



Youth Are Breaking the Rules of Traditional Entrepreneurship During a Global Pandemic

By Bochra Rouag

For my last birthday, I received a flower box from my friend Souad. It was a rectangular pink box with the words “for you” written on top of it. Inside of it, there were twelve beautiful white roses with “Ferrero Rocher” chocolates in it. It took me a while to realize that it was handmade and not bought – already made or prefabricated – from a store. Two months later, after Souad had been told time and time again that she should sell her flower boxes, she wanted to start a business. Not wanting to enter this new territory alone, she asked me to join her on this project. I was really excited by her idea and I directly accepted. I was ready for a new experience!

When the government announced a lockdown in March 2020, the economy was suddenly hit. Stores that were not considered essential had to close and find new ways to sell. While older entrepreneurs were trying to save their companies, a new trend emerged; that of businesses created by youngsters. People aged 25 and younger were breaking the rules of traditional businesses. At such a ripe age, they started building empires online using platforms that are completely free and accessible to everyone.



The new trend of “small businesses” is mostly created by young people, some of whom are just 12 years old, like Gabrielle Goodwin who owns a barrette business. Gabrielle’s business was so successful, that she was named the 2018 Black Enterprise Teenpreneur of the Year according to the article “Meet the 12-Year-Old Business Owner Who Launched an Entrepreneurship Academy for Young Girls”. For Gen Z, your age does not define how successful your business is.

Moreover, most of Gen Z entrepreneurs who started their business during the pandemic do not have a university degree.

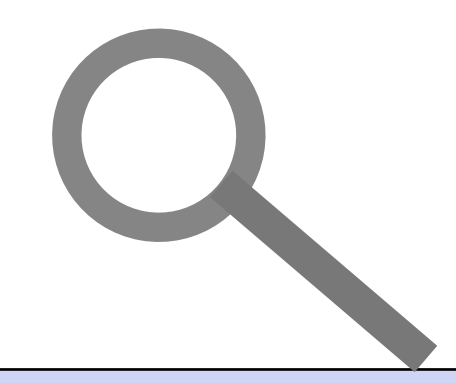
Erik and Nikko, two media students at LaSalle College near the heart of downtown Montreal, agree that a university degree is no longer necessary to run a successful business. Nikko says that he has seen “a lot of youth creating their own businesses and using different platforms to sell, doing so well without a university degree.” Instead of going to university for many years, Gen Z businesspeople prefer to spend these years on improving and growing their companies. Najla, a 16-year-old entrepreneur who makes custom digital drawings, agrees with them: “It is really easy to watch videos from YouTube and directly learn from them how to start a business.”

For young entrepreneurs, selling online solves a lot of problems that come with selling in a physical store. Firstly, because it removes a lot of costs. A physical store requires one to pay for rent, which can be upwards of \$3000 per month, according to a Quebec real estate industry website called “centris”, in a city like Montreal. A physical store also calls for different installations for the products and a lot of employees to handle those products. To avoid that, Gen Z businesspeople prefer to stay in the comfort of their house and make and sell their products directly from there.

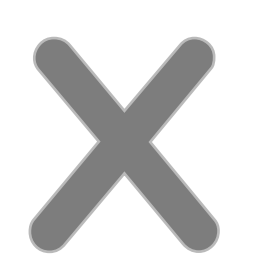


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Furthermore, during the pandemic, people prefer to shop online even when all the stores are open – mainly because they do not risk getting the virus online – and these trends may stick with us post-pandemic. A recent article called “The Next Normal Arrives: Trends That Will Define 2021- and Beyond” by Kevin Sneader and Shubham Singhal argues that “the trend is clear: many consumers are moving online. To reach them, companies have to go there, too.”



Platforms used to sell online



To advertise and sell products, different online platforms, both old and new, are used. Social media plays a huge role in helping people sell their products. The most popular ones are Instagram and Tik Tok. For instance, for my friend Souad, with whom I will be undertaking a flowerbox business, clients are extremely easy to find there, mainly because “these platforms are used by lots of people.” Moreover, social media is free. Now, young entrepreneurs only have to worry if the image or the video they created to promote their product is going to convince people that their product is worth buying, unlike big companies who also have to pay for the dissemination of their advertisements.

Another app popular for selling is Etsy. According to Mindy Lilyquist, a writer for the website “The Balance Small Business” where she participated in the writing of 48 articles, “Etsy is an online marketplace that connects sellers with buyers. It is primarily used for selling vintage items, handmade goods, art, and crafts.” Many teen entrepreneurs use this app to sell since it is specially designed for that purpose. Almost everything can be sold on Etsy; whether it is decoration items, jewellery, or beauty products, the choices are endless, but some items are rarer than others. For example, Najla, who sells custom digital drawings, considers that “there is not a lot of digital-realist drawings artists on Etsy, which makes it easier for [her] to make a place for [her] drawings on there.”

Like Etsy, Shopify is another app for online selling. Lucy Carney, an author who writes articles for different websites like “Shopify Partner”, sees that the particularity of Shopify is that “it has the tools to help you set up and run your business, from your store’s design to shipping,” which allows you to add a personal touch to your brand.

With the multitude of apps that exist to help small business owners, entering the world of entrepreneurship has become easier and more possible for anyone who wishes to start their own business. Even if the trend is becoming more and more well-known, it is not always accepted by some people who consider that young people are just having fun during the lockdown and their businesses will not work over the long term. In response to that, Najla says that: “a lot of new businesses have a good customer base, and they will succeed even when the pandemic will be over.”

For this budding entrepreneur, I think that all Gen Z entrepreneurs would tend to agree with her because it takes effort and time to build a business, and we are here to prove that we are as competent as the older generations in entrepreneurship. Young entrepreneurs are bringing new ways of accomplishing success in the world of entrepreneurship by accepting the fact that anyone can have a successful business no matter how young or old they are by selling online and using the free platforms that are at their reach to boost their business. It is only the beginning for Gen Z entrepreneurs, but they are here to stay and perhaps, in the future, their now small businesses will become bigger and compete with the most successful companies.