UNCOVER YOUR DIFFERENCE

Discover Your Unfair Advantage, Captivate the Right People & Cut Through the Noise

FOR ONLINE CONTENT CREATORS

MEERA KOTHAND

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INTRODUCTION

THE BIG, BOLD PROMISE

"Be different."

"Stand out."

"Find your unfair advantage."

That's the remedy, right? The cure-all to ~~thrive~~ *survive* in this huge ocean of online businesses filled with big players and even bigger marketing budgets.

As the owner of a tiny online business, it can feel like you're floundering amid the cacophony of voices. But *standing out* is always lauded as *the* elixir that will help you break through.

Business strategists and authors have been talking about this for years.

This is what Joe Pulizzi, founder of the Content Marketing Institute, refers to as "content tilt." He says that standing out is the best way to have "a fighter's chance of breaking through and becoming relevant." [1] Business strategist Michael Porter [2] says that companies and product ranges that appeal to customers and "stand out from the crowd" have a competitive advantage, and they can do so by developing a differentiation strategy.

And yes, that makes perfect sense!

I've dished out the very same advice to readers only to be met with…

I don't think I'm that different.

I actually have the hardest time figuring out my unfair advantage.

It also raises the question: *Errrmmm, but how?!*

With the gargantuan number of competitors all saying the same things, you can often go from a surge of excitement and a can-do attitude to feeling like you're ten years too late to the game all in a matter of days.

"Experts" and "influencers" are a dime a dozen. Unless you can offer a powerful and distinct difference to your audience, you will appear to have the same content or product or service as everyone else. You will appear to have nothing new to offer.

So how can online businesses like yours and mine—particularly personal brands, content creators, or those wanting to build an expert business (a business based around sharing your expertise)—be different?

You know having an unfair advantage is important, but *how* can you find that and position yourself as the right choice for the right people.

What about you will allow you to differentiate yourself from the competition?

How can you ultimately be a big fish in a small but rich pond?

This book is going to help you do just that!

Uncover Your Difference will introduce you to a series of steps designed to differentiate you from the competition and make you the logical choice for a niche group of people. Because if you don't know how you're different, no one else will.

WHAT DOES BEING DIFFERENT MEAN?

Most of us equate being different with thinking outside the box.

A “box” is a belief or concept, working hypothesis, or a mental model you use to interpret the niche or market. There are boxes that exist in every niche. These are the *shoulds* or *must-dos* —the common or cliché messages.

OpenGenius CEO Chris Griffiths said, “Don’t think outside the box; remove the box entirely.” [3]

The premise of this book is that you **create your own box but don’t forget existing boxes.**

When you create your own box, you probe the existing way of doing things. You question rigid assumptions and “the only paths to success” that you’ve come to believe as true.

But to truly stand out in the noisy online space, you don’t stop there. You question *why* those old boxes are there in the first place. You strive to understand who is controlling those boxes, what they’re saying, and why. [4]

In other words, **you can’t create your own stand without knowing what your audience is subscribing to and how you can create a path of difference.**

WHY IS BEING DIFFERENT IMPORTANT ESPECIALLY TODAY?

No matter which industry you’re operating in, it’s probably a noisy place full of competitors all vying for the attention of your shared audience.

You can’t just expect your audience to understand why they should choose you over a competitor; you need to help them make the choice.

Mark Schaefer, author of the book *Marketing Rebellion* said, “The customers are creating their own funnel. There’s only one single strategy that creates loyalty in customers, and that is meaning, and values, and that’s what’s leading this trend…What differentiates today is meaning.” [5]

Seth Godin says, “You have to figure out who you will disappoint or offend.

Most of all, you have to be clear about what's important and what you won't or can't do." [6]

If everyone feels connected to your brand and business, no one is going to feel connected to your brand and business.

Real authority and influence happen over time when you dare to break away from the crowd...

When you create new lines of thought and rules that the competition doesn't address…

When you bring a specific point of view (POV) to the niche you're serving.

This is based on your unique skill set, your values, and your experiences. **It's like your online DNA.**

The clearer you are about what you stand for, the more you'll be able to attract an audience that resonates with your business.

When you uncover your difference, you'll be able to rally your community (no matter how small) around your approach and POV.

You won't ever fear that your competition has similar products or content to yours because you know that you target different markets and buyers who want different things.

This book will point you in the right direction to do that and give you the tools to help you build your *own* box.

Now, let's get the definitions out of the way.

WHO ARE CONTENT CREATORS & ONLINE EXPERTS?

If you're using your content and expertise to make a living online, you're a content creator. But many content creators may identify with other labels such as the following:

the following:

Blogger – You may have a blog that you post content on regularly. You may drive traffic from Pinterest, Instagram, or Twitter to your blog to grow an audience by converting readers into email subscribers. You may also be using your blog as a source of revenue by displaying ads but that isn't your primary business model. You use it in conjunction with other revenue streams like coaching or digital products.

YouTuber – You may have a YouTube channel and use it primarily to share content and attract an audience. You may have a website you use in conjunction with your YouTube channel to turn YouTube subscribers into email subscribers. You may also be generating revenue from YouTube ads, but that isn't your primary business model. You use it in conjunction with other revenue streams like coaching or digital products.

Podcaster – You may have a podcast and use it primarily to share content and attract an audience. You may have a website you use in conjunction with your podcast to turn listeners into email subscribers. You may have also sponsors for your podcast, but that isn't your primary business model. You use it in conjunction with other revenue streams like coaching or digital products.

Coach or service provider – You may have a YouTube channel, blog, or podcast to share content with your audience, but you work with people one-on-one by coaching them in an area of your expertise, which could be anything from helping people launch their own fashion label to helping them take charge of their health to helping them become better writers.

Online entrepreneur – You may have a YouTube channel, blog, or podcast, but you thrive on creating content through courses or other digital products, coaching and consultancy, or even providing a service as part of your business model (or the way you generate revenue).

THE BRAND ANCHOR FRAMEWORK

Most entrepreneurs view their brand as simply their colors, logos, or a step further, the emotional response elicited from your customers when they think of

further, the emotional response elicited from your customers when they think of you, your products, or your services.

But this is just one tiny aspect.

I love this explanation on branding from the founder & CEO of Gallant: [7] "A business becomes a brand when it transcends its category of origin. It takes an existing core equity, or a particular philosophy, and it infuses that idea into everything it does, furthering its reputation or world view one product, service or line extension at a time."

To be a successful online creator and expert—whether you're new to the online space or someone more seasoned—you have to figure out what you stand for as a business…

How can you create a message that resonates powerfully with your ideal audience and makes you memorable?

How can you anchor your brand in the minds of your ideal customers?

This isn't about just identifying your products or services, your colors, or your logo. This isn't about dominating on Instagram or having a beautifully curated feed either.

It's about who you are as a brand and business and what you believe in aside from your product or service.

In this book, we'll employ the **Brand Anchor Framework** and how this specifically applies to content creators like you. Three specific pins drive this brand-building framework, and you need to figure out all three to have a solid strategy.

1. Discover Your Stake or Parking Space

How can you position your brand or business in relation to others in your space? If you've done any kind of research on how to market your products and services, you've probably heard about the concept of brand positioning. But if

you feel like the entire concept of positioning continues to remain abstract and unclear to you, I'll share a simple method to figure this out.

We'll also dive into uncovering your POV. Your POV reveals what you stand for and what your message is.

2. Identify Your Brand's 2Vs (Verbal & Visual)

Verbal - Visual elements pervade every aspect of how you show up online. This is how your business is perceived and how people recognize your brand not just visually but verbally as well.

It brings your brand's personality to life such that it allows your audience to remember you and form a connection with your brand (whether your brand is YOU or a different entity). It helps you lend an identifier to the box you're building.

We'll discuss the following:

- **Your Language**
  Identify words and phrases that can rally your audience around your brand and products through a system of tools.

- **Your Story**
  If you think you don't have a single storytelling bone in your body, this chapter will walk you through simple strategies you can use to tell stories that build trust and boost sales. You'll get acquainted with a system to identify and share the right stories based on who the story is intended for.

- **Your Visual Identity**
  You'll discover, beyond your color palette and logo, what visual elements contribute to a content creator's brand personality.

3. Build Your Brand Ecosystem

In this section, I specifically want to tackle your online footprint and building a brand ecosystem.

brand ecosystem

within which your POV and stories will pervade and attract your ideal audience.

A quick warning.

While these three pins will give you a base to work on, truly embracing the full potential of the Brand Anchor Framework will require a practice of continual observation, curiosity for conversations and beliefs, and at times, even a contrarian perspective.

Imagine standing out as the obvious choice to a small portion of your market—a small portion of the market whose needs the big players aren't serving.

Imagine baking uniqueness into everything you offer and every message you bring to market…

If you've ever thought "I don't think I'm that different…" remember that you are delightfully and maddeningly unique.

If you're ready, let's go!

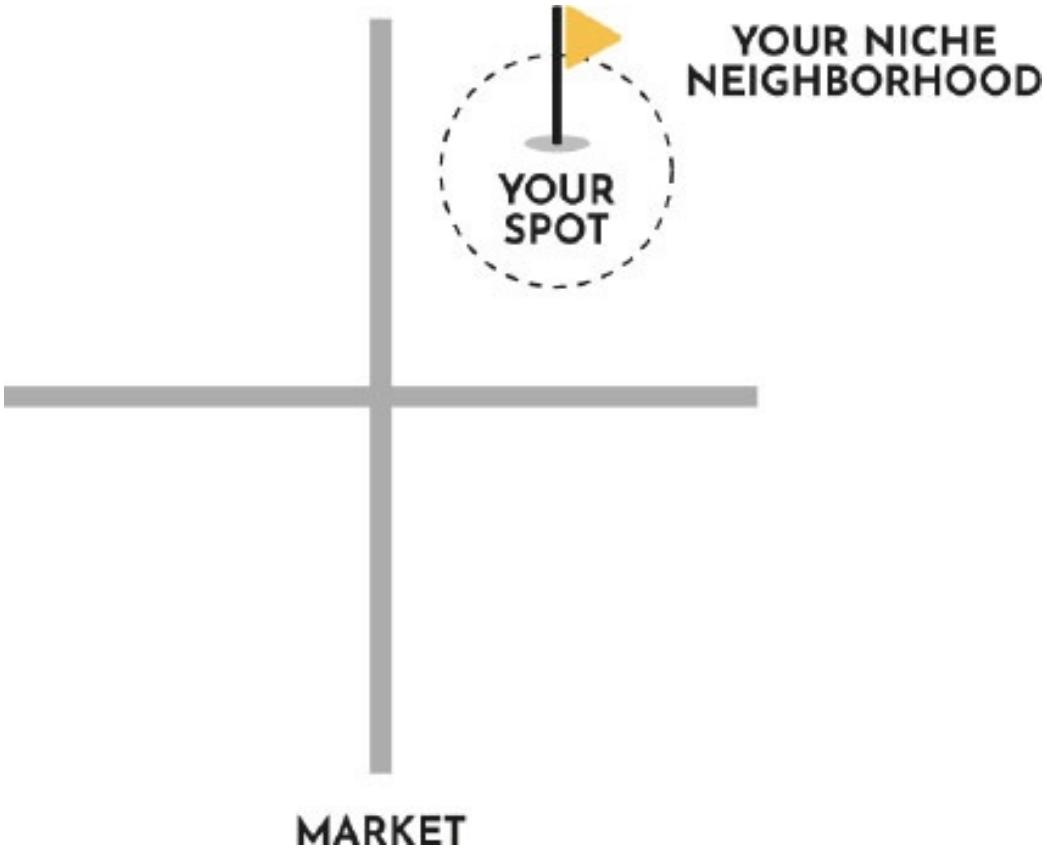
> You can download your copy of the *Stand Out Workbook* and bonus resources at https://meera.tips/uncoveryourdifference .

SECTION I

YOUR STAKE OR PARKING SPACE IN THE MARKET

According to Market Business News, a market is “any place where makers, distributors or retailers sell, and consumers buy.” [8] A niche market [9] is a subset of this market serving a specialized set of needs or segment of people. For example, general VA services vs. VA services for authors, email marketing vs. email marketing for bloggers, or fitness for gym-goers vs. fitness for nerds. I like viewing this subset as your niche neighborhood.

Every niche neighborhood is made up of various content creators. They may be bloggers, vloggers, podcasters, coaches, or entrepreneurs. Their label doesn’t matter. Ultimately, they all contribute to the literature or the conversation in this neighborhood.



The term “markets are conversations” stems from *The Cluetrain Manifesto.* [10] No brand or business exists in isolation in a market. Your brand and business exist in a market together with other brands and businesses. You have to understand the niche neighborhood in which you exist to grow your audience, business, and platform.

Many brands, due to sheer size and resources available to them, occupy a bigger share of the market. The more similar your conversation is to these players, the more you sound like them, the less you stand out, and the smaller the piece of the pie you take.

If you engage in a different conversation, you earn a spot in the market with an audience that chooses to engage with you.

Before you head into picking the conversations you want to engage in, it's important to know who the voices are in the market in the first place. It's important to get clear about whether they really are your competition.

The better you're able to understand the people and conversations taking place in your niche neighborhood, the better you'll be able to steer your own conversation. This will set you apart from those around you, help you break the mold, defy conventions, and stand out. Because you don't want to say what everyone else is saying.

In this section, you'll uncover exactly how to do that.

CHAPTER 1

UNCOVER YOUR SPOT

Some businesses stoke those fires of envy.

Maybe it's the way they churn out tutorial videos with ease, are on five different social platforms without breaking a sweat, post blog posts every other day, or have three specifically targeted newsletters for their audience segments.

Before you throw your hands up in despair because you'll never be like them, stop and consider the following:

Are you speaking about the same things? Targeting the same people? Are they in your niche neighborhood?

Are they *really* your competition?

Most people cringe at the word *competition or influencers.*

But getting clear about who your competitors are will help you ditch the overwhelm that comes from thinking you have to do it like them.

This is where positioning comes into play.

Philip Kotler, known as the Father of Modern Marketing, defined positioning as "The act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market." [11]

Positioning tells you how you differ from your competitors and where you are in relation to them.

Think about Hermes vs. Kate Spade. Or Trader Joe's vs. Walmart. Or Subaru vs. Porsche.

They differ in terms of the types of products they carry, their price points, and the types of customers they serve. All of these companies make money, but they are each positioned differently in the market. Some may be cheap while others are expensive. Some may be luxury while others are mass market retail. Some may focus on efficiency while others focus on safety and reliability.

They know their specific parking spot in their market and how they appeal to different audiences.

When you know your competitors, their offers, and their positions, you have a clear understanding of what's available to your audience. From here you'll be better able to uncover gaps and opportunities.

But how does this apply to personal brands and content creators? How do you find your stake or parking space?

WHERE IS YOUR STAKE OR PARKING SPACE IN THE MARKET?

We can discover this in a few steps.

Step 1: Identify the parameters of your business

You start by identifying the parameters of your business or your big business idea, i.e., your market. You then drill down to your core business or niche neighborhood.

Note

This is a concept I spoke about in my book The Blog Startup as well.

Market > Submarket > Niche Neighborhood (for who and/or how)

Big business umbrella (market): Photography

BUT not just any type of photography (submarket): DIY Photography

Not for everyone but (niche neighborhood): DIY Photography for Food Bloggers

Here are other examples: Relationships > Parenting > Parenting Tweens

Health > Weight Loss > Weight Loss for Busy Moms

If you already have an existing offer or offers, you could start by defining your offer in its simplest form.

Heard of the duck test? [12]

“If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.”

Is this a course on **email marketing** ?

Is this an e-book on **stitching** ?

Is this a workshop on **dating** ?

That category is the market you are a part of.

Let’s take it a step further.

Step 2: Pick two attributes to plot your spot using a simple positioning map/graph

By placing two attributes of the product/service you offer on a map or graph,

you can plot where your competitors sit in the market.

If you're a service provider, are you serving solopreneurs or small teams? Are you offering a high-end or a done-with-you service?

If you're a course or digital product creator, the same would apply. Do you serve beginners or people who are more advanced? Beginners are often problem unaware. They may not be aware of their pain points whereas people who are more advanced are actively "shopping" and looking for solutions to their pain points.

Another way is to think about whether you offer strategy or tactics. Strategy "gives you the path you need" to hit your mission, goals, or milestones. Tactics are "concrete and are often oriented toward smaller steps and a shorter time frame." [13] Strategy is the "'thinking' aspect that precedes the 'doing.'" Tactics are the "doing" that follows the thinking. [14]

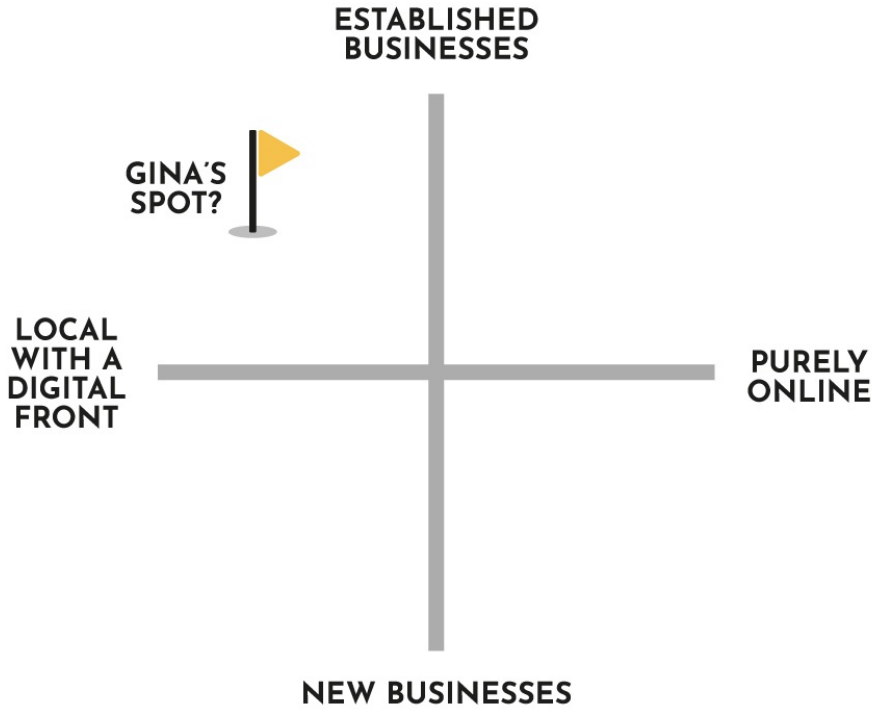
For instance, you will seldom see me sharing "how to" tech tutorials. You will seldom see me sharing how to set up a WordPress blog or your email service provider. Yes, I could very well show you how. But sharing tactics—the on-the-ground hacks—is not where I thrive and how I want to serve. I would rather send you to someone who does this better.

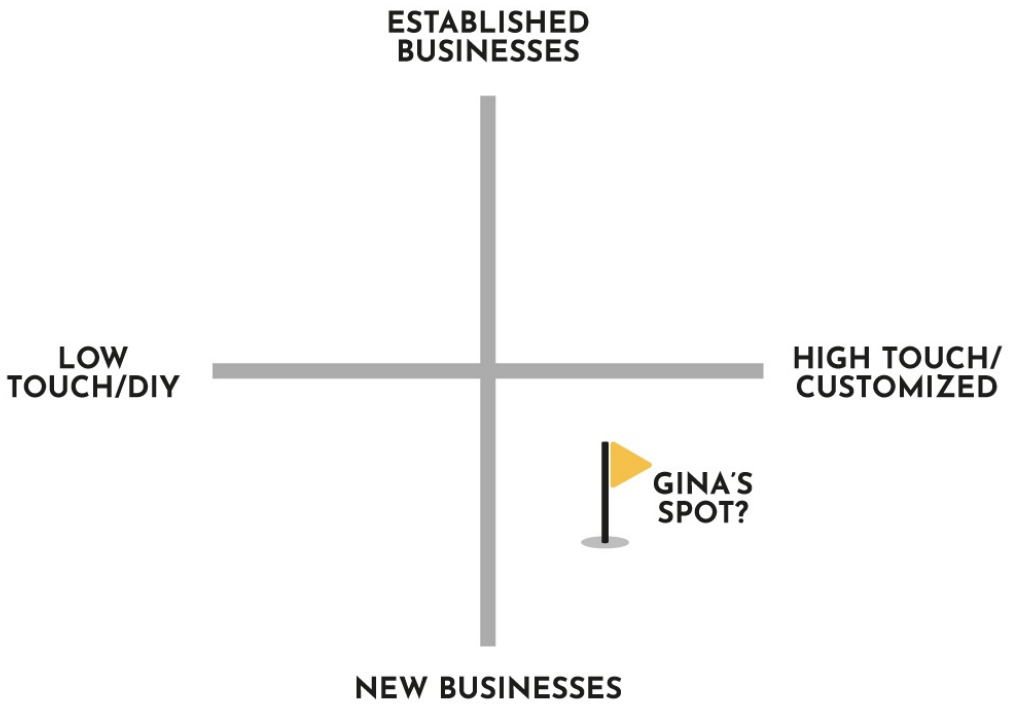
Now, let's apply this to some case studies.

CASE STUDY – SERVICE PROVIDER

Gina is a WordPress designer working with female business owners. As a service provider, her positioning is determined by a few factors. The audience she speaks to and the pain points and needs they have will vary according to how she chooses her position or spot in the market. Here are a few different variables she can consider when determining her spot. Note: If you're a new business owner, you can also use this exercise to identify a gap or spot available for you to fill.

OPTION	Is she serving new business owners vs. established businesses that

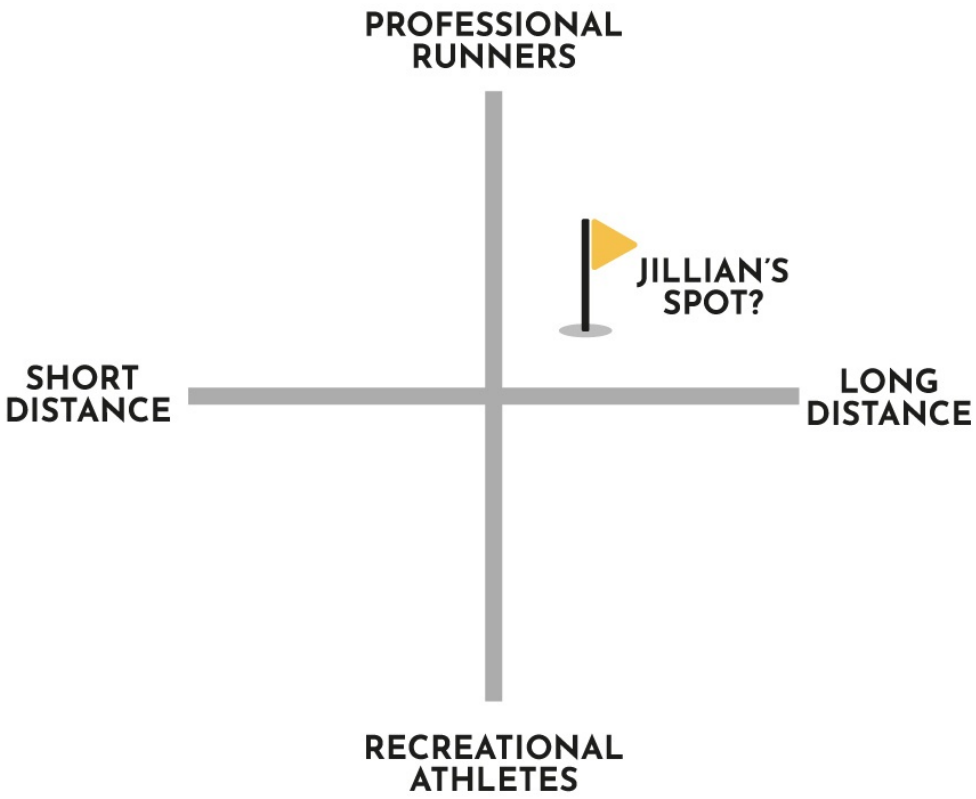
OPTION 1	Is she serving new business owners vs. established businesses that are primarily online businesses vs. local businesses with a digital storefront? 
OPTION 2	Alternatively, is she serving new business owners vs. established businesses by offering them a high-touch, customized service vs. a productized service with a quick turnaround (e.g., website in a day)?

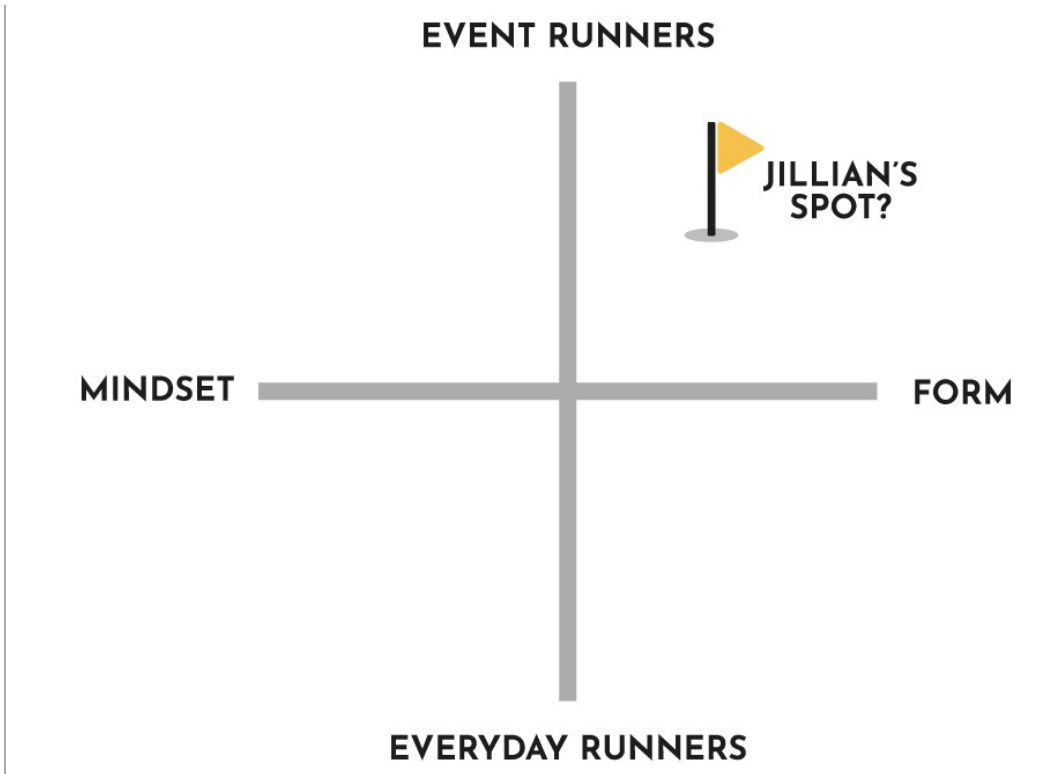


CASE STUDY – COACH

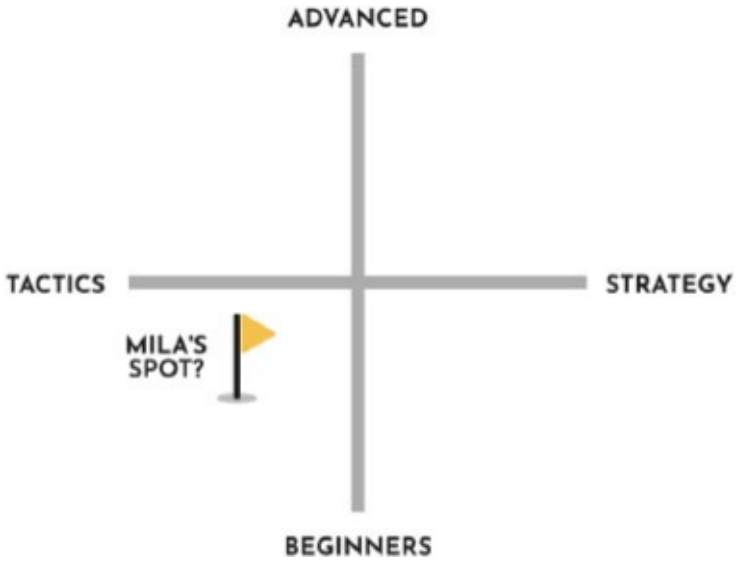
Jillian is a running coach. There are several types of runners: those who specifically train for competitions and events like marathons, those who are everyday runners, and those who are recovering from injuries. Each runner benefits from the attention, knowledge, and guidance of a coach but has different needs. Here are a few different position variables Jillian can consider when determining her spot.

OPTION 1	She could choose to serve professional runners whose livelihoods depend on performance vs. recreational athletes who are physically active but who do not train for competitions at the same level of intensity and focus as a competitive runner. She could also choose to serve short-distance vs. long-distance runners.

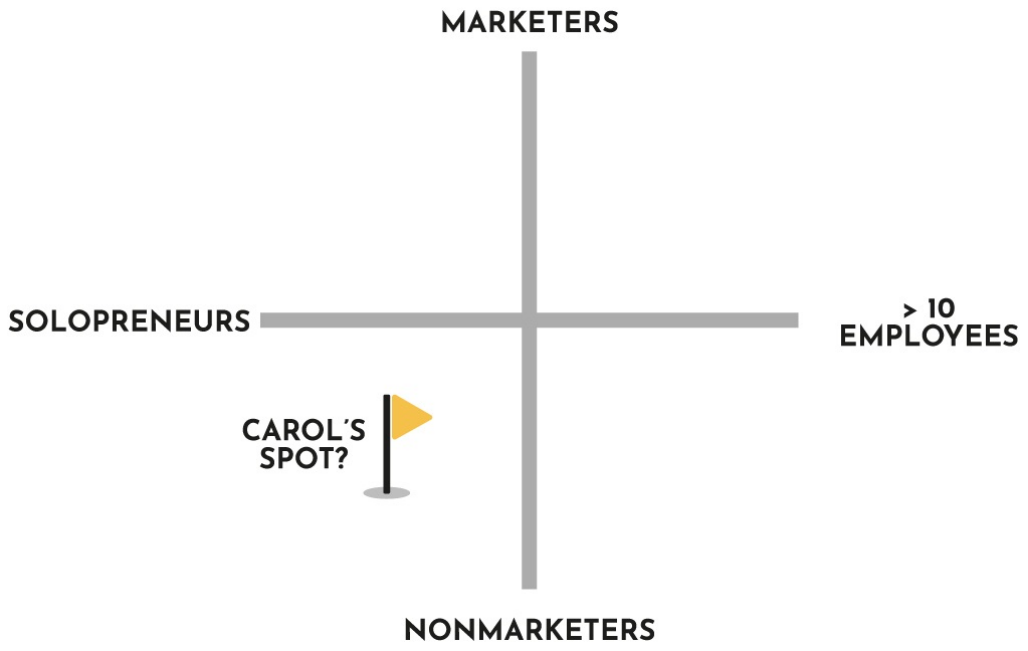
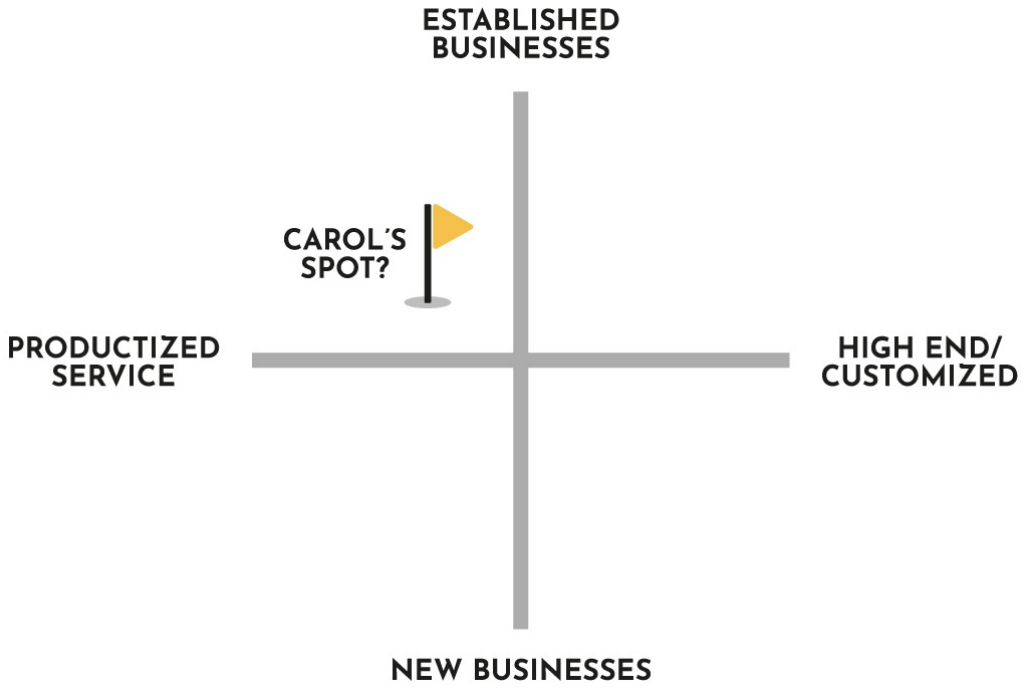
	
OPTION 2	Alternatively, she could choose to serve beginner runners training for an event vs. beginner runners who lead busy lives and need help balancing and prioritizing workouts and runs. She could focus on mindset vs. offer focused help with injury recovery, running form, and breathing techniques.

CASE STUDY – COURSE CREATOR Mila is a content marketing strategist and digital product creator.	
OPTION 1	Is she serving beginners or advanced users with a focus on strategy or tactics? **Content strategy** involves planning and guiding content creation so that it aligns with the business's needs and goals. It takes a look at the customers' needs and the business's needs and how to tie them both together. **Content tactics** are actions taken to *support* the content strategy—what social media platforms to use, which channels to use for distribution of that content, what metrics to use to measure content performance, SEO of content, and so on.

CASE STUDY – AGENCY Carol runs a PR & visibility agency. Here are a few variables that can determine her business's positioning as an agency.	
OPTION 1	Is she serving marketers vs. nonmarketers who are solopreneurs vs. companies with 10+ employees?

	
OPTION 2	Alternatively, is she serving new businesses vs. established businesses by offering them a high-touch, customized service vs. a productized service (e.g., VIP PR plan in a week)? 

Where you choose to position yourself is **YOUR CHOICE** . I've seen every variation possible.

I know people who offer nothing buy high-ticket packages to beginner coaches and consultants. I also know of people who only offer programs for less than $200 to absolute beginners. Who you choose to serve, how you choose to serve them, and the platforms you market your content on are your choice.

Over time you may realize that people come to you for certain things, and this may clarify your positioning further. You may find that most of your ideal customers are more advanced in their skill set than you originally thought or that they are more novice than you anticipated. Or maybe most of them are working a 9-to-5 rather than working from home.

Once you identify these patterns, you refine your positioning. You speak directly to these people whom you have identified through patterns. You get more targeted with every net you cast.

If you're just starting out, think about a spot that is poorly served by your competitors or existing players in the market. Is there an opportunity gap that you can fill? Consider the audience you want to serve and the content available to them before you answer this question. For instance, when I started out, there was plenty of email marketing advice for B2B firms and huge companies but hardly any in-depth information tailored to personal brands and solopreneurs. That was an opportunity gap that I wanted to fill.

The way you position yourself affects who your competitors are and assumptions about your brand and offers. Focus on one spot or segment you can stand out in. Is this segment big enough?

Your niche neighborhood needs to meet at least two criteria to be worthy of focus:

1. It needs to be big enough that it's possible to meet the goals of your business.

2. It needs to have important, specific, unmet needs that are common to the segment or niche neighborhood.

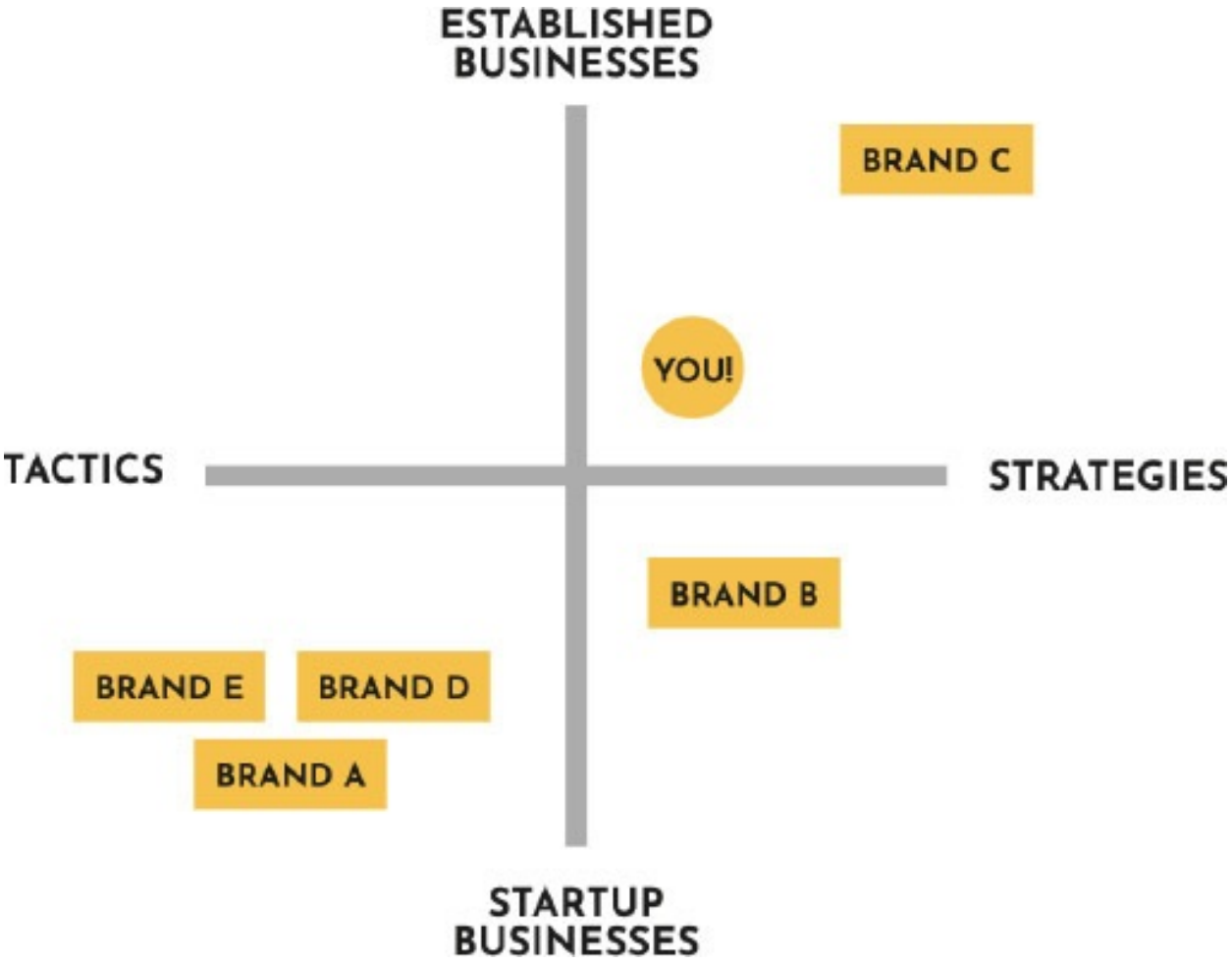
If the market is big enough to support your revenue goals, you will automatically attract an audience that is interested in solving this pain point.

Step 3: Identify your competitors

Which competitors are parked right beside you?

Who is in your quadrant in your niche neighborhood?

Who are the noticeable players in your market? Jot them down as well.



How different is your offer from Person A's Offer X?

I was considering your offer or Influencer B's offer.

Have you received comments like these?

These comments are gold because they highlight who your audience would approach if you didn't exist. These are people in your niche neighborhood.

You want to be the obvious choice for your audience, and to do this, you need to identify the options they are choosing from.

If you didn't exist, where would your audience go?

Who has similar offers in the same category?

What other products deliver on the benefit or value of products in the category of your offer?

Who does your audience compare your offers or content against?

You could also consider adjacent offers. You don't just consider those offering a digital product, but also those who offer services or coaching in the same category.

Often we tend to only look at people who have similar business models to us. For instance, when you only consider people who are course creators, you may neglect the voices who are in the same niche neighborhood, serving the same audience but via different business models such as coaching or offering a done-for-you service.

When you look at adjacent alternatives or substitutes, you will then be able to identify all relevant players in your niche neighborhood.

Now that you know which competitors are in your niche neighborhood, how are

you **NOT** like them? This is where you differentiate yourself with a POV, which we'll tackle next.

ACTION

Can you plot your spot? What variables can you pick to decide your spot?

Pick any two combinations for your axis and draw them out on a piece of paper or use the *Stand Out Workbook* . What makes sense for your business?

CHAPTER 2

UNCOVER YOUR POINT OF VIEW (POV)

Now that you know who the voices in your niche neighborhood are, let's identify the dominant messages or points of view.

What exactly is a message?

A message is the main idea, POV, or takeaway you want people to understand and remember about your brand and/or products. It articulates what you stand for, why you are different, what value you offer, and what problems you solve.

These are key points used to communicate with your audience so that they resonate with your brand and offers.

This is different from how product-based or SaaS companies would identify their key points of difference. They work by isolating features and attributes that make their products different. But for content creators, this works by identifying your stand or POV.

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE YOUR POV?

Start by looking out for the following:

1. Common or cliché sayings in your niche market that anger you or that you disagree with
2. What's considered the holy grail of success or must-take steps to success

Many of these may not be earth-shattering, polarizing, or controversial in any way. And this is fine!

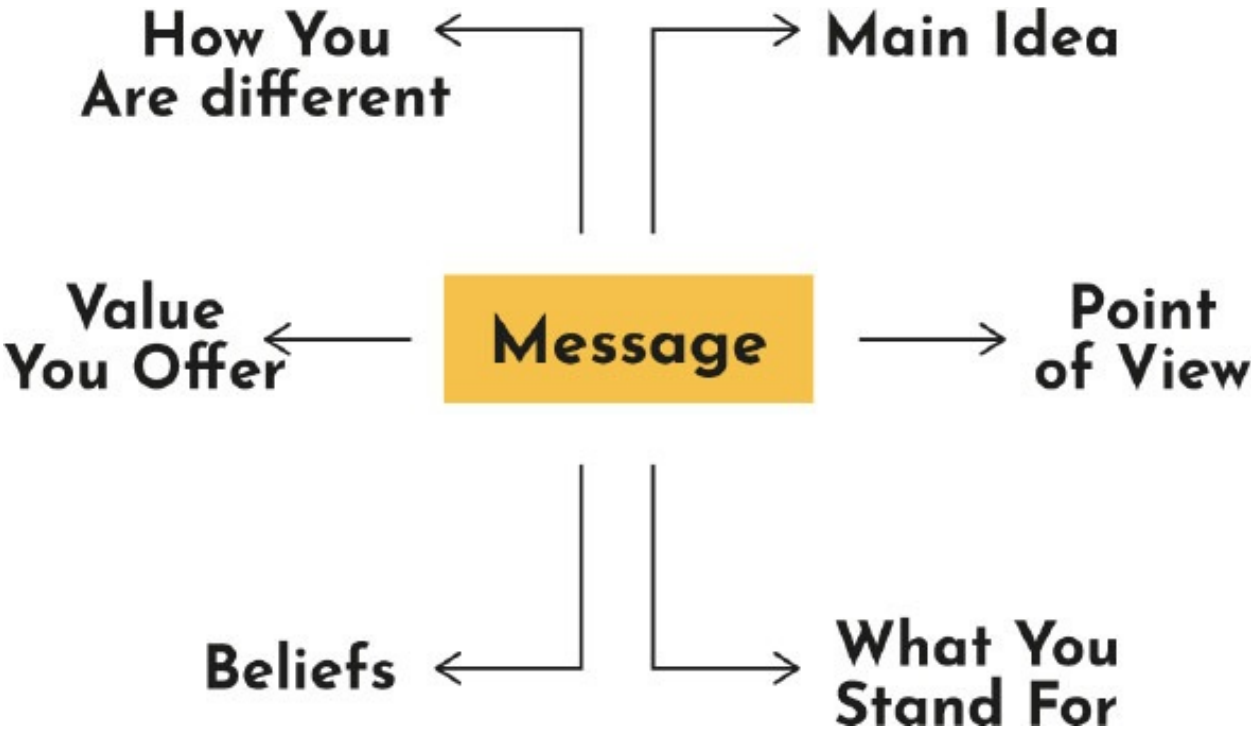
Remember, just because it's being said by everyone and it's the predominant line of thought does not mean that it's the only way of doing things. This will be hard because we're so used to taking most things at face value. Like I said, this will require a continual practice of observation and questioning.

Follow your hunches and your *hmmm…that doesn't really sound right* .

How are some of the common messages in the market shaping your existing beliefs or ways of working? How could they be deceiving you? How are some of them holding you back from thinking in more open-minded and creative ways? When you find any voices touting a specific strategy or way of doing things for everybody or for all markets, regardless of whether you're a physical product creator, fiction writer, course creator, or coach, those are the ones that you want to examine with a critical eye.

Can these strategies or beliefs be challenged, questioned, or completely debunked?

Having analyzed the conversations and the existing boxes, consider which are the most essential issues or perspectives or questions you want to address or investigate further. You don't want to pick on all of them. You only pick what is relevant to the audience you want to serve and the ones that fall within your niche neighborhood.



Now that you know the boxes you want to investigate, question, and analyze, here's how you craft your message or POV. We'll think about these along the 3Cs Triangle.

Contrast

Say the opposite of what they're saying.

E.g., A membership is not a revenue stream beginners should attempt because…
A course should not be your first product because…

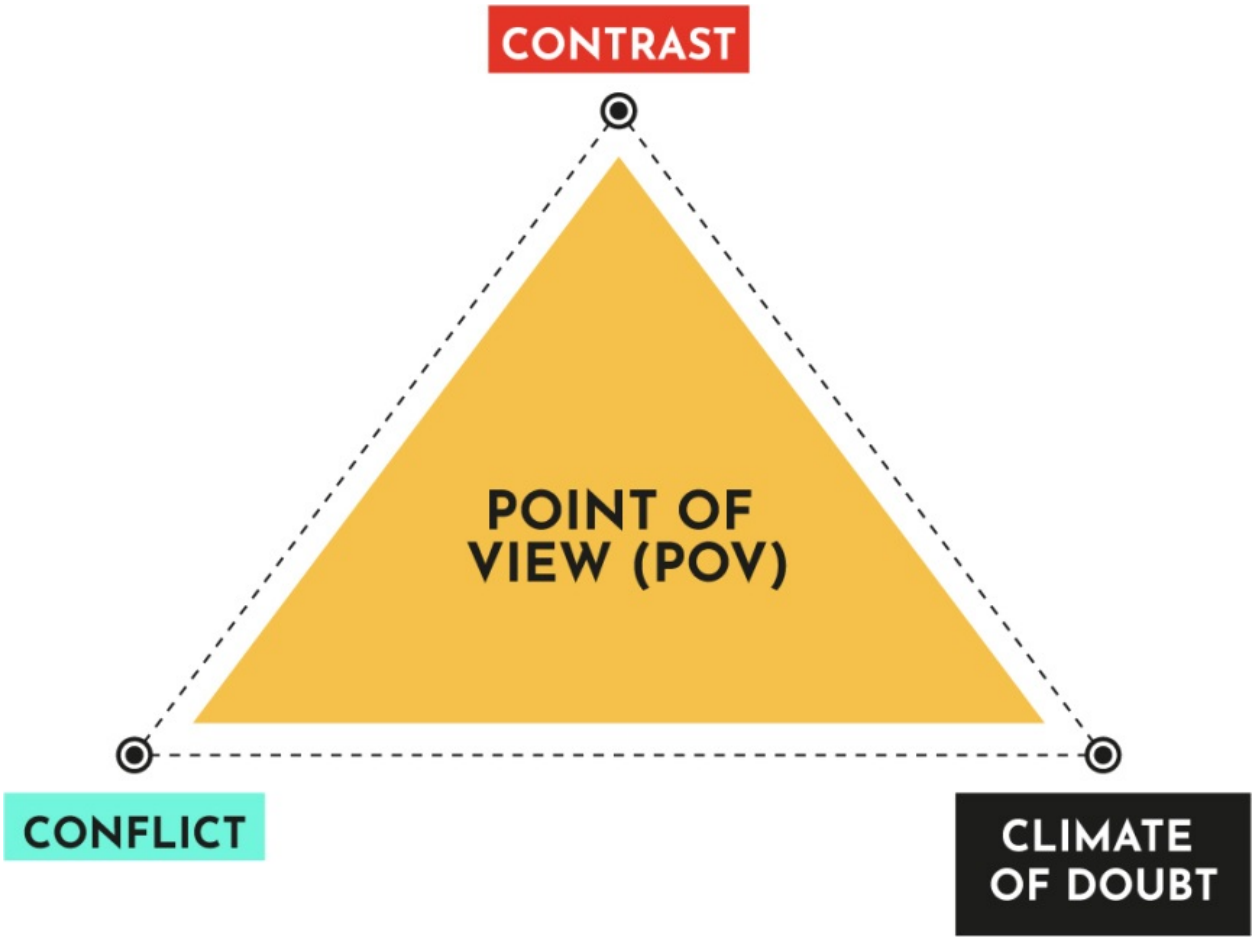
Conflict

Present whatever they're saying in a different way.

This is where your secret sauce comes in. These are your methods, frameworks, and processes. Can you present the existing information in a way that no one has before? Can you make it simple to understand? Are you doing it in a way that no one has before?

Create a climate of doubt

Attack the message either by sowing seeds of doubt or saying something completely different. But make sure you can back up your stand. You can do this without calling out names or hurting anyone.



When you follow the 3Cs, it catches the attention of those around you. It adds novelty to a conversation that might have been going on in your niche for years.

Your POV shouldn't be a rant. Put your message into the context of a goal your ideal customer or reader is trying to achieve.



What does it mean for them? What can they do with this?

What's your alternative pathway in relation to what they're trying to achieve?

Is it desirable and something your competitors don't say?

Does it draw your reader in and make them want to know more even if they may not entirely believe what you're saying at first?

Is it expressed in a way they haven't heard before?

Think of yourself as an advocate. An advocate upholds and defends a cause. Who and what are you an advocate of and do your ideal customers buy into it?

This helps customers quickly figure out what your product is all about and whether or not they should consider purchasing it.

For instance, my POV is that a course shouldn't be the first product you create and that marketing should be baked into the product creation process. I present my alternative pathway in my program Product in 7, and this relates to the goal or transformation my audience is trying to attain.

Your POV or message will help you answer the following questions:

- Why should they choose your brand [over the alternative]?
- Why should they choose your product or service [over the alternative]?
- Why is your offer an important part of the conversation?
- Why should they choose your content or choose to be on your email list [over the alternative]?
- What's that really great thing your ideal customer is going to get from you that they can't get elsewhere?

FAQ 1: I talk about a few different topics. Does this mean that I need to have a POV or specific approach for each of my topics or categories?

Yes, you do. But you don't have to come up with all of them immediately. If you're a new business, what I've suggested in all of my previous books is to start with a topic or category that you want to be known for. People will start to

identify your business with your approach, POV, or perspective on that topic or category.

Weave your alternative pathway into your products and services. If you already have multiple offers—whether these are a mix of digital products or coaching or services—each offer has to have its own POV or approach so that customers can determine why they need to consider purchasing them.

The POV or approach of your brand and your products should be linked.

When people experience your brand, you want them to have a cohesive experience. So you don't want your messages (your stand or POV or perspective) to contradict one another. You want your brand messages to cascade down to your offers as well.



While you may have different products, campaigns, or offers, there are interconnecting nodes that link them all to a central theme. Your approach and your message get your target audience's buy-in.

This is how you position your products in the marketplace as well.

ACTION

What are the common messages in your niche neighborhood right now? Based on the 3Cs, what's your unique POV or angle to the existing conversation? Where is the opportunity for you to get noticed? You may already be sharing some of these unknowingly. Use the workbook to work through these questions.

SECTION II

YOUR BRAND'S 2Vs (VISUAL & VERBAL)

The 2V elements (Visual & Verbal) are the behavioral and emotional means through which you share your brand's message or POV.

It allows your audience to remember you and form a connection with your business or brand whether your brand is YOU or a different entity. It helps you lend an identifier to the box you're building.

There are several tools that will give you ideas to flesh out your Visual - Verbal elements. These tools provide a base to start with for someone new to the online space. You don't have to utilize all of these tools, and many of them you'll build up over time. So don't worry if you haven't utilized all of these tools in your own business.

Before you head into the next few chapters, it's useful to think about your brand's character or archetype. Some brands are serious and sophisticated, while others are playful and fun. Aligning your brand with an archetype helps to project a consistent brand experience across various platforms. It helps to create an emotional connection with your target audience by telling them what to feel and how to perceive your brand.

Archetypes are based on Swiss psychologist Carl Jung's theory that there are twelve universal archetypes. Each of these archetypes has a powerful identity with its own set of characteristics, values, attitudes, and behaviors. Each of us tends to have one archetype that dominates our personality. We can use this very same concept for our brands as well.

I won't go into detail on what these specific twelve archetypes are, but you can find out more at this resource. [15]



Source: https://mapandfire.com/field-guide/brand-archetypes/

There are several variations of this exercise, and some prefer to use words such as journalist, scientist, teacher, or straight shooter. Your own style could straddle across two personalities.

To make this exercise easier, start by identifying the values that are essential to the identity of your business. What are core values that go to the root of who you are as a brand, not just things that are important in general like honesty or trust? Here is a sample list of words to help with this exercise:

Respect	Empowerment	Strength
Honesty	Freedom	Power
Justice	Fun	Reliability
Vision	Courage	Intelligence
Love	Trust	Expertise
Imagination	Loyalty	Tradition

What archetypes correlate with the words you've chosen?

Is there one distinctive archetype, or is it actually more of a blend of two or even three of these types? What do you want your audience to see or feel when they connect with your brand?

Have this in mind as you go through the following chapters on

- Language
- Story
- Visual Identity

CHAPTER 3

UNCOVER YOUR LANGUAGE

There are a few elements that make up your language. We'll kick off this chapter by discussing your brand voice.

1. IDENTIFY YOUR BRAND VOICE

The words, tone, and style you use in your writing say a lot about your brand. Brand voice is the distinct personality a brand takes with its communications.

It's not just what you say. But *how* you're saying it.

While businesses give a lot of attention to brand style guides, brand voice is often overlooked.

Like it or not, if you're publishing content, you already have a brand voice—whether it's in a personal capacity where your business is your name (e.g., Meerakothand.com) or your business is a separate entity.

Even if you're the only person managing all the content and communications of your brand, a brand voice document is useful to have and maintain.

What phrases and stylistic choices does your brand use on a consistent basis? What words or phrases do you avoid or are a no-no considering your business archetype?

A brand voice should be consistent across your content pieces, content channels, and brand touchpoints.

Imagine being witty on Facebook but being all serious on Instagram or on your blog. It sends mixed messages about who your brand really is. Worse, that it's

blog. It sends mixed messages about who your brand really is. Worse, that it's managed by a bunch of different people with different personalities, or that you sound like others in your niche.

If you're not careful, you can end up with a random concoction of voices and tones in the content you produce across different platforms. You start attracting disparate segments of people and end up confusing your target audience as a result.

That said, just as we show different sides of our personality to different people, there is room to show different sides of your brand in different situations as long as they are not starkly different.

The key is finding a balance.

Here are a few questions to ask to start discovering your brand voice:

How do you talk about yourself and your business?

What phrases or words do you tend to repeat? How do you talk about yourself or the work you do?

Who do you NOT want to be and what do you want to avoid?

Knowing who you aren't is just as helpful as knowing who you are. Are there buzzwords you hate or phrases you want to avoid? For instance, slang words or technical jargon and commonly-used marketing phrases such as bae, ultimate, and next level. For instance, mompreneur, mom boss, and boss babe are not a part of my brand's language. Are there brands you dislike for their tone? If everyone in your niche sounds the same or is trying to attract a certain persona, this is your opportunity to stand out and avoid that persona altogether.

When people interact with your brand, how do you want them to feel?

What emotional experience do you want to deliver for your audience? What's your brand's message and how can your brand voice help to reinforce that?

Something I've raised in other books of mine is to pick three attribute words to describe your brand.

Is your brand funny, warm, girly, or quirky?

Or is it sophisticated, modern, and serious?

Take cues from your archetype. This will give you an idea of the type of words you should be picking. Make sure these words align with your brand archetype. For instance, attribute words such as girly and warm are in direct contrast to the brand archetype Sage.

If you find that your attribute words are in contrast with your brand archetype, reflect on how you'll reconcile this difference. Do you need to change your attribute words? Are you identifying your brand by what you *think* it should be rather than what your brand really is?

If your brand isn't you and is a different entity, the same process applies. Think of your brand as a person. How would you describe him or her?

The words you've identified with your brand will also influence your writing voice. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions—just what's right for your brand and the target audience you identified in the earlier section.

The above are pertinent questions that will help guide you to define and refine your brand voice.

Here are four steps you can take to define your brand voice even further:

1. What words describe your brand?

Pick 3–5 words.

Now that you have identified these words, qualify what these aren't in short statements.

For instance, your **brand is confident but not arrogant or brazen.**

Confident: We're super happy you loved the resource and that it was helpful for your business.

Unsure: We hope you'll find this useful.

Brazen: Yasss! We did it again! That's what we like to hear. Get moving.

Honest but not curt or overly apologetic…

Honest: I'm not sure what went wrong, but I'm happy to fix it for you. Do let us know if there's anything else we can help with.

Curt: Mistakes happen and we're sorry that it did. But I got it fixed for you, and you should see things restored in your account.

Overly apologetic: This is completely unacceptable. We apologize for the error. I'll do everything in my power to sort this out for you.

2. How does your tone differ according to situations?

Like I mentioned earlier, your voice is consistent, but your tone can vary according to different situations.

On social you could loosen up a bit. Perhaps be more generous with your use of memes or emojis or exclamation points. When you're dealing with customers, you're empathetic and compassionate but not overly apologetic. On media and other platforms (summits, interviews, podcasts), you have a more authoritative tone.

According to Nielsen Norman Group, there are four primary voice dimensions: [16]

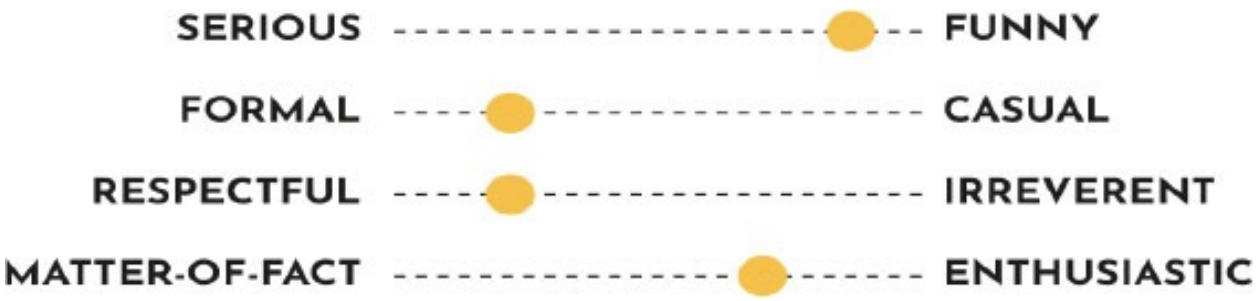
• Serious versus Funny

• Formal versus Casual

• Formal versus Casual

• Respectful versus Irreverent

• Matter-of-fact versus Enthusiastic



One message can be conveyed in several possible tones by dialing up or down on these voice dimensions.

Let's consider a situation that every content creator will come across: A sign-up form that isn't working or a download that's just not delivering.

Let's use the voice matrix [17] and dial up and down on each of the dimensions.

Let's try a serious, formal, respectful, and matter-of-fact response.

"*We apologize. There seems to be a technical issue and we are working hard to get it fixed."*

Let's dial down on the seriousness and make it more casual.

"I'm sorry! I'm not sure what's wrong. Let me have a look and get back to you in just a bit."

Let's add in more enthusiasm.

"Ahhh! I must have broken something! Haven't had my coffee yet. Let me fix that and aet back to vou in a iiffv!"

Which of these would work best for you? Consider what fits in with your brand voice. You could also identify common scenarios you come across as a brand and categorize them into the different tones you would and wouldn't use.

Common scenarios could be:

- A customer complaint
- A win
- Email replies
- Web copy
- 404

3. Codify your brand voice.

Put the answers to these questions together in a brand voice document using the ADDE (Attribute Markers – Do's – Don'ts – Expressions) Formula. I mentioned this in my book *The One Hour Content Plan* as well. Do's are a short description of what your attribute markers actually mean. Don'ts define how you don't want your brand voice to come across. And the expressions drill down into the tiny nuances of how your brand voice comes across.

Add in special expressions that embellish your writing.

- Do you use slang or expressive phrases, such as "Hey Lovelies!" "Say WHHAAT?" or "Hi Bosses"?
- Do you use emojis in your writing?
- Do you start sentences with conjunctions such as *and* ? Do you end your posts or emails in a certain way (i.e., *XOXO, Hugs, Till later, Talk soon)?*
- Do you use caps or italics for emphasis?
- Do you use acronyms in your writing (i.e., LOL, ROFL, LMAO)?

Attribute Markers	Do's	Don'ts	Special Expressions
Honest but not hurtful.	Honest about mistakes and failures. Keep promises and take pride in customer service. Reply personally to emails.	Oversell or hard sell. Push what they are losing out by not purchasing your product.	Use emojis like :) in writing.
Bold but not arrogant.	Not afraid to challenge status quo viewpoints in the niche. Never apologize for contrarian standpoint.	Use jargon. Use expletives. Use passive voice.	Talk soon, Say WHAAT.

In this instance, we're going to take this exercise a step further and specify responses to different situations based on either end of the spectrum. Let's take the example of the attribute bold.

Attribute: Bold			
Attribute Markers	**Situation**	**Response**	**Special Expressions**
Too arrogant			
Too timid			
Just right			

4. Take stock.

Have a look at your current content. Which content pieces have a similar tone across them? Which ones are unique to your style? Which ones sound like they could be written by someone else in your niche? Look at everyday communications such as your sign-offs, customer service replies, and social media replies to determine which ones feel like you (on brand) and which don't.

The more you approach your target audience with a cohesive brand voice, the more credible you become. Your brand voice evolves with time as you grow and

discover your brand further. The voice I started out with is not the voice I have now.

You can download a template and see a sample brand voice document here >>> https://meera.tips/uncoveryourdifference .

2. CREATE AN INSIDER VOCABULARY

Content-expert association.

Launch list.

Under-the-radar launches.

Product ecosystem.

The people who have been following my work for some time are familiar with these terms. They know the meaning behind them. They ask questions in emails and in my community Facebook groups rattling off these very terms and how they apply to their specific circumstance.

How can you create an "insider" vocabulary that your audience understands?

There are a few ways you can do this.

a. Create your signature processes or framework

Is there a unifying approach to your work in your expert niche?

Imagine a coach or course creator who has a proven, one-of-a-kind system that takes someone from A to Z in a topic. Everything they teach is based on this framework or process. Their thoughts or opinions are not haphazardly thrown together. Nor are they drifting or changing their take on the topic every single week.

Having a connected framework evokes confidence and shows your knowledge

Having a connected framework evokes confidence and shows your knowledge, investment of time in your craft, and commitment to getting results for your audience. How can you develop your own signature process or framework? Start by mapping out all the steps or the overall path someone must take to achieve the promised result. How can you group these steps into categories, themes, or concepts?

Is this something that you will know immediately? Of course not.

Your signature process or framework will develop over time as you work with and teach more people in your audience.

As you develop it, start naming that process.

Name that strategy.

Name that system.

It gives an identifier to your work and helps your audience connect with you and others when they discuss your teachings.

You don't want people to say, "I need to apply Step 2 in that five-step model thing…It's absolute gold!"

You want them to say, "I need to apply Step 2 in [Your Name's][Name of Framework]. It's absolute gold!"

b. Own a word or phrase/language

Take ownership of a word or a phrase—something that connects to your promise.

Marie Forleo – Everything is Figureoutable

Russell Brunson – Funnel Hacking

Danielle LaPorte – Desire Mapping

c. Identify a unifying statement that they can say about themselves and how it ties to your promise

What do you want your audience to become?

What's the end transformation or future vision you have for them?

I'm a *boss.*

I'm a *funnel hacker.*

I'm a _____.

d. Add writing embellishments or quirks

What are your favorite things?

What do you like to read or explore? What popular cultural references do you always use?

Bring these into your writing.

Are you a pop culture fan? Are you constantly belting out sitcom quotes or music video references? Maybe you have a weird penchant for coffee machines or *Harry Potter* or *Star Trek* . Infuse these elements, no matter how eccentric or simple they may be, into your writing.

FAQ 2: Is a tagline necessary?

A tagline is a short catchy phrase that gives context to your brand name. When done well, it's an amazing marketing tool.

But taglines can go wrong more often than not. If you're looking for directional signage for your audience, that's very unlikely to be served by a tagline.

Opt instead for a descriptive headline. When you're starting out, still growing your audience, or testing out your message, it's hard to nail your tagline to a tee, so don't worry about getting this absolutely right.

Focus instead on the essence of your brand and your content categories when it comes to the types of content you're going to be putting out for your audience. Taglines are not a critical part of your brand in any way. Start with a simple "who I help" statement.

ACTION

Now that you're armed with more information about brand voice and insider vocabulary, it's time for you to go create your own. Remember, you likely won't have the answers to all these questions but keep them in mind so that when the opportunity presents itself when you're creating your packages or programs, you'll know the possibilities that exist.

CHAPTER 4

UNCOVER YOUR STORY

I won't delve into the theory behind the importance of storytelling or how story has been playing a huge role in our communications since the caveman days.

What we're concerned about in this chapter is how storytelling can serve your business.

I bet you *think* you can't tell a story—that you're a horrible storyteller…

But I can guarantee that you've told at least one story in the last twenty-four hours to someone, be it your mom, spouse, colleague, or child.

"You won't believe what happened today…"
"I'm so excited that I found this…"
"You won't believe what John posted on Facebook today…"
"I'm in a terrible mood today because…"

Now, that makes you a storyteller. But when it comes to using storytelling in business, you clam up. Finding or thinking of stories to use to illustrate a point is not something I felt came naturally to me either.

Maybe you think…

I don't have a rags-to-riches story. I didn't have to face severe adversity to get to where I am.

And you don't need to have had these experiences.

We have a preconceived notion of what a story should be.

In this chapter, you'll discover simple strategies for how you can weave storytelling into your business.

TWO KEY QUESTIONS

Before you even think about stories, the two main questions you need to address are

1. What do you want your audience to know?
2. What do you want them to take away?

Yes, they're *your* stories. But they're about your audience, *not* you.

The mistake most entrepreneurs make is being consumed with what story they're going to tell and how they're going to tell it.

Rather, it's more about identifying the right story that matches the **takeaway** you want your audience to have and the **emotion** you want to elicit in them. Your stories should be what your ideal reader identifies with.

When you hold a mirror up to them, they should see their concerns and pain reflected in your stories. It may be your story, but your target audience has to see themselves in it. This is what will help to communicate your message.

Doug Lipman, in his book *Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond the Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work and Play* , [18] speaks of the storytelling model. He argues that there are three elements involved: the story, the storyteller, and the audience. POV ties all three elements together.

Any story that serves your business is one that ultimately

- Serves your audiences and their needs
- Gets your audience to

    - Know you better by building the know, like, and trust factor
    - Understand why you are the right business for them and/or understand your product better
- Elicits an emotional response in your reader

Cialdini [19] speaks about reciprocity and likeness as one of the six main levers of persuasiveness. He claims that people do business with or follow people whom they can relate to or like. So your stories should play up or accentuate the values that you want people to understand about your brand and who you are. Likewise, you want to play up or down how your audience perceives you and their likeness to you in terms of their values or beliefs.

For instance, when I started my business, my target audience was a stay-at-home mother of two. But over the years, my audience has shifted. And the story I tell about my brand and business has shifted as well. The story I was sharing earlier didn't serve my audience. Nor did it continue to serve my brand. A story has to spark the interest of your audience, cause them to relate to the story, and motivate them to act.

So not all stories are the right stories. The stories you tell very much depend on your audience, what they need to know, and what they want to know at that point in time.

They're not static and can and must evolve based on your audience.

Here's an example of a comment from a reader that conveys how they related to my story:

Hi Meera!

I’m currently reading “The essential habits of 6 figure bloggers” and completely relate to your story about mindset. I also come from a family where you go to college, get a degree, and a job, end of story. But I am really motivated to build an online business and started my blog a little over a year ago.

UNDERSTANDING STORY

To pick the right story, you need to understand the following:

1. The types of stories available

2. The structure of a story

TYPES OF STORIES

Most stories fall into five story plots that the protagonist goes through. The protagonist is the main character of the story. The protagonist is *always* your target audience. Remember, it may be your story, but your target audience has to see themselves in it.

The intensity of the story will vary, but it’s bound to fall into one of these five story plots.

Rags to riches

- This is your level of success right now.
- But it hasn’t always been this way.
- What your struggle taught you and what got you to this place.

Genesis

- Overcoming evil or an insurmountable enemy.
- This could be an illness, a tragedy, a bad relationship, or a near-death experience.
- Overcoming your struggle and the positive changes it breeds.

Quest

- Reaching an impossible goal.

Origin

- How you got here (a founder's story).
- The origin of a product, service, or idea.

Rebirth

- Something important happens and causes you to change or mend your ways.

STRUCTURE OF A STORY

You may have heard of the three-act story structure.

You have a beginning or first act that sets the scene and introduces the main character. At the end of the first act, there's a hook that prepares you for the second act.

The hook is a compelling statement or paragraph or piece of information in the introduction of your story. It grabs the reader by the throat and urges them to keep reading. This should be introduced very early on like a looming journey or change the character is going to face.

The second act is the tumultuous journey or change the protagonist experiences —the setbacks and heartaches and obstacles faced.

The final act is when the challenge comes to a close. It gets resolved.

Most story hooks fall under the following categories:

Divergence is any hook that goes against traditional lines of thought or rules.
- A rant
- An outlier
- Something that goes against typical expectations

Discord is anything that exhibits a conflict or disagreement.

Dissonance is anything that's a juxtaposition—it doesn't make sense.
- It highlights a contrast between two varying situations.
- It induces a "huh" factor.

Example 1

I don't think she knew that would kill her email list.
I mean, who would do something like that on purpose?
Her heart was in the right place. I knew that within minutes of chatting with her on Facebook.
It was Friday—promo day in a lot of groups.
I always used this time to load my buffer feed and that's when she messaged me to say she enjoyed reading one of my blog posts.
We bounced messages for a bit, then she said:
"I haven't emailed them in a while."
"How long?" I asked.
"Umm…about 4–5 months. When should I email them?"

This is a classic example of dissonance because who sabotages their own email list?

Example 2

It seems like everyone tells you to create a course, right? And that it has to be a premium product because if it’s not, you must be crazy to be undervaluing yourself.

So I did just that.

My first product took an enormous amount of time and emotional toil to create. There were plenty of tears, stress, and agony. I felt like this monster I was creating just never seemed to get done.

By the end of it, I vowed never to create a course again.

I got sick of the process.

If this was what creating and launching products was all about, I didn’t want any of that.

This example primarily shows divergence from traditionally accepted lines of thought. If you’re familiar with the online marketing space, a course is typically deemed to be the holy grail of monetizing your experience. But this story hook tackles it head-on.

Example 3

I was sneaking into the bathroom to load my Twitter feed because I had a self-imposed rule that I wouldn’t use screens in front of my daughter.

I wasn’t spending time with my husband.

I was doing a little of everything because I felt so much pressure.

I was exhausted, snappy, and completely defeated.

I was getting nowhere.

Then something clicked for me.

This is an example of dissonance. Who goes to the bathroom to check their Twitter feed? There’s also conflict inherent in the story—internal conflicts of guilt and defeat.

Example 4

> I'm the last person who should have ever become an entrepreneur. Some people say they always knew they wanted to be an entrepreneur. Well, that wasn't me. No one in my family is an entrepreneur. Going to college, getting a degree, and getting a job was the norm. That was until an abnormal scan report interrupted the norm and made me stay home. That was how I became an entrepreneur almost by accident and how MEERA KOTHAND came about.

This is a story I've told on several podcasts and emails. It reflects divergence. There is also dissonance in this story because it highlights a contrast—an entrepreneur coming from a family of people who only knew the 9-to-5.

So you could use any or all of these three hooks. What matters is that it's compelling and gets your audience wanting to read more.

WHAT STORIES TO TELL

So how do you know what kind of stories you should tell?

There are several story generator questions you can ask to find stories to share. Some of these stories can be defining life or business moments. Others can be based on your interactions with people in your niche or with your customers or clients. They could also be lessons and stories from your past.

The same five story plots can be applied to these different areas in your business as well.

Here are some questions to think about when you're brainstorming stories:

Brand

Your brand's story is already written. You just have to sieve it out.

This doesn’t have to be an origin story. It could be a story of quest or tragedy.

Why did I tell the story that I did?

Because I want my audience to know that I’m like them—that I’m no one special who started from subzero and worked my way up without a team or without aspirations of wanting to be an entrepreneur. Someone who never considered herself an expert, who had plenty of self-doubt just like my audience has. I want to accentuate these similarities.

Here are some questions to think about when you come up with a story or stories for your brand.

Origin

- What made you create this brand?
- Where did you grow up and what’s your family culture?
- Who was your childhood hero?
- What lessons did you learn from your parents?
- Who was your mentor?
- What happened with your business?
- What happened with your family?

You and your values

- How did an experience shape who you are today?
- What was a life-changing book you read?
- What goals do you have?
- What happened that was out of your regular routine?
- What struggles did you have?

Offer

Every offer of yours can have a marketing story attached to it. The offer story can be centered around the following:

- Origin
    - Why did you come up with it?
    - What inspired the creation of it?
    - What didn't you know about the topic of the offer that you wish you knew earlier?

- Difference
    - How is this different from other people's products out there?

- Reader's experience
    - What myths do people have?
    - What mistakes are people making?
    - What mindset shift is needed to shift them to using your product/service?
    - What revelation do they need to have to get results from your product/service?
    - What success have they seen from using the product?
    - Who was your first buyer?
    - What's your first buyer's story?

Customer/reader journey with your offer/topic

What stories will the customer relate to at each point in the journey? Dig into the stories of your target audience at each stage.

If you're making an offer or have a call to action, your story should have a natural connection to it. The story has to naturally flow into your call to action or offer. See the example below and how you can connect a story with an end goal.

Example 5

It was a huge day for Emily. Her guest post was going live on Forbes in less than ten minutes. She was expecting an avalanche of traffic. She decided to quickly check on her site, and what she saw sent panic surging through her body. There was a huge 404 sign staring right back at her. Her site was down on one of the most important days in her writing career.

Think this could never happen to you?
Most entrepreneurs I work with make five massive mistakes that could make their site go down.

It’s as easy as flipping a switch.

Example 6

As a full-time blogger, I found myself straddling a notebook for daily tasks and a huge desk calendar for promotions and launches, tracking my analytics in one and planning my content in another. It was confusing and downright frustrating.

ACTION

Start collecting stories in a folder.

Screenshots, quotes, stories your subscribers tell you—all of these can be used in marketing your products, services, and brand.

Does your brand story still align with your audience? Do you have stories for each of your offers?

CHAPTER 5

UNCOVER YOUR VISUAL IDENTITY

I won't spend too long on this chapter, but a word of caution before we proceed.

This is where many of us get stuck, and we spend months trying to get things to look right. We don't give half the amount of time to exploring the other aspects mentioned in the Brand Anchor Framework as we do to our Visual Identity.

But it's important not to get too caught up in this process. A lot of the initial months are about exploring what your brand voice is, who you are as a content creator, and what you like and don't like. You don't need to spend excessive amounts of money on a logo or site design at this point in time.

Why?

This is when you're testing different messages and exploring how you want to position your brand. You don't need to invest time, money, and energy into a professionally designed logo only to realize two months in that it doesn't make sense with your brand voice or strategy. Get a simple font logo instead.

The colors and fonts you pick for your site should be closely linked to the brand attributes you identified in the previous chapter.

Use the 60/30/10 rule for colors.

A primary color should take up 60% of the space. For contrast, 30% of the space should be occupied by the secondary color. The remaining 10% should be used for the accent color.

Not sure which colors to use?

Look at your answers from the previous chapters and think about the colors that

Look at your answers from the previous chapters and think about the colors that lend themselves to the words you have used to describe your brand.

You can also get known for a color or certain visual imagery.

Henneke runs a business blog called Enchanting Marketing. [20] She doesn't use stock images but fills her posts with visuals of her own drawings. She also makes references to cooking beef rendang (a Malaysian meat dish) and cycling in West Malaysia to illustrate her points.

It's her signature style. Her anchor imagery. She creates a welcoming home for her readers. They know what to expect when they read her blog posts and the signature purple figure is endearing and hard to forget. See it on a social media feed and you know it's Henneke's work!



Source: https://www.enchantingmarketing.com/how-to-find-joy/

ACTION

If you already have an existing site, see if the colors and fonts match up with the brand exercise you did in chapter 4.

SECTION III

BUILD YOUR BRAND ECOSYSTEM

What’s a brand ecosystem?

A brand ecosystem consists of various touch points that engage your audience

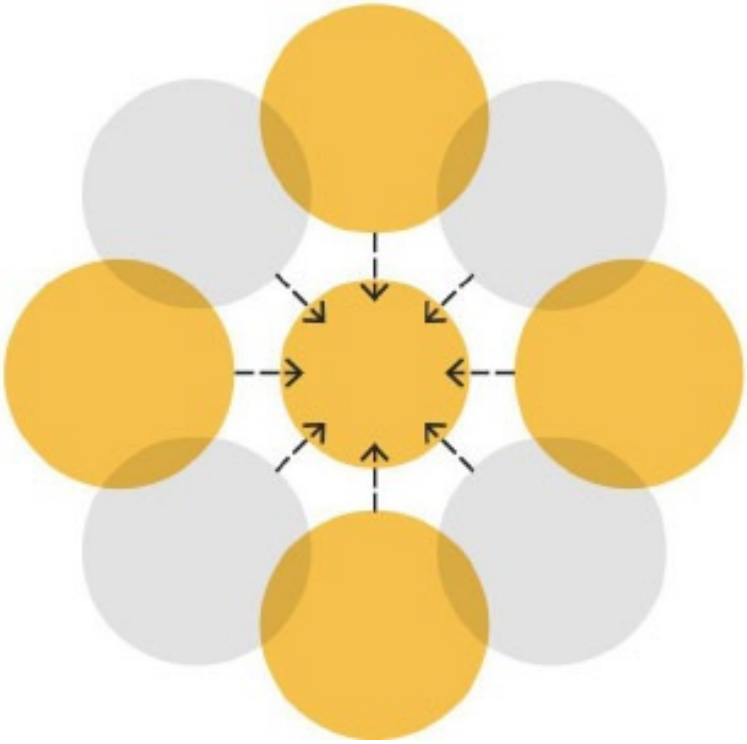
to create a sense of loyalty, increase retention, and make them brand ambassadors.

You can have several nodes and entry points within your brand ecosystem.

This is similar to the biological ecosystem with several different organisms coexisting and thriving to create a flouring environment.

Likewise, a brand ecosystem relies on multiple channels from social media, paid and unpaid marketing avenues, and content and email marketing to reach and connect with your ideal audiences. Your message or POV and content is shared via these different channels to connect with audiences across a number of different touchpoints making them highly desirable.

In this section, we’ll discuss building your own brand ecosystem and attracting people you can help the most—people who will feel good about the choice they made to do business with you.



CHAPTER 6

UNCOVER YOUR BRAND ECOSYSTEM

When I first started out, most people said they found me on Pinterest.

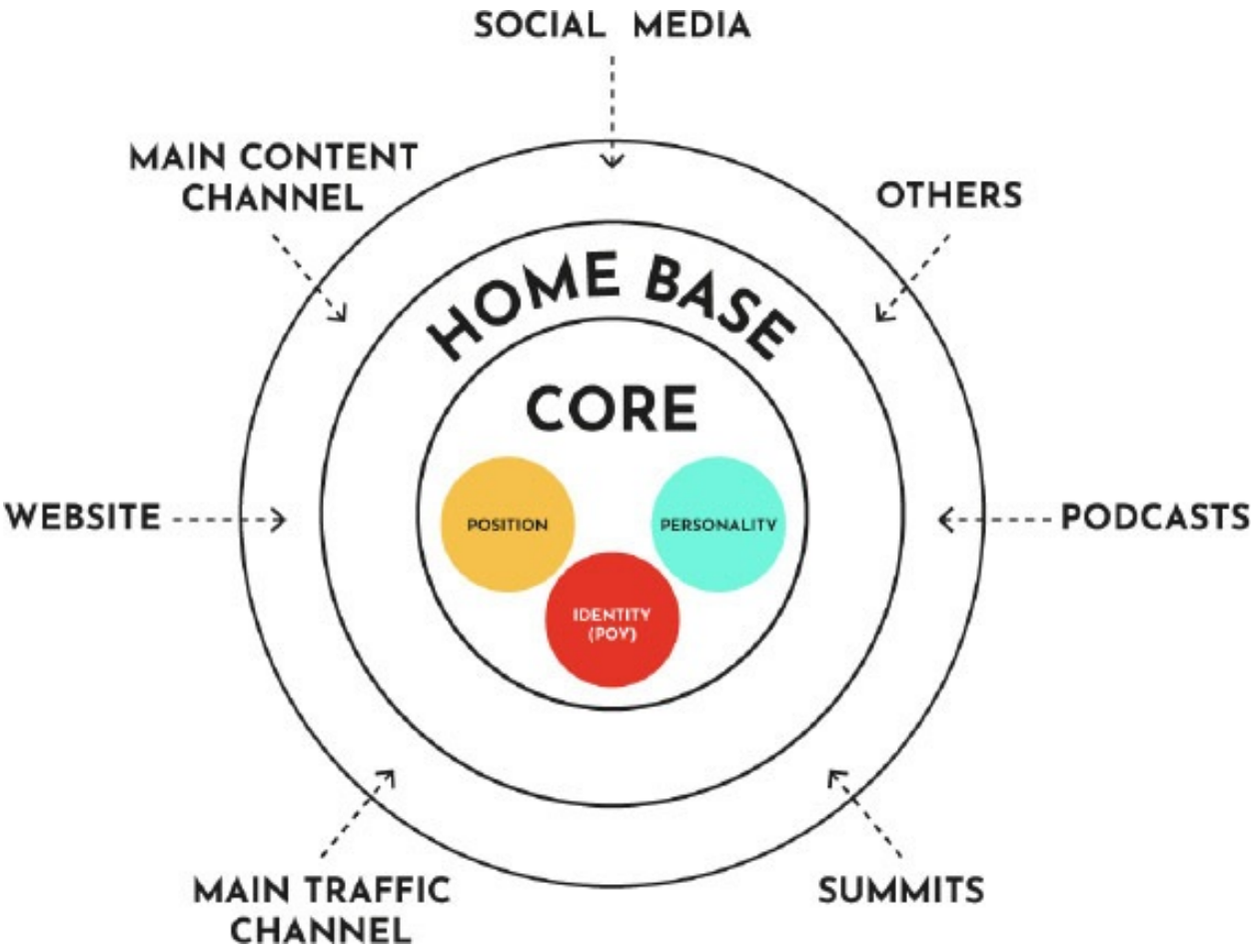
Others said it was via summits or podcasts they had heard me speak on. Over the years, Amazon books like this one were added as entry points for how people found me as well. There are also guest posts and articles I wrote several years ago that still serve as entry points for someone to find me.

You can have varying trails or pathways, and my entry points or nodes don't have to be the same as yours.

But ultimately, they should all lead back to your home base.

What's your home base?

Your email list.



At any entry point, opportunity, or node, start with the intent of leading people back to your home base. I'm not going to cover email marketing in this book, but it's crucial that you build your audience on a platform you own, and that's none other than your email list.

Some of these pathways may be taken by several people whereas others may be taken less frequently. When you're just building your brand and business, you have to start laying these tracks or pathways. I always suggest starting with the following:

ONE MAIN TRAFFIC PLATFORM

This is the traffic source that will help you with lead generation. It brings traffic to your site, and if your site is optimized well, it'll help you convert traffic to subscribers and grow your email list, i.e., your audience. Here are some

examples of traffic sources:

- Pinterest
- YouTube
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Borrowing others' platforms (i.e., guest posting)
- Influencers

There are several traffic sources, but you want to pick one that's aligned with your ideal audience. Every platform has a slightly different demographic. Take a look at the table below. It is based on a study by the Pew Research Center [21] and gives you a broad overview of the different traffic sources and the audiences that use them.

INSTAGRAM	• Best place to reach teens and millennials. 59% of 18 to 29-year-olds use Instagram.
FACEBOOK	• Works in largely any market. 84% of 30 to 49-year-olds use Facebook. • But Facebook is clamping down heavily on diet, weight loss, etc. Check if your market is approved by their ToS.
PINTEREST	• Marketing primarily to women, focusing on physical products. 45% of women online vs. 17% of men online.
YOUTUBE	• Involve keyword targeting. Reach predominantly male audience. 55% of men online vs. 44% of women online.
TWITTER	• Younger market. More techy.

LINKEDIN	• 45% $75K+ annual income.

ONE MAIN CONTENT CHANNEL

This is the medium you use to build trust and grow your audience. It's likely a content channel such as a blog, a YouTube channel, or a podcast. The primary goal of this content channel will be to attract as many people as possible and build trust with your readers so that you can convert them to subscribers.

Typical online pathways are as follows:

- Your profiles and bio links on social media
- Guest blog posts
- Online summits
- Being a guest on a podcast
- Publishing a podcast
- Hosting a workshop
- Giveaways and contests
- Ads
- Search engine traffic from people looking for content
- Social media posts linking back to your content
- And any other way you can think of that links back to your brand or your offer!

Typical offline pathways are as follows:

- Networking groups
- Business cards
- Speaking engagements
- Offering a local training workshop
- Offering to teach at professional associations and licensing bodies that your ideal clients are members of

- Wholesale contacts
- Tradeshows
- Catalogs
- And any other way you can think of that shares your brand or your offer!

Is your reach wider if you have more nodes and entry points? Will you have a propensity to attract a bigger audience?

Yes and no.

The more nodes or entry points you have, the more time and energy you may need to expend in order to maintain them. Imagine creating content for your podcast, writing weekly blog posts, engaging with your Facebook group, creating images for your Instagram profile, and pitching other podcasts as a team of one?

Yes, you'll likely have more people finding you from different channels, but you'll also be spreading yourself thin and diluting the way you show up on them. I've seen this happen with so many clients and students I've worked with.

Some entry points or nodes are more passive while others require work. Limiting these to the bare minimum when you're starting out allows you to show up on those platforms in the best way possible.

Every business has a trajectory. At the beginning, I didn't have several of the entry points that I have right now. The number doesn't matter. The *strength* of those points does. Your job is to notice the existing pathways, grow them, and pay attention to which are the strongest for you. Over time, you can explore new ones.

FIVE TYPES OF PEOPLE INTERACTING WITH YOUR BRAND ECOSYSTEM

There are five types of people who come into contact with your business as you build your brand ecosystem. And you need all five of them for your business to run smoothly.

Have a look at the table below.

Stranger	They haven't heard of you before at all. They probably clicked onto your site from seeing a pin image on Pinterest, a Facebook post that a friend of theirs shared, or a tweet on their Twitter feed.
Reader	They have some form of brand recognition. They've heard of you before via a podcast or have seen your guest post on a site they frequent. A friend of theirs has been raving about you. They've clicked through to your site to read your content.
Subscriber	They are new to your list. They visit your site likely from a link in your welcome email series. They may have read something intriguing in your email sequence and wanted to have a look at your blog, YouTube channel, or other content platforms.
Engaged subscriber	Heard of a brand crush? That's what these people have on you. They adore your style. Most of them cannot wait to get their hands on your paid products if they haven't already.
Customer & brand advocate	These are people who are attuned to your style. They've likely bought from you before—possibly more than once.

Each of these different segments offers a unique opportunity for your business. And you need all of these different segments in your business.

Your business needs to make an effort to

1. Have a continuous stream of the right people entering your brand ecosystem into your home base. This is how you continuously fill your sales pipeline with leads or potential customers. You do this by having a system where you attract people to your site with your content. You ensure

your site is optimized, and you have relevant opt-in forms and landing pages especially at the “hot spots” your audience frequents.

2. Nurture new subscribers so that they become engaged subscribers and customers. You want to have a system where you’re constantly nudging people from one audience segment to the next with your content. The further down the ecosystem people are, the better it is for your business.

When both of these processes stop, you have a situation where your email list can go stale and contacts can go cold because there’s no process in place for others to discover your business or to nurture new subscribers.

This is where your marketing system comes into play.

Marketing isn’t just about selling or promotion. It’s also about attracting and capturing your ideal customers.

In a nutshell, marketing is made up of these four activities: Attract – Capture – Engage – Convert.

If you break these down, your marketing system has these six parts:

- Identify your target audience.
- Attract them to your site.
- Capture your target audience.
- Nurture that target audience.
- Convert them to buyers.
- Turn them into brand advocates or repeat customers.

When there are gaps in your marketing system—gaps in any one of these six areas—your business will often experience feast-or-famine cycles. High and low

areas – your business will often experience feast-or-famine cycles. High and low seasons are part and parcel of every business, but it shouldn't become chronic.

GET VISIBLE

If you're building an expert business (a business based around sharing your expertise) as most content creators do, you also want to continually find opportunities to

a. enable your audience to discover you; and
b. build authority

In my book *But I'm Not an Expert!* , I specifically talked about leveraging your Authority Architecture and social proof elements to boost your expertise in the eyes of the people you want to serve.

Authority Architecture shows you three different pathways to build authority.

Be the authority – This is the hardest pathway because you've got to have the credentials, achievements, professional qualifications, or years of experience to show for it. Perhaps you've built businesses in your expert niche for ten years or worked for Fortune 100 companies. The majority of people don't start here at all.

Build authority – You build authority when you demonstrate your expertise through events such as challenges or live coaching. You also build authority when you share your progress online. If you're on a mission to help people lose weight, you document your progress even though you haven't "made it" as yet. Notice an explosion in personal brands tracking their quarterly or monthly progress through income reports or Instagram stories or behind-the-scenes pictures? Those are examples of building authority.

Borrow authority – You leverage other micro-influencers' and influencers' platforms to get in front of their audience. You siphon some of their credibility by associating with the clout their brand has built up. How? By getting featured on their podcasts or summits or blogs.

You don’t get a flood of people arriving at your digital doorsteps the moment you launch your business. It’s a trickle if hardly anything at all. You want to continually find opportunities to get in front of your ideal audience so that you can share your POV. Building authority is the most underrated element. There’s often a careless attitude that “publicity” is for later. But this helps you get discovered.

As you embark on building authority and visibility, you will naturally expand and build on your brand ecosystem by adding more nodes or pathways for people to discover you.

Likewise, as you build authority you want to embed social proof into spaces where people interact with you and your business so that they are more amenable to trusting you.

Social proof can be featured in one of the following ways:

- Testimonials
- Press mentions or “as seen in” logos
- Customer stories
- Awards and accolades
- Numbers (satisfied customers, rankings, subscribers, followers, etc.)
- Reviews and ratings

OPTIMIZE THE LAYER JUST BEFORE YOUR HOME BASE—YOUR SITE

I suggest having an image or hero shot in the header section of your site with a statement that calls out your audience and states how you help them. People need to land on your site and know within five seconds if your site’s for them and why they should trust you.

Apart from that, I suggest having a call to action or invitation to subscribe embedded within the header or right below the header as well as a place to present social proof.

Rather than just having this header on your home page, make sure it's featured prominently on the first third of every page on your site.

I spent hours perfecting my home page. But think about it. Where does a first-time visitor land when they reach your website?

If you said home page, think again.

Most visitors click through to your blog from Facebook or social media and land on a blog post or a services page. Even if they found you via organic search in Google, how likely is that going to be a link to your home page?

Unlikely, right?

That's the reason I recommend focusing on the first one-third of your screen. This is the header portion of your site.

Before you craft your home page, think about all the people likely to visit your site. What problems are they trying to solve and what are the different needs those visitors will have? What offers or incentives (paid or free) would you want to feature?

While your home page can feature a prominent call to action—the one that you deem the most important—it can also have additional buttons and links that are useful to your reader and present your body of work.

So a home page doesn't necessarily need to have just one call to action button unlike a landing page. When in doubt, remember that your aim should be to get people on your email list—your home base. Rather than feature all your products and services, let the focus be on getting someone on your email list from where you should have a pathway to get their eyeballs on your products and services.

Before you add any node to your brand ecosystem, consider the following:

- How does this enrich the lives of your audience within your brand ecosystem?
- How does this add to your overall vision of where you want to be?
- How does this fit into your stage of growth?
- Does it align with the audience you're trying to serve, i.e., does it bring you the right people?

ACTION

Which nodes need a refresh? What's going to be a part of your business stack? Choose your stack and then stick with it.

CHAPTER 7

UNCOVER YOUR PEOPLE

Now, your traffic is often a mix of a boatload of different visitors:

People who heard you on a podcast
People considering your product
People reading your blog
People who found you via organic search
People who saw your graphic on Pinterest

They're all your visitors. But they're not all your prospects or target audience. You can't create content for all of them.

I walked you through how to create a typical ideal reader or persona exercise in my books *The One Hour Content Plan* and *The Blog Startup* . In this chapter, I want to shift your attention to the key differences between ideal customers and other customers. Some characteristics stand out.

Ideal customers buy quickly. They don't bargain with you for a cheaper price. They might actually encourage you to charge a higher price or tell you that you are a steal. They tell their friends and colleagues about your work even if they are not affiliates. They understand your offer and marketing and often feel like it speaks directly to them or it comes exactly at the right time. They don't just like your product, they love it! Marketing and selling to these people doesn't take much effort once you've found them. They buy into your value system or beliefs.

Other customers may buy, but they may switch to someone else if your competitor offers it at a cheaper price. You're not the first choice. Your POV doesn't drive their purchases, but the price often does.

IDEAL CUSTOMERS	OTHERS
Buy quicky	Price sensitive
Easy to retain	May switch if price is not to their liking
Buy into your beliefs and values	
Don't like but love your work	
Don't bargain	
Tell you to raise your prices	

This adds a different angle or element to the ideal customer or avatar exercise. It doesn't look solely at brands your ideal customers like, websites they visit, books they buy, other influencers they follow, or jobs they hold. It captures characteristics that make them really care about what you do.

Your message, your content, and your products and services should serve THIS ideal buyer.

THE PERFECT MESSAGE FOR THE IMPERFECT CUSTOMER

You can even push this ideal customer away if the message and content you're sharing are not relevant to them.

To be top of mind, you need four main ingredients:

Relevance – This is just what I wanted to know!

Timing – This is what I need right now!

Credibility – She knows what she's talking about, and I want to learn from her!

Access – I'm not ready for that, but I still have access to this!

When any of these ingredients are off-balance, you get one of the following scenarios:

 Relevance  Timing  Credibility  Access = **A hungry audience with nothing they can buy.**

This is why I'm a huge advocate of the product ecosystem where you create a stack of offers that builds on one another and serves the different needs of your audience. I talk about this more in my book *Selling the Intangible* .

 Relevance  Timing  Credibility = **No content-expert association. No trust, all hype.**

 Credibility  Relevance = **No sales. Wrong audience.**

But what if you don't have customers yet or are fairly new to selling?

With any selling process, you start with an assumption that these are the people who will benefit the most from your brand and offers.

You share your content. You sell your products and services.

Patterns will emerge in the form of customer or audience feedback. Look at the comments they give and the questions they ask.

Who are they?

What do they identify or label themselves as?

What beliefs of yours do they identify with? The more they share your values and beliefs, the fewer objections and less resistance you'll experience.

Does your message apply to them? As a content creator, you want to be sure to serve your audience by addressing the questions they have at each phase in order to inch them toward the next. You want to get them to a stage where they are ready to hire or buy from you.

The same goes for digital products and coaching. Your offer solves a problem and gives your ideal buyer a transformation. But your prospective buyer will have a ton of questions about the problem that your offer solves.

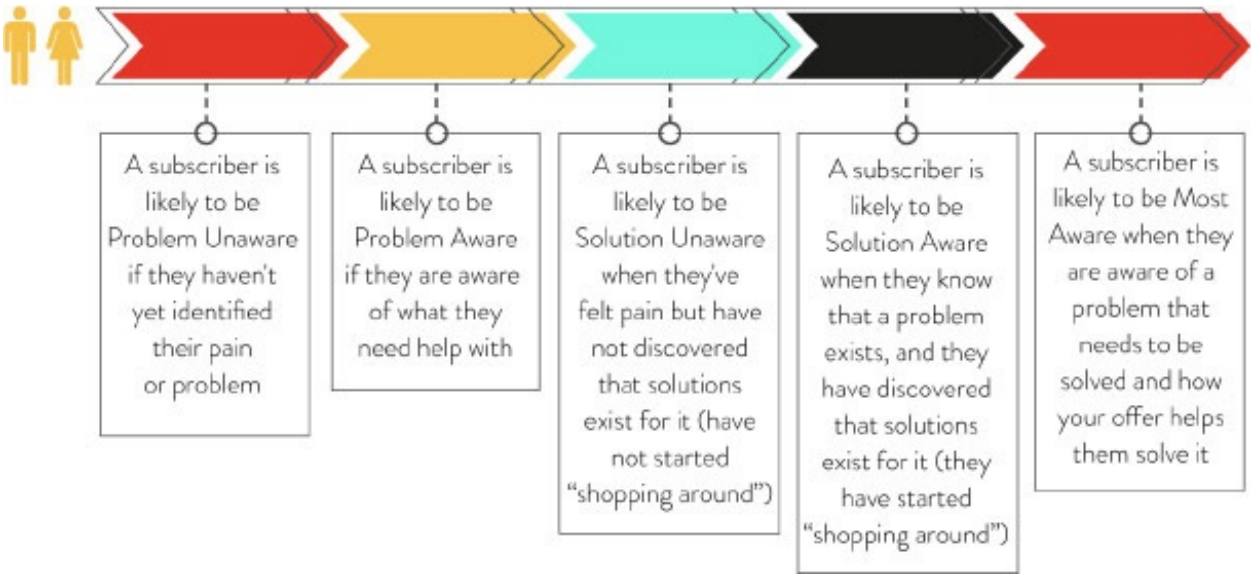
Heck, some people may not even know they have a problem!

They may be seeking solutions for the **symptoms they're experiencing without seeing the underlying problem.**

If you're familiar with my content, you know that I'm a huge fan of the five states of awareness created by copywriting legend Eugene Schwartz.

This states that a prospective buyer, reader, or subscriber starts by being problem unaware, then becomes problem aware, solution unaware, solution aware, and finally, most aware.

What's more important is that you understand that the content they need and the questions they have at each of these stages will differ. Make sure your POV speaks to the right person—the person you're actually targeting.



ACTION

In this step, you'll determine what makes some people much more excited about your offerings than others.

Start by thinking about the following questions:

- What is unique about you that others really value? Can you sieve this out from comments or replies you've received from your audience?
- What is unique about your business that others really value?

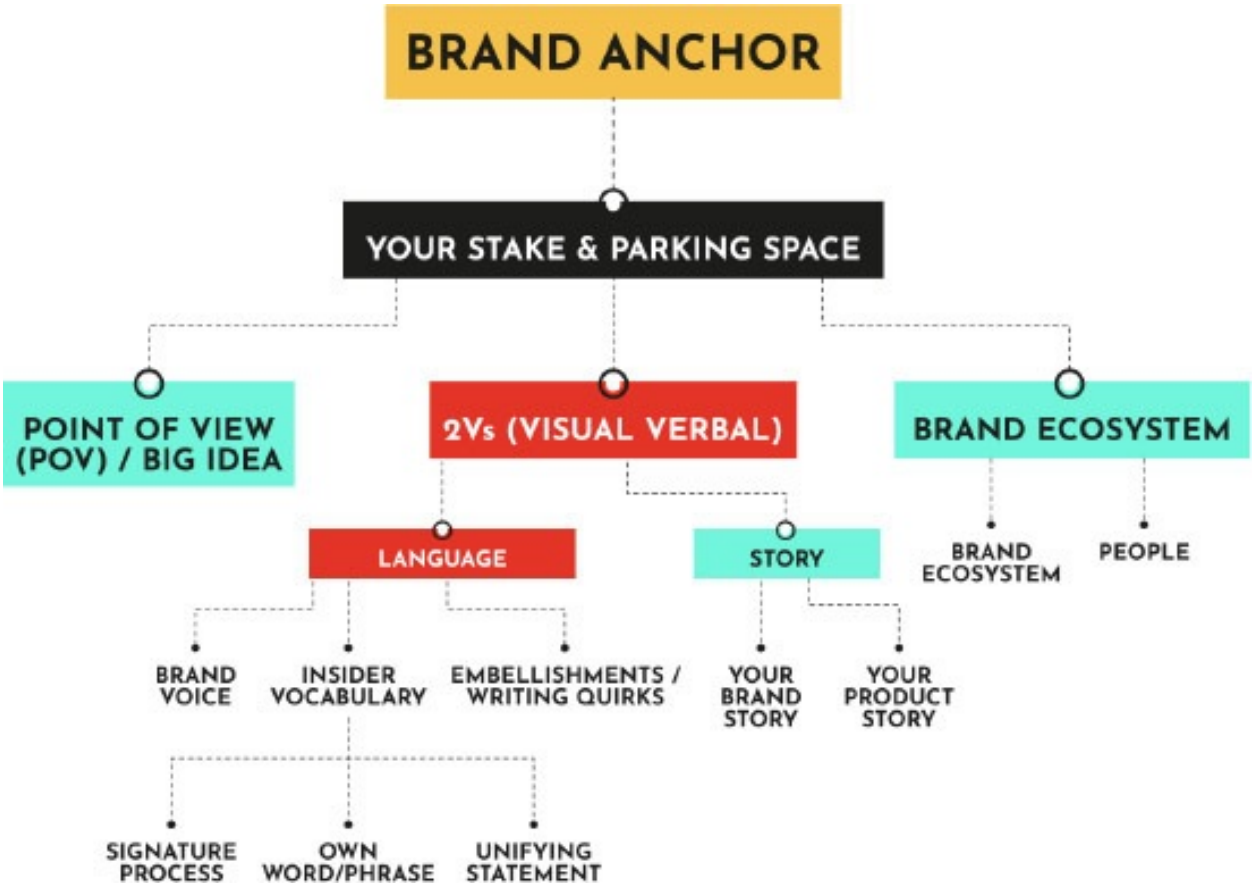
THE BRAND ANCHOR TEST

You now have more than a bare bones framework to uncover your difference and anchor your brand in the minds of your ideal audience.

It's hard work, and you may not have immediate answers to several questions I've raised. But the answers will reveal themselves to you through the course of your business journey.

How do you know if you've been successfully implementing the Brand anchor Framework? The following are signs or signals that you're well on your way to holding that spot.

- ☑ You come to mind when buyers think of _____ (your specialty area).
- ☑ You get tagged in conversations or groups when people are looking for help in _____ (your specialty area).
- ☑ No one delivers on this problem like you do (your secret sauce).
- ☑ There is recognition & respect for your brand.
- ☑ Your ideal audience hope you'll be willing to work with them.
- ☑ You actually turn some business away because it's not the right business.


BRAND ANCHOR
YOUR STAKE & PARKING SPACE
POINT OF VIEW (POV) / BIG IDEA
2Vs (VISUAL VERBAL)
BRAND ECOSYSTEM
LANGUAGE
STORY
BRAND ECOSYSTEM
PEOPLE
BRAND VOICE
INSIDER VOCABULARY
EMBELLISHMENTS / WRITING QUIRKS
YOUR BRAND STORY
YOUR PRODUCT STORY
SIGNATURE PROCESS
OWN WORD/PHRASE
UNIFYING STATEMENT

CONCLUSION

Your stake or spot will evolve over time as people leave and new people enter your market.

Your spot is never static because the market is not stagnant. New players constantly enter the space, just as old players may leave.

The online business environment changes rapidly. The things your ideal audience are interested in may also shift. You have to keep current and continuously analyze the space you're occupying.

Is it still relevant to your audience?

A STOCK CHECK ON VALUE

What exactly is value?

Most people associate massive free guides, downloads, lengthy how-to content, and tutorials as value.

But value is more than that.

Value is changing perceptions and mindsets.

Value is being the person your audience turns to, to make sense of it all.

Value is creating content that *adds* to the body of literature or content already present in this niche.

Is this more difficult than sending your audience a link to a post or email on "10 Must-Have Hacks to Do Something"?

You bet it is!

When done well, valuable content puts you ahead of the competition in the minds of your audience. You become the go-to person for everything related to the topic.

This is where your content can spur dialogue and conversation without being salesy. You get to earn the attention of people and position yourself as a solution to their problems.

ATTENTION VS. INFLUENCE

Attention can be fleeting.

What if you get attention but can't influence?

What would get your audience to sit up and take notice first? What gets their attention?

But not just attention, what would get them to take action and at the same time allow you to turn that attention to biz growth?

That's what matters!

Because your audience is tuning out messages in droves.

We're all fighting for attention in the online space because of the sheer number of options and channels out there.

Your marketing scores *if* you get your audience's attention and get them to take action on your message.

Influence can be built up over time. You can continuously hone your message—just like sharpening a knife—and work toward being top of mind.

DEFINE YOUR OWN VERSION OF SUCCESS

DEFINE YOUR OWN VERSION OF SUCCESS

In business and online marketing, we all have a predefined idea of what success has to be. And it often looks like huge office spaces and teams of ten.

But that version of success doesn't have to be your version of success. Be very clear about what success means to you to avoid burnout.

Most people are chasing internet money.

There's nothing wrong with money or wanting to earn a good living or wanting to monetize your business, but when you see every buyer or subscriber as a single sale or a single transaction, you're missing out on a massive opportunity to build an addictive business.

Spend time on building relationships with your audience and buyers.

With social media being saturated with ads and more people starting to use ad blockers, people will start to turn to reputable brands and content they trust.

The brands that stand out will be the ones that take a genuine interest in their audience.

Marketing is an ongoing relationship where you help someone consistently say yes to you. People buy from a brand because of the way it makes them feel and the meanings attached to it.

You help them choose YOU—to do business with you over someone else because of the way you or your brand makes them feel. That's what good marketing should strive to do.

HAVE PATIENCE

It's no longer about the quick bucks, the likes, or wanting massive reach.

Those will not build a brand that people care about.

A business that gets people addicted to its products and services and keeps them coming back to buy more is one that's endlessly patient about strategy over quick tactics.

With the current COVID-19 pandemic, you may see coaching services and digital products about making a fast income—and doing it without having an audience, or without having to write content, or without having an email list.

FAST income sounds great.

But it's dangerous as well.

I'm all for value stacking. Stacking layer after layer of your foundation, your revenue streams, and building relationships with your audience.

When you have the pressure of having to do things fast, you may inadvertently compromise on the value you bring to your audience.

But remember that value begets income.

Your online reputation and personal brand are everything. It's not worth losing those for any make-money-fast strategy.

"I have a thing, come buy it!" may have worked ten years ago. But it just doesn't anymore.

People buy from brands and businesses they know, like, and trust.

People buy from brands and businesses that are wildly helpful.

Trust in the process. Do the work and watch the profound effect it has on your business.

Before you go, remember to download your bonuses at

https://meera.tips/uncoveryourdifference .

Good luck and thank you for sharing your work with the world!

THANK YOU FOR READING

I hope you enjoyed reading this book.

I really appreciate your feedback, and I love hearing what you have to say.

Could you leave me a review on Amazon letting me know what you thought of the book?

Thank you so much! If you want to get in touch, come find me here at my slice of the internet:
https://www.meerakothand.com .

Meera



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MEERA KOTHAND



Meera is an author and speaker who specializes in making marketing your online business ridiculously simple. She’s got seven books on the Amazon Best-Sellers

list including *The One Hour Content Plan* , *Your First 100* , and *The Blog Startup* . She's also the founder of the CREATE planners and MeeraKothand.Com , an award-winning site listed as one of the top 100 Sites for Solopreneurs three years in a row. Over the years, she has developed a reputation for making the most complex topics simple and smashing misconceptions about what you HAVE to do in order to be successful in business. Think of her as your "Minimum Viable–Maximum Impact Biz Evangelist."

Through her best-selling books and marketing courses, Meera has taught over 80,000 students and readers, giving them the confidence to build super fans + sell out their digital products without sleaze, cringe, or "you've gotta haves" so they can build a community that's obsessed with what they're offering. She has been featured on Marketing Profs, Proof to Product, Addicted2Success, and several other sites and podcasts.

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