



# INSTAGRAM MASTERCLASS



*How to Attract, Maintain, and Grow an  
Engaged Instagram Audience*

Created + Hosted by **Amelia Bartlett**

*Marketing Director at ambr. creative*

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# HOW TO USE INSTAGRAM

*Decoding an ever-changing algorithmic app to make sense of the machine.*

## INSTAGRAM IS LEARNING AND EVOLVING EVERY SINGLE DAY.

It takes about 6 - 12 months of consistent investment (of time and effort) and engagement to grow a supportive Instagram community (audience). Support can range depending on what you as a creative business owner/service provider need, but often, support looks like: active engagement with your posts, clicking through your links, saving your posts, purchasing featured products, inquiring about services, subscribing to your list, commenting on your content, etc.

The truth is, you might not need to be on Instagram. Your business might benefit from a parked piece of real estate with a 9-tile eye-catching “landing page” that drives visitors to the link in your bio, which sends them to the next call-to-action in your funnel or process.

### QUIZ: DOES YOUR BUSINESS NEED TO BE ON INSTAGRAM?

- You can make money directly through the app by selling products (shoppable posts).
- You can book clients through traffic driven from the app (for creative or intellectual services) *and* are willing/able/excited about previewing your services through graphics and copywriting.
- Your brand is benefited by a visual representation of your work (like a portfolio) accompanied by “proof” of a large, engaged audience.

If none of these statements apply to you, your business will likely be benefited by you spending time on another platform, generating leads in person, or investing in business growth elsewhere!

**Alternatives to Instagram:** Facebook, Pinterest, SEO-optimized Content Marketing, In-person Networking, B2B Collaborations, Listing Services (Angie’s List, Better Business Bureau (BBB), Thumbtack), Marketplaces (Etsy, eBay, Depop), and more.

*Say it with me...*

Instagram is a **business tool**.

When you step into using Instagram as a business tool, it is **paramount** to shed the self-judgement and ‘cringe factor’ that says “I can’t post everyday / curate a visually aesthetic feed / I feel lame and spammy.”

STAKE YOUR CLAIM FOR INSTAGRAM REAL ESTATE AND OWN IT.

## TIP SHEET: INSTAGRAM MECHANICS

If you've ever wondered *how* to “beat the algorithm” or why people aren't seeing your post, here is a comprehensive tip sheet to try before giving up on the 'gram. In order for more of your followers to see your posts, you need 2 things: “algorithmic weight” and maximized opportunities for “impressions.” To increase algorithmic weight, Instagram needs to trust that your posts are quality.

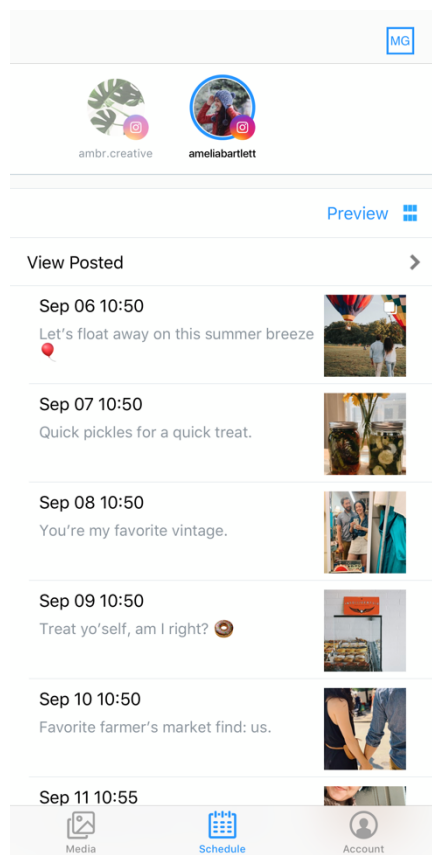
- Make all posts 4:5 vertical orientation, the maximum post height, to take up the maximum real estate in the feed.
- Consider creating carousels (slideshow) of multiple photos or using the app **SCRL** to make a horizontal orientation photo stretch over two carousel pages, to increase time-spent on photos.
- Publish videos to IGtv then downsample into a 60-second preview clip for your grid and short 15-second bytes for your Instagram Story. The more time a user spends circulating your content inside your profile, the more the algorithm trusts you as an expert.
- Write engaging captions with an eye-catching first line to increase time-spent reading your post.
- Utilize hashtags, mentions (@ tags), geotags, and in-photo tags appropriately to increase the amount of places your post appears. Choose only relevant tags so only your target audience sees your posts. They are most likely to engage.
- Decrease spam, noise, and non-valuable posts, which do not garner engagement, and which harm your algorithmic weight.
- Research your hashtags to ensure they aren't *shadowbanned* or oversaturated with irrelevant content.
- Encourage your audience to save posts and create collections. Infographic and quote posts the most saved posts, consider incorporating these into your grid.
- Share your posts to your Instagram story with stickers, GIFs, and audience-engagement tools to increase traffic to your posts and engagement with your stories.
- Engage with other users on the app: try setting a goal of ten comments per day throughout your most relevant hashtag communities.
- Engage with the Explore page on the app by liking and commenting posts that are relevant to your brand and interests. Over time, this page will be tailored to your preferences.
- Only follow accounts that are relevant to your business, your interests, and who could be potential collaborators. Over-following is not favored by the algorithm.
- Publish Instagram Stories regularly, as when you are an oft-watched Story for a user, your posts will show up higher in their feed.
- Utilize Story Highlights to spotlight *resources, brand elements, and valuable/enjoyable offerings.*
- Choose publishing times based on when your audience is online and engaging. Use an app like Later or When to Post to go further than Instagram's in-app Insights.
- Always respond to comments on your posts, and create conversation in this space, rather than just saying “thanks!”
- Photos of faces are the highest-priority post for the algorithm: posts with a face that takes up at least 1/4 the photo receive much higher engagement.



# MY (ONLY) 5 INSTAGRAM TOOLS

*Manage even the messiest social media like a pro, all from your iPhone.*

## SCHEDULING + TIMING: LATER



Batch-working with social media is the #1 way to cut the headache and reduce your time spent by *more than half*. Later has free and paid options (I'm a fan of the \$19 paid option) that allows you to manage multiple Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest accounts.

### How I use Later:

- Allow Later to calculate the best times to post.
- Create your Quick Schedule time slots for the week.
- Choose a selection of edited photos that *tell a story*.
- Pre-write your captions in Google Drive or, if you love to have polished grammar and spelling, inside Grammarly (free or \$3.99/month paid).
- Create 5 – 10 collections of 3 – 5 hashtags (hashtag walls are done) and store them in your Hashtag Bank on Later.
- Batch 1 – 4 weeks of posts at time, using saved hashtag banks and beautifully formatted copy/paste captions.
- For single-photo posts, select “Auto Publish” and ensure the app is setup with the proper permissions.

Check back daily and engage with your beautifully pre-scheduled, headache-free posts!

*Later has a highly-capable desktop app that includes more features than the mobile version, including analytics. Be sure to utilize both version to stay up-to-date with the performance of your posts.*

## AESTHETIC: VSCO

It seems like *everyone* is on the Lightroom Presents train right now, but not me. I spent five years in Adobe Lightroom as a professional photographer, and I know that photo editing doesn't have to be that complicated.

### How I use VSCO:

- Import photo sets to be edited for Instagram. I choose sets in multiples of three, but also maintain a unified “look” across all photos.
- Experiment with filters on unedited versions of photos you would (or have) posted and save your favorites. Favorites should align with your style, brand, and most-photographed environments.
- Edit one photo in the photo set, focusing on Filter, Exposure, Sharpness, and Contrast.
- Save that photo, then copy edits from that photo and paste edits onto the other photos in the same photo set.
- Make any necessary tweaks to individual photos (you probably won't have to!) and save all at once by selecting all photos and saving to camera roll.

*You can upload your saved photos straight to Later, and schedule accordingly.*



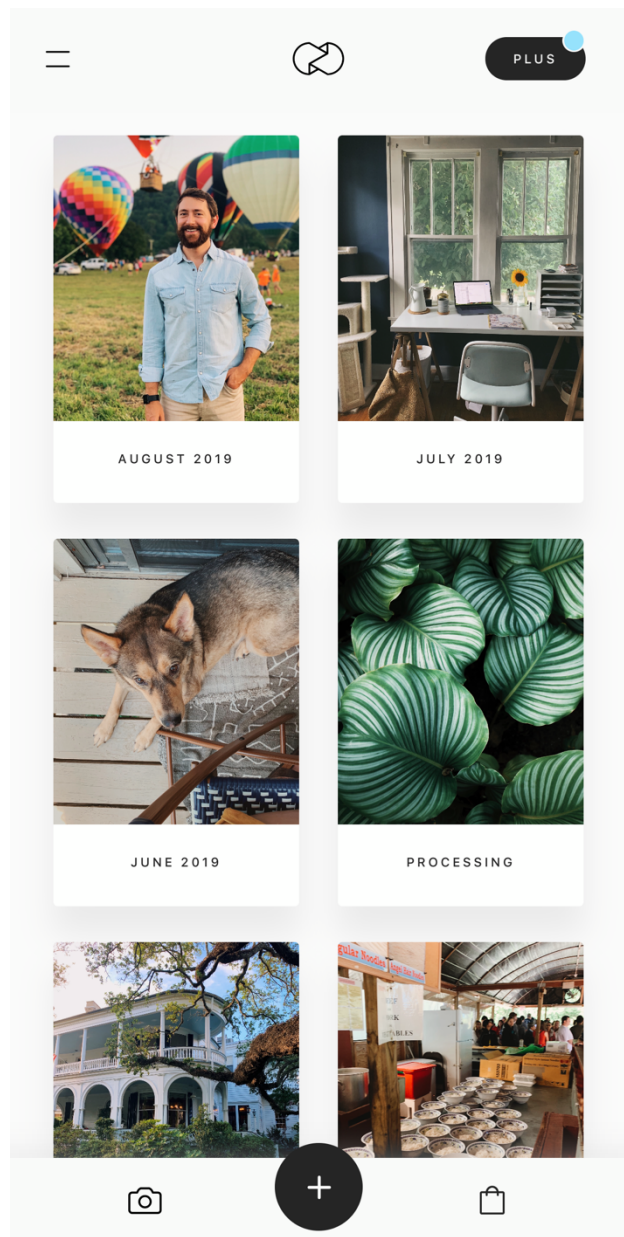
## STORIES: UNFOLD

Instagram Stories are my #1 strategy for staying top-of-mind with my audience, simply because they are “stickier” when it comes to the algorithm. Unfold is my favorite tool to make beautiful, eye-catching Stories that cause viewers to *pause, play again, and engage*.

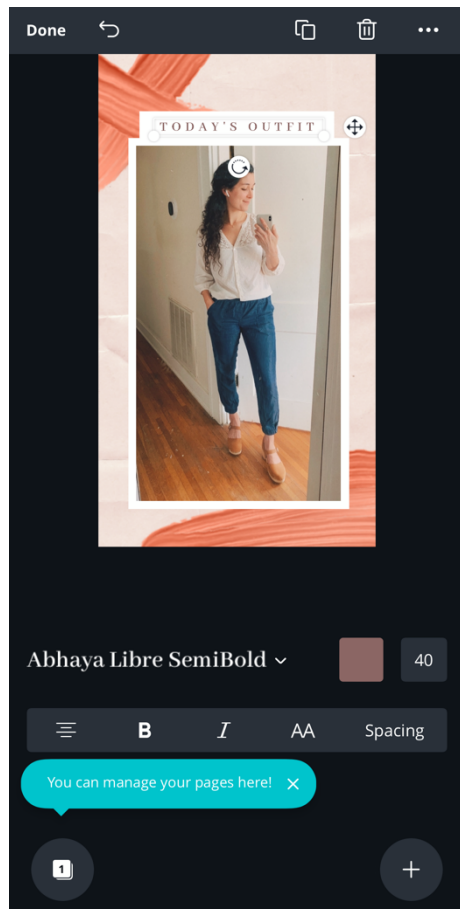
### How I use Unfold:

- Before opening the app, *storyboard* your Instagram Story on paper.
- Create a New Story from the Unfold dashboard and choose layouts, aesthetic/style (like ripped paper, film, or clean lines) that matches your brand, and stick with fonts that are readable and on-brand.
- Create your story with a mix of readable Story pages, in-laid videos, single stunning photos, and photo collages.
- Employ white space where appropriate so you can integrate Instagram Story Stickers, like Mentions and Location Tags, when you publish to the ‘gram.
- Flip through the Story to see if anything is missing or needs to be updated.
- Export the full story and upload to Instagram.
- *Pro tip:* Spice up your Unfold Story pages with GIFs, music, geotags, @ tag call-outs, and engagement stickers as fitting.

*You can upload Instagram Stories to Later, so if you'd like to save your exports for a 'later gram,' upload your recent exports to the Later app and schedule accordingly.*



## TEXT + GRAPHICS: CANVA



Canva has exploded onto the scene in mobile graphic design. Their templates are simple, they offer super-easy text animation, and you can create your own templates for later use.

### How I use Canva:

- From the Templates tab, I choose one that has graphics, layout, font, or subject-matter that fits my goal. I typically choose a Story-sized template for an easy starting point.
- Put your own style the template by changing one or all of the template elements.
- Animate any text you're using so it *pops* and causes your audience to pause the story and read.
- Export the Story and, if working in a series, continue using the same template until you've created each Story page.
- Spice up these Stories with more subtle elements (to not overshadow your super awesome design skills) like music and call-outs.

*Canva is a great place to create the newly-trending Story Surveys and fill-in-the-blank Instagram Story activity pages. Remember to brand them with your username and save to a highlights folder on your profile!*

## PHOTO + VIDEO: IN-PHONE CAMERA APP

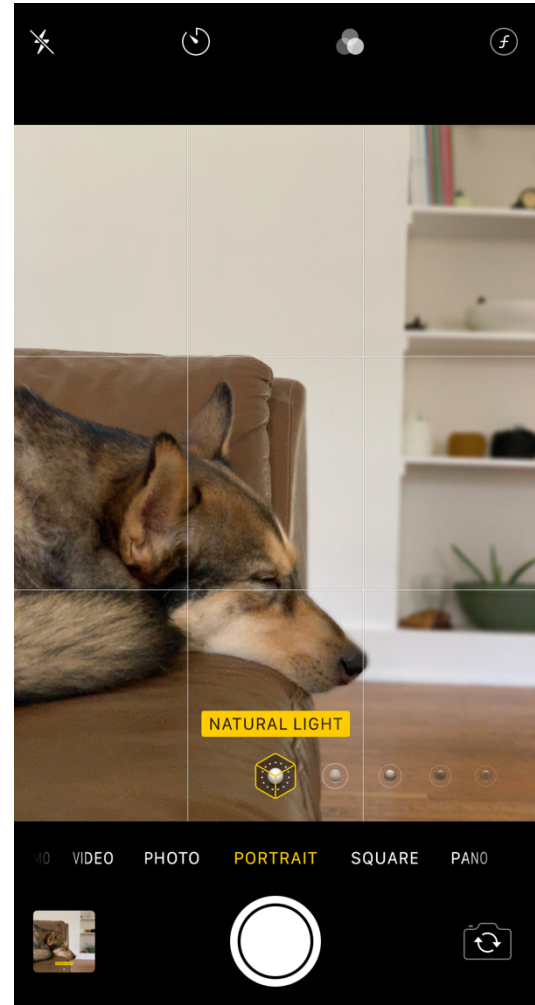
As a photographer, I spent countless hours (okay, years) agonizing over whether or not I had the right gear for the job. As it turns out, your 3 – 5-inch phone screen can barely make out the difference between a DSLR shot and a photo taken with an iPhone 7 or newer.

Of course, the depth-of-field and high megapixel count on your DSLR makes for crisp, highly editable photos. However, carrying an expensive (liability) around everywhere doesn't make content creation accessible to everyone.



## Photography tips for using your Camera App:

- Turn Live Photo on and, if you don't like the "photo" your phone has chosen, flip through the Live captures for a better millisecond capture.
- Settings: Turn on the Grid lines so your camera has a "guide" for you to line-up your photo subjects before you snap.
- When framing your shot, look for "leading lines," like walls, curbs, the horizon, and building architecture. Align these with your grid lines for a balanced shot.
- Take photos of people from your chest, rather than at eye-level, and hold the phone upright (as straight as possible) to minimize distortion.
- Use the 3-second time when taking a selfie to give yourself time to recompose your face after pressing the shutter button.
- Take at least 3 – 5 photos in every situation.
- Vary your angles, and always prioritize Portrait orientation (upright) for Instagram, as it takes up the most space in the feed and increases eye-time on your photo (which is great for the algorithm).
- For Landscape orientation or Panoramic photos, use the "rule of thirds," so there is balance throughout the image. That way, you can split the image into multiple "slides" on an Instagram carousel later on.



## YOU'RE READY TO RUN YOUR INSTAGRAM LIKE A PRO!

There are a few apps that get an honorable mention which include:

1. SCRL – For making gorgeous carousel (Image Galleries)
2. Snapseed – For in-depth photo editing, blemish removal, and so much more.
3. WhenToPost – Secondary app for determining best times to post and when your audience is actually online.
4. Repost – One-time purchase app for reposting images while retaining the original caption. *Pro tip:* Don't let the original poster's name get hard-coded into the image, @ tag them at the beginning (with permission) of your post for maximum attribution.
5. Boomerang – Make multiple Boomerangs that save automatically as GIFs, and pick your best one to post.

*Up next, we're going to Attract, Grow, and Maintain an engaged audience.*

# HOW TO ATTRACT, GROW, AND MAINTAIN AN ENGAGED AUDIENCE

## ATTRACT

If you were starting your Instagram at **zero**, where would you start? You'd share your profile with friends and family. You'd ask them to share with folks in their network who might be interested in what you post. And then, you'd go to the places where your target audience (customer) is already hanging out.

**Each Instagram post should only have 3 – 5 hashtags.** These hashtag *collections* should be rotated for every post, and be highly specific to the subject matter of your post.

LIST THE FIVE MOST COMMON POST SUBJECTS YOU TYPICALLY SHARE:

I post about: \_\_\_\_\_

Now begin your hashtag research with 1 – 3 hashtags you know your community is using.

## HASHTAG SEARCH TIPS:

- You're aiming to collect a lot of hashtags that are leading to the same group of people. These should have similar hashtags related to your brand and feeds that make you (and your target customer) feel at home.
- Choose tags that range from around ~1000 posts with a most-recent few posts that day to hashtags just around the ~1 million mark that aren't too oversaturated. 25k – 250k posts per hashtag is the sweet spot for community engagement.
- Look for similar hashtags in the *suggested* list from within a hashtag feed or listed in the posts of "influencers" in a hashtag. These are people who regularly use the hashtag and receive a lot of engagement from that community.
- Check out your competitors and similar-lane businesses for what hashtags they are using with success.
- Refresh your hashtags once quarterly to make sure you're not wasting valuable post real estate on communities that aren't converting.

## CREATE A BANK OF 30 – 50 HASHTAGS

These should relate to your products or services, brand and personality, and posting subject matter (lifestyle, interior design, travel, and all other supplementary visuals to your brand). Use the brainstorming space below!

## HASHTAG BANK

### **Now that you have your hashtag bank started, let's collect your most-used Mentions.**

Mentions (or @ tags) are profiles you can tag in your posts or in your actual photos to encourage re-posting and tapping into their audience. *Tips for using @ tags with etiquette and success:*

- Only use @ tags when featuring content relevant to the tagged profile. **Avoid spam.**
- Collect local and community tags, like @865life, @new2knox, or @freelancingfemales who may be apt to re-post your content when it is relevant to their audiences.
- Create conversation by mentioning a select number of people in your post caption if the conversation is relevant to their Instagram activities.

**Use the space below to brainstorm!** Refer to this list when you're scheduling your posts to ensure you don't miss an opportunity for expanded reach.

## MENTION (@ TAG) BANK

## GROW

At this stage, you're ready to multiply your attraction with consistency and broadening tactics. Broadening happens through collaboration and cross-platform traffic driving. Growth of your audience happens when people who otherwise wouldn't have found you are served your content in interesting and unique ways:

- Co-creating media with another artist, where both of you post the results to your Instagram and mention each other.
- Creating a project *for* another artist or business owner, where they call you out on their Instagram and encourage their audience to visit your profile.
- Posting your content to other platforms, such as Pinterest or Tumblr, with a link back to your Instagram.
- Sharing exclusive content on Instagram and sharing that exclusive opportunity to your networks on other platforms.
- Having your Instagram featured in the blog or newsletter of an influencer in your industry who drives traffic to your profile.

**Use this space below to brainstorm all the ways you can grow your audience by collaborating and driving traffic across platforms:**

## MAINTAIN

### ***How would you maintain a friendship?***

In order to maintain an Instagram audience, you must engage with them in a way that leaves them feeling valued, understood, and supported. Just like any relationship, there needs to be mutual expectation and a fulfillment on promises.

### FOR EXAMPLE, YOU HAVE 250 FOLLOWERS.

10 – 20% of them regularly engage with your content by liking, commenting, DMing, and saving. They have subscribed to your email list, bought a product, or engaged with you in some kind of professional service. *Now what?*

**Consistency is key.** Know why your followers continue to spend time with you. Ask them, create conversation around how you serve them and how you can serve them better. And, do so with consistency.

This is my Instagram Workflow. It's how I stay on-top of all the minutiae that goes into creating valuable content, completing a publishing schedule, and showing up for my community.

## INSTAGRAM CONSISTENCY WORKFLOW

- Start with a Marketing Strategy; write it like a S.M.A.R.T. goal: **Grow my audience/influence | Convert more sales | Drive more traffic**
- Instagram should be a *supporting piece* of your marketing strategy, and be driving traffic toward your marketing + business goals.
- Storyboard post subject-matter based on the Marketing Strategy. Utilize *StoryBrand* and *Customer Journeys* techniques to lead customers through a *Sales Funnel* or other type of goal-focused funnel.
- Map-out post subject matter based on a Marketing Calendar, which chronicles the most important dates for my business and outlines the schedule of collaborations that support the *growth* phase of marketing. Create a content calendar with this information.
- Create a diverse set of media to accompany my Content Calendar.
- Connect with collaborators as outlined in my Content Calendar to co-create and schedule content going out to our individual audiences.
- Write captions for this media in a Google Doc or other word processor.
- Use a Social Media Management Program (like: Later) to manage Hashtags and other batches.
- Use that same SM Management Program to schedule at least one week of posts (or up to 1 – 3 months), with hashtags, mentions, and geotags at a time. Schedule Stories as needed.
- Link posts to a cross-platform schedule, such as sending content to Pinterest or copying content into Email and Facebook post format.
- Set a reminder on my phone to check the app after posts are auto-published and at specific intervals throughout the day.

## AN ENGAGED AUDIENCE

### What really is a “good,” engaged audience?

A group of people who regularly meet your needs as a creative business owner/service provider, typically through: engagement, conversion, and promotion. Wouldn't it be awesome if you had an audience who grew your platform and promoted your services on your behalf? And was happy to do so?

### HOW TO EDUCATE YOUR AUDIENCE TO NURTURE YOUR BUSINESS

1. Set clear expectations for who you are and what you provide in your Instagram Username (@tag), Profile Name, Story Highlights, Link, and Bio.
2. The link in your bio should be the *landing page* where you want community to experience their true first impression of your business. This should be your email list sign-up, website landing page, product sales page, or other conversion-focused destination.
3. In each of your captions, provide a Call-to-Action for your reader.
4. Each post should provide your audience a benefit: Entertainment, Education, Opportunity.
5. Focus on increasing your *Know – Like – Trust* factor as a business. Let your audience get to know you and your mission, actually enjoy what you're creating, and trust that you'll deliver on the promises you make.
6. Make small promises, like releasing a new product or service, providing them a free download or gift, or hosting a small Instagram Live chat, where you can fulfill on that promise and *show up* for your audience.
7. Instead of “selling” to your audience, provide them value that leads them to your most valuable offering – which should come with a price tag.
8. Don't hide from sales: Being an entrepreneur, a creative, and owning your own business is a difficult and scary life choice. Celebrate the triumphs and share your challenges, allowing your audience to contribute to your overall experience in business. Chances are, they'll feel more connected to you – and thus, more likely to spend their hard-earned money with you – when they feel they are a part of your inner circle.
9. Pay attention to performance. If certain subject matter, copy, collaborations, offerings, or engagement activities aren't converting, don't waste your time. Stay nimble on Instagram and communicate openly with your audience about how best to serve them.
10. Give your audience somewhere else to go. Instagram is just borrowed real estate ~ give your audience more value through an email list or blog.

*None of us have a ton of time to spend on this app – nor should we.* Take the tips you need, leave the rest. Let's talk about how much time you should actually be spending on Instagram.

## HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD YOU BE SPENDING ON INSTAGRAM?

***As with anything in life, you get what you put in.***

I would love to say that you can run a badass Instagram account that grows and converts with only one hour per week. Personally, I've never done it, but I can tell you *where* you should be spending your time:

- Setting realistic marketing and growth goals.
- Developing your marketing strategy.
- Pulling together the pieces of that marketing strategy.
- Tightening-up your landing pages to convert.
- Planning your content, including the content that exists outside of Instagram.
- Working with your network to produce and co-create content.
- Batch-creating, writing, and scheduling your social content weeks in advance.
- Reviewing performance metrics so you can tweak in the next quarter.

**One Hour Per Week:** Consider front-loading most of your work (foundational strategy and setup, planning, content creation, scheduling, and cross-platform connections) to the top of a month, quarter, or year. Then, split your engagement to just 5 minutes daily (35 min / week) so you can focus that remaining 25 minutes on reviewing your metrics, creating an impromptu Instagram Story, or fixing a mistake made in batch-scheduling.

**One Hour Scheduling | One Hour Engaging:** This is the sweet spot. You should still be front-loading your strategy and scheduling to the top of the month or quarter, but this is part of a larger marketing plan. By scheduling your content each week for one-hour, you can keep your content super relevant to what's going on in your business (and in the world), and can increase your algorithmic weight by spending nearly 10 minutes per day engaging with the app and utilizing its variety of features.

## REALISTICALLY SCHEDULE YOUR CAPACITY FOR INSTAGRAM

Go back through this workbook and examine each of the calls-to-action I've outlined for you. Refer to the tip sheet, app usage guides, consistency workflow, and tips for maintaining friendships. **In the margins, make notes that estimate how much time you anticipate these activities might take.**

*For example, here's how much time these activities take me for one week's worth of content:*

- **30 – 45 minutes:** creating images and media.
- **15 minutes:** editing and exporting
- **30 minutes:** writing captions
- **15 minutes:** copy/paste captions into Instagram and schedule
- **10 minutes per day:** engaging with comments, posts, hashtags, DMs, and analytics

## WRITE IT OUT: **BATCH-CREATE ONE WEEK OF CONTENT**

**Now, for some real talk.**

### SCHEDULE THESE ACTIVITIES IN YOUR CALENDAR

You have all the tools you need to attract, grow, and maintain an engaged Instagram audience. These future members of your community are WAITING to see what you create and for the opportunity to engage with your business. **Make a commitment to consistency and create time for action!**

## YOU'VE MADE IT THROUGH THE INSTAGRAM FOR SMALL + CREATIVE BUSINESSES MASTERCLASS.

*Refer back to this workbook as your guide.* No one, and I mean no one grows an engaged following on Instagram overnight. And frankly, we're not trying to get you Instagram Famous with this Masterclass. We're working to get you **Instagram proficient with an engaged audience that converts where you need them to convert.**

*If you start today, where will you be in 6 months?*