



All photos by Laura Izumikawa

Checklist: How to Grow from 0 to 600,000+ Followers

Hootsuite interviewed Laura Izumikawa, a lifestyle photographer and mommy blogger, who grew her Instagram audience from 0 to 600,000 followers with no special equipment or black hat tricks—just family-of-four realness and dress-up fun.



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Follow Laura's Instagram adventures [here](#) and visit her website [here](#).

1. Cultivate a personal style

Where did the idea for your Naptime with Joey photo series come from?

I first used Instagram as a means to connect with clients and potential clients when I had my wedding and lifestyle photography career in full swing. When my daughter was born, I was always home with her. Instead of taking the same photo of her napping (she slept all the time!), I decided to have fun and dress her up in various costumes.

What's your number one tip to aspiring Instagram influencers and marketers?

Find what you're most passionate about sharing. Use your passion or what you're gifted in and document it with photos and videos.

YOUR ACTION

Don't limit yourself or try to imitate the success of others. You can't take the same steps as everyone else and expect original work to emerge. If you find yourself stuck in a routine, brainstorm unique approaches to the content you already like posting.

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[How to Establish Your 'Brand' Voice on Social Media](#)



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2. Put yourself in your audience's shoes

You Instagram feed offers an intimate window into your personal life and family adventures. How do you decide what to post and what not to post?

Yes, my family life is private to me and I do limit what I share. I like to share what I believe could really make someone's day or make someone smile.

YOUR ACTION

Aim to spark joy. Test posting different types of content to determine what your audience appreciates the most. If you receive a lot of positive engagement on a post or a Story, attempt to replicate that success in the future. Eventually a content strategy will emerge.

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[A/B Testing on Social Media: How to Do it With the Tools You Already Have](#)



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Example: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqDjUNoFduK/>

3. Be vulnerable

Your Instagram posts get upwards of 40,000 likes. In your opinion, what key elements should every successful Instagram post have?

The most important thing is vulnerability and honesty. People are on social media to connect—or at the very least—relate to others. Being open and transparent will go a long way to help you connect with your audience.

YOUR ACTION

Don't be afraid to show behind-the-scenes content or a less polished side of your life every so often. Remind your followers that you're a real person. It will be easier for them to relate and connect with your content.

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[How to be More Authentic on Social Media](#)



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Example: Amex Ambassador: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BIL0SSnHOiZ/>

4. Build natural partnerships

You're often hired by brands to run Instagram Influencer campaigns. What makes a good piece of branded content on Instagram?

I believe if you are a fan of the brand and their work, and your audience can see a natural relationship, that is what makes good branded content. I often see influencers grabbing any and all partnerships, and it doesn't always seem natural to who they are.

When considering brand partnerships, you must consider your audience and how the partnership will add or take away from your brand. I often turn down brand partnerships because I do not like the product, or it doesn't fit with my brand.

YOUR ACTION

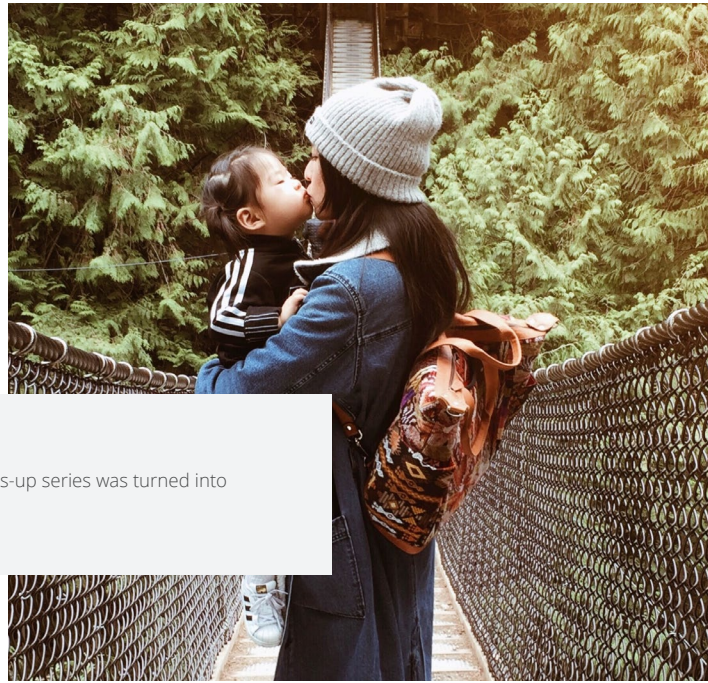
Followers can tell when content is forced. When considering a partnership with another brand, make sure your mutual goals align. Aim to create content with a look and feel that fits naturally with the content you already post.

READ MORE

[The Complete Guide to Instagram Influencer Rates](#)



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SEE MORE FROM LAURA

Laura's viral Naptime with Joey dress-up series was turned into a book. You can [grab a copy here](#).

Toolbox: filters and gear

What do you currently use to take your Instagram photos?

I primarily use my iPhone, but also various dSLR cameras.

Filters? Yes, no?

I do love filters because it gives my photos and video more of a cinematic feel or an editorial look.

Do you use any other apps or editing tools?

I like to use VSCO Cam for most of my photo and video filters. I like to use Filter A4. I also enjoy using Unfold for stories on Instagram. I edit my YouTube videos through Final Cut Pro X.

What tips do you have for phone photography?

Find the light and see how it can enhance a mood or look before taking the photo. Ask yourself if the subject of your photography needs anything added or taken away to tell a story and make the entire image stand out.

YOUR ACTION

The tools you use to enhance your content don't have to be expensive. Take photos on an iPhone and edit them using VSCOcam. Look for natural light and take multiple photos with different props to see what tells the best story.

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[How to Take Good Instagram Photos](#)

[How to Edit Instagram Photos](#)

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