

EXPLORE YOUR ENTHUSIASM

EPISODE 156: THE ARTICLE THAT CHANGED HOW I DO BUSINESS

In 2009 I read an article that totally changed the way I thought about my small business and shaped the way I do... everything in my business and how I make every decision.

The article I read was [1000 True Fans by Kevin Kelly](#), an early internet guy and founder of Wired magazine. I was reminded of it a few days ago when reading Tim Ferris's book, [Tools of Titans](#). In the book, he has an updated version of the article and as I was reading it, I realized it's something at the very core of my own business decisions and what I teach in my marketing books and classes.

The idea of the article is super simple: You only need to make 1000 people truly, truly happy to have a successful business. Don't get hung up on the numbers! The idea is that you need a small group of really happy fans, and you spend all of your energy on making things for THEM and making them happy, and you'll make a living from your art.

Let me quote the first few paragraphs:

"To be a successful creator you don't need millions. You don't need millions of dollars or millions of customers, millions of clients or millions of fans. To make a living as a craftsman, photographer, musician, designer, author, animator, app maker, entrepreneur, or inventor you need only thousands of true fans.

A true fan is defined as a fan that will buy anything you produce. These diehard fans will drive 200 miles to see you sing; they will buy the hardback and paperback and audible versions of your book; they will purchase your next figurine sight unseen; they will pay for the "best-of" DVD version of your free youtube channel; they will come to your chef's table once a month. If you have roughly a thousand of true fans like this (also known as super fans), you can make a living – if you are content to make a living but not a fortune."

Here's how the math works. You need to meet two criteria. First, you have to create enough each year that you can earn, on average, \$100 profit from each true fan. That is easier to do in some

arts and businesses than others, but it is a good creative challenge in every area because it is always easier and better to give your existing customers more, than it is to find new fans.

Second, you must have a direct relationship with your fans. That is, they must pay you directly. You get to keep all of their support, unlike the small percent of their fees you might get from a music label, publisher, studio, retailer, or other intermediate. If you keep the full \$100 of each true fan, then you need only 1,000 of them to earn \$100,000 per year. That's a living for most folks."

How this impacted me when I read it:

When I read this post in 2009, I was growing my hand-spun yarn business in order to quit a day job I didn't like. I had been doing it for a few years and sales were becoming consistent. I had an embryonic marketing plan, where I would post a new yarn every weekday, put a picture on Flickr and tweet it. I sent emails every month to a tiny list of 200 people. I obsessed over getting in a magazine or being featured by a big blog like the Yarn Harlot or Mason Dixon, even though I didn't actually make yarn that any of those knitters usually worked with.

Reading this just totally shifted my perspective. Instead of trying to find a bigger and bigger audience, I asked myself: What would I do if I focused on making "true fans" really deliriously happy? What would I create? What would I do? How would I talk?

Instead of focusing on the world of knitting, which at the time was crazy for sock yarn (I spun really bulky rainbow colored yarn), I looked DEEPLY at the people who had spent over \$100 on my yarn. They were usually older women, who were newish knitters, who used my yarn to make quick hats and scarves for kindergartners. And/or they were my fellow nerds, who bought a Battlestar Galactica colorway because they loved the show.

I shifted my focus, away from what the wider world of knitting was doing, and started talking directly to the people who were already buying my yarn - more simple, straightforward patterns highlighted on my blog. More tweets about nerdy things, more goofy colorway names.

And you know the result - my business replaced my day job salary, so I quit my day job and became a full-time yarn maker, which supported our family for years, until writing and teaching replaced my yarn salary in 2013.

But as my businesses have grown and changed and as I branch into new business models now, the focus is always always the same: Focus on the True Fans. I call them Right People in my books and classes, because I don't think of you, dear listeners as "fans" of me, I think of you as the

people I serve. I think of you, if you've bought my books or classes, come to a meet-up, joined the Starship or come to my webinars, as the People I Want to Make Deliriously Happy.

Let's break that down for you and your creative business.

First, the number 1000 isn't the important thing, the idea is that you focus all of your energy on a core group of people who LOVE what you do and want more of it.

Maybe your item makes more than \$100 profit from every superfan, maybe it only makes \$5. So you'll scale the number for you, up or down.

As Kevin says, "not every fan is super." Super fans will buy everything you make, but a much bigger percentage of people will be into one or two things. But instead of focusing on the blase middle, focus on the smaller group of hard-core supporters. They are your best word of mouth engine. The happier you make them, the more you serve them, the more they'll tell more people about you.

Second, this can shape all of your decisions. For example:

It's not necessarily that you need to have MORE fans, it may be that you need to make more stuff for the people who love it. Instead of trying to find more and more people who buy 1 or 2 things, focus on creating for the people who already LOVE your work. Not just products, but content, videos, Instagram stream, blog, etc.

Make your current fans really really happy. Empower your current fans to share your work. Their combined audience is bigger than yours will ever be.

Identify your superfans.

We talk more about how to focus in on your Right People in Elevate Your Business, and everyone is always afraid to narrow in on just those people who really love their work. Everyone wants to appeal to everyone, but that is a sure way to make sure that NO ONE is absolutely in love with you. To have super-fans or dedicated Right People, you have to focus on them, talk to them, serve them. You have to ask: how can I make them deliriously happy? And then apply that to your products AND your marketing. Apply that to your shop and your Instagram stream and your Facebook page and your emails.

If you wanna get ultra-focused on your Right People and learn strategies to use your website, email list and social media super-effective at reaching them, my newest class, [Elevate Your Business](#), is about to open again. You can sign up to be notified when it opens next week at TaraSwiger.com/elevate. I co-created this class with Joeli, who has created tech trainings for

everything we discuss: picking your website platform, setting up your email list, and lots more. So when you go to TaraSwiger.com/elevate, you'll be whisked to a signup page on Joeli's site, where you can sign up to hear the next time the class opens. (or if the class is open while you're listening, you'll find all the registration details there!).

Thanks so much for listening and have an enthusiastic day!