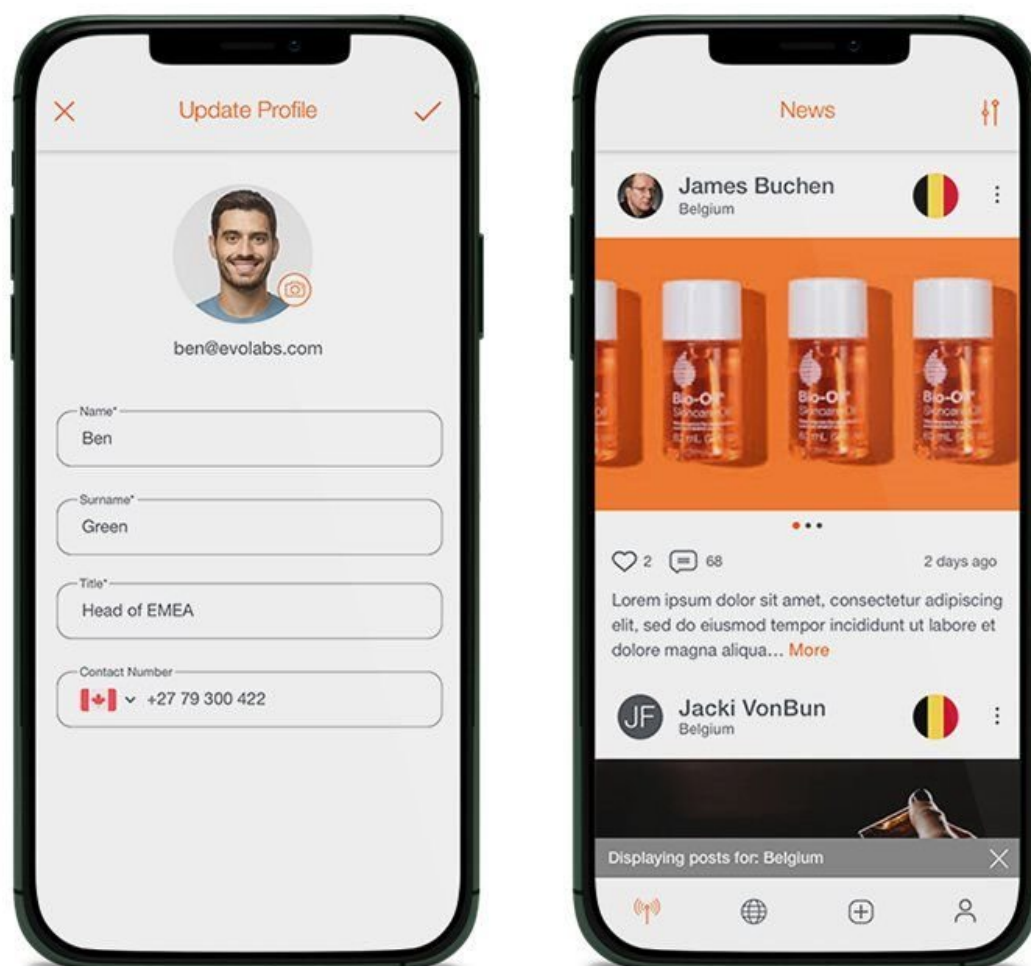


Bluegrass helps Bio-Oil boost B2B marketing strategy

By  Nick Durrant, issued by [Bluegrass Digital](#)

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Union Swiss are the makers of Bio-Oil, the world's leading skincare brand used to improve the appearance of scars and stretch marks.



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What they needed

The Union Swiss team was looking to design and develop an Instagram-style mobile application to transform their B2B communication efforts. At present, Bio-Oil's marketing, selling and distribution is exclusively handled by a distribution network of independently owned companies across 154 countries.

Union Swiss wanted to provide these global distributors with a platform that allowed them to access news and information from Bio-Oil, and share their own work and view the work of other distributors. "Working on the basis that we've selected the best distributors in each country, we wanted something that would support our initiative to hand over all the marketing to them so that we can focus our energy on R&D," notes Kim Lombard, Union Swiss CEO. This approach just made sense because the days of the big and bold brand adverts are over and have been replaced by local, more bespoke digital campaigns, she adds.

"With the app, we wanted to create a glass window between ourselves and our distributors so that they can see into our business and, ideally, we also get to experience what they're doing and how the strategy is translating in reality. Our aim was to build a Bio-Oil community. We wanted to seamlessly connect everyone in a more contemporary, real-time way, which wouldn't have been possible using more traditional communication."

How Bluegrass helped

The platform needed to have two key functions, explains Matthew Edwards, a solution strategist at Bluegrass Digital. Firstly, it needed to be a place where the Union Swiss team could communicate with and share information with their extensive pool of distributors. And secondly, it was intended to create a sense of community among distributors by giving them a platform to show what they are doing in their respective markets. We wanted to create an "Instagram experience" but with a more corporate feel, he says.

The app was designed to function as the only channel of communication between Union Swiss and their extensive distributor network, eliminating the email and extranet correspondence that was commonplace in the past. "Today, this is the primary way that we communicate with our distributors. Everything happens on the app," adds Lombard

Some of the key features include profiles for different distributors, a newsfeed where people can upload videos and photos, as well as a contact list detailing the different distributors across disparate regions. There also needed to be some sort of reporting functionality so that users can report any potential misuse of the app. Understanding these basic requirements, Edwards sat down with the Union Swiss team to unpack their vision in more detail.

"This was an important step in the process because we discussed things that we hadn't originally thought of and addressed any concerns before from the start," he notes. What followed was an iterative process where Bluegrass produced wireframes and then went back and forth with the client adding further features and functionality as the development went along.

Discussing the more technical side of things, Edwards explains that they built the app using React Native so that it was possible to make improvements that applied to across Android and iOS without having to maintain two different sets of code. The API was built with .NET and supported with Azure App services. All the images and video content that distributors share on the app is hosted in Microsoft Azure.

While the process may sound simple enough, he notes that Bluegrass have continued collaborating with the Union Swiss team since the app was launched in August last year and they regularly add new features and make improvements as things go along.

One such change, continues Lombard, included restructuring the app navigation so that there are two separate feeds - one that includes Bio-Oil's key communication announcements and one that showcases distributor content.

"It's a work in progress," she admits. "One of the big learnings for us is that we pushed it a bit too far in the social media direction, but it actually needed to be a business tool. People can still like each other's ideas but we quickly realised that there really wasn't any need for comments, so we've removed these. But to keep communication channels open, we have added direct messaging functionality to make it possible for distributors to communicate with each other more privately."

The results

In a very short time, Union Swiss have been able to get all of their distributors onto the app, confirms Lombard. And they're actively posting the work they do, which builds community and inspires others. "We've created this beautiful ecosystem where things can be shared. It also makes individual distributors feel like they're part of something bigger. It's been a wonderful experiment in how to run a global business and how to do so, well." Future plans include incorporating sales performance metrics into the app so that distributors can see how others are doing and measure their efforts alongside the efforts of their peers, Lombard suggests.

"Personally, I don't know of any other brands doing this kind of thing," comments Edwards. "Creating an internal social media/sharing platform and putting collaboration and information distribution into people's hands via a user-friendly, simple mobile app."

Speaking about her working relationship with Bluegrass, Lombard only has good things to say. "They are the most amazing company to work with. I have thoroughly enjoyed what we've done with them and would highly recommend them to anyone. They know when to push back and when not to. I honestly don't have any constructive criticism to give."

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Technical features:

- React Native for iOS and Android Apps
- .NET Core API architecture
- Azure Storage for storing files
- Azure SignalR for real time chat functionality
- Azure Notification Hub for Push notifications
- Azure function App for scheduled jobs.
- Azure DevOps CI/CD for automated deployments to App stores
- Cosmos DB for data storage
- Google Firebase for in-app analytics

ABOUT NICK DURRANT

Nick Durrant is MD at Bluegrass Digital, a digital solutions company with offices in Cape Town, Johannesburg and London. We are experts in crafting web and mobile products and platforms. After spending 17 years in working the tech industry in the UK and setting up the Bluegrass in London in 1999, Nicholas now runs the company from Cape Town, developing the business into Africa and Europe offering world class digital solutions.

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