

# Review: Warming up to photo-sharing app Instagram

April 11 2012, By ANICK JESDANUN , AP Technology Writer

---



Instagram is demonstrated on an iPhone Monday, April 9, 2012, in New York. Facebook is spending \$1 billion to buy the photo-sharing company Instagram in the social network's largest acquisition ever. Instagram lets people apply filters to photos they snap with their mobile devices and share them with friends and strangers. (AP Photo/Karly Domb Sadof)

(AP) -- I was skeptical, even horrified, when I first heard about the photo-sharing craze Instagram more than a year ago. As a journalist trained to reject alterations in words and pictures, I didn't get the concept of a social network built around modifying photos.

I quickly warmed up once I gave Instagram a try this week, after [Facebook](#) announced plans to buy the free service for \$1 billion.

I learned to appreciate the artistic side of [photography](#), and I learned that

Instagram is about much more than altered photos.

One way to describe Instagram is as a Facebook centered on photos. While Facebook allows you to post all sorts of things - links, quizzes, personal musings - Instagram only lets you post photos.

Specifically, these are photos on your camera phone. That means spontaneous snapshots of life, not the special events you'd bring a stand-alone camera for.

And only square shots are allowed, giving Instagram a uniform, uncluttered feel. Instagram reminds me of those Polaroid instant-camera photos from decades ago. You didn't have to fuss over whether a horizontal or a vertical shot worked better because square was your only option.

Instagram lets you take square shots right from its iPhone app. If you're using an Android phone or choosing a shot already stored on your device, you need to crop it.

You then have the option - emphasis on option - to alter your photo.

That's part of Instagram's appeal to some. So-so photos can look much better without much work.

We're not talking about removing objects or adding things that weren't there, as you might do with Photoshop. Rather, you can apply one of 17 Instagram "filters" to adjust lighting, color and other aspects of your shot.

For instance, you can give photos a "1977" faded, retro feel or distort some of the [colors](#) and sharpen the contrast with "Lo-fi." The iPhone version also lets you purposely blur portions of the photo. You see

[images](#) change as you flip through the filters, and you can always go back to the original.

You can also rotate photos, which I find odd for square images. Perhaps the option would be useful if you wanted to flip around a shot that was taken while you were holding your phone upside. It's a feature Facebook could learn from and adopt for its mobile app. I've avoided posting several shots to my Facebook profile from my phone because they would appear sideways.

Once the image is to your liking, you can add an optional caption and post it on any number of social networks, not just Facebook. The photos also appear on Instagram for friends and strangers to see. The [iPhone](#) version gives you more social networks to choose from and lets you email images to people as well.

In a sense, I'm the ideal Instagram user. I constantly take shots of things I find interesting, whether it's a meal, a street sign or a pile of garbage covered with snow. Those shots typically have stayed on my phone. Instagram gives me Insta-audience.

In terms of sharing, Instagram works much like Twitter. You choose any number of individuals or brands to follow, and their photos automatically appear on your personal Instagram stream. Others can also follow you, and your photos appear on their streams.

Unlike Facebook, you typically don't need permission to add someone to your circle. That person has an option to require permission, but most people don't bother. Under the default privacy settings, you can also browse through other people's photos without following them, just as they can do with yours.

Otherwise, Instagram feels like Facebook without the clutter. You're

only dealing with square images from those you follow. You can add a comment or declare that you "like" a photo.

That's about it.

There are no ads cluttering the screen. There's no potpourri of features such as "checking in" to a place where you just arrived.

You take a photo, you post it and you see other people's photos.

There's something magical about that simplicity.

I enjoyed the shots, even altered ones, from a friend's trip to Lebanon. The photos of people's meals made me forget my need to lose weight. Occasionally, I'd find shots of people - a self-portrait, a child, a spouse on the couch with a dog. It's fun to peer into what your friends find interesting, even as they peer into what you stumble upon in your everyday life.

There's also an unexpected benefit to the photos' square dimensions. I initially thought I'd be compromising my shots by cropping them to make them fit. But those square photos come to life on Facebook in a way rectangular shots don't.

That's because the photos take up the full space that Facebook allows for displays. Horizontal shots only take advantage of the full width and vertical shots the full height. Square photos come out bigger on Facebook by expanding in both directions.

One more thing to note is that Instagram lives on the phone. You can't browse or add [photos](#) from its website. For that, you'd need to link it to Facebook or another social network.

I know many Instagram veterans are grumbling about latecomers like me crashing their party.

But life isn't as fun if we live in silos. I find pleasure in the serendipity made possible by having a diverse circle of people to follow.

Hey look, someone posted bottles of English ales on [Instagram](#).

©2012 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Review: Warming up to photo-sharing app Instagram (2012, April 11) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-04-photo-sharing-app-instagram.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--