The 30-Minute Marketing Audit

TALLOW MARKETING LAB

Six five-minute checks for small businesses, and the one fix to make first in each

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The 30-Minute Marketing Audit

Six blocks of five minutes, one timer, and a ranked list of what to fix first.

Most small businesses do not lack marketing. They lack a recent, honest look at all of it at once. The website was built some years ago. The newsletter goes out when someone remembers. The analytics account belongs to a freelancer who left. Each piece made sense when it was set up, and nobody has checked since whether the pieces still point the same way.

This audit is a procedure for that check. It runs in thirty minutes, split into six blocks of five, and every block has the same three parts: what to check, what good looks like, and the one fix to make first. You do not fix anything while the timer runs. You look, you write down what you see, and you give each block one point for every check that passes. The fixing starts afterwards, in the order the last chapter sets out.

> **IMPORTANT**
> Set a five-minute timer for each block and stop when it rings. An unfinished check scores zero. The limit is the method: it makes you look the way a customer does, quickly and without the context you carry in your head.

Run it alone, on a weekday morning, before email gets hold of you. If you audit a client or a colleague's business, run it without them in the room and walk them through the notes afterwards; explanations given during the audit turn findings into excuses. Before you start the first timer, have these four things ready:

A private browser window.	Search results and your own site then appear as a stranger sees them.
Your phone.	Every website check is done on the phone first.
Your logins.	Analytics, email platform and business profile, tested before the clock starts.
The scoring sheet.	Printed or open beside you, one line per finding, no more.

Positioning

Minutes 0 to 5. Positioning is the sentence everything else depends on. If a stranger cannot tell within a few seconds who you serve and why you rather than the alternative, no amount of search or email work will rescue it. Start here, because every later block borrows its answer.

A quick outside test helps: show the homepage to someone who does not know the business for five seconds, then hide it. If they can repeat what you sell and who it is for, the positioning works. If they describe your industry instead of your offer, it does not.

What to check

Use the homepage, the main social profile and the last sales email. Read them as if you had never heard of the business.

1	**Write the one sentence.** Without looking at anything, write who you serve, the problem you solve and why you over the alternative. More than a minute is a finding.
2	**Compare it with the headline.** The first line on the homepage should say roughly the same thing, in words a customer would use.
3	**Check the three places agree.** Homepage, social bio and your last sales email should describe the same business to the same person.
4	**Name the alternative.** Write what a customer does if they do not buy from you: a competitor, a spreadsheet, nothing at all.
5	**Find one proof point.** A named client, a concrete result or a guarantee, visible on the homepage without scrolling.

What good looks like

Good positioning is specific enough to exclude someone. The first three headlines below, written for illustration, could belong to almost any business. The second three could only belong to one, and the right customer recognises themselves at once.

Before

- Quality ingredients for every kitchen
- Innovative solutions for modern businesses
- Your trusted partner in growth

After

- Bread flour and baking kit for home bakers who have outgrown the supermarket
- Bookkeeping for independent restaurants, by people who have run one
- Rebrands for family firms handing over to the next generation

The fix to make first

Rewrite the homepage headline so it matches your one sentence, then paste the same sentence into the main social bio. It is the cheapest fix in this audit and it improves every block that follows, because search snippets, sign-up forms and profiles all borrow from it. If you could not write the sentence in a minute, do that before anything else: book an hour this week, write ten versions, and read the best two aloud to a customer. Their face will tell you which one is true.

Website

Minutes 5 to 10. Your website is where most other marketing sends people, so its job is narrow: confirm the visitor is in the right place, make the next step obvious, and get out of the way. Check it on your phone first, on mobile data, because that is where the problems hide.

Do not judge the design in this block, and do not open the laptop yet. Taste takes longer than five minutes and rarely changes what visitors do. Judge only whether a stranger can find the offer, believe it and act on it.

What to check

Five checks, on your phone, in this order. Keep your thumb on the screen and note anything that makes you wait or wonder.

01

Load the homepage on mobile data

Note how long it takes before you can read the headline. If you start to wonder, so does everyone else.

02

Find the main action

One button, near the top, with a label that says what happens: “Book a tasting”, not “Learn more”.

03

Open every menu link

Note anything broken, empty, out of date or named in internal jargon.

04

Contact yourself

Use the form or email link as a customer would, and note whether an acknowledgement arrives.

05

Read the footer

Address, hours, legal pages and copyright year should be current. An old year quietly says nobody is home.

What good looks like

A healthy small business website, in five lines:

- The headline matches the positioning sentence from the first block.
- One primary action, repeated unchanged at the top and bottom of every key page.
- Prices, or at least where prices begin, visible without a phone call.
- Every page has one job and a title that says what it is.
- A real person, place or product photo appears near the top.

Notice what is missing from that list: animation, a blog, a newsletter pop-up the moment someone arrives. None of them is wrong, but none of them is something a first visit needs. A plain site that does those five things will usually serve a small business better than a beautiful one that hides its prices behind a contact form.

The fix to make first

Change the label of your main button so it names the outcome, and remove every competing button from the top of the homepage. One clear action beats three polite ones. If the contact test failed, fix that the same day. An enquiry form that delivers nowhere is the most expensive fault a small business can have, and it is usually a single setting in the form tool or an expired forwarding rule.

Search visibility

Minutes 10 to 15. Search is where people who already want what you sell go looking. You do not need a specialist to find the obvious gaps: a business profile half filled in, pages titled in words nobody searches for, and a brand name that leads to someone else.

Results are personal, shaped by location and history, so do this block in the private window. If you serve a local area, add the area's name to your searches rather than relying on where you happen to be sitting.

What to check

1	**Search your own name.** Your site should be the first result, with your business profile beside it.
2	**Open your business profile.** On Google Business Profile, or wherever your customers search, check hours, category, photos and the date of your latest post.
3	**Search the job, not the name.** Type the phrase a customer would use, with your town if you are local: "wedding florist Leeds". Note where you appear.
4	**Read your page titles.** Look at the browser tab on your three main pages. Each should say what the page offers, not "Home" or "Services".
5	**Read your reviews.** Note the newest review, its date and whether anyone replied.

The third check is the one that stings. Many small businesses appear for their own name and almost nothing else, because their pages describe the business rather than answering what a customer types. That is not a technical problem. It is a writing problem, which makes it fixable by the person who knows the customers best.

What good looks like

You own your name.	Your site and profile hold the top of the results for your business name.
The profile is alive.	Recent photos, current hours, and replies to reviews within days.
Pages match searches.	Each important service has its own page, titled in the customer's words.
Reviews keep arriving.	New ones come in regularly because you ask, not by accident.

The fix to make first

Complete the business profile today: every field, five recent photos, the correct category, and a short reply to every review from the last year, good or bad. Then pick the three customers who were happiest with you recently and send each a personal note with a direct link to leave a review. A request from someone they actually dealt with is much harder to ignore than an automated one. Make replying to reviews part of the weekly routine from now on, including the awkward ones: a calm, specific answer to a complaint reassures the next reader more than another five-star review.

Email and list

Minutes 15 to 20. Your email list is the only audience you own outright. Platforms change their rules and their reach; an inbox does not. This block checks whether people can join the list, whether they hear from you, and whether what they hear is worth opening.

What to check

1	**Find the sign-up.** Count the clicks from the homepage to joining your list. More than one is a finding.
2	**Join it yourself.** Use a personal address. Note what arrives, how quickly, and whether it says what happens next.
3	**Read the last three subject lines.** Would you open them if you were a customer? Be honest.
4	**Check the rhythm.** Note the dates of the last three sends. Long, irregular gaps are a finding even if each email was good.
5	**Reply to one.** Check that the reply-to address reaches a person who reads it.

The second check usually tells you most. A new subscriber is never more interested than in the minute after signing up, and many lists greet them with a generic confirmation, or with nothing at all until the next campaign goes out weeks later.

> Nobody unsubscribes from a list they look forward to.

What good looks like

A good welcome email is short, arrives immediately and does three things: it delivers what was promised, says what comes next and how often, and asks one easy question. For a small flour mill, it might read like this:

“Thanks for joining. Here is the price list you asked for. Every second Thursday I send one short note on what is fresh and worth ordering. One question: what are you baking at the moment? Just reply, I read every answer.”

That last line does more than it seems. Replies teach you what customers care about, in their own words, and they tell email providers that your messages are wanted. Notice also what the email leaves out: no logo banner, no grid of products, no discount code in the first message. A welcome that reads like a note from a person sets the tone for every email after it.

The fix to make first

Write or rewrite the welcome email using the shape above, and set it to send the moment someone joins. Then put the sign-up one click from the homepage, with a line that says what people get and how often. Those two changes turn the list from a storage cupboard into a conversation. If you have not sent anything for months, do not open the next email with an apology for the silence. Send something useful and let the rhythm restart quietly.

Social and content

Minutes 20 to 25. Social media is where small businesses most often spend time without knowing whether it pays. This block is not about posting more. It checks whether what you already publish points somewhere, sounds like you, and could be found and reused next month.

What to check

Audit one channel only: the one where customers actually talk to you. Ignore the others for now, however guilty they make you feel.

1	**Scroll your last nine posts.** Count how many show the product, a customer or a result, rather than announcements about yourself.
2	**Follow the profile link.** It should lead to a page that continues the conversation, not just the homepage.
3	**Find your best piece.** Identify the post or article that drew the most replies or enquiries, and note whether you ever reused it.
4	**Check the inbox.** Look for unanswered comments and direct messages older than two days.
5	**Look at next week.** Is anything planned? An empty calendar is a finding.

The fourth check matters more than its size suggests. A question left unanswered in a comment is a sales conversation abandoned in public, where every other customer can see it.

What good looks like

Good small business content is narrow and repeatable. It is closer to a column than a campaign: the same few subjects, shown from different angles, often enough that people learn what to expect.

Do

- Post fewer things, and reuse the ones that worked
- Show the product in use, by real people
- Send attention somewhere specific with every post
- Answer comments and messages within a day

Don't

- Join every platform because a competitor did
- Fill gaps with generic quotes and awareness days
- Judge success by follower numbers alone
- Leave enquiries sitting in direct messages

The fix to make first

Take your best piece from the third check and make three new things from it: a shorter post, a version for your email list, and a page that answers the question behind it. Then fill next week’s calendar with those three. Reuse is not laziness. Most of your audience missed it the first time, and the ones who saw it will not mind meeting a good idea twice. If no piece stood out, that is the finding: pick the question customers ask most often in person, and answer it properly once.

Measurement

Minutes 25 to 30. The last block asks one question: if something from the previous twenty-five minutes worked better next month, would you know? Many small businesses have analytics installed and nobody looking at it. Five minutes is enough to see whether the basics are wired up.

What to check

1	**Log in to analytics.** Confirm you can, that data arrived yesterday, and that you know who else has access.
2	**Name the one action.** Decide which visitor action matters most, such as an enquiry, a booking or a sale, and check it is recorded as a conversion.
3	**Test it.** Complete that action yourself and confirm it appears, with the right source.
4	**Check your campaign links.** Links in your last email and social post should carry UTM tags, so visits are credited correctly.
5	**Ask people directly.** Your enquiry form or checkout should ask “How did you hear about us?” in plain words.

What good looks like

Good measurement for a small business is small. One action that matters, recorded reliably with its source attached, and checked once a week by a named person. Everything else in the analytics tool is optional until that works. The plain question on the form matters as much as the software: analytics sees the last click, while customers remember the friend, the article or the conversation that actually brought them. When the two disagree, believe the customer, and look for the channel that started the conversation rather than the one that ended it.

The fix to make first

Set up the single conversion and test it end to end today, then add the “How did you hear about us?” question to your form. From now on, tag every link you control. A naming rule written on one page, such as source, medium and campaign in lower case, prevents the mess that makes reports unreadable six months from now. Finally, put fifteen minutes in the calendar every Monday to look at one number: how many of that action happened last week, and where they came from. Write it down by hand if you like. The habit matters more than the dashboard.

Measure one thing well before you measure ten things badly.

Tallow Marketing Lab, audit field notes

After the timer

Thirty minutes are up. You have a page of notes and six scores. Now turn them into a short, ranked list, because audits rarely fail on bad findings. They fail when someone fixes the easiest thing in every block and finishes none of them.

The scoring sheet

One point for every check that passes. Copy the first fix for each block from your notes.

Block	Score out of 5	First fix
Positioning		
Website		
Search visibility		
Email and list		
Social and content		
Measurement		

Read the total, then set it aside. The useful number is the lowest block score, because that is where a customer is most likely to drop out. A business with strong social content and a broken contact form is losing the very people its content attracts, whatever the total says.

Impact against effort

Every fix sits somewhere on two scales: how much it will change what customers do, and how much time or money it takes. Rank yours with this grid, using judgement rather than precise estimates.

Impact and effort	What it means	What to do
High impact, low effort	Quick wins, such as a headline or a button label	Do them this week
High impact, high effort	Big bets, such as a new website or a pricing change	Plan one, then schedule it
Low impact, low effort	Fill-ins, such as tidying old posts	Do them when an hour comes free
Low impact, high effort	Money pits, such as a new platform nobody asked for	Drop them, without guilt

Most audits produce a few quick wins and one big bet. If yours produced more, take the quick wins from the lowest-scoring block first. A short list that gets finished is worth more than a long one that gets admired. Write the final list somewhere you will see it every day, in the order you will do it, with a name next to each item if more than one person is involved.

The next thirty days

One focus per week keeps the work small enough to finish alongside everything else. Here is the month:

- Week 1: Make the quick wins from your lowest-scoring block. Rewrite, publish, done. Start nothing large.
- Week 2: Fix measurement, so whatever you change next can be seen. One conversion, tested, with tagged links.
- Week 3: Take the quick wins from the second-lowest block, and write a one-page plan for your big bet.
- Week 4: Run the audit again, timer and all. Compare scores block by block and note what moved.

The second run is faster and more honest than the first, because you know where to look. Repeat it every quarter. Over a year the audit stops being an event and becomes a habit, which is the point: marketing rarely fails all at once. It drifts, a little each month, until somebody looks.

Want the full audit done for you?

- [ ] Send us your scoring sheet and the address of your website
- [ ] We run the full audit on all six blocks within five working days
- [ ] You get a ranked plan and an hour on a call to walk through it

Book a full audit