

# School of Hard Knocks

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Identifying your target market is one of the things you should have learned in Marketing 101, no matter what school you attended. Many of us attend the "School of Hard Knocks", and if you don't learn it there, you probably never will be successful in your marketing efforts.

Now let's think a little. Would it pay you to advertise sporting goods to people in a nursing home? How about advertising a local fence installation company on National TV?

Why is the answer to both of the above no? Simple - their ads don't match their target market. Your target market should consist of people who not only need your product or service, but also have the wherewithal to pay for it.

Does the Internet have this same requirement? Sure - while the Internet is worldwide and covers most of the globe, it is probably more important to find your target market there than anyplace else.

Most places you might advertise in don't have detailed demographics on their visitors or readers. Some companies are trying to get this information, but it is a long uphill battle as most people are unwilling to give out personal information on the web.

This is one instance where you have to use some common sense. While you may not have detailed demographics available, there are some things you can do to sharpen the focus a bit. If you were selling a health product geared toward older people, you can automatically rule out the "kiddie sites" or ones that appeal to a young crowd such as the sites where you download free music.

Web Sites or Newsletters that specialize in humor are normally a "no-no" as the grind of getting two or three jokes out a day, will guarantee that they will publish some that will offend somebody. It is also one of the least targeted. Don't get me wrong here. Humor has its place as long as it is in good taste, is not offensive, and is part of a publication that reaches a specific group.

So, using some common sense, you identify either some web sites where you can place an ad, or a newsletter that appears to cater to your potential client base.

The next step is tracking your results. This is where many budding entrepreneurs miss the boat. There are a number of ways to track where your inquiries are coming from. Probably the easiest is

to give an email address, which is unique to that ad. If you have your own domain, you most likely have unlimited aliases that all come to the same email address. AOL gives you multiple email addresses, and if all else fails, get yourself a supply of free email addresses.

You can also use the web to help in your tracking. Designing a unique form, which sends you an email for each ad someone responds to, is not an overwhelming task. You can build a keyword right into the form, that the person filling it out will never see, that lets you know exactly where they saw the ad.

Newsletters are a good choice. If a newsletter has been around for awhile, and has a decent number of subscribers, they are doing something right. If your ad is not pulling, odds are either you are in the wrong target market, or have a crummy ad.

The first mistake someone might make is confusing subscribers with potential customers. One newsletter with 500,000 subscribers may produce minimal results, while another with only a thousand or so, may produce a lot. Here is where you have to determine if the newsletter you are considering is reaching your target market.

Many people will throw together a "crummy" ad, and then blame the vehicle they use to advertise it when it doesn't work. If it is reaching your target market, and you have a decent product or service, which is affordable to those you are trying to reach, you will do business. Maybe the "School of Hard Knocks" isn't so bad after all.

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