

myweeklymarketing.

Janice Hostager: 0:00

You don't have to actually answer this question because I think I know the answer already. But do you ever feel completely overwhelmed with your marketing? I asked this because today's podcast guest, Nicole Bernard, and I both focus on marketing strategy for our businesses and we do it for the same reasons because we see so many overwhelmed entrepreneurs and we both feel that the way to conquer overwhelm is through marketing strategy. But that means starting with the foundations, specifically your ideal customer avatar, which is what we're talking about in our episode today. As you'll hear in the interview, Nicole was first an entrepreneur with a farm she and her husband had together, but now she runs a marketing agency to help other small business owners manage their marketing too. In fact, it's her mission to help a million small businesses. I love that goal. So here's my conversation with Nicole. Good morning, Nicole. Thanks for joining me today. Thanks for having me. I'm excited to chat. So tell us about your story. How did you arrive at this place? Has your journey been what you expected it to be, or tell us a little bit about your background.

Nicole Bernard: 1:15

Yeah, definitely. It's funny. Actually, I had a meeting with Erk before this, and someone who asked a similar question like did you ever think like always think you're going to be an entrepreneur? And I was like no, I actually thought I was going to be in like the corporate world with cute clothes and stilettos, and then I ended up on a farm. But yeah, so it's been great. I started my entrepreneurial journey in 2007. As I mentioned, my husband and I had a small farm in Brewery. We did that for 10 years. I did all the marketing because that's my degree and because I can't really like growing plants very well.

Janice Hostager: 1:51

I did that part.

Nicole Bernard: 1:53

I want to. I really, really do, but it just does not work. So, yeah, we did that for 10 years and then we ended up closing the farm because we caused a little too much traffic and our neighbors weren't as excited about our success as we were Interesting. Yeah, that was kind of a crazy time, but looking back, you know, things always work out the way they're supposed to. Then I worked at a marketing agency and then branched out on my own in 2016. And that's what I've been doing for the past eight years.

Janice Hostager: 2:22

That is really interesting. I love it. I love hearing people's stories because everybody has such a unique story to tell and almost nobody I've ever talked to says this is exactly what I planned on doing. This is exactly. You know. No, life doesn't work that way. Nope, not at all. So you founded your agency in 2016. And I love that you came to the same realization. I do because we do pretty much the same thing to focus on marketing strategy. So did you have it like an aha moment where you realized that people didn't really have a strategy in place, or is it something that you kind of learned from in your own business?

Nicole Bernard: 2:57

Yeah, kind of similar. Yeah, like, I kind of learned from my own business and then also like and you know, in being in college was before the internet was even a thing so I learned about marketing strategy, but our tools and the way they're executed is completely different, as you well know. So I remember having you know strategy classes kind of back then, but not to the extent now. But yeah, like, even as a small business owner, like for the farm, even though I did the marketing, like I didn't quite write it down the way I probably should have and just kind of was doing things that were working. And then we went to, like, when we closed the farm, we were going to move locations and we came up with a big business plan. That was probably the first time that I ever really sat down and like wrote out a marketing strategy, and it was mainly because, you know, we were, we were going for funding, and at that point, I was like, oh, my goodness, like I should have done this before and so, and then, in talking with entrepreneurs and business owners over the past few years about that too, I've found that a lot of them don't, because, you know, we kind of jump into business and we're so excited there are a million other things to do that kind of gets put on the back burner. But it's such a fundamental piece of success, you know. And so yeah, just kind of like getting people to take the time to kind of and it doesn't have to take a ton of time either, you know, but just kind of getting their thoughts out and their goals and things like that. So that's been really fun to help other business owners do that.

Janice Hostager: 4:24

Oh yeah, yeah, I found that was true. I mean I had a design agency for a number of years and so I would do their website and I would do their logo, but I had a marketing background, so that's kind of. I came up in corporate and agencies and so on and that's the thing I saw is that small entrepreneurs or small businesses would do a lot of what I call shot-in-the-dark marketing, where they would do an ad here, social, do some social media, but they wouldn't really understand how it all connected together and they really wouldn't do, like you said, that the groundwork, which is really understanding First of all, their target customers and really niching down and really understanding who that customer was. So I know that's kind of what we want to talk about today too is a little bit about that target customer. So from what do you think is a kind of common myth about

target customers that when you see a new business or you have to do a client, what do they come in with? Like when you say who's your target customer, what do they say?

Nicole Bernard: 5:26

Yeah, I think people, like business owners, have like a general idea. You know like, oh, I'm, you know, solving this problem or I'm providing the service, and these you know like with a person on the end in mind, but they don't quite take the time to like really dig a little bit deeper, you know, and kind of like figure out, you know where they're hanging out online or offline. You know, like what kind of content they actually like to consume. Like I actually hate videos when probably, like one of those videos, the only person like that doesn't consume them. I'd rather read. And so, like just even those little nuances, a lot of people are like, oh, no, I'm just gonna do a bunch of videos because that's what I hear, and kind of similar to what you're saying about trying all these different things but nothing's really working because they're not quite connecting all the puzzle pieces together. So I think to like people just being like oh, I know who I'm talking to. But when you really start kind of asking those questions, you know like what are they really struggling with? Like what are they typing into Google? As you know, you can see a lot of that data on the back end. And then when they learn that they're like, oh my goodness, you know, and then they're able to kind of create content where they're at and it's just, you know, a lot more effective that way.

Janice Hostager: 6:38

Oh, it is like it's so foundational, I mean once you understand what they're looking for and what their pain points are, and even the little things like yeah, like where they like you said about the video. I mean there are customers that love video and there are customers in the same. It can be you, you still be your ideal customer, but they are more analytical. I know I did an article a while back about the four types of customers and some are really analytical. They look for those numbers and they read every word on your sales page. Other people are like they identify with your personality and they just want to connect with you on a personal level. And other people are really focused on doing good for the world and more of a humanist. And so I mean, there's so many different nuances to identify that target customer that it really does become challenging, and I think a lot of small business owners sort of brush past that. It's like oh yeah, yeah, I know, you know she's a woman, she's, you know, 25 to 55 or something like that, and the reality is that a 25-year-old is not going to be on the same social media platforms that the 55-year old is not so really, really understanding who that ideal customer is and creating an avatar about it is so important. So do you have a process that you use for your clients, or what do you

do? What do you recommend, like? So you say, okay, you need to dig a little deeper. What pathway do you bring them down?

Nicole Bernard: 8:12

Yeah. So, whether I am working like with doing done for them or I also work with them sometimes to kind of teach them what to do, I have a workbook that they start with and the first part is their goals. You know, like, what are their goals? Are they are? They? Are they going more like brand awareness, like I really want people to see? I want to do a lot of social media or are they trying to increase their conversions on their website because they're not taking that next step? Maybe their goal is to be able to hire someone you know and so kind of like really again taking the time to sit down for a cup of coffee or glass of wine or something and think about those goals. Again, I feel like people have a vague idea of what their goals are. But until you kind of start to write them down and get them out of your head, it's just harder to kind of like hold to them because you're not quite sure to start there and then kind of go into, like the buyer persona, the same thing, like what are their struggles? What are they googling? How do they like to consume that you know where? Where are they financially? Where are they like literally located? Are they seasonal things like that, to kind of really break it down? And then it has a part where they can actually write up like a paragraph about their avatar, like give, give her a name, you know, like it's kind of really getting that in-depth with it. No-transcript, finally, kind of like right now we know who we're talking to and our goals, like what is your, you know your messaging, like what resonates with them, like is it a video? Is it images? What kind of images? You know, like kind of where that is, and then is that consistent across, like your presence and that kind of working through that as well? So, yeah, that's kind of where I start. It's a, it's a workbook that I sent them.

Janice Hostager: 9:56

Oh, I love that idea and you have that workbook available right For as a download.

Nicole Bernard: 10:01

I do, I do, yeah, totally free. I've shown it. That's awesome, yeah.

Janice Hostager: 10:06

Because I think all of us, and I personally, have struggled with this because we don't want to leave people out. And what I say to people, to clients, is that you're not going to leave people out, you're just focusing on the one that's going to spend the most money with you. That's going to be the best customer to work with. That is your ideal, your dream customer. Because if you've got, if you're putting money and advertising, for example, and you're trying to reach everybody, you're going to get people that you don't want to be

working with as well. So if you really focus on that one ideal customer, it makes such a huge difference.

Nicole Bernard: 10:46

I agree and all that yeah.

Janice Hostager: 10:48

Yeah, so do you know of places that small businesses can kind of research and gather information about their customer, or is it something that do you feel like they need to know? If they have an existing business, do they need to know who's already buying from them, or can they focus on who they want to buy from them or how?

Nicole Bernard: 11:09

do you manage?

Janice Hostager: 11:10

that.

Nicole Bernard: 11:11

Yeah, so, yeah, kind of going through a little bit of analytics, whether that's their social media, kind of seeing who's following them, who's engaging. Because, yeah, there's a lot you can get from the KPIs on Meta or even LinkedIn. It'll show you where they live, their age group, their gender, they're. You know, it doesn't necessarily show their income level, but things like that so you can kind of glean a little bit of information. And then on your website as well, so you can kind of tell again where are they coming from, you know what, like how old they are. And then you can also even go a little bit more granular. If you have, like your Google Analytics in your search console, talking to each other, you can literally see the queries that they put in, so like what they're typing and how they get to your website. So that gives a little more insight too. It's like oh, this is how they found me, this is what they're looking for, and then you can kind of start to create content around that which is really, really effective because you already know what they're looking for.

Janice Hostager: 12:17

Gotcha. Yeah, yeah, that is so true. I mean, and I know that it's gotten harder over the years, like when we first started with Facebook, they used to have Facebook audience insights, which was like a goal of mine of information, and they still have that. It's just not as good as it used to be. Yeah, it's not in-depth, yeah, definitely, and it really is kind of hard, but a lot of it is just who you really want to be reaching to right, so it's not necessarily who.

Necessarily, it is not necessarily who is coming to you currently, but it's also people that you want to be reaching out to right. Yeah, definitely.

Nicole Bernard: 12:56

Yeah, the other thing that you could do is what we do is some hashtag researched across Instagram and LinkedIn as well, and kind of whatever you want to attract or your services you're provided like, I will put relevant hashtags to that and then I'll kind of go and see what kind of people are following that, what they're engaging with, what kind of content they're creating. So that's kind of another kind of high level, you know, not as granular, but an idea of what those kinds of people are searching for and what they're engaging with.

Janice Hostager: 13:29

Oh, I love that idea. It's a really good one, yeah, because sometimes you just don't know you take a guess right yeah. And sometimes our guesses are really wrong, exactly so. Is there a way that small businesses should adapt or change their target customer as their business grows or changes over the years, or do you recommend that people go back and do this exercise like every so often, or what are your thoughts about that?

Nicole Bernard: 13:58

Yeah, I kind of encourage every year, maybe even half, like every six months, like just kind of revisiting. You don't have to go through the whole thing again but kind of looking at, if my branding and messaging are still relevant to where my business is now, to the customers that I'm serving, that I want to serve. And sometimes you might tweak a little bit and some people will start as well with just the core avatar and maybe you have built other avatars you can have multiple. So again to like, are there new people that I am, you know, needing to create content and connect with? So yeah, I just encourage you at least once a year would be great. You know, if we have more time, that'd be great too.

Janice Hostager: 14:40

But yeah, and sometimes we can tell just by looking at our analytics. Right Like right, you know this is not the person I was hoping to pull in. Really you know, and you touch on this but it's okay to have multiple avatars for a customer right? I mean, I used to work. One of my clients was a children's museum and they wanted, of course, to reach parents, but they also wanted to reach grandparents and that was very different in the way they reached them, you know it was totally different platforms, totally different messaging.

Nicole Bernard: 15:14

Yep.

Janice Hostager: 15:15

Yeah, I agree.

Nicole Bernard: 15:16

And I think I wondered, I feel like too, sometimes small business owners get overwhelmed when they're like oh, I have different ones that have to create different content. But being able to like, have some templates or, still again, know who you're talking to and what kind of content they like to consume, it gets quicker to be able to create content for them. Because I've talked to business owners who are like I don't have the time to do. You know multiple or you know cross platforms with a different kind of content. But yeah, kind of getting into that routine of knowing what they're wanting and then you know you can schedule ahead and things like that, so that like little tips like that to make your life a little bit easier, that does work really well too, so let's talk a little bit about the business that you have now.

Janice Hostager: 16:01

What do you wish that you would have known when you started your business?

Nicole Bernard: 16:05

Oh, that's a good question. I asked that one on my podcast. Sometimes too, um, I guess I wish I would have known to just kind of be ready for whatever. Like I didn't realize you know how much of a roller coaster sometimes entrepreneurship can be. And that's okay. I actually really love it. I don't think I could ever work for anyone or go to a corporate job, but you know, just being prepared and knowing that's going to get uncomfortable but it's worth it, yeah, I think that's probably like. And also to the other one I would say like growing my network earlier, like I started my podcast five years ago, in the sense of, like I want to connect with other entrepreneurs, like maybe they're as crazy as I am, or you know, like things like that and that has been like that support and that community has been amazing, so that just having other people along the ride with you, because, like my, my husband and I work together on our first business. But this one now, you know, when I start to talk to him about things, he's like OK, I'm like you don't understand what I'm saying, you know. So, yeah, just stuff like that, my community and being prepared to be uncomfortable.

Janice Hostager: 17:18

Yes, oh, both of those. Yeah, in fact, I was just listening to a podcast the other night about loneliness and how it really. It wasn't necessarily like we think about the pandemic and post-pandemic age, but it really happened prior to that, like when we started jumping on social media and having your community being online rather than in person, like going to

networking events and just connecting with other entrepreneurs and I have loved this. So I haven't been doing my podcast all that long, just about almost a year, but, you're right, just connecting with other entrepreneurs and saying, oh, they get me, you know, and oh, I totally struggle with that too. And sometimes I think, like in our businesses, we paint this picture of perfection especially, it's all Instagrammable, right? You? i know it's like oh, this was so easy. I just did this, this, this and thing I was a millionaire.

Nicole Bernard: 18:11

you know, and it's not like that at all.

Janice Hostager: 18:14

Look, it is not like that. I mean, it may be like that. Some people but yeah, but I haven't met those people yet. But but so that's why I you know, that's kind of one of my passions like dealing with especially the foundational stuff with marketing, because I and I grew up in a small business family and my dad had a business, you know, and I think if I would have been able to utilize what I now know with his business, it would have been so much more successful for him. And it was successful, but it wasn't like as much as I think it could have been had he utilized some of these things. And you know, I think that's kind of what drives me. But is there anything else that you think is foundational? We talked a lot about the target ideal, customer rights. Is there anything else that you feel like is really foundational with small businesses when we're talking about marketing?

Nicole Bernard: 19:09

Yeah, I don't know if this falls. I feel like this falls into foundational, but I'm not sure Just being consistent, that seems to be also a big issue. Again, we've got a million things going on. But I saw a stat on LinkedIn this week. Like remember, it used to be like the seven touches to convert someone. I would think it's like 81 now or something. And so I was just like, oh what? Yeah, so that in itself, again, like even as a non-marketing person or business owner, seems discouraging, you know, because it's like how much am I going to have to keep going and doing? And I think that's where business owners, like you were saying before, they'll jump to other things, or I'll try and add, or I'll try a social media post, but they're not seeing the results because there's no like consistency behind it. And once you do like, once you it's kind of like you know, rolling down a hill the momentum starts to build, but a lot of people don't quite get to that momentum-building spot. So that would just be the other big thing that I try to like hammer home, like be consistent. Whatever one you're doing, even if it's once a week, just make sure it's consistent, like whatever works for you because we're all different and have different things going on, but however, you can find consistency like do that.

Janice Hostager: 20:28

Right, right, and you're. That is so true. I think you know, once you get some momentum, it does kind of keep going and keep building and just keep showing up, even when you know you have two followers, you know that's. Those are two people that are hearing your message.

Nicole Bernard: 20:44

And they're.

Janice Hostager: 20:45

There's so much out there like there's so much noise out there, especially in social media, it's so hard to stand out from it. You know, seeing what's working, and, of course, on social media, which is like a whole another dozen podcasts right there, it's hard to stay ahead of the algorithm, first of all. And what's you know once you figure out like, oh, this is working now and then they'll switch it up and that's not going to be working anymore.

Nicole Bernard: 21:15

Super annoying.

Janice Hostager: 21:16

Yeah, it's really a challenging thing, but there are other places you can be. You don't need to be pouring hours and hours up into Instagram when you could just be, you know, maybe talking at a conference, for example, and you're going to get a whole lot more traction from that. So there are other ways to get your message out there. I think other than just adding to the noise right? Definitely Yep, yeah, yeah, yeah 81. I hadn't heard that, Like I heard more than seven but like oh okay, well, that's a little discouraging.

Nicole Bernard: 21:49

It is. It's crazy, yeah, but like you said, like if there's two people that are following you, like those people are following you for a reason you know, and if you're building a community and support, you can reach out to them like referrals. You know public relations, there's lots of free opportunities there, like there are so many options. And again, I think that is what might be slightly overwhelming sometimes if you're not coming from like a marketing background. But once you have you know what your goals are, who you're talking to, and where they're at, then it makes it easier to figure out which of those you should put your time and effort into.

Janice Hostager: 22:24

Right, that's exactly right, which, once you have your strategy in place, or what I call the trail to the sale. You know exactly where you should be going and that's why that chart customer is so important, because it determines your next steps along the way for sure. And yeah, I think there are so many different options out there that it does kind of become a little overwhelming to a lot of people. But again, just start where you are, speak to that individual, speak to those two people that you're following, and sometimes I think we look at the numbers too. We're like. Oh, you know, only 10 people like this post. Well, those are 10 human beings. If we had 10 people in our office, that would be a lot. Right so you know it's that starting small is where everybody starts, and even the big corporate giants. You know they started with one follower, you know so it's not like. We start with thousands of you know likes for every post we do. We all start in the same place and that's kind of the nice thing about the technology we have right now is that we can. It is kind of a more level playing field. You don't have to have that massive marketing budget to make an impact and connect with people.

Nicole Bernard: 23:45

Totally. I was actually just telling my son the origin story of Nike the other day because we're not too far from Eugene where it all started and he had no idea. Yeah, like Bowerman made his shoes pre-fountain the owner, he made his shoe that literally his wife's waffle iron and they sold it out the back of their car at track meets, I mean, and they were called Blue Ribbon Sports. They weren't even Nike. So we all start small and could be out the back of our car, you know.

Janice Hostager: 24:14

Right, I didn't know that that's really interesting. Waffle iron Huh yeah, look at my waffle iron differently.

Nicole Bernard: 24:20

Yeah, so he could run, they were lighter and so he literally took his wife's and she got really upset with them because he ruined it, because he you know. But they were able to run faster and that's. That was kind of the catalyst of Nike. I love that. That is cool.

Janice Hostager: 24:37

So, Nicole, where can people learn more about you and your business?

Nicole Bernard: 24:41

Yeah, so my website is the best place to get started. Just nb. marketing, no. com that. That throws people off sometimes, but if that's where the freebie is, you'll see a drop-down.

There's a whole tab as well for some other freebies and the podcast is there social media links, so that would probably be the best place to start.

Janice Hostager: 25:01

Perfect, and I'll put all the links in the show notes as well Awesome, thank you. Thanks so much, Nicole, for joining me today. I loved our conversation.

Nicole Bernard: 25:09

Me too. Yeah, thank you so much. This is a blast.

Janice Hostager: 25:13

So do you think you have a better idea of who you should be aiming at with your marketing? If not, I want to encourage you to download Nicole's free workbook to determine your ideal target customer. I put the link in the show notes for today. Go to my weekly marketing. com forward, slash 47. That's episode 47. If you found this episode helpful, please consider leaving a review on Apple podcasts. That would mean so much to me. Thank you for listening today. I don't take it for granted. See you next time. Bye for now.