 1 Offer formal partnership programs, such as co-marketing or revenue sharing on ICSI breedings.

- 2 Create an "ICSI-approved stallion" list mare owners can browse.
- 3 Direct outreach to semen storage facilities and stallion managers.
- 4 Give stallion owners ready-made marketing kits: graphics, captions and FAQ sheets.

Segment 5: General practice vets (the hidden channel)

Their mindset: Clients trust their vet more than any ad. But many vets don't refer for ICSI because they don't know the process themselves.

Positioning: *"We make you the hero to your clients."*

What resonates:

- Simple referral steps and clear OPU shipping protocols.
- Continuing education (CE) credits.
- Keeping the client relationship with the referring vet.

Tactics:

- 1 Free CE webinars on OPU and ICSI basics.
- 2 A one-page referral guide and shipping kit.
- 3 Booths at veterinary conferences.
- 4 Send results updates to the referring vet, so they look good to their client.

Five rules for every ICSI ad

- 1 **Lead with the problem, not the procedure.** "Is your best mare getting older?" beats "We offer OPU-ICSI."
- 2 **Translate the science.** Say "IVF for horses" and "eggs," not "oocytes."
- 3 **Show the money.** Clear all-in pricing plus the value of the foal. Hidden costs kill trust.
- 4 **Prove it with foals.** Real horses, real owners, real results.
- 5 **Be honest about the odds.** Share realistic success rates by mare age. In a high-cost, emotional purchase, honesty is your strongest sales tool.

Where to put the budget

If you're a clinic or lab starting from zero, a simple split:

- **40%** on segments 1 and 2 (sport and Western). Highest value and fastest return.
- **25%** on vet referral programs (segment 5). It multiplies everything else.
- **20%** on stallion owner partnerships (segment 4). It builds supply and co-marketing.
- **15%** on legacy owner storytelling (segment 3). It's lower volume, but it creates your best testimonials.

This split is a starting point. Track cost per consultation and cost per pregnancy by segment, then shift money toward what works.

Deep dive sources: Grand View Research – Equine AI market • AQHA – What is ICSI? • Hippomundo – Facts and figures about ICSI and ET • Tri-State Livestock News – AQHA frozen semen and embryo rule debate*

The bottom line

ICSI turns "it's too late" into "let's try." It saves bloodlines, extends careers and stretches rare genetics further than ever. The clinics and breeders who learn to explain it simply, honestly and with real stories will lead the next era of horse breeding.

Sources: Stout – *Clinical application of in vitro embryo production in the horse*, *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science* (2020) • *Equine Medical Services* – ICSI

Hook&Hold

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Every number in this issue links to its source. Spot something off? Tell us and we'll fix it.