App Watch: New Instagram Tools Make Pics Pop

Mae Anderson, Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — I started using Instagram in late 2011 and was instantly hooked. I have always loved taking pictures but have felt overwhelmed by all the adjustment options offered by apps such as Snapseed and Camera+.

Instagram made it easy. After snapping a picture, I could simply add a filter or hit the "lux" button. Voila! A slightly heightened version of reality — usually pictures of flowers or street scenes — went out to all my Instagram followers.

So when Instagram gave its app 10 new editing tools last week, I was apprehensive. Sure, these tools give me more controls, the types available with more sophisticated editing apps. But I don't want to see the simplicity of Instagram go away.

Fortunately, Instagram has made the new tools just as easy to use as its other features. I'm hooked on them now as well.

BEFORE: Instagram has long offered basic editing tools such as cropping and rotating photos. It also offers 19 filters — such as the deeply hued "Lo-Fi" or the washed out "Hefe" — to enhance photos with one tap. In addition, the "lux" control lets you quickly adjust exposure and contrast, though one slider controls both.

THE ADDITIONS: The new version lets you make a variety of adjustments, from brightness to saturation, with a 100-point slider. It's no longer all or nothing with the "lux" slider. You can control each aspect individually.

IN USE: My first attempt to use the new tools came after I took a picture of a gorgeous rose bush climbing up a brownstone staircase on my Brooklyn street. Ordinarily. I would just take the picture, use the "Lux" button and add a filter.

This time, I clicked on the wrench icon to bring up the new editing tools. Using a slider for each tool, I quickly adjusted the picture with the exact saturation, warmth and contrast that make the image pop.

Even though I'm a novice photographer and I don't really understand the technical details behind what those things are, I don't need to. I can focus on how the image looks as I swipe the slider back and forth. When the roses glowed pink and the surrounding greenery shimmered, I posted the photo and let the "likes" roll in.

I noticed an uptick in "likes" in my next few shots: a sunset in Manhattan reflecting on tenement buildings and a street scene on Vanderbilt Avenue in Brooklyn with an impossibly blue sky. That's catnip to Instagrammers, and I'll definitely be using the tools more in the future.

AVAILABILITY: Instagram is owned by Facebook but has its own, free app for iOS, Android and Windows Phone devices. However, the new tools are available for iOS and Android devices only. They are in version 6.0 of the app, which requires at least iOS 6.0 or the Ice Cream Sandwich version of Android.

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