

How American Eagle Outfitters taps into authenticity on TikTok, BeReal, and Snapchat to reach its Gen Z audience

Article

TikTok. BeReal. Gen Z. Authenticity. That might seem like a grab bag of buzzwords, but it's the marketing strategy behind clothing retail chain American Eagle Outfitters.

"[American Eagle] was ahead of the trend in really celebrating the authentic, real you," Craig Brommers, CMO at American Eagle, said at The Brief, a Marketing Brew event in New York City last week. And it's leveraging more than a few rising social media channels to do that.

TikTok, BeReal, and Snapchat are winning with Gen Z and are seen as authentic, Brommers said. That's not so with Instagram, he says, because the heavy lifting curation doesn't match Gen Z's reality.

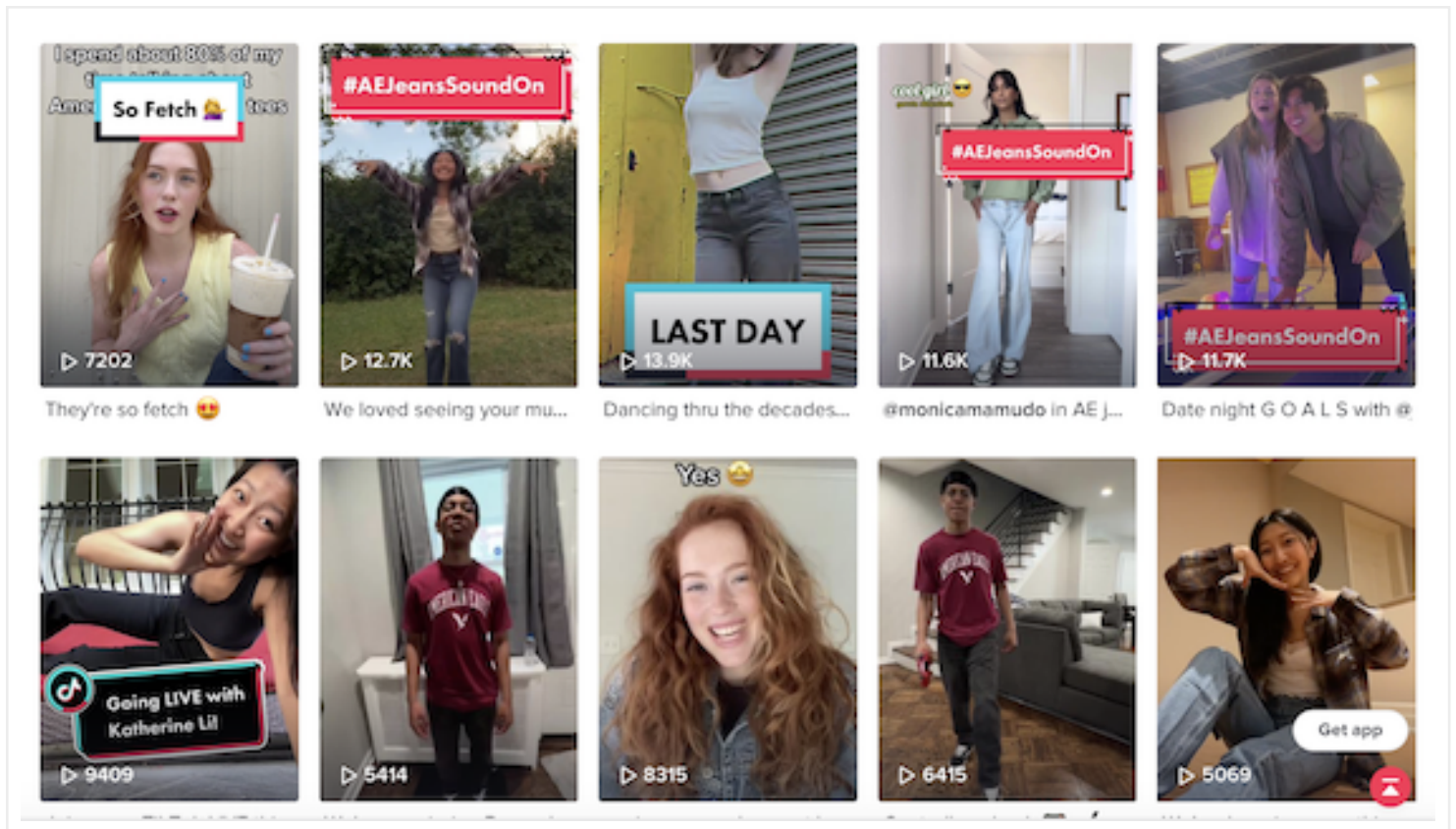
All of this comes as US retail social commerce sales this year grew 34.4% to reach \$53.10 billion. By 2025, we project that number to reach \$107.17 billion.

Here's American Eagle's social strategy:

BeReal: "We were one of the very first brands to launch on BeReal," Brommers said. "We didn't know what was going to happen."

- "It's not an easy [user experience]," he said, adding that they have one of American Eagle's social media managers sitting around waiting to post.
- Brommers said the brand wasn't sure what content was going to work, so it started with daily deals focusing on one big item. The company then tried behind-the-scenes content of a photo shoot. "We'll try anything," he said. "Unfortunately, only 1,000 people can follow you at a time, so we hit that cap pretty quickly."
- American Eagle is seeing a 300% higher engagement than some beauty brands that started on BeReal before the clothing retailer, Brommers said.
- **Why it matters:** Downloads of the BeReal app exploded in August and September, adding 27 million in those two months alone.

TikTok: "That's the drinking game in any marketing conversation right now," Brommers joked. "It has true impact, not just from a brand perspective but from a commercial perspective."



- American Eagle has just as much success with huge creators like Addison Rae as it does “plucking kids out of obscurity and helping them express themselves in whatever way they want to express themselves.”
- During the back-to-school season, for example, Brommers said the team suggested signing a musician known worldwide like Shawn Mendes as an influencer. Instead, the team used TikTok’s SoundOn, a platform for discovery of unknown musicians, and found a creator from Toronto, Katherine Li. “She had music we thought would speak to our audience, and the only ask of her was to put ‘American Eagle’ into a remix version of one of her songs.” According to Brommers, the video has 3 billion views and 25 million shares.
- “[This] really reinforces that the realness, the authenticity, the entrepreneurial spirit of Gen Z is something we can celebrate as well.”
- Why it matters:** We project that 39.5 million TikTok users (39.9%) will buy on the platform by 2026, an increase from 2022’s 23.7 million.

Snapchat: “10 or 15 years ago, our competitors would have been other mall-based retailers, and that’s just simply not the fact anymore. We are in a battle for attention and that attention

could be technology, going out to eat, [or] travel. So we have had to up our game in terms of entertainment to make sure that our Gen Z fans are fully engaged in our brand.”

- Creating augmented reality virtual pop-up shops on Snapchat have been successful—to the tune of “a couple million dollars” for each one.
- Each shop has a certain theme and only around 20 products at a time.
- “It shows us that there is real commercial value in ... this digital innovation space.”
- **Why it matters:** Snapchat use by Gen Z grew by 5.1% this year to reach 43.7 million.

Reaching the next generation: “Our customer lifetime value is [two and a half] years, so we are constantly tapped into the next generation and the next youthful push,” Brommers said.

- American Eagle has created three experiences on Roblox with 50 million unique visitors to those, coming in only behind Gucci. More than 30 million users put American Eagle clothes on their avatars. This holiday season, American Eagle integrated its loyalty program into Roblox for the first time. Brommers said about 75% of the company’s transactions are tied to loyalty, so the extension to the metaverse should also see traction.
- American Eagle was one of the first brands to get into the name, image, and likeness opportunities with college athletes. Brommers said the traditional big sports like college football and men’s college basketball are not the brand’s high engagers. A female gymnast is its No. 1 athlete. “Our audience is more interested in their personal stories off the field [or] court,” he said. However, unlike the musicians on TikTok, these athletes are not creators, so the American Eagle team does more lifting on the content.
- **Why it matters:** In 2022, 41.1% of Gen Z will be digital buyers. That increases to 59.5% in 2026, according to our forecasts. This means Gen Z will have the second-highest penetration of digital buyers, coming in only behind millennials.

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