



RESOURCE GUIDE

INSTAGRAM FOR TOURISM BUSINESSES



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Visuals are key to successful tourism marketing. Not only do people want to be able to read about your destination, they want to see it. Instagram is one of many social media platforms built around visual posts that tourism operators may want to consider when creating their digital marketing strategy.

INSTAGRAM 101

INSTAGRAM IS AN APPLICATION BASED AROUND SHARING PHOTOS AND VIDEOS

The app is available on Apple iOS, Android, and Windows. It is ideal for uploading visual content to share with your business' followers. Encourage customers to comment on your posts and extend your reach even further.

INSTAGRAM IS OWNED BY FACEBOOK

Facebook purchased Instagram in 2012, so users are familiar with the advertising network and the basic engagement structures such as likes, comments, follows, and followers.

INSTAGRAM SUPPORTS HASHTAGS

Hashtags became popular on Twitter as a way to sort and highlight information into different topics. Hashtags have been successfully integrated into Instagram and play an important role in finding and organizing content.

INSTAGRAM IS POWERED BY AN ALGORITHM

Algorithms are behind-the-scenes calculations intended to deliver the most relevant content available to each user, rather than deliver content chronologically. Although we will never know all the details behind these algorithms, they challenge marketers to create content that is relevant to their audience to ensure that posts are seen.

INSTAGRAM ALLOWS USERS TO CREATE A BUSINESS PROFILE

When owners switch from a personal profile to a business profile, they gain access to Instagram Insights (analytics), and other features such as a contact button and a section for the business address.

INSTAGRAM HAS BECOME PART OF TRAVELLERS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Travellers often come in contact with a brand multiple times during their decision-making process. Instagram is a popular touchpoint for tourism operators to engage with their customers because the focus on visuals makes Instagram a popular tool for travel research and planning.

INSTAGRAM IS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY MOBILE

The app works well for reaching audiences that prefer mobile devices to computers. Instagram does not allow for links inside organic posts, so the focus is sharing everything on the app, rather than sending people to other online resources.

Cover image: Jeff Bartlett @photojbartlett



USING INSTAGRAM TO TELL YOUR TOURISM STORY

Instagram was built to display photos, videos, and other rich visual media. The combination of a quality visual and a well-thought-out description will help maximize the impact of your posts.

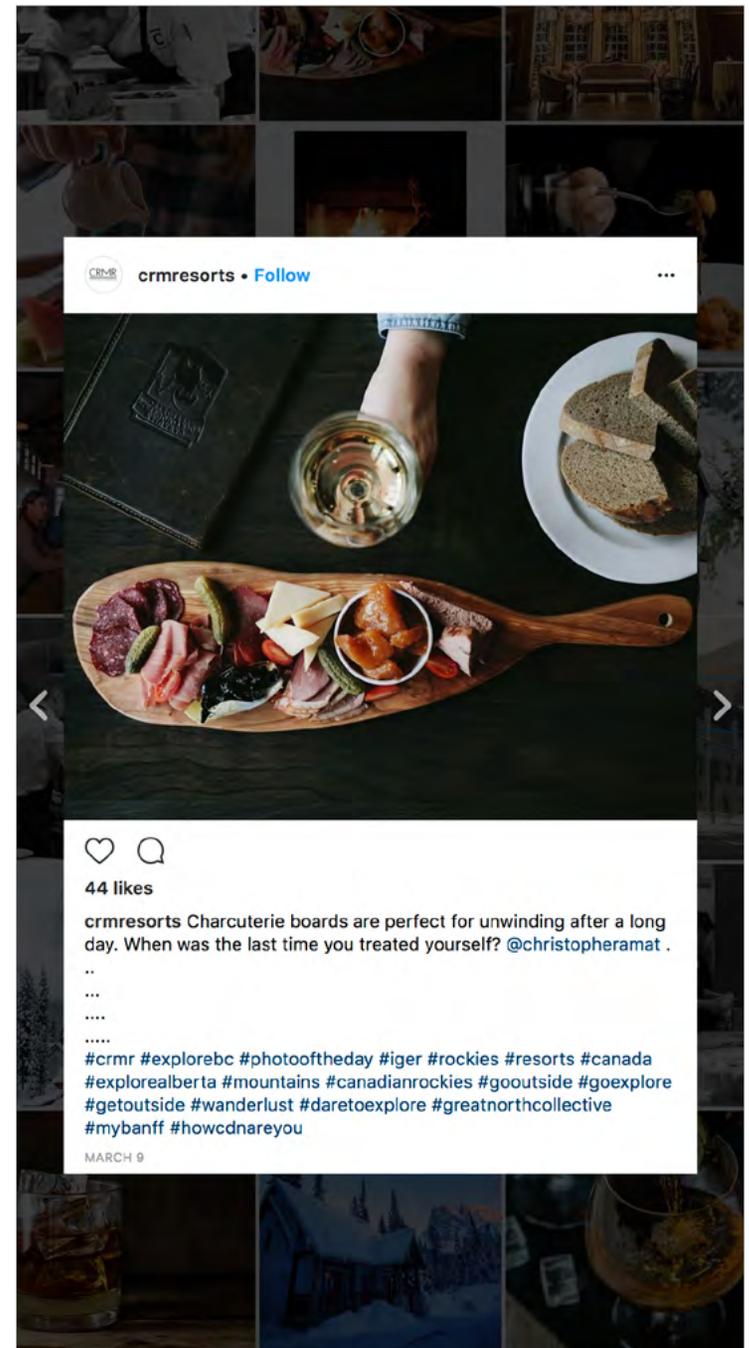
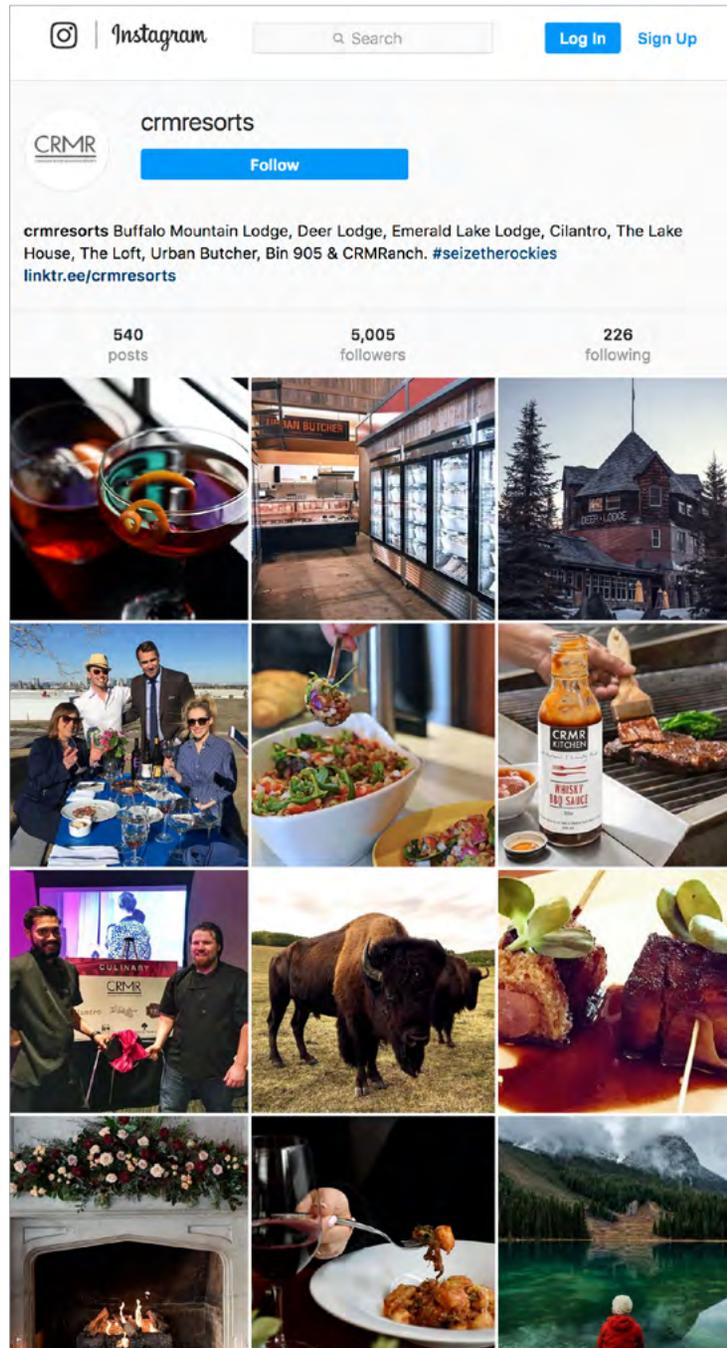
The visual nature of Instagram makes it a perfect fit for tourism businesses. Like any social media channel, business operators need to focus their posts on storytelling instead of selling. The goal of creating relevant and memorable content on Instagram is to inspire customers to consider your destination when making travel plans.

Try tying each post into the next and tell a story through visuals. The human eye responds better to social media that is visually consistent and easy to scroll through. Users will be engaged by a series of posts that tell a story.

Storytelling on social media requires a clear understanding of your audience. If you can create content that they find relatable, it stands a better chance of evoking positive emotions. These positive emotions help establish a connection between you and your audience.

USING INSTAGRAM TO TELL A STORY – CANADIAN ROCKY MOUNTAIN RESORTS

Canadian Rocky Mountain Resorts uses regular food and beverage photos to help tell their story. Photos of wine, plated food, and the people behind their creations showcase their culinary talents. The resort does a nice job of including photos of their properties and surrounding landscapes.



CREATING INSTAGRAM CONTENT

1. CREATING YOUR INSTAGRAM CONTENT PLAN

To ensure your Instagram account aligns with your marketing goals, invest time in creating an Instagram content plan. This is a great way to organize and maintain the vision you have for your business while guiding the voice and aesthetic representation you want to use.

An Instagram content plan is just one part of your overall content plan and should include several elements.

QUICK TIP

Your Instagram account should be consistent in both message and style.

GOALS

Before you decide what type of content you should share on Instagram, clearly identify the goals of your business profile. To do this, ask yourself, “When someone finds our Instagram profile, what do we want them to do?” In most cases, tourism business operators will use Instagram as a tool for brand awareness. The construction of a content plan, with goals and a strategy, is strongly recommended to create a successful Instagram account.

KEY MESSAGING

Once you have decided on your goals for Instagram, you can identify the key messages your Instagram posts should adhere to. If a hotel operator uses Instagram as a tool to increase brand awareness, they might focus on key messages such as:

- Their commitment to fostering an eco-friendly experience – posts focus on the environmentally friendly aspects of their facility.
- Incredible surroundings – posts showcase the scenery found around the hotel and region.
- Exceptional customer service – posts give customers a behind-the-scenes look at the hotel and key staff.
- World class dining – posts highlight dining experiences at the hotel.

It is important for marketers to remember their business mission statement and core values when sharing key messaging through Instagram. Brand-centric key messaging will keep your business’ voice consistent and memorable to potential customers.

SAMPLE POST STRUCTURE

Your Instagram account should be consistent in both message and style. Just like your website or offline marketing collateral, your Instagram profile is an extension of your brand. Customers appreciate consistency on social media. When they decide to follow a brand on a channel such as Instagram, they want to receive relevant and trustworthy content on a regular basis. One way for a business owner to satisfy the needs of their audience is to maintain a consistent post structure.

Your content plan should outline what a good post looks like. This includes information around the structure of the description, the number of hashtags used, which hashtags are regularly used, the content of visuals, and guidelines around tagging other accounts. For example, a business may choose to make all of their descriptions between 25 and 50 words. They might also decide to include 3-5 hashtags with each post, two being location-based (where the content is from) and the rest being activity-based (what the content is about).

IMAGE TREATMENTS

Although you may feel compelled to experiment with filters, remember to keep your visuals consistent. Your content plan should include the names of which filters fit the brand and how they should be used when posting. In an effort to maintain brand consistency, your business should use the same one or two filters.



2. TYPES OF CONTENT THAT CAN BE POSTED ON INSTAGRAM

Although Instagram focuses on visual content, it takes more than posting visually pleasing pictures to be successful on the platform. Instagram is one of the many touchpoints that a customer will discover during their travel planning. If a business can consistently post quality visuals that showcase their product, it will help keep them top of mind with the customer. These visuals, along with information from other touchpoints like websites, advertisements, social media channels, and branded content, help to educate the customer on what your business has to offer.

IMAGES

Pictures are your bread and butter. You should aim to post photos that are high quality, free of pixelation, well-composed, visually exciting, and capable of standing out in a feed.

VIDEOS

Videos are a powerful tool when they are kept short. Although the platform allows for videos between 3 and 60 seconds, the ideal video length for Instagram is 30 seconds. Use apps like Boomerang to create video loops that provide movement to your posts and keep visitors engaged. If a situation or product requires a longer video, you may want to create a series of shorter ones that tell your story. An ideal Instagram video helps tell the brand story and is visual enough to grab the attention of a busy audience. When possible, include a subject like a person or an animal to capture visitor interest.

3. INSTAGRAM DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

Instagram continually creates new and innovative ways for businesses to generate and deliver content. It is worthwhile for any marketer using Instagram to understand the platform's unique offerings so they can effectively engage with audiences.

POSTING TO YOUR FEED

The main feed is a mix of recommended posts, sponsored content, and user-submitted content in semi-chronological order. Users are able to post single images, multi-image galleries, and videos on their feed.

STORIES

Instagram provides users with a raw alternative to a well-curated feed with the Stories tool. Stories are often used by businesses for 'on the fly' content or updating their audience on day-to-day activities of the business. Stories work best when they get to the point by serving the important content or calls-to-action immediately. Explore Edmonton (@exploreedmonton) regularly creates stories featuring content submitted through the #exploreedmonton hashtag.

HIGHLIGHTS

Think of Highlights as a digital photo album. This tool allows you to curate and combine the best past Stories content into collections that viewers can play at any time.

4. ENGAGING AND RESPONDING

Like all social media channels, users have the ability to engage with your content on Instagram. It is important to monitor your posts for comments and respond as necessary. Commenting can also be a great way to extend your brand beyond your own profile. Operators that make it a point of leaving informative and helpful comments on content related to their region and industry are more likely to be seen by a larger audience.

QUICK TIP

It is important to monitor your posts for comments and respond as necessary.

USING PROPER FORMATTING FOR POSTING - CILANTRO AND CHIVE

Cilantro and Chive is a family owned and operated restaurant in Lacombe. Their content is consistently engaging and aesthetically pleasing. Their #DailyDoodle challenge, which shares customers' experiences, is a great example of effective customer and audience engagement.

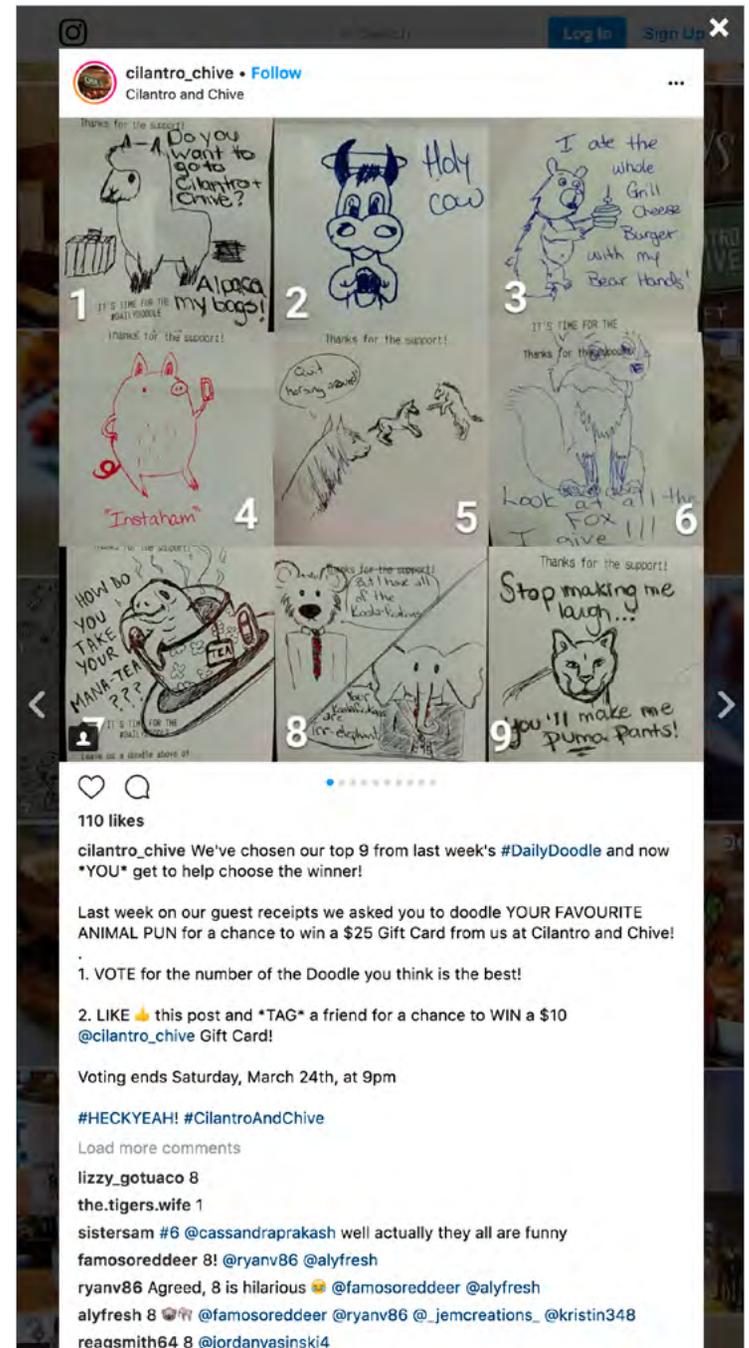
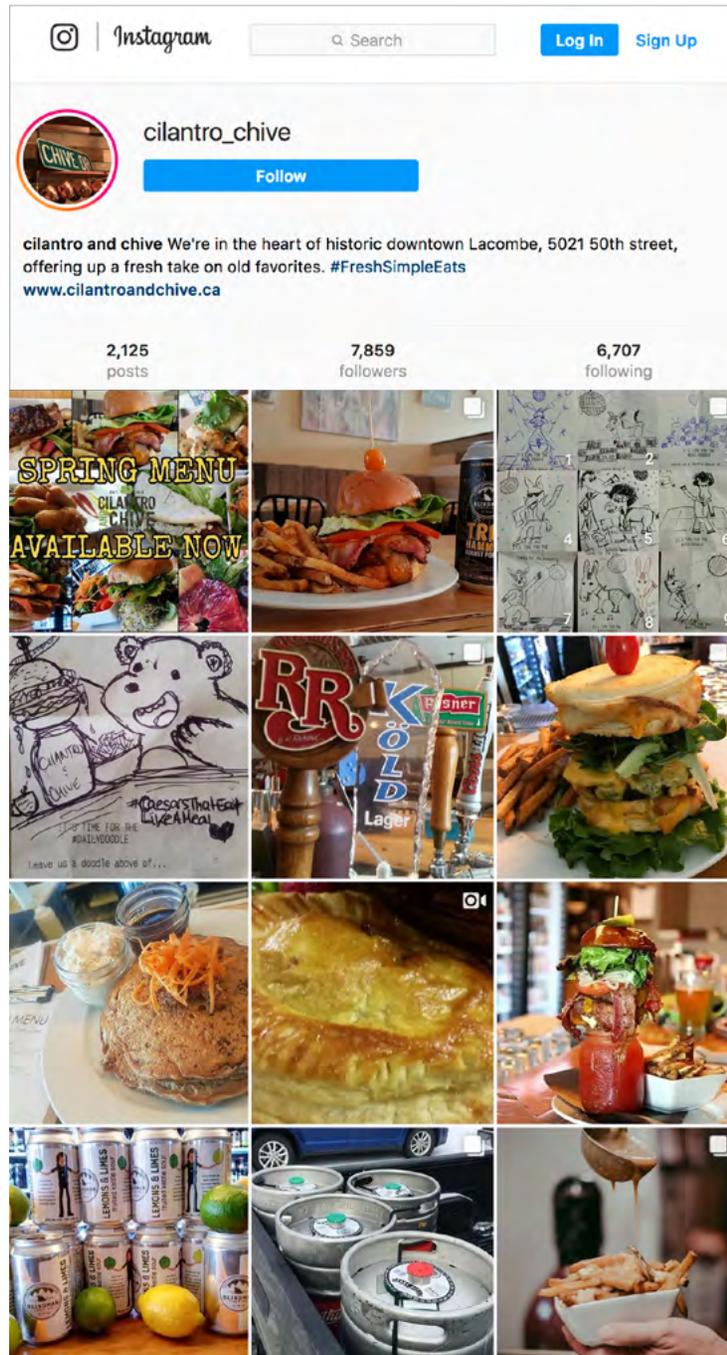




image: Courtney @courtneywithcamera

LEVERAGING LIKEABLE AND SHAREABLE CONTENT

Making Instagram content work for your business can be a challenging prospect, but breaking the process down into two types of content will help. The first step is to create your own content that customers can share. The second is to share other content on your Instagram feed that your audience will enjoy.

ORIGINAL CONTENT

Creating your own content can be a great learning opportunity, but it can also be a daunting task. Here are some ways to get your creativity flowing.

- **GET INSPIRATION FROM YOUR FAVOURITE FEEDS**

What do you like about them? Is it the personality conveyed through the feed? The quality of the pictures? Figure out what you like about the Instagram accounts you follow, whether it be personality or business-related, and incorporate these elements into your social media goals.

- **THINK ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF YOUR POST**

Is there an upcoming event for your business? Are you offering a special deal? Take a moment when creating a post and think about what makes it interesting or relevant. Make sure that the interests of your audience are your primary focus – what is interesting to you might not be as interesting to the people that follow you.

- **USE TOOLS**

There are a number of photo editing apps that can help you create professional and polished photos, especially if you practice using them before posting photos to your business feed. These apps are also a great way to keep your images visually consistent in appearance if you want your posts to have a thematic focus. Afterlight, VSCO, Aviary, and Camera+ are some of the more popular photo editing apps.



- **APPEAL TO EMOTION**

With other social media channels becoming obviously focused on marketing, Instagram remains one of the more relaxed platforms. Don't be afraid to give your business a personality when sharing videos and pictures. Pictures won't tell your story if there is no emotion or feeling behind them. Instagram posts with people in them receive more likes and feedback than those without.

DEVELOPING USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Consistently creating content is difficult, and even the most artistic of people hit roadblocks sometimes, making user-generated content invaluable. Encouraging your followers to share their own content is a great way to collaborate, make professional connections, and help build content for your brand. When users feature your brand through their own Stories and photos, this affords your business the opportunity to engage with a new audience and bring that content to your audience and customers. Instagram has become a platform for talented photographers, bloggers, and influencers to share their own images and experiences. Savvy business owners work with these users to create more content around their brands while building relationships with those that have influence over an audience.

An Instagram user-generated content program is often a combination of several avenues.

- **CONTENT SHARING**

Businesses regularly search social media to find images and videos related to their brand. These searches can be for keywords, hashtags, and brand terms (specialized language used by those within a certain industry or hobby). Popular tourism-related hashtags to monitor in Alberta include destination specific (#explorealberta, #exploreedmonton, #capturecalgary), city or town specific (#yeg, #yyc, #ymm), event specific (#jasperdarksky, #westernerdays, #kdays) and audience specific (#camping, #eatlocal, #staycation). Your goal is to find content created by others that can be shared through your business' Instagram profile. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Instagram does not have a built-in share feature. Users must rely on third party applications like Regram and Repost to share content on their own profile. Always give credit to the original creator when sharing content.

- **CONTENT COLLECTION**

A process similar to content sharing is content collection. When a business identifies interesting content, they reach out to the creator and ask for permission to download and share the content. This allows the business to create their own post with the image or video while crediting the original creator. Depending on the situation, a creator may ask for additional compensation from the business in exchange for using their content.



QUICK TIP

Always give credit to the original creator when sharing content.

- **INFLUENCER OUTREACH**

Influencer outreach has become a popular way to create content and reach new audiences. Business owners can identify Instagram users who cater to a specific target audience, or they can create content that is relevant to their goals. It is common for businesses to work with influencers to create campaigns and content. Travel Alberta can assist business owners with identifying influencers and offer suggestions on how to best structure a working relationship.

Identifying influencers can take some work as there are a number of factors to consider when selecting the right users.

- **AUDIENCE SIZE**

Although selecting users with the biggest audiences might make sense initially, it is more important to look at the quality of those that follow a particular user. Business operators should look beyond numbers and identify the types of people that follow the user and whether they match your target audience. Programs like SocialRank and Klear can assist with this process.

- **LOCATION**

Not only do you want to pay attention to the influencer's location, you also want to see where their audience lives. If you're looking to target people in Alberta, find an influencer with a strong Alberta-based following. Use Instagram search to identify those individuals that regularly use local hashtags and keywords. Click through to their followers and have a look at the types of accounts that follow them. Identify those accounts with a strong regional following.

- **AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT**

Pay attention to how the influencer engages with others. If they simply post content without talking with their followers, they may not be building trust with their audience. Audience engagement is important because it can create incentive for followers to like or comment more often.

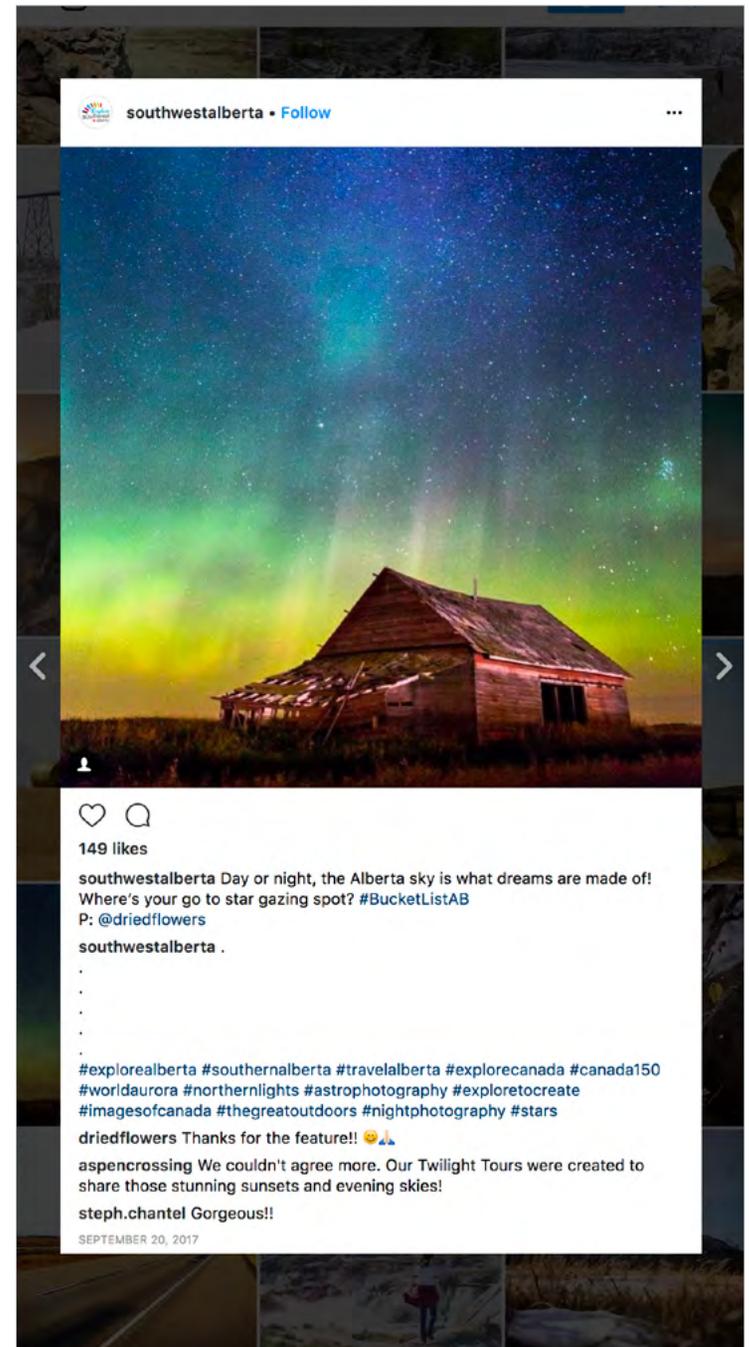
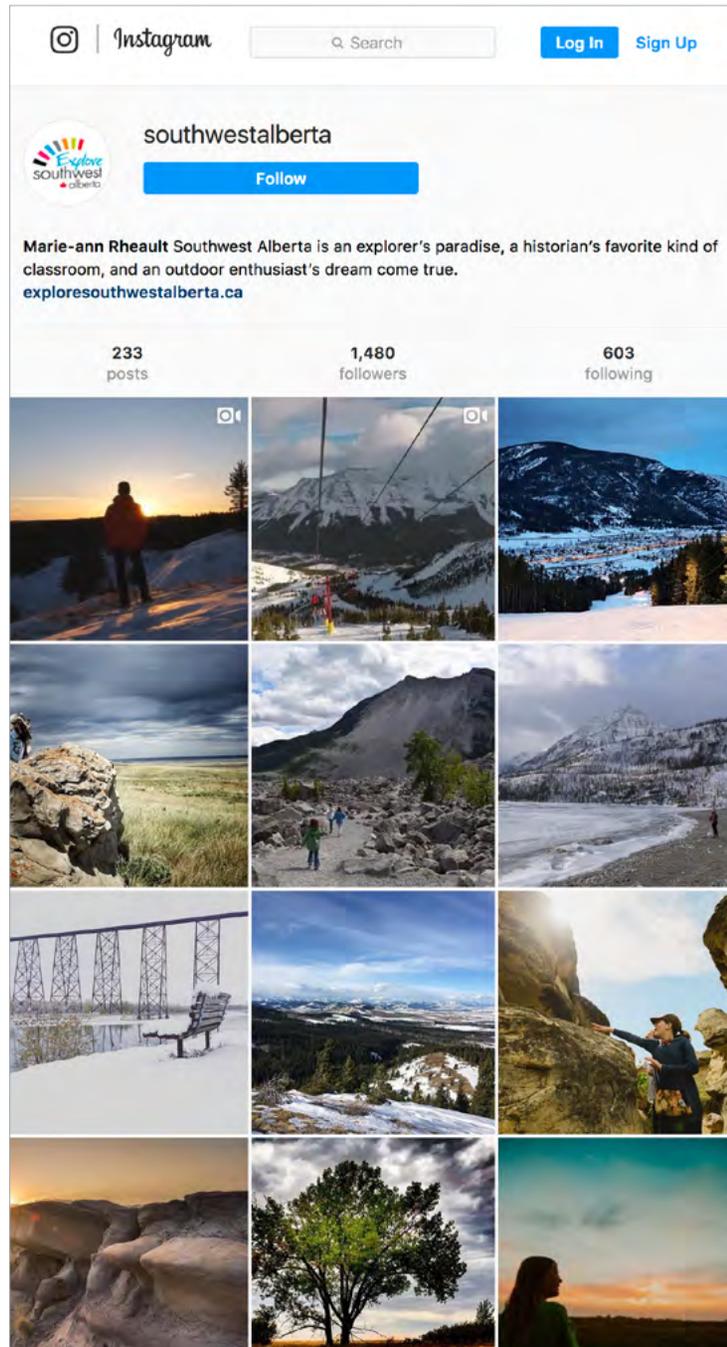
Identifying and vetting influencers can be time consuming. Consider reaching out to other local businesses and destinations that have worked with influencers to get their advice on the process.



image: Callum Snape @calsnape

USING INSTAGRAM TO TELL A STORY – SOUTHWEST ALBERTA

Explore Southwest Alberta does an effective job of sharing user-generated posts to create a fun and engaging profile. Each content creator is credited in the description. Despite sharing content from many different creators, the profile manages to maintain a consistent message.



NEXT STEPS – TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING YOUR INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT

MAKE YOUR BUSINESS INSTAGRAM FRIENDLY

Not all customers have the eye it takes to be a natural content creator, so it becomes your job to create these opportunities. Businesses that provide their customers with content-worthy experiences are more likely to have content created about them. Displaying social media posts in your business, training your staff to suggest content opportunities, and creating memorable experiences will encourage visitors to share their content. The Calgary Zoo (@thecalgaryzoo) offers visitors a variety of content creation opportunities like branded photo stand-ins, viewpoints, and photogenic venues. Restaurants like The Canadian Brewhouse (@thecanadianbrewhouse) feature curated social media content on screens at each location. Businesses can also embed Instagram content on their website or blog as a way to further highlight their visual content.

USE INSTAGRAM INSIGHTS TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL TOPICS

Users that convert to a business profile have access to Instagram Insights. Insights give you analytics into the content you post. Although not as robust as some platforms, the information obtained through Insights is still valuable for businesses. Look for posts that generate the most impressions and reach. Investigate what elements of those posts made them successful – when it was posted, the post content, the quality of the description, and hashtags. Remember, there are no perfect Instagram posts but there are thoughtfully strategic ones. The key to a successful post is keeping in mind your audience and their preferences. Using the information from Insights and routinely testing different post types will help you find a post style that resonates with your audience.

FILL OUT YOUR PROFILE

When a user converts to a business profile, they can expand the information on their profile. A properly constructed profile helps customers find your businesses through search engines. It also provides the customer with a more comprehensive brand experience. To get the most out of your profile, business operators should:

- use the bio section to describe who you are and what you do;
- connect to your Facebook page, if applicable;
- choose a category that best describes your business; and
- fill in the contact information to help people find your business.

UNDERSTAND SEARCH AND EXPLORE

The Search and Explore tab can be found by tapping the magnifying glass icon on Instagram. This feature helps users find content that is appealing and relevant to them. According to Instagram, content in this section is “selected automatically based on things like the people you follow or the posts you like”. Business owners who take the time to learn more about their audience, and the types of content they appreciate, are more likely to be recommended to a larger audience through Search and Explore.

CONSIDER USING THEMES

Instagram or content themes are an increasingly popular tool that businesses can use to visually align their content. Creating a theme may take extra time and attention to detail, but the human eye responds better to digital content that is streamlined and easy-to-read. Themes can also act as a ‘style guide’ for your brand and work to attract a certain demographic of customers. Yamnuska Wolfdog Sanctuary (@yamnuskawdsanct) ensures that their animals are front and centre in each image. This simple theme adds consistency to their Instagram brand.

USE TAGGING AND MENTIONS

Tagging and mentions are ways to include other Instagram users in your posts. When posting a photo, click “Tag People” to identify other users and businesses that are featured in your content. You can also mention users and businesses in your Stories, descriptions, and comments by including the @ symbol followed by their username. Either tactic will notify them that they have been mentioned in your post. Tagging and mentions are a great way to include partners in your content.

Although establishing a large social media following can take some time, it will create great opportunities for your business. Social media is always evolving, so it is best to stay flexible and open-minded. By using Instagram in a strategic way you can effectively increase the patrons, revenue, and reputation your business receives. Staying on top of your Instagram account with these guidelines can ensure that, no matter how large your network grows, you can keep your engagement, likes, and comments growing with it.



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