



Class Notes

You can't really have a productive discussion about picking a niche without talking about positioning. So, we're going to use positioning as our guide for making this important decision.

Positioning is the *perception* you create in the prospect's mind. It's the perception your prospect has about you and your services when they come in contact with your marketing materials, your website ... or *you!*

It's also about your "uniqueness." You're difference. What makes you different from most others ... and why a prospect should care about that difference.

A good way to start this “positioning” discussion is to talk about how three different companies position themselves.

Ritz-Carlton. The Ritz-Carlton is obsessed about every single detail about the consumer and the consumer’s needs, wants, and expectations. Everything they do is about *delighting* their guests.

Trader Joe's. One of the most profitable grocers in the world. Their secret? Innovative, hard-to-find, great-tasting foods at great prices.

Walmart. The world's largest retailer. Everyday low prices—absolute lowest-cost retailer. Huge assortment but not the greatest service.

These businesses DON'T try to be all things to all people. Instead, they take pride in serving a specific segment of the market or meeting a very specific need.

Remember: The world does NOT need another freelance commercial writer or copywriter. What the world really needs are freelance commercial writers who are clear about their positioning. That way prospects can make better decisions faster, and we can spend less time selling and more time on billable work.

Why Smart Positioning Is Critical

As a solo business owner, your time is your most valuable nonrenewable resource. And because you're limited by your time, you CANNOT afford to spend too much time and energy "selling" prospects.

Instead, you have to do as much pre-selling as possible through clear and compelling positioning (which often occurs through your website). That way when prospects inquire, they're already pre-sold to a certain extent, and you don't have to do all the heavy lifting at that point.

Pillars of Solid Positioning

For our purposes, positioning is about defining:

- What you do
- For whom
- Why you're different
- And why that difference matters to your prospects and clients

Your positioning should also include one or more credibility elements that answer the inevitable prospect question: "Why should I believe or trust you?"

Also, for our purposes, your positioning will be written from the point of view of what you'll be offering your clients—which is NOT necessarily focused on what

you've done in the past. *In other words, it's about what you're capable of delivering, not about what you've delivered or done in the past.*

A Word on Target Markets

Terminology we'll be using in this class:

- Target market
- Specialty

Target market refers to a group of prospects you can best serve. There are many ways to slice that, one of the most common being *industry*.

However, industry is NOT the only way to look at your target market. There are other attributes to consider, including other:

- Demographics
- Psychographics
- Common desires, needs or challenges

Also, for our purposes, the word "specialty" will refer to a type of assignment you've chosen to focus on. For instance, white papers, or bylined articles, or web copy or book ghostwriting.

Again, there is no right or wrong here. You do NOT need to focus on a particular industry, and you do NOT need to have a specialty. But you SHOULD have a well-defined target market if you want to improve your business in a big way. And again, a target market is simply a group of prospects you can best serve.

It's better to narrow your target market and stake your claim. When you do that, the prospects that are a good fit for you will be much more committed. They'll be more pre-sold, and everything else being equal, they'll be easier to work with.

Define Your "What"

"What" and "For Whom" are the two factors that define your target market.

"What" refers to the type of writing or writing assignments you take on. "For Whom" refers to the types of clients for whom you do that work.

When it comes to defining your "What," you want to look at factors such as:

- Type of assignments
- Copy vs. content (or both)
- Short vs. long
- Other assignment attributes

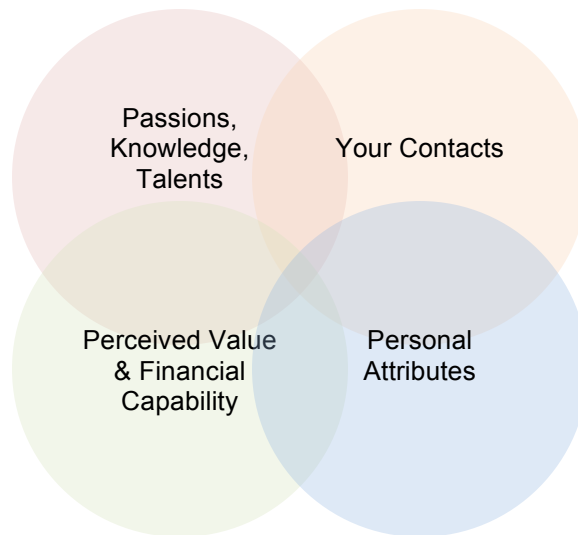
Your "What" doesn't need to be super-specific (e.g., I write case studies). It can be more general.

Define Your "For Whom"

The "For Whom" part of your positioning tends to create much more anxiety than the "What," so we're going to spend more time on this one.

Again, you do NOT have to declare an industry niche. You simply have to define a target market that's true to you and to your specific situation.

Here are the four key factors to consider when deciding on your "For Whom."
We're going to go through a detailed exercise later, so don't worry about trying to take down all of this information or making a decision right now.



There are four key factors to consider when making this decision, and it's important that you treat each of them with great care, because you'll have to decide where you fall inside each of these areas.

Your Passions and Talents

I'm talking about topics you care about or find interesting. Personal and/or business passions. Fields where you already have a good amount of knowledge.

Who You Know

You'll then want to start thinking about where you already have relationships. Where are your contacts today, both personal and professional? How strong are those contacts? How many of them are good "connectors"?

Relationships have never been this important. And very often some of our best opportunities can come from those we know, even if we can't see it at the moment.

Perceived Value + Financial Capability

As a potential target market emerges from thinking more about your passions, knowledge, interests and talents, as well as a closer inventory of the people you know, the third factor to consider is the value of your writing to that potential target market.

In other words, how important is the type of writing you do? Is it important enough for them to compensate you well? Or do they treat it more as a commodity than an investment with a high potential return?

Also, what's their financial capability to pay according to the value they see in your work? In other words, if they see great value in your product, can they pay accordingly?

- Example: Swimming instructor.
- Example: Energy conservation consulting firm.

First, you'll want to consider the offerings (products, services, solutions) of companies in that market. Ask yourself, are they:

- New or different?
- Expensive? (Expensive for their typical customers.)
- Complex?

Products, services or solutions that are new/different, expensive and/or complex don't just sell themselves. They're often "considered purchases."

Additionally, ask yourself:

Do the market's typical offerings address an URGENT or VERY IMPORTANT need or desire for their own customers?

You can answer that by looking at the products or services they sell to their customers. If these offerings are tied to:

- Revenue generation
- Profit improvement
- Risk mitigation
- Growth
- Mission
- A strong core desire or goal...

Then their offerings probably fall in the "Urgent" or "Very Important" category.

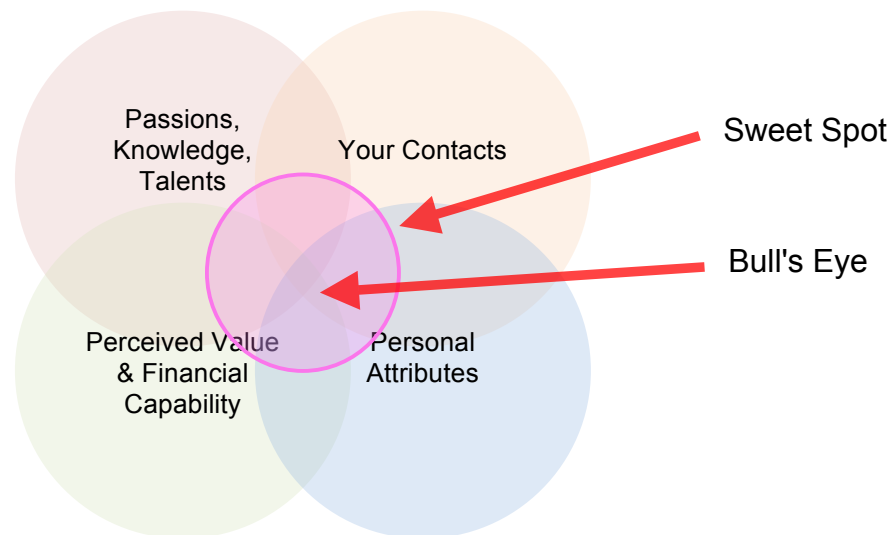
When a business or organization needs to market something that solves an urgent or very important problem for their customers, they're going to be much more willing to invest in content and/or copy to help market these offerings.

Personal Client Attributes

Finally, it's important that you consider other attributes that might play a role in how happy you are working in a particular target market. Specifically the attributes of the people you'd be working with directly.

The ideal target market for you is one where all these four factors meet. It's where you get to write about topics that interest you ... where clients don't take much work to close because you're able to leverage relationships and/or word-of-mouth marketing ... where they value the work you do and are willing to pay well for it ... and where the people are a real joy to work with.

There's a sweet spot you can focus on that includes—but is not limited by—the "bull's eye" below. The key is to pick a target market that's somewhere in this sweet spot.



In reality, the sweet spot is "moldable" and can bend in any direction that carries the most weight for you.

We'll revisit this "sweet spot" idea later. Let's get to the exercise...

Target Market Exercise

Please take the time to go through it over the next couple of weeks, even if most of the answers seem obvious to you. There's great value in writing down your answers.

Your "What"

1. What type of commercial writing do you really enjoy (or think you'd enjoy)? Content, copy, other? Long format vs. short format? Other factors?

2. What specific writing assignments do you like the most?

3. Which assignments feel easier to do? In other words, what type of work feels almost effortless when you get into it?

4. Are there any assignments that sound fascinating ... yet you've never had a chance to work on them before? What are they? What is it about them that sounds fascinating?

5. What types of writing assignments do you dislike? Are there any that you absolutely hate? If so, why?

Your "For Whom"

There are four key areas to consider in this "For Whom" category, starting with:

#1: Passions, Knowledge, Talents

1. First, consider your *passions, knowledge and talents*.

2. What topics do you know very well? What have you written about extensively (at least more than the average writer)?

3. In what industries have you written?

4. In what subject matter do you have particular expertise or experience?

5. What type of writing do you do well? What projects and topics tend to generate the most compliments from clients and colleagues?

6. What topics are you passionate about?

7. Say you inherited a \$20 million fortune this week. You no longer had to write for money. What kind of commercial writing or copywriting would you focus on? What topics?

#2: Contacts / Relationships

Next, let's look at your *personal and professional contacts*. Open your address book or your contact management system and create a list of where your best contacts work—their industries, fields or organizations. See if you find any patterns.

Also, pay particular attention to those contacts who seem to be good "connectors" (they seem to know a lot of people and are very good at connecting people together).

Here a memory jogger to guide you through this effort...

Current and previous employers:

Spouse's (or other family member's) current and previous employers:

People you've worked *with* in the past who may work in the marketing department of an organization or have a good connection in their employer's marketing department:

Fellow church members and/or parents from your children's school/social groups

Previous clients:

Anyone who has inquired into your services. They've called or emailed you in the past. Or you've met at a networking event of some kind:

Anyone who has subscribed to your e-newsletter or downloaded something from your website:

Anyone you know who's a potential referral source. A graphic designer, a consultant who knows you or has sent work your way. Or anyone else you know who's well connected and may know potential clients:

NOTE: You're looking for *quality* here, not necessarily quantity.

#3: Perceived Value and Financial Capability

The next area is that of *perceived value and financial capability*. Start your search by looking back at your answers above in the areas of knowledge, passions, talents, and interests—as well as your personal and professional contacts. See if you can find instances of products or services that are:

- New or different
- Expensive (expensive for the typical customers that buy them)
- Complex

(You're looking for at least two of out three in order for a market to score well in the "perceived value + financial capability" area.)

Again, products, services or solutions that are new/different, expensive and/or complex don't just sell themselves. They're typically "considered purchases" that involve a formal buying process, several decision makers and a lot of content from the vendor—content someone needs to write!

1. So, if you're familiar with industries, markets or organizations (or if you know people in those areas) that have these qualities, list them here:

2. As look at the list above, which ones seem to sell products, services or solutions that are perceived as "Urgent" or "Very Important" by their own customers (as opposed to "Nice to Have")?

Look at the products or services these industries, markets or sectors sell to their customers. If these offerings are tied to:

- Revenue generation
- Profit improvement
- Risk mitigation
- Growth
- Mission
- A strong core desire or goal

They're probably perceived as "Urgent" or "Very Important" by their prospects and customers.

Everything else being equal, the market that sells products or services that have a higher perceived value will be better targets for you as a writer *from a financial standpoint*. They'll have a greater need for content or copy, and they'll be more willing to pay higher fees.

If you didn't come up with any markets that fit this criteria based on your knowledge, experience, passions or contacts, work backwards and think of markets that have many of these qualities and that you at least find somewhat interesting. Run them through the litmus test above and see if you discover some possibilities.

#4: Personal Client Attributes

Finally, get clear on the types of people you want to work with. You may not be able to determine much about someone by the market in which they work or the organization they're a part of. But when you have that initial conversation with a prospect, you want to be able to assess that individual and how closely they match the attributes of your ideal client.

1. Think about the people you've enjoyed working with the most—the people you wish you could clone as clients. How do they treat you? What are their attitudes towards you and your work?

2. For contrast, let's look at the other side of the spectrum. Think about the people you've *disliked* working with the most. How did they treat you? What were their attitudes towards you and your work?

Why You're Different

1. Before thinking through your differentiators, ask yourself: What do you think clients value in a freelance writer? If you hired commercial writers yourself, what qualities would you look for?

Here are some ideas:

- No handholding required
- Quick turnaround
- Error-free work
- Excellent storytelling skills
- Can craft a compelling argument
- Professional
- Trustworthy
- Can hit the ground running
- Understand the industry, our business, our customers...

2. Next, describe what makes YOU (as a writer and a professional) different. What makes you a better choice than most of your competitors?

This is where I really want you to take your time. Some ideas to get you thinking:

- Background
- Career accomplishments
- Experience
- Education
- Skills
- Specialized knowledge
- Certifications
- Achievements, accomplishments, awards
- Track record
- Client roster
- Aptitudes
- Likes and dislikes
- Hobbies

Take inventory of what you have going for you in each of these areas. And again, take your time doing this. In some cases, your biggest differentiators aren't the ones you thought would be the strongest.

Also, please remember that the idea here is not necessarily to figure out why you're different from EVERYONE. That's a common mistake. Your goal is to describe what makes you different from MOST (or at least from MANY).

List those differentiators here:

3. Next, get some outside feedback. Email five to seven friends or colleagues—people you've known for at least two or three years. And if you already have clients and can include some of those clients here, even better. Here's the message I'd like you to send them:

Hi Jack,

I'm working with a business coach, and one of my assignments is to get feedback on the following question from a handful of people who know me well:

What do you see as my unique capability? In other words, what do I naturally do better than most other people you know?

Not looking for a ton of detail here. Just a few sentences. I need it by next _____, if possible. [give them 3 - 5 days]

Thanks in advance!

Jill

Don't be shy about asking your colleagues, friends and clients to give you this kind of feedback. Most people are happy to do this. If possible, try and pick people from different areas of your life (e.g., previous jobs, past or current clients, church, other outside activities, long-time friends, etc.). But if it's more concentrated in one area or another, that's fine also.

Once you have a few replies, you'll probably notice some patterns. Some of your responses will sound very similar. Pay attention to those patterns and

consolidate that feedback into themes. For instance, when I did this exercise, these three themes emerged:

- I have a gift for breaking down information into logical sequences and synthesizing that information into something useful.
 - I have a gift for understanding and developing powerful marketing strategies
 - I have a gift for analyzing, decoupling and solving complex problems
4. Finally, consolidate your differentiators. Review your responses from your questions above and from outside feedback and narrow it down to your strongest 3 to 6 differentiators. List them here:

Why Your Differences Matter

The final step is to describe what makes your differentiators important to your prospects and clients. So, for each differentiator in your consolidated list above, explain why it matters by matching it to what your clients need (which you listed in question #1 on page 21).

Example: "The fact that I have eight years' experience in the commercial insurance industry means that I can hit the ground running and tackle your projects with no handholding."

Essentially, you want to ask the following questions about each differentiator you listed: "So what? Why does that matter?" And specifically, "Why would that differentiator matter to a potential client?"

Explain each "So what?" here:

Putting It All Together

I've just given you a lot of questions, which will require some serious thinking. So let me recap how I would approach this:

1. Start with the "What" questions. That's usually the easiest area to define and get clear on.
2. The "For Whom" area will require the most thinking. Go through the questions in the order I've listed them. So, start by thinking through your skills, knowledge, passions and talents.
3. Move into the questions about the people you know. That will help you see potential opportunities in terms of people who could help you. It's also a good segue into the next area.
4. With the "financial capability" stuff, rather than creating a random laundry list of industries or markets to explore, start your search by looking back at your answers in the areas of knowledge, passions, talents, and interests—as well as your personal and professional contacts. Let those answers guide your brainstorming effort.
5. Don't discount the personal attribute questions. Those are very important. And again, they will give you the clarity you'll need when you talk with potential clients and you're trying to determine if that person feels like a good fit for you on a personal and professional level.
6. Finally, move to the "Why You're Different" and "Why that Matters" questions. And make sure to ask yourself "So what?" for every differentiator you list.

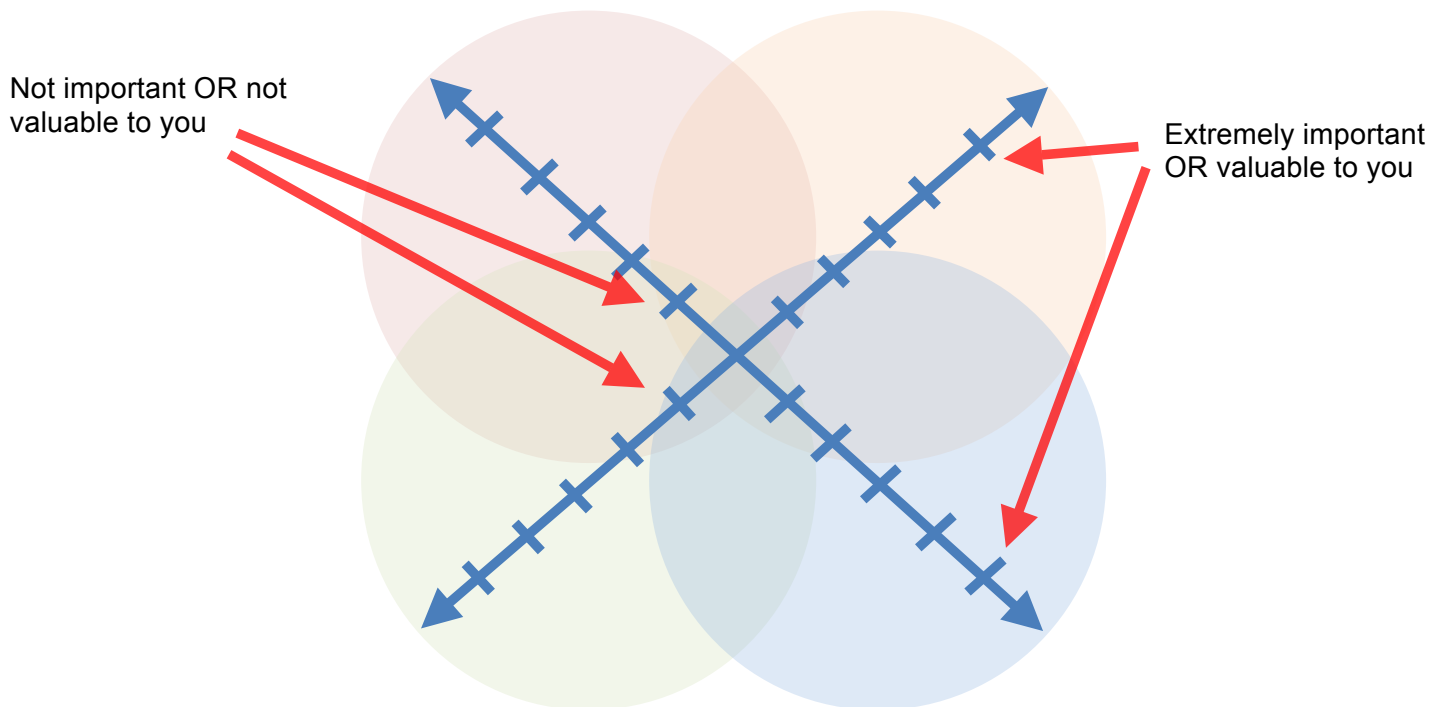
Bottom line: Go through this process methodically. Don't jump around.

Choosing Your Target Market

For many of you, the decision on a target market WON'T be very straightforward. You'll have to give this some thought, even once you have clarity on the issue.

You'll also weigh some of these four areas higher than others. In fact, I encourage you to use this "weighted approach" in your decision. This is not a decision you can make in a purely scientific way. But if you're really torn, try assigning each of these four areas a score between 1 and 5.

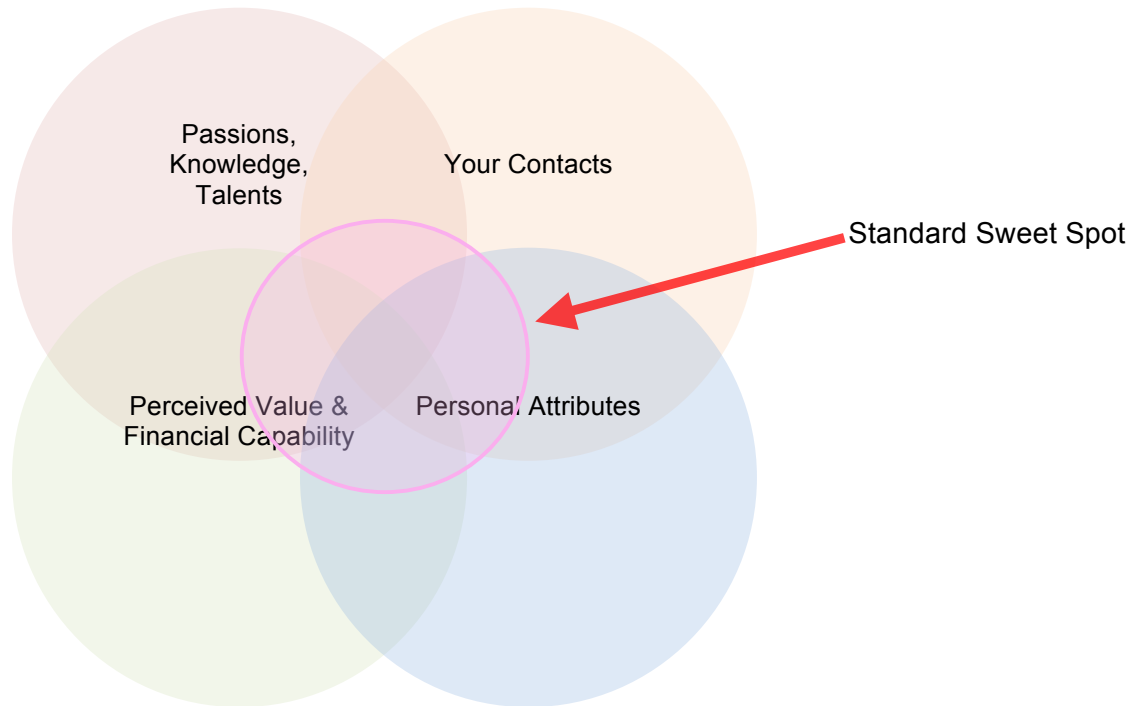
A score of 1 means that area is either not important to you OR there's nothing there that would help you get to where you want to go. Conversely, a score of 5 means that this area is incredibly important to you OR you have something very valuable to leverage there.



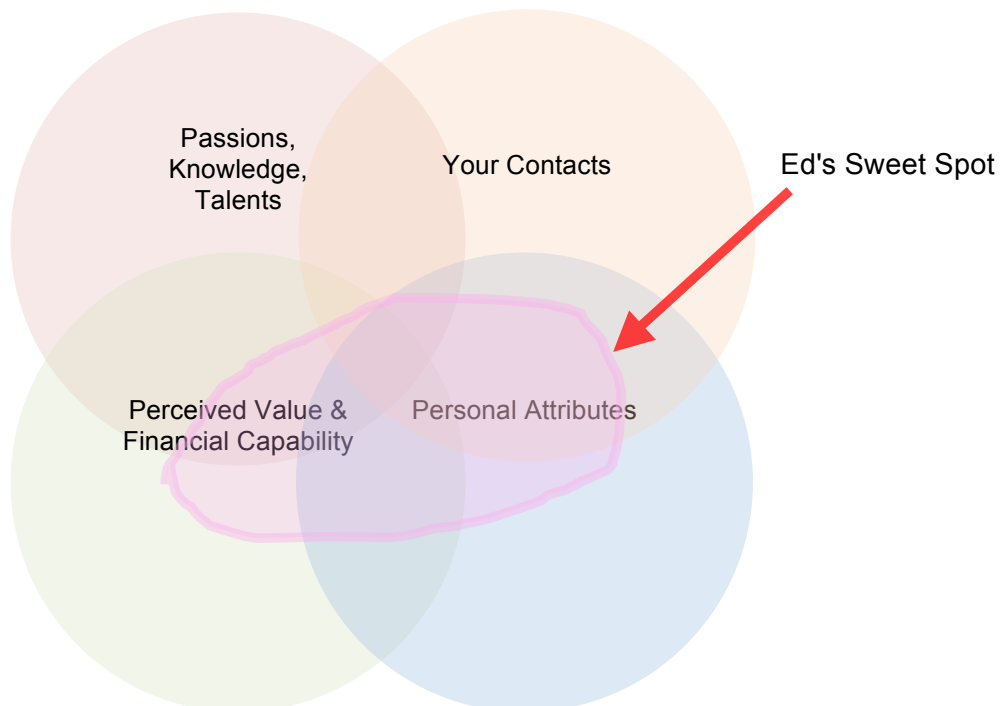
Make sure to weight each category honestly. And let the weights guide you. Use the results to think about your final answer, NOT necessarily to arrive at your final answer.

In other words, don't assume this is a decision you make simply by plugging in some numbers into a formula and accepting whatever comes out of it. You have to factor everything you've done so far in this exercise.

Let me give you a couple of ways to show this visually. The first image here is that of a basic sweet spot. Notice that there's that bull's eye in the middle, but then there's a larger area around it that's completely acceptable.



In my case, the sweet spot is a bit skewed. And that's represented by this second image. That's because I decided that financial capability, personal attributes and my network of contacts are more important to me than passions and knowledge.



Tips on Making the Best Decision

Choose Wisely: Make sure your chosen target market is big enough to support you AND clear enough to attract the right prospects.

Don't Go Too Narrow at First: Resist the temptation to go too narrow at first, in terms of target market specificity. It's safer to go down just enough to separate yourself from the crowd, but not so narrow that you drastically limit the size of your prospect base. Over time, you'll be able to go narrower as you get a better feel for the nature of your chosen market.

If You're a New or Aspiring Freelancer: Resist the temptation to be too rigid or focused. For instance, unless you have extensive experience writing case studies from your last two jobs in corporate marketing communications, don't say, "I'm a case study writer, and that's all I do."

Instead, follow the flow. Tap your personal and professional network. See where that leads you. Be open to working on just about any writing project just to get the experience of working with a client and managing a project. And see where that takes you.

Take Your Time: You may have to let this information (and your answers) marinate for a few days (or a week or two) before the right answer emerges.

Don't Wait for Perfection: Yes, you want to do this right and not jump into conclusions too early. But at the same time, it's best to make a "good enough" decision and take action on that decision than to sit around until the "best" solution emerges.

Keep in mind that this is more of a self-discovery process than a way to arrive at a perfect set of answers.

BONUS: Turning Your Findings Into Raw Copy

The final step of this self-discovery process is to turn your findings into some very raw copy. We're going to start that process by crafting a series of very simple **value statements**.

A value statement is nothing more than a simple paragraph or a series of bullet points that communicate your positioning. It describes:

- What you do
- For whom
- Why you're different
- Why that difference matters

I've found that creating a few of these value statements is a good warm-up exercise for crafting your web copy. It's an intermediary step that helps you get clear on this core message and gives you some good raw material for writing that copy.

It's a "sand box" of sorts. It gives you an opportunity to play around with some of the message elements in a "safe" environment before you make them live via web copy.

Using your findings from the positioning exercise you just went through, start crafting some statements that encapsulate your positioning. You can do this in one of two ways. You can write them in paragraph form OR in a series of bullets.

Let me show you some examples of each approach, starting with the paragraph format.

I help/work with _____ companies to write _____
(for whom) (what you do)

that _____. Unlike most business writers, I
(what's different about what you DO)

_____ and _____, which
(what's different about who you ARE) (Optional – 2nd differentiator / credibility element)

means that _____.
(what you bring to the table)

For example...

I work with software companies to write white papers, articles and case studies that help accelerate their sales cycles. Unlike most business writers, I am an 11-year software sales veteran, so I understand the complex, strategic selling process and the critical role marketing plays in this process.

Here's another format idea...

I'm a seasoned _____ who works with _____
(writer, copywriter, etc.) (for whom)

that need _____. I've worked with companies such as
(what you do)

_____, to _____.
(what's different about who you are) (what you bring to the table)

For example...

I'm a seasoned business journalist who works with midsize to large companies that need to continually produce clear and impactful thought leadership content. I've worked with companies such as McKesson, Cardinal Health, United Technologies and Honeywell to craft articles and white papers that generate better leads and increase media coverage.

I've found this "paragraph" approach to be useful when you have some really good ideas of how you want to communicate your positioning. So if you're ready to play around with some of the elements you uncovered during the positioning exercise, give this a try.

The "Bullet" Format

The other approach involves writing a series of bullet points that may not flow as well as the examples above. It works best when you're still sorting through ideas and trying to make sense of what you uncovered in that exercise.

Here are some examples of what that might look like...

- I write white papers, case studies and bylined articles.
- I work for enterprise software companies in the data management, WMS and A/E/C space.

- I have an 11-year corporate sales background.
- I have sold and marketed software and IT services for 14 years.
- I can build an airtight case for your solution using facts, reason and emotional triggers.
- I understand the complex, strategic selling process and the critical role marketing plays in this process.
- No handholding required. I'm the consummate professional. I get done, and I get it done on time. Always!
- You can't afford to work with people who won't come through. You already have enough on your plate. You're not a babysitter.
- On average, I work with clients for more than 2-1/2 years.
- I'm a dependable and trusted partner—a key member of my clients' marketing team.

Whichever approach you pick, the important thing is to NOT over-think this. You're NOT writing copy yet. You're simply trying to come up with raw statements that communicate the important elements of your positioning.

Credibility and Prospect Challenges

Once you have at least two or three iterations you feel good about, the next steps are to:

1. Come up with a list of credibility elements to include in your copy
2. Describe your prospects' biggest challenges related to marketing communications OR finding a solid writer.

Credibility Elements

Your web copy needs to include one or more credibility elements that answer the inevitable prospect question: "Why should I believe or trust you?" Usually these credibility points are woven through the other elements we've already talked about. But sometimes you have to state them outright.

Here are some potential credibility elements to leverage:

- Experience in a particular industry
- Extent of work background

- Years you've been writing professionally
- Past and current clients
- Organizations you've worked for
- Number of articles (or white papers, or case studies, etc.) you've written
- Degrees you've earned (MBA, a well-known school, etc.)
- Awards you've received
- Testimonials you've been given
- Problems you've helped solve (results you've delivered for clients)
- A very specific or unique talent or combination of skills you may have that's not commonly found
- Specific knowledge you may possess that makes you a no-brainer for a certain industry or segment of the market
- You've been quoted in the media, been interviewed, or have written for one or more high-profile publications.

Some of these may already be part of your value statement iterations. But go ahead and come up with a laundry list of possibilities.

Prospect Challenges

Next, write a few sentences that describe some of the biggest challenges your prospects face as it relates to marketing communications OR to finding a good writer to work with. Either way, try to write it in the second person.

Here's an example:

Finding a copywriter who grasps your technology solutions can be a challenge. Even harder is finding a writer with street-level technology sales experience. Someone with the skills to communicate your message so it resonates with your over-marketed prospects and drives action.

Here's another example:

You don't have to be a genius to know that how we do business has changed. Mobile, social media, search, technology, global competition — what worked yesterday doesn't work today.

While your small industrial manufacturing company has bred-in-the-bone values due to your hard work and vision (or your granddad or dad who may have started the business), those values can carry you only so far.

Today, you need a whole other skill-set to reach buyers — be they in your town or half-way around the world.

(The example above is from my friend and colleague Dianna Huff.)

Try a few iterations once you have something you like. You're going to end up picking your best one or two, so it pays to keep working on this until you have some great ones.

Let's Work Together!

If you've stayed with me so far and you've completed every step of this process and are even starting to prospect, congratulations! You've gone further than 95% of the people who set out on this journey.

And if you still feel you could use some help through this process—or if you're not sure where to go from here—I'd love to help you.

I have a 10-week group-training program called B2B Biz Launcher. It's designed specifically for B2B or commercial writers who are either trying to launch their writing business or they've already launched but are not happy with the results they've achieved so far.

In this program, you and I work one-on-one and in a small-group setting to make sure your ignition phase is solid and done right. We then go beyond that into key strategic topics such as how to:

- Manage your prospecting effort more effectively
- Handle prospect conversations with ease
- Price your work profitably (and present your fees for maximum impact)
- Negotiate like a pro
- Close more of the projects you quote

Plus, how to build on this launch foundation so that prospects start coming to YOU instead of you having to chase them all the time.

If this sounds interesting, visit www.b2blauncher.com/waiting and get on my early notification list. You'll then be one of the first to get all the details next time I open enrollment.