/ / THE PLAYBOOK

FOR UK & EU PROP TRADING FIRMS

The Prop Firm Growth Playbook

How we built a 45,000-trader email list and 5,000+ Discord community in twelve months — and the exact systems any UK prop firm can copy.

BY

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Why most prop firm marketing fails

The prop trading industry has exploded in the last three years. There are over 200 active proprietary trading firms competing for trader attention in 2026, up from around 40 in 2022. Despite the growth in demand, the marketing playbook used by most firms is essentially identical: run Meta ads with images of dashboards, send traders to a landing page comparing challenge tiers, hope they convert.

This works at small scale. It catastrophically fails at any scale that justifies the £2k-£5k monthly ad budgets serious firms now run. The problem is structural, not tactical. Generic prop firm marketing treats every trader the same, fails to differentiate the firm beyond price and rules, and stops the funnel at the challenge purchase rather than building a system for the trader's lifetime.

The firms that broke into the top 20 in 2025 didn't do it with better ads. They did it with better positioning, better community, better retention systems, and better economics-per-trader. This playbook walks through each layer.

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The four layers of prop firm marketing

Layer one is positioning. The single most expensive mistake prop firms make is positioning themselves on rules and pricing. Rules and pricing get copied by competitors in weeks. Positioning around a specific trader archetype, a specific instrument focus, a specific community feel — that's defensible. Athena Edge positioned around 'serious traders, professional firm' from day one. That positioning informed every ad, every email, every Discord channel.

Layer two is acquisition. Multi-channel from day one because prop trading audiences exist on different platforms. Meta for the under-30 retail trader. Google Search for the experienced trader who's churning out of another firm. YouTube for long-form trust building. TikTok for awareness. Influencer/affiliate as the compound channel.

Layer three is conversion. Most prop firms have landing pages that look like SaaS comparison tables. Traders don't buy like SaaS users. They buy on emotion (the dream of going full-time), validated by social proof (other funded traders), and de-risked by guarantees (the reattempt policy, the refund policy, the support quality). Funnels need to be built around those drivers, not around feature comparisons.

Layer four is retention and reactivation. A trader who fails a challenge is worth significantly more than a trader who has never bought. They've already proven willingness to pay. They've experienced your product. The sequences that bring them back are where the real economics are made.

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Layer 1: Positioning that compounds

Take five minutes and look at the homepages of the top fifteen prop firms by traffic. You'll see the same patterns: a dashboard hero image, a 'choose your account size' grid, some payout proof, an affiliate disclaimer. Indistinguishable.

Now look at the homepages of the firms that have broken out — the ones that grew from launch to $1M monthly revenue inside eighteen months. Their positioning is sharp. They don't try to be everything to every trader. One focuses purely on serious experienced traders and has a no-nonsense brand to match. Another positions explicitly as a beginner-friendly firm with educational content baked into the customer experience. A third leans into community as the product.

Your positioning needs to answer three questions before any marketing dollar is spent. Who is your archetype trader? What do you do better than every other firm for that archetype? Why should they believe you? Get those answers documented and pressure-test them with your existing best customers. That document becomes the brief for every creative, every email, every landing page.

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Layer 2: Multi-channel acquisition without burning ad accounts

Most prop firms get their Meta accounts banned within ninety days of going seriously into paid. Three reasons. First, they use restricted creative — exaggerated profit claims, unverified testimonials, the word 'guaranteed'. Second, they don't have proper compliance disclaimers on the landing pages the ads point to. Third, they scale too fast through a single ad account rather than building multiple business managers and ad accounts for redundancy.

The setup we use is three Business Managers minimum. Each runs a separate set of creative angles. We rotate creative every 14 days. We never push more than £500/day through a fresh ad account without warm-up. We document every approval rejection so we know the classifier's current sensitivities. We have a dedicated person whose job is creative compliance review before anything ships.

On Google, the play is Search + a hardened PMax structure with strict audience signals. Search captures bottom-of-funnel intent at much cheaper CPLs than Meta. PMax can work but only with seed audiences from funded trader data and strict negative keyword lists. YouTube ads work best as awareness campaigns paired with retargeting through Meta.

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Layer 3: Funnels that match how traders actually buy

A trader doesn't buy a prop firm challenge like they buy a SaaS subscription. They buy emotionally, then validate logically. The funnel needs to lead with the emotional driver — usually some version of 'imagine trading full-time on someone else's capital' — and then build credibility through specifics: payout amounts, refund policies, community testimonials, founder backstory.

The landing page sequence we ship for prop firms typically goes: cold ad → niche-targeted lander (different page for scalper vs swing trader vs FX vs futures) → challenge type comparison → checkout. We A/B test the niche-targeted landers heavily because the gap between a generic 'best prop firm' page and one tailored to a specific trader type is often 2-3x conversion.

The checkout page is its own optimisation surface. Trust badges, money-back guarantee callout, FAQ accordion, live chat available. Removing friction here recovers significant abandoned-cart revenue without changing anything upstream.

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Layer 4: Retention is where prop firms get rich

A funded trader is the single most valuable customer a prop firm has. They generate trading volume, they generate payout fee revenue, they generate testimonial content, they generate referrals. Designing the post-funding experience to maximise their tenure is the difference between a £1M revenue firm and a £10M revenue firm.

The reattempt sequence is the other lever. When a trader fails a challenge, you have a 14-day window where they're more likely to buy a reattempt than at any point afterward. We've tested this across multiple firms. The sequences that work lead with empathy, share data on the common mistakes that caused the failure, offer a small discount on reattempt within seven days, and frame the reattempt as a learning opportunity rather than a sunk-cost decision.

Done well, reattempt sequences recover 30-40% of failed traders. That's the difference between a one-time customer and a multi-purchase relationship. The math compounds fast.

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Community as a moat

Discord and Telegram communities are the most under-valued asset in prop firm marketing. Built well, they reduce CAC by driving organic word-of-mouth, lift retention by giving failed traders a reason to stay engaged, and provide a steady supply of social proof that fuels paid creative.

Built poorly, they become a graveyard of ticker spam, dead-channel proliferation, and toxic culture that actively damages the brand. The difference is design and moderation.

The Athena Edge Discord scaled to 5,000+ active members because we designed the role progression carefully, ran scheduled events (weekly live trading reviews, monthly trader spotlights), moderated aggressively against ticker spam and self-promotion, and built quality channels that gave traders a reason to log in even when they weren't actively trading. The community became a product feature, not a marketing afterthought.

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What to ship in your first 90 days

If you're a prop firm reading this and want to put the playbook to work, here's the ninety-day plan we'd run.

Days 1-30: positioning document, brand refresh if needed, two new landing pages built around your priority trader archetype, Discord/Telegram architecture and seed launch, email welcome sequence rewritten, affiliate programme scoped.

Days 31-60: Meta and Google campaigns built and launched at modest spend. Reattempt sequence shipped. First influencer/affiliate partnerships signed. Community engagement loops running. Funded trader testimonial production system in place.

Days 61-90: scale spend on what's working, kill what's not. Launch second priority funnel (e.g. funded account upgrade path). Hit your first community milestone (1,000 active members). Build out the retention dashboard. Plan next quarter from real data, not guesses.

This is exactly the plan we ran with Athena Edge. It's exactly the plan we'd run with any UK prop firm doing six figures monthly that's ready to scale properly. If that's you, the call link is on the next page.

// Ready to ship?

If you run a prop firm business in the UK and want this system built for you, there's one next step.

Book a 30-minute strategy call. We audit your current marketing live, identify the gaps, and map a custom plan. Zero pressure. If we're not the right fit, we'll tell you on the call.

cal.com/elavatewithalex/free-strategy-call

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