

# **The Loyal Audience Blueprint**

**HOW I BUILT AN  
AUDIENCE OF  
342,896 FANS  
FROM SCRATCH**

**JACOB JANS**

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Fans from Scratch

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# Chapter One: How I Stumbled on the Formula that Saved My Career, Gave Me an Audience, and Let Me Earn a Comfortable Living as a Writer for Fifteen Years (And Counting)

Sometimes in life, you get lucky. I've been lucky many times. I was born to wonderful parents, who cared deeply for me encouraged my creative instincts, and even paid for much of my college education, even though I was their fourth(!) child to go to college.

One of the best things my parents ever did was tell me they weren't going to pay for college anymore.

I get it: They had five kids. They'd given me \$40,000 for college. However, that money was running out.

I had to find a way to make a living.

And I did, surprisingly quickly.

Like I said, I've been lucky.

I've also faced serious challenges.

Just before I got engaged, my business nearly collapsed. I'd been a bit full of myself, in terms of making a living on my own terms, but suddenly that didn't seem quite so possible.

However, like I said before, I was lucky.

I'd already faced obstacles, and the solutions I had already come up with gave me a huge buffer for overcoming the challenge I was facing.

## How My Older Brother Accidentally Made My Career Possible (Even Though We Fought Like Crazy)

I don't think I've ever told my older brother just *how* responsible he is for the wonderful career that I've developed.

When he was in high school, he learned how to build websites. One of the websites he built was rather simple: It presented images that website designers could use as "background images." His website became so popular that he managed to earn a surprising amount of money from it.

Watching his success with that website firmly planted the idea that *it is possible to make a lot of money online.*

If anything is true, one requirement for success is the belief that what you're doing *just might be possible*.

Thanks to my brother, that belief became firmly embedded in my mind at a very young age. And it stuck with me. For that, I'll always be grateful. (Even though, after a big fight with him once, I secretly sabotaged his website. Luke – I'm sorry.)

Not only did I believe that I could make money with this crazy thing called the internet, the desire to run a successful website grew throughout my high school and college years.

## That Time I Dropped Out of Economics Class So that I Could Make a Bunch of Money

So – back to the story of my parents cutting me off in college.

I seriously believed their threat of no-more-money was very real, so my mind started kicking into high gear.

I was determined to figure out a solution – fast!

At my dad's encouragement, I invested in an eBook about online marketing. It was \$97, which seemed like a lot of money at the time, though I must say that it was *incredibly cheap* considering the amount of money it helped me earn.

(It turns out that spending money to learn things exists beyond just college – and can reap massive rewards.)

Two things about that book:

1. It talked *a lot* about how to successfully build relationships with an audience. And even though I completely ignored this part of the book, it did stick with me.
2. It taught me a simple “search engine optimization” technique that allowed me to earn a living by promoting other people’s products.

I will always be grateful that I invested in that book, even though I’ve completely forgotten the name of it!

At the time, I was looking for a solution: I had to pay my bills. And the search engine optimization (SEO) technique the book taught me let me do just that.

I was *actually* making money on the internet, just like my brother did!

However, I also had to spend time to do this work. I was making money – but I needed more time. I was also incredibly *bored* in my economics class. So, I dropped it, so I could focus on making more money.

All Good Things *Will* Come to an End – And That’s How It Should Be!

Sure, I’d learned an “SEO” technique that let me pay for college. That was the lucky part.

The other lucky thing that happened to me: That technique got increasingly less successful.

Over time, it became clear that it was eventually going to *stop working altogether*. I am incredibly grateful for this. Why? Because I was forced to look for a solution. I was forced to grow as an entrepreneur.

Up until that point, I'd promoted other people's businesses, but what did I really have to show for it? Some money in the bank. A nice set of speakers that I eagerly purchased *because I could actually afford them*.

But – despite all of that – I saw how easily everything could come crashing down.

I was reaching a lot of people, but they were immediately leaving me behind.

I realized that if I were to build something sustainable, I had to find a way to keep communicating with the people I was reaching.

The solution: Asking for their email address, instead of immediately sending them to another business.

The solution was incredibly simple. And that's part of why it worked.

Little did I know, I was starting to put together the pieces of the puzzle that would allow me to build a lasting career as a writer.

## Once You Can Talk to Someone, You Don't Have to Stop!

Once I started collecting people's email addresses, I quickly learned that I had to do something with them. (Duh!)

It didn't take long to figure out the answer: Give people what they want, again, and again, and again.

For example: I was reaching a lot of people who were interested in mystery shopping. (Mystery shopping is a huge and secretive field – everyday people, known as *mystery shoppers*, get paid to shop at businesses, then file a report with feedback about their experience.)

I figured out that people interested in mystery shopping wanted access to job opportunities. So, I started writing articles about those opportunities, and sending those articles to my email list.

I never really stopped doing that, either. Years later, instead of emailing just a few people with each article, I was emailing over a hundred thousand people. Many of whom had been on my email list for years.

How had I made so much progress?

Though I didn't have a name for it at the time, I'd developed something I now call *The Loyal Audience Blueprint*.

## The Blueprint that Gives Me Time, Money, a Loyal Audience, and So Much More...

I am so fortunate to have built a business that is stable, profitable, and flexible.

I live a wonderful life – and I owe much of it to the audience building blueprint I've developed.

But first – back to the *near-disaster* that happened right before my engagement.

What exactly happened?

My primary source of new audience members disappeared, overnight.

I'd gotten comfortable. I'd mostly moved on from that SEO technique that had worked so well in the past. Instead, my audience-building efforts were focused on buying Google Ads, and using those ads to get people to sign up to my email list.

The advertising campaign that I'd built was highly successful – and quite profitable.

Unfortunately, Google banned my advertising account with no explanation, and no recourse.

This was devastating. I'd gotten rather dependent on Google Ads. It was, at the time, such an easy *and* profitable way to continually gain new audience members.

All of that disappeared in a flash.

Fortunately – *very fortunately* – I didn't lose everything. I still had my audience to serve. And the people I had grown to serve weren't going anywhere.

If I'd remained stuck in the past, never building an audience, I would have been in serious trouble. My income would have disappeared overnight.

Fortunately, that's not what happened.

Why? Because I had a loyal audience.

## Introducing The Loyal Audience Blueprint

You could say that this blueprint has been forged by all of the mistakes, challenges, and problems I've faced in running an online business.

Each piece of this blueprint addresses one of the primary issues that I've faced – and provides a reliable solution.

Don't have a reliable source of new audience members? Step one walks you through the process.

Don't know how to get people to initially join your audience? Step two makes it happen.

Don't know how to build a relationship with your audience that lasts for years and years? Step three has it covered.

This blueprint has worked across many websites, covering a wide variety of topics.

I'm convinced that *no matter* the business you are in, this blueprint can help you dramatically increase the success and stability of your business.

This book is going to go into a lot of detail about each of these steps. However, this is an overview, to give you a sense of how the system fits together.

### Step One: Identify Potential Sources of New Audience Members

If you want a large audience, you've got to be able to reach people, and invite them to join your audience. There's an important set of criteria to follow when choosing where to put your effort. I've wasted a lot of time on the *wrong* sources of new audience members. The set of criteria I've developed dramatically increases your effectiveness when you finally get to step two.

## Step Two: Invite People to Join Your Audience

Once you've identified groups of people who are good candidates for joining your audience, you'll need to get people to raise their hands and say, "Yes, I want to hear from you again." This can be as simple as getting an email address. Everyone you encounter who doesn't say yes, is a lost audience member. If you want to build a large audience, you have to be hyper-focused on recruiting people to join your audience.

As you begin to develop your audience, you'll need to start learning about them. This means gaining a deep understanding of the people you are attempting to serve, so you can understand their unique needs and provide consistent value to them, but also so that you can be extremely effective at persuading them to join your audience.

## Step Three: Build a Long-Term Relationship with Your Audience

Once someone has given you permission to contact them again, you have the opportunity to build loyalty with them. This means you have the potential to create a long-term relationship.

The hallmarks of quality long-term relationships are consistency and understanding. You'll need to develop a system for learning about the

unique needs of your audience and consistently providing value to your audience members based on those unique needs.

This means understanding your role in the lives of your audience and why they pay attention to you.

## How to Use the Blueprint to Build a *Machine* that Grows Your Audience – Almost Automatically

I call this a blueprint because it is *not* the end result. What you're building should be something beautiful – a “machine” that almost automatically grows your audience.

Your job – as an audience builder – is to use this blueprint to build a beautiful audience-growing machine.

I'm going to be honest here:

Your first version of the “machine” is probably going to *very clunky*. It won't work very well.

Have you ever seen a video of the first “cars” that were built? They were loud, noisy, bumpy, and ugly machines.

However, those machines have evolved to become incredible pieces of technology.

I *know* my first attempts at hobbling this system together were ugly.

Even when I build new websites, with new audiences in new markets, I know my first attempts will be clunky.

That's a good thing.

Why? Because building a loyal audience requires *learning* about the audience. And that takes effort.

Fortunately, the blueprint shows you exactly the right type of effort to expend.

The best part? The better your machine gets, the easier it is to operate. Eventually, you'll be able to stand back and admire what you've built.

Here's what I love about The Loyal Audience Blueprint:

Improving one aspect of the *machine* you're building makes every other piece work better.

The better you get at finding new sources of audience members, the more people you'll be able to invite, the more you'll be able to keep them loyal.

The more loyal your audience members, the more you'll be able to invest in growing your audience.

As you get better at *inviting* people into your audience, you'll end up with *more* audience members who are *more loyal*, *plus* you'll open the doors to new sources of audience members.

Sometimes it can feel like an avalanche: It starts with the subtlest movement, and eventually becomes overpowering.

# Chapter Two: I Made These Mistakes So You Don't Have To

When you seek to serve others, especially as part of running a business, there is a very easy trap to fall into. I know because I've fallen into this trap more than once.

This trap is possible for any relationship at all. The relationship cannot become one-sided. In order to be a quality relationship, it has to serve both people.

The importance of this idea is easy to underestimate. How do I know this? Because I've underestimated it *way too many times*.

Fortunately, I think I've finally figured this one out.

## A Long Time Ago, When I Was Young and Short-Sighted

When I got my start, the allure of *actually making* money was enough to pull me in directions that I didn't really want to go.

And it made sense at the time. I *needed* to make money, after all. I had to pay the bills! I was learning just how uncomfortable the prospect of going broke really is.

What I wish I knew back then, that I know now, is that I could have built a nearly identical business around topics that I cared deeply about, instead of just pursuing the opportunities that landed at my feet.

However, none of the niches I worked in directly covered those topics. I promoted products in niches such as baby sleep, mystery shopping, and life insurance. Sure, these are markets that are extremely important to some people. Unfortunately, I had little connection to them.

That didn't stop me from pursuing business building in these markets.

I had great success promoting life insurance; however, I had zero interest in building a real business around this topic. So, of course, that part of the business eventually failed.

Why did I promote life insurance? *Because I could.* Not because I wanted to.

I did, however, have some success building a business around the topic of mystery shopping. For those who don't know, mystery shopping involves everyday people secretly shopping at stores, then filling out a report that provides feedback on the customer service. Hundreds of thousands of people work as very-part-time mystery shoppers in the U.S. alone. It is, really, a fascinating field.

I was able to build some personal interest in the topic and I built some educational products that I was proud of and that served many people very well. I even built a large and sustaining community of mystery

shoppers. However, I never became a mystery shopper myself, even as I continued to grow my audience.

At least I had *some* interest in the topic.

## I Really Wished I Asked Myself This Question – And Never Stopped Asking It

When you get into building and serving an audience – especially if you *truly* want to serve people, it is easy to get lost.

And by *lost*, I mean, it is easy to really forget about yourself.

This leads, inevitably, to burnout.

So – I encourage you to ask this simple question:

Is there a chance I'll be excited by this in *ten years? Or twenty?*

Realize that if you're building an audience, you just might end up sticking with them for decades. That's why, as soon as possible, you should find an opportunity that at least *has a chance* of being fulfilling in the long term.

## Don't Get Burnt Out Like I Did

My first big success with audience building was in the field of mystery shopping. Yes, I did find mystery shopping mildly interesting. But I never really loved it. And, *more importantly*, I never really saw it as something I could be passionate about.

That's a shame, for two big reasons:

1. It meant that I would eventually get burnt out. (I did.)
2. My audience would never get my full-fledged effort (It didn't.)

In retrospect, I really wish I had been *wise beyond my years*.

I wasn't. Instead, like a naïve young person, I jumped at opportunities as I saw them, and built something valuable. And got burnt out.

## An Important Lesson from My Young and Naive Self

I studied a lot of creative writing in high school. I love – and still love – to write. It consistently provides me with a lot of joy.

Back when I was young, my first impulse, when I finished a piece of writing I was proud of, was to immediately seek attention for the writing. I felt good—and that feeling led me to share my writing with others, immediately. This was ultimately a selfish endeavor, leaving me feeling empty. It also had the effect of pushing people away from me, instead of making them *want* to read my writing.

What was going on? I was focused on just myself, and not on being compassionate, caring, empathetic, or understanding of the people I was sharing my writing with.

The first rule of audience building is that it's not about the leader of the audience alone, it's about the audience too.

I was making a huge mistake: Focusing only on how I felt, instead of how my audience felt too.

This is important: As in any good relationship, you need to show that you understand and care for the members of your audience.

Being young and immature, I was not up to that task. It took me a while to get over myself, so that I could finally start connecting with people in a genuine way.

But there’s a very important caveat here!

Consider the two columns below. The left-hand side is all about the author, the right-hand side is all about the audience.

Writing this made me feel good	Reading this made my audience feel good
The writing is about something I care about	The writing is about something my audience cares about
Writing this helped me understand things in a new way	Reading this helped my audience understand things in a new way
Writing this changed my life	Reading this changed the lives of people in my audience
Writing this helped me take positive action	Reading this helped my audience take positive action

Think about those two columns for a minute.

What if you were focused only on yourself—the left hand side? You would have a meaningful writing practice that was important to you. But ignoring the audience side would limit your ability to connect with your audience.

What if you were only focused on the audience?

You would be able to build a large audience, but it would be hard to sustain. Your enjoyment of writing would diminish—and your audience would be able to tell.

Ideally, you should be focused both on yourself and the audience. Sometimes it may veer one way or the other, but both sides of the equation should be taken into account.

Again, this is another mistake I've made. I've built large audiences for topics that I didn't find personally important; I was able to sustain the practice of writing for those audiences for a surprising amount of time, but it was hard and ultimately led to burnout.

Which is why, when building your audience, you should take yourself into account too!

This means being genuine about who you are at the same time that you are understanding and caring for your audience.

Don't worry if you get this wrong at first! Like any relationship, there will always be give-and-take.

Sometimes you'll be too focused on your audience's needs. Sometimes you'll have to be focused on your audience's needs more than your own. However, on occasion you'll need to focus on your own needs as well.

Just like any good relationship, it's about everyone in the relationship, and not just one person.

So, don't forget about yourself. And don't forget about your audience, either.

In fact, I would argue that the more personally meaningful your audience building is to yourself, the more successful you will be—as long as you're equally focused on your audience too.

## My Wife Is A Whole-Lot-Smarter Than Me (And Wiser Too)

While I was struggling with burnout in my business, my wife was quietly percolating ways to create a business that *truly mattered to her*.

This was in 2012. By that time, I had managed to put together most of the pieces of the audience building puzzle. I'd also managed to start a website on a topic that was closer to home for me: Freelance writing.

That website, Freedom With Writing, took off. As the website grew, Caitlin saw that many of the writers I was reaching wanted to learn more about publishing their creative writing, which was something Freedom With Writing didn't cover.

So – she started talking about her idea for a new website *a lot*. She was excited by the idea of helping people find *legitimate* publishers for their creative writing.

Not only that, she taught me one of the most important lessons in building a loyal audience.

## Who Do You Think You Are!?

In the world of creative writing, there are *many* businesses out there that take advantage of writers – charging writers a lot of money for little in return.

Caitlin saw this, and wanted her new website to be an anti-dote to that kind of behavior.

In short: She wanted to stand up for creative writers.

There were other things that were important to her as well – such as providing opportunity for *all writers* around the world, instead of just a select few.

So, what did she do? She wrote down her ethical guidelines – and published them.

Guess what? Many of those guidelines have limited her options. It turns out, that's a good thing.

What is one of the most important aspects of a relationship? Trust.

In order to *trust* someone, you need to know who they are, and why they're motivated to be in a relationship with you.

The clearer the other person's motivations, the easier it is to trust them.

Caitlin has built *a lot* of loyalty with her audience, because she has made her motivations clear.

The website she started – Authors Publish – has turned out to be an incredible success. Not only does it reach a large and loyal audience, it has been at the core of a very successful career for her.

A big reason for her success is the simple fact that Caitlin’s motivations are clear to her audience, they’re guided by a clear sense of ethics, and she *sticks to them*, no matter what. Even if it limits her short-term opportunities.

# Chapter Three: Why You Should Build an Audience

## The Only Way to Build a Business that Lasts

If you want to build a business that lasts – and isn't just a flash in the pan – then the *only option* is to gather a loyal group of people around you, people who will stick with you and support you for a long time.

As I've written about already, I've learned this lesson through direct experience. Without a loyal audience, I would either be broke, or working a "regular" job in an entirely different field.

Over the years, I've had to change many aspects of my business. I've gone from selling other people's products, to selling advertising, to selling my own products and courses. The entire time, through all the changes, the people in my audience have stuck around, and supported me through the many changes I've had to make.

Why did they stick with me? Because, during that time, I stuck with them – consistently providing value every step of the way.

Here's the irony:

In anything in life is true, it is that *change is inevitable*.

The “current” marketing strategies of today are eventually going to fail. The easy way to weather the inevitable change is to build a loyal group of people who will stick with you, no matter the “marketing” you depend on to grow your business.

Let me be clear: If you want to work hard, make some money, then get out of business *fast*, then go ahead and ignore audience building.

However, if you like the idea of serving people for the *long-term*, while making a comfortable living for *decades* then you’re going to *have to* build an audience *eventually*. The sooner the better.

So why not get started now?

The “Secret” that Brings Wealth, Happiness, and Success to “Advanced” Marketers

I had an enlightening conversation recently with one of my mentors.

I had just told him about the many advertisements I’ve seen lately, offering “marketing” advice and training from “experts.”

These experts all seem to have the same message: Don’t build an audience.

The reasons varied. One of them actually said that spending time writing for an audience is not worth it. Why? Because you might have to *keep doing it*. He also said it is “too hard.” The alternative: Sell a product and make money right now.

This guy clearly doesn’t want to help people in the long run.

My guess: In a few years, he’ll have a lot of angry customers, no audience, and a failed business.

So, I told my mentor about this guy.

What did he say?

Beginning marketers think it's all about finding the right strategy, whether it is the right ad copy, the right "offer", or the right "trick" that gets people to respond. Intermediate marketers think it is all about building the right "system."

Advanced marketers, on the other hand, know that only one thing that counts, in the end: Relationships.

Relationships can sustain a career. The lack of relationships can mean a quick end.

If you want a successful career, then quality relationships matter, a lot.

And here's the thing:

Done right, you can build hundreds of thousands of quality relationships. How? By building a loyal audience.

Who is this mentor?

Well, he's built a very long and successful career serving people in his industry, as a writer, educator, and entrepreneur. He's semi-retired now, after selling his startup for millions of dollars.

Who is he, really, though?

He's my Dad.

## Thank You, Dear Audience Members

Throughout the years, I've reached many thousands of people with my writing. In fact, before sitting down to write this chapter, I sent an email to 143,355 people.

Yesterday, for another website, I emailed 185,275 people.

Incredible numbers, to say the least. It's not the numbers that matter to me though. It is the impact that I've had on people's lives.

I know I'm doing a good job when I get emails from my readers, thanking me for my work.

I know I'm doing an even better job when I get emails from complete strangers asking to sign up for my newsletter.

But few things make me happier than hearing from people in my audience who I've helped. I love to hear their success stories. And, to be honest, it is incredibly gratifying to hear about *my role* in their success.

Because of the people I serve through my work, people who have supported me for *many years*, I have been able to earn a more-than-comfortable living.

For that, I am extremely grateful.

Thank you.

# Chapter Four: How to Find a Reliable Source of New Audience Members – Even If You Are Starting from Scratch

Are you ready to get into the nuts and bolts of building your audience?

Yes?

Good!

This chapter is all about the very first component of the Loyal Audience Blueprint.

Finding sources of new audience members.

This topic has become an obsession of mine over the years. And for good reason. If you want to build an audience, you've got to *invite* people to join your audience.

So, how do you find people to invite?

And if you *do* find those people, is it even worth the effort?

This chapter will help you answer those questions.

The ability to reach people is not the same as having a loyal audience. For example, an author may give a reading at a bookstore, but if nobody buys the book or gives the author their contact information, and/or never attends another reading by the author, they're not really a member of the author's audience.

However, authors regularly set up book tours, where they sell books, build their email list, and begin to establish long-term relationships with readers.

The key is to identify a source of new audience members that is big enough to justify the effort of recruiting them to join your audience.

There are four key components to a good source of new audience members:

*1. It is a consistently reliable source.* While it can be amazing, for example, to land a guest post in a hugely popular blog, this offers only one-time benefits. You may get a rush of publicity from the publication, but it will fade quickly. Far better would be to establish a system for regularly landing guest posts that bring people to visit your website, sign up for your offer, and have the chance to stick with you in the long run.

*2. The people you reach are a good fit for joining your audience.* There's no point in reaching out to people who simply aren't interested in what you have to say. The more interested the audience is in your message, the better. It can be tempting to go after opportunities to reach large numbers of people, but be careful not to waste your time with the wrong people.

*3. It should be a large enough group to justify the effort.* This is a little bit fuzzy because, depending on your business, just a few people may be enough to justify a lot of effort. You have to think about this in the context of your business.

For example, in the freelance writing niche, I run a free newsletter for writers. The newsletter is ad-supported. In order to pay for the expenses of producing the newsletter, I need many thousands of readers, not just hundreds or dozens. Which means I need to have a source of audience members that can sustain and grow the list to thousands of people. In order to sustain and grow the audience, I regularly run Facebook ads that reach tens of thousands of writers. Every day, a small percentage of them sign up for my email list, potentially becoming long-term members of my audience.

However, you don't need to reach tens of thousands of people a day in order to build an extremely valuable audience. For example, many entrepreneurs speak at conferences, talking to just hundreds at a time, successfully building a loyal audience from reaching these groups of people.

I know of one author who speaks every year at an annual conference in her industry. Every year, before the conference, she sells a lot of books to the attendees. This has happened for many years, which brings us back to the first point in this list. There's a big difference between a one-time source of new audience members, and a repeatable source. By finding repeatable sources of new audience members, you can spend much less time on audience building, because you'll be able to do most of the legwork once, creating a lot of efficiency. Which brings us to the final criterion.

*4. The reward justifies the expense.* There's little point in consuming massive effort to reach people only to get limited results. The world of marketing presents many opportunities to spend a lot of money, while

getting few results in return. This can be a difficult criterion to gauge when you are starting, but it is important to keep this in mind for the long term. As you get better at building your audience, you will learn what is worth the effort, and what isn't. In the beginning, by necessity, many of your efforts won't be worth the effort. The key here is to find out as quickly as possible, without giving up too soon. This requires a combination of tenacity and flexibility.

## Before You Commit to a Source of Audience Members

Absolutely do not build a large marketing campaign centered on reaching potential audience members before doing your due diligence. You want to find out, as quickly as possible, whether the source of potential audience members fits the criteria above.

This will save you so much time, effort, and money.

Don't expect perfection at first; however, *do* make sure the potential is there, so that you can have some confidence that you're likely to be on a path that will be successful. There's not much worse than investing a lot of energy and effort in a project only for all of that effort to fizzle when it is finally launched to the real world. The more quickly an effort fails, the sooner you'll be able to try something new.

That means you need to start with small tests to validate each of the criteria above.

Keep in mind, as I said, you're not looking for perfection here. Your first efforts will eventually be greatly improved. However, you *are* looking for potential, and that's what you need to validate.

Let's talk about each of the criteria, using my website, Freedom With Writing, as an example.

**Is it a consistently reliable source?** I run a lot of Facebook Ads for Freedom With Writing. When I started, my initial efforts were pretty bad. I created a Facebook page and bought some advertisements. The results were not very good. However, I *was* getting results. People weren't responding to my ads, but there was *some* response. I knew, with some effort, I would be able to improve the response. Plus, it was clear that this was an opportunity that wasn't going away. Facebook provided a consistent, reliable platform for reaching writers. Thus, it met the first criterion.

**Are the people I am reaching a good fit for my audience?** The answer, even based on my initially lackluster efforts, was a clear “Yes.” There are many, many people interested in freelance writing on Facebook and Facebook provides an easy way to reach those people. Further, I was able to validate this because the freelance writing-related content that I was posting was getting some traction.

That was several years ago. These days, if you plan on using Facebook, I recommend building a Facebook page, and investing \$5 per day in advertising. With this modest investment, you'll be able to quickly reach hundreds or thousands of people, while learning quite a lot about how they respond to your offers. It is an incredibly powerful tool and well worth the money, if you know what you're doing. (I love helping people set up this type of thing.)

**Am I able to reach enough people to justify the effort?** This is a particularly important question. To continue the Facebook ads example, there are over a million writers that I can potentially reach on Facebook, which is why it is an extremely valuable source of new audience members for Freedom With Writing.

However, I know a business owner whose ideal customers are the owners of independent insurance agencies. While he *can* reach these

people on Facebook, the number of them he is able to reach likely doesn't justify the effort of a full-fledged campaign. However, for him, speaking at industry conferences, advertising in trade magazines, and even marketing on

LinkedIn are potentially viable options.

This gets to a further point: It is easy to think about your ideal audience member, and look for large groups of people who fit that criteria. For example, I would love to build an audience of writers who are ready to promote a newly published novel. However, I don't have a good way to find those people. I could, of course, go ahead and design a business for those people, even though I can't reach them, but that would be getting ahead of myself.

Marketers are often encouraged to identify their "ideal customer" and *then* figure out how to reach those customers. However, this is a mistake. It is completely backwards: We are always constrained by the people we are able to reach. It is better to look at the opportunities you know you can take advantage of, then modify your business to suit those opportunities.

This mistake often leads to another common piece of business advice: "pivoting." After designing a business around an audience the business owner *can't* reach, they're encouraged to completely change the business, by "pivoting" to serve people they can reach. It's silly. Instead of imagining an ideal customers and *then* designing a business around them, start by looking for the opportunities that *are* available, and moving forward from there.

This means looking for the people you *can* reach, before deciding *who* your ideal customer is.

First, look for the opportunities available to you. Second, take advantage of those opportunities.

If you design a business, and *then* look for ways to make it work, of course you'll have to “pivot” and redesign the business. If you *start* by looking at the opportunities available to you, validating those opportunities, and creating a business based on those opportunities, you won't need to pivot when you finally get around to building an audience, because audience building will be baked in from the start.

That being said, if you stay tuned in to your audience and your sources of new audience members, there will always be the need to shift strategies over time. If anything is true in life and business, it is that things change. By staying flexible and aware of the change, as opposed to staying rigid in the way we plan to do things, we're able to adapt to the circumstances we find ourselves in.

For example, when Caitlin Jans and I started Authors Publish Magazine, we knew there was a huge opportunity to build an audience for it right away. I had already established Freedom With Writing, and we knew much of the audience would be interested in what Caitlin wanted to offer.

We were also very confident that the same type of Facebook marketing we were using for Freedom With Writing would be effective with Authors Publish. So, based on this, we launched the magazine.

This was an audience-focused strategy. We found a reliable source of new audience members, analyzed what they were interested in, thought about what we would want to provide them in that context, and moved forward from there. The focus, to start, was on reviewing literary journals from an author's/submitter's perspective.

Caitlin didn't create this idea out of the blue. It was created by observing potential audience members she knew she would be able to reach; many of the emails people sent to Freedom With Writing were from creative writers looking for experience.

## Start Engaging With Your Potential Audience Members as Soon as Possible

In the long run, you'll want to build a system that automates much of the work of audience building, but when you are just starting out, many people are surprised to find that they actually *do* have a good source for new audience members.

However, these can be difficult to identify, especially if you're not used to thinking of the world in terms of potential audience members.

For example, an author was asked to write a book by the pastors of two local churches. This author approached me, asking for advice. She didn't think she had a platform to promote her work. How would I be able to sell this book, she asked, because I don't have anyone to promote it to.

I pointed out that the two pastors would be extremely likely to support her book marketing efforts. The congregations at those churches would be a likely source of readers for her book. Further, these pastors would likely be able to open doors at other churches where she could speak about her book. The opportunity was there, as well as a potential path forward. She wasn't used to looking for these types of opportunities, so she didn't see it laid out in front of her.

However, what if you only see opportunities that meet *just some* of the criteria listed above? Then I would suggest deciding which of the criteria are most important to you, and then moving forward with an imperfect opportunity that meets at least those most important criteria while you keep your eyes open for better opportunities. For example, you can always go to local networking events and speak to people individually. While it would be extremely difficult to build a

large audience by recruiting one person at a time, this has the advantage of allowing you to learn from and connect with the people you would like to reach in a way that is difficult to do on a large scale. These types of personal connections can be extremely valuable sources of learning.

## Your Audience Source Strategy

To summarize, in order to build an audience, you need to look for a high-quality source of potential new audience members. This source should, ideally, be:

- Reliable over the long term
- Full of people who are a good fit
- Big enough to actually provide an audience
- Realistic, in terms of the reward for the amount of effort/expense you put in

When you get to actually implementing your audience building, you aren't likely to find the perfect source of audience members immediately. That's fine. Look for potential. And, failing that, start with an imperfect source, simply to get the ball rolling. Sometimes that is enough to open the doors to better opportunities.

# Chapter Five: How to Invite People to Join Your Audience

When I started working on this book, I also started building an audience for it. I wanted to *know* that I was going to have people interested in reading it.

After all – what’s the use of publishing a book if it isn’t going to be read?

So, I started invited people to join my audience.

And the success rate of those invitations has been *very good*.

Why?

Because I was offering something that my potential audience members wanted.

How many people said yes?

The extreme-vast-majority. Nearly eight in ten. So far, according to my “analytics” page, eight three percent.

If you’re an experienced marketer, you’ll recognize how “good” that number is.

However, I have not always experienced that kind of success.

In fact, it would be a *bad thing* if my numbers were always that good.

Why? Because I wouldn't be pushed to learn more about my potential audience members.

The key to long-term-success is continually learning. And the best way to learn things is to *try and then fail*.

## I Was Pretty Bad at This When I Got Started – But I've Learned A Lot Since Then

When I first got the idea of inviting people to join my audience, I had a simple goal: Grow my email list.

That was the right goal, however, I wasn't very good at getting people to actually join my email list.

There were three reasons.

First: I was shy about asking.

Second: I had very little understanding of my potential audience members.

Third: I didn't know how vitally important it is to offer something of value right away.

Actually, thinking back, it was much worse: Just a few percent of the visitors to my website signed up.

I didn't want to grow my audience at a less-than-snail's-pace. So, I had to make big changes.

The first thing I did was make it *incredibly obvious* that I was asking for an email address.

This was, perhaps, the biggest thing that helped.

Instead of hiding my “ask” in a sidebar on my website, I moved it front-and-center. I made it impossible to ignore. I decided that visitors to my website would *have to* decide whether or not to join my email list *before* I gave them access to the site.

That alone, completely transformed the results I was getting.

It also made the second part easier.

In the beginning, I had to “guess” what people wanted from me. As my audience grew, I had more experience “guessing.” I also had more experience simply interacting and talking to my audience members and potential audience members.

I figured out what they wanted – and then offered it to them.

For the mystery shopping website – the offer was simple. I knew how to get people hired as mystery shoppers. I also knew the people visiting my website *wanted* to be hired as mystery shoppers. So, here was the basic offer: “Give me your email address, and I'll get you hired as a mystery shopper.”

*Lots of people were very happy to give me their email address.*

They didn't sign up because I wrote brilliant articles. They signed up because I knew what they wanted, and offered to give it to them. And I made sure they *couldn't ignore* the offer.

## If You Don't Ask – They'll Never Say Yes!

When someone visits one of my websites, they are presented many extremely obvious opportunities to join my email list. There is never any doubt about this: They are presented with the opportunity. If they're a good fit, I hope they sign up. If not, that is fine, too.

Asking directly is key to getting people to join your audience. If the opportunity isn't obvious, they aren't going to do it.

Not only do they need to know that you're asking for them to join your audience, you have to be crystal clear about what they need to do.

From your perspective, as an audience-builder, you need a way to reach out to your audience members on a consistent basis, on your own terms. This usually means getting some form of contact information from them that you can use in the future.

This could be their email address, mailing address, phone number, or something else. Ideally, it is something you can use consistently, over many years, to communicate with them.

Keep the long term in mind here. Building large followings on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can be valuable, but those platforms are owned by companies that don't have your best interests in mind. (They want to sell advertising, not support your ability to reach an audience.)

It is far better to get the direct contact information from people in a way that isn't owned by a third-party platform. Email is wonderful for this.

Once you've decided on the contact information you would like to collect, you need to present a crystal-clear opportunity for people to give you that contact information.

For example, if you were giving a book reading, you could pass around a clipboard with a contact information sheet, where people can give you their email addresses.

Or, as commonly seen on a website, you can present a popover that asks for an email address.

Of course, not everybody is going to say yes to this opportunity. That's fine. Not everybody is right for your audience.

However, you're looking for people who *are* right for your audience. Those are the people you want to sign up.

## The Key to Getting People to Say Yes

When asking for people's contact information, you have to give a reason why they should give it to you.

The better the reason, the more likely they are to give you their contact information.

This leads to the second key point in inviting people to join your audience.

You have to offer them something they want in exchange for their contact information. The more they want it, the more likely they are to give you their information.

How do you do this?

By spending a lot of time and effort getting to know your potential audience members. You need to consistently work to understand them and their situation. This simple concept is one of the fundamental pillars of audience building. Your job is to understand your potential audience members and to create something compelling to offer them in exchange for them giving you their contact information.

In short, you need to understand them, so that you can give them what they want.

This is easier said than done.

However, here are several strategies that dramatically increase your effectiveness.

Start your efforts by talking to people. Personally, I have struggled with this in the past, being a naturally shy person. However, few things can be more helpful than one-on-one communication. So, when you identify a group of people who are good candidates to join your audience, start talking to them.

First, start with the simple idea of gaining understanding. Ask probing questions. Listen. Develop rapport. Do this with four or five people, and you'll start to gain insights.

Second, create a hypothesis. Based on the understanding you've developed, create an idea for a compelling offer that you can sum up

in one sentence. Then go and offer it to people in person. Gauge their reactions. You'll quickly learn a lot. You'll also have the opportunity to try several different offers. Keep them concise and easy to understand. One sentence is best. Don't spend a lot of time creating what you are suggesting. Make it clear it is an idea you're working on. This way, you won't have to spend wasted effort on creating something people don't want.

You'll also be able to iterate through many ideas much more quickly.

This type of technique is extremely useful if you're able to connect with groups of people at something like a convention, networking event, or other gathering where there are a large number of people in the same place, ready to talk. These types of events are extremely useful, in terms of learning a lot in a short period of time. Even if you find a group that isn't a good fit for your audience, you can still use these techniques to gain *some* knowledge about how people respond to your offer. Take advantage of these opportunities when you can.

Keep in mind, what you learn in a conversational setting might not translate directly to other settings, such as an offer delivered via a website. You will gain a solid foundation, but will still need to iterate through offers and ideas for each context you'll operate in.

Another strategy is to create a small digital advertisement that presents your offer. Tim Ferris, author of *The 4-Hour Work Week*, used this strategy to create the title for his book. He created pay-per-click advertisements with several different titles and subtitles he was considering for his book. The advertisement with the highest click-through rate became the title for his book.

Many authors often struggle with titles, basing their decisions on gut feeling. He based his decision on real-world reactions from potential

audience members. The book was an instant hit; quickly reaching the best-seller lists, and launching an incredibly lucrative career.

I've used variations on this strategy many times to test offers to potential audience members. In a sense, I've baked this strategy into the core of my advertising method for Facebook.

Here's how: Once you've built enough of a Facebook following for a Facebook page, every post will get *some* response from the fans of the page. Because of this, you can think of each post as a test of what the audience is interested in. (Facebook certainly thinks of it this way.) For the website Freedom With Writing, we post five to seven articles on the Facebook page each week. Each of those articles leads to an opportunity for people to sign up for our email list.

Here's the key: Some of those articles get a lot of response on Facebook, resulting in many email signups, while others get very little response. Based on this response, I then buy paid sponsorship, through Facebook, for those articles. They have already been tested to be effective, thus the likelihood of them becoming successful advertisements increases dramatically.

## The Elements of an Effective Ask

Eventually, you'll need to ask people to join your audience. When it is time to do that, there are five key elements you should always keep in mind:

*It has to offer a benefit.* This means solving a problem or giving away something the potential audience member would want.

*It is immediately understandable.* When I first got started building email lists, I noticed that most people would sign up for the email list

within 30 seconds. That's the maximum amount of time people are going to be considering your offer if it is as simple as asking for an email address. If it takes them longer, they're much less likely to sign up. This means your offer should be understandable at a glance and fully understandable within just a few seconds.

*The action you are asking for is crystal clear.* There should be absolutely no doubt about *what* you are asking for. There should be zero mental burden. The more obvious, the better. It should be front and center. If you want someone to give you their contact information, you can't be shy about it, otherwise people will simply ignore you.

The more obvious your ask is, the more people will sign up for it. Of course, this might mean that more people will directly say "No." The good news is, those people aren't the ones you were aiming for anyway. There is only one surefire way to sort out the people who will join your audience from those who won't: By asking them directly and making the question hard to avoid.

For example, at a book reading, you might give a compelling reason to join your email list, and have a clipboard passed around, where people can fill out their contact information. I have seen this done to great effect, with nearly everyone in the room adding their information. Because the clipboard gets into everyone's hands, everybody is forced to consider whether to sign up or not. Imagine, instead, if they were asked to walk up to a corner of the room to fill out the form. The odds of anyone adding their information would shrink dramatically. And yet, you see things like this all the time. On websites, there's often a hidden opt-in box somewhere on the page, where maybe a few people will see it if they're lucky. It's much better to make it obvious; practically unavoidable, so people can at least have the *choice* of taking you up on your compelling offer.

*Finally, it should be relevant to the long-term relationship you are developing with them. Sure, you can bribe people to join your email list in exchange for something they want, such as a gift card, but if the thing you are offering isn't directly related to the types of things you're going to be presenting them going forward, it won't help to establish them as an audience member. Instead, they'll get what you initially offered, then become annoyed by the unrelated things you send them afterwards. Instead, make sure what you're offering sets you up for success in the long run. We'll talk more about this later, when we discuss establishing a long-term relationship with your audience.*



# Chapter Six: How to Build a Long Term Relationship With Your Audience

It is one thing to change someone's life after connecting with them once. It is an entirely different thing to become a regular part of that person's life.

When I got my start running an online business, I learned very effective methods of finding sources for new audience members. However, instead of building an audience for myself, I immediately sent those people to other businesses. I wasn't building a relationship at all. I was making money by referring people, but I wasn't getting any lasting value. Those businesses, on the other hand, were getting potentially loyal customers. They were building businesses; I was merely making money.

After hitting a few bumps in the road, I figured out that I, too, should build something of lasting value.

And there are few things as valuable as a group of people you've built a quality relationship with. People who will be part of your business for years, as opposed to minutes, hours, or even days.

I recently published an article on Freedom With Writing about building a sustainable income as a writer. One of the readers commented that she was going to save the article and read it every single day. That article, clearly, will have a profound impact on her life. However, will it have a profound impact on my business? Only if I am able to connect with the reader again. Fortunately, she joined our email list, giving us the chance to further develop a relationship with her.

That reader's response to the article demonstrates another important point: People want to be changed by what you have to offer. One effective strategy for creating loyalty is by providing those high-impact moments.

However, without follow-up, a moment is just a moment, not part of something bigger: A meaningful relationship that lasts and is mutually beneficial.

## Develop a Consistent Relationship-Building Strategy

One of the most powerful aspects of relationship building is consistency. As you build your audience, you will need to develop a systematic way of keeping in touch with the members of your audience.

This should be reliable and predictable. Your audience should learn to look forward to hearing from you and should be able to predict *when* they'll hear from you next.

This means finding a good reason to keep in regular contact, as well as establishing a consistent schedule.

This could be as simple as a weekly email newsletter or a monthly podcast. It could be an offline event, such as a weekly meetup, a speaking series', a book-reading series, or even an annual conference.

Though, with an annual event, you'll need to maintain the relationship between events in other ways.

At Freedom With Writing, we find opportunities for writers to get paid. That's the basic value we give to our audience. That is translated into a weekly email newsletter, sent out on Tuesdays. Our readers have come to expect this newsletter every week. It is predictable. We very rarely miss a week. And if we do, we're likely to get emails from our audience complaining about it.

Network television companies have learned how to take advantage of this. I grew up in the era of TV before live streaming. At the time, NBC was known for comedy on Thursday nights. (I think they still are!) I'm a fan of their show, *The Good Place*. I watch it online but am *very* aware that new episodes air on Thursdays. This is something to look forward to. If they skip a week, which they sometimes do, I find it frustrating.

The point is, if you become part of someone's life in the long term, this happens in a very literal sense. If you can make it predictable, they will figure out how to set aside the time they need to take advantage of what you're giving them.

## Stay Focused on Providing Value

As we discussed in the previous chapter, you should offer something of value when somebody signs up to be part of your audience. Further, whatever you offer them, it should tie into your long-term strategy for providing ongoing value.

When we ask someone to sign up to Freedom With Writing, we offer lists of publishers that pay writers. This ties in directly to our regular offering, which includes the same thing: Lists of publishers that pay writers.

Everything we offer our audience members is focused on providing value to them, based on their unique needs.

To do this well, you should pay close attention to the members of your audience.

I launched Mystery Shopper Magazine in conjunction with a thriving community of mystery shoppers who regularly participated in Mystery Shop Forum, an online community I created. The content for the magazine is largely inspired by paying close attention to the discussions taking place on the forum. There is a lot of overlap between the readers of the magazine and the discussion forum. By reading the forum, it is easy to see what people are interested in reading.

Odds are you don't have a pre-built community waiting for you to provide value. If that's the case, then you'll need to pay close attention to your audience members in another way. As with learning about potential audience members, I am a big fan of one-on-one communication, especially in the beginning. By having a few conversations, you'll often be able to gain insights that you wouldn't be able to otherwise.

One of your primary goals when launching your audience-nurturing efforts is to create a few *recurring categories* of content that you can send to your audience on a regular basis. With Mystery Shopper Magazine, we review companies that mystery shoppers may be interested in working with. This is a regular feature that people come to look forward to.

The other benefit of creating these recurring categories is that you don't have to keep reinventing the wheel. You'll have a much easier time staying in regular communication if you don't have to continually figure out *what* to communicate. By creating these recurring categories, you make your life as an audience-builder much easier.

This leads to the creation of something called an editorial calendar, a common term in the magazine publishing business. In a magazine, there are usually several different regular columns, a feature article, and shorter pieces that communicate useful tidbits, such as events. All of this is presented in a predictable format and on a predictable schedule. That schedule is usually planned well in advance with an editorial calendar, which becomes, in essence, your medium-term content strategy.

You don't need to publish a magazine to build an audience, but it is useful to think of the slots you want to fill in an editorial calendar, both in terms of learning how to serve your audience, as well as in terms of getting down to the nitty-gritty logistics of communicating with your audience.

## Set Expectations, Then Surpass Them

Once you've developed a consistent routine of communicating with your audience, it can be extremely helpful to, on occasion, go over the top by adding surprise value they don't necessarily expect.

For example, Authors Publish produces eBooks that are given away for free. These provide a lot of value at once, deepen the relationship, and increase the credibility of the magazine.

This type of over-the-top content does a lot to establish your reputation and increase the loyalty of your audience. In addition, you can leverage this content to grow your audience as well. Whenever we publish a new eBook, we use that book as a free gift to encourage new people to join our audience.

Not only does this work because we're able to use our own advertising channels, it works because our existing audience members regularly share our eBooks with their friends and associates. We regularly get emails from people requesting a copy of these books, because they

heard about it from a friend. (This is in addition to the people that simply are referred to a signup page by their friends.)

## Understand Your Purpose and Craft an Identity that Resonates

In any relationship, it is always important to develop trust with the other person in the relationship. One of the key components of that trust is understanding the motivations and goals of the other person.

You can answer that question, by clearly identifying your goals and motivations to your audience members. Your reason for communicating with them should be clear. The purpose behind what you do should be explicit.

If you do this, it will help the audience members to trust you, as well as give them further reasons to stay loyal to you, especially if they resonate with your motivations.

For example, in the world of publishing creative writing, there are many publishers that take advantage of writers, often by charging submission fees, or running dubious writing contests, or by charging exorbitant fees for publishing services. Authors Publish Magazine has taken a clear stand against all of these things: A big part of the mission at Authors Publish is to help writers steer clear of these types of situations, as well as to support publishers who remain ethical and supportive of writers.

This mission is reflected in everything produced by Authors Publish. Additionally, in every issue of the magazine, there is a link to the guiding principles that explicitly describe the principles of the magazine. This is a big part of why we regularly hear from readers that they support what we're doing. The magazine has a clear mission, the mission resonates with many of the issues encountered by the

audience, and the mission is made explicit to the audience. By doing this, Authors Publish gives people profound reasons to support the magazine beyond just the value we are providing them individually. They are supporting the guiding principles as well.

## Understand the Segments of Your Audience

If you build a truly large audience, then you'll end up reaching a diverse group of people with a variety of needs and interests, as opposed to just one primary interest.

As you get to know your audience, you will gradually learn about the different sub-groups that you are serving.

There are a few different ways of thinking about these groups that I will cover briefly here.

First, there are the straightforward interest categories. For example, at Authors Publish, we know that many of the audience members are interested in publishing short stories and poetry in literary journals. Those interests provided the original impetus that Caitlin Jans identified when she launched the magazine.

However, after gaining a fair amount of momentum with Authors Publish, she started hearing more and more requests for information about full-length manuscript publishers. There was clearly a large subset of the audience who wanted to learn more about this. Thus, it became a regular part of the magazine.

In addition to interest categories, your audience will also have different *intensity levels* of interest and engagement with the topic at hand. For example, at Mystery Shopper Magazine, we know that many people have heard of mystery shopping, are curious about it, and simply want to learn more. They have different needs and desires than

people who have professionally mystery shopped for many years and are making a substantial amount of money with it.

It is relatively easy to identify the intensity level when interacting with someone. Those with just a passing interest usually ask very simple and short questions, such as “How do I get started?” Those with higher intensity levels will often ask detailed questions that reflect their deeper interest in the subject.

Each group, of course, is best served in different ways. As you develop your audience, keep this in mind. Also, keep in mind ways you can help your audience members increase the intensity of their interest. This can be as simple as providing a clear path forward, so that they can take action, get results, and feel motivated to continue.

## Summary

To summarize, these are the key aspects of a long-term relationship building strategy:

*Consistent communication.* Regular communication builds trust and allows the audience member to integrate you into their life in a predictable way.

*Focus on value.* By paying close attention to your audience and serving their needs and interests, you will win them over simply because you are making their lives better.

*A reason why/purpose.* Your audience wants to know why you are serving them. Give them a reason they want to support, and their loyalty will grow. If they believe in what you're working on, they will *want* to support you.

*Provide surprise value.* Though you are providing consistent value, by occasionally providing something unexpected, you will keep your audience engaged, interested, and curious.

# Chapter Seven: How to Succeed in the Long Term

When doing research for the articles I publish on Freedom With Writing, I often encounter articles from obscure websites that were published five to ten years ago. Many of these articles link to websites that are gone, created by everyday people with big ambitions.

It seems to me that many people start a blog, sometimes putting a lot of effort into it, only to eventually give up. The internet is littered with the ghosts of these failures.

Why do some websites fail, while others thrive?

While there are many reasons, I have become convinced it comes down to a few basic principles.

## You're Not Just Building an Audience

I created the Loyal Audience Blueprint to help you create an audience. However, it is about more than just creating an audience.

A blueprint is a set of instructions for creating something *physical*. It could be instructions for building a house, or a car, or an airplane. All of those things are complex systems, despite the fact that being in a

car, a house, or even an airplane can be completely simple. All it takes is opening a door.

Just like building a house, your goal with following the blueprint in this book should be to create a seamless experience for the people you are reaching.

And just like a house, you are building a complex system with many pieces.

And just like a house, all of the pieces should fit together, supporting the entire structure.

When I follow this blueprint, I'm not just focused on building an audience. I'm focused on building something as real and sustainable as a house.

That means, I'm not just asking people to join my audience, I'm creating the literal infrastructure that will support the audience, and the growth of the audience, for the long term.

Think about it this way: You can't build a house and forget the roof. Otherwise it won't last for very long, no matter how good the plumbing is.

## You've Got to Work Smart

Just like when building a house, when putting together the pieces of your audience-building infrastructure, everything should fit together in a logical way.

For example, at Freedom With Writing, the work we do to maintain the loyalty of our audience *also* draws new people into the audience.

One of the ways we do this: The articles we publish are finely-tuned to serve the needs of our audience. However, these articles also aim to gain search engine ranking, attention on social media, as well as links from other websites and blogs.

Just like the wall of a room can also be the wall of another room, in addition to supporting the roof of the house, every aspect of your audience building should, ideally, support multiple aspects of your business.

When you're starting out, however, if you want to build something that lasts, you've got to focus on the basics. Just like building a house, focus on what matters most: A foundation. Walls. A roof.

It's easy to get sidetracked, spending too much time on one aspect of what you're building. Some people obsess with getting the "name" of their business *right*. Or creating a fancy logo. Others get sidetracked by writing article after article *before* the other pieces of the audience building system are in place.

When you're starting out, it is *very important* to remember that you can — and probably will — make *every aspect* of what you are doing better, eventually.

After all, what's the point of fancy chandelier if you don't even have a roof?

Focus on the *absolute basics* first. You can always remodel later.

Once you've started to gain some momentum you can focus on improving things. Do this once you have:

- At least one reliable source of new audience members

- A reliable way to get people to say “yes” to joining your audience
- A minimal strategy for keeping people engaged, such as a short weekly email.

Once you have that, you have enough to grow an audience in the long term. You also have enough that you’ll be able to get feedback on every aspect of what you are doing. It is incredibly difficult to make the *right* decisions without the real world experience that comes from directly engaging with your audience. That is why it is so important to focus on the absolute basics first. Implement each key aspect of the system *just enough* to get started and *then* prioritize your next steps for improvement.

## The Right Question Can Make a Big Difference

It sounds strange, but I didn’t go to university for any practical reason. I loved playing music, and I loved creative writing. The school I chose had good programs in both of those fields.

Looking back, I feel lucky that I was even able to get into my school of choice. When I was filling out my applications, my parents were wise enough to hire a tutor to help me finish everything on time.

I’ll be honest: I didn’t particularly *like* her, but that was because she asked me hard questions. She made me think about the real-world logistics. She asked me to actually plan, ahead of time, *when* I was going to finish each step of the process. Something that was rather foreign to me at the time.

I vividly remember her asking the simple question: “when are you going to do this?” And then staring at me, silently, while I did the work of figuring out the answer to her question.

To this day, I wish there were more people in my life who were willing to ask these simple questions, and then *wait* for me to think of the answers. Even if it is a bit uncomfortable.

There are few things more valuable than the right questions asked in just the right moment.

In closing, let me ask you a few simple questions.

Why do you want to build an audience? How would it change your life?

What is the first obstacle in your way?

I am inviting you to send me your answers to these questions – via email – to [jacob@jacobjans.com](mailto:jacob@jacobjans.com)

I would love to hear from you.