

Why You Should Choose a Niche for Your Freelance Business, and How to Do It

Nick Usborne

This is a topic I can become quite passionate about!

As a coach, I work with a lot of freelancers, many of them just starting out. And with almost every new client, I find myself having to argue the case for [choosing a niche or area of specialization](#).

I have to do this because the default setting for most start-up freelancers seems to be to launch their careers as generalists. They want to take any kind of work from any kind of client, from any industry.

I understand that point of view. I really do. By declaring that you will work for anyone, you are casting your net as wide as possible, apparently maximizing the opportunity to attract new clients and build your [copywriting portfolio](#) more quickly.

At least, that's the theory. And it's a reassuring theory. It's comforting to think you are reaching out to the maximum number of prospects.

But it doesn't work. Truly, that's a disastrous path to take.

Why? In part, you can blame it on the web. There are numerous "freelancers for hire" sites on which thousands of freelance writers and copywriters have signed up. Sites like Elance.com, Guru.com, and Freelancer.com. And many others.

Sign up at these sites and you get the opportunity to bid on jobs posted by companies looking for freelance help.

The trouble is, the competition is massive, as is the downward pressure on the price you can charge. Bid for a job and you might find yourself competing for it with a freelancer from India or Latvia who will quite happily work for \$6 an hour.

"Okay," you say, "I won't sign up at those sites, but I still want to be a generalist."

That doesn't help. Because all those people will still be competing with you. Even if some prospective clients find your site, they know they can compare your prices with other writers on those sites.

Besides which, there is no real value in ever presenting yourself as a generalist. It's not something worth fighting for or struggling for.

Specialists always earn more money than generalists. It's true in the medical profession, financial services industry, the consulting business, and every other business. Specialists earn more.

And to [be a specialist](#), you need to choose a specialty or a niche.

What is a freelance niche?

There are two main ways to choose your niche. You can choose by industry or by writing specialty.

An example of an industry niche is to write only for the software B2B industry. In other words, you would work only for companies which sell software to other companies.

An example of a writing specialty niche is to focus on writing only e-newsletters.

Or you can combine these two [kinds of copywriting](#). An example of that would be to specialize in writing sales pages for fitness equipment companies.

Important ways in which being a specialist helps you

First, you can earn a great deal more. As I said, specialists in all areas of business earn more than generalists.

Second, it makes marketing your business a great deal easier. Imagine it's Monday morning and you have scheduled an hour to spend on approaching some new prospects.

If you are a generalist, who are you going to call? You have a universe comprising of millions of companies. Which companies will you reach out to? And what will you say to them that might make them want to hire you?

Are you going to say, "Hi, my name is Jack. I'm a freelance copywriter and I'll write any kind of copy for any kind of company. Please hire me"?

Why on earth would they hire you? What they see is rock-bottom value.

On the other hand, if your specialty is writing copy for dentists, you can get up on Monday morning, open your copy of the American Dental Association's membership list, and call the next five dentists on the list.

Better still, you'll have something to say. You'll have some value to offer.

You could say something like, "Hi, my name is Brenda. I'm a freelance copywriter and consultant, specializing in helping dentists build their client base and profitability. I have some proven packages I would like to show you."

Do you see what I mean? Specialists know who to call, know what to say, and have proven value to offer. That's why they do so much better than generalists, and that's why they make so much more money.

How to choose your niche

Ask yourself ... what do you know? In which industries have you worked? If you have a hobby or passion, which industries are involved?

Also, what would you like to write about? Yes, it matters. If you choose an industry that truly interests you, it will always be easier to get out of bed in the morning and start work. Your writing will be better too.

Once you have chosen a few possible options, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Can I find these companies easily? (i.e., is there an equivalent of the American Dental Association membership list? Or an industry magazine? Or an annual trade show? Or a business directory? Or an online group site or forum?)
2. Do these companies understand the value of copywriting? In other words, will they treat you with respect and pay you a decent fee? Local aromatherapy experts may have neither the understanding nor the budget to support you.
3. Can I carve out a niche here, or is there too much competition from other freelancers? Want to specialize in the natural health business? Forget it ... thousands of other freelancers got there before you. As a niche, it's too broad and too competitive. Find a niche that other freelancers haven't found yet.

For example, I have a coaching client who writes marketing materials for software companies which sell custom applications to small banks and insurance companies. Does he have competition from other copywriters? Nope. None. This makes it easy for him to pick up new clients and to charge a premium fee for his work.

Finally, once you have chosen your niche, build your brand

It's almost impossible to build a strong brand as a generalist. [But as a specialist, you can.](#)

To paraphrase New York designer, Milton Glaser – be distinctive, focus on what you love and what you do well, and become celebrated for it.

It is that distinctive difference that will set you apart, establish your brand, and attract better and higher-paying clients.

Read this next to learn [how to be a freelance copywriter](#) and where to start.

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20 Responses to "Why You Should Choose a Niche for Your Freelance Business, and How to Do It"

Great article, Nick! I'm in the process of re-launching my business using this advice, after two years of being a generalist and making only moderate income. Thanks for the advice.

Steve Roller – over a year ago

Great Article.

One of the most important questions to ask is "Do these companies understand the value of copywriting?" It's easy to overlook, and assume people "get it", but I've wasted a lot of time on companies that just didn't appreciate the value of hiring a pro-writer. Cuz after all..."anyone can write."

Guest (Stacey Morris) – over a year ago

You've convinced me Nick, but I don't believe my talents and interests match a needed niche. For example, all my work experience is in law enforcement. There aren't that many companies dealing with this, so I don't think that is feasible. My interests also include dogs and travel, both of which seem to me to be saturated. So, I'm still a generalist.

Guest (Wally Mountxz) – over a year ago

I enjoyed your article very much. I am about a fourth of the way through the six figure copywriting course. I am interested in finance, sports an law. I look forward to developing a niche. I would like to talk woth you about coaching and mentoring. Thanks!

Guest (Corey jenkins) – over a year ago

Great advice Nick!

A thought for all new copywriters...

Heed Nick's advice on this one without giving it a second thought. I would bet nearly every up-and-coming student copywriter, myself included, has wasted far too much time and energy wavering over the idea of picking a marketing niche or copywriting specialty.

Focusing as narrowly as possible will minimize the overwhelm and forward one's copywriting career more quickly and with more enjoyment of the process than being a generalist.

Jerry Bures – over a year ago

Thanks for the feedback, everyone. I have been shouting and screaming this message for a long time...but plenty of people still try being a generalist. :) Corey, if you want to learn more about my coaching services, check out asknickusborne.com

Nick Usborne – over a year ago

Nick,

When you mentioned that the natural health field is pretty saturated, I felt a little disappointed because that's something I've always wanted to write about ever since I graduated from college. I was a biology major in college, and so naturally this is one of the niches I would be interested. I just wanted to know if there is another niche within the realm of health and fitness that's not as competitive.

Randy Kao – over a year ago

This topic is perfect for me this week! I am one of those who is OK at A LOT of things. Can pretty much figure anything out if I try hard enough. I decided on copywriting in particular, and being "pushed" like this has pointed me to my passions for the Brazilian culture & Language. How do I do market research...for example...Brazilian companies needing marketing pages for selling products to North Americans?

BrendasMailDesk – over a year ago

Thanks, Nick. I'm in the midst of choosing a niche. I've got several routes I could go: Dogs, Rare Books (I have found some of these for occasional customers), History, Health...

On that last note, how would natural health focused on psychiatric patients and care-givers work out in your opinion?

Aaron Atkinson – over a year ago

About the natural health market – let me clarify. Natural health as a whole is a huge and competitive market. But if, as a couple of readers suggest, you choose a vertical within natural health, like fitness and fitness equipment, or natural foods, etc, then these are certainly viable niches. In fact, there are probably dozens of viable niches in this area. Just avoid the generic, general promise of "I am a natural health copywriter".

Guest (Nick Osborne) – over a year ago

Your #2:Do these companies value of copywriting? I have lots of experience in the health industry so i think that would be the easiest for me to start with however, how do know these potential clients value all this? I don't want to put my efforts into a niche that wont be worth it. thanks.

Guest (vanessa) – over a year ago

I have read so many of these articles and study guides. I still have no idea which niche I should approach. I have spent more than 20 years as a reporter covering everything from business to education to local news and real estate. Most recently I have been volunteering with local church organizations and am thinking that maybe that should be my niche, but I am not sure. How do I really know?

Zelda M – over a year ago

How can you tell if your niche is saturated?

linda bennett – over a year ago

Is it possible to be too young to begin living "The Writer's Life?"

I've always had a passion for writing but I am more of a storyteller. I'm currently looking into copywriting but I'm not sure if it's the right path for me. And if I do copywrite, I'm not sure which niche I should choose. I'm into video games, interior design, and the environment. I haven't studied any of these topics in school but they are part of my hobbies.

Any advice or suggestions on how I ought to proceed?

Dani B – over a year ago

Great article Nick! I'm in the midst of choosing a niche. I had 3 ideas in mind (1) self help 2) Education market, and 3) Christian Market. I narrowed it down to Christian market. I have written a book called...To Every Woman There is a Season, teachings to guide a woman through her times.I have a passion for helping women to know who they are in Christ! The idea here is to start with the natural seasons and progress to the spiritual...Do you think this would be a profitable niche for me? THX

Angela Elaine 2016 – over a year ago

Angela, hi

I think the niche idea is fine. Now it's down to you to make the site remarkable and wonderful. :)

Nick

Nick Usborne – over a year ago

Excellent article. My "dilemma" is I know quite a bit about alternative health and self help (having been a coach in that field) and also financial education (having worked in that field for 18 years).

I do not tend to self motivate unless the topic is of interest so it seems to be a choice between the first two, even though I suspect the financial niche might be more lucrative.

Ellen S – over a year ago

Hello Nick.

Great article. I understand why specializing is such a plus for a writer. I have some niche ideas where I have some expertise, but how/where do I look to see if there is a market for my expertise?

My two biggest areas of expertise are:

Nostalgia - old time TV, radio shows and movies Social work - specifically foster kids

Best Regards, Colin

Guest (Colin Kingston) – over a year ago

My background is in Biology, however, my passion is in animal rescue, animal behavior, and essential oils and the use of essential oils for animal health. What kind of companies could I use my passions to write for?

Guest (Mary Nugen) – over a year ago

Mary, hi

The natural health care market for pets is pretty huge. I imagine you could carve out a nice niche among those businesses.

Nick

Nick Usborne – over a year ago

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American Writers & Artists Institute

220 George Bush Blvd, Suite D

Delray Beach, FL 33444

(561) 278-5557 or (866) 879-2924