

**A guide for nonprofits
and small businesses**

Defining Your Target Audience

Strategies to Enhance Effective
Outreach and Engagement

Executive Summary

Like Goldilocks searching for a bowl of porridge that's not too hot or too cold, your organization needs to find an audience "just right" for your mission — not too broad, not too narrow, but perfectly dialed in to maximize your impact. The good news is, they're out there!

This whitepaper will help you understand why it's important to know who your nonprofit or small business is trying to reach. We'll also talk briefly about how to identify and segment your audience, how to learn more about who they are and what motivates them, and how to craft messaging, programs, products, and services that resonate.

The Problem With a Broad Approach

"Everyone." That simple word strikes fear into the hearts of marketing teams around the world.

Knowing who you are trying to reach is crucial to your success, whether you're running a nonprofit or selling a product or service. The answer to "who is your audience?" is almost never going to be "everyone" — unless you sell air, water, or some other necessity of life.

Driven by a desire to reach as many people as possible, organizations frequently try to appeal to a wide audience. But what happens if you target the wrong group?



- **Wasted Resources:** You have a limited amount of time, money, and effort. If you use those resources inefficiently or spread them too thin, you risk reducing the overall effectiveness of your communications, not to mention your programs and initiatives.
- **Generic Messaging:** Broad and untargeted communications can become generic and fail to resonate with anyone in particular. This reduces engagement and leads to difficulty in building and maintaining a strong customer or supporter base.

Who Are You Talking To?

Even if your nonprofit or small business has big dreams like totally disrupting the education system or overhauling healthcare, you still have a specific audience (or a few specific audiences) that will be the key to unlocking your audacious vision.

Some people just may not be interested in what you have to say. Others may be very interested but some obstacles may be holding them back from the action you want them to take. There is probably also a group of people with the power to take action but with goals that run contrary to what you are trying to achieve.

And then there's that sweet spot: the people who not only want to hear from you but are also in a position to take action because of it. They are your main target audience!



Relevance vs Reach

Ever since social media became the prevailing form of communication, the idea of 'reach' has ruled over all other communications objectives. Suddenly, communicating became a battle for eyeballs and checking how many followers you have became an obsession. But does reach even matter anymore? It's an open secret that a huge proportion of the "users" on most social media platforms are actually bots, programmed to share spam content or artificially boost engagement. Do you want to communicate with bots?

While to some extent size does matter, we're here to say that relevance is more important. You want each message you put out to fall on the ears of real human users who want to hear what you have to say. To do that, you need to know who those humans are, what platforms they use most, when they are on those platforms, and what kind of content they interact with on a regular basis.

Finding Your Audience

1) Know your goals:

The first step to uncovering your ideal audience is to know what you are trying to achieve. You may have several goals — for example:

- find financial support for your activities
- market your products or services
- raise awareness about your progress and impact

Each of these goals may require targeting a different audience, and that's OK! You may end up with three or four specific target audiences; just make sure you don't end up with 30 or 40. And don't make each audience so broad that you can't define its common characteristics.

2) Gather intelligence:

Do some research on your current audience to discover more about their demographics, psychographics, interests, preferences, and behaviors. There are some useful tools that can help with this, such as social media analytics or Google analytics. Another good way to get to know your audience is to ask them — try a simple survey tailored to collecting the information that will best serve your needs.

3) Build audience personas:

An audience persona is a fictional biographical sketch of a typical customer or user of your service or product. Using the intelligence you gathered in the previous step, the persona begins to flesh out the pain points your target audience experiences and helps you visualize their typical online and offline behavior. This information will allow you to create targeted messaging and customized offerings that are more likely to be relevant to your audience. Personas help personalize and humanize your target audience, guiding your strategic decisions.

How Nike used audience personas to promote its loyalty app

Adam Sussman, Nike's chief digital officer, believes correctly targeting customers is key to the success of the Nike+ app.

"Ultimately, we know that when we deliver the exact right product, experience, and storytelling it makes a tremendous difference," he said during a recent keynote address.



One Nike+ user persona is called the "Weekend Runner." She is a 30-year-old woman with a half marathon coming up in a few months. Sussman explains that because this persona is an active user of the app, the company has a trove of data about her running habits as well as her goals and dreams.

The brand recently added features tailored for just this kind of user, such as recorded encouragement, advice from coaches, and footwear recommendations based on mileage and running habits.

Crafting Outreach and Engagement Strategies

Once you've identified your audience you will need to create a content strategy tailored to their needs and wants. This involves developing custom messaging, choosing the right channels, and creating engaging content.

Developing Tailored Messaging

As the Nike example on the previous page demonstrates, creating strategies and messages that resonate with different segments of your audience is the key to successful engagement.

Here's how to do it:

- **Value Propositions:** Clearly articulate the benefits you offer to each of your audience segments. Imagine you are speaking directly to each group. Highlight what they stand to gain by supporting your cause or buying your product. For example, young professionals might be interested in networking opportunities or maximizing convenience, while retirees might value the chance to give back to the community.
- **Tone and Language:** Adapt your communication style to match the preferences of your audience. Younger audiences might appreciate humor and a more casual and energetic tone, while older or more professional groups might respond better to a respectful and polished approach. Understanding these nuances helps make your messages more relatable and effective.
- **Storytelling:** Use relatable, human stories to connect emotionally with your audience. People are naturally drawn to narratives, so share stories that highlight the real, tangible impact of your work. Whether it's a testimonial from someone you've helped, a success story about a project, or feedback from a satisfied customer, storytelling can make your brand come alive and foster deep emotional connections.



Choosing the Right Channels

Selecting the appropriate channels for your outreach efforts ensures that your messages reach your target audience effectively.

- **Social Media:** Identify the platforms where your audiences are most active and focus your efforts there. For example, younger audiences may be more active on Instagram and TikTok, while professionals might prefer LinkedIn. Tailor your content to fit the platform's format and user expectations.
- **Email Marketing:** Develop personalized and segmented email campaigns to reach different audience segments. Use email marketing platforms to create tailored messages and track engagement. Personalized emails with relevant content are more likely to be opened and acted upon.
- **Events:** Host in-person or virtual events that cater to your audience's interests. Events provide a unique opportunity for you to meet your users face-to-face, learn about their likes and dislikes, and let them know what makes you tick. Consider hosting workshops or webinars, or attend trade fairs where you can meet people who fit your audience profile.
- **Traditional Media:** Don't overlook the power of press releases, print ads, and radio. Traditional media can be especially effective for reaching local audiences or older demographics, if that is a crucial segment for you based on your audience analysis.



Creating Engaging Content

Content is the cornerstone of your outreach strategy. Creating diverse and engaging content keeps your audience interested and involved.

- **Multimedia:** Incorporate videos, infographics, and podcasts to cater to different content consumption preferences. Visual and audio content can often convey complex information in an accessible and engaging way.
- **Interactive Content:** Use quizzes, polls, and surveys to actively involve your audience. Interactive content can make your audience feel more connected and invested in your cause. For example, a poll about future project or product ideas can generate excitement and valuable feedback and make your audience feel involved.
- **Educational Content:** Offer webinars, workshops, and guides to educate your audience about what you do and empower them with knowledge. Educational content can position your organization as a credible thought leader and build trust with your audience.



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