



HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF A SUCCESSFUL, **IN-DEMAND** TRAVEL INFLUENCER

(PLUS DOZENS OF TIPS ON PERSONAL BRANDING,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP, PITCHING, AND WAYS TO KILL IT IN LIFE!)

**WAKE ME UP
WHEN I'M
FAMOUS**



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Most people believe that influencers are born, not made. This is simply not true. Almost no one is born famous. Even Kim Kardashian made herself a star as a result of her hustle. She started out organizing other celebrity's closets and hobnobbing with the right people. Anyone can be an influencer in their field if they put the time into growing their audience and authority.

This two-part course to teach you how to transform yourself into an influencer and turn your social prowess into business opportunities. This first course is an easy and actionable 10-step program to teach you how to build an online persona, grow your following, and supercharge your digital footprint in order to begin marketing yourself for brand collaborations.

Part two will teach you how to assess your value, secure sponsorships and eventually monetize your profile with realistic goals and expectations. I'm not saying quit your day job and watch the dollars roll in, but if you're interested in a new side hustle and creating a strong personal brand, there are infinite opportunities if you put the time in. The examples focus primarily on travel and food because that's my wheelhouse (and who doesn't want to get paid to travel?), although the strategies and tactics identified should be applicable to any industry.

Exercise >> Before we get started; we need to document your baseline numbers. Take a screenshot of your Instagram account along with the date. Set up an excel sheet to document on average how many likes and comments you're getting on your most recent six photos (add them together and divide by six for both likes and comments). Set a calendar reminder to do a "health check" on your profile every month so you can evaluate how fast you're growing to compare your progress to your goals.

Chapter 1: Branding Yourself

Before you can go after opportunities, you need to make yourself marketable. The first step is viewing yourself as a brand.

1. Define your online persona

Goals: Choose your niche and determine what makes you different (be specific!).

Your personal brand is what separates you from everyone else in the world. That's a lofty statement so stop to let it sink in for a minute. Whether you want to be a luxury traveler, a goofy yogi or a consummate foodie, you need to flesh out exactly how you want to be seen by others before you can start shaping that message and putting it out into the universe. This also means knowing yourself – real influencers are authentic. They tap into their passions and share their enthusiasm with their fans. What do you bring to the table that no one else does? Are you obsessed with vegetarian food? The best travel hacker out there? Do you love going on solo adventures as a fun, fearless female?

Travelers are a dime a dozen. You need to know exactly what kind of traveler you are to know what niche you fall into (or whatever other overarching industry you're interested in) and what makes you keenly different within that space. In essence, it's your online elevator pitch. For me, that's approachable, offbeat adventures that anyone can emulate. I was never the fastest kid in gym class (quite the contrary), but I will never turn down the chance to try something new and quirky like blackwater rafting or dogsledding and love telling the tale. Here are a [few questions](#) to ask yourself as you begin to define your story.

Be very deliberate in your word choice as "Adventure Traveler" and "Travel Adventures" have subtly different meanings. The same goes for "Traveling Foodie" and "Culinary Traveler." The Instagram algorithm uses exact matching for keyword phrases and even notes which word is prioritized in your bio. Travel, traveling, and traveler all have different search volumes so it may be worthwhile to do a quick check for who comes up with different variations. The same goes for synonyms like wanderlust, globetrotter, jetsetter, etc.

Exercise >> Before you do anything else, make a list of all your social media handles, websites, and blogs and look at them objectively one by one. What three adjectives do you think each says about you? What do you want them to say about you? After you've written down what you think, ask a few friends how they would describe your online presence based on your current profiles. Does the impression of yourself match up? If it doesn't, it's time to work on what message you're conveying.

Note >> Your social media channels shouldn't have the exact same content, but each should complement and contribute to the overall story of who you are.

Exercise >> Jot down 3-5 of your favorite Instagram accounts in your industry and take a good hard look at their profiles. Make note of exactly what do you like and dislike about each one. Be specific: is it the color palate, the locations, the clothes? This is so you can begin to define your own style.

2. Manage your online brand

Goals: Make your username memorable, claim all accounts with your handle, and perfect your bio.

2A. Your Handle

Now that you've defined your niche, it's time to pick a handle that communicates your brand. Choosing the right username is one of the most crucial elements as it's hard to change later on. Put a good amount of thought into it upfront, and test many different variations to see what's available.

There are two schools of thought here – some people prefer their real name, while others choose whimsical, catchy monikers that describe them like @theboldbrunette, @tourdelust or @girlonthego (some which even incorporate

their name or nicknames like @getlostwithjackie or @wanderingk). Whichever route you go, make sure your handle is easy to remember and searchable. If your last name is uncommon or difficult to spell, you may want to go the moniker route. Similarly, leave out any numbers as they're hard to remember and you want to be original. Here are [some suggestions](#) for crafting the perfect username on Twitter, (which are also applicable to Instagram).

Exercise >> Secure your handle everywhere you can. If your account is @adventuresinamerica, register the domain adventuresinamerica.com and claim the handles on Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and Youtube, even if you don't plan on using all equally or actively right away. You don't want someone else to have the opportunity to take your name. If your username is unavailable on one or more platforms, make your names as similar as possible across all channels ie. @adventuresinamericablog, @adventuresinamericatravel or @adventuresinamericaofficial

Exercise >> Even if you're not a writer, consider setting up a blog right off the bat with at least 3-5 articles in your niche. This will only add to your credibility, as you'll be able to offer integrated campaigns. At the very least, it can be a place to host photo essays or photo galleries that live forever. Wordpress and other hosting providers have basic templates to help get you started.



2B. Your Profile Page

Next, you want to make sure your profile is as optimized as possible. Does your profile pic stand out when scrolling? It's up for debate whether a clear headshot is preferable to a logo, but I'm always a fan of putting a name to a brand. Does your bio clearly describe who you are, what you do and where you're located (important as many clients prefer to work with local influencers or influencers in certain areas)?

Note >> Use strong, active, inclusive language that is short, sweet and to the point like "Join me as I explore" or "Adventure with me." Break up long paragraphs with emojis. To add line breaks to your profile, write the text in the Notes app of your phone and copy/paste it into Instagram.

Should you designate yourself a business or personal account? This is up for debate. While a business profile gives you access to additional features like analytics with your optimal posting time and links in stories (if you have over 10K followers),

many users have reported drops in engagement when they switched to a business profile. It may be worth testing both (you can switch back and forth), but you need to determine if the reward is worth the risk. I recently switched to a business account and find the analytics to be invaluable.

3. Determine which networks to prioritize – if there was an unlimited number of hours in the day, we'd all be pounding the pavement on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and pumping out blog content 24/7. Since most people also have jobs and lives, learning where to prioritize your time is crucial to maximizing your ROI (return on investment).

If you already have a large following on any particular channel, it's worthwhile growing where you already have an established presence. If you're starting from scratch or have less than 10K followers on all platforms, I recommend putting your time into Instagram or YouTube as they're the most in-demand right now.

Note >> This course focuses primarily on Instagram, but videos are also super hot and lucrative. If you're comfortable in front of the camera, that may be an avenue you wish to pursue.

4. Understand how to use social media personally vs. professionally

Goals: think about what your current profile says about you.

4A. Photos

It's time to take a good hard look at your Instagram profile and see what kind of content you've been sharing thus far. Likely you've been posting random moments in your own life, which is to be expected. It's time to change this mentality and think of yourself as a professional content creator. The main differentiator between an average Instagram user and an influencer is how much time they put into pre-planning their photos.

With each location you visit, view it as a potential photo shoot and visualize how to show off the destination and any brands or gear (even the clothes you're wearing) in the best light possible. What props or outfits can you pack to enhance the backdrop? Will you sacrifice waking up at sunrise or sunset to get the best lighting?

The more premeditated and planned out your photos look, the more a potential brand partner can see themselves using your feed as a way to promote their product. To be a travel influencer, you're not getting paid to vacation; you're getting paid to create content, which means being a writer, photographer, stylist, and model all rolled into one.



Figure 1: Taken with an iPhone 7+ with tripod and remote

Note >> While photo quality is certainly better with a professional camera, you can still take very good shots on a smartphone. If you're traveling solo, I always have a tripod and remote with me and a detachable backlight for food shots. Recommended photo products are included in the resource library.





Figure 2: My Archived Posts - Some Real Gems in there!

Exercise >> it's time to go through and clean up your profile. Use a really critical eye when deciding what to keep. No one wants to see photos of your boyfriend (unless you're a couple's blogger), kids (unless family is your niche), what you ate for breakfast (foodies are a different story), half-naked or inebriated friends (ever, this is not a niche, there are zero exceptions, even alcohol brands don't show people drunk). You must do this before you start trying to grow your account as you only have one chance to make a first impression.

Note >> Even if you are a couple's blogger, family blogger, etcetera, there is a huge difference between a professionally styled photo you took to portray an aspirational lifestyle and what you find an adorable shot of your munchkin or significant other looking a hot mess with bad lighting in the morning. Your family by the Christmas tree? Cute, but unnecessary. Your adorable 80-year old Grandma? You looking super fine at a college football game? Your latest culinary endeavor? These are all great memories that belong on a personal profile, not an influencer account. It's important

to note that the subject of the photo matter is less important than the quality of the photo. Anything can look editorial with the right lighting, backdrop and props, from a half-spilled bowl of cereal to an athletic shoe. Similarly, anything can look unprofessional from selfies to badly lit nature shots.

Go through each photo individually on your account and ask yourself: is this relevant to your business? Will clients look at this and see me as a viable partner? If you're not sure, get rid of it. If you have to think about it – get rid of it. Less is more. Instagram is a quality over quantity platform. Leave all those questionable shots on a private Facebook or Instagram profile – not an account you use for business.

If you can't live without the photo from your cousin's wedding or your dog, make a separate Instagram profile for personal use. Start getting in the mindset that every photo you put out into the world on your business account is a direct reflection of your online persona. New content should add to your brand value, not dilute it.

Exercise >> Decide whether you want to give your current profile a makeover or create a secondary account. Instagram has a nifty archive feature where you can go through and hide all those personal moments reserved for your eyes only. Archive anything that is off-brand or start a new profile solely for business purposes. Another advantage of starting a second account is once you start following a bunch of people, your family and friend's posts will get lost in the clutter. I like having a separate account where I can just check what my favorite people are posting.

4B. Tone

When a company hires you to do a sponsored post on their behalf, you're essentially becoming an ambassador for their brand and embodying their values. You want to appeal to as many potential companies as possible by offering an upbeat, relatable voice. This means keeping your captions as clean as possible without losing your authenticity. In real life, I swear and am snarky AF, but I'm careful to filter this out from my online persona. Your tone and language are a direct reflection of your professionalism so keep the profanities in check, make sure your spelling and grammar are on point and keep the slang to a minimum. Imagine you're writing copy for a brand because, in essence, you are, whether it's your own or for a partner.

5. Create good content

Goals: Understand what good content means, why is it important and how often should you post (frequency).

Instagram is a visual platform so creating good content is the first step to success. Try to think of your feed as a beautifully curated collection rather than each picture as a standalone post. A well-edited, cohesive feed is the key to success on Instagram.

5A. What Makes a Good Photo?

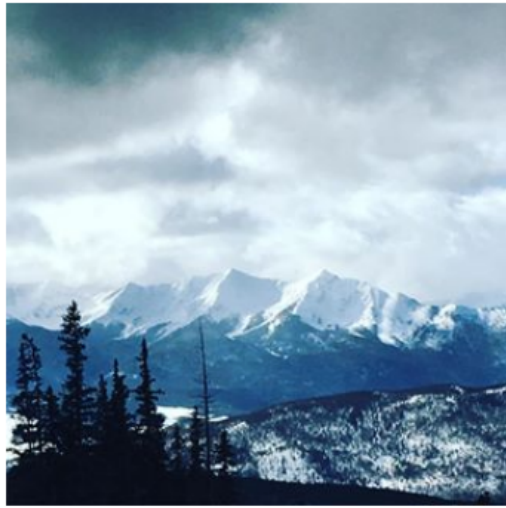
The perfect picture for your account depends on your niche, but there are some overarching themes that do well across the board. Here are some [suggestions and tips](#) for what type of photos do the best (spoiler: they can even be taken on your iPhone!). For your overall feed, focus on consistency in regards to colors/filters (a bright or muted palate), subject matter (landscapes, food, people in the shot, etc.), and composition (I recommend sticking to one standard size, collages or oddly shaped vertical photos are distracting).

Note >> Deciding what NOT to post is often the hardest part of Instagram. While you may take one super killer photo, if it looks too different than the rest of your feed, you may have to save it for awhile or “kill your baby.” Use the app Planoly to drag and drop images to test which looks the best next to each other so you can nail down the order of posts before publishing.

Note >> If you’re not a photographer or don’t have access to epic shots all the time, you can still curate a really great feed by running a feature account. Along with promoting your own images, asking to “regram” (share user photos) is one of the best ways to build a community. In fact, many big profiles don’t publish any of their own photos; they simply share the best of the web (ie. @sheisnotlost @wearetravelgirls). Whether you want to feature all user-generated content or a few here and there, make sure to designate a hashtag on your bio so users can proactively let you know they want you to use their photos. Something to the effect of: “Tag your photos with #adventuresinamerica for the chance to be featured.” Anyone who uses your hashtag is viewed as having consented to share. If they haven’t tagged you and you still want to use their photos – ask them nicely via a comment or DM. Don’t just assume or take. Digital copyrights should be taken seriously.

Note >> People always want to be featured on accounts bigger than their own for exposure. The bigger your account gets, the more people will start using your hashtag and proactively asking you to be featured (instead of having to go out and source content all the time, which can be time-consuming).

Most liked posts



3.4K ❤️



3.3K ❤️



3.2K ❤️



3.2K ❤️



3.1K ❤️

Exercise >> Use [lnk361](#) to see what your top performing posts are in terms of likes and comments. Do you see any consistencies in the style of the photo? Are they all landscapes / pretty nature shots like mine? Were you in all the photos? Try to assess what they all have in common so you can post more photos like the ones that have been successful.

5B. Captions

Like the perfect picture, the perfect caption varies widely by account, but again, aim for consistency with length and tone. Stories and quotes do really well, as they appeal to people's emotions. Keep it succinct, but provide enough detail to give the photo context and create a narrative. Consider using emojis to break up long paragraphs and including a call to action to drive comments like a question – “Have you ever done this?” or “What’s your favorite summer activity?”

Exercise >> Test a few different styles of captions to see which performs the best with your audience.

5C. Frequency

As stated, Instagram is a “less is more” platform. It’s not recommended to post more than once a day, twice at most. People will unfollow you just as much for overposting as they will for bad pictures. Create a posting schedule you can stick to so you’re always pushing out content at relatively the same days and times – this can be daily,

3x a week or whatever works for you as long as you develop a consistent routine schedule for users to expect new content. If you have a business account, the analytics section will tell you when your audience is most active for posting.

Some people use apps to schedule their posts, but I don't recommend it. Since time is such an important factor in the algorithm, it's better that you're online interacting and responding to comments right after you post to drive engagement. You should always plan to be online 15-30 minutes after you post to respond to comments and engage with similar hashtags (more on this later).

Note >> If you leave each photo up for longer (a few days in between posts), they will get better engagement if you're actively following people on the app. The first photo a user sees on your account is more often than not the one he or she will like or comment back on.

6. Understanding the Instagram Algorithm to Improve Discoverability

Goals: Learn how to use keywords, tag photos, and conduct hashtag research.

When Instagram first changed their algorithm from chronological feeds to ordering posts by popularity, it changed the app forever, and top influencers were left scrambling to garner the visibility they once had. Some turned to bad behavior like bots and automation to game the system. While these are never encouraged as they're against IG's terms and conditions, there are a number of other hacks to get those coveted likes and comments. Engagement across the board is nowhere near the level it used to be, but many of these tactics are still highly effective and your best chance of success.

In recent updates, Instagram has been all about providing individualized content recommendations to each user so what you see on the app is completely different than the person next to you. This makes it much harder to get your photo shown to everyone. That said, the goal is still to be shown to as many targeted people as possible.

The algorithm is used to determine which pictures show up on the search page, on location pages, as suggested user recommendations, on the explore page, and on your news feed. That's five places you could possibly be seen by millions of users. The equation is constantly being updated and tweaked, but two things remain constant -- quality and relevancy.

Any actions you take on the app (following, liking, commenting, saving, etc.) contribute to your profile's "[goodness score](#)," a secret weighted number that indicates to your account's popularity. Get your goodness score up and your content will be shown to more people. (It sounds ridiculous but this is an actual term taken from the Instagram engineering blog.) Things that factor into your score include keywords in your profile, consistent, quality posts, and regular, targeted activity with people in your niche.

Your account's score is weighted in conjunction with each specific post's engagement, which includes the number of likes + comments on a photo in a given time period (another signal of popularity and quality) to ultimately determine where and to whom to show your post.

6A. Keywords in profile

Understanding the basics of [SEO](#) (search engine optimization) is important as being discovered on social media is a similar concept. You want your profile to show up when people search for relevant keywords like "travel blogger" "food writer" or any of the other words and phrases you determined you want to be associated with in lesson one. Make sure these keywords are featured as prominently as possible in your bio (it's even recommended to put them in the name line if the character count works). Remember, the more specific and targeted, the better so choose your words wisely.

6B. Tagging

When you upload a post, you have two additional fields for discovery – the geo-location and the ability to tag people in the photo. Always geotag the location as specifically as possible so it will show up for anyone searching that location to plan a trip.

In the photo itself, tag as many relevant accounts as you can. Tagging is a way of notifying others to check out your photo that is more direct than a mention or a hashtag. You can tag any businesses, products or brands featured in your picture and any relevant tourism accounts in the area. For example, If you have a photo of street art in Denver, you could tag @VisitDenver (the local visitor's bureau), @DowntownDenver, @VisitColorado (the state tourism board), and any Instagram communities in Colorado (ie. @Coloradolggers, @ColoradoInstagram, etc.). If there's a person in the photo, you could also tag the brands you're wearing. The goal of tagging is to get your photo noticed by your community (which should translate to likes and comments) and possibly get featured on one of those bigger accounts.

Note >> While you should tag as many relevant accounts as you can, you don't want to be that guy spamming Colorado accounts with a photo of England. If someone tags you in a random photo you don't want to be associated with, you can easily untag yourself. Simply click on the "photos of you" button and remove from your profile. The bigger you get, the more random photos you'll be tagged in.

6C. Hashtags

Hashtags are important because they determine everywhere your photo may show up on Instagram: on the news feed, on the search page, on the explore place, on location pages, and who you show up to as a Suggested User. The way to win the

hashtag game is to get into the coveted “top post” spots on popular hashtag search pages. To determine who is worthy of a top spot (there are nine per hashtag), the algorithm looks at both your post and your account’s goodness score. The top nine used to be the same for every user, but now they’re personalized for each individual based on what the algorithm thinks you want to see. The reach is less than it used to be, but hashtags are still the most important element of organic growth. Choosing the right hashtags can expose you to thousands of new users.

Note >> You should always use the maximum number of hashtags allowed (30) to increase your chances of discovery. While that may seem excessive if you were given the choice between eight lottery tickets and 30, would you take 8? Of course not. Hashtags are how you get seen on Instagram, and each one equals thousands of potential impressions. You never know which one will pay off big.

6D. Hashtag Research

Hashtag research is the most important concept of Instagram, yet most people have no clue they even need to be doing it. Most users mindlessly throw whatever random word associations come to mind with their photo. “Beautiful” “Cool” and “Travel” get tons of views but they’re tagged at a rate of 100s per minute, which will give you visibility for mere seconds. The majority of your hashtags should have an average number of impressions and be specific phrases you’re trying to rank for based on your niche, location and engagement level.

Note >> All hashtags must accurately describe your photo. Instagram has well-honed image recognition software so assume they know what’s the photo is of (remember how creepy it was when Facebook launched their face recognition software? Same thing). While you may be able to rank for an irrelevant keyword, the algorithm looks down upon it and you may quietly be hurting your goodness score.

You want to plan out all your hashtags well ahead of time. If your hashtags are not added within the first five minutes, the algorithm likely won’t count them at all. Be meaningful with your word choices, but be quick. This means having groups of hashtags saved in the Notes app on your phone ready to copy and paste into Instagram right after you post. If you’ve ever done keyword research for Google Adwords, hashtag research is a very similar concept. The first step is to brainstorm a word cloud of associations.

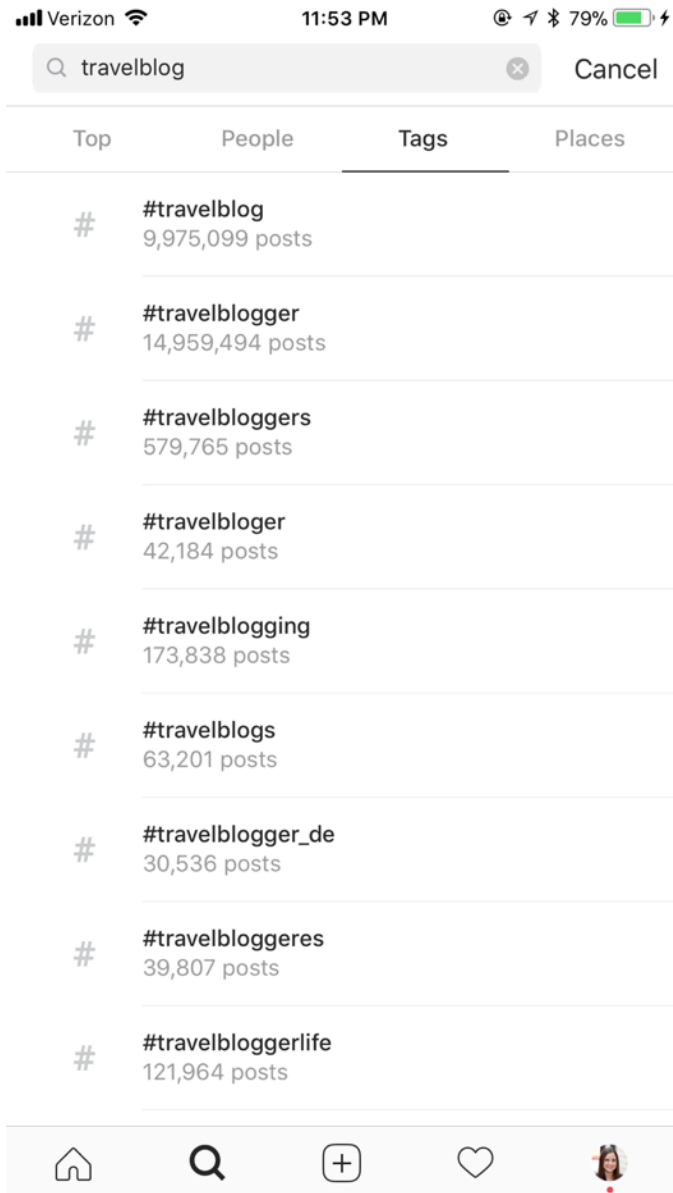
Note >> Hashtags can include emojis, but cannot include spaces or special characters.

Exercise >> Write down any and all words that could describe your account as a whole: travel, adventure, your location by city, state or country, and your main hobbies – skiing, boating, etc. If you are a Utah outdoors blogger, some things you may include are words like Utah, hiking, nature, national parks, adventure, outdoors,

biking, etc. Here is a [list](#) of generic travel hashtags to help get you started (note: search volumes have changed since this was published).

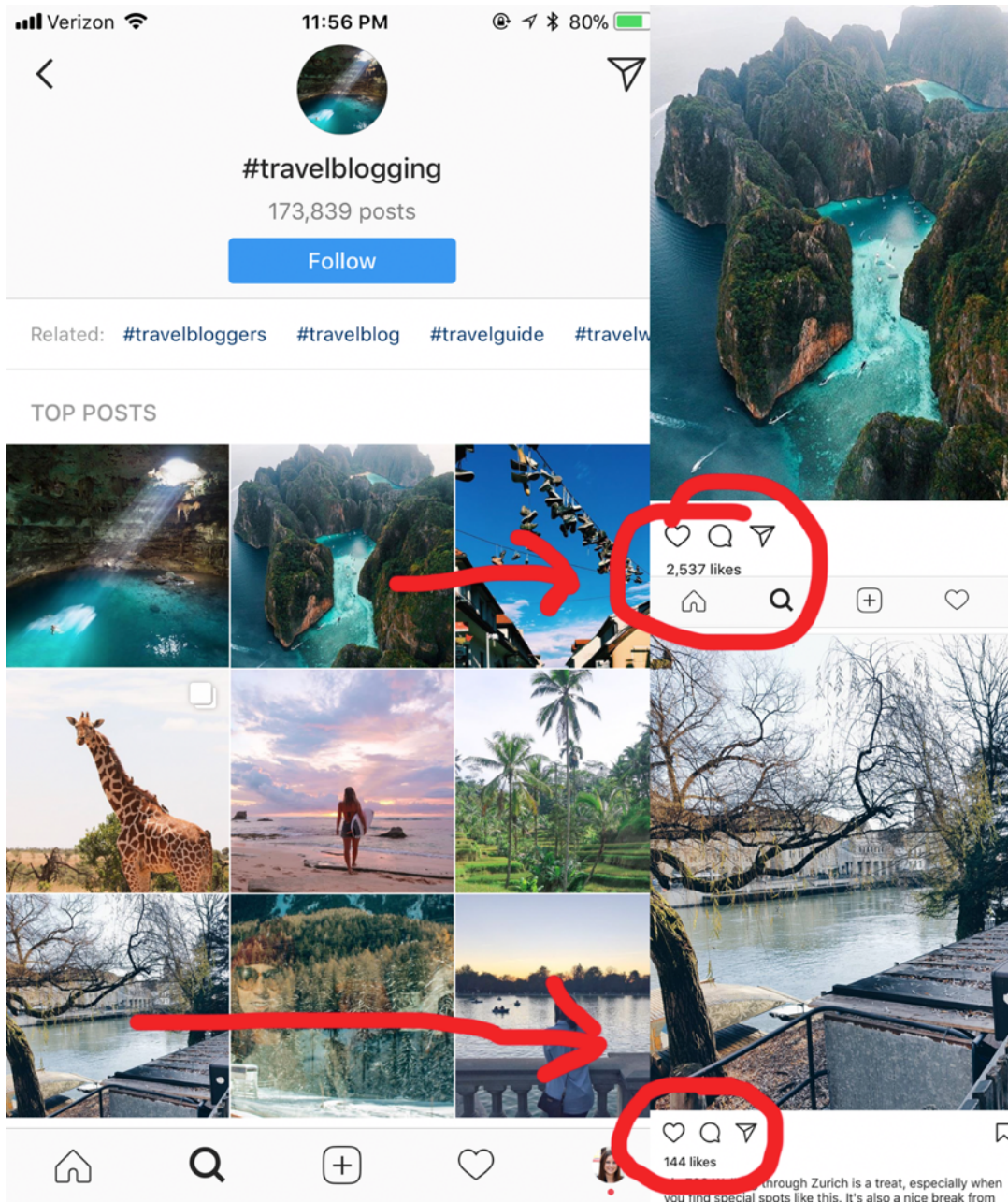
Exercise >> After you've compiled a general group of words that describe your account, do the same thing for each category of photo you tend to post. For example, if you post a lot of food pictures, some words you might list include yum, noms, good eats, dinner, etc. If you post about winter sports, you'd want to include phrases like powder day, skiing or snowboarding, powder hound, whiteout, the resort name, mountains. You want to have multiple groups of hashtags you can rotate between so you're not competing against yourself and you're opening yourself up to new audiences (similar to having different ad groups in AdWords).

Now that you have these various groupings of words, it's time to research the competition. That means going into the Instagram app and searching by keyword. Type one of the words you came up with in the search bar and filter by tag to see what else is suggested. For "travelblog," that looks like:



On this list, #travelblog and #travelblogger have millions of posts so they're likely not worth your time as they're too generic to rank for. Meanwhile, #travelblogging and #travelbloggerlife may be worth looking into further as they get a good amount of impressions, but we still don't know how stiff the competition is.

If you click into #travelblogging, this is what comes up:



You'll see the first nine are the top photos, which is where we're trying to be. Unlike the most recent pictures, which are always getting pushed down the feed, the top posts stay featured for a finite amount of time (which varies depending on how popular the hashtag is). To know whether you have a chance of making it into the top nine, you need to know your average account engagement (how many likes + comments you get per post) and how many the top nine for that hashtag gets. You can determine this by clicking on a few of the featured posts. If your average is higher than the majority of what is currently there, there's a good chance you'll take their spot.

For this example, the top nine #travelblogging posts get between 144-2500 likes. If your average post engagement is in that range or higher, it's likely you'll be featured.

Continue experimenting with different words and phrases until you have a solid list of hashtags you have a chance to rank for.

Note >> The more posts a hashtag has, the harder it is to rank for, but the more visibility you'll get if you do. Engrain the phrase "play in your own size playground" in your head. Which hashtags you go after completely depend on how big your account is and what your average photo engagement is (likes + comments). As your account grows, you can go after bigger hashtags with more exposure. When you're just starting out, focus on small niche words you can dominate and own. Your hashtags should grow as your account grows. It's important to conduct hashtag research periodically.

Note >> Some people put all their hashtags in their caption, while others put them in the first comment. I put all the hashtags as a comment so it doesn't distract from your caption (it's also a good way to hide them as it'll get pushed down as more comments roll in). Ultimately, it's personal preference. If you are going to put them in your caption, make sure to write out all your text in the Notes app of your phone with spacing before copying and pasting into Instagram.

Exercise >> Spend a few hours doing hashtag research. Come up with 3-5 sets of 30 hashtags for each of your photo categories.

7. Strategies and resources to grow your audience

Goal: Experiment using apps and tools to gain followers.

Most people think that influencers just get followers because they have quality content. This couldn't be more false. 90% of the influencers I know are doing some sort of audience development (or did at one point) to grow their following. Your audience size is the basis for your marketability, which is one of the main indicators of authority and clout. You carry with you a built-in audience hungry and trusting for your recommendations. The more followers you have, the more qualified you look. That said, size is not the only thing that matters. Engagement is equally as important and there are many studies where [micro-influencers](#) (people with 10-100K followers) are just as valuable to brands. 10K should be your first goal, then 25K, then, 50K, and 100K.

7A. How to Get Followers

You can grow your account organically by interacting A LOT (engaging with accounts that aren't already following you and liking and commenting on at least three of their most recent photos in order to dominate their news feed), but as you can imagine, this is very time-consuming.

If you want to grow faster, you simply have to start following people. It may sound skeezy, but even marketing wizard [Neil Patel says](#) it's the most effective method to grow. Think of Instagram as an awkward networking event that's conducted online. There are hundreds of people milling about, but no one really stands out until they stop you and hand you their business card. You're forced to notice them. Now they're a connection, just like when someone follows you. For most users, their immediate action is to check out your profile and decide whether to follow you back. You only have a few seconds to get their attention, which is why it's extra important to make a good first impression. Just like how the principle of reciprocity works with likes and comments, if you follow someone that's relevant, they more often than not will follow you back (I've done the math, half or a third will with the right follow sources).

7B. Who you should follow:

You can follow anyone you want, but based on personal experience, there are three main factors that will increase your chance of being followed back:

1. They're in your niche –the majority of their photos are travel-related or relevant to what you post about. This makes it very clear they will benefit from following you and vice versa.
2. Their follow to following ratio – people who are following more people than have following them are more likely to follow you back simply by how they're using the app. (And will be less likely to notice or care if you unfollow them). Influencers or people with big followings usually don't follow back or get so many notifications they don't even notice when they get a new follower. I've found that accounts with less than 1K followers in general are more likely to follow you back as they'll notice new followers more often than someone who's feed gets a lot of notifications.
3. They're active. (They've posted in the last 3-5 days).

7C. How to follow:

There are two ways to do follows, manually or app-assisted. Manually is more time consuming and labor intensive, but it means you can cherry pick your entire audience. If you use an app to copy someone else's audience, you may end up with some of their spam followers. It's up to you how much you want to prioritize quality over time. I manually followed everyone on my main account and then copied my own audience to my secondary profiles.

For either method, the first thing you need to do is curate a list of follow sources. This means making a list of accounts that are similar in content and style to yours whose followers you think would also like your content (the same concept as using a lookalike audience on Facebook). This could include other influencers, industry publications (like Outside or Afar) or feature accounts (like Girls Love Travel and Beautiful Destinations). Brainstorm as many potential follow sources as you can because you'll want to test a bunch to see which have the best follow back rates.

Exercise >> Make a list of follow sources that include similar and competitive accounts. Use a different source each day for 1-2 weeks to determine which you get

the most followers from. Setup an excel doc to track. The greater the return, the more you'll want to use that account regularly. Developing a list of good follow sources is the key to grow quickly on Instagram, which requires testing.

To follow people manually, go into one of the accounts you've identified as a good source and click on their list of followers (it's much easier to do on the app rather than desktop). One by one, go through the list and look at each person's profile. Follow anyone who meets the above criteria (following > or equal to followers, travel related and active). You'll want to get very disciplined about following a designated number of accounts a day. I do some right when I wake up, some right before bed, and most right after I post a photo (as it helps with immediate engagement).

If you're wondering how many people you should follow a day, Instagram has different limits for everyone based on how "warmed up your account is," meaning your limits grow as you get more active on the app. The limits have gotten stricter with each algorithm change and currently, you cannot follow or unfollow more than 160 people a day or 19/every 10 minutes. Start by testing the waters slowly like 10 or 20 an hour until you build up over a few weeks.

If you go too fast you risk getting a temporary ban for spamming (aggressively liking, following, unfollowing or commenting). A ban can last for any number of hours or days (called Instagram Jail) where you're not allowed to do the penalized action for an unspecified amount of time. With each warning, the time increases. Don't try to grow too fast because it looks unnatural and you put yourself at risk of losing your account completely if they deem you a spammer.

If you don't have the time to comb through everyone's account manually, the app Captivate can also do follows for you. Enter your follow sources and you can automatically follow their audience in batches of 10-50 people at a time. If you pay for the premium version, you can also set the app to continuously run throughout the day as long as there are new people to follow in the cue. There is also a setting to filter out anyone already following you so you're not "double dipping."

Should you follow someone back who follows you first? It's up to you if you like their account. I usually don't if I think they're just trying to grow. Follow numbers are precious as you'll soon see.

How fast can I grow? It depends on your account, your niche and how much time you invest. At my peak, I was getting 200-300 new followers a day (1500 a week) investing two hours a day. With the most recent algorithm changes, it's more like 50-100 a day or 1K a week. It gets easier after you get to 10K and have some credibility, as people are generally flattered to be followed by big accounts. It also goes much faster with a second account after you know what you're doing.

Note >> Once you acquire a new follower, it's up to you to keep them engaged. Your goal is to build a community of active fans. You do this by regularly posting good

content, using stories to show behind the scenes footage, answering comments, interacting with your fans, and even potentially featuring their accounts (in stories or in posts). A community is give and take and you want to appear as approachable as possible. If you invest the time into engaging with their profiles, they'll feel much more committed to the relationship.

I don't like the idea of follow/unfollow. Are there any other growth strategies?

Yes, but they're not as effective. You could spend hours engaging with hashtags in your niche (liking and commenting on everyone's photos) or pay to sponsor a giveaway. With giveaways, you will get a lot of followers fast, but they will not be targeted and many will unfollow immediately after the contest is over. It also looks sketchy to brands if your numbers jump hugely overnight. This tactic has also been equated to buying followers as you have to pay a large buy-in fee based on your account size, which ranges anywhere from \$35-hundreds of dollars. Of course, you could also buy followers but I would NEVER recommend this, and it's easy to tell when people have.

7D. Unfollowing

People generally don't care if you follow them (usually it's viewed as a compliment), but unfollowing is more contentious. Unfortunately, it's a necessary evil because Instagram imposes a hard limit that you can only follow 7500 accounts at a time. Once you get to that point, you simply have to unfollow to keep growing.

Think of it like this: After you hand someone that business card at the mixer if they make a purchase, you did your job. You have no obligation to continue the relationship with them. You got them to follow you as part of a transaction. Your Instagram is your business. There's no need to feel guilty about not staying invested in each individual customer.

When to Unfollow:

Just like with follows, make a habit of unfollowing a set number of people each day based on the below criteria. You should be following and unfollowing virtually the same amount of people each day so your growth looks natural. Just like following, start slowing and build up. Wait a week or two after you've been doing follows to start unfollowing as not everyone is active every day and you want to give them a chance to checkout your account.

Who to Unfollow (in this order):

1. Anyone not following you back (You can also use Captivate for this, but I prefer the app Followers & Likes Manager. Simply click the link "Not Following Back" and sort by oldest-newest).
2. "Ghost Followers" – A ghost follower is someone who is following you but is more or less inactive. These people are actually hurting your engagement/goodness score by not interacting with any of your photos. (you can find these via the Followers & Likes Manager app. Click the tab "Engagement Insight" >> "My Worst Followers").

3. Anyone who's following more people than has followers, as they're much less likely to notice and unfollow you out of retaliation.

Note >> Some people take unfollows very personally and use apps to track them. They may unfollow you back in retaliation, or even send you a nasty DM or comment (these are few and far between, don't worry). Don't get flustered, simply delete and ignore. Remember, it's a business you're trying to grow and bad reviews are unfortunately part of the game, even if they're unjustified.

Exercise >> Track your follower growth weekly via [Social Blade](#). You can see how many new followers you (and anyone else's public account) get in a day, week, month, and projections for the year. It's also a great way to track competitors.

8. Know the numbers

Goal: Understand what good following and good engagement means and when you should you start pitching yourself for projects.

There's no set timeframe for when you should start working with brands, but ask yourself when you truly have something to offer clients. Generally, 10-25K followers is the minimum number of followers you need for a brand to consider you for opportunities (unless you're in a very specific niche with little competition). A general guideline is brands pay \$100 per 10K followers. If you want a comped hotel stay at a property that costs \$150-250/night and you have 10-25K followers, you can usually offer a straightforward one-for-one exchange. Many other factors go into whether they'll accept your proposal (ie. it's high season, you're not the right demographics for their audience, etc.), but in terms of value, you're in the ballpark for consideration based on numbers alone.

If you want a comped stay at an ultra exclusive luxury resort that costs \$500-\$1000/night, that's a much bigger ask. They might write you off saying you need more followers... unless you pitch them a really enticing offer to cover the difference, like multiple social posts + blogs, use of your images in their marketing materials, videos, or other higher ticket items. It's all about providing an equal or higher value for the product or experience you want.

If you simply want a shirt or product that costs \$50-100, you could easily do a trade with as little as 1-5K followers. It's all about figuring out what the brand needs and what you can provide them. Take the time to research their website and social profiles. If their photos aren't great, offer to provide them some images to use. If they have no videos and that's your bread and butter, by all means, use your talent as a bargaining chip. Remember, it never hurts to ask – the worst that can happen is they'll say no.

Note >> Trades are easier to execute with boutique stores, hotels, and mom and pop brands rather than big chains that have PR departments and corporate policies.

In terms of engagement, 2% is basically a minimum requirement, which is harder to maintain as you grow. Smaller accounts have much higher engagement rates (closer to 10-20%) by sheer math. To calculate your engagement rate, take your total likes + comments and divide that by your total number of followers. Divide that number by your total number of posts to get the per post average. [This site](#) can tell you your engagement rate (along with a very low estimate of what your posts are worth).

9. Find your tribe

Goal: get active in engagement groups. Develop a network of other up-and-coming influencers.

The purpose of engagement groups is two-fold. One, they help you increase your engagement with reciprocal likes and comments. But more importantly, they're also a place to vent frustrations, bounce ideas off, and share projects. So many social media tactics are trial and error; you want a network of people to share intel as you experiment with what works and what doesn't.

[Engagement groups](#) are one of the primary ways influencers banded together to combat the algorithm change. For your photo to look popular, you need a lot of likes and comments immediately after posting (the exact timeframe is unknown but the more engagement right after posting, the better). An engagement group is a group of like-minded accounts (same niche and relatively same size) that like and comment on each other's most recent post to jumpstart engagement (the whole "I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine thing"). Most groups have specific rules like you must contribute five-word authentic comments, and comment within a certain timeframe. (ie. Don't write "what a beautiful pic" -- smiley face -- on every post.) Write something thoughtful so you get a thoughtful comment back. People have argued that this is fake or inflated engagement. On the contrary, it's getting your photo seen by a highly targeted group of users and making social media social again.

Engagement groups are organized a few different ways:

-Secret DM groups on Instagram (advantages: it's right on the app, you're engaging with a few accounts regularly so you really get to know these people's lives. This is how I really found my tribe and support system. Disadvantages: you're expected to participate fully daily, there's a max of 14 participants per group so you may need to join a few to really have an impact). You can request to join existing engagement groups (also called comment pods) [here](#) or create your own. Identify a few similar accounts and DM them to ask them if they'd be in an engagement group with you.

-Group messenger apps like What's App or Telegram (Advantages: they allow more people to participate at once, you can opt in or out whenever you want. Disadvantages: they generally have specific times for drops aka "rounds" when everyone posts and engages so you have to be active at this time.) To participate, [find ones](#) that are in your time zone and niche as people are all around the world. I am in a great travel one that runs daily at 9 a.m. PST.

-Online threads. These are secret Facebook groups where you drop a post at a certain time and like the 100 or so other posts in the thread (Advantages: you can participate whenever you want, they're a good way to boost a post that tanked because a huge amount of accounts participate / Disadvantages: these are generally less niche specific, they can also be time consuming since some have 100-300+ photos you have to reciprocate with). I just discovered a black magic \$10 Chrome extension called [like it all](#), which does the liking automatically from your account so you don't have to do huge lists manually. Check the resource page for lists of threads to join.

10. Set goals for sustained growth and keep yourself accountable

Always monitor your following, your engagement rate, and know your average likes and average comments. Not only do you want to check your progress, but you will want to include the most impressive numbers in your media kit. Plan to do a monthly health check to see where you're at via [Social Blade](#).

Chapter 2: Monetization

Making money doing what you love is the holy grail of business. Your success is determined by how valuable your profiles are, writing compelling pitches and selling your vision.

1. How much skin is in the game?

Goal: Know how much you can and should be making on Instagram.

The influencer market is red hot right now, but it is still a bit like the Wild West in that there are no defined standards or post rates. An influencer with 100K followers could charge 1K for a post, \$500 for a post, or even do a project for free if they really like the partner, project or trip. Similarly, a company may post an opportunity to partner with influencers above a certain threshold, and get an account with 20K, 50K and 60K followers to do the same project for the same rate.

The generally accepted guidelines used to be charge \$100 per 10K followers, but as the number of influencers grew and engagements tanked, that number has been diluted a bit. It's harder to negotiate for full-price rates because someone else may do the same project for cheaper. There's also a point of diminishing returns once you grow your account to a certain size. I charge the same at 100K as I did at 50K so I can get more projects. I also believe that's what my engagement is worth now (engagement is harder to maintain the larger you get).

Adweek determined [\\$300 to be the average](#) people were making per sponsored post on Instagram. Is that enough to quit your day job? No, but when you add in sponsored blogs, IG stories, tweets, and Facebook updates, it might be. Turning one-off posts into integrated campaigns are where the money is.

Your goal is to be competitive, show how you're the best fit for a project, and defend your value, which I'll break down in subsequent lessons. Getting projects is as much about perfecting your sales pitch as it is about optimizing your profile.

2. Make a media kit.

Goal: Understand what a media kit is and what to include putting your best foot forward.

Your media kit is your resume (CV) of the influencer world. It's an important selling tool that includes your unique value proposition (your elevator pitch), your stats (reach and engagement), and the justification to work with you. You want it to look professional, but also be a place to show-off your personality and what makes you unique. You should include past brands you've worked with, testimonials, and a few key demographics of your audience. You can have an online version [like this](#) and [this](#), but you also want to have a media kit in PDF form that you can email out to potential clients. Don't be put off by the big numbers in the examples. Everyone starts somewhere!

Just like your resume, you want to highlight your best assets and downplay any numbers that are not favorable (everyone has something they want to improve). If you have followers on multiple channels including a blog, it's a good idea to add your total reach together so it looks more impressive.

Media kits vary widely in length and style, but good design is crucial. Make it aesthetically pleasing, while presenting the facts. In terms of length, it should be as long as need be to convey the necessary info. If you're a newbie, it shouldn't be five pages or even two. Here's [mine](#) (short and sweet) vs. a few of my seasoned industry friends: [Matt](#), [Christina](#), and a few [examples](#) of good media kit design.

[Canva.com](#) has a number of free templates to help build out your media kit. Get in the habit of updating your media kit monthly or quarterly so the numbers are always current as you grow.

Note >> Some people include their rates right in their media kit. I like to keep this separate, as rates are often negotiable. You don't want to turn anyone off by immediately thinking you're out of their price range.

Your blog stats can be found via [Google Analytics](#) if you have the free tracking code installed on your site. If your traffic numbers aren't great (Trust me: mine aren't – you can still find some aspect of your blog to highlight). Is your audience primarily millennials, baby boomers or a very specific niche? Great, use that! Do you get 10+ comments per article? Include it. Your domain authority is awesome (I worked very hard to get mine up)? Put it in there. Was your photo featured by x huge account? Great. There's always something to say, you just have to find your angle.

Once you get to the point of having worked with a lot of clients, you may want to consider having a few versions of your media kit for different audiences (ie. One for outdoor gear/tech companies, one for tourism boards, one for restaurants, etc.) Always make your media kit accessible or by request on a [“work with me”](#) page on your website so brands know you’re open to partnerships.

Note >> If you’re just starting out and have no examples of past work, pitch a few local businesses so you can show some successes. Know a family or friend who owns a company? Work with them so they can be a testimonial. Think back on projects you did in your full-time job. Anything relevant? Include it. It doesn’t have to be just paying clients you include or projects that were 100% on your own. Any past projects are fair game. You may want to consider doing a few projects for free so you have some case studies. You know what they say, “fake it until you make it.” You want to look like you’re well versed and experienced potential partner.

3. Define your value

Goal: know what to charge.

Your following and your engagement rate are what determine your value on social media, but are largely set by you. There are a few sites out there to help estimate what your Instagram posts are worth. [Money Calculator](#) is notoriously low (tells me \$225-375 for 100k followers) and [Social Blue Book](#) is notoriously high (give me an average of \$775 for 100K followers). Thus, I like to go with a happy medium in the \$500-600 range because that’s what I believe my posts are worth. If you know you’re going to be negotiating, start a little higher and prepare to meet in the middle.

I like to send screenshots from Social Blue Book along with my proposals so potential clients feel like they’re getting a deal. You should always have a goal number to charge and a rock-bottom price and be happy accepting anything within that range. Your lowball rate is the number that you’ll never go below because you know on average how many hours it takes to do a project well. You have to be okay walking away from any potential collaboration if that number isn’t met. This means determining what your time is worth and how long on average it takes setup, style and execute a shoot. Remember: you are a professional content creator - don’t undervalue or undersell yourself.

Should you have an official rate card? It’s personal preference. You can design a template to match your media kit or include your rates right in your media kit, but I just send rates via email because every project is different. I want it to look like I provided a personal quote and package based on each client’s needs and goals.

4. How to find opportunities.

Goal: Understand there are two ways to find opportunities: apply for campaigns or pitch your own.

Potential clients can be anyone and everyone, but in the tourism industry, they will often be tour operators, hotels, rental car companies, gear/clothing brands, and experience providers. From my experience, the most opportunities lie with the CVBs (convention and visitor's bureau) and DMOs (destination marketing organizations). Every city, state, and country have one of these organizations to market their destination. Their budgets vary wildly depending on the amount of government funding they're granted and their local lodging tax (some cities charge nothing, while some like Vegas, have astronomical fees tacked onto hotel rates which go back into marketing the destination). Almost all operate as nonprofits, which is important to note that they must spend the entirety of their marketing and PR budget within the year (NFPs are not supposed to turn a profit).

This matters because each does their media planning differently. Some strategically put the majority of their budget into marketing specific verticals (like family or adventure) or seasons. Some distribute funds evenly throughout the year, while some run out of budget early in the year. Still, others are left with excess funds toward the end of the year they're looking to use (find these people!). You just never know until you have a conversation with them. It's often places you wouldn't expect that have the budget and are willing to try new advertising opportunities.

Note >> I've found it very tough to get international destinations to pay (as their trips are such high ticket items). My bread and butter have been small local CVBs in the U.S. who are interested in dipping their toes in the influencer world. To find these places, I choose one specific destination I want to go or am already going to like San Diego, D.C., New Orleans, etc. I'll pull up that city on Google Maps, and make a list of every surrounding city and town within a four-hour radius. Then, I look at each of those place's official tourism website to see which are a potential fit for my audience (outdoorsy and foodie) and if there is a marketing contact listed. For each trip I have planned, I email 20-30 neighboring cities to tack on. 2-3 will be interested and 1-2 will pan out. It's time-consuming, but sales are literally just a numbers game no matter what field you're in.

Influencer networks – Google the term “influencer network” and dozens of sites pop up where you can register your profile to be connected to brands that have active campaigns (usually 5K followers is the minimum to be accepted on these sites). Most focus on beauty/makeup/lifestyle products, consumer packaged goods, and food and beverages, but there are some hidden gems to be found. Add your profile to as many networks as you can so you'll be emailed every time a new opportunity comes up.

I'm subscribed to 30+ networks and have rounded up a comprehensive list of these sites in the resource library. Unless a brand contacts you directly with a proposal, for the most part, you have to apply for these campaigns. This means submitting a brief outline of why you're a good fit for the project (see details on pitching below) and a creative idea you have to show off the product. Put as much thought and detail into these as possible. How you sell your idea is the way to beat out influencers who have

more followers than you. Some sites have hundreds of influencer vying for the same opportunity – make sure yours is the one they choose.

Note >> While it's easy to be temporarily blinded by the breadth of opportunities and the money to be made on these sites, remember how hard you worked to develop your brand. Think long and hard about how each opportunity would potentially fit into your profile. How off-putting would posting about toothpaste, pet food, or something completely random be to your audience? You don't want to alienate your followers by bombarding them with ads even if the money is amazing. I turn down way more sponsorships than I take simply because they're off-brand. Remember, you're playing a long game and sponsored content should naturally integrate with your values. Only work with products you genuinely recommend – it's super transparent when you don't.

See who other influencers are partnering with –Comb through some of your favorite influencer's profiles and see what they're posting about. Pay particular attention to captions that have #sponsored, #ad or "paid partnership" in them. If you're in networking groups with other influencers (like your engagement groups), you can also offer to trade contacts and share details about opportunities.

5. Perfecting the Pitch

Goal: get over the fear of cold emailing.

Sales are often thought of as a dirty word. I hated the thought of sending a cold email because I thought I would be annoying the recipient. I learned really quickly you just have to get over yourself. If you truly believe you have a good idea that could benefit a brand – it does nothing not to tell them. Be creative, be bold, and make them notice you. View it as a game; what will it take to get them to respond?

Brands are bombarded with proposals and pitches all day, every day. How do you make yours stand out? By convincing them that you're the perfect fit to tell their story. You want to communicate that you understand who they are and that their messaging matches your audience. Highlight the commonalities between yourself and the company so they can easily envision you as an extension of their brand.

This means, having done your homework. Go to every potential client's site and social profiles and look at what they're promoting. While you can use a similar email template for everyone, make sure the message is custom and personalized. Sending the same idea to everyone is the fastest way for it to end up in the trash.

Campaigns in Florida and Alaska should obviously have totally different pitches. They're very different markets. You might be a fit for both clients but in different capacities. Even two cold weathered destinations like Tahoe and Breckenridge should have unique angles specific to the area.

Exercise >> Practice your pitching. I highly recommend the book [“How to Win Friends and Influence People in the Digital Age”](#) if you’re not familiar with basic sales techniques. Read it, and begin crafting your perfect pitch – it’s part art, and part science. It requires a bit of tweaking to get right – trial and error.

Note >> Finding the right contact is often the biggest challenge with outreach. Avoid the general info email whenever possible. You want someone in the press or marketing department. Look for a media or press section on the company’s website (CVBs and DMOs usually have one), while brands and gear may not. If you can’t find a person to email, you can try DMing them on Instagram or Twitter. Some of these inboxes are monitored, while others are not. If all else fails, try a LinkedIn search for a marketing or social media contact. I also highly recommend installing the free [Clearbit Connect extension](#) for gmail.

5A. What to include in a pitch

Your subject line is the most important part of the email. A simple and straightforward, “Can we do a campaign together?” has worked well for me. Make it clickbaity, but not over the top. Break up your thoughts with bullets and spacing.

-Why you’re emailing them (possible reasons could be: you’re coming to the area, you saw they were promoting x which is your favorite thing in the world, you’ve never been to y and it’s always been on your bucket list, etc.)

-Three ways you can work together (your ideas and value proposition).

-Who you are (why you’re uniquely qualified to do what you’re proposing. No more than 2-3 sentences with possible links to past work).

Remember, everyone is busy so keep it concise. You want to pique their interest just enough that they respond asking for more information. I don’t include pricing upfront because I want them to initiate a conversation with me. Only then can I ask about their budget and ways they’ve worked with influencers in the past so I know what to propose. Never lead with dollars. You want them to feel comfortable with you before broaching the topic of money.

Here’s the general format for email pitches:

Intro: Address the person by name. If you can, include something you’ve found about them or their brand on social media or their website (ie. you really liked their recent pic of x, their article about y really inspired you to want to visit).

Your Pitch: 3-4 bullets explaining your idea and why it’s a great opportunity for them.

Last sentence: Thank them for their time and offer to jump on a call to further discuss your ideas.

And a sample email template that's been successful for me:

Hi xx,

I hope you had a nice New Years! I wanted to reach out and introduce myself since I'm coming to x in April for x. I've never been to your neck of the woods, but would love to create some content for you guys while I'm in the area to share on either my channels or yours :)


Possible themes could include:

- Why x is an Outdoor Adventure Paradise
- The Most Instagrammable Places in x
- 48 Hours in x: Everything to Eat, See and Do

These could either be hosted on your website as expert guides/articles or on my blog. Similarly, I could do an Instagram takeover on the x account or promote the content on my channels (@[lmonitz](#) @[onetastytrip](#) @[anadventurestory](#)). I have 180K highly engaged followers and have worked with a number of travel brands to acquire Instagram followers if growing your audience is a goal for 2018.

My media kit is attached, let me know your thoughts or if you'd like to set up a call to discuss.

Cheers,

Lauren Monitz
Content Marketing & Digital Specialist
Follow the Mis(Adventures): [TheDownLo.com](#)
Connect:   

My favorite post: [NZ: It's Not You, It's Me](#)

Note >> Always include your social media links in your signature so they can check you out.

Now that you've sent your email, it's a waiting game.

5B. What Now?

There are four ways a pitch can go:

-Radio Silence - Unfortunately this is the most common response. Sometimes it's because the recipient is not interested, sometimes because you emailed the wrong

contact, and sometimes your email simply got lost in the Internet abyss. Maybe the person was out of the office and forgot to respond. Either way, add a calendar note to follow-up in a week or two because you just never know. Reply to your first email saying something to the effect of “Hey, just wanted to make sure you saw this. Let me know if you have any questions or would like to jump on a call to discuss. If you’re not the right contact, I’d appreciate if you could forward on.”

-A straight up no – That sucks, but it’s actually better than hearing nothing. With anything in life, you’ll get more nos than you will yeses. Don’t get discouraged, let it motivate you even more. Email them back saying thanks for the consideration and ask why you were not a fit. The more intel you can gather the better your next pitch will be. Perhaps your audience isn’t the right match for their demographic. Perhaps their rejection had absolutely nothing to do with you, they were just out of budget for the year but would love to consider you next year (this is valuable feedback you need to know so you can remember to reach out again when the time is right).

Note >> Remember, sales are a numbers game. I’ve seen it take anywhere from [20-30 pitches](#) just to get one accepted. Don’t take rejections personally, keep pounding the pavement and something will pan out. Get in a habit of sending a set number of pitch emails a week or month if you’re serious about making this a sustainable revenue stream.

-Yes – Awesome! This is rare. I’ve found on average it takes 30-50 emails and calls to finalize a campaign (It’s quite the process). Get excited and move on to the next step – contract negotiations.

-This sounds interesting, tell me more – This is great as most deals are done over the phone. Offer to jump on a call to walk them through your proposal. The sooner the better before they lose interest or forget.

A [successful sales call](#) is like a syncopated dance with both of you doing equal amounts of talking. Here’s the basic formula for success: establish that the goal of the call is to discuss a potential partnership and briefly summarize your background and experience. Then ask the recipient to explain their role so you know what their goals are. Build some rapport with a few minutes of small talk, before asking them a few questions. Ask how they’ve worked with influencers in the past and what their goals with marketing are. Listen carefully and take notes. After they’re finished, explain how you can offer a solution to their problem. You should be able to tell by their tone and reaction if they’re ready for you to present a proposal or it’s more of an introductory discovery call.

If they sound interested, flesh out how much money they have. Say you’d be happy to follow-up with an official proposal if they can give you some sense of budget and timing. If they counter back that they’re open to all ideas, send them a few different tiers of pricing (examples in the negotiations section). If they’re just trying to get to

know you and see what you have to offer or have no budget (see freebies/trades section) – it's up to you to decide if it's worth pursuing the relationship.

Be sure to send an email immediately after your call thanking them for their time, summarizing what you discussed and getting all the details in writing. If you promised a proposal, provide one as soon as possible so you stay top of mind. Follow-up in a week or so if you don't hear anything back.

Note >> It's important to recognize that brands have vastly different levels of experience working with influencers. Some understand the market very well and have well-established guidelines for partnerships. Others (primarily smaller, more local mom & pop brands) may not have any experience at all, which means it's your job to educate them on the advantages and benefits you (and other influencers) can provide. That's something you'll have to flesh out during the email exchange or call.

6. Look professional with contracts, invoices, and reporting.

Goal: learn to operate like a business.

As soon as you get the go-ahead to do a campaign, see if the brand has a standard contract they use, otherwise be proactive and send your own. This agreement is crucial to defining the content deliverables, timing, compensation, payment terms, termination clause, and general expectations. Always include the contact info for both parties, specific collaboration details, and required elements (hashtags, inclusions, etc.). [Here is an example of a standard influencer agreement.](#)

Note >> Always read the contract and make sure you're clear on who is paying for what. Some tourism boards cannot cover tips and alcohol. Some can pay for flights to their destination, while others cannot. Always consider these costs and what you may have to cover out of pocket in your proposal.

Things to look out for:

Photo or Video Licensing – Brands often want to reuse the content you create. I allow them to share my work on their social media accounts with credit, but if they want to use the image or video for any other purpose (like a paid marketing campaign or a print catalog), it's reasonable to charge a licensing fee. I've seen rates anywhere from \$20-250 a photo, or packages of 10 photos for 1K. It also depends if they want exclusive rights to the image/video, in which case you should charge more.

Exclusivity – what competitors (if any) can you not work with and for what time period during and after the campaign?

How Long the Content Needs to Stay Live for – Generally content you produce will stay up forever, but some brands do allow you to remove sponsored posts after a set period of time.

Reporting: Some clients will require reporting in the contract and clearly specify what stats you need to provide. Generally, this means screenshots of IG stories and

post reach and engagement. For blogs, this means screenshots from your analytics account of views and shares, generally after 30-days of being live. If a brand doesn't require or specifically request reporting, it's always a good idea to share your stats to show what ROI (return on investment) you provide, especially if there's a standout number. It makes you look professional and it's a way of keeping you top of mind for future campaigns. Send a follow-up email saying something along the lines of "Look how well this post did, imagine if we did another in a month or so to keep you top of mind with my audience..." Your report doesn't need to be fancy; a simple PowerPoint or word doc with screenshots will suffice. They'll appreciate the time you took to review and evaluate the performance.

Note >> [80% of your income](#) will come from 20% of your clients so identifying those anchor clients that will turn into repeat business is crucial. Basically, you don't want to end a relationship simply because the campaign's over. Make a calendar note for yourself to check in periodically (I do quarterly) to see if you can work together again.

Payments: Send an invoice as soon as you've completed the contracted deliverables and make note of the date. Follow-up monthly if you're not paid on time. Include a late payment clause in the contract whenever possible. Brands are notorious for paying 60 to even 90 days late. If you're working with an advertising or marketing agency that's the middleman, sometimes they won't pay you until the client pays them. Unfortunately chasing money is part of the game. Whenever you can, request to be paid a portion of the fee upfront to cover costs and the rest upon delivery.

Is there anything you can do about late invoices or not getting paid? You can threaten legal action and even send a scary note on legal letterhead, but unfortunately taking someone to small claims court is generally not worth it for these dollar amounts.

6A. Taxes

Even if influencer marketing makes up the majority of your income, for each client you will still be classified as an independent contractor unless you're employed directly by the brand. For each new campaign, you will likely be required to fill out a [W-9 form](#). Make sure to always save receipts from your trips, as most business expenses are deductible (even if you're getting a travel stipend or per diem from the client). You can also deduct things like a percentage of your home used as a home office, your car mileage for business, and the percent of your cell phone used for business. You'll want to get in the habit of organizing expenses with a spreadsheet sorted by trip or an app like [Expensify](#). Stay up-to-date on the current [self-employment tax requirements here](#).

7. Free stuff and trades

Goal: learn what to take and when to say no.

The first time a company approaches you with free product or free trip in exchange for a post is super exciting - celebrate it! Your hard work is finally paying off and brands are starting to recognize you. But should you take that freebie? It depends.

Comps are great for offsetting vacation costs and places you actually want to go on your own. You can proactively reach out to brands and offer to your service as a trade for free hotel rooms, lift tickets, experiences, etc. Make sure you do this well in advance of your travel dates (at least 3-4 weeks out) and don't put all your eggs in one basket. I generally email 3-10 hotels for each trip and hope to hear back from 1-2. Make sure your email explains the value of what you're offering and that their product is in-line with your audience (ie. not a hostel for a luxury account).

For an account with 20K followers, should you do a post just for a free meal? Maybe, if it's an exclusive \$200 Michelin starred restaurant and you regularly post about food. What about a \$50-75 meal? Dollar-wise, if the value's not there, it's likely not worth your time, but ultimately it's your call. If you're just trying to travel as cheaply as possible, comps are a great way to save money. The same goes for a \$50-100 tour. If you really want to do it, do it (but try to negotiate multiple tickets or add-ons so the value is more in-line with what you provide).

If a company reaches out and offers you a free watch, purse, snowshoes, meal, or something random in exchange for a post, you need to think long and hard about the retail value of the item and if it's something you really want. Hours and hours go into planning and styling a shoot, gathering props, perfecting the lighting, etc. It's all about knowing what your time is worth and if this is a product you would've purchased anyway. Remember, you are required to pay taxes on any freebie you accept so it's not technically free. Only you can decide if the offer is worth it to you.

There's a tipping point when you'll realize that "stuff" does not equal the amount of work it takes to create a good post and exposure does not pay the bills. There's a general sense of brands taking advantage of new influencers to create valuable content for little to no money. Professional photography and videography is expensive to produce and a highly in-demand skill. Never forget that. You wouldn't ask your lawyer, plumber, accountant or anyone else to work for free or for a trade - why should we be expected to? Remember, fully comped trips (as cool and dreamy as they are, are not a vacation. Agonizing over every photo angle and completing deliverables is not relaxing, trust me).

After you grow your account to a certain size, it may even feel a bit insulting to only be offered products. I've been asked to do trades for socks (at 70K), t-shirts, organic tampons, edibles, whatever random product, you name it; I've been offered it. While it's super easy to write a snarky response back, it's a small industry and people talk. Don't be rude in your "thanks, but no thanks" response. Thank them for reaching out and counter back with your rates. You never know who actually has a budget. They may just be opening the discussion with free product. It never hurts to say, "thank you for reaching out, for this type of collaboration, I charge x,y or z."

Terminology:

-FAM (Familiarization) Trips – Fam trips are free or highly discounted group tours to a destination that can include anyone from the travel industry. There may be travel agents or traditional journalists attending, which means it's less targeted to influencers. They often have strict schedules, set itineraries and are unpaid.

-Influencer Trips or Campaigns – These can be individual or group trips for influencers to experience a hotel, destination or product (ie. car brands are offering road trips). You may be given an itinerary or allowed to create your own. They can be paid or unpaid for a set number of deliverables – be sure to clarify the expectations.

-Comp (Complimentary) / Gifting (a fashion industry term) – a free gift, product, meal, or hotel stay, expected or unexpected, that you're assumed to post about in exchange for a product or service.

-Media Rate – if a client cannot offer you a comped experience, they may have a discounted rate for members of the media, which you may qualify.

8. Negotiating and upsells.

Goal: Learn to navigate contracts and offer packages with tiered pricing.

Everyone wants to feel like they're getting a deal, which is why I always try to offer discounts for multiple posts and packages at different tiers. You want to be able to show "added value" and have more wiggle room when you're working with a larger budget. You won't feel so nickel and dimed when you're negotiating the price of just one post. Similarly, it's more cohesive marketing to promote content on multiple channels as you have a bit of a different audience on Facebook vs. your blog vs. on Instagram.

Before you start putting together packages, think about all the services you can offer. Consider every possible type of content you can create and the value of each. Things to include may be IG posts (one or multiple), slideshows, sponsored ads or photos they provide, IG stories, IG takeovers, tweets, pins, FB posts, IG/FB lives, blog posts on your site, expert guides on their site, photo galleries, videos, photos for licensing, etc.

Here are a few different packages I've offered and real ways I've worked with brands at a variety of price points.

Package 1: 3-4 Day in Market

Deliverables:

1 IG Post on @lmonitz (100K reach): \$500

5 IG Posts on @onetastytrip (14K reach): \$500 or 3 IG Posts on @anadventurestory (45K reach): \$900

1 Blog with Pinterest, Facebook and Twitter Promo (22K reach): \$300

Live Tweets and Stories while in market (included) or Instagram takeover (included)

Total: \$1300-\$1700 + travel expenses

Additional A La Carte Media:

IG post on @lmonitz \$500

IG post on @anadventurestory \$300

IG post on @onetastytrip \$100

Blog Article with Twitter, FB and Pinterest promo \$300

Actual ways I've gotten paid by brands:

For x, I had to go to a nearby town anyway, so they rented me a car and I drove down there for a few days. I created a blog and did an Instagram takeover of their account along with IG stories and tweets while in-market. \$500 + travel expenses

For a weekend trip to y, wrote 1 blog and did one IG post on my biggest account, which has 100K followers. Budget: \$800 + travel expenses

X hosted me for four days, I created two expert guides for their website + did four Instagram posts on my accounts @lmonitz and @anadventurestory. Budget: \$1500 + travel expenses

For x, I spent an entire week road tripping around the state, created two blogs and did 8-10 Instagram posts across all three accounts. Budget: \$3000 + expenses.

Note >> One company had a PR policy that they could not pay for promotion so instead they offered me a day rate of \$300/day from their marketing budget for content creation. Day rates are getting more popular as a different way to work with influencers. Some companies are very strict in how their PR vs. marketing budgets are handled so different wording is a way of finagling the rules.

Unfortunately, many companies don't understand why they need to pay influencers and that it's not the same thing as paying traditional journalists or bloggers. You may need to educate them that it's more like an advertising buy. They're paying for a guaranteed amount of exposure to your audience. If you can show impressions and CPM (cost/million views) in your proposal, even better. Impressions are one of the major advantages of having an Instagram business account.

9. Working on projects

Goal: Always be professional, no matter how challenging the client.

The golden rule of business is underpromise and overdeliver so do whatever you can to make the sponsorship a success. If the client is happy they'll consider working with you again, recommend you, give you a testimonial, or become a case study.

On trips, always maintain a positive attitude and be gracious. Some clients will provide you with a set itinerary (which you may or may not like all the inclusions),

while others will leave it up to you to find the right angle for your audience. You may not like some of the activities or people (if it's a group trip), but do your best not to let it show and remain upbeat. Hit as many attractions as you can to showcase as much of the destination as possible without burning yourself out. Remember, it's not a vacation or a time to relax; you're there to do a job.

If you end up hating the product or place, do your best to find some angle you enjoyed. Never badmouth a client or experience especially in a post (it's a small industry and people talk). If you truly can't find anything you would recommend, don't just flake and not do the work. Be the bigger person and initiate that uncomfortable conversation with the client, but be constructive in your concerns. Don't just say the experience sucked, say what could be improved and why you feel like you can't share. Depending on your contract, you may be obligated to pay back part of your trip if you don't complete the deliverables or forfeit your payment if it's a paid campaign.

10. Keep it legal

Goal: Understand the FTC disclosure requirements for sponsored posts.

The Federal Trade Commission is always updating its requirement for influencers, but the basic premise is that any relationship with a brand (paid or trade) must be clearly disclosed in each sponsored post on each of your social media channels. On Instagram, that means including, #ad, #sponsored or "paid partnership" (if you have access to the branded content tool) within the first three lines of your post. For blogs, that means a disclosure statement at the top of your post so readers immediately know if it's a paid testimonial or honest endorsement. Even Twitter, with its character limit is required to have an #ad disclosure. The guidelines are constantly changing so [bookmark this page](#) and stay up to date on the current guidelines for bloggers and influencers.

Bonus: Diversify your revenue streams

Goal: Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

As hot as Instagram is, as with any social network, it's naive to assume its going to be around or popular forever (cue the violins). If you only focus on building up one channel, when it goes the way of Myspace so does your revenue. (Fun fact: Tom from Myspace is now an Instagram Influencer). Just like the stock market, you shouldn't invest all your money in one stock – you should hedge your bets and diversify your portfolio.

I read a really great article equating Facebook and Instagram marketing to farming on borrowed land. If the landlord raises the rent or changes the lease terms (or in this case changes the algorithm yet again), you're simply at their mercy. If they continue going the way of pay to play, the fee might become too steep to justify the returns. Your blog and your email list are the only channels you 100% own, so it's a good idea to spend time growing them.

Beyond expanding your reach on other channels, there are other ways to make money on social media. You can create your own products like e-books or guides.

Another revenue stream to consider is affiliate sales, which means you are given a unique URL link to promote a product. If someone buys the product from your link, you get a percentage of the sale. [Like to Know It](#) is very popular app for fashion bloggers that work the same way. Their outfits are tagged with shoppable links to highlight the brands they're wearing. For each sale that happens with their referral code, they get a percentage of the profit. Have another great way to make money online? Let me know!

Have a question I haven't answered? Want to share your successes? Post it in [the Facebook Group](#).