

Identifying Likely Markets for Your Certification Program

Janet Switzer



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Before marketing your certification program, you must decide which kind(s) of individuals, corporations, small businesses, or non-profit organizations would most benefit from your knowledge, system, or methodology. It may be a very narrow niche (such as Certified Public Accountants in the United States) or it may be very broad indeed (such as life coaches around the world). Additionally, if your expertise can be broadly applied, be aware that while *everyone* might be able to benefit from your methodology, *everyone* is not the most logical buyer.

In this tutorial, I'll detail a four-step process for identifying your best markets: professions where you can focus your marketing for the biggest impact and revenue.

Step 1: Inventory Your Expertise

To begin your journey of certifying others in your unique methodology, the first critical step is to inventory your expertise. This is where you take a detailed, honest look at your skills, knowledge, and experiences to define the core elements of your methodology. Understanding the exact nature of what you teach—and why it works—is essential for developing a certification program that others will want to buy into. This step is not just about acknowledging what you already know, but also identifying the special angles, tools, and insights that make your methodology distinct.

Start by reflecting on what makes your methodology unique:

- Is it a new approach to solving common problems?
- An innovative process for achieving specific results?
- A particular mindset shift that your audience gains from your work?

Document the key elements of your expertise:

- Outline the problems your methodology addresses and the outcomes it helps people achieve.
- Identify the process steps, best practices, and tools that you use in your work.
- Break them down into teachable modules and define the outcomes each segment is designed to create.

Next, think about the industries, professions, or sectors where this methodology would be most valuable. Your expertise inventory isn't just about what you do, but how it applies across various fields.

- What are the key challenges or pain points in those industries?
- Which groups or individuals would benefit most from your methodology?
- Consider both broad and niche markets, as each can provide valuable opportunities depending on how specialized your work is.

Also, consider how others might benefit from learning and applying your methodology. Thought leaders, influencers, or professionals may see value in getting certified in your unique system. This inventory process should also include a broad understanding of the buyer personas for your certification program, helping you visualize the exact target market for your course.

Step 2: Define Your Ideal Customer Profile

Once you've inventoried your expertise, it's time to narrow down who is most likely to benefit from your certification training. Defining your *ideal customer profile* (ICP) is crucial because it ensures you target the right audience. Not every person or organization is the right buyer for your certification program, and casting a wide net can lead to wasted time and resources. Instead, focus on those who are most likely to embrace and succeed with your methodology.

Your ICP should take into account several key factors:

Demographic profile: What industries do these individuals or organizations belong to?

Professional background: What roles do they occupy within their companies or teams?

Specific needs or desires: Do they have goals or challenges that align with the outcomes your methodology can help them achieve?

Cross-industry potential: Are there other industries where your expertise could be valuable? Could your methodology be adapted for different sectors facing similar challenges?

In this phase, you also need to consider their willingness to invest in certification training:

- Are they likely to prioritize personal development and professional growth?
- Are they looking for systems and strategies to elevate their work, improve performance, or expand their impact?
- Are they seeking ways to distinguish themselves in their field by becoming experts in your methodology?
- Would market research—such as surveys, interviews, or consultations—help you better understand their mindset and willingness to invest?

Additionally, think about the psychological and motivational factors that might influence their decision to invest in certification. Do they value lifelong learning, or are they more focused on practical, actionable strategies? Knowing the answers to these questions will help you develop a clearer picture of who your ideal customer is and ensure you are creating a certification program that speaks directly to their needs.

Step 3: Analyze Industry Trends and Market Demand

With a clear understanding of your expertise and your ideal customer profile, the next step is to assess market demand. This involves analyzing industry trends and understanding where your methodology fits within the broader market landscape. By identifying the demand for skills and

expertise in your area, you can tailor your certification program to meet the needs of these markets, ensuring a higher likelihood of success.

Start by researching industry trends related to your methodology:

- Are there emerging trends or shifts that indicate growing demand for the specific skills or expertise you offer?
- For example, if your methodology focuses on digital marketing, are there trends around online business, e-commerce, or social media management?
- In another example, if it's related to organizational development, how are industries evolving in terms of leadership, team dynamics, or productivity?
- Are emerging technologies or societal changes creating new opportunities for your methodology to thrive?

Next, identify key sectors that are investing heavily in training, development, and certification:

- Which industries prioritize employee upskilling, such as technology, healthcare, finance, or education?
- What organizations within these sectors are spending money on certification programs?
- What pain points do these industries have, and how does your methodology provide a solution?

You also need to consider competitive analysis:

- Are there similar certification programs in the market already? (This usually validates there's a market for this kind of training.)
- How saturated is the market, and what differentiates your offering from existing certifications?
- If your methodology is relatively new, does this provide a competitive advantage?
- If there are already established programs, how can you stand out through *unique selling propositions* (USPs), higher value, or a specialized approach?

Of course, one of the best sources of leads for your certification program is professionals who are already certified in something else. Those who pursue certifications understand the value of credentials in building authority, credibility, and career advancement. Many professionals actively seek additional certifications to increase their expertise, add prestige to their credentials, and boost confidence in their field. By targeting individuals who have already invested in certification programs, you can tap into an audience that values professional development and is more likely to see the benefit of becoming certified in your unique methodology.

Finally, examine how businesses and professionals in various industries perceive certifications. Do they view certification as a must-have for advancing careers or increasing business success? Understanding the attitudes and perceptions surrounding certifications in your target industries will help you refine your marketing messages and positioning.

Step 4: Validate Your Market with Customer Feedback

The final step before launching your certification program is to validate the market by gathering feedback from potential customers. This validation ensures that there is a genuine need for your certification program and that your target market is willing to invest in it. It also provides an opportunity to make any adjustments to your offering before you fully commit to creating and promoting the program.

There are several ways to gather customer feedback. One of the most effective is conducting pilot programs or beta tests of your certification course. Offer the course to a small group of individuals or organizations that fit your ideal customer profile. This group can provide you with valuable insights into the course content, structure, and overall value. Ask for detailed feedback on the curriculum, format, and delivery methods. Are they finding the course valuable? What challenges are they encountering? What do they wish had been included? This feedback can be used to refine the course before full-scale launch.

Additionally, surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews can help you gather input directly from your target market. These interactions allow you to ask deeper questions about their needs, motivations, and challenges. You can also assess their willingness to pay for certification and their expectations around training outcomes.

Customer feedback is an invaluable tool for fine-tuning your certification program and ensuring that it meets the needs of your audience. This step allows you to pivot if necessary and address any gaps in your offering before committing significant time and resources to a wider launch.

Appealing to Multiple Markets: Finding Less Obvious Opportunities

If you are fortunate to have a methodology that would appeal to multiple markets, you'd be surprised how many potential markets actually go *unidentified* because you're too focused on people and companies who look just like you.

For example, if you've developed an alternative therapy for trauma recovery—such as *tapping therapy* (Dr. Roger Callahan) or *reparenting* (Teresa Huggins)—you might be surprised at the types of people and professions who may want your certification to either augment knowledge they already have or to add to their other professional certifications. We often see alternative therapy certifications *also* purchased by: Reiki practitioners, yoga instructors, life coaches, chiropractors, hypnotherapists, psychotherapists, pain management doctors, military units, school counselors, Christian counselors, addiction-recovery coaches, educators, and more.

In addition to missing numerous opportunities for lead-generation and revenue, many experts seeking to replicate their work in their own “market” not only miss these adjunct markets, but also narrowly define themselves and their certification program as something these other markets don't understand or simply don't want. The key is to simplify your marketing message to explain the benefits in a way that others who might consider becoming certified will become solid leads.

Researching Other Markets: Accessing the SIC List for Potential Leads

One way to look at every type of industry out there—as a way to consider other possible markets—is to spend time looking through the *Standard Industrial Classification* (SIC) list: a valuable resource for identifying potential other industries that could be interested in your certification program. The SIC codes categorize businesses by their industry, providing a clear roadmap for targeting specific sectors.

To access the SIC list, visit one of the many official U.S. government websites (such as this one at the SEC: <https://www.sec.gov/search-filings/standard-industrial-classification-sic-code-list>) or use online directories that provide access to this list (many have search capabilities for subcategories). Look for industries that align with the expertise you offer. For example, if you are offering a certification in leadership development, you might look into industries such as management consulting, executive coaching, and corporate training.

There are several online resources that offer searchable SIC (Standard Industrial Classification) code databases with detailed subcategories. Here are some options you might find useful:

- **OSHA's SIC System Search:** This platform allows users to search the 1987 version of the SIC manual by keyword, access descriptive information for specific 2, 3, or 4-digit SIC codes, and examine the manual's hierarchical structure. Visit: <https://www.osha.gov/data/sic-search>
- **NAICS Association's SIC Codes by Industry:** This resource enables users to search and drill down through SIC codes by industry, facilitating effective categorization and classification of business operations. Visit: <https://www.naics.com/sic-codes-industry-drilldown/>
- **Exact Data's SIC Code Lookup:** Users can click on an SIC code to view subcategories within that sector, including detailed counts by channel (postal, email, and phone). Visit: <https://www.exactdata.com/sic-code-lookup.html>

These databases provide hierarchical structures of SIC codes, allowing you to explore broad industry categories and their specific subcategories. This can be particularly helpful for identifying precise classifications relevant to your business or research needs.

Once you have a list of potential industries, filter through them based on the specific characteristics of your ideal customer profile. What industries have the highest demand for certification programs? Which industries are focusing on employee development and upskilling? These industries are the most likely buyers of your certification training.

You can also try this exercise: Group industries into categories such as high-growth, innovation-driven, and professional development-focused. Then, rank the industries based on their readiness and potential to embrace your certification program. This step will provide clarity on where to focus your marketing efforts and identify the most likely buyers for your certification course.

How to Find Out What Your Markets Want in a Certification Program

What do your markets want in order to sign up for your certification program? Here are several marketing strategies to help you find out:

Host a Webinar on “Opportunities” in Your Field—Offer a live or recorded webinar to discuss trends, challenges, or opportunities in your industry. Promote the event through social media, email marketing, and your website. Encourage attendees to submit questions beforehand, giving you valuable insight into the topics most relevant to your target audience. This will help you understand their biggest pain points and interests.

Conduct Personalized Outreach to Prospective Buyers—Select 25-30 business owners or individuals in your intended market and reach out to them via email, phone, or social media. Introduce yourself and your area of expertise, and let them know you're considering creating a training program that leverages your knowledge and experience. Ask them: "If I were to develop a program that helps you achieve [specific outcome] and charges a few thousand dollars for it, what would be the top three results you'd want the program to deliver?" This direct conversation can uncover immediate market needs and give you clarity on what they value most.

Survey Your Audience and Share Results Publicly—Use tools like Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, or social media polls to informally survey your market. Gather feedback on what challenges people are facing, what solutions they're seeking, and what knowledge gaps exist. After gathering the data, create a press release or blog post to share the insights and position yourself as an industry thought leader. This demonstrates you understand the pulse of the market and are proactive in providing value.

Leverage Online News Aggregators and Alerts—Set up Google Alerts or use industry news aggregators to track the latest articles, trends, and discussions relevant to your field. Reach out to experts or people featured in these articles and engage with them about the industry's challenges. Use these conversations to discover what they would look for in a solution that addresses a common problem highlighted in the article. This proactive research can help you stay ahead of industry shifts and refine your offerings.

Research New Entrants to the Industry—Identify individuals who are new to your industry by checking social media platforms like LinkedIn or attending industry events. Investigate where these newcomers are coming from and what types of professional training or certifications they're pursuing. Engage with the schools, certifying bodies, and organizations that serve them to gather insights into the challenges and learning gaps that new professionals face. Understanding their needs can help you tailor your training program to the emerging demands of the industry.

Understand Why People Are Leaving the Market—Identify individuals or businesses that are leaving your industry and research the reasons behind their departure. Talk to former colleagues, industry associations, or customer service reps who may have been in contact with these individuals. By identifying why people are “dropping out,” you can discover potential problems that

your training could address. Maybe your methodology provides the solution to help them thrive and stay in the field.

Assess the Average Knowledge Level in Your Industry—Don't assume that everyone in your industry is fully trained or knowledgeable. Use tools like LinkedIn Learning, Udemy, or Coursera to identify typical skill levels across your market. If you find that the average professional is undertrained or lacks certain skills, your training program could fill that gap with just a few steps above their current knowledge. This positioning may be exactly what they need to get to the next level.

Talk to Potential Endorsers and Analyze Trends—Reach out to potential endorsers—people or organizations that could amplify your message or support your program. Discuss their customers or clients to understand what common needs or challenges they face. When you spot unmet trends, even among industry leaders, you've likely found a niche with significant untapped demand. This could become the foundation for your certification program and marketing efforts.

By following strategies like these, you'll be able to gather valuable data and insights to approach your chosen market effectively. Utilizing modern tools and research methods, you can develop a deep understanding of your target audience's needs, positioning yourself to create a highly effective and in-demand certification program.

Hone in on What Specific Markets Really Want:

Does Your Certification Program Take Away Their Pain or Fulfill Their Ambitions?

Before you even decide to target a particular market with your certification program, you need to determine whether there's a real demand. People invest in certification for one of two reasons: (1) to solve a pressing problem or (2) to achieve an important goal. If your program doesn't align with one of these motivations, you could waste time and resources trying to sell to the wrong audience. Before adding a market to your list of likely lead sources, do your research.

- Are professionals in this industry struggling with challenges that your certification can solve?
- Are they actively looking for ways to improve their skills, advance their careers, or grow their businesses?

If your certification eliminates barriers—like a lack of credentials, outdated knowledge, or inefficiencies—then your messaging should emphasize the relief and solutions it provides. If it offers new opportunities—such as career mobility, business expansion, or increased authority—then it should be positioned as a gateway to success.

Don't assume demand exists—validate it. Look at industry trends, talk to potential buyers, and analyze whether similar certifications are already being sought after. Only when you confirm that a market has both the need and the willingness to invest should you focus on it as a prime audience for your certification program.

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Email: success@replicateprogram.com