

A group of people in a meeting, with a woman in the foreground wearing a patterned sweater.

○ WHITEPAPER

THE
COLLABORATION
ECONOMY

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WE LIKE TO COLLABORATE TOO!

A modern, open-plan office space with a wooden bar counter, colorful stools, and large windows. The space is bright and airy, with a mix of natural and artificial light. The bar counter is made of light-colored wood and has a metal top. There are several stools in different colors (red, grey, blue) around the bar. In the background, there are bookshelves, a red leather sofa, and large windows with black frames. The floor is made of dark wood.

ARE WE ENTERING A NEW ERA OF COLLABORATION?

AS THE WORLD LOCKED DOWN IN 2020 AND OFFICES AND COFFEE SHOPS SAT EMPTY, WORK COLLEAGUES WERE FORCED APART, MEETINGS WERE NO LONGER AROUND A TABLE, “YOU’RE ON MUTE” BECAME A BUZZWORD AND WFH BECAME THE NORM... WILL THIS SHIFT TO VIRTUAL BUSINESS STAY FOR GOOD OR IS THERE A COUNTER-TREND EMERGING JUST AS FAST?

Despite all the great things this new world has brought, including a fairer and more flexible way for everyone to work – nobody can deny that separation has led to a longing for some form of human contact.

Whether it’s a hug from your grandma or the buzz of a good old office brainstorm – the energy that being around people again gives could lead to a whole new approach to doing business.

Put simply, we want to collaborate.

At O we have always collaborated with others. We like being around creative people and we enjoy meeting new talent, creators, entrepreneurs, and partners. Creative strategy takes on all opinions in our team, discussions are colourful and we believe great ideas can come from anywhere.

THE COLLABORATIVE WORKPLACE

The very word workplace says it all. It demonstrates how much we associate work with a place.

Google searches for 'lonely working from home' hit their highest peak in late 2021, the highest since we went into lockdown back in March 2020.

Searches spiked for 'what to wear to work' in early 2022, as hybrid working emerged as the new norm for many companies and people began to prepare for a return in some form to their place of work.

Research published in late 2021 showed that it is the youngest generations in the workplace that are pining for collaboration, as two-thirds of workers aged 18 – 34 (67%) say since working from home, they've found it harder to make friends and maintain relationships with colleagues.

People onboarded in lockdown have struggled with forming working relationships (42%), not having a manager or team "in the room" to ask for information or guidance (33%), learning to use new software and applications (24%), earning the confidence of colleagues (23%), and soaking up company culture (21%), according to Microsoft.

However, sitting at a desk 9-5, five days a week is not the type of place we want nowadays – what people really want is somewhere to connect and collaborate.

The author of a WSJ essay in January 22 suggested that the primary focus of the physical office will be fostering social interactions.

The idea of a 'company clubhouse', he suggested, is where conversations are shared over a coffee. Interactions that lead to ideas are leading to a new wave of office-layout concepts, with no fixed desks, coffee bar areas, cubicles and breakout zones instead of lines of desks.

Creating an environment conducive to collaboration is fast-becoming the way to make hybrid working successful. Given more than half (51%) of UK workers who currently have the choice to mix remote and office working would consider leaving their company if this hybrid option was removed, rethinking the benefits of your workplace environment for collaboration makes good business sense.*

67%
of workers aged 18 – 34
find it harder to make
friends with colleagues
when WFH

33%
of workers have
struggled not having a
manager in the room to
ask for information or
guidance

Source: <https://news.microsoft.com/en-gb/2021/12/09/more-than-half-of-uk-workers-would-consider-quitting-their-job-if-hybrid-working-was-axed-research-reveals/>

HANNAH CRAGGS - HEAD OF SUBSCRIPTION + CONTENT @ TREND BIBLE

DESIGNING FOR RECONNECTION IN A POST OR 'INTER-PANDEMIC' AGE

The consumer demand for reconnection is growing as we enter into what's been coined the "inter-pandemic phase". Although the impact of Covid-19 is far from over, trends are emerging to aid intimacy within spaces and environments. Materials, shape, form, and user experience all combine to establish our emotional link to objects and spaces and most of all, people.

Consumer thirst for exploration and interaction is at an all-time high. Whilst travel and socialising have been limited throughout the past two years, there is a forward movement towards a new era in which consumers re-establish connections, relationships, and a sense of intimacy with the people around them. Creating spaces which encourage personal wellbeing and promote healthy social interaction applies both to home and work.

Scale and space are changing - physically. Finding the balance between spaces that feel safe and allow for self-reflection and 'me time' yet welcome social interaction and aid playfulness, is an evolving challenge for employers. The idea of open plan is rapidly losing its appeal, not only does it feel intimidating for some now more accustomed to domestic design (i.e. lower ceilings, increased soft furnishings, less rigid / formal desk spaces) but also can feel harder to keep clean and safe. Instead people are seeking out all things modular that allow them to interact with their teams in a collaborative manner around bigger informal settings once or twice a week. Areas dedicated to silent / quiet working will also be key for focused periods of work.

Considerations when thinking about collaboration in the workplace are:

- Whilst considering how to help people connect through design, also consider how to create places for them to disconnect for self-reflection.
- The functional use of a space that can change, using design with modular, adaptable usage in mind.
- Facilitate friendliness but consider the concern for health and well-being. As the world transitions into an uncharted period of reintegration, sanitation and safety, as well as comfort, will be key.

Hybrid - blending IRL and URL working:

A need to facilitate fairness between those who are present IRL and those who will continue their employment via URL. Many have moved away or companies are now facilitating permanent distance working on new contracts. Therefore we will see an increase in things like owl labs video conferencing, connective calling and the rise of the "meta meeting".

Look to Google's "campfire" example - where 60% of Google's workforce are returning to the office environment part-time, 20% from home and 20% remotely. Connecting people on an even footing in real life and virtually, these rounded meeting circles with life-size digital screens provide a physical presence to virtual members.

Office Design focus - key details to create opportunities for reconnection and fostering friendship through design:

- Excite and engage the user through playful design and interaction.
- Celebrate nostalgic craft with a modern twist, combining comfort with excitement.
- Consider incorporating more circular forms to create a more organic sense of connection.
- The use of semi-transparent materials can create an open and calming aesthetic but still zoned.



THE RISE OF THE COLLABORATIVE ECONOMY

CAROLINE CAMPBELL, SUSTAINABILITY LEAD

Businesses and governments around the world have set themselves net zero targets and drafted corresponding strategies to reduce their carbon emissions in an effort to keep global warming within 1.5 degrees, as agreed in the Paris Climate Agreement.

In a society historically built around the fossil-fuel powered industrial revolution, this transformation towards a decarbonised world is no mean feat. Much like other seemingly overwhelming challenges, many are finding that the only way to make this task possible is through collaboration.

The thing about carbon emissions is they don't stay within people's homes, cars, business walls, or borders that divide countries – carbon emissions produced are shared amongst us all.

That's why it makes sense that businesses and governments who are most ambitious about achieving net zero are looking to collaborate to get results. There are now many businesses offering products and services which facilitate the collaboration necessary to reach net zero – here we shine a spotlight on some of those leading the net zero collaboration.

Low carbon travel

Travel is responsible for more than a third of all UK carbon emissions; something the UK government is looking at changing through its Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener white paper. This policy document sets out targets and measures to support the decarbonisation of the transport system including ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans from 2030, supporting the roll out of electric vehicles, and increasing the use of public transport and active travel. Introducing good quality infrastructure for electric vehicles (charging points) and active travel (cycle lanes) will require huge amounts of collaboration from industry, councils, and residents alike, but there's more to it than the collaboration around decision making and infrastructure implementation.

There are already several organisations who offer low carbon transport services through collaboration. Community car sharing clubs like Co Wheels give users the opportunity to borrow a car or van and to pay by the hour – and unlike traditional car hire, club cars are available 24/7 delivered to a nearby street. Meanwhile e-scooter rental systems like Tier Mobility offer an active travel option.

It's not just transport emissions from our day-to-day journeys that are up for review either, how goods are delivered to our door is also a source of carbon emissions, particularly with the rise of online shopping. This is why the popularity of e-cargo bike delivery companies who deliver packages from a variety of businesses are on the rise. Zedify, an e-cargo bike delivery service in Bristol had so much business during lockdown that it set up 10 mini-hubs on brownfield sites outside cities to make thousands of zero-emission deliveries into each city every day. E-cargo bikes have

a host of advantages over other vehicles: they can move more quickly through the city streets, meaning they are able to deliver packages 60% faster than their van equivalents. They're cleaner – saving about 90% in carbon emissions – quieter, and cut congestion, as a cargo bike uses a fraction of the road space of a typical delivery van.

Getting rid of waste also requires transport, so businesses looking to meet net zero targets can also consider teaming up to procure recycling services to reduce waste from their business processes. Not only will this reduce carbon emissions from recycling truck journeys, but it will also save businesses money. Going into a procurement process as a collective – increasing the value of a contract – will also give them more bargaining power and they might be able to stipulate carbon emission related targets in their contract, or specify electric vehicles. Bath Business Improvement District brought businesses together in this way to set up a low carbon city-wide recycling service for businesses.

To move away from a transport system that relies on fossil fuels the manufacturing sector along with many others, will need to tap into the skills necessary for electrification. The whole supply chain will need the facilities and equipment to test what's possible before all things fossil fuel powered become electric. One network providing just this – a network of the skills, capabilities and facilities needed to drive the electric revolution – can be found here in the North East of England at Newcastle University. DER-IC (Driving the Electric Revolution Industrial Centres) backed by UKRI and the UK Government, has over 30 partners and hubs in the North East, Scotland, South West and Midlands – and is always looking for business collaborations.

Source: <https://ukcop26.org/cop26-goals/>

Sharing energy

After transport, the biggest source of UK carbon emissions is energy. District heat networks – a heating system that relies on collaboration between businesses, local authorities and homeowners – are popping up around the country proving they have a role to play in decarbonisation.

As Andrew Hirst, decarbonisation specialist at law firm Womble Bond Dickinson pointed out recently in an article in Yorkshire's Business Insider, manufacturers who produce huge amounts of excess heat in processes can capture this energy, which can then be redirected to a district heat network – if the infrastructure is established. This set-up requires businesses and local authorities to work together, but this is already happening in Yorkshire. Leeds City Council is currently working with industry to develop the biggest district heat network in the UK.

Meanwhile, in the North East, Newcastle now boasts one of the UK's 'smart' energy system developments at the 24-acre Newcastle Helix site, where there is a District Energy Centre providing energy to homes and businesses via a network of underground pipes. Non-residential properties on the site also benefit from a cooling system and a bespoke electricity supply. The system is integrated with the smart electricity grid, smart meters, and on-site electrical energy storage to allow the generation, distribution and consumption of heat and power to be closely monitored and managed. It has been calculated that the scheme will provide a carbon emission saving of 30,650 tonnes over 40 years.

This region is also looking at innovative ways of repurposing and reusing the infrastructure left by its coal mining past, with Durham County Council recently receiving funding to develop its own low carbon heat network, which will use geothermal heat from former coal mines. The energy will then be distributed to Seaham Garden Village, where it will heat more than 1,500 homes, a school, and a health centre. If successful, it is hoped that the project can be replicated across the country.

Buying and selling 'stuff' in a circular economy

Back in 2013 The Economist ran an article stating 'On the internet, everything is for hire' and according to CBI data in 2021, the UK's Sharing Economy is expected to be worth £140 billion by 2025.

Ellen McArthur of the Ellen McArthur Foundation says:



THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY IS NEEDED TO GET TO NET-ZERO EMISSIONS. WHILE 55 PER CENT OF EMISSIONS CAN BE TACKLED BY THE TRANSITION TO RENEWABLE ENERGY, THE REMAINING 45 PER CENT OF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS COME FROM THE WAY WE MAKE AND USE PRODUCTS AND FOOD, AND MANAGE LAND.

THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY IS A WAY TO SOLVE THIS BY DECOUPLING ECONOMIC GROWTH FROM THE CONSUMPTION OF FINITE RESOURCES.



Part of decarbonising society is keeping the things we own (and the embodied carbon emissions in them) in use for as long as possible to avoid having to buy 'new stuff', which requires the consumption of carbon emissions to extract raw materials, manufacture of materials into products, and then operating the full supply chain right up to the point of the end consumer.

The idea of 'getting stuff' through the 'shared economy' – a framework where assets and services are provided, acquired, or shared between private individuals – supported by apps and digital platforms – is now very popular. These collaborative platforms support a 'circular economy' – an economic system where resources go round in circles – and one that's compatible with a net zero world. Have a look and you'll see that you can probably find anything you need (with some patience) through one of these sites, which connect users who either want to pass on, or are looking to acquire, goods and services.

For buying second hand things have a look at: Ebay, Facebook marketplace, Gumtree, Freecycle, Vinted, Depop and Vestiaire Collective. For acquiring discounted food that would otherwise go to waste (e.g. when restaurants, cafes and food shops have a surplus at the end of the day) try TooGoodToGo.

For renting goods and services for a limited period of time, some regions have a library of things where you can rent gardening tools and toys, there are lots of nappy and sling libraries for new parents, check out Hirestreet if you're looking to rent affordable fashion and many white goods manufacturers now lease appliances. Not only do these platforms that are designed to avoid waste contribute to our achievement of net zero, they have a social value too, in that they link you up with your local community.

Source: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2013/03/09/the-rise-of-the-sharing-economy>

COLLABORATIVE MARKETING



The days of a top-down approach to marketing your goods or services are long gone. The rise of social media put paid to that.

Nowadays the customer is a key part of the marketing channel, taking advocacy to a new level as the average Joe is a media owner. Almost everyone has a platform – taking word of mouth to a whole new powerful level.

Nowhere is there a better example of this than the social media influencer – the ordinary person who holds thousands, and sometimes millions, of people in the palm of their hand – via their iPhone.

As influencer marketing has matured over the pandemic, where more of us turned to social media for connection and online sites for buying stuff – they have become known as creators.

Take a look at Instagram or TikTok and you will find technology that supports Creators to become big business. These taste-makers have become experts at creating content that resonates with their followers.

Whether it's Mikayla Nogueira talking about the next viral mascara, Francis Bourgeois modelling for Gucci, or Maya the Samoyed enjoying a new dog treat, content creators are fast becoming one of the most effective tools in marketing.

TikTok themselves have stated that ads on their platform have a 27% higher Ad Recall for branded content in collaboration with creators. Ads created for TikTok without a creator partnership achieved 12% higher engagement rates, whereas ads created for TikTok with a creator partnership achieved 83% higher engagement rates and were watched for longer.

TikTok influencer and content marketing executive at O Rebecca Baty says:

“The value of TikTok really lies in the communities that its creators build. The creators that thrive on the platform have built their follower counts by being authentically themselves. In a world where consumers know they are being sold to on every corner of the internet, TikTok offers refreshingly original content. Creators are more honest about themselves, embrace their own weirdness or quirks and talk about their passions and interests. This resonates well with others as they see people on their mobile phone screens who really represent them or something about their personality.

“TikTok has become a great place for people to connect to their favourite content creators and feel part of a community of likeminded people. More and more TikTok users are turning to it as a source of entertainment, education and even product reviews. So embracing TikTok as a community led platform is key for success, and this is where most creators will spend the majority of their time, engaging with their followers.”

Brands have cottoned onto this and the ‘brand colab’ is big business.

Pepsi recently partnered with TikTok star Khaby Lame for an ad campaign to launch its Nitro Pepsi, a nitrogen-infused cola, in the US and Greggs chose grime artist Stormzy to be the first person to receive its VIP concierge card in the UK. According to Shopify, 61% of online consumers trust influencer recommendations and influencer marketing has an 11x greater ROI than banner ads.

Source: <https://www.tiktok.com/business/en-GB/blog/brand-collaborations-tiktok-creators-drive-big-results>

BRAND COLABS

Lucy Couldwell is the founder of This is Coco creator talent agency, a new breed of agency in the marketing world that operates between the brand and the social media creator to activate campaigns in the marketing mix.

What does an influencer/creator agent do?

We offer full scale management for our clients, where we help them to develop and nurture their talent, elevate their profile, help them achieve their aspirations and take care of all the admin that comes into being a social media content creator – so they have more time to focus on creating really great content for their followers and looking at leveraging their profile outside of the social media space.

We also work with a number of celebrity clients who have existing talent management. We consult with them to help them grow and leverage their social media profiles specifically and then act as agents to secure brand partnerships.

For both we help them identify the right brands to work with from a commercial perspective and manage the whole process from negotiating fees through to delivering results of the campaign.

My background was in-house PR at a huge retailer, so I understand the value and expectation from a brand's perspective. Our job at Coco is to respond to the brand's brief and explain what type of content the creator would produce. Sometimes we have conversations about how branded the content will be to manage their expectations. Brands often want as much exposure as possible, but they need to appreciate that influencer knows their audiences inside out and if the content feels too branded it won't perform. Followers are so much more savvy nowadays when they see content is an Ad.

We have to ensure the partnership is a really good fit for both the brand and the creator. We usually know pretty quickly if the brand brief fits with the creators usual style of content and will work for their audiences –will their audience care? If it's not a good fit it's not worth taking the risk for the influencer or the brand.

Who do you represent?

From a full time management perspective, we are very proud to represent Sophie McCartney, who is a comedian and very much a social media sensation. She started a blog in 2017 and created a famous Ed Sheeran parody video that went viral overnight so she was catapulted into social media fame. Sophie's content is hilarious, she is loved for her very honest portrayal of parenting and helped many knackered parents laugh through the hell of home-schooling.

We also represent the most incredible interiors and lifestyle stylist, Kerry Lockwood, who is based here in the North East. Kerry creates the most beautiful homes and interiors content and is now one of the UK's most recognised interiors influencers, her content is just heavenly. She has an incredible talent for turning simple everyday moments at home into stunning thumb-stopping videos.

They have both been able to give up their day jobs and do this full time, so they work with brands to create content to promote different products and services – that's where they get most of their income from now.

We help them identify opportunities for new brand partnerships and also review inbound opportunities. We do everything from negotiating fees to contracting, overseeing the creative process, making sure things are posted on time, ensuring everything is abiding by ASA regulations if it's a paid partnership and then at the end making sure that we are delivering the ROI results back to the brand. We are the link between the brand and the creator.



LUCY COULDWELL
Founder
at This is Coco



In terms of a content creator, what makes a great one?

You need a USP. Something you've got that nobody else has – meaning your content will be original and memorable.

Audiences need to understand what they are following you for. Why are you worth following and what can they get from you that they don't get from others? It's such a crowded market. Once you've got your USP it's about dialling it up. There is so much inspiration on social media, you can always be inspired, but try and make something your own creative property and embrace it.

There are really niche influencers now who have carved out a super engaged following based on specific interests or lifestyles. For some brands that are quite specialist that's priceless.

They have a good balance between brand partnerships and organic content. People want to understand who they are as a brand, what they really value, to get to know them outside of sponsored opportunities.

I think it's beneficial for the brand to choose someone that's not doing too many ads – I wouldn't ever suggest that a client should do more than two paid partnerships a week, around 4 out of 5 posts need to be organic.

What brands do you work with the most?

It varies so much. We work with all the big ones like Sainburys, ASDA, McDonalds and Boots but there's also some really nice smaller brands we work with too.

I find that smaller brands, perhaps with younger founders who are digitally savvy, are investing more of their marketing spend into social media. But there is also an opportunity for supporting smaller brands that my clients genuinely love even if it's not a paid partnership. Budget isn't as important as authentic endorsements.

We always encourage any brand to come to us and chat about what budget they have and what they are looking for and if it's a good fit we can work it out.

What are the brands looking for from creators just now?

A few years ago you wanted to work with creators with the biggest following, now that's not relevant – it's all about engagement. You can have a creator with over a million followers, but their engagement might be tiny. Whereas you can look at an influencer with a much smaller following but has an incredible engagement. Just because a creator has lots of followers it doesn't mean that number of people will see the content. The algorithm skews it so actually only 10-15% might see a post if engagement is low. Micro influencers are really having their moment at the minute.

If you're a brand you should go after a creator that creates the type of content that's perfect for your target audience – allowing them to use their creativity and unique style to bring your brand to life in a really authentic way for their followers.

Sophie created a funny video for Playdough that was so perfect for her audience that nobody even twigged it was a brand partnership – it got over 1m views and the brand was thrilled.

Brand ambassadorships are growing too – whenever I do a job with a brand I'd always like to think that it would be a longer-term fit. Fabletics usually work with hot yogi fitness influencers but Sophie's angle on a partnership was so different – her comedic approach was all about knackered mums want to just live in leggings! It's been so successful it has turned into a longer-term brand ambassador role. It's great for the brand because some followers might enjoy the content at first which is great awareness but it's months down the line when they see another post from Sophie that could be the nudge to purchase.

Do you think that more budget is being driven towards brand x creator partnerships?

The IPA reported that in 2020-21 there was a 20% decrease in traditional marketing but the influencer market grew by over 45%. In 2021 the influencer marketing platform was worth \$13bn but by 2028 its predicted to grow to \$85bn.

Data capture has driven this too, brands can give you a budget and you can go back at the end of the campaign to say exactly how many people saw the content, engaged with the content and clicked through to purchase. There aren't many traditional channels that result in such accurate insights.

Experienced brand managers will ask for audience demographics and insights – they are checking that the creator's followers are a good fit for their audience, because a creator can share their audience demographic. How old they are, where they live, even the times they are online.

Now you can see their average story views and link clicks in order to predict sales. Some smaller brands have a formula to work out how much they can afford to spend based on those insights.

So as a brand you can plan campaigns from a ROI perspective – you can walk into a board meeting and confidently say what a creator partnership is doing for the brand.

Where is it all happening for creators at the moment – is it all over on Instagram or moving to TikTok?

We used to talk about YouTubers – the Zoellas and the like – but now we talk about them more as creators, because I don't think you can be aligned to just one channel.

There's so much competition between the social channels I don't think any will just die – people aren't just going to just stop using them overnight or jump to another completely. There is also a huge split in terms of demographic when it comes to the different networks, we know that the Tik Tok users are much younger than Facebook.

If I was a brand I'd be hyper focused on a creator's audience – the creator's follower insights, not just them as a person – sometimes their following can be 10-15 years' younger for example.

You also need to decide what time of content you want to produce. Do you need longer-form content with depth of message for the brand – such as YouTube or Facebook – or short form content like Reels or TikToks which gets more reach and impressions.

What should brands be thinking about next when working with creators?

I think affiliate programmes are brilliant – a creator finds a brand they love and would talk about organically anyway, but an affiliate link will allow them to make a small commission on any link sales – those mentions will drive so many sales because it's so authentic.

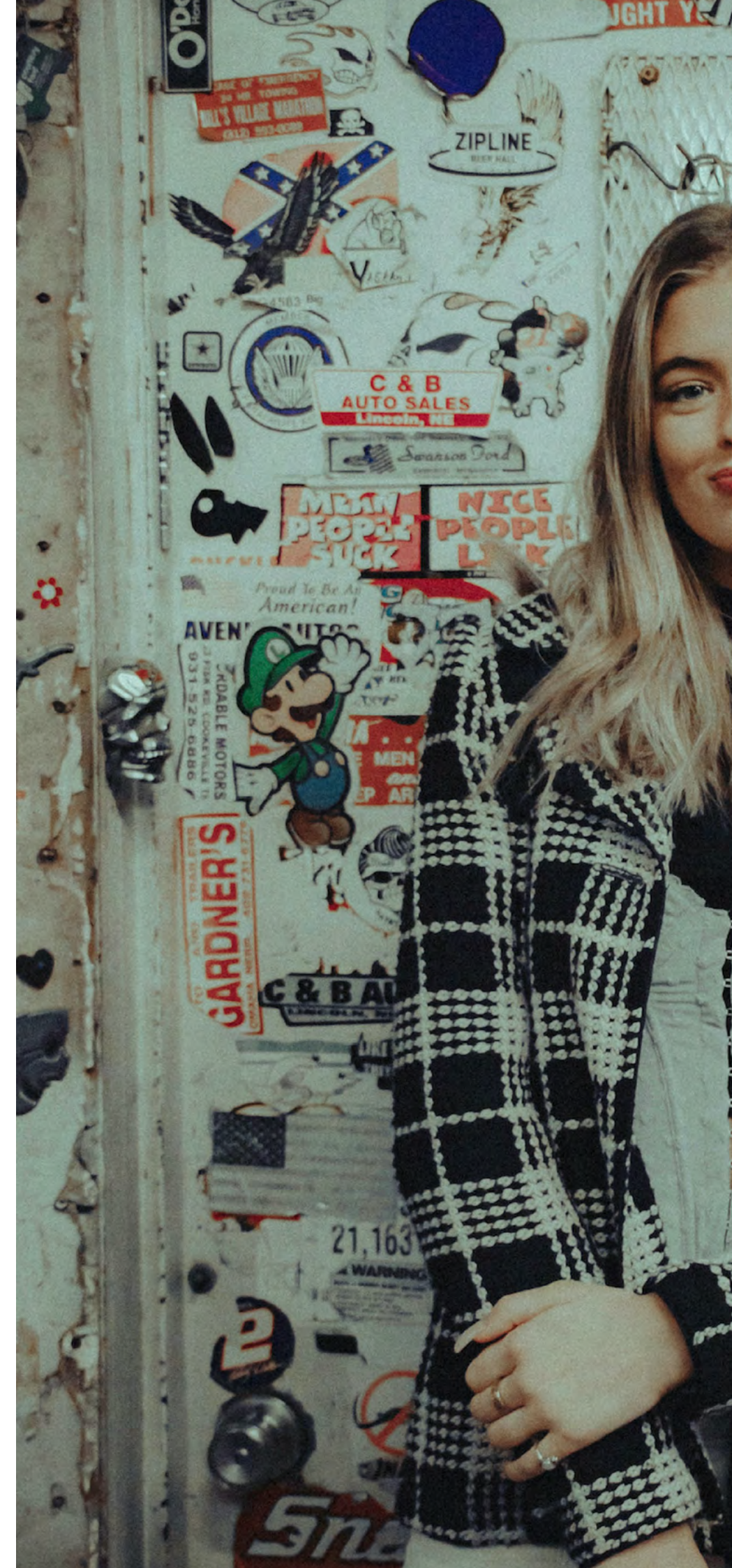
“THERE'S SO MUCH COMPETITION BETWEEN THE SOCIAL CHANNELS I DON'T THINK ANY WILL JUST DIE”

We know video is hero and it will continue to be – I think you see more long form content coming back.

Podcasts will grow – people are being choosy about the content they want to consume when they're on the go – a lot of creators have stepped over into the podcast realm, so sponsorship of episodes is a great option for brands if it's a good audience fit.

I feel it's important that brands are considerate of diversity and champion that – we are starting to see brands are being called out on lack of diversity in their campaigns. Influencers are also doing their own due diligence to make sure they align with a brands values before they jump into a partnership.

My final tip is to watch the rise of micro and nano influencers – they say the bigger your following, the smaller your engagement is. 3% has always been considered a decent engagement rate for an influencer but micro and nano influencers (those with up to 25k followers) can get engagement up to 7%.



WE LIKE TO COLLABORATE TOO!

**Our CoLab is our learning and collaboration space at OHQ,
and now we're turning it into a Club!**

Our CoLab Club will allow our community of clients to network, learn and be inspired.

As a client of O you can enjoy:

- Free use of office space / refreshments / wifi in The CoLab
- Monthly email full of advice, trends and tips
- Quarterly senior leaders event with guest speakers on leadership, trends, culture and more
- VIP invites to our regular marketing round table and workshops programme 2022



JOIN OUR FIRST COLAB CLUB EVENT

TUESDAY 28TH JULY AT 10AM

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Lead by our CEO Kari plus two guest speakers

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