



How to market your business locally

This course, delivered by **Evan Mangan** on behalf of the **Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Cork North & West**, provided a comprehensive overview of digital marketing strategies for local businesses. Evan described the session as a "helicopter view" of how to use various digital tools to promote products and services within a specific town or county.

Core Marketing Framework: Pull vs. Push

Evan began by distinguishing between two fundamental digital marketing tactics: **pulling** and **pushing** customers.

- **Pulling Tactics:** These involve getting found when a customer is already searching for a specific service (e.g., SEO and Google Business Profiles).
- **Pushing Tactics:** These involve placing your business in front of people who may not be searching at that moment but have shown relevant interests or behaviours (e.g., Facebook and Instagram advertising).

1. Mastering Google Search & Business Profiles

Evan explained the anatomy of a Google search results page, noting that it typically includes **sponsored ads**, followed by **map results**, and then **organic results**.

Google Business Profiles (GBP)

Evan highlighted that a Google Business Profile is a free and highly desirable tool for local marketing. He noted that when users search for a service followed by a town name (e.g., "restaurants in Limerick"), Google displays a map with the **top 3 profiles**.

- **Verification:** Evan explained that businesses must verify their location before a profile goes live. He noted that while postcards are common, using a **landline** often allows for immediate verification via an automated phone call.

- **Optimising Categories:** Evan warned that the **Primary Category** is crucial for relevance; changing it can significantly impact where you appear in search results. He advised participants to add up to nine additional **secondary categories** to help Google understand the full scope of their business.
- **Completeness:** Evan stated that Google prioritises profiles that are "comprehensively filled in and up-to-date". This includes accurate opening hours, special holiday hours, and descriptions.
- **Multimedia:** Evan suggested uploading both photos and short videos (under one minute) to make profiles more visually appealing and engaging.

The Power of Reviews

Evan noted that after relevance and completeness, Google looks at **reputation** via reviews.

- **Competitive Analysis:** He suggested searching for your service and town to see how many reviews the top three competitors have; this establishes your target.
- **The Review Link:** Evan demonstrated how to generate a direct "Ask for Review" link from the profile dashboard to prevent customers from getting lost.
- **Personalisation:** He suggested that businesses should explain to customers *why* a review is important (e.g., helping a local business compete with giants like Amazon), as this increases the likelihood of a response.

2. Leveraging Artificial Intelligence (ChatGPT)

Evan introduced **ChatGPT** as a "supercomputer" that can generate expert-level marketing content. He explained that it differs from Google because it generates tailored answers rather than just providing links.

- **Effective Prompting:** Evan shared a three-step formula for better AI results:
 1. Provide **context**.
 2. Ask the AI to **act as an expert**.
 3. Be **clear** about the desired output.
- **Marketing Applications:** Evan demonstrated using ChatGPT to write business descriptions and recommend optimal Google Business categories. He noted that users can ask the AI to "dumb down" technical explanations or adopt specific professional personas.

3. Local Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

Evan explained that Google ranks **individual web pages**, not just entire websites. Therefore, a business should have dedicated pages for each core service they want to be found for.

Signals of Relevance

To help a page rank high, Evan noted that the search term (e.g., "Plumber Macroom") must appear in several key areas:

- **Meta/SEO Title:** This is the text in the browser tab and is a primary ranking signal. It should be under 70 characters.
- **Headlines and Body Text:** Evan suggested writing for people first but ensuring the main search terms are naturally included.
- **URL:** Including the search term in the page's web address helps Google identify relevance.
- **Image Alt Tags:** Evan explained that "Alt Text" helps those with impaired visibility but also tells Google what an image represents, aiding both SEO and image search rankings.

Building Local Trust

Evan stated that businesses can reassure Google of their local presence by **embedding a Google Map** on their Contact page. He also advised being listed in high-ranking local directories (like a LEO directory or myhome.ie) only if they appear on the first page of search results.

4. Social Media: Organic vs. Paid

Evan discussed the reality of modern social media, where **organic reach** has declined significantly.

- **Algorithms:** Evan explained that platforms like Facebook and Instagram use AI to show users only what they find interesting. He noted that Facebook's organic reach for business pages averages only 5%.
- **Instagram Search:** Evan advised businesses to include their main search terms in the **"Name" field** (not just the username), as this field is searchable.
- **Hashtags:** He noted that Instagram has recently suggested a limit of just **five hashtags** per post.

Meta Advertising

Because organic reach is limited, Evan suggested using paid ads to "push" content to specific local audiences.

- **Hyper-Local Targeting:** Evan demonstrated how to "drop a pin" on a map in the Ads Manager to target users within a **1-mile radius** of a specific premises.
- **Interests:** Businesses can target specific demographics, such as women in Cork interested in "Yoga" or men within 3 miles of a pub who support "Man United".
- **Ad Strategy:** Evan recommended driving ad traffic to a specific, relevant web page rather than just a homepage.

Action Point List for Participants

To implement Evan's strategies, participants should complete the following tasks:

- **Audit Google Business Profile:**
 - Check for a profile by searching the business name on Google Maps.
 - Verify the business address using a **landline** for speed if possible.
 - Ensure the **Primary Category** is accurate and add up to 10 secondary categories.
 - Update opening hours and special holiday hours regularly.
 - Upload at least one **video** under 60 seconds to the profile.
- **Improve Google Reviews:**
 - Identify the number of reviews held by the top three local competitors.
 - Obtain the direct "Ask for Review" link from the GBP dashboard.
 - Create a personalised email or WhatsApp message explaining the value of the review.
- **Optimise Website for Local SEO:**
 - Check rankings using an **Incognito window** to avoid personalised results.
 - Ensure every target search term (Service + Town) has its own **dedicated page**.
 - Update **Meta Titles** (under 70 chars) to include the town name.
 - Rename image files and add **Alt Text** before uploading them to the site.
 - **Embed a Google Map** on the "Contact Us" page.
- **Enhance Social Media Presence:**
 - Edit the Instagram "**Name**" field to include search terms (e.g., "Boutique Limerick").
 - Experiment with **Meta Ads** by dropping a pin for a small-radius local campaign.
 - Limit Instagram hashtags to the **five most relevant** terms.
- **Utilise AI Tools:**
 - Set up a free **ChatGPT** account.
 - Use the "Act as an expert" prompt to draft a new Google Business description.

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