

FREE GUIDE

Digital Marketing Basics

Understand how digital marketing actually works — the channels, the funnel and the numbers, explained simply.

The funnel

SEO vs ads

Social media

Email & WhatsApp

Metrics

Strategy

Thejas

Digital with Thejas

About this guide

Everyone tells you to “do digital marketing”. Almost nobody explains what it actually is. So you end up posting on Instagram because a competitor does, boosting a post because the button is right there, and wondering why none of it turns into customers.

This guide fixes the missing layer: **understanding**. Not tactics, not tools — the map. How the channels fit together, how customers actually move from stranger to buyer, and what the numbers mean. Once you see the map, every marketing decision — and every agency conversation — gets easier.

How to use this guide

- **Read in order the first time.** The chapters build on each other: the customer journey and the funnel first (Ch. 1–2), then each channel (Ch. 3–8), then the numbers and strategy (Ch. 9–10).
- **Every chapter ends with a “Do this today” box.** These are thinking exercises, not tasks — ten short exercises that turn concepts into decisions for *your* business.
- **This is a concepts book, not a to-do list.** It explains how things work so you can decide what is worth doing — and spot bad advice from a mile away.
- **Chapter 11 saves you money.** The most expensive marketing mistakes come from beliefs that sound right but are wrong. Read it twice.

Three promises

- ✓ **No jargon.** Every term is explained in one plain sentence — there is a full glossary in Chapter 9.
- ✓ **No hype.** No “go viral” promises, no growth hacks. Just how the machine actually works.
- ✓ **No hard sell.** This guide is useful even if we never speak. The last chapter tells you how I can help — everything before it is simply the map.

TIP

Keep a note open as you read. Each chapter will ask you one question about your own business — by the end you will have a one-page picture of your marketing.

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What digital marketing actually is

Strip away the buzzwords and digital marketing is one simple idea: **being findable and convincing at the moments when a customer is deciding** — and those moments now happen on a phone.

The customer journey, online

Think about how you chose your last dentist, restaurant, or appliance. The journey probably looked like this:

1. **A need appears.** A tooth aches, a birthday approaches, the fridge dies.
2. **They search or ask.** Google, Instagram, YouTube — or a WhatsApp message to a friend: “know anyone good?”
3. **They compare.** Two or three options get shortlisted — websites skimmed, prices hunted for, profiles judged in seconds.
4. **They check trust.** Reviews, ratings, photos, how recently you posted — proof that you are real and good.
5. **They act.** A call, a WhatsApp message, a visit, an order.
6. **They remember (or forget) you.** A good experience — and a gentle follow-up — turns one purchase into repeat business and referrals.

Every piece of digital marketing — SEO, ads, content, email — is just a way of showing up helpfully at one of those six moments. That is the whole subject. The rest of this book is the detail.

The key shift: stop asking “should I be on this platform?” and start asking “at which moment of my customer’s journey am I invisible?” The second question tells you exactly where to spend your time and money.

DO THIS TODAY

Map your own customer journey. Write the six steps above and, next to each, what a customer currently finds when they look for you at that moment. The blank rows are your marketing plan.

The funnel, explained

Marketers compress that journey into a picture called **the funnel**: wide at the top (many people vaguely aware of you), narrow at the bottom (few people buying). Every marketing activity works on one layer of it.



Fewer people at each layer — that narrowing is normal. The goal is to narrow less than your competitors do.

Why the funnel changes everything

- **It explains why “more followers” often fails.** Followers are awareness. If your consideration layer (website, profile, proof) is weak, more awareness just means more people bouncing off.
- **It tells you where to fix first.** Fix the funnel from the bottom up: there is no point paying for attention that leaks out at the decision stage.
- **It exposes the forgotten layer.** Retention is usually the cheapest growth available — selling again to someone who already trusts you costs far less than winning a stranger.

Different tools live at different layers: ads and reels mostly work at the top, your website and content in the middle, reviews and pricing at the decision point, email and WhatsApp at the bottom. A business “doing everything” but growing slowly usually has all its effort piled on one layer.

DO THIS TODAY

Take your last ten customers and ask: where did they first hear of you, and what convinced them? Mark each answer on the funnel. The layer with no answers is your weakest one.

Owned, earned and paid media

Every marketing channel you will ever hear of fits into one of three buckets. This mental model keeps you from being dazzled by the next new platform — it is always just a new door into an old bucket.

Bucket	What it is	Examples
Owned	Channels you control and nobody can take away	Your website, email list, WhatsApp contacts, Google Business Profile
Earned	Attention other people give you for free	Reviews, shares, press mentions, word of mouth, customers tagging you
Paid	Attention you rent, priced by auction	Meta ads, Google ads, sponsored posts, influencer collaborations

How the buckets behave

- **Paid is fast but stops when you stop.** It is a tap: open it, enquiries flow; close it, they stop. Renting attention is fine — renting it with nowhere to send people is not.
- **Owned is slow to build but compounds.** An email list or a WhatsApp contact list built over a year keeps working with no algorithm and no ad budget standing between you and your customers.
- **Earned is the multiplier.** Reviews and word of mouth make both other buckets cheaper: ads convert better and search rankings improve when strangers vouch for you.
- **Social media followers are rented, not owned.** The platform decides who sees your posts. Smart businesses use social to move people into owned channels — a website visit, a WhatsApp chat, an email signup.

A healthy marketing system uses paid to create awareness, owned to convert and keep customers, and earned to lower the cost of both. Most struggling businesses are over-invested in one bucket — usually rented social — and empty in the others.

DO THIS TODAY

Classify everything you currently do into the three buckets. Most small businesses discover their “owned” column is nearly empty — that is the most valuable thing this exercise can show you.

Search: how Google decides who shows up

Search is special for one reason: **intent**. Someone scrolling Instagram is relaxing; someone searching “AC repair near me” has a broken AC and money in hand. Search traffic is small but ready to buy.

What Google is actually doing

Google’s business depends on the first results being genuinely useful — so its ranking systems are, in plain language, trying to answer three questions about every page and profile:

1. **Is this relevant?** Does the page actually talk about what was searched — the service, the problem, the place?
2. **Is this credible?** Do other people vouch for it — reviews, mentions, links from other sites, a consistent name and address?
3. **Is this usable?** Does it load fast, work on a phone, and give the answer without making the visitor dig?

SEO (search engine optimisation) is simply the work of deserving a “yes” to all three — there is no trick, and anyone selling you a trick is selling you a penalty waiting to happen.

SEO vs search ads: the same page, two doors

- **Search ads** buy the top of the results page instantly. You pay per click, you can start today, and the moment you stop paying you vanish.
- **SEO** earns positions below the ads. It can take months to move, but the clicks are free once you rank — it behaves like an asset, ads behave like rent.
- **For local businesses there is a third door:** the map results. Your Google Business Profile — kept accurate, reviewed, and active — often matters more than your website for “near me” searches.

The sensible mix for most small businesses: keep the profile and website healthy always (slow, compounding), and use search ads for moments that cannot wait — a launch, a season, a new service.

DO THIS TODAY

Search for your own service the way a stranger would (“best [your service] in [your area]”). Note who appears in the ads, the map, and the results — and honestly ask which of the three questions above your absent business is failing.

Social media: what each platform is for

Social media marketing splits into two very different activities. **Organic** is posting content your followers (and the algorithm) may choose to show people — free, slow, trust-building. **Paid** is renting the platform's targeting to reach exact strangers — fast, priced by auction, and off the moment you stop. Organic builds belief; paid buys reach. They work best pointed at the same offer.

The platforms, honestly

Platform	Best for	Its real job for you
Instagram	Visual businesses — food, fashion, beauty, fitness, décor, personal brands. Reels can reach non-followers.	Showcase and discovery — the shop window
Facebook	Local communities, groups, an older audience, marketplace — and the ads engine it shares with Instagram.	Local reach and community trust
LinkedIn	B2B services, consultants, hiring, founders — buyers researching professionally.	Professional credibility and B2B leads
YouTube	Anything people want explained or demonstrated. Videos surface in search for years — the most durable social content.	Deep trust — the long game
WhatsApp	Where Indian customers actually talk to businesses — enquiries, quotes, bookings, follow-ups.	Conversations and closing — not broadcasting

Notice what the table implies: platforms are not interchangeable. Instagram is a shop window, WhatsApp is the counter, YouTube is the trusted adviser. The common mistake is treating all of them as places to “post more” — and the second mistake is trying to be on all five at once, which usually means being mediocre on all five.

DO THIS TODAY

Answer two questions: where do *your* customers actually spend time, and which format (photos, video, writing, chat) can you sustain every week without hating it? The overlap is your platform. One, done well, beats five done sometimes.

Content marketing: why giving value wins

Content marketing is the strange-sounding idea that you grow by **giving away useful knowledge for free** — tips, answers, demonstrations, honest comparisons — instead of only announcing offers.

Why giving things away works

- **It answers the questions buyers already have.** Before choosing, your customer is quietly wondering about price, quality, risk, and “what if it goes wrong?”. Content that answers those questions does your selling before you ever speak.
- **It proves expertise instead of claiming it.** Anyone can say “best in town”. A physiotherapist explaining exactly why your back hurts after long drives has *demonstrated* competence — no claim needed.
- **It compounds.** An ad dies when the budget ends. A genuinely useful answer — on your website, your profile, YouTube — can keep bringing the right people for years. Content is an asset in the owned bucket; ads are an expense in the paid one.
- **It makes every other channel cheaper.** Content feeds SEO (Google ranks useful answers), fills your social calendar, and gives your ads something believable to say.

What counts as content for a small business

Not essays. A 30-second video answering “how much does it cost?”. A before/after with one honest line about how long it took. A post about the mistake customers make before coming to you.

Behind-the-scenes of how you work. The raw material is simply **the questions you answer on the phone every day**, published once instead of repeated forever.

The filter for every piece: would a customer find this useful even if they never buy from you? If yes, it builds trust. If it only serves you, it is an ad wearing a costume — and audiences smell it.

DO THIS TODAY

Write down the ten questions customers actually ask you before buying — the ones you answer on calls and WhatsApp every week. That list is a content plan; each question is one post, reel, or page.

Email & WhatsApp: the channels you own

Here is an uncomfortable truth about social media: when you post, the platform decides who sees it — usually a small fraction of your own followers. Email and WhatsApp are different: **your message lands in front of the person you sent it to**. No algorithm sits between you.

Why marketers guard these lists like gold

- **The list is yours.** Platforms change rules, reach drops, accounts get restricted — but a list of people who said “yes, contact me” moves with you anywhere.
- **It is where repeat business lives.** The retention layer of the funnel runs on these channels: the gentle “your service is due”, the festival offer, the new-arrival message to past buyers.
- **It costs almost nothing.** Reaching your own list is close to free — compare that with paying an auction every time you want the same people’s attention.

The one rule: permission

These channels are personal space — that is exactly why they work, and exactly why they are easy to ruin. The whole game is **consent and restraint**: people join your list because you offered something worth joining for (a discount, a useful guide, order updates), and they stay because you message rarely and usefully. Blast strangers from a purchased list and you train people to block you — and messaging apps to flag you.

In India, WhatsApp usually comes first. It is conversational — enquiries, quotes and bookings happen there naturally, and a saved contact with a label (“customer”, “enquiry — June”) becomes your list. Email earns its place as you grow: it is better for longer messages, newsletters, and reaching people politely at scale.

DO THIS TODAY

Decide your “reason to join”: what would make a customer happily say “yes, message me”? A first-visit discount? Useful monthly tips? Early access? Until you can answer that, you do not have a list strategy — you have a contacts folder.

How paid advertising actually works

Book 1 of this series shows the buttons to press. This chapter explains the machine behind the buttons — because advertisers who understand the machine waste far less money on it.

The auction, in plain words

Every time someone opens Instagram or searches Google, an instant auction runs for the ad slots they will see. But it is not a simple highest-bidder-wins auction: platforms score every ad on **bid × how likely this person is to respond to it**. An ad people ignore gets expensive; an ad people engage with gets cheap. This is the single most useful fact in paid advertising: **the platform rewards ads that people actually want to see**.

The three levers you control

1. **Targeting — who sees it.** Platforms let you choose by location, age, interests and behaviour. Modern systems mostly learn the audience themselves from who responds — your job is to point them at the right city and let the ad itself attract the right people.
2. **Bidding — what a result is worth.** You tell the system what outcome you want (messages, calls, visits) and roughly what you will spend; it bids in each auction for you. This is why ads need a learning period — the system is figuring out who responds before it gets efficient.
3. **Creative — what they see.** The image, video and words. Because of the relevance scoring above, creative is the biggest lever: a genuinely interesting ad wins auctions a boring ad loses at the same budget.

This also explains the classic beginner errors: judging an ad in two days (the system is still learning), micro-targeting a tiny audience (starving it of data), and blaming “the algorithm” when the honest problem is an ad nobody wanted to see or an offer nobody wanted to take.

DO THIS TODAY

Open Instagram and study the next three ads you are shown. For each, ask: why me (targeting)? What are they paying for — a click, a message, a sale (bidding)? And did it earn my attention (creative)? You are reverse-engineering the machine.

The numbers that matter

Marketing dashboards are designed to look impressive. Only a handful of numbers actually tell you anything. Here is each one in a single plain sentence — bookmark this page.

Metric	In one sentence
Impressions	How many times your content or ad appeared on a screen — one person can account for many.
Reach	How many different people saw it at least once.
CTR	Click-through rate: of the people who saw it, what share clicked — how interesting it was.
CPC	Cost per click: what you paid, on average, for each click.
Conversion rate	Of the people who arrived, what share did the thing you wanted — enquired, booked, bought.
CAC	Customer acquisition cost: total marketing spend divided by customers won — what one new customer costs you.
LTV	Lifetime value: what one customer is worth over all their visits and referrals, not just the first bill.

How they chain together

The numbers are stages of one pipeline: impressions → clicks (CTR) → enquiries (conversion rate) → customers (CAC). When results disappoint, walk the chain and find the stage where the numbers collapse — that is the thing to fix, and it is rarely “spend more”.

The only comparison that decides everything: LTV vs CAC. If a customer is worth more to you over time than they cost to acquire, your marketing works and can scale. If you do not know either number even roughly, every budget decision is a guess — which is why this pair is worth estimating before any dashboard metric.

DO THIS TODAY

Estimate your LTV on the back of an envelope: average bill × visits per year × years a customer stays (add referrals if you get them). Most owners are surprised how much a single customer is really worth — and how much that justifies spending to win one.

Strategy on a small budget

Small budgets fail when they are spread thin: a little boosting, a little posting everywhere, a website nobody updates. Nothing gets enough fuel to work, so the conclusion becomes “digital marketing doesn’t work”. The fix is not more money. It is **concentration**.

Pick one channel and go embarrassingly deep

Choose the single channel where your customers most obviously are (Ch. 5) and commit to it for a few months — long enough to learn what resonates, build a rhythm, and give compounding a chance. Depth on one channel produces something spread never does: **learning**. You find the message that works, and that message then travels to every other channel later.

Think flywheel, not fireworks

Campaigns are fireworks: a burst, then darkness, then you pay again. A **flywheel** is a loop where each turn makes the next one easier:

Good service → happy customers → reviews & referrals → more visibility → more customers → repeat

- **Every rupee should feed the loop.** Asking for reviews, publishing answers to real questions, collecting WhatsApp contacts with permission — these make next month cheaper. Pure one-off promotion does not.
- **Consistency beats intensity.** A modest effort sustained every week compounds; a heroic month followed by silence resets to zero. Choose a pace you can hold.
- **Paid ads are an accelerant, not an engine.** They spin an existing flywheel faster — pour them on a business with no proof and no conversion path, and you are simply paying strangers to bounce.

DO THIS TODAY

Write your one-sentence strategy: “For the next 90 days, my channel is ___, I will show up there ___ times a week, and every customer will be asked for a review and saved as a contact.” If it does not fit in one sentence, it is not yet a strategy.

Beginner misconceptions, corrected

1. **“Going viral is a strategy.”** Virality is a lottery ticket, and mostly the wrong audience anyway. A steady trickle of the *right* people beats a flood of the wrong ones — plan for consistency, treat virality as a bonus.
2. **“More followers = more sales.”** Followers are top-of-funnel awareness. Sales happen lower down — at your profile, website, reviews, and reply speed. Many small accounts out-earn huge ones because their funnel converts.
3. **“SEO is one-time work.”** Rankings respond to ongoing signals — fresh content, new reviews, competitors’ activity. SEO is a garden, not a construction project: less work than a build, but never zero.
4. **“Digital marketing is free.”** Organic channels cost time and consistency — which for a business owner is real money. Everything costs either rupees or hours; the honest question is which you can better afford.
5. **“Ads don’t work — I tried them.”** Usually the ads worked and the funnel failed: the click went to a weak page, or the enquiry got a reply the next day. Judge the whole chain (Ch. 9) before judging the channel.
6. **“I need to be on every platform.”** You need to be excellent where your customers decide, and merely findable elsewhere. Every platform added splits your attention — and audiences can tell a maintained presence from an abandoned one.
7. **“Posting daily guarantees growth.”** Frequency without usefulness trains people to scroll past you. One post a week that answers a real question beats seven that say “we exist”.
8. **“My business is offline, so this doesn’t apply.”** Your customers research online before walking in — the journey in Chapter 1 happens even when the purchase happens across a counter. Invisible online increasingly means invisible.

DO THIS TODAY

Pick the one belief above you held most strongly and write down what it made you do — the page you never updated, the platform you joined, the ads you switched off. That is where your next improvement is hiding.

BONUS

15 quick tips & tricks

Small ways to sharpen your understanding — come back to this section whenever you have a spare ten minutes.

THINK LIKE YOUR CUSTOMER

- 01** Once a month, search for your own business and service exactly as a stranger would — on your phone, logged out. What you find is what customers find.
- 02** Ask every new customer one question: “how did you find us?” Track the answers in a note — after a month you will know your real top channel, which is often not the one you work hardest on.
- 03** Read your own website and ask: does this answer the customer’s questions, or just describe us? Brochures describe; salespeople answer.

SEARCH & CONTENT

- 04** The questions people ask you on calls and WhatsApp are the exact phrases they type into Google. Use their words, not industry words, everywhere you write.
- 05** Look at Google’s “People also ask” box for your service — it is a free list of what your market wants explained.
- 06** One useful page per service you offer beats one page listing all of them — both for Google and for the customer comparing you.
- 07** Before publishing anything, apply the filter: useful even to someone who never buys? If yes, publish. If no, rewrite.

SOCIAL & ADS

- 08** Study which of your posts earned saves and shares — not likes. Saves and shares mean “this was worth keeping”, and that is the content to make more of.
- 09** Screenshot ads that stopped *your* scroll and keep a folder. When you eventually run ads, that folder is your creative brief.
- 10** If an ad or post works, resist the urge to change it out of boredom. You will tire of your message long before your audience even notices it.
- 11** Rented reach ends when the platform changes its mind — always give social visitors a next step you own: a WhatsApp chat, a website, a signup.

NUMBERS & HABITS

- 12** Check your numbers weekly, on a fixed day, for ten minutes — visitors, enquiries, reviews, customers. Trends over weeks mean something; daily wiggles mean nothing.
- 13** When a number disappoints, walk the chain from Chapter 9 and find the exact stage that leaks before changing anything — most “marketing problems” turn out to be one weak link.
- 14** Before adopting any new tactic, name the funnel layer it serves. If you cannot, it is entertainment, not marketing.
- 15** Keep a “worked / didn’t work” note for your business. Twelve months of honest one-liners becomes a marketing playbook no agency could sell you.

What to do next

You now understand the map: the journey, the funnel, the three buckets, how search and social and ads actually work, and which numbers matter. That already puts you ahead of most people buying marketing services — nobody can dazzle you with jargon anymore.

The natural next step is turning understanding into action — and there are two ways to do that.

If you want to do it yourself: the companion guide, **The Small Business Digital Growth Kit**, turns these concepts into a 30-day action plan — free at **digitalwiththejas.online**.

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ABOUT THEJAS

I help small businesses and service businesses improve their online presence through websites, landing pages, Meta Ads and practical AI solutions. This guide covers the concepts behind that work — shared free, because a business that understands its own marketing is a better client and a stronger business.

— Thejas, *Digital with Thejas*

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