INSTAGRAM MARKETING
GUIDE 2021
STRATEGIES AND TIPS
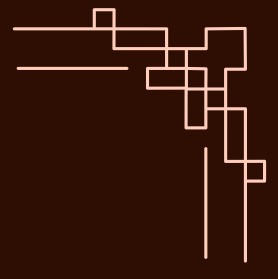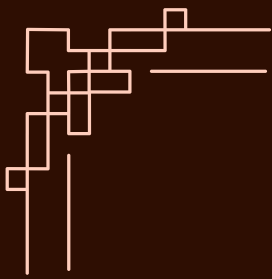
Alina Calianu,
Copywriter

Contents
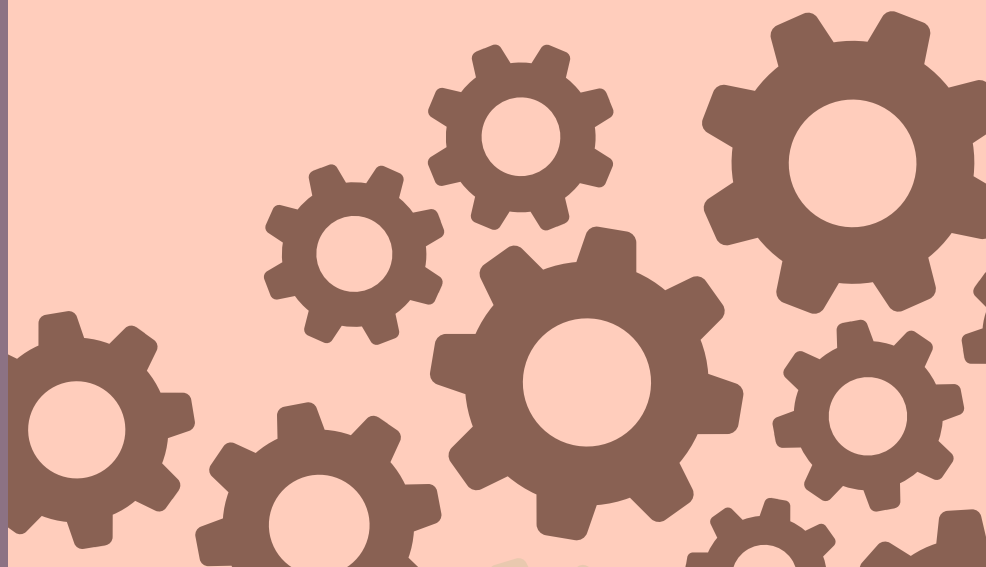
First things first... optimize your profile

Create a business account and not a personal one so that you can receive insights and statistics on your audience and engagement. You can easily switch to a business account in the settings, if you don't already have it set that way. Make sure you do this before you make any posts, as you won't get insights for posts made before switching.

Your Instagram name should have the following structure "Your Name | Descriptive Title"; your audience may not take the extra second to click on your profile and read your title in the bio, especially if they find someone else who has their title clearly stated next to their name.

Your bio should specifically state what you post about, who you help and what you help them with. Make it short and to the point. Add one or two keywords from your niche as hashtags, if you can fit them, and a CTA (call to action). To find keywords, go to Ubersuggest. Try to use them in as many places as possible.

Your handle (@....) should also align with your title and/or business name. At the same time, it should be easy to remember in case your posts haven't been showing in your followers' feed and they want to manually search for you.

Add a link. Either you add your website in the space provided for it on your profile, or you create a link through Milkshake or Linktree. These take your followers to a basic landing page where you can post larger content pieces or other links (e.g. affiliate links).

Let's talk hashtags!

Use 20-30 hashtags for each post; if they don't fit in the maximum of 2000 characters allowed for the caption, then copy them in the 1st comment below the post (right after posting).

When it comes to hashtag popularity and selection, you don't want to use only popular ones. Popular hashtags get posts almost every few seconds and your post will get pushed down quickly; only people who happen to search exactly when you post will find you. This is also why you should think about when you're posting, which I'll address later.

When determining which hashtags to use, you should also consider the size of your channel (aka how many followers you have). If you are just starting out, hashtags will be tricky to get right. Don't put a lot of hope in hashtags bringing you tons of followers yet. Try to use a lot more of the less popular hashtags (with only a few thousands posts under them) at first. Once you are a nanoinfluencer (500-1000 followers), you can start to include hashtags with 20K-50K posts. If you are a microinfluencer (1000-10 000 followers), then your hashtags should have between 50K and 200K posts). As a medium / mid-tier influencer, with 10 000 – 50 000 followers, you can begin using the 200K-500K hashtags. The next level is a macroinfluencer (50 000 – 500 000). At this tier your hashtags should have 500K-2M posts on them. Lastly, if you're a megainfluencer, with > 500 000 followers, you can use the mega popular hashtags with > 2M posts.

Mix up your hashtags in two ways: more of the less popular ones (usually long-form) with just a few of the popular ones (usually short-form) AND do not use the same hashtags for two consecutive posts, otherwise the IG algorithm might flag you as spam.

Research hashtags, make a list of a few hundreds of them, and then group them in categories based on the type of content you post. Then, you can easily copy-paste any section into your caption as you post.

Check all hashtags on this webpage before posting them: https://app.iqhashtags.com/en/banned-hashtags-checker

Other categories of hashtags are holidays, including those "World Something Day," and locations. If you're targeting a specific geolocation, you should also start following hashtags and people related to it.

You may want to add hashtags about current trends and news (e.g. COVID-19) + tie them in with your post (and niche). This will give you a chance to gain extra exposure. Examples:
#coronaviruswontstopus
#coronavirusworkfromhome
#coronaviruswontstopme
#coronaviruswontgetusdown
#coronavirusadvice
#coronavirusactivities

Careful for banned hashtags! If you add them to your posts, your entire account may get banned. No one besides your current followers will be able to find you on Instagram. Next is an updated list of banned hashtags (2021). These may change over time. It's always a good idea to check all hashtags before posting. You can check hashtags and also scan your entire profile using the link to the left.
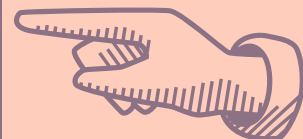
Banned Hashtags List

A
- abdl
- addmysc
- adulting
- alone
- always
- armparty
- asiangirl
- ass
- assday
- assworship

B
- babyrp
- bacak
- beautyblogger,
but #beautybloggers works
- besties
- beyonce
- bikinibody
- boho
- brain

C
- costumes
- cpr
- curvy
- curvygirls

D
- date
- dating
- desk
- direct
- dm

E
- edm
- eggplant
- elevator

F
- followforfollow
- fuck

G
- girlsonly
- gloves
- goddess
- graffitiigers
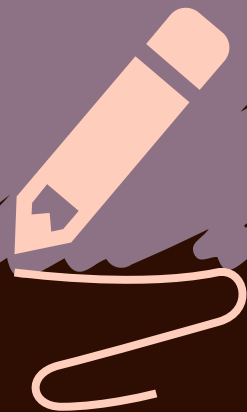
Banned Hashtags List

H
- happythanksgiving
- hardworkpaysoff, but #hardworkpaysoff⬚ works
- hawks
- hotweather
- humpday
- hustler

I
- ice
- ig
- ilovemyinstagram
- instababy
- instamood
- instasport
- iphonegraphy
- italiano

K
- kansas, but #kansascity works
- kickoff
- killingit
- kissing

L
- lean
- leaves
- like
- likeback
- likeforlike
- lingerie
- livinforalivin
- loseweight
- lulu

M
- master
- mileycyrus
- milf
- mirrorphoto
- models
- mustfollow

N
- nasty
- newyearsday
- nude
- nudism
- nudity

O
- orderweedonline
- overnight

Banned Hashtags List

P
- parties
- petite
- popular
- pornfood
- prettygirl
- publicrelations
- puppydogmondays
- pushups

R
- rate
- ravens

S
- saltwater
- samelove
- selfharm
- sexworker
- sexy
- shit
- shower
- single
- singlelife
- skateboarding
- skype
- snap
- snapchat,
but #snapchat⬚ works
- snowstorm

- sopretty
- stranger
- streetphoto
- sun
- sunbathing
- swole

T
- tag4like
- tagsforlikes
- tanlines
- teen
- teens
- thighs
- thought
- todayimwearing

U
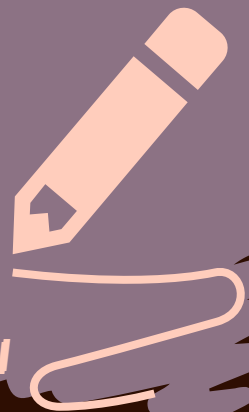- undies

V
- valentinesday

W
- woman
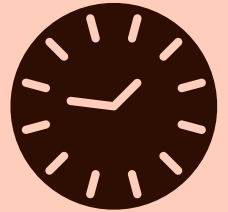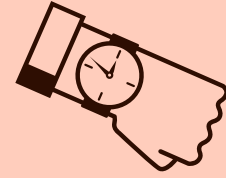- womancrushwednesday
- women
- workflow
- wtf

X
- xanax

Y
- youngmodel

When to Post

If you're trying to give value to your current audience, post when most of them are online. You'll find that information in your Insights (under a business account only). Keep in mind that most people can't digest/process lots of information in the evening. Evenings are more for light reading.

If you want to attract new audiences, post when they are more likely to browse (in their time zones). Here's a comprehensive website addressing timing for multiple social media websites: https://coschedule.com/blog/best-times-to-post-on-social-media/

The best time and day to post, however, will really depend on your target audience. If you're targeting stay-at-home moms, for example, you may want to post way later after the kids have gone to sleep and they get a moment to themselves (or way early). If you're targeting corporate audiences, lunch time could be a good one, or 3-4 pm right as they are wrapping things up. Remember, this is only for when you want to reach new audiences. For your current ones, just check your Insights.
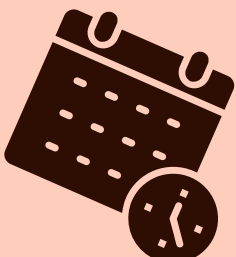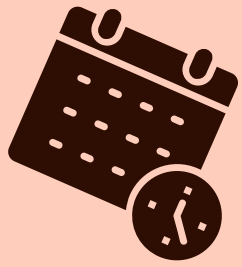
When to Post
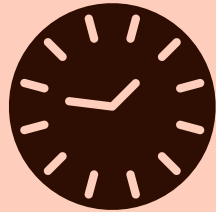
To avoid missing posts or posting at the wrong time, I suggest you invest in a Scheduler/Social Media planner or calendar. These cloud-based software are calendar-style planners where you can enter the content in specific time slots, edit it directly on there, and organize your posts based on categories. The more advanced ones can also give you suggestions of hashtags, crop your photos to the right size, edit your photos, and more. Here are the most popular ones: Hootsuite, Buffer, Later, Tailwind, Planoly, Autogrammer, OneUp, CoSchedule, Loomly, Agorapost, and Sprout Social.

Post regularly and, if possible, often – anywhere between daily to every three days will keep you at the forefront of people's minds.
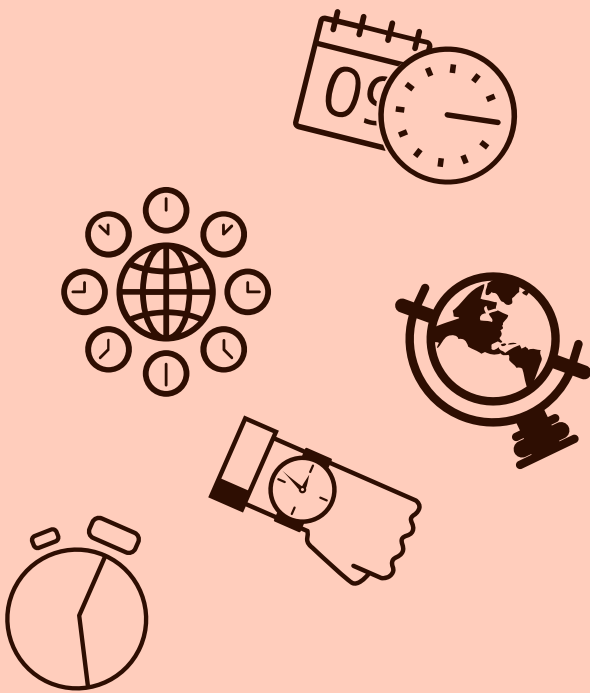
What to Post

Post 2/3's niche-related content and 1/3 about yourself (accreditations, experience, testimonials + optional: some personal bits). You don't have to post anything personal, but it can help you connect with your audience and build rapport; doesn't have to be much or too personal... your favorite morning routine, for example, will suffice. Always keep checking your Insights to see how each topic performs and how/if your demographics change, and then post according to that information. At the same time, look at your followers' profiles and interests to see what they're into. This will give you both topic ideas and hashtag ideas.

* For more information, see my FREE Instagram Content Guide.

Don't do interactive posts (unless they are giveaways) until you have a following of at least 500-1000, or at least don't use important topics until then. When you have a large enough following, start with one or two interactive posts/month first, to see if people respond; if not, wait until you add more followers. Otherwise, you might end up wasting potentially good engagement topics on people who aren't likely to respond. If people do reply, however, make sure to answer EVERY single comment even if it's not a question (unless it's spam). It will both increase your engagement rate and show your followers that you care about their thoughts.

What to Post

Although the IG algorithm changes frequently, one point that seems to remain constant is the importance of "saves" (posts that your followers save). These seem to have the biggest weight on your Explore page ranking. (The Explore page is the page that shows up when people go searching for content on Instagram).

Follow and post genuine comments on relevant accounts; do this often, and you'll start showing up in the recommended profiles section (the followers of those you follow will start seeing your channel as a recommendation).

Recycle your content – not every follower has seen every post you've made. Even if they did, they most likely forgot about it or forgot you were the one who posted about it. It's an easy and smart strategy to recycle content. You can just word your new post a bit differently or address it from another angle.

Do (real, authentic, credible) shout-out's to clients or accounts you follow OR do guest posts; these will give you access to other people's networks as well. You may also trade shout-out's with your CURRENT and RELEVANT followers only.

Don't be afraid to sell. Mix up your strategies between "soft selling" (indirect approach) and "hard selling" (direct approach). Hard sales pitches are most effective when using urgency ("limited spots available", "buy before..."). Soft sales pitches are subtle and can be used more often ("what's your style" vs "buy now" OR "chocolate-dipped or sprinkles on top?" vs "choose from a variety of flavors")

Videos, generally, have better reach and engagement than pictures, and personal posts (both videos and pictures) tend to have better metrics than generic ones.

Remind your followers who you are / what you do, often. You can phrase it in different ways: "as a copywriter, I know..." or "when I was editing this document for my previous client,..."

Take advantage of holidays and hold sales, promos, contests, giveaways, bundles, etc. Get frequent testimonials from previous clients and post them. Those are great for credibility. Add samples of your previous work to establish both credibility and authority in your subject matter.

Formatting tip: space out your paragraphs in your caption (even if it eats from the allowed characters); people won't read a whole chunk with no breaks in between. One formatting tip is to not place any extra spaces at the end of a paragraph, otherwise the next line will come out glued to the previous one, no matter how big of a gap you leave in between the paragraphs.
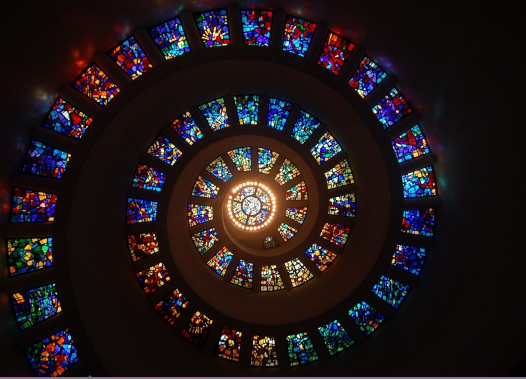
Add keywords under the ALT text option, right before you post and below the space for your caption, to rank on Google as well (only if you post manually). Eventually, you may also want to look into a visual organization of your posts that may include patterns and a consistent color palette (see for example @vanessalau.co or @ranaa.jaber).

If you have a products-based online store, make sure to connect your website to your Instagram channel and tag the product in the post. These products will then show under the "shop" button. The benefit of this is that when you post a product that customers are interested in, they can click on it and get sent to that product's page directly. They don't have to go to your bio, click on your website, and search for that specific product.

INSTAGRAM
MARKETING
GUIDE

ALINA
CALIANU
2021

Alina
COMMUNICATE | STRATEGIZE | IMPRESS
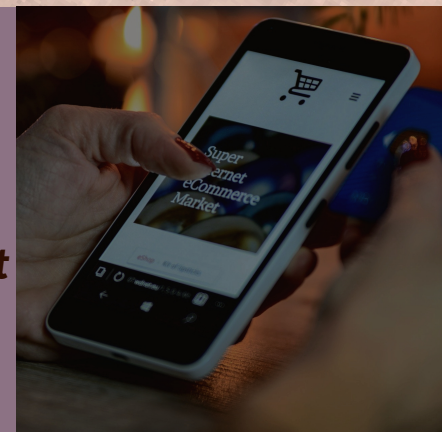
THE END

DID YOU LIKE MY TIPS?

@ FOLLOW.ALINA