



# How to Win Followers and Influence People

By aligning its Instagram launch with the 2018 International Builders' Show, Huber Engineered Woods LLC acquires 1,000 new social-media followers. By Kelli Billstein

Midway through 2017, the marketing team at Huber Engineered Woods LLC had one looming question: How do you quickly access – and gain the trust of – professionals in the building and construction sectors? After all, both of the company's product lines, AdvanTech (subfloor panels and adhesive that combine for stiff, squeak-free floors) and Zip System (water- and air-resistant sheathing and tape), require that builders be open to trying something they may not be familiar with. To overcome that hurdle, Huber's marketers initially launched a national ad campaign for Zip System encouraging builders to "join the Zip revolution." But Huber couldn't rely wholly on its ads for exposure. It needed a bolder approach that reached more forward-thinking audiences.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

**Exhibitor:** Huber Engineered Woods LLC  
**Creative/Production:** 3D Exhibits Inc., Schaumburg, IL, 800-471-9617, [www.3dexhibits.com](http://www.3dexhibits.com)  
**Show:** National Association of Home Builders International Builders' Show, 2018  
**Budget:** Less than \$49,000  
**Goals:**

- Gain 500 Instagram followers.
- Attract 30 industry influencers and media



"Our team turned its focus to social platforms," says Tracy Collins, event marketing manager at Huber. "We'd been on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter for a while, but we suddenly realized we couldn't ignore Instagram any longer." As soon as Huber started paying attention to Insta's photo-saturated feeds, it discovered the stuff of every marketer's dreams: There was already buzz about its products, and pictures were being posted of Huber brands in their natural habitats.

Upon a discovery like this, most companies would scramble to make an Instagram account and elbow their way into the conversation. But Huber played it cool and spent most of 2017 engaged in "social listening" – actively observing the online communities and following industry-specific hashtags such as #keepcraftalive, #buildersofig, and #moderncraftsman. Since Instagram offers such an excellent space to engage authentically with consumers, this was a prime opportunity the manufacturer couldn't afford to squander, especially if Huber could get a few influencers with big fan followings to talk up its products.

"We knew we needed to conduct a lot of social listening to understand who this community is and what matters to them," says Kristin Michael, brand marketing manager at Huber. "We had to learn the tone and develop our strategy. After a short amount of listening, we knew Instagram was a place where we could play. We recognized that this was a platform used not only to establish comradery between builders, but also to inform one another and help transform how people work on job sites."

In other words, Instagram was the megaphone Huber needed to amplify its message to an audience that already showed signs of being on board with the firm and placing that all-important trust in its products. To that end, it was a no-brainer that Instagram play a key part in Huber's biggest marketing event of the year: the 2018 National Association of Home Builders International Builders' Show (IBS).

Huber had already partnered with 3D Exhibits Inc. to develop a creative strategy and design a booth that would show off AdvanTech and Zip System products while weaving in echoes of Instagram. Now the question was how to more intimately integrate the social-media platform into the event.

## Social Strategizing

In today's social-media climate of constantly shifting algorithms, it's no small challenge to launch a new account and get noticed. But if you can synchronize that launch with a tsunami-sized event, it's possible to ride the waves of online activity and draft event hashtags to generate traffic. Knowing this, Huber timed its Instagram launch to happen one month before IBS 2018.

reps to the booth.

### Results:

- Acquired 1,000 new Instagram followers.
- Welcomed 35 influencers and members of the media during an in-booth meet-up.



"We knew we'd be using Instagram as an ongoing tool for our branding initiatives, and we wanted a strong start," Michael says. "Media consumption is at a high before and after the show, and it peaks during the event. That was our rationale for aligning the announcement of our new Instagram presence with IBS."

Huber set a slew of ambitious goals related to its Instagram inauguration. First, it aimed to amass a respectable total of 500 followers by the end of IBS. In concert with this growth, Huber wanted to host 30 Instagram influencers, editors, and other media reps at an in-booth meet-up to celebrate its Instagram launch and drum up even more buzz. An adjacent goal was to initiate an ongoing cultivation of relationships with these industry influencers whose product recommendations hold an estimated 10 times more sway with potential customers than any online banner ad or TV commercial ever could.

Central to the success of these targets was one key element: tone. During its year of social listening, Huber noticed that the recipe for popularity and trust among builders on Instagram was a one-to-one ratio of humor and professional expertise. Successful Instagram influencers take their work very seriously – but not too seriously – and are big fans of quirky posts and clever hashtags. This tone had to resonate throughout Huber's Instagram strategy and its physical booth if the company was to succeed.

In December of 2017, Huber made its first Instagram post: a photo of an AdvanTech subfloor with the casual words "Hey, Insta" printed over the image. Below the pic, Huber announced it had finally joined Instagram and encouraged others to tag @huberwood in their posts if they were using Huber products. Following this was a string of freshly minted brand hashtags, including #ZipSystem, #AdvanTech, and #ZipRevolution, which Huber hoped users would add to their Instagram arsenals.

Huber also reached out to influencers to explore collaborative opportunities at IBS. The company scheduled a popular podcast, "The Modern Craftsman," to record an episode in its booth, booked show-floor airtime on the popular "Fine Homebuilding" podcast, and slated YouTube celebrity craftsman Matt Risinger to shoot a video in the exhibit. With momentum building and Instagram followers already accruing, Huber was ready to make its presence known at IBS – both on Instagram and the trade show floor.

## **Making Impressions**

On Jan. 9, 2018, the three-day builders' mecca known as IBS began. To pique attendees' curiosity, Huber posted three pics of its exhibit on Instagram along with the question, "Want to talk about tight building envelopes? Come chat with us at booth W2883." Instantly, a new follower of Huber's commented, "You had me at tight!"

As they perused the show floor, IBS attendees could pick out Huber's exhibit aisles away by simply looking up. Two tiers of fabric banners mounted up to 22 feet off the ground featured the logos, taglines, and brand-specific hashtags for AdvanTech and Zip System. The banners served as a reminder to attendees that as they explored the 30-by-40-foot exhibit, they might wish to snap a pic for Instagram and tag it with the appropriate hashtag.

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Product demos, such as a stream of water gushing over a Zip roof system to prove its impenetrable design, mesmerized passersby and served as Instagrammable proof points for Huber reps to convince skeptical builders that the company's products were far cries from gimmicks. There was also a 12-by-8-foot LED backlit graphic featuring 150 preselected Insta posts projected on rotation and dappled with instances of Huber's Zip System hashtags. Above the feed, a graphic read, "It's not a trend, it's a revolution." Judging by all the posts made by Instagram users who were already adopting Zip products, a revolution did indeed appear to be happening.

As traffic picked up, Huber's first major influencer made his appearance in the booth. Matt Risinger, a YouTube celebrity builder boasting a following of more than 200,000 channel subscribers, set up a video shoot in which he discussed IBS highlights. With Huber's bustling booth as a vibrant backdrop, the camera rolled on Risinger interviewing three more influencers, the hosts of "The Modern Craftsman" podcast. Attendees gawked at the online celebs and couldn't help but notice that their heroes had associated themselves with Huber via the shoot location. It generated more positive buzz and was obvious fodder for Huber's Instagram feed, which was scoring anywhere from 100 to 300 "likes" per post. "Huber was appealing to those influencers' built-in audiences," Collins says. "We wanted to do what a lot of other consumer marketing groups are doing: using the power of influencers and enabling them."

Day two at IBS kicked off with even more influencer hobnobbing. Before the exhibit hall opened for the day, "The Modern Craftsman" trio arrived at the Huber exhibit to record an episode while the show floor was nice and quiet. Huber's Instagram post for that morning was a behind-the-scenes pic of the recording session littered with influencer handles and branded hashtags. A glance at Huber's Instagram feed gave the impression that this company had really cool friends who subtly or not so subtly endorsed the company.

To have a little fun, Huber made an Instagram post announcing its "Best of Social" awards for Instagram users it deemed worthy of some lighthearted recognition for differentiating themselves while also promoting the company's products. Huber tagged winners via their Instagram handles and awarded them titles such as "Most Complex Roof" and "Most Spirited Framing." The post garnered a slew of comments and jovial banter, plus more than 100 likes.



Later that day, the real tour de force went down. Huber hosted a meet-up at around 3 p.m., just before attendee happy hours would typically start. Placing emphasis on celebrating its Instagram launch, Huber invited its Best of Social award winners, other influencers who had massive online followings, and a smattering of traditional media reps to its exhibit. Arriving guests filled out name tags, but instead of writing their first and last names, they were instructed to share their Instagram handles to better facilitate new social-media friendships and follows. To drive home the Instagram appeal, the meet-up's bartender would only serve those who proved they were following Huber on Instagram. "People kept going up to each other saying, 'Gosh, I've been following you on Instagram for three years, and I see all your posts,'" Collins says. "They were able to finally meet each other through us, and the booth created lots of opportunities for conversation."

For those who didn't want the fun to end as the show floor closed up for the day, the in-booth fete flowed into an off-site Huber-sponsored fundraiser for SkillsUSA Inc., a nonprofit that offers occupational training and education to youth and young adults. Huber posted about the day's successful events on its Instagram feed, gushing, "We loved talking with our social media friends in person. Thanks to everyone who came to our meet-up and helped us celebrate the launch of our Instagram."

### **Posting Positive Results**

By the end of IBS, Huber had 1,000 Instagram followers, doubling its pre-show goal of 500. And after just 30 days on the photo-sharing app, Huber had amassed 40,000 impressions among users. Before long, its Instagram following had quadrupled, and it continues to grow at a steady clip of 4 percent each week.

Best of all, Huber now has a bunch of influencer buddies on the popular social platform. Risinger, who shot his YouTube video in Huber's booth at IBS, has since made posts about Zip System on his Instagram account, reaching a following of 31,100 users. One of those posts generated nearly 700 likes and more than 80 comments about Huber and its products.

"The Huber team achieved awesome results," said one Sizzle Awards judge. "Conducting a year's worth of up-front research on its target audience's Instagram use – and aligning with key industry influencers – paid off in the form of increased followers and the kind of authentic engagement that money just can't buy."

One other thing money can't buy, which was also on Huber's list of objectives for IBS, is quality face time with media reps. And by the end of the show, Huber was sitting pretty on that front too. It attracted 16 percent more editors, influencers, and media reps to its in-booth meet-up than anticipated – which yielded three articles in publications read by the company's target audience and a video clip on the DIY Network. It was a resounding success, and Huber attributes much of it to Instagram.

The rules of marketing may be constantly changing, but so are the kinds of strategies available to creative exhibitors. For Huber, Instagram afforded so much more than a grid of pretty promotional pictures. It locked in a boundless supply of opportunities to market its products to – and gain the trust of – the company's target audience. **E**