



PROMOTION

SEVEN HABITS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE BRANDS ON INSTAGRAM

BlogStar

From Content to Customer

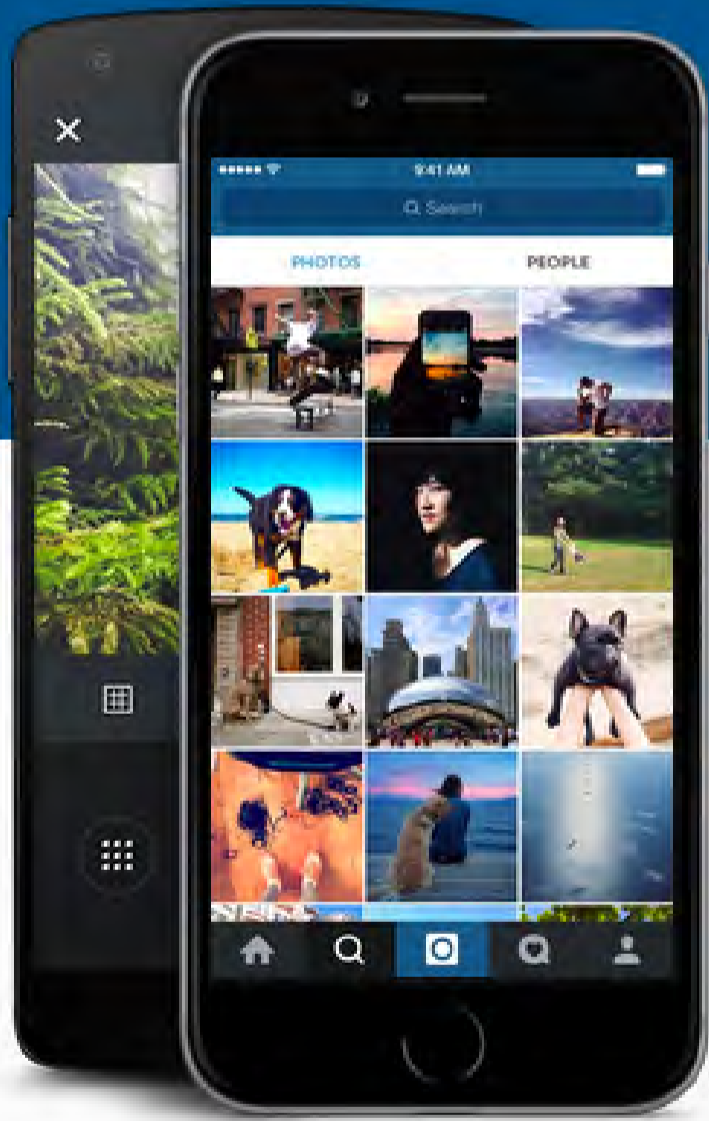


CHAPTER 1

TAP INTO THIRD
PARTY IMAGES

Once upon a time there was the Polaroid camera. Judged purely as photographic tools, the Polaroid was no great shakes but what it did offer in the pre-digital age was a means to snap a picture, print it out from the camera body in a matter of minutes and then pass the results around to anyone present in the room. It was a social lubricant. It's no accident that looking suspiciously like a Polaroid device provides Instagram with what has become an instantly recognisable icon.

As with the Polaroid, **Instagram** is all about taking pictures on the fly and sharing with a community - although in this case that community spreads beyond friends or relatives in a



The image shows a smartphone displaying the Instagram app interface. The screen is divided into two main sections: 'PHOTOS' and 'PEOPLE'. The 'PHOTOS' section shows a grid of various images, including a dog, a person, and a landscape. The 'PEOPLE' section shows a grid of profile pictures. The app's navigation bar at the bottom includes icons for home, search, post, activity, and profile. The background of the advertisement is a solid blue color.

Instagram

LOG IN

Capture and Share the World's Moments
Instagram is a free and simple way to share your life and keep up with other people.

Take a picture or video, then customize it with filters and creative tools. Post it on Instagram and share instantly on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and more—or send it directly as a private message. Find people to follow based on things you're into, and be part of an inspirational community.

Download on the **App Store**

GET IT ON **Google play**

room to a worldwide registered user base of more than 200 million, between them posting some 60 million pictures a day.

So for individuals, it's a social lubricant taken to the nth degree. For brands and marketers it offers a hugely effective platform to harness the power of the visual image to engage existing and potential customers. That is, of course, if you can generate the kind of imagery that attracts followers and encourages 'likes', and 'comments'.

And there are essentially two ways to generate images for Instagram. You can do it all yourself by setting up an Instagram account and posting pictures taken in-house by your team or marketing agency.

Alternatively, you can encourage your customers and potential customers to join the party by contributing their own Instagram snaps. The second approach might be described in terms of 'crowdsourcing' or as good-old-fashioned 'user generated content', but the terminology doesn't really matter. What it's really about is about drawing on the enthusiasm and creativity of your customers to create a real buzz around the brand and its products.

Encouraging Creativity

That doesn't necessarily mean inviting your customers to contribute pictures of your products, enhanced by the various filters that Instagram provides for its users. You certainly can do that, but some of the most successful Instagram campaigns have been much more tangential.

Witness Mercedes' campaign to promote its CLA coupe. Working on the premise that the four door vehicle had eschewed convention in favour of a wilder and freer approach to car design, the company invited Instagram users to submit photographs on the theme of untamed, with the best being put on show in an installation constructed in Paris. It was a campaign that related directly to the branding of the car itself while inviting digital photographers to interpret those values through their own choice of images linked by the

‘untamed theme’.

There’s no one way to approach this. For instance Red Bull has also encouraged instagrammers to get creative by submitting pictures featuring the brand colours of red blue and silver, with the best results appearing on billboards around Britain.

Product advocacy

Not all Instagram campaigning is quite so indirect. Arguably one of the best ways to drive interest in a brand is to encourage customer advocacy and once you turn to the currency of visual imagery an obvious step is to invite consumers to picture themselves (or their friends) with your products.

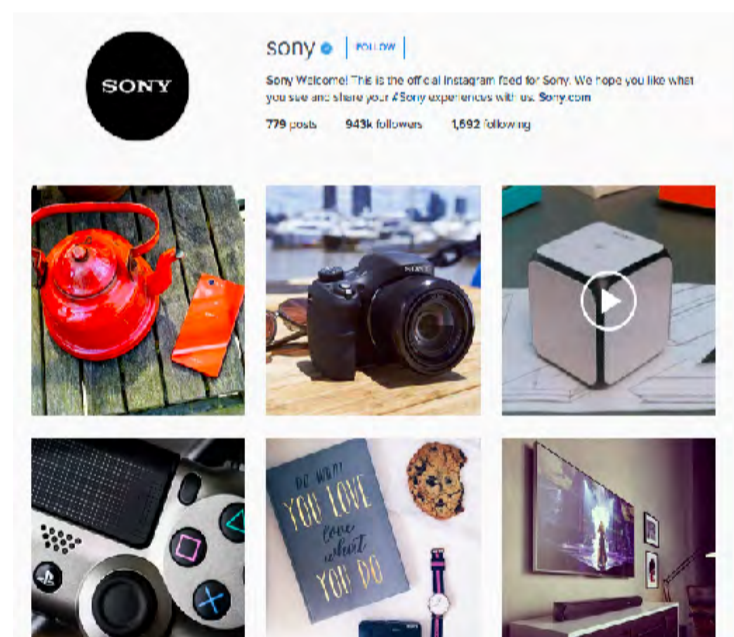
For instance, US clothing manufacturer Levi’s came up with an interesting variation on this theme in 2012 when it launched its **‘IamLevis’** campaign. This invited Instagram users to send shots of themselves wearing the company’s garments. In addition to the ‘bragging rights’ associated with posting a cool, Levi’s themed picture, all participants were entered into a competition for a model to front the company’s upcoming TV and press campaigns.

Incentivising

The truth is that Instagram is fun and a lot of consumers will post pictures to take part in campaigns simply for the joy of taking part.

However, a few incentives never do any harm

and one of the most effective ways to drive participation is to offer prizes. That could be a chance to become a Levis model or a financial incentive. For instance, when Sony invited instagrammers to submit photographs on the theme of Love, winning entries were rewarded by a \$50 gift voucher. User-generated pictures are the lifeblood of many Instagram campaigns. The key to success is giving the target market a real reason to take part.



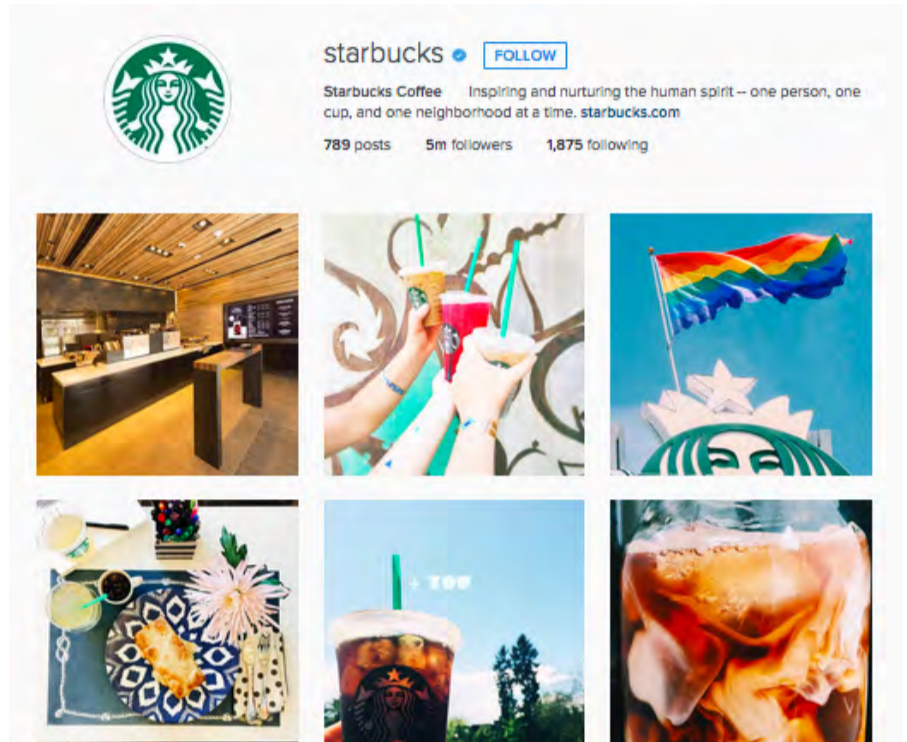


CHAPTER 2

IMAGE CREATION

The alternative to crowdsourcing your imagery is to create it in-house and use Instagram as a tool cum distribution channel for your visual messaging.

There a number of advantages to this, not least the fact that in producing your own Instagram pictures in-house or through an agency, you retain a degree of control over the imagery itself and the timing of posts. The biggest challenge, however, is that you are competing not only with other brands but with a whole universe of content produced for non-commercial reasons by millions of Instagram users. In other words, you need to provide something that will ‘cut through the background noise’.

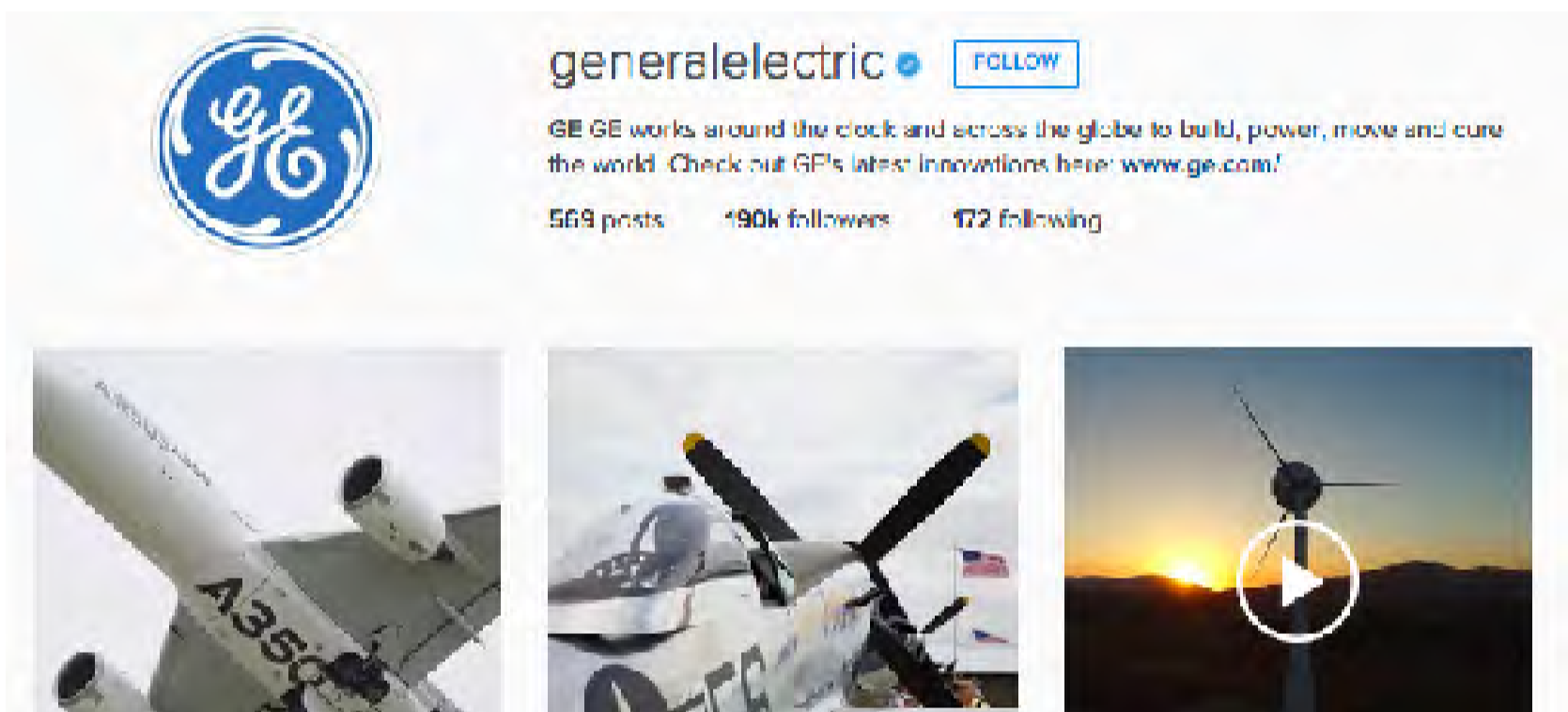


The rules of the road are not too different from those on, say, Facebook. Instagram is social media. Brands have a place and their messaging is enthusiastically embraced by many, but the primary purpose of Instagram is to allow individuals to share pictures with each other. So if you're to attract attention in a good way, your imagery has to bring something to the party. That something may manifest itself as 'useful' 'diverting' 'funny' or 'moving' but it has to, at some level, mean something to a significant number of Instagram users.

Behind the Scenes

So what does that mean in practice? Well in the case of Starbucks - an earlier adopter - Instagram has allowed the company to open a new channel of communication with its customers. It does this by posting a range of material, including behind the scenes pictures and shots of new products, including coffees. Starbucks also illustrates an important point. Go to its Instagram profile page and you'll find not only posts from Starbucks itself, but also user generated content posted by people using its stores. In other words, the content flows from two directions.

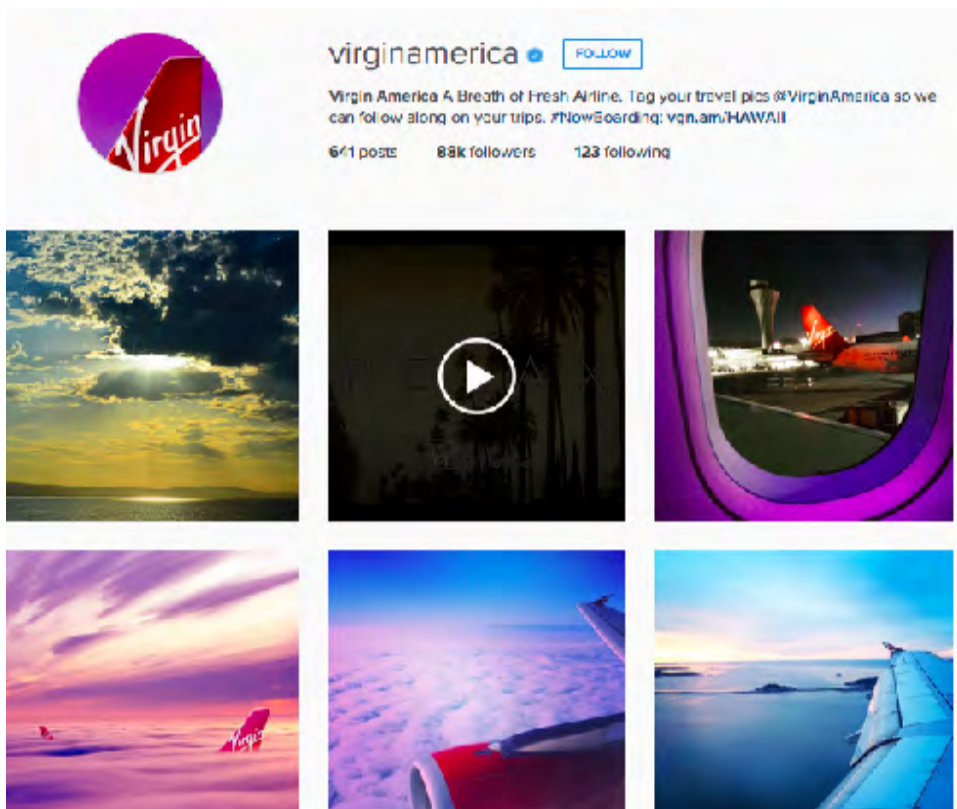
Arguably, Starbucks is well-placed to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by Instagram. Its coffee shops represent a social space where friends meet and it's an environment that encourages its customers to swap and share pictures. And while it has its critics, it's also a consumer facing brand that generates a lot of love. Consumers want to know what's going on inside the organisation and Instagram offers a route in.



But even B2B businesses can benefit from Instagram. Witness aero-engine manufacturer GE, which has won awards for its commitment to highlighting its achievements and company story through photographs. In terms of its Instagram presence, the company is best known for filtered-to-perfection shots of aero-engines, production lines and machinery photographed with its factories by employees and currently has more than 173,000 followers.

Get the Customers in Shot

The beauty of Instagram lies in the ability of mobile phones to capture moments as they happen and then share them with followers both in the community itself and across the wider social media universe of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, et al. And for a consumer facing business the opportunity is there to catch customers as they're trying on a jacket,



queuing for a sale or leaving the store with wrapped-up Christmas goods. People sell people and Instagram provides the means to share the experience of customers with others.

For instance, when Virgin America runs special promotions or gives gifts on its flights within the US, it also posts pictures on Instagram to underline its brand values of always doing something a bit special or different for its customers. This is a principle that can be applied in almost any situation. For instance, whether you're running a conference, staging an exhibition or launching a product with a party, posting pictures of the event via Instagram provides a souvenir for those attending and an enticing glimpse of what's been missed for everyone else.

Gift Aid

Your Instagram account can also be channel for gifts or giveaways, with pictures accompanied by, say product voucher codes or information on special offers. This gives customers a reason to follow your account and remain engaged. In the end whether you focus on generating pictures, encouraging third parties or combining the two, your use of Instagram should always add value for your audience.



CHAPTER 3

PROACTIVE USE OF HASHTAGS

Already familiar to all but the most casual users of Twitter, hashtags also play an important role in the Instagram universe.

As on Twitter, an Instagram hashtag is always prefixed with a # character, which is followed by a word or phrase that effectively categorizes the post, making it easier for other users to find. Thus, if a user searches the hash **#coffee**, Instagram will serve up a screen featuring pictures posted with that particular tag. Equally if an Instagram user is looking at particular interesting picture by tapping on the tag, he will be able to access every other picture with the same designation. As such, Hashtags are potentially a very blunt instrument. Popular tags are a gateway to an overwhelmingly large number of pictures and it's very easy for individual posts to get lost in the crowd. The Hashtag is an essential tool for Instagram marketers, but tagging should be done strategically with a clear purpose in mind.

Multiple Hashtags

That said, there is a case for achieving instant reach within the Instagram universe simply by using popular tags. So if you happen to be selling handbags, posting an Instagram picture with that particular tag will for (a short period) put your product in a prominent screen position when other users search under same designation.

And you can add multiple tags to the post and this is a proven way to increase reach and - if the visuals are compelling enough - drive a degree of engagement through likes and comments.

There are pros and cons to this approach. The chief pro is that you're placing your product in front of an audience with a predisposition to look at handbags - receptive eyes, in other words. The chief con is that you're not defining your own space. Your picture is simply added to a virtual album comprised of many thousands of other shots - some posted by amateurs, others by competitor brands.

The Brand Hashtag

The brand hashtag is a key component of most Instagram marketing and customer

engagement strategies. As with a more generalised tag, whenever a consumer taps on, say, **#starbucks**, Instagram will serve up all the photo and video posts relating to the brand. The pictures won't necessarily originate from the brand. For instance, search on **#kitkat** and you'll find thousands of pictures of the eponymous biscuit bar, submitted by an enormous range of people. And in many cases the kitkat hashtag will be just one of many. However, what a brand hashtag does do is provide a focus for anyone interested in the company and its products. And with brand-created pictures there too, the customer has the opportunity to click follow and receive regular posts from the company in question.

Supporting a Campaign

While 'brand hashtags' tend to be a focus for a broad range of material, you can also use the device to support a particular campaign or objective.

For instance, if you run a competition, the over-arching brand hashtag will probably not offer the best means to capture entries. A much better strategy is to invent a tag that is specific to that campaign.

A campaign hashtag might be a variation or extension of the brand name itself, such as **#Liptonbrightness** (the tag associated with a Lipton's tea competition) or the Levi's jeans companies **#iamlevis**.

On the other hand it could be more tangential, drawing inspiration from the brand values. Examples of this would be Veuve Clicquot's polo on the beach campaign - hashtag **#potb2012** - or the **#untamed** tag used to support the launch of Mercedes' latest CLA model.

The beauty of Hashtags is that they can be promoted across a broad range of digital and traditional media, driving consumers to an Instagram campaign. The Hashtags are a key tool not only for marketers but for all Instagram users. They can be used not only as a magnet for views and likes but also as a means to reinforce the brand and its messaging.



PROMOTION

CHAPTER 4

OPTIMISE YOUR POST
FREQUENCY

Marketers who ply their social media trade on Facebook and Twitter know the importance of balancing the imperative to offer regular posts and updates against the danger of boring the target audience.

It's not a dilemma unique to social media. From TV ads to direct mail there's a fine line between maintaining a regular flow of messaging that keeps you in the front of the customer's mind and over-egging the pudding through a torrent of largely unwanted communications.

But social media has its own unique hazards. You can bore your audience by running a TV ad too frequently but while your target consumer may zone out or switch off, you're not invading his or her personal space. Social media on the other hand, is where consumers go to meet friends and like-minded people. Those consumers are happy to let brands into the universe, but only if they add value and don't become intrusive.

So not only is it imperative that the content and promotional material upfront by brands is genuinely engaging, compelling and/or useful, it's also important to post at a frequency that optimises engagement. That's true on Facebook and Twitter and it's also the case with Instagram.

So what constitutes the right frequency? Truth to tell, there is no single formula but there are some useful rules of the road.

Establish a schedule

First and foremost, if you're posting your own imagery it's important to maintain a steady flow of updates. Fans of the brand - or at least some of them - will check regularly for new images but their enthusiasm will inevitably wane if the content isn't kept fresh. This is true of followers, who receive a regular feed from your brand, and also of those who search for images through hashtags.

But what exactly does a regular flow mean? This is where things begin to get a bit more complicated. A CEO writing a corporate blog probably only has to upload content once or twice a week to maintain interest. At the other end of the spectrum, the same company

might fire off a dozen or more tweets a day via Twitter. That's partly because tweets tend to have a shorter effective lifespan. The tweet lives in the moment. The considered 500 word blog that outlines company strategy or provides useful advice might be have a lifespan of weeks or months.

In the case of Instagram it's a case of testing the water. You start out by looking at the imagery you have to offer and how it could be useful to fans and followers. If you're promoting products, you might decide on an initial one or two posts a day. Once you've set up a schedule it's a case of watching the views and likes. If they're rising, there may be a demand for more uploads. On the other hand, a fall in likes, views and followers suggests that you're getting something wrong. That could mean the frequency is too great and your audience is getting bored. Equally it could indicate that you need to provide more to maintain interest.

So it's a question of experimentation. You start off by predicting a suitable frequency, analyse the response and then experiment by turning the tap up or down. Bear in mind though that the quality and relevance of the imagery will also have an impact on reach and engagement.

Getting the frequency right will require experimentation but the key requirement is a commitment to providing compelling images at a rate that will maintain interest and provide the maximum impact.



CHAPTER 5

GETTING MORE 'LIKES'

For those who use it regularly, Instagram can be a highly addictive medium and that's reflected in the sheer volume of activity.

Instagram is 200 million active monthly users who between them post an average of 60 million photographs a day, according to the network's own figures. So the good news is that every time you post a picture the potential audience is huge.

The bad news. Posting is easy but making an impact as measured by 'likes', follows', and comments is more difficult. These metrics - along with others, such as participation in competitions - are the measures of engagement with your content on Instagram.

A High Five

As on Facebook, a like is the equivalent of a 'high five'. It's a sign that that an Instagram member has not only seen your upload and appreciated it. At the very least, a like is a sign that you've made an impression. A high number of likes is an indicator that you're Instagram activity is finding a receptive audience.

Likes also get your pictures noticed, helping them to reach a wider audience, thus generating more likes in a snowball effect. In other words, they are important.

Getting your pictures seen

Unless your pictures are seen, they won't generate likes and there are various ways to improve your chances of reaching an audience. Arguably the most tried and trusted measure - dealt with in detail in a previous chapter - is to associate your pictures with popular, intuitive and relevant hashtags. This will make it much easier for interested members of the Instagram community to find your imagery. For instance, if a committed real-ale drinker has an interest in local beers, he might well key in #microbreweries. If you post under the same tag, there's a chance he'll find your imagery towards the top of the page. Multiple (relevant) hashtags will increase the chances of being seen by the beer drinking community.

Shares Across Networks and other Media

You can also share your pictures via other social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. This is particularly effective if you have built up a large community of fans or followers on another channel. Those followers won't necessarily be aware of your activity on Instagram, unless you actively promote your posts across all your networks. Using the same principle, you can also promote your Instagram activity via your website.

Be a Bit Social

Bear in mind, though, that Instagram is a social network and that simply 'broadcasting' pictures to a grateful public is very much an 'old media' way of thinking. In addition to posting your own material, commenting and liking the imagery posted by others will encourage reciprocation.

Buying Likes

As is the case on other social media channels, you can buy 'likes' on Instagram. This will have the short term effect of making your pictures appear more popular than they actually are and perhaps generate a temporary buzz (coupled with a snowball effect) but the obvious downside is that unless your content is strong enough to generate likes in its own right, any benefits are likely to have a limited longevity.

And ultimately the key to generating likes is to post images that have a value to your target market. That in turn will generate followers.





CHAPTER 6

TURNING 'LIKES' INTO 'FOLLOWS'

If a like is a high five — a momentary gesture of appreciation, forgotten in an instant— a follow represents a much higher degree of commitment on the part the Instagram user.

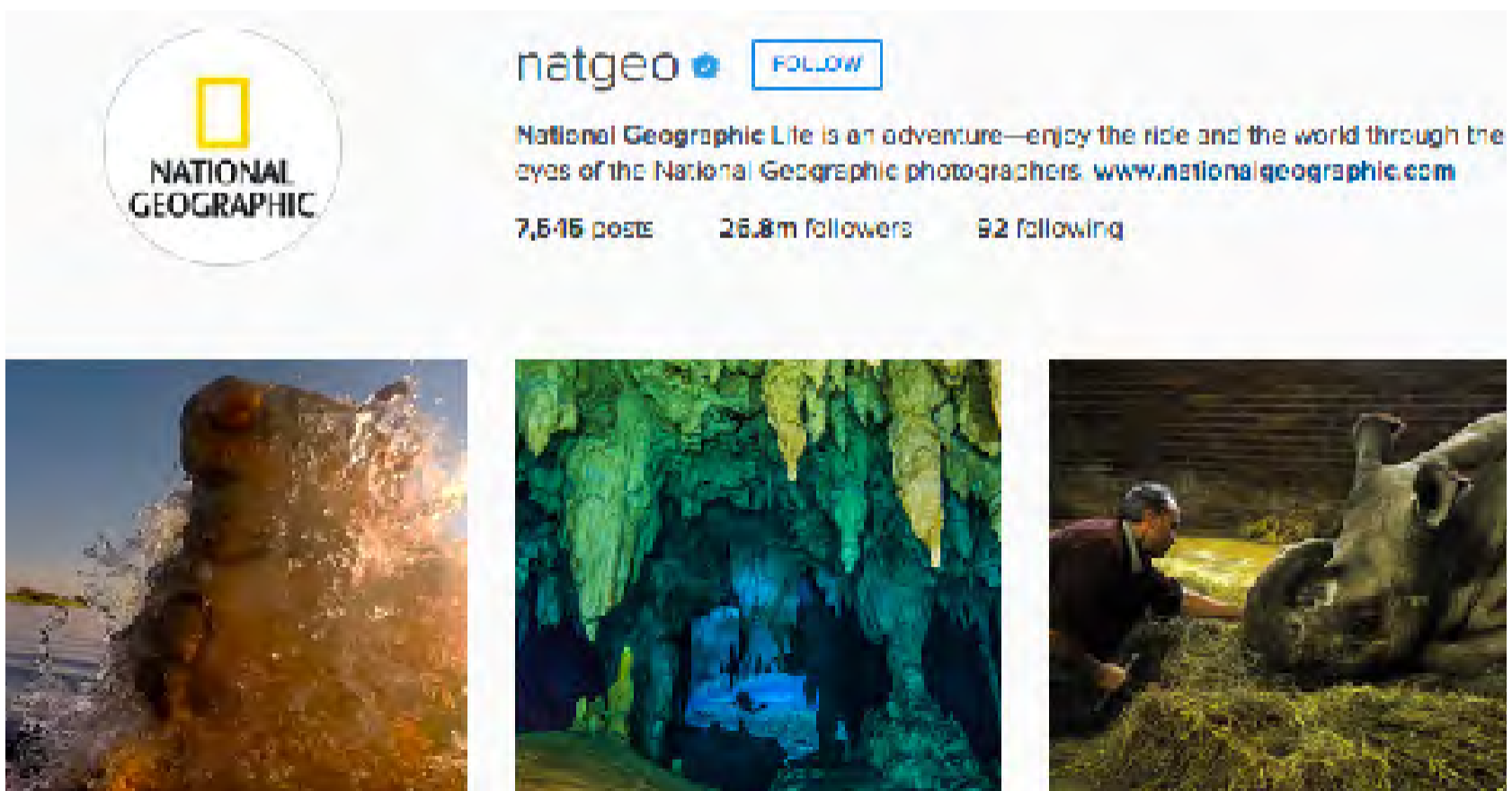
Think of this way. When an individual taps the follow button, your brand will become part of his or her daily Instagram experience. Every time they open up the app they'll see the pictures associated with your account, along with any comments. They also have an opportunity to become part of any conversation through their own comments and share these via their other social networks.

But here's the thing. The vast majority of 'civilians' on Instagram are following each other and posting pictures of nights out, cute pets, holiday landscapes and new boyfriends/girlfriends onto each other's feeds. To be part of that universe, the brand has to offer something a bit special.

But what does that mean in practice?

Be Beautiful

The stock answer is that success on Instagram is predicated on stunning or at the very



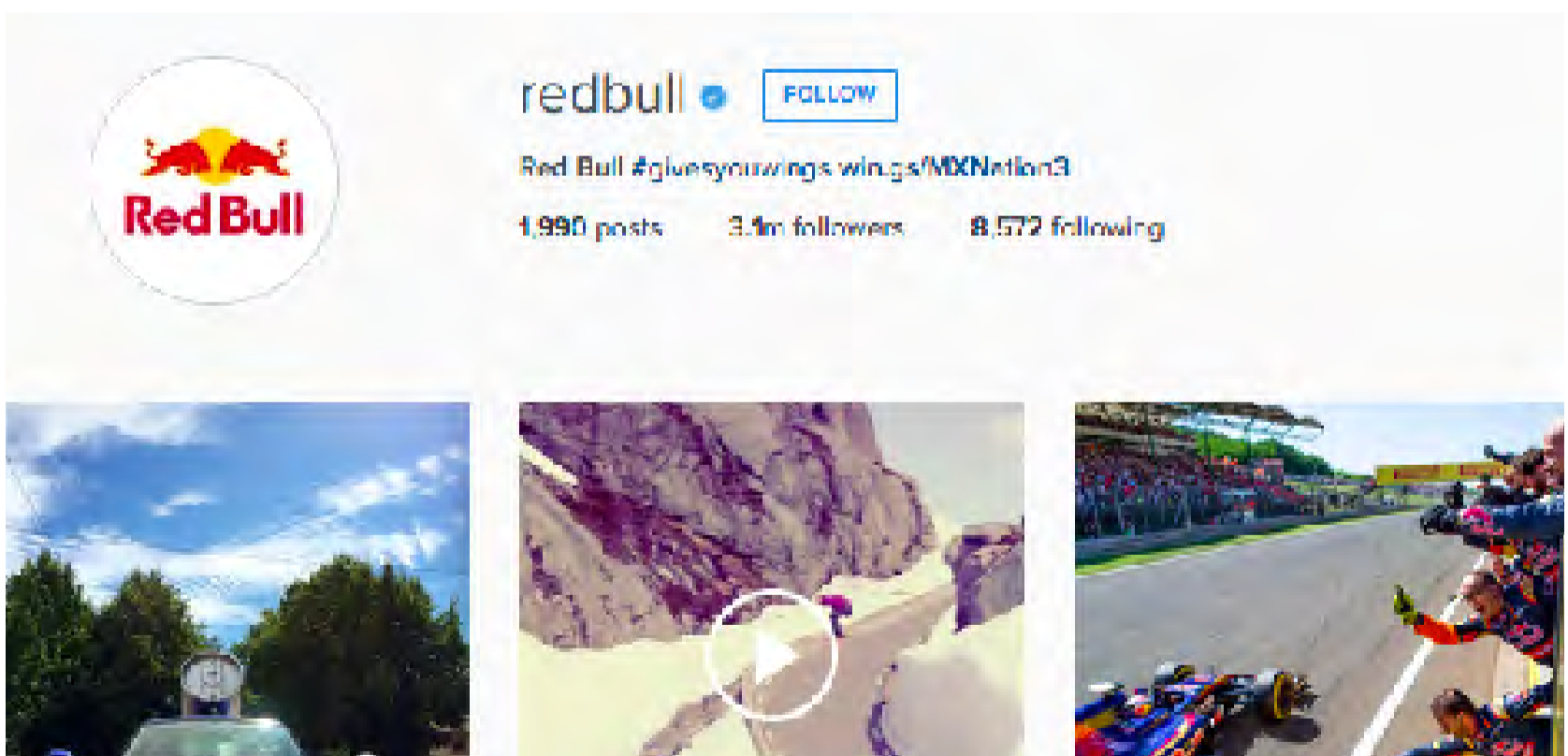
least arresting imagery. It is, after all, a visual medium. Instagram's users are there for pictures (and latterly video) rather than text. A brand that can deliver captivating images will have a head start when it comes to gathering followers.

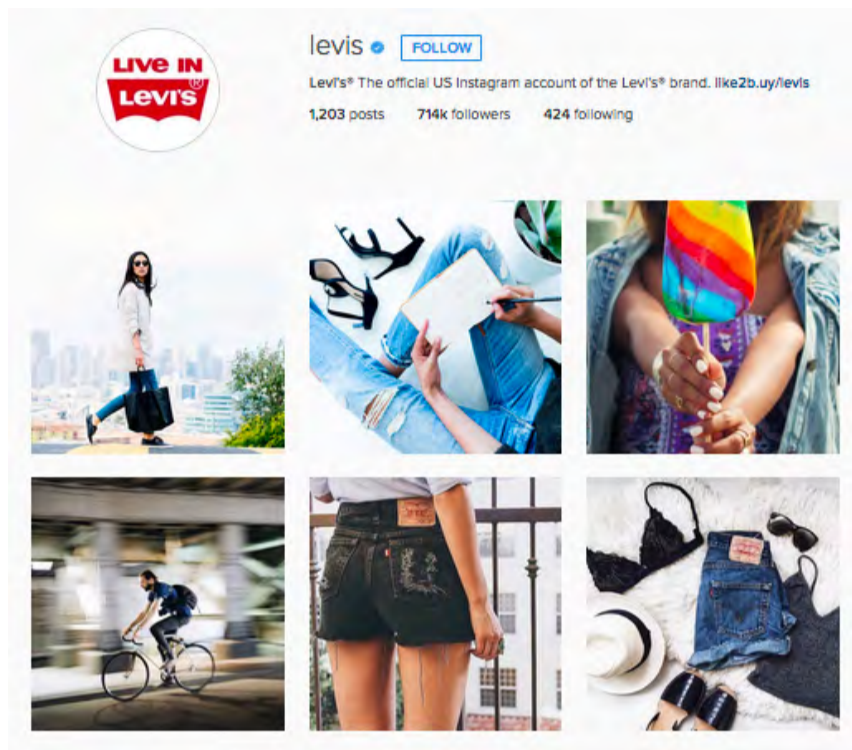
The power of the image is evidenced by National Geographic which has attracted more than 6 million follows through a mix of evocative landscape and ethnographic shots which reflect the print publication's content. But the adjective 'stunning' could be equally applied to the sporting pictures posted by Nike (5 million follows), Starbucks' (3 million) product shots and General Electric's aero-engines.

These are brands that can muster huge resources behind their Instagram campaigning, but any business can tap into the spirit of the network by enhancing basic image through judicious use of the available Instagram filters.

Find a Purpose

In some cases, an Instagram user may follow a brand account simply because he or she likes the imagery but that's unlikely to be enough to build and sustain an audience. Ideally the image/follow strategy should have a purpose that aligns the interests of the target consumer with the objectives of the brand itself. Arguably some brands have it easier





than others. Celebrities tend to do well on Instagram - as they do on Twitter and Facebook - because their fans are seeking to tap into a certain lifestyle. For the followers it's a way of experiencing that lifestyle second hand. For the celebrities, it's a means to maintaining a vital connection with their fans. A win/win.

Iconic consumer facing brands can pull off the same trick, by using pictures to reinforce the brand values it is offering. You can do this by being evocative. For instance, a restaurant chain might choose to capture the essence of its food and ambiance. Equally though, brands can thrive on Instagram by linking their own values to motivational or inspirational images that may or may not feature products. Witness Red Bulls feed, which often features skydiving and motorsport images.

Inspiration is also a driver for fashion brands. Levi's uploads of young and good looking adults wearing its clothes not only promote the clothes themselves, they also provide inspiration as to how to wear them. Fashion brands that post pictures of customers wearing their products are playing a variant of the same game.

And of course, you might simply choose to be useful by showing customers new or established products on a regular basis. The common factor is that to win and retain followers you must give them a reason for hosting your uploads each and every day on the limited real estate of their smartphone screens. **A**tracting followers - especially in large



CHAPTER 7

MEASURING ENGAGEMENT

numbers - is clearly a good thing as it means you have created an Instagram community that is receptive to your pictures. But the real test of Instagram success is the degree to which you are engaging with those followers.

Think of it this way. There are various ways to drive likes and bring followers on board through active promotion of your Instagram activity and a focus on imagery targeted on your core market. But the question is whether those followers are merely passive recipients of your uploads, or are they genuinely engaging with the content.

It's a conundrum is also familiar to Facebook marketers as well, where a company might have thousands of fan page likes but very little real engagement in terms of shares and comments.

So as is the case with Facebook, it's vital to measure engagement on Instagram and act on the findings.

Measure Reaction to Your Own Posts

When you post regularly onto Instagram, recipients can like or comment on each post. They also, of course, have the option of unfollowing. These responses provide three key metrics. Like and comment ratios can be used to identify both the pictures that work and those that fall on the visual equivalent of deaf ears. This in turn provides an opportunity to tailor future output for maximum impact.

In practice, by using a tool such as Statigram (www.statigram.com) you can measure:

- *Daily follower gain and loss*
- *Likes and comments posted*
- *Trends in terms of likes and comments posted.*
- *Third Party Content*

Of course, interaction with your brand, probably won't be limited to responses to your own posts. Instagram is rife with brand-related user-generated content - some positive, some negative. This third party material lies largely outside the control of individual companies but it, nevertheless, represents another level of interaction and engagement.



And there are opportunities. By monitoring and analysing activity associated with your brand name you can identify not only existing and potential brand advocates but also enter into the conversation through your own likes and comments. Dealing with negative posts is more difficult, but awareness that your brand is being undermined-either through imagery or comment- does provide an opportunity to gather market-intelligence and, where appropriate, address any problems.

Campaigns

Similar measurement principles apply to campaigns - and particular competitions - involving third party pictures. In addition to measuring participation, brands should also be looking closely at comments, likes and shares on other networks.

As Facebook is fond of telling its own business users, visual imagery provides the most powerful means for companies to engage with their audience. Instagram has distilled that insight into a simple, intuitive and hugely addictive social media channel. It's a medium that offers huge opportunities for engagement, but it's also a channel that requires ongoing measurement of results and a willingness to respond to the demands and changing preferences of the audience.

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