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Photo Ops Abound

Using Instagram to Engage and Sell

For many small business owners, finding ways to reach new customers and keep loyal clientele engaged can be constant challenges. Print and digital advertising can accomplish different objectives than the constant engagement social media platforms offer. Luckily for retailers, social media is becoming an increasingly effective—and often totally free—tool to help customers stay informed and attract new fans, near and far.

Since launching in October 2010, Instagram has become one of the most popular social media platforms in the world for sharing photos and videos. Instagram now boasts more than 800 million active monthly users, and more than 25 million businesses have set up shop on the platform. What's more, the social media platform reports more than 200 million users visit a business account on Instagram every day.

Instagram has a range of uses, and even independent home improvement retailers are utilizing it to reach new audiences. Randy's Do it Best, which has three locations in central Virginia, has been on Instagram since 2013, but the marketing team is making a renewed push to bolster its efforts. President and co-owner Randy Andes; CEO Christian Herrick; director of sales and marketing Josh Lambert; and creative director Rachel Herrick discuss how they are ramping up their Instagram efforts to tell their business's story and reach a whole new clientele.

Hardware Retailing (HR): Two years ago, Walmart opened a store in Timberville, Virginia. What was your strategy to differentiate against a big-box competitor?

Christian Herrick (CH): After Walmart opened, we saw a lot of our business neighbors close up shop. Our traffic count dropped, but we had started preparing for that long before Walmart came. We weren't reactionary; we did a lot of research on the effects on small towns where Walmart opened. We had been using social media for quite a while, and we've always used it as a way to connect with the community.

“For us, social media, including Instagram, is a differentiator. We can use it to show people we're actually part of the community.”

—Josh Lambert, Randy's Do it Best

Josh Lambert (JL): For us, social media, including our Instagram, is a differentiator. We can use it to show people we're actually part of the community. We're not just here to sell them something.

HR: Randy's Do it Best has had a strong web presence for many years. When did Instagram come on your radar?

CH: It used to be just me handling our Facebook account. When we were able to bring on Rachel and Josh to our team, we had more time to actually explore Instagram.

Rachel Herrick (RH): We found that the team really enjoyed using Instagram personally, so it naturally bled over into the business side of things.

HR: What does your customer base on Instagram look like?

CH: We all agree that Instagram is a little less formal than Facebook. Instagram is where we post fun things as they come. On Facebook, our average follower is a middle-aged woman, but on Instagram, we have many more millennial users. We post with their needs in mind, trying to capture their interest for the years ahead.



Instagram posts that include people create more engagement. By posting an on-the-fly shot of Randy's Do it Best co-owners Randy Andes and his wife Shirley in the store, Instagram followers got to know them on a closer level.

In an Instant

With more than 80 percent of all Instagram users following at least one business account, the social media platform is becoming an increasingly potent way to reach online audiences and deliver photo and video content in a new channel.

Take a look at a few of the ways the team from Randy's Do it Best has introduced their business to their hundreds of followers and get inspiration for your own Instagram account.

By including contest winners, seasonal images, photos of new inventory and shots of the team in action, the employees are increasing their follower count and developing new ways to reach and connect with online followers near and far.



As an employee ventured into the back room, he was greeted by an assortment of fresh flowers. By posting the sight to Instagram, the team delivered an inside look at the business and created an authentic way to promote products ahead of Mother's Day.



The business gives away two \$500 shopping sprees to promote its spring catalog. After the winners were selected, the team snapped their photos, combined the pictures and posted on Instagram using #shoplocal and other high-performing hashtags.



The team also uses Instagram to call attention to special savings. Here, an eye-catching flyer calls out deep savings on a product compared to a big box's advertised price. For more information on communicating price to customers, head to Page 40.

Join us to
make a



QUILT BLOCK TRAY

Thursday, June 21st
at 7pm, Timberville

Registration includes all supplies, instructions, and refreshments
Register online or in store

The team posts frequent reminders about in-store events on Instagram. "We're still trying to build that program's attendance, but I'm using Instagram to get more people to see what we're making at our events," creative director Rachel Herrick says.



One of the business's longtime employees is an antiques enthusiast who posts his obscure findings and asks followers to guess what the item is. "It's a really easy way to ensure you have regular updates on your social media," CEO Christian Herrick says.

A late-March snowstorm proved to be the perfect promotion for end-of-season ice melt and snow removal gear.



HR: What's your specific goal with Instagram?

JL: For me, I see Facebook as this polished, planned-out platform. Instagram is the in-the-moment platform. We can show who we are, give a behind-the-scenes look at the business and give our customers instantaneous access. People love that, especially the millennial age group. It's a great snapshot of a business.

RH: Instagram has been really helpful to drive attention to the higher-end brands we sell. We can use momentum from products that have really popular hashtags on Instagram to build our store's brand. By including those hashtags in our posts, people who are already following the hashtag then get exposed to Randy's Do it Best.

JL: Hashtags are by far the most important thing to utilize on Instagram. They're free marketing. When you use popular hashtags, people outside your area can see your business, and you've opened up a whole new audience for your business.

Randy Andes (RA): We've always said, no matter how you reach them, people want to deal with people. Everything we do on Instagram is another way to make that connection. But the bottom line is, if someone walks in your store and can call you and your employees by name because of an Instagram post, you've done something the big boxes will probably never do.

HR: How can a retailer use their Instagram presence to drive in-store sales?

RH: Our main website has an e-commerce option, and we're able to do a lot of event promotion on Facebook, but we're using Instagram to target a younger customer base. We're trying to get our younger followers to see us as the go-to hardware destination, not a big-box competitor.



Randy Andes opened the store in Timberville, Virginia, in 2001 and has since opened two other locations.

CH: In April, we opened our third store and launched a second Instagram account to support it. Not only are both Instagram accounts increasing in followers, but they're also generating sales. Our strategy has been to use hashtags for some of our more niche products. We had a line of insanely popular pens in our stores. We advertised them using the hashtag, and the day they came out, someone in Massachusetts bought almost our entire stock. He said the only way he found them was through the hashtag.

HR: What kind of analytics do you keep track of on Instagram?

JL: The interaction on each post is really important. That's where you can find out what's working and what's connecting with your followers. If you post something and it gets just a few likes and views, you can know it just isn't connecting with your audience. With trial and error, you can see what is popular and effective for your business.

HR: What are some of your most popular Instagram posts?

RH: Food posts always do well! Posting pictures of in-store product demonstrations always get attention, and any post with Randy in the store or in the community gets a pretty good reaction. In a way, I view social media as part of our overall service. It creates another way for the public to interact with us, and get the information they need. ➡