



10 Digital Marketing Priorities for 2026

(This was created with the help of one of our AI colleagues 😊)

This course, titled "**10 Digital Marketing Priorities for Your Business in 2026**", was delivered by **Evan Mangan** of The Marketing Crowd on behalf of the **Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Cork North & West**. Evan's background includes extensive marketing leadership roles at major companies like BT, Orange, and Yahoo before founding The Marketing Crowd.

The following is a comprehensive summary of the major themes and strategies discussed during the session, followed by a targeted action point list.

1. The Digital Marketing "Big Picture"

Evan began by establishing a strategic framework for digital marketing, emphasising that businesses need a "helicopter view" before diving into specific tactics. Success in 2026 relies on a three-step progression:

- **Step 1: Developing Key Skills.** To be effective today, business owners must master three specific skill sets: **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** (for strategy and content), **Graphic Design** (specifically using Canva), and **Video Production** (for social media).
- **Step 2: The Website as the Hub.** A website is the absolute centre of digital marketing. Evan dismisses the idea that social media can replace a website; the site is the "sales environment" where product features, testimonials, and calls to action reside.
- **Step 3: Conversion and Traffic.** Many websites act as a "leaky bucket," where visitors land but quickly "bounce" off. Businesses must evaluate their site's ability to engage and convert before spending effort driving traffic through free (organic) or paid channels.

2. Priority: Mastering Generative AI (Google Gemini & ChatGPT)

A significant portion of the course was dedicated to AI, with Evan highlighting **Google Gemini** as a tool that has recently surpassed ChatGPT in several technical areas.

- **The Power of Prompting:** Effective AI use requires "prompts" that include **context** (details about your business), an **expert role** (telling the AI to act as a business growth expert), and **clarity** on the desired output.
- **Gemini's Advanced Free Features:** Unlike the free version of ChatGPT, Gemini offers advanced features for free, such as **GPT Vision** (analysing images) and the ability to critique video files.
- **Marketing Applications:**
 - **Copywriting:** AI can analyse a product photo and write expert web copy or Instagram captions based on the visual details it "sees".
 - **Video Critiques:** By uploading a video, the AI can act as a video marketing expert, identifying where a "hook" is missing or where visual variety is needed.
 - **Mimicking Writing Styles:** You can train an AI to write in your specific voice by providing it with samples of your past writing. However, Evan warns that you should always rewrite AI content to ensure it is at least 80–90% human-written to avoid being penalised by Google.
 - **Image Manipulation:** Using Gemini's "Nano Banana" tool, businesses can change the colour of products in photos or alter backgrounds (e.g., placing a model on a beach) without a professional shoot.

3. Priority: Video Marketing and the "Edits" App

Social media marketing in 2026 is almost entirely driven by video. Evan recommends the **"Edits" app** by Instagram/Meta, which is a 100% free alternative to CapCut without watermarks.

- **Three Essential Video Types:**
 1. **Clips set to music:** Ideal for visually interesting products like shoes or furniture.
 2. **Voiceovers:** Allowing a business owner to show products while explaining the service or benefits.
 3. **Talking to camera:** Essential for service providers (coaches, accountants, solicitors) because they are "the product." This builds authenticity and trust.
- **Editing Best Practices:** The first **3 seconds** (the hook) are critical to stop users from swiping. To keep attention, the visual scene must change frequently—a technique called using "B-roll" or overlays.

4. Priority: Website Engagement and Conversion Tactics

Evan noted that while a physical shop might have a 20–30% conversion rate, a good e-commerce site typically only sees **2–3%**. Because online shoppers are prone to "researching" and comparing competitors, your site must work harder.

- **Psychological Triggers:**

- **Page Speed:** If a site takes longer than 4 seconds to load, 40% of people will leave before seeing the content.
- **Resonating Headlines:** Use AI to identify the top three things customers look for (e.g., for a dog sofa: "easy to wash," "durable," "stylish") and ensure these are in the headline.
- **Establishing Trust:** Use "As Featured In" banners and specific metrics (e.g., "Over 20,000 companies trained") to build immediate credibility.
- **Reassurance:** Testimonials are vital. Evan recommends **Trustindex.io** as an affordable tool to pull reviews from Google or TripAdvisor directly onto your site.
- **Incentives:** Limited-time offers and "scarcity" (e.g., "only 3 places left") are proven to focus the customer's mind and trigger a purchase.

5. Priority: Search Engine Optimization (SEO) & Google Profiles

Driving free traffic from search engines remains a top priority, as search traffic converts at a higher rate than social media traffic.

- **Google Business Profiles:** This is the "map result" for local searches. To rank in the top three, a profile must be **relevant, comprehensively filled in, actively updated,** and have **high-quality reviews.**
- **Organic SEO:** Google's "spider" crawls websites, weighing about 200 factors. The most important factors are **Relevance** (having a dedicated page for every service), **Trust** (backlinks from reputable sites), and **Page Experience** (speed and mobile-friendliness).
- **Keywords:** You must tell Google what a page is about using the **Meta Title** and **Headline.** Evan demonstrated that creating a dedicated page for a specific term (like "AI Digital Marketing Trainer") can move a business to number one on Google within weeks.

6. Priority: The Shift to AI Search (AI Mode)

Evan identifies **AI Mode** (powered by Gemini) as the "future of Google".

- **Synthesis over Links:** Traditional search gives you links; AI search gives you an actual answer by reading all those links for you.
- **Getting Recommended:** To appear in AI search recommendations, you must have high-quality reviews and a reputation that the AI can find across the web. Evan suggests asking AI search: "*What criteria are you using to recommend these businesses?*" and then updating your website to reflect those specific qualities.

7. Priority: Social Media Algorithms and Email Marketing

- **The Reach Reality:** Organic reach is extremely low (around 5% on Facebook and 10–15% on Instagram). Social networks prioritise interesting content over business updates. For important offers, you must run **paid ads.**

- **Regaining Control:** Because you do not own your social media followers, Evan advocates for **Email Marketing**. He recommends **MailerLite** for its simplicity and cost-effectiveness (free for the first 1,000 subscribers). The goal is to turn "leaky" website visitors and social media followers into an email list by offering free guides or discounts.

Participant Action Point List

Immediate Technical Tasks:

- **Check Page Speed:** Use **GTmetrics.com** to ensure your website loads in under 2 seconds.
- **Audit Google Profile:** Log into **google.com/business** to ensure your categories are correct and your profile is 100% complete.
- **Set Up AI Privacy:** In ChatGPT settings, turn off "Improve the model for everyone" to protect your business data.

AI & Strategy Tasks:

- **Experiment with Gemini:** Upload a recent marketing video to **Gemini** and ask for a critique from the perspective of a "Video Marketing Expert".
- **Refine Your Headlines:** Use AI to identify the "three things people look for" in your specific product or service, then rewrite your website headlines to include them.
- **Test AI Search:** Search for your business category in Google's **AI Mode**. If you aren't recommended, ask the AI what criteria it is using and identify what is missing from your online presence.

Content & Engagement Tasks:

- **Download the "Edits" App:** Practise making a 12-second "clips set to music" video or a voiceover video for your most popular product.
- **Request Google Reviews:** Use the "Ask for Reviews" link in your Google Profile to email five recent customers, as reviews are now critical for AI search rankings.
- **Start an Email List:** Sign up for **MailerLite** and create a simple "lead magnet" (like a guide or discount code) to begin capturing visitor email addresses.

Future Planning:

- **Review LEO Training:** Check the **LEO Cork North & West** calendar for upcoming deep-dive courses on AI, LinkedIn, SEO, and TikTok mentioned by Evan.

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