

COLUMNS

The art of the gram

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By **Karen Robinovitz**

I, along with what feels like most of the world, have an extreme Instagram obsession.

I am talking an addictive vortex in the middle of the night, when the "explore" page leads me to a someone in London with an oddly amazing talent for rendering famous photographs from Play Doh (@eleanormacnair), which then begets a rabbit hole of double-tapping my way through her followers who stand out and then their followers and their followers.

It typically feels like fifteen minutes passed, but it is three arthritis-inducing hours later and I have accomplished discovering a sea of innovative thinkers a guy in Tokyo who shows someone levitating on a broom all over the world (@halno), a whimsical photographer who conveys symmetry in every nature-filled image (@llewllewtwo), a .gif artist who works in a cotton candy pastel palette and makes weirdly appealing creatures dance across the screen (@zolloc).

The best thing that Instagram has given us, especially marketers, is a place to unearth talent we never would have come across otherwise.

Don't make a hash of it

While many may think of Instagram as the platform for showing gratuitous selfies in airport lounge bathrooms, naturally and studied vacation moments, as well as the obligatory #ootd, the content game has shifted towards artistic creators with a nuanced, consistent point of view that transports.

In the age of visual storytelling, the simple behind-the-scenes photo or lay-down product shot on a white background is no longer enough.

Instagram is largely driven by those who share the true definition of original content, meaning not just something shot by the person behind the handle but an image that fits a much more overarching sensibility, where every single individual image is part of an entire message.

That means they are doing what I call "grid thinking," taking their entire feed as it looks when in the formation of thumbnails into consideration. They may ask themselves what colors, shapes and types of images will the new post be next to, on top of, diagonal from, and how does it all look as one?

The best on Instagram labor over composition, lighting and angles. They do not just stick a filter on something and call it a day.

In fact, they may hardly use a filter at all and, instead, brighten, highlight and sharpen. They may catch a beautiful moment on a whim, but 99 percent of the images are studied, thoughtful, meticulously plotted. That means that not

every single image belongs on Instagram.

What does this all mean for you, whether you are an individual or a global public company?

High-water mark

It means you have to be smart, strategic and methodical. So lose the idea of shooting a photo of a page in a magazine in which you may be featured. Instead, find a way to show it in a manner that maps back to what you want your high-level philosophy to be.

For example, say you are the hyper-realist drawing aficionado @kawamurajumpai, who pens vivid high fashion runway moments, designers and mostly shoes, then cuts out each illustration and holds it in his hand against the backdrop of grid paper before photographing it.

If Vogue wrote about you, you would share it by drawing an exact replica of the page you are in, cutting it out, holding it in your hand against grid paper and shooting it. That way, you stay true to what your message is while posting brag-worthy media.

Brands, especially in fashion, do not think so much like a brand now. Think like a maker, an artist or a creator, which is how you think of your products.

Ask yourself what your brand is about: what are the words you associate with your DNA, how do you want to transport your consumers, how do you want to communicate your art and soul?

And then think hard about how that translates on Instagram, knowing that it has to go beyond product shots, backstage at Fashion Week, runway imagery, a regram of a celeb or influencer in your items, an event photo.

Do not even get me started on a photo with a watermark.

IF YOU WANT to separate yourself from the pack, it requires discipline and patience, like any successful practice.

Less is more.

Focus is better than frequency.

It is a beast to master. But it can be tamed.

Ten content creators I am loving:

@tanya_ling

@sew_sketchy

@ncour

@cj_hendry

@darias88

@skyframes

@paridust

@soledadbravo

@marion_Toy

@javicalleja

@46N2_

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