The $1M Playbook

BY JAKE ELBEERY

WEEK 1 OF 5

THE MODEL: *why small brands win with creators now*

Hey — Jake here. Thanks for grabbing this. Over the next five weeks I'm going to walk you through exactly how we built WELD, my energy drink brand, to over a $1M run rate in its first year. Not theory — the actual system, including the parts that didn't work.

Quick context so you know this isn't recycled guru content: WELD is a real brand, in maybe the most competitive category on earth (energy drinks, against billion-dollar companies). We had no celebrity, no retail buyer, no ad agency. What we had was TikTok Shop, a few hundred creators, and a way of putting money behind content that was already selling.

THE SHIFT YOU NEED TO INTERNALIZE FIRST

The old DTC model was: build a website, run Meta ads with brand-made creative, optimize your funnel. That model still works if you have a lot of money, because you're renting attention at market price and the market price keeps going up.

The new model flips where content comes from. Instead of you making ads and paying to show them to strangers, creators make the content, their audiences trust them, and TikTok Shop closes the sale right inside the app. Your job stops being "make ads" and becomes "find the right creators, get them posting, and amplify what works."

Three things make this the best time in years to do it:

1. **TikTok Shop pays creators commission automatically.** You're not negotiating deals — creators earn a cut of what they sell, so they're motivated to actually sell, not just post.
2. **The content is measurable.** Every creator post that drives a sale is tracked. You can see, in dollars, which creator and which video made you money. That was never possible with traditional influencer marketing.
3. **Winning content can be amplified.** A creator post that sells organically can become an ad — a TikTok Spark Ad from their handle, or a Meta ad where the creator earns a commission on every sale it drives. You're not guessing what creative will work. You already know, because it already sold.

WHAT THE YEAR ACTUALLY LOOKED LIKE FOR US

Months 1–2: setup and first creators. Slow. Months 3–4: the system started compounding — more creators, more posts, first record days. By month 6 we knew which creators drove revenue and put real ad spend behind their content. Growth from there wasn't a spike — it was a grind that compounded. Over 50% revenue growth in one two-month stretch. Eight all-time record days. Sixty percent of our tracked revenue coming from creators.

None of it required luck. All of it required the system I'm about to give you.

THE VOCABULARY (SO THE REST OF THIS GUIDE READS FAST)

- **GMV** — gross merchandise value: the total dollars of product a creator has actually sold. The only creator stat this guide cares about.
- **Spark Ad** — TikTok's format for promoting a creator's existing post as an ad, from their handle, with their permission.
- **Meta creator ad** — the Meta version of the same play: you run the creator's video as an ad from your brand account, with a commission set so the creator earns on every sale it drives.
- **Affiliate commission** — the percent a creator earns on every sale they drive through TikTok Shop. The platform pays it out automatically.
- **Attribution** — knowing which creator and which post drove each sale. This is the feedback loop the whole system runs on, and most brands don't have it.

THIS WEEK'S HOMEWORK (15 MINUTES)

1. If you sell a physical product and you're not on TikTok Shop, start the seller application today — approval takes a few days and everything else waits on it.
2. Write down your unit economics: product cost, price, margin. You need to know what commission you can afford (we'll use this in week 2 — 15% is a common starting point).
3. Go find 3 competitors in your niche on TikTok Shop and note who's posting about them. That's your first look at your future creator pool.

Next week: how to find creators who actually sell — and the one number that matters more than followers.

— Jake