

How to Sell on Instagram



While most brands use [social media](#) to build brand awareness, social networks can also be prolific revenue generators for brands. Statista estimated [\\$992 billion](#) in global sales via social media platforms in 2022.

Social media companies have cottoned on the opportunity, releasing new features for business accounts that enable retailers to set up storefronts, provide customer service and post “shoppable” content that lets users purchase within the Instagram app.

With [two billion](#) monthly active users (and counting), Instagram is one of the best platforms for social selling. The average user spends 29 minutes a day on the social network, and 400 million Stories are added each day. Moreover, Instagram’s visual-first platform is ideal for product discovery and branded content.

In a survey commissioned by Meta, [83%](#) of respondents said Instagram helps them discover new products and services.

Instagram offers various tools enabling sellers with business accounts to engage in [social commerce](#), including shoppable Instagram posts. Merchants can tag products in shoppable posts, open an online storefront and accept [payments](#) from Instagram.

Here's the lowdown on how to start selling on Instagram, optimize your Instagram Shop and build successful advertising campaigns.

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Optimize Your Instagram Profile and Bio

An Instagram bio establishes your brand identity, products and services and unique value proposition. Your bio should be concise, informative, easy to read and no more than 150 characters. It should convey your brand promise (i.e.: excellent customer service or one-of-a-kind products) plus your brand personality (i.e.: funny, laidback, playful, informative).

Instagram only allows one clickable link in bios, so choose carefully. While most businesses default to their website URL, you can link to ongoing promotions or a CTA to sign up for your newsletter. You can also use tools that redirect users to a custom landing page containing shortcuts to featured content and product pages.

Lastly, you'll need an Instagram username (your @handle) that lets people find you and a profile photo (ideally, your brand's logo). Business pages also come with call-to-action buttons such as 'Follow,' 'Message,' 'View Shop' and 'Contact,' which frees up space in [your bio](#).

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Publish Engaging Content

The ideal social media strategy contains a balance of organic and paid content. You should also balance sales-y posts with non-promotional content.

For example, you could post a behind-the-scenes video of how an item is made, followed by a Story promoting your latest product line. Post a range of content types — polls, Live videos, Stories, photos, GIFs and videos — to keep followers engaged. Ask questions to make your followers feel included in the conversation rather than maintaining a one-way conversation.

In a [survey](#) commissioned by Meta, respondents said they wanted to see content from brands that is fun (55%), real (53%) and creative (53%).

Be authentic.

Social media provides an opportunity to humanize your brand by posting relatable content. Share stories about how the product is made, how you became an entrepreneur and who your team members are. Memes, GIFs, jokes, blooper reels and self-deprecating humor make brands appear more authentic.

According to a survey from Stackla, [90%](#) of consumers say authenticity is important when deciding which brands they like and support (up from 86% in 2017). Tell people where you source your raw materials and why you decided to become a carpenter, chef or certified public accountant.

Actively engage with your community by responding to comments and DMs (direct messages), and engaging with other pages.

Utilize Instagram stories.

Instagram Stories content is displayed on the site for up to 24 hours and is one of the most popular features on Instagram. Rather than appearing on your audience's Newsfeed, Stories are displayed at the top of the site and can only be viewed by followers.

Product stickers let you create more engaging Stories by adding interactive elements such as polls, questions, countdowns, quizzes and emoji sliders. Asking questions or requesting recommendations encourages followers to engage with your content.

Instagram Stories are ideal for sneak peeks, behind-the-scenes footage and for teasing product launches. Add links to stories to drive traffic to your website or specific product pages or offer discount codes. Viewers can swipe up to access the URL.

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Live shopping — using live streaming to sell products — is estimated to be worth [\\$35 billion](#) in the U.S. by 2024, so consider experimenting with Live videos to drive sales for new product launches in real-time.

Build a “shoppable” Instagram feed.

Qualifying business accounts can take advantage of Instagram Shopping, which makes it easy to set up a shop, build a product catalog and feature items in posts and Stories on Instagram.

An Instagram Shop is a storefront that customers can access directly from your Instagram Business profile, posts or Story. Here, you can display and categorize products just like any ecommerce platform, complete with pricing and product descriptions. Eligible U.S. businesses can set up Checkout on Instagram to accept payments within the app.

You can highlight products in shoppable posts, where users can click on a product to see a tag with pricing information and a link to the product’s dedicated landing page within your Instagram shop tab.

Nail the caption.

While brands tend to favor short, snappy captions because of the widespread belief that too much text turns people off, engagement stats on Instagram suggest long-form captions often perform better.

According to research by Fohr, the average caption length has [more than doubled](#) since 2016. When you tell a story, share advice, or impart a personal anecdote in a relatable and informative way, people will read the caption until the end. Use an eye-catching photo or video to grab attention while providing more context in the caption.

Here are some tips on how to write a compelling IG caption:

- Treat the first sentence like a newspaper lede — the goal is to hook the viewer.
- Frontload your most compelling ideas/offerings (users must expand the post to read beyond the first sentence or two).
- Add value by educating the user about something, telling a story or inspiring an emotion (eg: humor, excitement or sympathy).
- Write as you speak — don’t come off as a robot.
- End with a call to action (i.e.: visit the website, shop a specific product, enter a giveaway).

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Use hashtags.

Hashtags are like SEO for Instagram posts: they make your content indexable when people search for specific topics on Instagram. Therefore, they're crucial for exposure and discovery. Use a hashtag generator to research trending hashtags relevant to your industry or product and identify related hashtags as inspiration for future content.

Branded hashtags are an ideal method for promoting a specific campaign or product. Branded hashtags encourage engagement because your followers can post photos or videos of your products using that hashtag. People engaging with your brand for the first time can click on the hashtag and see all associated posts aggregated in one place.

There's no solid consensus on the optimal number of hashtags to use. Instagram allows up to 30 hashtags in posts and 10 for Stories. Instagram's @Creators recommends no more than [three to five](#), while a [study by Later.com](#) found that posts with 20-30 hashtags generated the most engagement.

Share images your customers are taking with your product.

Followers may post photos or videos of themselves using your product using your branded hashtag or @mention. You can then reshare those posts while crediting the original poster. Always ask permission by commenting on their post or sending them a DM before resharing.

You can share images to your Instagram Feed and Stories. However, user-generated content (UGC) provides excellent material for your website, especially if you sell physical goods. In fact, 79% of people say UGC highly impacts their purchasing decisions, and consumers find UGC [9.8x](#) more impactful than influencer content when making a purchasing decision.

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Create and Optimize Your Instagram Ad Strategy

Instagram Ads are ideal for brand awareness campaigns. You can turn any Instagram post into an ad, or you can post original photos, videos and image carousels. Instagram Ads appear in both the Newsfeed and Stories on Instagram.

Decide on an Instagram ad budget.

Before you shell out money for advertising, decide on a goal. Advertising on Instagram is ideal for growing your following, attracting potential customers or driving traffic to your website.

The cost to advertise on IG depends on factors like the mobile device you're targeting, audience demographics, day of the week and your bidding model, such as cost-per-click (CPC) or cost-per-impression (CPM). Typically, companies pay [\\$0.50-\\$1](#) per link click.

Costs also depend on the campaign's duration. Ads can run indefinitely until manually deactivated or within a set time limit. To set an advertising budget on Instagram, simply enter the amount you're willing to spend each day.

Your budget affects how many views your ad gets. Meta [recommends](#) starting with at least \$5 for your daily budget and picking a duration over six days, which allows the ad delivery system to find the best people for your ad. If you spend too little, you won't get the ROI you're looking for. Overspend, and you could strain your resources.

Use creative assets that are consistent with your brand.

Use original, high-quality images and videos that reflect your brand aesthetic. Stay away from stock images as these erode your brand identity. Graphics are ideal for promoting events, limited-time offers and promotions because you can highlight numbers, prices and dates. Familiarize yourself with the types of ad formats Instagram supports (see below) before you design creative assets.

- **Photo ad:** A single image with or without copy, such as a product photo or a graphic.
- **Video ads:** Animated or live action videos. Remember, videos should convey the message even without sound because Instagram mutes videos by default.
- **Image carousels:** A post that contains more than one image or video, or a mix of both. Carousels can be used to promote multiple products that cannot be featured in a single image (such as a clothing line). Each slide of an Instagram carousel ad can have its own headline and CTA.

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- **Instagram Stories:** Stories are seen by followers and disappear from view after 24 hours. This is good for engaging your existing follower base, not necessarily for attracting new followers. You can choose ‘single image or video’ or make a carousel. You can also use a feature called Stories Templates (only available for image ads), which transforms your image into an ad and adds simple animations to grab a viewer’s attention.

Test multiple target audiences.

Before you start advertising, you must develop personas for your target audience — including age, gender, location, likes and dislikes and pain points. This means collecting customer data from your CRM system, website analytics tool and other social media accounts.

Also, consider your current Instagram follower base — you can find these details in [Instagram analytics](#). Another option is to use Instagram polls to understand your audience’s preferences. For example, you can A/B test different creatives or ask what product features they would prefer.

Once you start running ads, experiment with targeting different demographic groups on Instagram. For example, your core audience might be female, 18-25, and based in the U.S. You could try advertising to older audiences abroad. Keep rejiggering your audience targeting until you achieve the ROI you’re looking for.

Play with different ad imagery, copy and videos.

Social media marketing is all about trial and error. Tweak the copy, imagery and videos based on your [engagement metrics](#). Give the audience more of what they like and less of what they don’t. Sometimes a CTA needs rewording or an image wasn’t compelling enough or your video was too long. These finer details can differentiate between a successful ad campaign and a flop.

If you’re not achieving the click-through rate you’re hoping for, continue iterating the copy and content until you do.

Monitor results and iterate.

Running ads is not a set-it-and-forget-it process. You must monitor your ad analytics at least once daily and A/B test different creatives. Increase or decrease your daily ad budget and see how it affects your click-through rate, impressions and conversions. This will tell you if you’re under or overspending.

Use Instagram to Launch a Contest

Remember the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge that [took the world by storm](#) in 2014? While the contest went mainstream on live TV, it soon went viral on Instagram. Contests are an excellent source of user-generated content and help build engagement and brand awareness. Before launching an IG contest, start with a clear objective.

Generally, the goal of a social media contest is to:

- Generate more engagement with your posts.
- Produce user-generated content.
- Grow your Instagram following.

Next, decide on a prize. It must be something your audience values. For example, if you're offering freebies, are they limited-edition items your customers can't buy from your online store?

Determine the terms of the contest — how should people enter the contest, and how is the winner determined? Some contests select winners randomly, while others reward contestants with the highest engagement.

Here are some popular contest formats on Instagram:

- **Tag to win:** To enter, participants must tag family and friends in the post (they don't need to post any new content). Whomever they tag will see the post. You might also ask them to follow your page. The person with the most tags wins. This type of contest will expose your brand to a new audience.
- **Celebrate a milestone:** Milestones are a great opportunity to reward loyal customers (and build social proof!). For example, if you reached X number of sales on a best-selling item, you can host a giveaway. Or if you reach a certain number of followers on social, you can use that opportunity to expand your following even more.
- **Like to win:** To enter, followers must like your post for a chance to win. Winners are decided randomly. Instagram posts with more engagement get more views, so this contest is ideal for attracting new customers.
- **Ask for UGC:** Ask your followers to post a photo of your product, tag your brand in the picture and caption, and use a branded hashtag. The best photo wins.
- **Write a caption:** Ask your followers to write a caption for a photo. The best caption wins a prize.

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- **Instagram challenges:** Ask your followers to post a photo or video of themselves for X number of days using a daily prompt. Those who complete the challenge and/or submit the best content win.

Promote your contest across social media, in your newsletter, and on your website several weeks before launch to drum up excitement and get more people engaged.

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Build Relationships with Influencers

Working with credible Instagram influencers can help you build trust with your target audience. A 2021 survey by eMarketer found that [40%](#) of Millennials and 38% of Gen Zers said influencer content made them more likely to purchase new products or services.

First, set a goal for your influencer marketing campaign. For example, increasing sales of a particular product or improving your engagement metrics. Next, find relevant influencers who create related content. For example, if you offer a travel-related product or service, connect with a popular travel vlogger.

You can generally find influencers by researching posts with hashtags related to your product (eg: #travellight). Remember, the most important criteria when choosing an influencer to partner with is not their follower count but engagement.

Does their audience like and comment on their posts? Do their Stories attract a lot of engagement? Data shows that micro-influencers are on the rise. Despite having a smaller follower base, their followers tend to be more engaged.

Once you've shortlisted potential influencers, send them a pitch for a paid collaboration. Involve the influencer as much as possible in designing the campaign. For example, you can solicit their opinion on locations for a video shoot or the products they prefer to model. This is important because nobody knows their followers as well as they do.

As with any marketing campaign, you must track your engagement metrics and iterate your strategy based on your findings.

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The Final Word

Instagram is an excellent platform for building customer relationships, providing customer service via DMs and growing brand awareness.

However, to succeed on Instagram, you need a steady funnel of content and the right posting frequency. Hootsuite [recommends](#) brands post new content on their Instagram feed 3-7 times a week and two Stories per day.

If social media is a key sales channel for your brand, Instagram sales can provide a transformative level of exposure and access to new audiences.

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FAQs About How to Sell on Instagram

Do I need a website to sell on Instagram?

Yes. To be eligible for Instagram Shopping features, you must have your own website domain.

How do I accept payment on Instagram?

Instagram's checkout feature lets you accept payments for items purchased through your Instagram Shop. You can also accept payments from a customer through Instagram DMs. Customers can use Meta Pay to pay with a debit card, credit card or PayPal. Sellers get paid once they send the product to the customer. Instagram does not take any commissions.

Are Instagram tools worth the investment?

Social media tools enable busy small business owners to draft and schedule social media posts in advance, use social listening tools to analyze follower sentiment and track competitors and leverage advanced analytics to track marketing performance across all their social media accounts. These tools are only worth the investment if you already have a sizable social media following. Another reason to invest in dedicated social media tools is if most of your website referrals and/or conversion come from social media networks. Social media tools can augment your existing marketing strategy and increase your brand's share of voice (SOV), but only if you already have a strong foundation.

Is it better to sell on Instagram or Etsy?

Instagram is a social media network, while Etsy is an online marketplace for people seeking unique, handmade vintage items. Depending on what you sell, it may make sense for your brand to have a presence on both platforms. Instagram and Etsy are both highly visual platforms. Therefore, if your products are popular on Etsy, they will probably resonate with Instagram users. High-quality visuals, images and videos are the key to success. If you already run an Etsy shop, selling on Instagram not only provides you with additional revenue generator but a way to attract more people to your Etsy shop.

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