



Instagram

Holiday Marketing

Guide

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Introduction

Are you looking for Christmas marketing ideas and ways to connect your business with buyers during the holidays? Instagram is the way to go.

More than 80 percent of the people who use Instagram every month follow at least one brand. What's more, a sizeable percentage of that number have used Instagram to visit a brand's website, get directions to a business location or contact a business by phone, email or direct message (Source: [MarketingLand.com](https://www.marketingland.com), 2017).

Those are some eye-catching stats.

And that's just for starters: Brands on Instagram regularly see 4.21 percent engagement rates with their followers. While that might not sound like a huge number, it is: On Facebook and Twitter, brands see less than 0.1 percent engagement with their followers (Source: [Forrester research](https://www.forrester.com)).

***60%** of Instagram users say they learn about products and services on the platform and **30%** have purchased something they discovered on Instagram.*

SOURCE: [INSTAGRAM](https://www.instagram.com)

While 93 percent of brands have a presence on Facebook, [an estimated 70 percent](#) of brands are on Instagram. Instagram's [800 million users](#) post 95 million photos and videos per day and although Instagram doesn't have as many daily users as Facebook ([500 million](#) vs. 1.3 billion), what's eye-catching is the difference in engagement rates between the two platforms: Engagement on Instagram is [10 times higher](#) than it is on Facebook and that spells opportunity!



Okay, enough numbers. Now we're going to look at how your business can use Instagram strategically, and suggest a few Christmas contest ideas, promotions and galleries to help you connect with people who are ready open their wallets.

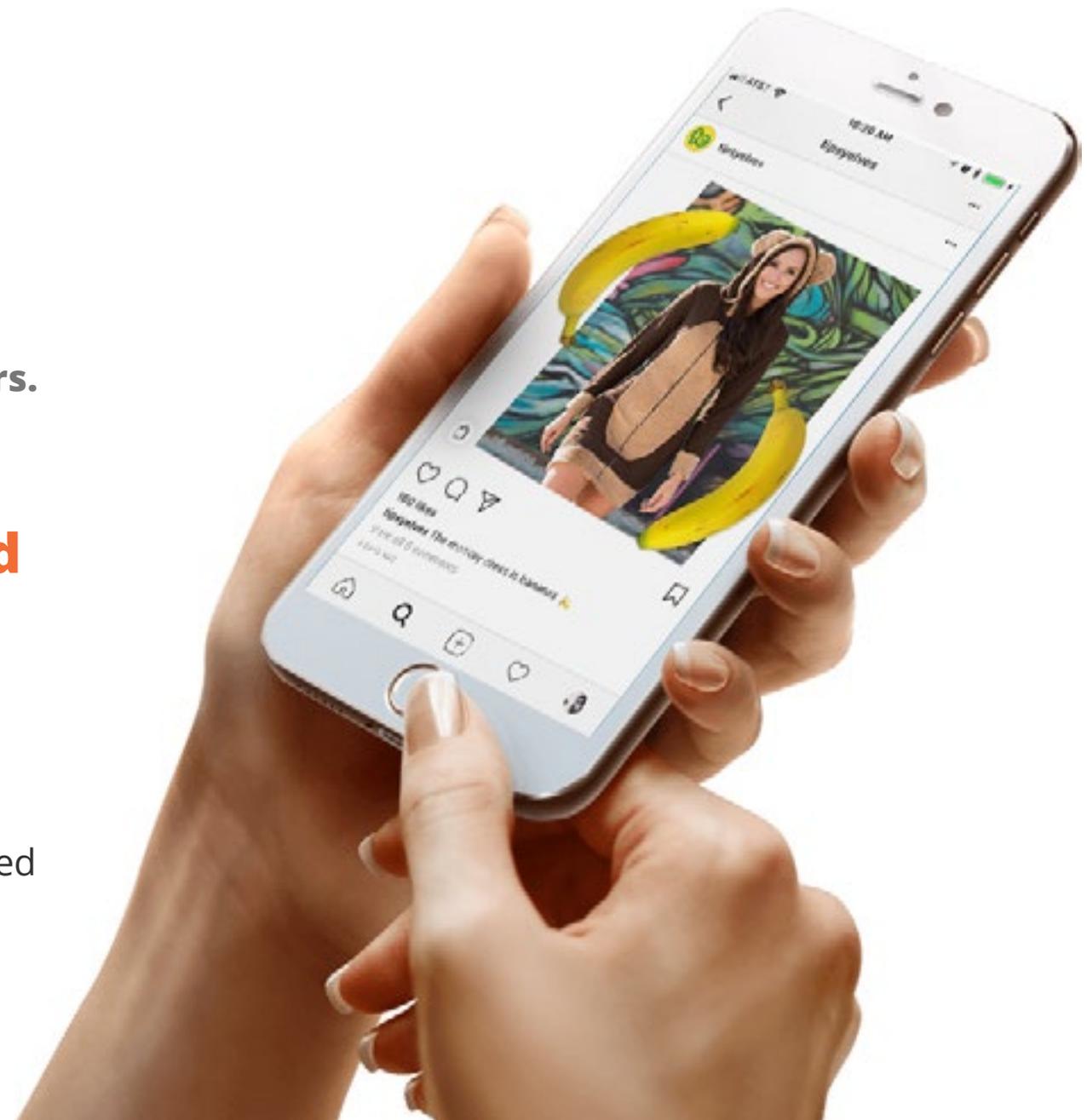
Why Instagram for the Holidays

As noted earlier, Instagram still presents a tremendous opportunity for businesses. It's an effective platform for:

- **Increasing awareness of your products and services.**
- **Shifting or reinforcing brand perceptions and awareness.**
- **Building relationships with celebrities and influencers.**
- **Developing partnerships with other brands.**
- **Hosting a contest to build awareness and increase followers.**

Creating the right content for your brand on Instagram

The content you post on Instagram should be an extension of the content you create for other platforms, for your email marketing and your website. The following 10 tips are based on Instagram's time-tested recommendations.



1. Maintain identity and voice

Use words that reflect your brand's tone and instill the feelings you want people to associate with your brand.

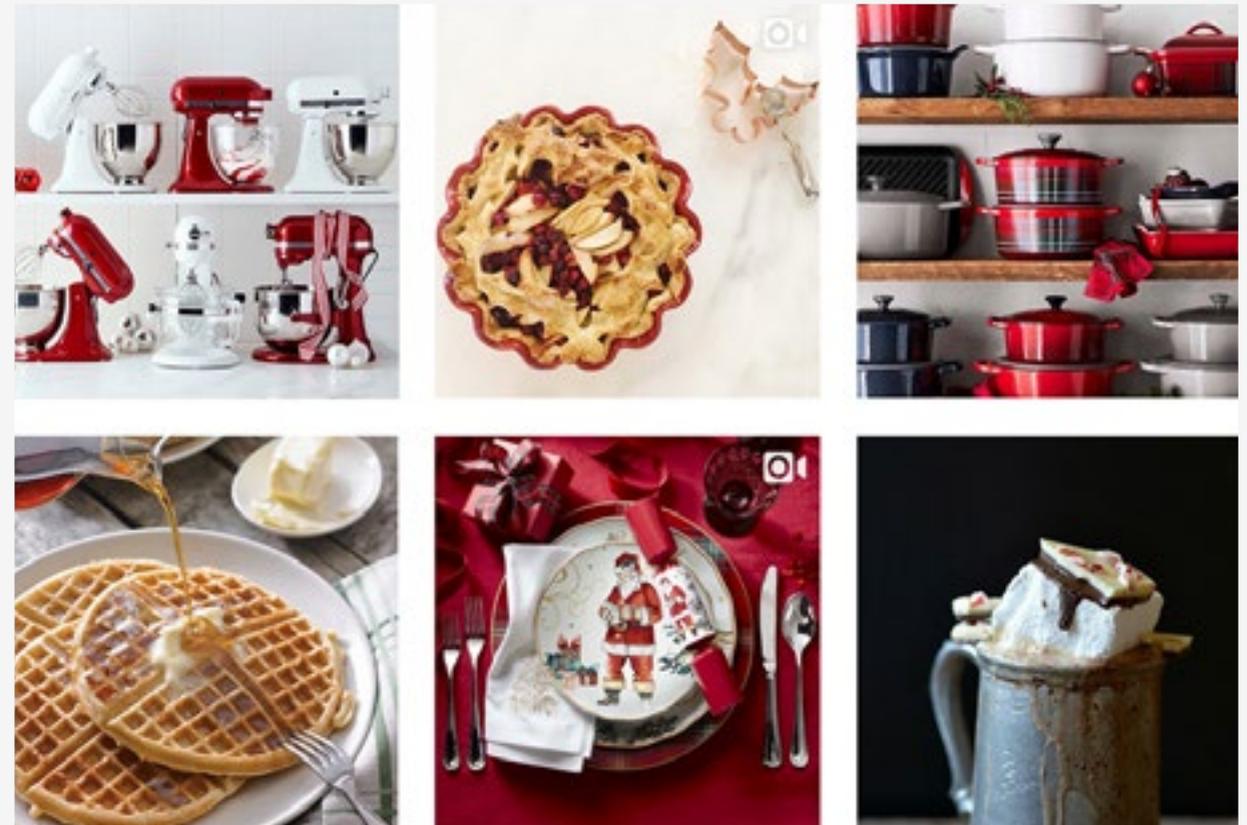
2. Plan themes

Establish content themes or pillars that are authentic to your brand. It is possible to post a variety of content that still reinforces the associations you want people to have about your brand. You don't have to be a master photographer to build a successful Instagram following, but it doesn't hurt to master [some photography basics](#). The stronger your image is, the more it will stand out in users' newsfeeds, and the more they're going to engage with it.

It also helps if your image is dominated by a single color (or group of colors), and if your subject matter is clear and in focus. For inspiration, check out successful holiday marketing campaigns from brands like [J. Crew](#) and [Target](#).

Even if you don't sell products, you can see how these brands choose a point of view, and often a color scheme (or a favorite filter) to give the images a consistent feel.

Here's an example of a series of holiday posts from Williams-Sonoma



3. Include a variety of subjects

Photos and videos that show your brand from a variety of perspectives — including images that show a behind-the-scenes view of your brand, or are about your company’s culture — are acceptable. Try to avoid simply republishing images that appear on your website or other social channels. And avoid frequent posts that are overtly promotional.

4. Experiment with filters

Some brands establish a “look” that is instantly recognizable. While not every image has to use the same filter, think about how you can use Instagram’s filters to create a consistent feel. You could even experiment with seasonal themes.

5. Keep captions short

Captions should be concise and can incorporate relevant hashtags.

If one of your goals is to increase engagement, ask a question in your caption. Instagram isn’t the place for lengthy musings. Keep things as concise as possible. At this time of year, you might even ask questions like “Tell us one thing you’re thankful for,” or “What’s your favorite Christmas carol?” or “Have you come up with a New Year’s resolution yet?”



6. Include location

Whenever possible, include the location where your photo or video was taken, especially if it's taken at your business' headquarter, at a retail location, a tradeshow or other special event. If it's appropriate, use the "add people" feature to tag accounts that might help you expand your audience (if you're tagging a celebrity or another brand, make sure you have permission, first).

7. Don't post too frequently

Instagram recommends 1-3 posts per day as a maximum.

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8. Use hashtags in moderation

Hashtags serve many purposes on Instagram. They are a terrific way for brands to reach people who are searching for something specific. Holiday hashtags can also be used to support marketing campaigns or contests aimed at increasing brand awareness, by asking people to tag their photos with a hashtag associated with your brand. Avoid using hashtags simply to capitalize on a current or newsworthy event unrelated to your brand.

9. Always include a call to action

Whether you're asking people to enter your contest, click the link in your bio, learn more, make a purchase, or just to follow you and tag a friend — ask for something.

10. Employ habits to boost organic reach

Instagram has an algorithm, just like Facebook does, but there are few things you can do to make it work in your favor.

Here are some to test:



Find your optimal posting times (use [Instagram Insights](#) to determine when your best times to post are).



Include an occasional video.



Host [contests](#) and ask questions to encourage engagement.



Curate and share user-generated content.



Use [Instagram stories](#) (Stories has 250 million daily users!).



Try going [live](#) on Instagram.



Run Instagram [ads](#).



Use Instagram Stories' [new polling feature](#) to survey followers.

Instagram Contests Best Practices

Brands run contests to inspire people to share their own content — known as user-generated content, or UGC — in order to increase awareness of the brand's products and services.

If you're planning to run a contest for the holidays, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

1. Create a unique hashtag

Creating a unique hashtag for your brand and your contest will help you keep track of the content intended for your contest. While generic hashtags, like #holidaycontest or #holidaygiveaway will widen the reach of your contest, they might also make it difficult for you to keep track of who is entering.

2. Create a photo (or video) to announce your contest

In this initial posting, refer people to the terms and conditions where you list details about requirements and details about how you'll choose a winner. Do not choose a winner solely on number of likes as this can trigger bad behavior from entrants, such as spam comments, auto-following, etc. and may not result in the best quality content.



3. Create a couple of example posts

If you have specific requirements for your contest, post a couple of images that demonstrate what you'd like to see from your followers. For example, if you're asking people to take a selfie with your product, and you want the product to be fully visible, show them an example. If you require that your brand's logo be recognizable, demonstrate what you want, and provide details in the contest's terms and conditions.

4. Use a moderation tool

If you're anticipating thousands of entries, use a [software tool or service](#) that will sort entries into a database so you can easily moderate and post acceptable entries.

5. Secure rights

If you intend to use any of the UGC you collect with a contest, make sure you've secured [explicit permission](#) from the content creator first. (Details on how to secure rights appears at the end of this guide.)

Don't want to run a contest? Offer another incentive instead.

If you want your audience of followers to stick around, make it worth their while. Reward your followers by giving them exclusive discounts or content, or, on occasion, freebies.

During the holidays, the freebie might even be free shipping on purchases using a code you've shared in a caption.

6. Display the curated posts

Once you've approved submissions, display them in a gallery you link to from your Instagram bio, as well as on your website and on a Facebook tab.

Like with any sort of marketing campaign, your holiday Instagram efforts will be more successful if you set goals:

Here are examples of some goals to consider:

-  **Showcase/sell products and services**
-  **Add more followers**
-  **Increase brand awareness and loyalty**
-  **Collect user-generated content**
-  **Advertise to potential customers**
-  **Show off your company culture and share news**

As with any effort, choose one or two goals to start with. Ask yourself:

-  **Why does Instagram make sense for my brand?**
-  **What makes it different and more appealing than other platforms?**
-  **How does Instagram fit into my overall marketing plan?**

Here's an example from J. Crew's hashtag contest, one they ran for the National Stripes Day, a "holiday" that doesn't get nearly enough attention!



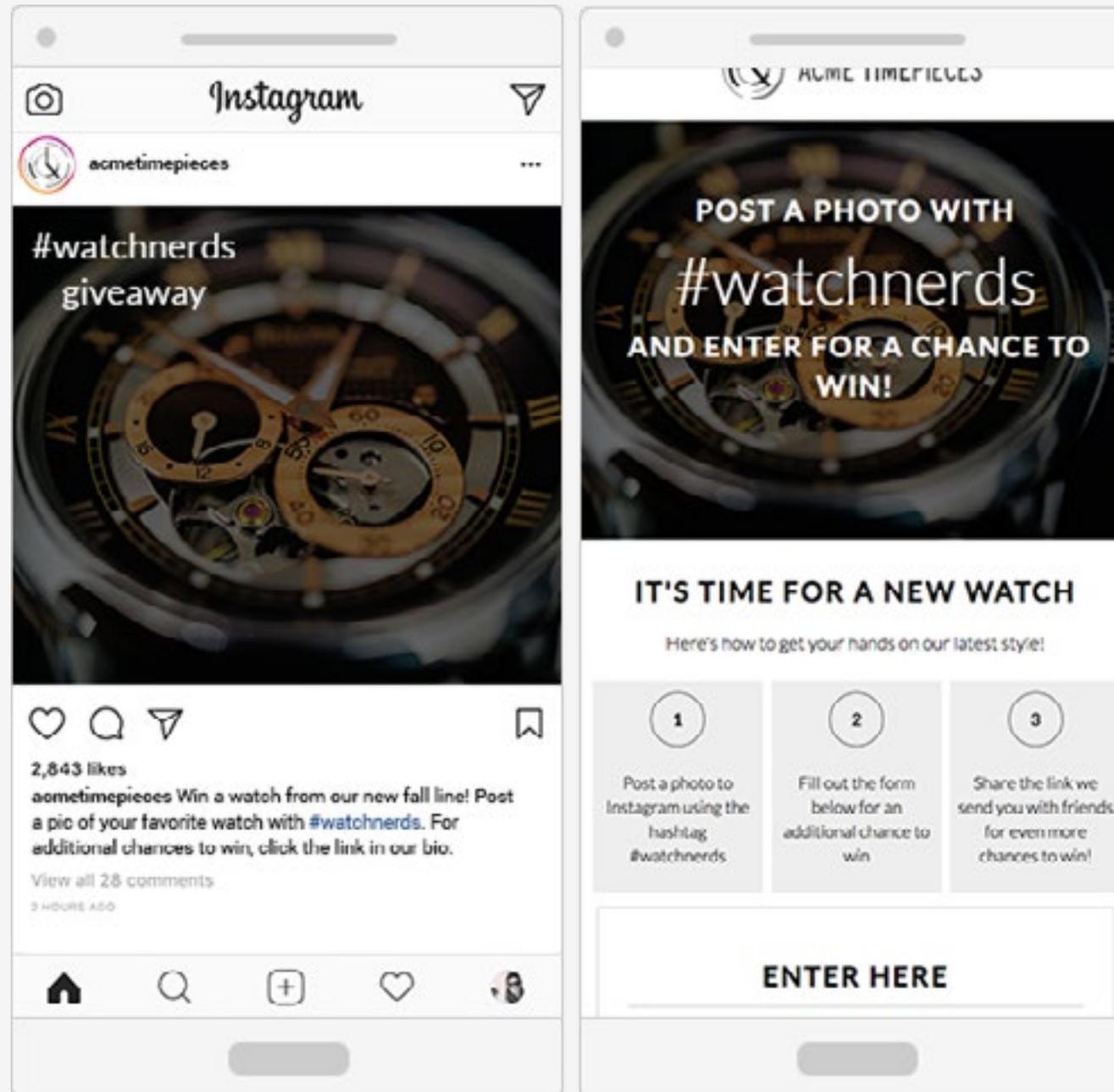
J. Crew had more than 5,959 entries. Check out one winner's entry, which J. Crew went on to share on their own feed.



Idea: Hashtag/user-generated content contest

The fastest and easiest way to build a following on Instagram is by using a hashtag contest. People are incentivized to follow you because they want to win your prize, but hashtag contests can also bring you high-quality images to use for your own marketing.

This example encourages users to earn more chances to win by clicking a link in your bio



[VIEW LIVE EXAMPLE AND CREATE YOUR OWN](#)

Try a hashtag template

To make your Instagram hashtag contest do double duty, ask people to upload their photo using your hashtag, and then give them an additional chance to win if they fill out your brief form. They can earn even more chances to win if they share the link to your contest with their friends.

Idea: Exclusive discount

British clothing brand FatFace announced a mega sale on Instagram and directed people to the link in their bio where they could shop. Notice how some of FatFace's followers tagged friends in the comments to let them know about the sale? What a great way to use your followers to help spread the word about your promotion and your business! To execute a promotion like this, you'd link from the bio to a brief form, and then give people who fill out the form access to your discount.

See how FatFace's followers tagged friends in the comments to let them know about the sale



[VIEW EXCLUSIVE DISCOUNT CAMPAIGN](#)

Here's an example of a simple and effective Customer appreciation post



Idea: Customer appreciation

Putting a simple “We appreciate you” message on Instagram could definitely stir up interest, and sharing, on Instagram.

Idea: Instagram hashtag showdown

Encourage your followers vote for their favorite of two options by posting their own photo with your hashtags. You determine the minimum number of votes you need before a winner is chosen. People are motivated to share because they want a chance to win your prize(s).

A “showdown” campaign could be a terrific way to learn what kinds of products your followers like best, the destinations they’d like to visit, or even dishes they’d like to see on your menu. Since you’ll be collecting email addresses with a showdown, you’ll want to make sure to [schedule emails](#) to go out to people as soon as you’re offering what they’ve asked for, and/or to send special offers to everyone who voiced an opinion.

You could also do this type of campaign to help plan next season’s designs. Interested in running a campaign like this? The custom services team at ShortStack can build one for you. Just ask us for details!

Hashtag Showdown campaign

**HASHTAG SHOWDOWN
GIVEAWAY**

WIN A BAG FOR YOURSELF AND A FRIEND!

Vote for your favorite bag by posting a purse pic to Instagram with the hashtags below. We'll select 5 winners for the first hashtag to reach 1,000!

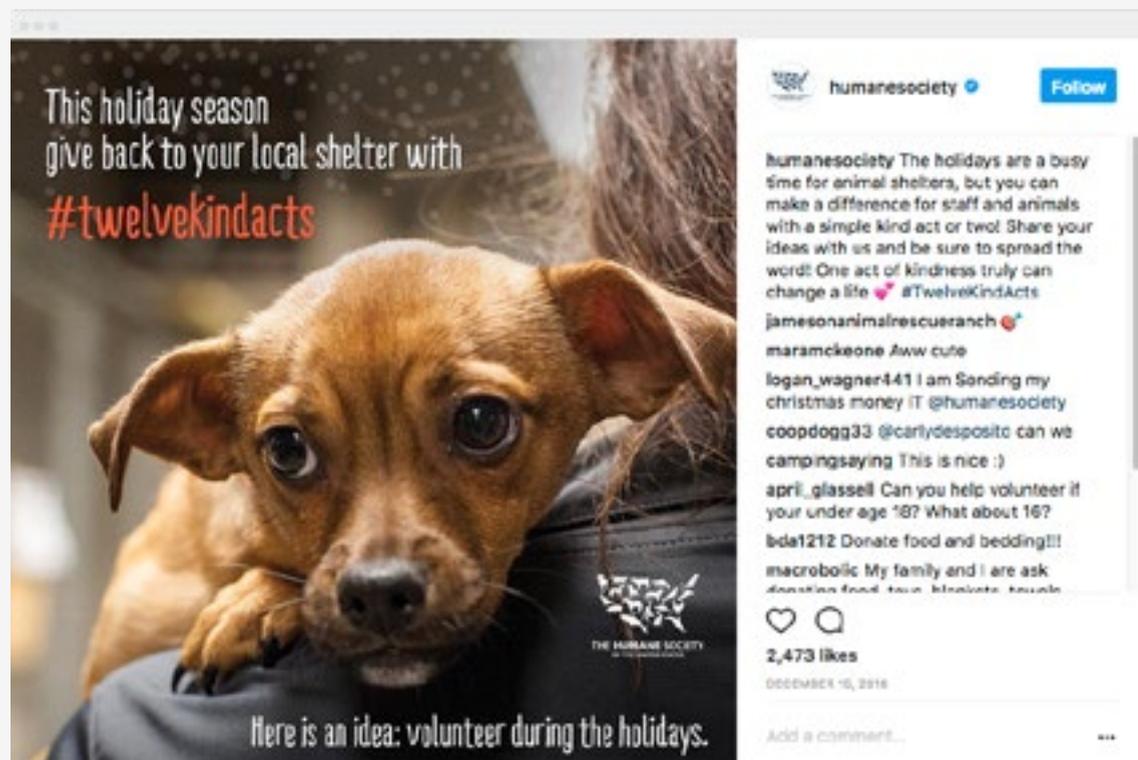
#whitebaggiveaway	#blackbaggiveaway
	
187	262

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Idea: Partner with a cause

Since this is a season for giving, why not create a giveaway that benefits a charity you care about? Lots of businesses collect money, food, toys, clothing and even pet supplies and then drop them at a local charity. Others sell products to raise money, or host fundraising events. This is a win-win because it can raise awareness about your brand's good deeds. If it's not possible to collect money or goods, think about how you could promote your employees' good deeds on Instagram, like volunteering at a shelter.

Check out the Humane Society's #twelvekindacts post

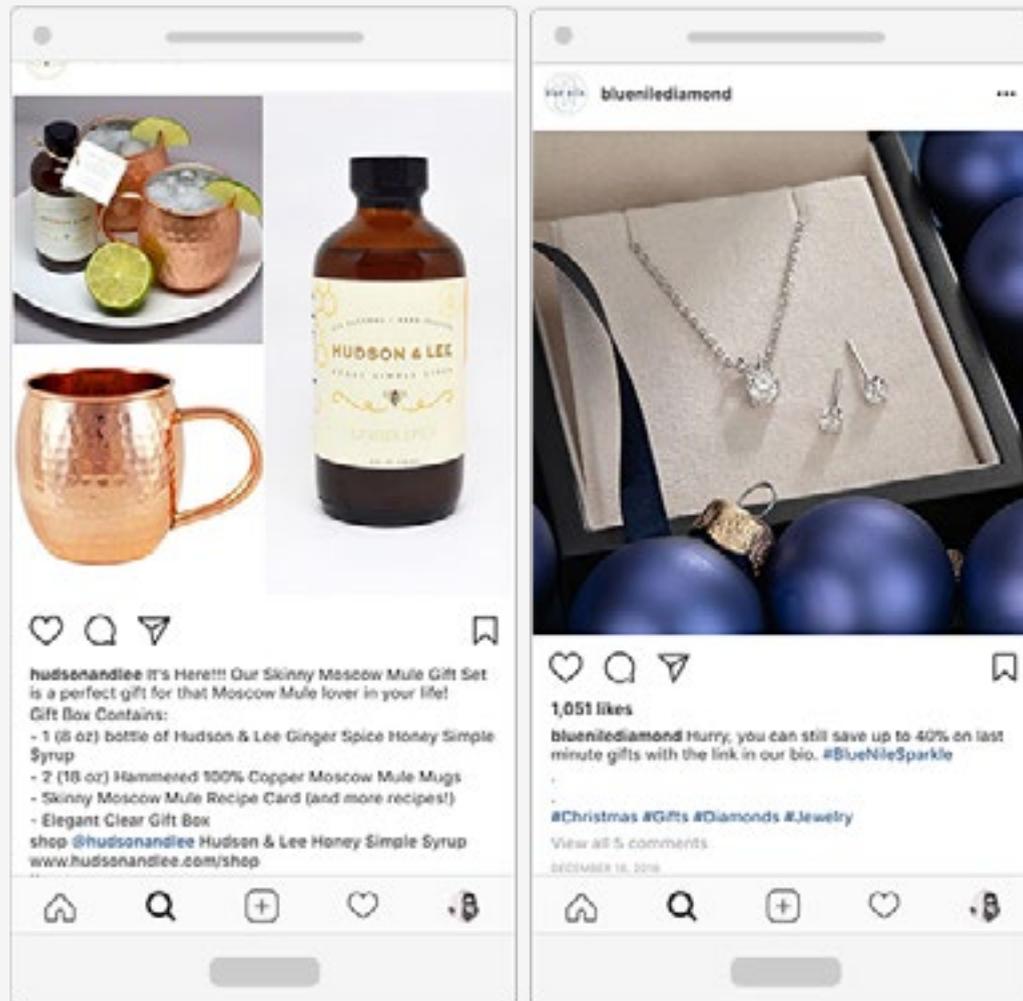


Pairing your post with a campaign like this one is a great way to collect valuable leads in addition to increasing brand awareness



[VIEW EXAMPLE AND CREATE YOUR OWN](#)

Here are two shining examples of gift sets and cross selling



Idea: Feature gift sets and cross sell

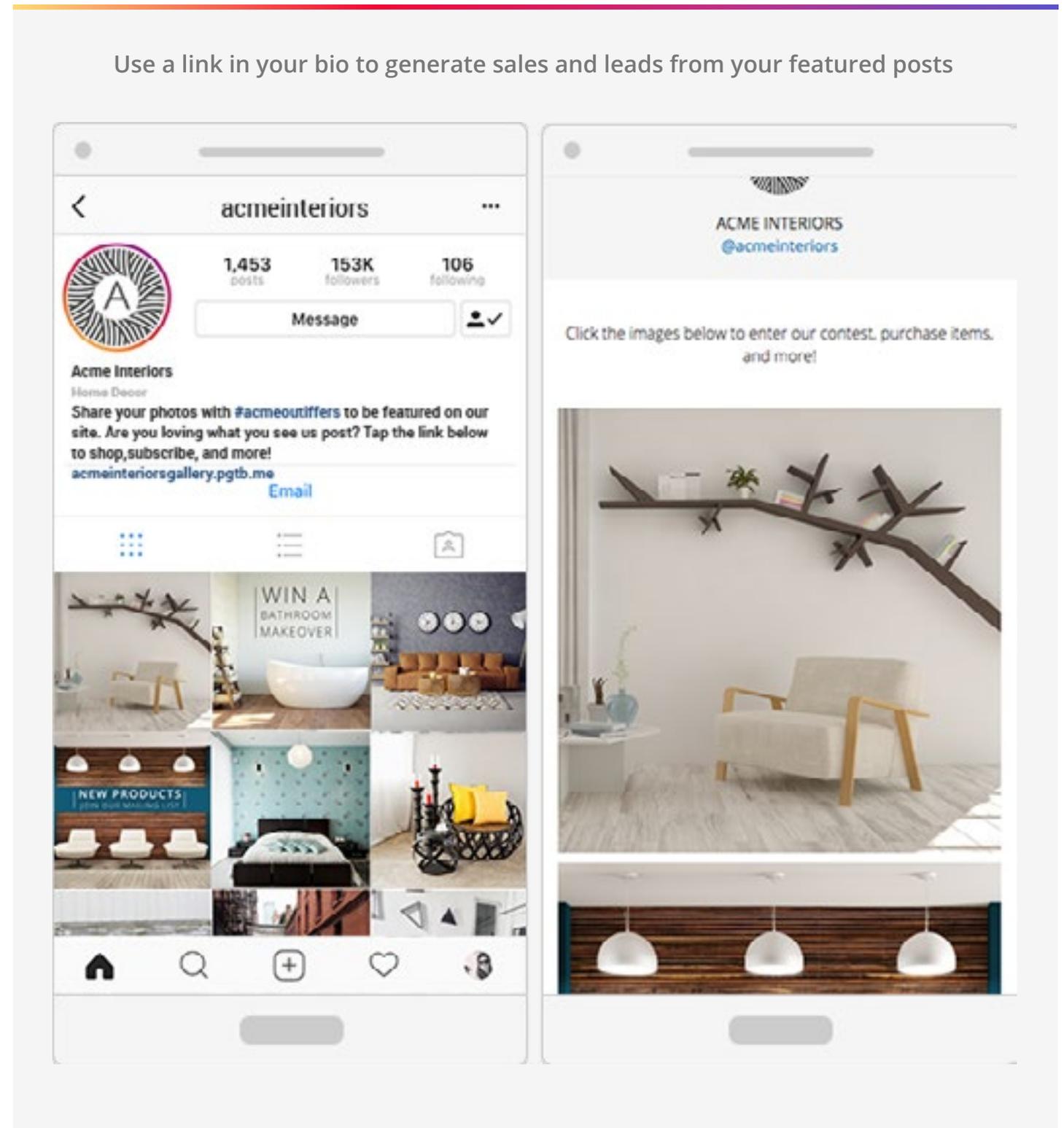
Successful salespeople always try to increase the sales total once a customer has selected the main product they're interested in (just like servers in restaurants always try to up-sell you with dessert). Adding on to a sale isn't necessarily a shifty practice. After all, it's a salesperson's job to sell and provide value. Whether you're cross-selling because you see a need, or because there's a deal to be had, what you're really doing is appealing to customer's desires.

You can easily cross-sell on Instagram to make products look more appealing and/or versatile. This is a time of year you're likely to see gift sets galore, and you can easily display a gift set, or a group of complementary products, on Instagram. People are already in the shopping mood, and they might also be willing to splurge a bit. Show off your gift sets and link to a web page where people can purchase, or use the link in your bio to send people to an Instagram gallery where you can showcase and sell your products using a third-party provider like Shopify (for another example, see "Instagram Gift Guide & Gallery").

Idea: Instagram gift guide & gallery

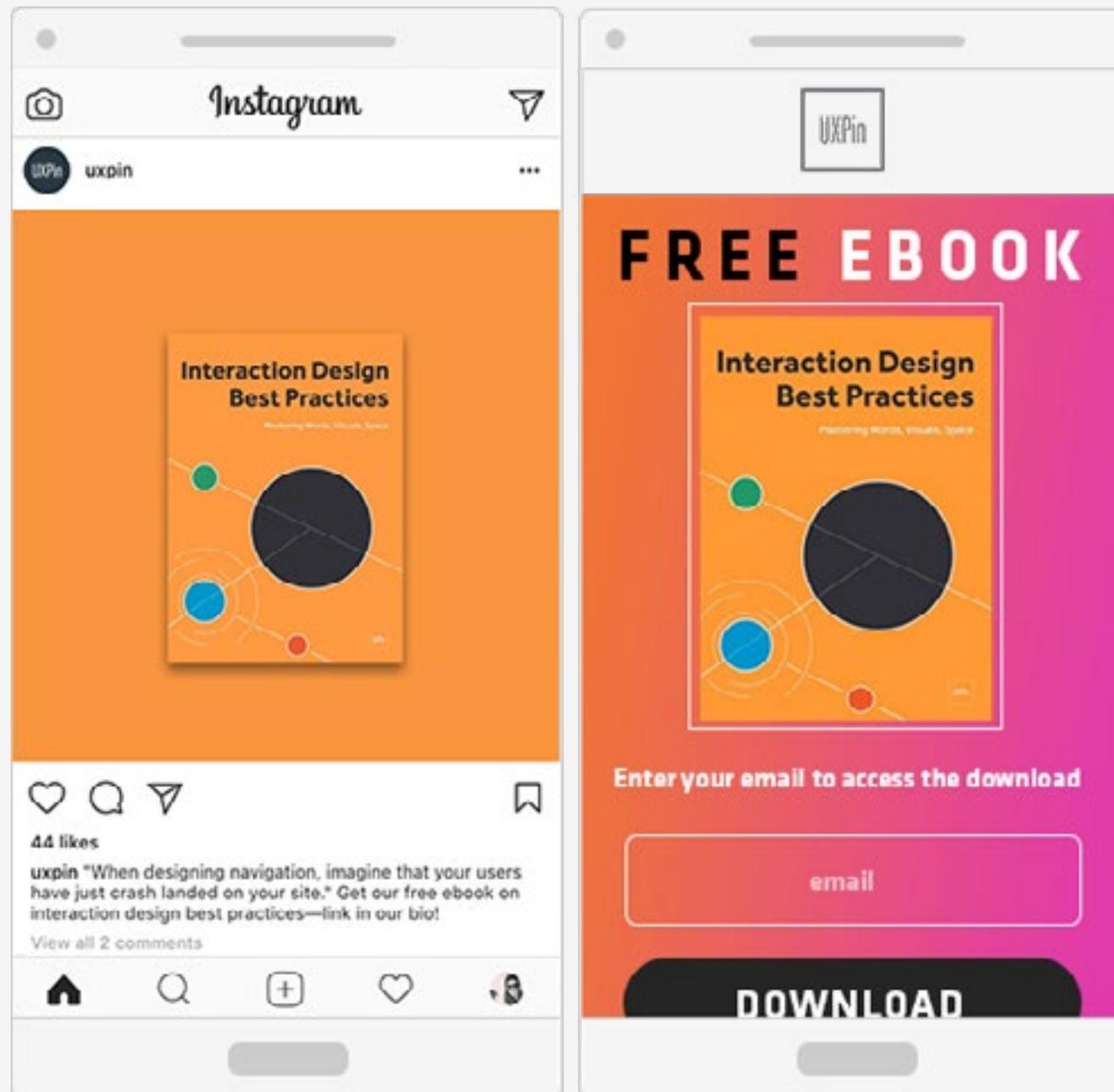
You can make it easier for people to make a decision to purchase your products by creating Instagram gift guides. You can even make specific guides for categories of people — dads, moms, sisters, friends, children, co-workers, etc.

Take advantage of the fact that people are busy and want decisions made for them by setting up galleries that ease their shopping indecision. Use the link in your bio to direct people to a gallery where they can purchase the products you're featuring.



[VIEW LIVE EXAMPLE AND CREATE YOUR OWN](#)

This example shows how UX Pin used Instagram to offer a free ebook to their followers. Pairing it with a campaign allows you to collect leads in exchange for the downloadable content.



[VIEW LIVE EXAMPLE AND CREATE YOUR OWN](#)

Idea: Downloadable content

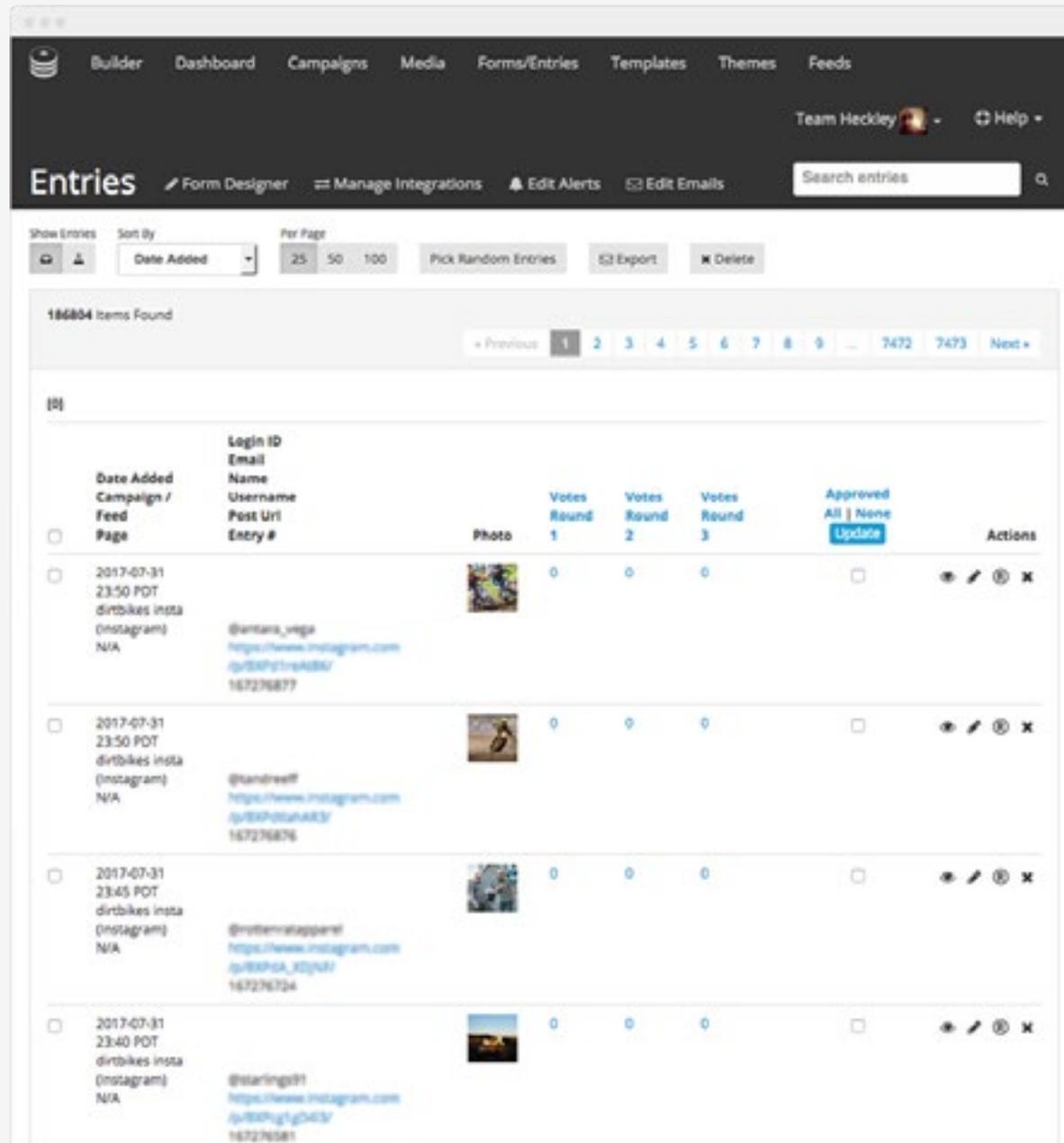
Instagram might not strike you as the place to promote downloadable content, but it certainly can be. Whether you've got a guide or ebook, a song, or a video to promote, you can create an eye-catching Instagram image and then simply use the link in your bio to bring people to it.

Obtaining Rights for User-Generated Content on Instagram

If one of your goals with your Instagram holiday efforts is to collect user-generated content, make sure you're getting the rights to use the photos/video you collect. When users post using your hashtag, they are giving you their **implied consent**, but you're better off getting their **explicit consent** and keeping a record of it. As of April 4, 2018, Instagram no longer allows third parties, like ShortStack, to access public comments so you will have to manually track requests and replies. ShortStack's rights management feature lets you gain **explicit written consent** from Instagram users, and to keep a record of their willingness to allow their photos and videos to be featured in your brand's marketing programs.



Store all your entries in one place and see at a glance which entries you've obtained rights for



Why explicit consent protects your brand and your clients

1. You have a record of your user's consent

Keeping a record of rights you've requested and rights you've been granted allows your business to capitalize on UGC and use it across all of your channels, including on social, in email, in-store and more.

2. You build relationships with your best brand advocates

Consumer who post photos and video of your brand are likely already fans of your business. Asking them for permission to use the content they share lets them know you value the relationship and may even make them even more loyal.

Best Practices for rights requests:

- **Be friendly but not overly familiar.**
- **Avoid awkward phrasing in requests. For example, “Are you 18?” could be flagged as spam or mistaken for sexually explicit material.**
- **Make requests from a brand account, not a personal account. And never use a blank “requests only” account to ask for rights.**
- **Don’t use programs that auto-respond to posts as these automation tools can request rights for offensive posts.**
- **Respond to everyone who grants you rights with a simple, “Thank you.”**

We hope this guide has helped you understand how to use Instagram for your holiday marketing.

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