



Digital Fundraising Playbook Series: Instagram

Introduction

If you've been thinking Facebook should be your sole focus, think again. Instagram has 10 times more engagement than Facebook, 54 times more engagement than Pinterest and 84 times more engagement than Twitter. One billion people use Instagram every month, and the average user spends 30 minutes per day on this platform, which is owned by (but is certainly not identical to) Facebook.

While Instagram's demographic skews younger than that of Facebook, it is the sixth most visited website (meaning people don't just access it through an app) and the ninth most popular Google query. If you have the bandwidth to post quality content consistently, even if it's just a few times a week, your organization belongs on Instagram.

This is true for municipal shelters as well as 501(c)(3) nonprofits, particularly if your audience skews younger than Facebook. Municipal shelters that rely on a "friends of" support group to handle their social media may want to share this playbook (or our whole digital series) with the board members charged with communications and fundraising.

Program Composition

Basic skills and equipment needed:

- A creative spirit and someone ready to rock the social media world! What staff or volunteers do you have that love pop culture, are into the latest trends, or are book or movie enthusiasts?
- An understanding of photography basics (e.g., good lighting, non-distracting backgrounds) is a bonus. Online courses from providers like [Skillshare](#), [Hearts Speak](#) and [Petfinder](#) can help.
- You'll need a smartphone, of course, and the Instagram mobile [app](#).

Basic steps in creating this channel or program:

- Create a business profile. By doing so, you'll have access to more advanced analytics and get access to the donate button.
- Connect your Instagram profile to your Facebook profile. You will have to do this to get access to donation tools. Also, make sure both pages are verified.
- Use the link in your bio to support your most recent campaigns, add applications, highlight adoptable animals and more.
- Network through tags. Are you running an event with another organization? Have a sponsor to thank? Want to recognize staff or volunteers? [Tag](#) them.

Bonus tip: Make content creation easy by creating a place where volunteers and staff can drop photos, and promote the opportunity. You'll get awesome photos, and the person whose photo is used feels

great. Don't forget to add a disclaimer that all photos become the property of the shelter to use for social media and other marketing purposes. In addition, set a few protocols (e.g., photos should be accompanied by the names of animals or people in the photos and a short description of what the photo represents) and ensure that participants sign off on obeying protocols before you give them access to the drop box.

How often should you post on Instagram? As with all social media channels, choose quality over quantity. Most organizations strive to post once a day, or at least a few times per week. Test to see what timing works best for your followers. Play with it, but there's nothing wrong with sticking with what works. There is no need to constantly switch it up. Maddie's Fund offers a [tutorial](#) that may help to jump-start your thinking.

Here are some initial measurements you'll want to make about your Instagram presence:

- Engagement: How many people are interacting with your content? If the answer is not very many, you may not be providing content that's meaningful to your followers.
- Reach: How many people did your content reach? The more people engaging with your content, the more it will reach. Reach is the total number of screens your content was delivered to.
- Effectiveness of your [call to action](#): Are you trying to get more volunteers or donations for a specific campaign? Did your post meet your expectations?

Hootsuite offers additional [tips](#) on Instagram analytics, and [SproutSocial](#) offers a free trial of its analytical tool.

Basic steps for sustaining this program:

- Find out what your followers like to see (go to notifications and swipe left). Create content that fulfills their wishes.
- Make the most of hashtags by using hashtags that have already been adopted by the Instagram community (#adoptdontshop) rather than ones that are personal and only make sense to you or your organization (#isntjimthecutestdog, #lookatrainbowfly).
- Communication is a two-way street, so give the engagement you wish to receive. Respond to as many comments and messages as you can. Even "liking" every appropriate comment can make a difference in engaging your community and making followers feel seen and part of the lifesaving team. Shares truly do equal cares, especially when it comes to showcasing adoptable animals.
- Think about Instagram Stories as a separate platform from your feed posts. Some people are only going to engage with your organization in one place, not both. The same goes for other Instagram tools like [IGTV](#) and [Reels](#).

Some additional tips:

- Figure out how to keep people on the platform. For example, instead of sending them to a link, encourage questions and comments. This will increase engagement and allow you to deepen relationships with your supporters.
- Create swag giveaways and post about them to draw people to your Instagram channel. Ask organizations and businesses in your community to help you fill that swag bag. And don't forget to @ them and use their hashtag in your posts and give them much deserved props.
- Use the Instagram option that automatically posts to your Facebook account via a click of the "share to my Facebook account" button.

Conclusion

While Facebook is a natural and easy place for most organizations to begin working with social media, Instagram offers an enormous return on investment for those with the bandwidth to support two platforms. The beauty and poignancy of great animal photos pairs well with Instagram's emphasis on visual content, and Instagram can help you reach audiences that are younger than those you reach on Facebook. If you're feeling confident about your use of Facebook, dip your toes in the Instagram waters and test, test, test.

Resources

- Social Media Today's [newsletter](#) can help you stay current on a rapidly evolving environment.
- Later is a scheduling tool that also has a great [newsletter](#) (no service agreement required).
- Build your iPhone photography skills with online classes like this one from [Skillshare](#).
- [Petfinder](#) offers tips on photographing pets in shelters.
- Maddie's Fund addresses the question of frequency in this online [tutorial](#).
- A beginner's guide to measuring Instagram impact can be found [here](#).