



A Dialogue with Clients



All Hail the Hashtag The Benefits (and pitfalls) Of The Pound Sign

What is a hashtag?

A hashtag is a metadata tag that is prefaced by the hash sign, #. Hashtags are used in social media and photo-sharing services such as Twitter or Instagram as a form of user-generated tagging that enables cross-referencing of content by topic or theme.

You can create your own hashtag when it is relevant to your topic. However, you should be careful not to use more than just a few as it would be seen as just bad etiquette and would make your content difficult to read and remember.



#hashtags101



A TIME FOR FACTS

We at Printfast Marketing know that our HVAC, Plumbing and Electrical clients are busy in the field, solving real, tangible problems. But we also know that the world of marketing has gone digital! Here, we address a digital darling that will help your business get the real-world attention it deserves. Enter: The Hashtag.

Do you recall when you first became aware of the existence of “hashtags”? Depending on your “generation”, it may have been a younger niece or nephew that explained the concept, or you may have first noticed it in the scrolling court-side ads at a basketball game, or on a billboard. You may have thought of the hashtag as a passing trend, a blip on the social media landscape. But, increasingly it seems the hashtag is here to stay. The reason is that a hashtag is a powerful tool for not only categorizing and organizing related content but for tapping into unlimited marketing potential. So, how can you best utilize hashtags to get your business in front of the most eyes? #letstalkabouthashtags

First, let’s get a 360 view of what a hashtag is.

A hashtag is comprised of one or many keywords, written without spaces, or punctuation, following the pound sign (#). It refers to a specific topic or idea. Hashtags are typically used on social media platforms and allow users to click on them to connect with related content (other users, and/or content that relates to the topic or idea). They can also act as slogans, witty or compelling copy that sticks in the minds of the people with whom you’re hoping to connect (i.e. followers, customers). Hashtags are free and can be so effective, that there’s no sign that their popularity will slow anytime soon. Hashtags, used properly, can be very rewarding for you and your business. However, there are some risks when used improperly, so read on!

Using Hashtags

Interested in using hashtags to benefit your business? No doubt there is great marketing potential embedded in these space-less, punctuation-less little phrases. Not only

can well-thought-out hashtags drive users to discover you, but they can also connect your potential customers with existing ones, and help categorize campaigns and information in the dizzyingly content-rich online environment. The key, like any tool, is using them correctly. Hashtags are used across society, in breaking news, high profile campaigns, activism, carrying both frivolity and gravity, and in connecting communities.

There is a world of creativity and strategy when deciding how best to utilize hashtags. You can choose to hop on to a hashtag that's already trending, you can use a hashtag (or series of hashtags) with a niche, but universal and enduring appeal (#hvac #plumbing), or you can debut an original hashtag specific to your business. Make yourself aware of the differences between these three usages, and be sure that any existing hashtag trend you align yourself with is in alignment with your brand's message. It's all about the company you keep, in this case!



How To Create A Hashtag

Countless books have been written on the subject of “trending”. How does a trend become a trend? While there will always be a magical elusiveness surrounding this topic, when it comes to creating successful hashtags there are a few formulas to help your hashtag gain momentum. Unless you're raking your hashtag across a Japanese sand garden, you're competing in a congested arena. You must find a way to stand out. You can choose to differentiate yourself by category (i.e. #hvac #plumbing #electricians #electriciansdoitwiththelightson) or by hopping on to an already trending hashtag campaign (making sure it's relevant to your business, of course). You can also choose to create your very own, business-specific hashtag (#abcplumbing #cooldownwithabchvac). The truth is, some hashtags will gain a following, and some will remain in obscurity. To increase the likelihood of exposure, keep your hashtags relatively simple. Because hashtags don't benefit from the clarity of spacing and punctuation, they must be brief to keep them legible, and repeatable/sharable. Simplicity goes a long way. Additionally, creating a witty or memorable hashtag can also assist in making your hashtag stand out. If it relates to a specific campaign or event, encourage your customers to share their experiences using that hashtag. Make sure it makes sense, and that it portrays your business in the best light. Thankfully, hashtags don't cost a penny, so you can experiment with the “tried and true”, and explore your creative side!

On The Subject Of Creativity

Remember that creativity doesn't mean anything in this case if your message isn't clear. Clarify your intended message and aim to hit that target with your hashtag. If you read it, would you be clear about its meaning, or at least intrigued enough to investigate further? Can it be confused with another topic that's not yours? Make sure it serves your purpose and communicates the values and personality of your business.

A Couple Of Things To Avoid

Earlier, we mentioned the risky side of hashtags. Even the best-laid plans can backfire, and anything you put in the public eye is up for scrutiny. So, scrutinize your hashtags before the public can. If you're planning on jumping on an existing hashtag, research it. Make sure its meaning aligns with what you plan to use it for. There are plenty of examples of marketing plans gone wrong, examples of companies mistakenly adopting a hashtag that was incongruous to their company's messaging (and sometimes even offensive). Make sure there isn't any bad press or tweets surrounding your hashtag, lest someone confuse that with your business. Don't let lazy hashtagging happen to you. Stay vigilant and your due diligence will be rewarded.



Conclusion

Hashtags are a fabulous way to increase organic visibility on social media. When you are clear in your messaging, you can be clever, straightforward, or a combination of both! As long as you're honest and in service of your business's message, you can increase brand awareness and customer engagement.

So, bring that pound sign (and your marketing) into the 21st Century by using hashtags! #goodluck
#fromyourfriendsatprintfast

About the author

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Jennifer Schemke has years of experience writing for theater and film, as well as for multiple clients in the marketing space. She brings humor and relatability to her pieces, allowing them to effectively reach their target audience. She holds an MFA from DePaul University in Chicago.



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