

Search Beyond Search Engines

Pinterest, YouTube, and the Alternative
Discovery Channels Your Customers
Already Use



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
The Search Map Just Changed	4
Chapter 1: The Alternative Search Landscape	12
Chapter 2: YouTube SEO Strategy	19
Chapter 3: Pinterest Marketing for Business	23
Chapter 4: Social Platform Search Optimization	27
Chapter 5: Community and Forum Marketing	32
Your 90-Day Multi-Channel Discovery Plan	38
Own Your Audience	42

The Search Map Just Changed

For almost 30 years, the internet has had one front door: Google. It launched in 1998, and once the dot-com dust settled, it became the way the whole world searched the web, holding over 90% market share consistently since 2009.

For most of its history, Google was a blank text box, a blinking cursor, and ten blue links. That simple page became the map everyone navigated the internet with, until AI rewrote that too.

Businesses soon learned the rules of that map and started trying to game it, which is how search engine optimization, or SEO, was born.

This became a game everyone wanted to win. People played it so hard for so long that search results turned messy and competitive. Ironically, you can look up Google to find people that keep declaring SEO dead, yet it keeps working, because the core instinct is the same: getting discovered by the right people.

The Search Map Just Changed

What continues to change is both the platform and the path. People no longer move in a straight line from awareness to purchase. Instead, they stream, scroll, search, and shop simultaneously, often across multiple platforms in a single decision. The channel someone discovers you on is rarely the one they buy from.

People have turned to YouTube to watch a product before buying it, Pinterest to picture a room before decorating it, TikTok and Instagram to see real people use some product, and Reddit to hear an honest opinion from a stranger with nothing to sell.

These places are more visual, more interactive, and frankly more fun than a page of links, so obviously, attention followed.

According to a McKinsey report, 50% of consumers today already use tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, or Google's AI Overview to research and decide before they ever click a traditional search result. McKinsey predicts this will result in a \$750 billion in consumer spend by 2028.

The five channels ahead will remain the focus of this book since AI search pulls its answers from these same places anyway. Reddit dominates AI Overview citations, YouTube transcripts feed AI summaries, and a well-optimized pin or LinkedIn post can surface in an AI answer the same way it surfaces in a Google result. Win these channels, and the AI front door opens on its own.

When the audience moved, marketers had to move with it, because you cannot win customers on Google once your customers have stopped searching there.

Consider this book a practical guide to those channels. Over the next five chapters, you will learn:

- Where your customers actually search now, and how to tell which platforms are worth your limited time.
- How to get found on YouTube, the world's second-largest search engine, without an expensive camera or a big following.
- How to make Pinterest work for months, turning one pin into traffic that keeps arriving long after you post it.
- How native search works inside Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Facebook, where keywords have replaced hashtags.
- How to build real authority in communities like Reddit and Quora, the same places [AI tools](#) now pull their answers from.
- How to run all of it as one system, so two channels feel manageable instead of six feeling impossible.

CHAPTER 1

The Alternative Search Landscape

The Alternative Search Landscape

Google is just one part of the search landscape now, but there's far more to it.

Today people are also typing full questions, describing a problem in detail, dropping in a photo of something they want to find, and saying their search out loud to a phone. Each of those habits lives on a different platform, and most small businesses lose simply by never noticing the five other places their customers now search.

A search engine is simply a place people go to find an answer on purpose. Under that definition, your customers are searching in at least five different places right now. Here is each one, and why it matters to you.

YouTube Is the Second-Biggest Search Engine on Earth

YouTube reaches 2.58 billion monthly users, and those users are not just watching; they are searching. Someone deciding between two products will type the product name into YouTube to watch it in action first.

A short clip of your reusable notebook surviving a spilled coffee answers a buying question that no product page ever could, and it shows up for the exact search a ready customer makes.

Pinterest Is a Visual Search Engine With a Credit Card in Hand

Pinterest processes more than 80 billion searches a month, most of them visual. People come here before they have decided what to buy, searching things like "small home office setup" with an open mind and an intent to act.

To top that off, 85% of weekly U.S. users have made a purchase based on a pin they saw from a brand, so Pinterest is a platform worth watching out for.

TikTok Has Become a Search Bar for an Entire Generation

Today, 49% of U.S. consumers have used TikTok to search for something, up from 41% in 2024, and among Gen Z that climbs to roughly 65%.

But while people search on TikTok, the share of Gen Z who prefer TikTok to Google for search actually slipped from 8% to 4% across the same timeframe. So, a feed is becoming the first stop, but users are venturing outside TikTok as well.

Reddit Is Where People Go for an Honest Answer

Shoppers learned to distrust the polished top result and started adding "reddit" to their searches to find a real human take.

Google noticed and rewarded Reddit with loads of position #1s, and one forum-friendly update lifted Reddit's readership from 132 million to 346 million monthly visitors between August 2023 and April 2024.

The AI tools magnified that value, because Reddit is now the most-cited source across Google's AI Overviews and Perplexity, so one good answer there

can end up feeding the machine that answers everyone else.

Podcasts Turn Ears Into a Discovery Channel

A full 70% of Americans have listened to one, and the place they listen most is itself a surprise, since YouTube now leads with 32% of weekly US listeners, ahead of Spotify and Apple.

Your customer's attention is split across all five of these surfaces at once. The question was never whether they matter. The question is which two of

The Search Map Just Changed

Google

YouTube

Pinterest

TikTok

Instagram

Reddit

Podcasts

BEFORE

NOW

Chapter 1: The Alternative Search Landscape

them your specific customer leans on, and answering that is the first real decision in this book.

How to Find Which Two Platforms to Pick

You don't need all five platforms. You need just one or two other than Google where your specific buyer actually searches.

Run the same search across each platform's own search bar. Type your category into YouTube, Pinterest, and TikTok, and watch what autocomplete suggests.

Autocomplete is the platform telling you, in its own words, what people are typing around those search terms. If your category produces rich, specific suggestions on Pinterest and nothing useful on TikTok, you know you need to spend more time on Pinterest.

Then check where your competitors and near-competitors already have traction. A quick search for your product category on each platform shows you whether anyone is winning there.

An empty result may give you a head start on that platform, but an even stronger opportunity is when your competitor shows up in the search results with low-quality content.

Before The Next Chapter

Write down two platforms: the one with the clearest match to your product and audience, and a backup. Note the specific autocomplete phrases you found for each, since you will need them again once you start producing content.

That short list is the only homework this chapter requires, and every chapter after this one assumes you have done it. Then, jump to the appropriate chapters for the channels you picked.

CHAPTER 2

YouTube SEO Strategy

YouTube SEO Strategy

YouTube is the second largest search engine, right after Google, and the biggest video search engine on the planet.

But cracking YouTube is a lot harder than other platforms. And it's common for brands and creators to quit YouTube simply due to the overwhelm. They assume they need a good camera, soft lighting, and editing skills, so they never press record. And while those add to your overall viewing experience, it's not always necessary.

A simple selfie camera and basic room lighting are enough to get your first set of videos out. All it takes is for the person on camera to be a little enthusiastic about the products they're talking about so the viewer is engaged.

How YouTube Actually Ranks a Video

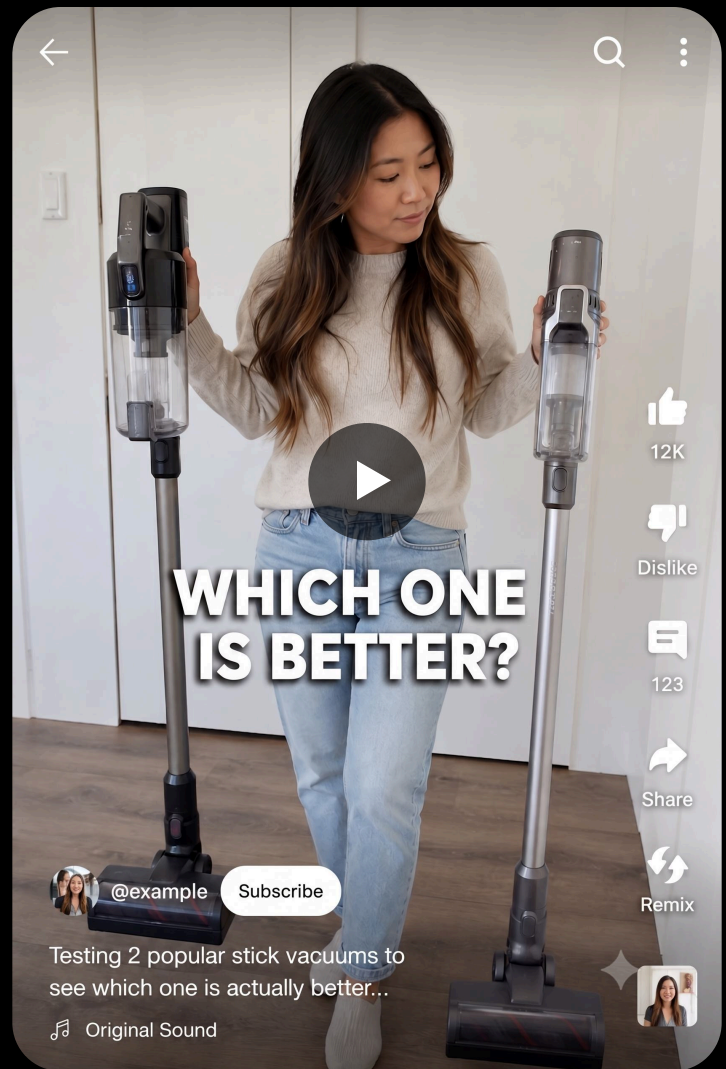
YouTube's CEO, Neal Mohan wrote in 2018 that recommendations drive a significant amount, up to 70%, of the overall viewership on YouTube, even more than channel subscriptions or search. According to that same post, the recommendation system is built primarily on watch time, with clicks, survey responses, shares, likes, and dislikes feeding into it as secondary signals.

A 2025 study, which analyzed 1.6 million videos and focused on 300 that ranked in the top three for competitive keywords across 10 industries, gives a concrete picture of what top-ranking videos actually look like.

What makes this data useful is the gap it reveals, not between good and bad videos, but between the top performers and everything else. Each signal below shows exactly where that gap opens.

- **Engagement:** Top videos averaged a 2.65% engagement rate, against a platform average of 0.09%. Channels hosting those top videos averaged 4.46%. The gap is roughly 30 times the platform norm.
- **Video length:** Videos between 8 and 9 minutes appeared most frequently in top positions, with a median length of 536 seconds. Longer does not automatically mean better; what matters is that the video fills the time with value rather than padding.
- **Transcripts and captions:** 94% of top-ranking videos included full transcripts and closed captions. YouTube can auto-generate captions, but adding a corrected transcript gives the platform a cleaner text signal about what the video actually covers.
- **Custom thumbnails:** 89% of top-ranking videos used custom thumbnails rather than auto-generated stills.
- **Exact-match keywords in titles:** Only 6% of top-ranking videos had titles with exact keyword matches. 75% used related keywords that addressed search intent without copying the query word-for-word. YouTube reads content relevance now the same way Google does, meaning semantic alignment with the query matters more than repeating the exact phrase.

Watching Before Buying



- **Channel age and authority:** Top-ranking videos came from channels averaging 111 months old, roughly nine years, with a median subscriber count of 520,000. A new channel cannot shortcut this, but the engagement data shows that engagement rate matters far more than raw subscriber count for individual video performance.

The metrics are designed to go from hardest to manufacture to the easiest. And that's why the algorithm automatically rewards good quality content.

Finding What to Make a Video About

You're looking for a topic that sits at the intersection of three things: real search volume, a format where video beats text, and a gap the current top videos have not closed. Here's the process, step by step:

Step 1: Pull Raw Topic Ideas From Autocomplete

Type your category into the YouTube search bar itself

Chapter 2: YouTube SEO Strategy

and write down every autocomplete suggestion. This is free, it takes five minutes, and it is the platform telling you, in its own words, what real people are typing right now.

Step 2: Confirm Volume With a Keyword Tool

Autocomplete shows you that a phrase exists. It does not show you how often people search it. Confirm volume before you film, using whichever tier fits your budget:

- **Free:** [Google Trends](#) (compare relative interest over time and by region), [TubeBuddy's free browser extension](#) (shows basic search volume and competition scores directly inside YouTube), [VidIQ's free tier](#) (similar overlay, plus related tags).
- **Paid:** [Ahrefs' Keywords Explorer](#) (set the search engine dropdown to YouTube to get volume and difficulty specifically for video search), [Semrush's Keyword Magic Tool](#), or TubeBuddy/VidIQ's paid tiers for deeper competitor breakdowns.

Step 3: Watch the Top Three Ranking Videos for That Keyword

Open the top three results and actually watch them, or at least skim the transcript. Note what they cover, what they leave out, and how long they take to get to the point.

Step 4: Mine the Comments for the Question Nobody Answered

Scroll the comments on those top three videos

specifically looking for a question that keeps coming up but never gets addressed in the video itself. That unanswered, repeated question is frequently a better topic than anything autocomplete handed you in Step 1, because it's documented, unmet demand rather than a guess.

Step 5: Run the "Watch Versus Read" Filter Before Committing

Ask whether someone would genuinely rather watch this than read it. Assemblies, comparisons, before-and-afters, anything involving hands or movement passes this filter easily. A pricing breakdown or a glossary of terms usually fails it, and forcing it into video format wastes the one advantage video has over a blog post.

If your topic survives all the steps here, you can assume you have a good topic at hand.

Making the Video Earn Its Click

Once you have the topic, start following this simple process.

Put the keyword in the title, since that gives you a slight edge over non-optimized videos. The algorithm is smarter now, however, and it can read through video transcripts to make sense of the video content without relying too much on the title alone.

Also write a good description that includes the topic and explanation of what you cover, so YouTube understands the video well without having to go

What Top-Ranking YouTube Videos Have in Common

2.65%

Engagement rate on top videos

vs.

0.09%

Platform average

8-9 mins

Most common length among top videos

94%

Included full transcripts and closed captions

89%

Used custom thumbnails

75%

Used related keywords in titles, not exact matches

vs.

6%

Used exact-match

520K

Median subscriber count, from channels averaging 9 years old

Chapter 2: YouTube SEO Strategy

through the transcript.

Tags barely matter anymore, so do not spend time there. Spend that time on the thumbnail instead.

YouTube has said half of all channels land between 2% and 10% click-through rate. Treat 2% as your floor. A thumbnail's only job is to make a scrolling thumb stop, with one face, one contrast, or one bold word doing the work in under a second. But remember, a thumbnail that oversells what the video delivers will spike clicks for a day and then get buried, because a flood of clicks followed by an instant exit tells YouTube you broke a promise.

The platform is measuring the click and the next 10 seconds together, the same way a search engine penalizes a page that bounces visitors immediately. Earn the click with an honest preview of the payoff, and the algorithm will continue to reward you.

The platform rewards a genuine, slightly enthusiastic explanation over a polished but flat one, because enthusiasm shows up in watch time.

The Metrics to Check Before You Move On

Once a video is live, there are three numbers in the YouTube studio that you need to keep an eye out for:

1. Audience retention shows the exact second people leave, which tells you what to cut next time.
2. Click-through rate tells you whether the title and thumbnail are pulling their weight.
3. Share rate tells you whether the video was good enough that someone spent their own social capital passing it along, and a high share rate often earns a second wave of reach within a week.

Pull up the retention graph and look for the exact second where the line drops hardest. That single drop usually points to something concrete: a slow introduction, a tangent, a clumsy cut, and fixing that one moment in your next video is worth more than any amount of guessing about keywords.

Pick one repeatable format, a weekly walkthrough or a regular comparison series, and hold the schedule. That rhythm teaches both the algorithm and your audience what to expect from you.

A Google-commissioned BCG study found video gets 43% of shoppers interested in a product and makes 50% aware of a brand in the first place. It also closes the gap at the end. 45% said video helped them choose which product or brand to buy, and 34% said it pushed them to buy a specific item.

Just make sure the page a video sends people to loads fast, because a video can do everything right and still lose the sale in the final 10 feet if the landing page is slow.

With your topic research process and your packaging checklist ready, let's move to the next channel on the list, the one built entirely around intent rather than attention: Pinterest.

CHAPTER 3

Pinterest Marketing for Business

Pinterest Marketing for Business

Pinterest isn't a platform for decor, weddings, and recipes, anymore. Adobe's 2025 survey found 39% of consumers already use Pinterest as a search engine, and 36% start their searches there instead of Google, a figure that climbs to 47% and 39% among Gen Z.

It also reaches 619 million monthly users, and the top reason people use it is for actively discovering new products and brands. The businesses still treating Pinterest as a decor-and-recipes niche are handing a channel to competitors, one that keeps working for months after a couple hours of effort.

What Is Pinterest?

Pinterest is a visual search engine. It hit 619 million monthly users at the end of 2025 and the audience skews strongly toward purchase-ready intent (details in the next section).

Compared to other social networks, with Pinterest, you publish to an index. Content gets filed, discovered through search, and resurfaces repeatedly over months and years just like it does with Google. But apart from the content lifespan and user base, Pinterest also has a high buying intent.

Who's On Pinterest?

Women make up more than 70% of Pinterest users worldwide, which is why home, beauty, food, fashion, and parenting brands consistently find strong audiences there. But what the stereotype misses is

the age shift happening underneath those numbers.

Gen Z comprises 42% of global Pinterest users, and they search and save more than any other generation on the platform. The platform's fastest-growing audience is younger than the cliché suggests, which is quite useful to think of, if your product targets anyone under 35.

For brands outside the obvious lifestyle categories, the question to ask is not whether your product fits the Pinterest stereotype but whether there is a visual, aspirational angle to what you sell.

For example, productivity tools have found traction through workspace setup content. B2B software brands reach their audience through planning templates and workflow visuals. The category matters less than whether the use case can be shown.

How Pinterest Decides What to Rank

There's a lot that goes on behind the scenes, but from a bird's-eye-view perspective, Pinterest's algorithm ranks pins based on four signals, according to how the platform describes its own system.

- 1. Domain quality:** Pinterest tracks how often users click through from your pins to your website and what they do when they get there. A site that earns repeat clicks and engagement from Pinterest visitors is treated as more credible, and that credibility flows back to your pins' rankings.

Chapter 3: Pinterest Marketing for Business

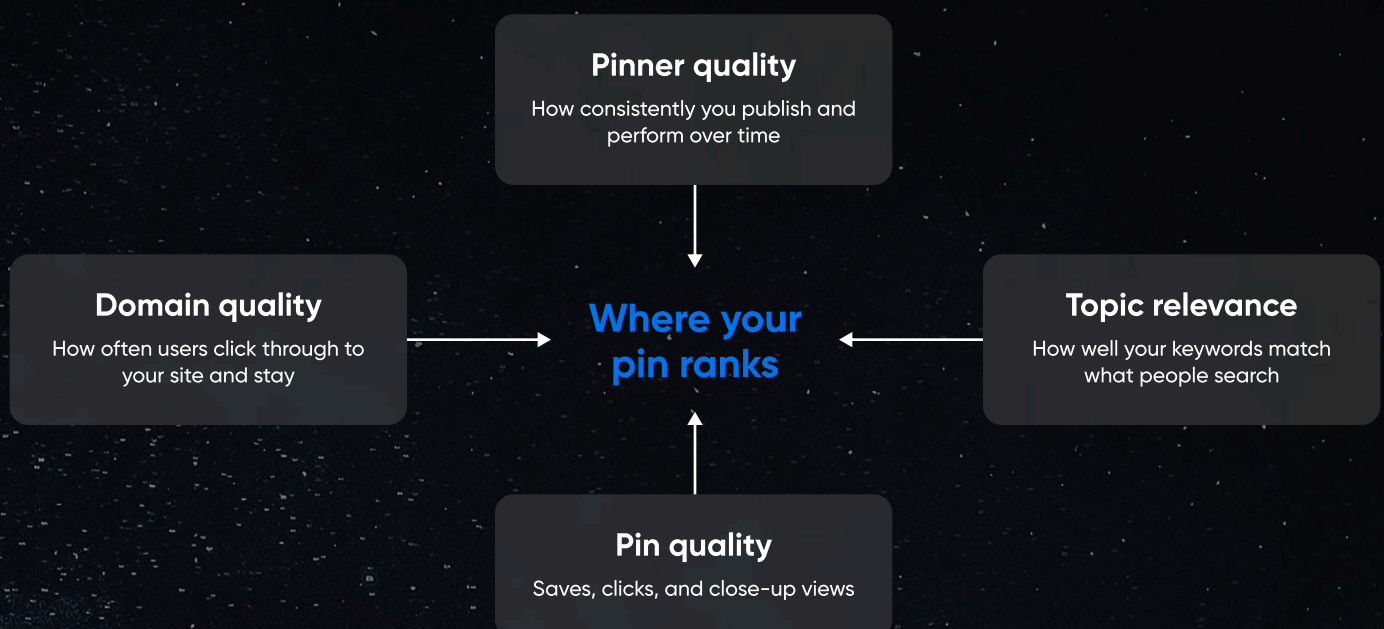
2. Pin quality: Saves, clicks, and close-up views signal to Pinterest that a pin is worth showing to more people. Saves carry particular weight because when someone saves a pin, they are often planning a purchase, a project, or a future decision. A saved pin stays in circulation in Pinterest's index long after the original post date.

3. Pinner quality: Pinterest monitors how consistently an account publishes fresh content and how well that content performs over time. Accounts that post regularly and earn consistent engagement are treated as more authoritative than accounts that post in bursts and go quiet.

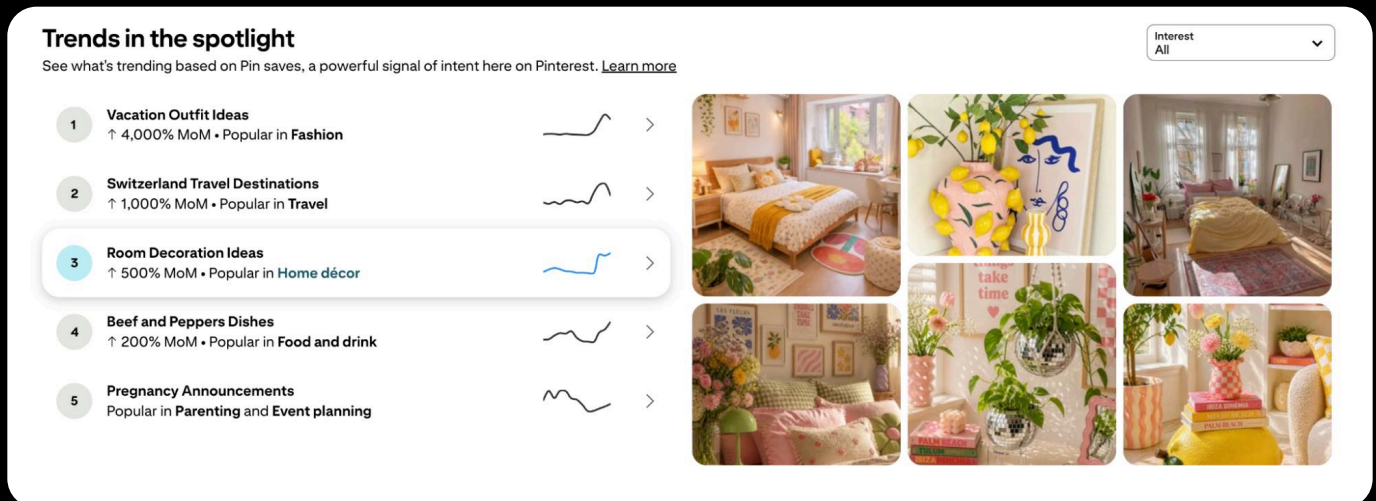
4. Topic relevance: Pinterest matches the keywords in your pin titles, descriptions, board names, and alt text against what users are searching for. Unlike older social platforms where keyword stuffing once worked, Pinterest's algorithm now reads for natural language. A description that reads as if a human wrote it, using the words a searcher would type, outperforms one that strings together keyword phrases.

Tailwind's 2025 research found that pins with alt text earned 25% more impressions, 123% more outbound clicks, and 56% more profile visits on average than pins without it.

How Pinterest Decides What to Rank



Researching Keywords With Pinterest Trends



Source: Pinterest Trends (trends.pinterest.com)

Pinterest's job is to match that half-formed intent to an idea, and your pin is competing to be that idea.

Researching Keywords on Pinterest

Pinterest's own search bar is a free keyword research tool, sitting in plain sight.

Then you have [Pinterest Trends](#), the platform's own forecasting tool, which adds a second layer to your data analytics.

It shows you which searches are rising months ahead of the season, and Pinterest has a track record: of the trends in its yearly Pinterest Predicts report, 88% have come true over the past six years, and trends on the platform last almost twice as long as trends that start elsewhere.

Pinterest users are, by habit, planning, saving ideas for a wedding eight months out or a kitchen remodel next spring. A seasonal pin posted in July for a December trend will usually outperform the same pin posted in November, after the planners have already moved on.

Once you have the search phrases, build the pin to match it directly.

Building a Pin for Your Brand

Pinterest is a visual search engine, which means the image is also the ad.

A pin that looks like a product photo from an e-commerce catalog will underperform against a pin that shows the product in a context that matches what the searcher was imagining.

Chapter 3: Pinterest Marketing for Business

- **Image specs:** Vertical images at a 2:3 ratio, ideally 1000 by 1500 pixels, are the standard. More than 85% of Pinterest usage happens on mobile, so a vertical image fills the screen rather than shrinking into a thumbnail.
- **Text overlay:** Adding a few words directly onto the image that name the benefit or the outcome, not just the product, consistently outperforms bare product shots. A pin for a desk organizer that overlays the words "5 steps to a clear desk by Friday" is targeting search intent, not just showing a product.
- **Alt text:** Fill this field every time. As noted above, the data on this from 2025 is clear enough to make it non-negotiable.
- **Descriptions:** Write 100 to 200 words in natural language, use your primary keyword phrase early, and write for the searcher rather than the algorithm. Pinterest can detect over-optimization attempts.
- **Board placement:** The board where you first save a fresh pin shapes Pinterest's understanding of that content. Saving a pin to an unrelated board because it has more followers dilutes Pinterest's ability to categorize the content accurately and hurts distribution. Save each new pin to the most specifically relevant board first.
- **The landing page:** Send the click to a page that mirrors the exact promise on the pin. A pin about a specific desk organizer should land on that organizer's product page, not the store's homepage. A searcher clicked because of one specific promise, and if the landing page requires them to hunt for it, they will leave before finding it.

Using Rich Pins on Pinterest

Rich Pins automatically pull real-time data from your website, including article titles, product pricing, and availability.

To set up Rich Pins, add Open Graph or Schema markup to your website's <head> section, then validate through Pinterest's Rich Pins validator. Once validated, pins can be used to display real-time information like live price and stock status directly on the pin, which increases both click-through rate and purchase confidence.

A shopper who sees an in-stock product at a visible price in the pin itself is closer to buying than one who has to click through just to find out if the item is available.

Setting up rich pins involves adding Open Graph or Schema markup to your website, verifying your domain on Pinterest, and applying through the Verified Merchant Program. Pinterest's own documentation walks through the technical steps. The effort is a one-time investment that benefits every product pin you publish afterward.

Pinterest Board Strategy

Boards are Pinterest's filing system for your content, and they carry their own keyword signals that influence how individual pins rank.

You need to organize them the same way you'd organize content on your blog (in categories, collections, groups, etc.).

Chapter 3: Pinterest Marketing for Business

Start by naming each board the way a searcher would type a query. For instance, "Sustainable Home Office Ideas" is a searchable board name, but something like "Inspired Spaces" is quite vague. The first version tells Pinterest's index exactly what content lives there and matches real search queries.

Then, write a full board description. The description gives Pinterest additional keyword context and gives a human searcher a reason to follow the board. Keep it under 500 characters and use the same natural-language approach as pin descriptions.

And more importantly, to build context for the algorithm on what the board actually carries, pin consistently. Pinterest's 2025 algorithm updates made board context a direct ranking factor, meaning boards that receive regular fresh pins are treated as more authoritative than boards that go stagnant.

Five to ten boards organized around your core product categories, each receiving consistent fresh content, will outperform twenty boards that each have a few pins and no activity.

What Metrics to Check Before You Move On

Pinterest Analytics shows three numbers worth tracking: impressions, saves, and outbound clicks. Only one of them tells you about money, and it is outbound clicks, because that is someone actually leaving Pinterest for your site.

Remember not to get caught up in vanity metrics if you're building on Pinterest to sell something. A pin can rack up thousands of saves from people building

mood boards who never buy anything, while a pin with a sharper, more specific promise sends a steady trickle of buyers to your website.

And add the Pinterest tag to your site so outbound clicks tie directly to sales, turning the guesswork into a clear ranking of which pins actually earn money rather than just applause.

With a search-driven asset library compounding in the background, you are ready to look at the platforms where search hides inside the social feed itself, starting with the death of the hashtag.

Tools for Pinterest Keyword and Analytics Work

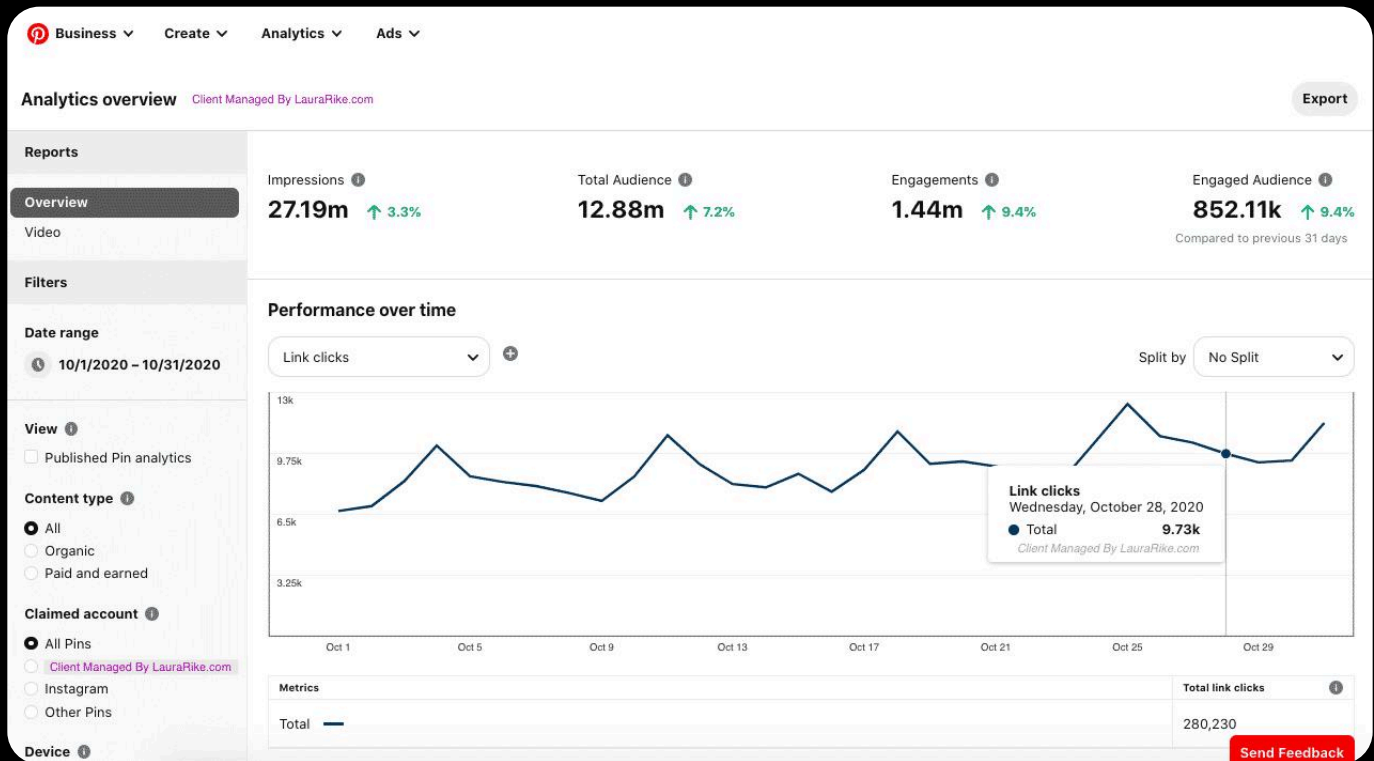
Research:

- Pinterest's own search bar and Trends tool; free.
- Pinterest Predicts annual report; free, published each November.
- Tailwind's keyword suggestions; free tier available, paid for deeper data.

Scheduling and fresh content at scale:

- Tailwind; the most widely used Pinterest scheduling tool, with native analytics integration.
- Buffer and Later; both support Pinterest scheduling at lower price points.

The Three Metrics That Matter on Pinterest



Source: Pinterest Analytics

Tracking performance:

- Pinterest Analytics; free, built-in.
- Pinterest Tag; free, requires installing a snippet on your website.
- Google Analytics with UTM parameters on your pin links; free, ties Pinterest traffic to on-site behavior and conversions.

Social Platform Search Optimization

Social Platform Search Optimization

Every social app seems to add a search bar eventually, and once people start trusting it, the app starts behaving like a search engine. That's what happened with Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

These days they are where someone looks up how to unclog a sink, decides whether a jacket is worth the money, or sizes up a vendor before answering their

email. The feed still gets the attention, but a growing share of real buying decisions now starts in that search box.

Are Hashtags Still Relevant?

Bolting 30 hashtags to a post was a common practice and that gave rise to many hashtag

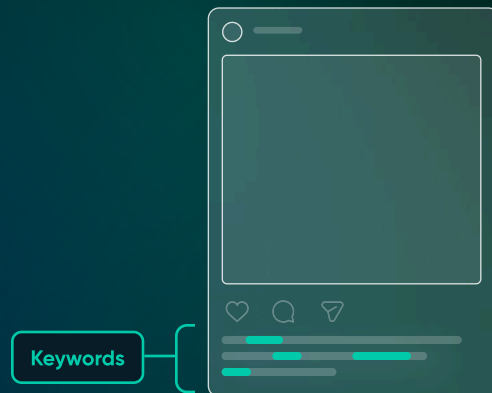
From Hashtag Lottery to Search Keywords

OLD WAY



30 hashtags =
A reach lottery

NEW WAY



A few keywords =
Targeted discovery

Chapter 4: Social Platform Search Optimization

generators, free and paid. But later Adam Mosseri, Instagram's head, stated that Instagram has capped hashtags at five, and removed the option to follow them entirely.

We'd not call hashtags completely obsolete, though. A few relevant hashtags still help platforms categorize your content and maybe help with brand awareness, especially when you're running a campaign with a hashtag.

Then Mosseri said in multiple public Q&As that hashtags do not improve reach. They mostly help the system file your post under the right topic and to use for branding where possible.

The shift is from using hashtags as a reach lottery, to using them like SEO keywords: fewer, more targeted, platform-specific.

Instead of a hashtag, you now have to write like a person describing what's in the image or video that you're posting. Native search reads the language inside your content to decide what to rank.

1. Instagram

Instagram was born in 2010 as a photo-sharing app, the kind where you ran a square photo of your lunch through a sepia filter and behaved like a documentary photographer.

For years it stayed like a polished, visual-first place built around the still image. Then it "implemented" the Stories feature that Snapchat had, then Reels from TikTok, and somewhere in that "borrowing" spree it became the video-scrolling machine it is today.

People on Instagram come to look. Your image or video has to earn the stop, and your words are left to do the less glamorous work of telling Instagram, and now Google, what the pretty thing in front of them actually is.

There are three fields that carry weight, and each rewards different handling:

- The caption is the heavyweight, and its first line behaves like a headline, so the phrase a person would search belongs up at the top.
- Alt text is the field almost nobody fills in, which is exactly why describing your image in plain language here is such an easy competitive edge on Instagram search.
- Your display name is searchable, so "Maya's Bakery | Austin Sourdough" out-discovers a cleverly misspelled handle every time.

The Signal You Should Care About

Instagram has a lot of vanity metrics, just like any other platform.

You have likes, you have comments, you have views, but Mosseri keeps pointing at "sends" as the actual metric to optimize for. It's the number of times someone decides a post is good enough to fire off to a friend in a DM.

That is a high bar, and it should be, because nobody forwards a forgettable post.

And because public professional posts now feed Google, that caption is working two jobs. A Reel that

walks through how to season a cast-iron pan can resurface months later for a stranger typing exactly that into a search engine, long after it has scrolled out of every feed it ever touched.

2. TikTok

TikTok never set out to be a search engine. It set out to be a slot machine for video, an endless For You feed tuned to keep your thumb moving.

People started searching it anyway. By 2026, 49% of U.S. consumers, and 65% of Gen Z, had used TikTok to look something up, usually the kind of question that is easier to watch than to read, like how to fix a leaky faucet, whether a cordless vacuum is worth buying, or where to eat in a new city.

The reason is trust. A polished top result reads like marketing. A 23-second clip of a real person showing the thing reads like a friend who happens to own it.

Because TikTok is video-first, it reads a clip on three channels at once, and most creators only bother with one:

- Spoken audio is the strongest of the three, so name your topic out loud, ideally in the first line of dialogue.
- On-screen text is the next, so stamp the same keyword on the screen, where TikTok and a muted viewer both catch it.
- The caption is the third and the easiest to skim past, so treat it as backup rather than the whole pitch.

Fill all three, and you have told TikTok exactly what the clip is about, in the languages it trusts most.

The platform takes its own search seriously enough to sell against it. It launched keyword search ads in the US in 2024, and its own research found that 61% of people who search on TikTok say the results there are more likely to push them to act than results on other platforms.

Before you ever hit record, open Creator Search Insights, TikTok's free tool that shows the exact phrases people are searching and flags the ones nobody has answered well. Those neglected searches are unlocked doors. Pick one, build a video around the question, and answer it in the first three seconds, before the thumb decides for you.

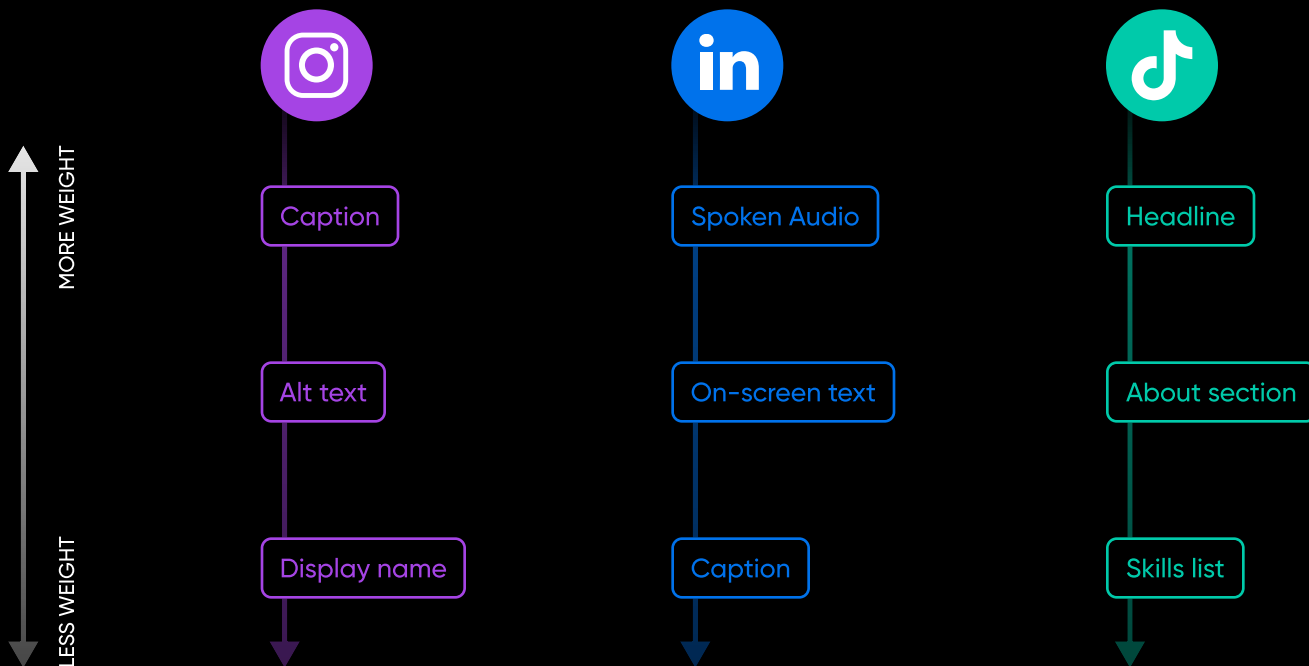
3. LinkedIn

LinkedIn has grown into a real publishing platform where business buyers can research vendors and people long before anyone picks up a phone. It is also where otherwise reasonable adults write posts that open with "I am humbled to announce," but that's a different book.

To optimize for LinkedIn, here are the fields worth optimizing, in rough order of how heavily LinkedIn weighs them:

- Your headline should read like a query a buyer would run; of course, you don't have to stick to the norm if you already have a following, but for smaller profiles, every bit of edge helps.

What Each Platform Actually Reads



- Your About section is room to describe the problems you solve in full sentences, in the language your buyers actually use.
- Your skills list is matched literally against searches, so fill it with the terms people look for rather than only your job history.

The aim is to be the name that surfaces when someone searches the problem you solve.

4. Facebook

Facebook is the platform people have been declaring dead since roughly 2016, which is a strange thing to keep saying about a service with around three billion people on it.

The old playbook is gone, though. Posting to a brand Page and expecting reach is a little like tacking a flyer to a board in an empty town. The crowd hasn't left Facebook, it's just gathered in two new places:

- **Groups are organized around a topic, and a Group named the way someone would search for it:** For example, "Portland Container Gardening," surfaces in Facebook's search and increasingly in Google, gathering the niche audience you would otherwise pay to reach. Name it in a clever brand voice, and it vanishes; name it like a query, and it works.
- **Marketplace is a product search engine, where people arrive having already decided to buy and simply type in what they want:** For physical and local goods, that intent runs about as warm as it gets, and it owes nothing to your follower count.



Once again, the indexing change from earlier applies here too, so a public Facebook post can land in a Google result.

So, you should definitely consider writing your posts to appeal to the Facebook audience as well as how a searcher on Google would phrase it, and the visibility mostly takes care of itself.

Tracking the Right Metrics

Most of the numbers these apps put in front of you are designed to feel good. Track the few that map to how the platform actually decides who to show.

- On Instagram, that means saves and sends.

- On TikTok, watch average watch time and whatever search-impression data you can pull, then revisit Creator Search Insights to confirm your keyword is matching real queries instead of the ones living in your head.
- On LinkedIn, watch profile views and inbound messages in the two or three weeks after you rewrite a headline, since that is the cleanest before-and-after you will get on the platform.
- On Facebook, count join requests and in-Group engagement, and ignore Page reach, which stopped describing a real audience a long time ago.

One extra habit for any public Instagram or Facebook account is to glance at your site analytics for visits arriving from Google. Indexed posts can send people who never opened the app at all.

CHAPTER 5

Community and Forum Marketing

Community and Forum Marketing

Every channel so far rewards two things: effort, and a clear read on how the platform's search works. But communities run on a different currency. They reward genuine subject knowledge, and almost everything else is thrown out.

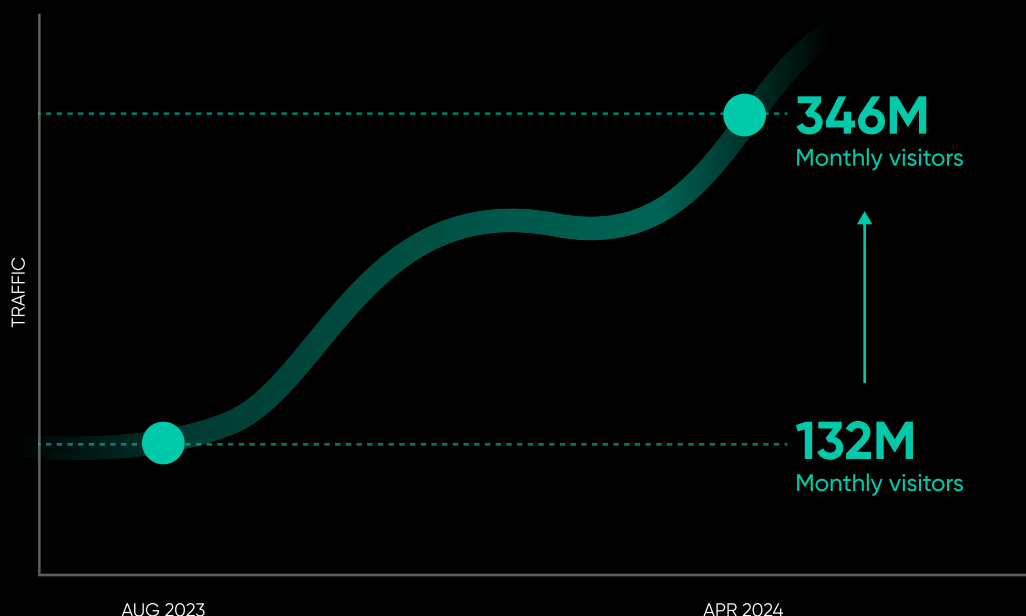
That is why a founder who actually understands the problem can outperform a marketing team on Reddit compared to a marketing team with a big budget. Money buys reach on most platforms. But for Reddit and Quora, it doesn't work that way.

The flip side is that there's no shortcut. The currency is time spent being useful, which cannot be bought or hurried, which is exactly why most businesses give up here long before they see a return.

How Reddit Earned Its Authority

Google noticed that a lot of people were adding

Reddit's Rise as a Search Authority



reddit

6.7%
of AI citations

Most-cited source in
Google's AI Overviews
and Perplexity

Chapter 5: Community and Forum Marketing

"reddit" to their searches, and it leaned into that behavior. A forum-friendly update handed Reddit so much search real estate that its readership nearly tripled, from 132 million to 346 million monthly visitors between August 2023 and April 2024.

Then AI raised the stakes even further.

Reddit is now the most-cited source in Google's AI Overviews and on Perplexity, it is among the most cited sources holding 46.7% of all citations. One honest answer written once on Reddit now does a few jobs at the same time:

- It helps the person who asked the question in the thread.
- It ranks in Google for that question, since Reddit threads routinely sit near the top now.
- It feeds the AI tools that answer the next thousand people who ask something similar.

But Reddit's traffic surge came from a single Google decision, and what an algorithm grants it can revoke, which is exactly why community channels should feed into something you own — an email list or a community on your own domain — rather than serve as the endpoint. Treat community channels as a way to get discovered, then route people toward a website and an email list you actually own, so no one platform's mood swing decides your future.

Earning the Right to Promote

Reddit can smell a sales pitch through a screen, so

your entry strategy needs to be about patience before pitch.

Before that first mention, spend about a month building a real account, joining conversations with no agenda, and getting past 100 karma. Read each subreddit's own rules first, because every community guards its borders differently and enforces them locally.

 **Pro tip:** We follow a simple 9:1 ratio for Reddit. Nine genuinely useful contributions for every one that so much as mentions your product.

The next part is finding where you should spend your time. With Reddit, you can find a community for almost every interest in the world, like this, this, and for the true heroes of the internet.

But in this immense catalog, here's how you can find subreddits you should spend time on.

- Search Reddit directly for your product category to see which subreddits host the conversation.
- Run a Google search for "site:reddit.com" plus your topic, which Reddit's own search often buries.
- Look for subreddits with weekly "Feedback Friday" or "Show and Tell" threads, which exist for exactly the kind of post you want to make.

💡 **Pro tip:** To test whether a given comment is safe to post, ask yourself: would it still be useful if you deleted every mention of your product? A yes means you are contributing. A no means you are spamming, and Reddit will treat you accordingly.

Quora and the Smaller Rooms

Quora plays a smaller part than it once did, now that its traffic has fallen, but it rewards a different kind of patience.

Treat it as a home for thorough, long-tail answers. A complete, expert answer with no pitch attached stays searchable for years and keeps earning AI citations long after you posted it.

Beyond the two giants, there are also niche forums, Discord, or Slack where the many committed customers already gather. And more importantly, it's not the size of the community but how engaged the members are there. So a 300-member community with active engagement is always better than a 3 million-person community with no one bothering to show up.

Tracking the Right Metrics

On Reddit and Quora, track these metrics over other vanity metrics:

- Karma growth and comment upvotes are a rough gauge that your contributions are landing rather than irritating people.
- Click-throughs on any profile or comment link, tagged with UTM parameters, are the cleanest read on whether trust is turning into actual visits.
- Removals or a sudden karma drop on a post are the community telling you the 9:1 ratio slipped, and that you owe it a stretch of pure value before you mention your product again.

Your 90-Day Multi-Channel Discovery Plan

Everything in this book points to one decision that'd simplify an overwhelmed founder's life: you are not going to be everywhere.

Instead of spreading a one-person team across six channels, put the same person into two well-chosen channels, and you build something real.

Days 1 to 30: Choosing

Find where your audience really searches, using autocomplete on each platform, Pinterest's Trends tool, TikTok's Creative Center, and Reddit's search to surface the questions people actually ask in your niche.

Then, settle on your main and backup channels and set up tracking with a UTM system, branded short links, and a "How did you hear about us?" field at checkout.

Setting up tracking before creating a single piece of content feels backward when you are eager to start, but it protects the next sixty days from being a guess.

Days 31 to 60: Building

Make one pillar piece, reshape it into roughly 10 native pieces across your two channels, tune every title and caption to the words your audience actually types, and post steadily on those two channels only.

Do not add a third channel yet. Depth on two and steadiness is what teaches each algorithm who you are and gives it time to build up the context required to let you rank and grow.

Days 61 to 90: Doubling Down

This is where the tracking setup comes in handy because you will now look at what worked and what did not.

Read what the first two months told you, push your effort toward the channel earning the most clicks and mentions, and pause whatever is not working.

There are a few thresholds you need to keep in mind:

- A channel with no real clicks and no mentions after eight to twelve steady weeks gets reassigned.
- A YouTube click-through rate under 2% means you fix thumbnails first.
- Removals or downvotes on Reddit mean you crossed the 9:1 line and owe the community a month of pure value before posting about your product again.

Own Your Audience

Never let a single algorithm own your growth. Google can rewrite its rules overnight, an AI engine can swing its citations in a week, and a platform's reach can vanish without notice.

While it's hard to control an algorithm that's not yours, you can always direct your audience from one channel to another owned channel like an email subscription list, a Discord community, or a Slack organization. You have to think of using the channels

we discussed in this E-book as a way to feed into your owned channel machine.

Just make that path to an owned channel fast, trustworthy, and ready for the people you are about to send it to.

Google was never the ceiling. It was only ever the front door, and now you know where all the others are.

 **Meet Remixer**

**You describe it.
Remixer builds it.**

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The AI website builder that turns conversation into designer-level sites. Free with hosting.

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