

Connecting with your customers using local community groups



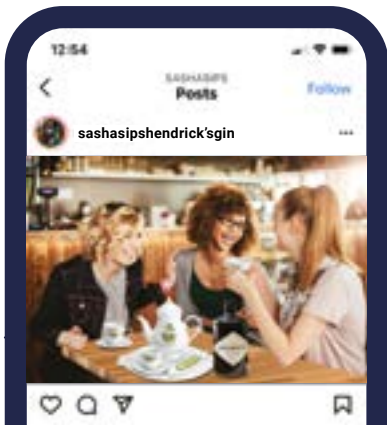
The Challenge

Social media offers huge opportunities to the hospitality sector but it's a crowded marketplace for sure.

Facebook is still the biggest network in the world and boasts the most users.

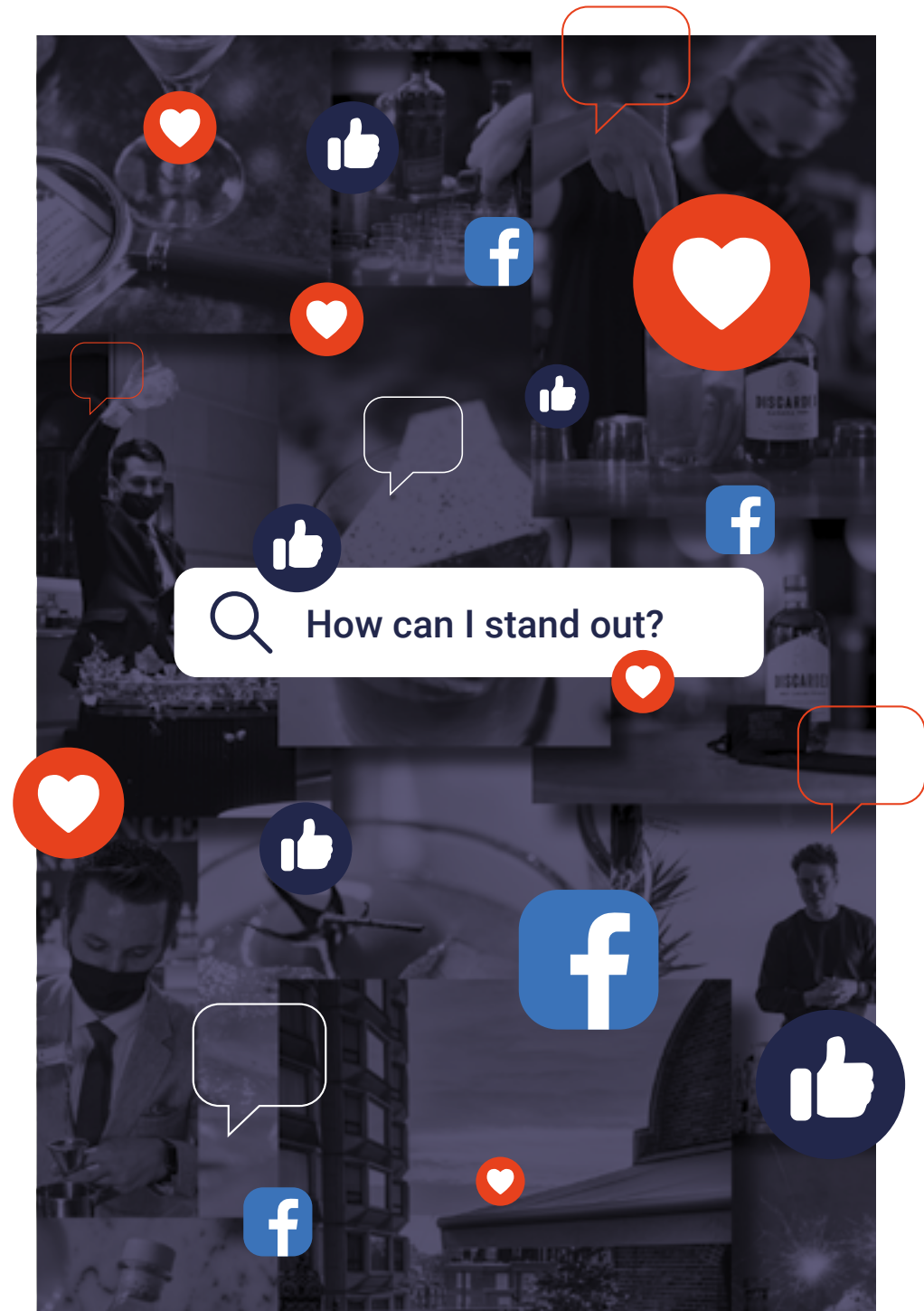
However, Facebook page reach has been dwindling for years. And people's feeds have become saturated with content from other businesses.

So how can you stand out? How can you increase your visibility and reach your customers organically?



Did you know?

There are over **50 million Facebook users in the UK**, with 25-45 years olds being the largest group.



Why use community groups?

Facebook community groups offer a direct line to your target audience.

Facebook community groups offer a direct line to your target audience. They're a great way for people to connect with others who have similar interests and needs. They provide a different experience on Facebook, one that's customised to the individual.

Facebook groups can be set up by brands, via their Facebook page, or by any individual, via their profile.

The most important thing to remember when posting in groups is to be 'human' and have an authentic presence. Nothing turns people off more than self-promotion in groups.

Whether it's new connections, shared experiences, details of events they may be interested in, entertainment or conversation, there's something of value in there for members.

Nearly half of all consumers will join private communities if they can engage with brands directly (Sprout Social, 2020). Now that's a compelling reason to start your own community group!

Simply, connecting with other people is a basic human instinct. We need our tribe to thrive, and community groups allow us to do just that.

64%

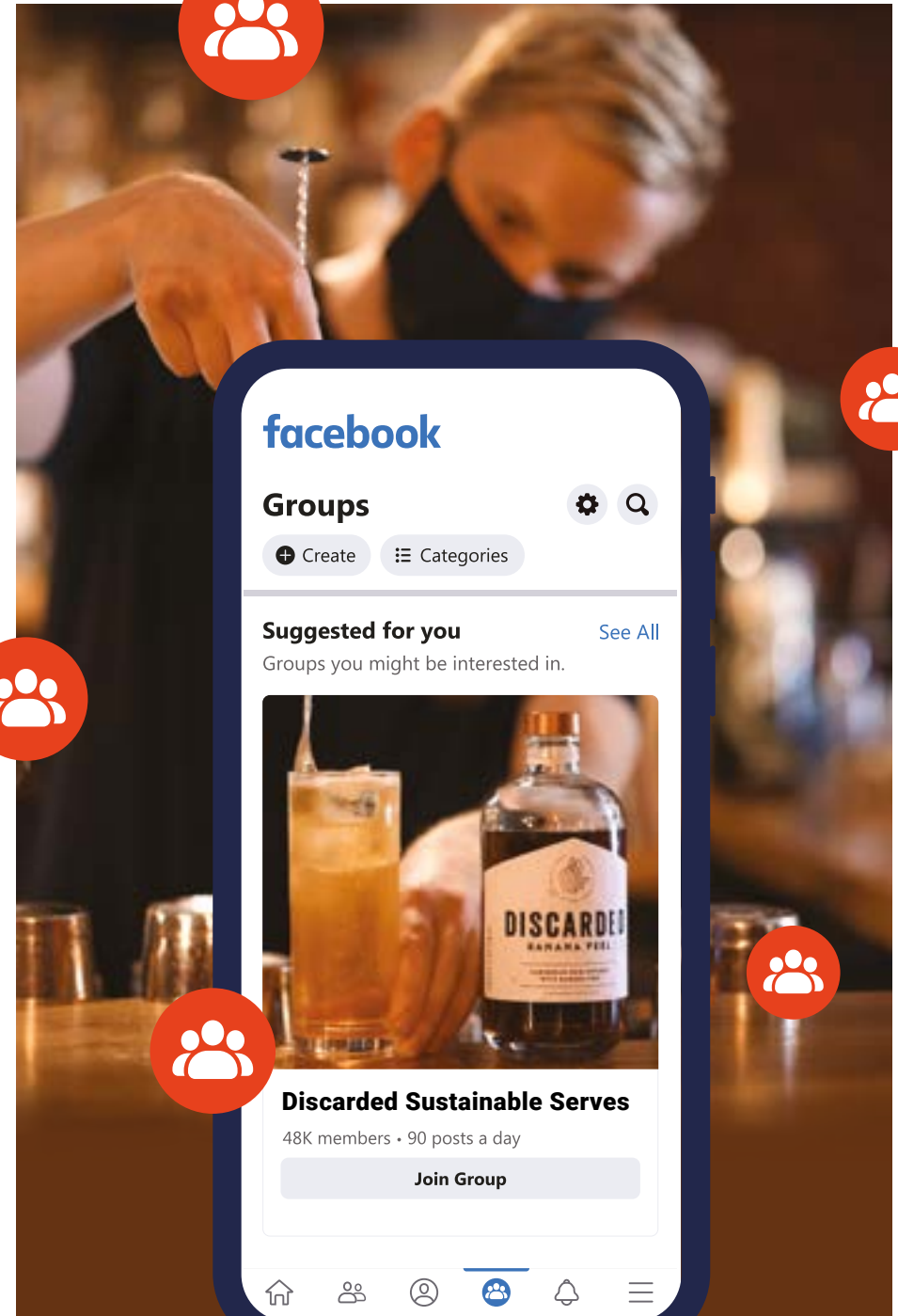
of Facebook users are part of **at least one group**

77%

of people in 2020 said the most important group they're a part of **now operates online** and 86% say they'll continue to engage with the group online throughout 2021

98%


of people said community groups gave them a strong sense of **community and belonging** (Facebook, 2020)





What role can community groups play in your marketing strategy?

You can:

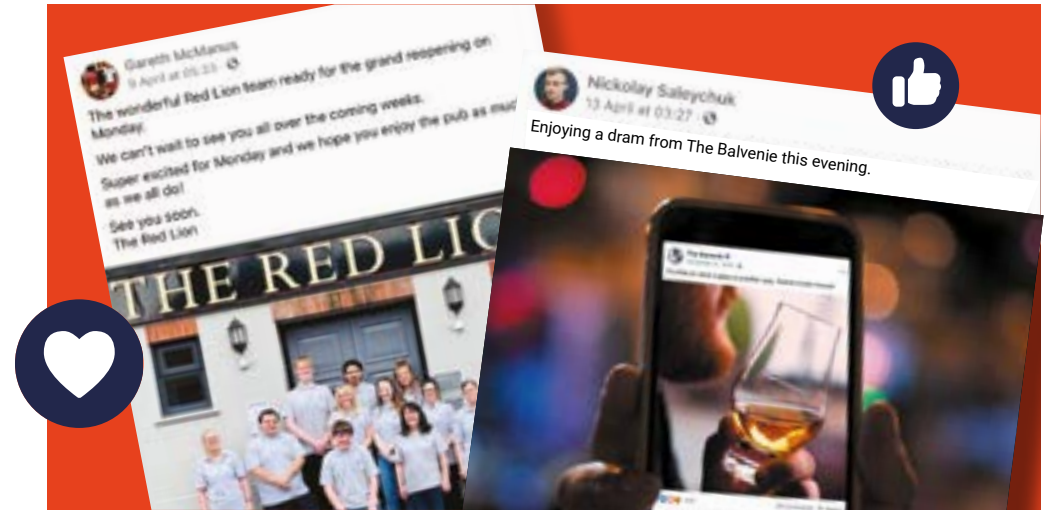
 Connect with your target audience on a personal level

 Form meaningful customer relationships

 Increase your organic reach

 Learn from your audience

 Grow customer loyalty



There's a lot to gain from posting in Facebook groups. But remember, these communities are about their members. The purpose of the group should be to provide value to them.

To achieve this, a different approach is required. Groups are not a broadcast channel. You need to think human first, brand second.

Nobody wants to be spammed to death, so posting in groups is all about etiquette and balance. Aim to engage with others and post in groups as individuals, not businesses. It's OK to mention your venue when it's appropriate, but definitely not in a 'salesy' way.

If you create your own community groups, built around your customers and local audience, then you naturally have more opportunity to promote your business. But you must still be adding value and giving more space to group members than you do to admins. Yes, people do want to hear from you if they've joined your group. They'll likely be interested in your content and probably keen to hear about what's happening... but within reason. They don't want to feel like you're too 'in their face'. Be cool.

Getting started with community groups

There's a big benefit to creating your own **Facebook group** as well as joining other community groups.

Before you start:

It's a good idea to speak to your customers and your staff to see what community groups they belong to and establish which are relevant to your business...



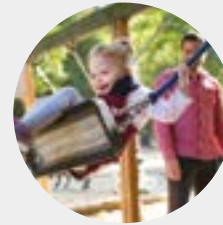
Is your venue by the coast?

Search for sea-swimming, paddle boarding and surfing groups.



Are you based in the countryside?

Search for hiking, bird-watching and trail running groups.



Are you a family friendly venue?

Search for local parenting and kids activities groups.



Do you have great spaces for meetings, express lunches or have a buzzing after work atmosphere?

Search for local business, networking and chamber of commerce groups.



Are you well known for your food and wine?

Search for local foodie, chef/ bartender and wine-tasting groups.

You know your customers best. What are they into? Why not run a survey over an email campaign, as well as gaining anecdotal feedback, to get some more ideas.

Or if you don't have an email database yet, you could ask your patrons to fill in an old-fashioned pen and paper survey at their table.



How to find community groups on Facebook

There's a big benefit to creating your own **Facebook group** as well as joining other community groups.



How to create your own group:

1. Click Groups in the left menu
2. Search for keywords (e.g. Hiking)
3. Click Groups underneath and filter your search by your local area (e.g. Brighton & Hove)

From here you can review the list of groups and find active ones to join.

Features of Facebook Groups

- Facebook groups can be public (anyone can join) or closed (group admins approve requests to join).
- Only commit to running a Facebook group if your admins have time to manage it between them, having several will make this easy.
- Every group has different rules which provide expectations for every member and guidelines for posting and interacting.
- Always check the rules when you join a community group and adhere to them.
- When you create your own group, well thought through rules will give you the best chance of growing an engaged community, as well as lowering the chances of any mishaps occurring.
- Your aim is to create a safe space in which everyone feels welcome, included and comfortable to participate. Then you'll achieve a tight-knit community centred around your brand.
- Groups use similar publishing features to the rest of Facebook, from photos, gifs and videos to events and live streams as well as Q&As and polls.

Add these features to your posts:



Checklist

- As a team, join some local, relevant community groups.
- Create your own Facebook group(s) around a specific topic e.g. Quiz night, Craft beer lovers, live music.
- Add an About section and group rules.
- Assign admin roles to your team.

How to make the most of community groups

There's a big benefit to creating your own **Facebook group** as well as joining other community groups.

Posting in others' community groups

Who's the best person to join community groups? The member of your team that has an interest in that area.

- Ask opinions and gather feedback
- Contribute useful info or knowledge about the local area
- Mention your business when it's appropriate
- Let people know when your venue can help to solve a problem or something the group might be interested in.

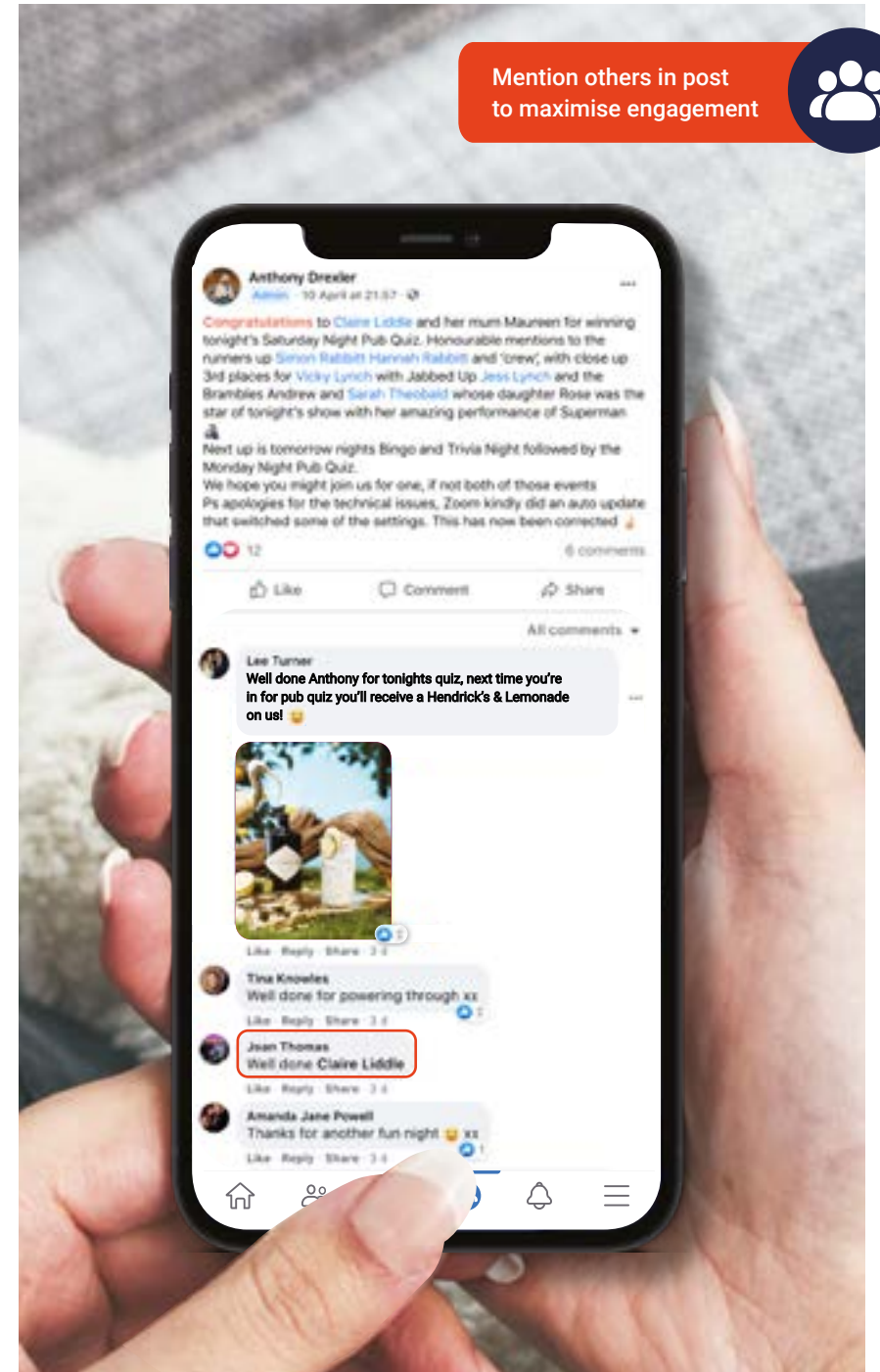
For example, ask if anyone wants to come for a free lunch to share feedback on your new menu after a hike. Or offer to book a table at your venue for a real life group

Posting in your own community group

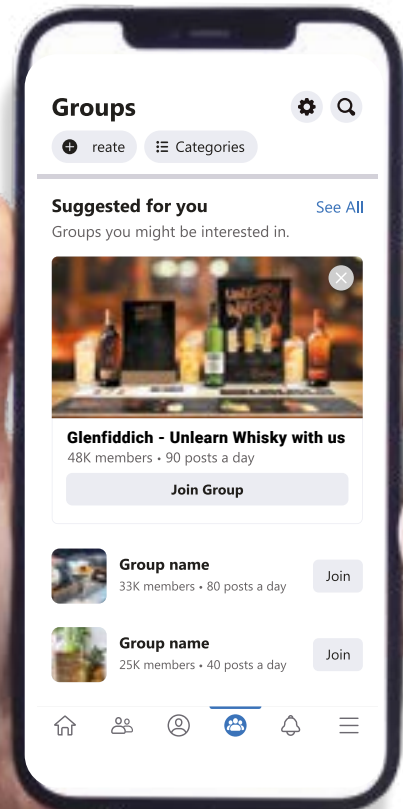
The best way to bring your group to life is to involve your community and ask for input and spark conversations.

- Interesting local news
- Call out for an extra quiz team
- What events are coming up
- Polls about favourite menu items

Keeping your community up to date and feeling a part of the business will help to increase loyalty while creating your very own brand ambassadors over time.



Community Groups Best Practice



You should:

- Put your audience's shoes on. What do they want from you? Juicy deals and offers? News and events? Photos from the weekend? Define what value you'll add to them and be consistent.
- Make sure your posts are always positive. Don't moan and never bad-mouth the competition.
- In others' community groups, always post from a personal profile, not a business.
- Posting in a Facebook group that you run for your business can be done from either your business page or a personal profile, whichever you're more comfortable with.
- People want to communicate with other humans so just be yourself. Your content should always be framed in a way that's valuable to the community.

Takeaways

Local community groups are great for building relationships with customers, if they're used appropriately. Groups are where like-minded people come together to gain value from the community so your team must respect that and contribute, rather than promote.

- It's not about you. It's about the community
- Pages are for broadcasting, groups are for conversation
- Encourage people to participate in your group through interactive and engaging content
- Publish consistently but not too much (1-3 times per week)

3 things you can do today to make a change

- Research local community groups on Facebook
- Discover which community groups your team/customer already belong to
- Speak to your team and your regulars about which venue-run Facebook community groups would be valuable to them