

meet the INSTAGRAM ALL-STARS

These New York women are young, talented, and building careers through the photo-sharing app, one follower at a time. What's not to Like?

Five years ago, Instagram didn't even exist. Now, 300 million of us are snapping, filtering, and sharing more than 70 million photos a day. And for a growing number of users, the app goes way beyond brunch photos—it's an important income driver. Case in point: These five brilliant New Yorkers have cracked the Instagram code to turn Likes into a living. They've built huge audiences on Instagram—audiences who appreciate their talent and have earned them real money. "This is absolutely not a gimmick career," says Karen Robinovitz, cofounder and chief creative officer of Digital Brand Architects, a talent management agency for digital content creators. "There's value to what people are creating." We caught up with the 'grammers about the hard work and talent they invest in their feeds.

THE ARTIST



@paperfashion
Katie Rodgers

Insta income: "Enough that I could quit my job, move into a one-bedroom on the Upper East Side, and travel. My salary has multiplied since my corporate days."

"I've always loved watercolors, so when I joined Instagram, I thought I'd show off the paintings I'd done in my free time. My big break came when a few fashion magazines highlighted my work. I still don't know how they found me! Then brands like Coach and Valentino asked me to create watercolors or digital videos that showcased their products or fit their advertising campaigns.

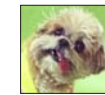
Now, I'm blown away by the projects I get to do. This winter, I created a digital campaign for Cartier using pieces they sent me and told me to be creative with. Sometimes I make fabric prints for clothing designers, and I'm doing a wallpaper line. Instagram gave me the platform to make a living out of my passion." —as told to Alyson Krueger

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY
SUNNY SHOKRAE

THE DOG MAMA



@marniethedog
Shirley Braha



Insta income: "Let's just say I can sustain my lifestyle from before, when I had a full-time job. I'm not stressed out about paying rent."

"When I adopted Marnie, everyone was like, 'This dog could be an Internet sensation!' But I was like, 'Well, she's not!' Then the show I was working on at MTV ended and I wasn't really doing anything, so after a few months, I thought, 'All right, I have no excuse now, let me just make this stupid Instagram for my dog!' I got 400 followers in the first month, which felt like a lot, so I decided to start paying attention to what resonated with people and doing more of that. Now Marnie has more than 1.2 million followers.

I don't do sponsored posts, but I made a 2015 calendar mostly out of photos I already had and sold it on Marnie's Tumblr (marniethedog.tumblr.com). I'm basically living off that now, plus fees for a few videos. My life is so different today. A year ago, I didn't know what the heck I was doing for the foreseeable future, and now I have a purpose and something I enjoy. There's stress that comes with it, but it's fun stress. People always stop us in the city, and celebrities have reached out to meet Marnie—Taylor Swift, James Franco. Jonah Hill stopped us on the street. I'm making people happy and I get to hang out with my dog!" —as told to Andrea Bartz

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THE FOOD ENTREPRENEUR



@inspiralized
Ali Maffucci

Insta income: \$50–70K a year

“My mother is a type 1 diabetic, so she needs to eat healthy, whole foods. She discovered the spiralizer—a tool that cuts raw veggies into noodles. I was so blown away by it, I started making dishes and posting them on Instagram. At first it was just for fun, but soon strangers started to follow me. When someone tagged #inspiralized, I’d comment on their post, and they’d follow me. The same was true when I wrote a guest post on someone’s blog and linked to my Instagram. I now have more than 66,000 followers.

That audience let me turn my passion for healthy cooking and eating into a career. I published a cookbook and created my own version of the spiralizer, the Inspiralizer. In two weeks we had 2,000 orders. And I get a dollar for every spiralizer sale that goes through me; from commissions, I can make up to \$4,900 a month just from Amazon. Brands like OXO and Williams-Sonoma ask me to use their products in my own Jersey City kitchen and share my experience on social media—I’ve gotten up to \$1,500 for that. Clients always bring up my Instagram feed. I have about a million monthly page views on my blog (inspiralized.com), but businesses value my Instagram followers more.” —AK



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THE STYLE BLOGGER



@feralcreature
Eugénie Gray



Insta income: “Enough money for me to make a living.”

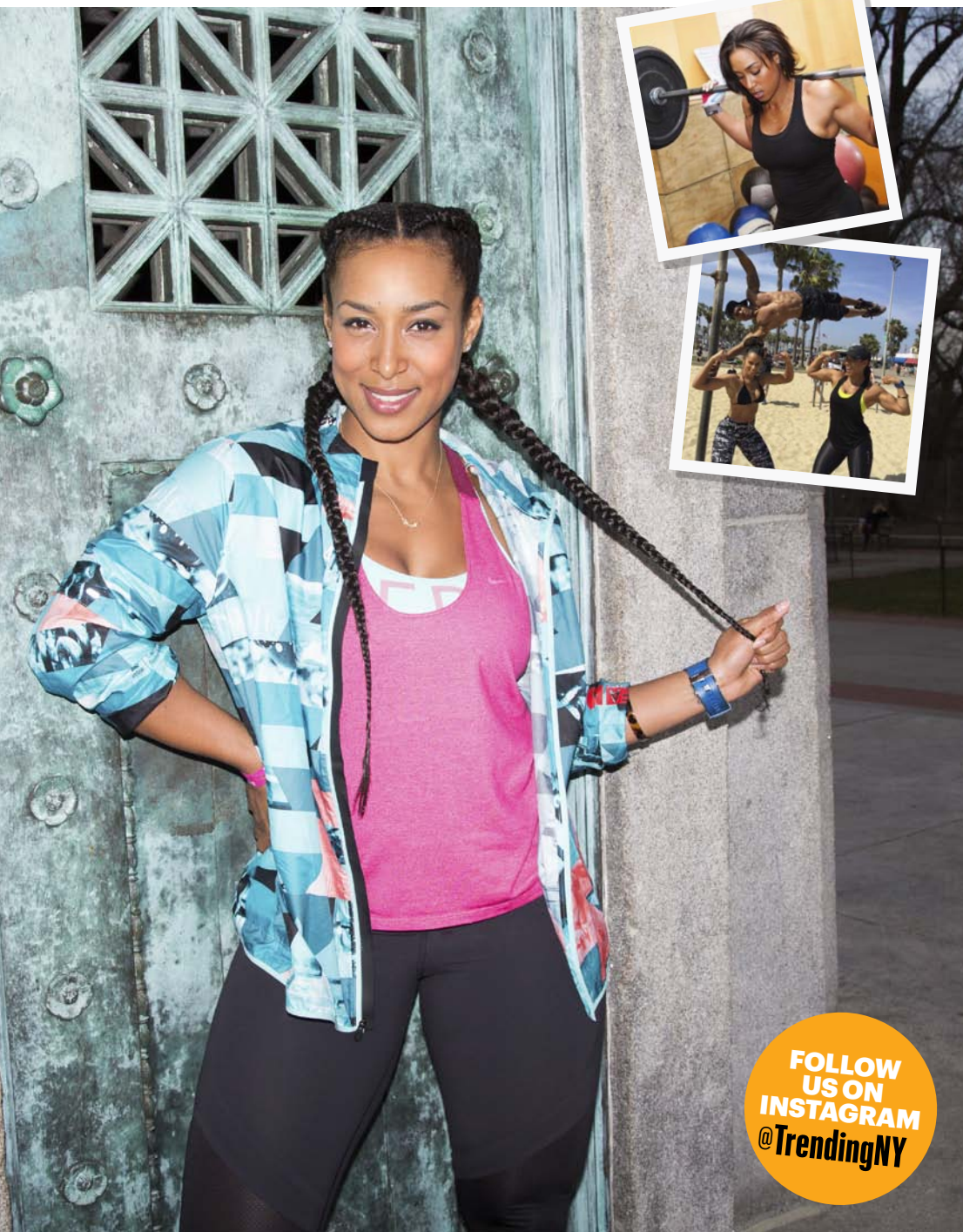
“I’ve busted my ass working multiple jobs since I was 17. At one point, I was in college full-time while working as a creative director of a clothing company and at an international production firm. I was always into fashion, but I felt overworked and creatively stunted. Then I started using Instagram.

I joined a few months after Instagram launched, so I started creating, well, *better* photos earlier than a lot of people. I never did anything intentional to grow my audience, but soon I had over 100,000 followers. Then I got two major pushes: Instagram featured me as a suggested user, and BuzzFeed Video highlighted my fashion. Now that I have 282,000 followers, I have companies paying me to promote their brands or host events for them. The freedom is exhilarating; I can be who I want, go where I want, and wear what I want. I’ve also gotten to do the raddest things, like attend red-carpet events, rub shoulders with celebs, and go to Coachella for free.

Going forward, I want to reach beyond fashion. My goal is to be a social-justice vigilante, especially for race and gender issues. I also want to create a dog foster/adoption organization. I have a lot of big dreams, and Instagram will be a key player in my outreach strategies.” —AK



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THE FITSPO STAR



@followthelita

Lita Lewis

Insta income: “It’s very easy for people doing everything I’m doing to make seven figures, no problem.”

“Three years ago, after a breakup, I wasn’t in good health, mentally or physically. I went to work at an advertising firm, came home, and slept. I knew I needed to get my life together, so I turned to the only thing that made me feel better: going to the gym. My appetite returned, along with my drive.

I was already on Instagram, so I shared my training schedule and diet there. Over the course of a year, a thousand followers jumped to 60,000. I quit my job and got my personal training certification and then started a boot camp in Fort Greene Park. I advertised it on Instagram, and strangers showed up and paid \$30 a class. I started boot camps in other cities and sold training packages online. But it was hard not having the six-figure salary from my corporate job; I was bringing in about \$4,500 a month.

Now I have more than 313,000 followers. Six months ago, I signed with an agency that specializes in athletes, and together, we’ve made some big plans. I’m launching an apparel brand, which I’ll show off on Instagram, and developing a reality TV show. And I have partnerships with brands like Reebok, Verizon, and Chevy. To me, Instagram is a portal to reach people and change lives.” —AK

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How to Make a Mint on Instagram

Followers are your currency. You need great photos, but what else? Here’s how to build an audience brands will drool over.

Post consistently.

Twice a day is good, says Brian DiFeo, cofounder of the Mobile Media Lab, an

Instagram-focused marketing agency.

Think big picture.

“Instagram stars aren’t just running

out and shooting whatever,” Robino-vitz says. “They’re watching how this looks on their grid, which images were before and after, the color palette. It’s not just slapping a filter on it.”

Follow the 80/20 rule.

You should spend about 20% of your time perfecting your photos, and the rest on engagement: responding to comments, following other posters, commenting

on pics, DiFeo says. “98% of the time, people find you because you liked a couple of their photos,” he adds.

Work with a pro.

Once you have 10,000 followers and 2% engage-

ment—that would be 200 likes per photo—add contact info to your bio and find yourself an agent. “It’s intimidating when a brand asks you to put a price on your work,” DiFeo says. —AB