

DEO BUILD AN AUDIENCE FOR YOUR MUSIC WITH SOCIAL VIDEO BUI

The TikTok Guide for Musicians



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You're wondering how to best promote your music and grow your audience on TikTok.

Of course you are: TikTok is the fastest growing social app and **MUSIC is what drives the platform.**

Over a billion active users around the world share their favorite songs on TikTok through things like **dance challenges and lip-sync videos**, or by simply putting the track in the background of a funny skit, how-to video, or emotional moment caught on camera.

Not only is TikTok a great platform for music promotion, sharing songs, and reaching new listeners, **it's also a place to earn revenue when people use your music.** For artists like Lil Nas X, Lizzy McAlpine, Joji, Lawrence, and Billianne, music promotion on TikTok has also led to huge boosts on other platforms like Spotify and YouTube.

GET YOUR MUSIC ON TIKTOK

What makes TikTok unique for music promotion?

If you've never used TikTok, here are a few things you should know about its unique meme-culture and quick-paced content:

- ★ **Videos are typically short**, but can be as long as ten minutes.
- ★ There's an **emphasis on "authentic"** versus "perfect."
- ★ Video is **vertical**, displayed in **1080×1920 pixels**.
- ★ It's more about **participation** than one-to-many broadcasting.
- ★ The **comment section** of popular videos is its own avenue for entertainment.
- ★ Because you can record in increments, even **short videos can feel narrative**.
- ★ Bad lighting? Recording on your phone? Talking in a mirror? All good.

Another important factor to consider is that TikTok is still in a growth phase. It's currently giving creators unprecedented access to something that more mature (monetized) platforms have throttled: **Organic reach** – aided by a powerful algorithm.

Your music, and your personal brand, can reach people who are guaranteed to like it if you train the algorithm properly. No other platform offers this much promise for growing an audience and reaching new people.

But **the growth phase won't last forever**; with so many creators joining TikTok each day and further saturating its video pool, it could be that we're living in the golden age of TikTok discoverability. Might as well make the most of it! So let's dive in...

The For You Page & “Viral” Songs

TikTok algorithmically generates a feed of content for each user, which is displayed on the For You Page (or #FYP). The more a user engages with content, the smarter TikTok gets at guessing what kind of videos they want to watch.

It’s tough to say WHAT kind of content does well on TikTok, because ANY video can do well if the algorithm deems it valuable and entertaining enough for a particular audience. Cooking tutorials, political rants, funny skits, you name it. TikTok has everything — so a **well-defined niche can actually HELP you reach the right people...** by the millions.

Evidence of this can be seen in the Sea Shanty craze from 2020, the group Windborne going viral singing Corsican folk music, and loads of bedroom songwriters who strike an emotional chord in how they introduce their most vulnerable tunes.

But one of the biggest keys to viral success is interactivity.

What can someone DO with your video or song?

Imagine your track is used in a video that appears on someone’s For You Page. That video inspires the viewer and they want to make a similar video. Well, TikTok makes it very easy to use that same audio clip when creating a new video. THIS is what drives the viral success of music on TikTok and makes music promotion on the platform so interesting. **If a dance challenge, funny meme, or imitable video style inspires one person, there’s a good chance it’ll inspire many people to add their own spin.** Suddenly the algorithm is reinforcing that musical hook, surfacing your song to more and more viewers in more and more contexts (via user-generated content).

Because a song can go viral in this way, there are quite a few instances of artists who have meager followings on other social platforms gaining huge exposure on TikTok. In this guide, you’ll learn how TikTok music promotion can help you grow your audience and get people sharing your songs.

TikTok's Function At a Glance

Shoot video in increments — Yes, you could do a single-take video if you want, but TikTok lets you shoot video in bits and pieces, almost like real-time editing. Capture a little bit of video, stop, and then pick up the next shot when you're ready. This way you can change scenes, characters, costumes, etc.

Shoot video to the song — All these lip-syncs and dance videos would be a lot harder to create if you couldn't record video TO the song. In TikTok, you can start by finding a song, swiping to the snippet you want, and then shooting the video. If you do cuts, the audio will stop at the appropriate part and then play from where you left off when you hit record again.

Produce in TikTok, or upload from elsewhere — You can use the above process to capture, edit and post videos within the TikTok app, or create vertical videos using other tools (such as CapCut or Adobe Premiere Pro) and then upload to TikTok.

10 WAYS TO GROW YOUR AUDIENCE ON TIKTOK

QUICK TIPS FOR SUCCESS WITH YOUR MUSIC PROMOTION ON TIKTOK

1. Put your music on TikTok

CD Baby can deliver your music to TikTok. Your songs will be available in TikTok's music library, where any user can pull it into one of their own videos. When one of your tracks gets used, you earn money. **Getting your music on TikTok is included with all CD Baby distribution.**

2. Follow other musicians on TikTok

The best way to learn about TikTok is to get on there and start using it.

Be sure to follow at least a few active musicians on the platform, too. Use the search feature to find videos made by artists in your genre AND other genres. You'll quickly learn what works for musicians who are willing to be creative on TikTok.

To get you started, check out the [Jonas Brothers...](#) and [Lizzo...](#)

3. Keep it light

TikTok is a fun platform. If you're an artist who takes yourself super seriously, you might have a hard time creating content that connects with TikTok users.

Music reviewer, musician, and meme king Anthony Fantano, aka The Needle Drop, is known for his ability to switch from "serious music reviewer" to social commentator in a way that is perfectly suited to TikTok. Check out [this video](#) where he pokes fun at fans of megastars.

TikTok can require letting go of your serious side. Lighten up!

4. Don't stress about being perfect

TikTok isn't about polish. Flaws, quirkiness, awkwardness, sometimes even things that are offensive get the most traction on the platform. So don't be afraid to be you, and don't feel the pressure to look 100% before you hit *record*. Get silly. Be weird. Stay true.

5. Capture eyes instantly (or else!)

If someone isn't sucked into your video in the first few seconds, they're never gonna watch the rest of it. Hooks are important.

Wow them. Shock them. Make them scratch their head.
Provide some kind of value as soon as possible.

Check out the way Ben Zaidi lets you know right from the start of [this TikTok](#) that you'll get some kind of songwriting advice that really meant something to him; there's mystery, a clearly identified audience for the content, and then the slow unveiling of the advice. He also does a good job showing how that advice informed his own writing process and material.

6. TikTok still skews young... but is trending otherwise

About half of TikTok's active users are between 10–29 years old, so it's become the go-to app for younger audiences who are breaking ground and shaping new trends in music, comedy, and culture. If you're in that age range, you're probably not wondering if you need to be there. You already are.

If you're older, you probably **ARE** asking if you need to be on TikTok. The answer (for any social media platform) is **NO**. You need to be wherever you can communicate with your fans most effectively.

But if you're in that "older" demographic, don't discount the platform outright; just as the 35+ crowd has widely embraced Instagram, the age demographic shift is already happening on TikTok. By getting in there now, you can shape how your generation's interests and music are featured on TikTok.

7. It's not about your song; it's about a musical moment

Familiarity. It's what makes a radio hit, a playlist hit, and a TikTok hit. TikTok gives you a chance to share a **HOOK**, over and over again.

8. Think visual: become a meme!

You may have seen videos where questions are posed in text while the people on screen lip-sync along to a track, saying “Nope” and “Yup.”

That song is **“Choices (Yup)”** by E-40, and it's a great example of how one song can be used in numerous contexts to bring the personality of the creators to the forefront. The song is basically an audio meme.

Lizzo's song “Truth Hurts” inspired a ton of videos where the person swabs the inside of their mouth during the lyric “I just took a DNA test...” (tagging the video #TruthHurts).

Of course it's tough to make a musical meme on purpose. But what makes for good viral audio on TikTok? Something with an instantly quotable lyric, something that suggests a visual stunt, or just a hook so undeniable that total strangers will want to drop everything and dance.

Speaking of...

9. Dance!

If you're willing to give it a shot, choreograph something.

Come up with a fun dance to one of your songs. If it's a **LITTLE** bit challenging, but still realistic enough for your fans to imitate the moves with minimal effort, post it!

Then post the tutorial. Dare your audience to make their own videos.

Do you dance on stage? Preview the moves ahead of time on TikTok so fans can dance along at the show.

10. Beware and embrace the “schtick”

TikTok DOES love when creators dial-in a particular kind of video content. Whether you call it a gimmick or a dependable voice is up to you. But you should know that if you make something that goes viral, there’s a compelling argument to follow it up with a lot of similar content.

Then again, if you view TikTok as a way of drawing people to your music, you’re not there to create successful video content for its own sake. So if you’re lucky enough to have a schtick that’s doing well for you, just make sure you reassess every so often to make sure it’s still serving your initial goal. Social should work for YOU, not the other way around.

11. Don’t ignore your back catalog

The perfect 15-second snippet might not be in your latest single; it could be from a song you put out years ago (this happened with Lizzo, and her career skyrocketed).

So be sure you’re thinking about your whole catalog in terms of what song contains the most catchy, viral audio snippet.

12. It’s not about you, it’s about them

TikTok is a platform that thrives on community engagement.

This isn’t a place where you put yourself on a pedestal and everyone bows to your brilliance. It’s about what your music can inspire in others, getting them to shape moments of their own.

13. Use TikTok as much or as little as you like

Because you can hit big on TikTok with one video or audio craze, you don't necessarily have to "feed the beast" the way you might with other social platforms.

However, if your goal is to grow a following on TikTok, it's a good idea to post as many videos as you can, within reason. Every post is an at-bat to reach brand new eyes and connect with potential fans. Do what you think you can sustain and feel comfortable with.

Plus, TikTok's algorithm does give some preferential treatment to content from creators who've posted a bunch of previous videos. This is because a new fan can jump into binging the back-catalog, increasing their watch-time.

14. Explore TikTok's built-in collaboration tools

TikTok gives you a number of ways to either encourage your fans to make videos, or to create your own videos based on existing TikTok content, such as:

Duets – A **duet** is a TikTok video that lives alongside another video; they both get played simultaneously. You can either create a video and then encourage fans to #duet with you, or create your own duet with any video that's already on TikTok (unless the duet function has been disabled for that video or account). Folks use Duets to add visuals or audio, or react to a video as it plays.

Stitches – Take a piece of the beginning of someone else's video and react to it, continue the conversation, or respond to their prompt.

Run your own challenge/contest – Want people to create their own videos on TikTok using your music? Prompt them with a fun contest:

- best original dance
- best lip-sync
- most creative location
- best costumes
- funniest video
- or something like the "ice bucket challenge"

Be sure to offer a cool reward for the winners (signed vinyl, free concert tickets, etc.). Also, create a unique hashtag for the contest so you can easily track engagement and spread the word.

Keep in mind that contests on TikTok **CAN** play out as duets or stitches. Jazz vocalist and TikTok sensation Stacey Ryan started a massively popular open-verse challenge that resulted in a **popular single release** with one of her duetters.

15. Don't forget hashtags

Just like Twitter and Instagram, you can get some mileage out of hashtags on TikTok. Though you may have heard differently, hashtags don't facilitate discovery on the For You Page. They do, however, make it easier for folks to find your videos in search (like SEO). Keep this in mind when choosing which hashtags to attach to your TikToks.

16. Treat TikTok like a community

Follow other users. Take advantage of the algorithm's power to connect with the artists that get served up to you. If you like their music, there's a good chance they'll like yours, too. Thank people who engage with your contests. Respond to comments. Don't be a hermit; getting the most out of TikTok is a two-way street.

17. Share TikTok videos on other platforms

TikTok makes this easy. For instance, with just a couple taps your TikTok videos can be posted to Instagram Stories. And you should do that, especially when you're just starting on TikTok and your followers elsewhere don't know you're on the platform yet.

18. Exaggerate!!!

TikTok is a platform where larger-than-life, in-your-face content grabs attention and keeps viewers captivated. So supersize your personality.

One artist that does this really well while still seeming “authentic” is **Austin Giorgio** (who also makes great use of text to give people a deeper look at his songs).

19. Collaborate with other artists

Duets and reactions don't have to just be between you and your fans (or haters). You can use these same tools with other artists too, and create short video content together that helps each of you reach the other artist's followers. If you build up a strong enough relationship with another artist, reach out and ask if they'd like to co-write or play a show together.

20. Go hyper-local

Once you start using the app for a while, you might notice that content related to your region populates your feed. TikTok loves localized content. That gives you a great way to reach new listeners — and no town is too small.

Go for local humor, show the landmarks, and be sure to post location information on your videos. When you're touring through a city, tag that town! If you have trash to talk about your hometown or some tour stop you can't stand, go for it. Viewers will agree or argue, but either way you've started a conversation.

21. Worried about getting verified?

Like other platforms, TikTok grants verified badges to accounts that it confirms are authentic (if the account holder warrants verification).

Do you qualify? You can answer that question **[HERE](#)**. But don't stress yourself out trying to get verified early on. Put your energy into making good videos.

22. Be prolific (if you want)

Because TikTok videos are short, unpolished, and focus on a hook and not a whole song, you can produce TikTok content quicker. When you take chances with your content AND produce videos more often, you'll improve every time you post something on TikTok.

Plus, unlike other platforms, the performance of your content on TikTok isn't altered by how recently you posted something else. Videos live or die on TikTok by their own merits (as judged by the algorithm, of course).

23. Promote your music from multiple angles

On TikTok there's no need to create professional, long-form music videos. Use that time instead to brainstorm all the ways you could pair your hook with video concepts.

In the age of short-form video, there's no such thing as too much content. The more you share your hook, the more familiar that music becomes — which can lead to more activity both on and off the TikTok platform.

Many artists will actually share the same or nearly identical video content on TikTok multiple times, just with slightly different on-screen text or captions. Context is key!

24. A video's success is not dependent on your prior engagement

TikTok's algorithm, more than other platforms, judges your videos as individual pieces of content. Whether something gets shared with a TikTok user is less dependent on external clout, the size of your following, or even the success of previous videos.

Yes, a bigger following will help you gain some early views for a video, but beyond that point, the momentum is determined by true engagement such as:

- Watch-time
- Repeat views
- Likes, comments, shares, follows

This is good news, because it means it's not too late for you to hop onto TikTok!

25. Get them to watch it all... and then watch again

Suspense is key. If you want someone to watch the whole video, they need to feel invested, a sense of mystery, risk, or deep connection. They need to wait for the punchline, or to see if the stunt ends in disaster.

Consider watch-time when you storyboard ideas. Have a great payoff.

Once the video is over, draw them back in! You can do this through:

- Subtle edits that make the video loop seamlessly
- Lots of activity or information (including on-screen text) so someone needs multiple views to catch it all

26. Invite conversation

To reiterate, interactivity is huge on TikTok. So compel people to comment!

Dare them to participate. Make it fun for them to lend their opinion or recommendations. And don't forget to respond to keep the conversation going (and get those repeat views!).

27. Pin your favorite videos

You can stick a few TikTok videos to the top of your profile.

Pick the ones you want people to see when they first discover you: a video explaining who you are, an announcement about a new single, a past video with high engagement; whatever is most important.

GET YOUR SONGS ON TIKTOK TODAY

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