SAVE THIS ♡NE

■ THE PLAYBOOK · 09 · SNAPCHAT

How to Run a Snapchat *Audit*

Public Profile, Stories, Spotlight, Retention and Community

Snapchat is a relationship platform and a discovery platform at the same time. This audit separates the people who found you from the people who keep choosing you, and checks what Snap's 2025–2026 originality, insights and monetization changes mean for both.

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Snapchat gets misread when teams treat every public surface like short-form video distribution. Spotlight, Public Stories and the Public Profile do different jobs, and Snapchat now gives creators enough analytics to audit those jobs separately.

Snapchat's creator insights include views, unique viewers, followers gained, favorites, reposts, comments, shares, clicks, screenshots, average view time, total view time and average view rate for Spotlight [1]. Public Stories add replies and per-Snap behavior, while Audience Insights can show follower and demographic information for eligible profiles [2]. In June 2025 Snap added returning viewers, top content, total view time across surfaces and views by traffic source [6].

The platform has also been explicit about originality. In July 2026, Snap said Spotlight recommendations would increasingly reward authentic, human-made creativity and that wholly AI-generated videos would no longer be eligible for recommendation [3]. That moves originality, creator presence and platform-native storytelling out of the taste column and into the audit.

■ AC'S AUDIT RULE

Audit return behavior, not just views. A spike in Spotlight can create discovery; Stories, replies and returning viewers tell you whether a relationship is forming.

BEFORE YOU START RECENT SHIFTS TO ACCOUNT FOR

- Wholly AI-generated videos are no longer eligible for Spotlight recommendation as of July 2026, while content edited with Snapchat's own AI tools stays eligible and carries transparency indicators [3].
- In April 2026 Snap said Spotlight would emphasize original content made with the Snapchat camera and show fewer synthetic AI videos and widely syndicated posts [12].
- Creator Subscriptions began alpha testing in February 2026 with subscriber-only Snaps and Stories, priority replies and ad-free Stories [11], and Snap said in March 2026 that the feature was available to 100% of eligible Snapchatters [9].
- The unified creator monetization program, live since February 2025, pays through ads placed in Stories and in Spotlight videos longer than one minute, with published follower, posting and view thresholds [10].
- Returning Viewers, Top Content, total view time and views by traffic source arrived in creator insights in June 2025, alongside auto-saving Public Stories to the Public Profile [6].
- Snap opened pre-orders for standalone SPECS AR glasses in June 2026 at $2,195, shipping this fall in the US, UK and France, and says developers have already published hundreds of Lenses for them [13].

SECTION 01

Start with the Public Profile

Audit the Public Profile before the content. Check image, bio, description, category where available, website, email, saved Stories, Spotlight posts and Lenses. A creator or business profile can also expose subscriber count, insights, website/email, Story notifications and role management depending on account type [4].

Snap announced in June 2025 that Public Stories would auto-save to Public Profiles so they no longer vanish after 24 hours [6]. Check whether that is switched on for the account, then audit what a newcomer actually sees: a profile full of stale, unedited Stories reads as clutter. Prune or pin with intent.

Ask: If somebody discovers one Spotlight and taps through, does the profile explain who this is and why they should subscribe? The discovery post has one job. The profile has the next.

Pro tip: screenshot the profile and cover the subscriber number. Does the page still make a compelling case to follow?

SECTION 02

Separate Spotlight from Stories

Spotlight is the discovery engine. Public Stories are closer to habit and relationship. Do not judge them on the same scoreboard.

For Spotlight, I focus on average view time, average view rate, shares, reposts, favorites, followers generated and traffic source. For Stories, I focus on unique viewers, total and average view time, screenshots, clicks, replies, drop-off across Snaps and whether people come back.

Snap itself describes Spotlight as a place that highlights entertaining Snaps regardless of who created them [5]. That is exactly why a smaller creator can use Spotlight for discovery while using Stories to build familiarity.

SECTION 03

Audit returning viewers as a loyalty signal

One of my favorite Snapchat metrics is returning viewers because it gets closer to the question I care about: did somebody choose you again?

Snap's returning viewer insight counts viewers who watched a creator's public content on at least 12 days in the last month, and Snap positions it as a signal of repeat interest and audience loyalty [6].

I would chart returning viewers alongside total reach. If reach rises while return behavior stays flat, you may have a discovery machine without a relationship engine.

SECTION 04

Audit retention at the Snap and sequence level

For Spotlight, compare average view rate and average view time by topic, opening, length, talent, sound and format. For Public Stories, look at how viewers move through the sequence. Where do they leave? Which Snap earns a screenshot, reply or click?

Do not only compare the best Story to the worst Story. Compare the first Snap of each Story. Your opening is a packaging decision.

Pro tip: take the top five Spotlight posts and rewrite the first two seconds in three different ways. That becomes the first testing backlog after the audit.

SECTION 05

Audit traffic sources and discovery paths

Snapchat can break views out by sources such as Discover For You, Following, Spotlight, Search, Chat and Profile [6]. Use that to answer a basic strategy question: where is growth actually coming from?

If Search is meaningful, audit captions, hashtags and topic clarity. If Following dominates, the existing audience is doing most of the work. If Spotlight drives profile taps and follows, identify the repeatable creative patterns behind those posts. If Chat shows up, people are sending your Snaps to friends, which is the most Snapchat-native form of distribution there is.

Do not call something "organic growth" without knowing which surface created it.

SECTION 06

Audit creative authenticity and platform fit

Snapchat's creator guidance leans into authenticity, camera tools, public Stories, Spotlight, replies and quoting [7]. I would therefore flag an account that looks like a watermarked dump of content from somewhere else.

That does not mean everything has to be shot inside Snapchat. It means the content should feel native to how people use Snapchat: closer, more conversational, less over-produced when the moment calls for it, and willing to show process or daily life.

Snap research published in 2025 found creators were 1.3x more likely to say they felt comfortable posting about daily life on Snapchat compared with other platforms [8]. Treat that as a creative prompt rather than a mandate: what would this account share here that feels too small, too immediate or too personal for the hero feed elsewhere?

SECTION 07

Audit AI use and syndication exposure

This is the section I would add first for 2026. Snap has now said two things in public. Wholly AI-generated videos are out of Spotlight recommendation, while posts enhanced with Snapchat's own AI creative tools remain eligible and get transparency indicators [3]. And Spotlight will lean toward original content made with the Snapchat camera, with fewer synthetic AI videos and widely syndicated posts [12].

That turns two production habits into distribution risks: generating whole videos with outside AI tools, and cross-posting the same cut to every short-form app. Snap also concedes that "no detection system is perfect" [3], so the absence of a penalty today is weak evidence of safety.

Check: Tag the last 30 Spotlight posts by origin: shot in the Snapchat camera, shot elsewhere and edited natively, straight cross-post, or AI-assisted (and with which tool). Compare average view rate and followers gained by tag.

Check: Which posts carry an AI transparency indicator, and do they perform differently from the account's baseline?

Ask: Is there a human on screen, a real voice, or a real place in the first two seconds? If the answer is no for most of the top posts, the account is exposed.

SENIOR STRATEGIST NOTE

Run a four-week split before you change the whole workflow. Take one recurring format and publish half the episodes as Snapchat-camera originals and half as the usual cross-post. Hold topic and length constant. If the originals do not beat the cross-posts on average view rate and Search or Discover For You share, you have evidence instead of a hunch, and you can decide where the extra production time is worth spending.

SECTION 08

Audit cadence without worshipping cadence

Publishing consistency matters, but I want to know whether frequency is creating more learning and more return behavior, beyond just more inventory.

Snap reported in its 2026 Snappy Awards materials that creators posting daily to Spotlight grew followers more than 10x faster than creators who did not post to Spotlight [9], and repeated that figure in April 2026 while noting that daily Spotlight creators in the US grew more than 70% year over year in Q1 2026 [12]. That is useful directional evidence. It does not justify forcing daily low-quality content, and a correlation from Snap's own data cannot tell you whether posting caused the growth.

Use the audit to identify a sustainable cadence by surface. More Spotlight may support discovery. Stories may need to map more closely to actual daily moments and audience habit. If the account is chasing monetization, cadence also has a hard floor, covered in section 10.

SECTION 09

Audit replies, screenshots, clicks and community signals

Views are cheap context. Replies tell you somebody crossed from watching into conversation. Screenshots often signal utility, identity or "I need to keep this." Clicks show movement. Shares and reposts show transport.

Read Story Replies, not just the count. Tag questions, emotional reactions, requests and repeated phrases. Those qualitative signals should feed the next round of content.

If the same type of Story repeatedly earns replies but never makes it into your planned content calendar, the audit should fix that disconnect. With Creator Subscriptions offering subscribers priority replies [11], reply handling is also becoming part of what a paying audience expects. Note who replies most often; that list is your early subscriber pool.

SECTION 10

Audit monetization readiness and the subscriber tier

Snapchat now has two creator revenue lines worth auditing. The unified monetization program places ads in Stories and, since February 2025, in Spotlight videos longer than one minute [10]. Creator Subscriptions let fans pay monthly for subscriber-only Snaps and Stories, priority replies and an ad-free experience in that creator's Stories, with creators setting their price inside Snap-recommended tiers [11].

When Snap announced the unified program, invitations required at least 50,000 followers, at least 25 posts a month to Saved Stories or Spotlight, posting to Spotlight or Public Stories on at least 10 of the last 28 days, and one of 10 million Snap views, 1 million Spotlight views or 12,000 hours of view time in the last 28 days [10]. Check the current figures and eligible countries in the Creator Hub before you build a plan on them.

Check: Where does the account sit against each threshold today? Which one is the binding constraint: followers, posting days, or views?

Check: How many Spotlight posts run past one minute, and how does their average view rate compare with shorter posts? Length that earns ad eligibility but loses viewers is a bad trade.

Ask: What would a subscriber get that a follower does not? If the honest answer is "the same Stories without ads", the offer is not ready.

SENIOR STRATEGIST NOTE

Build the subscriber offer from evidence in the replies, not from a menu of perks. Pull the 20 most repeated questions or requests from Story Replies over the last 90 days. If at least a handful point to the same deeper need (a full routine, a behind-the-scenes series, early access to a drop), that is the subscriber-only series. Pilot it for four weeks and track subscriber churn alongside returning viewers on the free side.

SECTION 11

Audit Lenses, Chat and the paid hand-off

Snapchat's camera and Chat are distribution surfaces in their own right, and the audit should note where organic work could hand off to paid. Sponsored Snaps arrive in the Chat tab, recipients can reply, and the brand name pulls automatically from the Public Profile [15]. A weak profile therefore weakens the ad as well.

Check: Does the account own or feature any Lenses on its profile, and do Spotlight posts made with them perform differently? List them with use counts if available.

Check: Which organic Stories already earn replies at a high rate? Those are the strongest candidates for a Sponsored Snap test, because the format is built around a reply.

Check: Is someone assigned to read and answer replies to paid Chat messages, or will they sit unanswered?

Watch SPECS without overinvesting. Snap opened pre-orders at $2,195 in June 2026, with shipping expected this fall in the US, UK and France [13], and it has been building Snap OS tools for multimodal AI Lenses since 2025 [14]. For most creator accounts this is a horizon item: note whether the account has a Lens-building partner and park the rest until there is an installed base worth reaching.

SECTION 12

End with Stop / Start / Continue / Test

STOP: recycled creative that feels imported, wholly AI-generated videos, long openings, dead Story sequences, output with no clear surface role.

START: return-viewer tracking, traffic-source analysis, Story reply tagging, stronger profile conversion, origin tagging for AI and cross-posts, a monetization threshold tracker.

CONTINUE: formats that earn both discovery and return behavior.

TEST: opening hooks, Spotlight length (including over one minute), Story sequencing, posting windows, captions, creator-camera tools, a subscriber-only series and CTA language.

CREATIVE SPECS

Creative specs and brand consistency on Snapchat

Snapchat is a vertical, camera-first platform, and the audience opens it to see people and moments, not brand assets. The work is deciding where your visual system shows up and where it gets out of the way. Covers, title cards and paid units can carry the full template. Inside a Story or a Spotlight, the system should feel like a light editor's mark on real footage.

Snap's ad-format page lists 9:16 at 720x1280 for Sponsored Snaps, Single Image or Video, Story and Collection ads, and specifies 1080x1920 for a Sponsored Snap's branded chat background [15]. As a working practice, I produce everything at 1080x1920 so one master covers organic and paid. Snap's page does not publish pixel safe zones for organic Snaps, so verify every template in the in-app preview before it ships.

ASSET	SIZE / RATIO	SAFE ZONE	PRO TIP
Spotlight video	9:16; produce at 1080x1920	No official pixel figure published; keep headline and captions in the center band, clear of top UI and bottom caption/action area, and check in preview	Open on the claim or the scene, not a logo. Keep any on-screen hook to one short line in large type, burn in captions for sound-off viewing, and check the frame in preview with the caption and action buttons showing.
Public Story title card	9:16; 1080x1920	Same as Spotlight; leave the top strip clear for the profile name and progress bar	Use your cover template here and only here: one statement, set large, with strong contrast. Place any series name or handle below the top UI so the profile name and progress bar do not cover it.
Public Story series Snaps	9:16; 1080x1920	Center band	Add a small, consistent position marker (for example "2 / 5") so viewers know how long the sequence is. Keep text to one idea per Snap and let the footage carry the rest.
Sponsored Snap	9:16; 720x1280 listed; under 10 sec recommended; brand name 25 characters, headline up to 34 [15]	Snap adds a SPONSORED label; keep key type away from the top edge	Lead frame should make sense without sound and in under two seconds. One message, one CTA; save launch-style emphasis for real launches so it keeps its weight.
Branded chat background (Sponsored Snap)	1080x1920 image; chat message up to 500 characters [15]	Keep the center clear for chat bubbles	Keep the background simple so the chat message stays readable. A logo here should be large enough to read at full-screen size; if it competes with the message, drop it.

ASSET	SIZE / RATIO	SAFE ZONE	PRO TIP
Story / Single Video ad	9:16; 720x1280 listed; 3-180 sec; headline 34 characters [15]	Center band	Design the cover frame as a thumbnail: one image, one short line. Test two openings rather than two color treatments.
AR Filter	Static PNG 945x2048; animated GIF 720x1560, 1-3 sec [15]	Logo top left or top right, below UI elements [15]	Use a simple icon or logo in a single solid color that reads on both light and dark camera scenes. Test it over real footage, not a flat mockup.
Profile image	Square icon; verify crop in app	Center the mark	Use a simplified mark or face, not a full wordmark, and check that it is legible at avatar size in Search results and Chat.

Your brand decides the fonts, colors and voice. On Snapchat, the job is to turn those choices into a small set of repeatable moves that survive a fast thumb.

Template: Build one cover template for Story title cards and Spotlight opening frames, and one lighter overlay template for the Snaps in between. Fix where the hook, any series marker and captions sit, then check both templates in the in-app preview with UI showing.

Type: One display style for hooks and one body style for captions and labels is enough. Set a minimum size you have tested on a small phone, and keep on-screen text to a few words per Snap.

Palette: Pick two or three core colors and one accent for numbers and CTAs. Camera footage changes behind your text, so test every pairing over bright and dark scenes; a contrast checker (WCAG AA asks for at least 4.5:1 for normal-size text) or a solid panel behind text solves most problems.

Avatar and logo: Use the same profile image across Snapchat and your other platforms so people who find you in Search or Chat recognise you. Set a minimum logo size and leave the logo off in-feed frames; the Public Profile and Sponsored Snap brand name already identify you [15].

Series markers: Name each recurring Story or Spotlight format and give it one fixed cue: the same opening line, sticker position or color block. Returning viewers should recognise the series in the first second.

Voice by surface: Write short guidance for each surface. Profile bio: who you are and why to subscribe, in plain words. Stories: conversational, first person, close to a message to a friend. Spotlight: a fast hook and a clear payoff. Story Replies and Chat: personal, quick, never copied and pasted. Sponsored Snaps: one specific promise, kept within the brand name and headline limits [15].

Accessibility: Burn in captions on talking Snaps, keep text large and away from the edges, avoid color-only meaning, and do not rely on fast-flashing text to carry information.

Restraint: Heavy design on every frame makes content look imported, which works against Snap's push toward original, camera-native posts [12]. Keep consistency in the cover, the series marker and the voice, and let most Snaps look like they were filmed by a person.

■ PRO TIP

For your next four Stories, alternate a fully templated title card with a plain opening Snap (a face to camera with one caption line). Compare completion of the first Snap and replies per Story. If the plain opener matches or beats the template, move the template to Spotlight covers and paid units only.

■ DO	■ DON'T
+ Shoot talking Snaps in the Snapchat camera and add your overlay afterwards, so the post reads as native	– Run every Snap through the full template; heavy design on every frame looks imported
+ Use the full cover template only on the first Snap of a Story or the opening frame of a Spotlight	– Use AI-generated video as the main footage of a Spotlight post
+ Keep hooks, captions and CTAs in the center band and check them in preview	– Put light text over bright footage without a panel, or rely on color alone for meaning
+ Use one accent color for numbers and CTAs, and test it over real footage	– Shrink a full wordmark into the profile image or an AR Filter until it is unreadable
+ Add position markers on multi-Snap explainers so viewers see the sequence length	– Exceed the Sponsored Snap brand name or headline limits and let the platform truncate them

Copyable audit checklist

- ☐ **Profile:** Does the Public Profile explain who the account is and why someone should subscribe?
- ☐ **Saved Stories:** Is auto-save on, and does the saved Story shelf help a newcomer or clutter the page?
- ☐ **Surface roles:** Have I separated Spotlight, Public Stories and Profile content by job?
- ☐ **Discovery:** Which traffic sources are actually creating new viewers and followers?
- ☐ **Retention:** Which posts win on average view time and average view rate?
- ☐ **Returning viewers:** Is repeat viewing rising alongside reach?
- ☐ **Stories:** Where do viewers drop, reply, click or screenshot?
- ☐ **Originality:** Does the content feel human, native and meaningfully original?
- ☐ **AI and syndication:** Have I tagged recent posts by origin, and is any wholly AI-generated or straight cross-posted content still in the mix?

- ☐ **Follower conversion:** Which Spotlight posts create profile visits or followers?
- ☐ **Community:** What recurring questions and reactions show up in replies?
- ☐ **Cadence:** Is frequency generating better learning, not just more posts?
- ☐ **Monetization:** Where does the account sit against each program threshold, and what would a subscriber get that a follower does not?
- ☐ **Lenses, Chat and paid:** Which Stories are Sponsored Snap candidates, and who answers replies to paid messages?
- ☐ **Creative specs & consistency:** Are your own templates built at 9:16, checked in preview against the safe zones above, and kept light enough to feel native?
- ☐ **Testing:** What 3-5 creative hypotheses should we test next?
- ☐ **Actions:** What will we Stop / Start / Continue / Test?

Audit scorecard

AUDIT AREA	WHAT I'M CHECKING	SCORE (1–5)	ACTION / EVIDENCE
Public Profile	Clear positioning, profile assets, saved Stories and subscriber conversion		
Spotlight discovery	Views, traffic sources, followers, shares, reposts		
Spotlight retention	Average view time and average view rate		
Story health	Unique viewers, sequence drop-off, replies, screenshots, clicks		
Returning viewers	Repeat viewing and loyalty trend		
Originality	Human-made, native creative and creator presence		
AI and syndication	Origin mix of recent posts, AI transparency indicators, cross-post share		
Audience/ community	Replies, interests, demographics and recurring signals		
Monetization readiness	Distance to program thresholds, long Spotlight performance, subscriber offer		
Lenses, Chat and paid	Lens assets, Sponsored Snap candidates, reply ownership		

AUDIT AREA	WHAT I'M CHECKING	SCORE (1–5)	ACTION / EVIDENCE
Creative specs and consistency	9:16 templates, preview-checked safe zones, captions, contrast and native feel		
Testing discipline	Documented hypotheses by surface and creative pattern		

DECISIONS

How I'd turn this into action

Build a two-column decision page: DISCOVERY on the left, RELATIONSHIP on the right. Put every winning format into one or both columns. Then choose three tests designed to move a viewer from the left side to the right side. That is the Snapchat growth story I care about.

Add a narrow third column for REVENUE. Only formats that already earn return behavior belong there, because both the ad program and subscriptions pay off on people who come back. If a format sits in DISCOVERY alone, it is not ready to carry a subscriber offer.

SOURCES

Official sources and creator resources

Platform features change quickly. This Playbook was checked against official guidance available in October 2026. Verify feature availability inside your own account before treating any tool or metric as universal.

[1] Snapchat Support: How do I view Content Insights for my Public Profile? · https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-gb/articles/7012363805332-How-do-I-view-Content-Insights-for-my-Public-Profile

[2] Snapchat Support: Viewing and Understanding Analytics · https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-us/articles/24892451593108-Viewing-and-Understanding-Analytics

[3] Snap Newsroom: Rewarding Authentic Creativity on Spotlight (July 31, 2026) · https://newsroom.snap.com/rewarding-authentic-creativity-on-spotlight

[4] Snapchat Support: What features come with a Creator Account on Snapchat? · https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-gb/articles/7012318435476-What-features-come-with-a-Creator-Account-on-Snapchat

[5] Snapchat Support: What is Spotlight? · https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-gb/articles/7012271311892-What-is-Spotlight

[6] Snap Newsroom: Empowering Content Creation with New Tools, Features, and Insights (June 12, 2025) · https://newsroom.snap.com/empowering-content-creation-with-new-tools

[7] Snapchat Support: Tips for Content Creators · https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-us/articles/7012329698964-Tips-for-Content-Creators

[8] Snapchat for Business: Decoding the Creator Mindset · https://forbusiness.snapchat.com/blog/what-creators-want-mindset

[9] Snap Newsroom: Introducing the Winners of the 2026 Snappy Awards Show (March 31, 2026) · https://newsroom.snap.com/snappys-awards-winners-2026

[10] Snap Newsroom: Snapchat Introduces New, Unified Monetization Program for Creators (December 16, 2024) · https://newsroom.snap.com/snapchat-new-creator-monetization

[11] Snap Newsroom: Snapchat Launches Creator Subscriptions (February 17, 2026) · https://newsroom.snap.com/snapchat-launches-creator-subscriptions

[12] Snap Newsroom: Still Spotlight, Still Real (April 2, 2026) · https://newsroom.snap.com/still-spotlight-but-still-real

[13] Snap Newsroom: Introducing SPECS Augmented Reality Glasses (June 16, 2026) · https://newsroom.snap.com/introducing-specs-augmented-reality-glasses

[14] Snap Newsroom: Snap to Launch New Lightweight, Immersive Specs in 2026 (June 10, 2025) · https://newsroom.snap.com/launch-specs-2026

[15] Snapchat for Business: Ad Formats · https://forbusiness.snapchat.com/advertising/ad-formats

OFFICIAL CREATOR RESOURCES TO FOLLOW: Snapchat Creator Hub · @OfficialSnapchat on YouTube

■ ABOUT

About the author

Ashley “AC” Trybula is an award-winning content and audience executive, journalist and media leader working across media, culture, social and the creator economy. Her work spans content strategy, audience development, editorial leadership, video, original programming and digital distribution. She writes about audience growth, social media, digital culture, media leadership and the business of attention.

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