A Guide to Social Media Images for Business

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Abstract: *In the paper "The Guide to Social Media Images for Business" we are going to focus on the importance of images in social media marketing. In the beginning, we are going to present the types of images encountered on social media platforms (e.g. photos, GIFs and memes), and some strategies that underpin them. Moreover, we are going to look into elements that can help every company personalize its own social media materials. In order to create a brand, each person/company has to create its own "signature", a number of elements that appear on all social media posts so that the audience can recognize and distinguish the brand from the others. At the end of the paper, we will offer some technical guidelines for Facebook, Instagram and Twitter posts. We will provide descriptions of each platform and examine some particularities in terms of image size.*

Keywords: *social media, images, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, marketing strategy.*

1. Introduction

The concept of images in social media marketing can be explained by one central concept: "visual storytelling". In simple terms, visual

storytelling is a technique that uses photos, videos, illustrations, GIFs and other means to convey a message.

That message can awake almost any emotional feeling in a viewer, by entertaining, informing, shocking, or even inspiring the audience.

We are all consumers, who see an image from a brand and decide immediately whether we want to continue to consume content from that particular brand (and show interest in their products or services), or we move on to something else.

Today, more than ever, effective visual storytelling is being used by marketers to help audiences extract and digest the content that is valuable to them. We live in a world where the flood of information is surrounding us permanently, where people's time is extremely valuable and attention spans are shorter.

2. The context and challenges

The well-known saying that a picture paints a thousand words has never been more prevalent. With the growth of social media and the importance of visual content among all of the major social media players (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram), building a brand has become a necessity.

2.1. Types of social media images

To achieve the greatest impact, it is important to plan ahead the kind of visual content that will best resonate with your target audience.

According to Macarthy (2014: 25), **photos**, as part of marketing campaigns posted on social media, give the opportunity of taking the audience by surprise. Below are presented some examples of best kinds of images to post on social media – these examples will help any brand to become more transparent, personable and valuable.

- **Advertising products and services.** Almost all brands are on social media to help sell their products. Product shots taken in natural settings - like showing a rain coat being worn in a real shower of rain - tend to be received much better because they

show how your products fit into customers' everyday lives and can help to establish an emotional connection with your brand.

- **Asking questions,** accompanied by an image, is a really simple and effective way of gathering information about the interests and needs of your audience. This will be of great help when it comes to developing your products, services, and social media marketing strategy for the future.
- **Behind the scenes.** With the openness of social media, audiences are now intrigued to go behind the curtain in your business and enjoy the feeling of being invited to a place that most people do not normally get to see. People want to know how your business works, and showing them parts of your company's "private life" demonstrates your human side.
- **Offering hints and tips** to your audience is a really effective way to remain consistently valuable, increase the shareability of your posts, and grow brand loyalty.
- **Highlighting the charitable side** and dedication to make a difference in the community can also help to improve the brand's image. Any example showing that you made someone's day a little bit better - and show it off in pictures – may have great results.
- **User-generated images.** Encouraging fans to share photos in which they show how your company is part of their lives is a very influential marketing strategy. By highlighting such content on your social media profiles, you make fans feel very special.
- **Using popular culture photos.** The selfie is a trend that looks like is here to stay, while others are transient. Nevertheless, all of these trends can be taken advantage of in order to boost audience engagement.

The small size (both physically and data-wise) of the animated **GIF** makes it a useful marketing tool for a number of reasons, and usually exists in one of three forms: using multiple still images to create an

ever-repeating "slideshow," lifting a snippet from a video that you own, or lifting a section of video from a recording found online (Jefflewis, *Explanation of Image File Types*):

- **Expressing a thought or emotion.** A humorous animation is often the type that is best received by the public.
- **Promoting a product or service.** This works whether you want to show an assortment of products in one animation, compare two products side by side, or give a quick demonstration about how something works.
- **Announcements and call-to-actions.** One of the biggest uses of animated GIFs is as a way to catch peoples' eyes and encourage them to click through to see your content - a product launch, a special offer.
- **Reliving a scene or a moment.** Another simple and effective way to use animated GIFs is to tell the story of a moment in time: it could be a replay of something unexpected, funny, or cool that happened at an event.
- **Visual effect.** As the animated GIF format sees snippets of video repeat over and over, this can be used to create some cool effects - in particular, the seamless loop, where the audience cannot tell when the GIF starts or ends due to the fact that the images used at the beginning and at the end are pretty much similar.

Memes are funny, entertaining, relatable, and creative images (combined with text) that have huge viral potential. They are not always judged upon as being the most "high quality" pieces of content. As a result, they should be carefully considered while used as part of marketing strategies, based on several important factors (Landa, 2014):

- **Understanding the concept.** Memes are easily digested and extremely shareable. The most common layout of a meme is two short lines of text laid out like a one-liner joke: first the setup, then the punch line.

- **Make it relevant.** If you have to explain the concept of a meme to your audience when you post it, it is probably not going to resonate with them. It is important that you select the memes relevant to your audience and brand.
- **Don't miss any opportunity.** Like most of the pop culture content, the majority of memes have a short life – here today and gone tomorrow. By the time the popularity of a meme has reached the saturation point, your use of it becomes less and less effective.
- **Move on quickly.** As soon as one meme becomes obsolete, another one is guaranteed to replace it, so make sure that your meme of choice isn't already out of fashion.

2.2. Elements of social media images

There are two main reasons why to brand all social media images. Firstly, people will always be able to identify the original source of the content and secondly, in this way the public can instantly identify the brand when the image is posted on social networks. There are five different examples of how to brand social media images: **Brand Name or Logo, Fonts, Color Palette, Image Border** and **Filters**. Keep the brand name and logo small, place them in one of the corners and even make them slightly transparent. The type of font that you use in social media images can reveal a lot about the personality and culture of your brand. Used consistently, it can really help make your content stand out in people's news feeds. When deciding on a font, think carefully about how it will reflect on your brand and the message you want to project. Whether it is a combination of two colours or more, this strategy is another powerful way of helping your images to stand out and be recognized on social media. One of the easiest ways to brand your images on social media is placing a thin colored border around them. This ensures that fans can identify the content as "owned" by the company. Where branding is concerned, consistent use of a particular

filter can help to strengthen your brand's identity on social media. Keep your use of filters subtle and restrained, in order not to detract from the honesty of your visuals (Wheeler, 2009).

3. The process and insights (Case studies)

With over a billion active users on desktop and mobiles, Facebook has allowed individuals to connect with their friends and brands - through Facebook Pages - to build relationships in a way that has never been seen before. In April 2014, the social media analytics company, Social Bakers, discovered that *most* of the content brands post to Facebook included photos - 75%, followed by link shares (10%) and text updates (6%) (David Coleman, *Facebook Profile Picture Size Guide*).

There are hundreds photo-sharing apps for mobile devices, but there is one that currently towers over all competition - Instagram. With a simple idea - the ability of users to instantly add vintage filters to their images, it has grown a large and loyal fan base. Instagram users share over 60 million photos per day, and daily engagement rates continue to rise (Dustin W. Stout, *Instagram sizes and dimensions 2018: everything you need to know*).

With the introduction of new features like image-sharing, video playing, embedded tweets, and personalized profile branding, Twitter has grown to become part of the worldwide culture. For businesses of any kind, it is the perfect platform to broadcast and interact with customers in real time. Statistics show that visual content is effective on Twitter, driving more engagement on the content that brands post (Macarthy, 2014: 63).

With these three social media platforms in mind, I performed a research study trying to determine whether or not restaurants, all around the world, follow the same patterns in terms of social media posts.

First, I had a look at some international awarded restaurants, listed on Eater.com. The very first restaurant, Eleven Madison Park,

from New York, impressed me with the use of the same profile image both on Facebook and Instagram. The image looks more like a logo, which demonstrates that behind the social media pages there is a marketing team, willing to make the brand easily recognizable on the Internet.
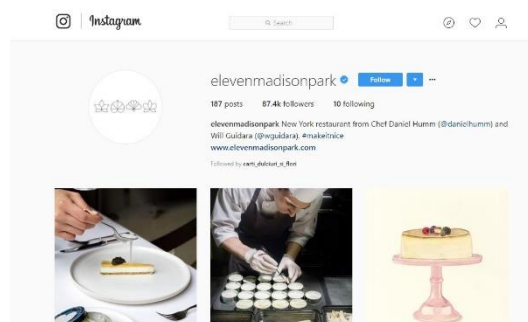

Another international restaurant that shows the hard work of a marketing team is Gaggan restaurant from Bangkok. The restaurant keeps in touch with its customers on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, where the official pages can be easily recognised after the profile pictures of the main chef/manager. The strategy used by Gaggan underlines the consistency between all their social media pages.
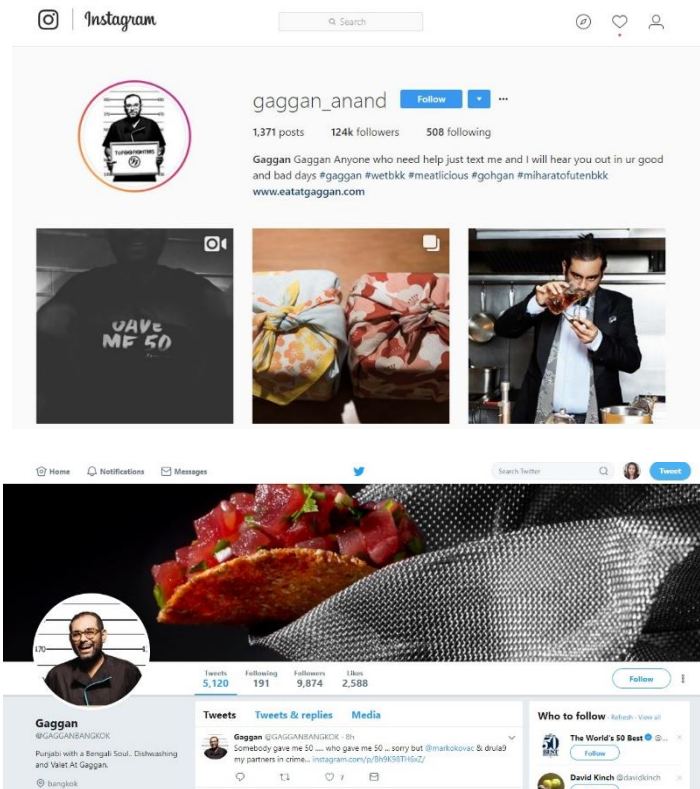
Another strategy, used by those from Relae, a restaurant from Copenhagen, shows customers behind the scenes images via Instagram's My Story section. The following image was posted on their official Instagram page on 25th of April 2018.

While analysing social media pages of Romanian restaurants, the first thing I noticed was the fact that Twitter is not really popular among the Romanian marketers. Most restaurants prefer to manage only Facebook and Instagram pages.
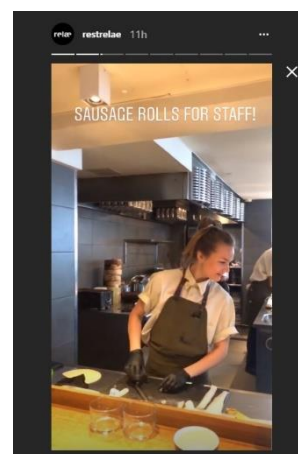
One particular restaurant caught my attention with its Facebook cover image. I am talking about Restaurant La Estancia, whose marketers decided to use a short video instead of a static image as a Facebook cover. The video runs automatically once the customers access the page, presenting them images from the restaurant.

Another Romanian restaurant that succeeds to impress with simplicity is Casa di David. Although they stick to promoting their restaurant only on Facebook, their really elegant logo used as profile picture and the cosy photo taken within the restaurant, positioned at the cover, attract customers on a daily basis.


A full list with Romania's best restaurants can be found on Restocracy.ro.

In an attempt to narrow the research area, I tried to focus on local restaurants from Timișoara and the results were quite unexpected.

The Facebook and Instagram page designs, the logos and the user-friendly menus of these social media pages show that marketers are aware of the importance of social media platforms and try to come up with new ideas.

Jolie Bistro is a really good example of incorporating a video made up of slideshow images illustrating dishes and short messages addressed to the audience.
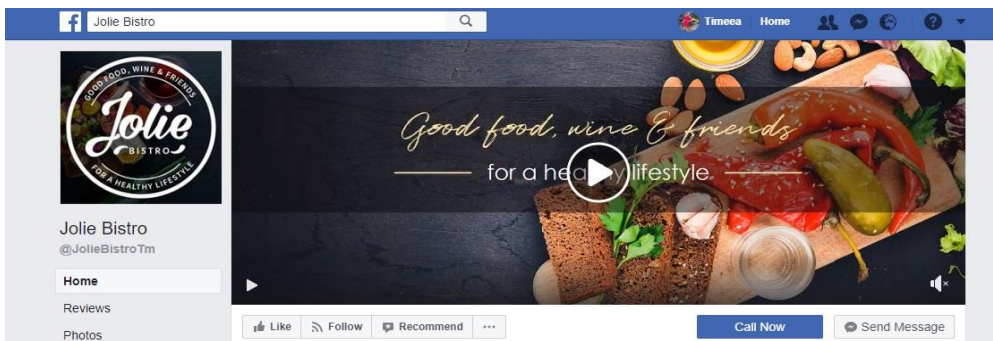
Another restaurant with a simple and elegant design among social media platforms is Caruso. Its marketers decided to use the same profile picture across Facebook and Instagram, picture that represents the logo consisting in the name of the restaurant. The Facebook cover photo invites customers into the Caruso "world", showing the main entrance of the restaurant.
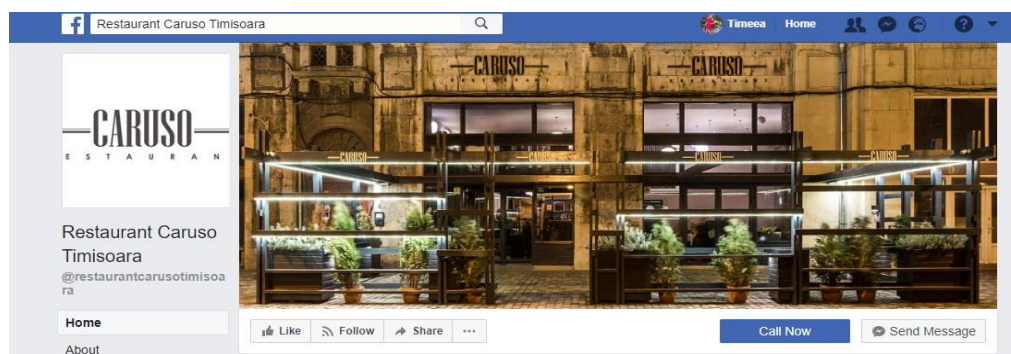

In their Instagram thumbnails we can notice that the main focus of the Caruso restaurant is to promote their dishes.

Last but not least, Sabres restaurant decided to go with a video instead of a Facebook cover still image; unlike Jolie Bistro, Sabres presents us images from within their location and photos of their spectacular dishes.

Also, their profile picture is the same both on Facebook and Instagram, following the strategy of consistency and making the brand easily recognisable for customers.
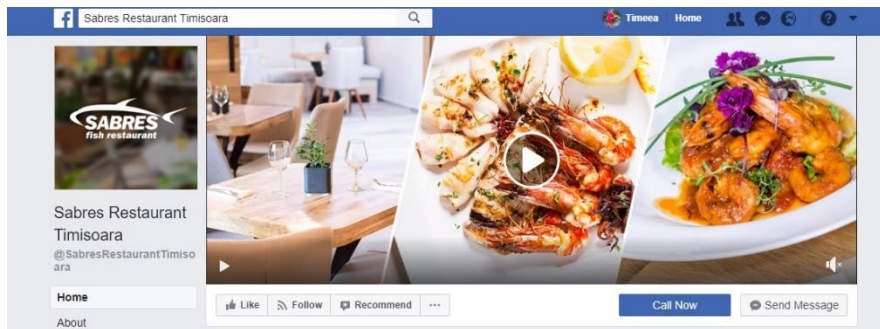
A list with Timișoara's best restaurants can be found on Tripadvisor.com

4. Technical guidelines to prepare graphics for social media
4.1. Facebook

In his article, *Always up-to-date guide to social media image sizes*, Kevin King establishes a series of guidelines for images posted on social media platforms. **Facebook cover photo**s are a nice real estate provided by Facebook to businesses, where they can showcase their strengths with their key marketing messages and product showcase.

Image guidelines:

- appear on page at 820 x 312 pixels, anything less will be stretched;
- minimum size of 400 x 150 pixels;
- displays at 820 x 312 pixels on desktop and 640 x 360 pixels on smartphones;
- for best results, upload an sRGB JPG file less than 100 KB;
- images with a logo or text may be best as a PNG file.

Regarding the type of cover photo, you can choose whether to display a single image or multiple images.

In terms of single image covers, panoramas are ideal. Simple crops also work, although the effectiveness is going to vary based on what the image is about. Also, you can assembly multiple photos into a <u>collage</u> in your imaging software, saving it as a single image file and uploading it.

Until fairly recently, it was only possible to choose one photo to act as your static cover photo. But a new feature has been added: slideshows. You can now select up to 5 photos that rotate. Access this feature through the same menu that lets you add or change the cover photo.

In choosing a **Facebook profile picture**, go for something that will work well at small sizes. While the one displayed with the cover photo is of reasonable size, the same much smaller profile picture is used elsewhere on Facebook, like next to any comments you post. It is

always displayed as a square. You can upload a rectangular image, but it will be cropped to a square shape.

Image guidelines:
- must be at least 180 x 180 pixels;
- photo will appear on page as 170 x 170 pixels on desktop, 128 x 128 on smartphones, and 36 x 36 on most feature phones;
- photo thumbnails will appear throughout Facebook at 32 x 32 pixels.

4.2. Instagram

Instagram is based on visuals, which should be an indication of how important it is to follow these image size guidelines. Ensure your **Instagram profile image** is recognizable, so users can find you even more easily through search or explore.

Image guidelines:
- appear on your profile at 110 x 110 pixels;
- square photos: make sure to maintain an aspect ratio of 1:1.

When someone goes to your page, they will be presented with all of your content arranged in rows of **thumbnails**. These smaller renditions of your images and videos will expand when clicked and include a place for people to comment.

Image guidelines:
- the thumbnails will appear on the page at 161 x 161 pixels;
- square photos: make sure to maintain an aspect ratio of 1:1 ratio.

Photo size - Instagram is all about the images and videos presented in your followers' feed. In fact, Instagram higher resolution photos when taken from the native application. If you decide to upload a photo or video from any other device, the resolution will be much lower.

Image guidelines:
- the size of Instagram images has been increased to 1080 x 1080 pixels;
- Instagram still scales these photos down to 612 x 612 pixels;

- square or rectangle photos: make sure to maintain an aspect ratio between 1.91:1 and 4:5 ratio.

With more than 300 million daily users, **Instagram Stories** is a popular source of visuals on the app. There are both video and image options available to publish.

Image guidelines:
- recommended resolution is 1080 x 1920;
- minimum resolution is 600 x 1067; aspect ratio is 9:16;
- maximum file size is 4GB.

4.3. Twitter

Your **Twitter profile photo** is the main image that represents you or your brand across the network. It is going to be seen across the site in a number of places, by a number of people, so make sure it is of the highest quality.

Image guidelines:
- square image recommended 400 x 400 pixels;
- maximum file size 2 MB;
- image types include JPG, GIF or PNG.

The **Twitter header photo** is the image that spans the top of your Twitter profile page. It is quite a bit larger than your profile photo so make sure to save it at the highest resolution possible.

Image guidelines:
- recommended 1,500 x 500 pixels;
- maximum file size of 5 MB;
- image types include: JPG, GIF or PNG.

In-stream photo - Twitter users can attach photos to any of their tweets. Luckily, Twitter updated to no longer count characters against your tweet limit. Uploaded photos will appear in your followers' streams and the streams of their followers (if retweeted).

Image guidelines:
- minimum to appear expanded 440 x 220 pixels (a 2:1 ratio);
- can tweet up to 4 images at one time;

- maximum to appear expanded 1024 x 512 pixels;
- appears in stream collapsed at 506 x 253 pixels on desktop;
- maximum file size of 5 MB for photos, and 5 MB for animated GIFs on mobile and 15 MB on web.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, visual storytelling is everything in today's marketing strategies. The battle has now moved away from printed newspapers, magazines and posters to the online environment, and every marketing specialist has to think of social media platforms as the new era weapons.

All marketers have to learn how to convey a certain message in an image and this paper is here to lend a hand to those who are making their first steps in this field. It presents the elements that have to be found on social media images, so that the audience can easily recognize the brand, it offers guidelines regarding how images should be configured according to the social media platforms on which the post will be made and most importantly, it describes a series of roles and messages that can be conveyed through images.

This paper gives a clearer image upon social media posts and demonstrates that every single photo is carefully created in order to impress and maintain alive the audience's interest.

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