

Maybe You Should Sell Niches

A Telescan, LLC Business Resource Document

A Telescan Business Note, No. 1

Shopping for telephone answering services is an enlightening experience. Just take the time to check out the web sites of different answering services. Go to Google and type-in 'telephone answering service,' or 'answering service.' Then, access ten or twelve of the listed web sites and read through the services offered. One thing should become clear - most answering services offer essentially the same services.

Imagine the problem someone really shopping for live answering services would have trying to choose between these offerings? It's no wonder that price becomes such an important factor in their selection. After all, if most answering services are providing the same services, why pay more for one over the other?!

YOU NEED TO SELL A NICHE

So here you are selling your answering services in a field of look-alike competition. The problem is - how can you make your service offering different so a prospect at least gives you a call? In fact, your marketing problem is even more complex because virtually any answering service in almost any part of the country (or even the world, for that matter!), is a potential competitor. In these days of universal telephone service and the growing trend towards outsourcing, calls can be directed to and answered in message centers located across town, or across the country, or even in a different country.

How does your web site, brochure, or Yellow Pages ad compare to those of the other answering services you visited on the Internet? Are your marketing materials helping to set your service offering apart from the others? If not, you have a problem.

The solution is to find a way to make your business different. To make the service you offer stand apart from all the others. In short, you need to find a market niche in which you can excel. What is a 'market niche'? Dictionaries include the following definitions:

1. Niche - A special area of demand for a product or service.
2. Niche - A specialized market.

Selling into a market niche means that you have identified a service you can offer to a group of prospects which sets you apart from your competition. A service that will make doing business with you more attractive to these prospects. Your goal is to find that special market niche.

A NICHE MARKET

A niche market can be defined as a tightly identified group of individuals having all of the following characteristics:

1. They all have the same specialized interests or needs.
2. They will have a strong desire for what you offer.
3. You can create a reason for them to do business with you instead of someone else.
4. You can easily reach individual prospects within the group.
5. The group is large enough to generate a sufficient volume of business.
6. The group is small enough that your competition is likely to overlook it.

A niche market enables you to better target your marketing and sales efforts. The more narrowly you can define your niche, the easier it will be to attract the interest of your target prospects. It's important to be as specific as possible, because people don't usually respond to a general message. But they will respond to your marketing message if they feel you are talking directly to them about their individual needs and can solve their problems.

DISCOVER YOUR OWN NICHE MARKET

You might be able to identify your own niche market by simply examining your existing customers and the services you provide:

- ? Is there a segment of your present customers with similar characteristics?
- ? Do you provide special services for a group of customers – even a small group?
- ? What special services or capabilities can your business provide?
- ? Who are the prospects that can benefit by using your services or capabilities?
- ? Can you develop a sales message that 'speaks' exactly to these prospects?

For example, perhaps because of your past personal experience in the trucking industry you gained an especially intimate understanding of the dispatching issues faced by trucking companies. You have used this experience to attract one or two clients who have become dependent on your service, and who represent a generous revenue source. If you believe the services you provide these one or two clients can be valuable to other trucking companies, then you have found a market niche. All you now need to do is develop marketing and sales messages that address trucking companies in general, and that specifically tells them about your special dispatch services which, by the way, are above and beyond those offered by your competition. Right!?

MORE THAN ONE NICHE

When analyzing your customers you might discover you are providing specialized services to more than one group of clients. Not only are you providing outstanding dispatch services to several trucking companies, but because your spouse worked a number of years in a medical center office you find you have a number of medical center clients using your appointment

scheduling services. In this case you are serving the special needs of two niche markets – dispatching services for trucking companies, and appointment scheduling for medical center offices.

Having more than one niche market is great, as long as you market to each group individually. Don't try to mix them into a single marketing message. Create separate ads for each. Create different web pages, and even separate brochures. Don't try to address the requirements of trucking companies and medical centers in one marketing message. First, it can't be done effectively because the target audiences are so different. And second, trying to combine them will result in a confused message which will most likely not attract either group of prospects. Sure, it will take more effort to create separate marketing and sales materials. And yes, it will cost more. But an individualized marketing and sales approach will win you the most clients.

SUMMARY

We are not suggesting, by the way, that you abandon the general marketing message you have been using. There are many client prospects searching for 'regular' answering services who will not be especially interested in your truck dispatch or medical appointment capabilities. It's important that you continue to market your professional answering services to these prospects. They are, after all, an important source of revenue.

However, finding one or two niche markets in which you can specialize will help you to differentiate your business from that of your competition. Yes, you do offer a range of professional messaging services attractive to a broad range of businesses. But, you also offer a special service to a well defined group of prospects – your niche market – who can become a major revenue generating source for your business. Your personal experience and knowledge has let you tailor a set of services for these target prospects, and then develop effective marketing and sales materials to attract them to your service.

For more about niche markets see the companion Telescan Business Note 2, "Make Your Service Unique."

<p><i>Compliments of:</i> Telescan, LLC 10679 Midwest Industrial Blvd. St. Louis, MO 63132 www.telescan.net (800) 770-7662</p>	<p>We invite you to call us to discuss any questions you may have about our systems and services. Our staff is available to answer your questions without any obligation. Call (800) 770-7662.</p>
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