



Unit 9

Instagram for Business

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Build Your Social Media Marketing Strategy
- ✓ Create Captivating Visuals, Grow Your Following, and Drive Engagement on Instagram

Unit 9

Instagram for Business

Instagram came out of nowhere to revolutionise the social media landscape in ways nobody could have predicted. The platform initially burst onto the scene in 2010, at which point it seemed destined to exist as something of a 'second class' alternative to the major platforms at the time.

After all, what's the appeal of a platform that's primarily (or exclusively) about sharing photos?

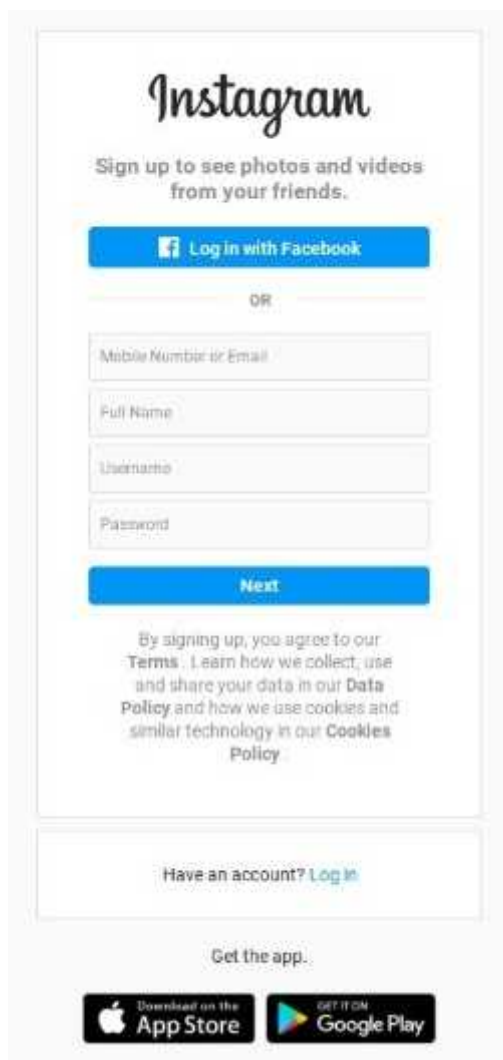
Given that photo sharing was already a big part of social media elsewhere, Instagram didn't seem to have the brightest future ahead of it. Fast-forward to the present day and the figures are no less than astonishing:

- More than 1 billion active monthly users
- 500 million daily Instagram Stories
- Used by 60% of all adult Internet users
- 25 million business profiles launched to date
- Used by 35% of all adults in the U.S.
- 72% of users base purchase decisions on Instagram content
- 80% of Instagram users follow businesses

Given the above, it's clear that Instagram has evolved into far more than a simple personal communication platform. It's still used by the masses to show off their dishes, their dogs and their daily lives, but Instagram has also become an exceptionally powerful business tool.

Along with the above, it's worth remembering that more than 70% of *all* Instagram users say they research brands and businesses on the platform. Hence, if you want to tap into this astonishingly broad and diverse audience of consumers, you need to know how to get the best out of Instagram for business.

How to Create an Instagram Business Account

A screenshot of the Instagram sign-up page. At the top, the Instagram logo is displayed in a cursive font. Below it, the text reads "Sign up to see photos and videos from your friends." There is a blue button with a Facebook logo and the text "Log in with Facebook". Below this is a horizontal line with "OR" in the center. Underneath are four input fields: "Mobile Number or Email", "Full Name", "Username", and "Password". A blue "Next" button is positioned below the input fields. Below the "Next" button, there is a paragraph of text: "By signing up, you agree to our Terms. Learn how we collect, use and share your data in our Data Policy and how we use cookies and similar technology in our Cookies Policy." At the bottom of the sign-up area, there is a link: "Have an account? Log in". Below the sign-up area, there is a "Get the app." section with two buttons: "Download on the App Store" and "GET IT ON Google Play".

Before we go any further, it's worth noting at this point that an Instagram campaign for business isn't a one-time-only affair. If you intend to make the most of Instagram's unique power and appeal, you need to approach your campaign as an ongoing process, with no defined end date.

Hence, you'll also need to allocate adequate resources to your strategy, which may mean hiring contributors or outsourcing to third parties.

Sign Up With Your Business Email Address

As for the logistics, actually getting started on Instagram is easy. You'll need to download the appropriate app from the **App Store** or **Google Play Store** to get things up and running on

your mobile device, or head over to the Instagram home page to sign up via a desktop PC or laptop:

<https://www.instagram.com/accounts/emailsignup/?hl=en>

At which point, you'll have the option to “*Log In With Facebook or Sign Up With Phone or Email.*” Instagram is owned by Facebook, so you can technically get started by simply linking your Facebook account to your new Instagram account.

However, as you are setting up a business account, you'll want to sign up from scratch using your **business e-mail address**. Don't make the mistake of linking your Instagram business account to your personal Facebook account.

Complete the Registration Process

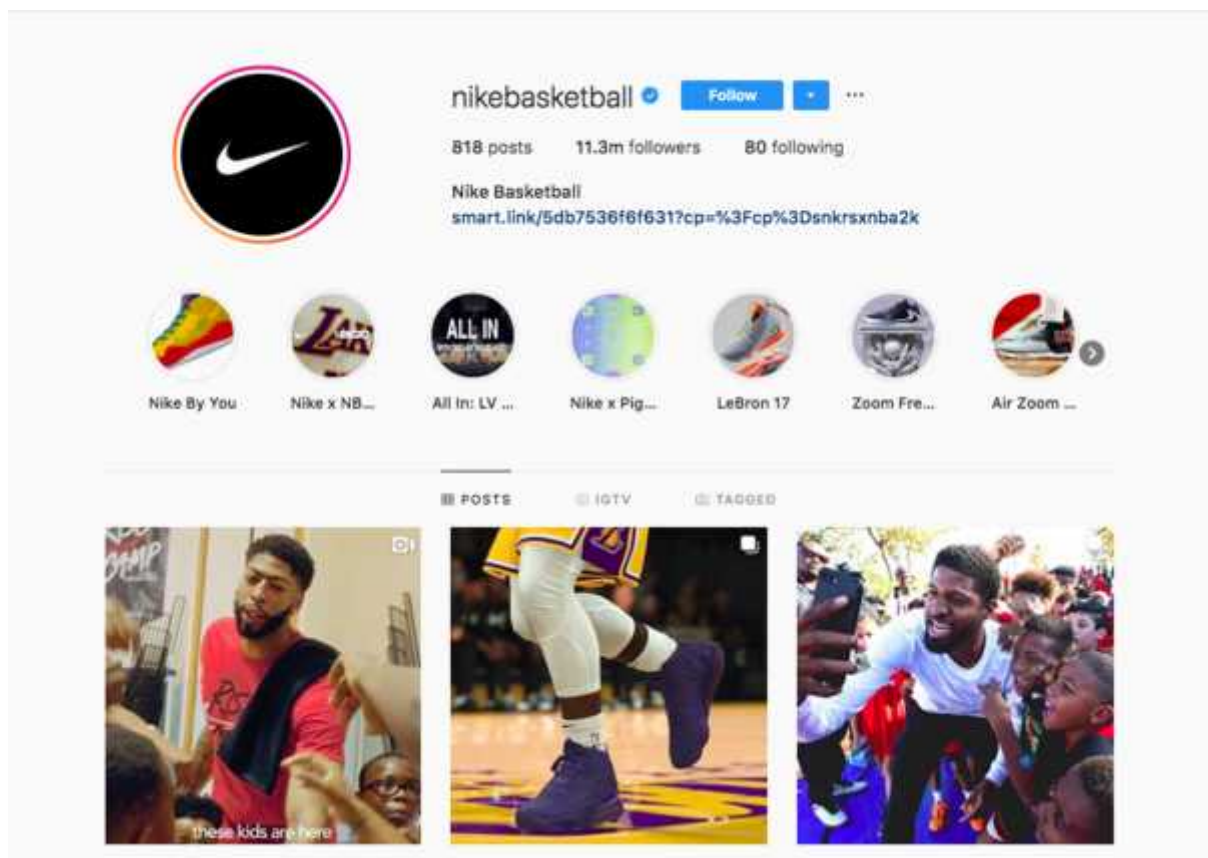
It's then simply a case of following the on-screen instructions, which will guide you through the rest of the registration process. When prompted to enter your *Full Name*, this is where you should enter the **name of your business**.

Note: *Your username is not the same as your 'Full Name', so this is where your full business name should be entered as it will be displayed on your profile.*

You'll then be able to decide on your username, which is the handle others will use to communicate and interact with your business. Your username will incorporate a '@' symbol followed the username you choose, which should be as close to your actual business name as possible.

Don't worry too much if you're struggling to come up with a catchy username – you can always change it at a later date in your account settings.

Instagram Business Account Optimisation



Optimisation amounts primarily to personalisation – all the modifications necessary to make your Instagram profile unique to your brand and appealing to your target audience. Always remember that your profile picture is the first thing anyone visiting your profile will look at, so it needs to deliver the best possible first impression.

Bear in mind that your profile picture will automatically be cropped in a circular shape, so make sure nothing important is chopped off when you upload it.

You've no choice but to keep your Instagram Bio concise, as you have a limit of 150 characters to play with. This is where it's good to get creative, providing visitors with a brief yet intriguing introduction to your business and giving them a taste of its personality.

Don't bother with hashtags or keywords here – your Instagram Bio isn't indexed for SEO purposes.

However, your Instagram Bio is the *only* place where you can position a permanent link to any other external page or website. For obvious reasons, you'll probably want to channel as many people as possible to your main website's home page.

Switch to a Professional Account



With the basics of your account up and running, now's the time to officially register your account as a business account. Instagram provides a variety of useful business tools for registered professional users, making it easier to promote your content and engage your target audience.

Switching over to a professional account is easy - click **Account > Switch to Professional Account** and you're good to go.

You can also link your professional Instagram account with your Facebook Business Page, if you have one set up. Doing so will automatically port key information from your Facebook Business Page to your Instagram account, saving you the job of doing it yourself.

Posting Content on Instagram

Your account is set up, your profile is personalised and you're ready to interact with your target audience. At which point, it's a case of posting the kind of epic and engaging content you need to get them hooked.

Instagram is (of course) a primarily visual platform, but there are still plenty of different *types* of Instagram posts you can publish. A few of the most popular examples of which we'll now be taking a look at in a little more detail:

Images

Instagram is used primarily for posting and sharing images. From a business perspective, each and every image you post should be relevant to your brand and of value to your target audience. If you're struggling for inspiration, check out the Instagram of any major brand and see how they get the job done.

Product imagery may seem like the obvious choice, but it's actually advisable to *avoid* publishing too many product photos. Think instead about lifestyle shots, contextual imagery, pictures of what goes on behind the scene at your place of work and so on.

Behind-the-Scenes Posts

On that note, it's worth stressing just how effective behind-the-scenes posts can be. Instagram provides the perfect platform to show the people behind the brand and how you do what you do. The days of getting by as a faceless brand are over – today's consumer expects total transparency.

This is also the perfect way to demonstrate how you do things *better* than your competitors, building rapport with your target audience by clearly showing your personality and human side.

Employee Contributions

Under no circumstances should you ever rely on just one (or a few) individuals to handle your Instagram account in its entirety. Instead, think about getting as many employees to contribute as possible.

Along with adding variety to the content you publish, this significantly contributes to the humanization of your business. It's also a great way of keeping a steady flow of content moving through your Instagram, while avoiding dry spells due to lack of ideas and inspiration.

User-Generated Content

By far one of the most beneficial and effective forms of content for your Instagram, UGC also has the benefit of being 100% free of charge. You simply ask your fans and followers to share their thoughts by way of images, videos and so on, which you then publish on your Instagram.

Positive praise that comes directly from real-life customers is exponentially more powerful than anything *you* could ever say about your brand. It also brings further variety to your feed and keep things interesting for your followers.

Educational Posts

Increasingly, Instagram users are showing preference to posts that show them how to do something. An educational post can be something as easy as a written recipe, or as advanced as a video tutorial on how to make something from scratch.

Think about something your target audience would like to do or a problem they'd like to solve, before setting about providing them with the solution.

Influencer Posts

If you can get an influential individual of any kind to promote your products, your services or your brand, you're golden. Paying influencers to say positive things about your business is one thing, but it's far better to appeal to them on a personal level and have them promote you willingly.

From day one, don't be afraid to reach out to influencers within your niche and attempt to get them on board. Just as long as your products and services really are as good as you think they are, you shouldn't have too much trouble finding influencers willing to promote them.

Newsjacking

Simply regurgitating posts and information from other online sources really isn't the way to go. By contrast, injecting your thoughts, your opinions and your personality into breaking news stories and current events can work wonders.

Newsjacking gives you the opportunity to discuss current and relevant topics with your target audience, while the same time reinforcing your voice, personality and humanity. It's simply a case of keeping on top of current events and trends at all times – yesterday's news is never interesting

Motivational Posts

These should be approached carefully and used sparingly, though can nonetheless be effective from time to time. Share inspirational and uplifting quotes by all means, but try to avoid anything that's been done to death or is painfully cliché.

The appropriateness of motivational posts will be determined by who it is you're targeting, but the occasional thought-provoking snippet is never a bad thing.

The Art of Effective Instagram Photography



At the risk of stating the obvious, your success (or otherwise) on Instagram will largely be determined by the quality of your images. Assuming you're not planning on hiring a premium-rate photographer to snap *every* picture you publish, you're going to need to familiarise yourself with the basics.

It's worth acknowledging the fact that you cannot and will not get away with low-quality, low-resolution imagery. Irrespective of context or quality of message, every image you upload should be pristine and perfectly presented.

If it is lower than 1080p, it's not worth publishing.

On the plus side, there hasn't been a decent smartphone manufactured in years that doesn't take reasonable quality 1080p photos. In case you're wondering therefore, the answer is yes – you can use the smartphone you're carrying right now to take your Instagram photos.

Feel free to upgrade to pro-quality gear if you like, but it isn't strictly necessary.

Instead, it's a case of familiarise yourself with the most important rules of taking and publishing engaging Instagram photos. Once you've got the hang of it, you'll find the whole thing second nature and you'll be capturing quality shots without even thinking about it.

1. Follow the rule of thirds

Every digital camera will (or should) have a 'grid lines' option, which will divide the screen into nine sections by way of a series of lines. The idea being that the primary subject of the photograph should appear at one of the points where these horizontal and vertical lines intersect.

What's known as the 'rule of thirds' is basically a fool-proof way of positioning the subject off-centre, in a way that is far more eye-catching than a central subject.

2. Avoid overcrowding

This basically means keeping things simple in terms of subjects and points of focus. Where possible, try to make sure each photograph focuses on a single subject, with as few distractions and unnecessary extras in the shot as possible.

Always remember that a pristine background with no distractions whatsoever can be more effective than an elaborate and OTT backdrop for your images.

3. Use negative space to your advantage

Speaking of which, negative space refers to the space around the central subject of the image that is left empty. Creative and strategic use of negative space can be exceptionally effective – think of the way Apple presents its products, logos and slogans in marketing materials, often dominated by negative space.

Before framing your subjects with elaborate backgrounds, see how things look with plenty of negative space.

4. Experiment with angles

What seems to be the most obvious or appropriate angle for a shot may not necessarily be the most eye-catching or impactful. If your instinct tells you to shoot something from directly in front, try taking the shot from above, below or a completely random angle.

The key to engaging audiences on Instagram lies in presenting them with things they've never seen before. Precisely why experimentation can be so powerful.

5. Keep the light as natural as possible

Where it's possible to do so, your shots should always be taken in natural light at a time of day that eliminates problematic shadowing. Shooting straight after sunrise or just before sunset can be particularly effective.

If you've no choice but to use artificial lights, try to make things look as natural as possible by avoiding strong and direct sources of light that will create troublesome shadows.

An Introduction to Instagram Stories

A relatively new feature to the platform, Instagram Stories provide users with the opportunity to post higher quantities of content on a regular basis, without cluttering their primary feed. As the name suggests, Stories provide you with the opportunity to tell a 'story' of some kind, through a variety of different types of images and videos.

The defining feature of Instagram stories being that they disappear after 24 hours.

Your primary Instagram feed is therefore the place for evergreen content and to showcase your proudest posts. By contrast, your Instagram Stories can be quite 'rough' in nature, which can actually enhance their authenticity and humanity.

For example, you could post a bunch of completely unedited and shaky shots of what's happening behind the scenes at your business right now, showing your audience how things work in a raw and unpretentious way. Stories are also great for showcasing snippets of live events and anything happening in real-time at your business.

Posting an Instagram Story is as easy as hitting the *Your Story* button at the top of the screen, which will activate the camera on your device and set things in motion.

IGTV for Business

Newer still, IGTV – aka Instagram TV – enables users to share much longer video clips that *don't* disappear after a set period of time. All such videos are shot in a vertical format with mobile device users in mind, which can be uploaded at a later time (rather than shot in real-time) and therefore allow for edits and improvements to be carried out.

You'll need to download the separate IGT app to use this feature, after which it's simply a case of shooting a video no shorter than 15 seconds and no longer than 10 minutes. If your account with Instagram has been verified, you'll be able to upload videos with a maximum duration of 60 minutes.

Once you're happy with your edited videos, you can simply upload them via the app for your audience to watch on-demand.

The Criticality of Quality Captions

Get it right with your Instagram images and they'll tell a more powerful story than all the words in the world ever could. However, the captions you publish alongside your images can take the impact and appeal of your posts to an entirely new level.

As you'd expect, there's no silver-bullet rule for creating quality captions every time. The subject and context of the image will determine what's appropriate and advisable.

Nevertheless, there are a few essential guidelines to keep in mind when penning captions of any kind for Instagram post.

The most important of which being as follows:

- **Take Your Time**

First and foremost, don't make the mistake of rushing the process simply to get your content published as quickly as possible. The captions you publish can make or break the quality of your posts and have a major influence on their interpretation, so it's worth taking your time.

- **Get a Second Opinion**

As you should be doing with *all* of your most important social media posts, it's also worth getting a second opinion from a colleague or friend before finalising your captions. Rather than studying its intricacies in-depth, ask how they feel about it in terms of first impressions at a glance.

- **Keep Things Concise**

Instagram provides publishers with plenty of creative freedom, allowing for captions to be written up to a maximum of 2,200 characters. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that most viewers don't bother to read past the first couple of lines in most instances. Where possible, keep things concise.

- **Use CTAs**

If you want your fans and followers to comment on your posts, share them, like them and so on, why not just ask them outright? The strategic use of CTAs in Instagram post captions can be remarkably effective – certainly more so than *not* including CTAs at all.

- **Show Your Personality**

Each and every caption should be a reflection of the voice and personality of your brand. If you usually publish in a light-hearted voice, don't suddenly switch to stuffy or formal corporate-speak in your captions.

Building an Audience on Instagram



Of course, all the quality content in the world is of little to no value, if nobody gets to see it. Ultimately, getting ahead on platforms like Instagram is all about the numbers. By which, we mean establishing an engaged audience of fans and followers.

One important note at this juncture – resist the temptation to buy fans and followers at all costs. Rather than boosting your reputation and helping you attract organic followers, the fake followers you buy will have the exact opposite effect.

Growing your Instagram audience will take time, effort and quite a lot of patience. Nevertheless, it's something that will happen eventually and can be accelerated with the help of the following good practice guidelines:

1. **Ensure you choose an appropriate username.** It's your username that will determine how easy or otherwise it is for people to find you, while at the same time contributing to their first impression of your business.
2. **Create a compelling Instagram Bio.** This is effectively your 'elevator pitch', which for many potential followers and customers will single-handedly determine whether or not they do business with you.
3. **Post regularly and consistently.** As soon as your account is set up, begin posting content on a regular basis and as consistently as possible. Do your best to avoid dry spells, as publishers that go silent for even a short period of time are easy to forget.
4. **Never post simply for the sake of it.** Each and every post you publish should be relevant your business and carry some kind of identifiable and quantifiable value for its intended recipient. If you've nothing interesting to say or show, don't post until you have.
5. **Start following other accounts.** Any entity on Instagram (individual or business) that has some kind of relevance to your brand is an entity you should be following. And more importantly, interacting with to encourage them to follow you back.
6. **Promote your Instagram elsewhere.** Use every online and offline channel at your disposal to aggressively promote your Instagram. Post as many links as you can elsewhere to drive traffic directly to your profile and your proudest posts.

Most importantly, be patient and tenacious as you cannot expect to build a broad and engaged audience overnight.

Converting Followers into Customers

Now that you've built a decent-sized audience of Instagram followers, the time comes to convert them into paying customers. You can have all of followers in the world, but it's not going to do your business any favours if they don't buy anything (or take action of some kind).

Again, there are dozens of different approaches that can be taken to enhancing and improving conversion rates. Though when put to the test, the following have proven most effective of all:

1. **Promotional Offers.** What better way to boost conversions than to offer exclusive deals and discounts to your fans and followers? This can also be a great way of bringing new followers on board, especially if it is a limited-time offer that generates a sense of urgency.
2. **Competitions and Giveaways.** Similarly, conversion rates and follower numbers can both be boosted with regular competitions and giveaways. Again, it's a case of ensuring these competitions and giveaways are exclusive to existing followers (or paying customers) only.
3. **Community Initiatives.** Research has shown that the vast majority of consumers are more likely to do business with brands that donate to charities, support local community initiatives and generally do good things for society in general.
4. **Loyalty Schemes.** A tried and trusted approach to driving sales, repeat business and loyalty, which simply involves rewarding regular customers with exclusive deals and incentives via your Instagram.
5. **Limited Numbers.** Post a stunning picture of a popular product, inform your followers you've only 100 available at a special 40% discounted price and watch them fight tooth and nail to take advantage of this irresistible offer.

In addition, remember to position CTAs strategically across your pages and your posts, reminding your followers to take action and giving them clear instructions on how to do so.