



**NET NATIVES**

# **TIKTOK 101 FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE MARKETERS**

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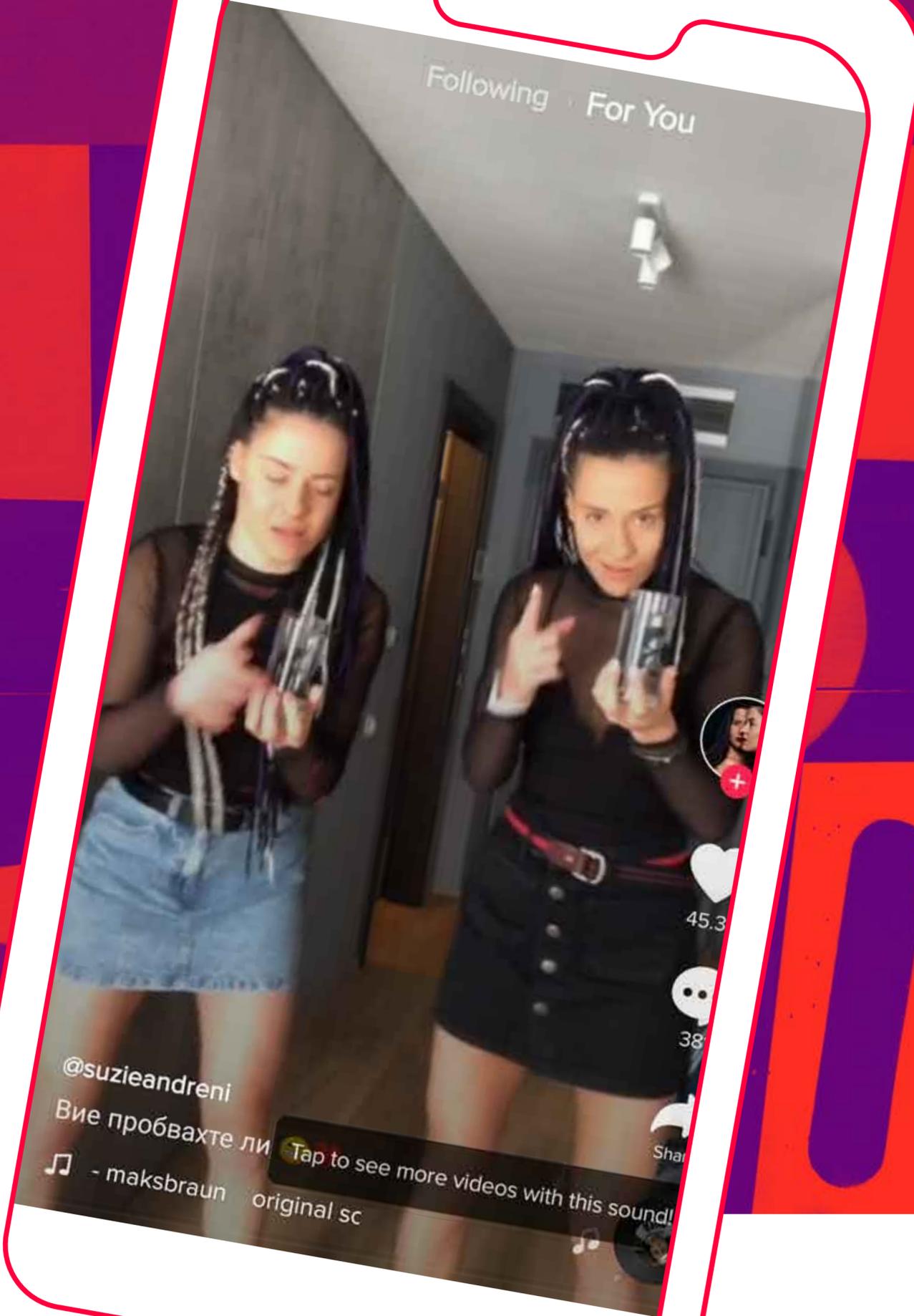
# THE TIKTOK PHENOMENON

**With two billion downloads globally, more than 500 million active users worldwide, and an average daily view time of 52 minutes, TikTok continues to take the world by storm. As the fastest-growing social media platform in the world, it's already giving Twitter and Snapchat a run for their money, surpassing them both in popularity.**

What's more, 41% of TikTok's audience are users aged between 16 and 24 years old, which isn't surprising considering the app was originally created to appeal to under-18s, reflecting the habits and behaviours of this age group. So when you're trying to raise awareness and improve the reputation of your community college, TikTok should be on your radar.

TikTok is less saturated with brands than its older counterparts, presenting a major opportunity to advertisers. Look at Crocs, who created a TikTok account in October 2019 specifically to reach Gen Z customers with their Post Malone #ThousandDollarCrocs challenge. Within a week, they had 84,000 more followers on TikTok than on Twitter. The Gen Z audience are there, and waiting, for those brands who get it right.





It may feel like a step into the unknown, but TikTok is a must for any student marketer. We now include TikTok as standard in every media plan we produce (where TikTok answers the challenge of your campaign brief). With the help of Akeru, every lead that comes through goes straight into your CRM. You'll be able to see exactly which adverts led to enquiries and enrolled students, making your first steps in the world of TikTok a little easier. And making it possible to attribute true ROI.

In this whitepaper, we'll explore the recipe to achieving authentic TikTok cut-through, and creating compelling content strategies that work for you, your values, and your proposition. We'll run through how to work with the student audience, the kind of results we've already seen from the platform, and what we can learn from them. We'll also address the effects of coronavirus, which may only be temporary, but has shifted online behaviour, and what you must consider as a result. And then, once you've got everything you need to kill it on TikTok, we'll go through how you can quickly, easily and effectively track ROI for your campaigns.

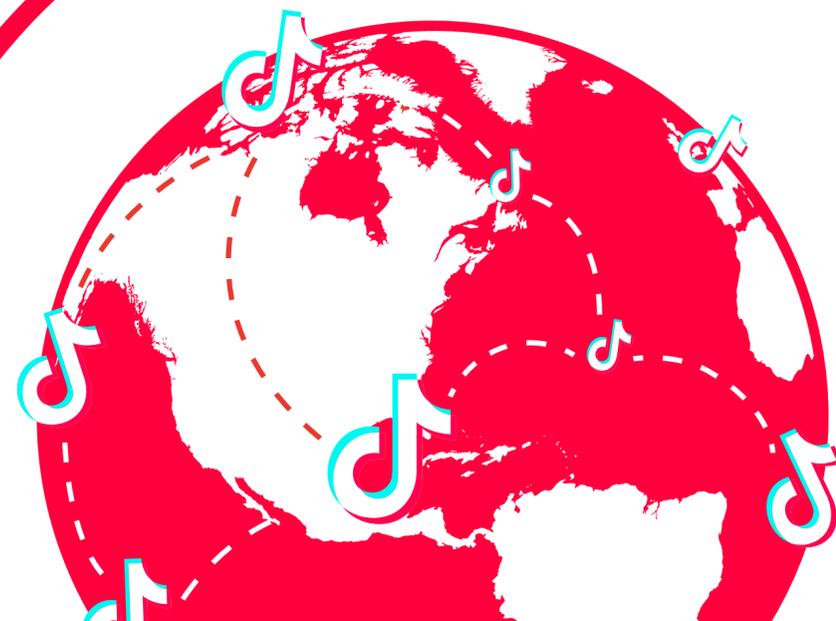
Making a name for yourself on any social media platform is an art, but here's a useful resource to help you get it right on an app that's still forging its path – and you could have a hand in leading it.



# HOW TIKTOK IS KEEPING THE WORLD CONNECTED

**TikTok has rocketed through the ranks of the App Store and Google Play in the past two years, performing incredibly well in number of downloads and active users, and being the first-ever app to generate a billion downloads in a single quarter. But TikTok's latest surge came from the millions of individuals drawn to the app as we all sought out new ways to stay connected during lockdown.**

The short, snappy, engaging and positive nature of TikTok lends itself amazingly to those stuck indoors, forced to slow down in every other aspect of life. TikTok's videos are heart-warming reminders that we aren't alone, and there's solidarity in millions of others doing the same abstract dance challenges.



By authentically capturing the sentiment and experience of lockdown all over the world, TikTok has cultivated true cut-through. In a sea of long-form, lean-back content found on YouTube and Facebook, TikTok stands tall.

But before we go any further, we can't discuss TikTok without addressing the elephant in the room; the platform almost getting banned in the US. With questions around national security and President Trump's threat of banning the app all together (it's already been done in India), TikTok has had a shaky few months. So while you might be thinking that you shouldn't get too attached, as TikTok is about to be knocked off the radar altogether, the deal between Oracle and Walmart has allowed it to live to see another day here in the US.

So with coronavirus and a potential Trump ban out of the way, here's how to get it right on TikTok.



# CREATING AN ENGAGING CONTENT STRATEGY

**So you're ready to give it a go. But you click on the app, and suddenly there's music blaring out of your phone and the content has started; complicated dances, loud voices, little heart emojis everywhere. We get it, it can be overwhelming and intimidating for anyone as a first time experience.**

*Where do we start? Do we jump on a trend? Which trend? What song do we use? What effects should we use? Is it going to make people cringe? Should we be funny? How funny? How do we be funny? Will the content be on-brand? Will anyone see it?*

## Our advice:

### **Keep it simple. Keep it student.**

Think about what your students care about and what they're interested in. How can you add value with your content, messaging and brand to students' lives and experiences?

The thing with TikTok, as opposed to any other platform, is that the whole app is focused on the individual experience. It is a content-led, user-first platform, typically from a single point of view. And your content, whether advertising or organic, needs to adapt that style too. You won't get away with posting videos of your campus, or studio-lit interviews with professors. It's got to showcase the individual student experience, native to TikTok, to really cut through.

The first place to start? StudyTubers and Study Influencers. Your students are already on the platform creating content, so why not involve them as part of your content strategy? We'll share some of our favourite student influencers later.

But the main takeaway? Be authentic, true and relatable. Creating a first-person student perspective is near-impossible to replicate without forming an alliance with actual students.

Okay, you've kept it simple. You've kept it student. Now what? 

## Don't sell. Solve.

The next piece of advice will help community colleges really come into their own.

And it's this; help people. Guide and inspire them. Solve their problems. It's not, and never should be, a sales-first approach.

Think about your students first. What problems, whether personally or academically, are they confronted with? And center your strategy around them. How you can add value to their lives? And how you can help them with these problems?

Since the disruption of coronavirus, focus has been placed on community colleges to help, support and solve, and not to simply to sell courses, campuses and lifestyles. And you should take those lessons, post-Covid, onto TikTok.

Start with the problem. And if you don't know the problem, stop and ask. Gather a focus group, commission our Opinion Panel, and talk to your students. Understand how they think and tap into the insights you've gathered as you connect with them.

And that's just for starters.

**HALF OF STUDENTS DON'T THINK THE ONLINE LEARNING PROVIDED BY THEIR INSTITUTION IS GOOD ENOUGH.**

**88% OF STUDENTS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH. BUT ONE IN 10 STUDENTS ARE NOW UNABLE TO ACCESS MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FROM THEIR UNIVERSITY.**

**ALMOST 30% OF STUDENTS LIVING WITH HOUSEMATES DURING LOCKDOWN FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THEIR LIVING SITUATION.**

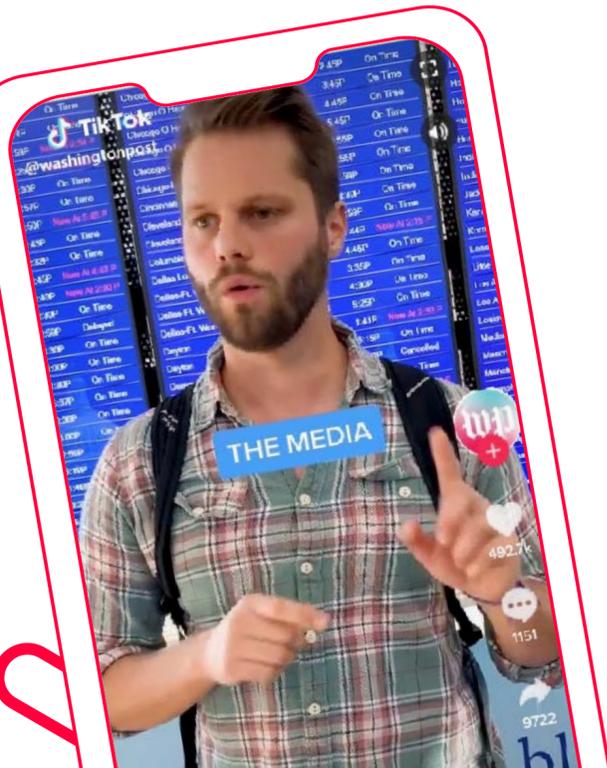
What is your edge, What can you offer? What can you do to help fix these problems? Can you create messaging and content around issues with online study? Or around success? Or future careers? Or fitting in?

Connect through communication and your understanding of students' experiences. Speak your own truths and provide information on what's unique to your institution and students. And engage with solutions and guidance for the problems they're facing.

# WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

**When we say “Don’t sell. Solve”, we mean this.**

**Here are some examples of existing TikTok brand accounts creating their own quality content and connecting to their brand identities.**



## The Washington Post [@washingtonpost](#)

### Their one thing is ‘truth’

The Washington Post uses their content to give an all-access look at their operations and to fact-check and myth-bust common misconceptions. They’ve amassed a following of over 400,000 in under a year, positioning themselves as a creative powerhouse and potentially shifting their reach to a new, more global, and younger demographic in the process.

They communicate and live their values with everything they do. Despite being a highbrow publication, their TikTok is not overly serious, keeping the content relevant and native to the platform.

Both of these brands have created really engaging and cohesive TikTok content strategies that are true and authentic to both their values and their audiences. And they effectively link back to that one big idea. What’s yours: community, truth, empowerment, or something else entirely?

## Gymshark [@gymshark](#)

### Their one thing is ‘challenge’

Gymshark’s content is simple and visual and is all about setting and beating personal challenges, whatever they are.

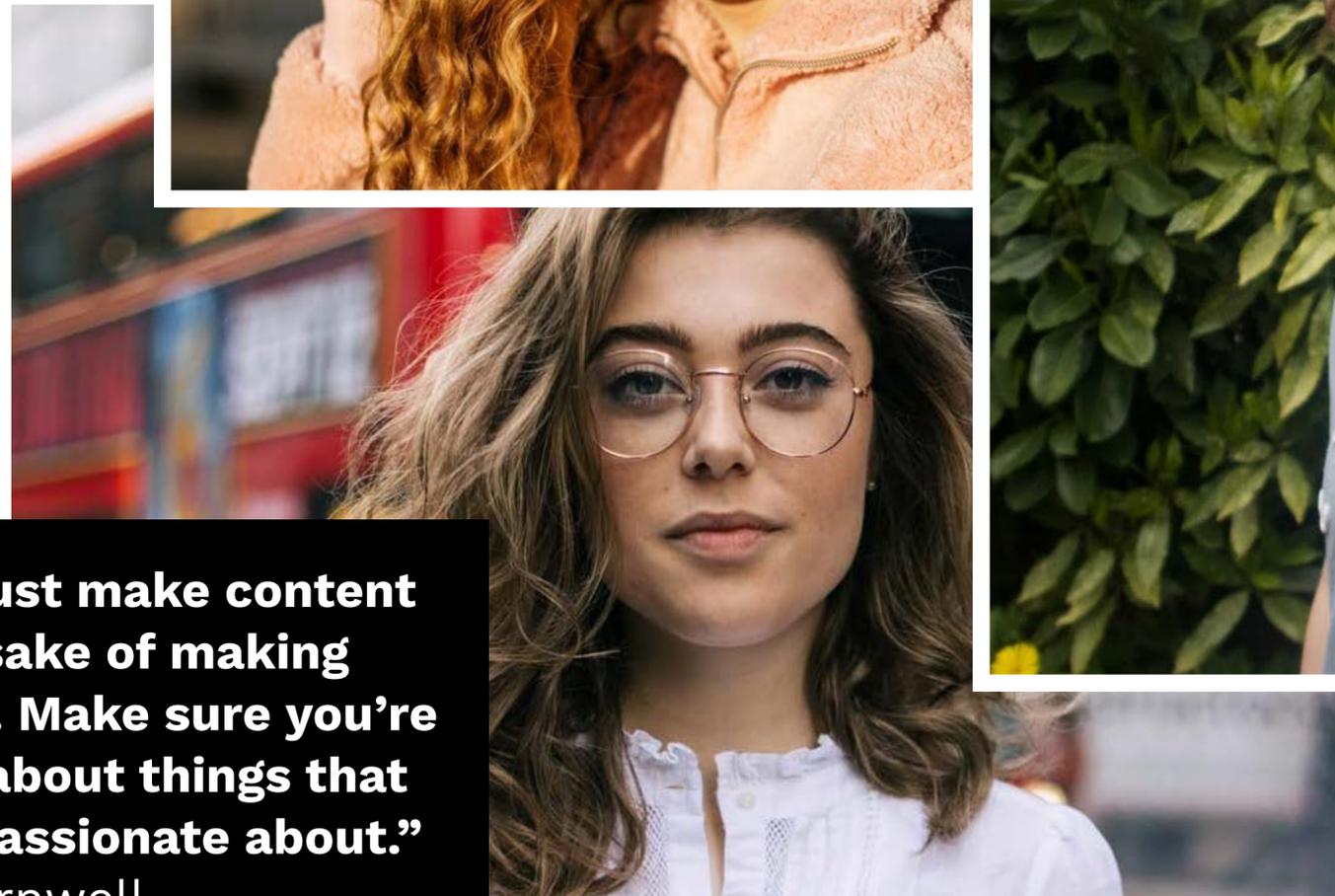
Their brand proposition and value is pulled through even on their TikTok feed. Gymshark focuses on setting individual challenges - rather than being the fittest, or strongest, it’s about only competing with yourself. And with that, they’ve built a loyal and strong community of all shapes, sizes and levels of fitness.



# HOW DO YOU MAKE YOUR TIKTOK CONTENT FEEL REAL?

Don't fake it.

**As we've said before, and we'll say it again; empower your students. Whether it's YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok, let your students do the talking for you. Authenticity is key in this new age of advertising and rather than trying to fake that student feel, make it authentic.**



**“Don't just make content for the sake of making content. Make sure you're talking about things that you're passionate about.”**

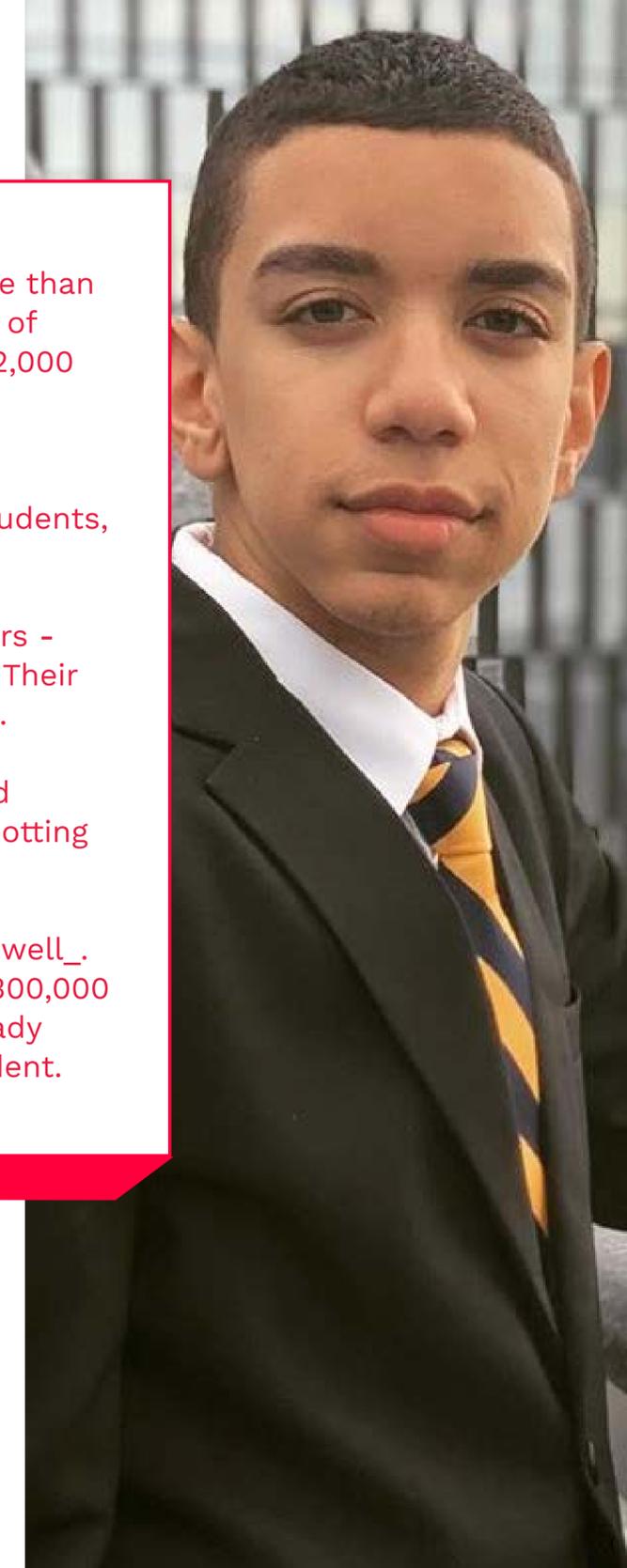
- Eve Cornwell,  
Study Influencer

# Study Influencers, Assemble!

**Not only are they sharing their beliefs, motivators and experiences, they're also compressing important lessons into bite-sized clips (complete with a backing track). The students of TikTok are revolutionising the way lessons are taught. Focusing on subjects from Calculus to Law, these Study Influencers are leading the way.**

And don't forget, as well as creating new content with your own students, you can also connect with existing Study Influencers at your institution, or those who are hoping to attend in the future. Reach out and make those connections, and ensure you're not only part of the conversation, but leading the way in your institution-specific areas.

1. Triggered by trigonometry? @Ludus\_ is your man. With a channel featuring more than 150 quick-fix solutions to common mathematical muddles, he is truly the voice of reason when it comes to crunching the numbers. His loyal following of over 352,000 users speaks for itself.
2. @Alexis\_Loveraz from New York is another good one to follow for top tips on mathematics. It doesn't stop there though; beyond making content for math students, his impressive TikTok portfolio also covers Geometry and Chemistry.
3. For Literature, take a look at @Ya.Books. This TikTok is shared between two users - Morgan and Riley - who, between them, get through books at an alarming rate. Their channel is jam-packed with recommendations and analyses of all things fiction.
4. @Revision\_Tips\_UK gives general advice for revision and exam prep - from mind maps to mock exam tips. This account also shares revision papers for screenshotting purposes, for students who want to give their hands a rest from taking notes.
5. Last but not least, we have the self-styled 'e-tourney' Law student, @EveCornwell\_. Eve has been on the Study Influencer scene for a while, racking up more than 300,000 subscribers on YouTube. Since making the jump to TikTok, her content has already garnered over 220,000 likes as she hilariously documents her life as a Law student.



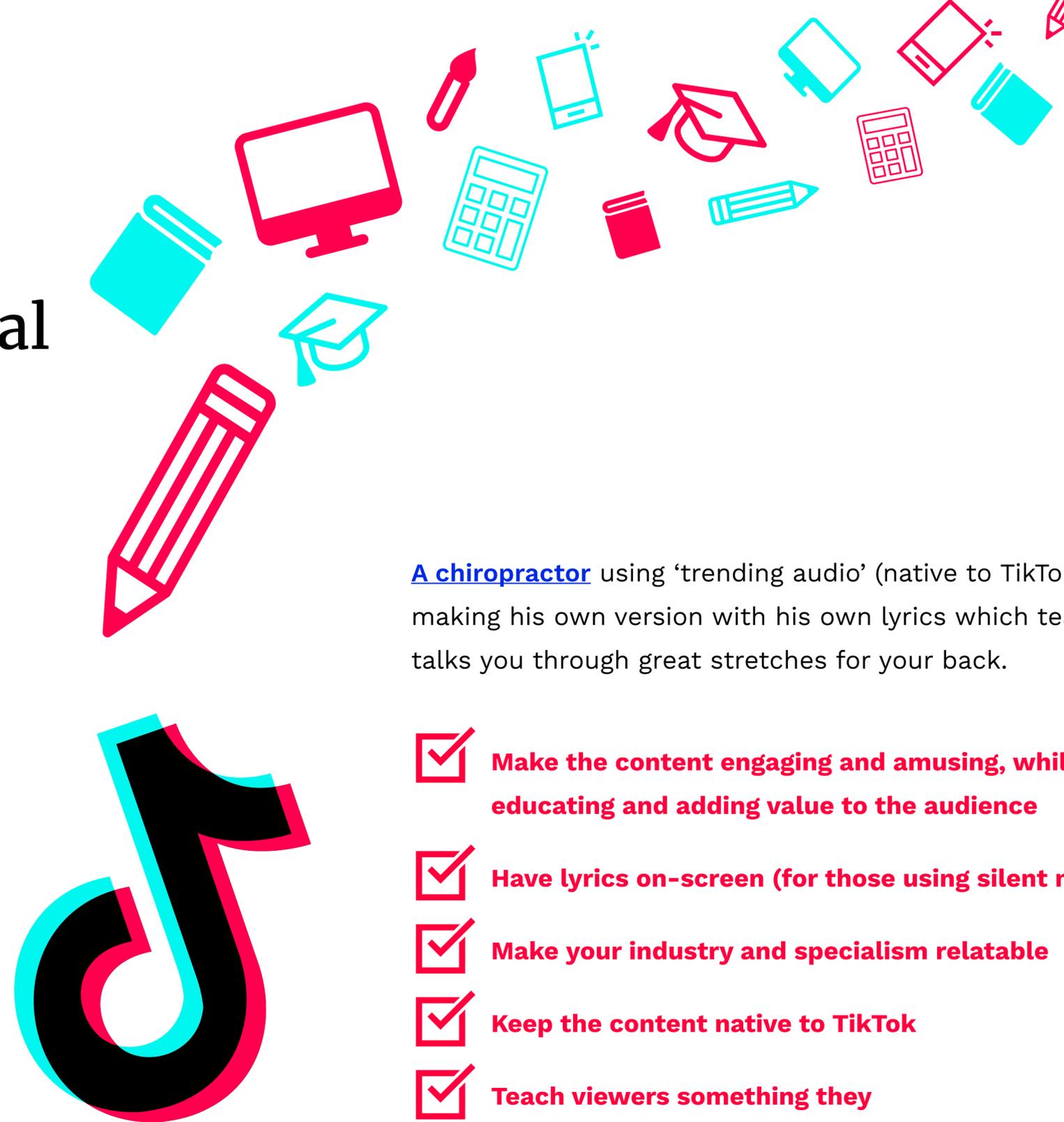
# But What Counts as Educational Content on TikTok?

**A whole host of things. And here's something else you can add to your content plan. When user-generated content isn't available, you, your marketing team and wider staff, can still have a presence that does your brand justice. Resonate with the app and target audience in a way that is helpful and inspiring. Just look at these examples from non-student users.**

The key is to be creative and unique to your brand.

Do you have a niche specialism that's worth shouting about? Maybe you have an amazing group of students who can showcase what they've been learning at your institution?

Here's what our friends at TikTok pulled out as fantastic examples of engaging, creative educational content for your #LearnOnTikTok inspo.



[A chiropractor](#) using 'trending audio' (native to TikTok) and making his own version with his own lyrics which teaches and talks you through great stretches for your back.

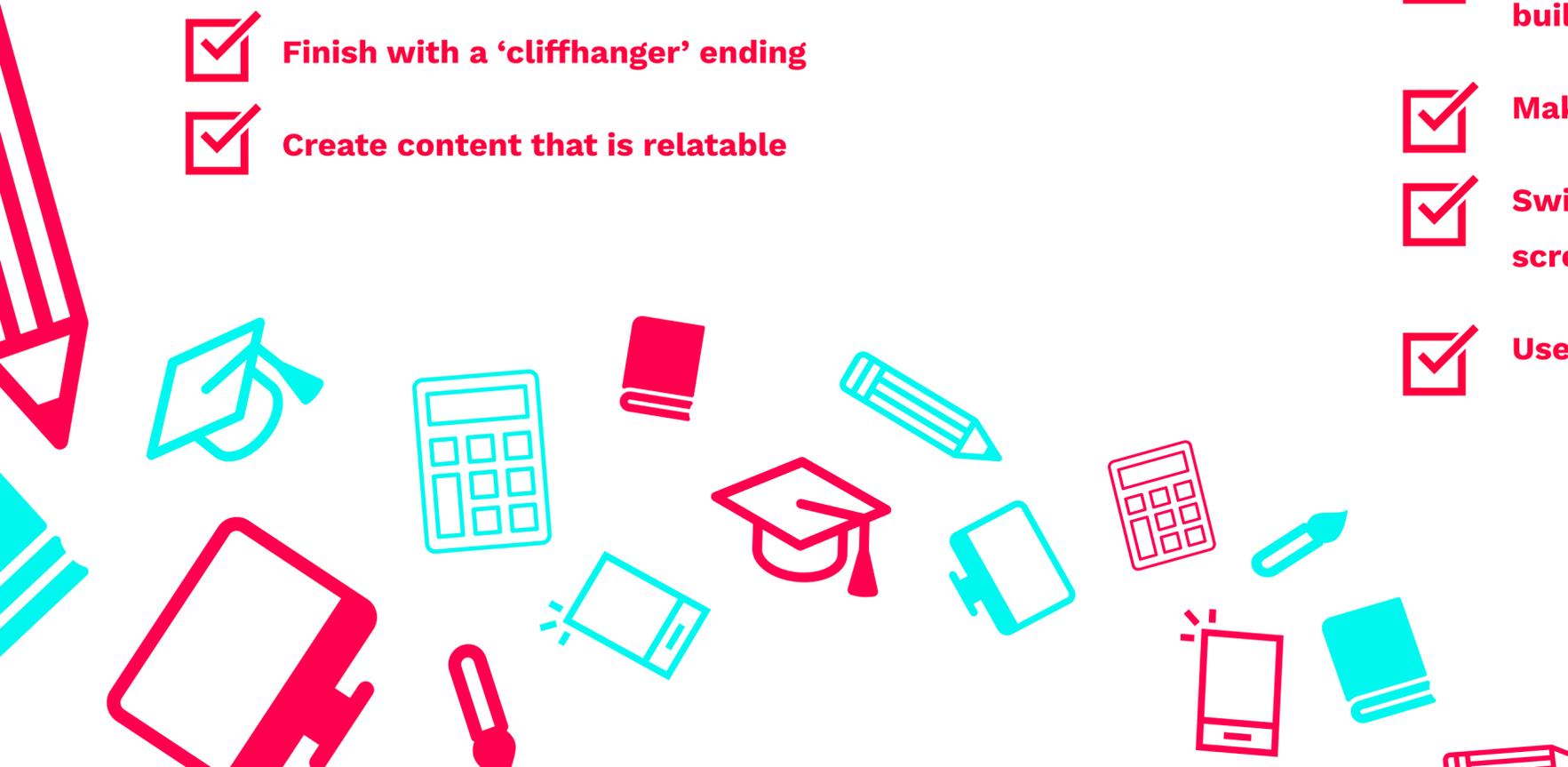
- Make the content engaging and amusing, while educating and adding value to the audience**
- Have lyrics on-screen (for those using silent mode)**
- Make your industry and specialism relatable**
- Keep the content native to TikTok**
- Teach viewers something they didn't know beforehand**

Or what about getting your students to produce content around their revision and memory techniques? Julia Ravey ([@JuliaRaveyScience](#)) guides her audience through a complex memory technique and here's why her videos work.

- ✓ **Opt for a two-part video to make each part more consumable**
- ✓ **Use different locations and editing it so it's really succinct, with fast frames**
- ✓ **If publishing a longer video; use a very short snappy edit**
- ✓ **Finish with a 'cliffhanger' ending**
- ✓ **Create content that is relatable**

And let's make this even more niche. Is one of your lecturers the ultimate Cambridge Referencing genius? Or do you have a faculty member that has an infinite bank of A-star book recommendations? [One user on TikTok](#) has created a whole account with nearly 140,000 followers who watch and learn very small titbits of Excel knowledge, 15 seconds at a time. Here's why it works:

- ✓ **Very condensed, easily consumed tutorials**
- ✓ **Use short and snappy frames to make a laborious task engaging and do-able**
- ✓ **Inject humour into an otherwise taxing task**
- ✓ **Make a series of mini tutorials so that people come back and review the profile, building followers quickly**
- ✓ **Make content hyper-relevant; the account becomes an expert in that niche area**
- ✓ **Switch between cameras, on a face to be human and relatable and then on a screen to show more detail**
- ✓ **Use trendy audios, they help you become more discoverable**



# How to Balance Organic vs. Paid Content

**So you might be asking yourselves, are we advertising or are we just ‘TikTok’ing? The simple answer is: both. While there’s a difference between organic and paid content, both are equally important to a successful TikTok presence. And both look very similar to each other, which is the key. Advertising on TikTok must look native and natural. And users shouldn’t be able to instantly tell it’s an ad - that’s what good looks like.**

TikTok is extremely accessible for marketers who want to try running a paid campaign. The informal nature of the platform means that your videos don’t have to be of the highest quality, or produced in any specialist formats. And with TikTok, anyone can give it a go. Your campaigns can be live with the click of a button using a marketing platform like Akeru Advertising.

TikTok is unique. Their adverts have a native look and feel, and they aren’t something you’re used to seeing on Instagram or Facebook. So don’t even think about dusting off your old creative assets! Anything sponsored shouldn’t look out of place on users’ ‘For You’ feed.

Building an authentic, relatable brand account with organic content will only strengthen any advertising you do on the platform, raising brand awareness in the meantime. But similarly, pushing forward with paid advertising will elevate and supercharge your brand’s limited organic-only reach. As we always recommend, be bold, be creative, and be yourselves in everything you do online. And that’s when you’ll unlock the student audience.

Take the time to consider your creative strategy, the message you’re trying to convey, and who you want your audience to know you as, and let all of that seep into your paid adverts. Forget what you think you know and allow the authentic, relatable content, that TikTok unapologetically demands, to shine through.



# HOW DO TIKTOK ADS WORK FOR BRANDS?

When it comes to [advertising opportunities](#) on TikTok, there are plenty of options for brands and businesses to explore:

- **In-feed ads**
- **TopView**
- **Brand takeover**
- **Branded hashtag challenge**
- **Custom influencer packages**

The recently launched TikTok for Business aims to get marketers on board using a content-first strategy with their ‘Don’t Make Ads, Make TikToks’ campaign.

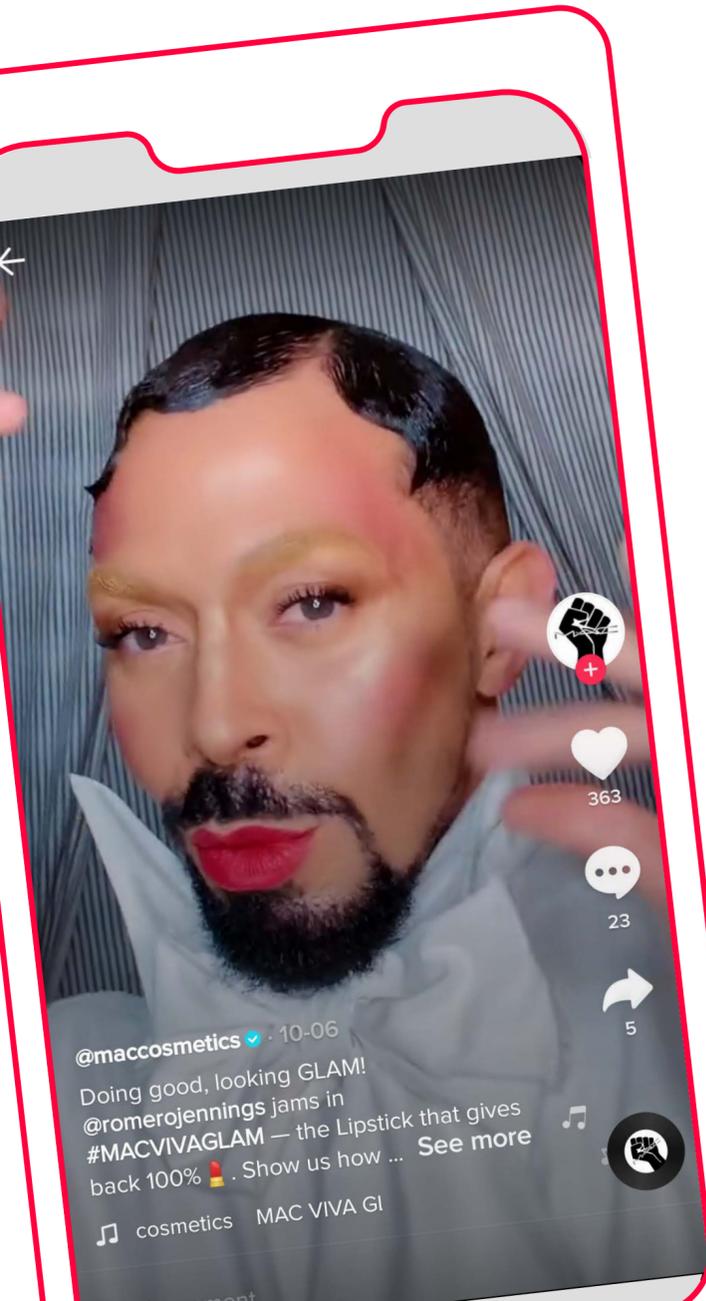
TikTok for Business allows marketers to access tools to help their content be found and followed on the app, and gives ideas on how to create meaningful, authentic native content, making it easier to achieve a successful campaign on the platform.

Options like in-feed ads have a clear ‘Sponsored’ label when they appear in the ‘For You’ page, as well as a new clickable pop-up Call To Action, such as ‘learn more’ or ‘book now’ (perfect for that virtual open house campaign).

And while we’ve already seen some fantastic results, you don’t need to take our word for it. Fashion retailer giant Levi’s has recently recorded significantly higher engagement and increased traffic to its website, with product views more than doubling for every product shown with TikTok’s new Shop Now button.

So in the same way you can create eye-catching, impactful ads for other social media platforms, which can raise awareness or drive traffic, you can do the same on TikTok.

The potential is definitely there, and the audience is waiting - you just have to get the messaging, strategy and creative right.



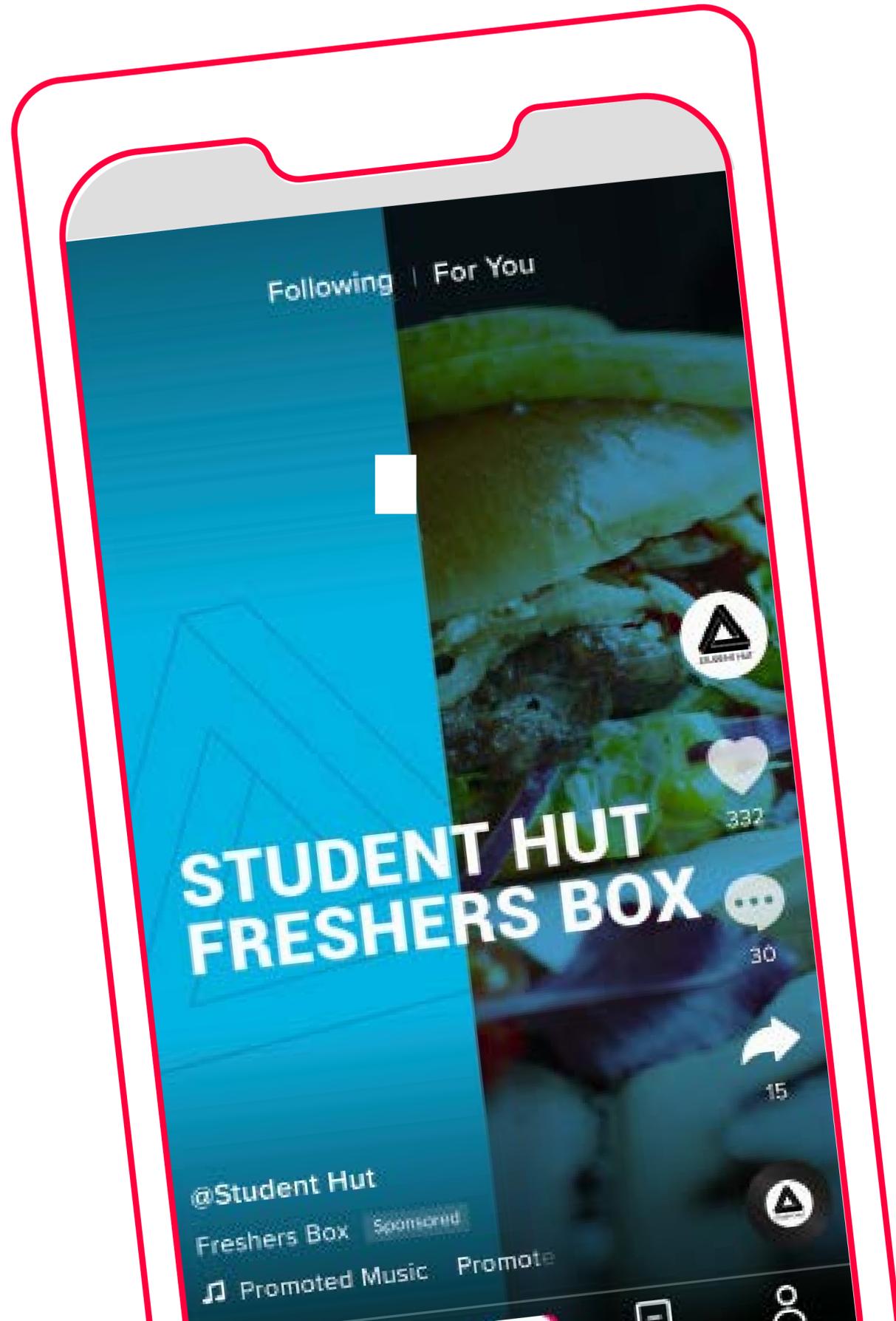
# The First Ever UK Student TikTok Campaign

**In early 2019, TikTok launched a beta version of its ads offering. Since then, big names like Nike, Fenty Beauty and Apple Music have used TikTok ads to promote their products in unique, visually compelling campaigns. With advanced targeting and unique ad creation features, the TikTok Ads platform is unlike many of its predecessors. And when used effectively, it can help you tap into one of the most lucrative pools of users.**

We couldn't wait to get started. So for the first-ever TikTok UK student campaign, we advertised our Student Hut Fresher's Box, to see how this new app would fare. To understand how it was working and what it was achieving, we ran a like-for-like campaign on Snapchat. TikTok demonstrated superb efficiencies for reach and engagement. It delivered 211% more impressions than Snapchat and we only spent 23% more, working out to be about 60% cheaper than Snapchat overall.

Sounds too good to be true? Try it out yourself. And if you pair it with Akero Advertising, you can plug guaranteed advertising performance straight into your CRM, meaning that you'll be able to track and measure ROI from every TikTok lead.

We've seen the same positive result from institution campaigns too. With TikTok being so attractive to Gen Z, including students, it has made the platform the ideal medium for reaching our target audience.



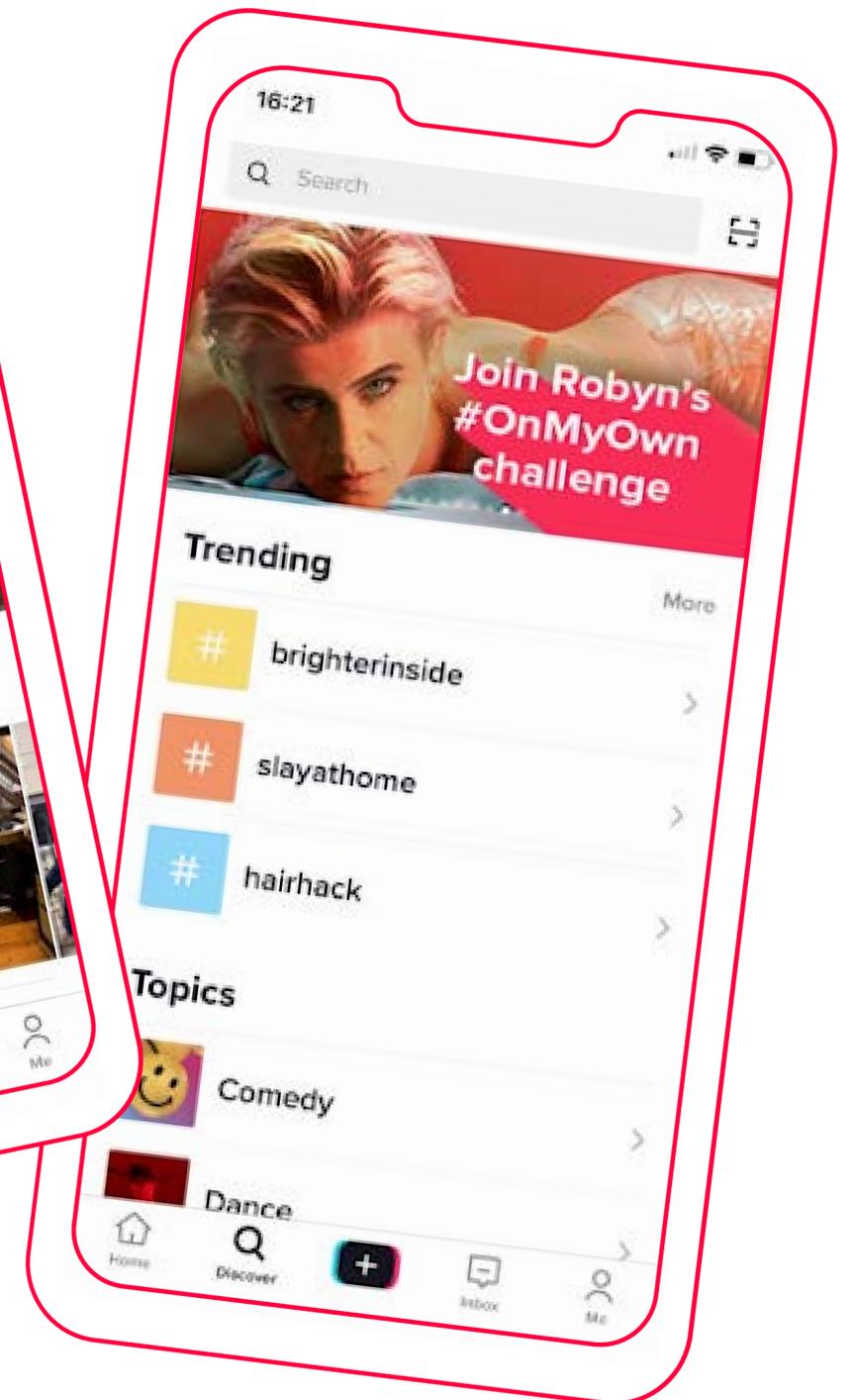
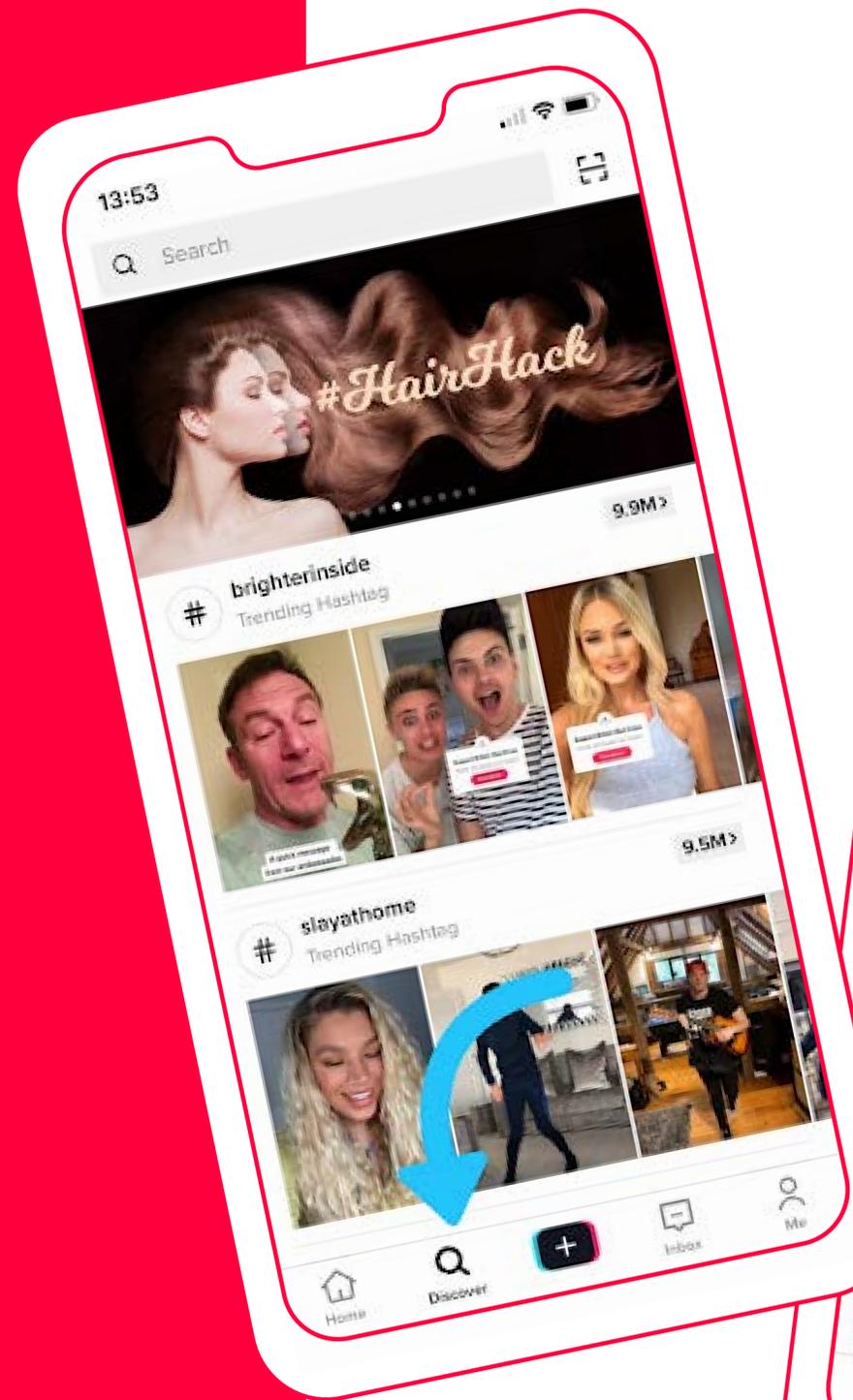
# Top Tip from the TikTok Experts:



**Keep it short. The more people watching your video to the end, the higher the chances the video will get served out across the platform, building your following and viewership.**

Unlike most social media platforms, TikTok is hugely driven by the user-created content and trend culture. But as we saw with the creative chiropractor, content inspired by trends but created with an original spin is a great way of cutting through the noise.

If you're not sure where to start, check out TikTok's Discovery Page for inspiration. Here you'll find trending hashtags based on your geographical location, as well as a breakdown of popular videos by category.





## Brand Safety

**You've got a strategy, ideas and inspiration. But here's a caveat to bear in mind. We wouldn't be doing our job without saying this. Advertising must be approached ethically and with care. As an agency, we ensure our clients' advertising is only going to be placed and tracked on the appropriate, relevant, brand-positive sites for their audience.**

We combine whitelists, blacklists and semantic technologies to filter out sites and placements that could cause brand damage. And take this a step further by looking to platforms' core values and practices before investing substantial budgets.

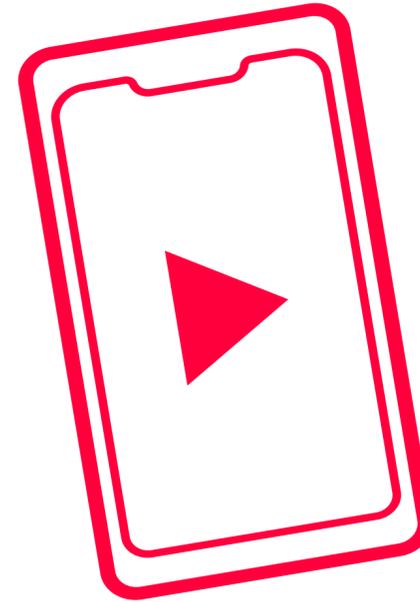
TikTok is still a fairly new platform, and has faced a few problems since its launch. Following hacking claims by protest group Anonymous and allegations of data breaches, TikTok was pulled from the App Store and Play Store in India in June 2019, and it narrowly avoided the same fate here in the US. Previously, TikTok has also been criticised for not removing inappropriate content, censoring videos and being selective with its users, but TikTok says it has since taken steps to improve brand safety and removed 'outdated' guidelines.

It's far from perfect. But with Facebook over the summer facing a large-scale boycott over #StopHateForProfit and Twitter being criticised for fake news, it needs to be considered alongside each platform on its own merits. We know that, for Gen Z, it's proving to be an essential space. So if it's right for your brand, it should be forming a key part of your student marketing strategy.

# SOME FOOD FOR THOUGHT AROUND THE TIKTOK ALGORITHM

**If you don't play by the rules, you're going to lose the game. TikTok, unsurprisingly, is an algorithm-based app, and it's good to get as familiar as you can with it to ensure you're putting your best foot forward. Don't be too hopeful though of 'cracking' the code, because TikTok are infamously cryptic around their algorithmic secret sauce.**

TikTok's goal is to empower users to share knowledge in many different ways and they want to see even more of that on their platform. They want to see educational content that promotes learning new skills, habits or information, with videos that feel inspiring and actionable to users. TikToks that add real value to the student audience will then be promoted further by the app, offering a fantastic platform for you to get started, especially during a time where conventional education and classroom teaching isn't accessible.



## **Power to each video**

The reason your TikTok can go viral and amass an army of viewers without an army of followers, is because the TikTok algorithm takes into account the interactions on each individual video, rather than your profile as a whole.



## **Aging like a fine wine**

The TikTok algorithm is constantly monitoring the performance of all your videos - even the older ones. So don't be surprised if a video from way-back-when suddenly gets some new attention. It could be that the audio has been picked up by a trend or a trending hashtag was coincidentally used.



## Boost your discoverability

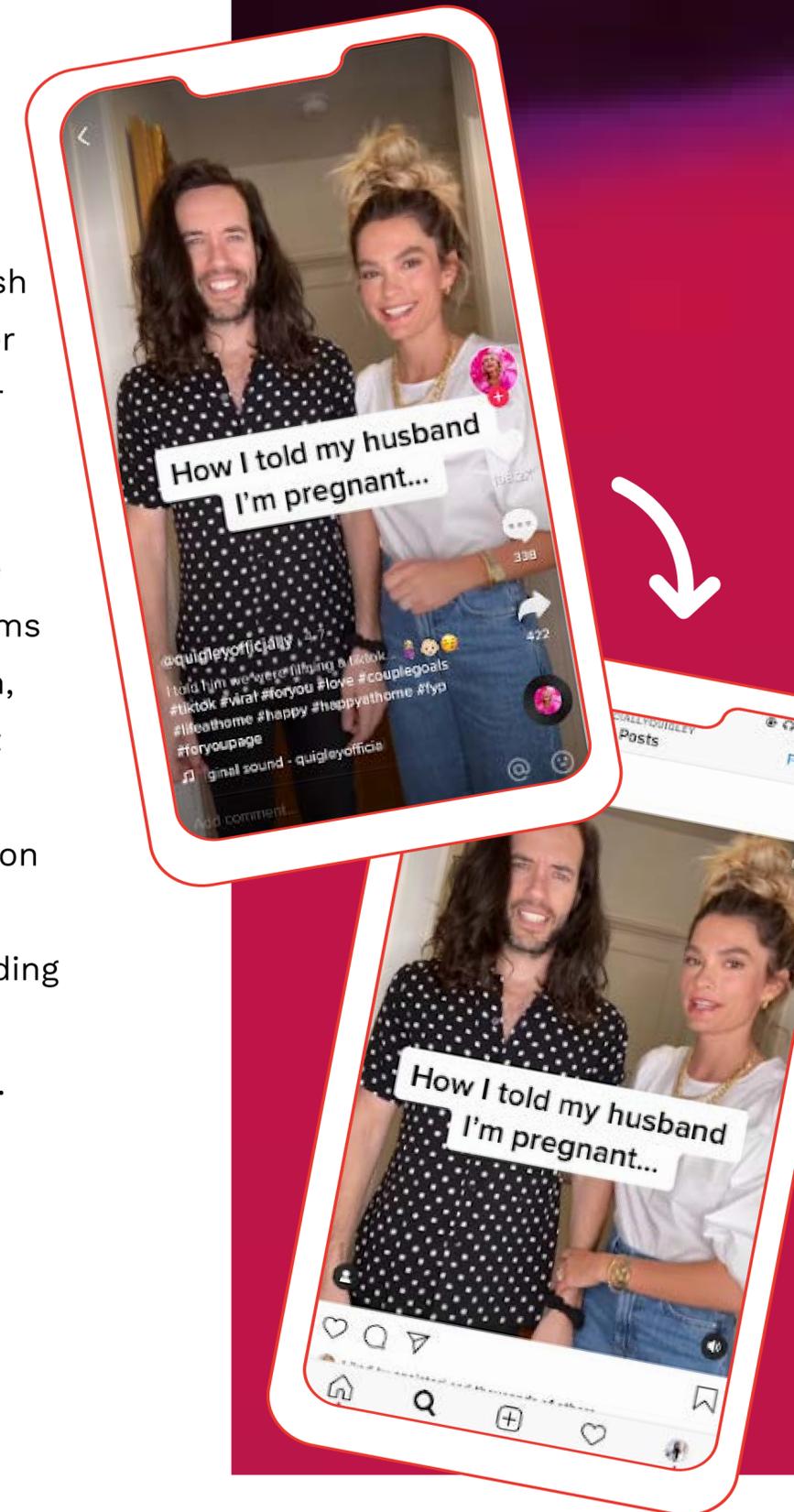
Hashtags and Sounds (i.e. the music you use in your TikTok video) are two fantastic ways to boost the discoverability of your content.

For example, TikTok videos that have trending hashtags in the caption will be pulled into relevant Discovery pages, and could even get boosted to more 'For You' pages.

In addition to the more conventional hashtags like #fyp, #foryou, and #foryoupage, it's always a good idea to include hashtags that are niche to your content. This will help the TikTok algorithm understand what your content is about, and who might be interested in it.

And using trending audio is another sure way of getting more eyeballs. Just look at how the National and Global Charts have been affected by TikTok trends.

Finally, not so much an algorithm tip, but more good practice. Once you press publish on your TikTok, share it out onto your other platforms too. This is great for driving your well-established following (for example on Instagram) to TikTok and introducing your audience to a new side of your online personality. Sharing TikToks across platforms is super simple and if you're producing fun, creative and entertaining content, why not get it out there – sharing is caring, right? With a 15-second TikTok, you could pop it on your Instagram Story or Reels. And paired with a swipe up link to an appropriate landing page or a CTA to follow you on TikTok, you could be doubling your marketing success.



**You've seen what you can do on TikTok, the opportunity it presents to your audience and the potential to get your brand in front of millions of hyper-engaged eyeballs. So what now? Time to get started with advertising on TikTok to your targeted student audience, and you can do this using Aker.**

Aker allows you to take advantage of the best of human expertise and artificial intelligence to guarantee your TikTok advertising performance. Our experts review your brief against the AI recommendations, and make suggested amends based on your campaign requirements: automated planning combined with real-world understanding. Giving you back more time to focus on your strategy and creative, to achieve that authentic, relatable TikTok content.

So how does it work? Aker scans TikTok alongside billions of data points across Google, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn and Bing plus more than 100,000 news and lifestyle websites.

The AI then automatically creates personalised advertising plans that predict outcomes and are performance-guaranteed, making it easy to achieve your TikTok goals and truly understand your student audience.

Aker allows you to track and attribute ROI with ease: all your leads can be plugged straight in to over 750+ popular CRMs and platforms, including Salesforce, Hubspot and Slate, and you can see which enrolled student came from which advert, providing a single source of truth for all your advertising campaigns.

**So, what are you waiting for? If you want to book your first TikTok campaign, [get in touch with our experts today.](#)**



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Student marketing with a growth mindset

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