

CONTENT THAT CONVERTS

*How To Build A Profitable and Predictable
B2B Content Marketing Strategy*

LAURA HANLY

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“Laura has a great ability to draw out the nuances of the way things are done in other people’s businesses. Her writing is fantastic and the delivery is spot-on.”

— Tristan King, owner of Blackbelt Commerce, highest rated Shopify agency in the world

Laura is a content machine that pumps out excellence onto paper. She took my outline, extracted the information from me, was very responsive and patient, and delivered a final manuscript I was very pleased with. We were an Amazon bestseller in my category and have 95%+ 5 star reviews at this point in time. I would recommend Laura and her team to anyone.

— Jeff Root, owner, SellTermLife & bestselling author of The Digital Life Insurance Agent

“Using your strategies, we’re getting more sales and people are much more engaged. Good work!”

— Scott Desgrosseilliers, owner, Wicked Reports

“Can I say again how smoothly this process has gone and how happy I am with the manuscript you developed. I’m so grateful that this whole part of the process was completely taken off my hands. Marketing a book is difficult and tedious enough without the additional burden of drafting the manuscript, and the fact that I’m so proud of the manuscript (much more so than I would have

been if I'd written the whole thing myself) gives me the extra motivation to make the launch as successful as the book deserves.”

— Kiri Masters, owner, Bobsled Marketing Agency

“I highly recommend Laura if you need help with content marketing strategy. Mind blown.”

— Coran Woodmass, owner, The FBA Seller

“It’s immediately apparent what a seasoned expert Laura is in her field. She provides great insights and lays out a clear direction for content strategy.”

— Jay Schaefer, owner, Adego Marketing

“Laura, I am so blown away by your work. It is SO GOOD! Thank you for listening to us, creating inspired content, and encouraging and enabling us to hone in on our message and story. It's remarkable what you've been able to bring to our team.”

— Sadie Roberts, owners, Tradlands

"Laura did a quick and thorough analysis of our website and sales process and was able to come up with some great ways to improve our user experience and increase our conversion optimization through a number of email marketing strategies."

— Ravi Coutinho, World Wide Golf Adventures

Chapter One: Developing Your Content Marketing Strategy

Content marketing is a powerful arm to add to your overall marketing strategy. It establishes you as an authority, it increases your revenue, and has high profit potential. Bill Gates talked about this way back in 1996, as the Internet was starting to come into its own:

“Content is where I expect much of the real money will be made on the Internet, just as it was in broadcasting... The broad opportunities for most companies involve supplying information or entertainment. No company is too small to participate. One of the exciting things about the Internet is that anyone with a PC and a modem can publish whatever content they can create. In a sense, the Internet is the multimedia equivalent of the photocopier. It allows material to be duplicated at low cost, no matter the size of the audience.

The Internet also allows information to be distributed worldwide at basically zero marginal cost to the publisher. Opportunities are remarkable, and many companies are laying plans to create content for the Internet... [But] if people are to be expected to put up with turning on a computer to read a screen, they must be rewarded with deep and extremely up-to-date information that

they can explore at will... They need an opportunity for personal involvement that goes far beyond that offered through the letters-to-the-editor pages of print magazines.”¹

Content is not, however, a magic bullet. It is not a rapid growth strategy, often taking months to grow into its potential. It does not guarantee you internet celebrity, or riches beyond your wildest dreams. (In the wrong hands, it can even harm your brand and put off potential customers, and we'll cover what *not* to do at the end of this chapter.)

Many businesses blog, or podcast, or post on social media for years and never see a dime in return for all their efforts. They might argue that they've built great brand equity, and that they've gained authority and credibility in their industry without selling out. Well, that might be true, but you can't eat brand equity, and you sure as hell can't pay a team with it.

Now, I'm the first to admit that everything would be awesome if I could just write and write and never have to think about whether it was actually going to generate money in return. Unfortunately, that's called going broke — it's not in my 10-year plan, and I'd take a guess that it's not in yours either. The only way to make content marketing pay off is to develop a complete ecosystem

¹ <http://www.craigbailey.net/content-is-king-by-bill-gates/>

around your primary content platform (whether that's your blog, podcast, or YouTube channel), instead of hoping it will just work by itself. Creating a complete system around your content leverages the resources that could help grow your business, instead of wasting them.

For now, understand that every business produces content, whether it's intentional or not. Every business has at least one expert in it. And it's that expertise that provides your business with its competitive edge. You must leverage this as the critical resource in your marketing, so let's dive into how to do that.

To develop any successful marketing strategy, you need to have a clear picture of the goals in your business. This is particularly true of content marketing: sitting down to bang out anything that pops into your head is not a sensible way to approach it. You need to have a consistent strategy for the content you're producing, so that your audience is engaged, comes to know and respect you as an authority, and will buy from you when the time is right. Let's look at how to produce recurring content in a way that will help you achieve those goals *and* keep you motivated to keep producing on a regular basis.

Here are some questions to ask yourself and your team in order to develop a marketing strategy that will serve your business:

- What is the purpose of our marketing?
- Who are we trying to reach?
- What are the types of marketing we should use? Is content the right fit for us?
 - Do we have someone who can produce it?
 - Do we have good ideas about what our content would be focused on?
 - Is our market segment interested in consuming that kind of content?
 - What other kinds of marketing do we need to implement to make our content really perform for us?
- How will we measure success?
- How long is our sales cycle? Can we absorb a delay between implementing this marketing strategy and having it start feeding into the sales cycle?
- What operational adjustments will we need to make as the marketing becomes successful?
- Who will be responsible for each part of the marketing strategy?

- What resources will we need to execute the marketing strategy effectively?

Now, there are two main types of content you can use in a content marketing strategy. There's recurring content, which builds a customer base gradually over time, and there are content assets used as near-term client acquisition tools. But before you commit to either of those options, there are four areas that you need to get very clear on.

I call this the Conversion Quadrant: this is the intersection between your expertise and what your customers want, what you want to be an authority on, how you produce your best content, and your quarterly plan.

1. What is the intersection between what your customers want and/or need?

What are the things you really, deeply care about in your business? What are you world class at, and how does that serve your customers? Maybe you believe you have the very best product in your niche and can defend that position. Maybe you go above and beyond for your customers in very tangible ways. Maybe innovation has allowed you to change your industry and is a critical part of how you function. Whatever it might be,

brainstorm and explore the things that are most important to you and your business.

Then take a look at your customers: every customer group is different. If you are selling to a fashion niche, maybe your audience takes presentation and style extremely seriously, and want to know what famous stylish people are doing, or what trends they need to be aware of in the coming months. Maybe your audience is very focused on ethical sourcing and production, and want to see transparency and sustainability in the brands they support. What are your customers looking to you for insight about, and how do those topics overlap with the values you outlined above?

2. What do you want to be known as an industry authority for?

A few years ago, Gary Keller and Jay Papasan wrote a book called *The One Thing*. The core idea of that book is to identify the one thing in your business that will make everything else easier or irrelevant... and the same goes for your content marketing. What is the one thing you can focus on becoming known for that will make it easier to develop, market and sell products that your audience will buy again and again?

Gary Vaynerchuk is known for his no-nonsense prioritization of hustle. You know if you work with him that things are absolutely going to get done. Tim Ferriss is known for his endless self-experimentation. You know if you work with him you're going to get innovative, uncommon results. Warren Buffett is known for his slow, measured approach to investing. You know if you work with him that you'll get steady returns over the long term. What is the one thing people should know about working with you?

The simplest way to become an authority on something is to say the same things about that topic over and over again. This is why people like Tony Robbins, Peter Drucker, Charlie Munger and Warren Buffet become superstars in their industries. Firstly, what they say works — it gets the results they claim. But secondly, they hammer on the same things over and over again. They communicate the same messages over the course of their entire careers, and create powerful positioning and profits as a result.

3. What is the format in which you produce your best content?

People will often talk about how you need to tailor your content production to how your audience consumes it. I think it's better to choose the format that you most enjoy working in, because if you like it, your audience will like it. For example: if you're awesome at

creating long-form blog posts (like Mark Manson or Tim Urban at Wait But Why) but are lacklustre with video, don't try to wrangle together a YouTube channel.

If you get a kick out of creating the content, it will show: it will engage your audience because it's high energy, it will be focused, and it will address things they care about in a way that shows you care about it too. But if you have to have five espressos and lock yourself in a distraction-free room for a day just to produce one video, the strain and negativity of that is going to come through. This creates a feedback loop: you don't like doing it, so people don't like consuming it, so it doesn't perform. Don't do stuff you hate. If you hate writing, do video. If you hate both, do podcasting. Just find the medium that works for you and run it.

4. What's your quarterly plan?

Last but definitely not least: make a specific plan for the immediate future. Develop content themes to go along with your 'one thing', and map out several topics within each theme to cover over the next three months. Pick four themes total, and three topics per theme. Write the headline for each of the 12 topics, assign a date to each one, and use that as your content framework. You can include any sales campaigns or

announcements in this plan if you want to. Simplified, here's the overview of what should be in your quarterly plan:

- A clear statement of your 'one thing'
- Four themes you want to rotate through
- Three topics per theme, including key points to touch on for each
- Headlines for each topic (I recommend brainstorming a few variations so you can pick the best one)
- Scheduled date of publication for each topic

Mapping your content out like this ensures that you can be strategic about your production: you can lead your audience to a certain action over time, you can educate them about a product before you've announced it, or you can just give them a complete, cohesive body of knowledge about the things that you all value. Whatever your goal, creating a plan in advance allows you to use your content to achieve it.

What *Not* To Include In Your Marketing Strategy

Here are a few simple guidelines for what to avoid in your content marketing. These mistakes vary in severity, from annoying to fatal, but all of them are easily avoided. Whenever you're thinking about your content, *remember that the people consuming it are people.*

They get distracted and tired. They get offended and hurt. They get excited and motivated. A little empathy goes a long way, particularly if you're referring to specific people in your content. Use this as your North Star and you won't go too far wrong. Here's the cheat sheet:

- Don't try to rip off someone else's style. Find your own voice and positioning — it's obvious when you're just copying what the cool kids are doing.
- Don't bad-mouth your competitors, even when you have an easy shot or would be justified. You'll probably be dealing with them for a very long time, and it's better to have good or neutral relationships with them rather than slagging them on the internet.
- Don't publish without a plan. Every piece of content that comes out of your business needs to serve a clear, strategic purpose, both for you and your customers.
- Don't try to be all things to all people. If you have a SEO consultancy, you do not need to make your content appealing to people looking for PPC information: focus on what you're good at.
- Don't use your content to spam your audience. Just because it's 'marketing' doesn't mean you can use every post to sell something. Respect your audience and only

make offers when it serves them and is strategic for your business.

Don't be complacent. Sloppy work will instantly alienate your audience — 'it'll do' is not good enough. Your content should be pin-sharp or not published.

Action Steps for Chapter One:

1. Create your Conversion Quadrant:
 - a. What do you value in your business, what do your customers value, and how do they intersect?
 - b. What do you want to be the authority on?
 - c. What format of content production works best for you?
 - d. What's the quarterly plan for your business, and what kind of content would best support those goals?

Chapter Two: The Content Marketing Ecosystem

Think of a complete content marketing strategy as an ecosystem: content is a dynamic medium, and there are living creatures — your customers — involved in it at every stage, just like a physical ecosystem. Your content strategy will grow and evolve over time, and there have to be a number of elements present for the strategy to be healthy and effective.

There are two types of content ecosystems: recurring systems, and asset systems. A recurring system has six parts that need to be built in for the ecosystem to be healthy; an asset system has four parts. You can use either system on its own in your business, or you can use them both in tandem.

The Six Parts of A Recurring Ecosystem

1. High-quality front end content

This might seem obvious, but everything you publish needs to be great quality: informative, actionable and interesting. It should serve a clear purpose for you *and* your customers. It should be spell-checked and formatted. It should be published on a regular schedule and consistently provide the best information coming out of your industry.

2. An opt-in offer

Your content is going to bring traffic to your site, but that traffic will leave again once it's done with the content. An opt-in offer (usually a pop-up or form on the site that requests an email address in exchange for an asset) captures that traffic, so you can continue marketing to them once they leave your site. Good opt-in offers include white papers, industry reports, educational courses, cheat sheets, checklists, webinars, video courses, coupons or demo/downloads.

3. An email onboarding sequence

Once you've captured a lead with your opt-in offer, you need to onboard them with a sequence of automated emails (which we'll talk about later in the book). A sequence is usually four to eight emails long, and educates the subscriber about your brand, shares some of your best resources, and invites them to connect with you. This engages them on an individual level, increases their investment in your brand and set their expectations for their future interactions with you.

4. An initial conversion opportunity

Once you've nurtured your leads for a while through your email sequence, providing them with lots of valuable information and sharing your expertise generously, it's time to make them an offer.

Your interactions prior should have led naturally to this point (by highlighting the benefits that come out of doing business with you), so that the prospect is comfortable with the offer and will be open to taking you up on it.

5. A follow-up sequence

Once you've made your initial offer, you will have two groups: prospects who converted, and those who did not. You need to follow up with both. Those that did convert should a) be offered an upsell or upgrade and b) onboarded to make the most of the product or service they've purchased. Those that did not convert should be a) offered a downsell or 'light' version to try to get a conversion, and b) put into a new sequence that will give further value and education in preparation for the next offer (whether that's the same thing offered in a new way, or an offer of a completely different product or service).

6. Another conversion opportunity (and another, and another...)

Ideally, you'll make multiple offers over the course of your relationship with each customer. It's easier to get a repeat customer than a new one, so you want to build in systems that allow you to maximize the lifetime value of each customer. Whether it's through automated email sequences or launch cycles, you need to have recurring sales systems in place.

The Four Parts of An Asset Ecosystem

1. A high-quality long-form content asset

Content assets include books, web summits, webinar series, or multi-part video courses. For most businesses, books are ideal, because you can use physical copies as real-world calling cards, sending them to potential clients and leveraging them into bigger opportunities for the business (like speaking engagements and interviews).

2. An initial engagement opportunity

This would usually be an invitation for the prospect to get on a call with you, to participate in a webinar or event, or to get a demo of your product. There needs to be a specific next step presented to the prospect once they've engaged with your asset that creates a one-on-one or real-time interaction with you.

3. An initial conversion opportunity

This is as simple as making an offer during the initial engagement. Whether you're on the phone, or talking on a webinar or demo, you should use this moment when you have their undivided attention to invite them to take action on a particular offer.

4. A follow-up email sequence

Again, you will end up with two groups: the prospects that converted, and those that did not. Both groups need follow-up. Your new customers should be onboarded and upsold through one email sequence, your customers-in-waiting should be downsold and put into a different sequence that will make them more amenable to your next offer.



It's critical that there is a specific guiding principle for all your marketing. This principle or goal should direct all your decisions, make decision-making easier, and keep you focused on the right things — otherwise it's all too easy to get shiny-object syndrome and get completely derailed by focusing on tactics or tools that don't actually serve your plan.

Now, all your content — regardless of whether you're producing recurring content or content assets — needs to be focused around five pillars.

Pillar One: Simplicity

“Simplicity is the keynote of all true elegance.” — Coco Chanel

There's one thing that will make or break how a piece of content will perform, and that's the level of complexity. If you can't boil the topic down into something that's simple and easy to digest, you shouldn't use that topic. This is an extrapolation of Einstein's point that if you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.

Yes, some concepts are complex, and yes, some concepts require in-depth analysis and technical exploration. But even those topics can be addressed simply — and if you want people to come back to your content again, you'd better make it simple and easy to consume.

Now, some folks mistake 'simple' for 'stupid'. I'm not suggesting that your audience or customers are stupid. In fact, they're exactly the opposite. They're probably much smarter than you give them credit for. But smart people are usually busy people, looking for a smart solution, and this is where simplicity shines: they can immediately identify that your content holds the answer they're looking for. If you make it complex, they're likely to look elsewhere to find something easier. If you can sum it up for the reader instantly, they'll have an easy time saying yes to future content and offers from you. Of course, you need to use their language, understand their problems and motivations, and be willing to be generous and helpful.

But even if you do all that, it won't hook a single customer unless they can quickly grasp what you're talking about. Don't complicate your content with jargon or dense theoretical explanations to make yourself look smart. It just alienates people. You can dress it up a little, but you must be able to boil it down to the bare bones before you add anything more complex.

Pillar Two: Specificity

This is closely related to simplicity. Specificity in your content creates a self-selecting audience who will come back again and again for your specific solutions. If you're able to answer these questions for each piece of content you produce, you'll be in good shape (I'm including an example here in italics to demonstrate what I mean... and to be really specific):

- Who is reading this content? *The owner of a B2B service business.*
- What is the specific problem they are trying to solve by reading it? *Creating a consistent flow of qualified leads into their business.*
- What is the higher order consequence they want to achieve by reading this? *Building a predictable stream of revenue*

and stability into their business (and, by proxy, the rest of their lives).

- What is the precise solution you can deliver that helps them achieve that outcome? *A step-by-step guide that shows them how to create content assets and systems that create traffic, capture leads and converts them into customers.*

Pillar Three: Serendipity

Jon Myers, a UX/UI designer I got to know in Vietnam, once told me to make room in my work for serendipity, and it's some of the best advice I've ever gotten. The more I pay attention to highly successful people, the more I hear this. Luck always plays a part, and it's no different when it comes to your content creation.

Chance, luck, the Universe conspiring, whatever you want to call it — sometimes things will fall into your lap and you have to be alert enough to grab them immediately. While I absolutely recommend having an editorial schedule, you should also have enough flexibility to change it quickly if something serendipitous happens.

Maybe you'll get featured somewhere and want to push the momentum as far as you can. Maybe you get to interview

someone amazing and can publish it before anyone else gets the chance. Maybe a competitor screws up big time and you can capitalize on it.

Realize that opportunities like this come up all the time. Sometimes it turns up like an ugly duckling on your doorstep. Other times it's a golden egg tied up with a pretty bow. Sometimes it's the whole damn goose. Whatever it is, pay attention to what is really happening around you. Don't be so locked into your production schedule that you let serendipity pass you by.

The \$10,000 Blog Post Case Study

In early 2015, I was working with a supplement brand who had spent a lot of resources differentiating themselves as the transparent provider of quality nutritional supplements.

That year Walmart, GNC, Target and Walgreens came under fire from the New York Attorney General's office. The supplements being sold in these giant chains had just been tested in independent research labs... and over half the products did not contain a single trace of any ingredient listed on the labels. Instead, they were stuffed with useless compounds, like ground up houseplants, rice powder and dried peas. And even worse?

Some of these fillers were well-known allergens, like soybeans and peanuts. Beyond being outright misleading, this practice was dangerous to consumers and totally irresponsible.

As soon as the news broke, we leapt at the chance to create content around this big event. This is a critical part of creating content that converts: making your message timely and immediately useful. This is a prime example why it's key to have space in your content calendar for 'occasional' topics, and to keep space in your brain for serendipity.

I wrote a piece describing everything consumers needed to know about this situation, and published it within 48 hours of the news breaking. It covered all the information a consumer would want to know about the scandal and took a very strong stance. We condemned the practice and delved deep into how something like this could have happened, as well as why people need to boycott companies who mislead their customers.

This is the second key to creating powerful content: having an opinion. It's not enough to just state the facts – you have to let people know what you stand for, so they feel compelled to join your tribe or get the hell away from you. It also serves the purpose of educating your customers about something they're interested in, in turn making you a trusted authority in the space.

Finally, we promoted the article like our lives depended on it. In the good old days of the Internet, you could put up a blog post with a strong SEO title and people would just find it. But these days SEO saturation is at an all-time high, and people's attention is at a premium, so you need to be very proactive about promoting your content. We made sure there was a link to our website in the body copy, with a product placement ad in the sidebar, and we had pop-ups ready to go to collect email addresses from new visitors.

Then we boosted it on Facebook, our team posted it across all our social media networks, we shared it with influencers in our space, and we submitted it to sharing platforms like Reddit, Digg and StumbleUpon to increase the audience that would see it. Promoting a piece of timely, action-oriented content pays off: the post got over 700 shares on Facebook, our email list grew by 20%, and we made over \$10,000 in sales in the next week directly from this post.

Even better? It's still making money. We added the post to an email onboarding sequence for new subscribers, as a way to differentiate ourselves from competitors. It's now one of the most highly trafficked pages on the client's blog, and continues to convert prospects into active buyers every week.

Pillar Four: Discipline

Serendipity has a way of showing up more often when you're putting in the work. Being disciplined about producing high-quality content creates high-quality opportunities. Finding the time for that work, though, is the biggest problem I hear about from business owners. They know they could make a real impact with their content. They know it's highly valuable information, and that they could probably crush their competition... if they could only be disciplined enough to get the words down.

It's not like they're slacking off, either. They're busy running their team, fulfilling orders, putting out fires... they just can't find the time to collect their thoughts, distill them into something simple and specific, and then actually sit down and write the damn stuff. It feels like it will take hours, every single week.

But that's the problem. Content works when you're consistent. You need to publish on a regular schedule to reap the full benefits, so you have to commit to the discipline of doing it, or find someone else to handle it for you.

If you do decide to produce your own content, you must pick ideas that inspire you. Picking *themes* that inspire you is even

better, because a theme will allow you to come back to it again and again from different angles.

This is extremely important. It doesn't matter if you're the most disciplined person in the world. If the content is boring to you, you won't do it. It's true of anything. You don't do stuff you hate doing. Make it easy on yourself to be disciplined about it. Set a BIG vision for your business and the content it's built on, and then get after it on the regular. Only exciting, visionary ideas will energize you, attract the right customers to you, and keep you motivated to maintain your production schedule.

Pillar Five: Content Delegation

As the leader of your business, creating content might not be the highest and best use of your time, even if you do find themes that you're excited about. Having the discipline to do the work does *not* mean that you need to do everything yourself. Hiring someone who can help you with the actual deliverables is probably the highest leverage point you can create, especially if that person has a background in writing.

A client I now work with was spending close to 20 hours a week creating content. It didn't leave much time for getting new leads or closing more deals, but he is a stickler for excellent content....

he basically needed a clone. Someone who got what was in his head and was able to create the same deliverables that he would.

To that end, he hired me. I've been through content marketing and conversion courses, publishing degrees and copywriting training. This has freed up all his time, and allowed him to focus on higher leverage activities that bring more customers into his business, while the content continues to be excellent quality and reliable for bringing in prospects for him to sell to.

Delegating content creation seems daunting at first. How could someone else possibly do as good a job as you would? How will they ever know what you know? But as I mentioned above, all you need is the right process for extracting the information from your head. Fortunately, that process is very simple and not quite as horrifying as 'extracting information from your head' makes it sound, and we'll get to that process later on.

Action Steps for Chapter Two:

1. Audit your current recurring content marketing:
 - a. Do you have all six elements in place?
 - b. If not, what would it take to have them built and implemented this quarter?
2. If you have (or are considering) a long-form content asset, does it have the four elements that would make it most successful?

- a. If not, what would it take to have them build and implemented this quarter?
3. Should you or your team be producing your content? Or would you be better served by outsourcing it to an expert who will produce high quality material while freeing up your time?

Chapter Three: Choose the Right Audience

“The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well

the product or service fits him and sells itself.”

– Peter Drucker

There’s a concept in copywriting that there are three elements to any successful campaign. First, you need the right audience. You need to be in front of people who know, like and trust you. You need to be positioned as someone they see as an authority, and there has to be goodwill present in the relationship that you can trade on. Secondly, you need the right offer. If you’re going to go to the trouble of getting their attention, you have to have something to offer them that has real, tangible value. Don’t dip into that goodwill unless it’s going to be worth it, for you and for them. Finally, you need the right copy. You could have the world’s *best* copywriter on your team, doing their very best work, but if the audience and offer aren’t right, it will count for nothing. No copy will compensate for a disengaged list or mediocre offer. You have to have all three elements in place to have a successful campaign, but the most important of these is the audience.

In this section, we’re going to delve into picking the right audience. To create a successful, evergreen content marketing

strategy, you need a deep understanding of the people you are selling to (and evergreen content should be where you focus most of your efforts — content that holds its value over time, that doesn't date badly, and that continues to be useful to your audience regardless of when they read it. This is particularly important if you're creating long-form content that takes a lot of resources to build).

Now, customers vary massively between different kinds of B2B businesses. For large industrial companies, for example, the customer is the wholesaler, retailer or purchasing department from another business — not an end user. The offer and copy, then, need to be focused on the people making the buying decisions. It's their responsibility to then market it accurately to the consumer. If you own a B2B *service* business, though, you often deal directly with the customer, and will often come into contact with your customer's customers. In that scenario, you need to understand how your marketing affects your customers directly, and how it trickles down to *their* customers.

Most people in B2B services have a rough idea of who their ideal customers are, but they don't have a clearly defined persona that they can build a marketing strategy around. For example, you might say "*Well, my customers are ecommerce owners who have over \$2 million in annual revenue.*" That's a start, sure, but it's

woefully incomplete. There are thousands of ecommerce businesses which would fit that criteria, but for one reason or another, many of them would be a terrible fit for your services. Maybe their team is too big or too small. Maybe the owners are in conflict. Maybe they have investors complicating their processes. Maybe they sell products that don't jive with your ethics or brand. Maybe they don't have the budget to work with you. Maybe they already have the solution you're offering. Without a clearly defined outline of your ideal customers and their needs, you're stuck before you've even started. That's why developing a customer avatar is such an important exercise.

Why You Need a Customer Avatar

The concept of a customer avatar has been in marketing forever, but it's gained a lot of momentum in the last few years as the online space has become more sophisticated and marketers talk about it more. The purpose behind developing a customer avatar is to develop a deep understanding of the motivations, fears, desires, and problems that influence customer buying decisions. In creating a profile that indicates the customer's priorities, goals and challenges, you can tailor your positioning and offers to serve them best.

To be clear: you are always going to have multiple types of customers. People are too complex to be categorized down into a single tidy box that predicts all their behaviors. You will probably have several types of people who will want your services. Your priority here, though, is to identify your *primary* customer — the person for whom your service is a no-brainer and who will get great returns on their investment with you. The Harvard Business Review² recommends a three-fold approach to identifying if a market segment is right for your business: perspective, capabilities and profit potential.

Assessing perspective is about making sure the customer's attitudes fit with yours. You want to make sure that they have similar priorities, sensibilities and direction to you. For example, Apple is renowned for its total obsession with design and usability. Their customers are also highly attentive to design and experience, so Apple's product and marketing teams know exactly who they need to get their products in front of. Amazon is relentless in its focus on providing amazing shopping experiences, and so they attract customers who prioritize great service and convenience. The perspectives between the business and the customer are aligned.

² <https://hbr.org/2014/03/choosing-the-right-customer>

Assessing for capabilities is about the ‘embedded resources’ of your company. These are the assets and resources that position your business to serve one type of customer better than another. For example, your business might have really strong or innovative technology, highly visible brand equity and marketing, or industry-specific capabilities that other companies have trouble competing with. Any one of those elements make your business much more valuable to a particular type of customer over others. Determining whether your capabilities fit with the perspective and profit potential is key to choosing the right audience.

Last but certainly not least is the profit potential of your chosen market. Do they have budgets that will accommodate your prices? Is your service likely to bring them a sufficiently significant return that it’s a no-brainer for them to work with you? Is there enough growth potential in *their* businesses for you to raise your prices and maintain them as paying customers? Are there other things they need that you can add to your services in order to increase your profit margins?

Now that you have a conceptual framework of the type of audience you’re looking for, let’s look at how you build a specific customer avatar.

B2B Customer Avatar Development

Background:

- What is this person's experience in this industry?
- What are they responsible for?
- What is the profile of their company (revenue, headcount, trajectory)

Demographic:

- Age, gender
- Income
- Family status
- Location

Identifiers:

- Position in the company
- Preferred communication channel

Goals:

- What motivates them at work? (i.e. delivering a profit, being seen as innovative, valuable to the company etc)
- What's the main responsibility in their role?
- What's their professional biggest opportunity? Biggest risk?
- What's their major fear or anxiety in their role?
- What's their ambition beyond their current position?

Challenges:

- What is hard or impossible for them to do themselves or in-house?
- Where do they get resistance or push-back at work?
- What pressures or problems are they facing from the rest of their team?
- What pressures or problems are they facing from their industry and competitors?

Influences:

- Who do they pay attention to? Who's the *"If so-and-so says it, I'll do it"* person?
- Where do they get their information from? What are their go-to websites, podcasts, and books?

How you help them:

- What part of their job do you make easier?
- What problems do you handle for them?
- How do you make them look good?

Their key objections:

- Logistics?
- Budget?
- Lack of authority?
- Don't think it will work?

Action Steps For Chapter Three

1. Get a pen and paper and think of a market segment you've done work with. Assess them for perspective, capability fit and profit potential. Is there a sufficiently good fit for you to commit to focus on working just with that segment? If not, repeat the exercise until you find a segment that fits the criteria.
2. Go through the customer avatar development list. Think of the customers you've had the best experiences with in the past, and model the avatar for your primary customer on them. Remember that your primary customer is the one you actively build your marketing and business development around.
3. Repeat the avatar exercise for secondary and tertiary customers. These are the customers who will want your service but are not the people you actively pursue in your marketing.