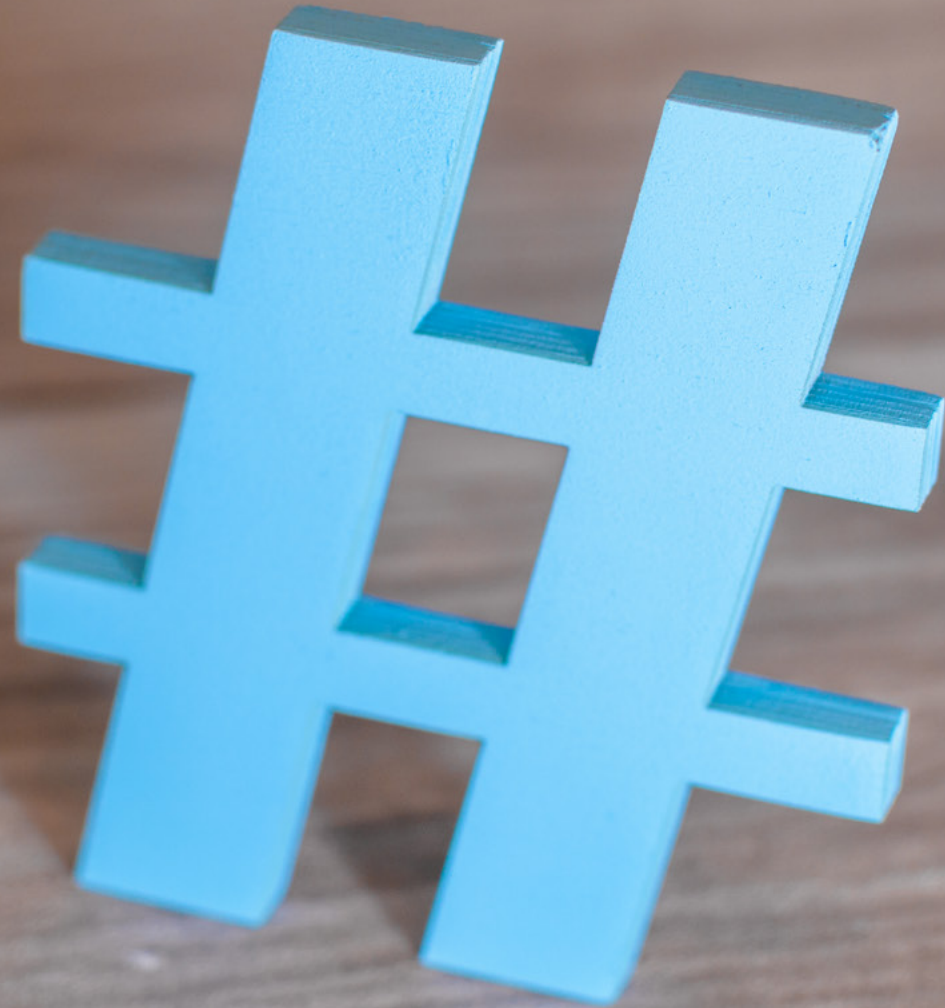6 TIPS FOR
# MORE EFFECTIVE HASHTAGS

act-on

**H**ashtags are a social media marketer's best friend. They can double the reach of social media updates, let you ride the tide of trending topics, reveal what's hot and what's not at any given moment, give you a way to search for content across the sea of information online – and give you a way to be found as well.

Used correctly, hashtags will amplify your message like nothing else on social media can do. All you have to do is apply the right ones at the right times, with a bit of finesse.

To give you the tools you need to create and manage your hashtag strategies, we've put together this eBook to show you what hashtags are, how they work, and how you can use them to achieve your business goals.

1. **Why Use Hashtags?**

2. **Hashtags 101**

3. **Types of Hashtags**

4. **Which Social Media Platforms Work with Hashtags?**

5. **Choose the Best Hashtags**

6. **Hashtag Tools to Speed Up Your Work**

# 1. Why Use Hashtags?

**Hashtags are essentially keywords that give you a way to promote your social posts, which can exponentially expand the reach of your social media updates.**

Recent research underscores how hashtags amplify engagement:

- Tweets with hashtags receive 2X more engagement than those without hashtags. (Buddy Media)

- Tweets that contain one or more hashtags were 55% more likely to be retweeted than tweets that did not. (Dan Zarrella)

Social media engagement begins with sharing your message with your connections, who in turn share your message (now their message) with their own connections. These interactions behave like a conversation; they're a medium of dynamic engagement, not static messages blasted to the masses like traditional advertising. If you're a messaging control freak, giving your audience the power to reshape your message any way they want is scary. But if you're trying to spread an idea around the world, it's gold.

## In practice, hashtags let you:

- Increase the chances your social updates will get liked and shared (i.e., promotion)

- Increase the reach of your tweets, posts and other updates (i.e., distribution)

- Participate in discussions and trends

- Search for information

- Contribute as people connect separate pieces of information and updates to create a crowdsourced body of content

# 2. Hashtags 101

## Let's start with how to construct a hashtag:

- **Keep hashtags short.**
  Some experts recommend hashtags be kept to six characters or less. That's a nice goal, but even a general hashtag like "#marketing" or "#business" would break six characters (which is why "#mktg" is so popular). Don't sacrifice the right hashtag for the shortest one.

- **Don't use spaces in hashtags.**
  The one exception to this is on Tumblr, but anywhere else a hashtag with a space won't work. Your hashtag "#B2B tips" will register only as "B2B."

- **Don't use special characters or punctuation (&, %, !) in hashtags.**
  These effectively end the hashtag, and everything after it will be recognized only as a tacked-on word. An example: "#Leslie'sDog" will read as "#Leslie." Most platforms do allow an under_score.

- **Make sure there is a blank space before the hashtag.**
  Neither "1#mytag" nor "good#mytag" will allow "#mytag" to function as a hashtag.

- **Don't use only numbers.**
  According to Twitter, if you write #1 or #123 the hashtag will not be hyperlinked and is therefore not searchable. However, if you include letters following the numbers in the hashtag (e.g. "#123go"), then the hashtag will work correctly. And you can use numbers in hashtags that follow letters, like this: "#Business101."

- **Don't use a hashtag within a hashtag.**
  "#USA#1" won't work; all that's read as a hashtag is the first part: "#USA."

## More Hashtag Dos and Don'ts:

- **Don't use hashtags that aren't related to your update.**
  Even if it does get some short-term exposure, you'll be labeled a spammer.

- **Incorporate hashtags into the words of your update, so you don't have to tack them on at the end.**
  This saves space and makes your updates look more fluent. For example, "Top 5 Ways to Build Your Email Marketing List url.com/xyz #emailmarketing" could be shortened to "Top 5 Ways to Build Your #EmailMarketing List url.com/xyz."

- **Choose hashtags that are easy to spell.**
  This is especially important for campaign and branding hashtags.

- **Use hashtags that are easy to remember.**
  This is another tip for brand and campaign hashtags. Memorable hashtags are also helpful if you want to start a movement or launch a trending hashtag, like "#FireColbert."

- **Capitalize the first letter of multi-word hashtags to make them easier to read.**
  For example: "#ThisIsSoEasy" vs. "#thisissoeasy." This makes it easier and faster for people to understand the hashtag, and that makes it more likely that they will share it.

- **Consider context.**
  Social media has too many examples of content being published with perfectly innocent intentions, only to become a public relations nightmare when someone took it out of context, or a later event happened that altered the context of the update.

- **Make sure the words in your hashtag don't have other meanings, including in other languages.**
  Remember that you may get global exposure.

# 3. Types of Hashtags

## Branding hashtags

Your brand or tagline can be a hashtag. This can help when people search on your brand, and it can tie your tagline and brand more closely together.
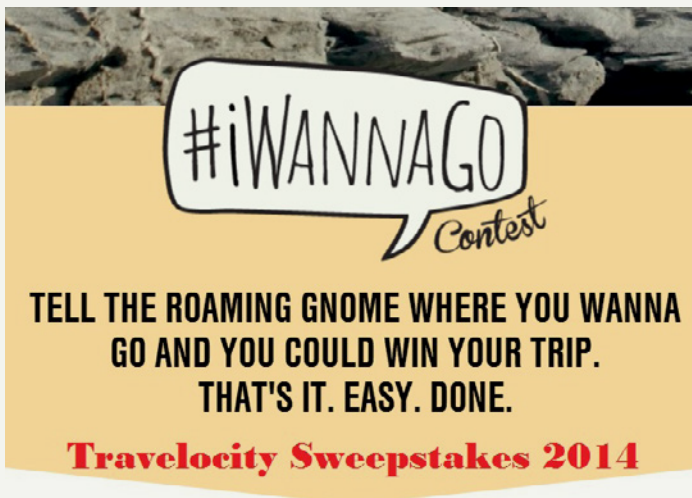


## Campaign hashtags

Every campaign you do should have a hashtag. In 2014 Travelocity used "#iWannaGo" and turned the campaign landing page into a social hub. The landing page itself received over 32 million impressions, and 95% of visitors scrolled below the fold to see more content.

## Product hashtags

You can use product names or categories as hashtags. In the example below, Piper is a home security and home automation company with a nifty camera-equipped night vision device. Here's an example of a product hashtag using "#Pipernv".

Notice that the author of the tweet also tweeted at the company with the "@hello_piper" handle. Why do that? Because the company might retweet this, as it mentions and promotes their product. The company may also be tracking #Pipernv, and might retweet this just to amplify someone's positive opinion of their product.



## Event hashtags

See the event hashtag ("#CES") in the tweet above? Anyone who searches that hashtag will bring up that tweet. Whether it's a conference, a wedding, or a webinar, event hashtags can be the thread that holds everyone's experience of an event together on a moment-to-moment basis.

The ultimate examples of event hashtags are "Twitter chat" or "tweet chat" hashtags. Here are a few tweets from the tweet stream of a recent chat about content marketing:

## Lifestyle hashtags

Lifestyle hashtags tend to reflect some aspect of a cultural characteristic or aspiration. Lifestyle hashtags sometimes behave much like campaign hashtags, and vice versa. But isn't this what marketers are hoping for – that a brand begins to speak to an entire lifestyle? A few brands, hashtags, and products have achieved branding nirvana. Apple products are presented as if they're part of a lifestyle. So are GoPro cameras and the RedBull energy drink. Say "Rolex" or "Gucci" and what comes to mind?

**The "#outdoorlife" hashtag used here is an example of a lifestyle hashtag:**



**This is an example of that same hashtag, now being reused by a retailer to gain exposure for their products.**



## Trending and niche trending hashtags

One of the best things about social media is that it lets you hook into other peoples' successes, or to chime in on the topic of the moment. Any hashtag that's enjoying a spike in popularity is a trending hashtag.

*Your Twitter pages displays trending hashtags; you can set this to display local trends if that's useful.*
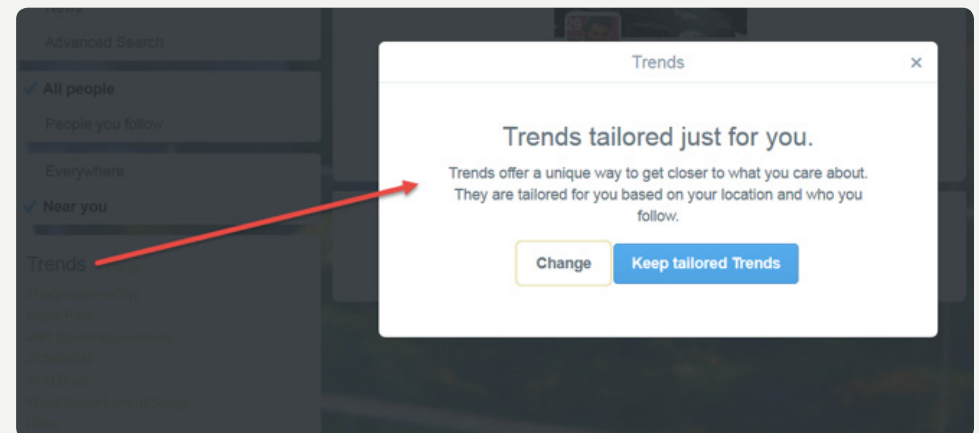
# 4. Which Social Media Platforms Work with Hashtags?

Hashtags are so intensively used on Twitter that you could be forgiven for thinking that's where they started out. But the hashtag's first use was actually on the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) to label groups and topics, way back in 2000. Hashtag use on Twitter didn't take hold until 2007.

> ...how do you feel about using # (pound) for groups. As in #barcamp [msg]?
> —Chris Messina, ("factoryjoe"), August 23, 2007

Now every major social media platform except LinkedIn uses hashtags in some way. If you've been limiting your hashtag use just to Twitter, it's definitely time to step out.

**Here are the nine other networks that let you search and sort information by hashtags:**

**Facebook**

**Instagram**

**Pinterest**

**YouTube**

**Google+**

**Tumblr**

**Vine**

**Flickr**

**Google Search**

While you can use hashtags on all these platforms, each network has its own particular best practices for hashtag use.

## Twitter:

Twitter is hashtag central; only Instagram uses hashtags more intensely. But while Twitter is awash in hashtags, your tweets shouldn't be. Limit yourself to two hashtags if you can, and never more than three. Several studies have shown that engagement drops off when tweets contain more than two hashtags.

Hashtags are sometimes used on Twitter for Twitter chats. If you've never participated in a Twitter chat, it's time to try it out, even just for a few minutes. Twitter chats move fast and are a little confusing, but they work very well for some audiences. All you need for a Twitter chat is a specified time, a topic, and a hashtag. The hosts of Twitter chats often include a special guest who answers questions. When the chat starts, everybody begins tweeting questions and answers and comments, with each tweet using that particular Twitter chat's hashtag.

If you're hosting a webinar or other event, give attendees a hashtag for the event so they can tweet about it in real time, generating conversation and publicity for your event and brand.

**Tweets with hashtags receive 2X more engagement than those without hashtags.**

**24%** Only 24% of the measured tweets contained hashtags.

**21%** Tweets with one or two hashtags have 21% higher engagement than those with three or more hashtags.

**17%** Tweets that use more than two hashtags actually show a 17% drop in engagement.

## Facebook:

Facebook was slow to adopt hashtags. They weren't incorporated on the largest social network until 2013. Even today, hashtag use on Facebook is relatively low, and brands are more likely to use hashtags than regular people are.

Some Facebook experts say hashtags can help with engagement, though there are just as many other experts who say hashtags on Facebook aren't worth the trouble. Some point to a study by Edgerank Checker that concluded using hashtags on Facebook could even hurt engagement. Try testing to see if they work.

## LinkedIn

Hashtags don't work at all on LinkedIn. The business-to-business network did try out hashtags in 2013, but scrapped them fast.

Because LinkedIn doesn't use hashtags, make sure you don't post the exact same social media updates to Twitter, Google+, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The hashtags meant for the other networks are just clutter on LinkedIn, so take them out before posting.
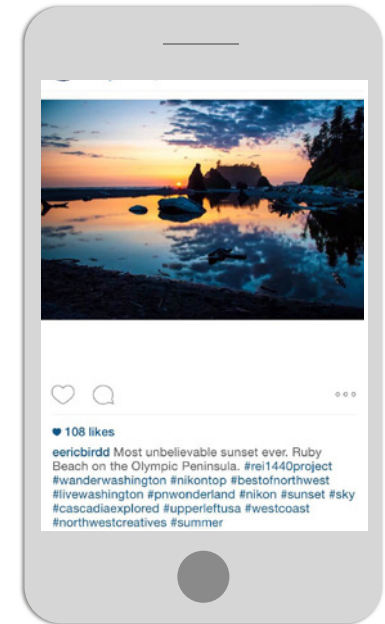
## Instagram

Instagram beats out even Twitter for hashtag use. It's not uncommon to see ten or more hashtags attached to an image

However, Piqora's late 2013 research showed Instagram engagement falls off after about seven or eight hashtags.

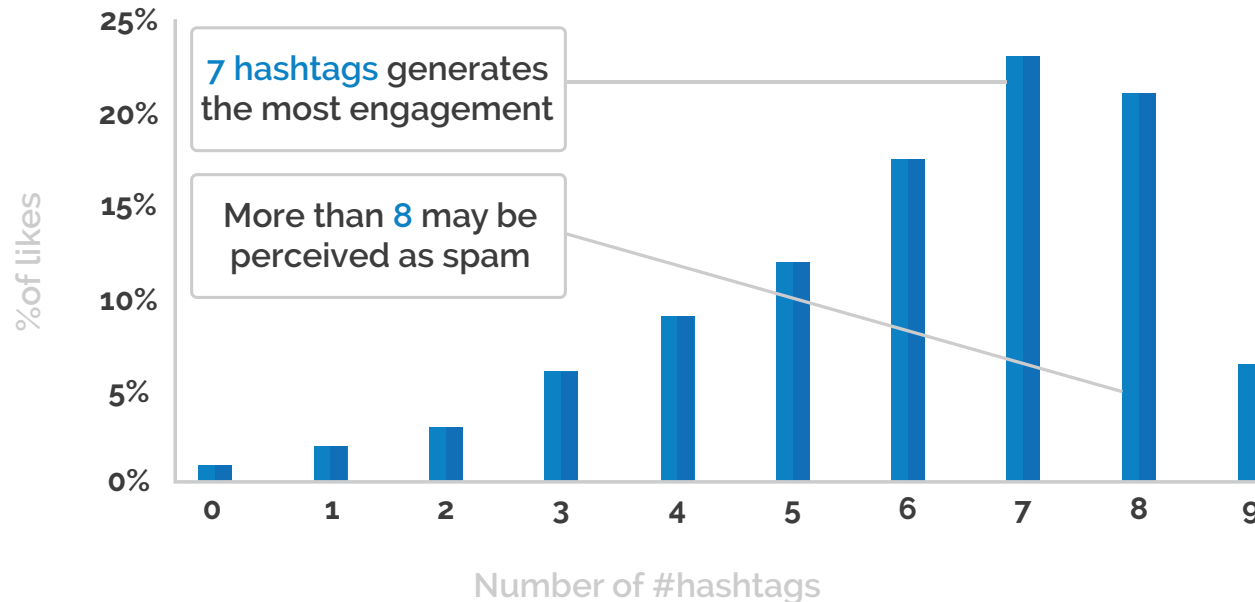Another study done in 2013 by TrackMaven, found 11 hashtags to be the sweet spot. Note that TrackMaven's data was specifically for accounts with less than 1,000 followers, making it especially relevant for small businesses or those just starting out on Instagram.

The key takeaway here? Don't be shy about using hashtags on Instagram. Whether the optimal number of hashtags is nine or eleven probably doesn't matter as much as how well the hashtags are chosen, and of course how good the picture or video looks.



*It may seem excessive, but multiple hastags means your photo will get many more views on Instragram.*

### Likes per 100 posts based on number of hashtags



7 hashtags generates the most engagement

More than 8 may be perceived as spam

%of likes

Number of #hashtags

**Courtesy of Piquora Instagram Study, December 2013.**

## Google+:

**Google's social network is embracing hashtags more and more. There are a number of tricks and features you should be aware of:**

- Google+ may add hashtags for you via its "auto-hashtags" feature. Sometimes that's a convenience, sometimes not. Google+ doesn't always add the hashtag a marketer would have chosen.

- If you click on any hashtag on the Big G's social network you'll see a box in the upper left corner of the page listing similar hashtags. The rest of the page will show posts with the same hashtag you clicked.

- Google+ also lets you add hashtags to your comments, as well as your posts.

- Check out the "related hashtags" functionality on Google+, too. It's yet another way to find the perfect hashtag.

- Pay attention to the autofill feature when you type a hashtag into a Google+ post or comment. It works just like the search autofill.

## Pinterest:

Hashtags work best in Pinterest when used in pin descriptions. You can use hashtags on board descriptions, but most sources say it doesn't help rankings much.

Hashtags are clickable on Pinterest, and once you click a hashtag in a pin you'll be brought to a whole page of pins that Pinterest thinks are related to that hashtag. You'll even get the option of following that hashtag, as if it were a Pinterest board.

## Tumblr:

Tumblr's hashtags can have a space between words. So a hashtag like "#internet marketing" will work on Tumblr. Any other site would see that hashtag only as "#internet." Tumblr also calls hashtags "tags." You can add tags to your Tumblr post by just entering keywords into the "tags" area near the bottom of the post creation screen. Tumblr will convert them into hashtags, and add the hashtag symbol for you.

### YouTube

Hashtags aren't too big a deal on YouTube, but you'll see them. Most hashtags are found in the comments. You can search by hashtag on YouTube and it will give you different results than if you searched with the same keyword (e.g., "#emailmarketing" vs. "email marketing"). If you want more views on YouTube, a little judicious hashtag use might get you an edge.

### Vine

If you add a hashtag to a Vine, it will show up when someone searches for that hashtag. Like YouTube, there's an opportunity here; not many people are using hashtags on their Vine videos.

### Flickr

Flickr lets you search by hashtag, and like YouTube, it will give you different results than if you search by keyword.

### There's a tool for that…

If you want to see hashtag performance across a number of platforms all at once, check out Tagboard.com It will show you all the updates for a given hashtag across the major social media platforms in a lovely Pinterest-like layout. It's free, too.
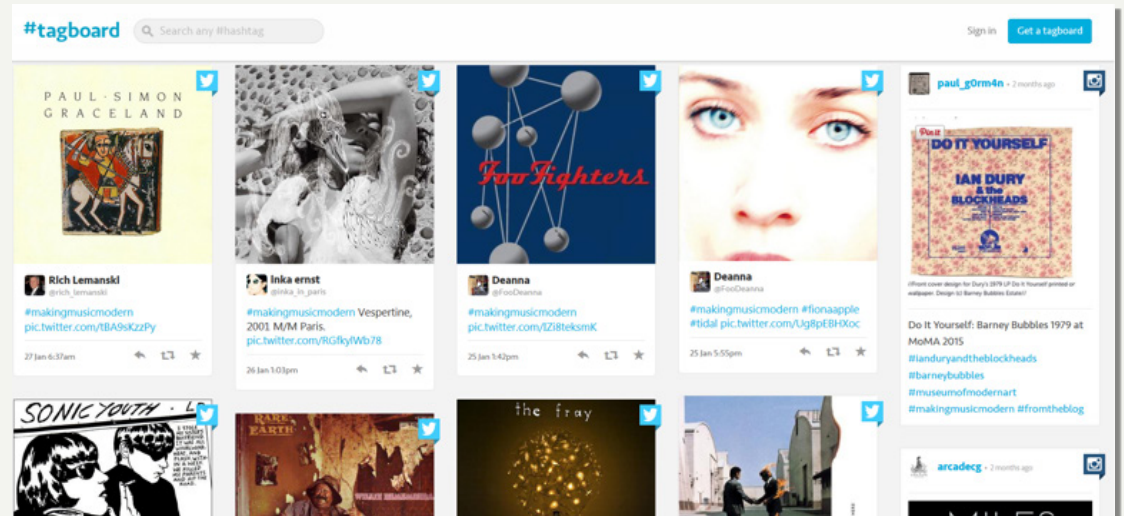
## How many hashtags to use?

These are the generally recommended number of hashtags to use on each social network, based on over a dozen different industry studies and surveys. You can start with these hashtag counts, but things change fast, so always keep experimenting.

| | Facebook | Twitter | Instagram | Google+ | Search | YouTube | Pinterest | Tumblr | Vine | Flickr |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Search by hashtag? | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Click on hashtags? | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Reccommended # of hashtags to use per update | 1-2 | 1-2 | 9-11 | 3-5 | 1 | 2-3 | 1-2 | 1-4 | 1-2 | Up to 7 |

# 5. Choose the Best Hashtags

Do you have a little experience with picking keywords for search engine optimization? Even a smidgen? It's going to help you a lot with choosing hashtags. Just as you'd pick a keyword, pick hashtags that have a good amount of search volume, but not so much volume that your piece of content will get drowned out.

For example, take the keyword "advertising" and the hashtag #advertising. They both get a lot of searches, but they also have an enormous amount of competition. If you picked the keyword "ppc advertising" and the hashtag "#PPCAdvertising", you'd still get a lot of search exposure, but the competition would be dramatically less. Your tweets would be more likely to be seen.

**Here's an example of two targeted hashtags in the same niche:#PPCadvertising and #PPCmanagement**

**Go wide – and deep**
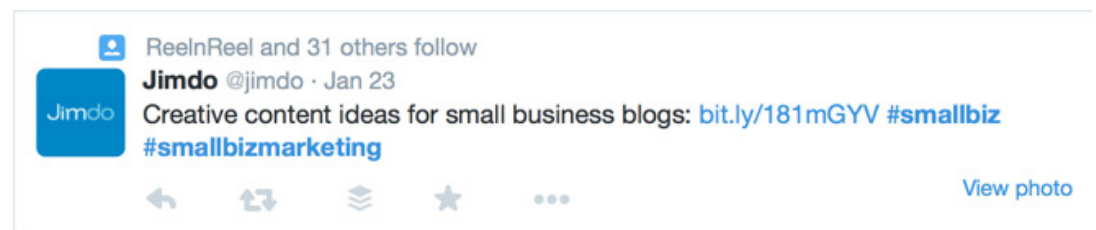
Often marketers will hedge their bets and include both a high-volume hashtag and a more specific hashtag, like this:

## Go local when you can

If you're a local business, try to add your town or neighborhood's name to the keyword you use for a hashtag, and include a hashtag to show your location. As a local business, you really don't need to be attracting traffic from users who aren't close enough to do business with you.

Uprooted @uprootednyc · May 23
11th st boardwalk in Ocean City, NJ. Bring the sunshine home with you! #oceancitynj #memorialday #funinthesun

#KeepItBadman

BadMan Media
@BadManMedia
#SMM #SEO #WebDesign #VideoProduction #Marketing #Events #PR #SocialMedia
badmanmedia.co.uk
4:16 PM - 19 Mar 2015

*This post, with eight hashtags, is about six too many for Twitter.*

## Just as you don't stuff keywords, don't stuff hashtags

We've mentioned this earlier, but it bears repeating. Too many hashtags and you look like you're over-promoting. In a worst-case scenario, you might even get labeled a spammer.

## Use hashtags your ideal audience would search for and respond to – or that influencers use

If you don't know the words your audience prefers to describe your company or product or service, or its benefits, then before you do anything else, do a little research. Look at the hashtags your competitors and partners use, and the analysts in your space. Look at the choices the social influencers make. Think about what works for you on SEO, and experiment with hashtag versions of the keywords that convert really well for your other types of content.

# 6. Hashtag Tools to Speed Up Your Work

## 1. Tagboard

This tool lets you see activity for a hashtag across all the major social networks. It also recommends related hashtags, gives you a snapshot view of the hashtag's activity trend, posts per hour, and sentiment. The limited version is free, with professional and enterprise versions available.
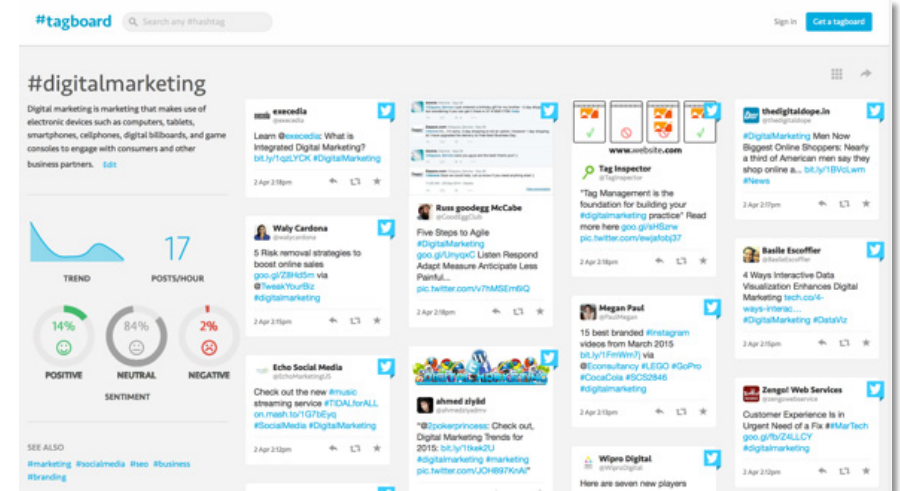


## 2. Ritetag

Ritetag is an at-a-glance way to see which hashtags to use while you're actually writing your updates. It has a browser extension for Buffer, Hootsuite, Twitter, Chrome, and Firefox, among others. It's a paid tool, but there is a 30-day free trial. What makes it special? Ritetag color-codes hashtags to show you which ones are best to use.
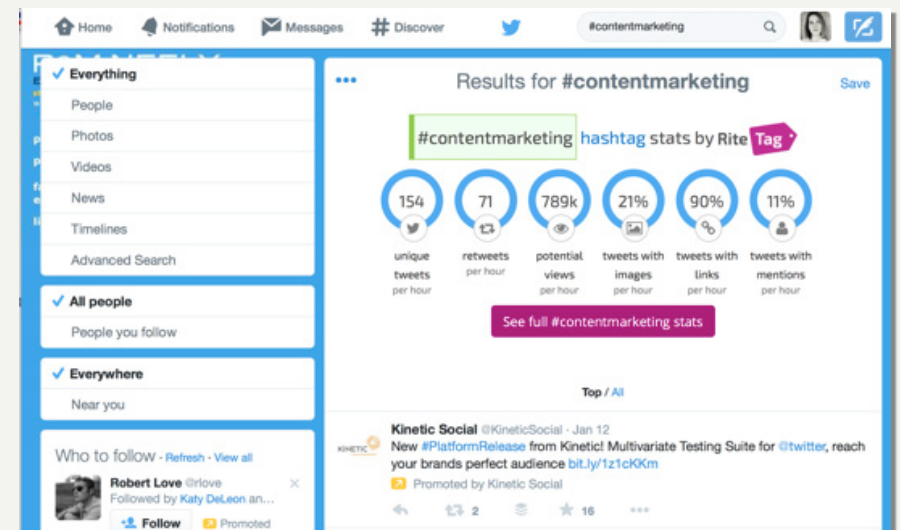
### 3. Hashtagify.me

An oldie-but-a-goodie, this tool will show you how often a hashtag has been used and what its related hashtags are. It also shows recent tweets using that hashtag, which is a nice way to spot check that you're using a hashtag without more than one meaning. You'll also be able to see top influencers for each hashtag. The basics are free, but premium tools that let you go deeper into statistics on individual hashtags.





### 4. Keyhole

If you need hashtag data for Facebook and Instagram, this is one of the best choices. Keyhole also includes data for Twitter, and it gives you a stunning amount of information for each hashtag. You'll get geographical data, top sites, demographics, a word cloud of related hashtags, top posts, a hashtag trending graph and even a pie chart for device usage. If you want to do detailed hashtag research, this should do the job. Three-day free trial.
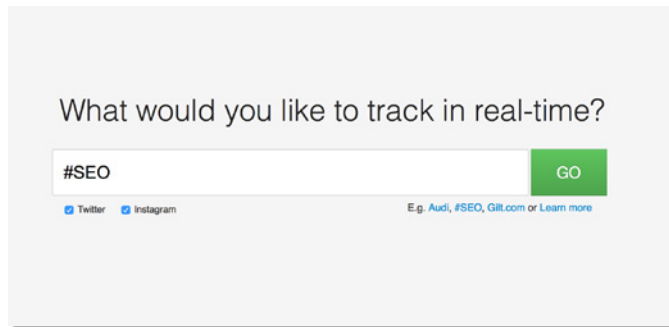
### 5. Trendsmap

Is your business local? Then you should know about this tool. Trendsmap does only show hashtag information for Twitter, and it only works for cities or large towns, but it still gives valuable insights into which hashtags are being used most in your area.
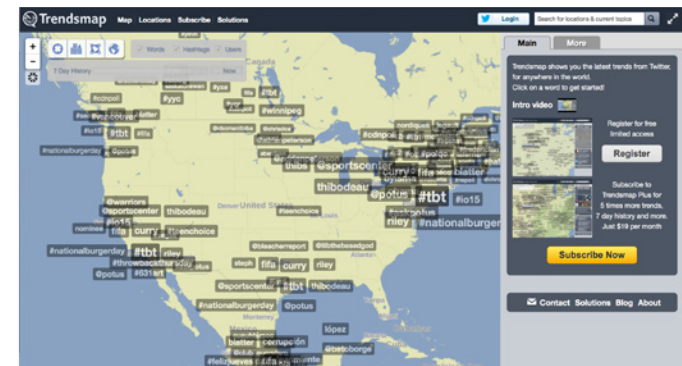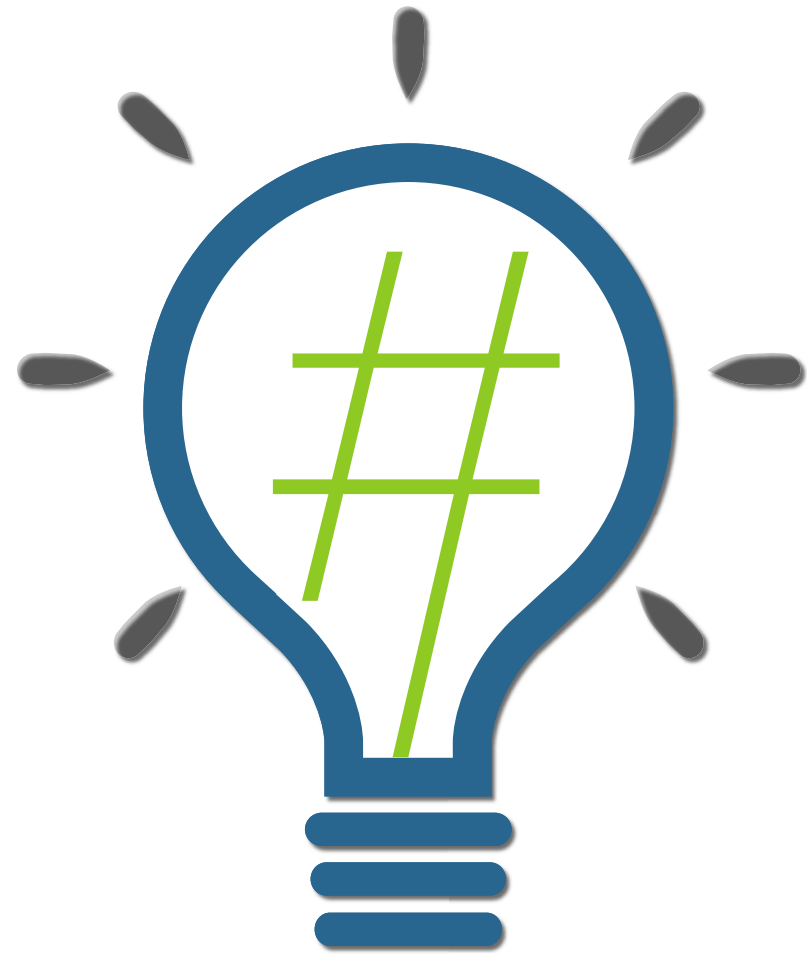
# Conclusion

Hashtags are not an exact science. We've outlined practices currently designated as recommended and offered research to support them, but:
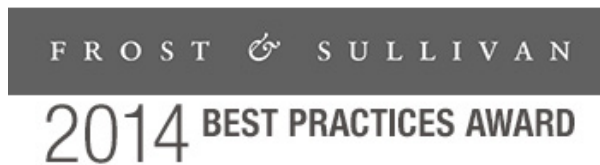
As you grow more comfortable with hashtags, you may find certain tricks work well for you. Some supposedly "best" practices may fall flat. That's okay. Just keep tracking your results. Learn from your mistakes, and make the most of your successes. That's the best any social media marketer can do.

Besides, this is social media. As soon as you think you've got it all figured out, it changes. So keep testing and rethinking, and stay in touch with the trends.

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FORRESTER WAVE
Lead-To-Revenue Management Platform Vendors, Q1 2014

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Act-On Software is a marketing automation company delivering innovation that empowers marketers to do the best work of their careers. Act-On is the only integrated workspace to address the needs of the customer experience, from brand awareness and demand generation, to retention and loyalty. With Act-On, marketers can drive better business outcomes and see higher customer lifetime value. The Act-On platform provides marketers with power they can actually use, without the need for a dedicated IT resource.

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