



Global Tone of Voice Guide

LAST UPDATED: 04.07.2026

2026

**How we engage
audiences is built on
our brand positioning.**



To other platforms, streaming is about filling time. To us, it's about stories that stick with you.

HBO Max delivers the “oh shit” moments that keep the world talking.

Truly Original.

Going our own way in the face of doubt.

Crafted.

Always created with intention & purpose.

Fan-Obsessed.

As passionate as our viewers and followers.

Quick-Witted.

Culturally relevant & clever.

STRATEGY + STORY = STYLE

This document is here to help us better connect with our fans by mastering the art of telling the stories of The World's Greatest Stories in any medium, around the globe.

Voice is the written expression of brand identity.

We make stories that stick with you. Our copywriting should stick with you too.

As writers, our responsibility is to think creatively and strategically about every single word to deepen our emotional connection with our audience.

The HBO Max Voice is:

The ultimate insider,
yet can relate to anyone

A truth-teller, sharp, naturally funny
without trying too hard

A thinker who makes you think —
and makes it fun

An earnest enthusiast
who brings out your inner fan

Tone is how our voice adjusts across various contexts

Use the slate words on the following pages to convey our voice in specific use cases.

Truly Original

THOUGHT-PROVOKING

INSIGHTFUL

TRUTH-TELLING

ASTUTE

• **NOT: Broad, Exhaustive, Vague, Universal**

Our brand talks about stories in a way that makes you think twice, whether a joke about last night's episodes that raises your eyebrow in the best way or a surprising new take on a classic that restarts the discussion.

Crafted

PERCEPTIVE

WORLDLY

INSIDER

CONFIDENT

-
- **NOT: Populist, Effusive, Hyped-Up, Precious, Cautious, Careful**

We're plugged into cultural currents and speak the language of our audience naturally – we know what's trending, what's resonating, and why it matters. We recognize the details that make stories exceptional.

Fan-Obsessed

ENERGETIC

CELEBRATORY

CURIOUS

CUSTODIAL

-
- **NOT: Hyper, Casual, Quirky, Desperate, Cloying, Trend-Obsessed**

We love the Monday morning discussion as much as the episode the night before. The experience of fandom is why we're here, and we don't think it's cool to be detached. We might be insiders, but we retain a bit of awe for the scope, power, and glamour of storytelling.

Quick-Witted

CHARISMATIC

MAGNETIC

HUMBLE

INVITING

- **NOT: Self-Deprecating, Charming, Sweet, Edgy for the Sake of Being Edgy**

Likable and sharp, funny but not a constant comedian begging for attention, charismatic and alluring in a confident yet quiet kind of way.

Voice modulates by region, and that's ok.

Our voice is universal, but certain attributes come forward or step back depending on the cultural context.

LATAM

ENERGETIC
CELEBRATORY
HUMBLE

Why?

- Higher relative price point in region means we can't come in too confident
- Historical social hierarchies mean elite is not aspirational or desirable

APAC

INSIGHTFUL
CELEBRATORY
CONFIDENT

Why?

- Confident in the quality and content that we bring to the table and how it is our biggest differentiator from other streaming platforms
- Clear about who we are and that we are not "Something for Everyone"

US

INSIGHTFUL
CELEBRATORY
INSIDER

Why?

- Quality legacy is our biggest differentiator from other studios
- Still course-correcting from past rebrands, need to maintain some selectivity around HBO Max

EMEA

PERCEPTIVE
MAGNETIC
SELF-ASSURED

Why?

- Our EMEA audiences are super savvy and digitally sophisticated, we need to be too – and with some wit
- Cutting across so many cultures, being perceptive is key for our diverse region
- Self-assured as last to market but with magnetic energy!

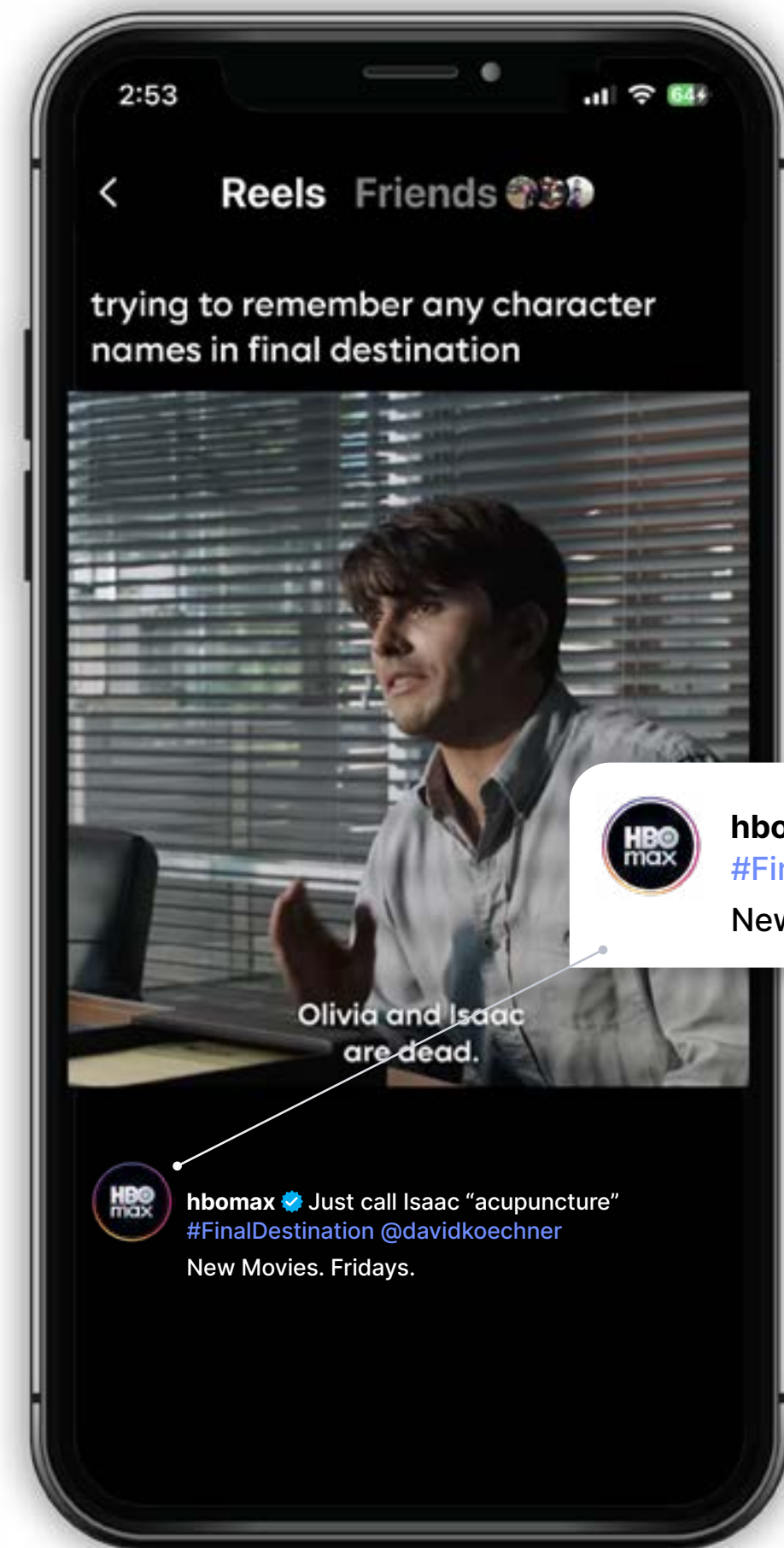
Examples

20

26



DISCUSS, ENGAGE, PARTICIPATE, AND ADD FUEL TO FANDOM

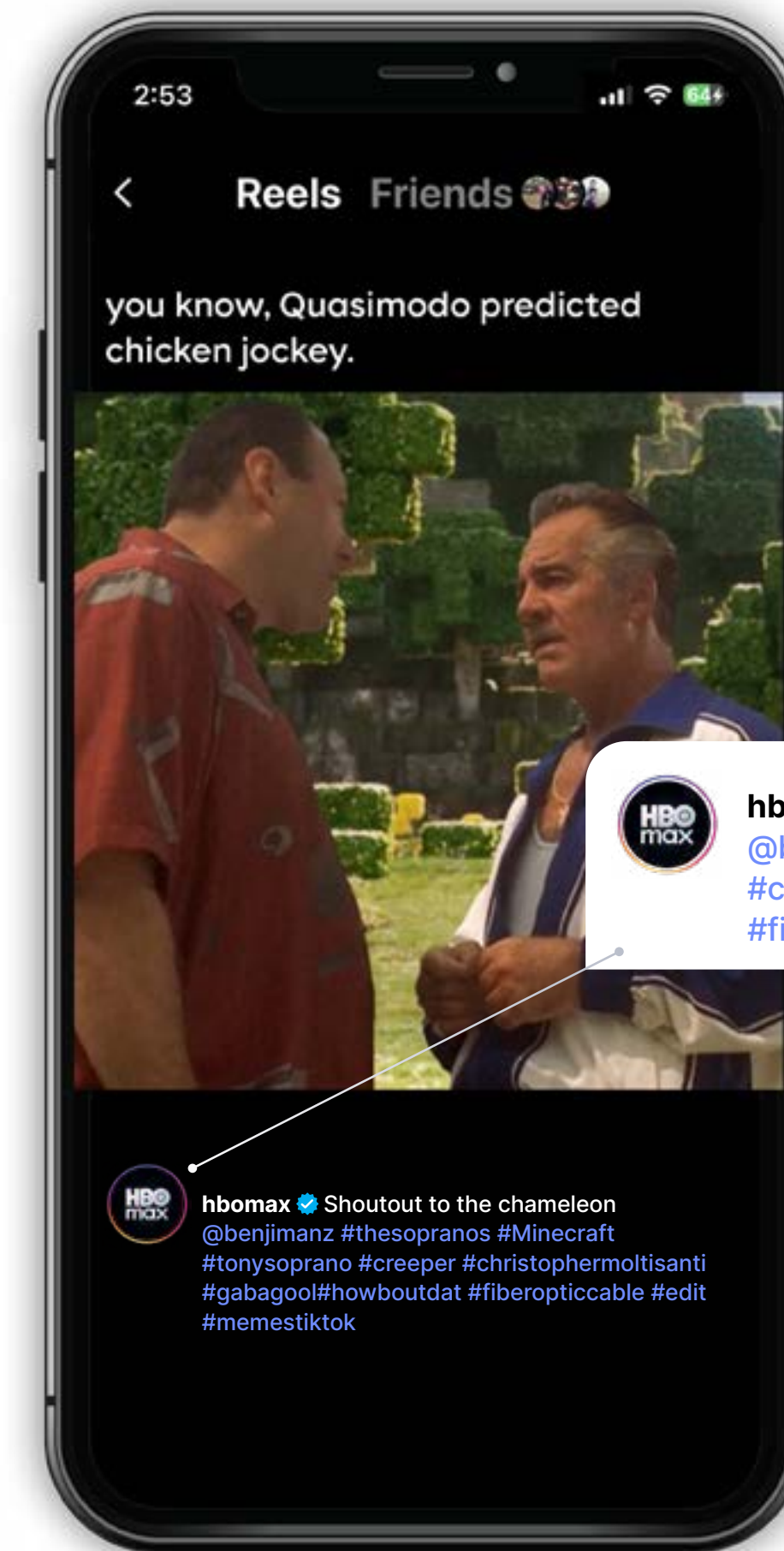


hbo max Just call Isaac "acupuncture"
#FinalDestination @davidkoechner
New Movies. Fridays.

hbo max Just call Isaac "acupuncture"
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New Movies. Fridays.



GOING BEYOND THE INTENTIONS OF THE CREATOR AND CHARACTERS

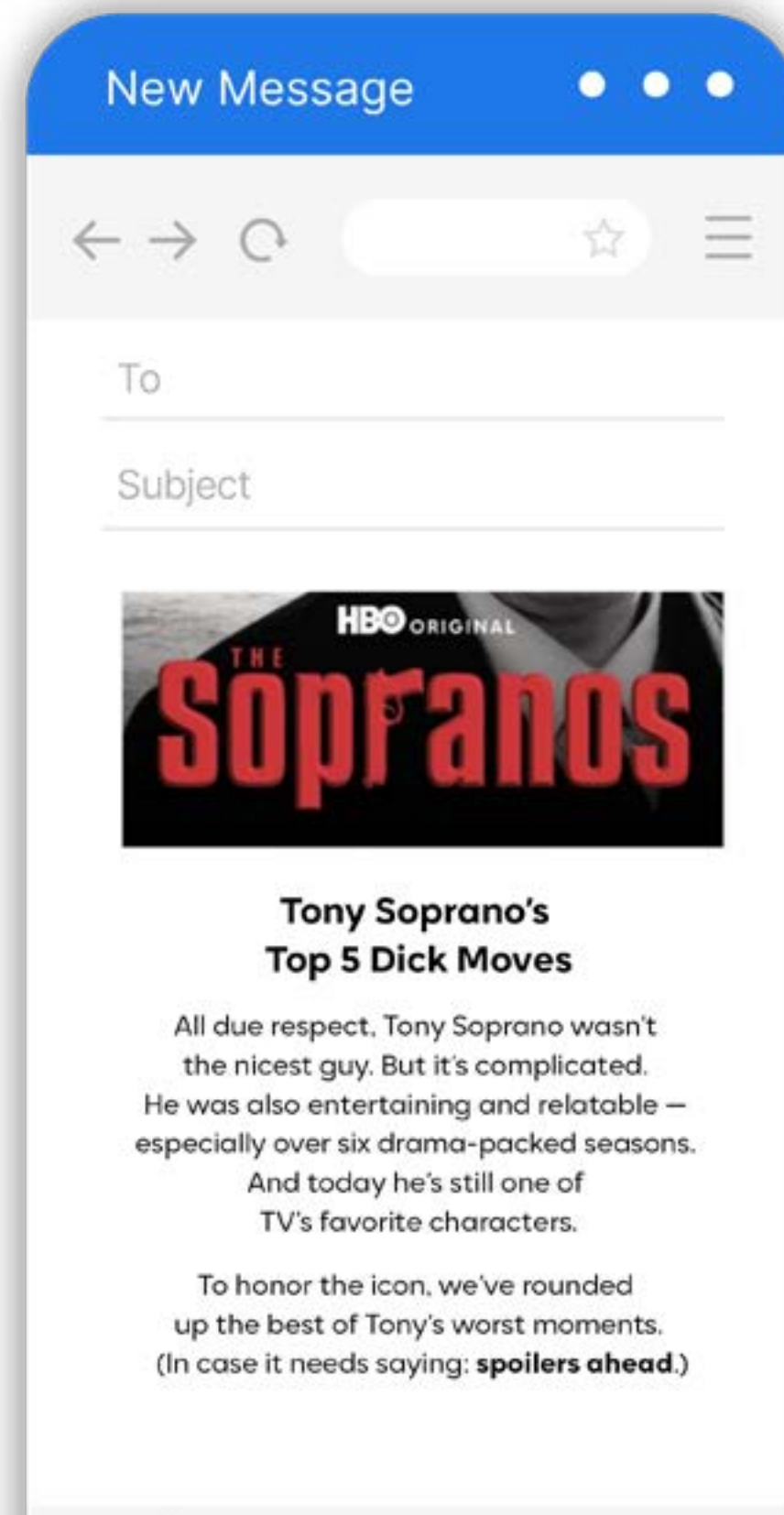


hbo max Shoutout to the chameleon
@benjimanz #thesopranos #Minecraft #tonysoprano
#creeper #christophermoltisanti #gabagool#howboutdat
#fiberopticcable #edit #memestiktok

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TRULY ORIGINAL SUBSCRIBER EMAIL

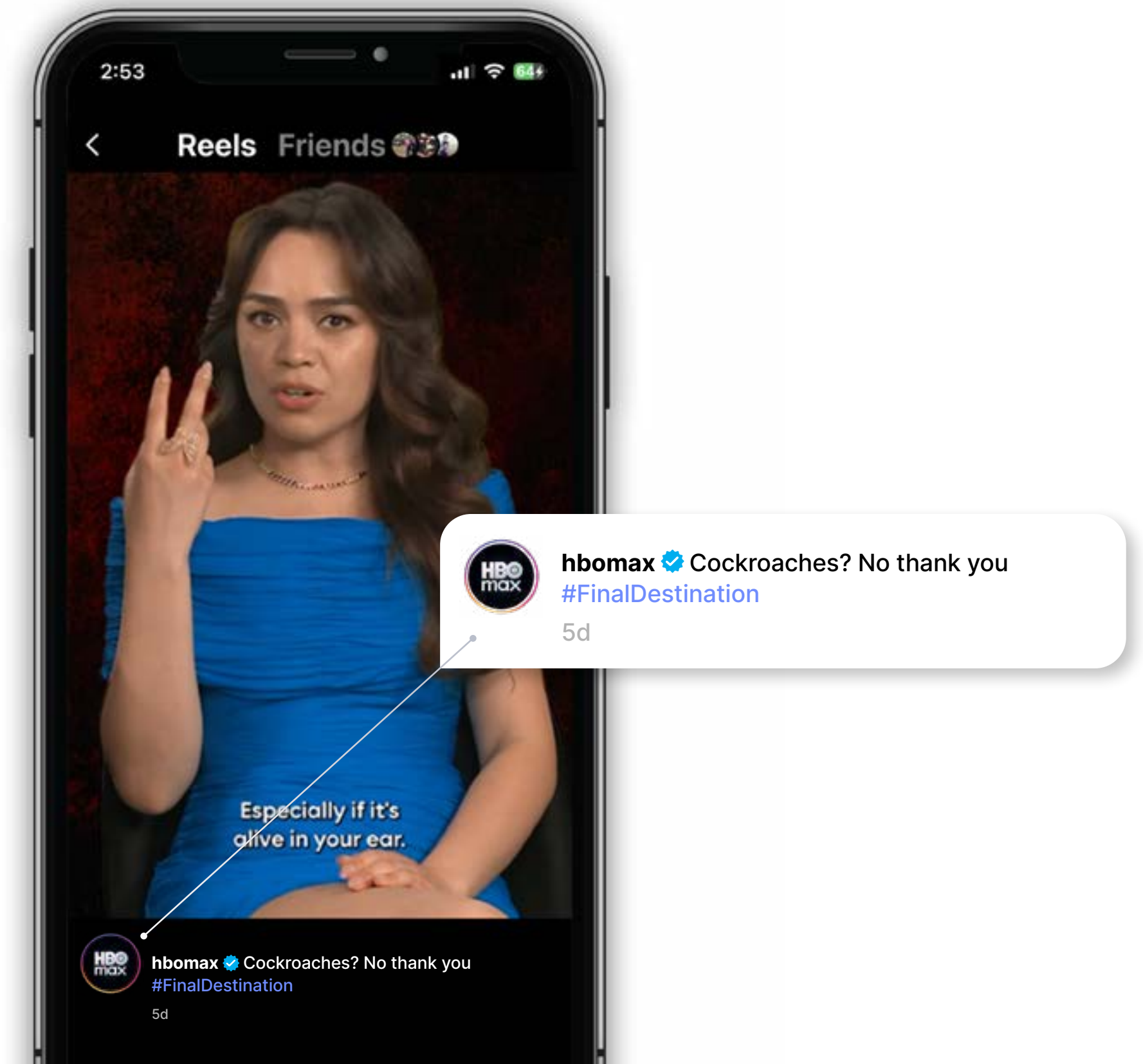


WHY IT WORKS

This copy wouldn't work in every market, but in the US, "dick moves" is a bold, surprising choice that also calls it exactly as it is. "But it's complicated" speaks to our nuanced understanding of Tony and the challenging nature of loving the show and this character. "The best of Tony's worst moments" recognizes that we love, and sometimes hate, him.



TRULY ORIGINAL US INSTAGRAM POST

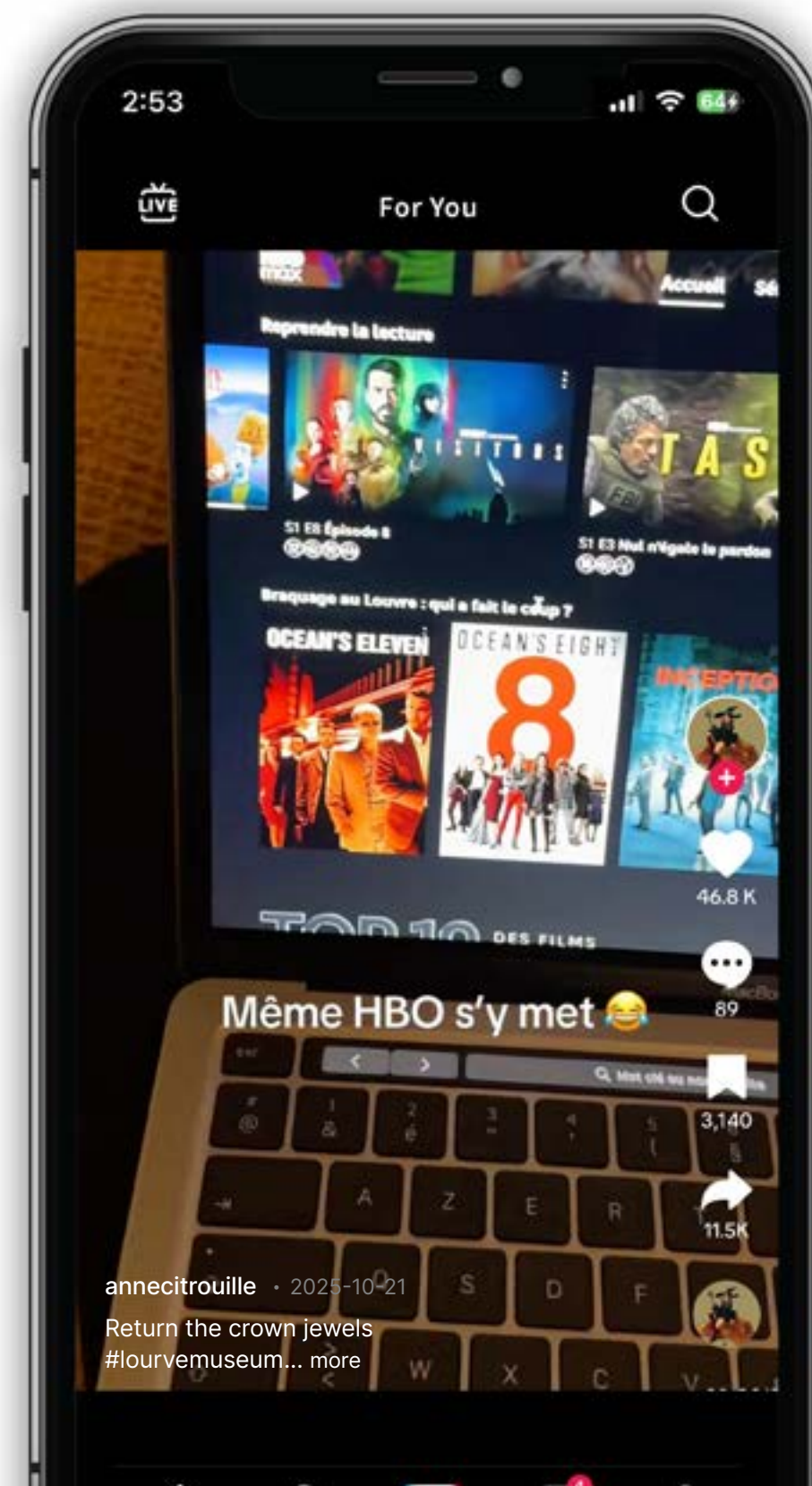


WHAT'S MISSING

This caption was a missed opportunity to be a bit more clever. Yes, cockroaches are gross — not exactly an insightful or particularly witty addition. If we can't think of a good joke or a fun reference, it could be a good opportunity to also go meta with something like "why do we continue to subject ourselves to this franchise idk but it just feels right."



TRULY ORIGINAL FACEBOOK POST



WHY IT WORKS

Plays off a timely cultural moment with clever, inviting language that drives fan curiosity and content discovery.



TRULY ORIGINAL MEDIA RELEASE

Larry David, executive producer, writer and star, quote: “Once ‘Curb’ ended, I celebrated with a three-day foam party. After a violent allergic reaction to the suds, I yearned to return to my simple life as a beekeeper, harvesting organic honey from the wildflowers in my meadow. Alas, one day my bees mysteriously vanished. And so, it is with a heavy heart that I return to television, hoping to ease the loss of my beloved hive.”

Amy Gravitt, Executive Vice President, Head of HBO & HBO Max Comedy Programming, quote: “It’s hard to remember a time before ‘Curb’, or without Larry David’s perspective on modern life. We’re thrilled that Larry is coming back to HBO, this time with Higher Ground, to give us a glimpse at our shared history as we celebrate our Semiquincentennial.”

WHAT’S MISSING

As a media release on the Press Site, it makes sense that the overall content of this release about a Larry David / Higher Ground project would be straightforward with minimal editorializing. That said, executive quotes are an opportunity to turn the voice knob up a bit. Quotes from President Obama and Larry David in this release are very funny, but our contribution is much more stale and generic than it needs to be. If we’re not comfortable with something as ridiculous as Larry’s quote above, even pushing for more unique word choice than “thrilled” and “celebrate” would go a long way.



TRULY ORIGINAL
SUBSCRIBER PUSH NOTIFICATION



WHY IT WORKS

Nice balance of title with meta brand perspective and the audience's expectations.



TRULY ORIGINAL
SUBSCRIBER PUSH NOTIFICATION



WHAT'S MISSING

Missed opportunity to reference the show, especially since this is aimed at people who've seen the entire season and would appreciate an in-depth nod.



CRAFTED
US INSTAGRAM POST

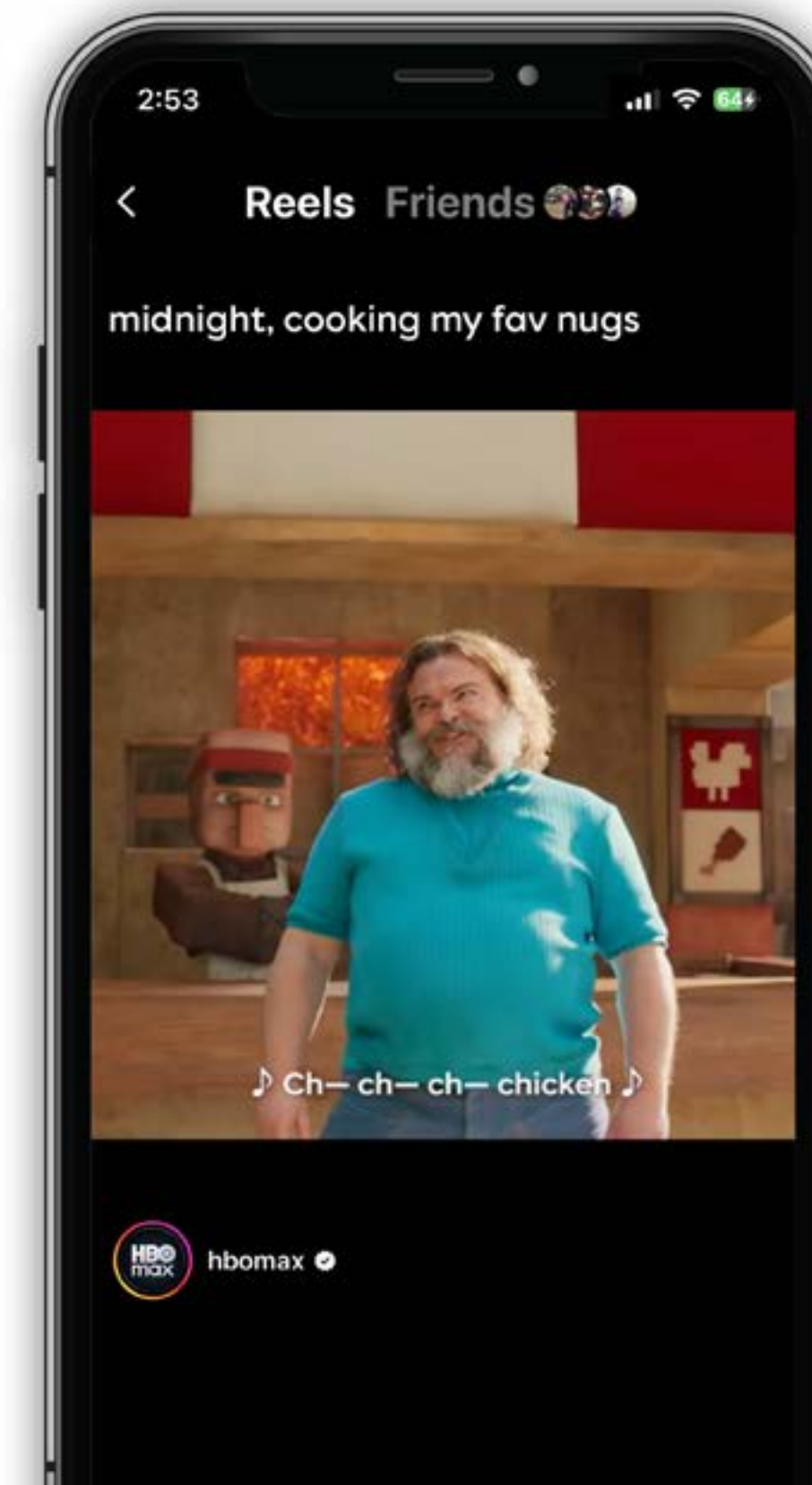


WHY IT WORKS

Very of the moment, unexpected yet on point. Winking and a little edgy about something we can actually defend – not just being sassy for the sake of it.



CRAFTED
US INSTAGRAM POST

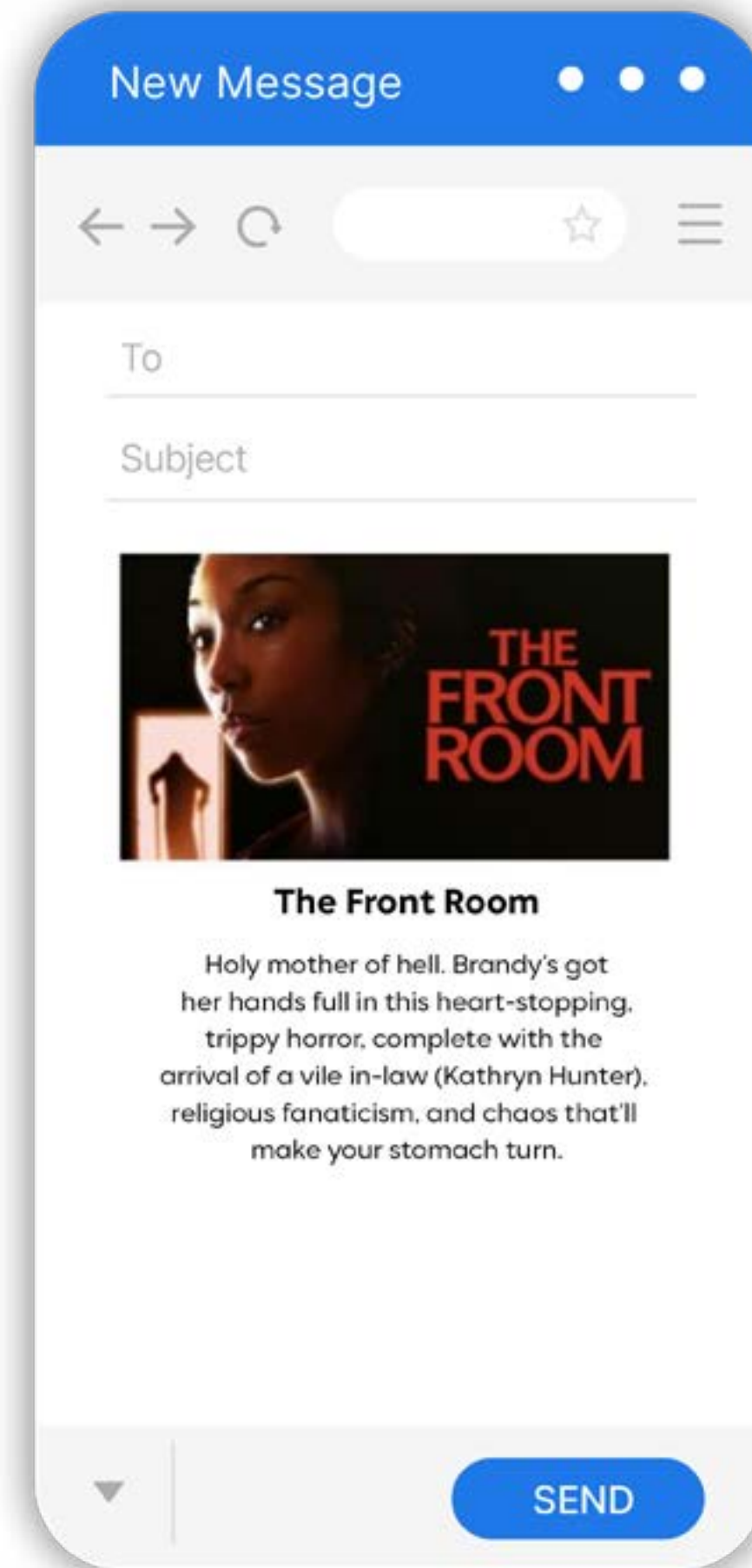


WHAT'S MISSING

Being silly isn't off limits, but this feels unintentional and random, without clear connection to our brand and status. "Fav nuggs" edges into try-hard territory and trying to sound younger than we can convincingly be.



CRAFTED SUBSCRIBER EMAIL MODULE

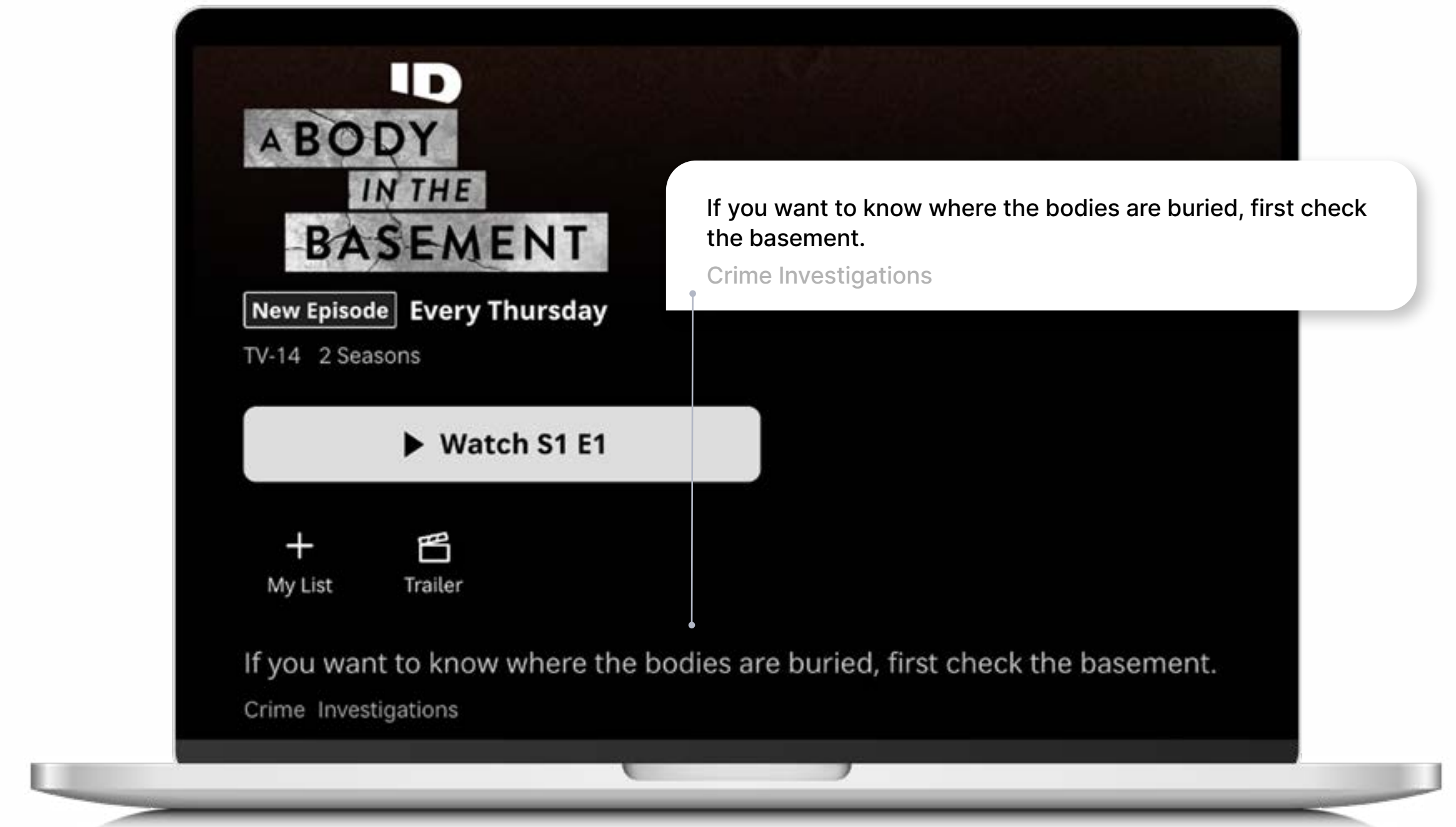


WHY IT WORKS

Unique word choice makes this description more memorable.



CRAFTED .COM SYNOPSIS

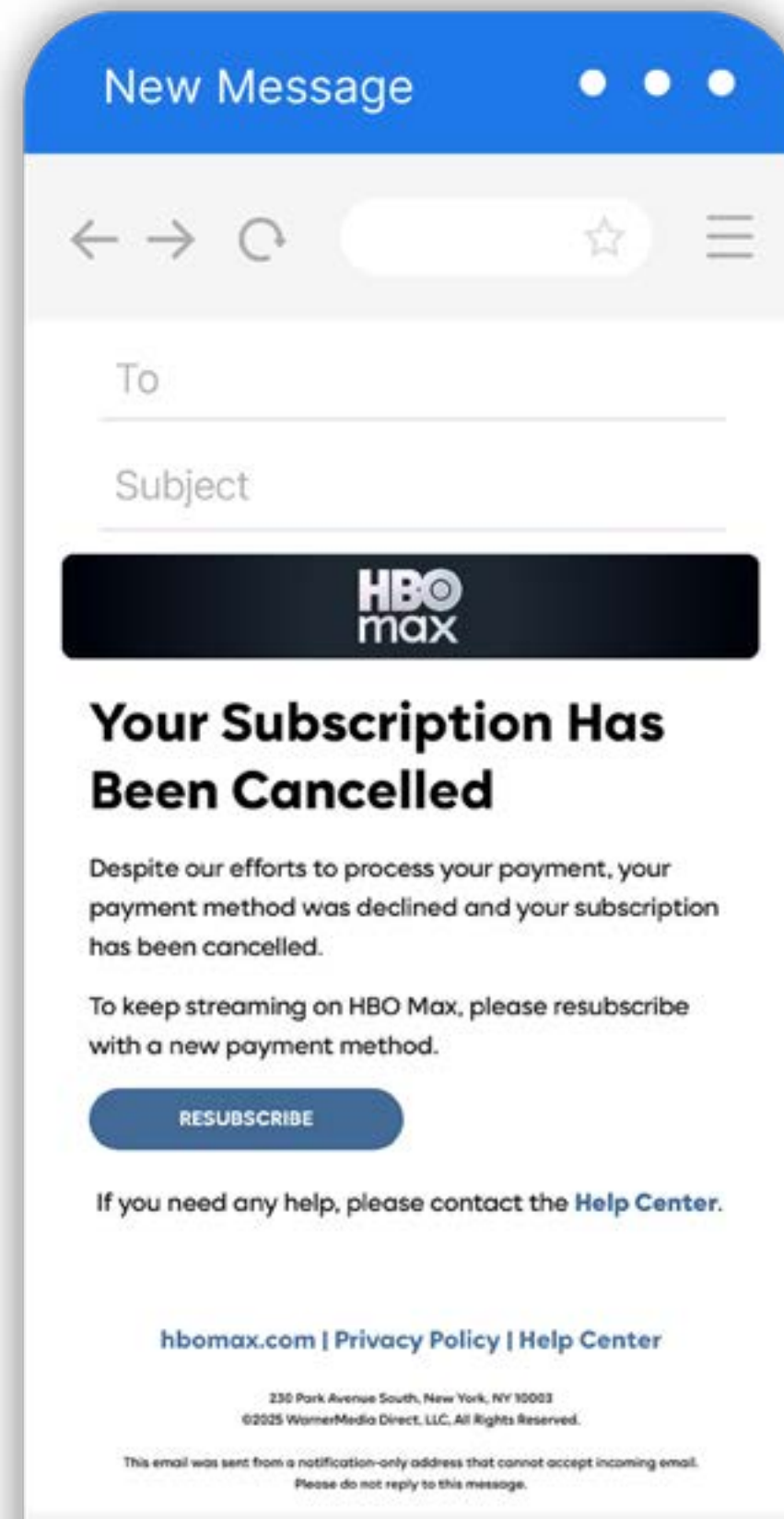


WHAT'S MISSING

This description copy is too simplistic both in content and word choice. It doesn't do anything to help the audience make a decision, is not creative enough to be intriguing, and doesn't particularly reinforce the belief that our recommendations are made by experts who've actually engaged with a title.



CRAFTED CRM EMAIL

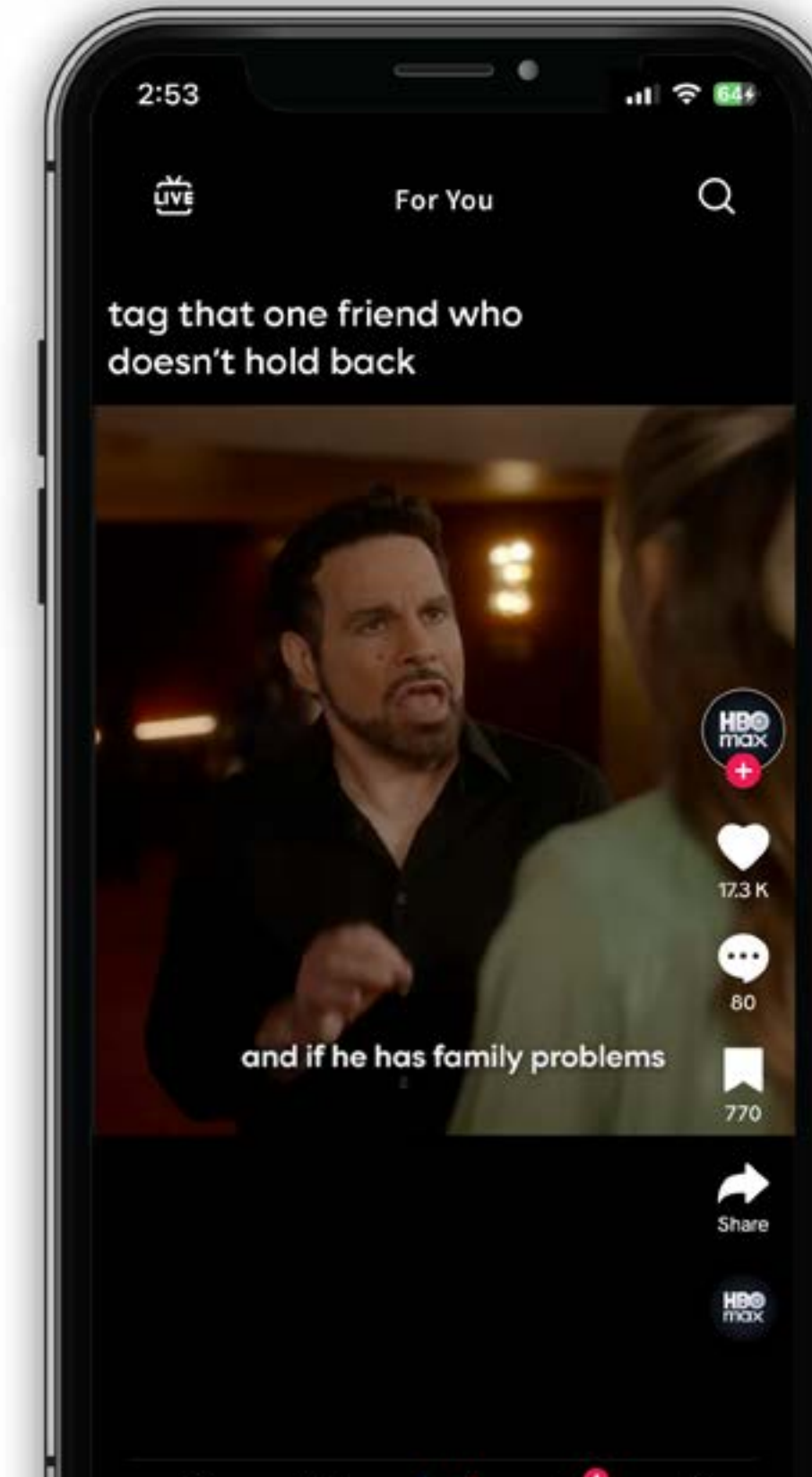


WHY IT WORKS

“Despite our efforts” confirms we’re doing our part. “Resubscribe” is specific and detailed to the situation. “If you need any help” isn’t cloying or desperate, we’re here for you but not begging you to come back.



CRAFTED US TIKTOK

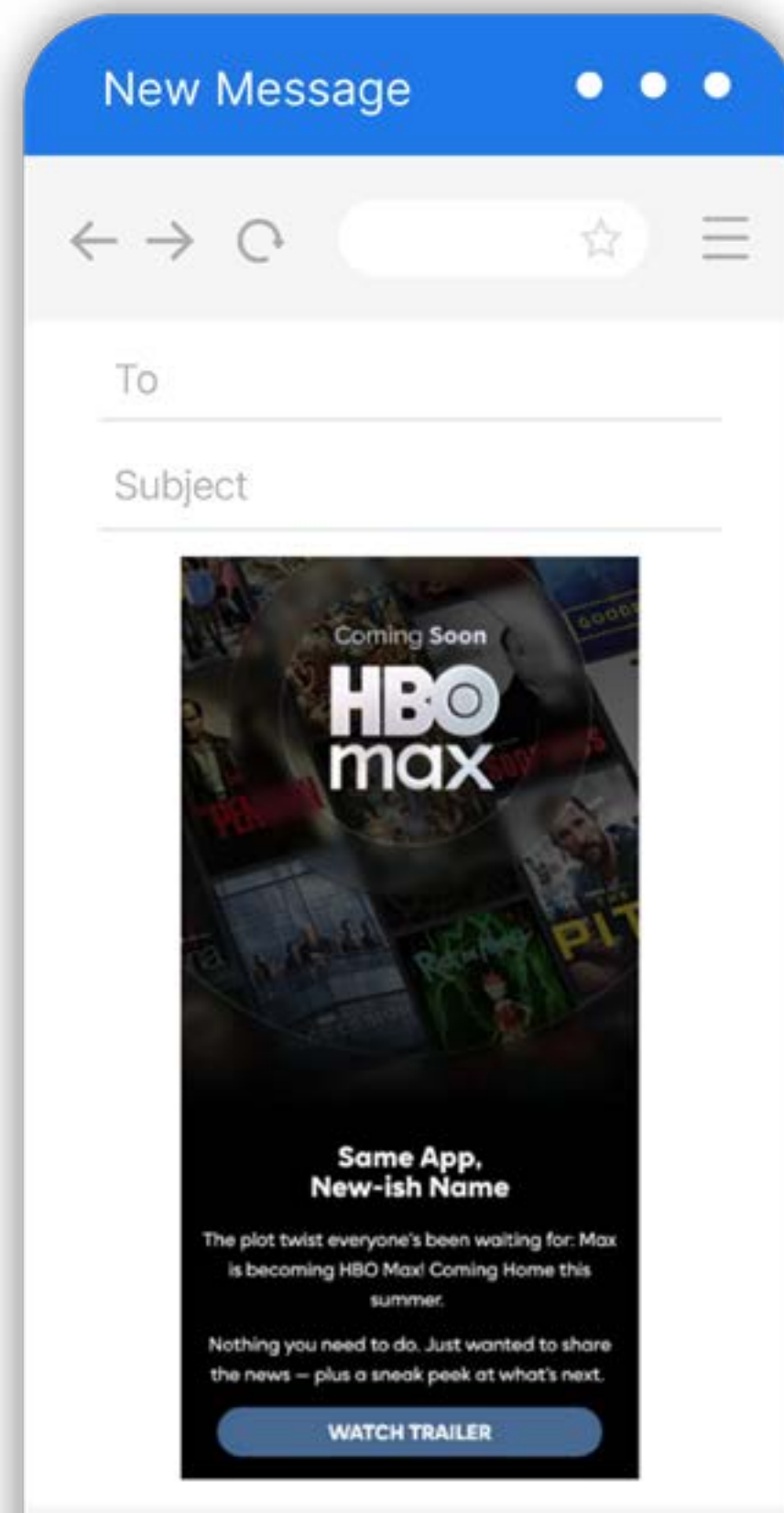


WHAT'S MISSING

“Tag that one friend” is a little thirsty, and feels fellow kids-y.



QUICK-WITTED SUBSCRIBER EMAIL

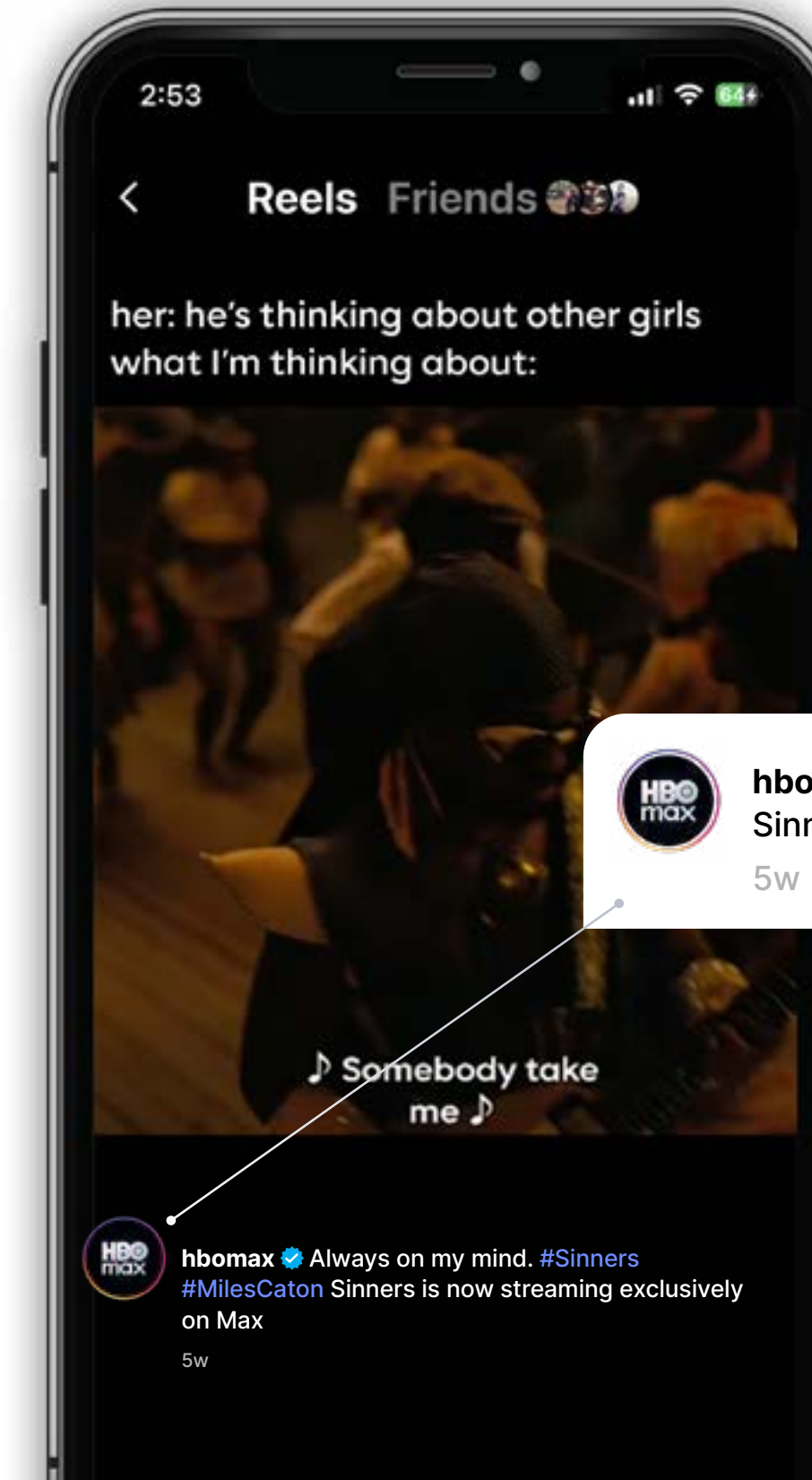


WHY IT WORKS

“New-ish” is honest without being apologetic. “The plot twist everyone’s been waiting for” is clever and ironically self-aware without being self-deprecating. “Nothing you need to do” puts us in a position of control in what could otherwise be a messy situation.



QUICK-WITTED US INSTAGRAM POST

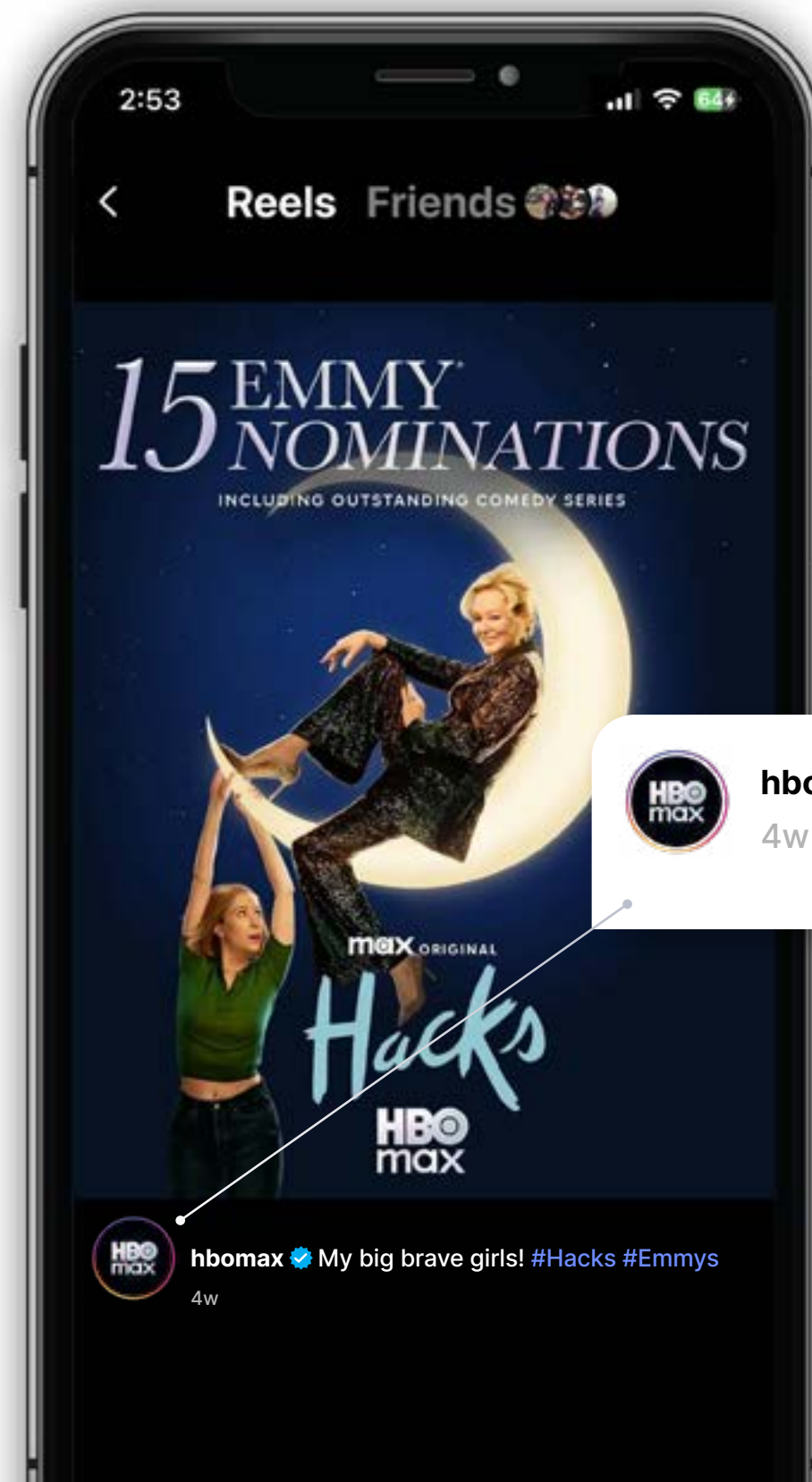


WHAT'S MISSING

The use of “I” in the video text feels like a cloying attempt to be more human than brands should expect to be in 2026. Simply rewriting as “what he’s thinking about” could be equally as effective. The casual text in the video doesn’t match the formal promotional text and hashtags in the caption, making the video feel inauthentic.



FAN-OBSESSED US INSTAGRAM POST



hbomax My big brave girls! #Hacks #Emmys
4w



hbomax My big brave girls! #Hacks #Emmys
4w

WHY IT WORKS

Caption perfectly balances brand credit with respect and love for the show, while referencing the world / voice of the show itself.



FAN-OBSESSED US INSTAGRAM POST



hbomax What happens in Thailand, doesn't stay in Thailand #TheWhiteLotus #Emmys
4w



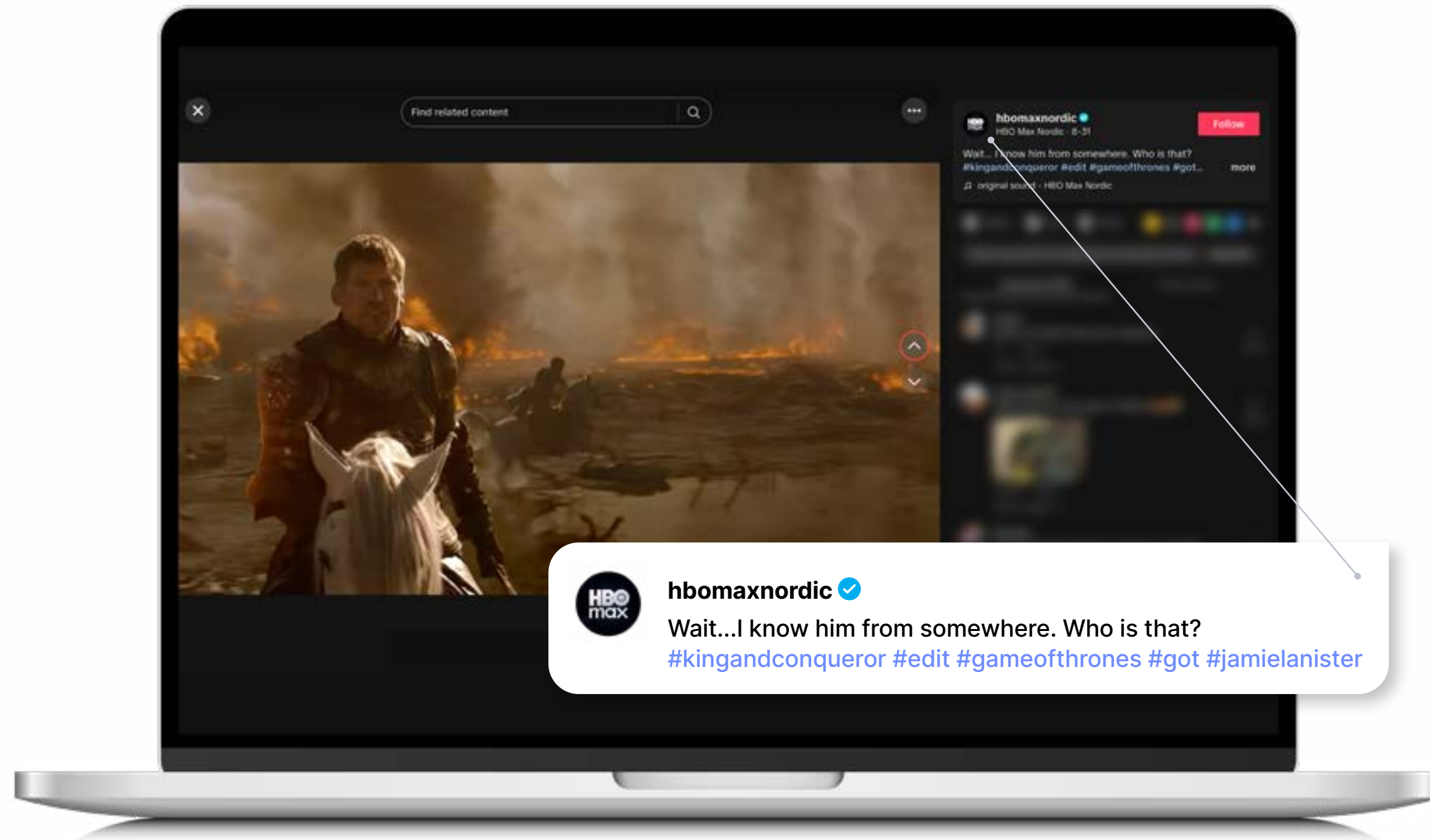
hbomax What happens in Thailand, doesn't stay in Thailand #TheWhiteLotus #Emmys
4w

WHAT'S MISSING

Caption is a missed opportunity to speak to the ongoing phenomenon of The White Lotus. Lacks gravitas and punch, feels almost like an offhand / low-effort comment on arguably the biggest show of the year on any platform.



FAN-OBSESSED NORDICS TIKTOK POST

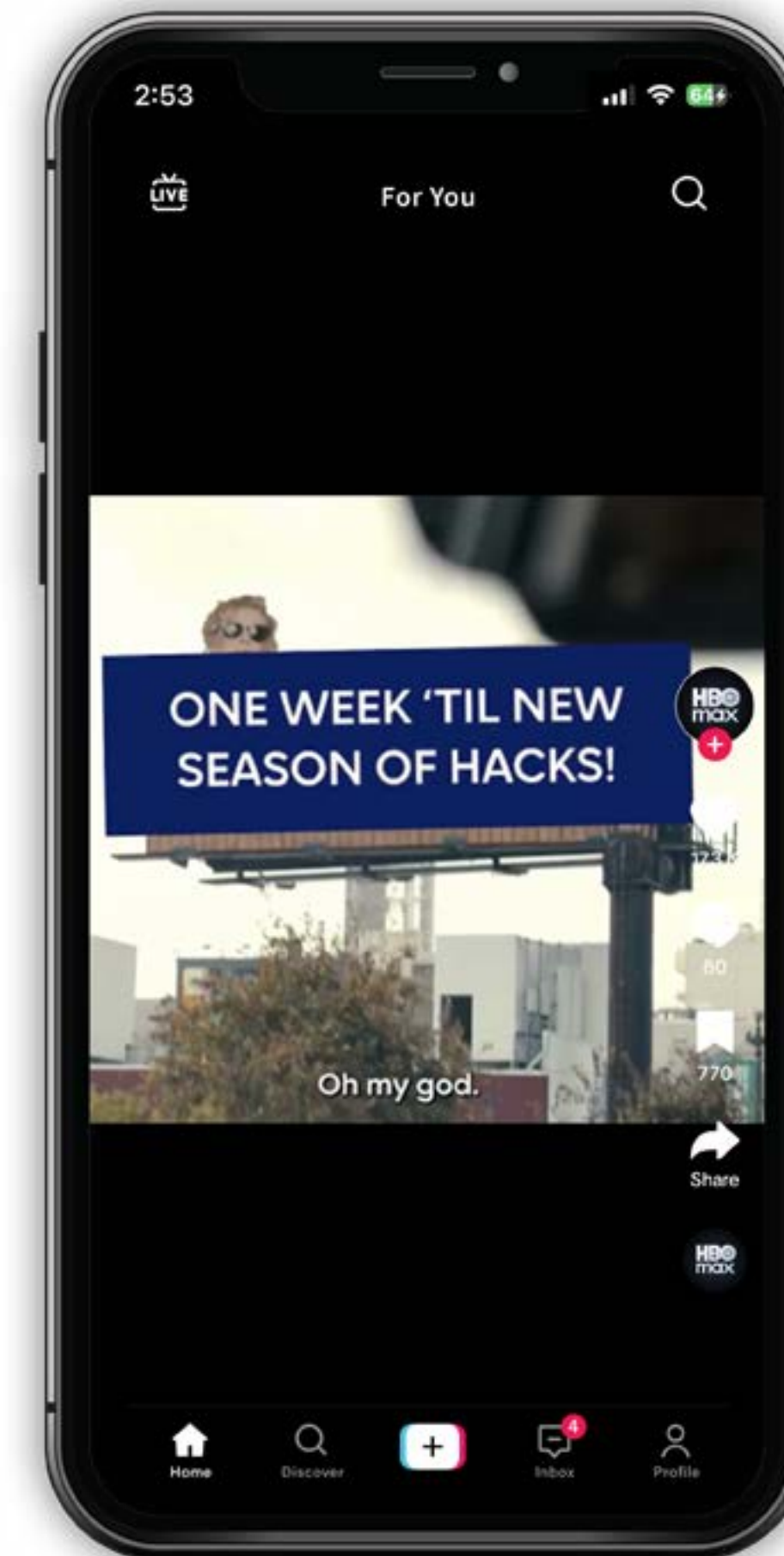


WHY IT WORKS

The combination of the spoofy fan edit video style, “Jamie Fookin Lanister,” and the ironic post copy is a lively and winking approach that is in line with how the fandom talks about Jamie and the show generally.



FAN-OBSESSED US TIKTOK POST

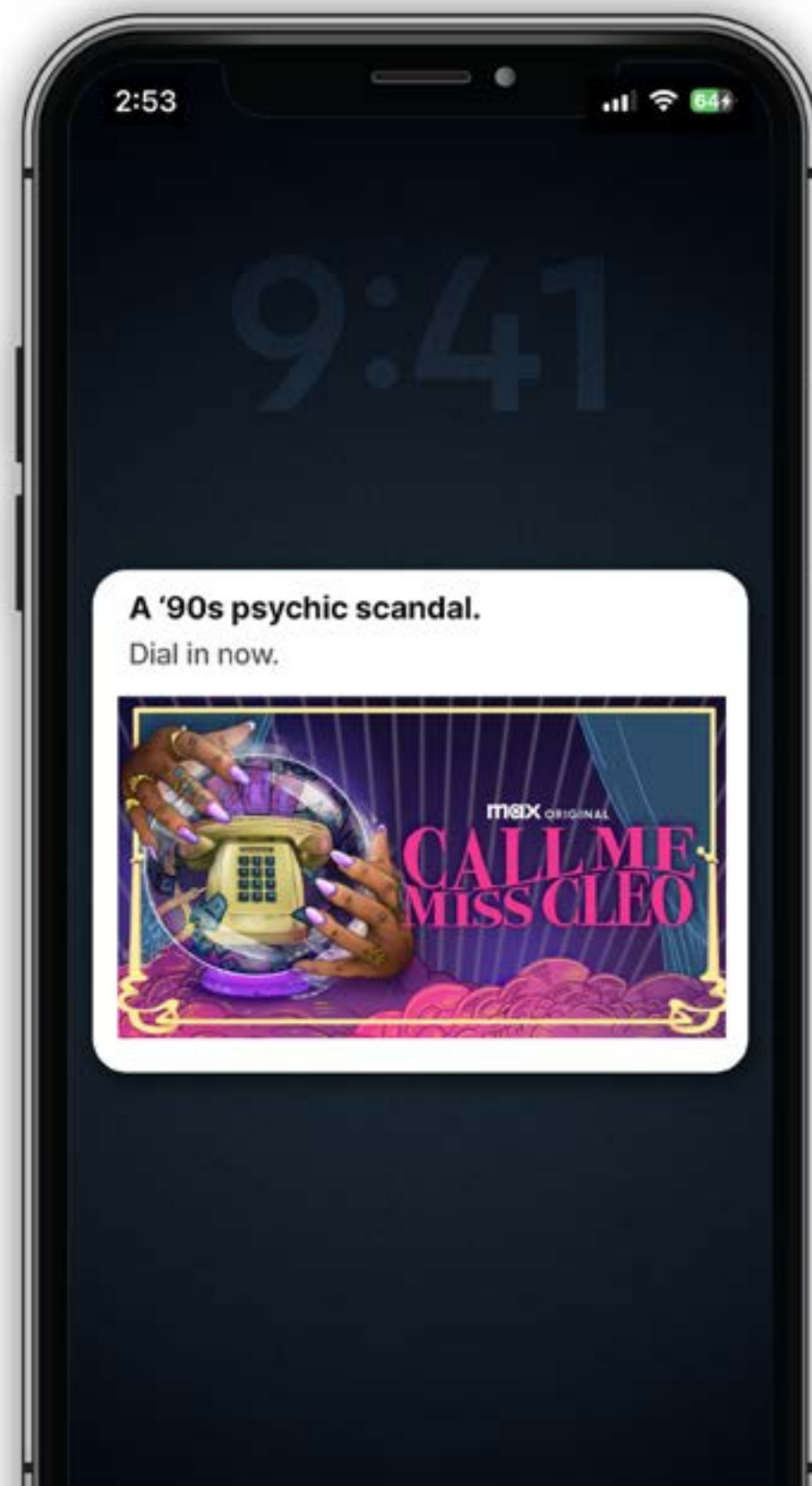


WHAT'S MISSING

While the intentionally shit-post-y creative is funny, the promotional copy in this context is overly fawning and effusive.



FAN-OBSESSED SUBSCRIBER PUSH NOTIFICATION



WHY IT WORKS

Referencing the famous line plus use of “scandal” gives it a campy, fun feel.



FAN-OBSESSED SUBSCRIBER PUSH NOTIFICATION



WHAT'S MISSING

“Grab the popcorn” feels dated and bland, “Your new horror favorite” separates us from the audience and doesn’t offer valuable or memorable commentary.

When to write in Title Voice vs. Brand Voice

We should always write in the brand voice with inflections of the show.
The brand is able to use the show voice because we are the ultimate fan.

Top Tips for Expressing the HBO Max Voice

Say it like you mean it.

- Better to be memorably bold to a few than forgettably palatable to everyone
- Cut out caveats, parentheticals, and explanations
- Don't water down words to appeal to a lowest common denominator

Believe in your reader's intelligence.

- Trust that readers have great taste and can make their own choices about what to watch
- Don't use pushy phrases like "everyone's talking about" or "don't miss"
- Respect the role of specific audiences like industry or journalists to do their own editorializing

Honor the work.

- Consider the goals of a title and creator first, then connect to trends and funny ideas
- Know your lore deeply
- How would it feel to be the actor featured in a piece of marketing content?

And as always, use your best judgment.

Put yourself in the reader's shoes and think about what would sound natural, engaging, and memorable to you

WHO WE ARE

Brand

Present as a driving factor — not always explicitly felt

Values, personality, behaviors, and positioning in our industry — the extra something that makes people trust us and stay with us between their favorite stories.

HOW WE SHOW UP

Voice

Always identifiable, does not turn on or off

Expressing and illuminating brand identity through copywriting. Voice is what makes our identity recognizable with or without a logo present.

MODULATE & MIX

Tone

Adjusting voice for context

Just like a person, we read the room and code switch depending on our audience, our context, and what we want to get out of an interaction.

STYLE GUIDE RULES

Essentials

20

26

Brand Names

USE

HBO Max app

hbomax.com

Max Original

Max Originals

HBO and Max Originals

Usage Example:

Movies on HBO Max

DO NOT USE

HBO Max App

HBOMax.com

HBOMAX.com

MAX Original

MaxOriginal

MAXOriginal

Usage Example:

Avoid HBO Max in the possessive:

HBO Max's Movies

Capitalization & Formatting

General Rules

Headlines, Headings, and Subheadings

Use AP style title case for all series, movie, and episode titles

<https://capitalizemytitle.com/style/AP/>

Capitalize

- Nouns, pronouns, and verbs (including “to be” forms: *is, are, was, were*) with four letters or more
- Conjunctions with four letters or more: *because, since, although*
- Prepositions with four letters or more: *with, across, among, beyond, from*
- Proper names of nationalities, peoples, races, tribes, etc.

Lowercase

- Articles (fewer than four letters): *a, an, the*
- Conjunctions (fewer than four letters): *and, but, or, if*
- Prepositions (fewer than four letters): *at, to, by, on, in*
- *The Murders at White House Farm, Raised by Wolves*

Hyphenated Words

- Capitalize both words: *Obsession-Worthy TV Dramas, Must-See*

Seasons and Episodes

- **Season:** Capitalize the “S” and use a numeral (*Season 4*), or use lowercase “season” when using the term in a general sense: *A new season of comedy coming this spring*
- **Episode:** Capitalize the “E” and use a numeral: *Episode 2*. Where possible, use episode title instead of number. Use title case and place in double quotes: *“Whitey’s on the Moon”*
 - **Episodic trays (in-app):** The show title and episode info is required. Override text can come after that: *Friends S8 E9: Guest Star - Brad Pitt*
- **Both:** Capitalize both “S” and “E” with a comma in between: *Season 3, Episode 2*. If adding episode title, capitalize and use a colon: *Season 3, Episode 2: Limonada*

End Cards / Outros / On-Asset Copy

- **CTAs:** All caps. *NOW STREAMING, SIGN UP NOW, WATCH NOW*
- **Tune-In:** All caps
 - Date: *SEPTEMBER*
 - Day and time: *TUESDAY 8PM ET*
 - Weekly: *TUESDAYS 8PM ET*
 - Post-launch: *NOW STREAMING*
 - Genre indicator: *NEW EPISODES*

Dates & Times

General Rules



USE

Always default to regional preferences for MDY, DMY, or YMD ordering

On-asset: Abbreviate, all caps, no period. Use numerals, no space, uppercase *AM* and *PM*: 8:15PM MON JAN 4

Short-form copy, push notifications, social posts: Title case, period, use numerals, followed by a space, lowercase *am* and *pm*: 8:15 pm Mon. Jan. 4

Within text: Spell out: 8:15 pm, Monday, January 4

For sports: Include abbreviated time zones: *ET, PT*



DO NOT USE

Avoid numerical-only format (1/4/25)
Avoid ordinals (January 4th)

Months

January = Jan.

February = Feb.

March = Mar.

April = Apr.

May, June, July = *spell out*
(**in key art only**, also *spell out*
March and April)

August = Aug.

September = Sept.

October = Oct.

November = Nov.

December = Dec.

Decades

- Use an apostrophe before the decade when contracting ('60s).
Use numerals: 1970s, 1980s, 1990s; '70s, '80s, '90s
- Use an en dash to express "from...to" in years: 1992–95

Seasons of the Year: Lowercase *spring, summer, fall, winter*, unless part of a formal name: *Spring 2025, Winter Olympics*

Days of the Week

Monday = Mon.

Tuesday = Tues.

Wednesday = Wed.

Thursday = Thurs.

Friday = Fri.

Saturday = Sat.

Sunday = Sun.

Numbers

General Rules

Spell out numbers through nine; use numerals for 10 and above

- *one writer for every nine episodes*
- *one director for every 10 episodes*

Exceptions (always use numerals): ages, dates, heights, money, numbers in charts or lists, page numbers, percentages (use % symbol: 99%), scores, sizes (*size 8 shoe*), statistics, time, volumes and chapters, recipe measurements

Large Numbers: Amounts in the millions and higher should follow the one-through-ten rule: *one million, 15 billion, 3.3 million*

Ordinals: Follow standard number style: *seventh, 11th, 101st*.
Do not superscript ordinals

Numbers in Sentences

- Sentences with both large and small numbers do not use numerals consistently:
There were more than 200 applicants for seven positions
- Write out general numbers and numbers used in casual expressions:
a hundred years ago; a thousand times no
- Never start a sentence with a numeral—unless a year starts a sentence: *1968 was an interesting year*, but try to avoid this. If a number must start a sentence, write it out or recast

Money: Usually in figures, but round sums can be spelled out: *\$5.99, 5 cents, \$1 million, \$3.26 billion, a million-dollar suit, a hundred dollars*

Hyphens & Compound Words

General Rules

When to Hyphenate: Use a hyphen to join words that combine to modify another word: *vampire-inspired wardrobe, stress-related condition*. Unless the reader would have trouble reading or understanding the word, omit the hyphen, especially for permanent compounds: *high blood pressure, dining room table*

- Don't hyphenate adverbial compounds (most words ending in -ly):
The highly anticipated results of the study will be released today
- In full sentences, omit hyphens between units: *5-6 minutes* becomes *5 to 6 minutes*
- In a list where an element of the modifying phrase is not repeated, use a suspended hyphen: *second-, third-, and fourth-place runners*
- Do not use hyphens to denote dual heritage, ethnicity, or religion, both as nouns and adjectives: *African American, Asian American, Turkish American, French Canadian*

Common Compound Words

No hyphen: *behind the scenes* (n.), *best seller* (n.), *catch up* (v.), *center stage* (n.), *follow up* (v.), *health care* (n.), *kick off* (v.), *log in* (v.) *sold out* (v.)

Hyphenated: *behind-the-scenes* (adj.), *best-seller* (adj.), *best-selling* (adj.), *catch-up* (adj.), *center-stage* (adj.), *follow-up* (n., adj.), *health-care* (adj.), *sold-out* (adj.)

Closed: *dotcom, kickoff, homepage, multimedia, login, logon, logoff, onscreen, offscreen, onstage, offstage, soundstage*

Prefixes: In general, close up prefixes: *costar, coworker, minibike, miniseries, overachieve, postscript, semifinal, superstar, superproducer*

Exceptions (use hyphen)

When the prefix would create repeated vowels: *anti-inflammatory, multi-instrumental*

- When followed by a capitalized word or numeral: *pre-Harvard, mid-1994*
- When it would create a homograph: *re-cover* vs. *recover*
- When there is more than one word: *pre-latency-period*
- When referring to a great family member: *great-grandfather*
- Always hyphenate: *quasi-, self-, half-, all-*

Links & URLs



USE

Learn more at [hbomax.com](https://www.hbomax.com)

In running text, use the full URL without “http://” or “https://” when the protocol isn’t necessary for clarity



DO NOT USE

Learn more at <https://www.hbomax.com>

Email and Digital Copy

Make URLs clickable whenever possible rather than displaying the full link

Use: descriptive link text instead of raw URLs

Do not use: Generic link text that doesn’t provide context

Link Text Best Practices

Use descriptive, specific link text that tells users where they’re going. Don’t use generic link text that doesn’t provide context

“Read the full interview with the cast”
“Explore the Season 3 hub”
“View your account settings”

“Click here”
“Learn more” (unless more specific context is provided nearby)
“Read more”

Mobile-First Language

- Use “Tap” instead of “Click” for mobile-first surfaces:
Tap here to update your preferences
- Accessibility consideration: Link text should make sense out of context (screen readers often read links in isolation)

“Download the HBO Max app”

“Download here”

Emojis

Emojis function more as a design element than a way of expressing tone or feeling, which we should express through our words. They are helpful to break up text, emphasize specific information, or add visual interest

- Emojis should NOT replace words entirely unless it's an integral part of a joke
- Use sparingly and intentionally
- Consider that emoji appearance varies across platforms/devices
- Emojis should enhance meaning, not create confusion

Usage by Context

- **Social media:** More liberal use acceptable, especially for breaking up text blocks, visual interest in captions, expressing tone that aligns with brand voice. Emojis can replace the punctuation at the end of a caption to denote tone. Still avoid overuse (“emoji soup”) especially with dated emojis like 🔥, 📺, 😂, 🙌
- **Email subject lines:** Use sparingly to preserve effect, test across email clients (some don't display properly)
- **Push notifications:** Generally avoid unless testing shows improved engagement. Must render properly on all devices
- **In-app or .com messaging:** Prefer designed UI elements
- **Formal communications** (PR, Legal, Corporate): Do not use emojis

Skin Tones

- Default to neutral/yellow tone unless depicting specific people
- For user-facing content, avoid showing specific skin tones unless contextually relevant and inclusive
- When showing diverse representation, include multiple tones

CTAs & Buttons

General Rules

- Keep CTAs simple, straightforward, and brief
- Clearly and literally reflect the experience after the click
- No cutesy jokes or flowery language
- Use sparingly in marketing copy and only when they serve a timely purpose

+ USE

“Don’t miss the finale”

Requires a CTA because the experience changes if not followed. However, seek to replace “don’t miss” with something more creative and unexpected

Terms to Use

Subscriptions (Monthly/Yearly) and Plans (Basic With Ads, Standard and Premium)

Enter, Sign up

Subscribers

Free trials

Series and movies

Stream on X screens at the same time

Tap here (mobile-first copy)

✗ DO NOT USE

“Don’t miss the hit of summer”

Doesn’t require a CTA. Write around it and create urgency without pushy language

Terms to Avoid

Memberships

Join

Customers/consumers (except in legal disclaimers)

Free experience (vouchers)

Content

Simultaneous streaming

Click here

Additional & Misc Best Practices

addictive: Avoid describing an activity that someone does frequently

aka: Lowercase, no periods, no spaces

à la: Use accent but not italics

ampersand (&): Use for products, stores, TV shows, movies, and group names only if part of the official name

awards show: Not “award show”

babysitting: Don’t imply that HBO Max or TV/film in general can be used as a babysitter for kids or take the place of a parent’s job in any way

cities: Spell out state names in written text when preceded by a city: *Sioux City, Iowa*. Major domestic and international cities stand alone. Canadian cities should be followed by province and country, except: *Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City, Toronto*

content: Avoid this term entirely, it places too much emphasis on the container and devalues the craft of the story

duo: A plural noun: *The duo of writers responsible for the show are being interviewed*

first-person pronouns: Write around it whenever possible. Implying a first-person speaker is acceptable without actually employing “I” in a caption. One exception is communications that are truly coming from the entity of HBO Max as a business—“we” is not a reasonable replacement when “I” is really what we mean, but “we” is perfectly appropriate in the case of a rebrand, announcing a greenlight, or corporate comms

GIF: All caps

Internet: Capitalize, except on social

OK, OK’d, OK’ing, OKs: Not “okay”

onetime: Use as synonym for “former”

possessive: Singular proper nouns ending in “s” add only the apostrophe: *Harris’ campaign, James’ favorite pastime*. Singular common nouns ending in “s” add “’s”: *the witness’s statement, the dress’s zipper*

preorder: Not “pre-order”

registered symbol (®): Use only on the first instance a trademarked name is mentioned, preferably in the header or intro. Not necessary to repeat on every instance

series: Preferred over “show”

sound bite: Two words

Sports add-on: Not “Sports Add-On”

US (n., adj.): Abbreviation for United States in headlines

U.S. (n., adj.): Abbreviation for United States in written text

versus: Spell out in ordinary text. The abbreviation “vs.” may be used in headlines and for effect. Use “v.” for court cases

Social Media Exceptions

General Rules

- Generally, social media posts should still seek to be grammatically correct unless deliberately bad grammar is part of a joke or trend. Post copy for high-profile releases like trailer debuts and key art should adhere more strictly to the rest of this style guide, but subject to discussion with OM teams
- Use best judgment for capitalization, punctuation, hyphenation, and compound words
- Adhere to style guide sections on Capitalization & Formatting, Dates & Times, Numbers, Additional & Misc Best Practices
- Consult but use best judgment for style guide sections on Emojis and CTAs
- Encourage creative use of spacing and non-standard punctuation to make a point or a joke. *Really can't wait!!* is different from the more loaded and suspenseful *Really can't wait for this ! ! ! !*