

format guide

Instagram

Your Guide to

Followers

Likes

and

for

Growing Your
Business

creatives



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Introduction



When it came to his lifestyle photography business, Jeff Mindell turned to Instagram to help build his brand. “As a photographer, Instagram is the obvious choice as a living, breathing online portfolio of my professional work,” he explained. But for creative professionals, Instagram is more than *just* an extension of their online portfolios. It’s a marketing and networking tool that can help build interest in their work.



“Instagram is a great inclusive way to connect with my audience around the world.”

– Jeff Mindell

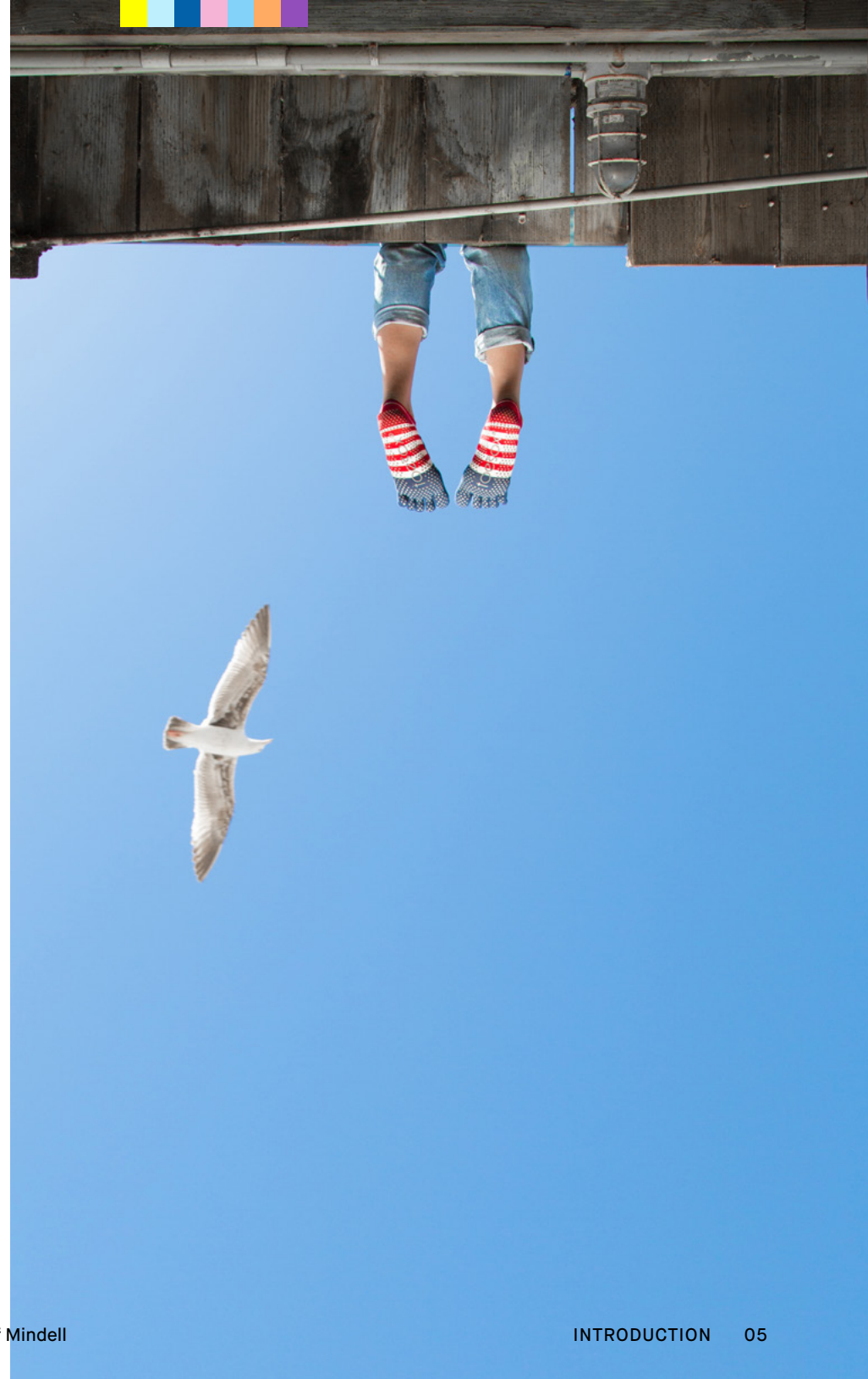
With 58k+ followers, Mindell credits Instagram for getting his work in front of the right people. “Years ago, I might have had to go the route of traditional PR and advertising to promote myself and my work. Since blowing up on social media, I haven’t spent a dime on promotion.”

Mindell has worked with commercial clients including Fox Digital, West Elm, Starbucks, and Dunkin Donuts. “One hundred percent of my business comes from Instagram, or word-of-mouth from past happy clients I worked with as a result of Instagram.”

The takeaway? If you are a creative professional and you aren't on Instagram yet, you're missing out on a great opportunity.

Instagram is increasingly important to every kind of business, but even more so for creative businesses. Why? It is the most active social media platform built around sharing images—it is all about creating a visual impact and building your brand.

Instagram has 500 million monthly active users and an astounding 300 million daily active users, making it one of the fastest growing social networks in the world. Almost half of those users (49%) use Instagram on a daily basis, and spend 21 minutes each day on the app.



According to Forrester Research, an average of only 0.22% of Facebook fans and 0.03% of Twitter followers interact with business pages. On the other hand, Instagram users are the most engaged, with 2.26% of users engaging with brands.

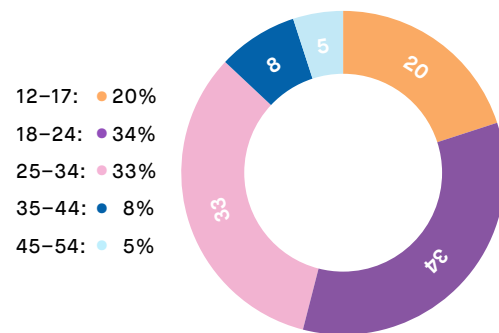
Even with these amazing engagement rates, most creatives aren't taking full advantage of the marketing opportunities that Instagram offers. While 60% of photographers plan to market their work via social media, only 4% actually use Instagram to market their work—meanwhile 48% are using Facebook, 10% are using LinkedIn, and 5% rely on Twitter.

If you aren't effectively using Instagram to grow your creative business, you're not giving your business everything it needs to flourish. In this guide, you'll learn the ins and outs of Instagram from the perspective of creative professionals.

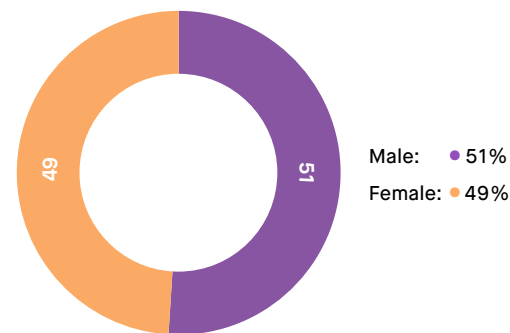
You'll learn:

- Navigating the stages of InstaFame
- 5 mistakes you're making on Instagram
- 7 apps that successful Instagrammers use
- How your business can use Instagram Stories
- Insider secrets to gaining 20k+ followers

AVERAGE AGE OF INSTAGRAM USERS



GENDER OF INSTAGRAM USERS



Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project

Instagram gives creative professionals a channel to get their work in front of millions of potential fans. Limiting yourself to the traditional methods of sharing your work is no longer a viable option for creatives trying to make a living.

Instagram is an amazing place to network, find inspiration, and engage with a community of like-minded creatives. It's time to make Instagram work for your creative business.

format

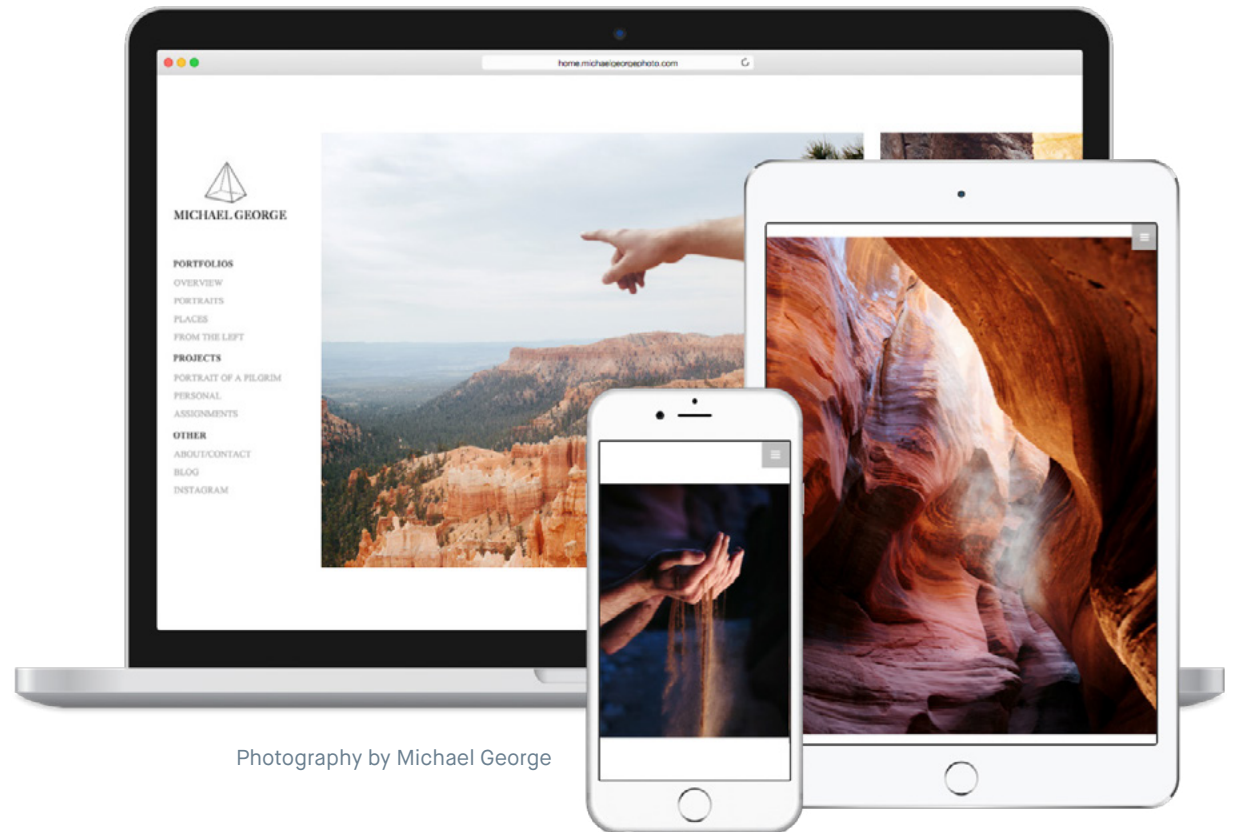
Creative success lives here.

Within 48 hours of posting images to his Format portfolio, photographer Michael George was contacted by National Geographic.

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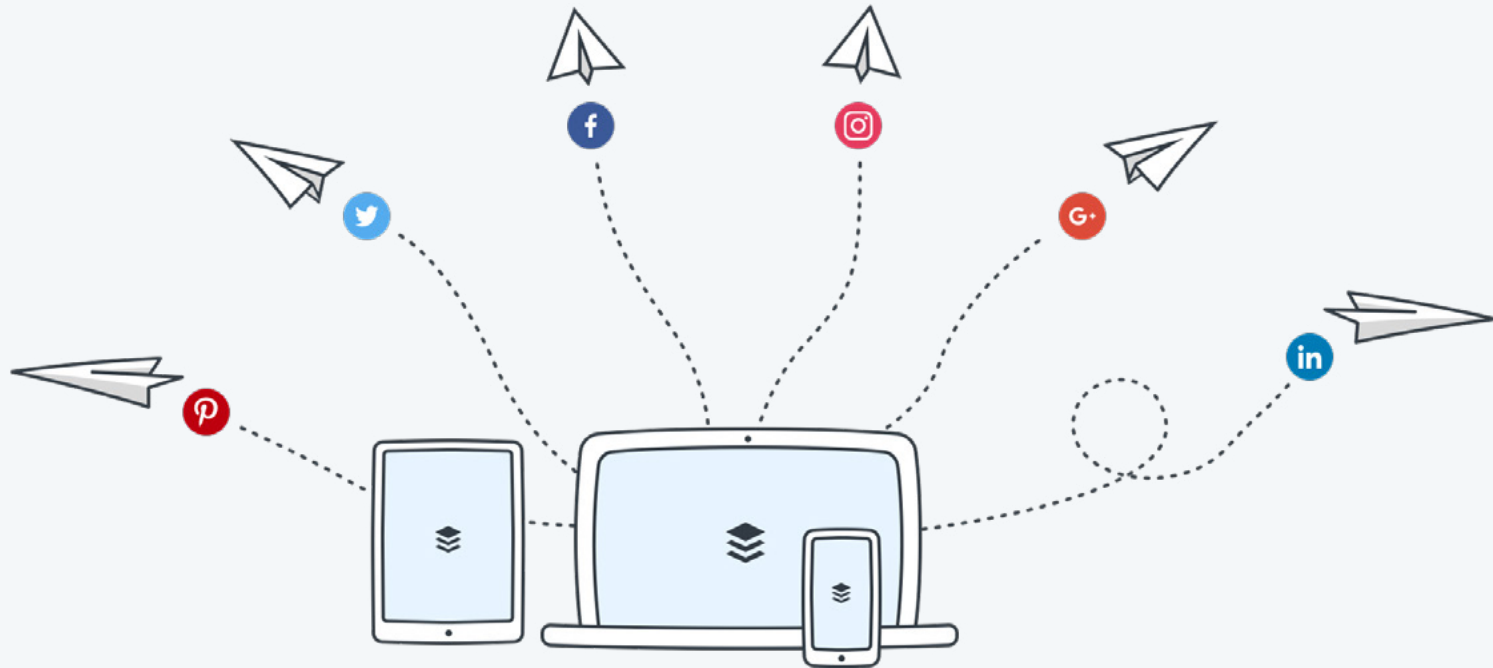
JUXTAPOZ

psfk

AppliedArts

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PHOTO DIRECTORY



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Navigating the stages of InstaFame

There are over 300 million daily active users on Instagram, and 60 million photos posted on the app every day. With so much content, you need to do everything you can to make your Instagram account stand out from the crowd.

So where do you start? With the numbers.

0–200 followers: The Newcomer Stage

Whether you're already on Instagram, or you've just downloaded the app, if you're in the Newcomer Stage, you're likely connected to a small audience made up of people you are also connected to offline. Your community is made up of your family, friends, and coworkers who often comment on and like your posts.

To grow your following but keep them as engaged as your cousin and hair stylist, try searching relevant hashtags to find other people that are part of your community. If you're a portrait photographer, search #portraitphotographer—follow people using the hashtag, and like and comment on their posts. You'll become a part of an engaged, likeminded community, and your following will start to grow.

For a quick and easy way to direct more followers to your account, add a “Follow Me” call-to-action to your email signature. Simply go into your email settings and update your email signature to include your portfolio URL and social media links. Every time you send an email, you're creating an opportunity to gain a new follower and market your Instagram account.

20% of internet
users regularly use
Instagram

200–500 followers: The Social Stage

At this point, you've expanded your following beyond your offline connections and you've started to reach out to relevant Instagram communities. Now's the time to leverage your other social accounts, as well as your online portfolio.

Sharing your Instagram content to your other social channels will drive traffic back to your Instagram account. If you have a larger Facebook following, for example, sharing your Instagram content to Facebook allows you to tap into that network while linking back to your Instagram account.

A simple way to drive more traffic to your Instagram is to link to it through your online portfolio. If someone visits your portfolio and likes what they see, they will want to search out other ways to connect with you and see more of your work. Be sure to use the Instagram icon to link to your account from your website.

Which social media networks link with Instagram?



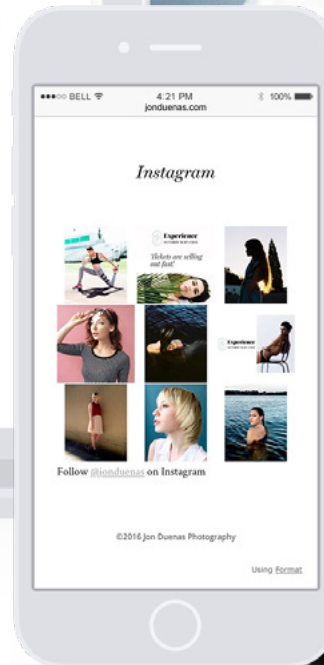
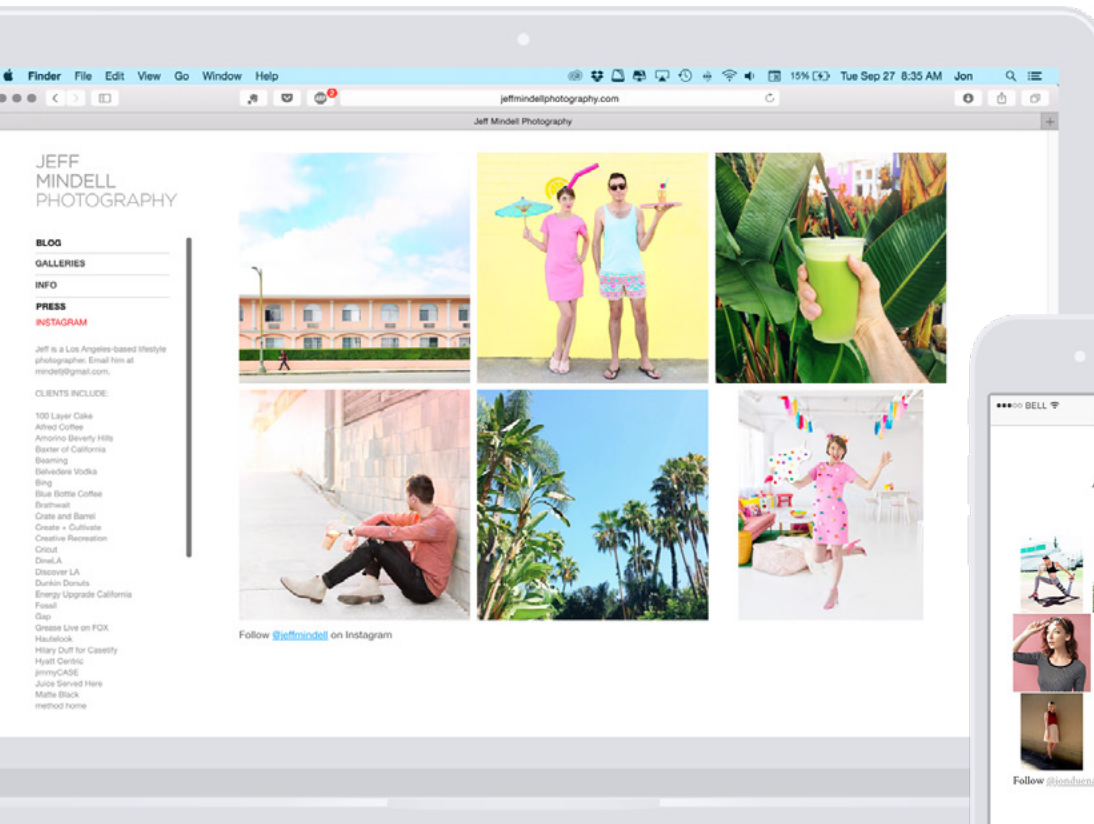
Make your Instagram feed part of your narrative

Build a better relationship with your followers by adding your Instagram feed to your About page. Giving your followers a closer look into your work and your life will make them feel more connected to you and your creative journey.

Keep your portfolio up-to-date

Give your portfolio visitors a front row seat to what you're up to on a daily basis by featuring your Instagram feed on a custom page. Every Instagram post will automatically update to your portfolio feed.

Try Instagram Custom Pages



500–2000 followers: The Design Stage

In the design stage, it's time to curate and fine tune your aesthetic.

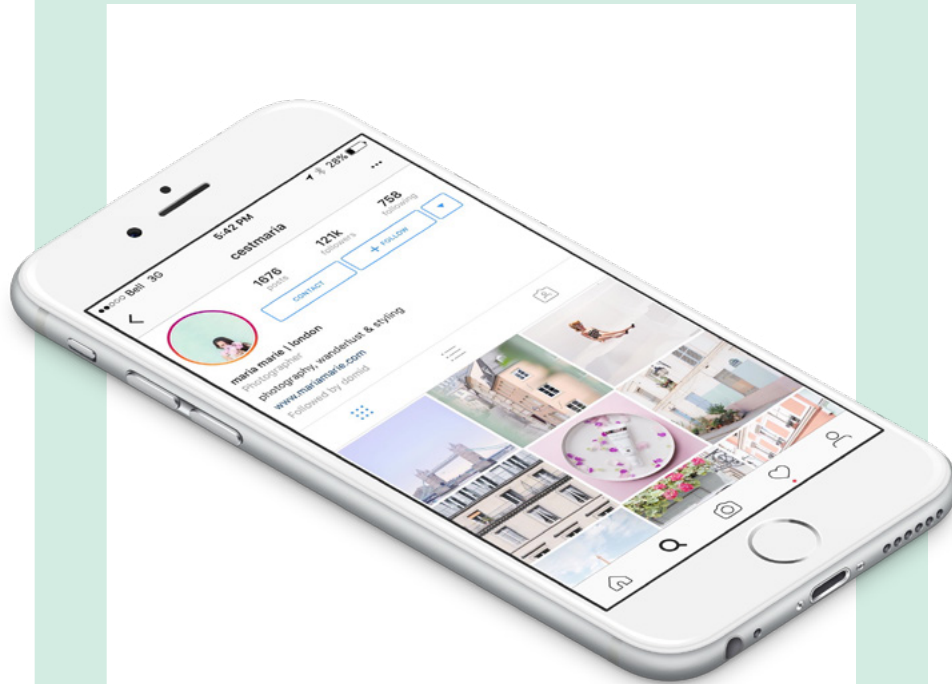
Lifestyle photographer Jeff Mindell knows what it takes to make it through the Design Stage—it's all about discovering your “it” factor. “What's hard nowadays is that everyone is trying to figure out their differentiating factor. Just be you and do not be anyone else. If people can sense authenticity from you and your brand, you're set,” explains Mindell.

The good news is, as a creative professional, you've already established your differentiating factor through your work. Now, it's just a matter of translating that aesthetic for an Instagram audience.

The goal of every image you post on Instagram should be to have people stop scrolling long enough to engage with your account. By creating a cohesive, recognizable identity, your followers should be able to see your images and instantly know that it's your post.

You need to determine what kind of content will engage the Instagram users you are trying to reach. Start off by looking at accounts in your industry—seeing what your peers are doing will give you insight into what is working and what isn't. All of the content you share should stay on brand—so that photo of the adorable puppy you saw or that hilarious meme might not be a great fit for your creative design business. Keep images like this to a personal Instagram account instead.





Publications who post Instagram content

- booooooom
- Vice
- Format Magazine
- Resource Magazine
- BuzzFeed
- Huffington
- Post
- Refinery29

2000–5000 followers: The Building Stage

You've secured a substantial following, you've defined your aesthetic, and you're creating interesting, beautiful content that is worth sharing. So why not extend your reach?

Make a short list of publications who publish Instagram roundups or articles on popular Instagrammers, research their previous roundups, and pitch your account to them. Some publications use their own Instagram to source images they share, so look into what hashtags are being used to track entries, and use those that apply to your work.

Remember to approach each publication with an angle that would appeal to their audience. Be as niche as you possibly can. If you're a food stylist who often works with vegan friendly clients, try pitching your account as the Instagram for vegan foodies. If you're a fashion photographer in Switzerland, try pitching your account as one of the 30 best Instagram's for fashion inspiration in Switzerland.

5000–10k followers: The Established Stage

Once you reach the 5k+ mark, it's clear that you know how to engage and retain your audience. But how can you continue to extend your reach and grow your community?

The Explore Tab is where you want to be. The Explore Tab shows users content that is relevant to them—it's a personalized, curated feed based on the people you follow and your geographical location. It does a great job of exposing people to content they may not have otherwise seen, making it the perfect place for you to reach a whole new audience.

To land yourself on the Explore Tab, you need to know your audience. Think about who your audience is, and what images that person would interact with. Try creating a persona for your audience and tailor your content for that individual. Look through your own Explore Tab to gain insight into what might be interesting to your community. Above all else, continue to create great, engaging content.

“The work itself should do all the talking,” says fashion photographer Gautier Pellegrin. “Bad photography is bad photography even with 15k followers and the professionals will see the difference in a split second.”

10k+ followers: The InstaFame Stage

Once you reach five digit followers, it's safe to say you've reached what we've dubbed the InstaFame Stage. From here, you should be monetizing your Instagram account.

Start by getting brands you already know and love interested in your account by tagging them in your images when you feature or discuss their product. For lifestyle photographer Jeff Mindell, it was as easy as speaking about the brands he was already passionate about. “I was signed on as a paid ambassador of Dunkin Donuts in 2016 as a result of me just talking about how much I love their coffee on my social media channels. I'm now responsible for creating Instagram content on a regular basis for the brand and it's been my biggest contract to date.”



“78% of respondents said that brands’ social media posts impact their purchases.”

–Source: *Inversp*

LIKELIHOOD OF MAKING A PURCHASE WHEN REFERRED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

- 71% are more likely to make a purchase when referred
- 7% are likely to make a purchase if not referred

Source: *HubSpot*



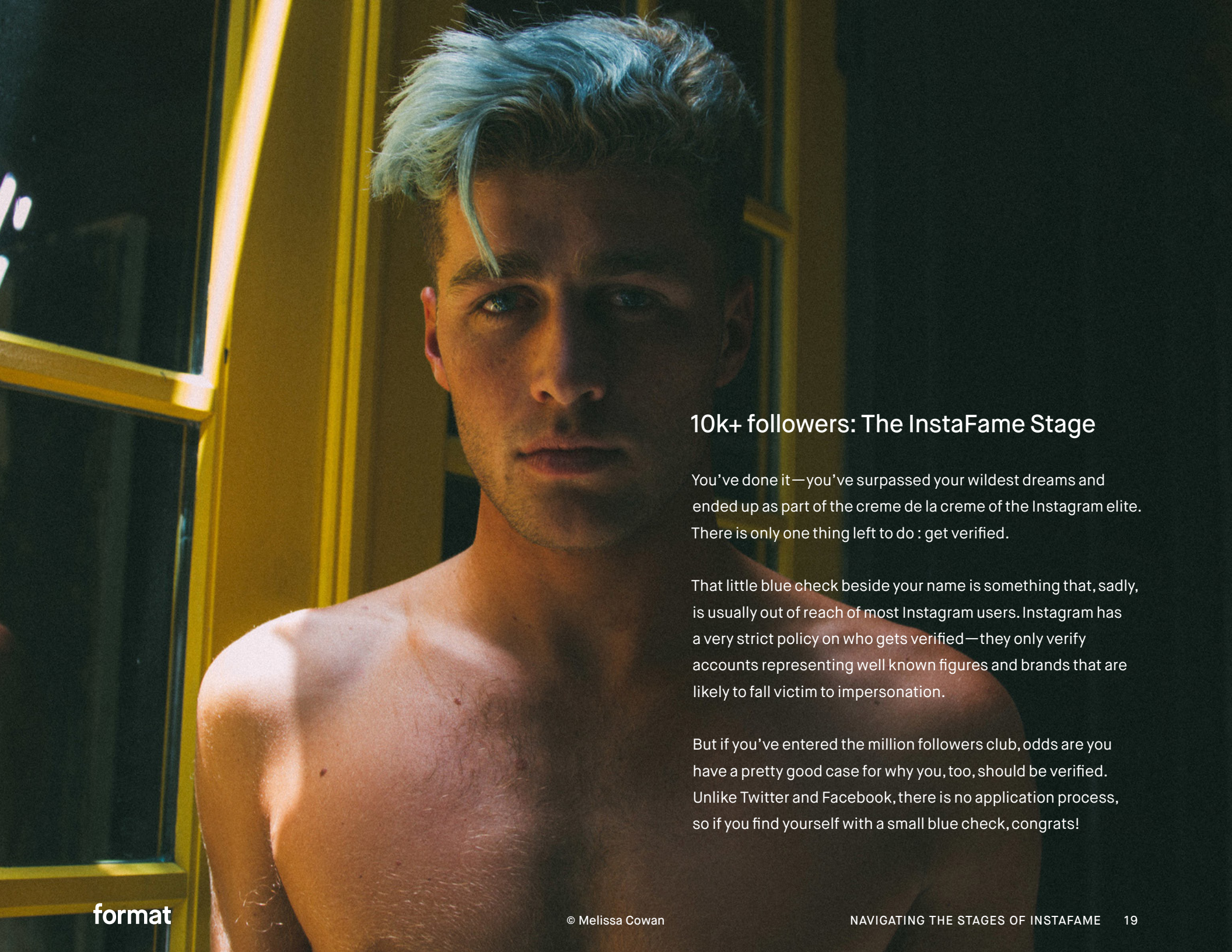


You can also look into one of the many influencer marketing networks such as [Instabrand](#) , [Tidal](#) , or [Speakr](#) and list your Instagram account in the verticals that your account fits within. From here, relevant brands can find you and your account easily, and reach out to discuss potential collaborations.

Fashion and editorial photographer Jon Duenas has worked with VSCO, Mastin Labs, and NEXT Models and has found that simply having 27k+ followers has made his brand more discoverable. He credits his Instagram account with landing him a magazine spread with a Yamaha Music Publication.

“The person who found and hired me told me it was initially through Instagram that they discovered me. But, it was my portfolio that ended up selling them. Instagram can be a great place to showcase work, but it should lead them on to your portfolio where you can really wow them.”

It’s essential to link to your online portfolio from your Instagram account. Sharing your website in your bio is an important way to take potential clients and collaborators from your Instagram page directly to your online portfolio, and entice them to work with you.



10k+ followers: The InstaFame Stage

You've done it—you've surpassed your wildest dreams and ended up as part of the creme de la creme of the Instagram elite. There is only one thing left to do : get verified.

That little blue check beside your name is something that, sadly, is usually out of reach of most Instagram users. Instagram has a very strict policy on who gets verified—they only verify accounts representing well known figures and brands that are likely to fall victim to impersonation.

But if you've entered the million followers club, odds are you have a pretty good case for why you, too, should be verified. Unlike Twitter and Facebook, there is no application process, so if you find yourself with a small blue check, congrats!



5 things you're doing wrong on Instagram

Just because you've been on Instagram since it's launch, doesn't mean your strategy is perfect. And if you're still using the same Instagram strategy you started with in 2010, it's time to rethink it.



“I was ‘late to the party’ with Instagram,” explains landscape photographer Richard Gaston. “It took me time to develop it into a professional tool—initially I used Instagram as a personal network to connect with friends. However, after sharing my creative photographs, I realized that there was potential to develop my account into a network of professional creatives.”

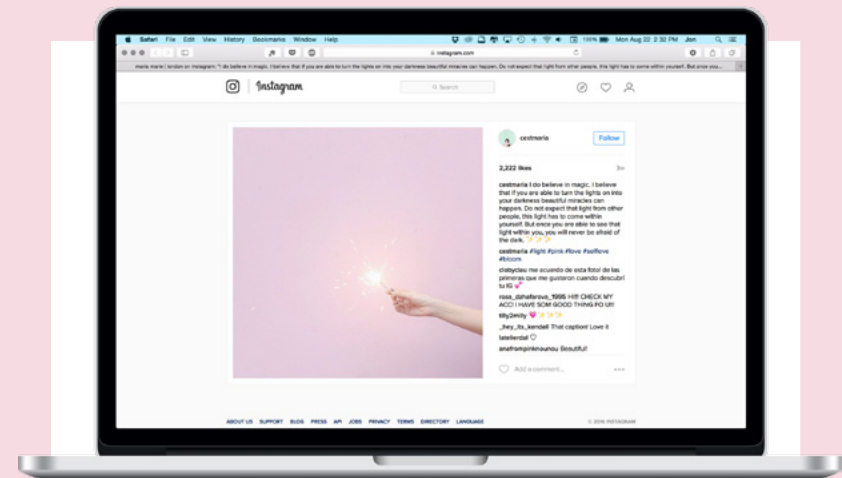
Now, Gaston has over 78k followers: “My photography career has flourished with Instagram allowing me to connect to my desired professional demographic.”

If you’re falling victim to any of these five Instagram pitfalls, you’re restricting your account’s ability to grow.

1. You’re an over/underhashtagger

When used correctly, hashtags can be extremely useful in reaching a broader audience and engaging more people with your brand. Used incorrectly, they can be annoying and actually alienate your followers.

Hashtagging your posts is the easiest way for people who aren’t following you to find your content. While Instagram allows you to post up to 30 hashtags on an image, best practice is to keep it between 5–10.



Top Performing Hashtags for Creatives

#fashion:	282,206,868 posts
#art:	177,706,677 posts
#model:	71,548,156 posts
#work:	69,490,207 posts
#design:	61,249,120 posts
#drawing:	55,658,157 posts
#illustration:	28,913,039 posts
#photography:	27,789,295 posts
#painting:	24,514,334 posts
#creative:	18,451,474 posts
#fineart:	3,896,732 posts
#selfportrait:	3,321,768 posts



Keep your hashtags relevant to your post content, and avoid generic hashtags such as #followback and #likeforlike. Nonspecific, all-encompassing hashtags are likely lead to irrelevant followers and likes, which ultimately won't help your business. Use a mix of broad hashtags (#designer, #photographer, #model), more niche hashtags (#abstract, #minimalism, #streetphotographer, #graphic) and location specific hashtags (#TorontoArtist, #BerlinPhotographer, #LADesigner).

Posting all of your hashtags in your caption is not aesthetically pleasing, and often comes off as inauthentic. Instead, only add one or two pertinent hashtags to the caption, and add the rest in a comment on your own image. Once more people leave comments on your image, the hashtag comment will be hidden.

You can also enter a period followed by a line break, and repeat a few times before you add in your hashtags. This will shorten the comment, so all you see is the periods and the hashtags will be hidden completely.



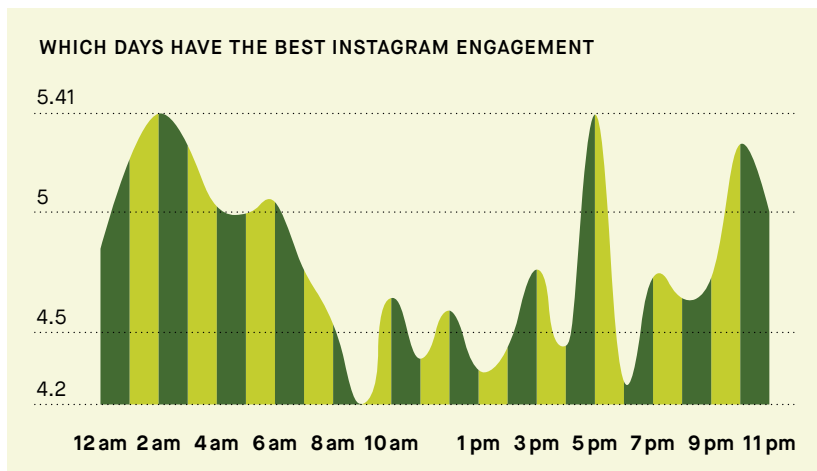
2. You're posting too often, or not enough to keep your audience interested

To keep your audience engaged and to reach more people, it's important to post regularly. But too many posts comes off as spammy and can alienate your community.

What is the sweet spot for posting?

According to Buffer, major brands post an average of 1.5 posts per day. Aiming to post once a day is a great starting benchmark. From there, you can build in more posts to your social media schedule.

Finding the ideal time to post can make the difference between your images being seen, or completely missed. Hubspot suggests any time on Monday to Thursday except from 3:00pm–4:00pm, while Later thinks Wednesday at 5:00pm is the most engaged time to post.



Source: Latergramme

Take it one step further and think strategically about your audience. What does a typical day in the life of your followers look like? Do they work fulltime? Are they night owls? Where do they live? Consider these factors when planning your post schedule.

3. You're buying likes and followers

If the 2014 Instagram spam bot purge has taught us anything, it's that paid-for likes and followers aren't doing your business any favors. Fake followers who don't interact with your content and don't add to the community you are building are not worth the \$3–\$30 you'll spend on 100–2,500 new "followers".

You're better off putting your time and energy into an organic growth strategy that helps to foster an authentic Instagram community.

Photojournalist Jessica Kourkounis has watched her Instagram audience grow organically from using one important tactic. "I think following and commenting on other people's Instagram feeds is a good way to get followers." Make a point of following other high calibre people in your industry, as well as brands you'd like to work with or whose products you already use.

Tagging relevant people in your posts, asking questions of your followers, and engaging with their posts shows your followers that you are genuinely interested in your Instagram community.

Make your Instagram analytics work for you

Two of the most important factors for success with Instagram content are 1) when you're posting and 2) how consistently you're posting. It's easy to read up on the "best" times to post and how often. But with Buffer for Instagram, you can determine the best time and frequency for your audience in particular.

Within Buffer's analytics, you can sort every post by the most popular, most likes, and most comments. You can also select any custom time frame or choose from presets like 7, 30, or 90 days.

Once you've sorted, do you notice any trends? If the same time keeps coming up on your top posts, you can feel confident knowing this is a good time to focus on.

Union Metrics ran a study that showed most brands post 1 to 2 times a day on Instagram (the actual average was right in the middle, 1.5), and that there was no correlation between increased frequency and lower engagement, meaning brands that posted more than twice per day didn't see any ill effects.

The takeaway:

Post often on Instagram. To see the effect of a consistent Instagram presence, you can dig into the advanced analytics for your Instagram account in Buffer (available on our Business plans).

By examining your stats, you can start to judge the effect of a consistent schedule on important Instagram metrics like likes and followers.



In 2015, 8% of Instagram accounts were reported to be spam bots and 30% of account were inactive

4. Your account is undiscoverable

First things first: If you want the world to be able to see your work, make sure your account isn't set to private. Don't turn away clients before they even have a chance to see your work. You want to get as many eyes on your work as possible and to do that, your Instagram should be a public account.

When you sign up for Instagram you'll need to select a username. Your username will identify you to your followers, and will become part of your Instagram URL. Don't underestimate your username—it should clearly support and identify your brand.

Keep it short, memorable, easy to spell and above all else, on-brand.

If you already have accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media channels, keep your username consistent across the board to avoid confusion. If the name you've used in the past is already taken, get creative—use your business' slogan, find a completely new name that is available on your other social channels and switch, or add an underscore or number to the username you already have on other channels.

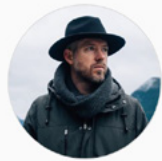
Find a username that works and stick with it.



5. Your bio is missing key information

What is the most important thing for your followers to know about you? With only 150 characters to write your entire Instagram bio, you need to be strategic about what you include.

The formula for a bio that attracts 30k+ followers



othellonine [Follow](#) [▼](#) [...](#)

718 posts 176k followers 383 following

Scott Rankin Vancouver and beyond. othellonine@gmail.com
www.othellonine.com



jeffmindell [Follow](#) [▼](#) [...](#)

2,553 posts 58.1k followers 333 following

SNAPCHAT: JeffMindell mindellj@gmail.com Los Angeles, CA 🌴👋 Creator of
[#cantcrothisclass](https://youtu.be/-vwez_qIKOs) youtu.be/-vwez_qIKOs

Your bio should be well thought out. Think of it as your About page, but shorter—it's an important avenue for people to get to know you and become part of your audience. Include your name, profession, location, email and, if you still have a few characters left, a small detail about you or your work that people will find interesting. Out of space? Include an emoji or two that represent you and your brand.





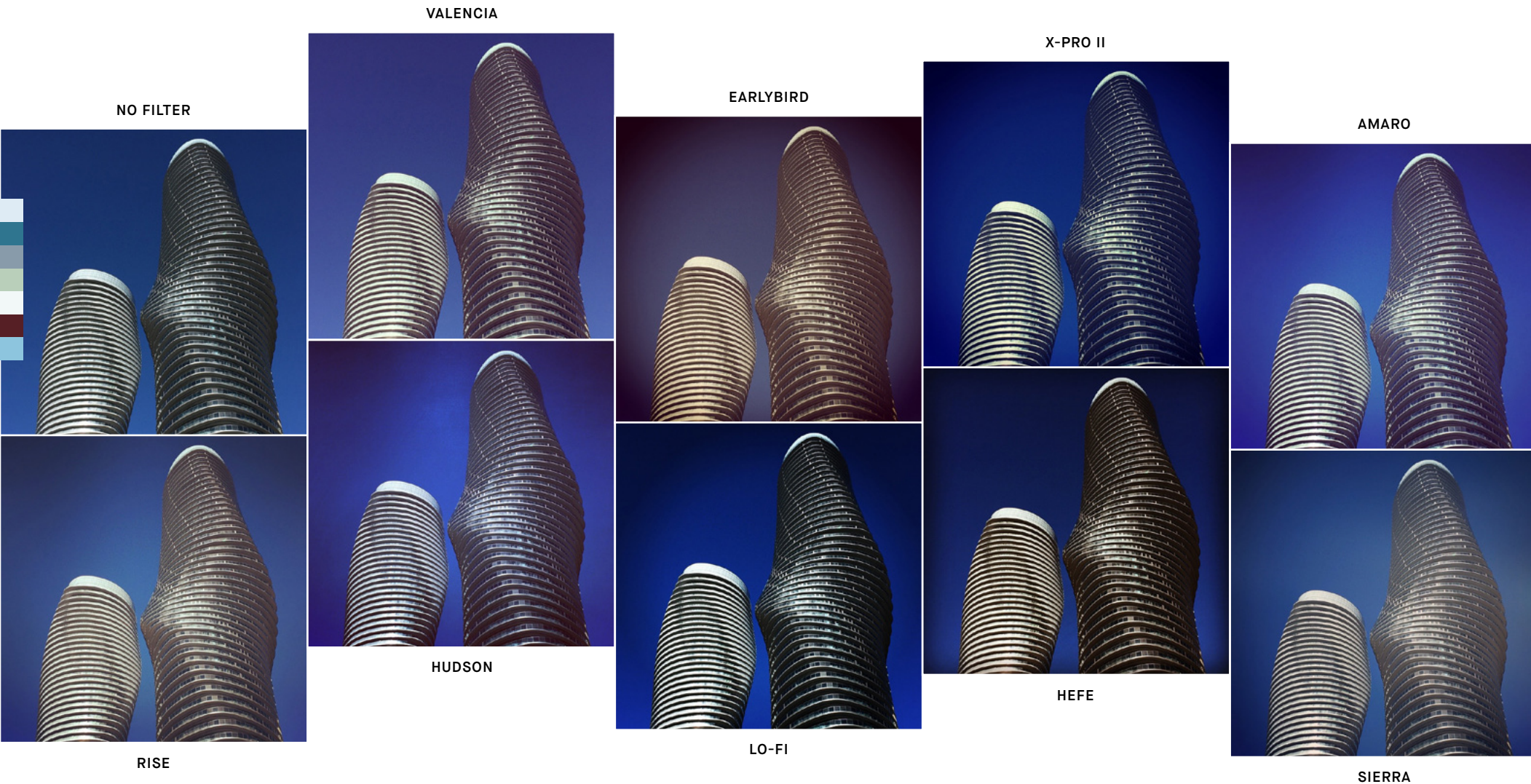
Apps to up your Instagram game

For Jessica Kourkounis, part of the fun of Instagram is being able to express her creativity in a whole new way. “Very little can be done to an image in postproduction when I’m on assignment as a photojournalist. I love the purity of shooting for work, but I do enjoy the creativity that comes with posting on Instagram.”

A big part of the creativity, says Kourkounis, comes from apps, photo editing, and filters. "I enjoy the freedom of being able to play around with filters, since that's a huge no-no in my business."

As a creative professional, you might be prone to forgo the use of filters and in-app editing. But editing or adding a filter can actually increase the number of views your image receives by 21% and the number of comments and engagement by 45% (Yahoo Tech).

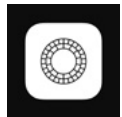
The Most Popular Instagram Filters



There are hundreds of ways within Instagram for you to fine tune your images. From vignette and contrast, to brightness and saturation, or one of the 41 available filters, you can manipulate an image right inapp with amazing results. But why stop there?

When it comes to Instagram, built-in tools are only the beginning. There are third party apps that can make your Instagram experience even better—with hundreds available, you're spoiled for choice. Third party apps are usually even more powerful than the built-in features, and offer more tools and even more precision.

Which apps should you add to your Instagram arsenal?



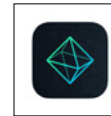
A good place to start is **VSCO**—with 30 million active users, the app is a favourite for Instagram users. The wide variety of presets (aka filters) allow you to do just about anything with your images. Some of the presets are meant to give digital images the feel of vintage film. LV filters were created to imitate classic slide film, while the C3 preset imitates modern negative Fuji film stocks. You can also create your own presets by playing around with the VSCO Cam's editing settings.

Photographer Richard Gaston uses VSCO to edit his images before publishing on Instagram. While the app and many of the presets are free, for Gaston “the outcomes are amazing and it's definitely worth investing in.”





“My studio space is a phone,” photographer Scott Rankin told Studio Beat. And while Rankin doesn’t rely heavily on edits—instead he tries to capture the essence of a moment—he does use a few apps on almost every photo he posts to Instagram. “Lately, I’ve been using an app called Lityly. Just light filters. I’m not big on the oversaturated Instagram filters. I just want something subtle that makes it my own.”



Lityly offers subtle filters that make small changes to your images, that are just what you need to make your images pop. The effects of the filters are understated—the idea is to elevate the image without treating them with oversaturated effects like many other filters. Images look brighter and warmer in a way that is exceptionally precise.



Rankin is also a fan of **Snapseed**. “Every single photo goes through Snapseed. I adjust contrast, brightness, and saturation.” Control every aspect of the image by enhancing details, adjusting white balance and exposure, fine tuning brightness, or adding a custom filter. Snapseed has very exacting controls over your edits—you can apply filters and effects to certain parts of the image using the brush tool, and the “stacks” feature allows you to re-edit and undo changes to the image after the fact.

Editing your images
increases engagement
on Instagram by 45%.





If you're looking for an app that will enhance the colors in your images instead of muting, or outright changing them, **A Color Story** is your perfect photo-editing app. With over 150 filters, effects and tools, there isn't much you can't do with A Color Story. The app features color balancing techniques from Photoshop, tools that allow you to target RGB, and filters designed specifically to brighten your smartphone imagery.

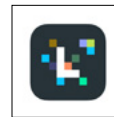
While over-filtering is never a good idea, every third-party app has their strengths. Sometimes using these apps in tandem can create the effect you're striving for. "In terms of editing, my go-to apps are Snapseed, A Colour Story, and VSCO," says photographer Jeff Mindell. "I use some combination of those three apps on every single photo before I post."

While Instagram doesn't allow outside apps to post directly to Instagram for you, there are a few apps out there that can help you manage your schedule, crosspromote to your social channels, and ensure you keep a consistent volume of posts. "Scheduling is really important because my free time to create a post isn't always the time when my network is likely to see the post," says Jon Duenas.





Buffer is a social media scheduler that allows you to schedule posts across all your social channels. Create an Instagram schedule and Buffer will send notifications to your phone. The notification loads the image into Instagram, with your pre-written caption saved to your phone's clipboard, ready to be posted. Buffer also allows you to track your analytics to measure the performance of your posts, and analyze what content is resonating with your audience.



Much like Buffer, **Later** uses a scheduler that sends you a reminder directly to your phone to alert you when it is time to post on Instagram. Later has a super handy visual content calendar that lets you actually view what your week on Instagram will look like. You can also store and organize your images, and search and repost images from your community, making it a onestop shop for your Instagram posting.

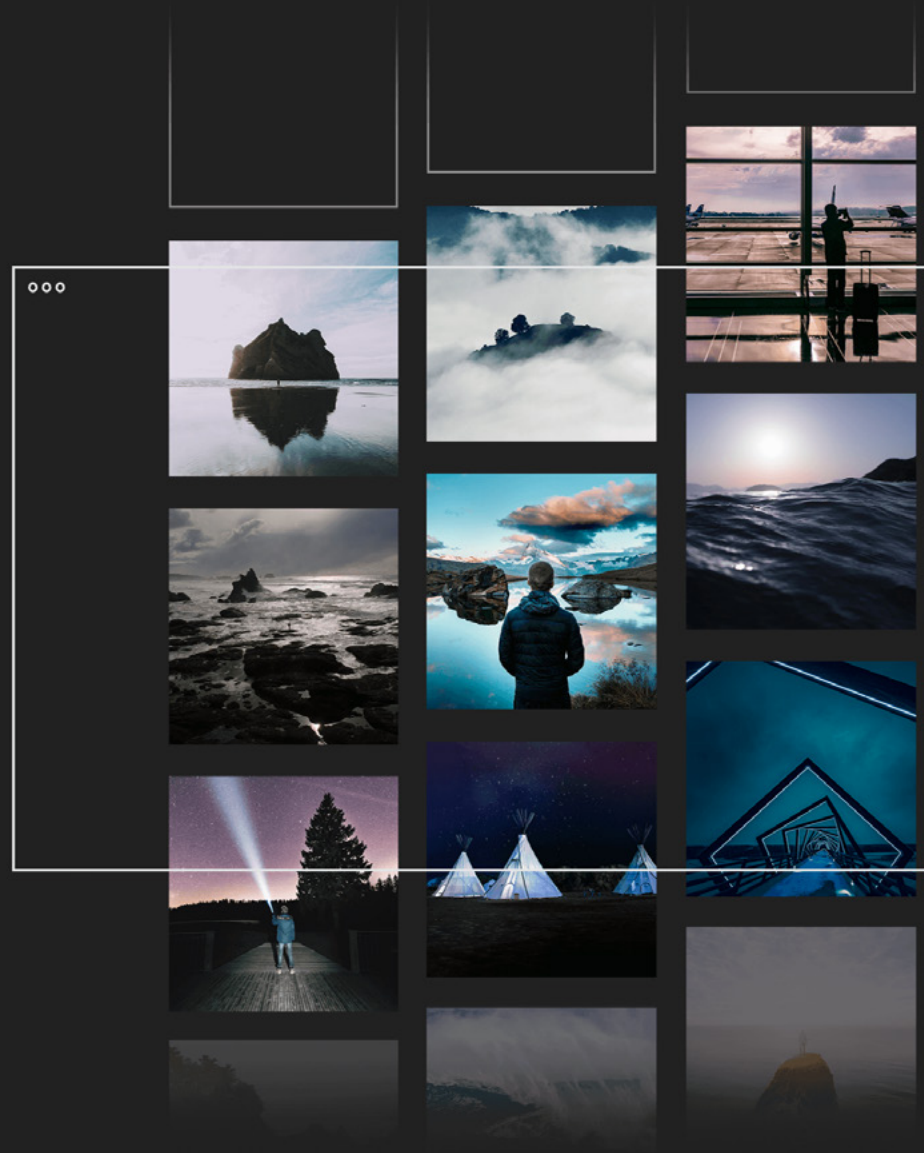


While you can't directly post from other social channels to Instagram, **If This Then That** allows you to share your Instagram posts across your other social networks. With IFTTT, your Instagram post can be translated into a native Twitter photo, a Facebook post, a Pin, or even a post on Tumblr.

Your Instagram + Your Portfolio

Cultivate and curate your personal brand by adding your Instagram images directly to your online portfolio. Our feature enables you to seamlessly and automatically showcase your Instagram images in your portfolio.

Visit format.com



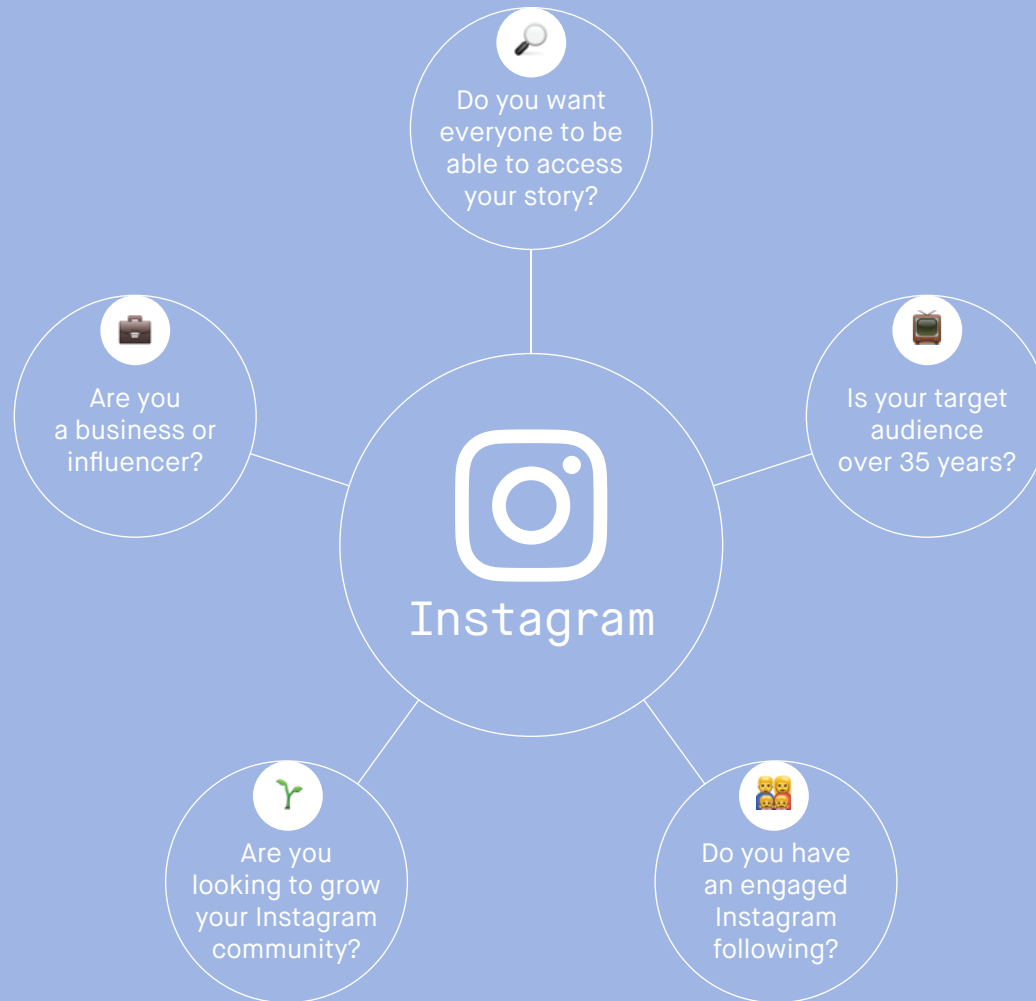
format



Should you use Instagram Stories?

In August 2016, Instagram introduced Stories—a Snapchat-esque feature that lets users share the more ephemeral moments of their day without clogging up their Instagram feeds.

Should I use Instagram Stories



“With Instagram Stories, you don’t have to worry about overposting. Instead, you can share as much as you want throughout the day—with as much creativity as you want,” explains Instagram’s official blog.

As you post images and videos throughout the day, they appear as a slideshow and, much like Snapchat, disappear after 24 hours. Your polished feed doesn’t become littered with selfies and dog sightings, but you still have the ability to share all the moments that make up your day.

It sounds like an interesting way to use the app, but is there value in Instagram Stories for creative professionals? “At first I was a little bit of a naysayer,” says photographer Jon Duenas. “But having said that, the biggest hurdle to making Snapchat useful for your creative business is moving over your already established following. Instagram just completely cut that giant hurdle out.”

And that’s the key—Instagram Stories lets you leverage your pre existing audience as opposed to requiring you to build a new following on a different social channel.

“It’s really nice to see who’s behind the perfectly curated Instagram accounts.”

– Danique van Kesteren, photographer

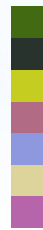


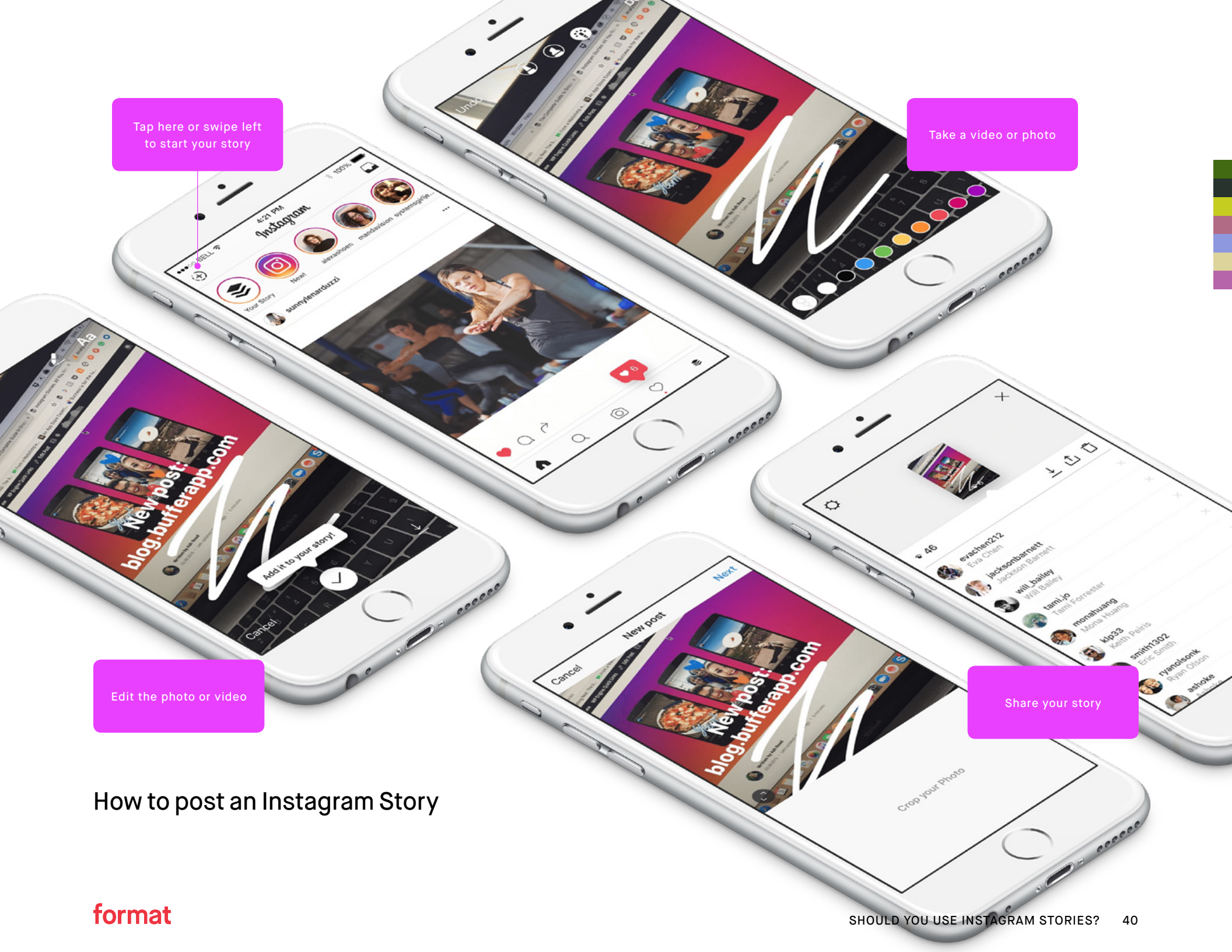
Stories is giving brands—like yourself—the chance to share the stories behind your posts. If you're sharing an image from a recent photoshoot, think of using Stories as a behind-the-scenes look into the shoot, or your editing process. If you've been working on a new sculpture, share the journey with quick videos and images of your process—from sketches to the final project.

format

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Instagram takeovers are already quite popular—an influencer takes over an Instagram account for a set time and posts content on behalf of a brand. Stories provides an even bigger opportunity for you to collaborate with other brands and creative professionals. Whether you are taking over an account, or you have another creative pro posting to your account, creative takeovers can open you up to a new audience you've never reached before.





Tap here or swipe left to start your story

Take a video or photo

Edit the photo or video

Share your story

How to post an Instagram Story

Live video content is a huge driver of engagement at the moment. Instagram Stories offer brands a simple way to create live, timely content that only exists for 24 hours. While the video won't be the uninterrupted broadcasts we expect from Facebook Live or Periscope, or the polished videos we see on YouTube, Instagram Stories may become the place to go to interact with brands and individuals in real time.

There are benefits to using Instagram Stories to promote your creative business. More content means more opportunities to reach a wider audience. But more content also means a larger time investment — Danique van Kesteren of Oak & Fir only plans to use Stories if it can add value to her business. “I will use it in the future, but only if it will add to my feed/work and not just house quick videos of my cat or food I’m eating like I share on Snapchat.”

The secret to gaining 20k+ Instagram followers

You've optimized your Instagram account, you know all the tricks for growing your followers, and you're using all the latest and greatest apps. But how can you get your follower numbers into tens of thousands? How can your content foster a community of individuals who engage and interact with you? How can your Instagram account lead to creative work outside of the social app?



that and people will follow along, especially if you are taking the time to interact with the community. Make connections. Comment on posts you like, and let others know you appreciate their work.”

Marioly Vazquez of Maria Marie is a photographer and stylist with over 121k followers on her account @cestmaria. For Vazquez, setting a theme for your account is essential.

“Stay true to your style. Do not try to emulate the popular trends on Instagram, try to think outside the box and post original content that resonates to your style. Also, try to keep your account coherent, think of the overall look and feel of the account.”

Seasoned Instagram users with enviable lists of followers know what it takes to entice and retain a participatory audience. From breathtaking landscape photos to perfectly-planned style shoots, these creatives know what makes a successful Instagram feed.

With over 175k followers, Vancouver-based photographer Scott Rankin’s Instagram account is by all accounts a sensation. Rankin and his @othellonline account have been featured on BuzzFeed, Forbes, Huffington Post, and Complex Magazine. His advice? Be consistent and genuine.

“I think consistency is key, and being genuine is another. There are a lot of people posting the same types of images right now, so it’s hard to stand out. I would say if you strive to improve your photography in order to challenge yourself, your feed will reflect



For San Francisco-based lifestyle photographer Cory Maryott, it doesn't matter if you're a photographer, model, or artist using Instagram—it's all about authenticity. "For creatives who want to use Instagram in their work, but aren't photographers, the rules are still the same," says Maryott, whose Instagram account has over 67k followers. "Show a slice of your creative life in a way that highlights what's unique about you. Tell stories about your day to day journeys. Try new creative ways to share your stories, and stay authentic to your voice."

Commercial fashion photographer Dixie Dixon has grown her Instagram account to 12.7k+ followers in three short years, and has worked with Virgin, Disney and Nikon. Her secret? Share captivating content. "The biggest way to grow your following is to post compelling content. Share portfolio images, behind-the-scenes, and great content that communicates who you are and what your brand is about."

Scottish photographer Richard Gaston credits his Instagram account—which has 78.1k followers—with a lot of the opportunities he's discovered through Instagram. Gaston believes that knowing how to balance your aesthetic with what is popular is important. "Be confident in posting," he says. "Share it because you like it. Having an understanding of the balance between what you like and what you know others will like is important."


There is no magical recipe for hitting followers in the thousands on Instagram. You need to figure out what works best for you. But using the advice of those that have walked the path before you is a great place to start.





Conclusion





“I think the beauty of the platform is the way in which it encourages even professional photographers to see things a little bit differently, and creatively. Instagram gives photographers so much power.”

– Kerri MacDonald, *New York Times* social photo editor

If you are considering social media marketing for your creative business—tip: you should be—Instagram is the perfect platform to share your creative endeavours. With over 500 million of the most engaged users on social media, you have the chance to put your work in front of more people than ever before. Your Instagram account is a powerful marketing tool that can propel your creative business forward.

For many, the aim of Instagram is to grow your following into the tens of thousands. There are many ways to grow your following—post consistently, be engaged with your community, strategically use hashtags, and share across your other social channels. Keep in mind, it's not all about the numbers. Having thousands of followers who don't engage with your work isn't going to help you in the long run.

When it comes down to it, the most important part of your Instagram account is that it stays true to you and your brand. From your bio and your profile picture, to your posts and Instagram Stories—every element of your account should reflect the overall aesthetic you've created for your brand.

Instagram can help build your brand and open up a world of opportunities for you and your creative business. With a killer account, the tools of the trade, and an organic growth strategy, you're well on your way to cultivating an impressive Instagram following.

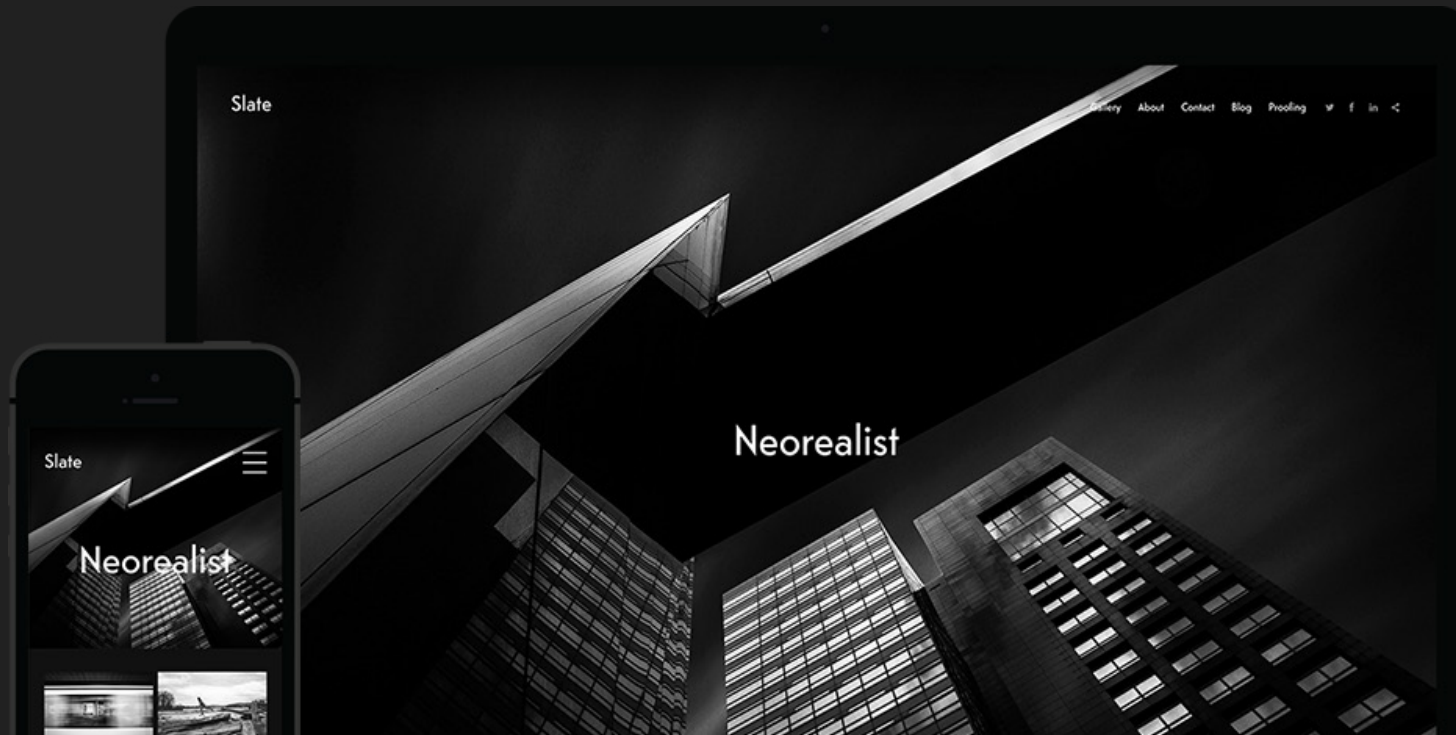


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