Instagram
Brad Pitt has one. So does Kim Kardashian and she has more than 3 million followers. Heck, even President Obama has one that includes about 1.2 million followers. In case you’re wondering, we’re talking about Instagram®, and it’s rapidly becoming a key player on many brands’ social media team.

Launched in 2010, Instagram was initially viewed as another photo-sharing platform. But it has proven to be a lot more.

You can upload photos and videos, filter them to create great effects, comment on content, explore Instagram for content, share and connect with your favorite brands.

And that is what attracted tweens and teens; Instagram’s early adopters.

The arrival of mom and dad, and even grandparents, on Facebook® left younger audiences wanting some digital freedom, a social media platform to call their own. This young audience also found that Facebook was becoming too complex, and they wanted a return to basics. So, they turned to Instagram, which was simple to use, relatively adult free and fun².

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And one of the features that really made Instagram fun from the start was the ability to easily apply filters to photos to make them cool. Sepia tones, fun borders, and being able to make photos look like they were taken with an old-fashioned Polaroid® camera, for example, were fantastically novel at the time.

And that novelty and appeal to younger audiences encouraged Facebook⁴ to buy Instagram in 2012 for an enormous sum—$1 billion in cash and stock⁵.

Under Facebook, Instagram’s audience has broadened but it is still dominated by younger users. It is most popular with 18-29 year olds, who account for 37 percent of total Instagram usage. Only 18 percent of those in the 30-49 demographic and 6 percent in the 50-64 demographic use Instagram⁶.

The audience also skews towards women, who account for 68 percent of users, and urban, with 17 percent of U.S. adults in urban areas using Instagram, compared to 11 percent in suburban and rural areas⁷.

Overall, this youthful audience has made Instagram an attractive platform for many apparel, entertainment and media brands⁸.

Research from Forrester also shows that Instagram leads Facebook and Twitter when it comes to consumer engagement, not just by a little, but by a lot.⁹ And, according to the online magazine Digital Trends®, Instagram is growing faster than Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest® combined.¹⁰

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⁸ (Smith, Cooper. “Here’s Why Instagram’s Demographics Are So Attractive To Brands Read More: <http://www.businessinsider.com/instagram-demographics-2013-12>.
For these reasons alone, you might want to give Instagram a second look—it’s clearly emerging as a ringer on many companies’ social media team.

This Blue Paper® uncovers everything you need to know to get started. It explains the why and how to add Instagram to your social media lineup. It will also shed some light on the business value it may hold and provide examples of how other organizations found success.

**A great batting average**

If you’re curious about the history of Instagram, take time to read the [historical timeline](http://instagram.com/redbull) posted on its website. It’s a fascinating story featuring bumps and hurdles before being acquired by Facebook in 2012. Facebook spent approximately $1 billion acquiring what was then a two-year-old company that had been downloaded 30 million times by iPhone® users. (When launched in 2010, Instagram was only available on the iPhone.) Android users had to wait two years until April 2012 before they had access to Instagram.

Instagram now has an estimated worth of $5 billion, a lift of 500 percent in just three years. And as of March 2014, it had around 200 million active users.

And brands are taking notice.

**Figure 2: Red Bull saw a lot more engagement on Instagram**

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Energy drink giant Red Bull® posted a snowboarding video in February 2014 on both Facebook and Instagram. The video got 2,600 total interactions on Facebook from its 43 million fans. On Instagram, the same video got over 36,000 likes from 1.2 million followers.  

To put it in perspective, consider that for every 1 million people who follow a brand on Twitter, about .03 percent, or 300 people, will engage through shares, likes or comments. On Facebook, a million followers will produce about a .07 percent engagement level, or 700 people. With Instagram, however, engagement is 4.2 percent, or 42,000, per million followers.

Using these numbers, Instagram is around 60 times more engaging than Facebook and 140 times more engaging than Twitter.

And, people are not just engaging more with this channel, but as you would expect, they are spending more time on it. A Forrester study found that Instagram users spend an average of 257 hours per month viewing their feeds, whereas Facebook users only spend an average of 170 hours viewing theirs. That’s no small accomplishment, especially for a player that hasn’t been in the game for long.

Moreover, in 2013, Instagram grew by 23 percent, while parent company Facebook fell by 3 percent. And every day, more than 40 million photos are uploaded to Instagram, and every second users “like” 8,500 of the filter-enhanced pictures and make 1,000 comments about them.

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Figure 3 shows the changes in active users for the top 20 social platforms. Instagram outperforms every platform. It shows a 23 percent increase in usage, surpassing the second top performer Reddit® by 10 percent. Meanwhile, big hitters like Facebook and YouTube® actually show a decline in usage.

Figure 4 shows that it is the car, fast food, soft drink and clothing sectors that are the most represented on Instagram, with a 100 percent adoption rate, according to the Millward-Brown 2013 BrandZ® index. The insurance sector, on the other hand, is the least represented at 30 percent.

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And, according to Totems Analytics®, the top three brands on the platform are Nike®, Starbucks® and the NBA®. L2 reports that the top brands' hitting average for Instagram is six images a week and 0.38 videos²².

So, right now, unsurprisingly, consumer-facing brands are stepping up to the plate with this social media platform because Instagram’s batting average is breaking .350.

The slumps

Every great player has the slumps now and again, and superstitious rituals go into overdrive to break the downward spiral. Instagram is no exception.

According to online marketer KISSmetrics, there are five misconceptions about Instagram that have put this platform in the slumps a few times:²³

1. It only works to sell visual products.
2. It is only for big business.
3. It’s all about posting your own photos and videos.
4. It’s not possible to measure performance.
5. Instagram owns your photos.

The first is that Instagram only works if you sell visual products. The truth is any company, even if it doesn’t sell products, can use this social media platform to promote its culture, employee goodwill and celebrations. Most companies have traditions to celebrate events and holidays—showing your team getting together in a non-work related context gives followers a peek in what goes on across your organization.

Secondly, Instagram is not just for big business. Many small companies use Instagram to their advantage with limited budgets, to help create sales leads or attract new customers. Even small startups are on Instagram, such as the eyewear and sunglasses retailer Warby Parker®, which is often cited as one of the textbook inspirations on how to use Instagram.

As far as not being able to measure your results on Instagram, that’s just not true. Although there is no built-in tool for measuring your performance, there are many software solutions:

• **TOTEMS Analytics**® (formally known as Nitrogram) provides insights on hashtags and accounts, showing engagement rates and number of photos shared.
• **ICONOSquare**® (formally Statigram) also provides data on the Instagram account.
• **SimplyMeasured**® combines Instagram performance with other social media sites.

And stay tuned, because Instagram’s business tool suite is coming soon!

Lastly, the biggest slump Instagram experienced related to use and ownership of photos. Probably due to the copyright mini-scandal a few years ago, some believe that Instagram owns photograph rights. Instagram has, however, updated its terms to clearly state that users own their own photos.

**Batter up!**

Okay, we have looked at Instagram’s story and reviewed its playing stats. So, let’s get this game started.

Begin by ensuring Instagram’s demographics are the right fit for your organization and that you’ve considered strategically its placement within your overall social media strategy. Clearly outline the goals and outcomes you are seeking from your efforts, such as engagement metrics, sales conversions or brand awareness. Take into account the platform’s sustainability—who is responsible for updates; how often will you post; when will your company report on its efforts?

Once you’ve been thorough in your planning, it’s time to step up to bat.

**Download app**

Start by downloading the app to your iPhone or Android—it’s free. All accounts, personal and business are treated the same. So, it’s not like Facebook, for example, where you can have personal and business pages.

Instagram can be accessed by any device online, but it is optimized for cell phones. For example, you can’t upload pictures or videos directly to a desktop computer or laptop, you have to use your phone or tablet. However, you can view accounts and change account information on your PC or Mac.

During the initial setup, you will be invited to upload a profile picture and fill out some personal information. Your account is viewable by the public by default. You
can decide to keep it private, but most brands will want to make their content available to as many people as possible.

You can also decide to limit who sees an individual photo or video by using Instagram Direct and selecting which followers you want to see the post, by ticking the box next to their name.

**Link social players**

After the initial setup, you are asked if you want to link to other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Vine®, Twitter, Tumblr®, Flickr® and Foursquare®.

One word of caution here: Linking your Facebook Business Page, rather than your personal page, can be a little complicated. First, you will need to link Instagram, using Share Settings, to the personal account attached to your brand page. Next, you will need to click on the Facebook Wall Default button, grant Instagram access to Facebook and select your Facebook Business Page. It can be messy, but here is a [great explainer article](#).

That may not be the end of your issues; some Android phones seem to have a real problem when trying to connect Instagram to Facebook. This can take a bit of trial and error to resolve.

Overall, it is always a good idea to link your social media channels when possible, to help potential customers find you in their preferred channels and to make content sharing easier. However, that does not mean that you should just auto-post, or have your posts automatically added to all your social platforms. It is better to customize your content to get the maximum benefit from each of your social team members.

**Set up notifications**

The next step is to set up notifications.

This ensures you are notified when someone posts a photo you are tagged in or makes a comment on your photos. You can even choose to be notified if someone likes your photo or mentions you in another photo.

This is a great source of brand feedback, showing exactly what potential customers think of you.
Swing!

Get creative and swing for the fences because Instagram can be used for more than posting pictures or videos. Special campaigns and photo contests are just two examples of how you add a twist to your content. Instagram contests, for example, give followers an incentive to share content and allow brands to reuse it. Red Bull (Figure 5) showcases how an organization can launch a contest via Instagram and encourage followers to share content.

Figure 5: Red Bull example on Instagram

Other ways to use Instagram include asking customers to post pictures using your product or service—like wearing earrings or taking your product on a picnic.

Each time you upload a photo or video, you can also decide which of the other social networks you have linked to your account get to see it. And Instagram users can find your content through Instagram Explore, which will present content people you follow like, as well as other content Instagram thinks may be of interest to you.

All in all, Instagram is fairly straightforward and easy-to-use. But if you’re still confused about how it works and what it can do, check out the beginners guide to Instagram created by Mashable® and use the content rules-of-thumb and tactics below to assist as you swing for the fences:

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Be fresh

Content should be fresh and meaningful to be successful on this platform. You should avoid reposting images and videos that are found elsewhere.

Be consistent and visible

Make sure your Instagram account is named logically and easy to find. Posting consistently keeps and attracts followers and is much more effective—you’ll attract more followers quickly. You should also follow your feed regularly to see how pictures are performing or what is grabbing the attention of customers.

Be spontaneous—don’t schedule automatic postings. Share momentary emotion, laughter and care. You want to give the impression you’re posting real time events and life, not just canned content and marketing photos.

Hashtag it

Hashtags, words or phrases with the # symbol at the start, are incredibly popular among Instagram users. Similar to Twitter, hashtagging photos lets users outside of your primary connections find you. They help people search, find images and add an image to current trends.

Find the right hashtags for your content. Use the search functionality within the app to search which hashtags are more common and let that be a starting point. Some of the top hashtags on Instagram include “#love,” “#me,” and “#follow.”

Hashtags can be used for photos or videos by event, geolocation or subject matter. But using too many hashtags can annoy users or make your company appear to be desperate for attention, so find a balance. Don’t use more than five hashtags and keep them short and sweet.

Hashtags also let you keep an eye on the conversation around your brand. As you monitor hashtags for relevant conversations, engage with users to form a relationship around the brand and to get them to take notice of the corporate presence.

Engage followers

To attract more followers, you need to engage. Follow similar accounts, like, comment on pictures and respond to comments on your own content. You should also use photos that ask questions that may engage users in order to attract a wider audience.
Here are a few more quick tips:

• Share your followers pictures and videos across your social platforms, including Facebook and Twitter
• Embed your followers’ photos and videos on your website
• Comment and like followers’ photos/videos; respond to comments on your posts
• Use @mention to promote people who showcase your products, e.g. @joepublic will send a message to Joe Public
• Capitalize on Instagram’s 15-second videos to create themed videos that show your brand personality or more closely resemble commercials
• Post creative pictures and videos that illustrate your company’s core values and brand
• Post pics or videos of the build-up to a company event or product launch, as well as the clean-up afterwards
• Ask questions: Have you used our product today? What would you wear with our new line of boots?
• Use fill in the blank posts: “During the weekend, my favorite snack is________.” could accompany snack images
• Ask your followers for picture captions; crowdsource pics with a photo contest
• Find the best time for your posts by monitoring performance; monitor all brand, sub-brand, and campaign hashtags

Sliding into home plate

Brands doing Instagram well are “safe” at home plate and scoring points for their teams. If you want to view examples from leading organizations, reference the article from the Business Insider® on the top 20 brands that mastered the use of Instagram. We’ve also included a few of our favorite examples.

The National Football League® (NFL®)

Figure 6: NFL

Figure 6 shows how the NFL uses images that are heartfelt and moving; no small task for a league known for being rough and tough. It’s a simple and touching photo, but the true value is in the message it conveys. Users may view the picture and feel inspired while the picture subtlety promotes the brand.

MyHauteCloset

Figure 7: MyHauteCloset

The small company MyHauteCloset® in Figure 7 provides another Instagram success story—without Instagram the company may not even exist. The organization reports that almost 100 percent of clients come from Instagram and credits the 38,000 followers for propelling the organization forward. Founder Milysan Troche says that her success is largely due to her personal style via Instagram and making connections. Initially, Troche received emails from followers that wanted to rid their closet of designer items that helped her identify a business opportunity. She says: “I began consigning and selling items solely through Instagram ... as my following [grew] I thought it was time to build a dedicated online store where my followers could shop with ease and still see what’s available via Instagram.”

Virgin America

Figure 8: Virgin America®

Virgin America® frequently posts pictures of surprises it gives to customers and shares snapshots of travelers during their journey or with celebrities along the way—see Figure 8. Even the CEO Richard Branson gets in on the fun and posts engaging pictures. If you don’t believe it, check out this [Instagram picture of Branson](http://instagram.com/virginamerica), or review a sample of recent quirky and creative photos on the [Instagram page for Virgin America](http://instagram.com/virginamerica). Followers of Virgin America associate the company with a brand experience that isn’t provided by other airlines thanks to vehicles like Instagram. Moreover, the company frequently engages with fans and works to show that happy customers are just average, every day people. This approach makes the airline highly successful in achieving its goals, and much of the credit goes to Instagram. 31

Required Flare

Figure 9: Required Flare

Finally, the small company Required Flare in Figure 9 uses Instagram to create relationships with current and future customers while standing out among competitors. The organization is diligent about responding to posts on Instagram to instill a sense of trust and comfort. Owner Sai De Silva, who credits much of the company’s success to Instagram, says: “Because of Instagram, RequiredFlare is able to interact with our consumers in an unconventional way.”

Next season’s lineup

Convincing others to add Instagram to the roster may take some time. Do the research; see if your target audience is adopting this platform and experiment. With 200 million users to play for, Instagram can be a highly effective way to give your company a boost and promote your brand, particularly if it becomes a successful advertising channel. Yes ... you heard that announcement right!

In October 2013, Instagram made its first move into advertising, or sponsored photos and videos. It initially teamed up with brands that were already very active on the platform: Adidas®, Ben & Jerry’s®, Burberry®, General Electric®, Lexus®, Levi’s®, Macy’s®, Michael Kors®, PayPal® and Starwood®. More recently TV shows, including Showtime’s “Ray Donovan,” as well as TNT’s “The Last Ship,” have started advertising on the platform. Clearly, Instagram is prepping for a profitable future as an ad-revenue generating model.

Launching the initiative, Instagram said it would serve up relevant and targeted ads, much like a customer sees when they flip through their favorite magazine. It said: “Our aim is to make any advertisements you see feel as natural to Instagram as the photos and videos many of you already enjoy from your favorite brands. After all, our team doesn’t just build Instagram; we use it each and every day.”

So, before you send Instagram up to bat, invest in training and practice as much as possible. And, as you move closer to adding Instagram to the marketing mix make sure you have the right coaches to effectively implement the platform.

Who knows, Instagram might help you win the business equivalent of the World Series®. Why not throw the first pitch and get the game started—your team might be the one to take it all.