AMG Affiliate Marketing Group

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THE AFFILIATE PROGRAMME LEAK REPORT

Seven ways established affiliate programmes lose revenue, how to spot each one, and what to fix first.

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FOREWORD

MOST PROGRAMMES ARE NOT BROKEN. THEY ARE LEAKING.

After 28 years in affiliate marketing, the pattern I see most often is not a programme that has failed. It is a programme that is quietly paying for the wrong things.

One established US brand came to us after hiring eight agencies in five years. Every one of them had started the same way: recruit more affiliates. The partner count went up, the reports looked busy, and revenue barely moved.

We started somewhere else. We audited the programme they already had. The partners were there. The structure around them was not. Commission was rewarding the wrong partners, tracking was dropping sales, and nobody had noticed because none of it showed on the network dashboard.

THE FIXES ALONE ADDED MORE THAN $51,000 A MONTH IN 40 DAYS, WITHOUT A SINGLE NEW AFFILIATE.

Client anonymised for confidentiality. Figures from tracked network reporting.

Below are the seven leaks we find most often, drawn from programmes we have audited and repaired, each with its warning signs and fix, plus a ten-point health check you can run this week.

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01

CRITICAL

PAYING DISCOUNT SITES FOR CUSTOMERS YOU ALREADY HAD

Voucher, coupon and cashback sites often top the leaderboard. Much of what they are paid for is a sale you had already won.

A shopper fills their basket, sees a promo code box at checkout, opens a new tab and searches for a code. A voucher site ranks for that search, sets its cookie and takes the commission. You pay full commission, give away a discount, and gain no new customer.

Voucher and cashback partners are not the enemy. Some genuinely tip hesitant new customers over the line. The leak is paying them the same rate as partners who create demand, and letting them become the backbone of the programme.



Share of affiliate revenue at one UK and US fashion brand when we took over the programme.

WARNING SIGNS

- Your top five partners are all voucher or cashback sites
- Revenue spikes only when you run a discount
- You cannot say what share of partner sales are new customers
- Codes meant for one partner appear on sites you never approved

HOW WE FIX IT

- Commission set by partner type, with lower rates for partners who catch existing demand
- New customer share tracked for every partner
- Exclusive codes and voucher attribution rules to stop code leakage
- Investment shifted towards content and creator partners

RESULT

We rebuilt that fashion programme around content publishers and creators. Monthly partner revenue grew from **$214k to $324k**, a 51% increase, with $1.92M in partner sales over the period and 587 active partners.

02

HIGH

MISSING WHERE YOUR BUYERS DECIDE

For any considered purchase, buyers read reviews and comparisons before they spend. If you are not there, a competitor is.

Review sites, comparison guides, "best of" round-ups and gift guides are where premium purchases are decided. These publishers rank for the searches your buyers make in the final days before they buy. They are slower to recruit than voucher sites, because they need product, information and a commission structure that makes your brand worth featuring. That is exactly why most programmes do not have them.



Share of revenue from review and comparison publishers at a premium wellness and recovery device brand.

WARNING SIGNS

- Search "best [your category]" and you are missing from the top results
- No review publishers in your top 20 partners
- Your product is high value but most partner sales are low value orders

HOW WE FIX IT

- Review units seeded to the comparison publishers that rank for your category
- Product-level deep links so readers land on the item reviewed
- Commission set by product category to reflect margin
- Gift guide planning months ahead of peak

$686k
partner sales over the managed period

+78%
trailing quarter growth

$88 to $152
average order value

The same programme delivered $129k in June, an off-peak month, against $74k the previous December peak, with zero paid placement fees.

03

HIGH

NOBODY INTRODUCING YOUR BRAND TO NEW CUSTOMERS

A programme built only on partners who catch existing demand cannot grow beyond the demand you already have.

Content publishers, editors, specialist bloggers and creators are the partners who put your brand in front of people who have never heard of you. They are the growth engine of every strong programme we run, and the part most often missing from the programmes we inherit.

Creators work best when they are treated as a revenue channel, not a reach exercise. Smaller, specialist creators with engaged audiences, recruited with a personal reason to say yes and paid on results, consistently outperform a single large influencer post.

$0 to $100k+

monthly partner revenue for a US lingerie launch in about six months

33%

of a supplement programme's revenue from niche creators, at zero fixed fees

30 to 36%

active partner rates across the programmes we build

WARNING SIGNS

- Few or no content publishers among your active partners
- Creator activity is one-off posts with no tracking
- New partner recruitment is mass email with low reply rates

HOW WE FIX IT

- Researched, personal approaches to editors, specialists and creators matched to your category
- Creators on commission, paid fees or gifting, always tracked as revenue
- Onboarding that gets new partners to a first sale quickly

RESULT

For an eight-figure lingerie house entering the US, a full programme build delivered **$416,507** in partner sales and **426 active partners**, passing $100k a month in about six months.

04

CRITICAL

PAYING TWICE FOR THE SAME SALE

When more than one partner can claim the same order, and the rules on who gets paid are unclear, you end up paying commission twice. It is most common in programmes running several networks or tracking setups side by side, and in categories with long consideration periods such as travel.

WARNING SIGNS

- Total partner commission does not reconcile with orders in your own system
- Several tracking tags fire on the confirmation page
- No written rules on which partner wins a shared sale

HOW WE FIX IT

- Order-level reconciliation against your own data
- One source of truth for attribution, with clear de-duplication rules
- Validation after the service is delivered where cancellations are common

RESULT

On a US travel programme with **$2.56M** in booking value across 3,048 bookings, we recovered **11%** of commission that was being paid twice.

05

HIGH

TRAFFIC SENT TO THE WRONG PAGE

When partners link to your homepage, a reader who clicked on a specific product has to find it again. Many will not. Product-level deep links and the right landing pages are among the fastest, cheapest fixes in any programme.

+45%

conversion lift from deep links on a supplement programme

+46%

conversion lift from deep links on a wellness device programme

+48%

conversion lift from routing partner traffic to a plan-matching quiz

06

HIGH

HUNDREDS SIGNED UP, A HANDFUL SELLING

A large partner list looks impressive on a report. What matters is how many of those partners send sales. In the programmes we build, 30 to 36% of partners are active. In the programmes we inherit, the share is often far lower, with most of the list sitting dormant after sign-up.

Dormant partners are rarely a lost cause. Most signed up with intent, then stalled on a missing asset, a confusing commission structure or a first month with no sales. A structured activation plan wins many of them back.

HOW WE FIX IT

- Weekly partner status: producing, active but not producing, quiet, lost
- An automatic flag after 14 days without promotion
- Re-activation offers and assets for the partners worth winning back
- A clear first action for every new partner within their first few days

07

CRITICAL

SILENT DECLINE NOBODY IS WATCHING

Network dashboards report what happened. They rarely tell you why. A programme can lose a quarter of its revenue month after month before anyone asks the right questions.

−25%
monthly decline in a $2M fine jewellery programme before our audit

549
audit findings, 38 of them critical

+23%
trailing quarter growth after repairs, $193k a month at handback

The fix is reporting written for leadership, not for the network: revenue, partner mix, new customer share and the plan for next quarter, every month.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

FIX THE FOUNDATIONS. THEN SCALE.

The order matters. New partners inherit every structural problem in a programme, so recruitment before repair simply adds more partners to the leak.

01

Audit

Tracking, commission structure, partner mix, attribution, compliance and terms.

02

Rebuild

Commission by partner type, deep links, landing pages and clear partner rules.

03

Recruit

The editors, review sites and creators your customers already trust.

04

Scale

Weekly reporting, constant optimisation and growth that compounds.

Your ten-point health check

#	QUESTION
1	What share of partner revenue comes from voucher and cashback sites?
2	Do you know which partners bring first-time customers?
3	Do content partners earn more than partners who catch existing demand?
4	Could two partners ever be paid for the same sale?
5	Are all products, checkout paths and devices tracking correctly?
6	Do partners link to product pages, not just your homepage?
7	How many approved partners have not sold in 90 days?
8	Are you present on the review and comparison sites your buyers read?
9	Are brand bidding, code sharing and claims rules written and enforced?
10	Does leadership see partner revenue and new customer share every month?

8 to 10 confident answers

Strong foundations. You are ready to scale.

5 to 7

Revenue is sitting in the structure of your programme.

Fewer than 5

Fix the foundations before spending on recruitment.

FREE PROGRAMME AUDIT

FIND OUT WHERE YOUR PROGRAMME IS LEAKING.

Our audit technology, checked by a senior specialist, runs every check in this report and several hundred more on your programme. Findings within 48 hours. No call, no obligation.

BOOK MY FREE AUDIT

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