



7 PROVEN WAYS TO FIND CUSTOMERS

Colophon

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Introduction

Many starting businesses find it difficult to find customers. They may not yet have experience with marketing or have limited time and financial resources to do it properly.

This White Paper will give you tools to get started with finding customers in a targeted and effective way. Then you will discover 7 ways experienced zzp'ers (self-employed professionals) find clients and new assignments.

Define your ideal customer

The first step to finding customers is determining who your ideal customer is and what your strategy will be to reach them. With the right marketing, you will sell more products and services. And you avoid wasting time and money. For example, you do not have to spend unnecessary money on an advert on TikTok if you discover that your customers are mostly active on Facebook. Or buying an expensive ticket to a big national conference, while your customers are mainly doing business locally.

With a customer survey, also known as target group analysis, you identify different characteristics of your customers. You answer questions such as: are they businesses or consumers? Where do they live? Why do they buy my product? Which channels do they use? What are their needs? What do they do every day? You approach your customers in a targeted and strategic manner with the data from your research. Suppose, as a bicycle shop, you find out that your customers find sustainability important. Then they have less need for discount offers. You can attract their attention, for example, if you advertise sustainable maintenance services. Or recyclable, replacement bicycle parts.

Getting started with your customer research

The [step-by-step guide to customer research](#) will help you find out who your customer is.

Create a marketing plan

With a marketing plan, you determine what you want to achieve. For example, increasing your turnover or brand awareness. You look at who your competitors are and where your opportunities lie. And you determine what makes you stand out, such as 'the only 100% sustainable bicycle shop in the Leeuwarden area'. You already know from your customer research who you want to target. Now it is just a matter of deciding what message you want to tell, how much money you want to spend, and when to use which marketing tools. It seems like a lot of work, but it ensures that you use your money and time as effectively and strategically as possible. You can also make targeted adjustments when something does not work well.

Getting started with your own marketing plan

Start by [creating your marketing plan](#).

Business Model Canvas

Do you want to start a business, or is your market changing, or do you have a new product idea? Use the Business Model Canvas (BMC) to create a business plan that grows with your business.

The BMC consists of 9 steps, called building blocks. With the building blocks, you describe and examine your entire business. Think of your organisation, customers, suppliers, costs, and revenues. This is how you discover the strengths and weaknesses of your organisation and product.

Getting started with your Business Model Canvas

Start [successful customer acquisition](#) in 9 steps.

This is how other zzp'ers find clients: 7 ways

Research by KVK shows that zzp'ers find clients and new assignments in the following ways. For each way, we provide tips and examples.

Video: Finding customers

Clients help you earn your money and keep your business afloat. But how do you actually get customers? In this video, 5 entrepreneurs share their experiences.



1. Business networking

Entrepreneurs find new assignments mainly through a formal business network. So, as a zzp'er, start building a business network. For example, go to local business meetings if you are looking for clients and collaborations in your own region. Visit trade fairs, industry-specific conferences, or networking events where you know there are visitors interested in your field.

Build relationships

Someone who is not your customer right away may still be interesting to you at a later stage. Entrepreneur Judith Smits of the Network Show says: "I often see that people want to move on during a conversation because they realise the person they are talking to is of no immediate use to them. But you are also talking indirectly to that person's network. So, finish your conversation and listen attentively. Then this person leaves with a good feeling and may recommend you at a later time."

"Networking keeps you
on top of mind."

*Sarah Reinhoudt, Wander-Lust, as heard in the KVK video
'Find your customers'.*

You can also find customers outside the school playground

As often and as much as possible, tell people what you do and what you are looking for. At a birthday party, on the football field, or outside the school playground, there may be people who can do something for you. At a party, tell a neighbour about that cool bathroom you designed for a client the other day. Then that neighbour will think of you when an acquaintance of his later asks if they know anyone else who can remodel their bathroom.

Be concrete and convincing

Be concrete and convincing when you tell people what you do and what problem you solve with your product or service. Then people will remember you more easily. Use concrete examples of clients or jobs you do. So do not say: "I am a copywriter and good with language." But instead: "I help IT professionals who do not know how to sell themselves on social media. I write appealing texts that make my clients' ads score much better."

Getting started with business networking

Do you want to know more about finding clients through business networking?

[Read the article](#) and learn [how to pitch convincingly](#).

2. Satisfied customers

Existing customers can also recommend you to others. 9 out of 10 consumers read reviews before buying something. Do you have satisfied customers? Then ask them to leave a review for you on your website, Google Review, LinkedIn, or on sales channels like Bol or Amazon.

Use feedback to improve your product

At first, customers may come via friends, family or, for example, your old employer. They are very valuable because, through these first customers, you can get a lot of information that you can use to improve your product or service. For example, a glass manufacturer discovered through a short survey that customers were returning their products because the photos on the online shop did not match reality. They took new photos, resulting in more satisfied customers and fewer returns.

Video: This is how you get loyal customers

How do you ensure loyal and satisfied customers? Entrepreneurs Puck from Hulaalooop (a subscription rental service for sustainable baby clothes) and Martijn Verspeek (installation company Verspeek) tell what they do to retain customers. From personal contact and happy employees to comprehensive aftercare and service.



Watch the video: How to get loyal customers
(with English subtitles)

Getting started with collecting reviews

Find out how to acquire new customers by collecting [reviews](#) from existing customers.

3. Fellow entrepreneurs

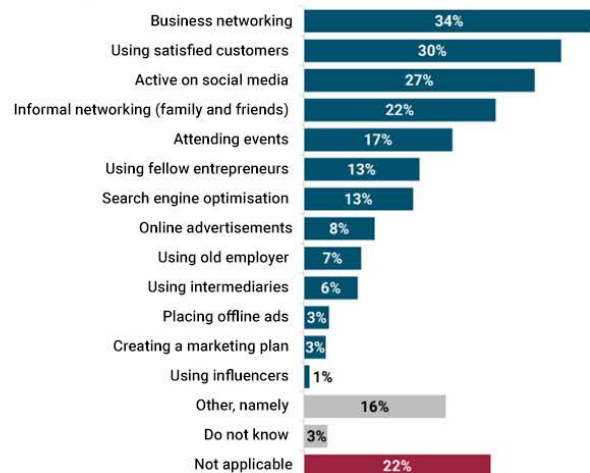
Not only potential clients, but also fellow entrepreneurs can help you get new assignments. Competitors or fellow entrepreneurs can recommend you when they do not have the time or space to take on an assignment themselves. A self-employed professional without staff who gives company emergency response training and CPR courses got many new assignments this way. By contacting other experienced trainers at the beginning, they found out that this kind of training was in high demand. In a short time, they were able to quit their salaried job and work full-time as a trainer because other trainers were sending clients to them.

Effective cooperation

As a zzp'er, you can also seek cooperation with fellow entrepreneurs who do not do the same work as you, but where you complement or strengthen each other. As a copywriter, for example, you can work together with a website builder and together offer a complete package for building and filling websites for clients. And as a plumber, you have direct clients for small jobs, but can also liaise with construction contractors for large projects.

KVK survey of 382 different sole proprietorships - October 2023

What are you doing (or have you done) to find new clients?



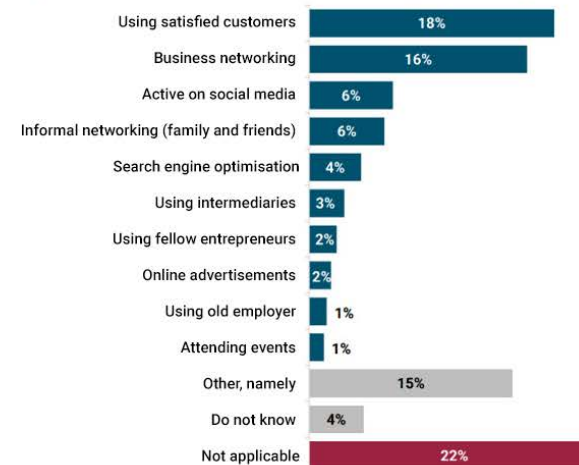
4. Written media

You can also draw attention to your products or services with advertisements, press releases, or other media coverage in newspapers, magazines, trade journals, or leaflets. Find a publication that matches the interests of your ideal clients. Newspapers sometimes also have themed issues at the weekend, from coaching and design to cooking and gardening. Ask different magazines about their annual schedule and see if, for example, you as an interior stylist can place a sponsored article or advertisement in a related section.

Getting started with writing a press release

Can you use your product or service to ride on a theme, topic, or issue that is already in the spotlight? Then write a [press release](#) (in Dutch) and send it to various media outlets.

Which way to find new customers works(s) best for your business?



5. Search engines such as Google or Bing

To get as many visitors and potential customers to your website as possible, you want to rank high in search engines. To get there, your website needs to answer your customers' search queries. Do keyword research and find out what questions or words your customers use. This knowledge will give you input for valuable and relevant blogs, articles, or videos for your website. This is called search engine optimization (SEO)

If you sell organic wines, see what combinations of keywords people use to search for organic wine. This may inspire you to write an article about 'organic white wine', for example. Or you can answer a frequently asked question like 'why choose organic wine?'. Incorporate the found search terms in your web texts. And also, for example, in the text description of your images. This is the so-called 'alt text' field, which is shown when an image cannot be displayed. All these small efforts can also help with higher search engine rankings. In addition, make sure your website loads quickly, is secure, and works well on mobile devices.

Getting started with search engines

If you want to rank higher in search engines for free, optimise your website step by step with [search engine optimisation \(SEO\)](#). This helps more people find your website. If you prefer to be found directly on certain keywords, it is more effective to start with search engine advertising, also known as [Search Engine Advertising \(SEA\)](#).

6. Social media

You use social media to find and engage customers. But how? With your customer research and keyword research, you now know which social media channels your customers are on and what they are busy with every day. You can also use this information to come up with fun posts and videos on social media.

For example, the owner of a plant shop found out that her customers searched for 'repotting plants' on search engines in spring. She additionally knew that her customers like to pay attention to their interiors and that they are active on Instagram and TikTok. This gave her the idea to create 2 explainer videos: '7 tips to repot your plants' and '2 fun ways to style terracotta pots for indoors'. By regularly posting inspiring and relevant content on social media, she gained many new followers and customers in a short time.



Getting started with social media

Find targeted and measurable new customers on social media with [these 5 steps](#). Looking for inspiration? Find out how to creatively get [more followers and sales](#) on Instagram. If you especially want to advertise on social media, read [the 6-step guide to advertising on social media](#).

7. Online platforms and agencies

Do you find it difficult to sell yourself? Then you can also find new customers or clients through agencies or platforms. For example, for gardeners, painters, or contractors, there are platforms like Werkspot. While you can find various freelance assignments on Freelance.nl or Hoofdkraan.nl, for example. If you are looking more for international clients, there is Upwork or Fiverr, for example. Finally, you can also find interesting assignments on LinkedIn.

Want to know more about (online) marketing?

Then go to KVK's [Marketing](#) theme page.

KVK offers guidance for entrepreneurs

Not only at the start of a business, but also later in the development of your business. With KVK's knowledge, you can make choices with confidence. For example, whether to embark on a new business model or digitise your administration. Visit [KVK.nl/en](https://www.kvk.nl/en) and read more about the different phases of your business.

