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Creating online courses the entrepreneurial way - Part 1

Considering that the eLearning market will be worth over 300 billion dollars within the next five years, more and more people are approaching the creation of online courses as an entrepreneurial activity.

One of the best ways to share your knowledge with the world and earn money at the same time is to create an online course. Online learning is the new normal and most companies and educational institutions are investing in digital courses to keep up with the changing trends. This trend is confirmed by the **growth of the eLearning market**, which will be worth over 300 billion dollars within the next five years.

As this market is growing rapidly and offers more and more opportunities, the following article aims to offer help to those who have decided or are planning to approach the creation of online courses in an entrepreneurial way. The article is the first part of a concise guide on how to create a profitable online course and how to approach the subject of creating online courses from an entrepreneurial point of view. The first part of the guide is devoted to the process of course conception and design, while the second part will be devoted to the creation and monetisation of courses.

1. Research and choice of course topic

The choice of course topic is probably the most difficult but also the most critical phase. If you create a course that does not solve a problem or offer nothing new to a group of people online, it will never be successful. To be clearer, do not think of yourself as a 'course creator', but as a **solution provider who has real value to offer the market**.

Deciding on what topic to make an online course is important enough to take the time to do the appropriate research. One can do online courses on any topic and figuring out which one to choose is not easy. The first question to ask is 'What are the trending topics for which people are most interested in finding solutions?' The question may seem complex, but by surfing the internet, one can find various **search engine optimisation (SEO)** tools that can help one understand which new and emerging topics most people are interested in.
This research will allow you to focus on the primary objective: providing people with a solution. In fact, you do not need to be a subject matter expert to create an online course, you just need to be ahead of your target audience by offering new solutions such as a new point of view or a different approach. Of course, it is important to choose a topic that you are passionate about and it can be useful to have formal training in the subject. For example, a baker can create online guitar courses if he has the knowledge and passion to do so. This does not mean that someone who has no knowledge in a subject cannot create courses on it. There are many cases of people offering courses in subjects on which they have no knowledge and in these cases the course content becomes their learning path. This choice facilitates the process of material and content creation and the production phase by making it easier and more manageable. Moreover, the popularity of this 'format' seems to indicate that it is appreciated by students.

2. Market research of the topic

In addition to researching the topic for your course, it is important to check whether the topic you have chosen has **sufficient popularity among your target audience**. Many people think that if their chosen topic already has many courses available, then it is more likely that theirs might not sell. This is not necessarily true. If there are many courses on the topic, it means that there is demand, and that is good. In fact, to be successful in selling courses it is necessary to identify the demand and provide unique and better solutions.
To provide something unique it is advisable to search for courses offered online on your topic and study them to see what they do not offer that you can offer.

In short, in the first two steps you need to find the match between a topic you are passionate about or could be passionate about, your knowledge and expertise, and demand. Once you have ticked all these boxes, you can choose your topic and move on to the next stage.

3. Building authority

Earlier I mentioned the need to know the topic on which you are creating a course and, at the same time, I also said that you do not need to be an expert to create your first online course. Although these two statements might seem contradictory, they are not.
In fact, on the one hand you need to have a basic knowledge of the subject of the course you are going to teach, but it is also true that you can learn a lot as you go along.
It all depends on what kind of authority you want to have over your students. If you have the knowledge, training and experience in a particular field then you can lead as an expert in that field. But one of the nice things about training is that you don't just learn from those who know more, but also from those you can relate to and trust. So even if you have no knowledge in an area, you can still offer courses in that area. In this case you do not have the authority to bring yourself as an expert to your students, but as a kind of friend. A person on their level, with whom they can identify and thus relate.
This has two advantages for those who create online courses:

- It is easier to create engaging material and content for online courses.
- Over time you can become an expert in the subject matter, gaining more authority and knowledge about specific niches that could make your online courses more profitable.

4. Identify your target audience

Once you have chosen the topic on which you intend to create an online course, it is time to work out who your target audience is, i.e. the **demographic group** to whom your course may be of most interest.
The reason it is important to understand who you are offering courses to is that not all topics are suitable for all audiences. If your target audience is well defined then it is easily identifiable and you can offer content that appeals to them.
Conversely, if you have no information about the participants of your course, trying to attract new students and create new content will be very complex.
Some examples of demographic factors to take into account when studying target audiences are:

- **Age** of the audience
- The **genre** with which your course is most popular
- The average **education level** of your target audience
- The **employment status** of your audience

These are just a few factors, but there are many more and they vary depending on the topic you choose.
A useful tip for identifying your target audience is social media. Searching for social groups related to your chosen topic and studying the participants according to the demographic factors you consider important is a quick and easy way to get initial ideas.

5. Profile the online course

Anyone can create an online course and market it, but achieving results and success requires serious planning. That is why, after identifying the topic and target audience, it is useful to create an outline. This point is not fundamental since organisation is a subjective thing that varies from person to person; however, planning can be very helpful in building consistency and constancy. For example, considering aspects such as insights, the tone you will use to appeal to your target demographic, and **learning objectives** are important aspects to always have in mind.
The tone will mainly be determined by the needs of your target audience. An online course aimed at graduates will undoubtedly need to have a more professional style and depth than a yoga course, which can be fun and quirky.
When it comes to creating an outline for an online course, there are so many options and possibilities. In general, the standard is to break the subject down into specific topics, learning objectives and further segment into sub-topics and targeted lessons. I recommend searching the various templates available on the Internet for creating online courses and choosing the one you prefer.

6. Frame convincing course outcomes

Once you have worked out how you want to organise and plan your course, it is time to define the results students will obtain by participating in it. Defining outcomes is important because it represents the **reason why a person should pay for your course**.

To define outcomes you have to answer the question "what do I offer and how can it help my audience?" Prospective students do not know this and if they cannot get a clear idea of what they can achieve from the course, they will be less likely to enrol. That is why creating a clear outline that allows your students to see what they can achieve is very helpful. Be sure to include these outcomes on the course page in a prominent manner.
Another advantage of creating an outline of results is that it ensures that only students who are genuinely interested register for the course. The right students result in higher satisfaction and completion rates, as well as lower refund requests.