# **Executing a Winning Digital Marketing Strategy in the Portland Metropolitan Area: A Guide to Research and Client Identification**

## **1. Introduction: Laying the Groundwork for Client Acquisition in Portland**

The primary objective of this report is to provide a clear and actionable framework for researching and identifying potential local business clients within the Portland metropolitan area. This foundational work is crucial before implementing any digital marketing strategy, such as that advocated by Nick Ponte. Understanding the local market and pinpointing businesses that can most benefit from digital marketing services will significantly enhance the effectiveness of any subsequent outreach and service delivery.

The Portland metropolitan area presents a vibrant and diverse business ecosystem. It's a landscape characterized by both established enterprises and a steady stream of new ventures.1 This dynamism, coupled with the presence of numerous digital marketing agencies 3, signifies a market that is aware of digital marketing's importance but also one where businesses continually need to adapt and improve their online presence to remain competitive. For those entering this market to offer digital marketing services, this environment presents both opportunity and the need for a well-structured approach. Simply casting a wide, undifferentiated net is unlikely to yield optimal results. Instead, a systematic method for identifying businesses with specific, unmet digital marketing needs is paramount. This report will outline such a method, enabling a focused and efficient client acquisition process.

The journey ahead involves understanding the geographical and economic contours of the Portland area, identifying business types most receptive to digital marketing, and employing effective research techniques to build a targeted list of prospects. By following the steps detailed herein, the user and their son can navigate this landscape with confidence, focusing their efforts on businesses where their services can deliver tangible value.

## **2. Defining Your Territory: Understanding the Portland Metropolitan Landscape**

A thorough understanding of the Portland metropolitan area's geography and economic structure is the first step in effective client prospecting. This knowledge allows for targeted efforts and messaging tailored to specific local conditions.

### **Geographic Breakdown: Counties and Key Cities**

The Portland Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), often referred to as "The Metro," spans across two states and comprises seven counties. In Oregon, these are Columbia, Washington, Yamhill, Multnomah, and Clackamas counties. In Washington State, the MSA includes Clark and Skamania counties.4 The total population of this area is approximately 2.3 million people.4

The largest and most economically significant cities within this area include Portland, OR (primarily in Multnomah County); Vancouver, WA (in Clark County); Gresham, OR (in Multnomah County); and Hillsboro, OR (in Washington County).4 Recognizing these key urban centers and their surrounding county contexts is vital. Digital marketing needs can vary significantly between a business located in the dense urban core of Portland and one in a more suburban or rural part of the MSA. For example, a search for "plumbers in Happy Valley" (a city in Clackamas County 5) will yield different results and target a different customer base than "restaurants in downtown Portland."

### **Economic Snapshot: Dominant Industries and Growth Sectors Across the Metro Area**

The Portland MSA boasts a diverse economy. Key industries across Oregon with a strong presence in the metro area include technology and software (which constitutes 11% of the state's GDP, with numerous tech hubs clustered around Portland), timber and wood products, healthcare and social assistance (Oregon Health & Science University is a top employer), agriculture and food processing (with notable companies like Tillamook and Bob's Red Mill), advanced manufacturing (including Nike and Precision Castparts), education, tourism and hospitality (driven by attractions like Mt. Hood and local establishments like McMenamins), renewable energy, transportation, and financial services.6

Delving into the county level reveals further economic specializations 4:

* **Skamania County, WA:** Dominated by the construction industry, largely due to its suburban, residential nature and the need for new housing. 90% of the county is forested, and Mt. St. Helens is located here.
* **Clark County, WA:** Features a strong construction sector, alongside manufacturing, wholesale trade, and health services. Vancouver, the metro area's second-largest city, is in Clark County.
* **Columbia County, OR:** Retail and wholesale trade are its largest industries, significantly fueled by paper manufacturing.
* **Washington County, OR:** Oregon's second most populous county, its economy is heavily driven by the presence of Intel and other electronics manufacturers in Hillsboro. Nike is also headquartered here, making it a high-tech and manufacturing hub.6
* **Yamhill County, OR:** A mostly rural county, its largest industry is healthcare assistance, with its western portions being significant producers of timber products.
* **Multnomah County, OR:** Oregon's most populous and dense county, home to the city of Portland. Its largest industry is healthcare, with a strong presence in trade, manufacturing, and professional and technological services.4 Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services and Retail Trade are also among the largest industries here.8
* **Clackamas County, OR:** The largest county by area, its key industries include manufacturing, trade, accommodation services, healthcare, and social assistance.4 It is also home to industry leaders in metals, machinery, high-tech, forestry, food and beverage processing, renewable energy, nursery/agriculture, and software development.9 Mt. Hood, a major tourist attraction, is located here.

This county-level specialization offers distinct avenues for targeted client acquisition. Businesses within specific industry clusters often share unique digital marketing requirements. For instance, a B2B technology firm in Washington County, near Intel's operations 4, will likely prioritize sophisticated lead generation and thought leadership content. In contrast, a tourism-oriented business in Clackamas County, leveraging the appeal of Mt. Hood 4, would benefit more from visually rich social media campaigns, local SEO, and online booking integrations. By understanding these nuances, digital marketing services can be more effectively tailored and pitched.

Furthermore, areas experiencing significant residential growth, such as Skamania County with its construction boom driven by housing needs 4, signal an expanding local customer base. As new residents move in, the demand for a wide array of local services—plumbing, dental, retail, restaurants—will inevitably rise. Businesses in these growing "bedroom communities," whether new or existing, will require robust digital marketing to become visible and attract these newcomers. This creates a fertile ground for identifying service-based businesses in need of online presence enhancement.

To provide a consolidated view, Table 1 offers an overview of the Portland Metropolitan Area's counties.

**Table 1: Overview of the Portland Metropolitan Area**

| **County Name** | **State** | **Key Cities/Areas within County** | **Summary of Dominant Industries & Economic Focus** | **Notable Large Employers (if mentioned)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Clackamas | OR | Happy Valley, Lake Oswego, Oregon City, West Linn, Milwaukie | Manufacturing, trade, accommodation services, healthcare, social assistance, metals, machinery, high-tech, forestry, food & beverage processing, renewable energy, nursery/ag, software development 4 | Kaiser Sunnyside Medical Center, Legacy Meridian Park Hospital 10 |
| Multnomah | OR | Portland, Gresham, Troutdale, Fairview | Healthcare, trade, manufacturing, professional & technological services, retail trade 4 | Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) 6 |
| Washington | OR | Hillsboro, Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin | Electronics manufacturing, high-tech, general manufacturing 4 | Intel, Nike 4 |
| Yamhill | OR | McMinnville | Healthcare assistance, timber products, agriculture (wine region) 4 |  |
| Columbia | OR | St. Helens, Scappoose | Retail/wholesale trade, paper manufacturing 4 |  |
| Clark | WA | Vancouver, Battle Ground, Camas | Construction, manufacturing, wholesale trade, health services 4 |  |
| Skamania | WA | Stevenson, Carson | Construction (residential), tourism (forested, Mt. St. Helens) 4 |  |

This table serves as a quick reference to help strategize initial prospecting efforts, aligning service offerings with the economic characteristics of each part of the metro area.

## **3. Identifying Your Ideal Clients: Pinpointing Businesses Ripe for Digital Marketing**

Once the general landscape is understood, the next step is to identify specific types of businesses that are most likely to need, invest in, and benefit from digital marketing services.

### **Characteristics of Businesses That Thrive with Digital Marketing Support**

Certain business characteristics make them prime candidates for digital marketing:

* **Reliance on a Local Customer Base:** Businesses like local restaurants, retail stores, home service providers (plumbers, electricians, landscapers), and healthcare practitioners (dentists, chiropractors) depend heavily on attracting customers from their immediate vicinity.
* **Operation in Competitive Niches:** When many businesses offer similar services, a strong digital presence is essential for differentiation and capturing market share.
* **Clear Service or Product Offering:** Businesses with tangible products or clearly defined services can effectively showcase their value online through websites, social media, and targeted advertising.
* **Goals of Lead Generation, Increased Foot Traffic, or Online Sales:** Businesses actively seeking to grow their customer base or sales volume are often receptive to digital marketing solutions.
* **Service-Based Businesses Emphasizing Trust and Reputation:** For professions like contractors, lawyers, and medical doctors, online reviews and a professional web presence are critical for building credibility.

### **High-Potential Sectors in Portland**

Drawing from the provided information, several sectors within the Portland metro area stand out as having high potential for digital marketing clients:

* **Home Services:** This is a vast category encompassing plumbers 11, concrete services, tree services, and general construction.5 These businesses often rely heavily on local search engine optimization (SEO) to be found when a customer has an immediate need, and their reputation, showcased through online reviews, is paramount.
* **Healthcare & Wellness:** The Portland area has a significant healthcare sector.4 This includes chiropractors, dentists, aesthetic services 5, and other specialized medical practices. Patients increasingly research practitioners and clinics online before making appointments, making a professional website, strong local SEO, and positive reviews essential.19
* **Retail (Brick-and-Mortar & E-commerce):** This includes a wide range of businesses from boutiques and specialty shops (e.g., gourmet gifts, flower markets 20) to hardware stores.5 Many require assistance with local SEO to drive foot traffic, e-commerce website development or optimization, social media marketing to build a brand community, and online advertising. The observed churn in the retail sector, with new stores opening and others closing 1, indicates ongoing opportunities as businesses enter the market or seek to improve their competitiveness.
* **Professional Services:** This category includes real estate agents and firms 5, insurance agencies 5, and financial service providers.6 These businesses often need sophisticated lead generation strategies, professional online branding to build trust, and content marketing to demonstrate expertise.
* **Food & Beverage:** Restaurants, cafes, and Portland's famous food carts 1 are heavily reliant on their online presence. Online menus, integration with review platforms, local search visibility, and engaging social media content are critical for attracting diners.
* **Tourism & Hospitality:** Particularly relevant in areas like Clackamas County (home to Mt. Hood) and Skamania County 4, businesses in this sector (hotels, tour operators, activity providers) need strong online visibility, attractive websites with booking capabilities, and active social media engagement.
* **Manufacturing (Smaller Scale/Local Focus):** While large entities like Intel and Nike dominate headlines 6, smaller manufacturing firms, especially those serving local B2B markets or niche consumer segments, also require digital marketing. For example, the Clackamas Industrial Area hosts many metals fabricators and industrial support services 10 that might need to improve their B2B online presence or lead generation.

Many businesses in these more traditional, local-focused industries may have been slower to adopt comprehensive digital marketing strategies compared to newer, tech-centric companies. Their owners are typically experts in their specific trade but may lack the time, expertise, or inclination to manage their online marketing effectively. However, their customers are increasingly found online; for instance, individuals are now more likely to search online for a local bookstore than to use a phone book.23 This creates a significant gap between traditional business practices and modern consumer behavior, representing a substantial opportunity for digital marketing providers. These "lagging adopters" often have clear, demonstrable needs—such as a modern, mobile-friendly website, better local SEO, or active review management—that can deliver tangible results, making them excellent candidates for initial client engagements.

Another unique target segment within the Portland area is franchise businesses. The presence of franchise businesses for sale (e.g., gourmet gift franchises, bubble tea franchises 21) and digital marketing agencies that specifically offer franchise-focused services 3 points to this niche. Franchisees typically must adhere to corporate branding guidelines but are often responsible for their own local marketing efforts. They may have a marketing budget allocated as part of their franchise agreement but could lack the local market expertise or the time to execute campaigns effectively. A digital marketing agency can provide tailored local strategies that respect brand consistency while driving local results. Exploring these local franchise operations could prove to be a fruitful avenue, as these businesses inherently understand the importance of marketing and are often receptive to expert local assistance.

## **4. Phase 1: Casting a Wide Net – Initial Prospecting Techniques**

The initial phase of client acquisition involves generating a broad list of potential businesses. This "wide net" approach helps ensure that no significant opportunities are missed before narrowing the focus.

### **Leveraging Online Business Directories**

Online directories are valuable resources for compiling lists of local businesses.

* **Chambers of Commerce:** These organizations often maintain member directories that are curated lists of businesses operating in their specific geographic area. Key chambers in the Portland metro area include:
  + Portland Metro Chamber 24
  + Beaverton Area Chamber of Commerce 25
  + Gresham Area Chamber of Commerce 25
  + North Clackamas County Chamber of Commerce (serving areas like Happy Valley) 25
  + Washington County Chamber of Commerce (serving areas like Hillsboro) 25
  + Lake Oswego Chamber of Commerce 25
  + McMinnville Area Chamber of Commerce (serving Yamhill County) 25 Visiting the websites of these chambers is a recommended first step. Many provide public access to their member lists, though some may require membership or a nominal fee for full directory access. Examples of business listings found in such directories include MP Plumbing Co. and A&E Plumbing through chamber portals.17
* **Specialized Local Directories:**
  + **Mercatus PDX** 2**:** This directory specifically features businesses owned by people of color within the Portland Metro area. Utilizing such a directory can help connect with and support specific community segments.
  + **Happy Valley Business Association (HVBA) Member Directory** 5**:** This provides a categorized list of businesses within the specific locality of Happy Valley, demonstrating the value of hyper-local resources.
* **General Online Directories:**
  + **Enigma.com** 26**:** This platform lists businesses along with their addresses, which can be useful for broad searches across various sectors.
  + **Yelp** 22**:** While commonly known as a review site, Yelp also functions as a powerful tool for discovering businesses categorized by type and location. Its utility in ranking businesses, such as burger joints in Portland 22, underscores its value as a discovery platform.

### **Strategic Use of Google Search and Google Maps for Business Discovery**

Google Search and Google Maps are indispensable tools for initial business prospecting.

* **Effective Search Queries:** Employing specific search queries like "[service type] in [city/county/neighborhood]" (e.g., "plumbers in Happy Valley OR", "boutiques in Pearl District Portland") can quickly yield lists of relevant businesses.
* **Google Maps Exploration:** Visually scanning specific areas on Google Maps can reveal businesses that might not surface in simple text searches. Google encourages businesses to create a "free Business Profile" to "stand out on Google Search and Maps".28 This implies that businesses whose profiles are incomplete, unmanaged, or non-existent are missing significant visibility opportunities.
* **Targeting Beyond Page One:** Businesses appearing on the second page or further down in Google search results for relevant keywords are often prime candidates for SEO services, as their lower visibility directly impacts their potential to attract online customers.

### **Exploring Local Industry-Specific Associations and Listings**

Many industries have their own professional associations or trade groups (e.g., a local chapter of a home builders association, a county dental society). These organizations frequently publish member directories, which can be another source for identifying businesses within a specific sector.

The effectiveness of these broad search techniques is significantly enhanced by applying a hyperlocal focus. Directories like the Happy Valley Business Association 5 and the ability to search for businesses within specific neighborhoods (e.g., "Sellwood neighborhood" 23, or districts like "Downtown Portland, Pearl District, Alberta Arts District" 29) highlight the importance of granularity. Businesses often serve a very specific local radius, and their digital marketing efforts, particularly local SEO, are most potent when targeted precisely. Identifying businesses at this granular, neighborhood level allows for a more compelling pitch centered on reaching their immediate customer base, potentially uncovering prospects that larger, less geographically focused agencies might overlook. Smaller districts within Multnomah and Clackamas counties, for instance, offer such hyperlocal targeting opportunities.4

## **5. Phase 2: Due Diligence – Assessing Digital Footprints and Identifying Needs**

Once an initial list of potential clients is generated, the next critical phase is due diligence. This involves evaluating the online presence of each business to identify specific weaknesses and potential needs for digital marketing services. This assessment transforms a general list into a collection of qualified leads.

### **Red Flags: Identifying Businesses with a Weak or Missing Online Presence**

Several indicators can signal that a business is a strong candidate for digital marketing assistance:

* **No Website or Outdated/Poorly Designed Website:** In today's digital age, a professional website is fundamental. As noted, if a local bookstore lacks an outstanding, optimized website, it's likely losing customers to online searches.23 Many businesses may have "cheap builds" characterized by limited functionality and generic design, which often require a complete rebuild to be effective.30 The assessment should involve checking if a website exists, and if so, evaluating its modernity, professionalism, ease of navigation, and how well it represents the business's brand. An inaccessible website, as noted for one plumbing service 31, is a major red flag indicating a critical need.
* **Lack of Mobile-Friendliness:** With a significant portion of internet traffic originating from mobile devices, a non-mobile-friendly website is a major handicap. Google's mobile-first indexing policy means that the mobile version of a site is prioritized for ranking.32 A website that functions poorly on a smartphone will deter users and negatively impact search rankings.
* **Poor Search Engine Visibility (Local SEO Gaps):** Businesses that don't appear prominently in local search results, especially on Google Maps, are missing out on many potential customers.29 Effective local SEO is crucial for discoverability.23 The assessment should include checking where a business ranks for relevant local keywords and whether its Google Business Profile is claimed and optimized.
* **Negative or Unmanaged Online Reviews:** Online reviews heavily influence consumer decisions. Approximately 60% of customers may avoid a company with negative online reviews.33 Tools like Targetron are designed to find companies with poor ratings on platforms like Google Maps 34, and it's widely acknowledged that negative reviews can severely damage a business's reputation if not managed.35 The evaluation should consider the average star rating on Google, Yelp, and other relevant platforms, and whether the business actively responds to both positive and negative feedback.
* **Inactive or Non-Existent Social Media Presence:** Social media is a key channel for building brand personality, engaging with customers, and driving traffic.36 A business with no relevant social media profiles, or profiles that are inactive and unengaging, is missing opportunities to connect with its audience.

### **Essential Tools for Preliminary Online Presence Audits**

A range of tools, many of them free, can be used for this preliminary assessment:

* **Manual Website Review:** The first step is often a simple visit to the business's website. Assess its overall design, content quality, clarity of calls to action, and user experience. Examples of such assessments were performed for plumber websites, noting elements like calls to action and SSL status.13
* **Google Search:** Perform basic searches for the business name to see what appears in the search results, including their Google Business Profile (GBP) panel. Then, search for their services locally (e.g., "best coffee shop near me") to see if they rank.
* **Google Business Profile (GBP) Analysis:** A well-optimized GBP is crucial for local businesses. A GBP should highlight essential information (phone number, hours), showcase photos and logos, list business attributes (e.g., women-owned, veteran-owned), and feature posts, offers, Q&A sections, and customer reviews.28 A "Full Google Business Profile Audit" should check for Name, Address, Phone number (NAP) consistency, correct business categories, quality of images, and recent posts.39 While advanced paid tools like Planable, SocialPilot, and Moz Local can analyze GBP performance metrics such as searches, clicks, calls, and direction requests 40, a manual review against the criteria from Google's own guidelines 28 is an excellent starting point.
* **Basic SEO and Website Health Checkers:**
  + **Google's Mobile-Friendly Test:** This free tool, mentioned in multiple sources 32, quickly assesses a website's mobile compatibility.
  + **Google PageSpeed Insights:** Also highlighted as a key tool 32, this evaluates site loading speed, which is a critical ranking factor and impacts user experience.
  + **Free Versions of SEO Audit Tools:** Several comprehensive SEO tools offer free plans or trials that can provide valuable insights. For example, WebSite Auditor can conduct technical site audits, and Screaming Frog SEO Spider can crawl up to 500 URLs for free, identifying issues like broken links or duplicate content.41
  + *Actionable Step:* It is highly recommended to run a target business's URL through Google's Mobile-Friendly Test and PageSpeed Insights as a baseline assessment.
* **Review Platform Monitoring:** Manually check Google Reviews, Yelp 22, and any industry-specific review sites. Tools like Targetron 34 can automate the process of finding businesses with low ratings on Google Maps, which can be a powerful prospecting technique.
* **Social Media Check:** Visit the business's profiles on major platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn (if relevant to their industry). Assess their activity levels by checking post frequency, the nature of their engagement with followers, and their follower count relative to direct competitors.

A business's online presence often forms the very first impression a potential customer has.23 If this "digital first impression" is negative—due to a poorly designed website, a collection of bad reviews, or an inability to be found easily on Google Maps—a potential customer can be lost before any other interaction occurs. These weaknesses in a business's "digital curb appeal" are tangible pain points that digital marketing services can directly address. Presenting a business owner with evidence of their 1-star reviews on Google or demonstrating that their website is unusable on mobile devices can be a very powerful conversation starter.

Furthermore, it's crucial to connect the lack of a strong online presence directly to the consequence of losing local customers. If a business isn't visible online, or if its online footprint is subpar, it becomes effectively invisible to a large segment of potential local customers who are actively searching for its products or services.23 This directly impacts the business's bottom line. Therefore, the need for digital marketing should be framed not merely as "being online," but as "being found by local customers who are ready to buy," thereby linking the service to tangible business outcomes like increased customer acquisition and sales.

To aid in this research, Table 2 provides a toolkit for prospect research and initial online presence assessment.

**Table 2: Toolkit for Prospect Research and Initial Online Presence Assessment**

| **Tool Category** | **Specific Tool Examples** | **Key Use in Prospecting** | **Cost Indication (based on available data)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Business Directory | Chamber of Commerce Websites (e.g., Portland Metro Chamber 24), Local Directories (e.g., HVBA 5), Yelp 22, Enigma.com 26 | Find lists of local businesses by industry and location. | Mostly Free; Some Chamber access may be paid. |
| Local SEO & GBP Analysis | Google Search, Google Maps, Manual GBP Review 28, Moz Local 42, Planable (for GBP) 40, SE Ranking 43, BrightLocal 39 | Assess Google Business Profile completeness, local search visibility, NAP consistency, local rankings. | Free (Manual, Google tools) to Paid/Freemium (Specialized tools) |
| Review Monitoring | Google Reviews, Yelp, Targetron 34, Thrive Local (Reputation Management Software) 33, BrightLocal 39 | Identify businesses with poor reviews, unmanaged review profiles, or low review volume. | Free (Manual) to Paid (Targetron, Thrive Local) |
| Website Health & Mobile | Google Mobile-Friendly Test 32, Google PageSpeed Insights 32, SEOmator Mobile-Friendly Test 32, Screaming Frog SEO Spider (free up to 500 URLs) 41, WebSite Auditor (free version) 41 | Check website mobile responsiveness, loading speed, basic technical SEO issues (e.g., broken links, crawl errors). | Free to Freemium |
| Social Media Engagement | Manual check of Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc., Buffer (basic analytics on free plan) 44, SocialPilot 40 | Analyze social media activity levels, engagement rates, and presence. | Free (Manual) to Freemium |

This toolkit provides a starting point for systematically evaluating potential clients.

## **6. Phase 3: Zeroing In – Building Your Targeted Prospect List**

After conducting initial prospecting and due diligence, the next step is to refine the broad list of businesses into a high-priority roster for outreach. This involves applying specific criteria to identify the most promising candidates.

### **Criteria for Prioritizing Potential Clients**

Not all businesses with online weaknesses are equally good prospects. Prioritization should be based on a combination of factors:

* **Demonstrable Need:** Businesses exhibiting clear and significant weaknesses identified in Phase 2 are top candidates. This includes those with poorly designed or non-mobile-friendly websites, very low search engine rankings for key local terms, unclaimed or poorly managed Google Business Profiles, a high volume of negative reviews, or a virtually non-existent social media presence.
* **Industry Fit:** It is advisable to align with industries that the service providers (in this case, the user and their son) feel comfortable with, have a genuine interest in, or perhaps even some prior familiarity. Additionally, some industries are historically more inclined to invest in marketing.
* **Location Focus:** To manage efforts effectively, especially when starting, it's wise to begin with businesses in a specific, manageable geographic area within the Portland metro. This could be a single county (e.g., Clackamas or Washington County), a particular city like Happy Valley 5 or Gresham 46, or even a few distinct neighborhoods.
* **Potential for Impact (ROI):** Focus on businesses where digital marketing improvements are likely to lead to significant, measurable results. For example, a plumber who starts receiving more calls due to improved local SEO, or a restaurant that sees an increase in reservations from a revamped online presence, will clearly see the return on their investment.30
* **Budget Indication (if ascertainable):** While difficult to determine precisely at the initial prospecting stage, some indicators might suggest a business's capacity or willingness to invest. Businesses already engaging in some form of advertising (even if poorly executed), those in higher-value service industries (e.g., specialized medical, legal, high-end construction), or larger local businesses might have greater potential budgets. Some web design agencies, for instance, note different pricing tiers based on business size and needs, with established local businesses ready to grow typically investing in the $15,000–$30,000 range for a website aimed at lead generation.30

### **Organizing Your Research: Spreadsheets and Simple CRM Approaches**

Systematic organization of research findings is crucial. A simple spreadsheet (using Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel) is an excellent tool for tracking prospects, especially in the initial stages. Recommended columns for this spreadsheet include:

* Business Name
* Contact Information (Phone number, email address, contact person, if readily available)
* Website URL
* Location (City, County, Neighborhood)
* Industry/Niche
* Key Digital Marketing Weaknesses Noted (e.g., "No mobile site," "2.5 stars on Google," "GMB not claimed," "Outdated design," "Low social media activity")
* Specific Service Opportunities (e.g., "Needs new website," "Local SEO optimization," "Reputation management")
* Priority Level (e.g., High, Medium, Low)
* Date of Assessment
* Notes (any other relevant observations or next steps)

As the client base and prospecting efforts grow, transitioning to a simple Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system might be beneficial, but a well-organized spreadsheet is perfectly adequate for starting out.

### **A Note on Initial Contact**

The detailed research conducted in Phases 1 and 2 directly informs and empowers the initial outreach to potential clients. Instead of a generic pitch like, "We offer digital marketing services," the approach can be highly personalized and problem-focused. For example, one could say, "We've been looking at businesses in the Happy Valley area and noticed that while your company provides excellent [service], your current visibility on Google Maps might not be fully capturing all potential local customers. We have some specific ideas on how this could be improved." This demonstrates that homework has been done and that the contact is not random.

This thorough research enables a much "warmer" approach to outreach. Cold calling or generic emailing has a low success rate. However, when the initial contact is based on an identified, specific need or pain point, the business owner is far more likely to be receptive. Business owners are typically busy; a generic sales pitch is easily dismissed. Conversely, a message that references a concrete problem they are likely aware of (or should be aware of)—such as, "I was looking for your services on my phone and noticed your website is difficult to navigate on mobile devices, which industry data suggests could be costing you potential customers"—has a much higher chance of capturing their attention and initiating a productive conversation. The research provides the "hook" and credibility for this first interaction. Digital marketing agencies often use this strategy by offering a "free SEO audit" 47 or a "free strategy session" 48 as an entry point to discuss these identified needs.

## **7. Action Plan: Your First Steps to Finding Clients in Portland**

To translate the preceding information into tangible actions, the following step-by-step checklist is provided. This plan is designed to guide the user and their son through the initial stages of client prospecting in the Portland metropolitan area.

### **Step-by-Step Checklist for You and Your Son:**

1. **Choose a Geographic Focus:** Begin by selecting a manageable geographic area. This could be one or two counties from Table 1 (e.g., Clackamas County, known for manufacturing and tourism 4, or Washington County, a hub for high-tech 4). Alternatively, focus on a specific city or a few distinct neighborhoods, such as Happy Valley 5, Gresham 46, or a well-defined district within Portland like the Alberta Arts District.29 This focus prevents efforts from becoming too diluted.
2. **Select 1-2 Target Industries:** Based on the high-potential sectors identified in Section 3 and personal interest or familiarity, choose one or two industries to concentrate on initially. Examples: "Plumbers in Clackamas County," "Independent retail boutiques in Multnomah County's Alberta Arts District," or "Dentists in Hillsboro."
3. **Utilize Prospecting Tools (Phase 1):**
   * Visit the website of the Chamber of Commerce relevant to your chosen geographic focus 25 and explore their member directory for businesses in your target industry.
   * Perform targeted Google searches (e.g., "landscapers Beaverton OR") and explore Google Maps for businesses in your selected area and niche. Pay attention to businesses not appearing on the first page of results.
   * Use Yelp 22 to find businesses by category and location, noting their review profiles.
   * *Goal:* Compile an initial list of approximately 20-30 businesses in your spreadsheet.
4. **Conduct Due Diligence (Phase 2):** For each business on your initial list, perform the online presence assessment:
   * Visit their website: Evaluate its design, content quality, clarity of messaging, and mobile-friendliness (use Google's Mobile-Friendly Test 32).
   * Check their Google Business Profile: Is it claimed? Is the information complete and accurate (hours, address, services)? Are there photos? Are there reviews, and are they being responded to?.28
   * Examine reviews on Yelp and other relevant platforms (e.g., industry-specific sites). Note the overall rating and sentiment.
   * Do a quick check of their social media presence (e.g., Facebook, Instagram). Note activity levels and engagement.
   * *Record all findings meticulously in your prospect spreadsheet.*
5. **Prioritize (Phase 3):** Based on your due diligence, rank your prospects. Identify the top 5-10 businesses that exhibit the most significant and clearly addressable digital marketing needs. These are your primary targets for initial outreach.
6. **Example Mini Case Study - Assessing a Local Plumber:** To illustrate the process, consider a hypothetical "Precision Plumbing of Happy Valley":
   * *Prospecting:* Found "Precision Plumbing of Happy Valley" via a Google Maps search for "plumbers Happy Valley OR" or through the Happy Valley Business Association directory.5
   * *Due Diligence:*
     + **Website:** The website appears visually dated, resembling a "cheap build" with generic stock photos.30 A quick check with Google's Mobile-Friendly Test 32 reveals it is not responsive and difficult to use on a smartphone.
     + **Google Business Profile (GBP):** The GBP is claimed, but has only two customer photos, no recent Google Posts, and lists only basic contact information. There are three reviews averaging 3.0 stars, with no owner responses visible.28
     + **Yelp:** Precision Plumbing has five reviews on Yelp, with an average rating of 2.5 stars. Common complaints mention slow response times to inquiries.
     + **Social Media:** A Facebook page exists but the last post was made over two years ago, with minimal engagement on older posts.
   * *Conclusion:* Precision Plumbing of Happy Valley emerges as a strong prospect. They have clear, demonstrable needs in website modernization (including mobile-friendliness), Google Business Profile optimization, active reputation management to address and improve review scores, and a consistent social media engagement strategy.

It is important to recognize that prospecting is often an iterative process. The phases are presented sequentially for clarity, but in practice, findings in one phase might lead back to an earlier one. For example, while researching one business, their key competitors might be identified, and these competitors could then be added to the prospect list for due diligence. Initial assumptions about the most promising target industries or locations might also evolve based on the research findings. If an initial industry choice appears to be saturated with digitally savvy businesses or, conversely, shows very little online activity (perhaps indicating a lack of perceived need or budget), it's perfectly acceptable to pivot based on the data. The overarching goal is to uncover genuine opportunities, and these may sometimes appear in unexpected sectors or locales. Flexibility and a willingness to adapt the search based on what the market reveals are key to successful prospecting.

## **8. Conclusion: Moving Forward with Your Digital Marketing Venture**

This report has outlined a systematic journey for identifying potential digital marketing clients within the dynamic Portland metropolitan area. By progressing from a broad understanding of the market's geography and economic drivers to a detailed assessment of individual businesses' online footprints, a targeted and actionable prospect list can be developed. This methodical approach is designed to replace guesswork with data-driven decision-making, significantly increasing the likelihood of connecting with businesses that can genuinely benefit from digital marketing services.

By diligently following these research and identification phases, the user and their son will be well-equipped to pinpoint local businesses whose current online presence may not be effectively serving their growth objectives. The process itself—involving market research, competitive analysis, critical thinking, and meticulous organization—is a valuable skill-building exercise, particularly for someone embarking on a new venture in digital marketing. This hands-on experience in business development, with the parent potentially acting as a mentor, can be as rewarding as the clients secured.

With a prioritized list of prospects in hand, the next logical step, though beyond the primary scope of this report, involves crafting compelling outreach messages, preparing tailored proposals that address the specific needs identified, and ultimately, delivering high-quality digital marketing services. The insights gained during this research phase will be invaluable in shaping those future interactions, allowing for conversations that are relevant, problem-focused, and demonstrate a clear understanding of each prospect's unique situation and potential for improvement through strategic digital marketing. The foundation laid by thorough prospecting is the bedrock of a successful digital marketing enterprise in the competitive Portland landscape.