Despite a Constant State of Crisis, Media Buyers Still Show Interest in TikTok

TikTok is in hot water with the U.S. government, but with its user base continuously growing, media buyers are undeterred. Still, advertisers and agencies are leery about long-term commitments as TikTok's owners face a looming deadline to sell the app.

In this moment of crisis, Blake Chandlee's job at TikTok is to assure advertisers that everything will be OK. But buyers seemed more convinced to stay because of the power of the platform, not necessarily because of how the company has communicated.

Chandlee, vp of global business solutions, said he's had "very few conversations with CMOs or CEOs of agencies" about the two executive orders signed by President Donald Trump that make it illegal to conduct business with parent company ByteDance after Sept. 20.

"The big question that they always ask is: 'Is TikTok going to be around after this executive order?' And the answer to that is: 'Yes,'" Chandlee said to Adweek last week. "They want confidence that TikTok and our base of consumers will be there for them to engage with."

Chandlee insisted advertisers want to talk more about how the company is "protecting" its "community" concerning brand safety and measurement. They're "business conversations versus political discussions," he said. His team reaches out to brands and agencies "whenever some news comes or there's a big headline" and has introduced them directly to the company's customer safety and security teams when they have specific concerns about TikTok's data practices.

However, media buyers have received varying levels of communication from the company after news broke this summer. One buyer, under condition of anonymity to speak freely, told Adweek that TikTok has been “increasingly communicative” over the past month.

Three other media buyers at different agencies told Adweek, under the same conditions of anonymity, that while they routinely work with TikTok, they did not receive proactive messaging from the company. The prospect of increasing that level of communication made a potential merger with a more established media organization appealing, said one of the buyers.

TikTok has grown its offerings for advertisers in recent months by investing in its new TikTok for Business brand, creator program for marketers and its self-serve ad platform, a play for advertisers and agencies of all sizes looking to reach TikTok’s audience.

“Buyers are totally comfortable working in self-serve platforms, and in many cases, prefer the hands-on flexibility that these platforms provide,” one buyer said. “However, being able to work with a rep on best practices, general troubleshooting, larger program structures, etc., is something that will provide value to new TikTok advertisers.”

“Overall, brands are being cautious about the platform,” said Tessa Kavanaugh, vp and group director for social media at Havas Media. “[Brands are] just seeing how everything will play out in the next month or, I guess, week or hour. But overall, they are still interested in the platform.”



TikTok just wants you to know everything is OK.KC Green, TikTok

All about the users

TikTok's political woes are nothing new. The company faced FTC fines for children's privacy violations last year, and bans were instituted this year so the app cannot be downloaded on some government-issued phones.

But TikTok's big draw to advertisers is its unique and growing user base.

TikTok's U.S. users more than doubled in six months, from 22 million in January to 46 million in July, according to Comscore. New U.S. downloads have since decreased, however, and are down about 12% in August (5.3 million) compared to July (6 million), according to app analytics firm Sensor Tower.

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