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Benefits of social media presence

Of course, your business can sell using social media without actively engaging with your customers. These customers will have already heard of you and may already be paying customers and will only check your social media accounts for things like business hours and contact information.

In this case nice pictures with short selling captions about what is available, where and when hold a **storefront informative function**. Your online presence does not sell this way, it just gives updates to a person who wants to be your customer. Your customer does not need to be sold, he is already there and is ready for purchase. Otherwise to keep people interested and make sales directly because of social activity, a business should be bringing value - educate, entertain, inspire.

Some ways social media can benefit your business:

- Increase awareness of your company locally.
- Increase awareness of your company beyond your local market.
- Help your customers make the most out of your products / services
- Eliminate objections for choosing your business, your products, show whether you can be trusted in terms of transparency, integrity, high quality of work; understand if you are customer-oriented
- Create anticipation for your new products, offerings, events
- Sell your product or service.
- Get recommended in an organic way without your active participation and self-promoting, get repeated exposure to your brand.
- Create connections with potential new customers.
- Build relationships with potential business partners, become desirable for collaborations.
- Develop longer-term relationships and deepen them with existing customers so they become repeat customers.
- Establish yourself as an expert or personality in your business' niche. You will be on A list for your products and a source of knowledge for your followers.

If there is nothing special about transaction, customer might keep looking for same products and services elsewhere. But if you get customers' attention, make them curious and excited about your brand, you might discover you got loyal ambassadors who will be happy to enjoy your products and to tell others about you, creating a great word of mouth.

With the new COVID world, actual visits to most businesses are restricted or limited, the bigger role goes to finding businesses on the Internet, checking their offerings there and ordering online whether it is food or a retail shop item. Being represented online is vital now more than ever.

In order to be visible online, you should be active at least on one social media platform. I favor Instagram because it is very structured and could be well organized. Since your business account is linked to Facebook, being active on Instagram allows you to automatically post on a second social media platform as well, getting the best of both worlds.

Your Instagram page is a representation of you and your business. Think of your customers as if they have 0 idea of who you are AND they are not sure if they want to learn about you, get to know you. Consider providing main pillars about yourself, your business, think of it as creating a dynamic mini journal with a great table of contents - when a person stumbles upon it, he can get an idea of what you represent and how to make the most out of your products / services.

The more followers engage with your content, the more often social media apps will surface your post to potential customers, people who don't follow you yet. Algorithms are designed to reward your page by showing it to more people when you are doing things right and show it less if you are not.

In order to increase your exposure, you should determine your goals, strategize your marketing efforts, brainstorm ideas for reaching it and make sure you **create proper stages of your buyer's journey**.

After you start implementing actions, tailored to your goals you should monitor your progress and make your decisions informed by strong data. Measuring & analyzing progress will help you optimize to improve results and performance. For this reason, you should consider performing an Audit your page at least once a month.

An audit is an opportunity to ensure that your account is aligned with your business goals and all the effort you're putting in is bringing you expected results. This will tell you what improvements you need to make to achieve your goals.

Instagram audit checklist

- Have you created profile of your perfect customer?** If no, define and segment your target audience. You should know your target persona's interests, preferences, pain points, objections for buying your product or getting your services.
- Do you position yourself or your brand to cater to your perfect customer needs and wishes through your Social Media?**
- Do potential customers know why should they choose your product or service?**
- Does your Instagram account have access to statistics (called Insights) of your profile?**

Top performing posts - why do you think it performed well?
Worse performing post - why do you think it performed poorly?

In order to track your progress, please record your current data
followers
posts
views/ likes/ comments of your 9 most popular posts
of reposts & number of times your most popular post was saved

First impression

- Is your username unique, properly spelled, and easy to remember?
- Is it easy to find your brand through Instagram by typing just the brand name?
- Is your Instagram "Name" field optimized (has keywords for your brand and business)?
- Do you have an avatar (profile picture)? Does it represent you or your brand?
- Is your bio informative? Does it mention who you are and what you offer?
- Is your bio optimized for search (has keywords for your brand and business)?
- Does your account show your unique proposition?
- Does your bio have call-to-action, multi link?
- Do you have Stories Highlights that can answer customers' questions, showcase your work, give more dynamic information about you and your brand? They work as a table of content for your page.

Content checklist

- Does your bio, Stories Highlights, posts from feed inform potential customer about your values, background (history), your offerings and ways to get in touch with you and your product?
- While exploring your account, will your follower know the names and stories of people behind the brand? Do you have a post or set of stories about who you are as an owner, how you got started, what keeps you going or what do you love about your business?
- Are you sharing content, relevant to your brand and readers without trying to make a sale in each sentence?
- Do you repurpose your existing content? Do you reuse your interview material from published articles, blogs for your content creation? Do you highlight your reviews across your social media?
- Are you using analytical data of your page to your advantage? Do you post at the most efficient time? Do you know which themes, topics, types of content your followers are interested in?
- Are you posting consistently (3 times or more per week)?
- Are you using different formats - posts, Stories, IGTV, Reels?
- Do you have at least one Instagram guide with structured information relevant to you and your business?

Captions checklist

- Are you checking your grammar and spelling prior to posting?
- Do you tell stories or give useful information rather than self-promote? If your posts consist nothing other than describing what is available and when, then consider the only function of your feed to be informative.
- Do your captions have a clear call-to-action? The most popular call-to-action requests are to save the post, answer the question below, share an opinion, tag your friend, make a reservation/ book an appointment?
- Do you include questions to engage your audience?
- Are you using mentions in your posts, do you add location to your posts?
- Do you add hashtags below your posts in the comment section?

Follower interaction checklist

- Are you responding to your page's comments, direct messages in timely manner?
- Do you check direct messages and "requests" folder in your direct messages at least once a day?
- Are your followers actively sharing their opinion and ideas under your posts? If not, create shareable content
- Do your followers share your posts often?
- Are your stories interactive? Are you asking your followers to express their opinion?
- Are you connecting with your followers who are active in your Stories part (who reply to your stories, answer polls, quizzes, etc.)? You can connect in the form of sending "Thank you" note, offering a discount or a special deal
- Do you thank your customers who tag you/ your brand in their own photos/ videos?
- Do you repost content generated by your followers/ customers?
- Are you following your local influencers?
- Do you collaborate with other brands or influencers?
- Do you show love to your customers, clients, partners by telling stories about them?
- Do you share information about other accounts who inspire or entertain you? Do you learn from your customers about their preferences?

Visual harmony

- Do you use 2 or less fonts in your feed? Check your last 9 posts.
- Are your pictures or videos cropped perfectly? All the words of posts fit, head is not cut, the shot from video is clear, well-centered, not presented as black square.
- Do the colors of your feed look harmonious?

Hashtag checklist

- Do you vary hashtags under your posts?
- Do you place hashtags in the comment section rather than add them under the post?
- Are you selecting relevant hashtags that fit your audience and brand?
- Are you selecting hashtags that are niche-specific rather than very broad?
- Do you check your post analytics to see if you got any views from hashtags?
- Do you have at least one branded hashtag for an easier navigation on your profile?
- Are you checking hashtags made by you and your customers for your business? Normally, it could be the name of the brand or the name of your brand +location

Investing into social media growth

Time

- Do you prepare your content in advance?
- Are you carefully analyzing under performing and over performing posts?
- Do you spend time to create content based on the preferences of your audience?
- Do you track your online & offline brand mentions?
- Do you check the reviews on available platforms and respond to them in timely manner?
- Do you highlight reviews in your content creation?
- Do you check offerings of your competitors?

Resources

- Do your photos and videos look professional?
- Do you have a content and marketing strategy in place?

Money

- Do you promote your business on Instagram or Facebook?
- Do you spend money for content creation (getting content plans tailored to your goals, making photos and videos that perfectly highlight your offerings, etc)

Guide on how to implement the basic knowledge of Instagram for enhancing your online presence

There are a few things you have to do to increase your chances of using Instagram to your advantage

1. Create a Business Account

In order to get access to additional features on Instagram, you can convert your profile to a business profile (or creator if you are planning to create Instagram masks like my https://www.instagram.com/yulia_sip_of_europe/ profile)

To set up your Instagram as a business account:

- Go to your profile
- Select “Settings”
- Click on "Account"
- Select “Switch to Professional Account”. There you will be given 2 options: business and creator.

I recommend connecting your business profile to your Facebook business Page. This will make it easier to use all of the features available for businesses.

You'll be able to utilize some of the following account features as a business profile on Instagram:

- You'll be able to add a phone number, an email address, and your business's physical address (if you have one)
- A Contact button will appear near the top of your profile, which gives your customers options like getting directions, call, and email
- You'll get access to analytics for your page - Instagram Insights, which help you learn more about your followers and about how your content is performing with your audience. There you can see accounts reached, content interactions (including top posts and top IGTV videos), follower breakdown (including top locations, age range, most active times).

With analytics you can research, analyze, compare, and grow.

In addition to your overall performance you can also see specific data for each single post. ATTENTION - only after you convert to a business account you will be able to see statistics for your new posts.

You can see the amount of profile visits, reach of your posts, number of times your post has been shared and saved. These are very important factors of your visibility not only for your own followers but also to people who can benefit by subscribing to you.

2. Make sure your "Name" field is optimized (first line of Instagram. You can change it by going to your profile and clicking Edit Profile)

The first step to getting discovered on Instagram Search is to optimize your Instagram name!

The “Name” field in your Instagram bio is searchable, and completely customizable and is separated from your Instagram handle.

Lots of people and businesses make a mistake of not utilizing it rationally. Some businesses put their own or business name, others add endless smiles and font that will not be recognized by search engines.

The best way to go is to think about search terms of your business - something that people would type in Google or Yelp to find a good product or a service. Think of what search requests could lead to you. For instance, if you are a baker, you can write Baker, Custom Cakes instead of repeating the name of your profile that does not necessarily explain your sphere of work.

Using words that highlight what your Instagram profile or business is about is great for finding you through search. Not everyone remembers your brand name, but they can still find you while looking for a specific category and being shown by Instagram.

By including important keywords in your Name field, your chances of appearing in the top results if anyone searches for those keywords will be much higher!

3. Choose a proper Profile Picture

If you are not a huge national brand, your logo might be not be immediately recognizable. The best way to go about this is to create a picture that shows the ambience of your business or you yourself as a business owner.

Make sure your picture is inviting people in while matching your brand.

Here are a few of these suggestions of a non-branded picture ideas:

- **Photo of you or your product in your business environment** – This can be at your business location, during your workflow, at your desk, at a coffee shop, on the couch with your product in your hands.

- **Photo of you smiling, looking directly at the camera** – Giving your audience eye contact is a great way to build a connection!
- **Photo of you with a fun prop** – add such a picture if there is a common theme within your brand such as specific utensils, paintings, murals, ornaments, brand colors, indoor plants, popular merch? Add a little bit of fun in your photo with a prop that is unique to you and your brand.

4. Create a Clear optimized Instagram Profile Bio

Your Bio is going to be your one-time pitch to your potential audience members to convince them that your account is worth following.

You only have 150 characters in your profile bio, so you need to make a big impact quick, fast, and smart.

In order to grab the attention of anyone who lands on your profile, don't be afraid to make your bio catchy and add a few colorful emojis.

The best way to create your Bio is to mention your unique Selling proposition, Competitive advantage, something special about you and your business.

Answer the following questions:

- What makes your services or products different? What kind of experience do you create?
- What are your strengths? Are you above average in your offerings? Is there anything to prove it? Do you have any awards? Is feedback mostly positive and easy to find? Are there any reviews or testimonials visible on your social media page?
- Does your business have a special emotional story behind it?
- What specific demographic are you trying to attract? Who is your ideal audience?
- What do you offer your target audience?
- What words do people use to describe you AND your brand?

Mention each feature on a different line.

5. Be Mindful of Your Instagram Bio Link

You may think that you should direct your link to your website, right?

Well, there may be a better way to convert people who are checking you out into intrigued and happy followers.

I recommend having a multilink, that acts like a one-page website with text about you and your offerings and has clickable multiple links, that give easy access to your exclusive offers, website, educational or entertaining platforms and free sources.

I personally use Taplink because it is a free Russian service, but I've noticed that English speaking account owners prefer Linktree (you can check it out here <https://linktr.ee/>).

It is not necessary to add call-to-action to this link in bio (such as download/ link/ check below or a simple emoji arrow), but if there are enough characters left, it will be beneficial to your account to add it.

6. Smart usage of Stories

A very effective tool for connecting with your audience, eliminating objections for choosing your business and your products, showing whether you can be trusted in terms of transparency, integrity, high quality of work by sharing with the viewer your backstage and processes, your interactions with your customers, your way of thinking and problem-solving.

Instagram Story is a feature that allows you to create a photo, collage, video (at normal speed, or like a boomerang, etc), or set of videos lasting up to 15 seconds each. Stories are available for 24 hours. If the circle around the avatar is bright (usually dark pink), it means that the account owner published a Story less than a day ago.

With the help of Stories features you can:

- Add location (if your customers tag your location in Stories, you will get a notification).
- Mention another account.
- Add hashtags.
- Be interactive: add a scale, use polls for checking your followers' preferences; ask open-ended questions or let your customers engage with you by wishing you well or asking something, make a multiple-choice quiz.
- Add a countdown that your followers can subscribe to.

With the help of polls, questions, and tests, you can find out what worries people, what content, and what topics they would like to get from you.

Subscribers' responses can also be used further to inform them about unknown or not fully understood details of offerings, features of products, eliminate objections, show benefits of choosing your brand, and build loyalty.

You can answer them:

- In private (direct) messages.

- Publicly, in Stories and posts.
- During videos and live streams.

Through just one Story you can repeatedly interact with the audience, identify its problems or desires, provide useful content, and demonstrate your expertise, create anticipation for more content and offerings, and make your followers excited about you and your business.

When you check your home feed, current Stories **are located at the top**, not necessarily in chronological order, mostly according to their ranking. This ranking is based on several factors including prior engagement with an account and sponsored (paid) stories from other pages.

The algorithms favor **popular content**. What I mean by popular – content that gets attention and interaction from other accounts resulting in a variety of actions. **You might have noticed** that sometimes when you have a big announcement or event, such as your birthday, your or your business anniversary, award, honorable mention, you get comments and likes from people with whom you haven't interacted for a long time.

This is not a coincidence. Instagram sees a lot of attention directed to your page and levels up the priority of your post and Stories. This way you are visible not only to your followers but also to people who might have the same interests or are from the same area.

The higher your reach, the more subscribers and non-subscribers see your posts. The reach is influenced by the reaction of subscribers to any content: posts, Stories, and Direct Messages. Therefore, **the task is simple - to encourage subscribers to be active and interact with you.**

It is easier to get exposure through Stories because once opened, the follower's action to scroll is not needed– everything is done automatically. If you make a set of Stories on a specific day, they might show up on your customer's feed after blogs that he is most active with.

Instagram has a wonderful feature called **Highlights**. It allows you to “Freeze” those Stories that were of significance to you and your customers. This way a life span of a 24-hour media creation expands to weeks and months. In a way, the highlight feature can and should be used as a **table of contents**.

The most essential highlights could be as follows:

- About (you, company).
- Services/ products + price, where & how to get.
- Reviews, Testimonials.
- FAQ, Q&A.
- Useful – let people know if you have free advice, DIY tutorials, good family recipes, helpful listings, and informational sources, other platforms (full-sized blogs, YouTube channels, Podcasts).

Also, make sure you acknowledge the newest addition to Story features – Reels. This format is highly promoted by Instagram and with proper use can bring you great organic exposure. Reels can be temporary, like Stories, or permanent, like posts – you choose the way that they are shared.

7. Content creation

A decade ago a lot of attention was focused on being featured in the local or national press, which would mean being asked to give an interview. Because the number of interviews **was limited** due to time & resource constraints, as well as sizes of publications, being featured would almost **100% mean being heard & read**, also it would **add a sense of selectivity, be unique of its kind**. You were chosen by trusted authorities who were considering other candidates for their material as well but preferred you due to your expertise, achievements, personality.

Now with such an extensive growth of social media every person, every brand can be its own media company, the source of news, ideas, useful tips & tricks, be a motivational speaker, or a role model.

Instead of writing unemotional sales pitches meaning of which is “buy it today”, “get it today or on a specific date” and “here is how” a better long- term decision is to provide useful, inspirational, aspirational, entertaining information to your audience that will be eagerly coming to you for more.

Content planning is not a sprint, it is a marathon.

If you happily talk about using your product, eliminate doubts with real and relevant information, answer questions, be a nice and friendly business owner who cares about his potential and actual clients, this attitude and care is enough for letting people decide if they are convinced or not to be your customer.

Instead of non-stop self-promoting, make yourself as a business owner and your brand desirable. If you love what you are doing, your **knowledge, passion, energy, and enthusiasm** might make a difference when choosing among businesses without a human aspect.

Bring up a healthy mix of Informative, Entertaining, Inspiring, Aspiring. Develop emotional connections and eventually create a community of like-minded individuals. Show effort and be truly interested in the opinion of your audience and it will be most likely that your customers will reciprocate.

With all that being said, you should have a defined target customer or so-called ideal persona in mind. You, as a person, business owner, and brand representative, have your own ideas and priorities in mind. You know what kind of person **will enjoy your offerings to the fullest and have your way of appreciating products and services.**

Your online following is not necessarily your target audience – they might like you, your business approach, your way of thinking but they will never become your customers because their priorities and preferences are different. And this is ok. Those same people can recommend you to their friends, relatives, and colleagues who will appreciate your brand’s existence. For them, you will have a value-for-money offering, desired assortment, wanted quality, and acceptable speed.

A quick analogy – you might not be the one to buy Haute couture clothing from Chanel, Versace, Dolce & Gabbana but you can still be subscribed to their Instagram profiles for inspiration, admiration, and EVEN motivation to own a real handcrafted masterpiece.

By understanding your customer, you’ll be able to:

- Write specifically to them and create the right expectations.
- List features of your products that your ideal persona cares about.
- Market through the right channels, the right way.
- create products and processes that will be appreciated.
- Maintain your social media platforms to inspire and inform your audience

I can help you understand your target audience through a **tailored social media strategy, made specifically for your brand (last page of this file).**

Yelp, Facebook, TripAdvisor, Square, UberEats 5* rating for Sip of Europe that has been maintained for over 5 years was a **direct result of perfect marketing research and precise definition of** my target customers. I had a certain type of people in mind and promoted myself as meeting their expectations. Every single time when I was getting those desired types of customers, I was able to over-deliver and create a wonderful aftertaste of a great experience which lead to incredible word of mouth.

It is important to show your history and roots, values, motivation, and purpose (even wins & losses). This way you will be relatable to your audience, provoke emotions, and aspire people to seek out more of your content and support you in new ventures. **People like interacting with people. They appreciate you being** sincere and personable in front of your audience, they **emphasize what they see in you.** This helps you gain trust and credibility. By sharing some wins and losses you might motivate someone to try to follow your path and succeed in life because of you.

If you remember, the mission of my café was “to show the beauty of other cultures through the food I make, stories I tell, the knowledge I share.” I mentioned frequently that “I believe beautiful and tasty food can and should be affordable.” For that reason, I had a lot of incredible deals, including the one that would incentivize people to come in for a hot drink and a fresh Lemon Power crepe and a good conversation with the total check of just4.32\$ for all of it. That deal would bring an insane awareness to my business, a great number of guests, and believe it or not, tips, doubling or tripling the initial amount.

In January of 2020, I shared a lot of insights on starting a food business in America, explaining my way of thinking, decisions, talking about struggles and goals. This interview was in the Russian language, here is a link <https://school.cheeseit.ru/blog/interview> . Since that interview, I was reached by so many fellow immigrants and Russian citizens thanking me for my advice and asking for more. The feeling of being needed, feeling appreciated was incredible!

If you have no idea where to get inspiration for new posts and every single content creating session feels like duty and a waste of time, you should think about repurposing content. It could be something that you produced while participating in an interview, writing an article, expressing your opinion either verbally or in written language.

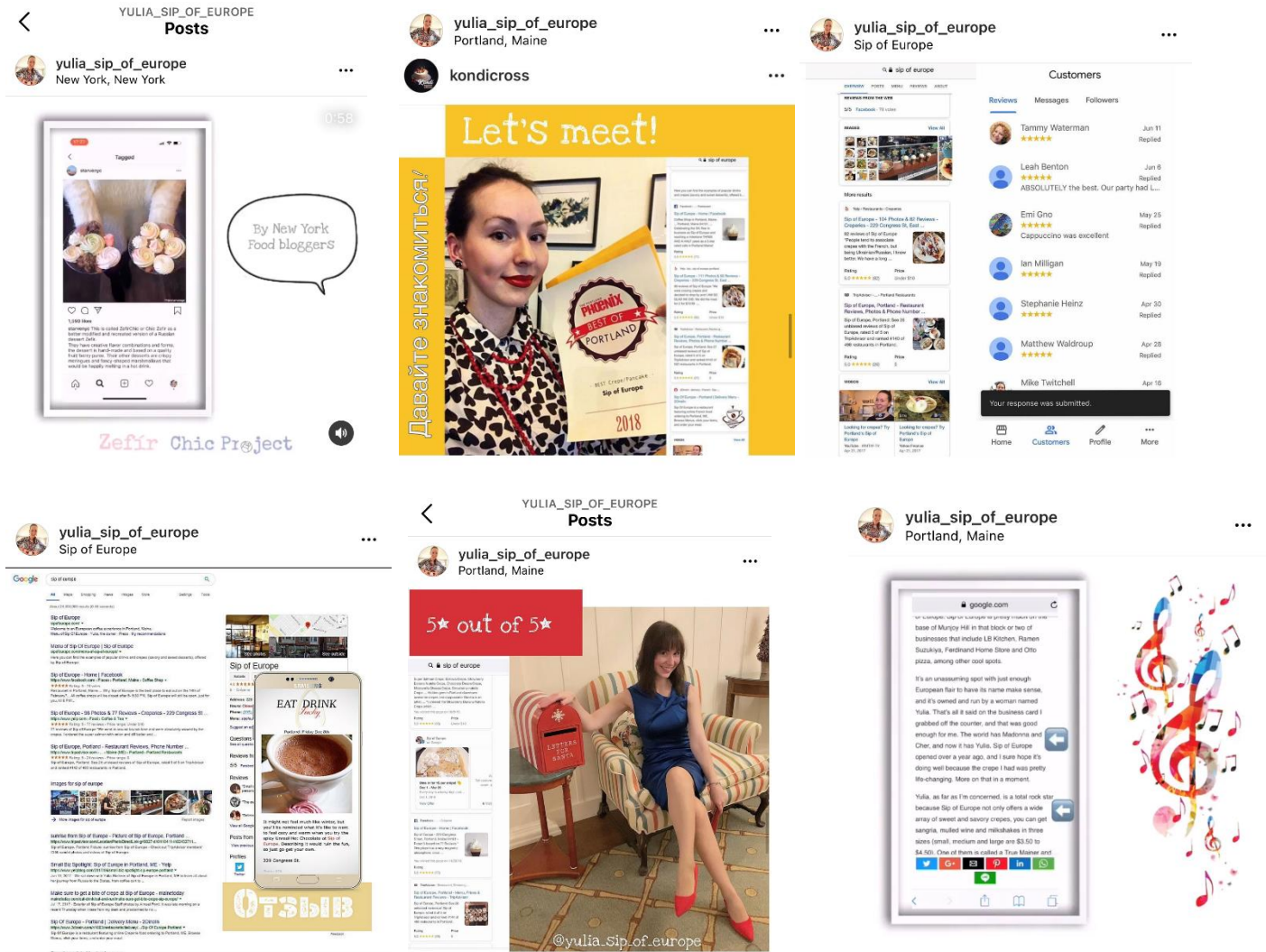
In addition to your content, you can utilize **user-generated content** which has a lot of benefits. Among them are:

- Originality – every consumer contributes from a unique perspective and in a particular personalized way.
- Low cost of creation – you got content most likely comes from a person who paid you for a product or service.
- Advocacy, organically shown in a storytelling way, made directly by a person who told about you once and is most likely to tell about you twice or more.

As a simple example of a source for such content consider review platforms and search engines. There you can see someone’s point of view on your offerings. You can agree with it, add your opinion, ask your customer – in any way you can use this review to create a masterpiece for Instagram.

If you want, you can use a professional picture of a mentioned dish and add a review over it, with the caption below; you can make a print screen and talk about it; you can create a collage or a video talking about those specific dishes/customers/situations (fill in the blank) – and that will be quite an impressive content creation as well.

Printscreens below are showing my use of a variety of apps for a visual representation of reviews. My profile has posts in Russian and English about life, business, meringues. Welcome! https://www.instagram.com/yulia_sip_of_europe/



With a smart way of telling about yourself, your products, your company you become a desirable product maker/service provider because you make your passions known and your information available.

You will be associated with bringing joy and value to your followers; providing relevant information about your niche and industry will make you an authority and expert in their eyes and when the time comes, you will be the first product/service provider that they think about when considering a purchase or when asked for a recommendation.

Make sure to **use a variety of formats for your posts.**

As mentioned earlier, Reels is highly promoted within the platform, bringing new followers in a nice and organic way.

From time to time I would recommend creating IGTV videos as they are randomly shown to people who don't follow you because they are very search-friendly and rank high through Instagram algorithms.

Stories, Live Streams, Images, Animated posts, Slideshows, Videos – are great ways to bring value to your audience and inform about hours, assortment, price, special deals. Be sure to analyze audience reactions. Review popular/unpopular posts, try new formats, distribute and repurpose your new and existing content.

Below I am adding food for thought for your brainstorming sessions. **Think of ways to use the following formats:**

A picture with a caption beneath it

Create original content

Repurpose your existing content (your interview, opinion, comment that you produced earlier, a topic that you've already discussed with someone)

Share someone's information - inspiring story, advice, give your thoughts on someone's opinion (customers, books, radio shows, podcasts, blogs, YouTube videos).

Image with text or slideshows (blank or with pictures) - perfect for visual topic distribution

Affirmation

Announcement, Reminder, Teaser

Collage

Comparisons: This or That?

Controversial statements

Customer photo of your product/ service (UGC content) with their opinion

FAQ & Q&A

Flatlay

Heading for navigation, rules, repetitive topics/ series of posts

Helpful tip

Hyperlapse

Idea / try this

List - how-to; top 5, top 10; 5 ways to; step-by-step tutorial

Myth/ facts

People, things, and places that inspire you. Add a short explanation

Quotes - of your own/ from your customers /famous

Review, testimonial - 1. Share a review as a quote in your feed, or 2. Share a photo, and then write the review in the caption

Secrets of Behind scenes magic

Shortlist

Someone's story relevant to your followers

Touch it, feel it, taste it - everyone can feel through the screen what your product feels like, looks like, tastes like. You see ingredients come together in a smooth motion, you can visualize the flavor based on what you see.

Examples below are from my café photo session by talented <https://www.instagram.com/theshelbysaucier/>



Animated post, slideshow, or video

Behind the scenes

GIF

Interview

Livestream

Pre-recorded video of talking for 1min or longer (IGTV format)

Preview/ trailer

Q&A

Slow-motion
Stop motion
Testimonial, review
Timelapse
Tutorial

A list of apps that help create Stories, IGTV, and Reels with the proper frame, posts with photos and videos **is included in the tailored strategy (see the last page)**.

8. Captions

As mentioned previously, you need to change your perception of posting just promotional content. It will be shared only if it is highly inspirational. With other posts the way to start conversations and get feedback is straightforward – just ask a question.

People love to feel valued. **If there are no incentives for interactions, people do not feel motivated to express their opinion.** Not only ask an opinion, but also listen to it, respond to it, play with it, and act in the future based on your feedback and profile statistics.

The basic way to get someone's opinion is by adding **call-to-action**. It works best with shareable content - something of value, it could be funny or educational or emotional that is relevant to your audience, explains your way of thinking, asks for advice or specific shoutouts.

The tailored package includes ideas of shareable content for your business and a variety of short captions that are created to create and keep high engagement on your profile (last page of this file).

Add relevant hashtags and location to Stories and under your posts. I would recommend using hashtags with a reach of less than 1 million because it will be hard to get traction with thousands of new posts daily. Avoid banned hashtags!

A good range of hashtags is 10-15, they will look better and more professional if added to the comment section, not to the main post. It will provide less distraction for your reader.

Do not use the same # every day unless it is your branded one, try varying not only brand-specific but also user-oriented. Perfectly chosen hashtags can bring you more than half of your subscribed audience. Learn more in the hashtag section of this document.

When you increase brand awareness without being too promotional, there are several benefits. It will elevate your brand position in your market and make you more competitive. The bigger your audience, the more eyes are on your products.

9. Follower interaction

If you do not interact with your audience in the form of Stories or posts, you and your business are basically equal to an **entrance sign on the front door** – interesting and visible only to those people who pass by. The same analogy can be used to describe the Instagram platform as a whole – customers will not be inclined to check your stories on a daily basis unless there is something special there waiting for them.

Would you feel motivated to comment on the post that **did not give you anything to work with**?

By telling a story, explaining something, communicating with your audience, encouraging feedback people are more drawn to liking and commenting on you.

You can learn from them to make your product better. In addition, customers you have great relationships with will advocate for your products and recommend them to friends. That is free advertising and word-of-mouth marketing from friends and family which has, by far, the highest conversion rates!

So, it is very important to make sure that your followers **are heard and appreciated**. The way to know it is to make sure to check and respond to direct messages and other “requests” (a special folder for messages from people who have never interacted with your profile before and might be considered as SPAM).

By the way, if such a person tags you in their story, the notification about it can also get in a “request” folder and dedicated to your brand photo and video will only be available 24 hours. So please make sure to be checking your direct messages at least every second day of the week.

If you repost a Story in which you were tagged, thank that person, and let him know that you appreciate their feedback. If you are planning to use pictures or videos in your post, ask permission for using it in your content. Make sure to mention that person in captions.

As mentioned previously, content created by other people is called user-generated content (UGC). It is a **wonderful way of differentiating yourself** from other businesses. Sure thing, every business can create appealing pictures and great

descriptions of their offerings, but if they do not have an outside validation, they are less trustworthy than other establishments with available reviews all over the place.

- User Generated Content gives you a unique perspective from people.
- Customer, who shared information about you once, will be more likely to share the content about you again, extending your reach.
- Because your customers become creators of content after you share it, they automatically turn into active participants in the content creation process, they would love to have their story mentioned and appreciate your love. People love to see themselves reflected in the content. When someone becomes a part of the process, they **feel a sense of ownership**. It also makes them feel elevated and valued, strengthening their relationship with your brand.

So, in order to differentiate, **you should use social proof** – objective ratings, data, and reviews created by actual customers who spent their own time to describe your offerings and their thoughts and emotions after getting those, their overall experience. This type of feedback is extremely valuable because it gives you a sincere insight into customers' expectations, satisfaction with your products and services, ideas for improvement. Moreover, you can share it and get feedback from your online audience, engaging your followers in the discussion.

People do not always make their opinion known and visible through review platforms and search engines – they are most likely to be told about it to their closest circle, possibly sharing pictures and advice. Since no one really wants to be upset about their hospitality destinations, not being included in that friends & colleagues' word of mouth group would leave those people to need to see the available reviews online.

Before the reviews, especially negative, get published about your business, think about the following: How will you know about the strengths and weaknesses of your business in the eyes of your consumers if you don't ask? Remember, it is important not to have an after-math of flaws of your business but get feedback while you are at it or right after you got a transaction from your customer.

In my cafe before accepting payments after serving the meal, I would always ask my customer if she/ he liked everything. If I heard something like "I wish I would have ordered a plain cinnamon-sugar crepe instead of one with jam or peanut butter (because it was too filling or didn't match the mood)", I would happily make a cinnamon-sugar crepe for indoors consumption or take to go and not charge for the initial crepe order. It is a golden rule to learn about customer satisfaction before it is too late and be able to turn any customer interaction into a happy event that my dear guest will have a positive aftertaste about.

Make sure you respond to all reviews online, including the good ones and especially the bad ones if they have a rational complaint! Those who stumble upon a bad review will likely skip your establishment, because they aren't aware of the whole story. If you bring your apologies, and make any alterations or corrections known regarding the issue that led to a poor review in the first place, you are much more likely to capture interest from potential customers.

The ways to see customers' reviews are **not limited to review platforms**. There is a plethora of information available through search engines, forums, social media apps. Start with a simple Google search, look at 5* reviews (or even 4* if they are nice and highlight great things about your business), check if there are any nice-looking pictures uploaded by your customers. Feel free to use them on your profile with a quote of your customer and a rating from his/ her visit.

It is very important to be checking **mentions of your Instagram page** (a little sign above your feed that looks like a person in a comment frame) and **location tag** (called "Places" on Instagram). Not only you can thank your customer for visiting your business, but you can also see his/her/their unique point of view on your offering, use it as your own promotional material (with their approval, of course), have a deeper conversation with them and your audience and get to see familiar faces again.

The more mentions, reposts, interactions your account has, **the more times it is shown to people who do not follow you**. If your account is structured and attractive, if you are staying actively present in your profile, you will be getting new people organically and there will be a bigger amount of your potential customers.

You, as a smart business owner, can and should use existing positive reviews **to your advantage** and showcase them all over your social media. This way the quick glance over your page will bring information not only about your business storefront but also real people's experience behind that.

Both the word of mouth and online reviews were making such a favor for me and my business, café Sip of Europe, that I would hear some good words while dining out and having a cocktail somewhere else in the city of Portland. I would hear the active conversations and recommendations of my business happening in Gross Confection Bar (my favorite elevated dessert destination in Portland Maine). That was an incredible feeling to be some sort of "undercover boss" revealing myself close to those people who were openly sharing their sincere feedback without knowing that the business owner of that establishment was there and inviting them over to my business for the next day.

It is important to remember that **any new customer costs you more to get than to keep existing customers** and increase their retention rate. Be very kind and understanding to your current consumers, they trusted you with your money

once and if they know that they are going to get a great next experience, they will have fewer objections to check you out than the newbies.

One of the axioms of marketing says that if a customer came to you 3 times, he is more likely to keep returning. This is why I had a very successful punch card strategy that would give 7th crepe for free with a purchase of any drink.

My ideal customers would be mostly individual travelers or locals, sometimes coming in alone, sometimes bring a friend, family member or a date; couples; two-three friends gathered for a catch-up meeting, so on average it would normally take my guests at least 3 times to come in use the deal. For over 4 years of being open, I have seen those very first customers bringing in their family members, friends, friends of friends, bosses, colleagues, and blind dates. That was very impressive!

After a few thousand used loyalty cards, I changed my strategy a little bit to fit my new needs, but the loyalty card strategy had a very long-lasting effect. I did my best to make my customers craving for more and choosing my place over and over again.

A good marketing strategy is to see your **local influencers like friends** and allow them to have the first look at your products or access to your best offerings for free or at a reduced price. If you are sure of the quality of your creations, making a free meal, sets of drinks for those people costs you just the bare minimum but brings unmatched leverage to your business.

I truly loved working with the **Yelp Elite community** and their fantastic **community manager Steff** with whom we had 3 fantastic Yelp dining events in my café. Check IGTV of my Instagram [@sipofeuropcart](#) profile or Google them! The events were called “Yelp’s Taste, Savor and Sip of Europe” - 2016, “Yelp’s Adventurous Dinner Party” - 2018, “Yelp Savors the flavors from beyond the pond” - 2019.

Please, remember, you **can always be interesting to people from out of state** with your social media profile if you impress them and give a reason to check your information out! Those people might have friends and family who live in your state, never been to your place, and could be surprised that you actually exist.

Your feed does not necessarily need to consist only of your products and services, you can give advice and recommendations about matters relevant to your followers.

Whenever you give a shortcut for your followers in terms of finding information that they might find useful, letting them know about your motivational and inspirational personas, you make the life of those who are inspired by your path and want to follow it just a little bit easier.

So being inspiring, helpful, and entertaining can bring you potential customers charmed by your organically created word of mouth.

10. Visual harmony

It is very important to have a visual harmony of the Instagram profile. You have just a few seconds to impress your potential follower and form an opinion about whether to follow your account and check your business out or not.

Nice looking feed to the best of your ability can happen if you:

- Use natural or professional light.
- Make clear, not blurry pictures - wipe your camera, try your best to have pictures in focus.
- Try following visual patterns (same style of pictures in columns or across the diagonals, etc).
- Alternate angles, sizes, and quantities of objects and set up make feed more diverse. Follow The Rule of Thirds, Create Movement, Change Perspective, feature finer details (macro focus), use selective focus, Add Negative Space to make your pictures shine.
- Choose proper frames for animated posts. Sometimes Instagram users forget to choose a frame for their video and automatically get the black square from the 1st or last second of it. IGTV videos sometimes do not have properly cut text or crop people’s faces. A good idea is to use photo and video apps and manually add a proper picture as a frame (cover).
- If there are specific series of posts, sections, repetitive topics that you discuss, it is a great idea to add a heading to the picture. Along with a specific branded hashtag, it makes navigation easier
- Use editing apps to enhance a picture (make it lighter, crop it, edit, add text, special effect, collage, etc.) or make your video better. A list of my favorite apps **is included in the tailored strategy (see the last page)**.
- Choose the Same set of fonts, styles of text consistently for your feed or at least each sequent set of 9 posts.

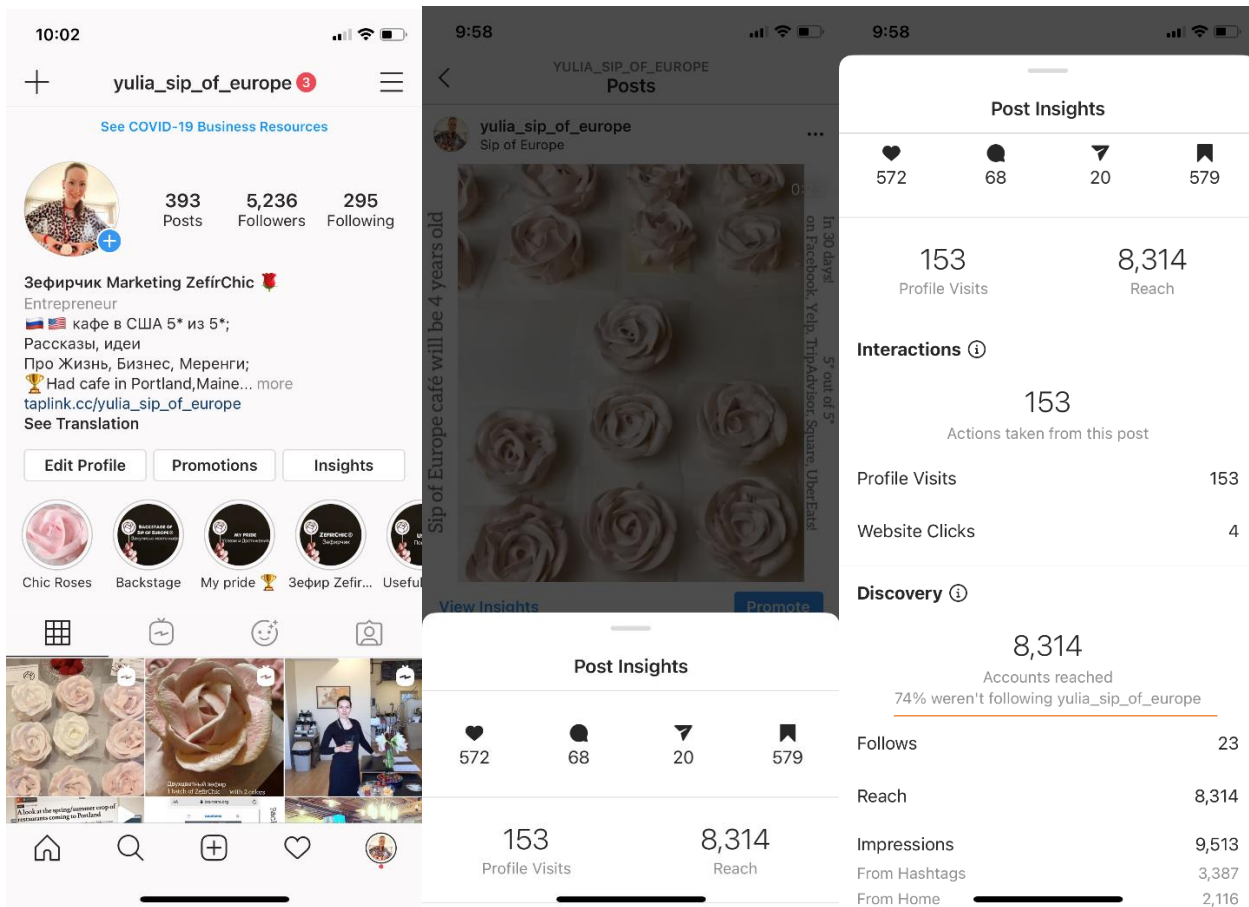
Having a systematic graphic style is a great way to get people to follow you. Once they see that you methodically post content that they find attractive, they will be more likely to follow you because they want to receive more content.

11. Using the power of hashtags

Using relevant, targeted hashtags for your posts and Stories is one of the best ways to get discovered by new audiences on Instagram. And this can translate into more engagement, more followers, and more customers for your business.

Since hashtags are used with an intent to discover content, **the right hashtags can put you in front of your target audience**, even if those people haven’t connected with you before.

As an example, you can see that posts could be shown to more than 70% of Instagram users who are not your followers just because they have the same interests and they look for what you can offer.



A few things to keep in mind:

- When people with private profiles tag posts and add hashtags, they won't appear publicly on hashtag pages.
- Numbers and smiles are allowed in hashtags. Spaces, special characters, and even dots will not work.
- You can only add hashtags to your own posts. You can't tag other people's photos/videos.
- You can use up to 30 hashtags on a post and 10 on Instagram Stories. The best number of Hashtags for a post is about 10-15.
- If you use even 1 banned hashtag (for example #likeforlike), your whole post might not be shown when looked for by other searched words.

Hashtags that help you be more search-friendly, attract new followers, grow your own community are called community hashtags.

Here are the **5 most popular types of hashtags** you can use for your business.

1. Hashtag illustrating your products and services, like #cappuccinoart, #crepecake, #coffeeshopsoftheworld
2. Hashtag specifying your niche in your industry, like #specialtydrinks, #hotchocolatebar
3. Hashtag relevant for Instagram communities in your industry, like #crepelovers, #nutellalovers, #dessertmasters
4. Hashtag using **locations**, like #portlandmaine, #mainefoodie
5. Hashtag with **phrases relevant** to what you do, like #brunchideas, #happyhourdrinks

Varying hashtags allows you to reach different communities and **plenty of people who might appreciate** what you offer. For instance, if you are a bar and you post a picture of a lady wearing a lovely dress with a cocktail in her hand, in addition to hashtags, describing your business, you can add hashtags about her outfit, dress, her accessories. This way, when a beauty blogger is looking for a dress or specific piece of jewelry your picture can still **show up in their feed!**

With a tailored strategy, **you will get a list of hashtags for your business**, both niche-related and not niche-related but relevant to your current and potential audience.

It is a good idea to create a branded hashtag for easier navigation or gathering feedback and reviews. After I opened up my coffee cart in Old Orchard Beach, in addition to coffee-related hashtags I was adding to my posts #sipofeurope, a hashtag made up with the name of my business. I was able to see my customer's posts in a fast and efficient way. My other Instagram

profiles have specific navigation hashtags divided by different themes – every time my follower would be looking for a particular topic, they would find what they were looking for in my feed.

In order to optimize and enhance your Instagram performance do not forget to check hashtag analytics under each post, this data will show **what is working for you and what is not**. Collect niche-related hashtags, make a few sets of good relevant hashtags, rotate them, and find out the best-performing ones.

The strategy for your hashtags is the same as for everything else – focus on the activities that work best for your business and keep improving!

12. Investing in social media growth

To make sure your customers and potential customers are aware of all your offerings and know as much about products and services as you do, you should be visible on social media.

A well-crafted message is only effective if it's heard. No matter how great your content is, if it doesn't have the chance to reach your target consumers, it won't have much of an impact.

If you want to create a buzz about your business, you'll not only need to create appealing and intriguing content but also share it in the **right place at the right time**.

To reach potential for yourself and your business you should be investing time, resources, and money.

In order to be active and consistent on social media, it is helpful to have a **content plan and strategy**. Benefits:

1. It saves your daily time costs for a month and let you spend spare time on other professional matters.
2. It helps you reach your goals since all your activities will be tailored to map a customer's journey from the awareness stage to the purchase and recurring sales stage.
3. You are consistent in taking care of your profile, engaging, and interacting with your audience.
4. You will have all kinds of content thought out. You will prevent the risk of overloading your reader with promotional topics without any useful or entertaining content that your customers can look forward to.
5. You can easily delegate blogging to a hired specialist and control it according to a given thematic grid.

It's best to look at your own Instagram metrics to determine the best posting time. It is usually a good bet to post when you know your audience tends to be online and active. Posting regularly gives followers more opportunities to find their content.

People on social media are at different places at different times and what is interesting to one person might be slightly less interesting to another, so do not be afraid of posting a lot each day every day. The more followers engage with your content, the more often social media apps will surface your post.

Remember, if you put time & effort into creating content (Stories, posts, etc.) – it is already more than other businesses are doing!

Perform audits regularly. Look at your business with an objective eye, armed with facts and data gathered from your research. It's an opportunity to see areas where your business is underperforming. Then you can make informed decisions about how to improve activities or employ new tactics to achieve greater success in your efforts.

Take time to **analyze your competitors as well**. By exploring the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors, you can improve the way you approach your audience and enhance your performance. Make a list of the things you like about what other brands are doing, what you think they could do better. Use your ideas to your advantage!

Social media users favor **visually appealing content**, so take advantage by treating them to some high-quality photography. If your pictures do not look inviting, attractive, and irresistible, consider hiring a professional.

If you are interested in a professional photo session for yourself, your product, or work process, check out the portfolio of **LOCAL photographer Brian Chambers** <https://www.perignum.com/>

Do not be afraid to **delegate** other time and skill-requiring duties to those who will complete tasks faster, in an efficient and customer-friendly way.

Promote posts that already did well with your organic reach – the ones that were saved, shared, and commented on.

The more reach your page has, the more eyes are there on your brand. If you have an interesting account, people who see your posts may stay and learn about your offerings. Most of the time people are aware of the things that are shown. The more you show, the more aware they are.

What I can do for you

It took me a couple of months to combine and structure my knowledge, tips, tricks, and advice into creating this document so that I could help hospitality friends and other wonderful business owners in Portland and beyond.

In January, I will be happy to provide **free 30-minutes consultations** (online or offline if I have availability for the requested day) about the material mentioned in this document and give some advice for your Instagram strategy.

My personal and business experience at this moment tends to be most helpful for hospitality providers (f&b, travel, transportation, lodging) and art creators, but I've also created strategies for lifestyle bloggers, clothing stores, master-class providers, etc. Feel free to reach out with your request through sipofeurope@gmail.com or **send a request for availability** through [HubSpot form](#) on my website www.sipofeurope.com.

Let me know **if my material was helpful** to you & your account **or shifted your perception of social media**. I will be happy to get your feedback to be able to share it with the world! Thank you for your time and best of luck with your business!

If you are looking for more than free information and want to have a strategy tailored to your account, I will be happy to assist! With me, you will gain exposure to new ideas and different strategies.

I will reduce your learning curve and help you avoid wasting time. I will do the following for you & your business:

1. Give **recommendations on optimizing your Instagram profile**.
2. Help understand strengths of your business and opportunities for improving your social media positioning, **broadcast your unique proposition on the market**.
3. Help you define **objections, pain points, wants and needs** of potential customers (target personas).
4. Explain how to encourage your followers to mention you more often and tag you in their content, **make your online audience more involved and engaged**, wanting to be active on social media and talk about you and your brand.
5. Give you **a list of ideas and short captions for gamification** in Stories & posts.
6. Give you online and offline marketing ideas.
7. Explain how **to attract new followers** that will eventually turn into paying **customers**
8. Let you know about **best practices of leading businesses** who are active on Instagram, provide you with accounts so that you can get inspired by their tactics and analyze their competitive benefits. I will share ideas of what to look for in competitors' profiles
9. Bring up what information should be on page for steady organic growth.
10. Provide **list of hashtags** relevant for your account.
11. Give you an additional set of apps that can **level up your** Stories, Video, and photo creations.
12. Explain **where to get ideas for content creation**.

About me

My name is Yulia, I was born and raised in Russia. I spent my school and university years in St. Petersburg, Russia – magnificent city, major historical center, country's cultural heart, Russia's imperial capital.

Saint Petersburg is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list as an area with 36 historical architectural complexes and around 4000 outstanding individual monuments of architecture, history, and culture.

Living in such an incredible city, studying in the best educational institutes in Russia and being able to travel to Europe resulted in my personal heritage that I cherish and share.

- In high school I was included to **prestigious list of Russian Talented youth** due to winning national competition of research works. It was a multi-stage process that had me compete with the smartest people in the country. For getting the 1st place **I received Presidential award**.

- I got to the final stage of selection for international **Junior 8 Summit**.

- I graduated school with **Gold medal** for academic excellence in school - highest award for scholars.

- **At the age of 16** I enrolled at prestigious **St. Petersburg State University**, the oldest in Russia and mentioned in the list of world best universities of the world. Due to high scores of passing exams **I studied for free** and was receiving **stipend**.

- Got an A for my final thesis research work in a field of **economic psychology**

- Graduated as a **specialist in economics** in 2013. According to my Diploma there were **11537 workload hours** and **100+ subjects** including mathematical analysis, management, psychology, business strategies, human capital theory, financial management, econometrics, economics of industrial markets, labor economics, economic psychology, economic and legal aspects of intellectual property, economic theory of law, accounting, economics of innovation, marketing, management of conflicts, information economics, marketing in services and advertising.

- After graduating I worked for **St. Petersburg International Economic Forum**, after that I was a **business developer** for a Mystery shopping company servicing big international clients.

- **At the age of 23** within 3 months after immigrating to the USA I **established my business called Sip of Europe®**, first as a coffee cart for summer season of 2015 and after that a year-round café in Portland, Maine. For over 5 years of having an actual business with physical locations I've been keeping ratings **5* out of 5*** on major review platforms (Facebook, Yelp, TripAdvisor, Square, UberEats. You can see the printscreens in my [LinkedIn article](#)). **Siri** was recommending me as the best crepe business and listing me among **3 best places to get breakfast** in Portland Maine. In the last month of operations of my café in July 2020 my business was considered **Top Eats by Uber Eats** platform.

- My café got **Portland Phoenix award** the same year when Portland was called the food city of the year.

- I am a proud owner of **4 trademarks** including one for Sip of Europe®, and a few more for my desserts that I am committed to make world-famous and loved (they are protected with trademarks ZefirChic®, Low in calories, high in happiness®, ZefirChic Rose®)

- I was mentioned in **over 30 online & offline sources**, including fantastic conversation with **Gary Vee** about the future of my delicious soft meringue treats; a few blog posts about the Yelp events that I hosted, a few mentions of being the best in different categories.

- And the most relevant of all - thanks to a **heavy and smart use of social media** during Portland's lockdown in spring of 2020 on crêpe cakes alone I managed to earn **a few months of rent** which was not reduced or changed.

Information in this document is based on my own personal and business experience, additional education.

I created this guide to help business owners utilize the powers of social media, getting better awareness, more sales, and more customers.

Feel free to share this file with your friends, family and colleagues.

If you have any questions or requests, feel free to fill in the contact form on my website www.sipofeurope.com