

Let's talk about hashtags

Love them or loathe them (or even if you're a bit confused by them) hashtags are a way of indexing and organising content on different social media platforms.

Although you can add hashtags to any social media platform you want by typing in # and then whatever word you want, the place we tend to see hashtags the most is Instagram. However they don't just work on there. Hashtags are also commonly used on Twitter and now they're also used on YouTube and LinkedIn too. They are often seen on Facebook too but they don't tend to work in quite the same way there.

So, let's look at how we use hashtags...

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Hashtags help the platforms organise the content that is published on them into some order.

And that is it.

So by using hashtags on our content, we are helping people who are interested in whatever we're talking about to find us. And then if we want to find content connected to our passions and interests, we can find that too.

To give you a demo, pop on over to Instagram and tap on the magnifying glass along the bottom of the screen. Now up to 'Search' at the top and then select 'Tags' just underneath the search bar. And let's type in 'Horses'. Below you'll see a list of hashtags that start with 'Horses'. If you tap on the top one, you'll see a screen that is divided up...

- **Top left** you have Stories that have used that hashtag AND Instagram has decided to show in that hashtag's story.
- **Follow** – if you want to follow this hashtag (like you follow a person), tap the follow button.
- **Related** – this is useful for hashtag research as Instagram has generated a list of connected hashtags that can be used together or might show other relevant content.
- **Top** – this shows the most popular posts using this hashtag
- **Recent** - this shows the most recent posts from people using this hashtag

On Twitter (if you want), you can again go to search and then type in #dog into the search. On the app you'll then see top, latest, people, etc. Again, you will see tweets from people who have used that hashtags and, again, these have been used in a similar way to Instagram... so it's handy if you're looking for something specific or connected to a specific subject or even an event, a campaign, or something else.

So now we're all singing from the same hymn sheet and we know the foundations of hashtags and why they can be useful, I'd like to focus on one place in particular- Instagram – and chat through how you can use these here, how many you can use, how you find the right hashtags and how you know if they're working...

How can you use hashtags on Instagram? How many?

You can use them on your grid or feed posts and you can use them in Stories. On a grid post you can have up to 30 hashtags, and you can have up to 10 hashtags on a story.

On a post, you can put your hashtags in the caption or the first comment – it doesn't seem to affect how they work at all, the placement of them is down to aesthetics and your personal preference. If you schedule your content, putting them in the caption is easier and means that the hashtags start 'working' as soon as the post is published. Many people, me included, use line breaks to split the hashtags from the caption.

In a story, you can use the # sticker for one if you like, but then you can simply list the others. If you don't like how they look (and a list of hashtags definitely messes up an aesthetic!) you can colour match them to the background or hide them behind a GIF.

How to find the right hashtags

The short answer is as simple as 'relevancy'. All the hashtags you use must be relevant to what you're posting – you could be penalised if not. So when you look at an image and your accompanying caption, think about who it might appeal to, what the image contains, and your brand hashtag too.

So let's say you're putting up a motivational quote which features a cat in the image with the words. You could use #cats #catsofinstagram #catsofinsta in addition to #motivation #motivational #motivationalquote. Even though #love is the most popular hashtag of all time, it's not really relevant for this post so even though it's popular, don't use it. You might also want to add your own brand if that's relevant, or something that can connect you to others in a group or community like #smallandsuperchargedextra

If you're struggling with ideas, you can use the explore/search for inspiration, as mentioned above when I talked through how search works. Type in a hashtag you're planning to use and look at what Instagram suggests. Another quick hack is to look at posts using one of the hashtags you're planning to use and see what other tags they have used. Don't just copy them all as it's unlikely they will all be relevant to you, but use it to inspire you.

You know how many hashtags you can use as a maximum BUT you don't have to use them all. Make sure all the tags are relevant – even if you can only think of five – don't add a load just because – make them all relevant.

Don't always go just for the hugely popular tags. Really popular tags are harder to rank for because (again, thinking of that explore/search page), it's very hard to get featured as a top post, and because of the volume of posts, you will move down the recent list pretty quickly. This doesn't mean you shouldn't use a popular # if relevant but also use some smaller more niche ones too as you're likely to rank much higher for these and also, if someone does find you through there, they're more likely to be very interested in what you have to say.

Are they working?

This is why we do it:

Grid posts:

Go to your Instagram feed now and pick a post you have posted with hashtags, Tap 'View Insights' on the left side under the image. When 'Post Insights' appears, swipe up. Scroll down to underneath the 'Discovery' header and under Impressions you'll see how any people found you through your hashtags.

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In Stories:

Go up to your Stories, pick one you have used a #

Swipe up

Tap the graph icon

See how many sticker taps you've received (this means people have tapped on that hashtag)

See how many views you've received (generally, if one Story with # has got a lot more views than the others, you've been featured in the story connected to that hashtag on the search page).

Your Challenge

Come up with a list of relevant hashtags for your brand.

Many people (me included) have different variations of hashtags that are used for different kinds of posts, so if your posts vary in focus and content, you can subdivide your list. So, for example...

Small & Supercharged Podcast Posts: #podcast #podcaster #podcastlife #smallandsuperchargedpodcast #itunes #spotify would be used in these podcast related posts.

But a motivational/inspirational quote: #motivation #motivationalquotes #quotestoliveby #inspiration #inspirationalquotes would be used, in addition to other hashtags

You can then save these into the notes section of your phone and just tweak them whenever you copy and paste over to your Instagram post...

Add #smallandsuperchargedextra and keep an eye on that # and support fellow group members too!

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