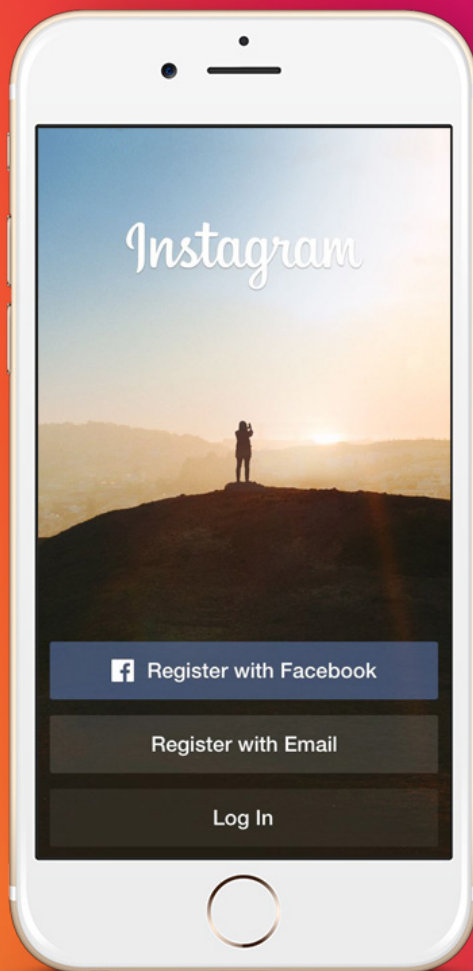


How to Win at

Instagram



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Introduction

If you're reading this, chances are you already know how important it is to market your business on Instagram. But, just in case you need a little extra convincing, here are some compelling statistics.

- Instagram is the **third most popular** social media platform, behind only Facebook and YouTube.
- Last year, Instagram announced that **1 billion** people use the service each month.
- **80%** of Instagram users follow at least one business.

This guide offers actionable advice for getting the most out of your Instagram account. From producing compelling content to networking with prospects, you'll learn how to use this fun, dynamic platform to form lasting relationships and grow your business.

Optimizing Your Profile

Like any other social media platform, your profile page on Instagram is the face of your business. When someone clicks your name anywhere on the service, your profile page is the first thing they'll see. So, you'll want to make sure it represents you and speaks to your target audience.

PUT YOUR BEST FACE FORWARD

If you're a service-based salesperson, it's a good idea to make your profile picture an actual photo of you, rather than a logo for your business.

Your profile photo should reflect your brand's values. If you're looking to be approachable and friendly, don't include a photo that makes you look too stoic. Conversely, if you're trying to attract a more professional clientele, don't choose an image where you're laughing.

Finally, make sure you update your profile picture every so often. When you do, your followers will take notice of the new avatar accompanying your posts, which will help your content stand out from the rest of their feed.

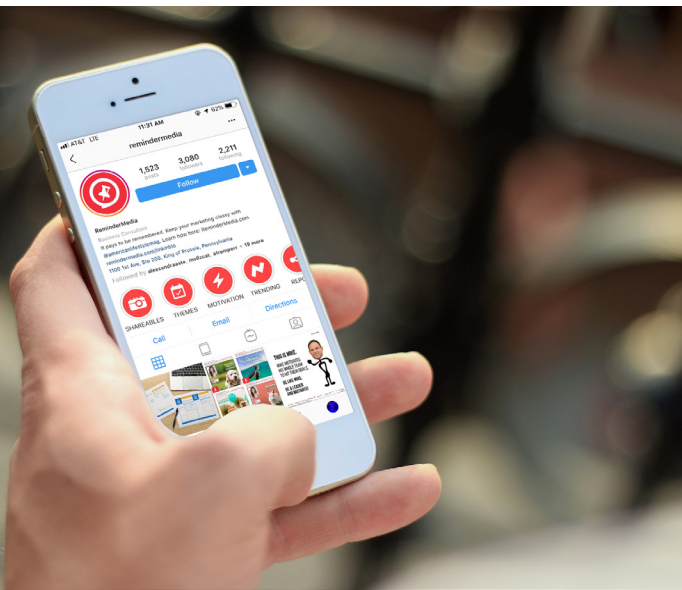
LEVERAGING YOUR BIO

Your bio is your chance to explain who you are and what you do. Just make sure you keep it relevant, as you'll only have 150 characters to work with.

Tip: If you work for a business that has a separate Instagram profile, you can tag them here by using @, followed by their handle.

Your bio section is also where you can include a link to your website, which is crucial, since you can't include hyperlinks in your individual posts.

Many businesses have gotten very savvy about how they use this link, updating it frequently when they have a new product or promotion they'd like to spotlight. Leverage the link in your bio by creating a call to action in the captions of your posts.



“If you're looking to sell your house, I'd be happy to help. Learn more at the link in my bio!”

PERSONAL VS. BUSINESS: WHICH SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Like any other social media platform, your profile page on Instagram is the face of your business. When someone clicks your name anywhere on the service, your profile page is the first thing they'll see. So, you'll want to make sure it represents you and speaks to your target audience.

Features	Personal account	Business profile
Photo and video posts	X	X
Stories	X	X
Customizable profile	X	X
Messaging capabilities	X	X
Link to website in profile	X	X
Link to contact your business		X
Performance analytics		X

As you can tell from the chart, personal and business profiles are functionally similar in many ways. On either one, you can create posts and Stories, send messages, and provide a link to your website.

A business profile has two significant advantages.

- It allows people to call you or get directions to your business, directly from your profile.
- It gives you access to analytics, which will not only tell you how well your posts are performing, but also provide valuable demographic information about your audience.

There is, however, one potential downside to creating a business profile, and that's the issue of your account's organic reach.

If you have a Facebook business page, you likely know that your posts show up less often in your followers' feeds than posts from their friends and family. Since Instagram is owned by Facebook, Inc., it's entirely possible that Instagram will enforce similar changes to their algorithm, and you'll need to run ads to increase your reach.

In the meantime, it's up to you to decide whether or not you want the added features, as well as the subtle, visual distinction of having a business profile.

What (and When) Do You Post?



In any kind of marketing, there is no magic formula for success. Instagram is, of course, no exception. But, as with other social media platforms you may have used, you'll keep your audience engaged by posting a variety of content on a regular basis.

Here are some ideas for types of content you might want to share with your Instagram followers:

- Photos of you engaged in your hobbies, getting some exercise, or otherwise working toward a goal that isn't your business
- Motivational quotes
- Short video clips that are relevant or useful
- "Behind the scenes" content
- Limited posts about your actual product (ex: listing photos, if you're in real estate)

Ultimately, when you give people a reason to follow you besides what you sell, they'll be more likely to keep following you. That means you'll have a chance to leverage the relationship for more repeat and referral business down the line.

So, remember: you're on Instagram to network and offer value. Don't constantly hit people over the head with sales pitches, and you'll be rewarded for your patience later on.

IDEAL POSTING TIMES

A 2018 analysis from SproutSocial suggests a variety of "peak times" for posting to Instagram. These times are:

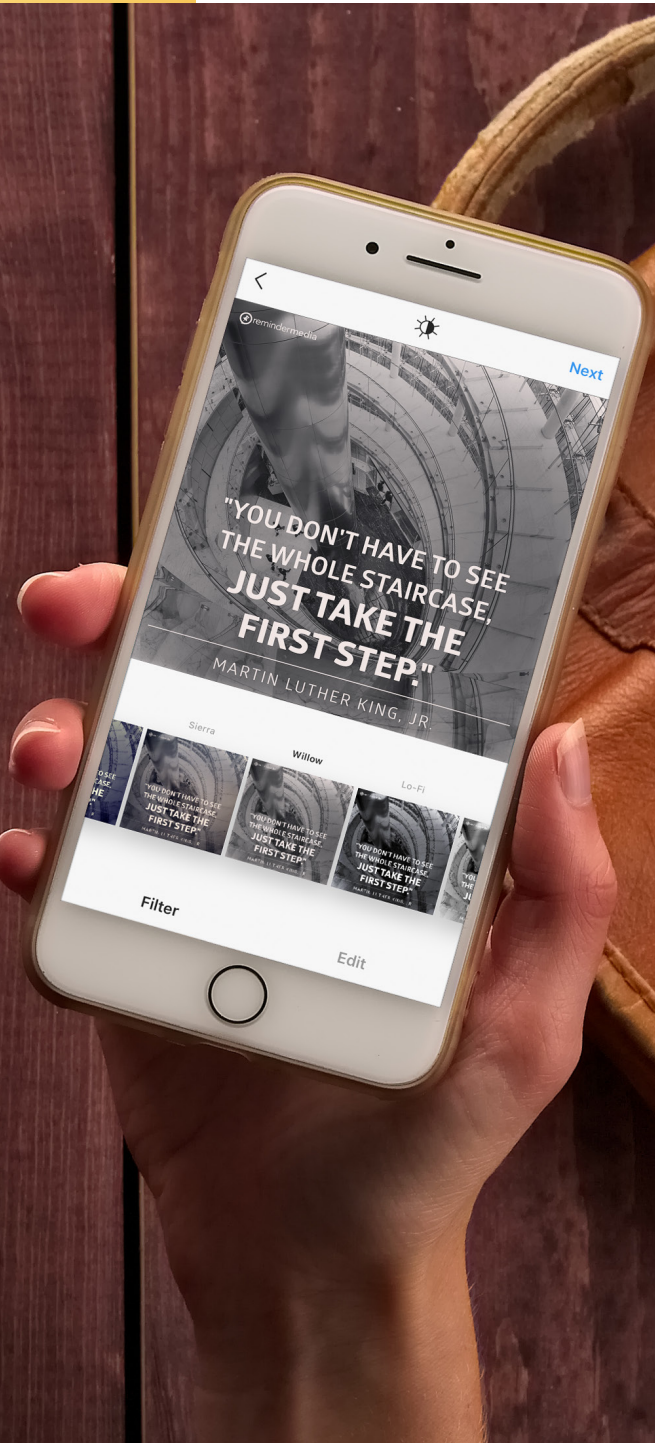
- *Wednesdays around 3pm*
- *Thursdays from 5am to 11am*
- *Thursdays from 3pm to 4pm*
- *Fridays around 5am*

The thing about optimal post times is that they do tend to change over time. The times that work best this year might not work as well a year or two down the line. Plus, individual outcomes will vary. So, by all means, start out by posting at these optimized times. But, if you find your posts perform better when you make them around lunchtime or early in the evening, you should take that into account.

Tip: Use a social media scheduler. Scheduling software (such as Buffer or HootSuite) ensures that you can post content at optimized times without having to set an alarm.

Appearances Do Matter

You don't have to be the world's greatest photographer to succeed on Instagram, but you do need to be deliberate about what you're offering up. On a platform based so heavily on visuals, putting a little extra effort into the details will go a long way.



For example, you've probably noticed that the default shape of Instagram posts is square. Your phone likely has an option for taking square images, which you should take advantage of. Though you can always crop your images later, starting out by taking square photos means you won't have to edit out crucial parts of the image when you go to post.

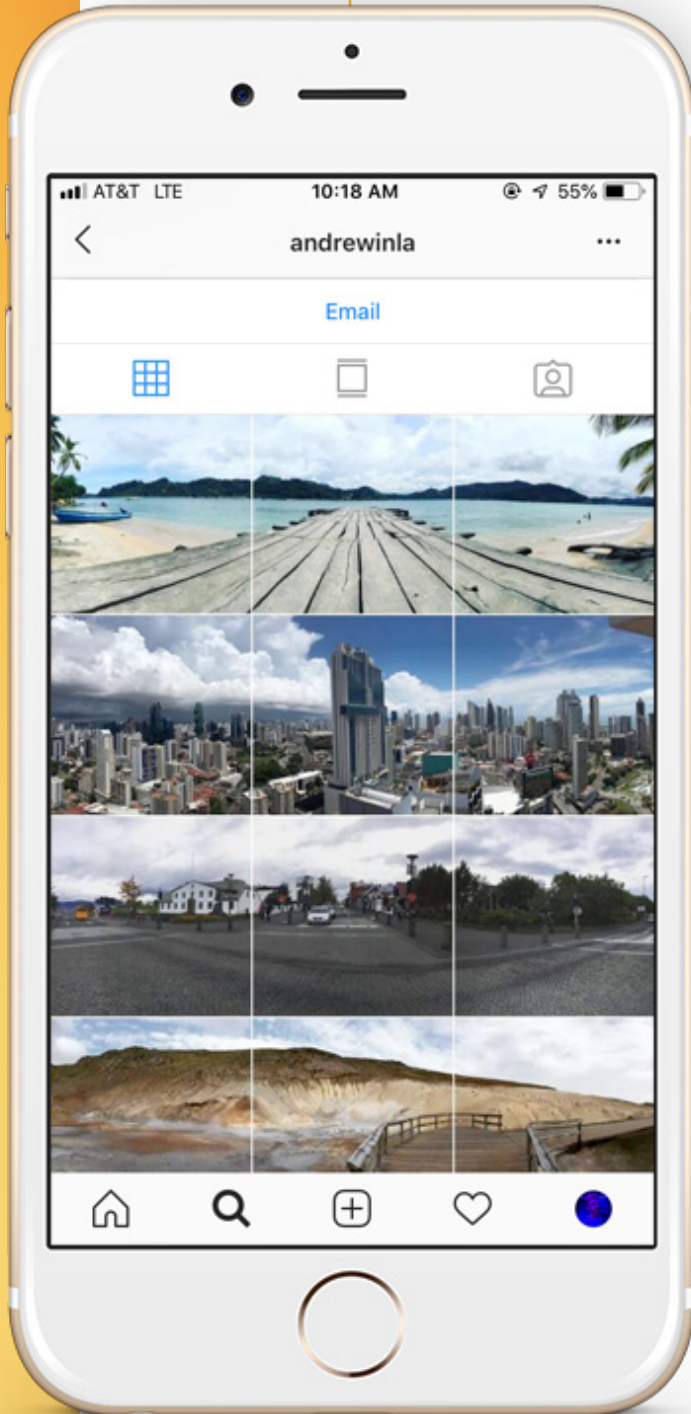
TO FILTER OR NOT TO FILTER?

Once you've got the image or video you want to post, Instagram allows you to edit your content's appearance right there in the app. There are some really advanced options for doing this, but the easiest method is to apply one of Instagram's preexisting filters.

Though Instagram's filters do change from time to time, there are always several options for brightening up your image, making it look darker/more dramatic, or rendering it black-and-white.

The decision of whether or not to filter is, like most other branding decisions, a largely personal choice. When you're testing out filters, try asking a third party to look at the image and give their honest reaction. Does the filter truly enhance the photo, or does it feel like you're trying too hard to fit in with Instagram influencers?

Again, there is no right or wrong answer. The key is to find something that feels right for you and stick with it. By deliberately selecting filters and using them regularly, you're making a statement about your business and, with a little bit of effort, injecting some extra personality into your posts.



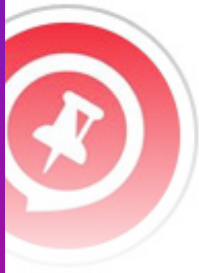
GETTING YOUR GRID LOCKED

As we mentioned earlier, when people click your username on Instagram, the first thing they see is your profile. And one of the most prominent features of your profile is your grid.

The grid is a scrollable presentation of all your posts in rows of three. Though people are able to select different options for viewing your posts, the grid format is the default.

Many Instagram users have tapped into some incredibly creative concepts for their grids, splitting up posts so that, when viewed in the grid, they form a more cohesive image. While it's not necessary for you to take on anything this elaborate, you should keep in mind the overall presentation when selecting what you share.

For example, if you tend to include images that are lit a certain way, feature some recurring colors, or are enhanced by the same one or two filters, your grid will be more visually pleasing as people scroll through.



Telling Engaging Stories

Stories are an especially interesting part of Instagram because they aren't permanent. By default, content you add to your Story disappears after 24 hours (though you can save a limited number of your daily Stories as permanent parts of your profile).

This ephemeral nature makes Stories a great way to share timely content that you wouldn't necessarily want sitting on your profile permanently. You might use it to document an event you attend or something interesting you're doing on a given day.

Unlike your posts, which should be meticulously planned, Stories are, by nature, less polished and more “real.” (They're also rectangular, so you won't be limited by the confines of a square grid.)

Think of Stories as a chance to show off your authentic self and to get people interested in your daily routine. Once they're interested in you as a person, interest in what you sell will follow.

USING STORIES TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Another interesting thing about your Story is that people are unable to like

or comment on what you've posted. Instead, if they want to engage, they'll need to message you directly. This can lead to conversations that will, in turn, blossom into profitable, lasting relationships.

You can also actively pursue relationships with your leads, based on how they interact with your Story. When you're sharing a photo or video clip, you're also given an option to add special features—for example, a location, an animated GIF, or even the current temperature where you are.



Tip: To find these features, click the icon that looks like a sticker being peeled back.

One of the most popular of these special features is a poll or question, which you can use to find out more information about your prospects. For example, if you're a real estate agent, you can ask whether your followers are looking to buy a house within the next year. Then, for the duration of the poll, you'll be able to look on your Story and see who has responded yes. From there, it's all about following up with those potential buyers through a private message (see: “Sliding into DMs” in the next section).

Expanding Your Reach

WINNING #HASHTAGS

Originally popularized on Twitter, hashtags present one of the best ways for you to get your content in front of new people on Instagram. Not only are hashtags active links—categorizing relevant content for people who are actively scrolling through a particular topic—but they also inform Instagram’s algorithm.

On the search section of every user’s Instagram feed, a grid full of potentially relevant photos is included, based on the accounts the users follow, as well as the posts they’ve recently interacted with. By attaching relevant hashtags to your posts, you’re more likely to have your content end up in front of the people most likely to appreciate it.

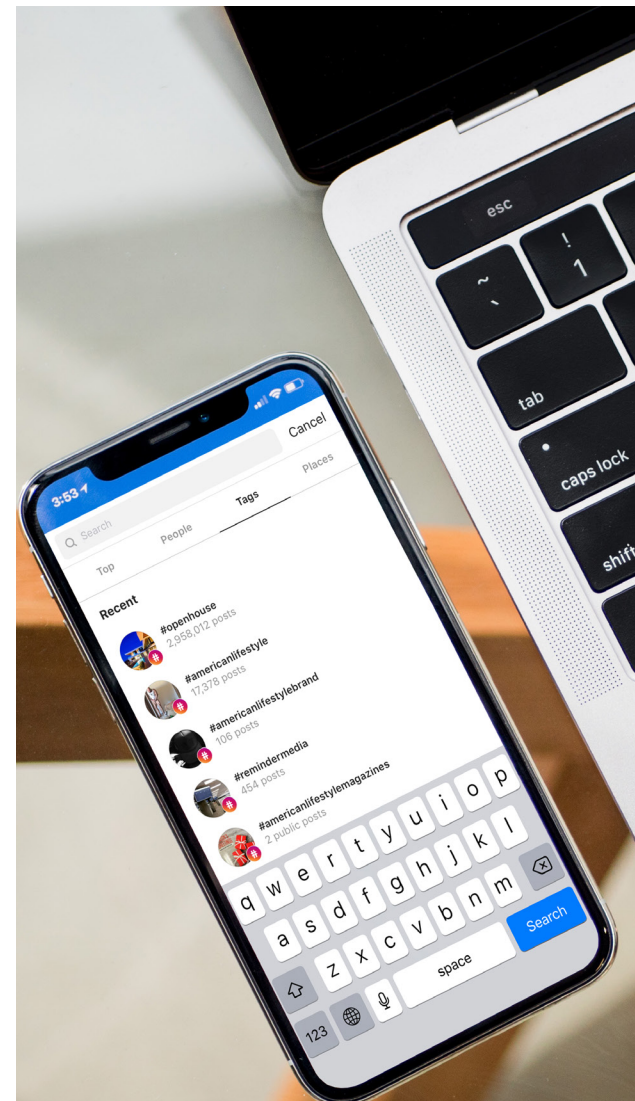
BEST PRACTICES FOR HASHTAGS

#KeepItRelevant. Research popular tags that actually relate to what you’re posting, or consider creating your own hashtag. Don’t use tags that have nothing to do with your post!

#Don’tGoOverboard. Instagram lets you use up to 30 hashtags per post, but try to limit yourself to 10-12, so you don’t seem desperate.

#SeparateYourHashtags. Loading up your captions with hashtags makes them hard to read. Instead, hit return six times. Place one punctuation mark at the beginning of the first five lines. Enter your hashtags on the sixth line, to keep everything nice and clean.

Tip: Alternately, you can include your hashtags in a comment underneath your post.



EXPLORING GEOTAGS

Just as hashtags link your posts to particular topics, geotagging connects them with a specific location.

When a user clicks the location listed on a post, they're taken to a grid full of posts geotagged in that same place. From there, they'll see recent posts from the location, as well as posts that have a lot of engagement (likes and comments).

You can probably imagine how this might be useful for your business. By tying your post to a particular location—be that a town, a landmark, or even another local business—you can increase the likelihood that locals will see it. Additionally, you can click the geotag on your post to see who else might be on Instagram in your area, which means you've got a chance to connect with a new lead.

BE SOCIAL

You can't just create winning content and expect every lead to come to you. Instead, you need to be an active participant on the platform. Follow people who share your interests, or who might be interested in what you have to say. Like and respond to comments—not just on your posts, but on posts made by others.

Think of the people you follow as friends: cheer on their successes and show empathy when they're experiencing setbacks. Watch their Stories, to keep up with what's going on in their daily lives. Become invested in your customers, so they'll want to become invested in you.

GO LIVE

Ultimately, you're taking advantage of this unique platform to let people see the real human being behind your business. One of the best ways to do this is by going live for a Q&A, product demonstration, or other event that encourages people to join a conversation.

Before you commit to going live, make sure you've got a decent number of followers, and plan to go live during a time when people will actually be able to spend time on their phones. While it's not the end of the world if your first live outing doesn't have many viewers, you want to make sure you're using your time wisely and encouraging participation.

SLIDING INTO DMs

Direct messages (or DMs) offer a great opportunity for communicating with your leads. Just be sure to do this tactfully. If you come across as annoying or overly salesy, your lead might block you from contacting them again in the future.

Instead, try easing your way into the relationship by responding to something on your prospect's story. Instagram even makes it easy for you to send an emoji with a single tap of your screen.

Though you're communicating with someone electronically, you want to treat this conversation with all the respect you would treat a phone call or face-to-face interaction. After all, you are asking someone for their time and, ultimately, you'll be asking for their business.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this guide has left you feeling a little bit more confident about your marketing efforts on Instagram, while offering up a few tips and techniques you haven't tried before.

While you might not end up using every tool Instagram has to offer, you now have the information you need to create top-notch content and build relationships with people who'll support your business for years to come.



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