



# So, Instagram is hiding likes. What's next?

A guide to what's ahead for brands,  
agencies, influencers, and users.



A REPORT BY

**SOCIALQ**

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# The Context.

**INSTAGRAM HAS BEEN BETA TESTING HIDING LIKES IN THE UNITED STATES. HERE'S A GUIDE TO WHAT YOU REALLY WANT (AND NEED) TO KNOW.**



Don't get us wrong, removing likes is a Very Big Thing™. As a social media-driven agency, we've been constantly been sharing articles, having formal (and informal) discussions, and listening to the fears of our clients. Now that the media blitz has passed and we've done our homework, we can strategically share our thoughts after giving the new format a beta test ourselves. That being said, we may know a lot more than we did previously but there's still a lot of things unclear about impact on the future of social, digital marketing, and business strategy. This is why

we've saved you the trouble and created a report about the current state of Instagram and what it means for marketing as a whole -- consider this your user guide to what you really need to know. Additionally, we know everyone loves tailored content served to them, so we've even broken it down by user journey (brands, agencies, users, and influencers). To top it off, we've included a few thoughts on where we think this is heading, and our most noteworthy predictions for 2020.

With Resonance,  
**SOCIALQ AGENCY**



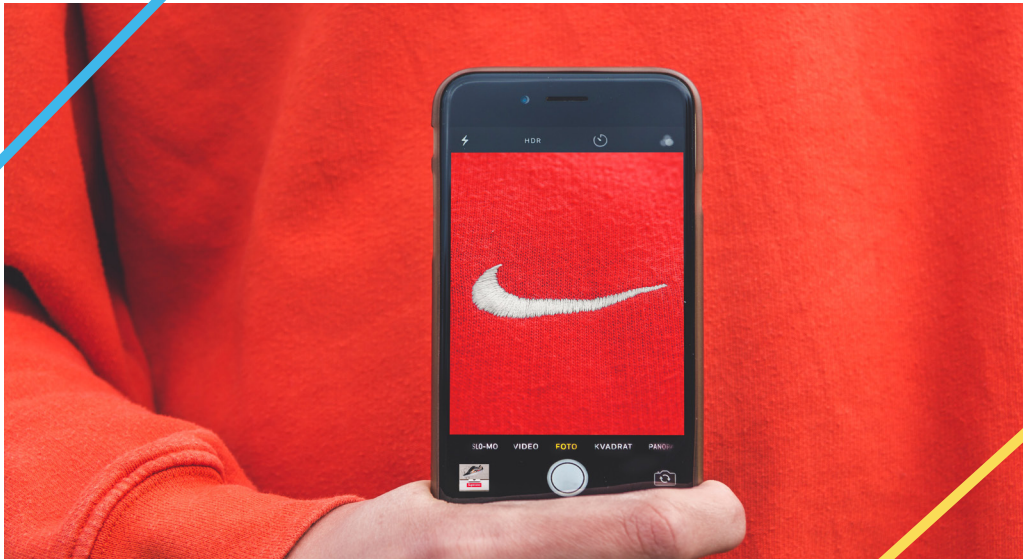
# The Hot Takes.

Here are the 3 key facts to inform your next conversation - whether at a staff meeting or a dinner party.

- 1. Instagram is not removing, but hiding likes.** Likes will remain a feature, but the number of likes will only be visible on a post to the user who owns the profile. In short, you can see who and how many people liked your post, but your audience can only see who and not the number.
- 2. So yes, you can still see who liked an Instagram post - with some digging.** Users can click "others" to view the aggregated list of profiles who liked a post. If you really want to know who liked a post - or how many people liked a post - on the desktop all you have to do is copy and paste the full list into an excel spreadsheet.
- 3. There is no immediate change to platform metrics and analytics within the app.** Metrics can be measured within each individual's own platform. You'll still be able to see how many likes your post has gotten, it just won't be public facing. However, this will just not be public-facing.

A GUIDE TO INSTAGRAM HIDING LIKES

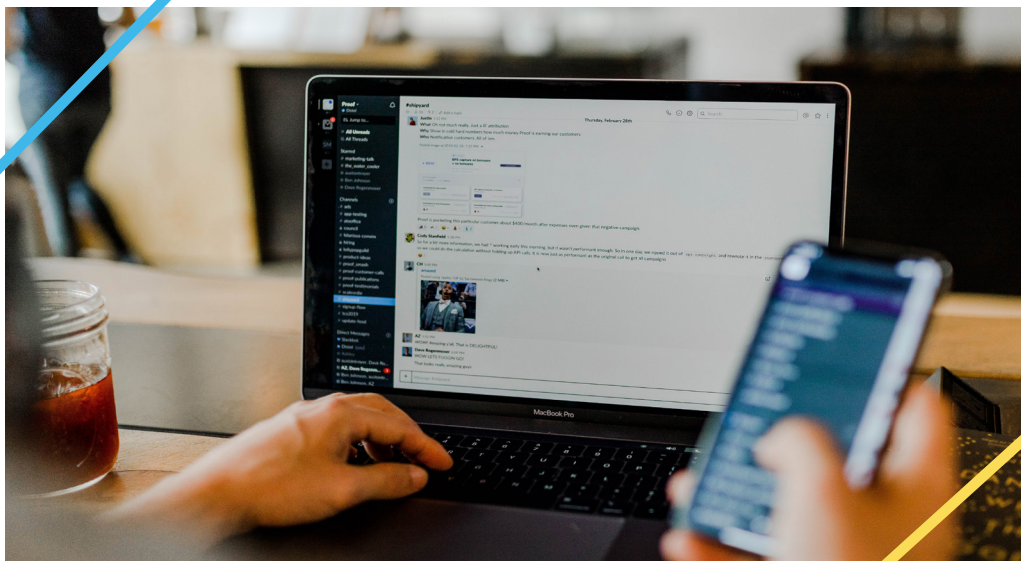
# For Brands.



- 1. Content Is Queen (Now, And Always).** If you're not already doing so, start investing in high-quality content production. Without obvious visual popularity, posts will need to rely on creativity now more than ever.
- 2. Test, test, test.** Leverage the fact that there is less risk in posting something organically now, and use this as an opportunity to try out new ideas and tactics. If they perform well, throw some ad dollars behind them and take the learnings back to creative.
- 3. Don't be fooled by the next obvious vanity metric.** Yes, this means follower count. Remember when brands dumped money into gaining page likes on Facebook and then it became irrelevant? Yeah, us too. Let's not go there again.
- 4. Focus on where you can actually win: paid media.** We'll also take a moment to shout out testing again one more time - gaining insight and learnings about your audiences is the best way you can grow and nurture engagement.

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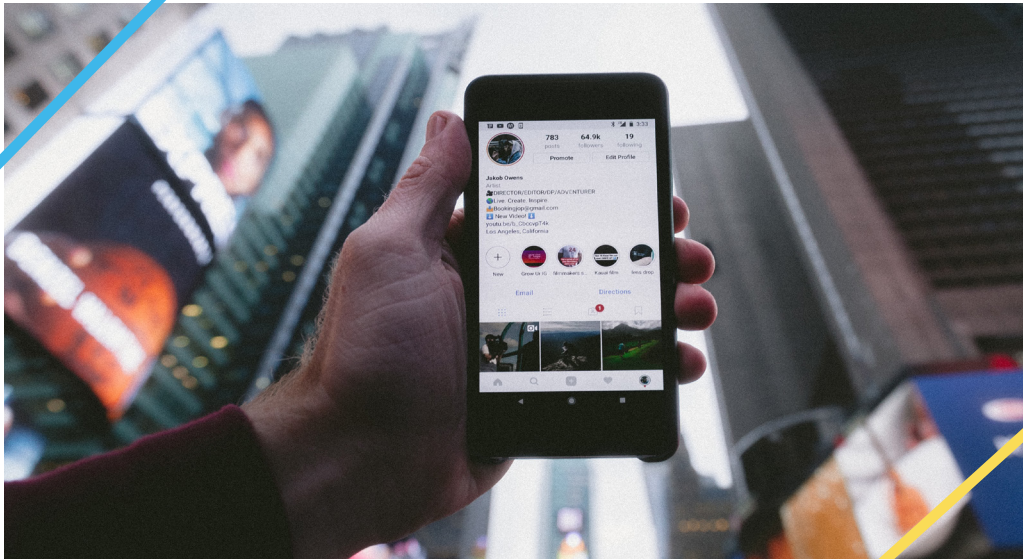
# For Agencies.



- 1. Make paid media and content testing the center of your social strategy.** Your ratio of time and resources spent on paid versus organic should be a solid 80% / 20% split. Hiding likes is just another step towards the platform being completely driven by ad dollars. Plus, this is where you're going to see the most results in terms of eventual sales and learnings.
- 2. Take a moment to re-educate your clients on the new role of organic social media.** The Instagram grid is the new landing page (you heard it here first, folks). It's the essential credential for new users to trust and vet brands, and it's also paramount when it comes to brand discovery.
- 3. Tell your clients to stop any major investments on vanity metrics.** Instead, focus on tactics that will drive real growth like affiliate programs, content production, strong influencer partnerships, and branded content.
- 4. Change your reporting and KPIs ASAP.** Only rely on paid media metrics and sales reports to measure success. Basically, let's make sure "engagement" is nowhere on your weekly media reports.

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# For Influencers.



- 1. Understand the shift in your value.** Your role as a key opinion leader is now more important than ever. Focus on brand partnerships that are authentic and a natural fit for your storytelling and capabilities. Keep in mind your essential golden rules: less is more, and quality over quantity.
- 2. Look for ways of building attribution models for yourself.** Chances are that affiliate marketing services will be on the rise and more important than ever. Find the right way to measure success for your business model.
- 3. Tap into what you can actually do for a brand.** Now that you're not weighed down by vanity metrics, re-imagine what a brand partnership looks like. Brainstorm how you can collaborate with a brand to make better content, tell richer stories, and drive each brand in an innovative direction.
- 4. Remember, change is hard.** Listen, you might be asked to screenshot your post's engagement. When asked to do this and the numbers aren't great, come prepared with the knowledge in this report to impress your brands on how to re-think influencer partnerships.



A GUIDE TO INSTAGRAM HIDING LIKES

# For Users.



**1. Yes, this will be less social pressure.** Whether or not you believe in Instagram's good intentions, this relief of pressure to achieve a certain amount of likes per post is lifted (at least from your audience's perspective).

**2. A little vanity or pride is ok.** If you're a non-influencer average Instagram user with a large following, it's going to be frustrating when the validation of likes is hidden from the world. We get it, building an organic following authentically without brand partnerships is a tough feat - and we applaud your hustle.

**3. Watch for changes in your habits and behaviors on Instagram.** For those of you questioning the purpose of social media in your life, this is the time to really watch your own behaviors and habits. How does this new update affect the way you use Instagram?

**4. Remember, human behavior likes to measure things.** Hiding the outward validation of likes per post may take away the fun of posting. Instead, find a new way you can use Instagram beyond measuring your success through chasing likes.

# Our Take.

## Clearly we're not going to leave you without a nice #IMHO. Here's what we think this all really means.


From a product standpoint, this is a very controversial change in the sense that "likes" have been around since Instagram's inception. But in the grand scheme of things, this is only another small step in the direction of where Instagram really wants to - and will - go. Is that direction aimed at benefiting mental health and people's lives as they claim? Most likely not, despite the potential positive effects this decision may have.

At the core, this is a strategic and calculated move towards further monetizing the app as an ad platform and to inspire more ad dollars spent towards paid media. The storyline worked out to their benefit, and we say "bravo". However, there's a lot we still don't know about the future decisions of Instagram and how the social media landscape will continue to evolve. From our perspective, this is only the first of many changes to come for Instagram (AKA, Facebook).





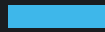
## **Lastly, here are a few questions for you to ponder as this new iteration - and era - of Instagram unfolds.**

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1. Instagram stories gave us room to post content that is temporary, not post-worthy, or a good fit our feeds. How will a lack of validation change the role of stories?
  2. By releasing the pressure of likes, are we also releasing the pressure for standardized measures of what content is good enough to post on the feed?
  3. Are we going to care about the grid anymore?
  4. Will the cadence of posting increase or decrease?
  5. Is this truly a step towards improving mental health pressures incited by social media validation?
  6. How will this affect media buying trends and the communication of key media metrics?
  7. What happened to "What on your mind?"



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