

Hashtag strategy that still works

If you are still dumping 30 generic hashtags into your Instagram caption hoping the algorithm gods smile upon you, stop. That method died around 2021. The **hashtag strategy that still works** is leaner, more surgical, and tied directly to search behavior within the platform. It is not about volume. It is about relevance density and intent matching. You have to treat hashtags like keywords for a social search engine, because that is exactly what they are now.

Why the old shotgun method is dead

Platforms like Instagram and TikTok changed their algorithms. They no longer rank posts based on the sheer number of hashtags. They look at engagement velocity and topical clustering. Slapping #love, #instagood, and #photooftheday onto a B2B SaaS post is noise. It confuses the algorithm about who should see your content. The result? Your post gets shown to a broad, disinterested audience, it gets zero clicks, and the algorithm buries it.

Think of it this way: a hashtag is a search query. When a user clicks #contentmarketingtips, they are not browsing. They are searching for specific advice. If your post does not directly satisfy that search intent, you wasted your chance.

Building your core hashtag cluster: The 3-5-2 rule

Stop using 30 tags. Use between 8 and 12. That is the sweet spot for modern feeds. Structure them into three distinct buckets. This is not a suggestion; it is a structural requirement for the current algorithm.

Bucket 1: The Content Pillars (3 tags). These are the specific topics of your post. If you are writing about email deliverability, use #emailwarmup, #inboxplacement, and #emaildeliverabilitytips. Be precise. Do not use #emailmarketing because that is too broad and competitive. You want to win the niche search.

Bucket 2: The Audience Tags (5 tags). These describe who the content is for. #saasfounders, #marketingops, #growthhacking. You are telling the algorithm: "This is for people who work in this specific field."

Bucket 3: The Location or Community Tags (2 tags). If you are local, use city-specific tags. If you are in a specific online community, use that. #saasgrowth, #b2bmarketing. This creates a tight community signal.

The brutal truth about hashtag size and competition

Everyone tells you to use "low competition" hashtags. That advice is half-trash. A hashtag with 1,000 posts is low competition, but it also has almost zero search volume. Nobody is looking at it. You want hashtags in the "goldilocks zone."

Look for tags with between 50,000 and 500,000 posts. They have enough search volume to drive traffic, but they are not so saturated that your post drowns in three seconds. A tag like #socialmediamarketing has 50 million posts. Your post is a grain of sand on that beach. A tag like #linkedincontentstrategy has 150,000 posts. That is a pond you can actually fish in.

Rule of thumb: If a hashtag has more than 1 million posts, treat it as a category label, not a discovery tool. Use it only if it perfectly describes the post, but do not expect it to drive reach.

Where to place them: Caption vs. first comment

This is a religious war. The data is clear for 2024: putting them in the first comment reduces their weight. The algorithm reads the caption first. It uses those words to classify your content. If your hashtags are in the comment, the algorithm has to work harder to connect them to your post. Do not make the algorithm work harder.

Put your 8-12 hashtags at the very end of your caption. Separate them from the main text with a line break. Do not hide them with periods and line breaks. That looks spammy and reduces readability. Just put them at the bottom, cleanly.

Myth vs. Reality: Three common hashtag lies

Myth 1: You should use trending hashtags.

Reality: Trending tags are usually flooded with spam and unrelated content. Unless your post is directly about the trend, you will just get ghost followers and bot engagement. Avoid them.

Myth 2: Hashtags are dead on LinkedIn.

Reality: LinkedIn search relies heavily on hashtags. They function as topic markers. Using 3-5 relevant ones on LinkedIn increases your discoverability in search results. Ignore them at your own risk.

Myth 3: You should use the same set of hashtags on every post.

Reality: This is the fastest way to get shadow-banned or algorithmically ignored. If you use the exact same 10 tags on 50 posts, the algorithm sees you as a spammer. Rotate them. Keep the core 3-5 consistent, but change the audience and location tags based on the specific post content.

How to audit your current hashtag performance

You need data. Do not guess. Go to your Instagram or TikTok professional dashboard. Look at your top 10 posts from the last 30 days. For each post, write down the hashtags you used. Now look at your bottom 10 posts. Compare the lists.

You will likely see a pattern. The high-performing posts probably used specific, niche tags. The low-performing posts probably used generic, broad tags. Remove the generic ones. Double down on the specific ones. This is a 5-minute audit that will immediately improve your next post.

If you are struggling to find the right niche tags, use the search bar on the platform itself. Type in a core keyword. Look at the "top" and "recent" posts. See what tags your competitors are using on their high-performing content. Steal them. Adapt them. Do not copy the entire list, but take the 2-3 that are specific to that piece of content.

When to break the rules: Branded and campaign tags

There is one exception to the "small hashtag" rule: your branded tag. If you run a campaign, create a unique campaign hashtag. This is not for discovery. It is for aggregation. You want to collect user-generated content. You want to track conversation. A branded tag like #SpeedyIndexSavesTime might have zero search volume, but it is your property. Use it on every post related to that campaign. It builds a searchable archive of your content.

Do not confuse branded tags with discovery tags. They serve different purposes. One is for search. The other is for collection.

Frequently asked questions about modern hashtag use



Q: Should I use hashtags on YouTube?

A: Yes, but only 3-5 in the description. YouTube treats the first three hashtags in the title as primary categories. Use them wisely.

Q: Do hashtags work on Facebook?

A: Barely. Facebook search is weak for hashtags. Use 1-2 max if they are hyper-relevant. Do not waste time on a Facebook hashtag strategy.

Q: What about TikTok?

A: TikTok is the most hashtag-dependent platform right now. Use 3-5 highly specific tags in the caption. The "For You" page algorithm uses them heavily for initial classification.

Q: Can I use emojis in hashtags?

A: Technically yes, but it looks unprofessional in most B2B contexts. Avoid them unless you are in a visual, lifestyle niche.

Stop optimizing and start executing

You now know the framework. It is not complicated. Pick 8-12 tags. Use the 3-5-2 rule. Put them in the caption. Audit your results. Rotate them. The only thing separating you from better reach is execution. Go look at your last post. If it has 30 generic tags, delete them and repost with the new strategy. That is the only test that matters.

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