

এইটাই লাভই চিনি,
শ্রম। স্বর্জর না স্বল্পে
পরে মন খাবার হবে।



ILLUSTRATIONS: NOOR US SAFA ANIK

12000 Facebook pages are run by female entrepreneurs

thousand bottles every month. And after deducting all my costs, my monthly profit is around Tk 1 to 1.5 lakh," she says. She now even has a physical shop, which she runs in partnership with another business page of Facebook, at Rapa Plaza in Dhanmondi 27.

Although Sazia has a five-member team, including part-time employees, she is the one who single-handedly prepares the hair fall solution, made of 10 herbs mixed with six natural oils. She believes that this is the only way she can control the quality of her oil. "Many banks and financial institutions are showing an interest in giving us a loan to expand the business, but I turn them away because I am afraid that the expansion might affect my quality," she says.

Women like Sazia are opening up Facebook businesses and creating a revolution online. According to the E-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (E-CAB), there are currently around 20,000 pages on Facebook selling products and of them, 12,000 are operated by female entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs are coming up with numerous innovative and unique ideas for doing business and delivering the desired products to the doorsteps of customers.

When freelance development worker and journalist, Sabiha Akond Rupa, launched Menka in 2015, she already had two years of market research under her belt. Menka is a Facebook shop that sells handloom cotton sarees and heralds itself as a sustainable fashion brand.

"It was possible for me to opt for the power-loom, and produce a hundred sarees a day, but I believe in slow fashion, and wanted my business to be socially impactful, so I produce my sarees using the handloom. It takes around 90 days to weave just 10 sarees," says Rupa.

By selling traditional handloom sarees to the customers, Rupa also wants to help the handloom weavers. The use of handlooms is being replaced by power looms, as this process is more labourious and time-consuming than the other processes.

She pairs her sarees with a visual story, which is a unique branding and marketing move by Menka. "The stories are about women's struggles, dilemmas, mental health and survival. Menka is my brainchild, my daughter. And those who buy Menka sarees, buy those after being emotionally attached with these stories," says Rupa.



FACEBOOK BUSINESS IS NOT EASY

Although many think that launching a Facebook business is easy and a source of making 'quick money', according to the female entrepreneurs, it is anything but. During the beginning, most of them singlehandedly manage the entire business. As they expand, it becomes harder and more challenging to cope with the competitive virtual space.

This is all an online businesswoman has to do by herself to stay afloat in the market: they have to promote their Facebook page, collect raw materials, go into production, create a brand value, do product shoots, edit and post photos online, reply to customer queries, keep track of transactions and maintain the delivery process. This persistence, hard work, sweat and tears shape them as successful entrepreneurs on Facebook.

The work is even more challenging for those who offer something different from what customers expect. Take the example of Hebaang, a Facebook page that started its journey in 2015 by delivering authentic Chakma cuisine. "In Dhaka's restaurant culture, everyone expects foreign cuisine, such as Thai, Korean and Chinese food. A large number of people couldn't think of a different culture inside the country—they thought that the Chakmas eat frogs and snakes! But we found people who appreciated our food, and we recently expanded into a restaurant," says Priyanka Chakma, the

Determination, hard work, sweat, and tears shape women as successful sellers on Facebook



Her Business Revolution

NILIMA JAHAN

Seven years ago, Sazia Hasan Izu, a second-year student of home economics from the University of Dhaka, could not have imagined that she was going to shape her profession as a businesswoman by selling her grandmother's homemade oil for hair fall solution. But when it was a hit amongst her friends, she opened a Facebook page, upon everyone's request, named "Rapunzel's Secret" and started her business journey online.

"When I started this business in 2012, selling hair oil on Facebook was a comparatively new idea. People weren't as familiar with online shopping through social media. In my first month, I only sold three bottles of oil, but now, by the grace of Almighty, I can sell around a