



Results Recharge:

**Content Strategy Featuring Hilary
Marsh**





How to Know What Your Audiences Really Want from You

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Several ways to learn what your audiences want

1. Surveys
2. Empathy-based personas and audience engagement journeys
3. Focus groups
4. Staff pilots

What are we looking to learn?

- Which association offerings* our audiences find most relevant and useful, *and why*
- What else they'd like to see us offer
- Any others?

* Programs, products, services, resources, information, tools, etc.

But first, we need to know

- Which audiences matter most to us?
- What are their top pain points? Their motivations, aspirations, and challenges?
- How can our association help them address those things?

Then, compare answers to what you actually offer!

Most important audiences

- NOT your staff
- NOT your board
- NOT “everyone”!

The organization needs to agree on who they are

Most important audiences

- People new to the profession?
- Experts/executives?
- People in specific segments?
- People in specific roles?
- People in specific locations?
- People in specific age groups?
- Current members, or prospective ones?

Be specific and creative

- Present them as profile stories. Be creative about what might be true for them based on the data you get.
- Combine details from several segments into a small number of stories (usually 8–12), since people are multifaceted
- Easy for people to alter and combine
- Have people vote on their most important (dots if in person, Google sheet if virtual)
- Usually takes 30–45 minutes (seemed insurmountable before, right?)

Profile #7

Social worker

Female, LCSW, age 37, married with two daughters in grade school, working in a social service agency in Chicago

Our agency's budget has been slashed over the past few years, so my caseload is three times higher than it used to be. I can't possibly keep in touch with all the families on my docket. A few years ago, a young girl in an abusive home died because her social worker hadn't visited in months, and I'm so scared that will happen to me. And in addition to my caseload issues, I need to get CEUs every year to maintain my license, and I need to be there for my own family too. As you can imagine, I'm exhausted all the time.

Profile #8

Pediatrician

Female, MD, age 46, married with a grown child, living in Medinah, OH

I work in a busy suburban practice along with three other doctors. We have a large admin and nursing staff. So I'm always juggling capacity, employee issues, and keeping the office open to serve our patients.

When I see a baby or young child with physical or mental challenges, I want to be sure that I'm using the most recent data and advice, and I need materials to share to help them support their child's development in the best possible way.

1. Surveys

Questions usually include:

- Of our offerings, which do you use?
- What is your opinion about our offerings?
- What is currently missing from what we offer?
- Who are you?

If you can, send separately to each audience you identified as most important

What we usually find in surveys

Audiences say they use a lot of the offerings

- People may be aspirational
- Numbers suggest otherwise
- Sometimes people say “I didn’t know about some of these – thanks for the info” – **that’s an opportunity**

Members say offerings are “fine”

- Comments suggest otherwise

In response to what’s missing, members ask for things that exist already

- **Those are your opportunities**

What we usually find in surveys

**If you get a response rate of 10–20%,
you may have heard ONLY from
members who are already engaged, and/or
current volunteers**

2. Personas

- Ideally, story-based and not just about facts
- Ultimately about the audience, not you
- You're looking to learn how your organization
 - serves their needs
 - addresses their motivations and aspirations
 - solves their pain points

They don't use your products and services for your good, but theirs

ZERO TO THREE Empathy-Based Personas

The Caring Entrepreneur

Mia

Owner/operator of a large family child care center

43 years old, married, one grown son. Lives in a suburb of Cincinnati. Has her CDA.

I've worked in early childhood education since I was 16, when I first started helping my aunt in her family child care home. I opened my own program 13 years ago and now have three full-time teachers in my center. I love that I've helped families in my neighborhood—I've taken care of all of their kids and they are part of my family now too.

I earned my CDA and keep it current. But it's hard to find time to get all the training I'm required to do every year as part of licensing and also as part of our state's Quality Rating and Improvement System. And it's hard to find the motivation too, since the training doesn't really help me do my job better. It's just the same stuff every year. And the children in my center range in age from 6 months to 6 years, so it's hard to find courses that address all of their needs.

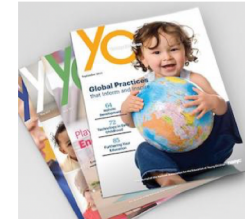
I've thought about getting a college degree, but it doesn't make sense for me – it would take me forever to get a degree and I wouldn't make any more money. Experience has been the best teacher for me.

Tasks:

- Hiring and managing employees
- Ensuring that the center meets all state regulations
- Attracting and keeping families – this is a business, after all
- Keep up with parents' expectations for communications and technology



“My center offers wonderful care to local children. It's part of the local community. I love what I do, but I always have to keep an eye on the bottom line.”



People

Instagram



NBCDI
National Black Child
Development Institute

TOP CHEF



MY MOTIVATIONS & ASPIRATIONS

- + Keep staff turnover to a minimum
- + It's a constant effort to keep the center's numbers where I want them to be. Children age out or families move away, so I can never stop marketing the center.
- + I'd love to add an after-school program and summer camps for older kids, but both of those would need investments in space, equipment, more teachers – I'm just not there yet.
- + I love being my own boss and love to try new strategies to improve my business. We're now on Instagram – I just have to keep it current!
- + Now that my son is living on his own, my wife and I are turning his room into a combination meditation area and craft center. And we've ordered new furniture for the backyard, since we no longer need the basketball hoop!

MY FEARS

- + That I'll never be able to retire
- + That one of my staff members will be accused of harming a child, or something will happen to a child in my center. I have some insurance, but is it enough to protect what I have built, my reputation?
- + That COVID will make the city shut down my center. I weathered that once already, but I'm not sure I can make it through again.
- + My neighborhood has really changed over the years, and while my property value has gone up, so have my taxes. Will I be able to keep my business if this keeps up?
- + Because I don't have a college degree and haven't gotten other certifications, sometimes this makes me feel less capable. I'm worried that other professionals don't take me seriously.

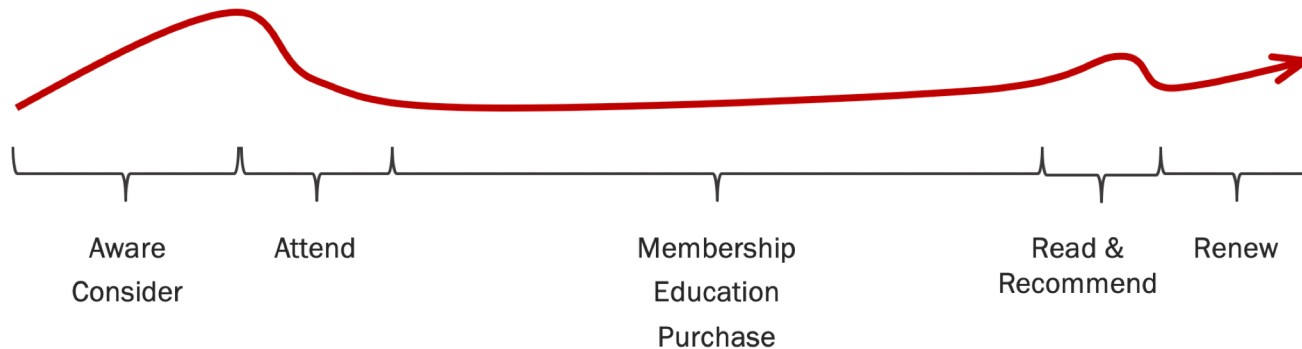
MY FRUSTRATIONS

- + My community doesn't really have the resources to help me build a strong curriculum. The library is on the other side of town and the nearest park is more than 6 blocks away and has become kind of run down.
- + I get NO time for me these days.
- + Exercise has always been important to me, both to stay fit and to work off stress – but I can barely make time for it these days, because there's so much else to do.
- + There are more franchised child care centers opening near me all the time. Where I used to be in huge demand, it's harder to compete with places that have endless marketing dollars. Fortunately, I have many years' worth of testimonials, and the new places can't match that!

Audience engagement journeys

Now that you know who they are, what do they want from you?

Journey from awareness (who are you and why should I join?)
to advocacy (I stay, I volunteer, I get others to come along too)



ZERO TO THREE PID Audience Engagement Journeys

The Caring Entrepreneur

"I love childcare, but I always have to keep an eye on the bottom line."

Mia

Owner/operator of a large family child care center

43 years old, married, one grown son. Lives in a suburb of Cincinnati. Has a CDA certificate.

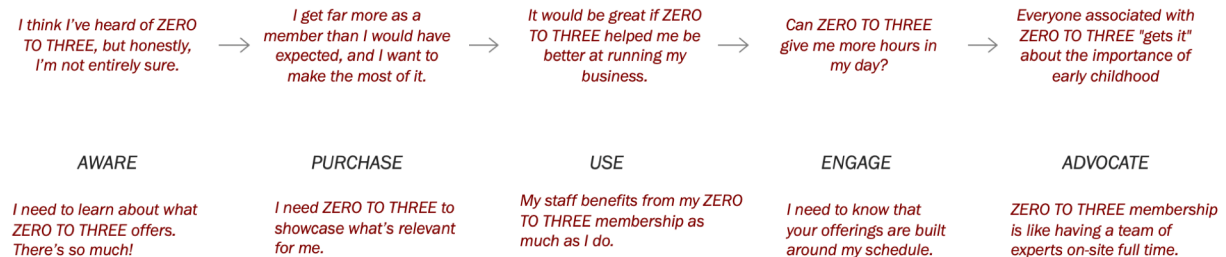
MY MOST PRESSING NEEDS

- + CE opportunities to keep up with licensing requirements.
- + I want to remain accredited and to make sure my center keeps its four-star rating to make us desirable to parents.
- + Making sure my business continues to thrive.

A TRULY EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE

- + Having my center featured as an example of promising practice in a ZERO TO THREE video.
- + Training held at my location.
- + "Golden Apple" type of award for family childcare centers, with surprise delivery and getting media coverage
- + Time off to get to go to a networking happy hour.

EXPERIENCES THAT SATISFY NEEDS CREATE DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS



EXPECTATIONS I HAVE

- + Being a member of ZERO TO THREE gives me many useful benefits, including a free webinar every month and CEUs from journal articles. I share those with my staff.
- + I expect ZERO TO THREE to tell me about new information that's important to my work, in clear language that I can understand when skimming.
- + It's challenging to even learn which topics ZTT's content covers, given my limited time.

CONTENT I VALUE

- + Webinars I could take at a time that works for me.
- + Content helping us address a specific need – for example, if a child in my center is having a behavior issue.
- + How to meet parents' changing expectations – communication with them, keeping them informed about their child's progress and happiness, offering the kind of experience they're looking for.
- + Content about running my business: recruiting, hiring, managing, marketing, budgeting, etc.
- + Instantly actionable information – e.g., behavior wheel with practical tips and tools.

MESSAGES I WANT TO GET

- + "You are so important in your community, and you are making a real difference in the lives of the children and families in my center."
- + "We serve all your needs: helping babies and young children thrive, identifying and solving your issues, advocating for you, and helping you run and manage your business too."
- + "We curate content especially for you, so you get what's most relevant."

DIFFERENTIATORS I NOTICE

- + When ZERO TO THREE anticipates what I need and delivers it so it's there where and when I want it (e.g., rewrite policy information for business owners instead of just policymakers).
- + Free resources I could point parents to.
- + ZTT providing a way for me to meet and talk with other people who do the same work I do.
- + Ideas and sources for small business grants and funding, with explanations about how it works.
- + I get more for my ZTT membership than I do as a NAEYC member.

3. Focus groups

- **If you have personas, recruit based on the personas and validate by asking the questions from the journeys**
 - (e.g., ask a room full of “real” Mias what their needs and expectations are)
- **If you don’t have personas, ask questions like those on the survey. From the same answers, you can go deeper into the “why”**
 - Small numbers, so challenging to ensure that staff buys in to answers

4. Staff Pilots

- Choose a topic that is important to the organization
- **Step 1: Identify content from the organization's perspective**
 - Have members of each department list the most valuable, important content they have created on that topic
 - Add analytics (unique pageviews over the past year)
- **Step 2: Reorganize participants into audience segment groups**
 - Start with the data you know about what each audience group wants from the organization
 - They review the list of content as if it was what came up in a search for that topic
 - Based on the known needs, identify which content they would be likely to click on
 - Add any other needs that the organization has not documented

4. Staff Pilots

- **Step 3: Interview members of the audience segment groups**
 - I created the questions, staff led the interviews
 - Goal was to generally understand the audience's needs
 - This was a new activity for this association

What we saw

- Staff is literal, didn't have enough interaction with audiences to "wear their hat" during Step 2
- Staff felt compelled to read every piece of content in order to decide whether it was for them → this is not what people do
- Interviews made a huge difference
 - "Close circle" members use internal terms for the work; others don't
 - Members want help using the organization's deep scientific content: how to apply, case studies/success stories from others in similar environments
 - Members need introductory-level information to explain the work to others

Takeaways

1. You are not your audience
2. All audiences are not equally important
3. Learning about your audience will make your content better and your offerings more successful
4. Many ways to learn – use what your culture and budget allow
5. An outside perspective plus inside expertise are an important combination
6. Focus more on audiences who aren't already engaged
7. It's critically important to keep the learnings alive



Thank you!

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