

**30
YEARS OF
EXPERIENCE
IN ONE BOOK**

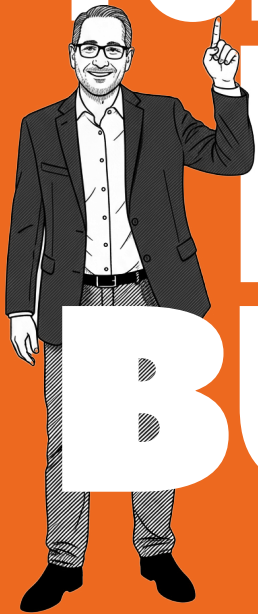
ADS

PLAYBOOK

FOR OWNERS WHO

HATE

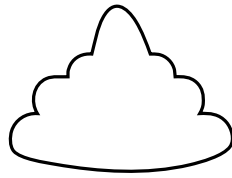
BULLS IT



**"A GUIDE TO RUNNING ADS
+ NOT GETTING PLAYED ON
BUZZWORDS & FEELINGS"**

WRITTEN BY:

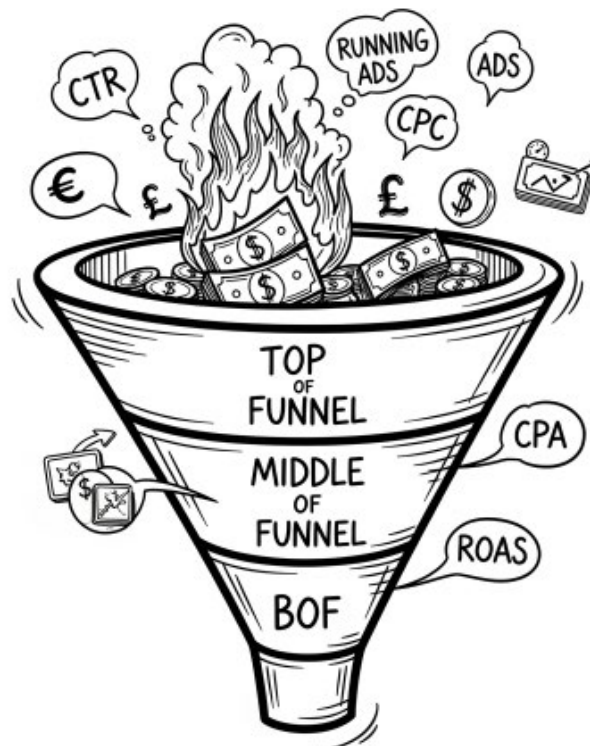
HENRY MCCRORY & CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN



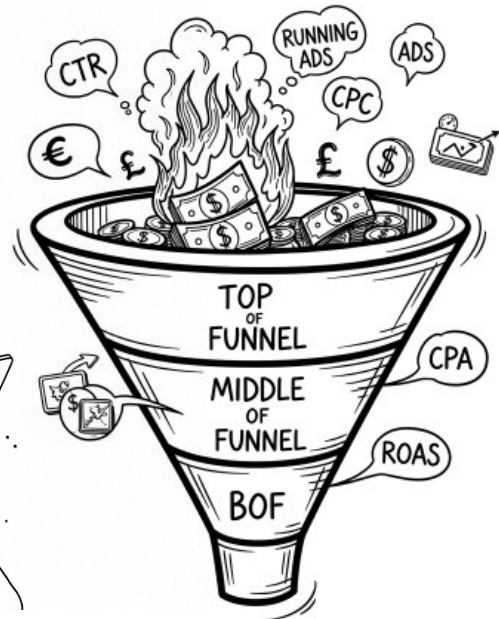
A NO FLUFF GUIDE TO RUNNING ADS

+ NOT GETTING PLAYED ON BUZZWORDS AND FEELINGS

WRITTEN BY:
**HENRY MCCRORY &
CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN**



“RUNNING ADS WITHOUT MEASURING THE NUMBERS IS LIKE FLYING A PLANE WITH THE DASHBOARD RIPPED OUT. YOU’RE STILL BURNING FUEL, YOU’RE STILL MOVING FAST... YOU JUST DON’T KNOW YOU’RE CRASHING –UNTIL YOU HIT THE GROUND.”



Welcome to a paid advertising guide that was written by agency owners that have seen waste, tears and spent thirty years learning what won't work and what will for business owners, not just employees looking to tick boxes.

We're Chris and Henry, two agency owners from Belfast, Northern Ireland with decades of battle scars in the world of e-commerce marketing. We've seen it all – the campaigns that skyrocketed sales, the money pits that made us want to cry into a sad warm pint of Guinness, and the well-intentioned mistakes that set perfectly good pounds on fire.

This book is our attempt to save you from the B.S., buzzwords, and bad habits that plague the digital advertising world. Consider it a straight-talking conversation between two grizzled marketers and a business owner (you) who's had enough of fluffy "gurus" and wants real, actionable advice.

Henry Chris

YOU'VE TWO OPTIONS PICK ONE

If your ads “aren’t working”, then my friend you’ve only two options.

Option one is what most ecom brand owners do.

Keep spending. Keep hoping. Keep refreshing Ads Manager like it’s a fruit machine. Then blame the platform. Or the economy. Or “people aren’t buying right now”.

Option two is what grown-ups do.

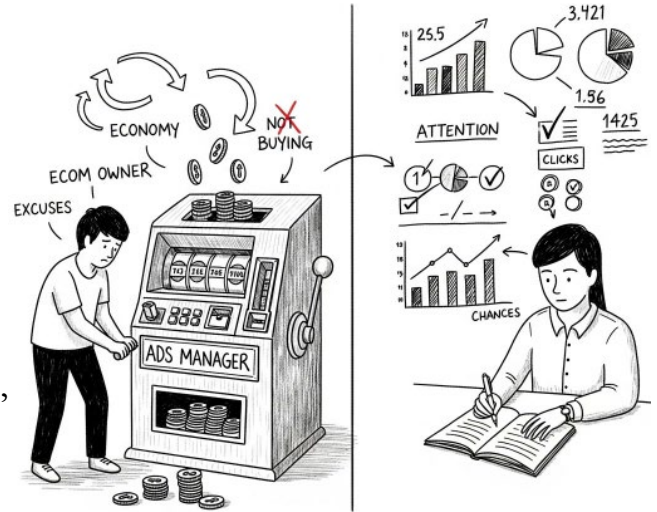
Learn the numbers that tell the truth.

Because ads are not mystical.

They’re a paid test.

**You are buying attention.
Then you are buying clicks.
Then you are buying chances.**

And if you can’t explain, in plain English, what each stage is meant to do, you’ll get mugged. Not once. Repeatedly. Monthly. On direct debit.



You may not know us, but trust this..

Henry and I have watched this film for many years.

We’ve sunk 30 solid years into learning this trade.

And we’ve watched millions in ad spend get burned.

All because people make panic decisions.

A brand owner calls. Says they “spent loads”.

We ask one question. What’s your break-even cost per purchase?

Silence. That silence costs people thousands.

This book exists so you never have that silence again.

You don’t need to be a nerd. You need to be dangerous.

Dangerous means you can look at the numbers and know what’s broken.

Dangerous means you can spot when someone’s chatting rubbish.

Dangerous means you can say, “No, that’s not the issue. The issue is this.”

If you own an ecom brand, this is your job now.






Not making the posts. Not picking the font.

Knowing the numbers that decide whether you grow or you bleed.

So, let’s get into it.

CONTENTS



	<i>Page</i>
 How to use this book: _____	5
Why this book exists and what to expect from it	
 Chapter 1 _____	6
Read This Or Keep Donating Money To Meta	
 Chapter 2 _____	8
Understanding the Ad: Funnel – TOF, MOF, BOF	
 Chapter 3 _____	14
Metrics That Matter – Cutting Through the Vanity Numbers	
 Chapter 4 _____	19
Budgeting & Break-Even – Don't Spend a Penny Without a Plan	
 Chapter 5 _____	26
Creative Testing & Scaling – Iterate, Innovate, and Ignite Your Ads	
 Chapter 6 _____	33
Spotting Agency B.S. – How to Tell If Your “Expert” Isn't So Expert	
 Chapter 7 _____	39
Platform Power-Ups: Meta, Google, LinkedIn When to Use What One	
 Chapter 8 _____	48
Red Flags, Money-Wasters, and Common Traps to Avoid	
 Chapter 9 _____	55
The First 30 Days – Step-by-Step to Launch or Reboot Your Ads	
 Chapter 10 _____	63
Days 31–90 – The 3-Month Growth Blueprint	
 Chapter 11 _____	69
Tracking & Reporting – Templates and Tools for Clarity	
 Chapter 12 _____	74
Crunching the Numbers – Key Calculations You Should Know	
 Chapter 13 _____	81
So, what we are really saying to do is this...	
Chapter 14 _____	85
One last thing... Be dangerous	
Chapter 15 _____	86
Glossary of jargon terms	

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

What to Expect: We'll walk you through how the ad funnel really works (no more guessing what "TOF" stands for), share fictionalized but oh-so-realistic stories of clients who learned lessons the hard way, and give you detailed how-to guides to plan, launch, and scale your campaigns. We focus heavily on Meta (Facebook/Instagram) because it's the workhorse of many e-commerce brands, but we'll also call out key tips for Google and LinkedIn along the way. If another platform does something best, we'll tell you. If it's a money trap, we'll warn you with all the subtlety of a flying brick.

Our Tone: Ad guys meet metrics but with a sensible twist. That means we won't sugarcoat things. If your landing page is crap, we'll say "it's crap." If an agency's feeding you fluff, we'll translate their jargon into plain English (and possibly a few choice four-letter words). We might swear occasionally, we might poke fun at common mistakes – but always with the goal of helping you learn. We have no time for vanity metrics or "synergy" buzzwords, and neither should you. By the end of this book, you should feel confident to take charge of your ads, whether you're managing them in-house or working with an agency.

Who This is For: E-commerce business owners, marketing managers, or anyone who touches the ads and wonders, "Is this actually working, or am I just burning money?" If you've ever been confused by acronyms like ROAS, wondered why your Facebook ads aren't printing money yet, or felt suspicious that your freelancer is bluffing with fancy reports, you're in the right place. We're going to demystify the process and empower you to make smart decisions.

Grab a pint or a coffee (or whatever keeps you awake), get comfortable, and let's dive in. By the final chapter, you'll not only understand the mechanics of *profitable advertising* – you'll also be armed with blunt, practical strategies to apply in the next 30, 90, and 365 days of your marketing journey.

Ready? Let's cut the BS and get to it.

"IF YOU'VE EVER LOOKED AT YOUR AD SPEND AND THOUGHT, 'I HOPE THAT DID SOMETHING,' THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU."

HENRY MCCRORY

"THIS IS FOR PEOPLE WHO RUN ADS, SEE NUMBERS MOVE, AND STILL DON'T KNOW WHETHER THEY'RE WINNING OR BEING POLITELY ROBBED."

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN

CHAPTER 1: READ THIS OR KEEP DONATING MONEY TO META

Or google, tiktok, Microsoft...

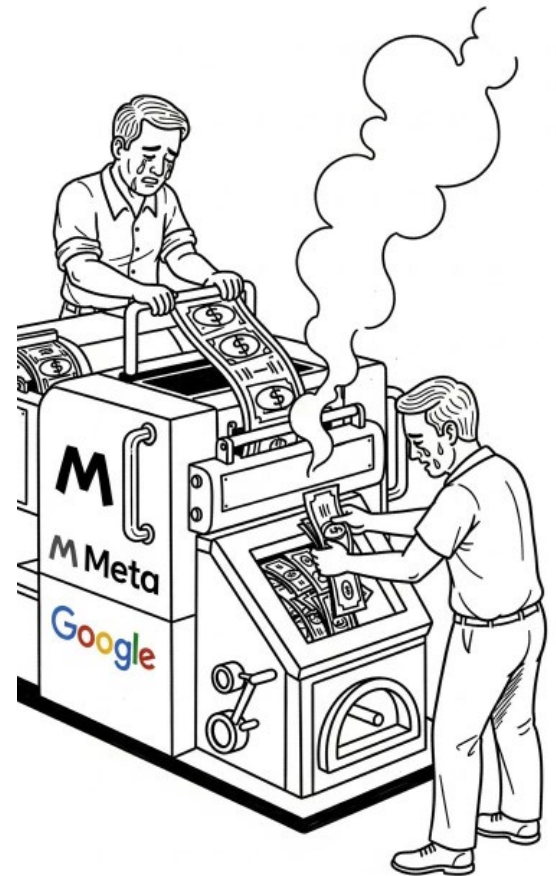
A £2,000 OWNER TEST

If you're spending let's say around £2,000 a month on ads and your sales have stalled, you're not "running marketing".

You're paying tuition and here's your test...

If you can't answer these questions without guessing, your ads aren't broken... your setup is.

1. What is your break-even cost per purchase?
2. What is your average order value?
3. What is your real profit per sale after fees, shipping and returns?
4. What is your best performing ad right now, and why is it winning?
5. What is your landing page conversion rate?
6. What is your click-through rate on cold traffic?
7. What is your plan for new creative every week?



Most people we meet can't answer all seven. And that's why their ad account feels like a fruit machine.

They change budgets when they panic. They blame Meta when results dip. They keep "testing" the same idea with a different headline and call it a new ad. They spend £2,000 a month and hope the pixel "learns". But we've seen it for years, it just won't. Meta doesn't reward hope. It rewards clarity. If you want your ads to print money, you need three things:

1. A clear offer.
2. Creative that makes people stop scrolling.
3. And numbers you actually understand.

That's what this book is for. Because once you know your break-even number, you stop making emotional decisions. And you stop donating money to make the internet a nicer place.



30 YEARS OF HENRY'S AGENCY INSIGHTS:

So, we've both been in the ads space in the same business for over 30 years, from a humble printing company, to a full digital agency and with a few killer team members added a results orientated performance marketing company

Way long before funnels, growth hacks, and agencies with more opinions than experience, we existed before the internet was formed and we have had to grow with it, and we had to adjust with the changes over the years, the minute you think you have mastered it, the algorithm changes or a new platform like Instagram or TikTok comes out of the woodwork.

This is what I have worked out: running ads isn't hard. Measuring them properly and you need the right brain and experience to interpret the data and work out what is working and what is not, or more importantly the eyes to see what is on the downturn and make the changes creatively or targeting. Most advertising fails because nobody defines what success means. Clicks, reach, and impressions look good on reports but don't pay wages, for us or our clients, believe me I know, I remember the times we had too much month at the end of the money with wages to pay.

If ads aren't tied to leads, sales, or profit, we are not winning — we are losing.

We see agencies hide behind opinion and dashboards, while their clients get confused over activity and productivity, don't get me wrong as audiences need to be built and created and we need cash put to a strategy to make this happen, however this information needs communicated at the start as client expectations needs to be tailored to the strategy, and the client needs to be informed that this is happening, and a return will come at a point in the future.

This is not a dig at agencies as we have made our fair share of mistakes, if an agency, and I include ourselves here, can't clearly tell you what's working, what's not, and what they're changing next, you're paying for guesswork.

This is how ads really work. Start with clarity and the agreed end in mind, not creative.

Know who you're targeting, and in my experience sometimes the client may not be completely clear here either, therefore we insist on strategy first process, this will bring clarity to the problem you're solving, and the action required to win.

Then test multiple creatives. Ads are a fluid process of testing, measuring and when all processes are aligned a winning formula.

We have been around the vanity metric corner a few times over the years, and like many have been impressed by our own ego, however, there is no knickers under the fur coat.

**We don't fall in love with ads. We fall in love with results.
Results pay the bills.**



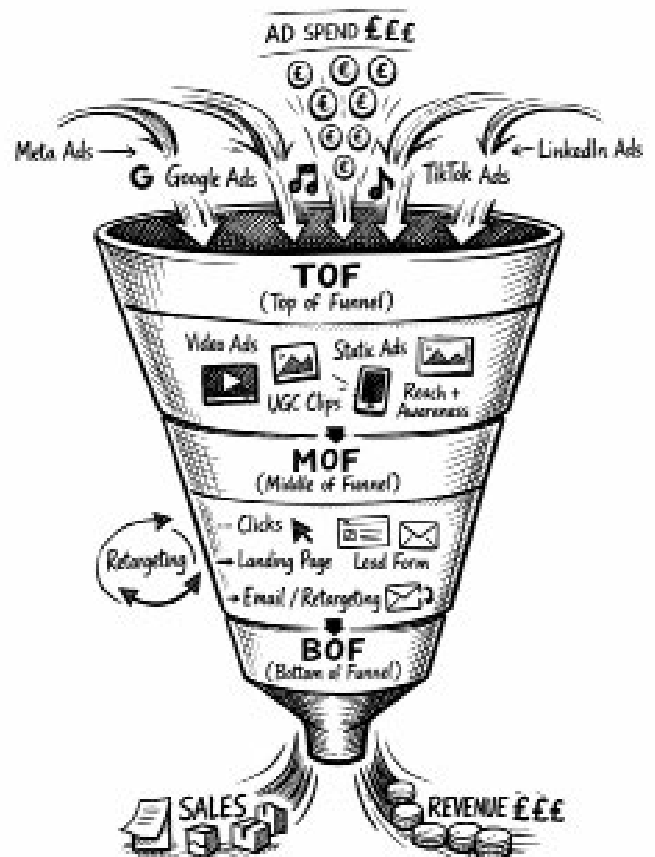
CHAPTER 2:

UNDERSTANDING THE AD FUNNEL – TOF, MOF, BOF

Every successful advertising strategy hinges on one core concept: the marketing funnel. If you've been in a marketing meeting, you've probably heard terms like Top of Funnel, Middle of Funnel, and Bottom of Funnel (often abbreviated TOF, MOF, BOF). Let's decode these without the MBA jargon. Think of the funnel as the journey a customer takes from first hearing about your brand to finally pulling out their wallet. At each stage, the customer's mindset – and what they need from you – is different. We're going to break down each stage, explain what kind of ads fit where, and share a few war stories of what happens when you get it wrong (or right).

Top of Funnel (TOF) – Awareness Stage: This is where strangers become aware that your company exists. At TOF, potential customers are cold – they've likely never heard of you. Your job is to introduce your brand and pique their interest without immediately shoving a “Buy Now” down their throat (that comes later). TOF is all about casting a wide net. You want to reach as many relevant people as possible and make them aware of your product or service. It's not about instant sales; it's about saying “Hello, world. We're here, and we solve problem X or we sell Y that you might like.” The content here should be eye-catching, valuable, or entertaining – something that stops the scroll. For example, if you sell eco-friendly workout gear, a TOF campaign might be a punchy video about the problem of plastic pollution in activewear, or a funny meme about sweaty gym clothes – something broadly interesting that subtly ties to your brand.

- **TOF Goals:** Grab attention and generate interest. Key metrics at this stage might be reach (how many saw the ad) and engagement (did they watch, click, like?). But remember, vanity metrics like impressions can only go so far – you need to attract the right people, not just any people. (We'll elaborate on metrics in Chapter 2.) The main thing: TOF campaigns build awareness. Don't expect a cold audience to convert on a £100 product off one ad impression – that's like asking someone to marry you on the first date. Instead, focus on making a memorable first impression.
- **TOF Story – The Over-Eager Salesman:** Early in our careers, we had a client (let's call him Over-Eager Oliver) who sold high-end espresso machines. Oliver kept insisting we run straight conversion ads to cold audiences – essentially saying “Buy this £500 machine now” to people who had never heard of the brand. The result? A lot of money spent, a trickle of sales, and a confused Oliver.



- We had basically walked up to random people on the street, shouted “Want to spend £500 on a thingamajig you know nothing about?” and walked away with an empty wallet. Lesson: At TOF, slow your roll. Instead, once we convinced Oliver to let us run a fun video showcasing coffee lovers’ pain points (messy coffee pods, expensive café trips) and how our machine solved them, we saw a huge spike in website visits. People were intrigued – and that’s all we needed at TOF.

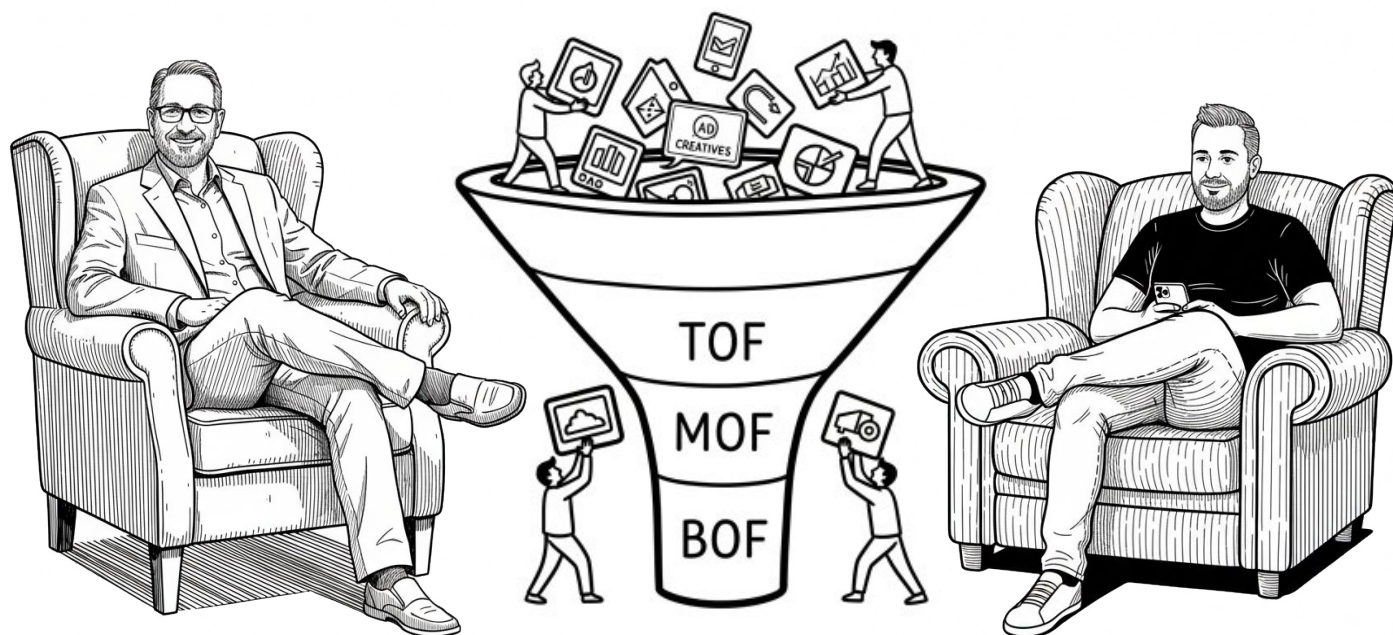
Middle of Funnel (MOF) – Consideration Stage: Now the funnel narrows. MOF is where those intrigued people from TOF start considering your offer more seriously. Maybe they clicked your first ad or visited your site; maybe they started following your Instagram for more content. They know who you are (at least vaguely), and they’re looking for more information to decide if what you offer is right for them. Here, your job is to educate, build trust, and differentiate yourself from alternatives. MOF content often includes things like product explainers, comparisons, case studies, testimonials, or even lead magnets (like a free guide or quiz) to get folks more invested.

- **MOF Tactics:** This stage is perfect for retargeting. For instance, show ads to people who watched 50% of your video or added a product to cart but didn’t buy. Your messaging should say, “Hey, we saw you checking us out – here’s why we’re awesome.” Maybe you offer a bit more detail: “Our espresso machine isn’t just fancy; it pays for itself in 3 months compared to buying lattes daily.” Use social proof and education. If someone is on the fence, a carousel ad of customer testimonials (“This changed my mornings!” etc.) or a blog post about “How to choose the right espresso machine” can gently nudge them toward a decision in your favor. At MOF, you’re not shouting into the void; you’re having a follow-up conversation with folks who showed interest.
- **MOF Metrics:** Here we start caring more about things like click-through rate (CTR) and time on site, sign-ups, or even add-to-cart rates. These tell us if our more interested audience is engaging deeply. We still might not see huge purchase numbers yet, and that’s okay. We’re playing the long game – warming them up so the Bottom of Funnel can seal the deal.
- **MOF Story – Dating Before Marriage:** We once had a client in the skincare space who did TOF brilliantly – viral videos that got millions of views. But they lamented that “views don’t pay the bills” (truth!). The issue? They had no MOF strategy. It was like they threw a fabulous first date and never followed up. Viewers were interested but left hanging. We stepped in to introduce MOF content: a series of comparison ads (“Our natural serum vs. the industry standard”), some influencer testimonials, and an email capture offer for a free sample. The result: the audience that had been merely aware started to trust and desire the product. Their question changed from “What is this?” to “Is this the right solution for me?” By the time these folks hit the next stage of the funnel, many were practically convinced – needing just one more nudge (and maybe a slight discount) to buy.

Bottom of Funnel (BOF) – Decision/Conversion Stage: This is it – the show me the money end of the funnel. BOF is where people are ready to purchase (or very close to it). They’ve done their homework (or you’ve spoon-fed them the info via MOF). Now your advertising should be laser-focused on conversion – turning that interest into action. BOF audiences are usually much smaller than TOF or MOF (because, naturally, only a fraction of the original folks make it here),

but they're high intent. These are people who have, say, viewed your product pages multiple times, or abandoned a cart, or are loyal email subscribers. At BOF, you ask for the sale – directly and confidently.

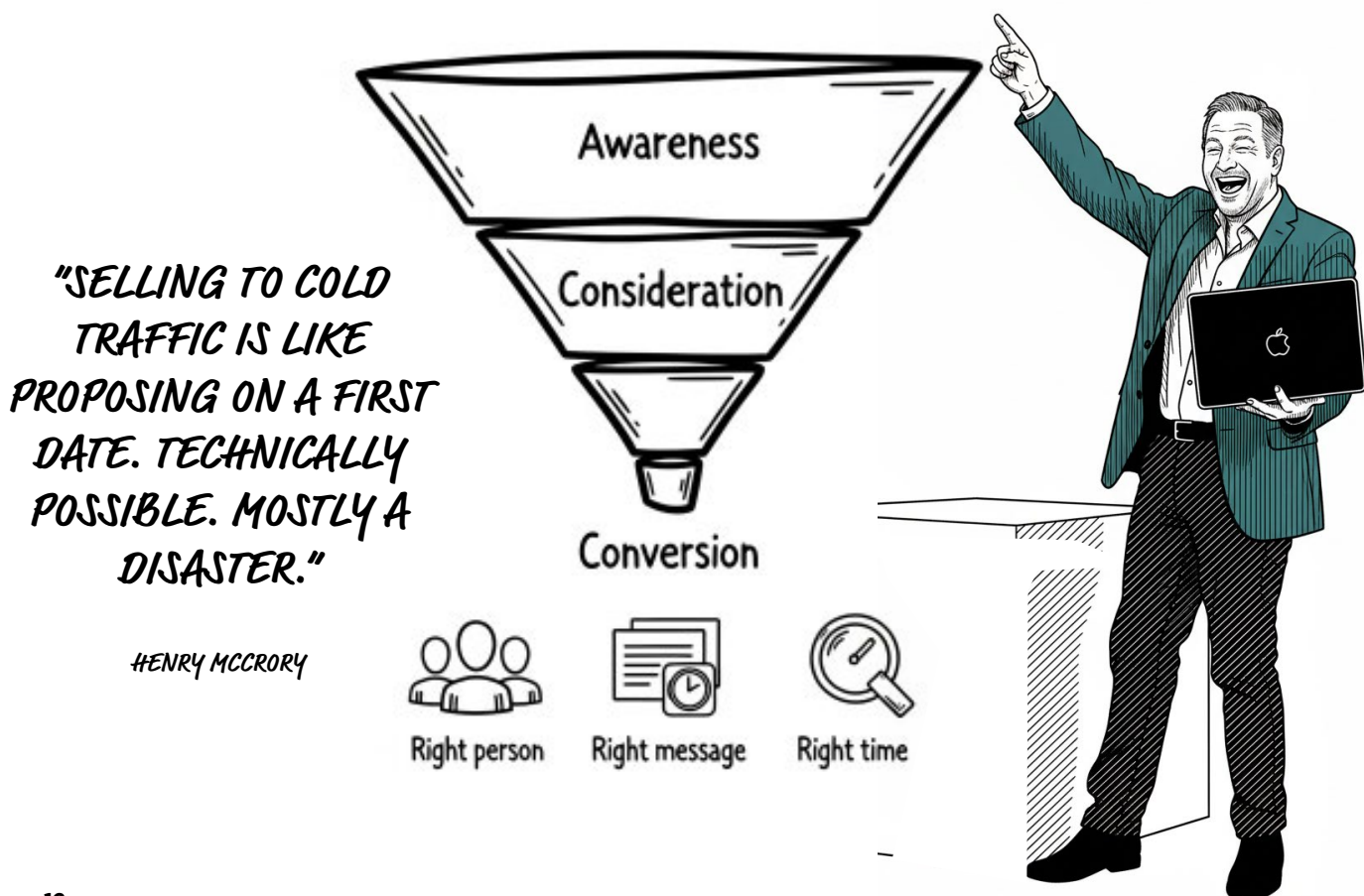
- **BOF Tactics:** Common BOF ads include retargeting ads offering a promo, such as “Come back and get 10% off your first purchase – use code FINAL10,” or “Still interested? Stock is running low!” You might also use dynamic product ads (on Meta, for example) that automatically show the exact products someone viewed on your site, reminding them what they're missing out on. BOF is also where you'd promote things like a limited-time offer, free shipping, or a bonus gift to overcome final hesitations. Basically, you're saying: “You've checked us out, you like what you see, here's a little extra push to seal the deal.” Since this audience is hot, your tone can be more urgent and direct: “Last chance to get our espresso machine at 20% off – order now.”
- **BOF Metrics:** The king here is conversion rate and Cost Per Acquisition (CPA) – i.e., how many of these bottom-funnel folks actually buy, and how much did it cost us to get each sale. We also obsess over Return on Ad Spend (ROAS) at BOF (more on this later, but essentially how many pounds we got back for every £1 spent on ads). A healthy BOF campaign shows strong ROAS because these people were likely to buy – the ads just nudged them over the edge. If your BOF ROAS is weak, something's off in your funnel alignment or your offer (or maybe your tracking – check that first!).
- **BOF Story – Cart Abandoners and the Chase:** One of our favorite client wins was for a boutique fashion e-tailer. They had tons of people adding items to cart and then ghosting at checkout. (We all do it – load up a cart at 11pm and then decide, nah, I don't really need 5 new hoodies). We created a BOF retargeting campaign specifically for these cart-abandoners. The ads showed the exact items they left behind with the headline “Still thinking it over? Get 15% off to complete your look!” The wink emoji was intentional – a friendly nudge, not a hard sell. We also added a bit of FOMO: “Popular items are selling out fast.” The result? Many of those lost prospects came back and bought within 24 hours of seeing the ad. We effectively became that helpful store associate who says, “I can hold that at the counter for you with a discount, if it helps.” Conversion rates shot up, and the client's only complaint was, “Could we handle the sudden surge in orders?” That's the kind of problem we love to have.



Why the Funnel Matters (No, it's not just marketing theory): Understanding TOF, MOF, BOF helps you avoid the #1 rookie mistake in advertising: showing the wrong message to the wrong audience at the wrong time. If you run a hard-sell ad to a cold audience (as Over-Eager Oliver did), you'll likely fail. If you only ever run feel-good awareness ads but never ask for the sale, you'll also fail (or at least not make money) – you'd be surprised how many big brands burn budgets on “engagement” and then wonder why revenue isn't growing. The funnel framework keeps you disciplined: each piece of content has a role, each pound spent has a purpose. And when someone goes from not knowing you to becoming a loyal customer, it feels almost seamless – because you guided them step by step, like a well-choreographed dance.

Before we move on, here's a blunt truth: Your funnel is only as strong as its weakest stage. If your TOF doesn't bring in enough fresh people, your sales will eventually dry up (you'll keep marketing to the same exhausted audience). If your MOF doesn't educate and persuade, people will lose interest and drop out before buying. If your BOF doesn't convince the hot leads to act, you leave money on the table. So, you need to work on all three. In the coming chapters, we'll keep referring back to this funnel and how to optimise each part – from the metrics you track, to the creative you use, to how you budget. Stick with us, and by the end, you'll not only toss around TOF/MOF/BOF like a pro, you'll actually build campaigns that move people from “never heard of it” to “shut up and take my money.”

Key Takeaway: Memorise this: Awareness → Consideration → Conversion. Right person, right message, right time. Every ad you create should fit one of these stages. Pin it above your desk, tattoo it on your arm, whatever – just internalise the funnel. It's going to be your compass in the chaotic world of ad decisions.



spending more time reporting than tweaking, streamline it. Automation can help (we've saved countless hours with simple reporting scripts or tools).

Interpreting Metrics in Context: Metrics rarely exist in isolation. A high CPA might be fine if AOV or LTV is also high. A drop in ROAS might coincide with ramping up spend (when you scale, efficiency often dips a bit – that might be okay if profit in absolute terms is higher). Always consider external factors too: seasonality (conversion rates go up in holiday season, etc.), discounts/promos (a sale will spike conversion but lower AOV or profit margin), and even tracking quirks (after Apple's iOS14 changes, Facebook might under-report conversions – so your real ROAS is higher than it looks in Ads Manager). **Use common sense:** if your online store's overall sales doubled, but Facebook reports only a small ROAS, maybe Facebook played a bigger part than the numbers show (people opted out of tracking). Look at the big picture and multiple data sources.

Story – The “500% ROAS” Agency Report: One client came to us proudly showing a report from their previous agency that boasted a “500% ROAS on Facebook ads.” Naturally, the client thought, “wow, 5-to-1 return, things are great!” Yet their business was struggling to break even – how could that be? We dug in and found the agency was taking credit for view-through conversions like crazy (meaning if someone merely saw an ad and bought within a window, it counted, even if that person was already a customer or found the product organically). Also, they were running retargeting ads to people who had already intended to buy. **Essentially, they were crediting the ads for sales that likely would have happened anyway.** We recalibrated the tracking: turned off view-through attribution, separated new customer acquisition from returning customers in reporting, and got a more realistic ROAS of about 150% (1.5:1) for cold traffic. That was the real number that needed improving. The client's jaw dropped at how much the narrative changed. The agency's fancy report was technically not “lying”, but it was definitely misleading. **The lesson:** know what goes into the metrics you're being shown. If someone flaunts a high ROAS, ask “*according to what attribution? New customers or including repeat? What's the CPA? What's our profit on that?*” Don't be blinded by one shiny metric.

To close this chapter, here's your action item: Identify the one or two metrics that matter most for your current goal and make sure you can see them easily. For example, if you're in growth mode and willing to spend up to £20 to acquire a customer, watch your CPA like a hawk – that's your north star. If you have a fixed budget and need to maximise efficiency, ROAS is king. If you're testing new ads to see if they resonate, CTR might be your early indicator. But always tie it back to dollars (or pounds) in the end. As we like to put it: Clicks and likes are nice, but cash flow is life. Metrics are just the tools to ensure your ads are contributing to that life and not bleeding it dry as a badger — Typing this and pondering, do dry badgers exist?



30 YEARS OF CHRIS'S WISDOM:

What I've learned building campaigns that actually work - I don't handle the cash. That's Henry.

My job has always been upstream of the numbers. I design the ideas, shape the message, and decide what people actually see. And after 30 years of doing that, one thing is clear:

Metrics don't fix bad thinking. Creative does.

Most ad accounts don't fail because the numbers were wrong. They fail because the idea was weak.

You can't optimise your way out of an ad no one cares about. You can't retarget your way out of confusion. And you can't spreadsheet emotion.

Before CPC, before CTR, before ROAS,

there's one question that matters:

Would a real person stop for this?

If the answer is no, nothing downstream saves it.

CTR isn't success. It's curiosity.

CPC isn't efficiency. It's clarity.

High clicks with no sales usually means you attracted the wrong people — or made the wrong promise.

Conversion rate is where creative meets reality. If people don't buy, I don't blame platforms.

I look at the message, the design, the trust, the handoff from ad to page. Design isn't decoration. It's friction control. ROAS and MER don't and won't improve by accident. They improve when the story makes sense end to end.

Henry decides how hard we can push. I make sure the engine actually works. That's been my role for 30 years and I still love it because it helps me help you...

What this book will grant you is judgement you don't yet have time to earn. It helps you look at an ad and know whether it's worth testing, fixing, or killing. I'm not bragging over age, it is really just lessons learned - mostly the hard way...

This will help you to spot when numbers are pointing to a creative problem instead of a budget one. It helps you stop tweaking settings and start asking better questions about message, clarity, and trust.

If you use this properly, you'll waste less money, argue less with dashboards, and build campaigns that work because they make sense to real people — not because you got lucky with a metric.

**"IF THE CREATIVE IS BAD,
THE METRICS WILL POLITELY
LIE TO YOU BEFORE THEY
HURT YOU."**

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN



CHAPTER 3: METRICS THAT MATTER - CUTTING THROUGH THE VANITY NUMBERS

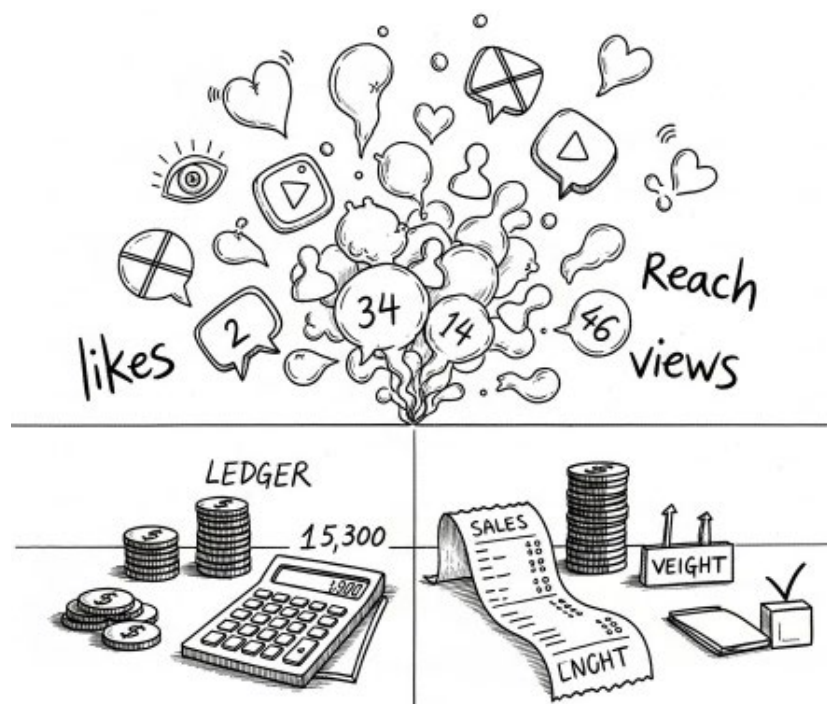
If you've ever sat through a marketing report meeting and wondered, "Okay, but what does all this actually mean for my sales?" – you're not alone. There's an old saying: "What gets measured gets managed." The problem is, in digital advertising we can measure everything – and that means a lot of noise. Clicks, impressions, reach, likes, shares, time on site, bounce rate, scroll depth, cost per mille, cost per click, cost per acquisition, ROAS, MER... Ahhh! It's enough to make your head spin. But fear not. In this chapter, we're going to zero in on the metrics that actually matter for e-commerce advertising, how to track them, and how to avoid getting bamboozled by vanity stats that look pretty but don't pay the bills.

Vanity Metrics vs. Performance Metrics: First, let's distinguish vanity metrics from performance metrics. Vanity metrics are numbers that might make you feel good but don't necessarily indicate business success. Common culprits: impressions (how many times your ad was shown), likes or followers, video views, etc. Don't get us wrong – these have their place (e.g. you need impressions to get awareness, and a high number of views might signal engaging content). But if an agency or freelancer is constantly hyping your impressions or reach without tying it to conversions or sales, alarm bells should ring. You can't deposit impressions in the bank.

Performance metrics, on the other hand, tie directly to your business goals – typically sales, leads, or whatever conversion event makes you money. For e-commerce, the biggies are things like Cost per Acquisition (CPA) (how much you spend to get one customer or sale), Return on Ad Spend (ROAS) (revenue generated per £1 of ad spend), Conversion Rate (what percentage of people who click actually buy), and overall Marketing Efficiency (more on a metric called MER in a bit). These are the numbers that keep the lights on. If these look good, who cares if your Instagram post only got 7 likes? Conversely, if these are bad, no amount of viral tweets will save you.

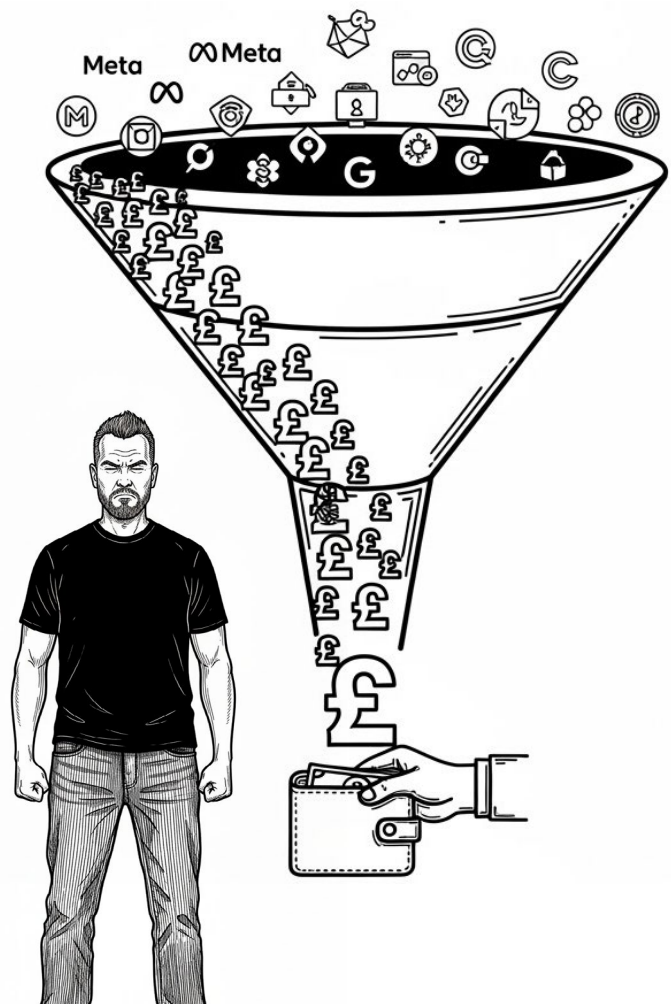
Let's break down the key metrics and what they mean in plain English, along with how you track them:

- **Cost Per Click (CPC):** "What am I paying for each click to my site?" This is a simple one. Take the amount you spent on an ad,



divide it by the number of clicks it generated – that’s your CPC. For example, £100 spend and 50 clicks = £2.00 CPC. Lower is generally better, because it means you’re getting traffic cheaper. However, cheap clicks mean nothing if they’re the wrong audience. We’d rather pay £2 a click for people who actually buy, than £0.50 a click for random tyre-kickers. CPC is most useful for diagnosing issues with your ads’ appeal and targeting. If your CPC is sky high, it could mean your ad isn’t compelling (people aren’t clicking), or you’re targeting a super competitive audience (bids are expensive). We once ran a campaign for luxury watches where initial CPCs were £5+. By tweaking the ad creative to something more eye-catching (and clarifying the value prop), we brought it down to ~£1.20. Boom – traffic quadrupled for the same budget.

- **Click-Through Rate (CTR):** “Of the people who see the ad, how many click through?” CTR is calculated as clicks divided by impressions, expressed as a percentage. It basically tells you how enticing your ad is. If 1000 people saw your ad and 50 clicked, your CTR is 5%. On platforms like Facebook, a CTR of 1-2% might be average for cold audiences; on Google Search, CTR varies by position but could be higher if you’re the top result for a relevant query. CTR is a diagnostic metric. Low CTR? Probably your ad creative or copy isn’t resonating or you’re showing it to the wrong folks. High CTR but no conversions? Possibly clickbait – people click out of curiosity but don’t find what they expected. Keep an eye on CTR to gauge relevance. It’s like an early litmus test before conversion.
- **Conversion Rate:** “Of those who clicked, how many actually converted (made a purchase or took the desired action)?” This is gold. If 100 people visit your product page and 3 buy something, that page’s conversion rate is 3%. In e-commerce, typical site conversion rates might range from 1% to 5% depending on the industry, traffic quality, etc. Your ad conversion rate will depend on both your ads and your website experience. If you have a great ad that sets the right expectations, and a smooth, fast website, you’ll have a higher conversion rate. If either piece fails (ad attracts wrong people or site is a dumpster fire), conversion suffers. We’ll say it now and probably again: No ad in the world can save a terrible website or offer. If your site takes 10 seconds to load or your product pricing is way off, fix that ASAP. Sending traffic to a leaky bucket is one of the worst money-wasters (we’ve seen clients insist on pumping more budget while their site was the conversion equivalent of a sieve – it’s painful to watch). Use conversion rate as a reality check on your whole funnel: it’s not just the ad, it’s the ad plus landing page plus product/price.
- **Cost Per Acquisition (CPA)/Cost Per Action:** This one is critical – how much money do you spend on ads to acquire one customer or



conversion. The formula: divide your total ad spend by the number of conversions (purchases) it drove. If you spent £500 on ads and got 25 sales, your CPA is £20 per sale. CPA tells you if your ads are profitable. If your average order value (AOV) is £50 and your gross profit per order is £25 (say your product costs you £25, you sell at £50), then a £20 CPA means you're making £5 profit per order after ad costs – not bad, possibly sustainable (and we haven't even factored overhead). If your CPA is £30 with that same scenario, you're losing money on the first sale. In Chapter 3, we'll talk about calculating your break-even points and lifetime value, but for now, know your CPA and what you can afford for a CPA. A high CPA might be acceptable if you have repeat purchase revenue (subscription box, consumables) and can recoup over time, but if you're one-and-done sales, you better acquire customers for less than your profit per customer.

- **Return on Ad Spend (ROAS):** This is the revenue generated by your ads divided by what you spent on those ads. It's often expressed as a ratio or multiple. For example, if you spent £200 and generated £600 in sales directly from those clicks, your ROAS is 3:1 (sometimes we just say "ROAS was 3" or "300%"). ROAS is a quick way to gauge efficiency: are my ads bringing in more money than they cost? A ROAS above 1 (or 100%) means you're getting more revenue back than you spend – but note, **revenue is not profit!** (We must deduct product costs, etc., which is where ROI comes in – more on that difference in a second). If ROAS is below 1, you're losing money on those ads (again, maybe okay for a limited time if you have strong repeat business, but not forever). Many e-commerce folks aim for a certain ROAS to break even or be profitable. For instance, if your product margin is 50%, a ROAS of 2 might be your break-even (spend £1 to get £2 in sales, you keep £1 – which covers your cost of goods). We'll delve into break-even ROAS calculation in Chapter 3. For now, just know ROAS is like the scoreboard of your ad campaigns. It rolls up the effect of CTR, conversion rate, AOV, etc. into one number. But ROAS alone can mislead – for example, a campaign might show 10:1 ROAS (awesome!) but if it only spent £5 to get there, it's not moving the needle. We care about both magnitude (total profit) and efficiency (ROAS). Also, ROAS can be manipulated by attribution quirks ("last click" vs "view-through" conversions), so always sanity-check against overall sales trends.
- **Marketing Efficiency Ratio (MER):** Here's one you might not have heard of if you're new, but it's becoming popular among savvy e-commerce marketers. MER (also known as Media Efficiency Ratio) is basically total revenue / total marketing spend (all channels). It's like ROAS but at the macro level – looking at everything together rather than individual campaigns. Why care about MER? Because it gives a holistic view of how efficiently your entire marketing is turning money into revenue. For example, say in a month you spent £10k on all ads and made £40k in total sales for the company, your MER is 4.0 (or 4:1). Some consider MER the true north because it's harder to game – it's all your sales vs all your spend. If you start remarketing heavily, your Facebook ROAS might look amazing, but MER will tell you if overall you're actually scaling revenue or just shifting it around. Many brands aim for an MER that aligns with profitability goals. A common benchmark is ~3-5 for healthy e-commerce, but it varies. Lower than 3 might mean ads are eating too much of revenue (unless your margins are huge), higher than 5 might mean you could actually invest more in ads to grow faster (or enjoy fat profits). We like MER because it forces you to see the big picture – no hiding behind channel-specific attributions. If your MER is dropping, time to pause and investigate: is one channel overspending? Is overall demand down? It keeps you honest.

- **Other Honorable Mentions:** CPM (Cost per 1000 Impressions) – useful for understanding how expensive the ad inventory is (e.g. LinkedIn CPMs might be £50+ while Facebook could be £10-£20, indicating how costly it is to reach people on each platform). Customer Lifetime Value (LTV or CLV) – not exactly an ad metric, but important to know how much a customer is worth over time. If you have a subscription box where an average customer stays 6 months at £30/month, LTV is £180; that means you could spend quite a bit to acquire them and still profit long-term. We will touch on using LTV to justify higher CPAs in Chapter 3. Bounce Rate/Time on Site – these are more web analytics metrics (from Google Analytics, etc.) but can clue you into how the traffic from ads behaves on your site. If your bounce rate (people who left immediately) is 90%, maybe your landing page is irrelevant or slow – fix it or you’re wasting money sending people there. If time on site is 2 seconds, probably same issue. We mention these because a savvy advertiser always looks beyond the ad platform into Google Analytics or Shopify analytics to see what happened after the click.

Now, how do you track all this stuff? A few essentials:

- **Pixel and Analytics Setup:** If you haven’t already, install the Meta Pixel on your website (for Facebook/Instagram) and set up conversion tracking for Google Ads, LinkedIn Insight Tag for LinkedIn, etc. These pixels allow the ad platforms to report back on conversions (purchases, sign-ups, etc.) that came from your ads. Without them, you’re flying blind. Ensure your pixel events are firing correctly – e.g., the purchase event triggers on the thank-you page, not on add-to-cart. Nothing worse than thinking you got 50 sales when it was actually 50 people who just added to cart. Also, use Google Analytics (GA4 nowadays) to measure traffic and conversions from all sources for verification.
- **UTM Parameters:** These are tracking codes you append to your ad URLs (like ?utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=SpringSale etc.). They help analytics tools attribute traffic and sales to the right campaign. If this sounds like tech gibberish, don’t worry – there are free UTM builders. Just know that adding UTMs to your ads can give you an extra layer of data in Google Analytics beyond what Facebook or Google Ads self-report. It’s like a second opinion on performance.
- **Dashboards and Spreadsheets:** In Chapter 10 we’ll go deeper into reporting templates, but at minimum, have a way to regularly review these key metrics. It could be as simple as a Google Sheet where each week you log spend, sales, CPA, ROAS, etc. Or use tools – many exist – that consolidate data. Heck, even the platforms themselves: Facebook Ads Manager and Google Ads have decent dashboards. The key is to actually look at them consistently and interpret them. Don’t just collect data; use it. If math isn’t your friend, lean on ROAS and CPA – they distill multiple factors into one. But also, don’t ignore why those are what they are (which could be gleaned from CTR, conversion rate, etc.).

Beware of Blinding by Data: We promised blunt advice, so here it is – don’t drown in metrics that don’t matter. We’ve consulted for companies where the marketing team presented 50-slide reports each week, full of charts and heatmaps and sentiment analysis, but nobody in the room could answer, “So, are we making money from these campaigns or not?” It’s tragicomic. Focus on a core set of KPIs: for example, each month look at spend, revenue from ads, ROAS, CPA, conversion rate. Add others as needed to diagnose issues (like CTR if things are not converting, etc.). But if you find yourself or your team

30 YEARS OF HENRY'S WISDOM:

I've watched more money get burned at the wrong stage of the funnel than anywhere else in marketing. Not because people are daft. Because they're impatient.

Every ecom owner wants BOF results with TOF effort. They want sales before trust. Revenue before relevance. Profit before patience.

The funnel isn't theory. It's behaviour.

Cold people don't buy.
Warm people hesitate.
Hot people decide.

Ignore that order and you pay for it — loudly. Most losses I've seen didn't come from bad products. They came from shouting too early... or never asking at all.

If you only run awareness, you build an audience that enjoys you but never pays you.
If you only run conversion ads, you drain the same small pool until it dries up.
If you skip the middle, people forget why they cared in the first place.

The funnel forces discipline. It stops you panicking. It stops you chasing yesterday's results. It stops you blaming platforms for human behaviour.

Good funnels don't feel clever. They feel obvious in hindsight.

And when they work, they scale calmly instead of violently.

If you're an ecom owner reading this, here's the hard-earned shortcut:

Right message.
Right person.
Right moment.

Miss one, and the maths never saves you.

**"MOST ECOM LOSSES HAPPEN BECAUSE SOMEONE
TRIED TO SELL BEFORE THEY WERE INVITED."**

HENRY MCCRORY



CHAPTER 4:

BUDGETING & BREAK-EVEN – DON'T SPEND A PENNY WITHOUT A PLAN

Money talks, and in advertising it often mostly says “Goodbye!” if you’re not careful. One of the most common questions we get from business owners is: “How much should I spend on ads?” The honest answer is: It depends – on your goals, your cash flow, your risk tolerance, and (most importantly) your business’s economics (margins, lifetime value, etc.). In this chapter, we’ll walk through how to set a sensible budget, how to calculate your break-even points so you know when an ad is truly profitable, and how to distribute budget across campaigns. We’ll also sprinkle in some sobering tales of budget bloopers (we’ve had clients literally flush money down the digital toilet due to not understanding these concepts – you won’t be one of them after this).

Start With the Unit Economics: Before any talk of ad spend, you need clarity on your unit economics – essentially, how much margin do you have to play with? Let’s define a few basics:

- **Cost of Goods Sold (COGS):** what does it cost you to produce/acquire the product (including manufacturing, packaging, any direct costs per unit)?
- **Gross Margin:** selling price minus COGS, usually expressed as a percentage of the selling price. For example, you sell something at £100, and it costs you £40 to make/deliver. Your gross profit is £60, which is a 60% margin.
- **Other Variable Costs per order:** Do you pay shipping, transaction fees, etc., out of your pocket? Subtract those too. Say another £10. Now your margin might effectively be £50 on that £100 sale.
- **Contribution Margin:** That £50 is what’s left to cover everything else (marketing, salaries, overhead) and hopefully profit.

Why is this important for ads? Because that contribution margin per sale is the absolute max you could spend on ads per sale and at least break even on the first order. In the above case, if we have £50 margin, spending £50 to get a sale means you made zero profit (but did get a customer). Spending £30 means you made £20 profit on that sale (nice!). Spending £60 means you lost £10 on that sale (not sustainable unless that customer buys more later). This tells us our allowable CPA or break-even CPA. In this example, break-even CPA is £50. If our Facebook ads are driving purchases at £40 CPA, we’re in good shape on a per-sale basis; if it’s £60, we either need to improve efficiency or bank on lifetime value.

Calculating Break-Even ROAS: Another way to frame this is break-even ROAS – the return on ad spend at which you break even. It’s essentially 1 divided by your profit margin (as a fraction). Using the

above example: profit margin was 50% (£50 on £100). Break-even ROAS = $1 / 0.5 = 2.0$ (or 200%). That matches our finding: £100 sale / £50 ad cost = 2 ROAS would be break-even.

If margin was 30%, break-even ROAS is ~ 3.33 (you need £3.33 revenue per £1 ad to break even, because you only keep 30% of revenue). You can derive this easily: Break-even ROAS = Sale Price / (Sale Price - COGS - other variable costs). Many sources simplify it to Break-even ROAS = $1 / \text{Gross Margin}$. This is a must-know number. If you don't know it, stop and calculate it now for your business (or each major product line). It tells you the line between losing and not losing money on ads. Any ROAS above that and you're making some money per sale; below that, you're losing per sale.

- Example: You sell a widget for £20. It costs you £10 to produce. Gross margin 50%. Break-even ROAS = 2.0 (i.e. you need £2 back for every £1 in ads). If Facebook says your campaign ROAS is 1.5, you're underwater. If it's 3.0, you're profitable on the first sale. Easy. Many businesses have surprisingly slim margins, so don't be shocked if your break-even ROAS is like 4 or 5 (like in fashion or home goods once you factor in shipping, returns, etc.). That means you need a very high performing campaign or repeat purchases to profit. Knowing this also prevents panic or false jubilation. If your ROAS is below break-even, you either accept it temporarily (for strategic reasons) or fix it; if it's above, you know you can scale that campaign more aggressively because each sale adds profit.

Strategic Unprofitable Acquisitions: It might sound crazy, but there are times you intentionally spend more to acquire a customer than you make on their first purchase. Why? If you have good Customer Lifetime Value (LTV) or repeat purchase rates. For instance, those subscription box companies or razor blade clubs often lose money upfront (negative profit on first shipment) because they know subscribers stick around and pay monthly, making it profitable over 6-12 months. If your business has that dynamic – you might be willing to go above break-even CPA/ROAS initially. But you need to know your numbers cold and ensure retention is strong, otherwise you'll just... go broke. In the early 2010s, lots of VC-funded brands did this (spend £100 to acquire a customer worth £50 because hey, growth!). Many imploded when cash ran out. The mood now is smarter: push for profitability sooner. We typically advise: if you can break even on first purchase, that's great – then repeat buys are all gravy. If you can't, at least know how many months until a customer becomes profitable and ensure you have the cash to wait that long.

Setting an Overall Budget: Okay, now that you know what you could spend per sale, let's talk about how much to budget on ads overall. For a new advertiser or brand, a common approach is to decide what percentage of revenue to reinvest in marketing. Say you're comfortable with 10-15% of revenue on marketing (this can vary widely by industry). If you're doing £50k a month in sales, 10% is £5k. That could be your total marketing budget (split across channels). If digital ads are the main driver, maybe the bulk of that is Facebook/Google. This approach keeps spending proportional to size. If you want to be more aggressive in growth mode, you might spend 20-30% of revenue on ads for a while (basically plowing profits back in). Just be careful not to overshoot and kill your margins entirely. Always watch the MER (Marketing Efficiency Ratio) as introduced – it will tell you overall ad spend vs

revenue. If MER starts creeping too low (e.g. 2 or below for extended time without reason), you might be overspending relative to return, which is a warning sign.

For brand new launches with no revenue yet, it's trickier – you might allocate a fixed amount you're willing to “invest” (read: possibly lose) in learning. For example, “I'll spend £2,000 on Facebook ads to gather data and hopefully initial sales, then re-evaluate.” In that case, have a number in mind that you're okay parting with for market entry. Too often we've seen folks say “we don't really have a budget, we'll see” and then they either pull the plug too early (after £100, which is not enough to conclude anything) or they keep spending indefinitely without targets and later regret how much vanished.

Allocate Budget Across the Funnel: Remember our funnel from Chapter 1? You should spread your budget across TOF, MOF, BOF campaigns – but not necessarily evenly. A common mistake is either all in on TOF (driving a ton of awareness but not converting it) or all in on BOF (milking the bottom of funnel without filling the top, eventually running dry). The right mix depends on your situation. A rough starting point for many e-comms might be something like 60% TOF, 20% MOF, 20% BOF.

Or even 70/20/10. Why more on TOF? Because you constantly need new people entering the pipeline. If you never prospect for new customers, you'll saturate and annoy your existing audience. That said, TOF is also the riskiest spend (cold traffic has lower conversion rates), so you balance it with the high-efficiency retargeting. The ideal allocation changes as you grow: in early days, you might spend heavier on prospecting to find new audiences; as you get big, you might find you have to invest in retention (email marketing, loyalty) which effectively boosts bottom funnel. One guide suggests allocating budget based on funnel stage goals and monitoring – essentially shifting as needed. We say: start with a plan (like 60/20/20), watch performance. If your retargeting (BOF) has more demand than budget (e.g. it's pacing well, high ROAS, but limited by budget), feed it a bit more until diminishing returns. Conversely, if TOF spend is going nowhere (very low conversions, poor engagement), maybe trim it and reallocate to mid or bottom until you fix your TOF approach.

Don't Be Afraid to Spend (Within Reason): One phenomenon is the under-spender – business owners so scared of wasting money that they never spend enough to get meaningful results. They put £5 a day into Facebook and then wonder why they got 0 sales in a week. Reality check: if your product costs £50, and your typical CPA might be, say, £20, at £5/day you might get one sale every 4 days in theory. But in practice, with so low spend, the algorithm can't even learn who's likely to convert. It's like trying to boil water with a tiny candle – not enough heat to get results.

We often advise setting a minimum budget for each ad set or campaign to exit the “learning phase” (Facebook's term for when it's still figuring out who to show ads to). Facebook's guideline is ~50 conversion events per week per ad set for stable results. If your conversion rate is, say, 2%, and you want 50 conversions, that means ~2500 clicks a week, which at a 1% CTR and, say, 100k impressions per conversion... okay that gets complicated. But the point is: ensure you're spending enough to get at least a handful of conversions per week. For many small campaigns, that might mean £20-£50 per day

on a key ad set. If that's beyond your means, focus your spend more narrowly (fewer campaigns) rather than dribbling £5 here and £5 there across many campaigns.

On the flip side, don't just throw money at ads expecting linear results. Doubling budget doesn't always double sales; in fact, performance can taper off. There's always a point of diminishing returns – where each extra £1 yields less and less. The art is finding the sweet spot: spend enough to scale, but not so much that you're just buying overpriced marginal impressions. We once scaled a campaign from £1k/day to £5k/day because it was crushing it at a 5 ROAS at £1k. At £5k, ROAS dropped to ~2.5. Why? We probably maxed out the most responsive audience and then Facebook started showing it to less ideal folks to use up the budget. The additional spend still brought in sales (still profitable at 2.5 ROAS given their margins, so it was fine) – but if our break-even ROAS was 3, that scale would've actually pushed us into unprofitable territory. So, monitor as you scale – don't assume yesterday's efficiency will hold at 5x budget. Often you have to accept a lower ROAS to get more volume, but as long as you know your break-even and targets, that's a conscious decision.

Set Goals and Limits: When budgeting, it helps to define targets or cut-off points. For example: “We're aiming for a CPA of £20. We'll allocate £3,000 this month to Facebook. If by £1,500 in spend we're seeing CPAs consistently around £40, we will pause and rethink (because that's double our goal). If we're at ~£25 and improving, we'll continue and maybe increase budget.” This kind of rule-based approach prevents you from either panicking too early or blissfully overspending too long. It introduces a checkpoint. Some advertisers use automated rules (in Facebook or Google) to do this – e.g. pause an ad if CPA > £X after so much spend. Those can be handy, but with small data, they might cut things off prematurely (because early data can be volatile). Often it's better to do it manually with human judgment.

Budgeting for Testing vs Scaling: We'll talk about creative testing in the next chapter, but note that some portion of your budget should be earmarked for testing new ideas (new ads, new audiences) while the rest goes to “business as usual” (BAU) or scaling of proven winners. A healthy ratio might be 70% budget to proven campaigns, 30% to experiments. That way you can try new things without risking the whole farm, but also not stagnate by never innovating. We frequently see either extreme: some companies spend 90% of money on their one best ad until it fatigues and then freak out when it dies (because they haven't tested backups), and others tinker endlessly with 10 different experiments and never put enough money to scale the ones that work. Balance, my friend. We once had a client who obsessively tested every slight color change in their ad (micro-optimisations) but never raised the budget on the obvious winning concept that outperformed all others. We had to say, “Mate, you found a golden ad – put real money behind it!” Don't test for testing's sake – test to find winners, then feed the winners.

The Human Side of Budgeting: Quick story: We had a client who, on paper, had plenty of cash and a decent margin. We recommended they ramp up spend from £10k/month to £30k/month based on positive results. The owner balked – he admitted the idea of spending £30k in a month on ads made him sweat, even if logically the projected return was £90k in revenue. This is an overlooked aspect: comfort level. It's your money (or your company's). Some people get heartburn seeing big credit card charges or ad invoices, even if ROI is there. If that's you, it's okay to scale more gradually while you build confidence. Conversely, we've seen overly gung-ho folks toss £50k at an untested campaign and then panic at the loss. Know thyself. A good rule: increase budgets in steps (e.g. 20% increase per few

days on Facebook is often cited as a max to avoid shocking the algorithm too). From a psychological view, stepping up in increments also gives you checkpoints to ensure things don't go off the rails.

Cash Flow Considerations: Ads usually charge in arrears (Facebook bills you after you spend a certain amount or at month's end). Ensure you have the cash to pay that, and that your sales (and the cost of fulfilling those sales) don't leave you in a crunch. It's possible to grow yourself into a cash hole: e.g., spend a lot on ads, get tons of orders, now you need to pay for inventory and shipping before the revenue fully collects, etc. This is more finance 101, but important. Budgeting isn't just about the Excel sheet of ROAS; it's also about when money leaves your account vs when it comes in. Keep an eye on that cycle.

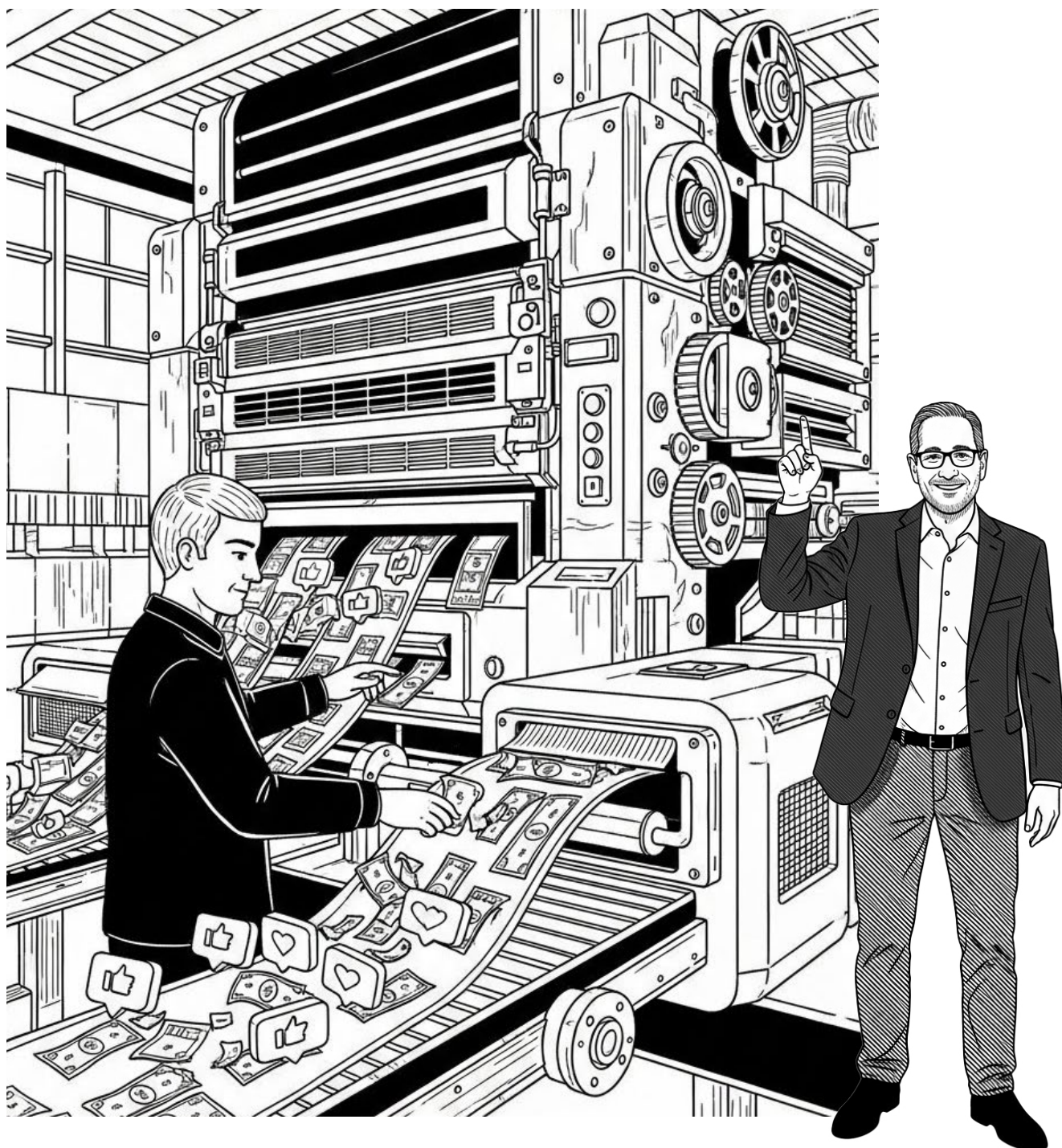
Story – Budget Blowout vs Strategic Scale: We had two clients in the same niche, let's call them Client A and Client B. Both started with about £5k/month ad budget. Client A got great results early (they hit a 4 ROAS out the gate). In excitement, they jumped to £20k spend the next month without laying groundwork (they hadn't fully tested creatives for that level, hadn't checked inventory scaling, etc.). What happened? They ended up blowing a lot on subpar new audiences; ROAS plummeted to 1.5; plus they ran out of stock of their best-seller halfway, so a chunk of spend was wasted promoting something people couldn't even buy (whoops!). It was a budget blowout – we had to regroup, drop back to £5k, and be more deliberate. Client B, on the other hand, took a measured approach: we increased their spend by 20-30% each week as long as metrics held, expanded into similar lookalike audiences gradually, and introduced new creatives to support higher spend. Over 3 months, they also quadrupled budget, but in a way that felt controlled – and they maintained a solid 3+ ROAS throughout. By month 4, Client B was far ahead in total sales compared to Client A, despite both having great products, simply because the budgeting strategy was smarter. The lesson: scaling isn't just more money = more results. It's smart money = more results.

To wrap this chapter, here are some **Budgeting Commandments** from Chris & Henry:

1. Thou Shalt Know Thy Break-Even: Calculate your break-even CPA and ROAS and tattoo it on your brain. This frames every decision.
2. Thou Shalt Start with a Plan: Don't wing the budget. Decide on a test budget, an initial monthly budget, and criteria for scaling or cutting.
3. Thou Shalt Not Starve nor Stuff the Funnel: Allocate across funnel stages; feed your prospecting enough to grow, but not at the expense of retargeting your hot leads, and vice versa.
4. Thou Shalt Monitor and Adjust: Check in on spend and key metrics at least weekly (if not daily when things are volatile). Adjust budgets up or down based on performance, not on gut alone.
5. Thou Shalt Preserve Cash Flow: Remember that an ad budget is not an island – it affects inventory, operations, and finances. Don't overspend if you can't fulfill or if you'll bankrupt yourself waiting for revenue.
6. Thou Shalt Be Brave but Not Foolhardy: If the numbers justify, don't fear spending more – ads are an investment, not just a cost. But also, don't ignore early warning signs and just pray more money will fix a failing campaign (it won't).

"MORE BUDGET DOESN'T MEAN MORE SALES. SOMETIMES IT JUST MEANS YOU LOSE MONEY FASTER, IN HIGHER DEFINITION."

HENRY MCCRORY



Now that you have your budget in order and understand how to keep it in the green, it's time to talk about what you're actually showing people for all that money.

In the next chapter, we'll tackle the creative side of advertising – testing and scaling winning ads without losing your mind (or sense of humor). Onward!

30 YEARS OF CHRIS'S WISDOM:

I don't decide how much money goes in - that is usually down to the client's investment. But... I decide what happens when it does. And after 30 years of watching budgets succeed or explode, here's the uncomfortable truth:

Budget doesn't fix bad thinking. It only reveals it faster.

Most ad budgets don't fail because they were too small or too big. They fail because they were pointed at the wrong idea.

I've seen £500 do serious work behind a clear concept. I've seen £50,000 evaporate behind confusion, panic, and "we'll see what happens". From the creative side, budgeting isn't about how much you spend. It's about what the spend is asking the audience to do. If the idea is unclear, more money just spreads the confusion wider. If the promise is weak, more money just disappoints more people. If the funnel is broken, budget only accelerates the leak.

That's why break-even matters even to creatives. Not because I care about margins — but because they define how brave the idea is allowed to be.

A tight margin forces clarity.
A strong margin allows patience.
A misunderstood margin creates panic-led ads.

When people scale too fast, it's rarely arrogance. It's excitement without groundwork.

The creative hasn't been tested at volume.
The message hasn't met resistance yet.
The audience hasn't been exhausted.

So the moment money goes up, performance goes sideways. Good budgeting feels boring from the outside. From the inside, it feels controlled. Ideas get tested properly. Winners get fed. Losers get killed quickly.

From my side of the table, the goal is simple:

Make sure every pound is backing a message that deserves to travel further.

When that's true, Henry can push the numbers with confidence.

When it's not, no budget in the world saves it.

**"BUDGET DOESN'T
MAKE ADS WORK.
IT JUST MAKES THE
TRUTH LOUDER."**

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN



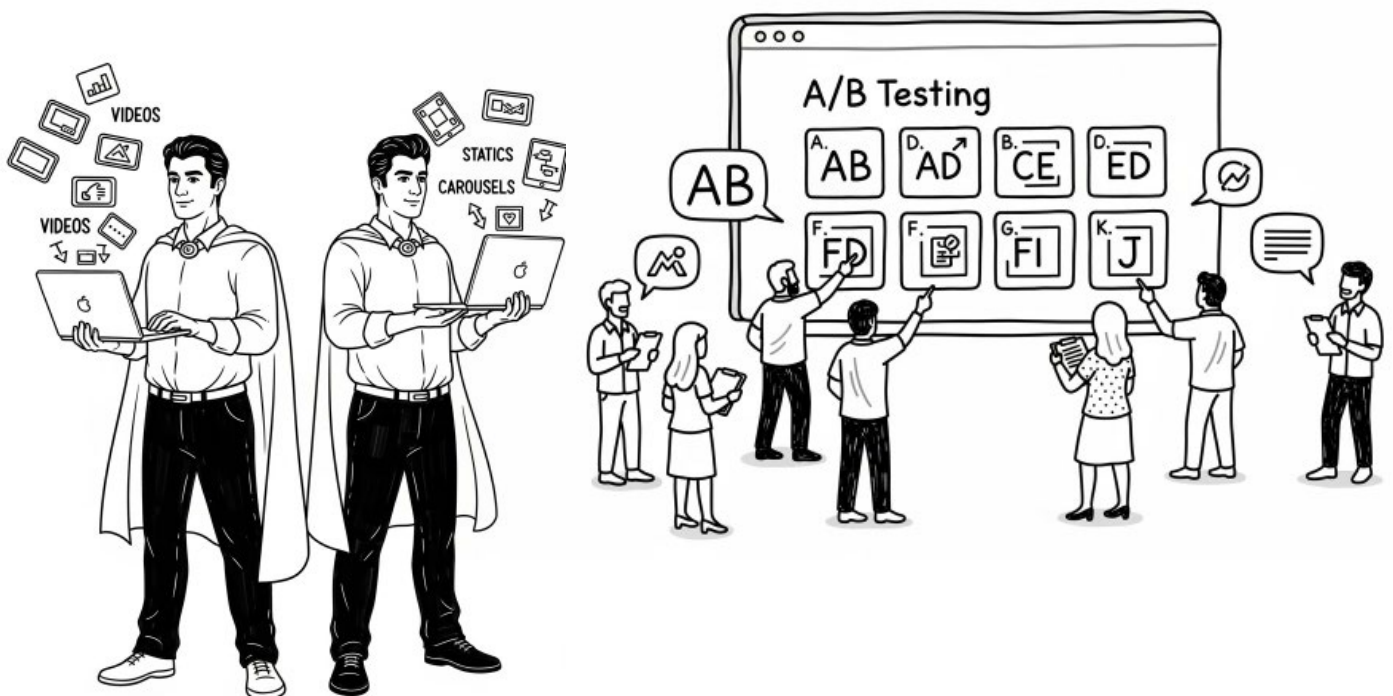
CHAPTER 5: CREATIVE TESTING & SCALING – ITERATE, INNOVATE, AND IGNITE YOUR ADS

Here's a cold, hard truth from two guys who have overseen thousands of ads: Creative is the #1 factor in your ad performance. Yes, targeting matters. Yes, budgeting and funnels matter (that's why we covered them first). But you can do everything else right and a crappy ad creative will still flop. Conversely, a brilliant ad can sometimes overcome poor targeting or a modest budget and still bring home the bacon. This chapter is all about how to systematically test your ad creatives to find those winners – and then how to scale them up without falling flat. We'll also share cautionary tales of chasing “creative hacks” and how to avoid burnout (for both your ads and yourself).

Why You Must Test Creatives (No Exceptions):

Many business owners have a gut feeling or personal favorite idea for an ad – and that's fine, start with it. But don't ever assume you know what will work best. I've been shocked at least once a month for 30 years what actually works. We've been surprised more than we should admit. The polished, high-budget video ad you think is amazing might get slammed by a simple selfie-style clip or a quirky graphic.

Creative testing is not optional if you want consistent wins. The landscape is competitive and consumer attention spans are microscopic. What worked last year might not work now. Tastes change, platform algorithms change, heck – society memes change (remember when fidget spinners were a thing?). The only way to stay on top is to keep throwing controlled spaghetti at the wall to see what sticks. I say “controlled” because you shouldn't do it haphazardly; there's a method to effective testing.



Structured Testing – A 3-Phase Approach:

We recommend thinking of creative testing in phases

- **Phase 1: Initial Creative Test (New vs New).** When you have a batch of new ideas, test them against each other on a level playing field. For example, create a testing campaign where you run, say, 3-5 different ads (be it different images, videos, headlines, etc.) to the same audience. Keep budgets low and equal. The point is to see which concept grabs the most attention and drives the most efficient results (clicks, conversions) relative to each other. Do not include your long-standing champion ad in this test yet – new ads need a fair shot to compete without the algorithm biasing towards the proven one. It's like a rookie tournament before facing the champion. In Facebook terms, you might do an ABO (Ad Set Budget Optimisation) campaign for testing, with each ad isolated, so each gets spend. Or use Facebook's built-in split test feature. The key is: only one variable difference per ad if possible. If Ad A is a funny video and Ad B is a serious image with different text, and B wins, was it the humor or the video format or the copy? Hard to say. In early rounds though, you will be testing pretty different concepts – that's okay, the goal is to find a direction that clearly outperforms the rest. Allow a few days to a week to gather data (be patient – results can fluctuate day to day). Then pick your top 1 or 2 ads.
- **Phase 2: Champion Challenge (New vs Proven).** Now take your best new ad (or two) and pit it against your current champion ad (the best performing existing creative). This answers the question: "Is the new ad actually better than what's already working?" Many new ads fail here – they might be good, but not better than your control ad that has honed in via algorithm over time. If a new creative can meet or beat the KPI (say, CPA or ROAS) of your champion, congrats – you have a new champion! If not, sometimes you still keep it in rotation as a backup or for frequency relief, but you know it's not a star. We often run this phase as a Campaign Budget Optimisation (CBO) on Facebook with two ads: new vs old, let Facebook allocate, or do a 50/50 split test. During this phase, be prepared for a slight dip in performance overall; you're basically challenging the king, and if the challenger sucks, you temporarily wasted some spend. That's okay – it's the price of innovation. As one source put it, expect performance may dip during experiments, but it's a temporary pain for long-term gain.
- **Phase 3: Scaling Winners.** When a creative proves to be a winner (either it beats the old champ or adds significant value), it's time to pour gas on the fire. "Scaling" means showing that winning ad to a lot more people (and/or across more ad sets, more budgets, even more platforms). A crucial point: do NOT pause your old winning ad the minute a new one wins. There's no rule you can only run one ad. Often, running them together yields the best results – the new one picks up conversions at a great rate, while the old one continues to chug along with folks it still resonates with. We typically increase budget on the campaign containing the new winner, or move the new ad into the main campaign that had the old winner. There are two schools: either gradually raise budgets in the existing campaign (e.g., 20% increments every few days if performance holds) or duplicate the campaign/ad set with a higher budget. Both can work; some advertisers find duplication (creating a fresh campaign with a higher budget and the same ads) "resets" the learning and can either swing great or flop – use with caution. If you have a really stable winning campaign, you might just prefer to up the spend there slowly. Additionally, expand your audience if needed – your winner might saturate the existing target. Consider broadening targeting or adding new lookalike audiences now that you have a proven ad

that could appeal widely. Also, think cross-platform: if a concept killed on Facebook, maybe it'll do well on Instagram Story placement, or TikTok, or as a YouTube bumper ad. Resize/reformat it and give it a whirl (just be mindful of platform norms; an ad that's great on Facebook might need tweaks to vibe with TikTok's style, for example).

Creative Elements to Test:

We keep saying “different ads” but let's clarify – what can you actually test? Here's a non-exhaustive list:

- Visual format: image, carousel of images, video, GIF/animation, infographic style, user-generated content style (lo-fi). Each can have radically different impact. Often video is hyped as king, but we've seen images crush videos plenty of times. Always test both.
- Messaging/Angle: What's the hook? You can promote the same product with different angles. Example for a blender: Ad1 focuses on “powerful motor – blends anything” vs Ad2 focuses on “easy to clean” vs Ad3 “save £5 a day on smoothies by making at home”. These speak to different pain points. Try various angles and see what resonates.
- Ad Copy (headline/text): Sometimes small changes here can influence results. But generally, if you're drastically changing the text, you're also changing the angle. We've had cases where just changing a headline from “50% OFF today” to “Last Chance: 50% OFF” boosted clicks by creating urgency. Test tone too – playful vs professional.
- Creative Style: Within a video – is it an unboxing? A founder talking? A customer testimonial? A straight product demo? An emotional story? We had one client where a heartfelt founder story video did 3x better than a slick product demo. You bet we pivoted to storytelling after that.
- Call to Action (CTA): The CTA button or line – “Shop Now” vs “Learn More” vs “Sign Up.” Minor, but sometimes making the action clear (“Get yours now”) vs soft can change who clicks. For purchases, we lean direct (“Shop now”), for higher funnel maybe “Learn more.”
- Ad Placement Adjustments: Maybe your creative works great in Feed but not in Stories. You might create a version more suited to vertical full-screen for Stories. It's good to test how creative performs on different placements (Facebook newsfeed vs Instagram stories vs Reels, etc.). Meta's algorithms often handle placement automatically if you use Advantage+ placements. We typically allow all placements in initial tests to see where it thrives, then perhaps refine.

Interpreting Test Results: When running tests, especially with small budgets, you must determine when you have a clear winner. Use stats sensibly: If Ad A has 5 conversions at £10 each, and Ad B has 3 conversions at £15 each, over a few days and similar spend – A is likely better. But if it's 2 vs 1, it could be luck. Look for significantly better performance, not just a tiny edge. We often look at CPA as the deciding metric (or ROAS if each ad's spend and attribution is enough to see). Also consider CTR and engagement: if one ad has a much higher CTR, it's grabbing attention better (even if conversion is similar, that might scale more efficiently). However, if one has a low CTR but

surprisingly all who click buy (maybe hyper-targeted message), that's also interesting. One trick: We sometimes intentionally optimise test campaigns for an earlier metric like link clicks or add-to-cart, to get faster read; but ultimately, purchases are the north star. Facebook's algorithm might not optimally distribute spend unless you optimise for the event you care about (purchase). So usually, we do tests with purchase conversion objective still, but if data is slow, we examine early funnel metrics as clues.

Creative Fatigue – Why Testing Never Stops: Let's say you found a killer ad. You scaled it. Sales are rolling. Done, right? Wrong. After a while (weeks, months, depends on spend and audience size), that ad will show diminishing returns. Audiences get saturated – meaning most people in the target saw it a bunch of times (frequency goes up) and it's not fresh anymore. Performance can decline. Also, ad platforms favor fresh content – there's anecdotal evidence that new creatives get a relevance boost. So you have to keep a pipeline of new ideas. We're not saying drop everything and make a new ad daily – but have a cadence. Many successful brands produce new creatives monthly or even weekly. A good practice: allocate, say, 10-20% of your time/budget continuously to testing new things, even when current ads are doing fine. This ensures when an old ad fatigues, you've already got a contender warming up. In practical terms, watch frequency metrics – if your frequency is 5+ (each person on average saw it 5 times) and sales from that ad dip, likely fatigue. Also listen: comments like “I see this ad all the time” or rising negative feedback signals it's time to refresh.

Don't Take Results Personally: As an owner or creative, it's easy to get attached. You love Ad Concept X because you poured your heart into it – but customers might prefer Ad Y with a goofy meme. It can be humbling. One fictional (but typical) scenario: Henry writes a heartfelt, on-brand ad copy paragraph he's sure will resonate; Chris, meanwhile, mocks up a silly GIF of a cat using the product as a joke. We test both. The cat GIF gets double the clicks and sales. Henry facepalms – his masterpiece lost to a cat meme. But guess what? We immediately put more budget on the cat ad, and it makes a ton of money.



The moral: the data has no ego. Follow the numbers, not your ego. Save the art for your personal blog; when it comes to ads, it's about what works. That said, maintain brand integrity – if the “goofy” thing that works goes against your brand values or would upset your existing customers, find a middle ground. (Though in our experience, a brand's voice can be flexible; sometimes brands learn their customers enjoy a lighter tone than initially assumed.)

Scaling – Mind the Gaps: We touched on budget scaling in Chapter 3, but to reiterate in creative context: when you find a winner, you scale until it breaks, then back off a bit. That might mean increasing budgets as long as CPA stays acceptable. Or expanding geographies if you were limited. However, ensure the rest of your business can handle it – scaling a great creative by 5x might mean 5x orders. Check inventory! We've unfortunately helped blow up demand only to find the client stocked out in days and then had to turn off ads (losing momentum and frustrating buyers). Now we ask upfront: “If this works, can you fulfill 100 orders a day? 200? What's the cap?” It's a good problem to have, but a problem nonetheless if not managed.

Creative Production – Quality vs Quantity: You might wonder, do I need a fancy agency to crank out new videos or a designer for polished images every week? Not necessarily. In the age of smartphones, authentic, less polished content often performs extremely well. Many brands find that customer testimonial videos shot on an iPhone, or founder selfies talking into the camera, outperform slick studio commercials. It comes across as more genuine in social feeds. Also, tools like Canva make graphic design accessible for non-designers, and there are tons of freelancers who can churn out variations quickly. You should have a pipeline: maybe one month you invest in a professional shoot for a hero video, while weekly you make smaller, quick creatives in-house. Use what you have – user-generated content (UGC) is gold. Ask loyal customers for permission to use their Instagram pics or unboxing clips. It adds social proof and saves you production time. Some of our best performing ads for a cosmetics client were literally TikTok videos from real customers demoing the product (with their OK to use). It beat the high-end photo shoot images by far – people trust people. So, mix it up.

Story – The Repeated Winner (That Eventually Lost): We once found an absolute winning ad for a client – it was an image ad with a bold, contrarian statement that really grabbed attention. It single-handedly drove sales for 3 months straight at an incredible CPA, and we thought it might be “the one ad to rule them all” forever. So we got a bit lazy on making new creatives. Why bother, this one is unstoppable! But then, as all good things do, it came to an end – performance slid as the audience had seen it too often and competitors perhaps mimicked the style. Suddenly we were scrambling, tossing out rushed new ads to replace it. None hit the mark immediately, and the client's revenue dipped that month. That scramble was preventable – had we been testing a few new angles while the champion was still hot, we'd likely have had a successor ready. We learned never to rest on our laurels. Now our motto is: “If you have a winner, great – now find the next one.” It's kind of like how sharks must keep swimming. In advertising, you must keep testing. The market is a moving target.



Practical Testing Tips Summarised:

- Test in small batches regularly rather than huge batches occasionally. (E.g., 3 new ads every week beats 20 new ads every 3 months, in terms of learning cadence.)
- Keep a record of tests – what you tried and what the results were. This helps avoid repeating flops and guides new ideas.
- Form a hypothesis before each test. E.g., “I believe highlighting our eco-friendliness will appeal to younger customers.” Then create an ad around that. This way, whatever the result, you’re learning about messaging.
- Don’t be afraid to kill losers fast (if an ad is clearly underperforming, turn it off to save money) – but also don’t kill too fast. Usually give at least a few thousand impressions or a few days unless it’s just dramatically bad (e.g., spent £50, got zero clicks? Yeah dump it).
- Look at qualitative feedback too: comments on ads can be illuminating. Did people tag friends (good sign), or leave complaints? Sometimes a negative comment reveals an objection you need to address in future creative (“Is this gluten-free?” – oh, people care about that – maybe mention it).
- Use platform tools – e.g., Facebook now has an automated Creative A/B testing tool and even dynamic creative optimisation (where it mixes and matches headlines, images automatically). Those can be helpful to find combinations that work that you might not have predicted. But still supplement with your own deliberate tests.

When Scaling Goes South – Adapt: You’ve scaled your winner, and suppose it starts fatigue or performance degrades. What can you do to extend its life? Sometimes a minor tweak will reset the freshness. Change the headline, or tweak the opening of the video. Facebook often treats it as a “new” ad. We had an ad with a red background that fatigued; we changed the background to blue and ran it again – surprisingly, it got traction (probably hit some new people who ignored the red, or the same people didn’t mind seeing a variation). You can also try “retro” revival – pause an ad for a month, then run it again to a fresh audience later. We’ve seen successful creatives come back and work again after a break. Don’t assume a fatigued creative is dead forever; sometimes it just needs a rest or a remix.

By now, you should be convinced that creative is not a set-and-forget part of advertising. It’s an ongoing, iterative process – but also one of the most fun parts. This is where marketing meets art and psychology. Embrace it. Get creative (literally) – involve your team, brainstorm wild ideas, look at competitors’ ads for inspiration (the Facebook Ad Library is a great tool to see what others in your space are running). And remember: the market votes with clicks and purchases. You’re essentially conducting mini-experiments with each new ad. Treat it like a game where each test reveals valuable clues about your customers’ desires.

Now that we’ve armed you with the creative testing mindset, let’s shift gears in the next chapter to something a bit more down and dirty: how to spot when someone managing your ads might be full of it. Yes, we’re diving into agency/freelancer bluffing and red flags – because whether you do ads yourself or hire help, you need to know the signs of competence vs. BS. As Belfast’s own, we promise to call it like we see it.

30 YEARS OF HENRY'S WISDOM:

After 30 years watching ad accounts live or die, I'll tell you the boring truth most people don't want to hear: Creative decides whether the maths even gets a chance.

Targeting matters. Budgeting matters. Funnels matter. But creative decides whether any of that is worth arguing about. I've seen accounts with perfect structure bleed money because the ads were dull, confusing, or trying too hard to be clever. I've seen scrappy ads with shaky targeting print money because they spoke plainly and hit a nerve.

From my side of the business, creative testing isn't a "nice to have". It's risk management.

Testing stops you falling in love with the wrong idea. It stops ego dictating spend. It stops one bad assumption getting expensive. Most losses don't come from testing too much. They come from not testing soon enough.

People assume their best idea will win. Experience says it usually doesn't.

The ad you're proud of is often not the ad that sells. The ad you nearly didn't run is often the one that carries the account. That's why structure matters.

Testing new against new first keeps it fair. Challenging winners keeps you honest. Scaling only what earns its place keeps you alive. And here's the part ecom owners miss:

**Every pound you scale behind unproven creative is a gamble.
Every pound you scale behind a proven winner is a decision.**

Fatigue isn't failure. It's physics. Audiences get bored. Platforms reward freshness. So testing never ends. If that sounds exhausting, it's because advertising is a job, not a trick.

The brands that win aren't the cleverest. They're the least sentimental.

They test. They listen. They move money without feelings. That's how creative turns into cash — repeatedly, not accidentally.

**"THE AD YOU LOVE IS RARELY THE AD
THAT PAYS THE RENT - TRUST ME."**

HENRY MCCRORY



CHAPTER 6:

SPOTTING AGENCY B.S. - HOW TO TELL IF YOUR "EXPERT" ISN'T... SO EXPERT

In our line of work, we've not only run ads, we've also been brought in to clean up after other agencies or freelancers. Let's just say, it's a mixed bag out there. For every talented, honest marketer, there's a slick-talking chancer ready to bamboozle an unsuspecting client with buzzwords and vanity reports. If you've ever hired someone for ads (or are considering it), this chapter is your B.S.-detector. We're going to share the common red flags that indicate your agency/freelancer might be bluffing, overcharging, or simply not very good at what they do. By the end, you'll know how to call out the nonsense and demand the transparency and results you deserve.



Red Flag #1:

Grandiose Promises and Guarantees. If an agency promises you “Guaranteed #1 rank on Google” or “We will 10x your sales in one month” – run the other way. **Marketing has variables**, and no one can ethically guarantee specific results (especially not without deep analysis). Bold promises are often a lure to close the deal. The truth is, even the best can't guarantee a #1 on Google (thanks to competitor and algorithm factors), nor can they magically 10x something if product-market fit isn't there. Real pros talk about strategies and realistic goals, not silver bullet guarantees. We once had a prospect say, “Agency X said they guarantee 5 ROAS or money back.” We told him, “Then go with Agency X, because no legit agency we know would make that blanket guarantee.” He did. Two months later, he came back, money lighter, results nonexistent. The guarantee? Full of loopholes, of course (they blamed his website, economy, etc., so the guarantee voided).

Red Flag #2:

Long-Term Contracts with No Out. Be wary of agencies that want to lock you into a 6-12 month contract with no escape clause. Why do they need to trap you if they're confident in their work? We operate (and prefer) month-to-month or at least have a performance-based out. If someone is pushing a “12-month commitment, pay up front” scenario, it might indicate they know you'd leave if you saw the results first. They're securing the bag regardless of performance. Now, some agencies do require an initial 3-month minimum – that can be okay (ads do take some time to ramp). But you should have some out if they plainly fail to deliver on agreed benchmarks. The best agencies know they'll keep you by delivering value, not binding you in legal handcuffs.

Red Flag #3:

“We Own Everything” Setup. Huge one: If an agency wants to run ads from their own accounts and keep ownership of your data, pixels, or even your website – big no-no. You as the client should own your advertising accounts (Facebook Ad Account, Google Ads Account, etc.), your analytics properties, your pages. They can be given access. If they insist on using their accounts (sometimes they’ll say it’s to leverage their “agency account advantages” – which is largely BS now), be cautious.

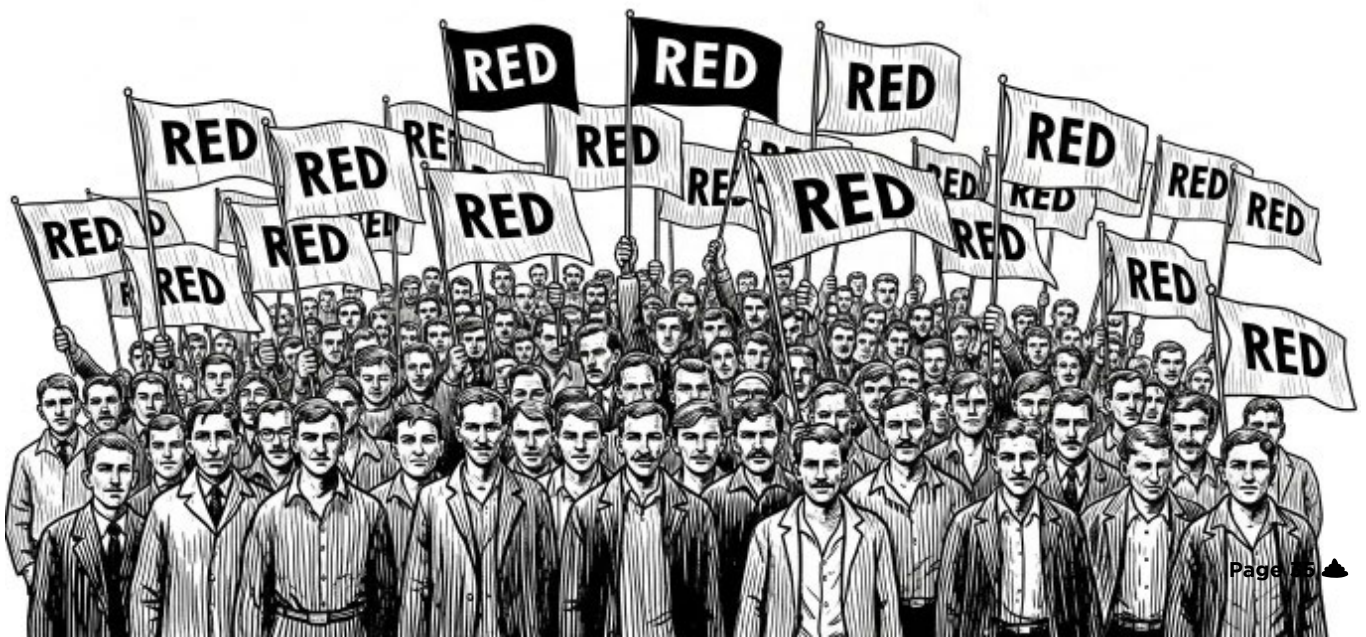
We’ve seen horror stories: client decides to leave the agency, and poof – they have no access to the ad account, all their pixel data (the learning Facebook has done) is gone, and they have to start from scratch. One client had an agency build their entire Shopify site but in the agency’s own Shopify account – when they left, the agency literally shut the site down until a ransom was paid. It’s digital hostage-taking. So, insist on owning your assets. Add the agency as an admin, not the other way around. If they balk, that’s a sign of either insecurity or foul play.



Red Flag #4:

Lack of Transparency/Access. Similar to above, but even if accounts are yours, does the agency willingly share login access or at least detailed reports? If they say, “Don’t worry about looking in the ad account, here’s our summary,” that’s fishy. A good agency encourages you to look (they might need to teach you how to interpret things, but they shouldn’t hide it).

If someone says **“trust us, you don’t need account access”** – alarm bells. We’ve audited accounts where clients were shocked to see what was actually happening (e.g. the agency was spending half the budget on broad keywords or irrelevant audiences to rack up impressions). Full admin access for you is ideal. At minimum, view access to all platforms. You should be able to log in 24/7 and see your campaigns. It’s your money, after all.



Red Flag #5:

Overemphasis on Vanity Metrics in Reporting. We covered vanity vs real metrics in Chapter 2, and it applies here: If your agency's reports rave about impressions, reach, clicks, or social media followers gained but never clearly tie to leads or sales, something's off. They might be distracting you with big numbers that sound impressive (millions of this or that) which don't actually correlate to profit. For example, an SEO agency boasting, **"We got you 10,000 more page views this month!"** Great, but **if those visitors bounce and don't convert, who cares? Or a social agency showing "Your posts got 5,000 likes!"** Nice vanity, but did revenue move? The report should lead with metrics like cost per lead, cost per sale, ROAS, conversion rate – whatever your objective is. If you see a report with mostly fluff metrics and maybe one small line about conversion, guess what the conversions probably look like: not great (hence the burying in fluff). Solution: demand that reports answer these questions: How many sales or leads did we get from these efforts? How much did we spend? How does that compare to last period? What's the plan to improve? If they can't answer or deflect to "but look at your reach," they might be bluffing or just incompetent in driving real results.

Red Flag #6:

Jargon Overload & No Clarity. Ever read a report or email from a marketer and by the end, you have no idea what's happening? It's full of terms like "optimising the synergy of multi-channel touchpoints to leverage a paradigm shift". **Some agencies use jargon as a shield.** If they can confuse you enough, maybe you won't question them. This is crap. A sign of expertise is the ability to explain complex things simply. If your agency's explanation of poor results is, "We're experiencing suboptimal CTR due to creative saturation in a high CPM environment, but we're pivoting to an omnichannel strategy to amplify LTV," they might as well be casting a spell. Ask them to speak plain English. If they won't or can't, either they don't understand it themselves or they think you shouldn't know. Neither is good. Good agencies educate their clients rather than hide behind techno-babble.

- Related: If they get defensive or evasive when questioned, that's also bad. You have every right to ask "Why did this happen?" or "What does this metric mean?" If they treat you as ignorant for asking, or dance around answers, they might not have a good answer. You're not there to stroke their ego; you're there to get value.

Red Flag #7:

Cookie-Cutter Strategy. If in the initial discussions they hand you a one-size-fits-all plan without deep questions about your business, beware. For example, the "We do the same 3-campaign Facebook structure for all clients" approach. While certain frameworks are common, a good partner tailors tactics. We read a funny list once describing agencies like "The Copy-Paste Strategists" who give everyone the same generic plan. If you sell high-end B2B software and they come at you with a plan clearly made for a D2C fashion brand (or vice versa), they might not get your niche. Ask them for case studies in your industry or how they'd adjust strategy for your specific customer journey. If it feels templated, it probably is – and if that template doesn't fit, you're wasting money while they learn.

Red Flag #8:

They Won't Teach You Anything. **Some agencies guard their “secret sauce” excessively.** They might refuse to show you how to check metrics or how campaigns are structured – because they fear if you know, you might not need them. But in truth, empowering clients creates trust and long-term relationships. If they are paranoid about you learning, maybe they worry you'll see they're not doing much special. A colleague of ours once said “If an agency does their job, the client should actually become smarter and more self-sufficient over time – but they'll keep the agency because of results and convenience, not ignorance.” We agree. When we encounter an agency that basically says “You wouldn't understand this, just let us handle it,” it reminds us of shady mechanics who say “**Don't you worry about what a catalytic converter does, you just need a new one – trust me.**” Nope, show me the old part, show me why. Marketing isn't magic; you deserve to have it demystified.

Red Flag #9:

Poor Communication & Responsiveness. Not exactly bluffing, but a sign of a bad agency is you email/call and get radio silence for days. If you ask for a performance update and they take a week to respond with anything coherent, that's a problem. In advertising, things move quickly. While you shouldn't expect 24/7 on-demand service unless you pay for it, timely communication is fair. Especially if things are going wrong – they should proactively inform you and explain. If you constantly have to chase them down, they may be avoiding giving bad news or they're just disorganised. Neither bodes well.



Red Flag #10:

Metrics Don't Align with Business Outcomes. One subtle bluff: agencies optimising to the wrong metric because it makes them look good. For instance, an agency might show great CTR improvements or low CPM as their achievement, but your sales didn't budge. Or they celebrate reducing CPA on a campaign, but when you dig in, it's because they started targeting only high-intent brand keywords or remarketing (basically taking credit for conversions that would've happened). Ensure the focus is on incremental business – e.g., new customer acquisition, total sales growth, etc., not just making one metric shiny at expense of others. A classic: SEO agency gets you ranking for some easy keywords that have zero relevance just to show increased rankings. Or social media agency floods a contest to gain followers – you get 10k freebie-seekers, and no actual customers. These tactics pad stats but don't help you. Keep bringing the conversation back to “How does this drive revenue or key goals?” If they squirm, hmm.

So, what to do if you see these flags? First, address it head-on. Ask direct questions: “I noticed our report highlights impressions heavily, but can we talk about conversions? How many sales did we get from this and at what cost?” or “I'd like access to the Google Ads account to review things myself – can you arrange that?” Watch their reaction. A good agency will say “Sure!” and even walk you through it. A bad one will make excuses or try to persuade you it's not needed. If they double down on B.S., consider cutting ties. Better to lose a couple months of fees than bleed for a year. Also, trust your gut: if something feels off, investigate.

How to Find a Good One: In the spirit of solutions, what are green flags? Transparent reporting, willingness to educate, custom strategy discussions, proof of past success with real numbers (and ideally references you can talk to). They focus on metrics that matter to you. They insist on proper tracking. They might even push back on you for things like fixing your website or improving product margins, etc., because they care about the whole funnel success – not just running some ads blindly. We had a client whose site was so slow, we said “We can’t scale your ads until this is fixed.” A shady agency would’ve just taken his ad budget and then blamed “ad fatigue” or some nonsense for poor results rather than call out the site issue.

Story – The Jargon Juggler:

We were brought in to audit a Google Ads account for an e-commerce company. The existing freelancer kept telling them things like “We’re optimising the quality score to improve ad rank and tweaking the attribution model to maximise assisted conversions, so results will come.” Month after month, low sales. We looked and saw basic issues: wrong keywords (they were bidding on broad terms that barely related), no negative keywords, terrible ad copy.

Basically, it was set on autopilot. When we presented findings, the client was upset: “But he told us everything was ‘optimising’.” Yeah, he was just juggling jargon to seem busy. We fixed the basics and sales jumped. The client’s reaction was a mix of joy and anger – happy to see results, annoyed they’d been paying for fluff for 6 months. The freelancer in this case either didn’t know what he was doing or knew and was just phoning it in while baffling the client with tech-speak. Don’t let that be you. If your gut says “I don’t really know what I’m paying for here,” it’s time to dig deeper or seek a second opinion.

To sum it up: **You have the right to clarity and honesty.** Advertising isn’t dark magic practiced by a secretive cult. It’s a service you pay for to grow your business. If the people you’ve hired act like wizards on a mountain who can’t be questioned, fire the wizards. The best agencies and consultants will hand you the wand and show you how the trick works, even if you let them continue performing it for you. You’ll know you’ve got a keeper when they treat your money as if it were their own – with respect, a focus on efficiency, and a humble attitude to continuous improvement.



Next, we’ll move on to platform-specific tips – because running ads on Meta vs Google vs LinkedIn isn’t a one-size-fits-all game. Now that you know how to manage people managing your ads, let’s ensure you’re picking the right tools for the job and using each platform’s strengths. Onward!

30 YEARS OF CHRIS'S WISDOM:

I've spent a big chunk of my career cleaning up after other people. Not fixing ads. Fixing stories.

Stories agencies tell clients. Stories freelancers tell themselves. Stories dashboards tell when no one asks the next question. And here's the uncomfortable truth:

Most bad agencies don't fail because they're evil. They fail because they're vague. Vagueness is expensive. It hides behind promises. It hides behind reports. It hides behind jargon.

And if you don't know what to look for, it can look a lot like competence. From my side, the red flags usually show up long before the numbers do. Big guarantees are the first giveaway. Anyone who promises outcomes before understanding your product, margins, or customer is selling confidence, not capability.

Long contracts with no exit are the second. If they need to trap you, they don't trust the work to keep you. Owning your accounts is the third — and it's unforgivable. If you don't own your data, you don't own your future. Full stop. But the most common problem I see isn't technical. It's communication.

Reports that sound clever but explain nothing.
Meetings where lots is said and little is decided.
Charts that move while the business doesn't.

If someone can't explain performance in plain English, they either don't understand it — or don't want you to. Good marketers simplify. Bad ones decorate. Cookie-cutter plans are another tell. If your business is unique but the proposal looks recycled, guess how much thinking went into it.

**"IF AN AGENCY
CAN'T EXPLAIN YOUR
RESULTS SIMPLY,
THERE PROBABLY
AREN'T ANY."**

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN

**And if they refuse to teach you anything, that's fear talking.
Fear that you'll realise how little is actually happening.**

The best partners don't hide knowledge. They share it — because they know judgement, consistency, and execution still matter. Here's the real litmus test I've learned to trust:

Do you feel clearer after talking to them... or more confused?

Clarity builds confidence. Confusion buys time.

If something feels off, it probably is.

Ask better questions.
Ask to see inside the accounts.
Ask how this turns into sales.

And if the answers start circling instead of landing — walk.

It's cheaper.



CHAPTER 7:

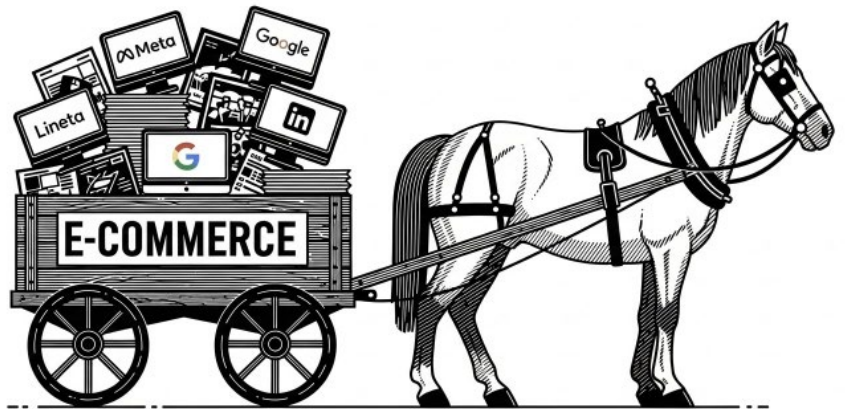
PLATFORM POWER-UPS – META, GOOGLE, LINKEDIN AND WHEN TO USE WHAT ONE

Not all ad platforms are created equal. Each has its own strengths, quirks, and ideal use cases. As e-commerce business owners, you'll likely spend a lot of time with Meta (Facebook & Instagram), and possibly supplement with Google or even dabble in LinkedIn if you have a B2B angle or specific targeting need. In this chapter, we'll give you a candid rundown of each major platform, focusing on how they fit into your overall strategy. We'll cover what each is best for, what metrics or approaches make sense, and any red flags particular to them (because yes, each platform can also waste your money in unique ways if you're not careful!). Consider this your field guide to the advertising ecosystem.

Meta (Facebook & Instagram) – The E-commerce Workhorse:

If e-commerce ads were a band, Facebook and Instagram are the lead singers. For many D2C brands, Meta ads drive the bulk of new customer acquisition.

Why? Massive reach (billions of users), rich targeting (interests, behaviors, demographics, lookalikes), and visual ad formats perfect for showcasing products (images, videos, carousels, stories). Meta excels at discovery – showing people products they weren't actively searching for, but might impulse buy or develop a want for. It's like digital window shopping. You can target by interests (e.g. people who like "Fitness and Wellness" if you sell protein bars), by demographics (new parents, recently engaged, etc.), and by behaviors (like past purchasers of online in a category). Plus, Facebook's algorithm (despite the iOS privacy hits) still learns rapidly who your converters are and finds more of them if you feed it data.



- **Best Uses:** Top-of-funnel prospecting (using lookalike audiences of your customers or interest targeting), retargeting (showing ads to your site visitors, IG engagers, etc.), and even retention (with custom audiences like past purchasers for new product launches). It's especially strong for visual products – fashion, home decor, gadgets, beauty, etc., where a scroll-stopping image or video can hook someone. Also great for storytelling with video and long copy if needed.
- **Metrics & Mindset:** We often see cheaper traffic on Facebook than Google (CPC can be quite low, but conversion rate might be lower since it's interruptive marketing vs intent-based). Don't be alarmed by low CTRs (1% is common) – it's a different game than search ads. Focus on the conversion metrics. The pixel tracking (if set up with Conversion API nowadays) will give you ROAS in Ads Manager, but verify with your backend because post-iOS14, it might undercount some conversions.

- **Creative is Key:** As covered in Chapter 4, you'll need a pipeline of creative for Meta. People get ad fatigue quickly on these platforms. But the advantage is you can try a lot of fun stuff – memes, UGC, polished brand ads, etc., and see what resonates. Also, leverage things like Dynamic Product Ads (catalog sales objective) if you have multiple products – they let you retarget people with the exact product they viewed or related ones, which is a BOF killer feature.
- **Budget Note:** Facebook can scale quite far if you find a winning combo. There are brands spending six figures a day profitably on FB/IG. But you may hit thresholds where the audience saturates and CPA creeps up – always watch frequency. Also, use lookalikes and broad targeting once you have some data – Facebook's AI can do heavy lifting if you give it a broad pool.
- **Gotchas:** The platform can be volatile. One week your CPAs are great, next week some algorithm change or seasonal effect spikes them. Don't panic – adapt. Also, their policy enforcement can be finicky; ads can get disapproved for strange reasons (like innocent phrases mistaken for personal attribute targeting). Try to familiarise yourself with ad policies to avoid issues (e.g., don't use "you" in a way that seems like you're calling out personal traits, etc.). Lastly, beware the "Boost Post" button on your Facebook page – it's like the "lite" way to advertise and often leads to wasted spend on engagement objectives. Use Ads Manager and choose proper campaign objectives (like Conversions). Boosting a post without strategy is a newbie trap; it optimises for likes or reach, not sales.

Google Ads – Intent is King:

Google is the OG of online advertising. It's a very different beast from Facebook. Instead of showing ads based on user interests as they browse a feed, Google primarily shows ads based on what users are actively searching for, or shows your banners/video on websites they browse (Display Network/YouTube). For e-commerce, the two big parts of Google Ads are Search Ads and Shopping Ads (now part of Performance Max campaigns).

- **Search Ads:** These are the text ads that appear when someone searches on Google. The beauty is intent. If someone searches "buy running shoes online UK", they're likely looking to purchase, which is gold if you sell running shoes. You bid on keywords relevant to your products. Search ads are great mid-to-bottom funnel – capturing people ready to buy or at least compare options. They often yield higher conversion rates than Facebook because the person is actively looking. But the flipside is limited volume for niche terms and often higher cost per click because you're competing with others for that intent. It's also not as good for creating demand – you catch existing demand. If your product is new or not something people search for, Search won't help much.



- For Search, key things: Match types (exact, phrase, broad) – use them smartly. Negative keywords – exclude terms that aren't a fit (if you sell luxury bags, negative out “free bags” or “cheap bags” maybe). Also, writing good ad copy to stand out so searchers click you over competitors is an art. And ensure your landing page matches the keyword intent.
- Search shines for things like supplements (people search “best protein powder”), unique products that solve known problems (people search “solution for X”), or branded search (people look for your brand name – you may want to bid on it to defend it).

- Shopping Ads (and Performance Max): For e-commerce, Google Shopping (those image + price ads that show up on search results) is huge. If you have an online store, you can feed your product catalog to Google Merchant Center and run ads that display your products when people search relevant terms. They often show above text ads and get good clicks because people see the product image and price right away. If you have competitive prices or eye-catching products, Shopping works well. It's very ROI-driven – you'll often find an overall ROAS for Shopping and you manage bids and products to maximise it. Google has Performance Max campaigns now that automate a lot: they run across Search, Shopping, YouTube, Gmail, etc. using your product feed and some creative. PMax can work great once you feed it enough data, but some find it a black box (less control, Google decides where to show what).
 - If starting, you can run a PMax for ecommerce which is basically Shopping on steroids. Or run Standard Shopping campaigns (though Google is nudging towards PMax). Keep an eye on search terms in Shopping too – sometimes your products appear for weird queries (make negative keywords via a workaround if needed).

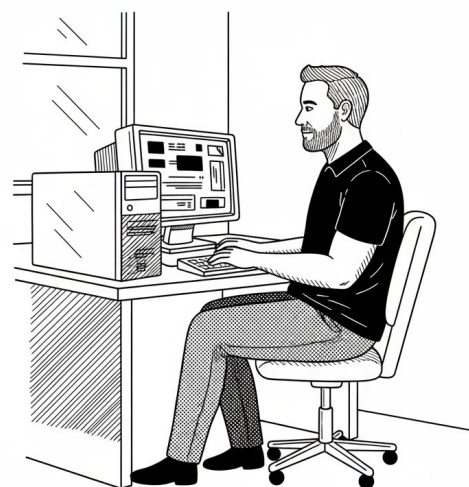
- Best Uses: Google is best for capturing people ready to buy or researching with intent. Also crucial for brand defense – if you have brand awareness, bid on your brand name so competitors can't steal those clicks easily. It's often cheaper and high converting (they searched YOU after all).
- Metrics: For search, CTRs can be higher than Facebook because of intent (5-10%+ if you're top position for a relevant term). CPCs vary widely by industry (few pence for niche, several pounds for expensive categories like insurance). Watch Impression Share – it tells you how often your ad showed vs how often it could have (if low, maybe budget or bids are too low). For Shopping, ROAS is key – manage your bids to reach a target ROAS that's profitable.
- Gotchas: It's easy to waste money if you bid broad and don't monitor search terms – you'll show up in irrelevant searches and pay for useless clicks. Example: you sell handmade “wooden combs”, a broad match could have you showing for “combustion engine” (cause contains ‘comb’) – no joke. Use phrase/exact for control and check search query reports often. Also, display network can be a money pit if not done carefully – those banner ads that follow people. It can work for retargeting or branding, but for direct conversion it often has low conversion rates and many accidental clicks (ever had those annoying mobile app ads? Yeah, those advertisers often waste cash). If you do display, target narrowly (like in-market audiences or specific placements) and use it more for retargeting or awareness with cheap CPM, not

expecting high ROAS. YouTube ads can be great for awareness and even conversion if you have a strong video (and good targeting), but that's a whole separate mini-discipline (worth exploring if you have video content – some ecom brands kill it on YouTube, especially for products that need demo or have a story).

- When Google outperforms Facebook: if your product solves an obvious existing need (e.g., “replacement laptop charger”), Google might be your main driver, cause people search exactly that and buy. For generic lifestyle products (fashion, art, novelty), Facebook might do better by generating interest. Often, we use both: Facebook to create demand and Google to capture those who then search for your brand or category. We noticed many times when we run FB ads, organic and direct traffic rises – likely people see the ad, then Google it later. So they work in tandem.

LinkedIn Ads – B2B Sharpshooter (with a price tag):

LinkedIn is a unique beast. The audience is professionals, and the targeting allows by company, industry, job title, seniority, skills, etc. This is gold for B2B or high-ticket items aimed at specific roles (e.g., an HR software can target HR Directors at companies 500+ employees). The big caveat: LinkedIn ads are expensive. CPCs of £5-12 are not uncommon. CPMs can be high too. But, they can yield leads or customers that are very high value, so sometimes it's worth it. For e-commerce, frankly, LinkedIn is rarely used unless your ecom sells to businesses or professionals in a niche way (like office equipment, or say luxury swag for executives). It could also be used if you have a personal brand and want to sell a high-end course or something – even then, likely better on FB or YouTube. We include it because some of you might have a B2B side or might consider it seeing LinkedIn's hype.



- Best Uses: B2B lead gen (collecting leads for a sales team or for a webinar, etc.), recruiting (some use ads to attract hires), or very targeted outreach (account-based marketing where you target employees of 5 specific companies with custom ads). For example, one client of ours sold an enterprise service – we ran LinkedIn ads to CTOs in the UK at companies >1000 employees with a free ebook. The volume was low (few hundred clicks), but each lead was gold if it converted to a six-figure deal. LinkedIn was appropriate there.

- Formats: LinkedIn offers feed ads (single image, carousel, video), message ads (inMail – which can be spammy, we rarely recommend unless very compelling offer), and sidebar tiny ads. Their feed ads are most common now. The targeting is the big sell – you can ensure only people with certain job titles see it, which you can't on FB (FB removed a lot of that work-targeting years ago).

- Metrics: Don't expect high CTRs – people aren't on LinkedIn to shop; they're mostly reading work news or networking. CTR 0.3%-0.8% is common. The goal is quality over quantity. You might pay £8 a click but if that click is a COO of a bank, that might be fine. LinkedIn's optimisation is often for leads or click depending on your objective. They also have a lead form ad (like FB's lead forms) – can work to collect leads with less friction (the form pops in LinkedIn and auto-fills their info).
- Gotchas: Burn rate is high. You can spend a lot and get little if your offer isn't truly compelling to that professional audience. Also, creative on LinkedIn tends to be more straightforward; what works on Instagram (“OMG love this product!”) would feel out of place. LinkedIn users are a bit jaded with ads, so something that promises to solve a business problem or advance their career works better than cutesy consumer angles. Also, ensure your landing page or offer is business-appropriate and detailed – these folks want substance. For ecom folks reading: likely you'd only consider LinkedIn if you decide to wholesale to businesses or something like that. Or if you sell, say, premium corporate gifts – LinkedIn could target HR or executive assistants who buy client gifts, for example.
- According to LinkedIn themselves: LinkedIn = ideal for high-quality B2B leads, albeit at higher cost; Google = broad reach for B2B & B2C; Facebook = detailed interest targeting, great for B2C engagement. This rings true in our experience. You pay more on LinkedIn but you might get closer to decision-makers easily. So the ROI can be there if one conversion is worth thousands. If one conversion is a £30 purchase, not so much.

Other Platforms (Briefly):

- TikTok: Rapidly growing for ecom, especially if targeting Gen Z or young millennials. Cheaper CPMs so far, highly creative-driven (must look native and snappy). Consider it if your product has a younger demo or is very visual/fun. It can drive impulse buys big time if you crack a viral style ad.
- Pinterest: Good for evergreen products with a strong visual and planning aspect (weddings, home decor, fashion). Users there often save ideas to buy later, etc. We've seen some success for niche like custom furniture or art prints. CPCs can be low, but volume might be limited depending on niche.
- Twitter (X): Historically not great for direct conversion – often more for brand voice and reactive marketing. Ads could work for apps or content but not a primary channel for ecom sales typically.
- Snapchat: Younger demo like TikTok, has AR lens ads etc. Some apparel and beauty brands have done decent there but it's more niche now with TikTok eating its lunch.
- Amazon Ads: If you sell on Amazon, that's a whole other platform to consider – essentially buying sponsored positions within Amazon search results. More like a retail channel tactic than broad advertising, but crucial if Amazon is part of your game.

Holistic View – Multi-Platform Strategy: Ideally, you have a mix that plays together. For example, you might use Facebook/Instagram to generate awareness and initial interest, Google Search/Shopping to

capture those actively searching or those who saw you elsewhere and now search for you, and maybe LinkedIn or TikTok for specific campaigns. Attribution becomes messy in multi-channel – a user could see a FB ad, not click, Google your brand, click a Google ad, then buy. Each platform may claim the conversion. Be aware of overlap and consider using tools or models to attribute properly (or simply look at overall blended metrics like MER). We often do “incrementality tests” – e.g., turn off one channel for a week and see if total sales drop, to gauge its real contribution.

Platform Strengths Recap:

- Facebook/Instagram: best for broad reach, visual storytelling, impulse/discovery. Lower purchase intent per impression, but volume makes up for it. Good at creating initial demand.
- Google Search: best for capturing existing demand (people know what they want). High intent leads. Good conversion rates, but limited to what people search and can be expensive if competition is high. Also critical for local marketing or niche queries.
- Google Shopping: ecom staple for when people are searching product types. Show them yours right in search results with price/pic – great for competitive comparison shoppers.
- YouTube (Google’s video arm): great reach and branding, can also convert if content is compelling and targeted (we’ve seen success with direct-response style YouTube ads for, say, high concept fitness products – basically infomercials on YT).
- LinkedIn: laser targeting of professionals, expensive, use only if LTV of customer is high and targeting by role yields big advantage.
- Pinterest: hits mostly women planning lifestyle projects, decent AOV products or those that benefit from visual inspiration. Lower competition in some verticals.
- TikTok: trend machine; if you can make your product a TikTok trend (or hire influencers to do so), you can blow up. Ads require native feel and quick attention grab. Could complement Meta – maybe you repurpose winning IG videos to TikTok or vice versa, adjusting style.
- Email & SMS (not ad platforms, but worth noting): These are crucial owned channels. Your ads bring people in, but don’t neglect capturing emails or phone numbers and marketing there – the ROI is usually higher since no per-click cost. But that’s more Chapter 9 or so in execution.

“EVERY PLATFORM HAS A JOB. USE META TO SPARK INTEREST, GOOGLE TO CATCH INTENT, AND LINKEDIN ONLY IF THE CUSTOMER IS WORTH MORE THAN THE AD BILL.”

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN

Red Flags on Platforms:

- Meta: As mentioned, boosting posts mindlessly, or not testing multiple creatives, or targeting too narrowly (FB now does well with broad targeting if pixel has data, so don't over-specify interests to the point of microscopic audiences). Also, watch out for comments on your ads – on FB/IG, people can write anything, and if there's negativity or spam (like crypto scammers in comments), moderate that or hide it. Users do read comments – a thread of “never got my order!” can kill your performance. If you see such comments and they're real issues, address them and fix the underlying problem. If they're trolls or irrelevant, hide them.
- Google: Mistake is setting up one broad campaign and leaving it – it can hemorrhage money. Also not adjusting for device (maybe your site sucks on mobile; if so, bid down on mobile until site is fixed). Also, the default recommendations Google gives (like “use broad match everywhere!” or “raise budget 50%”) are not always in your best interest – they want you to spend more. Use your judgment over their AI suggestions.
- LinkedIn: Don't target too broadly – you'll pay for lots of people you don't care about. The power is in narrowing (e.g., don't target “all professionals in UK,” target “Marketing Directors in Retail companies 200+ employees in UK”). Also ensure your offer is gated (if lead gen). You rarely want to send cold LinkedIn traffic to a “Buy now £5000 product” page – they're likely in research mode, better to offer a whitepaper, consultation, etc., then nurture.
- All platforms: Don't just set and forget. Each requires at least weekly check-ins (sometimes daily when scaling or during critical times). Watch for anomalies (spend spikes, tracking errors, etc.). Use rules or alerts where possible – e.g., if a campaign's CPA goes 20% over target, alert me. These help catch issues early.



Story – Platform Fit: The Wrong Tool for the Job: We had a client selling industrial equipment – very niche B2B. Their previous marketing company had spent thousands on Facebook ads targeting broad “business owners” and got zilch. We shifted them to LinkedIn targeting facilities managers and operations directors, and also set up Google Search for specific equipment names. Immediately, they started getting a few solid inquiries. It was a classic case of wrong platform choice: their £50k machinery was never going to impulse sell on Instagram next to cat videos. The audience was small and specialised. It needed a rifle approach (LinkedIn, and content marketing) not a shotgun (FB blasts). Conversely, we saw a small jewelry brand waste money on LinkedIn because someone told them “professionals have money.” True, but they're not on LinkedIn to buy jewelry. We moved them to Instagram with shiny photos, and voila – sales. The medium matters.



In essence, choose the platform that matches the mindset of your target customer when they encounter your ad. On FB/IG, they're in browse/entertainment mode – so entertain or intrigue them into shopping. On Google search, they're in solve/find mode – so offer the solution or best offer right there. On LinkedIn, they might be in work/network mode – so hit them with how you help their business or career. Meet people where they are, with the right message, through the right channel.

Now that you're equipped with platform know-how, you can avoid square-peg-round-hole scenarios and put your budget into the channels that will yield results. Don't try to do them all at once – focus on 1-2 that make most sense, nail those, then expand. We often start clients on Facebook/Google duo (covers demand gen and demand capture nicely).

Up next, we're going to discuss common traps and money-wasters in advertising – some we've touched on already, but we'll compile a nice list of "DON'T DO THIS" so you can double-check you're steering clear of these pitfalls. Think of it as a final warning signpost before you accelerate your advertising engine.



30 YEARS OF HENRY'S WISDOM:

After three decades watching businesses pour money into ads, here's the truth: platforms don't fail you, expectations do. Every platform has a job, and problems start when owners expect one platform to do all of them. Meta isn't broken because it doesn't convert like Google, Google isn't expensive because it's greedy, and LinkedIn isn't useless, it's just not for £30 products.

Most losses I've seen came from forcing the wrong platform into the wrong role - that square peg in the round hole thing..

Meta is discovery; it introduces you to people who weren't looking, which is powerful, but it means intent is lower and creative has to work harder. Treat Meta like a vending machine instead of a shop window and you'll be disappointed.

Google is intent; people raise their hand and say what they want, and you either catch it or your competitor does. It's brilliant when demand already exists and useless when it doesn't. LinkedIn is precision; you pay more because you're skipping the guessing, which makes sense if one customer is worth thousands, and is a fast way to light money on fire if not.

The biggest mistake ecom owners make is picking platforms emotionally: they chase what's trendy, copy competitors without context, and expect every channel to perform the same way. That's not strategy, that's hope.

**Good accounts treat platforms like a team:
Meta creates demand, Google captures it, email and SMS keep it.**

When those work together, attribution gets messy but revenue gets clearer. And here's the part most people learn too late: every platform will happily take your money while doing the wrong thing. Boost buttons, auto-recommendations, broad matches with no guardrails — none of them care if you make a profit.

That's your job. The owners who win don't obsess over platforms, they obsess over fit: right channel, right job, right expectations.

Do that and the platforms stop feeling expensive and start feeling predictable.

**"NO AD PLATFORM IS
BROKEN — IT'S JUST
BEING ASKED TO DO
THE WRONG JOB."**

HENRY MCCRORY



CHAPTER 8:

RED FLAGS, MONEY-WASTERS, AND COMMON TRAPS TO AVOID

By now, we've armed you with a lot of "do this" advice. Equally important is knowing what not to do. In this chapter, we're going to lay out the common traps that e-commerce advertisers (especially those new to the game) often fall into. Some of these we've hinted at in earlier chapters, but here we'll consolidate the list of pitfalls so you can use it as a checklist of things to steer clear from. These are mistakes that burn budgets, confuse you with false signals, or simply waste time. We've stepped in a few of these bear traps ourselves over the years, or watched clients do so before we intervened. Our pain is your gain – let's make sure you don't repeat these.

Trap #1: Boosting Posts Without Strategy.

We've mentioned it a couple times because it's so prevalent. Facebook's Boost Post button is seductive – you click it, throw £50 at a recent post, and watch the likes roll in. But unless your goal was pure engagement vanity, this is often wasted spend. Boosting defaults to an engagement objective, meaning Facebook optimises to show it to people likely to like or comment, not necessarily those likely to click to your site or buy. If you have a post that's organically doing well and you want more people to see it for awareness, boosting can be okay. But if you're thinking "I want sales," it's usually not the way. Instead, use Ads Manager to run a proper conversion campaign with that post's content if you want. We had a client who burned hundreds a month boosting every Facebook post because an "expert" told them to "maintain presence." They got some extra impressions, sure, but zero trackable sales from it. Meanwhile, their store traffic was flat. We re-allocated that spend to targeted conversion ads and their sales immediately ticked up. Lesson: have a concrete objective and choose the campaign type accordingly; don't boost willy-nilly.

Trap #2: Wrong Campaign Objective.

This is broader than boosting. On any platform, if you pick the wrong goal, you get suboptimal traffic. E.g., on Facebook, running a Traffic campaign (optimised for link clicks) because "I just want people to visit my site" is usually inferior to a Conversions campaign (optimised for purchases) if what you really want is buyers. The conversion-optimised one might get fewer clicks (it deliberately shows to people who click less but buy more), and the traffic one might get tons of cheap clicks (maybe accidental clickers or low-quality traffic). Many novices choose reach or traffic objectives to "get the word out," then wonder why no one purchased. The ad platform tends to give you what you ask for. So ask for conversions if you want conversions. Conversely, if your goal is video views for a new product teaser, then sure, run a video view campaign. But be intentional. On Google, a wrong objective could be using a Display campaign to try to get direct sales when Search would be better – result, lots of impressions, few conversions. Or using a "Brand Awareness" campaign on LinkedIn when you really wanted form fills. Always sanity-check: Is this campaign type aligned with my end goal? If not, adjust or expect disappointment.

Trap #3: Neglecting Tracking and Attribution.

We harped on installing pixels and such. If you don't track properly, you can't tell which ads or channels work, leading you to possibly cut the wrong thing or scale the wrong thing. A classic example: someone doesn't set up conversion tracking on Google, sees no conversions in Google UI, assumes it's not working and turns it off – but in reality, Google was driving sales, just not recording them due to missing tags. Or vice versa: they see conversions but double-counting is happening, and they think they're getting more than reality.

It is a trap not to QA your tracking. This includes having proper Google Analytics or a similar tool to see holistic data. Attribution trap is chasing last-click metrics only: sometimes a channel assists and won't show well last-click, but cutting it drops your overall sales. Example: prospecting Facebook ads may not get a lot of last-click conversions (people often see ad, later Google you to purchase). If you turned them off because FB ROAS looked poor, you might see a dip in overall sales. So try to use attribution models or at least consider multi-touch. Tools like Triple Whale or Northbeam (for ecom) have emerged to help by combining data, if you're at a scale to justify them. But even a manual approach: look at new visitors, look at direct traffic changes, etc. The trap is blindly trusting one platform's numbers. Avoid it by cross-verifying and measuring incrementality as best you can.

Trap #4: Focusing on Vanity Metrics (instead of north star metrics).

This one we've covered in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5: Don't chase likes, shares, or even CTR and assume success. We've literally seen someone say "Our ad is killing it, it got 100 comments!" – but when we asked, any sales? "Uh not really." You can't pay your suppliers with Instagram likes. Always align with the true business metrics. It's fine to be happy about a viral post – just know what that's worth. Sometimes virality with no conversion can still have indirect benefit (brand awareness, pixel data). But track whether those eyeballs eventually do something. A big example: a video ad goes viral, millions of views, the client celebrates. But if you dig into audience, it's maybe people outside your target market (some viral boost can go to random regions or demographics). We had a pet brand get a funny dog video ad to go quasi-viral – turns out a lot of teens and kids watched it for giggles (not buyers of premium pet food!). It looked like a hit, but we refocused on more targeted content that got fewer views but more purchases. Ego can lure you to bigger numbers; discipline keeps you aimed at profitable numbers.



Trap #5: Over-Targeting and Micro-Audiences.

Many new advertisers think the more granular the targeting, the better (“I only want to show to 25-year-old left-handed golfers who drive Teslas”). While it’s good to define your audience, overly narrow targeting on platforms like Facebook can actually backfire. The audience might be too small to exit learning phase or gets repetitive and expensive. Often, broader targeting with good creative works better – let the algorithm find pockets of converters. We’ve seen folks stack so many interest filters that their potential reach was like 5,000 people – they spent a ton showing those same folks the ad 20 times and got nothing (except annoyed potential customers). Unless your audience is truly extremely niche (like targeting Fortune 500 CTOs – then LinkedIn with specific company filters is warranted), usually, you can go a bit broader. Also, avoid assumptions that might exclude good prospects. For example, early on we targeted a luxury item only to high income post codes thinking only wealthy buy – turns out lots of middle-class folks bought too when we opened it up. Facebook’s broad targeting nowadays can be shockingly effective when you feed it good conversion data. So the trap is being too clever by half with targeting. As one Redditor quipped: “Don’t go IDK with TOF segmentation” – meaning don’t use wrong tactics at wrong funnel stage. TOF (cold) needs breadth with filtering done by creative messaging (appeal to the right people in your ad content). MOF/BOF can be narrower (like retargeting site visitors – that’s fine).

Trap #6: Ignoring the Landing Page & Site Experience.

We’ve drummed this refrain, but it’s worth its own highlight. An ad is only as good as where it sends people. One common trap: spending all your time optimising ads, and none optimising your website or product pages. Then wondering why conversion is low. Slow load times, poor mobile layout, confusing navigation, lack of clear CTA, no trust signals – these kill conversions. If your bounce rate is high or time on site low from ad traffic, you likely have a disconnect or site problem. Another trap is sending ad traffic to your homepage instead of a relevant page. If your ad was about “50% off summer dresses,” don’t send people to the general homepage where they then have to find those dresses. Take them straight to the dress category or a dedicated landing page for the promo. We massively improved one campaign by simply directing the click to a better page – the previous agency lazily sent all ads to the homepage. Once we matched ad messages to specific landing pages, conversion rate doubled. Put yourself in the customer’s shoes: they clicked for a reason – fulfill that reason quickly or they’ll drop.



- Additionally, ensure your site is optimised for mobile. Most social traffic is on mobile. If your site still has tiny text, pop-ups that are hard to close on phone, or requires pinch-zoom, you're done. We've literally stopped some clients' campaigns mid-flight saying "we refuse to waste your money until you fix your mobile site; it's that bad." If you don't, you're basically paying to show users a broken experience.

Trap #7: Chasing "The Next Big Thing" Constantly.

Shiny object syndrome – every few months a new platform or tactic emerges and some advertisers jump ship or shift focus prematurely. Like dropping stable Facebook spend to throw money at Clubhouse or whatever's hyped. It's fine to test new channels (you should, modestly), but don't abandon what's working because some guru tweeted that "Platform X is untapped!" Often these require different approaches and may not pan out. We saw many rush to Snapchat or Pinterest or recently TikTok. Some did well, many came back to core channels after losing some money. New platforms can have lower costs initially but maybe less buying intent. The trap is falling for marketing fads or thinking there's a magical platform where ROI rains from the sky. Reality: fundamentals apply everywhere. We are not saying ignore innovation – just test carefully and keep the bulk of budget in proven winners until data justifies moving more.

Trap #8: Setting & Forgetting Campaigns.

We'd love to tell you ads are passive income – set them up and watch sales roll in while you sip piña coladas. Not quite. We've audited accounts where someone hadn't touched a campaign in 6 months. It was spending daily, but performance had degraded due to ad fatigue, competitive shifts, etc., and nobody adjusted bids or refreshed creatives. Money was just being bled. You don't need to tweak obsessively every hour (that can hurt more than help, as you reset algorithms too often), but you do need to monitor. At least weekly check: Are any ads worn out? Is spend pacing to plan? Are any search terms irrelevant and need negating? Did an ad accidentally get disapproved leaving an ad set with no active creative (happens)? Automated rules can help catch extreme cases, but human review is key. I've seen budgets accidentally doubled by a glitch and nobody noticed for days – ouch. This is common with small businesses who don't have a dedicated marketer – they launch a campaign, then they're busy with business and forget it. Make it a routine (e.g. every Monday and Thursday morning I check all ad platforms metrics). This is how you catch problems and opportunities (maybe an ad is doing amazing – that's when you could increase budget to capitalise).



Trap #9: Giving Up Too Early (or Too Late).

Two extremes: some kill campaigns at the first sign of trouble (like after one day of no sales) – too early, not statistically significant. Others let a failing effort drag on for too long “hoping” it’ll turn around – too late, money wasted. You need a balanced approach. For a new campaign, set a test budget (like we said in budgeting chapter: e.g., I’ll spend £500 and expect at least 5 sales, otherwise re-evaluate). That way you don’t kill at £50 (maybe no sale yet but was about to come at £60), but you also don’t run to £5000 with zero results. We had a client who tried FB ads themselves and turned them off literally every night because they got nervous, then back on in morning – effectively resetting learning daily. They concluded “FB doesn’t work for us” after 3 days. We convinced them to run a steady test for 2 weeks – results started coming in day 5 once algorithm optimised, and it ended up working. On the flipside, we had one who kept pouring money into a Google campaign targeting the wrong keywords for months – thousands spent – because “Google rep said give it more time”. No, if 0 conversions after a decent spend, something’s wrong. Fail fast, but not too fast; scale slow, but not too slow. It’s a bit Zen. Set criteria and heed them.

Trap #10: Falling for Scams and Fake “Experts.”

The digital marketing world is full of gurus selling courses or shady services. Be careful buying into “secrets” that promise ridiculous returns. Common scam: someone says they’ll send you huge traffic via some network for cheap – often it’s bot traffic or incentivised clicks that never convert. Or agencies that charge a small fortune and do nothing special (we covered how to vet them in Chapter 5). Another: don’t buy followers or likes – those metrics are hollow and can even hurt your account’s algorithmic standing (FB/IG might show your posts to fake followers who don’t engage, lowering your overall reach). Or “email lists of 1 million prospects for £100” – likely garbage or harvested emails that will mark you as spam. If something in marketing feels too good to be true (“£0.10 leads on autopilot!”), ask hard questions. We’re a bit jaded maybe, but it’s because we’ve seen clients waste money on the marketing equivalent of snake oil. Stick to proven channels and tactics; when exploring new ones, do due diligence or ask for references.



Trap #11: Not Testing Anything New (aka Complacency). This is the inverse of chasing shiny objects, but equally dangerous long-term. Maybe you have one channel working and you stick all your eggs in it – what if things change? (Platform policy, increased costs, etc. – just ask anyone who relied only on Facebook pre-2021 and then iOS14 hit, many struggled). Or you have one ad that’s doing great and you never make another – eventually performance drops, and you have no backup. Always allocate some portion of budget to testing new creative, new audiences, even new platforms on a small scale. We preach being disciplined, but not rigid. If you never try new angles, you’ll either plateau or get caught flat-footed when the market shifts. As they say, “Adapt or die.” Find time for R&D in your marketing. We often keep, say, 10-15% of spend as experimental at any given time. Sometimes those tests fail (cost of learning), sometimes we discover our next big success.

Trap #12: Pushing Spend Without Fixing Fundamentals.

We teased this in our fictional parable suggestions and it's worth concrete emphasis. More money on ads will not fix a broken funnel. If your website conversion is poor or your product isn't appealing or your customer service sucks (leading to bad reviews, low repeat business), pumping more traffic in is just blowing up the balloon of failure faster.

Yet under pressure, many just think "we need more sales, quick increase ad budget!" We had a client (here's that parable) who was adamant: "If we double spend, we'll double sales, right?" But their site conversion was barely 0.5% (awful) because their pricing was high and site was slow. We advised pause ads, improve the site and offer, then scale. They resisted initially and pushed spend up – what happened? They spent double, sales maybe went up 20% (because they saturated the tiny percent who would buy even with a bad site). ROI plummeted. We finally got through by showing analytics: bounces, cart drop-offs, feedback.

They revamped some things (simpler checkout, better copy, a first-time discount to reduce sticker shock). Conversion improved to ~1%. Only then did scaling spend result in proportional sales growth. So, fix the leaks before turning up the tap. Otherwise, you're just flooding the floor.



Let's end this chapter with that anecdote more fleshed out:

Story – The Client Who Tried to “Spend Through” a Problem:

This e-commerce store sold custom suits online. Great concept, but their website had issues: complicated measurement input, long delivery times not clear until checkout, and pricey. Their ad performance was mediocre: lots of clicks from fashion-conscious men, but few completed purchases. Instead of addressing the concerns (which customers even commented about in ads: “Not sure if this will fit, returns?”), they told us, “Just double the ads, we need volume.” We reluctantly complied for a short test – as expected, it mostly doubled their spend, not sales. We then insisted on a strategy pause. We dug into why users weren't converting. Turns out, many potential customers were dropping off at the measurement step – it was too confusing. Also, no clear return policy shown – for a £500 custom suit, that's scary. We convinced them to simplify the measurement process (offer an optional concierge support) and plaster “Perfect Fit Guarantee or Free Alterations” on the site. That gave buyers confidence. Conversion rate jumped from sub-1% to 2%. Then we scaled ads. Sales grew in line with spend, and the client said, “Oh, so it wasn't the ad reach after all – it was our process.” Exactly. Ads bring the horse to water; your site needs to not be a muddy, scary pond.

Alright, we've beaten you up with warnings, but it's to save your wallet and sanity. If you avoid these traps, you'll be ahead of many advertisers who learn the hard way. Now, equipped with knowledge, we move to the execution phase – a practical roadmap of what to do in the first 30 days and the first 90 days to either reboot or launch your ads. It's blueprint time: we're going to outline step-by-step how to put all this theory into action in a structured way so you can build momentum safely and effectively.

30 YEARS OF CHRIS'S WISDOM:

By now, you've had plenty of "do this" advice. This chapter is the other side of the coin: what not to do. These are the traps that quietly torch budgets, give you false confidence, or keep you busy while nothing improves. I've stepped on a few of these landmines, and I've watched plenty of brands do it before we got involved. Read this like a checklist. If you can avoid these, you'll beat most advertisers without ever learning a new hack.

First trap: boosting posts without a plan. The Boost button is basically a snack machine for ego. It's great at buying likes from people who like liking things. It's rarely good at buying customers. If you want awareness, fine. If you want sales, use Ads Manager and run proper conversion campaigns. **Second trap:** choosing the wrong objective. Platforms give you exactly what you ask for, and many people ask for the wrong thing. Ask for traffic and you'll get clickers. Ask for conversions and you'll get buyers.

Third trap: sloppy tracking. If your pixel, tags, and analytics aren't correct, you're making decisions based on fiction. You'll scale the wrong thing, cut the right thing, and blame the platform when it was your setup. **Fourth trap:** falling in love with vanity metrics. Views, reach, likes and comments can be useful signals, but they're not a business result. If a report sounds like a popularity contest, you're probably losing money politely.

Fifth trap: micro-targeting yourself into a corner. New advertisers often try to laser-target with twenty filters, then wonder why costs rise and results die. You end up showing the same small group the same ad again and again until everyone hates you. On many platforms, broader targeting plus strong creative works better. **Sixth trap:** ignoring the landing page. Ads don't sell on their own; they escort people to the moment of truth. Slow site, messy mobile experience, weak product page, vague returns, confusing checkout, and you're paying to send people into a wall. **Seventh trap:** shiny object syndrome. Jumping to the newest platform because someone on the internet said it's "untapped" is how you turn a working account into a hobby. Test new channels, but don't abandon what's proven without data. **Eighth trap:** set and forget. Ads aren't passive income. They need routine checks, fresh creative, and basic hygiene. Leaving campaigns unattended is like leaving the tap running and hoping the bath will manage itself.

Ninth trap: quitting too early or too late. Killing tests after one bad day is panic. Letting a dead campaign run for weeks is denial. Set a test budget, set clear pass or fail rules, then follow them like an adult. **Tenth trap:** buying snake oil. Bot traffic, fake followers, bargain "expert" packages, magic lists, miracle ROAS claims. If it sounds like a shortcut, it's usually a detour with a receipt. **Eleventh trap:** never testing anything new. The opposite of shiny object syndrome is complacency. One channel, one creative, one angle, and eventually it dries up. Keep a small portion of spend for controlled tests so you're never one fatigue cycle away from panic. **Twelfth trap:** spending harder instead of fixing fundamentals.

If the funnel leaks, turning up the tap just floods the floor. Fix the page, the offer, the trust, the checkout, the experience, then scale. Otherwise you're paying to learn the same lesson repeatedly.

**"IF YOU'RE BOOSTING
POSTS, TARGETING TINY
AUDIENCES, IGNORING
YOUR FUNNEL, YOU'RE
NOT RUNNING ADS,
YOU'RE DONATING TO
MARK ZUCKERBERG'S
NEW YACHT"**

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN



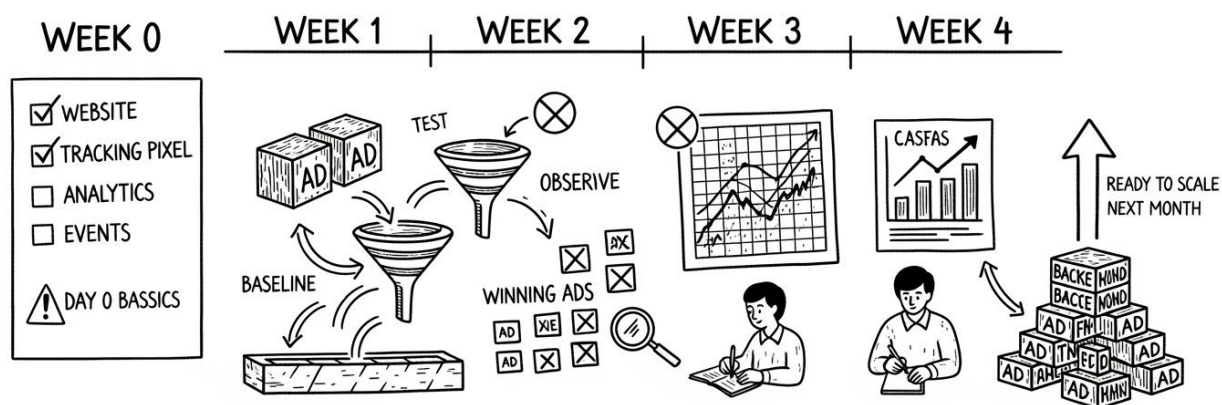
CHAPTER 9: THE FIRST 30 DAYS – STEP-BY-STEP TO LAUNCH OR REBOOT YOUR ADS

So you're ready to dive in (or back in) to advertising, and you have all this knowledge swirling around. The first 30 days are critical – they set the foundation for either lasting success or ongoing struggle. In this chapter, we'll break down a week-by-week plan for your first month of advertising. Whether you're launching ads for the first time, or rebooting after a hiatus (or a rough patch), this plan applies. It's all about starting smart, gathering data, and building the structure that you'll then scale in subsequent months. We'll assume you've got basics in place (like a functioning website and tracking pixels – if not, those are day 0 tasks!). Alright, let's roll out the blueprint:

Week 1: Audit, Research & Strategy Setup (Days 1-7)

This initial phase is prep and plan. Don't rush to spend big on Day 1. Instead:

- **Audit Your Assets:** Review your website (again). Is the landing page for your main offer solid? Check mobile experience, load times. Set up or verify your Google Analytics and ad pixels. If something's not tracking (like test a conversion yourself to ensure it fires in FB Pixel Helper or Google Tag Assistant), fix it now. No data, no improvement. If rebooting, also audit past campaigns' data – what were past CTRs, CPAs, etc.? Identify what was working and what wasn't.
- **Define Your Customer Personas:** You likely know your target, but write it down. Who are your best customers? What do they care about? This will guide ad messaging and targeting. Also, brainstorm any specific segments. E.g., if you sell fitness gear, perhaps one persona is “Busy moms working out at home” and another is “20-something gym bros.” These might need different ad creatives or targeting. In later weeks you may test... (continuing Chapter 8)
- **Competitor & Market Research:** Spend time looking at competitors' ads, websites, and social media. What offers are they pushing? What language and imagery do they use? Facebook Ad Library is a great tool – it lets you see active ads of any brand. Jot down ideas that could work for you (and pitfalls to avoid). Also research benchmarks in your niche (e.g., average CPC or conversion rates if available) to set realistic expectations.



- Set Clear Goals: Define what success looks like for these 30 days. For example: “Achieve 5 purchases at a CPA of £20 or less,” or “Generate 100 leads at £5 each.” Make it concrete. Also set a budget for the 30-day test. Say you allocate £1000 for the month – that’s about £33/day. Having this figure prevents overspending in panic or excitement. (Ensure it’s an amount you’re willing to invest even if you don’t see immediate profit – think of it as buying data to learn.)
- Campaign Strategy & Creative Prep: By mid-week, decide which platforms and campaigns you’ll start with. Our suggestion: Meta (Facebook/Instagram) for cold outreach, and possibly Google Search/Shopping if your product has search demand. If you have an email list or past site visitors, set up a basic retargeting campaign on Meta to capture low-hanging fruit (people who know you but haven’t bought yet). Next, craft your initial ad creatives. Aim for 2–3 variations to test (different images or messages)
- For example, one ad could highlight your product’s biggest benefit, another could use a testimonial approach. Keep it simple and on-message with what you gleaned from personas. Also, write a few versions of ad copy (short vs. slightly longer) to see what resonates. Ensure each ad has a clear call-to-action (e.g., “Shop Now,” “Sign Up,” etc.). Finally, set up your campaigns in draft mode: input your targeting, ads, budget, but perhaps schedule them to start next week so you can double-check everything.

By the end of Week 1, you should have your groundwork done: tracking verified, goals set, ads ready to launch, and a calm mind knowing you have a plan rather than winging it.



Week 2: Launch, Test, and Initial Data Gathering (Days 8-14)

Time to hit the go button – carefully.

- **Day 8 (Launch Day):** Activate your campaigns (or start them early in Week 2). Start with moderate budgets – enough to get data, but not your full throttle. For example, if you budgeted £30/day, maybe allocate £20 to a prospecting campaign and £10 to a retargeting campaign. Alternatively, split among platforms (e.g., £20 Facebook, £10 Google) if using multiple. The key is to not blow a huge amount in one day; we want to observe and adjust.
- **Closely Monitor Technical Issues:** On launch day and the next, watch for any obvious problems. Are links working (no 404 errors)? Are conversion tracking pixels firing when a sale/lead happens? Is spend roughly in line with expectation (no runaway budgets due to a misplaced decimal or Google overshooting daily budget – it happens)? Also, check ad approvals – if something got disapproved, address it (edit the ad or appeal if it's a mistake).
- **Let It Run (Patience!):** Once things are running correctly, resist the urge to tweak targeting or pause ads within the first 48-72 hours unless something is very wrong (e.g., zero impressions due to too-narrow targeting, or a mistake like an ad pointing to the wrong URL). The algorithms (especially on Meta) need a bit of time to find their footing and exit the “learning phase.” You won't have statistically meaningful results in a day. Give it at least 3-4 days to gather data on each ad. That said, keep an eye out for extreme outliers: If one ad spent £20 with zero clicks while another got clicks, you might pause the non-performer early to let budget flow to the better one. Use common sense.
- **Mid-Week Checkpoint (Day ~11):** By now, you have a few days of data. Review key metrics: CTR (are people clicking your ads?), CPC (how much you pay per click), you have conversion tracking, any add-to-carts, leads, or purchases yet? Don't panic if purchases are few – early on you're primarily gauging interest and ensuring traffic quality. However, if something looks off, consider adjustments:
 - If CTR is very low (say <math><0.5\%</math> on Facebook), your ads might not be resonating. Try a different creative or headline in a new ad. Or check if your targeting is too broad/irrelevant – maybe refine your audience interests a bit to better align with the creative.
 - If CPC on Google is way higher than expected, maybe your keywords are too broad or competitive – refine keywords or adjust bids. Check the search terms report to see if irrelevant queries are triggering your ads; add negatives for junk terms.
 - If you have many clicks but no conversions at all, look at the landing page experience. Is the page functioning on mobile? (We've



seen forms that didn't submit on mobile – ouch.) Also, sanity-check your offer: perhaps people clicked out of curiosity but your site didn't convince them. It might be too soon to tell, but note these things.

- **Tweak Lightly:** Based on the above, make minor tweaks. For example, if one Facebook ad is clearly outperforming another (higher CTR and maybe even a few conversions), you can allocate more budget to it by pausing the loser or duplicating the winner into a new ad set to see if it scales. But avoid wholesale strategy changes in Week 2. Stick largely to the plan; we're in learning mode. Use this week to test those 2-3 creatives against each other, and maybe a couple of audiences (e.g., one interest group vs another). By week's end, you might identify an early front-runner ad or a targeting combo that shows promise.
- **Communication and Logging:** If you work with a team or just for your own records, start a log of observations. Example entry: "Day 10: Ad A (blue background) CTR 1.2%, Ad B (testimonial) CTR 0.6%. Ad A also got 2 sales, Ad B none. Will pause Ad B tomorrow if trend holds." This habit will help in reporting later and keeps you objective.

Week 3: Optimisation and Emerging Trends (Days 15-21)

Now we have roughly two weeks of data – enough to make more substantial optimisations.

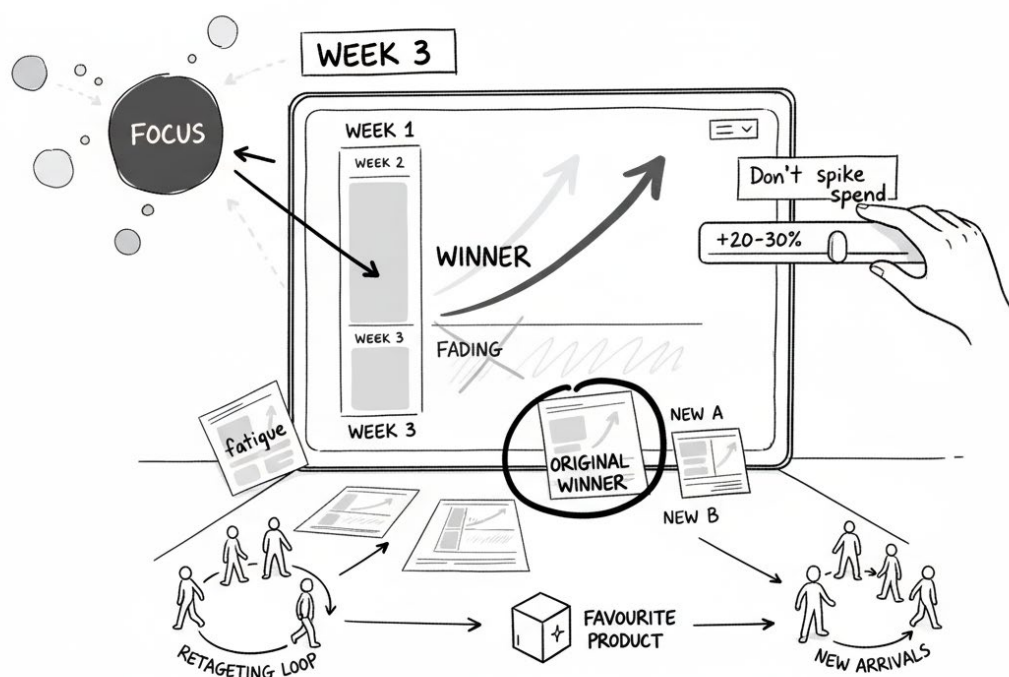
- **Scale or Refine Budgets:** If one channel or campaign is performing significantly better (e.g., your Facebook retargeting a 3 ROAS while prospecting is 1 ROAS), consider shifting a bit more budget to the winner – but do this gradually. For instance, you might increase the budget on the winning campaign by 20-30%. Don't suddenly double it; that can upset the algorithm balance. Conversely, if something is consistently underperforming (no conversions and high cost per click), you can cut budget or pause it to reallocate funds more efficiently.



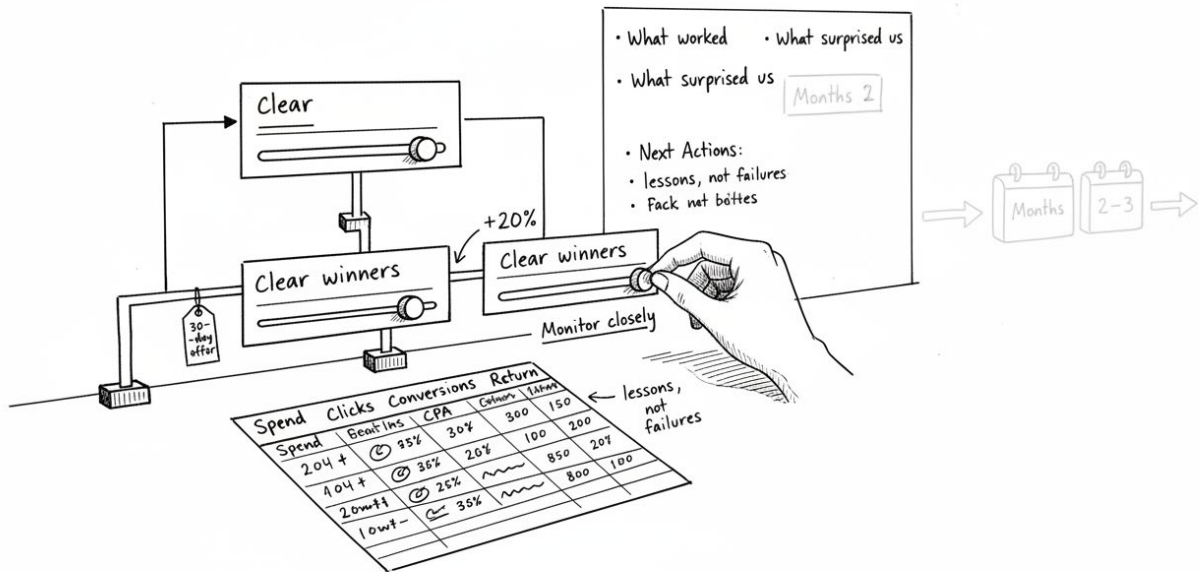
- **Ad Creative Iteration:** By now you likely know which ad creative did best in initial tests. It's time to make new variations inspired by that winner. Say Ad A (with a certain image) outperformed – you could create "Ad A2" with the same message but a different image angle, or vice versa, to see if you can further improve or keep the content fresh. Also, rotate out ads that have high frequency (if your cold audience ad frequency is already, say, 4+, people have seen it a lot). Intentional to avoid fatigue. Essentially, keep testing – perhaps you haven't tried a video yet, so introduce one now that you have baseline stats from images.
- **Targeting Optimisation:** Look at your audience breakdown. If you tried two different audiences on Meta (for example, one interest group of "fitness" and another of "nutrition"), see if one yielded better cost per result. If one is clearly better, you might narrow focus to that

for now. Or, create a new audience combining what you learned (e.g., maybe “online shoppers + fitness interest” together if you suspect higher intent). On Google, identify top-performing keywords and ensure budgets cover those while trimming spend on keywords that got clicks but no relevant engagement. Also check geographic or demographic breakdowns – perhaps you see certain regions responding better. You might allocate more to those or tailor messaging by segment if applicable (advanced move: e.g., create a separate campaign for a region with a specific offer if it’s doing well).

- Conversion Path Check:** By mid-week 3, if sales/leads are coming in, analyse them. Are they coming mostly from retargeting ads? (If yes, that’s natural early on – cold prospects often need multiple touches. But it also means you should keep feeding that funnel with new cold traffic). Did any particular product or offer get more traction? Use that insight. For example, if you have multiple products and notice 90% of purchases were of one item, maybe feature that hero product more in your ads moving forward – it’s clearly a draw. **Feedback:** If you’ve made some sales, even just a few, consider reaching out to those customers with a quick personal thank you (if appropriate) and maybe a single-question ask like “How did you hear about us?” or “What made you decide to buy?” The answers can be gold for refining your ads and site. This is optional at this early stage, but can provide qualitative insight beyond the numbers.
- Troubleshooting:** If at this point you still have no conversions at all, re-examine everything critically. Is your budget perhaps too low to even get results? (e.g., spending £5/day on a £100 product might take a long time to see a purchase). Is your product priced competitively? Are your ads truly conveying a strong value proposition? Consider running a quick promo or incentive as a test in Week 4 (like free shipping or 10% off for first customers) to see if that tips the scale. Sometimes the issue is not ads or targeting, but the offer. As tough as it is, be blunt with yourself: would you convert on your own? If not, what’s missing? It could be trust (maybe add some testimonials or social proof on the landing page), or clarity (maybe your ad claims aren’t clearly backed up on the site).



WEEK 4



Week 4: Scaling Up and Consolidating Learnings (Days 22-30)

In the final week of the first 30 days, the goal is to apply what you've learned, attempt a bit of scaling if things are working, and document outcomes and next steps.

- **Increase Spend Cautiously:** If you've identified one or two campaigns with a positive return (or very promising cost-per-conversion metrics), now you can try to scale them up a notch. For example, if your Facebook prospecting campaign is hitting near your target CPA, bump the budget by, say, 20% and monitor. If Google Search is profitable, add more budget or raise daily caps to capture more of the search volume. You might also broaden targeting on Meta slightly (e.g., include Lookalike Audiences built from those who visited or purchased on your site). The idea is to test slightly larger scale now that things seem dialed in. Don't go crazy – doubling budgets can sometimes reset learning and performance might wobble. But a controlled increase is the next logical step.

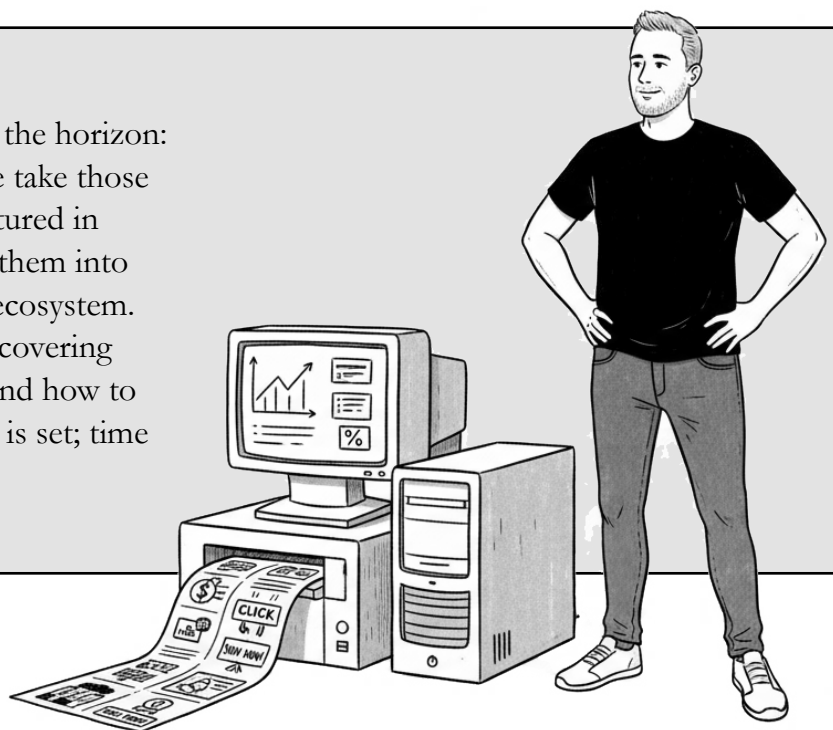
- **Launch 30-Day Offer or Promo (Optional):** Since it's the end of your first month, consider running a small promotional campaign to try and boost conversions and “train” your pixels with more data. For example, “This week only: 15% off for new customers – use code FIRST15.” Promote that via your ads (you can do a short-lived ad or adjust your copy on existing ads to mention the sale). This can incentivise fence-sitters to buy, and you'll gather more customer data. Note: only do this if it fits your business model (don't discount so heavily you lose money; it should make sense margin-wise). Promotions can be a lever to generate momentum when starting out.



- **Evaluate Metrics vs Goals:** At around Day 30, sit down and review: Did you hit the goals you set in Week 1? For instance, if your goal was 5 purchases at £20 CPA, and you got 4 purchases at £25 CPA, you fell short on volume and efficiency – but you’re in range. That might be a partial success learning stage. Or maybe you smashed it with 10 purchases at £15 CPA – great, time to raise the bar for next phase. If you got 0-1 purchases, clearly the strategy needs adjustment – identify the biggest bottleneck (ad engagement vs site conversion, etc.). Use a simple table or report to summarise: Spend, impressions, clicks, CTR, conversions, CPA, ROAS. We’ll talk more about reporting in the next chapter, but even for yourself, document these numbers. This is your baseline to beat in the next 90 days.
- **Key Learnings Meeting (even if it’s just you):** Treat the end of month like a mini-review. Ask: What worked best? (“Ad with video and free shipping message got most sales”), What didn’t work? (“Targeting college students was a bust; they clicked but didn’t buy our high-end item”), What surprised you? (“LinkedIn actually drove two enterprise inquiries with minimal spend – maybe we should explore B2B angle more”). Write down 3-5 bullet points of lessons learned. This will guide your strategy in the coming 90 days.
- **Plan Adjustments for Next Phase:** Finally, outline your plan for the next month (or quarter) based on these results. For example: Increase Facebook budget by 30% on winning campaign, pause underperforming audience, test two new creatives focusing on benefit X, and launch Google Shopping ads now that feed is set up. Essentially, roll your insights into action items. This bridges you smoothly into the 90-day plan.

By the end of the first 30 days, you should have: at least some real customer data (or at worst, a list of what didn’t work, which is still valuable), a clearer idea of your effective ad content and audiences, and a sense of how your budget translates into results. You’ve also hopefully avoided major pitfalls by starting small and iterating rapidly. Give yourself a pat on the back – the first month is often the hardest because it’s a lot of setup and unknowns. Now the fog is starting to lift.

In the next chapter, we’ll expand the horizon: the 90-day plan. This is where we take those seedlings you’ve planted and nurtured in the first month and aim to grow them into a flourishing, scalable campaign ecosystem. We’ll map out months 2 and 3 – covering how to scale, when to diversify, and how to optimise deeper. The foundation is set; time to build upward and onward.



30 YEARS OF HENRY'S WISDOM:

By the time someone reaches this chapter, they're usually either excited... or slightly overwhelmed. That's normal. Knowledge without order turns into paralysis fast. The first 30 days are where most ad accounts are either set up to grow, or quietly sabotaged from the start. This chapter exists to stop you rushing, guessing, or burning money out of impatience. The goal isn't instant profit. It's clarity, data, and a structure you can actually build on.

The first week is about discipline, not spending. Before a penny goes live, your site, tracking, and offer need to hold water. If conversions aren't firing, pages don't load properly on mobile, or your message doesn't match where people land, ads will simply amplify the problem. This is also where you define who you're really talking to, what problem you're solving, and what success looks like for the month. Not vibes. Numbers. A budget you're willing to spend. A result you're aiming to see.

Week two is where ads go live, carefully. Small budgets, limited variables, and patience. The mistake here is overreacting. Early data is noisy. Let the platforms learn, fix obvious issues, and start observing patterns rather than panicking at every wobble. You're looking for signals, not perfection. Which ads get attention. Which audiences lean in. Whether clicks behave like humans or tourists.

By week three, you should see shape forming. Something will be working better than something else. That's when you refine, not reinvent. Budgets shift gently toward winners. Losers are paused without emotion. Creative evolves based on what's already proven. You're still testing, but now with context instead of guesswork. This is also where reality checks happen. If nothing converts, you stop blaming algorithms and look hard at the offer, pricing, trust, and friction.

Week four is where learning turns into intent. If performance is close to your targets, you apply controlled pressure. Slight budget increases. Broader reach. Maybe a small incentive to push fence-sitters. Then you stop and document everything. What worked. What didn't. What surprised you. Those notes matter more than the month's profit, because they shape the next 90 days. If you do this properly, you finish month one with something most advertisers never get: a calm understanding of where growth will come from and what's holding it back. From here, scaling becomes a process, not a gamble.

**"THE FIRST 30 DAYS
AREN'T ABOUT
WINNING BIG.
THEY'RE ABOUT NOT
DOING ANYTHING
STUPID ENOUGH TO
LOSE THE NEXT 300."**

HENRY MCCRORY



CHAPTER 10:

DAYS 31-90 – THE 3-MONTH GROWTH BLUEPRINT

Congratulations – you survived month one and learned a ton.

The next 60 days (months 2 and 3 of your ad journey) are about refinement and expansion. You'll take what's working and pour more fuel on it, fix or drop what's not, and introduce new elements (like additional channels or more complex strategies) as appropriate. By day 90, the goal is to have a well-oiled advertising machine (or at least a clearly directionally positive one) that's either profitable or on a clear path to profitability with scale. Let's break the 90-day plan into two phases: Month 2 (days 31–60) and Month 3 (days 61–90), since they have slightly different focuses.

***Month 2 (Days 31–60): Optional...**

In month 2, you double down on what worked in month 1, and optimise the heck out of your funnel.

- **Increase Budget Strategically:** At the start of month 2, consider raising your overall ad budget if month 1 results justify it. For example, if you spent £1000 in month 1 and saw a decent ROAS or you're comfortable investing more to gather customers, you might increase to say £1500–£2000 for month 2. Allocate this increase mostly to the campaigns that showed a positive trend. For instance, if Facebook prospecting and Google Search both did well, give them more to see if they scale linearly. Keep an eye on diminishing returns – sometimes doubling spend yields less than double results (because you start reaching less ideal audience members as you scale). That's okay within reason, but track your CPA/ROAS to ensure they stay within acceptable bounds. If they start slipping too much as you scale, you may need to scale slower or expand to new audiences to keep efficiency up.
- **Expand to New Audiences:** Month 2 is to widen your reach. On Meta, this could mean testing Lookalike Audiences (e.g., a 1% lookalike of your website visitors or purchasers) which often perform well by finding people similar to converters. It could also mean trying new interest clusters you haven't yet, or even broad targeting if your pixel has enough data (Facebook's algorithm can sometimes find buyers with very little targeting input once it has a baseline of who converts). On Google, consider adding more keywords now that you have search query data – maybe there are phrases customers used that you didn't anticipate which you can target. Or, if you haven't tried Google Shopping/Performance Max, month 2 is a good time to launch that, using your product feed (if e-commerce physical products). Shopping ads can capture demand effectively that your search ads might miss.

"MONTH 2 IS WHERE YOU STOP GUESSING AND START PRESSING THE BUTTONS THAT ACTUALLY WORKED – CAREFULLY, NOT LIKE A DRUNK ON A SLOT MACHINE."

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN



- **Introduce Retargeting Depth:** In month 1, you likely had a basic retargeting ad (e.g., targeting all site visitors with a generic “come back” message). In month 2, you can get more sophisticated. For example, create a dynamic product ad on Facebook if you have a catalog – this will show users the exact items they viewed or added to cart with perhaps a nudge like “Still deciding? Grab it now!”. Or on Google, set up Display Retargeting to follow site abandoners with banners (just watch frequency so you don’t stalk them to annoyance). Also consider an email retargeting: do you have an email capture popup for those who don’t buy? If not, add one (“Get 10% off your first purchase – join our list”). By month 2 you’ll have a pool of interested but non-converted people – find ways to re-engage them through ads and other channels like email or SMS. This multi-touch approach can lift your overall conversion rate significantly.
- **Optimise the Website and Checkout:** Use insights from month 1 to fix any weak spots on-site. Did you see a lot of adds to cart but drop-offs at checkout? Perhaps offer free shipping in month 2 if you can, or streamline the checkout process (fewer form fields, more payment options like PayPal/Apple Pay for one-click). Did users spend time on certain info pages? Maybe they needed more info – consider adding an FAQ section or more reviews to build trust. If you have enough data, you can attempt an A/B test on a key page (for example, test a different headline or a shorter vs longer product description) to see if it improves conversion. Month 2 is great for site Optimisations because you have baseline metrics from month 1 to measure against.
- **Creative Refresh and Expansion:** Don’t let your ads go stale. By now your initial audience has seen last month’s ads, and you also want to combat ad fatigue. Create new creatives to test: possibly using themes that emerged. If a certain benefit or image worked, try a new spin on it.

Also, explore new formats. If you haven't tried video, do it now, even a simple 15-second demo or a slideshow-style carousel of product images. Keep the creative testing cycle alive. Consider putting 10–20% of spend in month two into testing new creative and new messages, while 80–90% goes into what's already working. That way you're improving performance without going stale.

Channel diversification, if it makes sense. Depending on your audience, add one new platform in month two with a small test budget. If your product skews younger, try TikTok using creative that already works on Instagram, with small tweaks. If you spot B2B demand, test a small LinkedIn campaign aimed at that segment. Keep these tests small. Your main focus stays on the channels proving themselves, while you probe new avenues and carefully track KPIs.

KPI targets. Tighten them where possible. If you hit a 2.0 ROAS last month, aim for 2.5 this month through better creative and conversion rate. If CPA was £25, see if you can bring it to £22. Watch frequency to avoid over-serving ads, quality rankings to catch weak creative early, and the big ones: conversion volume and cost per conversion. By mid-month two you should see conversions rising and CPA easing as the pixel learns and your tweaks take effect. If not, diagnose fast. By day 45, if nothing is improving, you need bolder changes: a new offer, a different angle, or a fresh creative approach.



- **Month 3 (Days 61–90): Expansion, Scaling, and Systematising**

If month 2 was about pushing the limits of what worked, month 3 is about cementing a broader strategy and systems for ongoing success.

By now, you hopefully have a solid base of campaigns that yield a predictable outcome (e.g., “If I spend £X, I get ~Y sales”). Now you can consider scaling further and adding layers like perhaps new product ads, content marketing integration, etc.



- **Aggressive but Measured Scaling:** In month 3, if ROAS and CPA are looking healthy, you can attempt more aggressive budget increases to find your ceiling. For instance, you might gradually double your spend over the course of this month (e.g., each week adding 15-20% budget to key campaigns, new campaigns targeting broader lookalikes or adjacent interests to enlarge reach). Keep a close eye – as you push budgets up, efficiency might drop; know your break-even ROAS or CPA so you don’t scale into unprofitability. If you can pull back a bit or figure out if a creative refresh can help at higher scale. Often, scaling means showing ads to “colder” people who need a different approach (e.g., maybe at small scale your hardcore fans were buying; at larger scale you need more education in the ad for the newbies). So you might need to tweak messaging as you scale to a wider net.
- **Introduce New Funnels or Products:** By month 3, you can start getting more sophisticated with funnel segmentation. For example, create a dedicated Top-of-Funnel content purely for awareness (like a cool video ad that doesn’t hard-sell but draws people in), then a Middle-of-Funnel (MOF) campaign retargeting those engagers with more product info or an offer, and a Bottom-of-Funnel (BOF) for cart abandoners with a stronger incentive. This full-funnel approach can improve efficiency, as each stage’s ads are tailored to the audience’s knowledge level. You might not have had the budget or bandwidth to set all that up early on, but by month 3 you have enough data to implement it. Also, if you have multiple products or tiers, consider cross-selling or upselling in your ads now. E.g., retarget purchasers of Product A with an ad for Product B (“Get 20% off an accessory for the item you bought!”). Customer retention and lifetime value growth often start now – don’t forget about those who already converted; cheaper to get repeat buys than new customers.
- **Content and Social Proof Amplification:** At this stage, hopefully you’ve gathered some reviews, testimonials, or UGC (user-generated content) from your first customers. Leverage that in your ads and on your site. Month 3 is a great time to run an ad that is basically a happy customer review screenshot or a 15-second video testimonial. Social proof can significantly

boost conversion rates. Additionally, consider broader content marketing: maybe run a blog post or advertorial as part of your ad strategy. For example, an ad that says “Not sure which widget is right for you? Read our Buyer’s Guide” leading to a helpful article on your site. This can capture people who are earlier in decision-making. It’s a longer play, but can warm up cold audiences that don’t respond to “buy now” immediately. Essentially, you’re enriching your advertising with content and proof to hit people from different angles.

- **Refine Reporting and Analytics:** By month 3, you should set up a more formal reporting routine (if you haven’t already). This means weekly or bi-weekly performance reviews and a comprehensive monthly report. You might use tools or a spreadsheet to consolidate metrics across channels (we’ll detail this in Chapter 10). The point is to start treating your marketing like a science: hypothesis, test, measure, iterate. At 90 days, you have enough data to calculate some important figures: your Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) overall, your Marketing Efficiency Ratio (MER) (total revenue vs ad spend), and maybe even an early read on Lifetime Value (LTV) if customers have re-purchased. These help guide strategy. For example, if MER is only 2.0 (meaning 50% of revenue is ad spend), and your margins are 50%, you’re at break-even. If MER improves to 4.0, you’re making good profit. Track these trends – month 3’s data will tell you if scaling is improving or hurting efficiency. Often as you scale, ROAS might drop a bit, but volume increases – you have to find the balance that yields maximum profit (sometimes better to have a slightly lower ROAS on much higher spend, resulting in more net profit, as long as it’s above break-even). *Do that analysis.*
- **Explore Automation and Tools:** Once your campaigns get larger, consider using some automation to manage them. For example, set up automated rules: “If CPA today goes above £X, pause the campaign” or “If spend > £Y with 0 conversions, alert me.” Facebook and Google have such features. This safety net will help as you manage more moving parts. Also, possibly invest in a tool or two: maybe a creative analyser, or a reporting dashboard, or even hire a virtual assistant to help with some campaign monitoring tasks if you’re overwhelmed. The idea in month 3 is to start building scalability into your processes – you proved the concept, now ensure you can handle growth without losing control.
- **90-Day Review:** As you approach day 90, schedule a thorough review meeting (with your team or just yourself in CEO mode, pen and paper or slides). Compare where you stand vs 90 days ago on key metrics: website traffic, cost per click, conversion rate, cost per acquisition, total customers acquired, etc. Identify the biggest wins (e.g., “Our Instagram Ads are killing it with a 3.5 ROAS, generating 100 sales – hero channel!”) and biggest challenges (“Google Ads CPA is still too high, maybe our keywords are too broad or we need better landing pages for search traffic.”). Revisit your overall marketing budget and decide: will you increase it for the next quarter based on positive ROI? Or reallocate it between channels differently? The data will guide you. Importantly, decide on next steps and document them: perhaps the next 90 days you’ll focus on scaling vertically (more spend on same channels) or horizontally (adding new channels, new markets). This is also a good time to consider if you need additional help – maybe it’s time to bring in a freelancer for content creation, or an agency for a specific channel now that you know what you want (and you can better vet them thanks to Chapter 5!).

At the 90-day mark, if all went well, you should see a clear trajectory: maybe you're not a millionaire yet, but you have a repeatable marketing system: put money in the ad machine, get customers out. If things didn't go as planned, you at least have clarity on why – and that's invaluable. Sometimes the outcome of 90 days is realizing a certain product or offer just isn't viable at the current costs, prompting a pivot in strategy (different audience, product tweaks, etc.). That knowledge saves you future loss. But assuming you've found some degree of success, it's time to rinse and repeat: scale further, experiment continuously, and optimise always.

We've covered a lot of tactical ground in these last two chapters. Think of the first 30 days as laying the foundation and the next 60 as building the first floor of your "sales engine" building. Beyond 90 days, you'll be adding more floors (more campaigns, bigger budgets, perhaps new markets or product lines), but the principles remain the same. To keep that engine running smoothly, you need good tracking and reporting – which brings us to the next chapter. Let's talk about how to keep score and make sense of all these numbers in a sane way that will inform your decisions (and impress any stakeholders or just your future self). Onward!

By now, you've gathered a mountain of data: ad impressions, clicks, costs, conversion rates, revenues, and more. Raw data is useless unless you turn it into insights and actions. This is where tracking and reporting come in. In this chapter, we'll outline how to effectively track your campaign performance and present it in a clear, logical way (even if it's just for you). We'll discuss what metrics to include, how to structure a report, and some templates or tools you can use. The goal: make sure you always know what's working, what's not, and where to focus next – without getting lost in vanity metrics or drowning in spreadsheets.



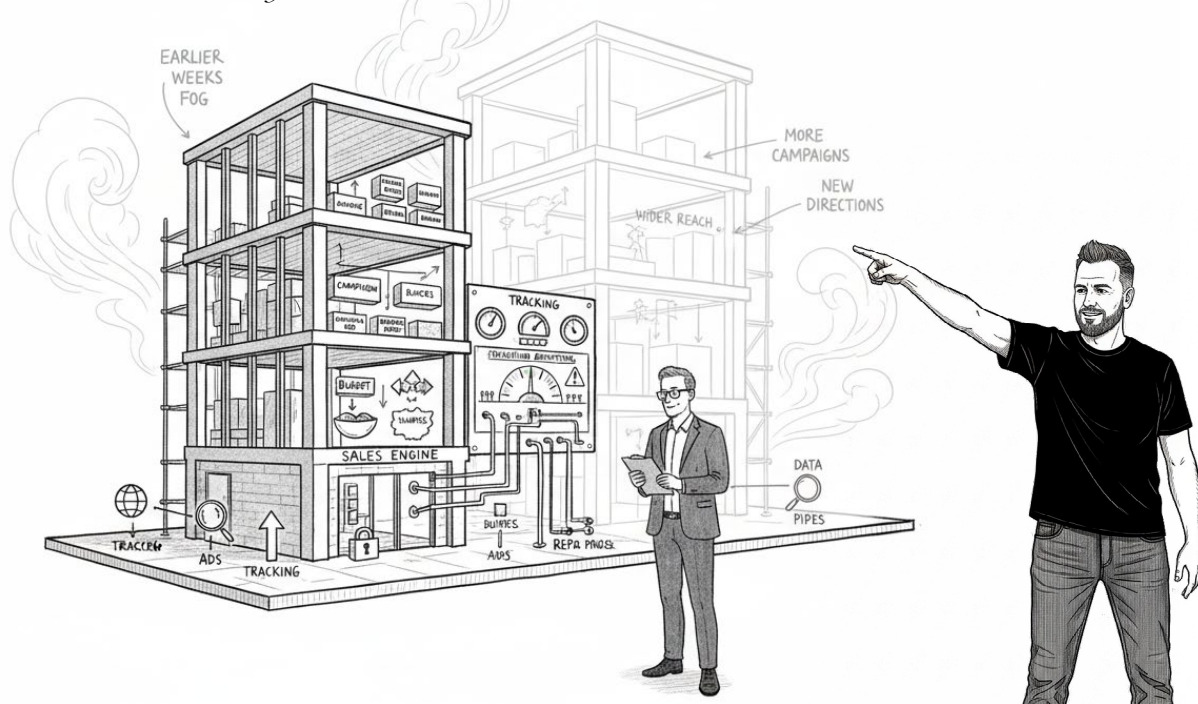
Establish Your KPIs and Dashboard: First, nail down the key performance indicators (KPIs) that matter for your business. From earlier chapters, those likely include: Spend, Impressions, Clicks, Click-Through Rate (CTR), Cost Per Click (CPC), Conversions (sales or leads), Cost Per Acquisition (CPA), Conversion Rate (CR)%, Return on Ad Spend (ROAS), and possibly Revenue from ads. If you're e-commerce, you'll have ROAS or MER; if lead-gen, you might have Cost per Lead and then later conversion of leads to sales offline. Whatever the case, decide on the core metrics you need to see regularly. A typical PPC report template will have a summary of conversions, cost, impressions, clicks, CTR, CPC, and cost-per-conversion, broken down by campaign. This is a good starting point.

CHAPTER 11: TRACKING & REPORTING TEMPLATES & TOOLS FOR CLARITY

Now, set up a simple dashboard or spreadsheet that tracks these KPIs for each campaign and channel. You can do this in Excel/Google Sheets or use a marketing dashboard tool. For many starting out, Sheets is fine. For example, create a sheet with columns: Date, Channel (FB, Google, etc.), Campaign, Spend, Impressions, Clicks, CTR, CPC, Conversions, CPA, ROAS. You don't have to fill it daily (though some do daily for precision); a weekly entry might suffice for trends, plus a monthly roll-up. If you want automation, tools like Google Data Studio (free) can pull data from sources and visualise it, or paid tools like AgencyAnalytics, Supermetrics, etc., can save time. But a manual approach is fine initially and forces you to really look at the numbers.

Include Context and Benchmarks: Don't just report raw numbers – interpret them. A good report has commentary: “Clicks increased 20% WoW, but conversions only 5% – indicating a drop in conversion rate, likely due to the broader audience we tested.” Also compare against benchmarks or past performance: “Our CTR of 1.5% on Facebook is above industry avg of ~1%, meaning our creative is resonating.” Or “Google Search conversion rate is 3%, which is a bit lower than our last month's 4% – let's investigate the new keywords added.” Always ask “so what?” about each metric. If something went up or down, note why (if known) or plan to find out. Over time, your reports become a narrative of your marketing – not just data points, but a story of what you tried and what happened.

Visualise Key Data: Charts can be hugely helpful for spotting trends. Plot your daily or weekly spend and revenue to see the trend line – is it diverging or converging? A simple line chart of ROAS over time could show, for instance, an upward trend after you made a certain fix. Bar charts by campaign can quickly highlight which campaigns drive the most conversions or have the best CPA. Many people glaze over at tables of numbers, but a graph grabs attention. Even if it's just you reviewing it, a visual might reveal “Hey, why did our cost spike on April 15th?” prompting you to recall an event or error that day. Excel/Sheets can make basic charts easily. Agency templates often include sections with graphs for performance overview – *you can emulate that.*



30 YEARS OF CHRIS'S WISDOM:

Month one was about learning without blowing your legs off. Months two and three are where you turn that learning into momentum. This is the phase where most advertisers either build something repeatable or slowly drift back into guesswork. The aim by day 90 isn't perfection. It's confidence. You should know what works, what doesn't, and roughly what happens when you put money in.

Month two is refinement. You take the winners from month one and give them more room to breathe. Budgets can increase, but only where the numbers justify it. If £1,000 gave you promising signals, £1,500–£2,000 is a reasonable next step. Not everywhere. Just where performance held up. Scaling always brings friction. Costs rarely stay identical as spend rises, so your job is to watch whether efficiency slips slightly or falls off a cliff. The difference matters.

This is also the month to widen intelligently. On Meta, that means broader targeting, or adjacent interests once the pixel has learned something useful. On Google, it means expanding keyword coverage based on real search terms rather than guesses. If Shopping or Performance Max wasn't live yet, this is when it usually earns its place. At the same time, retargeting should deepen. Generic "come back" ads get replaced with relevance: product-view retargeting, cart abandon nudges, email capture for non-buyers. This is where multiple touches start doing the heavy lifting.

Month two is also where your website gets judged properly. By now, you'll see where people hesitate. Cart drop-offs, mobile issues, unclear pricing, weak trust signals. Fix those before you throw more traffic at them. Ads don't fix friction. They expose it. Creative needs refreshing too. If something worked, build variations around it. If everything's getting stale, costs will creep up quietly. Keep a portion of spend for new ideas while the bulk backs proven ones.

By month three, the fog should be lifting. You should have campaigns that behave predictably. Spend goes up, results follow, within reason. This is when scaling becomes deliberate rather than hopeful. Budgets can rise more aggressively, but always against break-even numbers you already know. As audiences widen, messaging often needs to change. What convinced early buyers won't always convince colder ones. Education, reassurance, and proof start to matter more at scale.

Month three is also when structure improves. Full-funnel thinking becomes practical, not theoretical. Cold awareness feeds warmer education. Warm traffic gets nudged. Hot traffic gets closed. Existing customers get spoken to again. Retention and cross-sell begin to matter, because repeat customers make scaling safer. Social proof starts pulling weight. Testimonials, reviews, UGC, even simple screenshots often outperform polished brand ads at this stage.

Reporting should mature too. By now, you're no longer staring at daily stats in panic. You're reviewing weekly patterns. You're watching blended performance. MER, CPA trends, volume versus efficiency. You'll notice that ROAS might dip slightly as scale increases, but total profit improves. That's normal. The goal isn't pretty ratios. It's money left over after the dust settles.

By day 90, the real win is clarity. You either have a system that works, or you know exactly why it doesn't. Both outcomes save you time and money. If it works, you repeat, scale, and layer. If it doesn't, you pivot with evidence instead of excuses. Most businesses fail here not because ads don't work, but because they never give themselves a clean read.

"MONTH ONE TEACHES YOU WHAT PEOPLE CLICK. MONTHS TWO AND THREE TEACH YOU WHETHER THE BUSINESS DESERVES THE CLICKS."

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN



Reporting Cadence: Formally report (even internally). A weekly snapshot is useful for tactical tweaks; a monthly report is for bigger-picture strategy.

For example, every Monday send (or write in a diary) a few bullets: “Last week: spent £500, got 25 sales (£20 CPA, up from £18 prior week). CTR improved on new ads. Main issue: mobile checkout bug on Thursday caused drop – fixed now.”

Then at month’s end, do a deeper dive: include cumulative metrics, cost vs revenue, MER, etc., and analysis of tests (like which new creative worked, which audience flopped, lessons learned). This monthly can mirror what we did at 90-day review but on a monthly scale.

If you have a team or boss, this is when you’d present results – and having those cited sources or industry benchmarks can back up your points

(e.g., “Our 5% conversion rate is double the industry average for e-com, indicating our funnel is strong” – throw in a stat if helpful).

Template Structure: A clear report might be structured as follows:

1. Executive Summary

A short paragraph that compares results to goals and sets the scene.

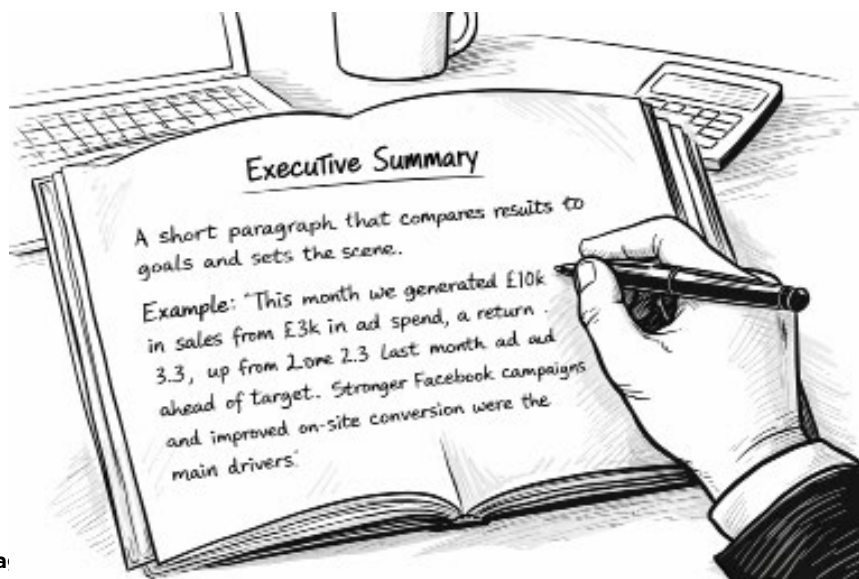
Example: “This month we generated £10k in sales from £3k in ad spend, a return of 3.3, up from 2.8 last month and ahead of target. Stronger Facebook campaigns and improved on-site conversion were the main drivers.”

If someone reads nothing else, they should understand performance from this section alone.

2. Performance by Channel

Break results out by channel (Facebook, Google, etc.).

Use a simple table or side-by-side view showing spend, conversions, cost per conversion, and return for each channel. Call out what performed best and worst, and why you think that happened. For example: Facebook returned 4.0 while Google sat at 2.0 — note possible reasons rather than just stating the numbers.



"ADS DON'T FAIL.

**THEY JUST QUIETLY
MUG YOU WHILE
YOU'RE "WAITING FOR
THE ALGORITHM TO
LEARN".**

3. Top Campaigns and Ads

List the top three and bottom three campaigns or ads based on conversions or return. This makes it obvious what to push harder and what to pause or rework. If useful, include a small image of the top ad creative for quick visual recall. Add a short note to each, for example:

“Campaign X – 50 purchases at £15 per conversion. Clear winner, driven by lookalike audiences.”

“Campaign Y – 5 purchases at £45 per conversion. Underperforming and marked for revision or pause.”



4. Trends and Visuals

Include one or two simple charts to show movement over time. This could be a weekly trend of cost per conversion, a bar chart of conversions by week, or a breakdown of spend by channel.

The goal is to show direction at a glance — are things improving, flat, or slipping? Learnings & Actions: Arguably the most important section. Bullet out what you learned and what you will do. “Learnings: 1) Video creative outperforms static – all new ads will prioritise video. 2) Our Google search ads have high CTR but low conversion – likely landing page issue, plan to create dedicated landing page for Google traffic. 3) Offer of free shipping boosted conversion rate by 20% – consider making this standard if margin allows.” Then Actions: “Next month, we’ll increase budget by 25% mostly on Facebook, pause underperforming Google keywords, test two new ad angles around ‘summer sale’, and launch dynamic retargeting.” Being explicit here creates accountability and a to-do list driven by data.

- 5. Appendix (if needed):** If you have extra data, like detailed breakdowns (by demographic, placement, etc.), you can stash it in an appendix for reference. Or if presenting to others, an appendix of metric definitions helps (e.g., define ROAS, MER, etc.) so everyone’s on the same page. You can have a brief glossary: “ROAS (Return on Ad Spend) = Revenue / Ad Spend. Example: £500 revenue on £100 spend = ROAS 5.0”.
- 6. Citing Data and Sources:** If you’re sharing this report, especially upwards in an organisation, citing credible sources for claims or benchmarks can add weight. For instance, if you say “Our CTR is above average,” you could footnote the source of the industry average. Or if you claim “Email marketing will boost retention,” you might cite a study. In our context, since you’ve been diligent in researching, you could include a footnote or endnote in the report where relevant (though in an internal doc, a simple hyperlink or source mention might suffice).

Use of Tools: There are many pre-built templates online (a quick search yields “marketing report template HubSpot” or similar). These can give a polished look. Some, like Porter Metrics or

Whatagraph, offer free templates where you just plug in your data. If design isn't your forte, these can help your reports look executive-ready with minimal effort. But remember: the insight is more important than the format. A fancy PDF means nothing if it doesn't highlight the right info or, worse, hides it in fluff. We'd prefer a plain spreadsheet with the crucial numbers and honest commentary over a pretty chart that obscures reality. Keep it clear and honest – if results are bad, don't fudge it, explain it. People (or you) need the truth to make decisions. And when results are good, a solid report showcases that and builds trust in your strategy.



Tracking Beyond Ads: It's worth noting that ad metrics alone aren't everything. Tie your reporting to business outcomes. We mentioned MER (total revenue vs spend) – include that if you can. Also track metrics like Customer Lifetime Value (LTV) if you start getting repeat purchases (beyond 90 days this becomes more relevant). For instance, if you notice 10% of month-1 customers buy again by month 3, that's a great stat – include a section “Customer Retention: X% repeat rate, indicating growing loyalty.” Over time, these measures tell the full story: maybe your CPA is a bit high at first purchase but if LTV is strong, it's worth it. Having these in reports ensures you and stakeholders don't knee-jerk cut something that's actually profitable long-term.

Make Reports Actionable: Always end a report with clear next steps (as mentioned). A report isn't just to say “look what happened,” but “here's what we do next.” If every report leads to 2-3 action items, you know it's driving continuous improvement. Also, archive your reports – they become a historical log. One day, you'll look back and see how far you've come (e.g., “Wow, our CPA was £30 six months ago and now it's £15 – our efforts paid off!”). Or you'll avoid re-testing something that already failed a year ago because you have it documented. In essence, good tracking and reporting create a feedback loop that guides your strategy.

With solid reporting practices, you take the guesswork and emotional rollercoaster out of advertising. Instead of “I feel like we did okay” you'll know precisely how you did and why. It turns marketing from a gamble to a calculated investment. And as a bonus, if you ever seek investment or decide to sell your business, these records and the Optimisations they led to become part of your story of growth.

Now that you have a handle on making sense of the numbers, let's wrap up with one more important chapter: key calculations every e-commerce advertiser should know by heart. We've touched on many of them already (CPC, CPA, ROAS, etc.), but we'll consolidate those formulas and concepts in one place as a handy reference – a mini

“marketing math 101” that underpins all these decisions you're making. Math haters fear not: we'll keep it straightforward and show why these numbers matter for your bottom line.



CHAPTER 12:

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS - KEY CALCULATIONS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Marketing isn't just creative slogans and some AI generated snazzy videos – it's equally a numbers game. Fortunately, the math you need isn't complex (we're talking arithmetic, not calculus - to be fair we are creatives and don't love the calculations that much), but understanding the key calculations and their implications is critical. AND WE MEAN IT.

In this chapter, we'll succinctly list and explain the core metrics and formulas from our journey – think of this as your cheat sheet for marketing math. Knowing these will help you set targets, diagnose issues, and communicate results clearly. We'll also toss in an example or two for each to cement the concept.

1. Cost Per Click (CPC): This is the average cost you pay for each click on your ad. It's calculated as:

$$\text{CPC} = \frac{\text{Total Ad Spend}}{\text{Total Clicks}}$$

For example, if you spent £200 on a campaign and got 500 clicks, your $\text{CPC} = \frac{£200}{500} = £0.40$ per click. This metric matters because it indicates how expensive it is to get someone to your site. It's influenced by factors like competition (lots of advertisers = higher CPC), relevance (better ads often get cheaper clicks), and targeting. A low CPC is good only if those clicks are quality. As we can plainly put it, divide total ad cost by number of clicks to get CPC. Use CPC to compare efficiency of different ads or platforms (e.g., you might notice Facebook clicks cost £0.50 while Google search clicks cost £1.00 – reflecting the higher intent but higher competition on search).

2. Click-Through Rate (CTR): The percentage of people who saw your ad that clicked on it. Formula:

$$\text{CTR} = \frac{\text{Clicks}}{\text{Impressions}} \times 100\%$$

E.g., your ad was shown 10,000 times and got 150 clicks, $\text{CTR} = \frac{150}{10000} = 1.5\%$. CTR gauges how compelling your ad is to the audience it's shown to. A higher CTR generally means your creative and message resonated well (or your targeting was spot on). We discussed that a decent CTR on Facebook might be ~1% whereas on search it could be higher for top positions. Use CTR to diagnose ad performance: if CTR is very low, your ad isn't enticing – maybe the creative needs a revamp or the offer isn't attractive. It can also alert you to mismatched targeting (e.g., showing dog food ads to cat owners yields low CTR – wrong audience). So, CTR = early indicator of ad appeal.

3. Conversion Rate (CVR): The percentage of clicks that convert (purchase or sign-up).

Formula (for site conversion):

$$\text{Conversion Rate} = \frac{\text{Conversions}}{\text{Clicks}} \times 100\%.$$

Example: 50 people out of 500 clicks bought something, $\text{CVR} = 50/500 = 10\%$ (which is very high for e-comm; 2-5% is more common). Conversion rate tells you how effective your website or landing page is at turning visitors into customers. It's heavily influenced by user experience, product-market fit, price, trust, etc.

We mentioned industry averages – e.g., across industries 2-3% might be average for e-commerce, though it varies. If your CTR is good but CVR is low, the ads are doing their job, but the site might be dropping the ball (or your audience has interest but maybe not the intent/ability to buy – perhaps refine targeting or offer). Often, improving CVR (through site changes or better audience targeting) is the fastest way to improve ROI, because you're making more of the clicks you already paid for.

4. Cost Per Acquisition (CPA) / Cost Per Conversion: How much you pay to acquire one customer or lead. Formula:

$$\text{CPA} = \frac{\text{Total Ad Spend}}{\text{Total Conversions}}.$$

If you spent £500 on ads and got 25 sales, your $\text{CPA} = 500/25 = £20$ per acquisition. This is one of the king metrics – it directly tells you the cost to get a customer. You must compare this against what a customer is worth (profit per customer) to know if it's viable. We showed how to calculate break-even CPA in Chapter 3 by factoring in margin. Geckboard defined it simply: total spent divided by number of new customers. In our e.g., if your product profit is £30, a £20 CPA means £10 profit per sale (assuming no other big costs) – that's okay. If your CPA was £40, you'd be losing £10 per sale – not sustainable unless you have strong LTV (repeat purchases). You'll often have a target CPA in mind from the start (based on margin math); hitting or staying under it is crucial. Note: sometimes people use CAC (Customer Acquisition Cost) interchangeably with CPA – CAC often is broader including marketing + sales costs. But in our scope, CPA suffices.

5. Return on Ad Spend (ROAS): The revenue generated for every £1 spent on ads. Formula:

$$\text{ROAS} = \frac{\text{Revenue from Ads}}{\text{Ad Spend}}.$$

It's often expressed as a multiple (e.g., 3.0) or percentage (300%). Example: you spent £100 on ads and they drove £300 in sales, $\text{ROAS} = 300/100 = 3.0$ (or 300%). That means £3 back for every £1 spent. Adjust defines the basic formula clearly: revenue attributable to ads divided by cost of ads. ROAS is great for assessing efficiency of your ad spend. A $\text{ROAS} > 1$ (100%) means you got more revenue than cost (good), < 1 means you got less revenue than cost (bad short-term, though maybe acceptable if pursuing growth with LTV considerations).

Many companies have a target ROAS that aligns with profitability – e.g., if your margins are 50%, break-even ROAS is 2.0 (because for every £2 in revenue, £1 is cost of goods, £1 is ad – leaving zero profit). You’d aim for higher to profit. We’ve talked about ROAS throughout; it’s the counterpart of CPA (just inverted: $ROAS = \text{Revenue}/\text{Cost}$, CPA often can be derived if AOV known). Use ROAS to compare channels’ efficiency: e.g., “Facebook ROAS 4.0 vs Google ROAS 2.5 – FB is more efficient at driving revenue for spend.” But also consider scalability – maybe Google can spend more even at lower ROAS. Balance both.

6. Marketing Efficiency Ratio (MER): Also known as Blended ROAS or Media Efficiency Ratio. It looks at the big picture: total revenue from all sources divided by total marketing spend. Formula:

$$MER = \frac{\text{Total Revenue}}{\text{Total Ad Spend}}$$

For instance, your entire business did £50,000 in sales this month and you spent £10,000 on all ads, $MER = 50k/10k = 5.0$. Interpreting that: £5 in revenue for each £1 in ad spend overall. We cited Funnel.io’s definition: MER measures the holistic marketing performance. It’s useful because it cuts through attribution nuances – it doesn’t matter which channel claimed credit, MER tells you overall if ads are pulling their weight relative to sales. If MER is too low (say 2.0 or 1.5), you’re spending a lot for little return – might signal over-investment in ads or other issues. Many healthy DTC brands shoot for MER of 4+ (meaning 25% or less of revenue goes to ads). It depends on margin though: lower margin products need higher MER to profit. Use MER along with ROAS: ROAS might be high on one channel, but MER might lag if another channel is sucking or if non-ad sales (email, organic) factor in. MER is also how you ensure you’re not double-counting revenue (since it’s just total sales vs total spend).

7. Profit (and ROI): Ultimately, beyond these marketing metrics, Profit is what matters – revenue minus all costs. ROI (Return on Investment) can be calculated as profit divided by cost, but in advertising often we use ROAS instead. However, let’s clarify:

- Gross Profit per sale: $\text{revenue} - \text{cost of goods}$. E.g., £50 sale – £20 cost = £30 gross profit.
- Net Profit: gross profit minus ad cost (and any other variable costs). If that sale had £10 ad cost (CPA), $\text{net profit} = £30 - £10 = £20$.
- You can compute an ROI on ad spend in terms of profit: $(\text{Net Profit} / \text{Ad Spend}) * 100\%$. In our example, £20 profit on £10 spend = 200% ROI. But this can be confusing, so many stick to ROAS for revenue efficiency and ensure break-even ROAS is known. Adjust did differentiate ROI vs ROAS: ROI includes profit context, ROAS is top-line revenue focus. For your sanity, track profit too. For example, if MER is 5.0 and your overall margin is 50%, then roughly your ROI on ads is 150% (you’re getting 5x rev, keep half as profit, so 2.5x return net, meaning 150% profit on cost). If these calculations make your head spin – at least know break-even points.

8. Break-Even ROAS & Break-Even CPA: We covered in detail in Chapter 3, but here's a quick formula recap.

Break-Even Basics (Know These Cold)

Break-even ROAS = $1 \div$ profit margin

If your profit margin (after costs of goods, shipping, fees, etc.) is 25%, then:

$$\text{Break-even ROAS} = 1 \div 0.25 = 4.0 \text{ (400\%)}$$

Meaning: you need £4 in revenue for every £1 spent on ads just to stand still.

Break-even CPA comes from profit per sale.

If you make £30 gross profit per order, you can spend up to £30 to acquire a customer and break even on that first sale.

There is no profit until your CPA drops below £30.

Use these two numbers to set your targets.

If your actual CPA is higher than break-even, you are losing money unless you have strong repeat purchases to recover it later.

If your ROAS is below break-even, same outcome.

No business survives long while losing money on every sale — unless it's a deliberate decision backed by proven lifetime value.

Simple example:

Product sells for £40

Profit per sale is £20

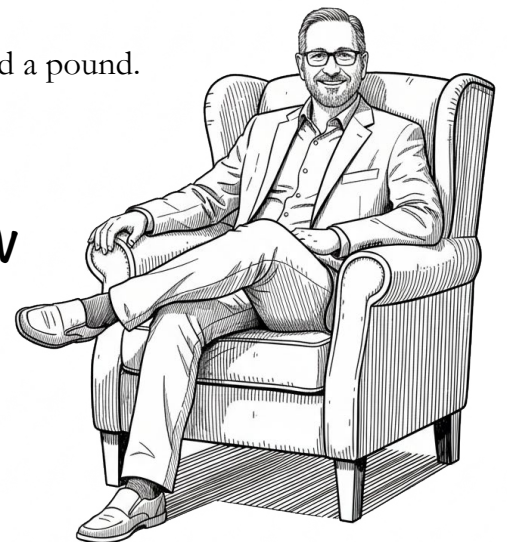
Break-even ROAS is 2.0

That's the core idea.

Know these numbers before you spend a pound.

"EVERY POUND SPENT WITHOUT A BREAK-EVEN NUMBER IS A DECISION MADE BLIND."

#HENRY MCCRORY



9. Customer Lifetime Value (LTV or CLV) & CAC Ratio: A bit beyond initial campaigns, but worth mentioning.

LTV and CAC: The Numbers That Actually Matter

LTV (Lifetime Value) is the total revenue or profit a customer generates over their time with your brand.

For example, if a customer buys three times at £50 over a year, their revenue LTV is £150.

If your margin is 50%, your profit LTV is £75.

CAC (Customer Acquisition Cost) is what it costs you to get that customer.

In most cases, this is simply your CPA.

The actually half useful relationship to burn in your head is the LTV:CAC ratio.

If your profit LTV is £75 and your CAC is £25, your ratio is 3:1.

That's healthy. You're making three pounds for every pound spent acquiring a customer.

If the ratio drops to 1:1 or worse, you're working for nothing.

A common rule of thumb is to aim for 3:1 or higher.

These aren't day-to-day campaign metrics, but they sit underneath everything.

They tell you whether scaling makes sense.

Once you're past the first 90 days and real data starts coming in, watch these closely.

If LTV is far higher than CAC, you may even choose to lose money on the first sale to win market share. If LTV is low, scaling will always feel painful.

This also highlights the power of retention.

Increase repeat purchases, subscriptions, or cross-sells, and your LTV rises — which means you can afford higher acquisition costs without breaking the business.

"IF IT COSTS YOU £25 TO GET A CUSTOMER WHO ONLY GIVES YOU £25 BACK, CONGRATULATIONS — YOU'VE BUILT A CHARITY FOR AD PLATFORMS."

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN



That's the core maths toolbox. Stripped of jargon, it comes down to this: what a customer is worth versus what you pay to get them.

- CPC: What you pay to get one person to click (keep it as low as possible for relevant traffic).
- CTR: How enticing your ad creative is to improve this).
- Conversion Rate: How well you turn clicks into customers (higher is better; tweak site/offer to improve).
- CPA/CAC: What it costs to get a customer – your budget per sale (must be lower than what that sale is worth to you).
- ROAS: Revenue return on your ad spend (should be above a threshold that covers costs; higher means more efficient revenue generation).
- MER: Big-picture efficiency of all marketing (tells if overall ads are sustainable as a chunk of revenue).
- Break-even points: Know at what ROAS or CPA you neither make nor lose money on first sale – a critical line to stay above.
- LTV & LTV:CAC: The long game – total value of a customer and the ratio of that value to what it cost to get them (higher ratio means healthier business).

When you know these numbers, you can answer crucial questions like: Can I scale and can I increase budget or pull back? Which channel is giving best bang for buck? Do I need to improve my website conversion or my ad targeting? You become a data-driven marketer instead of guessing. It also lets you cut through B.S. For example, if an agency brags about “We got you clicks for £0.10!” but you know those clicks didn’t convert (so CPA was terrible), you won’t be impressed by vanity metrics. You’ll focus – cost per acquisition and ROI.

As a final tip: periodically revisit these calculations with fresh data. Your AOV (average order value) might increase if you introduce upsells, which changes break-even CPA. Or your LTV could improve as you add more products, allowing you to spend more on acquisition. Treat these as living metrics. Update your assumptions every few months with actual data.

We’re almost at the end of our journey. In the concluding chapter, we’ll tie everything together – the blunt truths, the big lessons, and the mindset that will carry you forward. You’ve got the strategies and the formulas; now let’s talk about the attitude and philosophy that will make all this stick and drive success in the long run.

“LTV IS HOW MUCH A CUSTOMER IS WORTH. CAC IS WHAT YOU PAID TO GET THEM. IF THE SECOND NUMBER'S BIGGER, CONGRATULATIONS – YOU'VE BOUGHT A HOBBY.”



30 YEARS OF HENRY'S WISDOM:

Reporting is where advertising either becomes calm and repeatable, or stays emotional and reactive. Without a rhythm, you end up making decisions based on yesterday's numbers, today's mood, or whatever the platform shouted loudest. This chapter exists to stop that. The point of reporting isn't pretty charts or justifying spend. It's clarity. What moved, why it moved, and what you do next.

A simple weekly snapshot keeps you honest. One short note: what you spent, what you got back, what changed, and what broke. This is tactical. It stops overreacting to single days and helps you spot real problems early, like tracking issues, site bugs, or creative fatigue, before they quietly drain money.

Monthly reporting is where strategy lives. This is spend versus revenue, efficiency versus targets, and learning versus noise. You're asking bigger questions now. Which channel actually drove growth.

Which campaigns earned the right to more budget. Whether performance improved because of creative, conversion rate, or luck. This is also where blended metrics like MER matter, because they tell you if marketing makes sense for the business, not just inside one dashboard.

Good reports are structured, not bloated. A clear summary up top. Performance by channel. What worked best. What underperformed. One or two visuals that show direction, not decoration. Then the most important part: learnings and actions. If a report doesn't end with clear decisions, it's just historical trivia.

Over time, reporting becomes your memory. It stops you re-testing dead ideas, chasing vanity metrics, or believing stories that don't survive the numbers. It also removes emotion. You stop feeling like ads are "good" or "bad" and start seeing them as systems that respond to inputs.

When reporting is done properly, marketing stops feeling like gambling. You know what's happening, you know why, and you know what lever to pull next. That's when growth becomes boring in the best possible way.

*"REPORTING ISN'T
FOR FEELING
CLEVER. IT'S FOR
FINDING OUT
WHERE THE MONEY
ACTUALLY WENT."*

HENRY MCCRORY



CHAPTER 13: SO, WHAT WE ARE REALLY SAYING TO DO IS THIS...

No-Nonsense, No Limits – Your Roadmap to Ongoing Success

By now, you've traveled with us through the entire landscape of e-commerce advertising – from understanding funnels and metrics to crafting creative campaigns, avoiding costly traps, executing 90-day action plans, and crunching the key numbers. You've essentially gotten a download of 30 years of hard-won lessons from two marketers who've seen the good, the bad, and the downright ugly in this game. Now it's time to conclude with some straight-talk wisdom and a look forward. This isn't goodbye – it's the start of the next phase where you take the wheel, armed with knowledge and confidence (and maybe a few battle scars to come, but that's okay).

Own Your Numbers, Own Your Decisions: One theme we hope rang loud and clear is accountability. Don't delegate understanding to someone else. You now know how to read the story your metrics are telling. No agency can bluff you with jargon now – you'll call them out if they try (“Don't show me impressions, show me conversions”). When results are great, you'll know exactly why and can do more of it. When results suck, you'll pinpoint where the leak is and fix it.

This empowerment is huge. It means you're not flying blind or at the mercy of “experts.” You might still hire experts, but you'll manage them by the numbers, not by fancy reports. This no-nonsense approach is how small businesses become big businesses. It's not magic or luck – it's rinse-and-repeat of what works, and ruthless cutting of what doesn't.

Customer-Centric Thinking – The Ultimate Guide: While we dove deep into ad platforms and tactics, never forget the golden rule: know thy customer. Chris and Henry (that's us) might be seasoned marketers, but our best campaigns always came when we truly understood the customer's pain, desire, and language. If there's one “secret” in marketing, it's that. Everything flows from it – your funnel, your creative messaging (“speak to their needs, not your vanity”), your choice of platform (go where they hang out), even your budgeting (spend more to delight valuable customers, not to chase everyone).

We illustrated with stories: the client who ignored site issues (customer experience) and just spent more – flop. Versus when we fixed what customers cared about (site speed, trust) – success. As you continue, make it a habit to regularly step back from charts and ask: “Would this ad/offer convince me if I were the customer? Am I solving their problem or just shouting about myself?” Keep it real, keep it about them. That's what cuts through the noise.



Test, Learn, and Don't Fear Failure: We tried to impart both the strategy and the mindset. On mindset: you must accept that some (even many) of your ideas and campaigns will fail. And that's fine, as long as you fail forward – meaning you learn something each time. We've had campaigns where we swore the idea was brilliant, only to be humbled by the data. Instead of mourning the ego bruise, we say “Okay, the data is telling us something – what is it?” We adapt, and come back stronger. You should too. The blunt Belfast truth is: there's no success without a trail of failures behind it. If you go in knowing that, you won't be rattled when an ad flops or a CPA spike happens. You'll treat it as an expected part of the journey, adjust, and move on. That resilience (with a dash of humor ideally) is what sustains you. Marketing is an iterative process, not a one-and-done. Those overnight success stories? Usually years in the making and multiple iterations deep.

Cut the Fluff – Always: Gary Vee style: no excuses, no BS. If an agency isn't delivering, fire them (you know the warning signs now). If a strategy isn't working, don't sink cost fallacy yourself into oblivion – pivot. Don't get attached to tactics or vanity metrics. We hammered this, but it's important: many businesses waste money on things that don't move the needle because they feel busy or look cool. Like pouring money into a flashy awareness campaign that wins awards but doesn't sell squat.

We're not saying don't do branding – do it, but measure impact. The beauty of digital is you can measure nearly everything. So if something isn't contributing to your bottom line or a defined goal, either find a way to track its influence or stop doing it. Time and money are limited; spend them where it counts. This no-fluff approach might make some old-school marketers uncomfortable, but hey, you're in the driver's seat to grow your business, not to collect claps. In the words of one of our mentors: “You can't deposit likes into your bank account.” Focus on what you can deposit – revenue, profit, customer equity.



Stay Agile and Updated: The ad world changes fast.

Algorithms update, new platforms emerge (who saw TikTok coming like it did? When I saw my daughters dancing to the first version of it formally musical.ly I thought it was just a silly dupe for meta but man was I wrong, then Chinese developers know how to make a good app), consumer behaviors shift (cookie tracking gets tougher, etc.). The foundations in this book will hold – understanding consumers, metrics, funnels – those are evergreen. But the tactics will evolve.

So keep learning. You now know how to research effectively (use credible sources, test things yourself, etc.). When LinkedIn releases a new ad feature or Google changes its targeting options, you'll be able to assess it and adjust. Sign up for industry newsletters, follow a few reputable marketing blogs, even join communities (Reddit's r/PPC or r/FacebookAds can be decent for peer insights – just remember to verify claims). The point is: don't get complacent.

What gave you an edge in 2025 might be standard by 2026; you'll need the next edge. But guess what: many of your competitors won't bother – by reading this book and caring about this stuff, you're already in the top percentile of proactive marketers. Keep that mindset and you'll continuously outsmart the competition who rely on autopilot or outdated knowledge.

Leverage Your 30-Year Coaches (Us) in Spirit:

We wrote this in a conversational, story-driven way because we truly want these lessons to stick. When you're at a crossroads – say, an agency is dazzling you with a “powerpoint of puffery” – we hope you hear our voices in your head saying “Ask them about real metrics!” When you're tempted to crank up spend to solve a conversion problem, recall our story of Over-Eager Oliver and check yourself before writing that check. When an ad fails, imagine us saying with a shrug, “Alright, that didn't work – what did we learn? On to the next!” It's like we're your grizzled corner coaches in a boxing match – giving you pointers between rounds, maybe a splash of cold water and a cheeky one-liner to keep you grounded. You ultimately have to fight the fight, but you're never truly alone – this experience (ours and now yours) is with you.



Enjoy the Ride:

Last but not least, advertising and growing a business is actually pretty damn fun when it works.

There's a real thrill in cracking the code – finding that winning ad, seeing sales roll in at a profitable rate, scaling up and saying “Wow, this is working!” Even the process of experimentation can be enjoyable if you cultivate curiosity (treating wins and losses as discoveries rather than personal validations). So celebrate the victories – big and small. First sale from a cold ad? Awesome, someone bought who never heard of you 10 minutes prior! 100th sale?

Equally awesome – you’ve built something that hundreds want. Hit a ROAS goal? Reward yourself and maybe the team (coffee’s on you today). These moments keep morale up and momentum going. And if things are rough, remember every great marketer or entrepreneur has been there. You’re playing a long game. Keep humor in your toolkit (we find laughing at our own mistakes to be way more productive than crying).

As we wrap up, imagine us raising a glass (or a mug of tea, we are Irish after all) in your honor. You’ve taken the time to invest in your knowledge – that already sets you apart. Now, go implement. Re-read chapters as needed, use the checklists, adapt the templates, cite the sources when convincing others (or yourself). This book isn’t meant to gather dust – make it your working playbook. It will serve you for years, even as platforms change, because it’s based on principles and real talk that endure.

We’ll leave you with a final straightforward mantra that encapsulates our philosophy:

“Know your funnel, know your numbers, no fluff.”

Do that, and you’ll do more than just fine.

Here’s to your advertising success – may your funnels be ever flowing, your metrics ever improving, and your bulls**t detector ever sharp. Go for it and get after it!



Henry Chris



CHAPTER 14: **ONE LAST THING... BE DANGEROUS!**

"BE DANGEROUS ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND THE NUMBERS, CALM ENOUGH NOT TO PANIC, AND DISCIPLINED ENOUGH TO WALK AWAY FROM ANYTHING THAT DOESN'T EARN ITS KEEP."

By the time you've reached this page, you know more than most people who spend money on ads for a living. You know the maths. You know the traps. You know the platforms don't care. You know that guessing feels productive until the bank balance disagrees. So here's the final message from us, after three decades of watching businesses win, stall, and quietly bleed out.

Be dangerous. Not loud. Not reckless. Not flashy.

Dangerous because you understand what's actually happening.

DANGEROUS because you don't confuse activity with progress.

DANGEROUS because you don't hide behind vanity numbers.

DANGEROUS because you ask uncomfortable questions early, not when it's too late.

Most advertisers fail for boring reasons. They rush. They hope. They copy. They panic. They spend without knowing why. Dangerous operators don't do that. They slow down when everyone else speeds up. They read the numbers without flinching. They kill what isn't working without emotion. They scale what is working without ego. Being dangerous in marketing means you stop outsourcing your brain. You don't abdicate responsibility to platforms, agencies, dashboards, or gurus. You use them as tools. Nothing more. Meta is a tool. Google is a tool. Agencies are tools. We are tools. You are the decision-maker. And once you understand the fundamentals, nobody can sell you nonsense again. From Henry's side: the most dangerous owners I've worked with weren't marketers.

They were curious. They wanted to understand just enough to see through B.S. They didn't need to run ads themselves. They just needed to know when something smelled off. That alone saved them hundreds of thousands. From Chris's side: the accounts that scale cleanly always have one thing in common. Someone at the top actually knows what success looks like. Not "more traffic".

Not "better awareness". Real numbers. Real limits. Real expectations. This book wasn't written to turn you into an ad tech nerd. It was written so you stop being easy prey. So here's your call to action. Don't be passive. Don't be impressed easily. Don't confuse noise with progress. Build slowly. Measure honestly. Fix fundamentals before scaling. Write things down. Review them. Repeat. If something works, press it. If something doesn't, cut it. If someone can't explain what they're doing in plain English, walk away. That's how grown businesses are built. Not with hype. Not with hope. With clarity and discipline. Be dangerous enough to know where every pound goes. Be dangerous enough to say no. Be dangerous enough to wait. Be dangerous enough to scale only when the numbers earn it. Do that, and advertising stops being scary. It becomes predictable. Then boring. Then very profitable.

CHAPTER 15: GLOSSARY OF SILLY AND ANNOYING JARGON TERMS

"IF SOMEONE CAN'T EXPLAIN YOUR ADS WITHOUT ACRONYMS, THEY PROBABLY CAN'T RUN THEM EITHER."

CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN

Below are the terms you'll see throughout the book, explained like a normal human would explain them, and you may find it hard to find these people when it comes to marketing agencies.

Ad Set

A group inside an ad campaign where you decide who sees the ads, where they see them, and how much you spend.

Attribution

How a platform decides which ad gets the credit for a sale. This is often messier than reports make it look.

Audience

The people you show ads to. Cold audiences don't know you. Warm ones have interacted. Hot ones are close to buying.

Average Order Value (AOV)

The average amount someone spends each time they buy from you.

Break-Even CPA

The most you can spend to get a sale without losing money on that first purchase.

Break-Even ROAS

The minimum return you need from ads to avoid losing money.

Campaign

The top level in ad platforms. Think of it as the container that holds ad sets and ads.

Click-Through Rate (CTR)

The percentage of people who see your ad and click it. A quick way to judge whether an ad is interesting or ignored.

Cold Traffic

People who have never heard of you before. Expect lower conversion and more work to earn trust.

Conversion

The action you actually want. Usually a sale, but sometimes a lead, sign-up, or booking.

Conversion Rate

The percentage of visitors who complete the action you want.

Cost Per Acquisition (CPA)

How much it costs you in ads to get one customer or conversion.

Cost Per Click (CPC)

How much you pay each time someone clicks your ad.

Cost Per Thousand Impressions (CPM)

The cost to show your ad 1,000 times. High CPM usually means high competition.

Creative

The actual ad itself. Image, video, copy, headline. This matters more than most people want to admit.

Creative Fatigue

When an ad stops working because people have seen it too many times.

Dynamic Product Ads

Ads that automatically show people the exact products they viewed on your site.

Engagement

Likes, comments, shares, saves. Useful for awareness, useless on its own for paying the bills.

Frequency

How many times the average person has seen your ad. High frequency often means fatigue.

Hot Traffic

People who are ready or very close to buying. Cart viewers, repeat visitors, email subscribers.

Learning Phase

The period when platforms are still figuring out who responds to your ads. Performance can wobble here.

Lifetime Value (LTV)

The total amount a customer spends with you over time, not just on the first order.

Marketing Efficiency Ratio (MER)

Total revenue divided by total marketing spend. A reality check number that's hard to fake.

Middle of Funnel (MOF)

People who know you exist and are weighing up whether you're worth buying from.

Pixel

A small bit of code that tracks what people do on your site after clicking an ad.

Prospecting

Showing ads to new people who haven't interacted with your brand before.

Reach

How many unique people saw your ad.

Retargeting

Showing ads to people who've already interacted with your site, ads, or content.

Return on Ad Spend (ROAS)

Revenue divided by ad spend. A fast way to judge efficiency, but not the whole story.

Top of Funnel (TOF)

Ads aimed at awareness and attention. These people don't know you yet.

UTMs

Tracking tags added to links so you can see where traffic and sales came from.

Vanity Metrics

Numbers that look impressive but don't tell you if money was made.

Warm Traffic

People who've engaged but haven't bought yet. They're interested, not convinced.

If someone managing your ads can't explain these terms clearly, that's your warning sign. If they can explain them but won't, that's an even bigger one.

Keep this chapter bookmarked. It's here so you never have to nod along pretending you understand what someone just said, when what they really mean is "we spent money and hope it worked"...

NOTES:

“RUNNING ADS WITHOUT MEASURING THE NUMBERS IS LIKE FLYING A PLANE WITH THE DASHBOARD RIPPED OUT. YOU’RE STILL BURNING FUEL, YOU’RE STILL MOVING FAST... YOU JUST WON’T KNOW YOU’RE CRASHING UNTIL YOU HIT THE GROUND.”



WRITTEN BY: HENRY MCCRORY & CHRIS MCCLENAGHAN

If your ads “aren’t working”, you’ve got two options. Option one is what most ecom owners do. Keep spending. Keep hoping. Keep refreshing Ads Manager like it’s a fruit machine. Then blame the platform. Or the economy. Or “people aren’t buying right now”.

Option two is what grown-ups do.
Learn the numbers that tell the truth.

Because ads are not a mystical art. They’re a paid test.
You are buying attention. Then you are buying clicks. Then you are buying chances.

And if you can’t explain, in plain English, what each stage is meant to do, you’ll get mugged. Not once. Repeatedly. Monthly. *On direct debit.*

Henry and I have watched this movie for years.
A brand owner calls. Say they “spent loads”. We ask one question... What’s your break-even cost per purchase?
Silence. That silence costs people thousands.

This book exists so you never have that silence again.
You don’t need to be a nerd. You need to be *dangerous.*

Dangerous means you can look at your numbers and know what’s broken. Dangerous means you can spot when someone’s chatting rubbish. Dangerous means you can say, “No, that’s not the issue. The issue is this.”

If you own an ecom brand, this is your job now.
Not making the posts. Not picking the font. Knowing the numbers that decide whether you grow or you bleed.

This book is made just for you.



Henry McCrory



Chris McClenaghan