SOWETO BUSINESS DIRECTORY · BOOK 5

Phone Photos & Simple Posters

A phone, a window and one clear offer



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Fictional stories. Practical steps. A phone and free tools.

Full-book review - 4 November 2026

Chapter 1: The Photo That Sells the Plate

People buy with their eyes first - and your phone is enough

You cannot taste a photo. But people order with their eyes first. Sis Palesa cooks plates to order from her kitchen, and her food is the kind that makes a taxi rank go quiet. Monday night, six o'clock, she took a picture of the plate under the kitchen tube light and sent it to the stokvel group: "Plates tomorrow, R50, order tonight." The picture was dark. The steam fogged the lens. The gravy shone like something you should not ask about. The group said nothing. One aunty asked "how much?" - and the price was right there in the message.



The pot was perfect. The photo said leftovers.

The pot was perfect. The photo said leftovers. Two streets down, Uncle Sol takes pictures of cars for the men selling at the rank. He has never owned a camera in his life. "The car that looks clean in the photo gets the first call," he told her. "Food is the same. Nobody is tasting your picture, Palesa. They are deciding from it. Give the eyes a plate they can trust."

The fix cost nothing, because the studio is a window. Tuesday morning, eleven o'clock, Palesa dished one plate early - before the rush, while the food was still proud. She put it on the one clean cloth next to the kitchen window, outside light coming in from the side. No flash. She wiped the edge of the plate, held the phone with both hands, and took the picture from the side where you would sit down to eat. Same pot. Same price. Same group. By one o'clock she had seven orders and a problem every cook wants: not enough pap.



Same plate. Same price. One window.

The window is the studio

Light is the whole secret, and the soft kind is free. Daylight from a window, or open shade outside, makes food look like food - it is the easiest light to get right while you are learning. The kitchen tube at night makes food look like evidence, and mixing tube light with daylight confuses the phone's colours, so keep to one kind of light. Skip the flash for now: direct flash flattens food and puts a shine where the shine should not be. If the room is dark, carry the plate to the light. The light will not come to the plate.

> **You do not need an expensive camera. You need a window.**

One plate, one clean background. A photo with the sink, the dishwashing bottle and three grocery bags in it is a photo of your kitchen, not your food. The plate is the star; everything else is noise. One cloth, one table, one wall. If the background is busy, the food is hiding. And wipe the rim before you shoot - the camera sees the fingerprint your eye skips.

Steady hands, both of them. Blur is not a style. Hold the phone with two hands, tuck your elbows in, tap the plate on the screen so the phone knows what matters, then take three and keep the best one. Delete the other two. Your gallery is not a museum.

Too dark next to the window? When the bright window is behind the food, the phone may make the plate dark to please the light. Fix it before you shoot: tap the plate on the screen so the phone focuses and meters there, then look for the brightness control that appears - on many phones a little sun or a slider next to the focus box, on others a plus/minus or an exposure setting - and slide it up until the food looks like food. Every phone shows it a bit differently; the trick is the same: tell the phone the plate matters more than the window.

The photo still needs the words

A good photo opens the door; a clear message closes the sale. Under the window photo Palesa wrote one line: "Plates today, R50. Inbox your order, collecting from one." Photo, price, time, how to get it. The aunty who asked "how much?" the night before ordered two. People are not slow - they are busy. If they must ask, some will simply not ask.

Sho't left, do this today

1. Take tomorrow's photo in soft daylight - next to a window or outside in the shade. Skip the flash and the kitchen tube while you are learning.
2. One plate, one clean cloth or table. Nothing else in the picture.
3. Shoot from the eater's side - the angle where you would sit down to eat it. Wipe the rim first.
4. Take three, keep the best one, delete the rest.
5. Post it where your customers already are, with the price, the time and how to get it in the words - not only in the picture.

Sis Palesa and Uncle Sol are made-up characters, and their plates and cars are just to show the method. The tube light, the steam and the window are real - ask anyone who has ever sold food through a WhatsApp group.

Chapter 2: The Poster With One Job

One offer, big words, your name on it - made free on the phone

A poster is not a shop window. It is one shout. After the window photo brought her seven orders, Sis Palesa got ambitious. Sunday evening she opened a free design app on her phone and made a poster with everything on it: plates, fat cakes, magwinya on Saturdays, a special for stokvels, her nephew's DJ services, five fonts, seven colours and a clip-art chicken dancing in the corner. She posted it proudly. The group said nothing. One uncle replied, "Sisi, what are you selling?"



Everything on it. Nothing in it.

If they must squint, they will not buy. Uncle Sol laughed when she showed him. "I sell a car with three things," he said. "A clean photo, a price, my number. The man who wants the car phones before I finish posting. Your poster has eleven jobs, Palesa. Give it one." A poster on a phone screen is the size of a matchbox. If the price needs a magnifying glass, the poster is decoration, not advertising.

So she made the matchbox shout one thing. Monday morning she opened the same app and started again: the Tuesday window photo of the plate, four big words - "Plates today, R50" - then "Collecting from one" and "WhatsApp Palesa" with her number. One font, two colours, nothing dancing. She pinched it small on her screen, the size it would be in the group. She could still read every word. She posted it. By ten past one the plates were sold, and a woman from two groups away asked to be added "for next time."



One photo. One price. One number.

One poster, one job

Decide the one thing before you open the app. A poster can announce today's plates, or Saturday's special, or that you deliver - never all three. Write the job in six words first: "Sell today's plates before two o'clock." Everything on the poster must serve that sentence. Anything that does not - the DJ services, the dancing chicken - goes on its own poster on its own day. Free design apps give you a thousand temptations; your job is to say no to nine hundred and ninety-nine.

> **One poster, one job. If they must squint, they will not buy.**

Big words, few words, your own photo. Use the photo you already made by the window - it is yours, it is real, and it costs nothing. Then the words, biggest first: what it is, the price, when, and how to get it. Your name and number go on every poster, even the ones inside your own group, because posters travel - someone forwards them, and a stranger cannot order from "Sis whoever". One font is enough. Two colours are enough. The food should be the loudest thing on the page.

Test it the way they will see it

They meet your poster as a small screen in a busy hand. Before you post, pinch the poster small on your own phone - the size it appears in a group chat - and hold the phone at arm's length. If you can read the offer, the price and your number in three seconds, post it. If you cannot, make the words bigger and fewer. Nobody studies a poster. They glance at it between a taxi and a meeting, and the glance is all you get.

Sho't left, do this today

1. Write the poster's one job in six words before you open the app. One offer only.
2. Use your own window photo. Your food beats clip art every time.
3. Four lines, biggest first: what it is, the price, when, how to get it.
4. Your name and number on every poster - posters travel further than your group.
5. Pinch it small and read it at arm's length. If you squint, start over.

Sis Palesa and Uncle Sol are made-up characters, and their plates and cars are just to show the method. The crowded poster, the squint and the three-second glance are real - ask anyone who has ever skipped an advert they could not read.

Chapter 3: Where the Poster Travels

Post where they already are - and let happy customers carry it further

The best order of the week came from a stranger. After the one-job poster sold out Monday's plates, Sis Palesa added the woman from two groups away to her own group. Then she asked the question that matters: "How did you see it?" The answer: her cousin in another group had forwarded the poster, because the photo made her hungry and the number was right there on it. Palesa had posted once. Her customer's phone had done the rest.



Posted once. Carried everywhere.

A poster with your number on it is a messenger. "That is the whole trick," Uncle Sol told her. "I do not stand at the rank shouting. The man who bought the white Golf shows his friends, and the friends phone me. Make it easy to carry, and they carry it." Easy to carry means: the poster says everything a stranger needs - what, how much, when, who to call - because once it leaves your group, you are not there to explain it.

So she stopped spraying and started placing. Palesa made herself a small rhythm. Her own status every morning she cooks - with the date and the collection time in the words, because a morning status can still be standing the next morning, and "today" means nothing without a date. And when the plates sell out she says so, quick - "Sold out, more tomorrow" - because a status expires on its own clock, not when the pot is empty. The groups she belongs to, only when the plates are actually ready, because the group that gets "plates today" on a day there are no plates stops believing the poster. And after lunch, one short thank-you message with tomorrow's plan, so the group hears from her even on the days she is not selling.



Same time. Same place. They learn to look.

Same time, same place

People buy from the poster they remember. One good post at the time your customers are thinking about food beats ten posts scattered through the day. If you sell lunch, late morning is when hunger is making plans - that is Palesa's time; yours may be different, and your own group will show you when the replies come fastest.

Whatever time you choose, keep it. A seller who appears at the same time every day becomes part of the day, like the taxi at the corner. Appear ten times at random and you become noise, and noise gets muted.

> **Post where they already are, at the time they are already looking.**

Ask for the forward, and make it worth forwarding. The cousin did not forward the poster because Palesa asked - she forwarded it because the photo made her hungry and sharing good food is a pleasure. That is the real engine: a poster good enough that sending it to a friend is a favour, not a chore. You can still ask: "If you know someone who likes a good plate, pass it on." People like helping a business they trust. They just will not carry a poster that embarrasses them.

Do not wear out the welcome

Every group is somebody's home. The stokvel group exists for the stokvel; the church group exists for the church. Post your plates where plates belong and the group's rules allow it - the admin's patience is part of your stock. One clear post when the food is ready keeps the welcome. Five reposts before breakfast spends it. The day a group removes you, you lose every phone in it.

Sho't left, do this today

1. Make sure today's poster can travel alone: what, price, when, your name and number - no explanation needed.
2. Post your status every day you cook, with the date and collection time in the words - and when it sells out, say so. Expiry is not stock control.
3. Pick your posting time from when your customers get hungry, then keep that time every day.
4. Ask once, simply: "If you know someone who likes a good plate, pass it on."
5. Respect each group's purpose and rules. One clear post keeps the welcome; spam spends it.

Sis Palesa and Uncle Sol are made-up characters; their plates and cars are just to show the method. The forward, the mute button and the admin's patience are real - ask anyone who has left a group that became a market.

Chapter 4: The Name They Remember

One name, one look, repeated until the township knows it

The order was hers. The name was not. The posters were travelling now, and one Wednesday a new customer phoned and asked, "Is that the plate lady?" Sis Palesa took the order, but the question followed her around the kitchen. The plate lady. Last month's poster had said "Palesa's Plates." The month before, "Taste of Home." Her status name was something else again. She had been in business for a year and had quietly been three different businesses.



Three names. No name.

Every new name starts the counting from zero. Uncle Sol understood at once. "Twenty years at this rank," he said. "Everybody knows Sol's Cars because I never gave them a second name to forget. You are not renaming your business, Palesa. You are restarting it." A name is not decoration. It is the hook people hang their memory on - the good plate, the fair price, the time you helped. Change the name and the memory falls off the hook.

So she chose once, and repeated. She picked "Palesa's Kitchen" - easy to say, easy to spell, and big enough to hold more than plates if the business grows. Then she put it everywhere, spelled the same way every time: the top of every poster, her profile name, the way she answers the phone. Same two colours from the one-job poster, same window-photo style. A month later a stranger in the queue at the shop turned around and said, "You are Palesa's Kitchen. I see your plates every day." She had never posted to that woman in her life.



Same name. Same colours. They saw you before they met you.

One name, said the same way

Choose a name your customers can say without you in the room. Short beats clever: if they cannot spell it, they cannot search it; if they cannot say it, they cannot recommend it. Let the name be bigger than today's menu - "Palesa's Kitchen" leaves room for fat cakes next year; "Palesa's Pap" may make people think you sell only pap. Then write it the same way everywhere, every time. Not Palesas Kitchen on Monday and Palesa's Kitchen on Friday. A name that keeps changing its spelling is a name that keeps starting over.

> **They cannot remember you if you keep changing your name.**

The look that says it is you

People recognize the wrapper before they read the words. Keep the same two colours and the same lettering on every poster, and your regulars will spot your plate in a busy group before they have read a word - the way you spot a familiar shop sign from the taxi. Keep one profile picture, your best plate photo or a simple mark, and let it stay. When you get bored of your own look - and you will, because you see it every day - remember your customers are only just beginning to learn it. Boredom is not a reason to rebrand. Keep repeating long enough to give the look a chance.

Sho't left, do this today

1. Choose one business name and write it the same way everywhere - poster, profile, phone greeting.
2. Pick a name that can grow past today's menu.
3. Two colours, one lettering style, on every poster - recognition is repetition.
4. One profile picture, then leave it alone. Let them learn it.
5. When your own look bores you, wait. Your customers are just starting to remember it.

Sis Palesa and Uncle Sol are made-up characters; their plates and cars are just to show the method. The renaming itch and the lost memory are real - ask anyone who has searched for a business that changed its name.

Chapter 5: Keep What Brings Orders

Do less guessing. Keep a simple record. Make the next poster better.

The dancing chicken finally won something. Sis Palesa's nephew found her old crowded poster and shared it as a joke. People laughed. The chicken got compliments. Someone asked for the nephew's number to book him as a DJ. Palesa looked at all the replies, then at the plates waiting in her kitchen. "My chicken is famous," she told Uncle Sol. "My lunch is still here."



The chicken got applause. The plates needed orders.

A laugh is lovely. It is not a lunch order. Sol tapped the notebook beside her stove. "You gave that poster one job. Did it do the job?" The simple poster from the week before had brought fewer replies, but people had ordered plates. She had been counting the noise because it was easy to see. Now she wanted to count what brought money into the kitchen.

So the notebook got a new page. Across the top she wrote: date, poster, where posted, orders collected. She saved each poster with its date so she could find it again. When a new customer ordered, she asked, "Where did you see us?" Some said her status, some a forwarded poster, and some could not remember. She wrote "not sure" instead of inventing an answer. It was a notebook, not a court case.



Count the plates that leave, not only the faces that laugh.

Compare fairly, not hopefully

One quiet day does not prove a poster failed. Rain, the menu, payday or running out early can change the result. Note those things beside the day's orders. Compare a few similar selling days before you decide. If you posted late and had only three plates left, do not blame the lettering for selling only three. The poster cannot sell food you did not have.

> **Keep what brings orders. Change one thing, then look again.**

Improve the poster, not the whole business

Change one thing you can explain. If customers keep asking the price, make the price bigger. If they cannot find the number, move it where they can see it. Keep the name and familiar look while you fix the problem. Change the photo, price, colours and posting time all at once and you will not know which change helped. A simple record gives you a clue, not a promise.

Save the layout. Check the offer every time. Keep a copy of a clear poster so next time you do not start from nothing. Before sharing it again, check the price, date, collection time, number and what is actually available. Use a fresh photo when the food or portion changes. A beautiful old photo is a bad helper if today's plate cannot keep its promise.

Sho't left, do this today

1. Save today's poster with its date. Keep the editable copy if your app allows it.
2. Note where you posted and how many orders were collected. Replies alone are not sales.
3. Ask new customers where they saw you. "Not sure" is a useful, honest answer.
4. Compare similar selling days. Note rain, a different menu or an early sell-out.
5. Fix one problem at a time. Recheck every offer detail before using a saved poster.

Sis Palesa and Uncle Sol are made-up characters; their plates and cars are just to show the method. Their notebook is ordinary. Yours can be too.