

News **UAE**

Why UAE companies are moving digital marketing budgets away from Meta platforms

Dubai's Nightjar Coffee Roasters announced last week it was moving its advertising spend to TikTok and Google

Katy Gillett

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Companies across the UAE are spending less money on advertising on [Meta's](#) platforms, such as Instagram and [Facebook](#). Reasons include [Mark Zuckerberg's recent announcement](#) to end fact-checking and lower returns on investment, business owners have told *The National*.

Last week, Leon Surynt, founder of [Dubai coffee brand Nightjar](#) Coffee Roasters, said he had decided to take the brand's Facebook account private and cease all [Instagram](#) interaction, move all social media presence to [TikTok](#) and use targeted Google ads. Nightjar had until now typically spent between 8 and 12 per cent of its roastery retail sales on Meta ads.

Mr Surynt said there were three reasons behind the decision, including the fact click-through rates converting to website sales had significantly declined within the past six months. The cost to develop content that performs well on Meta platforms is also rising, he said.

The final deciding factor was Meta's recent announcement to [end its third-party fact-checking programme](#) and replace it with a new crowdsourced system called Community Notes. "Their stewardship and values no longer align with Nightjar's," said Mr Surynt. "Meta's [shadow banning](#) and political bias around continuing geopolitical events is now the norm, and the lack of transparency or fact-checking harmful content now in place at Meta gives me great concern for the future."

Kevin Michel Joliat, general manager at hospitality recruitment firm 360 Agency Middle East, said they are also moving their money away from Instagram and Facebook, although they do still utilise [WhatsApp](#). This is due to previous accounts being blocked.

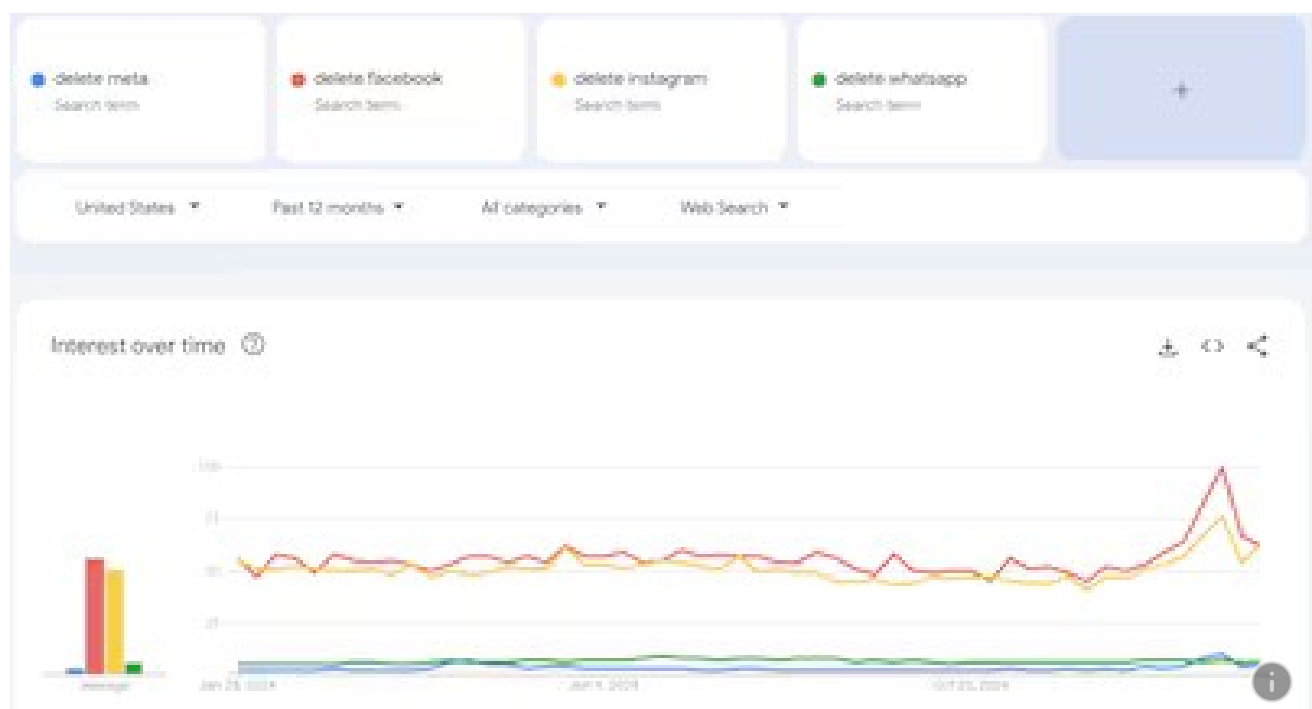
"We grew the channel to over 28,000 followers on Instagram and from one day to the next our profile was blocked without any logical reason," he told *The National*. "We make videos, we do everything according to the law, but we still got blocked. Not only the company Instagram, but also private Facebook accounts, because they're all linked together."

Mr Joliat said they have been unable to retrieve the account, despite six calls with Meta representatives and "empty promises".

"You practically need to hire a specialist just to manage your Meta accounts because it's too complex for the average user," he added. "Even our IT team struggles with it – nothing is clear, and you never get a straightforward explanation as to why certain things aren't working."

Global trend

The sentiment is not unique to the UAE, as globally users are looking elsewhere in an attempt to remove their reliance on Meta products. A sharp rise in people seeking advice on deleting various apps owned by the mega tech company has been noted in Google searches this year.



Musician Michael Stipe, the frontman of former American alternative rock band R.E.M., even called for a week-long boycott of all platforms, which also encompassed

[Threads](#), Messenger, Giphy, Meta Quest and Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses.

Jenna Cummings, co-founder of UK-based growth marketing agency We Are Rival, told trade publication *Adweek* that 10 per cent of its clients were considering pausing ad spend on Meta due to these changes, although she warned that pausing or pulling ad spend is not practical for most advertisers.

A lawyer who has represented Meta in a court case surrounding artificial intelligence, also announced in January he would no longer have the company as a client.

"I have struggled with how to respond to Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook's descent into toxic masculinity and Neo-Nazi madness," Mark Lemley wrote on LinkedIn. "I have fired Meta as a client. While I think they are on the right side in the generative AI copyright dispute in which I represented them, and I hope they win, I cannot in good conscience serve as their lawyer any longer."

Mr Lemley was one of many social media users who have taken to alternative platforms to vent their feelings on the public decisions of Mark Zuckerberg.

Enter BlueSky and RedNote

There are many factors why companies are spending their ad budgets elsewhere, said Laurent Ross, chief operations officer and co-owner of digital marketing agency Oxygen, who splits his time between the UAE and Hong Kong.

"I can't mention a client by name, but it's common, especially for B2B," he told *The National*. He said while they're not moving away from the platforms completely, many are decreasing their budgets on Meta in favour of platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

"Competition is increasing and ad saturation is very real, with a 324 per cent increase in ad exposure from 2023 to 2024," he said, adding that his clients are diversifying their marketing strategies by exploring video ads on YouTube and influencer marketing on TikTok, [BlueSky](#) and [RedNote](#).

"AI marketing tools for content and video editing are also allowing smaller teams to create traditionally more time-consuming content for these platforms efficiently," he added.

Dawn Kubicek, managing director of Dubai-based female SEO consultancy LeadersInDigital, echoed these sentiments. "We need to be clear about audience differences on platforms like Instagram, which is generally more B2C, versus Facebook, more diluted and with diverse ad types," she said.

"Launching B2B campaigns on Instagram and Facebook isn't effective, so ad spend shifts to other platforms better suited for B2B marketing."

Ms Kubicek said that more targeted campaigns on parts of Instagram and Facebook, specifically the feed, Stories or Reels, can be more effective and require less budget. "However, Meta generally doesn't allow ads to perform as well unless the entire audience network is used, creating a difficult situation. Consequently, people are diversifying their budgets and trying new platforms."

"Effective ad management requires a scientific approach, continuing optimisation and significant experience, a different skill set from organic social media management," she said. "Meta can be very successful, if used correctly."

The future of digital marketing and PR

Ananda Shakespeare, chief executive of public relations agency Shakespeare Communications in the UAE, said she has been considering a non-Meta strategy for a while, but it's not always feasible. "We really only leverage LinkedIn, but the social media landscape changes regularly and rapidly," she told *The National*.

"What social media channels to choose for a brand or organisation essentially depends on your target audience. X and YouTube offer great options for sharing brand messaging, but again X has been quite a controversial choice of social media channel recently.

"What's for sure is that it's not wise to keep all your eggs in one social media basket, as the landscape is quite volatile."

There are some brands out there who are starting to shun social media altogether, Ms Shakespeare added. "In 2025, we would advise social media-savvy brands to look at emerging platforms like BlueSky and RedNote to add to their strategies.

"Traditional PR, such as broadcast, print and digital media, also still offer much credibility to brands that social media can't compete with."

Clarisse Tan, performance marketing manager at communications and PR Agency TishTash in Dubai, said Meta remains a key platform for many of their clients. "We haven't seen a significant shift away from Meta, but some clients are keen to test alternative platforms to ensure they're making the most out of their budgets. For most, it's about optimising across multiple platforms rather than abandoning Meta altogether."
