

Are you in the right niche?

By Jane Heaton

Are you doing the work you love with people you enjoy doing it with, in a way that suits you and your personality? This article explores why creating a successful business is about a lot more than just creating a whizzy sales and marketing strategy.

Sometimes being a marketing consultant is a bit like being a doctor (although without any of the gory bits). Someone may come to me with a certain problem, but I see that the root of that problem lies elsewhere, hidden under the surface. And it may have been there for some time, niggling away. Left unattended, it has the potential to cause increasing trouble and even become fatal.

Treating the cause, and not the symptom, is the only way to get things back on track and this usually means getting right back to basics and answering the most basic question of all - are you working in the right niche? Or, put another way, are you doing the work you love with people you enjoy doing it with, in a way that suits you and your personality?

If you've not yet found the right niche, here are some common warning signs:

- You're not zinging out of bed every morning, eager to get stuck into the day ahead.
- You wish some of your clients or customers would just go away.
- You keep putting off certain marketing and customer-facing tasks.
- Your energy levels are low and, more often than not, you feel you haven't achieved much with your day.
- You don't always feel enthusiastic about talking to other people about your business.
- You sometimes say to yourself "I have to do this because I need the money", even though you don't really want to.
- You never seem to have quite enough clients or customers, no matter how hard you work.
- You start to feel that maybe you should give it all up and go and do something else, like become a hermit or, worse, get a full time job.

When we start out, we usually start with something we are interested in, enjoy, or get excited about, or we have a certain craft or skill. So far, so good. But it's a myth to think that **what** we do is the all important thing. "As long as I'm doing what I love, then I don't care who I'm doing it for, or where I do it". This type of thinking can be a recipe for disaster – for your business and your emotions.

Finding and being happy in your niche, is about getting all parts of the puzzle right for you – the what, who, where, when and how. The negative, energy draining signs are little wake up calls. Like someone poking you in the ribs and saying “Come on then, don’t ignore it, do something about it”.

And there really is no reason to be afraid of delving a little deeper, because, if you are doing something you love, then the rest of it can quite often be a case of re-thinking, re-aligning and just charting a slightly different course.

My own niche story

Before setting up my own business, I worked for several big companies and so my first clients were just like the organisations I left behind. I soon realised that, although I had ditched the corporate politics, I was still lumbered with lots of the other negative aspects associated with working for big organisations. Increasingly, I was being drawn to the satellite network of smaller businesses that revolves around the corporate world – like trainers, IT and HR specialists, and e-learning consultants. This was getting a little better.

Then, I started to get involved in enterprise type projects and was bowled over by the creativity and enthusiasm of very small business owners.

At this point, my fellow marketing consultants were all too ready to give me the benefit of their experience – which, to put it politely, was don’t try and work with small businesses unless you’re prepared to do it for free.

This was the point where I started working on my small business niche – certain that I could come up with a service/product format that would be economic both for me and for my small business clients.

My “what” has never changed. I’ve always provided marketing support and still do today, whatever the “size” of my client. But when, where, and how I do it is very different.

Where are you now?

Maybe you feel you’re struggling a little at the moment to make your business work really well? Maybe it’s got to the point where it feels more like wading through treacle? Maybe you’re just starting up and are worrying about whether your idea is going to work at all? Or maybe things are going well, but that little voice inside your head is telling you that you might be able to do even better with a little tweaking here and there?

Taking time out to work on your niche will pay dividends. And a few changes can often make a dramatic difference to your health and wealth!

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.

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