

Winning marketing in 2026

Be the most useful, trusted answer at the moment of need, then prove it with numbers

Oscar Radido Oyomba

Founder and Director, Savanna Digital Labs, Nairobi



The short answer: be the most useful, trusted answer at the moment of need, then measure what happens



1

Be found

Answer engines and maps decide who is named. Be the cited source, not just a ranked page.



2

Earn trust

Original proof, named experts and people like the customer beat polish and volume.



3

Convert in conversation

Messaging is where enquiries become orders. Answer fast, from approved facts.



4

Measure payback

Judge channels on customers, profit and payback. Clicks and reach are diagnostics.



5

Stay safe and human

Consent, disclosure and a person behind the bot protect the brand you are building.

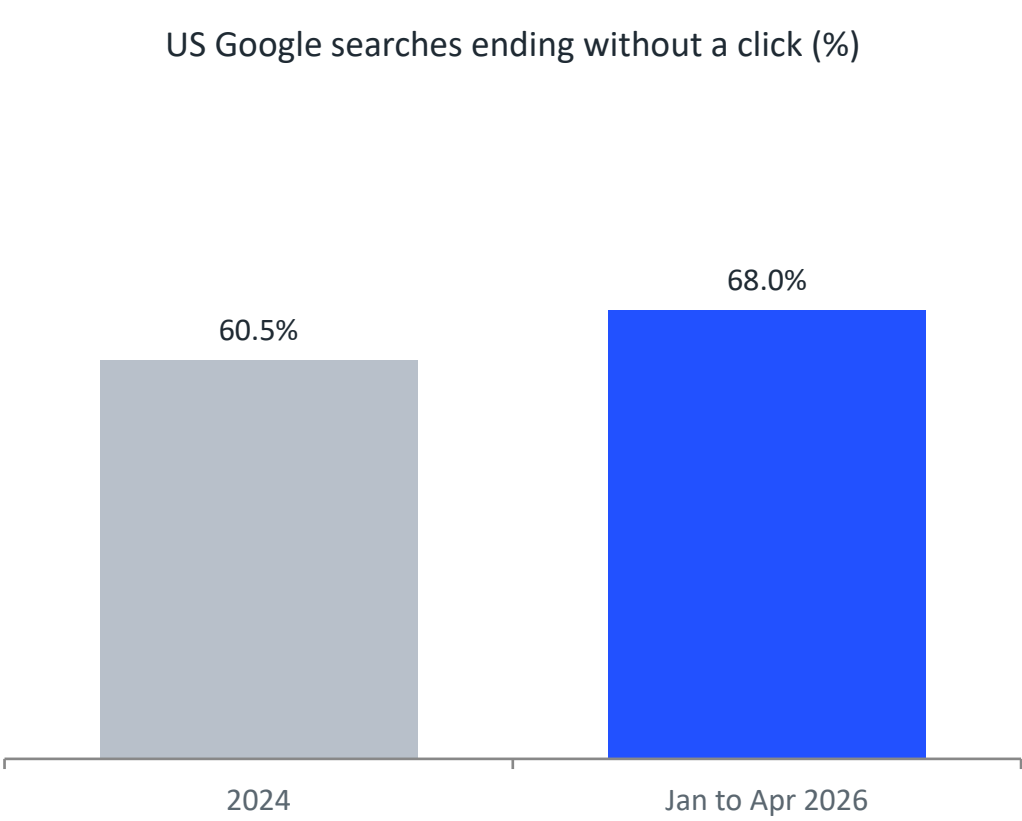
The next 40 minutes take each one in turn: the evidence, then what to do on Monday.

Every channel moved from rankings and followers to answers, recommendations and conversations

Area	What worked then	What works now
Search	Rank first for a keyword and win the click	Be the cited source inside the AI answer; earn the click that remains
Social	Follower counts and daily posting	Feeds reward watch time, saves, shares and real voices
Messaging	One-way broadcasts and email blasts	Two-way chat: answer, qualify and take the order in one thread
Content	More pages, more posts, more keywords	Fewer, original, expert-led pieces that a summary cannot copy
Measurement	Last-click attribution and platform dashboards	Experiments, payback and revenue reconciled to finance
Privacy	Buy lists, scrape numbers, ask forgiveness	Consent captured at source, purpose stated, easy opt-out

Source: Savanna Digital Labs synthesis of platform guidance and the evidence in this deck.

Search answers before it clicks: 68% of US Google searches ended without a click in early 2026



-38%

outbound organic clicks on queries that show an AI Overview (randomised field study, 1,065 users)

54% to 72%

searches ending without a click when AI Overviews are shown, in the same study

8% vs 15%

share of visits that click a result with an AI summary on the page, against none (Pew, 2025)

Sources: SparkToro with Similarweb data (Jan to Apr 2026, US); Agarwal and Sen, SSRN working paper (Apr 2026, not peer reviewed, desktop Chrome users, US); Pew Research Center (Jul 2025, US). Directional for Kenya.

AI answers name brands that are talked about, and not only brands that are linked

0.664

correlation of brand mentions
with visibility in Google AI
Overviews

about 0.74

YouTube mentions, the
strongest signal in a
December 2025 follow-up

169 vs 14

average AI Overview
mentions: top quarter of
brands against the next
quarter

What to do about it



Earn mentions where customers already read: press, associations, directories, creators.



Publish original video. YouTube was the strongest signal measured.



Keep your name, facts and contacts identical wherever you are mentioned.



Treat links as a by-product of being useful, not the goal.

Source: Ahrefs studies of 75,000 brands with Domain Rating above 40 (2025; follow-up December 2025). Correlation, not proof of cause, and large brands only. Use to set priorities, not to promise results.

Field notes: being missing from AI answers usually traces to brand confusion and conflicting facts



Named in 4 of 20 non-brand AI answers, and only when the question asked for a list of brands, never when a customer asked what to buy.



Blended with a same-named foreign parent: products and pages from another country appeared in the answers.



Its own sources contradicted each other, so AI tools repeated the errors and invented prices.



Two Google listings, one unclaimed. Best rating among local rivals, but few reviews, no owner replies, and present in 1 of 8 local searches.

Run this audit in an afternoon

1. Write 10 questions customers really ask, brand and non-brand, in each language.
2. Ask 4 AI tools. Log who is named, which facts and which sources.
3. Run 8 local searches in Maps. Log rank, rating, reviews and replies.
4. List every place your facts appear. Mark the conflicts.
5. Repeat at day 90 to show movement.

Source: Savanna Digital Labs audit of an anonymised Kenyan manufacturer, 2 October 2026 (10 prompts, 4 AI tools, 8 local searches). Results vary from run to run.

Fix the facts before you buy reach: one source of truth, repeated everywhere customers look

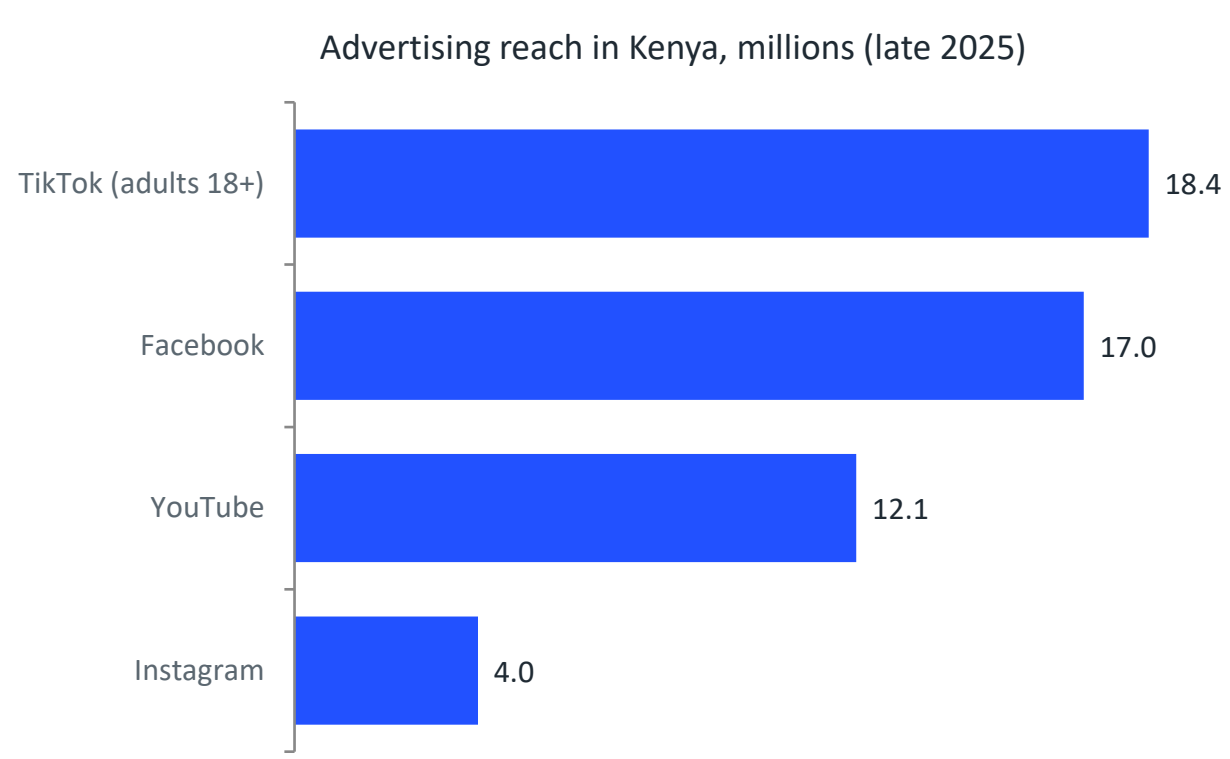


Four rules

- One owner and one change log.
- Prices: publish a dated list or a pricing policy, never leave it to a guess.
- Bots and AI read the same file.
- Review monthly. Fix the source first, then the copies.

Source: Savanna Digital Labs method, drawn from audits where AI tools repeated conflicting facts.

Kenya's reach sits on TikTok, Facebook and YouTube, and mobile connections outnumber people



23.4M

internet users, 40.5% of people

18.4M

social media user identities, 31.8% of people

77.5M

mobile connections, 134% of the population

So what: plan for mobile-first video and light pages. Reach is high; data budgets are not.

Source: DataReportal, Digital 2026: Kenya (data to late 2025). Platform figures are advertising reach, not unique active users, and overlap. Connections are SIMs, not people.

Younger audiences search on social: 46% of Gen Z prefer social media to search engines (US survey)

46%

of Gen Z prefer social media to search engines (35% of millennials)

44%

of Gen Z discover new brands on social media every day

57%

of people use YouTube to look things up the way they use Google

Make your content searchable on social



Title and caption in the words customers type, in every language you serve.



Put the answer in the first seconds, then show the proof.



Pin the best answer and reply to comments with a short video.



Add on-screen text and subtitles: many people watch muted.

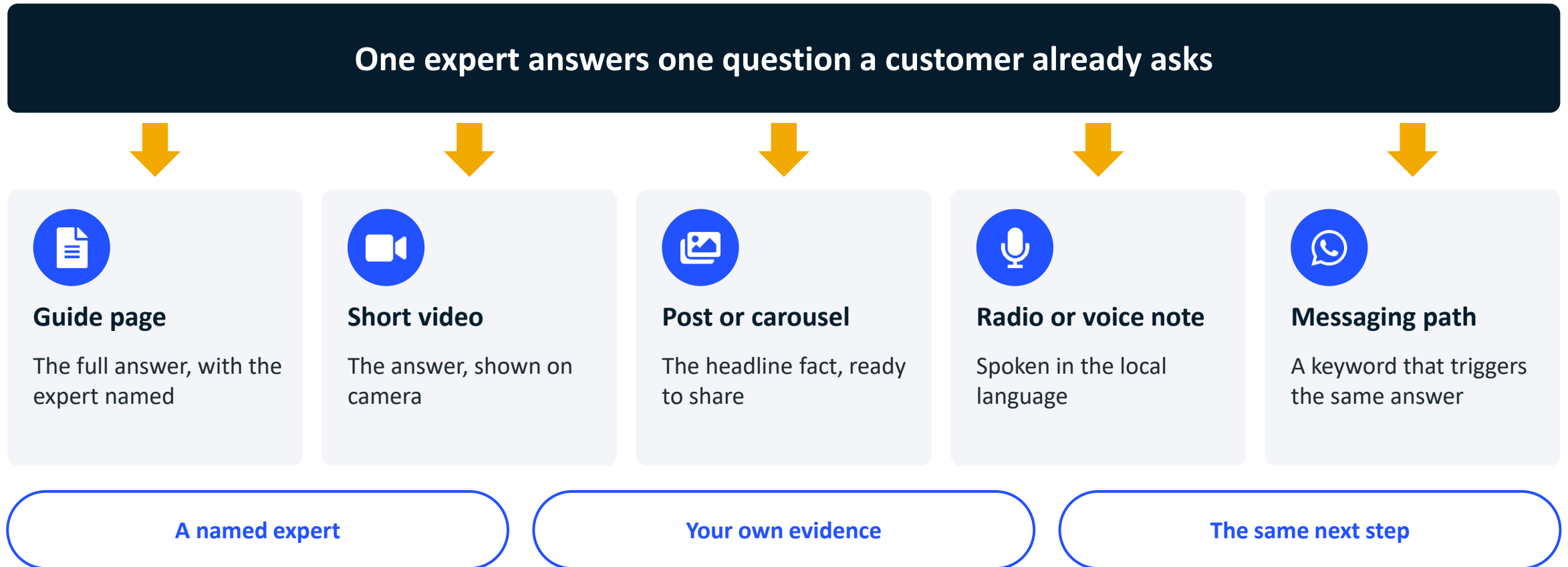
Source: Forbes Advisor and Talker Research survey of 2,000 Americans, reported by EMARKETER (2024). US data: use as direction and test with your own audience.

Give every channel one job and one number, so the plan never becomes seven separate campaigns

Channel	Its one job	Its one number
Search and AI answers	Be the source that is cited and found	Share of answers naming you; enquiries from search
Social video	Earn attention with original proof and answers	Saves, shares, replies; profile visits that become enquiries
Creators and communities	Borrow trust from voices people follow	Assisted enquiries; sentiment in comments
Messaging (WhatsApp)	Answer, qualify and take the order	Enquiries, qualified enquiries, orders, repeat rate
Radio and trade partners	Reach people with thin data and high trust	Calls and codes quoted; stockist sales
Owned data (email, lists)	Keep customers and invite them back	Repeat orders; opt-out rate

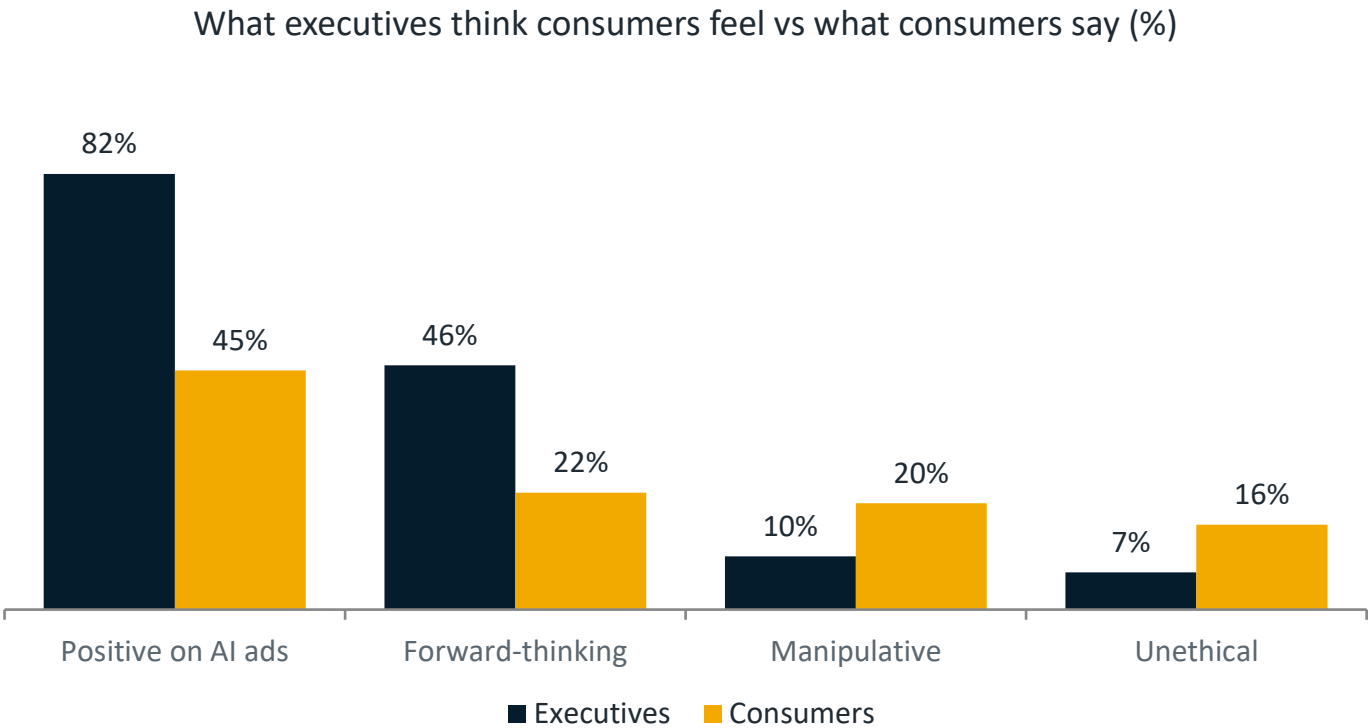
Source: Savanna Digital Labs channel framework.

One expert idea becomes five assets, each ending in the same next step



Source: Savanna Digital Labs content method.

Marketers overrate AI ads: 82% of executives think consumers like them, 45% of consumers do



83%

of executives use AI in creative work (60% in 2024)

71%

of consumers think they have seen an AI-made ad

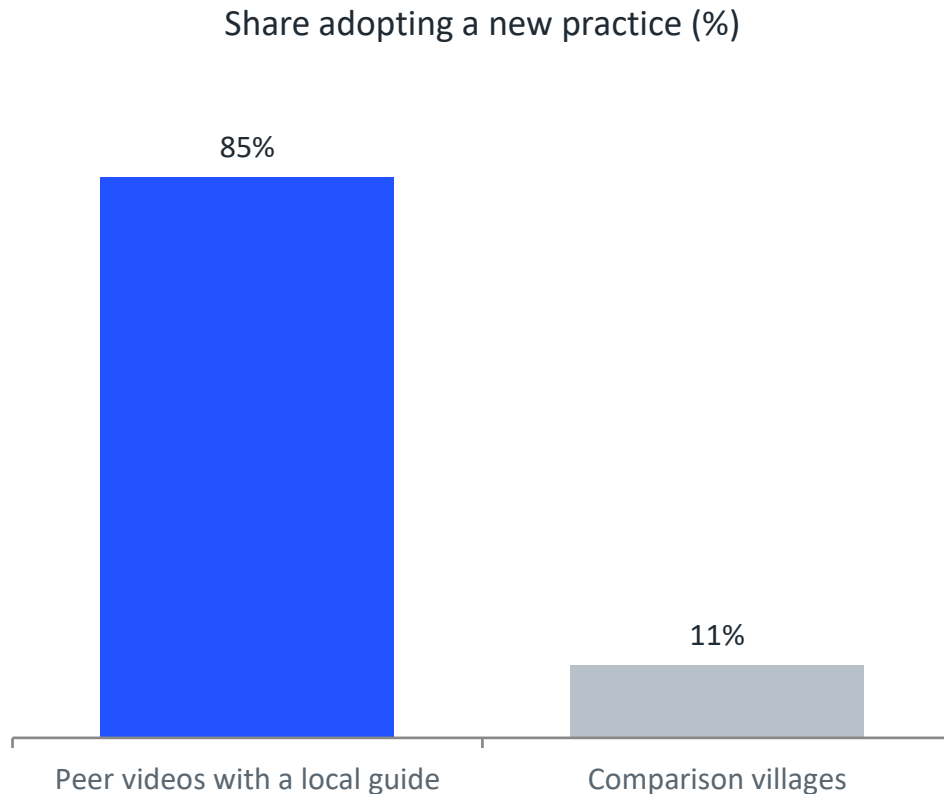
89%

disclose AI use at least sometimes; fewer than half always

Rule: use AI to raise quality, disclose it, and keep real people and proof visible.

Source: IAB and Sonata Insights, The AI Ad Gap Widens (January 2026): 505 US Gen Z and Millennial consumers, 104 US ad executives.

Proof from people like the customer changes behaviour: 85% adopted after peer videos, against 11%



US\$3.70 vs US\$38.18

cost per adoption: peer video
against standard extension

Why it worked

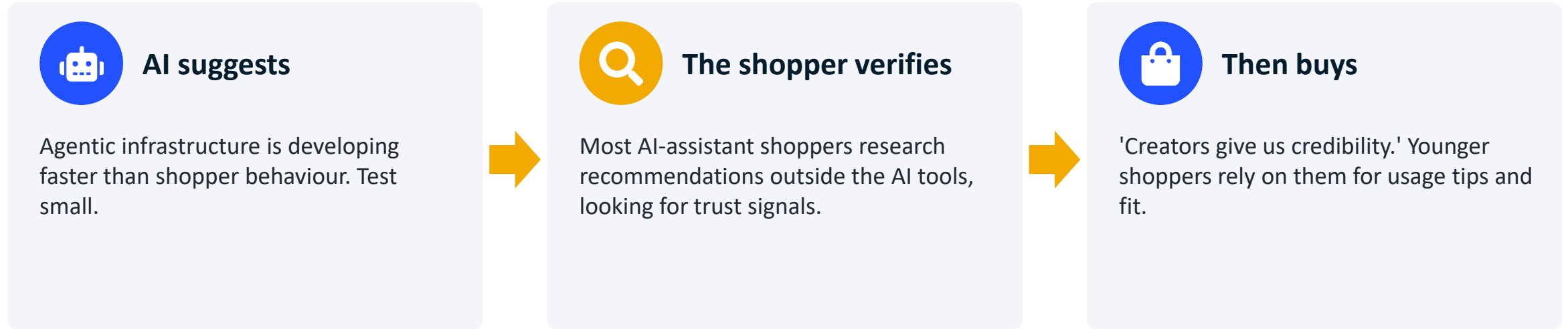
- Peers who looked like the viewer
- A trusted local guide discussed each video
- Topics were repeated

How to use it

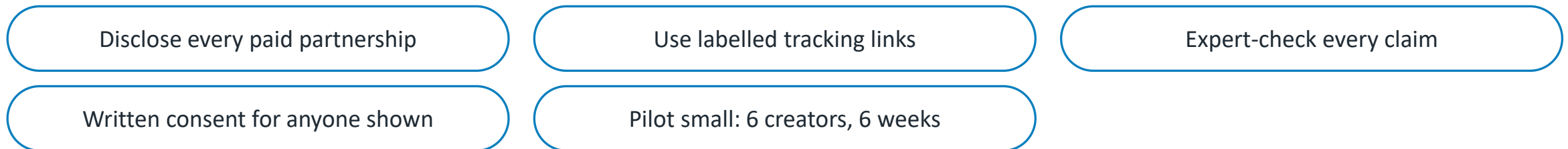
- Customers and your experts tell the story
- Written consent, expert review first
- A rep or stockist as the guide

Source: Gandhi et al., Digital Green trial, Karnataka, India (16 villages, 1,470 households; preliminary). Later studies in Ethiopia and India show smaller effects in the same direction.

AI shortlists, people verify: creators, reviews and expert proof still close the sale

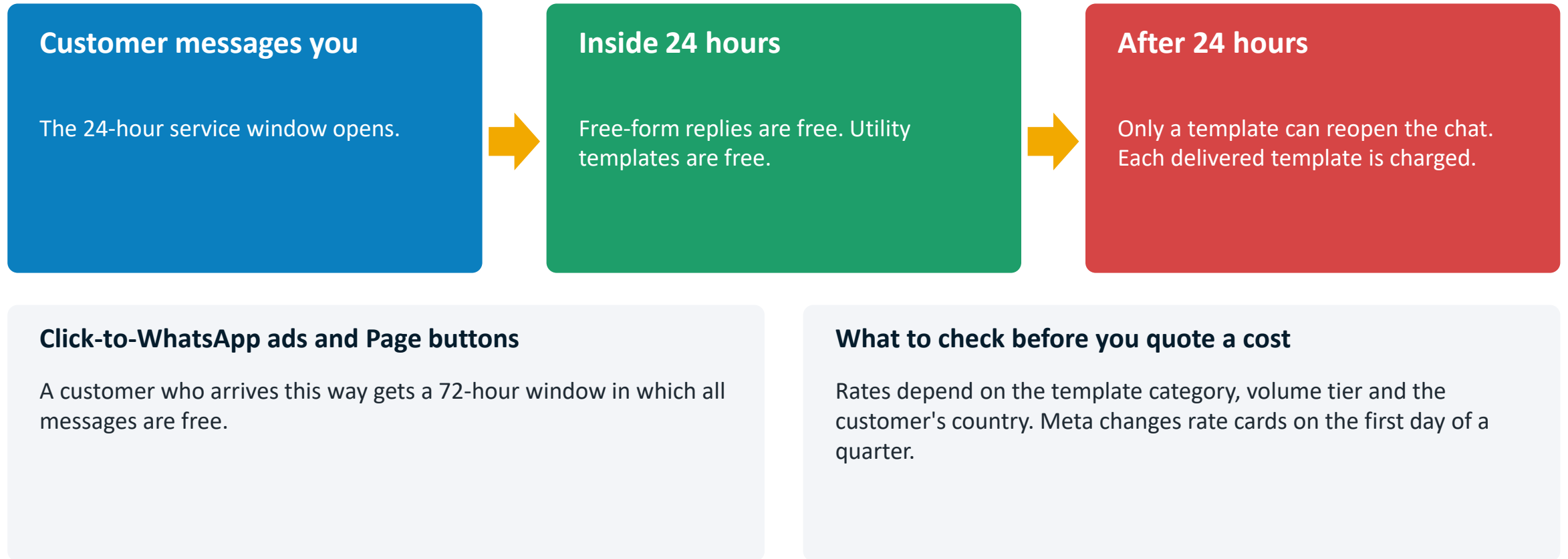


Creator guardrails



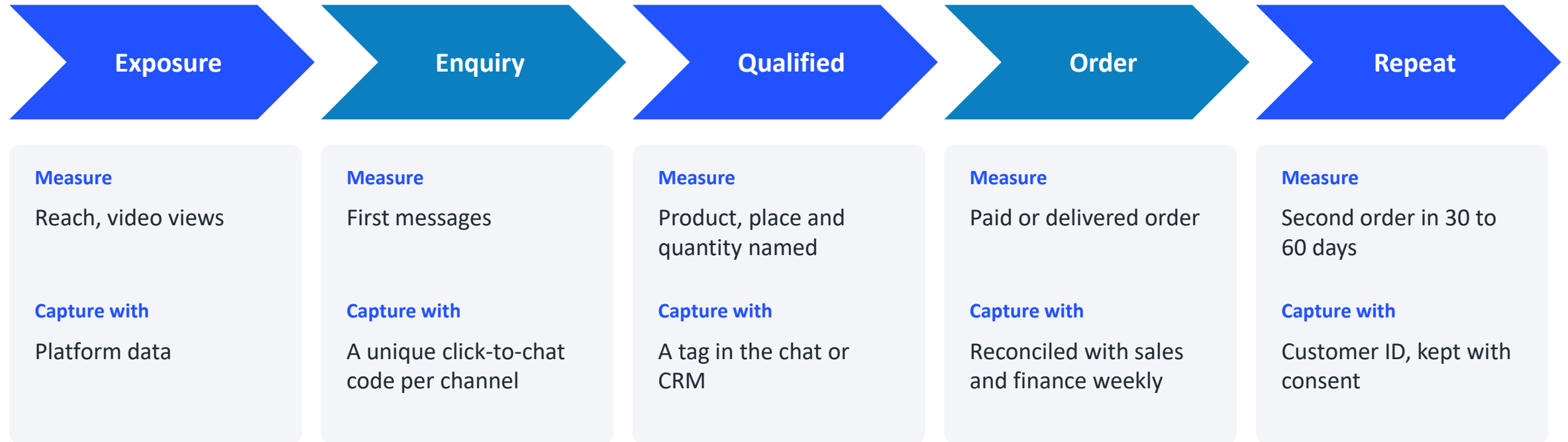
Source: EMARKETER, Takeaways from Shoptalk 2026 (27 March 2026): analyst and retailer statements, not survey tables.

WhatsApp is a business channel with a meter: replies in the 24-hour window are free, broadcasts are not



Source: Meta for Developers, WhatsApp Business Platform pricing (per-message pricing since 1 July 2025), accessed October 2026. Kenya rates not shown: check the current rate card.

Measure the enquiry, not the like: five stages from first exposure to repeat order



Report cost per enquiry, cost per order and gross profit per channel. Clicks and reach are diagnostics.

Source: Savanna Digital Labs measurement framework.

A bot earns trust only when it stays inside approved facts and hands over to a person



Do

- Answer only from the approved facts file
- Reply in the customer's language
- Give the next step: nearest outlet, price policy, how to order
- Ask consent before saving details



Never

- Invent prices, stock or health and legal advice
- Pretend to be a person
- Argue with a complaint
- Share anyone's personal data

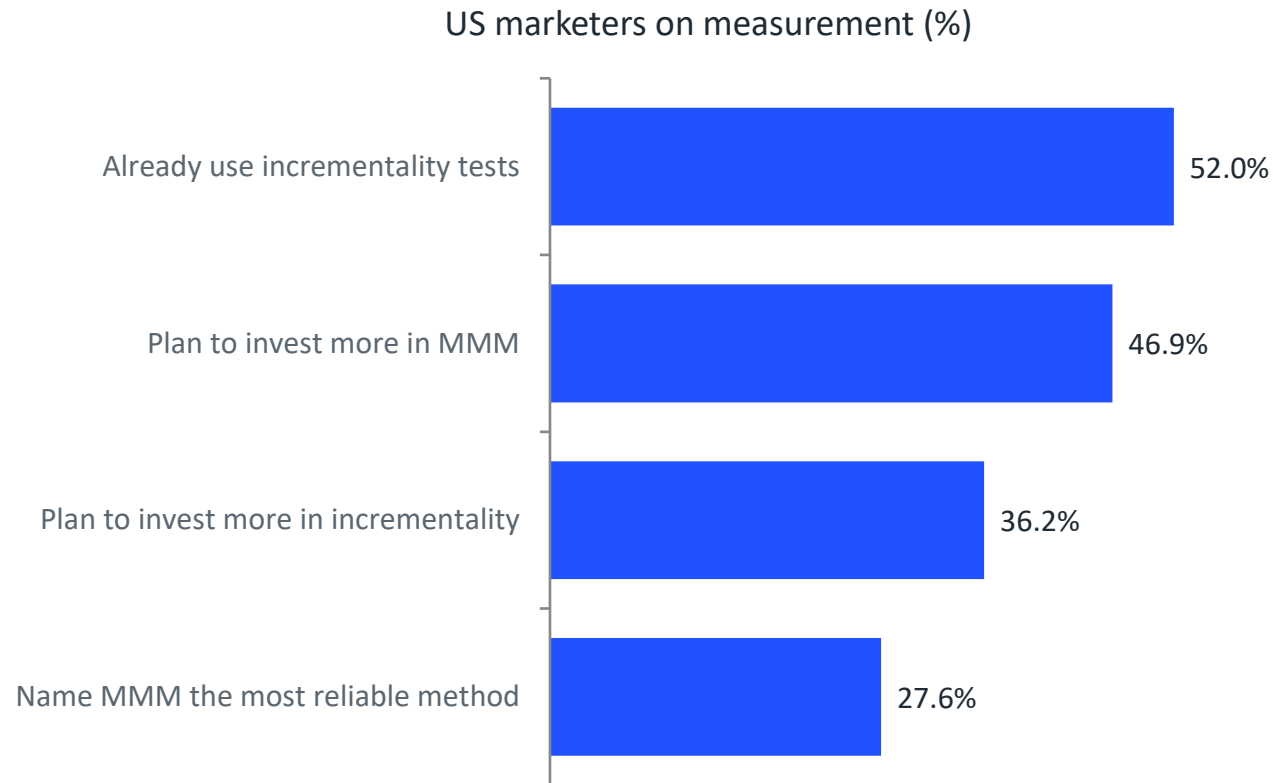


Hand over to a person

- Complaints and adverse mentions
- Health, safety or legal questions
- Large or unusual orders
- Anything the bot cannot answer twice

Source: Savanna Digital Labs bot design rules.

Measurement is moving from clicks to experiments: 52% of US marketers already run incrementality tests



44%

worry about the accuracy of incrementality results, the top barrier

With a small budget

- Holdouts by time or place
- Matched-market tests
- Before and after, with a control
- Reconcile to finance weekly

Sources: EMARKETER and TransUnion survey (July 2025), as reported by EMARKETER; Skai and Path to Purchase Institute for the 44% barrier (retail media, CPG). US marketers.

Set budgets from payback, and stop where the next customer costs more than they return

Method	The question it answers
Percent of revenue	What do others spend? A sanity check
Competitive parity	What are rivals doing?
Objective and task	What will this goal cost?
Payback	When does the next shilling stop paying back?

Customer value = margin per unit × units a year × years kept

Payback = cost to win a customer ÷ monthly gross profit



Illustrative numbers, not a forecast. Method: Savanna Digital Labs payback planning. Benchmarks from CMO surveys are a sanity check only.

AI pays back for teams that automate more and verify more, not for teams that only cut costs

1 in 3

CMOs see the returns they expect from AI

2x

more likely to realise returns when teams automate more

1.4x

more likely: high performers verify automated work



Let AI do

- First drafts and variants
- Translation drafts
- Tagging and reporting
- Summaries of comments and calls



Keep humans on

- Facts, claims and numbers
- Brand voice and approvals
- Customer conversations
- Ethics, disclosure and budget calls

Sources: Gartner, Kate Fridley (18 May 2026; figures attributed to unnamed Gartner research); IAB, The AI Ad Gap Widens (January 2026): cost efficiency the top cited benefit at 64%.

Consent is a growth input: Kenyan firms paid over KES 30 million for privacy violations in 2025

KES 30M+

paid by Kenyan firms to individuals for privacy violations in 2025

KES 500,000

awarded to a person who kept getting marketing emails after asking for erasure

KES 400,000

reported penalty on a lender for unsolicited SMSs and calls to one person

A consent checklist

- Capture consent where data is collected and state the purpose
- Keep a consent log
- Make opt-out and erasure one message away
- Set and publish a retention period
- Sign data processing terms with every vendor and bot platform
- Never buy or scrape lists
- Check whether registration with the regulator applies

Sources: TechTrends Kenya (12 January 2026, ODPC enforcement); NTV Kenya (ODPC penalty on Platinum Credit); Kenya Data Protection Act 2019. Press-reported amounts. Not legal advice.

What we may have missed: eight gaps that decide who wins in 2026



Brand and performance

Brand builds the demand that performance harvests. Fund both.



Owned audiences

Email and WhatsApp lists cannot be switched off by an algorithm.



Language and context

Kiswahili and Sheng queries. AI Mode reached Kiswahili in March 2026.



Brand protection

Fake pages and misused names erode trust. Monitor and report.



Listening and reply

Unanswered questions are the new complaints. Name a reply owner.



Trade and offline

Radio and stockists reach where data is thin. Online captures the rest.



Agentic commerce

Infrastructure leads behaviour. Show up in answer engines; spend small.



Finance as truth

Reconcile marketing numbers to sales and finance every week.

Sources: Savanna Digital Labs; EMARKETER (Shoptalk 2026); Capital FM (March 2026); Africa Check investigations (2024 to 2025). Items carried from earlier research are marked in the appendix.

A 90-day playbook: foundation first, then the content engine, then authority and paid scale

Days 0 to 30 Foundation

- Audit AI answers, local search and the site; set baselines
- One source of truth, cleaned profiles
- Consent, privacy notice and enquiry codes
- Messaging line and bot v1 on approved facts
- Customer value and cost to win, calculated

Days 31 to 60 Content engine

- 3 posts a week; 1 expert guide a fortnight
- Reply desk with owners and response times
- Short video answers to the top questions
- Review and reply routine
- First weekly and monthly reports

Days 61 to 90 Authority and scale

- Earn mentions: press, associations, a creator pilot
- Test paid media on offers that already convert
- Release budget in gates against payback
- Repeat the audit against the baseline
- Decide what to stop, scale and fix

Gate to scale spend: tracking works, enquiries reconcile to orders, cost per order sits inside payback.

Source: Savanna Digital Labs 90-day method. Targets are directional, not guaranteed outcomes.

One page for the boss: visibility, then qualified demand, then profitable orders

1 Visibility	Share of AI answers naming you Branded search growth	Local search presence Reviews and replies
2 Qualified demand	Enquiries by channel code First response time	Qualified share Cost per enquiry
3 Profitable orders	Orders and gross profit Repeat rate	Cost to win a customer Payback in months

Clicks, reach and likes sit in an appendix as diagnostics.

Source: Savanna Digital Labs scorecard.

Ten questions to ask on Monday morning

- 1 Who is named when a customer asks an AI tool what to buy, and are the facts right?
- 2 Do your name, phone, location and prices match on every platform?
- 3 Who owns replies, and how fast does a customer get an answer?
- 4 Which expert's name and evidence are on each piece of content?
- 5 What does an enquiry cost, and what does an order cost?
- 6 Can you trace an order back to the channel and message that started it?
- 7 Where is consent recorded, and can a customer leave in one message?
- 8 Where do you use AI, who checks it, and is it disclosed?
- 9 What would you stop doing if only payback counted?
- 10 Which test will you run this month to learn something you do not know?

Source: Savanna Digital Labs.

Be the answer. Prove it. Repeat.

Questions?

Oscar Radido Oyomba

Founder and Director, Savanna Digital Labs

oscar.oyomba@savannadigitallab.com

+254 724 671 596

Nairobi, Kenya

Questions for the room

- Where do your customers ask questions today, and who answers?
- What would you stop doing if only payback counted?
- Which of the five pillars is weakest in your team?

Appendix: sources and what is not yet verified

Sources

- SparkToro with Similarweb: zero-click Google searches, Jan to Apr 2026 (via TechWyse)
- Agarwal and Sen: AI Overviews field experiment, SSRN, April 2026 (via Search Engine Journal)
- Pew Research Center: AI summaries and clicks, July 2025
- Ahrefs: 75,000-brand studies, 2025 and December 2025
- DataReportal: Digital 2026: Kenya
- Forbes Advisor and Talker Research, via EMARKETER (2024)
- IAB and Sonata Insights: The AI Ad Gap Widens (January 2026)
- Digital Green: Gandhi et al. trial and evidence review
- Meta for Developers: WhatsApp Business Platform pricing
- EMARKETER and TransUnion (July 2025); Skai and Path to Purchase Institute
- Gartner, Kate Fridley (18 May 2026)
- TechTrends Kenya (12 Jan 2026); NTV Kenya; Kenya Data Protection Act 2019
- EMARKETER: Shoptalk 2026 takeaways (27 March 2026)
- Capital FM (March 2026); Africa Check (2024 to 2025)

Not yet verified

- Most evidence is US data: use as direction and test locally
- The AI Overviews experiment is an unreviewed working paper
- Ahrefs figures are correlations, for large brands
- Pew, Africa Check and Capital FM figures were carried from earlier research and not re-read for this deck
- Gartner does not name the surveys behind its figures
- Digital Green results are preliminary
- Kenyan privacy amounts are press-reported
- Field notes are anonymised: confirm client approval before use
- WhatsApp Kenya rates are not shown: check the rate card