

## Insta-Worthy: Developing Content That Works for Instagram

Toyin Ademokun: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Health Literacy and Communication Series. This training series was established to support CDC's commitment to promoting health literacy and the use of plain language principles. They are providing training sessions to improve health literacy among health professionals. Each CDC center, institute, or office provides a liaison to CDC's Health Literacy Council which promotes and coordinates health literacy efforts in and around the agency. Next slide. NCHHSTP's health literacy liaison is Mary Cashin. Please contact Mary with any questions you may have. Next slide. Social media is a tool to connect people and organizations around topics of common interest. It can help increase the number of people receiving news and health information online, engage with numerous and diverse audiences around the world. Incorporating health literacy strategy and technical considerations into social media approaches can help make content more accessible and engaging. Today, we're going to learn from CDC's Kathleen Layton, a senior health communication specialist from the Office of the Director for Communication. As CDC's Instagram account strategist, she will share how CDC is leveraging this important social media platform. Onto you, Kathleen.

Kathleen Layton: Hi everyone. Welcome to Insta-worthy: Developing content that works for Instagram. I am so excited to be speaking about Instagram. It is one of my favorite social media platforms. And so, throughout my presentation, I'm going to be talking about what works on Instagram and how we at CDC can align our content with Instagram trends and its particular style of content. I'm going to be giving an overview of CDC's Instagram audience, providing best practices for creating great content, and suggesting ways to optimize your content based on what we know works for our channel. I'll also briefly touch on some other Instagram features beyond just your standard post. I know the last time that I presented on Instagram, there were a lot of questions, so I've saved plenty of time at the end to answer any that you may have.

We could go ahead and... There we go. Sorry, go back. Before we get into the content, let's get to know our audience. This platform has high usership with over 1 billion monthly active users, over 500 million daily active users, 500 million active on stories daily, and 95 million photos and videos being shared on this platform daily. It's also important to note that CDCgov, the agency's Instagram handle, recently surpassed the 2.5 million follower mark on Instagram, so we're continuing to see so much growth on this channel. Okay, now we can go to the next one. Thank you. A little bit more on our profile. Of our audience, women between 25 to 34 are our leading audience segment. There's also a strong portion of our audience between the ages of 35 to 44, so really the age range 25 to 44 are a huge audience segment. In terms of location... If you could go ahead and hit next, please. One more. Thank you. The U.S. is the top country, and New York is the top city. We do have a smaller segment of international audiences as well.

Okay. So we've talked about who our audience is, but what are we posting? Here is our posting behavior, and what I mean by that is, this is the type of content that we're putting on our @CDCgov Instagram profile. We utilize a variety of content types, including photos, videos, and carousels. A carousel in Instagram terms is just one singular post with multiple photos or videos. As you can see, photos by far represent the majority of the content we post day-to-day. It is also important to note that generally we don't just repost the same photos over and over and over. So with the amount of photos that we're posting, that's the amount of fresh content that is circulating for our channel. So a lot of photos being posted from us. And throughout the last couple of years, we've started to include more and more video assets, just to be in line with “digital first” and what our audience would expect to see from an Instagram profile.

Okay. So during this portion of the presentation, I'm going to be specifically talking about content that is a standard Instagram post. I'll dive into the other features later, but let's dive into this now. Instagram is all about the visuals. When deciding content for Instagram, you have to find the photo, graphic, or video. And what I mean by that is, you just know it when you see it. It's that dynamic. It's reactionary. It makes you want to pause as you're scrolling and learn more. This first example definitely does that. The first thing I think when I see this image is, What are they looking at? I'm sure many of you probably wondered the same thing, and that's because generally people resonate with eyes—either eye contact, displayed emotion, point of view, or, in this case, where the subjects are looking. That adds entry. This entry prompts me to read the caption where I learn that this post is about a viral disease lab.

Additionally, it's in black and white. You can see people dressed in the era. And what you see but maybe don't see at the same time, is just a lack of equipment in the background. So there's just so many interesting facets to this one image that makes it so compelling. Historical images typically just do really well on social media—throwbacks or even just “this day in history.” This one in particular most likely came from CDC's Public Health Image Library, or PHIL. They provide a peek into the past and add a sense of nostalgia. When posting these types of photos, we do try to tie in the subject of the image with some sort of relevant current hook, essentially balancing out the history with content reflecting current events. This second image... You can go ahead. Thank you. Is from a responder story from the COVID-19 response.

As long as I've been on the social media team, we've always included responder stories as part of the content to support the overall response. It's always helpful to an audience to put a face with an action. Hearing that there are responders on the ground is easy to ignore, but seeing it resonates. This one in particular did very well on Instagram, and you can see why. The image just moves without having any movement at all. You can almost feel the wind blowing against them as they're walking, and the urgency with which they're walking. It just really, really strikes you as you're scrolling through. You also have other elements in the background. So for instance, you see all these cars that entails that there's a long line, and so there's just a lot happening. You also see these ladies in PPE.

Before the pandemic, we weren't used to seeing people in PPE, and so that also adds a novel element to it.

I think the image itself is so striking, and that coupled with the content is especially powerful. If you read the quote itself, which the image is interesting enough to where I would read the quote, and where she says working on the response can be chaotic, everything is constantly changing, and each morning you go in not knowing what the day will hold, that ties in so strongly with this image. I can also say that at the end of the post, as we would with most of the content, it has a call to action. It's so important to kind of guide your audience through what you want them to do. So we want them to look at our photo, done. We want them to read our post, done. What is the end action that we want to take users through? And generally that's read more, or learn more, or sign up, or watch this.

So including a call to action to kind of finish out that series of actions that you're guiding a user towards is just so important. Additionally, we definitely recommend using hashtags. These help with discovery by users outside of your followers and can extend the reach of your post. Hashtags don't necessarily work well with all social media platforms, but they are native to Instagram. As with anything though, it's important to find balance. Too many hashtags is just overkill, but not enough or too little, it cheats your content out of additional viewership. Okay. We can go to the next slide, please.

Okay. So, if we learned anything from the last slides examples, we know that creating great content is all about finding the photo. When you're curating content for Instagram, there's just a certain look that works. There's so many buzzwords out there and Instagram trends, and they all lend themselves to the most infamous one. I'm sure you've heard it: the aesthetic. And finding your aesthetic is basically just the overall creative direction that you want your content to share. It's a linking factor. It can be as specific or diverse as you need for your brand. For @CDCgov, we have such a diverse range of topics to cover that we really just focus on clean, clear content that's timely, informative, and eye-catching. Whether it's art, food, DIY, fashion, science, or even public health, there's always a way to leverage Instagram's style or aesthetic with health guidance. For example, the CDC field manual, this image promoting the manual just works.

It's such a common visual layout seen on the platform, but in a way that highlights CDC content. It's a really great intersection of the two. There's a lot of book covers or magazine covers that hinge on this sort of layout, and I think the reason that it works is, as I mentioned, it's clean, but also other things, there's no creases, it's perfectly centered. There's just something so visually satisfying about something being new and crisp and just laid out centered. If you look a little bit closer, the background also balances out the cover really well. It's got a slight texture, it's not cluttered, and it doesn't distract from the photo. There's not a lot of text competing with the cover. It all just aligns really well with what

our audience would expect to see on Instagram, but also what they would expect to see from CDC on Instagram.

If you click to the next example, this is a carousel set of images related to the brief pause of the Johnson & Johnson Janssen COVID-19 vaccine. This happened back in April at a really crucial point in the response. During the first part of the year, our Instagram profile got a lot of content out on vaccination, so naturally when this pause came about, we needed to relay that to our audience. Showed here are the first two images of five total. Users can scroll through these series of images to read various status information in a way that's easily digestible and not overwhelming. You can even go a little further and see how there's a clear segue between each image and just the overall flow of information that we're sharing. It just makes sense. It's not jumpy. It is not sporadic.

If you want to go a little bit further into color psychology, you can see that the colors like the green aqua color, which overall is pretty calming, it exudes security. I guess my point being it's a lot better than red in this instance. So you're kind of just walking users through something and relaying information in a way to not cause panic, but also to clarify anything that's circulating. The ability to swipe through images also makes it interactive. It's just so colorful and visually appealing.

Okay. Can we go to the next slide, please? There we go. Okay. So with this... I think I went one too far. Here we go. In talking about visual content, another great way to relay information is charts, graphs, and maps. Using one of these approaches can help make complex information really easy to understand. It could also turn general guidance into more of a resource that users can refer back to later on. On Instagram specifically, users have the option to save content. The ribbon icon that you see on the far right underneath the text of the post, that's a save button, and what that allows you to do is to save content within your profile privately, and you can go back and review any posts that you've saved later on. So this is a really good way to extend the lifespan of content.

Another good way to tell if content is just really great and good to use is asking yourself if you yourself would interact with it. Does the content that you're putting together, does it provide some sort of lasting benefit? Not all content can live as a living resource. There's sensitive outcomes, there's application periods, there's webinars that expire and whatnot. So not everything can last for forever, but some content can. And also when you're thinking about just content for your general audience, this is really good to weigh out and know ahead of time the life expectancy of your content. This first example on this slide shows what you can do once you're fully vaccinated, which... Actually, can you go back one, please?

There you go. This first example shows what you can do once you're fully vaccinated. And I know that this has probably been top of mind for a lot of people. I know for me, I wanted to know. So using a chart to outline very easily

and very succinctly and clearly through check marks and X emojis, those icons is just such an easy way to understand what's safe and what's not safe. So that's really good in terms of just explaining content easily. Okay. Now you can go to the second example. It should be the map. Yeah, there we go. This second example, it's a reoccurring type of content that we've done every week on our channels for a while now: maps. Kind of gave it away there, didn't I? But ever since grade school where we learned how to read them, they've become such an intuitive way to digest information, especially complex information.

And going back to some of the intro slides done by the Center, having information presented in an easy to understand way, and even easier to take and apply to one's personal health choices, is such a fundamental part of social media's role in health literacy. If you can go to the next example, please. There we go. This last example, it's a really great resource for users. So what I was talking about just a few moments ago, knowing the side effects of a common illness, or, in this case, a vaccine, is something that our audience is going to want to know. I know I would want to know it. Most people would want to know it. Perhaps a user sees this and says to themselves internally, Well, I'm going to get my shot in a couple weeks, so this doesn't really apply to me now, but maybe I save it. I'll look back on it when this does apply, just to kind of prepare myself. This post goes from just being something that circulates through the feed, to being a living resource that users can go back to and refer. Next slide.

Okay. So a little bit of a warning here, guys, this image is, it's a lot. It shows a horrifying amount of ticks on an animal. When you're thinking about content, what kind of emotion does your content generate from a user? Does your content convey an emotion? Does it elicit an emotion from a user? Emotion is such a powerful tool that we can use in social media. It can be used to generate curiosity, to generate awareness. It can be used for so many beneficial things. So in terms of emotion, this post in particular got a lot of comments obviously. It was so compelling in a gross way that users just intuitively added their comments of disgust. Also, there was a lot of comments of sympathy for the animal, but luckily there was someone helping the animal in the photo, so we know that this probably ended up okay for them.

This next example, it shows the size of ticks by placing them on a poppy seed muffin. And if you can go ahead and click the next two through. There we go. This also was a carousel post, and it's especially engaging because it's interactive. You start out with just a photo of a muffin, seems really benign at first, but then the next image goes on to show the five very tiny ticks that were hidden on this muffin. This set of images, it teaches the audience very visually just how small ticks can be and why the guidance of checking for ticks is just so important. They can so easily be missed, and I think that's a bit of a misnomer. This post ends with an image of how to correctly remove a tick, if found. So you go from start to finish, allowing the audience to learn, and also give them tools for the future.

This post also got a lot, a lot of comments. Some of the things that were added among users were disgust, curiosity, and anger. Apparently there was a small group of people who felt that we had ruined poppy seed muffins for them, but I guess everyone learns something, so hopefully people have gotten over that by now. These images, they all convey something so strong that users were compelled to interact with these posts. It was most likely second nature. Sometimes you comment on something, and you don't even realize that you're engaging with it, because it's just that intuitive. I do want to take a moment though to emphasize that conveying and evoking emotion from users is such a great tool to make your content more engaging, but you have to use it responsibly. We wouldn't want to go and overuse or overstimulate or just trigger our audience. You want to be using these tools in a way that's healthy and promotes information sharing.

Okay. Next slide please. Okay. So in terms of talking about triggering your audience, what if on the other side of the coin your audience already has a certain emotion? Maybe they are really, really hungry for information on a certain topic. What emotion can your content address? We posted recently another carousel on Instagram highlighting six facts about the Delta variant that people should know. It's a great example of providing information to users who were already really hungry for more information on this topic. It proactively answers audience questions about current events without actually answering them one by one. So it really is a great tool for sharing information. The next example, please. Oh, you're already there. Or perhaps it's an anticipated seasonal illness, such as strep throat. We all know that strep throat could happen at any time, but it's much more likely to happen when school is in session, so we try to share informative pieces like this when we know that it may be more useful to our audience. Both of these examples, they're relevant to current trends, and they address an immediate need from our audience.

Okay. Next slide please. Thank you. So we've talked a lot about images, but video is important, too. We definitely recommend the use of video when planning content. But when you're creating video assets, there are some things to keep in mind, mainly that most users on Instagram will watch content without sound. And in fact, the app will most of the time default to sound off. So when you're looking at developing a video, you may want to weigh the benefit of adding or omitting audio. Likewise, when you're creating a video, think about the needed runtime. Regardless of how long the video is, make it worth the runtime. The longer the video, the less likely a user will watch it through to completion. So when you're deciding whether or not something should be a graphic or a video, consider what added benefit the animation might add. If it's minimal, then perhaps a still graphic would serve the same purpose. The same rules of good content apply to graphics and videos.

When crafting content for Instagram, ask yourself, Is this content visual, is this video interesting, what emotion does it trigger or address? The first example of the girl sliding down the water slide is a really great example. This post labeled "Don't poop in the pool" just shows how quickly things can go awry. This visual

just works. It works really well. And it does that because it's relatable, it's unexpected, and it's even kind of funny. Animation always gets such a range of reactions, including disgust and surprise. Additionally, think of what need is this video satisfying. This next example guides users in a way that provides information about suicide prevention and is a resource that users could easily share. In the same way that you can save graphics or videos, keep in mind that you can also save videos as well.

This video is such a great example of another chart that acts as an easy-to-understand guide for users wanting more information on this topic. It's colorful, but it's not alarming. Suicide itself is a very serious and somber topic, rightfully so, and this video finds a way to bridge the seriousness in a way that isn't scary, in a way that kind of promotes some optimism of prevention. And then finally, when you're reviewing your video content, keep in mind that it's really common, even expected to see a video get less likes. The way it works is, generally, you'll make up for likes in views. Most users when they're scrolling through the feed, if they watch it, they won't like it. It's kind of an added bonus when you get both. So keep that in mind that you may see some variance there when you're evaluating the metrics.

Okay. Thank you. After the last year through now, conveying information has just been of the utmost importance. As you can see from these top performers from 2021 sorted by engagements, charts were the top contender. We have a chart on allergies, when to wear a mask, and what fully-vaccinated people can do. If you look a little closer, you can see that all three of these were timely. They have high numbers of saves, which is what we've been talking about in making your content an evergreen resource for users. There's one that has 16,000, 15,000, and 12,000 saves by users respectfully.

They're visually easy to digest, and they're really, really informative. It can also tell you that all three have calls to action in their copy to reinforce the messaging. I do think it's important to note I've been talking a lot about charts, and we see a lot of really great successful charts, but I do understand not everything can be a chart. Charts don't work necessarily for everything. And so if you're trying to create content and don't see an easy fit, don't force it. There are tons of ways to make content visually interesting.

The next slide please. Okay. So shifting gears, I'm going to briefly touch on other Instagram features, stories, reels, IGTV, and guides. These content types are unique from standard feed posts, but they all offer something beneficial to users. While these are different in functionality, the same driving principles that we've discussed in the feed largely apply to these as well. Thank you. And to build on these themes, here's a brief overview of Instagram stories. Unique from the feed, an Instagram story will disappear after 24 hours. So earlier I spoke about content in the feed being able to be saved and used later as a resource. This isn't the case with an Instagram story. Instagram stories will disappear entirely 24 hours after posting. The only way a story could live longer

would be to add it as a highlight to your profile. But not every story should be its own highlight. That just doesn't make sense.

Also important, stories require a vertical layout. Instagram is predominantly used on a mobile app, which means users are viewing content on a much smaller screen. This also means that taking up all the vertical real estate is key. Even though the layout is a little different, the same kind of content recommendations we talked about earlier still apply. For example, this story is so colorful, it's such a rich blue, it has a strong lead, it offers information clearly, it has a call to action, it was timely at posting. I think in critiquing this concept, the only thing that I could really say as a negative would be that it's a little text-heavy on panel two, but we also know that with sharing information about COVID, getting as much information to users as needed was of the utmost importance, so I think it works. Thank you.

Next, I want to briefly highlight three other Instagram features. Again, these are different from a standard feed post and from stories. The first was released a couple years ago, and it's called IGTV or Instagram TV. This content for IGTV is ideal for vertical videos that are over one minute long. All of these videos can be linked to Instagram stories for a better user experience. This content type is great for a series of longer videos or something that is a video that is explaining a long, complex process. Again, with videos, the understanding is that the longer the video, the greater the drop-off of people watching through to completion. So with that being said, this is still a great place to add longer videos as appropriate for Instagram. Can you go ahead and click again?

Thank you. The second is reels. Now, reels are essentially Instagram's version of TikTok. We posted our first reel to Instagram in January on four things to know about COVID-19 vaccines, and it performed exceptionally well, likely because of its timeliness. It's so clean. It's visually interesting, and it shares information in such an easy-to-understand way. Reels are similar to IGTV but shorter. Reels are a maximum of 30 seconds. You also can't link to a reel in a story. This content type is however though also vertically formatted. You can click one more.

The third Instagram feature that I'm going to talk about is guides. Guides are really just their own thing completely. The best way that I can describe a guide is essentially a separate section that highlights feed content. A guide will show you a collection of content that you've posted to your profile related to places, products, or posts. And so far, we've posted two post guides, one on mask-wearing and the other on COVID-19 vaccines. Both guides are made up of posts that we posted to our profile, to CDC's Instagram profile, on those specific topics. There is a drawback to these though. While they do provide a way to highlight content that's already been posted, there aren't at this time any metrics. So any ROI established for these is purely based on benefiting the user and providing them with an easier way to explore our content.

Okay. So I've went over a lot, and we're going to do just a real quick recap of what works. So when you're thinking about content, remember, it's all about

the visuals. Instagram hinges on the photo, video, or graphics that you're sharing. Catching the user's eye increases the chances that the message will be read and that the call to action will be made. A good way to do this is to lean into a really strong photo or video, use of color, or posting content that's timely. What emotion does your content convey? Does this content elicit a positive emotion? Does it motivate users to learn more or read more or watch more? Remember the examples we talked about earlier with the muffin or the child in the pool? Those are great examples. Does it satisfy a need? Does this answer questions from your social media audience?

Does it address something in current events? Again, content that's timely overwhelmingly does well. It also gives your audience a reason to follow you. Can this content be used in the future? Is this content something that a user would save for use later on or keep as a resource? Consider the lifespan of your content and whether or not video is an option. Does using animation add context? Does it make the message more engaging? Remember to consider whether or not sound is needed. And the golden ticket to all of this, would you yourself interact with this content? It's a pretty good litmus to see if your content is strong, if you would.

Okay. Next slide please. So I know that this is a lot of information, and if all of this just has you stumped, here's some parting inspiration from other Federal agencies in an international account. From NASA to the Department of Interior, we can see that these three accounts posts content that has such strong imagery. They're so vibrant. Color, again, it can be so inspiring and awe-inducing. All three of these, they can use... If you can go ahead and tap forward, please. Go ahead. There you go. All three of these, they use high-quality photos, strong images that evoke emotion, and when possible, they make sure that the emotion is human, it's relatable. They tell really great stories through the use of imagery. It's also important to note that these accounts do have different goals than CDC's Instagram account, but it's always good to see what other accounts are doing and kind of how our subject matter could be refreshed for our own channel. So in closing, think about what purpose your content serves and make it visual. Keeping these points in mind can help you craft Insta-worthy content. And then I'll take questions.

Toyin Ademokun: Hi, Kathleen. I think we have two questions in the Q&A box. I can read off the first one to you real quick. It says, "The head of Instagram just last month put a video out saying that they want IG to become more of an entertainment video-driven app, driven by algorithms and videos. With possible upcoming changes to IG, which leans more into success of TikTok, how do you see this affecting the CDC's Instagram strategy and overall performance?"

Kathleen Layton: Yeah. I think that that's really, really interesting. So we can only adapt with the content options that we have. So as more features are made available, we can definitely experiment with what works for our audience. As new features have been made available, we've definitely leaned into as many of them as we possibly could, as made sense. So I think if there's an algorithmic benefit to

doing more reels or doing more IGTV, I think we'll see that on our channel and just kind of naturally hone in on that.

Toyin Ademokun: Okay, awesome. The next question we have is from Rebecca. She says, "Do we include any disclaimers for sensitive images like the one of the ticks on the dog? If yes, what is that language like?"

Kathleen Layton: So we actually, when we posted this, we did not. Instagram did flag it as a sensitive image where basically a user has to tap in order to view it. Instagram just did that on its own through whatever magic it has. And I actually think that added a level of intrigue, because CDC doesn't normally post sensitive material, and I think just that natural human part of wanting to know what's behind the wall maybe made that even more engaging.

Toyin Ademokun: Okay. We just had another question pop up from someone anonymous. It says, "Does CDC try to connect with Instagram influencers to share content?"

Kathleen Layton: So that's always been really tricky, because influencers, generally there has to be some sort of partnership or understanding that all of this will be done without payment. And so I know with COVID, we were able to partner with some YouTube influencers, but as far as Instagram-specific influencers, not that I'm aware of. It's just really, really tricky, but I know that we've definitely leveraged our content for posting and interacting with other partners as made sense.

Toyin Ademokun: Okay. There's another one. "Do you find that content in the form of graphics, real photos performs better than elements like icons, animated graphics? How do you find the balance?"

Kathleen Layton: I don't think necessarily there's one that just naturally performs better than the other, at least not that I can recall. I think it's just really based on how strong the image or graphic is. So one of the first examples that we showed, that black-and-white image, that was super strong. The charts were also super strong. They're two different types of images, but they both rose to the top. So really it's just making sure that whatever type of visual you're wanting to go with is as optimized as possible.

Toyin Ademokun: We have a few others who have questions. Feel free to unmute if you would like to ask Kathleen any questions. We would like this to be engaging, so whatever questions you may have, just feel free to unmute, and then you can ask your question.

Angela Walker: Thank you. Hi. Thanks for the presentation. Very informative about Instagram and how CDC is using that platform. Thank you. Question is, Are programs using iPhones for videos, or is it through creative services that videos need to go through?

Kathleen Layton: So I would really recommend creative services. I think there have been maybe some instances, rare instances, where there may have been a video recorded on an iPhone. There's a lot of clearance that would have to go through on that, because you would need to make sure that it was [inaudible 00:42:46]-cleared, especially if you're showing any sort of equipment, if you're showing any sort of CDC facility. You have to make sure your smart card's hidden. There's all these other things that you have to consider, and if you just go through creative services, it really eliminates that area of potential issue.

Angela Walker: Got it. Thank you.

Kathleen Layton: Yeah. Who's next? Is anyone next?

Molly Dunham-Friel: I had a quick question.

Kathleen Layton: Yeah.

Molly Dunham-Friel: I was wondering, Do you know what type of video content IG prefers or preferences in their algorithm? For example, do they prefer reels versus IGTV versus short video posts, or are they all created equal? Do you know anything about how the algorithm works and what gets maybe more attention in this era?

Kathleen Layton: So the algorithm itself, I wish I actually knew it, but unfortunately that likely changes more often than anyone could ever predict. I can tell from just my own kind of curiosity and just looking at the different video content, strong content performs well. So if you have strong content, it'll likely do well, no matter what type it is. That being said, I do remember that it's largely based on a lot of the elements that we talked about, so timeliness, addressing content need, being clean and easy to understand. We have IGTV videos that showed takeaways from press conferences during the height of COVID, that did outstandingly well. We have that first reel that I showed, the four things to know about a COVID-19 vaccine, did exceptionally well. We have just standard video posts that, again, have done exceptionally well.

I think in just remembering how Instagram treated new features, I think right now we may see a temporary boost in... And by boost, I mean just a temporary increase in reels, just because it is so new, and Instagram wants to beat TikTok so bad, but I don't know how long that'll last or if that'll balance out. It's just kind of ever-changing, and you kind of have to keep throwing things out there and seeing what works and what doesn't work, if that makes sense.

Molly Dunham-Friel: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

Kathleen Layton: Yeah.

Edward Vallejo: Hi, Kathleen. Thank you very much for a great presentation, and thank you for showing us the engagement metrics. So I was wondering if for CDC's Instagram account specifically, if there were certain days or times of the day that were most successful for the different types of content, whether it was carousel or reels or anything else? Thank you.

Kathleen Layton: Yeah, great question. So we actually use a social media content management tool that will give us optimal times. And so we schedule our content as close to those optimal times as we possibly can. The optimal times are not broken down by content type, like post a video at this time, or post an image at this time, it's just general times when your audience is likely to be more available or more active. I had another point that I was going to mention. Oh, but that being said, content does tend to circulate through the feed. So if it starts getting attention, then the Instagram algorithm will lean into that, and you'll probably serve it to more people. So if it's a strong piece of content and people want to interact with it, it'll be seen. I hope that kind of answers your question.

Iman Lemma: Hi Kathleen-

Kathleen Layton: Hey.

Iman Lemma: Hi. Thank you so much for the presentation. It was very informative, especially as we're looking to create some IGTV stories. I know this is about Instagram, but I'm just really curious to know if there has been talks of possibly creating a TikTok account, because it's just no denying that there's a large audience, especially when it comes to younger audiences and people we're trying to target, so is there any talks around possibly getting into that by any chance?

Kathleen Layton: We actually looked into that during COVID-19, and HHS doesn't have terms of service for that. So right now, we're just stuck with Instagram reels, which are similar, and they do well.

Iman Lemma: Thank you.

Kathleen Layton: Yeah.

Toyin Ademokun: Hi, Kathleen. We got a few more questions in the chat box. The first one asks, "Do you know what type of video content IG wants or preferences in their algorithm, example reels versus IGTV versus short video posts?"

Kathleen Layton: I think I answered that one. Was that from the same user?

Molly Dunham-Friel: Yes. Yes, you answered it.

Toyin Ademokun: Oh. Yeah. All right. Thanks, Molly.

Molly Dunham-Friel: It's okay.

Toyin Ademokun: Okay. The next one we have is, "Which social media scheduler do you all use or preview?"

Kathleen Layton: Sprout Social.

Toyin Ademokun: Sprout Social for the person who asked that question. The next one says, "Does CDC OADC have rules around optimal number of hashtags?"

Kathleen Layton: No, we don't have a specific number of hashtags one way or the other. There's a lot of variable research on the ideal number of hashtags. Really, I think there's nothing wrong with including the ones that make sense. I think if you're going too broad or outside of your topic area, just to get an extended view... For instance, this is being kind of exaggerated, but just as an example, we hashtag love, hashtag people. That's a little bit too broad, and I think those are the types that we may not necessarily suggest utilizing. But as kind of a default, we always for Instagram will hashtag CDC, we'll hashtag public health, and then sometimes I'll add health science and any of the others that are relevant. So yeah, good question.

Toyin Ademokun: Thank you, Kathleen. If there is anyone I missed as far as questions, please feel free to unmute and ask Kathleen.

Molly Dunham-Friel: I have another question. Do you ever share other people's content ever? I know it's probably different for CDC versus a personal account, but how do you engage with the community, or do you do engagement, and do you share others' content?

Kathleen Layton: Yeah. So we do very selectively. And I think the main way that we've interacted with the Instagram audience is probably through stories. Just for instance, when... There's two examples that are coming to my mind. One is when we did an Instagram takeover with the former first lady, Mrs. Michelle Obama. And when she was posting all of the content, because Dr. Walensky took over her profile, we had asked that our profile be tagged, and so we were able to share all of that content to ours.

So it wasn't natively on our platform, but we shared it to ours. That's a good example. Another example is, I know a couple years ago for Birth Defects Prevention Month, we did a series of quizzes, and we said that the first person that answered correctly, we would tag their profile. So that was one way. I know that for this year in particular, really the last year and a half, we've seen huge spikes in engagement on our channels, which kind of makes sense. People are wanting information, and our profile's a good place to get it. And so kind of going through all of that is just a lot. So we do engage with our audience, but really, really selectively and really carefully.

Molly Dunham-Friel: Sorry, I have a lot of questions. I have one more. How do determine what content gets a highlight bubble?

Kathleen Layton: Yeah. So generally in my mind, there's a couple different, I guess, parameters. So for instance, if we did an Instagram engagement... For instance, last week we did an Instagram Q&A on AFM, so we had a promo story, and then all the Q&A items. To me, that's really good content that you definitely see a flow of information. It's not just one stand-alone. A stand-alone story doesn't need its own highlight, it just doesn't, unless it's just something mind-blowing that we need our audience to see everywhere in any capacity, which would be very rare. I just don't see a stand-alone post work, but for instance, vital signs typically gets a highlight. That's a reoccurring type of thing. Of course, we highlight all the content related to COVID variants and COVID vaccines. So content that we can kind of group together that we know we're going to be posting a lot on, and a lot on as a sequence, it's really ideal for a highlight. I think I had saw a question from a Kevin Clark in going through the nuances of video length, profile, IGTV. Kevin, are you still on?

Kevin Clark: Yeah. Yeah. I'm here. So I do a lot of video, and a handful of it makes it to social, mostly YouTube, but there's just nuances around each one of these platforms where Twitter only has so long or... Essentially it comes down to 60 seconds or less if you can get it on the profile page of Instagram, or they push you to IGTV. It just feels like this kind of black hole. I make a lot of videos, it's tough to get them under 60 seconds these days, so just wanted to... There was a lot of people talking about videos, just want to make people aware of some of those nuances.

Kathleen Layton: Yeah. And I can kind of mention those just for everyone's awareness. I was trying to talk more on content strategy as opposed to making things overly technical, but you do make a really, really good point. Each area of Instagram, or each content type, meaning a feed post, as Kevin mentioned, a feed post can be a maximum of 60 seconds. If it is over 60 seconds, it cannot go on the feed, it would have to go in IGTV, which means that that asset would have to be completely redesigned because IGTV is vertical. In the feed, most likely it'll be 1080 by 1080 square, but with IGTV it would have to be, I want to say it's a minute to 10 minutes we can do. Sometimes your profile can be whitelisted for a little bit longer, but we've never really tested that.

So I would be more comfortable with a 10-minute limit, just for this purpose. But when you're doing an Instagram TV video, there's all these other things to consider. So yeah, it's vertical, but up here, you have the post, because the post will preview at the top, you have your profile photo, your account name, and I think there's another dropdown. And then at the bottom, you have the comment, the like, you have all these other elements that are available at the bottom. So really even though it's a vertical video, you really only have that middle 1080 by 1080 to work with, but you have to take up all the real estate, which makes it even more complicated. That being said, same thing for reels. Only thing is, reels are not an IGTV post. Reels have to be under 30 seconds.

And so if you're going to create a reel, you need to create it as a vertical asset first. Then if it's a story, it's also vertical, but the maximum length for a story

video would be 15 seconds. And then there's a whole lot of nuances to stories, which I actually focus on stories day-to-day, so that's a whole other thing, but I'm also really into stories. So I hope that kind of touched on what you were looking for. In terms of file type, always in MP4, not a MOV. MP4.

Toyin Ademokun: All right. We have another question in the chat box that asks, "How do you handle negative comments?"

Kathleen Layton: It depends on what you mean by negative. I'm trying to see who asked this.

Toyin Ademokun: That was Deanna Altomara. And forgive me if I'm mispronouncing your name.

Deanna Altomara: That's me. I just know that when I scroll through the CDC Instagram, there's a wide array of comments, and some of them are skeptical, some are asking questions, and some are just plain nasty. What do you think is the best way to handle all of those different types of comments, whether they're outright belligerent, worse, whether they're more asking for information because they're skeptical?

Kathleen Layton: Yeah, that's a great question. For anything related to our comments, we do have a comment policy that is basically our governing document for how we do the comment moderation. And you're right, it runs the gamut, but as it's a government account, people and the users that comment, they have the right to free speech. They can say what they want, as long as it doesn't conflict with our comment policy. If it conflicts with our comment policy, then there's a particular set of procedures that we would go to handle it. So does that kind of answer that?

Deanna Altomara: Yeah, I suppose so with some of the more angry comments, but what if there's a comment where someone's asking for clarification and they're still just skeptical?

Kathleen Layton: So I know in the last year, generally, what we would do pre-COVID is we did do a lot of real-time question answering on our profiles. The guidance has just changed so quickly and so much over time to where we haven't done as much proactive question answering on our profiles as we would've liked to have done, however, ideally in a perfect situation, we would've answered those questions where people were wanting more information.

Toyin Ademokun: Okay. I know we're at time, but we have one more question that I wanted to ask. It's from Angela Walker. She wants to know, "Are programs using iPhone videos or creative services?"

Kathleen Layton: I did answer that one.

Toyin Ademokun: Okay. So there we have it. Does anyone else have any last-minute questions for Kathleen? Feel free to unmute yourselves or you can ask in the Q&A box.

Kathleen Layton: I think people are dropping off, which is a shame, because I could keep on talking about Instagram.

Molly Dunham-Friel: I'm still here.

Kathleen Layton: Okay. I'll take one more question if anyone else has any.

Luciann Draper: Hi. My name's Luciann. I work with a program that's very technical, and most of our messaging has up until more recently been more focused towards public health professionals and a technical audience, so we would like to be more engaging, but I don't know if Instagram is the right audience, and I'm wondering should we remain in the Twittersphere, or should we try to get more posts into maybe LinkedIn through the CDC account? Basically I'm wondering if there is a CDC account that kind of angles more towards a professional audience, or would you be willing to do Instagram stories if we can find the right angle?

Kathleen Layton: I think looking at a specific content piece would really help be able to better answer that, just because speaking just in general terms, it's really hard to give you the best way to optimize something. Are you within [inaudible 01:02:12] or within a program?

Luciann Draper: So I'm with the Advanced Molecular Detection Program. So up until recently, we had to explain what genomic sequencing is, and now everyone's of course hearing a lot about it with variants. So there's more interest in it, but it's still kind of at a high level where some of our messaging is a little more technical. But we're trying to kind of highlight what CDC is doing in this realm. And I've been interested in trying to do something for a lay audience, but trying to find that right spot of having it be informative but not too technical. So I'm just wondering if Instagram is the right audience, or if I should stay with Twitter?

Kathleen Layton: I don't necessarily think it's the wrong audience. There's always a way to make something work, but just without really taking an in-depth look, I don't know if there's a really great way to do that in the way that you're describing. We don't have necessarily professional information available about our Instagram users, there's just a lot of privacy layers from the social media platforms these days, but I do know that LinkedIn is a more professional audience. But that being said, if you were working on a specific release or report, anything that was sent for post consideration, we would take a look at it. And before anything went on our channels, we would see if there was any good way to optimize it. That being said, in OADC, if you are going to be working on a big release, or if there's a need to get information out on a certain topic, if there's a surge of cases in something and there needs to be more done on a particular topic...

Right now, it's tricky because COVID is still the top of mind for everyone, but hopefully as that ramps down, we can work on optimizing more content and provide some guidance along the way from concept to completion. So I guess if you have any questions, or this would go to our channel for posting, just send it

to us ahead of time, and we can kind of take a look and provide some guidance. I also know most of the Centers, they have their own social media liaison at the center OD level, and so they may also be able to provide some really great guidance.

Luciann Draper: I appreciate it. Thank you.

Toyin Ademokun: That's it. Thank you again everyone for joining the webinar. I hope you all learned from Kathleen's great presentation, and definitely look out for the next one, for sure. Have a good afternoon, everyone.