



# HOW-TO: HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

## The Long & Winding Road to Brand-Building

You want to build your ESD brand, but have no clue where to begin? Let's take this step by step. Branding is a complex process that requires us to make many foundational decisions about our organization. Namely, we must define our:

1. Audience or Market
2. Mission
3. Voice
4. Services or Product
5. Value Proposition

If it sounds like a lot, that's because it is! Rather than overload yourself with too many tasks at once, use this How-To Guide to focus on defining your target audience, or market. This guide is designed to give you a clear sense of direction as you begin building your brand, and specifically as you start to identify your audience.

If you want your ESD organization to really thrive, we recommend you block off some time for office work and get the ball rolling with the questions and exercises outlined in the following pages.

## What Is a Target Audience?

Good question, let's start there!

### Hint: It's Not Everyone

For whom are your ESD classes, workshops, or trainings? Who is your "ideal" student or client?

Resist the temptation to answer, "everyone!" Don't worry if that was your gut reaction. Most entrepreneurs, creators, and teachers want to believe that the thing they do, make, or teach is for everyone. And when it comes to empowerment self-defense (ESD) *of course* you want this information to reach every single person in the world. As ESD professionals, we are passionate about providing all people with the tools they need to live lives free from violence, with confidence, safety, and power.

And so, when it comes time to define your target audience, it is easy to fall into the trap of casting the broadest net possible: everybody.

Certainly, your offering is universal, in a sense. Anyone *can* and *might* take your ESD class, sign up for your empowerment program, or hire you to give a training for their company or institution. There is value in having a broad or “universal” appeal. If you believe everyone could benefit from your services, then shouldn’t “everyone” be a potential client or student?

Yet, when it comes to *defining* your ideal audience, specificity is key.

## The Opposite of Everyone is Specific

*“If you serve everyone, you serve no one.” —Unknown*

It is powerful to accept, even celebrate, that your particular ESD brand and services have a specific and clearly-defined client. When you hone in on that student or client profile, you will be able to do a few things with greater ease and aptitude:

1. Adapt your offerings to suit their specific needs and desires.
2. Craft your marketing (your *way of speaking about* your offering) to reach their ears.
3. Stay connected to the idea of your audience—less abstract, with more substance—through the process of designing curriculum, writing blogs or social media posts, and crafting class descriptions.

**Vocabulary Check:** We are using the terms “audience profile” “target audience” “ideal student” “client profile” and “target market” more or less interchangeably. While each term has its own nuance, we recognize that different ESD professionals may think differently and prefer different words for the people they teach (audience, client, student, participant). Feel free to use the terminology that makes the most sense to you. At the end of the day, this brand-building process is for your benefit!

You are not for everyone, and neither is your teaching, coaching, or presenting style. That should be a liberating thought! Not everyone will want or like or even care about what you have to offer. This realization, taken the right way, can free you to focus on those people who *do* care and who *are* interested. That is your target market.

Resist the instinctive urge to reply, “Everyone!” when asked about your audience, and start thinking seriously about who they actually are. Demarcating this persona *does not* mean that no one else can or will benefit from your ESD offerings. It *does* mean that you will be able to tailor your classes, events or courses to suit the people you really want to serve, and reach *more* of them.

## So, Who Is Your Audience, Really?

An audience is not a fuzzy concept of shadow figures; rather, it is made up of real, human individuals with real needs and interests, real eyes and ears, real hearts. Are you creating for them? If you are looking to share your work with a wider audience and serve your mission, then you should be.

One of the most interesting things about getting to know your clients is digging beneath the surface and exploring what their biggest fears and challenges are, what they yearn for, how they want to self-actualize, why and how they make the choices they make, their wildest dreams. Then, if you are a good listener and diligent in your brand-building and product or curriculum development, maybe you can meet them there.

Modern marketing revolves around creating needs and insecurities—telling consumers what they want. (This is evident in many marketing materials out there for self-defense classes, featuring dark, scary streets, a scared, subdued woman, and a villain with a knife or gun. You’ve seen them.) Most marketing is fear- or scarcity-based, and in the case of self-defense training, that can feed off of and into a status quo where women’s safety depends on limiting their freedom or agency. Not so empowering.

What if you tossed fear-based marketing out the window? Try to understand what your audience truly seeks and be of genuine service with your work. Your organization’s path will unfold from there.

## **Create Your Audience or Client Profiles!**

To get started on your brand-building adventure, create at least two specific profiles of your ideal client. (But don’t stop at two if you’re having fun. Fun? You may be surprised!) Give each one a name, age, gender, profession, hobbies, income, passions, fears, desires, goals, and interests.

Be sure to explore the following questions:

### **What type of person do you want to work with? Here are a few ideas:**

- Single Moms
- Mothers & Daughters
- Fathers & Sons
- Teen Girls
- Hikers
- Bartenders
- Nightlife Crowd
- Entrepreneurs
- Solo Travelers
- Dancers
- Teachers
- Parents
- PE Teachers
- Martial Artists
- Non-Martial Artists
- Yogis
- Nurses

### **What else do you know about them, or can you make an educated guess?**

- ❖ What Instagram or TikTok profiles do they follow?
- ❖ What books, news sources, or websites do they read? (Where might they find an article or advertisement about your ESD organization?)

- ❖ What are their values? Core beliefs? Driving motivations?

Ready to take it even deeper? Let's get very specific.

**Answer these questions about your ideal client or student:**

1. Where do they like to hang out?
2. What do they do for fun?
3. What are their hobbies?
4. What are their stress points?
5. What problem are you solving for them?
6. What issue in their life do you have an answer to?
7. Are they at a specific stage of their life?
8. When pertaining to trauma, do you have a specific group you like to work with?
  - a. People who just experienced an adverse situation
  - b. People who are still in the thick of abusive relationships.
  - c. People who had adverse situations in the past and they are in their healing process.
  - d. People who want to instruct others.

All of these questions are leading you to one critical piece of understanding: *What is their desire, which your offering can satisfy? What do they need, and how can you help with that? What are they missing, and how can you fill that gap? How do they wish to grow, and in what way can you support that growth?*

Write down these client profiles with as much detail and specificity as you can, and save them in a physical or digital file for reference.

These profiles are for *you*. (And potentially for anyone who may work with you later on in a marketing or communications role.) The intention is to give you a crystalline idea of *who* you are creating for as you move forward. When you get stuck or unmotivated, you now have your audience profiles to remind you of why you are *still* on this crazy ride—and for whom.

Furthermore, as you continue to design your ESD classes and other services, you will want to keep in mind *who* is going to be on the receiving end.

## **Next Steps**

As you enter into the complex world of brand-building, you may want to start paying more attention to other brands out there that inspire you, or that speak to a similar target audience. Keep a list. Note down what they're doing—on their websites, social media, or marketing campaigns—that's effective. You don't have to start from scratch. Use these notes as a starting place, and learn from the successes and failures of other brands.

And as you come to a deeper understanding of your ideal client, start thinking about how you want to address them: your brand voice, messaging, logo, design will all build on this foundation.

Stay tuned for more guides on branding soon to come, and let us know if you would love to see any specific how-to resources. Reach out anytime at [hello@esdprofessionals.org](mailto:hello@esdprofessionals.org).

Enjoy the process!