

# THE ACCIDENTAL INFLUENCER

## SOCIAL MEDIA HAS PROVIDED ME WITH A NEW CAREER... BUT WHAT'S THE CATCH?

by Jess Bacon

Jess is a writer, social media consultant, influencer and creator of the Guide to Life After University podcast. She's currently working on her first novel and curated this month's playlist too. Jess' Instagram account sky-rocketed during the pandemic, so I asked her to tell us about some of the positives and negatives of finding a following online.



Back in March when the pandemic hit, I thought I would take the opportunity to give my neglected blog some TLC, as it had been gathering dust in a corner of the internet for the past year or two. I had 2,000 followers on Instagram and love taking photos, so decided I'd try and grow my account to increase the traffic to my blog. And well, it worked, far better than I thought it would.

I now have almost 30,000 followers, have started my own podcast, work as an influencer and have gone freelance with my writing and social media consultancy. As you can imagine, I'm a huge advocate for utilising social media and the digital space to propel your career and share your passions online. But that level of exposure and work to get there does take its toll, it's just about trying to not let that put you off.

Social media is about virtual socialising and finding "your people" online. Anyone, anywhere can find your content, which opens endless possibilities, but it's also quite terrifying. For me, the pros of having an active social media has always outweighed the cons... but it doesn't make the downsides any easier.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA?

#### You can connect with like-minded people

It's easy to find your kind of people online. Maybe they're pet people who love cacti and Marvel, or they're Diet Coke lovers and *Normal People* fans. Either way, you get them and they get you.

Social media increases the chances of connecting with people that are like you. It's actually quite difficult to do that in real life, it requires knowing the right people, or being introduced or thrown into situations that increase social anxiety. So it's a great way to connect with people and bond over issues that affect you both.

#### Earn additional income

More and more we're looking for flexible ways to work our own hours and for our own goals. Whether it's starting an Etsy shop, consultancy or running a small business from home, social media is great for raising your profile and driving sales of your products.

It's a useful tool for generating an additional income stream, if you have the time and capacity to put the work in alongside your day job.

#### Find great brands and businesses

Social media is essentially another Google. You can find new brands and businesses and sometimes find exactly what you needed, which could be anything from local flower delivery, to sustainable sanitary products, to unisex clothing.

#### It can be creative

All forms of social media allow you to be creative. Twitter has its witty one liners, or threads that will make you howl with laughter, while Instagram allows you to cultivate your photography or graphic skills and YouTube benefits your video content creation skills. It encourages creative ways to connect with people both inside and outside of your immediate circle.

### Social media can be a force for encouraging change and action on social injustice and raising awareness of charity initiatives

I've learnt so much this year through social media and about marketing via Instagram, from people I've connected with, to books they've written and content they've shared. It expands your insight on the world by learning from other people's experiences.

Unfortunately, social media platforms don't always get it right. Instagram has great potential for connectivity and finding your kind of people, but it doesn't filter out the ones that aren't.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU BE WARY OF WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA?

#### Online bullying

Online bullying has always been one of the most difficult and detrimental parts of social media. People hide behind screens and dehumanise the people behind the accounts they follow to leave criticism in their comments and DMs that they'd never say in real life (you'd like to think). It's unsettling and emotionally taxing being subjected to that kind of criticism and it does wear your resilience down. Thankfully I've had quite a positive experience with social media overall, but it doesn't mean there aren't the stray comments that will knock me sideways.

#### Censorship

As a cis, mid-sized, white woman, none of my posts has ever been censored by Instagram. The extent of the bias in Instagram guidelines for certain types of content, bodies and ethnicities has come to light over the past year (take a look at @curvynome's account to see what happened to her in 2020). It's something to be mindful and vocal about, as it's just wrong

on so many levels and won't change without collective action.

#### Deceiving or misleading content

Social media should never be your source of news, which we all know, but more and more we're finding there is deceiving or misleading content. Remember that you aren't seeing the whole picture of a brand or a person's life online. Sometimes the deception is intentional to buy a product, join a pyramid scheme etc. or it's unintentional, and people simply withhold information that might impact their public image. It's something to be wary of when making relationships online, but know that the truth does come out in the end.

#### Inappropriate comments

Now this happens a lot on my account. I'm quick to delete comments or DMs that make me uncomfortable, but if a post is doing well and reaching more people there's a good chance a handful of those will leave inappropriate (often sexual) comments. These comments, which are similar to that of online trolling, are something you should never have to get used to, but are an unfortunate part of growing a social following.

I focus on the positives, as for me the benefits of social media have outweighed the downsides. It's given me a new creative career and allowed me to have creative conversations with people I never would have known without Instagram. But that doesn't make the fatphobic or trolling comments any easier to stomach.

Social media has a lot of work to do, but there are ways to have an account, campaign for better treatment of each other online and protect your mental health if you have the right support network on and offline.

