

Niche and Grow Rich

By Steve Strauss



Q: Steve – I would like to know what you think of this idea: I own a website devoted to horses. We get a lot of traffic and I earn a nice income from it. But I want to grow, and besides horses, my passion is dogs, so what I am thinking is adding a dog component to the site, similar to the horse part. What do you think?

Jeri

A: Sorry, but I think you are barking up the wrong tree.

Of course we all want to grow our businesses, but you have to do it in a way that is organic, natural, and that blends into, rather than messes with, your brand. I'm not sure dogs and horses mix.

Example: Apple Computer is in the news these days because of the retirement of Steve Jobs. Well, one reason, a key reason, why Apple became Apple is that it and Jobs introduced products that complemented each other and seamlessly fit together – iTunes ran on the iPod and the iPod morphed into the iPhone. Apple knows what it does best and doesn't try to do more than that. They do not try to be all things to all people (which likely would make them nothing to no one) and instead focuses on its core competencies.

Here's how to do it wrong, and we have all seen these businesses: The Chinese restaurant that advertises "Chinese and American food." Well, which one is it? Instead of promising to do one thing great, it's as if they are telling the world, "We are mediocre at not one, but two things!"

Recently, I was speaking with Kyle Janssens, the Senior Brand Manager for one of my clients, [Greatland](#), about this very idea. Greatland is a very unique business that does exactly what I am talking about. Greatland does one thing, and they do it very well: Helping small and medium businesses "with simple solutions to the complicated issue of W-2 and 1099 reporting." As such, they have become the market leader in this niche.

Janssens explained to me that Greatland doesn't try to be the biggest, broadest software company round, but instead, wants in fact to do and be the opposite: To be the very best at the

one thing they do best. Janssens says, “We don’t try and solve all of the problems for a small business, but just one, and we do that very, very well.”

And, he says, it is a smart model for any small business.

Back in the day, there was a great book called [*Niche and Grow Rich*](#), the idea being that you stand a much better chance of standing out from the crowd and being seen as something special if you specialize rather than compromise. Janssens says that there are all sorts of benefits to this seemingly counter-intuitive business model of doing more by specializing:

- You become a big fish in a small pond. By being seen as *the* expert in your field, you command respect.
- Your brand awareness grows as people will much more likely remember you if you do one thing well rather than 10 things poorly.
- You will be able to focus your energy, efforts, and resources in one direction

Janssens points out that this is such a great strategy for small business because it takes the typical small or medium business off of the competing-on-price Merry-go-Round and instead establishes the business as a valuable expert. “People like and pay more for experts,” points out the brand manager.

Certainly I have seen this in my own career, and I bet you have too. When I was a young lawyer, I took any and every case. Then I specialized in business and bankruptcy law, and never looked back. It was more fun and more lucrative. Similarly, when I began writing books, I started out writing whatever became available to me – political histories, ghost-writing, legal self-help, etc. but then I got this amazing gig at USA TODAY, and all I will write now is about small business. Believe you me, being called “America’s small business expert” sure beats being the King of the Idiots Guides.

So that is the idea and the secret. Niche and grow rich. Figure out that thing or two you do best, like most, and which can enable you to stand out, then focus like a laser on that and watch your business and brand grow.

Today’s Tip: Have you seen the new website for SCORE? It’s very impressive. Aside from the 13,000 mentors and 500 chapters being touted there, the site offers a plethora of tips and tools that can help any small business. Steve says [check it out!](#)