

EPISODE 33: HOW TO GET OUT OF THE RAT RACE OF CONSTANTLY HUNTING FOR CLIENTS

with Pia Silva

Marketing for Creatives Show
at IntNetworkPlus.com

Announcer:

Turn your hobby and freelance work into a profitable business! Make your marketing easier by applying the strategies of experienced entrepreneurs and have more time to do the work you love. You are listening to the Marketing for Creatives show with your host Marina Barayeva.

Marina Barayeva:

Hi everyone. This is Marina Barayeva. Welcome to another episode of Marketing for Creatives show. In this episode, we gonna talk about how to get out of the rat race of constantly hunting for clients.

You know that feeling when you were connecting with the client, you delivered your service, got the payment and everything starts all over. Keeping yourself busy 24 hours 7 days a week. Never ending process of chasing clients.

I got a fantastic guest for you today. Pia Silva went through all of these too and now helps other entrepreneurs to get out of this rat race.

Entrepreneur, speaker and author Pia Silva is a partner and brand strategist at Worstofall Design where they build "Badass Brands without the BS" for 1-3-person service businesses in 1-3 day intensives.

She is a Forbes contributor and has spoken at a host of entrepreneurial organizations including The Million Dollar Women Summit, Goldman Sach's 10,000 small businesses, and The Chamber of Commerce.

Marina Barayeva:

Hi Pia. How are you doing today?

Pia Silva:

I'm doing great, Marina. Great to be here.

Marina Barayeva:

Welcome to the show. Please tell us about yourself.

Pia Silva:

Sure. I am calling in from Brooklyn, New York. I have a pretty badass business called **Worstofall Design**. We build badass brands without the BS for one to three-person service businesses.

And what that really means is we help generally a lot of very cool and expert creative people build badass brands that stand out, and we do it in a process that is a no BS, which means we do it in one to three-day intensives.

So that's the long and short of what makes us pretty badass.

Marina Barayeva:

Wow! You work with creatives, but everything is like a badass or worst of all. Why Worstofall?

Pia Silva:

I usually tell people, well, we built badass brands and that's a badass name, don't you think?

Marina Barayeva:

Yeah

Pia Silva:

But actually, the origin of it is my partner and my husband's last name is Wasterval, and it derives from that: Wasterval - Worstofall. A long time ago, before I was even around, it was his nickname. So it became our business name.

Marina Barayeva:

Well, as you work with small businesses and entrepreneurs, you know that working for yourself is good at one point. But another side is for many people, it creates never-ending rat race when you constantly looking for clients and we're glad to have you here. Can you help us to know how to escape that? How to escape that rat race?

Pia Silva:

Yeah, I know it well. I was in it myself and now I help other people get out of it. Our approach is obviously you have to market, but our approach is really starting from before you actually put your stuff out there, you need to have a great brand. Because your brand will influence how effective your marketing is.

And I don't mean marketing. Marketing is not just one thing. It's anything you do so that people see your business, but the brand:

- What makes you special?
- What makes you unique?

- What are you all about?
- What can you build a reputation on?

That is so important to figure out before you put your stuff out there because that is what makes you noticeable, memorable and shareable. And to me, that's the most important thing for your brand. You need to be noticeable. You need to stand out from the competition. It needs to be memorable so that when you interact with someone when someone interacts with your business, they actually remember it after because what a waste if you're forgettable.

And then you need to be shareable because when they meet you, and they notice you and remember you, you want them to tell others organically. And that's how you start attracting clients because other people become your organic, unpaid marketing force.

Marina Barayeva:

When you talk about branding, what does it mean for solopreneurs and small businesses who sell their services?

Pia Silva:

It's a combination of... a lot of people think your brand is, is your logo and your website. And that is your visual brand, and those things are important. But before you do that, and that's probably one of the biggest mistakes I see, most people go straight to their logo on their website, "OK, I'm starting a business. I need my logo on my website. What are my colors?"

I get it because that stuff is fun. But if you haven't already understood and made the decision on what am I really going to be all about? How are people going to know me? It's not going to be some logo as cool as it might be, isn't going to be the reason that people hire me.

They're going to hire me because I am better than the rest at something. Because I clearly solve a problem that they have.

So your brand is the focus. What are you focused on and what are you known for that people can remember you for and talk about you to others. I defined badass branding is having two critical characteristics.

One, it magnetically attracts clients, and it's OK repelling everybody else. Which means that it really is owning something. And it's OK if potential clients that aren't a perfect fit, don't get it or don't want to get it.

And the second thing is that it attracts a premium price so you can actually charge more than the competition and still win the business.

Marina Barayeva:

How do you position yourself in that? Or how would you suggest our listeners do that? They build the foundation of the brand. And what is that for you? You position yourself, like 'worst

of all' and everything, all this bad, it's kind of interacting, it stands out. But for other people who are more regular businesses.

Pia Silva:

There are lots of different ways to do it, and you definitely don't have to be as in your face as we are. That's authentic to us. But we do that partially because we want to be our brand instead of just say.

So a lot of people in our situation, a lot of branding companies, they'll say, "We'll help you stand out and be different." Well, that's not different. Everybody says that.

We don't say that on our website, we just are different and people get that we're different. So it's about being your brand. Specifically, any business owner can own their niche and focus if they decide to focus on something specific.

So you can do this in a bunch of different ways. I usually teach that you can do this with your target market.

You can be very specific with who you work with.

You can do this with the way that you work. So your process. I'm often helping small creatives a productize their services because I find that that is an incredibly effective way to own a positioning and own reputation that you have a process that makes you much more profitable and something you can own.

And then there is your personality.

It doesn't have to be an interface, like I said, our personality, but whatever you are really about taking that thing that is authentic to you and making it really extreme.

Your thing could be something you could be like... (laughter) I've always wanted to build this brand for somebody like a really anal retentive, detail oriented, like an accountant for example.

That seems antithetical to what I'm doing, but if you really owned it, it's a really great brand because that's a really good characteristic for to have as an accountant. Somebody who is just obsessed with spreadsheets and numbers.

While all accountants might be like that, if you own it as your brand, you can be the extreme event and then that's something that people want to talk about

Marina Barayeva:

You talk about three things. One it's more about working with your audience, knowing your ideal client and then you told that we can stand out with our services. Do you have any recommendations on how to find out that? How to stand out with the service or with the work we do?

Pia Silva:

Absolutely. I help people with this every day. I'm usually, I start by asking them about their previous experiences:

- Who have your favorite clients been?
- What of your favorite projects been? Why?
- Who are the clients who got the most value out of you?

Usually when you're trying to focus both on a target market and in how you deliver your services, you want to do it around a target, at a service that you are really, really good at, where your target market is the audience that's going to get the most value out of you and the space that you love to work in most.

If you're going to build yourself a profitable business, you might as well do it around something that you yourself love to do that you feel really motivated about and that your clients get a ton of value out of. That is where I start.

And sometimes you find that the thing that you love the most and the clients you love the most aren't the most profitable. I usually look for the intersection of the clients and the projects you love the most and the ones that were most profitable.

If you find that your favorite clients are not most profitable, that's fine too. You just have to look for ways to increase the profitability of whatever is your favorite thing to do.

That can be done in multiple ways. Just by focusing on a certain kind of service, you can do it over and over again if you only do a certain kind of service over and over and over again, you'll get really good at it.

That means you can make a process that's really reliable and that's really effective, which allows you to get better and better at it. Maybe you can decrease the amount of time that you spend on it while you're increasing your prices. All of this over time allows you to increase your profitability and that's how you charge premium prices.

Marina Barayeva:

Some people get caught in it. They, for example, like to work with one type of clients, but they don't bring enough money so they have to do another work. They have to get higher paid clients, but they don't really like this work. So how would you find the balance here?

Pia Silva:

It's a great question. I think the biggest reason that people end up in that situation is because they don't have clarity around what they're best at, what they could be doing, and what they need to charge in order for that to make sense.

In my book, I actually break down a formula to figure out exactly what your service needs to be and what you need to charge for it in order to make the money you need to make.

I think people usually don't value their time enough and don't realize that the goal is not to work all the time and take all the clients. The goal is to work a very specific and structured amount of time and to have time to actually build your reputation and brand. And that's an important chunk of time you need to put aside to build your business.

If you know what that amount of time is and what services are and what those prices are, then you can go out and get those clients. And I think a lot of freelance creative specifically will just take whatever they can get and they end up being overworked and underpaid, and you will never get out of the rat race.

If all you're doing is working for a low hourly rate wage all the time because you haven't set aside enough time to actually build the reputation that's going to get you out of that hamster wheel.

Marina Barayeva:

Ouch! You touched one of the most hurting points for creatives or freelancers. So how they can get to better clients, how they can attract or start attracting higher paying clients? Or raise their prices? What can they do?

Pia Silva:

It's really about focusing and owning your expertise. And part of that, and this is really painful for most people, is getting comfortable with the idea that you don't want to work with anyone outside of your niche and specialty.

Which means you have to be ready and OK to say No to clients who you could theoretically work for but are not a perfect fit for you.

What that does is it reinforces your reputation. It reinforces your expertise to those people. And the people around them and it frees up your time to find those perfect clients.

So it's a little bit of a chicken and an egg thing, but the commitment to that brand will get you there much, much faster. If you focus and then all your clients are in that focus, you can actually very quickly start becoming more and more of an expert in that space, raising your profile, raising your reputation, and then raising your prices.

And what most freelancers do is they do a little bit of everything, and then they'll never advance to the place where they can increase their prices.

I don't recommend just raising your prices, you know, Willy Nilly. You have to have focus first, and you have to build that expertise. But it can happen very quickly if you're focused in one particular space.

For example, if you are a graphic designer and you work with... I mentored someone doing this. He works with musicians specifically now that's a pretty specific space. He's very creative and very artistic.

At first, it kind of seems like, well, musicians don't have a lot of money, so maybe that's a bad niche. However, if you go to his website and you see only musicians and there are tons

of album covers, and there's definitely a style, and he definitely knows a lot about marketing musicians.

As a musician, if I'm looking to hire a graphic designer and I see his website, I'm going to want him over all the other designers who do everything, who also have lawyer websites that they're showing. I'm going to be willing to pay more for this guy because I want what he's got because he clearly knows my industry really well.

Marina Barayeva:

For some people, it can be quite scared to switch right away to one type of client or one type of service they can provide. How would you recommend to smooth that? How would you recommend to get to the other clients, those which they want to work with and kind of get rid of low paid clients? Or those who they don't want to work with?

Pia Silva:

I think, first of all, you want to pick this niche out of people you've already worked with. I don't actually work with start-ups because when you're just starting out, you have no idea. You don't know who you love to work with and you don't know where your value is, but after you've had a few clients who can usually look back and say, OK, that was my favorite client. Now this means you're already starting with at least one project that is somewhat in the vicinity of where you want to focus on.

The transition is difficult. I call it the gap and it's a scary place to be. But what I think it entails is owning your positioning and what this focus is on your outward facing brand. Now, if you need to pay the bills in the interim by using doing other clients, fine, but you don't use those clients.

You look at those clients as cash in pocket. They are not building your brand equity. They are not building your reputation. They're just keeping the lights on while you go out and find as many of those clients in your niche as possible.

And you don't need that many in order to start really owning it. So that's why I would say, I think it's about restraint in your brand.

Many creative people can do a lot of different things, and we can wear a lot of different hats, and we could theoretically work with all kinds of clients, but having the restraint to not say that and to not talk about all the different things you can do this mish-mosh menu of offerings, but to really hone in and your marketing and your brand message on one thing that is going to be the difference maker.

Marina Barayeva:

Then what to do with your current clients, who you serve for a lower price or those who reach you out and ask about little price when you start this transition?

Pia Silva:

This is up to the person and how boldly they want to move into their new space. I for one probably two to boldly just cut these clients off as I raised my prices. It's just like, "Sorry. I'm

more expensive and if you want to pay the higher prices, great and if not we can't work together anymore."

Some people are a little more risk-averse and therefore might hold onto those clients a little longer while they go through the gap. But you can keep working with those clients in the interim if it makes you feel safer.

I just I wouldn't advertise them as your clients. I would really only focus your marketing efforts and your communication on the new space that you're moving into. Because it's the only way that you can build a reputation around your brand niche and become known for that so that you can charge the higher prices.

And it's up to you if you feel comfortable saying I'm just going to go for it or if you kind of want to hold onto some of your old clients for a little while just to feel safe that you have some cash coming in.

Marina Barayeva:

OK. This is about the service, how we can stand out with the service and our work. And the third thing you said that we can stand out with our personality. How will that help us to get out of the rat race?

Pia Silva:

The personality part is really special when you do it well because what you do is you own whatever this personality. I usually say that it only counts as a brand personality if it's somewhat contrary to the prevailing personality in your industry.

It's not so much that it has to be one way or the other. It's only going to stand out if generally speaking your industry goes one way and yours goes the other.

Every brand has a default personality. It just might not be very memorable. It definitely will stand out if it's contrary to the prevailing one in the industry.

But what I find is so powerful about it is that if you really own your brand personality and put it out there unapologetically, that people who are aligned with your personality will project their own excitement of it onto your brand. They will be magnetically attracted to it.

And that's one of the two, do you remember? Then one of the two characteristics of badass branding.

For example, we are badass brands without the BS, Worstofall Design. Clearly, we're not for everyone. I really thought we were going to attract many more young male creatives.

We actually tracked all kinds of lawyers, and financial planners and people in these industries that I would think are very corporate. But you know why? Because they themselves feel like badasses and they see our website, and they're like, yeah, like I, I am that too. I want to be that too.

They resonate, and when they contact me, they are very excited because they're like, "I get what you're saying. And I want that"

And other people probably come to our site, I'm sure, and say, what is this? I do not get it. They go away. And that's fine. Because I only want the people who are really enthusiastic about working with us because those are the people who are going to pay higher prices and those are the people that I can actually help.

I'll give you an example. We have a client. We worked with the financial planner Stash Wealth. You can go to their website StashWealth.com. Before we worked with them, their brand was very... They come from Merrill Lynch, very corporate company. Their brand looked a lot like Merrill Lynch.

They were supposed to be this young hip, the cool company for millennials, but they weren't embracing that voice enough. When we help them embrace that voice and say things that they were almost uncomfortable to say. On their website, it says like, "get your financial shit together."

When I told the owners she should say that, she was like, "Ah, we can't say that in the financial world." And I said, "Exactly. This is what's going to make you stand out. This is very different. It's very authentic to you, and it's very authentic to your market."

When they moved over, and they do a really good job of owning their brand voice, you'll see that it's a very push-pull kind of brand. People love it or hate it. But whatever it is, it really magnetically attracts their ideal clients to them.

Marina Barayeva:

When you talk about the personality, you talk more about branding, more like a face of the company or you talk about the personality as the person as you unique Pia Silva, and you're so stunning. People like to work with you.

Pia Silva:

It depends on your business. It doesn't have to be the person. It can be the person or the business. It's really about the voice:

- How do you specifically talk about this topic?
- What kind of language do you use?
- If it's a person then, obviously there's also:
- How do you present yourself visually?
- How do you talk?

My personality... because I have my own brand, I have my company, and then I have piasilva.com that is a brand. It's me, and it comes from an authentic place, but it's also not everything about me. It's not me at 7:00 in the morning when I'm having my first cup of coffee. It's me in a certain light. So that's the difference between it just being about you and being like the brand of you.

And similarly, a business is the same way. You should think about a business brand as being kind of a living creature that has its own voice and personality.

But generally speaking, because I work with small service businesses, usually only one to three people. The personality of the business, even if it's not a personal brand, even if the person's face isn't front and center, the personality of the company does derive from the owners because they are the lifeblood of this company and their values and their perceptions. And how they do things, that is what feeds what this brand looks like.

Marina Barayeva:

You're a service provider too. You choose your logo as the face of your company. Why didn't you choose yourself? It seems like you have a stunning personality.

Pia Silva:

(Laughter) Well, when we started the company, we started at... I actually started this business around my partner and husband, his graphic design talents. He was a freelance graphic designer, and I just said, "Why don't I handle the business?" And we started it out of our house. Just him doing freelance graphic design, me finding the clients and billing them.

It evolved into a branding company because as we grew and I learned how important branding was for us to get our clients, I realized how important it was for my clients to get their clients as well.

Over the years, we learned more and more about branding. We learned how effective it was. We started implementing in our client's businesses. Then we obviously saw how much more valuable it was than graphic design. And we're able to charge a lot more.

And then at a certain point when I wrote my book, I said, "OK, I think I'm going to launch my personal brand as well because there's a different opportunity in that."

So we have both. I have my personal brand that's more Pia, the speaker or the thought leader or the writer. I have a column on Forbes, and then there's Worstofall Design. That's our company. That's where we provide services to clients. And I am an owner of that.

I think a lot of people end up or I've encountered a lot of people who end up kind of at a crossroads where maybe they have both. And I think it makes sense depending on what your goals are.

Marina Barayeva:

You started small. You started with your husband, and there was a time when you had the big debt. How did you get your business out of that debt to \$500k within a year? It's incredible!

Pia Silva:

It was the worst and the best thing that ever happened to us. We started really small in our house. We grew, we're working all the time by the way.

Even though we were having success, we were working seven days a week. But we were copying the other little agencies around us because that's what it looked like we should do. So we got a studio, we hired employees, we went after bigger and bigger clients.

We raised our prices, and the work was great, but I raised our prices very quickly and it was hard to close them, and it took a long time to close the bigger clients and these are just things that I didn't know when we did it because I had never done it before.

That ended up, landed us in \$40,000 of debt three years into our business. That number was very significant to us at that time because that was our credit cards maxed out. We actually had nowhere else to go. We couldn't keep going into debt.

That was the lowest point I would say. And my business was not having a kind of feeling very cornered feeling like I had to close up shop. But what it did it forced us to get creative, and it forced us to make some moves that I wouldn't have normally done.

We had to let our employees go because we couldn't afford them. Something I would never have done if we had had more access to credit or had more cash in the bank because I felt like we were imploding, and they've felt like we were downsizing, and then that was a failure, and that means we were horrible, we sucked and all these things.

But instead, we just reimagined what our business could be because as Steve, my partner, pointed out, he said, "Just because we're letting our employees go doesn't mean we don't have all this amazing track record of work and all these happy clients. And we're good at what we do. We don't have to close our business. We just have to do it a certain way. We have to do it a different way."

That's when we actually took our own medicine and put ourselves through our own branding process and realize that we had something really special that actually larger agencies couldn't compete with and that was a nimbleness and an ability to do work in a very concentrated amount of time.

That's how we pivoted to do what is now the process we're known for, which is building entire brands in one to three-day intensives.

And as soon as we pivoted the business and we started telling people, "We don't do those long, long, six month projects anymore. We only do one to three-day intensives. These are the prices, flat prices. All this stuff."

We just started attracting all these clients from my entire network that had previously really liked me and wanted to send me clients but just didn't know how because we were just another design company branding agency and we looked like all the rest.

Once we owned that specific niche and way of working, all these people that wanted to send me business previously did. And it was a very organic \$500,000 that we made in those next 12 months.

We didn't pay for advertising. I didn't have to network or anything. I just had to go reeducate my network on how we worked. And it was, it was noticeable, memorable and shareable enough that it really flooded us with awesome clients and projects that were very profitable.

Because even at a much lower price point at the time we were charging \$3,000 for a one day. Now we charge \$15,000 for one day. But at the time \$3,000 for a one day was actually much more profitable than these \$30,000 projects that I was pitching. That took six, eight

months to finish. So that's really where the pivot came. That's what I try to help other people do.

Marina Barayeva:

What a journey! And from all of that experience of your experience and working with different small businesses and entrepreneurs, what will be one biggest takeaway or a big piece of advice that you could give to our listeners on how to get out of the rat race of constantly hunting for clients?

Pia Silva:

I would say that getting really clear on what success means to you is probably the first step. So I think that we all get lost in thinking more is better: higher prices, more clients, more work. That's it.

When we don't really think about what does that mean.

I encounter this with clients all the time. They prefer to be very busy than to be less busy making more money. Oddly. That sounds like an oxymoron. That sounds like a paradox.

But actually, if you can get comfortable with the idea that if you get very clear, and that's what I was talking about before, the formula of what you should charge, if you can get very clear on how many clients you needed a certain price point and you can get comfortable when you're not working, actually investing your time and your business and your brand so that you can get those clients, then you can actually pivot to a place where you're making much more money in less time.

That is oddly very scary to transition over to in your mind. But that is getting aligned with what success means to you. And for me, success is about freedom and having a lot of control over my time and doing really great work that I love with clients that I love and projects that I love and not working all the time.

I had to shift my mindset from feeling like busy work was useful in order to move to space where we could make a lot of money in a short amount of time and be comfortable when we're not working that that will continue to make money as we move forward.

Marina Barayeva:

Fantastic. So not working all the time, but focus on your definition of success. That's a great one.

Pia, please tell us, how can we find more about you? There's a lot of tips. We want to get connected with you and tell us more about your book.

Pia Silva:

Sure. I released a book recently called **Badass Your Brand**. Where I tell in more detail how we pivoted from the debt to making \$500,000 and what questions we went through to answer to do that.

I share a lot of stories about our business, about client's businesses, how they use these same tools and the success that they had. So

I would love to gift all the Marketing for Creatives listeners the first chapter of my book and also my brand shrink interview, which is the interview I give all my clients in order to figure out what is so badass about their business.

It's pretty intense interview, but if you take it yourself, you'll find a lot out about where you should pivot your business. I put that up at badassyourbrand.com/MarketingForCreatives. You can go there and download that and then you can follow me on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) at PiaLovesYourBiz.

And I'd love to see you guys there.

Marina Barayeva:

Fantastic. I'll make sure that we'll put all the links under the episode post. Thank you so much for all of your tips.

Pia Silva:

Thank you so much, Marina. It was great to be here.

Marina Barayeva:

All right. So many great tips in this episode. If you want to go back to some parts of it just go to intnetworkplus.com for the show notes and the full transcript.

And let me know what you want us to talk about next. Just email me at marina@intnetworkplus.com. Remember, this show is dedicated to answering your questions so you could build a successful business and enjoy your life.

Announcer:

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Resources from this interview:

- Learn more about Pia Silva on [Worstofall Design](#)
- Look at how financial planner Stash Wealth positions his business StashWealth.com
- Read Pia's book [Badass Your Brand](#)
- Download the first chapter of Pia's book for free here
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