

Paid Media Map

Which ad platform should your business start with?

By Ajoke Emekene. Paid media operator. I have spent my own money on ads, run them for clients at my agency, and worked inside TikTok and Amazon Ads.

Start here: nobody owns your customer

Your customer's attention is scattered. The same person searches Google in the morning, scrolls TikTok at lunch, plans a wedding on Pinterest at night, and buys on Amazon without ever seeing your website. Every platform holds one true piece of that person, and no platform holds the whole picture.

So the question is never "which platform is best." The question is: **where does your customer's buying moment already happen, and what can your budget honestly buy there?**

This map answers that question. It is drawn from my own research across 483 advertising platforms, narrowed down to the ones a business can open, fund, and run by itself. Read the three questions first. They matter more than any platform card.

The three questions before you spend anything

1. Where is the buying moment?

Some purchases start with a search ("emergency plumber," "best running shoes"). That intent lives on Google, Microsoft, and Amazon. Some purchases start with discovery: someone sees a product in a feed and wants it. That lives on Meta, TikTok, Pinterest, and Snapchat. Some purchases are decided at work, by title and company. That lives on LinkedIn. Match the platform to the moment, not to the hype.

2. What can your budget actually buy?

Every platform on this page lets you start small, but small buys different things in different places. On Meta or TikTok, a modest daily budget buys real data within a week. On LinkedIn, the same money buys a handful of expensive clicks, because you are paying for job titles. A small budget on the wrong platform teaches you nothing except that the platform is "expensive."

3. What can you feed it?

Platforms eat creative. TikTok and Snapchat run on a steady supply of short video. Pinterest runs on good product photography. Google Search runs on landing pages that match what people typed. If you cannot feed a platform what it eats, your results will blame the platform for a creative problem.

The ten platforms most businesses should consider first

Meta Ads (Facebook, Instagram, Threads, WhatsApp)

The broadest consumer reach there is, and still the default first platform for most small businesses.

- **Start here if:** you sell to consumers, you have a product or service people can understand in one image or one short video, and you want your first real data fast.
- **Skip for now if:** you sell only to senior decision-makers at other companies. Go to LinkedIn first.
- **Your first campaign:** one sales or leads campaign, your strongest offer, your best existing photo or video of the product in use. Let the platform's automation work; judge it after a full week, not a day.

Google Ads (Search, YouTube, Maps, Display)

The intent platform. People here are already looking for what you sell.

- **Start here if:** customers search for your category by name, or your business depends on "near me" searches.
- **Skip for now if:** nobody searches for what you sell because the category is new. You will need a discovery platform first.
- **Your first campaign:** search ads on the exact phrases your customers type when they are ready to buy, sending each phrase to a page that answers it directly. YouTube and Display come later.

TikTok Ads

Discovery and commerce in one feed, with the youngest-skewing attention of the majors.

- **Start here if:** your product shows well on camera, your buyers are under 40, or you sell through TikTok Shop.
- **Skip for now if:** you cannot make or source short videos regularly. This platform starves without them.
- **Your first campaign:** Spark Ads on your best-performing organic videos. Content that already earned attention organically is the cheapest creative testing there is. Note: TikTok sets daily minimum budgets at campaign level, so plan for the test to spend quickly.

Amazon Ads

Purchase intent in its purest form: people with a payment method saved, searching to buy.

- **Start here if:** you sell products on Amazon, or your category is bought there whether you list or not.
- **Skip for now if:** you sell services. There is no shelf for services here.
- **Your first campaign:** Sponsored Products on your best-selling listings. Fix the listing first: ads amplify a good product page and expose a bad one.

LinkedIn Ads

The expensive, precise one. You pay for job titles, companies, and seniority.

- **Start here if:** one customer is worth a lot to you, and you know their exact title and company type.

- **Skip for now if:** your customer value is low. The clicks cost too much to recover on small sales.
- **Your first campaign:** a single, specific offer for a single, specific title. A report, a briefing, a consultation. Broad brand campaigns are how budgets die here.

Microsoft Advertising (Bing and partners)

Google's quieter sibling: search intent, an older and more affluent audience, usually cheaper clicks.

- **Start here if:** you already run Google Ads and want the same intent at a lower price, or your customers skew older and desktop-based.
- **Skip for now if:** you have no search demand anywhere. This is an amplifier, rarely a first platform.
- **Your first campaign:** import your proven Google campaigns and compare cost per customer honestly.

Pinterest Ads

Where people plan purchases: homes, weddings, wardrobes, renovations. The intent is slower and stronger.

- **Start here if:** you sell retail, home, fashion, beauty, or anything people save and plan before buying.
- **Skip for now if:** you need sales this week. Pinterest decisions ripen over weeks.
- **Your first campaign:** your best product photography as shopping Pins, aimed at search terms inside Pinterest, not just the feed.

Snapchat Ads

Young attention, creative-first formats, augmented reality that actually gets used.

- **Start here if:** your buyers are under 30 and your product plays well in playful, full-screen creative.
- **Skip for now if:** your audience is older or your creative is corporate. The mismatch is instant.
- **Your first campaign:** short, direct video that looks native to the app, with one clear offer.

Reddit Ads

Passionate communities that punish lazy advertising and reward genuine usefulness.

- **Start here if:** your customers gather in identifiable interest communities, especially in tech, gaming, finance, and hobbies.
- **Skip for now if:** your plan is to paste your Meta ad here. Reddit can tell, and it will say so.
- **Your first campaign:** target the specific subreddits where your customers already talk about the problem you solve, and write like a member, not a brand.

Spotify Ads (Ad Studio)

Audio attention: music and podcasts, including the moments when no screen is being watched at all.

- **Start here if:** your customers are local, mobile, or hard to reach on screens, and a 30-second audio message can carry your offer.

- **Skip for now if:** your product needs to be seen to be understood.

- **Your first campaign:** one audio ad, locally targeted, one offer, one action to remember.

The wider map

Those ten are the front door. Behind them sit 23 more self-serve platforms a business can run itself, including X Ads, Apple Search Ads, Walmart Connect, Quora, Nextdoor, The Trade Desk, StackAdapt, Taboola, Outbrain, Criteo, Roku, and Telegram, and behind those, hundreds more bought through sales teams and partners. I have mapped 483 in total: what each one is, where its audience's time goes, and how its ads are bought.

You do not need 483 platforms. You need the right first one, then the right second one when the first is working. That is what this map is for.

The \$50 Test, and your updates

Right now I am running a public experiment: US\$50 of real spend on each of the ten platforms above, advertising this map, with the results published as I go. What each \$50 bought (the impressions, the clicks, the cost of every new reader) becomes the scoreboard inside future editions of this guide.

Because you downloaded this map, the scoreboard updates come to you by email as each test completes. Watch the rankings change. By the end, you will know what \$50 actually buys across the whole landscape, measured by the same offer, the same page, and the same rules on every platform.

If you want this done with you, or for you

The audit. A full review of your ad account: what is working, what is leaking, and exactly what I would do next. US\$997, one-time. If you continue into management, the audit fee comes off your first month in full. Apply here: <https://tally.so/r/dWrMly>

Done-for-you management. I run your paid media for US\$1,000 a month, a small number of clients at a time, with your ad spend always on your own card and under your own account. Start with the audit application above.

About the author

Ajoke Emekene is a paid media operator and performance marketer. Her career runs from her own agency, Joke Ralu and Associates (30+ clients), to Client Solutions Manager at TikTok working with fintech brands, to Amazon Ads. She has spent over US\$30,000 of her own money on ads, which is why this map is written the way it is: every recommendation here is priced like it is your money, because for years it was hers.

The full landscape research, the walkthroughs of every platform in this guide, and the \$50 Test

results are published on her YouTube channel.