



## USING INSTAGRAM TO EXPAND YOUR BUSINESS REACH

Using Instagram can be beneficial for all types of businesses. Whether you own a small hardware store or a high-end luxury boutique, Instagram is the perfect platform to help you market your products. This is because it provides your company with significant online exposure and appeals to your more visual audience, which leads to more sale conversions and profits.

Building on solid Instagram strategies helps to attract your targeted audience segments and increase your customer base. Small and medium sized businesses sometimes shy away from using Instagram; however, trends have shown that Instagram works. With more traditional marketing mediums becoming less compelling to younger audiences, it's important to maintain a steady stream of new and/or young people to grow your business.

Some businesses believe that if you don't have a visually appealing product to showcase Instagram is probably not worth the hassle but that is the farthest thing from the truth. Businesses that sell services and products can all benefit from Instagram. The key is to push your brand more often than your products in order to gain greater brand recognition and influence on Instagram.

In order to remain relevant in today's ultra-competitive consumer world, successful businesses should find a way to attract the attention of audiences who are now looking to social media entertainment and content networks by creating traction through both proprietary media channels and earned media worth of mouth recommendations.

Compelling content that drives audience engagement is key. Posting with Purpose and having high quality content can spark conversations and optimize engagement. Whether it's an expertly photographed image or a series of videos, content creation is the backbone of successful Instagram Business accounts.

However, engaging content is not enough to keep up with the business trends on Instagram. To properly leverage your account, you will want to engage with your customers and audience often. This can be through giveaways, contests, targeted campaigns and other ideas.

Many businesses use Instagram instead of traditional advertisement space to make their followers aware of deals and sales they are hosting. It is also a powerful platform to capture leads and generate new revenue. In this guide we will go over all of the best practices of establishing your small business on Instagram.

Instagram is a very visual platform which is why compelling content is key to getting your followers to stop and actually read or view your post. There are many ways to do this, but the number one way is to always be authentic and genuine in your branding and message. What are your company's core values? What is a catch phrase associated with your company? What demographics does your company primarily serve? These are just a few of the questions you will want to ask yourself when taking your brand online to Instagram. Many of these factors have already been established but your messaging needs to be tailored and curated for Instagram.



## GENERATING IDEAS FOR POSTS

The best way to make sure you have Instagram content that resonates with your audience is to consistently post relevant content and plan it out. Some small businesses decide to hire a social media manager or social media planners that are already skilled in these areas. These specialists are creative and have experience in creating words and imagery for brands to generate leads and sales. If you are not in the position to hire a social media planner just yet, you can give it a go yourself. It may take some experimenting to learn what captions and posts work best for your audience, but it is totally achievable.

Pick a theme based on your business or industry and create a brand guide that includes your company's logo, colors and fonts. Creating unique branding can ensure that whenever your content is seen, people know just by viewing a post that it belongs to your company or brand. It's wise to learn and implement Canva, a simplified graphic design tool as it will come in handy to create visually engaging images and graphics.

The best way to optimize your Instagram feed and plan what to post is to consider a website that schedules your content out over time. Whether it's two weeks or one month in advance, having an editorial calendar can be really beneficial and reduce the time spent to create posts.

There are thousands of social media management tools and schedulers for Instagram on the market so deciding which one works best is all up to you. You may decide to start with one platform and then change direction based on new needs and that is perfectly okay. Platforms such as Buffer, Hootsuite, Plann, and Later are some of the more popular options on the market today. These apps will help you visually layout your content and help generate ideas of clever things for you to post. What to post:

The type of business you have will dictate what you post. Research the competition and likeminded businesses to see what they're posting and the hashtags that they are using to drive engagement. Use this as inspiration for what your content should like. What other businesses are in your industry or niche that are performing very well on Instagram?

If you are selling products, you could create quick 30 second tutorials on how to use them. If you are offering a service, you could create quotes and statistics about your industry to inform your audience of trends and current best practices. Memes are also pretty popular and if you find some popular ones that are already created that takes the duty of content creation out of your hands.

Videos are pretty popular on Instagram and well. Utilizing Instagram TV could give you a significant advantage as they are always on the Explore Feed of Instagram. Instagram is a fantastic way to connect with your audience and create expertise-like credibility with them.

Another great content idea is to create behind the scenes videos of your business such as product creation or a in depth look at your storefront, factory or wherever your place of business is. Show your audience how ideas come to fruition and you will gain their trust.

Whenever you are running promotions, sales or deals notify your audience by creating posts whether it's a video or an image.

Using your existing customer's social media to showcase testimonials is also a great idea. Do you have repeat customers who are loyal to your brand that use Instagram? If they are not already posting about you, you should reach out to them and ask them to if they are satisfied with your business. This brings us to our next point which is influencers.

Many businesses are turning to creative agencies who hire influencers and micro-influencers that are already using similar products or services and pay them to push and advocate for your brand. The word "influencer" includes a wide range of socially informed experts. Skincare, beauty, "foodies" and tech influencers, among others, will help businesses to accomplish what can be challenging demographics. According to Buffer.com, recent studies show that 70 per cent of millennial consumers are influenced by their peer's recommendations for purchasing decisions on brands.

You could curate a press package and send it to influencers so that they can try out your product and give a review. User generated content enables advertisers to share this information through their social media accounts in order to build social proof and gain trust.

User generated content is bringing real customers into the fold. This will increase your credibility score, while consumers will be delighted to see their content shared or retweeted. Leveraging influencers and micro influencers and featuring them on your feed and stories with product placement or services can help to create authenticity and bridge the gap between your brand and a larger and steady audience.

### **Giveaways**

If you implement it the right way, giveaways can help establish your Instagram account and brand, build loyal customers and an active audience who will share your incredible products or services with a wider audience than you can organically. Decide on what it is that you want to give away. Whatever the service, product, or experience you're giving away as your reward should be interesting to your

audience. This will differ contingent on your goal. For example, if your goal is to spread awareness about product launch, you should most likely to give away the specific product as your reward.

Reaching out to other similar brands is also a great idea to cross-promote. Brand partnerships are especially helpful for younger, newer businesses. Aligning yourself with other reputable businesses and outlets can help to build your credibility. Move this process along by working with brands in your industry. Exchanging content or co-hosting an event and promoting it on Instagram and other social media platforms can push your businesses way farther than doing it alone. Your content will be twice as powerful with half of the effort.



## SNAPPING PHOTOS & CREATING VIDEOS

If you are creating content in house there are tons of apps on the market that can help you get started with producing great photography and videos. Below we will outline some of the most popular apps and websites to help you jumpstart your Instagram content.

For high quality photos:

- Afterlight 2 is a pretty popular and powerful iOS-only photo editing solution. It's pretty affordable and offers a lot of tools to make the perfect edits. It's a flexible platform that works both for portrait shots and for capturing candid photos. A number of filters are included along with color and overlay capabilities.

- Lightroom is a dependable mobile version of the much-loved Adobe suite platform. The application has a variety of presets that add a beautiful picturesque quality to your images. The free version is easy to use and has a sophisticated look, with color and lighting features that will take your Instagram photos to the next level. Even better, if you opt for the paid subscription option you can unlock tons of more tools and features to enhance your images.

If you want to start creating video sooner than later there is good news. There are thousands of mobile applications and web-based apps that exist now that can take your video to next level. Good news: There are a number of free and inexpensive video editing applications and tools you can download that run from super simple to powerful in-depth abilities. Some of the more popular options are listed below:

- Magisto is an online video editor with a web application and a mobile app for automated video editing and production for businesses and consumers. According to the website, Magisto uses Artificial Intelligence technology to make video editing quick and easy.
- Inshot is a HD video editor that allows you to trim and cut video and movies, add music and video effects to stand out amongst the competition. It helps you create and edit videos with ease across multiple platforms, not just Instagram.
- Hyperlapse is an application that allows you to create time-lapse photography, method that enables your photographs to become motion pictures.



## OPTIMIZING YOUR HASHTAGS

Optimizing your hashtags is a great best practice to make sure that your relevant audiences are finding and following you. There are a host of websites and apps that can help guide to using hashtags in a smart and manageable manner. When you use the right hashtags, you directly help Instagram organize and arrange your posts. This will help them reach people who value your products and your brand. But is important to know how to use them effectively.

There is a balancing act to using hashtags. You need to balance the ability to use common hashtags against the possibility of being squeezed out of trending and high-demand topics. This is similar to SEO in many ways. As you try to search for keywords in the Google search engine that are more generic, you will get more broad and generic results back.

Your business will do much better if you choose to rank for long-tail terms and curated hashtags. For example, if your business sells skincare products and solutions, using a hashtag such as #hyperpigmentation is more curated than going for an already very saturated hashtag like #skincareproducts or #beautyproducts. This directly targets an audience and consumers who may be looking for help with hyperpigmentation issues.

This is one of the main reasons why you need to provide some "long tail" hashtags in your posts. It will make it easier for your posts to compete with thousands, sometimes millions, of others using common hashtags. It is also wise to stay abreast of trending topics and use trending hashtags on your posts because it is current, and many people follow what's new and relevant.

In 2018 Instagram enabled the capability for followers to follow hashtags. This enables users to stay up to date on new posts that feature certain hashtags that they deem relevant to them. It is also wise for your business to follow certain hashtags to stay in the loop on the content that is being generated and it could help you identify new trends and inspire your own feed.

There are even websites and apps that will help you generate the best hashtags to use based on your brand and show you how other competitors are performing with those hashtags. Websites such as Ingramer.com and apps such as #HashMe are the perfect place to start if you need to get insight on what could work for your business.

## **The Instagram Algorithm**

The long-debated concept of the Instagram Algorithm has seen much criticism since its inception. No longer are users seeing content from their closest friends and family first, but instead they're being shown content of that the algorithm thinks they'd like the most. It used to be complex to understand, but in an effort to increase Instagram's transparency Instagram released more details on this last year.

According to their latest reports, posts are prioritized based on three key factors of the user: interest, timeliness, and the relationship the user has with the accounts they are following. Understanding these trends can help Instagrammers to reach their desired number of Instagram impressions and followers.

Many experts have written articles and think pieces attempting to debunk the algorithm, but the main takeaways have been the same: Instagrammers who post consistently and engage with their audiences consistently are given priority on the timeline over other posts. This is important to note as you are building up your account on the platform.

The primary goal of Instagram is to increase the time that users spend on the platform. The longer the users stay, the more advertisements they display. So, directly or indirectly, the accounts that help Instagram achieve that goal will be rewarded.

## Instagram Insights

Using Instagram's built-in insights is a great benefit for accounts that are signed up as businesses. This tool gives you actionable information on how you can reach more people and meet your business goals. The tool has information on the demographics of your followers, your most liked posts, your activity and more.

It is wise to check this often to understand the times and dates that you are audience is online and the type of content they are engaging with the most. You can also learn what actions people are taking once they click on your profile. If they decided to visit your website or clicked on your profile based on a post, you will know it by checking the insights. Knowing your best performing content can help you generate more ideas to produce similar posts instead of doing your own research and trying to come up with what you think is best.

The downside of Instagram analytics is that it only lets you see about a week's worth of growth from the app. To track the growth of your account with more detail and insights you can use third party apps and websites such as Later.com or PlannThat.com.

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## **BUILDING TRUST WITH YOUR INSTAGRAM COMMUNITY**

Businesses and marketing companies today face a massive challenge in trying to reach out to young consumers. According to a study conducted by executives from Crowdtap, Weight Watchers, and MRV 84% of Millennials do not like or trust traditional advertising.

Building trust on Instagram is easy, just use the same methods and strategies that you use in other areas. Your brand needs to have reputable products or services, and your message needs to be authentic. Share a clear, sharp vision of what your company stands for. This includes your company's core values, philosophies, and outlooks.

Social media and brand-loyalty go together, hand-in-hand. It's a modern method that helps brands engage emotionally by building trust with their consumer base. Pay careful attention to the type of content that engages users and focus on delivering it, and people will simply want to learn more about your brand.

To build a consumer-facing business, you need to use good marketing strategies and techniques. Businesses that have a hazy stance on community concerns will not get very far when trying to attract new customers or sell to existing customers.

Customers want authenticity that they can relate to. Making sure that you provide valuable content that solves a problem or answers a question is a great way to build up trust and increase audience retention.

Take communication to the next level by enabling consumers to post their photos and videos of their products on social media. Today, customers want real people to use the product before buying it themselves. The best way to get prospects and repeat customers to engage and follow you is to get in front of them and provide relevant information. It's particularly important to spend time on your own Instagram account, as well as participate on other relevant sites. Consider sponsoring user-generated content to get your brand in the feeds of your customers. You can also hold an Instagram contest to bring attention to your brand, while appealing to a slightly different segment of your target audience.

Social media platforms foster two-way and group conversations. Use proven techniques to promote discussion and stay around to respond. Regramming and commenting on customer posts about your brand can also promote brand loyalty.

Don't be spammy. What is this you might ask? Well it is when the content you are posting or the comments you leave under other accounts don't appear authentic or meaningful. This is harmful because it usually results in people unfollowing you or engaging less with your own content.

You're probably eager to tell Instagrammers all about your awesome products or services. But before you post a glaring ad, take a break. Social media users rate over-promotion as their top pet peeve. Don't break your audience's trust by being spammy. Pay close attention to the type of content that attracts users and focus on providing that, and people naturally want to know more about your brand.

## ADDRESS NEGATIVE FEEDBACK SOONER THAN LATER



If you are running an Instagram business account, it's almost impossible to avoid getting negative feedback even if your products are the best first in class products around. Simply put, you just can't meet the expectations and demands of every consumer.

Customers are now flocking to social media platforms, when they are dissatisfied, where they can complain about your product or service and get a response. It's easy to leave feedback on social media, as customers can reach you wherever they are, especially since it is sometimes quicker than calling a customer service number and being put on hold or e-mailing a company for help to receive a response days later.

Consumers want and need to be heard. Especially if their business originated from them seeing a product on your Instagram for the first time. Instagram has become an important part of customer service, and selling your products is not enough to enhance authenticity. Even when a mishap is not 100% your company's fault or if things are a misunderstanding, consumers almost always take the other consumers side.

Most small businesses do not have a Public Relations Specialist on hand that they can dial up in a crisis. It is best to address things quicker than later, even if you don't have all the facts prepared when it happens.

Recognize and acknowledge the customer's problem quickly. Don't wait until things snowball and then other customers are alerted. This gives other customers the opportunity to air their grievances with your company as well. You do not have to have another way. You really do not need a solution right away, but it is important to be transparent and open to what your customers have to say. The last thing you want is for the issue to go viral because you didn't take action soon enough or tried to ignore the issue.

It is also important not to address every negative third party that might chime in or have no business with your company at all. The internet calls these people "social media trolls". These people just want to join in on the conversation and stir up trouble for the fun of it. It is important to be able to discern between genuine dissatisfaction in your customers and those who get a kick out of it trolling.

When you finally do come to a resolution there is nothing wrong with doing a PSA of sorts to let the rest of your audience know that an issue has been handled. This will help reaffirm their trust in your brand and confirm that your company is proactive when mistakes do happen.

## BRANDS THAT HAVE SUCCESSFULLY USED INSTAGRAM:

There are hundreds of businesses and brands that are successfully executing Instagram campaigns and have case studies you can learn from. Instagram is growing larger each day and it is one of the go-to platforms and best places for businesses to invest in ad space. From smaller startups to the largest global brands, everyone is using Instagram in some shape or form, to boost their business. Below we will outline some of the most notable business case studies, which use it effectively, and their results.

### Adidas

As one of the top brands in apparel and footwear, Adidas has utilized social media marketing to surpass its competition. In 2018 Adidas executed a campaign called #MyNeoShoot. to promote their Neo brand which launched in 2012.



### #MyNeoShoot

The Neo brand was a new subset division of Adidas geared towards trendy, youthful consumers. They invited their followers to create Adidas-inspired Instagram posts with the hashtag and labeling them with the hashtag #MyNeoShoot. They then invited the best content creators were to model in a professional photo shoot for them and share their branded photos with engaging social media followers and on Adidas own account as well. They even recruited Selena Gomez to help with the contest.

As a result, the campaign generated 71,000 mentions of the #MyNeoShoot for Adidas. The hashtag also enabled them to gain 41,000 new followers. This was a splendid example to show that a creative contest is enough to engage your viewer and to underscore the importance of social media influencers.

## Old Spice

The Old Spice brand is somewhat known for its reputation for their clever and quirky ad campaigns but sometimes credibility can be more of a burden than a reward. How does Old Spice stay on the forefront of edgy advertising? How do you create engaging marketing assets when your target audience already has clear expectations for you to be creative? The answer for Old Spice was to focus efforts into unknown territory: social media with their Dream Runner Campaign.

In 2016, Old Spice introduced The Dream Runner campaign. The campaign encouraged their followers to win things by posting photos of their running routes in the shape of a prize they wanted to win – complete with the hashtag #runoldspice.

Using the thousands of apps that are out there, runners tracked their daily runs and highlighted the routes they took across the different cities to win prizes. Their campaign motto was “If you can run it, you can own it.” It was a case study of how to use your audience’s favorite activities and interests to boost your campaign.

Once again, this campaign showed how, prominent Instagrammers played a major role in helping Old Spice hit their campaign goals. It's also a great example of reducing marketing pressure by selecting influencers that already fit the brand's ideals to promote the brand and their products that would be enjoyed by the majority of people who were exposed to the advertisement.

## Camp Brand Goods:

Camp Brand Goods is a great example of a smaller company getting in on the Instagram trend. Their brand is inspired by the outdoor and travel niche and lifestyle.

According to Business.com, the brand created the #keepitwild contest which awarded a weekly t-shirt to users who posted the most original photo with this hashtag. They ran this contest to increase their followers and increase engagement. During the competition, the company partnered with other Instagram users who are well known in the outdoor world and helped them attract more followers.





WORKHARD  
ANYWHERE  
IMAGE BY ALEX RODRIGUEZ

## MONETIZING STRATEGIES TO DRIVE SALES

Instagram has now added the ability for qualified, eligible businesses to tag their products in posts. This practice is called “shoppable media.” Customers can get details about your products from your posts and purchase them.

Once you have enabled a shoppable post customers can click on the link directly from Instagram and it will take them to a checkout page on your whatever landing page or e-commerce website you have your products on. To do this you will also need a Facebook for Business account to setup a catalog of your products. Unfortunately, this isn’t available for business selling services but there are other ways to connect your services through Instagram. Utilizing Instagram stories is great for both businesses selling products and services. If you have Instagram businesses account over a certain following you can advertise to consumers directly from your stories and enable a call-to-action for them to swipe up to view more about whatever it is that you are selling.

Use this guide to learn how to properly start executing your Instagram strategy. All-in-all focus your efforts on the solutions you deliver to your customers and not just the products. Instagrammers want to know how your brand and products can deliver value to their everyday life.

Create a consistent voice for your brand and reliable and consistent information. View your Instagram Business Account from behind the scenes to gain insight on how viewers might view yours. It could be helpful to have a trusted friend or colleague look at your content and strategies to see if they resonate with non-stake holders.

You may think it’s better to be broader with your messaging to gain more followers, but the more niche your tactics are the better for conversion of followers into actual buyers. Keeping your customers interested is a key part of any successful marketing campaign. Don’t underestimate the potential value that Instagram has to grow your business.