

# Time to think outside the bag

For fledgling businesses seeking to connect with their customer base, a creative or even playful approach can go a long way

BY ELAINE O'REGAN

**C**ourting the media can be a tricky business, but a creative approach to publicising your venture could mean the difference between success or failure in the critical early stages.

"To have a great product is not enough. You have to be clever and innovative to get as much publicity as you can and convert those web hits to sales," said Attila Magyar, who, along with his brother Levente, established Mamukko three years ago.

The Magyars moved to Cork from their native Hungary in 2007, but it wasn't until they relocated to the coastal town of Kinsale that they hit upon the idea for a nautical venture that would showcase their inherited skills in traditional leatherwork.

Mamukko sells one-off handmade bags for men and women, using re-purposed sailing cloths.

## Mamukko range

There are 15 styles in the Mamukko range, costing from €155 to €495, including backpacks, hobos, laptop bags, slingbags, duffel bags and sailing bags.

"We use traditional leather craftsmanship and leather to upcycle sailcloth and unusual fabrics to manufacture," said Attila.

"We are fourth generation designers and makers, and we are following the family tradition in our own way.

"We learned everything from our parents, who are master leather workers – the love of craft and the respect of tools and machines."

The brothers are targeting sailing enthusiasts and eco-conscious consumers looking for handmade recycled products.

"We wanted to carry on the family tradition, but also add an upcycling twist. People



Daniel Plewman,  
managing director,  
Happythreads

always want something different and our products tell a story and are unique," said Attila.

"Our Kinsale location is perfect for sourcing sails and gives us the opportunity to live our dreams and do what we love doing the most."

## The Astrid

When the Dutch tall ship The Astrid ran aground and sank outside Kinsale Harbour in July of last year, the Magyars saw an opportunity to commemorate the vessel and publicise Mamukko.

"That tragic story gave us the opportunity to showcase to the media what we actually do," said Attila.

"We introduced ourselves to the skipper with samples of products we'd made from other sails and we made a deal to use the sails from the Astrid and four life rafts."

The deluxe edition of Mamukko's Astrid Tallship Life Raft Duffel won a highly commended award in the accessories category of Showcase 2014.

## Design award

Priced at €495, the bag was made from one of four life rafts used to rescue the 30 crew members that were on board the Astrid when it sank.

"When we were starting out, we literally talked to boat owners in Kinsale Harbour and asked them for their old sails," said Attila.

"The first sails we got came from a local charter business in Kinsale, and we now get supplies from yacht clubs and Kinsale Outdoor Education Centre. We organise sail collections and are looking to source sails from other tall ships.

"Our ethos is that we recycle sails that are no longer needed. There are a lot of sails going to landfill every year and our policy is to use that material instead of wasting it."

The Magyars sell their products online at mamukko.ie, and have received orders from the Netherlands, Britain, Germany, the US and Japan. Their bags are also stocked by Granny's Bottom Drawer in



Levente and Attila Magyar  
of Mamukko, in West Cork

Kinsale and Union Chandlery in Cork city.

"It took some time to find the avenues and channels that best suited us," said Attila. "As boutique manufacturers, our business model is based on online as well as direct sales at shows and events."

## Happythreads

For Abigail Moore, co-founder of Happythreads, a Dublin-based distributor of high-quality American scrubs, gaining a foothold in the British market required an ambitious publicity campaign from the get-go.

Moore started the business from home in 2009 with construction engineer Daniel

Plewman.

Five years on, Happythreads employs 10 people in Kimmage and is on course to realise revenues of €660,000 this year, 65 per cent of which will comprise British sales.

"Abigail had purchased Koi scrubs in the US. She wore them when she came back and wanted more," Plewman said.

"She contacted the company to find out where they could be purchased in Ireland or Britain, and they told her they had no distributor in Britain and asked if she could recommend one.

"We registered business as a uniform distributor because we felt there was a demand

for high-quality cotton fitted scrubs and tunics in Ireland and Britain."

## Holby City

Moore and Plewman devised an inventive strategy to get Happythreads free primetime coverage on British television.

"We have supplied uniforms to BBC series Holby City and In The Club," said Plewman. "Abigail is a big fan of Holby City and contacted the set designer with suggestions for each character."

"We secured In The Club in March, and an earlier drama called The Syndicate. We got the deal to supply Critical, an upcoming drama airing on Sky in October, through an

encounter at a London trade show. We also supply Channel 4's Hollyoaks, and we got that through digital marketing – Facebook and our website."

Moore and Plewman's ingenuity is paying off. Sales in Britain, where they have 4,000 customers, are doubling year-on-year.

Happythreads sells Koi, Orange Standard, Dickies and Cherokee scrubs, and will invest €50,000 to launch its own brand net year.

"We are seeking Irish designers to collaborate," said Plewman.

"We have been listening to our customers and will be developing styles that meet the requirements of the Irish

and British markets."

## Website investment

"We are also investing in new state-of-the-art e-commerce website solutions, as customers are increasingly using tablets and mobiles.

"Our current site cost €4,000 and has yielded a turnover of almost €1 million over the last five years, so we will be investing €40,000 in the new site, which will be mobile-optimised, with order tracking, video, and virtual fitting features.

"We are using Irish plus-size model Louise O'Reilly, which together with the other models will reflect the range of sizes of our customer base."

## LowDown Top tips for SMEs

### This week: social media

BY TOM TRAINOR

Social media is a critical asset today for small businesses to grow and engage with their audience, even at a local level. However, many feel they don't have the time, resources or even skill set to think about social media. Here are some pointers on what to think about when looking at your social media strategy.

#### 1. Who is your audience?

Understand the needs of your audience, what information they are looking for and what motivates them to engage. Social media is about meeting their needs in real time. Take a look at your audience demographic. Are they Gen Z, Dinkies, or OAPs? Where do they go online? If you're not sure where to look, take a look at your competition. What platforms are they on? How are they engaging, and what audience are they engaging with?

#### 2. What to post

In order to know what to post, you firstly need to understand why you are using social media to market your business and what your end goal is. Understand the needs of your audience and the information your customer is looking for. Social media is about meeting their needs in real time. It's about asking questions, building excitement and bringing the conversation around to your product, service or company.

Social media site Facebook is cracking down on promotions and "gimmicky" content pieces – for example, competitions, which have been invaluable in helping small business to gain traction on their sites. SMEs now have to start looking at alternative ways to engage customers. Creating engaging content for your audience is the way to go, and there are two ways to do this.

#### a) Valuable content for your audience

Once you find out what motivates your audience, start building content around that. Content creation allows you to build your message around valuable content. Remember that we are all visual creatures, so creating images or videos is a bonus. No matter what the content, here are the key questions to ask yourself before you start:

- is this timely and relevant content?
- would they share it with friends or recommend it to others?
- if you are sharing: Is this content from a source you – and more importantly, they – would trust?
- is the content genuinely interesting to them or is it trying to get news feed distribution? (for example, asking for people to like the content)
- would you call this a low quality post?
- would you complain about seeing this content in your own news feed?

#### b) If you can't create, curate

Good content takes time to research, write and promote. If you don't have a large enough audience on social media, you can't justify the time or resources – but if you don't have good content, you can't get an audience. It's a catch-22, so how do you get great content, without spending an extraordinary amount of time or money?

This is where content curation comes in. Content curation is the process of reviewing and filtering articles and blog posts that are of interest to your audience across the web. It directly places other people's work on your social sites through liking, promoting and so on. The most basic form of content curation is retweeting or repinning to your board. This should be stepped up a notch and incorporated into your schedule. Once you have access to great content or blogs, it's easier to write a quick opinion piece of your own. This means that not only do you have great content, you also have an original piece of your own layered on



Tom Trainor of the Marketing  
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top of that. By selectively retweeting important news from other people, you're curating a stream of information that's branded as your own, but built on the ideas from the community of people who you follow.

#### To do this, follow these steps:

- find the top 10 influencers or bloggers on social platforms that are of interest to your audience
  - start retweeting, reviewing and sharing information from both influencers and your audience
  - overlay your thoughts, ideas or opinions based on your brand message and goals
  - push your content out to others by using select hashtags and keywords in the title, heading and body
  - optimise images, by ensuring your keyword tag any images you use.
- People often search for images and these tags are what enables search engines to rank your picture
- interlink all related posts on your blog.
- If you're looking for free tools to help compile content for your audience, try the content curation tools Scoop.it, Curata, or Triberr.

#### 3. Where to post

Be selective with your social media channels. Although social media managing tools make it easy to post content on multiple sites, you don't have to be everywhere and every-

thing to everyone. This will only get more and more challenging as social channels increase. Understand where your audience is first and go from there. Here's a quick overview of how audiences differ between social media sources:

#### Business-to-consumer

Facebook: Sporting, social companies and events work particularly well here

#### Business-to-business

LinkedIn: Great for influencing influencers. Growing in popularity and now features an internal blogging platform

#### Both

Twitter: Short bursts of real-time engagement. Great for gaining followers and views. Say it quick and say it well on this platform. Images can work well here as a means to grab the viewer's attention.

Google: popular with photographers and great for improving search engine optimisation (SEO). Google Authorship is popular for increasing search results.

Pinterest: Think lifestyle, fashion, home cooking, infographics. Visually pleasing posts work best on this platform. Great for curated images that inspire.

YouTube: interviews, webinars, how-to videos, viral campaigns and more.

#### 4. Why post

Think about why you are posting each piece. Understand what you are using social media to market your business and what your end goal is. Have an overarching strategy that not only engages in that moment, but provides real long-term value for your business. Use social media to build momentum – think value-driven, not a product push – and simply to get the conversation started.

#### 5. Find your audience

Twitter: Search Twitter is a very pop-

ular tool. It has a wide range of search criteria, one of which is location – a useful tool for small businesses. This tool is useful to find those key influencers you want to look at using, for content curation and their followers. WeFollow is a directory that organises people by hashtags. Twellow is the Twitter equivalent of the Yellow Pages: a directory sorted by occupation. Just Tweet It is a directory sorted by interest. Tweepz helps you find people nearby. Hashtags are also great for events and activities and for getting eyeballs on your brand.

LinkedIn: Search for the names of those people you've already identified by name using LinkedIn's search box. The advanced search feature allows you to filter your search by job title or company name and keywords.

Join groups that fit your interests or industry. Once you've been accepted as a member, browse the member lists and find people with shared interests that you want to connect with. Remember, it's about providing value, not promoting your product.

You can now follow people on LinkedIn as you would on Twitter. If there are industry leaders related to your area (for example, Richard Branson), you can now follow them, like their posts and engage in their conversation.

Facebook: Use the "find friends" tool on the right-hand side. You will see "add personal contacts" there. Input your email and it will find all your contacts on Facebook, and you can quickly and easily invite them to connect. Once you have connected with some key influencers, browse their friends and connect with people that way. When using the search function, filter your results to drill down to the people you're looking for. Keep an eye on the suggestions that pop up on the right side of the screen.

## Movers & Shakers

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■ Tony McDonnell is the new managing director of HSBC Securities Services Ireland. Before this, McDonnell held two roles in HSBC Securities Services: regional head of asset managers, Europe and North America; and regional head of alternatives, Europe.



■ Quintas Wealth Management has appointed a new senior wealth manager. Matt Conlon is joining from AIB, where he was senior wealth consultant for 18 months. He was also formerly executive financial consultant with Irish Life & Permanent for four years.



■ Bitbuzz has appointed a senior business development manager. Mike Best is joining from Premier Choice Telecom, where he was business sales consultant. He was also formerly regional sales manager with British Telecom for three years.



■ Espion has appointed Roger Fitzpatrick as its new head of research and development. Fitzpatrick was Eircom's transformation programme director and was also product management director, OSS, with Ericsson Ireland.

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