



PEAK PERFORMANCE

Mastering eCommerce for
SPORTS & APPAREL



VELSTAR



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Introduction:

Welcome to Peak Performance

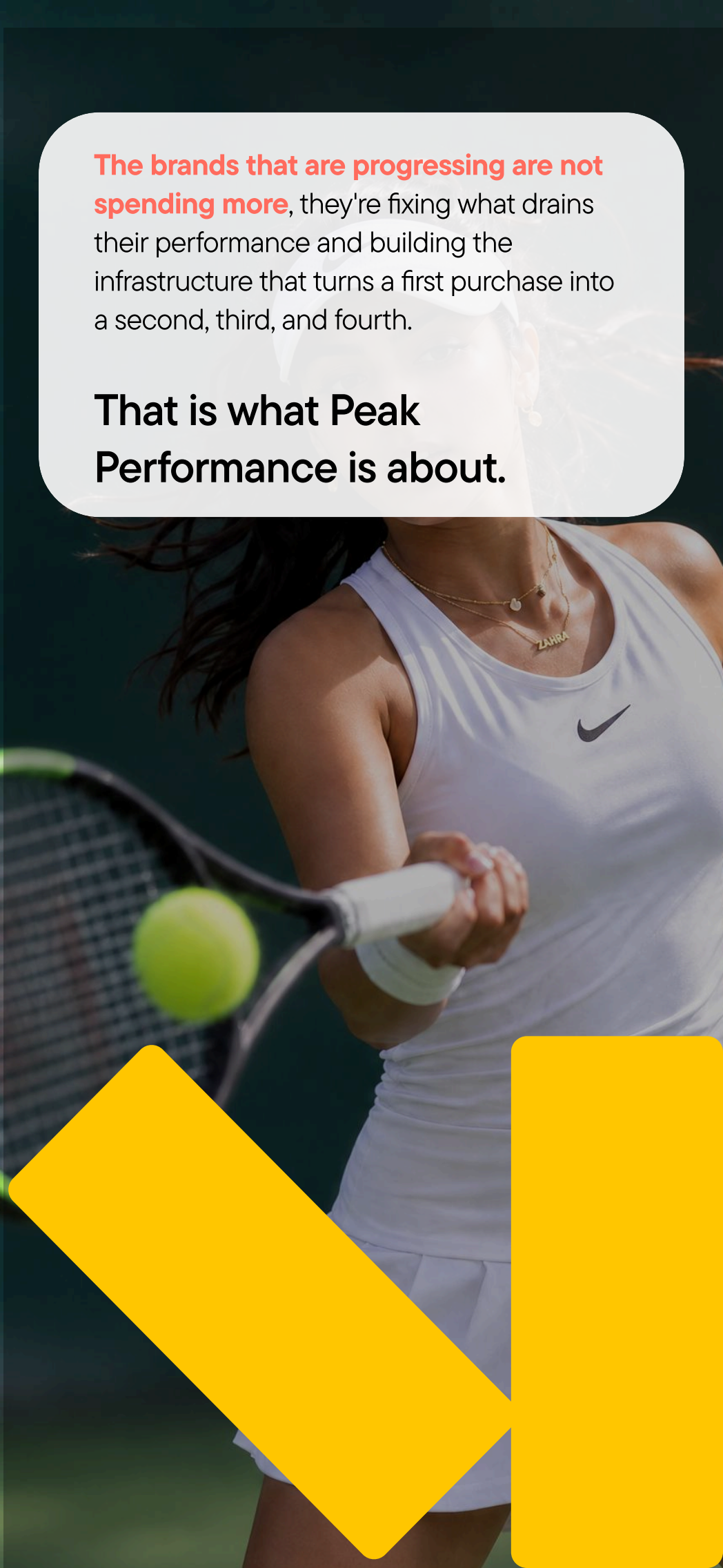
Velstar's guide to eCommerce in the UK sports and apparel sector. What follows is practical, specific, and written by people who work in this space every day.

The UK sports and apparel market is growing.

The athleisure sector is projected to hit **£17.8 billion by 2026** (Sourceready). Sports nutrition is on course to exceed **£1 billion by 2030**, and nearly **two-thirds of UK consumers** now wear activewear outside the gym (The Reportcubes). Participation is rising, demand is strong, and the category shows no sign of slowing down.

The eCommerce reality is harder.

Customer acquisition costs have risen 40 to 60% in two years. Cart abandonment sits above 70%, and mobile accounts for over 70% of all traffic but converts at just 1.8%. Clothing returns run at around 23%, the worst of any online category, costing DTC brands between £10 and £25 per parcel before the refund is even processed. And every platform in your stack is claiming the same sale. (Sources: Swell, Behaviour Digital, Eightx)



The brands that are progressing are not spending more, they're fixing what drains their performance and building the infrastructure that turns a first purchase into a second, third, and fourth.

That is what Peak Performance is about.

What's shaping the sector right now

1: Acquisition costs have hit a wall

Paid social has helped build many sports and apparel brands, and it's now one of the most expensive ways to grow a business. **Over 200,000 brands are active on TikTok Shop in the UK alone** (Brabners). The brands still relying on a single paid channel are running out of runway. The ones growing are diversifying into affiliates, social commerce, and owned channels that compound over time rather than charge by the click.



2: Retention is where the margin lives

Existing customers convert at 60-70%. New prospects convert at 5-20% (Swell). **Yet most brands spend the majority of their budget chasing new ones.** For brands with natural replenishment cycles, supplements, kits, footwear, email, SMS, and lifecycle automation are not extras. They are the difference between a brand that grows and one that churns through customers as fast as it finds them.

3: The data driving decisions is wrong

Every platform claims the sale. Add up what your channels report, and you will likely see two to three times your actual revenue. For a brand spending seriously across paid social, search, affiliates, and email, that is not a reporting quirk. It is a budget allocation problem (Triple Whale). Brands that scale intelligently have built a neutral source of truth that no single platform can distort.

4: Social commerce is no longer optional

Media buying at scale has become increasingly automated. The lever that large brands still fully control is creative, and most are not pulling it hard enough.

Apparel accounts for 30-35% of all TikTok Shop transactions globally (Social Commerce Club). The brands that treated it seriously early are now running creator ecosystems that generate content, affiliate revenue, and community at a fraction of what paid social costs. The window is still open, but it's narrowing.

What's inside

Peak Performance brings together Velstar specialists across paid social, affiliates, design, SEO, email, data, and web development, each going deep on what actually moves the needle for sports and apparel brands right now. Along the way, you will find case studies from **Hearts FC, Up & Running and Castore**, showing you what good looks like in practice.

If you want to know where your eCommerce performance is leaking and what to do about it, let's get into it...

Author:

Kieran S-Lawler

Director of Marketing, Velstar





02:

Paid Social: *Measurement That Moves with You*

Meta has changed the rules again. If your reporting still looks the same as it did six months ago, you are almost certainly looking at the wrong numbers.

In early 2026, Meta overhauled its attribution framework in ways that caused significant reporting shifts across eCommerce. The core change: click-through attribution for website conversions now counts only genuine link clicks.

Likes, shares, saves and other social interactions no longer count as click-through conversions. Instead, Meta moved those interactions into a renamed category called 'engage-through attribution', previously known as 'engaged-view attribution'. Alongside this, Meta shortened the video engaged-view window from ten seconds down to five, reflecting how quickly consumers are now converting through Reels content.

On the surface, this sounds like a tidying exercise. In practice, it caused meaningful discrepancies in Ads Manager reporting for brands that had not updated their attribution settings, exposing something more fundamental: how dependent most brands still are on platform-reported numbers that Meta can and does change without much warning.

Attribution Is a Moving Target. Your Measurement Can't Be.

The reason Meta made this change matters as much as the change itself. For years, Meta counted all click types toward click-through conversions. Third-party tools like Google Analytics and Triple Whale counted only link clicks. The result was a persistent gap between what Meta reported and what every other tool showed, eroding confidence and making cross-channel budget decisions significantly harder.

Meta's update was designed to close that gap. The recommendation from Meta is clear: **use engage-through attribution to capture the full value of social interactions**, particularly the high-value behaviours unique to social platforms, shares, saves, and the kind of Reels engagement that drives purchase within seconds of attention.

For sports and apparel brands, the practical implication is this: **if you are not yet running engage-through attribution alongside your click-through window, you are missing a meaningful portion of the conversion picture**. Particularly for brands where Reels is a significant acquisition driver, the five-second engaged-view threshold means fast-converting video content is now measurable in ways it was not before.

Meta is now also partnering directly with third-party measurement platforms including Triple Whale and Northbeam, bringing both click and view data into their attribution models. Triple Whale's pixel sits outside the Meta ecosystem. It captures post-purchase data, tracks customer journeys across channels and gives you a performance view that does not shift every time Meta updates its measurement definitions. For brands running across Meta, Google, TikTok and email simultaneously, this triangulation is not optional. Without it, you are crediting or discrediting channels based on whichever platform's model was most recently updated.

The question to ask your team right now: where does your Meta-reported revenue diverge from your actual revenue? If the gap is significant and growing, you have a measurement problem, and you are likely making budget decisions based on it.

Meta Should Be Driving New Revenue. Is It?

For large sports and apparel brands, the risk is that paid social becomes a retention channel dressed up as an acquisition channel. Your existing customers are clicking your ads, converting, and your Return on Ad Spend (ROAS) looks healthy. But you are paying to reach people who would have purchased anyway.

Tightening audience definitions and building proper exclusion lists is not a technical detail. It is a commercial decision. Excluding

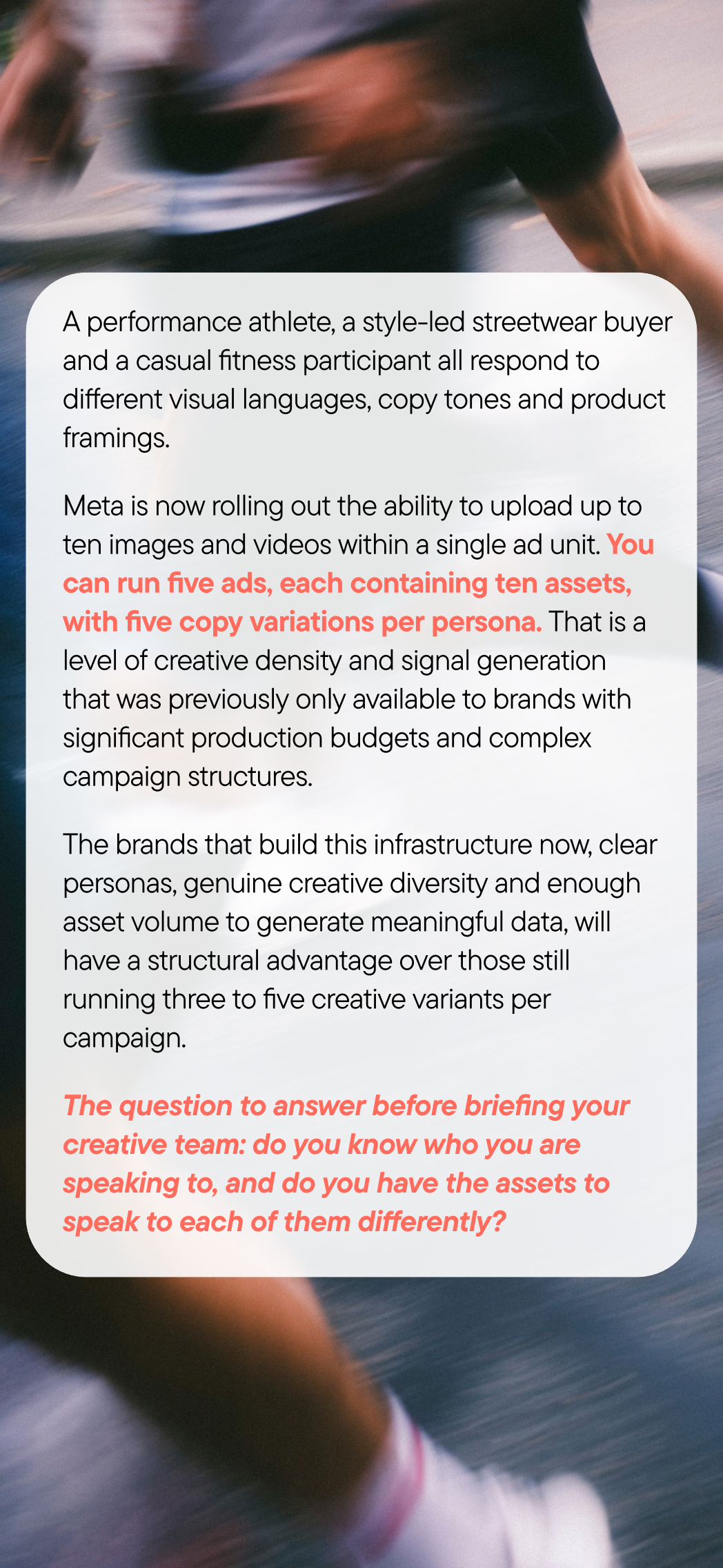
existing customers, recent purchasers and high-frequency site visitors from prospecting campaigns changes what Meta is actually doing with your budget. You stop subsidising loyalty and start funding growth.

For sports and apparel specifically, this matters because your audience segments are often distinct. A customer buying a performance running kit is not the same person buying lifestyle streetwear, even if they are the same individual. **Audience architecture that reflects those differences gives Meta cleaner signals and keeps your prospecting genuinely new.**

Creative Is the Variable Most Brands Are Under-Optimising

Media buying at scale has become increasingly automated. The lever that large brands still fully control is creative, **and most are not pulling it hard enough.**

A proper creative audit does not just look at what performed well. It maps where your coverage has gaps: which customer personas are underserved, which formats are missing, which visual territories are going untested. For sports and apparel brands, the persona landscape is wide.



A performance athlete, a style-led streetwear buyer and a casual fitness participant all respond to different visual languages, copy tones and product framings.

Meta is now rolling out the ability to upload up to ten images and videos within a single ad unit. **You can run five ads, each containing ten assets, with five copy variations per persona.** That is a level of creative density and signal generation that was previously only available to brands with significant production budgets and complex campaign structures.

The brands that build this infrastructure now, clear personas, genuine creative diversity and enough asset volume to generate meaningful data, will have a structural advantage over those still running three to five creative variants per campaign.

The question to answer before briefing your creative team: do you know who you are speaking to, and do you have the assets to speak to each of them differently?

Three Practical Starting Points:

Measurement

Review your attribution settings in Ads Manager and make sure engage-through attribution is active. Audit the gap between your Meta-reported revenue and your actual revenue using a platform-neutral tool. If you are not running a first-party pixel through Triple Whale or an equivalent, implement one before your next major campaign period.

Audience

Build a full exclusion architecture for your prospecting campaigns. Remove existing customers, recent purchasers and high-intent site visitors from your new customer acquisition spend.

Creative

Build a full exclusion architecture for your prospecting campaigns. Remove existing customers, recent purchasers and high-intent site visitors from your new customer acquisition spend.

Map your personas before you brief creative. Identify gaps in your current asset library and build toward the volume and diversity that Meta's multi-asset ad units now make possible.

Author:

Gina McGurk

Head of Paid Social, Velstar





03: Affiliate Marketing: *The Channel Built for Sports & Fitness*

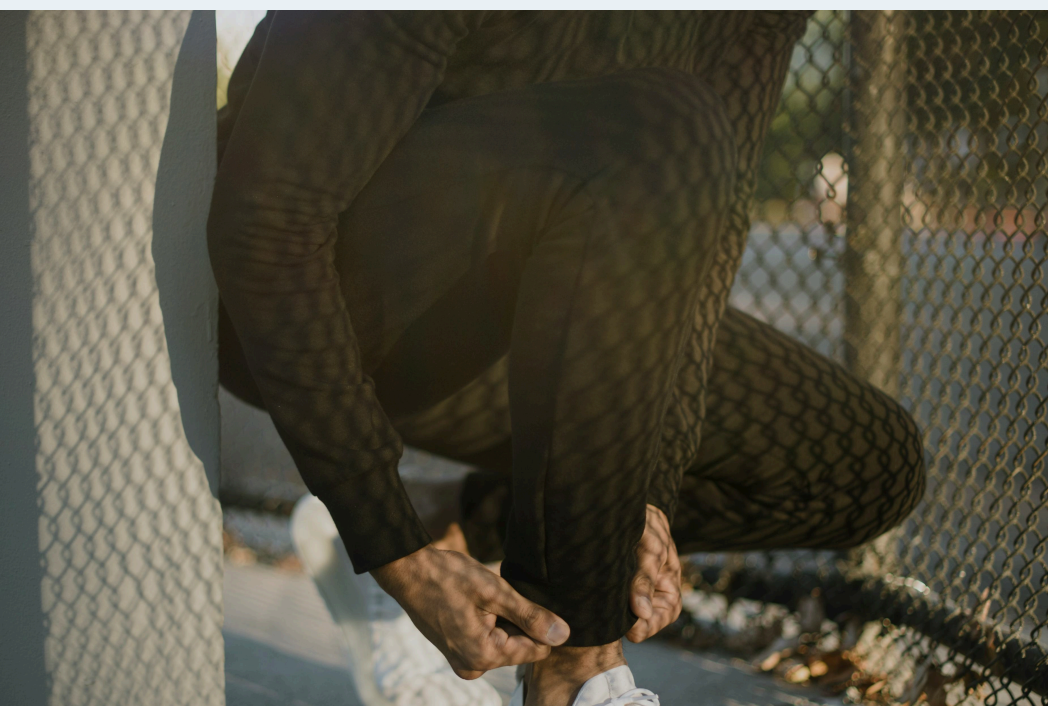
Since Covid, there has been a dramatic increase in affiliate marketing activity across the sports and fitness sector, and yet it remains one of the most underutilised channels available to brands in this space.

With more fitness brands entering the market, established players expanding fast, and hard launches of supplements and fitness products becoming the norm, more and more consumers are turning to trusted voices for guidance. **If your brand has not yet built an affiliate programme, you are missing out on revenue that is already being earned by your competitors.**

Trust Within the Sector

Sports and fitness customers primarily buy on recommendation. They will read reviews before committing to a £180 trainer purchase. They will ask their gym community what protein powder works. They will follow athletes, coaches, physiotherapists and fitness influencers who shape their decisions, particularly as the continuing effects of a cost-of-living crisis have made shoppers more selective about where their money goes.

Affiliate partners are already inside those conversations. Comparison sites, niche publishers, creators, athletes, performance coaches and training platforms all have audiences actively researching what to buy.



If your brand is showing up where it is needed, it is showing up at the moment of intent. That is a far more strategic position than broad paid targeting that may only reach a fraction of genuinely interested customers.

Pay for What You Receive

Affiliate marketing is built on performance. **Commission per affiliate is triggered on sale rather than on click or impression,** which fundamentally changes the risk profile compared to paid media, where spend goes out upfront and you hope the funnel converts.

For categories with strong repeat purchase, the maths gets sharper. Supplements, nutrition and apparel all have predictable customer lifetime value, which means you can afford a purposeful commission on the first sale because the second, third and fourth are cheaper to win.

Partners Are Plentiful

Sports and fitness offers more partner types than almost any other category. Depending on your brand and audience, the right programme could include review and comparison sites for equipment and supplements, creators across YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, endurance and

training publications, affiliate-enabled apps for nutrition, running and workouts, voucher and loyalty platforms for promotional moments, and charity or event partners around marathons, races and challenges. This breadth means you can build a programme that mirrors how your customers actually research and buy, rather than relying on a single partner type.

Affiliate Marketing Magnifies What You're Already Doing

A well-run affiliate programme amplifies every other investment you make. A new launch, a product drop, a sponsorship moment, a viral creator post: all of it can pull partner activity. If the programme is set up properly, you get results from moments you are already investing in elsewhere, without paying twice.

It also provides a cleaner route into new markets. Local creators and publishers understand their audience better than any paid targeting feed. For international growth, affiliates often deliver traction before paid spend becomes efficient.

What Good Looks Like

A well-run programme is not a network plus a discount code. It is a curated set of partners, a commission structure that protects margin, attribution that does not double-count,

and a calendar that aligns with trading peaks: January resolutions, spring race season, summer, Black Friday.

The leading brands in this sector, Adidas, JD, Gymshark, Alo and Lululemon, are already present across cashback sites like Topcashback, closed user groups like Student Beans, and influencer partnerships on Instagram and TikTok. All of it is affiliate marketing. Done well, it sits comfortably alongside paid, organic and retention as an essential part of a brand's commercial infrastructure.

Author:

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Affiliate Marketing Manager, Velstar



Want to know which channels are right
for your brand? Let's talk.



04: Design & UX: *Where Performance Begins*

Sports and fitness brands invest heavily in visual identity, and rightly so, but **aesthetics alone do not convert.** Page load speed, navigation clarity, product discovery and checkout friction are all design problems with direct revenue consequences.

Add an additional layer of complexity with products such as performance trainers that commonly come in twelve sizes, four widths and six colourways. Multiply that across a full product catalogue and standard user interfaces can quickly buckle. **When product discovery breaks down, so does conversion.**

The Design and UX Shifts Sports Brands Can't Ignore

The digital commerce experience in sport and fitness has moved quickly over the last two years. **Mobile-first is no longer a preference**; your audience browses between sessions, shops post-workout and engages with content on the go. A storefront that is not genuinely built for smaller screens rather than just responsive is losing sales before customers ever reach product pages.



Video and motion have become baseline.

Static imagery no longer does the job for performance sportswear and equipment. Customers expect to see products in motion: how a jacket moves during a sprint, how a training shoe performs on different surfaces, how resistance bands handle load. Brands that have integrated short-form video into product pages are seeing measurable lifts in time on page and conversion.

Social proof has also become a design element, not a marketing afterthought. User-generated content, athlete endorsements and customer reviews no longer sit on standalone pages. The top-performing brands have woven this content directly into the buying journey, from collection to product to cart. Page load time, meanwhile, is not just a technical concern separate from design. Heavy, unoptimised assets and bloated page structures slow sites down in ways that directly degrade experience and conversion.

The UX Friction Points That Cost Sports Brands Money

Across sports and fitness storefronts, the same friction points appear consistently. A size guide buried on a separate page, or a variant selector that does not update product imagery in real time, introduces exactly the kind of uncertainty that pushes a customer to abandon their purchase. Clear, intuitive variant selectors with contextual sizing information, presented at the highest-intent moment in the journey, reduce this friction directly.

Subscription options are another area where many brands leave revenue on the table. Sports nutrition and supplements have strong subscription potential, yet most storefronts present these options as an afterthought.

Surfacing subscription pricing and benefits prominently makes upgrading effortless rather than optional.

For premium sportswear brands, **trust signals must match the price point.** In-depth material specifications, manufacturing standards, athlete partnerships and independent testing all close the gap between a browser and a buyer. Navigation architecture is equally important: many customers shop by activity, gender or goal rather than product type, and a site built around internal logic rather than customer behaviour will consistently underperform.

Creative Is a Performance Asset

In sports and fitness, customers are not just buying a product. They are buying into an identity, a goal, an aspiration. A runner buying race shoes wants to see themselves running. A gym-goer investing in a training kit wants to feel the performance benefit before paying for it.

Creative quality is directly related to commercial performance in this sector. Aspirational imagery, athlete storytelling and lifestyle content do not just build brands, they close sales. That creative must be consistent across every touchpoint.

High-impact paid social creative driving customers to a product page with poor photography and bare descriptions degrades trust and kills conversions.

The top-performing brands treat every creative asset as a commercial one. They test, measure and iterate with the same discipline they would apply to a pricing change or checkout flow test.

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Case study

Hearts FC



The Client

Heart of Midlothian Football Club, commonly known as Hearts, stands as **the oldest club in Edinburgh**. Competing in the top Scottish division, the club holds the distinction of being the **largest fan-owned club in the United Kingdom** and the third largest club in Scotland.

The Goal

Replacing multiple outdated sites with a unified, scalable solution while **improving user journeys** across all touch points for a seamless and cohesive digital experience.

The Challenge

Relying on outdated and costly legacy technology across multiple fragmented sites created significant operational bottlenecks for the club.

Fragmented digital infrastructure resulted in a poor return on investment and a lack of a seamless experience for supporters.

The Results

+110%
Total Orders

+90%
Total Sales

+51%
Returning
Customer
Rates

“This transition across all sites, especially through the Foundation of Hearts, would not have been possible without the dedication and expertise of Velstar. The transition to Shopify has been transformative, offering an intuitive and more cohesive experience across FC, Direct, the Foundation, and the Tynecastle Park Hotel sites. This shift represents a major leap forward.”

Andrew Brown

Non-Executive Director, Heart of Midlothian FC

[Read the full Hearts FC case study](#)



05: *SEO: The New Search and Discovery Playbook*

Sports and fitness is one of the fastest-growing categories in eCommerce. But customers researching a protein supplement, a training shoe or new kit are not starting on your website. They are starting on Google, asking ChatGPT and scrolling TikTok, often before they have heard of your brand.

By the time they reach your website, the decision is already half made. **The brands that win are not always the ones with the best product. They are the ones that showed up early, made sense fast, and earned enough trust to get the click.**

Search Has Changed. Most Brands Have Not

Search is no longer a single channel. People use Google for intent-driven queries, AI tools to shortlist and compare, and social platforms to validate. Each environment influences the decision differently and rewards different things. **Brands treating search as a single tactic lose ground across all of them.** That shows up in falling organic traffic, rising paid media costs and competitors appearing in places you do not.

You Now Have Two Audiences

Your website has always needed to work for customers. Now it needs to work for AI too.

Large language models crawl the web at a scale most brands do not appreciate. Research shows that for every visitor a traditional Google search sends to a site, AI systems crawl around 80,000 pages. Those systems are constantly deciding whether your brand is worth recommending, and they do not browse the way people do. They parse structure, schema and metadata. If the signals are not there, neither are you.

The human side is no simpler. Sports and fitness customers are sceptical. They compare products, check reviews and validate claims before committing. Your website is the one place you fully control. No algorithm can rewrite it, no platform can suppress it. What you put there, and how clearly you say it, determines whether you earn the sale or hand it to someone who did the work.

Three Disciplines. One System

Getting this right comes down to three things working together.

Content is the foundation. Answer the questions your customers are actually asking, including the follow-ups. AI search is conversational. Large Language Model (LLM) queries average 23 words and the typical dialogue runs over seven minutes. Shallow content that only answers the first question does not get surfaced. Content built around training goals, use cases and outcomes does.

SEO is the structure underneath it. A technically sound site that search engines can crawl, interpret and rank. In competitive categories like supplements, apparel or equipment, solid structural SEO is what turns good content into visible content. Without it, even the best work underperforms.

Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO) is where the next wave of competitive advantage is being built. When a customer asks ChatGPT which protein powder to buy, the answer names a handful of brands. Most brands are not on that list. GEO changes that, making your brand credible, well-structured and citable enough to appear in AI-generated answers before your competitors do.

Organic Visibility Is Your Strongest Long-Term Asset

A brand that ranks well, gets cited by AI and produces content people genuinely trust builds something that compounds over time, adding authority that no ad budget can replicate overnight and no competitor can simply outspend.

In a category where customers are bombarded with performance claims and sponsored posts at every turn, that trust is worth more than most brands realise. Being the brand that shows up consistently, answers questions accurately and gets recommended by AI tools is not just a search advantage. **It is a commercial foundation that becomes harder to displace the longer you build it.**



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06:

Email: *Moving Beyond Campaigns to Lifecycle Revenue*

Email marketing for sports and fitness brands is often undervalued because it is treated as a campaign channel, when in reality it should be a **lifecycle revenue engine**. In categories like supplements, performance apparel or fitness subscriptions, customer behaviour is highly repeat-driven. **People do not just buy once, they build routines.** That fundamentally changes how email should be approached.

The most effective programmes are structured around lifecycle stages rather than one-off sends: attracting new subscribers, converting intent, driving repeat purchase and re-engaging lapsed customers. This creates a system where email supports the entire customer journey, not just short-term sales spikes.

A common issue is overcomplicated or fragmented automation. Multiple flows triggered by similar behaviours, duplicate journeys and legacy logic all lead to inconsistent messaging and poor performance. Simplifying this structure is often the quickest win: consolidating flows and ensuring each has a clear purpose improves both reporting and customer experience.

Converting Intent Efficiently

Abandonment flows covering browse, cart and checkout are typically the highest revenue-driving emails in sports and fitness. Many brands under-optimize them. The best-performing journeys follow a clear progression: reminder, product benefits, then urgency or social proof, rather than repeating the same message. Consistency here directly impacts conversion rates.



Building Repeat Purchase Behaviour

This is where most brands leave money on the table. Products like protein, electrolytes and supplements have natural consumption cycles, yet **replenishment flows are often missing or inactive.** Triggering emails based on expected usage windows, for example 14, 30 or 45 days post-purchase, is one of the most reliable ways to increase customer lifetime value.

Cross-sell is another major lever. Rather than generic recommendations, emails should reflect the customer's goal: performance, recovery or weight management, and introduce complementary products accordingly.

Retention and Re-engagement

Engagement does not stop after purchase. Winback flows, loyalty messaging and community-driven content such as athlete stories, training advice and product education all keep the brand relevant. Inactive subscribers should be managed through sunset flows to protect deliverability and maintain list quality.



The shift is from volume to value. It is not about sending more emails. It is about sending the right email at the right moment in the customer's journey. For sports and fitness brands, where habits and routines drive revenue, email is uniquely positioned to reinforce behaviour. When done well, it becomes less of a marketing channel and more of a performance engine, consistently driving conversion, retention and long-term growth.

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Ready to turn your eCommerce
performance around? Get in touch



07:

Data Analytics: *How Smarter Data Wins*

The UK sports nutrition market is on course to exceed **£1 billion by 2030**. Athletic apparel is growing faster than almost any other retail category. **Yet most brands in this space are making their most important budget decisions based on data that is, at best, incomplete.**

It is not a technology problem. Most sports and supplement brands have more tools than they know what to do with. The issue is that **those tools were never designed to work together.** Each was designed to make its own platform look indispensable.

The Foundation: Privacy-First Data Collection

In health and fitness, your customers are not just buying a product. They are sharing something personal: their training goals, their recovery routines, their body composition targets. The data they leave behind as they browse is more sensitive than it looks, and the regulatory environment around it is only getting stricter.

For supplement and sports apparel brands, **a privacy-first data strategy is not simply a compliance exercise. It is the foundation of customer trust.** Brands like Huel have built their entire positioning around radical transparency, and that extends to how they handle customer data. First-party data collection, properly communicated consent and a clean Customer Data Platform (CDP) are the infrastructure that makes everything downstream both more accurate and more defensible. Treating data privacy as a brand value rather than a legal obligation will prove to be a structural advantage as restrictions tighten further.

Build for What Is Coming, Not What Is Here

Standard browser-based tracking has been deteriorating for several years, and the pace is accelerating. iOS updates, ad blockers and tightening cookie consent requirements have collectively degraded the conversion signals that most sports brands rely on for paid media decisions.

A supplement brand running £40,000 per month in Meta spend could be feeding the algorithm data that reflects only 60 to 70% of actual purchases. The platform optimises against a distorted signal, costs creep up, and the ROAS number in the dashboard quietly decouples from reality. This is not hypothetical. It is exactly what happened to hundreds of DTC brands following the iOS 14.5 update in 2021, and the tracking environment has continued to fragment since.

Server-side tracking addresses this at source, by moving event collection off the browser and on to your own infrastructure. It is more resilient, more accurate and far more durable as a long-term foundation. For sports brands with ambitions to scale media spend, **it is no longer a nice-to-have.**

The Attribution Trap

Every platform claims the sale. That is worth repeating, because it is the source of some of the most expensive budget misallocations in sports and fitness marketing.

Consider how a real customer journey might unfold. A gym-goer discovers your protein brand through a YouTube creator. They visit your site, leave without buying. Days later they see a Meta retargeting ad. A week after that, they Google 'best protein powder for muscle gain' and find you organically, sign up to your email list and convert on a welcome offer four days later. Meta claims the conversion. Google claims the conversion. Your email platform claims it too. Add their reported revenues together and you are looking at three times your actual takings.

In-platform ROAS signals performance. It does not reflect the full picture. The brands that understand this distinction are the ones that scale intelligently. The ones that do not end up pouring budget into whichever channel shouts the loudest.

What Connected Data Actually Reveals

Getting this right means building data pipelines that consolidate every platform into a single, neutral source of truth. From there, the questions that actually shape strategy become answerable.

Which channels are bringing in genuinely new customers, and which are converting people who already knew the brand? For a supplements business with a subscription model, that distinction is worth a fortune.

The channel that drove a first-time buyer's initial visit deserves the credit, not the one that processed their checkout.

The picture that emerges from proper full-funnel modelling is frequently surprising. A sports apparel brand might find that organic TikTok content or influencer seeding drives the majority of new customer traffic, while Paid Search collects those conversions after the decision has already been made elsewhere. **The dashboard says: scale Paid Search. The full-funnel data says: if you cut the content spend that feeds the top, your Paid Search results will follow it down.**

The same analysis surfaces which products attract first-time buyers versus which ones loyal customers return for. A core performance leggings might be your acquisition product. A training accessory might be what drives the second and third order, and therefore most of the margin.



Margins, Not Just Revenue

Revenue by channel looks very different from margin by channel once you factor in returns, checkout discounts, fulfilment costs and customer service overhead. A channel that appears to deliver strong ROAS might be acquiring customers who return product at twice the average rate. A channel that looks expensive in the dashboard might be delivering your highest lifetime value (LTV) cohort.

Custom dashboards that surface margin-adjusted performance by channel, product and customer cohort give growing sports brands the clarity to scale with confidence, not just optimism. The data is already there. The infrastructure to read it clearly is what most brands are still missing, and it is closer than most realise.

Author:

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Case study Castore



C A S T O R E

The Client

Founded in 2015 by brothers Phil and Tom Beahon, Castore is a **global pioneer in premium sportswear** on a mission to bring a new level of performance to the industry through high-quality materials and engineered proportions, delivering **comfort and consistency for elite athletes** and everyday consumers alike. The brand has grown into a long-term partnership with Velstar, focused on driving DTC sales and expanding a growing portfolio of online stores.

The Challenge

As Castore scaled across multiple markets and product lines, the complexity of managing a growing DTC operation required a more sophisticated approach to data, analytics and development.

Building a diverse portfolio of stores demanded robust, reliable infrastructure alongside a clear view of performance across every channel.

The Goal

Drive DTC sales and build a diverse portfolio of online stores capable of supporting Castore's continued international growth, with performance tracking that could match the pace of the business.

The Results

+128%
Revenue

+237%
Transactions

+10%
Conversion
Rate

"With a strong team of Shopify Plus experts, and a commitment to always go above and beyond for their clients, Velstar are the perfect fit for us and are the ultimate embodiment of our Better Never Stops ethos. We look forward to continuing to benefit from their experience and advice as we enter our next stage of growth."

Andrew Birchall

Head of Digital, Castore

[Read the full Castore case study](#)



08: Web Development: *Building for Speed, Scale and Searchability*

In sports and fitness eCommerce, the bar is high. Customers are decisive, brand loyal and increasingly mobile-first. When a product drops, inventory moves fast.

Find out where your eCommerce
performance is falling short. Drop us a line.

When a search returns the wrong result or a page loads slowly, that sale is gone. For brands in this space, **the website is not just a storefront. It is the performance layer between product and purchase.**

Working with some of the UK's most exciting sports and fitness brands, great web development in this sector comes down to three things: integration depth, market precision and resilience by design.

Integration Depth: Don't Just Connect, Engineer

Sports and fitness brands often have sophisticated third-party ecosystems: search and merchandising platforms, mobile apps, loyalty tools and market-specific pricing engines. **The common mistake is treating these as plug and play. They rarely are.**

When integrating tools like advanced search and merchandising platforms into a Shopify theme, the development work goes well beyond API connection. It means understanding how data flows across the customer journey, from the moment a user opens the search bar, through autocomplete suggestions, into collection browsing and down to the product card. **Each of those touchpoints needs to be engineered deliberately, not just wired in.**

Best practice means mapping every customer interaction that will be affected, building fallback mechanisms so that if a third-party service has issues the site continues to function, and ensuring the integration is properly performance-tested before it goes anywhere near a live environment.

Market Precision: Global Brands, Local Experiences

Many sports and fitness brands are growing fast across Europe. That growth brings real complexity: multiple currencies, multiple languages, market-specific product availability and localised pricing. The development challenge is ensuring what a customer in the Netherlands sees is just as accurate and relevant as what a customer in the UK sees, without that complexity creating a performance overhead.

This requires a structured approach to market configuration. Rather than building entirely separate experiences per market, smart architecture consolidates where possible, using shared language indexes for markets with similar needs while keeping dedicated configurations for priority markets where precision matters most. Pricing and availability data needs to flow from the source of truth into whatever search or merchandising layer is in use, ideally on a scheduled, automated basis so it stays current without manual intervention.

A useful principle worth returning to: **plan your data architecture before writing a line of front-end code.** The UI is the easy part.

Getting the right product, at the right price, in the right language to the right customer is the real engineering challenge.

Resilience by Design: Plan for Things Going Wrong

High-performing sites are built with the assumption that something will eventually go wrong. A third-party service may go down. A data feed may fail. A deployment may surface an unexpected issue. In sports and fitness, where peak trading periods are predictable and high stakes, **resilience is not optional.**

This means building feature flags so that new integrations can be switched off without a full rollback. It means configuring failure alerts on automated data processes. It means performance benchmarking before and after any significant change, and having a clear, agreed position on what 'ready to launch' actually looks like, rather than leaving that call to the last minute.

The brands that perform best online are not always the ones with the most features. They are the ones whose sites are fast, accurate and built to keep running when things get complicated.

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Case study

Up & Running



The Client

Up & Running is the **UK's largest independent running-specialist retailer**, operating 30 stores nationwide alongside a growing online presence. The brand provides leading running shoes, apparel and accessories from names including ASICS, Brooks and Garmin. **Community focus** remains central to the business through free gait analysis, weekly runs and award-winning customer service, maintaining its reputation as a trusted expert for runners of all levels.

The Challenge

Up & Running's legacy platform had grown increasingly difficult to manage. The existing tech stack created friction across both the customer experience and internal operations, and was limiting the brand's ability to move at the speed the market required.

The Goal

Migrate to Shopify 2.0 to modernise the storefront, simplify the technology stack and deliver a faster, more convertible online experience that could support continued growth.

The Results

+90%
Revenue

+13%
Sessions

+68%
Conversion
Rate

+68%
Average
Order Value

"Velstar finished the project on time and within the budget. The website figures have continued to reach record levels month on month. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend the team at Velstar if you are looking to improve your website platform or eCommerce offering."

Sarah Staiano

Head of Marketing, Up & Running

[Read the full Up & Running case study](#)



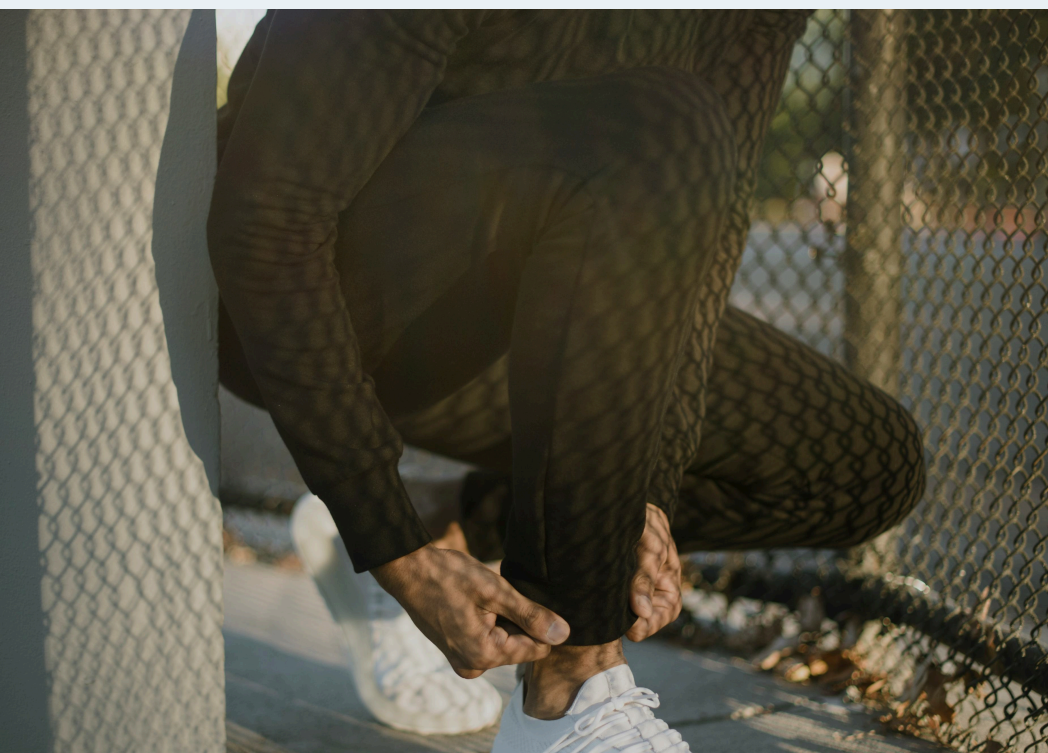
09: *Peak Performance Starts Here*

Sports and fitness is one of the most commercially exciting sectors in eCommerce right now. It is also one of the most demanding. Customers are informed, loyal to brands that earn that loyalty, and quick to move on from those that don't. **The gap between a brand that grows and one that stalls is rarely a product problem. It's almost always a problem with performance infrastructure.**

The chapters in this eBook cover the infrastructure that matters: measurement that reflects reality, not platform reporting; affiliate programmes that reach customers at the moment of intent; design and UX that converts rather than merely impresses; search and discovery that works across Google, AI and social simultaneously; email that builds habits rather than just campaigns; data that tells you what is actually driving margin; and a technical foundation built to handle the demands of a growing, international catalogue.

None of these things operate in isolation. A stronger data foundation makes paid social more efficient. Better attribution makes email strategy sharper. A faster, more technically sound storefront amplifies everything sitting above it. The sum is considerably larger than the individual parts.

What the case studies in this eBook show, from **Hearts FC** consolidating a fragmented digital estate, to **Castore** scaling DTC across multiple markets, to **Up & Running** turning a platform migration into a 90% revenue uplift, is that the right partner and the right infrastructure combination changes what is commercially possible.



If your current growth has plateaued, or your technology is struggling to keep pace with your ambitions, the starting point is usually simpler than it looks: identify where performance is affected, fix the foundations, and build from there.

That is what we do.

If you want to explore what Peak Performance looks like for your brand, get in touch with the Velstar team.

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