



AN INSIDE LOOK AT
**GENERATION
TIKTOK**

ADWEEK BRANDED

StudentBeans

WHO IS GENERATION TIKTOK



2020 was the year TikTok took control over an entire generation.

Few platforms have had the immediate impact that TikTok has among the audience we used to call Gen Z. It's disrupted everything about their social media interactions. They've taken to TikTok to be entertained, to interact with each other, to connect and to be a part of communities.

And to buy stuff.

The hashtag #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt couldn't be truer. In fact, an exclusive Student Beans survey of students aged 16-24 found that 55% of TikTok users had actually made a purchase after seeing a

brand or product on the platform. 41% said they'd consider buying something directly off the app.

Still, if mention of the platform inspires a shiver of fear, you aren't alone. TikTok came on the scene so quickly that many marketers have yet to wrap their heads around it.

Consider this: According to AppAnnie, TikTok was the most downloaded app of 2020 and it is set to reach 1.2 billion

average monthly active users in 2021.

On top of that, many of TikTok's young users aren't on other platforms. The company says that 40% of people on TikTok don't have Facebook accounts and 63% are not on Twitter.

TikTok is all about raw, unpolished, often humorous video. No endlessly edited photos or Facetuning here. Gen Z's preference for truth, authenticity and humor pervades.

The platform itself is ruled by a powerful algorithm that quickly learns users and curates a highly personalized “For You” page. While it’s impossible to know exactly how the algorithm works, TikTok has shared that recommendations are based mostly on user interactions. Meaning users will see videos similar to those they’ve liked, commented on or shared.

The takeaway? You don’t need a massive following to have your content promoted. The algorithm rewards quality, relevant content for its viral potential regardless of who created it.

As for ad capabilities, TikTok is still experimenting with formats and

experiences, but there is a lot to be excited about. Opportunities available now include in-feed videos, homepage takeovers, branded hashtag challenges and creator partnerships. On the ecommerce side, TikTok recently confirmed that it will roll out affiliate links, in-app brand catalogs and self-service ad features. There’s also a social commerce partnership with Shopify. Because of the viral nature of the algorithm, affiliate links in particular could be a massive boon for brands.

Now that you know who is on the platform and how it works, let’s explore how you can tap into all things Generation TikTok and create content that drives results and gains you a following.

YOU HEARD THAT RIGHT

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EMBODY AUTHENTICITY

Gen Z has high expectations for the brands they interact with. They are constantly on the hunt for anything that feels real or true and expect brands to define and communicate their values accordingly. This search is exacerbated on TikTok, where the point is to be unpolished and unapologetically you. In this context, it's crucial you throw out the strict brand guidelines and tap into your brand's unique character.

Make it your own

To make content that feels genuine, you need to start by examining what makes your brand unique. At a base level, what purpose does your product or service have? Taking the time to brainstorm around this will help guide you as you decide which content trends to engage with, which to avoid and what type of content (silly, educational etc.) most fits with your brand. Although Gen Z does take authenticity seriously, it's important not to take yourself too seriously. Values-based authenticity with a side of self-awareness is the sweet spot for generation TikTok.

Who does it best?

E.l.f Cosmetics holds the trophy for the most-viral TikTok campaign ever with its "Eyes.Lips.Face" campaign. It spawned almost 5 million user-generated videos and had celebrities like Jessica Alba and Reese Witherspoon joining in unpaid. What led to this runaway success? First, the project originated with a desire to communicate its edgy and inclusive brand values to the audience it had identified on TikTok. The song itself, created by the agency Movers+Shakers, was crafted with recent hit songs in mind and to tee up the hashtag challenge.

Not only did it create mass awareness, but it had college students reaching for their wallets. When Student Beans ran a campaign with e.l.f in late 2019 to get its TikTok campaign in front of a college audience, total student codes issued skyrocketed by 80% compared to the previous month. Orders grew by 88% and conversion rates grew by 50%. What's more, Student Beans identified that students were actually piling their digital baskets even higher. Average order value also saw a 31% month-on-month increase, too.

Take action

Who do you want to show up as on the platform? What specific brand pillars or values can be best communicated via short videos? Take some time to dive into the viral trends, hashtags, songs and dances from the past few months and brainstorm where you might fit into those moments. It's also crucial to define your end goal. Is it driving sales? Creating awareness around a new product? Or simply establishing your brand as a fun contributor to the platform?



FIND+CREATE COMMUNITY



TikTok is composed of hundreds of thousands (and maybe millions) of niche communities. For example, college TikTok, finance TikTok and food TikTok. These communities and the algorithm that helps users find them is unique to the platform. Finding what communities your audience interacts with and how your brand can become a part of them is key. Let's dive in.

Make it your own

Creating community is all about taking the time to engage. To make sure this gets done, designate a specific team member (or even entire team) to take ownership of audience engagement. Take time to educate them on the importance of tone, timing and consistency and help them create space in their schedules to respond to user comments and interact with other accounts. Hashtags are another way users find and define their communities so use the ones unique to your audience as much as possible. Note that the Student Beans survey found a little under half (40%) of respondents say they look for content that helps them connect with their friends, so be mindful of encouraging these connections without overstepping.

Who does it best?

Arby's has perfected the art of creating and engaging its community on TikTok. After a creator called @h1t1 posted a video of a TV that could only display the Arby's menu board went viral, the brand knew it had to act. They played along, sliding into the now-viral video's comment section saying, "We've been looking for this." Users went wild for the exchange, so the brand worked to extend the moment, creating a back and forth with @h1t1 and other creators who posted "Missing Menu" videos. It all culminated when the chain launched a limited "\$5 Missing Menu Meal." While affiliate links or other ecommerce features weren't available at the time of the campaign, the brand was still able to take a virtual cultural moment and turn it sales.

Take action

Start by defining who you are trying to reach. Is it budding Gen ZEOs working to monetize their crafting skills? Or young activists looking to make their social justice message go viral?

Once you know the who you can work on the how. With this defined, spend time observing the community. What kind of lingo or hashtags do they use? Are there any particularly fun trends your brand could connect with? Remember, authenticity is crucial. If you don't see an obvious way to connect your brand to a specific community, either look elsewhere or focus on a more general audience.

CREATION NOT CONSUMPTION

The creator community The creator community on TikTok is different than on other platforms. Why? Because most everyone participates (83% of TikTok users have posted a video at some point) and the algorithm makes it so anyone can go viral. For marketers, understanding and leveraging the creator community is crucial. Right now, TikTok offers the “CreatoMarketplace” for brands to form partnerships. Remember that brand engagement with TikTok creators is still relatively new territory, and success will depend on staying flexible, open-minded and up to date as the capabilities evolve.

Make it your own

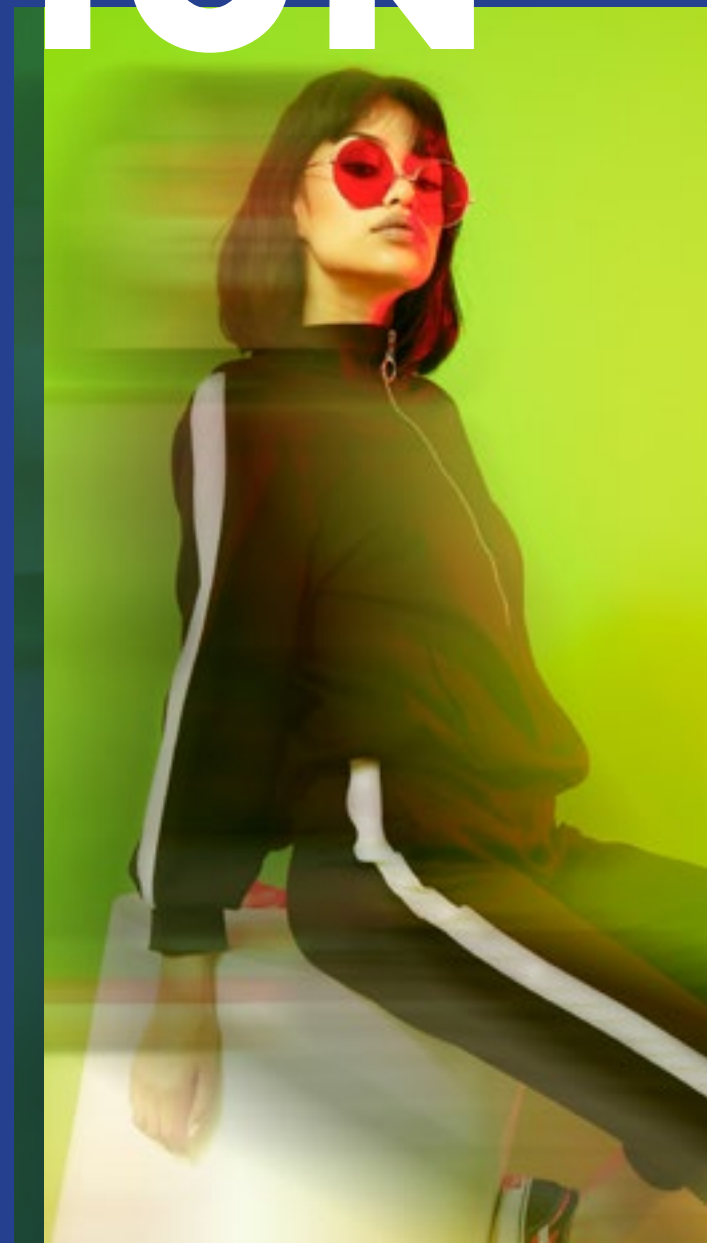
TikTok users are obsessed with challenges and one of the best ways to tap into the creator community and mentality is through a hashtag challenge. A challenge can revolve around pretty much anything but should be grounded in TikTok’s fun, quirky vibe. Any challenge should feature a clear call to action and be focused on what matters to your audience.

Who does it best?

Sportswear brand Gymshark is the undisputed king of engaging creators to boost its brand. It carefully selects creators who fit its aesthetic and values and pays them small sums to do their thing—whatever that is—but in Gymshark gear. After building up their following via the creator fitness community, they launched the “66 Days I Change Your Life” campaign. Followers and fans were asked to choose a personal goal and upload a photo. Sixty-six days later they uploaded an “after” photo for a chance to win a year’s supply of Gymshark goods. This challenge was intrinsic to the brand’s values and missions and successfully engaged the fitness community by creating a challenge that tapped into its reason for being.

Take action

When it comes to hashtag or other types of challenges, it’s crucial that you stay up to date on content trends in general and within the community you are trying to reach. These change daily if not hourly, so it’s a good idea to have one person or team dedicated to monitoring trends. When creating a challenge, remember that it’s all about fun. A whopping 87% of the Student Beans survey respondents said they go to TikTok for entertainment so keep it light.



BE FUN



In contrast In contrast to Instagram, being polished and put together on TikTok is decidedly uncool. When asked what kind of content they want to see from brands, 68% of the Student Beans survey respondents checked off funny videos. The platform is all about realness and letting your guard down which can be both good and bad for brands. On one hand, it means you don't need thousands of dollars to create a single video, but on the other, trying too hard to be funny will quickly put you in the try-hard adult category. As Nick Tran, TikTok's global head of marketing said, "This is fun. Don't feel that what you put out on TikTok needs to be perfect. Go out, try a bunch of things; as long as it speaks to your values as a brand, it'll probably do well because our community is very accepting."

Make it your own

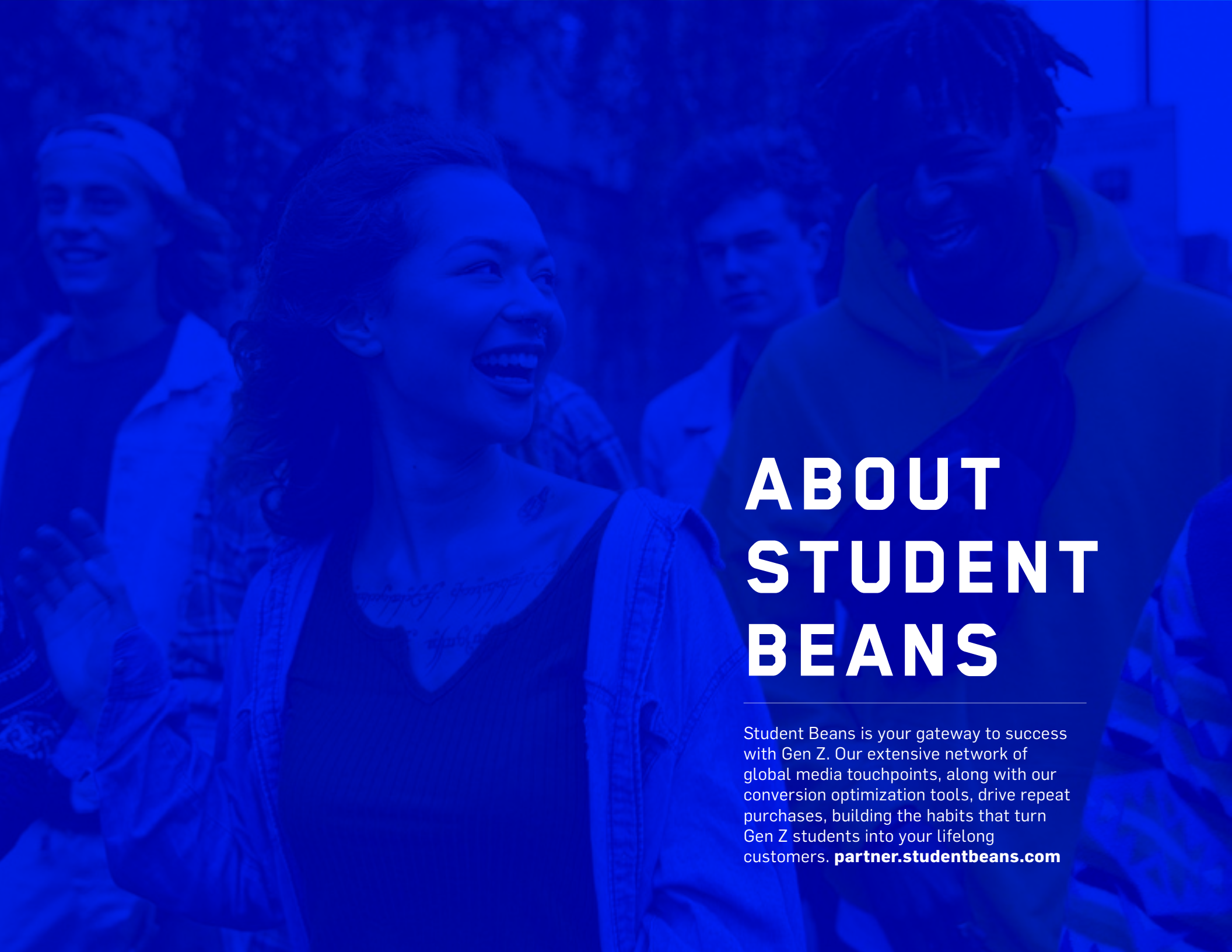
Letting your guard down as a brand can be scary, but it is possible to do without opening yourself up to criticism or brand safety issues. Note that most of the humor on TikTok tends to be pretty wholesome, with creators using it as a positive tool to make themselves and their audience feel good, so lean into that.

Who does it best?

The Washington Post TikTok is a prime example of using humor to engage an audience in a way you might not expect. While it's known for its hard-hitting investigative journalism, the WP is using the platform to show its lighter side and engage a younger audience. It posts "behind the scenes" videos from the newsrooms and memes of news tidbits. The videos are definitely silly, with reporters donning costumes and doing dances, but also self-aware, allowing the publication to laugh at itself while still staying true to its brand pillars.

Take action

Gen Z's humor moves fast and can be hard to decipher for those on the outside. One of the best ways to keep up is by simply spending time on the platform. Designate someone on your team as the official trend tracker and have them present to your team weekly or daily. Keep in mind that a joke or hashtag that's trending on Monday could very well be outdated by Friday. So, if you want to jump in on a joke make sure you have the bandwidth to turn the content around within a day or so. Top creators like Addison Rae, the D'amelio sisters, Bryce Hall etc., have a lot of influence on what's trending so make sure to follow them and stay in-tune with what kinds of content they are putting out. And last but not least, remember that your content doesn't need to be (and really shouldn't) be perfect. Sometimes the best content can come out of blooper moments or "fails" so don't be afraid to just get into it. Gen Zers will appreciate your brand putting its whole, authentic self out there in the same ways they are.



ABOUT STUDENT BEANS

Student Beans is your gateway to success with Gen Z. Our extensive network of global media touchpoints, along with our conversion optimization tools, drive repeat purchases, building the habits that turn Gen Z students into your lifelong customers. partner.studentbeans.com

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