

# RETURN ON CREATIVE:

HOW COMPELLING CONTENT  
DRIVES BUSINESS RESULTS



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome to Ipsos and TikTok's exploration of Return on Creative. This whitepaper, which was a joint effort between the two entities, uncovers insights about the value of creative in today's marketing landscape, what advertisers need to do to break through, and how TikTok specifically can serve as a tool for advertisers who want to drive business results through creativity.

We believe that creative holds untapped potential to deliver incremental results for brands. As viewers' expectations about watching and making content continue to change, brands should have a new perspective on the value that creative brings to their business, beyond traditional metrics. This will in turn transform the way they create, optimize, and measure their content. The benefit? It gives marketers a whole new way to grow their business. We unpacked these concepts within three key sections:

1

## The value of empathy in marketing

*Today's audiences are viewing, creating, and reacting to content in a very unique way. Through research, we uncover one of the keys to breaking through in today's marketing landscape: Empathy.*

2

## The role of resonance on TikTok

*Resonance is the ability to strike a chord with a viewer in a way that genuinely inspires them to take action. On TikTok, it's a make-or-break characteristic for quality content. We delve into data-backed advice on how to create resonance.*

3

## Strategies for unlocking the value of creative

*Because of the importance of things like empathy and resonance, it's more valuable than ever to invest in creative. We explore the different ways that marketers can start to unlock, and make the most of the content they create.*



## FOREWORD: THE VALUE OF CREATIVE

*In a skippable world with endless content, creativity is the key to breaking through*

Think of how many times in a day you hear a brand message. Whether it's on television, digital platforms, or in the pre-roll ad on your favorite podcast, you're getting stories from advertisers, telling you about their values and products and offerings. Of all the messages you hear in a day, which ones are the most memorable to you?

For most people, the answer is: The ones that are *funny*. The ones that are *relatable*. The ones that are *entertaining*. In short: **The ones that are genuinely creative, and add value in some way to a viewer.**

In order to break through, brand messages of today must be creative, memorable, relatable, bold, inclusive, and respectful of the consumer's attention, all while achieving a brand's objective: to impact the bottom line. It's a complicated brief—but in order to drive business results, it's a necessity.

Because viewers have access to more channels and more content, they have higher expectations for the ads that they see. They want a variety of content that **resonates**; meaning, it strikes a chord with them, speaking to something that is relatable or true about the world that they live in. Creativity is the avenue into resonance, and by extension, the path toward true results.

Ipsos and TikTok worked together to understand the driving forces behind creativity and resonance, to give more specific insights to brands who want to tap into it more deeply. In this whitepaper, we shed light on how **empathy** is at the core of marketing today, across all platforms and channels. We also dig into the value of **resonance** on TikTok specifically, and strategies for building creative.

The overarching finding? That, when done right, brands can see better business results when they lean into quality content that resonates. We call this concept the **return on creative**; the idea that creative, just like any other aspect of marketing, is an investment. When brands are strategic and intentional about how they plan and produce their creative, it benefits their bottom line.



*We have long known the power of creative, and have shown with clients up to 44% variance in effectiveness, due to creative quality alone. More recently, we have unpacked the path to effectiveness as a combination of both creativity and empathy.*

*- Pedr Howard, Head of Ipsos US Creative Excellence*



*Creativity is fuel for driving business results. In today's marketing landscape where communities form around participatory content engagement, genuine creativity is the key to connecting with consumers and inspiring action.*

*- Adrienne Lahens, Global Head of Content Strategy and Operations, TikTok*

Source: Ipsos Global Ad Testing Validations, 1,000+ ads

# PART 1: THE VALUE OF EMPATHY IN MARKETING

## The new age of creative content

We're living in an era where anyone can be a creator. Viewers have endless options when it comes to where they get their entertainment, and there's more content than ever before, branded or otherwise.

This is the new age of content; it's built on social and entertainment platforms, powered by creativity, and contributed to by everyone—everyday people, creators, and marketers alike.

This new reality has sparked three key shifts in the way viewers interact with creative, and as a result, changed the way advertisers can reach their audiences.

The undercurrent of all these shifts is the need for *empathy* in marketing. To put it plainly, empathy in marketing is the act of understanding what's important

to people, reflecting that in content, and framing it in the right way, so it lands properly with the right audiences. When brands do this, they are better able to resonate, show up strong on interactive platforms, and speak to different perspectives in their content.

The question then becomes: In today's ever-changing world, how can brands be empathetic to the audiences that matter to them?

The answer is by looking on platforms like TikTok. There, people show up every single day to share stories and glimpses of their lives. Their content serves as a rich well from which brands can pull inspiration on how to make content that reflects the actual, real-life interests of viewers. In doing so, they can build advertising strategies that are built to thrive in the new age of content.

### Shift 1

#### **From scarcity to abundance.**

**The change:** Viewers have access to a higher quantity and variety of content.

**The result:** Brands need to create more content that spans their audiences' interests and lifestyles, so viewers can easily find what's relevant to them.

### Shift 2

#### **From passive to active.**

**The change:** Viewers are no longer just consumers; anyone can be a creator, thanks to platforms like TikTok. When planning content, many creators and marketers look for clues and inspiration from the community for ideas—meaning interactivity provides the foundation for much of today's content.

**The result:** Advertisers need new strategies to take advantage of interactive platforms, so viewers can add to brand conversations—and brands can engage accordingly.

### Shift 3

#### **From access to connection.**

**The change:** New technology has made it easier than ever to create and discover content. This has led to a creativity boom, which has brought forth a wider range of voices—and greater opportunities for community formation and connection.

**The result:** Brand messages need to reflect this diversity, and speak to different perspectives, styles and tones.

# Building great brands today

Brand-building playbooks look a bit different in the new age of content. Ipsos research indicates that, today, building a great brand requires three key actions on the part of marketers:

## 01

### Shaping Viewer Expectations

Marketers must form the expectations that people have about their brand and the category—including emotional, digital and buying expectations

## 02

### Understanding Context

Brands need to understand what is happening in people’s lives, and the world around them. The things that are important to people, and the brands they choose, will change depending on this context.

## 03

### Acting With Empathy

Marketers who demonstrate empathy are able to continuously capture and feel what is important to people and cultures, regardless of context or timing.

## A double-click on empathy

For a long time, the industry has focused heavily on the science of marketing, investing time and energy into things like targeting and performance. While these are important aspects of a campaign, they can’t come at the expense of the art of a campaign (in other words, the creative element of it.)

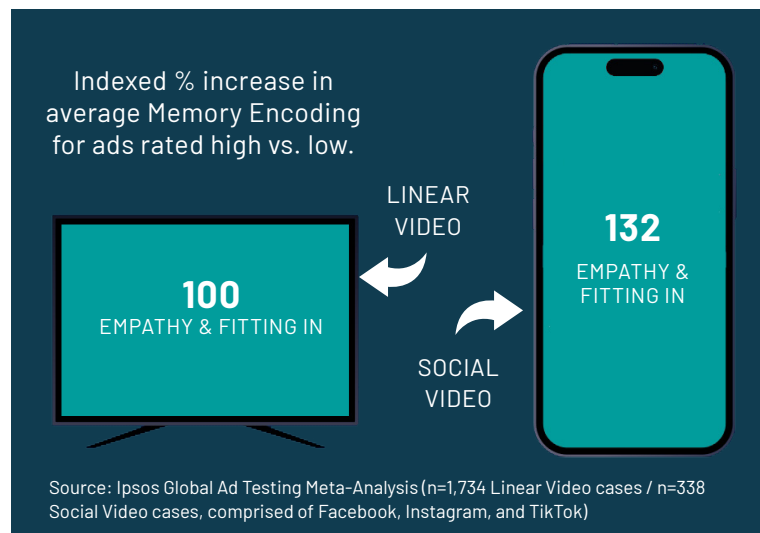
### What is empathic marketing?

Ipsos analyzed ~1,800 high-performing video ads\*. In doing so, they found that many of the videos demonstrated empathy on the part of the brand. In this context, empathy entails:

- Representing a viewer’s needs and challenges, rather solely focusing on product benefits
- Aligning with the brand’s values
- Adding value via education, connection, or entertainment
- Leaves viewers feeling that the content is “for people like them”

\*Inclusive of TikTok and non-TikTok ads.

By being empathetic, brands can form sincere connections with viewers. They can go beyond surface-level metrics and one-off sales, and start to build lasting relationships with audiences, which can translate to loyalty and retention. And they’ll be able to do it because they’re re-introducing the artistic part of marketing back into their strategies—which is the part that adds value in today’s over-saturated digital world.



\*The results of this research also found that many high-performing videos **entertain** viewers in a unique way that creates buzz (also known as **creative experiences**.) It also found that successful ads tell viewers something new and teach them about their options, their lives, and the world around them (also known as **creative ideas**.) For the purposes of this report, we focused on “empathy,” as it sheds the most light on resonance and what it can do for brands.

## Case Study: KitKat Japan

In early 2023, **KitKat Japan** unveiled its noteworthy Yokubari Double ad, which effectively championed this brand success framework on TikTok.

The partnership with Piko Taro (a Japanese celebrity who shot to fame in 2016 following his smash hit 'PPAP'), the relatable tone, and its unique fit in the

TikTok environment made this creative a roaring success.

The distinctive KitKat spirit and nostalgic memories invited by Piko Taro blended brilliantly with an aura of freshness, making a profoundly resonating impact on its audience.



- **A remarkable creative experience:** By tapping into popular culture through a partnership with the well-known character, Piko Taro, the creative offers a unique, entertaining experience that audiences relished.
- **Solid empathy and fitting in:** The ad imparts a narrative that aligns with what the Japanese market expects from KitKat, already revered for its eclectic flavors. It's a fresh idea that demonstrates brand continuity. The ad's influence is not restricted to tapping into popular culture; it actively contributes to it, extending the legacy of Piko Taro on TikTok. Importantly, it produces a sense of closeness and relevance for the TikTok audience.
- **A clear, compelling creative idea:** The freshness of the product is vividly pronounced and thus readily understood by the audience. Importantly, this notion is delivered in a highly entertaining manner, breaking some anticipated chocolate demonstration conventions, thereby fortifying brand difference, and increasing desire for the new product.

## PART 2: THE ROLE OF RESONANCE

### Why resonance matters on TikTok

When a brand shows up over time with empathy on TikTok, they reflect the culture and trends of the platform that make viewers feel seen and heard. This is what TikTok calls **resonance**; the ability to strike a chord with a viewer in a way that genuinely inspires them to take action.

Resonance helps brands form meaningful connections with TikTok viewers—a group of leaned-in consumers who often take action based on what they see on the platform, whether it's buying a product, downloading an app, or seeking out more information. And those actions translate into real results for brands. TikTok users are 1.5x more likely to discover something on the platform and immediately go out to buy it (vs other social/video platforms.) [1]

#### The 4 key ways to build resonance on TikTok



##### Be credible:

- **83%** of TikTok viewers say they trust the brands that they see in TikTok-First ads.
- **82%** of the TikTok audience say the brands are credible\*. [2]



##### Have good storytelling:

- **28%** of TikTok users say 'storytelling' would likely get their attention while scrolling on TikTok [3].
- **65%** of TikTok users agree TikTok is the most inclusive platform for storytelling. [4]



##### Be relatable:

After viewing TikTok-first creative\* on TikTok

- **71%** of TikTok users say the brand is personally relevant to them
- **72%** for repurposed creative on TikTok). [2]



##### Demonstrate variety:

- **65%** of TikTok users felt a positive emotion when shown a variety of content. [5]
- **51%** of TikTok users prefer brands that have a variety of content because it keeps things entertaining. [5]

\*"TikTok-First" content is that which is clearly made for the platform (ie. not repurposed) and included a number of TikTok-First elements (e.g., text overlays.)

[1] TikTok Marketing Science Global Retail Path To Purchase Study 2021 conducted by Material.

[2] TikTok Marketing Science Global Creative First Study 2022 conducted by Ipsos

[3] TikTok Marketing Science EU Entertainment Vertical Research 2022 conducted by InSites Consulting

[4] TikTok Marketing Science Global Creators Like Me Study 2021 conducted by Hotspex

[5] TikTok Marketing Science North America Value in Variety Study [US,CA] 2023, conducted by Alter Agents

## A double-click on variety (and volume)

As we've been saying, viewers have more options than ever before, in terms of what content to watch and which videos to engage with and linger on. When brands add value for viewers, they're more likely to capture their attention and engagement.

Having a wide variety of content can help brands achieve that. Here's a look at three ways in which variety adds value:

### It drives entertainment

The #1 reason people come to TikTok is to be entertained, and people trust the FYP to make entertainment effortless. [6]

There is something for everyone on TikTok, no matter who they are, where they live, or what they're interested in. [7]

### It enables education

Through accessible authentic education, viewers can learn about even more products and categories—and different ways to use them.

### It spotlights different perspectives

Representation is driven by millions of individuals sharing their own unique stories, perspectives, and points of view on the platform. 67% of TikTok viewers enjoy hearing stories from underrepresented voices. [8]

In essence, we recommend that brands **show up more** on TikTok. Ultimately, this is about maximizing a meaningful presence; implementing a high-volume, varied approach is fundamental to unlocking the value creative on TikTok.

## Brand KPIs increase when you introduce variety in your content

**+5%**

uplift in branding [5]

**+23%**

in engagement [5]

**+25%**

in time watched [5]

[5] TikTok Marketing Science North America Value in Variety Study [US,CA] 2023, conducted by Alter Agents

[6] TikTok Marketing Science Global Entertaining Ads Study 2022 conducted by Marketcast

[7] TikTok Marketing Science Global Time Well Spent Study 2021, conducted by Kantar

[8] TikTok Marketing Science Global Diversity on TikTok 2022 conducted by Flamingo Group



## The role of organic and paid

On TikTok, the act of “showing up more” doesn’t just mean making more paid ads. Organic content is also crucial in order to cultivate deeper connections with viewers, since it lays the foundation for understanding your audience’s interests and the topics they want to engage with.

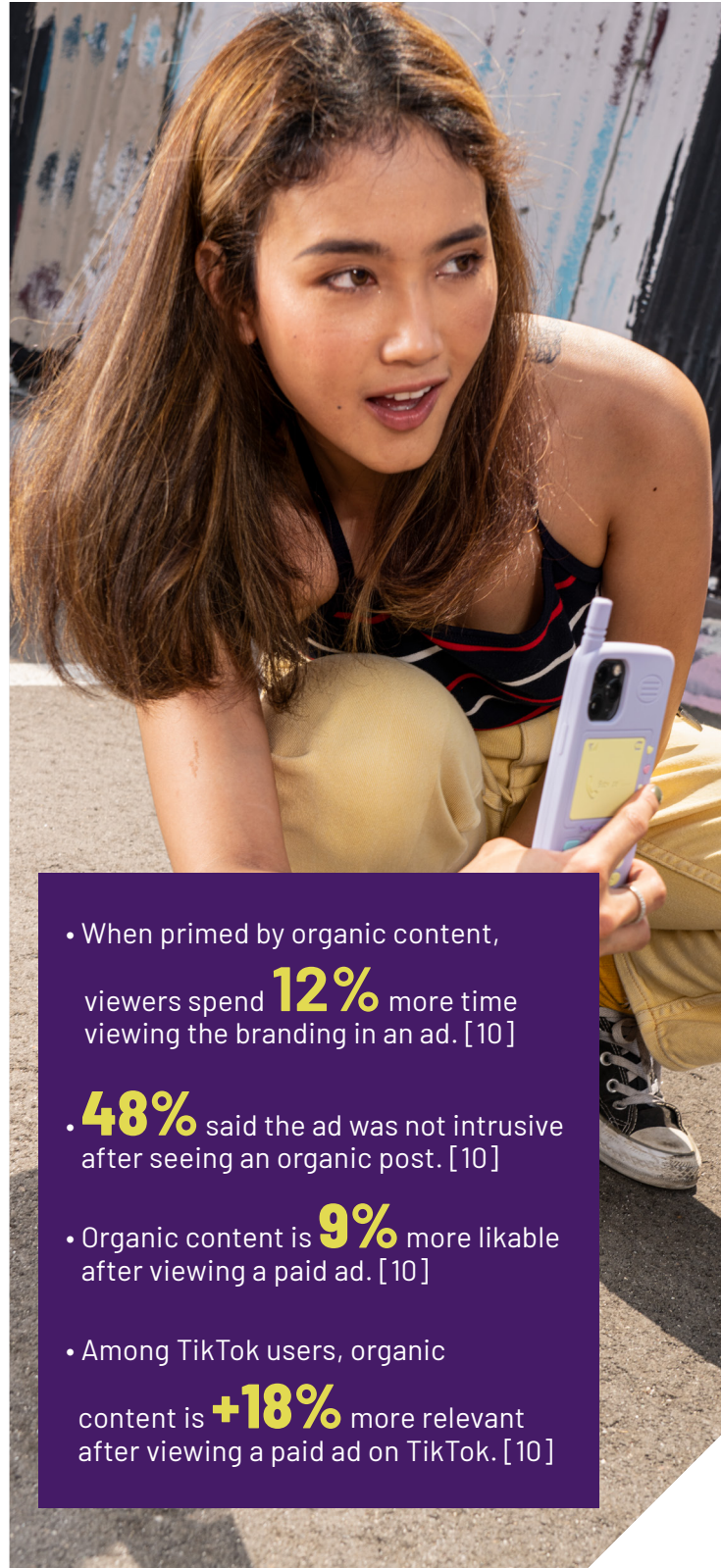
When viewers see an organic brand video on their FYP, it sends them a message: the brand understands TikTok. They enjoy the culture of this platform as much as the viewer. They’re *part* of the creative ecosystem that everyone’s there to experience. Building this rapport with viewers supercharges the impact of paid ads.

Additionally, by using a combination of organic and paid in an always-on approach, brands can drive full-funnel results for their campaigns; a healthy mix of organic and paid helps brands tailor specific videos to boost awareness, conversion, and everything in between.

Scenarios with a mix of organic, brand led, and creator content have the greatest probability of full funnel outcomes (vs those that do not include organic). [5]

Always-on brands saw a **+28%** uplift in purchase intent compared to less active ones. [9]

This synergy between organic and paid ensures that your creative works harder. For example, paid campaigns are more effective when the audience has already had exposure to the brand through organic content, as this familiarity makes ads feel less intrusive and more like a natural extension of the organic experience. The inverse is also true; exposure to paid ads can also have a positive effect on organic performance.



• When primed by organic content, viewers spend **12%** more time viewing the branding in an ad. [10]

• **48%** said the ad was not intrusive after seeing an organic post. [10]

• Organic content is **9%** more likable after viewing a paid ad. [10]

• Among TikTok users, organic content is **+18%** more relevant after viewing a paid ad on TikTok. [10]

[5] TikTok Marketing Science North America Value in Variety Study [US, CA] 2023, conducted by Alter Agents

[9] TikTok Marketing Science Internal data, US Growth Clients 2021-2022

[10] TikTok Marketing Science Global Organic + Paid Study 2021 conducted by Neurons

# Case Study

## Booking.com uses Sprinklr technology to support their *organic to paid* TikTok strategy

Booking.com used integrated innovative AI-powered models from Sprinklr to efficiently manage TikTok comments on a large scale, transforming vast data into actionable insights. This enabled Booking.com to harness real-time customer feedback for optimizing ad campaigns. Through AI-driven analysis, content performance was monitored via a unified dashboard, facilitating agile spending adjustments.

This initiative illustrates how performance analysis empowered Booking.com to swiftly identify successful content. With a significant portion of positive sentiment, the team promptly leveraged paid media to amplify reach and engagement.

Corina Bordeianu, of the Social Media & Consumer Insights team at Booking.com, said, "As part of our boosting strategy, we conduct audience targeting tests to reach new demographics we anticipate will engage with our content. Monitoring sentiment patterns validates our hypotheses." Over a 60-day test period, Sprinklr analyzed over 9,500 TikTok comments, categorizing them into positive experiences, brand engagements, complaints, thank you messages, reservation issues, and more.



***One campaign had over 300 messages that were tagged as positive stay experiences. Having Sprinklr automatically classify these and provide real-time reporting is not only a huge time saver, but important for future campaign recommendations."***

*- Corina Bordeianu, Social Media & Consumer Insights, Booking.com*



## PART 3: STRATEGIES FOR UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF CREATIVE

None of the insights in this report are valuable without a plan for how to implement them. Fortunately, on TikTok, creating is easy. That's one of the things that makes the platform notable; no matter who you are, what your skills are, or what story you're trying to tell, you can film a TikTok video. The same applies to making branded content.

At the same time, TikTok knows that each advertiser has a different set of objectives, bandwidth, skills, and existing assets. Our goal is to make creativity achievable, seamless, and scalable as possible for any brand, so they can find the mix of content that most empowers them to build resonance—and unlock return on creative.



***Creative is the difference. More than at any time before in social marketing, the difference between success and failure isn't in ad tech, testing, or sheer volume of exposure. It's investment in creative. Any brand can buy ads to reach to a certain number of eyeballs. Instead, when brands understand their audience and know what resonates for them, they can build authentic creative allowing their brand to join or drive the conversation versus just pushing a message or copying a meme.***

*- Bridget Jewell, Executive Creative Director, Dentsu*

TikTok has developed a flexible suite of creative tools for advertisers to choose from, depending on how they want to show up. This flexibility means that marketers no longer need to choose between creativity and scale; they can achieve both. They can make a high volume of creative, varied content that helps them build resonance.



# Creative for paid ads

Making ads for TikTok doesn't have to be a huge undertaking. There are different avenues into showing up on the platform—from using the assets you already have, to fully investing in a long-term, native campaign. No matter which approach works best for your brand, TikTok has tools to help you get there.

## 1. Remix existing assets

Remixing existing assets offers brands a practical and efficient strategy to establish a presence on TikTok. This approach allows for a cost-effective entry into the platform, and makes it easier for brands to have a regular stream of content live on TikTok.

**By making as few as three strategic edits to their existing content, brands can realize considerable improvements in their full-funnel performance.** [11]

This adjustment process might involve reformatting videos to suit TikTok's vertical viewing experience, adding interactive elements, or incorporating timely and relevant hooks that appeal to the TikTok community.

## 2. Tap into low-lift native solutions

While remixed content does hold value, TikTok-first content drives the strongest results for brands. There are low-lift and turnkey solutions that help brands create native campaigns that build resonance with viewers.

### TikTok-first content by the numbers:

**79%** of TikTok users show a preference for brands that demonstrate a clear understanding of how to create content specifically for the platform. [12]

Moving from TV-style assets to TikTok-first\*

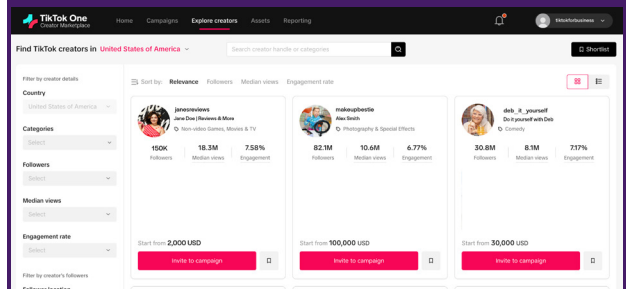
**+37%** ads boosts purchase intent

**+38%** brand favorability. [13]

\*"TikTok-first" content is that which is clearly made for the platform (ie. not repurposed) and included a number of TikTok-first elements (e.g., text overlays.)

## Tools For Making TikTok Creative

**TikTok One Creator Marketplace**  
Within the creator marketplace, advertisers can partner with creators to make ads in a way that's fast, scalable, and low-lift.



## Spark Ads

Boost existing videos that feature a brand or product.

[11] TikTok Marketing Science Global Repurposed Creative Study 2023, conducted by Material

[12] TikTok Marketing Science Global Community and Self-Expression 2021 conducted by Flamingo

[13] TikTok Marketing Science Creative Coding Analysis based on 3,500 TikTok ads that ran from 1/1/2021 - 10/1/2021 representing all major verticals, conducted by Kantar, 2022

### 3. Go full in on TikTok-first\* creative

To make the most of viewers' love of TikTok-first content, brands may want to go deeper with their native storytelling. They can build relationships with creators, collaborating on long-term content strategies. They can absorb as much as they can about trends, then put their brand's spin on them. They can learn from TikTok storytelling formats and emulate those patterns in their own content. In short: They can grow to understand the culture on TikTok, and reflect that in the custom TikTok-first content they make.

\*"TikTok-first" content is that which is clearly made for the platform (ie. not repurposed) and included a number of TikTok-first elements (e.g., text overlays.)

## Tools For Making TikTok Creative

### TikTok One Creator Marketplace

With the creator marketplace, brands can go deeper with creator collabs, partnering with them on sophisticated campaigns and long-term ambassadorships that connect strongly to TikTok culture, communities, and trends.



### Creative Assistant

This generative AI-powered chatbot from TikTok allows you to generate scripts, brainstorm ideas, learn about the latest TikTok trends, and more—setting you up for success in your next fully-native campaign.



# Creative for organic content

As we've noted, combining organic and paid content together is the strongest way to see results on TikTok.

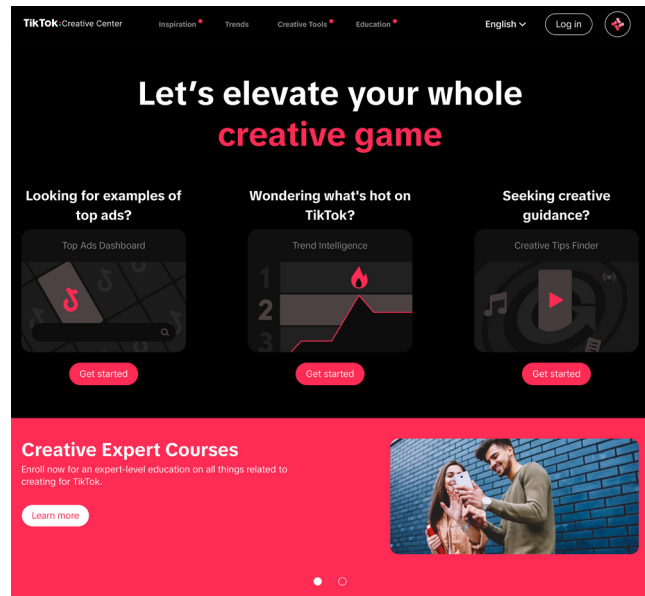
Showing up organically goes beyond posting in-feed videos—advertisers can make the most of TikTok's features to form connections with viewers and drive engagement.

**1. Make stitches and duets:** These formats cultivate audience participation, collaboration, and deeper brand engagement.

**TikTok Creative Center** has up-to-date intel about the latest trends, top ads, and popular video formats.

**2. Explore hashtags:** Hashtags are powerful discovery tools on TikTok; showing up within the right hashtags can demonstrate that a brand understands TikTok, and ensure they reach viewers who are interested in their content.

**3. Leave comments:** TikTok viewers love when brands are active in the comments. It's a low-lift way for brands to connect and form relationships with their audience.



**76%** of TikTok users agree that brands that post or reply to comments on TikTok feel like part of the community. [12]

## Ready to unlock the value of creative?

You have the insights and advice you need to succeed. We can't wait to see how you master creative on TikTok.

**START TODAY!**

[12] TikTok Marketing Science Global Community and Self-Expression 2021 conducted by Flamingo