

Ep#191: Developing a Niche and Gaining Clients with
Kristen Luke



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Caleb Brown

[*New Planner Podcast*](#) with Caleb Brown

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Welcome to the *New Planner Podcast*, where it's all about helping you successfully enter the financial planning profession and accelerate your financial planning career.

This podcast will help you understand the profession, become familiar with the various career paths available to you, and avoid the mistakes that limit your success.

Join your host, Caleb Brown, to explore the human side of creating a successful planning career through interviews, personal experience, and insights from the trenches.

Let's get started.

Caleb Brown: Welcome to the 191st episode of the New Planner Podcast. This is Caleb Brown, your host. My guest today is Kristen Luke, who is the president of Kaleido Creative Studio, a marketing firm specializing in financial advisory firms. Kristen joins the show today to share how she ended up finding the financial advisory niche, why she started her own firm, and what some of the best practices are for firms who are trying to obtain clients, plus some of the biggest mistakes firms make with their marketing.

Stay tuned to the middle where she shares her insights from her new book, "Uncomparable The Financial Advisor's Guide to Standing Out Through Niche Marketing," that walks firms through how to develop a niche and market to it correctly. Check out the end too where Kristen explains the various marketing channels that advisory firms should be active in, the appropriate way to repurpose content, and the number one marketing tool she recommends. I hope you enjoy my interview with Kristen Luke. Hi, Kristen. Welcome to the New Planner Podcast.

Kristen Luke: Hi, Caleb. It's great to be here.

Caleb Brown: Thanks so much for joining us, really looking forward to chatting with you. Would you just start us off with your introduction, how you got into, well, financial planning and wealth management?

Kristen Luke: Yeah, I'd be happy to. I actually fell into this industry. My background, if you want to call it that, was marketing. I was getting a graduate degree or an MBA with a specialization in marketing. And really the first real job that I found was working for an RA in San Diego.

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And they were growing very quickly. We were doing everything from radio shows and workshops, client events, kind of you name it, all that stuff that you'd be doing in 2005. I started helping them coordinate all of that. And so I found that I really enjoyed the industry, even though I did not have a financial background.

I just loved how marketing was about relationships and education. And after three years of being there, I decided to start my own company of helping financial advisors market themselves. So really the last almost 16 years now, I've been working with independent advisors to come up with marketing strategy and implement that as well. So really just lucky that I got into the industry.

Caleb Brown: That's awesome. So what's a typical client or someone that you would help look like?

Kristen Luke: Yeah, it's changed over the years. We've always worked with independent advisors, mostly fee-only RAs. That's really been where we have traditionally helped firms. I'd say most of my career, I've worked with firms that are about a hundred million to a billion in asset center management, but we've been making some changes lately where we find that we're working with firms that are either just starting up or just under a hundred million in that range.

And the reason is because after being in this industry for 19 years now and doing marketing, I've just found that marketing is getting so much harder. And I've just come to the philosophy that the easiest way for financial advisors to market themselves is to specialize in a niche and become known as an expert in that niche.

For most people, if they're already a generalist, like the firm's between the hundred million and a billion, they are already so ingrained in having so many different types of clients that it can be hard for them to niche. But either career changers, or advisors who are just starting their firm, or advisors who are looking to go independent, focusing on a niche is much easier for them, and it can actually be very profitable and a better way to market themselves.

So I'd say most of the advisors we work with now are somewhere between startup and about a hundred million in that center management or we tend to work with individual advisors at larger firms who want to have a specialization. So more of the billion plus. So we kind of inverted the people that we were working with over the last four years.

Caleb Brown: You said it was harder to market now. Why is that? And what do you, or what'd you mean by that?

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Kristen Luke: Yeah. So when I first started, I think it was fairly difficult to market just because there wasn't a lot of online opportunities. And then when social media came up and SEO, there was a real period where advisors could take advantage of that.

And people would find them online or they could network with people on social media. Well, 2020 happened, everyone who wasn't online flooded to online, and now there is so much noise out there, it's really hard to stand out. And so if you're just pushing out the canned content on your LinkedIn or Facebook or whatever social media you're on, pretty much no one's going to notice you.

And so if you are in a very large market, like a metropolitan area, you're going to have a hard time being noticed through those channels. That's why it's really gotten harder. Also, the technology is just getting more complicated. You have to figure out the algorithms. You have to understand what the different social media sites are looking for, and it's very complicated. And if you're not doing marketing full-time, it can be really hard to keep up with that. But if you're a specialist in a niche and you become known in a certain community, the word of mouth is a lot more likely to bring you clients and then also you're always on topic on any content that you're creating, so it's actually of interest to them. So you're being able to break through the noise by being a specialist.

Caleb Brown: Yeah. And that's interesting. I mean, I feel like everybody knows kind of the algorithms, although they change, it's like you got, cause you LinkedIn, it's oh my gosh, this is like everybody posts at the same time. They know they got to put all this content out there.

And it's to your point, all the noise, it's man, I feel like this is becoming the Facebook people are like taking pictures of their dog just to put something up so they can keep the algorithm going. It has nothing to do with business and it drives me absolutely bonkers. Talk about the mistakes that you see people making right now and what they can do to fix them.

Kristen Luke: But yeah, there's a couple of different things. One would just be trying to be all things to all people, especially if you are new to having to bring in clients. So whether you've been an advisor for a long time or not, once you are responsible for bringing in clients, if you try to be all things to all people, it really will spread you thin and you won't see very much success. So that's an obvious one to me. Another mistake I see people make is that they will hear about some sort of marketing tactic that they think should work and they just start doing it because it's trendy or everyone's doing it.

Caleb Brown: Grab the shiny object, right?

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Kristen Luke: Yeah. I see this a lot with social media. I have seen advisors who all of a sudden start doing reels and stories, and all these different sites. And I'm like, well, are your clients watching this? You need to go where your clients are, your prospective clients are, and not just get caught up in whatever the trendiest thing is.

And I will say, I hope I'm not offending anyone out there, but financial advisors tend to be behind trends when it comes to marketing. Everyone's on social media now, but social media was good 10 years ago. Right now it's like it's so much noise. It's so much harder to be recognized that it just takes that much more effort and so I think instead of thinking social media is going to be the area where you can get the most traction, I'm advising advisors to go find offline, offline channels or go find communities where your client already is 'cause that's where you're gonna be able to actually make connection. Social media is all just noise. And so it's gonna be harder for you to stand out.

Caleb Brown: That's interesting. So I heard go back to sort of the grassroots, like the way they used to do it with the, I mean, maybe it's not a radio show or a—

Kristen Luke: Yeah, now it's like a podcast.

Caleb Brown: Yeah. Or I mean, just getting out in your community, kinda that's old school. I mean that's the thing.,

Kristen Luke: Yeah, It is old school, but you can do that online too, right? So you can be a guest on a podcast, you can guest on different websites that your niche is going to, those kind of things.

But social media, I think there's an overreliance on social media, and there's an overreliance on SEO, and all of that is going to change with AI, I believe. And so you're better off just creating a community, no matter who you are, whether that's online or offline, but connecting with actual human beings instead of just pushing out content and hoping that people will see it.

Caleb Brown: And just for some of our, maybe the people just starting in their career, I mean, can you just maybe give us some, what are a handful of niches that you see out there? I know when I got started, I asked somebody a long time ago, I asked somebody like, “Well, who do you work with?” I don't think I use the word niche, but who do you work with?

And they're like, they looked at me like I was crazy. “What do you mean? Anybody that has any money that will pay us. That's who we work with.” “Caleb, why are you asking

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dumb questions?” That's sort of the response I got. So what, just a couple examples of some niches you've seen?

Kristen Luke: If you're just starting out, I'd say the number one thing to think about is who do you have access to because that's going to make your life a lot easier.

So if you have some sort of, if you're in a career where there are people who have money, that would be a very good way to start a niche. It's like I'm going to work with tech professionals or I'm going to work in the biotech. That's kind of a no-brainer, easy one. Otherwise, it can be a lot more challenging to find clients if you don't have access to them.

That being said, I've worked with niches across the board. I see I'm working with somebody right now who is working with caregivers of their parents' assets, working with tech professionals, business owners. But I want to say when you are choosing a niche, it shouldn't just be the type of person, it should also be the problem.

So like business owners by itself is not a great niche, but business owners who are selling or business owners who are facing some sort of tax consequence 'cause business owners can be a startup who's making no money, or it could be somebody who's retiring with a 10 million dollar company, so you need to make that distinction.

Working with people who are focusing on like 1099 contractors, I mean, you can really just go in any different direction. The thing is to not pick one that you think is going to be the right one, just, “Hey, I'm going to do business owners because they've got money,” but you need to actually be interested in them, have access to them, have some sort of credibility or competency in working with them.

Caleb Brown: Talk about the, I mean, I think you wrote a book recently, right? The Uncomparable book. That was last year, right? Wasn't that last year?

Kristen Luke: It was. It came out last July.

Caleb Brown: Okay. We'll link to that. But that's what you're talking about, right? And this, the whole book is dedicated to this.

Kristen Luke: Right. The whole book is basically a guide for how do you take a niche, mark it to a niche, and become an expert in a niche. It is step-by-step. You can read all of it. You can just read certain sections, but it will talk—one of the chapters, I think it's chapter four, talks about niche and how do you pick the right one for you.

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And there's some tools in there as well and a link to an assessment so you can assess the niche and whether or not it's a viable niche on its own and also if it's a good fit for you as an advisor.

Caleb Brown: Yeah. I appreciate all your insights in there and there's the checklist and it's very practical and easy to follow. So I will link to it in the show notes. I recommend people check that out. Who out there is that book a good fit for?

Kristen Luke: It's really a good fit for just anyone who wants to start marketing to, you know, they're just responsible for business development. So whether it's a brand new advisor who's just getting started, a career changer who's starting their own firm, it could be an employee of another firm that say, "Hey, I want to have a business development role," or "I want to have ownership someday." If you want to have ownership in the company you're working for, you have to be able to bring in clients. And if you don't have those connections, or if you're not a super salesy, schmoozy kind of person, then this is the formula for you. Because it's really more about being an expert than about those kind of traditional sales skills that a lot of advisors think they need in order to be able to market and bring in business.

Caleb Brown: Maybe talk a little bit about your marketing firm right now. I mean, is it like the traditional agency model where people kind of come in and pay you to do all this for them or how does it work right now? Someone wanted to sign up, be a client,

Kristen Luke: Right. We actually have two sides of our business. One is a traditional agency, though currently, we are not accepting new clients in that model. The majority of our work these days is a program we call On Niche, and it's On Niche by Kaleido, which is the agency. And it's really a six-month program to help advisors launch into a niche.

So we help them discover who their niche should be. We help them build some basic marketing materials to be able to go out and market their niche. And we help them create a marketing plan so that they have a guide or a path for what they should be doing next. And so that is a six-month process and we get them launched by the end of it.

And then we do have ongoing support services that they can opt into if they want to so they can need that continued support. But it's actually very reasonable if you have ever tried to hire a marketing agency, it's usually very expensive. Or if you hire a service that's more canned, that's in your budget, it's not very effective because it is canned. So we're really trying to be somewhere in between the canned and then the full customized, very expensive agency.

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Caleb Brown: I guess you pay sort of an upfront fee or a monthly fee or something, or what? How does the structure work?

Kristen Luke: Yes. It's a one-time fee for 6,500 for six months. And then after that, there is a potential or optional membership fee for 250 a month after that. And that's just a month-to-month commitment.

Caleb Brown: Okay. So that would be similar to, I mean, I'm just trying to think, these financial planners charge upfront for a financial planning fee. And if they want an ongoing, whether it's investment management or planning services or some sort of subscription. I mean, it seems like it's very similar to that.

Kristen Luke: It is very similar. Yeah. Yep. And after the initial 6500 six-month engagement, the idea is that advisors could just go out and start marketing on their own with a niche and wouldn't necessarily need more support.

Caleb Brown: Have you ever worked with someone that you were just like this person's just not cut out to be a marketer? Maybe they need to be doing something else.

Kristen Luke: Yes, I have.

Caleb Brown: Well, what do you tell that person? My listeners like that are like, "Yeah, Kristen, loved it. You sound great, but I'm an introvert. I can get the book and I can read through that, but I just don't like this and I'm not good at it." I mean, what words of wisdom or encouragement would you give them?

Kristen Luke: I think though the ones that I've seen that are not great at marketing are the ones who just really aren't willing to put the effort in. At the end of the day, marketing is about communicating with other people. And so if you think you're just going to throw up some content on your website and that's going to be the end of it, it just doesn't work that way.

You have to put real effort. You can be an introvert. I'm an introvert. I don't like to do videos. I don't like to do speaking engagements for the most part, right? But I've still been able to market myself. And the key is to find the areas that you are good at. Are you good at writing? Do you like doing videos?

Do you like doing webinars? Whatever that is, really put your effort there and spend time promoting that either on social media or through one-on-one networking, however you want to do it. But just really find a thing that you like and then put a lot of effort and focus on getting people to whatever that is.

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So it doesn't have to be, you don't have to be this extroverted person that is at every networking event and doing YouTube shorts four times a day. That doesn't, isn't necessary. And that's what I like about a niche is because you only have to talk to so many people. It's a small pond, right? So your efforts are a lot more effective because you are working in a small pond.

Caleb Brown: Yeah, instead of just putting information out there, like yours truly, who is also an introvert, who's guilty of it, like how does this, the question I always try to ask, how does this solve my client's problem?

I'm looking at it from that view, helped me so much and I still have a lot to learn. And I think another thing too, and you maybe have mentioned this already, but these people need to give themselves some grace and have some patience, right? It's not like you just hit one button and you got all these, I mean, it takes time to develop this, doesn't it? And I mean, look at your firm and my company, my brand, like it took a long time to do that.

Kristen Luke: It does. It takes about three years. That's not just my estimate. When I was interviewing people for the book, I asked them how long it took before they really started seeing exponential growth, and they said three years. Michael Kitsis has written about this being three years. Stephanie Bogan has talked about it for being three years. "Can you make it go faster?" If you're putting more effort in, maybe. But it does take time for people to get to know you and trust you and like you, and you can't speed that process up, unfortunately.

Caleb Brown: I just want to make sure we're, that was three years, not three months.

Kristen Luke: I was just talking to an advisor the other day and he's telling me he was so frustrated because he's been in business for three months and he's not seeing any traction yet. And all he had done really was send out a cold email to 500 people. And it doesn't, that's not going to cut it. You have to be consistent and have a volume and time.

Caleb Brown: And you're the marketing person, you know the stats better than me. But every time I like, what is it like you got, they got to see people have to see your stuff like 13 or 17 times or something before they were like, "Okay, this person's legit. I may want to reach out to them."

Kristen Luke: Yeah. I've seen all sorts of numbers anywhere from seven to 13. And I'll be honest, it's probably a lot more than that.

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Caleb Brown: Well, to your point with all the extra noise, it's like, how do you, and look, I'm going to push you a little bit more on this. I mean, you're talking about developing a niche, but you also said there's so much noise out there.

I mean, there's lots of people with an equity compensation, tech professional niche. So how does that person stand out even with those other people?

Kristen Luke: Yeah. If you are in like Silicon Valley or something like that, it tends to be a common niche. So you can narrow down, and I actually just, I wrote an article about this on Texas.com in May. So maybe we can link to that too. But how do you refine your niche even more? It might be different types of people within the tech. So maybe you just work with engineers and a lot of financial advisors don't like working with engineers. So that could be a good niche, right? Or it could be very specific companies or very specific stages. So narrowing it down. So I just always think like, how can I make, how can I be a big fish in a small pond? How do I make that pond as small as possible?

Caleb Brown: Got it. And maybe for people that the new planners are just starting out that maybe like love to hire you and do all this stuff, but just maybe don't have the budget.

I mean, other than just sitting down and devoting time just to kind of creating content, is there anything else they should be doing or could be doing to try to help get this train up and going?

Kristen Luke: Yes, I mean, I would buy my book and I'm not just saying that, but it is an actual step-by-step guidebook. And so if you don't have money to spend on getting help, that will guide you on exactly what you need to do.

Other than content, though, the other thing is just channels. Like, where can you find your community? Go there. It could be online, right? It could be in person. So I think about when I started my business, I went to every financial advisor networking group I could go to so I would end up at insurance groups which I quickly learned I did not want to be in the insurance world. But I was just going anywhere just start to get to know people and then I also went online. I would go on Twitter and find financial advisors and connect because this is back in 2009. Go on LinkedIn and connect.

So wherever these people are congregating is where you want to be, whether that's online or offline. And so meeting as many people as you can, building a marketing list as quickly as you can so that you can continue to market to them through content and that kind of thing is where I would spend most of my time.

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Caleb Brown: And I've heard that from other marketing people, I mean, probably outside of the industry say things like, "You should come up with a channel. You shouldn't be doing stuff across multiple channels. You need to find a channel that really works for you and just go all in on that." I mean, so I'm just thinking of my, I don't do that.

So I'm like wondering if I need to make an adjustment because we have like podcast, YouTube videos and we have a written newsletter. I mean, what do you think about that? Is that, I mean, maybe I'm doing it wrong.

Kristen Luke: Well, I do agree with that. Whatever you're doing, focus on that. So especially social media, don't try to be a TikTok star and an influencer on LinkedIn. Pick one.

When it comes to content though, if you have the capacity, having the same content in different formats can be good. So if your podcast is also a YouTube video, is also a written transcript, like that's just repurposing content. If you're doing your podcast and your YouTube is completely different and your newsletter is completely different, that's a lot of work.

Caleb Brown: It is a lot of work.

Kristen Luke: Yeah. If you can have one core marketing piece, so like podcast or YouTube channel, or for me, it's like my book, just capitalize on that as much as possible instead of trying to spread yourself then.

Caleb Brown: And let's talk about that a little bit more. I mean, because there's some people that, including me, "Oh my God, I got to sit down and write this and do all this."

The repurposing piece. I mean, that is a, maybe just talk about that for a little bit. I mean, you did a little bit already, but just the book that you wrote, like how that turns into other things. I mean, somebody can write one piece and just kind of adjusted, kind of—do you see people having success with that?

Kristen Luke: Absolutely. You can easily turn, like I said, a podcast into a video, or you take your podcast and you have clips and you share it on social media. Everyone in my On Niche program know that's how long it's going to take me to say this, and I got, what are we 20 minutes into this right now? But I think the best marketing tool out there right now, and it only costs you 20 a month, is ChatGPT, because it can repurpose anything.

If you wrote a blog, you can have it repurpose into four or five other things, right? Or it can even write the blog for you. I actually, for my book, I upload it to ChatGPT and I say,

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write me a marketing tip from this chapter and it'll write one. And I can use that for my newsletter. So anyone who's just starting, get ChatGPT.

It can write you video scripts. It can write you blogs. It can give you ideas for blogs. It can write social media posts. It can edit things that you're doing. It can repurpose things. So that's the best 20 dollars you will ever spend a month.

Caleb Brown: Is that your preferred AI tool?

Kristen Luke: That's the one I started with and I haven't really experimented with others.

Caleb Brown: Got it. This has just been a lot of fun and just a lot of stuff I didn't know. So again, I appreciate you coming on here and sort of also helping with my marketing. Is there anything else that you'd like to leave with the New Planner audience just on how to develop a niche or get clients or build a brand like what we've been talking about?

Kristen Luke: Yeah, I just say go buy my book. That sounds so self-promotional, but it really is a good tool. And everyone who's read it just that's like changed their lives and their businesses. And I don't know how much it costs on Amazon. Maybe it's like \$15. It's going to be well worth it. And it'll just give you the guidance you need to be able to really start focusing on a niche and building your business.

Caleb Brown: Awesome. Thanks so much for coming on the show, Kristen.

Kristen Luke: Thanks, Caleb. It's been great being here.

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Tune back in next week for another episode, and until then, we are here to help you succeed.