



Instagram Reels

Evan Mangan delivered a comprehensive course on **Instagram Reels** on behalf of the **Local Enterprise Office Cork North & West**, emphasizing that Reels are currently the most significant area for digital marketing. Evan said that while Instagram includes several features like stories and standard posts, this particular session was "laser-focused" on Reels because they are the format that allows businesses to reach the highest percentage of followers and, crucially, non-followers.

The Fundamentals of Instagram Marketing

Evan began by explaining the fundamental structure of Instagram to ensure all participants, 40% of whom had never used the platform for marketing, were on the same level. He described **the Grid** as a helicopter view of a business's recent content, where strangers form an instant impression. Evan said that because every Reel is represented by a "cover" image on this grid, choosing an attractive and relevant cover is essential to getting users over the "initial visual hurdle".

He distinguished between the three primary feeds on the platform:

- **The Main Feed (Home):** Consists of posts and Reels from accounts a user already follows.
- **The Stories Feed:** A secondary, less prominent feed where content disappears after 24 hours.
- **The Reels Feed:** A dedicated space for short-form video where users primarily see content from accounts they do **not** yet follow.

Understanding the Instagram Algorithm

A significant portion of the course was dedicated to how the **Instagram Algorithm** (powered by AI) functions. Evan explained that the algorithm has two primary jobs: micro-analysing users to understand their interests and evaluating every piece of content to determine if it is "interesting".

Evan said that the algorithm is heavily biased toward Reels because they keep users engaged on the app longer. He highlighted the "**3-second rule**": the AI calculates what percentage of viewers watch past the first three seconds. If a Reel hooks viewers early and they watch toward the 50% or 100% mark, the AI views it as "interesting" and shows it to

more people, creating a "snowball effect". Conversely, if users swipe away immediately, the content "collapses" and reaches very few people.

The Three Types of Reels

Evan identified three main styles of Reels that businesses should utilize:

1. **Multiple Clips Set to Music:** This involves taking several short, 1–3 second clips of a product, service, or location and syncing them to a catchy track. Evan said this keeps the scene changing and prevents the video from becoming boring.
2. **The Voiceover Reel:** This builds on the first type by adding a spoken narrative over the clips. Evan explained that this is particularly effective for marketing because it allows a business to impart specific information or tips while keeping the visual interest high.
3. **Talking to the Camera:** This involves the business owner or staff speaking directly to the viewers. While optional for product-based businesses, Evan said this is "crucial" for service-based businesses to establish expertise and trust.

The "Edits" App: A Professional Editing Tool

While Reels can be made within the Instagram app (which Evan compared to driving a "Ford Fiesta"), he strongly recommended using the **Instagram Edits app** (the "Mercedes"). Evan said that Edits is a free, powerful, and watermark-free alternative to apps like CapCut.

Key features Evan demonstrated within the Edits app included:

- **Projects:** Unlike the Instagram app, Edits saves work as a project, allowing users to return and update videos months later.
- **Precise Trimming:** Evan showed how to use the "white line" (playhead) to split and delete boring parts of a clip to keep only the most interesting seconds.
- **Speed Adjustments:** He demonstrated how to use slow motion (e.g., 0.5x) for dramatic effect, such as pouring honey or bees at a hive, and how to use high speed (up to 100x) for time-lapses like clouds moving or a room filling up.
- **Audio Control:** Evan explained how to mute "scrunchy" background noises from original clips and replace them with trending music.
- **Music Selection:** Evan showed how to search for tracks and use the "red blobs" in the editor—which indicate the most popular, catchy parts of a song—to align with the video.
- **AI Captions:** The app can automatically scan a voiceover and generate text captions. Evan said these are vital for accessibility and keeping viewers engaged, though he cautioned that they should always be proofread for AI-generated typos.
- **Overlays:** This "advanced technique" allows a user to place a video or photo on top of them while they are talking to the camera. Evan said this transforms a static video into a dynamic marketing tool by *showing* the product (like a lunch special) while *talking* about it.
- **Cut Silences:** A "handy" AI feature that automatically removes awkward pauses at the start and end of a recording.

The Content Strategy Spectrum

Evan introduced a strategic framework for content creation based on where a business sits on a **spectrum**:

- **Visually Interesting Products (e.g., Boutiques, Artists):** These businesses have an easier time because their products are naturally attractive. Evan said they can "sell" 90% of the time because users enjoy seeing beautiful items in their feed.
- **Service-Based Businesses (e.g., Accountants, Coaches):** These businesses must work harder because they don't have a "product" to show. Evan said they should follow an **80/20 rule**: 80% of content should be helpful tips and expert advice to prove they are "any good," and only 20% should be direct selling.

Account Types and Professional Tools

Evan explained the differences between **Personal, Business, and Creator accounts**. He noted that Business accounts are often restricted to a "stock" music library because of copyright deals with record labels. Evan said that many small businesses switch to a **Creator account** to gain access to the "brilliant" library of popular music (like Ed Sheeran or Harry Styles) while still retaining professional analytics and scheduling tools.

Recommended Equipment

To improve video quality, Evan suggested several pieces of equipment:

- **Microphones:** He highly recommended the **Hollyland Lark M2** for its small size and magnetized clip, noting it works with all devices and includes windbreakers for outdoor shooting.
- **Stability:** A tripod and a "tripod adjuster mount" are essential for talking-to-camera videos. For walking shots, he suggested a budget stabilizer or a motorized **gimbal** (like the DJI Osmo) for a professional "drone-like" feel.
- **Lighting:** Evan recommended a **Neewer ring light** for indoors. He specifically advised those with glasses to position two lights at 45-degree angles and tilt them slightly to avoid reflections in their lenses.

Action Point List for Participants

- [] **Install the Instagram Edits App:** Download the app from the App Store or Play Store to access professional editing features and the "Projects" save function.
- [] **Check Your Account Type:** Review your Instagram settings. If you lack access to popular music, consider switching to a **Creator Account** to access the full music library and professional analytics.
- [] **Identify Your Position on the Spectrum:** Determine if your business is product-based (visual) or service-based (expertise). Plan your content ratio accordingly (e.g., 80% helpful tips for services).
- [] **Brainstorm with AI:** Use tools like ChatGPT or Gemini to generate 20 innovative Reel ideas. Provide context about your business and ask the AI to "act like an Instagram marketing expert".
- [] **Film in Portrait Mode:** Ensure all video clips are shot vertically (9:16) specifically for Reels.
- [] **Master the "3-Second Hook":** Plan the first three seconds of every Reel to be the most visually or audibly arresting part to satisfy the algorithm.
- [] **Record a Voiceover Reel:** Practice using the microphone button in the Edits app to narrate a series of short clips. Remember to lower the background music volume to roughly 20–30% so your voice is clear.
- [] **Utilise AI Captions:** Always add captions to your Reels for accessibility. Ensure you proofread and style them (using the "Style" and "Bubble" font options) to match your brand.
- [] **Audit Your Grid:** Look at your profile grid through the "eyes of a stranger." Ensure your Reel covers are consistent and visually appealing.
- [] **Invest in Basic Audio:** If you plan to do voiceovers or talk to the camera, prioritize buying a dedicated microphone (like the Lark M2) to ensure professional sound quality.

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