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The Right Channel

Most small businesses spread their marketing too thin across too many platforms. The skill isn't being everywhere. It's choosing the one or two channels that fit your customer, and ignoring the rest.

A Moor & Co commercial briefing

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POWERED BY 3DMAI

IN SHORT

Digital marketing is one of the easiest budgets in a small business to waste, and rarely by spending too little. It is wasted by spreading too thin across platforms that were never right for you in the first place. The honest truth is that every channel works brilliantly for some businesses and is a waste of money for others, and the difference is almost never the size of the budget. It is whether the channel matches your customer, your product and your stage. This briefing walks through the major channels in plain terms, sets out who each one genuinely suits, and gives a simple sequence for choosing, without the invented statistics the marketing industry loves to quote.

1. The real mistake: spreading too thin

The digital marketing industry runs on an assumption that suits agencies and platform owners far more than it suits you: that more channels, more spend and more activity is always better. For a small business with limited time and money, that is simply wrong. The most common and most expensive mistake is not underspending. It is being present on six platforms badly instead of one or two well.

The right starting point is never "which platforms should I be on?" It is three plainer questions: what am I actually trying to achieve, who am I trying to reach, and where do those people genuinely spend their attention? The channel falls out of the answers. Get those right and you can ignore most of what is shouted about online with a clear conscience.

2. A word on the numbers

You will see confident statistics quoted everywhere in marketing: this percentage of buyers do that, this platform delivers that much better return. Treat almost all of them with suspicion. They are usually reported by the platform or agency selling the service, they vary enormously by sector, date and method, and they are very often repeated with no verifiable source behind them at all.

We have deliberately left those figures out. The only marketing statistic that is reliably true about your business is the one you measure yourself.

What follows is the durable part, the part that does not go out of date or depend on who funded the survey: which channel suits which kind of business, and why. Where numbers genuinely matter, they are the ones from your own accounts.

3. SEO: the slow burn that pays longest

Search engine optimisation simply means making your website show up in the unpaid Google results for what your customers are actually searching. It is the most misunderstood channel in small business marketing, because the results take months to arrive and rarely get the credit when they do.

For any business serving a defined local area, a tradesperson, an accountant, a consultant, a local retailer, local SEO together with a complete, active Google Business Profile is usually the highest-return digital foundation available. In practice it means four things: a website Google can actually read, content that answers what customers are searching for, consistent name, address and phone details across the web, and a Google Business Profile kept complete and current with reviews. The honest caveat is timing: SEO typically takes several months to show, sometimes up to a year. It is the foundation, not the quick fix.

4. PPC: fast results, paid for by the click

Pay-per-click advertising, mostly Google Ads, puts you at the top of the results immediately, for a fee every time someone clicks. The moment you stop paying, it stops working. It earns its place when two things are true: the average value of a customer is high enough to absorb the cost of a click, and there is a clear, fast path from click to enquiry.

A two-thousand-pound boiler installation can comfortably absorb a costly click. A fifteen-pound takeaway order cannot. So PPC tends to suit emergency services, high-value trades, professional services, and competitive markets where waiting months for organic rankings is not an option. The most common way small businesses waste money on it is running broad, untargeted keywords with no list of negative terms, paying for clicks from people who were never going to buy.

5. Social media: match the platform to the customer

The honest answer to “which social media should I be on?” is that most small businesses should pick one, do it consistently, and ignore the rest until it is clearly working. The platforms are not interchangeable. Each has a distinct audience and a distinct kind of content that succeeds on it.

- **LinkedIn.** The dominant professional and B2B network in the UK. If your customers are business owners or senior managers, this is usually the one that matters. Direct, experience-based posts from a real person consistently outperform polished company-page content. Right for B2B, professional services, consultancies and commercial suppliers.
- **Facebook.** Still very widely used, with an audience that now skews older. Strong for local service businesses reaching homeowners and families, with precise local and interest-based targeting on paid, and good organic reach through groups and local pages. Right for local trades, home improvement, family retail and hospitality.

- **Instagram.** Visual, and skewing younger than Facebook. It suits businesses with a genuinely photogenic product or service, rewards consistent visual content and short video, and offers a real sales channel through Instagram Shopping for product businesses. Right for consumer products, food, hospitality, interiors, beauty and fashion.
- **TikTok.** A young audience, and an algorithm that can hand a business with no following a large reach off a single strong video. Authentic, unpolished content wins; produced, branded content tends not to. A genuine opportunity for consumer businesses targeting under-35s, and little use for B2B or businesses whose customers are older.
- **Pinterest.** Smaller, but with a distinctive quality: its users are actively planning purchases rather than passively scrolling. Home improvement, interiors, weddings, food and fashion dominate, and content keeps working for far longer than on other platforms. Underused by SMEs in exactly those sectors. Right if your customer plans a purchase in advance and uses images to decide.

6. Measuring whether it works

The most common reason a marketing budget is wasted is not that the channel was wrong. It is that nobody decided what success looked like before the money was spent. A few honest measures fix that: cost per enquiry (spend divided by genuine leads), cost per acquisition (spend divided by paying customers), and, for anyone selling a product, profit ROAS, the return on ad spend after your margin is applied, which we cover in full in the companion briefing, *Which Half?*

Ignore the vanity metrics, impressions, reach, follower counts. The platforms put them front and centre because they feel good, and they tell you almost nothing about money. Before any campaign, write down what success looks like at thirty and ninety days, and the most you are willing to pay per enquiry. If a paid campaign passes that limit, stop or change it. Give organic activity ninety days before you judge it.

7. Where to start: a practical sequence

- **Get your Google Business Profile right first.** Complete every field, add photos, answer reviews, post monthly. It is the single fastest free win for any local business.
- **Build a website that converts, not just one that exists.** Fast to load, clear on what you do, with an obvious next step beats a beautiful site with no clear action.
- **Pick one social platform and be consistent for ninety days.** Match it to your audience using the descriptions above, and give it a real, uninterrupted run.
- **Run one small paid test before scaling.** A modest budget with a specific offer and a specific landing page tells you more than a year of intuition.
- **Measure before you add anything.** Add a second channel only when the first is working and you have the capacity to do it properly, never because a competitor is on it.

The firms that get the best return from digital marketing are not the ones doing the most. They are the ones doing the fewest things consistently, and measuring them honestly. Choose the channel that fits your customer, give it a fair run, watch your own numbers, and ignore the rest.

ABOUT MOOR & CO & 3DMAI

The goal isn't to be on every platform. It's to be on the right one, and to know it's working.

Moor & Co is a commercial advisory for small business owners, built by someone who has run, scaled and exited real businesses. We help firms across North Staffordshire and South Cheshire decide where to invest their marketing and, just as importantly, where not to, so the budget goes to the one or two channels that actually fit the business rather than being spread thin across all of them.

The numbers behind it run on **3DMAI**, our commercial intelligence platform for UK SMEs. Its Marketing Analysis tool shows what each channel returns once your margin is applied, so you can see which spend is genuinely working, on your own numbers and in plain English, for £19.99 a month. The free tools need no sign-up. If you would rather talk it through first, the discovery call is free and there is no commitment.

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ABOUT THIS BRIEFING

This briefing deliberately avoids the precise platform statistics commonly quoted in marketing content. Such figures are typically reported by the platforms or agencies selling the service, vary widely by sector, date and method, and are frequently cited without a verifiable source. The guidance here reflects established practice on matching channels to audiences and on honest measurement. The only marketing figures that genuinely describe your business are the ones drawn from your own accounts.
General guidance only — not financial or legal advice.