

# The Few, Not the Crowd

## How Specialization Makes Marketing Easier

By Daryl Kulak

John Kuhn had finally made the decision to turn his part-time intuitive energy healing passion into a full-time vocation. During a business planning class, he had what might seem to be a strange thought. He decided to narrow the focus of his practice to people going through divorce.

Mia Turpel knew from her business career that her new massage therapy and reflexology practice would need a special “edge” to differentiate her from the crowd of therapists in her area. She looked at everything she did, everything she could do, and decided to focus on ... feet.

Debbie Moore noticed that her energy healing practice was attracting a large number of breast cancer survivors and people with a history of sexual and physical abuse. She decided the universe was trying to tell her something. She oriented her entire business toward survivors of trauma, a passion of hers since finding a path through her own childhood traumas.

These bodyworkers have learned about the joys of “specialization” — targeting a specific interest group and doing it well.

### Why Specialize?

At first, it seems counterintuitive to specialize a bodywork practice. As an instructor in business classes with bodyworkers, I hear all the following responses:

- “But I like all the clients I work with equally.”

- “I want to appeal to the maximum number of potential clients.”
- “I would get bored doing just one thing.”

The paradox of specialization is that, by serving a smaller target market, you may actually get a much larger number of clients.

You like all your clients equally? Then it's time to look for a group you could serve. Perhaps you'd like them even more than who you work with now.

You want to appeal to the maximum number of people? Good luck. A diluted message like “Affordable Bodywork for Everyone” will actually attract fewer clients than a specialized message. No one feels “Oh, that looks like it was created especially for me.”

Get bored doing one thing? Then don't do one thing. Instead, accomplish one thing. For instance, a practitioner who specializes in helping people overcome addictions might create variety by using meditation, bodywork, energy healing, counseling, yoga, art therapy, and herbs.

### Painting the House Hurts the Feet

Let's look at a prospective client's view for a minute. I'm as much of a consumer of bodywork as anyone I know, so let's use me.

A few months ago, my wife and I stained our cedar house, as we do every few years. My wife took care of the lower sections while I climbed the ladder to reach the tallest parts of our five-level split house. The ladder had small

rungs, only about 2 inches wide. After five weekends of standing on the ladder, my feet began to ache and, I had shooting pains, and periodic numbness.

Through my work, I know holistic healers in all realms, but who should I call for this particular problem? Western medicine was last on my list. I needed someone who could help quickly and expertly. I scanned my resource list. Suddenly, I remembered one of my students, Mia Turpel, who specialized in helping people with their feet.

I booked a session with Turpel right away, because I knew I would be on my feet every day for the next two weeks. Turpel had won me over even before I called her. I didn't shop around for the best price. I didn't try to negotiate. I was in pain, and I was going to the specialist.

Incidentally, because of Turpel's strong specialized knowledge, she was able to eradicate my foot problems, including some nerve damage, with one session. So, Turpel's specialization in feet (she calls her business Happy Feet) got her a new customer, gave her significant pricing power, and made her name pop into my mind at the time I was making a buying decision. What more can you ask from your marketing?

### How Do I Pick a Specialization?

Have you ever read the book *Do What You Love and the Money Will Follow*, by Marsha Sinetar (DTP, 1989)? (It's possible this book might be the reason you're a bodyworker.) You can take Sinetar's idea even further, though. Investigate doing what you love to narrow down your marketing approach for your bodywork practice.

It's really a matter of finding the target audience you love. In order to give you a glimpse at how you can begin to narrow the focus for your business, let me give some examples:

- "I help families with kids having trouble in school." — *registered nurse, Bach flower essence therapist, aromatherapist, Herbalife consultant*
- "I help homeless and foster kids feel safe." — *registered nurse and coloring book author*
- "Our clinic helps clients with chronic pain and injury treatment, in a Western, medicine-friendly way." — *clinic providing massage therapy, counseling, energy work, Alexander technique*
- "I help overweight teens lose weight and

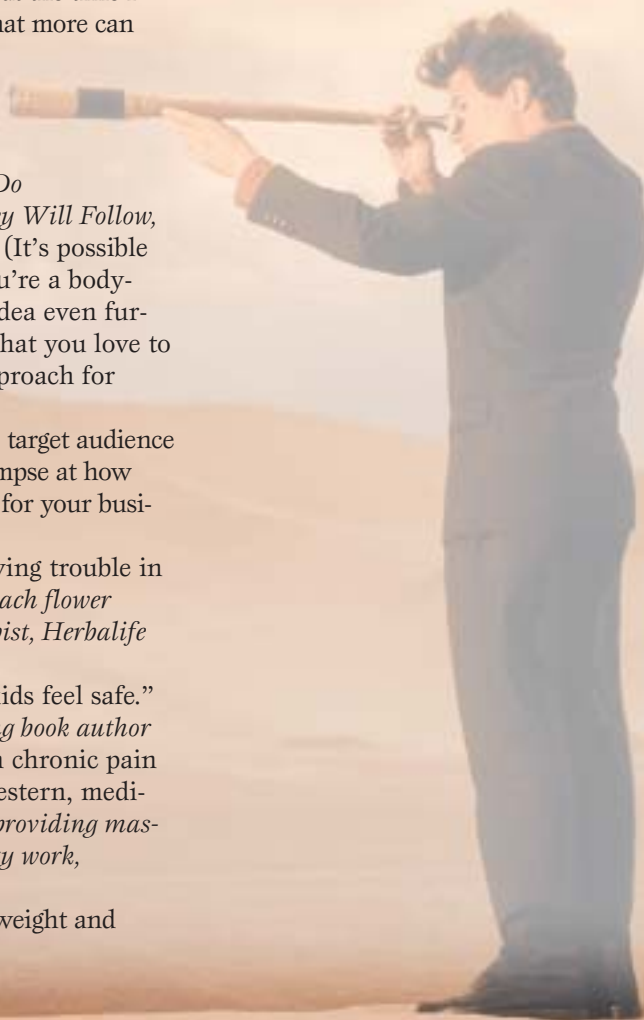
repair their self-image." — *yoga and pilates instructor*

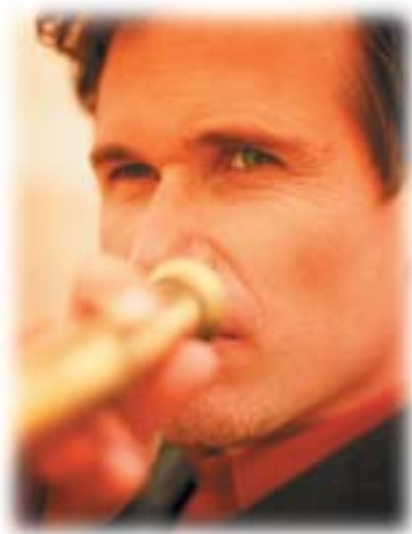
- "I help Christians energize their faith." — *Bach flower essence consultant*
- "I help children with cerebral palsy." — *Alexander technique and Feldenkrais method teacher*
- "I help people get power over addictions." — *naturopath*

### How Do I Make it Happen?

Here are five steps to quickly and effectively specializing your bodywork practice.

**Get past the excuses.** It's human nature to want to avoid specializing, and your mind will come up with every excuse in the book not to. Work through these excuses logically. For example, you've chosen single moms as your target audience, and you hear a voice saying "There aren't enough single moms in this town for me to make a go of it." Use this opportunity to calculate how many single moms there are. If 100,000 people live





### Advantages of the Specialized Bodywork Practice

- **Pricing power** — A specialized practice will be able to charge significantly more than the average bodyworker because it is solving a specific issue. If you are pregnant, and you see a list of massage therapists where four have the same price, and the fifth costs 25 percent more but specializes in pregnant women, who will you go to?
- **Word-of-mouth** — You want your practice to come to mind whenever two or more people are gathered together. By specializing, you can do that. Any time “problems with anger” come up in a conversation, the Healing Touch practitioner who specializes in “problems with anger” will undoubtedly get a mention as well.
- **The competition goes away** — You are no longer competing against similar services. If you’re a reiki practitioner, you are not competing against others who do reiki. Instead, you compete against the people who serve your target audience. If you’ve specialized in helping people going through chemotherapy, then your competitors are actually other drugs and herbs used to counteract the devastating symptoms from the treatments. Other reiki practitioners will be less threatened, and more likely to refer people to you when the topic of cancer and chemotherapy comes up.
- **Marketing is so much easier** — Now you know exactly where to go to find your prospective clients. The intuitive energy worker who specializes in male models goes to their schools, their catwalks, and their hangouts. She speaks at their conferences about how energy work can help them become better at their jobs. She joins their associations. She sponsors some lunches of smaller groups. She becomes part of the scene.

in the area, that means about 40,000 households. The government census says that 2,000 out of 10,000 households are headed by single moms, so that’s 8,000. Probably only half those single moms could afford my services, which brings it down to 4,000. Of those, maybe half would be open to alternative medicine, so that leaves 2,000. I think I could reach 5 percent of those people in the first year, so I should be able to get 100 new clients in the first year, maybe an average of five appointments per new client. Can I work with that? No problem!

**Find your passion.** It’s unfortunate, but most business planning classes miss this step completely. Base your specialization on what really, truly makes you happy. This will probably relate to something in your past that affected you deeply. For Debbie, it was abuse in her childhood that led her to want to specialize in survivors of trauma. For Mia, it was watching her mother going through cancer late in life and feeling immense relief from reflexology treatments done by her holistically-minded aunt. Search your own past and look for those appointments that make your heart jump, then find out why. Nothing is too ridiculous to be investigated. Do what you love and the money will follow.

**Identify your “new” competitors and differentiate yourself.** The good news is you are no longer competing against other people using the same modality as you. Massage therapists no longer compete with massage therapists. Instead, the yoga instructor who specializes in “helping overweight teens” is competing against those who solve that problem for that group, in this case, Weight Watchers, weight loss herbs, doctors and drugs, aerobics classes, and the Atkin’s diet. Once you’ve identified these competitors, create a vision of how you are different and better.

**Focus your marketing.** Once you’ve found your passion, it’s time to focus your marketing. Without a

specialization, marketing is a horrible task. With specialization, it’s easy. Remember, marketing a service boils down to three things: speaking, publishing, and networking. Where does an energy worker who has chosen to specialize in helping kids with trouble in school do his marketing? He might speak to attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) support groups, at high schools, and at suburban neighborhood meetings. He might network with parents, teachers, and teens at the meetings they go to regularly. He might solicit referrals from psychiatrists with patients who do not respond to Ritalin or other drugs, and are frustrated with the lack of alternatives. He might publish articles in ADHD support journals for parents and psychiatrists, showing how his approach to bodywork can help.

**Refine your practice.** Up to this step, you haven’t really done anything differently with your practice — just changed your marketing approach. But the fun part now comes when you adapt your bodywork techniques to best serve your target audience. You’ll learn what works and what doesn’t, and continue to refine your practice to become better at helping your clients with their specific problem. You’ll soon become well-known as the specialist in this area. You’ll begin evaluating every new bodywork technique in terms of how it can help your chosen clients.

Specializing in solving a specific problem for a targeted audience will make those people feel special beyond measure. And isn’t that really why we’re all here in the first place? **M&B**

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