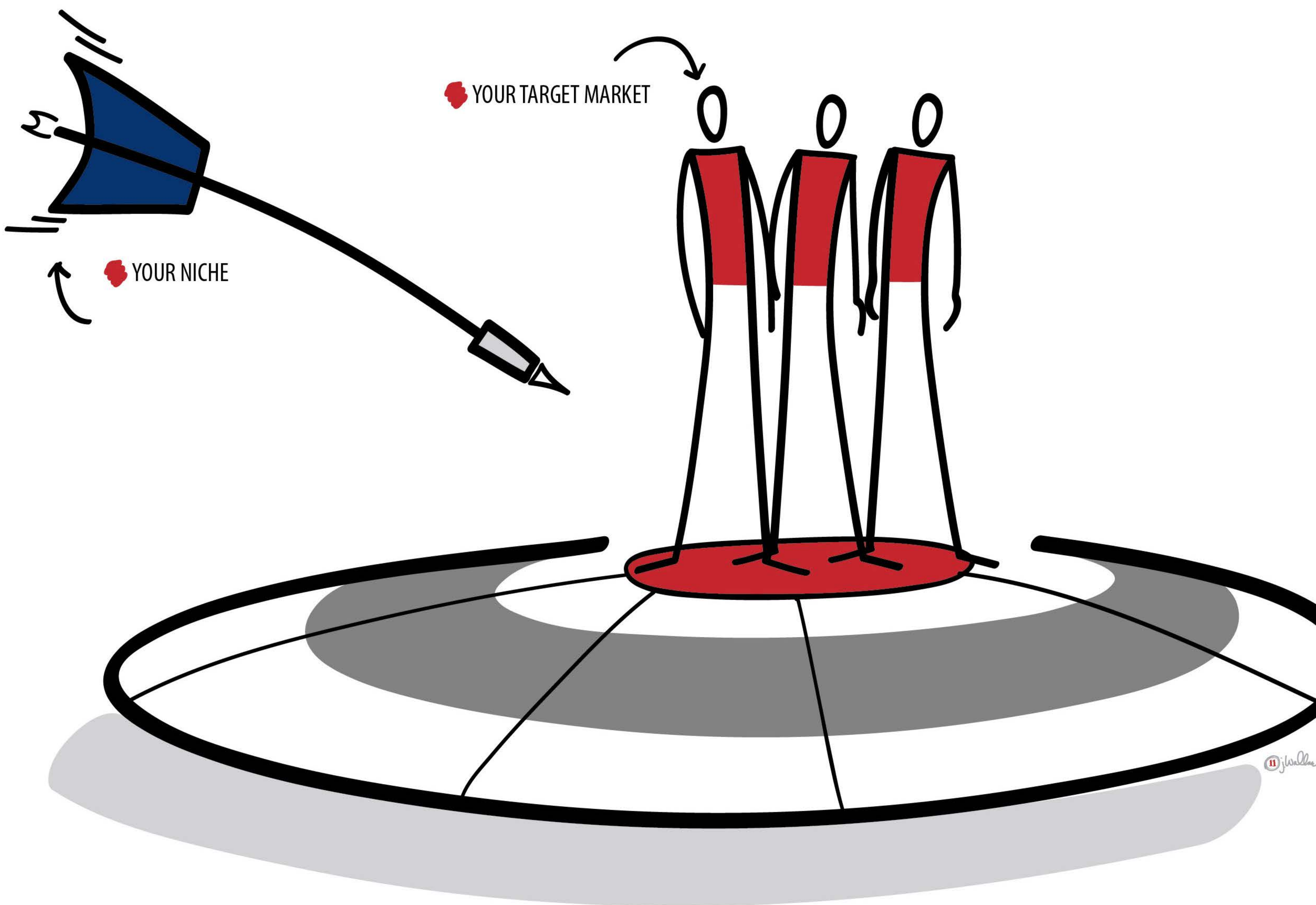


How To Find Your Niche, Determine Your Ideal Client, And Target Your Market



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How do you find your niche, target market, market, niche market, ideal client? Whatever you call it, you need to define it for yourself to be successful in business. Whatever you want to call it, the way I define these terms is as follows: offering what you do best (your niche) to a group of people (your ideal client) who hang out together in some organized fashion who desperately need and will pay for what it is that you offer (your target market).

Most business owners are afraid to declare a niche or focus on a target market for fear of excluding people. Read this next sentence carefully: In order to be successful, your goal needs to be to exclude as many people from your business as possible. As a matter of fact, I do that regularly with my website. One of the primary goals of my website is to scare away as many visitors as I can. I realize that is contrary to all the advice I give regularly on how to attract traffic to your website. However, if it's the wrong

traffic, what's the point? You'll make much more money attracting a smaller stream of ideal prospects to your site than a deluge of wrong ones.

Therefore, my clarity in what I do and with whom I work as described on my site will appeal only to precisely who it's supposed to -- my ideal client. All other visitors who don't see themselves in this description will leave and go elsewhere. Am I leaving money on the table? Probably, but I do feel there's enough to go around.

I can hear it now. You're saying, "Is she crazy, or what?" What I've long called the shotgun approach to marketing (where you try and hit every moving target) isn't very effective. After all, getting hit with one shotgun pellet might sting a bit and cause a minor skin injury, but it doesn't stay with you long. It's the same way when you try to reach out to everyone with a 98.6 degree temperature. You might be slightly memorable, but in the end, you're more of a nuisance than a real help and you're quickly forgotten.

Imagine a more concentrated approach, as though you were holding a rifle (please forgive my gun analogy, but it's effective). When you shoot a rifle, all your effort and energy is concentrated on one target, and assuming you have good aim, you have a greater rate of success in hitting what you're shooting at.

It's the same way with your business. The more focused you can become in defining what you do and in describing the group who needs what you do, the more effective your marketing becomes. Weeding out all those prospects who don't fit your niche, target market, or ideal client profile will leave you with a much better qualified pool of prospective clients.

Still confused about uncovering your niche and describing your target market? These 7 questions should help:

1. What is your gift to the world? What is it that you do better than anyone else in the world? What's your purpose -- for what reason were you put in this world? What causes people to seek you out regularly? For what do you want to become known as the "go-to" person? What activity engages you so fully that time seems to slip away unnoticed? It is the answers to these questions that will help you determine what you enjoy and makes you unique.

You may actually come up with several divergent answers, but you should only pursue one at a time. Trying to be several things to several groups of people causes confusion. Trust me, if you don't like what you've chosen, modify it or go to the next thing on your list. It may take a number of attempts over a 2-3 year period before it this piece really gels for you. Don't get discouraged -- it's happening just the way it was supposed to, and you're picking up what you need to know along the way.

2. Who needs your gift? Out of all the people in the entire world, what are the qualities of the people who need your gift? What gender are they? Where do they live? How old are they? How much money do they make? What do they do for a living? Use as many adjectives as you can brainstorm to describe them. Here's an example that a professional organizer recently came up with: chronically disorganized and overwhelmed Christian middle-class thirty-something suburban moms who struggle with balancing family expectations and career responsibilities. If you can actually visualize this group of people in your head (and personally know people who fit this description), then you've got an accurate portrait of your target market.

3. With whom do you want to work? Once you've figured out what you do and who needs what you do, the next step is to then narrow the vision a bit more to determine the qualities of your ideal client. What are their beliefs? What values do they hold dear? What industries are they in? What are the traits and qualities of great colleagues/bosses/friends that made them enjoyable to work with or be around? Are there foundational issues that need to be in place before someone is ready to work with you? For example, in my coaching practice, I only work with business owners who've been in business for at least 2 years and have a pretty solid understanding of the basics of their business.

4. Are they viable as a group? Is it worthwhile to focus on this group of people? Is there a list of them, like in a civic group, professional association, or support group? Are they part of a particular industry or profession? Are there enough of them to make them worthwhile to target? Are they in enough pain that they're willing to pay you to solve their

problem? Do they make enough money so that they can easily afford to pay you? If you are unable to find groups of people that fit your description, then you need to go back to the drawing board until you come up with a description of people who you can reach out and touch -- whether that's in real time or online.

5. What do they need? Now that you've got a description in place, go through your contact database and find prospects who meet your description and request to talk to them about their challenges. You can set up 30-minute interviews over coffee or over the phone with people who fit your ideal client profile and ask them a series of questions about things you want to know more about that will give you insight into their daily lives. Or, join in and participate in their online discussion lists, forums, or blogs and research the kinds of questions being posted. Find someone else who provides a different offering to the same target market and ask to send out a short survey to that person's contacts and to find out more about them as a group. Based on what you've learned, determine how your offerings will help them resolve their greatest needs, and make adjustments accordingly.

6. Where do you find them? Once you've described your ideal client (a combination of your description of who needs your service and with whom you want to work), now you need to determine how they congregate together on or off-line. Where do they hang out in real time -- at church, the local coffee shop, the hardware store, civic groups or professional association meetings? What about online in discussion groups, blogs, forums, online networking sites? Can you open the yellow pages of your phone book and find several listings that would encompass your ideal client? Can you find groups or associations to which they would belong? What do they read? Where do they network? With whom do they do business on a regular basis? You're seeking all places where you can reach them inexpensively and in large numbers.

7. How do I reach out to them? Now that you've found them, start to reach out to them. Offer to speak at their meetings. Write an article for their publication. Post flyers about your business at "natural referral partners", or

other businesses who cater to the same target market but offer a different service. Become an expert on their site. Answer questions in their discussion forums. Attend their networking functions. Offer an event that would be appealing and useful to them. Take out display or classified ads in publications that they read.

Every successful business person has become successful because she's figured out what talent she offers to the world and ascertained who's positioned to pay for that talent. Give up your shotgun approach to marketing and start focusing your efforts. You'll be rewarded with more qualified prospects that are a great fit for your business