



Everything you wanted to know about

TikTok

(BUT WERE TOO AFRAID TO ASK)

You've got a burning question, one that's been smouldering in the back of your mind for the past half-year, maybe more. It's a question hundreds of marketers like yourself have been silently wondering as they parse through social media headlines or watch as the people around them dance for hours in front of their mobile phones.

What the heck is TikTok, and why is everyone talking about it this much???

It's a question that's becoming increasingly critical to understand, as more and more of the world's top brands and organizations are exploring this new and exciting space and laying the foundations for strong connections with a new generation of multi-platform consumers.

So fear not! This white paper is here to answer all your pertinent TikTok questions (and maybe a few you didn't even know you had). By the time you've finished this guide, you'll be able to not only stand up and explain to a group of fellow marketers what this awesome social media platform is all about, you'll be ready to effectively and confidently add TikTok to your future marketing strategies.

Let's get started.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 What is TikTok?

....And Why Won't Everyone Stop Talking About It?

TikTok is a **mobile-first social media platform**, the latest in a long line of massively popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. TikTok is dedicated entirely to **short-form vertical videos** which last anywhere from **15 to 60 seconds**.

The easiest and most commonly-used point of comparison is the now-defunct platform Vine, but another way to wrap your head around it is to imagine a platform made up of Instagram's massively popular **Stories** format.

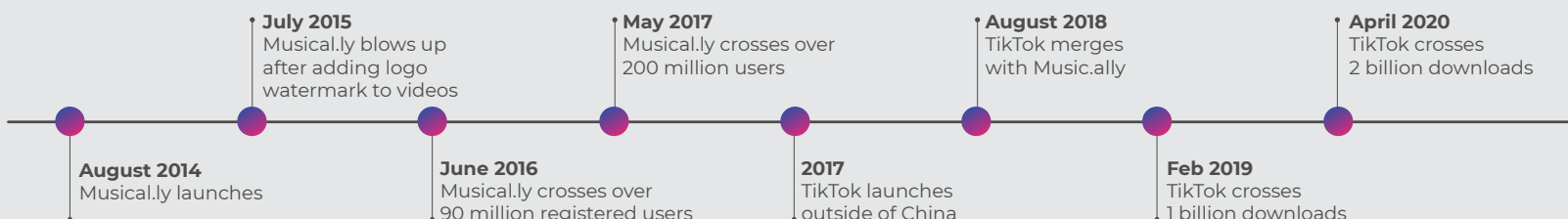
Despite being the youngest of the big social media platforms, TikTok is already home to some of the most creative and engaging video creators on the web. It's powered by an extremely advanced AI system that continuously shows users a stream of fresh content, learning and adapting the more they watch and interact.

When Did TikTok Blow Up?

TikTok truly hit its stride in **2017** when it was merged with the popular lip-syncing app **Musical.ly**, which had a substantial user base in the United States, particularly among teenagers. Much of Musical.ly's original DNA still can be found on the platform, such as the extremely popular genres of **lip-syncing videos** and **dance challenges**.

However, TikTok quickly got to work expanding its audience and innovating its functionality, introducing powerful **artificial intelligence** to curate and sculpt the user experience. It also added a suite of **editing tools** that, with a bit of practice, allows the average user to make truly impressive and dynamic videos all within the app.

Timeline



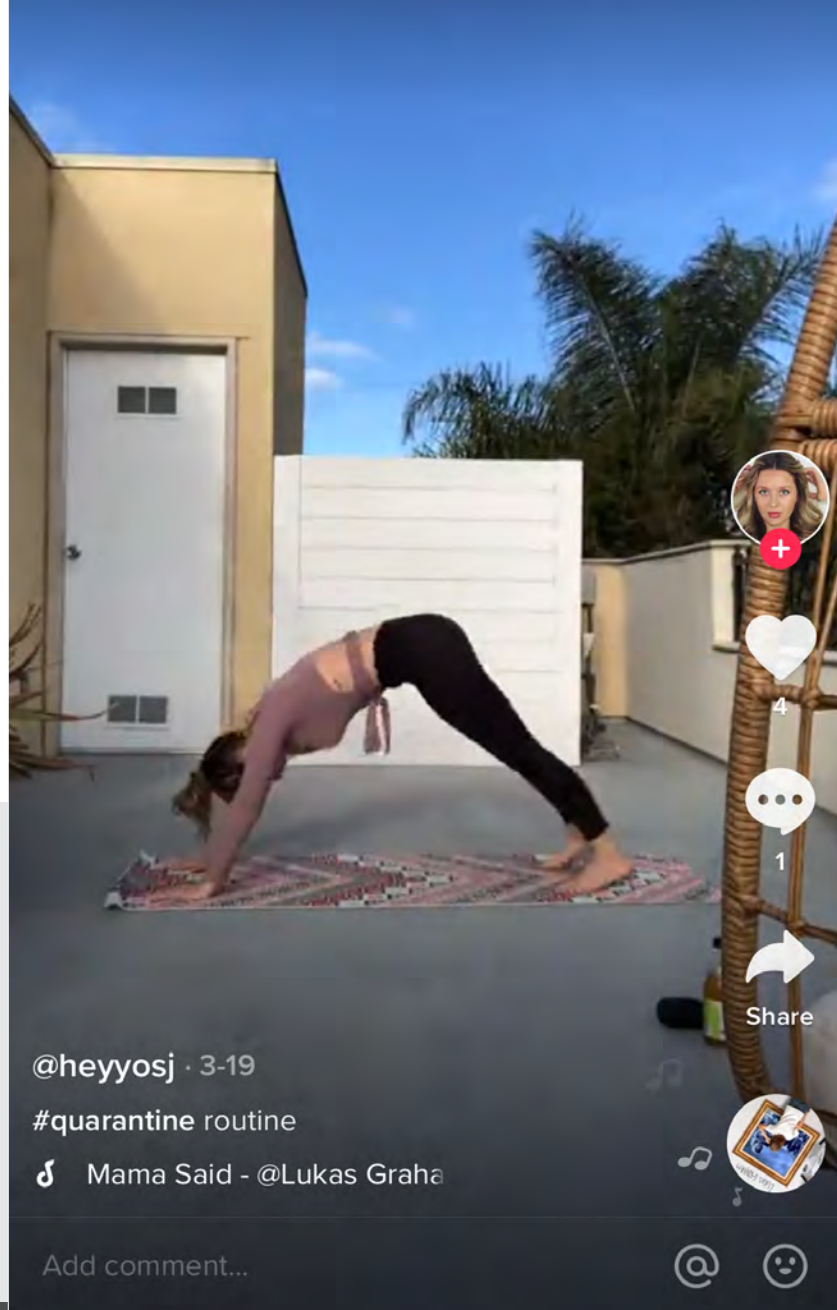
TikTok captures the joyous spirit of creativity and expression, combined with the excitement of the Wild Wild West. TikTok truly is the platform for the **mobile-first generation** who speak video as if it were their first language.

Many have described the platform as “**addicting**,” citing the many hours they’ll suddenly find themselves spending while sucked into its steady supply of entertaining, engaging and inventive content - behavior fueled by a home screen and UI designed to pull you in and keep you swiping.



Maggie Reznikoff

Director of Account Management
(Resident TikTok expert)



On Why TikTok is So Darn Addicting...

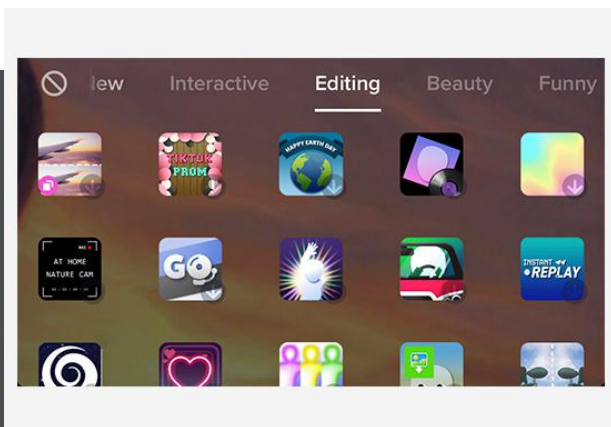
“It’s partially driven by the user experience - the endless feed of full-screen, short-form videos makes it easy to get sucked in for hours and difficult to swipe away. But that isn’t why I [and others] keep coming back.

TikTok has broken the rules of every other mainstream platform. TikTok’s algorithmic observation and inference sets it apart and creates an addicting experience. It doesn’t ask you to build up a social network (in fact it doesn’t really care about your offline social circle), it simply shows you things that it thinks you’ll like, and that makes it difficult to close the app. The algorithm very quickly picks up on your habits, and constantly adapts. Rather than a carefully arranged feed of people or hashtags you choose to follow, the “For You” Page is filled with endless videos tailored to what you enjoy.”

A Tour of TikTok's Interface

TikTok presents you with its main focus from the get-go: the **For You** tab, an infinity-scroll of bite-sized videos filtered one after another using Swipe-Ups. The **secret sauce** behind TikTok's ability to hook users is its powerful Artificial Intelligence that analyzes each piece of content and ranks it based on real-time user behavior. Their algorithm is so good at predicting what users like, they stay on average for **over 10 minutes at a time**, the highest of any other platform including Instagram at [almost 3 minutes](#).

TikTok captures data such as Likes, Comments, Watch Time, Exit Rate and more, and is able to quickly discern what types of content each user wants to see, even after the first few minutes post-signup. The algorithm starts by showing new users a stream of videos it's previously identified as having the **highest engagement** for the **widest audience** to instantly hook them. Within minutes, TikTok can combine thousands of data points from their behavior including repeat views, hashtags within the content, audio cues and more to create a comprehensive profile of what each user likes to watch.



You create content on TikTok from time to time - how easy is it to learn in your opinion and do you enjoy it?

“In the same vein as the supportive & inclusive mindset that thrives on TikTok, the app makes it really easy to dive in and create your own videos.”

There are tons of fun editing tools like filters, text overlays, effects, and of course, an endless library of audio clips and songs to add to your videos. The editing features allow people of all skill sets to enjoy and create, and this is what makes TikTok special. It's an app that allows anyone to be a creator, not just those who have amassed a large following.”

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the For You screen

Shares (and More)

Sharing is a big part of TikTok culture. This button lets you share videos directly, but also gives quick access to more unique and engaging forms of social sharing such as **live reactions** or filming a duet video, a format pioneered on the platform.

Discover

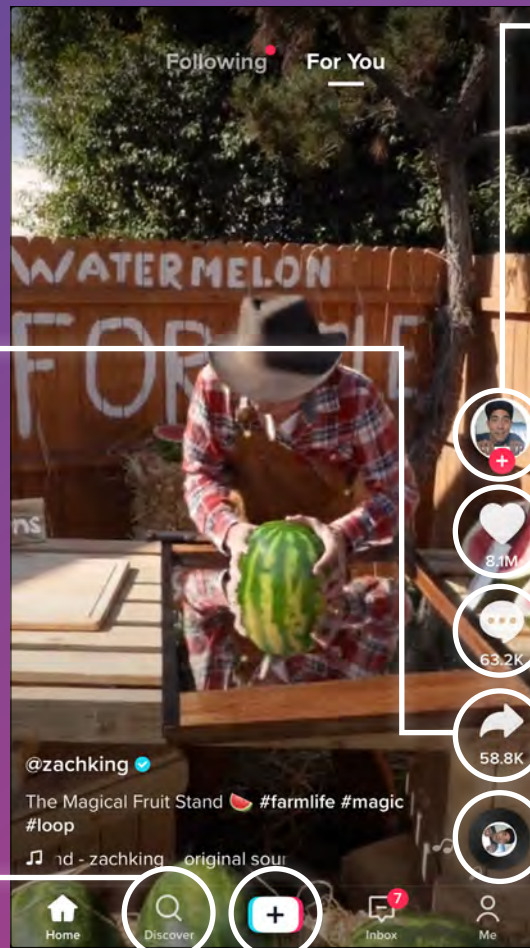
This button takes you to the Discover Tab, where you'll find the latest trends and challenges that the platform aggregates. While many trends are set by the user base themselves, TikTok closely monitors its network and aggregates new and emerging trends **all the time**.

(+)

Last but not least, TikTok encourages **EVERYONE** to be a video creator - so it places their create button front and center. Here you'll access TikTok's native camera and editor, which features a robust suite of effects - many more than you'll find on most apps out there!

Features Include:

- Speed controls
- AR Beauty Filters
- Voiceovers
- Time Warp, Nine Camera splits and other fun effects
- The ability to stitch multiple clips together
- Hands-free timer



Follow User

Tap to add users to your Following list and see their most recent videos by tapping on the Following tab next to 'For You'.

Likes

The amount of people who have liked the video by "double-tapping" - users familiar with Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest and a plethora of other platforms will intuitively know how to Like videos.

Comments

Users may leave comments on their favorite videos if they like, which helps the algorithm understand which pieces of content are resonating - and why.

Current Sound

Check to identify what 'sound' is playing, which will typically be a popular song from their **extensive library of licensed music**. Click on the spinning record to see who else has used the sound in the past - anything featured in a recent trend will typically have a long list!

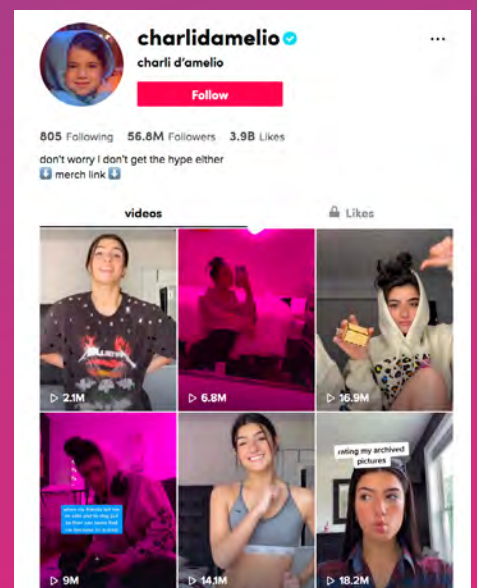
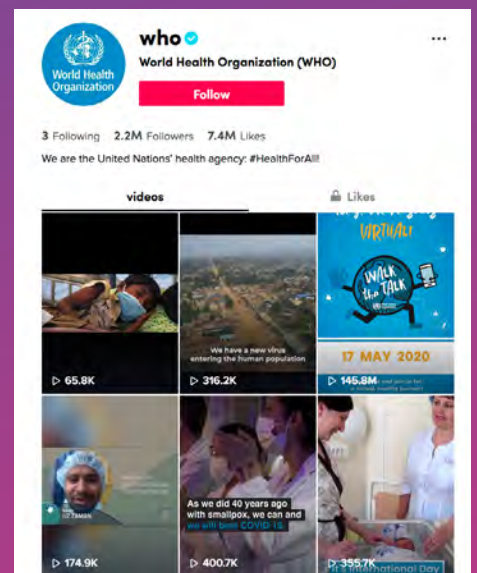
3 Who uses TikTok?

Everyone! TikTok boasts [800 million monthly active users](#). For reference, Twitter, which has been chirping along since 2006, is currently home to 330 million users worldwide. For being the new kid on the block, TikTok has already earned itself quite the reputation, being downloaded more than two billion times and consistently landing on the most-downloaded app lists.

While a noteworthy **60% of TikTokers are between the ages of 16 and 24** according to a November release from [Reuters](#), anyone can use the platform and grow an audience. A quarter of US users, for instance, are aged 45-64, demonstrating that the app holds sway with a wide array of people beyond the teenage demographic.

Not only has TikTok earned itself a cult-like following of casual viewers and bonafide influencers, it's home to AAA talent like Jimmy Fallon and Will Smith to legacy organizations like **The Washington Post** and the **World Health Organization**.

The growing presence of traditional celebrities on TikTok is indicative of shifting viewer preferences. Hollywood talent and other traditional celebrities are mirroring influencers and are connecting their audiences on a more personal level, inviting people into their worlds and giving them access to pieces of their lives beyond the screen and stage.



4 Where is TikTok Popular?



All over the world! Owned by Chinese conglomerate ByteDance, AKA the most valued start-up on the planet, TikTok boasts a massive audience in China, followed by India and the United States. India in particular is [leading the charge](#), responsible for a third of all downloads in Jan 2020, followed by Brazil at a little over 10%.

While these three are currently the largest markets, TikTok truly is a **global platform**, with its parent company operating in over 150 markets and in 75 languages.

Top Apps Worldwide for January 2020 by Downloads (Non-Game)



Overall Downloads	App Store Downloads	Google Play Downloads
1 TikTok	1 TikTok	1 TikTok
2 WhatsApp	2 YouTube	2 WhatsApp
3 Facebook	3 Instagram	3 Facebook
4 Instagram	4 WhatsApp	4 Instagram
5 Messenger	5 Facebook	5 Messenger
6 Likee	6 Messenger	6 Likee
7 SHAREit	7 Netflix	7 SHAREit
8 TikTok Wall Picture	8 Google Maps	8 TikTok Wall Picture
9 Snapchat	9 Gmail	9 Snapchat
10 YouTube	10 Kuaishou	10 UC Browser

Note: Does not include downloads from third-party Android stores in China or other regions.

5 What Content is 🔥🔥🔥 on TikTok?

AKA Why Is Everyone Suddenly Dancing All the Time?

TikTok is the first social media platform that, theoretically, **doesn't have anything to do with your social network**.

Instead, TikTok connects people around trending ideas, topics and challenges via the use of **hashtags**. It encourages everyone to join in on the fun through reinterpreting trending videos and putting their own unique spin on them.

While trends change on TikTok by the day, some formats that have remained consistently popular are:

Dance Videos

Dance videos were a huge component of Musical.ly when it was acquired and melded into TikTok, and they've remained popular ever since. Many popular challenges revolve around easy-to-learn dances set to popular songs, such as the **Yeehaw Challenge** set to Lil Nas X's Old Town Road (but more on that later).



#hiteverybeat

359.6M views



The **Hit Every Beat Challenge**, or why dance is in TikTok's DNA

Videos containing dance challenges, choreography or just groovin' to the beat are foundational to TikTok, but not just because it was originally popular among the teenagers who migrated over from Musical.ly. It's due in part to how easy it is to share your dance moves and teach others to join in on the fun. Dance is emotion in motion and is a universal language and that's made clear with how quickly each new dance becomes a major trend.

No better example of this is the Hit Every Beat Challenge, which became immensely popular in late 2019 - 2020. This easy-to-learn dance riffs off the ubiquitous macarena, so any users already familiar with the macarena could soon be able to partake in the challenge.



Lip-Syncing Videos

Users can choose from a number of popular licensed songs or pantomime along to any sound, usually to great comedic effect: bits of famous speeches, trending sound bites, the only limit is your imagination.

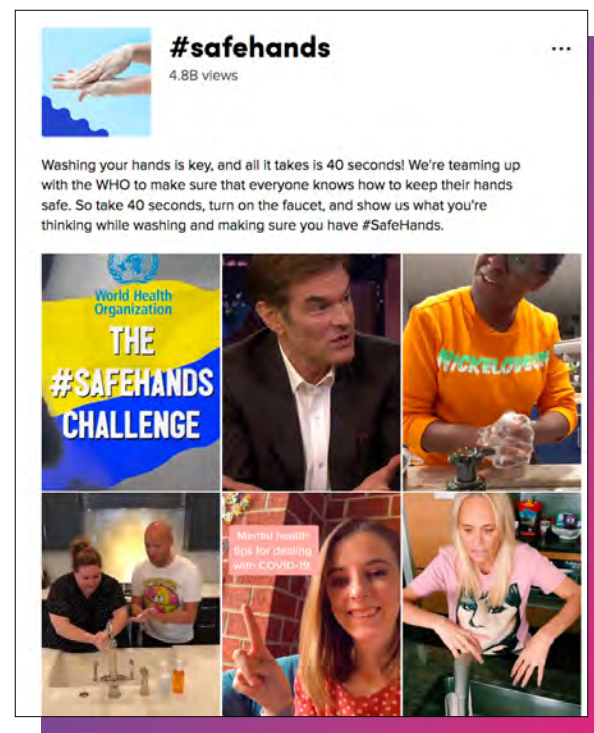
Skits

TikTok actively promotes positivity and lighthearted content, which initially led many to call it Vine 2.0 in its early days. In fact, many of Vine's funniest and most beloved creators, who focused largely on skits, eventually made their way to TikTok after Vine closed down in 2016, finding a new home to showcase their talents and express themselves when the platform began to rise in popularity.

Trending Hashtag Challenges

If you ever wonder where to start on TikTok - whether as a brand or as a content creator - the Discovery tab is the best place to start. There you'll find trending videos aggregated by key topics, which you can put your own spin on to use as a launching pad for your own content. TikTok curates many user-driven trends, which are found and spread through the use of hashtags, but brands can also purchase direct placement on the Discovery page in the form of **branded hashtag challenges**.

TikTok also knows when to get serious with its trends - such as their recent partnership with the WHO to spread key health messages around COVID-19. So far, videos containing the **#safehands challenge** have been seen over 40 million times.





The Power of Music

The active, fervent user base that migrated over from Musical.ly brought with them their passion for music, which has seeped into the very fabric of TikTok. Look no further than the logo - a music note! TikTokers love to sing, dance, and edit videos along to popular tunes, and can even help new tracks reach overnight global success.

You've undoubtedly heard the universally-beloved banger Old Town Road by Lil Nas X. That's right - the **#yeehaw challenge** helped propel the unknown artist into superstardom, with Old Town Road becoming one of the most popular songs of the decade. That's right, not year.... decade.

**May 2020 Update*

While TikTok offers an extensive library of popular music for users to include in their content, brands and other organizations will no longer be able to select licensed music when creating. Instead, brands can select from a library of royalty free tracks, with possible updates in the future.

As Dave Jorgenson, who manages the massively successful TikTok account for The Washington Post wrote, "this is a hiccup for the @washingtonpost TikTok account but ultimately a new challenge. I only use popular music about 30% of the time, so now it's time to **double-down** and get even more creative."

All in all, content on TikTok is always fresh, new and insanely relevant. And wherever creators are breaking barriers and forging new genres, brands are quickly following suit.

TikTok has already been everywhere the world's biggest brands are, from New York Fashion Week to behind-the-scenes of your favorite [NBA games](#).

6 What is TikTok Like For Brands?

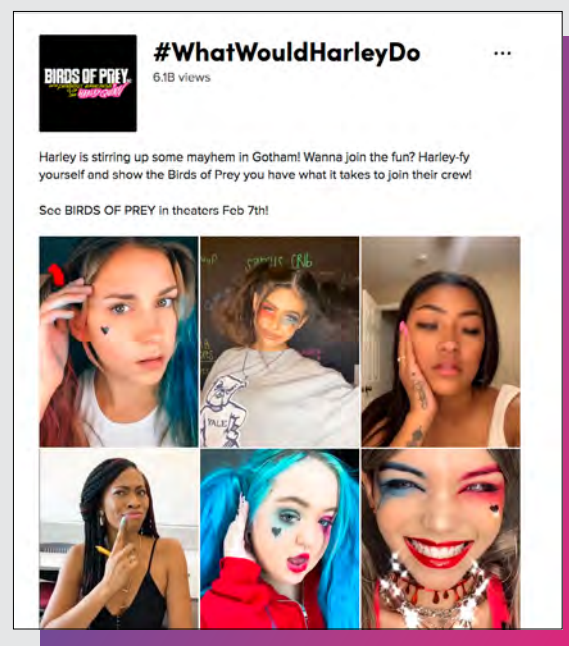
TikTok may be the youngest of the major platforms, but it's wasted no time making itself home to some of the world's biggest brands. Maybe that's because TikTok's endless stream of highly-addicting content makes for some of the most engaged audiences online, with users spending roughly **52 minutes a day on the app**, right up there with [Facebook \(58 minutes\)](#) and [Instagram \(53 minutes\)](#).

There are several ways that brands and organizations can either advertise directly with the platform or with its creators such as:

- Branded Hashtag Challenges
- Native, auto-play videos
- Branded AR filters
- Influencer partnerships

For example, Warner Bros. branded [hashtag challenge](#) #WhatWouldHarleyDo was featured at the top of the Discovery tab and encouraged users to create their own movie-inspired content, using the hashtag to spread the word about the film's release.

According to TikTok, over half of creators have participated in at least one [hashtag challenge](#), which means that engaging with or starting your own hashtags are an extremely effective way of generating audience participation and massive amounts of User Generated Content.

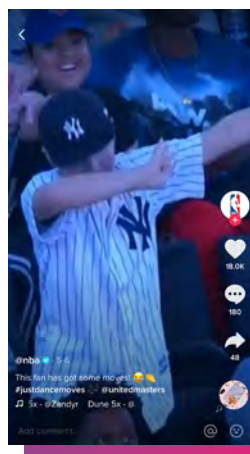
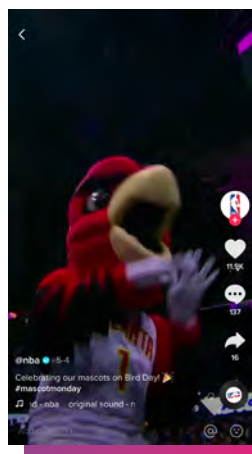


The Top Brands on TikTok

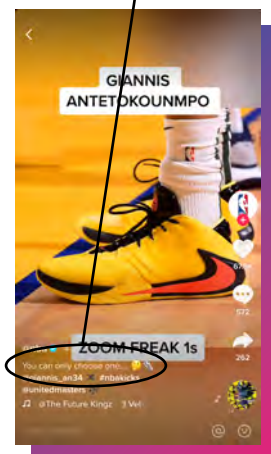
Glancing at [the top brands on TikTok](#), we notice a few similarities which can best be summed up with one word: **relatability**. Despite having access to vast amounts of premium content, none of these brands are simply copy/pasting their material and calling it a day. They know **exactly** how users on TikTok speak, what their ups and downs are, and can filter their vast catalogs of content through these cultural lenses to produce highly relevant posts.

1 NBA

[The NBA](#) was one of TikTok's earliest adopters, creating content back when the platform was still Musical.ly! Despite being home to some of the world's most-followed athletes and larger-than-life sporting moments, the NBA TikTok account keeps it **lighthearted**, with plenty of content revolving around dancing (the native language of TikTok), jumping on rising trends, and encouraging audience engagement.



"You can only choose one..."

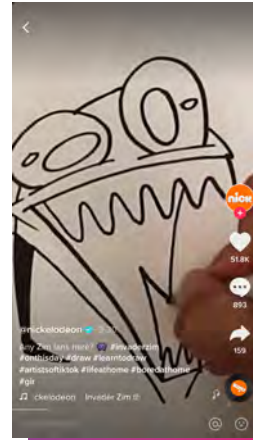


2 Nickelodeon

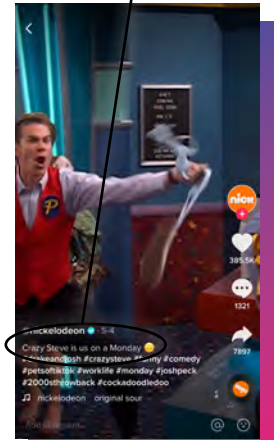
The beloved children's entertainment company knows how to filter their vast library of content into organic and wonderfully TikTok-y moments. A brand whose primary audience is Gen-Z, they understand clearly that the best form of communication is connection through meaningful content, not pushing messages.

For example, you can routinely find **Learn to Draw** tutorials and other useful videos on their profile. As a brand, Nickelodeon has inspired and continues to inspire millions of young storytellers, and they lean into this role by providing value to up-and-coming artists.

Nickelodeon also knows how to speak TikTok, recycling clips from old shows but in new contexts such as our universal loathing for Mondays.



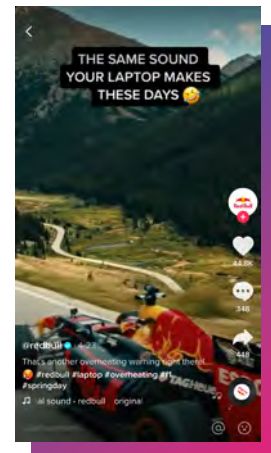
"Crazy Steve is us on a Monday"



3 Red Bull

If you're familiar with [Red Bull's content](#) in any way, you know they don't do **anything** on a small scale. Red Bull is about big stunts, big ideas and big moments - but the genius of their TikTok profile is their ability to take this EPICLY-scaled content and turn it into something completely relatable and everyday.

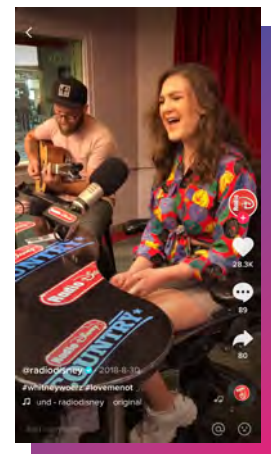
For example, they took an exciting video of a roaring race car engine and transformed it into a **relatable joke** about the sound of overheating laptops while everyone is under quarantine.



4 Radio Disney

[Radio Disney](#) is another great example of a legacy brand that understands what makes TikTok such a unique experience. Instead of simply reposting their content, Radio Disney makes sure that their TikTok experience feels authentic and in-the-moment, giving audiences a behind-the-scenes look of live performances that make you feel as if you're there.

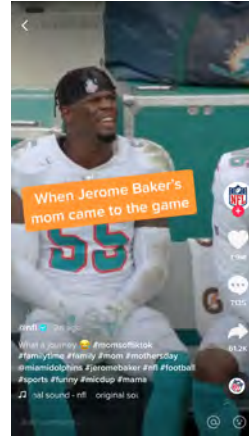
Oftentimes, their videos consist of someone sitting up close to a live studio performance and filming simply by holding up their mobile phone and pressing "record." It's presented - in other words - exactly like an everyday user on TikTok would capture and share these moments.



5 NFL

The NFL is a great example of a brand that understands what matters, especially on platforms like TikTok - people and their stories!

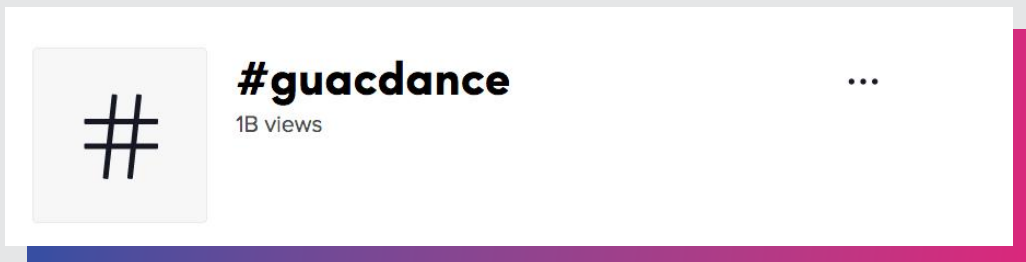
Their account does a great job balancing epic sports highlights with incredibly **human and relatable moments**, catching these mythical figures in the most mundane experiences, such as when Miami Dolphins linebacker Jerome Baker was caught on camera asking his teammates to help him find his mother in the crowd.



But if every social movement is like a campfire, they all start off with an initial spark - which is why the world's top brands often rely on TikTok's many influencers to kick off trends and set the tone.

For example, the most-followed TikToker, Charli D'Amelio, was recruited by Procter and Gamble to lead the **#distancedance challenge**, which encourages consumers to stay home in solidarity with health care workers and to help slow the progression of COVID-19.

Brands understand how powerful these creators' voices are and the influence they carry, which is why more and more creators are being activated to spread the word and create highly-engaging content.



Working With the Influencers of TikTok

Yes, TikTok is home to some of the internet's most-beloved creators, who are hard at work developing the latest and most engaging content formats on the web. Some of these creators have become so ubiquitous they've even been featured alongside NFL players and rock stars in the latest Super Bowl commercials.

These creators are popping up everywhere around the globe - some of them, such as Anna O'Brien, have reportedly grown millions of authentic and highly-engaged followers in as **little as weeks**.



Brands are quickly following suit. When brands partner with TikTok creators, they harness the power of integrated messaging, eschewing the interruptive and alienating forms of advertising that users have grown to ignore. These creators are masters at finding organic and entertaining ways to show off products using their authentic voices - like, mind-bogglingly good!

Measuring Success

IN-FEED VIDEOS

- Impressions
- Clicks
- Video views
- Video views for over 3 seconds
- Video views for over 10 seconds
- Likes

BRANDED LENSES

- Total Number of videos featuring the lens
- Total video views of posts featuring the lens
- Engagement (total likes, comments)

INFLUENCER PARTNERSHIPS

- Views
- Likes
- Comments
- Shares
- Reach

Charli D'Amelio

AUDIENCE: 57M



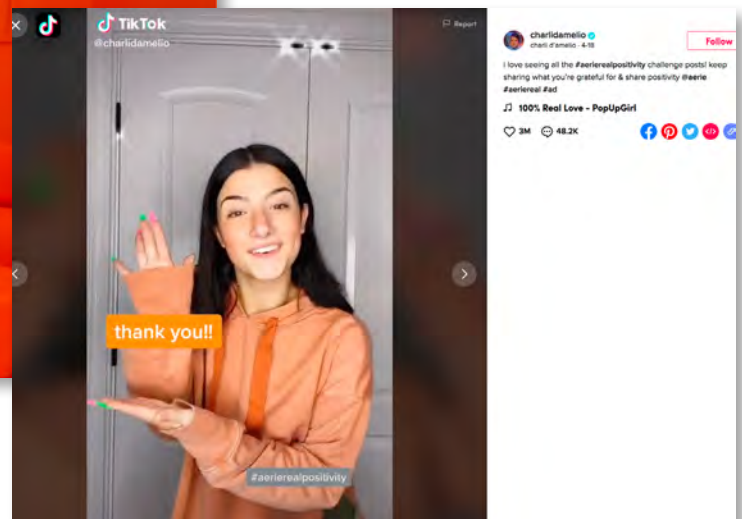
charlidamelio ✓
charli d'amelio

Follow

806 Following 57.2M Followers 4B Likes

don't worry i don't get the hype either

📌 merch link 📌



“Brands are quickly learning how to play with influencers in the TikTok space, and it definitely requires a different mindset and approach. Rather than a prescriptive campaign brief laying out product placement guidelines, a rigid creative concept, key messaging etc., TikTok requires brands to offer more creative license. The success of a piece of content lies in the content itself, not in the audience of the creator, and giving at least some amount of creative freedom is key. For the brands that have figured out the formula, the results are absolutely outstanding. For those that are still observing from the corner and unsure how to dive in: take the risk, now is the time.”



Maggie Reznikoff
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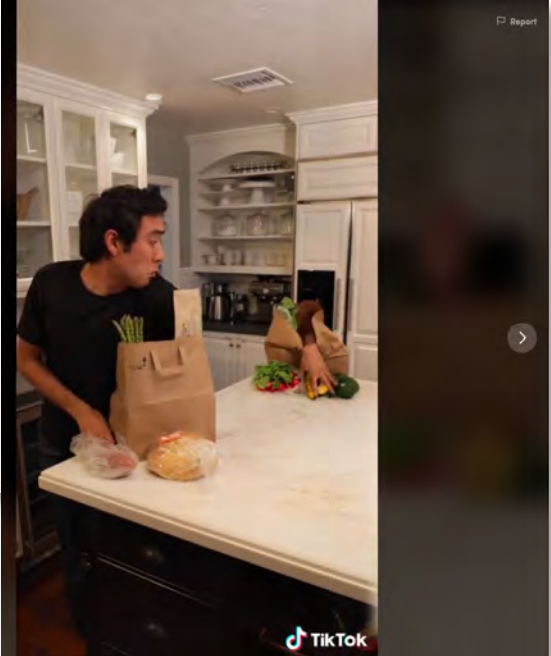
Zach King

AUDIENCE: 43M



zachking ✓
Zach King
[Follow](#)

21 Following 43.3M Followers 475M Likes
👉👉 Watch my BEST TRICKS here 📺👉👉



8 In Their Own Words -The Influencers of TikTok

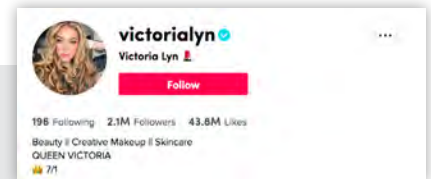
@victorialyn

When did you first hear about TikTok and how long before you started making content on the platform?

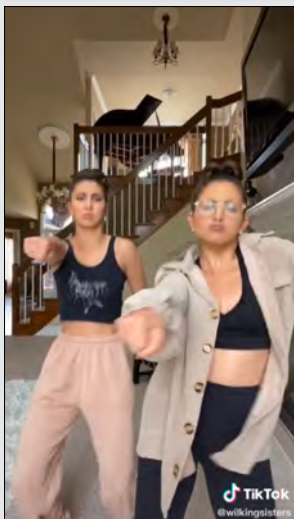
I was on TikTok back when it was still known as "Musical.ly" - I was one of a few beauty influencers who worked with the app directly.

As a creator, what makes TikTok special? Do you think it will be a major part of our social media landscape?

I believe it's a great platform where you can be yourself, you don't really need a studio or special lighting, you can record on your phone. It's not structured like Instagram or Facebook.



@wilking sisters



Did it take you long before you felt comfortable on the platform, or did it take a while to get the hang of it?

It didn't take long for us to get comfortable on the app. Once we started posting our dance videos we felt right at home.

As a creator, what makes TikTok special? Do you think it will be a major part of our social media landscape?

TikTok is so special because it is more of a friendship/close community of people. It is a great way to market yourself in front of millions of people. I definitely think it will be a major part of our social media landscape.



Thank You

Open Influence is trusted by some of the world's most discerning brands with getting their TikTok influencers strategies up and running. If you want to learn more about activating on this awesome channel, connect with us [here](#) or by sending us an email at social@openinfluence.com.