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Strategy

How the TikTok algorithm ranks content in 2025 + tips for visibility

Understanding how the TikTok algorithm ranks content can help you work with it and improve your visibility on the platform.

Christina Newberry

May 12, 2025

 12 min read

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TL;DR

- 1. Instead of chasing broad, unpredictable viral hits, prioritize content that resonates deeply within your niche community on TikTok.** The algorithm favors content that aligns with specific groups (e.g., #BookTok, #SportsOnTikTok), amplifying visibility in these engaged audiences.
- 2. The TikTok algorithm heavily weighs watch time, especially in the initial moments.** Starting videos with a strong hook (a question, a preview of the payoff, or striking visuals) can boost retention and signal quality content worth recommending.
- 3. The algorithm relies on video information like captions, hashtags, and sounds to categorize and recommend content.** Optimizing for search with relevant keywords (via TikTok Creative Center) and using trending sounds can significantly increase your discoverability.



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It's a request too many social marketers have had to face. Fortunately, attitudes toward virality are shifting. Hootsuite's [Social Trends 2025](#) identified micro-virality as an important trend in which brands focus

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gaining visibility and traction within their core community.

place.

This aligns well with the TikTok algorithm, which is all about building communities of people clustered around shared interests and passions. If you understand both the TikTok algorithm and your own audience, you can set up to create content that resonates, gains traction, and leads to real business results.

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What is the TikTok algorithm?

The TikTok algorithm is a proprietary ranking system that determines which TikTok videos to recommend to each user.

No two TikTok users will see the same combination of TikTok videos on their [For You Page](#)—this feed is unique and highly personalized. In fact, the type of content you see on your FYP will evolve over time, as the algorithm catches on to your changes in your interests and viewing preferences.

Here's how [TikTok itself defines](#) the For You feed algorithm:

“A stream of videos curated to your interests, making it easy to find content and creators you love ... powered by a recommendation system that delivers content to each user that is likely to be of interest to that particular user.”

How does the TikTok algorithm work in 2025?

The main factors that influence the TikTok algorithm are user interactions, video information, and device and account settings.

1. User interactions

Every action you take on TikTok provides the app with information about what kind of content you're most interested in.

Here are some of the user interactions that will impact what shows up on your For You feed:

- Videos you've liked or shared on the app
- Videos you've added to your favorites
- Videos you've marked as "Not Interested"
- Videos you've reported as inappropriate
- Interests you've expressed by interacting with organic content and ads
- Which accounts you follow
- Comments you've posted
- Creators or sounds you've chosen to hide
- How long you spend watching a video
- Content you create on your own account

The positive signals tell the algorithm to serve more similar content, while the negative ones will prevent similar content from showing up in your feed.

2. Video information

The TikTok algorithm also collects information about the videos you seek out through search and the overall types of videos you watch in general. Video information signals include:

- Captions
- Sounds
- Hashtags
- Effects
- Trending topics
- Video length

3. Device and account settings

This doesn't have as much influence as the user interaction and video information signals, but device and account settings still factor in. These are the settings [TikTok](#) uses to optimize performance. But because they're based

on one-time settings choices rather than active engagements, TikTok doesn't deem them to be quite as relevant.

Some of the device and account settings included in the TikTok algorithm are:

- Language preference
- Country setting (you may be more likely to see content from people in your own country, or videos that are particularly popular in your country)
- Device type
- Categories of interest you selected in your new user preferences

If you're not happy with the recommendations you're getting, it's possible to [reset your own personal algorithm](#). Head to **Settings and privacy**, tap **Content Preferences**, then **Refresh your For You feed**. You'll start with a fresh slate of popular new content.

You can also train your algorithm with the **Not interested** feature. Press and hold a post or tap **Share**, then tap **Not interested**. You can also [set up filter lists](#) to remove content containing specific words and hashtags.

9 tips for getting picked up by the TikTok algorithm

1. Find your community

Connecting with existing communities is important on every social network. But the way TikTok's algorithm works, it's even more important to engage with specific subcultures on this social media app than on, say, Facebook.

On other platforms, people spend most of their time engaging with people they already know or accounts they already follow. On TikTok, though, users are engaging with content primarily through the For You feed – a feed full of fresh content from entertaining strangers.

But those strangers can quickly gel into a community. In fact, TikTok users are [four times](#) more likely to say that TikTok is the best platform for being part of a community. And [72%](#) of women on TikTok say it's easy for new communities to

connect and bond over shared life experiences on the platform.

Here's how [TikTok itself describes](#) its community culture: "Communities shape their own lingo, aesthetics, and styles that are distinctly unique to the platform, yet they remain inclusive, inviting everyone—brands included—to join in, explore, and co-create."

Tap into an existing community and you'll likely find your content amplified to that audience. Fortunately, TikTok subcultures tend to [congregate around hashtags](#)

Some of the fastest growing communities on TikTok include:

- **#BookTok:** This community of book lovers saw more than [1.2 million posts](#) in the first ten months of 2024. Note that the more niche #Romantasy community saw a 300% increase in posts in 2024.

- **#SportsOnTikTok:** This hashtag saw a **350% increase** in posts in 2024. Meanwhile, #WomenInSports saw a more than 2400% increase!
- **#Science and #STEMTok:** TikTok's dedicated STEM feed, which became available to **all users by default** late in 2024, partly explains the 45% increase in posts to the #Science hashtag in 2024.

Understanding your most valuable subculture can also help you plan your content creation that **connects authentically with TikTokers**, creating greater credibility, brand loyalty, and even more exposure. TikTok users *want* brands to take this approach: **76%** say they like it when brands are a part of special interest groups on the platform.

TikTok's Audience Insights can help you find your subculture by identifying the interests and hashtags most relevant to your target audience. You can even find the "Bottom 10" interests for your audience so you can avoid cheating content in those categories.

To access Audience Insights, open **TikTok Ads Manager** and hover over

Analytics, then click **Audience Insights**. Note that you don't have to be a TikTok advertiser to use this tool.

To go more in-depth, check out our [full guide to audience research](#).

2. Maximize the first moments

TikTok moves fast. This is not the platform to add a wordy intro before you dive into the meat of your video. The hook needs to inspire viewers to stop scrolling. Remember: Watch time tells the TikTok algorithm that this is content worth sharing with other viewers.

The first [three seconds](#) are critical. TikTok recommends starting off with a question that your video will answer, setting a timer or including the time in your title, or flashing ahead to a quick preview of the end result before walking viewers through a process.

This video from the Met Museum walks users through getting to the Cloisters. But before diving into the step-by-step navigation, it leads with some gorgeous shots of the Cloisters themselves. Who wouldn't want to go ... and therefore watch the video to find out how to get there?

3. Optimize for search

As important as hashtags are for your [TikTok strategy](#), don't forget about the importance of keywords. [TikTok SEO](#) is critical to teach the algorithm just what your content is about... and to allow interested TikTokers to find it, of course.

Destination Madison created a [TikTok series called Madison's Iconic Eats](#), playing off pop-culture themes like set-jetting:

“Social search and TikTok SEO is a huge focus for us,” says Sarah Warner, PR & communications manager at [Destination Madison](#). “We want to anticipate what people are looking for and make sure that when they’re looking, they find us first. Doing so gives our content longevity and helps new people find us every day, even when we aren’t posting.”

You could search for trending keywords that match with your content. Or, like Destination Madison, you could use trending topics and keywords to inspire your content.

TikTok [captions](#) can be a maximum length of 4,000 characters, which means you’ve got plenty of room to work with. Start looking for trending keywords by region and industry in the [TikTok Creative Center](#). (And if you’re stumped for what to write, [try our social media caption generator](#).)

Keep in mind that your caption is not the only place to include keywords. TikTok can also pick them up from your voiceover or text overlay.

4. Create high-quality content specifically for TikTok

This should be an obvious one, right? Low-quality content is not going to find its way to the For You feed. But just in case you need proof, TikTok's [internal data](#) shows that high-quality content creators get 67% more watch time per video view, three times as many views, and more than 40 times greater follower growth.

And since TikTok is unlike other social platforms, high-quality content is TikTok-first content. In fact, [79%](#) of TikTok users prefer brands that understand content creation specifically for TikTok.

You don't need any fancy equipment. In fact, TikTok [research shows](#) audiences prefer a "less-polished, authentic aesthetic."

What you do need is decent lighting, a good microphone if you're going to record audio, and some quick edits and transitions to keep the visuals moving. Here are ways to embrace the TikTok-first aesthetic:

- **Try different video lengths.** Videos recorded in TikTok can be up to 10 minutes long, while uploaded videos can be up to 60 minutes long. TikTok [says](#) users spend half their time watching longer videos. But keep an eye on completion rate, an important signal to the algorithm.
- **Experiment with aspect ratio.** Yes, you can now upload horizontal videos to TikTok, and they'll play in full screen mode on phones. These will also work well with TikTok's improved desktop interface. We're not suggesting you abandon vertical videos, but it's worth testing both formats, especially for different lengths.
- **Dive into editing.** Play around with TikTok's built-in features like effects and text treatments. [According to TikTok](#): "These native features help keep your content feeling native to the platform which can also help get it on more For You pages!"
- **Try different formats.** [76%](#) of TikTok users say they enjoy a mix of images and video on the platform. Carousels are great too, like this example from @chipotle:

- **Showcase expertise:** Specialized content that highlights unique knowledge and expertise elevates the quality of your TikTok offering and connects to your niche. A couple of suggestions [straight from TikTok](#) are to solve a problem, share a hack, or teach something step by step.
- **Add text to your video:** Captions are in general a best practice for accessibility. Text like headlines and intro cards can also help draw viewers in and keep them engaged. And heads-up: More than [30%](#) of TikTokers watch videos on mute and need captions for content. Leave them out and you're missing out on a third of potential viewers.

5. Post at the right time for your audience

Posting at the right time is important for all social media platforms, and that includes TikTok. (That's why we made this [handy cheat sheet](#) of the best times to post on every social platform.)

Engagement with your content is a key signal to the algorithm, and the best way to get engagement is to get in front of TikTokers when they're actively using the app.

Hootsuite's research with Critical Truth shows that overall, the best time to

post on TikTok for engagement is either Thursday midmorning or Saturday midday.

But for best results, you need to know the best time to post for your specific audience. And for best results with the TikTok algorithm, you need to post at the best time to extend reach, which is not always the same as the best time to maximize engagement.

Fortunately, reach is a key goal available in Hootsuite's [Best Time To Publish feature](#). This handy tool provides custom recommendations based on your past performance and tailored to your unique audience and their activity patterns on TikTok.

When planning your posting times, consider that the average brand posted on TikTok around four times per week in Q1 2025.

6. Engage with other TikTok users

Interacting with other TikTok users is a surefire way to build engagement... which in turn will tell the algorithm you're an account worth putting on people's FYP.

Whether you're an individual content creator or a brand, TikTok [recommends](#) a "react, respond, and remix strategy" for maximum engagement.

- React to trending content
- Respond to trending questions or prompts
- Remix trending ideas with creators

Duets, Stitch, and video replies to comments are great ways to engage this strategy.

Stitch is a tool that allows you to clip and integrate moments from other TikTokers' content into your own.

Duets, meanwhile, allow one user to record a "duet" with another user by commenting alongside the original creator's video in real time. Video replies to comments let you create new video content based on comments or questions on your previous posts.

The default settings on TikTok allow others to create Duets and Stitch videos using your content. If you want to change this for any particular video, tap the **More options ...** icon on the video, tap **Privacy settings**, then toggle off **Allow reuse of content**.

You can also turn off these features for your whole TikTok account, but that would limit the opportunities for other TikTok users to engage with your content, decreasing discovery potential.

Finally, be sure to engage with your audience in the comments. **76%** of TikTok users say brands that post or reply to comments on TikTok feel like part of the community, and **68%** of TikTok users say brands should use the comments section to better understand their audience.

7. Use the right hashtags

As you've seen, hashtags are an important way to connect with communities and new audiences on TikTok. But don't go overboard. TikTok recommends just **two or three** relevant hashtags per video.

To find trending hashtags, head to the [TikTok Creative Center](#). Click on the **Analytics** button next to any trending hashtag to see a full breakdown of its popularity, including audience demographic details and related interests.

Source: [TikTok Creative Center](#)

Keep your eyes peeled for hashtags related to challenges. These are a good way to come up with [new ideas for content](#)... and the algorithm will appreciate the participation, too. Plus, users want to get involved: **77%** say they like it when brands create new challenges, trends, or memes.

8. Use trending sounds and music

Like we've already said, participating in any kind of trend is a good bet when

aiming for the For You feed. Sounds are a big part of TikTok culture, with audio clips that take on lives of their own.

TikTok [specifically says](#) that using trending sounds or music can help make your videos more discoverable. Bonus: Videos with background music get an average [98%](#) more views than those without.

You can get a sense of the latest trending sounds just by keeping an eye on your For You feed. But to get more specific, you can find trending songs by region in the [TikTok Creative Center](#).

Just like for trending hashtags, you can find analytics data like audience demographics and related interests. Note that this section of the Creative Center only includes songs, not user-generated original sounds.

For a deeper dive into TikTok trends to lean into, try using the [TikTok Symphony Assistant](#). This platform-native AI tool can help you source trending sounds, music, and themes that fit your specific creative needs.

9. Be real – and have fun

TikTok just isn't the place for buttoned-up, overly polished content. The most popular content on TikTok is playful and unpredictable, so have some fun.

Maybe some behind-the-scenes content

After all, [77%](#) of TikTok users say brand videos should offer a view into their (and their employees') everyday lives.

TikTok users *want* to see brands experiment and have fun on the platform: [79%](#) say brands should experiment with different topics to see what suits them

best on TikTok. And [40%](#) say brands that show personality are more relevant.

14 things the TikTok algorithm will penalize

When planning your content strategy, it's just as important to understand what types of content the TikTok algorithm will *not* recommend.

The following types of content are [ineligible for recommendation](#) in the For You Feed. They may also be harder to find in search.

1. Content created by anyone under 16 years old
2. Hate speech and hateful behavior
3. Disordered eating and body image
4. Dangerous activity/dangerous challenges
5. Nudity and body exposure
6. Sexually suggestive content
7. Shocking and graphic content
8. Misinformation
9. False or unverified claims about civic and election integrity
10. Fake engagement (such as "like-for-like")
11. Unoriginal content (such as content uploaded with a watermark or a simple GIF)
12. Gambling
13. Promoting tobacco or drugs, or showing excessive alcohol consumption
14. Live content with the main goal of driving people off-platform.

[Content not suitable for young people](#) may be restricted to audiences over 18. And content that violates the [Community Guidelines](#) will be removed altogether (and could result in a [strike against your account](#)). If you post content that falls into any of these categories, you'll see that information in TikTok Analytics, where you can also file an appeal.

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By Christina Newberry

Christina Newberry has been writing about digital marketing since the prehistoric days of 2002, when email opt-ins were every marketer's biggest goal. With a deep understanding of how to connect to online audiences, she shifted her focus to social media and has been contributing to the Hootsuite blog since 2016.



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