

# Kroger's Hashtag Challenge: A Retailer's Perspective on TikTok

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**Blake Droesch**

**L**ooking to reach college students during the back-to-school shopping season, grocery retailer Kroger turned to short-video app TikTok.

With a highly engaged Gen Z audience, the Chinese-owned app has **attracted major brands**, such as the NFL, Ralph Lauren and Chipotle, that have used its Hashtag Challenge offering. The popular ad unit—which places branded hashtags on the app's Discover page—has also been used by major retailers like Walmart and Macy's.

For **Kroger's #TransformUrDorm campaign**, the grocery chain became one of the first brands to use TikTok's shoppable **Hashtag Challenge Plus feature**. Focusing on back to school, the challenge encouraged college students to show off their decorated dorm rooms. When users tapped on the sponsored hashtag, they were led to a separate in-app Explore tab showcasing Kroger products and direct links to its ecommerce channel.

For our recent report, " on TikTok marketing, we spoke with Casey Smith, social media manager for influencer and publisher marketing at Kroger, to get a retailer's perspective on TikTok's Hashtag Challenge.

**Why was Kroger interested in working with TikTok?**

One of our primary audiences are college students. Looking at the audience that's using TikTok, about 42% are between the ages of 18 and 24, so it seemed like a perfect opportunity to test out the platform for this campaign.

### **What was it like working with TikTok?**

I was kind of surprised. Since TikTok is a newer platform, I assumed we wouldn't get a lot of analytics from them, but they were able to provide us with all the typical KPIs—engagement rates and click-through rates. They also did a brand lift study for us, which is what we're very interested in on our social team, more than final transactions. Looking into brand lift, we were able to get measurements that were very helpful for us.

### **Kroger was one of the first brands to use the Hashtag Challenge Plus ad unit, which adds a shoppable component within the app. As a retailer, how important is this function?**

It was a great addition, even just to see what kind of traction we would gain through having the shoppable platform. And given that this campaign was really focused on general merchandise, as opposed to just food, it helped to have a visual destination for users to click along within the app. It showed them we have their dorm supplies, we have things to organize with, items like that.

### **Is there anything else you can share about the results of the campaign?**

With the brand lift study, we did see that there was a large increase in those who recalled seeing the ad, as well as associating Kroger as a convenient back-to-school shopping destination, which was the main goal of the campaign. We were able to see that there was an increase in users' likelihood to shop at Kroger in the next three months. The other KPIs of views and engagement rate were also above our benchmarks.

### **One of the unique aspects of TikTok is that they provide creators to brands. What was this experience like?**

We decided to partner with influencers to kick this off because, on a new platform, no one is going to be better at making the content. We

were very happy with partnering with the four content creators. They have a massive reach and great engagement. The list [of creators TikTok] provided was really based off the information we gave them with our goals, and the demographic we were trying to reach. From the list that we received, we were able to select these four to have a little bit of a diverse group, and also ensure that we were working with influencers in different markets.

**Was this more of a testing of the waters, or will TikTok now be incorporated into your overall social strategy?**

This was definitely testing the waters. However, moving forward, we would be interested in partnering with the platform or influencers, if it makes sense for our marketing priorities. We have created a special account for Kroger on the platform. We will likely repurpose content from our creators or user-generated content that we see on TikTok. It's low-cost and low-effort, but allows us to keep a presence on the platform.