

LAB REPORT

AN IRON LIGHT LABS PRODUCT

How to Go Viral on TikTok — Without Dancing

BY JOE KENT AND JOSH MASON

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Executive Summary

So your nonprofit wants to go viral on TikTok, but you don't want to dance?

*"NEVER FEAR – IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE TO REACH
MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ON TIKTOK WITHOUT DANCING".*

Although if you do decide to dance, you might reach even more people!

I'm Joe Kent, executive vice president of the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, a 501(c)3 nonprofit research organization. People on TikTok know me as "OahuJoe."

Our organization had an idea: Start a TikTok account and go viral educating people about the importance of individual liberty, economic freedom and accountable government in Hawaii.

The crazy thing is: It worked!

In just a few months, our videos went viral, racking up millions of views and thousands of likes, shares and comments.

Our success finally hit home when people started to recognize me. My Uber driver even said, "Hey, you're that guy from that TikTok video about the state budget. I love that video!"

That's when we realized that we were reaching a broader audience of real people in our state who were hungry for our content.

Throughout our experience, we have learned valuable lessons that we'd like to share with you about what works and what doesn't, and what's required to go viral.

The brutal truth is that TikTok isn't for all organizations. It's finicky and requires lots of time, tinkering, experimentation, brainstorming and creativity.



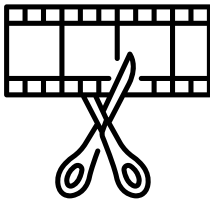


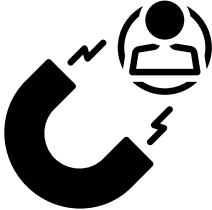
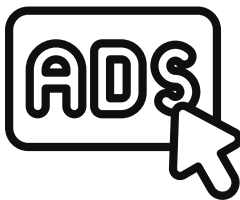
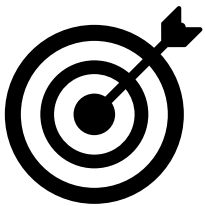
But if you're willing to put in the time and effort, it can help your organization go viral, generate leads and engage with Gen Zs, Millennials, and others who may find your content valuable, and whom your donors may be interested in reaching.

JOE KENT

JOE KENT
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT,
GRASSROOT INSTITUTE OF HAWAII

8 Tips for TikTok

HOW TO GO VIRAL ON TIKTOK — WITHOUT DANCING

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INTRODUCTION

One day, our newest employee asked me, “If you guys are trying to reach a broader, younger audience, why aren’t you on TikTok?”

The question shook me. Surely she was right that we could potentially go viral and reach millions of people. But the app seemed to be all about cringe-worthy dancing trends. I couldn’t imagine using it to educate the masses about economic policy.

Plus, what if someone made fun of me?

So I downloaded the app and I was surprised to find that it wasn’t all dancing trends and silly pranks. Some of the content was richer than I expected.

Upon downloading TikTok from my phone’s app store, I was presented with a 15-second looping video in portrait mode. TikTok’s algorithm guesstimates the types of videos you like by how you interact with the video — whether you like it, share it, comment on it or skip it — and will try to fill your feed with videos that pique your interest.

For a few weeks, I spent time scrolling through videos on the app to get a sense of what was possible. Then I saw a video of Bill Nye the Science Guy demonstrating the science of putting out a flame. The video had 16 million views, and I could see why: There’s just something really engaging about seeing Bill Nye doing a science experiment.

With the Science Guy’s example in mind, let’s take a look at the components that made his content so engaging.

First, it had a good hook, in that it’s Bill Nye from the 1990s TV show “Bill Nye: The Science Guy.” Like, “Whoa, what is he doing on my feed?”

Second, a science experiment naturally evokes curiosity. Will the candle be extinguished or not? Viewers have to wait and see what happens.

Third, the video had tight editing, with snappy cuts, little animations and sound effects.

Fourth, he was being authentic. He wasn’t trying to be cool or funny. He wasn’t doing the latest dance trend. He was just talking to the viewers like they were old friends. And his interest in the science experiment was magnetic.

Fifth, he was good at explaining things at an elementary level. There is a reason so many kids loved his show, and it was because he was a master at explaining complex things in a way that anyone could understand.

Any one of those factors would probably have been enough to make the video do well, but the fact that the video had all five launched it into mega-viral status.

As it turns out, TikTok's algorithm loves promoting educational content. But it's more likely to go viral if it has those five factors: a hook, curiosity, tight editing, authenticity and a good explanation.

And a bonus for any nonprofit educational organization is that TikTok is an emerging platform for generating leads, such as email subscriptions. We'll cover that at the end of this guide.

Note: *This guide focuses on TikTok. However, note that other social media platforms have copied TikTok's short-form viral portrait mode looping videos, such as Meta's "Reels" for Facebook and Instagram, YouTube's "Shorts" and SnapChat's "Spotlight." The principles in this guide can generally apply to all of these platforms.*

1 THE HOOK

TikTok's algorithm closely tracks whether people are watching your video. The typical attention span of someone browsing TikTok is 0.9 seconds. You have less than a second to get someone to keep watching, lest too many people scroll past your video too quickly and TikTok puts your video in purgatory, where it's unlikely to get more than 200 views.

But if you can keep people watching for more than 15 seconds, that's the ticket to going viral — and you're likely to get at least 30,000 eyes on it.

15 seconds is a good rule of thumb for how long your TikTok video should be when you're starting out, since a good hook will generally get most people watching for at least 15 seconds.

Try to get the average watch time to be longer than the length of the video. For example, if the average viewer watches for 20 seconds on a 15 second video, the video will likely go viral and reach hundreds of thousands — or even millions — of viewers.

The most basic hook is to simply write a compelling statement on the screen, since reading text automatically keeps most viewers interested at least long enough to get to the end of the first sentence.

>> "3 reasons not to raise taxes in Alabama."

>> "Which state has the highest cost of living in the country?"

>> "5 - 3 + 2 = ?"

These are all basic hooks that may keep viewers interested for at least five seconds.

Hooks can vary in an infinite number of ways. They can be silly, scary, heartfelt, visual, nostalgic, funny ... the list goes on. But they have to somehow get the viewer's attention.

The best hook I ever saw was a guy with a deck of cards who just looked into the camera and said, “Hey,” as if he was an old friend. The video had 3.3 million views!

The text on the screen said, “You will not believe this simple fact.” And he explained, “Are you aware that every time you take a deck of 52 cards and shuffle them, that your deck is almost certainly in an order and configuration that has never — hear me — never been on this planet before?”

That factoid is interesting, and true. But the simple authentic hook and friendly attitude of the presenter was enough to get millions of people to listen to what he had to say.

Hooks do not have to be gimmicky, wacky or trendy. The presenter does not have to be a supermodel. And the subject matter does not have to be trite. Anything can go viral if it has a good hook.

The best way to find hooks is to watch TikTok. Notice the videos that keep you watching, then experiment. And when you find a hook that works well for you, do it again!



2 CURIOSITY



So you've got a good hook and people are watching for at least five seconds. But how do you keep them from scrolling away?

The answer: Evoke their curiosity.

Scriptwriting is critical in keeping the viewer captivated. Always remember that the viewer is itching to scroll to the next compelling video after every word. So the words have to be laid out in a way that holds their hand and doesn't let go.

It's not that the first sentence has to be interesting; it's that the first few words have to be interesting.

For example, I got 1.7 million views on my video with the following TikTok script:

This little train in Canada is loaded with fish from Alaska, and it travels only 100 feet this way — it stops right there. And then it goes 100 feet back where it's unloaded. The fish were carried by a foreign ship from Alaska to Maine, and the law says that's illegal, unless you put it on a train in Canada."

This is a dense concept, but told in a way that teases the viewer into watching more. Let's analyze how each concept is laid out, and examine what the viewer might be thinking (in parenthesis).

"This little train in Canada"

(Okay that's random. Why would this guy be telling me about a little train in Canada? I'd better keep watching.)

"... is loaded with fish from Alaska, and it travels only 100 feet this way —"



(Why would a train travel only 100 feet? I'll keep watching.)"

... it stops right there. And then it goes 100 feet back where it's unloaded."

(Huh? That seems completely pointless. Why does it do that? Now I have to keep watching.)

"The fish were carried by a foreign ship from Alaska to Maine ..."

(Boring! But I can't stop watching now, I have to see why that little train does that.)

"... and the law says that's illegal, unless you put it on a train in Canada."

(The law says that's illegal? Wait, that can't be. Hang on, I have to watch this again.)

The video was 18 seconds, but the average watch time was 21 seconds, meaning that most viewers actually re-watched the video, hence the reason it went viral.

Be wary of writing the script like you would for print. For example, the following script would probably not go as viral:

"Foreign ships have been circumventing a U.S. federal maritime law known as the Jones Act which requires only U.S. ships to be used in the transportation of goods between U.S. ports. But that law has a limited exemption known as the 'third proviso' which allows foreign ships to transport goods from a U.S. port to Canada where they can then be transported via rail over the border into the U.S."

The script above says essentially the same thing as my viral TikTok video, but it's such a slog to get through that most people would probably scroll away after the first five seconds.

So be sure to write your scripts colloquially, like you're telling it to a friend, rather than writing an article. Even better, pretend your friend is a third grader.

Good script writing can help walk a viewer to the end of your video, no matter what concept you're trying to convey. But videos also need to be tightly edited if they are to do well on TikTok.

3 TIGHT EDITING



When I was in high school, I took a class at the local public-access studio on how to edit VHS tape using equipment that looked like it came out of a spaceship. I think I was the only kid in my school who knew how to edit video.

Today, all kids know how to edit video. They know about overlays, transitions, voice-overs, effects, how to trim and add music, and they don't have the patience to watch poorly edited videos with long intros, bad lighting and tons of dead space.

Every fraction of a second counts on TikTok. Sometimes trimming a clip half a second shorter can be the difference between reaching thousands or millions of people.

The good news is that TikTok's editing tools are fairly easy to learn. I highly recommend watching Josh Otusanya's 37-minute training course, "[TikTok for Everybody: Script, Shoot, and Upload Your First TikTok](#)," which can be accessed for free on Skillshare. He also shares a lot of tips to help your videos go viral.



Alternatively, you can just edit the videos with a desktop editing tool such as Adobe Premiere Pro or Final Cut Pro, then just upload the videos to TikTok.

Note: *If editing with a desktop editing tool, I have found the videos play back smoother on TikTok if exported in portrait mode at 1080 x 1920 at 23.976 fps. After exporting, send the file to Google Drive, then use your phone to download the file to your photos. That can be downloaded to your phone by downloading the Google Drive app, accessing the right folder, and tapping on the three dots to the right of the video file. Then tap "Send a copy" which will allow you to "Save Video" to your phone. Then you can upload the video to TikTok on your phone.*

After you learn the basics of editing on TikTok from Otusanya, consider the following tips:

>> When starting out, aim to keep your video to 15 seconds, which is the easiest length to go viral.

>> When trimming, err on the side of shorter, rather than longer. Cut the breath before you begin talking and cut the breath after you've finished.

>> It's almost always better to have a shorter video, but not shorter than seven seconds.

>> When beginning a video, try to cut as close to the action as possible. For example, if editing someone dunking a basketball, don't start the action when the person is about to jump. Start when the person is already in the air, about to dunk.

>> If adding music, be sure to listen to the video through headphones before publishing, in case the levels need adjusting.

>> Use TikTok's effects, such as its in-app captioning effect, stickers and trending effects. This helps TikTok see that you're a real user and not just someone posting content from another platform.

>> Be sure your video looks good, since TikTok's algorithm will penalize darkly lit or low-resolution videos.

>> Always add captions, either manually or automatically, since that helps with virality.

>> Add hashtags related to your location and topic. TikTok generally wants videos to go viral nationwide or worldwide, and hashtags give TikTok a hint about who you think would be most interested in watching your videos. For example, #Hawaii and #Taxation tells TikTok I want my video shown to people who may be interested in taxation and Hawaii.

>> Before publishing, be sure to click on "more options" and enable "Allow high-quality uploads."

After publishing your video, be sure to watch it and give it a free "like," and leave a comment. Anyone watching the video may see that someone commented and check out the comment — and that increases the watch time.

Then ... just wait.

TikTok is like the snowball that leads to an avalanche. First it shows your video to 100 people in the first hour, and if those people like your video, it will show it to a few thousand people, and if those people like it, it will expand the reach to tens of thousands of people, and so on.

If it seems like your video isn't getting traction, don't worry. TikTok may boost your video after a few days, or even months, especially if you post regularly, such as every weekday.

How often should you post? It's really up to you. I try to post once per weekday. But sometimes I'll take a break for a week or two to do more research and scriptwriting, and that allows me to return with fresh ideas and good content, which TikTok shares widely.

I don't recommend deleting any video, since it also deletes your likes on the video, which subtracts from your total likes. But if you really want to delete it, I recommend just changing the video to "private," since that retains the likes.

It's best not to get too obsessed with your numbers at first. Focus more on experimenting and making new videos. Eventually one will take off, and when that happens, think hard about why it succeeded — and do it again!

At the time of this writing, it is difficult to collaborate on TikTok videos within an organization, and that makes quality control difficult. TikTok does not make it easy to share drafts of videos with other friends or staff members before the video has been published. The best workaround is to get a phone screen recording app, record the video, and send it via text message. We do this with a few people internally at our organization before publishing to TikTok, just so we have another set of eyes on the video.

4 AUTHENTICITY



Who should be the on-camera TikTok personality for your organization?

Before you rush to say, “An intern!” ask the question: Who is best in your organization at explaining things in 15 seconds? Who are the natural spokespersons for your organization? Who represents your brand? Who is the most creative? Who knows your messaging really well?

Often the best spokesperson for an organization is the CEO or another person very high up on the organization chart. But they usually are too busy to record TikToks.

The communications or marketing staff may have more time for TikTok, but sometimes they can make errors when boiling down a complicated policy issue into a simpler one, so they may need to consult with policy staff to ensure accuracy.

Use caution and oversight when outsourcing TikTok to interns, since they often don’t know your organization well and could easily go rogue.

Talk with your staff about what makes the most sense. Whomever you choose, make sure he or she is supported because the alternative is to try to run a TikTok account without an on-camera personality, and that can result in videos that are less viral, and a bit more “corporate.”

Corporate videos typically bomb on TikTok. TikTok viewers are used to scrolling past anything that looks like an ad, so logos must be used sparingly, if at all.

Reposted videos from YouTube typically don’t perform very well either. And clips of podcasts, interviews or legislative hearings usually don’t perform well, unless the clips are well-edited, snappy and short.

This can be hard for businesses and nonprofits who are used to hiding behind their logo and speaking in the royal “we.” For years, brands have been able to hide behind TV commercials and glossy, perfect Instagram photos.

The truth is: TikTok’s audience wants to see a human being. They want to see you.

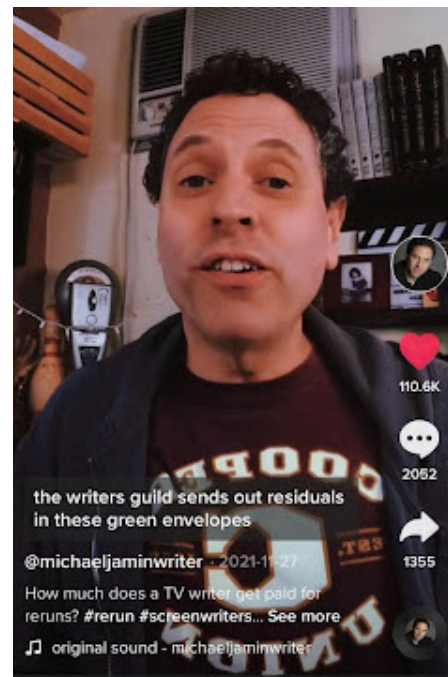
That's why The Washington Post is killing it on TikTok. Their office staff makes skits about their news stories. The videos vary from being funny, serious or simply educational, but you get the feeling they are passionate about presenting their articles in a way that's easy to understand. And that influences the perception of their brand.

It might seem odd that our little TikTok account @OahuJoe actually performs almost as well as the Washington Post TikTok @WashingtonPost, with each video reaching tens of thousands, and often hundreds of thousands of people. This is despite the fact that The Washington Post has 1.3 million followers, and our TikTok account only has 7,000 followers at the time of this writing. This goes to show that you can often reach a phenomenal amount of people on TikTok even if you don't have any followers. But your videos have to be good.

Your TikTok videos can be zany and off the wall, but they don't have to be. They can be as simple as you talking to the camera. Often, that can perform even better.

One of my favorite TikTokers is @michaeljaminwriter, because of his authenticity. His videos are not well edited, they don't have gimmicks or trends, and they are usually pretty long for TikTok. He just sits and talks to the camera about his career writing for TV sitcoms. However, his conversational tone is totally disarming, and the stories he shares are so hilarious and insightful that the viewer always walks away with something meaningful and worthwhile.

Scroll through TikTok and you will see lots of well-performing videos that are nothing more than an older gentleman playing piano or someone watering their flowers or taking a picture or telling a story. These videos grab your attention because there's something authentic and "human" about them.



So don't be afraid to be on camera. You have a whole audience out there that wants to hear what you have to say. But they want it to be short, sweet and explained really well.

5 A GOOD EXPLANATION



I asked a friend one time, “Have you heard about the rail tax?”

She said, “Oh yeah, I want to hear about that. But can you give me the 15-second version?”

At first I thought that maybe she didn’t want to hear about the rail tax, but that wasn’t it. She really did want to hear about it, but just in 15 seconds.

TikTok’s audience really wants to hear what you have to say, but they want it in 15 seconds.

So how do you talk about a tax policy or some other complicated issue in only 15 seconds?

One strategy is to think hard about the style of your video.

For example, a concept can be told straight:

Text on the screen: Taxes going up!

Presenter: Lawmakers are considering raising your taxes again for the rail system, and some Lawmakers say this is the last time. But they already said that eight years ago, so there’s really no guarantee that the tax hikes will stop.

It could be told as a skit:

Lawmaker: I have good news and bad news.

Taxpayer: What’s the bad news?

Lawmaker: We’re going to raise your taxes again to pay for the rail.

Taxpayer: Well, what’s the good news?

Lawmaker: This is the last time we have to raise taxes, I promise.

Taxpayer: Oh that’s good ... wait, you said that last time!

It could be like a minidocumentary or news story:

Visual: Pictures and videos of the rail and key lawmakers.

Narrator: In 2014, lawmakers said this is the “last time” they’d have to raise taxes to fund the rail system. But now, lawmakers are not only breaking their promise, they’re saying the same thing.

Clip of a lawmaker: This round of revenue generation is necessary to finish the rail project, and this should be the last time it’s needed.

Narrator: So is it really the last time?

It could be told emotionally:

Video of a taxpayer speaking at a public hearing on the tax hike: For too long you have made promises, promises, promises. But now your promises are broken. You want our money? Then here, take our money! (As she throws a stack of hundred dollar bills in the air.)

It could be told like a meme or trend, such as the [“What a lie”](#) trend:

Text on screen: Lawmakers in 2014: I promise this is the last tax hike for rail.

Visual: The Capitol.

Song: “What a Time” by Niall Horan and Julia Michaels, timed to the section where she sings, “What a lie, what a lie, what a lie ...”

There are many ways to explain a concept, and some video styles fit certain concepts better than others.



I wanted to explain the concept of the strain of the economy under the massive unfunded liabilities and debts of the state, and I came up with the idea of using a Jenga set, which is a set of blocks stacked on top of each other.

I filmed myself carefully taking out each block, labeled, "debt," or "pension debts" or "health benefits debt" and putting it on top of the stack of blocks labeled the "economy," until the whole thing collapsed.

The TikTok video garnered nearly 40,000 views and it was shared so much on popular local Instagram and Facebook pages that it was likely seen hundreds of thousands of times statewide.

Note: Meta's "Reels" on Facebook and Instagram and YouTube's "shorts" are currently in an all-out war with TikTok for dominance of the short-form viral video format, and that's an opportunity to reach even more people by reposting content originally made on TikTok or vice versa. All of these platforms are desperate for viral videos and, often, videos that don't perform well on TikTok can perform very well on Instagram, Facebook or YouTube.

Creativity is essential to explaining a concept well, so think hard about the best way to convey your message succinctly. And don't forget: sometimes, the best way to say something is just to say it.

6 LEAD GENERATION



TikTok's advertising and lead generation tools are still in their infancy, but we've experienced moderate success in generating email subscribers. But advertising on TikTok comes with a few caveats.

TikTok has two account types: Personal accounts and brand accounts. To switch your account type, go to settings and privacy >> manage account. Brand accounts give advertisers a suite of targeting features unavailable on personal accounts, and for that reason, we've opted to have two separate accounts.

I manage the "OahuJoe" personal account and our marketing director, Josh Mason, manages the "Grassroot Institute of Hawaii" brand account. We use the personal account to reach more people organically, and the brand account mostly for advertising.

We've found that videos tend to go viral more on the personal account rather than the brand account. One reason for that may be because the music library is nearly unlimited for personal accounts, so it's easier to pick "viral" music.

Brand accounts, on the other hand, have an extremely limited selection of music which has a hollow marketing feel to it. For that reason, we've found that it's more difficult to make organically viral videos on brand accounts, but not impossible.

I recommend beginners start with a personal account, and then decide later whether you'd like to create a separate brand account for advertising purposes.

TikTok's lead-generation advertising features were rolled out at the end of October 2021. This has proven to be an exciting and effective tool for us, but its limited targeting options have also driven up our cost per lead.

When we ran our first experiment in November, our cost per lead was less than \$1 for the first day. The week following, it managed to stay under \$2. But over time, the ad started to generate one lead for every \$3 or \$4 and at one point cost \$10 per lead.

Unlike Facebook, which will expand your audience-targeting options to other users who it assumes will be interested in your ad, TikTok's targeting is very limited.

Of the hours I've spent on TikTok, I've never encountered a lead-generation ad. Not once. Everyone I've asked, including late teens, who comprise a majority of the platform users, has said they have never encountered one either.

There are many explanations for this. An initial reaction might be to believe that the lead-generation tool is not very effective because it costs too much, similar to ad platforms on LinkedIn or Reddit. The more optimistic view is that it is still so new that the tool hasn't been refined by the creators or mastered by advertisers.

As of May 25, 2022, our best ad campaign received 1,095 leads at \$2,735, for a total cost of \$2.50 per lead. For reference, we've launched three other campaigns on Facebook for a few hundred dollars less that have costs per ad of about \$2.

Other metrics on May 25, 2022:

- CPM (Cost per mille): 13.10
- CPC (Cost-per-click): 1.00
- Impressions: 208,868
- Clicks: 2,733
- CTR (Click-through rate): 1.31%
- CVR (Conversion rate): 40%

This could be attributed to the ad itself, which is a very straightforward ask for people's email addresses. But again, it could also be TikTok's targeting, which is very limited compared to Meta. We will discuss the difference in their targeting methods in greater detail later.

Still, we have found that, as of April 28, 2022, our TikTok leads have the best retention and engagement compared to our other major sources.

	Retention	Read any of the last 5 campaigns	Read all of the last 5 campaigns
Tik Tok	84.45%	62.75%	21.29%
Facebook	82.17%	55.39%	17.39%
Get Emails	65.68%	50.57%	14.95%
Website/Other	64.62%	51.22%	17.16%

7 UNDERSTANDING TIKTOK'S AD MANAGER —

If you've used Ad Accounts in Meta's Business Manager, TikTok's Ads Manager is set up in a nearly identical way. TikTok starts businesses in its Campaigns, where you can set the budget and kind of ads you're running, such as for reach or lead generation.

Under Campaigns is Ad Groups, where you can control settings with user comments, video downloading, automated creative optimization, targeting, budget, schedule, optimization and bidding.

Under Ad Groups is Ads, where you control the actual creatives being shown to the audiences you're targeting.

For lead-generation forms, there are limitations to what you can request. This is the list of what you can ask for:

Contact Information

- Phone Number
- Email
- Address
- Country
- Province/state
- City
- Zip code

User Info

- First Name
- Last Name
- Name

Demographics

- Gender

There are no customized options. For example, if you wanted to run a petition, you couldn't give the petition taker the opportunity to provide comments. Or if you wanted to run a quiz, you can't make custom quiz questions.

The available tools will still bring in leads. Thankfully, you don't have to worry about manually moving leads over to the appropriate platforms since there are ways to automate this process. We use Zapier to connect our TikTok lead-generation forms to our Mailchimp list, but Leadsbridge is another option.

8 TARGETING OPTIONS



There is a clear limitation that prevents TikTok from being as great as Facebook, and that has to do with what you can target.

You can include and exclude your own custom and lookalike audiences, which will be touched on later. But without your own audiences, you are left with tools that are very limited for the public policy space. The platform seems to be largely geared towards mobile apps and e-commerce for now, which makes sense for TikTok's business model.

A major limitation concerns location. The location section does not allow you to simply type in a zip code or use a pin drop on a map to target people based on their proximity to an area. You can target only on the basis of state and select counties or a designated market area.

There isn't a detailed targeting option like with Facebook and Instagram. TikTok has just interests and behaviors. The number of options are dwarfed in comparison to Meta's platforms. There are four categories:

>> Interests: which list over 700 interest categories like eyeliner, men's clothing, Japanese cuisine, home repair, cats and role playing games.

>> Video interactions: which includes whether someone watched till the end, liked, commented or shared the video.

>> Creator Interactions: which includes whether they've followed certain types of creators.

>> Hashtags: which includes whether they've watched videos with certain types of hashtags.

Lookalike and custom audiences

Unfortunately, TikTok does not have the same useful audience tools as Meta. Its lead-generation system is tailored primarily for groups that have mobile applications.

As of May 25, 2022, you cannot upload a list of your current subscribers with their emails and then create a lookalike audience. All customer file uploads have to have Apple's Identifier For Advertising (IDFA) or Google Advertising ID (GAID) values, which are unique identifier codes for specific mobile devices that are used to measure the effectiveness of advertising.

These are identifiers that apps sell to advertisers so they can tailor ads to your interests. But if you are like us, then you haven't collected this information for your users or you don't even have a mobile application to collect it.

TikTok says that phone and email matching are currently in testing, so they may roll out the ability to upload email lists in the future.

You can also create custom audiences based on these four other options: Engagement (e.g., people who engaged with your videos in the last seven days), App Activity, Website Traffic, and Lead Generation.

Note on political ads: *As of May 25, 2022, TikTok had a policy against political ads. It prohibits ads that promote, reference or oppose:*

- *A candidate for public office.*
- *A current or former political leader, political party or political organization.*
- *Content that advocates a stance, for or against, on a local, state or federal issue of public importance in order to influence a political decision or outcome. Cause-based advertising or public service announcements from nonprofit organizations or government agencies might be allowed, if not driven by partisan political motives. In order to be approved, the advertiser must be actively working with a TikTok sales representative.*

CONCLUSION: AND A FINAL WARNING

Nonprofit organizations that have plateaued on other platforms should consider creating content on TikTok, since it allows for truly organic viral growth and audience discovery.

But a final word of warning: It's likely that your first few videos will not go viral at all.

If this happens, you may wonder if something is wrong with the app. Or if they changed the algorithm somehow to make your videos tank. You may wonder if people will laugh at the low numbers you're getting, and feel compelled to delete your early videos.

But don't worry too much. Just keep trying.

It will take time to find your unique voice and style, so just have fun and don't get too discouraged if your videos bomb. Take it as a sign that there is room for improvement, and try to figure out why people are scrolling away. It may be as simple as the video is too long, or maybe it needs a better hook.

If after 30 videos you just don't seem to be making progress, then sure, it may be time to throw in the towel.

TikTok isn't for everybody, and not everyone can go viral. I've shared five factors in this report to help your videos go viral, such as a good hook, curiosity, tight editing, authenticity and a good explanation. But there is a sixth factor that I can only describe as the "X" factor, which has to do with how well-suited you or your organization is to being a so-called "influencer."

The only way you will discover whether or not you have what it takes to go viral is to try. There may be a whole new audience out there who could be interested in your work and the mission of your organization. So go forth, be creative, reach new people! And if you're feeling really brave: bust a move!

Advertising on TikTok, especially for lead generation, pales in comparison to other platforms, specifically Facebook and Instagram. But we still believe it's important that nonprofits and educational groups get on TikTok now because it helps diversify your advertising options which can help reach new audiences and mitigate against any potential problems on other platforms. TikTok also frequently rolls out new advertising features which may benefit early adopters.

Join the Discussion

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ABOUT



Iron Light Labs is an award-winning nonprofit focused on R&D for social impact. The nonprofit is called “Labs” because it experiments, innovates and tests to discover the best way to drive change. Iron Light Labs is building a future where storytellers leap out of their echo chambers, creators partner with effective messengers, changemakers experiment with emerging media, and everyone measures what matters.

ABOUT JOE KENT AND JOSH MASON

Joe Kent is the Executive Vice President of the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii. Joe grew up on the Big Island and attended the University of Hawai'i at Hilo and Minnesota State University, where he obtained his degree in education. Kent was a public school teacher for eight years, at King Kamehameha III School in Lahaina, Maui, and Sleepy Eye Public School in Minnesota. He also is a former student fellow at the Foundation for Economic Education.

Josh Mason is the Director of Marketing of the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii. Josh holds an MBA from the Acton School of Business and a bachelor's degree in psychology and music from Brigham Young University-Hawaii, where he also served as managing editor of Ke Alaka'i, one of the nation's top-ranked college publications. He joined the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii in 2018 as director of communications until leaving Hawaii in 2019 to earn his MBA. Named marketing manager in 2020, Mason is fluent in Spanish and enjoys listening to nonfiction audiobooks and journaling.