

# From Chipotle to Bama Rush: Turning TikTok trends into real-world activations

Article

Brands can capitalize on social trends with real-world products and programs, but they have to be able to act at the speed of TikTok. That means giving creators autonomy, having a

strong brand identity, and keeping a close eye on trends.

“Taking social into the real world, it’s so critical,” said Tim Sovay, chief business development and partnerships officer at CreatorIQ, during the company’s “From Engagement to Conversion: Unlocking the ROI of Creator Commerce on TikTok” webinar.

## 1. The quick pivot

When creators Alexis Frost and Keith Lee shared their **Chipotle order “hacks” on TikTok** (fajita steak quesadilla with roasted chili-corn salsa, sour cream, and either chipotle-honey vinaigrette or tomatillo red-chili salsa on the side), the burrito brand acted fast to capitalize on the viral item.

- The first videos were posted in December 2022. By March 2023, TikTok made the “Fajita Quesadilla Hack” and the “Keithadilla”—Frost’s and Lee’s orders, respectively—official menu items.
- In that time, #Keithadilla garnered 33.3 million engagements and 433.6 million impressions on TikTok, according to CreatorIQ.

“Chipotle moved really really quickly to jump in on this and not only engage with [Lee] on the platform, they made it an official menu item,” said Sovay.

**Why it worked:** “We hear all the time that brands can’t move as fast as trends and culture is happening on TikTok, and Chipotle is just a fantastic example of a brand [that] not only can move quickly from a social and digital marketing perspective, but they can move this into in-stores quickly as well,” he said.

The organic origins of this activation also built upon what Savoy says is one of the most important things brands can do on TikTok: let creators create. Too much editorial input from brands waters down the authentic feel of creator videos.

## 2. The ambassador

Bama Rush is a major area where brands turn TikTok into real-world activations. The Panhellenic recruitment event at the University of Alabama has been an explosive opportunity for apparel and jewelry brands like Kendra Scott.

Kendra Scott turned TikTok momentum into a **campus influencer ambassador program** called the Gem Campus Ambassador program, which helped rush recruitment momentum take off, according to CMO Michelle Peterson.

**Why it works:** Kendra Scott has credited a strong brand identity surrounding fashion, philanthropy, and family with its ability to move quickly with social activations. “You can activate a brand plan and you can **move very quickly in social, posting content** and being part of relevant conversations when everybody understands the brand,” Peterson said.

### 3. The early mover

One of the first TikTok trends that turned into a real-world activation was Dunkin’s introduction of “The Charli,” which Dunkin’ modeled after **TikTok creator Charli D’Amelio’s iconic order** in 2020 (cold brew with whole milk and three pumps of caramel flavor swirl).

At the time, D’Amelio had close to 80 million followers while TikTok had around 67 million US users and 485 million users worldwide, per our forecast, meaning the potential for influence was huge.

**Why it worked:** People were already ordering “The Charli” before it became an official menu item. By paying close attention to that trend, and trusting that TikTok trends could work in the real world as early as 2020, Dunkin’ was able to turn an idea into a product.

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