

8 Social Media Growth Tips for Small Businesses in Calgary

1) What are the first steps in growing my social media following?

Start with a good set-up.

- Is your account name professional and does it match your business? It's better to start a new account with your business name rather than using your personal account. When you start the new account be sure to choose "business" rather than personal as a business account offers analytics on your followers and their behaviour.
- Fill in your bio with what your business does. Your bio can only be so many characters so carefully choose the most relevant words to your industry.
- Use the link to add your website or link to a [Linktree](#) (allows multiple links).
- Consistently post high quality photos that professionally represent your business. These should match an overall aesthetic. This is really important as mismatched photos with poor photo quality will give people stopping by a bad first impression of your business. Think of your page as your storefront. Make it neat and welcoming.
- Figure out who your ideal customer is and direct your branding to be most attractive to that customer. Make posts that offer value to your ideal customer. Posts should be either entertaining, educational, or inspirational. People will follow because they receive value from your posts (otherwise why would they follow?). Be sure to include relevant captions.
- Keep your stories active. Since stories expire after 24 hours this can be difficult to stay on top of, however, always having at least one story up shows people that your account is active and that you are interesting to follow.
- Overwhelmed? You can hire social media manager to help with setting up and running your account for the first few months.

2) What shouldn't I do when trying to grow my account? Or what will hurt me when growing my social media?

- The worst thing you can do is buy followers. These bots won't ever buy your product/service so you're really just throwing your money in the garbage for a number that looks good.
- The next worst thing you can do is not engage with your followers. If someone sends you a DM or leaves a comment interested in purchasing your product make sure you respond. Sometimes potential customers will leave a question under a post (e.g. are you open today?), if you don't respond or respond 3 days later, not only did you probably lose a sale, you probably lost a follower.
- The other bad habit I see businesses do is not engaging with others. Following other businesses and liking others' posts means you are part of the community. If you never comment or share others' content, they won't share yours. It's a two-way street.
- On the extreme end of things, another bad thing to do is too many contests. While contests are good because your account gains followers and they help spread the word about your

business, there can be too much of a good thing. Many people follow only for contests despite having no interest in your actual business. To do contests right, make sure that they aren't the main source of your followers and only giveaway prizes that relate to your niche (e.g. if you're a donut shop, giveaway donuts, not a WestJet voucher).

3) How can I improve the odds people will find me?

- Hashtags are the best way for people to find you. The max is 30 hashtags, there is some debate about if you should use all 30 or not. I feel like using all 30 just means there are more ways people can stumble upon you. However, some say that fewer hashtags mean a better score in the algorithm. I'll leave it to you to decide.
- Geo tags or location tags are when you add a location at the top of the post. These are an excellent way for local people to stumble upon your business. You can alternate from tagging Calgary to smaller locations like a community or your business.
- Engage with other Instagram accounts. Think of each like and comment as a bread crumb leading back to your account. Not only that, but relationships built on social media can become business relationships too.

4) I see a lot of people doing contests, is this something I should do to increase my following?

While there is a downside to contests, (see Q2), contests are a quick way to get a boost in followers. My advice would be to make sure that this is not the MAIN way you receive new followers because then you've just become a contest account and your business is meaningless. It's also important to make sure you are offering value to your new followers through your non-contest posts so that they stay with you or you will lose any follower gains you made. Also try to give away prizes that relate to your business. If your business sells food, give away food, if your businesses sell clothes, give away clothes. If you give away food on your fashion account, you're attracting foodies who are not interested in your clothing posts, they will either unfollow or simply never engage in any of your content.

5) Should I pay for Instagram ads?

Personally, I think there is no harm with playing around with Instagram ads and seeing how they perform. This is one of a number of tactics to get your business out there so why not try it. You can start with small amounts (\$10) and see if you like how the ad does. Is it getting likes? Are you gaining followers? If it gets minimal traction try a different post to boost. However, because Instagram charges your credit card you need to watch how much you are spending. If you set an ad for a long period of time (3 weeks) and forget to check on it, you could easily have just spent \$500. I have the Facebook setting turned on where I get notification whenever my ad spend hits \$100 so I am reminded that I'm running up ad charges and I should check in and evaluate if it's good ROI. Note, I am not an expert in ads and another option is to hire a professional to dive into the world of ad testing.

6) What about hiring an influencer to spread the word about my business? Should I do this?

Maybe. First do the above steps and work on growing your following yourself. You may be able to get a long way on your own! I would say after you've tried a lot of the other techniques and are well informed on how using Instagram for marketing your business works at that point it's worth approaching an influencer.

Prior to approaching an influencer make sure you are clear on your objective. Do you want to spread awareness of your business? Do you want more followers? Do you want people to buy from your business? What you tell the influencer will affect the marketing strategy that they recommend to you.

Keep in mind that influencer marketing isn't a magic bullet form of marketing, yes, perhaps when Kim Kardashian posts about a pair of shoes those will sell out the next day, but most don't have that level of impact on people's buying behavior and do not have that large of an audience. Keep your expectations realistic regarding what results you would expect especially with regards to sales. It is possible you'll make back your investment with a single post from the influencer, but that would not be typical. In advertising, a general rule of thumb is that someone needs to see a product/service 7 times before they are sufficiently encouraged to buy. They need to move through the stages of awareness, liking, and then motivation to purchase. This usually doesn't happen with a single post.

7) How does social media translate into actual business sales? Is this really a good use of my time?

Great question. Social media isn't the only way to market your business and it may not even be the best way to market your particular business. I think especially some industries are more prone to flourish on Instagram (food and fashion) versus others (lawyers, plumbers). It's a lot harder to make law or plumbing pretty and interesting! Doesn't mean it can't be done, it just means your approach will have to be more creative to attract and keep people.

Also, you don't HAVE to have a big social media following. You don't even have to be on social media if it's not something you want to do. If you're currently using more traditional marketing methods and it's working for you, don't join Instagram just because everybody else is.

That said, having social media work for you can also do amazing things for your business and it can definitely translate into physical sales. There's something in social media called "know, like, trust." This refers to the 3 steps that people go through before they ultimately decide to purchase. Yes, maybe someone will see a post once and be like "damn I was looking for a purple sweater and I just saw one on Instagram so I'm pulling out my credit card." But for everything else, things people weren't actively looking for, they have to go through the *know, like, trust* stages. First, they must know it exists, warm up to it (decide they like it, usually after seeing it or similar stuff from the business several times) and eventually trust it (feel confident that a purchase is worthwhile). Social media platforms like Instagram provide businesses with a place to guide people through the know, like, trust, process and that's how sales result.

8) Should I hire/outsouce my company's social media?

I would say if it's something you dislike doing then definitely yes. Don't force yourself to do it if you're the wrong person for the job. That said, if you like it but just feel inexperienced that's okay! Sure there's a bit of a learning curve, but it's not steep, you can definitely do it. Personally, I think it's the time commitment that is harder than the work itself. Also, if you're just starting off and feeling overwhelmed with the decisions (aesthetic, post schedule, etc.) you can hire a social media manager for a 3-month contract to get you set and you can take it from there.

If you're interested in working with me specifically reach out to info@yycsociables.com I have an all-local audience (Calgarians) who follow for information about local events and restaurant news.



Instagram: [@sarah.sociables](https://www.instagram.com/sarah.sociables)

TikTok: [@sarahsociables](https://www.tiktok.com/@sarahsociables)

Website: [sarahsociables.com](https://www.sarahsociables.com)