

By: Racheal Blackmore BlackmoreMarketingSolutions.com Instagram is the most powerful social media platform for visually engaging content. Often business owners express confusion about how or why they need to use Instagram.

Though it may feel like you must be a professional photographer (or professional selfie taker) to gain traction on this platform, that simply isn't the case. Many leading smartphones have incredible photography capabilities and can be the only equipment you need to post professional images.

Influencers, large companies, and small businesses throughout all industries have created massive followings on Instagram. Let's get you a piece of that pie.

## 1. Shape the Narrative of Your Feed with Pictures

Decide prior to publishing your page what you want your followers to *feel* when they see your posts.

Note that this is different then what you want them to *know* about your business. For example, when someone sees an image of a man underneath a car fixing it, and your business name is "Jimmy's Fix It and Forget It", they're likely to know what your business is about.

However, to become truly successful on Instagram you want to evoke feeling. There is nothing visually spectacular about a man in a garage, fixing a car.

Now let's say Jimmy's Fix It and Forget It posted an image with an older man checking under the hood of a classic car, greased up from a hard day of work, with a young boy standing next to him holding the grease rag and a ratchet. Overlaid is a warm filter and a caption that says, "Helping folks and teaching the next generation since 1959".

Which do you think would be more effective? When you imagine these two photos, do you understand how the second gives knowledge of the business but evokes feelings of wanting to engage with it as well?

Shaping the narrative of your business through evoking feelings from your images will get you far on this platform.

Are you in the fitness industry and want the public to feel powerful and inspired by your images. Then you wouldn't want to overlay with filters of warm tones and soft imagery.

Are you in the health and beauty industry? You likely will not want to dominate with dark/bold colors such as black and red.

Whatever feel you decide to go with, try to stay consistent. Your followers expect the same type of imagery from your feed day in and day out. If you veer too far from the original narrative, you risk losing your following.

## 2. Post Often and Regularly

Where other platforms may thrive with one or two posts per day, Instagram demands more.

Plan to post 3-5 times per day and be consistent. Not only will this help grow your following, but it will also tell the algorithm that you have a healthy feed.

Statistically, the best time for engagement (you liking and following others' posts, and others doing the same on your posts) is between the times of 7 pm – 9 pm in the US. This is not true for everyone, however, so test several times for your business and see which yield the best results. If you have a business account, you can study your analytics to see when your audience is online and engaging with you.

## 3. Do Your Research

Have you ever wondered what the "big deal" is with hashtags? Why is everyone using them and is there any reason for them?

Hashtags are one of the fastest ways to grow and engage your followers. However, to experience the best results, you must use the right ones.

Basically put, hashtags were created as a virtual filing system. A user is able to click on the hashtag and see all the posts that have ever used it.

This is valuable because those that don't know you exist but are searching for products or services you provide can stumble across you via their hashtag search.

So what exactly do I mean by the "right" ones? Use the following guidelines to help determine which hashtags to use:

- 1. Only use hashtags that are relevant to your posts. For instance, if your post is an image of your new latte flavor and you hashtag it #JustinTimberlake in order to attract more people, you will not only attract the wrong people but be penalized by Instagram for spamming.
- 2. Keep it simple. Let's use the latte again. If I am posting about my café's newest latte flavor, I would not want to hashtag #NewLatteFlavorBlueberryVanillaAvailableNow. Keep your hashtags easy, relevant, and short.
- 3. Research the hashtags first. Some hashtags have been used so much that you don't have a chance of being seen amongst the other images. Instead choose a relevant and popular, but not too popular hashtag.

For instance, if I'm hashtagging my café, after a little research, I see that #coffeeshop has over 5 million posts, whereas #coffeeshops only has 130,000 posts. Which do you think I'll stand out in more? Right. #coffeeshops.

Gaining more loyal Instagram followers may not be as difficult as you think. Evoke feeling with your feed, post often and regularly, and choose the right hashtags for your niche. Then be sure to follow, engage others, and enjoy yourself! You'll have a raving fan base in no time!

