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From the Columbus Business First:

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Why Facebook is promoting small businesses with big downtown Columbus advertisements

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A few weeks ago, Ajit Kumar, owner of Two Fatt Indians food truck, was asked by a customer if he'd seen the giant advertisement featuring the business near 3rd and Spring streets in downtown Columbus. He hadn't.



HAYLEIGH COLOMBO

Bake Me Happy owner Wendy Miller Pugh said a friend of hers who recently flew in to the Columbus airport saw an ad

featuring the gluten-free bakery on the side of a nearby hotel. It was the first Miller Pugh had heard of it.

The small business owners said they didn't place the advertisements themselves – they don't have that big of a marketing budget. Instead, it's Silicon Valley tech company Facebook Inc. that's behind them.

At least nine Ohio businesses – including Central Ohio's own Doggie Day Spa, Native Cold Pressed, Johnson's Real Ice Cream and Tiny House Vintage & Art – have been featured in the Facebook advertisements, which are appearing everywhere from the sides of buildings to the pages of *The Columbus Dispatch* to digital displays in the Short North.

It's part of an ongoing relationship that some of the businesses have with Facebook that started back in 2018, when the tech behemoth hosted small-business workshops in Columbus and launched a "Keep it Local" campaign in four cities: Columbus, Nashville, San Diego and Sacramento.

Facebook did not reply to a request for comment on the new ad campaign. But the advertisements direct viewers to a [website](#) on which the company says it is creating “a guide to Ohio's favorite businesses.”

"When small businesses succeed, so do the communities they serve," the website says, "which is why Facebook is proud to support local, hardworking businesses all over Ohio."

Kumar described the ad featuring his business – it says “Two Fatt Indians serves up culinary diversity across the 614. We (love) that” – as “awesome.”

“It’s a Lebron James type of feeling,” Kumar said. “Never in my dreams did I think something would be on the wall like that.”

Check out the gallery above to see more of the advertisements.

Kumar didn’t seek out the relationship. At some point officials from the company were in town and “they tried our food and they liked it,” Kumar said. The company then reached out to him about the advertisements and took pictures, but he hadn’t heard anything about it since.

Matt Wilcoxon, owner of Johnson's Real Ice Cream, said the ad for his business that popped up this month also caught him by surprise. But, he said, “every little bit helps and counts.”

“I thought it was pretty funny that my brother happened to be sitting in traffic, (noticed the ad), and took the picture,” Wilcoxon said. “He said, ‘I didn’t know you were doing this,’ and I said, ‘I didn’t either.’”

Miller Pugh said Bake Me Happy got connected with Facebook in 2018 through Facebook’s Community Boost

program, which offered free training, advice and digital skills for how businesses could use Facebook advertising tools.

“They identified businesses who use Facebook and Instagram well for their business,” Miller Pugh said. “Ever since, they kind of kept us on file for other projects. We got really lucky.”

Miller Pugh said it’s “hard to pinpoint” when exactly the ads started popping up, but she believes it was early December. She also has no idea how long they will be up for. She said Bake Me Happy could “absolutely not” have afforded to do that type of advertising.

“They talk about supporting small businesses but practicing what they preach made an impression on us.

“It benefits them but it’s also helping us,” Miller Pugh said. “We could not afford to do digital billboards. I can’t even imagine the cost. That’s pretty amazing.”

Hayleigh Colombo

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