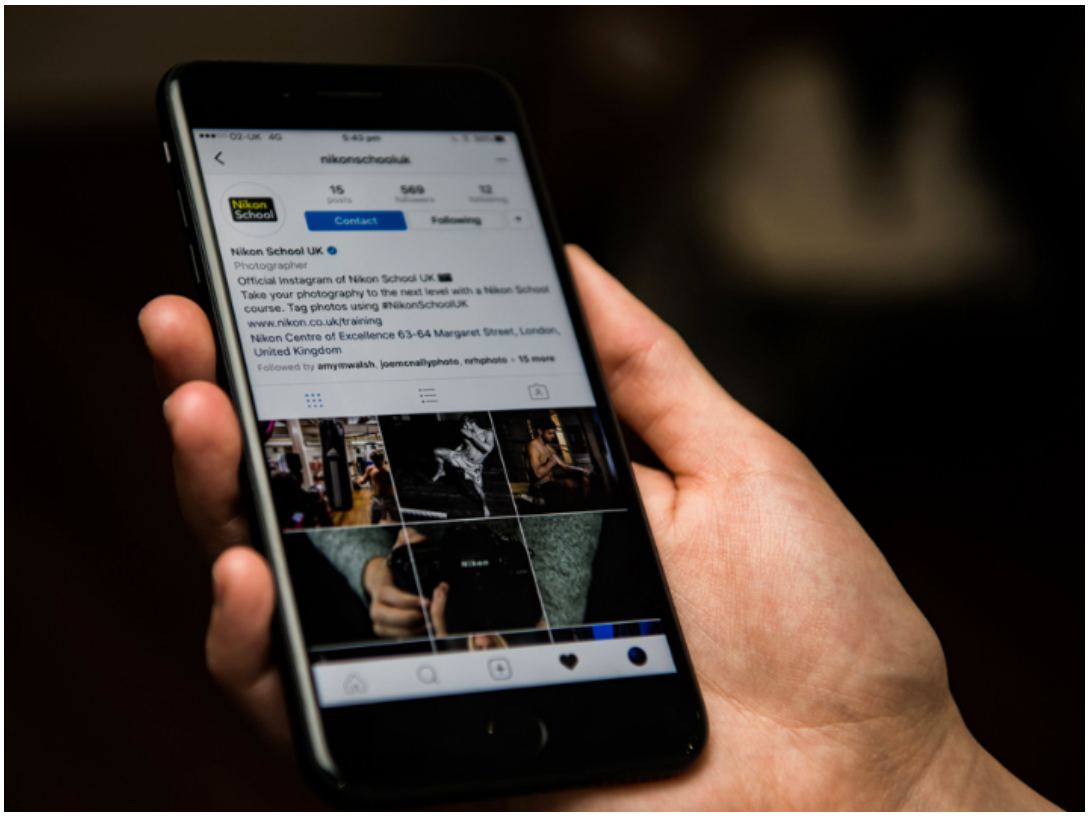
A quick guide on how to improve your Instagram feed

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With over 600 million users by the start of 2017, Instagram is one of the world's most popular social networks, it's designed specifically for showcasing images – and it's free. Whether you're using it as a way of sharing with friends or building up a business, here's how to start harnessing its incredible power to make a real difference to your photography.



Set up your account

It's probably an obvious point, but when you set up your Instagram account, do remember to make it public in the settings to give it the widest possible reach. And make sure you are easily contactable by including links to your photo website and blog (if you have these) in your profile. Email and location can also be useful inclusions. Think about what you want to call it; you might simply want to use your name, or you might want to be a bit more creative to help people remember you and help you build your individual brand.

Share from your camera

Many Nikon cameras now feature SnapBridge, which uses Bluetooth to keep your camera constantly connected to up to five smart devices, so images and movies are automatically streamed to your phone or tablet as you shoot. Not only does this mean they are ready and waiting for you to review, edit and share, but SnapBridge will even resize your shots so they're quick to upload to social media, including to Instagram.

Set-up is simple: install the free SnapBridge app on your smartphone or tablet, switch on your camera, and select it from the in-app list of available devices, and you can then transfer shots as you shoot without needing to reconnect each time. All the shooting data goes with your image onto your smart device too, and your camera will automatically sync its location and time information to that on your smart device.
If your camera doesn't have SnapBridge, use Nikon's WU-1a or WU-1b Wireless Mobile Adapters and your smartphone or tablet. For these you'll first need to download and install the free Wireless Mobile Adapter Utility app, then follow the instructions in your camera manual, or check out our comprehensive guide to wireless shooting and sharing here .

Post regularly

You need to keep things fresh to keep people interested, and it's a good idea to have a regular schedule so people will learn that there's something new every day or every weekend and will therefore keep coming back. You don't need to put hundreds of images up at a time, either – in fact, Instagram is a case of less is more. Post one or two eye-catching shots rather than a dozen 'so-so' ones; remember that this is your online portfolio, so only put your best shots in it.

Keep captions simple

While no one has time to read an essay on your images, it can be frustrating to spot a great shot on Instagram only to find it has no contextual information tagged to it. So do add captions but keep them short and sweet – even just adding location via the Instagram location tool can do the trick.

Tag your images

According to a recent survey, images posted with at least one hashtag get nearly 13% more engagement that images without, so they are a good way of drawing new followers to your images. You can add up to 30 hashtags to each image's caption field, although you probably won't ever need all 30. There are apps available that enable you to create your own hashtag lists that you can add to your posts to make this easier.

So how do you choose the best hashtags? Think about what you would type into a search engine to find that sort of picture. Check out what hashtags the competition is using, and pay particular attention to posts by people with large followings to see what it is that is working for them. You can also select the search menu on Instagram, then 'Tags', key in a tag you're thinking of using and it will then show you how popular that tag is. Remember to tag your brand name, too.

Be consistent

Probably the most important pictures on your profile are those at the top of the page. Think about how your newly uploaded images are going to look sitting next to shots you have already posted, and aim for consistency either in genre or style, so people get a clear idea of what your imaging is all about – portraits, street, landscapes, a specific colour palette or shooting style, or whatever. This will help you grow your audience, by giving them what they want.

Shape up

Instagram gives you several presentation options when it comes to posting your images. Square is the original, and it means there will be no difference between the thumbnail version and the larger linked version. Vertical (portrait) shots fill a phone screen and have the highest resolution of Instagram's offerings, but they also tend to suffer from a bit of cropping, as they

have a slightly different aspect ratio than the original image files. Horizontal (landscape) shots are a tad smaller than squares and verticals, and Instagram is in charge of cropping the thumbnail version, which can be frustrating. Framing your shots with a white border is another option that can look very appealing, as well as preserving the original aspect ratio.

Reply to comments

So your Instagram account is up and running, and people are checking your images out – result! And then they start leaving comments. Instagram etiquette is to post a reply, at least to the useful comments. This makes sound business sense too, as your correspondee will be more likely to continue engaging with your images and recommend your work to other people, which can be a great way of developing relationships with potential clients. You can also reciprocate by looking for photographers whose work you love and connecting with them – this can create a virtuous circle of them checking out your account and so your Instagram network grows. But don't actively approach people and ask them to follow you – it's a bit needy…

Don’t get too hung up on ‘likes’

Although it's always great for the ego to get lots of likes, remember that likes mean nothing if nothing comes of them. It's better to have 50 followers who give you feedback and spread the word about your work than 5000 who don't engage with you after that initial 'like' click – they'll quickly clutter up your account, so be prepared to do some regular pruning.

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