

## Brands, fans and influencers: why social media for small business is about more than sales

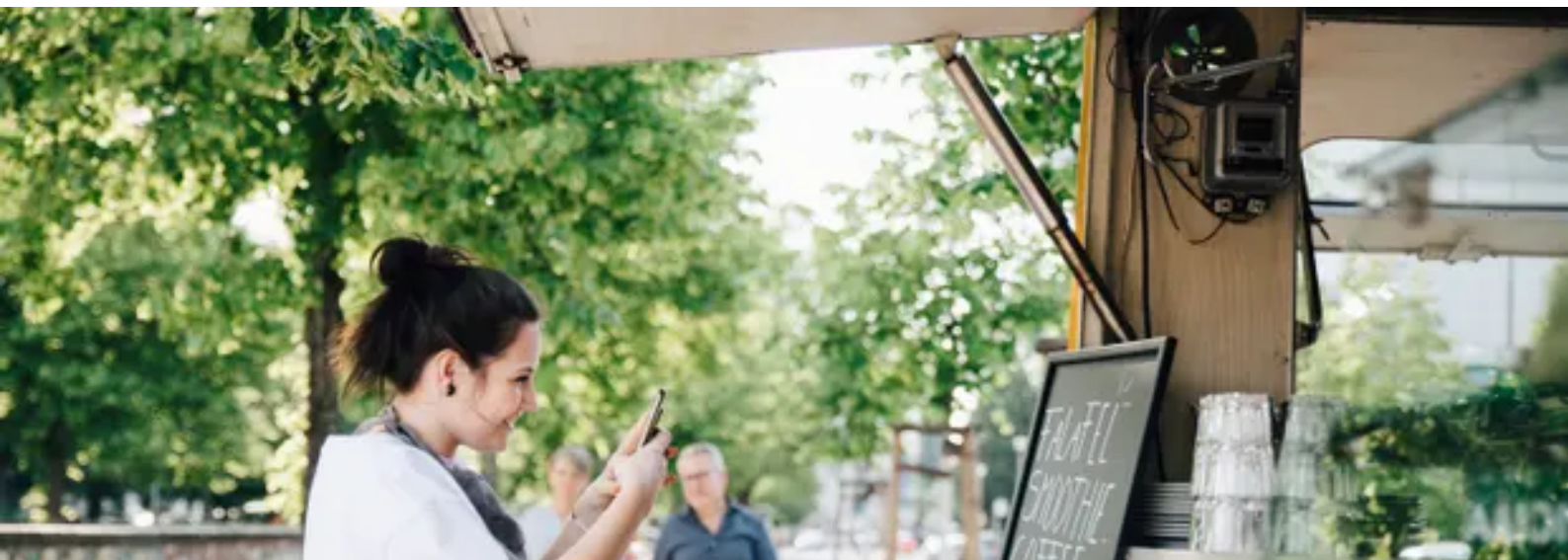
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Standing out online can transform a business, but it takes focus and strategy. Here, three stars of social share what they've learned

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Like all aspects of technology, social media is constantly evolving. So while a small business may have set up a Facebook or a Twitter account a few years back and thought that was a case of "job done", new social media platforms such as TikTok have been developed since then, while Instagram and YouTube have become vital parts of a holistic social media ecosystem.

Beyond the platforms themselves, trends have also changed in terms of what users want, how they interact with brands and what's important to them. Customers have now become fans, emotional ties to brands are a thing and thought-leadership can make you an influencer. Content is still king, and shareability is vital.

But as well as all this modern stuff - the basics are still important too.

"On the high street you wouldn't have a shopfront with a broken window, peeling paint, rubbish everywhere and goods randomly thrown on displays, and expect to thrive," says PR and social media expert Mike Crutchley.

As someone who helps businesses improve and overhaul their social media strategies, he says first impressions count.

"Social media channels must be up to date with everything from posts to contact details and opening hours," he says. "High-quality images and videos, as well as good grammar and spelling are as vital as creating engaging posts."

The tools that allow businesses to make this happen have never been more accessible, and there is now an opportunity to try some of them out free of charge. Customers of the website builder GoDaddy are currently receiving a complimentary 90-day premium subscription to the mobile app Over, which gives them access to simple templates for creating sleek and effective social media content.



High quality images and video are vital on social media. Photograph: Stocksy United

## **Shareability matters**

Sometimes the things that work best on social media are the simplest. You can have all the metrics and dashboards in the world, but if people don't engage and share your original posts then you're missing a huge potential source of customers.

When Dutch-born Londoner Annemarie Plas saw people in countries throughout Europe clapping for their healthcare workers she was inspired to help set up something similar in her adopted home, and so created [clapfourcarers.co.uk](http://clapfourcarers.co.uk) with GoDaddy.

Scaling up quickly could well have proved a challenge, but with the astute use of social media things have gone from strength to strength.

"I just put together a small image and posted it on my socials such as Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, and sent it to all my UK friends by WhatsApp, I also made a small website and an Insta page," says Plas.

Her efforts to spread the word were given a huge boost when her campaign was picked up by influencers such as the Beckhams and the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, who shared it to their followers.

The first clap happened on Thursday 26 March at 8pm and became a weekly event, being covered by the national media and circulated widely on social media too, right up to the final clap on 28 May.

Although Plas has a background working for media agencies, she had neither the time nor staff support that other organisations might be able to draw upon. So she decided to keep things simple and made shareability a big part of her strategy.

"I understood the importance of having simple and engaging messaging. I used a hashtag and made the image easy to share on any social channels."

Her simple and consistent messaging has resulted in the #clapfourcarers hashtag being shared more than 139,000 times on Instagram alone.

## **Becoming an influencer**

"Some influencers get a bad reputation," says Masha Zvereva, founder of Coding Blonde. She set up her blog back in 2015, when she was trying to learn some coding skills to make her more employable. She originally registered it with GoDaddy, which she then also used as a hosting provider.

Through that blog, as well as Instagram and YouTube, Zvereva has amassed a loyal following and is now regarded as an influencer in the field of women in tech, entrepreneurship and personal growth.

"Influencers can be perceived as fake, superficial, salesy etc, but what people don't see is the hard work that goes behind being able to make a living off of this business model and growing your business," she says.

Quality content is paramount according to Zvereva. Whether you're filming a video for YouTube or writing a thought leadership piece, it has to add value beyond simply advertising your skills to the wider world.

"Anyone can become an influencer if they want to, but I'd recommend approaching it from the standpoint of adding value to an audience," she says.

"What's the purpose behind your blog? How will you be impacting people's lives and who is your target audience? And finally, why should it be you?"

## **Building a brand**

Many people might still associate social media in a business context purely with selling, but its importance when it comes to building a brand can't be overstated.

This is something Zaffrin and Brian O'Sullivan, co-founders of the vegan skincare company Five Dot Botanics set out to do well before their company launched.



# Social media has allowed small brands like mine to build a brand

Establishing it on Instagram even before they had products to sell, they were able to develop a loyal audience.

"Social media has allowed small brands like mine to build a brand. Historically it would not have been possible to launch a beauty brand without millions of pounds to acquire customers through marketing," says Zaffrin.

Before setting up those social channels though, their first move was to register a domain name and get a URL through GoDaddy. Then it was time to get the ball rolling with social media.

The stories the O'Sullivan's shared weren't all about success, but about the challenges they were facing. This honesty helped create a situation where people were rooting for them. The couple were also able to get 600 people signed up to their newsletter email list so there was already an eager customer base waiting for when the products were ready.

Once the social channels were up and running, the O'Sullivan's set up an internet landing page using GoDaddy's services - and they were in business.

Social continues to be at the heart of their marketing. As well as using Instagram for brand-building, Zaffrin posts to Pinterest and Facebook, although she says the latter works best for business if you're willing to put money behind it - paying for targeted ads, for example. Otherwise the other platforms can be effective without budget, simply by skilful use. Zaffrin uses LinkedIn to raise her business profile and publish articles, and is curious about TikTok, saying it is "one to watch".

"Our audience are our fans," she says. "They root for our success, and our customers on social tell us every day what they think and what they want. We are constantly listening to them, whether they're letting us know how they are using our products or coming up with ideas for new ones."

***GoDaddy launched the #OpenWeStand initiative offering a number of free tools, widgets, resources and blogposts at [OpenWeStand.org](https://OpenWeStand.org) to help small businesses keep their digital doors open while their physical doors are closed. Over 50 companies have joined the cause, including Slack, Salesforce, PayPal, and more***

## Topics

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