

**Stop Selling.**

**Start Solving.**

**A guide to  
understanding your customers,  
transforming your business  
and loving your work.**

**by**

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## About This Book

If you own a small business, or are considering starting one, and have found yourself experiencing any of the following, this book is for you:

I know what I want to sell, but I don't know who will buy it.

I know who I want to sell to, but I'm not sure where to find them or what to say to get them interested.

My marketing and sales efforts aren't getting me enough customers.

I'm working with too many of the wrong customers.

I'm not getting enough referrals from people I know.

I'm getting referrals, but they're the wrong kind of customers or the wrong kind of work.

I want to love my work and my business — but right now I don't.

If you've found yourself thinking like this, welcome to the club. I'd venture to guess that at some point during the process of considering, planning, starting and growing a business, every business owner has had these concerns.

**This little book was written to change how you think about your business, your prospects and your customers, and in doing so will radically simplify the path to eliminating all of these concerns.**

In short, by thinking differently you can transform your business, fulfill the dreams of those you want to serve, and make your work life better (which goes a long way toward making everything better).

## Do You Love Your Work?

As small business owners, we don't get paid unless things are WORKING. Sales must be working. Marketing must be working. Quality control must be working. Accounting must be working. All of the elements that have to fall into place between someone never hearing of us and someone paying us for work done well, have to be working. And for many of us, that means WE have to be working. HARD. For me, it meant working harder than I ever had while I was working for someone else.

And while people always say you should "love your work," it's in entrepreneurship where that rubber really hits the road. You will spend your waking hours (and many of your sleeping ones) working on or thinking about your business. It is the engine that will support you, your family, and your goals down the road.

### So why not intentionally build something you love?

Whether you got here because you planned to start your own business all along, or found yourself in this situation because your other options fell apart, or are just trying to avoid ever working in a cubicle ever again, here you are. Whether you are still deciding what your business should be, or are in the thick of it and finding it frustrating, you can still move forward to build a business you will love, with customers you are passionate about serving.

And believe me when I tell you that a business like that is worth working hard for.

## What Do You Want?

Building the business you want means you have to know what you want. Believe it or not, your own goals can have a really big impact on the business you build, the audiences you target, and the work you sell.

### Let's start with what you want.

If you've started your own business, or even just given some thought to what it might be like to start a business, you've probably got some ideas in your head about what you want that to look like.

Do you want to work in an office, around other people? Do you want to work on your couch in your PJ's? Or maybe a mix of both? And how would you prefer to work with them? Remotely, using mostly email or a collaborative framework online? Via phone or video calls? Or face-to-face, and if so, at your location or theirs?

Do you want to do the same kind of work you've done in the past? Do you want to work with the same kind of collaborators or coworkers? Do you want to be the boss, or prefer having somebody give you a goal and then just work to achieve it? Was there something really great you wish you could have done more of?

And how about the people you want to serve? Is there a certain group you're passionate about helping? Or a type of person you're most comfortable with?

### **And, for a moment, consider what you DON'T want.**

Compromises you're not willing to make. People you can't stand working with. Organizations or industries that make you crazy, or that you don't want to support. Processes that seem like a huge waste of time.

Understanding what you don't want can be equally as powerful as understanding what you do. In fact, what you DON'T want is a critical component in building your marketing program, as you'll see later in this book.

### **Write it down.**

It doesn't have to be well-phrased, or even be anything you ever show to anybody else. It's for you. Keep it somewhere where you can refer to it often, and update it whenever you think of something you want, or something you don't. It will be a potent reminder of what's really important to you as you grow your business. Otherwise, what's the point of building a business at all?

## Solve a Problem

People don't do anything – change the channel, go for a run, search for something online, make a phone call – without a reason. Some are big reasons (“I need a doctor”), some are small (“I have to get to the store before it closes”), but they're all fundamentally attempts to resolve a problem (“I'm having trouble breathing” or “My nail polish doesn't match my shoes”).

**You serve customers by solving problems for them.**

For many of us, this is a radical shift in thinking. Often business owners are so focused on what WE do, or what WE make, that we go through tremendous effort to get our product, website and marketing materials JUST PERFECT in describing the winning characteristics of what we're selling, put all that wonderful perfection out in the world and . . . nothing. Empty inboxes, bleak analytics and anemic bank accounts. What could possibly have gone wrong?

Often, we are so focused on what we do, that we forget to think about how our product could solve a problem for someone else.

Imagine walking up to a stranger and having the following conversation:

“Good morning. I sell all kinds of home fragrance products.”

“Uh, morning...What?”

“Home fragrance products. I have candles, potpourri, reed diffusers, oils, plug-in fragrance warmers, sachets, air and linen sprays.”

“...okay, but...”

“Each of our items is available in scents like Forest Grass, Lemon Zest, Jasmine Blossom, Orchid Breeze...”

“...Orange Mist, Lichen Lemonade, Mint Marble...”

“...uh...”

“...and of course we have a variety of design styles and color options...”

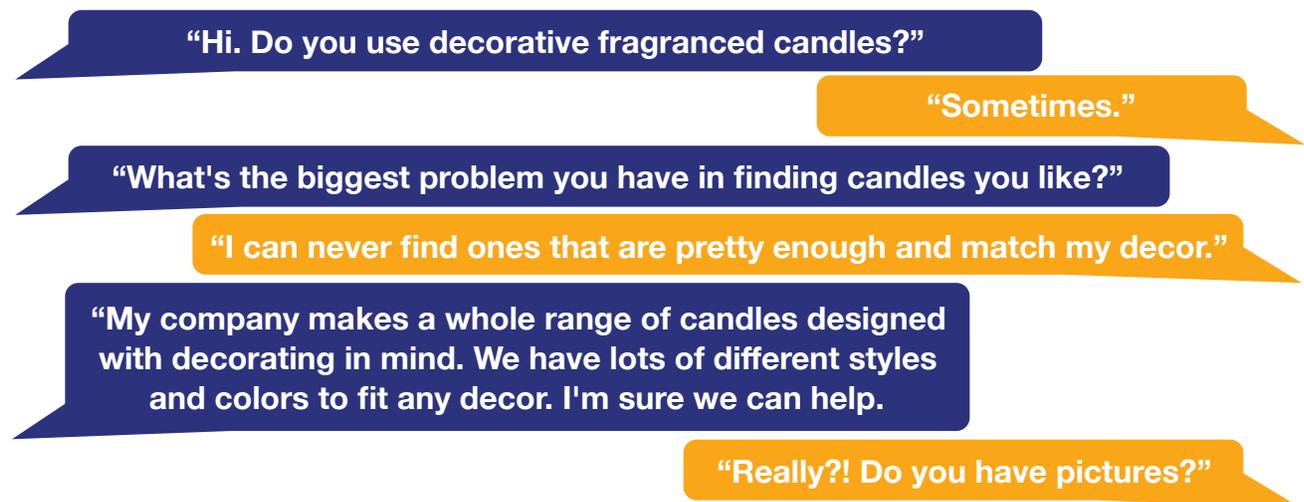
“...but I don't...”

“...Art Deco, Modern, Renaissance...”

Unfortunately this is what many businesses are doing every day with our websites, our sales letters and our cold calls. We are inundating potential customers with all the information we can shove at them, without taking a moment to discover if they even have a problem that our products could solve for them—and if they do, which problem that is.

## Small Business is About Service (or Should Be)

What if, instead, the conversation with the stranger happened like this?



That's a conversation worth having, because it's focused on a prospective client's problem and how you can solve it.

The difference, of course, is approaching the conversation from a perspective of service: "Can I help you?"

## A Problem is not the Lack of a Solution

My good friend Chris is an expert in CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems. He knows all the ins and outs of using a CRM system to help companies keep track of their customers and prospects, and engage with them effectively and efficiently. So it's not surprising that when Chris and I started talking about the problems his ideal customers have, his first response was, "They don't have a CRM system."

Chris sees this is a problem because he knows how beneficial a good CRM system is for an organization. The problem is, "need a CRM system" isn't actually a problem. It's Chris identifying a solution.

**Your audience may not experience their problem as lacking the solution you provide.**

What if some of the people Chris could help don't know what a CRM system is, or that such things even exist? If that's the case, telling them "you need a CRM system" isn't going to be very helpful to them.

While Chris's prospective customers may, in fact, need a CRM system, they might say the problem they're having is "I can't keep track of my prospects." Or, "I can never find the contact information I need." Or, "I never seem to have my prospect list with me when I need it." Or, "Our organization is never going to be successful if we can't follow up on leads." Or, even, "Trying to keep track of this stuff is driving me crazy." THAT'S a problem.

**When we're making an effort to define the problems we solve, we must do it from our customers' perspective, using the language they use.**

Focus on the problem as they'd describe it, understand what they're hoping for, and be prepared to offer a solution that will make them wonder where you've been all their life. This not only helps us empathize with and relate to them, but it will come in very handy when we're ready to use search engine marketing to help them find us. (Trust me—if you don't know CRM systems exist, you're definitely not typing "I need a CRM" into Google.)

## **Problems Aren't Just for B2C**

I know you B2B folks are out there thinking, "Well fine, but I don't sell to the Man on the Street. I sell to companies." But businesses don't make decisions—people do.

If you're selling to a business, you're solving a problem for the person who's choosing to buy from you. Their problem may often be influenced by their organizational role ("I need to find a better software solution or I'll be fired"), but it's still a problem THEY'RE having. Which means you have an opportunity to solve it, if solving that problem is what you do.

**Really, all marketing is P2P — Person to Person.**

## Solve More Than One Problem

Another wrinkle to consider here is that you probably don't solve just one problem.

Think back to your scented candle business. Maybe not having a way to fill my home with beautiful fragrance isn't the only problem you solve.

Maybe, for some customers, you solve the problem of not being able to find beautiful items in a range of colors and styles to decorate their homes.

Maybe you solve the problem of failing to find gift items that will wow the recipients with their beautiful packaging.

**It's perfectly fine for you to solve different problems, for different people.**

In fact, understanding that people can love your product or service for very different reasons gives you many options to consider for marketing and selling your work. You just have to consider who will love you, and why, and make sure that you're not fooling yourself.

## Love Isn't Universal

Just because you think your product or service is great doesn't mean everyone will. Even people who have a problem that you can solve may not consider you the best solution. And they might be right.

If you sell services to business, there might be prospective customers who could benefit from your work, but really want a large high-profile firm—and you're a one-person shop. If you sell lovely fragranced candles, some potential buyers might want something they can pick up for cheap—and your products command a higher price.

At the same time, even if someone thinks you're perfect for him or her, you might not feel the same way. Maybe they have unreasonable requirements you'd have to meet to get the work. Maybe working with them would require you to travel more than you want to. Maybe they're notorious for taking too long to pay their bills.

For whatever reason, you may have people you'd prefer would go to someone else to solve their problem.

## Focus, Focus, Focus

Imagine receiving an email that said, “We make candles for women!”

Even if you were interested in candles, and even if you were a woman, chances are you wouldn’t find that message very compelling.

What if, instead, the message said:

“We make candles in a wide variety of styles and colors that can help you make your home look like a professional decorated it.”

If you’re interested in home decor, that message would probably be far more compelling than the first.

And if you’re not interested in decor, you’ll rightly assume that the message isn’t for you and move along.

The reason it’s compelling to the first group and not the second is the same—it’s specific about the problem the product is designed to solve. It’s a tighter target, but more successful.

**It sounds counterintuitive, but the more you narrow your audience target, the more successful you’ll be.**

There are two reasons why this works:

1. The people you’re targeting will understand that you’re specifically working to earn their business. You’re not just hoping they’ll find something they like, you’ve made the effort to understand their needs and craft your product or service to meet those needs. You speak their language, and they see that, in your eyes, they’re not just a nameless, faceless consumer with a debit card.
2. The people you’re **not** targeting won’t waste your time, or theirs. They’ll recognize that your product is designed for someone who has a different problem than the one they’re trying to solve, and will move along.

## The Beauty of Self-Rejection

Most business owners have had the following experiences, at one point or another:

- Being contacted by someone who obviously isn't the right type of client;
- Investing time in convincing a prospective customer to buy, only to find out that you don't have something they consider absolutely essential;
- Recognizing that you shouldn't have agreed to work with a particular client, and kicking yourself for not realizing it before;
- Receiving unhappy feedback from a customer that makes you wonder why they picked you in the first place, if that's what they wanted.

All of these situations are functions of dealing with people or organizations that aren't a good fit with what you do. And they all cost a tremendous amount of time and heartache (for both you and the prospect) that can, for the most part, be avoided.

**The secret to small business happiness is to stop wasting time and energy on the wrong customers.**

What if, instead of having to spend half an hour on the phone with someone before realizing they are not right for you, they just never called you in the first place?

What if people could figure out whether you were a good fit for them before wasting your time and theirs? Wouldn't they thank you?

Guess what? You have everything you need to let people know when you're not their solution.

- You know your own goals—what you want, and what you don't.
- You know your audiences—the people with problems that you want to solve, and can solve well.
- You understand the problems driving your ideal customers, how they describe those problems, what they think they need and you can give them a better solution than anything else they might consider or try.
- You understand what makes someone a poor fit for you—and what makes you a poor fit for them.

## Leveraging Your Audience Focus

So how can you use all this knowledge to encourage the wrong people to opt out, and to convince the right people you're perfect for them even before you have your first phone call?

### Your Website

Instead of flooding your site visitors with what you SELL, why not start with showing them you understand the problem they're trying to solve? Why not say, "Hey, if you're like this, I totally get that. And I can help."

**Make it clear that everything you do is done specifically for people just like them, trying to solve the same problem.**

Tell them the answer to absolutely every question you know they're asking—all the features and benefits of your product or service, why they can believe that you know what you're doing, and why you're better for them than all those other options they've already tried, or have considered trying, to solve their problem.

**If you're serving different audiences with different needs, give them the opportunity to identify which problem they're trying to solve as early in the sales cycle as you can. Don't make them slog through information that isn't relevant to them.**

Consider a simple "which one of these are you?" interface on the homepage of your site, taking your different audiences directly to content that is helpful for them.

**Your site isn't a resume—it's a sales tool. Use it to sell only your ideal type of work, to your ideal type of prospect.**

And pull anything off your website that doesn't specifically respond to the needs of the audiences you've chosen to serve. If something on your site doesn't answer a question, contribute to your credibility or show your perfect customers that you eat, sleep and breathe thinking about solving their problem, get it off your site.

## Your Search Engine Strategy

Instead of trying to rank on the first page of Google results for something like “scented candles”, why not try to rank for something like “decorating with candles” or “beautiful candle gifts”?

The more specific you are about the problems you solve, the fewer competitors you’ll have to contend with, and the more perfect you’ll seem to the customers you want.

## Your Elevator Pitch

Many of us fill our elevator pitch with big jargony catchwords that don’t mean anything to anyone:

**“I facilitate collaborative engagement between innovative brands and enthusiastic communities.”**

**“Blech.”**

Stop using general industry jargon to tell people what you do, and start telling them the problems you solve.

“I help people find the perfect scented candles to beautifully decorate their homes.”

“I help companies keep track of their leads and stay connected to their customers and prospects.”

Be as specific as you can be. Your elevator pitch should be so compelling that your ideal customer, standing across the room within earshot, makes a point of coming over to ask you about it.

**“I totally understand your problem!”**

**“I can help!”**

**“I know!”**

**“I believe you!”**

Once you have your simple, compelling, focused statement figured out use it everywhere.

Use it when friends ask what you're doing these days.

Use it when you're talking to people who will probably never buy anything from you.

Use it anytime you talk about your work.

**What you'll quickly find is that people begin to associate you with what you're telling them you do.**

- Referrals will increase because people can quickly identify someone who'd be a great customer for you.
- The people referred to you will be much more likely to fit into your ideal customer target because the person referring them had a better sense of who that ideal customer is.
- You'll convert more of these prospects because they'll see that you're doing something that will help solve their problem.
- Your customers will be more satisfied with their experience than ever because they'll see you're focused specifically on their needs.
- Word-of-mouth will increase because you'll have happier customers who can easily tell others like them that you're the perfect solution.

## Want Help?

My course **"Find Your Audience Axis"** helps small business owners like you walk through this process, step by step, to build an audience-focused marketing strategy. It will give you the tools and skills you need to figure out your ideal audience targets and how to be relevant to them.

I'd love to help you figure this out. It's really important. Let's do it together.

[Learn more here.](#)