Jane Heaton
ASSOCIATES

Finding the right niche

By Jane Heaton

Do you need to re-align what you do and who you do it with in order to achieve a sustainable and truly enjoyable business? This article gives you three simple exercises to help you find the right niche.

We can often think our marketing isn't working when actually the root of our problem lies in the fact that we're not truly comfortable with either what we are doing, who we are doing it for, or how we are doing it.

Marketing and selling in this situation become a bit of a slog because our heart's not really in it. And we are undermining our chances of success because we are unconsciously putting up a sign that shouts "Don't come here, I don't really want to be doing this, I'd rather be doing something else." And, lo and behold, we find ourselves with an increasing lack of customers, or ones that turn out to be just plain difficult to service.

Here are two things that make those who are happy with their "what", "who" and "how" stand out from the crowd:

1. They are enthusiastic about what they do. They are so enthusiastic it's catching. After about 10 minutes, you're hooked and totally uplifted by their energy, passion, and commitment. You can't stop smiling.

2. They have an unquenchable thirst for learning. They are an expert on their product or service, they research, they keep trying new things, they practice new techniques, they send themselves on training courses, they seek out mentors, and they take every opportunity to talk to their customers.

If you want to explore your own situation, here are 3 simple exercises you can start right now:

1. Think about your business over the last 12 months (or longer if you wish). Make 2 lists. On one, write down everything you have enjoyed the most – projects, customers, tasks. Write down where you were, exactly what you were doing, how you were doing it, when you were doing it, who you were doing it with. Now do the same, but for everything you've disliked or downright hated. What's different about the two lists? What do they tell you?

2. Commit to writing a daily journal. That's right, find a note book and make an entry every day. Write down the highs and lows of your day. What went well, what left you feeling a little flat? What were your successes? If something didn't go as well as you planned, what might you do differently next time? How are you feeling? After a couple of weeks and then at regular intervals, review what you have written. What is this telling you?

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3. Find some thinking space and clear your mind. Then write down a list answering the question "What do people come to me for?". Include customers, but also business partners or colleagues and suppliers, as well as friends and family. And don't just include hard facts about your product or service, think about the softer things and the unique things that you bring to the relationship, like empathy, understanding, advice, or learning. What does this tell you? If you're feeling brave - ask one or two of them to tell you what they get out their relationship with you.

These three exercises are aimed at raising your awareness of your situation. What you learn from doing one or all of these will give you some pointers about how you might re-align what you do, who you do it for, and how you do it – to take you closer to doing the work you love with people you enjoy doing it with, in a way that suits you and your personality.

Then of course you have to take action. No need to jump in at the deep end though – small steps work just as well.

Jane Heaton is a freelance marketing professional who works with owners of small businesses to help them get the results they want from their marketing. She can help you work out what to do and how to get it done. However, Jane also knows that having the inspiration and confidence to take action is an important key to success. That's why her blend of consultancy, mentoring and practical help focuses on keeping both you and your business in good shape.

Jane writes a monthly marketing e-newsletter - free to subscribe at www.janeheatonassociates.com

Contact her by email: jane.heaton@janeheatonassociates.com or by calling 01386 701944

Read more at: www.janeheatonassociates.com

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