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High Point's Pizza Vino doubles staff, adjusts to boom after social media videos go viral (VIDEO)

Family restaurant overwhelmed by social media surge as Zachary Elsayed's TikTok videos go viral, with one getting 4 million views



Zachary Elsayed took over Pizza Vino's social media accounts just over a month ago. A few viral videos later, the restaurant is experiencing an unprecedented surge in business.

SARAH FRASCA



By Sarah Frasca – Reporter , Triad Business Journal
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Story Highlights

- A viral TikTok video by Zachary Elsayed drove Pizza Vino's customer count up 400% in one week.
- Pizza Vino doubled its staff and paused delivery services to manage the unprecedented surge in demand.
- The trade off? Restaurant faces negative reviews, prank calls alongside positive attention from social media fame.

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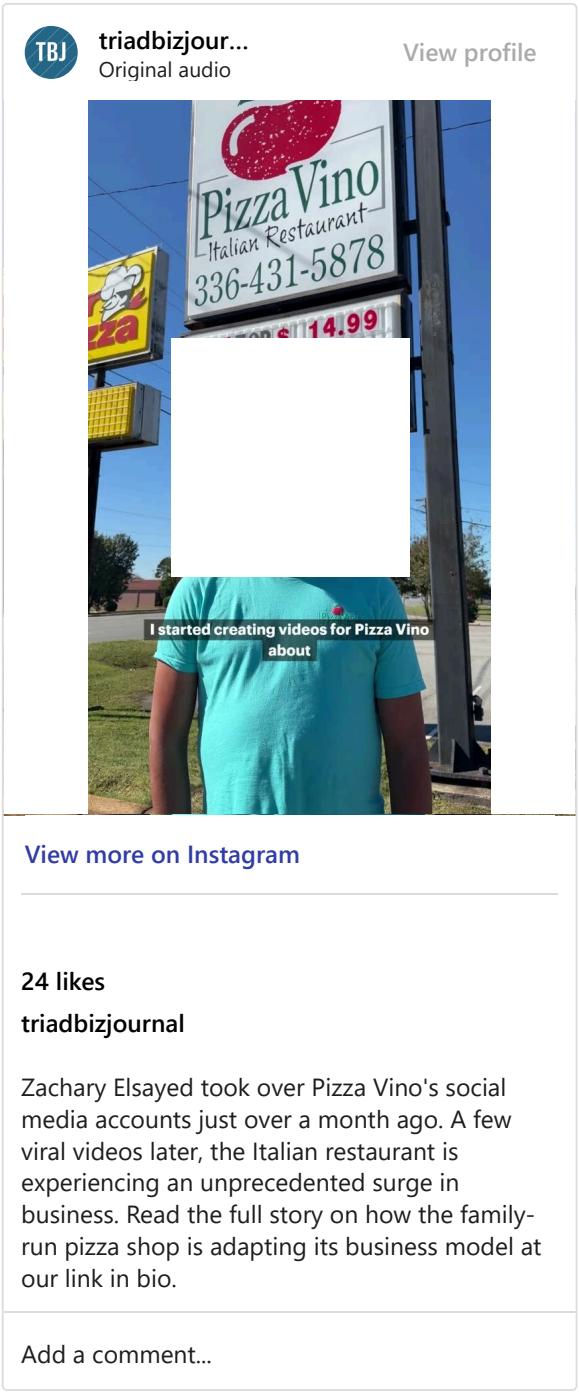
On Sept. 28, Zachary Elsayed posted a TikTok video encouraging viewers to order the customer-favorite sweet tea from Pizza Vino in High Point. Complete with a now-famous arm swing, big gulp of tea and pronunciation of today as "tuh-day," the unique video quickly took off, gaining 4 million views.

It prompted an unexpectedly large response on social media, with creators around the U.S. posting videos about making cross-country trips to the pizza place and viewers sharing humorous screengrabs of Elsayed in comment sections.

Since he took over the Italian restaurant's social media presence about a month and a half ago, Zachary has racked up more than 77,000 followers across social media accounts and continues to produce viral videos.

PIZZA VINO GOES VIRAL



The reactions haven't all stayed online. Customers have been flooding in to make food reviews – which have been both good and bad – and simply meet the quirky man from their For You Page. Even when the shop closes early to catch up on its instant popularity, customers pull into the parking lot and peek into windows trying to catch a glimpse of the social media sensation. In the past week, the virality brought Pizza Vino a 400% increase in customers, said owner Bob Elsayed, Zachary's dad.

"It just changed everything for us," Zachary said.

Zachary Elsayed (left) and father Bob (right) and are a dynamic duo at the family-run Italian spot.
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Pizza Vino, a family-owned Italian restaurant at 2839 S. Main St., has been a part of the High Point community since 1995. The family bought the property in 2016, according to deeds, and Bob said that aside from the 2008 recession and Covid-19, the business had been relatively steady for the last 31 years.

Confident in his social media skills, Zachary wasn't a fan of the content a hired marketing team was making for the restaurant, so he started running it himself. His authenticity is what makes the videos so popular, he said. Zachary has also launched T-shirts for the restaurant based on his viral saying "get one tuh-day."

"It's a lot easier to be yourself than it is to be somebody else," Zachary said. "Because if you're always trying to be somebody else, you'll never be satisfied. So I just figured out it's the key, just to be confident in yourself."

Large groups of customers trying to see Zachary Elsayed and eat at Pizza Vino constantly show up, even when the restaurant is closed.

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Adjusting to the extremely fast surge in business with 1,200 diners in the last week, Bob is making significant operational changes, including doubling staff, changing hours and pausing delivery and takeout services.

Before the videos gained traction, the restaurant employed roughly 10 staff members. In the past two weeks, the staff has grown by 8 or 9 employees and the restaurant is still hiring. Bob didn't share a confirmed number, but he estimated Pizza Vino made approximately $600,000 in gross annual revenues last year. Overwhelmed by the recent workload, he has not yet had the time to rework his budget in response to the influx, he said.

To manage the sudden influx of business, the restaurant closed early yesterday, taking time to catch up on work.

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The restaurant, named after Bob's late former boss from when he worked in London as a 15-year-old, serves food using homemade ingredients, fresh local vegetables and family recipes, so getting his growing team up to speed has been a challenge. Bob doesn't want to compromise his restaurant's quality, so he's temporarily stopped takeout, delivery and other third-party ordering services, only offering in-house dining. He's also switched hours from 10:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. to 10:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. with last orders at 7:30 p.m. He also has closed doors some days to catch up with orders, cleaning and other essential practices, as well as give his staff a break.

"That's why we had to modify the whole business structure," Bob said.

"We have to have that balance between our regular customer and (those) supporting us for 30 years, and people just coming in to see Zachary and coming to see Pizza Vino. So we have to have that balance very quick. So we have to adjust as fast as we can, and of course we struggle a little bit."

Bob Elsayed opened Pizza Vino on Main Street in High Point in 1995.

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Balancing the negativity

With nearly any social media attention comes negative feedback and backlash. As the restaurant faced growing pains trying to keep up with its multiplying customer base, some reviews have rated the food and environment very poorly and others post mean-spirited comments and memes. One day could bring 100 to 150 prank calls, which sometimes include fake emergency calls about Zachary, which can be frightening.

"A lot of things; it makes me worry about him," Bob said of his son's new-found popularity.

While the father-son team believes the positivity greatly outweighs the hate, it has been a struggle to take it in stride. Bob recently held a pep talk with his team to boost morale after the negative posts started to feel draining, encouraging them to focus on the positive attention and continue the strong work they're doing.

"The amount of eyes on us is very new for almost everybody here," Zachary said. "So everybody's still finding out how to maneuver through it, but it's not easy. It's definitely not easy."

Pizza Vino, a 31-year-old Italian spot, is experiencing a sudden uptick in business after social media virality.

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Outside of Pizza Vino, Zachary goes by Zbron, makes rap, R&B and pop music and goes viral for eccentric street interviews. While TikTok is the main platform for his restaurant content, "Zbron" has more than 50,000 followers on Instagram. Now, Pizza Vino is directing more attention to his personal platform.

He uploads about 10 videos a day across his own and the restaurant's accounts and works at the restaurant six days a week

"I always knew it would happen," Zachary said. "I didn't know exactly how it would happen, but I always knew it would happen. I feel like everybody has a dream. Everybody's capable of having a dream. All you gotta do is just take steps forward."

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