

The Loyal Audience Blueprint

**BUILD AN AUDIENCE.
GROW YOUR BUSINESS.
CHANGE THE WORLD.**

JACOB JANS

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Chapter One: The Loyal Audience Blueprint

After nearly fifteen years of running an online business, I've developed a straightforward method for building and sustaining a large and loyal audience for my business.

When I first started working on my business, I was an undergraduate student in college. My parents had given me a fair amount of money to pay for school, even though I am one of five children, but that money was about to run out. I had to figure out a way to pay the bills.

So I began percolating ways to make money. In high school, my brother had managed to earn a surprising amount of money by building a website that featured “background images” designers could use for websites. This was in the 90s, when web design was an entirely different thing. Through this website, he'd managed to earn hundreds of dollars a month. This made a big impression on me and gave me the idea that I, too, could figure out a way to build websites and pay the bills.

So, I got my start. I was both unlucky and lucky. I invested some money, maybe \$97, in an eBook about online marketing. That book had quite a lot of valuable information in it. It even talked a lot about how to nurture a relationship with an audience. I skipped the vast majority of the book and focused on one simple technique for search engine optimization. That one technique ended up being extremely successful.

For the first time ever, I was making a real living. At the time, I promoted other people's products, mostly through Clickbank. I helped other entrepreneurs and authors sell their books and ebooks.

However, after a while, I figured out that I wasn't building anything sustainable. I didn't have a business. I had a trick that I could use to make money for other people, pocketing some as the middleman. If the technique I'd learned for SEO stopped working, I would quickly go broke. I had to do something differently.

I decided to focus on building an email list.

That decision, it turns out, was the best business decision I ever made.

By building my own email list, I was creating something that provided stability, consistent income, and the opportunity to build a long-term relationship with the people I was reaching.

And those long-term relationships have ultimately let me earn a comfortable living throughout the many drastic changes the internet has undergone in the past fifteen years.

Since then, I've built audiences in markets such as freelance writing, creative writing, and mystery shopping. Many people have been in one of my audiences for longer than a decade.

Because of these audiences, I've been able to work from home, making my own schedule. In my mid-twenties, I fine-tuned my business so that I could work just a few hours a week. (And still comfortably pay the bills.) In my late twenties and early thirties, I increased my ambition, worked more, grew my audiences, built a bigger business, earned more money, and reached more people.

Now, I work most mornings but take afternoons off to spend time with my two kids.

All of this is possible because of my focus on audience building.

Over the years, I've developed a straightforward system for building large audiences. This system is simple. More important: it works. This system doesn't just build an audience. It builds a loyal audience that you can serve confidently, so you can provide massive value that lets you earn a living with your business.

So, here is an overview of the three-step blueprint for building a large and loyal audience.

Step One: Identify Potential Audience Members

Before you build an audience, you have to find groups of people who are potential audience members. There's a lot that goes into this. You'll need to make sure you can consistently reach those groups with your marketing efforts. These groups need to be a good fit for your unique offering and they need to be large enough to support growing your audience.

Step Two: Invite People to Join Your Audience

Once you've identified groups of people who are good candidates for joining your audience, you'll need to get people to raise their hands and say, “Yes, I want to hear from you again.” This can be as simple as getting an email address. Everyone you encounter who doesn't say yes, is a lost audience member. If you want to build a large audience, you have to be hyper-focused on recruiting people to join your audience.

As you begin to develop your audience, you'll need to start learning about them. This means gaining a deep understanding of the people you are attempting to serve, so you can understand their unique needs and provide consistent value to them, but also so that you can be extremely effective at persuading them to join your audience.

Step Three: Build a Long-Term Relationship with Your Audience

Once someone has given you permission to contact them again, you have the opportunity to build loyalty with them. This means you have the potential to create a long-term relationship.

The hallmarks of quality long-term relationships are consistency and understanding. You'll need to develop a system for learning about the unique needs of your audience and consistently providing value to your audience members based on those unique needs.

This means understanding your role in the lives of your audience and why they pay attention to you.

Three Steps to Long-Term Success

Once you've started, building an audience can feel incredibly slow. Imagine getting one new audience member: It doesn't seem like much. Sure, you may be able to change that person's life, but one person isn't much of an audience.

However, imagine getting one new audience member every single day. Someone who reads everything you write, who is eager to buy your

products or services. Eventually, that adds up to something very meaningful—and potentially quite sustaining.

I'm hoping you'll learn how to get much more than one new audience member a day, however. Ultimately, you may earn dozens or hundreds of audience members a day, snowballing into hundreds of thousands or even millions of people you can consistently reach and provide value to. People who will be happy to support and grow your business, whatever it is. People who will be part of your loyal audience.

To achieve that, you'll need to follow the three steps outlined above, consistently refining your process for each step. Success in these endeavours doesn't just involve following the steps blindly; it involves constantly improving each part of the process, little by little. By making small improvements every day, you'll get dramatic results in the long run.

Chapter Two: Your Role as an Audience Builder

When you seek to serve others, especially as part of running a business, there is a very easy trap to fall into. I know because I've fallen into this trap more than once, to my detriment.

This trap is possible for any relationship at all. The relationship cannot become one-sided. In order to be a quality relationship, it has to serve both people. The importance of this idea is easy to underestimate. However, it should always be part of your decision-making process when building an audience.

When I got my start, many years ago, I was promoting products in a wide variety of niches. I was fascinated by the world of technology, marketing, and online business. However, none of the niches I worked in directly covered those topics. I promoted products in niches such as baby sleep, mystery shopping, and life insurance. Sure, these are markets that are extremely important to some people. Unfortunately, I had little connection to them.

That didn't stop me from pursuing business building in these markets. I had great success promoting life insurance; however, I had zero interest in building a real business around this topic. So, of course, that part of the business eventually failed.

I did, however, have some success building a business around the topic of mystery shopping. For those who don't know, mystery shopping involves everyday people secretly shopping at stores, then filling out a report that provides feedback on the customer service. Hundreds of thousands of people work as very-part-time mystery shoppers in the U.S. alone. It is, really, a fascinating field.

I was able to build some personal interest in the topic and I built some educational products that I was proud of and that served many people very well. I even built a large and sustaining community of mystery shoppers. However, I never became a mystery shopper myself, even as I continued to grow my audience.

Can You Sustain This for Yourself?

Of course, the problem I encountered, due to my lack of interest in my early business efforts, was a constant fight with burnout. Because I did not find the topic interesting, I found it difficult to engage deeply with the topic. I was able to fight this lack of interest for many years. However, it always held me back from serving the audience as well as I could.

When I was younger, my first impulse, when I finished a piece of writing I was proud of, was to immediately seek attention for the writing. I felt good—and that feeling led me to share my writing with others, immediately. Sometimes that worked out, but it was ultimately a selfish endeavor, leaving me both feeling empty and lacking a loyal group of readers who were engaged in my work.

What was going on? I was focused on just myself, and not on being compassionate, caring, empathetic, or understanding of the people I was sharing my writing with.

The first rule of audience building is that it's not about the leader of the audience alone, it's about the audience, too.

I was making a huge mistake: Focusing only on how I felt, instead of how my audience felt too.

This is important: As in any good relationship, you need to show that you understand and care for the members of your audience.

Being young and immature, I was not up to that task. It took me a while to get over myself, so that I could finally start connecting with people in a genuine way.

But there's a very important caveat here!

Consider the two columns below. The left-hand side is all about the author, the right-hand side is all about the audience.

Writing this made me feel good	Reading this made my audience feel good
The writing is about something I care about	The writing is about something my audience cares about
Writing this helped me understand things in a new way	Reading this helped my audience understand things in a new way
Writing this changed my life	Reading this changed the lives of people in my audience
Writing this helped me take positive action	Reading this helped my audience take positive action

Think about those two columns for a minute.

What if you were focused only on yourself—the left hand side? You would have a meaningful writing practice that was important to you. But ignoring the audience side would limit your ability to connect with your audience.

What if you were only focused on the audience?

You would be able to build a large audience, but it would be hard to sustain. Your enjoyment of writing would diminish—and your audience would be able to tell.

Ideally, you should be focused both on yourself and the audience. Sometimes it may veer one way or the other, but both sides of the equation should be taken into account.

Again, this is another mistake I've made. I've built large audiences for topics that I didn't find personally important; I was able to sustain the practice of writing for those audiences for a surprising amount of time, but it was hard and ultimately led to burnout.

Which is why, when building your audience, you should take yourself into account too!

This means being genuine about who you are at the same time that you are understanding and caring for your audience.

Don't worry if you get this wrong at first! Like any relationship, there will always be give-and-take.

Sometimes you'll be too focused on your audience's needs. Sometimes you'll have to be focused on your audience's needs more than your own. However, on occasion you'll need to focus on your own needs as well.

Just like any good relationship, it's about everyone in the relationship, and not just one person.

So, don't forget about yourself. And don't forget about your audience, either.

In fact, I would argue that the more personally meaningful your audience building is to yourself, the more successful you will be—as long as you're equally focused on your audience too.

Who You Are Matters to Your Audience

In any relationship, you want to have a clear idea of who the other person is, why they are engaging in a relationship with you, and what their motivations are. The more coherent and meaningful the other person's motivations are, the easier it is to trust and depend on the relationship. This is, really, the essence of loyalty. If you want a loyal audience, it is very important to be clear about the role you are filling in their lives, the reasons you are filling that role, and why it ultimately matters.

In a sense, you want to demonstrate a clear sense of ethics and integrity. You want your brand to be solid. To have purpose and meaning.

When I worked with Caitlin Jans to launch Authors Publish Magazine, she figured this out quickly. She developed a set of guiding principles that served as the core ethical guidelines for the magazine. The magazine started by reviewing literary journals open to submissions of creative writing directly from writers. The first rule she came up with is that these journals must not charge any submission fees.

This immediately limited the number of journals the magazine could write about.

Even further, the publishers written about must be open to writers from around the world. Another strict limitation. While clearly limiting, these guidelines make it clear that Authors Publish is a champion for writers. Every issue of the magazine includes a link to the ethical guidelines. This has paid off: Audience members often tell us that Authors Publish is a force for good in the world. Many people believe in what the magazine stands for. The audience is loyal.

Contrast this with a publication that bases its decisions purely on generating the biggest response with its content. You see this all the time online: Temporarily successful brands learn how to push buttons with audience members, get a lot of attention, and then fizzle. This leads to what is commonly known as clickbait.

This type of content is usually driven by numbers: What gets the biggest click-through rate? What will generate the most immediate return-on-investment? The hallmark of businesses that create such clickbait is an extreme focus on tracking and measuring numbers.

Think about it in terms of personal relationships. Someone who is constantly modifying their behavior solely based on your response, is an inherently untrustworthy person. They may be successful for a while but eventually, the relationship will feel hollow.

Of course, you can't discount numbers when engaging in audience building, either. Understanding click-through rates, return on ad spend, engagement, etc., are all important tools for audience building. Many of them are necessary when designing an online campaign. However, it is important to use them as tools, not as ends themselves. For example, building an email list, you could simply measure the raw number of people who sign up for your email list. While useful, it doesn't tell you the entire picture. It could be that none of the people who sign up for the list end up engaging with anything you have to offer. When analyzing numbers such as these, it is important to put them into the broader context, allowing yourself to prioritize subjective things that are difficult to measure, such as demonstrating your brand's purpose.

Your Role as an Audience Builder

When you start to focus on attempting to understand your audience, their needs, thoughts, and actions, it is very important to realize that it is your job, and not your audience's job, to identify the things that matter.

It can be tempting to ask people simple questions, such as: What do you most want from me?

While this can be useful, it is of limited value. Figuring out a good answer is work. It takes critical thinking. It's not always obvious.

Your job, as an audience builder, is to do the hard work of figuring out how to serve your audience.

Chapter Three: Why You Should Build an Audience

In 2009, I was living a comfortable life. I'd fine-tuned my business so that I only needed to work a few hours a week to keep it running. I'd moved to New York City and was able to dedicate much of my time participating in the literary community there, attending poetry readings, meeting interesting people, and enjoying the many benefits of living in a big city.

Unfortunately, late that year, disaster struck in my business. I had been depending on Google Adwords to grow my audience. The ad campaigns I had developed were very successful, and quite profitable. Unfortunately, Google unexpectedly banned my Adwords account without any explanation or recourse. It was impossible to run any ads on their platform at all.

For many businesses, losing your primary source of advertising means everything stops running: no new leads, no new clients, no new revenue. Everything grinds to a halt. For some, it means the end of the line. A failed business.

This is the type of scenario that keeps many business owners up at night. What do you do when disaster strikes? Do you have a backup plan?

Fortunately for me, all of my marketing efforts had focused on building an audience for my business. I had an extremely large email list with a loyal following. I had leveraged that audience to build a sustaining community of engaged people. These were assets that provided massive stability to the business.

Even though my primary source of advertising disappeared overnight, my income only took a relatively small hit. I had a huge buffer that gave me years worth of breathing room, if necessary. The audience was there and it wasn't going away.

People Are Your Biggest Asset

In business management, it is often recommended that you focus on finding the best people to work with in your business. The best employees can and do make a huge difference.

The flip side to this, of course, is that the most important people in any business are the people who ultimately become your clients or customers. Building a loyal audience for your business gives you just this: A stable source of people who are waiting to support your business. People who are

loyal to you and your company, no matter the twists, turns, and challenges every business will face.

Further: A loyal audience gives your business tremendous flexibility. Because of my audience-building efforts, I've been able to restructure many aspects of my business over the years, depending on my personal goals, the business climate I was operating in, and the unique challenges I faced. I've variously made money via affiliate marketing, display advertising, book sales, and online courses.

None of this would have been possible without a loyal audience that I was able to consistently reach throughout my years of running a business.

The biggest benefit to building an audience is the stability it provides. A loyal audience, by definition, doesn't go away. They are there for you through ups-and-downs. The second biggest benefit is the flexibility. There are endless options for making money, when a loyal audience is there to support you.

An Audience Can Serve Nearly Any Type of Business

It is hard to imagine any business, entrepreneur, or even artist that wouldn't be well served by a loyal audience.

The examples are endless:

An author has a regular email newsletter, featuring exclusive stories for their readers. When they release a new book, the audience is eager and willing to buy the book.

An enterprise company hosts a popular podcast with a large following in its niche. This wins a lot of good will with the decision-makers who will buy its product. It also gives a big opening to the salespeople who will make the sales happen. A regular listener whom you've built trust with is a much, much easier sell.

A chef builds a popular recipe blog and creates a loyal following with a large readership. They leverage the social proof of this following to land a book contract with a major publisher, rocketing their career to the next level. (Many, many cookbooks have been published this way.)

A local insurance company publishes a weekly newsletter their clients *actually like reading*. Retention increases dramatically, plus the newsletter becomes a valuable source for referrals, allowing the business to grow dramatically.

It doesn't take much effort to think of the endless benefits a loyal audience can provide. When thinking about these benefits, perhaps the most meaningful benefit is the value you will be creating for your audience. The best audience-builders improve the lives of everyone dramatically, making the world a much better place.

Chapter Four: Why Audience Building Isn't Just Marketing

It is easy to think about audience building just in terms of marketing. After all, it can be a powerful way to find new clients, make sales, and generate significant revenue.

However, to do so is shortsighted. Audience building, if done properly, can become a foundational pillar of your business building efforts.

In today's online marketing world, there are so many trendy marketing techniques that get a lot of attention. You can build a funnel, host a webinar, launch a social media campaign, engage in retargeting, or any number of marketing techniques. While all of these can be useful, and part of your audience building efforts, they are limited. They are tools that serve a broader purpose.

Done right, audience building seeps into every part of your business. Why? Because it forces you to question everything through the lens of your audience. The better you get at audience building, the more your

business will be infused with a deep understanding of the people you are reaching.

When building a sustainable business, you don't want to get distracted by the tools you're using. The focus should always be on the people you are reaching. The tools are there to help you become more effective. They're not an end in and of themselves. They're just a small part of the puzzle.

In marketing, it is very common to use the language of the military to describe your efforts at reaching people. You hear words such as *targeting*, *hits*, and *campaigns*. This type of thinking can be extremely pervasive, and yet very difficult to even notice—and it can have a profound impact on how you think about the people you are reaching.

If you are focused on targeting people as part of a campaign to generate sales, it is easy to lose sight of the big picture. I know, because I've made this mistake too many times. Traditional marketing has way too much emphasis on optimizing for the right numbers. Unfortunately, this can make it easy to lose sight of the big picture. It dehumanizes the audience, turning them into statistics.

It's no wonder that most people say they dislike advertising. It seems to me that most advertisers dislike people: They treat them as numbers to manipulate in order to make the most money possible.

This isn't to say that numbers aren't an important aspect of your audience-building efforts. But they should never be in the center of it. It is absolutely important to measure and understand the response to your marketing efforts. You need to know whether an advertisement is losing money or not. You need to know how many people are responding to your sign-up pages, and how many people are actually reading the articles you publish. These are necessary parts of successful audience building, but making decisions solely on numbers can lead to serious long-term problems.

For a long time, I focused way too much on maximizing the readership rate for an email newsletter I created. I followed best practices, such as optimizing for open rates and click-through-rates. I ran split tests to see which of two versions of an email would generate the most response. I made many short-term gains, getting more people to read my articles, resulting in more advertising revenue being made. It was exciting to see these types of results in real time.

Unfortunately, by focusing on these short term numbers, I lost sight of the big picture.

Ask yourself this: Is it better to write a headline that pushes more people to click on a link or to write an article that changes the lives of the people who read it?

The short-term, short-sighted approach is too often focused on getting people to click a link, or like a Facebook post, or otherwise engage in a very shallow interaction that serves little purpose.

Yes, it is possible to build an audience using clickbait that grabs people's attention, causes a big reaction, and/or makes them feel the urgent need to respond to what you're saying. But what is the point? What is the long-term value of this?

Building an audience means winning long-term loyalty, not short-term attention.

Anyone can get attention by yelling on a street corner. However, nobody can win a loyal audience that way.

Your audience-building efforts should focus on the subjective experience of the people you are reaching, as should the rest of your business.

A strong focus on audience building should infuse every aspect of your business. Product creation, customer service, and yes, even marketing, should be focused on this.

Just like any human relationship, in order for your audience to last, it needs to be taken into account. The more your audience is set aside, or ignored, the more difficult it will be to maintain a positive relationship with your audience. This doesn't mean only doing what your audience

wants. It means having an awareness, in all things, of all sides the relationship. It means focusing on people.

By understanding the unique needs of your audience, focusing on building loyalty, and clearly defining the role you are playing in their lives, your entire business will be changed. Every decision will be more effective. That is why audience building isn't just marketing. It is, ultimately, a way of running a business focused on people first.

Chapter Five: Identify Potential Audience Members

The primary requirement for building a large audience is the ability to invite people to join your audience.

However, in order to invite people to join your audience, you need to find them. This means finding a reliable source of potential audience members that you're able to consistently reach.

The ability to consistently reach people is not the same as having a loyal audience. For example, an author may give a reading at a bookstore, but if nobody buys the book or gives the author their contact information, and/or never attends another reading by the author, they're not really a member of the author's audience.

However, authors regularly set up book tours, where they sell books, build their email list, and begin to establish long-term relationships with readers.

The key is to identify a source of new audience members that is big enough to justify the effort of recruiting them to join your audience.

There are several key components to a good source for new audience members:

It is a consistently reliable source. While it can be amazing, for example, to land a guest post in a hugely popular blog, this offers only one-time benefits. You may get a rush of publicity from the publication, but it will fade quickly. Far better would be to establish a system for regularly landing guest posts that bring people to visit your website, sign up for your offer, and have the chance to stick with you in the long run.

The people you reach are a good fit for joining your audience. There's no point in reaching out to people who simply aren't interested in what you have to say. The more interested the audience is in your message, the better. It can be tempting to go after opportunities to reach large numbers of people, but be careful not to waste your time with the wrong people.

It should be a large enough group to justify the effort. This is a little bit fuzzy because, depending on your business, just a few people may be enough to justify a lot of effort. You have to think about this in the context of your business.

For example, in the freelance writing niche, I run a free newsletter for writers. The newsletter is ad-supported. In order to pay for the expenses of producing the newsletter, I need many thousands of readers, not just hundreds or dozens. Which means I need to have a source of audience members that can sustain and grow the list to thousands of people. In order

to sustain and grow the audience, I regularly run Facebook ads that reach tens of thousands of writers. Every day, a small percentage of them sign up for my email list, potentially becoming long-term members of my audience.

However, you don't need to reach tens of thousands of people a day in order to build an extremely valuable audience. For example, many entrepreneurs speak at conferences, talking to just hundreds at a time, successfully building a loyal audience from reaching these groups of people.

I know of one author who speaks every year at an annual conference in her industry. Every year, before the conference, she sells a lot of books to the attendees. This has happened for many years, which brings us back to the first point in this list. There's a big difference between a one-time source of new audience members, and a repeatable source. By finding repeatable sources of new audience members, you can spend much less time on audience building, because you'll be able to do most of the legwork once, creating a lot of efficiency. Which brings us to the final criterion.

The reward justifies the expense. There's little point in consuming massive effort to reach people only to get limited results. The world of marketing presents many opportunities to spend a lot of money, while getting few results in return. This can be a difficult criterion to gauge when you are starting, but it is important to keep this in mind for the long term. As you

get better at building your audience, you will learn what is worth the effort, and what isn't. In the beginning, by necessity, many of your efforts won't be worth the effort. The key here is to find out as quickly as possible, without giving up too soon. This requires a combination of tenacity and flexibility.

Before You Commit to a Source of Audience Members

Absolutely do not build a large marketing campaign centered on reaching potential audience members before doing your due diligence. You want to find out, as quickly as possible, whether the source of potential audience members fits the criteria above.

This will save you so much time, effort, and money.

Don't expect perfection at first; however, *do* make sure the potential is there, so that you can have some confidence that you're likely to be on a path that will be successful. There's not much worse than investing a lot of energy and effort in a project only for all of that effort to fizzle when it is finally launched to the real world. The more quickly an effort fails, the sooner you'll be able to try something new.

That means you need to start with small tests to validate each of the criteria above.

Keep in mind, as I said, you're not looking for perfection here. Your first efforts will eventually be greatly improved. However, you *are* looking for potential, and that's what you need to validate.

Let's talk about each of the criteria, using my website, Freedom With Writing, as an example.

Is it a consistently reliable source? I run a lot of Facebook Ads for Freedom With Writing. When I started, my initial efforts were pretty bad. I created a Facebook page and bought some advertisements. The results were not very good. However, I *was* getting results. People weren't responding to my ads, but there was *some* response. I knew, with some effort, I would be able to improve the response. Plus, it was clear that this was an opportunity that wasn't going away. Facebook provided a consistent, reliable platform for reaching writers. Thus, it met the first criterion.

Are the people I am reaching a good fit for my audience? The answer, even based on my initially lackluster efforts, was a clear “Yes.” There are many, many people interested in freelance writing on Facebook and Facebook provides an easy way to reach those people. Further, I was able to validate this because the freelance writing-related content that I was posting was getting some traction.

That was several years ago. These days, if you plan on using Facebook, I

recommend building a Facebook page, and investing \$5 per day in advertising. With this modest investment, you'll be able to quickly reach hundreds or thousands of people, while learning quite a lot about how they respond to your offers. It is an incredibly powerful tool and well worth the money, if you know what you're doing. (I love helping people set up this type of thing.)

Am I able to reach enough people to justify the effort? This is a particularly important question. To continue the Facebook ads example, there are over a million writers that I can potentially reach on Facebook, which is why it is an extremely valuable source of new audience members for Freedom With Writing.

However, I know a business owner whose ideal customers are the owners of independent insurance agencies. While he *can* reach these people on Facebook, the number of them he is able to reach likely doesn't justify the effort of a full-fledged campaign. However, for him, speaking at industry conferences, advertising in trade magazines, and even marketing on LinkedIn are potentially viable options.

This gets to a further point: It is easy to think about your ideal audience member, and look for large groups of people who fit that criteria. For example, I would love to build an audience of writers who are ready to promote a newly published novel. However, I don't have a good way to find those people. I could, of course, go ahead and design a business for

those people, even though I can't reach them, but that would be getting ahead of myself.

Marketers are often encouraged to identify their “ideal customer” and *then* figure out how to reach those customers. However, this is a mistake. It is completely backwards: We are always constrained by the people we are able to reach. It is better to look at the opportunities you know you can take advantage of, then modify your business to suit those opportunities.

This mistake often leads to another common piece of business advice: “pivoting.” After designing a business around an audience the business owner *can't* reach, they're encouraged to completely change the business, by “pivoting” to serve people they can reach. It's silly.

Instead of imagining an ideal customers and *then* designing a business around them, start by looking for the opportunities that *are* available, and moving forward from there.

This means looking for the people you *can* reach, before deciding *who* your ideal customer is.

First, look for the opportunities available to you. Second, take advantage of those opportunities.

If you design a business, and *then* look for ways to make it work, of course you'll have to “pivot” and redesign the business. If you *start* by looking at the opportunities available to you, validating those opportunities, and creating a business based on those opportunities, you won't need to pivot when you finally get around to building an audience, because audience building will be baked in from the start.

That being said, if you stay tuned in to your audience and your sources of new audience members, there will always be the need to shift strategies over time. If anything is true in life and business, it is that things change. By staying flexible and aware of the change, as opposed to staying rigid in the way we plan to do things, we're able to adapt to the circumstances we find ourselves in.

For example, when Caitlin Jans and I started Authors Publish Magazine, we knew there was a huge opportunity to build an audience for it right away. I had already established Freedom With Writing, and we knew much of the audience would be interested in what Caitlin wanted to offer.

We were also very confident that the same type of Facebook marketing we were using for Freedom With Writing would be effective with Authors Publish. So, based on this, we launched the magazine.

This was an audience-focused strategy. We found a reliable source of new audience members, analyzed what they were interested in, thought about what we would want to provide them in that context, and moved forward

from there. The focus, to start, was on reviewing literary journals from an author's/submitter's perspective.

Caitlin didn't create this idea out of the blue. It was created by observing potential audience members she knew she would be able to reach; many of the emails people sent to Freedom With Writing were from creative writers looking for experience.

Start Engaging With Your Potential Audience Members as Soon as Possible

In the long run, you'll want to build a system that automates much of the work of audience building, but when you are just starting out, many people are surprised to find that they actually *do* have a good source for new audience members.

However, these can be difficult to identify, especially if you're not used to thinking of the world in terms of potential audience members.

For example, an author was asked to write a book by the pastors of two local churches. This author approached me, asking for advice. She didn't think she had a platform to promote her work. How would I be able to sell this book, she asked, because I don't have anyone to promote it to.

I pointed out that the two pastors would be extremely likely to support her book marketing efforts. The congregations at those churches would be a

likely source of readers for her book. Further, these pastors would likely be able to open doors at other churches where she could speak about her book. The opportunity was there, as well as a potential path forward. She wasn't used to looking for these types of opportunities, so she didn't see it laid out in front of her.

However, what if you only see opportunities that meet *just some* of the criteria listed above? Then I would suggest deciding which of the criteria are most important to you, and then moving forward with an imperfect opportunity that meets at least those most important criteria while you keep your eyes open for better opportunities.

For example, you can always go to local networking events and speak to people individually. While it would be extremely difficult to build a large audience by recruiting one person at a time, this has the advantage of allowing you to learn from and connect with the people you would like to reach in a way that is difficult to do on a large scale. These types of personal connections can be extremely valuable sources of learning.

Your Audience Source Strategy

To summarize, in order to build an audience, you need to look for a high-quality source of potential new audience members. This source should, ideally, be:

Reliable over the long term

Full of people who are a good fit

Big enough to actually provide an audience

Realistic, in terms of the reward for the amount of effort/expense you put in

When you get to actually implementing your audience building, you aren't likely to find the perfect source of audience members immediately. That's fine. Look for potential. And, failing that, start with an imperfect source, simply to get the ball rolling. Sometimes that is enough to open the doors to better opportunities.

Chapter Six: Invite People to Join Your Audience

Once you've identified a source of new audience members, the next step is to invite people to join your audience.

Presenting incredibly compelling content isn't enough. You could write an article that changes someone's life forever, but if they never hear from you again, then they aren't part of your audience.

The sad fact is that no matter how meaningful or valuable your work is, almost nobody is going to join your audience unless you ask them to directly.

Many people make the mistake of assuming that if their work is good enough, it will draw people into their audience all by itself. Maybe this is how it works for a lucky few people. More power to them.

The rest of us, however, have another option. And that means explicitly asking people to join our audience. The more explicit, the better.

When someone visits one of my websites, they are presented many extremely obvious opportunities to join my email list. There is never any doubt about this: They are presented with the opportunity. If they're a good fit, I hope they sign up. If not, that is fine, too.

Asking directly is key to getting people to join your audience. If the opportunity isn't obvious, they aren't going to do it.

Not only do they need to know that you're asking for them to join your audience, you have to be crystal clear about what they need to do.

From your perspective, as an audience-builder, you need a way to reach out to your audience members on a consistent basis, on your own terms. This usually means getting some form of contact information from them that you can use in the future.

This could be their email address, mailing address, phone number, or something else. Ideally, it is something you can use consistently, over many years, to communicate with them.

Keep the long term in mind here. Building large followings on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can be valuable, but those platforms are owned by companies that don't have your best interests in mind. (They want to sell advertising, not support your ability to reach an audience.) It is far better to get the direct contact information from people in a way that isn't owned by a third-party platform. Email is wonderful for this.

Once you've decided on the contact information you would like to collect, you need to present a crystal-clear opportunity for people to give you that contact information.

For example, if you were giving a book reading, you could pass around a clipboard with a contact information sheet, where people can give you their email addresses.

Or, as commonly seen on a website, you can present a popover that asks for an email address.

Of course, not everybody is going to say yes to this opportunity. That's fine. Not everybody is right for your audience.

However, you're looking for people who *are* right for your audience. Those are the people you want to sign up.

The Key to Getting People to Say Yes

When asking for people's contact information, you have to give a reason why they should give it to you.

The better the reason, the more likely they are to give you their contact information.

This leads to the second key point in inviting people to join your audience.

You have to offer them something they want in exchange for their contact information. The more they want it, the more likely they are to give you their information.

How do you do this?

By spending a lot of time and effort getting to know your potential audience members. You need to consistently work to understand them and their situation. This simple concept is one of the fundamental pillars of audience building. Your job is to understand your potential audience members and to create something compelling to offer them in exchange for them giving you their contact information.

In short, you need to understand them, so that you can give them what they want.

This is easier said than done.

However, here are several strategies that dramatically increase your effectiveness.

Start your efforts by talking to people. Personally, I have struggled with this in the past, being a naturally shy person. However, few things can be more helpful than one-on-one communication. So, when you identify a group of people who are good candidates to join your audience, start talking to them.

First, start with the simple idea of gaining understanding. Ask probing questions. Listen. Develop rapport. Do this with four or five people, and you'll start to gain insights.

Second, create a hypothesis. Based on the understanding you've developed, create an idea for a compelling offer that you can sum up in one sentence. Then go and offer it to people in person. Gauge their reactions. You'll quickly learn a lot. You'll also have the opportunity to try several different offers. Keep them concise and easy to understand. One sentence is best. Don't spend a lot of time creating what you are suggesting. Make it clear it is an idea you're working on. This way, you won't have to spend wasted effort on creating something people don't want. You'll also be able to iterate through many ideas much more quickly.

This type of technique is extremely useful if you're able to connect with groups of people at something like a convention, networking event, or other gathering where there are a large number of people in the same place, ready to talk. These types of events are extremely useful, in terms of learning a lot in a short period of time. Even if you find a group that isn't a good fit for your audience, you can still use these techniques to gain *some* knowledge about how people respond to your offer. Take advantage of these opportunities when you can.

Keep in mind, what you learn in a conversational setting might not translate directly to other settings, such as an offer delivered via a website. You will gain a solid foundation, but will still need to iterate through offers and ideas for each context you'll operate in.

Another strategy is to create a small digital advertisement that presents your offer. Tim Ferris, author of *The 4-Hour Work Week*, used this strategy to create the title for his book. He created pay-per-click advertisements with several different titles and subtitles he was considering for his book. The advertisement with the highest click-through rate became the title for his book. Many authors often struggle with titles, basing their decisions on gut feeling. He based his decision on real-world reactions from potential audience members. The book was an instant hit; quickly reaching the best-seller lists, and launching an incredibly lucrative career.

I've used variations on this strategy many times to test offers to potential audience members. In a sense, I've baked this strategy into the core of my advertising method for Facebook.

Here's how: Once you've built enough of a Facebook following for a Facebook page, every post will get *some* response from the fans of the page. Because of this, you can think of each post as a test of what the audience is interested in. (Facebook certainly thinks of it this way.)

For the website Freedom With Writing, we post five to seven articles on the Facebook page each week. Each of those articles leads to an opportunity for people to sign up for our email list. Here's the key: Some of those articles get a lot of response on Facebook, resulting in many email signups, while others get very little response. Based on this response, I then buy paid sponsorship, through Facebook, for those articles. They have already been tested to be effective, thus the likelihood of them becoming successful advertisements increases dramatically.

The Elements of an Effective Ask

Eventually, you'll need to ask people to join your audience. When it is time to do that, there are five key elements you should always keep in mind:

It has to offer a benefit. This means solving a problem or giving away something the potential audience member would want.

It is immediately understandable. When I first got started building email lists, I noticed that most people would sign up for the email list within 30 seconds. That's the maximum amount of time people are going to be considering your offer if it is as simple as asking for an email address. If it takes them longer, they're much less likely to sign up. This means your

offer should be understandable at a glance and fully understandable within just a few seconds.

The action you are asking for is crystal clear. There should be absolutely no doubt about *what* you are asking for. There should be zero mental burden. The more obvious, the better.

It should be front and center. If you want someone to give you their contact information, you can't be shy about it, otherwise people will simply ignore you. The more obvious your ask is, the more people will sign up for it. Of course, this might mean that more people will directly say “No.” The good news is, those people aren't the ones you were aiming for anyway. There is only one surefire way to sort out the people who will join your audience from those who won't: By asking them directly and making the question hard to avoid. For example, at a book reading, you might give a compelling reason to join your email list, and have a clipboard passed around, where people can fill out their contact information. I have seen this done to great effect, with nearly everyone in the room adding their information. Because the clipboard gets into everyone's hands, everybody is forced to consider whether to sign up or not. Imagine, instead, if they were asked to walk up to a corner of the room to fill out the form. The odds of anyone adding their information would shrink dramatically. And yet, you see things like this all the time. On websites, there's often a hidden opt-in box somewhere on the page, where maybe a few people will see it if they're lucky. It's much better to

make it obvious; practically unavoidable, so people can at least have the *choice* of taking you up on your compelling offer.

Finally, it should be relevant to the long-term relationship you are developing with them. Sure, you can bribe people to join your email list in exchange for something they want, such as a gift card, but if the thing you are offering isn't directly related to the types of things you're going to be presenting them going forward, it won't help to establish them as an audience member. Instead, they'll get what you initially offered, then become annoyed by the unrelated things you send them afterwards. Instead, make sure what you're offering sets you up for success in the long run. We'll talk more about this later, when we discuss establishing a long-term relationship with your audience.

Chapter Seven: Build a Long-Term Relationship with Your Audience

It is one thing to change someone's life after connecting with them once. It is an entirely different thing to become a regular part of that person's life.

When I got my start running an online business, I learned very effective methods of finding sources for new audience members. However, instead of building an audience for myself, I immediately sent those people to other businesses. I wasn't building a relationship at all. I was making money by referring people, but I wasn't getting any lasting value. Those businesses, on the other hand, were getting potentially loyal customers. They were building businesses; I was merely making money.

After hitting a few bumps in the road, I figured out that I, too, should build something of lasting value.

And there are few things as valuable as a group of people you've built a quality relationship with. People who will be part of your business for years, as opposed to minutes, hours, or even days.

I recently published an article on Freedom With Writing about building a sustainable income as a writer. One of the readers commented that she was going to save the article and read it every single day. That article, clearly, will have a profound impact on her life. However, will it have a profound impact on my business? Only if I am able to connect with the reader again. Fortunately, she joined our email list, giving us the chance to further develop a relationship with her.

That reader's response to the article demonstrates another important point: People want to be changed by what you have to offer. One effective strategy for creating loyalty is by providing those high-impact moments.

However, without followup, a moment is just a moment, not part of something bigger: A meaningful relationship that lasts and is mutually beneficial.

Develop a Consistent Relationship-Building Strategy

One of the most powerful aspects of relationship building is consistency. As you build your audience, you will need to develop a systematic way of keeping in touch with the members of your audience.

This should be reliable and predictable. You audience should learn to look forward to hearing from you and should be able to predict *when* they'll hear from you next.

This means finding a good reason to keep in regular contact, as well as establishing a consistent schedule.

This could be as simple as a weekly email newsletter or a monthly podcast. It could be an offline event, such as a weekly meetup, a speaking series', a book-reading series, or even an annual conference. Though, with an annual event, you'll need to maintain the relationship between events in other ways.

At Freedom With Writing, we find opportunities for writers to get paid. That's the basic value we give to our audience. That is translated into a weekly email newsletter, sent out on Tuesdays. Our readers have come to expect this newsletter every week. It is predictable. We very rarely miss a week. And if we do, we're likely to get emails from our audience complaining about it.

Network television companies have learned how to take advantage of this. I grew up in the era of TV before live streaming. At the time, NBC was known for comedy on Thursday nights. (I think they still are!) I'm a fan of their show, *The Good Place*. I watch it online but am *very* aware that new episodes air on Thursdays. This is something to look forward to. If they skip a week, which they sometimes do, I find it frustrating.

The point is, if you become part of someone's life in the long term, this happens in a very literal sense. If you can make it predictable, they will figure out how to set aside the time they need to take advantage of what you're giving them.

Stay Focused on Providing Value

As we discussed in the previous chapter, you should offer something of value when somebody signs up to be part of your audience. Further, whatever you offer them, it should tie into your long-term strategy for providing ongoing value.

When we ask someone to sign up to Freedom With Writing, we offer lists of publishers that pay writers. This ties in directly to our regular offering, which includes the same thing: Lists of publishers that pay writers.

Everything we offer our audience members is focused on providing value to them, based on their unique needs.

To do this well, you should pay close attention to the members of your audience.

I launched Mystery Shopper Magazine in conjunction with a thriving community of mystery shoppers who regularly participated in Mystery Shop Forum, an online community I created. The content for the magazine is largely inspired by paying close attention to the discussions taking place

on the forum. There is a lot of overlap between the readers of the magazine and the discussion forum. By reading the forum, it is easy to see what people are interested in reading.

Odds are you don't have a pre-built community waiting for you to provide value. If that's the case, then you'll need to pay close attention to your audience members in another way. As with learning about potential audience members, I am a big fan of one-on-one communication, especially in the beginning. By having a few conversations, you'll often be able to gain insights that you wouldn't be able to otherwise.

One of your primary goals when launching your audience-nurturing efforts is to create a few *recurring categories* of content that you can send to your audience on a regular basis. With Mystery Shopper Magazine, we review companies that mystery shoppers may be interested in working with. This is a regular feature that people come to look forward to.

The other benefit of creating these recurring categories is that you don't have to keep reinventing the wheel. You'll have a much easier time staying in regular communication if you don't have to continually figure out *what* to communicate. By creating these recurring categories, you make your life as an audience-builder much easier.

This leads to the creation of something called an editorial calendar, a common term in the magazine publishing business. In a magazine, there are usually several different regular columns, a feature article, and shorter

pieces that communicate useful tidbits, such as events. All of this is presented in a predictable format and on a predictable schedule. That schedule is usually planned well in advance with an editorial calendar, which becomes, in essence, your medium-term content strategy.

You don't need to publish a magazine to build an audience, but it is useful to think of the slots you want to fill in an editorial calendar, both in terms of learning how to serve your audience, as well as in terms of getting down to the nitty-gritty logistics of communicating with your audience.

Set Expectations, Then Surpass Them

Once you've developed a consistent routine of communicating with your audience, it can be extremely helpful to, on occasion, go over the top by adding surprise value they don't necessarily expect.

For example, Authors Publish produces eBooks that are given away for free. These provide a lot of value at once, deepen the relationship, and increase the credibility of the magazine.

This type of over-the-top content does a lot to establish your reputation and increase the loyalty of your audience. In addition, you can leverage this content to grow your audience as well. Whenever we publish a new eBook, we use that book as a free gift to encourage new people to join our audience.

Not only does this work because we're able to use our own advertising channels, it works because our existing audience members regularly share our ebooks with their friends and associates. We regularly get emails from people requesting a copy of these books, because they heard about it from a friend. (This is in addition to the people that simply are referred to a signup page by their friends.)

Understand Your Purpose and Craft an Identity that Resonates

In any relationship, it is always important to develop trust with the other person in the relationship. One of the key components of that trust is understanding the motivations and goals of the other person.

You can answer that question, by clearly identifying your goals and motivations to your audience members. Your reason for communicating with them should be clear. The purpose behind what you do should be explicit.

If you do this, it will help the audience members to trust you, as well as give them further reasons to stay loyal to you, especially if they resonate with your motivations.

For example, in the world of publishing creative writing, there are many publishers that take advantage of writers, often by charging submission

fees, or running dubious writing contests, or by charging exorbitant fees for publishing services. Authors Publish Magazine has taken a clear stand against all of these things: A big part of the mission at Authors Publish is to help writers steer clear of these types of situations, as well as to support publishers who remain ethical and supportive of writers.

This mission is reflected in everything produced by Authors Publish. Additionally, in every issue of the magazine, there is a link to the guiding principles that explicitly describe the principles of the magazine. This is a big part of why we regularly hear from readers that they support what we're doing. The magazine has a clear mission, the mission resonates with many of the issues encountered by the audience, and the mission is made explicit to the audience. By doing this, Authors Publish gives people profound reasons to support the magazine beyond just the value we are providing them individually. They are supporting the guiding principles as well.

Understand the Segments of Your Audience

If you build a truly large audience, then you'll end up reaching a diverse group of people with a variety of needs and interests, as opposed to just one primary interest.

As you get to know your audience, you will gradually learn about the different sub-groups that you are serving.

There are a few different ways of thinking about these groups that I will cover briefly here.

First, there are the straightforward interest categories. For example, at Authors Publish, we know that many of the audience members are interested in publishing short stories and poetry in literary journals. Those interests provided the original impetus that Caitlin Jans identified when she launched the magazine.

However, after gaining a fair amount of momentum with Authors Publish, she started hearing more and more requests for information about full-length manuscript publishers. There was clearly a large subset of the audience who wanted to learn more about this. Thus, it became a regular part of the magazine.

In addition to interest categories, your audience will also have different *intensity levels* of interest and engagement with the topic at hand. For example, at Mystery Shopper Magazine, we know that many people have heard of mystery shopping, are curious about it, and simply want to learn more. They have different needs and desires than people who have professionally mystery shopped for many years and are making a substantial amount of money with it.

It is relatively easy to identify the intensity level when interacting with someone. Those with just a passing interest usually ask very simple and short questions, such as “How do I get started?” Those with higher

intensity levels will often ask detailed questions that reflect their deeper interest in the subject.

Each group, of course, is best served in different ways. As you develop your audience, keep this in mind. Also, keep in mind ways you can help your audience members increase the intensity of their interest. This can be as simple as providing a clear path forward, so that they can take action, get results, and feel motivated to continue.

Summary

To summarize, these are the key aspects of a long-term relationship building strategy:

Consistent communication. Regular communication builds trust and allows the audience member to integrate you into their life in a predictable way.

Focus on value. By paying close attention to your audience and serving their needs and interests, you will win them over simply because you are making their lives better.

A reason why/purpose. Your audience wants to know why you are serving them. Give them a reason they want to support, and their loyalty will grow. If they believe in what you're working on, they will *want* to be loyal.

Provide surprise value. Though you are providing consistent value, by occasionally providing something unexpected, you will keep your audience engaged, interested, and curious.

Chapter Eight: Create an Unfair Competitive Advantage

When I work to build the audience at Freedom With Writing, all of the pieces of the audience-building framework fit together, amplifying their effectiveness.

This is key to building an unfair advantage in your business. The pieces of the audience-building puzzle shouldn't operate independently, they should work to amplify the other pieces.

For example, when we publish an article at Freedom With Writing, such as a list of publishers seeking essays about parenting, that list serves multiple purposes:

It provides value to our existing audience.

It is used to recruit new audience members via our advertising and social media channels.

The content is later re-purposed to be part of *The Paid Publishing Guidebook*, which lists over 1,400 such publishers. We update this book

twice a year. When we do this, we provide massive value to our audience. We can also offer it as a compelling reason to join our audience.

The content becomes part of an even bigger and easier-to-use database of publishers available to paid customers.

As you can see, the one article fits into multiple aspects of the audience-building puzzle, amplifying its value significantly. It helps generate revenue, nurture the audience, draw in new audience members, and open the door to new sources of audience members.

Another example: In the world of podcasts, it is common to interview celebrities and well-known people in the field. For example, Tim Ferris' popular podcast features interviews with successful entrepreneurs, billionaires, and athletes. These interviews have quite a following; his podcasts have been downloaded nearly half-a-billion times. Incredible!

His audience is well-served by these podcasts. However, the act of publishing these podcasts also works to grow his audience. Not only do many of his interviewees promote the interview to their pre-existing audiences, many of the podcasts show up in Google search results for the celebrities' names.

For example, I just listened to an interview with the entrepreneur Safi Bahcall. When you search his name in Google, his podcast interview

appears in the search results. This serves to bring more people to the podcast.

In fact, I've employed a very similar strategy with the articles for many of the websites I've created. For example, we've systematically reviewed the names of mystery shopping companies for Mystery Shopper Magazine. These reviews subsequently appear in search results. Not only do the reviews serve the audience, they also open the door to new audience members.

As much as possible, all of your audience-building efforts should serve to support multiple aspects of the audience building framework.

The more you're able to do this, the bigger your competitive advantage will be.

But it gets even better.

How?

If we go back and review the audience-building framework, we'll see three main components:

Identify potential audience members

Invite them to join your audience

Build a long-term relationship

Working together, these three components create a snowball effect. The better you get at each one, the more effective everything else will be.

If you find a new source of audience members, you'll potentially end up with more long-term audience members.

If you get better at inviting people to join your audience, you'll end up with more long-term audience members. This will also open doors, in terms of new sources for audience members, because...

If you get better at building a long-term relationship with your audience members, not only will your audience keep growing and become more loyal, they will also support all aspects of your business, including inviting new people to join your audience, funding your audience-building effort, joining your events, buying your products, and even proactively helping you learn about the ways you can serve your audience.

With this framework, you can build an audience that keeps growing and growing. Done right, this framework gives you momentum. There are few things more powerful for a business than a growing and loyal audience.