From Lemonade and River Rocks to Energy Bars: The Ally's Bar Story

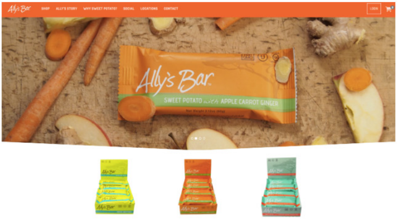
CUSTOMER STORIES WRITTEN BY MARINA PAPE

Many of us have fond memories of our earliest entrepreneurial efforts. Toffee apples sold to stoic neighbours, lemonade stands, school bake sales, or 1c per hungry snail from the rose garden.

Whether to keep us out of mischief or earn precious savings towards a life changing item (for me it was a Barbie microwave and rollerskating troll), **learning to earn at a young age lights a certain type of spark**.

For some, it lights a fire. An energy bar fire.

In Ally Stacher's case, the same entrepreneurial spirit that inspired pop-up lemonade stands, gathering buckets of garden apples, and the gathering and selling of truckloads of river rocks to pay for weekly school snacks led to Allysbar.com.



Read on for the story of what might well be the world's first sweet potato energy bar (gluten and GMO free, naturally), and how Gabe and Kacey of LongTailCreative built the colorful, customer-friendly store that Ally uses to run her online business.

Childhood aspirations, dehydrating experiments, and the early days of Ally's Bar

Ally has always had a sharp self-starter mindset. From an early age, she was accustomed to creating her own work to buy the things she wanted, always had a job of sorts, and was either self-employing with a trade or working on a farm or ranch.

> ***My parents were big advocates of learning how to work hard and make money.***

Kudos to those parents, because it sure paid off: today Ally is a co-founder of a successful energy bar startup and does everything from sales and customer service to invoicing, mastering accounting, and coming up with new flavors for the bar she invented.

But backing up a little: **early days of original businesses are fascinating, and here's how this one came about.**

Ally and her husband were both professional cyclists and craved snacks that gave them energy, met their principles of non-GMO, tasted good, and actually contained real food. Ally had a dehydrating kit and had been experimenting with dehydrating all sorts of different food, including mashed sweet potatoes:

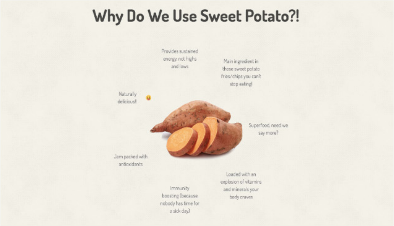
> ***One day I found myself thinking it would be really good to mix some sweet potato mash with a bunch of ingredients and throw it in the dehydrator to make into little bars for training.***

Who knew: **a little experimenting with food dehydration would lead to a bar empire**. Production began in her own kitchen for family and friends, but a sports trip to Portugal took things to the next level.

When Ally was still racing professionally, she had a team camp in Portugal and took big bag of bars with her. Intended to be a little gift from home to spread the love, the bars ended up being a massive hit with teammates, staff, and sponsors: a quantity that should have lasted two weeks lasted only held out a few days! Everyone was eating them.

Why? Well, sweet potatoes are a super-powered ingredient. They are one of the best carbohydrates you can eat, filled with all sorts of good things like vitamin A, C, B, magnesium, and potassium.

Without ever intending to, Ally created demand for her tasty bars.


Why Do We Use Sweet Potato?!
Provides sustained energy, not highs and lows
Main ingredient in those sweet potato fries/chips you can't stop eating!
Naturally delicious!
Superfood, need we say more?
Jam packed with antioxidants
Loaded with an explosion of vitamins and minerals your body craves
Immunity boosting (because nobody has time for a sick day)

Oh sweet potato. How we (and Ally especially) love you. Let us count the ways.

Returning home from the trip, she realized she was onto something and got her LLC in February 2013, starting to make bars at home on a small scale. The Baked Food Act of North Carolina meant she was able to run a small cottage industry business from home without having to have a special graded kitchen.

Rocketing demand meant that production moved pretty quickly from home to a commercial kitchen to a manufacturer. It took a bit of time to find a partner that ticked all the boxes, but Ally worked with the one she chose for thirteen months on R&D and getting packaging just right.

The original Ally's Bar launched in October 2014, and it's all been up from there.

Ally and her beloved sweet potatoes.

From one bar to 1,000: how Ally's gained momentum

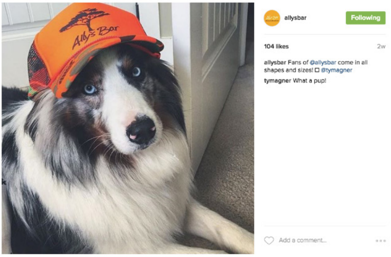
In the early days, all of the marketing for Ally's Bar was pure word of mouth and networking. **Ally and her husband capitalized on their involvement in racing world** — the perfect platform to have their product picked up for events, and an audience they already knew very well.

The bars were featured in Outdoor Magazine and also got some coverage from Lululemon, the sponsors of Ally's team. This coverage brought people to the store; though the bars are a bit more expensive than similar brands, Ally said almost all of the the people who try them see the value.

> ***A lot of people try the bars in a store, or get their first one in a subscription box service. We sent out 15,000 bars through Cairn and a lot of those customers found their way to our website.***

You'll also notice Ally's Bar is active on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Self-proclaimed as not being particularly good at all things social but understanding the value of it, Ally hired someone to focus on these networks — and it's proving to be a great investment.

The content across all channels is unified in tone, feel, and visual style. They have experimented with boosting posts on Facebook to extend reach, and are also trying out running contests to win bars.



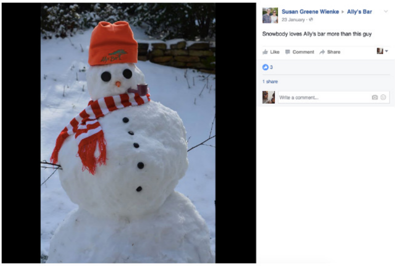
allysbar Fans of @allysbar come in all shapes and sizes! ☐ @tymagner

tymagner What a pup!

Barking mad? Nope, just another fan of these tasty bars.

For a relatively small company, it's packing a punch on social, sending a high quality signal about the products and creating a wonderful space for customers to reach out and engage.

It's not a one-way conversation, either: we spotted a number of fun posts from the community via the hashtags and on the wall, including a few some Ally's bar swag in the form of beanies and caps. Clever, hey?



Susan Greene Wienke ▸ Ally's Bar
23 January ·

Snowbody loves Ally's bar more than this guy

Snowman even gets to be a fan of Ally's bars, neat!

When it comes to email marketing, Ally said emails to their subscribers have always led to an impressive and immediate uptick in reorders:

> ***You bring them to the site and then all of a sudden accidentally they have a box of bars in their cart and they're like: I don't know what happened but I just bought it! And you're like yes, yes you did.***

She's also found that online sale days from Thanksgiving to Christmas are the hot spots:

> ***It's out of control. As a business owner I just didn't know there were so many holidays you had to send mass emails for a discount about!***

The makings of a solid online store

The early days of Ally's Bar were a whirlwind of rapid growth. While the bars were being made by hand, they didn't have a website, but brand awareness still grew and they did a good job of gathering and interacting with fans on social media.

When it came to thinking about selling online, they initially spun up an eCommerce site using an out-of-the-box solution. But the team found this a bit limiting. They wanted an online home that shared the story of the bars, something user-friendly, and with more color and uniqueness.

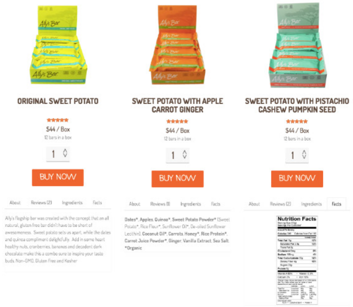
Ally reached out to her web developer friends, Gabe and Kacey Lloyd at Long Tail Creative, to talk about a more flexible iteration for round two.

Long Tail Creative focus purely on WordPress development. Over the past couple of years their experience of WordPress has been that it's a super flexible tool for web projects:

> ***When you go to WordCamps and see the amazing projects people are doing, how they are leveraging WordPress, there is just so much potential. Every day I am getting better at it.***

While they weren't quite early adopters, Long Tail Creative became aware of WooCommerce a couple of years ago. With Ally's project, they started to get more advanced with breaking down templates and actions, thinking about the complete user flow, and so on, **leading to some interesting customizations and uses of extensions**.

If you're on the Ally's Bar site and you look underneath each product, they have tabs for images, nutrition information, ingredients and so on. Gabe explains this was something they could have custom coded, but as there was a WooCommerce extension that got the heavy lifting done and made the whole process really easy **without custom code**.



ORIGINAL SWEET POTATO
$44 / Box
12 bars in a box
1
BUY NOW

About | Reviews (2) | Ingredients | Facts

Ally's flagship bar was created with the concept that an all natural, gluten free bar didn't have to be short of awesomeness. Sweet potato sets us apart, while the dates and quinoa compliment delightfully. Add in some heart healthy nuts, cranberries, bananas and decadent dark chocolate make this a combo sure to inspire your taste buds. Non-GMO, Gluten Free and Kosher

SWEET POTATO WITH APPLE CARROT GINGER
$44 / Box
12 bars in a box
1
BUY NOW

About | Reviews (1) | Ingredients | Facts

Dates*, Apples, Quinoa*, Sweet Potato Powder* (Sweet Potato*, Rice Flour*, Sunflower Oil*, De-oiled Sunflower Lecithin), **Coconut Oil*, Carrots, Honey*, Rice Protein*, Carrot Juice Powder*, Ginger, Vanilla Extract, Sea Salt**
***Organic**

SWEET POTATO WITH PISTACHIO CASHEW PUMPKIN SEED
$44 / Box
12 bars in a box
1
BUY NOW

About | Reviews (2) | Ingredients | Facts

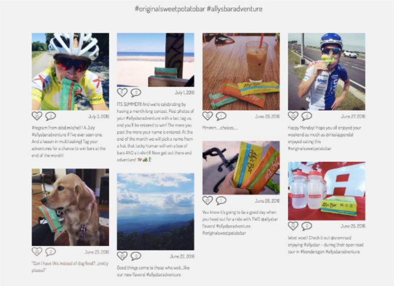
Nutrition Facts

The WooCommerce Tab Manager extension made it possible to easily display four neat and tidy tabs for additional information about Ally's delicious bars, including nutrition facts and reviews.

The team opted for Stripe payments to power Ally's store. This popular payment processor is now available free for WooCommerce stores, enabling customers to pay with all major credit cards, as well as save payment information and set up subscriptions. (Are subscriptions coming to Ally's Bar anytime soon? Fingers crossed!)

Instagrate Pro is also running on Ally's store, which means likes and comments from Instagram — an important social destination for Ally's — are automatically synced and people can click directly to her account.

This functionality provides a way for the site to update and stay fresh without the store owner having to go in and update it themselves all the time.



#originalsweetpotatobar #allysbaradventure

July 3, 2016
#regram from @bd.mitchell ! A July #allysbaradventure if I've ever seen one. And a lesson in multitasking! Tag your adventures for a chance to win bars at the end of the month!

June 23, 2016
"Can I have this instead of dog food?...pretty please?"

July 1, 2016
ITS SUMMER!! And we're celebrating by having a month long contest. Post photos of your #allysbaradventure with a bar, tag us, and you'll be entered to win! The more you post the more your name is entered. At the end of the month we will pick a name from a hat, that lucky human will win a box of bars AND a t-shirt!! Now get out there and adventure!

June 22, 2016
Good things come to those who wait...like our new flavors! #allysbaradventure

June 29, 2016
Mmmm....choices....

June 26, 2016
You know it's going to be a good day when you head out for a ride with TWO @allysbar flavors! #allysbaradventure #originalsweetpotatobar

June 27, 2016
Happy Monday! Hope you all enjoyed your weekend as much as @irisslappendel enjoyed eating this #originalsweetpotatobar

June 25, 2016
Woot woot! Check it out @sramroad enjoying #allysbar – during their open road tour in #benderogon #allysbaradventure

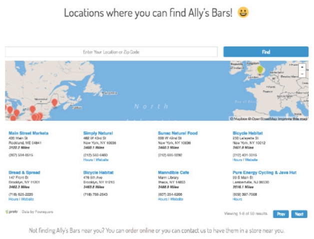
Ally's Bar has an active Instagram feed, what a great way to bring life and freshness to the site.

Kacey, Long Tail Creative project manager, notes this serves as a form of automation:

> ***A lot of the businesses we work with don't have big teams that can create content, so we find ways around this and make the most of the content they do create, automating as much as possible.***

Finally, a smart way to guide online food shoppers offline. These sweet potato bars are sold in over 150 stores across the United States, and before the Ally's Bar store was built with WordPress and WooCommerce, Ally was already using a software called Prolo to coordinate the listings.

There is a free Prolo for WordPress integration, which Gabe installed, and presto: **a map and store listing for all to see**.


Locations where you can find Ally's Bars! 😀

Enter Your Location or Zip Code

Find

Main Street Markets
435 Main St
Rockland, ME 04841
3122.2 Miles
(207) 594-8515

Simply Natural
482 W 43rd St
New York, NY 10036
3460.1 Miles
(212) 563-6480
Hours | Website

Sunac Natural Food
600 W 42nd St
New York, NY 10036
3460.3 Miles
(212) 695-9292

Bicycle Habitat
250 Lafayette St
New York, NY 10012
3461.9 Miles
(212) 431-3315
Hours | Website

Bread & Spread
147 Front St
Brooklyn, NY 11201
3462.3 Miles
(718) 625-2220
Hours | Website

Bicycle Habitat
476 5th Ave
Brooklyn, NY 11215
3463.5 Miles
(718) 788-2543

Manndible Cafe
Mann Library
Ithaca, NY 14853
3488.9 Miles
(607) 254-6206
Hours | Website

Pure Energy Cycling & Java Hut
99 S Main St
Lambertville, NJ 08530
3516.1 Miles
(609) 397-7008
Hours

prolo | Data by Foursquare

Viewing 1-8 of 50 results.

Prev Next

Not finding Ally's Bars near you? You can order online or you can contact us to have them in a store near you.

Prolo adds a store locator to your website in minutes. Maybe there's one near you?

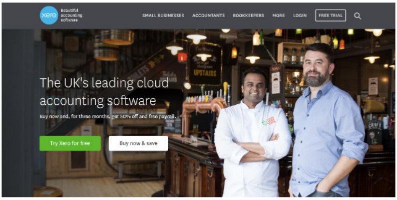
> ***Over 75% of the users on the site come to this section, enter their zip code, interact with the map and use the map functionality. So, it's doing a lot!***

A few sweet time-savers recommended by Ally & team

As far as Ally's workflow goes, integrating her store with ShipStation has proven to be a really good choice. She says that wearing so many different hats means small things can slip, so **having a solid shipping partner that helps you keep track of orders, print labels, and ship things fast is a big win**.

When Ally's pushes print in ShipStation, it pings back into the system to say that the order is done. Next the Xero integration running on her store will then **send a completed invoice over to their Xero account, so they can track it**. Another valuable time-saver:

> ***I can keep track of sales and how they are doing each month, whether they are up or down. It tracks invoices paid, every box sold, sales per bar. And it makes it easy to give numbers to someone if they need them, I just log into Xero and get feedback.***

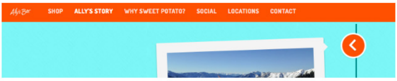

The UK's leading cloud accounting software

Buy now and, for three months, get 50% off and free payroll.

We love Xero. It is a hero.

Finally, a time-saver implemented by the smart people at Long Tail: the menu on Ally's store is dynamically generated based on the sections on the homepage, so when you are managing the site you can drag and drop the order of each of these sections on the backend. Says Gabe:

> ***If Ally wants her story to be under social media, she doesn't have to contact me. She logs in, goes to the dashboard, drags that section underneath it and hits save. This updates the order of the section on the page and updates the top menu bar as well, because that menu bar is listening for that order constantly.***



The menu bar in action, dynamically updated with no custom development needed.

This menu reduced another screen that needed attention and the number of pages that Long Tail Creative are required to administer and maintain. They are always looking for ways to hand things off more efficiently to clients, and creating customizations has become one of the ways they do this. Hat tip to WordPress for being flexible enough to allow it.

Ally's three best tips for new store owners (and a bonus question)

We asked Ally to share a few of her top tips for those building their own online stores. Here's her three best:

1. **Know your numbers**. If someone asks you, you need to be able to give them headline numbers quickly.
2. **Do whatever you can to make it right**. Even if your customers make it really challenging, do whatever you can do to make it right. If they see the effort they will become a loyal customer.
3. **Ship immediately**. Customers really appreciate a speedy delivery, so you should ship as quickly as you can so they get their orders fast (even the next day) as often as possible. Ally's Bar offers customers two options: USPS and FedEx.

Finally. If Ally was stuck on a desert island and could only have one of her bars…

Apple, carrot, and ginger:

> ***If you're going to be on a desert island, you'd have nutritional benefits from the ginger and some good apple and carrot. You'd probably have to bury them to keep them cool. And make sure nothing got into the wrapper. Maybe I'd use them as bait to trap animals. And I'd find a ball and name it Spalding.***

If Ally set her sights on it, we bet she would find a ball and name it Spalding. Or Wilson. She's just that kind of determined.

Big thanks to Ally, Gabe, and Kacey for their time and generous contributions to this post.

WOO COMMERCE
Get more inspiration for your store.
See more food and drink sites in the WooCommerce Showcase.