A GUEST SESSION WITH CIPHERS DIGITAL MARKETING

Real talk about digital marketing

How an agency gets built from zero, what the work actually looks like, and anything else you want to ask.

Mike Rux, Founder, Ciphers Digital Marketing

CIPHERS DIGITAL MARKETING

HOSTED BY

Queen Creek High School

CTE Marketing and DECA

Home of the Bulldogs

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Short talk. Long Q&A. Honest answers.

WHO'S TALKING

Built from zero, right here in the East Valley

Mike Rux

- Founder of Ciphers Digital Marketing. Started with zero clients and built it one result at a time.
- Before that: digital marketing director for a multi-million-dollar company.
- Queen Creek resident. Two offices, one in Gilbert and one in Queen Creek.
- Guest speaker for a BYU-Idaho marketing seminar. Same format as today: questions first.

Ciphers Digital Marketing

- Clients are local service businesses: painters, landscapers, plumbers, remodelers, pest and wildlife control.
- The work: websites, SEO and AEO, Google Ads, Google Business Profile, social, CRM and automation.
- Goal for every client: make the phone ring, then prove it with real numbers.
- One rule: results reported honestly, every cycle, even when they are not pretty.

THE INDUSTRY, HONESTLY

What a digital marketing agency actually does

We make the phone ring for businesses that are too busy doing the work to market it.

Website

The storefront. One job: turn visitors into calls.

SEO and AEO

Be found on Google and quoted by AI.

Paid ads

Buy attention when the business needs leads now.

Social

Proof and familiarity, not the lead engine.

Reviews and GBP

The Google profile people actually trust.

Tracking

Count every call and form, or you are guessing.

Five steps. No shortcuts.

1

Get good at one thing

One skill a business will pay for: SEO, ads, or websites. Not all three on day one.

2

Land one client

Someone who already trusts you. Then over-deliver until it hurts.

3

Get a result you can show

Before and after. Calls, leads, rankings. Proof beats a pitch every time.

4

Write down how you did it

Checklists and process. The process is the business, not you.

5

Repeat, then hire

Systems before people. Hire slowly and train with the checklists.

Nobody hands you clients. You earn the first one. The result earns the next.

THE PART TIKTOK LEAVES OUT

It’s long hours before it’s anything else

- You are the sales team, the delivery team, and the billing department. At the same time.
- Results show up in months, not days. And clients only pay for results.
- Nobody sees the years that make it look easy. That is the part that gets cut out of the video.

Ask me for the real numbers. I will tell you.

OUR GENERAL PROCESS

How we work, start to finish

1

Audit

What is broken, what is working, and why.

2

Strategy

Where the leads will come from. What we fix first.

3

Build

Website, UX, tracking. The foundation everything sits on.

4

Launch

SEO, ads, social, Google Business Profile.

5

Measure

Calls, forms, cost per lead. Real numbers, not vibes.

6

Report, repeat

Tell the client what we did and what is next. Then go again.

Every cycle ends with a report the owner can read in two minutes: results first, problems with the fix right beside them.

SEARCH

SEO gets you found. AEO gets you quoted.

SEO: Search Engine Optimization

Showing up when someone Googles “landscaper near me.”

- Site structure built like a map: one page per service, one page per real city. We call it Hub, Wheel, Spoke.
- Content written by people who actually know the work. Google calls this E-E-A-T: experience, expertise, authority, trust.
- A fast site, real reviews, and the same business facts everywhere online.

AEO: Answer Engine Optimization

Being the answer ChatGPT, Gemini, or Google’s AI Overview gives.

- Clear, direct answers on the page. A question, then the answer, no fluff.
- Structured data (schema) so machines understand who you are, where you work, and what you do.
- Consistent facts and mentions on sources the AI already trusts.

Same foundation. Content that is true, specific, and useful wins both.

Traffic is worthless if the page doesn’t convert

REAL EXAMPLE, NAME WITHHELD

A remodeling company was paying for Google clicks. The quote form sat 70% of the way down a very long page, asked seven questions, and the first one was “Company.” Four buttons sent paid visitors off the page.

Result: paid clicks, zero leads.

The fix: form at the top, four fields, one clear button, phone number visible without scrolling.

The conversion checklist

- One job per page. One thing you want the visitor to do.
- Phone number and the button visible before anyone scrolls.
- Short forms. Ask less, get more.
- Fast on a phone, because most visitors are on one.
- Proof next to the ask: reviews, photos, license number.
- A thank-you page, so every lead gets counted.

Where social media actually fits

For a local service business, social is proof and familiarity. Search is where the lead happens.

What it does well

Shows real work, before and after. Keeps the brand familiar. Backs up the reviews. Reaches people again after they visited the site.

What it rarely does alone

Replace search. Nobody scrolls Instagram for a plumber at 11 pm with water on the floor. They Google it and call whoever looks trustworthy.

The myth: “just run Facebook ads”

One client ran a 10% off carousel ad. Zero website leads. The next campaign was built for engagement and social proof instead, and the organic feed stays clean: no price graphics, no star overlays.

APPLY IT THIS WEEK

Marketing the new Spirit Store

The same playbook a paying client gets. Run it on the store this week.

1

Who buys, and why

Students, parents, alumni. Spirit, gifts, game days. One buyer per post.

2

Where they already are

The school and DECA Instagram, Facebook, announcements, the hallway. Meet them there.

3

Show the real thing

Real products on real students. A launch moment. One item that will not last.

4

Make it easy to buy

Where, when, and how much, in every post. Open at lunch means say which lunch.

5

Count it

Tally what sells after each post. A QR code on the poster shows who scanned.

Ask me how I would launch it. Then tell me what I got wrong about your school.

THE POWER OF AI

AI is the biggest shift in this industry. Use it right.

What we use it for every day

- Research and audits at a speed one person could never match.
- First drafts that a human rewrites with real expertise.
- Checking a site for errors before the client ever sees them.
- Reading reports and spotting the pattern in the numbers.
- Automating the routine so the hours go to strategy and clients.

What it cannot do

- Know your client, their customers, or their town.
- Take responsibility when something breaks.
- Make the sale or keep the relationship.
- Be trusted blindly. It makes things up with total confidence.
- Replace judgment, taste, and follow-through.

AI makes a good marketer faster. It does not make a lazy one good. Learn the fundamentals, then let AI multiply them.

CIPHERS DIGITAL CASE STUDY

From nearly invisible to found

The client

A Mesa wildlife removal company. One owner, a certified wildlife biologist, excellent at the work. A year earlier the website barely showed up in Google at all.

What Ciphers did

- Rebuilt the site around who he really is and where he really works: Mesa and the East Valley.
- Hub, Wheel, Spoke structure: one page per service, one per city, plus a “what animal is in my attic” guide.
- Content from his expertise, not generic filler, with schema so Google and AI tools understand it.
- Tracking so every call and form counts, and an honest report every cycle.

Honest footnote: this took months of steady work, not a hack. Numbers are from the client’s own Google data; the business is not named.

About 6x

more Google search impressions than a year earlier (Search Console, July 2026 vs July 2025)

+22%

new visitors in a single month (Google Analytics, June 2026 vs the prior period)

+21%

active users in that same month

GETTING IN

Four ways into this industry

Freelance

Sell one skill to one business. The fastest way to learn what people actually pay for.

Agency job

Many clients, fast feedback, and a boss who has already made the expensive mistakes.

In-house

One brand, deep knowledge, steadier hours. Where I spent years before Ciphers.

Your own shop

All of the above at once. Highest ceiling, longest hours, nobody to blame.

What matters more than the tool

Writing clearly. Reading numbers without flinching. Curiosity about how a business works. Follow-through. And being able to talk to a business owner like a person.

QUEEN CREEK BULLDOGS, THE FLOOR IS YOURS

Now it’s your turn

Ask anything. You will get the real answer, not the TikTok version.

No question is dumb. The one nobody else asks usually gets the best answer. The next slides have starters if you need them.

Q&A STARTER 1 OF 5

Ask me about starting from zero

What did your first month as a business owner actually look like?

How did you get your very first client, and what did you charge?

What would you do differently if you started over today?

When did it stop feeling risky? Or did it?

Or ask your own. Those are better.

Q&A STARTER 2 OF 5

Ask me about the money

What does a small business actually pay for marketing each month?

How does an agency make a profit, and where does the money go?

What is the most expensive mistake you have seen a business make online?

What can someone our age realistically earn doing this?

Yes, you can ask about money. Everybody wants to and nobody does.

Q&A STARTER 3 OF 5

Ask me about clients

How do you tell a client their idea will not work?

What happens when the results are bad?

Have you ever fired a client? Why?

What do your best clients have in common?

Marketing is a people business before it is a tech business.

Q&A STARTER 4 OF 5

Ask me about AI and the future

Will AI replace marketing jobs? Which ones?

What should we learn now that will still matter in five years?

How do you actually use AI in a normal work day?

Is social media marketing dying? Is SEO?

The honest answer to most of these starts with “it depends on whether you learned the fundamentals.”

Q&A STARTER 5 OF 5

Ask me about your DECA competitions

You get a marketing case study and 30 minutes to prep. How would you attack it?

What does a real client want to hear in a pitch, and what makes them tune out?

How do judges and clients spot fluff?

What makes a role play feel like a real business conversation?

December, February, and April are coming. Use me.

STAY IN TOUCH

Questions after today? Ask them.

Help with a DECA case, a question about a career, or a straight answer about something you saw online. Email me.

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Mike Rux, Founder, Ciphers Digital Marketing · Gilbert and Queen Creek, Arizona

Last session, 4 of 27 students asked for mentorship afterward. That offer stands here too.

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