

# Grameenphone's ambition to breaking the barriers

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In the second part of this five-article series on Abu Saeed Khan's 'Partner in Digitalization 1997 - 2022', we will take a look at the key developments that lead to Grameenphone's current success in the rural development of Bangladesh - making it a top telecommunication choice for rural mobile users in the country.

An indispensable part of Grameenphone's success lies in its contribution to Bangladesh's rural development. During the first 25 years since the nation's independence, access to a telephone was considered a matter of privilege. Back then, telecommunication access in rural areas was deemed impossible. Nowadays, a significant number of rural citizens use Grameenphone for day-to-day activities, including managing successful rural business ventures.

## Staying interconnected

Grameenphone's switch to optical fiber transmission systems paved the way for telecommunication access in rural sectors and remote villages. The nationwide coverage expansion meant that there was no communication barrier between urban and rural markets - opening new opportunities for rural business to flourish.

One strategy that particularly helped rural expansion was the flattening of national call charges. Introduced in 1999, Grameenphone's prepaid billing system enabled low-income citizens to avail the benefits of instant telecommunication.



Laila Begum, Grameenphone's first rural customer in 1997.

Rural workers living in the cities could now call their families anytime, opening accessibility of services for Bangladeshis all around the nation. Charging small denominators in scratch cards also helped bridge the financial gap among daily mobile phone users.

Being connected with the city life via a handset also meant new job opportunities for rural citizens aiming to settle in the cities. The garment industry, in particular, saw a major increase in female workers arriving in Dhaka when Grameenphone expanded rural network coverage.

## Empowering rural networks

To respond to this rise in business

opportunities, phone operator shops were set up in villages where rural citizens could call their family members at a low cost. These rural phone operators could also be contacted by migrated workers wishing to call back home to a family that did not own a mobile phone.

A study published by the Canadian International Development Agency in 2000 stated that a phone call from a village to Dhaka ranged from 2.64% to 9.8% of a regular consumer's monthly household income. Conversely, a trip to the city would cost two to eight times that amount.

This meant that rural citizens could save up to Tk. 490 for a phone call instead of traveling to the city. The study also revealed

that operators running these phone booths earned 24% to 40% of their average household income - making such jobs lucrative and economically viable.

## Training in modern technology

Aside from providing solar-powered charging facilities and pole-mounted external antennas to improve the network, Grameenphone also ensured that the rural users were sufficiently trained in using mobile handsets.

Abu Saeed Khan's report states that when GSM mobile phones were first launched in rural Bangladesh, it was relatively easy to teach rural citizens the English numeric keypad of mobile phones. Basic education in modern technology opened the path for a sustainable supply chain management which further connected the urban side of Bangladesh to the rural, thus bridging a previously difficult gap through the power of interconnected telecommunication.

Grameenphone's contribution to the development of rural Bangladesh left a long-standing impact on the nation's financial and technological advancements. With further expansion of rural network coverage and easier access to modern technology, rural citizens are steadily on their way towards a self-sustaining, thriving economy.

*[The viewpoints and findings in this article are based on Abu Saeed Khan's compiled report 'Partner in Digitalization 1997 - 2022'.]*

# Building a career as a social media influencer: Brand maintenance

MORIUM KULSUM

With the growing popularity of influencer marketing and branding activities, aspiring content creators are becoming ever more curious about how to become an influencer. However, many often fail to recognise that achieving the influencer status and making a living from it is not as easy as it seems. The final part of this two-article series will outline how a growing social media influencer can retain their brand image, quality and followers.

## Maintain a strong relationship with followers

You have to establish a good relationship with your audience to survive the competition. Respond to your followers' comments, feedback, and suggestions, and tailor your content accordingly to build a rapport with them. Rasheduzzaman Rakib says, "Influencers always have to be honest and transparent with their audience. They must never get involved in false or misleading product promotions."

## Find steady sources of income

Brands often reach out to influencers directly or through influencer marketing agencies. Influencers are entrusted with the responsibility of promoting and recommending the brand's products to their audience. Their endorsements serve as a form of social proof and instantly improve consumer trust. In return, the brand incentivises them with free product samples or cash.

On Facebook or YouTube, influencers can generate revenue from their video content by using in-stream ads. On TikTok, viewers can show appreciation by sending 'gifts' in the form of in-app currency 'diamonds', which can then be redeemed for money. Remember that when you are earning enough from your job, you

need to consider other options, such as launching your own brand, to create a more secure financial future.

## Start collaborating with compatible brands

In order to reach the next level as a content creator, start working with brands compatible with your content and community. Mention in your bio that you are interested in collaborations and provide contact details.

You can also contact brands directly or utilise influencer marketing agencies to land brand deals. Habiba Akter Shurovy reveals the harsh reality that no brand wants to work with new content creators. She suggests, "In the beginning, influencers should make high-quality content with their own

resources and efforts to build a name for themselves." She believes that as a content creator eventually grows, brands will start reaching out on their own.

## Network with influencers within and beyond your niche

Develop great relationships with peers by interacting with their content and requesting collaboration. Do not neglect attending industry conferences and in-person networking. Nusrat Upoma mentions that when she started collaborating with other content creators, she got a huge response from her audience. According to her, collaboration adds "a sense of variation to a creator's content and introduces them to a new audience base".

With all these steps in mind, keep in mind that being a social media influencer is a unique profession that requires a monumental amount of hard work to succeed in. Hopefully, these steps will help you launch your passion for online content creation into the career of your dreams.

