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CAREERS GUIDE



Break Into Digital Marketing

A hiring manager's playbook for your first role

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I have spent more than 12 years buying traffic, and for a big chunk of that I have been the person reading resumes and running interviews. So I want to be honest with you up front. Most advice about breaking into digital marketing is written by people who are selling you a course or a dream. This is written by the person who decides whether you get the job.

The good news is that the bar for your first role is lower than you think, and it has almost nothing to do with a degree or a fancy certificate. It has to do with proof. In this guide I will show you exactly what I look for, how to build that proof for zero dollars, and how to walk into the interview already looking like someone I want on my team.

What digital marketers actually do

Before you pick a role, you need an honest picture of the work. Digital marketing is not posting nice graphics and waiting for likes. At its core it is one job: get the right person to notice a product, trust it, and take an action, then measure whether it worked. Everything else is a specialty inside that loop.

Most of the day is not glamorous. It is checking numbers, writing copy, adjusting a campaign, replying to a Slack thread, and running small experiments. The marketers who succeed are curious about why people click and comfortable being wrong, because they change something, measure it, and try again. If you like solving a puzzle where the answer keeps moving, you will enjoy this.

- Attract: bring the right audience in through search, ads, content, or social.
- Convert: turn a visitor into a lead or a customer with clear copy and offers.
- Retain: keep people around with email, lifecycle messages, and useful content.
- Measure: track what happened so the team knows what to do more of.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

When I ask a junior candidate what a marketer does and they say something about creativity and passion, my interest drops. When they say something about attracting the right people and measuring whether it worked, they just moved to the top of the pile. Speak in outcomes, not vibes.

Choosing the role that fits you

You do not need to be good at all of marketing. You need to be genuinely useful at one thing. Hiring managers post for specific roles, so the fastest way in is to pick a lane and go deep enough to be helpful on day one. Here is how the main entry paths differ so you can match one to how your brain actually works.

Entry roles compared, so you can pick one that fits you

Role	You like	Daily work	Good first fit if
Paid ads	fast numbers and clear wins	launch and test campaigns, watch cost per result, cut losers	you are comfortable with spreadsheets and quick decisions
SEO	puzzles and long games	research keywords, improve pages, earn links, track rankings	you are patient and like research and writing
Content	writing and storytelling	plan, write, and edit articles, scripts, and social posts	words come easily and you enjoy explaining things
Email and lifecycle	systems and sequences	build flows, write campaigns, segment lists, test subject lines	you like organizing and steady, repeatable improvement
Analytics	data and answering why	set up tracking, build reports, find what is working	numbers calm you down instead of stressing you out

If you are unsure, I usually steer beginners toward paid ads or analytics. Both give you fast, honest feedback and a skill that is easy to prove with real numbers. But the best lane is the one you will not quit in week three, so weigh your natural pull too.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Pick one lane to start. You can always broaden later.
- Fast feedback lanes like paid ads keep beginners motivated.
- The right role is the one you enjoy enough to keep practicing.

Skills and free tools to learn first

There are two kinds of skills, and you need a bit of both. Foundation skills apply to every role. Tool skills are specific to your lane. Do not try to learn everything. Learn the foundation, then the two or three tools that matter for the role you chose.

The foundation is simpler than the industry pretends. You need to write clearly, read a basic report without panic, and understand the funnel from attention to action. Add a working knowledge of one spreadsheet tool and you are ahead of half the applicants I see.

- Google Analytics 4: free, and the standard way teams measure a website.
- Google Search Console: free, essential for anyone touching SEO or content.
- Google Sheets or Excel: your everyday tool for pulling and sorting numbers.
- Google Ads and Meta Ads: both have free learning centers and let you build campaigns without spending to learn the interface.
- Google Keyword Planner and free tools like Ubersuggest's limited tier for keyword ideas.
- A simple site builder like Carrd or WordPress to publish real work.
- Canva for clean visuals without a design background.
- ChatGPT or a similar assistant to draft, edit, and speed up research, as long as you check the output.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

I do not care about paid certificates from unknown providers. They tell me you can pay for a course, not that you can do the work. The free Google certificates are fine as a signal, but I would rather see one real project than five certificates. Proof beats paper every time.

Building proof on a zero dollar budget

This is the chapter that gets people hired, so slow down here. The single biggest thing separating candidates I call back from ones I skip is proof. A resume says you learned something. A project shows you did something. You can build that proof this month without spending a dollar, and here is exactly how.

- 1 Pick a real target. A local business, a nonprofit, a creator, or even a made up brand you build fully. Real is better because the results are real.
- 2 Do actual work. Write five SEO focused articles, rebuild a landing page, plan a 30 day content calendar, or run a small mock ad campaign and document the strategy.
- 3 Measure something. Even estimated or projected numbers show you think in outcomes. Screenshots of real analytics are gold.
- 4 Write it up as a case study. One page: the goal, what you did, what happened, and what you learned. This is the story you will tell in the interview.
- 5 Publish it. Put it on a simple free site or a document you can share. If nobody can see it, it did not happen.

Free work for a real business is the fastest shortcut. Offer a local shop or a nonprofit one focused project at no cost in exchange for permission to use the results. You get real numbers and a reference. They get help. Everyone wins, and now you have proof that most junior applicants simply do not have.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Two or three finished projects beat a long list of courses.
- A one page case study turns work into a story you can sell.
- Real, measurable results, even small ones, build instant trust.

A portfolio and a resume that get read

Your portfolio is where those projects live. It does not need to be beautiful. It needs to load fast, be easy to skim, and lead with results. A single clean page with three case studies, each showing the goal, your work, and the outcome, is enough to get you interviews.

The resume is a filter, not a life story. I spend about 15 seconds on the first pass, so the top third has to do the work. Lead with what you can do and what you have made, not a paragraph about your passion. If you have no marketing job yet, your projects section goes near the top, above unrelated work history.

- One page. Nobody reading junior resumes wants two.
- Start each bullet with a verb and end it with a result or a number where you can.
- Name the tools you actually used, so I can match you to the job posting.
- Link your portfolio at the top, not buried at the bottom.
- Cut the objective statement. Replace it with one line on the exact role you want.
- Proofread twice. A typo in a marketing resume is a self inflicted wound.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

Tailor the resume to the posting. When I see the same tools and phrasing I used in my job ad reflected back with real projects behind them, it feels like the person actually read it and can do the job. A generic resume blasted to 50 companies reads as generic to every one of us.

Passing the interview and the test task

If you did the proof work, the interview gets much easier, because you are not talking in theory. You are walking me through things you actually did. Most junior interviews are testing three things: can you think in outcomes, can you communicate clearly, and are you someone the team wants around. You control all three.

Prepare stories, not scripts. For each project have a short version of the goal, what you tried, what happened, and what you would do differently. That last part matters more than you think. Admitting what did not work and what you learned signals maturity, and it is exactly what separates people who grow from people who stall.

- 1 Research the company and its product for 20 minutes so you can speak to their actual marketing.
- 2 Prepare two or three project stories in the goal, action, result, learning format.
- 3 Write down three specific questions about the role and the team. Curiosity reads as competence.
- 4 For the test task, follow the brief exactly, then add one small thoughtful extra to stand out.
- 5 Explain your reasoning in the test task. I care why you made a choice more than the choice itself.
- 6 Send a short, genuine thank you note the same day. Most people skip it, which is why it works.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

The test task is where most candidates either shine or vanish. The ones who lose me are the ones who over polish and never submit, or who ignore half the brief. The ones who win explain their thinking, hit the deadline, and clearly read the instructions. Done and reasoned beats perfect and late every time.

Where to find the jobs

Plenty of good roles never make it to the big job boards, and the ones that do get hundreds of applicants. So use the boards, but do not rely on them alone. Your goal is to be the applicant who came with a warm introduction or a project already attached, because that person skips most of the line.

- LinkedIn: set your headline to the role you want, post about your projects, and message hiring managers directly, not just apply.
- Company career pages: apply to startups and small teams that hire generalists and give juniors room to grow.
- Niche boards and communities: marketing Slack and Discord groups, industry newsletters, and role specific job boards often post before the big sites.
- Agencies: they hire junior marketers constantly and give you fast, broad experience across many accounts.
- Your own network: tell everyone you know what you are looking for. Most first jobs come through a person, not a portal.

Aim for quality over volume. Ten thoughtful applications with a tailored resume and a relevant project beat a hundred copy paste submissions. Track them in a simple sheet so you know who to follow up with, and follow up once after a week. Persistence, done politely, works.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Warm introductions and attached projects beat cold applications.
- Small teams and agencies are the friendliest to beginners.
- Follow up once, a week later, and keep a simple tracking sheet.

Your simple 30 day plan

Here is how I would spend the next month if I were starting from zero today. It assumes an hour or two a day. The point is not to master everything. It is to finish this month with one lane chosen, two projects built, and a resume that gets read. Do that and you are genuinely employable.

A week by week plan for your first 30 days

Week	Focus	What you finish
Week 1	Learn the map and pick a lane	Understand the funnel, choose one role, set up your free tools and accounts
Week 2	Learn your lane's core tools	Complete a free course in your role and get hands on with two or three tools
Week 3	Build proof	Finish your first real project and write it up as a one page case study
Week 4	Package and apply	Build a simple portfolio, finish a second project, write your resume, send 10 tailored applications

If life gets in the way and it takes you 45 or 60 days instead, that is completely fine. The sequence matters more than the calendar. Learn a little, build something real, show it clearly, and keep applying. Most people who fail to break in do not fail because they lack talent. They fail because they never finish a single project. Do not be that person.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

A candidate who shows up 30 days into learning with two finished projects and a clear story beats someone who has been vaguely interested in marketing for two years. Momentum is visible in an interview, and it is one of the most attractive things a junior can bring to the table.

Your next step

This guide is the map. If you want the full walkthrough with me talking you through each step, take my free Udemy course, *How to Break Into Digital Marketing With No Experience*. It expands every chapter here into short, practical lessons you can follow along with. And when you want to go deeper on a specific lane, the careers articles on shenshin.co break down each role, tool, and interview in more detail. Pick your lane, build one real project this week, and you will be further ahead than most people who have been thinking about it for a year.

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