



Local Enterprise Office Kerry

Instagram for Marketing - Part 1

18th August 2026

Course Summary

Prepared by The Marketing Crowd

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

Course Overview

Here's the full recap I'd flag first, this was a beginner-heavy group (64% had never used Instagram for marketing, 36% had tried but weren't sure how), so Evan pitched the whole session at ground level. Part 2 next week covers the feed in more detail, posting a single image vs. a carousel, stories, and the three big marketing objectives (growing followers, reaching more followers, driving traffic to your website).

The helicopter view: how Instagram works

Evan opened with a phone-screen walkthrough of the Instagram app to establish shared vocabulary before going deeper.

Home is your main feed. It shows **reels** (videos) and **posts** (images), mostly from accounts you follow. Unlike Facebook, which shows only your most recent post when someone lands on your page, Instagram shows a **grid** of your recent posts and reels the moment someone lands on your profile. This creates a "visual hurdle": people form an instant, subliminal impression from the grid before they even look at individual content. If the grid looks messy or boring, they leave before engaging further. If it clears that hurdle, they'll browse the actual content, and only then decide whether to tap **Follow**.

There's a second, smaller feed under Home called the **Stories feed**. Despite the name, nobody is "telling a story" in a narrative sense, it's just what Instagram calls it. Stories appear as circles at the top of the main feed, only from accounts you follow. Content posted to a story disappears after 24 hours and never appears on the grid, so it carries less weight and less risk than a reel or post. Images in stories display for 5 seconds each; tapping right advances through a story or to the next account's story, swiping left skips ahead.

When a business wants to send something out, they choose: post it into the main feed as a reel or post (permanent, appears on the grid, more reach), or post it to their story (temporary, less reach, more casual).

The Reels tab (third icon) is a separate, third feed made up of videos from accounts you don't follow, but that the algorithm predicts you'll find interesting.

How the algorithm works

Evan explained the algorithm has two jobs:

1. **Learn what each of the ~3 billion users finds interesting**, by watching engagement signals: likes (low commitment), comments and reposts (higher commitment), shares and saves (highest signal of genuine interest). It does this so people keep coming back to Instagram rather than switching to TikTok.
2. **Evaluate every piece of content for how interesting it is**. When an account posts, Instagram shows it to a small batch of followers first (e.g. 100–200 people) and watches: what percentage watch past the first 3 seconds (the point where people subconsciously decide whether to keep watching), what percentage of the video they watch overall, and how many like/comment/share/save. Good engagement

snowballs into wider distribution, including to non-followers via the Explore/Reels feed; poor engagement means the content quietly dies without reaching many people.

This is why reels reach further than static posts: they're the main mechanism for reaching both more of your existing followers and entirely new people.

Search (magnifying glass icon) opens Explore, populated with content the algorithm thinks you'd like, plus a search box at the top for finding content or accounts on any topic.

Profile (bottom right circle) is your own grid. A single Instagram app can host multiple accounts; tapping the profile circle switches to your current account, while pressing and holding it opens a list of all accounts you're logged into (Evan demonstrated switching between The Marketing Crowd, The Laughing Horse, and a personal test account).

Setting up your profile correctly

Creating an account

Push and hold the profile circle → Add Instagram Account → Create New Account → choose a username. Usernames are globally unique and must be lowercase with no spaces; if your first choice is taken, Instagram suggests random alternatives, but you can also just adjust it (e.g. adding a number).

Username vs. name

Every profile has both:

- **Username:** appears everywhere your content goes out (captions, comments, under your profile picture in the feed). This is what nearly everyone sees. Change it via Edit Profile (limited to once every 14 days).
- **Name:** rarely seen by anyone, but it's searchable.

Instagram search is basic, not sophisticated like Google. It only returns accounts whose search terms appear in the **name or username field** — nothing else (not the bio, not past captions). So the strategy is:

- Make your **username** match your business name as closely as possible (this is your "clean" identity — people recognise and trust it). If the exact match is taken, options include adding a dot (the.marketing.crowd), an underscore, or, if you have a .ie/.co.uk/.net/.info domain (not .com, which Instagram won't allow in usernames), appending that (Evan's own example: themarketingcrowd.ie, which also signals "Irish" to browsers).
- Load the **name field** with the actual words people search for: location, service type, niche terms. Evan's own name field includes "Social media, digital marketing, AI, Ireland, Evan Mangan" to be found under multiple searches.

He ran several live search demos to prove the point: "Boutique Limerick" surfaces accounts with those exact words in name/username; "Boutique Tipperary" returned zero results, not

because no Tipperary boutiques exist on Instagram, but because none of them have "boutique" and "Tipperary" in their name or username. He also showed that using your own name as username only makes you findable by people already searching for your name specifically, so if you want to be found by topic/location, you need those words there too.

Important side note: if you change your username, any existing link to your Instagram profile (e.g. an icon on your website) breaks, because that link is [instagram.com/\[username\]](https://www.instagram.com/[username]), and the old one stops working.

Bio

156 characters, positioned as context rather than a sales pitch. Evan compared several real business bios (a bridal boutique, a fashion boutique) to show how a good bio tells a first-time visitor what the account is about before they've even reached the grid. His own bio leads with an authority/credibility statement (20,000+ Irish businesses trained across 12 LEOs) before a soft call-to-action pointing to the Digital Marketing School.

Links

You can add up to 5 links to your profile. Critically: **links placed inside a caption on a reel or post do not work on Instagram** (unlike Facebook). This is a deliberate platform decision to keep Instagram from becoming a promotional link-dump. The workaround: add your destination URL to your profile links beforehand (Edit Profile → Links → Add Link, pasting a copied URL), reorder it to the top using the three-dot "reorder" menu, and then in your caption write something like "tap the link in our profile" rather than a dead link. Stories are the exception, links do work directly in stories.

He also flagged that Instagram now sells a paid subscription (around €55/month) that allows adding working links directly to posts/reels, but limited to four times a month, which he characterised as a way of monetising businesses that want that convenience.

Account type: personal, business, or creator

Every new account defaults to **personal**. For marketing you should switch to a professional account (Edit Profile → "Switch to professional account" → choose a category → choose Business or Creator). Benefits of switching off personal: proper insights/analytics, ability to schedule content, and the ability to run ads (not covered in this course; LEO runs a separate ads course).

The business vs. creator distinction used to not matter much, but changed with reels: **business accounts only have access to a stock music library** (~10,000 tracks), while **creator accounts get the full commercial music library** (Ed Sheeran, Taylor Swift, Oasis, etc.), because platforms pay labels for that access and labels won't extend it to all business accounts (citing brands like Marks & Spencer paying artists directly for ad usage as the commercial logic). Evan's practical advice: there's no eligibility check when switching to Creator, even for businesses like restaurants, and switching costs nothing and loses no followers, analytics, or ad capability, so if the music library matters to you, choose Creator.

He live-demonstrated switching between account types via Profile → menu → Account Type and Tools → Switch Account Type.

Poll result: only 1 participant had switched to business, 2 to creator, 77% had never switched.

Reels: the three types, and how to make one

Evan set up this section with the content spectrum concept (explored more next week): businesses fall somewhere between "beautiful visual products" (boutiques, shoe shops, jewellers — can be highly promotional, ~90% sales-friendly, because people are already emotionally drawn to the product) and "service providers" (coaches, consultants, solicitors, financial advisors, marketing trainers — need to be roughly 80% helpful/informative content and only ~20% promotional, because there's no inherently visual product and audiences need to be convinced the person is good at what they do before booking).

Reel fundamentals

- People decide within **3 seconds** whether to keep watching; that first 3 seconds needs a visual or textual hook.
- Keep the video **visually varied**, cut between multiple short clips rather than one long static shot, because attention spans are short and constant scene changes hold interest.
- **Shorter performs better**: the average view length on Instagram is 9 seconds, and viewers are more likely to watch a 20-second video to completion (and rewatch it) than a 60-second one. Aim for roughly 20 seconds for product-type content; service providers may need 40–50 seconds to say enough, but shorter is still better where possible.

The three types of reels

1. **Clips set to music** — multiple short clips (a couple of seconds each) stitched together with a catchy soundtrack. Good for visually strong content (products, venues, hospitality). Demonstrated with real examples: a shoe shop reel, a boutique reel (boots/jacket/belt/bag), a hotel/tourism reel, a hair salon reel, a garden maintenance reel.
2. **Voiceover reels** — clips with the creator's spoken narration layered on top instead of just music, letting you convey more information than visuals alone. Shown via examples from an artist and a beauty consultant.
3. **Talking to camera** — direct-to-camera video, which tends to generate higher engagement per studies Evan cited. Optional for visual-product businesses, but strongly recommended for service businesses, since the person **is** the product being sold and needs to build visible credibility and trust.

Using ChatGPT to generate reel ideas

Evan ran a live example using a volunteer's real business (energy healing/channelling). The prompt structure he recommends: give it **context** (describe your business/location), ask it to **act like an expert** (e.g. "act like an Instagram marketing expert"), and be **clear about the ask** ("brainstorm 20 ideas for reels and explain how each would help my marketing"). He then took one of the generated ideas and asked ChatGPT to structure exactly how to film it (clip type, hook, structure), showing participants that AI can help both with ideation and with turning an idea into a shootable plan.

Making a reel step by step (using Instagram's built-in editor / the "Edits" app)

1. **Decide the idea.**
2. **Shoot your clips** — always shoot portrait, not landscape. Shoot several short clips (a few seconds each) rather than long single takes, since you'll only use a second or two from each in the final edit.
3. In Instagram: go to your correct account → Profile → + → **Reel** → select multiple clips from your camera roll (tap to select in order) → **Next**.
4. Instagram will offer an **AI auto-edit with music selection** — Evan's firm advice: always tap **Skip**, since the AI edit is a poor substitute for doing it yourself. Skip takes you into the main editing screen, then **Edit Video** opens the actual timeline editor.
5. **Editor mechanics** (same interface logic as CapCut, the Edits app, or TikTok's editor): a playback screen up top, a clip timeline below. A white marker line tracks your position; press play/pause to move it, or drag left/right along the timeline for precise navigation.
6. **Trimming**: tap a clip to bring up its options menu (delete, cut silences, reorder, adjust volume, adjust speed, crop, split). To keep only part of a clip: position the white line at the cut point, tap **Split**, select the unwanted portion, tap **Delete**. Undo is available if needed.
7. **Crop vs. Split**: crop removes unwanted visual content from within the frame (e.g. pinching to exclude a bin in the background); split cuts the clip at a precise time point so you can delete an entire unwanted section. Different tools for different problems.
8. Evan live-edited a 34-second raw sequence down to a punchy ~10-second reel (3 seconds from clip one, 4 from clip two, 3 from clip three), explaining there's no fixed "correct" clip length, just keep it short and take the most visually interesting few seconds of each clip.
9. **Adding music**: tap **Audio** to open the music library. On a business account, searching an artist like Adele or Ed Sheeran returns nothing (stock tracks only); on a creator account, the full commercial catalogue is searchable. Preview a track, select it, then choose which section of the song to use by scrubbing.

10. **Adding text:** tap **Text**, type your message (e.g. "20% sale"), then adjust font, colour, and animation (pop, jump, etc.), and position it anywhere on screen. Useful for immediately conveying the video's purpose, especially for sales/offers or for service-based content where the topic isn't visually obvious.
11. **Voice and captions:** tapping **Voice** lets you record a voiceover directly onto the clip; captions can then auto-generate from that spoken audio, with adjustable font.
12. Tap the main screen to exit the editor back to the main reel-creation screen, then **Next**.

Before publishing: cover, caption, hashtags, location, tagging

- **Edit Cover:** every reel is represented on your grid by a still image (the "cover"). Instagram picks a random frame by default (can be unflattering or unrepresentative), and Evan strongly recommends changing it, either by scrubbing to a better frame from the video itself, or (better) designing a custom portrait-orientation cover image in Canva and uploading it via "Add from camera roll."
- **Caption:** the text accompanying the reel/post. Write it naturally for the reader first (Evan's live example: an end-of-summer 20% sale announcement mentioning Nike and Reebok, with a "tap the link in our profile" call to action rather than a dead in-caption link).
- **Hashtags:** originally the primary discovery mechanism on Instagram, they're now secondary to plain search but still function two ways: (1) as a tappable link to a dedicated search-result page for that exact hashtag, and (2) as extra searchable words within your caption (Instagram's search engine treats hashtag text the same as caption text when matching a plain-text search query). The historical cap of 30 hashtags has been reduced to **5**, after Instagram cracked down on spammy, irrelevant tag-stuffing (using an unrelated trending hashtag purely to ride its traffic can trigger a "shadow ban," where your content stops appearing in search results). Choose hashtags that reflect words your actual audience would search for.
- **Add Location:** recommended when relevant, it's another route into search results for people looking for content tied to a place (Evan's example: tagging "Killarney" for a Killarney-based shoe shop).
- **Tag people:** notifies another Instagram account they were tagged; Evan deferred full detail to next week's post-focused session but confirmed it works identically for reels.
- **Scheduling:** available under "more options" if you want to queue a reel for a future date/time rather than posting immediately.
- **Pinning:** once published, up to three posts/reels can be **pinned** to the very top of your grid (tap the post → menu → "Pin to your main grid"). Useful for an introductory "welcome to our account" reel, your best-performing content, or something with a strong current call to action, so first-time visitors see it before anything else.

Search: how discovery actually works

Evan closed the session on Instagram search mechanics, tying back to the name/username points from earlier.

- Instagram search only matches **exact words appearing in a post's caption text, its hashtags, or words spoken in the video's audio/captions** — nothing more sophisticated.
- He demonstrated with live searches: "Killarney" returned a mix of reels/posts where that word appeared somewhere in the caption or hashtags; adding "Restaurant" narrowed results to only accounts using both words; searching "Digital Marketing Ireland" surfaced The Marketing Crowd's own content; searching "ADHD tips" returned content from an unrelated coach who had used those exact words, illustrating how a business (in this case a counsellor working with ADHD clients) could deliberately use search-relevant phrasing to be discovered by people actively looking for that help.
- He also showed the **Audio** search tab (find reels using a specific music track) and the **Tags** search tab (browse everything using an exact hashtag, e.g. tapping #KillarneyNationalPark surfaces every post/reel carrying that specific tag, whether it's in the caption or the comments, since Instagram counts hashtags placed in comments as valid too).
- Core takeaway: getting found in search matters because it's how non-followers with a genuine interest in your topic discover you organically, distinct from the algorithm pushing your content into people's main or Reels feeds based on engagement.

Wrap-up

Evan closed by checking understanding was solid across the group, then flagged an upcoming **6-week digital marketing programme** starting the first week of September (delivered by him for LEO Kerry), covering ChatGPT across the business, Google/AI-mode search visibility, website inquiry generation, Canva, video editing with the Edits app, and Facebook/TikTok/Instagram. Link was shared in chat. Session notes (approx. 40 pages of slides/screenshots) will be emailed by his colleague Siobhan after the session, available only to attendees. Part 2 runs at the same time and Zoom link next week, starting with the feed in more detail, posting formats (single image vs. carousel), stories, and the three marketing objectives (grow followers, reach more followers, drive traffic to website).

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