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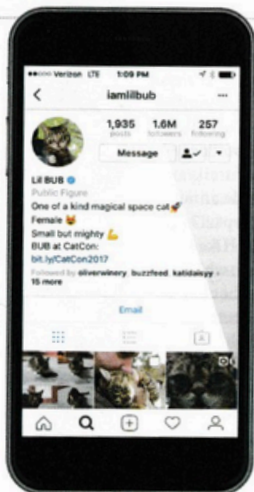
FAME

Indiana Instagrammers capture moments and followers

BY ANGELA HURLEY JORDEN

Since its inception in 2010, Instagram has grown exponentially as a social media platform. Because interactions feature photographs and short text, it's a visual feast and a reprieve from the tension that can be found in other social media platforms. Instagram's simple structure and high functionality make it popular with everyone, iPhone and Android users alike. Users download the app to their smartphones, then upload photos or take them in-app, sharing them with followers.

According to Forbes contributor Jayson DeMers, Instagram has done a phenomenal job of attracting younger audiences, with the majority of its users clocking in at younger than 30. "(Instagram) has an energy that older social media brands have lost over the years," DeMers writes. He should know; he's the founder of a Seattle-based content marketing firm. But don't think that this social media platform hasn't gained fans in the Midwest. Indiana-based Instagrammers have built huge followings, netting national and international attention for themselves and the Hoosier state. They've made plenty of friends along the way.



Lil BUB,
big following

Instagram handle:
@lamililbub

With an Instagram following of 1.6 million and appearances on "Good Morning America" and the "Today" show, along with a movie, books and a glut of merchandising, Lil

Bub hardly needs an introduction. The one-of-a-kind cat first caught the attention of Hoosiers and the world in 2011. Born the runt of the litter to a feral mother, Lil Bub has several genetic anomalies. She has dwarfism and will remain kitten-sized her whole life. Her legs are short and stubby, and her lower jaw is shorter than her upper jaw. Lil Bub's teeth never grew in, and her tongue hangs distended from her mouth. She has extra toes and was diagnosed with osteoporosis in 2012. Her condition limits her ability to walk well, but she's perfected the waddle. Lil Bub's Dude, owner Mike Bridavsky, bills the Bloomington-based star as a "one-of-a-kind space cat." Her bulging bright green eyes express curiosity and warmth and are rather alien-like in appearance.

But don't feel bad for Bub. The 6-year-old cat has had a healthy appetite and a happy life, and her striking looks rocketed her to fame. Bub was already popular online, but when Instagram became available for Android phones, Bridavsky began sharing photos of Lil Bub through the platform. "Bub brings inspiration, hope, happiness and a respite from the constant barrage of politics, news and other human-related complications that flood our social media every day," he says. "I am honored to be able to provide this to her millions of fans online."

Although she is a published author, talk show host and TV star, Lil Bub has not forgotten her Hoosier roots. "Bub has always been proud to have been rescued in rural Indiana," Bridavsky says.

People cannot get enough of Bub. Most recently, she was a featured "celebricat" at Cat Con 2017 in Pasadena, California, in August. Lil Bub also uses her celebrity for good. In 2014, she partnered with the ASPCA to create Lil Bub's Big Fund, the first national fund for special needs pets. To date, more than \$300,000 has been raised for animals in need.



Indiana roots, international game

Instagram handle:
@Pacers

Nothing goes together like Indiana and basketball. But what do Pacers teammates do when they're off the court? Their Instagram feed has the

answer, as it showcases the many facets of Pacers life.

"There's so much more to the team than just what you see on the court," says Celeste Ballou, Pacers' associate director of digital marketing. "So, while our account does focus on the games, it's more than just basketball. Our Instagram account shares more personal access to the team and the players, from practice to press conference to a team huddle outside the locker room to off-the-court events in the community."

With a following of 1.1 million, they're doing something right. As Instagram's popularity rises, so does the opportunity to connect with new fans. "Instagram has become a community where we can engage with our fans in a purely visual way," Ballou says. "It has become a community of Pacers fans: peo-

ple who share the same love of Pacers basketball. We enjoy seeing engagement from our fans and the opportunity to share our team's story in a unique way."

Although the Pacers are a global brand, they've never lost sight of their Indiana roots. "For some fans, our account may be the only way they learn about Indiana, so we're excited to share the beauty of our city, the heart of our community and all the things that make Indiana great," Ballou says.



Fostering felines

Instagram handle:
@kitten_faces

When Fort Wayne-based Barb Kaminski and her husband were building a house, she had a unique request: She wanted a kitten room. With its cheerfully painted walls

and cat trees, toys, beds, boxes and blankets, the room serves as the primary setting for Kaminski's incredibly popular Instagram feed, @kitten_faces.

Kaminski has always loved cats and kittens, as does her family, and she currently fosters kittens from the Allen County SPCA and the Humane Society of Whitley County. Since she began fostering kittens in May 2013, Kaminski has fostered more than 113 cats; her Instagram feed documents those experiences. Kittens come to the Kaminski family in various states of duress. Some are abandoned by their mother cat, some are found wandering the streets, but all are in need.

And they are received into Kaminski's gentle care. As she has helped kittens grow, her Instagram following has grown; @kitten_faces has an Instagram following of almost 100,000. "That's nuts," she says. "I didn't even know what Instagram was. My daughter was the one who suggested that I start a feed." It has garnered followers from everywhere, and fans track all the kitty happenings on the page. "It's a way to connect with people all over the world. It's amazing to see that kind of passion."

Kaminski has even received adoption inquiries from as far away as Indonesia, but doesn't entertain adoption for anyone who can't drive to Fort Wayne to retrieve their pet. She has accepted applications from Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and Wisconsin; the customer from Boston made the 14-hour trip twice to adopt two batches of three kittens each.

While @kitten_faces showcases animals, Kaminski has found human connections in her followers; fans have shared many stories with her, one of which is near and dear to her heart. One follower visited her gravely ill father every day in the hospital. "She showed him pictures and videos of the kittens, and he brightened up and laughed," Kaminski says. "He was dying, and he did pass, but it was touching to hear that for a few moments, you can change somebody's mood."



Bully for Indiana

Instagram handle:
@thewhitestpuppyouknow

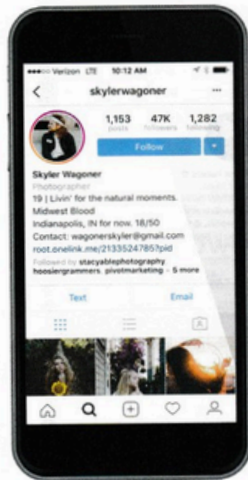
When Kelsey Hopkins adopted her dog, Beebes, she started sharing pictures on her personal Instagram feed daily, like any proud mama would. When someone commented that they were tired of seeing dog photos constantly, Hopkins created

an Instagram account just for Beebes. Pretty soon, Stache and Jax joined the Carmel-based crew. As the dog family grew, so did its Instagram following: @TheWhitestPuppyouknow boasts 128,000 followers.

All three dogs are white bullies. What's a bully? It's a breed recognized by the United Canine Association; American bullies were developed through selective breeding, marrying the best traits of the UKC American pit bull terrier and the AKC American Staffordshire terrier. Although bully breeds and pit bulls have gotten a bad rap over the years, Hopkins hopes that her Instagram and Facebook feeds reflect a very different side to an oft-maligned dog breed. "They are just as lovable and goofy as any other breed of dog," she says. Although her bullies are from shelters and rescues in the Midwest, Hopkins bills them as "three white babes from Indiana" on social media. And babes they are: With their white coats and inquisitive faces, they are highly photogenic. Pictures and videos highlight Beebes, Stache and Jax snuggling under covers, dressed up in costumes, playing in water, singing and eating ice cream.

Hopkins' @thewhitestpuppyouknow account has done more than show off its three canine stars; it's helped their owner as well. "I have social anxiety, so meeting new people is hard for me sometimes," she says. "Through my dogs' Instagram account, I've talked to so many people who deal with the same thing and people who also share a love of dogs. It's also an outlet for my creative side and pushes me to try new things when it comes to photography."

Instagram has also enabled Hopkins to help others. The power of social media is strong in the animal rescue community. "Through Instagram, we've been able to work with other accounts to raise over \$30,000 for rescues and shelters across the country," Hopkins says. "We've also been able to partner with companies like Dogly and Jolly Pets to donate to local Indiana-based shelters and rescues."



From high school to the big time

Instagram handle:
@skylarwagoner

When Skyler Wagoner posted a picture of an Indiana sunrise on Instagram in 2014, he never expected his account to receive accolades from the likes of Time magazine. He received so many likes on the shot that he was inspired to cultivate his photography talent and post more photos. "I got more love on that photo than any other posts," Wagoner says. "That's what fired up my motivation to take photography seriously."

The 19-year-old Indianapolis native began posting pictures of his friends when he was a sophomore in high school. What started as candid shots of his friends and their adventures turned into an Instagram following 47,000 people strong. Simple and stunning, Wagoner's pictures feature places ranging from waterfalls to railroad tracks to layers of orange rock in Canyonlands National Park.

Many of his pictures present slices of life in Indiana. He was featured in Time magazine's "Instagram Photographers to Follow in All 50 States" in 2015, when he was still a senior in high school. The magazine recognized this young talent, describing his portraits as having a "certain nostalgic 'Stand by Me' feel to them." Wagoner is thrilled to be associated with his home state. "I've grown so much from the community here, and without this state and the love from the people in it, I would not be where I am today," he says. "It's a pleasure to represent Indiana and a great place to call home. I'm thankful for the roots I've grown here."

It's not all about the pretty pictures and fan follows, though. Skyler Wagoner Photography has taken off as a result of his feed. "It's been incredible meeting up with people because of the app, and it's a dream having my own photography business," he says. "From sharing on Instagram, I get a lot of business and relationships. Without Instagram, I don't believe I would be as successful." 📸

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