

FREE GUIDE

The Instagram Growth Guide

A practical guide to growing — and converting — on Instagram, for creators, businesses and freelancers.

Bio formula

Content pillars

Reels

Hashtags

DM selling

Analytics

30-day plan

Thejas

Digital with Thejas

About this guide

You post on Instagram. Sometimes a Reel does well, most of the time nothing happens, and none of it seems to bring in actual customers or clients. If that sounds familiar, this guide is for you — whether you are a creator, a small business, or a freelancer.

One idea runs through every chapter: **growth without conversion is vanity**. Followers do not pay bills. So this guide treats Instagram as a system with two halves — getting seen by the right people, and turning that attention into enquiries, sales, and clients.

How to use this guide

- **Read in order the first time.** The chapters build: fix your profile first (Ch. 1), build a content engine (Ch. 2–5), grow it (Ch. 6), then convert (Ch. 7–8).
- **Every chapter ends with a “Do this today” box.** Do those ten things and you will be ahead of most accounts in your niche.
- **Chapter 10 is your calendar.** The 30-day plan tells you exactly what to do each week — pin it up next to your desk.
- **The bonus section is for later.** 20 quick tips to come back to whenever you have a spare ten minutes.

Three promises

- ✓ **No hacks.** Nothing here depends on tricking the algorithm — only on giving Instagram what it already rewards.
- ✓ **No fluff.** Everything here is something you can act on this week, with a phone and a free account.
- ✓ **No dependence.** You can do all of this yourself. And if you would rather spend that time on your actual work — the last chapter tells you how I can help.

TIP

Grab a pen. Chapter 1 has a 3-line bio formula — you will want to draft yours as you read.

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Your profile is your landing page

Before anyone follows you, DMs you, or buys from you, they do the same thing: they tap through to your profile and decide in a few seconds. Most profiles fail that test — not because the work is bad, but because the profile does not **say** anything.

The 3-line bio formula

1. **Who you help + what you do (+ where, if local).** Not a slogan — a plain sentence a stranger instantly understands.
2. **Proof or promise.** One line of credibility ("200+ weddings shot", "Featured in ___") or the outcome you deliver.
3. **One call to action.** "DM 'PRICE' for packages" or "Free guide ↓" — one action, not four.

Example bios

"Bridal makeup artist | Udupi & Mangalore • 500+ brides since 2018 • DM 'BRIDAL' for packages" / "I help coaches get clients from Instagram • Systems, not hacks • Free checklist ↓" / "Home bakery, Kochi • Custom cakes from ₹800 • WhatsApp to order ↓"

The name field is a search box

The **name field** (not the username) is searchable. "Priya | Bridal Makeup Mangalore" can be found by someone searching for exactly that. "Priya" alone cannot. Use the words your customers would type.

Highlights: answer the questions people actually have

Keep 3–5 highlights, named after buyer questions, not moods: **Prices, Reviews, Work / Results, FAQ, Start here**. Refresh them monthly — a highlight from two years ago quietly tells people you are inactive.

Pinned posts: your top shelf

You can pin three posts to the top of your grid. Use them deliberately: one **result or best work**, one **introduction** (who you are, who you help), one **offer**. Together with your bio, your profile now works like a landing page.

DO THIS TODAY

Rewrite your bio with the 3-line formula, fix your name field, and pin your three best posts: one result, one intro, one offer.

Content strategy: pillars and the 4:1 rule

Accounts that grow are not the ones that post the most — they are the ones a viewer can describe in one sentence. “She posts saree draping tutorials.” “He reviews budget gadgets in Hindi.” That clarity comes from **content pillars**: three or four repeating themes you rotate through.

The four pillars almost every account needs

Pillar	What it looks like	Its job
Teach	Tips, how-tos, mistakes to avoid in your niche	Makes you worth following
Show	Behind-the-scenes, process, day-in-the-life	Builds familiarity and trust
Prove	Results, before/after, client stories, testimonials	Makes buying feel safe
Sell	Offers, launches, “DM me to work together”	Turns attention into enquiries

The 4:1 value-to-offer rule

For every four posts that give value (Teach, Show, Prove), post one that sells. Accounts that only sell get muted and unfollowed; accounts that only entertain never earn anything. The 4:1 rhythm keeps you welcome in the feed **and** keeps your offer visible.

Within your pillars, aim your content at the person you want as a customer — not at other people in your industry. A wedding photographer’s audience is couples, not photographers: post “how to plan your wedding timeline”, not “which lens I use”.

DO THIS TODAY

Write down your 3–4 pillars in one line each. If you cannot, your audience cannot describe you either — fix that first.

Reels that get reach

Reels are the main way Instagram shows your content to people who do not follow you — which makes them your growth engine. And most Reels live or die in the first moments: viewers decide almost instantly whether to keep watching or scroll past.

Hooks: the first line does most of the work

A hook is the first thing viewers see or hear. It should name the viewer or the problem, create a curiosity gap, or promise a payoff. Proven hook shapes:

- **Call out the person:** “If you run a home bakery, stop doing this...”
- **Open a loop:** “The mistake that keeps most small accounts stuck...”
- **Promise a payoff:** “Three caption lines that get people to DM you”
- **Show the result first:** the finished cake, the transformed room — then “here’s how”.

Hook bank — steal these

“Nobody tells [audience] this, but...” • “I did [thing] for 30 days — here’s what happened” • “Stop [common habit]. Do this instead.” • “How I [result] without [thing everyone hates]” • “The ₹500 version vs the ₹5,000 version”

Rules that make Reels work harder

- **Burn captions into the video.** Most people scroll with sound off — a Reel that makes sense muted gets watched to the end far more often. CapCut’s auto-captions do this in minutes.
- **As short as the idea allows.** Length matters less than retention: trim every second of dead air, start mid-action, cut the “hi guys, welcome back”.
- **Shoot on your phone, natively.** Real and specific beats polished and generic. Avoid re-uploading videos with other apps’ watermarks.
- **Show a face when you can.** People follow people — even a few seconds of you talking builds more trust than a slideshow.
- **End with one next step.** “Follow for more”, “Comment ‘GUIDE’”, “Save this for later” — pick one.

DO THIS TODAY

Take your best-performing post ever and remake it as a Reel: hook in the first line, captions burned in, one clear next step at the end.

Captions and hashtags that actually matter

Captions and hashtags are the most over-thought part of Instagram. Here is what actually moves the needle — and what you can stop worrying about.

Captions: the first line is a second hook

Only the first line shows before “more”. Treat it like a headline: a question, a bold claim, or the start of a story. Then:

1. **Hook line** — earns the tap on “more”.
2. **Value body** — short lines, line breaks, no walls of text. Say one thing well.
3. **One CTA** — “Save this”, “Comment ‘PRICE’”, “Send this to a friend who...”. Comments, saves and shares are the signals that push a post further.

Hashtags: relevance over volume

Hashtags help Instagram understand what your post is about — they are a label, not a growth hack. A handful of specific, relevant tags beats thirty generic ones. #love and #instagood put you in an ocean; #mangalorebakery or #keralaweddingphotography put you in the room where your buyers are.

- Mix niche tags (your exact topic), local tags (your city or region), and audience tags (what your buyer follows — #bridgetobe, not #makeupartist).
- For local businesses, **always add the location tag** on posts and Stories — nearby users can discover you through it.
- Do not copy-paste the same block on every post — match tags to the content.

The honest truth: a great Reel with zero hashtags will outperform a weak one with thirty. Spend your energy on the content, add sensible tags, and move on.

DO THIS TODAY

Rewrite your last caption: hook first line, short value body, one CTA. Replace generic hashtags with niche + local ones.

Posting rhythm: a system you can actually sustain

The algorithm does not reward posting daily — it rewards posts people respond to. But **you** need rhythm, because accounts die from inconsistency far more often than from low quality. The winning rhythm is the one you can keep for six months, not the one you can keep for six days.

A sustainable weekly baseline

Three to four Reels or posts a week, plus Stories on most days, is enough to grow — if the content is aimed at your pillars. Here is a week plan you can adapt:

Day	Format	Pillar	What to post
Mon	Reel	Teach	One tip or mistake-to-avoid from your niche
Wed	Reel / carousel	Show or Prove	Behind-the-scenes, process, or a client result
Fri	Reel	Teach or Prove	Your strongest idea of the week — weekend scroll time
Sun	Post / Story set	Sell (the “1” in 4:1)	Offer, availability, “DM to book for next month”
Daily	Stories	All	1–3 frames: today’s work, a poll, a reshare, a reply

Batching: the system behind the rhythm

- 1. One shoot session a week.** 30–60 minutes of phone video and photos gives you raw material for everything.
- 2. One edit-and-write session.** Cut the Reels, write captions, all in one sitting — context-switching is what makes content feel heavy.
- 3. Schedule it.** Meta Business Suite schedules Reels and posts for free. Your week of content goes out even when work gets busy.

Post when **your** audience is online — check Insights → Total followers → Most active times. For most Indian audiences, evenings and weekend afternoons are strong — but your own data beats any general rule.

DO THIS TODAY

Block two slots in your calendar this week: one shoot session, one edit-and-schedule session. Consistency is a calendar problem, not a motivation problem.

Engagement: the growth most accounts skip

Instagram is a social network, not a broadcast channel. Accounts that treat it like a noticeboard — post and vanish — grow slowly, because the algorithm watches how much genuine conversation your account creates, in both directions.

The 20-minute engagement routine

1. **Before posting (10 min):** comment genuinely on accounts in your niche and city — real sentences, not “Nice post!”. You become visible to exactly the audience you want.
2. **After posting (10 min):** reply to every comment on your post, ideally with a question that keeps the thread going. Early conversation helps a post travel.
3. **Reply to every DM and Story reaction the same day.** Each one is a warm lead — and DM activity deepens your relationship with that follower’s feed.

Stories: your engagement engine

Stories rarely reach new people — their job is to turn followers into fans. Use the interactive stickers: **polls** (“Which design should I make next?”), **question boxes** (“Ask me anything about ___”), **sliders**. Every tap is a signal, and every answer is a conversation starter you can take to DMs.

Collabs: borrow an audience the honest way

- **Use the Collab feature.** A co-authored post or Reel appears on both accounts and reaches both audiences — one of the fastest organic growth moves available.
- **Partner sideways, not up.** A mehendi artist and a bridal photographer share an audience without competing. Local pairings like that are easy to arrange.
- **Ask small accounts too.** A collab with a similar-sized, highly relevant account often beats chasing one big influencer.

DO THIS TODAY

Do the 20-minute routine with your next post: 10 minutes of real comments before, 10 minutes of replies after. Then DM one account this week about a collab.

Converting followers into customers

This is the chapter that pays for the rest. Growth gets you attention; **conversion** turns attention into enquiries — and on Instagram, almost every sale starts in the DMs.

Reel / post → Profile visit → DM or link tap → WhatsApp / call → Customer

DM keywords: lower the barrier

“Comment or DM ‘PRICE’ and I’ll send the details” works because it asks for one word instead of a composed message. It starts a private conversation — where deals actually close — and every comment pushes the post further. Have a saved reply ready so every keyword gets an answer within minutes.

Your link: one page, one action

Send the link tap somewhere with a single job: a simple landing page for your offer, or a **wa.me link with a pre-filled message** (“Hi! I saw your Instagram and want to know about ___”). Never your homepage — a menu of options is where warm leads cool off.

Move it to WhatsApp

For most Indian businesses and freelancers, WhatsApp is where the sale happens: voice notes, photos, payment links, follow-ups. Move interested DMs there early — it is more personal, and the conversation does not get buried.

A DM-to-WhatsApp script that feels human

Them: “PRICE” → You: “Hi! Thanks for reaching out — happy to share. Quick question so I send the right details: is this for [option A] or [option B]?” → (they answer) → “Perfect. I’ll send the full details and a couple of examples on WhatsApp — what’s the best number? Or ping me here: wa.me/91XXXXXXXXXX”

Two habits that close deals: reply fast — the sooner you answer, the more likely an enquiry becomes a customer — and always end your message with a question or a next step (“Would a call tomorrow at 5 work?”), never a full stop.

DO THIS TODAY

Set up one DM keyword and its saved reply, and change your bio link to a wa.me link or a one-action page. Test the whole path yourself, from Reel to WhatsApp.

Analytics: the few numbers that matter

Instagram gives you dozens of numbers. Most of them are noise. Check **these five, once a week, in ten minutes** — and ignore the rest.

1. **Reach — and the share from non-followers.** Non-follower reach is your growth signal: it tells you which Reels Instagram is showing to new people. Find the pattern in your top two and make more of that.
2. **Profile visits.** Content interesting enough to make people check who you are. High reach with few profile visits usually means the content is generic — entertaining, but not making anyone curious about *you*.
3. **Follows from a post.** Your profile's conversion: visits that became followers. If visits are high but follows are low, revisit Chapter 1 — the profile is leaking.
4. **Link taps + DMs started.** The first commercial step. If this is near zero while reach grows, you have a conversion problem, not a content problem — revisit Chapter 7.
5. **Enquiries and customers won.** The number Instagram cannot show you — count it yourself in a simple note or sheet. It is the only number that pays rent.

Read the funnel, not the post

Each number is a stage of the same funnel: reach → profile visits → follows → DMs and link taps → customers. When a week looks bad, find the **first** stage that drops — that is the thing to fix. Chasing likes is how accounts stay busy and broke.

One warning: judge patterns over weeks, not single posts. Any one post can flop or fly for reasons that have nothing to do with you.

DO THIS TODAY

Open Insights now and write down this week's five numbers. Same time next week, compare. That 10-minute habit is your entire analytics system.

The 7 Instagram mistakes almost everyone makes

1. **Posting and vanishing.** The first hour matters — replies to comments and DMs help a post travel. Post when you have 15 minutes to stay, not on your way into a meeting.
2. **Chasing followers instead of enquiries.** Ten thousand random followers convert worse than one thousand local, relevant ones. Growth without conversion is vanity — aim every post at your buyer.
3. **Making content for your industry, not your customer.** Other designers will applaud your typography breakdown. Clients want to see what you would do for *them*.
4. **No CTA anywhere.** If no post, bio, or Story tells people what to do next, they do nothing. One clear action per post — always.
5. **Deleting posts that “flop”.** A slow start is not a failure, and deleting tells you nothing. Leave it, learn from it, and let your grid show a working account, not a highlight reel.
6. **Buying followers or joining engagement pods.** Fake numbers wreck the one thing that matters: showing your content to people who genuinely respond to it. It is the most expensive shortcut on Instagram.
7. **Quitting at week three.** Instagram compounds slowly, then quickly. Most accounts quit in the flat part of the curve — the 30-day plan in the next chapter exists to get you through it.

DO THIS TODAY

Pick the one mistake that stung the most while reading. Fix that first.

Your 30-day Instagram plan

Week 1 — Foundation

- **Day 1–2:** Rewrite your bio (Ch. 1), fix the name field, set up highlights, pin three posts.
- **Day 3–4:** Define your 3–4 content pillars (Ch. 2) and write 12 content ideas — three per pillar.
- **Day 5:** Set your bio link: wa.me link or one-action page (Ch. 7). Set up one DM keyword + saved reply.
- **Day 6–7:** First batch: shoot one session, edit 3 Reels with hooks and burned-in captions (Ch. 3).

Week 2 — Rhythm

- **Day 8:** Schedule the week in Meta Business Suite (Ch. 5).
- **Day 9–14:** Post 3 Reels + daily Stories. Do the 20-minute engagement routine with every post (Ch. 6).
- **Day 14:** First weekly numbers check (Ch. 8): reach, profile visits, follows, DMs/link taps, enquiries.

Week 3 — Conversation

- **Day 15–16:** Batch and schedule week 3. Make one of the four posts a Sell post — offer plus DM keyword (the 4:1 rule).
- **Day 17–18:** Run a question-box Story; answer every response, take the warm ones to DMs.
- **Day 19–21:** Pitch one Collab to a sideways account in your niche or city (Ch. 6).

Week 4 — Double down

- **Day 22–23:** Review three weeks of numbers. Find your two best Reels — remake the pattern, not the post.
- **Day 24–27:** Batch week 4 around what worked. Keep the rhythm: 3–4 posts, daily Stories, engagement routine.
- **Day 28–29:** Follow up with every DM enquiry that went quiet: "Hi! Did you have any questions about ___?"
- **Day 30:** Month review: which pillar grew, which posts converted, what will you do more of in month 2?

THE ONLY 4 NUMBERS TO TRACK WEEKLY

Non-follower reach • Profile visits • DMs + link taps • Enquiries won

BONUS

20 quick tips & tricks

Quick wins you can apply in minutes. Come back to this section whenever you have a spare ten minutes.

PROFILE & POSITIONING

- 01** Put your city in your name field if you serve a local area — it is searchable; your username is not the only way people find you.
- 02** Read your bio as a stranger: if it does not say who you help and what to do next, it is a caption, not a bio.
- 03** Refresh your pinned posts monthly — they are the first three things every profile visitor sees.
- 04** Use a recognisable face or logo as your profile photo — it appears tiny next to every comment and DM you send.

REELS & CONTENT

- 05** Write the hook before you shoot — a great clip cannot save a weak first line.
- 06** Batch-shoot once a week: 30 minutes of phone footage covers your whole week of posts.
- 07** Remake your winners: your best Reel's format + a new example is your most reliable next post.
- 08** Cut the intro. Start mid-action or mid-sentence — context can come second, attention comes first.
- 09** Carousels still earn saves: a "save this checklist" carousel can keep working for months.

STORIES & ENGAGEMENT

- 10** Post a poll or question box weekly — every tap deepens your place in that follower's feed and hands you a DM opener.
- 11** Reply to Story reactions with a message, not a like. A reaction is a raised hand — shake it.
- 12** Reshare your feed post to Stories with a sticker or one extra line — many followers see Stories first.
- 13** Spend comments where your buyers already are: local pages, niche communities, complementary businesses.

DMS & SELLING

- 14** Answer every keyword DM within minutes if you can — speed is the cheapest conversion upgrade there is.
- 15** End every sales message with a question or a next step, never a full stop.
- 16** A 20-second voice note feels personal and settles doubts faster than four typed paragraphs — use it for quotes and follow-ups.
- 17** Keep a simple note of every enquiry (name, date, what they asked). Follow up after 2–3 days — many 'lost' leads just got busy.

TOOLS & WORKFLOW

- 18** Meta Business Suite schedules Reels, posts and Stories for free — one sitting, one week of content.
- 19** Keep one “content brief” note (who you help, pillars, tone, offers) and paste it into every AI chat you use for caption drafts — the output improves instantly.
- 20** Save every idea the moment you have it — a WhatsApp chat with yourself works. Blank-page days kill consistency.

What to do next

You now know more about growing and converting on Instagram than most accounts ever learn. But knowing the plan and executing it every week — alongside your actual work — are two different things.

That is where I come in.

GET A FREE WEBSITE & MARKETING AUDIT

I will personally review your Instagram profile, website, and wider digital presence — and send you a short, honest report with the **3 highest-impact fixes for your account and business**. No generic checklist. No obligation. If you can do the fixes yourself, great — the audit is yours to keep.

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ABOUT THEJAS

I help small businesses, creators and freelancers improve their online presence through websites, landing pages, Meta Ads and practical AI solutions. This guide is the playbook I use in that work — shared free, because a business that understands its own marketing is a better client and a stronger business.

— Thejas, *Digital with Thejas*

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