

GROW YOUR BUSINESS

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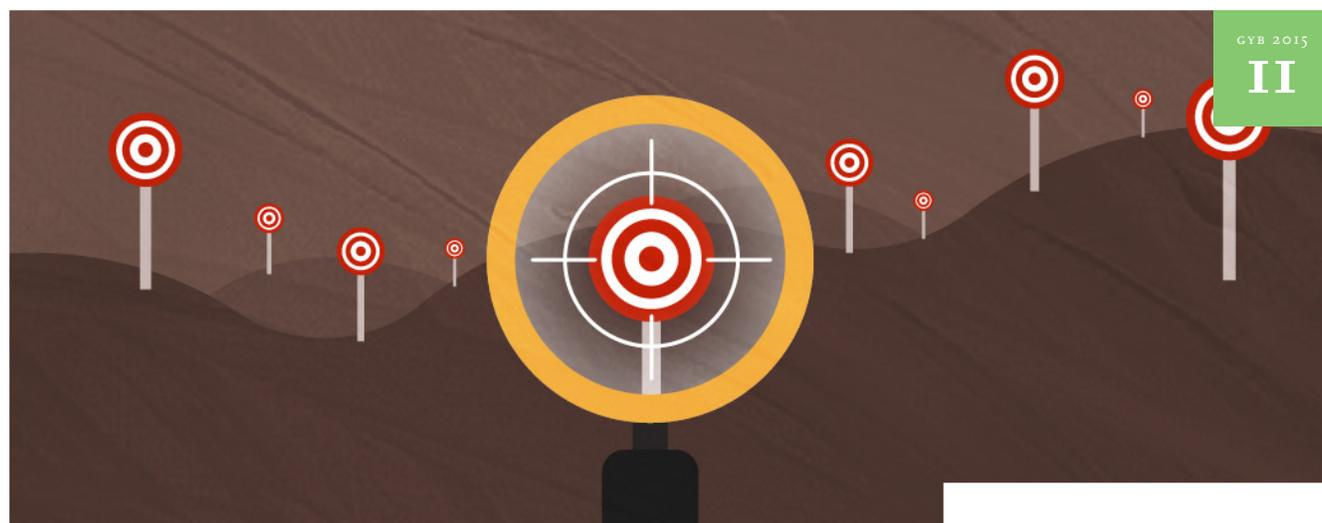
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Finding Your Business Niche

It is a well-known fact that clients are more likely to pay higher prices for a more specialized and targeted product or service. This kind of specialization also helps create the niche market in which your business is best set for success.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What and to whom are you selling?
2. Is your product/service applicable to the market you serve?
3. Are the benefits of your service clear?
4. Does your service/product serve the clients who are seeking you out?

These are the most basic questions you would start with when defining a niche market - any unclear answers? Then you need to revisit your business plan and reevaluate your niche.

So how do you find your business niche? Start with research - a lot of research! Investigate the market standards - what is currently being offered, what is needed, where could improvements be offered?

Research can be overwhelming - start with industry publications and attend conferences or seminars targeting your intended market. These will give you the most current information, tied up in simple packages, easy to decipher and apply.

“Focus your business to a specific market and specialized service.”

Consider banking on the client complaints of other like-minded businesses. Reading into what is not working for your competition allows you to cater directly to the needs of your market by offering what they are missing.

Once you have some research done, you can clearly define which type of business market you are reaching - consumer or business?

Known industry wide as B2C and B2B, respectively, the differentiations are already quite clear, though the importance of identifying as one or the other will help more clearly define future marketing strategies.

Now apply tunnel vision - whittle and scale back, then whittle some more. Focus, focus, focus. Your niche should be as defined and specialized as you can get it - don't try to please everyone!

One specialist defines the 'best niche' as:

1. Committed to your long-term vision.
2. In demand - clients actively seeking (and therefore creating) it.
3. One of a kind.
4. Meticulously planned out.
5. Built to evolve - inherently supported by flexibility and the ability to grow and change.

SMALL BUSINESS PR POINTER

Competition can be tough for a new business on the block! Scrounging up funds to cover publicity, advertising and media coverage costs is even tougher. Local businesses can thrive by reaching out to other local outlets- radio shows, magazines, newspapers, blogs, newsletters, etc. Make a connection and offer up your expertise to act as a commentator, guest speaker, columnist or features writer and get your name out there, at no extra cost!



Using Online Surveys to Target Your Clients

Creating and utilizing specialized online surveys can provide intricate insight into the mind of your client and with the right message and crafted content, can provide a deep well of consumer information.

There are two general challenges to online surveys: getting the RIGHT people to respond and gathering enough data (respondents) to actually produce meaningful results.

“Surveys are a great way to breed an honest answer!”

With online options galore, both of these challenges can be easily mitigated, usually for low to no cost to your business.

Firstly, let's identify the five best uses of surveys within the small business realm:

1. Client follow up. Immediately following a purchase, a survey (included with receipt or invoice) can shed light on the sales and

purchasing process as well as offer a space for clients to share thoughts and ideas on improvement or highlight strengths.

2. Market/Trend analysis. At all stages of your business operations, a deep understanding of your market - its peaks and valleys, strengths and weaknesses - is essential. Surveys can be utilized at the beginning, middle and end stages of any business operation to assess your reliability and relationship to the market.

3. Performance and operations management. Track your operations by enquiring with clients about their interactions with your company. Encourage a dialogue on improvement, be sure to ask about the strengths and the weaknesses.

4. Develop stronger relationships with clients. With a survey, you can easily and quickly find out more about your desired clients. Find out what they like, how they seek information, where they are spending money, what makes them buy! The possibilities here are endless.

5. Decision-making. Create an interactive atmosphere by bringing some small decisions to the public. Post new logo ideas, garner feedback on your image and consider tweaking things to reflect the public's opinion. A survey is a great forum for interactivity.

Surveys allow you to constantly be engaging with your clients. As we know, engaging content is what keeps people interactive on your web page or social media sites, and what will ultimately keep them coming back.

Also be clear, ask open ended questions to encourage feedback and consider offering discount coupons or some form of incentive to entice clients to participate.

Remember, time is money, and keeping your surveys short and direct is best - never ask your client to spend more than 5-7 minutes filling out your survey. Respect their time, they will likely provide more meaningful responses.



Getting Online Business Reviews

Time to face facts - it's a dog-eat-dog world out there online and without a plethora of good reviews to back you up, it's easy for a small business to get lost in the mix!

We don't mean rave reviews from your family and friends. We also don't mean those few disgruntled clients who never seem to be happy. We are talking about small businesses with thousands of genuine client reviews.

“Online review is more about quantity mixed of good and bad reviews than quality.”

How are they doing that? Well, certainly not by sitting around and waiting for them! Human nature 101 - we are only inclined to take time to write reviews when met with either terrible or exceptional service, right?

So how can a small business encourage every middle-ground client to provide an online review? A small effort can go a long way.

Every time you make a transaction - online, in-store, with vendors, with other business owners - you should be imploring them to write you a review.

Consider incorporating a line “We value our clients and strive to constantly provide better service. Write us a review online and receive 10% off your next purchase!” on all invoices and receipts.

Yes, we know you aren't supposed to buy a review, but ... a little incentive can go a long way!

Timing is an important factor here. Directly after purchase is a great time to ask. If no response (or a yes without action) wait until the product/service has been received/completed, then ask again.

Rule of thumb - three times, then move on. Don't be annoying about it! Conversely, don't wait too long afterwards - the experience needs to be fresh in order to garner an honest review.

Speaking of honesty, it is also a crucial factor in online reviews on your part. Be sure to disclose any existing relationships or partnerships. Just remember to be transparent - you are asking for honesty, offer it up in return.

If you paid for a review or offered a trade or service/product in return, be sure to disclose this as well. While not frowned upon (hello, power of bloggers!), be sure to follow the transparency rule if you want the reviews to be accepted.

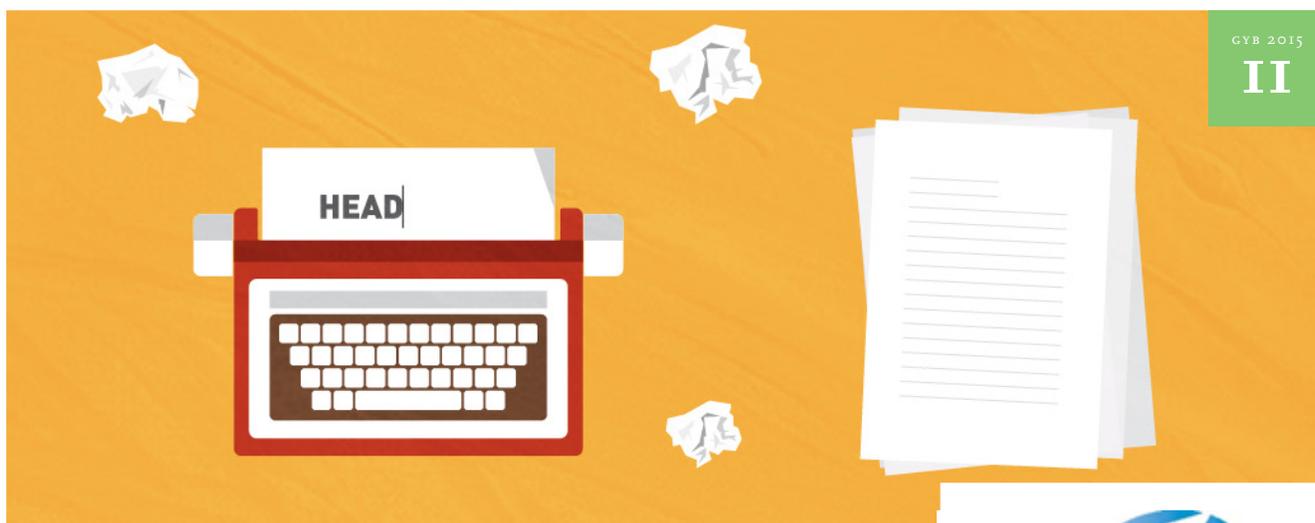
With online reviews, it's almost more about quantity than quality. 1000 reviews (mixed bag of good and bad) is better than 50 reviews (mostly good with a few bad). The consumer is looking for a consistency or reliability, and that is reflected with quantity.

Be aware - we are not suggesting 1000 negative reviews will do your company good! However, if you manage to positively resolve every single one of those reviews and change the attitude of the clients, you have done something right (and powerful!).



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Creating a Great Headline

“On the average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written your headline, you have spent eighty cents out of your dollar.”
–David Ogilvy

Whether for your website, brochure, flyer, newsletter or catalogue, if you can’t catch someone with a headline, chances are your body copy is of no interest to them.

So how do you efficiently capture your content into one snappy headline?

Let’s start with some DON’T’s:

1. Don’t create a snappy headline with no relevance to your content. This is setting your reader up for disappointment right off the bat. When they realize they have been misled, it’s over!
2. Don’t exceed 62 characters (specific to online headlines) as search engines tend to drop off the rest of the characters, rendering them un-searchable. Also, it’s a headline, let’s be quick about it!
3. Don’t exceed 6-12 words (non-online copy). Like we said, short and sweet.

5 times as many people read the headline than do the copy!

Now what should you do?

1. Stop viewing headline creation as ‘writing’. Copy writing is not the same as writing. If you don’t know the difference it may be time to invest in a freelance copy writer!
2. Start with the body copy, end with the headline.
3. Highlight the most highly desirable morsel of information in the headline - the top billed content, the most popular part of your content - put it on display.
4. Write more than one - many, many more. Experts suggest writing up to 25 headlines, and cultivating down from there.
5. Incorporate numbers, symbols and stats. Studies show that headlines with characters other than just letters are more powerful. (Interesting fact, the brain responds to odd numbers more than even numbers!)

6. Consider a play on words, issue a challenge or command, offer something, explain something, or announce something. Anything to make your headline less vanilla - it’s not meant to be just words strung together, it needs to be enticing.

Still seem overwhelming? There are many online resources and expert opinions out there on how to best generate a headline - do some research!

“Write an intriguing headline and keep it simple, short and relevant.”



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