

How to launch your brand on Instagram

Emma Crandell, AEF Communications & Outreach Manager

Friends and family often approach me seeking help in getting their name or new business out there in the social media world. Twitter, Facebook, and other networks function effectively each in their own unique way, but Instagram remains my favourite for selling or storytelling. A picture's worth a thousand words, right?

I learned how to unearth the power of Instagram while managing up to nine accounts at a time for a social media agency specializing in a diverse range of small-medium clients. Since taking on the role of Communications & Outreach Manager at the Alberta Emerald Foundation (AEF) in May 2019, I've more than tripled our followers. Growth takes time and attention, but developing a substantial presence and engaged audience on Instagram does more than make you look good; it creates your own little online community.

This is my tried-and-true process for anyone launching a new brand or even just looking for a refresh. I share and follow this method for almost any industry, from introducing our podcast [What On EARTH Can We Do?](#) to helping a friend sell her hand-sewn baby clothes.

If you have any questions or are looking for extra support in launching your Insta brand, you can reach me at emma@emerald.foundation.ca or [@albertaemerald](https://www.instagram.com/albertaemerald). Happy posting!

Get a logo

You need a logo. There's nothing more "bleh" for me when checking out a new Instagram handle that has no profile image! A logo should be two things: simple and memorable. You have two options:

1. If you have the funds, hire a graphic designer. [We may know just the one](#), but do research into finding someone who can bring your vision to life. What's the best way to find the perfect designer, you ask? Look on – surprise, surprise – Instagram! Here you can start to familiarize yourself with using hashtags; for example, I'm based in Edmonton, so I could look up the hashtag [#yegdesign](#) and see what catches my eye.
2. If you don't have the funds, don't worry! There are some incredible templates online that are free and easy to use. I'm a fan of [Canva](#), but if that's not your cup of tea, there are plenty of online tools to choose from.



I don't know about you, but I get jazzed on good branding, from both the perspective of the creator and audience. Have fun with it! I'm much more likely to follow or purchase from a business if their logo presents a clear and appealing vision of who they are. I adore the logo for our podcast, [What On EARTH Can We Do?](#), designed by [AEF partner Hazel](#). Andrew perfectly captured the playful spirit we were looking for – check it out:



[@whatonearth_pod](#)

Write a solid bio

Again, simple and memorable is the key to writing a good bio. First off [set up a business account](#), which allows access to special features and Instagram Insights, which can help you understand your audience. As the AEF is a nonprofit organization, our business account is set up as such, so that's the first thing you see when you look at our profile.



Then begins the bio itself. Instagram limits you to 150 characters, so make it count. Use relevant emojis as bullet points, highlighting your mission and who you are. Our flagship event is the Emerald Awards, so that hashtag is featured here. I've also included the handle to lead you to our podcast's Instagram. If you're comfortable, include your personal handle on



your business account – e.g. 🍁 Made in Canada by @yourhandle – followers love to get to know the person behind the brand. Be creative!

Lastly, include your website! You do have a website, don't you? If you think Instagram is going to manage your business for you, you've got to read [I have social media. Why do I need a website?](#) Trust me!

📸 Collect content 📸

Posting to your feed on the fly can feel like a huge chore. Make it easy: take numerous high-quality photos – this can be done on most phones – and store them in one place, whether that's on Google Drive or a designated folder on your computer. Don't forget to delete the bad ones to remove the clutter! That way, instead of dreading creating or finding content to post, it's already there. If you're forgetful like me, move images you've posted to an "Archived" folder. When pickings start to get slim, schedule another photoshoot!

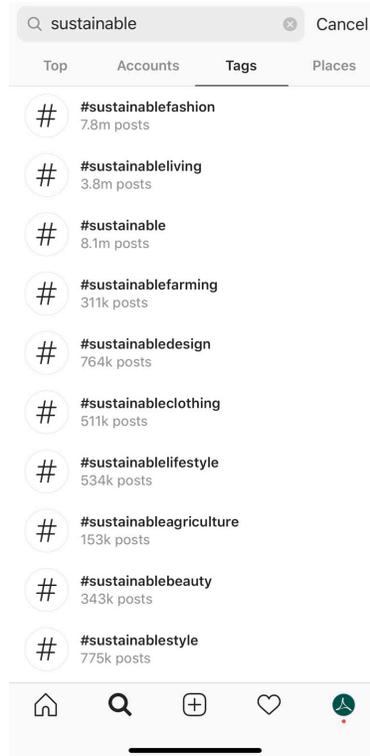
Also, a friendly reminder that not all of your content has to be original. Repost is your friend, as long as credit is given where credit is due!

☁️ Research hashtags and create your own hashtag cloud ☁️

Hashtags are important on Instagram. Facebook tried to make it happen, Twitter makes big ones happen, but Instagram gives you 30 tags per post to make it happen.

You know when you see a bunch of hashtags at the end of a post or in a separate comment? That's called a hashtag cloud. You need to create and copy/paste one onto your posts so like minded people can discover you. Here's how:

1. Start with the location of your target audience. There are likely a few hashtags associated with it. For example, in Edmonton, we use both #edmonton and #yeg. Because we're province-wide, I use multiple for the AEF account: #edmonton #calgary #yeg #yyc #yq1 #yqu #ymm #alberta #canada. Feel free to expand outside your immediate area, but I wouldn't go outside your country unless you are based in more than one.
2. Find popular hashtags in your related industry. The AEF is an environmental nonprofit, so we use #environment #sustainability #sustainable #sustainableliving and similar. Use the Search function to find the most popular related hashtags:



3. Lastly, make up your own that are on-brand. We are the founder of the Emerald Awards, so I make sure to use #emeraldawards plus #emeraldawards2020 or the applicable year. Of course, this isn't a popular hashtag, but establishing your own hashtags sorts your related posts into one feed and establishes the brand.

Keep around 25 hashtags saved on a note on your phone or computer so they are ready to copy-paste into either your caption or first comment. Some argue that hashtags, especially uber-popular ones, should be posted in the caption because the delay of posting in the comments will bury your post. I personally wouldn't worry too much about that – you'll get more targeted (read: important) engagement from the smaller ones anyways. I personally think the cloud looks better in a separate comment as to not clutter your caption.

Come up with a schedule

Set aside a few hours on a weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis to plan your posts for the period ahead. Use a free tool like [Later](#) or [Planoly](#) to simplify your scheduling. This will not only save you time, but allow you to see your grid before you post. I agree with social media marketers that having an aesthetic grid is important, but it's not everything!



👁️ Use stories for behind-the-scenes 👁️

My hard-and-fast rule for Instagram Feed versus Stories is like a mullet: business in the front (feed), party in the back (stories). Posts made on your feed are permanent and should have a curated feel – think back to your plethora of photos you already have saved. Stories are great for showing your followers the day-to-day, like your cute business paw-rtners or the behind the scenes of your work. Use GIFs and be creative! They're also a great way to engage and hear from your followers. Run a poll, ask them questions about what they'd like to see, and play around with Instagram's other Story features.

For more info, I recommend reading [Instagram Stories: The Complete Guide to Using Stories](#).

💬 Write concise captions that captivate 💬

- Develop a voice that stays true to yourself and your brand. Be professional, but not phoney.
- Make sure to tag and @ people and businesses you mention.
- Include a call-to-action often, but not on every post! Avoid sounding like a cheesy salesperson by diversifying your CTAs – even just “leave it in the comments” is great.

🌱 Tips for growth 🌱

- Follow brands that align with yours and like their content. Comment and message them when it's relevant, but don't spam!
- Don't expect to be an influencer overnight – or ever – and remember that follower count isn't everything. Read Sprout Social's article [The most important social media metrics to track](#); notice their focus on engagement, impressions and reach, share of voice, referrals and conversions and response rate and time. 50k robot followers? Who cares. 500 dedicated customers? You've got a good thing going on!
- Once a day, when you post, or when you think of it, scroll through one of your often-used hashtags and just like...everything. Double tap until that finger feels like it ran a marathon. Or until you've gotten bored and moved onto TikTok.

Emma Crandell (she/her) is the Communications & Outreach Manager at the Alberta Emerald Foundation and an avid environmentalist. She has her BA in French, Spanish, and Sociology from the University of Alberta, as well as her Public Relations Diploma from MacEwan University. She loves travelling, reading, video games, and her mini aussie Cooper. Emma will never say no to an impromptu camping trip, bike ride to a coffee or record shop, or meeting a goat.

