

# PRNews

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## Adding Instagram to Your PR Mix? That's the \$1 Billion Question

When Facebook announced Monday, April 9, that it had acquired photo-sharing app **Instagram** for \$1 billion, Instagram's founders—Stanford grads Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger—became very rich young men. The acquisition that has put Instagram in the spotlight also begs a question for PR pros: How rich is the app when leveraged in communications programs?

Quite possibly as rich as **Pinterest** is becoming for brands. Like Pinterest, Instagram's appeal is visual, and photos appear to be the communications vehicle du jour in social media.

"It's no longer 'tell me a story,' it's 'show me a story,'" says **Donetta Allen, VP and social media practice leader at Hunter PR**. "People want to have an instant emotional connection that only a photo can give," she says.

### MOBILE SIGNIFICANCE

But the significance of Instagram isn't just that it's a visual platform. Instagram is an app for iPhones and the Android operating system, meaning mobile is front and center for PR outreach. There is no central Web destination as the anchor. So for many communicators who haven't ventured into mobile waters, Instagram may be that point of entry.

To ocean conservation group **Oceana**, using a mobile app like Instagram is advantageous because it can connect with supporters across the country and make a visual connection with them, says Emily Fisher, manager of Oceana's Web site and publications. "We can connect with them wherever they are with the message, 'Look, this is what we're helping to save,'" says Fisher.

Oceana began using Instagram last summer in conjunction with its Ocean Heroes contest, in which the organization asked the public to nominate individuals who had done great things for the ocean. Oceana encouraged supporters to take photos and tag them with #ocean, after which they would appear on an Ocean Heroes Web page. More than 200 people participated, says Fisher.

On the flip side, Oceana itself pushes out photos through Instagram—of anything having to do with the ocean. Fisher went to Belize in January, snapped away on her iPhone and got plenty of photos out via the app. "It's just very easy to do," she says.



Surprise stowaway in Galapagos



0 calories/0 carbs/0 fatigue/  
0 chance of getting between  
@johnjamun & his @RedBull

Organizations like Oceana (left) and Red Bull are using Instagram as an audience engagement tool. The Red Bull pic garnered hundreds of comments via Twitter.

### GETTING STARTED

How easy is it? Since 2010, Instagram users have been snapping photos, applying Polaroid-like filters to them, captioning the photos and sharing their creations on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and other popular social networks.

For brands looking to get started on Instagram, once you sign up, be sure to link your Instagram account to all of your applicable social networks and publish photos to those social networks via Instagram.

And, just like on Twitter, adding hashtags to photos is the best way to share photos with more people. Relevant tags help attract new followers who may take a genuine interest in your photos and continue liking and commenting on them over time.

What's the difference between Instagram and the hundreds of free photo-enhancement apps for both Android and iOS? Instagram can connect individuals—and brands—to a photo-based social network of more than 30 million users.

### FILTERS HELP

The practical beauty of Instagram, says Jonathan Rick, director at **Levick Strategic Communications**, is that the app can turn even the worst photo into something at least "sort of interesting." With its set of filters, anyone can make a photo better than the original shot. "There's no real need for any Photoshop wizardry," says Rick.

Some communicators may view Instagram as another social media diversion that might take away from more traditional PR tactics. Yet Instagram does represent another way to connect with consumers where they are. Not to mention, brands can simply make even the most mundane products or services look flat-out cool.

But beware. Much like Pinterest, Allen says it's best to have a visual story to tell, and the more a lifestyle narrative fits into that story, the better.

While both Rick and Allen say their respective agencies have yet to use Instagram with clients, they are using the app personally to get a feel for it, and strongly recommend other PR pros do the same. So get clicking.

### Interested in Instagram? Ask These Questions Before You Leap

Whether or not you believe that the \$1 billion Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook paid for photo-sharing app Instagram was too much, you should accept its use as communications tool. Donetta Allen, VP and social media practice leader at Hunter PR, suggests that you ask yourself these four important questions before you grab an iPhone and start snapping away.

- **Does your brand already have a social media presence?** Most organizations use Facebook and Twitter to showcase their Instagram photos.
- **Does your brand have a lifestyle story it can tell through photos?** If not, you may want to consider another platform from which to get your messages out.
- **Do you want to engage your fans through photos?** Some brands, particularly in non-consumer spaces, don't lend themselves to photos.
- **Is it important to reach your audience through their mobile devices?** Since a majority of people now have smartphones, for most this answer will be "yes."

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