

TikTok executive talks shopping and the famous feta pasta

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This photo provided by TikTok shows Sandie Hawkins. TikTok, launched in the U.S. in 2018, has become a force in the shopping world, influencing people to buy things they've seen on the app, from cheese to leggings. Now TikTok wants to capitalize on that power. It hired Sandie Hawkins last year, whose job as

general manager is to make money for the company in North America. Credit: TikTok via AP

Feta cheese was scarce in some stores earlier this year. The culprit? TikTok, where videos that showed an easy-to-make baked feta pasta recipe went viral.

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Now TikTok wants to capitalize on that power. It hired Sandie Hawkins last year, whose job as general manager is to make money for the company in North America. She works with brands directly, getting them to buy ads on the app, create TikTok videos and explain how they can use it to boost sales.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Hawkins talks about the difference between an influencer and a creator and why she ended up buying feta cheese, too. The questions and answers has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: How do you create a TikTok [video](#) that goes viral?

A: That's the beautiful part about the platform—you don't know. Any piece of content on the platform can take off. The magic of TikTok happens on the front page, the "For You" page. It starts to learn the type of content that you like and bring that type of content to you. It's not based off of the people that you follow.

Q: What is it about TikTok videos that makes people want to buy what

they see?

A: I think it's the evolution of product placement. You have [real people](#) that are demonstrating product or wearing product and using it in a way that you would use it or wear it. Maybe if you're a dancer and you see leggings that are super comfortable and somebody who's dancing and you see that they're not sliding down or they're not riding up. They're not trying to pretend that the products are doing something that they don't.

Q: You call people who make TikTok videos creators instead of influencers. Why?

A: We choose to call them creators because anybody can do it and anybody can take off on the platform. There was a fashion creator who is big on TikTok and she started wearing her Gap hoodie in her videos and they started taking off. And she's not somebody that Gap was following or sending clothing to, which would be more of that influencer side. She was somebody who wore a Gap hoodie one day as an outfit and then Gap hoodies started taking off because people liked what she was wearing.

Q: People know that influencers on other social media apps are paid and can't be trusted. How do you stop that from happening on TikTok?

A: There is an authenticity to the platform. People don't want to be fake. Based off of what I've seen, folks would just not talk about it rather than start endorsing things that they don't believe in because their followers would stop following them. They would lose their credibility, which is so important.

Q: Have you bought anything you've seen on TikTok?

A: I have made the feta pasta. I'm not a very good cook, but I do love

watching recipes on TikTok. And when I saw the feta pasta recipe, I thought to myself, that is something that I could make. And so I went out for the feta cheese, which started selling out in stores. It took me a few times to actually be able to find it.

Q: Users can't buy anything directly on TikTok right now. Is that going to change?

A: We're always looking for ways to evolve our features and to make shopping on the platform better. It's definitely something that we're looking forward to continue to push on, consolidating that path to purchase.

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