



freelancelift

DEFINE YOUR DREAM CLIENT

How to find a dependable specialist audience for your service and ensure you're not 'just another' freelancer

by Liam Veitch



About the author

I've grown my freelance business into something I am truly proud of, yet I know the feeling of battling as a freelancer all-too-well. Following an initial failure I tried again with a renewed mindset and I teach everything I know at freelancelift.com.

It took me one failure at the freelance game and a 2 year sentence as a zombie-herd employee at a corporate to figure it out, now I want to give you the benefit of my experience as well as inviting you into the world of the people who have been there and broken the freelance boundaries themselves.

There is lots of unnecessary complication, particularly when it comes to being the specialist, so in this workbook I wanted to show you how to find, filter and decide on a direction for a market specialism.

WHY?

Skip the why, you already know

So we all know we **probably should** refine our audience. We've heard well-constructed, logical arguments to support it and we've probably made some early forays into switching into a narrower audience already.

'Would you go to 'Bobs Plumbing' or 'Bob the drain blockage expert' if you had a blocked drain?'
they shout.

'If you're targeting everyone you're targeting no-one'
they cry.

I could exhaust 5,000 words giving you example upon example with a stack of case studies, but I won't.

Not because I'm lazy, work shy, or because I've already written 4,622 words on it in my book 'Stop Thinking Like a Freelancer' (even though I have); nor is it because I don't think this is the right move for you.

No, the reason I won't lay out justification for refining your audience is because I believe you **know it already**.

There's a reason you're reading this book (aimed at you, a freelancer specifically) over a generic small business book.

There's a reason you know my name (the guy who teaches freelancers specifically) over the plethora of other more general voices in the space.

I believe you already know that having a specific, mapped out dream client is key to making it:

- 1) Easier to locate them and **command their attention**
- 2) Easier to explain the benefits of your service so as to **build desire**
- 3) Easier to justify your cost (vs their return) and **convince them to buy**

Having a specific, dream client in place will make these key elements of salesmanship **infinitely easier** to attain.

I believe you're worn out by the theory behind 'getting specific' and need something fresh, actionable and concise.

That's why I wrote this short book.

I'm continually fascinated by inherent weaknesses in our trade that are accepted as norms. If we *just accept* that we have competition in the order of millions, and *just accept* that we're a small fish in a really big pond then we will continue to see daily life as a freelancer a struggle.

When it is possible right now, with a blinding speed of execution to turn that **really big pond into a tiny, yet viable fishbowl** with only us in it why wouldn't we?

Whether consciously or not, we are making the decision to blend into the background by not defining and pursuing a specialist idea of a dream client.

There will be the odd story in this book, to back up my reasoning but consider this a workbook, a ticket to making the theory you already know happen in practice.

Then the video lessons which complement this book and the live workshop will help pull all of this together into something truly change-making for your business.

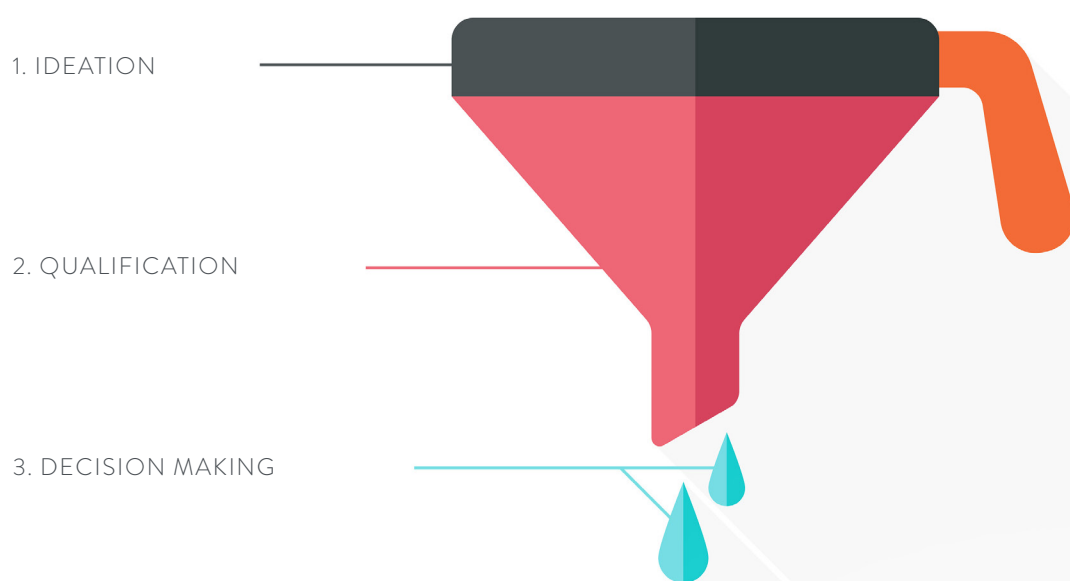
As the perfectly apt Richard Branson quote goes:

“Screw it, let’s do it”

HOW

The process outlined clearly

As with everything I teach, I fully subscribe a 'KISS' (keep it simple, stupid) way of working. Therefore, to pin down a specialist audience there are only really three stages to consider:



Ideation

You may have ventured this far already, to attempt to develop some outline ideas for what your market specialism might be. Indeed, I would hazard you've gotten as far as deciding which sector you'll go for, only for something else in your business to pop up, so you don't follow it through.

In this phase we'll pull together 5 methods for developing ideas for market sectors, quickly.

Qualification

This is a vital step, it's important to be objective, realistic and open minded when it comes to narrowing down the ideas you've developed into prospective audiences.

Some of this is data / science; some of it is a feeling. Our goal is to score and rank our ideas accordingly, ready for the final cut.

Decision making

Since I couldn't think of a snappy third word to end in 'tion' I'll go with the most descriptive name for this phase.

We'll make the final call on these ideas along with determining how we can look to build our main brand, or a sub brand around our chosen market.

So let's jump right into the ideation phase.

ONE

Ideation - Research and idea generation

As covered earlier, I'd like to get straight into the meat of the ideation phase, so developing a good chunk of ideas we can cut away at so as to ensure nothing is missed, but all options are open.

Here are the five areas we'll develop ideas from. They'll go through an initial common sense filter (unique to your particular situation) before taking around 10-15 into a spreadsheet.

1. Bulk idea generation
2. Combining groups are you already part of
3. Previous client alignment
4. Aspirational markets
5. Geographic locality

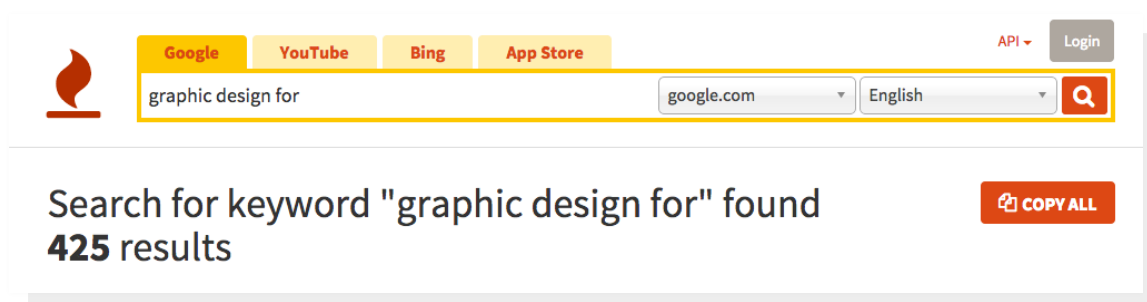
1. Bulk idea generation

There are several ways to do this; I'm going to go with the simplest one.

Open up a tool like ubersuggest.com or keywordtool.io - each of these will crawl google auto suggest en mass to give you lots of ideas based on prior phrases typed.

Note: I am not showing you how to do keyword research, so it's not wholly necessary to discover search volumes and such. In the first instance we're just looking for suggestions, which will spark other ideas quickly.

You should use this technique to add in your freelance skill ie 'copywriting' then add 'for' as detailed below:



All of these options will bring back hundreds of examples. Even before you get to the qualification phase ask yourself the following questions for each:

- > Is this an area I know something about?
- > Is it indeed 'an area' or is it the title of a book or course teaching the skills I have?
- > Could I see myself being the [skill] for [market]?

Example, can I really see myself being 'graphic design for education sector'?

If you can answer yes to these three initial common sense filters then you should add them to your list of ideas.

You'll find the bulk of your market areas in this place, but there are others.

2. Combing groups you're already part of

Things began to turn a corner for me as a freelancer when I combined my experience within the music industry with my abilities as a designer. What groups do you have an affiliation with, either at a hobby level or as a passive interest?

As freelancers we work most of the hours we're sent but you'll still have hobbies or activities, which take up your spare time.

What are they?

- › What takes up your downtime?
- › Which non-business entities do you follow on social media?
- › Would any of these areas have a need for your service?

Example:

- › In your downtime you may show an interest in political commentary
- › You might follow grass roots political change movements on social media
- › Could grass roots political parties use your copywriting / logo design / web design / marketing services?

More often than not, these simple questions may lead you into unexpected areas. A simple tip is to check through previously visited sites on the devices you generally use in your downtime, such as your smartphone or iPad. Any areas you can isolate, add them to your list.

3. Previous client alignment

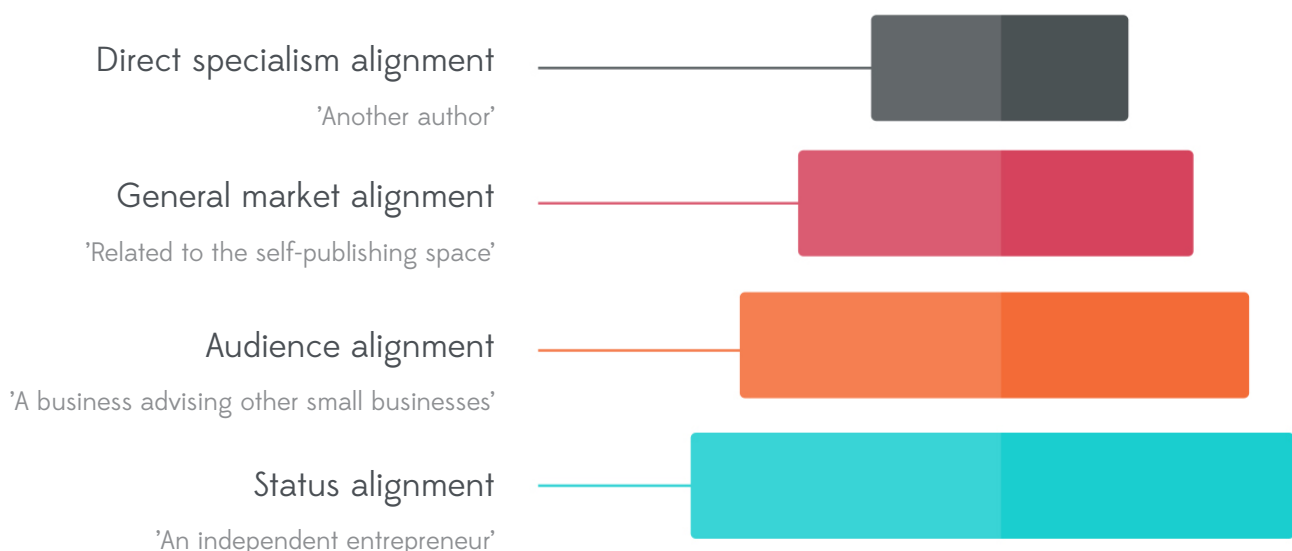
When I talk to freelancers on a 1-2-1 basis, we often circle around the idea of ‘being the specialist’ with the freelancer proceeding to tell me that there is no alignment between their prior clients.

To which I respond, “there is always alignment, at least at some level”.

So I developed a simple diagram, which enables you to **compare client A with client B** for each tier of the pyramid to look for alignment.

Your job is to seek out at **least 3 clients which align within at least one of the tiers of the pyramid.**

To demonstrate this approach I will recall a conversation with a freelance illustrator, who was struggling to pick out the alignment between her previous clients, the first of which was an author. Here are the tiers of alignment for that scenario.



While there were no three clients that matched identically, by asking the questions prompted by this diagram we were able to find three clients which **matched for general market alignment**:

- > An author
- > A podcaster
- > A blogger

These may otherwise be dismissed as unconnected (and they were until we unearthed them) but by tying them together at the lowest common denominator level we were able to reframe her service as:

‘Book Illustration services for the self-publishing sector’

And we had three case studies to back up that specialist market segment. All of these have a general market alignment for ‘self publishing’ and they all would show the characteristics required to safely assume that at some point in the future they might consider publishing a book.

With these case studies in hand - and with supporting website messaging speaking in the worldview of this client - we were able to provide the consistency of message that was missing before.

4. Aspirational markets

Is there an area of business or life that fascinates you deeply?

Whether you are part of this environment yet or not we all feel an element of wonder around certain topics.

Much like the feeling as a child (shortly before reality hit) that you could be anything you wanted to be, we all over time have been fascinated by a topic enough to really want to embody it. In my case, it was to be an astronaut around 5 or 6 years old.

Over time however, the industries I aspired to be part of got gradually more realistic.

Of course, lunar travel was never really a possibility for me but what I found was that the awe I felt around music (and to a lesser extent sport) still remained.

If our job is to feel completely satisfied by the job we do, why not do this job on behalf of an industry we aspire to be a part of?

Admittedly, at this point we're heading more into blue sky territory but take a second to consider how your service might integrate with some of the industries you've been fascinated by over time and when we get to the qualification phase we can easily filter them out if needed.

5. Geographic locality

The fifth area we can look towards for specialism takes us right back down to earth, literally. The area around you is probably one you've identified before, especially if you have been plying your trade for longer than 10 years.

The Internet has brought with it easy access to a global market. This leaves us sometimes a little too eager to consider a specialism that ignores our physical location.

In the main, it makes sense to open yourself out to a market specialism (which given its specificity demands a global reach) but don't forget to consider how a geographic specialism might play out.

If the competition in your area is low, and the qualification scores from the next section are high then it might be a good hunting ground for you to acquire new customers.

In any case, you should add your locality to your list of ideas in order that you can qualify them accordingly in the next stage.

TWO

Qualification - Refining your ideas

In this phase we're going to cross-reference the list of specialist markets we've developed against a simple scoring system.

I need to reiterate that this is not an exact science; for the most part I do seek out data to back up my decisions but in this case any data is subjective and sketchy at best, so the final call will be part market analysis and part **intuition**.

By asking the questions laid out in this phase though you'll have the insight you're going to need to pin down this dream client, who will be accessible, ambitious and able to pay.

Your job then will be command their attention and guide their experience toward making the sale. Speaking of guiding an experience towards a sale...

THE VEGAS EFFECT

In January 2014 I visited Las Vegas and I loved it, indeed I'm going again this year. You can't help be cautious or wary about the Vegas underbelly, but what is undeniable is their efficiency at making the sale.



The expression 'The House always wins' is not unfounded and those dramatic water fountain shows don't pay for themselves.

In the casino industry (and in Las Vegas in particular) it has long been understood that it's worthwhile **profiling and filtering players by activity**, funneling these into the areas that'll generate the **most return for the house**.

High rollers have the red carpet laid out with free, lavish access to hotel facilities. It is understood these ‘whales’ will return this tenfold in bets.

Casual gamers are offered free drinks to keep them playing at tables and slots, again within the confines of what they will likely spend in return.

Browsing guests are invited to walk on through, with lit walkways guiding their journey to gift shops and restaurants.

That is to say, a casino or hotel complex makes it their job to **specialize in on certain sub-sets of customers and guide their experience accordingly**, for the maximum amount of financial gain.

So the first fresh perspective I’d like to put to you here is to consider qualification as ‘filtering out’ rather than ‘excluding’ your ideas.

A key mistake I see on the web presences of freelancers is to target high rollers, casual gamers and browsers with the exact same message which results in a jumbled experience with no one sub-set of customers having an optimal experience.

High rollers will walk on through, casual gamers are not tempted into making contact and the browsing guests are the only ones that make contact, tying up your time without ever making the purchase.

We’re not just picking a market sector for the sake of doing it, we should be putting in the work to understand their likelihood to spend, and **shape our Casino floor accordingly**.

TRIPLE A RATINGS

So how do you figure out whether an audience might be a good fit for you? As with everything I develop, it needs to be really simple.

You should cross-reference each market outline against this Triple A qualification process. Is the audience:

Accessible

Is this a pocket of prospective customers that's easily reachable? It should be quite clear where (online) this audience hangs out, in order that you can access them via paid channels, with content or by direct communication.

Ambitious

Do they care about what your service can bring? For example, in web design some industries (namely the legal sector) are so far behind as an industry, they lack the hunger for innovation, resulting in widespread apathy that'll be difficult to change.

When an audience is on the leading edge however with lots of jostling for position, your job to make the sale is made easier.

Able to pay

Put simply, do their business interests generate enough revenue to support the cost of your service?

Even with the most proactive ‘attention getting’, the best possible pre-sales dialogue and perfectly justified pricing, there will still be a significant obstacle if your audience **doesn’t generate more profit than the cost of your service.**

In the case of industries where funding is prevalent (tech startup environment for example) you should factor this over raw profit numbers.

AAA

Are they accessible?

ACCESSIBLE

Here's where you can start to look at this from the mindset of a marketer in imagining how locating and interacting with an audience may play out

Put simply, would you be able to pin-point precisely where this audience would exist online?

Here are some clues you can follow:

Voices in the space

Would this audience actively follow and engage with another voice in this space?

If your audience is aspiring bands, would they follow management companies or booking agents? Would they exist around the voices who teach them how to be better bands or artists?

That being the case, you can start to consider how you might intercept them while in their natural habitat.

Naming conventions

How do they name themselves online? Is it easy to locate them? In some industries the naming conventions are complicated and diverse, meaning it's a little more difficult to access a large enough cross section.

Online communities

Are there online communities with this group of dream clients inside?

How easy would it be to become a voice in these communities so as to generate the level of trust required to win clients.

Aligning with the content they're already consuming

Would it be easy (with the skillset you already have) to create content and 'breadcrumbs' back to your site in a format they already consume?

If this audience only consumes videos, for example do you have what it takes to create good enough videos to capture their attention?

If the bar is set a little lower, with written content, could you create the sufficient quality level required to appear on the blog channels this audience is consuming?

For each of the markets you've identified, imagine you have to **pique the interest of this dream client by being visible in their natural habitat**. How easy would this be, in terms of the ability for you to find them initially and to provide valuable input that will ultimately lead them to you and your service.

You can give a score of accessibility, 1 to 5. 1 being difficult and 5 being easy to access.

AAA

Are they ambitious?

AMBITIOUS

As I covered earlier in the book, no two markets are the same when it comes to their eagerness, or hunger to make business improvements, or more appropriately to evolve.

In a large majority of cases, freelancers are hired to solve non-regular, non-critical business problems.

A logo design, new website, killer copy or a new ad campaign are vitally important from our point of view as the service providers, yet arguably not vitally important to the existence of the client's business.

So some businesses - and sectors in general - choose to take this information and translate that into an 'I don't need it' reflex. There is a bias towards 'putting up with' rather than changing the status quo.

Real change and real evolution (with resulting ambition) happens when competitors are constantly changing their logos, websites, copy or ad campaigns or when the very image of their business **relies on them being innovative.**

Stoic law practices, that sit in a row of three other law practices may go 10 years between business changes, whereas forward thinking sectors will change things up every year.

So it's important to distinguish between market sectors that are innovating or constantly evolving and those that are not, as these will demonstrate the required levels of ambition to provide a great client.

Here are some things to look out for which might demonstrate the ambition of an industry:

Are there awards for innovation or breaking boundaries?

A need for such accolades can only be supported by an industry that has ambition at its core.

Are there expos or industry conferences for this space?

Again, this is useful information for gauging the amount of competitive spirit which exists.

Can you see (via wayback machine or similar) if websites of key industry players have changed over the past 2-3 years?

A website is a good barometer, for most freelancer services. If sites are changing often, you can be sure that content / branding / development and basically any other freelancing skill is changing at a similar pace.

Make an assessment as to whether the industry (or your locality) has ambition scoring 1 for no ambition and 5 for a healthy amount of ambition.

AAA

Are they able to pay?

ABLE TO PAY

Arguably the most important qualification criterion is that of financial fluidity. How feasible is it for your dream client to cover your fee (at the required levels and frequency) without breaking the bank?

One of the early mistakes I quickly fixed was **focusing on the wrong tiers** of my target audience.

Initially my focus was on unsigned bands, I figured these guys had the:

Ambition

They did, in great numbers. It's an ever-changing landscape and it helped for them to be as innovative as possible so each one wanted the best.

Accessibility

There are numerous blogs, voices and online spaces, which exist to serve the unsigned musician community. It would be relatively easy to enter this arena and become a blip on their radar.

What I had completely missed though was evaluating their ability to pay.

Cashflow was an issue since, well; there was no cash!

Unsigned by definition means ‘*not yet professional*’, or ‘*not yet achieving mainstream success*.’

After early exchanges that underlined this point I decided to hone in on bands, artists and DJs who **were signed to a record label already**.

Either larger acts on smaller independent record labels or smaller acts on larger labels. This was the sweet spot where the bands still looked after their own online presence and there wasn't too much interference from management companies or the record labels themselves.

On average each band would earn upwards of \$60k a year - which rendered my \$3k fee viable for an investment that would last 2 years.

A quick way to figure this out is to run this calculation:

Your fee should represent no more than 5% of gross revenue for the duration of its lifetime.

- › So if your service renews each month calculate 5% of their estimated monthly earnings as a ceiling.
- › If your service will last for a year, take a 5% estimate of annual revenue
- › In my case (web design) where the investment could spread over 2 years (\$120k gross) I could be comfortable with a ceiling of \$6k for my work.

These percentages do differ, based on on the client's ambition and their aversion to risk, some will be comfortable pouring 20% or more into a project that they know will work.

Indeed, if you're billing on value you might base your costs on future return.

It just pays to be realistic however, and based on over 200 client interactions **I've found 5% to be a good area for minimal friction.**

So here are the brief calculations you need to make:

- › How much revenue can we estimate this market (or sub set of the market) generates on a monthly / annual basis?
- › What is the lifecycle of our service?
- › Is a 5% cut over this range viable as a fee range?

You can also ask the question in reverse:

- › What fee am I looking to achieve for my work and how much revenue would need to be made to comfortably support this?

Simplistically, if your ideal fee is \$10k and your service would need to be renewed every 12 months you need a client generating at least \$200k a year. You can then run a check against your ideas to see who might fit the bill.

This is the final piece of the qualification puzzle and should allow you to score each industry by their ability to pay.

Give a score of 1 for 'no ability to pay' and 5 for 'comfortably able to pay at the 5% ceiling range.'

You should now start to see some immediate winners and losers to take through to the decision making phase.

THREE

Decision making - Finalizing your choice

DECISION MAKING

You should now have a healthy list that'll be easy for you to narrow down. But I wanted to give you some words of encouragement:

This isn't a do or die decision, any call you make now can easily be changed, evolved or reversed - that's the beauty of being a one-person business. **Agility is your friend.**

I know that it can be daunting switching your entire message to that of an audience sub set but you should be confident that this is the best short-term move you can make.

If this fear is too great you might want to consider setting up a sub-brand which focuses on this sub-set of customers.

If your skillset allows you can execute on sub brand ideas rapidly, building a web presence to test each one quickly.

Then in the next book in the series we talk about converting this dream client outline into words, messaging and a web presence, which tells your story.

With that said, let's look at how we will make the decision.

1. Filter down to a final three

As always, you can deviate from raw scores and exact data if you believe in one market more than another, but if nothing else filter by the highest scoring options first.

This will give you a final three or four options remaining.

2. Build out your short vision statement for each

One of the biggest and most impactful moves you can make as a freelance business is to develop a 'difference statement'. A simple, punchy paragraph that gives an anchor point for your brand and will influence later decisions.

I have another book on this topic entirely (look for '[A blueprint for your next big move](#)' in the short book library) which goes into a little more detail, but it stands to reason that you should feel comfortable in what this statement might look like for the markets you're choosing between.

Here's a recap of the formula:

[brandname] exists to help [customer] [the frame]
with [primary] and [secondary]

This simple paragraph, in less than 100 words, gives you something for your brand to look towards.

It is something we'll dive a little deeper on in the next book as we look to apply this specialism to your brand, but consider how comfortable you would be with a statement like this for each of the three final items.

[customer]

The specialist market segment you've identified

[primary, secondary]

Defines and documents your primary and secondary product set.

[theframe]

What's the frame (descriptive story of victory) for your service? How might life be different with your service and what unique aspects are you bringing to the table?

From the band example above here's how mine would play out:

"MyBusinessName exists to help signed, growing bands and artists generate exposure and develop new revenue streams with forward thinking websites which showcase their talents and tools and marketing support for growing merchandise sales."

If you don't feel completely comfortable reciting this short statement out loud then it might be a good fit, so your job is to develop something which feels a right for you.

3. Pick which one feels right and make the call

Remember, this can be changed, evolved and improved over time so don't let the gravity of this decision turn it into an excuse for procrastination.

4. Move forward

The next short book in this series will teach you how to grow this market specialism into a brand.

A brand isn't a logo, nor is it necessarily design at all. What we're trying to impact is a feeling. A flavor of your business and clear messaging covering how you can help a specific, dependable dream client.

In the next book we'll look at the language you're using to describe your service and how this should translate to a web presence which delivers leads for your service.

Until then, reach out with any questions at liam@freelancelift.com

DEFINE YOUR DREAM CLIENT

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This was short book for
Freelancelift Pro members.

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