



DASH HUDSON

## Walking the Instagram Runway: Next Steps for Fashion Brands in 2020



## Instagram as a Launch Pad

Instagram is no longer an exclusively social space. Over the years, and especially in recent times, the channel has evolved into a visual content hub—a destination to share, explore, and indulge (read: shop)—and the fashion industry plays a key role. As brands rely more heavily than ever on Instagram to reach consumers, the question of how to best invest in the channel is top of mind. When it comes to Instagram, the dollars are in the data.

Strategic initiatives brands take on Instagram are based on specific goals, which can be anything from generating awareness to ramping up sales. The beauty of the channel is its flexibility—you can optimize the experience depending on need. But, whatever the target, the top four KPIs on Instagram are almost always the same: engagement rate, effectiveness rate, growth rate, and weekly earned reach.



### Engagement Rate

Measures the ratio of likes and comments to number of followers (likes + comments / followers). This helps a brand understand the performance of its owned content when looking at its total addressable audience size. High engagement is a good indicator of brand affinity in the market, and the success of a brand's content strategy.



### Effectiveness

Measures the percentage of users who saw your post and engaged with it (likes + comments + saves + video views / reach). While the engagement rate factors your entire audience into the equation, the effectiveness rate accounts only for users who the content actually reached via the algorithm. This provides a more accurate measure of how that content is performing with the people who saw your post.



### Growth Rate

Measures the rate at which a brand's audience is growing. Paying attention to growth over specific periods of time is an effective way to determine which campaigns or initiatives are drawing in followers (and which ones aren't). This is closely aligned with earned reach.



### Weekly Earned Reach

Measures the number of impressions a brand receives through user-generated content (UGC) on a weekly basis. Simply put, UGC is how users show love to brands they care about. Brands rely heavily on UGC to fuel content strategy and drive community growth. The more UGC, the more impressions have been made about your brand on Instagram.

# Why Social Media is Business Critical

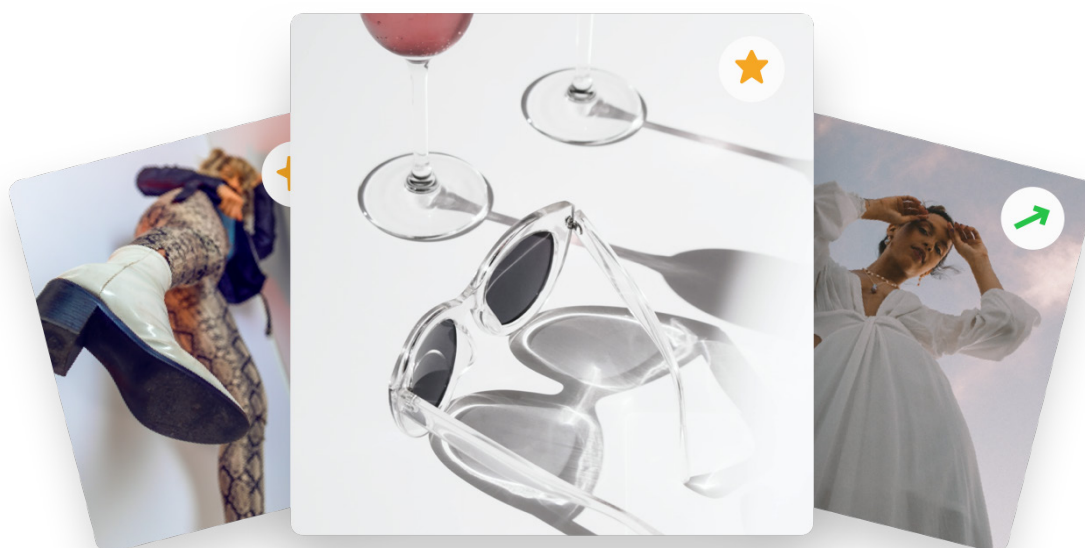
A rapid transformation of the global business landscape has left many brands to their own devices—literally, electronic devices—when it comes to running their businesses. As we move further toward a new era of ecommerce and digital screens become essential for accessing an audience, it's clear that social media marketing isn't just an option anymore, it's a business critical operation. Instagram is a one-stop shop for everything from customer relations to sales, adding major value for the convenience factor alone.

## What to Prioritize

With an influx of companies transitioning to online operations, this is a prime time to scale up your digital presence and build an online community that can grow and evolve with your brand. Reaching out and connecting to your followers in their times of need creates trust and loyalty—and that's priceless. Innovation is also key. Businesses that stay the course, take initiative, and invest in marketing right now are the ones that will make it through an economic rough patch in good shape.

So, where do you start? Instagram is a visual channel first and foremost. 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual, and it's processed 60,000 times faster than text. Your creative assets are your first impression with online consumers and are often what converts a follower into a customer. Tapping into a solid mix of original and user-generated content, including stills and videos, should be priority number one. And this doesn't mean a steady stream of glossy campaign shots—lo-fi, relatable imagery can do just as well. That initial draw is what inspires those coveted clicks.

Content creation should always center around goals. If you're looking to boost sales, consider eye-catching product shots that are easily shoppable. For growth, look at top-performing UGC. AI technology is also a brand's best friend when it comes to selecting images. It can see beyond the scope of the human eye to analyze and identify the niche visual elements your followers care about. Figure out what works for your brand and get creative in the spaces that are resonating.







# Content in Style

The biggest challenge for fashion brands on social media is its constant state of flux. Like the industry itself, trends come and go at lightning speed and keeping up with the changes can be overwhelming. That’s where data comes in. Reviewing KPIs on a regular basis gives you a better understanding of the content your followers want and lets you react accordingly. But don’t forget—you always have to evolve to stay relevant, which is why you also need to keep an eye on the big picture. What are the high-level industry trends that are resonating across the fashion community?

To get a clearer image of the current landscape, we looked at 10 CFDA designers on Instagram and segmented their most recent content into categories: editorial, product/lookbook, runway, behind the scenes, and celebrity/influencer. Next, we crunched the numbers to see what was most popular. Some categories were strong in certain KPIs and weak in others, some were consistent across the board.

Content featuring celebrities and influencers had the greatest total reach and most likes, but product and lookbook shots were the most engaging and effective. On the other side, runway shots had the least amount of likes and comments, but behind-the-scenes content was the least engaging and effective. Editorial content was a strong performer overall.

It’s not always that simple, though. Some rulebreakers have forgone the traditional content mix in favor of a mood-board style feed that speaks to their brand aesthetic. The Row almost exclusively shares modern and contemporary art images to their 1.2 million followers. At 11.2 million followers, Balenciaga takes an avant-garde, meme-able approach that has proven to be wildly popular.



## Balmain

Rihanna. Naomi. Iman. Period. It's no surprise that this iconic mononymous trio is still a hit with fans of the brand 6 years after its first appearance. The FW14 campaign saw more than 2x the likes and comments compared to Balmain's previous posts and an increase of 118% for engagement.



+118% increase in engagement

## Opening the Archive

Timely content is another pillar that belongs in every Instagram strategy. Right now, more time at home means more time to reminisce. Many top fashion accounts are looking back through the archives to share historic content with followers in need of a nostalgia boost. And it's paying off—big time. We compared archive campaigns shared late March to early April with SS20 campaigns shared in the weeks prior. Archive content outperformed five out of six times.

While it's easy to attribute a rise in engagement with a rise in social media use from the onset of global lockdowns, most of these campaigns were very close in total reach. One brand surveyed saw a dip in engagement for the archive images—a sign that brands need to understand their audience's tastes and preferences to surface the hidden gems that will resonate the most.

Revered photographers, beloved celebrities, and iconic collections are always in style. Pair that with shifting conversations around fast fashion and it becomes clear why fans are loving this blast from the past. Slowing down and appreciating the artistry of the clothes and shoots beyond a single season could be the direction this industry is headed in. Here are some brands getting it right:

## Versace

Legendary photographer Richard Avedon shot Versace's home campaigns in 1995, 1996, and 1997, including the likes of top models Naomi Campbell, Claudia Schiffer, and Kristen McMenamy. The weeklong throwback was a huge hit, with over 400,000 more likes than the previous campaign and an increase in engagement of 112%.



+112% increase in engagement



## Louis Vuitton

Steve McCurry's 2011 #SpiritofTravel campaign plus Jean Larivière's L'Oeuvre has captured the quarantine wanderlust of Louis Vuitton's followers. The transportive photo series garnered over 1.3 million likes and increased engagement for the brand by 54%.



**+54%** increase in engagement

## Moncler

Moncler's approach to the archive included American masters Annie Leibovitz and Bruce Weber. Striking compositions starring animals, babies, and a cameo from artist Liu Bolin won the brand a 24% increase in engagement.



**+24%** increase in engagement

## ROI, But Make It Fashion

When so much is at stake, it's tempting to go the safe route just to get by. But paying attention to your audience and creatively pivoting can be key to success. While there's no perfect formula to get businesses through turbulent times, a data-backed approach to marketing initiatives has a demonstrable impact on outcomes. Ultimately, staying true to your brand DNA and maintaining a deep understanding of your customer is the most important way to break through the noise online, and data makes that possible.

