

Back to school with social media

A primer for students of
social media marketing



UNION
metrics

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA SCHOOL?

Social media changes at a rapid pace, and even for the best of us, it can be hard to keep up with changes. That means now is the perfect time to review your social strategy to be sure you're directing your resources to the right place.

With that in mind, we put together a Social Media School series to cover some of the essential social media marketing concepts. That includes everything from tips for increasing engagement to how to write a good Tweet (there's more to it than you might assume) or create more compelling Instagram content.

Take it all in as a refresher course, a place to build from if you're newer to social media marketing, or skip around to what's most relevant to your social strategy at the moment. So grab your No. 2 pencil and let's get started!

WRITING A GOOD TWEET

A Tweet seems so simple. With just 140 characters, how can there be an art to something so small? It turns out there's a lot you can do within that small space, so let's talk about how to write a good Tweet. And this isn't just for those newer to Twitter; any seasoned social media marketer can always use a review of the basics to keep from getting stuck churning out the same Tweets over and over again.

First: Check the simple stuff and be your own ruthless copy editor. You want to be sure the language of your Tweet flows well and isn't clunky. Your message needs to be concise but meaningful.

Keep in mind that you do have a little more room to work with now that media like photos and videos don't take up any of the character limit, but keep in mind that (as of this writing) emojis do still eat into that limit.

Next, you want to keep your audience in mind. How do you want to talk to them? You should be working from an established brand voice and guidelines for how your brand communicates, but if you haven't laid those out yet start by asking how you would want to be spoken to in their place.

Take a look at the bios and timelines of your followers. What keywords do they contain, what level of expertise do they have in your industry? Keep an eye out for patterns and craft your content to meet their needs.

Make sure you're also keeping your goals in mind. Do you have a specific campaign in place right now? Does your Tweet reinforce or call back to it? You always want to keep your brand voice and values in mind, but also be sure you're always referring to ongoing campaigns in a way that isn't repetitive or obnoxious. Tweak copy and visuals to keep things fresh.

Which brings us to our next tip: Keep it interesting. Think about how you can spice a Tweet up to make it more visually interesting. Does it make sense to add an image? A GIF? Some emojis? Video? Test different options over time to see which your audience responds to best and work with those.

You also want to strategize with hashtags to boost your reach; we'll cover that in the next section.

Using hashtags on Twitter

A lot of people ask: Where should I use hashtags? First, the very basics. Individuals, personal brands and brands should all use hashtags on Twitter and Instagram. Facebook doesn't see a lot of hashtag use and we as a brand have only seen positive feedback when using "national day" hashtags on Facebook (like #NationalRunningDay), but it's worth testing for your particular brand, especially if you have a popular event hashtag you're using across platforms. Try it in a few posts and see if it gives you a boost.

How should you use hashtags? On Twitter, stick to about one hashtag per Tweet; more than two starts to look spammy very quickly and you also want to use your character limit to convey as much information as possible, not to use as many hashtags as possible.

The key is to keep them relevant. We'll also take this moment to reiterate The Golden Hashtag Rule: Always, always research hashtags before you use them. This way you'll see if they're already in use and most importantly, how they're being used if they are. Something that seems straightforward might not be and you can avoid a crisis communication situation with a few minutes worth of searching, clicking and scrolling.

Measuring Twitter engagement

Finally, be sure you're measuring what you're posting. Make measuring hashtag performance a regular part of your metrics reviews. You can use something like our Instagram account checkup to see which hashtag is getting your brand the most engagement, or go more in-depth with our comprehensive analytics.

The latter will give you a chart mapping the frequency and effectiveness of the hashtags you've been using in any particular time:

And also a table that lays out different engagement metrics for each hashtag, letting you choose the ones that get you the response you want from your audience.

This will depend on what your specific goals are for your brand on Instagram: Are you striving to become a thought leader in your industry? Build an Instagram

community for your fans and followers? Establish your brand as a lifestyle brand? Think about which hashtags will help you reach those goals and work on finding more related to them to test on your future posts (the explore pages are great for this as well as checking in on what industry influencers are using).

CREATING MORE COMPELLING INSTAGRAM CONTENT

A visual content marketing strategy is key to your larger content marketing, especially since having a strong visual identity makes it easy for your customers, fans and followers to find and identify you across social media platforms.

Your visual identity should be a cohesive part of your larger brand values and voice and it's okay if it takes a while to develop it. It should be an ongoing project that you consistently tweak once you have established something solid.

Measuring engagement on Instagram

Part of establishing that is to pay attention to feedback from your fans and followers on Instagram via metrics. Some metrics will matter more than others depending on your specific goals for your brand (and for your brand on Instagram), but for the most part you should pay attention to the following:

Likes: How many likes per post are you getting on average? While many consider likes a vanity metric, trends over time are important and they can act as a canary in a coal mine. Any sudden spike in likes or severe drop tells you that something in your content resonated very strongly either positively or negatively. Either way, you need to pay attention.

Comments: This is an engagement metric a little above likes; it takes more effort to leave a comment than it does to double-tap a photo as you scroll down your stream. Pay attention to who regularly comments on your posts and also if followers are tagging other accounts in your comments; that means your post resonated enough that they wanted to share it (and publicly instead of in a message).

Top post engagement: How does your top post perform relative to your average post? Compare a few of your top performing posts and see what patterns you can pick out: Color themes, composition, subject matter (people vs. no people, selfie vs.

non-selfie, etc) hashtags used, time of day posted, and anything else you can identify.

Engagement rate: What percentage of your followers are engaging with your content? This is more important than the overall numbers of followers that you have, because it means they're interested in what you're sharing and want more of what they're most interested in. How can you give them that? Figure that out and you'll increase your engagement rate.

Follower growth rate: How quickly are you gaining new followers? You want to look at your overall trend over time; hopefully it climbs steadily upward. Pay special attention to any spikes in either direction and determine what caused them. A particular piece of content? A bot purge from Instagram? Try to identify and block bots as they follow you so they don't affect your numbers.

Unique fans: How many different people are engaging with your content? The more unique people are interested in what you're posting, the better.

Decide which metrics are most important to your brand depending on what your goals are on Instagram, then work to improve them. Need some tips on how to do that?

Tip 1: Find relevant accounts to follow

Instagram will suggest several related accounts for you to follow when you follow a new one, but you can also use the explore pages to find accounts using hashtags relevant to your industry. Accounts with a lot of engagement that show up frequently are likely influencers in that space and you should pay special attention to their strategy, content, hashtags and consider how your brand can best interact with them.

Tip 2: Post regularly and regularly test new times to post

Our past research on Instagram has shown that a consistent posting schedule is more important than any particular time that you post, but you should also use something like our free Instagram account checkup or more comprehensive Instagram analytics to find out the best time to post and when your audience is most active on the app.

With that in mind you should also try out new times of day to post; you might be surprised at when your particular audience is active!

Tip 3: Explore and like photos on niche hashtags

Hashtags are still absolutely the key to discovery on Instagram and niche hashtags are a big part of this; they're the smaller hashtags you can find by searching related hashtags when you use a big one (from #cocktails to #manhattanmonday, for example) and they're a great way to narrow down really dedicated audience members in your industry. Spend a little time exploring, searching these hashtags out and testing them.

Tip 4: Add niche hashtags later for a second boost

One way to test them is to add them to your Instagram posts a little while after you've initially posted them for a second boost in exposure. Don't wait days or months, rather set a calendar reminder for an hour or so- maybe a few- after your initial post and add a niche hashtag to see what it does for your engagement. Why the specifics on time? Instagram will add your post to the hashtag explore page at the original time you uploaded it, not at the time you add the hashtag. That's also why this doesn't work for larger, more popular hashtags (your post will just get lost in the sea of older posts).

Tip 5: Try new things with your photography

This is why keeping tabs on your competitors and influencers in your industry is so important; they can give you a lot of ideas for different ways to present your own content. Never outright copy, but definitely draw inspiration from those sources as well as your general Instagram stream.

Tip 6: Incorporate video into your Instagram posting strategy

If you haven't already, you should definitely test adding some video posts to your Instagram content strategy. Test different video formats: Instagram's own apps Boomerang (a sort of GIF) and Hyperlapse (for timelapse videos), as well as regular videos and the formats offered in Stories.

As a bonus tip: You can record something in Stories to use the backwards or hands-free mode, then save it to upload to your regular profiles rather than in Stories itself. This is extremely helpful for smaller teams with limited resources.

Tip 7: Test different apps to create quality content on a budget

Aside from Instagram's own apps, there are some quality third-party apps out there worth testing and adding to your Instagram content-creation rotation. We recommend Repost to share others Instagram posts with credit (as there is, of this writing, no native way to "regram" content), InstaSize to resize photos for Stories that you took in a camera app (Stories otherwise arbitrarily crops them) and HypeType to add music, text and more to videos.

EXPERIMENTING WITH ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is much more than just counting likes. Engagement shows you what's resonating with your audience. Measuring different forms of engagement helps you understand what content works, when and with whom, even why.

Some engagement metrics will matter more to you than others. Decide what your goals are and how you'll measure them to know you're making progress. For example, here are the metrics we would recommend you start with on Twitter:

- Actual Impressions: How many times a Tweet has been viewed.
- Potential impressions: How many times a Tweet could have been viewed.
- Replies: How many replies a Tweet received.
- Retweets: How many retweets a Tweet received.
- Likes: How many likes (favorites) this Tweet received.
- Total engagements: The total number of all engagements a Tweet received, including clicks, media views and follows.
- Audience reached: The true reach, number of unique people who saw a Tweet.
- Engaged audience: The true number of people who did something to a Tweet.

Before you can start experimenting to improve your engagement rate, you need to establish a baseline. We recommend tracking your metrics in a spreadsheet, or using something like our comprehensive analytics to get everything you need in one place at one time (that you can also easily filter for specific date ranges).

Keep in mind that most people's efficiency ratio will be somewhere between 1 and 20%. So if you find out today that yours is 3% don't panic; that's a perfectly reasonable number that still has room for improvement.

Try these experiments to improve it (some will be similar to what we just covered for improving on Instagram):

Experiment 1: Analyze your recent Tweets. Taking stock of 5 or so of your best performing recent Tweets, look for patterns.

Experiment 2: Post at a different time. Brands often find a time that works well for their audience and stick with it, which is fine, but since you can easily schedule posts ahead of time on Twitter using tools like TweetDeck, we encourage you to test out different times to see what might resonate with your audience. You might have some active followers in London, for example, that would enjoy some midnight Tweets because that's their breakfast time.

Experiment 3: Post more often. Twitter is a fast-moving platform so it's difficult to post often enough to really overwhelm your followers. If you're already posting a handful of times a day, kill two birds with one stone by scheduling some more Tweets during the times you usually stay quiet, like the middle of the night or very early morning.

Experiment 4: Share the same content more than once. Don't post the exact same thing every hour on the hour, but tweak your copy and presentation and share it several times with different CTAs. Pay attention to what gets the most engagement and use it as a template going forward.

Experiment 5: Include different hashtags in your Tweets. If you always use the same handful of hashtags in your Tweets take the time to find some new ones to test. Run them in our free Twitter snapshot report to get a quick idea of how they're being used and how much they're being used, then see how they work for you.

Experiment 6: Follow new, relevant accounts. Every quarter or so you should do an audit of your followers. Unfollow any inactive or irrelevant accounts and spend time looking at who your competitors and industry influencers follow and add some of them to your following roster. Chances are they will at least check you out, if not follow you back.

Experiment 7: Mention other accounts. If you curate a lot of content from your industry that you share on your account, tag the author when you get the chance or even just Tweet at them to let you know you liked a piece they wrote or some research they contributed to. Always make these mentions meaningful; don't just tag popular accounts with random questions. That's a transparent tactic that will most likely be ignored, or worst case scenario, get you blocked.

Experiment 8: Test media. Especially when you're sharing the same content more than once you want to see if it connects with your audience better using images, video, GIFs, whatever you can create and share. Keep using more of what your audience engages with and less of what they don't.

For best results, isolate these experiments as much as possible, running each one for two to six weeks at a time and paying attention to your results. Implement one at a time so you can tell which have the most impact on the metrics that matter the most to your brand.

While you can't control everything with social- there are always going to be seasonal impacts as well as impacts from the news cycle- being as careful as possible with these experiments should let you know which individual factors affect your particular brand the most.

QUESTIONS?

Congratulations! You've completed your first semester of Social Media School!

If you want more details around some of these topics, definitely check out our resources page and our blog, both of which have deeper dives into all of this subject matter. And best of all, it's all free.

If you still have questions, you can always find us on Twitter at [@UnionMetrics](#) or shoot us an email at marketing@unionmetrics.com.