

Analyst Take: Is BeReal for real?

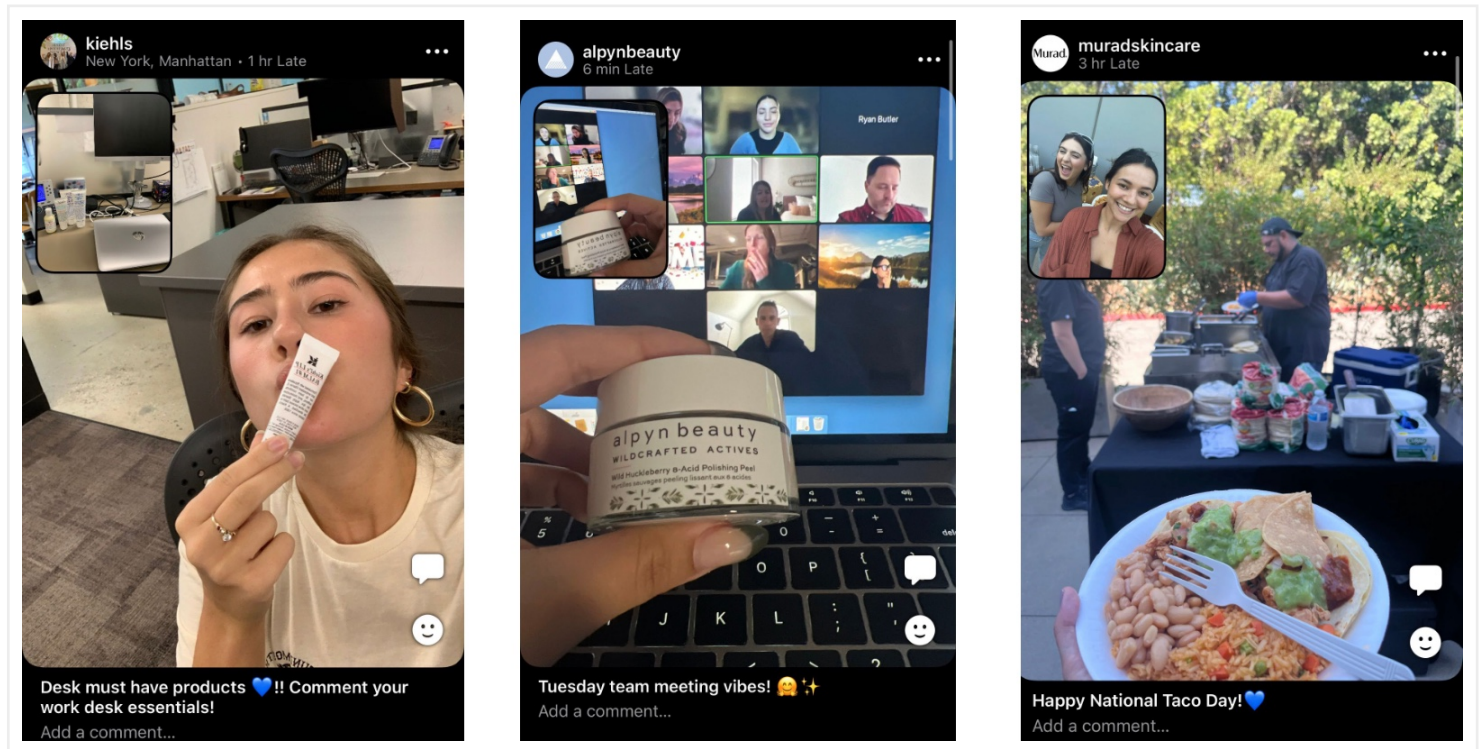
Article

Here's the deal on BeReal. At its core, BeReal is a social app that prompts all users to simultaneously take a front- and forward-facing photo once per day at a random time. Founded in France by **Alexis Barreyat**, BeReal has been on the scene since December 2019, but didn't make waves until this year.

- The app sends one notification daily to users and gives them two minutes to take the photo, which is then shared to friends. All users receive the notification at the same time based on their time zone, so in theory, it's capturing users in real time.

- BeReal skyrocketed in popularity thanks to its focus on authenticity. Photos are unfiltered, unedited, and given an asterisk if they were retaken. Photos taken outside of the two-minute time frame are marked with how late they were posted—a mark of shame, of sorts.

While the app doesn't yet feature any ads, BeReal's popularity has caught the attention of brands like **e.l.f. Cosmetics**, **Chipotle**, and **Pacsun**, which have started experimenting with the platform.

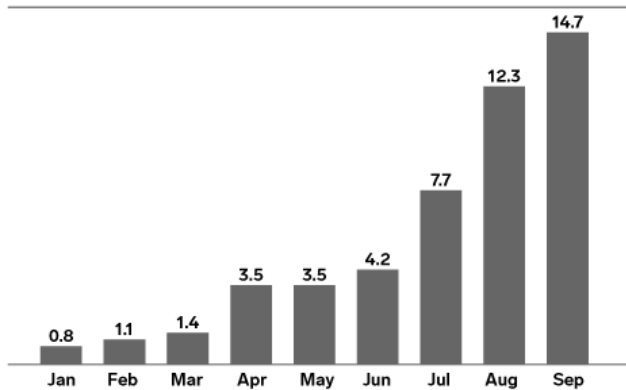


BeReal climbed as Facebook fell out of favor

BeReal is currently the No. 2 non-gaming app on the US App Store. By August, the app reached 10 million daily active users worldwide, per BeReal's own job portal. Its ascendance is highly correlated with Facebook's inability to maintain its place among the Top 10 apps on the US App Store this year, per Sensor Tower data. As of October 11, Facebook was No. 12 in the iOS App Store rankings of free apps, with BeReal at No. 1.

BeReal App Downloads Worldwide, Jan-Sep 2022

millions



Note: includes Apple App Store and Google Play; excludes third-party Android Stores
Source: Sensor Tower as cited in company blog, Oct 7, 2022

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BeReal's user base skews female; in some countries, it tends to be overwhelmingly so. **It also tends to be quite young, with the majority of its users below 25** and only a fraction of its users above 45.

BeReal iOS App Users in Select Countries, by Demographic, July 2022

% of total in each group

| | Australia | Brazil | France | Germany | UK | US |
|---------------|-----------|--------|--------|---------|-------|-------|
| Gender | | | | | | |
| Female | 98.7% | 98.2% | 69.8% | 93.9% | 99.4% | 58.0% |
| Male | 1.3% | 1.8% | 30.3% | 6.1% | 0.6% | 42.0% |
| Age | | | | | | |
| 16-25 | 90.7% | 97.6% | 82.5% | 44.8% | 72.6% | 43.3% |
| 26-44 | 2.1% | 2.4% | 16.4% | 49.3% | 23.6% | 55.1% |
| 45+ | 7.3% | 0.1% | 1.2% | 5.9% | 3.8% | 1.9% |

Note: iPhone only; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Data.ai, Aug 2022

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Our Take

One of BeReal's bigger problems is its functionality. **Users complain about the app's frequent crashes and glitches.** A lengthy outage in late September 2022 pointed to another budding issue with the app—a reluctance to communicate about the cause of the glitch and when it would be fixed, even with users. Hours later, after the outage ended, the company sent a tweet stating “all good now.”

But there are issues beyond that lack of transparency from a company asking users to ‘be real’ themselves. Brands such as e.l.f. have found themselves unable to accept additional

friend requests, user notifications don't come on some days with no rhyme or reason, and users reported unable to post as recently as the past week. Some growing pains are to be expected— but such issues also killed the aspirations of early social platforms like Friendster and MySpace.

Can BeReal stand out as competitors eye its features?

Meta is testing yet another feature on **Instagram** that copies directly from a competitor—but instead of taking from **TikTok**, this time it's borrowing from BeReal. **Instagram's** new feature, dubbed “Candid Challenges,” borrows liberally from the latter, posting photos in a user's IG story rather than featuring them in a feed.

Meanwhile, TikTok's new TikTok Now feature enables users and their friends to record what they're doing in the moment using their device's front and back cameras. Users get a daily reminder to record a 10-second video or a still image to quickly share what they're doing. In some markets, TikTok Now is even being marketed as a standalone app.

Instagram and TikTok aren't the only app experimenting with dual-camera capabilities; **Snapchat** is doing the same. Users can now simultaneously use the front-facing and rear cameras on their phone to take photos and videos. A picture-in-picture style, a cutout overlay mode, and a horizontal or vertical split-screen version are all available.

Our Take

Instagram was able to copy Snapchat Stories almost wholesale and push them further than Snapchat could. And while there's an opportunity for Meta to do the same with BeReal, it's unlikely to take off.

- The biggest obstacle in the way of Candid Challenges claiming the throne is Instagram itself. Its reputation is battered and [the app's UI is messy](#).—compare that with BeReal, which is designed from the bottom up to support its central concept, and it's easy to see Candid Challenges getting lost in the shuffle.
- **BeReal's single, dedicated feed means it's incredibly easy for users to scroll through and see posts from friends—something that's not so easy to do on Instagram anymore.** Candid Challenges will likely also get obscured by being relegated to the Stories function, where its distinction will suffer for being mixed in with ads and other posts.

It's reasonable to see TikTok succeeding with its Now feature. Social media users are getting more comfortable with platforms copycatting one another, which could lessen any potential blowback. Moreover, TikTok users are so engaged with the app that they could be more likely to engage with the prompt—and many have personal connections whose Now photos they would be interested in engaging with..

While Snapchat is now employing dual-camera capabilities, it doesn't send all of its users to post their photos at a certain moment—arguably the main reason BeReal has caught on. That said, the timing of the dual-camera functionality's release makes Snapchat look ... old. In short, Snapchat looks like it's gone from being copied to being the copycat.

A testing ground for marketers

At first glance, BeReal doesn't come across as an app designed for marketing or public relations uses, but some brands are experimenting with it in an effort to drive awareness and buzz among younger consumers. Here are some best practices drawn from those who have taken a closer look.

Follow the rules. Just because brands can post after the “It's time to BeReal” prompt doesn't mean they should—and the community is more likely to call out a brand for not playing along.

Aspire for accessibility. “It really is best to at least seem off-the-cuff, or as unplanned as possible, because that's the vibe of the app right now,” advises **Evan Horowitz**, co-founder and CEO of agency **Movers+Shakers**. “You want to show up on any given platform in the way that the community already interacts.” Horowitz recommends that brands accept BeReal's ephemeral nature. **“It's just so tempting for brands to come in with an overly curated, overly thought-through message. And that's going to make them look like annoying interlopers. It's going to get them negative equity.”**

Give consumers a reason to seek you out. Most consumers don't know there are brands on BeReal, and it's not easy to find them from the spartan interface. E.l.f. created a campaign to compel people to find the brand on BeReal by launching a giveaway where only BeReal friends would receive the code, with many marketing it on Instagram and their other social presences. The cosmetics brand also did a media push to drive awareness of the BeReal campaign, which reached its target number of users in just a few hours.

Keep it interesting without curation. **Laurie Lam**, chief brand officer at e.l.f., says her brand shows glimpses of life at its headquarters along with “behind-the-scenes snapshots of hot product drops, photo shoots, and happy hour hangouts.” It's that mix of activities that makes

the experience more interesting for the brand's BeReal friends and keeps them looking forward to future posts.

Will BeReal stick around?

Our Take

In a way, BeReal is what Snapchat and Instagram Stories were supposed to be before they eventually morphed into the often highly staged and curated properties they are today.

In the spirit of authenticity, the app is strictly against filters and editing—again, a stark departure from leading platforms. But then again, certain other social media mainstays such as Snapchat's Stories began in much the same way. For whatever reason, most platforms eventually lose that uniqueness that audiences purportedly clamor for.

People had doubts that Instagram could co-opt from Stories as successfully as it did back in August 2016—but it did so in part because social media users were more likely to have more friends on Instagram than Snapchat, and posting a story on Instagram brought more feedback from their peers.

The social media landscape has changed quite a bit since then—and users have gotten accustomed to each platform borrowing quite a bit from its peers. Unless users start to reject any app that co-opts functionality from another, **BeReal's ephemeral nature may not be enough to keep it around for the long term.**

But that said, for every **Meerkat, Vine, Yik Yak, and Google+**, there's a TikTok. Embracing an app like BeReal even in a test-and-learn capacity protects a brand from being left empty-handed if the platform matures and develops staying power.