

How to Run Instagram Ads in 2025

Beginner Tutorial — Complete Course Notes

SECTION 1: Overview & Prerequisites

1.1 What You Will Learn

This course walks through the complete process of setting up and running Instagram ads in 2025 — from creating a Meta Business account to launching, testing, and scaling profitable campaigns. The methods are based on real agency experience managing hundreds of thousands of dollars in monthly ad spend.

- Set up a Meta Business Suite account and connect Instagram
- Create an Ad Account and link a payment method
- Install and connect a Meta Pixel / Data Set to your website
- Understand the three-level campaign structure: Campaign → Ad Set → Ad
- Choose the right campaign objective (Sales, Leads, Traffic)
- Configure targeting: demographics, interests, custom audiences, placements
- Create ads using existing posts (boosting) or the Flexible ad format
- Read and customise your analytics dashboard columns
- Split test creatives and headlines to find winning ads
- Optimise, scale, and manage campaigns over time

1.2 Who This Is For

- E-commerce brands and Shopify store owners looking to drive sales
- Anyone wanting to grow their Instagram follower count with paid ads
- B2B businesses looking to generate leads
- Beginners who have never run an ad before
- Advertisers wanting a structured, proven framework from a professional agency

1.3 Platform Used

- Meta Ads Manager (also called Facebook Ads Manager) — accessed via business.facebook.com
- Instagram ads are created and managed inside Meta Ads Manager, not directly in the Instagram app
- The Meta ecosystem covers: Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, and the Audience Network
- You need a Facebook or Instagram account to log in — all ad accounts are tied to your personal Meta identity

SECTION 2: Meta Business Suite — Account Setup

2.1 Logging In & First-Time Setup

- Go to business.facebook.com and log in with your Facebook or Instagram account
- Meta requires everything tied to one personal account — avoid creating multiple personal accounts
- On first login you land on the Meta Business Suite dashboard — this is your central hub for all Meta advertising activity
- Left sidebar shows: notifications, Ads Manager, settings, and account switcher
- If you manage multiple Facebook/Instagram pages or ad accounts, use the dropdown on the left to switch between them

2.2 Business Settings — Key Areas

Navigate to Settings (left sidebar) to configure your business before creating ads:

- Business Info — add all company details (name, address, website, etc.). Keep this current.
- Users — invite team members or staff who need access to manage the account
- Partners — invite external agencies using their Business ID so they can access your account
- Pages — view and manage connected Facebook Pages
- Ad Accounts — view existing ad accounts or create a new one
- Instagram Accounts — connect or add the Instagram account you want to run ads from

2.3 Connecting Your Instagram Account

- Go to Settings > Instagram Accounts
- Click Add and follow the prompts to log in with your Instagram credentials
- Once connected, your Instagram account is available to use as an ad identity and as a placement
- You can connect multiple Instagram accounts if needed (e.g. for different brands)

2.4 Creating an Ad Account

- Go to Settings > Ad Accounts > Add > Create Ad Account
- Enter: Ad Account Name, Time Zone, Currency
- Select 'This is for my business' and agree to the terms
- Your new ad account is created and ready
- Add a payment method immediately: Settings > Billing and Payments > Add payment method (credit/debit card)
- Your card will be charged periodically as your ads spend — Meta bills at certain spend thresholds
- You can add the payment method later, but ads cannot run without one

SECTION 3: Meta Pixel / Data Set — Tracking Setup

3.1 What is a Pixel / Data Set?

A Meta Pixel (now officially called a Data Set) is a piece of tracking code that connects your website to your Meta Ad Account. It records visitor activity on your site — page views, add-to-carts, checkouts, and purchases — and sends that data back to Meta so your ads can be optimised for real conversions.

- Without a Pixel, Meta cannot track what happens after someone clicks your ad
- With a Pixel, Meta learns who is buying and shows your ads to more people like them
- Essential for running Sales campaigns optimised for purchases

3.2 Creating a Data Set

- In Ads Manager, click Events Manager in the left sidebar
- Click Connect Data > Select Web > Click Next
- Name your data set and click Create
- Your data set is now created and ready to be connected to your website

3.3 Connecting the Pixel to Your Website

There are three connection methods. The recommended approach is Partner Integration:

Method	Details
Partner Integration (Recommended)	Code-free, low maintenance, gives the most data. Each major website platform has a native app/plugin. Shopify: search 'Facebook and Instagram' in the Shopify App Store, install it, and connect your Meta account. Also works with WooCommerce, WordPress, Wix, Squarespace, and most major platforms.
Manual Code	Copy the pixel code snippet from Events Manager and paste it into every page of your website. More technical — only use if no partner integration exists for your platform.
Conversions API Gateway	Server-side tracking for advanced users. Not typically required for beginners.

3.4 Events Tracked by the Pixel

- Page View — someone visits a page on your website
- View Content — someone views a product page
- Add to Cart — someone adds a product to their shopping cart
- Initiate Checkout — someone starts the checkout process
- Add Payment Info — someone enters payment details
- Purchase — someone completes a transaction (the most important event)

Always optimise your campaigns for the final goal event — Purchases — not intermediate events like Add to Cart.

SECTION 4: Campaign Structure — The Three Levels

4.1 Overview

Every Instagram ad campaign is organised into three nested levels. Understanding this hierarchy is critical because each level controls different settings:

Level	What You Control Here
Campaign	Campaign objective (Sales, Leads, Traffic), campaign-level budget, bid strategy, A/B testing
Ad Set	Targeting (location, age, gender, interests, custom audiences), placements (Instagram only vs. all platforms), conversion events, schedule, ad set budget (not recommended — use campaign budget)
Ad	The actual creative — images, videos, primary text (copy), headlines, call-to-action button, destination URL, ad format

4.2 How They Nest

- One Campaign can contain multiple Ad Sets
- Each Ad Set can contain multiple Ads
- Example: 1 Sales Campaign → 3 Ad Sets (different interest targeting) → 3 Ads per Ad Set = 9 total ads
- Campaign budget is distributed by Meta to whichever Ad Set is performing best

Recommended structure for beginners: 1 Campaign → 2–3 Ad Sets with different targeting → 3–4 Ads per Ad Set using the Flexible format.

SECTION 5: Campaign Level Settings

5.1 Campaign Objectives

The objective tells Meta what result you want. Meta's AI will then show your ads to people most likely to take that specific action. Always choose the objective that matches your actual goal — do not optimise for a proxy metric.

Objective	Best For
Sales	E-commerce brands, Shopify stores, anyone wanting purchases. Meta optimises for people who typically buy online. Always choose this if your goal is ROAS.
Leads	B2B businesses, service providers, anyone wanting contact info, email sign-ups, or form submissions.
Traffic	Growing Instagram followers. There is no dedicated 'followers' objective — use Traffic and select 'Instagram Profile Visits' as the destination. Meta shows ads to people likely to click through to your profile.

5.2 Naming Your Campaign

- Use a clear naming convention — e.g. 'Sales | Brand Name | Apr 2025'
- A good name includes: objective type, brand/product, and the month/year
- Consistent naming makes it easy to filter and compare campaigns over time

5.3 Campaign Budget (Recommended)

- Set budget at the Campaign level — this is called Campaign Budget Optimisation (CBO)
- Meta automatically distributes the budget to the best-performing Ad Set
- Do NOT set the budget at the Ad Set level — CBO gives Meta's AI more flexibility to optimise
- Recommended starting budget: \$100/day minimum, or equal to your average order value (AOV)
 - Example: if your product sells for \$300, start with \$300/day to give Meta enough data to optimise quickly
- You can also set a campaign spending limit as a safety cap

5.4 Bid Strategy

- Highest Volume (Recommended for beginners) — Meta spends your entire budget to get the maximum number of results. Best when you don't yet know what ROAS to expect.
- Cost Per Result Goal — set a maximum cost per purchase you are willing to pay. Only use once you have established performance benchmarks.
- ROAS Goal — set a minimum return on ad spend target. Requires business verification and established spend history. Not recommended for new accounts.

Stick with Highest Volume for all campaigns until you have solid performance data to inform a cost target.

5.5 Other Campaign Settings

- Special Ad Categories — only tick these if your product/service is related to finance, employment, housing, or social issues/politics. Leave blank for most businesses.
- Catalogue Ads — turn off unless you specifically want to run dynamic product catalogue ads (Shopify stores may have this enabled by default — disable it for manual campaigns)
- A/B Testing — not needed when starting out. Skip this.

SECTION 6: Ad Set Level Settings

6.1 Conversion Location & Optimisation

- Conversion Location: Website (always for e-commerce — sends people to your website)
- Performance Goal: Maximise number of conversions (suitable for most single-product or small catalogue stores)
- Alternatively: Maximise value of conversions — better if you have multiple products at very different price points
- Conversion Event: always select Purchases — this is the end goal
- Data Set: confirm your pixel/data set is selected and connected

Never optimise for Add to Cart or Initiate Checkout — you will get lots of those events but fewer actual purchases.

6.2 Budget & Schedule (Ad Set Level)

- Budget: Leave blank — set budget at Campaign level instead
- Start Date: Start at midnight the next day to ensure full days spend from the beginning
- End Date: Optional — useful for promotions or time-limited campaigns. Otherwise leave open-ended.

6.3 Audience Targeting

Audience targeting is the main differentiator between Ad Sets. The key targeting options are:

Advantage Plus Audience (Meta's AI Mode):

- Gives Meta maximum AI freedom to find the best audience
- Only manually controllable setting: Location
- The course recommends switching to manual targeting for more control, especially when starting out

Manual Targeting (Switch Setup):

- Location — target specific countries, regions, or cities. Example: United States only.
- Age Range — set a minimum/maximum age. Broader is usually better unless your product is strictly age-specific. Recommended starting point: 25+
- Gender — leave as All in most cases. Only restrict to one gender if your product is exclusively gender-specific.
- Audience Suggestions vs. Requirements:
 - Suggestion: Meta starts with your settings but may go outside them if performance is better elsewhere
 - Requirement: Meta strictly respects your targeting settings
- Broader targeting is generally preferred — Meta's algorithm is powerful enough to find buyers within a broad pool

6.4 Interest Targeting (Detailed Targeting)

- Add one interest per Ad Set to clearly split test results — e.g. 'Cats', 'Health Club Fitness', 'Yoga'
- Interest targeting is a suggestion — Meta may go outside it if it predicts better performance elsewhere
- Use interests to point the algorithm in the right direction at launch
- Each Ad Set should have a different interest — this is how you split test audiences
- Add languages (e.g. English) if needed, but not required for predominantly English-speaking countries

6.5 Custom Audiences

- Custom Audiences allow retargeting of warm audiences — people already familiar with your brand
- Examples: website visitors in the last 30 days, Instagram followers, past purchasers, email list
- Create via: Ads Manager > Audiences > Create Audience > Custom Audience
- Best practice: run retargeting custom audiences in a SEPARATE Ad Set — do not mix with cold interest targeting
- For new accounts: skip custom audiences initially. Focus on cold interest targeting first.
- Exclusion: always exclude recent purchasers (e.g. last 180 days) from acquisition campaigns to avoid wasting budget

6.6 Placements — Running Ads on Instagram Only

By default, Meta runs ads across all placements: Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, and the Audience Network. To run only on Instagram:

- Ad Set level > Placements > Show More Settings
- Click Edit icon next to Platforms
- Turn off: Audience Network, Messenger, Facebook
- Result: ads now only run on Instagram

Available Instagram Placements:

Placement	Description
Instagram Feed	Appears in the main scrollable Instagram feed
Instagram Explore	Shown when users browse the Explore discovery page
Instagram Explore Home	The grid on the Explore tab homepage
Instagram Stories	Full-screen vertical ads between Stories
Instagram Reels	Short-form video ads between Reels content
Instagram Search Results	Ads shown in search results on Instagram

- You can selectively turn off individual placements within Instagram if desired (e.g. only Stories and Reels)
- Device targeting: optionally restrict to mobile, desktop, iOS only, or Wi-Fi only — usually leave as default

6.7 Naming Your Ad Set

Use a descriptive naming convention that includes all targeting variables so you can instantly understand what each Ad Set is targeting:

- Format: [Number] | [Campaign Type] | [Location] | [Age] | [Interest] | [Platform]
- Example: 001 | Purchase | USA | 25+ | Cats | IG Only
- This makes it easy to compare Ad Sets at a glance in the dashboard

SECTION 7: Ad Level — Creating Your Ads

7.1 Ad Naming

- Match the ad name to the Ad Set number for easy reference (e.g. 001, 002)
- Add a short unique identifier describing the creative (e.g. '001 | Red Product Image' or '001 | Headline A')

7.2 Connected Accounts

- Confirm that both your Facebook Page and Instagram Account are correctly connected at the top of the ad setup
- This determines which profile the ads will appear to come from

7.3 Method 1 — Boosting Existing Instagram Content

You can run an existing Instagram post as an ad through Ads Manager, giving you far more control than using the 'Boost Post' button directly on Instagram.

- At the Ad level > Use Existing Content > scroll through your Instagram posts and Reels
- Select the post you want to boost
- Add a Call-to-Action (CTA) button — e.g. Shop Now, Learn More, Sign Up
- Add your website URL as the destination
- The ad will run with all existing likes, comments, and engagement from the original post intact
- Recommended: create 4 separate ads using 4 different existing posts to split test which content performs best

Advantage of boosting through Ads Manager vs. Instagram Boost button: you retain full targeting control, budget control, placement control, and access to all analytics data.

7.4 Method 2 — Flexible Ad Format (Recommended)

The Flexible format is the preferred method for creating new ads. It allows you to upload multiple creative assets and copy variations, and Meta's AI automatically combines and tests them to find the best-performing combinations.

- At the Ad level > Create Ad > Select Flexible Format (not Single Image/Video)
- Turn off Multi-Advertiser Ads (prevents your ad appearing alongside competitor ads)

Recommended upload combination (the '3-2-2' sweet spot):

Asset Type	Recommended Quantity
Images or Videos	2 (testing different visuals / hooks)
Primary Text (ad copy)	2 (testing different messaging angles)
Headlines	2 (testing different value propositions)

- Meta will automatically create combinations (e.g. Image 1 + Primary Text 2 + Headline 1) and optimise toward the best performers
- You can preview all combinations to check how they look across placements
- Add your website URL and select a CTA button (e.g. Shop Now)
- Do NOT upload too many variations at once — 2 of each is the sweet spot. Too many means no single combination gets enough spend to generate meaningful data.

7.5 Using Post IDs for Existing High-Performing Ads

If you have ads that have already been running with lots of accumulated engagement (likes, comments, shares), preserve that social proof when re-using them:

- Find the existing ad in your Ad Account > go to Instagram/Facebook Post with Comments
- Copy the Post ID from the top of the browser URL bar
- In the new Ad Set > Use Existing Content > paste the Post ID
- Your ad will run with all the original engagement retained — social proof increases trust and click-through rates
- This is the best starting point for accounts that already have winning ads

SECTION 8: Reading Your Analytics Dashboard

8.1 Default vs. Custom Columns

The default Ads Manager column view shows basic metrics. To properly analyse performance, you need to customise the columns to show the KPIs that matter most.

- Go to Ads Manager dashboard > Columns > Customize Columns
- Delete the default columns and add the following recommended metrics

8.2 Recommended Column Setup

Metric	What It Shows
Cost Per Result	How much you're paying per purchase (or per click/lead for other objectives)
Link Clicks	Total number of clicks on your ad's link
Click-Through Rate (CTR)	Percentage of people who saw the ad and clicked — indicates creative quality
Landing Page Views	How many people actually loaded your website after clicking (different from link clicks)
Add to Carts	Number of Add to Cart events fired — shows product interest
Cost Per Purchase	The average cost to acquire one customer
Purchase Conversion Value	Total revenue generated from purchases attributed to the ad
ROAS (Return on Ad Spend)	Revenue divided by ad spend — the key profitability metric
Hook Rate	Percentage of people who watched the first few seconds of a video — indicates opening hook quality
Hold Rate	Percentage who watched to a certain point — indicates overall video quality
Average Order Value (AOV)	Average spend per customer who purchased
Conversion Rate	Percentage of landing page visitors who completed a purchase

8.3 How to Read Results

- High CTR but low purchases → good ad, bad landing page or product-market fit issue
- Low CTR → the creative or headline is not grabbing attention — test new hooks
- Good add-to-carts but few purchases → checkout friction or price objection — check the checkout process
- Low ROAS → either CPA is too high or AOV is too low — optimise both sides
- Ad Set getting no spend → Meta's algorithm doesn't think the creative will perform — improve the creative and relaunch

8.4 Viewing Flexible Ad Breakdown

To see which specific headline, primary text, or image is performing best within a Flexible format ad:

- Go to the Ad level in Ads Manager
- Click Breakdown > Dynamic Creative
- Select Text to see performance by each primary text variation
- Select Image to see performance by each image/video
- Select Headline to see performance by each headline
- Use these breakdowns to identify winning copy and visuals — then use the winners to inform your next round of ads

SECTION 9: Split Testing & Ad Angles

9.1 What to Split Test

Split testing (A/B testing) is the process of running variations of your ads to systematically discover what resonates most with your audience. Every element of an ad can be tested.

Element to Test	How to Test It
Headline	Same image + copy, two different headlines in Flexible format — most direct test of messaging
Visual Hook	Same headline + copy, two different images/videos — tests what stops the scroll
Primary Text (Copy)	Same image + headline, two different body copy angles
Audience/Interest	Different Ad Sets with same ads but different interest targeting
Age Range	Different Ad Sets targeting different age brackets
Placement	One Ad Set for all placements, one for Instagram only — compare performance

9.2 Ad Angle Framework

An ad angle is the core message, benefit, or perspective used to sell the product. Different market segments respond to different angles. Before creating ads, define:

- Market Persona — who exactly is your ideal customer?
- Market Desire — what does your customer deeply want? (not just what your product does, but the outcome they seek)
- Awareness Level — is your audience already aware of your product/brand, or completely cold?
- Market Sophistication — how familiar are they with similar products? What claims have competitors already made?
- Mechanism — what is unique about how your product delivers the desired result?

Recommended creative structure: 3 images/videos, 2 headlines, 2 primary texts = up to 12 ad combinations tested simultaneously.

9.3 How Many Ad Sets to Run

- Launch 2–3 new Ad Sets per week
- Keep winning Ad Sets running — do not pause them
- Turn off underperforming Ad Sets after 3–5 days of poor results
- If an ad gets zero spend after launch, the creative is low quality — Meta already knows. Go back to the drawing board.
- Use learnings from top performers (which images, headlines, copy are working) to create the next generation of ads

SECTION 10: Optimisation & Scaling

10.1 When to Optimise

- Leave ads running for 3–5 days before making any changes — Meta needs time to exit the learning phase
- Do not make frequent changes — every significant edit resets the learning phase
- Review performance after the learning phase before deciding to scale or cut

10.2 What to Keep vs. Cut

- KEEP: Ad Sets with high ROAS, strong CTR, low cost per purchase, growing spend
- KEEP: Ad Sets getting good engagement, add-to-carts, and link clicks even if purchases are not yet high (allow more time)
- CUT: Ad Sets with very low or zero spend after 3–5 days
- CUT: Ad Sets with high spend but zero or very few purchases after 5+ days
- CUT: Ad Sets with consistently high cost per purchase that exceeds profitability threshold

10.3 How to Scale

- Only scale Ad Sets that are already at a profitable ROAS
- Scale gradually — increase the campaign budget by 20% every 24 hours
- Monitor results after each increase — if ROAS holds or improves, increase again
- If ROAS drops significantly after an increase, stabilise at the previous budget level
- Do not double or triple budgets overnight — drastic increases destabilise Meta's algorithm and tank performance

10.4 Minimum Budget Recommendations

Scenario	Recommended Daily Budget
General starting point	\$100/day minimum
Product with \$300 AOV	\$300/day — equal to the AOV to give Meta enough data
Scaling a profitable campaign	Increase by 20% every 24 hours, monitor ROAS
Testing a new creative	\$50–\$100/day per Ad Set for 3–5 day test window

10.5 Growing Followers with Traffic Campaigns

- Objective: Traffic > Instagram Profile Visits
- Placement: Instagram Only (turn off all non-Instagram placements)
- Optimise for: Link Clicks or Landing Page Views
- Key metric: Click-Through Rate (CTR) — higher CTR = more people visiting your profile = more followers
- Monitor: follower growth in Instagram Insights to correlate with ad spend
- Creative tip: use content that showcases your page's personality and gives people a reason to follow

SECTION 11: Quick Reference — Full Setup Checklist

Step	Action
1	Go to business.facebook.com — log in or create a Meta Business account
2	Settings > Instagram Accounts > Add your Instagram account
3	Settings > Ad Accounts > Create Ad Account (name, timezone, currency)
4	Settings > Billing > Add payment method (credit/debit card)
5	Ads Manager > Events Manager > Connect Data > Web > Create Data Set
6	Connect Data Set to website via Partner Integration (Shopify App / WooCommerce plugin)
7	Ads Manager > Create > Select Campaign Objective (Sales / Leads / Traffic)
8	Name campaign, set Campaign Budget (\$100+/day), select Highest Volume bid strategy
9	Ad Set: set conversion location (Website), optimisation event (Purchases), connect data set
10	Ad Set: set start date (next day midnight), no end date unless time-limited
11	Ad Set: configure targeting (location, age 25+, gender, 1 interest), switch off Advantage Plus if needed
12	Ad Set: Placements > Edit > turn off Facebook/Messenger/Audience Network for IG-only
13	Ad Set: name with full identifier (e.g. 001 Purchase USA 25+ Cats IG Only)
14	Ad: connect Facebook Page and Instagram Account
15	Ad: choose Flexible format, upload 2 images, 2 primary texts, 2 headlines, add URL + CTA
16	Publish campaign — ads enter review (usually approved within hours)
17	Customise dashboard columns: CTR, Add to Carts, Cost per Purchase, ROAS, Hook Rate, AOV
18	After 3–5 days: review results, keep winners, cut losers, launch 2–3 new ad sets with new creatives
19	Scale profitable ad sets by increasing budget 20% every 24 hours

— End of Course Notes —