

# THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S GUIDE TO INSTAGRAM



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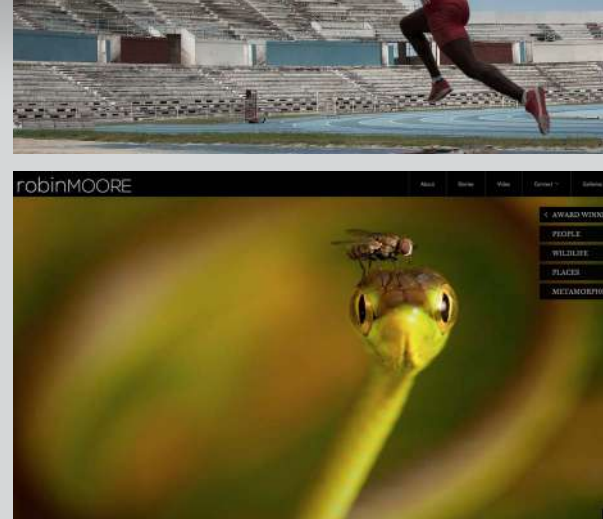
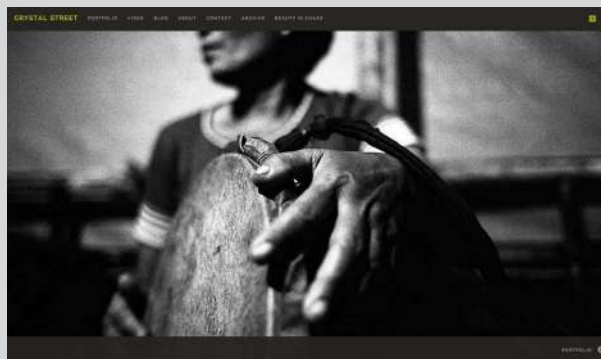
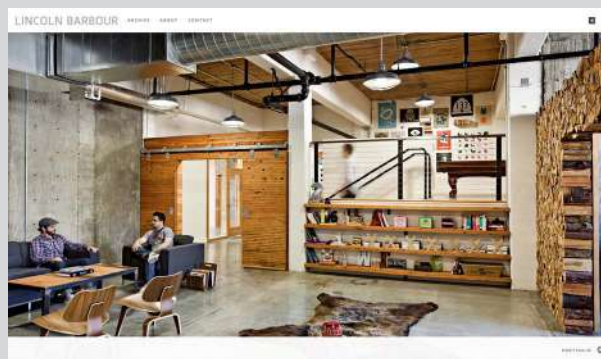
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## PART I

# Intro

Over [200 million users](#) use Instagram on a monthly basis, and since the service launched in 2010, over 20 billion photos have been uploaded and shared. With such high penetration and user engagement, it's easy to see why this mobile app has caught fire and continues to attract photographers, celebrities and brands alike.

For professional photographers, Instagram has posed a bit of a conundrum. Several rounds of notorious changes to the Terms and Conditions had many photographers threatening to leave the service. But, even with those changes, more and more photographers are realizing the power of Instagram to enable: 1) Direct publishing to an opt-in following, 2) Access to photo editors and other imaging professionals, 3) An increasing number of ways to generate revenue.

Thus today, the race is on to amass as many followers as possible, which may sound like a pursuit better suited for angst-ridden teens. However, building a following is the reality of today's social media environment. National Geographic contributor Jim Richardson ([@jimrichardsonng](#)), who has garnered a following of close to 80K followers, reasoned, "Being interesting is the coin of the realm. The audience gets to decide if the photographer is interesting. Very democratic. Very frightening for many photographers...now that elite cadre of editors is no longer the only way to reach a lot of people. Photographs go straight from mobile device to mobile device."

Instagram is a social media force that should be a part of every photographer's marketing arsenal, even if you're not exactly sure how to leverage that audience. Instagram doesn't allow users to click off the app into another ecosystem unlike most other types of social media, so in



[@jimrichardsonng](#)

that sense, there is no obvious call-to-action. But this shouldn't dissuade you from building a bigger audience now. As Richardson smartly points out, "I do absolutely believe that you have to build the following first; the value will follow."

## THOSE PESKY TERMS OF USE

In 2013, American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP), a leading photographer trade association in the U.S., issued [The Instagram Papers](#), to educate and discuss the implications of Instagram's far-reaching [Terms of Use](#). Their main objection centered around three areas of concern: 1) Users should be able to delete their account and all their content at any time (the current TOU allows reshared data to live on), 2) sublicensing of content should be compensated (the current TOU grants a royalty-free license to Instagram with the ability to sublicense content), 3) users should not indemnify Instagram for sublicensing/third party use for which the user has no control nor knowledge.

The Terms of Use are onerous, but it's unclear if/how Instagram will act on the granted rights. For example, while they have the right to use your content, likeness and metadata without compensation for advertising, Instagram has actually been very slow to integrate ads—presumably because of the real potential to incite user wrath.

In [an interview with Business Insider](#), Instagram's Director/Market Operations Jamie Squires indicated, "We're being very methodical and deliberate, which is why you're not seeing a lot of ads in your feed."

The threat from professional photographers might be seen as a tertiary threat, but the potential to anger its 200 million users is real, and Instagram can't afford to lose ground to upstarts like Snapchat.

Industry pundit John Harrington isn't so sanguine, and believes that giving away a royalty-free license to Instagram puts you in an undesirable position if you are ever infringed—even if the image is copyrighted. "When you go into court, the opposing counsel is going to point to the fact that you were willing to give

away for free, your copyright, or perpetual license, for nothing. So why should we now pay you a quarter million dollars?"

You might want to consider adding a visual watermark to your images as well since images have a nasty habit of becoming untethered from their captions. You don't want it to be too intrusive, so as to block an already small area of your images. For example, award-winning photojournalist Ami Vitale adds a small copyright notice in the lower corner of her images (see right).

Like all social media, you must weigh the real potential of infringement against the potential marketing benefits.

## MEASURING SUCCESS

Not everyone can amass one million followers, and followers aren't the only way to gauge success. For example, if you're looking to use Instagram to engage with specific photo editors, a large following may not be necessary. In general though, the level of engagement as measured by likes and comments, your ratio of followers to posts, and your acquisition rate of new followers are all important metrics. Ultimately, it's up to you to decide how to measure a meaningful return on investment, but here are a few tools to help you analyze your Instagram account.

### Free:

[www.iconosquare.com](http://www.iconosquare.com)  
(formerly statigram)

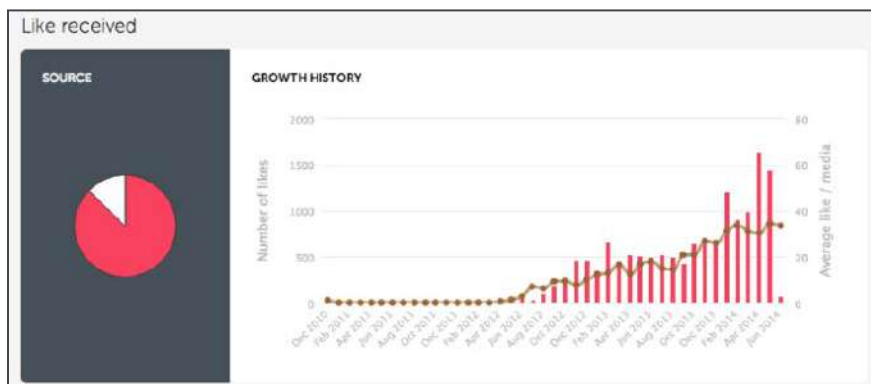
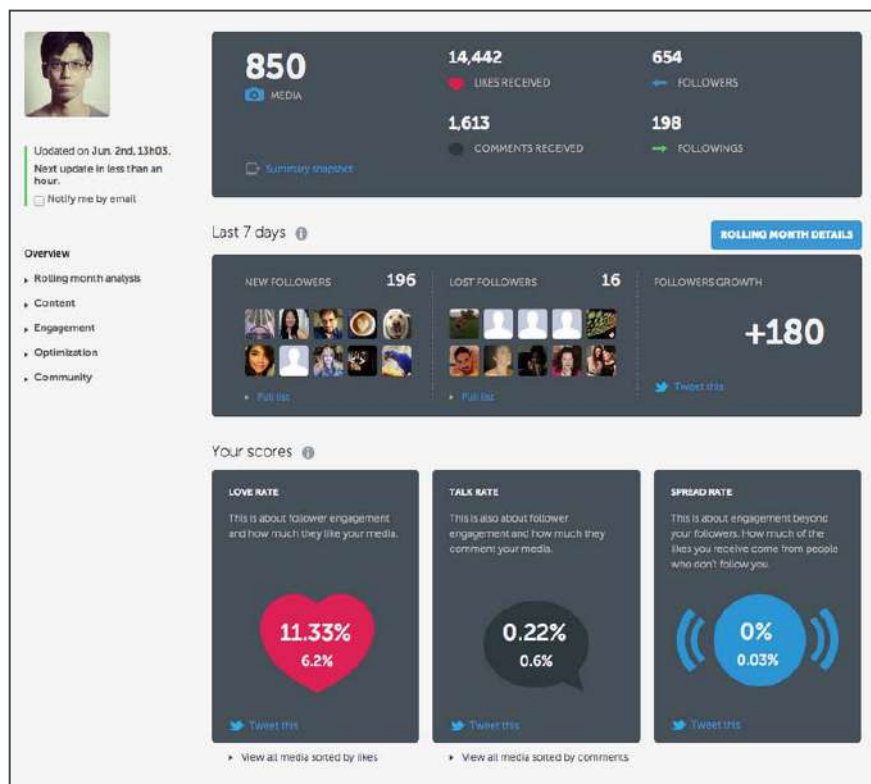
### Paid:

[www.simplymeasured.com](http://www.simplymeasured.com)  
(they do offer a [free report option](#))  
[www.nitrogram.com](http://www.nitrogram.com)



[@amivitale](#)

Like all social media, you must weigh the real potential of infringement against the potential marketing benefits.



You can view your Instagram user stats with [Iconosquare](#), see above

## PART I

# Making the Most of Instagram

**I**nstagram is more than a photo app. It's a still-nascent publishing and distribution platform that has lots of potential for monetization. Letting the world know about your Instagram account by adding a link on your website or cross-publishing work on Twitter or Facebook are obvious ways to build your following. But they can be slow and tedious. Here are a few reasons why Instagram can help you engage with more people and expand your business.

### 1 Direct Publishing to Your Community

Instagram provides a direct publishing platform to your audience. It allows you to personally curate and publish work to any number of followers—selecting the photos you like rather than what an editor might choose. The real-time nature of the Instagram stream provides a way to constantly engage your audience rather than waiting until the end of a project, and making publication such a significant event in the lifecycle of an image.

Jim Richardson explains, “Photographers used to produce pictures, now photographers must produce eyeballs. The point being that we used to just make pictures and it was somebody else’s job to get the pictures seen. Now it is incumbent on the photographer to make pictures that go directly to the audience, many times by-passing traditional publishing altogether.”

Anthony Danielle ([@takinyerphoto](#)) from [The Mobile Media Lab](#), an agency that specializes in matching Instagrammers with brands, thinks the direct contact to an audience is a key differentiator from traditional media. “Instagram has always been a community driven app and most users that are popular on the medium understand

this important face. Reaching out to your audience, letting it be known that besides nice pictures there is a human on the other end of the lens really goes a long way.”



[@bmangin](#)

# The direct contact to an audience is a key differentiator from traditional media.

[Instant Baseball](#) photographer Brad Mangin ([@bmangin](#)) noted, “It’s a community. I’m sharing my pictures with my friends and followers, and I also follow hundreds of people. It’s a give and take...when people make comments...you’ve got to come back in and engage them in conversation. And it also goes the other way. When you’re following other people in your feed, go in and say, ‘Hey, that’s a great picture,’ or make comments because it is a community. It’s fun, you can make friends, meet people and carry on conversations.”

On [his blog](#), VII Photo Founder and National Geographic contributor John Stanmeyer ([@johnstanmeyer](#)) commented on the app’s power of communication. “Instagram also supports numerous aspects of photography—the marketing of books, exhibitions, workshops, lectures and interest in stories that are in progress, allowing for greater connectivity with the general public, both immediately and down the road.

“Decades ago, I often thought how brilliant it would be to publish photographs of issues I’m passionate about, placing them on roadside billboards to scream what mattered to me. I almost did just that until discovering how expensive physical billboard space cost. Instagram (and again, other social media) does just that, reaching the potential consciousness of tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands. Even more so—and without the expense.”

## 2 Access To Photo Editors

Photo editors find using Instagram is a more casual way to keep tabs on photographers. And given the way some

people obsessively check their feeds, the likelihood of your Instagrams being seen by even top flight editors is high.

Emily Shornick, photo editor of *New York Magazine’s* [The Cut](#) told us, “Instagram is great because it shows me how people are going to work in the digital sphere, and what their images might look like on a small screen. I can also get a sense for who a photographer really is, as well as the photo community they’re participating in.

“Too often in portfolio reviews photographers are catering to what they think a photo editor wants to see, and they might have been given some bad advice that’s dictating how they’re presenting themselves and their work. With Instagram I feel like I’m getting to see a more true version of a photographer.”

Esquire photo editor Elizabeth Griffin ([@zabelita](#)) agreed, “It has become an increasingly important tool for both editors and photographers to post work and procure work...We know it can be filtered and manipulated and such, for sure, and as an editor I am careful to keep that in mind. But, it also feels like it’s somehow less restricted than what we pull off wires. I know it’s not entirely true in all cases, but often times, it feels like I’m seeing exactly what the photographer wanted to post and not what his or her editor was saying to post.”

## 3 Generating Revenue

The Mobile Media Lab’s Anthony Danielle believes that monetizing mobile photography is in its infancy,

“We are just beginning to scratch the surface of photographers being hired to shoot specifically mobile and to share on Instagram. I was hired last week to shoot at the Time 100 Gala on Instagram only and [Jamie Beck](#) ([@annstreetstudio](#)) of Ann Street Studio was just hired to Instagram the Met Ball.”

Instagram is less of a camera app and more of a distribution platform, and while it’s becoming more commonplace for photographers to be hired to shoot specifically on mobile for mobile, entrepreneurial photographers are using the medium to sell prints.

Brooklyn-based Daniel Arnold ([@arnold\\_daniel](#)) leveraged the power of his then 22,000 followers (he’s now up to 50,000+) to manage a print sale to pay his rent. [According to Forbes](#), the photographer sold prints from his Instagram archive for \$150 each and ended up with \$15,000 of requests and \$5,000 of fulfilled orders—enough to increase the \$90.03 in his bank account to pay his rent.

Less you think this was an isolated incident, National Geographic contributor Aaron Huey ([@argonautphoto](#)) took over the New Yorker Instagram ([@newyorkermag](#)) account and announced a print sale through his website. The resulting traffic crashed his website, but he still sold \$10,000 worth of prints within 24 hours.

The success of individuals selling online has been enough to impress the likes of the VII Photo Agency and Magnum Photos, both of which have conducted online sales in recent months. Gideon Jacobs, Creative Director at Magnum Photos [told TIME](#), “The agency has almost 700,000 likes on Facebook, almost 600,000 followers on Twitter and almost 75,000 followers on Instagram...The social image making and image sharing revolution seems to have increased visual fluency around the globe and, in turn, increased interest in photographs that possess depth, photographs that strike a glancing blow at some kind of ambitious target.”

Forbes [reports](#) that Instagrammers are being hired by major brands as well. Tiffany & Co. contacted Carlie Kiene ([@inkedfingers](#)) to use some of her images, and now “significant portion of Carli’s income is from advertising clients, an avenue she never explicitly pursued.” Kiene goes further to say “With social media there’s no art director involved. We get 100% creative control because the brands are coming to us for our style. They pay money and say, ‘I want your vision.’ That’s every artist’s dream.”

Viral sensation, Murad Ossman ([@muradossman](#)), turned a photo of him being led by his girlfriend into a whole series that gained exposure (see right). Tourism Boards from various countries now hire him to come take an iconic shot in their respective countries and hashtag the image with their slogans. (e.g. #discoverhongkong, #shareyourjord)

#### 4 Getting Featured

In April, Instagram modified the Explore tab by introducing algorithmic results that considered the types of images that your friends or followers had liked. [According to Instagram](#), “We’re always working to update the types of posts you see in Explore to better tailor it to you. For example, we may show you photos and videos liked by people whose posts you’ve liked and/or posts that are liked by a large number of people in the Instagram community.”

The change is great news for photographers who are looking to organically grow their audience because it potentially exposes your “good” content to a wider audience without relying on being featured by Instagram’s editors.

The takeaway is to continue to post high quality content that garners lots of likes and comments from your friends because these images may be seen by a broader audience in the Explore Tab.



[@muradossman](#)

Note that Instagram also features a weekly hashtag project from [their blog](#), and the winners are featured in Instagram’s feed which has over 55 million followers. The hashtag project is an easy and obvious way to gain exposure.



[@instagram](#)

#### 5 Guest Posts

Although Google frowns upon guest posting as a method to enhance SEO, there is no such restriction on Instagram. For photographers who are looking to rapidly build their audience, guest posts offer a tremendous way to gain exposure, and media properties are always looking for good content (see right from [@newyorkmag](#)).

Even individuals with large followings are leveraging their popularity to act as curators for other photographers. Don't forget to consider approaching media outlets and/or friends with large followings to gain a broader exposure and build your audience.

## 6 Form a Collective

If the thought of posting content regularly is a bit daunting, you might want to consider forming a collective based on a given topic. [@everydayafrica](#) and [@everydayasia](#) are two examples of informal photographer collectives publishing geographically-specific content to a sizable audience.



*[@newyorkermag](#) photo by [@arnold\\_daniel](#)*

## PART I

# 10 Ways to Win Instagram

**C**aught in a rut, and don't know where to start? Here are 10 ways you can start winning at Instagram now and take advantage of its many features and opportunities.

### 1 Remember Photography is Aspirational

Photography has the power to transport people to different places and experience different things. Travel and food photography are two examples of popular genres that you might dismiss, but make an effort to understand why certain types of photos resonate with an audience.

» Example: [@trevlee](#), [@kathyylchan](#), [@parisinfourmonths](#), [@allen3](#)

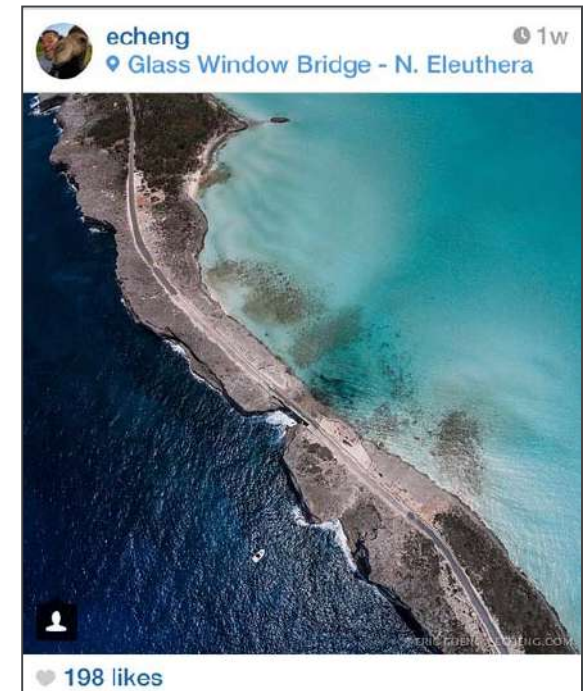


[@allen3](#)

### 2 Consider using your non-mobile photos

There's no rule that says you must use your phone's built-in camera to post to Instagram. Some see it as a badge of authenticity, but Instagram is a distribution platform, not a camera. Don't like the square format, use apps like [Whitagram](#), [InstaFit](#) or [Squaready](#) to add borders to your rectangular photos.

» Example: [@neilkrug](#), [@echeng](#)



[@echeng](#)

### 3 Geotag, people tag and hashtag your images

All forms of tagging increase the points of discovery for your photos. A well-composed photo by a professional easily stands out among the crowd of photos. But don't over-hashtag, and don't tag people who aren't in your photo. And remember, if your Instagram account is private—meaning only those who follow you can see your posts—then you immediately eliminate the possibility of having others find you through your hashtags. To get a sense of popular hashtags on Instagram, [Webstagram](#), an Instagram management platform, compiles the top 100 hashtags. [Take a look.](#)

» Example: [@kenkaminesky](#), [@muradosmann](#), [@benlowy](#)



[@benlowy](#)

### 4 Learn the lingo

Speaking of hashtagging, if you're trying to build an audience, make sure you become familiar with niche vernacular. For example, #foodporn is a common term amongst foodies and good food photos with this hashtag are likely to generate likes and/or followers. #tbt, Throwback Thursday, is also a very popular hashtag to share older photos with your audience.

» Example: [@dannybones64](#)

### 5 Experiment with Video

Video on Instagram is still new territory, and there's a lot of opportunity to "own" it. And unlike Vine, you don't have to be creating humorous or stop-motion videos to audience build. Also in contrast to Vine, which only allows you 6 second videos, on Instagram you can create videos up to 15 seconds.

» Example: [@themagdalenalexperience](#)

### 6 Be consistent in theme and style

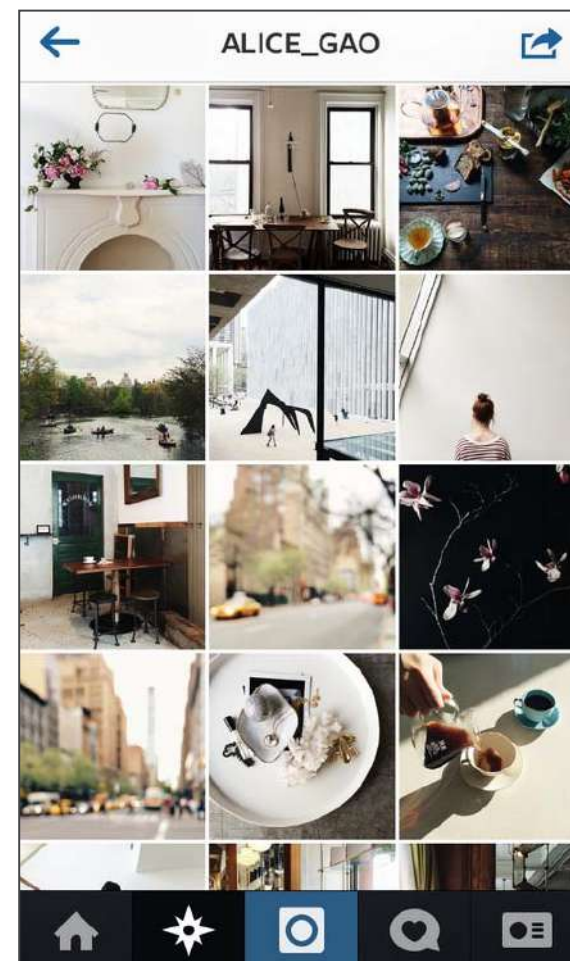
As you build your audience, people will come to expect a certain type and quality of image from you. We're all for experimenting, but don't play rap on the jazz station.

» Example: [@knwng](#), [@alice\\_gao](#), [@thiswildidea](#)

### 7 Repost on Twitter and Facebook

Let the world know your Instagram account exists by reposting the photos on other social media. You can also set up your Instagram account to automatically link to your Twitter and Facebook feeds by going into your Instagram Settings and then "Share Preferences".

» Example: [@pauloctavious](#)



[@alice\\_gao](#)

### 8 Don't Over Post

Instagram doesn't let you post a series. It's one photo. Don't post three cronut photos in a row from different angles. It's unnecessary. It annoys people. It shows that you lack an understanding of the medium.

If you are going to post a series, be creative! Consider using an app like [Diptic](#) to combine multiple images into one. Or use the 3-column app design to your advantage to create mosaics.

» Example: [@mazdacanada](#)



[@mazdacanada](#)

## 9 Explore

Don't forget to consume and enjoy photography! The Explore tab gives you multiple ways to find new content by hashtag, user or thumbnails. You can use geotagged locations to see more photos from the same location. The "Following" tab allows you to see the images that your friends are liking.



## 10 Learn from the non(-traditional) photographers

Sure, it's easy to turn up your nose at Instagrammers who didn't study photography, or didn't "do their time." But photographers like [@curious2119](#) have built enormous followings with a consistent style that resonates with an audience. This has led to commercial opportunities, broad press exposure and over 600,000 followers.

Now that you've got the basics down, get advice and inspiration from some of the photographers having success on Instagram, amassing followings ranging from 3K to 800K+. How'd they do it? We asked and found out.

## PROFILE

# 3,000+ Followers: Breaking Into Instagram

Featuring Daeja Fallas



📷 @daejafallas

🏠 [www.daejafallas.com](http://www.daejafallas.com)

**Niche:** Fashion & Lifestyle

**Location:** Brooklyn, NY

**Date Started on Instagram:** June 16, 2011

*How does Instagram fit into your overall marketing plan? Do you use it to generate more business, or is it a tool for personal expression?*

Instagram is fun! We talk about it, we blog about it, we take snapshots of our food, our pets, our vacations...plus it's instant. So when you get back from vacation, you don't have to throw a cocktail party and force everyone to watch a presentation of Kodachrome slides like our parents did (although I think I'd love that). That said, Instagram is also an easy way of keeping up with editors and art buyers that follow you in an unobtrusive way. I would never send an editor weekly emails of what I'm doing, but I do put up posts of my shoot locations or final edits of jobs when they are released, so if someone is interested in my day to day, they can see it. It is definitely a piece of the marketing puzzle these days but, for my business, it has by no means replaced traditional marketing materials like printed promotional pieces.

*Were there any major press hits or other marketing events that led to dramatic increases in your followers?*

I've noticed that when I shoot for someone like Free People or Billabong, who have several thousand followers, I'll gain quite a few new followers the day they post a photo of mine, especially if they tag my Instagram handle in the post.

*What techniques have you employed to increase your base? How are people generally finding you?*

It seems people follow me when I shoot for a brand or magazine that then in turn posts one of my images on their feed and tags me. Other than that, I'll add Insta-

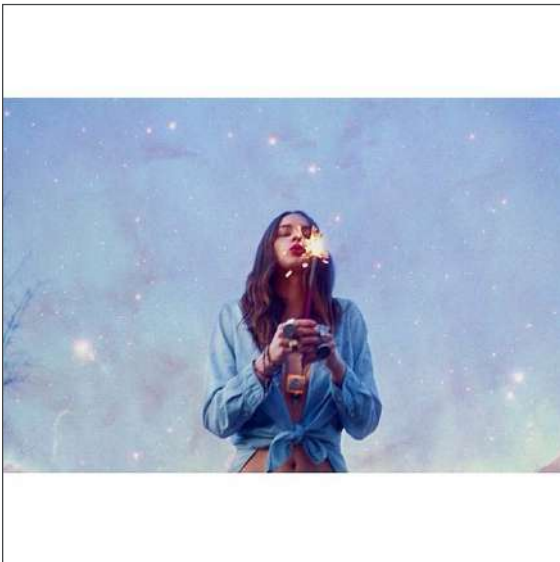
gram posts to my Facebook page, and on jobs with bigger teams, everyone tends to follow everyone, so that's a very organic way to gain followers.

*Are you aggressively hashtagging or geotagging your images to pick up new followers?*

I add hashtags to posts when I have a reason to. I work quite a bit with the publication Tiny Atlas Quarterly and they have started the mytinyatlas hashtag which I use often because it's adding another layer to a project I'm involved with and contributing to a collection of images my friends are making. My general rule on hashtags is #lessismore, too many can be #obnoxious.

### TAKEAWAYS:

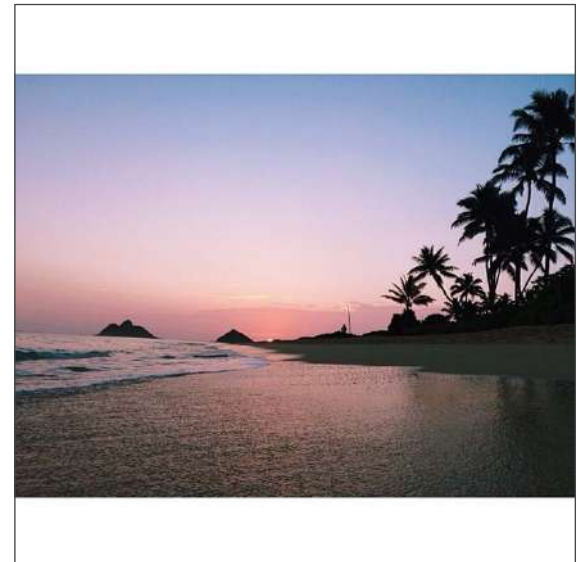
- » Always keep in mind that Instagram can provide photo editors an insight into your day-to-day life, including how you work, your photography style, and even your personality through the comments and captions you write.
- » Although Instagram is a powerful distribution platform, it's not the silver bullet to increasing awareness about your brand. Your presence on Instagram should be coupled with other marketing channels, including your website, Twitter, and even printed promotional pieces, for example.
- » If you're working for a client who also has a presence on Instagram, ask them to share one of your behind-the-scenes shots while on assignment for them. And more importantly, ask that they include your Instagram handle so their audience has the opportunity to easily follow you.



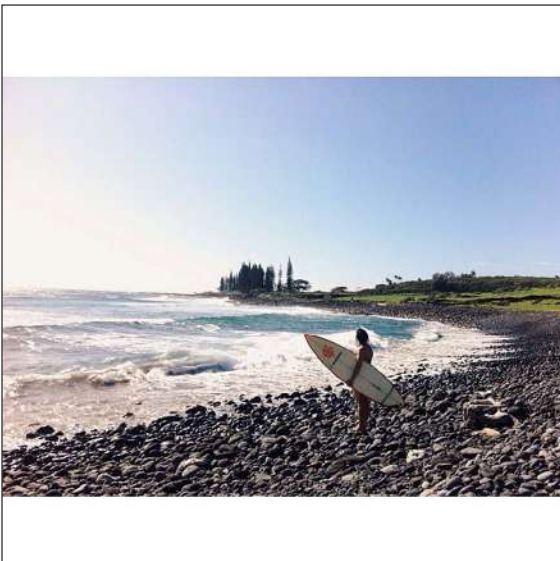
[@daejafallas](#)



[@daejafallas](#)



[@daejafallas](#)



[@daejafallas](#)



[@daejafallas](#)

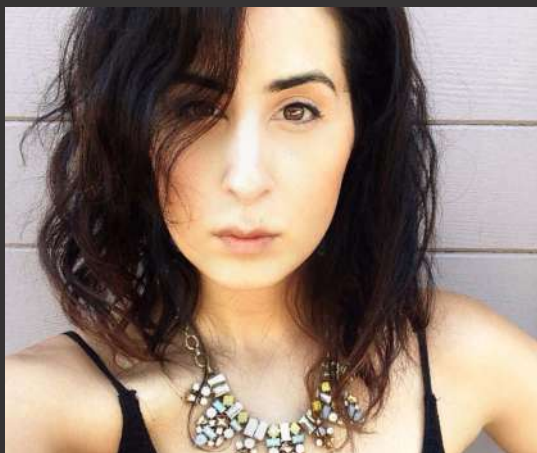


[@daejafallas](#)

## PROFILE

# 7,000+ followers: The Perfect Marriage of Photography and Social Media

Featuring Delbarr Moradi



@delbarrmoradi  
www.delbarrmoradi.com

**Niche:** Fine Art & Wedding

**Location:** San Francisco, CA

**Date Started on Instagram:** December 23, 2010

*How does Instagram fit into your overall marketing plan? Do you use it to potentially generate more business, or is it a tool for personal expression?*

From a business perspective it's really allowed me to share my everyday life artistically, allowing clients to see a more well-rounded artist in me. I use it more as a business tool, posting more of my day to day business and inspiration; however, I do sprinkle in some photos of my baby girl and life as a working momma. I find that it's important to tell the full story!

*You're very active in social media. How do you rank the effectiveness of Instagram vs other social media channels?*

Instagram has easily become my most go-to creative outlet and social media source. I have seen such rapid growth in my business via Instagram than any other social media source. It's allowed me to make connections with people all over the world and inspired business opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise.

*What techniques have you employed to increase your base? How are people generally finding you?*

For the most part, I post what inspires me, a little bit of my personal daily life, some professional work and a mix of fun artistic shots that hopefully reflect who I am as an artist. Posting at certain times of the day has proven to have its benefits so that my posts don't get lost in the mix. Also hashtags are so helpful and a fun way to categorize my work while attracting more people to my account. I'm also a big collaborator and welcome

many opportunities to connect with other small business owners and use Instagram as a way to promote all of our talents!

*You have a diversity of images in your feed. What types of images are more successful?*

My most successful post to date was a portrait of a beautiful woman I photographed for her maternity session. It was a professional shot, pulled from the session I had shot earlier that day. She looked dreamy and ethereal, it's a favorite of mine too! My other most popular posts have been a mix of my daughter, Delara, and some more of my professional photography both on location (iPhone) and my SLR shots. I take comfort in knowing that those who follow my work appreciate both the personal stuff I post and the professional. After all, that's what makes up my daily life, right?

*How do you differentiate (if at all) between your approach and technique to SLR photography and your Instagramming?*

I find that Instagram has helped me see things a bit differently when I shoot with my SLR. It's strange to say but I almost see things in square format now. I think it's affected my composition in certain ways, in a good way. I've been using Instagram for a few years now and it's increased my desire to shoot for fun, capturing little details and things I may have ignored. It's also inspired a new creativity inside me. I would say they both work hand in hand, each strengthening the other.

I  
II  
III

When posting on Instagram, if I am posting something that comes from my professional camera (non-iPhone photo) then I make sure to tag it with my #delbarrmoradiphoto tag. That has helped clients really find my work quickly as well!

*How do you think professional photographers should be using Instagram?*

If a photographer chooses to use Instagram as a means for business, I think it's important to be mindful of your brand at all times. Post photos that are visually appealing, consistent with your brand and of course, creative and inspiring! I also think sharing more of your artistic eye is important—whether it's your work day, a day off with your family, behind the scenes on a shoot or your professional portfolio, it's so important to share a nice balance of who you are. I've had such an amazing experience hearing from fellow artists, new moms and clients who connect with me on so many other levels other than my professional work side thanks to Instagram. Finding that balance on what to share is key; be your own gallery curator.

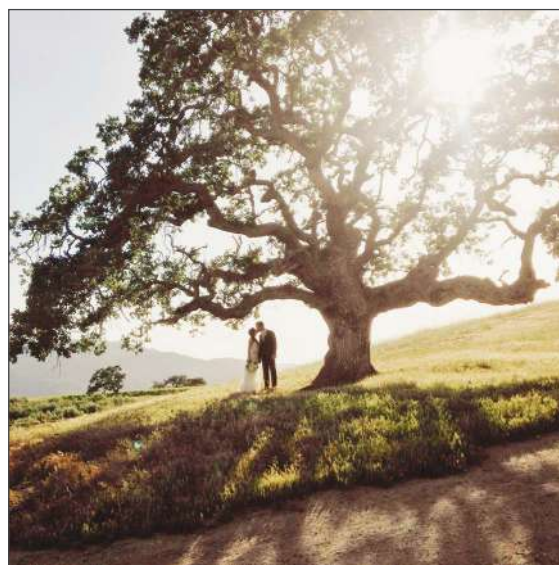
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**THE TAKEAWAY:**

- » Use relevant hashtags to help categorize your posts and make it easy for others to find you organically. For a look at popular hashtags, check out a [long list here](#).
  - » Partnerships with local stores or blogs can be a great way to increase your following. For example, if you're a portrait photographer, is there a makeup boutique who might like to feature a photo of yours on their account after you use their stylist in a shoot? Get creative about how you might be able to partner up in your area to cross promote.
  - » Always post photos that are consistent with your brand and your photography style. If the photo is creative and you feel inspired by it, there's a good chance others will feel the same way and be more inclined to like or comment.
- 



@delbarrmoradi



@delbarrmoradi



@delbarrmoradi

## PROFILE

# 19,000+ followers: A Fashionable View with (Z)emotion

Featuring Zhang Jingna



@zemotion

www.zhangjingna.com

**Niche:** Freelance fashion photographer

**Location:** New York, NY

**Date Started on Instagram:** June 1, 2011

*How does Instagram fit into your overall marketing plan? Do you use it to generate more business, or is it a tool for personal expression?*

For my work fashion photography, Instagram is it's actually a really great way for networking. The whole fashion industry is invested in social media and Instagram leads the forefront of it right now; it's great for discovering new people and for others to discover my work.

*Were there any major press hits or other marketing events that led to dramatic increases in your followers?*

My follower increases is mostly steady, but being mentioned in collaborations with users and brands who have a substantial fanbase always causes a surge.

*What techniques have you employed to increase your base? How are people generally finding you?*

People typically find me from Instagram's Explore tab, plus as a result of work I post for both my personal and fashion photoshoots. That's because there's a full team of people involved in such productions, and people tend to check out the crew responsible for creating pictures they like.

*You have a diversity of images (food, fashion, behind the scenes). Do you think any particular type of image resonates more with your audience?*

I think people enjoy the finished images the most. After all, they are the images I've put most time and ef-

fort into. But I think travel pictures resonate heavily as well because we all enjoy beautiful and spectacular landscapes.

*How do you differentiate (if at all) between your approach and technique to SLR photography and your Instagramming?*

Approach-wise there's not too much difference. I'm limited to the fixed lens of the phone and use only that, and the images are processed on the phone itself instead of a computer. But in terms of composition, lighting and framing, I still pay attention and plan a shot as I would when I'm shooting with an SLR.

*How do you think professional photographers should be using Instagram?*

It's a great way to share our work and use it for networking. More people should use it!

*Do you have any regular apps that you use to capture/post process for Instagram?*

I shoot with the iPhone camera. For processing, I like [Picfx](#), [VSCOcam](#) and [Snapseed](#).

## TAKEAWAYS:

» Do some groundwork to find out the presence your photography niche has on Instagram. By checking out other photographers in your field, or even related photo editors

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using Instagram, you can get a sense of a) what type of content tends to “work” and b) common hashtags that are being used.

» What content resonates most with your audience? Whether it be behind-the-scenes shots, photos on the road, landscapes, finished shots, etc., find out what garners the most engagement from your audience by experimenting at the beginning. Take note of which content is most popular to inform your strategy moving forward.



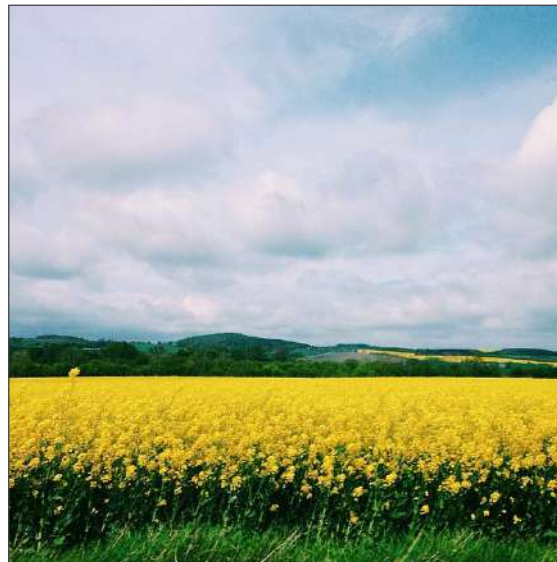
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## PROFILE

# 68,000+ followers: Peaceful Images in a Bustling City

Featuring Adrienne Pitts



📷 @helloworld

🏠 [www.adrienne.co.nz](http://www.adrienne.co.nz)

**Niche:** Travel & Portrait Photographer & Art Director

**Location:** London, UK

**Date Started on Instagram:** November 13, 2010

### *How does Instagram fit into your overall marketing plan as a photographer?*

I treat my Instagram account as my diary of my life and travels, in which I try to document things that happen and places I go to. I make sure I curate my images which I put on there, so that I am happy for them to be out there, but it is a more personal extension of myself. So in that sense, my Instagram account is not really a key element of how I market myself as a photographer. I do have my feed up on my website, and enjoy sharing those images, as I believe a photographer should have as many strings to their bow as possible!

### *Were there any major press hits or other marketing events that led to dramatic increases in your followers?*

There have been a couple of events which I think added to the amount of followers my account has: Attending Phoot Camp in 2012, visiting the Instagram offices in San Francisco and them kindly posting a picture of me on their feed, and being included on [Buzzfeed's list of '23 Instagrams to Follow to Travel the World in 2014'](#). I've been lucky to have been included in these wonderful things, as well as some other great opportunities.

### *What techniques have you employed to increase your base (e.g. hashtagging, geotagging)? How are people generally finding you?*

In all honesty, Instagram for me is not really about trying to attain a certain amount of followers. I have met some incredibly good friends and all-around inspiring

people from an app that I carry around in my pocket—which never ceases to surprise and amaze me. It's about the community—talking to people, sharing images, gaining inspiration, and always pushing yourself to create with a small, quite limiting device. When it comes to my own images, I like to geotag them so other people can find the places I go to; I'm happy to share the knowledge! I use personal hashtags for some projects, such as #adrienneheartslondon, in which I am gathering images from all my favourite spots in the city that I currently live. I also use various hashtags when I travel, so that I can gather all my images from one place together.

### *Have your images been featured on the “popular” page, or have you been featured as a “suggested” photographer?*

I was a suggested user for 2 weeks, around a year or two ago, which was a huge honour for me, and very humbling!

### *There is a quietness and sense of solitude to your photos (e.g. rarely more than 1 person, if that) that seems more fitting for New Zealand than London. Do you think that this type of image is somehow more resonant with your Instagram audience?*

I think you're quite right about that. I live in a very crowded and bustling city, which I love, but I also crave moments of solitude. It's nice to find those moments, and to share them with others. You can see the typical tourist photos of London anywhere these days, so I like to think that I'm sharing my version of London, and I'm happy that there are people who like seeing it!

*What images are most popular with your audience? Do you have any speculation as to why?*

I never can tell! And I really don't mind. There's a general thought out there that portraits don't do that well on Instagram, which many of us are trying to challenge. Lately it's been images from my current trip home to New Zealand, and a trip to Iceland which have been the most popular. I used to think the brighter more colourful ones in my own feed did well, but these buck that trend.

I honestly think it's down to each photographer and what they shoot as to what type of images prove the most 'popular' for them. I have friends who take the most colourful, joyous photographs which work for them, and others who take a much more minimalist approach. And that's the joy of the app; you can follow the work of a whole different range of photographers and styles. At the end of the day, I'm adding images to my photo diary. I'm incredibly happy if other people like it and take joy in it too.

*Are you aggressive in cross-marketing your Instagram website on your other web presences?*

Ahhh, I wish I were that savvy! I tend to cross-post to Twitter, as I try to keep my Twitter feed about photography and the work that I do. The only other cross-posting I do is to Flickr, which I use as an online archive, and which I know my family checks—so I put them there so they can see what I am up to!

*You have over 65,000 followers on Instagram, but only 245 on Facebook. Why do you think there is such a discrepancy?*

I wouldn't see it as a discrepancy. I think it just shows what I am more into. I pour a lot of myself into my

Instagram images, and have been using the platform almost since its launch (November 2010). By comparison, I only created the Facebook page last year, and really haven't promoted it to anyone. I see my actual website as the place people can go to, to see my work and to be able to contact me.

*Have you changed your approach and style to Instagram as you've grown your followers?*

I've definitely started taking a lot more care with my images! The first one I ever posted was a blurry shot taken from the top of a double decker bus. I didn't realise you could really interact with people on there for quite a long time, so it took me a while to realise that it could be a really valid creative tool. I see it as a challenge now, to try and take the best images I can on this small device, to capture life and the moments-in-between-moments, all the things that currently make up my days. I don't always have my full camera gear with me, so Instagram is a nice little challenge in my pocket to keep me on my toes, and to make sure I am always 'seeing'. To that end, I'm more critical of myself and the work I post on there now, compared to the blurry bus shots I used to post.

*Do you have any regular apps that you use to capture/post process for Instagram?*

I regularly use [VSCO Cam](#), [Snapseed](#), and [Touch Retouch](#).

#### TAKEAWAYS:

- » Remember that Instagram is a social community, so in addition to posting your own great content, make sure to follow others and engage through likes and comments with their photography too. Not sure who to follow? Think about other photographers you admire or even your dream clients.

Commenting even a simple "great work!" or liking a photo can leave a positive impression. After all, everyone likes to get great feedback and positive reinforcement.

- » Instagram lets you easily share your images on other platforms like Twitter and Facebook. If you have a following on either, resharing can be a great strategy to attract people who are already following you on other channels.
- » It's okay (in fact, encouraged!) to let your style on Instagram evolve. So as you grow as a photographer, make sure your photos on Instagram reflect that change.

## PROFILE

# 155,000+ followers: Underwater Photos, But Sky- High Followers

Featuring Brooke Dombrowski



@brooklynhawaii  
www.brooklynhawaii.com

**Niche:** Freelance Surf & Lifestyle photographer

**Location:** Hale'iwa, Hawai'i

**Date Started on Instagram:** June 2, 2011

### *How does Instagram fit into your overall marketing plan?*

Instagram started as a creative outlet to my photography business. I didn't take it very seriously until it was brought to my attention that most of my new clients used it as my "portfolio". That, in fact, many of them hadn't even seen my actual website. It was then when I decided to be more intentional/professional with my account.

### *You've amassed a very large following (over 150,000) with a fairly small number of posts. To what do you attribute this rapid rise?*

I consider myself lucky to have acquired this many followers based on my content alone. My photos were somehow frequently on the "Popular Page." I was at 61,000 followers when I received an email from Instagram about being featured.

### *Were there any major press hits or other marketing events that led to dramatic increases in your followers?*

Instagram emailed, saying they had listed me as a 'Suggested User', and my following grew by 40,000 in two weeks.

### *What techniques have you employed to increase your base (e.g. hashtagging, geotagging)? How are people generally finding you?*

I'm not a "hashtagger." I continue to be intentional with what I post, who I'm collaborating with, and just being myself. I am not as concerned with growing my follow-

ing as I am with putting out content I'm happy with—that best represents me as a photographer.

### *How has your Instagram style evolved since you started?*

I am focused more on creating a "lifestyle", which I think is what people are drawn to when they see my feed. My posts try to be cohesive, less personal, more general. Mostly everything I post is taken with my iPhone.

### *How would you characterize your followers? Are they surf aficionados? Photo enthusiasts?*

I'm still trying to figure this out. I believe that if people don't love seeing an authentic Hawai'i lifestyle, they will not enjoy following me. I'm simple, I capture what's in front of me, there is little glitz and glamour. I think people are intrigued with Hawai'i.

### *What type of image resonates the most with your followers?*

People really love my underwater shots!

### *What has been your most popular image? Any speculation as to why?*

I think my most popular image is one swimming with sharks in Tahiti. Maybe I got lucky on the "Popular Page", or maybe people just really "liked" it!

*Are you aggressive in cross-marketing your Instagram website on your other web presences?*

Not at all. I actually just added my Instagram link on my website last month.

*What's your advice for getting from 50,000 to 100,000 followers?*

I actually don't think the number of followers matter, it's about the 10-20% likes-to-followers ratio that matters; how many people are actually engaged. If I have 100,000 followers, but only get 1,000 likes on any given post, I cannot say that my Instagram is "successful".

#### TAKEAWAYS:

» Be sure to keep your Instagram account public, not private. If your account is private, then you immediately remove the potential for new followers to find you organically and engage with your work. And you never know if that new follower could be Instagram itself. If you shoot quality work and Instagram is impressed, the opportunity to be featured by them will increase your audience exponentially. If you're curious how Instagram selects accounts to feature, check out their [FAQs here](#).



[@brooklynhawaii](#)



[@brooklynhawaii](#)

## PROFILE

# 830,000+ followers: An Authentic Approach to a Massive, World- Wide Following

Featuring Pei Ketron



📷 @pketron

🏠 [www.penelopesloom.com](http://www.penelopesloom.com)

**Niche:** Freelance photographer, educator and social media consultant

**Location:** San Francisco

**Date Started on Instagram:** October 16, 2010

*How does Instagram fit into your overall marketing plan? Do you use it to generate more business, or is it a tool for personal expression?*

I wish I could say that I approached Instagram from the beginning with such intention. In reality, I started posting photos on Instagram the first week it was released to the public with the goal of sharing fun casual photos with my friends, and it quickly evolved into a more artistic endeavor for me. It remains, first and foremost, a tool for personal expression, but I'm certainly aware of how it can be a valuable marketing and business tool and post with that in mind. I am extremely careful, however, to not let the business side of things take over as I never want to be perceived as just a mouthpiece for brands.

*You mentioned in an interview on [asiasociety.org](http://asiasociety.org) that you were featured as a suggested user by Instagram, which helped you grow your followers, while having much respect for those who do it organically. Do you think it's really possible to grow your audience in excess of 100,000 without having a featured image or being a featured photographer?*

Not only do I think it's possible, but I know it's possible to grow your audience to be that large without being a suggested user. I've seen it happen on several occasions, but I do concede that it's extremely difficult. Growing an audience is difficult and takes time. When asked for tips on how to do it, I recommend that people be consistent and regular with their posts and that they become active members in the community by not only leaving thoughtful comments on other peoples' images, but also by making an effort to meet others if they hap-

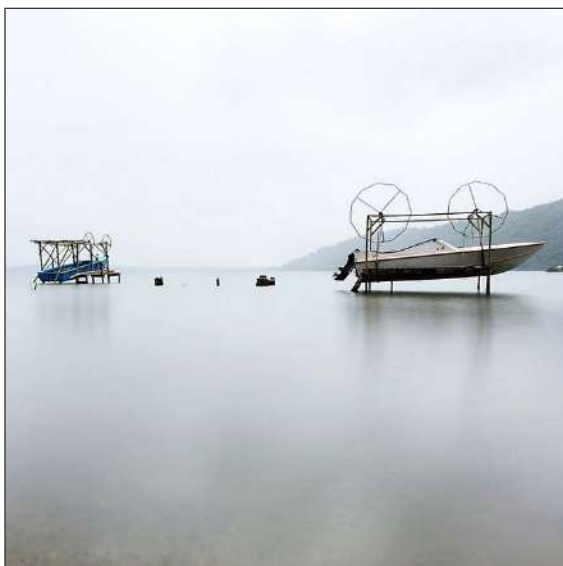
pen to be in an area where there is an active local community. It comes down to getting your name out there and promoting yourself in natural, non-obnoxious ways. Be a photographer who others want to follow and get to know; don't force it.

*Many of the heavily followed photographers on Instagram post "quiet" images—images with a certain sense of solitude (and perhaps symmetry). Is there a visual aesthetic that drives more followers and likes?*

I don't think there's a definitive answer to this question. I agree that a lot of clean, quiet images tend to garner a large number of likes, but it often depends on the audience that that particular photographer has built. People make the decision to follow photographers based on the images that they see in their feed, so if a photographer's feed is built off of those types of images, there's more of a chance that a subsequent, similar image will be popular. I do have to say, however, that one of the biggest challenges of photography is to distill a scene down to its most important components and to eliminate clutter and distraction. Photographers who are able to successfully capture "quiet" images have really mastered this skill and have made their mark as photographers to follow because they're just really good at what they do.

*You feature yourself in a small percentage of your posts. Is this a conscious effort to "brand" or make yourself more approachable online? Would you recommend posting selfies?*

Personally, I've never made a conscious effort to brand myself, but when I think about the photographers I like



@pketron

the most, I tend to gravitate towards those who not only post great images, but who also depict themselves as real people. I want my followers to get to know me because it makes my posts and my words more meaningful. I want people to follow me because they like my photos and because they like me as a person. I want to be someone they'd want to hang out with.

*Have you been approached by brands who want to pay you to gain access to your followers?*

Yes, and I think this is both a positive and a negative thing. I've accepted very few proposals and those I do tend to be travel and humanitarian in nature (working with tourism boards and organizations I respect like Save the Children and UNICEF). I make every effort to only work with companies whose missions I support.



@pketron

*How should professional photographers be using Instagram?*

It's interesting how much criticism I've seen from traditional professional photographers when it comes to Instagram. I believe that if a professional photographer wants to get their images seen by as many people as possible to build an audience and widen their recognition, they should embrace Instagram. Instagram provides photographers with an extremely active and engaged audience that is constantly consuming and creating imagery, spreading the word about people they like, and pushing themselves creatively. Being a part of the community and culture encourages photographers to grow and not become stale, and it puts our images in front of hundreds of thousands of people who might just happen to include people like photo editors, brand marketing people, and the like. I, along with hundreds of others, have gotten photography work because of what we do on Instagram.



@pketron

*Cell phone photography is often thought of by the old guard as not serious photography—an area where food and travel photography seem to dominate. How do you respond to this “accusation” and what do you think the old guard don’t understand about Instagram?*

I think that most people who hold that opinion are close-minded and haven't really been looking at the right Instagram accounts. In my opinion, one of the advantages of mobile photography is that it eliminates the stress of having to think about technical aspects like what focal length I should shoot at or what my aperture, shutter speed, and ISO should be, allowing me to instead focus on nailing my composition and evoking the mood and emotion that I'm aiming for. I'm extremely confident on the technical side, so spending the time shooting with my phone instead of my DSLR or film camera has really allowed me to grow on the artistic side.

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Additionally, mobile photography has been great because it has inspired people who have never been interested in photography to get into the field. I've witnessed huge numbers of people start with casual iPhone photos and then evolve to DSLR photography, even on a professional level. We have Instagram and mobile photography to thank for the growing number of creatives in our field, which pushes each and every one of us to keep improving and innovating. This is a good thing.

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#### TAKEAWAYS:

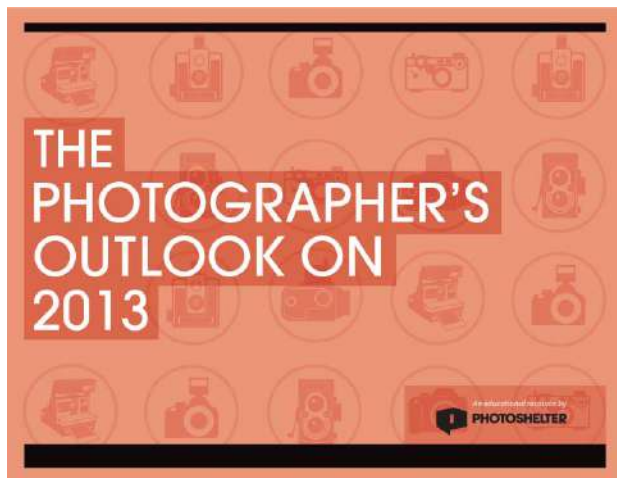
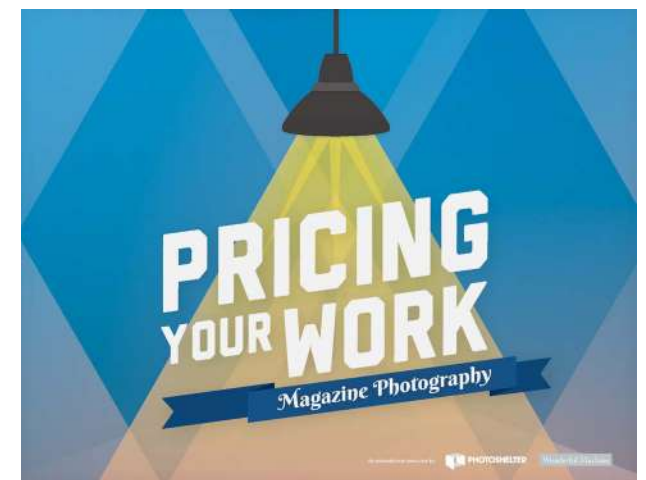
- » Growing an audience won't happen overnight, but it is something you can accomplish (like everything else) with hard work and dedication. This means you need to post consistently so your audience can expect to see content from you, and also take the time to leave thoughtful comments on others' images too. This shows that you're an active participant, not just shouting from the rooftops about your own work.
  - » Professional photographers, who have at times criticized the platform, should learn to embrace Instagram and use it to their advantage as an effective way to engage a quality audience. Remember that Instagram provides photographers with an audience that is constantly consuming and creating imagery and spreading the word about people they like. And at the end of the day, word-of-mouth marketing is your most powerful tool.
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Be a photographer who others want to follow and get to know; don't force it.

## PART III

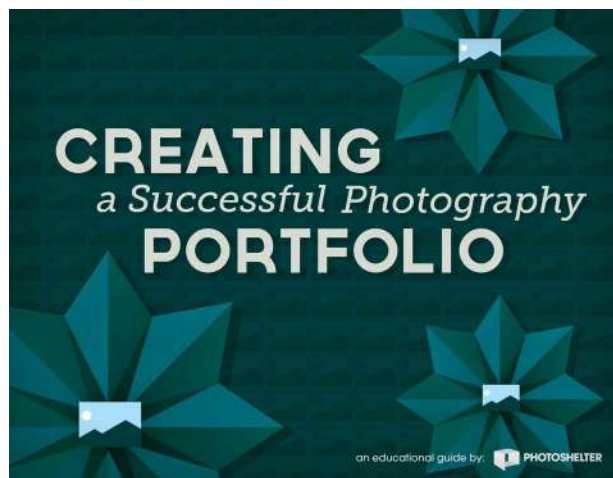
# Conclusion

**U**nlike Twitter and Facebook, Instagram still shows strong user engagement and growth, and is the perfect medium for visual artists. More and more photographers are realizing the power of Instagram to enable: 1) Direct publishing to an opt-in following, 2) Access to photo editors and other imaging professionals, 3) An increasing number of ways to generate revenue. While you might never aspire to accumulate 1 million followers, the platform provides a solid means of communicating with your audience while showing signs of real monetization potential in the near future. And remember that at the root of Instagram, like any other social platform, the best way to grow a following and attract quality engagement is to post great content that can inspire a reaction. Next time you post, ask yourself, “Would I like or comment on this photo if I saw it in my own feed?” If the answer is Yes, then you’re heading in the right direction.



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