

Sealing the deal with partnerships

Effective partnership strategies for online businesses

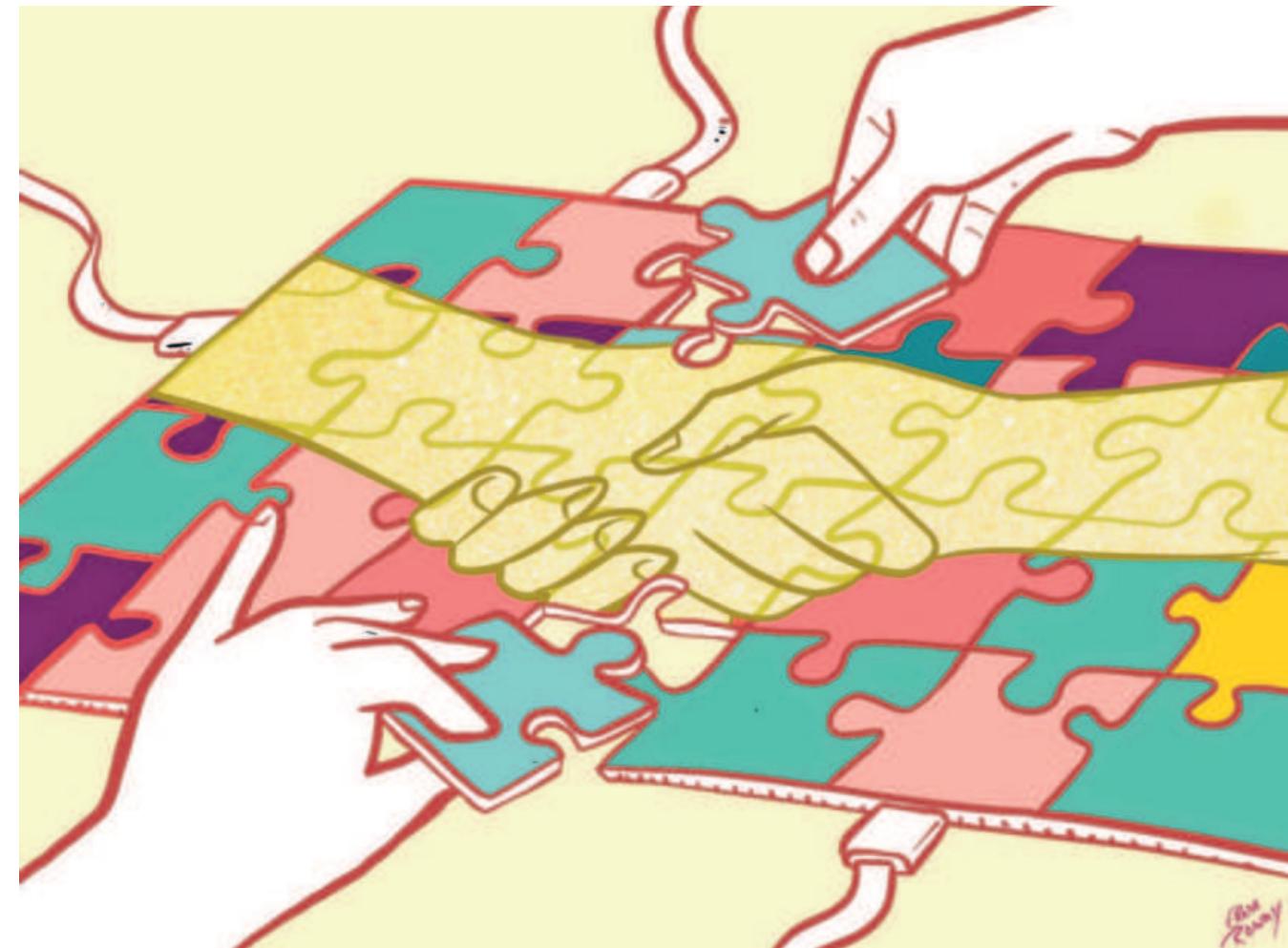
Dhaka's booming scene of online businesses & freelance modelling is a good indicator of how our economy is moving steadily towards e-commerce more and more every day. These businesses have social media at the core of their modus operandi. They are run by makeup artists, online business owners, photographers, digital marketers, etc. Marketing strategies of these pages are different from that of other businesses. Large portions of their revenue come from "collaborations", which are basically partnerships and sponsorships with other online businesses. We investigated a few local online pages to find out what their marketing strategies are and how they ace it.

WORD OF MOUTH

Customers can become your best brand managers. For example, customers' photos with the company's products are often featured on these pages. The Purple Box, an online-based jewellery shop, uses the strategy of featuring customers wearing their products along with the models on their page. Malika Eena, owner of The Purple Box says, "In online businesses success is all about trust. So, you have to build a relationship with your customers that nurtures trust. Your customers then become your marketers." This is a successful strategy to gain sponsorship because it shows your investors that your customers have faith in you. Customers also feel engaged with the company as they feel their feedbacks are being received and implemented.

PEER ENGAGEMENT

Engagement in peer circles of our field is an effective strategy for successful partnerships. Freelance photographers usually keep connections with other photographers to form teams when requested to cover an event. They also collaborate on photo series and thematic exhibitions. Anika Anjum, owner of Rouge Photography says, "Being confident about your work, engaging and knowing the right people are keys to good marketing. By right people, I mean the handful of number of people of your social circle who share your work with the same enthusiasm. And then, just like wildfire, your work is spread amid social circles. That's passive engagement for you." This passive engagement in work and social circles is useful to find work collectively. Your marketing is not just limited to your customers but is extended to your acquaintances as well, forming a great network for you. These partnerships are particularly effective for creative arts professionals.



Freelance models also use innovative engagement posts with their audience in the form of short videos and Q&A sessions. This helps them identify what their audience profile looks like. Sunehra Tasnim, one of the fastest growing fashion bloggers of Dhaka, attaches her opinions in captions along with engagement questions. This helps her know what sort of content can get the highest number of viewership. Local boutiques, whose target customer base is young female students and professionals of Dhaka, are often featured in her posts because their customer base matches her follower profile.

SIGNATURE STYLE

Once you have established a peer circle and good customer engagement, the next step is to focus on making your brand stand out to your investors. Fat Man Film, a digital marketing page for food photography, has a unique set of colours and shades that they use while photographing in different restaurants. No matter what the cuisine is, the food is always photographed in the same style that makes their work

stand out. A dark background with rustic accessories has become its signature style and customers identify them by it. Having your own signature colour palette creates an automatic brand of your work.

However, repetitive colour palettes aren't always necessary to create your signature style. Sharly Rahman, a freelance model, rather opts for creating trends using her local culture. Her page often features content focusing on fusion of sub-continental jewellery items with European and North American fashion trends. She says, "My strategy is to try and find new ways to creatively express my brand on social media which on its own generates a lot of attention."

EMAIL MARKETING

What if you are a newcomer and you don't have any connections to hunt partnerships? Opt-in email list is a solution to this problem. Your customers or followers can sign in and receive correspondence from you and you can do the same with other businesses. Email local businesses around you with your portfolio and attach specific

promotional plans you have for your future. Sharing promotional plans can help you build a trusted relationship as well as demonstrate your marketing abilities. Email marketing is considered to be one of the most powerful tools of our time because of its vast outreach.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is also an effective method to make your page visible on the map. This is not helpful for content creators who create new content every day. But page admins who offer products and services using certain common tags and keywords can opt to this to make these pages easily searchable. Try to use similar tags as other businesses or common tags your customers can remember.

Noshin Saiyara

Noshin Saiyara is an aspiring conservationist, deluded into thinking that she can save the planet from dying. Reach her at nshin.saiyara12@gmail.com to bring her back to reality.

THE BOSSMAN

BY E. RAZA RONNY



TOASTMASTERS

THE BEST INVESTMENT FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Public speaking is perhaps one of the few soft skills with universal utility. Every individual needs to have a firm grasp of public speaking skills regardless of their stage of life and area of work. According to research, three out of every four individuals have some degree of aversion or fear of public speaking. One of the easiest yet most effective ways to improve public speaking capability is through peer to peer learning in a safe environment. This is where Toastmasters International comes into play.

Toastmasters International is a non-profit educational organisation that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs. Headquartered in the USA, the organisation's membership exceeds 3,58,000 in more than 16,800 clubs across 143 countries. Since 1924, Toastmasters International has helped people from diverse backgrounds become more confident as speakers, communicators, and leaders. In Bangladesh, the Toastmasters movement started in 2014 in Dhaka with just one club. Fast forward 5 years, there are 16 clubs across 3 different cities and close to 350 members, or Toastmasters as they prefer to be called, in the Bangladesh Toastmasters community.

Toastmasters International uses a local club-based structure, each having around 20-40 members. Members play different roles during the regular club meetings in order to help each other become better versions of themselves. For example, while someone is giving a prepared speech, other people are working as their speech evaluator, timer, grammarian and ah-counter (a role designed to keep our habit of using filler words in check). All these

different roles combine to teach the members how to improve themselves and be better speakers and leaders. All the Toastmasters members follow an educational program called Pathways. Pathways helps members learn communication and leadership skills that are needed to succeed in personal and professional spheres. There are 11 specialised learning paths to choose from. Some of the paths are dynamic leadership, engaging humor, motivational strategies, presentation mastery, team collaboration, etc. All the learning materials are available online so that members can learn anytime, anywhere. Toastmasters believes in learning by doing and so each stage



in the path assigns a certain task to the member. Sometimes it is giving a speech in a specified format or on a specific topic; sometimes it is to organise an event or manage a project within the club. The online contents work as a guideline on how to complete the task successfully but eventually it is upon the individual members to apply the learning into action. There is also an excellent system of mentorship within the Toastmasters community. Every new member can select a mentor who can guide them through the journey of Toastmasters. This collaborative and friendly culture helps members feel relaxed and learn at their own pace. The core mantra of Toastmas-

ters is to encourage everyone to speak and provide constructive feedbacks on every speech. This helps the members feel safe within the club environment and get over their fear of public speaking.

Besides this, every year Toastmasters International holds a World Championship of Public Speaking contest. Contestants come from all around the world after winning their respective club, area, division, and district level contests. This is the most prestigious title of public speaking in the world and many of today's famous motivational speakers/coaches are former champions of this contest. Bangladesh, currently a division, has been taking part in

the district level contest for the past few years and working towards the dream of one day having a Bangladeshi as the World Champion of Public Speaking. With so many new clubs opening up in Bangladesh, it is the best time for students as well as professionals to become a part of this educational movement and make a valuable investment in self-development.

Syed Ibrahim Saajid

The writer is an Assistant Area Director (L2) of Toastmasters and Founding Vice President Education of Dhaka North Toastmasters Club. He can be reached at saajid90@gmail.com.

Making a DIFFERENCE

How IoT is transforming the workplace

One of the new concepts brought about by the advent of the fourth industrial revolution that is greatly impacting the modern workspace is IoT, broadly known as Internet of Things. IoT is an interrelated system of computing devices, digital and mechanical machines, objects, people or animals that are provided with unique identifiers and the ability to transfer data over a network without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction. Beyond reaching every possible industry, IoT is augmenting everyday things like energy consumption, surveillance, mobility, building management, homes and even apparel. The platform collects data through network devices, analyses it, shares it to the IoT remote and finally sends it back to the devices across the network. IoT can greatly impact the workplace when everything as a service can be delivered in an online platform with accessible capacity.

By 2020, IoT will have more than 24 billion devices, which will ultimately represent a four to one ratio



for every device to human entity in the world. Three stakeholders will benefit from this emerging technology- consumers, businesses and the government. With the huge variety of IoT applications in use, companies will have access to an enormous amount of data which will no longer be an exclusive, enterprise-only option. Businesses of all sizes will be able to improve their operations by tapping into these data clusters. Companies will need to use IoT as part of their planning to stay competitive and offer innovative

and unique products and services. Virtually connected workplaces will link people using live chats, host meetings and share projects that are managed from one centralised system. Bring Your Own Device will take a new meaning when a smart-watch or smartphone will connect to a company device or when a roving laptop will dock at a workstation and instantly connect to the company network, giving more freedom to virtual and mobile workers.

Bangladesh needs to equip itself with the necessary infrastructure and formulate appropriate regulatory policies. With one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the densely populated country has a huge range of uses for IoT, which can be achieved through combined efforts of the government, industry and academia.

Nabila Hossain

Nabila Hossain is a senior at Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka. Reach her at nabilaanima@gmail.com.