

APRIL 2021 | ISSUE NO #1

the كرك

let's talk about social media and small food businesses





custom
cakes •
cookies
• brownies

DM @nadzbaking.ae to place an order

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STAYING RELEVANT: A POSSIBLE FEAT

Handling a business can be hard, especially when you're a one wo/man show. We all are aware of the power of Instagram, and now TikTok. One of the most prime details an SME needs to consider is not the mere use of the platforms, but the consistent challenge to stay relevant.

Given the state of the F&B industry, it is not only important to consider your sole products but also the experience you provide to your target audience.

In this issue, we had the opportunity to speak to small business owners who discovered their passion over the course of this pandemic as well as those creative professionals and social media experts that share their take on the next biggest step a small food business needs to take.



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Spillin' the T



House of Pops now delivers to Al Ain

Plant-based startup, House of Pops is now delivering to Al Ain, UAE. Orders for its products can be placed on the online food delivery company, Deliveroo or on its individual website, houseofpops.ae.

The brand is well-known for its wide range of ice lollies that are 100% vegan. All of House of Pop's ice lollies are curated using the sweetness from freshly grown fruits that come in compostable packaging, hence free of refined sugar, preservatives, gluten, allergens, coloring and additional flavorings. Being one of it's kind, House of Pops is the first and only plastic-free ice cream stick in the MENA region, as stated by them.

The ice lollies are available in 20 different flavors, four of which include keto options, four which are part of their Royal collection. Its Happiness collection is inclusive of tropical flavours such as Galactic Lime, Crazy Coconut and Tropical Fruit as well as classics like Fancy Choco, Mighty Mango and Super Strawberry. The small, now going big, business has held its stalls at the Ripe Market, Kite Beach and Al Khawaneej Walk in Dubai.

To know more about House of Pops, head to its site, Instagram page or scan the QR code:





Treat Me Gluten Free reveals collaboration

Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council award winner, Treat Me Gluten Free has launched a new collection of products in collaboration with The Cookie Bite, a home business. The collaboration features the launch of three gluten-free products: chocolate cake mix, vanilla cake mix and oat cookies.

Treat Me Gluten Free revealed its excitement about working with The Cookie Bite in a recent post: "We are thrilled to announce our collaboration with @the_cookiebite and treat you with gluten free desserts which are also food-allergy friendly and are free from refined sugar."



Treat Me Gluten Free also provides other mixes and granola packs on its site (treatmeglutenfree.com) with delivery as well as international shipping.

'Bake with Coconut Sugar': Chilly Date Spreads' new option

Chilly Date Foods, a certified gluten-free homebased business that has launched a coconut sugar option for all of its sweet treats and freshly baked goods.

The brand shared: "Coconut sugar regarded as a better alternative to refined sugar, is the dehydrated and boiled sap of the coconut palm. It contains potassium, magnesium, and sodium, which are all essential for regulating your body's water content as well as many heart, nerve, and muscle functions."

The coconut sugar option is available when the order is being placed on the start-up's website (chillydate.com) and can only be availed on sweet products such as the dairy free chocolate chip cookies or date muffins.



Signature of Sugar launches Valentine's Day box

Home based and local bakery, Signature of Sugar teased its pastel pink Valentine's day box filled with a variety of sweets.



The V-Day crate consists of two vanilla cakes with pink rose shaped frosting, two cake popsicles — or cakesicles, two baby pink-iced sugar cookies and two breakable white chocolate hearts, trending on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. All of these goodies will be topped with pink-white sprinkles.

The Greedy One gets fizzy with a new flavour

Specialised in crafting flavored kombucha and kimchi in recyclable packaging, Samantha Marshall, The Greedy One's founder reveals a new addition to her brew collection - Butterfly Pea Flower with a hint of fresh lemon juice.

The Greedy One mentions that opting for kombucha is a great alternative for carbonated drinks. Brew flavours also include



Lavender & Honey, Strawberry, Apple, Mixed Berry and Passionfruit. Orders for kimchi, kombucha and kefir can be

placed on IG. Scan the code for easy access to the account.



Shop Kitopi introduces Go! Chinese range

Shop Kitopi announces an exclusive launch to its online stores in collaboration with Go! Chinese. A range of five Asian sauces as well as pre-made meals has been launched on the grocery's website (shopkitopi.ae).

Pre-made and frozen meals, packaged in brown sustainable packages, come with three options: Veggie spring rolls, Chicken scallion dumplings and Lemongrass shrimp dumplings. Other products feature the Dynamite sauce, Mangolian sauce, Sweet and Sour sauce as well as the Chili Lime Soy dip and the Truffle Shiitake Dip, all of which are recommended to be consumed with the frozen meals.



All the Sprinkles adds to product line



Sister shop to The Sweetie Shop, All The Sprinkles has introduced two limited edition range of sprinkles for Valentine's Day. The range includes hot pink heart sprinkles and light pink hearts with silver pearls.

The start-up is also working with international shipping companies to make their products available to the ones across the globe.

Bulk buys with Saba Plant-Based

Leader in plant-based organic and vegan yogurts, Saba Plant-Based's website will now allow customers to bulk buy a pack of 12 flavored yogurts of choice using the Mix & Match option on its website (sabaplantbased.ae).

Yogurt flavour, made with fresh fruits, agave syrup and coconut milk, comprise of Mango, Chocolate, Vanilla and Plain.



Kaffir offering by Artiserie Gelato

Artisanal Crèmerie, recognised for its plant-based gelato and sorbets and conscious efforts have launched a limited edition sweet yet tangy gelato flavor, Coconut Kaffir Lime using aromatic kaffir lime leaves, fresh lime juice and pure coconut milk.

Adding to their limited edition collection are two other flavors that they are yet to announce on social media, the Very berry Basil Balsamic that pairs well with an Italian meal as well as the Matcha Lavender made with



essential oils and green tea. Orders for all its natural, unprocessed and dairy-free gelato and sorbet tubs can be placed 24 hours before desired delivery date, on its online store/website (artiseriegelato.com). For easy access, scan the QR code.

Al Barakh Dates reveals organic date syrup

Locally grown and sold, Al Barakh Dates has added 470ml Organic Date Syrup Bottles, priced at AED 9.50, to its product range. The business had teased the vegan and gluten-free product at the end of last year through an Instagram post.

Last year, the company had also launched a Date Bake Box inclusive of a pack of date sugar, date paste and date syrup that is still available for purchase. Its product line also extends to date-based snacks such as date bars in flavors like cacao and strawberry as

well as pineapple mango, strawberry and cacao date bites. All products are available for purchase on Amazon, Kibsons, Noon or its e-store on its website (albarakahdatesfactory.com).



YÛMOCHI introduces vegan options



Launched by M'OISHÎ, a well-known mochi store, YÛMOCHI has introduced a collection of vegan ice creams comprising of six flavors: Chocolate, Mango, Matcha, Strawberry, Pistachio and Salted Caramel.

Its product line is also inclusive of Japanese Granola with flavored yogurt, packaged in paper boxes are mochi which come in the same flavors as the vegan ice cream pints as well as Matcha and coconut rice dough bites.

The products are available on its e-store (yumochiicecream.com) and Instashop.

cakes, cupcakes, cheesecakes and chocolate covered strawberries!

CAKES & MORE



Dalia Cakes

10 Ways to Say 'Hi' to Your Demographics



Conquering as a small business on social media can be hard, especially when you're new to the works of networking sites like Instagram and TikTok – the platforms that keep upgrading with new features every two months. It is important to have a set list of dos for your own business. An efficacious method of ensuring that your likes, shares and followers are in proportion while also making sure that your brand equity, value and awareness are on a consistent rise and never on the downfall is by implementing these strategies. It is key for a brand's presence on social media, regardless of whether you are well-established or not.

① Consistent Posting

Many small businesses that have emerged on Instagram don't realize why there lies no interactivity with users is because of the lack of information or less posts. By posting consistently and engaging with target audience on a daily basis, one is likely to seed a stronger bond with the brand. Moreover, it's crucial to ensure that creative content should follow a certain theme that is visually alluring to those that pop by one's page. What appeals to many is the use of video, especially in the F&B industry. Instagram allows users to create Reels and IGTVs, convenient for short and long video uploads.



② Stories! All day, Everyday!

Research conducted by Microsoft in 2017 shows that human attention has dropped drastically to 8 seconds. Creating informative yet captivating content gets difficult but fortunately, Instagram allows accounts to post bits of fresh promotional content for a short time through Stories. Stories are a great way to grow an audience, especially with tools such as Location, Mentions and Hashtags. Well-designed branded content along with amusing polls, quizzes and filters are a good combination for high engagement and, breed loyalty. For small businesses with more than a handful of followers, harnessing the 'swipe up' option can do wonders. From BTS to limited time offers, Instagram Stories can deliver information without ruining the aesthetics of one's page.

③ Instagram Shopping

Instagram, being widely used across the world, has more than 200 million active accounts visiting business profiles every day, out of which 130 million make use of the Instagram Shopping feature to hopscotch their way through products that interest them. Implementing this feature increases the likelihood of businesses gaining more revenue and increasing sales. The only major downside to this strategy is that it is limited to only a few countries most of which are European. However, making use of this feature means that one is directly marketing its products to prospects that would tap into impulse purchases.



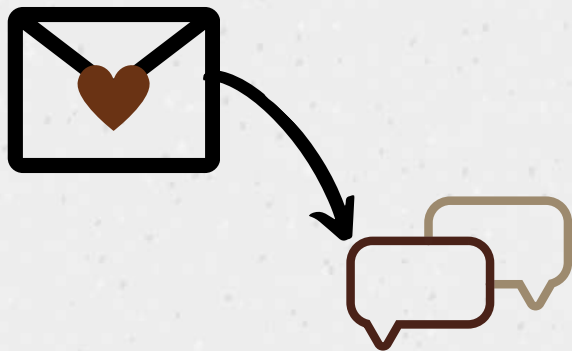
④ Collaborate with Micro-Influencers

Choosing to collaborate with specific micro-influencers that fall under your niche could help, not only reach, but also allow your audience to trust your brand. This would also count as a bonus as it will build brand awareness and authenticity when a blogger or influencer reviews your products or services and hosts giveaways with you. As a small business, understandably so, one is not expected to splurge thousands on advertising. Sending PR packages to local influencers that you think would successfully get the word out about your start-up, could deeply impact your business. It is also more affective compared to spending on advertisements.



⑤ Slide into DM's

It's all about approaching the right way! And yes, the saying remains true to this day. The first impression is indeed the best impression, so when you decide to approach a member of your audience through text, ensure that you tread the way they prefer it. Firstly, do your research on the one you will be speaking to. Are they Arabic dialects? Are you speaking to the Gen-Z? Are they the type to cut to the chase? Identify common interests and start with that - big corporations are not human, but you are! Most importantly, let your brand's essence and tone reflect in the way you speak.



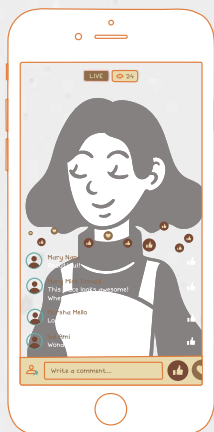
⑥ UGC and Testimonials

This may go hand in hand with the previous pointer. A good way to call out your loyal customers and followers is by posting user-generated content and testimonials. One, it shows that you are genuine and a reliable small business that are not in to give new customers a scam. Two, it shows that you are here to take criticism and customer feedback. This also means that you are hearing them out and are enforcing ways to fix the negatives. It is also likely for one to approach you after getting testimonials from a friend or relative on Instagram.



⑦ Appreciate & Support

For a small business, Thanksgiving comes when small achievements are celebrated. Be it successfully reaching 100 followers on Instagram or having sold 20 orders, or even receiving your first big order - thank and appreciate the support provided by your followers and customers. Loyalty lies in good spirit and simple pleasures. A few ways you could go about doing so is following back ardent commenters, giving special discounts for a limited time or hosting giveaways with multiple winners. And to go the extra mile, thank and appreciate other businesses that have supported you or shouted out your business.



⑧ IG Lives: Be Transparent

Nothing will get you real-time engagement like a Live stream session. Going Live is an easy yet effective method to sell a feeling rather than a product, reason being it shows the real you and why this business means so much to you. It also keeps you and your customers bound together because you decided to be transparent with them. It also proves to them that you are approachable and responsive. Live sessions are not limited to Q&As, they could also be a great opportunity to showcase a product launch, offer tutorials or how-to's. But establish an objective for the live discussion and inform your followers about it, days before it takes place.

⑨ #Hashtags

Social activity and exposure - that is why! Generally, customers look for products that they have seen online using specified niche hashtags such as **#smallbusinessUAE** or **#shoplocalUAE** for the ones looking for homegrown start-ups in the region. This issue talks about hashtags that have immensely helped small businesses to grow (see page 17), apart from the sea of posts that can be confusing. Furthermore, having a standard branded hashtag benefits one in keeping a track of how many are aware of the brand.

#SMALLBUSINESSUAE

#SHOPLOCALUAE

#LOCALBUSINESSUAE



⑩ Attention to Detail

Little mistakes and having an eye for extra details eases up the functionality of a business in the long run. Fortunately, social media is flexible enough to customise and get creative in multiple ways. When starting out, secure keywords in your biography for SEO purposes. Favouring the use of emojis and short caption lengths helps to keep the audience's attention right where it's required. Geo-tagging and perfecting your logo and profile picture are a few other elements to keep an eye out for. Make sure to make your call to action, evident by providing contact information. An unexpected extra is your involvement in social causes such as sustainable measures.

BRANDING CHECKLIST: TO GET YOU STARTED

Have you gotten your brand in order? It's essential when creative professionals such as yourself establish certain elements of your brand to safeguard its authenticity. These **branding guidelines** act as a style guide or a strict pattern when it comes to communicating your message to the audience, consistently.

☐

Mission & Vision

Define the direction of your brand. Why did you launch your brand and what do you wish to achieve with it? This would also state your USP and how you differ from your competition.

☐

Brand Values

Document your brand's core values. Draw from the past experiences you have gone through as the owner of your brand and reflect on the values you've managed to incorporate.

☐

Brand Personality

Think of your brand as a person with certain traits or particular characteristics. Example, would you consider your business to be friendly or tough? It is important for one to realize this as it helps in building a loyal bond with the target audience.

☐

Target Audience

How would you feel if a business' set audience are millennials and it decides to advertise on Facebook or MySpace? This is exactly why your brand needs to clearly state the audience - in order to curate thorough apt communication strategies.

☐

Logo

Let this act as the face of your brand. It's the first thing your audience sees when they land on your profile or website. It is of much importance that the logo format is flexible and easy to use in advertisements and packaging.

☐

Typography

When formulating a brand identity, let your values and personality mirror the typography you implement throughout your content. Minimal or quirky - you get to decide that!

☐

Color Scheme and Mood Board

Your brand's visuals need to be tenacious but they also need to follow a common pattern that resonates with the overall brand identity. This is why it is important to envision and map out your brand colors and aesthetic through a mood board.

☐

Implementation

This is not about the what; it's more about the how. Let's say you're printing out stickers for your packaging - ensure that the colors used in the logo are the same when printed. This is just an example. You can make your own rules or do's and don'ts for your little startup.



FEEDS WITH ROCKING CONTENT

Sam scrolls through her Instagram, in search for the perfect birthday cake for her daughter's very first. She finds eight bakers that bake similar cakes. In a fix, she thinks to herself: "They all look the same, maybe I'll inquire and pick the cheapest." Is this our way of telling you to be the cheapest in the market? No way! This was a light attempt at picturing what it means for a business to not invest their time and creativity on visuals.

Unlike Twitter, Instagram is such a platform that requires one to stand out uniquely amongst a million others. Obviously, this is not a game of Simon Says, so we spoke to one such small business, **Rainbow Toast**, that stood out to us most, in terms of its visual demeanor to let us in on its secrets. We also came across other eye-pleasing pages that you could take inspiration from.

Spotlight: Rainbow Toast, Dubai

Out to bring more color and creativity (and cheese) to the city, all the way from Japan, are Dubai's grilled cheese masters, Rainbow Toast. The homegrown business started off as an exciting venture with a stall at Dubai Mall's Miami Vibes Food Festival, until the pandemic hit. The owners then found the need to take to social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to get in touch with their consumers.



While the startup is known for a splashy twist on the classic American grilled cheese sandwiches, they endure a more extensive product line. This includes a local touch to the plain cheese sandwiches by topping it with Oman Chips, Flamin' Hot Cheetos and Amwaj - but the classic outsells them all. Besides the sandwiches, Rainbow Toast also deals with Mojito boxes that come in various fruity flavors including Vimto, a drink standard to UAE residents. The business had also recently launched bento cakes, an instagrammable take on a classic three-layered cake.

Although Emirati's are their key audience, a great number of kids are, much expectedly, drawn to their colorful classics. The startup has also been enthused to take on the challenge and participate on TikTok, which took off really well, say around 500,000 views. What's more exciting is that the business has been established on Talabat and Bilbayt, two trusted delivery services.

" Don't be afraid, and do not care what others say.

When it comes to building on visuals, undoubtedly, the business has piqued the interest of many due to its strong use of pastel colors and minimal layouts. The brand has managed to play around with ingredients and uncomplicated props that go well with the brand itself. This aesthetic was picked up from Pinterest by the owners: "Clean background matters a lot specially when it's food business, you want to showcase your main product. Rainbow toast is already very colorful so we had to be very careful not to mix too many things in one shot.





@picual.ae

Consistency is key, especially if you're looking to evoke trust out of your target audience. That's where Picual hit the right spot! A great way to maintain a certain approach to content visuals, is by creating a brand guidelines handbook to adhere to. One of the most consistent elements in this feed is the use of a neutral background, color of props, lighting and the overall focus on the products itself.

One of the most dominating feels of this grid is the strong representation of a holistic approach, which pinpoints the health purpose of these food products.

@honestbadgerfoods

This is a great example of incorporating text without looking abrupt and controlling. Moreover, the business has chosen a colorful appeal for its whole account. Besides the bright photos, the range of colors could depict how vegan food is not your monotonous green leafy veggies - it screams **variety**, in a beautiful way!

Honest Badger Foods has also chosen to gracefully present the testimonials without using raunchy fonts and lewd colored backgrounds that don't go well with the overall brand theme.



@threecoffee_

Three Coffee chose a theme and evidently stuck by it. The brand has groomed its feed in a way that looks friendly, approachable and **trustworthy** as well as minimalist. They also seem to lay emphasis on the product's packaging which clearly stands out as unique amongst other local roasters - so, why not flex in style?

The brand has also made brilliant use of a professional camera to cover lifestyle images and product images - from covering events to showcasing the baristas at work.

HASH TAGS

Prettying up your caption is purely in your hands as it depends primarily the context of your images, of course, ensuring that you use a friendly tone, always. Nevertheless, inserting the apt hashtags is crucial for a small business to reach more accounts. Here are some Dubai-based hashtags to make use of in each post:

#mydubai
33,412,654

#dubaifoodbloggers
271,961

#supportsmallbusinesses
3,731,353

#smallbusinessdubai
7,358

#dubaifood
1,558,268

#smallbusinessuae
5,556

Out of Ideas?

MAKE USE OF THESE BRILLIANT CONTENT IDEAS!

What's on the mind of a small business owner? Well, for starters, finances and budgeting, packaging and logo designs, getting customer feedback and "Oh my, I forgot preparing this order." One could guess how it must be handling a startup, especially if you're the face behind it all - social media, branding, packing, scheduling and, you get the point. On that premise, it's close to difficult to figure out your next content or the idea behind your upcoming posts. With that in mind, we formulated a list of content ideas for you, as small business owners to work towards (you can't be expected to only post about your product).



A DAY IN THE LIFE

"But who cares what I do?", a fair question. Trust is the reason! Letting your audience take a glance or peek at your everyday behind the scenes is one of the easiest methods of gaining their trust for your brand.

Besides, showing a different side of your business is also quite intriguing and gives your viewers or followers a deeper understanding of your background, your everyday struggles eventually humanizing your company.

This makes it less of a business to consumer conversation and leans more towards an open space for person to person real-time engagement. That transparent view also speaks a lot about your brand's culture and reveal your brand's personality - be it sincerity or competence.

SHARE YOUR 'WHY'

Why did you start this brand? What was the reason for the big idea behind this startup? What is your brand's purpose and how has it affected your life?

Might seem meaningless when you are talking about it to your audience but as you grow, you will possibly look back at your 'Why'. That poses as a big moment, and is a memorable way for you to see your progress so far.

It will also get you thinking about why you're doing what you're doing. Don't get us wrong, it's always good to remind yourself (and your followers), why this motivates you to get going right from the moment you wake up to - oh well, entrepreneurs never get any rest do they? Let this be a self-awakening moment for you.



HOW-TO TUTORIALS

If you are one such business that specializes in pre-made meals or half-prepared goods, this is a great idea. Demonstrating and showing a how-to for your products is not only a cool content filler for your social media platforms, but also a necessity.

Considering how fast-paced the growth of video content is on social networking platforms, it is an easy-to-execute piece of information to put out. Not only that, it is also a simple way to cut down on customer service requests and fosters a solid brand perception in the minds of your consumers.

It could be as simple as heating up a frozen soup or you could make it a series, if this is a product that can go well with a bunch of vivid combinations.



TESTIMONIALS

A good brand would know that asking for feedback is essential. A smart brand would know how to use that feedback to grow the trust of your consumers. You could call it lazy content, sure! But it works in your favor, doesn't it? One, a potential consumer gets quality assurance from another..

Second, if there's something that you could work towards-let's say, adding more chocolate chips in your classic cookies-you could take that feedback and work on it. When the time comes, you can let your followers know that, any and all feedback is helpful in improving the works of your business - now revealing your classic cookies with a chocolatey upgrade.

And three, it proves the validity of your brand.

RELATABLE CONTENT

Social media content could look less like 'content' and more like 'a promotion or advertisement'. That's no problem that can't be fixed without the use of relatable content. Are we talking about memes? Not entirely.

Gen-Z tend to make some of their life's challenges into light satirical humor. You're human too, You could partake in this too. Think about the storms you are faced with on a daily basis - could be a financial fix or an not-so-intense exposé of your most problematic customer approaches.

If you're scared about this content straying away from your products, you could always do a little mix and match. Playing around and getting creative with your content is not something you should shy away from. Go for it!





JASMINE JOSE

DOES FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY SELL?

Setting out to find purpose from what used to be Jasmine Jose's monotonous accountant job, she started to discover her potential in food blogging. Being born and raised in a country filled with culture, diversity and, needless to say, unique eateries and sumptuous food in every nook and corner, Jose found blazing passion for food photography which worked well for her! She is currently a successful content creator and a social media executive at one of Dubai's biggest media agencies.

After prioritizing her fascination with food photography, she remarks: "I believe that images convey a message hundred times better than words."

Her belief is that photography and strong visuals or images can truly engage and influence one to act: "Let's be honest, how many times have we seen a scrumptious dessert & driven all the way to have it?" That being said, she reasonably points out what many choose to ignore, and that is making use of photography and videography to create brand awareness. Be it product visuals, the process of making it or the ingredients used -

- all this allows your consumers to not only trust your brand but also know more about your little startup.

Obviously, with food photography, food styling and presentation is a given. Jose advises: "Understand what your brand is & the colors that pertain to your brand. Do you want bright, aesthetic images or are you looking for something moody?" A few efficient ways to fit into your brand's aesthetic is by ensuring that your brand colors match the props used in your food photography.

If you're spooked into spending a lot for props, there are better and inexpensive ways to go about it - this is where research and practice go hand in hand. Jasmine comments: "When your products look good, customers are motivated to purchase it."

Most entrepreneurs are not professional photographers or do not have the financial stability to afford one. With investing in labor, ingredients, packaging and what not, having to spend on photography equipment can seem quite ludicrous.

"Okay fun fact - You really don't need to be a professional photographer to get good images! As long as you have a camera, even a phone camera, and natural light you can take fantastic images.", Jasmine acknowledges and suggests. Another way you could do this is by collaborating with influencers that fall under your niche and are regularly participating in the sort of photography or visuals you are in search of.



Of course, another resort is to reach out to or hire photographers that fit your budget: "There are many well-established food photographers that are willing to collaborate with startups."

Agreed, there are many bloggers, content creators and social media influencers that are willing to put in their best efforts to promote small businesses and products. These collaborations not only benefit your business but are a great way to build you network leading up to creative and personal fulfillment for both parties.

It is definitely worth mentioning that Jasmine has her very own food photography account as well as a food blogging account on both Instagram and TikTok – it is called [@kala.jamoon](#) and [@jamoonstudios](#). Speaking with years of experience in F&B photography and having collaborated with a bunch of small food businesses, Jose says: "I believe that the impact created by visual storytelling is massive." She goes on to mention that great visuals turn into visual storytelling which converts into brand awareness eventually benefiting the brand in curating an emotional connection with your followers and consumers – and that itself, differentiates you from your competitor. Jose comments: ". With a strong plan in brand storytelling, you'll establish loyalty as your followers begin to associate your brand with your content."

" I believe that images convey a message hundred times better than words.

We also urged the talented photographer to let us in on her top five checks that a small food business owner could pay attention to when it comes to imagery and/or photography. This is her advice:

1. Ensure that you have ample of light to work with.
2. It is necessary to have the apt props when photographing a particular dish or product.
3. Good quality backgrounds delivery good quality visuals.
4. Click sharp images and avoid any shaky or burry mages when uploading on social media – be it stories or posts.
5. Lastly, edit. This can make or break your image. She recommends Snapseed, Picsart and Lightroom. They are easy to use and definitely help in beautifying your images.

RAPID FIRE Q&A



FAVOURITE CLICK

1) One small food business on Instagram that has aced at photography and/or visuals?

@bakedbynehla & @crumbandco.me

2) What is better – natural or artificial light?

Both got their own pros. But I'd prefer natural light!

3) Instagram v/s TikTok?

TikTok due it's massive reach.

4) Best piece of advice that got you where you are?

Keep trying until you get that perfect shot.

5) Favourite all-time photographer?

Sarah Crawford from Broma Bakery

6) Your best click so far?

This is my personal favourite image, shot during the lockdown period. Favourite because I took a leap of faith & tried something new that I shot before!

Should I consider advertising on SM?

There has been an explosive growth in small businesses on social media. However, in this day and age, posting on social media is just not enough, or is it? Let's talk about the effectiveness of paid promotions and advertising strategies for small online businesses.



Krishika Mahesh

PR & Social Media Manager at
Matrix Public Relations



Bahar Satyanarayan

Account Manager at Digital Orks Tech



Sean John

Digital Marketing Executive at
Global Media Insight

Tell us a little about yourself and what you do.

KM: I joined Matrix as an intern in 2015 and have worked hard to be recognized and promoted to several roles (account executive, senior account executive & manager). In the past 5 and half years, I was fortunate to get the opportunity to work on brands across different sectors in the region which helped me build a solid foundation in understanding different business sectors and garner a holistic insight into the ME markets.

BS: I have over 3 years of full time experience in the Digital Marketing Industry. Currently I work in a digital marketing agency i.e. Digital Orks Tech as an Account Manager. Previously, I worked at NADIA Global where I was a digital marketing specialist which meant that my work revolved around SEO, Google Adwords and Analytics, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and TikTok ads, email marketing and more.

SJ: I graduated from Middlesex University last year and I was looking into the field of business development and this position at this company came up. I was asked to handle the business development role at the company, it focuses on digital marketing as a whole. We handle social media, websites, online advertising and SEO.

Do you think advertising on social media is worth it?

KM: I think advertising on social media is effective for all business, big or small. It simply helps brands reach a wider audience. The way these ads work is – Facebook or Instagram, would organically only show your content to a select percentage of your followers. By advertising (could be small amounts, but regularly), these platforms show your content to a much percentage - of not just your followers, but potential followers too.

BS: If done right, I firmly believe social media advertising increases awareness, engagement and sales for any B2C business. What I mean by “if done right” is you can’t be advertising with a budget of AED 5 per day and expect great results. When a business is just starting out they are bound to have opening promotions; social media ads especially Facebook/Instagram ads would be highly beneficial and cost effective to attract a pool of customers and kick start your business.

SJ: It's all dependent on the budget you're open to spend. If you're someone that's just starting out, you need to reach your target audience, you definitely need to spare some budget. Because of the younger and millennial generation, and they're active on Instagram, these ads would interest them.

What do small business owners need to focus on when advertising on social media?

KM: Any business/brand, on social media needs be one thing – SOCIAL. That is the most important. The content needs to be engaging and NOT promotional. Of course, you would run promotions on these platforms, but that cannot be the only focus. We previously worked on a 66&-33% formula for our content, 66% focused on the consumer (social posts and contest posts) and 33% on the brand (products). In terms of visuals, for F&B, it should be a mix. Lifestyle visuals of people enjoying the food, ambience visuals, BTS of preparing the dishes, User generated content (reposts from people/influencers) along with just the food images. It's also important for up and coming outlets to be in touch with what's trending on social media – quirky challenges or offerings, video content etc.

BS: Our main objective from the ads is to get the customer through your door. I have seen best results when we have something for free in the ad, the cost per sign up being AED 2. I have also seen results on ads which do not promote an offer, the ad without an offer usually has a high cost of acquisition. In my experience I have seen people who come from our ads preferred to pay higher even though they can get the same service elsewhere for cheaper just because they received exceptional customer service when they came to the store location.

SJ: When you're in the food industry, the first key is to showcase the USP. Aesthetics is fine but during a pandemic, but show off your key feature. It is about differentiation! When I come on t Instagram and I see an ad, there's only two things I can do: one I'm impressed with and one that I scroll past. What you show is what matters the most. You could also show the process of preparing your food, it's a great way to build trust. It is important to stay relevant.

Do you think consumers trust businesses that advertise?

KM: They do have an advantage as they are able to reach a wider audience. Unless the ads are totally irrelevant to the audience, I think people usually are interested in it. We've seen increase in followers and enquiries on products/services because of the ads that are run on social media.

BS: Ads on Instagram have been made to look native, some would not know the difference between an ad and a regular post even though the post says "sponsored". Businesses advertising on Instagram would be reaching a wider audience, giving them the competitive advantage. Moreover, running ads on social media platforms for extended periods is necessary to instill brand awareness.

Lastly, what piece of advice would you offer small business owners on social media?

Krishika Mahesh

It's important to be social, and be real. People follow brands on social platforms, especially TikTok or Instagram, because they can relate to that brand. So it's important for the brand to be humanized to connect to their audiences.

Bahar Satyanarayan

If you got no results from Instagram advertising does not mean you should abandon advertising on the platform. If you want to run ads for lead gen and sales then you need to use the ads manager for detailed targeting options. Have a good monthly budget. Don't abandon running ads on the platform if it didn't work once. Get a professional to help you when you run ads. Provide a good offer when running ads to get the best results.

Sean John

Your ads have to be relevant. You can have different types of products and ads but what you put your money into should boost your business. You need to have a call to action and be able to measure the reach of your ads. Measuring helps in getting to know your target audience better. Know your target audience, know what they like and measure if it's truly preferred by the audience. You have to meet that standard.

PLANT
BASED
&
GLUTEN
FREE



THE ULTIMATE[↑] *Local* STARTUP SOCIAL MEDIA TIMETABLE

Let us be honest with ourselves – Instagram has taken over our mornings, noon and nights. Welcome to the club if you are also into late-night scrolling. In this respect, it is surely safe to say that we are not consuming social media; it is consuming us. To small businesses, do not worry – this is not a decent attempt at getting users to stop consuming. In fact, this acts as a major plus point.

Did you know that 57% of Instagram users are active on the application, every day? Did you also know, around 53% of UAE residents are on Instagram? This makes Instagram a great platform to build your business on because from here onwards, its only up and above!

Now if you're in search for an easy way out, here's what our research proves:

- **Mornings are the best time to upload on your Instagram feed** (and, yes, more than 80% of users check their phones within 15 minutes of waking up in the morning - early birds have a huge advantage here).
- **Generally, one is recommended to post anytime between 10AM to 3PM (GST) everyday.**

However, if you'd like to get into the specifics of uploading on Instagram and TikTok, follow the time-table below:

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Why Should I Make TikToks?

"They're just for dances."

"This is serious business, not a joke."

Sultana's Maha reminds us that times are changing.

Young and fresh out of university, Maha was in search of a job. Just then, the pandemic hit but that didn't stop her to do what she loves most. With passion in her heart and a whisk in her hand, she set out into the world of baking and built her very own homebased online boutique, Sultana's, that gradually turned into a catering business.

Do not be mistaken, she's not your usual home baker, in her words, her business is here "to reinvent the packaging wheel, one sweet treat at a time." Sultana's is more than your stereotypical cakes – it's personalized dessert boards and customized tiered cakes – be it for weddings to birthdays. Maha has managed to claw her way into the big busy world of small online businesses. She says: "I initially thought that I wouldn't be able to get the market that I've gotten so far, especially without doing anything outside of my house." Predominantly present on Instagram and TikTok, Sultana's also looking to open an account on LinkedIn.

Wait, TikTok? Yes, TikTok!

Most of us have these instilled beliefs that TikTok is unhelpful to brands or businesses – so did Maha. Even when she found it scary: "I wasn't really seeing bakers or anything besides dancers on my For You page." Nevertheless, she thought to herself, 'let's give it a shot!'. And best believe something beautiful came out of it.

Of course, this wasn't based on guesswork. She made sure to do her research before she posted her first TikTok. Inarguably, there are myriad small businesses on the program which gave the guidance she was in search of. Taking inspiration from the videos based on US-based small businesses, that are now ubiquitous on TikTok, Maha she had a much clearer hint as to what she could post yet thinking to herself: "For me to do food videos and then expect it to go viral - it seemed a bit crazy."





Let us concur to the fact that not everyone is a professional when it comes to filming and transitions. Maha did not see that as a problem. She pointed out that she would always film behind the scenes, could have been maybe five to ten seconds of her day and post it on her Instagram stories. The only difference with TikTok is that she made use of a tripod to record bits and pieces, edit that on the app and upload the finished video on TikTok. Indeed, fathoming it all out is the hardest part: "Takes a while to figure out how to film and edit, and have content that's engaging."

Does that mean she gave up? Obviously not! Her biggest 'why' is that TikTok helped her tap into a market that she wasn't able to reach on Instagram. For instance, she would receive private message or comments under her videos on how one can place an order. Getting transparent, Maha says that TikTok assisted in gaining more orders and followers, even on Instagram. She elaborates: "With TikTok, I've been able to reach the community of people that I wouldn't have been able to reach on Instagram. Honestly, the [Instagram] algorithm isn't such that I can reach so many people unless I do paid promotion so TikTok lets me do that for free."

"It just gets me on peoples For You pages and I think that it gives me a lot more eyes on my content which is what I want." Surely, understanding the Instagram algorithm is quite the task so if there's something Maha would recommend to all small businesses, it's to make use of TikTok as it is a free creative yet engaging platform: "We're people that have small communities of followers and we're trying to get our names out there and Instagram makes that very difficult unless you're a big account."

She also implies that having a set number of followers, say a hundred, doesn't matter as much because, regardless, you could still get more than a thousand views on your videos without the use of paid promos.

It gives me a lot more eyes on my content which is what I want. It's definitely one of the apps that is going to help small businesses as it works in our favor.

Would you believe us if we told you that her very first video received 91 thousand views? How's that for convincing? If you're looking for advice on how you can get started on the app, Sultana's finest has got your back.

Besides continuous learning and grasping, Maha mentions three very significant elements to delve into when uploading your content on TikTok. One, hashtags: "Using 4-5 of the most trending hashtags that you see on the app will definitely push your video on people's For You page."

Secondly, ensure that the sounds/audios you use are viral: "Whether it's someone speaking or whether it's your own voice, or if you want to just take a song that's popular, that's definitely going to help."

Lastly: "It is very important for businesses to take part in the trends and challenges that TikTok creates." Doing so enables you to potentially get a thousand or more views on your videos.

Another key piece of advice you should be applying if you're creating a business account on TikTok is to pay attention to your first post. Differentiating. That's it. There may be many like you, who are either baking or creating customized gift boxes, how do you do that? "You want to show case your business' unique selling point. You want to put your key differentiator that you have and that will just give you content that's different from everyone else who is doing what you're doing."

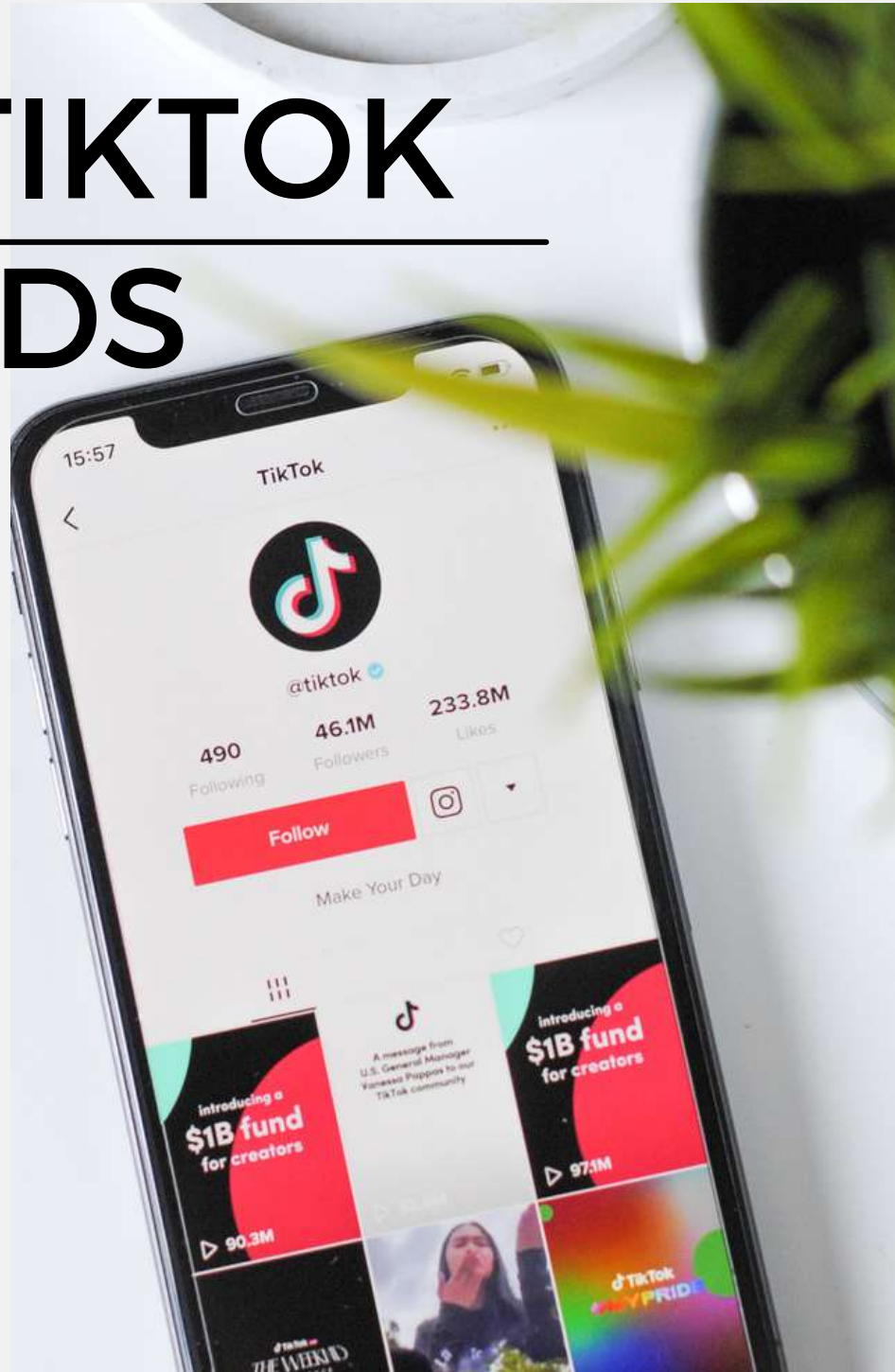
Just like Maha, get inspired by the collection of TikToks that other small businesses have created. It's true what they say: Don't make ads, make TikToks. Sultana's could be your biggest evidence that potential for startups and home-based franchises on TikTok, is on the rise, now more than ever.

TOP TIKTOK TRENDS

The biggest takeaway when we go to calculate global efforts to fight the seriousness during the pandemic and unite, while of course, having to social distance, is the rise of TikTok as a social media platform. Many but not enough small businesses in the UAE have taken to TikTok to promote their products or services.

At this point, if you want to get caught up with the everchanging trends, TikTok is the place to be. Moreover, the traction that small businesses gain from TikTok is immense and quite frankly, helpful. Moreover, being a part of the F&B industry is a major plus point - it has always been doing well and it's something that will never go out of style, per se.

We know that starting off on such a platform can be quite intimidating, so here are some trends you could hop on, to get you started.



#PackAnOrderWithMe

We would say that this particular hashtag saw potential in a 'small business' side on TikTok. The whole idea behind packing an order is to lay focus on not only the product but the over all branding, packaging and, not to forget, the sanitary precautions you ensure when packaging a customer's products. It is also an ingenious way to land on the 'FYP'.

One could also show how custom orders are packed. This also is a great way to gain engagement and trust as customers that order from you could comment their order number to which you could reply with a video of yourself packing their order.

Unboxing Inventory

Unboxing videos were a big hit in August 2020, and they still are! Big brands were able to get a lot of reception due to these videos on TikTok. This counts as organic content. These videos could reveal, to the consumers, how much effort goes into picking out the perfect packaging. Moreover, revealing your inventory could give viewers a clearer idea of the type of business you are part of, or what you sell.

If we haven't mentioned it already, catching on to these trends may show potential consumers how passionate you are about your very own startup, especially when they see how excited you are to unbox your colorful inventory and unique packaging.

Small Business Tips

Being a small business owner means a lot of things and one of them is being part of an online community of other small business founders and entrepreneurs. Studies prove that an audience is more interested in brands that are involved in social causes.

Showing support to other small businesses does not mean that your business is not worth it. A great way to support your community is by sharing tips on how you stormed through the struggles of owning a business. Some ideas include sharing where you buy your packaging, what softwares you use to create content and what one can pay attention to, when launching a business.

Oddly Satisfying

Whether its ASMR or frosting your three-tiered cake, if it is satisfying to the senses, it will do well. The history behind this concept originates from these sticky slime videos. Regardless, there are new ways to recognize this phenomenon and one is through creating food platters, plating food, packaging your product, decorating the top of your cake, a time lapse of the next batch of brownies in the oven – the list is limitless!

The hashtag #satisfying has over a hundred billion videos under it. Pretty convincing, isn't it?

Then v/s Now

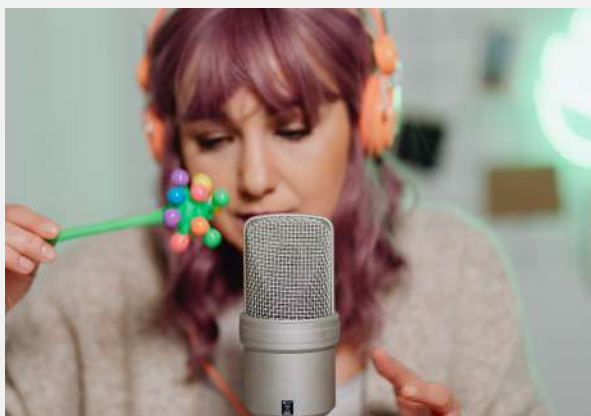
Generally, a frequent TikTok user would have come across hundreds of Then v/s Now videos. In TikTok terms, this is called a glow up. Think about how creating a visual on how your business started off, how it was at the very beginning – sort of a look back. Share your honest story, your struggles, and the challenges you faced initially.

Nothing captivates an audience like transparency and realness does. Then start revealing how it is currently working out for your business. These videos are a good opportunity to show gratitude to your supporters and followers.

Expectations versus Reality

If you think that you have reiterated your USP enough, think again! Obviously, every business is unique in their own way – you must show it, and an easy way to do it, is to break assumptions or pre-conceived opinions that one might have about your business. No better way to explain the functionality of your products than by showing it.

Are you thinking about acting on this? Step 1: go through your comments section, take note of what they say about your business and then turn that 'hate' into something productive and magical. After all, it is your business and at the end of the day, you get to be creative and make your own rules.



Kindness in Every Little Crumb

Have you heard of 3C (Clean Chunky Cookies)? The powerful trio of homepreneurs at **Kind Lyfe** talk to *The Karak* about their no-nasty cookie business.

Words by Saher Suthriwala



"We are here to give you delish goodness free from chemicals and preservatives."



The Grand Invention

What was initially determined to be a fun little experiment in the kitchen, has inaugurated into a homegrown business called Kind Lyfe, introduced and co-founded by Ruchika, Aria and Akshay Ramsinghani.

Just like most of their consumers, they too were on the hunt for guilt-free indulgences and at the time, it seemed like close to impossible to find one on the supermarket shelves that were suited to their liking. The three also recognized the need for clean snacking in the region and how there seemed to be a conspicuous shift to social and health consciousness in this fast-paced world. In search of an inventive cookie recipe that contained no nasties, they happened upon a creation that they did not expect would change their lives for the better.

Ruchika Ramsinghani shares: "The original recipe was made in our kitchen in an act of discovering something tasty that was also free from gluten, refined sugar and preservatives."

About Kind Lyfe

Since the small, now going big, brand was introduced by a family with distinctive eating habits, the recipe for each of the flavours remains consistent in its offerings. Most of their products also lay emphasis on the word raw, in terms of the ingredients being used. Not only are Kind Lyfe's cookies free from preservatives and

gluten, but they also happen to be a 100% vegan. The team said it best: "We are here to fulfill wants and needs for a healthy lifestyle without compromising on taste and cravings, giving you delish goodness free from chemicals and preservatives."

"To be the leading vegan snacking brand in the GCC and eventually globally by providing products that are clean, and being as transparent as possible with our consumers.", is their business objective.

What makes their Non-GMO and sugar-free brand so unique is not only the fact that they advocate for guiltless sweet treats but also that there are genuinely only a handful of competitors that are able to provide such an offering with the same qualities and taste at a nominal rate.

Why 'Kind'?

The team also provided us with a little insight behind why they decided to go with kindness as a lead into their clean snack brand. Kind Lyfe promotes healthy and vegan eating, and that means being kind and "respecting all life forms around us, as well as our own bodies."

And the "Y" in Lyfe, as Ruchika mentions, was a way to introduce to their prime audience that there's always an alternative when it comes to veganism: "The play on the word 'Lyfe' is to mirror the words such as 'mylk' which suggests looking at an alternate way of doing life as majority have been taught, as veganism does."

The Fantastic Four

The brand launched prior to the pandemic in 2020, that was when they revealed the fantastic four. The brand has stuck to the production of cookies so far but of course, with the right amount of variety.

The cookie base comes in flavors of four include the best-selling Raw Chocolate Dipped cookie made with a covering of actual raw chocolate. Other varieties range from The Fruit Mix which is formulated with dried apricots, cherries, pineapple, oats and pumpkin seeds, The Raw Double Chocolate Chunk and The Raw Chocolate Chunk. The cookie base is made from an array of gluten free flours, coconut sugar and oil, flaxseeds and a natural prebiotic, chicory root fiber.

Products by Kind Lyfe are conveniently available at most local supermarkets in the UAE such as Waitrose, Spinneys, Carrefour and Choithrams amongst others. These cookies can also be spotted at Barracuda Beach Resort's eateries, located in Umm Al Qwain. The brand has also extended to online stores such as Noon as well as their own independent website.

Hopping on Socials

Businesses that use social media to market their products and services obviously have the upper hand. Additionally, interacting with consumers, increasing brand awareness, and spreading messages has become an easy process and the credits go to social media platforms, especially given the adversity caused by the pandemic.

In point of fact, Kind Lyfe had no option but to choose digital methods to converse and connect with its audience. Fortunately, its target audience appears to be one that could easily be reached through the help of social media. They revealed: "Social media plays a big role in our growth as its proven to be the most accessible way to reach our target market - it allows us to set the tone of our brand and communicate what we are here for."

Speaking about target audience, the brand targets vegans, those with celiac intolerances, fitness freaks and basically anyone who is looking to switch to a healthier lifestyle. The three were also able to reach a category of family members as well as children, which counts as a plus.

Successfully, they managed to spring onto Instagram and Facebook with a strong number of followers. Instagram seemed to leverage a big chunk from the audience even before the launch took place. The brand let them in on a sneak peek which may have fruitfully intrigued them to support the three co-founders on their journey.



Slowly their content started to blend into a more informative base. In other words, they used nutrient-based information to spill out how its audience will benefit from these products.

Taking on a more friendly, positive and smart tone, Kind Lyfe continues to subtly remind its audience of the healthy edge it offers through the cookies. Primed to brand consistency is an apt way to describe the look and feel of the brand's evergreen feed. There is also a very strong depiction of each of its brand elements on the pieces of content



Social Media Tactics & PR Strategies

While the brand has not worked on any sort of integrated digital campaign, due to the complications caused by the COVID pandemic, they are soon planning to put one into action in the near future.

One of the few tactics that they made use of was proposing a contest on social media that involved consumers purchasing and posing with their favourite cookie and a peace sign. The brand would then have the opportunity to select the most creative input and gift the member 30 Kind Lyfe cookies.

Another fun activity that the brand had initiated to prompt traction from the fitness geeks was the #StayInspired20 challenge. This was a great way for gain engagement and create brand awareness.





Influencer marketing and collaborating with social media bloggers has been on the rise for a while now, UAE included. In fact, it is one of the most effective means of a brand reaching out to its audience. Kind Lyfe were marvelous in recognizing that and quickly adapting to movement in the types of marketing. Ruchika affirms: "When we first launched, we sent our products to many influencers to create a buzz." The brand has also confirmed that it will continue to do that regardless as it keeps up the hype "especially with the new products we are about to launch."

The team was able to get a hold on influencers that were popular on Instagram with a great number of followers such as Tamara Jamal, specialized vegan accounts such as Busy Vegan Dubai, health-based bloggers such as Hira and many more.

We also asked the brand to share some of its tips when it came to branding and they were generous enough to share a few that would help a small business owner in control of his or her social media account, packaging and other branding elements.

" When we first launched, we sent our products to many influencers to create a buzz.

Branding Tips from the Kindest

When a brand is positioned in a saturated market, it can tend to get lost in all the haze. But through clear and consistent branding, a brand ought to stand out. What happens when a brand stands out? Your consumers and your targeted demographics will be automatically drawn to your brand ergo, they will stay loyal to the brand all in all. High credibility and recognition are two celebrated ways to get more engagement and build brand equity. The co-founders have shared their top three branding tips to get your brand going with:

1.Create a theme and stick to it.

Think about what you would want your target audience to feel when they come across your brand, write down a few key words, and use those as foundations for creating your brand theme.

2. Go the extra mile and customize everything!

Create your own templates & spin on images using your own theme. This way everything looks unique and like your own brand rather than using something generic.

3. Be consistent

That way everything looks and feels cohesive - from colors to design - which translates the idea of your brand to the customer straight away

Challenges

2020 brought instability and challenged a lot of businesses including Kind Lyfe, that was just in its launch period when the pandemic stormed in. In the midst of such a crisis, this is how the brand best coped and made it out alive and well: "The first time we appeared on shelves was the same week of lock down here in the UAE, which also meant people were seeking the known and not at a stage to experiment with new products. We did our best to reach out through social media in order to gain brand awareness - one year later as things have settled down we are ready to be more aggressive with our sales strategies. Luckily for us, a lot of our supermarket listings went through right before lockdown - if we launched slightly later we would've missed the listing opportunity and would have had a much more difficult time." Even then mistakes were made but what did they make out of it? The three believed it to be a great learning curve and lesson, which is quite inspiring if you think about it.



"The most challenging part about growing our business was the pandemic. It created a lot of restrictions and we got denied many opportunities, especially in the food service sector, since hotels & cafes were not in a position to take on any new brands. The most fun part about our business was celebrating with each other.. The first time we saw our product on shelves and the first online sale we made, made us so happy! It is crazy to think that one day we just woke up and had this idea and have made it a reality!"

These mini celebrations are what makes small businesses stand out from big corporations. Kind Lyfe shared the advice that other small businesses might be in search for and that is, to think ten steps ahead instead of focusing on the tiny unnecessary details that won't matter to you later on. They also admit that the experience of launching your very own business does a great deal in boosting one's confidence. but they also "have grown from mistakes, giving us more experience under our belts."

Final Takeaways

The brand has disclosed the announcement of a new product customized to the needs of those looking for protein rich options. They are in the final stage of production, and will be targeting gym-goers as its key audience. They are also hoping to expand across the MENA region and eventually, introduce it to the rest of the world. The trio has also given us final tips to help out any fresh entrepreneurs when launching business from scratch: "Think about everything in different perspectives and viewpoints; Be patient, everything takes time, don't expect to see results and success straight way; and account for that will put you in a better position through time management."





#8E7863

#CEA47E

#E1C9A3

#D7BCA3

The color palette your packaging needs.

TOP
5

noon

BUYS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

AED 28.50



Foldio2Plus Portable Lightbox Studio 15inch White

Did you visual stimuli play an important role in impacting the consumer's impression of your business? Making use of a mini studio for your products are a smart yet inexpensive way to save up on professional photography costs and impress your target audience.



AED 144.00



10 inch Ring Light With Tripod Stand And 360° Phone Holder 10inch Black/White/Silver

Social media professional, Regina Luttrell suggests engaging with your audience, not only through hashtags but also through Live sessions, a great tactic that allows for more 'in the now' connectiveness. Presentability and stability are two things that you can be assured of, when going live with the use of this product.



AED 599.00



Thermal Label Printer Black

Owning a digital printer is not only convenient for all your printing and labelling needs but also works wonders to effectively package your products, especially if you have a wide assortments of products.



AED 69.00



Dessini Digital Kitchen Scale Silver

As a food business owner, precision and speed are two things that need to be focused on. They are portable and affordable in price and are an efficient way to assure the accuracy of your inventory. These instruments add transparency of your startup!



AED 45.00



500-Piece Thank You Order Label Sticker Roll White/Black White

A thank you goes a long way! This a thoughtful yet inexpensive way to appreciate you customers, followers and other businesses. Thanking your supporters are step one of building brand loyalty.





How is using LinkedIn beneficial to entrepreneurs that are fresh?

With LinkedIn, you can grow your profile very quickly and connect with people and invite them to your business. However, it is important to spend some time on a regular basis, say half an hour would work well. Your content needs to bring some sort of value, maybe if you have a café, you could post the specials of that week or even promote nutritional benefits of your products. You could personal brand yourself, also add multiple admins to your company profile and show the people behind the brand.

LinkedIn: Your Startup's Biggest Missed Opportunity

Finally, what is a word of advice for the one's starting from ground zero?

The more you're active, the better the growth and exposure for your business. To nurture and maintain your growth, you have to keep building a network that is relevant to your brand. Be active and have a good story to tell. You have to make sure you have relevant content and that you have a good narrative to explain. Regularly fly out content, connecting with comments on general topics that relate to the industry you're in. The more often you're being seen by other people, they'll start recognizing your brand - eventually, there's a lot of positive indirect affect.

There is no question that social media has changed each one of our lives. Consumers keep consuming what's provided to them on platter, well in this case, a tiny screen. Then why are we most doubtful when it comes to a professional site like LinkedIn? Many assume that the platform was created by and for white-collar employees purely for recruitment purposes, which we can partially blame traditional media for.

Nevertheless, **Stephan van Wijk**, founder of creative agency, Radical Thinking is here to change your mind! Wijk's agency has provided branding, design and technological support to brands like Lenovo, Microsoft and HP but he also has experience in building the online presence for startups that can always get lost in a competitive market.

Do you think that LinkedIn is important for small business owners in the food industry?

LinkedIn has the ability to filter down your network. It has a rare structured profile for each individual so if you can be very specific to whom you want to target. There may be some region-specific CEOs or PAs who will be aware of your campaigns. The good thing about LinkedIn is that it's free to create a company profile.

What tools does LinkedIn provide for these up and coming businesses?

You can freely and automatically invite a lot of your connections to follow your page and so, whatever content you post shows up on their feed too - eventually creating brand awareness. By doing this, you become the 1% of LinkedIn that is very active. This way the results have a better conversion than other media platforms. If you tailor the narrative then it could be a great tool to utilize without paying a lot.

■ The more you're active, the better the growth and exposure for your business.

WHAT DO CONSUMERS EXPECT?



In this month's issue, we decided to reach out to some of the consumers of small food businesses on Instagram. Why, you ask?

Customer experience and satisfaction has inevitably become a priority for businesses, big and small, all over the world. It's sort of like the make or break situation that many still underestimate. Consumers no longer rely on product quality, rather the personal experience or service they are handed, to grow loyalty towards a brand. A research performed by Super Office in March 2021 revealed that customer happiness and experience landed in a bawling 45.9% when compared to product (33.6%) and pricing (20.5%).

The Karak wanted to put it to the test, what consumers in the UAE were amazed by, in relation to the experience of buying from a small food business on Instagram. While this test was done amongst 35 individuals, it is not certain that this is what all consumers of small businesses pay attention to.



Market research is becoming extensively useful for businesses that are looking for finer ways to improve their strategies and tactics.

In this survey we uncovered how the consumers were made aware of their favourite small food business, to reflect on what owners need to work towards when it comes to adopting marketing techniques, be it influencer marketing or advertisements. Consumers also answered on whether they would recommend purchasing from such a small business and if they would be open to participating in a giveaway hosted by that particular brand. This would mirror on how satisfied the consumers were with the overall experience.

Lastly we also interrogated consumers on what they liked most about the business - packaging and labels or the content on Instagram and TikTok, or even the whole product experience.



34.2%

consumers came across their favourite small businesses through Instagram Advertisements

100%

consumers would recommend their friends, to purchase from a small food business online and would also participate in giveaways associated with the brand itself.

65.7%

LOOK FOR EXPERIENCE

- "great service"
- "love the social media content"
- "good consumer satisfaction reviews"
- "owner got friendly and got to know me"
- "easy to navigate the ordering process and website"
- "delivery was quick"
- "personalized service"

- "colorful packaging"
- "offered a complimentary cupcake"
- "they had many options"
- "clean and easy use of product"
- "elegant packaging"
- "good quality"

22.8%

LOOK FOR PRODUCT QUALITY

11.4% LOOK AT PRICING

- "comparatively cheap"
- "reasonable pricing"

looking for
BENTO

CAKES?



customized cupcakes - bento cakes - cookies



THE FAT FIVE

Books for Start-Ups

It is no easy feat to start a business from scratch however, a large bit of knowledge and motivation are of great help when you're just starting out. The concept of building fruitful strategies, contemplating how to advertise and promote, producing, delivering and after sales could seem intimidating but positively speaking, spending days with these five books may give you the jump start you were seeking:



The Lean Startup by Eric Ries

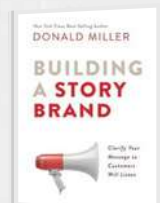
Entrepreneurs today are posed with a lot of difficulties in not just coming up with ideas

for start-ups but in terms of execution. What Ries does is carefully word out different methods and strategies that can be used by small businesses without lacking either the capital or creativity. Moreover, he weighs in on the importance of customer-feedback data and business models that lack sustainability. Speaking of business plans, the writer suggests learning from the case studies mentioned and how the instability of these unrealistic frameworks and bad leadership lead to failures. He then goes on to provide key takeaways from each example.



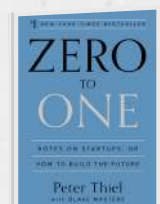
Likeable Social Media, 3rd edn by Dave Kerpen

Social media is undoubtedly a game-changer in terms of business and branding. Kerpen reveals his secret to the immense worth of word-of-mouth on social media for small businesses, especially those that need the positive exposure. Just like Ries' work, Likeable Social Media generally amplifies on how to be human and real with the loyal base you've built for your business and adding a personal touch to keep them engaged. In a world moving oh-so rapidly, being liked by every public seems impossible.



Building a StoryBrand by Donald Miller

Getting into the details of storytelling as a brand (or start-up), Building a StoryBrand is really about how to get through every element of branding. Too often, businesses are unable to communicate well with their target audience or usually tire out their demographics while explaining their objective. Bring a solution to the table, Miller builds onto a seven-step framework, which what this book is known for, that is seen as an efficient way to climb the ladder. The framework features understanding problems, providing quick fixes and bringing effective results.



Zero to One by Peter Thiel

'We're too distracted by shiny things' is perhaps one smart way to put it.

This self-help book for budding small business owners gives a hint of what capitalism is and its connection to planning a business keeping that in mind. Taking that as an example, Peter Thiel goes on to enunciate how a start-up for needs to take over a small niche market before dominating the big guns. He also expresses how most businesses fail because, regardless the quality of the product or service, if you do not take advertising or proper promotional tactics into consideration, your business is most likely going to fail.



Instagram Power by Jason Miles

Before TikTok took its place as the best social media platform, Instagram was at its sky high and still continues to be the best integrated platform that helps small business grow big. Jason Miles convinces small businesses that are struggling to hop on to the app, catch trends, figure out tactical marketing strategies and make use of all the tools provided by the channel. He also takes readers through how they can make the most out of insights, IGTV, Instagram Shopping, Stories and Ads.

VEGAN IS THE NEW BLACK

Misunderstood and misinterpreted, veganism used to be perceived as a trend picked up by the Gen Z. Mainstream media has played a big role in turning this so called "trend" into a social movement. However, that does not mean that traditional media's portrayal of veganism is veritably good.

While some have made veganism their very own lifestyle, many still view the practice as sticking to green leafy salads or limiting your intake to fruits and colorful veggies.

With an increase in influencers and bloggers that have taken to social media platforms, like Instagram and Pinterest, to share their personal favourite vegan recipes, a big lot have changed their sentiments towards a vegan lifestyle. In fact, celebrities like Beyoncé and Ellen Page have incorporated this into their daily grind and are very open about it.

Brands such as Marks & Spencer's and Tesco have introduced vegan assortments in their product line. And to those that are still not convinced that veganism is growing, here's a little some-



thing - even fast food brands had to adjust to this colossal shift in the food market. Big corporations such as Burger King, popularly known for its meaty hamburgers were, you could say, compelled to launch a meatless burger.

To summarize, veganism is taking over the food industry, especially as more are starting to realize the health benefits it offers and the fact that it's more sustainable to have a no-meat and no-dairy life.

Let's have a look at some of the most unique vegan food businesses on Instagram, in the UAE:

109
million

Instagram posts under the hashtag **#vegan** as of April 2021.

8% of the total world population has turned to veganism.

According to Live Kindly,

500,000

UAE citizens will become vegans by 2025.

20% of meat consumption in the UAE will be plant based, Arabian Business predicts.



@ildonaccino

Known for its wide range of flavors, Donaccino is a vegan coffee and donut online startup. From sweet indulging assortments such as the Milk Choco Biscoff and Choco Oreo to Apple Cider Glazed, Matcha and White Chocolate Blueberry, they've got it all!

What's more is, they also curate themed boxes for special occasions such as their most recent, Mother's Day and Valentine's Day.



@veganlifeuae

A purely vegan bakery home-based business, Vegan Life deals with a variety of baked goods including tiered birthday cakes, themed cupcakes, chocolate chip cookies, cake pops and brownies.

Additionally, the business is also known for turning all these vegan delights 100% gluten-free!

Going head-strong ever since 2017, the cruelty-free business is the perfect pick for all of your sweet vegan cravings!

Their most recent product is the vegan Date Maamoul.



@foodforsouldxb

Finding vegan cheese can be quite a struggle, especially considering the region we are in. Food for Soul, however, has favorably mastered the art of vegan cheese. How you might ask?

Besides the fact that they sell cashew based cheese, the brand has launched six exclusive flavors of cheese - Jalapeno & Oregano, Dill and Sunflower seeds, Truffle Pistachio, Zaatar, Cranberry, Walnut & Paprika, and Black Pepper.

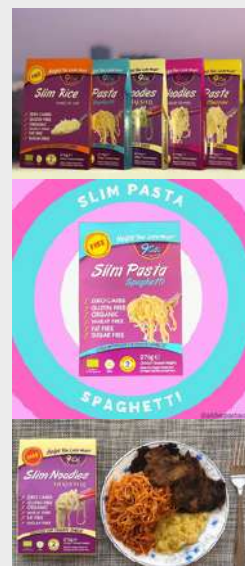
It would be equally important to mention that they also provide cheese boards that contain a mix of all these flavors, and they do vegan cheese boards with fresh and dry fruits, nuts and crackers or breadsticks.



@alldietpastauae

Keto, low in carb, great for diabetics, gluten-free and vegan? These are some excellent USP's, aren't they?

While they are well known for their pastas such as the Thai Slim Noodles and three styles of Slim Pasta, they also deal with Monk Fruit Sweeteners, Slim Rice and Quest Granola Bars.



@park.uae

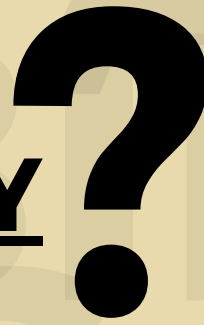
Caught onto a missed opportunity by many businesses is the recent trend of hot chocolate bombs and hot cocoa DIY boxes.

Park UAE is one such small business that hustles in hot cocoa boxes that are 100% vegan.

the boxes are inclusive of vegan marshmallows, organic cocoa powder blend with unrefined palm sugar as well as freshly made nut-based milk. Each box also comes with 6 cups so it's a great treat for vegan folks!



DOES SUSTAINABILITY SELL



According to the International Federation of Accounts, small sized entities or startups comprise up to 95% of all businesses. This automatically means that small businesses are an integral part of the global economy in terms of health as well as stability. This automatically makes your brand sustainable. But what can you do to promote sustainability as a brand and leave a carbon footprint? More importantly, why do you need to incorporate sustainability measures at your work? This is the research that we came across.

To answer the main question, yes, sustainability does sell. A lot, more than you think, alter their purchase decision because it is no longer just about the product's quality. They're in search of a brand that holds the same values as they do. Founded by multiple studies is that many consumers are impacted by the sustainability of a brand and are openly willing to pay a higher price for that extra care.

Though it may be that sustainability is not a primal decision maker, it is still a great idea to purchase something that would attract big changes.

Harvard also mentions that many of the brands assume that consumers' intentions are to buy something that would be environmentally friendly and not really but it. These assumptions are just baseless thoughts because almost a 50% of consumer goods that had seen growth from 2013 to 2018 came from backgrounds of sustainability.

In addition to this, many young eco-aware users on social media have been vocal about including green checks and managed to educate a wide audience on the term "greenwashing". This demand is not ever-growing, ergo when brand revamp their values to propagate green objectives and practices, it directly cultivates loyalty because you listened to your target market and successfully implemented it.



However can a small home-grown business bolster such green practices though? Even though most pollutants of the world are big corporations, it does not sidelines millions of other small businesses. You too are held responsible and so, you should be partaking in this environment-friendly cycle.

Let us take the example of plastic water bottles and how they've been polluting the oceans, disrupting the sea life and overall ecosystem. **NÜ Water**, a startup that was launched in hopes to create a more viable lifestyle in the UAE was successfully able to grow its business overnight. If you think about it, water is water regardless of the form it comes in. This startup shone light on the functionality of its packaging and how convenient it is to use. This carbon net positive company was able to generate and appeal to the socially conscious audience even if it meant that they would have to charge eight times the price of a regular 500ml Masafi bottle.

Moreover, they were able to involve consumers and build a friendly connection with them with their **Plant Trees With Us** motive. Furthermore, the brand is very transparent with its audience about its entire production process to avoid having the term "greenwashing" associated with their name.

Another brand that has recently started to grow in popularity because of its cutting-edge customizable packaging is **Green Agile**. The brand specializes in the production of all paper related products such as bags, boxes, cartons, table mats, menus and more. This makes it easier for the brand to get creative when it concerns packaging style. Their eco-friendly products have been utilized by many smaller locally known brands in the UAE.

Yousuf Ahmed, founder, sends out a message on Green Agile's website: **"Keeping everything in mind, the goal of my company has always been delivering the best quality while taking proper precautions to ensure sustainability around us. We want to bring sustainability in the market & allow businesses to be able to have the best quality products while taking care of the environment."**

To summarize, any brand can and absolutely should embody feasible operations and these are a few easy ways to go about it;

- Use paper over plastic and avoid the use of packaging if it isn't required.
- Avoid delivery through cars and involve professional services to save time and energy.
- Consider delivery through public transport.
- Recycle inventory and packaging elements that have not been used.
- Avoid wasting food when preparing for a client or customer.
- Involve consumers by coming up with effective strategies, such as the Plant Trees With Us motive by NÜWATER.





INFLUENCER MARKETING

G H Y N A
K U R D Y

IS IT INFLUENTIAL THOUGH?

As a small business owner, you may have experienced being approached with several DMs from influencers that suggest collaborations. The reality is influencer marketing is a real thing and it's not just a concept that has been limited to implementation by big brands. This particular ongoing debacle about whether influencer marketing actually helps, can cause quite the confusion for small business owners, especially for those who aren't even aware of this term.

Ghyna Kurdy, a consultant at a leading communications firm called Sahara and a former mass media and communications lecturer at the University of Balamand, Lebanon talks to us about the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Kurdy, carrying 10 years of experience in the communications field is not an expert in advising clients across a range of sectors. She looks after businesses that manage to leverage their full potential when it comes to truly building a secure relationship and connection with their consumers. One could say that she has successfully disciplined herself to the constantly changing market environment and the whole dynamic of social media in the 21st century. Through her time studying and teaching communications, she has gathered the knowledge and experience of various creative media topics including influencer marketing.

"With an ever-increasing focus on online connection, influencer marketing presents a grand opportunity for startups to achieve a trusted status with a niche target audience and deliver more authentic and genuine content - allowing people to experience meaningful connection rather than just a promotional advertisement. As the pandemic has forced much of people choices and decisions to migrate to the online realm, influencer marketing has become the digital equivalent to word-of-mouth, enabling startups to grow faster and outpace their competitors.", Kurdy shares.

So, what can a small brand expect from participating in influencer marketing? Kurdy advises that the success of a collaboration only depends on a drafted measurement plan and what you wish to achieve by the end of this influencer partnership. What would you expect from the influencer you are looking to work with? It could range from attracting traffic on a platform by hosting, let's say, virtual cooking classes, or it could be a direct call to action in the form of a story or post suggesting one to use a promo code. In light of this suggestion, Kurdy reminds us: **"The expectations will be very different for each campaign and for each goal that the brand is trying to achieve."**

Another valid factor she points out is that success is only guaranteed if the collaboration is presented to an audience that fits the niche because at the end of the day it's primary for the brand to **"build experiences that deepen customer relationships and strengthen loyalty."** Kurdy's research and study also reveals that influencer marketing is predicted to grow into a \$15 billion industry by 2022.

Yet again, nothing is absolutely perfect. Influencer marketing is faced with its own challenges and as suspected, they involve the use of fake followers and vanity metrics, which eventually affect the initial measurements and expectations of a brand when collaborating with an influencer. Kurdy warns small businesses against these haphazards: **"The best way to avoid this pitfall is to use the right tools to measure the average engagement rate of influencers, analyze audience and engagement quality; red flags for fraud include: sudden spike in followers, low engagement or generic comments, that are versatile enough to fit any post such as "nice", "great post"."**

Fortunately, millions of brands and businesses that have grown on Instagram, which also happens to be the breeding hub of user-generated content. These brands catch on to UGC and implement it on their business accounts as a way to grow brand credibility and loyalty. It acts as word of mouth (WOM) communication in a way and creates a trail of trust.

One of the greatest results that come out of collaborations is the enormous amount of relevant user generated content (UGC). This could be used to the brand's advantage to, as Kurdy words it, **"develop and connect with an online community and strengthen the relationship with influencers."** However, it is important to ensure that the content is being used after consent has been provided. This is also an efficient method of analyzing and calculating the overall performance of the reposted content is also essential to fine-tune the content curation efforts.

Real, authentic and engaging are some of the key elements and criteria that a brand needs to be on the look out for, when working on an influencer collaboration. Success is guaranteed given that a brand invests some time into researching and doing a background check on its influencer picks. Kurdy's final piece of advice to small business owners and fresh entrepreneurs that are in search of the perfect influencer to market their products is this: **"Identify the culture-shapers and authentic micro-influencers that truly influence the niche target audience and reflect the brand's purpose and engage with them as content creators and not only channel distributors. For the same investment required to collaborate with one macro influencer, brands can leverage nano and micro-influencers to underscore an ongoing campaign, reach various audiences and repurpose the content through paid amplification to maximize its reach."**





Giveaways: Do or Don't?

Collaborating with Insta-fluencers is a tough decision to make. Nikita Thakwani, food blogger and small business owner talks to The Karak about giveaways.

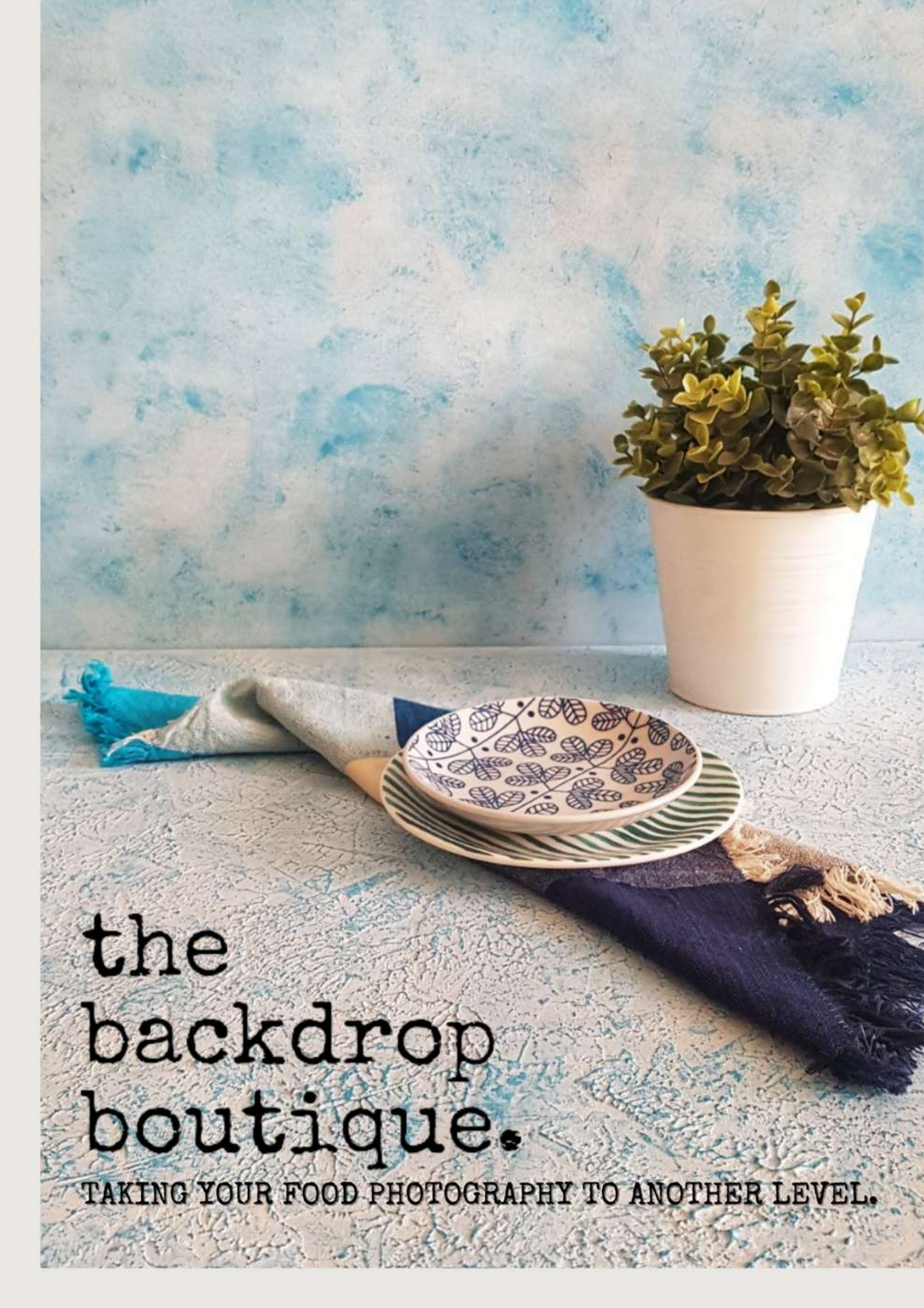
We interviewed Nikita Thakwani, an experienced food blogger and the co-founder of Best Friend's Kitchen, a small specialized small business, about collaborating with influencers for giveaways or contests and here is what she had to say about it.

If we go to see the bigger picture, small businesses are emerging at a very fast-paced, especially the ones that are focused on more specific range of products or services. For instance, home-based bakeries that are doing well are usually the ones that come up with unique flavors or designs.

Getting to the point, many small food businesses have grown because they chose to collaborate with micro and macro influencers such as Naomi D'Souza or Lavina Israni. It is certainly a great way to create and gauge engagement without having to pay a hefty price. However, when it comes to collaborating for giveaways, it is important for your brand to be selective of the mediators you chose. It goes without saying, that giveaways can benefit a brand a whole lot. The impact your giveaway's audience has on the growth of your business certainly shows! Regardless of whoever wins, brand awareness is a given.

Now we know what you're thinking: "This is just an easy way for influencers to get more followers". Thakwani agrees! But that does not mean that your startup does not benefit from it either. She says: "If it benefits influencers by 60%, then businesses benefit by 40%." It's sort of a half cup full instead of half cup empty situation.

Another valid point that Thakwani pointed out is that it is ultimately the brand's responsibility to be engaging. She also advises small business owners to study their collaborators. Set a target – what sort of influencer are you looking to collab with? Have they been involved in a cause that goes against the purpose of your brand? Do they buy their followers, or do they engage with their current followers? In her words: "Someone doing fashion cannot collaborate with a food brand."

A still life composition featuring a potted plant, a patterned bowl, and a striped plate on a textured surface against a mottled blue background. The plant is in a white pot and has small green leaves. The bowl is white with a black leaf pattern. The plate is white with green stripes. The background is a textured, mottled blue wall. The surface is a light-colored, textured material.

the backdrop boutique.

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