

From Instagram page to fully-fledged media startup: meet The Know

Maddyness spoke to Lynn Anderson Clark, cofounder and CEO of The Know, about sorting fact from fiction in the Instagram era and why younger people are flocking towards solutions journalism.

As Big Tech and the mainstream media tussle in the foreground over misinformation, bias and profitability, some creators are carving out spaces away from the noise. They're designing media platforms that take the prevalence and power of social media as a given – with a fresh pair of eyes, and an appetite for actionable solutions. They know – as the finest players in our national press do too – that there's an audience for truth.

Lynn Anderson Clark is one of the people applying the startup mentality to the world of media. “There's a cycle of feeding people negativity for clicks”, she observes of the news as it stands.

It's causing us to look the other way. “I think the biggest mistake we can make is switching off. And I understand why people are doing it. I totally do”, Anderson Clark continues. “But without information, how do the wheels of democracy turn?

“If you're not informed, you're not voting. If you're

not informed, you're not trying to create policy change."

On top of this, "big, traditional companies are very slow to change." "And they have traditional power structures; they're male-dominated at the top. I think they're doing a better job of hiring. But if you look at the top of those media companies, it's all men."

She would know. After nearly a decade at NBC Universal in New York and Los Angeles, Anderson Clark upped sticks to work in partnerships at slow news pioneer *Tortoise Media*, before moving to Founders Factory, and then ultimately becoming a founder herself. She's seen how media functions at all levels – from entertainment conglomerate, to startup founded by a collection of 'old school' media alumni, to the startup she now runs with Holly Beddingfield – who only left university in 2018.

Roots at Founders Factory and on Instagram

While Anderson Clark was strategic partnerships lead at Founders Factory, Beddingfield was taking part in its accelerator programme via a publication then known as *This Much I Know*. Her original cofounder Emily Sheffield (former deputy editor of *Vogue*) got scooped up for the top job at the *Evening Standard*, and Anderson Clark was there to fill the gap.

"I really got the startup bug from *Tortoise*, and then I wanted to go full on", she says. "Being at Founders Factory, I got to see dozens of founders... and it was incredible just to see different leadership styles, different growth styles, how they handled problems."

"So many of my frustrations from my time in traditional media, The Know was solving."

Anderson Clark officially started as CEO and cofounder of *The Know* on

December 1st 2020, in sync with a name change (*This Much I Know* gave the sense that all learning had been done) and a decision to move the publication's centre of gravity away from Instagram and into a daily newsletter.

With 35K followers on Instagram – and a recent takeover from Mila Kunis to boot – *The Know* has developed a reputation for its 'approachable, digestible, and visual' rendering of the news headlines. It was designed to help millennials and Gen-Zers feel less stressed about current affairs, and more capable of implementing small changes in their daily lives and incentivising heftier change in policy, investment and so on.

Since 2019 when *The Know* was founded, however, Instagram has become pretty saturated with infographics. They've been a revolutionary means of disseminating information and resources for social justice movements, but have also attracted their fair share of ridicule for sanitising and oversimplifying complex issues.

"I think Instagram is a brilliant place to start. It's where our users already are, and it's a wonderful place to build a community", says Anderson Clark. "But of course I don't think you can ever base a business just on Instagram. So we have other platforms."

These are daily and weekly newsletters, and longer features generally falling under the umbrella of "sustainability, equality, and mental health and wellness". Recent pieces span a profile of the Pakistani feminists taking to Facebook Live in light of lockdown; an investigation into what it's really like at Napier Barracks, a disused military facility being used to house asylum seekers; and an opinion piece arguing that 'age is just a number – even after losing a year to a pandemic'.

Regarding all this content, Anderson Clark says, "It's owned by us – so we can control everything about it. It's also a way to have a bit more of a nuanced conversation. So Instagram is really about telling you the top facts and getting you interested. But our newsletters can really get into the nuances."

Synthesising social and traditional media

However, *The Know's* editorial strategy and funding model takes the digital native profile of its readers into account.

Its stories are shaped, debated and fleshed out via Instagram polls and Clubhouse discussions. The team pick a hot topic to cover on Monday –

recently they focused on #NotAllMen – before asking followers for their thoughts. “We do all kinds of polls – and [Instagram’s] feedback cycle is brilliant for us”, says Anderson Clark.

Then, there’s a mid-week Clubhouse session to collect more viewpoints, and the main feature drops on a Thursday. The process shares much with that in place at *Tortoise Media*; Anderson Clark’s former workplace hosts weekly open news meetings and ‘ThinkIns’ with its members, who thus help choose which stories get investigated and told.

The role of *The Know*’s weekly feature – and the other, smaller stories published concurrently – is to deconstruct the news, tell people what’s going on on both sides, and “if you’re passionate about that issue, telling you how you can actually make change.” To Anderson Clark, change looks like anything from signing a petition and writing to your MP to organising major campaigns – of which *The Know* has a few in the pipeline.

Likewise, *The Know* doesn’t plan to charge for access, at least in the short term, because its readers aren’t used to having to pay for news. Building on original funding from Founders Factory and a small Angel round in spring 2020, the platform hopes to generate income through working with brands to co-create content.

“In 2021, businesses are expected to take a stand. Throughout all of this change and turmoil, you’ve seen all top brands having to come out and make a statement about what they believe in. Both their consumers and employees are expecting them to do that.”

“There’s a huge opportunity to align with brands, because we stand for a lot of what they want to stand for. And we do it in a really authentic, engaged way.”

A problem that needs solving

For the time being, however, *The Know*’s prime focus is growing its community and output. Initial signs from investors have been positive, says Anderson

Clark, because they experience the problem everyday, in their homes and their workplaces. Everyone is talking about the state of the news.

“For me, there’s a true purpose behind this”, she adds. “This is not just a job; it’s about how we have healthier conversations around the news. So I wake up every morning and I’m thinking, how can we do this?”

“We’re in a pandemic. There’s so many things we could be down about.”

“But the fact that we have this community just gives me hope that there are people like us in the world that want to come together, that want to be informed and and want to make change.”

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