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IS TIKTOK RIGHT FOR YOUR FRANCHISE?

Many Gen Z and millennial communicators know the value of TikTok. It's the social media platform largely popularized by their generations. They understand the platform's nuances, keep up with its trends, and influence how it evolves.

But when it comes to pitching TikTok to your bosses or executives, it can be hard to communicate the platform's value to those who haven't used it. TikTok can be confusing to the unaccustomed user: Why are they using these weird sounds? Who is coming up with all these dances? Why are there so many inside jokes and why are they even funny?

When there are so many other well-established social media platforms out there, why would a sports franchise choose to start a TikTok account? What value could it offer to your business and fan base?

This white paper will help you — and your executives — understand if a TikTok account is right for your sports franchise. It answers common questions communicators are likely to have:

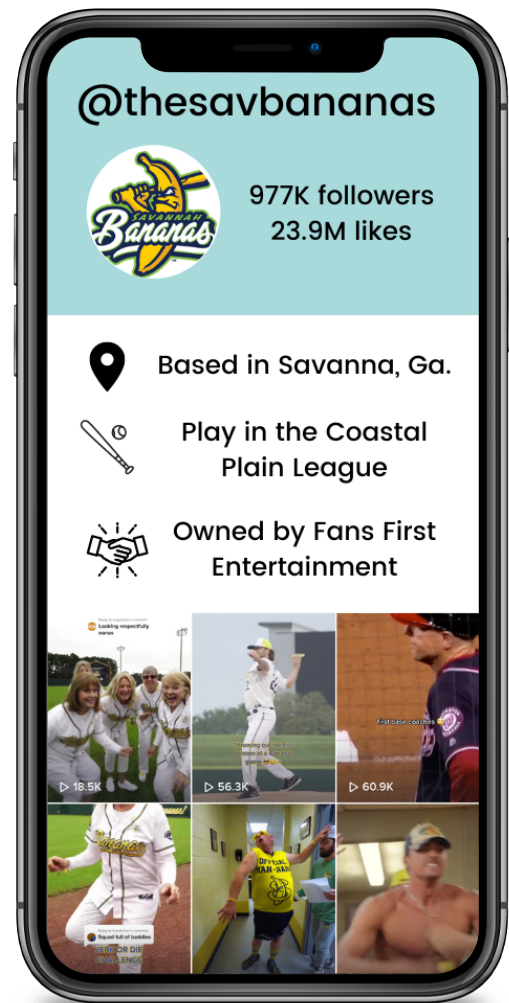
- How is TikTok different from other apps?
- What audiences are on the app?
- How do you reach those audiences?
- What content is most effective?
- What objectives are most appropriate?

Remember, you don't need to be a professional franchise with deep pockets to have a successful TikTok account. In many cases, it's exactly the opposite — TikTok is built on a culture of relatability and authenticity. It's an online sounding board, comedy club, and hangout spot. If you're not coming to the app with a mindset that matches the app's culture, you best not waste your time.

CASE STUDY: SAVANNAH BANANAS

The Savannah Bananas are “TikTok’s Favorite Team”[1] with a follower count that rivals the top MLB teams and a fanbase that stretches around the world. And their popularity online translates to real life. They’ve sold out every home game since they started playing in 2016[2].

The Savannah Bananas’ personality stems from their mission of “Fans First. Entertain Always.”[3]. That mission is executed at every single home game and on their social media pages. The franchise jumps on all the TikTok trends, with players fully committing to the videos, even if they look a little goofy. Actually, the players looking goofy is almost guaranteed. But that’s the personality of the franchise. Their strategy has changed the social media game for all sports franchises, and outlets like USA Today, ESPN, and The Boston Globe are taking notice[4]. As should you.



“We are not like your typical baseball team. We are different. We take chances. We toe the line. We test the rules. We challenge the way things are supposed to be.”

Two Bananas players
show off their silliest
strikeout celebrations



Franchises may gain some social media followers because of their existing fanbases, but building a community on an app like TikTok is a whole different ball game. The Bananas, and many other accounts, use various strategies outlined in this white paper to connect with users, deliver the content they want to see, and build a loyal fanbase.

[1] The Savannah Bananas (@thesavbananas), TikTok page, <https://www.tiktok.com/@thesavbananas?lang=en>.

[2] Alden Gonzalez, "The most fun you can have at a ball park? What MLB could learn from the Savannah Bananas," ESPN, June 17, 2021, https://www.espn.com/mlb/insider/insider/story/_/id/31589713/the-most-fun-at-ballpark-mlb-learn-savannah-bananas.

[3] The Savannah Bananas (website), last modified in 2022, <https://thesavannahbananas.com/>.

[4] The Savannah Bananas (website), last modified in 2022, <https://thesavannahbananas.com/>.

WHAT IS TIKTOK?

Welcome to your crash course on TikTok. Although the best way to understand the app is to actually go on it, here are a few key components to help you understand what you'll see when you start scrolling.

How is TikTok different from other apps?

For You page. The app's home page, the For You page (FYP) is a never-ending stream of content that recommends videos from other users based on an algorithm. This algorithm is based on factors like self-identified interests, user interaction, video information (captions, audio, hashtags), device/account settings, and reactions from other users.

Trends. The algorithm creates a breeding ground for viral videos. Trends can be a dance, sharing a personal story or opinion, reacting to a video or audio, or anything else. No joke is too dumb, and no task is too simple. But as quickly as trends are born, they die. If you want to jump on the bandwagon, you better hop on quickly.

Culture. This one is the hardest to describe, and those wishing to understand the culture will find the most success by just spending time on the app. To simplify it, TikTok thrives on authenticity and genuineness. Humour is the app's currency and creators are encouraged to spread the wealth. Few, if any, creators succeed by being an 'influencer' or acting like a robot – and actual robots aren't funny either.

What audiences are on TikTok?

Age range. Gen Z runs this town. Although there are people from all age groups on TikTok, 60 per cent of users are born from 1997 to 2015 [5]. That makes the biggest audience ages seven to 25 in 2022.

Hashtags. Hashtags are essential if you want to target a specific audience. Many trends or groups of people with similar interests use the same hashtags. For example, if you search #FitTok, #NBATok, #UnlockIt or #OkPerfect you'll find similar videos and trends.

[An NBA fan references Shaq in her version of a viral challenge](#)



[5] "TikTok Statistics - Updated Sep 2021," Wallaroo, last modified September 27, 2021, <https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/>.

HOW CAN SPORTS FRANCHISES USE TIKTOK?

What are good objectives for TikTok?

Increase brand awareness. If you're an amateur franchise or new to the market, this is a great way to get your name out there. TikTok now has over one billion users, so you'll likely find your publics, especially if you want to engage with a younger audience.

[The Winnipeg Ice show how their players "celly"](#)



Build engagement. There are lots of ways to build engagement on TikTok. You can bring viewers behind the scenes and show them the character of your players and organization. Posting videos is also a great way to get feedback from your audience. TikTok is more than just posting content. Engaging with the people watching, liking, and commenting on your videos is important. That's what will create a community on the app and earn you a loyal following.

[The Calgary Dinos' videographer takes fans behind the scenes on game day](#)



Generating Leads and Sales. The opportunity for self-promotion remains the same on TikTok as with other platforms. Once an audience knows you're there, you can tell them what you're doing and how they can get involved. But be careful — no one wants to get ads shoved in their face. If you're going to advertise organically or use calls to action, it must be consistent with your content and fit the app's character.



These objectives are simply a starting point — there are many other possible objectives for TikTok and they should change depending on your organization's existing social media strategy. No matter what objectives your franchise chooses, they should be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely).

What are the risks of using TikTok?

Along with potential opportunities TikTok can bring to your franchise, it also comes with risks. Here are some of the most common ones and how to mitigate them:

Wasting Resources. It can take a lot of time and money to build a successful account. If you're not strategic about your content or audiences, it could be a waste of resources. The key to avoiding wasted resources is frequent, in-depth evaluation. What's working? What isn't working? Why? Set up processes to evaluate your account regularly to understand the gap between where your account is and where you want it to be.

Success Isn't Guaranteed. Both success and virality are unpredictable. You can't force people to engage with your content — unless you buy likes and followers, which would make you the Houston Astros of TikTok. If running your TikTok account is continually hurting your franchise more than it's helping, you may need to re-evaluate or step away.

Players or Leadership May Not Buy In. Communicating value to someone who's not familiar with the app might be difficult, so remember to understand where each player or executive is coming from. What do they know? What concerns them? What motivates them? How can TikTok help them reach their goals? Answer these questions before you pitch and be prepared to answer their questions to increase the likelihood you'll get them on board. Once players agree to participate, don't just lead them blindly through dances and other trends — make sure they know how the app works to make your content as authentic and effective as possible.

Hurting Your Reputation. The stripped-down, authentic nature of TikTok can hurt or help you. If you create casual videos or use humour, you might unintentionally offend part of your audience or say something that doesn't align with your brand.

On TikTok, there's less to hide behind than other platforms because authenticity demands vulnerability. If you show your audience what your organization is really like, they may not like what they see. To mitigate this, stick to your brand guide and personality. Post content that truly reflects your values. Following trends is important, and the algorithm will reward you for it, but staying true to your personality is more important.

How to run a successful sports TikTok account

Highlighting Players' Personalities. Athletes are regular people who have silly senses of humour, inside jokes, and quirks. Fans recognize the shared humanity between themselves and their favourite players when they see their favourite player also loves "Jeopardy!" or linemates have a pre-game ritual of getting bubble tea together. That connection will keep fans coming back for more content.

[A Toronto Blue Jays player dreams of becoming... a groundskeeper?](#)



Social Listening. Along with recognizing athletes are just people, fans want to know they're viewed as a person by your franchise — not just a ticket sale or a number in the crowd. Interacting with people who view, like, and comment on your posts (and viewing, liking, and commenting on other users' posts) builds a community rather than a following. You should set aside equal, if not more, time for interacting with your audience as you do for creating content.

Understanding TikTok Culture. Just like you don't want to go to work underdressed or give someone a hug when they are expecting a polite handshake, you don't want to post content that's out of touch. Spend time scrolling on the app to understand how it works, who's on there, and what kind of content they're looking for. Pay attention to the trends, language, and content themes and find ways to incorporate those into your own content.

Creating Content That People Can Engage With. If your content is good, people will likely engage with it anyway — but it doesn't hurt to nudge them in that direction. This doesn't mean you have to include a “Comment below if...” call to action at the end of every video. Actually, it's probably better that you don't. Engagement is connected to relatability: is this something they would send to a friend? Or save for later? Or would prompt a thought or reaction? Content that creates those types of reactions is what will get the best — and most genuine — engagement.

[The Toronto Raptors ask fans to pick Scottie Barnes' best celebration](#)

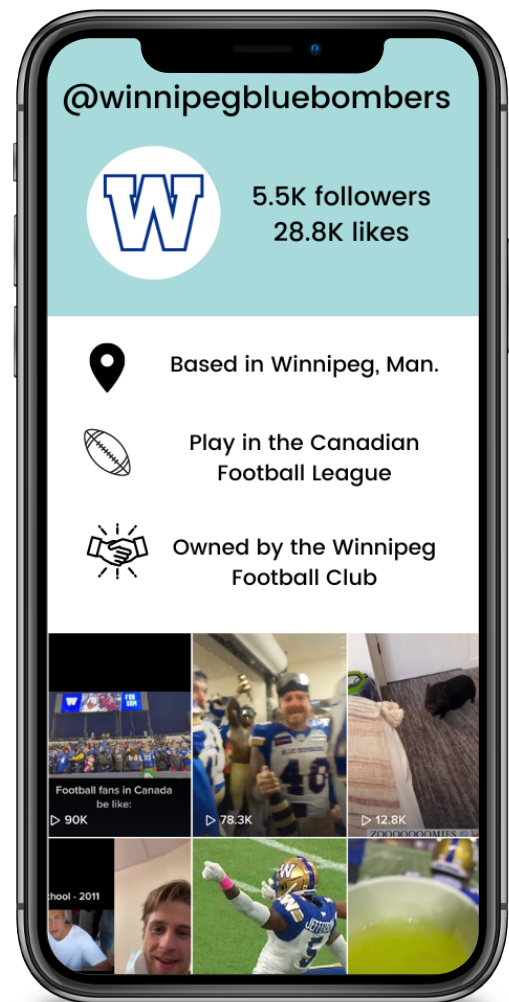


CASE STUDY: WINNIPEG BLUE BOMBERS

Riley Marra is the senior manager of digital media for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers. The Blue Bombers are the 2019 and 2021 Grey Cup champions in the Canadian Football League (CFL) and they recently started their own TikTok account. Their case study is a practical guide for you to understand the common challenges and considerations of creating a TikTok account for a sports franchise.

Pitching and Research

Marra says he pitched TikTok to his bosses during the pandemic. He researched the app and looked at other successful accounts to emulate their content and tactics. The account has seen steady growth since they posted their first video in April 2020, except for a large increase in viewers for their 2021 season opener.



"I thought it was like a thing for teens...I was like, I don't know how that can be used in our sports world."

Audience

The Blue Bombers' audience on TikTok is mainly in the 13- to 18-year-old age range, compared to the age range of 30+ on most other platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Marra says the franchise wants to reach a younger audience that have never engaged with the team, and TikTok delivers that.

Content

Most of their content is behind the scenes, point-of-view-style videos. Marra says users like videos that show unscripted moments with players, and players' take on current trends.

See what it's like to come
out of the tunnel on
game day.



Player Relationships

Marra has worked with the Blue Bombers for years and has developed trust with the players. He says he knows who is camera-shy and who likes to be the centre of attention. Knowing and having access to players is key to creating great content.

“I know what players would be good in a scenario and who wouldn't. So I know, even before asking, the top five names of guys who I want to do this video.”

Some of the most high-
energy players show off in
a photoshoot



Time Commitment & Analytics

Marra says he spends about five hours per week on TikTok-related tasks during the season. He plans to dedicate more time to that in the future, including liking and commenting on other users' videos. Eventually, he'd like to post daily videos to keep growing the account.

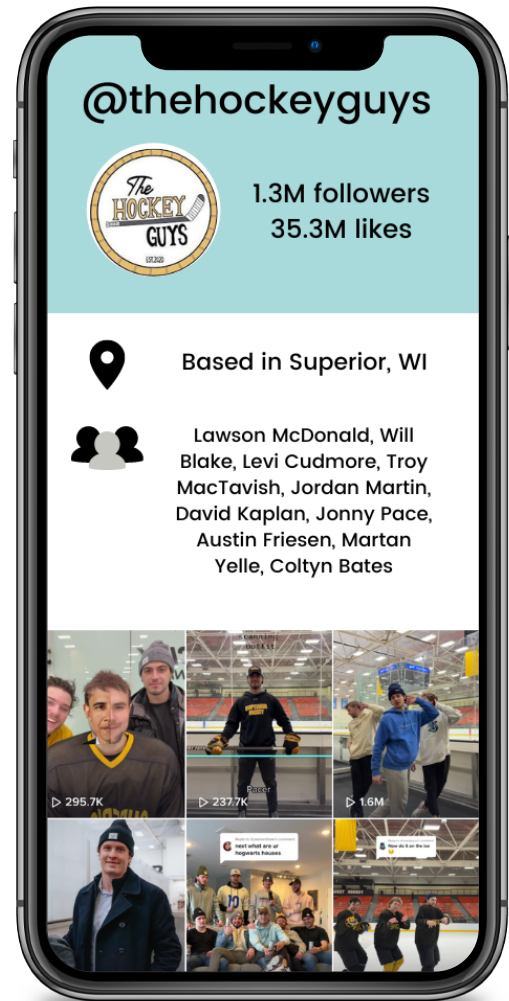
CASE STUDY: THE HOCKEY GUYS

Lawson McDonald is a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Superior and an alumnus of the men's hockey team. Along with nine other teammates and friends, McDonald runs the most popular non-franchise hockey account on TikTok: The Hockey Guys (THG).

McDonald is the creative mind behind THG's videos, doing most of the filming, editing, and producing. McDonald says he took the director role in the beginning stages of building their account, but now it's a more collaborative effort between the guys.

How It Started

This type of success didn't happen overnight – two years of hard work carved the path to one million followers, and it all started with McDonald.



“Every video we posted with the group did well, right from the beginning. So that was cool to see. And it never really stopped.”

McDonald says he almost deleted his personal TikTok before a hockey-themed video with four of his teammates blew up in late 2019. He added a few more teammates to make an even group of 10, and The Hockey Guys was born.

The water bucket challenge was one of McDonald's first viral videos



Although they have a solidified strategy more than a year after creating THG, their fundamental appeal is still the same — McDonald says people love their group atmosphere and goofy personalities. High-level athletes are often known for their skills and stat lines, but THG focuses on their personality and quirks. Pulling back the curtain and letting users see a different side of sports makes for engaging content.

"One video would get 50,000 to 100,000 views and then immediately people were already intrigued and connected to certain guys."

Who's the nice guy and who likes to drop the gloves?



Keys To Success

The Hockey Guys' success has been built on a few major factors, according to McDonald. They do a lot of social listening and interacting with their community. Several of the guys spend time during the week monitoring the account and responding to comments, along with scrolling through the app to get a sense of the new trends and audios. They've stayed consistent with their silly, trendy, hockey-themed content, so people know what to expect from their brand.

"I think now with so many different people on the app and having like the amount of followers we do it's kind of important to strategize the content you're putting out and making sure...we're not putting videos that are way out of the ordinary for us."

THG's version of a
slo-mo montage



Audience

McDonald says THG's audience is about 80 per cent female, ages 18 to 30 years old. Some of their fans have never watched hockey before and some know the game well. Because of this, THG talk about the game in simple terms – not in a condescending way, but to create a more welcoming atmosphere so anyone can join the hockey community.

"There's people from Brazil, Europe, Australia, and that's kind of cool because you never would think that your videos are being watched worldwide, especially when you're like hockey players and creators. They've never seen hockey before and now that we're making these kinds of videos, they're getting into hockey and seeing it."

Sharing their hockey
"problems" used a popular
trend to explain the game



Content Strategy

Their content focuses on videos that showcase the guys' personalities through popular trends. Their strategy evolved over time to post about six videos per week. Most posts are their own takes on popular trends since McDonald says those tend to get better engagement. They also post their TikToks on Instagram Reels. They shoot and edit their videos on the camera roll rather than within the TikTok app to avoid the TikTok watermark.

“Things move fast, and you just have to understand what's actually relevant right now. If you're hopping on a trend from six months ago, people will think, 'We're over that. We've done that, we've been there.'”

The "Pull Up" challenge
took over TikTok in
December 2021



The Creation Process

McDonald says three of the guys watch TikToks consistently and gather ideas throughout the week. They especially look for popular audios, which can determine whether a video goes viral or not. McDonald says it takes about an hour to film three videos, then another 90 minutes to edit those three videos in Final Cut Pro.

After a video is posted, McDonald says at least one person will spend the next hour monitoring and responding to comments. He says these first viewers are often the most loyal fans and when they see THG are seeing their replies, they're encouraged to keep watching and supporting them. This first hour is a crucial time that decides whether the video will get a lot of views — the TikTok algorithm accounts for the behaviour and reaction of the initial viewers. If they like it, the algorithm shows it to more and more users. If they don't like it, the algorithm doesn't show it as much.

"It's not just creating content. You have to be on the app and participating in the conversation and understanding how it works."

THG's most popular video
is a simple prank trend



McDonald says THG have no intentions of slowing down. Their follower count is surging and new partnerships with big companies and franchises will help this group of guys keep growing the game on and off the app.

Their latest partnership
took them to the NHL
Winter Classic



Although The Hockey Guys don't belong to a professional team, franchises can learn valuable lessons from their success:

- Following trends and showcasing player personalities.
- Promoting sponsorships and products while remaining true to their brand.
- Using their platform to make the hockey community more accessible.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

01 How To Know If TikTok Is Right For Your Franchise

All social media platforms require separate strategies and tactics, including TikTok. Before you jump into making videos and building a community, do your research to figure out if the app is right for your organization.

Consider your objectives. Along with being SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely) objectives, they should be appropriate to both the app and your organization.

Know who you're trying to reach. Find and observe the audiences you're targeting to understand what kind of content will appeal to them.

Make a time commitment. TikTok should be its own item on your to-do list, not something you do in between tasks.

Develop trust with players and coaches. Your content will only be good if people are willing to buy into it. Show them examples of what you're looking for and communicate how it can help them and the organization.

02 Keys To Effective Content

You don't want any two posts to be the same, but there are some non-negotiables if you want to create solid content:

- A popular audio — using a sound your viewers will recognize is more likely to stop people from scrolling past your video.
- A relevant trend — if you don't know what's trending, look at the Discover page.

- Appropriate humour — if a user thinks a video is funny, they're much more likely to share it with their friends, which increases your video's reach.
- Showing personality and authenticity — users who watch your videos consistently should have a good idea of who your players are and what your franchise values.

Mitch Marner hits all the boxes
to create a successful TikTok



03 How To Build An Audience

The most important part of building an audience on TikTok is social listening. Respond to comments on your posts and others' posts, listen to their content suggestions, and find out the type of content they're watching.

Spend as much, if not more, time interacting with your community as you do when creating content. The community is the important piece of the TikTok puzzle, and the whole reason you're creating content in the first place. Putting your fans first will serve your sports franchise well online and IRL.

SOURCES

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Interview with Lawson McDonald, October 24, 2021.

Interview with Mia Hildebrand, October 9, 2021.

Interview with Riley Marra, November 10, 2021.

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The Savannah Bananas (@thesavbananas), TikTok page, <https://www.tiktok.com/@thesavbananas?lang=en>.

FURTHER READING

[TikTok Newsroom \(TikTok\)](#)

[TikTok for Business \(TikTok\)](#)

[SMART Goals: A How To Guide \(University of California\)](#)

[The Ultimate Guide to Marketing on TikTok \(Fanbytes\)](#)

[The TikTok Challenge: Get to Know the Short-Form Video Platform \(Collabary\)](#)

[Social Media Use in 2021 \(Pew Research\)](#)

[How to Get Verified on TikTok \(Hootsuite\)](#)

[The Psychology of Social Media \(Buffer\)](#)

[Social Media & Psychology: 8 Lessons For Marketers \(Hootsuite\)](#)

[How TikTok is Rewriting the World \(The New York Times\)](#)