foxie

always ahead of the competition

STAND OUT LIKE...

A plain-English starter guide
to branding and marketing
for Australian small business

2027 edition

...dog's balls

That is the job of branding and marketing: to make your business impossible to miss.

Branding, design, websites, search, ads, social media. It is a lot, and you have a business to run.

This guide is a map. It explains the main pieces in plain English, in the order you would tackle them: know your market, build the brand, get and keep customers, then work smarter.

It will not make you a designer or a marketer. It will help you do the parts you want to do yourself, and know what to ask for when you hire someone for the rest.

A word on AI. Much of what follows, an AI assistant can now help you with: research, first drafts, ideas, rough mock-ups. We point out where as we go, and Part 4 shows how to use it well and where to keep it out.

The examples are ordinary Australian businesses: a builder, a cleaner, a painter, a steel fabricator. Swap in your own.

Who we are. Foxie is a design and marketing studio on the NSW Central Coast. Human-led, AI-assisted. We have put in what we would tell you in a first meeting. If you read it and do the lot yourself, good. Our details are on the back page.

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PART 1

Know your market

What a brand is

Know your competition and your price

Know who you are talking to

Make it easy to be your customer

Map the customer's journey

What a customer is worth

> ***"People ignore design that ignores people."***
>
> Frank Chimero, designer

What a brand is

A brand is not a logo.

A brand is a personality. It is what people think and feel about your business before they have bought anything. It evokes opinions and emotions, whether you plan them or not. Your job is to build a brand people trust, and one that means something to the customers you want.

Underneath the personality is a promise. Marketers call it your point of difference: the reason someone should choose you over the business down the road. It only works if it passes three tests.

- **Relevant.** Customers care about it.
- **Distinctive.** Your competitors cannot say the same thing.
- **Deliverable.** You can keep the promise every time, and afford to.

"Quality work and friendly service" fails the second test. Everyone says it. "We answer the phone, and we turn up when we said we would" passes all three, if it is true.

Whatever you claim, be ready to prove it. A claim on a website, a ute or an ad is a statement the law holds you to.

How designers pin a personality down. They write it up as a persona: one page that shows, at a glance, the brand's voice, its style, and the ideas and values it stands for. You will write your brand persona in Part 2.

You will also write customer personas, which do the same job for the people you sell to. That is two chapters from here.

Try it. Finish this sentence in under 20 words: "People choose us instead of the others because..."

Know your competition and your price

It is hard to be different until you know what everyone else is doing. Give this one afternoon.

Pick three competitors and look at them the way a customer would. Search for what you sell in your area. Read their websites and their reviews. Ring one.

For each, write down four things.

- What they promise.
- What they charge.
- What their customers praise.
- What their customers complain about.

Now the trick most people skip: do the same to yourself. Look at your own business and what you have built so far, as coldly as you looked at theirs.

- What is working? What is broken?
- What does their website do well? What does it do badly? Now yours.
- Where are the gaps nobody is filling?

The gaps are your opening. If every review of the other builders mentions calls that were never returned, returning calls is a point of difference worth more than any logo.

Price is part of the brand. It tells people who you are for. Someone will always be cheaper, and it is rarely the small business that wins that race. A higher price works when the reason for it is obvious at a glance: the proof, the presentation, the way the phone is answered.

Know your margin before you set a price. That is what is left after the direct cost of doing the job, your own time included. The last chapter in this part shows why that one number decides what marketing you can afford.

Know who you are talking to

A customer persona is a short sketch of a typical customer: what they are responsible for, what they need, what worries them, and how they choose.

Build it from evidence: the customers you already have, the questions they ask, the jobs you won and the ones you lost. A persona built from guesses is fiction. Most businesses need two or three. An AI assistant can draft one from your notes in a minute, but only you know whether it is true.

Use it to decide what to say, where to say it, and what to leave out. And remember it is a tool. Talk to people like people.

A sample persona, for a steel fabricator

Mark, 47. Operations manager at a food processing plant in regional NSW.

Responsible for	Keeping the line running. Safety. The maintenance budget.
Needs	Stainless platforms, guarding and conveyors made to drawing and installed during a planned shutdown.
Worries about	Downtime. A supplier who misses the shutdown window costs him far more than the job is worth.
How he chooses	Proof of similar work. Drawings he can check. A straight answer on lead time. Who picks up the phone.
How he finds suppliers	Asks other plants first. Then searches. Remembers who he met at a trade show.
What loses him	A quote that takes two weeks. No photos of real jobs. Being passed around.

Notice what is missing: his hobbies. A useful persona is about the buying decision.

HubSpot's Make My Persona (hubspot.com/make-my-persona) is a free tool that lays one out for you.

Make it easy to be your customer

Good design starts with what people actually need. That idea changed the modern world. The Bauhaus school, founded in Germany in 1919, rebuilt design around function: a chair is judged by sitting in it. Its thinking went on to reshape buildings, furniture and everyday products. Designers now call it user-centred design: designing for the people who will use the thing. Design for people and you get satisfied customers, which is the whole game.

So before you build anything, find out whether people want it. That is market research.

- Would you buy this? What would you expect to pay?
- What do you use now, and what annoys you about it?
- What would make you switch?

Ask ten real prospects. Run a short survey if you have a list. Watch what people do as well as what they say, because the two differ.

Then make a prototype. The cheapest version someone can react to: a sample, a sketch, a one-page website, a trial with three customers.

Then comes UX. User experience is everything a person goes through when dealing with you, from finding your number to getting help after the job. Watch someone go through it. Say nothing. Note where they stall. Fix that. Repeat.

Designers call this an iterative process: test, get feedback, improve, test again. It never really ends. Your product and your service keep changing as the business grows, and each change needs testing again.

Three checks to run this week: can a stranger tell what you sell within five seconds of landing on your home page, can they contact you in one tap from a phone, and can everyone read it?

Map the customer's journey

A customer journey map tells the story of one customer, from first noticing you to recommending you. Read it left to right. Each column is a stage, and each stage has touchpoints: the moments where the customer comes into contact with your business, such as a sign, a website, a phone call or a quote. Under each stage, write what goes well, what goes wrong and what you would fix. The point is not the drawing. It is to see where you are losing customers.

This one follows a family who want an extension built.

	Find	Check	Quote	Build	Recommend
They want	A builder nearby they can trust.	Proof he has done jobs like theirs.	A clear price, soon.	Progress without stress.	A home they are proud to show.
Touchpoints	The site sign down the road. A Google search.	Website. Reviews. Photos of past jobs.	Phone call. Site visit. Written quote.	The site. Calls and texts.	Handover and final invoice.
Goes well	The sign is easy to read from the car.	Recent local jobs, with photos.	Call returned the same day.	Tidy site. An update every Friday.	Clean house. No surprises on the bill.
Goes wrong	Cannot find him on Google by name.	Newest review is two years old.	The quote takes three weeks.	Silence when materials run late.	Small defects take months to fix.
The fix	**Claim the Google Business Profile.**	**Ask every client for a review.**	**Promise a quote date and keep it.**	**Tell the client the day anything slips.**	**Fix defects within a fortnight. Then ask for a referral.**

Other customers find him another way: an ad, a friend. Only the first column changes.

Draw your own. Pick one typical customer. Write their journey left to right, in four or five stages that suit your business. Fill in the rows, then start with the fix that costs least. Better still, ask three recent customers how it really went.

What a customer is worth

Before you spend anything on marketing, work out what a customer is worth to you. It decides what you can afford to pay to win one.

Start with what a job leaves you. Take the price and subtract the direct costs: materials, wages, travel, and your own time. What is left covers your overheads and your profit.

Then ask, whether you sell products or services: do they come back?

A cleaner gets repeat business. A fortnightly clean at $150 costs $100 to deliver and leaves $50. Over a year that is 26 cleans and $1,300.

A painter mostly does not. A $5,000 job costs $3,500 to deliver and leaves $1,500, and that customer will not need painting for years.

	Cleaner	Painter
Left after one job	$50	$1,500
Jobs in the first year	26	1
Worth in the first year	$1,300	$1,500
Cost to win the customer	$200	$200
Paid back after	4 cleans, about 8 weeks	The first job

In this made-up example, $200 to win a customer leaves both ahead, before overheads. But the cleaner is out of pocket for two months and only wins if the customer stays. So the cleaner's first job is keeping customers, and the painter's is making each job count: a review, photos, a referral.

Three cautions. Plan on the first year's worth, not a lifetime's. Twenty price-shoppers can be worth less than two serious jobs. And grow at a pace your cash can carry: more work means more staff and more wages, which still have to be paid if the work drops away.

PART 2

Build the brand

Start with a mood board

Give the brand a personality

What's in a name?

The logo and the look

Put the brand to work

> ***"Every great design begins with an even better story."***
>
> Lorinda Mamo, designer

Start with a mood board

Now you know your market, decide how the brand should feel. A mood board is the fastest way to do that, and it comes before any design.

It is a scrapbook. Collect colours, photos, typefaces, signs, vehicles, packaging and words that feel like the business you want to be, on paper with scissors and magazines or on screen with Canva or Pinterest.

Name the mood first. Fun, vibrant, retro, serious, high-tech, professional, minimal. Pick three words and collect to them.

AI can help here. Most AI assistants can generate a picture of a collage, and some can search for real reference images. Paste this in:

> *Help me make a visual mood board for my business, before any logo is designed. First ask me what the business does, who my customers are, and three words for how the brand should feel. Then gather visual ideas from several places, such as Pinterest, archive.org and design journals: colours, photography, lettering, signs, packaging and textures. Put 10 to 15 into one collage with colour swatches. Use real reference images where you can, and tell me which ones you generated. Show me the board itself, not a list of links.*

To refine it: "Keep what works, but make it feel more [word] and less [word]. Show me the revised board."

Then finish it by hand. Edit hard, with the people who will live with the result. Add your own photos: the shop, the vehicles, the work. Choose real typefaces and note the colour codes, because lettering in a generated image is often gibberish. Keep a note of where real images came from: inspiration is not permission to copy.

A mood board is not your finished brand. It is a collection of ideas for how the brand should look and feel. Keep it for every designer you hire.

Give the brand a personality

Chapter one said a brand is a personality. This is where you write it down.

Every time a customer meets your business, on the phone, on a quote, at the front door, they learn something about it. If each meeting feels like a different company, they trust none of them.

So describe the brand as if it were a person. That is your brand persona.

- **Three or four character traits.** Ours come from a fox terrier: loyal, tenacious, cheeky.
- **Its voice.** Write five sentences it would say and five it never would.
- **Its values.** What it stands for, and what it will not do.
- **How it behaves when something goes wrong.**

It can be a person, a character, an animal or a mascot. The test is whether you would recognise it in a crowd.

Write it on one page. It becomes the first page of your brand guidelines, which the last chapter in this part covers.

A written persona matters more than it used to. It is what you hand to staff, to suppliers and to AI tools, so that what they produce sounds like you and not like everyone else.

What's in a name?

Already trading under a name people know? You may not need to change it. A known name is worth more than a clever one.

If you are choosing: good names are short, easy to say, and easy to spell after hearing them once. They can describe what you do, hint at a feeling, tell a story, or be invented outright.

Keep a running list. Say each one out loud. Ask customers and friends which they remember a day later, not which they like on the spot.

Then check it before you print anything.

1. **Business name.** Search the ASIC business names register.
2. **Trade mark.** IP Australia's TM Checker is free and takes a few minutes. Look for similar names in your line of work, not only identical ones. It is a first check, not a guarantee.
3. **Domain.** Is the .com.au or .au available? You will need an ABN to register a .com.au.
4. **Social handles.** Is the name, or something close, free on the platforms you plan to use?

A clash on the first two is serious. A taken domain or handle is a nuisance you can sometimes work around.

If the name matters to the business, register it as a trade mark. A registered business name on its own does not stop someone else using it.

The logo and the look

A logo has one job: to be recognised. It does not have to explain what you do. A good one works in a single colour, at the size of a phone icon, on the side of a ute, and on light and dark backgrounds.

There are many kinds, from text-only wordmarks and monograms to symbols, mascots, badges and marks that hide a second image in their negative space. You do not need to know the names. You need one that suits the business and that people remember.

Three ways to get one

Do it yourself. Canva and AI tools are fine for testing ideas. As a final mark they are risky: a template is shared with everyone who uses it, so it is hard to register as a trade mark, and in Australia copyright in an image made wholly by a machine is uncertain.

Hire a freelancer. Upwork, Fiverr and Airtasker have designers at every price.

Hire a studio. It costs more and usually comes with research, options and brand guidelines.

Whoever draws it, get a written agreement that assigns the copyright to you, because holding the files is not owning the design. And get vector files (SVG, EPS or PDF): a JPG cannot be enlarged for a sign.

Rules of thumb. Two typefaces at most. Two or three colours. Readable first, clever second.

Put the brand to work

A brand lives on the things people see and hold. For most small businesses those are not ads. They are the everyday surfaces you already own.

- **The vehicle.** A signwritten ute or van is a moving billboard and a sign that you are a real business. Name, what you do, phone, website. Readable at 50 metres.
- **The site sign.** A clean sign on a tidy job tells the whole street who to call.
- **Uniforms.** A shirt with a logo says someone is in charge.
- **Quotes and invoices.** A clear, good-looking quote sent the same day beats a price in a text message. It is the first piece of your work the customer judges.
- **Packaging,** if you sell a product. Test it on the shelf beside the competition, and as a thumbnail, because that is how it looks online.

Write the rules down. The document is called your brand guidelines, or brand style guide, and is often referred to as the brand bible. It is where every rule for the company's branding lives, so that a signwriter, a printer and a web designer all produce the same brand. It holds:

- **The logo.** Every version, when to use each, the clear space around it and the smallest size it may appear.
- **What not to do.** Stretched, recoloured, on a busy photo.
- **Colours,** specified for every use: CMYK for print, RGB and hex for screens, and Pantone where a job calls for it.
- **Typefaces,** and how each is used: headings, text, sizes, spacing.
- **Photography and illustration style.**
- **Icons, patterns and shapes** that belong to the brand.
- **Tone of voice** and the brand persona.
- **Layouts:** stationery, signs, vehicles, uniforms, social media.
- **Where the master files are,** and who to ask.

One page is enough to start. A business with a consistent brand style comes across as more authoritative, more memorable and more trusted.

PART 3

Get and keep customers

Measure first
Answer the enquiry
Keep the customers you have
Reviews and social proof
Choose your channels
Your website
Hooks, calls to action and funnels
Google Business Profile and the map
SEO and content
Paid ads
Email
Social media, platforms and community
Offline: print, trade shows and events
Stay legal

Measure first

Launching a website is not the end of the journey. It is the start. The day it goes live you begin collecting evidence, and without a starting number, a benchmark, you cannot tell whether you are winning or losing.

When we build a site we run two checklists. **Before launch:** everything that makes the site good, useful and not broken. **After launch:** proving it works in the real world. Every contact form is tested end to end, and the measuring tools go on.

- **Google Analytics** shows what visitors do on your site.
- **Google Search Console** shows what people searched to find you.
- **Your Google Business Profile** shows calls, direction requests and clicks.

Then choose your KPIs (key performance indicators): the few numbers that say whether the business is winning. Pick three and look at them on the same day each month.

1. **Enquiries or orders.** How many, and where each came from.
2. **Cost per customer.** What you spent on a channel, divided by the customers it brought.
3. **Repeat business.** How many came back.

Treat the big numbers as warning lights, not results. From our own website, for the year to October 2026: one page was listed in Google results about 139,000 times and was clicked 20 times. Another was listed about 4,500 times and was clicked 165 times. The bigger number had by far the lower click rate. And neither number is customers.

How we do it. Google Analytics and Google Search Console can be overwhelming if you have not used them before. They have so many moving parts that it is hard to know which numbers to look at. That is why we often build a custom, evergreen KPI (key performance indicator) report. It always shows the last 30 days and whether your main KPI has gone up or down. You can change the period, and compare it with the 30 days before or with the same period a year ago. Setting these tools up so they count enquiries, not just visits, is technical work. If you get stuck, ask us.

Keep a simple enquiry log. Your ad reports and Search Console show where the clicks came from. They cannot show which enquiries became paying jobs. A five-column list closes that gap, and a spreadsheet is enough.

Date	How they found us	Quoted	Won or lost	Worth
3 March	Google search	Yes	Won	$5,000
9 March	Referral	Yes	Lost on price	

Answer the enquiry

Sales is a book of its own. But one part of it belongs here, because it decides whether everything else in this guide is wasted.

Every business owner is a salesperson. Many of us would rather not be.

Follow up every lead, fast, by phone. We have seen businesses spend thousands on a website and then leave an enquiry unanswered for days. That is one of the most expensive mistakes in marketing, and it is free to fix.

- Reply the same day. Within the hour is better.
- Do not rely on email alone. Your reply may be sitting in their spam folder. Pick up the phone and start the relationship.
- Decide now who answers enquiries when you are on a job.
- Send the quote when you said you would.

With new clients, we watch their enquiry forms ourselves and check in: did you get this lead, and have you called them yet?

Qualify, gently. Not every enquiry is a customer you want. A long questionnaire scares off good leads along with the bad ones, so say who you are for instead. One of our clients was tired of driving out to quote for people who only ever chose the cheapest price. Their quote page now says it plainly: we will not be the cheapest quote, because we stand behind our work, and the cheapest job often costs two or three times more when it has to be redone.

Keep the customers you have

A customer who already trusts you is the easiest sale you will ever make. Most small businesses spend their effort finding new people and almost none on the ones they have.

Follow up. A message a week after the job: did it go well? It costs nothing, catches problems early, and is the natural moment to ask for a review.

Give them a reason to come back. A reminder when the service is due. A maintenance plan. First look at something new.

Fix complaints fast, and in person. A problem solved well can make a more loyal customer than one who never had a problem.

Ask for referrals. "Do you know anyone else who needs this?" is a fair question after a good job. Thank the people who send you work. A handwritten note does more than a discount code.

Build partnerships. Find the businesses that meet your customers before you do, and help each other. A builder and an architect. A cleaner and a property manager. A fabricator and the engineer who draws the job. One good partner can be worth more than any ad.

Keep a list. Names, what they bought, when. A spreadsheet is enough. You cannot look after customers you cannot find.

Check one number each quarter: how many of last year's customers bought again this year.

Reviews and social proof

People trust other customers more than they trust you. That is social proof.

Ask for reviews

- Ask every customer, at the end of every job. Not only the happy ones.
- Never offer anything in return. Google bans rewards of any kind for a review, even an honest one, and removes reviews it thinks were bought.
- Never write, buy or swap fake reviews. That is also against Australian Consumer Law.
- Do not hide the bad ones. Answer every review politely and briefly. A calm reply to a bad review can win more customers than the review loses.

Show the proof a careful buyer looks for

- Before and after photos of real jobs. For a trade or a manufacturer, these are the best content you will ever make.
- Licences, insurance and qualifications, stated plainly.
- Warranties and what they cover.
- Case studies: the problem, what you did, the result.
- A 30-second phone video of a happy customer.

Testimonials and influencers. On your own website, use real words from real customers, with permission. If you pay or gift an influencer, the post must be clearly marked as advertising.

Choose your channels

A channel is any route that brings customers to you. The best book on choosing them is *Traction*, by Gabriel Weinberg, who founded the search engine DuckDuckGo, and Justin Mares. It names 19.

1. Targeting blogs
2. Publicity
3. Unconventional PR
4. Search engine marketing
5. Social and display ads
6. Offline ads
7. Search engine optimisation
8. Content marketing
9. Email marketing
10. Engineering as marketing
11. Viral marketing
12. Business development
13. Sales
14. Affiliate programs
15. Existing platforms
16. Trade shows
17. Offline events
18. Speaking engagements
19. Community building

Read the book for the detail. It was written for start-ups, so here is what we would add for a local Australian business.

- **Google Business Profile and the map.** For a local trade this is often channel number one.
- **Reviews and referrals.** Trust travels by word of mouth.
- **Your ute and your site sign.** Advertising you have already paid for.
- **Lead marketplaces** such as hipages and Airtasker. Know the fees, and that the same lead often goes to your competitors.
- **Letterbox drops** in the streets where you are already working.
- **Sponsoring the local club.**
- **Suppliers and other trades** who can refer you, and tenders if you sell to bigger firms.
- **Guerrilla advertising and brand activations:** the stunt, the prop, the thing people photograph.

How to choose: the Bullseye. The book's method, in our words.

1. **List every channel that could possibly work.** Do not rule one out because competitors ignore it.
2. **Test the three to five most likely, cheaply.** A small slice of your budget each. Give paid ads about a month. Slower channels, such as search, referrals and partnerships, need longer before you judge them. You are finding out three things: what a customer costs, how many are there, and whether they are the right ones.
3. **Put your effort behind the one that works,** until it stops working.

It will stop working. Channels wear out as competitors crowd in, and a business at a new stage of growth often needs a new channel. When the results fade, run the test again.

Keep score. For each channel you test: what it cost, how many enquiries, how many customers, and what those customers were worth.

Some channels are fast (paid ads), some are slow and lasting (search), some are built on relationships (referrals, partnerships). A healthy business usually has one of each. The chapters that follow cover the ones we know best. Two we leave to others: viral marketing, which nobody can promise, and affiliate programs.

Your website

Your website is the one place online where you set the rules. It has four jobs: say what you do and where, prove it, make it easy to get in touch, and work quickly on a phone.

A site builder, such as Squarespace, Wix or Shopify, is quick to start, with a monthly fee. You are renting: leave, and most of the site stays behind. **WordPress** runs about four in ten of the world's websites (W3Techs, October 2026) and is open source. All of these are what the industry calls a CMS, a content management system: software that lets you change your own website without writing code.

An AI site builder. For a simple brochure-style site, an AI-built website may be all you need. The catch comes later. It is often much harder to adjust by hand than a site built on a CMS, so most changes mean going back to the AI that built it. The AI does most things well, and then gets stuck on something. If you cannot edit it yourself, that is where the frustration starts to mount.

Why we still build in WordPress. Because it is open source, our clients own what we build and can move it to another host. And we have invested for years in a professionally licensed software stack for forms, shops, payments, bookings and client portals, so we do not reinvent the wheel on every job. The AI does much of the heavy lifting, building on that stack, but the site is put together so a human web designer can open it and edit it by hand. You get the speed of AI and the judgement of a person.

Use real photos where you can. A photo and video shoot gives you material for the website, social media and ads. Good stock photos beat no photos, and usually beat AI-generated ones. Put faces on a team page: people like to see who they are dealing with. And make the site usable for everyone, with readable text and strong contrast. We add a tool that lets a visitor enlarge the text or switch between light and dark.

Hold the keys. The domain, the hosting, the logins and your Google and social media accounts belong in your name. Turn on two-step login, keep the software updated, and keep a backup somewhere else.

Hooks, calls to action and funnels

A website that gets visitors and no enquiries has a conversion problem. Three ideas help with most of them.

The hook. The first thing a visitor reads should be the benefit to them, not a description of you. Ask what problem you solve or what pain you take away. "Extensions finished on the date we promise" is a hook. "Welcome to our website" is not.

The call to action. Decide the one thing you most want the visitor to do: ring, ask for a quote, book, join the mailing list. Make it a button. Put it near the top and repeat it down the page. One page, one action.

The funnel. A funnel is just the steps between a stranger arriving and a customer buying. A simple one:

1. An ad or a search result makes one promise.
2. It lands on a page built for that promise: same words, the hook, the proof, one button.
3. The visitor takes the action.
4. You follow up, fast.

Sometimes people need a reason to take the first step. A free guide, a checklist, a cost calculator, a sample. If you offer one in return for an email address, add a box they tick themselves to join your mailing list. Handing over an address for a download is not a yes to marketing.

Keep it simple. Most small businesses need one good page and a fast reply, not a complicated funnel.

Google Business Profile and the map

When someone searches "builder near me", the first thing they see is a map and three businesses. For a business people search for locally, getting into those three can be worth more than anything else in this guide.

The listing comes from your Google Business Profile: the panel with your hours, photos and stars. It is free if you deal with customers face to face, at your place or theirs. An online-only business generally does not qualify.

Google says it ranks local results on three things.

- **Relevance.** How well your profile matches the search. Choose the right categories and list every service.
- **Distance.** How close you are to the searcher. You cannot change that, so be accurate about where you work.
- **Prominence.** How well known you are: reviews, mentions and links across the web.

What to do

- Claim the profile and fill in every field.
- Add real photos: the team, the vehicles, finished jobs. Keep adding them.
- Keep hours and phone number exactly right, and identical to your website.
- Ask every customer for a review, and answer every one.
- Post an update now and then: a finished job, an offer.

Many customers will ring straight from the profile and never visit your website. Check that the number is right.

SEO and content

SEO, search engine optimisation, is the work of showing up when someone looks for what you sell: in the search results, and now in the answers written by AI.

Why it is worth the effort. Paid ads are a tap: turn them off and the leads stop. A good page can bring in customers for years. It is slower to start and often cheaper in the long run.

How it works in practice

1. **Find out what people search for.** Keyword research shows how many people in your region search for a phrase each month. An agency can do it properly, and free tools give you a rough idea.
2. **Write the page that answers it.** What does it cost, how long does it take, do you come to my suburb? One clear, helpful page per topic beats ten thin ones.
3. **Say where you are.** "Steel fabrication Tamworth" wins customers. "Best steel fabrication" puts you up against the world.
4. **Earn mentions.** Links from other real sites: local news, suppliers, trade magazines, the club you sponsor. If you win an award, tell the trade press.
5. **Keep the site healthy.** Fast, phone-friendly, secure, images described.

Content marketing is the same idea, wider: articles, videos and before-and-after photos that help your customer and show your work. Not every business needs a blog. Every business needs proof.

What hurts: stuffing keywords, and mass-producing thin pages, whether a person or an AI wrote them.

Being named in an AI answer is not an enquiry. Neither is ranking first. Count the enquiries. And nobody can promise you first place. Anyone who does is guessing.

Paid ads

Ads buy attention you have not earned yet. They can start working within days, and they can lose money just as quickly.

Search ads on Google and Bing put you in front of people already looking for what you sell. You pay when someone clicks. They suit a business with a clear service and a clear area.

Social and display ads on Facebook, Instagram and across the web find people by interest and behaviour. They are seen by people who were not looking, so the picture or the video does the work. Use your customer persona to choose the audience and write the ad.

Remarketing shows your ads to people who have already visited your site. It is worth testing once you have steady visitors.

Before you spend a dollar

- Know what a customer is worth to you (Part 1).
- Have a page built for the ad, with one hook and one button.
- Have your measuring in place, so you can count enquiries and customers, not clicks.
- Know who answers the phone.

Count customers, not enquiries. $600 of ads that bring 12 enquiries and 3 customers cost $50 an enquiry and $200 a customer. A $20 enquiry is expensive if one in fifty buys.

Start with one platform and a small daily budget. Give it a month.

If an ad is not paying for itself after a fair test, turn it off. Search, email or simply ringing back faster may be the better spend for you.

Email

A good email list is the most valuable audience you can build: people who know you, asked to hear from you, and are interested in what you sell.

You own it. A social media account sits on someone else's platform, and platforms do close accounts without warning. No social media algorithm decides who sees your email, though spam filters still apply.

Give people a reason to join. Nobody hands over an email address for nothing. Offer something worth having: a useful guide, a checklist, a discount, first look at new work.

Send something useful, regularly. Monthly is plenty. Help more often than you sell. A targeted email to 200 of the right people beats a blast to 20,000 strangers.

Cold email has pitfalls. In Australia you need consent to send marketing email. Consent can be inferred in narrow cases, such as a work address published openly and an email relevant to that person's job. A bought or scraped list is a legal risk before it is anything else. If you do contact people you have not dealt with before:

- Be sure you have grounds to contact them.
- Run the list through an email verifier first. A high bounce rate damages your sending reputation.
- Protect your domain's reputation. Once providers mark you as spam, your invoices and quotes start landing in junk too.

The Spam Act, in three rules

1. **Consent.** They agreed to hear from you. A box they tick themselves is the safe way.
2. **Identity.** Every email says clearly who it is from and how to reach you.
3. **Unsubscribe.** A working way to unsubscribe in every email, acted on within five working days.

Social media, platforms and community

Social media will take every hour you give it. Choose one platform where your customers actually are, and do it well before adding a second. Then ask honestly, every few months, whether it is bringing you work.

What to post. More useful and human posts than selling ones. Show the job, the people, the before and after. Answer the questions you get asked every week.

Short video does well on most platforms. A phone, daylight and a clear first sentence are enough. Add captions, because many people watch with the sound off.

Reply. Comments and messages are customers talking to you in public.

Use the platforms that already have the crowd. YouTube for how-to videos. Facebook groups for local communities. Eventbrite and Meetup if you run events. You are borrowing someone else's audience, so always lead people back to your website and your list.

Build your own community. For some businesses the strongest channel is a place where customers talk to each other: a members' area, a forum, a group where people ask for advice. It takes work to keep alive, and it is very hard for a competitor to copy.

Giveaways can work. Check the rules first: each platform has its own, and so does each state. In NSW, a prize draw run to promote a business needs an authority once the prizes total more than $10,000.

If it is eating your week, hand it over or do less of it. A half-kept account looks worse than none.

Offline: print, trade shows and events

Not everything that works is on a screen. For many trades and manufacturers the best channels are still physical.

Print and broadcast. Magazine and newspaper ads, radio, billboards, direct mail. They cost more to test than a digital ad, so be clear who will see them. Trade magazines reach buyers no social platform does. A letterbox drop in the streets around a job you are doing is cheap and well aimed.

Trade shows and expos. You choose the show; the stand has to do the selling. What a good stand needs:

- Signage that can be read from the next aisle.
- A branded tablecloth and banners.
- Flyers and a catalogue people can take away.
- A video running on a screen.
- Business cards, and a reason to leave theirs. The fishbowl still works: drop in your card to win a prize. A card in the bowl is not permission to email them, so ask.
- Your best salespeople on the stand, and a plan to ring every contact within the week.

Events and speaking. A workshop or a talk for local business owners makes you the expert in the room. We have run them on the Central Coast on the subjects in this book.

Brand activations. Take the brand to where people already are: a display in a shopping centre, a stand at a market or a festival, a pop-up in a public space. People can touch the product, meet you and take something home.

Guerrilla advertising. Low cost, high attention: a projection on a wall at night, a prop in an unexpected place, something built to be photographed and shared. Get the property owner's permission, and the council's where it is needed.

Stay legal

A short checklist, in one place. It is general information, not legal advice. When real money or risk is involved, ask a lawyer.

- **Claims.** Anything you say in an ad, on a label or on your website must be true and provable. That includes "best", "cheapest", health claims and environmental claims. Australian Consumer Law applies to the overall impression, pictures included.
- **Reviews and testimonials.** No fake reviews. No hiding bad ones. Google allows no rewards for reviews at all.
- **Influencers.** Paid or gifted posts must be clearly marked as advertising.
- **Email and SMS.** The Spam Act: consent, identity, a working unsubscribe.
- **Personal information.** Collect only what you need, say what you do with it, and keep it secure. Some small businesses are exempt from the Privacy Act and many are not. Check where you stand, especially if you hold health or financial details.
- **Competitions.** The rules differ by state and by platform. Check before you launch.
- **Names and logos.** Check the trade mark register before you use a name. Get copyright in your logo assigned to you in writing.
- **Images and music.** Use only what you made, bought a licence for, or have written permission to use.
- **Trade and product rules.** Licence numbers on advertising where your trade requires it. Labelling rules for food, cosmetics and other regulated products.

PART 4

Work smarter

AI, the quick way
Systems, automation and our framework
Where to start
Who wrote this

AI, the quick way

AI tools are part of marketing now, whether you use them or not. Your competitors do, and your customers ask AI assistants who to hire.

The tools change every few months. The judgement does not.

Think of it as an art studio. You are the art director. The AI is a fast, capable assistant who has read everything and knows nothing about your business. It produces; you direct, check and decide.

Good uses. Brainstorming. First drafts. Twenty headline options. Rough visual mock-ups to show a designer what you mean. Sorting your reviews into themes. Drafting a customer persona from your notes. Turning one article into five posts. A second opinion on a plan.

Bad uses. Publishing what it wrote without reading it. Trusting it on facts, prices or the law without checking. Fake reviews, fake photos of your work, fake staff.

Four rules

1. A person checks everything before it goes out. AI says wrong things with total confidence.
2. Give it your style guide and your personas. Without them it writes like everyone else.
3. Keep customer details, passwords and confidential documents out of it, and read what the tool does with what you type.
4. If a customer would feel misled to learn AI was involved, tell them, or do not do it.

AI makes average work cheap. What it cannot supply is your point of difference, your proof and your judgement. Spend your time there.

Systems, automation and our framework

The quickest way to find more profit in most businesses is not more customers. It is to stop doing the same job by hand every week.

Write your systems down. The Australian author David Jenyns makes the case in his books *SYSTEMology* and *Systems Champion*. His idea of a systems champion is a good one: one person, not necessarily the owner, whose job is to capture how things are done so they can be repeated, handed over and improved. Every organisation should have one.

Then automate the repetitive parts. Here is the best explanation of automation we have heard.

Years ago we took on a new client, Apollo Engineering, and went to see their factory in Tamworth. One of their business development managers, Ben Bronkhorst, showed us their cobot welder: a collaborative robot that learns a particular weld from a skilled welder and then repeats it.

That is one of the best things about this work: clients teach us their industry while we help with their marketing. Ben was careful to stress one thing. The robot has not cost anyone their job. It cleared the bottlenecks, by taking on the high-volume, repetitive, boring work. That freed the skilled people for low-volume, interesting work, and gave them time to learn new skills.

That is what we have done in our own studio. We built a context engineering framework: a library of plain-text files, kept on our own computer, that every AI session reads before it does anything. It holds our rules, our processes and the mistakes we do not intend to repeat. For the rules we can test, automatic checks stop work being saved if it breaks one.

The difference from using AI the usual way is context. An AI with no context guesses. An AI that has read how your business works is far more likely to do the job your way.

The smallest version, which you can build this afternoon: write down the ten things a new staff member would need to know, and give that page to the AI every time you use it.

Where to start

You do not need to do everything in this book.
You need to do the next thing.

This week

1. Ring back every enquiry you have not answered.
2. Ask your last ten customers how they found you.
3. Work out what one customer is worth to you.
4. Check your Google Business Profile: hours, phone, photos.

This month

1. Write your point of difference in one sentence.
2. Draw your customer's journey and fix the worst box.
3. Start asking every customer for a review.
4. Pick three channels and test each one small.
5. Write down the ten things a new staff member would need to know.

If you hire help, ask four questions.

1. Who will actually do the work, and can I talk to them?
2. Can I see results for a business like mine?
3. What will I own at the end? Files, logins, accounts.
4. What does it not include?

We update this guide. The latest version is always at foxiewebdesign.com

Who wrote this

Craig Brown founded Foxie. He has worked in design and marketing since 1986, through art studios, print and pre-press, and has built websites since 1999.

> When I started as a designer in the 1980s, I realised design and marketing were powerful tools of persuasion, and of manipulation. It was the first time I thought seriously about ethics. When I raised it in the studio, the art director and the senior designer told me the less I thought about it, the better off I would be.
>
> I am not that kind of person. What solved it was starting my own business, because I could choose who I worked with. Once I knew I could really help people and their businesses, selling stopped feeling like selling. Believe in what you do, and you can sell it honestly.

Craig was a founding member of Social Design Sydney, a community of practice for co-design and design thinking. Its talks are free to watch: Social Design Sydney on YouTube.

Foxie is a design and marketing studio on the NSW Central Coast: branding, web design, print, photography and video, SEO, ads and marketing. It is human-led and AI-assisted, and open about where AI is used.

Our framework. The context engineering framework described in Part 4 runs our own studio. We are preparing to release it free of charge, with paid consulting and training for organisations that want help setting it up. The news will be on our website.

How this book was made. Craig wrote it, drawing on forty years of work. Zen, Foxie's AI production assistant, edited it, checked the facts and laid out the pages under his direction. Craig read and approved every page.

Stuck, or short of time?

A first conversation costs nothing.

Take it. It is a free consultation with a senior design and marketing professional who has been in the game since 1986. We will tell you straight what we would do, including the parts you do not need us for.

Foxie is a design and marketing studio on the NSW Central Coast. Human-led, AI-assisted, and open about where we use it. We have been building websites since 1999. Branding, web design, print, SEO and marketing.

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