



Why Commercial Real Estate Pros Should Be on TikTok and 5 Tips for Starting

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Far from its origins as a platform for teenagers to share lip-sync and dance moves, TikTok has become one of the most popular social media platforms in the world. The short-video-sharing app, which saw a huge rise in use during the pandemic, has become a cultural juggernaut, a place for users to learn, explore trends and connect. And for business owners and commercial real estate professionals who know how to take advantage of it, TikTok helps them connect with younger audiences, build community, attract clients and even find new employees and tenants.

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“This is the place that our audience is, and so it’s a great place for us to be,” explained JLL’s Anja Silvers, digital media and events coordinator for Rosedale Center in Roseville, Minnesota.

TikTok’s Relevance

Launched in 2016, TikTok has more than 1 billion monthly active users and has been downloaded over 200 million times in the U.S. Nearly 70% of its active users are under 40 years old, according to Statista, making the app a prime target for owners, brokers and brands seeking the attention of Millennials and Gen Zers. It has the highest engagement rate of any social media platform. “TikTok is a great platform for engagement because you’re able to connect with a captive and active audience,” said Jamie Gyerman, director of planning and channel strategy for Akhia Communications, which provides digital strategy for national brands. “I say ‘captive’ because you can’t leave. Once you’re on there, you go in to maybe watch one video, and 10 minutes later, you’re still there. It’s very addicting, and it is tracking the highest right now for how long people spend on the platform.”

That's because TikTok's algorithm is an attentive concierge, anticipating what users want to see before they even know they want to see it. "I really feel like it knows me," Silvers laughed. The selection of videos that appear on a TikTok user's For You page is personalized based on the user's past interactions, including the accounts they follow, the videos they've watched or shared, comments they've posted and creators they've hidden. The result is a stream of videos tailored directly to a user's interests, even if that user hasn't liked or followed the creators' accounts. "Unlike other social media platforms, you're going to see content ... from people or businesses that you maybe don't follow because the app is serving you content it thinks you're going to like," explained Gyerman. "That gives you or your brand the ability to appear in someone's news feed that you might not have been introduced to yet or connected to. It allows you to get some really great exposure."

Indeed, when Mall of America senior manager of social media Nate Sandell studied the Bloomington, Minnesota, property's TikTok engagement, he was surprised to see that many of the people commenting on the videos are from out of state. People from around the country were discovering the mall and tagging each other with comments like: "Why can't we have a mall like this in our area?" and "We need to go there this summer!!" To Sandell, that's a sign that the content is working. "We have over ... 200,000 followers, and I would say most of them are from all over the country," he said.

TikTok also allows commercial real estate professionals to humanize themselves. When users see someone's face or videos enough, that person becomes a trusted and recognizable name and top of mind when those viewers think about finding or selling space. "I equate it sometimes to having your face on the bus bench," said SVN Desert Commercial Advisors broker Eddie Gonzalez, who generates all his business from social media.

Indeed, if used well, TikTok can generate more leads than email blasts or cold-calling campaigns. "You're hitting people in their pockets," said restaurant consultant and social media strategist Kyle Inserra. "They're looking at their phones all the time." The key is demonstrating professional chops while sharing snippets of your personal life. "I've gotten two deals strictly because of my French bulldog," he said.

For those on the fence, now is a good time to get on the app. "People are excited about TikTok," Gyerman said. "They're using it. They're exploring. There [are] not a ton of ads and businesses on there yet. You're going to have a really great audience to connect with."

Not Sure Where to Begin? 5 Tips for Getting Started on TikTok

1. **Know your purpose.** Before you create your first post, have a sense of what you want to accomplish. It could be to build your personal brand, to create awareness with a younger generation, to educate, to show a lighter side of your business or just to have fun. Your purpose will drive your content. The main goal of Mall of America's TikTok page, for instance, is to tell the story of the 5.6 million-square-foot center "in a

way that makes people see it and say, ‘I want to come there. I want to be part of that,’” said Sandell. The property’s videos are light, fun and whimsical, mimicking the in-person experience of the property. Some of its most popular videos are montages – of some of its 500-plus stores and attractions – set to trending music. “We get comments like: ‘I didn’t realize there was a go-kart track,’” Sandell said. “I love seeing that because it means we’re tapping into something that many people haven’t seen, and now [they] are more enticed to come to the property because of it.”

2. **Bring your full self.** Authenticity is the key. If TikTok users think you’re using the platform only to sell something, they’ll disengage or block you. Instead, think in terms of the content your audience is looking for. According to TikTok’s own stats, 38% of TikTok users said a brand feels authentic when it teaches them something. Developer Mario Kiezi, whose TikTok videos have been viewed more than 1 million times, found engagement success by narrating behind-the-scenes videos of Oakland Mall in Michigan, which he purchased in March, and by giving tips on closing commercial real estate deals. Silvers said some of Rosedale Center’s most successful videos feature store employees or managers showing off their favorite pieces and trends extemporaneously as part of Tenant Tuesdays. The content is “very in the moment, very real-time,” said Silvers. “It portrays the experience you have by shopping at our mall. That kind of interaction isn’t something that you can get online.”
3. **Spend time thinking about hashtags.** TikTok’s algorithm rewards videos that use audio clips that many other TikTok creators are using and trending hashtags. To increase the odds your posts will show up on users’ For You pages, create content that fits with the trending hashtags and sounds. For now, you can find those on TikTok’s Discover tab, though some reports indicate TikTok may move away from the Discover page. TikTok users also can search keywords, such as “New York” or “real estate.” Gonzalez said: “My TikTok strategy is to be the Phoenix commercial real estate guy. I’m hyperfocused on central Phoenix, and if you look at my hashtags, I’ll do things like ZIP codes and area codes.” That prompts his videos to show up for anyone searching for content from that area.
4. **Include a call to action.** Engaging, informational content keeps people watching, but if you don’t include something on which viewers can follow up, they may simply scroll to the next video. Last year, TikTok and Shopify unveiled a Shop Now option for merchant pages. It enables consumers to click to purchase an item directly from TikTok. Calls to action also can be more subtle. Gonzalez has found engagement, for instance, by posting photos of Phoenix buildings and inviting people to guess what they’re worth.
5. **Just press record.** Posting your first video can be intimidating, but note that TikTok isn’t supposed to be a polished medium. In fact, data shows that the more unpolished and organic a TikTok video feels, the better it performs. If you’re not sure where to start, simply start with a bio. Inserra advised: “Just get on there and say, ‘Hi, I’m X. I’m a commercial real estate advisor in New York City or wherever, and I specialize in X. This is my first TikTok. I’m just getting started but would love to talk to you guys more about commercial real estate. I like the Yankees. I have a dog. I like to travel.’ And that’s really how it starts. It doesn’t have to be anything more than that.” Then keep posting. Some of your videos will take off. Others won’t get the views you’re hoping for. That’s OK. The way to find success on TikTok is just to keep using it.

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