Lesson Plan: Digital Detective - Solving the Case of the Dropping Traffic

Materials Needed:

- A computer with internet access
- A Google Account (for accessing Google Docs/Sheets)
- The "Kevin Blake" email example
- Link to Google PageSpeed Insights: https://pagespeed.web.dev/
- Link to a Broken Link Checker: https://www.deadlinkchecker.com/
- Link to a Mobile-Friendly Test: https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly
- Access to a website to analyze (e.g., a local non-profit, a favorite hobby blog, or a family/friend's business site with permission)

Lesson Details

Subject: Digital Literacy, Business Communication, Web Fundamentals

Grade Level: High School (Ages 14-16)

Time Allotment: Approximately 2.5 - 3 hours

1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- **Analyze** a piece of business communication (an email) for tone, effectiveness, and professionalism.
- **Identify** at least three common technical or user experience (UX) issues that can cause a drop in website traffic.
- **Apply** free online tools to diagnose potential problems on a real website.
- **Synthesize** findings into a clear, actionable report.
- **Create** a professional and persuasive outreach email that offers genuine value, contrasting it with the provided spam example.

2. Instructional Steps & Activities

Part 1: The Inciting Incident - Analyzing the Evidence (20 minutes)

The goal here is to deconstruct the "Kevin Blake" email to understand *why* it's ineffective and learn to spot "red flags" in digital communication.

1. **Read the Email Aloud:** Start by reading the "Kevin Blake" email.
2. **Initial Reactions:** Ask the student for their first impression. Does it feel trustworthy? Would they reply? Why or why not?
3. **Guided Discussion:** Discuss the following questions:
   - **Vagueness:** Kevin mentions "major errors" but doesn't name a single one. Why do you think he does this? (Answer: It's a template sent to many people; he hasn't actually looked at the website).
   - **Tone:** How would you describe the tone? Is it helpful? Threatening? Generic?
   - **The "Hook":** He offers to send the errors and solutions. What is his likely goal? (Answer: To get a reply so he can sell his services).

- **Professionalism:** Does "Thanks & Best Regards" feel genuine? What makes an email feel personal vs. like spam?
4. **Activity:** In a document, create two columns: "What Kevin Did Wrong" and "A Better Way." Have the student list the flaws and brainstorm how each point could be improved. For example, instead of "major errors," a better way would be "a specific, verifiable error like 'I noticed several broken links on your services page'."

Part 2: The Detective's Toolkit - Gearing Up for the Investigation (40 minutes)

This section introduces the core concepts and tools for the main project. Frame it as gathering the necessary equipment for a digital investigation.

1. **Introduce Key Concepts:** Briefly and clearly explain what could cause website traffic to drop. Avoid overly technical jargon.
     - **Slow Page Speed:** "Imagine waiting forever for a video to load. People get impatient and leave. That's a slow page." Google notices this and ranks slow sites lower.
     - **Broken Links (404 Errors):** "This is like a door that leads to a brick wall. It's frustrating for users and makes a site look neglected."
     - **Not Mobile-Friendly:** "Over half of all web traffic is on phones. If a site is hard to use on a small screen, people will give up."
     - **Poor User Experience (UX):** "Is the website confusing? Hard to navigate? Are the colors jarring or the text hard to read? A confusing site drives people away."
2. **Tool Demonstration:** Briefly demonstrate how to use each of the three free tools listed in the materials section.
     - Enter a familiar URL (like wikipedia.org) into **Google PageSpeed Insights**. Point out the "Performance" score for mobile and desktop. Explain that a score below 50 (red) is a major problem.
     - Run the same URL through the **Mobile-Friendly Test** to show what a "pass" looks like.
     - Use the **Broken Link Checker** to show how it crawls a site and lists any "dead" links.

Part 3: The Investigation - Going Undercover (60 minutes)

This is the core, hands-on part of the lesson where the student applies their new knowledge.

1. **Select a "Client":** Have the student choose a real website to investigate. Good choices include a local library, a small non-profit organization, a favorite hobby blog, or a local community center. The goal is to pick a site that likely doesn't have a big corporate web team behind it.
2. **Conduct the Audit:** The student will now act as a "Digital Detective." Their mission is to use the tools and their own observations to find potential issues on their chosen site. Have them document their findings in a "Case File" (a simple Google Doc is perfect). The Case File should include:
     - **Website URL:** [Name of website]
     - **Page Speed Score (Mobile & Desktop):** [Screenshots or written scores]
     - **Mobile-Friendly Test Result:** [Pass/Fail with screenshot]
     - **Broken Link Scan Results:** [List of any broken links found]
     - **Personal UX Observations:** The student should browse the site for 5-10 minutes and answer questions like:
         - Is it easy to find the contact information?
         - Is the menu clear and logical?
         - Is the text easy to read (font size, color contrast)?
         - Does the site feel modern or outdated?
         - Did anything frustrate you while using the site?

Part 4: Cracking the Case - The Final Report & The "Right" Approach (30 minutes)

In this final section, the student synthesizes their findings and demonstrates true understanding by creating a high-quality, helpful piece of communication.

1. **Create the "Case Report":** Based on their "Case File," the student will write a one-page summary. This report should:
    - Briefly state the purpose of the audit.
    - List the 2-3 most critical issues they discovered (e.g., "The mobile page speed is very low at 34/100, which may cause visitors to leave.").
    - For each issue, propose a simple, clear solution (e.g., "Compressing the large images on the homepage could significantly improve this speed.").
2. **Creative Writing - The "Better" Email:** Now, challenge the student to rewrite Kevin Blake's email. Using their findings from the audit, they will write a new email to the website owner. This email must be:
    - **Specific:** Mention one or two concrete, helpful findings from their audit. ("I was browsing your site and noticed the 'About Us' link is broken...").
    - **Genuinely Helpful:** Offer a solution or a resource without immediately asking for money. ("This is often a quick fix in WordPress. Here is a helpful article on how to resolve it...").
    - **Professional & Respectful:** Use a polite and authentic tone. The goal is to build trust, not to scare them into hiring you.

3. Assessment & Evaluation

The lesson will be assessed based on the quality and thoughtfulness of the two creative outputs:

- **The Case Report:**
    - **Clarity:** Are the identified problems and proposed solutions clear and easy to understand?
    - **Evidence:** Is the analysis supported by data from the online tools and specific observations?
    - **Prioritization:** Did the student correctly identify the most impactful issues?
- **The "Better" Email:**
    - **Professionalism:** Does the email have a respectful tone and proper formatting?
    - **Value:** Does it provide specific, actionable value to the recipient *before* asking for anything in return?
    - **Persuasiveness:** Does it build trust and make the recipient *want* to learn more, rather than feeling pressured?

4. Differentiation and Extension

- **For Extra Support:** Provide a pre-made template for the "Case File" with prompts for each section. Work alongside the student to interpret the results of the online tools.
- **For an Advanced Challenge:** Have the student research a fourth tool (e.g., an SEO keyword checker or a website accessibility checker) and add its findings to their report. They could also analyze two competing websites and write a brief comparison of their technical strengths and weaknesses.