TUESDAY ROBBINS · A GUIDE FOR SMALL-BUSINESS OWNERS

Stop Posting Just to Post

How small businesses actually get people to watch, click, message and share - without posting every day, dancing on camera, or begging the algorithm for mercy.



You are holding this because you commented GUIDE. Smart move. This is the good stuff - keep it, print it, tape it to the wall by your register.

By Tuesday Robbins

For shops, restaurants, makers and service businesses who do the posting themselves - in between actually running the business.

START HERE

Seriously. Posting is not the problem. What you post is.

People are nosey. They want to know about you - your real life, your real shop, your real Tuesday-morning chaos. That is not a flaw in your audience. That is the whole opportunity.

So no, the answer is not "post more." And it is not "never talk about yourself." It is this: give people something worth stopping for, in the first three seconds, and then give them one clear thing to do with it.

The only three signals that run the show

Instagram's own head, Adam Mosseri, named the top three ranking signals in January 2025. Everything in this guide hangs off these:

- **Watch time** - how long people actually stay. This buys you the audition.
- **Likes per reach** - matters a little more with people who already follow you.
- **Sends per reach** - how often people send your post to someone else. Matters most with strangers. This is how new people find you.

> **My promise on numbers:** every stat in here names where it came from. And I will tell you straight when a number is a best-case story from a company selling something, instead of a promise. If somebody guarantees you viral, they are selling you something.

How this guide is built

- **Listen** - get them to watch past three seconds
- **Click** - Reels barely click, so stop asking them to (and do this instead)
- **Message** - the comment-to-DM path that actually brings in customers and emails
- **Share** - make the thing somebody sends to one specific person
- **Your week** - how much to post, what mix, and what to stop doing today

Sources are listed at the end. Figures checked November 2026.

PART 1 · LISTEN

You have three seconds. The average viewer gives you eight and a half.

Average watch time on a Reel is **8.5 seconds** (Metricool, January-February 2026, 24 million posts). Instagram now even measures your **skip rate** - the share of people who swipe away in the first three seconds. Lose the open, lose everything.

Open in the middle of the action

Never open with "Hey guys, today I wanted to show you..." and a logo. Open with the thing itself, moving, with words on screen. Six openers that work:

- **Contrarian:** "Everyone does it, and does it wrong: ..."
- **Curiosity gap:** "The one thing nobody tells you about ___." (Answer comes later. That is the point.)
- **Proof first:** show the finished result in second one, then show how you got there.
- **Call-out:** name your person. "Coffee lovers, this one is for you."
- **Specific number:** "3 dishes under $15 - number 2 sells out by 7."
- **Save-worthy:** "Save this: 5 rules for ___."

One idea per video. Five to ten words on screen, readable in about a second, up in the top third where the buttons and captions are not sitting on it. And only promise what the video actually delivers - clickbait gets you one view and loses you the person.

1.22x vs 0.78x

Videos with heavy on-screen text averaged 1.22 times the creator's normal views. Videos with no text at all averaged 0.78 times. Same study: visual + text alone had a median of 25,492 views; visual + spoken word only, 1,828. Most people watch with the sound off at first - if your hook is only spoken, it is invisible. (The Content Labs, 5,012 videos.)

So: big, clear captions on everything. Word-by-word if you can. Styled captions beat plain auto-captions, and anything beats nothing.

PART 1 · LISTEN, CONTINUED

How long should it be? Honestly - the studies fight about it.

I am not going to pretend there is one magic length, because there is not:

Study	What it found
Buffer - 2.7 million Reels	90-179 seconds earned about 7% more reach. Under 90 seconds, length barely mattered - the hook did.
Socialinsider - 9.77 million Reels	45-60 seconds had the best engagement and the most views.
Highviz - 346 Reels	15-30 seconds had the best engagement per view.

Here is what they all agree on, and it is the part worth taping to the wall:

- **Over 3 minutes kills discovery.** Instagram does not recommend Reels longer than 3 minutes to people who do not follow you. Buffer measured reach down about 49% past three minutes.
- **Under 90 seconds, the hook matters more than the clock.**
- **My working rule:** 30-60 seconds for reaching new people, 15-30 seconds for one quick tip, longer only when the extra time adds real steps, proof or story.

Make it loop without them noticing

Reels replay on their own. If your last frame flows into your first - same spot, same motion, or a sentence that splits across the end and the start ("...and that is exactly why -" / "- you never do it that way") - people rewatch before they realise it, and your watch time climbs past 100%. A tight 7-12 second loop of a satisfying process - pouring, plating, stirring, a before-and-after wipe - is the easiest version of this.

Pacing, quickly

- Change what is on screen every few seconds.
- Cut the dead air at the start and the finish.
- Promise the payoff in the hook, deliver it near the end.
- No static opening shot. No logo intro. No two seconds of silence while you get ready.

> **Try this week:** take your best-performing old post and remake just the first three seconds - result first, words on screen. Same content, new door.

PART 2 · CLICK

Reels barely click. Stop designing them like they do.

Here is the number nobody puts in the sales pitch: a Reel gets **under 1 click per 100 views**. That is not you failing. That is the format. People are in lean-back, keep-scrolling mode, and there is no link in a Reel to click anyway.

So give each format the job it is actually good at:

Format	Its real job	Rough click rate
Reel	Discovery - new people find you	Under 1 per 100 views
Story with a link sticker	The click	About 1-3 per 100 viewers
Carousel	Saves, teaching, and a better bio click	About 2.4% bio click-through vs 0.8% for Reels in one large vendor study
Comment-to-DM	The lead - see Part 3	The highest-converting path in this whole guide

The click routine that works

- **Same-day Story:** post the Reel, then post a Story about it the same day with the link sticker on it. Reel finds them, Story clicks them.
- **Say the offer early:** if there is an offer, it goes on screen in the first five seconds, not in a caption nobody opens.
- **Make your bio match today's Reel:** if the Reel is about the guide, the top of your bio and your link should say "the guide," not a generic homepage.
- **Retire "link in bio" as your only plan.** In one study of 271,550 posts, captions saying "link in bio" actually got about 16% fewer likes. Use it as a backup, never as the strategy.

> **Honest note:** there is no trustworthy "average link-in-bio click rate" out there. Published numbers run from 1% to 30% with no method behind them. Anyone quoting you one exact benchmark for it is guessing with confidence.

PART 3 · MESSAGE

"Comment GUIDE and I will send it to you" - the money path

This is exactly how you got this guide, so you already know it works on you. One word to comment. One real, useful thing delivered in a DM. No link to hunt for, no landing page to load.

Why it beats a link

- The comment itself helps the post - real comments from real people who want a real thing.
- The DM starts a conversation, and conversations are where sales actually happen.
- Deliver the free thing first. Ask for the email second, for the bigger pack. Gate everything and people leave at every step.

4,552 emails, +900 followers

One local burger shop ran a comment-to-DM offer (comment for a 2-for-1 code) and collected 4,552 emails and about 900 new followers from one campaign, with reach up 431%. Other reported cases run from about 65% of commenters giving an email in the DM, up to 85% registering for a freebie. Those are vendor and creator case stories - best cases, not averages, and there is no neutral benchmark. But even a small slice of it beats under-1-click-per-100-views.

The rules, so you stay out of trouble

- Use Meta's official tools or a Meta-approved partner tool. Never a tool that logs in with your password.
- You get **one** private reply per comment, sent within **7 days**. Once the person replies, you have a **24-hour** window after their last message.
- Professional (business or creator) account only, with message access turned on.
- Never cold-DM strangers. This only starts when they comment first.
- Once the automation delivers, **show up like a human** - answer fast, by hand. Nearly 3 in 4 people expect a reply within 24 hours.

Good things to give away this way

A one-page checklist. Your price list or menu as a PDF. A booking link. A free mini-audit. A template. This guide. If it helps them in five minutes, it is a good lead magnet.

> **The bait trap:** Instagram does not recommend posts that beg for comments with nothing behind them ("comment a fire emoji if you agree"). A keyword tied to a real thing you actually deliver is earning it, not baiting it. Deliver, every time.

PART 4 · SHARE

Nobody shares "content." They send something to one specific person.

Sends per reach is the signal that reaches strangers - likes speak to your followers, sends speak to everybody else. Meta has said there are billions of Reel reshares a day. When somebody sends your post, they are putting their own taste on the line with a friend. That is why the algorithm trusts it, and why you cannot fake it.

How am I doing? A rough yardstick

Sends per reach	What creator guides call it
Under 0.5%	Weak - mostly reaching your own followers
0.5 - 1%	Solid
1 - 2%	Strong - expect it to travel past your followers
Over 2%	Viral territory

Straight talk: Instagram has never published these numbers. They are creator-guide consensus, and guides disagree with each other. Use your own account's usual rate as your baseline and watch the ratio move, not the bragging rights.

Saves and shares are different jobs - design for one per post

	Save-worthy ("I need this again")	Share-worthy ("Someone needs this")
Make	Checklists, how-to steps, price lists, "5 mistakes," templates	Relatable moments, humour, local inside jokes, before-and-afters
Best format	Carousels earn the most saves	Short, relatable Reels earn the sends
Example	"5 hooks that stop the scroll - save this"	"Send this to the business owner still posting flyers"

The test before you post

Ask one question: **"Who would somebody send this to, and why?"** If you can picture one specific person - the friend who always cancels, the teammate who needs the checklist, the spouse who needs the hint - you have a shareable post. If the answer is "everybody," it is for nobody. Build the post for that one recipient and let people do the sending themselves. You do not have to beg for it in the caption - in fact, begging can cost you reach (see the stop list, next page).

PART 5 · YOUR WEEK

How much, what mix - and what to stop doing today

A week you can actually keep up in your busiest month

- **Instagram:** 3-5 feed posts a week. Accounts posting 3-5 times a week earned about 12% more reach per post than 1-2 times a week (Buffer, about 2.1 million posts). Skipping whole weeks hurt more than posting modestly.
- **Facebook:** 2-4 posts a week is a sustainable start for a small team. Regular and good beats daily and tired.
- **Stories:** 1-2 a day when you have something to show. Reels find new people; Stories keep your people warm.
- **Starting times to test:** Instagram Tuesday 1-7pm and Wednesday 12-9pm; Facebook Tuesday and Wednesday 12-8pm (Sprout Social 2026, about 2 billion engagements). Other studies disagree by hours - so test these, then trust your own Insights "active times." Your bakery crowd scrolls at 7am, not 2pm.

The mix

The famous **80/20 rule** - 80% educate, entertain or inspire, 20% sell - is a rule of thumb repeated everywhere, not a measured law. It still works as a gut check: if every post is a promo, your reach starves, because promo posts earn the weakest distribution. A week that models it: 2 teaching Reels (save-worthy), 1 relatable Reel (share-worthy), 1 behind-the-scenes or customer-result post, 1 soft offer through comment-to-DM.

Stop doing this

- **Engagement bait** - "comment a fire emoji if you agree," "tag a friend," giveaways as a growth plan. Instagram limits recommendation on these.
- **Hashtag stuffing** - the cap is now **5 per post** (December 2025). Five specific ones. Hashtags categorise; they do not create reach.
- **Reposting other people's clips, watermarks and all** - since April 2026, mostly-reposted accounts lose recommendation. Borrow a hook idea all day. Shoot your own footage.
- **Buying followers, pods, follow-unfollow, cold DMs** - fake followers dilute everything the algorithm measures about you.
- **AI-sounding captions** - in that 271,550-post study, captions that read AI-generated got about 25% fewer likes and 34% fewer comments. Write like you talk. People can tell. They always could.
- **Logo intros and silent openings** - you know why by now. Three seconds.

PART 6 · WHAT CHANGED

The 2025-2026 changes that actually affect you

When	Change	What it means for you
Apr 2025	Views replaced impressions as the headline metric	Old and new numbers do not compare. Do not panic over a "drop" that is just a new ruler.
Jun 2025	Every Facebook video is now a Reel	All your Facebook video gets Reel treatment - judge it by watch time, shares and new followers, not raw views.
Jun 2025	Skip rate and retention graphs added to Reels Insights	Your hook now has a report card. Check it.
Dec 2025	Hashtag cap: 5 per post	Pick five that actually describe the post.
Dec 2024 on	Trial Reels - show a Reel to non-followers first	The cheapest hook test there is. Try 2-3 openings as Trials, promote the winner.
Apr 2026	Originality rule extended to photos and carousels	Original footage and photos, every time.
Ongoing	Business accounts and trending songs do not mix	Instagram's licensed songs are for personal use. For a business, use Meta's Sound Collection - 14,000+ tracks cleared for commercial use - or add the trending sound in the app when you post, and never bake a chart song into an ad.

Numbers to judge yourself by

Average Instagram engagement in 2025 was **0.48%** - carousels 0.55%, Reels 0.52%, single images 0.37% (Socialinsider, tens of millions of posts). Under about 5,000 followers, Reels actually beat carousels; past that, carousels pull ahead on engagement while Reels keep finding people. If you are a small account beating 0.48%, you are not behind. You are ahead of the average brand on the internet.

> **One-page recap:** Hook in 3 seconds, words on screen, payoff at the end. Reels for discovery, Stories for clicks, comments for leads. Make one person want to send it to one other person. Post 3-5 times a week, 80% value, 20% sell. Five hashtags. Your own footage. Sound like yourself.

BONUS · FOR MY PEOPLE WHO RUN PAGES

Want to give this guide away too? Here is the whole launch kit.

This guide spreads by one mechanic: **comment GUIDE, get it in your DMs.** Below is ready-to-use copy for a Reel, a feed post and a Story sequence - a different headline for each, on purpose. A fresh headline makes the same guide feel new every time you run it. Steal these, swap in your business, go.

1. The Reel

Headline (on screen, first frame): "Posting every day and hearing crickets? Read this first."

Script (about 30 seconds): "Stop posting just to post. [beat] If your views are stuck, it is probably not how often you post - it is the first three seconds, the words on your screen, and whether anybody would send it to a friend. I put what actually works - watch, click, message, share - into one free guide. Comment GUIDE and I will send it straight to you."

Caption: "It is not your posting schedule, I promise. It is what happens in the first 3 seconds. I made you the cheat sheet I wish somebody had handed me - free. Comment GUIDE and it is yours. #SmallBusiness #SocialMediaTips #BusinessOwner #MarketingTips #ShopLocal"

2. The feed post

Headline (on the graphic): "Your content is not boring. Your first three seconds are."

Caption: "Real talk: people are nosey, and that is good news for your business. They want your real life, your real process, your real mess-ups - not another flyer with a caption. I compiled what is actually working right now for small businesses into one guide: how to get watched past 3 seconds, why Reels barely click (and what does), the comment-to-DM trick that brings in emails, and how to make posts people send to their friends. Want it? Comment GUIDE and I will DM it to you."

3. The Story sequence

Headline (Story 1): "Quick question for business owners..."

Story 1: Poll sticker - "Be honest: do you post and pray?" (Yes, every time / I have a system)
Story 2: "The average Reel gets watched for 8.5 seconds. Your hook has 3. I made a free guide that fixes the first 3 - and the click, DM and share parts too."
Story 3: Question sticker - "Want it? Drop the word GUIDE right here and I will send it to you." (Replying to the Story starts the same DM path.)

BONUS · THE FOLLOW-THROUGH

The DM, the checklist, and one last thing

The DM you send when they comment GUIDE

> "Hey! Thanks for commenting GUIDE - here is the guide: [link]. The part most people tell me hit home is Part 1, the first-three-seconds fix. Quick question so I send you the right stuff next time: what do you sell, and where?"

Deliver first, question second - exactly like Part 3 says. When they answer, reply like a person, not a funnel. That conversation is the whole point.

Before-you-post checklist

- ☐ Does the first frame have words on it, readable in one second?
- ☐ Is the good stuff promised early and delivered near the end?
- ☐ Could this loop without a jolt?
- ☐ Is there exactly ONE thing to do - comment, save, send, or tap the Story?
- ☐ Same-day Story planned, with the link sticker if there is a link?
- ☐ Five hashtags or fewer, all specific?
- ☐ My own footage, no watermarks, business-safe music?
- ☐ Does the caption sound like me talking - because people are nosey and they want YOU?
- ☐ Can I name the one person somebody would send this to?

One last thing

You do not need to be everywhere, every day, doing every trend. You need the first three seconds, something real about your actual life and business, and one clear next step. Do that on repeat and the listening, clicking, messaging and sharing take care of themselves.

Now go make the post. And when it works - tell me. I am nosey too.

- Tuesday Robbins

TUESDAY ROBBINS MARKETING & DESIGN · FROM VISION TO VICTORY

Sources (checked November 2026): Adam Mosseri's top ranking signals, January 2025, via Social Media Today. Metricool Reels watch-time data (24M posts), via VayBe, "Reels hooks: how to win the first 3 seconds," vaybestudio.com. The Content Labs, on-screen text studies (5,012 and 5,354 videos), thecontentlabs.app. Buffer, "Instagram Reels Length" (2.7M Reels) and frequency study, buffer.com. Socialinsider, 2026 Instagram benchmarks and Reels length study, socialinsider.io. SocialToolsAI caption study (271,550 posts), socialtoolsai.com. OpenSponsorship click-rate benchmarks, opensponsorship.com. ShoutlyAI format study (1.8M assets). LogicBalls, comment-to-DM rules from Meta developer documentation, logicballs.com. Burger Crush case study (agency PDF, 2024). Sprout Social best-times 2026, via GrowWebPro. Where sources disagreed - on video length and conversion rates especially - this guide says so rather than picking a winner.