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social
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Basic Tips for Instagram

Introduction

Percentage of month-over-month audience growth
(months that brands added followers for each social channel)

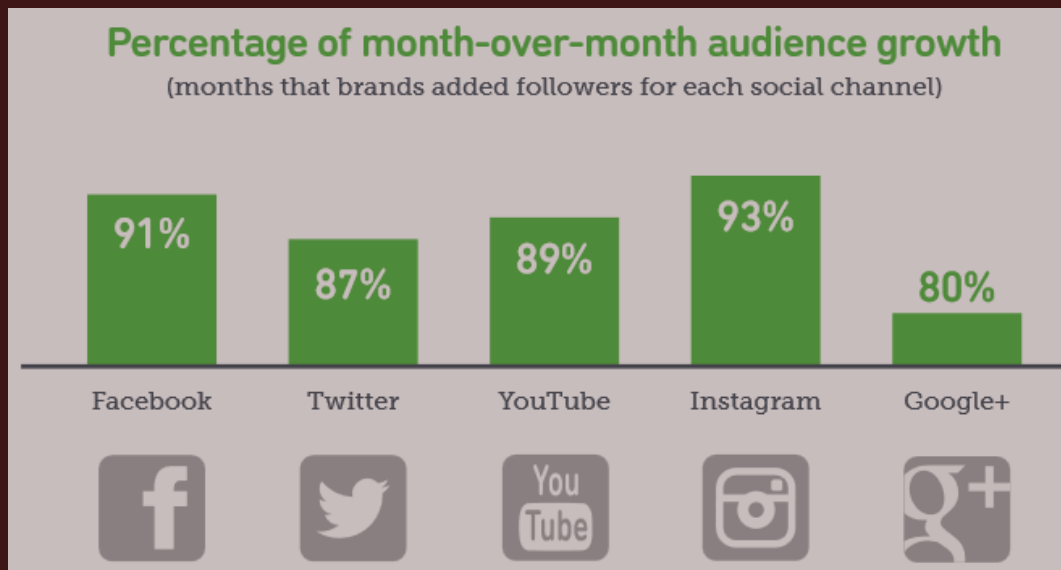|				
91%	87%	89%	93%	80%
Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram	Google+

As a company that's growing your business in the world of Inbound Marketing, you've already established an online social presence to attract leads, promote your content, and delight customers across platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest.

It's time to move to the next frontier: Instagram. With 500 million users and over 95 million posts per day, Instagram for Business has become an essential element of social media marketing.

It's critical to navigate growing Instagram for your business the right way, which is why we put together this guide on how to set up, grow, and optimize your Instagram strategy to increase your audience, followers, leads, customers, and continue down the path of becoming an (even more) lovable brand.

What will you be using Instagram for?

The first step with any social media channel is to determine your goals.

Will it be a place to show off your internal company culture, similar to how we use ours at Smash Social?

Often companies will use Instagram as part of a "brand awareness" strategy, as it's an ideal place to share what your company is all about.

Do you want to showcase your customers? Perhaps you run an ecommerce business and you'll be using Instagram as a place to showcase deals and customer success stories, or showcase your products.

Will your Instagram be a part of your lead generation strategy? If so you'll need to consider that users typically interact with Instagram on a mobile phone. If you have particularly lengthy forms, you may want to consider using smart content.

Do you want to gain followers and then decide what strategy to go after?.

Keep in mind you can hone in on goals, too.

For example:
Gain "X" # of followers per day, week, month, quarter

Post "X" # of video posts

Get "X" # of likes on each post

Determine Your Metrics

Until recently, Instagram had limited native analytics. But as of 2016, Instagram introduced their Instagram for Business platform with a built-in Insights tool. Now, you can see who your followers are and which posts resonate best with your audience.

To get more data on your Instagram account, you can also use third-party applications like Iconosquare to measure the success of your Instagram campaigns, follower churn rate, growth over time and success of our hashtags.

Creating an effective Instagram strategy is easy when you have data to back your decisions, you can stick to a plan for the best posting times of day, days of the week, etc.

Keep a running tally of followers gained per day/ per week and more; determining these metrics before you get started and as you focus your strategy will help determine both your success and ability to repeat what's working and cut what is not.
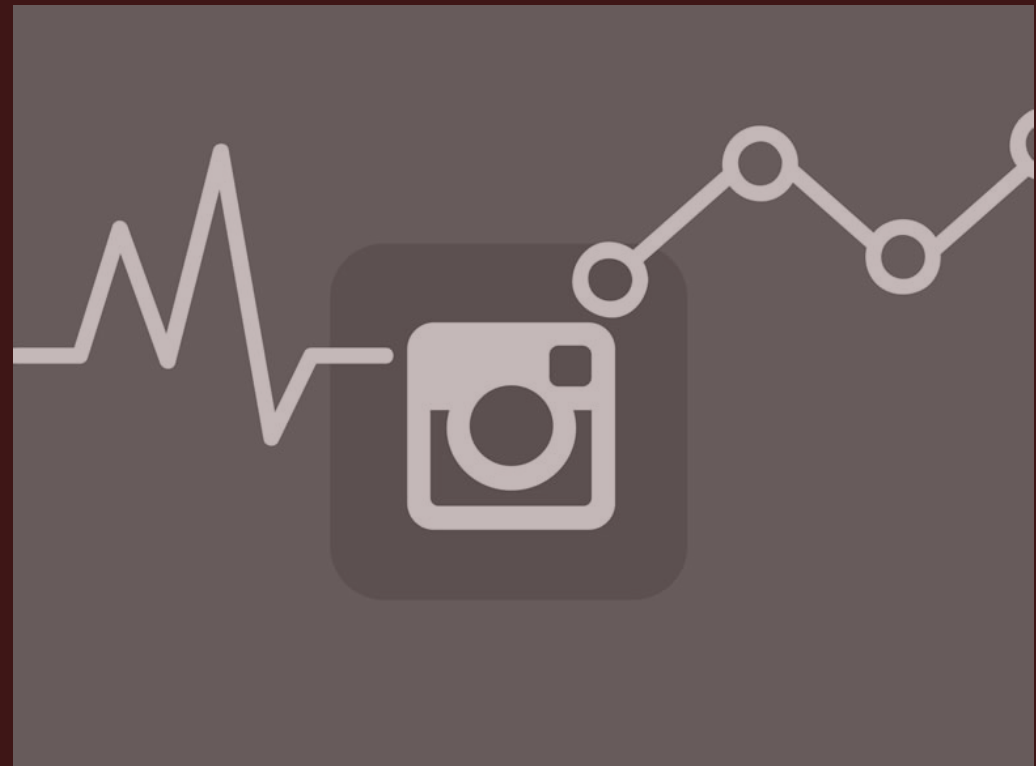
Define Value to Management

Often times with social networks, it can be hard to define value from a platform that is somewhat "intangible." Unlike an ebook or webinar that could generate hundreds or thousands of new leads and customers that you can proudly show your CMO, Instagram is beneficial to the heart of a company: it humanizes and gives life to your brand.

Where Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are for networking and sharing and promoting content, Instagram is the platform where a company can show its human side.

By showing off the wonderful people who build your product, the place where you all come together and work, events and friends in the industry you're growing with, the dogs that roam around your office, and the things that your company celebrates, you're offering an invaluable window to your brand's culture that is warm, inviting, friendly, and most of all: human.

Stay on Brand

If your company utilizes a visual style guide (colors, fonts, etc.), make sure that your Instagram posts are "on brand" and follow the prescribed guidelines.

For example, does your company only post social images in your brand's specific color scheme on Twitter and Facebook?

Should your pictures all include your company's logo? If necessary, ask your PR or branding team before posting to agree upon visual guidelines before you get up and running.

Next we bring you few tips when it comes to branding,

Tips for Brand

Use High Quality Stock Photos

Freestockphotos.org, unsplash.com, deathtothestockphoto. com High quality stock photos, set as a backdrop for text and graphics, are a fantastic way to showcase your brand's look and feel.

Follow the Rule of Thirds

The rule of thirds states than an image is most pleasing when its subjects or regions are composed along imaginary lines which divide the image into thirds — both vertically and horizontally. The rule of thirds is all about creating the right aesthetic trade-offs. It often creates a sense of balance without making the image appear too static, and a sense of complexity without making the image look too busy.

Designate a Content Creator

If you work for a large organization, chances are many decision-makers will want a say in what is posted. Be prepared to have an organized request or guidelines document on how to request a post on your Instagram for Business account, when, the value, and why. Be prepared to back up your own posts as well!

Take Great Pictures

Not all of us out there have a professional photographer to encapsulate a story in one image and make it look great! For the iPhone user, here are some tips for taking great pictures with your phone.

Follow Typography Rules

When adding text to images, remember the graphic design rules for typography and how to use different fonts to captivate audiences and create beautiful designs.

Use Instagram Stories

In August 2016, Instagram introduced a new feature that looks remarkably similar to Snapchat: Instagram stories.

While traditional Instagram posting is reserved for creating picture-perfect content for users to engage with, stories is all about posting quick, transient moments without worrying about over-posting.

Stories are hosted on a different part of the Instagram platform. While your feed will continue to show your traditional content, Stories live at the top of the feed.

Your traditional content can be liked and commented on, but your Stories can only be viewed; there's no real feedback loop on how much your audience likes this new format.

They are meant to be quick, unfettered bits of content to showcase snapshots of your business.

Traditional Instagram content is more refined. As a Marketer, you should use Stories to showcase ephemeral content. Focus more on creating quality posts for traditional Instagram content, and use Stories for quick, silly content.

How to use Hashtags

Appropriate hashtagging that's relevant to your goals, content, and brand will help aggregate your images and will also associate them with trending topics.

The importance of a "brand identity" goes along with a specific hashtag you create for your business. A lot of brands will use their own brand name as a hashtag, so your brand name can be your handle (username) and also used as a "brand hashtag". When coming up with a hashtag for your brand you should make sure it's something unique enough that it will be relevant to your company and not overlap too much with other brand's posts (ie, if you are a Nike, rather than using #sneaker you will want to use something like #nike).

When you use a hashtag that you've created for your brand you can follow its evolution and start answering important questions such as:
● Is the hashtag gaining popularity?
● Do your followers use the hashtag?
● Is that hashtag gaining you followers?

Instagram Etiquette

No matter what the social network, there will always be people out there posting negative or inappropriate comments.

Respond to positive comments on your Instagram content if a user takes the time to ask a question and participate in any conversation you've started. As a best practice, check comments at least once a week thoroughly, especially for contests/timely posts.

Engage with people who follow you, or other people in your category that you follow, ie. you Give love to get love. Spend time daily or at least weekly "liking" and commenting on other posts besides your own.

How to Respond to Comments on Instagram

Positive + False = Respond

Postive + True = Listen or Respond

Negative + Not a Troll + Rant/Joke = Listen

Negative + Not a Troll + Not a Rant/Joke + Erroneous Information = Respond

Negative + Not a Troll + Not a Rant/-Joke + Not Erroneous Information + Unhappy = Respond

Negative + Not a Troll + Not a Rant/Joke + Not Erroneaous Information + Not Unhappy = Listen

Conclusion

Instagram is a growing channel that will allows you to grow and humanize your brand, recruit future employees, showcase your product, company culture, delight customers, and generate new business. All with images you can create and share!

Give it a shot: make a profile, start testing and learn from what works and what doesn't. Have fun and keep checking the Smash Social blogs for information and examples on growing your Instagram for Business account and tweet to @smash1social with any questions about growing your social media following!

Alternitavely please visit us on
Facebook @smashsocial.co.uk
Instagram @smashsocial
Linkedin: www.linkedin.com/in/tarrynrothstein

Bonus:
Checklist for Getting Started with Instagram

Reserve a username that is as close to your company's name as possible.

☐ Set your account to "Business Profile" in settings to start using the in-app Insights and Promote tools.

☐ Choose a profile picture that is on-brand with your other social networks (e.g. company logo.

☐ Fill in your bio with delightful, actionable and informative information about your brand. Always include:

☐ who you are and what you do

☐ a hint of personality

☐ Click here for more tips on creating an effective Instagram bio

☐ Use the space allotted for URLs strategically; it's precious real estate and the only place within Instagram to have an interactive, trackable link. Utilize and change it when needed.

☐ Create a backlog of photos to use and include key stakeholders in aggregating different types of posts (e.h. CMO, CEO, your direct manager, Community Managers, HR, etc.).

☐ Use relevant hashtags to build your following

☐ Create a hashtag for your brand a monitor on a regular basis (#yourbrand).

☐ Post based on optimized tests you've run that prove peak engagement for your target audience

☐ Keep an eye on what your competitors are doing.

☐ Engage with your audience and reply to comments.

☐ Don't be spammy (ie. don't use hashtags that don't make sense or are not helpful to your followers).

☐ Run a contest for fast follower growth.

☐ Promote your Instagram account across your other social channels (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest) and include icons in your customer and promotional newsletters and emails.

☐ Measure your performance using Instagram Insights and Iconosquare; you can't manage what you don't measure!

☐ Have fun growing a community and increasing your brand's audience!

Glossary of Instagram Terms for Reference:

#MCM = Man Crush Monday

#WCW = Woman Crush Wednesday

#TBT = Throwback Thursday

#TransformationTuesday = transformational photos along with the hashtag in the description of what the transformation was. Many people will make a diptic showcasing a "before and after" photo

#bae = before anything else, usually used to signify a strong love or connection to someone or something

#selfie = a picture of yourself, taken by you

#igers = means Instagrammers and is a powerful hashtag in Twitter.

#Latergram = Something you post on Instagram at a "later" time.

#Repost = posting a picture that someone else posted, making sure to credit them (often using an app like this https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/repost-for-instagram/id570315854?mt=8)

#MotivationMonday = a positive and motivational message, often written with an image that reflects the message

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