HASHTAGS

What You Need to Know About Marketing with Hashtags Across Social Media
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Hashtags first came into the social media spotlight on Twitter, which describes them as a way to categorize messages. When you include a hashtag in your tweet you are assigning a specific theme or topic and creating a link, which allows your tweet to be included with all other tweets including the same hashtag. This means that your tweet could potentially be seen by hundreds or even millions of other users who are interested in that topic—pretty powerful stuff. It's easy to see why hashtags have become a staple in social media marketing.

Hashtags have become so popular that most social media networks now feature them. Users like to use hashtags to find topics and follow conversations. Social media marketers like them because they can extend the reach of brand messages. Hashtags allow your tweets to be seen by people who don’t even follow you—that's pure marketing gold.

So while hashtags can be used on multiple platforms, the use case does differ slightly on each one. In this ultimate guide, we'll provide tips for creating your own hashtags and break down best practices for using them across the social media landscape so you're using them to their full potential, and most importantly, look like a true social media pro.

Twitter

Extend Your Reach
The best use of hashtags is still to extend your reach. Any tweet that includes a hashtag is visible to people browsing through that hashtag's stream—even to people who don’t follow you. That's pretty powerful.

Participating in a popular conversation is a great way to get your message to new people. Get involved in topics that are relevant to your brand—add to the conversation (emphasis on add). At this point, people are pretty well-versed in tweeting and won’t stand for off-topic tweets in a hashtag conversation. (i.e. Don’t jump on a trending hashtag for the sole purpose of promoting your brand or company.)
Build Your Brand
Hashtags are also great for branding. You can get creative and give your brand a real personality by creating a unique hashtag and using it as a regular theme for your tweets. Charmin does a great job with this angle with #tweetfromtheseat. The brand posts humorous musings supposedly from—but we hope not for real—the toilet. Charmin uses the hashtag often but not in every tweet, which keeps it fresh and users engaged. The hashtag has become so popular with Charmin’s followers that it is as identifiable on Twitter as the brand itself—pretty impressive for bathroom humor.

Increase Engagement
Another great way to establish your brand and increase engagement is to hold regular Twitter chats. A Twitter chat is where people interested in a certain topic discuss it during a specified time window using a designated hashtag created by the chat’s host. The Community Manager (@TheCMgr) holds a weekly Twitter chat for social media and community managers to discuss their jobs and share advice. To participate, users tag each of their tweets with the assigned hashtag #cmgrchat.

A Twitter chat can revolve around whatever topic you’d like. Perhaps you set aside a certain time every week to answer direct questions from followers. Or maybe you host a chat that discusses the latest happenings in your industry like The Community Manager does. Whatever it is pick a short and sweet hashtag, using your brand name if it’s a branded discussion. A bonus: hashtags are clickable in Twitter profiles. Add your ongoing Twitter chat hashtag right there in your profile description so users can easily find it and start participating.

LinkedIn
Hashtags no longer work on LinkedIn. So....don’t use them. Existing hashtags still appear hyperlinked, but if you click on one in the news feed it takes you to a Help Page explaining the withdrawal of LinkedIn Signal (which also included hashtags).

If you’ve been blasting updates from a social dashboard to all of your accounts at once make sure to not include hashtags. (Or better yet stop that practice all together)
Facebook

While the majority of Twitter accounts are public (only 12% of accounts are protected), the opposite is true on Facebook (only 28% of accounts are completely public). Since most people choose not to share their updates publicly, the uniting power of hashtags—and the ability to extend a marketer’s reach—is significantly lower. Since they were introduced on June 12, 2013, some brands have been attempting to utilize hashtags the same way they do on Twitter and instructing people to make their updates public to participate in the conversation. The problem with that is people are pretty tied to the way they use Facebook. They value privacy and it remains to be seen if hashtags will catch on enough to change that.

Promote Campaigns Across Multiple Platforms

Facebook has pretty strict promotional rules, which means you can’t have people enter a contest simply by including a branded hashtag on an update like you can on other platforms. But you can promote contests or campaigns you’re running elsewhere. Using the same hashtag on every platform will help increase awareness.

Monitoring Made Easy

You can search for hashtags on Facebook by using the URL facebook.com/hashtag/_____ and including the keyword on the end. Other similar hashtags will appear on the top of the page so you can easily browse and potentially find other topics that your brand should be participating in.

You should monitor hashtags related to your brand and even just your brand name. Some people have been using hashtags on Facebook for awhile and now that they are clickable some topics—both positive and negative—could start to trend for your brand. Don’t be the last to know.

Vine

Hashtags and Channels

Hashtags are useful on Vine much the same way they are elsewhere—they add context to a post. They were heavily promoted at launch by the Explore section, which highlights the most popular hashtags in the video app. This was helpful to users and brands alike in knowing what hashtags they should include on their posts to get their videos noticed. The problem was that every time you wanted to find a new video type you had to click on a hashtag. This might be why Vine recently added Channels.
Each channel has its own theme and a feed of popular videos within that channel. This means that videos are no longer categorized by just their accompanying hashtag, but their popularity as well. Plus, users can assign their video to a specific channel. So not only is it important that you pick the right hashtag to get noticed but you also need to pick the most relevant channel.

**Pinterest**

**Where to Use Them**

Hashtags only work in pin descriptions. They are not clickable (or searchable) in profile names, descriptions, board titles, board descriptions or board titles.

**What They Do**

Hashtags in Pinterest have the same basic purpose as they do in Twitter—uniting common conversations. But functionally, they’re a bit different. When you click on a hashtag in Twitter it displays all other tweets including that hashtag. In Pinterest, clicking on a hashtag not only displays other pins that contain it but also pins that include the same word or phrase in their description—and it can even result in pins that include the word in its URL.

Take a look at this example from uberVU’s Pinterest page. We pinned a picture we took at 2013’s New Media Expo and included the event’s hashtag #NMX.

After you click on #NMX you’ll see a bunch of pins that are also related to the event, both ones that include the hashtag and ones that include just NMX. The sandal appears because as you can see NMX is used in its description.

But what about these shoes? There is no mention of NMX in the description, but when you click through you’ll see that the URLs attached to these pins contain NMX.
Make Them Unique
Since search works a bit differently on Pinterest it’s best to create hashtags for your company or brand that are totally unique—the more specific the better. This will help people find the right content—content by or about you!

Plus, if you run a contest asking people to pin with your hashtag, having a very specific one will make your job of searching through the entries that much easier.

Build and Monitor Your Brand
Hashtags are a great way to brand your content on Pinterest. Include #YourBrandName on images you pin from your site to make it easy for people to find more of your content. Make sure to check out your brand or product hashtags as people might already be pinning about you. Check out what people are sharing, what they’re saying about your brand and engage with them!

Instagram
Monitor and Engage
People are pretty savvy with hashtags so if you’re a large company there’s a good chance a hashtag of your brand or company name already exists on Instagram. Search for hashtags of your brand name and make sure to include all possible versions (ex: if you’re Coca-Cola you’d want to check out #CocaCola and #Coke). See what people are saying about your brand and start engaging in conversations.

If there aren’t any hashtags of your brand or company name then start your own. Tag all relevant posts with your branded hashtag—product shots, behind-the-scenes at your company—not a dog you passed on the street that has zero relation to your brand.

User Generated Content!
The success of Instagram proves that people love sharing photos. Why not use that to your advantage? Create a reason for fans to send you photos and create custom hashtags around those promotions. Run a contest or campaign asking users to submit their photos of your product. Encourage users to upload photos of a brand event they’re attending.

These promotions not only increase engagement but are perfect facilitators of user generated content. Use the images on your website, share your favorites on Facebook or use them in your next print ad (just make sure your intent is clearly stated and give the person credit when you repurpose the photo).
Google+

Relevance Rules

A big difference with hashtags on Google+ compared to other platforms is that while more than one or two hashtags can seem spammy elsewhere, it works on Google+—in fact, best practice is to include three. You can add more than three, but the first three affect how your post appears when users browse hashtags. Make sure the one you deem most important is listed first.

Another difference is that while hashtags are often used ironically (#hashtagproblems) to add a little personality to tweets, the practice won’t be successful on Google+. Hashtags have to be relevant in order to be effective.

Hashtag Helpers

Here’s where the relevance factor comes into play. Google+ will automatically add hashtags to your posts if it thinks that they are relevant—and from our experience they’re usually pretty spot on. (But if they’re not don’t worry, you can delete them. Just hover over the hashtag and you’ll see a X appear to the right.)

These added hashtags display differently from the ones you add yourself. Check out this example from uberVU’s Google+ page. Our post was about social media fails and we added #FAIL within the text. As you can see on the top right, our hashtag shows up first and then below it Google+ has added its own hashtags—#SocialMedia and #Branding.

Navigating through these added hashtags work a bit differently than you might expect. When you click on one the post you’re viewing flips around to display related posts. When you click on #SocialMedia in the left example above, it displays the image to the right.

You can then use the navigation arrows on the top to flip through the posts. Below the highlighted hashtag you’ll see an “also related” field. These are related hashtags that have been used in posts along with the hashtag you’ve clicked on. Chances are your competitors’ content will show up in this view at some point so it’s important to focus on creating quality titles and images to attract a user to click on your post rather than browsing past it.
If you click on a hashtag listed within a post (#FAIL in our original example) or you click on the hashtag in the flipped post (#SocialMedia in the second example) you’re brought to a landing page displaying all posts with that hashtag. The landing page is organized by “best of” posts and “most recent” and you can choose how you want to view it. Google+ doesn’t provide much information on how to get your posts to appear under “best of” but most guess it’s due to engagement. So, be mindful that you’re sharing quality content so people will want to engage with it. Timing is also important. Research when your audience is most engaged and post at those times to ensure your content will appear on the top of the “most recent” page when they’re most likely to be on Google+.

Creating Your Own Hashtags

So now you know how to use hashtags across social media, but do you know how to create the best hashtags? Here are some tips for creating effective hashtags for your brand.

1. Keep All Hashtags Short and to the Point
   It’s best to keep Twitter’s 140-character count in mind when creating your hashtag, regardless of what platform you’re using it on. The longer the hashtag the harder it will be for your fans to understand or remember.

2. Don’t Be Afraid of Capital Letters
   If you’re going to use a hashtag with multiple words (but still short and to the point, right?), capitalize each word. This will make it easier to read and help avoid any possible misinterpretations.

3. Avoid Hashtag Overload
   With the exception of Google+, tagging your post with too many hashtags can be spammy. One is best, use two if necessary and if you use three…..you better be posting on Google+.

4. Be Unique
   Get creative and come up with a hashtag that’s unique—and therefore memorable—for your brand. Avoid generic phrases or common sayings. Pick something that can be easily associated with your brand and unlikely to be used in reference to something else.

5. Do Your Research
   So you think you’ve come up with a completely unique and original hashtag perfect for your brand? Are you sure? Take the time to look up the phrase and see if there is any content out there that you do not want to be associated with. Better safe than sorry.

#Marketing with Hashtags

Well, there you have it. That’s your complete round up on using hashtags on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Vine, Pinterest, Instagram and Google+, plus tips for creating your own. Now that you know how hashtags work on every platform and the best practices for each, you can get creative in the ways you utilize them. Run a contest, monitor your brand, get involved in broader conversations—the marketing opportunities are endless. #GetGoing
Optimize your hashtag campaigns with uberVU!

uberVU’s powerful software allows social media marketers to optimize campaigns with ease. Run a hashtag campaign, monitor its progress and measure its success all from a single, easy-to-use dashboard. Plus, gain customized, real-time insights about those campaigns, your brand, your industry and the competition.

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- Discover top-performing content opportunities
- Get alerted of any real-time spikes in mentions, sentiment, or activity

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