

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA ROI FOR THE FOOD SECTOR

DASH HUDSON



Food porn is reaching epic proportions on Instagram, where various iterations of gastronomy are divided into all kinds of delicious subcategories. There's a specialty niche for every type of edible fodder on social, whether it's content from consumer packaged goods, restaurants, patrons, critics, bloggers, or publishers. People open Instagram to satisfy their culinary cravings with palatable grub shots, and businesses are serving up some tasty-looking eye candy to tell their story and create a community.

Nevertheless, a very vexing question has loomed above all those visual marketing efforts—how does one measure the ROI of all those posts of delectable delicacies? Keep reading to find out.



BAR SNACKS

Before businesses began hopping on the social media bandwagon, visual networking platforms like Instagram and YouTube were just a fun hobby that regular folks engaged in to connect with their peers. Sharing a meal, a coffee, or a snack was an experience that took place solely between the involved parties, and restaurants did not install neon signs or funky bathroom wallpaper as photo bait.

The Internet sprang an entirely new industry based on the principle that people are no longer satisfied with the idea that food is simply fuel; members of this generation expect their daily feedings to be an experience, and one that is photogenic enough to share with the world at that. The hospitality industry now has to rely heavily on aesthetics to attract patrons and, with a bit of luck, become a viral sensation. Millennials now choose where they'll eat or what snack they'll buy based on its Instagram potential. It's a necessary X-factor that no food company could have ever seen coming in a pre pic-or-it-didn't-happen world.

In a previous life, trendy decor was not required for restaurants and the general food culture was far more needs-based than a pleasure-seeking affair. As it turns out, digital life enabled meal-sharing on a much larger scale, and the sector had to elevate its game. Instagram is the most important, powerful word of mouth vehicle they'll ever need and that extra aesthetic oomph serves social shareability.

Social media is now a top priority for companies in the food industry, resulting in them leaning into their brand factor. They're getting food influencers involved to keep things buzzy through gifting programs, invitations to comped experiences, and partnerships with other industries for maximal exposure—the beauty of food, after all, is that it's a universal affair. Everyone eats, therefore anyone can be customer.

While channels like Instagram are driving buzz, it remains fairly challenging for these brands and hospitality establishments to properly track the return on what they're investing. That is the issue we're about to solve.



ONTO APPETIZERS

A strong social media strategy yields returns that are both intangible and concrete, although the latter has eluded many businesses and the former is difficult to quantify. Both advantages work in tandem, are complementary of one another, and are equally as important.

Visual social marketing is an ecosystem with various degrees of benefits for each layer of commerce. Everything you do intersects, and the abstract value points of Instagram consistently converge with the more tangible, measurable ones. To fully grasp the return of all those goodie boxes you sent out to various foodies, it's important to properly perceive those more elusive visual social marketing attributes that help your business thrive. Here are four key points to keep tabs on.

1 | Awareness

How does a restaurant stand out in a sea of #foodporn and how does a smoothie brand differentiate itself among its fierce competitors? They use social media channels and influencer marketing to spread the good word about their Instagrammable wallpaper, innovative flavor profiles, or how awesome their packaging looks in an photo. Platforms like Instagram are today's primary discovery tool, where users come upon brands and restaurants they never would have had on their radar otherwise. For some businesses, it's their only marketing tool.

Awareness sits at the very top of the marketing funnel for a good reason: the first order of business for any brand is being discovered and gaining equity. Users willingly follow the companies whose content they're fond of and whose hot spots they want to frequent. If you want people to know about your products or your latest seasonal offerings, establishing a strong social presence and using influencers is your best bet.



2 | Communication

There's no greater gift to marketers than a direct line of communication with their consumers, period. And communication on social is delightfully multilayered, just like the chicken and waffles on your brunch menu. In the literal sense, it means that your business can have firsthand interactions with its patrons by way of liking, commenting, or direct messaging. Cementing that feeling of [community](#) or providing a customer service experience by answering user questions drives loyalty, the holy grail of consumer sentiment.

But in terms of bigger picture, it also enables your brand or resto to enter the conversation and reach its target demographic through well-crafted, targeted imagery in real-time. Millennials speak in visuals and if you're not creating that kind of a dialogue, others will. When it comes to visual communication, your company has to be present to be relevant, whether you're making the doughnuts or selling them. Creating those bonds with followers will entice them to try your fine fare, and will ultimately drive hype and boost your engagement.





3 | Loyalty and Advocacy

Nothing tugs at your Instagram audience's heartstrings like a great melty cheese moment, amiright? The thing with visual communication is that it's really efficient for creating emotional connections through photos and videos, which is the secret to unlocking one of the most coveted sentiment from a consumer: loyalty. Or in the case of a restaurant, the burning desire to try it out. When you're interacting with the community you lead, those followers will feel compelled to engage back with you, ergo cinching that yearned-for relationship status. Here's a revelation: Instagram is a content-focused platform, and the accounts that are going to succeed on it are those that understand how to connect with audiences through photos and videos, period. A consumer's positive association to a brand or establishment can turn into advocacy real quick in the food sector. Take that insight and run with it.

4 | Brand World

Social media presents food companies with the opportunity to create a larger-than-life brand and highly coveted table to score. In fact, there are thousands of popular spots that are admired by people who have never even stepped foot in them thanks to foodies and their compelling social shares. Hello, FOMO.

Nowadays, business owners need to get clever and conceive attractive interiors or packaging to facilitate social recognition. Creating a hyper-focused brand world and telling its story on social will help set your company apart—you just need beautiful visuals and a well-crafted narrative. It's how you'll win over consumers and how you'll become celebrated by your rivals. A powerful brand aura is not exactly quantifiable, but it's the source of life and meaning for all your other activities.



THE MAIN COURSE: LET'S TALK KPIs

Businesses want to be able to input actual numbers in their reports, and social media metrics begin and end with the following five key performance indicators. Their tracking is vital to measuring what you're getting for all the marketing money you're spending. Sidebar: we mentioned earlier that all matters of social media activities are intertwined and affect one another in some capacity—this is also applicable to your KPIs. Their communal health is integral to accelerating growth and driving conversions and/or reservations.

1 | Organic Reach

Your brand receives organic impressions every time another account mentions it in their caption or tags it in a photo. This is also known as earned reach, and it only occurs through auxiliary users. Let's just cut to the chase: it's priceless exposure.

When another account posts an image tagging yours, it puts it in front of their followers and gives them an opportunity to convert into new ones for you... And in the food world, where hype is generated through the senses and the human need for nourishment, photos are the most powerful tool there is. Being exposed to audiences other than your own is the number one tactic for fresh exposure and consequently, a business boost.

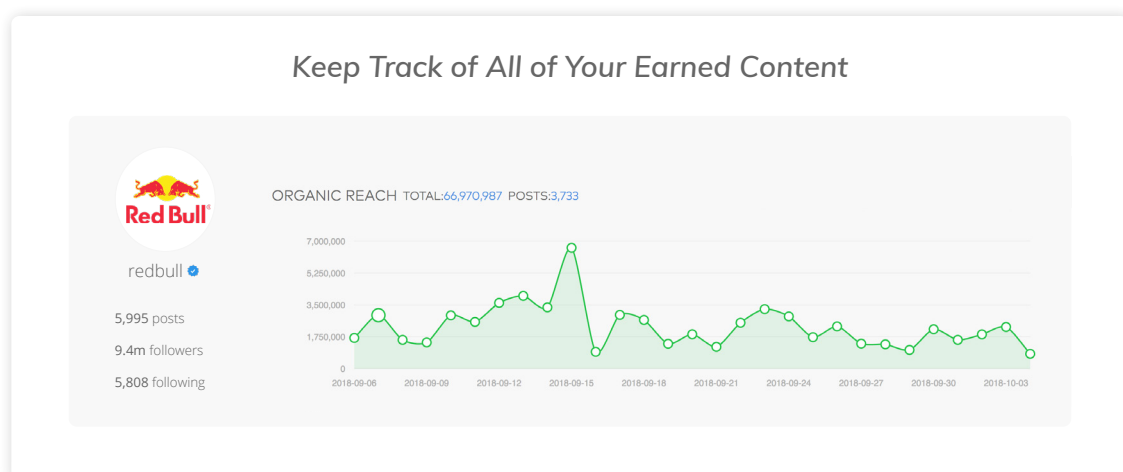
If you want the world to come to you for their midday coffee break or their next recipe inspiration, you have to harness fan power. Prompting your community to create content around your business makes for a very positive catch 22: followers feel loved and valued when you ask to regram their images, which motivates them to keep producing more in the hopes of being featured again, which also serves as free widespread publicity for your product or hot spot.

What Does it Measure?

Your reach numbers, the impact of your influencer partnerships and campaign activations, your popularity among fans.

The DH Way

[Dash Hudson's tool for measuring organic reach](#) reveals all the important numbers relating to the impact of your earned content, which is important to measure both collectively and individually if you're working with influencers. Instantly compile your reach numbers for a specific timeframe, or for any single post by clicking on an image thumbnail.



The background of the page is a close-up photograph of several slices of grapefruit. The slices are arranged in a way that shows the vibrant red, juicy segments of the fruit, separated by thin, white pith. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture of the fruit's surface.

2 | Growth Rate

Your growth rate is the percentage at which your audience is growing, and it can be benchmarked on a weekly or monthly basis. Gaining new followers is what the 'Gram is all about, isn't it? Monitor this metric closely to understand whether or not your strategy is working.

Buyer beware: it's one thing to be growing, but it's another to make headway with quality acquisitions, aka new followers who are actually fond of your brand and who are likely to buy your products or make a reservation. Hence the importance of organic reach, which drives authentic growth. Seeing as most audience expansions are made when another account is featuring yours, tightening your strategy around seasonal launches and leveraging influencer marketing is essential. True fans joining your inner circle is key for ROI lift, as they're the ones who will become engaged members of your [community](#).

What Does it Measure?

The effectiveness of your strategy, the impact of your organic reach, the quality of your content, the general health of your account.

The DH Way

You can track all of your follower growth in the [Dash Hudson visual intelligence platform](#). Sort through your audience increases on an hourly, daily, weekly, or custom basis. Correlate your follower spikes with organic content, learn what your weekly follower increase average is, and inquire about our custom reporting for more granular coverage of your growth rate.



3 | Content Engagement

The amount of engagements on your posts is the most indicative figure relating to your content's success, revealing how much your photos and videos are actually resonating with your followers. A high engagement rate is endlessly beneficial, notably alerting the algorithm of your high quality posts to prioritize them in user feeds. It also lets you know that perhaps brunch spreads perform better than afternoon coffee shots, or that your audience is particularly keen on product flatlays. Additionally, engagement rates are very strong indicators of more patronage and sales, loyalty, advocacy, and growth opportunities.

Your post engagement percentage can be calculated with this basic equation:

$$(\text{Likes} + \text{Comments}) \div \text{No. of Followers} = \text{Average Engagement Rate}$$

Converting these numbers into a percentage effectively measures engagement because it puts all of your posts on an even playing field as your account grows. Collecting solely the number of likes and comments doesn't enable an apples to apples assessment of your content as your follower acquisitions ramp up.

Learn what's resonating within your posts by monitoring your engagement. It'll point to where your content strategy needs tweaking so you can focus on consistently bringing in extra lit numbers.



@epicurious



What Does it Measure?

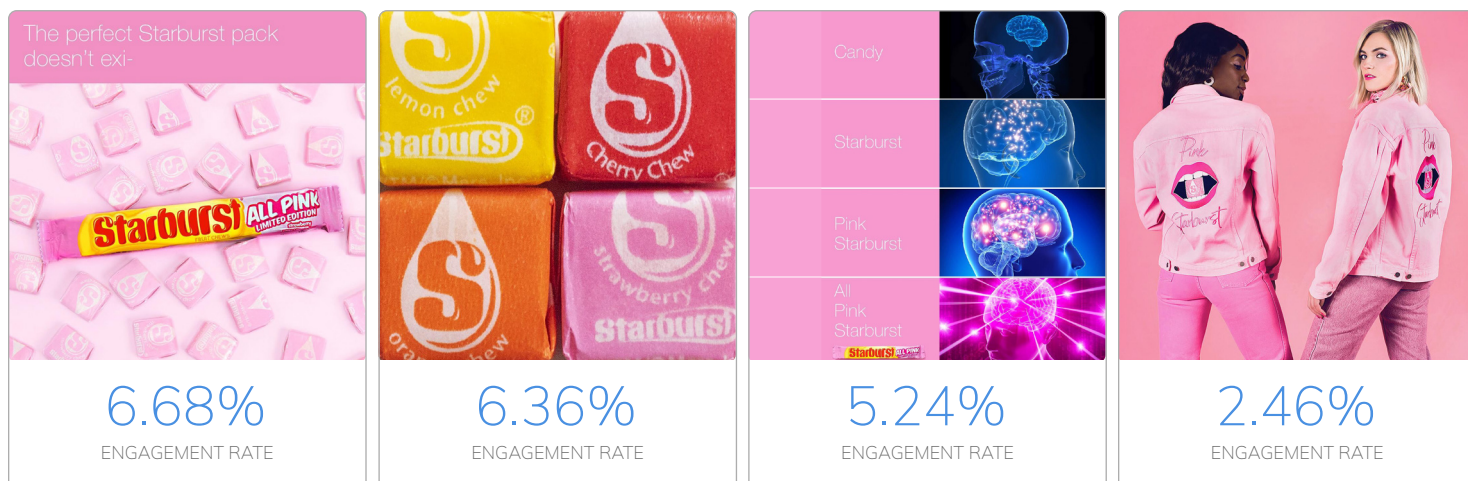
The quality of your content and whether or not your posts are resonating with your followers, fan love, popularity.

The DH Way

You could manually do that math, but don't waste your precious time when it's all automated in Dash Hudson! The platform provides your average engagement rate from the past three months and the engagement rate on each of your posts. Learn what did great and what tanked, and benchmark those performances against your average.

Go deep into content performance assessment with [Dash Hudson's Boards](#), a tool to analyze the efficiency of visual segments. Compare the top and bottom numbers to hone in on your best performing photos and videos for the highest returns, every single time you post.

Starburst's Top Performing Posts of All Time



4 | Profile Engagement

Your content engagement might be the crux of your social activities, but your Instagram profile also receives engagements that should be measured. These are the interactions comprising all the little activity around your page, such as your website click-throughs, content saves, and profile visits.

The importance of a killer profile page is not to be underestimated. People are increasingly searching companies on social rather than going through the old fashioned World Wide Web and it behooves all brands to conceive an informative, attractive, impressive bio that showcases their point of view at first glance: are you an innovative vegan café or a brand new cold brew company? Potential followers need to grasp that as soon as they land on your account's profile.

But the honey that's first going to attract the bees is your content. If it's high-quality and cohesive within your feed, you'll get more post saves. And if your

captions carry a strong call-to-action, you'll receive more link taps. Awareness of clicks, views, and saves is instrumental in understanding not only your traction, but your potential conversions as well.

What Does it Measure?

The aesthetic of your profile, the resonance of your content, the efficiency of your CTAs.

The DH Way

The LikeShop link-in-bio solution is a game-changer in terms of driving new traffic and revenue. Attribute URLs to your Instagram posts before you push them live to make your feed shoppable or drive traffic to a specific page, crush your captions with super strong CTAs, and keep tabs on how many click-throughs your posts received. Link it to Google Analytics on the backend to find out which of those URL visits led to sales or table reservations. Magic.



5 | Influencer Partnerships

Perhaps one of the food sector's most important elements to track given its affinity for product gifting and comped meals, although not **technically** a KPI. Social managers love to hate influencer marketing and hate to love it, as they still try to crack how to measure the ROI of their hired tastemakers. What does sending out fifty free boxes of granola to be showcased in pretty breakfast scenes truly do for you? Figuring this out is more pressing than ever, given that the practice is set to reach a value of over 2 billion dollars in 2019, more than double what it was in 2017.

The lack of answers pertaining to tangible influencer marketing ROI has been a source of frustration despite knowing that Instagram is primarily a means for discovery, which happens primarily through paid or gifted social stars. Marketers don't like to invest in something without understanding how to measure its value, and while a lot of brands grapple with how to approach the trade, the net-net is that it works, and it can make a business go viral faster than you can say bon appétit.

What Should You Measure?

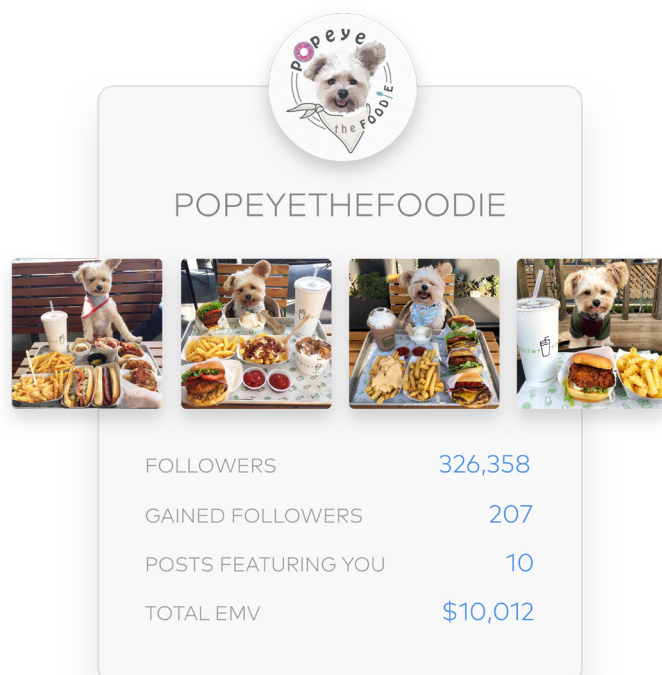
Tapping on-brand partners will help convert their audience members into followers for you, and will probably make them buy your yogurt, too. Not to mention go eat someplace if you have a physical location. Once you've established who you want to hire and have outlined your goals and scope of work, you need to track the results of your collabs based on those objectives. Depending on what's important to you, keep tabs on your account growth, your sales or foot traffic, as well as the engagement of your collaborators' posts. Things like new followers and link clicks will be quantifiable while others benefits won't, like awareness and clout.

The DH Way

Dash Hudson's sophisticated tool suite encompasses specific functionality to evaluate the ROI of influencer marketing. Use [Relationships](#), a game-changing functionality, to see each one of your influencers' basic stats along with their posts for your brand. It also reveals an estimate of how many new followers each of those posts converted to your account, along with their engagement percentages to benchmark against their average.

The EMV tool (earned media value) also lives here. It attributes a unique monetary figure to each of your influencers and their posts based on their Instagram stats to help you better assess their worth to your business. Go even deeper into results by creating influencer-specific Boards to scrutinize your partner content. You'll be able to make all sorts of correlations to the results of your activations while also pinpointing what works and whose content is most on-brand for you. It's the most granular way to focus on what brings your company the most value.

Measure the Result of All Your Influencer Initiatives in Dash Hudson





NOW DESSERT, YOU DESERVE IT

Social marketing goals will always vary depending on the company and the sector in which it operates, along with strategies on how to reach them. But one common denominator never wavers across all industries: the focus on the bottom line. Profitability is a universal business objective and social media marketing is a really amazing earnings facilitator. We've now laid out all the consequential knowledge you need to analyze the numbers that matter to measure the ROI of those efforts, as well as all of their more intangible benefits. It's time to go out and apply all of it.

The Dash Hudson visual intelligence platform is a one stop shop for all your social needs thanks to sophisticated tools built explicitly for ROI measurement. Number-crunching has never been easier.

[GET A DEMO](#)