**What is Instagram**

What is this trendy thing called Instagram that all the cool kids seem to be into? It's been around for a few years, quietly picking up traction mostly thanks to everybody's new obsession with [mobile photography](https://www.lifewire.com/tips-for-mobile-photography-2378404), so don't feel embarrassed to ask if you have absolutely no clue what it's all about.

**An Intro to Instagram**

Instagram is a [social networking app](https://www.lifewire.com/top-social-networking-sites-people-are-using-3486554) made for sharing photos and videos from a smartphone.

Similar to [Facebook](https://www.lifewire.com/tutorial-how-facebook-works-2654610) or [Twitter](https://www.lifewire.com/twitter-basics-3476455), everyone who creates an Instagram account has a profile and a news feed.

When you post a photo or video on Instagram, it will be displayed on your profile. Other users who follow you will see your posts in their own feed. Likewise, you'll see posts from other users whom you choose to follow.

Pretty straight forward, right? It's like a simplified version of Facebook, with an emphasis on mobile use and visual sharing. Just like other social networks, you can interact with other users on Instagram by following them, being followed by them, commenting, liking, tagging and private messaging. You can even [save the photos you see](https://www.lifewire.com/save-instagram-photos-4125398)on Instagram.

**Devices That Work With Instagram**

Instagram is available for free on [iOS](https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-ios-1994355) and [Android](https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-google-android-1616887) devices.

It can also be accessed on the web from a computer, but users can only upload and share photos or videos from their devices.

**Creating an Account on Instagram**

Before you can start [using the app](https://www.lifewire.com/how-to-use-instagram-3485864), Instagram will ask you to create a free account.

You can sign up via your existing Facebook account or by email. All you need is a username and a password.

You may be asked if you want to follow some friends who are on Instagram in your Facebook network. You can do this right away or skip through the process and come back to it later.

It's always a good idea to customize your profile by adding your name, a photo, a short bio and a website link if you have one when you first get on Instagram.

When you start following people and looking for people to follow you back, they'll want to know who you are and what you're all about.

**Using Instagram as a Social Network**

As previously mentioned, Instagram is all about visual sharing, so everybody's main intention is to share and find only the best photos and videos. Every user profile has a “Followers” and “Following” count, which represents how many people they follow and how many other users are follow them.

Every user profile has a button you can tap to follow them. If a user has their profile set to private, they will need to approve your request first.

Keep in mind that when your profile is created and set to public, anyone can find and view your profile, along with all your photos and videos. [Learn how to set yours to private](https://www.lifewire.com/make-instagram-account-private-3485850) if you only want the followers you approve to be able to see your posts.

Interacting on posts is fun and easy. You can double tap any post to “like” it or add a comment at the bottom. You can even click the arrow button to [share it with someone via direct message](https://www.lifewire.com/use-instagram-direct-3485870).

If you want to find or [add more friends](https://www.lifewire.com/get-instagram-followers-3485845) or interesting accounts to follow, use the search tab (marked by the magnifying glass icon) to browse through tailored posts recommended to you.

You can also use the search bar at the top to look for specific users or hashtags.

**Applying Filters and Editing Your Instagram Posts**

Instagram has come a long way since its early days in terms of posting options. When it first launched in 2010, users could only post photos through the app and add filters without any extra editing features.

Today, you can post both directly through the app or from existing photos/videos on your device. You can also post both photos and [videos up to one full minute in length](https://www.lifewire.com/video-sharing-apps-shortest-time-lengths-3486106), and you have a whole bunch of extra filter options plus the ability to tweak and edit.

When you tap the middle Instagram posting tab, you can select the camera or video icon to let the app know whether you want to post a photo or a video.

Capture it through the app, or tap the photo/video preview box to pull up a previously captured one.

Instagram has up to 23 filters you can choose to apply to both photos and videos. By tapping the *Edit* option at the bottom of the photo editor, you can also apply editing effects that allow you to edit adjustments, brightness, contrast and structure. For videos, you can trim them and select a cover frame.

If you want to edit your photo or video within the Instagram app, simply tap the wrench icon and choose a feature from the bottom menu. You can adjust the contrast, warmth, saturation, highlights, shadows, vignette, tilt shift and sharpness.

**Sharing Your Instagram Posts**

After you’ve applied an optional filter and possibly made some edits, you’ll be taken to a tab where you can fill out a caption, tag other users to it, [tag it to a geographical location](https://www.lifewire.com/edit-location-on-instagram-photo-map-3485866) and simultaneously post it to some of your other social networks.

Once it's published, your followers will be able to view it and interact with in their feeds. You can always delete your posts or edit their details after you published them by tapping the three dots at the top.

You can configure your Instagram account to have photos posted on [Facebook](https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-facebook-3486391), Twitter, [Tumblr](https://www.lifewire.com/how-to-use-tumblr-4049305) or Flickr. If these sharing configurations are all highlighted, as opposed to remaining gray and inactive, then all of your Instagram photos will automatically be posted to your social networks after you press *Share*. If you don't want your photo shared on any particular social network, simply tap any one of them so that it's gray and set to Off.

**Viewing and Publishing Instagram Stories**

Instagram recently introduced its new Stories feature, which is a secondary feed that appears at the very top of your main feed. You can see it marked by little photo bubbles of the users you follow.

Tap any one of these bubbles to see that user's story or stories that they published over the last 24 hours. If you're familiar with [Snapchat](https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-snapchat-3485908), then you'll probably notice how similar Instagram's stories feature is to it.

To publish your own story, all you have to do is tap your own photo bubble from the main feed or swipe right on any tab to access the stories camera tab. If you want to find out more about Instagram stories, check out [this breakdown of how it differs from Snapchat](https://www.lifewire.com/instagram-stories-vs-snapchat-stories-whats-the-difference-4069910).

**Ready to Start Instagramming?**

We could go on and on in extreme detail about every little thing there is to do and experience on Instagram, or we could just leave it here so that you can go try Instagram for yourself. Before you do though, make sure you take a look at the following extra recommended articles to really ramp up your Instagram presence as you get started:

Why Instagram?

Instagram’s popularity has been growing steadily since it first debuted back in 2010. With [more than 500 million active users](https://www.statista.com/statistics/253577/number-of-monthly-active-instagram-users/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), it’s currently the second most popular social media network in the world, behind only Facebook (unless you count YouTube), and marketers are falling more in love with the platform.

In fact, the number of advertisers on Instagram has doubled over the past six months or so, [to more than one million](http://marketingland.com/instagrams-1-million-advertisers-209882%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), in part due to the fact that Instagram is now considered the best social media platform for customer engagement. But what is it that makes the platform so engaging to users, and how can marketers take advantage of it?

What the Metrics Say

“Engagement” is hard to measure, and involves several distinct factors, like post visibility, tendency to comment, and shareability. Put simply, it’s your ability to connect with your followers. In a survey of more than 2,500 micro-influencers (mid-sized social media users with a large following of daily engaged users), [60 percent thought Instagram](http://www.adweek.com/digital/influencers-instagram-is-the-most-engaging-platform-report/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) was the best overall platform for engagement. The runner-up, Facebook, only gathered support of 18 percent.

The "Why"

So why is Instagram so good at engaging with audiences?

Mobile functionality. Instagram is easy to use when you’re on the go. It’s a mobile-exclusive platform and can immediately edit images you take on the move to post on the platform. That makes it an in-the-moment experience, which naturally attracts more people. It’s also a very simple app to use, with only a handful of posting options and the lovable “infinite scroll” of new content.

Visual nature. Human beings prefer to gather and interpret information through sight, which is why [visual marketing has become so popular](https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/visual-content-marketing-strategy%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) in recent years. Instagram appeals to that visual nature. Nearly the entire newsfeed is occupied by the horizontal span of images, and since they’re all reduced to the same square format, it gives a certain level of formality to the experience.

Novelty. Instagram is also a departure from apps like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, mostly because of its simplicity. It’s done a phenomenal job of attracting younger audiences, with the majority of its users clocking in at under age 30, and has an energy that older social media brands have lost over the years.

Function. Instagram also caters to an interesting audience. It offers publicly available posts like Twitter, but at the same time has greater control over spam and reasonably tight personal networks. It isn’t limited to just one social function, like LinkedIn is used for professional networking, and is approachable to a wide number of people. This maximizes Instagram’s potential user base, and naturally encourages people to interact more.

The Downsides

Unfortunately, Instagram isn’t a perfect platform. There are some downsides you’ll need to consider when developing your campaign:

No links. For starters, you can’t publish links in your Instagram posts, so it’s harder to lead people back to your site. The usual workaround is to include a link to your homepage in your main profile, and reference that link in your post. Though it may be annoying, it’s part of what cuts down on spam—making audiences more engaged.

Text trickery. People don’t jump on Instagram to read posts; [they want to see images](https://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2016/06/21/7-businesses-that-are-doing-instagram-marketing-the-right-way/%22%20%5Cl%20%221f830dad7d93%22%20%5Ct%20%22_self). If you have a written message to share, you may not reach as much of your audience as you’d like (unless you use the text as the image, meme style).

Conversation limits. Instagram also wasn’t created for extended back-and-forth conversations. If you’re looking for debates or dialogue, you may need to find another platform.

Tips for More Engagement

If you’re looking to get more engagement from your posts, you can try these strategies:

Image first. You don’t have to be a master photographer to build a successful Instagram following, but it doesn’t hurt to [learn some photography basics](http://improvephotography.com/photography-basics/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). The stronger your image is, the more it will stand out in users’ newsfeeds, and the more they’re going to engage with it. It helps if your image is dominated by a single color (or group of colors), and if your subject matter is clear and in focus.

Keep it light. Again, Instagram isn’t the place for extended or heavy engagements. In your image, posts, and comments, your goal should be to keep things as concise and light as possible. Get in and get out.

Always have a call to action. It’s nice to make your followers happy and keep your audience large, but if your followers aren’t actively doing something, you aren’t going to make your campaign profitable. Every post you make should have some kind of call to action, whether it’s leading people back to your site or having them compete in a contest.

Reward your followers. If you want your audience of followers to stick around, you need to make it worth their while. Reward your followers by giving them exclusive content, discounts, or freebies on occasion. Even a simple thank-you message can be enough to keep users around.