

The Z Link, the social media agency bridging the gap between generations

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Erifili Gounari, Founder and CEO of The Z Link about helping brands connect with Gen Z, social media and self-drive.

What was the catalyst for launching The Z Link?

I got the idea in 2020 after working in social media marketing for a few years alongside university, when I realised that the same pattern kept appearing: brands were hiring me because I was young and they needed help connecting with Gen Z on social media. They felt a gap of understanding between themselves and Gen Z.

Around the same time, a lot of research started emerging around connecting with Gen Z and our generation's behaviours and preferences. I saw that there was no Gen Z-led social media agency that specialised in that specifically, hence The Z Link was born.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

We're the first Gen Z-led social media agency that helps brands connect with Gen Z, so we do social media marketing, strategy, and content, as well as a lot of original research on generational behaviours. We love helping bridge the gap between generations and also having fun with creative content to make marketing more human, and more of a two-way conversation! We've worked with brands like the UN, IKEA, Deloitte, Hearst, and more.

How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

The launch was in May 2020; it was just me as a solo founder with no resources and no team, for the first months. The demand was there since the start, so once we started having more clients and working on bigger projects, I started growing the team.

We are now a team of 25 Gen Z social media strategists and creators spread across the world. We've also expanded into market research since the beginning where we were just focused on social media marketing.

Tell us about the working culture at The Z Link

It's great that everyone in the team is young and excited about having fun and being creative in their work. We're a fully remote company so we're very focused on efficiency and cutting unnecessary processes; we work very well asynchronously, with project meetings when needed.

One of the things I feel strongly about too as the CEO is not creating unnecessary urgency in the team! We work in marketing, we're not saving lives; we take our job seriously but without anyone feeling like if they make a mistake it is the end of the world. It's what helps us create a healthy working culture where no one feels like they have to be on their phone 24/7 and sacrifice their work-life balance.

How are you funded?

We have no external funding, the company keeps itself running. It helped that I started it without costs, I bootstrapped by doing everything as inexpensively as possible: mainly the website, domains, etc.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

As a founder, it has been learning to build efficient processes. I had no entrepreneurial experience before starting The Z Link so I learned most of it on the job, in the first months. Learning to delegate and build sustainable processes is what enables us to scale, there's just a big learning curve on exactly how to do that for most founders at the beginning.

How does The Z Link answer an unmet need?

There's a large gap between brands and Gen Z; so much social media marketing is considered 'cringey' by our generation, or simply frustrating/invasive because we see too many ads while very few resonate.

On the side of Gen Z, they're tired of being bombarded by annoying content on social media. On the side of brands, they want to communicate their messaging in a way that resonates with young consumers, especially for brands with a larger purpose or mission that would likely appeal to Gen Z. We help bridge that gap by helping brands communicate with Gen Z and build organic communities that Gen Z actually enjoys being a part of.

What is the difference between millennial marketing and Gen Z marketing?

Gen Z is the first generation of digital natives, so everything is accentuated: mobile-first content has a greater importance, omnichannel marketing works better, they see content at a greater scale and thus evaluate things more quickly and strictly. Gen Z also uses social media a lot to facilitate connection and feel like they *belong*.

That's why community-driven social media strategies work well with our generation, because if a brand can find a way to create communities that people feel like they can benefit from, that add some value to their lives, then it's giving back by creating a space that Gen Z enjoys online.

What's in store for the future?

We're seeing the emergence of Gen Alpha research, which I think is going to be very different than Gen Z in some ways. If we were the first digital natives, Gen Alpha is on a whole other level, expertly knowing how to use an iPad before they learn how to write properly. We don't yet know how this will affect them when they grow up and become more active users of social media, and marketing consumers.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

My top piece of advice to aspiring founders is always to cultivate a *bias for action*: learning to favour action over inaction, even when imperfect. Being self-driven enough to go from 0 to 1 even among uncertainty and self-doubt, is often the best indicator that someone will be successful.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

At the moment I'm focusing a lot on mindfulness. I've finally managed to stick to consistent meditation for 100 days so this is now a part of my daily routine that I value. I've also been a huge proponent of journaling, which I've been doing almost daily for a year and a half, and it's been one of the most life-changing and beneficial habits I have ever built.

Regarding rules I'm living by, I'm finding it increasingly important to have time to follow my inspiration. I think it's very valuable to be able to act upon inspiration when it strikes, so I try to enable that freedom for myself in my daily life because it's what ultimately leads to you feeling fulfilled everyday, and puts you into a flow state more often.

