

# Being brave on TikTok with Amy & Dustin, TikTok PT 1

## Pierre-Loic Assayag:

Amy, Dustin, it's so great to have you guys and the voice for TikTok on this important topic of creators and social commerce. Before we kick things off, I'd love to hear from each of you a little bit, what it is you do at TikTok beyond the job title? What's your function? So if you don't mind spending a minute sharing that with us, maybe starting with Amy.

## Amy Oelkers:

Sure. Thanks, Pierre. Nice to be here. I'm Amy Oelkers. I am the vertical director for CPG at TikTok. So what does that really mean? Really responsible for the partnerships with our US-based CPG clients, and that covers clients that are in the food and beverage space, personal care, home and beauty. I'm six months in, loving my time at TikTok and Dustin has certainly been one of my main partners in crime. So I'll kick it over to him.

## Dustin Goot:

Thank you so much, Amy. My name is Dustin Goot. I am the Creator Solutions Lead for the Americans at TikTok, and that means that we connect brands with creators and help them work harmoniously together.

## Pierre-Loic Assayag:

Thank you both for this quick intro and without veering completely off track. Amy, I was snooping into your bio on LinkedIn and noticed that somebody described you there as a "digital publishing badass". And I'm wondering Dustin, what's Amy's new nickname over at TikTok?

## Dustin Goot:

I think that sums it up. For me, it's just Amy O - that says it all. When Amy's working on something, you know that some amazing marketing content is going to come out the other side.

## Pierre-Loic Assayag:



Awesome. And very politically correct too. Though, I would love to see "badass" in your title. You should work on that.

Amy Oelkers:

I'll weave it in somewhere.

Dustin Goot:

I'm really nervous that we're starting with LinkedIn stalking cause mine is like a mile I don't, I haven't proved it the way that you really should prove your career. And so I hope we're just moving on with this.

Pierre-Loic Assayag:

All right. I'll spare you. We'll do everything else offline, Dustin. So going straight into our topic of the day, which is the meeting of the creator economy and social commerce, you're in a very unique position at TikTok, where you have to cater to your creators, to the consumers, and to your brand partners as well. One of the key elements is the competition that there is among platforms for the creator's attention. And it's especially true when it comes to monetization. What makes TikTok special in this? What makes TikTok stand out? Maybe Dustin you're well-suited to answer that.

Dustin Goot:

Yeah, of course. For that, I really have to credit people who are not speaking to you on the podcast. What is really necessary is to be a platform where creators want to be, and that's what TikTok has done an amazing job building, mostly through our product and engineering teams, our trust and safety teams, our user partnership teams. Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy, and I think we do a phenomenal job at that. We have specific tools like duets and stitches to allow a really vibrant community where people riff on each other's content and create together. We offer effects and all sorts of things to unleash creativity, and our users put them to unbelievable, innovative use.

I know we're going to be talking about brands and monetization, but step one is you just have to create an environment to build that creator community. And that's not about money. There's tons of platforms that come at TikTok creators every day and throw money at them. But the bottom line is people have to be in a place that they consider safe that inspires them to express themselves and do their best work.



Amy Oelkers:

I think that's the keyword, right? It's safe. I mean, that's what sticks out for me. And I knew Dustin would end there because I think whether you're a creator or you're just a user who's coming on to our platform to engage and consume, you do feel safe, right? I always say TikTok is a great platform where it's come as you are, be who you are. And I think that inherently makes people feel safe there.

Pierre-Loic Assayag:

I appreciate both your perspectives on this. And I think when we look at the skyrocketing success of TikTok, at the very beginning of the COVID year in 2020, there is something to be said as well for the positioning as you're laying it out and how it matched the brand values and the experience that users would have there.

Let's go into the partnerships between creators and brands, if you don't mind. One thing that we observed at Traackr (during the early timing of COVID for early 2020 and since) is that these partnerships have vastly evolved and therefore almost matured a decade within the span of a year and a half. Where it all started with the engagement of creators as supporting plays around awareness and advocacy, and they have really moved full-funnel from the brand side.

There's an expectation today that through the creator partnerships, brands will be able to leverage the creators to support the e-commerce, their social commerce efforts that have gone from being a sideshow for many to be center stage today. And my question is; have you observed the same thing? The trend I'm describing over at TikTok, and if so, how have brands and creators adapted to this... I hate to say this but new normal?

Dustin Goot:

I definitely think that we've seen creators being central to marketing success at TikTok. That's not to say that it's the only way to do it, but I think telling believable, real stories about real people is, in my opinion, where marketing is going in general. I'd like to think TikTok is helping to lead that. And TikTok creators are helping to lead that because they're so brave, which I know is a word Amy uses and sorry to steal it initially, but in telling their own stories and they bring that to their brand partnerships. So it's been really inspiring.

A little over a year ago, we put out the tagline, "don't make ads make TikToks" and that doesn't explicitly mention creators, but creators are kind of tacitly in there because who makes the best TikToks? It is TikTok creators, of course, and I feel brands have really embraced it. It can be a scary thing. It's for a lot of brands it's a new way of working, but I think they find real

rewards in having their brand be interpreted by a new set of voices, a more diverse set of voices. And the new normal can be a little scary, but there's a lot of amazing rewards that brands find from telling these very rich, authentic stories on TikTok through creators.

Amy Oelkers:

Yeah. I'm just going to follow up. This will be my, this will be our pattern for today, guys, where Dustin says something brilliant and I follow up, but I want to expand on that because it's actually part of what we talk about with clients today.

Bravery is huge, right? You have to be brave to come on our platform and release control, especially for CPG clients, very traditional clients, releasing control into the hands of an unknown. That's scary, but the payoff and the reward is like, "sky is the limit". I'll add to what Dustin was saying, that I think there has been a shift. And I do think it really was fast-tracked during the pandemic where consumers, users, just the audiences no longer wanted a highly curated experience. They wanted the realness, they wanted to see themselves. So that, that very edited aspirational, creative, or dream is not relative today. And I think, TikTok grounds everybody to show you that they want the realness, they want the messiness.

I'll just give you one example. I think one of our partners, Estee Lauder with Clinique did a really great job when they talked about acne. I mean, one of my favorite campaigns is with Zit Happens. I mean, think about another platform that really is embracing what you truly look like without the makeup on and embracing your natural self, your authentic self, and that like again, highly engaged, highly viewed, highly participated with.

Dustin Goot:

Yeah, totally agree. And if I can build on Amy's brilliance, Dove did a no digital distortion campaign, to really be out front with a message of, beauty needs to be real. We need to talk about real issues and not just hold up these impossible standards with air touched images in our marketing. To lead that campaign, they tapped a creator, Jessia, who had really gone viral on the platform for the song called "I'm not pretty". I'm not going to attempt to do the singing, but it goes like, "I'm not pretty, I'm just fun." And it's talking about how she's just a normal girl and she doesn't feel beautiful, but...

Amy Oelkers:

"She has a belly and bum," Dustin.



Dustin Goot:

[Laughter] That is the end of the refrain. The first video is her just singing that chorus actually in her car. She was just kind of workshopping at or something, and it just struck a nerve and it became super popular. It was so smart of Dove to see this and say, "this is the way we feel about beauty. You should just embrace who you are and you can have a belly and a bomb, and still be beautiful and still use our products." Using her to headline the no digital distortion campaign was a great way to lean into that realness of the platform.

Pierre-Loic Assayag:

Great example, and very interesting. And I completely agree that TikTok in many ways has reached beyond Tiktok to nudge a lot of marketers to think differently about production. Even beyond this, to tie this back to authenticity, which is maybe the magic or the key component to success, both for creators with the audience and for creators with brands, because the minute something feels inauthentic is when it stops working and feeling like an ad, whether or not it is.

I want to go back to my original question though because your answers were brilliant, amazing. But it was different from what I asked. I want to track back to what we were talking about. These partnerships around brand awareness, brand values, et cetera, they've been around. I think TikTok has done an amazing job with the creators to support that trend.

The one thing that we have observed, and we have a very skewed vantage point because we work with brands not creators, is that on the brand side there's really been a trend during COVID, in part because the physical, retail stores were closed, for e-commerce to become center stage. And for brands to realize that the affiliate programs they had been relying on for years were not scalable. They needed something new - need new blood, new ideas to help direct traffic to the e-commerce sites. And that trend included very much the creators becoming front and center.

So, my question to you is; have you seen these partnerships evolve over the past year or so in the way brands engage with creators? Are the asks different? Are the partnerships different? Do creators feel more inclined to go down this path than others? How has this evolved?

Dustin Goot:

Yeah, I don't want to sound like a broken record, but if the story resonates, the commercial goals will take care of themselves. We were doing a client workshop the other day, that's a series that we do with some of our creators. And this one creator had a brilliant line, which is "Gen Z is as smart. We're digital natives." Obviously, I'm not quoting directly, but he said, "you don't have to give us all the product messaging. If you just get us interested, we'll do the

research". It's basically like we know how to Google stuff. I had never heard someone kind of reframe the goal of the marketer in that way, but it really is a brilliant insight because you think of how so many marketing campaigns are constructed. It's all about the product attributes, the key messaging. And then, you kind of back into some kind of creative concept from there.

In this information age with marketing to a digital native consumer set, they can find your products, they can price compare, they can look up all of the ingredients, they can see where their source and they're going to do all of that. What's most important again, is telling a real story about the product. What is it really good at? How do you want it to make you feel? And that story has to connect with people. Brands are getting better at... what Amy said, "letting go and understanding that a stilted, relentlessly on-message that use our tagline approach just is not going to get the results that you want." You have to make people interested to do all of those other steps to shop and learn more. Brands are getting better in their creator partnerships to achieve that.

#### Amy Oelkers:

Yeah. And I'll say think about... listen guys, I'm going to date myself here. You can come along for the ride or not. So back in the day, my biggest outing was to go to the mall with my friends, right? You would go, walk, shop, and eat. You would just have a great time. I think that whole retail experience, because unfortunately of COVID because of the pandemic has been completely diminished, right? It doesn't take away the fact of how consumers still shop, you shop on emotion, right? You shop on "I see it. I want it. I got to have it". Then take that to gen Zs right now where it's all about instant gratification. This is a consumer segment that is used to having it within two days at most. The beauty of TikTok, the realness, the authenticity, is that we are really pushing discovery for the user, where they don't even know they're discovering something or that they wanted to discover something.

But like Dustin said, then you put it in a storyline. Then you have a narrative. Then you have something that entertains them. And now you're giving them all of those great things all at once. So to me, it's because of all of those things is the collapse of the funnel. So Pierre, going back to your question, it used to be yes, here's our brand awareness. Here's our consideration. And how do we drive that user down to ultimately purchase? It is all happening right on our platform. And you can see it and everyone can look it up. I mean, we were just in the New York times over the weekend, style section on hashtag TikTok Made Me Buy It. I mean, TikTok Made Me Buy It is the perfect example of us collapsing the funnel, and the importance of discovery, but authentic discovery. Did that answer your question?

#### Pierre-Loic Assayag:



More times than one. And so Amy, if I'm a CPG or a beauty brand coming to you with my hair on fire and saying, "Amy, my e-commerce sales are in the slum. I need help. What do I need to do in order to improve my bottom-funnel?" Your answer is going to be, "don't bother, create amazing campaigns with amazing creators, and the rest will take care of itself."

Amy Oelkers:

Show up. Right? I like to joke, and I really don't mean it to be so funny, but it's a little bit of a duh moment. You need to participate, show up, be brave, jump in, watch. My favorite thing too, about TikTok, as I say, it's like a focus group, right in your hand, you literally can watch what is happening with these creators, with their communities, with their sub-communities, like what is happening, what's trending. And then as Dustin actually pointed out with the great Dove example, they were smart enough to watch what was happening, that it was all about inclusivity, body positivity, and they embraced it and they ran with it. And you know what? They had a great payoff.

Dustin Goot:

With this "TikTok Made Me Buy It" phenomenon. These are usually products where the demand is impossible to forecast once these trends really surge and they start selling out and people are going to, extreme measures. I mean, these are, these are sort of the most difficult sort of e-commerce conversion situations that any brand could face they're out of inventory. It's out of stock everywhere and people will chase after it. I mean, just to take an example from inside of TikTok and I hope I'm not giving too much away here, but the Peter Thomas Roth eye cream phenomenon that recently happened where...

Amy Oelkers:

I still can't find the product.

Dustin Goot:

[Laughter] Where one user used the eye cream and showed, not even time-lapse, in real-time, "look what it's doing to my skin." The realist product demonstration that you could possibly give. It caused so many people to want to run out and get it, including at TikTok! We had an internal thread where we'll share different brand mentions that we see on the platform. People were like, "I need this right now!" And they were sharing, "hey, my local Sephora still has a few of them, if you guys want to run out".

And on our company chat in real-time, people were sharing the last retail caches of this product. Everyone was kind of crowdsourcing and solving it for each other. No marketing input from the brand, no campaign, no optimization, no retargeting, no anything. It's just, people connected so much to the effect they saw in this TikTok that they were willing to do the rest of the work. And so I think, yes, in a vacuum, like make your bottom of funnel more efficient than someone else's. The power of that emotional connection can trump everything else. That's where we really guide brands to focus.

Amy Oelkers:

Well, again, you won't have the bottom of the funnel. You won't have people who are hunting for your product if there's not the desire to hunt after you. I'm not kidding guys, I still can't find that product.

Pierre-Loic Assayag:

That's an amazing story. What I really like in what you're both sharing is that there's been quite a bit of news coming from TikTok on the efforts and partnerships that you're putting forth as it pertains to commerce because you are part of the infrastructure. So how do you connect the Shopifys of the world and TikTok and et cetera, et cetera. But what you're saying is not even outside of the technical side of it, the buzz, the community building, the decision from consumers to purchase is happening even outside of all this. It's happening because we built a community that is able and willing to share and communicate and gets excited about specific product.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Fast Track. Make sure to listen to the second part of this conversation to find out which brands are succeeding on TikTok and what TikTok has in store for the future. If you enjoyed this episode, please share with a friend, give us a review on Apple podcast, Spotify, or wherever you're listening from today. Thanks again, and see you next time.

