



“Tell me again about how I can shop online and have gifts delivered without leaving my office.”

Ghost Kitchens | Social Media

OBSERVATION: TikTok is partnering with a company called Virtual Dining Concepts to introduce physical TikTok Kitchens for delivery only. Approximately 300 spots will open up at launch, with more than 1,000 planned by the end of 2022. Some of the restaurants that TikTok Kitchen operates out of will be existing restaurants, including Buca di Beppo and Bertucci's. The menu, which will change every three months, will focus on the most viral food trends on the TikTok platform, and the social-media company claims it will share profits with the creators of those viral food dishes and will also invest in new talent. (*TechRadar*, 12/18/21)

COMMENT: If you have an established brand, it has never been easier to open a restaurant via the use of ghost kitchens. The bigger news in this announcement is that TikTok will share profits with the creators of the meals on its menu. In the recent “True Influence” *inFocus*, we examined how creators are the driving force for social-media engagement. TikTok apparently recognizes where its bread is buttered.

Telemedicine

OBSERVATION: The Australian federal government has announced it will invest over AU\$100 million to make telehealth a permanent fixture within the country's healthcare system. Since early March 2020, more than 86.3 million COVID-19 Medicare Benefits Schedule telehealth services have been delivered to 16.1 million patients, with AU\$4.4 billion in Medicare benefits paid. Additionally, more than 89,000 providers have used telehealth services. (*ZDNet*, 12/12/21)

COMMENT: Telehealth is one of numerous uses of technologies to benefit from COVID-19 and one that will continue to grow even after the pandemic ends. In Australia, the government is ensuring such growth with funding.

Livestreaming | Retail

OBSERVATION: Walmart, which is hosting live-streamed shopping events on TikTok and more than half a dozen other social media platforms, announced a deal last week with TalkShopLive, which will allow viewers to buy what's appearing on-screen, without being redirected to another page for purchase. (*Pymnts*, 12/14/21)

COMMENT: Walmart and TalkShopLive are eliminating the friction from live-streamed retail and playing into the consumers' desire for convenience, simplicity and speed. If it works as well as the two companies claim, we suspect this technology will be adopted by others, and that it will help propel live-streaming sales in the West.

Fuel Cells | Auto

OBSERVATION: In 2020, South Korea was the top market globally for sales of passenger fuel-cell vehicles at 5,786, or less than one percent of total auto sales in the country, and compares with the number-two hydrogen vehicle market, the U.S. at 937. This year from January through September, Hyundai sold about 6,400 of its hydrogen-powered Nexo model, and it exported about 875. That compares with about 87,000 battery-powered EVs the company sold globally over the same period. The South Korean government gives buyers almost 50 percent subsidies on the hydrogen cars themselves, while also giving large subsidies to commercial bus operators and owners of refueling stations. Hyundai now plans to produce 500,000 hydrogen cars annually starting in 2030. (*Bloomberg Businessweek*, 12/6/21)

COMMENT: The South Korean government and its biggest automaker appear to be going all-in on the promise of hydrogen fuel-cell technology for transportation. The investments for subsidies and fueling stations will need to be substantive over the long term for this carbon-neutral transportation option.

Ransomware | Healthcare

OBSERVATION: A ransomware attack on Brazil's Ministry of Health (MoH) websites resulted in the unavailability of COVID-19 vaccination data on millions of citizens. According to a message left by the Lapsus\$ Group, which has claimed responsibility for the attack, some 50TB worth of data has been extracted from the MoH's systems and subsequently deleted. "Contact us if you want the data returned," the message said, alongside contact details for the authors of the attack. (*ZDNet*, 12/12/21)

COMMENT: Healthcare systems have been among the most targeted in ransomware attacks, and now the Brazilian government doesn't know which citizens have been vaccinated. Hackers continue to get more brazen, and at the moment, there seems to be little to deter them.

Gen-Z | Drug and Alcohol

OBSERVATION: Drug and alcohol use among U.S. teens saw a record decline in 2021. Researchers recorded the largest single-year drop in the use of substances such as alcohol, marijuana and vaped nicotine among teens since the annual survey by the National Institute on Drug Abuse began in 1975. The percentage of teens who had ever used any illicit drug other than marijuana dropped by more than 25 percent this year. There were also significant declines in the use of drugs including cocaine, hallucinogens, tranquilizers and prescription opioids. The survey also asked students about their mental health and found that students across all age groups reported increases in feelings of anxiety, depression, loneliness and worry. (*USA Today*, 12/16/21)

COMMENT: Despite mental health issues, fewer teens turned to drugs, alcohol or nicotine for escape from their problems this year. With kids out of school for some parts of 2021 and many

more parents working from home access may have been one reason for the decline. This is a bit of good news amidst a continuing rise in psychological distress.

Traffic

OBSERVATION: So far this year, individual U.S. commuters are on schedule to lose 36 hours to congestion, which is 10 hours more than 2020 but 63 hours less than 2019. (*The Week*, 12/17/21)

COMMENT: We suppose that's progress. We hope instead of sitting in traffic that you and your families have a wonderful Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

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