AHEAD4HEIGHTS

Video Strategy

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HOW SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS WORK

A practical guide to YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn & Facebook — and a repurposing workflow for construction/trade content.

Prepared as a working reference for planning and creating video and social content across platforms.

1. The Core Idea Behind Every Algorithm

Every platform's algorithm has one job:
Keep people on the app as long as possible. It does this by predicting which content a person will engage with, then showing them more of that. Everything else — how content spreads, what gets suppressed, what goes viral — flows from that single goal.

What the algorithm actually measures

- Watch time / completion rate — did people watch the whole video, or rewatch it? The single biggest ranking factor on TikTok, Reels, and YouTube Shorts.
- Engagement velocity — how fast likes, comments, shares and saves arrive right after posting.
- Shares and sends — especially DMs to friends. Weighted heavily as a strong-content signal.
- Comments — especially longer comments and replies that spark conversation.
- Saves / bookmarks — a strong signal for "useful" or "reference" content.
- Session continuation — did the viewer keep scrolling after your content, or leave the app?

How Social Media Algorithms Work

How distribution actually works

- Test batch: content is shown to a small sample first — often not even your followers.
- Signal check: the algorithm watches behaviour in the first 30–60 minutes to a few hours.
- Expand or bury: strong signals → bigger batch → repeat. Weak signals → distribution dies quickly.
- Relevance matching: content is also matched to individual users based on their own past behaviour.

This is why a post can "flop" for two hours and then suddenly take off — it's clearing successive test batches.

What actually works

- Hook viewers in the first 1–3 seconds.
- Engineer for rewatches and saves, not just likes.
- Post when your specific audience is active — check your own analytics, not generic advice.
- Avoid cross-posting with a competitor's watermark visible — it gets suppressed.
- Reply to early comments fast to extend the engagement window.
- Prioritise consistency over one-off virality — accounts get trust over time.

What no longer works (or backfires)

- Engagement bait ("comment YES if...") — actively detected and suppressed.
- Follow/unfollow schemes, bots, engagement pods — can get accounts shadow-restricted.
- Hashtag stuffing — largely irrelevant now that platforms understand content directly.
- Misleading thumbnails/cliffhangers — spikes clicks but tanks completion and satisfaction signals.

2. Platform-by-Platform Breakdown

YouTube (long-form + Shorts)

Optimises for total watch time across the whole platform — not just your video. YouTube wants viewers to stay in the YouTube ecosystem afterwards.

- Key signals: click-through rate on impressions, average view duration, and session time after your video ends.
- For trade content: rewards depth — a 10–15 minute project walkthrough often outperforms short clips, since viewers are usually in research mode.
- Search matters most here: titles/descriptions using real search terms (e.g. "scaffold access solutions") drive discovery for months or years, unlike the 48–72 hour life of a Reel or TikTok.
- Shorts as a funnel: YouTube pushes Shorts viewers toward long-form from the same channel — useful for discovery even with modest standalone view counts.
- Thumbnails: custom thumbnails with clear text/faces outperform auto-generated ones for technical content.

Instagram (Reels-dominant)

Reels prioritises watch time and shares; feed posts and Stories prioritise relationship signals — who you interact with regularly.

- Key signals: completion/loop rate, sends to DMs (very highly weighted), and shares to Stories.
- Audience skew: more decision-makers and industry peers than TikTok — site photography, before/afters, and satisfying process time-lapses do well because they're shareable and save-able.
- Carousels are undervalued: Instagram still rewards saves on carousels — e.g. a "5 mistakes we see on X Job" carousel is a strong save-magnet.
- Best for case-study storytelling: caption space + carousel format suit a problem → process → result narrative.
- Link in bio: matters more here than TikTok/YouTube — often where a warm lead visits your website.

TikTok

Optimises almost entirely on a per-video basis rather than account history — the easiest platform for an unknown account to suddenly go viral.

- Key signals: average watch time relative to video length (a fully-watched 9-second clip can beat a 60-second clip watched for 20 seconds); test batches move fast, often within 15–60 minutes.
- Process and personality win: raw, on-site footage often beats polish — reads as authentic and gets rewarded via engagement.
- Broad appeal, mixed value: trade content does well with general audiences due to novelty — great for brand awareness and recruiting, less reliable for direct lead-gen.
- Hooks: text overlays stating the hook in the first 2 seconds matter more here than anywhere else. Trending audio: can boost initial distribution but decays fast — usually 1–2 weeks of relevance.

LinkedIn — the outlier

LinkedIn isn't really part of the "optimise for watch time" family the other three belong to. It optimises for professional relevance and dwell time on individual posts, and is far more text-and-image-native than video-native.

- Dwell time on the post itself: how long someone pauses in-feed, even without engaging — fairly unique to LinkedIn.
- Who engages matters: a comment from someone in a relevant industry counts for far more than engagement volume alone.
- Comments over likes, dramatically: roughly 10x+ the value of a like, especially comments that spark discussion.
- "See more" expansion: a strong signal — this is why LinkedIn rewards long-form text posts unlike the other platforms.
- Longer shelf life: posts can perform for days, not hours.

Format nuances

- Native video helps, but doesn't need a punchy 3-second hook — LinkedIn's audience is in a slower, research mindset closer to YouTube than TikTok.
- Document posts (PDF carousels) are a strong underused format — each swipe is its own dwell-time and engagement event.
- Text-only posts with a strong opening two lines can outperform video entirely — genuine opinion or insight is still a top-tier strategy here.
- Tagging/mentions extend reach into another person's network — no real equivalent on TikTok.
- In short: on TikTok/Instagram/YouTube, visuals lead and text supports. On LinkedIn, the written narrative leads and visuals support.

Facebook — three systems, not one

Facebook no longer runs a single feed algorithm. Three distribution systems run in parallel, each with different ranking logic: the Main Feed (personalised to your existing social graph, reach capped by follower count unless re-shared), the Reels Tab (discovery-first, shown to non-followers based on watch behaviour and engagement velocity), and Groups (deeper interaction signals that can outrank Page posts). Ranking runs on a four-step framework — inventory, signals, predictions, relevance score — calibrated differently per surface. The Feed weighs relationship and "meaningful interaction" signals most heavily; Reels prioritises watch-through rate and entertainment value.

- Feed signals: who you interact with regularly, comments and dwell time over passive likes, and time spent on a linked destination (Facebook rewards posts that keep people on-platform or lead to a genuinely engaging destination).
- Reels signals: watch-through rate (completion above ~70% signals strong content), replay/loop rate, use of trending audio, and originality — watermarked reposts (e.g. from TikTok) are penalised.
- Groups: comments, questions and community discussion give clear value signals — useful for building a niche trade community and testing content before wider Feed distribution.
- Down-ranked: explicit engagement bait ("like if…", "share if…"), low-effort or heavily automated posts, and reposted content carrying another platform's watermark.

For trade content: Facebook's audience skews older and more local than Instagram/TikTok — it's genuinely strong for local homeowner reach, community trust-building via Groups, and repurposing the same case-study carousel and process clips used elsewhere, alongside native Reels versions of TikTok content (re-exported without the TikTok watermark).

3. Cross-Platform Summary

Platform	Best For	Content Style That Wins
YouTube	Search-driven, long-term discovery, decision-maker research	In-depth project walkthroughs, problem/solution explainers
Instagram	Peer credibility, case studies, warm lead conversion	Carousels, before/after, process time-lapses
TikTok	Broad awareness, brand personality, recruiting	Raw on-site footage, fast hooks, novelty/scale shots
Facebook	Local reach, community trust, older demographics	Native Reels, Groups discussion, repurposed case-study carousels
LinkedIn	B2B lead generation, industry credibility	Text-led narrative posts, document/PDF carousels

4. One-Day-Shoot Repurposing Workflow

Film once, in a way that gives you raw material for every platform — don't shoot "for TikTok" and "for YouTube" separately. A well-planned day should produce roughly 15–25 minutes of usable raw footage, becoming one YouTube video, one Instagram carousel, one LinkedIn document post, and 3–5 TikTok/Reels clips.

On-site filming checklist

Capture all five categories regardless of what you think you'll use — decide the edit later, not on-site.

- The hook moment — the most visually striking single shot of the day. Becomes your TikTok/Reels opener and YouTube thumbnail.
- Process B-roll — hands-on work with a clear start/middle/end. Your time-lapse and carousel material.
- Talking moments — Lee or the crew explaining what they're doing in plain language, 15–30 seconds each, unscripted.
- Problem/solution beats — anything showing a challenge being solved. Your strongest storytelling material.
- Wide establishing shots — scale and site context. Useful for YouTube's slower pace, less so for TikTok.

The pipeline

- **Step 1** — YouTube first (the master edit): cut the full 8–12 minute **narrative — problem → process → result**. Every other platform's content is pulled from this edit, not shot separately.
- **Step 2** — Instagram carousel: pull 6–8 key moments as stills/short clips — hook, process beats, result, soft CTA. Caption carries the human-story angle.
- **Step 3** — LinkedIn document post: rebuild the same case-study beats as a PDF carousel, with a professional, results-focused caption; or a text-led first-person post from Lee with one supporting clip.
- **Step 4** — TikTok/Reels clips (3–5 cuts): a pure hook clip, a satisfying process clip, one or two problem/solution clips, and a personality clip of Lee or the crew talking naturally to camera. Re-export 1–2 of these natively (no watermark) for Facebook Reels and Groups.

Editing YouTube first forces you to find the actual narrative arc of the job — cutting down for the other platforms afterwards is far faster than starting from scratch each time, and all platforms end up reinforcing the same brand story rather than feeling like separate content strategies.

5. Optimum Upload Routine by Platform

"Best time" data is generally US-skewed, so treat clock times as a starting point and check your own analytics after a few weeks. Frequency numbers are starting points too — consistency and quality beat volume every time.

TikTok

- Frequency: **2–5 times a week** gives the most meaningful lift in views versus posting once. Daily posting can drive faster follower growth, but only if quality holds — poor-performing videos can suppress future distribution.
- Timing: roughly **6–9 PM** performs best, with early morning and lunchtime as secondary windows to test.
- Mix: blend shorter and longer-form clips (over a minute) — useful given both hook clips and process cuts from one shoot.

Instagram

- Frequency: **3–5 feed/Reels posts per week** is a solid starting target — fits well with the carousel + Reels output from one shoot day.
- Timing: peaks around **9–11 AM and 7–9 PM**.

YouTube

- Frequency: no hard consensus number — YouTube rewards depth and consistency over volume. One upload a week done well outperforms three rushed ones.
- Timing: roughly **2–4 PM and 8–11 PM** tends to perform best.

LinkedIn

- Frequency: **2–5 posts per week** — content has real staying power, so daily posting isn't needed. Each post typically gets 24–48 hours of real distribution before settling.
- Timing: roughly **7–9 AM and 12–1 PM**, though the peak window has reportedly been shifting from mornings toward afternoons through 2026 — worth testing both.

Facebook

- Frequency: **1–2 posts per day** is a common starting target for Pages, though one strong post daily is usually enough to stay visible — low-effort daily posting is actively punished.
- Timing: roughly **9 AM–12 PM and 6–9 PM** tends to perform best.
- Note: treat Reels and Feed posts as separate systems — a native (non-watermarked) Reels re-export of a TikTok clip usually outperforms a straight repost.

A realistic weekly routine from one shoot day

Platform	Frequency	Best Send Windows
YouTube	1 long-form / week	Afternoon or evening
Instagram	3–5 posts / week (mix Reels + 1 carousel)	Mid-morning or early evening
TikTok	2–5 clips / week	Evening
Facebook	1 post / day (native Reels + occasional Feed)	Late morning or early evening
LinkedIn	2–3 posts / week	Morning or early afternoon

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