The TikTok Marketing Playbook: Top Performing Content Strategies for Brands
A Guide to TikTok Marketing for Brands
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A Guide to TikTok Marketing for Brands

Brands across industries have embraced TikTok as a high performance channel for consumer engagement and digital growth. TikTok has taken the world by storm, with 1.1 billion monthly active users—and yet for many brands, it remains a tactical enigma. TikTok is unlike any other social channel brands have interacted with in the past. TikTok revolves around trends, music, and of course, the For You Page where organic brand discovery can soar. It does not appear that the platform’s growth is slowing down anytime soon, and the opportunities for brands on the platform continue to skyrocket. Companies like McDonald’s, Disney, and Fenty Beauty have already found success on TikTok by tapping into its viral magic.

Contrary to popular thought, TikTok is not just for Generation Z—it’s reach spans generations and has quickly become an essential channel for brands to create meaningful connections with online consumers. It’s not only an opportunity to bolster brand awareness, but also a burgeoning medium to drive e-commerce traffic. According to Adweek, 49% of TikTok users have purchased a product after seeing it advertised, promoted, or reviewed on the app. There’s no one-size-fits-all strategy for TikTok success, but brands across industries are testing the waters with organic and paid TikTok content—and it’s paying off in terms of brand relevance and conversions.

49% of TikTok users have purchased a product after seeing it promoted on the platform

Source: Adweek

Brands who’ve adopted TikTok and taken the time to test what styles of content work for their identity and audience, have seen monumental results. Stepping away from traditional approaches to content creation and embracing lo-fi video and spontaneous storytelling, is what differentiates the brands that have found success on TikTok. A combination of data and creative content production has catapulted brands to the For You Page (FYP).

What you’ll learn in this guide:

- The creative and technical best practices to guide your content creation for TikTok
- How to tap into the power of TikTok creators
- The secret to creating high-performing TikTok ads
- How to capitalize on the latest trends to increase your chances of landing on the For You Page
- Why authenticity and data are critical to maximizing reach and views
- How to use TikTok Analytics to measure and guide your content
Creative and Technical Best Practices

Content creation for TikTok requires some brands to step outside of their comfort zone. The videos that engage your Instagram audience won’t necessarily strike a chord with TikTok users. Finding a balance between following the tips and tricks that are building momentum in the space and participating in a way that expresses your brand’s unique POV is key. In terms of technical best practices, video length and sound can make or break a post’s chances of making it to the FYP. Creative best practices encourage brands to embrace lo-fi content and lean in to spontaneity to capture attention.

**Creative Best Practices**

*Put your own spin on the latest trends*

It’s important to keep a pulse on what types of videos, music, and content are trending on TikTok, but it’s equally important to find a creative way to integrate your brand or products into a trend. Tutorials can be an optimal tactic to engage consumers across generations—46% of Gen Z TikTok users and 44% of users over 26 enjoy tutorials from brands on TikTok.

*Stop the scroll*

First impressions are critical on TikTok. The first few seconds of your video needs to hook users.

*Have fun with it*

TikTok is a place to test new themes, take risks, and be unfiltered. 74% of Gen Z consumers and 72% of consumers over the age of 26 said they most want to see funny content from brands.

*Bring your brand to life*

Pull back the curtain on your brand. Offer a behind-the-scenes look at your products, your team, and your biggest advocates. Walmart introduced an internal employee influencer program, Spotlight, to launch hashtag challenges on TikTok. Challenges like #DealDropDance and #SavingShuffle generated over 6 billion views and likely influenced the company’s increase in net sales in Q4 2020, which surpassed the past seven quarters.

**Technical Best Practices**

*Aspect ratio*


*Length*

Videos should be at least 8 seconds long. 10-15 seconds in length is the sweet spot for optimal performance.

*Sound*

Keeping a pulse on audio trends and putting your brand’s unique spin on catchy songs and clips will help guide your content creation.

*Publishing cadence*

Higher posting frequency can equate to higher growth. TikTok recommends that brands aim for 3–5 posts per week.

*Hashtags*

According to TikTok, less is more. 2–3 hashtags per piece of content will help brands reach new audiences (and using #fyp won’t up your chances).

*In-app effects*

Leveraging native effects like TikTok text helps create a unique visual experience for your audience.

Backpack brand Brevitē uses the video response feature to interact with its community on TikTok, answer questions, and respond to criticism. These video responses have generated over 100,000 views and the brands accredit the videos to a 200% lift in sales.
TikTok Trends: Tips to go Viral

While no one can predict the exact formula for how to go viral on TikTok, there are proven methods to get served up more often and grow your audience through the burgeoning platform’s For You Page. The FYP is your opportunity to reach new users who have previously watched your content but haven’t followed your account yet.

TikTok launched the Business Creative Hub exclusively to TikTok Business Account users to help brands tap into the latest trends. Marketers can find the feature under the ‘Business suite’ section of the ‘Setting and privacy’ menu on the TikTok app. The Business Creative Hub has two key resources: the Business Content Guide and the Video Showcase.

Unlike other social channels, TikTok is less about curating a brand story and more about putting forward content that is on-trend. One of the biggest challenges brands face is keeping up with the trends and knowing which to act on. The Business Creative Center helps to inspire and educate by giving brands a snapshot of the latest trending content. This is a not-to-be-missed resource for brands that need to fine tune their content strategy development, video production, and storyline creation. Brands can also find best practices, insight into successful brands’ strategies, and technical tips.

The Video Showcase feature has three curated feeds of trending content over the past 30 days. With these feeds brands can get a pulse on the latest trends on TikTok as well as the specific types of content brands are putting forward on the platform.

- **Trending: Business**: showcases the most ‘liked’ videos in your country

- **Engaging: Business**: features the most popular content from Business Accounts by level engagement (the ratio of comments to video views)

- **Trending: Community**: shows videos from all account types, ranked by total ‘likes’

Leveraging TikTok’s in-app tools, keeping a pulse on audience behavior, and being open to taking risks will increase your chances of landing on the FYP. There’s no magic recipe for success but a combination of strategic thinking and persistence will pay off in the long run.
Clare Tassin, digital marketing analyst at Gartner contends that brands need to embrace homemade style content and let trends and users take control of the brand narrative to build an impactful TikTok strategy. Finding your brand’s TikTok sweet spot largely relies on three key factors: data, authenticity, and trends. Brands need to put their own spin on the latest trends while leveraging data to understand which styles of content perform with their target audience and increase their chances of landing on the For You Page. Complex TikTok strategies are unlikely to garner performance, instead flexible strategies that are designed to pivot on the fly will optimize your brand’s video views, impressions, and reach on the channel.

Hook the viewer

The topic of your video should be clear to the audience within the first few seconds, especially as your video may be shown to users that are unfamiliar with your brand. Getting the point across early will capture attention and encourage the viewer to watch the video until the end. The more your videos are being viewed to completion, the higher chance they have to be served up across the FYP, reaching more new viewers. The most successful videos across TikTok tell a story and benefit the user. Make your videos educational, informative, aspirational, or entertaining to provide value and give people a reason to watch, share, and comment.

Be consistent

With TikTok, it’s a best practice to keep a regular publishing schedule—not only so that your followers can look forward to your content—but to provide a bit of runway for when you want to experiment with a new style of video. The Following feed is not shown in chronological order, so there is less chance of bombarding your followers with “too much” content.

Being consistent also applies to cohesion and authenticity. The videos you post on TikTok should match in terms of tone and quality so your style is consistent across the board. Your presence on TikTok should also be authentic to your brand’s presence off of TikTok. If your videos come across as inauthentic and disingenuous, your viewers will be able to tell. This practice also applies to the creators you partner with. It’s best to work with creators who genuinely care about your product and message.
Explore with creativity
Creativity and originality are rewarded on TikTok. Branded content won’t break through on TikTok where homemade style content rules. The platform is designed to make it easy for anyone to be creative in their own way. Trending hashtags and sounds can change quickly, and the platform is filled with users adding their take to these trends. Pay attention to popular and up-and-coming trends to share your unique take on them and surface your videos on the FYP to those who are engaging with those trends. Another tactic to try is to use seamless transitions to keep the pace of your content moving, captivate your audience, and keep them guessing as to what’s coming next.

Don’t treat TikTok as an afterthought
Take an active role in managing your presence on the platform and leaning into what makes it unique. Community is big on TikTok. Like and reply to comments and questions that users leave on your videos to build community and encourage engagement. Leverage viewer sentiment to guide your content strategy where applicable and ask your viewers questions where you can. Another tactic for visibility and community building is spending time interacting with other users’ videos within your vertical, and exploring what else is being done in your niche.

Hear what the experts have to say
As the digital habits of customers evolve, the approach brands take to social media must evolve with them. A seamless e-commerce experience and investing in building an online community are aspects of digital strategy that have become expected of brands and retailers. To dive deeper into how TikTok best fits into the marketing mix, watch our panel discussion with TikTok and Vogue Business on-demand now.
User-Generated Content: How to Generate, Curate, and Optimize

User-generated content (UGC) offers brands a powerful opportunity to tap into the homemade style content that TikTok users crave. Relatability plays a part in what will and won’t become a trend. Videos with zero props that anyone can create at home using TikTok native post-production climb the virality charts the fastest. Content that people just get is working, ideas that land quickly, and a broad swath of the population can instantly identify with are the ideas that make it onto the For You Page.

TikTok is a UGC goldmine for brands. Whether you prompt a flood of community content creation through a creator partnership, paid content, or organic campaign, incorporating a content pillar solely for UGC is integral to developing an impactful TikTok strategy.

Pepsi tapped into the viral magic of UGC on TikTok to successfully kickstart its growth. The brand partnered with professional soccer stars like Leo Messi and Paul Pogba to challenge users to show off their own skills. Fans accepted the challenge, creating over 300,000 videos in response. The campaign generated 601 million video views across target markets as well as 47 million likes and 3 million shares. Pepsi credits the campaign to increasing brand recognition, differentiation, and awareness in Turkey, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain.

How to fuel UGC on TikTok:

- **Hashtag challenges**
  A top tactic to generate UGC is hashtag challenges. Brands like Chipotle, Nike, and Samsung rely on challenges to guide their community growth on TikTok.

- **Creator partnerships**
  As mentioned, creator partnerships present a powerful opportunity to elicit action in the TikTok community. Whether it’s showing off a new shopping haul, creating a new dance, or offering a cooking tutorial, Creators are likely to increase your chances of inspiring and engaging TikTok users.

- **TikTok Advertising**
  Putting ad spend behind a post will increase views and bolster your brand’s presence on the channel. Including a strong call to action or creative story is critical to making a lasting impression with your target audience and fuel community content creation.
How to Work With TikTok Creators

Creator partnerships on TikTok have proven to be a top tactic for brands, generating engagement 5x higher than any other platform. Brands quickly caught on to the powerful opportunity as TikTok surpassed Pinterest and Facebook to become the second most popular platform for influencer marketing. In contrast to the editorial-style static imagery of the past, modern consumers demand content that isn’t overproduced and creator partnerships on TikTok are meeting these shifting expectations.

TikTok-first creators

While integrating some existing partnerships into your TikTok strategy will likely be effective, we recommend focusing on creator-first partnerships. Where TikTok is so trend-driven and moves at such a fast pace, creators who aren’t staying up to date with the latest trends won’t achieve the same degree of reach. Working with TikTok-first influencers ensures that your content reaches an extremely targeted and engaged audience immediately, effectively maximizing conversions.

Test, measure, repeat

Instead of segmenting your paid, organic, and influencer strategies on TikTok, Forbes recommends looking at them as one and the same, in that putting ad spend behind influencers, who are somewhat of a proven model (if one exists) on TikTok, will likely yield the best results. They’re all part of a holistic strategy, which should involve extensive testing, and a willingness to be creative and leverage non-traditional tactics.

Integrating TikTok influencers into your global influencer strategy

In looking at the influencer marketing lifecycle, Creator Marketplace makes sourcing TikTok influencers much more streamlined than other channels. However, there’s no clear-cut best practice in how to integrate influencers in your TikTok strategy—instead, savvy brands are leveraging some or all of the following, or coming up with new ways to work with creators.

Repurpose Creator content in TikTok advertising

Where TikTok is a channel that so heavily values unpolished, authentic content, leveraging influencers can provide a canvas for less curated content. Using influencers for ads stops the scroll because viewers recognize the face of a content creator that they already know and love.
Amplify hashtag challenges

#AerieREALPositivity, with 7.4B views, is a great example of a brand leveraging influencers to start a trend and make a real impact on online sales. The brand partnered with influencers like Charli D’Amelio, a TikTok influencer with almost 115M followers. The campaign contributed to a +75% increase in e-commerce sales for Aerie in the first quarter of 2020. The key to success? Aerie was able to create a trend that authentically engaged its community.

75% increase in e-commerce sales from #AerieREALPositivity

Source: Marketing Dive

Integrate product reviews into your partnerships

Product reviews are one of the most common types of content shared on TikTok organically—but can easily transfer into a paid relationship as well. For example, an influencer could start by asking a question and encourage their audience to stitch with a response. Reviews could be shared on the brand and creator’s pages to maximize reach.

Leverage creators to fuel content creation

Instead of brands creating media themselves, some are choosing to solely get paid partnerships to generate content for their feed. This could be an optimal path for brands that might not have the resources to produce a constant flow of TikTok-specific videos.

Integrating TikTok influencers into your digital marketing strategy and taking a channel-specific approach is likely to glean the best results. The rapid-fire nature and focus on fleeting trends of TikTok require a level of focus that most influencers who are spread across platforms won’t fully grasp. Regardless of how you decide to move forwards with integrating influencers into your TikTok strategy, it’s crucial that you remain willing to test and be innovative—your KPIs will thank you!
Translate TikTok Success to the Bottom Line

The connection between TikTok engagement and sales growth continues to strengthen. Adweek reports that 15% of all adults and 36% of Gen Z consumers have purchased a product or service after seeing it on TikTok. TikTok continues to introduce new tools and features to help brands integrate the platform into their e-commerce strategies. A recent partnership with Walmart introduced tie-ups, which allow TikTok users to make purchases without leaving the app. By bringing discovery and purchase closer together, TikTok is creating an optimized sales funnel for brands to drive real business growth through the platform.

What impact can clickable content really have? Firstly, it cuts down on the customer journey from discovery to checkout. Instead of tireless Google searches and cross-referencing to find the product they’re looking for, your audience has a seamless way to transition from your content to your website—and fewer steps means fewer sales lost due to customer frustration.

Link in Bio

TikTok’s unique algorithm gives content its best opportunity to be discovered—and maximize brand awareness in the process—but options to monetize these viral video moments are still limited. Want to make your content shoppable? Here’s how to put a link in your TikTok bio that drives audiences directly to your website or product pages:

🔍 Check your profile settings to see if you have access to the website feature, then click “edit” and add the link

🔗 Leverage Dash Hudson’s Shoppable TikTok to create a standalone URL you can customize for your TikTok feed

💡 Measure your clicks and conversions over time to help streamline and maximize your strategy on the channel
To make the most of the space, consider your goals and how your link will help achieve them. With Dash Hudson’s **Spirit Galleries**, for example, you can leverage all of your posts in a standalone URL and add up to 25 shopping links per image. Not only are these posts shoppable, they’re trackable, too. Your Gallery is the gateway to views and clicks, which means you can set and monitor goals for any period of time and best understand the content that drives revenue—all in one place.

**Lead Generation**

TikTok introduced **Lead Generation** to give brands a direct line to reach consumers and drive conversions. Brands can leverage the tool to create custom messaging and gather information from TikTok users, supporting customer acquisition and community-building.

Fragrance brand **Nina Ricci** leveraged the Lead Generation feature to support the launch of its newest scent in Spain. The brand partnered with a local creator to produce an unboxing video. Using the custom content, Nina Ricci launched a targeted TikTok campaign with a call to action to sign up to receive a free sample of the new perfume. The campaign ran for one day and boasted a **41% conversion rate**. Not to mention, the cost per lead was 83% lower than previous campaigns.

The evolution of TikTok is largely defined by a push towards a platform built for community and commerce. The introduction of new features to create seamless set-ups for brands and frictionless experiences for consumers has quickly put TikTok at the forefront of the digital marketplace. It is more important than ever that brands capitalize on the space before it becomes more saturated.
TikTok Advertising: Create, Customize, and Convert

TikTok advertising has grown exponentially over the past year as the number of advertisers increased **500% from 2020 to 2021**. And for good reason—marketers suggest that TikTok advertising often generates conversion rates 3x higher than Instagram and Facebook. The conversion generating opportunities that TikTok has to offer are equipping digital advertisers with a competitive advantage.

Some brands opted to increase their investment in the platform after mastering their organic strategies, while others leveraged paid posts to ramp up growth. The best part? TikTok ads are seamlessly woven into users’ feeds, appearing as organic TikTok content.

Condé Nast Germany launched a campaign to promote GLAMOUR Shopping Week. A captivating 15-second ad showed a model switching outfits to a timely soundtrack and sent TikTok users to download the publisher’s app. Curating TikTok-specific ads resulted in staggering results—the campaign generated over 13 million impressions and a 35% conversion rate.

Many of the best practices for organic TikTok ring true for TikTok advertising. The platform’s mantra “don’t make ads, make TikToks” says it all. Authenticity, storytelling, and purpose-driven marketing are all key to a successful campaign. Avoid salesy content that is purely product focused and lean into creative ways to naturally integrate your product into a trend. The secret to success? Finding a way to allow TikTok users to be participants in your brand story—triggering an emotional connection to your brand.
The following tactics have proven to be high-performing advertising tactics for brands on TikTok:

1. **Leverage UGC**
   By putting ad spend behind UGC, brands can weave their way into the TikTok feed without coming off as too curated or produced. It’s ideal for brands that are already investing in creator partnerships or hashtag challenges.

   Australian brand **Royal Essence** used customer-created videos to create a top performing campaign. TikTok users naturally love to talk about their favorite products and routines, which proved to be a perfect opportunity for Royal Essence to put its candles and bath products in front of a larger audience. The campaign was not only cost-effective but generated a 2.22% clickthrough rate and 50,000 unique clicks.

2. **Surprise your audience**
   TikTok is the perfect place to introduce new products or launch new campaigns. Videos that have an element of surprise or something unexpected also have a higher chance of going viral, feeding into shareability and reach.

3. **Test promo codes**
   Discounts have proven to be an effective tool for retailers to convert TikTok users into customers. Australian fashion brand **Princess Polly** leveraged exclusive promo codes to convert TikTok users to their website, generating **15x return on ad spend** and **9 million impressions**.

4. **Seamless commerce experience**
   Creating a frictionless path to check-out is just as important as a high-performing piece of content. Optimize your TikTok posts to take your audience from TikTok to your website in one step. Include direct CTAs, easy access to product links, and quick steps to purchase to maximize ROI.
Set Goals and Objectives

The first step in your approach should be to set goals and determine your brand voice upfront as a guiding light. Ask yourself what purpose TikTok serves for your community. Setting objectives for your videos may help develop your content strategy and reach your ideal users. Keeping a consistent tone will also let your audience know what they can expect when they follow your account. These objectives don’t need to be rigid. As you post and learn more about which of your videos are resonating on TikTok, you can adjust accordingly.

TikTok differs from many traditional marketing mediums in that followers and engagement aren’t inherently tied. The For You Page is almost entirely algorithm-driven, which means that even small brands can reach large audiences. It’s not uncommon to see brands on TikTok with low views on the majority of their posts and to have several posts with hundreds of thousands. Unlike other channels, followers are no longer your ceiling.

As with any new social initiative, establishing goals is crucial to optimizing performance. However, one of the challenges with TikTok, is that posts can gain traction months or years after posting—making optimization difficult. For this reason, it’s important to set long-term goals and track content performance over time.

To start, we recommend setting goals tied to posting cadence, creator partnerships, and UGC. Sticking to these goals for your first six months on the channel will help you test different types of content and understand what performs best with your target audience. Once you’ve found your brand’s footing on the platform, integrate follower growth, engagement, and conversions into your goals. This will look different for different brands, however best practices suggest that setting flexible goals that can shift as the platform evolves will increase your performance over time. As a channel highly focused on trends, tracking results of specially produced influencer and trend content makes it easier to determine areas of opportunity and where to invest for faster payoff.

How to Use TikTok Analytics

To gain access to TikTok analytics, brands need a Pro Account. Keep in mind you will only be able to track your performance on TikTok after setting up a Pro Account. Afterwards, be prepared to add a wealth of content into the platform to generate enough data for an accurate analysis of your TikTok community’s preferences.

TikTok differs from many social channels when it comes to metrics. Success starts with video views. One viral post can launch your brand onto the platform and kickstart community growth. The For You Page is at the heart of the channel and as a result, maximizing profile and video views will always be a top priority. Discovery and relevance are top of mind on TikTok and should guide your strategy. The videos that speak to TikTok users’ preferences have the best shot at finding a spot on the For You Page and ultimately meeting your brand objectives.

Content segmentation is particularly important, where TikTok strategies are shifting rapidly as more brands begin to experiment with the platform. Brands should keep a pulse on how hashtag challenges perform vs trends, creator content vs original videos, and product focused videos vs UGC to understand which areas are showing promising results and which are underperforming.

How to Set Up a Pro Account

1. From your profile page, open the Privacy and Settings tab
2. Choose “Manage My Account”
3. Tap “Switch to Pro Account” and follow the steps from there

Once you activate your Pro Account, you’ll find a new analytics button under your account options.
TikTok Pro Account overview

TikTok Pro users are met with an Overview when first accessing analytics. Here users are served three key metrics: video views, profile views, and follower count. Brands can see total video views and how many times followers viewed your profile over the last seven days. Next, the Followers metric displays the followers lost and gained over the last seven days. These metrics help you understand your growth and community-building efforts over time.

Content tab

In the Content tab, brands can quickly get a pulse on which videos generate the most views and followers. Under Trending, you can see which of your videos were on the For You Page and the total number of views those videos generated. You can see videos posted outside of the seven-day window to understand which types of videos have longer life spans than others. Even if your videos underperform in the immediate days after posting, they could peak weeks or even months after based on shifting trends and new content styles.

Followers tab

The Followers tab is valuable for understanding TikTok user behavior and your followers’ preferences. Marketers can analyze follower retention, follower demographics, and geographic location for insight into followers gained and lost over seven days. Beyond the basics, brands can see which types of videos their followers are watching and at which times of day they are most active to optimize posting strategies. Marketers can also go a step further and keep a pulse on the music trending within their follower base. This intel can help guide your audio selection for new posts.
From Viral to ROI

TikTok revolves around content that consumers resonate with, laugh at, share, and recreate. Unlike other social channels, success on TikTok does not equate to developing a clearcut strategy and posting schedule. Marketers have adapted to the fast-paced nature of social media—but this reality reaches new heights on TikTok. Brands need to understand how to leverage the latest trends, embrace lo-fi style video, and let the TikTok community participate in content curation. TikTok is all about relevance. Trends can sweep through the platform in a matter of hours, and it’s up to brand marketers to decide what is and isn’t right for them to jump on board with fast. The brands who are winning on TikTok are the brands that are using it. They’re the brands that took the leap, learned from their results, and continue to iterate to evolve with the platform and its community.

To learn more about how Dash Hudson’s globally-leading visual marketing and social media management software can help your brand optimize performance, request a demo today.