



---

**THE SIGNAL PAPERS**

*Essays on the Creator Governance Gap*

---

No. 7

# The Assessment Gap

*Why Basic Creator Checks Are No Longer Enough*

---

**One Is About Selection. The Other Is About Defensibility.**

signalintelligence.consulting

Most organisations are not approving creators blindly.

They review feeds, check audience fit, look at engagement, consider recent content and assess whether the creator appears suitable for the campaign. In more mature programmes, they may also check disclosure behaviour, previous brand partnerships and obvious brand safety concerns.

That work matters, but it is not the same as Creator Due Diligence.

A basic Brand Safety Check is usually designed to answer a campaign question: does this creator look suitable for this activation?

A Creator Governance Assessment asks something more demanding: can the organisation evidence why this creator was suitable to represent the brand, what risks were considered, what information was reviewed and what conditions, if any, were attached to approval?

Those questions may appear similar, but they are not the same.

One is about selection.

The other is about defensibility.

The distinction matters because creators are no longer simply media placements. They are public representatives, commercial partners and reputational extensions of the organisations that work with them. When a brand approves a creator, it is not only approving a piece of content or a campaign asset. It is approving a relationship that may be visible to thousands, or in some cases, millions of people.

In that context, feed-only checking is no longer sufficient.

A creator's recent posts may appear clean, while their wider public record tells a more complicated story. Their current content may fit the campaign, yet their direction of travel suggests increasing political, regulatory or reputational risk. Their audience may appear commercially attractive, while their visibility, category or prior conduct creates a level of exposure that requires senior review.

*The issue is not that organisations are doing no checks, but rather that the level of checking often does not match the level of exposure.*

## The Limits of Brand Safety Checks

Basic Brand Safety Checks usually focus on what is easiest to see.

The feed is reviewed. The audience is assessed. Engagement is examined. Recent content is checked for obvious concerns. If nothing immediately problematic appears, the creator may move forward.

For many campaigns, that may feel reasonable. It is quick, familiar and operationally convenient, and it reflects the way creator marketing has often been managed.

However, the most significant creator-related risks are not always visible in the last ten posts. They may sit in older content, platform behaviour, news coverage, litigation, previous brand relationships, political activity, commercial conflicts, audience reactions or changes in how the creator is perceived over time.

They may also sit outside the creator's own feeds entirely, which is why a purely social-platform review can create a false sense of confidence.

This is where the assessment gap appears.

An organisation may be able to show that somebody reviewed a creator. It may even be able to show that a process was followed. But if the review was narrow, undocumented or limited to recent feed activity, it may struggle to show that the decision was proportionate to the role the creator was being asked to play.

That matters because governance is not just about making good decisions, it is about being able to explain them.

## From Screening to TRACE

Signal Intelligence uses TRACE as a structured methodology for Creator Governance Assessment.

TRACE is designed to move creator review beyond surface-level screening and towards a documented, repeatable, timestamped and auditable assessment process. It does not assume that every creator presents high risk, and it does not treat governance as a reason to slow every decision unnecessarily. Its purpose is to make the right checks visible, consistent and explainable.

TRACE assesses five connected dimensions.

## TRACE — Five Dimensions of Creator Governance Assessment

**T****Trajectory**

*Direction of travel ·  
Risk trend ·  
Stability*

Considers the creator's direction of travel: whether risk is increasing, decreasing or stable, whether content has drifted and whether controversies are escalating or fading.

**R****Reputation**

*Public record ·  
Documented  
incidents · Legal  
history*

Considers the wider public record: news coverage, documented incidents, legal history, public controversy, brand departures, apologies, corrections and whether issues are active, historic or unresolved.

**A****Alignment**

*Brand fit · Values ·  
Commercial  
conflicts*

Considers whether the creator is suitable for the organisation, not merely the campaign: values fit, political positioning, category sensitivity, commercial conflicts and whether association with the creator sends a message the brand is prepared to own.

**C****Content**

*Platform behaviour  
· Disclosure ·  
Authenticity*

Considers what the creator publishes and how they behave across platforms: disclosure behaviour, content authenticity, IP and likeness risk, category drift and whether the creator's public content is compatible with the role they are being asked to play.

**E****Exposure**

*Reach ·  
Amplification risk ·  
Consequence*

Considers the consequence of getting the decision wrong: reach, audience quality, amplification risk, market sensitivity, regulated-category exposure and the scale of likely attention if the partnership becomes controversial.

**Output: a documented, timestamped and auditable Creator Governance Assessment.**

Together, these dimensions create a fuller picture than a standard creator check.

They also create a record.

That record matters because a timestamped assessment shows what was reviewed, what was known, what risks were identified and why a decision was made at the time it was made. It does not remove risk, and it does not guarantee that nothing will change

later. But it gives the organisation something more valuable than a vague memory that someone checked the creator before approval.

*It gives evidence of oversight.*

## What Basic Checks Miss

The gap between a Brand Safety Check and a Creator Governance Assessment is not theoretical. It appears whenever organisations rely on narrow checks for relationships that carry broader exposure.

A creator may have a clean feed but a documented history in news coverage. They may have strong engagement but an audience that is politically activated, commercially unsuitable or likely to amplify controversy. They may disclose sponsored posts correctly while still creating risk through misleading claims, undisclosed conflicts or content authenticity concerns. They may appear aligned with a campaign while being misaligned with the organisation's wider values, customers or regulatory obligations.

The Bud Light partnership with Dylan Mulvaney illustrates this clearly. The central issue was not that the creator had produced unsafe content. The issue was that the partnership itself became a political and commercial signal that the brand did not appear prepared to manage.

That is the difference between checking a feed and assessing exposure.

Basic checks often ask whether anything obvious prevents approval.

TRACE asks whether the relationship can be justified.

That difference becomes especially important when creator programmes scale. In a small programme, decision-makers may know the creators personally, understand the context and retain much of the reasoning informally. In a larger programme involving multiple agencies, markets and stakeholders, that informal knowledge begins to break down.

At that point, the organisation needs more than selection: it needs assessment.

## From Basic Screening to Creator Governance Assessment

The distinction between a Brand Safety Check and a Creator Governance Assessment is not one of intensity. It is one of purpose.

| Basic Brand Safety Check             | Creator Governance Assessment                                        |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reviews recent feed content          | Reviews feed, news, media coverage and public record                 |
| Checks campaign fit                  | Assesses suitability as a brand representative                       |
| Looks at audience and engagement     | Assesses exposure, audience quality and amplification risk           |
| Checks obvious brand safety concerns | Reviews reputation, conduct, controversy and legal signals           |
| Focuses on current profile           | Assesses trajectory and direction of travel                          |
| Checks disclosure labels             | Reviews commercial conduct, content integrity and regulatory context |
| Identifies obvious content risks     | Considers IP, likeness, authenticity and synthetic-content risks     |
| Identifies obvious reject cases      | Produces a documented, timestamped recommendation and rationale      |
| Ends at selection                    | Identifies monitoring, escalation or reassessment needs              |

This is the shift from simple creator screening to Creator Due Diligence.

From marketing process to governance discipline.

## The Better Question

The question is not whether organisations are checking creators: most are in some form.

The better question is whether those checks are sufficient for the role creators now play.

A creator partnership can influence public perception, create regulatory exposure, trigger litigation, undermine brand trust or become part of a wider reputational issue long after the original campaign has been approved. In that environment, an organisation should be able to demonstrate more than the fact that a feed was reviewed and the audience looked right.

It should be able to show why the creator was suitable, what evidence informed the decision, what exposure had been considered and what should happen if the

assessment changes.

That is the role of TRACE.

Not to make creator marketing slower, but to make creator approval more defensible.

## **From Assessment to Monitoring**

A TRACE assessment is not the end of creator governance.

It is the baseline.

Some creators will require no further action beyond a documented approval. Others may require conditions, senior review, contractual controls, periodic reassessment or ongoing monitoring. The assessment should make that distinction clear because not every creator presents the same level of exposure, and not every approval decision should create the same level of ongoing oversight.

This is where assessment leads naturally into monitoring.

A creator who is suitable today may remain suitable for years. Another may change quickly because their content, audience, commercial activity, public conduct or media profile shifts after approval.

Approval creates the relationship.

Monitoring protects it.



---

### **About The Signal Papers**

*The Signal Papers explore the emerging discipline of creator governance, creator due diligence and portfolio monitoring.*

[signalintelligence.consulting](https://signalintelligence.consulting)