

MARKETING

How can luxury brands capture the opportunity on TikTok?

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TikTok video still of Celine Homme - The Dancing Kid. Image credit: Celine

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When **Balenciaga** launched a shoppable campaign on **TikTok** over the Christmas period last year, the videos drove more than 25 million views, exposing the luxury brand to a new and younger audience, resulting in 4.5 million-plus clicks to its landing page.

The brand used TopView, a feature of **TikTok For Business** that enables companies to capture the attention of its users from the moment they open the app with a full-screen takeover. TikTok says this feature guarantees millions of views in a 24-hour period to produce heightened brand awareness and engagement results.

After testing the format in France and the United Kingdom, where Balenciaga saw an impressive reaction, the brand then extended its campaign to the U.K. once again and Italy and, overall, it registered an 18 percent click-through-rate across all markets and 23 million impressions.

It comes as no surprise then that many other luxury brands are getting involved.

From **Fendi's** profile launch which gathered more than 4 million views, to **Furla's** branded hashtag challenge to encourage users to replicate dance moves to a bespoke soundtrack driving over 124 million views, brands are jumping on the opportunity to connect and engage with the younger audiences found on TikTok.

"We're very thrilled to share that we've been seeing an upward trend of brands joining TikTok across Europe," said David Roland, TikTok brand partnerships leader for Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

"Every day, more brands like Balenciaga, **Gucci** and **Celine** are joining our platform to create content and use our platform as an exciting way to reach and engage with a broader audience," he said.

"The reception we've had from our local campaigns have been very encouraging. There were even the first luxury fashion shows that were hosted on the platform for example, the latest menswear collection for Celine, titled The Dancing Kid,' was inspired from and shown on TikTok."



Balenciaga's TikTok campaign. Image credit: Balenciaga

The success of TikTok lies in its inclusivity.

While many luxury brands often use Instagram to curate more polished feed with imagery often seen in glossy high-fashion magazines, content created on TikTok is more playful, often encouraging users to participate in challenges, and interact with brands on a more personal level.

And while it can be argued that the communities on Instagram and TikTok are very different, it still did not deter **Instagram** from launching Reels, a short-form video feature that made its debut in August that showcased many similar functions to TikTok.

Nevertheless, luxury's love of the platform is growing and gaining further momentum.

A key indication of this is TikTok's recent announcement that it was launching its **own fashion month**, which kicked off Sept. 10 to end Oct. 8.

The platform said it would livestream two fashion shows a week from brands such as **Louis Vuitton** and **Saint Laurent**, as well as include a variety of hashtags and live videos.

"We've seen the fashion industry reinvent what luxury fashion means to culture and society through TikTok by bringing fashion into the homes of our community during quarantine," said CeCe Vu, fashion content partnerships lead at TikTok in a statement.

"With the launch of our TikTok Fashion Month, this is just another way for our brand partners to leverage the platform's authentic and community-driven approach to showcase their art, creativity and personalities in a unique and truly TikTok way," she said.

With millennials are expected to make up 40 percent of the global personal luxury goods market in the next five years, according to **new research** by **Bain & Company** and **Farfetch**, it comes as no surprise that luxury and fashion brands are looking to engage with consumers on the platform, where the average ages range 16-25. But how can brands ensure they are getting the best of the platform, which is estimated to have around 500 million users globally, and engaging with its community?

Be original

For TikTok, the key lesson it imparts to its brands is to have an original approach to content creation. Specifically, brands need to create campaigns that work for the platform and its community, to ensure that the message is authentic.

"Our claim and mantra is: Don't make ads, make TikToks. And that means creating native content for TikTok, which the community wants to interact with. Therefore, brands need a deeper understanding of the platform and trends," Mr. Roland said.

When Furla ran a branded hashtag challenge, it encouraged users to replicate dance moves to a bespoke soundtrack and involved established TikTok creators to launch the #FurlaDance.

The challenge saw more than 127,000 videos and registered a 12.96 percent engagement rate. By spearheading the challenge with well-known creators, Furla was able to kickstart its campaign through their large combined followings, as well as spark user's creativity with within their own content.

"It's important for brands to move away from highly polished content as TikTok is all about authentic and entertaining content," said Anne-Sophie Scharff, social media practice lead at **DLG** (Digital Luxury Group).

"Repurposing content used on other social platforms is really not the way to go."

Experimentation is another key point.

"The best way to learn what creates a sticky following is to keep experimenting," Mr. Roland said. "Try different formats, themes, audio, edits, work with TikTok creators and make trends your own to find your audience."

"Our users have access to content from across the world and are not limited by their social graph to what they can see," he said. "This opens the possibility for brands to hit global trends across the platform."

"Moreover, our users want to participate in challenges, in addition to watching videos. That makes the brand impact much higher as brands are actively remembered."

Indeed, many viral moments on TikTok have originally stemmed from organic content created by its users.

Users began recreating a rainbow-colored knitted cardigan from British designer **JW Anderson**'s Spring 2020 men's collection, after the singer Harry Styles was seen wearing it during a rehearsal for NBC's *Today Show* in February, and attempted to recreate the item themselves.

The hashtag **#HarryStylesCardigan** has racked up 23.3 million views since and resulted in JW Anderson sharing the pattern so that users can recreate the item. In addition, the designer will reveal its new collection on the platform Oct. 28 as part of TikTok Fashion Month.

"It's always been important for JW Anderson to work with new technologies and platforms," said Jonathan Anderson, founder and creative director at JW Anderson in a statement. "I think TikTok is challenging norms and innovating the way JW Anderson does."

"I am very excited to be working directly with TikTok this season to show our women's SS21 collection on the platform," he said.



Sabrina Carpenter in Fendi's F is For... campaign. Image credit: Fendi

Collaborate with creators

Brands should ensure they collaborate with creators and celebrities to develop unique content that appeals to their audiences.

"TikTok is a platform for creative, fun, and positive experiences the brands we see having the most success are those that embrace the creativity and authenticity of the TikTok community," Mr. Roland said.

"TikTok gives rise to interactive trends and creative memes that encourage everyone to participate," he said. "By letting users create their own content for a campaign, brands can give users a sense of being part of the brand, turning them into authentic and powerful brand ambassadors."

When Fendi wanted to launch a new profile on TikTok and build a new follower base, the brand ran five In-Feed Ads, which featured American singer and actress Sabrina Carpenter writing music, performing and wearing the brand's latest collection.

The ads were part of a campaign called F is for...', representing Fendi's values: family, fearless, freedom, friendship and future.

By collaborating on the campaign with Ms. Carpenter, Fendi was able to connect to her 4.8 million followers and direct users to its brand profile page. The brand gained more than 15,000 new followers and registered a 5.8 percent engagement rate.

"Collaborations with content creators on TikTok will continue to grow," DLG's Ms. Scharff said. "They know what works well on the platform and create this sense of authenticity that is sometimes more difficult for brands to replicate on their own."

To promote more collaboration between companies and creators, TikTok is testing a platform called "TikTok Creator Marketplace" in selected regions. There, advertisers can search for a Creator matching their campaign and request for paid influencer campaigns to increase brand awareness and attract new customers.

Lastly, TikTok encourages brands to get involved with their audiences and understand the different technological features that it offers to boost their storytelling.

Using different camera points of views and play speeds with slow motion or reverse motion, having one or two unexpected twists in your videos adds to the viewer's enjoyment and interaction with a brand.

To ensure brands are really engaging with their audiences, TikTok says it has devised a number of formats including hashtag challenges, brand takeovers, in-feed native video, top view, customer influencers and branded lenses.

"Creating a great app experience has always been our top priority," Mr. Roland said.

Some like its hashtag challenges, branded lenses and custom influencers to encourage users to take part, while others like brand takeovers, Top View and In-Feed native video showcase branded videos that users watch before moving into their news feed.

"Through our formats, we encourage companies to be creative, original and engaging in the creation of their content," Mr. Roland said. "This helps to diversify the content on TikTok even more and make visible the creative potential of our community every day anew."

Variety is the name of the game.

"From challenges to filters, there are a lot of formats to experience with and I think luxury brands should be a bit adventurous and test everything the platform has to offer," Ms. Scharff said.

"As TikTok is a relatively new platform for advertisers, brands should continue to test and learn to see what works best, to ensure they are using TikTok to its full potential," she said.

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