

Catering Foodservice & Events

Flowering Flavors

*Enticing plant-based
options, from cocktails
and starters to entrées*



PLUS
**Greening
Your Business**
**Boosting Your
Social Media
Presence**



Mastering Social Media

Follow these steps to increase your visibility on channels such as Instagram and create buzz for your events

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We live in a day and age where anything worth seeing is captured on our phones. For better or for worse, our lives, the places we go and the events we attend are on full public display via various social media platforms.

Data from event industry blog Skift Meetings revealed that event professionals deemed social media to be of high importance, with 73 percent of those surveyed indicating they believe "social media to be the most effective tool for marketing events." Instagram particularly is effective for engagement, with *Special Events* magazine reporting that engagement rates on the platform are 15 times higher than on Facebook and 20 times higher than on Twitter.

As the usage of social media evolves, opportunities abound to leverage the exposure and create buzz before, during or after an event. There are a number of strategies event professionals can use to both encourage user-generated content (social posts that guest share) and to produce quality branded content for venues or event management companies.

For event planners looking to add an extra Instagram-worthy quality, balloon arches, floral walls or neon signs can do the trick.

Branding, Branding, Branding

There's a reason successful companies make consistent branding such a priority. On Instagram—an especially visual medium where the aesthetic reigns supreme—there are several best practices to brand your social media presence for awareness and visibility:

- Create hashtags that are catchy and directly related to your event to encourage others to post and to build brand awareness. Once created, utilize these prior to, during and after the event to build a large collection of posts that your targeted audience will be able to see, add to and share.
- Cultivate a unique, consistent look to build an association to your event. With an active posting schedule, your audience will be able to attach the branding to an event or entity. Build familiarity by including your logo in every post.
- Keep a consistent color scheme, select a signature font, and incorporate visual elements that will help to differentiate you from others.

Photo-Readiness at Your Event

Want people snapping photos at your event? Make sure it's designed and set up to include a variety of unique, attention-grabbing photo-ops. Step-and-repeats are always effective, but there are plenty of creative ways to provide an atmosphere that's ripe for photo-worthy moments. For event planners



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Catering and foodservice businesses have plenty of opportunities to present cuisine creatively. From themed charcuterie boards to donut walls and slider bars, there are so many photo-ready food concepts that can earn major points with guests and produce engaging social media content that you can reuse.

If you want to bring even more to the table, opting for a theme for your event will present the perfect opportunity to spruce the venue up with a share-worthy concept and engaging visual décor. Stage and light the event in such a way that your attendees can't help but capture and share the moment.

Top: Make your events more Instagram-friendly with balloon arches, such as this glitzy addition to a Marcia Selden Catering wedding anniversary party.

Above: An eye-catching champagne wall, like this one by EVL Events, will have guests reaching for their cameras.

Opposite: Engaging visual decor includes creative buffets and stations, such as this Albany Capital Center display at a retirement party.



The Albany Capital Center shows off menu options with high-quality photos of its cuisine (above and opposite bottom).

Engage with other users by liking and commenting on their posts, especially those in your target market.

Consider an Influencer Campaign

Who knows how to leverage the brand-building power of social media better than those who make a living on it? The advantage of hiring an influencer is exposing your brand and/or event to your target audience through the perspective of a voice they trust. Not all influencers are alike, however. Some, known as micro influencers, are more niche and have smaller, more focused audiences, while macro influencers have a large and more general following. With that said, you shouldn't merely focus on the number of followers they have but rather how much engagement (likes, comments, shares) they generate.

You'll want to choose someone appropriate for your event. Do they have knowledge of the industry you're promoting? Is the event casual, or more buttoned-up? You'll want their personality to match.

Lastly, keep in mind that most influencers do not work for free—even if you are offering in-kind compensation like free attendance at the event. It's safe to assume that the larger their following, the more they charge. So, set a budget and do your research.

Social Media Strategies for Venues

Best practices for the event industry don't end at encouraging attendees to engage on social media. A solid digital presence is a value-add for any event facility and hinges upon a comprehensive effort to put your venue's best foot forward. At Albany Capital Center—a premier event space in downtown Albany, New York, that boasts 22,500 square feet of ballroom and exhibit space in addition to meeting rooms and pre-function space—social media content is a key driver of attendee and client engagement.

Albany Capital Center has seen success by incorporating the following best practices when planning social media content:

- Keep up a regular posting schedule before, during and after the event.
- Prime times for posting are late morning to late evening, from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- Write concise captions tailored to the endless scrolling feature that is a hallmark of Instagram. Using 125 characters or less ensures your audience can read your content quickly.
- Keep videos to a minute in length or shorter.

- Video shot on a phone should be done so vertically to ensure it fits within Instagram's specifications.

- Utilize hashtags but limit them to about six characters each. Hashtags that begin with or use only numbers do not perform as well as word-based hashtags.

- Leverage your staff's capabilities and encourage them to take photos, videos and even livestream during the event. Facebook—whose parent company, Meta, owns Instagram—reports that users spend three times longer watching a video when it's live.

- Testimonials from clients and attendees are a great way to communicate the success of your event.

With creativity and a little legwork, event planners and event venue professionals alike can harness the power of Instagram to build brand awareness, encourage attendance and engage their target audience. By following some general guidelines and experimenting with what works, anyone can add value to their overall marketing strategy by utilizing social media.

Social Media Strategies for Catering Businesses

When it comes to the catering industry, social media offers a visually appealing platform to showcase your culinary creations. As a highly visual platform, the best-performing food content on Instagram consists of high-quality photos and videos of your delectable dishes, beautifully arranged event setups and behind-the-scenes glimpses of your culinary process. Tips for successfully marketing a catering business on social media include:

- Investing in good photography equipment or hiring a professional photographer to capture mouthwatering images that will make your audience crave your food and associate your brand with upscale and unique events.

- Making use of relevant hashtags to expand your reach. Research popular hashtags within the catering and food

industry, and incorporate them into your posts. Engage with other users by liking and commenting on their posts, especially those in your target market. Collaborating with influencers or partnering with other local businesses can also help increase your visibility and attract new customers.

- Optimizing your Instagram bio. Your bio serves as a snapshot of your catering business, so ensure it is concise, engaging, and includes important information such as your location, contact details and a link to your website. Consider using relevant keywords that resonate with your target audience to boost awareness among your target audience.

- Utilizing Instagram's various features, such as Stories and Instagram Live, to showcase your services in a dynamic and interactive manner. Stories allow you to share short-lived content, giving your audience a real-time glimpse into your daily operations or upcoming events, while Instagram Live enables you to engage with your followers in real time, hosting Q&A sessions or live cooking demonstrations.

By leveraging Instagram effectively, caterers, event professionals and venues alike can not only showcase their services and expertise but also connect with potential clients, build a loyal customer base and create a compelling brand presence. Embrace the power of visual storytelling, engage with your audience, and utilize the platform's features to create an Instagram presence that leaves a lasting impression. ●



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shannon Licygiewicz is the general manager of the Albany Capital Center in Albany, New York. She has played a vital role in management of the facility since it opened in 2017. Prior to her promotion as GM, Licygiewicz served as the director of sales for the Albany Capital Center Convention Center.

With more than 17 years of experience in the convention center industry, Licygiewicz is a seasoned professional in sales, operations and facility management. She got her start at the Rhode Island Convention Center in Providence, where she quickly rose through the ranks to become senior operations manager. Licygiewicz graduated from Southern New Hampshire University in 2005 with her bachelor's degree in Convention and Event Management.

For more information, visit albanycapitalcenter.com.