

20

Opportunity Paths 2026

AI & Creator Economy

Choose a direction. Learn the work.
Build something you can show.

20

SPECIALIST ROLES

1

ROLE TO FOCUS ON

5

STEP ACTION PLAN

A practical field guide for the AI era

What each role does. What to learn. Where to start.

Original learning advice and portfolio exercises by Temi.

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Look for a paid problem. Then choose your path.

A NOTE FROM TEMI

I have been earning online since 2019. My advice is to look beyond broad labels and understand the work a business needs done. You may already have experience you can apply in a more specialised direction.

WHY THESE 20

This guide focuses on AI production, creator-led growth, business operations and AI implementation. It includes emerging freelance specialisms and established roles with a relevant niche. It is an editorial shortlist, not a statistical top-20 ranking.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

Upwork's August 2026 report records growth in AI video contracts and strong AI automation searches. Employer and client postings provide additional examples of paid roles. A search trend is not a hire, and one listing does not prove market-wide growth.

USE THE GUIDE WELL

Read each role for its buyer, paid outcome, learning needs and sample project. Shortlist three, then review ten current briefs before committing. Check location restrictions, budgets and required experience.

A REALISTIC STARTING POINT

Opportunity does not mean easy entry or guaranteed high income. The readiness labels are editorial guidance. Several roles need existing professional experience; learning a tool alone is not enough.

Choose your direction.

- 01 AI Video Creator
- 02 AI Avatar Video Producer
- 03 AI Visual Designer
- 04 Performance Creative Strategist
- 05 Social Media Content Strategist
- 06 Affiliate Program Manager
- 07 TikTok Shop Affiliate Manager
- 08 Creator Partnerships Manager
- 09 Lifecycle Email Marketing Specialist
- 10 GEO / AI Search Specialist
- 11 Online Business Operations Manager
- 12 Community Manager
- 13 CRM Automation Specialist
- 14 AI Workflow Automation Specialist
- 15 AI Agent Developer
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- 17 AI Full-Stack Developer
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01 / AI Video Creator

CREATIVE / PORTFOLIO FIRST

Who pays and why: Brands, agencies and creators pay for finished videos made with AI-generated footage. The value is coherent storytelling, visual consistency and a usable final edit.

What to learn: Storyboarding, visual prompting, continuity, sound, editing and rights checks.

Build proof: Create a 30-second fictional product film with a shot list, consistent product appearance and a clean final edit.

Search: AI video creator; AI video generation | Evidence [1]

02 / AI Avatar Video Producer

CREATIVE / PRODUCTION SPECIALISM

Who pays and why: Educators and businesses need presenter-led lessons, demos and multilingual videos. This specialist manages scripts, authorised avatars, pronunciation and production quality.

What to learn: Avatar tools, script adaptation, audio cleanup, captions, consent and localisation QA.

Build proof: Produce a short lesson using your own likeness or an authorised stock avatar; include captions and a pronunciation checklist.

Search: HeyGen specialist; AI avatar video producer | Evidence [2]

03 / AI Visual Designer

CREATIVE / DESIGN FOUNDATION

Who pays and why: Marketing teams buy campaign images and product concepts. Generating an image is only part of the work: the designer must preserve brand and product accuracy.

What to learn: Art direction, composition, image generation, retouching and brand systems.

Build proof: Build six campaign visuals for one fictional product and explain how you maintained consistency.

Search: AI image creator; generative AI designer | Evidence [1]

04 / Performance Creative Strategist

CREATIVE / MARKETING EXPERIENCE

Who pays and why: Brands and agencies need ad concepts that can be tested. This role connects audience research, creative briefs and performance findings to the next set of ads.

What to learn: Customer research, direct-response copy, creative briefing, testing and ad metrics.

Build proof: Write three distinct ad concepts for one offer, with hooks and a testing plan. Label any sample results as hypothetical.

Search: creative strategist; performance creative strategist | Evidence [3]

05 / Social Media Content Strategist

CREATIVE / STRATEGY + PRODUCTION

Who pays and why: Creators and businesses need a repeatable content operation. The specialist turns audience questions into scripts, publishing plans and production briefs, often using AI.

What to learn: Audience research, short-form scripting, repurposing, content planning and analytics.

Build proof: Turn one original tutorial into five platform-specific scripts and a weekly production plan.

Search: social media content strategist; AI content creator | Evidence [4]

06 / Affiliate Program Manager

GROWTH / COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCE

Who pays and why: Businesses pay someone to recruit, activate and support partners who refer customers. Owning the partner pipeline and sales contribution matters more than distributing links.

What to learn: Partner recruitment, onboarding, attribution, commission tracking and commercial communication.

Build proof: Build a sample partner recruitment plan, onboarding sequence and performance dashboard using fictional data.

Search: affiliate marketing manager; affiliate program manager | Evidence [5]

07 / TikTok Shop Affiliate Manager

GROWTH / PLATFORM SPECIALISM

Who pays and why: Consumer brands need creator-led product sales. This role manages creator outreach, samples, collaboration follow-up and affiliate performance within TikTok Shop.

What to learn: Creator selection, product briefs, sample logistics, shop analytics and campaign operations.

Build proof: Design a launch plan for one product: creator criteria, sample tracker, brief and reporting template.

Search: TikTok Shop affiliate manager | Evidence [6]

08 / Creator Partnerships Manager

GROWTH / RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCE

Who pays and why: Brands and agencies hire this specialist to source creators and manage collaborations. Unlike affiliate-only work, deals may centre on content deliverables and usage rights.

What to learn: Creator research, negotiation, contracts, licensing, briefs and delivery tracking.

Build proof: Prepare a creator shortlist and collaboration brief, with a deliverables tracker and proposed usage terms.

Search: creator partnerships manager; UGC partnerships manager | Evidence [7]

09 / Lifecycle Email Marketing Specialist

GROWTH / MARKETING + SYSTEMS

Who pays and why: Online brands pay for customer journeys that improve repeat engagement and purchases. The work includes onboarding, segmentation and post-purchase automation.

What to learn: Email strategy, copy, segmentation, deliverability, consent and tools such as Klaviyo.

Build proof: Map a welcome and post-purchase journey, write three emails and document triggers and exclusions.

Search: Klaviyo specialist; lifecycle email marketing specialist | Evidence [8]

10 / GEO / AI Search Specialist

GROWTH / SEO FOUNDATION

Who pays and why: Businesses want their information discoverable in AI search. This emerging role combines technical SEO, useful source content and repeatable visibility measurement.

What to learn: Crawlability, structured data, entity consistency, content research and measurement.

Build proof: Audit a small website and document a baseline, five fixes and a repeatable AI-search test. Do not promise recommendations.

Search: GEO specialist; AI SEO specialist; AEO specialist | Evidence [9]

11 / Online Business Operations Manager

OPERATIONS / MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

Who pays and why: Founder-led businesses need someone to own delivery systems, team accountability and recurring workflows. This is a move from task support into operational responsibility.

What to learn: Process mapping, SOPs, project management, team coordination and operational reporting.

Build proof: Design an onboarding-to-delivery system for a fictional agency, including owners, handoffs and a weekly dashboard.

Search: operations manager; online business manager | Evidence [10]

12 / Community Manager

OPERATIONS / PEOPLE + PROGRAMMES

Who pays and why: Membership businesses and educators need organised onboarding, events, discussions and member support. A platform niche such as Skool makes the offer more specific.

What to learn: Community moderation, onboarding, event operations, member feedback and engagement reporting.

Build proof: Create a 30-day member journey, weekly event plan and escalation policy for a sample learning community.

Search: Skool community manager; online community manager | Evidence [11]

13 / CRM Automation Specialist

OPERATIONS / SYSTEMS PRACTICE

Who pays and why: Service businesses need reliable lead follow-up and booking systems. A specialist connects forms, pipelines, reminders and reporting rather than simply entering CRM data.

What to learn: CRM design, workflows, integrations, consent, deduplication and testing.

Build proof: Build a demo enquiry-to-appointment pipeline with a reminder, opt-out and failed-automation alert.

Search: GoHighLevel specialist; CRM automation specialist | Evidence [12]

14 / AI Workflow Automation Specialist

AI SYSTEMS / TECHNICAL PRACTICE

Who pays and why: Businesses pay to connect tools and reduce manual handoffs. The deliverable is a monitored workflow with clear rules, not a collection of AI prompts.

What to learn: Process discovery, APIs, n8n or Make, structured outputs, error handling and access control.

Build proof: Automate a sample enquiry into a categorised draft response and CRM entry, with human approval and a failure log.

Search: AI automation expert; AI workflow automation | Evidence [1]

15 / AI Agent Developer

AI SYSTEMS / SOFTWARE FOUNDATION

Who pays and why: Clients need agents that use tools to complete bounded tasks. The developer defines permissions, tests behaviour and adds approval points before consequential actions.

What to learn: Programming, tool calling, retrieval, evaluations, security and observability.

Build proof: Build a support agent over sample documents that cites sources and escalates requests it cannot resolve.

Search: AI agent developer; agentic AI developer | Evidence [13]

16 / Voice AI Developer

AI SYSTEMS / INTEGRATION EXPERIENCE

Who pays and why: Service businesses commission phone assistants for enquiries, qualification and booking. Good systems handle interruptions, errors and transfers to a person.

What to learn: Telephony APIs, speech systems, dialogue design, CRM integration and privacy.

Build proof: Build a demo receptionist using fictional details, with appointment checks and a reliable human-transfer path.

Search: voice AI developer; AI receptionist developer | Evidence [14]

17 / AI Full-Stack Developer

AI SYSTEMS / EXPERIENCED ENGINEERING

Who pays and why: Companies need complete AI-enabled applications, including interfaces, accounts, data storage and dependable model integration. A generated prototype is only the beginning.

What to learn: Frontend and backend development, databases, authentication, testing and model cost control.

Build proof: Build a document assistant with sign-in, source citations, usage limits and deletion controls.

Search: AI full-stack developer; full-stack AI engineer | Evidence [1]

18 / AI Enablement Trainer

AI ADOPTION / TEACHING + DOMAIN EXPERIENCE

Who pays and why: Organisations hire trainers to help staff use AI in real workflows. The work combines practical instruction, role-specific exercises and adoption support.

What to learn: Facilitation, workflow analysis, safe AI use, learning design and adoption measurement.

Build proof: Design a 60-minute workshop for one team, with a before-and-after task exercise and a follow-up checklist.

Search: AI enablement trainer; corporate generative AI trainer | Evidence [15]

19 / AI & E-Learning Instructional Designer

AI ADOPTION / LEARNING DESIGN

Who pays and why: Education businesses and organisations need complex material turned into usable courses. This role designs learning; it differs from delivering live training.

What to learn: Learning objectives, course structure, assessment, accessibility and authoring tools.

Build proof: Convert a sample expert interview into a short module with an activity, quiz and accessible lesson outline.

Search: instructional designer AI e-learning | Evidence [16]

20 / Mobile App QA Tester

PRODUCT / TESTING FOUNDATION

Who pays and why: App teams need documented testing across devices and user journeys. AI-built products still need checks for broken flows, usability and regressions.

What to learn: Test cases, bug reproduction, device coverage, accessibility and regression testing.

Build proof: Test a demo app and create a concise report with reproducible steps, severity and screenshots.

Search: mobile app tester; mobile QA tester | Evidence [1]

One role. One useful first project.

1 / CHOOSE A PATH THAT USES YOUR STRENGTHS

Creative background? Explore video, visuals or creative strategy. Relationship and sales experience? Consider affiliate or creator partnerships. Operations experience? Investigate business operations or CRM systems. Coding experience? Consider agents, voice AI or full-stack development.

2 / VALIDATE BEFORE BUYING A COURSE

Read ten recent briefs for your chosen role. Note the buyer, deliverables, budget, location and experience required. Save recurring requirements. A title appearing online is not enough; check whether the work suits you.

3 / LEARN THROUGH DELIVERY

Use official product tutorials and documentation first. Search YouTube for a specific task, then practise it yourself. Learn the underlying craft too: editing, negotiation, systems design or teaching. Verify AI-generated advice.

4 / PRODUCE A SMALL, HONEST PORTFOLIO

Complete the starter project, show your decisions and document how you checked the result. Use fictional or authorised data. Do not invent client work, revenue or testimonials.

5 / TEST A NARROW OFFER

Example: "I build an enquiry-to-booking workflow for service businesses." Define the deliverable, timeline, revisions and support. Review client quality and scope before agreeing a price. Improve your offer from real feedback.

Learn it. Build it. Put it to work.

JOIN MY NEWSLETTER

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COMMUNITY

Explore the Build with AI community →

YOUR NEXT STEP

Pick one role, save five relevant briefs and start one sample. You do not need to learn all twenty.

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Research behind the shortlist

[1] Upwork: August 2026 hiring insights

Market signal for profiles 1, 3, 14, 17 and 20. AI creative contract growth, automation search interest and mobile testing momentum. Published 15 September; this is platform-specific, not a global census.

[2] Client brief: HeyGen video generation specialist

Profile 2: example of a paid avatar-video production specialism. Titles vary.

[3] Employer: Phoebe, Creative Strategist

Profile 4: evidence of the role and creative testing responsibilities. This example is on-site, not proof of remote availability.

[4] Client: Social Media Content Strategist & AI Video Creator

Profile 5: a combined strategy and AI content production brief.

[5] Client: Affiliate Marketing Manager

Profile 6: posted 28 September 2026; recruitment, activation and ownership of a partner channel.

[6] Employer: UFactory, TikTok Shop Creator Partnerships

Profile 7: platform-specific affiliate management role.

Links are research references, not promises of open vacancies. Listings can expire. Role descriptions, project ideas and learning recommendations are original editorial guidance; the shortlist is not ranked by pay, competition or hiring volume.

Research behind the shortlist

[7] Employer: Workhorse, UGC & Creator Partnerships Manager

Profile 8: creator relationships, agreements and production partnerships.

[8] Client: Email Marketing Specialist

Profile 9: Klaviyo flows, segmentation and integration. Listing budgets vary greatly; not a pay benchmark.

[9] Employer: Higglo, GEO Specialist

Profile 10: employer evidence of an emerging AI-search job title.

[10] Client: Operations Manager / Virtual Assistant

Profile 11: operational ownership, processes and team delivery. The advertised budget is low; this demonstrates role existence, not high pay.

[11] Client: Skool Community Manager

Profile 12: a community platform specialism with content responsibilities.

[12] Employer: Magic, GoHighLevel Specialist

Profile 13: CRM platform specialism. Check location and working-hours requirements.

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Research behind the shortlist

[13] Client: Full-Stack AI Agent Developer

Profile 15: agent development brief. Scope and budget require scrutiny; not an income benchmark.

[14] Client: AI automation workflow / receptionist

Profile 16: voice assistant, booking, integrations and human handoff requirements.

[15] Employer: Neurons Lab, AI Enablement Trainer

Profile 18: senior training role with specialist industry requirements, not an entry-level vacancy.

[16] Client: Instructional Designer, AI & E-Learning

Profile 19: digital learning design from mixed source material.

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