

TODAY'S PRIVATE PRACTICE

***" I have heard that niche marketing is a good practice-building strategy.
How do I find/choose a niche market?"***

Dr. Bill Morgan

A niche market is a group of people with common characteristics, issues and concerns.

For example, attorneys, couples dealing with infertility, parents of children with ADHD, children whose parents divorced and career women over 40 are all potential niches.

Defining your services and target groups are an important step in effective marketing. It is not enough to say you are a therapist. "Therapy" or "Counseling" is too broad and non-specific.

Marketing is simply getting the word out about what you do.

Not choosing a target market or markets is like trying to get your voice heard over the din of your whole community.

You aren't going to be heard.

If you want to effectively communicate and get the word out, you need to know to whom you want to communicate.

That's the idea behind the exercise of choosing a niche market. No one can effectively market to everyone.

Great marketing goes in depth with a specific target group. Surface attempts to get the attention of the masses do not work.

Sometimes a niche can be a clinical specialty. Specialties attract clients more than a general practice. It will also attract your ideal client — the type of client and services you most enjoy in your work. Sophisticated consumers today are more likely to seek out a specialist if they can find one.

It may take some time and reflection to identify ideal niches for your practice. It may evolve over time. Or maybe one day, your niche will jump out at you.

Richard Bolles said, "Your mission is where the world's deepest hunger and your heart's greatest gladness intersect." The same can be said for identifying your niche.

Some questions to stimulate your thinking:

- Think about your previous clients. What profession was your most enjoyable client?
- What characteristic of clients do you tend to attract?
- What similar problems do your clients seem to have?
- What type of situation have you been most effective in?
- What knowledge and skills have you accumulated? How have you utilized (or underutilized) them in your work to date?

Developing a Service Line

As you define your practice, you will want to select a niche or maybe a few niches and get to know them well. You will research their felt needs and urgent concerns. You will shape your services to meet these needs and develop effective ways of communicating to your niche.

Do some market research. What are the felt needs and issues that appear to be of urgent concern to people in the target group you plan to serve? Talk to and interview a number of people in your target market to find out. Read the newsletters they read. Attend meetings they attend.

Make a list of the kinds of services you have interest in providing and what interests and energizes you.

Examples:

- Helping ADHD executives increase productivity
- Assisting struggling college students to achieve better grades
- Helping singles to have greater success in dating relationships.

The basic idea is to match the felt needs of your market with solutions that you can offer, based on what services command your interest and is within your capability. You may need to receive some training if a service is not within your current skill set.

By zeroing in on a specific niche and line of services, you will develop a competitive advantage over other providers in your area, due to your specialization. You will eventually develop a reputation for the service that will attract referrals to you.

Speaking of competition, there are advantages to having services in our line that are not covered by managed care. Although many people will opt to pay out of pocket for customized, quality services, others may not. Examples of services that are not covered by managed care include child-custody evaluations and other court-related services, psycho-educational evaluations, business consulting and coaching business owners or executives.

Other examples of specific services include resiliency training, co-parenting counseling for divorcing parents, divorce recovery groups, marriage enrichment retreats, career counseling for professionals in transition, court-ordered psychological evaluations, forensic consulting in personal injury cases, or a 10-week group for business professionals with ADHD.

Again, more traditional services, such as psychotherapy for anxiety or depression, are fine as well. There are effective ways to market these services and gather private-pay referrals. I have a steady stream of referrals based on my reputation for cognitive therapy of anxiety and depression. If this applies to you, keep it as a part of the mix.

William D. Morgan is a psychologist, author, and private practice business coach. He coaches human service professionals and others who want to build thriving practices. For information about his NEW BOOK – Today's Private Practice: Strategies for Building a Thriving Managed-Care Free Psychotherapy Practice, see <http://www.TodaysPrivatePractice.com>.