

YOUR DIGITAL MARKETING IS LEAKING LEADS



A plain-language field guide for Ottawa Valley business owners who are serious about growing online.

If you have ever run a Google or Meta ad and felt like you were throwing money into a hole, you are not alone. Most small businesses in the Ottawa Valley are making the same handful of mistakes, not because they are not smart, but because nobody ever explained how this stuff actually works.

This guide will not give you every answer. What it will do is show you where the problems usually live, help you recognize the signs in your own marketing, and give you a checklist to audit where you stand today. The information here is not secret. But the execution is where most businesses fall short.

1 THE MISTAKES MOST LOCAL BUSINESSES ARE MAKING

These are not rare edge cases. They come up every week across professional services businesses in Renfrew County, Lanark, Carleton Place, and the broader Ottawa Valley.

! THE SHORT BURST CAMPAIGN

Running a campaign for two or three weeks, seeing slow results, and pulling it. Paid advertising has a learning period. Cutting it early is like pulling a plant before the roots form.

+ TURNING OFF CAMPAIGNS MID-LEARNING

Both Google and Meta use machine learning to optimize who sees your ads. Every time you pause or restart, the algorithm resets. You pay full price for the learning phase every single time.

? NO CLEAR CALL TO ACTION

Ads that say "check us out" or "learn more" generate curiosity, not leads. A business that has not defined exactly what action they want someone to take will not get any specific action back.

X SENDING AD TRAFFIC TO THE HOMEPAGE

Your homepage is for browsers. Ad clicks need to land on a focused page built for one purpose: converting that specific visitor. A homepage with ten options gives people ten reasons to leave.

= BRAND INCONSISTENCY ACROSS PLATFORMS

Different logos, different tones, different messages on Google versus Meta versus your website. Inconsistency costs credibility, and credibility is the currency of every professional service.

O TARGETING TOO BROADLY OR TOO NARROWLY

Either casting a net across all of Ontario and burning budget on people who will never hire a local provider, or targeting so tightly that the algorithm has no room to find the right audience.

BEFORE YOU SPEND ANOTHER DOLLAR ON ADS, READ THIS

Platform settings and budgets are not the reason most local advertising underperforms. The deeper issue is almost always the message itself, and specifically, who the message is written for.

Most small business marketing is written about the business. Your history, your certifications, your range of services. That information is not useless, but it is answering a question your customer has not asked yet. The question they are actually asking is: can you solve my problem, and can I trust you to do it?

When your advertising leads with what you do rather than what your customer is trying to accomplish, you are making them do the translation work. Most people will not bother. They will move on to the next result.

MESSAGING DIAGNOSTIC

IS YOUR ADVERTISING BUILT AROUND YOU OR YOUR CUSTOMER?

Pull up your website or last ad. Work through these honestly.

> **Does your headline describe a problem your customer has, or does it describe your business?**

"Trusted contractor since 1998" is about you. "Finally, a contractor who finishes on budget" is about them.

> **Does your messaging acknowledge what is actually at stake for your customer?**

Not just the practical outcome — the frustration they are trying to avoid, or the feeling they are hoping for.

> **Is there one clear next step, and is it easy to take?**

If someone reads your ad and thinks "okay, but what do I do now," your call to action is not clear enough.

> **Could a competitor swap their name onto your messaging and it would still make sense?**

If yes, your positioning is generic. Businesses that convert have messaging that could only come from them.

THE OBJECTIONS WE HEAR MOST OFTEN (AND THE HONEST ANSWERS)

"I tried Google Ads. They just don't work for my business."

Google Ads work when the setup is right. The most common failure points are poor keyword targeting, ads pointing to the wrong page, and campaigns pulled before the data has time to optimize. Google needs roughly 30 to 50 conversions per month to exit the learning phase. Most small businesses cancel before they get there. It is not that Google does not work. It is that it was not set up to work.

"I ran Meta ads and got zero leads."

Meta is a discovery platform, not a search platform. People on Facebook or Instagram are not actively looking for your service the way they are on Google. That means the ad creative, the offer, and the audience targeting need to do more work. Boosting a post is not an ad campaign. Most "Meta did not work" stories are boosted posts, not campaigns.

"I already have a website, so I'm covered for digital."

A website that nobody finds is a brochure sitting in a drawer. Without active traffic through search ads, social, or organic SEO, most small business websites receive fewer than 100 visits per month. That volume will not move your pipeline. Traffic is the variable most business owners underestimate.

"My business runs on referrals. I don't need advertising."

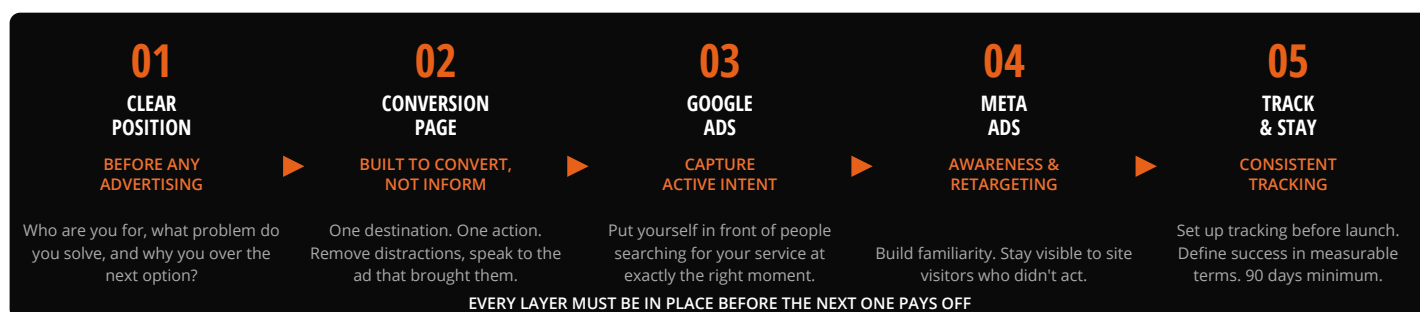
Referral businesses are the most vulnerable to market shifts. If your top referral source retires, moves, or just gets busy, your pipeline dries up fast. Digital marketing is not a replacement for referrals. It is the hedge that makes sure you are not entirely dependent on them. The businesses that scale are the ones that have both.

"I'd rather pay an agency a commission per lead than a monthly fee."

This feels logical because it seems to align incentives. In practice it creates the opposite problem. An agency paid per lead has every incentive to send you volume, not quality. Worse, when the agency controls the source, you have no visibility into where leads are really coming from or how your brand is being represented. A retainer keeps the agency accountable to your brand, not a volume target.

WHAT A PROPERLY BUILT DIGITAL PRESENCE ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

The fundamentals are not complicated. But every layer needs to be in place, in the right order, before the next one pays off.



01 CLEAR POSITION — BEFORE ANY ADVERTISING

Before you spend a dollar on ads, you need to answer: who are you for, what specific problem do you solve, and why you over the next option? "We serve everyone" or "great service and competitive prices" is not a position. It is a placeholder.

02 CONVERSION PAGE — BUILT TO CONVERT, NOT INFORM

Every ad campaign needs a destination page with one job: get the visitor to take a specific action. Book a call. Fill out a form. Request a quote. Remove distractions, speak to the ad that brought them there, make the next step obvious. A slow or poorly structured website undermines every ad dollar you spend before the visitor even reads a word.

03 GOOGLE ADS — CAPTURE ACTIVE INTENT

Google Search captures intent. When someone in Arnprior types "kitchen renovation contractor near me," they are already a warm lead. The right campaign puts you in front of that person at exactly that moment.

04 META ADS — AWARENESS AND RETARGETING

Meta is where you build familiarity with people who do not know they need you yet, and where you stay visible to people who visited your site but did not act. Retargeting a warm audience on Meta is one of the most cost-efficient strategies available.

05 TRACK AND STAY — CONSISTENT TRACKING

Set up conversion tracking before the campaign launches, not after. Define success in measurable terms: booked calls, form completions, phone clicks. Give the campaign enough runway. Ninety days minimum.

YOUR SELF-AUDIT CHECKLIST

Work through this honestly. It is not a test. It is a diagnostic. Every "no" is a gap worth understanding before you spend another dollar on advertising.

YOUR SCORE



0-5 YES: Significant gaps. Advertising spend is at risk.

6-11 YES: Foundation is forming. Prioritize the gaps.

12-16 YES: Strong foundation. Ready to scale.

- BRAND AND MESSAGING

- ☐ Can you describe your ideal client in one sentence? Not "local businesses" or "homeowners." A specific person with a specific problem.
- ☐ Does your homepage lead with your customer's problem, not your credentials? Read your own headline — would it mean anything to someone who had never heard of you?
- ☐ Is your brand visually consistent across your website, Google profile, and social pages? Same logo, same colours, same tone.
- ☐ Is there one clear call to action on your homepage? One ask. Not five options.

- GOOGLE PRESENCE

- ☐ Do you have a fully completed Google Business Profile? Including current hours, photos, service areas, and at least ten reviews.
- ☐ If you are running Google Ads, are your ads pointing to a dedicated landing page? Rather than your homepage or contact page.

☐ Do you have conversion tracking active? Do you actually know which clicks turned into leads?

- META AND SOCIAL ADVERTISING

☐ Are you running actual campaigns with defined objectives? Or are you boosting posts and calling it advertising?

☐ Have your campaigns run for at least 60 to 90 days continuously? Before you evaluated whether they were working.

☐ Do your ads have a single, specific call to action? One ask per ad, not "visit us, follow us, and book a call."

- WEBSITE AND SEO HEALTH

☐ Have you run a Google Lighthouse audit on your website? Open Chrome, go to your homepage, right-click and select Inspect, then open the Lighthouse tab. A score below 70 on Performance or SEO means your site is likely costing you leads.

☐ Have you searched for your own business from an incognito window? Use the terms your customers would actually type. If you are not appearing on page one for your core service and location, neither are you appearing for them.

☐ Have you checked how you rank against your top local competitors? Search your main service plus your town or county. Note who appears above you and what their listings look like. That gap is your benchmark.

- LEAD GENERATION FUNDAMENTALS

☐ Is your primary lead source diversified beyond referrals? If your top referrer stopped tomorrow, do you have another channel producing leads?

☐ Do you follow up with leads within 24 hours? Speed of response is the most underrated conversion variable in local service businesses.

☐ Do you know your cost per lead? Not roughly. Actually. If you cannot answer this, the campaign is running blind.

READY TO STOP LEAKING LEADS? BOOK YOUR DISCOVERY CALL.



A free 30-minute call with MacLeod Growth Partners. We'll identify exactly where your digital marketing is losing leads and tell you what to fix first. No pitch. No pressure. Just clarity.

BOOK YOUR FREE DISCOVERY CALL »

calendar.app.google/mfutejGmutYTRhHv9

EMAIL

joe@macleodgrowth.com

WEBSITE

macleodgrowth.ca

BASED IN

Ottawa Valley, Ontario