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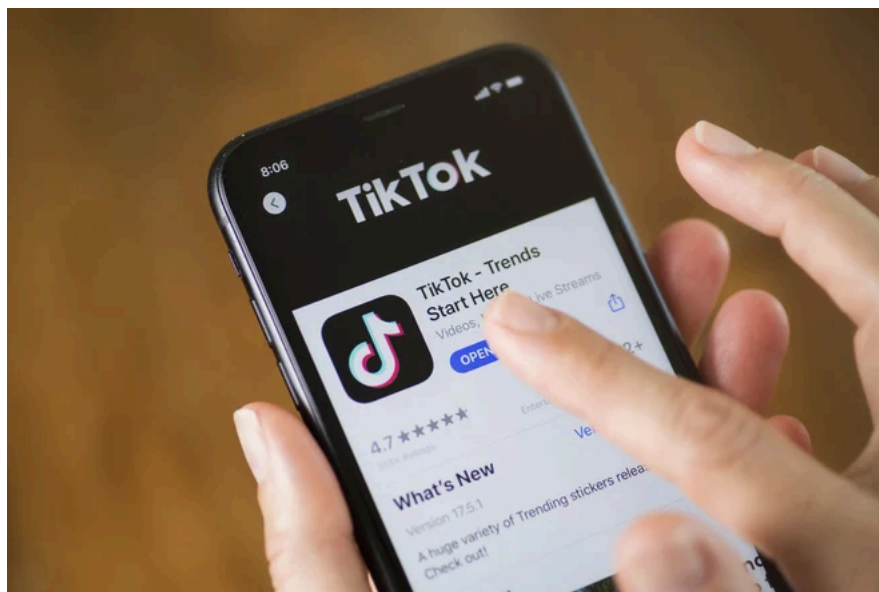
TIKTOK AD SPEND RESUMES—BUT BRANDS ARE HESITANT AFTER SHUTDOWN

Advertising traffic creeps back up as app tries to reawaken its spark with creators and marketers

By [Garett Sloane](#). Published on January 24, 2025.

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TikTok went dark last week, sending ad traffic to zero, but there are signs it is humming again with brands.

TikTok's ad business is showing renewed spark after the app's brush with the FTC. New data shows the number of major brands resuming ads on the platform. TikTok Shop. But there could still be hesitation from some major brands, according to ad leaders who spoke with Ad Age, saying TikTok's on-again-off-again chance to reset strategies.

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On Thursday, traffic coming from TikTok ads, tracked through e-commerce marketing platform MikMak, reached as high as 16%, following that same ad metric hitting zero percent during the outage on Saturday into Sunday. MikMak works with brands that buy across platforms, including Meta, Google, TikTok, Pinterest and Snap, and can detect trends as its system picks up traffic from ad spend. Meanwhile, earlier this week, Tinuiti, a TikTok marketing partner, reported that at least 70% of the advertisers on its commerce marketing platform resumed advertising after the stoppage. At the same time, the cost per thousand impressions [CPMs] on TikTok had decreased 29% this week compared to the week prior to TikTok's blackout in the U.S., Tinuiti told Ad Age.

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Digital ad agency Wpromote saw a similar TikTok advertising dynamic—with brands rolling in and prices down. “[It] has unlocked a huge opportunity for advertisers, reminiscent of the platform’s early arbitrage days of low CPMs, high engagement, and high returns,” said Christina Freel, Wpromote’s group director, paid social.

So far in January, TikTok CPMs were down 24% compared to the same period in 2024, while click-through rates, or how often consumers engaged with ads, were up 14%, Wpromote said. The cost per action, how much advertisers pay for those clicks, was down 47% so far in January compared to last year, according to Wpromote.

On Friday, a TikTok representative shared some data about the platform since its return Sunday that was largely in line with what advertisers were saying. On Sunday and Monday, there was a surge of engagement with advertising on the platform, TikTok’s rep said in an e-mail. Also, some top creators recorded double their average video views on those days, according to the rep. TikTok did not specify which creators.

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The data show that TikTok ads were stable after the shutdown, and that marketers were getting their campaigns through without major disruptions, the rep said, adding that the majority of advertisers were back.

Divest or else

Last week, TikTok's ad platform came to a standstill after the app shut down for about 14 hours during a political spat in the U.S. A law passed last year forced TikTok's China-based owner ByteDance to divest from the app or it would risk being banned in the States. The deadline to sell was January 19, and TikTok took itself offline as the day approached, before quickly restoring services. The app, which claims to have 170 million users in the U.S., set off a run among brands and creators to search for alternative media plans in the event of an extended outage.

This week, TikTok worked with President Donald Trump to get a 75-day extension to work out a deal that could keep the app operational. Even with the reprieve, it's still unknown if TikTok will get a deal to remain functional in the U.S. Some TikTok critics claimed the app did not have to shut down, as it was getting signals from the U.S. government that it could receive the extension beyond the sale deadline, and the whole ordeal left a sour taste in some users' mouths.

The implications for TikTok's long-term advertising prospects remain a little clouded. For now, MikMak saw brand activity slowly restore in the days after the app went dark: The TikTok ad traffic received by MikMak was at 26% last week before the stoppage; traffic went to zero during it; then it ticked up to about 4% Wednesday. On Thursday, it was ramping up to 16%. At first, Fortune 1000 brands were slow to restore their spending, and it was mostly smaller marketers placing ads, according to MikMak CEO Rachel Tipograph. Now, the major brands are returning. "Smaller, independently owned brands don't have the level of internal scrutiny that big brands need to go through," Tipograph said, "especially when big tech platforms are no longer about media but also are now about politics."

"Several Fortune 1000 brand advertisers across food, beverage, personal care, and beauty have significantly increased their TikTok paid traffic in the past two business days," Tipograph added.

There were also steady sales happening through TikTok Shop, the place where TikTok consumers buy products promoted on the app, according to e-commerce data company Charm.io. "Despite the TikTok outage for about 12 hours starting on January 18, TikTok Shop saw sales increase on January 19 when the ban was lifted, with total revenue that day amounting to \$32 million," Charm.io said in a statement shared with Ad Age. "For context: revenue on the January 18 was \$31 million, and January 17 it was just under \$29 million."

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Garett Sloane

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Time for rivals

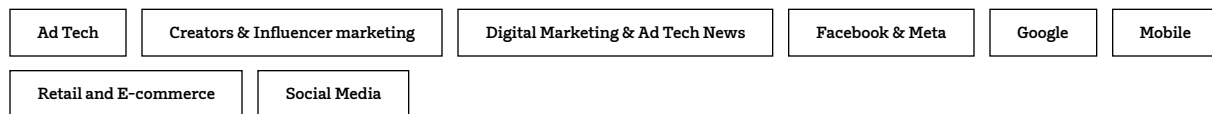
TikTok's U.S. issues did give rivals a chance to try to poach creators and brands. For instance, last week, Snap ran a marketing campaign highlighting creators and monetization options on its app. Meta-owned Instagram is reportedly offering money to TikTok creators to lure them to the platform. Instagram also updated the app with a new look that gave off a TikTok feel in the video feed. Pinterest launched an online hub promoting its ad platform, saying, "Make the switch to Pinterest today."

This week, a digital marketer from a major auto brand who spoke with Ad Age on condition of anonymity, said that the company's ad agency recommended keeping a pause on TikTok ads because of the turmoil. The app was still available to existing users, but it was not open for new downloads from service providers such as Apple. That meant TikTok was still not on solid footing, the auto advertiser said.

TikTok was still not in the clear with creators and advertisers, according to another industry insider at a top talent agency, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The shutdown forced brands and creators to rethink their strategies, and they started to consider TikTok alternatives, this person said.

"It's detrimental to TikTok that they went dark, even though it was such a brief amount of time," this person said. "They forced creators to really think about contingency plans and think about what else they wanted to do. So even though it's back on, and who knows if it's for 75 days or if it's for good ... most of the clients I'm talking to are still planning to put all the contingency plans we put in place, and pursue those strategies, despite the fact that it's back."

In this article:



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Garrett Sloane is Ad Age's technology, digital and media reporter. He has worked in newspapers from Albany to New York City, and small towns in between. He has also worked at every advertising industry trade publication that matters, and he once visited Guatemala and once rode the Budapest Metro.

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