



Succeed with Social Media

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Social Media: Instagram

Instagram can be extremely useful when connecting with customers, prospective clients, industry experts, competitors and more. Unlike other social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook, Instagram is almost strictly visual. It allows users to share photos and videos with one another and also gives them an option to post their content to other social media sites.

The Instagram website explains: 'Instagram is a fun and quirky way to share your life with friends through a series of pictures. Snap a photo with your mobile phone, then choose a filter to transform the image into a memory to keep around forever. We're building Instagram to allow you to experience moments in your friends' lives through pictures as they happen. **We imagine a world more connected through photos.**'

The arrival of Instagram launched a new, more visual way of communicating via social media. To some users, visual communication is intuitive. For others, the concept can be difficult to grasp. Follow the suggestions and best practices listed below to get started.

Definitions and Examples

The first step to understanding Instagram is learning the language. Here are some of the basics:

- **Follow:** On Instagram, you follow someone to see images and videos he or she posts. For others to be able to view your posts, they must follow you. This is not a reciprocal relationship like some other social media sites—each party can choose whether or not to follow the other.
- **Post:** A post is an upload of a photo or video, with the option of adding a caption as well.
- **Comment:** You can add comments to your own photos and videos or to the photos and videos that others post.
- **@Username:** This is how Instagram displays usernames in posts and comments. For example, your company Instagram username could be **XYZcompany**. If a customer wanted to reach out to you, he or she could comment on one of your posts by saying, '**@XYZcompany, please tell me more about your product.**' The '@' symbol ensures that you will be notified about the comment.
- **Instagram Direct:** This feature allows you to send a photo or video just to one person (or two or three, or however many you choose) who is following you. Simply upload the photo or video and, from a drop-down list, tick the names

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You can use Instagram to share information, gather market intelligence and build relationships through posting your photos and videos and searching through the posts of others.
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of the followers you want the post to go to. This can come in handy when exchanging contact or other personal information, since all other Instagram communication is public.

- **Hashtag (#):** Using a hashtag (#) helps categorise your post based on keywords you designate. Users can find all posts with a particular hashtag by using the search tool to help filter results on a specific topic.
 - For example, if you specialise in selling energy-efficient products, you may want to use the hashtag **#energyefficient** in some of your posts to attract people searching for that term.
 - Or, for example, if you are a mattress store and want to find others who are talking about or selling mattresses, you can type **#mattress** into the search tool to view all recent posts with that hashtag.

Suggestions and Best Practices

Once you've mastered the lingo and created your Instagram account, consider the following tips and best practices to get off to a strong start.

- Use the search feature to find clients, competitors and people in your industry to follow. Try various keywords related to your industry, niche or related topics.
- You can also use Instagram to look for leads. Search targeted phrases that match your location and product or service, and then reach out to people who have used hashtags about your topic by commenting on their posts.
- Remember to use meaningful hashtags to reach a broader audience than just those who follow you, particularly when posting insights, information and expertise—this can attract people interested in your topic to your company, which can lead to later sales. You can also add hashtags when you comment on someone's post, to share helpful information and bring the value back to your company.
- Engage your followers. Don't just spit out information—post interesting questions, provocative statements, fun facts, contests, etc., in the caption part of your post, along with your photo or video. Find new ways to keep your posts interesting. For instance, ask customers to share success stories along with pictures of themselves using your product. Be sure to ask customers to use a corresponding hashtag, such as **#mattresssuccessstory**, so that all posts are easy to find.
- If someone mentions your brand in a post, whether talking directly to you or not, respond. Answer a question, address a concern or find another way to continue the conversation. And always be timely with your comments. In today's digital world, people expect quick responses—you should ideally write back within a few hours.
- Don't shy away from responding to negative comments. You may be tempted to respond via Instagram Direct (if the commenter is following you), but sometimes it may be in your best interest to respond publicly. Your client base and others will see your company as responsive and willing to listen to clients and resolve issues.
- Have a system in place to pass comments, questions and criticism along to the appropriate people in your company, so that you can gather the feedback you need to respond to a customer, or even just let the customer know that his or her input was given to the appropriate person in your company.
- Try to post several times each day to stay in front of your audience. Aim for every four to six hours during the business day to reach the most people without overwhelming them.

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Make your content easy to look through by keeping the caption short and the photo or video simple and clear.

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- Offer something of value in your posts. Whether it is discounts, samples, promotions, advice or expertise, along with photos and videos of your product or even customers using your product, provide something that is worthwhile for your followers. One example would be offering exclusive deals to your Instagram followers to bring value to your Instagram relationship and make them feel special—and encourage them to share the deal by reposting and hashtagging your company and product.

Common Mistakes

- Avoid broadcasting any private grievances or annoyances. Whether about a competitor, the government or your mother-in-law, Instagram is not the place for venting or complaints.
- Be careful not to offend your customers. This sounds like a no-brainer, but you could do so unintentionally. When sharing advice, for instance, take care not to make followers sound unintelligent.
- Don't use a company Instagram account to talk about your personal life.
- Don't over-promote your products or services. Instead, focus on your customers. Offer solutions, information and advice they will find valuable, rather than simply trying to sell.

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Instagram should not be entirely about selling your products—it's also about engaging your followers.

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