



Local Enterprise Office South Cork

Instagram Reels

Course Summary

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Prepared by The Marketing Crowd *with the help of one of our AI colleagues* 😊

Course Overview

The session opened with a walkthrough of the core Instagram interface using Brown Thomas's profile as an example. The Home feed shows posts and Reels from followed accounts. Every account has a grid showing recent posts and Reels, and landing on that grid creates an instant impression: it doesn't need to look amazing, but it must not look like a mess, or people won't check the account out or follow it.

Evan clarified the terminology: sending an image (single or carousel) out is a "post," sending a video is a "Reel." There are three main feeds: the main Home feed, the Stories feed (a secondary feed, less visible, images/videos disappearing after 24 hours, not shown permanently on the grid), and the Reels feed. Stories typically reach 7–9% of followers, image posts reach 10–15%, and Reels reach more than either, because Instagram knows users engage more with Reels.

The Algorithm

Instagram's algorithm has two jobs:

1. **Microanalyzing every user** so Instagram can keep them on the platform (and therefore showing more ads). It tracks what users stop and watch, what percentage of a video they watch, and which engagement actions they take. Save and share are weighted much more heavily than a like, since a like takes almost no thought while saving or sharing signals real interest.
2. **Evaluating every piece of content for interest.** When something is posted, it goes to an initial batch of followers. The algorithm measures the skip rate (what percentage stop scrolling within the first three seconds) and watch-through percentage. If engagement is strong, Instagram shows it to more followers, and potentially to non-followers in the Reels feed who share similar interests. If engagement is weak, distribution stops.

This is why the first three seconds of a Reel are described as critical: our brains decide within about three seconds whether something is worth watching. Reels that survive that window and are watched, saved, and shared get pushed to more people, including non-followers.

Search and Multiple Accounts

Instagram search surfaces posts/Reels containing the searched term in the caption or spoken audio. Businesses should think about being found this way. Evan also demonstrated switching between multiple Instagram accounts (he uses training dummy accounts, e.g. "The Laughing Horse," "the gardening crowd") by long-pressing the profile icon.

Content Strategy: What to Actually Post

Evan introduced the Blendtec example: rather than posting only about blenders, Blendtec makes smoothie recipe videos with the blender featured throughout, since "10% off

blenders" content is boring but recipe content is genuinely useful while still showcasing the product.

He then introduced **the spectrum concept**, a central framework for the day:

- **One end of the spectrum:** businesses with visually interesting, tangible products (boutiques, florists, shoe shops, antiques, tattoo artists, photographers). These can hard-sell around 90% of the time because the product itself is visually appealing and people are already passionate about that category (demonstrated live via a search for the boutique "Ruby Rouge"). Talking to camera is optional here since the products largely sell themselves.
- **Other end of the spectrum:** service-based businesses with nothing inherently visual (solicitors, accountants, financial advisors, psychologists, life coaches, digital marketing). These face two extra challenges: nothing to visually showcase, and people aren't passionate about the service category the way they are about shoes or handbags. The extra challenge here is that viewers can't tell if the service is any good just by looking, so video becomes the way to "bring the product to life" and prove expertise. Talking to camera is recommended, not optional, here — the business owner effectively is the product.

For businesses in the middle (Evan used a hotel, a hair salon), the guideline is roughly **80% interesting/helpful/informative content, 20% hard-selling**, though he stressed this ratio is a starting point, not a universal rule, and businesses need to place themselves on the spectrum to know how far to shift it. Content ideas he gave for a hotel: local attractions and tips, upcoming events/gigs, chef recipes, spa wellness tips, with offers mixed in occasionally. For a hair salon: DIY styling tips and before/after transformation videos, which subtly build demand for bookings without hard-selling.

The Three Types of Reels

1. **Lots of little clips set to music** — best for visually strong products; typically maxes out around 15–20 seconds. Average video view length across Instagram is about 9 seconds, so shorter, changing content performs better than one long static shot (e.g. a one-minute sunset clip is boring; five or six 2-second clips of different sunset angles set to music is far more engaging).
2. **Lots of little clips with a voiceover** — the same clip style, but with the creator's voice recorded over the top to convey more specific information (used well by a gym, a beauty coach, a business coach). Ideal for businesses that need to explain something more substantial than visuals alone can carry.
3. **Talking to camera** — a person speaking directly to camera, generally overlaid with supporting B-roll. Recommended as close to essential for service-based businesses (parenting coaches, psychologists, life coaches) since it builds trust and shows expertise; optional for visually strong product businesses, though even they benefit from mixing it in.

Recommended lengths: 20 seconds max for clips-with-music; up to 40 seconds for voiceover or talking-to-camera if the content genuinely needs it, but always aim for the shortest version that gets the message across.

Evan showed several real examples via his saved Reels collections: a shoe shop (7 quick clips), a boutique, a guest house sunset reel, a restaurant/café, a hair salon, a garden maintenance business (opening shot of a phone dropped on a road as a car drives over it, used as an attention-grabbing hook), a gym's 6-week programme video, a beauty coach, a business coach, an artist, and a fashion pop-up shop.

Using ChatGPT for Reel Ideas

Evan demonstrated live using a volunteer's website (a parenting content/blog business). The method:

1. Paste the homepage and About Us page content into ChatGPT.
2. Prompt: *"Could you analyse the pages and then act like a marketing expert and tell me what you know about the business?"* This produces a positioning summary, target audience, core objectives, strengths/weaknesses, and SEO potential.
3. Follow-up prompt: *"I am looking to make better Reels for Instagram... could you act like an Instagram marketing expert and brainstorm 20 ideas for Reels? For each idea, could you explain how it will help my marketing?"*
4. Once an idea is chosen, ask ChatGPT to break down which of the three Reel types would suit it best, suggest hooks for the first three seconds, and structure the whole video.

Evan noted the idea itself is only about 20% of what makes a Reel succeed — the other 80% is execution.

Making Reels: The Edits App

Evan explained that Instagram is pushing people from the Instagram app to a free app called **Edits** (Instagram's own app, a close copy of CapCut). He explained the backstory: TikTok (owned by ByteDance) took huge market share from Instagram, so Meta copied TikTok's short-video format and called it Reels; ByteDance's CapCut then became the dominant editing app until it started charging (subscriptions now around €16/month with a lot of paid-only features and watermarking), so Meta built and gave away Edits for free to draw CapCut users across.

Advantages of Edits over the in-Instagram editor: more features, and critically, videos exported from Edits have no Instagram watermark, so they can be posted natively to TikTok, LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. Videos made and saved directly through Instagram carry the Instagram logo and can't be reused cleanly elsewhere.

Main menu overview (bottom of the app): Ideas (saved Reels, collections, sticky notes for inspiration — Evan noted he never personally uses these), Camera (record directly, lip-sync to music, or use a built-in free teleprompter with adjustable speed/text size), the middle

"Reels" area (where actual video creation and past projects live), and an Insights section showing skip rate and audience retention per second for past Reels — a key metric to review and aim to improve.

Building a "lots of clips set to music" Reel — step by step

1. Tap plus in Edits, choose Gallery, select a clip.
2. Playback screen: white line marks current position; swipe left/right to scrub.
3. To trim: tap the clip to select it, choose "Split" at the white line, then tap the unwanted portion and choose "Delete." Originals on the phone are never affected — Edits only works on a copy.
4. Repeat, bringing in each clip via plus → Gallery, trimming each to the strongest few seconds (Evan aimed for roughly 3 seconds per clip across 5 clips for a ~15 second Reel — no fixed rule, just keep it short).
5. **Reordering:** tap-and-hold (push down, not a light tap) on a clip to drag and reorder it.
6. **Volume:** tap a clip, choose Volume, drag to 0 (or any level) — "Apply to All Video Clips" mutes every clip in one action, useful before adding music.
7. **Speed:** tap a clip, choose Speed. 1 = normal; above 1 speeds up (suggested benchmarks: ~4x for something like chopping, ~20x for a gardening/hedge-cutting clip, up to 100x for clouds moving across the sky or a venue filling up); below 1 slows down (0.5 = half speed, 0.2 = one-fifth, useful for something like bees around a hive to make them look like they're hovering). Undo button available if a change doesn't work.
8. **Transitions:** tap the line between two clips to add a transition effect (e.g. "Reveal," "Zoom Bounce"). Advised to use sparingly — one or two per Reel, not between every clip, or it becomes gimmicky.
9. **Music:** tap Audio, search for a track, tap play (square icon) to preview, tap the scissors to choose exactly which part of the song to use (rather than letting Instagram auto-select a point), then tick to confirm.
10. **Text:** tap Text, type the message, Done. Selecting the text box afterwards allows repositioning (drag), editing style (font, colour, animation via the Edit submenu), extending/shortening how long it displays (drag the slider), moving its start point, and duplicating a styled text box to reuse the same look elsewhere in the video without rebuilding formatting from scratch.
11. **Export:** tap Next, then Download — this saves a clean copy (no watermark) to the phone's camera roll/Media, ready to post anywhere.

Two Music Libraries — an important distinction

Instagram has two separate music libraries:

- **Business accounts** get a limited "Stark" library (Evan's term for it) without major commercial tracks.
- **Creator (and personal) accounts** get the full commercial music library (Ed Sheeran, Harry Styles, Taylor Swift, etc.), because Instagram pays record labels for this usage but record labels won't extend that deal to business accounts commercially.

This is why some businesses have "the good music" and others don't — it depends entirely on account type, not on any hidden setting. Evan strongly recommended switching to a Creator account for this reason alone, alongside better insights/analytics, scheduling, and the ability to run content as ads.

How to switch (covered in detail, twice — once for people who've never switched a personal account, once for people already on a business account wanting to move to creator):

- From personal: Profile → tap circle → Edit Profile → "Switch to professional account" → choose a category (e.g. Restaurant) → choose Business or Creator (choose Creator if commercial music matters).
- From business to creator (or vice versa): Profile → menu (top right) → Account type and tools → Professional → Switch account → select the account type you want.

Switching does not lose followers, insights, mentions, or content.

Building the voiceover Reel

Evan demonstrated duplicating a project (long-press → duplicate) so a "music-only" version and a "voiceover" version of the same Reel can both be kept and renamed (e.g. "More Music" vs "More VO") — similar to keeping two versions of a Word document or PowerPoint.

Recommended workflow for voiceover Reels:

1. Decide what you want to say **before** shooting clips (not after editing).
2. Write it out, time yourself saying it, and cut it down — aim for roughly 15–20 seconds, and don't exceed about 40 seconds even for more complex topics.
3. Shoot clips that visually match what will be said (e.g. don't show sunshine footage while narrating "out in the rain").
4. Do a practice run reading the script against the edited clip sequence before recording, adjusting pacing as needed.
5. Record via the Voice button (microphone icon) in Edits. If a take goes wrong mid-recording, tap X to abandon and restart, or tick to keep it. A teleprompter is available in-app but Evan advised against reading visibly from it — audiences disengage from someone who's clearly reading.

6. If two audio tracks exist (voiceover + music), reduce or mute the music (tap the music clip → Volume → down) so it doesn't compete with the voice. Evan demonstrated dropping music like Ed Sheeran to 0% since the lyrics compete with speech, and instead used an instrumental-style option (Bill Withers, "Lovely Day") at reduced volume where music is wanted.

AI voice option: a participant (Noelle) asked whether a different voice/AI voice can be used instead of the creator's own. Edits does not have a built-in voice changer or text-to-speech option. The workaround: create an AI voice at **ElevenLabs** (free account available, choice of pre-made voices or building a custom voice by accent/gender/age/tone), generate the narration there, download it as an MP3, then import it into Edits via Audio → import a music track from your phone — it's treated as a music/audio track, not a special voice feature.

Captions: tap Captions → choose to generate from "voiceover only" (recommended when there's background music, so lyrics aren't transcribed) or all audio. Always proofread generated captions afterwards (Evan caught a misspelling of "Automower" as "Automore" during the demo) by tapping a caption box → Edit. Captions can be restyled (tap a box → Style) with different highlight styles, fonts, and colours per spoken word. Evan cautioned against having both an on-screen text headline and captions running simultaneously, since it overloads viewers — pick one or sequence them (e.g. a short headline for the first 2–3 seconds, then let captions take over once speech starts).

Reasons given for using captions: accessibility for people with hearing impairments, and from a marketing standpoint, reading along keeps people watching longer (which the algorithm rewards) and improves message retention versus audio alone.

Automatic translation note: Instagram now auto-translates spoken captions into a viewer's own Instagram language setting (e.g. English speech shown as Spanish captions to a Spanish-language viewer) and is trialling AI lip-sync dubbing. Because of this, Evan advised not manually adding foreign-language subtitles in Edits — Instagram already handles this natively.

Building the talking-to-camera Reel

Demonstrated using a restaurant ("The Laughing Horse") scenario, phone on a tripod, wearing a microphone.

Key technique: leave a second or two of silence before speaking on camera (since recording doesn't start instantaneously), then trim it out afterwards. Evan showed a practical trick: watch for a physical tell (e.g. hands opening) that reliably signals "just before I start speaking," scrub to that point, and split/delete everything before it. The same logic applies at the end — there's always unwanted footage as the speaker finishes up or reaches to stop recording, so trim it the same way.

Evan then critiqued a plain talking-head video as weak marketing: it loses viewer attention over time, and it fails to show the product being described (comparing it to an estate agent describing a garden without showing it). The fix demonstrated: use **Overlay** (found in the main menu) to layer B-roll video or images on top of the talking-head footage at the point where that topic is mentioned (e.g. overlaying footage of the chef, then the roast beef dish,

then the fish dish, as each is mentioned in the voiceover). Overlaid clips can be resized/repositioned with pinch-to-zoom and drag, shown full-screen or in a corner, and trimmed with the same split/delete method once finished with that visual. The end result mixes narration over B-roll rather than a static shot of the speaker throughout.

Filming Tips (woven throughout)

- Always shoot **portrait**, never landscape — applies to Reels, Stories, TikTok, and increasingly LinkedIn video.
- Shoot clips in short bursts (8–10 seconds each) rather than long continuous takes, to make editing far easier.
- Vary camera angles (not everything at head height) to keep footage visually engaging — referenced the garden maintenance example of the phone placed on the ground with a car driving over it as an attention-grabbing opening shot.

Recommended Equipment (covered near the end, full details in notes)

- **Microphones:** Lark II (magnetic clip-on lapel mic, works with iPhone and Android receivers, has a windbreaker, now roughly €110–115, works with computers and DSLR cameras) — Evan's top recommendation, especially for outdoor use. A cheaper alternative from Ulanzi was also mentioned — works well but has only one receiver (not separate iPhone/Android) and no windbreaker, so better suited to indoor/office use only.
- **Tripod:** around €35.
- **Phone clamp/holder** for a tripod (to hold the phone with the microphone): around €12.
- **Gimbal:** for smooth, judder-free handheld movement (e.g. walking up/down stairs).
- **Ring light:** recommended for indoor filming where more even lighting is needed.
- Evan encouraged shopping locally for tripods/lights where possible, noting the microphones specifically may not be available locally.

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