

AI Content Engine Economics: The Cost of Short-Form Video Production by AI Agents and by People

Technical report accompanying the article "The AI Content Engine: How Claude Agents Replaced a Video Studio and Paid Influencers"

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Abstract

This report shows how the figures in the article were calculated. The subject is a working AI content engine at one company in the wellness category, targeting the US and other English-speaking markets. AI writes the scripts, AI avatars appear on camera, the voice is synthetic, and editing and publishing are handled by software written by Claude agents. The engine was built by one person with no technical background.

In its first 101 days the engine produced 1,497 short-form videos across 67 channels. The videos collected 8,250,024 organic views, and the channels have 1,126,322 followers and subscribers. Subscriptions cost \$4,313.76: \$0.52 per 1,000 views and \$2.88 per video.

By our model, producing the same volume with people would take 42–78 staff and \$179,000–1.21 million a month, 138 to 935 times the cost of the subscriptions. Buying the same reach from influencers would cost 3.8 to 57 times more. A scenario forecast for 100 AI presenters gives 10 to 178 million views a month.

1. What is disclosed and what is not

The company operates under a non-disclosure agreement. As in the article, this report does not disclose:

- the company name, channel names or presenter names;
- calendar dates of operation;
- revenue, sales or leads;

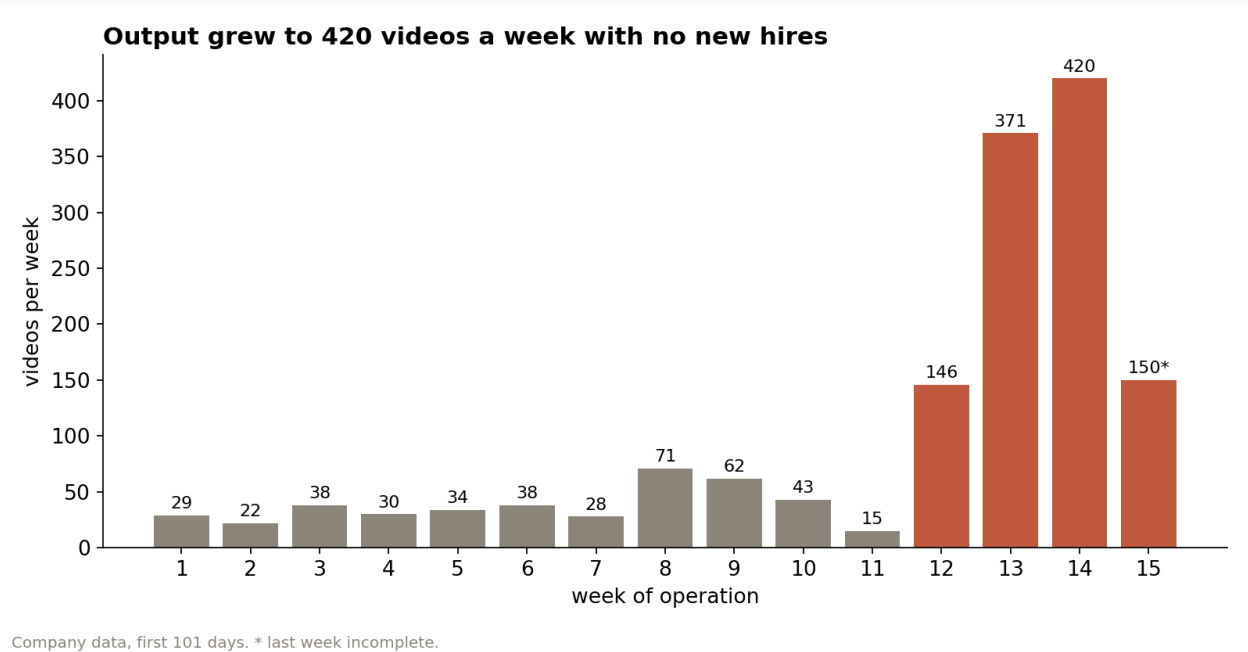
- services used other than Claude agents;
- the underlying data.

The report contains only the figures published in the article and how they were calculated. The company's raw data is not published.

2. Engine metrics

metric	value	source or method
observation period	first 101 days of operation	
videos produced	1,497	engine production records
language versions	2,137	engine production records
weekly output, first eleven weeks	15–70 videos	weekly production records
weekly output, after scale-up	146, 371 and 420 videos	weekly production records
average pace	104 videos and 148 language versions a week (the 104 originals plus 44 translated versions), about 21 videos per workday	1,497 and 2,137 divided by 101 days, times 7
channels	67 on six platforms	
YouTube share of views	90%	
views	8,250,024	public platform counters for videos released in the period, at the end of the period
followers and subscribers	1,126,322	sum across all channels at the end of the period
AI presenters on camera	22	engine character library
people	1	the person who built the engine and sets its tasks
from the first agent task to the first production project	3 days, about 20 hours of the person's time	agent conversation log
share of first-version code written by the agent	99.7%	lines added in commits where the Claude agent is listed as co-author

model running production today	Claude Opus 5	engine settings
code in agent messages	none: tasks were given in plain language, dictated by voice	agent conversation log
builder's terminal use	one command: starting the agent with - - dangerously-skip-permissions	builder's account
subscriptions during the period	about \$1,300 a month; one additional agent plan added late in the period	subscription records
AI label	the company labels its videos as AI- generated with the platforms' labels	platform settings



How to read the views. Organic reach grows with a delay: output rises first, and views and followers catch up later. 8,250,024 is a snapshot. Videos from the last weeks were still gaining views when it was taken.

3. Production cost

Subscriptions to all production services cost about \$1,300 a month, or \$4,313.76 over 101 days.

metric	calculation	value
cost per 1,000 views	$\$4,313.76 / 8,250,024 \times 1,000$	\$0.52
cost per video	$\$4,313.76 / 1,497$	\$2.88

The calculation excludes the person's time, servers, the additional agent plan, and spending before the period.

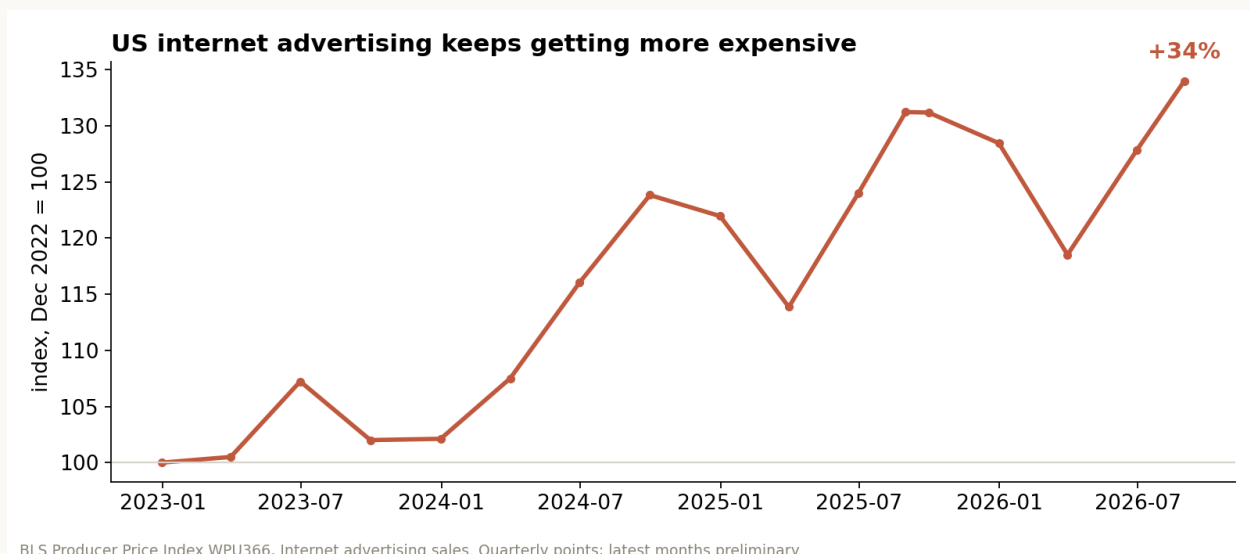
4. Comparison with paid ads

The same company's Meta ad account:

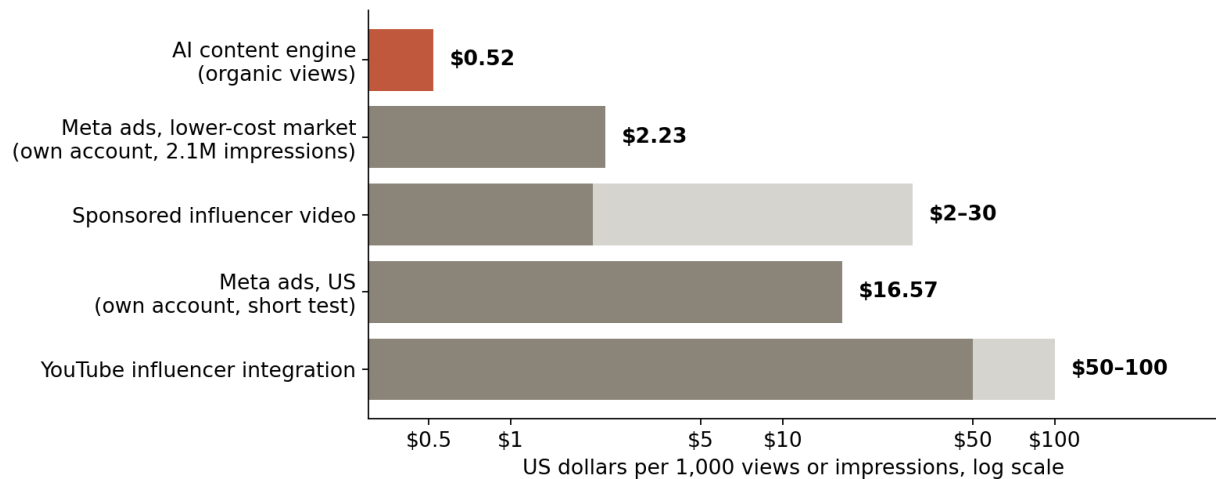
market	cost per 1,000 impressions	volume
lower-cost market	\$2.23	2.1 million impressions
United States	\$16.57	short test

The US figure comes from a short test and may be inflated, as the campaign was likely still in its learning phase. Ad prices are per impression; the engine's figure is per organic view. The two units are not identical, and the geography of the organic audience is unknown, so the comparison uses the full range \$2.23–16.57.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics producer price index for internet advertising (series WPU366, Internet advertising sales) rose 34% from December 2022 to August 2026. The latest months are preliminary.



Cost per 1,000 views: AI content engine vs ads and influencers



AI: subscriptions over 101 days / 8,250,024 views. Meta: the company's own ad account. Influencers: Influencer Marketing Hub, 2026.

5. Human studio model

5.1 The question

How many people and how much money would it take to produce the same volume without AI: 104 videos and 148 language versions a week, 67 channels, 22 presenters on camera.

5.2 Productivity assumptions

We found no published productivity benchmarks for short-form video production. The figures below are assumptions, so the result is given as a range. Only the crew size is supported by a source.

role	output per person	status
scriptwriter	3–8 scripts a day	assumption
translator	10–20 short scripts a day	assumption
video editor	2–5 finished videos a day	assumption
voice-over artist	10–30 short videos a day; needed only for the 44 translated versions a week (presenters voice the originals)	assumption
social media manager	5–15 accounts	assumption
producer	1 per 8–15 staff	assumption
batch shooting	10–30 videos per shoot day	assumption
film crew	3–5 people	Vidico, 2026

A work week is 5 days, a month is 30.44 days. Headcount is rounded up; shoot days are monthly averages and are not rounded.

5.3 Wages

Median annual wages, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, May 2025. Employer taxes, benefits, office and software are not included, so the real cost of staff is higher.

role	BLS occupation	median per year
scriptwriter	Writers and Authors (27-3043)	\$76,910
translator	Interpreters and Translators (27-3091)	\$60,170
video editor	Film and Video Editors (27-4032)	\$75,420
voice-over artist	Announcers and DJs (27-3011), closest category	\$47,340
producer	Producers and Directors (27-2012)	\$90,360
social media manager	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists (13-1161), closest category	\$78,760

5.4 Shoot day

Rates published by the video production agency Vidico, 2026 (an agency's own price guide, not an independent survey):

item	low	high
crew of 3–5	\$2,500	\$8,000
studio	\$500	\$2,000
equipment	\$1,000	\$4,000
makeup artist	\$500	\$1,000
on-camera talent	1 amateur, \$250	2 professionals, \$6,000
day	\$4,750	\$21,000

Talent is paid as part of the shoot day: each day features one or two of the 22 contracted presenters in rotation, so the 22 are counted as people but paid per shoot day.

5.5 Result: average pace

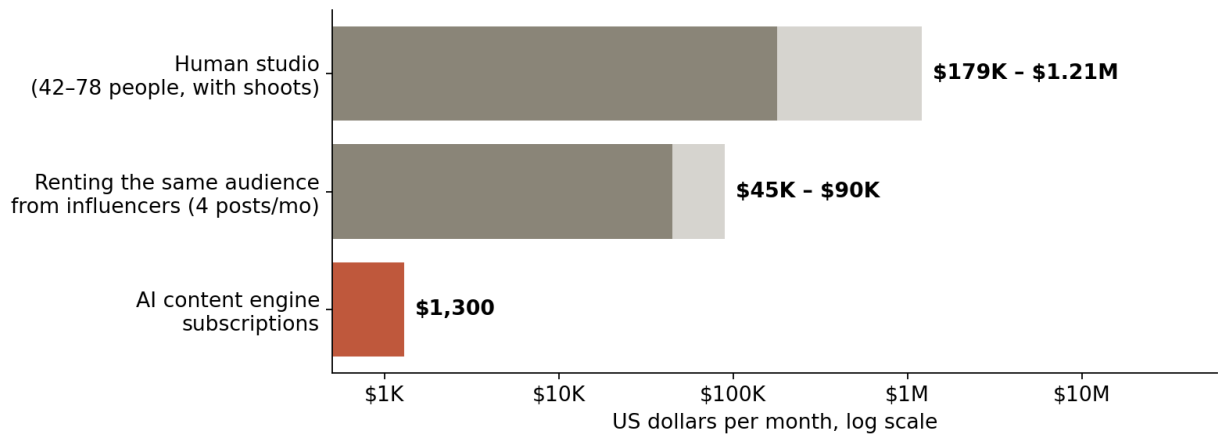
role	headcount	per month
scriptwriters	3–7	\$19,228–44,864
translator	1	\$5,014
video editors and motion designers	5–11	\$31,425–69,135
voice-over artist	1	\$3,945
producers	2–7	\$15,060–52,710
social media managers for 67 channels	5–14	\$32,817–91,887
staff wages		\$107,000–268,000
film crews	1–3 crews	15.0–45.1 shoot days on average: \$71,000–947,000
on-camera talent	22	included in shoot days
total	42–78 people	\$179,000–1.21 million

Over 101 days that is \$0.59–4.03 million. Subscriptions for the same period cost \$4,313.76. Per month, the human studio is 138 to 935 times more expensive than \$1,300 in subscriptions. The comparison slightly favors the engine: its cost excludes the builder's time and servers, while the studio model includes producers.

5.6 Result: peak pace

At about 400 videos a week (the two peak weeks were 371 and 420), the same assumptions give 69–168 people and \$0.51–4.33 million a month. The engine's output grew without hiring anyone.

Same monthly video output: people, influencers, AI

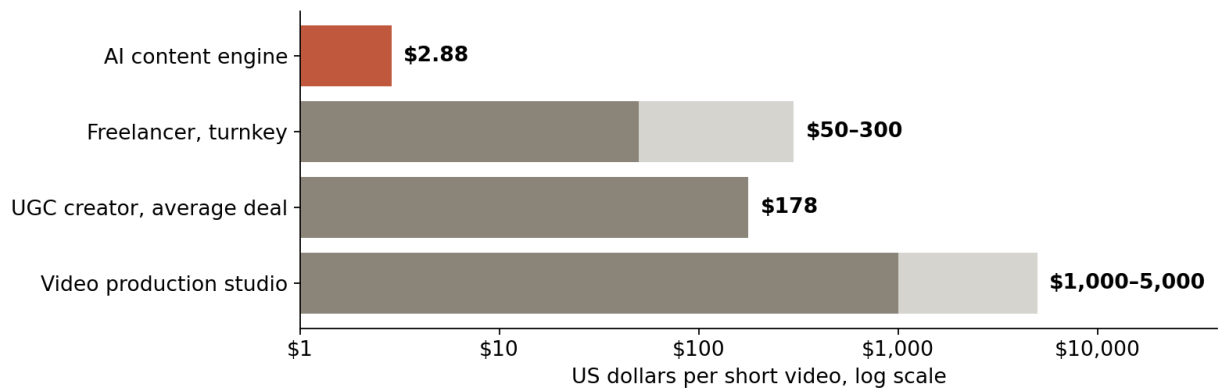


Staff: author estimate from BLS median wages (May 2025) and Vidico 2026 shoot-day rates. Influencers: \$10-20 per 1,000 followers per post (Sprout Social).

5.7 Cost per video with people

who makes it	cost per video	source
AI content engine	\$2.88	section 3
UGC creator, average deal	\$178	Collabstr, 2025 report, 15,000+ deals
turnkey freelancer	\$50-300	Vidico, 2026
video production studio	\$1,000-5,000	Vidico, 2026

Cost per short video: AI vs people



AI: \$4,313.76 / 1,497 videos. UGC: Collabstr 2025 report, 15,000+ deals. Freelancer and studio: Vidico, 2026.

5.8 What the model does not claim

The model shows what it would cost to buy the same volume from people. It is not money the company saved: nobody would hire that many people for this volume. The quality of human-made and engine-made

videos was not compared.

6. Renting the same audience from influencers

6.1 The same views

Cost per 1,000 views of sponsored content per Influencer Marketing Hub, 2026: typically \$2–30, and \$50–100 for YouTube integrations. These are prices for views of sponsored posts, which are not the same as organic views of short videos.

cost per 1,000 views	8,250,024 views	vs subscriptions
\$2	\$16,500	3.8×
\$30	\$247,500	57×
\$100	\$825,000	191×

6.2 The same audience

Sprout Social rule of thumb (2024): about \$10 per post per 1,000 followers on Instagram and TikTok, about \$20 on YouTube. With four sponsored posts a month to 1,126,322 followers:

$1,126,322 / 1,000 \times \$10\text{--}20 \times 4 = \text{\$45,000--90,000 a month}$, every month. Part of the 1,126,322 followers was gained before the period.

6.3 Market size

Brands worldwide spend about \$32.5 billion a year on influencer marketing (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025). Global video production services are estimated at \$31.4 billion (The Business Research Company, 2025). We assumed that 20–50% of that is open to engines like this, since no public data on the share exists: \$6–16 billion. Together, by our estimate, \$40–50 billion a year.

7. Forecast for 100 AI presenters

7.1 Method

The company has 22 AI presenters and plans to grow to 100. Most presenter channels are only a few months old. The company's three best YouTube channels show what a mature channel can look like:

channel	views per month
best	about 1.78 million
second	about 250,000
third	about 100,000

Subscriber counts and channel ages are not given, so the channels cannot be identified.

Views per month are the channel's views over 101 days, scaled to 30.44 days. Scenario: each of 100 presenters reaches the level of one of these channels.

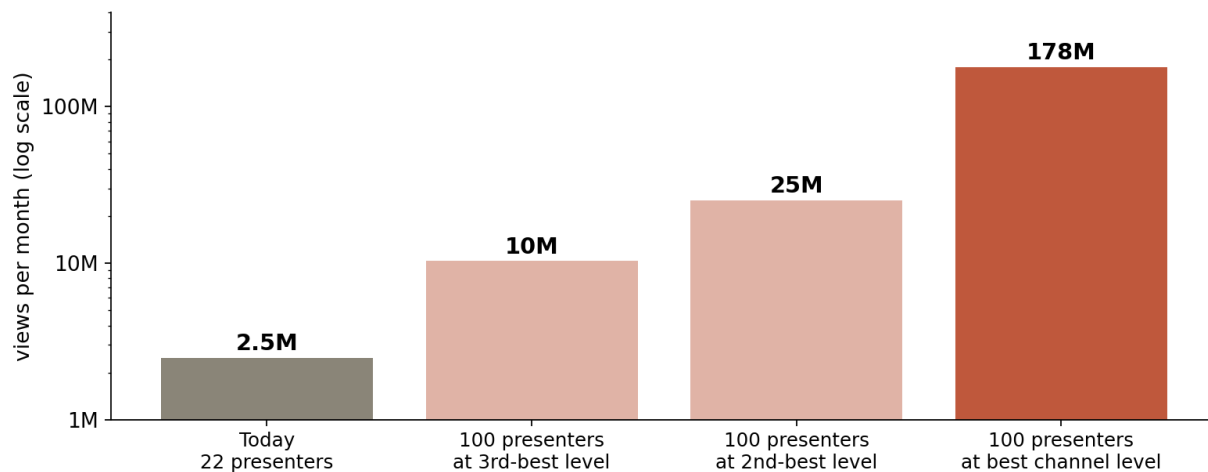
7.2 Scenarios

scenario	views per month	vs today's 2.5 million
third-best channel level	10 million	4×
second-best channel level	25 million	10×
best channel level	178 million	72×

Today's 2.5 million a month: $8,250,024 \times 30.44 / 101$. For reference, simply scaling today's output from 22 to 100 presenters gives about 11 million a month, close to the lowest scenario.

The middle scenario, 25 million views a month, would cost \$50,000–750,000 a month at influencer rates, or \$56,000–414,000 a month in Meta ads at the company's own \$2.23–16.57 per 1,000 impressions.

Forecast: monthly views with 100 AI presenters



Scenarios: monthly views of the company's three best YouTube channels × 100.
Today: 8.25M views in 101 days. Scenarios, not a promise.

7.3 Limits of the forecast

- The best channel is an outlier: it alone brought more than three quarters of YouTube views.
- Not every channel will reach even the third level.
- Growth takes months.
- Platforms may start limiting the reach of AI video.
- A hundred presenters will need more subscriptions; the cost of that expansion was not estimated.

8. External context

- **Regulation.** No US federal law bans businesses from producing AI video. In New York, bill S8420-A (Chapter 617, signed December 11, 2025, effective 180 days later) requires ads to clearly disclose a synthetic performer; the fine is \$1,000 for a first violation and \$5,000 for repeat ones.
- **Freelance markets.** Demand for substitutable skills such as writing and translation decreased by 20–50% relative to the counterfactual trend (Teutloff et al., 2025). Image work orders fell 17% (Demirci, Hannane and Zhu, 2025).
- **US employment.** 39,400 video editor jobs and 32,600 camera operator jobs, including self-employed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook).

9. Limitations

- One company, one category, one period.
- Sales and revenue are under NDA, so \$0.52 is the cost of attention, not of a customer.
- Some of the audience was built before the period.
- Platform analytics did not show where viewers live.
- The US ad price comes from a short test.
- Productivity figures in the staffing model are assumptions.
- The person's time, servers and pre-period spending are not included in cost.

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