



The Secret to Brand Success on TikTok

Proven strategies for audience engagement
on this rapidly rising social media network



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Who's on TikTok?.....	4
First, Define Your 'Why'.....	5
Reimagining Your Brand Personality.....	6
Content Creation.....	8
Proven Brand Strategies.....	11
TikTok Personalities Need Brand Content.....	16
Measuring Success.....	17
Getting Started	18



Introduction

TikTok quickly became a major player in social media, even before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to stay at home. Now, [with rapidly accelerating](#) growth, the short-form video social network can't be ignored. TikTok offers organizations access to a unique audience with a platform that allows them to influence awareness and perception of their brand more than any social network has before.

It's time to take stock of TikTok. With over 52 million active users in the US (800 million worldwide) and 74% of US social media users aged 13–21, TikTok has access to a young, energetic and difficult-to-reach demographic. ([Get more TikTok stats](#)).

Younger people love TikTok exactly because it's not like other social media networks. It's a place where creators thrive, where the focus is less about production and more about personal entertainment and storytelling—everyone here is a performer. If Twitter is where brands can build their voice, and Instagram is where brands establish their aesthetic, TikTok is perfect for brands to activate their multi-dimensional personality. And, it's the perfect place to set up a digital shop if your brand is working with advocates, customers, or avid fans to cultivate and share your message. TikTok can effectively integrate your brand into audience conversations in a uniquely authentic way.

Before going in depth on the secret to brand success on TikTok, we'll give a quick primer on the platform: who the audience is and how it actually works.



Who's on TikTok?

TikTok has over [800 million monthly](#) active users worldwide and has been downloaded over [2 billion times](#) overall. In the U.S., the number of monthly active users is estimated to be over [52 million](#) as of March 2020. TikTok is particularly important to U.S. brands trying to reach a young audience. Recent Morning Consult research published by [eMarketer](#) notes that 74% of all social media users aged 13–21 in the U.S. use the platform.

TikTok tends to skew female ([63% of Android users on TikTok are female, for example](#)) and TikTokers like to create, with [83% of users](#) creating at least one video on the platform. TikTok users also represent a broad spectrum of socio-economic groups. 37% of its U.S. users have over \$100,000 in annual household income (and over 50%, at least \$75,000 per year), but another 30% of users are in households making less than \$40,000 a year. ([stat source](#))

So who's on TikTok? They're largely young and female, with a mix of income levels. As we'll see later in this guide, TikTok is a place where brands have taken unique approaches to engage this audience. The focus on organic content made on the platform is more about brand, voice, personality, messaging and fun, and less about driving a sale or another direct call to action.



74%

of all U.S. social media users (P13–21) use TikTok

63%

of all TikTok Android users are female

52m

the approximate number of active U.S. TikTok users



First, Define Your ‘Why’

It might be easy to conclude your brand should have an active presence on TikTok because you want to reach that emerging, active, young audience. But unlike other social networks, you’ll need to really think about and clearly define your brand voice or strategy. Unlike Facebook or LinkedIn, you can’t just set up a page and count your likes and follows. Your brand needs to have a ‘why’ clearly articulated if you want to see TikTok success.

What story does your brand want to tell? How does creativity and two-way conversation with customers fit that story?

There are an infinite number of ‘why’s’ you need to define before committing to TikTok. Have a discussion with your entire marketing team on this, because the ‘why’ needs to have buy-in from everyone. Some of the questions you’ll want to answer before you move forward are:

- What is the most important thing to get across?
- What does our organization expect from this younger crowd?
- Do we want them to make purchases, or do we want to just influence their brand perception favorably so they will buy in the future?
- How much influence does this audience have on our short-term and long-term growth?
- How much time, effort and budget do we want to devote to TikTok?

Always keep your “North Star” for TikTok in mind—your ‘why’—and make sure it aligns to your brand’s approach. For some organizations, these questions will be easy to answer. For some, not so much. But having answers, and knowing why you’re committing to engage this audience, is truly key for success. You can’t step in one toe at a time; to succeed on TikTok, you need to fully embrace TikTok.

**What story
does your
brand want to
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**How does
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Reimagining Your Brand Personality

TikTok offers such intimate engagement and connection that choosing the individual who'll be staring back at the camera is the most critical part of your strategy.

The first decision you need to make is determining who can help you to activate your brand. TikTok is a community of creators producing and sharing cool content; for brands to fit in on this social network, it requires them to be more human than on any platform. Personalities lead the way here.

A brand with a naturally playful personality can easily establish itself as an active participant, become more relevant as a representative of pop culture, and foster its own organic community. Brands that aren't such a natural fit with the platform can and do see success, but they have reimagined their brand voice, brand personality and content, and reframed them specifically for this audience.

To make this shift from 'corporate' to 'personal', many brands have chosen to partner with TikTok personalities to represent them and make them approachable and personable. By associating themselves with these individuals and their TikTok-appropriate content, organizations can position themselves as comical, inspirational, weird, funny, artistic, or witty without undermining their well-defined brand outside of TikTok.

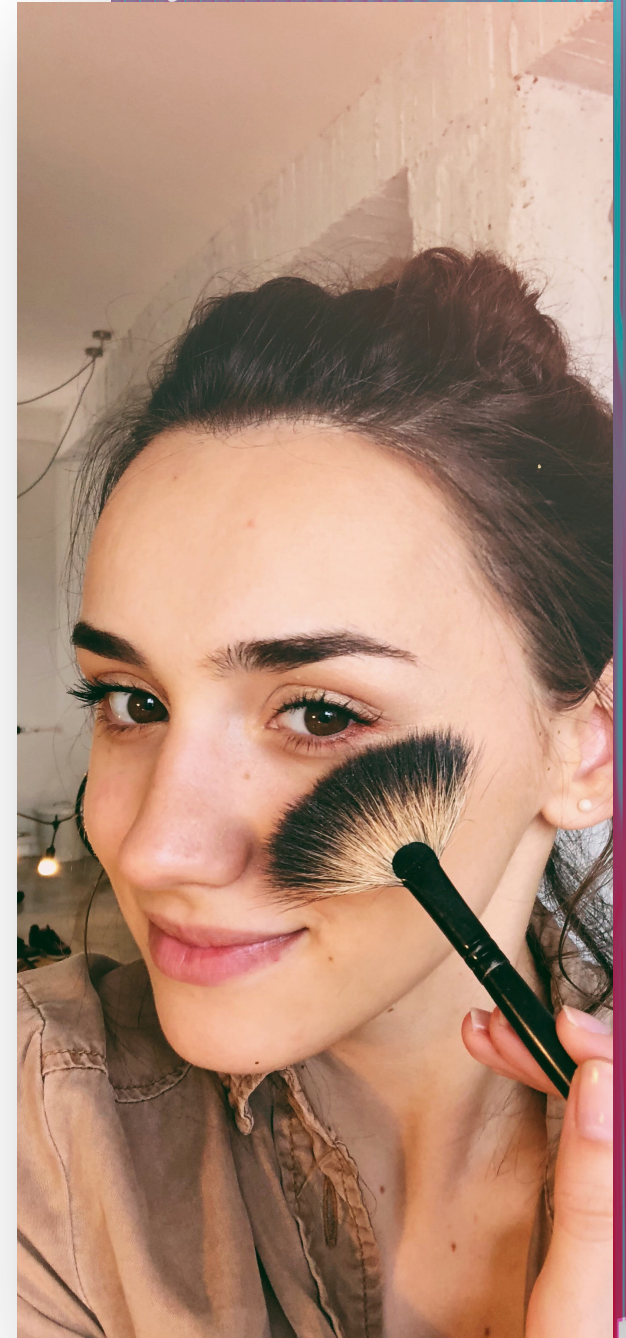


Who Will Represent Your Brand on TikTok?

To make any impact on TikTok, your brand personality must literally be a person (or people). There are a few choices when choosing the right personality that represents your brand.

1. Empower the customers and/or fans who are already evangelizing your brand
2. Team up with an influencer(s) or creator(s) that already has an engaged audience
3. Designate or hire a staff member who is comfortable on camera and can be an effective representative for your brand

You may step-in with one of these options, or choose a combination. One or more can work effectively, as long as the 'what' and 'how' of your strategy is defined.



Content Creation

What's in a 'TikTok'?

Spend a few minutes scrolling through TikTok and you'll quickly see how diverse TikTok content can be. There are a lot of videos that took time to instrument and practice: choreographed dances, lip-syncing, and various 'challenges'. But there's also a diversity of impressive, engaging short-form content -- stunts, skits, clips, compilations, UGC, special effects, and more. TikToks can be created entirely outside the platform, with fully produced content simply uploaded in the app. Or, content can be created inside the platform using the extensive suite of tools and options that TikTok offers.

There are [online resources with deep TikTok tutorials](#), but here are the basics of content creation on TikTok:

TikTok Formats:

- **Original video:** Your own video—a mini movie with effects, text, music, etc.
- **Slideshow:** A collection of photos, with options to add effects, text, music, etc.
- **Templated slideshow:** When creating a photo slideshow, you can choose from a set of TikTok templates, which include special effects, to create a specialized slideshow (the 'transformation' has been popular, and you may run across the 'morph' filter, too).
- **Pre-loaded content (including longer video):** Long-form video content that doesn't require additional editing can be easily uploaded (videos created in-app are limited to 60 seconds each).
- **Pre-loaded, then edited:** Upload assets as needed and stitch them together with effects.
- **Duet:** Create content alongside someone else's TikTok post for a dual screen TikTok.



Supplemental Elements:

- **Music:** Utilize TikTok's extensive library of licensed music, or look for opportunities to create content with trending hashtags or songs.
- **Original sounds (and even name your sound):** When you upload original video, your audio becomes 'original sound.' You can make this sound discoverable and identifiable by naming it (and allow others to discover and use it). Copyrighted music WILL be taken down so be mindful of that when uploading content!
- **Other Sound Effects:** Fun with audio isn't limited only to music. TikToks can be produced with famous movie lines, sound effects, and any other form of audio.

Additional Activities:

- **TikTok challenges:** You can find daily challenges promoted in the app's 'discover' sections. Mimic these and invite your customers, staff, influencers, and advocates to participate.
- **Interactions:** It helps to be an active and engaged user. Follow, comment, and share. Similar to other social media platforms, you can tag users in TikTok posts, whether that's tagging a brand partner, content contributor, influencer, brand advocate, or more.
- **Hashtags:** Like other networks, improve content discovery by using relevant hashtags. Try to associate content with trending hashtags or a challenge, and ensure content is organized into relevant category hashtags (it helps to do research here). You will also often see #fyp (For Your Page) used on posts, though [the jury is out how much this actually helps](#) content with TikTok's algorithm.



Additional Activities (continued):

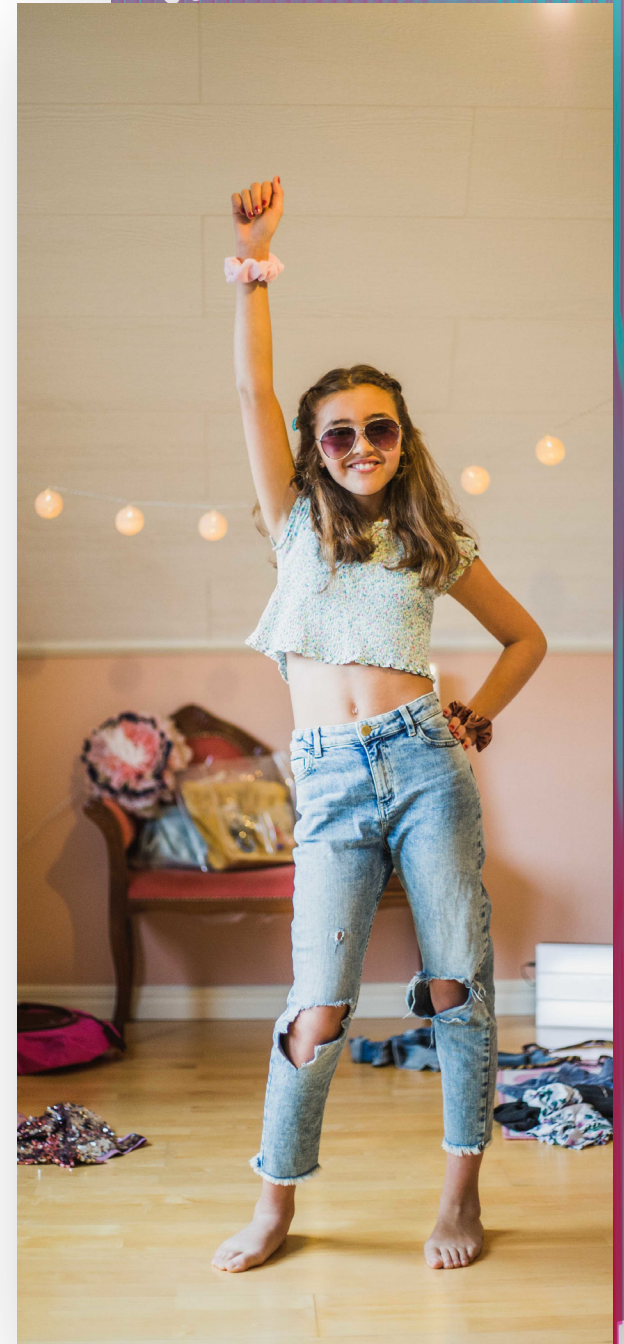
- **Cross-Promotion:** A lot of TikTok content makes its way to other social networks like Instagram Stories and Twitter. Likewise, TikTok users will encourage their audience to [visit them on Instagram or YouTube](#).
- **Repurpose Content:** Content that performs well on other digital platforms will often also be successful on TikTok. One place to start is to comb through the archives of top-performing social content over the years and repackage or edit it for TikTok. TikTok content doesn't have to be 'timely.'
- **User-Generated Content Sharing:** TikTok is driven in large part by 'average' users reposting great content. Spending a few minutes on TikTok quickly reveals that a lot of popular content is posted by non-creators, with credit given to the original content source (even cross-platform).

Creative Tips

Figuring out what to post on TikTok to earn audience engagement can be intimidating. But TikTok makes it easy for any user to create content and to start to build their brand intentionally, and through experimentation and optimization.

TikTok provides users with a suite of creation tools including templates, music, special effects, and the ability to 'duet' alongside another existing TikTok post. And, the network promotes imitation, especially through the dances and challenges that gain quick popularity. Learning the power of these tools and mimicking other content is a great place to start.

When considering what your TikTok content should look like, keep these tips in mind:



- Authentic, raw video is more effective than something that looks overly produced (it's time to rethink what advertising agencies have been advising for decades!)
- Great content provokes a reaction—laughter, fear, awe, inspiration, illusionment, surprise—don't tie this too much to your brand personality. Change it up.
- If you're going to build anticipation (a good storytelling tip in general), make it clear early that there's a payoff coming, otherwise you'll lose a bored audience
- Become a student of the platform. See how other users are succeeding, check the latest TikTok trending hashtags, challenges and songs

Now that you can pass TikTok 101 with flying colors, it's time to go to the next level and plot a long-term marketing and brand strategy for the platform.

Proven Brand Strategies

There are many strategy blueprints visible in the TikTok feed, and every user—from individual creators to big businesses—can earn engagement and build an audience by cultivating their brand personality. Any TikTok account driving views and engagement is delivering consistent quality content, and it's delivered in the way they want their audience to think of them, view them, talk about them, and share them. The following are a few concepts to get you started:



Personality-Driven Strategy

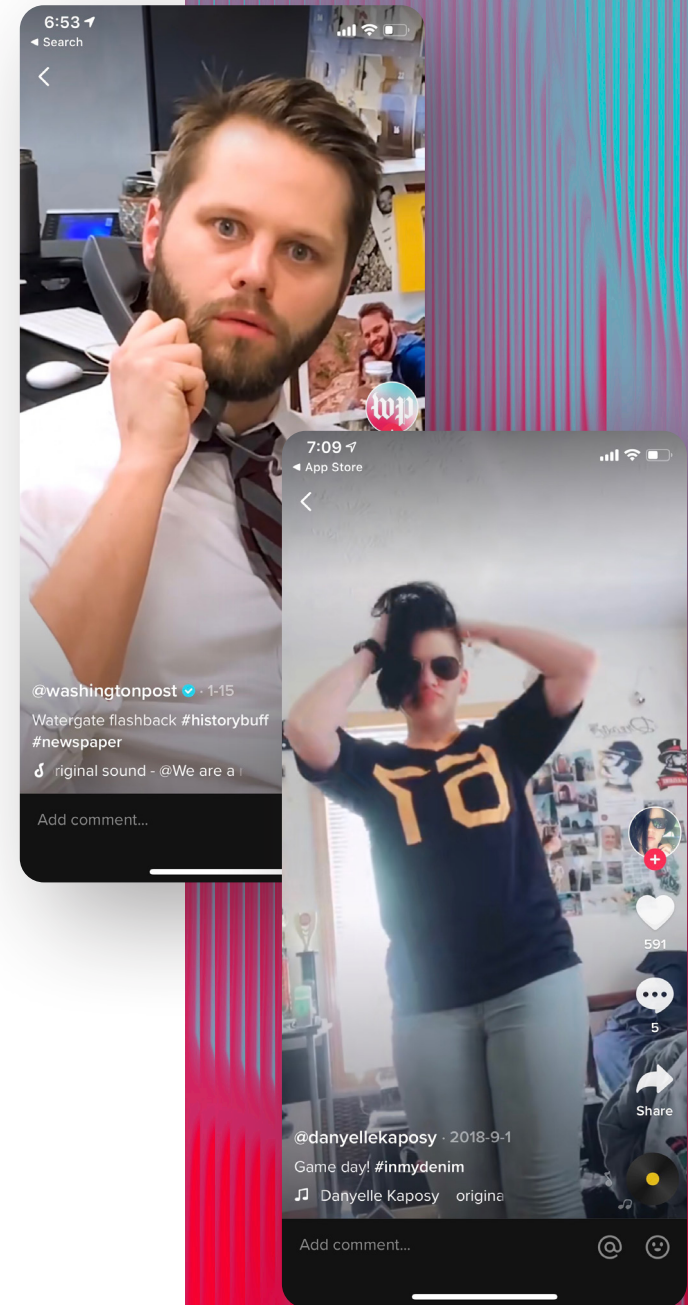
Many organizations have handed their brand reins over to individual creators, letting their unique personalities drive the content while weaving in the brand's messaging in a nuanced or not-so-nuanced way. This approach works well for brands seeking to truly humanize themselves and make their message more relatable to TikTok's younger audience. Using a brand representative enables this single power user to master the platform and really live the brand. It's important to make sure that person is truly an embodiment of your brand and its personality, because a single individual can't run your brand's TikTok forever.

Even before COVID-19 required us to practice social distancing, [The Washington Post has been earning engagement on TikTok](#) by letting its representative Dave Jorgenson be [its TikTok agent](#). While he is the lead actor, the newspaper and its daily stories drive the narrative. Jorgenson knows how to take stories the Post wants to tell and translate them for the TikTok audience.

[Meanwhile, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History has built an audience of over 120,000 followers](#), mostly with videos featuring Tim Pearce, the head of the Section of Mollusks at the museum. Pearce's dry delivery of snail jokes and factoids, in videos dressed up with fun TikTok effects, lets the museum deliver educational content in a funny, entertaining way. With TikTok videos earning hundreds of thousands of views, the museum finds great success by turning their staff member into a star. What better way to put a face on the brand than an actual face of an employee of the brand?

Performance-Driven Strategy

If you're looking to activate a group of brand advocates to extend social proof and reach new audiences, using [TikTok challenges](#) could be the right approach. Depending on how the challenge's 'act' is constructed, promoted and executed, it can and should reflect the brand's personality. In creating and getting others to replicate a particular performance, a brand personality can grow and travel rapidly through content sharing with challenges.



[Chipotle](#) created an effective challenge and enabled customers to have fun with the brand. Chipotle was an early adopter of TikTok and sought to reach and engage this younger audience. They created the [#ChipotleLidFlip challenge](#), which resulted in millions of views, a lot of brand awareness, and users from all over trying to nail their #ChipotleLidFlip.

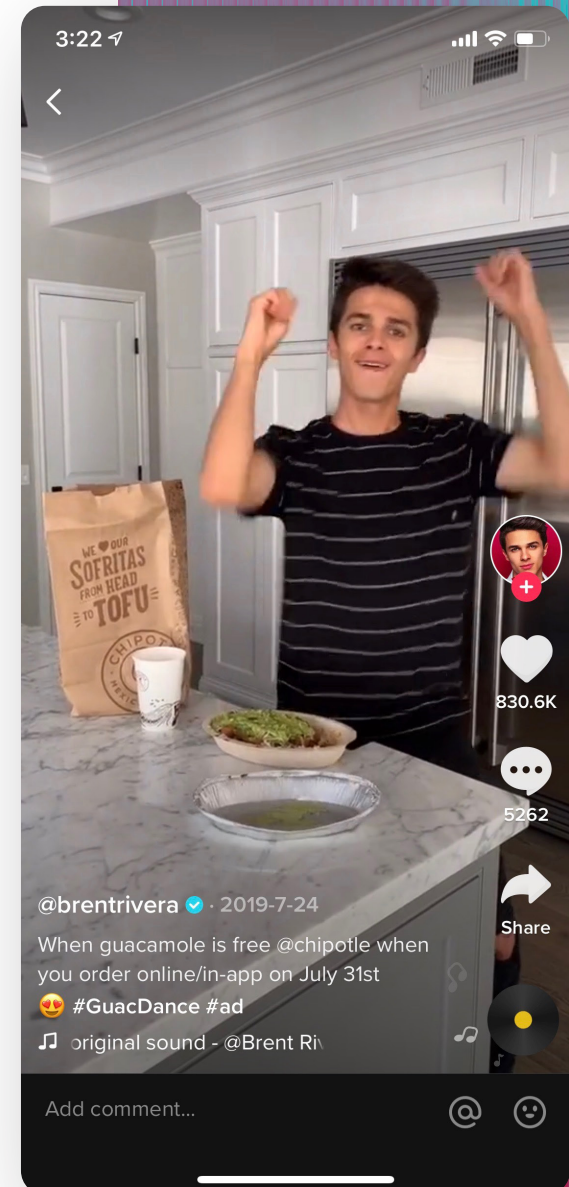
[Guess](#) jeans also challenged fans to step up their game with denim. They had a different goal in mind, and incorporated the [‘transformation’](#) content type that is popular on TikTok. This challenge encouraged users to create content and more organically activate brand conversations. Here are some examples of the [#InMyDenim](#) challenge, demonstrating how the Guess brand invigorates otherwise plain or boring experiences and outfits.

Is there an activity that relates to your brand, which could be lightheartedly competitive—where users would try to outdo each other for social recognition or rewards? Or is there another brand’s TikTok challenge that you could mimic? These are golden opportunities for mass sharing, and are especially beneficial when your goal is to get users posting more and having integrated conversations about your brand.

UGC-Driven Strategy

Many organizations have built their TikTok audience around a growing collection of user-generated content that they’ve curated. Selection and sharing of other creators’ content that is on-brand is a popular approach (as long as appropriate attribution is given). Your brand personality can be activated by the type of content you share and how you present it to your audience (e.g. with additional editing, captioning or some other branded element that adds value to the original content).

Adding value through UGC isn’t a great (or easier) strategy because it doesn’t require original content creation. It’s a great strategy because user-generated content is inherently authentic, and capturing and promoting authenticity is like grabbing the brass ring on TikTok.



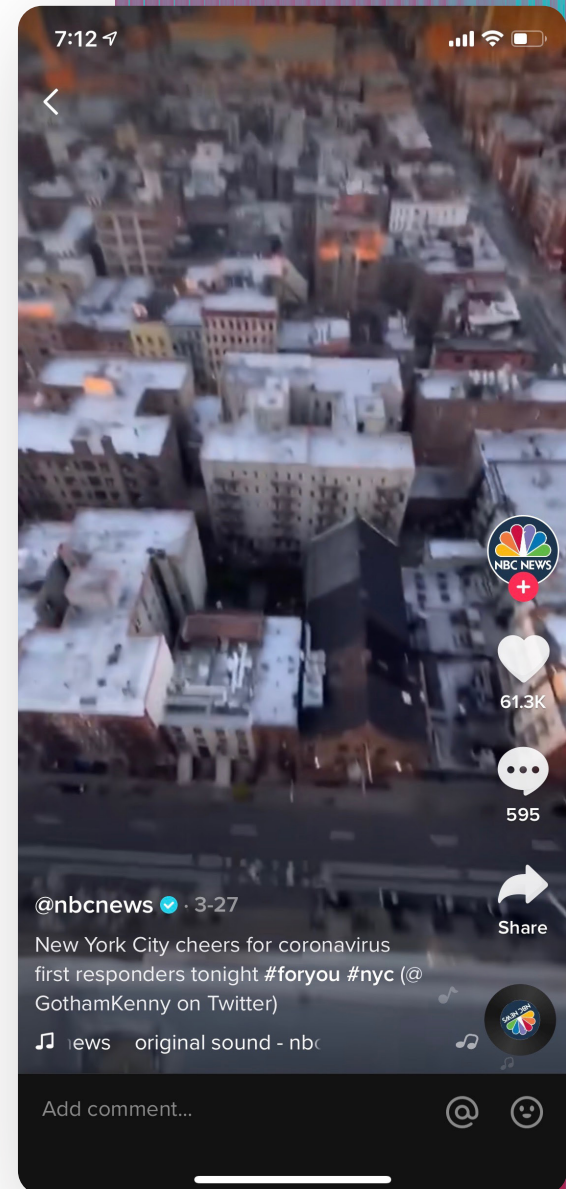
The worldwide leader in sports, [ESPN](#), is making its brand relatable to a younger generation of sports fans through a UGC strategy. The network has amassed an audience of over seven million followers on TikTok with [a feed that is entirely driven by other users](#). ESPN injects its brand voice into content it shares, with captions of praise. This activates and provides positive messaging to the youthful, energetic audience it's aiming for, and it delivers the quick hits of positive engagement that users are seeking.

Similarly, [NBC News](#) wants to be known as the news organization that delivers authentic news, and their content is dripping with realism and emotion. When they post real authentic content like [this](#) and [this](#)—stories that are uplifting but also raw (and not shot on a professional camera), it drives authentic interest and a more intimate emotional connection with each viewer.

Looking again to Chipotle for one more angle on user-generated content, they have effectively leveraged their staff as brand advocates. Original content created by employees and staff can be some of the best UGC at a brand's disposal. And here's where that suite of TikTok tools for video editing can turn the simplest videos into amazingly engaging and shareable content, like turning lead into gold. Here's how Chipotle [made a TikTok that earned over 100,000 views](#), starting with a video from the kitchen, featuring a staff member chopping up vegetables.

Repackaged Content Strategy

For brands that find it harder to create original content for TikTok, a repackaged content strategy can make sense. Repackaging means curating and compiling or re-editing existing media to make it more fun, shorter, snappier, and better suited for a younger audience. Repackaged content can be especially suitable for brands with a lot of archived, timeless content. Repackaging long stories into quick hits or highlights, or putting them to music can quickly build audience engagement. Think about a new editing style or styles, or added captions designed for immediate gratification, humor or personal connection.



There are many brands making hay with this TikTok strategy. [Netflix earns acclaim for much of its social media strategy](#), and a lot of its TikTok success stems from the effective use of show clips to build a culture of memes created from original content. These aren't previews or trailers, but clever cutting, editing, and curation of [select parts of its shows](#) to give fans a new shorthand language to discuss each show.

[Ellen DeGeneres](#) has had several TikTok posts go viral using [edited clips from her shows](#). There are segments, dances and funny moments—all of which serve to bring the energy, enthusiasm and fun of her shows and personality to life on TikTok.

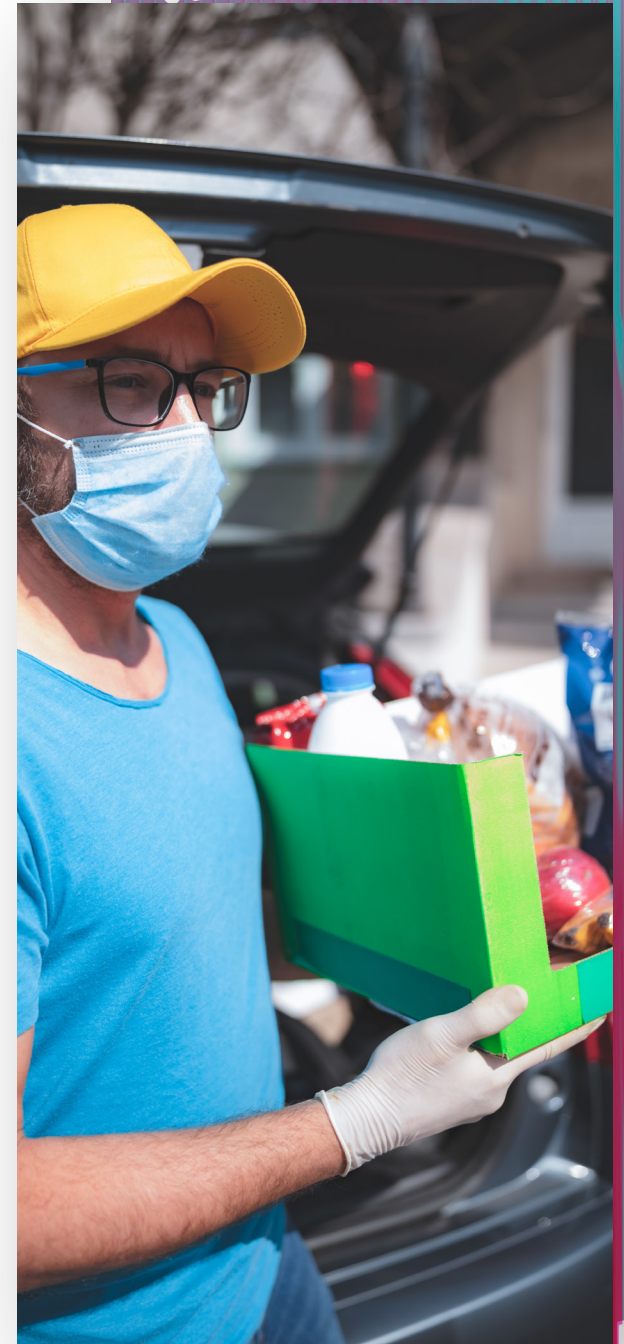
Finally, [Major League Baseball](#) is another example of an organization that has given new life to their archives of content, carefully curating emotional awe-inspiring and tear-inducing moments. The league uses [cool game highlights](#) to reinforce amazing plays. It also takes clips from its bank of non-game content like [first pitches](#) and [feel-good moments with fans](#) to show the emotional side of the game—the feelings fans experience when watching but might not be able to articulate.

Message-Driven Strategy

For brands that are already established on TikTok but haven't seen tremendous success, it may be time to activate around a single, specific message.

Two organizations whose messages have become especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic are the [Red Cross](#) and the [World Health Organization](#). They each make their core message relatable for TikTok users with [music](#), [eye-catching tempo](#), and an [imitable](#) #SafeHands 'challenge.'

When the content feels native to TikTok, and not forced, it opens up trust for brands, fans, and potential customers to engage, relate and deliver their messages across audiences.



TikTok Personalities Need Brand Content

Few brand personalities can create every single post on their own. They need material, videos and photos to start—the core stories that are important to your brand. They can quickly edit and post some of these directly, or modify according to the strategies outlined earlier. To deliver evergreen and new media to them easily, quickly, and directly to their mobile phone, you'll want to look for software to streamline and automate this process.

A brand advocacy platform, like [Greenfly](#), is the only efficient way to deliver a stream of media and galleries of content. It can deliver this content directly from digital asset management systems and filestores directly to the mobile phones of creators, influencers, advocates and personalities—no matter how many there are. To grow your TikTok influence, it pays to keep advocates "gassed up" with a steady supply of photos and images that they can edit, modify and turn into great content.

Your collaborators and your brand's own TikTok talent and staff can spend more time creating TikTok treasures when content clips are readily accessible. And, your team won't get derailed with constant emails and texts for more or specific content.



User-generated content—from customers, fans or staff—can also be a cinch with a software platform for sharing and curation. Many brands get hung up on the logistics and time-consuming work involved with content collection, curation, and approval, and that slows their progress on building a presence and a personality on TikTok. And on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, for that matter. The Greenfly mobile app enables creators to browse galleries of media as if your entire digital asset management system was on their phones. They can share content directly on just about any social network with two taps, or edit and share new content quickly and easily.

If you're serious about TikTok, you'll want to ensure that your personalities have 24/7 access to content with the Greenfly brand advocacy platform. We have the expertise and the technology to bring any TikTok strategy to life.

Measuring Success

Much like other social networks, you can track stats on TikTok. Again, it's important to keep your 'why' in mind when you're scrolling through this data—not all of it will be relevant to your goals. Measurement on TikTok, outside of advertising, is evolving, but there are some good resources available now.

First, you can access a handful of metrics around followers and posts by assuring your TikTok account settings are set to 'Pro' (there is no cost for doing this).

One of the best things you can do in the beginning, as you're getting a feel for success, is benchmark your account's performance against those of peers and similar accounts. The best way to research and track benchmarks are with a couple of free sites: [TikAnalytics](#) and [Pentos](#). These sites will help you to get started analyzing engagement rate, over- and under-performing posts, and more.

As a starting point, here are the average engagement rates on TikTok, according to [Influencer Marketing Hub](#), based on follower count:

Average engagement rates on TikTok based on follower count

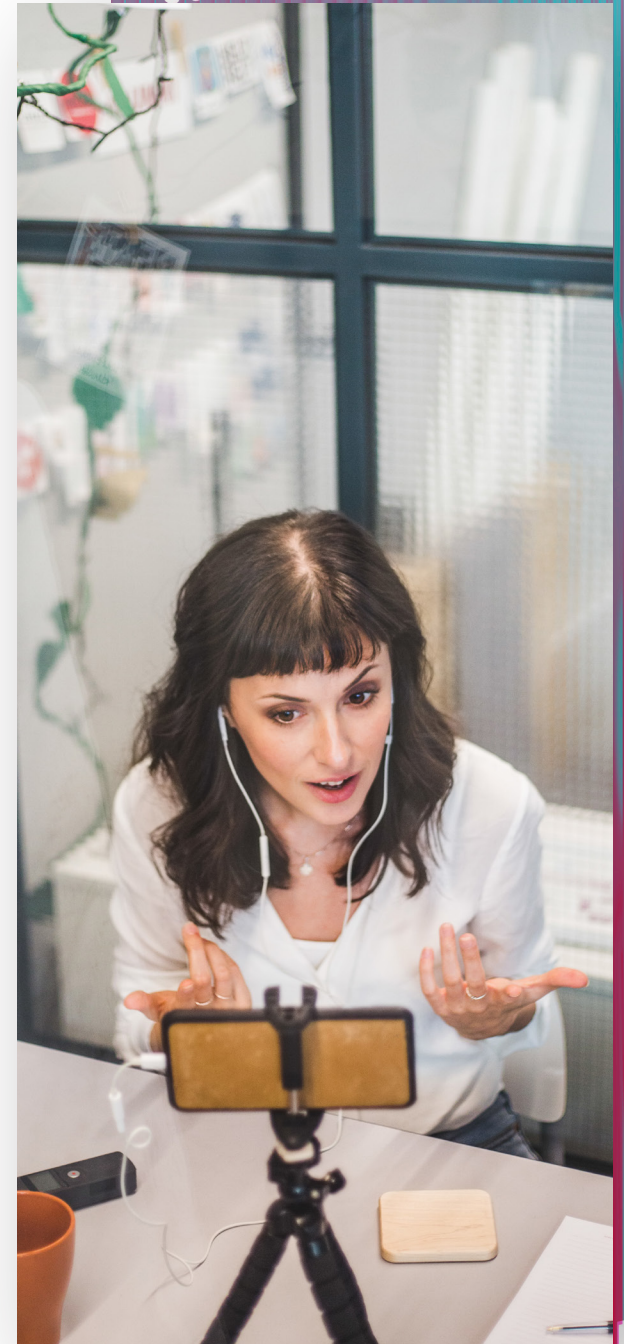
Follower Count	Engagement Rate (Avg)
0–10K	9.38%
10K–100K	8.43%
100K–500K	7.23%
500K–1M	4.88%
1M–5M	4.99%
5M–10M	3.35%
10M+	3.07%

Getting Started

Regardless of the story you're trying to tell, or the brand personality you have, TikTok is a powerful, growing vehicle for authentically connecting with a younger audience today—particularly teens and young adults. The network has many features that can get you quickly in front of TikTok's user base and keep your brand in control of conversations. And, whether your TikTok strategy is driven by collaboration with creators, curating UGC, or resurrecting an archive, the ability to distribute content as well as collect original content from advocates and personalities will be a game-changer for your organization.

Connect with us to learn how [Greenfly](#) can help you get off to a great start, and quickly and effectively activate your advocates on this new and exciting social network.

[Send us a note](#) or give us a call today at +1 (310) 620-8565.



Greenfly, the leader in brand advocacy, enables organizations to fuel brand love through authenticity. The company's brand advocacy platform and mobile apps enable organizations to transform their advocates into brand builders by harnessing the power of authentic content. Founded in 2014, Greenfly is headquartered in Santa Monica, California with sales offices across the US and Europe. To learn more, please visit www.greenfly.com.

