

12 Of The Most Engaged Brands On Instagram via @sejournal, @donutcaramel13

For many verticals, Instagram should be an essential part of their digital marketing strategy to help grow their audience and their brand. With over 2 billion monthly active users, Instagram is a strong social media channel where brands can connect with their audience.

However, when building your following on Instagram, don't fall into the trap of chasing numbers. Engagement counts.

Engagement is a much better measure of your brand's impact. It tells us how well your content was received, how active your audience is, and how those interactions translate to conversions or loyalty.

We reviewed the engagement rates for some of the top brands on Instagram to see who is engaging their customers and not just shouting into a void.

To achieve engagement, the brands below aren't just posting randomly or frequently – they're leveraging storytelling, jumping on timely trends, and cultivating communities.

By the end of this article, you'll have actionable insights and inspiration that could help your marketing team rethink how to connect with your customers on Instagram.

Note, the following brands are grouped by theme and not ordered by engagement rate*.

12 Brands & Their Winning Strategies On Instagram

Storytelling & Brand Identity

1. Nike (@nike)

- **Followers:** Approximately 302 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.03% (While this seems low, this measurement is “average” given its massive number of followers, and the same goes for the big brands listed below.)
- **Average Likes:** 103,000.
- **Target Audience:** Millennials and Gen Z, aspiring athletes from all generations.

Nike's bio – “You can't win. So win.”– sets the tone for its entire Instagram presence, mixing in high black-and-white images and motivational quotes. Their Instagram posts feel like a tough but encouraging coach, pushing followers to strive for more.

This is all exemplified in their recent post: Nike teamed up with Grammy-award-winning rapper Doechii to voice their new mantra, featuring powerful women in various sports challenging what they're told they can't do and breaking free from societal expectations.

Meanwhile, high-energy neon colors bring sneaker shots to life. Nike is doing an awesome job inspiring its audience with its motivational content.

The flood of comments are jam-packed with flame emojis, trophies, and applause hands – clearly shows the deep connection they've built with their audience. Their powerful messaging truly resonates and hits the mark.

2. McDonald's (@mcdonalds)

- **Followers:** 5.3 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.93%.
- **Average Likes:** 49,000.
- **Target Audience:** Fast-food lovers, Gen Z, Millennials, and nostalgia-driven consumers.

McDonald's Instagram takes audiences straight back to the '90s with its use of bright, bold colors, disposable camera-style photos, and the return of McDonaldLand characters.

Its strategy blends product promotion with collaborations with culturally relevant brands, like the Pokémon Happy Meal, to appeal to Millennials.

It also taps into present trends, using pop culture memes related to their fast-food staples, such as one referencing the iconic Kendrick vs. Drake rap battle.

Creating user-centric content – like polls, memes, quizzes, and teasers – for established brands like McDonald's goes a long way.

With only 360 posts, it has an engagement rate of 0.93% in followers in the past month, averaging 882 comments per post.

This success isn't just due to its fame but because it consistently produces simple yet engaging content that resonates with Gen Z and Millennials. Fast food brands can take a cue from McDonald's.

User-Generated Content (UGC) & Community Building

3. GoPro (@gopro)

- **Followers:** 20.8 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.07%

- **Average Likes:** 14,800.
- **Target Audience:** Adventure seekers, extreme sports athletes, and content creators.

It's easy to see why GoPro has 20 million followers – their account is filled with immersive, adrenaline-pumping POV shots. But that's not all.

By showcasing real user experience through UGC and contest giveaways, like its #GoProLineOfTheWinter winners' post, the brand is engaging its audience of GoPro users and thrill-seekers while offering a clear demonstration of the product in action. And that is a strategy you can replicate for your product.

The blend of pro tips to sleek product shots, seamlessly tying in dynamic POV footage and photos from users against stunning landscapes drive genuine engagement with its audience – they're genuinely excited, as shown in this product post of Go Pro Hero13 that received 8,000 comments.

Social media managers should remember to collaborate with, not against, their fans, rewarding their efforts and keeping corporate branding to a minimum.

4. Shopify (@shopify)

- **Followers:** 1.6 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.08%
- **Average Likes:** 1,012.
- **Target Audience:** Ecommerce entrepreneurs, online business owners, and small business startups.

Shopify's strategic use of blue, green, and yellow neon accents enhances its visually appealing feed. With carousel tutorials and reels featuring entrepreneurs, it caters to online shop owners who are short on time or frustrated potential business owners who lack motivation to finally open up shop.

The brand's content is brief, educational, and conversational, like this post about their bundles' feature, which generated over a thousand comments. It also regularly addresses topics that resonate with its audience, such as restocking issues, cart abandonment, and influencer collaborations.

Similar platforms could benefit from emulating Shopify's optimistic branding on Instagram so that users are enticed to demo their products. Takeaway: clearly upbeat messaging not only attracts users to try your product but also builds a community of hopeful business owners.

5. Zendesk (@zendesk)

- **Followers:** 46,000.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.36%
- **Average Likes:** 160.
- **Target Audience:** Customer service professionals/teams, small- to medium-sized businesses.

Zendesk's Instagram feels like a small, welcoming community of customer service professionals. Each post features a white text overlay that clearly introduces the topic, from customer success advice to thoughtful discussions on AI integration.

For example, posts about the "perfect service customer voice" or "ideal hold music" are conversational and approachable, helping build rapport with support professionals rather than focusing solely on product specs.

This approach fosters authentic connections and conversations, which could eventually lead to conversions, making its customer support-focused feed both useful and genuine.

SaaS brands would do well to take this humanized approach so they can demystify their technology while provide a safe space for their users, in this case, customer service pros and SMBs.

Humor & Relatable Content

6. Liquid Death (@liquiddeath)

- **Followers:** 5.1 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.24%
- **Average Likes:** 11,932.
- **Target Audience:** Millennials, Gen Z, alternative lifestyle consumers.

Definitely standing out from the crowd, Liquid Death feels more like a heavy metal band than a beverage company.

While it may seem like an alcohol brand at first glance, its non-alcoholic drinks carve out a unique niche as an alternative to mainstream alcohol and sugary iced teas.

On Instagram, the brand embraces edgy aesthetics, featuring metallic gold accents, dark colors, and bold typefaces.

Its brash, in-your-face marketing strategy drives engagement – evidenced by its collaboration with The Deep (from Amazon's The Boys), which racked up 24,000 comments.

Since launching in 2019 in the highly competitive F&B space, Liquid Death has skyrocketed in popularity thanks to its clever, viral marketing – amassing millions of views on TikTok and tens of thousands on YouTube – proof that unconventional approaches can engage and create new communities, too.

For marketers building new brands or even existing ones, this is proof that unconventional strategies can work, especially when tailored for specific social media platforms.

The key is ensuring brand identity translates seamlessly across channels without sacrificing originality, so don't be afraid to brainstorm "refreshing" ideas with your marketing team.

7. Duolingo (@duolingo)

- **Followers:** 4.2 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 7.14%
- **Average Likes:** 316,000.
- **Target Audience:** Foreign language students, meme lovers, and Gen Z.

Educational technology need not be boring, and Duolingo's Instagram page is anything but. It has capitalized on how users have a love-hate relationship with Duo, its ubiquitous green owl mascot, and its endless reminders to take their next language lesson. And so it has 'killed' er, announced the bird is dead.

With posts full of Gen Z/Millennial humor and commentary on current trends, it manages to keep a very high engagement rate (the highest on this list as seen above and a whopping 265% increase in followers in the past month), and yet still reminds everyone to use the app and continue the learning process.

According to *Meme Marketing: Generation Z Consumer Behavior on Social Media*,

"Successful and viral memes should match their interests and values, such as entertainment, informative, trend-relevant, and reflect the unique characteristics of tech-oriented, innovative, curious Generation Z."

Social media managers of EdTech should learn to speak the slang of their target audience on Instagram as it works. Overall, playful content with cultural memes and trending events mixed with education connects with younger, digital natives – use memes to your advantage to increase your brand awareness.

8. Ryanair (@ryanair)

- **Followers:** 1.6 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.16%
- **Average Likes:** 2,500.
- **Target Audience:** Budget travelers, frequent flyers, and meme culture enthusiasts.

Ryanair's Instagram bio reads, "Catch flights, not feelings with Europe's favorite airline." It perfectly sums up its brand and sets the tone for the entire page – meaning it is not afraid to poke fun at its audience.

It posts hilarious short videos, and every post to the left on its grid features a relatable flying meme in its signature royal blue branded template.

Once in a while, it mixes in stunning bird's-eye shots of exotic locales. It also caters directly to budget travelers with frequent flight deals and announcements.

Budget travel apps and sites should take note: Knowing your target audience and tailoring your messaging, whether funny or serious, is key. They switch between funny and practical content without losing their brand personality.

Ryanair's Instagram works because it has mastered content that resonates with budget travelers who just want to be entertained and at the same time, pick up useful travel info.

Influencer & Partnership Strategies

9. Vans (@vans)

- **Followers:** 16 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.06%
- **Average Likes:** 10,000.
- **Target Audience:** Skateboarders, streetwear fans, and music culture enthusiasts.

Vans appeals to various groups of people around the world as a lifestyle choice instead of just a shoe brand.

Loyal fans flock to its page to check if old favorites have been restocked. Fashion brands managers, you should take note of showcasing your brand as a lifestyle for and in order for this strategy to work, carefully choose collaborations that represent their target audience.

Its success on Instagram is partly due to strategic collaborations with musicians like The Paranoys and rising club DJs for the brand's Premium Old Skool Music Collection, which features a bold leopard print.

It also collaborates on shoe designs with skaters, surfers, and athletes, like the Skate Old Skool 36+ featuring Olympic athlete Zion Wright.

Vans mixes grainy, quirky product shots with lifestyle imagery and behind-the-scenes takes that make viewers feel like they're part of the club.

It has done this over the past decade, yet this strategy still works to engage people subconsciously, with seemingly low-effort content, but the charm takes some effort to pull off.

10. Red Bull (@redbull)

- **Followers:** 26 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.33%
- **Average Likes:** 85,000.
- **Target Audience:** Extreme sports fans, adventure seekers, and adrenaline junkies.

As expected from the world-famous energy drink, Red Bull's Instagram is packed with adrenaline.

Case in point: multi-gold-winning bike athlete David Godziek riding on top of a moving train! This is just another day for the brand, as it has featured Adam Snosler jumping his

snowmobile over a bus.

Red Bull's Instagram showcases jaw-dropping feats by legendary athletes doing the seemingly impossible, with nearly every post being a collaboration.

Like Vans, Red Bull highlights a wide range of sports and stunts – on foot, two wheels, or four – and is also well-known for its F1 team, Oracle Red Bull Racing, with some posts dedicated to pushing speed boundaries.

This strategy ties in perfectly with Red Bull's unique selling point and sparks engagement from fans, who fill the comments with witty jokes, like in this skydiving post.

Between these stunt posts, it mixes in product updates, like new flavors or pop quizzes. It's a great example of sticking to what works, showcasing what your product is known for, and expanding your talent network to appeal to an energetic audience.

Stunning Visuals & Interactive Content

11. The Sill (@thesill)

- **Followers:** 734 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.08%
- **Average Likes:** 551.
- **Target Audience:** Houseplant lovers, home decor enthusiasts, and young professionals.

Like their logo, The Sill's Instagram page feels balanced, featuring eye-catching florals, lush greenery, and elegant, cozy home gardens.

Its branding is strong across the board, with posts highlighting its online shop – like this carousel of a red-and-pink pigmented plant shaped like a heart as part of its Valentine's Day offering. Scroll past the first image and

you'll see multiple close up shots of violet-tinged leaves and flowers – it simulates receiving a bouquet of flowers and admiring them individually, making it creative.

How do you want your brand to come across? What do you want your customers to feel when they check out your page – energized or relaxed?

Every picture on The Sill evokes warmth, sunshine, and various shades of green.

To ensure customers enjoy visiting their page, social media managers of small brands should prioritize high-quality visuals over stock images. Don't scrimp on the budget for creative shoots. Invest in them and over time, your Instagram page can evoke a soothing atmosphere, too.

Especially for B2Cs, whatever your brand sells, showcasing it beautifully on Instagram with a mix of close-ups, overviews, and short videos is key to maintaining engagement and awareness.

12. National Geographic (@natgeo)

- **Followers:** 279 million.
- **Engagement Rate:** 0.03%
- **Average Likes:** 84,500.
- **Target Audience:** Nature lovers, photographers, and educational content consumers.

Wildlife content takes the spotlight on National Geographic's Instagram, with every other post featuring fun facts about animals, the environment, or notable figures.

For example, this post about first-documented encounter with a deep sea fish: the black seadevil is accompanied by detailed scientific descriptions. The same goes for this listicle of five fun facts about female samurai, featuring colorful drawings and well-placed image captions with arrows to help

accessibility.

While lengthy, it effectively engages users in the comments section, who share their knowledge and opinions about the subject.

This works because Nat Geo's audience enjoys exploring and learning about the world. There's no need to brand every post, but the subtle use of a yellow rectangle and yellow font helps viewers recognize the brand.

Media and publishing companies can thrive on social media, using it not just for entertainment but also as an educational platform for consumers who may not watch TV.

Continue adapting your documentaries, interviews, and more into digestible formats on social media. Make every post as accessible as you can for viewers of all ages and grow your page into an educational hub where people foster learning from each other in the comments section.

Level Up Your Instagram Strategy This 2025

While you can emulate these brands above, true engagement will always come from your brand's authenticity.

Maintain authenticity by being clear with your brand identity and values.

Engaging content is possible in any niche, whether B2B SaaS, multinational food & beverage, travel, or education.

Even topics that Gen Z might find boring can be turned into bite-sized, entertaining formats, and austere-sounding brands can still humanize their content by partnering with the right influencer.

Staying in tune with trends, including key U.S. holidays and

events, and short-form video formats, whilst layering in your brand identity and messaging can help.

When done right, creating content that resonates with your audience will result in genuine interactions and thoughtful engagement.

**All stats above are taken from Social Blade but the engagement rate has different benchmarks depending on the industry, so the order is not a comparable measure for all the engagement rates above. According to the 2024 Social Media Industry Benchmark Report from Rival IQ, 0.43% is the median engagement raacross all industries.*

More Resources:

Featured Image: Roman Samborskyi/Shutterstock

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/most-engaged-brands-on-instagram/540036/>