

DEFINING YOUR AUDIENCE



*A chewable guide to customer
research (so you can make
stuff they'll love)*

“

*You've got to start with a
small, intense fire.*

*It's impossible to make something that
a large number of people want a lot.*

*You've got to know who those first users
are and how you're gonna get them.*

*And then you just sit down and have a
party with those first users, focus
entirely on them, and you make them
super, super happy.”*

~ PAUL GRAHAM ~

*A brutal — but worthwhile — pattern
has evolved as I've watched hundreds
of entrepreneurs develop and launch
their things at Fizzle.co*

YOU (THE ENTREPRENEUR) WORK HARD — really hard — to get your thing done, developing the idea, making the thing, finalizing it, uploading it to Gumroad and clicking “Publish.” And then you say to yourself, “phew, here goes nothing” as you copy and paste the link into your Twitter app... and click “Tweet.”

You come back to your Gumroad dashboard... you wait... you look back to the twitter stream... “did it go out?”... pull up your account at Twitter.com just to be sure... “yea, it published”... back to Gumroad... refresh... no sales yet... make a cup of coffee... “I just need to get my head out of this for a bit”... come back in 3 minutes... nothing... come back the next day... nothing... come back the next week...

No sales. No retweets. No love... just crickets.

As painful as it is, you just learned something essential: *nobody gives a shit*. Nobody cares about you or your product. You're not entitled to any sales or clicks or shares or love simply because you made a thing. Nobody cares about your thing.

WHAT DO THEY CARE ABOUT? They care about themselves, their needs, their wants, their loves.

Defining your audience is the process of discovering *WHO* could care about *THIS* thing you're making *BEFORE* you waste a bunch of time making it. It's a simple set of tools and tactics to determine *IF* your idea is any good, and which specific parts of the idea you should make first... because you *DON'T* have to have the crickets moment.

It's been the toolset of advertising and marketing experts for years, the secret sauce energizing all of the campaigns you've seen (certainly all of them you still remember). And now we can use these tools ourselves before we risk too much... for crickets.

This short book will guide you through some of the basic concepts in audience definition (or "customer development" as our friends in the lean startup movement call it). There are notes from interviews with

successful founders which will show you there's no single way to define your audience and understand your market's needs. The entrepreneurs featured here are all independent successes, and they've all tried different methods (with a few notable consistent methods).

You'll also find worksheets and exercises to get to work on this process with your business immediately.

There's a better way to build a sustainable, independent business than making a bunch of assumptions and hoping for the best. Defining your audience is a critical milepost on that way and this is the shortest/strongest guide to get you there.

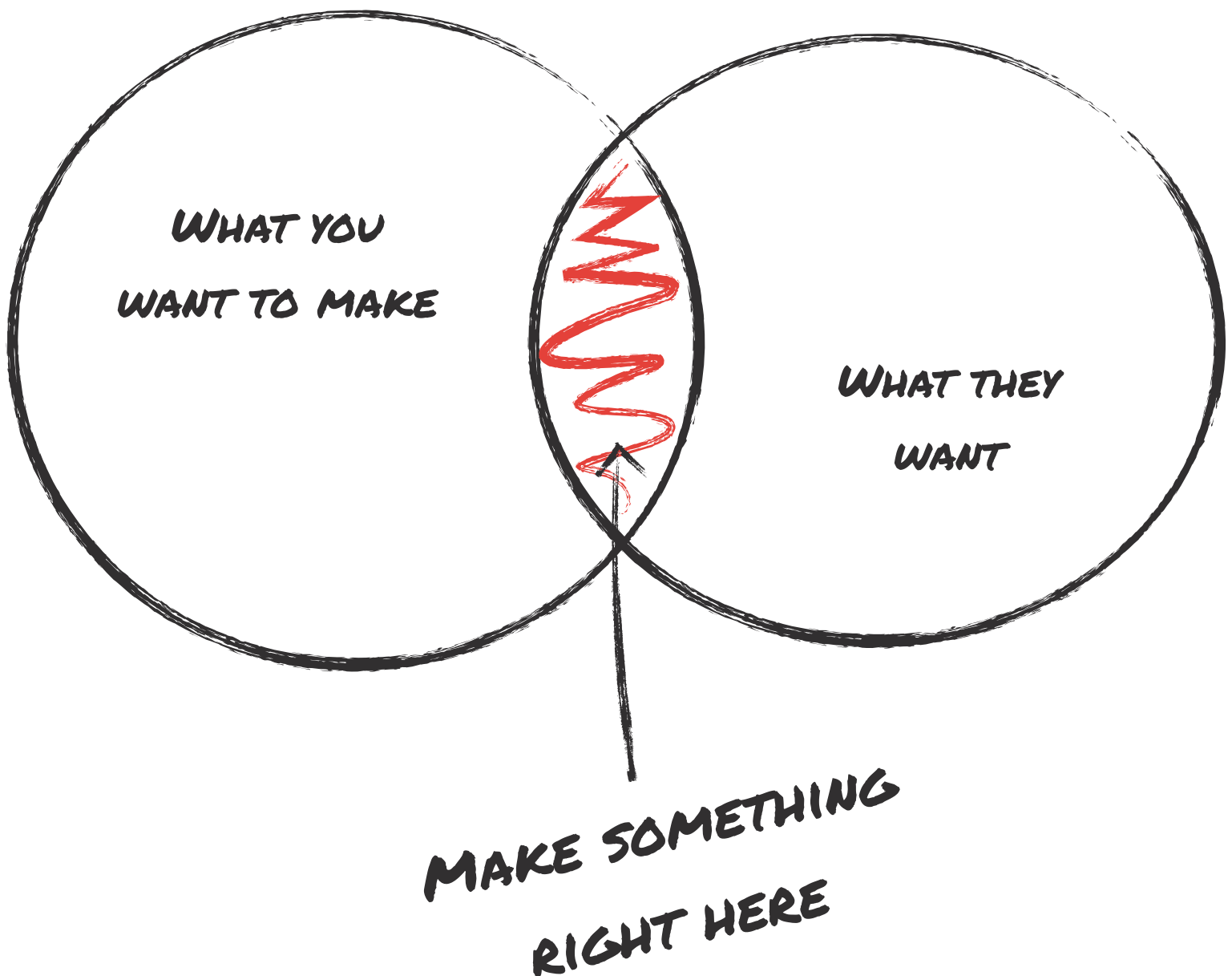
"Get the right head, heart + data about your audience. @Fizzles Guide to Defining Your Audience."

TWEET THIS

Common Principles

things to look for in the interviews to follow

1. FIND THE OVERLAP



“Happiness, in my business, occurs in the overlap between what I want to build and what they want to buy.”

~ Corbett Barr

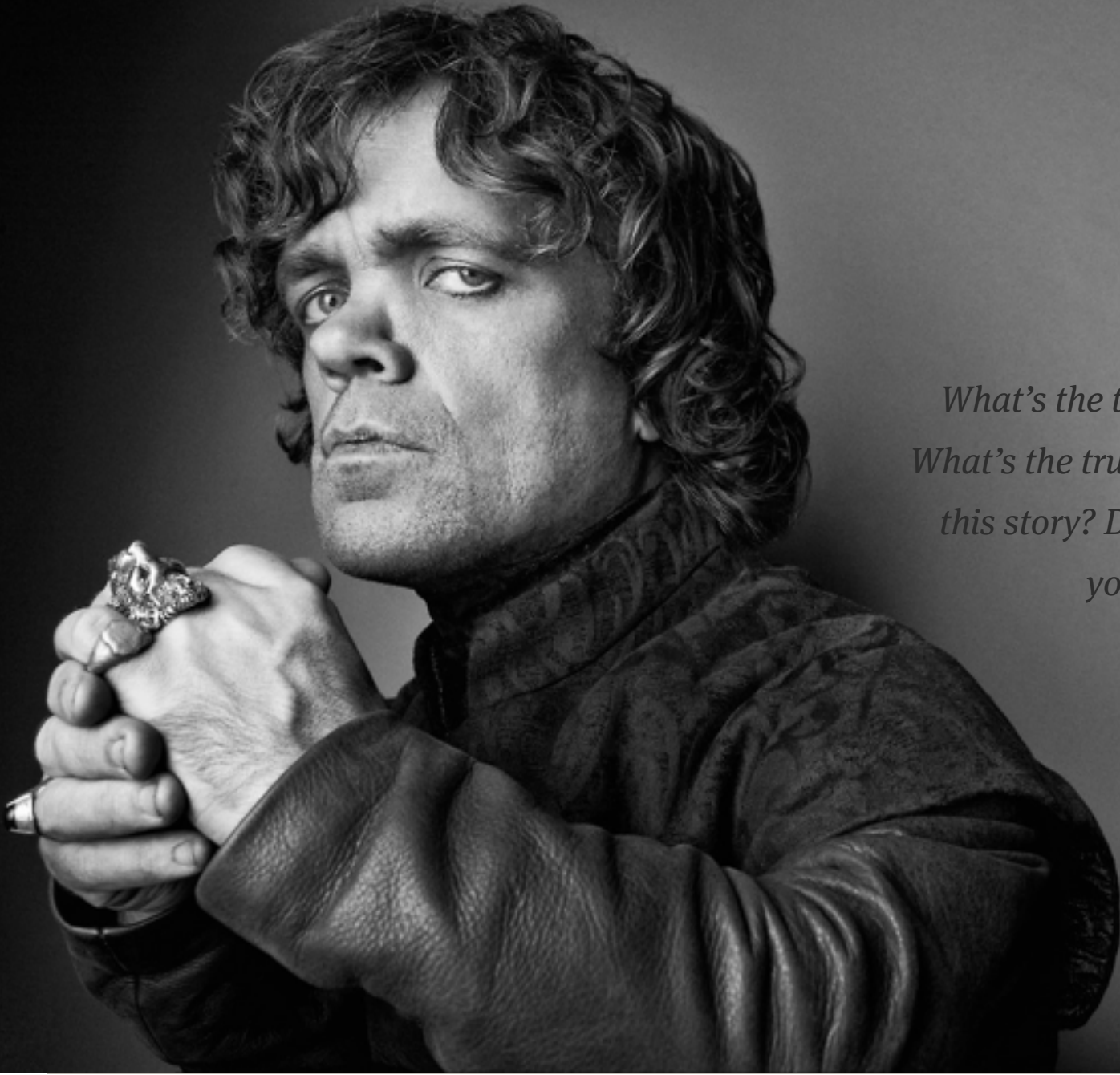
2. GET TO A SPECIFIC PERSON YOU KNOW



“We have very social brains that understand people at an incredible level. So I go small first and think about individual people. Who is one person I know who has this problem?” ~ Tara Gentile

3. LOOK FOR TRUTH

HINT: THEY OFTEN DON'T KNOW OR CAN'T SAY THE TRUTH ABOUT THEMSELVES.



*What's the truth about Tyrion?
What's the truth about ANYONE in
this story? Depends on how far
you've read*

*“The greatest thing we can offer is to be great listeners and to
have empathy for your culture to understand what is the truth.”*

~ John Jay, Weiden + Kennedy

4. 2 FAILSAFE QUESTIONS

1

CAN THEY PAY?

Do they *literally* have money to buy things with? Do they have disposable income? E.g., college students may not have disposable income for deeper education, but their parents might.

2

WILL THEY PAY?

Is this the *kind* of thing they'd buy? Does it fit with their values? E.g., my uncle—even after months of a sore back—would never try acupuncture. He'd rather drive his tractor in pain than be a hippy.

“I spent 14 months building this audience only to realize they weren't the kind of person to buy anything on my topic.”

~ Survey Respondent

COMMON PRINCIPLES RECAP

1. **Find the overlap** — *between what you want to make and what they want to buy.*
2. **Get to a specific, real life person you know** — *what if you made your thing just for that one person?*
3. **Look for the truth about them** — *be a great listener and have empathy.*
4. **Ask the 2 failsafe questions** — *can this audience pay? Will they?*

Interviews

Now let's learn how a bunch of successful founders define their audience before they build something. Notice how they don't all have the same answers?

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU'LL FIND NOTES from interviews I conducted with these entrepreneurs, asking them about how they define who their audience is and what should be made for them.

There are similarities and differences. That's important — there's rarely hard-and-fast right answers with this stuff. You'll learn by doing (that's how all these founders did it).

These notes all come from audio interviews. If you haven't yet, you can [listen along to the interviews »](#)



ROB WALLING — GETDRIP.COM

“Lessons learned by a Solo Entrepreneur.”

- The easiest time defining an audience was when he stumbled into an audience by blogging at **Software by Rob**. Then I doubled and tripled down on that same audience to build **microconf**, the **podcast**, **microprenuer academy**.
- Blogging to build an audience might not work as well for a B2B audience.
- He started **GetDrip** by talking to his existing audience. He's expanding that through content marketing, seo, paid acquisition.
- Facebook Ads was a good change. Facebook is demographic-based (not intent-based like keyword advertising).
- 4 headlines with a few different demographics (Startup founders, email marketers, info marketers are the three audiences he tested early on).
- When he really started paying for Facebook ads (4 figures a month-ish) it became clear he needed to segment specific people to specific landing pages (startup founders DONT care about the same thing info marketers care about).
- Give yourself a time constraint if you're fiddling with your ideas and advertising methods too much. (e.g., 25 min a day maximum).

LISTEN TO THE INTERVIEW →



PAT FLYNN — SMARTPASSIVEINCOME.COM

“Lead by example. Be honest. Hold nothing back.”

- Typically it starts with keyword research. What keywords are underserved?
- Then he reaches out and tries to call people in those spaces. What are your biggest pains, what was difficult about what you did, what do you wish you would have known, etc?
- He also finds other people making things for that niche and gets in touch with people *in* that audience, gets in touch in any way he can to find out what their biggest pains are, what they wish they would have known before they started.
- **FoodTruckr** has a podcast because he figured out from talking with people with food trucks that they don't read often, mostly listen to radio, etc.
- You can get so much more info on a short phone call than you can on a few emails over a few weeks.
- For FoodTruckr he scraped google searches for existing food truck owners, got emails for 400 people, reached out via email to have a call. Of 400 emails 20 responses from first email. Then a second email, “just in case you missed it, i'd love to talk to you...” and from that go round 50 people responded.
- From keyword research he discovered “food truck for sale” was an underserved keyword... it validated the idea enough to do some more work (getting to emails and calls).
- He uses **Long Tail Pro** for keyword research. Put in a seed keyword (e.g., “food truck”) and it lists out a TON of other related keywords with statistics about those terms (frequency of searches, competition, etc). He uses facebook ads to validate tag lines, subtitles for books, etc... see which one gets the most clicks.

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JOHN LEE DUMAS — ENTREPRENEURONFIRE.COM

“EntrepreneurOnFire: Awarded Best in iTunes 2013 IGNITE!”

- He learned a lot early on from Derek Halpern’s idea to respond to everyone who signs up on your email list with a question: “what are you struggling with right now?”
- “I get thousands of emails a month but I find value in responding to most of them because I get insights about my audience.”
- He emailed every person who signed up for his email list asking 1. how did you find us, and 2. what do you struggle with?
- Based on the responses to those emails he came up with the ideas and content for the products he’s developed. He heard directly what they struggled with.
- **Vocaroo**, press a button, record an mp3 and attach it to any email you’re sending. He liked doing this because it showed the recipient it’s actually him responding, not an assistant.

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TARA GENTILE — TARAGENTILE.COM

“Helping small business capitalize on big ideas.”

- She’s developed something called the Customer Perspective Process where she tries to dig into the social information she has about the people she’s looking to serve.
- We spend too much time in analytical data (customer surveys, keyword research, etc) trying to develop a customer profile instead of getting into who these people really are. Our brains are *very* astute at understanding people by nature.
- She goes small first. Think of individual people. “Who is the one person I know who has this problem?” or “Who is the one person I really want to serve? What problems do they have? How do they think, act, feel?”
- All of the messaging and marketing and branding and content are defined by the discoveries that come from those questions.
- “Flipping the sales funnel.” Typically we get as many into the funnel at the top and filter down to those who will buy the product. She flips that around and focuses on 1–3 people (her “virtual focus group”) and she thinks about the social patterns she sees in them... how do they want to feel? what things are they trying to achieve? what frustrations are they currently dealing with?
- She builds products based on an *individual’s* desire/struggle because if 1 person has a very particular problem that we can identify and really understand, then lots of people likely have that problem.
- Big data analysis can be expensive in time and energy (as well as money).
- Most of the time focusing on specific individuals can lead to answers, insights and results very fast. “Yes, I mean it: *really* just think of *one* person.”
- She uses insights based on *one* person multiple times: headline of sales page, product outline, launch series, content strategy. One answer, multiple times.
- TaraGentile.com/Map for the prospective map.

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STEVE KAMB — NERDFITNESS.COM

“Rebel Leader of @NerdFitness. Frequent traveler. Strength training enthusiast. Complete goofball. Decent piano player. Awful singer. Ostrich whisperer.”

- He sends an email to everyone who signs up for his email list asking “what are you struggling with right now?”
- He also pays attention to the questions he continually gets in other channels... email, forums, blog comments, etc.
- He’s done pre-sales and announcements for things they hadn’t made yet to see what the audience’s reaction to the product was.
- He’s also started sending traffic to product pages that haven’t been built yet to collect email addresses and interest (as opposed to blindly creating a product).
- He created a guide to running before doing any prelim audience interest tactics like these and the guide didn’t end up selling all that great.
- When he made the women’s fitness guide he prelaunched a minimal product at a discounted price for a limited amount of time (saving him time and money in the making of the product). Then he made the product better with input and feedback from *actual* buyers of the product. This did a lot better than anything else he’d done in the past.
- When he has an idea for a product he’ll write an article about it, mention the potential of a bigger book or guide on the topic and create a separate email list for people who are interested in said book/guide to be able to work directly with those people.

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JOSH SHIPP — JOSHSHIPP.COM

“Every kid is ONE caring adult away from being a success story.”

- First he takes it back to the audience he originally chose to work with... the people he cared about and wanted to serve. “Who do I, selfishly, feel the most passionate about helping?”
- It’s really important to feel like you care about your audience... then whatever methodologies you come up with to help them, so be it. When you selfishly dig an audience you will naturally be in the position to do the homework and the nerdy stuff and it won’t drain you... it’ll delight you.
- “Care” can be tough... what does it mean? How do I know if I care or not? etc. But when you care about the audience you’re more likely to endure the difficulty that comes with creating any business.
- No matter what you build there’s going to be some difficulties and hardships... it’s not going to be easy all the time. So it makes sense to ask yourself, “this thing I’m building, do I actually like the inhabitants?”
- He asks either in person or via email or surveys: what sort of things could I make that you would be willing to buy? Which of these sorts of products would help you? What is the number one problem you struggle with?
- He finds that people tell you they want the advanced stuff when what they really struggle with are some critical basics.
- He also does some tests to “dip his toe in” to see if this particular audience is interested in this particular product. He often does this through pre-selling the product or doing a limited run on the first go.
- If you care your motivation to solve those problems is not only financial... which can make you better at solving those problems.

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JON COLLINS — SINCERELYTRUMAN.COM

“Director of Story @TrumanPDX Co-founder @epipheo I write epic novels in my head and impromptu children’s songs at bedtime.”

- He goes through an exercise to develop the “persona” he’s targeting. A persona is an attempt to get to a general idea of a category of people without getting too general or too specific.
- He creates a story map for these personas asking 4 questions:
 - What is success for them?
 - What conflicts are they experiencing?
 - What questions are they going to have?
 - What do we want them to do?
- It’s really great when the answer to “what do we want them to do” directly impacts the problem they have.
- The job is to find out who your thing is valuable to and market to them, tell them the truth about why your thing is important. Sometimes the truth is not that interesting so you may have to sex it up, etc., but the point is to get *these* folks’ attention rather than waste your time with the people your thing *isn’t* valuable for.
- When he builds things he thinks of himself as a tour guide for that persona. “We’re entering into that person’s story a moment in time and we’re trying to become a story teller to bring them on a journey so that, when the story’s over, they see the value in that thing.” In order to do that we have to know them.

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SARAH PECK — ITSTARTSWITH.COM

“I encourage people to be brave, use their voice, tell their story, and cultivate kindness. I teach writing, swim outdoors, and love yoga.”

- There’s a huge disconnect between being a person who’s interested and capable in lots of things and clearly communicating who you are to someone who’s typically got a specific need they’re looking to address.
- You may have lots of ideas and lots of places where you can help people, but it’s always difficult to put that into a “form” (whether that’s written, podcast, video, whatever).
- She’s had the most success finding and growing an audience when she’s very specific about her projects... choosing to focus on one category (writing or swimming or architecture or design... etc).
- “I am not a niche.” That’s right, but in order to communicate and resonate with your audience you will have to focus so they can understand you.
- When we listen to stories we track and digest small packets of information. The same is true with how you communicate who you are and how you help people.
- If I say, “I am a writer,” you can understand that and share it with others. But if I say, “I am a writer who does architecture but I swim in the mornings and I like urban designs and sometimes I do yoga” and I’ve lost you.
- It’s in our best interests to be clear with our messaging/positioning because it’s more shareable/understandable and we’ll impact more people that way.
- It’s painful... picking something to focus on is really hard. “I’m so much more than a writer,” but she didn’t have traction until she focused on one topic (writing) and made something for that specific need.

LISTEN TO THE INTERVIEW →



NATHAN BARRY — NATHANBARRY.COM

“Founder and Designer at ConvertKit. App designer, writer, traveler.”

- He built an audience around what he wanted to talk about. (1. design, 2. marketing.)
- “I want people to come to me who are a good fit for what I want to talk about.”
- He likes to pursue things from the angle of “this is what I know and want to teach,” rather than the other way around: “where’s the opportunity? can I talk about that?” He’s done both... He prefers the first.
- Idea validation technique 1: create a landing page asking for email address to get more info. Someone giving you their email in exchange for something is basically a form of payment.
- Idea validation technique 2: ask people “do you have this problem? i’m thinking of building this. would you buy it?” and if they say yes, ask, “can I have your credit card info?” That last part is where the real feedback happens.
- Discovering what you want to make: the best way he’s found is this (he heard it from Amy Hoy)... ask “who am I?” List out all attributes and discover what audiences you fit into. Dad, traveller, writer, marketer, author, snowboarder, etc...
- When you target an audience you’re a member of you’ll enjoy it more, can stick with it a lot longer, care about it more, you’ll understand their pain a lot more, have more important insights, and more stories that relate.

LISTEN TO THE INTERVIEW →



JAMES CLEAR — JAMESCLEAR.COM

“Entrepreneur, weightlifter, and travel photographer in 20+ countries. Good things happen to me for no apparent reason.”

- Defining who your audience is and what they’re willing to pay for doesn’t have to be hard, but it involves a lot of work.
- To serve an audience long term you’ve got to figure out what’s important to you, what your voice is. It can take a while to discover what those things are and that voice is.
- Think about it in leadership terms. Leadership is a way of rallying people who believe the same things you do. As you write more about what’s important to you the more you collect people who feel the same. (As opposed to trying to convince people who don’t already care about those things.)
- Try This: Be more vocal about what’s important to you, what values you care about. His recent **integrity report** does this by answering the questions: What are the values that are important to you? How are you living by those values now and expressing those values in your work? what are some areas of improvement?
- When you open up and talk about what’s important to you other people resonate with it.
- How do you figure out what you should sell them? Derek Halpern’s response to email signups (“what are you struggling with right now?”) is helpful.
- Surveys. He uses a short google form.
- TIP: for surveys, use really easy quick ones up front. This starts a little momentum, get’s their foot in the door, making them more likely to fill out the whole thing.
- Asked his audience specifically, “what are 2 or 3 things I could write about that would help you?”
- Also asked, “what are other books that solve this problem for you?” Then he went to amazon and look at all the 3 star reviews to see what those books lack... that showed some gaps that weren’t already being filled for that problem.
- If you write about a topic every week you’re gonna develop a feel for what people want.
- Just build and launch something. The idea that you can create a best seller right off the bat is completely false. Launch, get feedback, improve, launch, get feedback, improve again... etc.

LISTEN TO THE INTERVIEW →



JOSH CHANG — PANICANDRUN.COM

*“I like to live. Communications planning at Wieden+Kennedy.
It’s like child and youth development.”*

- The biggest thing is figuring out what you want to accomplish, what is that goal? Do you want to learn about a market? Test an hypothesis?
- From there you have two roads to discovery: quantitative and qualitative.
- Quantitative: Where are they? How do they consume messages? How large are they? Google or Facebook insights can be good for this as well.
- Qualitative: out in the field, talking to people, figuring out what makes them *them*, what’s the truth about them? Creating what he calls the consumer journey. What do they do, what do they consume, etc.
- The Old Spice guy actually came from an insight that most of the time it’s wives and girlfriends buying deodorant for their men. The idea for the campaign came directly from that.
- Getting into the individual helps make it tangible. They become a muse, an inspiration for creative decisions.
- Good Questions: Who defines your brand? Who is the ambassador for your message and mission? Who are you trying to present this to and who are you trying to sell this through?
- “The greatest thing we can offer is to be great listeners and to have empathy for your culture to understand what is the truth.” ~ **John Jay**
- Getting to *the truth* about them is the real work. It can be difficult because it’s likely something they are not explicitly saying to you... it’s under the surface just a little.

LISTEN TO THE INTERVIEW →

Worksheets

Ready to get started? Here are a couple exercises and worksheets. Pour a coffee and waste some time on this... you may be surprised with what insights come.

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU'LL FIND 2 EXERCISES. One is a worksheet called the Empathy Map. The other is a list of powerful questions I've compiled to help you think deeper about your audience.

This process, for me, typically leads to some kind of insight, a surprising hunch or fact about the audience. For example, when I designed ThinkTraffic.net I was surprised to realize that the people in that audience were *brave*. That became a defining theme for me as I wrote and designed for them.

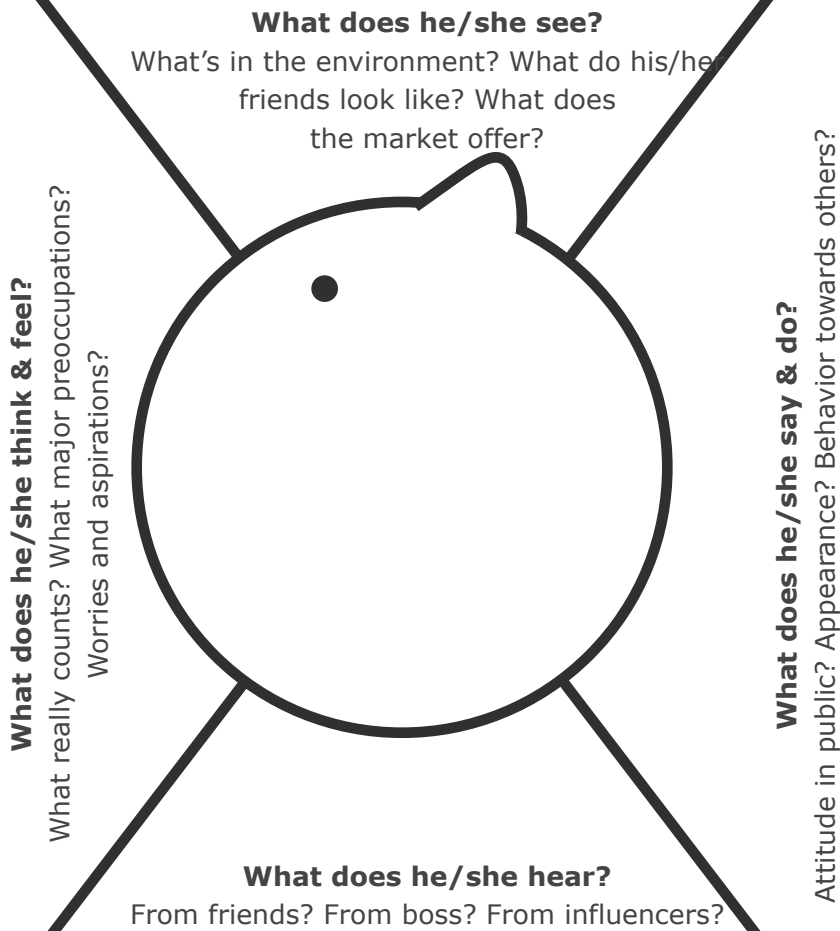
As you go through these exercises, look for the insights, the surprising bits that help you really get your teeth into who they are, what they care about and how to communicate freshly with them.

THE EMPATHY MAP

This is a simple exercise. It gets your hand moving and juices flowing. The drawing is not insignificant; it gets you thinking in different ways. And the pre-determined categories are meant to spur on real curiosity... what is this person hearing?

On the next page you'll find a blank version of this worksheet. Here are some tips on how to use it:

- Think of a specific person you know or can find online. Write their name down. Draw their hair and eyes on the circle—even if you're quite sure you *can't* draw.
- Ask this person a specific question like, “what do you like about x,” or “what are you missing?” Let that question be your entry point into their experience.
- Start brainstorming about the sections of the worksheet. What do they see/hear/think/feel/do/say about that question (and any others that come up)? No bad ideas. Get it all out. Can you get into their skin and see what's inside?
- Coffee and a beer could help. But not too much of either.
- Do it with a few friends. See how others think differently about this person.
- Once you're done you'll have some hypotheses about this person. What could you do to test those hypotheses?
- **Here's** some more info on the Empathy Map.



EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

The next two pages have a bunch of questions designed to help you get out of your own assumptions and into some insight about your audience.

Here are some tips on how to use these questions:

- Think of a specific person you know or can find online. Write their name. Maybe answer these questions for a few different people.
- Try hand writing your answers on a large pad of paper or a whiteboard. See how moving your arms and hands while writing affects how you think.
- We're brainstorming here; no wrong answers, no bad ideas. Get it all out. Edit and cross out things you don't like later.
- Coffee and a beer could help. But not too much of either.
- Take time, but not too much time. You're a big boy/girl—you can determine when you're stalling and when you're faking.
- Do it with a few friends. See how others think differently about this person.
- Once you're done you'll have some hypotheses about this person. What could you do to test those hypotheses?
- **Here's** some more info and some example answers to questions like these from Pat Flynn as he was thinking through a new offering.

EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS *(Answer these on a separate piece of paper. Replace “she” with your customer’s name)*

1. Name? age? gender? married? kids?
2. Where does she live?
3. What kind of job does she have? How much does she earn?
4. What is going on in her life right now?
5. what does she do in her free time?
6. Where was the last time/place she vacationed?
7. Where is her fantasy vacation?
8. What kind of car does she drive? How else does she travel?
9. What kinds of things does she read? What magazines? What blogs?
10. What websites does she frequent? Which is her favorite?
11. What are a few of the purchases she made in iTunes this year? Amazon?
12. What movies did she see recently? What TV shows? What are her favorites?
13. What’s her favorite youtube video?
14. What conferences or events does she go to?
15. What are her guilty pleasures?
16. What gurus, teachers or experts does she already follow?
17. What (and who) does she most admire? Who does she idolize?
18. What does she wish for before blowing out the candles or while seeing a shooting star or when praying?
19. How does she see herself?
20. What’s the biggest threat to that self-identity?
21. What frustrates her?
22. What conventional wisdom does she subscribe to?
23. Where is the system or conventional wisdom letting her down and leading her astray?
24. What keeps her up at night?
25. What does she secretly wish was true about her or her situation?
26. What does she secretly fear may be true about her or her situation?
27. What’s her worst case scenario?
28. What’s a worst case scenario that’s even WORSE than that?
29. What do others in her life (parents, siblings, friends, coworkers) think about her situation?
30. Where will she lose control/freedom/power/influence if things get worse or don’t change?
31. What is she betting on being true about her situation?
32. If her life could go perfectly from here on, how would that story go?

BUSINESS QUESTIONS

(Answer these on a separate piece of paper. Replace “she” with your customer’s name)

- a. How will she know when it’s time to look for a site/product like yours?
- b. What does she google to find you? (List as much as you can related to your business and her other interests.)
- c. How will she feel after her first experience visiting your site?
- d. How will she feel after visiting your site consistently for three months?
- e. What primary emotion does she feel at the exact moment she’s about to buy your product or service?
- f. What’s the “dream solution” (OMG, i can’t believe that exists!) that she’d pay almost anything for?
- g. Where in her life will she be more powerful and influential because of your solution?
- h. How else will her life be different after engaging with you?

Final Thoughts

This stuff takes time. It also takes work. Listen to the interviews, go through the exercises and try some stuff out.

*You'll learn a sh*t ton by doing. Break a leg.*

*“Get the right head, heart + data about your audience.
@Fizzle’s Guide to Defining Your Audience.”*

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