

Interview with Alicia Forest of Client Abundance (www.clientabundance.com) and the Client Abundance Coaching Café (<http://www.clientabundance.com/coachingcafe.htm>)

Brought to you by Linda Dessau of the Idea Generator blog (<http://lindadessau.typepad.com/ideagenerator>) and You Talk, I'll Write (www.youtalk-iwrite.com)

How to find out what information products your prospective clients really want

Linda: Congratulations on the success of your membership site, Alicia. I'm wondering what you think is the number one thing that keeps your members coming back month-after-month?

Alicia: A few different things, but the #1 thing is always giving them something new to look forward to and to keep the content fresh in the Cafe. So, each month I hold a teleseminar on a new topic that fits within the parameters of the purpose of the Café, and that's to help new-ish solo business owners build their online business – either solely or as a component to an existing off-line business.

A close second to that is the discussion list. It's a simple email list, and once we hit about 40 members, it started getting pretty active. Once we tipped 100 members, though, it's really active. But what the members tell me they enjoy the most is the camaraderie this allows – and that the posts are always of high quality and usually everyone gets at least one (usually many more) response to their questions.

We've created a safe place to ask for help – no question is dumb – and the members often collaborate with each other on offering testimonials, swapping ads in their ezines, and doing products together.

Linda: What is your favorite way to get feedback from your members and find out what they want?

To find out what the membership is most interested in and wants right now, I make the effort to survey them about once every 3-4 months. I use Survey Monkey to do this, and their answers inform the next set of teleseminars.

I also ask them what I'm not offering that they'd like and take those ideas into consideration as well. And of course I always ask for general comments. This makes it really easy for me to give them exactly what they want and need.

Linda: What if you don't have a membership site? Is there a way to ask your prospective clients directly what it would take for them to become a customer or client?

Sure – that's where your email list of potential clients and customers comes into play. I think there's still lots of solo business owners who don't quite grasp that building that email list is critical in creating an online business that produces income consistently.

So I do the same thing with my email list – and that’s survey them, usually only once a year, with a bit more of an in-depth survey than I use with the Café members, where I give them actually topics, programs, and the like to choose from (and they can add their own ideas as well), and I use that information to inform my offerings for the next several months or so.

I also ask periodically on discussion lists and forums that are made up of the solo business owners I work with. And I ask “what’s your biggest challenge with building your business online” to everyone who signs up for my Creating Client Abundance ezine.

Linda: How do you make sure you’re creating the specific information products that your market REALLY wants and will buy?

I’m really glad you asked this question, Linda, because this will be a huge shift for some folks listening to this – especially for those who aren’t make the number of sales they’d like to...

In the Café, and 21 Steps Take Action Group, we follow this formula:

The Client Abundance Formula:

Your Unique Message + Your Niche + Your Niche’s Problem + Your Solution Packaged
=
Your Profitable Product/Program

Once you’ve figured out your message and your market, you want to figure out what problems they are struggling with, and what they want by way of solutions.

But what I see happen a lot is that many solo business owners create products/programs/services that they think their prospects need - offerings that seem the most logical to them that will help their prospects do, be or have better - but then they can't seem to sell many - or any of what they put out there.

In order to serve your target market well, you need to know them well. Even if you are one of your target market, you need to keep on top of what's going on in your niche, what's being talked about, what challenges they are facing, what their current needs are.

So, how do you do this? Here are some ideas to get you started right now:

1. Hang out where your target market does (forums, blogs, etc.) and participate in the discussions.
2. Ask them questions in your newsletter.
3. Ask for feedback on all programs and products you offer.
4. Read, read, read - by subscribing to industry periodicals, websites, other ezines in your niche, business magazines (Entrepreneur, Fast Company), and books specific to your target market.

5. Create an R&D team of people in your target market.

As you learn more about your target market (and never stop learning about them!), make sure you USE that knowledge - in your offerings, in your marketing materials (sales letters, web copy, etc.), and in your responses on appropriate discussion lists.

There are three important factors to creating a profitable product for your niche:

1. Always know your niche before you begin to sell them anything.

Get inside their heads, feel what they are feeling, enter the conversation on your niche's mind, and intimately understand the problems that your niche is experiencing. The more you are able to do that, the more effectively you'll be able to create what it is that they want.

2. It's not what you want to sell that matters. It's what your niche wants to buy that matters.

It's actually irrelevant what it is that YOU want to sell to them – at least in the beginning of your relationship with your potential client or customer.

You may have already learned this lesson. I know I have, where I got so excited about creating something that I thought would be great for my niche, and I went ahead and put it together, and then watched in dismay as hardly anyone bought it.

On the flipside, when I created 21 Easy & Essential Steps to Online Success System™, I was asking my niche all along what its biggest challenges were, and asking them what they wanted, and then I continually asked them what they wanted to so I could be certain I provided it for them – and my results this time were hugely different. Over 40% of my list bought the first edition of 21 Steps (which is an incredible conversion rate, by the way!).

3. Give them what they want now so you can give them what YOU want later.

To give you an example, I'm in the process of writing a book, which answers many of the challenges my niche is struggling with, and much more, but I didn't specifically ask them if they wanted a print book to help them solve their problems.

Yet writing and publishing a print book is something that I've really wanted to do, and I feel confident that this particular product will sell because of three things:

1. It solves the problems my niche has told me it wants solved. So, over time, I've already done my research to know this.

2. It's a first-level funnel offering (< \$50). It's much less risky to create and offer something that you haven't specifically asked your niche if it wants it if it's a low-ticket item.

I'd never put together a more complex product like a multi-media package or live event before making sure it's something that a significant number of my list would be interested in enough to invest in it.

3. Because there's a certain percentage of my list who've bought something from me before, so from that I can take an educated guess a certain percentage of those people will also buy the book.

If you will only ask your market, it wants to help you create the products it wants to buy! Here are three ways to do this:

1. Simple: Ask them! Ask your prospects a simple, open-ended question, like "What's your biggest challenge with building your business online?" or "What's the one thing you'd like to learn more about that relates to balancing your work and family life?" Tailor the question to your niche and use the information you receive to help spark ideas for new products and services.

2. Almost as Simple: Do a simple survey that asks 1-10 questions using a survey tool like Zoomerang or Survey Monkey. This allows you to ask more specific questions to elicit more specific responses. Doing a survey like this really helps you to NOT waste your time creating offerings your target market simply doesn't want.

3. Advanced: Set up an Ask Database campaign. This tool helps you ask your niche what it wants in a sophisticated and professional-looking way. It does a few other things besides just asking the questions, so if you have the budget, it might be worth looking into.

There are at least three audios in the Café's Audio Library that address exactly "How to find out what information products your prospective clients really want."