

Strategy to Impact.

The Lowest Hanging Fruit for your Business

Digital Marketing Guide

Katya Ellis

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How to use this guide

Having worked with thousands of business owners over the years, I know exactly how unique all our preferences are for consuming new knowledge. A preferred method for one person may be overwhelming for another. I especially understand this having taught Digital Marketing to university students for 5 years, the same material can be consumed and interpreted in many different ways.

I want to accommodate as many preferences as possible. This guide is part of Phase 1, along with the Toolbox and the Knowledge Library. Phase 2 will enhance your learning experience with audio and video versions of the guides, live sessions, and a planning workbook.

The Marketing Planning Guide covers the foundations and is best read from start to finish. This guide works differently. The 20 channel sections can be read in any order, so if you already know which channels you are considering, go straight to them. If you are starting from scratch, work through them in sequence and use the Questions to Ask Yourself at the end of each section to decide which channel is your lowest hanging fruit.

This guide is a powerful tool, saving you valuable time and money. Treat your engagement with it as seriously as any scheduled meeting. Set aside focused time, just as you would for a one-on-one session, to achieve the best results.

You will also have access to the Strategy to Impact Knowledge Library, with additional reading material and links to trusted sources, plus our Toolbox with current and useful tools that will help you save a ton of time researching.

In Marketing Mix terms, this guide is essentially about Promotion: the channels and tactics you use to reach and engage your customers. Many of these activities also feed into Proof. Reviews, testimonials, case studies, user-generated content and awards all help show potential customers that your business can be trusted to deliver.

Strategy to Impact

- The Lowest Hanging Fruit

DIGITAL MARKETING CHANNELS GUIDE 2026

There is really so much to share on this topic, that I wish I could just 'Airdrop' all that I know from my brain into your brain, as that is not an option this is my knowledge share on everything that I think you should know about digital marketing. To avoid making this guide into an overwhelming thesis, I have decided to stick to just focusing on the main digital marketing channels and tactics. There might be some emerging channels that will become prevalent for future iterations of this guide, but for most part the categories mentioned below are going to remain with innovation changing the tools and tactics. Some traditional forms of advertising can be very effective, but for most businesses with limited budgets, digital marketing is the easiest and most accessible form of marketing. It's best to focus on something that is easy to measure, cheap, or free (meaning it only costs your time), unlike TV commercials and bill boards. (I have to say that I am a massive fan of letterbox drops for some businesses that are area based and rely on local clientele. It has to be authentic and not as part of the big bundles of rubbish that go straight in the recycling but something that speaks to the locals like a local)

The Essential Considerations

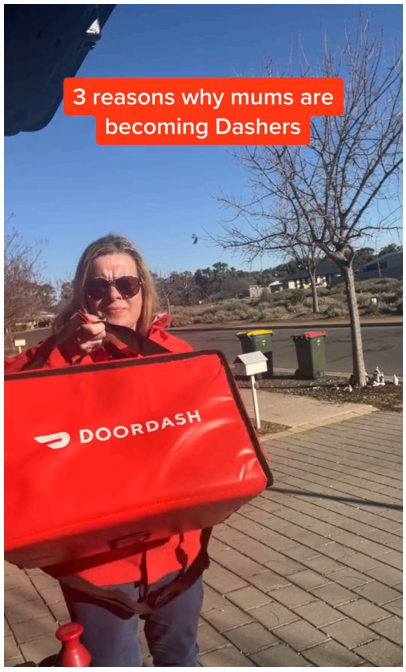
Before we look at digital marketing channels it's important to discuss a few things that need to be at the forefront of your mind when planning your marketing. Below are the essential elements of good marketing. Hopefully you have read the Marketing Planning Guide, and the below builds on the considerations from that.

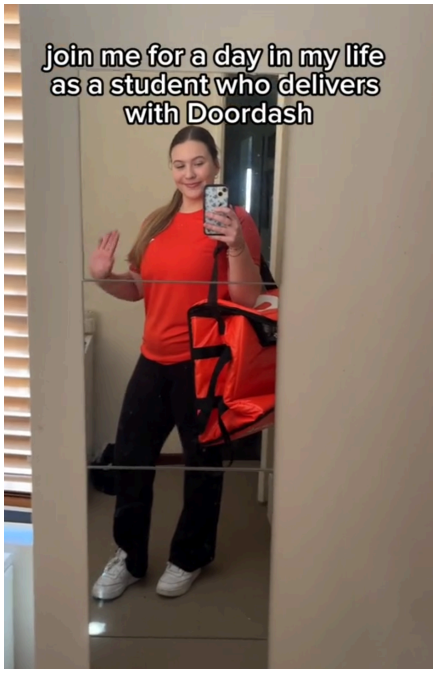
Target Audience Profile

Yes, "Understanding your target audience" is Marketing 101, however, not all business owners are clear on that, especially when their product has broad appeal, or they are capable of offering custom solutions for example. What I want to emphasise here, is being clear on the target audience you are marketing to at campaign level. You can have everyone as your target audience, but your marketing campaigns will not be as effective when they are broad, compared to being very niche in your messaging. Your brand's website can remain neutral enough to have broad appeal, but your marketing campaigns need to speak to specific archetypes so you can speak their language, provide them with value and share messages that resonate with how they see the world and their priorities and solve their unique problems.

My favourite example to illustrate the difference between different segments is the DoorDash campaign to attract delivery drivers. They ran these 2 ads inspiring people to become drivers, but they ran separate campaigns to speak to the different segments in terms of their interests and values.

Campaign for Mothers vs Campaign for Students





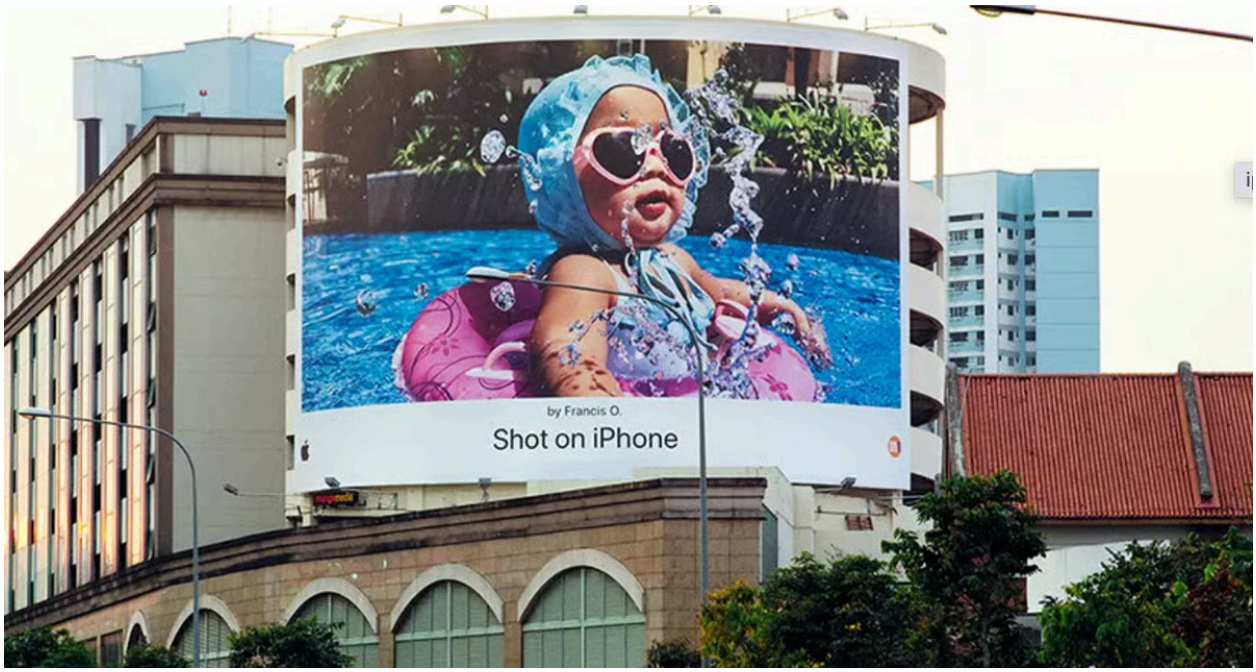
Links: Mothers https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS2gSckLE/ ? Students https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS2vwcfmT/

If these segments saw the other campaign they would not resonate with the message at all, but the brilliance of social media is you can specifically target and speak the language of exactly the people that would benefit from your product without alienating another group.

Understanding who you are aiming your communications at will help you determine which of the following channels are most relevant to them. All marketing is most effective when it is talking to exactly the people who need to hear it, but the brilliance of social media marketing especially is that you can easily reach exactly that group of people. The broader your marketing net, the more likely you are to be missed by the more suitable customers.

Large companies like Apple have the budget to invest in a large range of billboards, for example, to catch the eye of the various consumer groups.

For example this “Shot with iPhone” would especially resonate with parents who want to capture their child’s cute moments, but not so much with people whose life does not revolve around children. If this was the only campaign visual for the brand, the perception of the brand might become that it's for parents, and if you do not have children, then another product may resonate more purely because of how they positioned their campaign visuals.



For example, people who are more interested in taking selfies are likely to resonate with this more -



Apple and Samsung have the budgets to run campaigns to reach all their target audiences, whereas SMBs are in a good position if they can afford to run just one.

Take away message here - identify your lowest hanging fruit target customer, the segment that is more likely to become your customer, the easiest one to convert and then give it all you have, get it right and your revenue will enable investment in campaigns to reach other segments. Existing businesses may already have insights into which customer groups are the most profitable. For new businesses you will need to do some analysis to help you determine which to focus on.

Here are a couple of other examples to drive home the message:

1. In my university digital marketing class, the students were required to work with a small business and develop and implement a digital marketing plan. I had a student that was looking to promote his own brand of beard oil. I asked him to sell me the oil. He then proceeded to tell me the benefits of using beard oil on a beard ie “It makes your beard shiny and healthy and easy to manage etc”. I then asked him “But do I have a beard?!” The penny dropped! He then described the benefits of the oil for hair in general, but also why as a woman I would want to buy beard oil for my partner. And hence my point, women buying beard oil for their partners are a target audience segment, equal in importance to males buying it for themselves, but I am unlikely to be inspired to buy beard oil promotions unless you tell me using visuals and words that appeal to me that solve my problem - ie what are the benefits to partners of men with beards.
2. Another example would be if you are selling a product that would be suitable for most people, let's say sunscreen. If the visual communication is centred around construction workers protecting their skin from long days in the sun, that would attract the attention of construction workers, but without a doubt women in their 30s who are concerned about their skincare routine and looking youthful, and generally staying out of the sun would not resonate with this type of messaging.

To help get clarity on your target customer’s profile, there are plenty of free templates and tools available. Here is an example of a template available on Canva. Ideally you adapt each section of characteristics to summarise all the relevant traits that are specifically relevant to what you want to know. For example:

- What social media platforms do they use?
- What type of content do they value?
- What are their trusted sources of information?
- What processes do they go through to search for products or services?
- What concerns would they have about your product or service?
- What challenges do they have that your product or service may solve?
- What qualities do they look for in a brand or business?
- What are their online behaviours? Do they join communities? Comment on posts?

Buyer Persona Guide



Stella

Client persona example

Profile

Age & life stage: Define age (a specific age is better than an age range) and the life circumstances that shape needs and priorities.
Location: Identify the market, region and local context relevant to targeting.
Occupation & finances: Outline work context, income range and spending capacity.
Household & lifestyle: Describe living arrangements, routines and interests that influence decisions.
Buying stage: Establish readiness to act and the likely decision timeframe.

Mindset & Motivations

Explain the values, attitudes and emotional drivers behind decisions. Capture what builds confidence, how risk is perceived and why the desired outcome matters.

Goals

Define the outcomes the audience wants to achieve, the priorities guiding their choices and what success looks like from their perspective.

Pain Points & Barriers

Identify practical difficulties, information gaps and emotional concerns that prevent progress. Explain the objections marketing needs to address.

Digital Behaviour

Identify the platforms this person uses, why they use each one and the content formats they prefer on each platform. Explain where they are most active and receptive to messages, then prioritise the best channels to reach and engage them.

Buying Behaviour

Explain how the audience compares options, evaluates value and reaches a decision. Identify key criteria, trusted influences and the reassurance needed before taking action.

Key Triggers

Identify the events, changing needs or moments that move the audience from passive interest to active consideration. Use these to inform campaign timing and relevant calls to action.

You can create a Persona Profile like this for all your potential customers and then identify which one you think you are most likely to succeed in reaching.

In short: When you're not targeting a specific niche, your messaging needs to stay as neutral as possible. Crafting something clever that resonates with a broad audience is an art form. Keep your landing pages broad and adaptable, while running targeted campaigns tailored to different audiences. This is best achieved through digital marketing, as it's the only channel where you can easily pinpoint where each audience spends time and what they want to hear about the problems you're solving.

We will include some additional reading on client segmentation for you in the Knowledge Library. My recommendation is to use the Lowest Hanging Fruit principle and decide which audience groups seem the easiest to focus on. And I suggest doing it not by age and sex and the typical demographic breakdowns, but archetypes - groups with similar characteristics eg A cafe may have 3 segments - early morning = Tradies; mid-morning = Mothers and babies; lunch/afternoon = office workers. Despite the individual characteristics of people within these groups, most will resonate with similar marketing messaging. All of these groups are attracted to your product, and yes you can do neutral marketing, however, if you want to effectively increase business from any of these groups, doing targeted campaigns is the way to do it. Think about how you can reach more mums to come in for brunch - free babychino?? Now thinking about how construction workers would feel seeing this type of marketing? So how do you reach construction workers specifically?

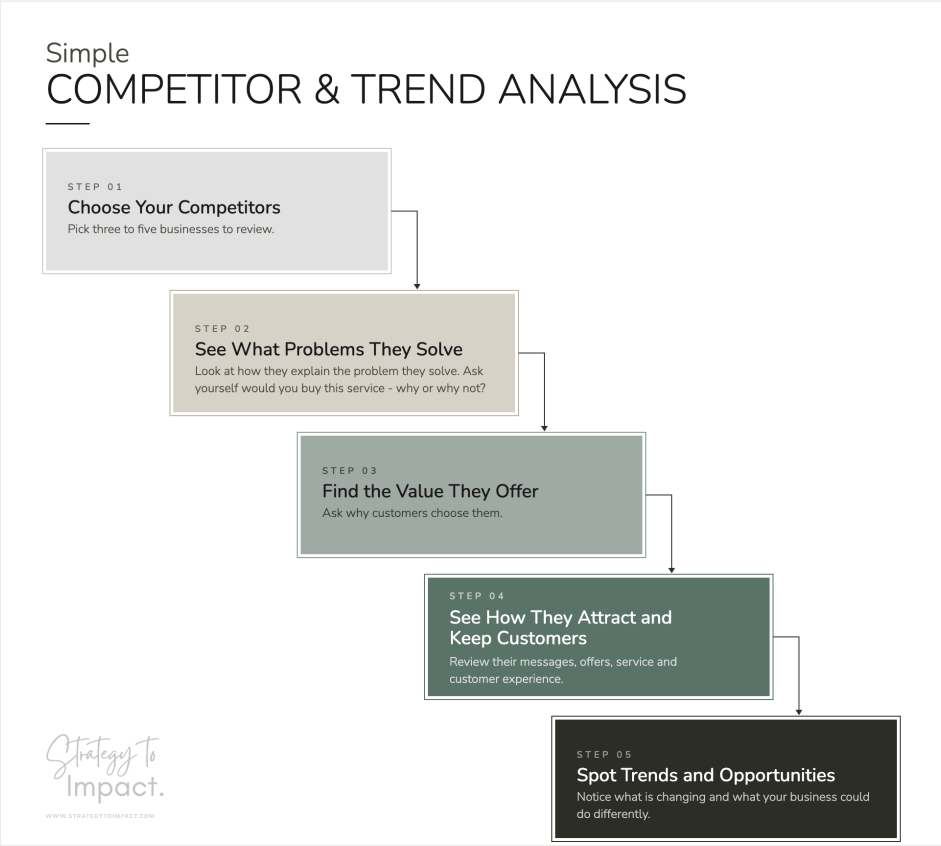
There are also instances where the online customer is different to the physical in-store customer. What channels can you use to reach the online customers specifically?

Competitor and Trends analysis

It is very important to do your own analysis to understand what other similar businesses are doing and what is working for them. Especially if you are attempting channels you are not familiar with, you need to establish a benchmark. What does success look like in your specific industry and for your target audience? What are the digital trends that your industry is under utilising and you can leverage to stand out.

By analysing your competitors, you can identify effective strategies, uncover gaps in the market, and even learn from their missteps, saving you valuable time and resources. Some entrepreneurs are trend-setters, most are not, and in that case research and analysis to understand the landscape that is relevant for your business is a wise investment of time.

An effective method for conducting competitor and trend analysis involves a systematic review of their online presence, content, and customer engagement. Start by identifying your top 3-5 direct and indirect competitors (perhaps leaders who are not in your industry but their tactics are transferable to your business). Then, delve into their websites, social media channels, and any public-facing marketing materials. Pay close attention to the types of content they produce, the platforms they prioritize, their messaging, and how they interact with their audience. Tools like social listening platforms and competitive analysis software can offer deeper insights, and of course AI tools, but even a manual, consistent review can provide a wealth of information to help you refine your own "lowest hanging fruit" strategies. We will keep relevant tools up-to-date in our Toolbox. The best person to do the research is the person who is driving the marketing, as much as agencies, assistants and interns can provide an overview, no one provides the light-bulb insights like doing your own research can.



Channels vs. Tools: Understanding the Difference

As you work through this guide, you'll encounter two distinct concepts that are essential to understand: marketing channels and marketing tools.

A marketing channel is a medium through which your target audience discovers, engages with, and purchases from your business. The 20 sections of this guide focus on these channels - where your customers are and how they find you. Examples include social media, email, search engines, podcasts, and paid advertising.

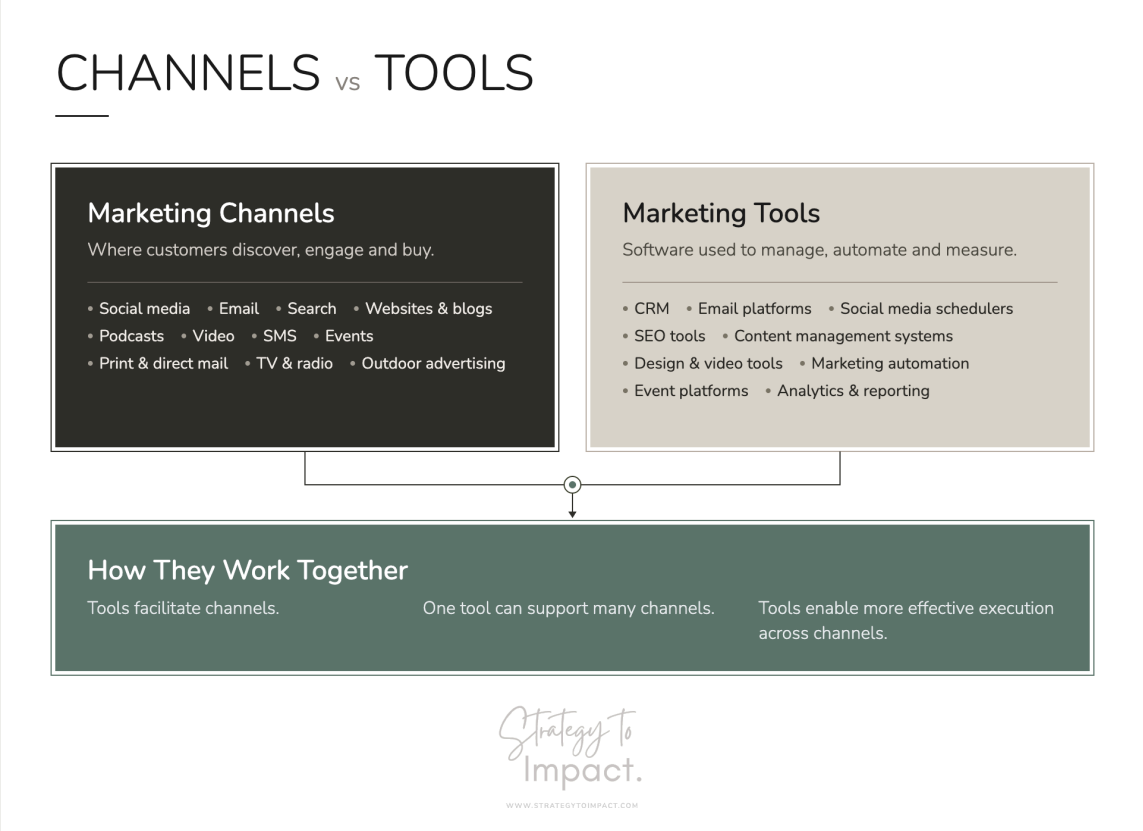
Marketing tools, by contrast, are software platforms and systems you use to execute your strategy across those channels. Tools don't inherently reach new customers; instead, they help you manage relationships, automate processes, and measure results. A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system manages customer data. Email platforms send campaigns. Analytics tools track performance.

Important to note:

- You may use the same tool across multiple channels (e.g., your CRM captures leads from your website, social media, and paid ads)
- A tool alone cannot replace a channel strategy (owning a CRM doesn't mean customers will find you)

Understanding this separation helps you allocate your budget and time effectively.

Later in the guide you'll find guidance on supporting systems and methods.



Digital Marketing Tactics

Now that we have covered the foundations, we can explore the various digital marketing tactics and channels to help you identify which channels are most relevant for your business, and especially most relevant right now! But first there are a couple of important considerations that are relevant to most if not all digital marketing channels:

Content

All marketing requires some kind of content / marketing materials to be created. When deciding on what marketing channel to use, you have to really understand your capability and resources available to you to deploy on creating it all. Content creation can be one of the most challenging tasks for a small business. Content can be anything including videos, photos, articles, how-to guides, quotes, digital banners etc. Social media especially is one very hungry hippo when it comes to content, and it lasts mere seconds in someone's feed when you could have spent hours putting it together. Here our Lowest Hanging Fruit principle needs to be considered again, if you do not really have the resources, do not pick a channel that needs a lot of resources to make it happen.

Once you have decided on your channels, you will need to plan your content. Ideally, you can leverage pieces of content across multiple channels.

Start planning your content by considering what are the relevant content types and topics for your business? Use a value creation model to ensure that your content definitely creates value. The Creating Customer Value with Content graphic adapts Smith and Colgate's Customer Value Creation Framework, which is covered in the Marketing Planning Guide, for content marketing (see next page for the model).

I find this model especially helpful to refer to when planning content. It is a practical way to understand the different types of value your content can create, and a great source of inspiration when you are looking for ideas. Keep in mind that a single piece of content can combine several types of value. For example, a how-to video can show how a product works (functional) while also being entertaining to watch (experiential).

Ideally you create a **Content Bank.** Gather all the created content and inspirations in a folder that you can refer to, so you can do the planning systematically, not succumb to the typical adhoc scramble to try and get something out there because "you should". You could have content that you created yourself in your content bank, as well as inspirations from others that you can adapt, and lastly you can syndicate content, which means you use other's content and adapt it in your own content with full reference to the original creator. For example, if you see an article by an expert that is relevant to your audience and you want to share it with your target customer, you can use this article, acknowledge the offer and add your own comments. This is perfectly acceptable and does not infringe copyrights as long as you do not claim it as your own. However you should not use other people's content and images for commercial purposes to directly sell your product to your customers.

There are plenty of tools available now that help the content creation and scheduling simpler. *(see the Toolbox)* Free apps like canva.com help to create images and even video suited to various platforms. And then of course there is AI....

Creating
CUSTOMER VALUE WITH CONTENT

VALUE 01

Functional / Instrumental Value

Content that helps people understand what a product or service does, how to use it and how it meets their needs.

- **Features and benefits:** Explain what it offers and why those features matter.
- **Practical guidance:** Share how-to videos, demonstrations, tips and step-by-step guides.
- **Performance and results:** Show how it solves a problem through examples, comparisons and case studies.

VALUE 02

Experiential / Hedonic Value

Content that creates value through the senses, emotions, connection and discovery.

- **Sensory experiences:** Use imagery, sound and descriptions to bring an experience to life.
- **Emotional experiences:** Share stories that entertain, inspire or spark joy.
- **Social connection:** Encourage conversations, shared experiences and participation.
- **Curiosity and discovery:** Offer fresh ideas, interesting facts or behind-the-scenes insights.

VALUE 03

Symbolic / Expressive Value

Content that connects with who people are, what matters to them and how they want to express themselves.

- **Identity and aspirations:** Reflect people's lifestyles, values and who they want to become.
- **Personal meaning:** Connect with memories, traditions and meaningful moments.
- **Self-expression:** Show how people can express their personality or style through their choices.
- **Belonging and recognition:** Highlight communities, shared values or achievements people identify with.
- **Special occasions:** Show how an offering gains meaning in a particular situation, such as a gift or celebration.

VALUE 04

Cost / Sacrifice Value

Content that helps people understand the costs involved and shows how a product or service can reduce the money, time, effort or worry required.

- **Money:** Explain pricing, what is included and ongoing costs or savings.
- **Time and effort:** Show how easy it is to choose, buy, set up and use.
- **Confidence and peace of mind:** Answer common questions and explain what to expect.
- **Reduced risk:** Clearly explain trials, guarantees, returns and available support.

Adapted for content marketing from Smith and Colgate (2007), Customer Value Creation: A Practical Framework.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI exploded as an accessible tool for the general public in late 2022. It is evolving so fast that I think whatever I write here today will be outdated tomorrow.

In the initial draft of this I wrote that AI is mainly just tools and not so much marketing channels, so it was not included in the channels section, but literally a few months later, I had to update to include this as a channel, because ChatGPT, Google's Gemini and similar tools are quickly replacing search engines, and search engines are integrating AI summaries rather than just providing a list of search results. ChatGPT is enabling ads, so soon we will not know if our favourite AI tool is giving us independent insights or selling us something. This feels scary, though I am sure soon it will feel standard.

AI platforms and marketing tools are springing up like mushrooms after the rain. They are not marketing channels as such, but are tools you can use for marketing. Currently ChatGPT and Gemini are the most commonly used free text-based tools. They really are like magic when it comes to copywriting and generating visuals. Many commonly used apps are now implementing AI features.

For those who find the whole concept of AI overwhelming, think of it as basically the computer's ability to look at vast amounts of information, and make assumptions to produce something or make a recommendation. Not too dissimilar to the familiar Google algorithms but rather than just scanning and spitting out everything that has been found on the topic like search engines do, AI will take into account all that it finds and present you with a summary of what it assumes is best practice from what it has analysed. The word AI is being thrown around loosely these days, some computer programs that analyse data are now being called AI.

General consensus by marketers is that usually AI writes in a very generic style and can lack authenticity and depth. If you are going to create content, create valuable content, rather than just pumping something out for the sake of it. It's really obvious when its generic AI output. If you know how to write the prompts/commands effectively you can start to get a bit more out of these tools, but you really still need a human to review it to make it sound human. (Will include relevant info in our Knowledge Library)

AI and copyright

When ChatGPT first exploded, we had to face the challenge of university students using AI to write their assignments. Yes, there are tools to check if something has been written by AI, but until these tools are integrated into the plagiarism marking systems, we have to commit to assessing their work on how authentic it comes across. We looked at how much they combine examples from the lectures, and examples of the theories in practical application of theory. If it's a dry regurgitation of the topic, we instantly knew AI wrote it. Now I just look for formatting that is a clear indicator of AI use, and when I see it in any content or communication, my brain switches off and I do not see it as something genuine that I want to read.

If you are using AI to create your content here are couple of AI'esque styles that you need to delete:

1. Delete the default emojis it puts in. Very elaborate emoji use is a give away, as no-one (with the exception of a few bored gen-z's) has the patience to insert emoji's in subject headings, every paragraph and bullet points.
2. The long dash or em dash " - "when making a point. Normal keyboard dashes look like this -, the long dash - is uniquely AI and you cannot get the generated text without it and have to manually replace it. I heard an AI expert talk about this and consider if the long dash was the engineer's way to include it as a subtle hint that AI is in use.

Here are the dashes side by side:

AI — vs Human -

(Note, I have come across one person that claims that they use the em dashes all the time, this would be a minority, as its not easily accessible on most keyboards)

New apps are emerging that combine both text and visual communication for marketers. This space is evolving quickly, so it's best to continuously review what is available. Lastly you should also understand the difference between Open and Closed AI Models which is important when it comes to paid tools. I asked Chat GPT to explain the differences, which helps illustrate the earlier point about excessive emoji use and dashes = AI:

Okay - here's a Grade 5-level explanation of open and closed language models in AI tools, written by ChatGPT with its standard formatting to highlight how obvious it is compared to the rest of the formatting in this book, because humans specifically picked it as a personal preference.

> ### 🧠 What Is a Language Model?
>
> A language model is a computer program that learns how people use words. It reads lots of text — like books, websites, and stories—so it can understand and create sentences that sound like a person wrote them.
>
> ### 🔓 Open Models
>
> Open models are like open source that everyone can see, copy, and improve.
>
> - Anyone can look at how they work.
> - People can change the code or use it for their own projects.
> - Examples: Meta's Llama, Mistral, and some versions of GPT (like older research ones).
>
> Good things: ✅ Free or cheap to use ✅ Lets people learn and build cool new tools
>
> Not-so-good things: ⚠️ Can be used in unsafe or unfair ways if people aren't careful ⚠️ Quality depends on who trains or edits it
>
> ### 🔒 Closed Models
>
> Closed models are like secret recipes owned by a company.
>
> - Only the company knows exactly how they work.
> - People can use them (like ChatGPT or Google Gemini), but they can't see or change the code.
> - The company controls updates, safety, and privacy.
>
> Good things: ✅ Usually more powerful and polished ✅ Better safety and reliability
>
> Not-so-good things: ⚠️ Not free ⚠️ You can't see how it was trained or change it yourself

Example over, back to human writing.

When deciding on paid AI tools to help you. It is helpful to understand if a tool is just an interface for ChatGPT, in that case it's just prompts and may not be worth paying for. Whereas Close Language Models are usually trained based on someone's expertise not just general information from the internet, so that could be valuable.

In the spirit of transparency, here is the list of AI apps we used and how we used them in the creation of this guide:

- **Gemini** (Google's AI assistant) - The guide is my own words and insights, but Gemini did help me reword some sentences to make it sound better. It also helped me get started on a section where I wanted to say so much that I didn't know where to start) As with all of them there are still plenty of limitations, for one, I asked for it to help to make sure the font size in this book was consistent and it said it did it, but it did not.
- **ChatGPT** - is an AI tool I pay subscription for (though a free version is available), at the time that I decided to start paying for it, I found it had some features that the others did not have. Most tools catch up eventually, but now that I have so much history with ChatGPT, sticking with it is the path of least resistance. I used it to research some leading tools for specific purposes, and with brand development, including wording. I will be using it to help create social media content to promote Strategy to Impact. ChatGPT has wasted my time and lied to me before about being able to do a task that I was not sure it could do, and specifically checked to see if it could do it, and it said yes, and then 2 hours later it was acting up and I asked if it actually cannot do it, and it said "Yes you are right, I cannot do it, and you right to be annoyed". I was so shocked. This has caused major trust issues... probably forever.
- **Claude** - I also pay for this, I find it better for some tasks than ChatGPT, but still prefer ChatGPT for others. Claude to me is better at document creation, and financial modelling and spreadsheets. To chat through ideas I find ChatGPT better, and it's also nailed my writing style better this far. As with all of them, Clause has made mistakes in calculations and attributed numbers incorrectly, it was lucky I picked up on... so again trust issues.
- **Canva AI** - I have tried other image generators but always end up using Canva AI, mainly because I already have a paid subscription, but it seems to be producing the best images, though more miss than hit. I use it to create background images for formatting the guides, and one of the cover images, after a graphic designer created the first version.

Digital Marketing Channels

Below you will find a summary of the 20 most common digital marketing channels that will help you find and attract more customers. A common misconception is that digital marketing is just social media. And yes, social media features prominently in most digital marketing strategies, but there are many other channels that fall under the digital marketing umbrella. Let's explore them to determine which are the Lowest Hanging Fruit for your business.

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1. Social Media

Writing this section was challenging due to the vast amount of things to consider regarding social media. My goal is to provide a comprehensive yet concise summary, ensuring that you grasp the essentials without feeling overwhelmed. A detailed standalone guide for social media is on the to-do list - stay tuned.

I wrote this blog to address the topic I am most often questioned about - Why is social media not working for my business? - In short, when making your decision, it's important to think about the product lifecycle of the platform you choose. Some are new, exciting and allow creativity; others have a well-worn playbook that you need to follow to appeal to an audience that expects you to know the rules of engagement - while still somehow being authentic. A neat trick.

Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, is past the peak of its growth cycle in terms of user engagement. The company is primarily focused on maximising profits rather than promoting organic content. As a result, businesses are less likely to gain visibility without paying for advertising. However, it also means there are still many opportunities for those willing to pay.

Businesses who are new to these mature platforms and attempt DIY tactics tend to not produce original content and ideas - instead, they imitate established best practices in a crowded space. This approach lacks authenticity and is doomed to fail. If you are not a regular user of these platforms, it will be near impossible to understand all the unspoken rules and nuances. Your opportunity cost here is deciding whether it's worth your time learning how to market on a particular platform yourself, or investing in someone who already knows what they are doing. For best results, a hands-on approach alongside a professional tends to yield the best outcome. Meaning you cannot just off-load the task entirely and expect that a 3rd party will truly know what is going on in your business and reflect that in your socials accurately, you need to be involved, but sometimes creating content and being a social media manager is not the best use of your time, so you need to find the right balance for your time/capability and budget.

Lastly, social media content has notoriously low conversion rates. The big win is that it's highly measurable, so you can at least see what is happening and tweak accordingly - unlike some traditional forms of advertising, like newspapers, where you are flying blind.

So what is best for your business - Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, TikTok, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Snapchat, or something else entirely?

The answer..... it depends. And this is where understanding your target customer's digital preferences and behaviour becomes really important.

Rule #1: it is best not to create an account if it is not going to be maintained properly. If a potential customer is researching your business and finds a neglected social media account, it leaves a bad impression - and potentially makes it look like you are no longer in business.

The next question to consider: organic vs paid?

Is it worth the time for your brand to invest in organic growth, or will you see better results investing in paid advertising on these platforms? You need to have a social media account to run ads, but you do not need the following or organic content to run successful ads. It is a perfectly valid tactic to use a social media platform purely for paid advertising, without investing in organic content at all.

Below is a breakdown of the current social media landscape - and there are a lot of them (22 shortlisted here, but there are more!)

As you can see, there are far too many to cover in depth here, or this will fast become a thesis. I have added more detail around the leading platforms, as the chances are that most businesses will want to explore these first. That said, you may find opportunities in some of the emerging or niche platforms, where audiences are eager and organic reach has not yet been strangled by the algorithm.

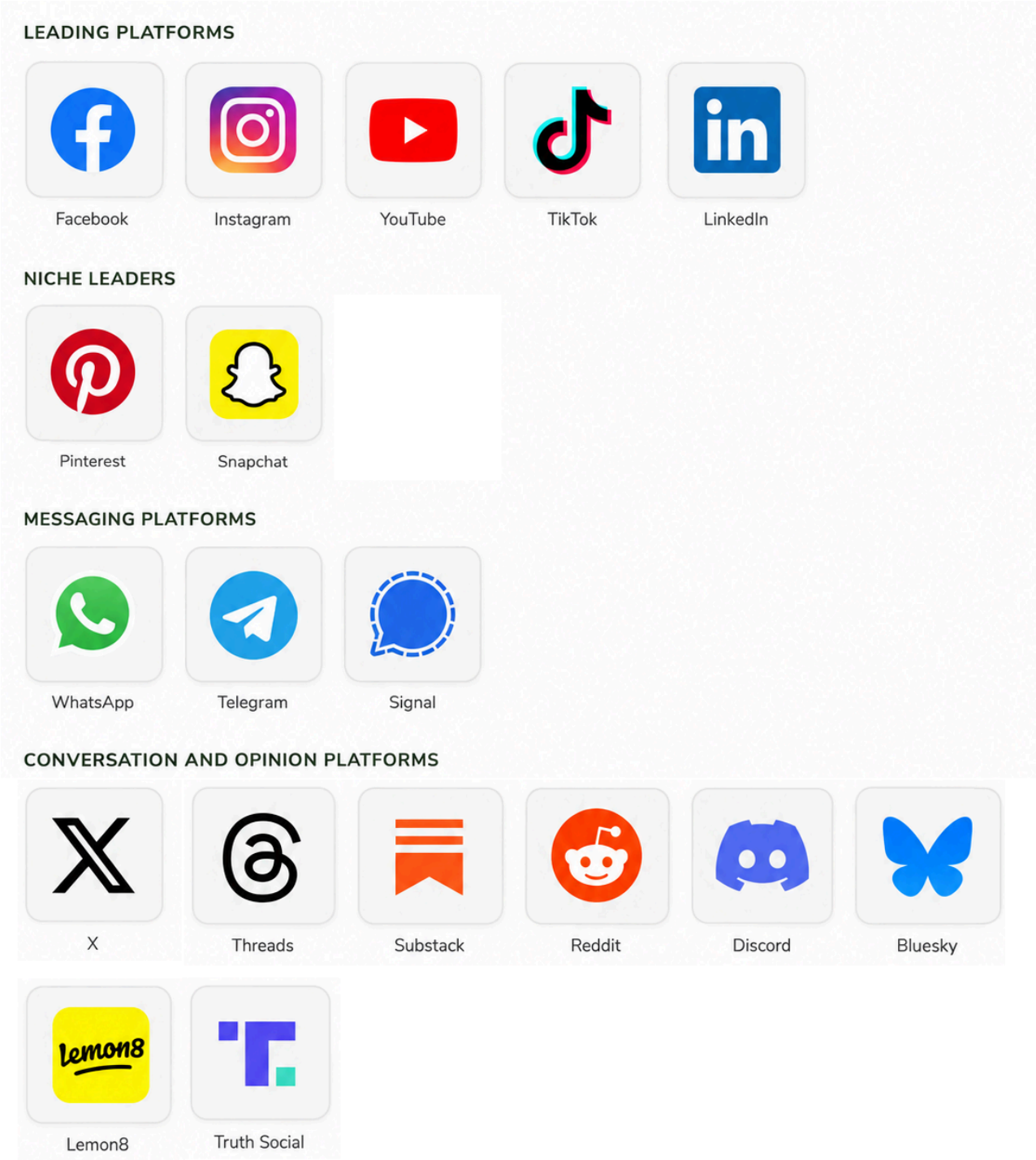
Remember the average person has 6 social media platforms that they engage with!

These are the 6 platforms that are best to reach me and have influenced my buying decisions:



The Social Media Landscape

The platforms covered in this section, grouped as they appear in the pages that follow.



Leading Platforms

Most people (above 10 years old and below ‘too old to use a computer’) with internet access and no government restrictions will be using at least two of these.

Facebook

A behemoth with over 3 billion users. Despite a significant decline in younger users, globally it is still the #1 social media platform. Owned by Meta.

Unfortunately organic page content for businesses is as good as dead for impressions - the algorithm barely shows it to anyone. That said, Facebook's community groups are thriving and offer real marketing opportunities. Getting visible and helpful in a relevant group is still one of the better free tactics available on the platform.

For your business page: treat it like a directory listing. Keep it current, because search engines still surface it, but investing significant energy trying to grow followers organically may lead to disappointment. If you do not have a website, a Facebook page can serve as a basic web presence. Pages that adopt a media, influencer, or thought leader approach can still do well organically - but a standard "business" page classification all but guarantees low reach.

If paid advertising is never going to be relevant for you, but organic reach matters, consider classifying your page differently. The algorithm favours these categories over "Business":

- Artist, Band or Public Figure
- Entertainment and Media
- Cause or Community

Paid advertising on Facebook is still very effective - if done well. Millennials are the platform's core base (they were the early adopters and never really left), and Boomers have joined in large numbers. Younger users largely consider Facebook passé and only maintain accounts out of habit or to access community groups.

Instagram

Instagram was purchased by Meta, founder of Facebook, so between these 2 platforms they have a significant share. This platform was a visually driven platform ideal for product showcases, service businesses and influencer-style marketing, particularly popular among Millennials and older Gen Z. Organic impressions are increasingly suppressed - the algorithm actively limits the reach of even strong content on business accounts. If you intend to invest in creative content, consider using a Creator account and approaching it like an influencer: entertainment and value first, sales second.

The good news is that Instagram still allows you to reach potential new customers directly by finding and engaging with them on relevant profiles - so there is still genuine opportunity to build a following through authentic engagement. Service businesses - therapists, hairdressers, financial coaches, fitness professionals - tend to see better results on Instagram than product-based businesses, which often need paid ads to cut through.

Instagram also has built-in features businesses can use to monetise the platform, if relevant to their business model and audience. Instagram Shopping lets you tag products in posts, Reels and Stories so people can tap through and buy. Subscriptions let you charge followers a monthly fee for exclusive content, such as workout plans, recipes or industry tips.

YouTube

A powerful platform for video content, tutorials, storytelling, and long-term discoverability. Bought by Google. YouTube content has a long shelf life - a video you post today can still be driving traffic in five years, which is very different to most other social platforms. YouTube also offers monetisation opportunities once you build an audience, making it not just a marketing channel but a potential revenue stream.

Ways to use YouTube for your business:

- Product demos and explainer videos
- Educational content and tutorials (excellent for positioning as an expert, and doubles as internal training material)
- Behind-the-scenes and brand storytelling
- Paid advertising - highly targeted, though YouTube Premium subscribers pay specifically to avoid ads, so keep that in mind
- Engagement with short videos similar to Reel on Instagram, usually used for quick demonstrations/lessons or entertainment.

YouTube Shorts is now a serious player in the short-form video space, competing directly with TikTok Reels. If you are already creating short-form content, repurposing it to Shorts is a low-effort additional reach.

TikTok

TikTok has moved well beyond its "dancing teens" reputation. This is the only leading platform that is owned by a Chinese and not American company (Controversially so). It is now one of the top three platforms to seriously consider for your business, and for Gen Z, it has effectively replaced Google as a search engine. If Gen Z is your target audience, TikTok is not optional - it is where they go to find products, topical discussions, recommendations, restaurants, tutorials, and answers to questions... even the news!!

TikTok's algorithm is genuinely democratic - a brand new account with zero followers can go viral if the content resonates. That window of opportunity will not last forever, so if TikTok is relevant for your audience, now is the time to learn it.

Like YouTube, TikTok enables content monetisation, so if you build a following, it can become an additional revenue stream. The content formats that get traction are often surprising - there is a lot of room for creativity, as long as you work with the algorithm rather than against it. TikTok also offers a strong business advertising platform for those who want to go the paid route. Tiktok also pays the creators (was not available to Australian accounts until recently), and Tiktok shop is gaining fast momentum as a shopping platform in some regions of the world but has not been rolled out everywhere yet.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn has transformed significantly in recent years. It is no longer just a digital CV or B2B prospecting tool - it has become a legitimate content platform where thought leaders, consultants, service businesses and executives are building real audiences through consistent, valuable posts.

Organic reach on LinkedIn is still comparatively strong, which makes it attractive for those wanting results without a paid budget. B2B businesses, professional service providers, consultants and coaches tend to get the most traction. LinkedIn newsletters are worth noting separately - they allow you to build a subscriber list directly on the platform, which is a meaningful marketing asset.

Paid advertising on LinkedIn has a reputation for being expensive and less effective than its price tag suggests. Direct outreach via Sales Navigator or the premium account can be useful for prospecting, but be careful - automated outreach tools rarely come across as authentic and can damage your reputation faster than they build it.

Niche Leaders

These are not in the top biggest platforms but with all due respect are also huge. They have a unique style and attract specific types of audiences.

Pinterest

A visually oriented platform for product discovery, inspiration, and organic reach, with a predominantly female user base. Best suited to products and services where customers might save something for future reference - furniture, interior design, recipes, fashion, travel, guides and templates. Not ideal for fast-moving or seasonal goods. Paid advertising on Pinterest is reportedly cost-effective compared to Meta, with a highly targeted audience that has not yet become automatically blind to sponsored content.

Snapchat

A fun, ephemeral platform popular with younger demographics. Unless you are a Gen Z entrepreneur specifically targeting Gen Zs, Snapchat is unlikely to deliver meaningful business results. Big brands sometimes create filters for entertainment value, but for most small businesses, this is not the lowest-hanging fruit.

Messaging Platforms

Mainly used for one-to-one or group chats, but also are used for community management and broadcasting, even course delivery.

WhatsApp

A widely used messaging app for private communication and group interaction. Also purchased by Meta. Businesses can create private community groups or broadcast channels to share updates, offers or even automated content. I have seen WhatsApp used to deliver automated daily courses, which is a creative use of a tool people already have on their phones. WhatsApp Business adds features like automated replies, catalogues and labels that make it more functional as a marketing tool.

Telegram

A messaging app focused on privacy and large group capabilities. Popular in some international markets but not widely used for business marketing in Australia. Approach with caution - it can feel spammy.

Businesses that make money on Telegram usually do it through channels, which are one-way broadcast feeds with no limit on subscribers. Common models include paid membership channels for premium content such as trading signals, investment insights or coaching (often managed through bots like InviteMember), deal and coupon channels that earn affiliate commission, and selling sponsored posts once a channel has a large audience. Telegram also lets channel owners sell paid posts and digital products using its in-app currency, Telegram Stars, and shares advertising revenue with larger channels.

Signal

Founded by the co-creator of WhatsApp, who departed after Meta acquired it and was unhappy with the direction it took on data privacy. Signal is independently funded and has no commercial agenda. I have encountered businesses using it where privacy is genuinely important to their audience - healthcare, legal, advocacy. Not a mainstream marketing channel.

Conversation and Opinion Platforms

These platforms are not usually used to connect with friends and share your wedding pictures. They have a purpose, which is usually to share opinions and knowledge.

X (formerly Twitter)

X has had a turbulent few years since the Elon Musk acquisition and rebrand, but it remains one of the strongest platforms for text-based content. It suits businesses that don't want to produce pictures and videos, and works particularly well for consultants and thought leaders who share opinions and expertise. Some creators report earning a meaningful income through X's creator payouts from a relatively small following. X also has strong communities in politics, finance, tech, media and sports, and works as a Public Relations (PR) tool because journalists often refer to it for quotes from people of influence, and companies use it to broadcast company statements.

Threads

Meta's answer to X. Thread-based conversations, linked to your Instagram account, which means your content gets pushed to Instagram users - a meaningful advantage for reach. Some people are getting genuine traction here, partly because it is not yet oversaturated and the algorithm is still being generous with organic reach. Best suited to businesses that can adopt a conversational tone: thought leaders, consultants, educators, media, community groups. As with any platform in its growth phase, the question is whether your target audience is actually there and whether you are prepared to invest the time to learn it. If the answer to both is yes - it is worth experimenting. If you are doing it just because someone told you to, probably not.

Substack

One to watch seriously. Originally a platform for independent writers and journalists, Substack has grown into a significant content and community platform. It allows you to publish written content, send it directly to subscribers as a newsletter, and charge for premium access. The discovery features mean new readers can find you without you needing to pay for it. The bonus is that you can offer exclusive content to paid subscribers that can create an additional revenue stream.

Worth noting: Boomers who have resisted Facebook and Instagram are showing up on Substack in meaningful numbers, consuming the same kind of content that circulates on Meta and TikTok. If your target audience skews older and values depth over quick hits, Substack could be an underrated channel.

Reddit

A vast network of niche communities (subreddits) with highly engaged users. Reddit requires a genuine, non-salesy approach - communities have strict rules and will reject or downvote anything that feels like advertising. However, the opportunity is real: people regularly ask for recommendations, review services, and share experiences. Being a helpful, knowledgeable presence in a relevant subreddit is a legitimate long-game marketing strategy.

Reddit has partnered with some of the AI giants, meaning that AI chat bots will refer to Reddit's user opinions to form recommendations. Income from Reddit usually comes indirectly: a genuinely helpful answer sends readers to your website, and founders often win early customers by sharing their journey in communities like r/smallbusiness or r/Entrepreneur. Reddit Ads also let you target specific subreddits, so you can reach people by niche interest.

Discord

A community platform originally built for gamers, now used by all kinds of interest groups. Strong for building tight-knit communities with real-time chat and voice features. Worth considering if you want to build an engaged membership community around your brand or topic area. Businesses that have done well here include course creators, coaches, trading and investing educators, and game and software developers, many charging for premium access through Discord's built-in Server Subscriptions.

Bluesky

A decentralised Twitter alternative that has been growing steadily as users look for a less chaotic X experience. Currently ad-free with no native monetisation - so the path to making money from it is indirect (build an audience, drive them to your product or service). For most small businesses, it is not the lowest-hanging fruit right now. For thought leaders and consultants who enjoy conversation-style content and want early-mover advantage, it is worth keeping an eye on.

Lemon8

Created by the same team behind TikTok, Lemon8 is best described as Instagram meets Pinterest - visually rich, lifestyle-focused content. Popular with younger women. Paid advertising options are limited in most markets for now, with brand activity primarily through influencer partnerships and organic content. Worth watching, especially if your business targets younger female audiences and you are already creating visual content for other platforms.

Truth Social

A social media platform launched by Trump Media & Technology Group as a "free speech" alternative after Donald Trump was banned from mainstream platforms. In short, he got banned, so he built his own. It is essentially a platform for conservative Trump supporters to post without moderation. There are ongoing concerns about the quality of advertisers and the integrity of promoted products on the platform. If your target audience happens to be American Trump supporters... Well, you have found your channel. For everyone else, this one's here mostly for amusement and completeness, as it is often quoted in Trump related news.

International Markets

If your target customers include significant Chinese-speaking audiences, you need to be across their platforms - primarily

- WeChat (messaging, payments and social combined),
- Weibo (microblogging), and
- Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) (lifestyle and product discovery, particularly popular with younger Chinese women).
- Line dominates in Japan and parts of Southeast Asia.
- VK is the primary social network in Russia and parts of Eastern Europe.

These are enormous platforms with massive user bases, but unless you are specifically targeting those markets, they do not belong in your core strategy.

Keep in mind tourists from these destinations may be looking for travel and shopping advice for your location on those channels, so this could be a clever way to reach visitors.

The Big Picture

According to Neil Patel's 2024 research, here is how much content was being published daily across the major platforms - and these numbers have only grown since..

- TikTok - 23 million posts
- YouTube - 216 million posts
- Facebook - 350 million posts
- X - 500 million posts
- LinkedIn - 2 million posts
- Instagram - 95 million posts

Let that sink in for a second. Over 1.1 billion pieces of content, every single day, across just those six platforms. Patel's team also analysed over 5 million social media posts and found that 59% of them received zero engagement - no likes, no shares, no comments.

I am not sharing this to put you off, instead I am helping with context why social media cannot and should not be your only marketing channel. Especially when the platforms can shut down an account at the drop of a hat for some arbitrary breach of community guidelines. I know a number of businesses affected by this and it feels like a disaster.

For many people, social media has replaced television - so in essence, marketing on social media is just a new spin on traditional TV advertising, except the channel shows you only what it thinks you want to see. Which makes getting in front of new eyes harder, and getting in front of the right eyes more valuable.

Why Use Social Media for Marketing

As with anything, social media has its critics, but there is no denying it transformed marketing since its inception. Before it was much harder for small businesses to build easily accessible communities, locally but especially globally, to get any promotion you either had to pay for traditional advertising tv, radio, magazines etc, or you had to pay for PR agencies to build relationships with journalists on your behalf. Social media has enabled direct lines of communication with consumers, and despite the natural evolution into commercialisation of post views and influencer promotion, there are still plenty of opportunities to achieve sufficient marketing reach just with your time and a little bit of know-how.

Here is a summary of the benefits of using social media:

- **Connect with your Niche** - engage with your target audience segments directly, which makes marketing so much more effective
- **Brand awareness and visibility** - reach a wider audience organically and through paid advertising. There is really no better or more efficient way to reach new audiences, and be visible to your existing ones
- **Community building** - foster genuine connections and cultivate loyalty
- **Real-time interaction** - respond to feedback and build trust through direct communication
- **Content distribution** - share valuable content and drive traffic to your website
- **Trend spotting** - understand what your audience is paying attention to and tailor your efforts accordingly

Tips for Navigating the Noise

- **Know your audience** - understand their demographics, interests, and preferred platforms. Customers get put off by inconsistent content. They followed you because something resonated, and they expected more of that. Varying your content too much is off-putting. (This again makes it challenging when starting out because you need to be consistent but you don't yet know what actually resonates. General advice is to test and measure and do not take lack of engagement personally... if you can)

- **Quality over quantity** - one great post beats five mediocre ones. However if you want to grow your follower base organically, unfortunately quantity becomes essential. Accounts posting 10 times per week see the most significant growth. The challenge is maintaining quality with that quantity. It's fine for influencers and content creators as this becomes their fulltime job, but for small business owners it's mostly unrealistic.
- **Variety helps** - mix up formats: text, images, video, live sessions, carousels. Keep it fresh. The algorithm preferences always change on this so you need to refer to experts on the latest. Youtube or expert content on the platforms themselves will tell you everything you need to know.
- **Authenticity wins** - be genuine and let your brand personality come through. Polished-but-authentic is the sweet spot. Keep in mind that poor quality DIY production rarely resonates with anyone outside your immediate circle. This is in my opinion is the biggest challenge with social media marketing - creating authentic, yet polished content that compliments and enhances your brand instead of deters from it.
- **Listen and respond** - actively engage with comments, questions and mentions. Social media is a two-way street, not a broadcast channel.
- **Post consistently** - everyone who now has a meaningful following started by posting regularly to basically no audience. Consistency is how you eventually get noticed.

Best Practice Recommendations

- **Track what matters** - reach, engagement, and traffic to your website. Analytics are your friend. Do not obsess over vanity metrics like follower count if they are not translating to anything meaningful.
- **Collaborate and cross-promote** - partner with other brands or creators to expand your reach.
- **Experiment** - try new features, explore trends, and see what actually resonates with your specific audience. What works for someone else's business may not work for yours.
- **Remember** - social media is not about broadcasting marketing posters. It is about building genuine connections. Businesses that approach it that way tend to actually get somewhere.

Case Studies

1. Personal Trainer - Facebook Struggles

I had a client come to me frustrated that her Facebook efforts were not working. She is a personal trainer and health coach targeting middle-aged women with a premium coaching package. At a glance I could see issues with the content - visuals lacking consistency, design quality that looked more like a Grade 6 digital art project than a premium health brand. But that was not actually the main issue. The main issue was that Facebook's organic reach for business pages had collapsed to around 1.5% by the time she came to me - meaning for every 100 followers, fewer than 2 people were even seeing her posts. And those 2 were almost certainly already-engaged followers like friends and family, not new customers ready to invest thousands in a coaching program. Facebook was her only marketing channel, and no matter how much best practice she implemented, the channel simply

could not deliver what she needed from it. So the solution here was to look at what other channels are most relevant for the target audience in this case, which may not be social media at all. Paid ads in this case could have been a good option as the business is limited to a geographical area and Meta enables you to advertise to specific target groups.

The Lesson: Organic reach on social platforms is unpredictable and diminishing. When a single channel is your only marketing strategy, you are vulnerable to algorithm changes. Diversification across channels and consideration of paid advertising is essential for premium, high-ticket offerings where targeting precision matters more than raw audience size.

2. Building Audience Before Monetising The most successful social media strategy I have seen consistently is to build an audience before launching a product. By creating authentic, engaging content without pushing a sale, you attract a community of like-minded people who trust you and are genuinely interested in what you offer when you eventually launch. Early-stage entrepreneurs who are not yet ready to sell, but want to use social media strategically, should start building an audience as early as possible. I have seen businesses create real hype with "launching soon" content and countdowns. One of my clients started by sharing his perspectives on his industry, his posts went viral, and he is now working on how to monetise that audience. Worth noting: building an audience takes significant time and focus, so if you are also trying to develop a product simultaneously, something will suffer. Fastests growing accounts that I have seen are usually individuals not businesses, so founders of businesses often get better traction with their “personal account” than their business accounts, and fans then follow the business because they are fans of the person. However that adds to the work load of managing different accounts and creating different content.

The Lesson: Building social authority takes time but creates compound growth. Authentic engagement and launching soon hype can generate momentum, but requires sustained focus. Founders often get better traction on personal accounts than business accounts. Consistency and personal brand matter more than polished corporate messaging.

3. Strategy to Impact - Deliberate Decision on Organic Social For Strategy to Impact, I made the conscious decision not to focus on organic social media in the early stages. Building a noteworthy audience is an art form that requires sustained focus, and that would have taken energy away from our lowest-hanging fruit channels. However I am also fully aware that if I claim to be a digital marketing expert I need to have the vanity matrix to support it, so despite knowing that it is not a good use of my time, I have been playing with different content types to work out what resonates and what doesn’t, and having done that, I have to say that I now see social media as more of an art than a science. The data analytics are of course helpful and provide scientific insights, but if your creativity is not resonating then the analytics cannot tell you what to do next, then can only validate what is working or not.

The Lesson: Social media excellence requires sustained focus and testing. If it is not aligned with your lowest-hanging fruit strategy, it is reasonable to deprioritize in favor of channels with clearer ROI. When you do invest, treat it as experimentation. Data validates what works, but authentic creativity often matters more than analytics.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Which platforms does my target audience actually use, and how do they use them?
- What role will social media play in my marketing strategy? What does success look like, and how will I measure it?
- Am I a regular user of the platform I am planning to market on? If not, am I prepared to become one?
- Would my efforts be better spent on a leading platform, a smaller niche platform or a specific community within a larger platform? Where can I make a useful contribution and reach the right people?
- Why would my target audience follow me? What can I share that they would find useful, interesting or entertaining?
- Which content formats suit both my audience and my strengths? Can I create these consistently with the resources I have?
- What mix of organic content and paid advertising makes sense for my goals, budget and audience?
- Do I have the skills, time and resources to maintain this channel consistently and at a quality level that reflects my brand?
- If I create an account, can I commit to keeping it current? If not, would it be better to focus my efforts elsewhere?
- Am I prepared to participate in conversations and build relationships, as well as publish content? How will I manage comments, questions, messages and complaints?
- How will social media connect with my other marketing channels? How will I help interested followers take the next step, such as visiting my website, joining my email list or making an enquiry?
- What will I test, and when will I review my results to decide whether to continue, change my approach or focus my efforts elsewhere?

2. Website

Websites (or some kind of online landing page) are essential for any legitimate business looking to attract new customers. There are instances where a business can be fine without a website - for example, businesses with long-standing personal client relationships and word-of-mouth referrals, or using social media pages instead. However, if you are serious about growing your business, you need a website as a customer destination resulting from all your marketing efforts via other channels. If your website is not converting, then it is best to stop driving traffic to it until the issues are fixed, otherwise you are literally losing customers.

The good news, basic websites are now really affordable and easier than ever to create and update yourself. With modern website builders and AI tools, you no longer need to be technical or hire expensive developers to get online. If you can type text and upload pictures, you can build a professional-looking website using templates. AI can even help with copywriting, design suggestions, and basic coding.

Types of Websites

A website can be:

- An information-only website with pages, navigation, galleries, and blogs
- A landing page with information and a basic sales option
- A landing page that serves as a portal for software systems like Learning Management Systems (LMS) or Membership Management Software (MMS)
- An eCommerce site with the capability to sell products
- An information page utilising 3rd party apps to provide additional information for prospects or send them to your other channels via links
- Social media pages can be utilised as an alternative to company websites, but there are many limitations

NEW WEBSITES

Building Your Own Website

Modern website builders have made DIY website creation accessible to non-technical users. Most offer free or low-cost options with templates that look professional. *See the Toolbox for a complete list of current website builder platforms, including AI-powered options that can help with design, copy, and layout suggestions.*

AI tools can assist with: writing website copy, generating product descriptions, creating images (using tools like Midjourney, DALL-E), designing layouts (Canva with AI features), and even basic coding if you want more customisation.

Your domain (your website address, such as yourbusiness.com.au) is registered separately from the website itself. You register the domain first through a domain registrar for an annual fee, then connect it to whichever website builder hosts your site. Because you own the domain, you can change website providers at any time and keep the same address, so make sure it is registered in your name.

Tips for Building a New Website:

- **Start with your goal in mind:** What do you want visitors to do? (Buy, contact you, sign up, download something?)
- **Choose the right platform for your needs:** See the Toolbox for options tailored to eCommerce, information sites, landing pages, etc.
- **Use templates:** Don't start from scratch. Professional templates save time and look polished.
- **Focus on first impression:** You have 1 second to make an impact. Visual appearance and key messages should align with what visitors are looking for and resonate with them.
- **Design mobile-first:** At least 50% of traffic comes from mobile. Test on phones and tablets.
- **Use high-quality images:** Poor quality photos are the #1 reason visitors leave. Use AI image generators if you can't take photos yourself.
- **Write clear copy:** Use AI writing tools to help, or hire someone. Vague or confusing messaging kills conversions.
- **Set up analytics from day one:** Use built-in platform analytics or Google Analytics to track visitor behaviour.
- **Keep it fast:** Slow websites lose visitors. Test page speed and optimise images. *(see the Toolbox)*

Hiring Someone to Build Your Website

If you require high customisation, have a comfortable budget, don’t want to have to learn a new tool, or just want professional help, hiring a developer is an option:

- **Budget:** Highly-customised enterprise websites cost $70K+. Professional designers typically charge $5K+ for eCommerce sites. For basic websites, $2K with freelancers or graduates is often sufficient.
- **Hiring options:** Outsource on Upwork to offshore freelancers or hire graduate students at lower rates.
- **Critical tip:** Be very clear on what you want. Provide examples, detailed requirements, and regular check-ins. Be cautious of developers who overpromise and underdeliver. Lower priced options are very templated, lacking character and may not convert.
- **Get a second opinion:** If you're not technical, have someone you trust (mentor, tech-savvy friend, colleague) review proposals and oversee the work to protect yourself from shonky developers.

EXISTING WEBSITES

Before You Drive Traffic

If you already have a website you're reasonably happy with, before you start driving traffic to it through marketing, make sure your website's conversion rate is where it should be. Most website builders come with basic analytics that are detailed enough to be useful, or you can set up Google Analytics.

If your website looks dated, most website builders enable you to update the template for free or low cost, and it updates the layout and visual elements of your website without needing to update the products or the written content again, some images may need adjusting to fit the new template better.

Conversion Rate Benchmarks

- **Average conversion rate:** 2-3%. This means for every 100 visitors, you should get 2-3 conversions (sales, bookings, sign-ups, etc.). Though it differs for some industries, this is the average for all industries and is a good starting point.
- **Below 2% conversion rate:** You have a User Experience (UX) problem. Something on your website is putting customers off.
- **2%+ conversion rate but low volume:** You have a traffic problem, not a website problem. You can confidently market to drive more visitors.
- **High bounce rate:** Visitors are leaving quickly. This signals UX issues.
- **For non-eCommerce businesses, define your conversion**: Booking an appointment, contacting you, downloading a lead magnet, signing up for your VIP list etc.

Tips for Optimising Existing Websites

- **Audit your homepage first:** 9 times out of 10, issues are homepage images or key messages that don't resonate with visitors.
- **Check for obvious friction:** Unexpected shipping fees, forcing customers to request pricing instead of showing it upfront, confusing navigation, slow loading.
- **Use heatmap tools:** Microsoft Clarity (free) shows you where visitors click, scroll, and drop off. This reveals exactly where problems are.
- **Test on mobile:** Ensure your website works smoothly on phones and tablets. Mobile traffic is huge.
- **Update images:** Poor quality photos are a conversion killer. Refresh them with professional shots or AI-generated alternatives.
- **Simplify messaging:** Make it immediately clear what you do and why someone should care. Vague copy confuses visitors.
- **Test changes incrementally:** Change one thing at a time and measure the impact. This is how you identify what actually works.
- **Conduct usability testing:** Ask real users to navigate your site and observe where they struggle. Best practice for identifying issues.

Website UX Checklist (For New & Existing Websites)

- **User needs:** Who are they? What do they want? Are they finding it on your website?
- **Clear goals:** What do you want users to do?
- **Mobile-first design:** Works on all devices
- **Usability:** Fast loading and accessible
- **First impression:** Visual appearance and key messages should resonate with visitors

- **Content:** High-quality, relevant content. What you would value yourself, not just text for the sake of text.
- **Trust and transparency:** Does your website look trustworthy?
- **Track and improve:** Monitor analytics and iterate
- **Best practice:** Conduct usability testing with real users

A simple way to understand best-practice principles is to look at the websites of leading brands - they use experts and psychology to determine how to best set up the flow of their websites.

Remember: User experience is an ongoing journey, not a one-time project.

Case Studies

1. Mobile-First Redesign (eCommerce Client) Mobile-First Redesign (Existing Website) - I was reviewing analytics for an eCommerce client and noticed 80% of traffic came from mobile. They were using default mobile settings on their Shopify template, and had never really thought about the mobile experience on their website. After testing their website on my mobile, I found several areas for improvement. The client agreed to switch to a mobile-first template designed specifically for mobile viewing. The month after launch, they saw a 20% increase in online sales, and have consistently grown since.

The Lesson: Mobile experience directly impacts conversion. When the majority of your traffic comes from mobile but your website is not optimized for it, you are leaving revenue on the table. A simple template switch aligned to mobile-first design principles delivered measurable, immediate results.

2. Product Image Quality (Fashion Client) I worked with a fashion client whose website had poor quality images that didn't reflect brand value. Despite paying for Google ads and being very active on Instagram, their conversion rate was 0.01%. Looking at analytics made the issue clear. My recommendation was to stop paying for ads immediately and fix the website UX - primarily the product images. Poor imagery was the barrier, not lack of traffic. There could have been other issues, but the images were an obvious deterrent, and did not accurately reflect the brand quality and pricing.

The Lesson: Website UX problems show up as low conversion rates, not traffic problems. Before spending money to drive more visitors, diagnose what is stopping current visitors from converting. In this case, poor product imagery was the silent conversion killer - fixing it mattered more than getting more traffic.

3. Platform Selection for Startup (Strategy to Impact)

For Strategy to Impact, we needed to consider our current needs and future growth. We wanted a robust CRM with email marketing integrated, plus the ability to sell digital products. After analysing options, we chose Systeme, which offered landing pages integrated with CRM and comfortable pricing. We may eventually outgrow it and need a custom website, but as a starter solution, it had everything we needed. The challenge is that often low cost systems can over promise features, but when it comes to usability they are clunky and cumbersome, with limitations, which is what we have since found Systeme to be. The decision is then to invest in a new platform or make do with the existing one.

The Lesson: Low-cost platform solutions offer speed to market but often sacrifice usability for features. Choosing a platform requires balancing immediate needs, growth potential, and UX reality. Sometimes the trade-off is worthwhile; other times it is worth investing in a better platform before operational friction becomes a customer friction problem.

Questions to Ask Yourself

For All Websites:

- What do I want my website to achieve: sell products, generate enquiries, take bookings or provide information? What actions do I want visitors to take?
- Who is my website for? What do visitors need to know, and what questions or concerns should it address before they feel ready to act?
- Does my website clearly explain what I offer, who it is for and why someone should choose my business? Does its presentation reflect my brand?
- How will people find my website? How will it support my other marketing activities?
- Can visitors easily find what they need and take the next step? Does the website work well on mobile devices, load quickly and accommodate people with different accessibility needs?
- What will help visitors trust my business? Could relevant reviews, testimonials, examples of my work or clear contact and service information help?
- How will I measure success? Can I track meaningful actions, such as purchases, bookings or qualified enquiries?

For New Websites:

- What features do I need at launch, and what could wait? Does the website need to connect with systems such as payments, bookings or email marketing?
- Can I build the website myself, or do I need professional help? What is my budget for creating it and covering ongoing costs?
- Do I have the copy, images and other content I need? Who will create anything that is missing?
- Who will own and manage the website, domain and hosting accounts? Will I have the access and support I need to keep it updated and secure?

For Existing Websites:

- Is my website delivering the results I need? What proportion of visitors take the intended action, and where do people leave before completing it?
- Does my website still reflect my current business, audience and offer? Does its design, copy, imagery or functionality need updating?
- Have I watched people from my target audience use the website? Where do they get confused, hesitate or struggle?
- Are key functions, such as links, forms, bookings and checkout, working properly? Who is responsible for checking and maintaining them?
- Which improvements would make the biggest difference to visitors and business results? What should I prioritise within my budget?
- Before I invest more in attracting visitors, are the relevant pages ready to deliver on my marketing promises and help people take the next step?

3. Organic SEO – Search Engine Optimization

Understanding Search Engines

Many people understand SEO only as "being found on Google," but a deeper understanding helps clarify the tactics for this channel. When we search the internet, we're not searching the internet broadly - we're searching a snapshot taken by the search engine at some point in time. Whether Google, Bing, or another engine, we're looking at what that search engine has deemed the most appropriate content to answer our query, based on algorithms with varying parameters, or in simple terms the search engine is using a formula to find a website record in its archives that matches what you typed into the search bar.

Periodically, search engines send out bots to crawl the internet and index what they find. When these bots visit your website, they index your content and note external references to your site. The more your website aligns with desired algorithm parameters (requirements), the more likely it will appear higher in search results. Search engine algorithms change frequently to improve searcher experience and bypass workarounds people use to manipulate rankings.

You may have heard of "keyword stuffing" - overusing keywords to trick algorithms into thinking a website is most relevant for that term. This makes websites sound repetitive and unhelpful to readers, so search engines now weight quality content and natural keyword usage much more heavily.

What is SEO?

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is the continuous process of ensuring your website meets search engine algorithm requirements so it appears for keywords you want to be found for. Improvements typically show results months later because search engines only note changes when they periodically re-index websites.

With Google being the most popular search engine, most SEO discussion refers to Google's algorithms. If your customers use other search engines, ensure your website's SEO is complementary to those platforms.

The AI Factor: With AI advancement, we're seeing major changes in how people search for information and how search engines use website content. Search Generative Experience (SGE) is changing traditional rankings, and focus is shifting from keywords to search intent. This makes quality, authentic content more valuable than ever. As it is a new frontier, and analytics from SGE is not readily available, the current best practice recommendation is to still continue to ensure that your website is optimised.

This is something you can learn to do yourself, but it is tedious and time consuming and ever changing, and becoming increasingly complicated. I liken it to bookkeeping, anyone can learn to do their own bookkeeping, but the question is do you really want to and is it the best use of your time?

Here is a snap shot of what you need to be aware of regardless of if you are trying to DIY or engaging an expert.

On-Page Optimisation

- **Keyword research:** Identify relevant keywords people use to search for products or services related to yours. *(Many tools are available to help you with this, see the Toolbox)*
- **Content creation:** Develop high-quality, informative, engaging content targeting your chosen keywords. Focus on answering what searchers actually want to know.
- **Title tags and meta descriptions:** Craft compelling, accurate titles and descriptions that entice clicks and reflect your content. (Most website builders have instructions on how to do this)
- **Internal linking:** Structure your website with relevant links between pages, helping search engines understand your content hierarchy.
- **Image optimisation:** Use descriptive filenames and alt text for images. This one is easy to implement when you are uploading images to your website, but is a pain to go back to and update later down the track.

Example: instead of IMG65439.jpg, use brandx-black-suede-leather-bag-tote-clutch-made-in-australia.jpg. Search bots can't see images, so clear naming improves SEO. Use search terms people actually type when looking for this image.

- **Technical SEO:** Ensure your website is mobile-friendly, has sufficient Core Web Vitals (CWV) ie - fast loading speeds, follows accessibility standards, and meets technical guidelines set by search engines.

Off-Page Optimisation

- **Link building:** Earn backlinks from high-quality, relevant websites. Quality matters far more than quantity - a few links from authoritative sites outweigh many links from low-quality sites. This is where other digital marketing channels like advertorials, directories, and awards can help a lot.
- **E-E-A-T:** Increasingly, Google prioritises Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness. Establish yourself as a trusted source in your industry through content, credentials, and customer trust signals.
- **Local SEO**: Optimise your website and online presence for local search results if you have a physical location or serve specific geographic areas. This includes geo-targeting your content and location-based keywords.
- **International considerations:** If you serve multiple countries or languages, be aware of hreflang tags (which tell search engines which version of content is for which language/region). This is an advanced topic - if relevant to your business, research it or discuss with an SEO provider.
- **Social media engagement:** Build and engage with the community on social platforms. Strong social presence indirectly influences search rankings and trust signals. Search engines are increasingly pulling content from social media in their searches.
- **Brand building**: Establish your brand as a trusted information source in your industry. Strong brand reputation influences search ranking perception.

Additional SEO Elements

- **Structured data markup:** Provide additional information to search engines about your content (e.g., product pricing, ratings), potentially enhancing how your content appears in search results.
- **Passage-based indexing:** Google can now rank individual passages within content, not just whole pages. This means well-written, focused sections on specific topics can rank for queries without the entire page being relevant.
- **Google Search Console:** Use tools provided by Google to track performance, diagnose issues, monitor which keywords you rank for, and optimise your website.
- **Content promotion**: Share your content on relevant platforms and communities to increase visibility and earn potential backlinks.

Google Business Profile (GBP)

If you have a physical location or serve customers in a specific area, your Google Business Profile is one of the most valuable free listings you can have. It controls how your business appears in Google Search and Google Maps, and for many local searches it is the first thing people see, often before your website. Online only businesses can benefit from a GBP in some instances, especially if your delivery capability is limited to a specific geographical area.

- **Claim and verify your profile:** Set it up for free at business.google.com and confirm you are the owner. Google will verify your business, sometimes by sending a postcard with a code to your address.
- **Complete every section:** Choose accurate categories and add your address or service area, opening hours, phone number, website, products or services, and photos.
- **Keep it current:** Update holiday hours, changes to your services and new photos, so customers are not turned away by outdated information.
- **Encourage and respond to reviews:** Ask happy customers for reviews and reply to all of them, positive or negative.
- **Hiding your address:** If you don’t want your address to be visible for any reason, you can switch it off. However, you can only do this once your account is verified, so your address will be visible while you are waiting for your verification code.

Key SEO Principles to Remember

- **SEO is a long-term strategy:** It takes time and consistent effort to see results. Don't expect overnight changes. And now with AI searches, it's hard to know if the effort will pay off at all, but you cannot win the game unless you play the game.
- **Quality content matters:** Focus on creating valuable, informative content your target audience will actually find helpful.
- **Stay updated:** Search engine algorithms evolve constantly. Keep informed about best practices and adapt your strategies accordingly.
- **Analyse and adapt:** Monitor your website's performance and adjust tactics based on data-driven insights.

Note: Appearing for your business name in Google searches is not technically successful SEO, and if your business is not appearing when you search your business name it means that the website has not been indexed properly and you need to notify Google. Rather than explaining it here you can Google how to do that. You are aiming to appear for your keywords, not just your business name.

**See the Toolbox for SEO tools and resources*

The Toolbox includes free and low-cost SEO tools for keyword research, site audits, ranking tracking, and competitive analysis. These tools help you understand how your website rates and identify improvement opportunities.

Should You Hire an SEO Professional?

This is a common question with no single answer. The challenge is that SEO work is ongoing and invisible until you see results in traffic and rankings. You can spend hundreds per month and feel you're not getting value because so many variables affect results - your overall marketing mix, competition level, and market saturation.

That said, many clients have invested in SEO with great results, making it their primary marketing spend. And as previously mentioned, like bookkeeping, you can do SEO yourself if willing, but it's tedious. The real question: can this time be better spent creating value elsewhere?

If you outsource SEO, understand the concepts so you can verify your provider is actually doing the work and making a difference. All websites should adopt essential SEO principles, but many will never get sufficient organic traffic to warrant the effort - competition levels vary dramatically by industry.

Case Studies

1. SaaS Business Acquisition

A client purchased a property management Software as a Service (SaaS) business that came with a valuable digital asset: high-quality, SEO-friendly content. The website included industry-specific FAQs, summaries of local laws and regulations - content that positioned the business as industry leaders. The amount of leads generated without any other marketing was astounding. The business now invests A$1,500/month in SEO management to maintain top rankings because it's proven itself as extraordinary warm lead generation. The business has not had to spend money on any other marketing because of the volume of leads generated by their organic SEO.

The Lesson: Quality, authoritative content about your industry creates compounding SEO value. The business discovered that consistent investment in organic ranking maintenance created more qualified leads than any paid advertising could, despite the long-term nature of SEO results.

2. Impact of Algorithm Changes

I've seen friends lose a business when Google changed their algorithm. They were a coupon marketing business whose owners had become algorithm experts for their version of Google SEO. When the algorithm changed overnight, they dropped so far off searches that recovery would have taken years. They decided it wasn't worth the effort and pursued other opportunities.

The Lesson: Over-reliance on organic search is risky. Algorithm changes can devastate businesses with no channel diversification. SEO is valuable for long-term credibility and warm lead generation, but should never be your only customer acquisition channel. This is especially an important consideration with AI summaries replacing search results.

3. Strategy to Impact - SEO Priority

For Strategy to Impact, SEO is not a priority for us at this stage. We've done keyword research to understand demand and customer language, but since we're launching with a landing page and direct-to-consumer marketing strategies, we're not investing heavily in organic SEO yet. However all content is created with SEO in mind, and analytics are considered when formatting i.e. image sizes and names.

The Lesson: SEO requires patience and consistent effort before results appear. While it is essential for long-term credibility, new businesses often see faster ROI from channels with more immediate feedback. Building SEO fundamentals now creates a runway for future growth when the strategy becomes active.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What role will SEO play in my marketing strategy? Do I want to increase awareness, attract qualified enquiries, generate sales or help customers find my business locally?
- What words and questions does my target audience use when searching for the products, services or information I offer? How will I find out?
- What are people trying to achieve with these searches? Are they looking for information, comparing options or ready to buy? Does my content meet those needs?
- Does my website appear for relevant searches, including searches that do not mention my business name? Which opportunities should I prioritise?
- Which websites appear for the searches I want to be found for? What can I learn from them, and what useful information or perspective could I offer that they do not?
- Do I have clear, helpful pages covering my main products, services and customer questions? What content needs creating, improving or updating?
- Can search engines find and index my important pages? Do I need help identifying technical issues that could limit my visibility?
- Is local search important to my business? Can people easily find accurate information about my location, service area, opening hours and contact details?
- Do I have a Google Business Profile? Is it verified, complete and up to date, and am I encouraging and responding to reviews?
- Do I have tools in place to understand my search visibility and website traffic? Which searches and pages attract relevant visitors, and do those visitors take the actions I want?
- Do I have the skills and time to manage SEO myself, or should I hire someone? What budget can I commit to ongoing improvements?
- What results would make the investment worthwhile? What is a realistic timeframe, and how often will I review progress and adjust my priorities?

4. Paid Digital Advertising

Digital platforms have been a blessing for super-targeted advertising to niche customer groups. The ability to segment and reach specific audiences with a few clicks has meant businesses can reach exactly who they want. Whether it works depends on your ad copy, visuals, call to action, and your overall Marketing Mix.

There are many paid digital advertising options. While some require larger budgets (like ads before streaming TV shows), this guide focuses on the most accessible forms for any budget.

What is Paid Digital Advertising

Paid advertising, referred to as Pay-Per-Click (PPC), can also be based on interactions and impressions. The two main categories are Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Social Media Ads.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Google Ads (also called Search Engine Marketing) includes several formats:

- Google Text Ads (also referred to as Search ads or PPC ads) - Are the “sponsored” posts appearing at the top of Google search results. You pay when someone clicks your ad.
- Google Shopping - Lists your products in the Shopping section of Google searches, ideal for eCommerce businesses with competitive pricing. If you have an unknown brand, but have a product that customers would be researching to compare pricing and features on, Google Shopping is definitely a channel to utilise.
- Remarketing - Ads for products you've recently visited or searched for, appearing on websites you visit. These ads also integrate with social media platforms. You can remarket to past visitors to your website, look-alike audiences to your existing customer list, and also leverage your competitor searches, where your ads will appear to customers searching for specific brands you nominate.
- Display Ads - Banner, image, and video ads embedded in ad spaces on various websites. Websites earn advertising revenue when you click. Remarketing uses display ad spaces.

Social Media Advertising

Social media ads are integrated into users' feeds on major platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. They can also appear embedded in videos (YouTube, Facebook video). Getting social media ads right is arguably an art form. I've seen many clients struggle, but reflecting on my own buying behaviour, most of my unexpected purchases come from social media ads - so they're very effective when done well.

Social Media Ad Formats

- **Story Ads -** Ads displayed within stories on platforms like Instagram and Facebook
- **Carousel Ads -** Multiple images or videos users can swipe through
- **Video Ads -** Short videos playing within the platform feed

- **Interactive Ads -** Quizzes, polls, or other engagement formats that drive user participation

When to Use Paid Social Media Ads

- **Brand awareness is your primary goal -** Social media excels at reaching broad audiences and generating brand recognition.
- **Targeting is key -** You can target users by demographics, interests, behaviours, and purchase intent.
- **Engagement and community building matter -** Social media fosters interaction and relationship building.
- **Visual content is important -** Social media is ideal for showcasing products or services through images, videos, and stories.
- **Faster results are desired -** Social media ads deliver quicker results than SEM, which takes time to build.

In short, I recommend businesses consider using Social Media ads when there is an education component to your product or service i.e. the target customers are not aware of it, and are not actively searching for it.

When to Use Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

- **Generating leads and sales is your top priority -** SEM targets users actively searching for products or services like yours, with high purchase intent.
- **Driving qualified website traffic is essential -** SEM increases traffic from people already interested in what you offer.
- **Long-term visibility is desired -** Organic ranking through SEM offers sustained traffic over time.
- **Specific keywords are crucial -** Target high-intent keywords directly related to your products or services.
- **Budget allows for long-term** investment - SEM involves ongoing costs for keyword research, ad creation, and optimization, but offers good ROI.
- **Detailed product information is key -** SEM allows you to showcase specifications effectively through optimized ad copy and landing pages.

In short, if customers are searching for your product or service then you need to appear for the searches. Google has defined searches as Micro-Moments, these are:

- **I Want to Know:** Research-focused moments where users explore or learn facts but are not necessarily ready to purchase. (e.g., Googling "is it better to rent or buy a house in Melbourne")
- **I Want to Go:** Location-driven moments where users search for a physical business or service in their immediate vicinity. (e.g., Using Google Maps to find "coffee shops open now near me")
- **I Want to Do:** Action-oriented moments where users seek hands-on help, tutorials, or instructions. (e.g., Watching a YouTube video on "how to fix a leaky faucet")

- **I Want to Buy:** Bottom-of-funnel moments where consumers are ready to make a purchase but need a final tie-breaker. (e.g., Reading product reviews or clicking a "book now" button on a business website)

Identifying which Micro-Moments your customers have in order to have the opportunity to find your products helps you ensure that you have visibility when they do.

Best Approach: Combination Strategy

In most cases, the best approach combines both paid social media ads and SEM. Leverage social media to build brand awareness and target specific audiences, while using SEM to capture high-intent searches and drive qualified traffic to your website. Remarketing is a great way to utilise both channels - remarketing to people who are engaged with your pages, or remarketing to those searching for similar brands and products.

Additional Considerations:

- **Industry differences -** Different industries benefit more from one approach. Commercial plumbers likely won't see value from paid social media but will benefit from Google text ads. A new kids' toy needs to be seen to be desired, so it won't benefit from Google text ads.
- **Target audience behaviour** - Understanding your ideal customer's online behaviour guides your strategy.
- **Budget allocation** - Paid ads involve advertising costs; decide how much to invest in testing and learning.
- **Clear objectives -** Know exactly what you're trying to achieve. 'Boosting a post to see what happens' wastes money. Focus on specific goals like sales, email subscribers, or followers.
- **AI-powered optimisation -** Modern platforms use AI for automated bidding, creative optimisation, and Performance Max campaigns. Let AI do the heavy lifting while you provide strategic direction.
- **Privacy landscape -** Third-party cookies are being phased out. Which is not ideal from a marketing perspective as the value was being able to effectively identify your target customers based on specific behaviors. The focus is now on first-party (your own) data collection and contextual targeting rather than purely behavioural targeting.
- **Test and measure -** What works for one business may not work for another. Use A/B testing features to determine which approaches have the best traction, then put your budget behind the most promising version. When you are first starting to avoid disappointment I suggest that you expect the ads won’t work but you are gathering engagement data, which should hopefully helpfully tweak the ads to start converting.

Return on Investment Expectations

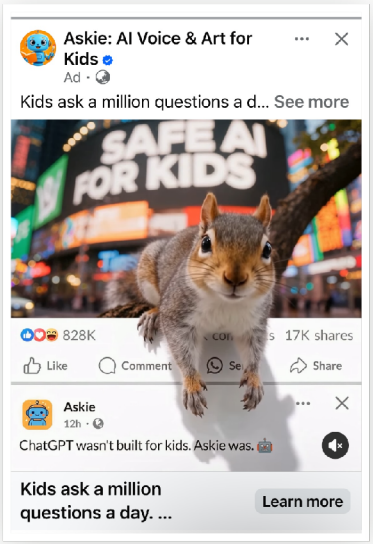
Aim for a 10x return on your advertising spend (the 10% marketing budget rule). It takes time to achieve this return. A 3x return is the bare minimum - anything less means you're losing money, and you ads are not working (which could be the ads, or your website, or your product, or your price)

For small business initial trials, arguably the best approach is to advertise a specific product to generate sales, or encourage email subscribers. You need something tangible in return for your ad spend. General brand-awareness advertising typically doesn't yield immediate measurable results - expect at least 3-6 months to see a return.

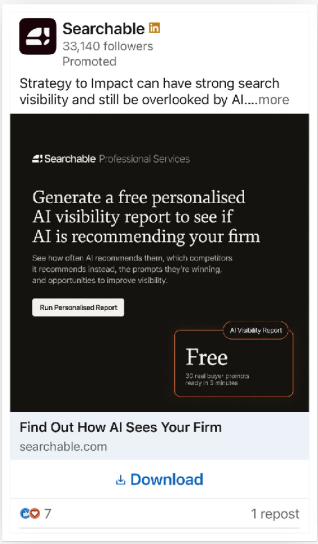
Should You Get Professional Help?

Definitely YES, unless you're very savvy and willing to upskill. The advertising platforms are complex and constantly evolving. I have an Information System degree and I am finding the ad manager systems increasingly complicated and painful. At minimum, get someone to set it up properly. Options range from having someone help with setup while you test and measure, to full-service ad management (which can be expensive. Be very careful who you choose to work with as I have seen many clients lose money with big promises and no results).

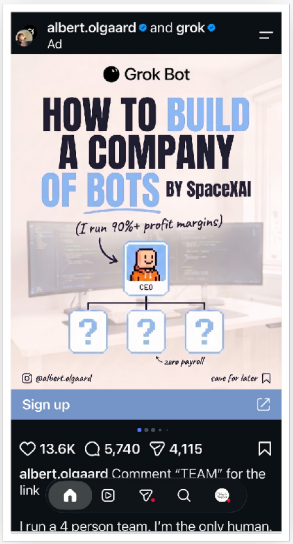
Successful paid advertising requires three skill sets: technical know-how (platform operation), strategic thinking (identifying opportunities and angles), and creative ability (writing copy and creating quality visuals). Ideally you have at least one of these in-house and can outsource the rest.



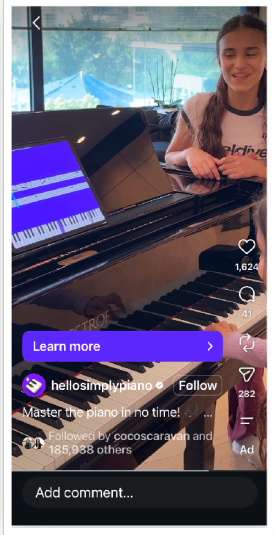
Facebook Ad



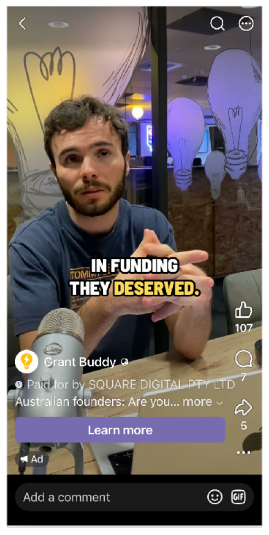
LinkedIn Ad



Instagram Ad



Instagram Stories Ad



Instagram Stories Ad

Here are some examples of ad styles and formats on different platforms. Explaining the considerations behind ad styles can be it's own book. For now the important thing to highlight is that it goes back to considering what your target customer is most likely to engage with, based on their persona profile, and remembering just like content, the ads should create some sort of value in order to capture attention.

See the Toolbox for Paid Advertising tools and platforms

The Toolbox includes free, low-cost, and professional tools for Google Ads, social media advertising platforms, campaign management, analytics, and AI-powered optimisation tools.

Case Studies

1. Website UX and Paid Ads Failure Website UX and Paid Ads - I spoke to a client in disability support services who had spent $3,000 on Google ads with an agency and saw no return. They were understandably frustrated. However, before blaming the agency, it was important to look at the bigger picture. When I checked their website, the UX and homepage didn't reflect the nature of the business - it looked more like an accounting practice with poorly selected stock images and weak marketing messages. The ads were driving traffic to the website that instantly lost potential clients and not gained them. A good agency should flag when a website may not convert before driving traffic to it. It's hard to say whether this was agency incompetence or issues within the business, but you can understand why the client was frustrated - when in fact they can be effective under the right circumstances, especially for niche services people search for.

The Lesson: Paid ads amplify existing problems. A poor website does not convert whether traffic comes organically or via paid ads - it just costs you more money to find out. Always ensure website quality before driving paid traffic. A good agency should flag UX issues before campaigns launch; if they do not, question their value.

2. Google Shopping Success - Product Business
Google Shopping is excellent for product-based businesses, especially with competitive pricing. A client with a hat shop wanted to grow their eCommerce presence. They had a trending Fedora style at competitive prices, invested in quality images, and connected it to Google Shopping. Soon their online store was doing $10K/month, mostly selling just a couple of the most popular products. There's nothing wrong with giving each sales channel exactly what it wants - even if it means not selling your full range through that channel.

The Lesson: Different ad platforms suit different business models. Google Shopping works well for product retailers where comparison and visual appeal drive decisions. Understanding which advertising platform matches your business type, product, and customer search behavior is crucial for ROI.

3. Strategy to Impact - PPC Strategy For Strategy to Impact, PPC ads are definitely part of our strategy, but they require investment while testing and measuring. We're prioritising email and affiliate marketing first to minimise upfront expenses until we generate sufficient revenue to enable ad investment. Initial sales will be reinvested in digital ads, prioritising social media ads over Google. I see these products advertised on socials regularly and know the targeting works. We'll focus on Facebook and Instagram, with possible TikTok experiments. LinkedIn could work but we're cautious due to reports of high costs and lower effectiveness for B2B professional services. Our approach is to create visually engaging content aligned with trending social content, targeting small business owners engaging with educational content and coaches.

The Lesson: Paid advertising is a tool best used once you have the foundations right - clear positioning, strong offers, and validated messaging. It accelerates what already works, rather than fixing what is broken. Timing your entry into paid ads matters as much as choosing the right platform.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What do I want paid advertising to achieve: awareness, qualified enquiries, sales or repeat purchases? How will it support my wider marketing strategy?
- Who am I trying to reach, and which channels are most likely to reach them? Are they actively looking for a solution, or will I need to introduce my product or service and build interest?
- Which audience offers the strongest starting opportunity? Could I reach people searching for what I offer, previous website visitors or existing customers?
- What is my budget for advertising, including content creation, management and testing? How much can I afford to spend while learning what works?
- How much can I afford to pay for a new customer while making a worthwhile profit? If my goal is enquiries, how many are likely to become paying customers?
- What message or offer will give my audience a reason to act? Is the value clear, and does the ad have a specific call to action?
- Where will people go after clicking my ad? Does that page deliver on the ad's promise and make it easy to enquire, book or buy?
- Do I have the skills and time to create, monitor and improve campaigns myself? Do I need a full-service provider or support with specific tasks?
- Am I prepared to test different audiences, messages, offers and creative formats? Could a different buying occasion reveal an opportunity, such as promoting men's T-shirts as Father's Day gifts?
- How will I track meaningful results, such as qualified enquiries and sales? Can I connect these results to my advertising spend?
- Do I have the capacity to respond to enquiries and fulfil additional orders? What follow-up will help turn interest into customers?
- When will I review performance, and what evidence will guide my decision to stop, adjust or increase spending?

5. Email Marketing

More often than not when I suggest this channel, it is met with apprehension. Most of us think of email marketing as annoying spam that clogs our inboxes, and to some extent it is. But hear me out - with social media platforms going through cyclical fads and algorithm changes and restrictions, it is quite risky to have all your customers on one 3rd party platform. I have seen Instagram business accounts shut down several times without warning due to some poorly defined guideline violations, and it's near impossible to get in touch with the platform to get support, and your years of community building can vanish overnight.

Email is still one of the few direct ways you can reach your customers, and the good news is that you are in control of how you communicate with your customers via email, and it doesn't have to be spam. Reflecting on your email inbox, I bet you still have some marketing emails that you allow to go in there, without instantly unsubscribing, why those emails in particular? I always say that email should be used as an opportune way to keep in touch with your customers, without hounding them. It really is the best way to reach existing clients, remind them of the business, and generate repeat sales by adding value. It is much easier to get repeat business than attract new customers, and email is the best tool to nurture your customers. We will pop some effective email examples into the Toolbox.

Email Addresses Are an Asset

When I had my fashion boutique/marketing agency, I was equally reluctant to pursue email marketing as the majority of the clients I see today. A business coach once taught me 2 valuable lessons:

1. You need to see your email database as an asset to the business. The best way to value it is: 1,000 emails = $1,000,000 asset - because if you can get 1,000 people to spend $1,000 with you, there is your $1,000,000. Though this formula does not apply equally to all types of businesses, it does to the majority, whether it is wholesale, retail or a service business. Ecommerce businesses are especially aware of the value of those emails. *(You can adjust your database valuation estimate based on your customer average spend per year.)*

2. If you ever want to sell your business, buyers are looking for your brand value, a lot of which is in the number of customers you have and the most tangible way to measure it is with email addresses.

Here's a summary of why it's valuable and how to use it effectively without turning recipients off:

The Email Value Proposition

- **High ROI:** Recent email marketing benchmarks show ROI of $40-$50 per $1 spent, though this varies significantly by industry. Ecommerce tends to see higher returns. Making it a cost-effective way to reach your audience. This is why email remains one of our lead tactics for Strategy to Impact.
- **Direct Communication:** Emails reach individuals directly, unlike social media, where organic reach is limited. You need to get into their main inbox, because if you land in their random subscription inbox *(you know, the one that looks like promotional clutter)*, you won't get opened. You do not want your leads giving you that email address.



This is my inbox where all the "subscribe to get a discount" registrations go, and my online order confirmations. I never check the emails in this inbox, unless I am searching for one in particular. You do not want your leads giving you this email address. I have my main daily address too, and I do allow some businesses into that one... why? Because they create value for me, either:

- they educate me, or

- their email creates value for me and I want to continue to receive it,

- or I find their emails amusing,

- or I want to be reminded of the business as I want to be a customer in the future. What value can you offer your leads to get into the primary email? Hint - see the Lead Magnets section, page 120.

- **Personalisation:** Tailoring messages to specific segments increases engagement and conversion rates. Segmentation remains critical - if you have a diverse audience, segmenting makes marketing to each group much more effective. The earlier you start segmenting your database, the more you can address each segment's specific needs and provide solutions that resonate.
- **Data-driven Insights:** Track metrics like open rates and click-throughs to measure campaign performance and refine your strategy. You know exactly who opened what and how many times. This helps you understand what is working well and how to craft communication with your audience values. I always recommend putting links in with calls to action. Opening an email is one thing, but reading it and taking action is another. Engagement matters more than open rate.
- **Owning Your Audience:** Unlike social media platforms, you control your email list, offering greater flexibility and stability. Think of it as an asset in your business you can leverage or sell.
- **Nurturing Leads:** Emails help build relationships and keep your brand top-of-mind, ultimately converting leads into customers. I always say to my clients: "Emails are an opportune way to remind your clients that you exist." No need to hound them for sales twice a day or bombard them for their Black Friday spend. Offer clear value, infrequently enough that they want to open what you've sent.
- **Modern email platforms now use AI-powered personalisation** - dynamic content that changes based on subscriber behavior, location, purchase history, and engagement patterns. This has become standard and should be leveraged if your platform offers it. AI can optimize send times, subject lines, and content recommendations in real-time, dramatically improving performance.

Avoiding the "Unsubscribe" Button:

- **Permission is Key:** Only email those who have opted in to receive your messages. However, not all recipients will subscribe, even if interested. My controversial recommendation: it's better to ask for forgiveness rather than permission. I have received plenty of emails from companies I've purchased from where I know for a fact I did not tick the subscribe box. However, I see it like this - if my favorite shop is moving location or having a clearance sale, I'd like to know. That's value. I don't want them in my inbox every time I open it. Be respectful and treat your clients' inbox like your own.
- **Segmentation is Your Friend:** I cannot emphasize this enough. Divide your list based on interests and demographics to send relevant content. This opens up many more marketing opportunities. Yes, you can manage campaigns without segmentation, but they have to be general to not alienate your audience. Segmentation means you can hone in and create value for each customer profile. Result: emails are more likely to have the desired effect. It's never too late to start segmenting. To be honest this has been one of my biggest challenges, segmenting my contacts in a way that I can offer each group unique value. I have tried many digital tools to try and help this, but unfortunately nothing at this stage is as accurate as your brain and insights at this time. If your list is small, start segmenting it now. If it's already big, you can segment by running different promotions with gifts and calls to actions to segment the contacts that respond to particular offers. It's not perfect but it's something.
- **Value Over Hype:** Offer valuable information, discounts, or exclusive content, not just sales pitches. I have been on email lists where I was so inundated with constant sales that I knew I would never buy at full price. Every email, every day, was a limited time only special. I unsubscribed.
- **Frequency Matters:** Find the right balance between staying engaged and bombarding inboxes. I prefer need-to-know frequency, but there are many mixed opinions on this - work out your target audience preferences. Some platforms now allow recipients to choose their frequency and opt out of certain campaigns. I always appreciate having that option.
- **Be Transparent:** Clearly state who you are and why you're emailing in the sender name and subject line. At the same time, stating the obvious can be boring. When Black Friday season approaches, I basically delete anything with "Black Friday" in the subject. You can approach seasonal campaigns more subtly.
- **Mobile-Friendly Matters:** Ensure your emails are optimized for mobile devices, especially if your target audience opens them on mobile. I used to create campaigns on my computer, but my client only opened them on her mobile. It was incredible how different they looked - what looked great on the computer was often too text heavy on mobile. Think about your target audience - if your product is recreational, they'll likely open on mobile. If offering professional services or B2B products, they'll open on their work computer during business hours.
- **Unsubscribe Made Easy:** Make it simple for recipients to unsubscribe. Ideally, use an email system that allows customers to choose what communication they want - so you don't lose them entirely. Some retailers now offer opting out of specific campaigns *(e.g., Mother's Day campaigns)* so you can stay connected.

- **List Decay and Re-engagement:** Email lists naturally decay over time - inactive subscribers stop opening emails. Every 3-6 months, run a re-engagement campaign targeting inactive subscribers with special offers or valuable content. Remove subscribers who haven't engaged in 12 months to maintain list health and sender reputation. A smaller, engaged list is far more valuable than a large, inactive one.
- **Email Authentication and Sender Reputation:** There are some regional legal requirements and technical set-ups that you may need to consider. This will sound like jargon but it gives you an insight into what you will need to understand if it applies to you, if this is your chosen channel. Ensure your emails have proper authentication (SPF, DKIM, DMARC) to avoid spam folders and maintain sender reputation. ISPs track your sending patterns and bounce rates - a damaged sender reputation is hard to recover from. Monitor your unsubscribe rates and complaint rates. High unsubscribe rates indicate your content or frequency isn't resonating.

Email Marketing Tips

- I always say: the best time to start building your email database is yesterday; the next best is today. Even if you're not ready to send anything, start collecting now. Develop clever tactics to collect emails by offering something valuable for free - discounts, lead magnets, competitions. Get into their primary inbox, not the spam one.
- If you have a physical location, use QR codes to collect emails with incentives.
- Best to avoid using wording like "Join our mailing list/newsletter." No one wants that. If you can't offer a freebie, use friendly terms like “Let's be friends" or “Stay in touch." Though in some scenarios - *Newsletter* subscriptions can work if you offer education and knowledge, or for brand loyalists that want everything you send.
- Companies sell email lists - this treads a fine line legally. However, it's not illegal to gather contact details from Yellowpages of every potential business client that might interest you. Contacting them is not illegal - this is how B2B sales have worked forever. Tread carefully and respectfully here. Note: Ensure you comply with CAN-SPAM, GDPR, and CASL regulations depending on your target audience's location. You can find more on this in the Strategy to Impact resources.
- Research best practice principles for email marketing in your industry - then adapt to your preferences and your customer preferences.
- SMS as a Complementary Channel: Email isn't your only direct communication tool anymore. SMS (text messages) have extremely high open rates (98%+) and can complement your email strategy for urgent announcements, time-sensitive offers, or re-engagement of cold email contacts. However, SMS requires explicit opt-in and should be used sparingly - frequency matters even more with SMS than email. Consider SMS for flash sales, shipping updates, or exclusive offers to your most engaged customers. (More in the Text Messaging / SMS Marketing section, page 79)

Remember: Email marketing is a marathon, not a sprint. Build trust, provide value, and personalize your approach to reap long-term benefits this powerful channel offers.

On the next pages you, I share some examples of emails that resonated with me and I saved to show as examples of good emails. As always to go over the styles and formats and approaches in detail would require a whole other book, so here are just a few that are worth sharing:

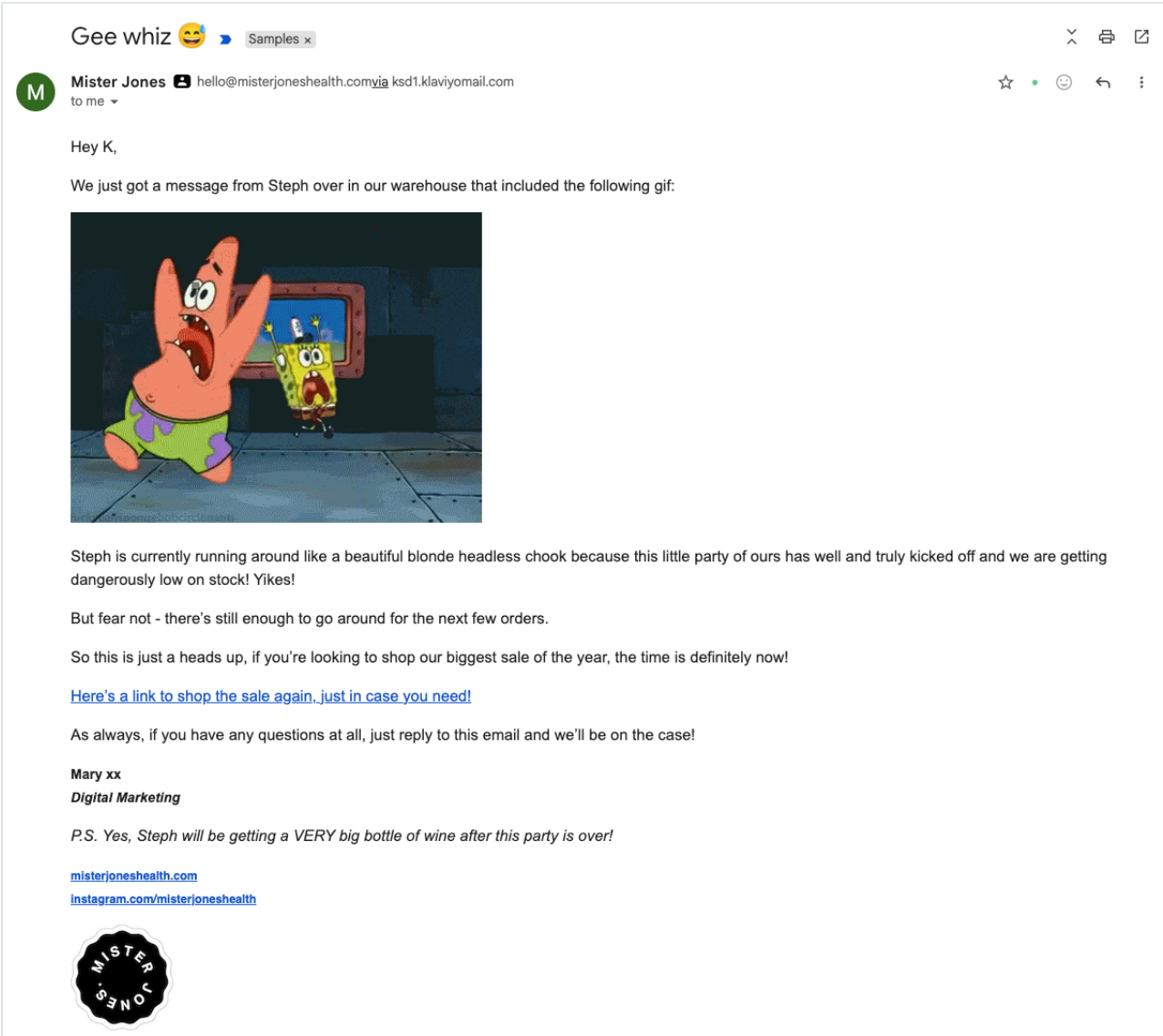
Examples

Mister Jones Health

This is a good example of a text-led email. Traditionally, text-based emails have been seen as less likely to trigger spam filters because they look less like "advertising", although deliverability depends on more than appearance alone. Long blocks of text can put readers off, so it's good practice to highlight the main points and give readers an opportunity to click through to find out more. If you use email tracking tools, these links can also provide useful insights into engagement. An 'open' doesn't necessarily mean someone has read your email, but if clicking a link is a good sign of engagement.

This email also had a good dose of humour, which made it much more enjoyable than a dry sales promotion. The GIF of the characters running around was a nice touch, too.

I enjoyed this brand's emails so much that I stayed subscribed long after I'd decided I didn't like the product.



Gee whiz 😅 Samples ×

Mister Jones hello@misterjoneshealth.com via ksd1.klaviyomail.com
to me

Hey K,

We just got a message from Steph over in our warehouse that included the following gif:

Steph is currently running around like a beautiful blonde headless chook because this little party of ours has well and truly kicked off and we are getting dangerously low on stock! Yikes!

But fear not - there's still enough to go around for the next few orders.

So this is just a heads up, if you're looking to shop our biggest sale of the year, the time is definitely now!

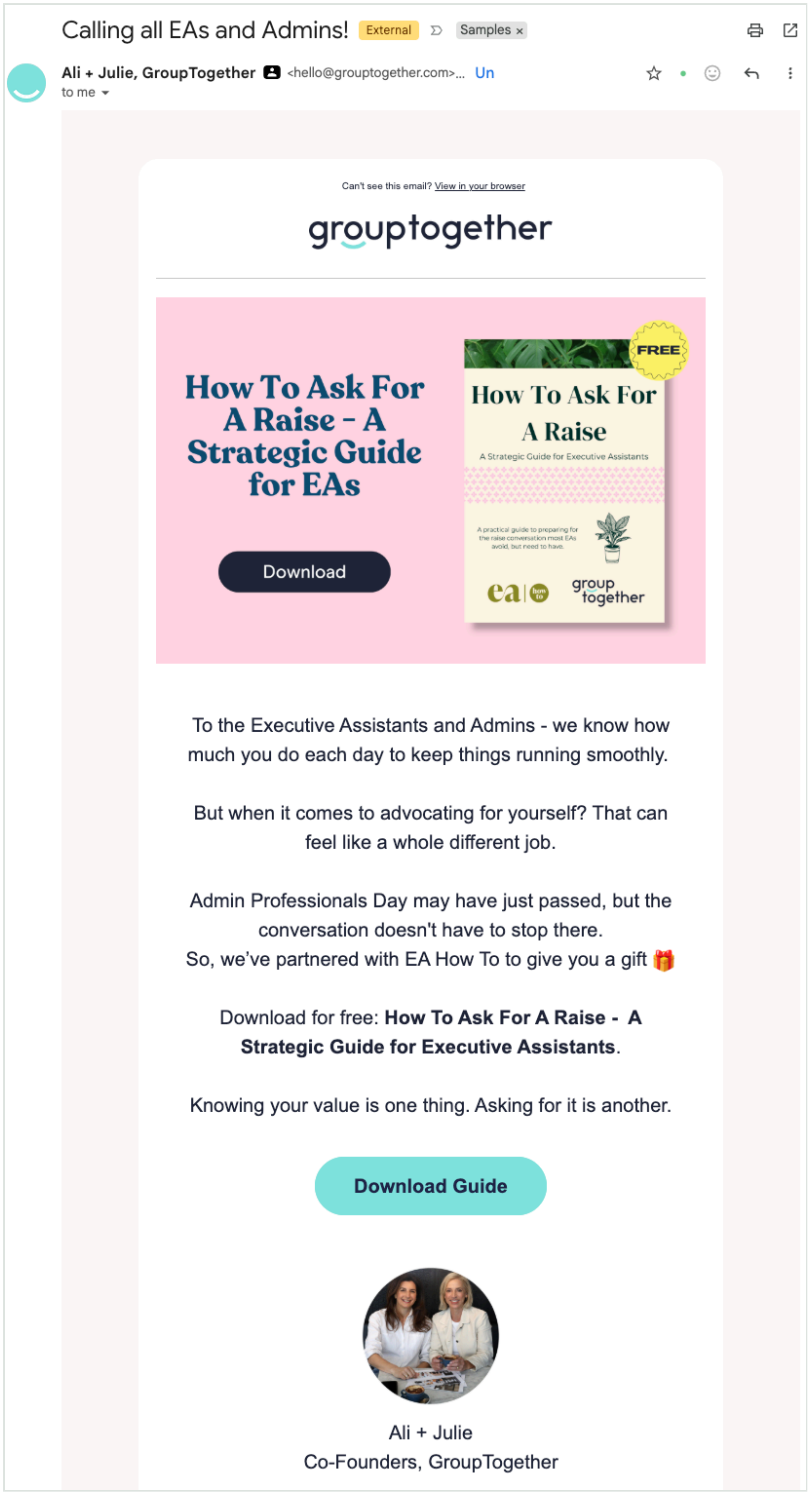
Here's a link to shop the sale again, just in case you need!

As always, if you have any questions at all, just reply to this email and we'll be on the case!

Mary xx
Digital Marketing

P.S. Yes, Steph will be getting a VERY big bottle of wine after this party is over!

misterjoneshealth.com
instagram.com/misterjoneshealth

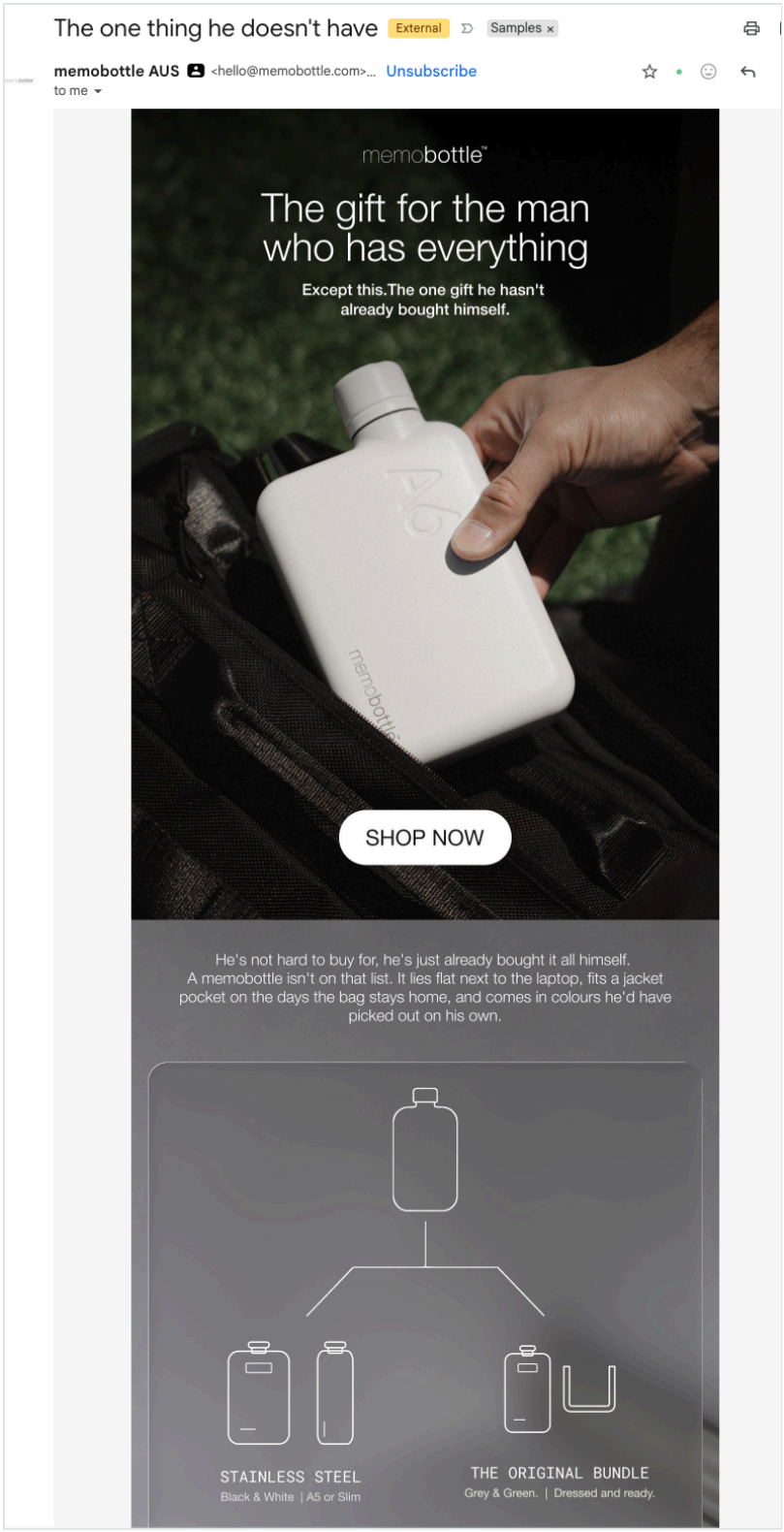


GroupTogether

This is a good example of a mixed-media email that combines text and images and includes a lead magnet.

I found this approach to reaching new customers interesting. Group Together has a broad target audience: anyone who organises group gifts.

In this instance, they appear to have created a targeted campaign to attract more executive assistants and administrators. By offering a guide tailored to this audience, they can identify interested readers based on who downloads it. They could then use those downloads to create a distinct audience segment and send follow-up emails with a value proposition tailored to that group.



memobottle

This is a good example of a highly visual, image-based email that addresses a common pain point: finding gifts for men.

It also shows how premium visual communication can reinforce a premium product. We don't cover branding in this guide, but it's important to emphasise that if you choose a visual email style, the design should reflect your brand identity and the value of your product.

Memobottle does this very well.

Case Studies

1. Email Database as Business Asset

Dick Smith Electronics - When this large Australian retailer went bust and entered liquidation, Kogan Technologies snapped up the company logo, website, and email database for $2.6 million dollars. Kogan saw no value in retail spaces and inventory - only in the email database and logo. Kogan segmented the customer list, created a Dick Smith-branded Kogan site, and continued selling Kogan products. Barely any were aware of the change - still fond of the iconic brand. Point: unless you have a very unique product or service, all value is in brand reputation and ability to reach customers to sell them "stuff."

The Lesson: Your email list is one of the few marketing assets you truly own. Buyers looking to acquire businesses often value email databases heavily because direct audience access equals predictable revenue potential. Build and protect your email list from day one. Email databases command premium prices in business acquisitions because they represent direct customer access and predictable future revenue. Kogan recognised that the value was not in inventory or retail spaces - it was in customer relationships. This demonstrates how critical audience ownership is to long-term business value.

2. Fashion Boutique Email Collection

Your email collection strategy needs to be clever. No one is prepared to hand over their contact info for the sake of it. This is when lead magnets become important (there is a section on Lead Magnets for more on this). In my “previous life” I owned an emerging designer fashion label boutique, where we used a tactic that worked impressively well. We wrapped unwanted stock or leftovers from gift bag fillers in a bowl as a "lucky dip" for anyone who signed up. Offering wrapped trinkets outperformed discounts - customers perceived free gifts as more valuable than discounts requiring purchase. We also included a chance to win a $250 voucher - ensuring they gave their best email address to find out if they won. Email collection can be fun and engaging, offering customers immediate and long-term value. We did notice that some people subscribed just to get the free gift in-store when they were not a customer and did not intend to be, so we changed the offer to be available for purchasing customers only.

The Lesson: Email collection requires removing friction and providing value in exchange. When customers see clear benefits, they willingly exchange contact information. The key is capturing emails from customers who matter for your business.

3. Strategy to Impact - Email as #1 Channel

For Strategy to Impact, email is our #1 digital marketing channel. As a B2B services company, it's our lowest-hanging fruit. With a bit of time, we can identify and reach most businesses fitting our client profile. This strategy requires very little upfront investment. We're confident our customers get real value - it's just a matter of articulating what problem we solve correctly.

The Lesson: For B2B and service-based businesses, email is the most controllable and measurable direct marketing channel. You are not subject to algorithm changes like social media or search. Your ability to reach customers depends on the quality of relationships you have built, not platform policies.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What role will email play in your marketing strategy? Do you want to nurture potential customers, generate sales, encourage repeat purchases or strengthen customer relationships? How will you measure success?
- Do you have an existing email database? If not, how will you build one? How will you obtain permission from people to send them marketing emails?
- Why would someone subscribe to your emails? What value will you offer, and where will you invite people to sign up?
- Is your database segmented? Which groups would benefit from different messages or offers? What information, time and resources would you need to organise these groups?
- What marketing emails do you choose to receive and read? What value do they provide? Do you know what your own audience would value? Could you ask them?
- What do subscribers need at different stages of their relationship with you? Should a new subscriber receive different emails from a loyal customer?
- Does each email have a clear purpose and call to action? What do you want readers to do next, and how will you know whether they have done it?
- Do you have an email marketing platform that supports your needs? Can you use it effectively to create campaigns, manage your audience and measure results?
- How often will you send emails? What frequency can you sustain while keeping the content relevant and valuable to your readers?
- Are there key moments when an email would be particularly useful, such as welcoming a subscriber, following up after a purchase or reminding someone to reorder? Could these emails be automated?
- Who will plan, create and manage your emails? Do you have the time, skills and budget to do this consistently?
- How will you use the results to improve future emails? What could you test to learn which messages, offers and calls to action resonate with your audience?

6. Blogging

Traditionally the term "blogging" is seen as synonymous with online personal diaries, and "blogger" has morphed into the over-used word "influencer." In a business context, blogs are a channel to share topical additional information and insights that help readers learn about the product or topic. For businesses, blogs offer a versatile marketing tool to attract, engage, and convert customers. Blogs can be structured on your website as knowledge centres, guides, insights and product education. Blogs can even be used as stand-alone channels, and a blog can become a business - fundamentally all online news publications can be referred to as blogs.

IMPORTANT CHANGES: The AI Evolution and SEO Shifts

Blogs have been a major contributor to Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and were material used to train AI. This is changing SEO and blogs rapidly. Search engines like Google still rely on blogs to index information for searches, but our search behaviors are changing quickly - we prefer summaries over scanning lists of words. Ironically, many people use AI to write blogs, so AI is now summarizing AI to give us answers (This doesn't sound problematic at all, said no one ever!)

Word on the street at the time of writing is that Google is planning to phase out the search bar and use AI summarise entirely, compiled from trusted sources i.e. websites and blogs. The source is credited but current research shows that few users click through to the source. This is referred to as Search Generative Experience (SGE).

Some points to note:

- Google's focus has shifted to E-E-A-T (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness), meaning your blog must demonstrate genuine knowledge and authority in your field.
- Core Web Vitals - page speed, interactivity, and visual stability - still matter for rankings.
- Search Generative Experience (SGE) is impacting traditional blog traffic by providing AI-generated summaries directly in search results, so differentiation through authentic voice and unique perspective is more important than it has ever been.

The status quo with blogging may change quickly, but for now it is still relevant in this format. However, the key to standing out is making AI-generated content sound authentically human - if your blog reads like it was written by an AI, it will blend into the noise. Your unique perspective, voice, and experience are what will cut through.

Ways to Utilise Blogs in Your Business

Building Brand Awareness

Establish yourself as an industry expert. Share your knowledge through informative articles, guides, and thought leadership pieces. Showcase your personality - inject your brand voice and values into your writing to connect with your audience deeply. The personal tone will become more valued, as any form of 3rd person professional writing now sounds AI generated.

Tell your story - craft compelling narratives about your company, its journey, and its impact. This helps establish your brand's voice and connect with customers on a personal level. Storytelling resonates well with customers, especially younger generations not interested in dry recounts of features and discounts.

“Human’ess” is fast becoming a value proposition.

Attracting and Engaging Audiences

Blogs attract customers by creating value: education, functional how-to guides, sharing stories, and helping with your website Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). This is the best way to improve your page's SEO. Search engines want long-form content that answers search queries. The ideal word count keeps changing. Google recently reduced the priority of articles that are 1,000+ words - they've finally accepted that low attention spans and high word counts aren't compatible. Search engines want to make users happy by giving the best search responses as fast as possible - the best results answer the questions searchers are asking.

Target your content to your audience's interests and pain points. If you're using your blog to attract new customers, title blogs with frequently searched questions. There are plenty of free online tools like Answer the Public *(see the Toolbox)* to see popular search terms. Or simply start typing keywords into Google - it gives you a list of popular questions.

Visual storytelling - use images, infographics, and even videos to enhance your content and break up text. Video content and short-form video blogs (think YouTube Shorts, Reels) can be repurposed from your longer blog posts to reach audiences who prefer visual learning. This multiplies the value of your blog investment.

Community building - encourage comments, discussions, and social media shares to foster engagement. Note: You will need to plan for comment moderation challenges. Spam and bot comments are common, so set up filters and monitoring systems to maintain comment quality and authenticity.

Lead Generation and Conversions

Using these elements in your blogs will have turn your blogs into lead generators not just articles:

- **Offer valuable gated content** (Ebooks, whitepapers, or webinars) in exchange for email addresses.
- **Calls to action:** Clearly tell readers what you want them to do after reading - subscribe, contact you, or visit your website.
- **Integrate with landing pages:** Link your blog posts to relevant landing pages for specific products or services.
- **Run contests and giveaways:** Generate excitement and collect leads through engaging campaigns.

Making the most of your blog

Working smarter not harder is our motto, so if blogging is your chosen channel, here are some useful tips:

- **Guest blogging:** Reach new audiences by contributing to other relevant blogs in your industry. (See more in the Advertorials section, page 56.)
- **Podcast integration:** Expand your reach by embedding podcast episodes or creating blog posts based on them. (More in the Podcasts section, page 106.)
- **Repurpose content:** Turn your blog posts into social media content, infographics, or email newsletters. You can also utilise content created by others - called content syndication - and it's perfectly fine to use other people's content as long as it's fully credited with a hyperlink. Most content creators are happy for their content to spread as it helps build their audience. Obviously, this only applies to content already in the public domain. It's not okay to republish sections of this guide publicly without asking our permission. But whatever we post on our blog and other public channels, please go ahead and use it with appropriate acknowledgment, preferably a hyperlink to our website or socials.
- **Refresh old content for SEO:** Periodically revisit and update your older blog posts with new information, data, and insights. Search engines reward fresh, updated content, and this is a quick win for SEO without creating from scratch.
- **Monetisation beyond ads:** While Google AdSense and display advertising are options, explore sponsorships with relevant brands, affiliate partnerships, selling digital products (courses, templates), or premium content subscriptions. These often generate higher revenue per reader than traditional ads. (More on this in the Affiliate Marketing section, page 60)
- **Collaborate with influencers:** Partner with industry experts to create unique and valuable content. (More detail in the Influencer Marketing and Affiliate Marketing sections, pages 67 and 60.)

Remember: Building a successful blog takes time and effort. Be consistent, focus on quality, and provide genuine value to your audience. AI has drastically simplified blog writing, but don't forget the very important element of all content marketing - authenticity. Your unique voice and perspective are your competitive advantage. This is an effective strategy but it is time consuming with a long lead time, so may not be the right pick as far as lowest-hanging fruit goes.

Case Studies

1. B2B Wholesale Knives Business - Blog Content Strategy

I had a client specializing in wholesale distribution of knives to retailers. They didn't sell directly to consumers, but distributed high profile international brands. Their marketing goal was to support wholesale customers by increasing brand awareness in Australia. We created a stand-alone blog (no visible links to the wholesale business) publishing general interest articles like "Best bread knives," "Best knives for kids," "Christmas gift ideas" - featuring their brands with key search terms. Call to action: contact for nearest stockist. And it worked! We attracted consumers and sent them to local retailers. A win for all. This business also used blogs to create a product knowledge centre on their wholesale website for retailers to train staff - creating value and inspiring continuous engagement.

The Lesson: B2B businesses can use content to support retail partners by building consumer demand for their brands. Blogging works when it provides genuine value first and mentions your products naturally. Supporting your downstream customers with marketing assets creates a win-win ecosystem.

2. Income from Content Traffic
I know someone who created a topical (general interest) website with highly click-baity content - titles that attract clicks. This drove huge traffic to the site and made them money from ads and affiliate products. They're living on a Thailand beach, working a few hours per day, making $500,000 per year off advertising with articles like "10 ways to know you're in love." As easy as it seems, with all due respect, it requires time, knowledge and wit. The point: your blog could be your main income or even your business.

The Lesson: Blogging for pure ad revenue requires massive scale and is becoming increasingly difficult as user expectations for quality rise. If blogging is your marketing strategy, focus on building an audience and trust for your actual products or services rather than relying on ad revenue from third parties.

3. Strategy to Impact - Blogging Future Plans For Strategy to Impact, blogging is definitely on our channel list someday. Right now it's not the lowest-hanging fruit - we'd rather write niche guides than create free content that may not convert. The great thing: we can leverage AI tools to turn our guides and webinar content into blog posts.

The Lesson: Repurposing existing content into blog posts is efficient. Rather than creating blog content from scratch, leverage content you have already invested in creating. This extends its lifespan and reaches audiences who prefer written content over video or presentations.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What do I want my blog to achieve: attract potential customers, demonstrate expertise, support existing customers or generate enquiries?
- What questions do my customers frequently ask? Which topics would help them solve a problem or make a decision?
- What experience, examples or insights can I share that would make my content distinctive and useful?
- Do I have the skills, time and budget to create quality posts consistently, or will I need help?
- How could I use AI to support content creation while maintaining accuracy, my own voice and original insights?
- How will people discover my posts through search, email, social media or other channels?
- What would I like readers to do next, and how will I make that step easy and relevant?
- How will I balance creating new posts with keeping existing content accurate and useful?
- Could I repurpose blog content for emails, social posts or customer resources to get more value from the work?
- How will I measure whether my blog is attracting the right readers and contributing to my business goals?

7. Advertorials

Advertorials are essentially editorial articles written in third person about your business that read more like journalist-written informative insights rather than standard ads. They can be paid or free. Traditionally PR agencies engage the media for editorial coverage.

In short, advertorials are a hybrid of advertisement and editorial content, and can be a potent marketing tool for businesses - much more effective for SMBs than typical ads that often go ignored by readers. Especially if you need to educate your customers about your brand or product. By blending storytelling with subtle promotion, you create more value for your target audience and your brand is more likely to be remembered. Most accessible third-party publications/blogs are online, though physical publications are also an option - think free local newspapers, gig guides or industry magazines. Most publications will have guidelines on submitting guest and sponsored content.

Some publications rely on advertorial fees to survive and will rarely publish any content free of charge. Other publications rely on website traffic and on-page advertising, which requires continuous new content, so they're more likely to offer free posts in exchange for topical articles relevant to their readers. These need to come across as general interest, education, or opinion pieces rather than brand plugs. In these cases your brand may be barely mentioned, other than an acknowledgement backlink to your website - which is great for SEO.

A business can leverage publications obviously relevant to their business and primary target audience. However, you may also be able to adapt your articles to suit an audience that is not your primary audience (see case study).

How Businesses Can Effectively Utilise Advertorials

Building Brand Advocacy

- **Credibility Boost:** Partnering with reputable publications adds a layer of trust and authority to your message. This is relevant for the publication's audience and you can leverage being featured as a credibility boost to your prospects. Think about all the times you've seen products mention "As seen in" - it gives a sense of social proof. Most people don't question whether you paid for it; the feature claim alone is sufficient for marketing.
- **Expertise Demonstration:** Share your knowledge and insights in a valuable and informative way, positioning yourself as an industry leader.
- **Targeted Reach:** Utilise publications relevant to your audience's interests, ensuring your message resonates with the right people.
- **SEO Advantage:** External backlinks to your website are valued by search engines. If you and your competitor have similar websites and content, search engines rank higher the website with the most backlinks - especially high-profile referring websites. This long-term SEO benefit is often underestimated in advertorial ROI.

Driving Engagement and Lead Generation

- **Compelling Storytelling:** Craft narratives that capture attention, connect with emotions, and motivate action.
- **Problem-Solution Focus:** Address challenges your target audience faces and highlight how your product or service offers the solution.
- **Calls to Action:** Include clear and enticing prompts to encourage website visits, product trials, or lead capture.

Key Strategies for Advertorial Success

- **Choose the Right Publisher:** Align with publications your target audience reads and trusts. Be clear on the language and style they use so you can align your content precisely with their editorial voice. Tone alignment is critical - advertorials that sound out of place with the publication's voice will underperform.
- **Focus on Value:** Create informative and engaging content that benefits readers, not just promotes your brand. The best advertorials solve a problem or teach something valuable first, with your brand as the secondary benefit.
- **Transparency is Key:** Clearly disclose the sponsored nature of the advertorial. FTC and ASA guidelines require prominent disclosure (e.g., "Sponsored Content" or "Paid Partnership"). Authentic disclosure actually builds trust rather than diminishing it, especially with younger audiences.
- **Data-driven Approach:** Track metrics like website traffic, lead generation, and conversions to assess effectiveness. Note: Determining leads from the article (attribution) can be tricky with advertorials since readers may not click through immediately. There are a number of tools using various methods to help with tracking. Consider longer attribution windows since advertorials often build brand awareness over time.
- **Multiple Formats:** Explore text, video, interactive content, and multimedia elements to keep things fresh. Video advertorials and embedded content perform particularly well on modern platforms.

Opportunities Beyond the Basics

- **Niche Publications:** Consider smaller, targeted publications for laser-focused audience reach. Micro-publications often have highly engaged audiences and lower competition for advertorial space.
- **LinkedIn Advertorials:** For B2B businesses, LinkedIn is a powerful platform for thought leadership articles and sponsored posts. This ties in social media with blogging. LinkedIn's native article feature allows long-form content that performs well with professional audiences.
- **Podcast Sponsorships:** Host-read podcast sponsorships are a form of audio advertorial. They work exceptionally well because of the intimate, trusted relationship between podcasters and their audiences. The host's authentic endorsement carries significant weight.
- **Native Advertising:** Utilise platforms designed for seamless integration of sponsored content (like Outbrain, Taboola, or platform-native options).

- **Micro-Influencer Collaborations:** Partner with micro-influencers (10K-100K followers) rather than macro-influencers. They often deliver better engagement rates, more authentic endorsements, and cost significantly less. Their audiences tend to be more niche and loyal. (See the Influencer Marketing section, page 67, for more detail.)
- **User-Generated Content in Advertorials**: Incorporate customer testimonials, case studies, or user stories into advertorials. This adds authenticity and proof of concept that resonates more than brand-only messaging.
- **Repurpose and Amplify:** Leverage advertorial content across other marketing channels for maximum impact. You can reword a blog post from your website to create original content that aligns with the publisher's style. Then repurpose that published advertorial into social media content, email, or your own blog.

Case Studies

1. Essential Oils and Pregnancy Article

I have a client who sells essential oils. We considered what advertorial opportunities are relevant for these product categories. We identified that peppermint oil is one of the recommended remedies to help alleviate morning sickness in pregnancy, which provided the perfect indirect promotional opportunity, by writing an article on *"5 ways to alleviate morning sickness"* with their essential oil being one of the ways, and submit it to a popular baby and motherhood publication with a direct link to your product. The publication may be happy to publish for free in exchange for affiliate commissions (see the Affiliate Marketing section, page 60). This approach works because the article genuinely solves a problem for the audience first and foremost.

The Lesson: Advertorials work when the content genuinely solves a problem first and your product is a natural fit within that solution. Publications are more likely to accept content that serves their readers. Start with reader value, not product promotion, and the affiliate opportunity becomes credible rather than transparent advertising.

2. Fashion Journal - Publication Options

Fashion Journal is an iconic fashion publication traditionally distributed via free magazine in fashion boutiques. Market conditions during Covid forced it to focus on being an online publication, but it recently returned to print. All of their content is paid advertorials written in a way that makes you feel their journalist discovered a little gem - which comes across as authentic to readers happy to consume this content to discover new brands. This type of content is far more interesting to readers than a typical half-page ad.

The lesson: invest in quality advertorial production that feels native to the publication. Publishing outlets are evolving beyond traditional advertorial models. Modern publications have multiple integration opportunities. Understand a publication's digital reach, influencer partnerships, and audience before pitching. Different publications work for different products.

Example: Fashion Journal Advertorial vs Fashion Journal Ad

You can see clearly here that the Advertorial appears to be an article for those who are interested in learning about new brands and their methods. The Ad is clearly an Ad. If the mentioned label published an Ad like this it could be easily ignored along with all the other advertising we see.



FASHION JOURNAL

FASHION 23.02.2024

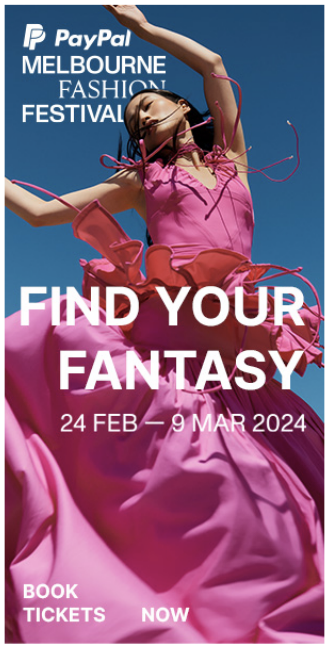
Melbourne-based label With Consideration is fusing mindful production with simple yet sexy designs

WORDS BY ELLY SHINKFIELD

"Before you see the end garment, it takes 100 revisions before I'm happy with the fit and pattern and my approach to design will always be this way."

Growing up surrounded by fabric and sewing machines, it's not surprising that Melbourne-based designer Jasmine discovered a passion for textiles and fashion design early on. Her family owned an interior design company and during her school holidays she would spend her time "immersed in the behind-the-scenes of different forms of design and product development".

This instilled a strong entrepreneurial spirit in her, and with the support and encouragement of her family, her slow fashion label With Consideration was born. The label is committed to a more mindful approach to fashion (hence its name) and makes each item in Melbourne. Working with local manufacturers has always been a priority for Jasmine, and she's worked hard to cultivate these relationships.



3. Strategy to Impact - Advertorial Plans For Strategy to Impact, advertorials are definitely something we will pursue in combination with our affiliate marketing channels. Publications like Inside Small Business (www.insidesmallbusiness.com.au) are perfect for reaching our target audience of small business owners.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Which publications do my customers read? Which offer advertorial opportunities that suit my business and audience?
- Are there niche or specialist publications that could offer a better audience fit and value than major publications?
- What story or useful insight can I offer that will interest the publication's readers? What action would I like them to take after reading?
- Can I create the content in-house, or do I need help? Do I have the writing skills or budget for a copywriter?
- What is the maximum amount I am prepared to spend on an advertorial? Could that budget achieve better results through another channel?
- What does the placement fee include: content creation, website placement, newsletter or social promotion, and performance reporting? How long will the advertorial remain available?
- How will I measure success? Is my priority brand awareness, website traffic, qualified enquiries or sales, and what results would justify the investment?

8. Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing can help you tap into the customer base of another organisation, or become another revenue stream for your business if you can leverage your client base to promote the products of other businesses. Fundamentally it's an advertising model where a business rewards individuals or entities (affiliates) for generating traffic or sales through their marketing efforts. Think of it as a commission-based partnership where you promote another company's products or services, and earn a commission for each sale or action generated through your unique affiliate link. Influencer marketing taps into this format, but more on that in the Influencer Marketing section (page 67).

If you have an audience you could market affiliate products that align with your values and target audience. Alternatively you can seek a partner with a like-minded customer base and have them market your brand and product.

Affiliate Methods

- **Affiliate links or codes** - Where a link to a product or service, or a specific discount code, is provided as part of a promotional effort of the affiliate. Any sales resulting from the use of this link will be tracked and a commission is payable. There are software applications that can generate and track the links for you and create reports for your affiliates, or you can simply create a discount code for your customers, and run reports to see how many orders were made using that code.
- **Affiliate apps and marketplaces** - There are affiliate apps for some industries, where the business joins a network of vendors, and the app has users that then can see that your business is part of that network, and perhaps can leverage discounts offered to this network. For example - LivenPay is an app for restaurants and cafes, consumers get discounts at participating businesses and also get points every time they use the app, which accumulates to a free meal. Other familiar apps like UberEats, MenuLog, TikTok Shop, and even Amazon are affiliate services. They list businesses and products that they do not own and just promote, in return for a percentage of the sale. Participation in these platforms can reduce your profits, but it effectively exposes your business to a large and loyal customer base that rarely seeks businesses outside these apps.

Examples of Affiliates

Many of these overlap with some of the other channels we explore in this guide. The main point is that Affiliate Marketing usually refers to commission generating partnerships, and not just advertising.

- Bloggers review products, write tutorials, or create content mentioning the affiliate product or service with their unique link.
- YouTubers showcase products, integrate them into their videos, and include affiliate links in the description.
- Social media influencers promote products organically within their content, using affiliate links in their posts or bios.
- Coupon websites offer deals and discounts on affiliate products, earning commissions on sales generated.

- Email marketing specialists promote affiliate products through targeted email campaigns to their subscribers.
- Advertorials promote products via articles in publications, usually appearing as a general interest article and not just an advertisement. Affiliate commissions can be used to leverage and negotiate any paid advertorial opportunities.
- Like-minded businesses promote complementary businesses to the customer base in return for a commission. You may have received an order from a supplier which included marketing material for another brand for example.
- Affiliate apps and marketplaces that have customers who are often loyal to these kinds of apps, so if you are not on there, you are basically invisible to them.

Affiliate Approaches

1. Relationship Based

- **Unattached Affiliate Marketing:** This involves promoting products you have no personal connection to, often through paid advertising (PPC) campaigns. It requires less effort to set up but can lack trust and authenticity.
- **Related Affiliate Marketing:** Here, you promote products or services relevant to your niche or audience. You might have some experience with them but may not personally endorse them. This balances effort with trust, targeting a specific audience.
- **Involved Affiliate Marketing:** This focuses on promoting products you genuinely use and believe in. You actively recommend them to your audience, often based on personal experience. This requires deeper product knowledge but builds trust and strong conversions.

2. Promotion Based

- **Content Marketing:** Creating blog posts, articles, or videos reviewing or showcasing products.
- **Social Media Marketing:** Sharing affiliate links on your social media platforms or collaborating with influencers.
- **Email Marketing:** Promoting products through email newsletters to your existing audience.
- **Paid Advertising:** Running ads on search engines, social media platforms, or other websites.
- **Coupon and Deal Sites:** Partnering with sites offering discounts and coupons for your affiliate products.

3. Based on Commission Structure

- **Pay-Per-Click (PPC):** Earn a commission for every click generated on your affiliate link.
- **Pay-Per-Lead (PPL)**: Earn a commission when someone signs up or completes a specific action on the merchant's website.
- **Pay-Per-Sale (PPS)**: Earn a commission for each sale generated through your affiliate link.
- **Revenue Sharing:** Earn a percentage of the total revenue generated by customers you refer.

Important Considerations for Affiliate Marketing

- **Privacy and tracking** - Third-party cookies are being phased out, affecting traditional affiliate tracking. Prioritise platforms and partners using first-party data and privacy-compliant tracking methods. AI-powered attribution models are becoming standard for accurate conversion tracking without cookies.
- **Disclosure and compliance** - FTC guidelines (US) and AANA Code of Ethics (Australia) require clear disclosure of affiliate relationships. Always use #ad or #affiliate hashtags on social media. Failure to disclose is increasingly monitored and can damage trust and credibility.
- **Emerging platform opportunities** - New affiliate opportunities exist on TikTok Shop, Pinterest Shop, and other creator-focused platforms. These platforms have high engagement rates and are ideal for micro-influencers and content creators.

**See the Toolbox for Affiliate Marketing tools and platforms*

Case Studies

1. Misaligned Partnership A jewelery brand I follow recently ran a promotion offering a free boutique skincare product with purchase, supported by an email campaign that included a discount code for the skincare. Though a clever marketing tactic, the pairing of skincare with jewelry seemed a bit mismatched, highlighting the critical need for clear alignment. Your affiliate partners must have genuine value for your audience, not just visibility to any customer base.

The Lesson: Partner misalignment is obvious to customers and undermines trust. Your affiliate partners must appeal to the same audience and enhance your brand perception. Lazy or convenience-driven partnerships damage credibility more than no partnership at all.

2. Enterprise Affiliate Opportunity
A friend of mine works at a fashion retailer, and she told me that they recently connected with the Qantas Airline Marketplace platform, where Qantas members receive discounts from partner retailers as well as earn frequent flyer points, enabling this retailer to reach the airline's customer base of 15 million members. The costs involved were said to be quite high, but it is a tactic worth considering if you have a marketing budget. Large affiliate networks can unlock massive audience reach.

The Lesson: Affiliate programs work at scale when there is clear alignment, attractive commissions, and easy execution for partners. Fashion (visual, shareable, aspirational) lends itself to affiliate success. Success requires investment in partner enablement, not just commission rates.

3. Strategy to Impact - Affiliate Marketing Strategy
For us, affiliate marketing is one of the lowest-hanging fruits for our business. Digital products are well suited to affiliate marketing, and we have a number of industry contacts where promoting a product like this is aligned with their audience and objectives, thus creating passive income potential. We are also looking at connecting with our preferred tools and educators with the intention to set up affiliate partnerships with them. If you intend to promote someone else's product in any way to your audience and anticipate sales, an affiliate relationship is a logical choice.

The Lesson: Affiliate marketing becomes lowest-hanging fruit when you already have strong content, trusted relationships, and clearly differentiated products. It is a channel that rewards alignment and consistency rather than heavy promotion.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- How could affiliate marketing support my business? Could I earn commission by recommending other products, recruit partners to promote my own, or do both?
- What do I want to achieve: additional income, new customers or increased sales? How will I measure whether the effort is worthwhile?
- Which businesses, creators, publishers or communities reach an audience that overlaps with mine? Are there less obvious partnerships worth exploring?
- Does the product or partner fit my audience's needs and my brand's values? Would I feel confident recommending the product based on its quality and customer experience?
- Where would affiliate recommendations be useful to customers: blog posts, newsletters, product guides or other channels? How can I make them helpful and relevant?
- If partners promote my products, what commission can I offer while maintaining a worthwhile profit? Have I allowed for discounts, returns, platform fees and management costs?
- If I promote another business's products, are the likely earnings worth the time and resources involved? What do its commission rates, payment terms and exclusions mean for me?
- Would a commission-only arrangement appeal to the partners I want, or would they expect an upfront fee as well? What makes my offer attractive to them?
- Should I manage partnerships directly or use an affiliate network or platform? What support, costs and control would each option involve?
- How will referrals and sales be tracked? What happens if a customer buys later, uses another promotional link or returns their purchase?
- What terms should we agree on, including payment timing, permitted promotional methods, disclosure of the affiliate relationship and ending the partnership?
- What content, product information or samples will partners need? Who will recruit, support and communicate with them?
- How will I check that partners represent my business accurately and that commissions relate to valid referrals?
- Are these partnerships bringing in valuable new business or mainly earning commission on purchases customers would have made anyway? When will I review, improve or end an arrangement?

9. Collaborative Marketing

This is slightly different to affiliate marketing, as no commissions are involved. This refers more to partnering with other brands to cross promote, and the win-win benefit of reaching each other's customer base. (Note: the word *collaborate or 'collab'* is often used by influencers when working with brands, but technically it is influencer marketing, and here we discuss collaboration in terms of working together with other businesses or partners for cross promotion purposes)

Collaboration Ideas

- **Sharing** images, video, and content as added value to your audience.
- **Collaborating on competitions** to increase the value of prize packs and attract a broader audience.
- **Website mentions** to create backlinks to each other's websites or specific products.
- **Collaborative photoshoots** and content creation.
- **Joint promotions** - for example, competition to win a package combining offers from both businesses.
- **Collective events** - both virtual and in-person.
- **Social media collaborations** - TikTok duets, Instagram Reels collaborations, YouTube Shorts featuring both creators.
- **Product development** - it is not unusual to see brands collaborate with influencers to create a range of products under the influencer's name. The influencer makes a commission on sales, which is likely to be a lot more than their posting fee. (This tactic is a combination of affiliate, collaborative and influencer marketing)
- **The possibilities are endless.**

Benefits of Collaborations

- **Reach a wider audience** - Tap into each other's existing customer bases, expanding your reach without additional marketing spend.
- **Increased brand awareness** - Leverage each brand's reputation and strengths to build greater brand recognition.
- **Enhanced credibility** - Partnering with a reputable brand can boost trust and confidence in your own offering.
- **Cost-effective marketing** - Share resources and expertise to create impactful campaigns without doubling efforts.
- **Innovation and creativity** - Combine diverse perspectives and ideas to develop unique and engaging marketing initiatives.

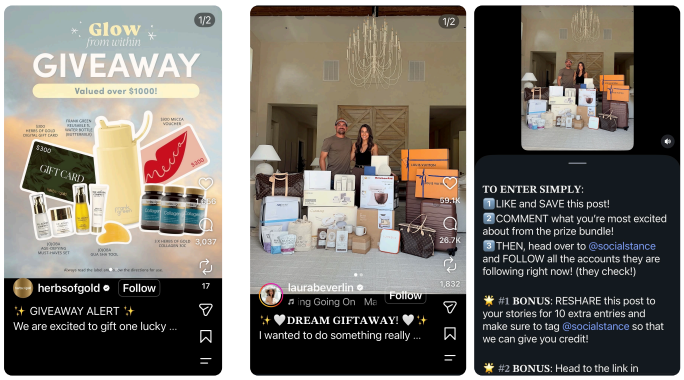
Approaching Potential Partners

1. **Identify targets** - Research brands with similar audiences, values, and complementary products or services.

2. **Understand their goals** - Different businesses have different goals. Some may want to just get quality content, others may want a broader audience, or communicate their brand values to their audience through specific brand partnerships. For example, a cruelty free brand may want to partner with PETA to show how committed they are to this cause.
3. **Develop a compelling proposal** - Outline the potential benefits, target audience, proposed activities, and expected outcomes. Highlight shared values and a win-win scenario.
4. **Start small and build trust** - Begin with a less complex collaboration to establish trust and understanding before scaling up.
5. **Clear communication and agreements** - Define roles, responsibilities, budget allocation, intellectual property rights, and success metrics in a formal agreement.

Important Considerations for Success Collaborations

- **Social media collaboration features** - Platforms now offer native tools for collaboration. TikTok duets and stitches, Instagram Reels collaborations, and YouTube Shorts allow creators to collaborate directly within the platform, making it easier to reach both audiences simultaneously. (This definitely boost your reel views)
- **Measurement and attribution** - Establish clear metrics before collaborating. Use tracked links, unique discount codes, or dedicated landing pages to track which collaborations drive results. This data helps justify future partnership investments.
- **Values-aligned partnerships** - Consumers increasingly expect brands to align with causes and values. Collaborations that authentically showcase shared values create stronger connections with audiences on both sides.



Examples of typical collaborations

Competitions are a common starting point for collaborative marketing. Several brands contribute to a prize pack and promote the giveaway to their audiences. Entry steps might include following the participating brands, commenting on the post or tagging a friend, with sharing encouraged to help spread the word. This introduces each brand to potential new followers and gives people a reason to engage. These examples show one approach to collaboration, but the possibilities extend as far as your creativity.

Case Studies

1. Large Brand Collaborations GoPro and Red Bull partnered on extreme sports events and content, reaching an adventurous audience. McDonald's partners with Monopoly, keeping the game current and creating value for their customers beyond the fast food. These collaborations work because both brands appeal to the same demographic and enhance each other's brand perception.

The Lesson: Successful collaborations multiply audience reach without duplicating effort. When partners share audience values and complement each other's brand, both benefit. Scale matters - large brands can absorb collaboration investment; smaller businesses need partnerships that create immediate mutual benefit.

2. Fashion Industry Example

For a number of years I ran an event promoting Australian designers at New York Fashion Week and LA Trade Week. I collaborated with an LA-based agency to produce the events, and then invited designers to collaborate and split the cost of the event. This created affordable opportunities for brand promotion in the US, visual content, and 'street cred' for the brands that could communicate their New York Fashion Week success to their customers.

The Lesson: Events create collaboration opportunities by gathering aligned businesses around shared values or audiences. Sustainable collaborations require ongoing investment and clear mutual benefit. Events as collaboration platforms work when all participants see real audience value, not just visibility

3. Strategy to Impact - Collaboration Plans Our collaboration strategy will be to partner with thought leaders and experts to create complementary products that create value for our customers. This positions us as part of a larger ecosystem of trusted resources.

The Lesson: Strategic collaborations multiply your reach without proportional effort increase. Partner selection matters - collaborators must enhance your credibility and reach the right audience. Start small with clear expectations and mutual value alignment before scaling partnership depth.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What other interests, needs or purchases complement what my business offers? Which businesses already serve those needs?
- Which potential partners have a relevant audience and values that align with my brand? Would I feel confident introducing them to my customers?
- What could we offer together that would be valuable to both audiences, such as a joint event, product bundle, useful resource or special offer?
- What do I want to achieve, and what does my potential partner want to achieve? How could the collaboration support both objectives?
- What can each business contribute, such as audience access, expertise, content, products or budget? Is the exchange worthwhile for both parties?
- How will we promote the collaboration? Who will be responsible for each activity, cost and deadline?
- What should we agree on before starting, including approval of shared content, use of each other's branding and responsibility for customer enquiries?
- If we collect customer details, how will we make it clear which business people are signing up to hear from and obtain their permission?
- How will we measure success against each partner's objectives? What results will we share with each other?
- Could we start with a small collaboration to test the fit? When will we decide whether to repeat, expand or end the partnership?

10. Influencer Marketing

Influencer, affiliate and collaborative marketing are related, with slight variations on technicalities.

Influencer marketing involves partnering (usually with up front fees) with individuals (influencers) who have a following, usually social media, but celebrities can also be influencers, and are considered experts or 'trusted' figures within their niche. It's basically 'celebrity endorsements' in the digital age, with micro influencers becoming mega stars on various social media platforms. Businesses leverage the influencer's credibility and reach to promote their products or services to the influencer's audience.

I do get a lot of questions from clients on how effective influencer marketing is, which is a complex question, but in short, I believe if your goal is sales, then this channel is not the lowest hanging fruit, because most businesses that I have spoken who tried it, few really see a significant increase in sales as a result of the partnership. However, if you see influencer collaborations as a great endorsement, especially if your audience values the opinion of that influencer then it is more like a PR exercise, which also creates content for you, that you can utilise for marketing and validation/credibility to your customers.

The Benefits of Influencer Marketing

- **Reach a targeted audience** - Tap into the influencer's engaged followers who are already interested in the niche.
- **Increased brand awareness and trust** - Leverage the influencer's established reputation and authenticity to build trust with their audience.
- **Enhanced brand image and engagement** - Influencers can create compelling content that resonates with their audience, fostering positive brand perception and engagement.
- **Cost-effective marketing** - Compared to traditional advertising, influencer marketing can be more cost-effective, reaching a targeted audience through trusted voices.
- **Diverse marketing options** - Collaborate on various content formats like reviews, tutorials, social media posts, or even product launches.

How to Utilise Influencers

1. **Define goals and target audience** - Align your campaign goals with the influencer's niche and audience demographics. Authenticity is key, choose influencers who genuinely align with your brand values and resonate with your target audience.
2. **Identify relevant influencers** - Research and select influencers who authentically represent your brand and resonate with your target audience. (There are tools to help with this)
3. **Develop a clear partnership** - Establish transparent communication, outline expectations, define campaign details, and agree on compensation.

4. **Provide creative freedom** - Allow influencers creative control to maintain authenticity and engagement with their audience. Transparency is crucial, disclose influencer partnerships clearly to maintain audience trust and comply with regulations.
5. **Track and measure results** - Monitor campaign performance using relevant metrics like brand mentions, engagement rates, and website traffic.
6. **Be ready to leverage** the influencer promotions with your own audience, and to capture any interest from the influencer's audience.

Influencer Costs and Engagement

Influencer pricing varies wildly depending on follower count, niche, and engagement rates. Micro-influencers (10K-100K followers) typically charge $500-5,000 per post, while mid-tier influencers (100K-1M) can charge $5,000-50,000 or more. Mega-influencers (1M+) can charge six figures. However, there is plenty of evidence that engagement often matters more than follower count. An influencer with 50K highly engaged followers often delivers better results than someone with 500K disengaged followers.

How to gauge real engagement vs bought followers:

- **Look at engagement rates** (likes, comments, shares as a percentage of followers). Anything above 3-5% is typically considered good. If someone has millions of followers but minimal engagement, that's a red flag.
- **Check comment quality.** Real engaged audiences leave thoughtful comments. Bought engagement shows generic comments like 'Nice!' or emojis.
- **Look at the audience demographics**. Does their audience match your target market?
- **Spot check.** Scroll through follower list and pick a couple of profiles to look at, if they are an account that follows thousands of accounts and only has a few followers and ambiguous profile with random posts, that's usually a fake account, and when they are purchased they appear in clusters, so if you find a number of accounts equally ambiguous that follow thousands of other profiles, it's a very good indicator that followers have been purchased. I'd also manually check their post engagement - scroll through recent posts and get a feel for the quality of interaction. Talk to other brands they've worked with. Real engagement can't be faked long-term, but it does take detective work to verify.
- **Use tools like SocialBlade** to check follower growth patterns. Sudden spikes indicate purchased followers. Steady, organic growth is more trustworthy. SocialBlade is a useful starting point for research, but it's one tool among many. The key is: cheaper doesn't always mean better value, and large follower counts don't guarantee results. Invest time in finding influencers with genuine, targeted audiences that align with your brand.

Case Studies

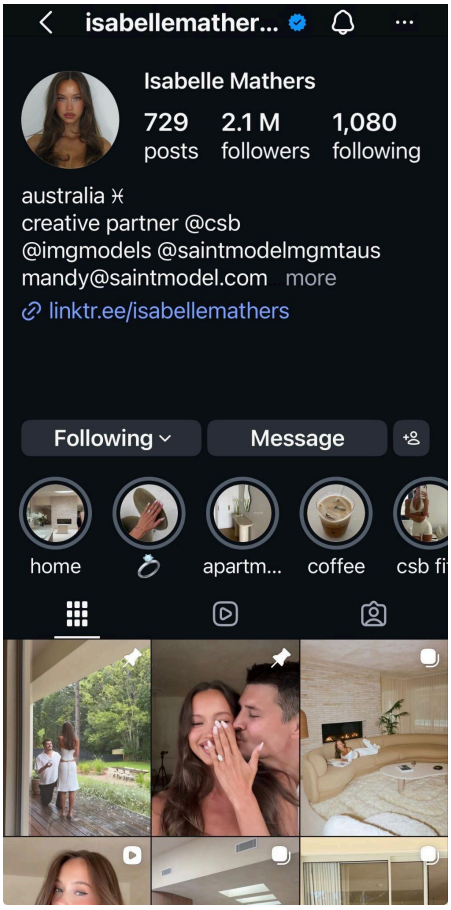
1. Large Brand Campaigns

Traditionally large brands have used famous celebrities in ad campaigns. The rise of influencers has enabled brands to be more accessible to diverse demographics, without incorporating them into their broad campaigns. Nike partnered with fitness influencers to showcase their new sportswear line through workout videos and testimonials. L'Oreal collaborated with beauty bloggers to review and promote their latest makeup products. GoPro teamed up with travel vloggers to capture stunning footage using their cameras in various destinations. Large brands have the budgets to leverage both Mega-influencers and Micro-influencers because they value the audience reach regardless of the size of the audience.

The Lesson: Influencer partnerships work when the influencer's audience genuinely matches your customer. Large brands use both mega and micro-influencers because audience size and niche fit serve different strategic purposes. Authenticity matters more than follower count - micro-influencers often deliver better ROI because their audiences trust them more.

2. Creator-Led Product Ranges

Popularity has an increasingly high price tag, so influencer partnerships can be expensive. However influencers know that their posts do sell products and may prefer to do a collaboration instead where they make a percentage of the sales. Model Isabelle Mathers, who is relatively unknown to the general public, has amassed a huge Instagram following, and now frequently collaborates with brands to create her own product ranges, that she models, launches, usually sells as pre-order, eliminating inventory risk. If you can create a product or a service that an influencer can put their name to, this strategy is definitely worth considering. She is currently the 'creative partner' for athletics brand CSB, which really aligns with her fitness persona.

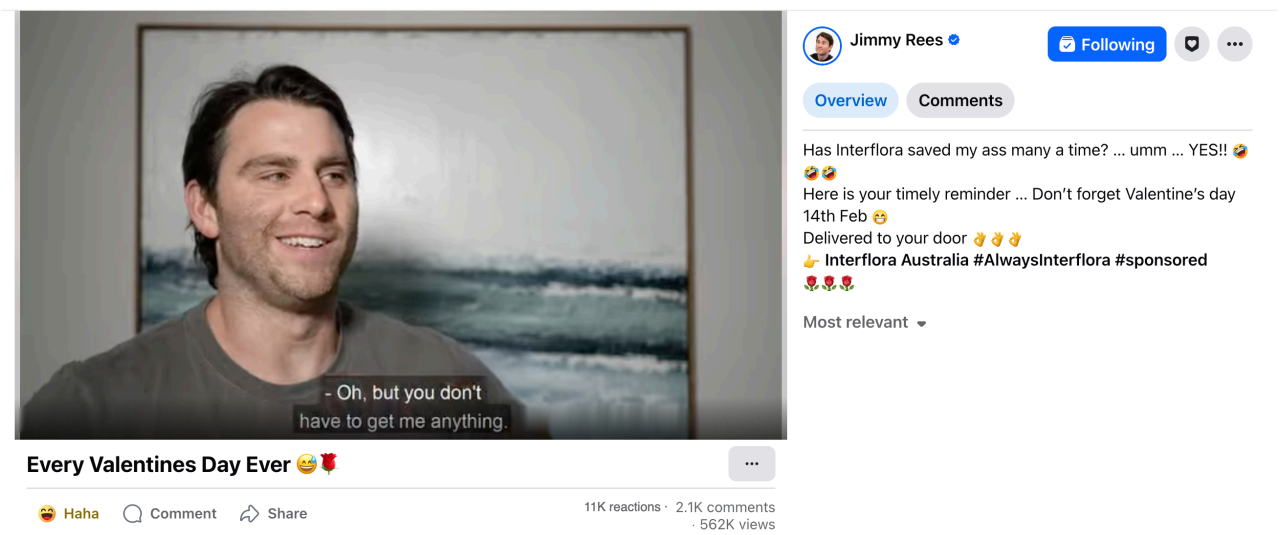


The Lesson: Working with successful creators is not cheap, and pricing increases with audience size and engagement. Start with micro-influencers or creators-to-watch rather than mega-influencers. Test partnership ROI on a smaller scale before scaling investment to proven performers.

3. Strategy to Impact - Influencer Strategy For Strategy to Impact, at this stage we will not be utilising direct Influencer marketing, but to some extent in a business education context some of our affiliate and collaborative partnerships could be with an industry influencer. But at this stage paying anyone to promote our product on a social media account like that does not seem like a priority.

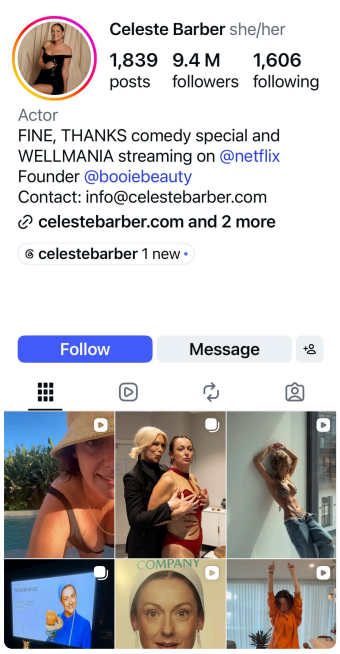
The Lesson: Influencer marketing requires budget and relationship building that might not be efficient at the early stage. As you build case studies and success stories, influencers become more interested in unpaid partnerships. Build your own authority first; influencer partnerships become easier once you have something worth amplifying.

More Examples



Jimmy Rees/Interflora Collab

This collaboration stayed with me because Jimmy Rees uses his signature humour to capture a familiar Valentine's Day dilemma: saying "don't get me anything" while secretly hoping for a gift. The joke naturally introduces Interflora as a last-minute solution. Although identified as a paid partnership, it feels like the comedy his audience already enjoys, making the promotion a natural part of the story. Watch the video here.





Celeste Barber

Celeste Barber shows why an influencer doesn't have to fit the typical mould. Her humorous recreations of celebrity and model poses built an audience drawn to her relatable approach. Partnerships with brands such as MCoBeauty followed, and she later co-founded BOOIE Beauty with Claire Greaves. Her story illustrates how a distinctive voice and a strong audience connection can create opportunities to promote other brands and build your own.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Which influencers are relevant to my business and target audience? Could an unexpected choice, such as a comedian, chef or industry expert, be a good fit?
- What am I trying to achieve? Am I looking to build awareness, grow my audience, generate sales or create content that builds trust in my product or service?
- Does the influencer's audience genuinely align with my target market? What evidence supports their audience profile and the quality of their engagement?
- Do their values, style and previous partnerships fit my brand? Would a recommendation of my product or service feel credible to their audience?
- What is my budget? Can I afford an upfront fee, or could I negotiate a commission or a combination of both? What other costs, such as products, shipping or content production, should I allow for?
- What could we create together that would be valuable to their audience? Am I comfortable giving them creative input so the content feels natural?
- What will we agree on before starting, including the content, timing, payment and how the partnership will be disclosed to their audience?
- Do I want to reuse their content on my own channels or in paid advertising? What permission and additional budget would I need?
- Would a one-off collaboration or an ongoing relationship better support my goals?
- How will I measure success? What results would justify the investment, and could I start with a smaller collaboration to test the fit?

11. Referral Marketing and Networking

Referral marketing is essentially word-of-mouth marketing, and it continues to be the number one trusted channel both online and offline. The challenge is figuring out how to harness the power of your happy clients sharing with their friends and contacts.

The million dollar question is how to incentivise referrals without making people feel like they're "selling" something. Commission-based incentives alone often don't work because most people won't refer friends and family for money - they don't want to be perceived as pushy or salesy, or in it for themselves.

When thinking about the effectiveness of referral marketing, just consider how many times you have shared a link of a product or service with a friend after having a conversation about a challenge they need a solution for, or something they complimented you on, or when you are a raving fan of a product and just want everyone to try it. Or if you have not shared, you may have received a referral from a friend, and trusted it enough to take immediate action without much research.

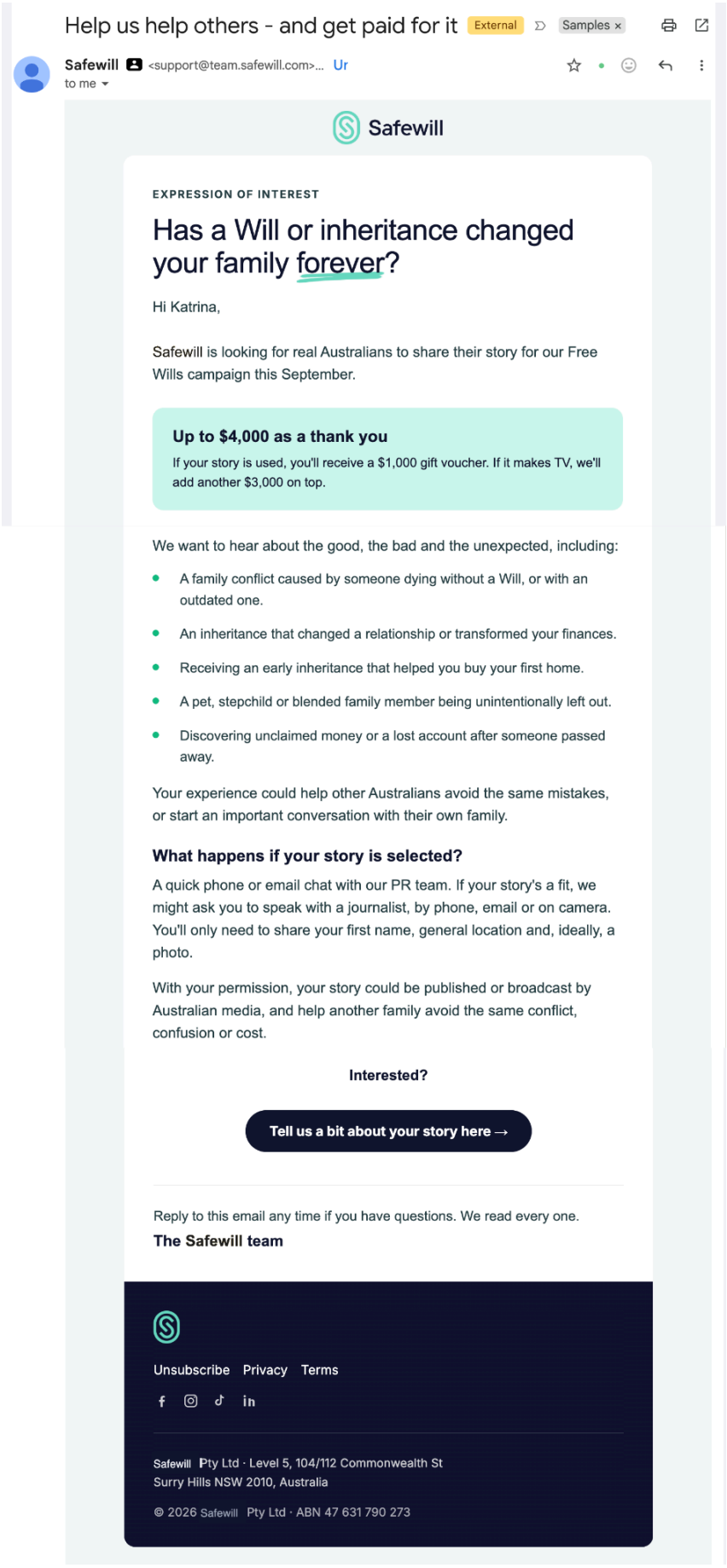
There is a theory called the '*20 | 60 | 20 rule*' (it may have a more academic name, but I could not find its name in this context). Basically what it means is that 20% of your target audience will never be your customer regardless of what you do. 60% are neutral and may be convinced with the right approach. The last 20% are your raving fans, they love your brand and don't need much convincing. The marketing theory here is that many marketers spend most of their energy trying to convince the 20-80% of the less-engaged audience to like and buy your product, which sometimes feels like a waste of time, especially when it's invested in the bottom 20% who will never buy. The recommendation here is that if you invest in the top 20%, your raving fans, you are most likely to succeed with your marketing. You either generate more sales from them, which aligns with the concept that it's much easier to convert your existing customers again than attract new customers, but this is also where referral marketing becomes a winning formula.

The Gift-Based Approach

A more effective strategy is to reframe referrals around giving rather than selling. Offer a gift, discount, or exclusive access that your customer can easily share with friends. People are psychologically more willing to refer to something valuable they genuinely enjoy and want their friends to try, rather than chase a commission.

The key is making it easy to forward. Set up your system so customers can share with minimal friction - a simple link, pre-written email, or social share button. The underlying commission or discount for the referrer can exist quietly in the background, but the emphasis should be on the value for the referred friend.

Here is a an example of a recent email I received from Safewill, with a clear gift/value based referral strategy in action -


Help us help others - and get paid for it
External
Samples ×
Safewill <support@team.safewill.com>... Ur
to me
Safewill
EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
Has a Will or inheritance changed your family forever?
Hi Katrina,
Safewill is looking for real Australians to share their story for our Free Wills campaign this September.
Up to $4,000 as a thank you
If your story is used, you'll receive a $1,000 gift voucher. If it makes TV, we'll add another $3,000 on top.
We want to hear about the good, the bad and the unexpected, including:
A family conflict caused by someone dying without a Will, or with an outdated one.
An inheritance that changed a relationship or transformed your finances.
Receiving an early inheritance that helped you buy your first home.
A pet, stepchild or blended family member being unintentionally left out.
Discovering unclaimed money or a lost account after someone passed away.
Your experience could help other Australians avoid the same mistakes, or start an important conversation with their own family.
What happens if your story is selected?
A quick phone or email chat with our PR team. If your story's a fit, we might ask you to speak with a journalist, by phone, email or on camera. You'll only need to share your first name, general location and, ideally, a photo.
With your permission, your story could be published or broadcast by Australian media, and help another family avoid the same conflict, confusion or cost.
Interested?
Tell us a bit about your story here →
Reply to this email any time if you have questions. We read every one.
The Safewill team
Unsubscribe Privacy Terms
Safewill Pty Ltd · Level 5, 104/112 Commonwealth St
Surry Hills NSW 2010, Australia
© 2026 Safewill Pty Ltd · ABN 47 631 790 273

The Reward-Based Approach

Tiered rewards encourage more referrals - first referral gets X benefit, three referrals gets Y benefit. Gamification elements like leaderboards or status badges appeal to certain audiences without requiring monetary incentives. For B2B, ambassador or advocate programs create ongoing partnerships rather than one-time referrals.

Timing matters too. Referral programs work best when customers are most satisfied - right after they've achieved a win or result with your service. Building referral functionality into loyalty programs makes it easier to monitor and manage.

Different Approaches by Industry

SaaS companies often use credit or account discounts. E-commerce brands use gift codes or exclusive products. Service-based businesses benefit from exclusive access or early product launches. Digital products lend themselves well to affiliate-style referrals where sharing is already expected.

The key is determining what motivates your specific audience and making it effortless for them to share. If they have to take your code and type up an email to their friends it's not going to work. The most effective tactic is to give them a template that they can simply copy and paste or even better, just forward to anyone they think is relevant.

I have seen instances where businesses contact complementary businesses and ask for referrals straight away, and that is unlikely to lead to success because people are not likely to refer to someone they don't know or have never experienced, even if there is a financial reward to do so. Most people will happily refer anyone that they have experienced positive results and value from. So when considering developing referral partner relationships, make sure you provide something of value first to your partner, and show them what you are capable of, before they are comfortable with opening doors for you.

Here are the main referral management tactics by industry:

General Tactics (All Industries)

- Pre-written templates for easy sharing
- One-click referral links
- Gamification (badges, leaderboards, status)
- Timing rewards (when customer achieves success)
- Non-monetary recognition
- Community/network directories

SaaS

- Account credit discounts
- Extended trial periods
- Premium feature access

- Tiered rewards (more referrals = more benefits)

E-Commerce

- Gift codes/discount codes
- Exclusive products
- Store credit
- Free shipping vouchers
- Loyalty points accumulation

Service-Based Businesses

- Exclusive access (early booking, priority service)
- Early product/service launches
- Discount on services
- Complementary service bundles
- Tiered rewards for multiple referrals

Digital Products

- Affiliate commission models
- Revenue sharing
- Extended licenses
- Bundle discounts
- Lifetime discounts

Professional Services (Legal, Accounting, Consulting)

- Personal networking relationships
- Complementary business partnerships
- Informal introductions
- Formal referral networks (BNI)
- Mutual referral agreements

Local/Service Businesses

- Discount codes
- Free trial/consultation
- Loyalty program integration
- Status/recognition (referrer leaderboards)
- Ambassador programs

Networking and Interest Groups

Networking is known as a powerful marketing tactic because of the leads and referrals it generates. Though traditionally done offline, of course there are online platforms that have been created to facilitate networking events that have made finding the right networking group easier than ever. For example, Meetup.com lists all the interest groups in your local area. You can market through networking groups simply through paid advertising promotions to their members, or by sponsoring or hosting an event, being a guest speaker if applicable, or indirect marketing just by attending events and networking.

Similarly, there are many online community interest groups. Facebook and Reddit are the leading platforms for interest groups. Some groups allow businesses to promote themselves on a specific day, for example.

Creating your own networking interest group is also an option, whether online or offline using the mentioned channels. This is a great way to either add value to existing clients, or keep in touch with prospects or former clients. Keep in mind that it does require effort to moderate online communities, and some just do not get traction despite your best efforts, which can influence an undesired culture amongst your clients if new customers see that the existing ones do not engage.

Referral Networks

Referral networks are communities built specifically around exchanging referrals. They range from formal membership organizations to casual online communities.

Types of Referral Networks

- Facebook community groups are one of the most accessible. Many industries have dedicated groups where professionals share leads and recommendations. These groups function like digital water coolers where you can build relationships and make warm introductions.
- In-person networking events remain powerful, even in digital-first marketing. Regular meetups, industry conferences, chamber of commerce meetings, and local business groups create face-to-face referral relationships that often convert better than online-only connections.
- Formal referral network organizations (like BNI - Business Network International) operate on structured formats where members commit to regular meetings and actively exchange referrals. Membership typically requires a fee, but the accountability and organized lead-sharing can work well for certain service-based businesses.

Many referral networks maintain directories where members can search and connect with other professionals. This creates warm lead opportunities - you're not cold-calling, you're reaching out to someone within your trusted network. These directories add value beyond just the referrals themselves.

The Advantage of Referral Networks

Unlike trying to build referral relationships from scratch, joining an existing network gives you immediate access to potential referral partners. The shared membership signals credibility, and the network structure makes it easier to stay connected and top-of-mind.

Case Studies

1. Conveyancer - Nurturing Referral Relationships I worked with a conveyancer who felt overwhelmed by all the marketing recommendations she was receiving. As a solo operator, she barely had time to do her actual work, let alone implement a comprehensive marketing strategy.

When we looked at where her leads were actually coming from, the answer was clear: most came from associated professionals like lawyers and real estate agents. Rather than chasing new marketing channels, we refocused her strategy on nurturing those existing referral relationships and potentially developing new ones through personal connections.

The beauty of this approach is that it's a natural win-win. She could refer her clients to complementary services (like financial advisors or legal specialists), and those professionals would refer back to her. With just a basic, up-to-date digital presence so referral partners could verify she was credible and professional, her strategy boiled down to one simple task: nurture her referral network.

This is a powerful reminder that for many service-based businesses, referral marketing isn't an add-on strategy - it's the primary strategy. The key is identifying where your best leads already come from, then doubling down on those relationships rather than spreading yourself thin across multiple channels.

The Lesson: The most effective referral sources are often already identified - you just need to look at where your best leads actually come from. Rather than spreading thin across multiple marketing channels, service-based businesses often see better ROI by doubling down on existing referral relationships and creating mutual value. A basic, credible digital presence supports this strategy by giving referral partners confidence to recommend you.

2. Video Production Specialist - Formal Networking Organisations
I had a contact who was a video production specialist considering joining Business Network International(BNI). The fees are quite high - around four thousand dollars a year - and she was wondering if it was a worthwhile investment. With my lowest-hanging-fruit hat on, I wondered if that four thousand dollars could be spent better somewhere else to attract business for her. She decided to join and give it a shot. She really found a great chapter that genuinely needed video production services. That investment opened so many doors and led to really lucrative video contracts. She's had nothing but success from it. From her perspective, that four thousand dollar investment was the best marketing she's ever spent.

That said, I've spoken to other members who find it time-consuming and not that relevant for them. It's not really leading to a return on their investment. So it just depends on your business format. Referral networks like BNI are definitely worth considering as part of your marketing mix, but only if you can genuinely leverage these kinds of connections for your particular product or service.

The Lesson: Formal networking organizations like BNI require significant investment (time and money) but can deliver excellent ROI if you find the right group that genuinely needs your services. Success depends heavily on fit - the wrong chapter wastes money; the right one opens doors. Before joining, research whether your target market participates in the organization and whether you can genuinely serve other members.

3. Strategy to Impact - Informal Network Building

For Strategy to Impact, leveraging referrals is an obvious part of our strategy. We want to expand our network with professional expertise and tap into their contacts for referrals. But referral marketing doesn't have to be formal or structured.

Another way to think about referrals is simply talking to people in your network about the challenges you're having or who you're looking for, and seeing if they can open some doors or connect you with someone. It's not necessarily about launching a formal referral program or joining a network organization - it's more about looking at who in your network could be the right contact to progress your business.

At this stage, we haven't asked our existing client base for referrals yet (except for extending invitations to our events), but eventually that would be part of our plan. For now, we're focused on engaging relevant stakeholders in our network who might be interested in participating in some of our initiatives. Building those relationships first, understanding their needs, and creating genuine value - that's where we're starting.

I personally do a lot of referrals and connections for my clients, and also refer students to job opportunities when they come up. I do it because I like to help, but always joke that if I had a $1 for every connection that I have made, I would not have to work again.

The Lesson: Referral marketing does not require formal programs or organizations. Informal network building - talking to your network, understanding their needs, making genuine connections - often creates the most authentic and sustainable referral relationships. Building relationships first and creating value before asking for referrals is the foundation. Formal referral programs can scale this later, but the relationships must come first.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Is networking and referral marketing relevant for my business?
- Do I have a database of happy clients who could participate in a referral program?
- Would incentives help encourage referrals? How could I create value for both the person referring and the new customer?
- When will I ask for referrals, and how will I make it easy for clients to introduce someone?
- What tools do I need to manage referrals and incentives?
- Do I have a network of contacts who could make relevant introductions? How could I support them in return?
- Are there relevant networking events I should attend?
- Are there online or in-person networking groups I could join?
- Would creating my own networking group be relevant and viable?
- How will I follow up with new contacts and referrals, and measure whether these efforts lead to new business?

12. Text Messaging / SMS Marketing

Unless you have lived off the grid without a mobile phone, then you know what text messaging is, and have received marketing via this channel.

SMS is exceptionally effective in some instances, and is a really bad idea in others. With near-instant open rates and high engagement, SMS marketing bypasses email clutter and connects directly with customers wherever they are.

I have love-hate feelings towards this channel. Most of the other channels are there when you are ready for them - emails, social, articles are all up to me to read when I want. Text messages intrude, and this channel is usually reserved for my friends and family (or 2-factor authentication on my banking apps). Texting has many similarities to email. Yes, you are reaching customers directly, but it is a lot harder to create value in one sentence, meaning that the messages often come across as a sales promotion, and I don't want to be interrupted by an ad.

Nothing has me unsubscribing faster than a text message notifying me that the Black Friday sale is on. However, I love it when my physiotherapist sends me a personal text saying that her usually booked-out reformer pilates class has a vacancy. Even though she is trying to fill this spot and make money, I see it as personal care and great customer service. And this is the example I always use when I ask my students if they like to receive text message marketing, to which the answer is always a resounding NO. Like I said there are niche segments that it works a treat for.

In the given example the text is one-on-one and targeted at one person, and it's not always viable to text each of your clients individually, so of course there are text messaging systems and software you can use, selecting the right one is important, because some of these tools more often than not takes the authenticity out of it. Many systems are available, usually pay per text. *(See the Toolbox for a list of the popular platforms.)*

In short, if you are a business that has a small but high value customer base, and are 'texters,' then this could be one of the best marketing channels for you.

Messaging Apps as Alternative Channels

While SMS remains powerful, messaging apps like WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook Messenger offer similar benefits with added features. These platforms often have higher engagement rates than traditional SMS and allow for richer content (images, videos, links). Many customers already use these apps daily, making them a natural communication channel. If your customer base is more tech-savvy or international, these apps may be more effective than traditional SMS. The key is understanding which messaging platform your customers prefer and meeting them there. There are automation systems and chatbots that can put your leads through a funnel with daily messages and customised responses. Like with any inbox, it's important to respect the customer's time and create value with every engagement.

Benefits of Text Marketing

- **Unmatched Open Rates:** Boasting open rates exceeding 98%, SMS messages land directly in consumers' hands, ensuring your message gets seen.
- **High Engagement:** With 90% of messages read within 3 minutes, SMS sparks immediate attention and drives action.
- **Personal Touch:** Direct communication fosters a closer relationship with your audience, building trust and loyalty.
- **Timely Updates:** Send instant alerts, appointment reminders, or flash sales, keeping customers informed and engaged.
- **Measurable Results:** Track metrics like open rates, click-throughs, and opt-out rates to refine your strategy for better results. (Applicable if you are using text messaging systems)

Getting Started with SMS Marketing

- **Build your opt-in list:** Encourage customers to sign up through website forms, in-store promotions, or social media campaigns. Or simply go through your phone and any past registrations where customers have left phone numbers.
- **Segment your audience:** Tailor your messages based on demographics, interests, or purchase history for personalisation. Same as email marketing, the more segmented your audience, the more value you can deliver for each segment by speaking their language and solving their specific problems.
- **Craft compelling content:** Keep messages concise, clear, and action-oriented, offering value or promoting relevant offers.
- **Respect consent and frequency:** Avoid spamming, provide clear unsubscribe options, and adhere to regulations.
- **Track and optimise:** Analyze results to understand what resonates and refine your campaigns for improved performance.
- **Offer customer service** via text messaging, and the leads that prefer that method are likely to make themselves known.

Examples



Here are a few examples of marketing SMS. Only so much you can say in one message. Note you always have to give the Opt out option too.
Do I like receiving marketing via text? - No.
Have I bought anything as a result of a text? - Yes.
If you are going to intrude with a text message, make sure the recipient gets some value out of it.

Remember: Text marketing is a privilege, not a right. Build trust, respect preferences, and provide genuine value to cultivate strong relationships with your customers through this powerful communication channel.

Case Studies

1. When SMS are Appreciated

Beauty salons often see success from text marketing. Phone number collection is easy, as it is often required to book an appointment. Reminder messages are appreciated, and the occasional 'here is 10% off for your next visit' doesn't irritate customers enough to take the action to unsubscribe. With that in mind, any appointment-based consumer business can cleverly leverage this channel.

The Lesson: SMS works for permission-based, frequency-limited messages to engaged customers. Appointment-based businesses have natural collection points for phone numbers. SMS succeeds when it is genuinely useful (reminders, updates) rather than always promotional.

2. Essential for some Industries

I have also seen a student of mine implement text messaging effectively in her father's Middle Eastern food wholesale and distribution business. When going through the process of understanding the business's customers, it was clear that most shopkeepers were not tech savvy and unlikely to visit websites or read emails from their suppliers. They also preferred personal relationships, and were text message users. Texting their clients was an effective way to let them know that something new has come in, or send an offer to increase sales during quieter moments. Similarly I had a client who provided labour hire to builders and landscapers and the most effective method was to confirm jobs via text messages.

The Lesson: In some instances there ONLY way to reach your customers and leads is via text messages whether you like it or not.

3. Daily Value

Another effective approach I saw by a relationship counselor who offered daily text messages with quotes to inspire people to live their best life. I thought that was quite clever because the messages were nice reminders in the morning, but also kept her at the forefront of her clients' minds. It's a good use of the channel that goes beyond typical sales promotions.

The drawback? She stopped the program after a few months (or at least took a break). While the messages provided genuine value and functioned as a lead magnet, the sustainability and return on investment became a question.

The difference here is that if you're using SMS for content marketing or relationship building rather than direct sales, you need to have a strategy for converting that engagement into revenue. You could offer a weekly call-to-action within the messages - perhaps "this week's insight is part of my paid program, click here to learn more" - or use the engagement to segment customers and later send targeted offers to the most engaged readers. The value-add messages build trust and keep you top-of-mind, but they need to eventually connect to your business goals, or the effort becomes unsustainable.

If you can think of a similar approach for your clients that provides genuine value through regular text messages while also generating sales opportunities, that would be a true win.

The Lesson: SMS can serve as an ongoing customer value delivery channel, not just promotions. When customers opt in for regular value-adds, SMS becomes a retention and engagement tool that deepens customer relationships beyond point of sale.

4. Strategy to Impact - Not a Texter

At this stage Strategy to Impact is not considering this channel for our marketing. We do not typically collect phone numbers from our clients, and though it wouldn't hurt to have that information, realistically would you like to receive a text about business strategy when you are in the middle of a busy day to remind you to purchase our amazing marketing guide because it's on special? I bet not. Though I have had some success with messaging some contact to check if they had received my email, which they had not, and they appreciated the follow up. So it's all about time and place and relevance and context.

The Lesson: SMS works best for transactional or appointment-based businesses with regular customer touchpoints. If your business model does not naturally collect phone numbers or have frequent customer communication needs, SMS may not justify early-stage effort. Revisit when your customer volume and touchpoint frequency increase.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What role could text messaging play in my marketing strategy? What would it offer my customers that email or social media does not?
- When would a text message be useful and welcome? Could I offer early access to sales, notifications about limited-edition stock, opportunities to pre-order popular items or birthday offers?
- Would my customers welcome text messages from my business? How could I ask about their preferences or test their interest before committing?
- How will I collect phone numbers and obtain permission to send marketing messages? How will I make it easy for people to opt out?
- Should different customers receive different messages? What information would help me make each message relevant?
- How often will I send messages, and at what times? How will I keep them useful without becoming intrusive?
- What action do I want recipients to take? Can I communicate the value and the next step clearly in a short message?
- Which text messaging system suits my needs and budget? Would a messaging app such as WhatsApp be a better fit for my customers?
- Can customers reply, and who will manage their questions or responses? Do I have the time and resources to manage this channel consistently?
- How will text messaging work alongside my other marketing channels without overwhelming customers or repeating the same message too often?
- What does success look like, and how will I measure it? Will the results justify the cost, and how will I use feedback and opt-outs to improve my approach?

13. Directory Listings & Review Platforms

Online directories offer a valuable platform for businesses to reach potential customers actively searching for specific products or services. Especially relevant when there are many choices, directories can help with segmenting. Being featured on a leading directory may also help you overcome some of your SEO limitations, and even help your SEO as an external backlink.

I am splitting directories off as a standalone channel here, though one can argue that DoorDash for example is a directory listing as well, with different food options via different businesses listed. However, anything more of a platform performing multiple tasks at once is best referred to as a third-party platform (covered in the Marketplaces: Third-party sales platforms and Dropshipping section, page 89), this can also overlap with affiliate marketing.

Obviously, Google Business Profile is a type of directory listing and is essential for most business, but especially location based businesses, and should have a Google Business Profile set-up and regularly updated (we covered GBP in the Organic SEO section, page 34)

I want to focus more on industry-specific directories, and general-purpose directories like Yellow Pages, as well as websites that serve as directories by amalgamating related products and services. For example, I recently was searching for kids' party venues, and there was a directory website that included a large variety of kids' activity businesses.

There are some free directories, but most will be paid, so it's important to understand if your target audience is likely to engage with this directory while searching for this type of product or service. For example, Capterra and TrustPilot are a respected directory and reviews websites for software. Whenever I am looking for software solutions, I usually check these out for their recommendations and reviews, and will rely on that more than Google results.

The Power of Review Platforms

Review platforms have become arguably a critical factor in purchasing decisions. Think about your own behaviour - when considering a new service or product, how much do you rely on reviews before making a decision? If a business isn't on a review platform you trust, or has poor reviews, how likely are you to use them?

This is especially true in certain industries. As mentioned for SaaS companies, platforms like Capterra, G2, and Trustpilot are essential. Potential customers expect to find software reviews there before making purchasing decisions. A SaaS tool without reviews on these platforms is immediately suspect. Similarly, for hotels and restaurants, TripAdvisor and Google Reviews are non-negotiable - customers absolutely will check these before booking.

For other industries, like a candle-making business, review platforms matter less, though having good reviews on Google and relevant craft marketplaces still helps with trust and credibility.

The maintenance burden is relatively low once you're set up. You maintain your listing information, respond to reviews promptly, and ensure negative feedback is handled professionally. A thoughtful response to a negative review can actually increase customer trust more than if no negative reviews existed at all. Sometimes 100% 5 star reviews seem in-authentic, so genuine reviews are great, even if

not perfect. Whatever you do, do not get defensive on a negative review, instead use it as an opportunity to show your brilliant commitment to customer satisfaction.

Benefits of Using Online Directories and Review Platforms

- **Improved search engine ranking:** Well-optimized listings can boost your website's ranking in search results.
- **Increased website traffic:** Drive qualified leads directly from a targeted audience actively searching for your offerings.
- **Enhanced brand awareness:** Expand your brand reach and build credibility through directory exposure.
- **Cost-effective marketing:** Free listings provide a budget-friendly marketing channel, with paid options offering additional features and reach.
- **Targeted marketing:** Reach potential customers actively seeking what you offer, increasing conversion potential.
- **Trust and credibility:** Reviews and ratings build social proof, with many customers trusting peer reviews as much as personal recommendations.

Directory Examples

Here are various directories to give you ideas of the kinds of directories you could search for that might be relevant for your business:

- **True Local** - segmenting business listings by locality
- **Yelp** - popular online directory allowing customers to review and rate businesses. Great way to build trust and credibility with potential customers.
- **TripAdvisor** - specifically for travel and hospitality businesses. Great way to reach travelers looking for hotels, restaurants, and attractions.
- **Houzz** - specifically for home improvement and design businesses. Great way to reach homeowners looking for contractors, designers, and products.
- **UpCity** - online marketplace connecting businesses with marketing agencies and service providers.
- **Capterra** - directory and reviews website for software. Essential for SaaS companies.
- **G2** - peer review platform for business software and services.
- **Trustpilot** - reviews platform for various industries and services.
- **The Good Shopping Guide** - resource for ethical shoppers, rating brands based on their social and environmental impact. Being listed here demonstrates your brand's commitment to ethical practices.
- **Made In A Free World** - organization fighting slavery and exploitation in global supply chains. Their directory lists companies committed to ethical labor practices.
- **What's On (in Melbourne)** - listing of all upcoming events in Melbourne.

- **Blog articles and curated lists** - such as theurbanlist.com/melbourne featuring Melbourne's best gift shops, creating directory-style content. Here is another example of a directory listing that overlaps into advertorials/affiliate marketing - Fashion Journals “selection” on *The best local jewellers for engagement rings in Australia and New Zealand* https://fashionjournal.com.au/fashion/local-jewellers-engagement-rings-australia/



FASHION JOURNAL

FASHION 22.07.2026

The best local jewellers for engagement rings in Australia and New Zealand

A Warning About Generic Directories

There are companies that create general directory listings and ring businesses charging them to be listed. Unfortunately, those general business directories offer little value to customers, and they are unlikely to use them to search for businesses, meaning that it is a waste of your budget. If it's specialist and niche, it will more likely attract searches from exactly the client base you are looking for. Focus on directories where your target audience actually searches, not ones that just chase listings.

Creating Your Own Directory

You can also create your own directory on your website if it creates value for your customers. If you cross-promote your affiliates, it can be done simply by creating a web or blog page listing your affiliates. This positions you as a curator and trusted source in your industry. There are also online directory software tools available.

If you think your industry is lacking a valuable directory, by creating one you are positioning yourself as the leader and the centre of the industry.

You can also do blog articles listing affiliates in a directory format.

Case Studies

1. Software Company - Selective Channel Strategy Backfires

I was exploring a software asset to help with lead generation that a friend of mine is involved with. I noticed their Google Business listing had terrible reviews - mainly from people annoyed about privacy violations and contact details being shared without consent. There were a lot of reviews, and they were pretty harsh. I was surprised the company wasn't doing anything about it.

When I asked my friend about it, she explained that their company's priority was other directory channels like Trustpilot, because that's where people review the actual software and service quality rather than their personal customer experience. It's fair strategic thinking - focus on platforms where your product shines. However, when I researched further, I couldn't find positive reviews on Trustpilot either, and the negative Google reviews did give me a concerning perspective on the organization's ethics and values around privacy. The company was essentially ignoring a reputational crisis.

The Lesson: It's important for businesses to reflect across all the channels where they're getting feedback, not just the ones they think matter most. Even if you prioritize certain directories, you can't completely ignore others - especially negative feedback that could harm your reputation and deter potential customers.

A better strategy would have been to prioritize Trustpilot but still monitor Google and address the privacy concerns head-on. A thoughtful response to those negative reviews explaining what they've done to address privacy issues could have actually improved trust rather than appearing to ignore customer concerns.

2. Kids Activities Platform - Building a Directory as Revenue Stream

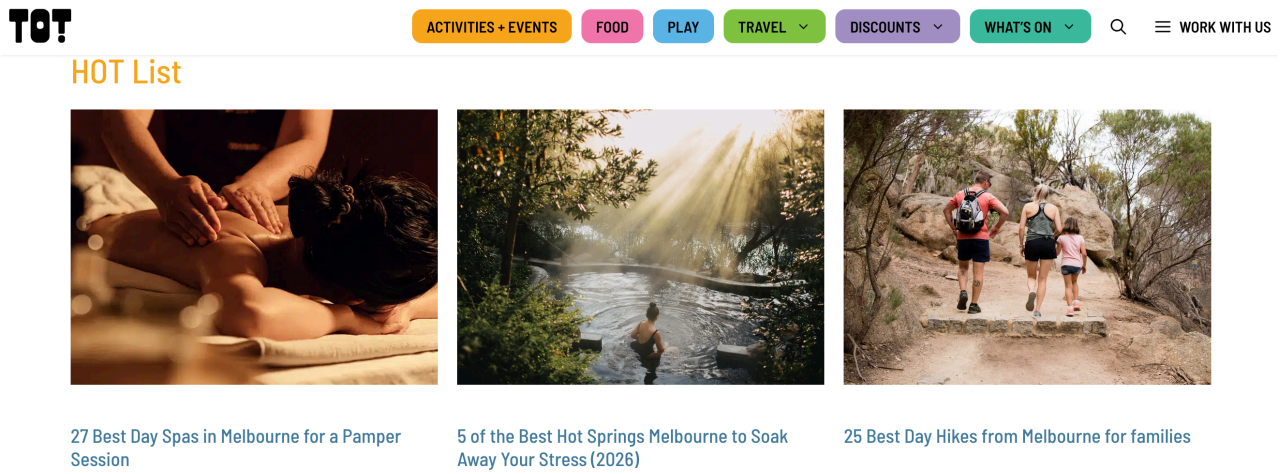
One of my clients runs a successful media platform that promotes kids activities around Melbourne. She was creating blog articles, comparisons, and guides about local kids activities - and had built a dedicated audience of parents with young children.

She realised that while she had all this content and audience engagement, she wasn't monetizing it through a directory listing feature. Parents were coming to her platform specifically to find kids activities, and businesses offering those activities would want to be visible there.

She developed a directory listing component where businesses could pay a small fee to be listed in her curated directory. This served multiple purposes:

- First, it created a direct revenue stream from businesses that wanted visibility with her audience.
- Second, it provided an alternative for businesses that didn't want to invest in advertorials or more expensive coverage options. A small directory listing fee was accessible to most small activity providers.
- Third, it created another engagement channel with businesses - some who hadn't considered advertising with her before now had an affordable option to participate.

The Lesson: If you have an engaged audience and they're actively searching for specific products or services, building your own directory can be a powerful revenue stream. You're solving a real problem for both sides - businesses get visibility, customers get curated recommendations - and you capture value from that marketplace dynamic.



These TOT examples show how a platform can combine directory listings with useful articles that help readers decide where to go and what to do. A roundup of Melbourne day spas or family-friendly hikes acts like a curated directory, bringing relevant options together around a particular interest or need.

For businesses, there may be opportunities for both independent editorial coverage and paid advertorials. These articles can introduce a business, highlight its appeal and include backlinks to its website, giving readers a direct path to find out more or book.

Backlinks also connect this approach with SEO. Relevant editorial links can support a website's search visibility, while links in paid advertorials should be identified as sponsored and should not be relied on to improve search rankings. Their value can still lie in reaching the right audience and attracting interested visitors.

This illustrates how directory listings, advertorials, content marketing and SEO can intersect. The opportunity is to identify publications your target customers already use and understand which types of coverage could help them discover your business.

3. Strategy to Impact Director Plans We have not identified any specific directories that would make sense for us to be listed in at this stage, we have plans to implement our own directory to promote partners and small businesses that we trust. This will serve as a value-add for our partners while also potentially generating income through directory listings.

However, we're conscious about one aspect: we're concerned about charging for space from people we don't know. Our priority is that Strategy to Impact is positioned as a trusted source. This means any businesses in our directory need to align with our values and meet our quality standards - not just be willing to pay a listing fee. This positions the directory as a curated recommendation rather than a "pay-to-play" listing service. It may limit revenue in the short term, but it protects our credibility long-term, which is our most valuable asset.

Lesson: Directory listing strategies should be in alignment with brand values.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Which directories and review platforms are relevant to my industry? Which does my target audience actually use?
- How do my customers use listings and reviews when choosing a business? Could being absent from an important platform affect their consideration of mine?
- Would a free listing meet my needs, or could a paid listing offer enough additional value to justify the cost?
- Are there relevant directories serving particular communities, languages or geographic regions that I should consider?
- Are my business details, links, images and service information accurate and consistent across my listings? Who will keep them updated?
- How will I encourage honest customer reviews, monitor feedback and respond to it?
- How will I track whether these listings generate relevant website visits, enquiries or sales? Which are worth the time and cost?

14. Marketplaces: *Third-party sales platforms and Dropshipping*

This channel refers to when a third party or marketplace sells to customers on your behalf, and processes the entire transaction and then pays you out, which is slightly different to commission-based affiliate links we have looked at, or directories.

You can say that this is more related to the *Place* element of your Marketing Mix, as it is more of a distribution channel than a marketing channel, as these platforms promote your product, not your brand. However, the reason why I include it in the marketing channels section of *Promotion* is because of the large pool of customers you can reach, and exposing your brand to new leads, right where they are doing their research.

How Marketplaces Work

The marketplace platform attracts its own customers, and lists your product for various searches, and the platform manages the customer service component. Occasionally you may be able to convert their customers to be your own direct customers, but reflecting on your behaviour, how often do you purchase something on Amazon, for example, and then continue to purchase directly from the supplier? I definitely never do, so it seems other than sales, there is limited value for building your own customer base.

Understanding Dropshipping

Dropshipping is a term used to describe instances where products are sold on a third party website, and you are notified that a sale has occurred and are required to ship the item to the customer. The retailer keeps a percentage and pays you the rest. Any communication with customers is handled by the retailer, not the supplier.

Though there is no inventory risk for dropshippers, there are many customer service risks. Suppliers may not update you that something is out of stock, and you only find out once you have confirmed the sale, meaning time wasted refunding. Or the supplier does not ship correctly, or anything else that can go wrong when you are relying on someone else to action your sales.

HardToFind.com.au is an example of a dropshipping website. Marketplaces like Amazon are a combination of inventory and dropshipping. And we are seeing more and more large retail brands incorporating the marketplace model to offer their customers a broader range that they do not have to stock - for example, supermarkets and department stores online.

Common Third-Party Platforms

The common third-party platforms include:

- Amazon
- eBay
- Etsy
- UberEats

- Airtasker
- ClassPass
- and many more

Facebook Marketplace is a variant, but it does allow you to handle your own transactions. Some multi-brand online retailers are dropshippers, as opposed to purchases of inventory that they warehouse and ship out, which is the more traditional form of retail. Generally dropshippers make a smaller margin, more like a marketing fee, than the full RRP margin.

The Margin Reality

These third-party platforms are notorious for eating into your margins, so ideally you want to build your direct sales pipeline. But the size of their customer base and associated volumes are a definite incentive for businesses. In many instances, either you are on that platform or you are nowhere. For example, for UberEats customers, restaurants not listed on the platform are as good as non-existent when it comes to takeaway food delivery. So if you want takeaway customers, you probably need to be on the platform.

Valuable Insights on Marketplaces:

- Some marketplaces are very selective, and choose to work with known brands, as they are actually hoping to capitalise on searches of the popular brands. Determine which marketplaces are relevant for your business and find out what is involved in working with them.
- Many of the leading Point of Sale (POS) systems and website builders now have the ability to integrate with the major marketplaces, meaning you only have to keep track of your inventory in one location. There are also third-party applications that can aggregate all your sales channels in one location. If you are a business that deals with a lot of inventory, it would be wise to ensure your systems support you doing this efficiently.

Here is a list of some of the leading Australian marketplaces:

General/Horizontal Marketplaces

- Amazon - Dominates with 60% of Australians purchasing
- eBay - 51% usage, declining (down from 58%)
- Gumtree - Classifieds and peer-to-peer
- Facebook Marketplace - Local peer-to-peer sales

Retail with Embedded Marketplaces

- Woolworths Marketplace - Groceries and general goods
- Bunnings Marketplace - Hardware, home improvement, outdoor
- Big W Marketplace - Fashion, homewares, electronics
- Kmart Marketplace - Fashion, homewares, toys
- Target Plus - Fashion and general merchandise

Fashion & Lifestyle

- THE ICONIC - Fashion, shoes, beauty
- Ozsale - Designer fashion and lifestyle brands
- Depop - Fashion and vintage clothing

Handmade & Vintage

- Etsy - Handmade, vintage, unique items. (Though the introduction of cheap chinese products by resellers has meant that Etsy is losing its reputation as a platform for artists and creatives)
- Vinted - Pre-owned fashion

Food Delivery

- Uber Eats - No. 1 food delivery app in Australia (major cities)
- DoorDash - Growing presence (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide)

Dining Loyalty & Payment Apps

- Liven (Eat, Pay & Earn) - Loyalty rewards app with 700,000+ users at 1,000+ restaurants, cafes, bars (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane). Earn 5-30% rewards per transaction.

Services & Tasks

- Airtasker - Task and service marketplace
- TaskRabbit - On-demand services (limited Australia availability)

Education & Online Course Marketplaces (Global)

- **Udemy** - 65M+ learners, instructors earn commissions. Largest audience but lower instructor control.
- **Coursera** - 191M+ learners, partnerships with Stanford, Google, Yale. University-backed credentials.
- **Skillshare** - 50M+ learners, project-based learning, best for creative topics (design, photography)

Loyalty Program Marketplaces

- Qantas Marketplace - 30,000+ products from 1,200+ brands, reach 15M+ Frequent Flyer members. Customers earn 3 Qantas Points per $1 spent.

Case Studies

1. COVID Crisis and Marketplace Pivot This example illustrates the power of leveraging marketplaces. The business was initially a B2B distributor of a premium storage container brand (similar to Tupperware) in Australia. When COVID hit and all the retailers shut their doors, the business went from a busy wholesale business to a $0 business basically overnight. Fortunately for the business, they stored their inventory with a third-party logistics provider that was able to pick and pack individual orders. Without having an email database of customers or any efficient

direct-to-consumer model, the owners quickly figured out that they could partner with the leading marketplaces that eagerly accepted the products because of their popularity. Within a month, the business had 5,000 orders directly from consumers. Crisis averted.

The Lesson: Having multiple distribution channels provides resilience. When one channel collapses (in this case, retail partnerships), marketplace platforms can quickly provide access to new customers and keep your business alive. This is a powerful argument for businesses to diversify their channels rather than relying on a single revenue stream.

2. Artist on Etsy - Building Independence Another client of mine, an artist, was making a livable income from selling her designs on Etsy. She appreciated Etsy for helping build her business but was getting frustrated with the forever increasing costs of listing with the platform. We had to work on developing strategies for the business to have its own eCommerce channels, and how to encourage customers to engage with the business directly instead of via Etsy. This is an example of utilising marketplaces as your only distribution channel to launch your business, which has many pros, but of course is limiting in the long term.

The Lesson: Marketplaces are excellent for launching and building a business quickly, but relying on them exclusively has significant limitations. Rising platform fees and lack of customer loyalty mean you eventually need to transition to direct-to-consumer channels. Use marketplaces to validate and grow your business, but invest in building your own customer relationships and sales channels for long-term sustainability.

3. Strategy to Impact Perspective on Marketplaces We sit more in the realm of affiliate marketing than marketplaces. However, we have looked at what is involved in selling our products on Amazon for example. There are also marketplaces for courses and education materials that should be considered at some point. It is definitely on the cards, however aligning to their criteria at this time will be limiting in what kind of products and services we can produce, so it is not our lowest hanging fruit.

The Lesson: Not every marketplace is right for every business. Before jumping on a platform, carefully evaluate whether their requirements and audience alignment make sense for your specific products or services. Sometimes it's better to focus on channels that don't constrain your offering, rather than squeezing your business model to fit a marketplace's criteria.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Is your product or service suitable for marketplace sales and dropshipping?
- Which channels are the most relevant? What do you need to do to work with them?
- Could you partner with another vendor to sell your products on your behalf through their marketplace listings?
- Are marketplaces viable as additional distribution channels for your business?
- Do you have the margins in your pricing that allow you to pay commissions without impacting the profit?
- Are marketplaces currently your only channel, and what are the risks and limitations associated with that?

15. Online Events

Online events represent a powerful marketing channel that transcends geographic limitations. Unlike physical events, online events allow you to reach a global audience from anywhere, and create opportunities for both direct engagement and scalable, repeatable content.

Types of Online Events

- Webinars are the most common form - live, interactive presentations where attendees can ask questions and engage in real-time. However, prerecorded evergreen webinars are equally valuable. These are recorded once and run continuously, allowing people to register and attend at times that suit them. This means you're not limited to a single time slot or timezone.
- Online launch events create buzz around new products or services. You can invite key influencers, media, and customers to a virtual event that feels exclusive and special, then repurpose the content afterward.
- Online award events or recognition ceremonies build community and celebrate achievements. These create shareable moments and position your brand as a thought leader in your industry.
- Product demonstrations and masterclasses allow you to showcase expertise and build authority. Live Q&A sessions create direct engagement with your audience and help answer common objections.

The benefits of marketing through Online Events

- **Lead generation is a primary benefit** - registrations capture attendee information. You're building a list of interested prospects who have already shown engagement.
- **Authority and thought leadership** position you as an expert in your field. When you host valuable content, you're implicitly positioning yourself as knowledgeable.
- **Community building** through networking events (even virtual ones) creates relationships and loyalty.
- **Content repurposing** means your event isn't just a one-time thing - you can extract clips, turn it into blog posts, social media content, or email sequences.
- **Sales opportunities** emerge naturally when you provide value. Attendees are warmed-up prospects.

Key Advantages Over Physical Events

- No geographic barriers - attend from anywhere.
- Lower production costs compared to in-person events.
- Scalability -> run the same event multiple times or continuously.
- Easier tracking and analytics - you can measure attendance, engagement, drop-off points.

Challenges to Consider

- Attention span - online attendees are more likely to multitask or drop off.
- Technical requirements - you need reliable platforms and backup plans.
- Engagement - creating interaction in a virtual environment requires intentional design.
- Attendee fatigue - 'Zoom fatigue' is real, so keep sessions focused and energetic. During Covid we discovered the value of attending online events - no travel time etc. Now the value proposition is less interesting, why attend an online lecture when you can watch a replay or find a Youtube video on a similar topic, and feedback from our event attendees that they have missed the personal contact of physical events, which are again gaining popularity.
- The effort of marketing online events is just as resource intensive, but the challenge with online events is people expect online events to be cheaper, and do not feel as compelled to attend if something else has come up. Meaning the audience is more difficult to entice and retain.
- Sponsorships are a great way to fund event costs, however with online delivery potential sponsors may not see the value, compared to an in-person event.
- If events make sense in the context of your business and industry, delivering them online has many benefits and can facilitate scale. Like with any event the effort and costs of producing the event, can sometimes outweigh the value it creates for your business. However if this value is measured in PR and customer engagement, and a time-sensitive call to action to your clients, it's definitely a channel that could be worth the effort.

Case Studies

1. Naturopath Infertility Specialist - Niche Education Success

One of my friends is a naturopath specializing in infertility and teaching other naturopaths about fertility naturopathy. For her business, online events have been remarkably successful - not just as a marketing channel, but as a core revenue and credibility-building strategy.

The results speak for themselves. Online events have enabled her to reach a significantly larger audience than would ever be possible with in-person workshops. Her geographic reach has expanded from local to national, and even international. Beyond reach, the online events are building credibility and a strong following within the naturopathy industry. She's positioning herself as a thought leader and go-to expert for fertility-focused practitioners.

The Lesson: Specialist and niche education is a natural fit for online events. When your audience is geographically dispersed practitioners or professionals seeking specialized knowledge, online delivery removes all barriers - travel time, location, cost of venue. It's a low-hanging fruit because your niche audience is actively seeking this type of education, and online delivery is often the only way to reach them. The added benefit is that each event builds your authority and credibility within that niche community, creating a compound effect where your reputation grows with each successful event.

2. Evergreen Webinars - Lead Generation at Scale

You've likely experienced this: you sign up for a webinar, select a time slot that suits you (often across different time zones), and join what feels like a live, interactive event. The host acknowledges attendees by name (never your name), people ask questions in the chat box, and appears that there's real-time engagement happening.

Except it's not actually live - it's a pre-recorded event being played back.

Evergreen webinars are one of the most efficient lead generation tactics available. They minimise operational and resource investment dramatically. You don't need to host a live audience, manage technical issues in real-time, or worry about attendance numbers making or breaking the event. You can reuse the same content over and over, running it continuously until it's no longer relevant. This means one webinar production can generate leads for months or years.

Because attendance numbers are hidden, you can't tell if 5 or 500 people attended any given session. This removes the pressure to promote aggressively for each session and allows you to scale without the operational burden of live events. This is different to an information video that can be sent around, because in this instance leads have to sign up, opt-in and pick a time that suits them to attend, which increases the probability of them actually attending.

However, there's an authenticity question. When a pre-recorded event is presented as live with simulated engagement, some attendees will realise it's not live and may feel deceived. Even if the presentation is pre-recorded, if it is possible to have someone available to answer questions from the actual attendees, it would minimise this negative experience.

The Lesson: Evergreen webinars are a powerful scalability tool, but the trade-off between efficiency and authenticity matters. Being transparent that a webinar is pre-recorded (while emphasizing the flexibility attendees gain) removes the deception and allows audiences to accept the model willingly. The real value isn't the illusion of liveness - it's the ability to deliver valuable education at scale without burning out your resources.

3. Strategy to Impact - Live Events vs Evergreen Potential

We've experimented with both online and in-person events. The in-person events attracted more attendees and generated more hype. Our online events, by comparison, haven't drawn the same level of interest.

The reasons could be varied - timing of advertising, the time of day they were scheduled, or simply that people prefer the personal connection of in-person gatherings. The ticket cost could have been an issue as well. Webinars have been used as free lead magnets to such an extent that people are unlikely to want to pay. Charging for such events has two objectives, one is to of course generate revenue, but also payment encourages people to actually attend or watch the recording, as they value it more, just because they paid for it.

Also it's worth mentioning that our online events were live events, which meant real-time interaction but also real-time pressure to promote and deliver to a specific audience at a specific time.

We didn't record those live events for later use as evergreen webinars. While it's tempting to simply record a live event and repurpose it, creating effective evergreen content requires more intentional planning and production. It's not a simple record-and-reuse model - it requires designing the content specifically for evergreen delivery.

We are planning to expand our event schedule. Events are central to our strategy because our guide includes classes and lessons as deliverables. The plan is to leverage both live and evergreen formats strategically - using live events for community engagement and momentum, and evergreen content for scalable lead generation and education delivery.

The Lesson: Online events may not generate the same immediate hype as in-person events, but they shouldn't be abandoned. The real opportunity lies in strategic planning: designing content that works as evergreen webinars, experimenting with timing and promotion, and recognizing that live and evergreen serve different purposes. Live events build community; evergreen content builds scalable reach. Both have a place in a comprehensive events strategy.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What do I want an online event to achieve: generate enquiries, demonstrate expertise, educate customers or build relationships? How will I measure success?
- What topic and format would offer value to my audience? What would make attending live worthwhile, such as questions, personalised advice or interaction with others?
- Would an online-only event suit my audience, or would combining online and in-person attendance offer enough value to justify the extra resources?
- How will I attract the right people, make registration easy and encourage them to attend? Do I have the time and budget to promote the event effectively?
- What timing, duration and accessibility features would make it easier for my audience to participate? How will I keep them engaged throughout?
- What platform, equipment and support will I need? How will I rehearse the event and prepare for technical problems?
- What next step will I offer attendees, and how will I follow up with them and those who registered but did not attend?
- How could I repurpose the recording, key insights or audience questions to extend the event's value?

16. Awards

Entering awards can be a strategic move for small businesses, offering a range of benefits beyond just the chance to win. So much so that for relevant clients I recommend they review the criteria to make themselves eligible to enter and if not eligible at this time, implement strategies to make them eligible for future rounds.

Benefits of Awards

- **Increased Brand Awareness and Credibility** - Awards recognition puts your business in the spotlight, potentially reaching new audiences and media outlets. Winning or being shortlisted can enhance your brand image and establish credibility within your industry. Awards logos on your website or marketing materials add a mark of distinction, boosting trust with potential customers. Being a finalist and a winner proves to your audience that you are a noteworthy leader in your field. Backlinks from award websites are valued by search engine algorithms and improve your SEO.
- **Improved Marketing and Sales** - Award participation can generate positive PR, leading to media mentions and increased website traffic. Recognition can be used in marketing campaigns to showcase your achievements and attract new customers. Winning awards is a powerful sales tool, giving you a competitive edge and influencing customer decisions. In short, it gives you bragging rights.
- **Validation and Benchmarking** - The award application process itself encourages self-evaluation, helping you identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Receiving feedback from judges, even if you don't win, can provide valuable insights and guide future business strategies. Awards allow you to benchmark your performance against industry leaders and identify areas for growth.
- **Employee Morale and Motivation** - Participating in awards demonstrates dedication to excellence, boosting employee morale and team spirit. Recognition for the team's hard work fosters a sense of accomplishment and motivates employees. Winning an award can be a great team-building experience, strengthening internal bonds and celebrating collective achievements.
- **Networking Opportunities** - Award ceremonies and events often offer opportunities to connect with industry peers, potential partners, and investors. Judges and fellow nominees can be valuable contacts and sources of support or collaboration. Networking can open doors to new business opportunities and partnerships.

Selecting the Right Awards

Not all awards are worth your time and effort. Consider the effort-to-ROI calculation before applying. Industry-specific awards typically carry more weight within your sector than general business awards. Regional awards build local credibility while national or international awards offer broader reach. Look for awards that align with your business goals and target audience - there's no point winning an award if it doesn't resonate with your customers.

Research the award's reputation and reach. How many people will see that you won? What's the quality of past winners? Is this award respected in your industry? Some awards are very competitive while others have slim pickings - sometimes we have a category winner because there was no one else in the pool. Don't assume competitiveness based on the award's name. (As a business awards judge I can share some intel, and that is some award categories finalists are the only applicants, and were in the running for the award through lack of competition, not merit)

Be aware of awards to avoid. Low-quality or pay-to-win awards where money matters more than merit don't add value to your brand. If every business seems to win, it's not a meaningful recognition. For example “New York Times Bestseller” gets widely used like a badge of owner, by owners, but if you look at the fine print is based on a certain number of sales in a specific period of time, which can be manipulated by drumming up network support to buy your book on pre-order, the sales of which get aggregated toward your first week of official sales. Once you know this, the accolade bleakens.

The Application Process

The most critical rule: judges score based on specific answers to specific questions. They are not supposed to read between the lines and see how amazing your business is. They evaluate what is explicitly written against their scoring criteria.

Before you write anything, deeply study the judging criteria. What are judges specifically looking for? What's the scoring rubric? What evidence do they want to see? Write each answer directly addressing what the judges score on. If the criterion says 'innovation,' don't write about how great your customer service is - that won't score points.

Be clear, specific, and evidence-based. Use data and examples rather than vague claims. Show, don't tell. Instead of 'we've grown significantly,' say 'we grew 150% year-over-year from $500K to $1.25M revenue.' The judges need concrete proof, not persuasive prose.

Follow the format and guidelines exactly. If the application asks for 250 words, don't submit 400. If they ask for specific metrics, provide those metrics, not alternative ones. Judges often have limited time and won't dig through your submission looking for what they asked for.

Have someone unfamiliar with your business read your application. Does it clearly answer each question without requiring insider knowledge? Does it demonstrate why you deserve to win according to the stated criteria?

Cost and Budget Considerations

Awards aren't free. Application fees range from nothing to several hundred dollars per entry. Some awards require travel and attendance costs for ceremonies. You may invest in professional help to craft a strong application.

Factor these costs into your decision. A $500 application fee for an award reaching 10,000 relevant customers might be worth it. A $300 application fee for an award with minimal visibility might not be. Calculate the potential return based on reach, relevance, and your business goals.

Timing and Planning

Awards run on cycles. Most have annual deadlines, and some have specific submission windows. Mark key award deadlines in your calendar at least 3-6 months in advance so you have time to prepare a strong application.

Plan backwards from the deadline. If the deadline is in March, when do you need to start gathering evidence and data? When do you need to write and review? When will results be announced? This timeline helps you integrate awards strategically into your marketing calendar.

Build eligibility over time. If you're not eligible now, identify what needs to change and make it happen. Maybe you need 2 years of audited financials, or you need to demonstrate specific impact metrics. Work backwards to make yourself eligible for next year's round.

Leveraging Your Award

Winning an award is only half the battle - you need to leverage it in your marketing. Add award logos prominently to your website, especially on your homepage or about page. Use the award in your email signatures, social media profiles, and marketing materials.

Create a PR story around the win. Issue a press release, pitch it to relevant media, and get it covered in industry publications. Feature the win in your email newsletter and social media campaigns. Include it in sales presentations and pitch decks.

Use the award as a customer trust signal in your sales messaging. Incorporate it into case studies and testimonials. Train your sales team to mention it when relevant.

Update your Google Business Profile and industry directories with the award. The backlinks and SEO value compound over time.

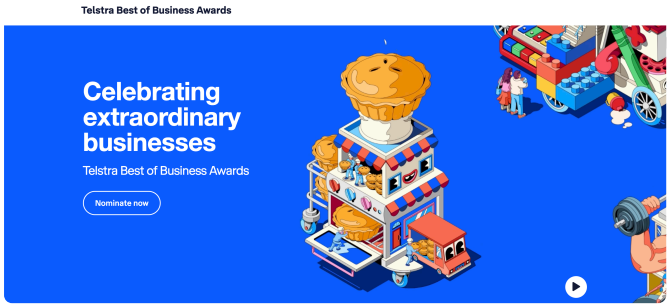
Remember:

- Don't be discouraged if you don't win. Focus on the learning experience and feedback from judges. Being a Finalist is 95% as valuable as being a winner.
- Align your entire application with judges' specific scoring criteria - this is non-negotiable.
- Some categories are highly competitive, others less so. Don't assume based on the award's prestige.
- Consider creating your own awards as a marketing strategy or even as a business itself.



Here are a couple of business awards accessible by small business.

Regional Heroes, run by Business Builders, celebrates businesses in regional Australia. Owners can nominate themselves or be nominated. Twenty finalists are profiled nationally, the public votes for the winner, and the prize includes a feature on Kochie's Business Builders on the Seven Network. Learn more



Telstra Best of Business Awards are open to Australian small and medium-sized businesses, including sole traders, that have been operating for at least 12 months. You can nominate your own business and enter one of four categories: Change, First Nations, Growth or Innovation. Learn more

Case Studies

1. Master Builder - Renovation Success

One of my friends is a master builder doing mostly renovations, initially working on projects under $1 million. He was wise enough to invest in professional staging and photography of finished projects, which elevated the quality of their social media content and enabled them to enter awards. They won. This recognition got them noticed by influencers who featured their work, and as a result they started getting clients with $2 million+ projects. They continue to invest in their images and continue to win awards, now in the $2 million+ category. The award strategy directly contributed to their business scaling up.

The Lesson: Strategic investment in showcasing your work (photography, presentation) isn't just for marketing - it directly enables award eligibility, which opens doors to higher-value clients.

2. Hat Business - SEO and Local Recognition

One of my long-term clients, a retailer specialising in hats that has been in business for over 30 years, entered the Australia Post Local Hero Awards, which recognise small businesses doing something noteworthy. She won. Their digital marketing person was over the moon with the SEO backlink from the Australia Post website because it single-handedly improved the website's organic ranking which would have taken months if not years to achieve. The award provided both immediate recognition and lasting SEO value.

The Lesson: Local and regional awards carry SEO weight through high-authority backlinks. The credibility signal benefits both your reputation and your search rankings.

3. Awards and Strategy to Impact

At this stage, awards aren't our immediate priority. However, in the future, we'd love to consider running awards ourselves. Depending on your business, you can collaborate with like-minded businesses to create your own awards. There are no barriers to creating awards - in fact, some people create awards as a business model itself. Creating an award positions you as an industry authority and builds community around your brand. I have been involved in judging a variety of awards, and am including Awards as a digital marketing channel because I have seen first hand the value and possible ripple effects being involved has created for businesses and their leaders.

The Lesson: Awards aren't just about winning existing ones - they can be created as a strategic marketing and community-building tool.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- How could entering awards support my business goals, such as building credibility, gaining exposure or recognising my team's achievements?
- Which awards are relevant to my industry and audience? Are they credible, with clear judging criteria and a reputable organiser?
- Is my business eligible now? If not, what would need to change, and would those changes also support my wider business goals?
- Can I clearly demonstrate how my business meets each judging criterion? What results, examples or customer feedback could support my entry?
- Do I have the time and budget to prepare a strong submission before the deadline? What entry fees, event costs or promotional expenses should I consider?
- If I become a finalist or win, how will I use that recognition across my website, social media, emails and other marketing?
- What would make entering worthwhile, and how will I assess the value of the recognition, feedback or connections gained?

17. Video Marketing

At the risk of stating the obvious, video marketing is now as important as any of the other mediums, if not more. When referring to video marketing, it's more of a tool than a marketing channel in itself, but using video content enables you to utilise it across many marketing channels, including social media platforms and your website. Your video streaming channels can also become an income stream. Video marketing can be a strategy in itself, as it is not platform specific.

Cross-Platform Video Strategy

If you're creating short-form video for one of the main social media platforms - TikTok, Instagram, Facebook or YouTube - you should consider posting the videos to the other platforms to repurpose content and start building up your content library and audience on those channels too, even if you're not prioritising them in your marketing plan. Viral reels now spread across all of these platforms regardless of which one they started on.

Interestingly, some people can make a name for themselves on one platform while getting little engagement on other platforms. Why? Algorithms. Each platform prioritises different content and user behaviours. So if you're going to go through all the trouble of creating videos, you might as well give them more opportunities to be seen. Of course, there are some exceptions depending on your audience and content type.

Creating Video Content

Smartphones and apps have made video creation accessible to everyone. You don't need expensive equipment to start. If you have the budget and your brand calls for a more premium video experience, you can always hire professionals. Options range from hiring someone to edit your DIY videos and create content bites, right through to full video production with professional equipment.

Start with what you have. Many successful video creators began on their phones. As your business grows and your content becomes more polished, invest in better equipment or professional help based on your ROI.

YouTube as a Video Marketing Channel

YouTube is classified as a “social media” channel, but it deserves special attention as the #1 video marketing tool available. Creating your own YouTube channel to share valuable content about your business works as a lead generator. If your content becomes popular, it can even become a revenue stream.

While TikTok is also a video-based platform and now pays creators generously, YouTube is seen as the respected broadcasting channel. It's also available as an app on most smart TVs, whereas TikTok is still largely perceived as a platform for teens on phones, and entertainment creators.

YouTube makes it easy to share and host video content. You can embed YouTube video links into your website without uploading large files to individual platforms. Videos can also be private, allowing you to share them exclusively with clients.

YouTube is so widely accepted that it almost doesn't make sense to use anything else as your primary video host. Even universities now host recorded lectures on YouTube and embed them into their learning management systems.

Alternative and Secondary Video Platforms

While YouTube remains the primary platform for video hosting and content distribution, alternative streaming channels are increasingly important for reaching specific audiences and niches. YouTube has strict rules and can cancel your channel or demonitise it without much explanation, which is a stressful experience for anyone 100% reliant on it as their business model, so diversification is a good idea.

Professional and Business Platforms:

- Vimeo has evolved into a professional video platform used for marketing, internal communications, live events, and monetization. It's favoured by professional videographers and creators for its high-quality video support, advanced privacy options, and video marketing tools.
- Wistia is marketing-focused with lead-capture capabilities and CRM integration, making it ideal for teams actively measuring video ROI in a marketing funnel.
- For B2B thought leadership, LinkedIn Video posts earn 3x the engagement of text-only content, positioning it as a key channel for professional audiences.

Live Streaming Platforms:

- Twitch has evolved beyond gaming into a leading live-streaming platform featuring real-time chat, subscriptions, and a strong community across gaming, music, and IRL content. Many creators stream on Twitch and republish highlights to other platforms.
- LinkedIn Live allows professionals to host live events and webinars for their networks, particularly effective for thought leadership and B2B engagement.

Creator and Alternative Platforms

- Dailymotion offers a mix of user-generated and professional content with a more curated experience than YouTube, providing free video hosting with advertising revenue and built-in global audience exposure.
- Rumble has grown as a creator platform positioned around minimal content moderation, attracting creators seeking alternative distribution channels.

Enterprise and OTT Solutions

(This will not be relevant to most small businesses, but mentioning it for general knowledge) For businesses needing enterprise-level video infrastructure, platforms like JW Player, Brightcove, Dacast, and Wowza offer advanced features for OTT streaming, FAST channels, and ad-supported content. These solutions are particularly valuable if you plan to sell video content through a subscription or pay-per-view service, stream live events regularly, or need reliable delivery and built-in advertising for large audiences.

Webinars as a Marketing Tool

We touch on webinars in the Online Events section (page 93), but it falls under the video marketing category as well. One of the few benefits of COVID has been that webinars have been normalised as a perfectly suitable alternative to in-person seminars and workshops. Previously you had to travel across town in peak hour traffic, or even fly somewhere to attend events. Now you can tune in from your desk, and if you can't make it live, the chances are high that a recording will be shared.

This shift has made events more accessible for many people, especially those managing caregiving responsibilities or with limited time flexibility. While some people still enjoy in-person networking, webinars now offer an inclusive alternative that reaches a broader audience.

Webinar Marketing Applications

- Webinars are a great lead magnet to attract new customers.
- They're a great way to educate, whether by running your own webinars or guest speaking at others.
- Engaging your existing customers through valuable webinars is also a common practice.
- Webinars can be recorded, and snippets can be used to create video content for other channels.

Webinar Platforms

A variety of platforms are available for hosting webinars. Zoom is the simplest option - the webinar is just a Zoom meeting. Alternatively, simulated live webinar platforms create a live experience for pre-recorded content, which most 'free' webinar lead generators use. Choose based on your needs: pure live interaction or pre-recorded efficiency.

Maximising Video Content

With AI technology, you can now get a transcript of your video, cut long form video into short snippets, upload it to an AI chatbot and ask it to write a blog post about the topic. You can then use that blog text to write social media content captions and other derivatives. One video can become multiple pieces of content across different platforms and formats.

Case Studies

1. Wholesale Knife Distributor - Multi-Channel Video Strategy

For a wholesale knife distributor client, we created a consumer-focused blog to discuss knives and promote products, with the intent that readers reach out to find their nearest retailer. We also created a YouTube channel with the same name and created video content aligned with popular searches on knives - for example, 'how to sharpen knives.' This reached the YouTube audience searching for that information who wouldn't have found a text blog. We also utilised those videos in the wholesale website's knowledge center to help retailers train their staff on the products.

The Lesson: Video reaches audiences that text content doesn't - YouTube searchers looking for 'how to' content are fundamentally different from Google searchers. Plus, the same video can serve multiple purposes: customer education, staff training, and content distribution across channels.

2. Grant Application Mentor - Webinar as Product

A business mentor who specialises in grant applications ran a paid webinar session for her clients and LinkedIn network to educate them about a specific grant round and what needs to be done. Using this method, she was able to deliver the information many clients needed without booking one-on-one sessions, making it far more accessible for business owners. The webinar was paid for by attendees because it wasn't just a lead magnet promotion - it was a product in itself.

The Lesson: Webinars can be a revenue-generating product, not just a lead magnet. When your expertise is valuable enough to command a fee, positioning the webinar as educational content rather than a promotional tool creates a different value perception.

3. Strategy to Impact and Video

Strategy to Impact will definitely utilise video and webinars. From the perspective of different learning styles, we want to offer written, video and audio content to suit different preferences. The CRM we chose has a webinar component that we intend to use for this purpose. Video allows us to demonstrate concepts visually, webinars allow for live interaction and Q&A, and written content serves those who prefer reading.

The Lesson: Different audiences learn and consume content in different ways. Offering content in multiple formats (written, video, audio, live webinars) maximises reach and ensures you're serving your entire audience effectively.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- How could video help me demonstrate my product, educate or entertain my audience, or build trust in my business?
- Where does my audience watch video, and which topics, lengths and formats would suit their needs?
- What can I learn from how other businesses use video? Which approaches could I adapt to reflect my own brand and strengths?
- Do I have the time, skills and budget to plan, film and edit videos consistently, or will I need help?
- How will I make my videos clear and accessible, including sound quality, readable text and accurate captions?
- What action do I want viewers to take after watching, and how will I make that next step easy?
- Could I repurpose my videos across different channels and formats? What would I need to adapt for each?
- How will I measure whether my videos are effective? Are they attracting the right viewers and generating engagement, enquiries or sales that justify the effort?

18. Podcasts

Podcasts offer a powerful marketing tool for businesses of all sizes. They represent an evolution of the good old radio, but now audiences can listen to exactly the topics they want to, meaning you can reach exactly who you want to by identifying what your target customers are listening to.

You can either create your own podcast, be a guest speaker on podcasts, or be an advertiser. Many podcasters now record their podcasts on video and utilise the content as video marketing as well as audio, extending the reach of a single recording across multiple formats and platforms.

Three Ways to Leverage Podcasts

Host Your Own Podcast

Establish yourself as an industry expert by creating a podcast focused on topics relevant to your target audience. This is easier said than done, but when there is a will there's a way. Hosting your own podcast allows you to control the narrative and build a loyal audience around your expertise.

Be a Guest Speaker

Appear as a guest speaker on relevant podcasts to build relationships with key figures in your field and reach new audiences. Guest appearances require less ongoing commitment than hosting your own podcast.

Be an Advertiser

Partner with relevant podcasts to reach a pre-qualified audience and promote your brand through sponsored segments or advertorials. Advertising on podcasts is as effective as radio, if not more so, due to audience targeting capabilities.

Brand Awareness and Thought Leadership

Hosting your own podcast establishes authority in your industry. By creating consistent, valuable content, you position yourself as a trusted voice. Sponsoring or appearing on existing podcasts amplifies this effect, as listeners associate you with respected shows and hosts.

Content Marketing and Lead Generation

Don't just focus on selling in your podcast content. Offer insightful discussions, interviews with industry leaders, or helpful tips related to your products or services. Include clear calls to action (CTAs) that encourage listeners to visit your website, download a free resource, or sign up for your email list.

Building Relationships and Community

Interview industry influencers to attract new listeners and build relationships with key figures in your field. Engage with listeners by responding to comments and questions on social media or your podcast platform to foster a sense of community.

Starting Your Own Podcast

- Define your goals: What do you want to achieve with your podcast - brand awareness, lead generation, or community building?
- Choose your format: Interview-based discussions, solo presentations, or narrative storytelling are all popular podcast formats.
- Invest in good audio quality: Ensure your podcast has professional-sounding audio to retain listeners.
- Record on video: Consider recording your podcast on video as well as audio to leverage it across multiple channels and formats.
- Promote your podcast: Leverage social media, your website, and email marketing to promote your podcast and reach new listeners.

Being a Guest Speaker or Advertiser

- Identify relevant podcasts: Look for podcasts either directly related to your industry or expertise, or general interest podcasts whose audience might benefit from learning about your expertise.
- Research prior guests: Understand the profiles of previous guest speakers and why they were chosen.
- Pitch your idea: Present your idea for a podcast appearance with evidence of why you are the best person to speak to on that topic.
- Request their media kit: Understand the costs involved in advertising, which will detail their audience size and profile.

Reflecting on Consumer Behavior

Consider your own behaviour as a consumer - do you buy from radio advertising, or are you more likely to engage with and purchase from guest speaker products or services? This perspective helps explain why podcast advertising, particularly through guest appearances and recommendations, can be highly effective.

Case Studies

1. Holistic Doctor - Building Authority Through Podcasting

A client of mine, a holistic doctor who used to have her own practice, sold it and decided to pursue being an author and to run health retreats. Prior to becoming an author, she co-hosted podcasts and was a guest speaker on several others. She was able to leverage her podcast presence to validate that she is an authority on the subject matter, which proved to be a useful marketing technique when she published her book.

The Lesson: Podcasting, whether as a host or guest speaker, establishes credibility in your field before you launch other ventures. This built authority translates directly to book sales, course enrollments, and other products when you're ready to launch them.

2. Mel Robbins - Multi-Channel Podcast Distribution

Mel Robbins, the self-help guru with a chart-topping podcast, video records her podcast episodes and publishes them on YouTube alongside audio distribution. This is how many people first discover her - through YouTube rather than traditional podcast platforms. By distributing her content across multiple channels, she reaches audiences who prefer different consumption formats. Mel invites thought leaders and subject matter experts who already have their own substantial following, and most if not all the leading podcasters now adopt this multi-channel recording and distribution technique.

The Lesson: A single recording can reach vastly more people when distributed across multiple formats and platforms. Many listeners prefer video content over audio-only, and by capturing your podcast as video, you unlock YouTube, social media clips, and other visual platforms without additional production work.

3. Strategy to Impact and Podcasts

For Strategy to Impact, we currently do not have any plans for podcast engagement, but that is not to say that we will not explore this option in the future as our content library and audience grows.

The Lesson: Podcasting is not essential from day one, but as a thought leadership business grows and content becomes available, it can become a natural extension of your marketing strategy and an additional channel to reach your audience.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Does my target audience listen to podcasts? What would I want podcast marketing to achieve for my business?
- Which approach best suits my goals and resources: hosting my own podcast, appearing as a guest or advertising on an existing show?
- If I host a podcast, what topic and perspective would give people a reason to listen and return for future episodes?
- Do I have the time, skills and budget to plan, record, edit and promote episodes consistently?
- Which podcasts reach the audience I want to connect with? What expertise or stories could I offer as a guest?
- If I advertise or sponsor a podcast, what evidence supports its audience fit and reach? What does the fee include?
- How will I promote and repurpose podcast content through my website, emails, social media or video, where appropriate and permitted?
- What next step will I offer listeners, and how will I measure whether podcast marketing generates worthwhile awareness, enquiries or sales?

19. Custom apps

Having a custom app for your business is not a viable or realistic option for many businesses, but there are instances where it makes absolute sense. In this discussion, we mainly focus on mobile apps, though custom applications can evolve into standalone software products and web-apps. AI now enables low-code and no-code development platforms, making it cheaper and easier to create a custom app than ever before, putting this option within reach for more small businesses.

When a Custom App Makes Sense

Improving Customer Experience

- **Loyalty programs:** Create a custom app to manage loyalty rewards, points, and exclusive deals to incentivize repeat business.
- **Appointment booking:** Allow customers to easily schedule appointments, reservations, or consultations directly through the app, streamlining the booking process.
- **Mobile ordering:** Enable customers to browse menus, place orders, and pay for services directly from the app, perfect for restaurants, cafes, or coffee shops.
- **Delivery services:** Develop a custom app for on-demand delivery of your products, enhancing convenience for customers.
- **Self-service options:** Integrate features like self-ordering kiosks, mobile check-in, or in-app troubleshooting for a more customer-centric experience.

Boosting Efficiency and Productivity

- **Task management:** Create a custom app to streamline internal operations, assign tasks to employees, track progress, and improve team collaboration.
- **Inventory management:** Develop an app to track inventory levels, automate reordering, and optimize stock management.
- **Field service management:** Optimize scheduling, dispatching, and communication for field workers.
- **Data collection and analysis:** Build an app to gather customer data, track sales trends, and gain valuable insights.
- **Internal communication:** Create a secure platform for employees to communicate, share documents, and collaborate.

Creating Unique Selling Propositions

- **Niche functionalities:** Develop a custom app that offers features specific to your industry or service, differentiating you from competitors.
- **Personalised experiences:** Leverage customer data to personalize the app experience with targeted promotions, recommendations, or loyalty rewards.
- **Gamification:** Integrate game mechanics like challenges, points, or leaderboards to increase user engagement.

- **Offline functionality:** Allow users to access certain app features even without an internet connection.
- **Augmented Reality (AR):** Integrate AR features to showcase products virtually or enhance customer experience.

Creating Value is Essential

The app has to create value for your customers, otherwise it will be forgotten with all the other unused apps on their phones. Useful complementary business apps typically improve the user experience over the website experience. Examples include retail apps like H&M, which make browsing and purchasing easier, and gym or health club apps that make booking classes and viewing timetables more convenient than visiting a website.

Development Options

Custom apps can sound technically advanced, but technology has moved quickly. Like web builders, there are now app builders and low-code/no-code platforms that make creating apps accessible to small businesses. However, some app builders can produce basic or limiting features that may not deliver the real value your customers need. For truly custom and useful functionalities, professional app developers remain your best option. That said, AI-powered development platforms now make it faster and more affordable than ever to get professional-quality custom apps developed.

Case Studies

1. Nervous System Education Platform - Multi-Channel Content Delivery
I recently came across a small psychology education business that offers a course in managing the nervous system, delivering content through both website-based modules and video materials. The organisation recognised that different learners have different preferences, so they developed a mobile app alongside their website platform to make the content more accessible on mobile devices. The app likely uses a templated or content management system option, which does come with some limitations, but it effectively serves the purpose of making their educational material accessible based on user preferences - whether someone prefers to learn on their desktop via the website or on their phone via the app.

The Lesson: You don't need a fully custom or technologically advanced app to create value. A small education business using templated app solutions can still significantly improve the learning experience by meeting students where they are - on mobile devices. The app doesn't need to be perfect; it needs to be useful and accessible.

2. Event Compliance Specialist - App Becomes Software Product

An event compliance and security specialist dealing with major public events found it difficult to keep track of all event details including insurances, contractors, and policies. Unable to find an existing application that met his needs, he hired a developer to create one. The original goal was simply to help himself do a better job, but he realised all his clients would appreciate this solution as well. The software evolved into a standalone business that he can now easily sell to large corporate and government clients, and it comes bundled with his service as an added value proposition.

The Lesson: Sometimes the best app ideas come from solving your own problems. If your solution works for you, it likely works for others in your industry - this can become a secondary revenue stream or even evolve into a standalone business.

3. Strategy to Impact and Apps

For Strategy to Impact, we have discussed the idea of creating an app that supports your marketing planning journey with us. We decided that developing an app could hold up the launch process, so we chose to launch without it. However, it is definitely something we are exploring for future development to enhance the customer experience.

The Lesson: A custom app is not essential to launch, but it can become a valuable addition to your offering once your core service is established. Sometimes launching first and iterating based on customer feedback is more effective than building everything upfront.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What specific problem could a custom app solve for my business or customers? Could it simplify a process, improve service or encourage repeat purchases?
- Do I need a custom app, or could an improved website or existing tool meet the same need?
- What would motivate customers to use the app and keep returning? How will I test their interest before investing?
- What features are essential? Could I start with a simple version and test it with a small group of users?
- Could I build it using an app builder or low-code platform, or would I need professional help? Will it connect with my existing business systems?
- Can I afford both the initial development and ongoing costs, including hosting, updates and support? Is this the best use of my budget?
- Who will maintain the app, protect customer information and resolve problems as they arise?
- How will customers discover and start using the app? What results would demonstrate that it is worth the investment?

20. AI Platforms as a Marketing Channel

AI is a new addition to digital marketing channels. The uncharted Wild-West. I want to distinguish between AI as a marketing tool vs a marketing channel. In its short history, AI has been more associated with facilitating the creation of marketing material, but not a channel to reach new customers through. With AI search optimisation and talk of paid advertising on ChatGPT, it's time to consider it as a channel in its own right.

AI platforms are rapidly emerging as marketing channels in 2026, fundamentally changing how customers discover products and services. Unlike marketing tools that help you create content or experiences, AI platforms are channels where your target audience is actively searching, asking questions, and making decisions. This is a new frontier channel - measurement is difficult, results are unpredictable, and it's not suitable for all industries - but the opportunities for early adopters willing to explore and invest are significant.

The Current Landscape

Currently, there hasn't been heavy reliance on AI for direct purchasing decisions. Stats show that people are still using traditional Google search for product discovery and purchasing. However, this is changing. As AI-assisted search becomes more prevalent and generative AI becomes integrated into everyday discovery, the way customers find and evaluate solutions will shift significantly. The question isn't whether AI will matter for marketing - it's when it will become essential for your industry.

Five Emerging AI Marketing Channels

1. Google's Generative AI Search

We have touched on this evolution a little bit in the Organic SEO section (page 32). Google is transforming its search bar into AI-assisted generative conversation. Instead of users clicking through to websites, Google itself is providing AI-generated answers directly in search results. This fundamentally changes search engine marketing. Rather than optimising for traditional search rankings, businesses need to consider how their content appears in AI-generated responses and recommendations. The impact on SEO is significant - being the top-ranked website matters less if your content isn't featured in the AI's generated answer.

Apparently, reviews are one of the key signals AI search tools use when deciding which businesses to recommend. This makes Proof (also known as Physical Evidence), one of the secondary elements of the Marketing Mix, increasingly important. Encourage happy customers to leave reviews, respond to them, and make sure they are visible on platforms such as your Google Business Profile.

2. Paid Ads in AI Chat Applications

Paid advertising is coming to AI chat applications like ChatGPT, Claude, and other generative AI platforms. These ads will appear within chat windows where users are actively asking questions and seeking recommendations. While disclosure of paid content will be mandatory (like Google), there is legitimate concern about whether paid recommendations will maintain the integrity that currently makes AI valuable. Users trust AI because it considers their interests rather than who's paying for visibility. If that trust is compromised, the channel loses its effectiveness.

3. AI Recommendation Engines

Apps and platforms are increasingly featuring AI-powered recommendations - suggesting products, services, or content based on user behaviour and preferences. Getting featured in these AI recommendation systems is becoming a marketing priority. Businesses that are actively asking users "How did you find us?" and showing excitement when users mention AI recommendations, because it indicates their marketing is working. Optimising your product or service to be recommended by AI algorithms is a growing opportunity.

4. Voice Assistants and Smart Speakers

Voice-activated AI assistants (Alexa, Google Assistant, Siri) are becoming discovery channels. Customers are asking voice assistants for recommendations, making purchases through voice commerce, and discovering businesses through voice search results. Optimising for voice search queries and voice commerce is an emerging opportunity, particularly as smart speaker adoption grows.

5. Prompt Optimisation

As people ask AI platforms questions about products, services, or industry topics, your business can be featured in the AI-generated response if your content is optimised for these queries. This is similar to SEO, but optimised for how AI systems process and recommend information. Getting your brand, product, or service mentioned in an AI's generated answer when someone asks a relevant question is a significant discovery opportunity.

Key Considerations

Measurement is Challenging

There is no standard messaging or measurement framework yet. Tracking whether a customer found you through AI recommendations, voice search, or prompt optimisation is difficult. Attribution is unclear. This makes ROI calculation challenging and means early adopters will be experimenting without guaranteed results.

Results Are Unpredictable

This is a new frontier. Success depends on your industry, your target audience's adoption of AI for discovery, and how quickly these channels mature. Results are not guaranteed. Some industries will benefit significantly; others won't see meaningful impact for years.

Integrity and Trust Matter

The value of AI recommendations comes from their perceived objectivity. If users believe recommendations are influenced by payment rather than genuine alignment with their interests, trust erodes. For businesses, maintaining ethical practices and authentic engagement with AI platforms will be crucial long-term.

Risk and Ethical Considerations for Australian Businesses

- Data Privacy: Australian Privacy Act compliance is essential. Ensure any AI platform you use respects Australian data protection requirements.

- Consumer Law: Ensure paid advertising disclosures meet Australian Consumer Law requirements. Greenwashing or misrepresentation through AI recommendations can result in legal consequences.
- IP and Content: Be cautious about how AI platforms use your content or business information in their training or recommendations.
- Authenticity: Avoid over-reliance on AI-generated marketing content. Authentic, human-created messaging typically outperforms AI-generated alternatives and builds stronger customer relationships.

When AI Platforms Make Sense

AI platforms are worth exploring if:

- Your customers are early adopters using AI for discovery and purchasing decisions.
- Your industry involves complex research or decision-making where people ask AI questions for recommendations.
- You have the budget to experiment and learn without guaranteed ROI.
- You're willing to adapt quickly as these channels evolve.

Case Studies

1. Software Recommendations via AI Chat

Regularly asking AI chat applications (ChatGPT, Claude, etc.) for software app and solution recommendations reveals how this discovery channel works in practice. The process involves asking for recommendations, testing the suggested apps, evaluating what works and what doesn't, and troubleshooting solutions that don't meet expectations.

What's notable: when visiting apps' websites or using their products, customer surveys ask "How did you find us?" with celebratory pop-up messages appearing when users select "AI recommendation" as their source. This indicates businesses are actively tracking AI-sourced customers and celebrating when this channel delivers results.

The Lesson: AI recommendations are producing measurable results, particularly for software and SaaS products. Businesses are investing in tracking AI referrals because they're seeing real customer discovery happening. The channel is delivering customers, even if attribution and ROI calculation remain imperfect.

2. Self-Directed AI Discovery Behaviour Analysis

Rather than observing others, reflect on your own use of AI chatbots and purchasing behaviour. Ask yourself: what are you searching for in AI applications? What products or services are you asking AI to recommend? Do those categories match your own business offerings?

The key is observing your own micro-moments - those instances when you need something quickly and turn to AI for answers. Google micro-moments remain relevant: understanding the specific moment, intent, and context where customers reach for AI recommendations. Then analyse your own behaviour: when AI recommends something, do you click through to the original link or stay in the AI application? Which recommendations do you act on, and which do you ignore? What makes you trust one recommendation over another?

The Lesson: Your own behaviour as a consumer using AI assistants reveals the patterns that will work for your business. By observing whether you click through links, stay in the AI application, or trust certain recommendations, you uncover how customers will interact with your business when it appears in AI responses. These patterns directly inform how you should position your business for AI discovery.

3. Strategy to Impact - Observing the Growth Curve

Strategy to Impact is currently prioritising organic SEO and creating valuable, human-written content that can be discovered through traditional search. This foundational work ensures the business remains discoverable as search evolves. Currently, there are no plans to actively leverage AI channels. Most options would require a budget, and a steep learning curve, for now happy to see how it evolved and then jump on the bandwagon later.

The reasoning aligns with platform lifecycle positioning: AI platforms are at the early stage of the growth bell curve. Anyone who leverages these channels cleverly during this phase could see impressive results - but the methods aren't yet clear, and the outcomes are unpredictable. Rather than rushing in without a clear strategy, Strategy to Impact is watching, learning, and building the content foundation that will serve whichever channels matter in the future. If you are interested in platform life-cycles and the impact it has on your marketing results, you can read more on our blog.

The Lesson: Being an early adopter of emerging channels can be powerful, but it's not mandatory from day one. Building strong SEO fundamentals and valuable content creates a foundation that works across any channel - traditional search, AI recommendations, or channels yet to be invented. The opportunity with AI platforms exists for those ready to experiment; the advantage goes to those who understand their own micro-moments and customer behaviour deeply enough to position effectively when they do move.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Are your target customers using AI platforms for discovery and purchasing decisions?
- Which of the five AI channels (generative search, chat ads, recommendations, voice assistants, prompt optimisation) is most relevant to your industry?
- Do you have the budget and appetite to experiment with AI platforms without guaranteed results?
- How might AI recommendations change the way customers discover your products or services?
- What does prompt optimisation or content optimisation for AI look like for your business?

Supporting Systems & Tactics

Now that we have covered all the channels, we need to consider some of the ways you can manage and utilise these channels.

CRMs, Funnels & Learning Management Systems

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, marketing funnels, and Learning Management Systems (LMS) are more tools than marketing channels. However, for suitable businesses, they can automate your entire marketing process and enable sophisticated customer relationships. The first essential step is to have an email database.

CRMs

CRMs are ideal for managing customer relationships where you need to keep a record of your engagement with the customer. They support managing notes on client activity and conversations, sending emails, and automating nurture funnels -meaning you can set up sequences of emails that clients receive automatically. You can even trigger follow-up emails based on actions they take, such as clicking a link.

A huge range of CRM SaaS solutions exist. Determining which fits your needs depends on what you're looking for, here is a list of systems tested and tried by us:

- **HubSpot** is a leader with a great free version, best for B2B client management and tracking email responses. However, bulk email features enter the paid zone at notably high prices.
- **Systeme.io** is what is currently used by Strategy to Impact. Free entry level subscriptions that have a free website feature, and well priced paid subscriptions that scale with your business. It seems to offer a lot of features which look great initially, but there are a number of frustrating limitations and clunky interfaces that often make me regret my life choices. It will do for now.
- **Mailchimp** is entry-level email software continuously adding CRM features, best for bulk campaigns. They recently changed pricing to charge for over 500 contacts at rates higher than some paid competitors, making it less attractive for growing businesses.
- **Monday.com** is a leading CRM with a generous free version offering extensive features, though it lacks bulk emailing - requiring integration with another system like Mailchimp.
- **Zoho CRM** offers a free plan with good all-around features including marketing capabilities.

Types of CRMs and Marketing Applications

Operational CRMs focus on automating tasks and streamlining sales processes with limited marketing features, though they can track leads from campaigns and manage customer interactions.

Collaborative CRMs improve communication between departments (sales, marketing, customer support), helping integrate marketing campaigns with other customer touchpoints.

Analytical CRMs offer robust data analytics and reporting to track campaign effectiveness, identify customer trends, and personalise marketing efforts.

Key CRM Features for Marketing

- **Lead Management:** Capture and track leads from various sources (website, social media, etc.)
- **Marketing Automation:** Automate repetitive tasks like email and social media scheduling
- **Campaign Management:** Plan, track, and measure marketing campaign performance
- **Customer Segmentation:** Segment your customer base for targeted campaigns
- **Email Marketing Tools:** Create and send personalised campaigns
- **Social Media Management:** Integrate social channels with your CRM

Choosing a CRM for Your Business

Small businesses with basic marketing needs might benefit from an operational CRM with lead management features. Businesses prioritising data analysis should consider analytical CRMs. If collaboration across departments is crucial, a collaborative CRM suits your needs.

Many solutions can integrate and work together, so you don't necessarily need a standalone system for every function. For instance, you might use Monday for customer management and Mailchimp for bulk email campaigns, with the two platforms connected.

Funnels

Funnels are preset email campaign sequences that automatically enrol clients based on their interactions with your initial marketing contact. There are systems that just do funnels, but most marketing focused CRMs will have funnels as a feature.

Example: You offer a prospect a free lead magnet they're interested in. They provide their email address. You then set up a sequence of 5 emails (the general recommendation for customer touchpoints before purchase) spaced every few days. These emails tell your story, create value, and inspire purchase. Clients can automatically move to other funnels based on their actions- for instance, clicking a link about a blog topic signals their interest, triggering a related email sequence.

Most people have experienced funnels as inbound email campaigns. While these can be effective, I recommend creating a value-based relationship rather than aggressively pursuing sales. Excessive emails frustrate subscribers and lead to unsubscribes before they've even reviewed what they signed up for. I find that I disengage with a lead magnet immediately if I get 2 emails per day following signing up for something, often I forget how I got on the list in the first place and unsubscribe. Remember the rule of thumb, send what you would want to receive, it won’t appease everyone but at least you can be confident that it’s in alignment to your values.

Funnel Platforms

- ClickFunnels is the leading player but comes at a premium price
- Many CRMs integrate funnel features, so a standalone system may be unnecessary
- Systeme is competitively priced with features including landing pages, digital product sales, and webinars

Learning Management Systems (LMS)

Learning Management Systems aren't technically marketing tools, but deserve mention if your business model involves offering courses or educational content. Many LMS platforms include CRM and funnel features. Leading platforms include Kajabi (particularly popular for online course sales with features for creation, marketing, and sales), Thinkific (all-in-one course platform for building communities and monetising memberships), and many web builders like WordPress and Squarespace that offer LMS add-ons.

Remember: Many systems exist for various purposes - membership management, project tracking, and more - that can support your marketing. The earlier you implement a system, the easier it is to engage your audience long-term. Start by understanding your requirements and researching basic options. You might find a standalone solution or need multiple applications. You can even have integrations built to share data between systems (your 'tech stack'). The options can seem overwhelming, so consider enlisting professional help to identify the right fit for now and for growth.

Case Studies

1. Fashion Wholesale Distribution - System Selection Crisis & Recovery

A fashion wholesale agent client hired me to implement a sales and marketing system as Excel spreadsheets became time-consuming and error-prone. At that time, options fitting the budget were limited, so we adopted a system designed for fashion brands to track orders. While close, it required adapting our business processes to align with the system - which became cumbersome. After a year, we needed another solution.

Then ShowroomHQ appeared (~$50/month), specifically designed for this niche, and was nearly perfect (despite random bugs and quirky logic). It enabled clients to place orders online, avoiding data entry and reconciliation headaches. It also provided marketing emails tracking engagement so we could follow up accordingly.

The Lesson: Systems designed for your specific niche, even at modest cost, often outperform generic solutions despite imperfections. Investing in the right tool pays dividends in time saved and customer experience improved.

2. Labour Hire Business - Hybrid Integration Approach

A labour hire business client operated entirely through Excel, WhatsApp, and text messages. We discussed finding an all-in-one system, but options were limited - especially one that automated WhatsApp communication with their workforce, their preferred communication method. Instead of forcing one system, they found an integration tool connecting Excel and WhatsApp, allowing them to use preferred systems with higher automation.

They also implemented Monday as their CRM for customer management. However, Monday's lack of bulk email and text capabilities proved limiting; those processes remain manual until volume increases enough to justify dedicated systems.

The Lesson: Perfect isn't always possible. Sometimes a hybrid approach using integration tools to connect your preferred platforms beats forcing one expensive system. Start with what works and scale thoughtfully as needs grow.

3. Strategy to Impact - Research-Driven System Selection

We conducted extensive research on the best CRM system and initially thought HubSpot was the answer. However, we discovered their bulk email system was prohibitively expensive. After exploring alternatives, Systeme emerged with everything we needed at a friendly pricing structure: free entry-level access and a Premium tier under $200/month. Comparable HubSpot features apparently cost $5,000/month.

We proceeded with Systeme, though we've since discovered that low-cost systems can over-promise on features while delivering clunky, limited usability. The decision then becomes: invest in a new platform or adapt to current limitations?

The Lesson: Pricing models significantly impact customer perception and fit. A slightly different pricing strategy can either attract or alienate prospective customers. When evaluating systems, test-drive them (free trials matter more than money-back guarantees) and consider your growth trajectory when choosing.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Do I have a system to manage leads and customer relationships? Does it make my work easier, or are important details and follow-ups being missed?
- What steps do people typically take from first discovering my business to becoming customers? What information or support do they need at each stage?
- Where do potential customers lose interest or get stuck? What could I improve to help them take the next step?
- How will I capture and organise leads, identify those ready to buy and stay in touch with those who need more time? Who will be responsible for following up?
- Which CRM features are essential, such as contact history, reminders, audience segmentation or automated emails? Will it connect with my existing systems?
- Which processes should I improve before automating them? Where would automation save time, and where is personal contact more valuable?
- Do I have the budget and time to set up the system, keep customer information accurate and secure, and ensure everyone uses it consistently?
- How will I maintain relationships after a sale? Can the system help me support customers and encourage repeat business or referrals?
- How will I measure improvement, such as faster follow-up, more leads becoming customers, repeat purchases or time saved?

Lead Magnets

Imagine you have a store with a bowl of candy in the window. People walk by but don't come in. You put up a sign: 'Free Candy! Just come inside!' Now people are curious and more likely to enter. That's the concept behind a lead magnet in marketing.

Lead magnets are not a channel themselves, but a tactic you can use across many channels- your website, social media, paid ads- to attract customers and capture contact information (usually email addresses). They're like a piece of candy that entices potential customers to learn more about your business. And yes, free candy is more enticing than free fruit, so make sure your lead magnet appeals to your target audience.

What is a Lead Magnet?

A lead magnet is free valuable content you offer in exchange for someone's contact information. Examples include:

- Ebooks, guides or whitepapers offering helpful information on topics relevant to your audience
- Templates or checklists providing time-saving tools for specific tasks
- Webinars or workshops offering educational sessions (covered in detail in the Online Events section, page 93)
- Free trials or consultations giving people a chance to try your product or service
- Discounts - those discount offers for first-time purchases if they sign up to mailing lists
- Competitions - valuable prizes incentivise people to leave their details and share
- Quizzes and surveys engaging customers in discovery through diagnostic questions, collecting emails while providing personalised suggestions
- QR codes directing people to sign-up pages, further product information, competitions, reviews, or even serving as digital business cards

How Lead Magnets Benefit Your Business

- Build an email list by capturing addresses for long-term contact
- Increase brand awareness and establish industry authority
- Generate qualified leads - your lead magnet content attracts genuinely interested people
- Qualify prospects before they contact you, understanding their interests and needs

Creating Effective Lead Magnets

- Focus on your target audience: Offer something your ideal customer genuinely wants and needs
- Offer real value: Content should be high-quality and informative, not recycled information easily found online
- Have a clear call to action: Tell people exactly what to do to get your lead magnet
- Promote your lead magnet: Use your website, social media, and other channels to spread the word

Examples

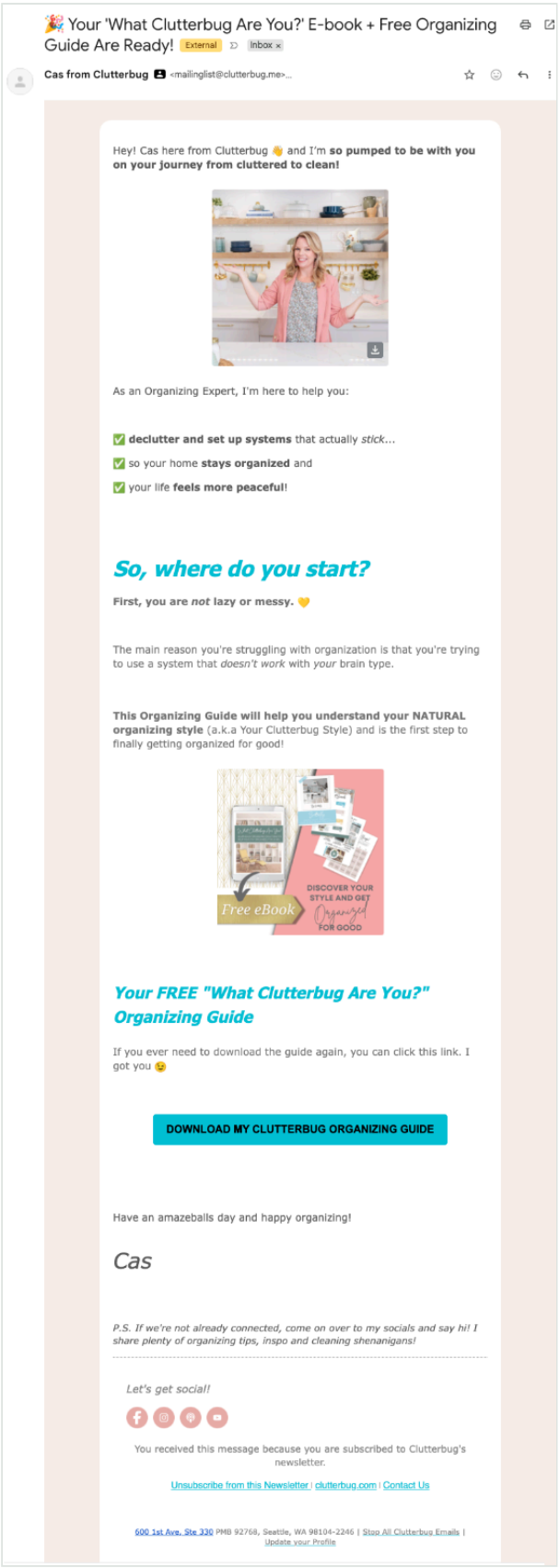
Clutterbug

I discovered Clutterbug through someone's recommendation in the comments section of another post. No targeted ad, just someone saying, in effect, "you should try this". Word of mouth had done the introduction.

Once on the website, my funnel journey started with a free quiz to identify my organising profile. After completing it, I was offered another free lead magnet: a guide tailored to my results in exchange for my email address. I came for an explanation of my clutter habits, and they gained a subscriber that they now know a fair bit about.

This example shows how a quiz and a downloadable guide can work together as lead magnets. The quiz sparks curiosity, while the guide offers a reason to continue the relationship. From here, I would expect follow-up emails that offer useful tips while also introducing the business's products and services.

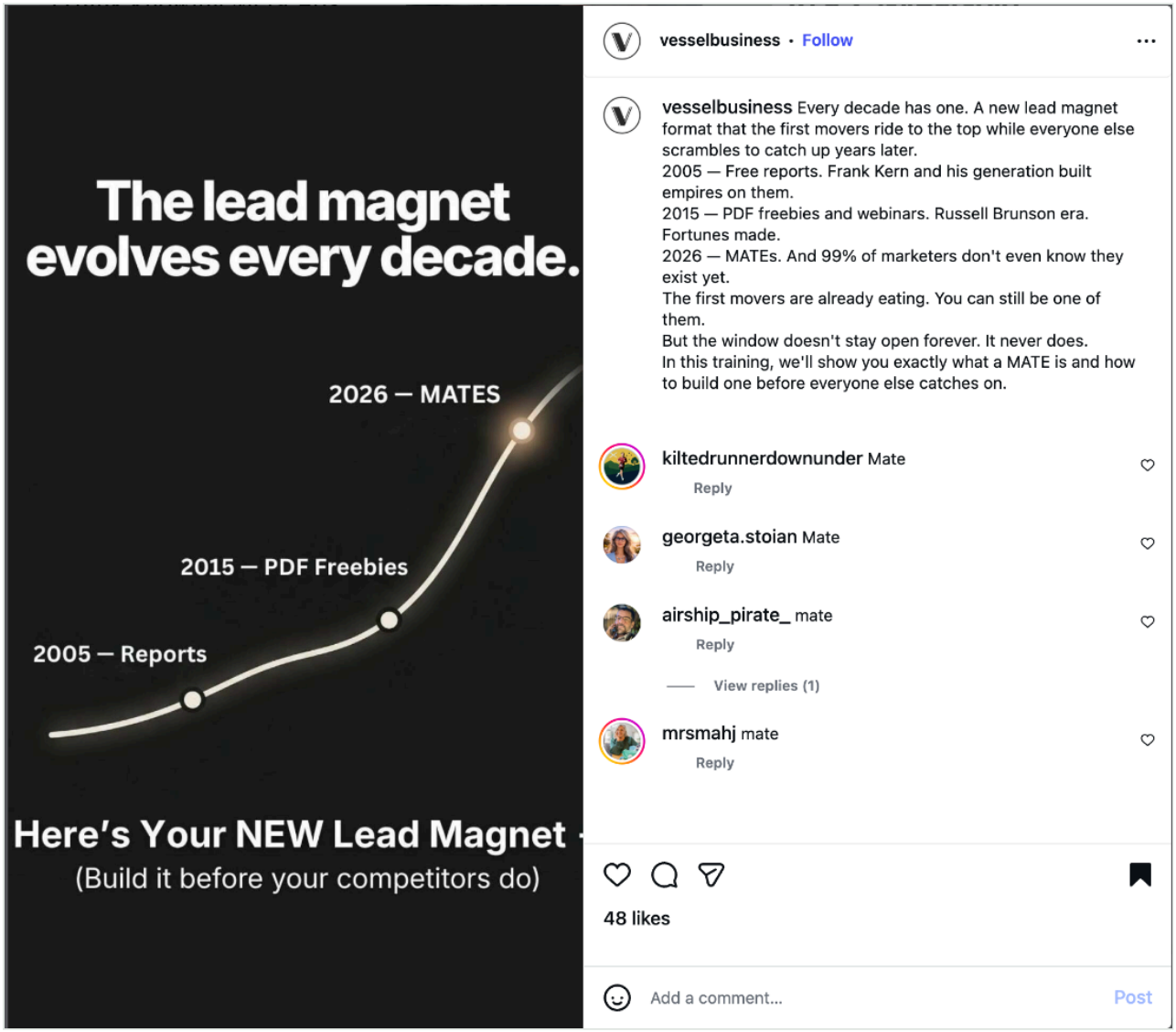




Vessel Business

This Vessel Instagram post felt particularly fitting: it talks about the evolution of lead magnets while offering one itself. A little tongue-in-cheek, and a neat demonstration of the approach in action. It introduces MATES as the new format and invites readers to comment “MATE” to access free training on what comes next for lead magnets.

It’s a reminder that lead magnets don’t have to be downloadable guides. Training sessions, webinars and events can also give people a reason to connect with your business. The right format depends on what your audience values and what you can deliver. Live sessions offer a chance for personal interaction and questions, while downloadable resources can be delivered automatically and are generally easier to manage.



Case Studies

1. Disability Support Services - Bridge the Research-to-Contact Gap

A disability support services client was investing significantly in Google ads to drive traffic. However, the website only offered one next step: contact the business for information. During the research phase, prospective customers often aren't ready to call or book appointments. If they leave without converting, they forget about the business.

By offering a downloadable information pack requiring email address capture, the business created an opportunity to follow up and remind prospects about their services during the consideration phase.

The Lesson: Lead magnets bridge the gap between interest and purchase intent. They capture prospects not yet ready to convert, allowing you to nurture them until they're ready.

2. The Double-Edged Sword of Email Follow-Up

I love lead magnets but often don't review them after signing up. Meanwhile, I get inundated with follow-up sales emails, forcing me to unsubscribe before even reviewing what I signed up for. I've even created a separate email account for this. The lesson: use the opportunity to engage your customers, not alienate them.

It's fine to remind people to use the lead magnet and offer additional value, but no one appreciates twice-daily emails counting down 'never-to-be-repeated offers' only to launch another the next day.

The Lesson: Lead magnet effectiveness depends on your follow-up strategy. Provide value, not aggressive sales tactics. Respect your audience's inbox.

3. Strategy to Impact - Lead Magnets for Premium Offerings

We're pricing our digital marketing guide to reflect its value - not an immediate 'no-brainer' purchase for everyone. However, we want to stay connected with interested prospects, so we're implementing lead magnets to nurture these relationships until they're ready to invest.

The Lesson: Lead magnets are essential when your offering requires consideration time or represents a significant investment. They keep interested prospects engaged without requiring them to purchase immediately.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- What do I want a lead magnet to achieve, such as attracting potential customers, building my email list or identifying interest in a particular service?
- What specific problem could I help my audience solve? What format would they find useful and easy to use?
- How does the lead magnet connect with my paid products or services? Will it attract people who are likely to become customers?
- Do I have the skills, time and resources to create it and keep it current, or will I need professional help?
- Where will I promote it? How will I clearly communicate why it is worth signing up for?
- What information do I need to collect, and how will I make sign-up and delivery simple? How will I obtain permission for follow-up marketing?
- What happens after someone receives it? What useful follow-up and relevant next step will I offer?
- How will I measure effectiveness beyond sign-ups or downloads? Is it generating qualified enquiries or customers, and what could I improve?

User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-generated content (UGC) is any content - photos, videos, reviews, testimonials, posts - created by your customers or audience rather than your business. UGC is a cross-channel tactic that amplifies your marketing efforts by leveraging the voices and experiences of real people.

Why use UGC

Potential customers trust other customers more than they trust your marketing. A review from a real user carries more weight than polished brand messaging. UGC is authentic, relatable, and socially proven. It also reduces your content creation burden - your audience becomes your content creators. (Of course there are AI generators now that can create UGC, so this tactics will remain reliable for as long as customers still trust it)

Types of UGC You Can Leverage

- Customer reviews and testimonials on your website, Google, Trustpilot, or industry platforms
- Photos or videos of customers using your products (tagged or shared)
- Social media posts mentioning your brand or using branded hashtags
- Customer testimonial videos or case study content
- Before-and-after photos or transformation stories
- Questions and answers from your community

How to Encourage UGC

- Make it easy: Provide clear instructions and hashtags for sharing
- Ask explicitly: Request reviews, testimonials, or tagged photos
- Incentivise: Offer discounts, features on your social media, or prizes for contributions
- Feature contributors: Repost customer content and thank them publicly
- Pay creators, there are agencies that manage talent, and create UGC style content in return for the product and a small payment (usually $100-$150 per submission of videos that match the brief)

How to Utilise UGC

On social media, customer posts and tags increase your reach organically. On your website, testimonials and reviews build trust and improve conversion rates. In paid advertising, UGC content often outperforms branded content. On review platforms, customer ratings and detailed reviews influence purchase decisions. In email, customer success stories increase engagement and conversions.

The Risks and Responsibilities

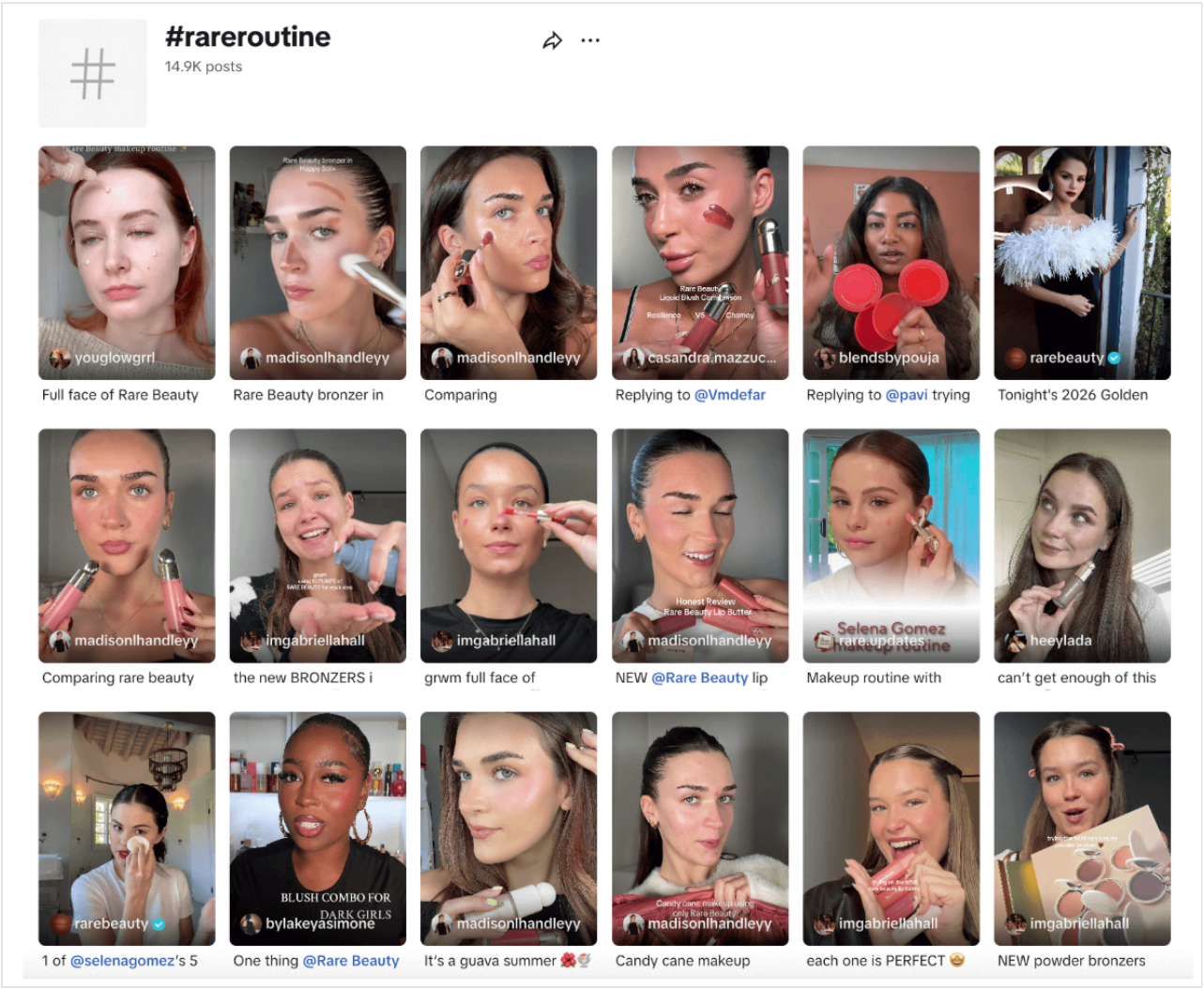
Always get permission before reposting customer content. Be transparent - never misrepresent who created the content. Moderate for authenticity and brand safety. Compensate fairly if using UGC commercially, especially if it involves significant effort.

Examples

I included this Bazaarvoice example because it gives a useful snapshot of creator-made UGC. Once you see the style of content, the concept quickly clicks.

While influencer partnerships often involve reaching the creator's audience, UGC creators are typically engaged to make content for the brand to use on its own channels. They don't need a large following because their value lies in the content they create.

Businesses can find creators through platforms and agencies or contact them directly. This commissioned content is distinct from customers independently sharing their experiences, although both can show a product in a relatable, everyday setting.

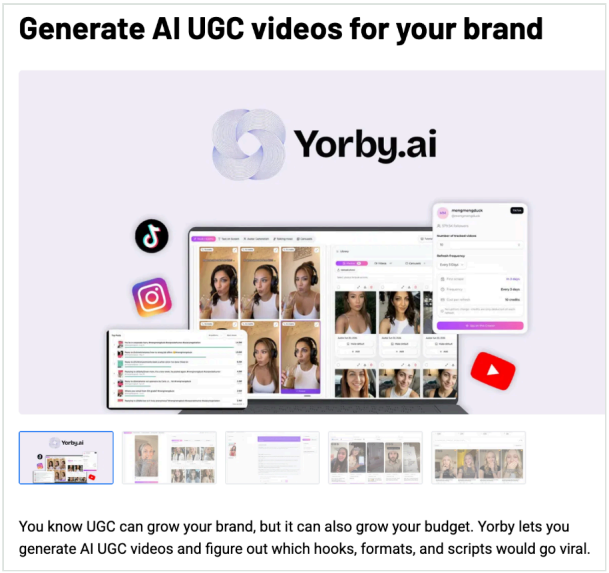


Source: https://www.bazaarvoice.com/

AI can also create videos in the style of user-generated content, complete with a virtual person presenting the product. This example landed in my inbox, so I thought it was worth including as another option.

Personally, I often find AI presenters easy to spot, although others may find them more convincing. For a business with a limited budget, this could be an option worth testing. Whether your audience will connect with it is another question.

For me, there's a difference between a virtual presenter explaining a product and a fictional customer claiming to have used and loved it. A convincing face doesn't come with actual customer experience. Many AI tools are available; whether they suit your brand comes down to your values and the trust you want to build.



Questions to Ask Yourself

- Are my customers already sharing content about my business? How could I help more people see it?
- What types of user-generated content would be most useful to my audience and marketing, such as customer photos, demonstrations or stories?
- When and how could I invite customers to share their experiences? How can I make it easy while encouraging honest, natural contributions?
- How will I obtain permission to reuse content, agree on where it can appear and credit its creator?
- Do I have a process to find, organise and feature suitable content across my website, emails and social media?
- How will I measure whether this content builds trust, encourages engagement or helps generate enquiries and sales?
- Is UGC created with AI something that I want to try? Will it enable me to use the tactic more efficiently, or will it damage the reputation of my brand?

Strategic Objectives: The Foundation of Effective Digital Marketing

This guide covers 20 digital marketing channels. However, these channels mean nothing if you don't know what you're trying to achieve with each one. Too many business owners invest time and money in marketing simply because they believe they 'should', or because they heard it's a 'good strategy' from a competitor or industry expert. Without clear objectives, you're marketing for the sake of marketing - and that's money wasted.

Before you choose which channels to pursue, you need to be crystal clear on the objectives of each channel and ensure they align with your overall business strategy. This allows you to measure effectiveness, identify what's working, adjust tactics that aren't delivering, and ultimately prove ROI.

The SMART Objectives Framework

To help determine your tactical objectives, apply the SMART objectives model. Your marketing goals must be:

- Specific - Clearly defined. What exactly do you want to achieve?
- Measurable - Quantifiable. How will you know when you've achieved it?
- Attainable - Achievable within your resources and constraints.
- Realistic - Grounded in reality, not fantasy. Does it make sense for your business?
- Timely - Bound by a specific timeframe. When do you want to achieve this?

Examples of Objectives That Aren't SMART

"Grow social media audience"

This objective fails on Specificity and Measurability. How big do you want your audience to be? 1,000 followers? 10,000? 100,000? Without a number, you can't measure progress or know when you've succeeded. A better version: "Grow Instagram followers from 500 to 5,000 within 6 months."

"Get 10 million views on the first post"

This fails on Attainability and Realism. Unless you're an established celebrity with an existing massive audience, this isn't realistic for a new account or small business. You can't will 10 million views into existence. A better version: "Achieve 1,000 views on the first post within the first month, building toward an average of 5,000 views per post by month six."

"Grow social media account to 1 billion followers in 5 years"

This fails on Realism and Timeliness. 1 billion followers is unrealistic for most businesses (only a handful of accounts globally have this reach). The 5-year timeline is too distant to be actionable - you need milestones along the way. A better version: "Grow Instagram followers to 10,000 by end of Year 1, 50,000 by end of Year 2, with quarterly milestones to track progress."

Setting Objectives for Each Channel

Not every channel serves the same purpose. Before choosing channels and tactics, define what each channel should achieve:

- **Brand Awareness:** Reach new audiences and build recognition (e.g., social media, video marketing, podcast sponsorships)
- **Lead Generation:** Capture contact information and qualified prospects (e.g., email marketing, webinars, content marketing)
- **Sales and Conversions:** Drive direct revenue or transactions (e.g., paid ads, e-commerce platforms, affiliate marketing)
- **Customer Retention:** Deepen relationships with existing customers (e.g., email marketing, loyalty programs, community building)
- **Thought Leadership:** Establish expertise and credibility (e.g., blogging, podcast hosting, awards, speaking engagements)

Alignment With Overall Strategy

Your channel objectives should cascade from your broader business strategy. If your business strategy is to become the premium provider in your niche, your marketing objectives should reflect that positioning - perhaps through thought leadership channels and quality-focused messaging. If your strategy is rapid growth through market penetration, your objectives might focus on brand awareness and lead generation at scale.

Every channel you invest in should contribute to moving your business toward its strategic goals. If a channel isn't aligned, it shouldn't be in your plan.

Measuring What Matters

Once you've set SMART objectives for each channel, you need to measure them. Establish:

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) - The specific metrics that show progress (followers, engagement rate, leads, conversions, revenue)
- Baseline - Where you're starting from
- Review Schedule - How often you'll check performance (weekly, monthly, quarterly)
- Adjustment Plan - How you'll respond if a channel isn't hitting targets

The Bottom Line

For every digital marketing channel you embark on, ensure you have a SMART objective. This isn't about creating bureaucracy or endless planning - it's about being intentional with your time and budget. When you know what you're trying to achieve and how you'll measure success, you make better decisions, optimise faster, and ultimately build a marketing strategy that actually drives business results.

Moving Forward: Your Digital Marketing Journey

You now have a comprehensive overview of identifying your target customer needs, 20 digital marketing channels, the tactics, systems and tools that support them, and a framework for setting objectives that align with your business goals. But reading about channels is only the first step. The real work begins when you take this knowledge and apply it to your specific situation.

This guide is intentionally a high-level summary. It exists to save you time and money on your marketing by helping you focus on the right things for your business. More importantly, it equips you to have an informed conversation with service providers, marketing agencies, and consultants. When you understand the options available, you can ask better questions, evaluate recommendations critically, and ensure any solution is right for your business.

We've seen too much money wasted when business owners are sold solutions they don't need, simply because they didn't have enough knowledge to push back. This guide is your defence against that. It gives you the language, the framework, and the confidence to say 'no' to strategies that don't fit, and 'yes' to approaches that align with your goals.

Deep Dives: Our Knowledge Library

While this guide provides the strategic overview, there's always more to learn. Our Knowledge Library contains in-depth articles on the full range of topics covered in this guide. As digital marketing evolves (and it evolves constantly), we continue to update these resources with relevant, current information. Whether you need to understand a specific tactic more deeply, explore case studies from your industry, or stay updated on emerging trends, the Knowledge Library is your ongoing resource.

LINK TO KNOWLEDGE LIBRARY

Tools That Work: Our Curated Toolbox

There are reportedly 25,000 marketing applications available today. That's overwhelming. Choosing the right tools can mean the difference between a marketing strategy that runs smoothly and one that drains time and money on clunky, poorly-designed software.

We test many of these tools so you don't have to. Our Toolbox is a curated collection of applications that actually work - organised by channel, by tier (free, low-cost, professional/enterprise), and by use case. Rather than sending you on a wild hunt through countless options, the Toolbox lets you focus on the tools that are truly worthy of your time and investment.

LINK TO TOOLBOX

Your Next Steps

Take what you've learned from this guide and apply it. Use the questions posed throughout each channel section to clarify your approach. Map out your strategic objectives. Identify your lowest-hanging fruit target customer. Then, one channel at a time, build your marketing presence with intention, measurement, and focus.

Your marketing success doesn't come from being on every channel. It comes from being present in the right channels, with the right message, for the right people. This guide shows you how to figure out what 'right' means for your business.

The questions in this Guide have been summarised in the sister Workbook complimentary with your Lowest Hanging Fruit Guide purchase.

LINK TO DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY WORKBOOK

Questions? Ready to go deeper? Visit our Knowledge Library and explore our Toolbox. We're here to support your marketing success, get in touch via grow@strategytoimpact.com