

# UNITING VEGAN BUSINESSES

Written by Carole Audet



Photos courtesy The Vegan Business Tribe

When meeting business and life partners Lisa Fox and David Pannell, one can see how they complement each other. They were both vegetarians before becoming a couple, but two months into their relationship, they committed to veganism. As a result of their passion for the vegan lifestyle, they have made it their mission to use their skills and knowledge to help vegan businesses succeed so that one day they are the norm.

Lisa Fox and David Pannell met through work—to be more precise when David's marketing and branding agency ran a marketing boot camp where Lisa, who was heading up a marketing department at the time, was in attendance. During a conversation after the event, Lisa immediately felt a connection with David.

"I had this feeling I'm meant to be next to this person. It was a bit like coming home; it was the weirdest thing, and I can't possibly explain it, but I hadn't felt it before. And, luckily for him, not since," jokes Lisa.

They connected on social media and went about their busy careers, and in the case of David, he was in a relationship when they met. As fate would have it, 12 months later David recruited Lisa to work for his agency.

Then, shortly after that, he was made an offer he couldn't refuse for his business, so the pair decided to launch a new agency together. It was during this time that they became a couple, and then two months into dating, they became vegan together.

For about two and a half years with their new venture, they did consulting work with manufacturers. They didn't know what they didn't know as new vegans; looking back they would provide much different advice to some of their clients.

But their growing awareness about all the day-to-day items that contain animal products, their involvement with the vegan community, and their passion for this way of living, started the wheels turning for pivoting to working with vegan businesses.



"We said, we've got a proven skill set of helping companies grow and helping them promote themselves. Let's take that skill set and let's help vegan companies grow. That can be our form of activism, that can be our way of helping move the vegan cause forward," says David.

They set out with good intentions, but they quickly learned that fledgling vegan businesses don't have the budget to hire a marketing agency. They weren't deterred. "We started helping non-vegan companies understand the vegan marketplace better. I've got quite a lot of background in consumer buying behaviour, so it was quite interesting that the people who could afford those consultancy rates and the people who really wanted to know about the plant-based market sector were these non-vegan companies," explains David.

This was their start in supporting the vegan community, and what provided the funds to launch and run Vegan Business Tribe for the first two years of its existence. Vegan Business Tribe is a membership community where vegan business owners, entrepreneurs, and solopreneurs can network with like-minded folks who love to help each other, and where they get the help they need to move their business forward.

Their idea for Vegan Business Tribe was stirred when they were invited to speak about running a vegan business at the Plant Powered Expo in London in February of 2020. Despite this not being exactly their area of expertise, they decided to accept. Their talk ended up being packed, which got them thinking that there's a real need for this kind of information and guidance. One of their original Tribe members was in

that audience.

Lisa says, "These people either have a business already, or they are wanting to start a business. They need help, but they can't afford it. So how do we do something about that? The only way we could do it is by doing it in a collective way. Could we take our knowledge and give it in a collective way? That's what started the idea."

They launched Vegan Business Tribe with a live event in Bristol in March 2020. While the shutdown hadn't yet been mandated, the advice was to stay home, which meant that only about half the people registered for the event showed up. Despite this, their talk was well received, but because of the changing landscape due to the pandemic, they decided to offer Vegan Business Tribe for free.

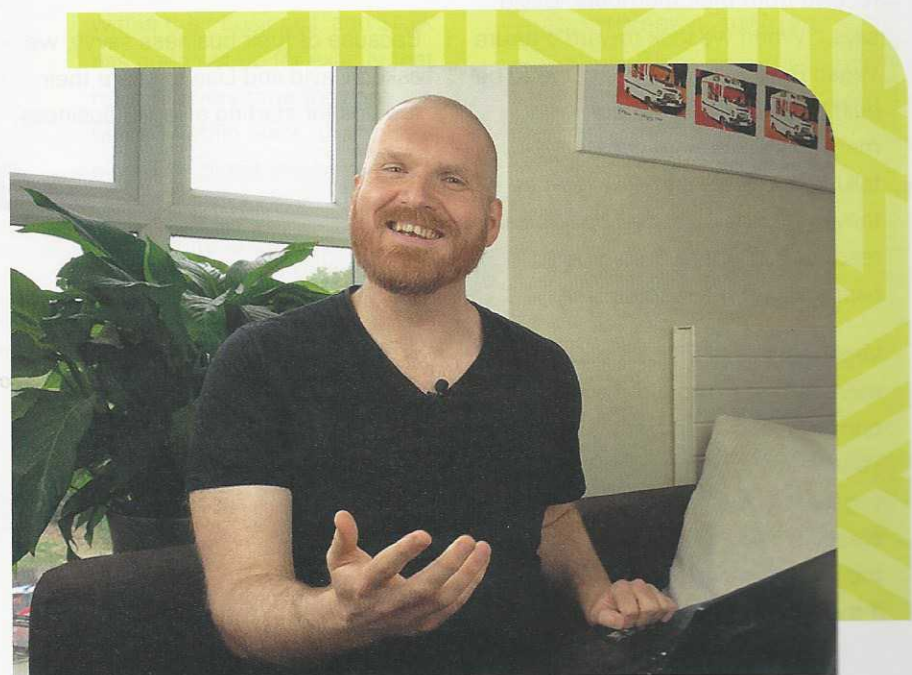
"We said, let's open it up, and anybody who wants to join Vegan Business Tribe can for free. We will do what we can to help vegan businesses in this uncertain time. I'm glad I did that because at that point, some of the companies who joined said that they appreciated

what we did and that we were there to help them.

"On the flip side, it worked out well because it gave us the start of a community as well. People were signing up a lot quicker than they would have if it was paid. It gave us this group of people for us to learn from and say, you're part of this community now. We're not charging for it at the moment, so tell us what you want Vegan Business Tribe to be. Although it was an altruistic way of helping as many people as we could at the time, it turned out to be quite beneficial for ourselves as well," says David.

Although they still have a free starter level, the free model that includes all the resources was available for eight months, during which time they initiated what Lisa calls the "Robin Hood exercise" with the membership site and all the work that's involved with that being financially supported by the consultancy work they were doing for large corporations.

In a sense, they credit the pandemic and the initial free offering for the success of Vegan Business Tribe; the





community played a large role in building it to what it is today.

“We put out a lot of content, just as we do now—new articles every single week, new videos, interviews, things like that. We went back to our membership and we said, Well, you’ve been consuming this content for eight months now, so how much would you pay for it? And they said, ‘We love your content. We engage with what you send out. We would pay you absolutely nothing.’”

What the members meant was that while the content they were given access to was useful, what they wanted was connection with other vegan business owners, in addition to David and Lisa’s advice on their businesses. So, they set about fulfilling the wishes of their members, and one of those wishes gave birth to the virtual networking sessions. Another wish they fulfilled was creating what they call business clinics, where members can get answers to their questions.

They have implemented other components in the membership, all from the feedback they ask for and receive from their members. David says, “When we look toward a future Vegan Business Tribe, it’s going to be built hand-in-hand with our membership. We are constantly talking to people and asking what they want, then seeing how we can react to that. There is so much happening in the marketplace.”

Vegan Business Tribe attracts members from around the world, the primary reason being shared ethics. Vegans love to connect with other vegans, to be a witness to all the creativity and ingenuity happening in the vegan space, and to lend a hand if they can.

David and Lisa believe more animal-free products will be coming into the marketplace, not only because of the demand from vegans, but also those who care about the environment and sustainability.

“The thing that people have to understand about veganism is that the biggest buyer of vegan and plant-based products are non-vegans,” says David.

He goes on to cite research by a large plant-based meat alternative company that showed that 93% of their customers were not vegan, or vegetarian for that matter. He explains, “I think the pandemic has pushed this market forward a couple of years because people have been looking at their relationship with animals and what that could lead to. Also, it’s led to many non-vegans viewing veganism almost the same as they view recycling or maybe not using plastic packaging and things like that. Many people who don’t identify as vegan see choosing a vegan option or choosing a vegan product as a way of reducing their carbon footprint and their impact on the environment.”

Because of their business savvy, we asked David and Lisa to share their top tips for starting a vegan business.

1

Talk about your idea before it’s completely ready to launch—don’t wait until you think everything is perfect and ready to start building your audience. When you do that, you will find the people who are interested in your idea. Start building excitement right away, not only for your potential audience, but also to keep you motivated to move forward.





2

Think outside the box in terms of opportunities that aren't being addressed in the vegan space. Elder care facilities, children, and pets are underserved areas. For example, vegans in the care system currently have no way to maintain their vegan lifestyle because there is nothing in place to support it, including staff. When it comes to the vegan market for children, it includes providing education for parents to dispel the false narrative that children need milk for strong bones, for example.

3

Test, test, test. Regardless of whether your vegan business idea is a product or service, determine if there's a marketplace for it before building it. Testing also provides the opportunity to incorporate changes from the feedback you receive, and could potentially save you time and money. For example, if you're thinking of launching a course, don't create it fully until you know what people are hungry to learn.

4

Be passionate about your 'why' and the mission your business idea stands behind. This passion will sustain you, especially at the onset when your idea is just starting to get traction. This is one reason why vegan businesses succeed—their creators are passionate about advancing the vegan movement and their businesses become their form of activism.

Vegan Business Tribe members inspire some of the topics David speaks about on the popular podcast show. He admits that when you produce content regularly, sometimes it's a challenge to come up with something to talk about. But he expands on issues that may have come up in the membership and keeps track of any idea that crosses his path that he has knowledge about and could speak to.

"Sometimes it's about trying to find an angle on something because there are lots of really useful things that people should know in business but don't, especially if it's your first business. What we say is, how can we find the vegan angle to that?"

David and Lisa have many ideas percolating for the growth and future of Vegan Business Tribe. One of the things they are most excited about is meeting members in person. "We like getting out there, so one thing that we're putting on in November is Vegan Business Tribe live. That is going to be a two-day event happening with Veg Fest UK down at the London Olympia venue. We've got some big names who are going to be doing talks, and we're doing workshops. That takes us right back to the start of what we thought Vegan Business Tribe might be—actually doing live events."

Another perk of being a member of Vegan Business Tribe is the ability to ask a question or get an opinion from David and Lisa should a problem or issue arise within their business, and Slack has been set up for exactly that reason. Every time they are tagged within Slack, their phones ping. This direct involvement is beneficial to members for the opportunity to get advice, but it also helps them keep current about the marketplace.


David explains, "We've got members all over the world, so I've got a good idea what's going on in veganism in Zambia at the moment because we've got a member there. I know what's going on in veganism in South Africa, South America, Japan,

Sri Lanka because we've got members telling us. An important part of keeping up to date on what's happening in the vegan scene is being hands-on with our members so that they can educate us and then we can redistribute that knowledge amongst everybody."

The couple has found their tribe in the building of their membership and a valuable way to use their skills to help the vegan movement. They both love what they're doing and can't imagine doing anything else. "We're absolutely about our members, supporting them in every possible way we can and keeping them excited and full of joy for what they're doing." •

For our readers who would like to learn more about Vegan Business Tribe and to connect with David and Lisa please visit: [veganbusinesstribe.com](http://veganbusinesstribe.com)

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