

# Angela Kelly Smith

## How to Pick a Niche for Your Business Brand + Design Scoop ep. 012 Podcast Transcript

Welcome to Brand + Design Scoop, where I share practical, relatable tips on branding, design, and building a business for do-it-yourselfers who want to stop doing everything themselves.

I'm Kelly, a brand strategist and Squarespace website designer and founder of AKS Design Studio.

Today I'm going to discuss what a niche is, why you need a niche, and how to pick a niche for your business.

So many small-business owners, especially in service industries, find picking a niche really difficult. I've also seen some marketing people suggest that you don't need to pick a niche at all today.

### **So, let's look at what a niche is and why I think you still need one.**

The term "niche" comes from biology. A species' niche is the specific environment in which it lives, the effect the environment has on the species, and the effect the species has on its environment.

I'm going to give an example that is a huge oversimplification, as the term "food chain" is totally inaccurate and has really been replaced with "food web." We think of a lion as being quote "at the top of the food chain." Though really it shares this position with hyenas, if we're being totally clear, which I have to be, given my background in biology and anthropology!

Lions are apex predators in that they are prey to no one. Their place in the savanna ecosystem is to prey on species such as wildebeests, gazelles, baby giraffes, and various other animals. Their main competition comes from hyenas who can successfully steal food from lions and even kill a lion. Leopards and cheetahs cannot compete against lions.

Lions are unique among big-cat species in that they are the only cats that live in and hunt in groups. Although male cheetahs will stay together and hunt together into adulthood. But they still can't compete against lions. Cheetahs are too small and run out of strength after they sprint.

Okay, now that you've gotten this biology lesson, how does this biological niche apply to a business niche?

A business niche is the specific area in which you do business. **Your business niche takes into consideration your area of expertise, the general industry, the economic outlook, the effects of the market, the competition, and the audience size.**

Like a biological niche, in your business niche, the environment affects your business, and your business affects the environment. That is, the fluctuations of the industry, the economy, market forces, the competition, and your audience all exert an effect on your business. Likewise, your business, depending on its size, can affect all parts of the business environment, some more than others.

Let's go back to lions real quick. A lion's niche isn't just an African savanna. A lion's niche is quote "at the top of food chain" in an African savanna. A cheetah's niche would be next down in the quote "food chain," as a cheetah is also a predator, but lions also prey on cheetahs when available, as in, when a cheetah is worn out after sprinting. A lion's usual prey, zebra, gazelles, and wildebeest, are quote "lower down in the food chain" in that they are grazers and, thus, prey. Again, total oversimplification.

Even among grazers there are different niches. One species will prefer one type of grass, while another species will prefer another type of grass. That means that there is enough food on the savanna for everyone.

## **What does this mean for your business niche?**

This means that when you pick a niche, you're not simply picking an industry. You're picking a specialized area within an industry. For example, if you're a massage therapist, instead of marketing yourself simply as a massage therapist, you might focus on Thai massage or prenatal massage or massage for cancer patients.

Why would you choose such a specialized area that would seem to narrow your market? That is, why would you risk narrowing your pool of potential clients?

I discuss in my podcast "[How to Identify and Attract Your Ideal Client](#)" — link in the show notes — how narrowing your ideal client to a very specific person helps you attract people who are looking to hire you, who are willing to pay you, and whom you can help. These are also people with whom you will enjoy working. When you pick a specific ideal client, it may feel as if you're limiting yourself to a smaller market. But you're actually making it easier for clients to find you.

## **Same thing with picking a niche.**

Back to the example of being a massage therapist. Massage therapy is a crowded field. To stand out in this field, you've got to figure out what makes you unique. You can do this through your branding, as I discuss in "[Don't 'Just Do It' With Your Branding](#)" and in "[Branding, Color, and Style: An Interview with Personal-Image Consultant Julie Shields](#)" — links in the show notes.

Setting yourself apart with your branding is necessary. But, honestly, it isn't enough. The best way to set yourself apart is with your niche. Your ideal client is part of your niche.

So, if you're a massage therapist, and you decide to make prenatal massage your niche, then your ideal client is pregnant women. You can even be more specific than that. It could be pregnant women in the third trimester. And you don't have to limit yourself to simply one prenatal massage service. I'm not a massage therapist, so I don't know all the options out there. But I'm guessing there are various massage packages or practices you could offer.

In my case, my industry is website design. My niche is Squarespace website design for do-it-yourselfers who want to stop doing everything themselves. I offer services from fully customized Squarespace websites for people who want a hands-off experience to 90-minute video sessions for people who want a little guidance to do their own websites.

## Why is it important to have a niche for your business?

Having a niche helps your business in several ways.

### 1. It sets you apart from your competition.

Having a niche helps your business stand out, especially in a crowded field. In the massage therapist example, it's tough to stand out when you're a solo practitioner. You should definitely use your branding to identify what makes you unique, especially your personality. But using your niche will be even more effective, especially when you add your branding on top of your niche. When you look at how many massage therapists there are in your area, how many do you find who focus on prenatal massage? How many focus on massage for cancer patients?

We'll get to picking a niche in a moment, but don't pick a niche just because it's not crowded. You'll want to pick a niche you're passionate about, as well as really good at.

### 2. Having a niche establishes you an authority in your area of expertise.

When you pick a niche, you're staking your claim to that area of expertise. You're telling the audience that you're an authority in that area. Now's your chance to prove it. How do you do that? You prove your authority through your services, through client testimonials, through social media posts, and through blogging or podcasting.

For your services, offer more than one option so that you show that you really know what you're doing.

For client testimonials, set up a [Google for Business account](#), and send your link to clients to ask them for a testimonial after they've had a service with you.

For social media, don't just create promotional posts (though you should do those). Post tips and how-tos.

For blogging and podcasting, check out my blog post called "[Best Practices for Blogs and Podcasts](#)." Link in the show notes. It discusses why you should blog or podcast, how often you should post, using keywords, and so much more. The post also contains links to some video blogs that walk you through step-by-step how to set up a blog and how to set up a podcast in Squarespace and in Apple Podcasts.

### **3. Having a niche makes it easier to attract your ideal client.**

Even before you've picked a niche, hopefully you've already picked an ideal client. In fact, picking an ideal client often helps you pick a niche. In the massage therapist example, if you choose pregnant women as your ideal client, then prenatal massage will naturally become a niche.

When you have a niche for your business, your ideal client can find you more easily. If I didn't have "Squarespace website design" all over my website, my ideal client wouldn't find me when they go looking for someone to create a website for them in Squarespace. I don't work in Wordpress anymore. I don't want people to ask me to build a website for them in Wordpress. So, I make it very clear on my website that my niche is Squarespace website design for do-it-yourselfers who want to stop doing everything themselves.

Squarespace website design is still a large field. So, narrowing it further to "for do-it-yourselfers who want to stop doing everything themselves" gives me a more specialized arena to work in. And it makes it easier for my ideal client to find me. My ideal client is googling information on how to do certain things on their website. When they find that information on my website, they'll see that I can take over, make their lives easier, and build their website for them. If I stayed in the large field of Squarespace website design or the even larger field of general website design, it would be extremely different for clients to find me—and for me to find clients.

### **4. Having a niche helps you to design services that your ideal client is looking for.**

When you know your niche, you can easily design your services within your niche and around what your ideal client is looking for.

Prenatal massage for pregnant women in their third trimester? What are they looking for? Probably relaxation, preparing to give birth, relief for a sore back and swollen feet, and easing headaches. Now you know how to design your services and even some of what to write in the description of your services.

Do-it-yourselfers looking for a new website? What are they looking for? Well, they want it right now. They want things their way. They often have a vision of what they want. So, I have a service for creating a Squarespace website in two weeks in which I do all the work, but the client gives me a ton of input on their vision.

## How do you pick your niche?

Let's look at the six steps to picking your niche.

### 1. Identify you passions and skills

If you want to start a business but haven't done so yet, you're going to start with what you're passionate about and what you're skilled at. For example, people start Etsy stores that can become profitable out of their passions for and skills in sewing, knitting, and jewelry making.

I moved from business coaching to website design because website design was something I had been doing on the side—for myself and for select clients—for 20 years. It's something I love doing and have skills at.

If you already have a business, to pick a niche within your industry, you can still look to your passions and skills. In the massage therapist example, you may have the specialized skill in massage therapy for cancer patients. This type of massage requires additional training as cancer patients require special attention and care during massage. Massage therapists who take this additional training are probably passionate about this specialized niche area. So, this would be a good passion and skill to consider.

### 2. Identify what problems you can solve

Within your passions and skills, you're going to identify what problems you can solve. So you can make jewelry. Are you fixing broken jewelry? Are you designing new pieces? Are you designing casual pieces for everyday wear? Are you designing pieces for special occasions?

When you look at what problems you can solve, consider your potential clients. What problems do they have? What kind of help are they looking for? What are their actual problems? What are they googling?

As I website designer, I had to figure out what I'm able to help with, what I want to help with, and what my potential clients are googling. I'm most able to help with Squarespace websites at this point. I most want to help with creating new Squarespace websites, as opposed to fixing existing websites. My potential clients are googling "how to start a Squarespace website." In fact, I have a blog post with video with that exact title.

### 3. Research the profitability of your potential niche

Once you've figured out what you're passionate about and skilled at and what problems you can solve, you'll need to figure out if there's a market for your niche. Just because you love doing something, are good at doing it, and can solve a problem within that area, doesn't necessarily mean that there are enough people out there to support that area as a profitable business.

Now, some businesses you just suspect have the potential to be profitable because those industries are well-established, such as massage therapy and website design. Those industries are huge. But how can you tell if your industry is growing or declining?

Google "market growth for [you industry]." You'll find some articles and reports about the historical trends in your industry and the projected growth or decline in your industry. This will give you an idea of what to expect.

You should also see if your potential niche is something that people are looking for. Use [Google Keyword Planner](#) to see how many people are googling your niche's keywords. Link to Google Keyword Planner in the show notes. Google Keyword Planner will show you how many people are searching your exact keywords, as well as related keywords.

I'm including an image of a screenshot from Google Keyword Planner in the transcript from this episode. You can download that from the website. Link in the show notes.

The screenshot shows the Google Keyword Planner interface. The search term is 'squarespace website' with a URL 'https://www.aksdesi'. The location is set to 'United States', language to 'English', and search engine to 'Google'. The date range is 'Jan - Dec 2021'. There are buttons to 'Broaden your search' with suggestions like 'website builder website', 'content management system website', 'cms website', 'web d', and 'graphic design'. A filter 'Exclude adult ideas' is active. The results table shows 96 keyword ideas available. The table has columns for 'Keyword (by relevance)', 'Avg. monthly searches', 'Three month change', 'YoY change', 'Competition', and 'Ad imp.'. The results are divided into 'Keywords you provided' and 'Keyword ideas'.

| Keyword (by relevance)                                    | Avg. monthly searches | Three month change | YoY change | Competition | Ad imp. |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------|---------|
| Keywords you provided                                     |                       |                    |            |             |         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> squarespace website              | 1K - 10K              | 0%                 | 0%         | Medium      |         |
| Keyword ideas                                             |                       |                    |            |             |         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> squarespace pricing              | 10K - 100K            | 0%                 | 0%         | Low         |         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> squarespace free                 | 1K - 10K              | 0%                 | 0%         | Low         |         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> squarespace best website builder | 100 - 1K              | 0%                 | -99%       | Medium      |         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> squarespace hosting              | 100 - 1K              | 0%                 | 0%         | Medium      |         |

In addition to the average monthly searches for each keyword, you get a rating for competition: High, medium, and low. “High” means that there is a lot of competition in that keyword search. A “low” rating means that you’d have a better chance of showing up higher in the ranking. However, you’d need to look at the average monthly searches to make sure that that number is high enough to support your business. If there aren’t enough people searching for your niche, your business won’t be sustainable.

A wonderful feature of Google Keyword Planner is that it gives you related search terms. The first result you see is for the keyword term you type in. After that, you see a list of related terms with the average monthly searches and competition rating. This will give you ideas as to adjusting or narrowing your niche and what keywords to use on your website.

For more information on keywords and search engine optimization, check out my [“Guidebook for Search Engine Optimization.”](#) Link in the show notes.

#### **4. Narrow your niche**

Now you’ll want to narrow your niche. So, I’ve figured out that I’m passionate about and skilled about creating websites. I prefer to create in Squarespace. I solve the problem of creating new websites in Squarespace.

Narrowing even more, I create customized Squarespace websites, as opposed to using template. Even more, I create these websites for do-it-yourselfers who want to stop doing everything for themselves. Even more, these do-it-yourselfers are midlife women making a career change to freelancing.

Now that’s a niche!

How can I be sure that there’s a market for this niche? I googled “midlife women freelancers” and came up with tons of articles on midlife women making a career change. Lots of resources for these women on how to make a career change and how to get into freelancing. So, I know they’re out there, and they’re looking for help.

#### **5. Look at the competition**

Next you’ll want to check out your competition. Google your keywords and see who pops up. You may need to scroll for a few pages to get a good idea of your competition. Don’t stick to just page one. Those are domain authorities against whom you really can’t compete.

And remember, include your city or region to get an idea of local competition.

How is your competition marketing themselves? What do they seem to be doing well? What do you like about their website? What don't you like?

From their website, you won't be able to tell if they're successful or not. But you can tell how popular they are based on how high they rank on Google. That reflects how many hits their website gets, which might indicate profitability. But it's no guarantee. Though clearly they're doing something right to get ranked that high.

To really hone your niche, you need to look at what you can do better than your competition. Don't emulate them. See what their niche is and adjust yours to be a bit different. Like one grazer on an African safari prefers one grass and another prefers a different grass, there are enough clients for all of you—presuming you've chosen a big enough field.

Figure out what makes you unique. Yes, this is tough. Your niche might not be the one and only in the whole world. So, this is where your branding will come in to make you stand out. The combination of your niche and branding will show your uniqueness.

## **6. Test your niche**

Finally, now that you've chosen a niche, you'll want to test it out. You can start with a landing page, even simply offering a freebie to download. This is great if you already have an established business and are working on narrowing a niche.

Or you can launch a whole website. This is good for new businesses. This is what I did when I started my Squarespace website design business.

When you want to promote your business with a blog or a podcast—so, lots of content—you'll need a whole website. A simple landing page won't do it.

Now, starting a new website means that it will take a while to build your SEO. Again, refer to my "[Guidebook for Search Engine Optimization](#)" for detailed information on SEO. It can take months to see changes in your search engine results page ranking. But this is the case whether you change your niche on an existing website or create a new website.

How do you know if your niche is working?

Monitor your website analytics to see how many hits your site is getting. Look at what keywords people are using to find your website. Track how many people are signing up for your freebie and newsletter. How many hits are you getting on your blog? How many sales are you getting? How many followers are you getting on social media?

Again, give it some time since organic SEO results take months to see results.



In the meantime, use word of mouth and referrals to get clients. This often tends to be the best way to clients anyway!

That's it for today. I hope you've seen why it's so important to have a niche for your business. And I hope these steps to find your niche have been helpful.

Follow the link to the episode on the website to download the transcript. It's all written out in bullet points.

I'll be back next week with more branding, design, and business tips.

See you next time on Brand + Design Scoop!

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Links mentioned in the episode:

[“Branding, Color, and Style: An Interview with Personal-Image Consultant Julie Shields”](#)

[“Best Practices for Blogs and Podcasts”](#)

[“Don't ‘Just Do It’ With Your Branding”](#)

[Google for Business account](#)

[Google Keyword Planner](#)

[“Guidebook for Search Engine Optimization”](#)

[“How to Identify and Attract Your Ideal Client”](#)

[Link to this episode](#)

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Angela Kelly Smith provides custom Squarespace websites, branding strategy, and marketing instruction so freelancers and entrepreneurs can run a successful business while spending more time focusing on the work they really love doing. Check out her [website design + marketing strategy services](#).