

How to Choose the Topic of Your First Online Course: Where Interest Meets Opportunity



Mirasee
reimagine business

A
Primer

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Message from Danny Iny, CEO, Mirasee:

There's great information, and there's magical information. Great information is something that you can learn from and use to maximize your chances of getting great results in your business. Magical information works no matter what, without you having to do anything at all – just buying or reading it is enough to make you rich.

The material in this report is great, but not magical, which means I can't guarantee specific outcomes. You should do your own due diligence, and think carefully through your own plans, because ultimately, you're the only one responsible for the results.

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Introduction



“But what should I teach?”

This is one of the most frequently asked questions we hear from aspiring course creators when they’re just getting started.

Should you teach what you love and are passionate about?

While that can sometimes yield an answer that’s full of opportunity (assuming you’re aware of what your passion is and it’s only one thing), the rule of thumb we provide is this:

Let your audience direct your course development.

The creators of most blockbuster products have figured out how to avoid flops by allowing their audiences to guide product development.

By putting the audience first and letting them tell you what you should create, you don’t have to wonder what they want or make assumptions that lead you in the wrong direction.

Wise entrepreneurs know that even their best guess as to what the market wants may not be a true reflection of reality.

The only way to know for sure is to test.

Your first course—which we call a “pilot” course—should be designed to validate your assumptions as quickly and inexpensively as possible.

Quickly, so that you can pivot and iterate rapidly as the situation calls for, and inexpensively, to minimize your risk.

So, how do you identify the topic for your pilot course? Here are some ideas:

Mine Your Experience



Sometimes the answer is right under your nose, in the experiences that you've already had engaging with ideas and helping the people around you. After all, you've had your fair share of life experiences and lessons learned in the years that have led up to this moment.

Some of those might prove valuable to others, and some of them very likely already have. So begin there. Do a mental review of:

- the places you've been
- the things you've done
- the people you've interacted with over the last two or three years

Look especially for the people in your past whom you've helped in a way they truly appreciated:

- What did you help them with?
- What did you teach them?
- What were the outcomes they found to be most valuable?

Ask Your Audience



If you have an audience, whether email subscribers or an engaged community on social media, you can find your pilot course topic by listening to them.

Let go of assumptions and pay careful attention to what your audience says, **in their own words**.

You can do this in several ways:

- Study your blog posts that get shared the most and those with the largest number of comments.
- Notice the email and newsletter subjects your audience responds to with the highest levels of urgency and emotion.
- When your audience emails you "just because," collect the questions they ask and the problems they mention.
- Create a simple survey, asking the respondents about their biggest challenge.
- As you interact with your audience, take notes about the most common problems and questions.

But what if you don't have an audience?

Listen to Other People's Audiences



The good news is, you can listen the same way even if you don't have a large audience yet, or even any audience at all.

By engaging with your *future* audience where they hang out online, you can still gather the same type of data.

Copyblogger describes this as “being an integral member of your own market.”

Listen in on your target audience wherever they happen to be:

- Look at comments they leave on blog posts and forums around the web. You will start to see frequently asked questions.
- Eavesdrop on and join in conversations on social media. By finding interest groups on LinkedIn or Facebook and taking part in the discussion, you can explore the topics discussed most often, or you can observe the interactions between a market leader and their Twitter followers.

At this point, you should have a list of possible topics for your pilot course. Don't stop now!

Evaluating Your General Topic Ideas



You'll want to filter these topics through two questions:

1. “Does this topic align with an expertise that I’m at least somewhat known for?”

We don't usually get good enough at something to teach it without some sort of background with the subject matter, and that sort of background will often leave clues in the form of past experiences, successes, and maybe even credentials.

2. “Is this topic of interest and value to people that I can reach with relative ease?”

This is an important reality check for aspiring course creators, because it's hard to get good at something without being at all connected to anyone who stands to benefit from that expertise. This skill assessment allows you to validate that you're on track with a topic that will truly be of value to the market.

Almost everybody has topics that meet these criteria and are within their immediate grasp. And often, they're best served pursuing one of those accessible ideas, to build their course-building muscles, and to start generating an income that will fund their future growth in new directions.

The next step is to zero in to something narrow and specific you can teach—and can lead to meaningful outcomes for your students—in a short amount of time.

Narrowing Your Topic: The Two-Hour Plane Ride



How do you find an appropriate level of focus for your pilot course, to validate that you've hit on an outcome people will pay for and you can deliver?

An easy way to zero in on an appropriate level of focus involves a thought exercise about a short plane ride from New York to Chicago.

Imagine you're in your seat, the plane takes off and you're on your way. Just as the plane starts taxiing down the runway, you start chatting with the person sitting next to you. You immediately hit it off, and learn that they are your ideal prospect and in dire need of your help.

You've got the length of the flight, which is just over two hours, to teach them as much as you can to provide help and transform their lives.

What would you teach in those two hours that will create the biggest impact in their lives?

This thought exercise is useful in arriving at a focus for your pilot course because it crystallizes your thinking around the *minimum viable outcome* you can deliver that would still be meaningfully impactful to your students.

Ready to Move Forward?

Are you ready to take the next step with your pilot course?

[Register here](#) and get our entire blueprint for building—and selling—your online course.

