



# **Failing Forward: How a Pivot to 'Free' Unlocked Our Future**



AK035 Strategic Impact Report 2025 | A  
Transparent Review of a Year in Pivot

Reporting Period: Jan – Oct 2025 | Lungelo Shandu, Founder

# The Pivot Was Not Just Necessary—It Was Transformative

2025 began with a spectacular failure: a paid service model that generated zero revenue. By removing financial barriers, we moved from declining interest to a validated mission.

## The Paid Model (Jan–Mar)

0

Rands Revenue

8

Registrations

0

Conversions

## The Free Model (Apr–Oct)

667.36

Rands Revenue  
(Ad-Supported)

9,000+

Page Views

Unlimited

Access Granted

Insight: We proved that our mission to serve those who need help most required removing financial barriers entirely.

# Our Hypothesis Was Wrong: The Failure of the Paid Model

We launched with confidence, offering tiered pricing (100 to 500 Rands). We assumed value would drive payment. We were wrong.

| Starter Package                                     | Professional  | Premium   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>R100</b>   | <b>R250</b>   | <b>R500</b>   |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUE: 0 Rands</b>                       | <b>TOTAL REVENUE: 0 Rands</b>                       | <b>TOTAL REVENUE: 0 Rands</b>                       |
| 5 Registrations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 Registrations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 0 Registrations <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 0 Conversions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | 0 Conversions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | 0 Conversions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |

Context: Traffic actually grew during this period (278 to 968 views). The demand existed, but the capacity to pay did not.

# The 'Non-Paying' User: Qualified, Desperate, and Broke

The 8 people who registered but didn't pay weren't looking for handouts. They were qualified professionals in economic crisis.



Education: 80% held post-matric qualifications (Diplomas, Degrees).



Location: 100% based in economic hubs like Gauteng.



Mindset: 100% interested in side hustles (entrepreneurial).

**“Asking for upfront payment was asking them to choose between feeding their families and investing in their job search. This was the moral breaking point.”**

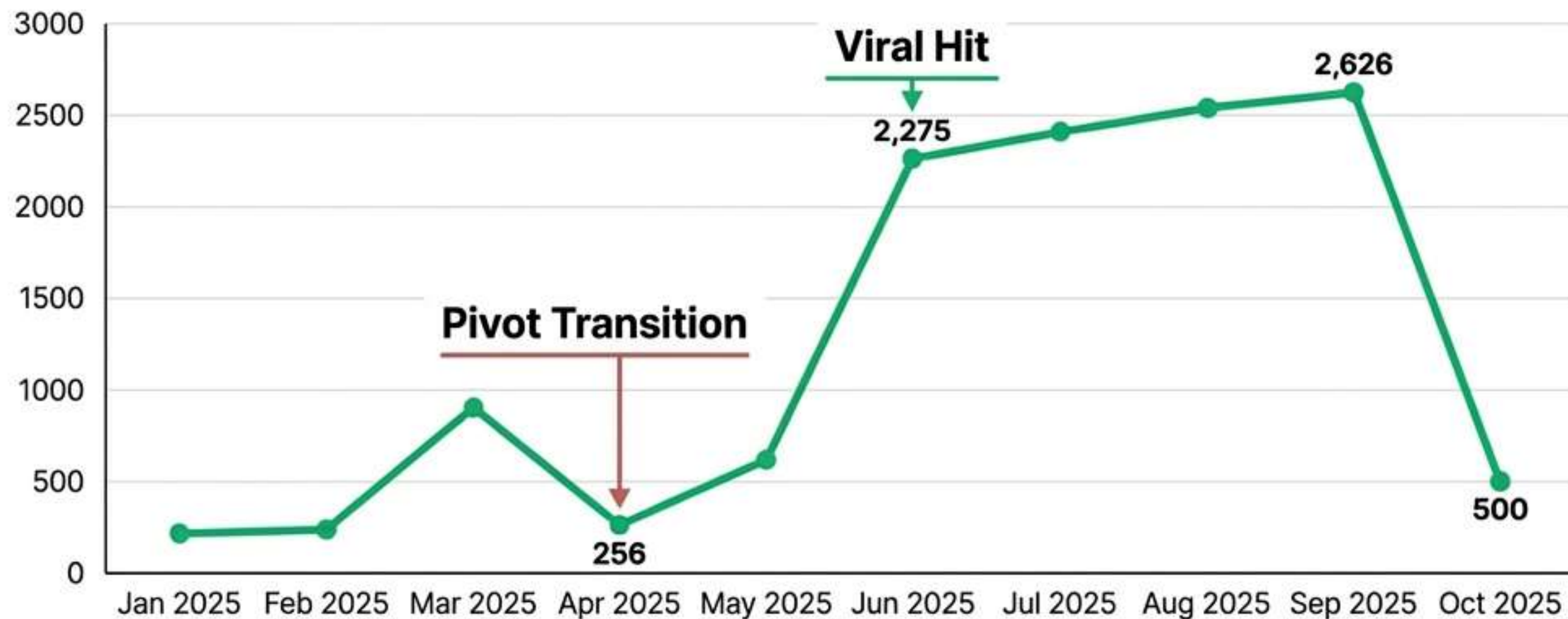
# The Pivot: Aligning Profit with Purpose (April–October)

In April 2025, we removed the paywall. We bet on a high-volume, ad-supported model to subsidize free access.



# When We Opened the Gates, the Community Responded

## Monthly Traffic Views



## Traffic Sources

X (Twitter): 38.9%  
(Primary driver of volatility)

Direct: ~28%

Search (Google): 0.7%  
(Critical Weakness)

**Volatility is high. We are currently surviving on viral hits, not sustainable organic growth.**

# Proof of Concept: Monetizing Attention, Not Poverty

Total Revenue:  
**667.36 Rands**

via Google AdSense

RPM (Revenue Per Mille):  
**~93.18 Rands**

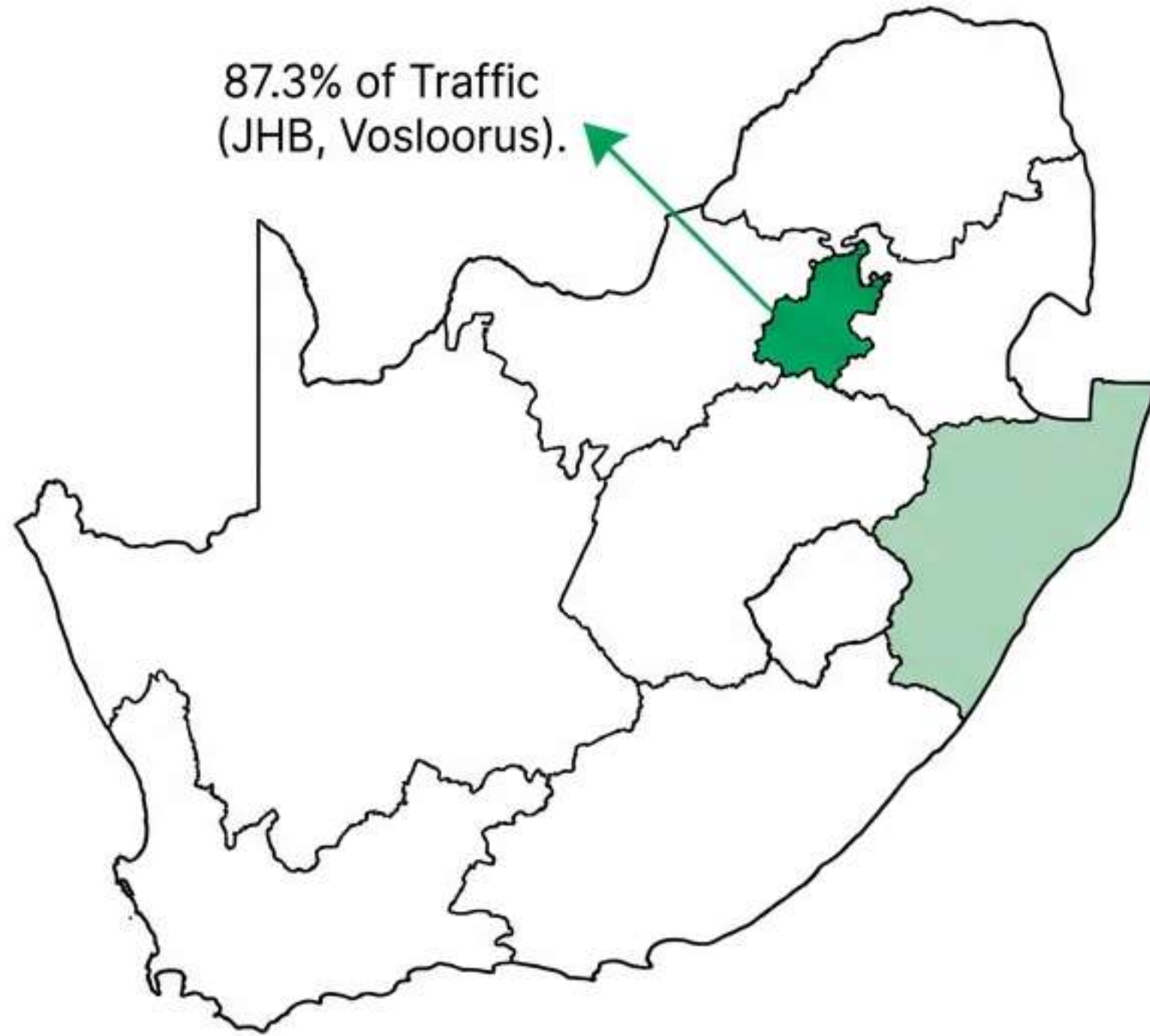
## The Technical Leak

We lost ~20.5% of potential revenue due to a technical error. 1,848 visitors went un-monetized because of poor ad placement on subdomains (careerguide/jobsearch/cv).

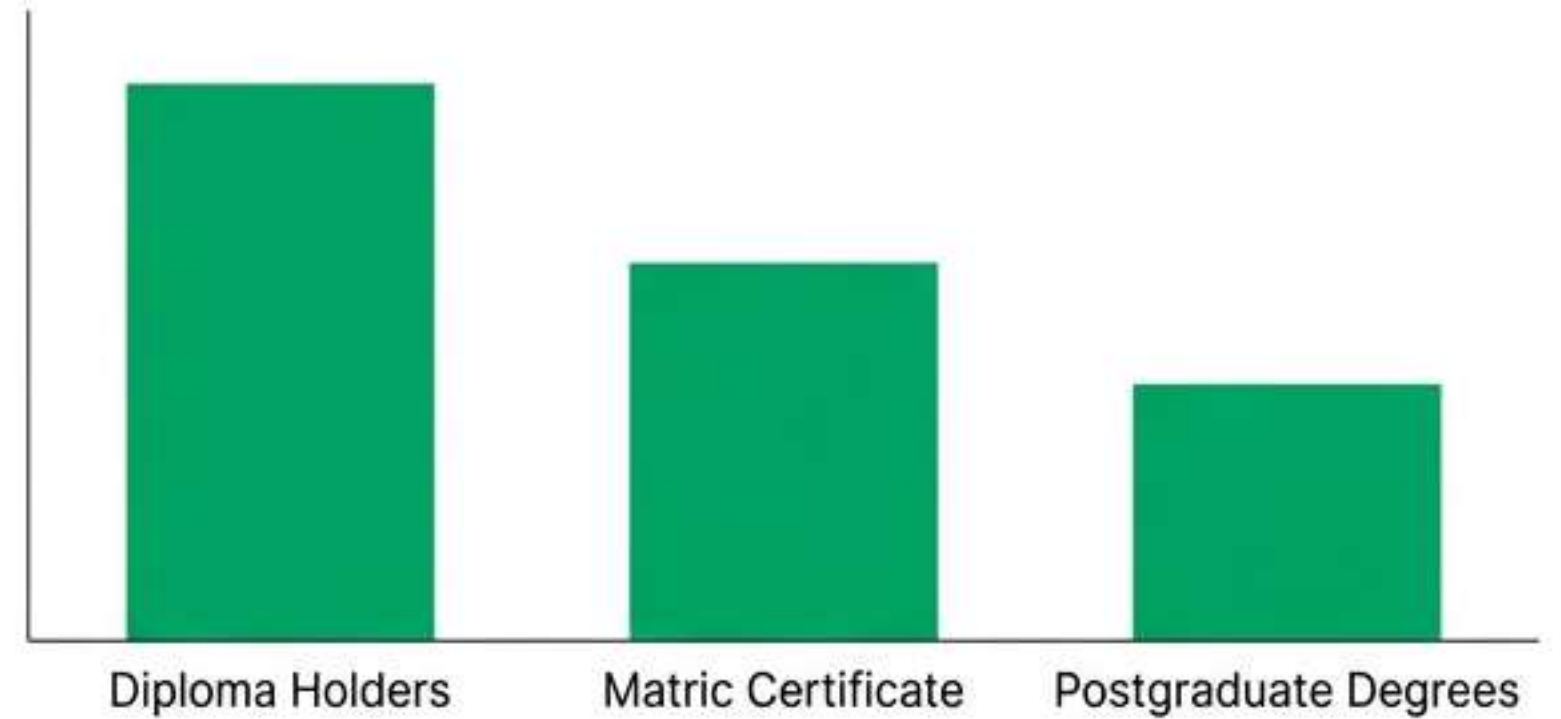


**Correction target:**  
**+25-40% revenue increase.**

# We Serve the “Young, Qualified, and Stuck”



## Education Profile



The Paradox: These are skilled individuals failing to connect with the market, not because they lack qualifications, but because they lack strategic knowledge.

# The Universal Experience is Rejection

“I’m getting rejected.”

“Agents do not get back to me.”

“Searching for more than 12 months.”

## The ATS Gap (Opportunity)

### No ATS

Knows they need help. Uses the CV builder.

### Yes ATS

Think they are fine, but still failing. This is the Strategic Gap.

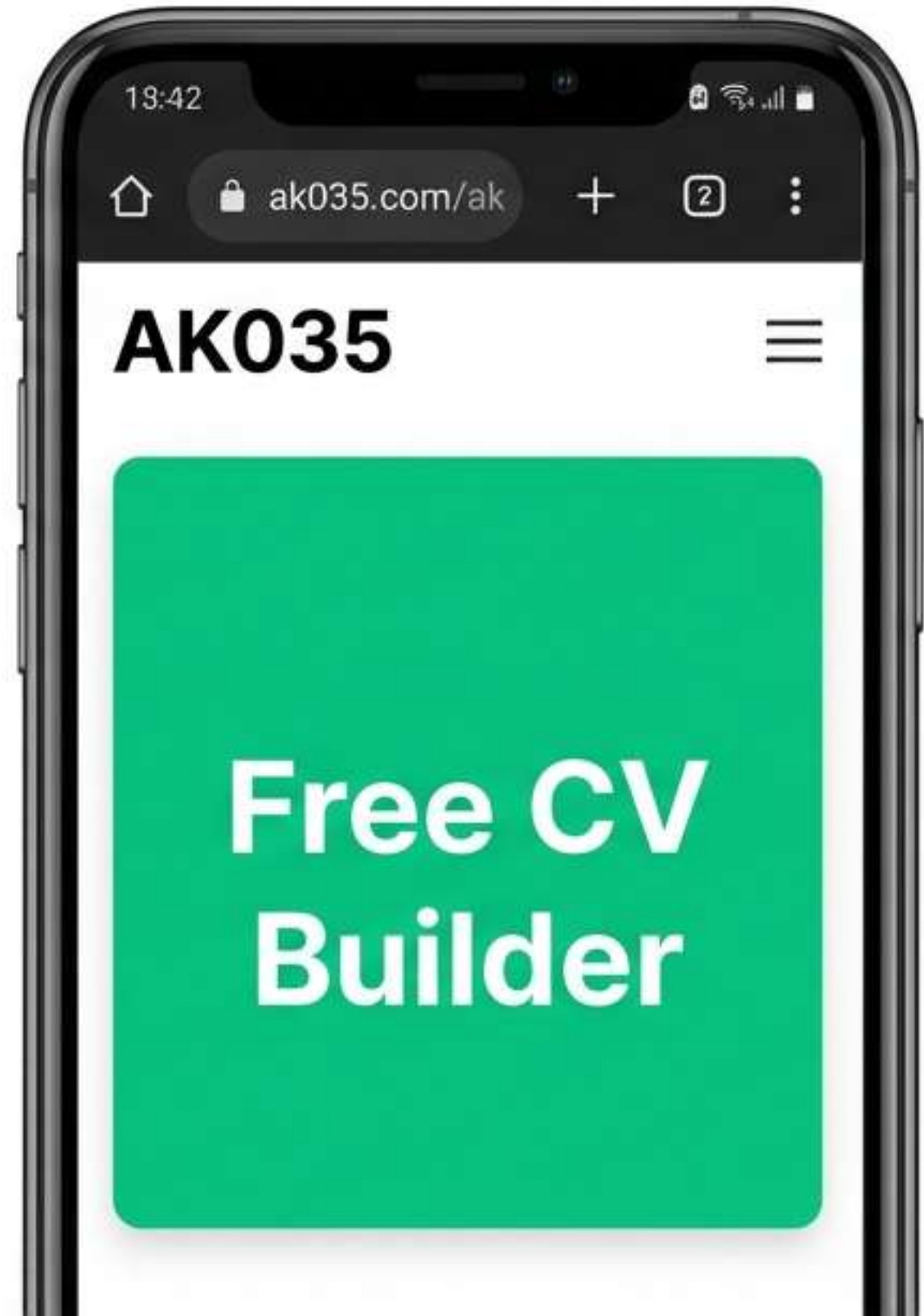
Focus for 2026  
Premium Services.

# The Reality is Mobile-First

# 89.1%

of all traffic comes from mobile devices.

Our audience accesses us during commutes and late at night. If a feature doesn't work on a phone, it effectively **doesn't exist**.



# We Are Not Safe Yet: Three Critical Vulnerabilities



## Search Invisibility

Only **0.7%** of traffic comes from Google. We are **invisible** to organic searchers.



## Algorithm Dependency

**71.7%** of traffic hits a single page. If X/Twitter changes its algorithm, we **lose our audience**.



## Seasonal Collapse

The Q2 drop (**76% loss** in April) shows we are susceptible to **seasonal slumps** we failed to predict.

# Strategic Lessons from the Frontlines

01

## Trust is Currency

You cannot ask for payment from a user in crisis until you have proven you can help them.

02

## Strategy > Templates

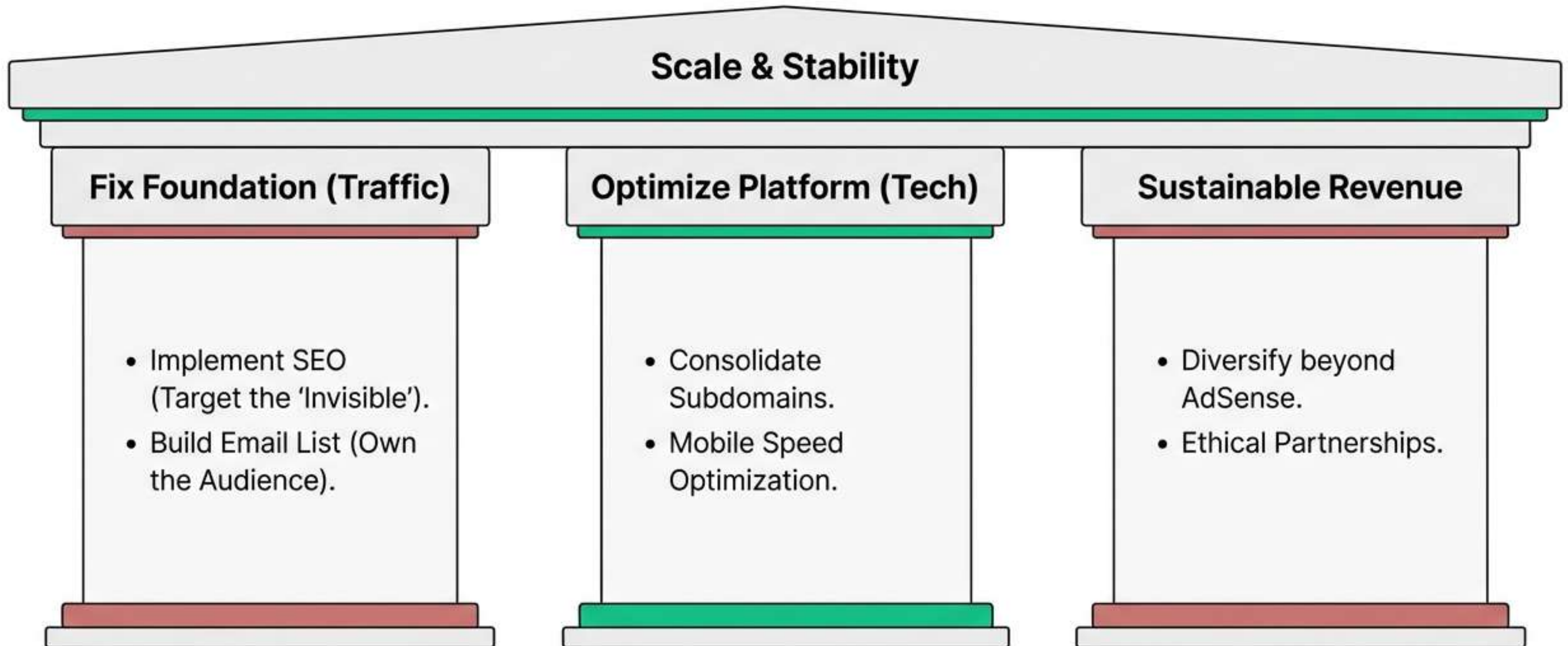
The problem isn't just the CV format; it's the **application strategy**. Users are **failing the human review**, not just the machine review.

03

## Owned Channels are Mandatory

We cannot build a business on **rented land** (social media). We must **build an email list**.

# 2026 Strategy: Three Pillars for Stability



# The 'High-Trust' Revenue Model

We only charge those who have succeeded or are already established.

## 2026 Revenue Mix



**Target: 50,000+ Rands monthly revenue by year-end.**

# The System is Broken. Not You.

To those still searching after 12 months: You are not failing. AK035 exists to navigate this broken system until we can help fix it.

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