

How This Writer-Turned-Entrepreneur Leveraged Her Experience to Create a Beauty Line That's Sold at Sephora



Zoë Foster Blake, founder of Go-To Skincare, shares how she juggles her myriad of projects.

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In this series, Instagram Icon, Entrepreneur speaks with the individuals behind popular Instagram accounts to find out the secrets of their success.

For most of her career, Zoë Foster Blake was on a mission to find the best beauty products, first as beauty director at legacy media titles such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper's Bazaar* Australia, and then through her own sites: a blog called

fruitybeauty in 2006 and Primped in 2008. In 2014, after years of reviewing and recommending, she wanted to create something of her own and launched skincare line Go-To.

“I knew which ingredients worked, and which didn’t, and I knew that Australian women generally found skin care to be wildly confusing and very frustrating,” Foster Blake recalled. “The result was Go-To, a meaningful [collection] of effective, clean skin care essentials to make women enjoy and feel confident about looking after their skin.”

Five years later, Go-To has grown to offer 15 different products and gone international. In 2018, Go-To launched in all 400 of Sephora’s U.S. storefronts. Foster Blake said that seeing her work on store shelves has been a thrill.

“I still take selfies with them in store, like a real dork. Sephora is a huge, world-class beauty retailer, so for a small indie brand from Australia, it was a huge honor to be chosen to be part of their family of clean skin care,” Foster Blake said. “We have our work cut out for us in the U.S. It’s an enormous market with a lot of very good, very established players, but I passionately believe we offer something different, and we’re here to play ball.”

Foster Blake isn’t just a beauty entrepreneur. The married mom of two has more than 660,000 followers on Instagram and is the bestselling author of eight books, including a break-up guide called *Break Up Boss*, and a novel called *The Wrong Girl*, which was adapted into an acclaimed TV series in Australia.

We caught up with Foster Blake to talk about how she uses social media to connect with her customers.

How did you get started with Instagram? Why do you think your brands lend themselves well to the platform?

I joined in 2012 because everyone else had, and my lazy side saw that I could use it as a micro-blogging platform, rather

than do whole blog posts. Go-To joined Instagram in April 2014, and the two make such a gorgeous couple. We have a strong personality and clear vision about who we are, why we are, what we make and who are customers are. Instagram is a brilliant mouthpiece for this narrative, and a great forum to bring the customer into our world and make them feel confident and even a bit excited about looking after their skin.

Instagram makes it so easy for women to share products they do and don't like. It's their digital back fence, and beauty brands like us are at their mercy. This is a positive thing. It keeps us accountable and helps us grow. Beauty is democratic now, there is a dialogue and people want to be able to ask questions about usage or ingredients and feel heard very quickly, and Instagram allows us to cater to that in real time.

What have you learned about growing a following and creating content that resonates with people as you've transitioned from more traditional journalism to books and blogging to creating your own brands in Go-To Skincare and Break Up Boss?

The channel matters less than whether you're enjoying your work, and ideally, the audience is too. In truth, I care less about the content, and more about the delivery. Writing is a huge joy for me, it's so fun to play with my readers, and make them feel part of the conversation. I joke that I only started Go-To to be the copywriter I always dreamed of being. I love subverting a format, and skin care is traditionally pretty dry, and earnest, so there's a lot of room to have fun.

I find that if you can keep the tone light as you're lecturing people about SPF, or advising them not to text back someone they really like, they might hate you a little less, or hang in until the end of the book. I love and respect my audience, and I feel responsible when I give them advice, but I also need them to understand we're not gonna take things too seriously here.

What have been some of the challenges of developing Go-To Skincare over the past few years? What do you think sets it apart?

We've spent the past five years working on completely clean SPF products. Two launched in Australia in 2018. Creating clean zinc oxide SPF products that are cosmetically elegant is near impossible. More broadly, there's so much fortune-telling involved in business and I'm garbage at it. I prefer to focus on doing good work this *hour*, this day. I think the future takes care of itself if you ensure what you do today is of high quality.

However, since business is about logistics and manufacturing and forecasting and giant, risky decisions, I have a team of excellent people who are very good at what they do in those areas, so that I can be good at what I do. Everyone needs to know their superpower, and do all they can to create an environment where it can thrive.

How would you describe your approach to social media? How has that changed over time?

I started blogging in 2006 because I wanted to recommend beauty stuff that I swore by, and save women time and money by giving them a useful edit. Instagram has made that process so much easier, and as someone who's ravenous for recommendations, I look to my feed for travel, food, fashion, design, gadgets, books and Netflix shortcuts. In turn, I try to serve us as many useful ones as I can, wholeheartedly and honestly.

I probably rely on Instagram more as a professional tool than as personal outlet these days. I still jam my life, kids, cat and breakfast into people's feed occasionally, but there is only so much of my life I expect people to care about, and I generally aim for quality over quantity. The exception is my IG Stories. I post anything there. It's a complete stream of

consciousness pigsty.

With all the different projects you work on, how do you organize your time?

I'm easily distracted, so I rely on a crude system of rules and rewards. I compartmentalize two weekdays for business and comms, one day for deep work and writing, and two for my kids. I also create boundaries, such as having a permanent email auto reply and limiting my Instagram time to help keep me on task. I wholly subscribe to the "if it's not a hell yes, it's a no" philosophy with regards to any speaking gigs, events or collaborations. My kids are fun and young and still want to hang with me, so anything that takes me away from them or Go-To, to a lesser extent, has to really be worth it.

What advice do you have for other people who want to build brands and businesses in the beauty and lifestyle space?

Do what *you* want. I mean this in a literal sense: make or do a thing that you personally believe is missing from the world or market, but which you would like to exist, and which you believe other people will see value in. Also don't get caught up in the keeping-up-with game. Newness is nice, but not at the cost of your product quality or company values. Finally, honor your customer. She is trusting you with her face and with her money. Take that responsibility seriously.

Read on for Foster Blake's top five favorite Instagram posts.

"I mean, it's a plump baby, in a bunny suit, on Easter Sunday."

"Seeing Go-To in Sephora when I am in the U.S. is *never* not an exciting moment. I like sharing that truth, because I'm never going to be too cool not to be proud."

“It’s very important to let your followers know you aren’t perfect and beautiful 100 percent of the time.”

“I’d seen this Puglian beach in my feed so many dang times, it was only fair I repaid the favor once I got there.”

I’m a huge perv when it comes to birth stories, and a desperate fiend for recommendations, (especially when it comes to birth/breastfeeding stuff because I forget/am nosy/have no clue/time so I just need Internet Friend Advice from people who’ve been there) so to pay back the favour, I wrote a (long and pretty boring) blog on my birth, and what I packed for the hospital, and some great breastfeeding clothes, and the tights I wish I knew about when I brought my first baby home, because when I was pregnant, I bloody inhaled blogs like that. I wanted ALL the details. Thank you, Internet, for allowing us women to share our stories, and also our favourite maternity pads. Link in bio!

A post shared by ZOË FOSTER BLAKE (@zotheysay) on Oct 12, 2017 at 1:49am PDT

“I live for recommendations, and try to offer as many useful ones as I can. This post linked to a blog on useful stuff no one tells you about giving birth, newborns and the hospital bag.”

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/331166>