

Hashtags 101

Much to the frustration and chagrin of many, hashtags are often misunderstood and misused. However, hashtags have become an unavoidable part of most social networks and increasingly important to online marketing strategies. When used properly, hashtags can get your social media content in front of other users discussing a similar topic, including potential patients unfamiliar with your dental practice. Pretty cool, right?

Let's dive a little deeper into hashtags to find out how you can use them to get more out of your social media presence.

What are Hashtags?

Hashtags are keyword phrases written without spaces that have a hash or pound (#) sign in front of them. They work by summarizing a social media post into a few relevant words.

Quick example: You've just posted something funny that your dog did. You may choose to use a hashtag like: **#DogLove**, **#CanineCutie**, or **#DogLover**. Each of these hashtags would work because they are relevant to your post.

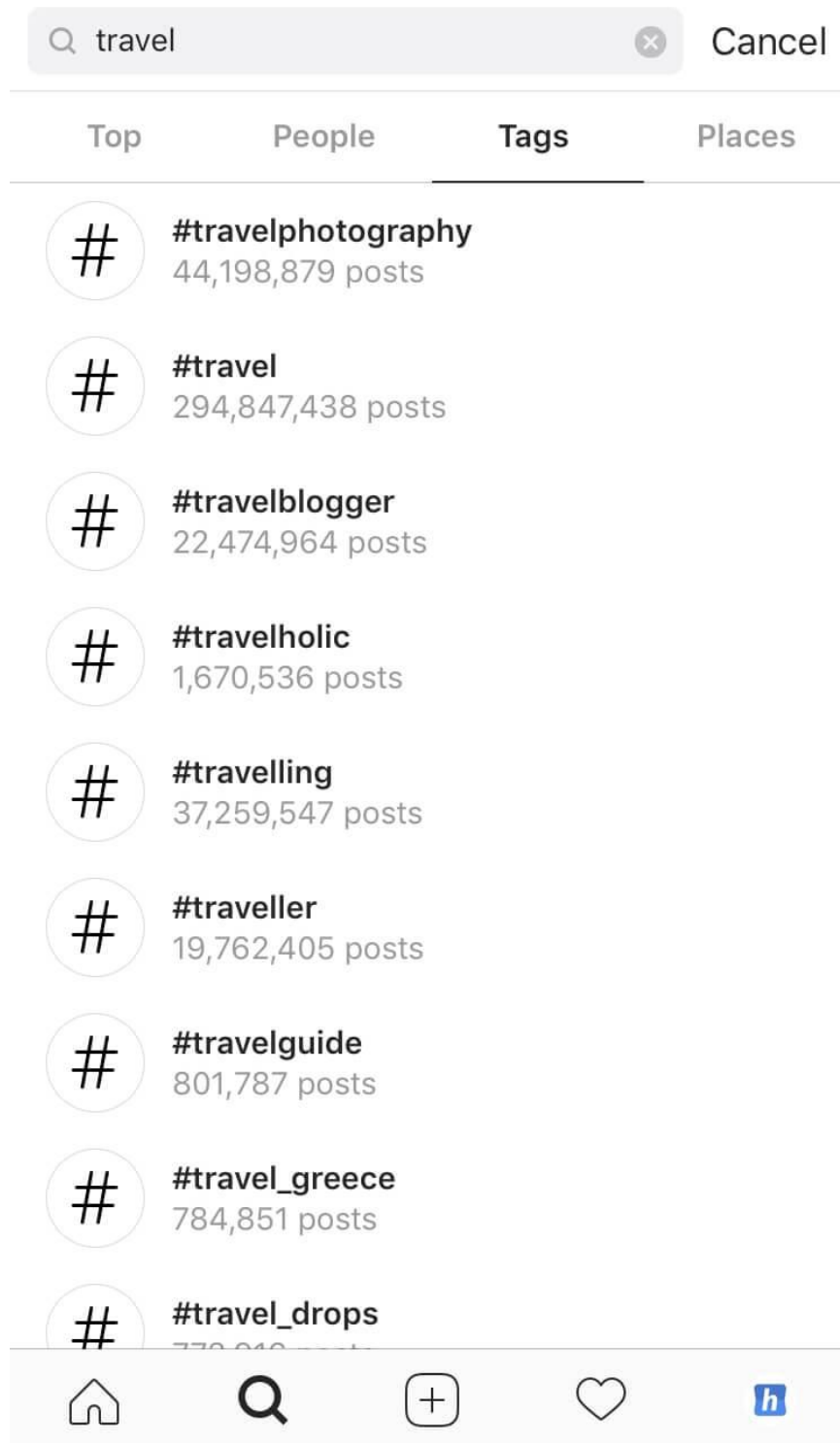
When a hashtag is used in a social media post, it will be sent to the hashtag conversation stream where users that have used the same tag can see your post. Usually, hashtags are pre-established by large brands or social influencers and shared by a large quantity of people. You can also create your own hashtag (and many people do, sometimes for comedic effect), but you won't get your post shared in a popular stream like you would if you used an established tag.

You can use an online tool like [Tagboard](#) to find popular hashtags across multiple social media platforms and maximize the exposure of your post.

Hashtag Streams

Once you use a hashtag, you can click on it and it will take you to the conversation stream where other users and social media influencers have used the same tag. The conversation stream will vary from platform to platform, but each stream allows you to obtain more crowd-sourced information from others using that same tag. You can search for conversation streams within each of the social platforms that utilize hashtags.

An example: You create a post using **#travel**. When you click on **#travel**, it will take you to a page that displays all of the posts containing the same hashtag. This is how you can connect with other like-minded posters.



Which Platforms Use Hashtags?

Hashtags are an invaluable connector of people and ideas, so it's no surprise that they have found popularity on just about every major social platform. However, they are especially useful on Instagram and Twitter.

Ok, I Understand Hashtags. Now What?

Now that you understand the basics of hashtags, it's time to start incorporating them into your social media posts. Hashtags are great for spreading awareness of trending topics, holidays and celebrations, events and conferences, and personal items that you find share-worthy. It can be intimidating at first, but once you are comfortable with them, hashtags can really grow your social media following and engagement.

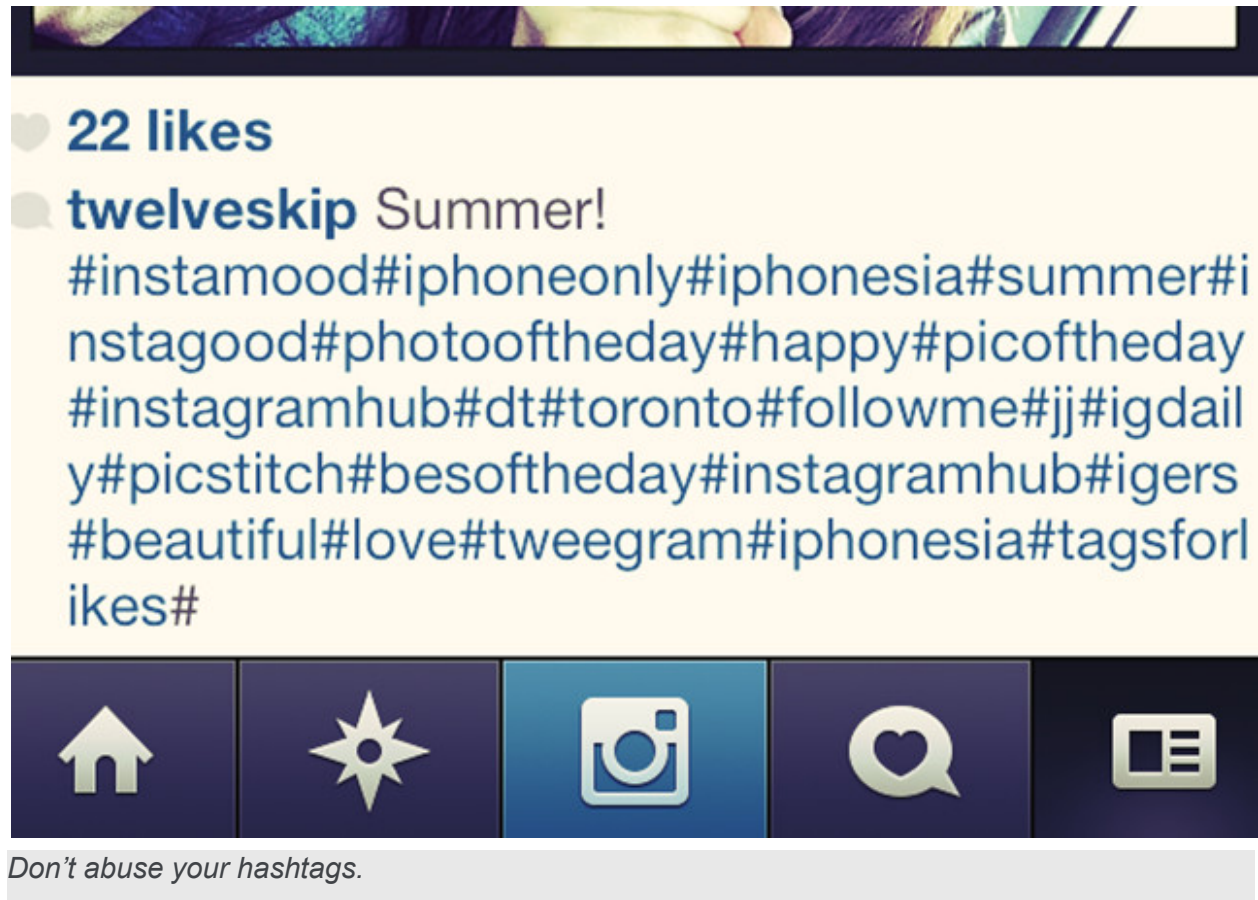
Don't Abuse Them

Hashtags are exciting! However, some newer hashtag users can get a bit carried away or lose focus on a hashtag's purpose. When using hashtags, try to keep each tag short, and don't use more than four-ish hashtags in one single post.

Why? There is nothing more annoying than a sentence-length hashtag. Longer hashtags are unreadable, and look like a jumble of nonsense.

An example: You just went to your town's holiday celebration and you want to share your joy with a hashtag. You decide upon: **#ahappyholidaystoallandtoallagoodnight**. Pretty illegible, isn't it? A more appropriate hashtag may read: **#HappyHolidays**. It's easier to read and simpler to absorb.

Similarly, you want to avoid using too many hashtags. We suggest using around four hashtags per post as a flexible rule. A long, rambling and confusing use of hashtags may look like this: **#HappyHolidays, #MerryChristmas, #HappyKwanza, #HappyHanukkah, #Dreidel, #Rudolph, #Reindeer, #SantaClaus, #Snow, #WinterWonderland, #Presents, #FrostyTheSnowman, #EggNog, #Xmas, #ChristmasTreeLights, #12DaysofChristmas, #SleighbellsRinging, #CelebrateTheHolidays**.



The above is an example of what not to do. No one will take the time to read all of those hashtags, and it defeats the purpose of precision and concision which helps sort conversations into relevant streams.

Bottom line, use only 4-ish hashtags per post.

Hashtag Quick Tips

Capitalize individual words — You can make your hashtags easier to read by capitalizing the individual words within it. In fact, this isn't so much a piece of advice as it is a rule of hashtag law. If you want your audience to understand your tag, you can differentiate the words within it by capitalizing them.

Include a call to action in your post — By including a call to action in your post, you can invite your audience to participate in a contest, promotion or campaign. CTA's will help ramp up your engagement, and spread awareness of the hashtag you've chosen. A relevant CTA here and there can do wonders for your social media presence.

Avoid tagging vague words — Hashtags are commonly misused when users break up one hashtag into many separate, smaller words. For example if you just saw the movie “This Is The End,” your hashtag should read **#ThisIsTheEnd**. However, some people would post **#This #Is #The #End**. This will send your post into many different, vague conversation streams that are irrelevant to your post. Remember to craft your hashtags with specific, relevant words.

Check for mistakes — It can be pretty embarrassing when you send out a misspelled hashtag, or a tag that could be misinterpreted. Remember to always double check your hashtags to ensure that they clearly communicate your intent and that they won’t be misread.

Be specific — Specificity is critical when crafting the perfect hashtag. Without specificity, your post is subject to interpretation, and your message can be lost in ambiguity. Therefore, you should always try to be as specific as possible. If you were posting about your new Husky puppy, you could use **#HuskyLove** to share your post into a Husky related conversation stream. **#PuppyLove** would send your post to a completely different thread altogether.

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Need help with social media? Contact us today!