



Hashtags:

THE ULTIMATE HOW-TO GUIDE

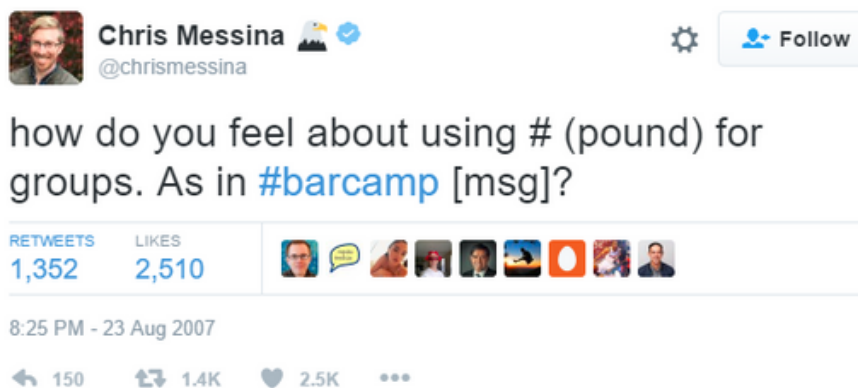
#HASHTAGS: AN INTRODUCTION

Whether you love ‘em, hate ‘em, or still just don’t get ‘em, hashtags are here to stay. And they’re not just on social media anymore. They’re in the corner of the screen during your favorite talk show, they’re on the box your chicken fries came in, and they’re a part of our language. They haven’t just changed the way we communicate on the internet, but how we express ourselves.

Because of the way they group ideas together and increase the possible reach of your content, hashtags can be a powerful tool for social media marketing. That’s why DemandZEN put together the ultimate how-to guide for how to use hashtags. We want to make you a pro.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HASHTAGS

[Chris Messina](#) tweeted the first hashtag in 2007. At the time, he was a Twitter employee who had the idea to use the pound sign to group conversations together concerning a specific conference they were attending. And that’s why the first hashtag is [#barcamp](#). Messina invented it, but his coworker at the time, [Stowe Boyd](#), named it.



The hashtag was just too big of an idea to be confined to one social site. So it migrated to Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Google+, and even [LinkedIn \(kind of\)](#). Hashtags are everywhere. And that’s why you have to know how to use hashtags properly.

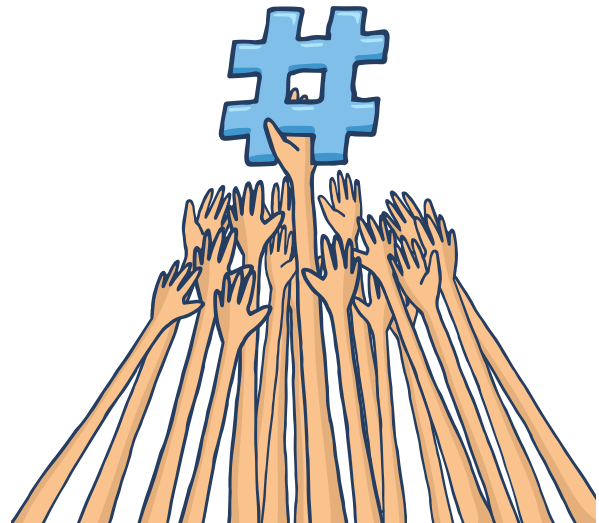
CHOOSING THE RIGHT HASHTAG

You need to make sure the hashtags you use are relevant to the content you're posting. Irrelevant hashtags seem spammy, and the goal is for people to find your post because they're interested the topic you're posting about. If it's a stretch to make it work (and you can't think of anything else), it's okay to ditch the hashtag on that one post. You'll have plenty of other opportunities in the future to incorporate a relevant hashtag.

You might also consider using a hashtag unique to your business, but more on unique hashtags later.

METHODS OF HASHTAG RESEARCH

Before you publish to social media, you need to know what hashtags you should use. The best thing you can do is use existing hashtags. If there is already a conversation happening around that hashtag, you want to join it. You want to be searchable. Using hashtags that are trending or have been used and interacted with recently gives you a better chance to reach a broader audience.



RESEARCH ON SOCIAL PLATFORMS

Doing your research right on the platform you'll be posting to is often the best approach. What's trending on Facebook doesn't necessarily translate to Twitter. And when it comes to Instagram, it's often about finding the specific hashtags used in certain subcultures ([#vinyljunkie](#), anyone?) rather than trending topics.

Performing research right on the platform is also a great idea to get the context for a hashtag. You might assume that a hashtag will work with what you're promoting, but see how people are using it. You might want to use a hashtag genuinely, and find out the use of it is ironic. Or, you might be interested in a hashtag that just has a flat out different meaning from your intention.

A great example is #grills. A company selling backyard grills might think it makes sense to use this hashtag on their Instagram page, but performing a quick search returns more teeth jewelry than barbeque pictures. However, Twitter seems to embrace both meanings of this hashtag equally. It's all about knowing the context.

Let's look at [DiGiorno's unfortunate bandwagoning](#) on a trending hashtag they clearly didn't research. In 2014, after [Ray Rice's domestic abuse video](#) was released to the public, the hashtag #WhyIStayed began trending. Thousands of survivors of physical and mental domestic abuse used the hashtag to start a conversation around why individuals remain in abusive relationships. And that's when DiGiorno tweeted "#WhyIStayed you had pizza."

This resulted in an onslaught of negative responses to what was seemingly making fun of domestic abuse. While the tweet was only live for roughly 10 seconds according to their Social Media Manager, the damage was done. DiGiorno's account sent out half a dozen apology tweets, doing major damage control because they didn't understand the context of the hashtag they were using.



And lastly, don't forget competitor research. What tags are they using? Are they working? Paying attention to the space you're in is a great mindset to have. You can monitor your competition while you try to stay ahead of the hashtag curve.

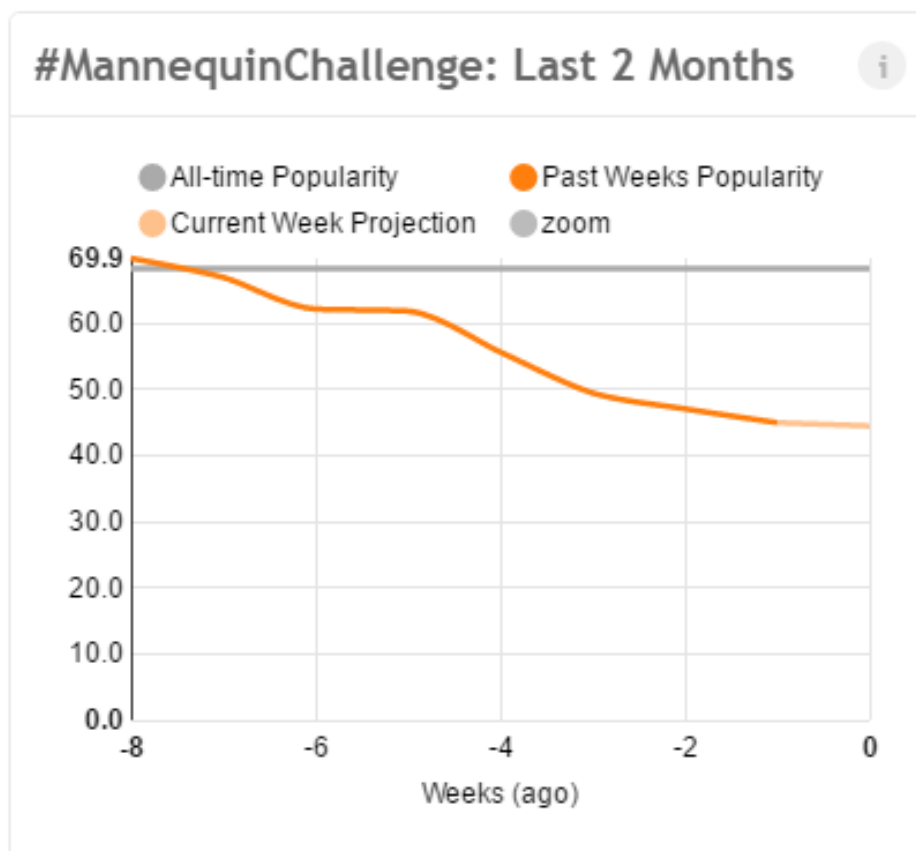
RESEARCH USING EXTERNAL TOOLS

While most of your research will be done on the social platform you're posting to, there are a lot of great tools out there to give you even better insights.

HASHTAGIFY

Personally, my favorite tool is [Hashtagify.me](https://hashtagify.me). It's a great tool to keep you in the loop about what's happening on Twitter, without actually logging in. With Hashtagify, you can sign up for updates on the most popular hashtags by month, week, or as they "breakout." You can also see what hashtags are usually used together, so you have a better understanding of how certain hashtags are connected.

Hashtagify also allows you to look at trends over time for specific hashtags. This gives you insights regarding hashtags that might have once been popular but have fallen off. You can look at a viral movement like the [#mannequinchallenge](https://twitter.com/hashtag/mannequinchallenge), for instance. You can see when this trend reached its peak popularity, and when it began to die off. Monitor hashtags to see if they have plateaued, died off completely, or are still growing in popularity. If you get in on a fad too late, people will notice. So it's great to check where a tag is in its lifecycle before using it.



*data as of February 2, 2017

You can also see who influenced the popularity of the hashtag you're researching. In this case, it was four public figures, a news site, and a popular Twitter profile that comments on trends.

HASHATIT.COM

The best way to search multiple platforms at once (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest) is [HashAtIt.com](https://hashatit.com). It's a simple tool that doesn't require an account if you only want to do searches. By creating an account, you can create hashtag boards that you can return to over time to see the most recent posts across all platforms. This is a time-saver if you find yourself monitoring the same few tags repeatedly.

You can even create a full profile and follow other users' hashtag boards, which can be an advantage for teams that have different interests but still need to come together.

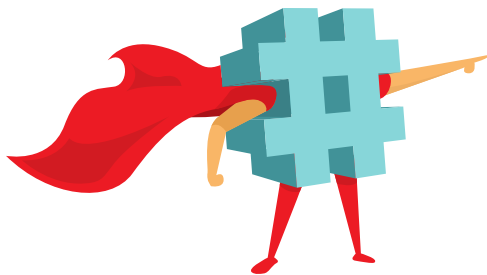
ADDITIONAL TOOLS

Other great tools include [Hashtags.org](https://hashtags.org) (similar to Hashtagify.me but requires an upgrade to see related hashtags), [RiteTag](https://ritetag.com), [GeoChirp](https://geochirp.com) (ideal for regional businesses doing local research), and [Trendsmap](https://trendsmap.com) (which allows you to see trending topics by location).

CREATING A UNIQUE HASHTAG

The option to create a unique hashtag should not be taken lightly. [The Onion article](#) "2-Hour Meeting Spent Thinking Up Hashtag Absolutely Nobody On Planet Earth Will Ever Use" parodied the effort that goes into hashtag creation perfectly. The problem is it's not just about creating a hashtag and using it once, it's about using hashtags to support campaign efforts. You might be attending an event, having a sale, or looking to create more brand awareness. Your goals need to come first, the hashtag second.

BRAND AWARENESS



The easiest unique hashtag you can use is to turn your business into a hashtag ([#DemandZEN](#)). This is great for highlighting things that are specific to your brand and not just your industry. You can later build on this hashtag if you decide to host events, contests, or challenges ([#DemandZENmannequinchallenge](#)).

If there are multiple layers to your business, consider branding the departments if it makes sense:
[#DemandZENMarketing](#) and [#DemandZENColdCalling](#).

If you have a slogan you're trying to push, use that when it makes sense. An easy example to look at is Nike's #justdoit. This has been the company's slogan since 1988. The campaign is a monster in its own right, and has served the company well for almost 30 years. It's an actionable phrase that transcends apparel and appeals to their active customer base: Just go out and do something. That's why they can get away with possibly one of the shortest "About Me" sections on Twitter.



But whether your slogan is 30 years old or born yesterday, turning it into a hashtag and using it regularly is another way to tell the world who you are as a company. Just make sure your slogan is short enough to work as a hashtag. Hashtags shouldn't be too long, so if you have a lengthy slogan you might consider shortening it or creating a slogan just for social media.

ENGAGEMENT

But what about encouraging users to respond with a certain hashtag? It all comes back to your goals and the amount of effort needed on the part of the user. Let's look at the Budweiser #Clydesdales campaign that encouraged users to suggest names for a baby Clydesdale and the time Disney asked us to #ShareYourEars, promising to donate \$5 to the Make-A-Wish Foundation for each picture posted with the hashtag.

Asking users to tweet a picture of themselves in Mickey Mouse ears or suggest a name for a horse are pretty simple tasks. And you won't necessarily find yourself asking this of your customers in B2B marketing. Still, you have to be careful not to ask a lot of your customer base so that they don't tune out. Make the action they need to take simple and understandable.

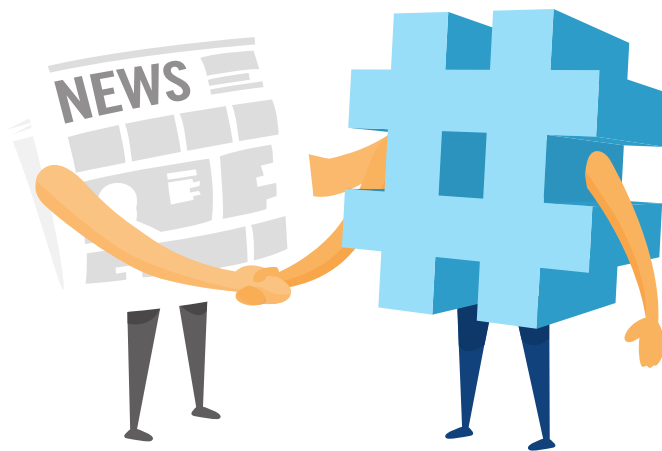
Intel launched the campaign #iamcourage in 2013, which seemingly has nothing to do with their brand. They asked followers to be especially courageous for one week. Followers posted their daily acts of courage with the hashtag.

This campaign was successful because it was built around a social idea rather than a brand idea. “Courage” can be interpreted many different ways, which Intel highlighted on their campaign landing page. They also included a tagboard so those interested could go to Intel’s website and look at the most recent tags using the tweets. It was a smart way to generate site traffic and interest in Intel’s offerings.

When it comes to creating the hashtag for engagement, it also needs to be short, sweet, and to the point. If the hashtag for Budweiser was #NameTheBabyClydesdale, it might not have been as successful because it required a lot more typing and increased the chance for user error.

Come up with a short list of easy-to-remember and easy-to-type hashtags. See if they’ve been used before. It’s not a big deal if they have been, as long as it was either a long time ago or it’s rarely been used. You can claim it as your own.

But before you do any of this, ask yourself if this makes sense for your customers. Do they care about naming horses? Do they want to post pictures of themselves? What incentive do they need to use that hashtag and participate in your campaign? Listen to your customers, and give them something in return that you know they want. Does what you’re offering justify their interaction? Asking them to post pictures and offering a coupon isn’t a great return. But entering them in a chance to win a subscription or a free upgrade to your product might be valuable to them.



HAVE A CONVERSATION

The best way to spread your unique hashtag is to start a conversation. Think of it as the difference between talking to someone and talking at someone. Posting to your Twitter feed is talking at someone. But responding directly to your customers, that’s talking to someone.

If they're talking about you, something relevant to your brand, or they've engaged with you before, feel free to let them know you hear them. Talk to them directly using the hashtag you want to promote. Let them know personally that it exists (without flashing a neon sign).

You should also be responding to the customers who actually use your hashtag. The more activity you can drum up around this phrase, the better.

USING HASHTAGS BY PLATFORM

Social media platforms have crossover, but no two are exactly alike. That's why your hashtag strategy depends on the platform you're using.

TWITTER

You might think the birthplace of the hashtag is the place to go hashtag crazy, but it's not. When you're limited to 140 characters, you need to focus on your messaging and use hashtags to support it. This is even more important when you consider that tweets with fewer than 100 characters have a [higher rate of engagement](#).

The general recommendation is to use 1-2 hashtags in each tweet. Using more than two tags results in a significant, 17-percent drop off in engagement. Meanwhile, posts with two hashtags are twice as likely to be engaged with.

Being limited to only two hashtags means you have to choose the ones that best represent the content or message you're sharing. Relevancy is the name of the game. Keep your tweets short and easy-to-read to make your hashtags shine.

INSTAGRAM

Instagram takes the hashtag game to a whole other level. A picture is worth a thousand words, but that doesn't stop anyone from complementing their photography with a thousand hashtags.

In fact, using as many as 10 hashtags on Instagram is not only really common, but it doesn't work against you the way it does on other platforms.

In part, this is because Instagram automatically hides everything after the third line of your caption. Users can choose “...more” to read on if they genuinely care, or they can look at the picture and keep scrolling. This feature not only keeps your feed looking clean, but it removes the spammy quality present in the other platforms when you go hashtag crazy.

However, beware of spam followers. The more hashtags you use, the more likely you are to attract spam accounts.

So as long as you do your research and stay relevant, hashtag away. Instagram allows up to 30 tags in a post. You really don't need all of those, but just know it's okay to be a little more indulgent on this platform.

FACEBOOK

Hashtag usage on Facebook is similar to usage on Twitter. Stick to one or two and make them relevant. You might even decide to forego a hashtag (gasp!). There is research out there to indicate that posts without hashtags do better than [posts with hashtags](#).

While hashtags are searchable on Facebook, they're not an integral part like they are with Twitter or Instagram. But, using them on Facebook allows you to integrate all of your social media campaigns so you have consistent messaging across all channels.

The best use of hashtags on Facebook is using them in regards to current events, specifically ones used in the “Trending News” section. Of course, it has to make sense for your brand to talk about recent news and possibly controversial subjects. Not every business is going to want to go there.

Facebook is also a great place to stick to brand awareness hashtags. Since it's still the [No. 1 social media platform](#). The best place to get your brand's hashtag in front of the biggest audience is Facebook.

LINKEDIN

Yes, [LinkedIn supports hashtags now](#). But should you be using them? Not regularly.

Hashtags are searchable now, which makes them useful on LinkedIn. But while hashtags are now clickable on the LinkedIn mobile app, they're not on the desktop. So the feature isn't really complete.

Since LinkedIn is a professional networking tool, hashtags haven't really taken off there yet. Don't shy away from the hashtags completely, but don't treat LinkedIn like Twitter, either.

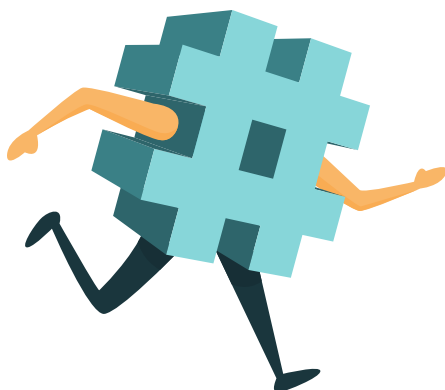
It's OK to be the fun company. Throw a hashtag in once in awhile and see what happens. But don't make it a habit, and definitely limit it to one at a time.

GOOGLE+

Hashtags are unique on Google+, mostly because Google+ is the most unique of the popular social platforms. They're searchable and they connect you to posts, communities, and collections.

Collections are posts, photos, and videos that are categorized by topic. They are moderated by a single person and appear on that person's profile. They can appear to the public or within circles.

These search capabilities highly encourage users to use hashtags. When you join communities on Google+, pay attention to the tags they're using and engage with them. Don't be afraid to use a few in all your posts, with three being your max.



CONCLUSION

As with most things in life, hashtags require balance. Too much is not a good thing. But if you do your research, stay on-topic, and talk to your customers, and you'll be good as gold. DemandZEN wishes you the best of luck on your journey to creating and using hashtags that reach a broader audience.

[Get help today with your hashtag strategy.](#)



ABOUT DEMANDZEN



DemandZEN is a small team of cold callers, marketers, and salespeople dedicated to helping technology companies grow and prosper. We provide demand generation solutions that fit and adapt to our clients' needs.

www.demandzen.com
info@demandzen.com
855.982.1589