



THE Q3
— 2026

Retail Trend & Strategy Guide

Back-to-School, College Move-In & Fall Content Activation Strategies



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Introduction.

Back-to-School content doesn't start when kids go back to school in August, it starts in July when parents are shopping for school supplies. Dorm prep spikes about a week before move-in day.

Search interest for "back to school lunch ideas" and "dorm essentials" historically begins climbing in late June, with peak spikes mid-July through early August*.

On TikTok, #BackToSchool consistently generates billions of views annually, with creator content ramping up 4-6 weeks before retail peak.

Strong Q3 campaigns start well before Q3 arrives. Plan in May, kick-off in June, and launch by July.

This playbook outlines how to:

- Segment Q3 audiences properly
- Activate one product across multiple moments
- Align to social and consumer behavior
- Turn content into omnichannel retail storytelling

Because Q3 isn't just **one campaign**, it's a series of **purchase decisions**.

*(Google Trends, 2023-2025 historical data).

Timing Is the *Strategy*

Historical trend data shows that social interest leads purchase behavior, peaking before key retail moments. Prioritizing sequence over seasonality ensures brands show up at the moment of highest intent.

“High Protein Snacks for Kids”

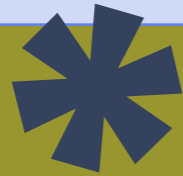
Significantly increases starting mid-summer, correlating with school prep behavior.

“Dorm Organization”

Searches spike 200%+ from baseline between June and August (Google Trends historical index).

“Sunday Reset”

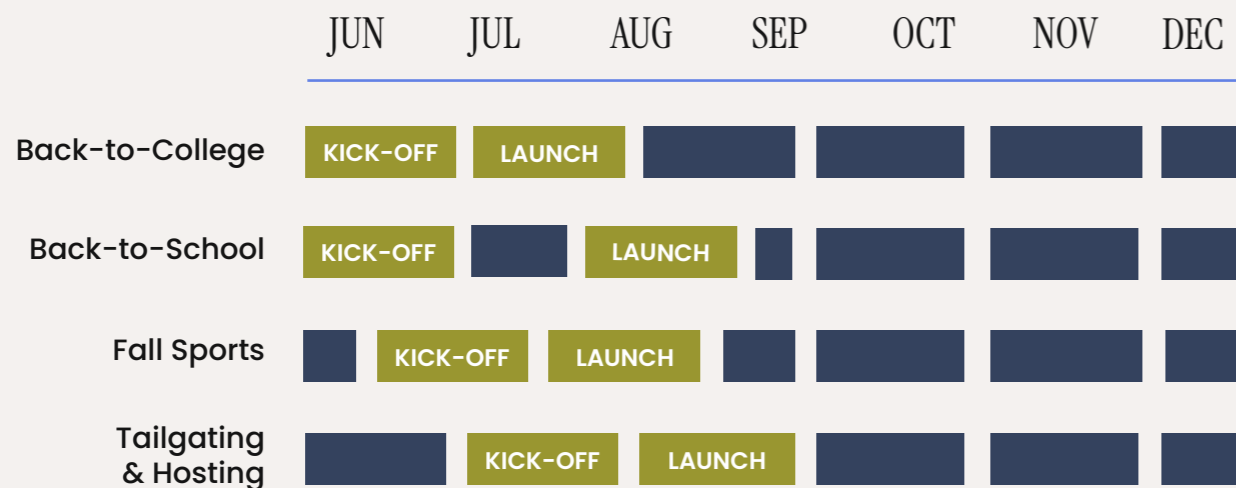
...and “School Morning Routine” content increases sharply on TikTok in July each year.



Planning *Windows*

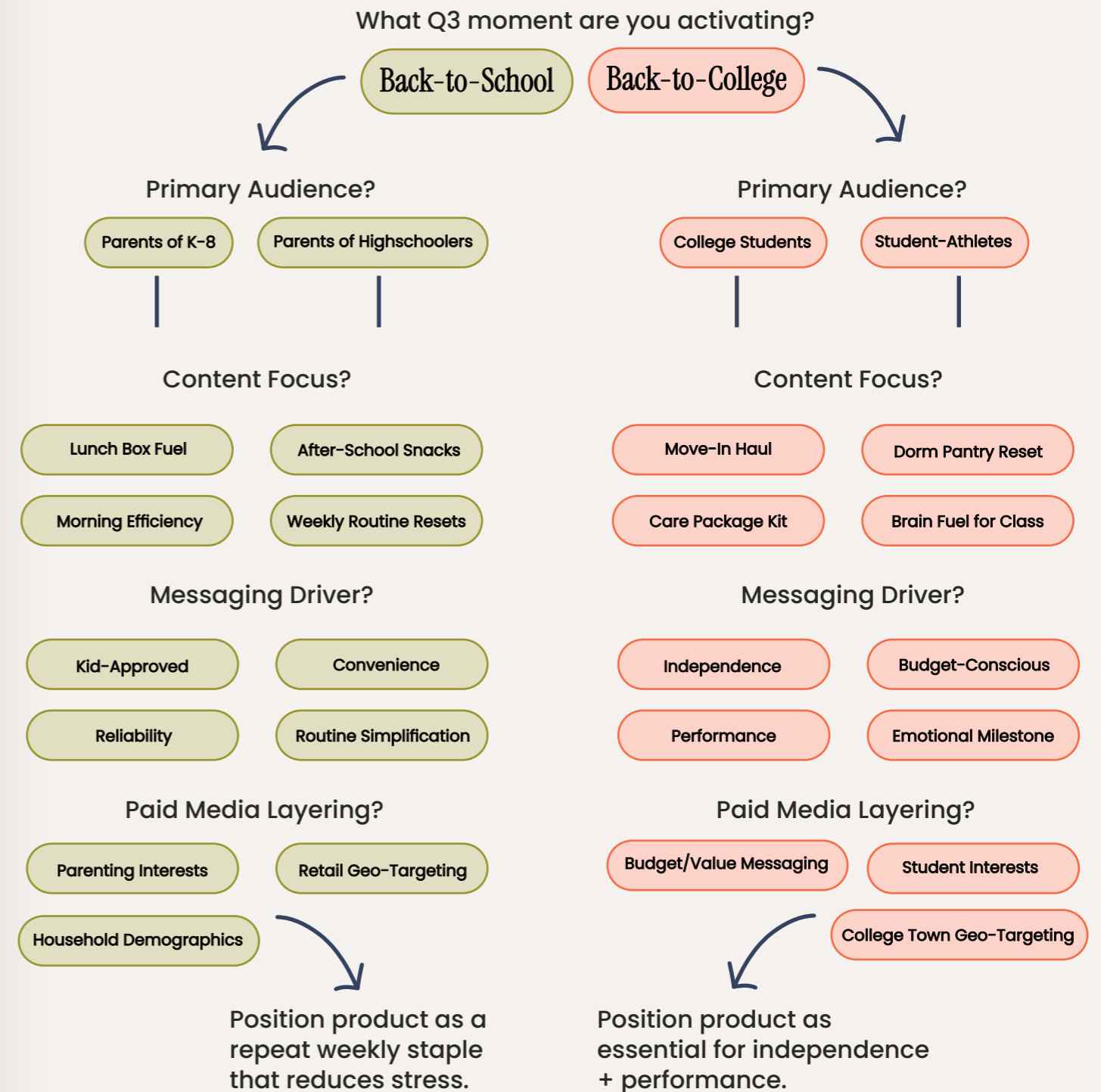
Speed without strategy doesn't scale.

Expedited campaigns can effectively support layered tentpoles like hosting or fall sports. But strong performance still depends on: audience segmentation, platform-native creative, and retail alignment.



CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

One Product. Two Audiences. Different Revenue Paths.



Back-to-School

The Routine Reset

For busy families, the back-to-school season is all about shifting their summer mindset and rebuilding routines with intention. In 2026, content that blends nourishment, efficiency, and emotional connection will resonate most.

On TikTok, “school morning routine” content sees annual surges in late July. On Pinterest, searches for “lunchbox ideas” and “meal prep for kids” trend upward 4-8 weeks before school start dates.

FUEL THAT WORKS OVERTIME

Busy mornings call for easy, reliable options. Brands can win by showing up across breakfast, lunch, and after-school moments with simple, repeatable solutions.

- Protein-forward breakfasts and snacks
- Make-ahead meals for busy mornings
- Lunchbox and after-school refuel ideas
- Kid-approved, multi-use product integrations
- Quick prep for weekday routines

Supports repeat purchase, multi-pack formats, and routine-based purchases



Creator Spotlight

Angela Campos

@angelaxsantanaa — 95K Followers

KNOWN FOR:

- * Motherhood
- * Soft Life

Angela is a Gen Z mom creator with a “señora soft life” aesthetic, sharing authentic kitchen, recipe, and daily routine content from her Texas home that resonates with young families navigating the school-year reset.

SIMPLIFIED MORNING SYSTEMS

Families aren’t looking for perfection. They’re looking for routines that work. Content that brings structure and ease into the school week builds lasting relevance.

- School-week reset routines
- Meal prep with built-in grocery lists
- Backpack, homework, and paper organization
- Time-saving morning workflows
- Realistic, repeatable daily systems

Supports everyday essentials, pantry staples, and routine-driven purchases



Creator Spotlight

Teresa Gonzalez

@withlove_tere — 208K Followers

KNOWN FOR:

- * Easy Recipes
- * Slow Wellness

A Texas-based creator known for inspirational family recipes and hosting content that feels warm, accessible, and celebration-ready.

ROUTINES THAT FEEL GOOD

As routines return, parents are prioritizing ease and emotional balance. Brands can connect by showing up in small rituals that make everyday moments feel more manageable.

- Weekly reset and wind-down rituals
- End-of-week treats and small rewards
- Kitchen reset and cozy home moments
- Playlist-driven meal prep and routines
- Balancing efficiency with comfort and ease

Supports emotional connection, self-care products, and lifestyle-driven purchases



Back-to-College

The Independence Economy

For college students and their families, this season marks a major transition that blends independence, practicality, and emotion. In 2026, content that supports budget-conscious living, small-space functionality, and everyday performance will resonate most.

Search interest for “dorm organization,” “college grocery haul,” and “care package ideas” rises in mid-summer, as students and parents prepare for move-in and the routines that follow.

MEMORABLE MOVE-IN MOMENTS

Move-in content naturally follows a built-in storyline, creating multiple opportunities for brands to show up from planning through the first week on campus.

- Road trip and car packing moments
- Dorm move-in and setup routines
- First grocery haul and pantry restock
- Snack kits and travel-friendly essentials
- “Stock the dorm” and first-week prep content

Supports multi-touchpoint integration and stronger brand recall



Creator Spotlight

Megan Zarcone

@meganzarcone

KNOWN FOR:

- * 40+ Style
- * Travel

Colorado-based mom and lifestyle creator sharing content around motherhood, style 40+, and everyday life as a mom of three boys (including twins). Her content naturally weaves in moments from youth football season, offering a look into busy family routines.

DORM LIVING, ELEVATED

As students settle in, they look for ways to make small spaces feel functional and personal. Brands can win by showing up in organization, convenience, and budget-friendly solutions.

- Dorm organization and space-saving solutions
- Multi-functional and budget-friendly essentials
- Pantry and storage resets
- Under-\$50 dorm upgrades
- Study and daily routine setups

Supports multi-category carts and value-driven purchases



retail INSIGHT

Gen Z shoppers prioritize products that are both **functional and aesthetic**, driving strong engagement around dorm organization and small-space upgrades. This often leads to **multi-category** shopping across food, storage, personal care, and everyday essentials.

CARE PACKAGE CULTURE

Care packages blend emotion and utility, creating repeat purchase moments throughout the semester as students and families stay connected.

- First-week and move-in care packages
- Midterm and exam-week resets
- Seasonal and holiday send-offs
- “Wellness” and self-care bundles
- Snack, beauty, and OTC essentials

Supports repeat purchase and high-conversion gifting moments



Fall Tailgating & Hosting

The Basket Builder

As the weather cools, consumers shift from summer spontaneity into more routine, at-home moments centered around gathering. Weekends become anchored by games, hosting, and shared meals, while weekdays bring smaller prep and reset behaviors.

These moments create consistent opportunities for brands to show up, whether it's stocking up for a watch party, refreshing a space before guests arrive, or simplifying the hosting experience altogether.

ELEVATED GAME-DAY SPREADS

Visually-driven food content continues to perform, with shareable spreads and easy entertaining solutions driving saves, shares, and purchase intent.

- Grazing boards and shareable snack spreads
- Slow-cooker and set-it-and-forget-it meals
- Game-day food prep routines
- Easy entertaining shortcuts
- Group-friendly and multi-pack formats

Supports snack foods, beverages, and basket-building moments



Creator Spotlight

Jamie Strand

@jamielestrand — 28.1K Followers

KNOWN FOR:

- * Affordable Finds
- * Mom Crafts

Known for her trend-forward lifestyle content, this Texas creator inspires seasonal moments, home décor, and relatable everyday living.

EASY FALL REFRESHES

As hosting increases, consumers look for simple ways to refresh their space, creating opportunities across home, cleaning, and seasonal essentials.

- Quick home resets and cleaning routines
- Seasonal decor and small upgrades
- Outdoor setup and hosting prep
- Pre-guest arrival routines
- Everyday hosting essentials

Supports home, cleaning, and seasonal purchase behavior



Creator Spotlight

Madison Sweitzer

@makingwithmadison — 23.2K Followers

KNOWN FOR:

- * Comfort Cooking
- * Lifestyle Rituals

A lifestyle creator in DC focused on cozy, approachable recipes with a warm, lived-in aesthetic.

HOSTING, SIMPLIFIED

Consumers are bringing tailgate energy home, looking for ways to make hosting feel easy, repeatable, and low-lift.

- At-home watch party setups
- "Hosting without the stress" routines
- Prep-ahead food and drink systems
- Guest-ready checklists and shortcuts
- Mix of food, beverage, and convenience solutions

Supports repeat hosting occasions and multi-category carts



Backpacks, Breakfast Bars & basket growth

Q3 is driven by routine-based shopping moments, from dorm move-in to weekly restocks. Brands that connect across these moments see stronger basket growth and more consistent visibility.

At A2, we bring this to life through an omnichannel approach that connects creator content, paid media, and retail placements, helping brands show up across the full shopper journey.



Omnichannel Capabilities

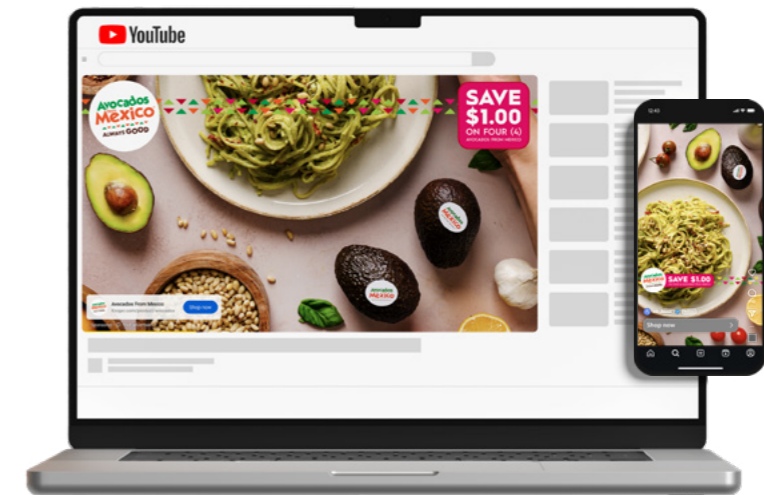
- * SOCIAL MEDIA
- * DISPLAY
- * CTV
- * VIDEO
- * DOOH
- * RETAILER ONSITE & IN-STORE



Connecting Every Channel, Seamlessly

CUSTOM AD CREATIVE

Designed to stand out while meeting platform & placement requirements



QUALITY CONTENT

Influencer, UGC or A2 Studio developed to suit your campaign needs

STRATEGIC MEDIA

Optimized to influence purchase behavior, driving measurable sales impact

Content Built for Every Channel

From creator content to full-scale production, we build assets designed to perform across every placement.



INFLUENCER CONTENT

Custom, high-performance influencer-generated content using A2's diverse creator network—amplified to your target audience with paid media.



CONTENT STUDIO

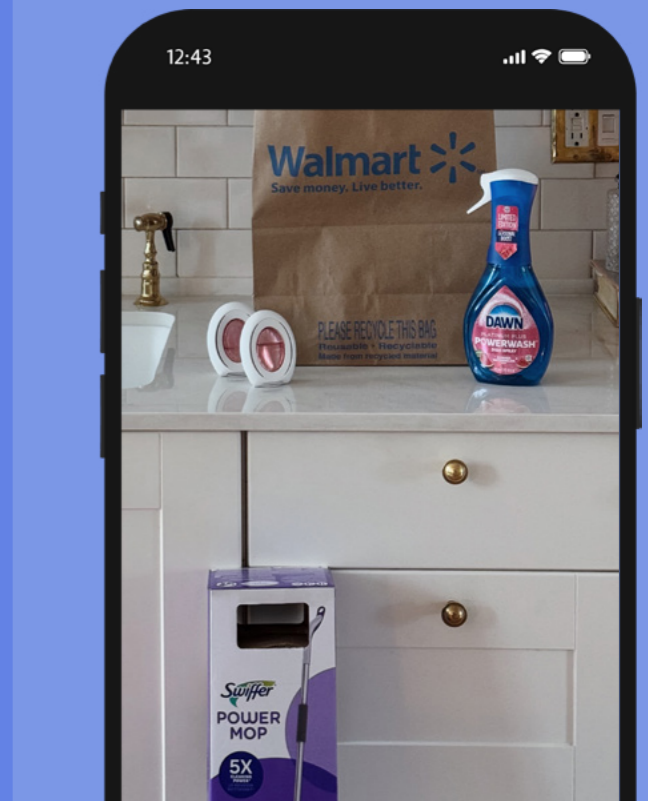
High-quality assets developed for omnichannel promotion, ensuring full brand creative control and digital usage rights in perpetuity.

Content designed to perform, wherever your campaign shows up.

BUILT FOR Q3 MOMENTUM

Retailers have a clear opportunity to support multiple brand initiatives by aligning campaigns to key Q3 tentpole moments, from back-to-school to fall hosting.

By bringing together integrated content and media, A2 helps brands show up across shared shopping moments with multi-product storytelling that drives both discovery and conversion. The result is stronger basket growth and more consistent performance throughout the season.





Let's work together!

At A2 Influence, we help brands meet consumers where they are—strategically, seamlessly, and successfully. Whether through creator storytelling, omnichannel activations, or shoppable social, we're here to help your campaigns make an impact that lasts all year long.

For partnership inquiries, contact moreinfo@a2influence.com.

