

Create scroll-stopping, authentic creatives with Twirl

Creating a startup is always challenging. Founding one during a tech downturn, cost of living crisis and recession seems near impossible. However, with risk comes reward and many of the world's most successful companies were founded during times of economic uncertainty. As part of a series with Antler, Maddyness has interviewed founders hoping to become the entrepreneurial success stories to emerge from this time of crisis. This week, Maddyness spoke to Lara Stallbaum, the cofounder of Twirl.

Temps de lecture : minute

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The idea for *Twirl* came from my experience in the D2C e-commerce space, where UGC (user-generated content) was the primary growth driver for my previous fashion platform. We handled everything ourselves—managing hundreds of creators, contracts, budget negotiations, and project management—because back then, there wasn't a scalable solution for brands like ours. UGC was still a new concept, and while other brands were relying on agencies to produce polished content, we worked with what our customers and relatively unknown creators gave us due to our restricted budgets. The results were astonishing—this content, which cost a fraction of what high-budget productions did, outperformed everything we had created before.

Twirl was born out of the frustration of navigating this gap and the realization that brands needed a faster, more affordable way to scale this type of content. Today, UGC is essential to paid media and content marketing, and more marketers are seeing that you don't need a \$30K

budget to create something so impactful. Twirl was built to bring that vision to life—making high-performing content accessible and scalable for all consumer companies.

Can you share your elevator pitch?

Twirl is the UK's leading UGC platform that simplifies the way consumer companies create and scale user-generated content (UGC). We connect businesses with an extensive network of talented creators, offering a streamlined solution to produce authentic, high-performing content at scale.

Can you tell our readers about your engagement with Antler?

When I came to the UK in 2020, my entrepreneurial network was limited, and I was looking for a way to connect with like-minded people. I knew I wanted to start my next venture, and while funding was important, being part of a community of entrepreneurs was the most valuable aspect for me. I didn't just meet fellow founders to share challenges with—I found friends for life. Antler was always approachable, not just as a funding source but as a partner. They understood the challenges we faced and made everything relatable. You could come to them almost like a friend, ready to challenge ideas and have honest conversations.

With my previous business, I never really shared with investors when things got tight because I wasn't used to that level of openness. I saw VCs as purely money givers and felt I always had to present my best self, even when things weren't perfect. With Antler, I made a conscious decision to approach it differently—being honest and transparent from the start. Antler made that easy, and it was a refreshing experience to work in such a supportive environment.

Tell us about the working culture at Twirl?

At Twirl, we're all about building a culture that's as real and authentic as the content we create. We're a close-knit team where smarts and attitude matter more than background, and everyone jumps in to help, no matter the task. When there's a weekend feature launch, no one has to ask for support—everyone shows up, ready to pitch in. We openly admit our mistakes, even to customers, and that honesty has built trust and loyalty over the last 2 years.

I want everyone at Twirl to feel like their work makes a difference and to be excited about coming to work every day. We've just moved into a new office, and I've involved the whole team in making it ours—starting with a shared Pinterest board to fill the space with everyone's ideas. We've grown quite a bit, and we celebrate those wins together, whether it's with lunch, dinner, or a ceramic painting afternoon. Everyone contributes, and we succeed as a team, big or small.

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

One of the biggest challenges was when my co-founder decided to step away due to personal reasons. It was a mutual decision, and there were no hard feelings, but it's still a big change. It's similar to a personal breakup—there's an adjustment period, and the team can feel uncertain. But with open communication and the strong foundation we had, we managed the transition smoothly, and things settled back into place quickly.

What made it tricky to navigate was that it's not something you hear a lot about, even though I know it happens to teams. Rarely do people talk about it openly, especially regarding things like legalities and taxes. I felt

a bit lost at first and wished I had some sort of guide on what to do. Later, someone reached out to me when the same thing happened to them, and I had already created a full Notion document on the steps you need to take and what to be aware of. I just wish this kind of information was more accessible when I was going through it.

What's in store for the future?

For the future, we're really just scratching the surface with UGC. The most innovative companies are already leading the charge, fully understanding its power and allocating larger budgets to it. But what excites me most is that Twirl is positioned to be a thought leader in this shift—where content is no longer confined to big productions but created at home, on our phones, by everyday people. Soon, we'll see more brands moving away from traditional content that requires high budgets, embracing the accessibility and authenticity of UGC.

Everyone can become a creator now—there's virtually no barrier. All it takes is the ability to convey relatable content, a bit of editing, and almost a sense of acting from your living room or kitchen. It's fast, it's real, and it's what people want to see. We're shifting towards a world where video content dominates, and Twirl will be at the forefront of guiding brands to embrace this transformation.

How has the cost of living crisis and the tech downturn impacted your experience building Twirl?

The cost of living crisis has brought both opportunities and challenges for Twirl. On one hand, as companies tighten their budgets, they're shifting away from expensive traditional content in favor of UGC, which is more cost-effective and still delivers results. We've seen companies increase

their UGC budgets, and it's exciting to be leading that movement. However, because UGC is still relatively new for some companies, they can be hesitant to invest right away, needing extra budget to test its effectiveness—especially if they've heavily invested in traditional methods.

At the same time, the tech downturn taught us the importance of becoming profitable quickly, rather than burning money for years before turning a profit. We've been careful in how we allocate budgets, focusing on what matters most—no blind hiring or unnecessary expenses. We've also been firm in pricing UGC at its true value to build a sustainable business model. It's been a balancing act, but we're proud that Twirl became profitable within a year, proving that you can grow quickly without losing sight of profitability.

What barriers have you faced in realising your entrepreneurial ambitions? How can we make entrepreneurship more accessible in the UK?

One of the biggest challenges for (foreign) entrepreneurs, especially in places like the UK and the US, is dealing with visa issues. The visa systems often make it incredibly hard for people to stay and build businesses. I've seen so many smart, driven individuals—who could be creating jobs and driving innovation—forced to leave simply because the visa rules are too complicated or expensive.

I was lucky to be in the UK before Brexit, but I know many entrepreneurs & friends who weren't as fortunate. They had to navigate a maze of regulations and costs, even though they wanted to contribute to the economy by building businesses here. It's frustrating because these are the people who could really make a difference.

To make entrepreneurship more accessible, we need clearer, more practical guidance on how to handle visa issues, along with affordable, flexible visa solutions. That way, we can make sure the brightest minds aren't held back by red tape, and they can stay and build the businesses that will shape the future.

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

Focus on problems, not ideas. It's easy to come up with a cool idea, but the real challenge is making sure it solves an actual problem for your clients. It's all about finding solutions that people are willing to pay for.

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

My day starts with a good sweat at the gym—because the morning sets the tone for the day. After that, it's straight to our favourite café next to the office in North Greenwich for coffee, a little morning ritual that sets the vibe. I walk into the office with a cheerful "good morning" for the team, and then, I always check on the flowers. If they're looking sad, I grab a fresh bouquet on the way because a well-kept office with a good aesthetic is SO motivating!

I'm a big believer in winning the morning, so I block off those early hours for focused work. No calls until 11 a.m., just ticking things off my to-do list in peace. The team knows this is my quiet time to get things done without interruptions.

Then there's lunch with the team—it's a must. No one eats at their desk. We make sure to sit down together, chat about life, travel plans, and

enjoy a proper break. It's a little tradition that keeps us connected.

As for my personal rules: healthy food, plenty of sleep, and staying active are non-negotiables. I've really embraced investing in my long-term health, and that extends to the team too. We cover gym memberships because I want everyone to stay active and avoid the "laptop slump" that comes with sitting all day!

Lara Stallbaum is the cofounder of Twirl.

Antler is one of the world's most active early-stage investors. With 1,000 portfolio companies in 27 countries, they have a global community of early-stage founders addressing the world's biggest challenges.



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