INSTAGRAM ALGORITHM

AND HOW TO "HACK" IT

2020

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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HOW IG ALGORITHM WORKS FOR FEED POSTS

How does Instagram algorithm actually work?

This is the question that confused many users ever since Instagram stepped away from its chronological feed.

What performs better in the algorithm, videos or photos? Will hashtags help me rank better? How do I get my post in front of more followers?

Find out the facts about the new algorithm and how it affects stories, feed posts, and explore pages!
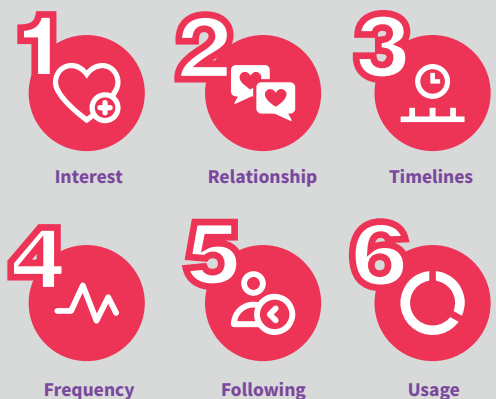
WHAT'S NEW

How Instagram Algorithm Affects Your Feed Posts in 2020

Many people have been under the assumption that Instagram releases new version of algorithm every couple of weeks. But it isn't so. Recently, Instagram went on record to address rumors and to clear things up.

The Instagram algorithm is powered by machine learning and changes constantly based on the enormous amounts of data it gathers every minute of the day.

Simply put, the algorithm factors in any new behavioral trends and patterns into how it works, constantly adapting and improving based on new data.

In January, Instagram announced several key factors that influence Instagram algorithm for feed post.

1 Interest

2 Relationship

3 Timelines

4 Frequency

5 Following

6 Usage

Interest

The Instagram algorithm foresees how much you care about a post.

Who & What You Like

The more the algorithm assumes you will "like" a specific post, it will appear higher in your feed.

In other words, what you see in your Instagram feed is a sequence of all your Instagram presence. People you interact with the most, the type of posts you like or comment on, and what stories you watch.

Vital Engagements

It is a known fact that Instagram algorithm prioritizes posts that are most engaging. But what type of engagement is most important?

Instagram announced that the most important engagement for feed are likes, comments, and re-shares. Video posts are ranked on the amount of views they receive.

creators
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ENGAGEMENTS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO FEED RANKING:

COMMENTS LIKES
RESHARES VIEWS

@CREATORS

View More on Instagram

7,142 likes
creators
A peak at some of the 🔍 metrics that impact feed ranking . Check out our stories today where we're busting those algorithm myths you ask us about most frequently! 👀
view all 316 comments

Add a comment...

Did You Know?

While it's not officially listed as a vital engagement indicator at the moment, optimizing your content for "saves" may prove extremely valuable since Instagram experiments are hiding likes in many countries.

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Relationship

The Instagram algorithm prioritizes to display posts from accounts you care about.

Tip #1: Post Consistently

Posting consistently signals to the algorithm that you are an excellent account and helps improve your engagement.

Your ideal posting frequency should be determined by your business goals, posting schedule that you can maintain consistently, and workflow that allows you to produce high quality content.

Smooth pattern of consistently engaging content will be rewarded.

Tip #2: Use Notifications & Facebook Page Manager

Make sure you constantly reply and engage with the comments on your feed. If the comment doesn't call for response, you can always show some love with a heart. Doing so will alert the algorithm that you have a "relationship" with that follower.

Facebook Pages unified inbox now allows you to respond to Instagram Direct Messages directly from your Pages Inbox. This is guaranteed to speed up your workflow and drive more engagement.

In order to show you the most valuable content, the algorithm uses your engagement with others to figure out who is closest to you. Below are several key indicators Instagram considers about your user behavior to theoretically determine which accounts you care about the most.

- Accounts whose content you like
- People you direct message
- Accounts you search for
- People you know in real life

For instance, when you are tagged in someone's photos or comment on their posts, Instagram automatically "assumes" that they most likely fall into your "friends and family" category.

Have you noticed that when you start following somebody, you will see a lot of their posts in your feed, but if you don't engage with them, Instagram assumes you might no longer be interested. This shows how your behavior on Instagram has a direct impact on what content you will see in your feed.

Did You Know?

Engaging on Instagram consistently with stories and feed posts is extremely important! It helps your engagement, keeps you relevant to your followers, and helps the algorithm see your posts.

Timelines

3 The Instagram algorithm factors in when you posted to display latest, most engaging posts.

Tip #3: Post When Audience Is Most Active

Use Instagram Insights feature to find out when your followers are most active online .

It is important to remember that such peak times may vary depending on the day of the week. While your audience might be most active during the week after work, they may be the most engaging during mid-mornings on weekends.

Studies find that the best times to post on Instagram during the week are when people first wake up at 5 am, 9 am, and again after work at 5 pm. On weekends, the best time to post is between 11 am and 2 pm.

Since each business, brand and followers will have different engagement behavior, the best times to post can be determined by analyzing the Activity metric using Instagram Insights Feature.
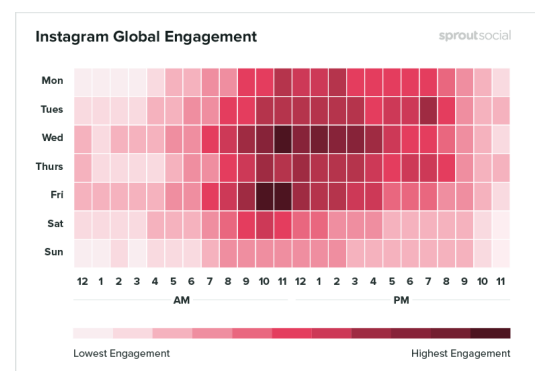
The new algorithm now considers not only how much engagement your Instagram post receive, but also how long ago you posted that photo or video.

When 2020 rolled around, and Instagram users were still seeing Christmas related posts in their feed, although it was January. Users became aware that Instagram algorithm started to consider much more when the post was created, instead of simply the content or engagement size of the post.

Posting your content during time period when majority of your followers are online, you put yourself in a better position of engaging your audience with likes and comments.

You can "hack" the Instagram algorithm by discovering your individual best time to post on Instagram. Doing so will increase your organic reach and in return get you more likes and new followers.

Instagram Global Engagement — sproutsocial

Lowest Engagement — Highest Engagement

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Following

5

What you see on your feed will depend on how many people you follow.

Do you follow a lot of people on Instagram? If so, it's very likely that you will NOT see all the posts from each account since the Instagram has more options to determine your feed from.

Frequency

4

The Instagram algorithm considers frequency when sorting your posts.

Do you open the Instagram app often or do you check it once very few days? The way your feed looks has a direct correlation to the frequency you go online.

If you are someone who scrolls through the feed frequently, Instagram will try to show you most engaging posts since the last time you opened the app, thus giving your feed more of a "chronological" look. On the other hand, if you check Instagram less often, your feed will be sorted according to what Instagram thinks you will like the most.

Usage

6

The Instagram algorithm calculates your app usage.

Users who only spend few minutes on Instagram each day, will only be seeing the feed highlights calculated by the algorithm.

Users who tend to spend a lot of time in the app, usually tend to see more post in their feed. This is because the more time you spend in the app, the algorithms gets to "dig in deeper into data."

Interactions

96

Total taps on your posts or profile from
7 May - 13 May

M T W T F S S

Profile Visits   76
+48 vs. 30 April - 6 May

Website Clicks   11
+8 vs. 30 April - 6 May

Emails   9
+9 vs. 30 April - 6 May

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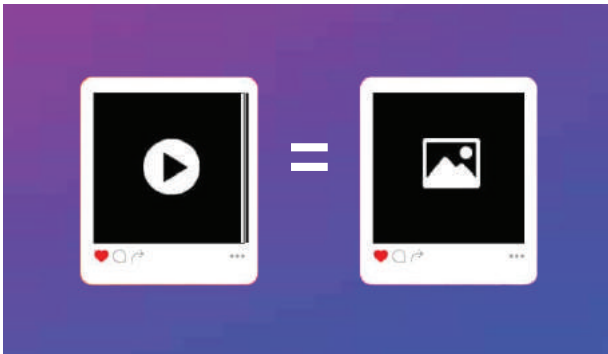
Reputation Management

FACTS

Important Facts About Instagram Algorithm

Ar you ready to separate myths from facts? Instagram creators put rumors to rest with a series of stories that answered the most common questions.
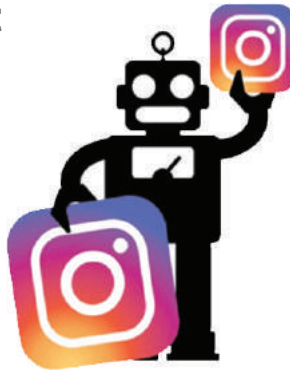
Photos & Videos Are Equal

Instagram confirmed that the algorithm is not biased towards video posts over photos.

Essentially video posts create more engagement due to extended format and longer viewing periods. The algorithm will prioritize most engaging content, so it's a good idea to experiment with more video content and see how it impacts your engagement levels.

Fake Interactions Don't Count

Instagram can now identify fake interactions and rank them accordingly, thanks to its new machine-learning algorithm.

Fake interactions occur when users set up bots and comment pods. So, the best way to create engagement, is by building sustainable and transparent relationships with your followers.

All Account Types Are Treated Equally

Are you worried that switching to a Business Profile may impact your engagement?

No need to worry! Instagram confirmed that all account types (Personal, Business, & Creator) are treated equally with new algorithm.

First 30 Minutes Have No Impact On Your Ranking

To put the rumors to rest that the first 30 minutes after posting is the most crucial for engagement, Instagram announced that the algorithm does not prioritize posts that receive more engagement in first 30 minutes. The algorithm will show your posts to users who regularly engage with your content.

All Comment Lengths Are Considered Engagement

The truth about comments, is that all comments alert the algorithm as the engagement, even if they only contain a single emoji. So it's a great idea to always reply to all comments, as they are an important engagement factor.

HOW IG ALGORITHM WORKS FOR STORIES

How can you beat the algorithm for stories?

Generally, the Instagram Stories you see at the beginning of the row on your home feed are usually from the accounts whose stories you watch and posts you engage with the most.

The algorithm also takes timelines into consideration to make sure you always see the latest stories posted by your favorite accounts.

This explains why you always see stories from accounts that post stories consistently and regularly engage with you.

USEFUL TIP!

Tip #4: Dedicate More Time Posting Regularly to Instagram Stories

The Instagram algorithm is designed to evolve and impact engagement of users. As a result, more and more users began shifting to sending their time on Instagram Stories instead of feeds. When you post to Instagram Stories frequently, your chances of showing up at the top of the stories feed are significantly higher.

By posting to Instagram Stories more often you have multiple chances throughout to be viewed and discovered. In addition, it alerts the algorithm that you regularly post quality and engaging content that your followers are interested in.

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8

HOW IG ALGORITHM WORKS FOR IGTV

How does Instagram select videos for you?

IGTV, being one of the newest features in Instagram platform, works based on the same algorithm criteria as Instagram feed posts.

Instagram will select videos for you based on your interests, relationships, and what accounts you follow. IGTV videos can also be shared with other accounts you follow through Instagram Direct, much like Instagram Stories.

If you like to browse through trending videos, you can do so using the "popular" channel. Currently, IGTV is categorized in 3 categories:

- "For You" category is made up of videos from accounts you follow and what Instagram thinks you will like the most.
- "Following" is an assortment of videos from all the accounts you already follow.
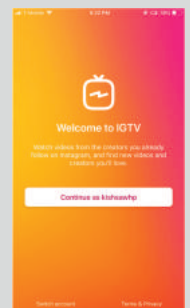- "Popular" category spotlights trending videos on IGTV.

USEFUL TIP!

Tip #5: Boost Your IGTV Engagement By Posting The Preview

Unlike before, when IGTV videos populated solely in your IGTV channel, you now have the option to display a 60-second clip preview of your IGTV video on your Instagram feed.

Before Instagram implemented this update, the only way to get views and create engagement, was to link IGTV videos on Instagram Stories and direct followers to switch over to IGTV. Thankfully to newly implemented changes, your IGTV videos will also be displayed in the grid of your Instagram profile, with a small IGTV icon in the right hand corner.

Generating tons of engagement in IGTV preview option will alert algorithm that you are creating high quality content for IGTV and lead many viewers to your videos.

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9

HOW IG ALGORITHM WORKS FOR EXPLORE PAGE

How does Explore page work?

In general, Instagram Explore page is very similar to your feed in terms of content delivery - both based on your interactions and interests.

The Explore page functions under its own algorithm in order to display personalized content for each individual. That's why your Instagram Explore page might look completely different than it does for your best friend. The Instagram algorithm takes into consideration what type of content you like to see on the app, and tailors it specifically to your interests.

The algorithm consistently learns from your interactions on Instagram by looking at accounts you follow, which posts you like and comment on, and what Stories and IGTV videos you like to watch.

Instagram users can now discover content based on their specific interests using topic channels on Explore page.

For example, "For You" channel, is a collection of posts personalized to your overall interests. You will also see additional channels based on topics you might like. It could be Art, Fashion, Sports, or a Beauty channel.

But how do I get my posts to show up on the Explore page? Luckily, the answer is very simple - by using relevant hashtags, making your posts algorithm-friendly, and optimizing your Instagram marketing strategy.

When it comes to hashtags results page, please remember, that it applies to the same algorithm rules. When you search Instagram for a hashtag, "top posts" will appear in a grid at the top of search results. "Top posts" are selected based on same factors that apply to Explore page - amount of likes or comments and reputation of the hashtag. Hashtag results page will appear the same for every user.

Content Writing

Branding

SEO

TIPS FOR BEATING IG ALGORITHM

How can I build a strong brand on Instagram?

Understanding the way the Instagram algorithm works gives you a huge leverage when building your brand and growing your following. By using information and tips described in this e-book, you gain an advantage with the new 2020 Instagram algorithm.
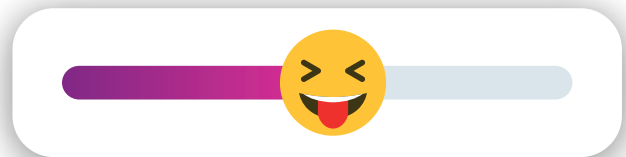
Tip #6: Use Instagram Stickers

A great way to encourage user engagement is by using the Instagram Stories Stickers. And we already figured out that the more engagement your posts receive, the better they will be ranked by the Instagram algorithm.

While Instagram offers a huge variety of stickers, the most effective ones for generating engagement are the emoji slider, poll and question stickers.

Emoji slider and poll stickers can work for nearly any brand or business, and are an excellent way yo encourage engagement.

Question stickers take a little more time than emoji or poll stickers to partake in, but are highly valuable when it comes to generating genuine engagement with your audience.

Tip #7: Start Conversations

Recently, Instagram confirmed that engagement through likes and comments is very important when it comes to better feed ranking. But how do you get followers to like and comment on your post?

The answer is simple. Writing good Instagram captions is one of the best ways to drive engagement. A good caption usually includes some sort of call-to-action.

It can be something as simple as asking your followers to double-tap if they agree with the post, tag their friends in the comments, or share their thoughts.

Taking your time in generating a good caption with a call-to-action will yield immediate results, when it comes to driving engagement.

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11

Tip #8: Optimize Hashtags

If your goal is to reach more people in Instagram, try adding hashtags. Strong hashtag strategy enables you to reach people who will engage with your content and are relevant to your brand.

Well, which hashtags are most valuable for my brand? It varies from business to business. The easiest way to figure it out is by looking at brands and business who post similar content, offer similar product, or have similar target audience.

Once you find those accounts that are similar to yours, take your time to carefully asses their content strategy. Focus on their top-performing posts and identify hashtags that could be relevant to your brand in the future.

Tip #9: Dive Into DMs

Have you noticed that accounts that DM you most frequently usually pop up at the top of your Stories feed? That's because Instagram algorithm is trying to show you content it "thinks" you want to see the most. And DMs are a very strong engagement indicator, very much like likes and comments.

A great way to encourage your audience to DM you is by regularly inviting them to DM you with their feedback and questions. Another way to take advantage of DMs is to encourage followers to send "quick emoji reactions" to your Stories.

Tip #10: Cross-Promote

Cross-Promoting your Instagram content is a great way to drive engagement and boost your algorithm ranking. Luckily, the number of channels on which you can share content has grown along with Instagram.

Now you can share content through feed posts, stories, and newly added IGTV. With all these publishing channels, you can strategically drive different audiences to your most recent posts.

Tip #11: Use Instagram Analytics

Level-up your Instagram marketing strategy by combining some of our tips, and monitoring the performance of your Instagram content.

When you have a clear understanding of what works for you and what doesn't, you have the ability to come up with a strategic marketing plan, which will save you time and money in the long term.

Understanding how your content performs means more than just comparing which post performed the best. To gain a deeper understanding of your insights, you must track metrics over a period of time.

To access Instagram Insights feature, simply tap the menu in the top right-hand corner on profile page, and select Insights.

Here you can see how each individual post or story performed - how many like, comments and impressions each post generated.

Whatever tip you choose to concentrate on to improve your ranking, just remember that developing a genuine relationship with your followers is the most proven and most powerful way to "hack" the Instagram algorithm.

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Analytix Media is a digital marketing agency that treats your business as if it were our own.

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