

# Happy Birthday, Instagram: Social Media Giant Turns 12



The social media juggernaut has come a long way from the humble platform where we shared pictures of our food and [cats](#). With 545 million downloads in 2021, Instagram is the [second most popular app](#) of all time, beating out other titans such as Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp.

It's also one of the most massive sources of unstructured data out there—with users posting new photos and videos every second.

Having said that, how has the app evolved since its inception, and what are some of the amazing ways it has been used throughout its short life? Let's look at its evolution and how data and technology have played a role.

## Instagram's Bourbon-filled Origin Story

Back in October of 2010, Instagram launched for iOS users only. Android users had to wait two more years to get the app. Initially, the app was called [Burbn](#). The founder, Kevin Systrom, was a fan of fine whiskies and bourbons and wanted an app where users could share [photos](#) showing where they were over the weekend, and what they ate and drank. He also wanted users to have the ability to tag both people and locations in photos.

However, after getting new ideas (and new investors), the trajectory changed and Instagram was born.

Today, you can share videos, stories, and short clips on your feed. But back in 2010, you could only share single photos cropped into a perfect square. Despite its simplicity, the app had about 1 million users by the end of the year.

## Facebook Buys the Competition (and the Data)

In 2012, Facebook purchased Instagram for \$1 billion. Ironically, the following year Instagram beat out Facebook for the [most downloads for the year](#). Since purchasing the app, several new features were added, including direct messaging, the ability to post videos, and the ability to post multiple pictures at once. But behind the scenes, the real value was in the data.

For users, this meant a more seamless experience between the two platforms. For brands and advertisers, it means even more in-depth analysis into preferences and behaviors.

## Instagram Changed the Way We Do Business

Businesses have [transformed the way they market](#) and promote their products, services, and brand itself because of Instagram. The platform offers them the opportunity to showcase a product in unique ways, target it to the right audience, link directly to shops, and even monetize accounts for additional revenue.

The currency of all of this is photos, which represent a big chunk of the world's [unstructured data](#). Brands are creating more unstructured data than ever before, thanks to an appetite for contextual photos and videos, which allow them to market products and interact with customers outside of e-commerce settings alone.

In many cases, followers do some of the heavy lifting themselves. Take the thousands of #OOTD posts (outfit of the day) shared every day. Companies like [Converse](#) can capitalize on this by sharing pictures that customers have tagged the brand in. Then, there's the two-way street of features like polls and questions, generating free survey data right in the app—no market research required. For example, beauty products retailer [Sephora](#) often posts polls asking its 20+ million followers for feedback on products.

## “The Feed”: How Data, Algorithms, and Machine Learning Determine What We See

There are approximately [95 million posts on Instagram every day](#). You probably aren't going to see all of those posts—but you will (hopefully) see more of what you're interested in. How does this happen?

The way Instagram feeds you content is a complicated feat of data science and engineering.

About [six factors](#) determine what you see:

- **Interest:** The algorithm logs what type of content you like to see. If you hit “like” on a lot of meme content, you'll have fresh memes greeting you at the top of your feed. If you like cute cats and dogs, your feed will serve up more furry friends.
- **Recent posts:** The algorithm will take into account how recently a post was shared, so older content is less likely to precede something that's only a few hours old.
- **Relationship:** The algorithm can actually factor in how tight you are with other accounts on

Instagram and is more likely to show you posts from friends on the app whose posts you typically interact with.

- **Following:** The more accounts you follow, the more variety the algorithm has to pull from, and the more varied your feed will be.
- **Frequency:** As you open the app throughout the day, Instagram is going to attempt to show you different content from the last time you opened it. The Instagram algorithm takes a look at who you're following and then serves up a variety of posts to keep you scrolling.
- **Usage:** The more you're exploring your feed, the more unique content it will attempt to deliver.

## The Power of Metadata, Hashtags, and Search

As you probably know, you can also find new content based on what you search. The Instagram algorithm is always at work and [analyzes each and every piece of content](#) that is posted. To figure out whether or not to display the content in search results, the algorithm is going to look at the meta description of the post. It will also note hashtags and location tags, which do double duty by allowing users to sort and search for relevant posts.

## In Conclusion

Instagram isn't going anywhere—and will be a big contributor to the world's growing unstructured data volumes. Pure Storage® [FlashBlade//S](#)® is one storage technology that's up to the task. A unified fast file and object (UFFO) storage platform, FlashBlade//S delivers the scalability, flexibility, and investment protection to uncomplicate your unstructured data for the next decade and beyond.

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