

## **Riches in Niches Ideas Podcast**

### **Interview with Renee Raab Whitcombe**

Here is a full transcript of the interview:

Susan Friedmann: I'm Susan Friedmann, the Nichepreneur Coach, and welcome to another "Riches in Niches Ideas" podcast. Where I interview entrepreneurs and small business owners who are successfully niche marketing their products or services. I am looking for them to share some practical tips and techniques. I call these savvy individuals "nichepreneurs."

Today's "nichepreneur" guest is someone I've recently had the pleasure of meeting, and I truly admire the work she's doing niche marketing her business. Renee Raab Whitcombe is an awardwinning author and founder of Budding Family Publishing. She launched her business together with Big Sister & Big Brother, to develop a series of easytopersonalize interactive photo keepsakes for children experiencing milestone transitions. Renee has been featured on national TV, radio, and is a columnist in numerous local and national publications. In fact, the list is so long I could spend the next 20 minutes reading it. And believe me if I tell you that it's very impressive. So Renee, welcome to "Riches in Niches Ideas" podcast.

Renee Raab Whitcombe: Thank you so much for having me.

Susan: It's my pleasure. So Renee, I believe you have a really fun story about how you got started in your business. Let's start off by having you share a little bit of that with us.

Renee: I would love to. I was originally motivated to create and publish books on helping children through milestones and transitions, because my family was very much in need at the time of the very same thing. I was pregnant, we were moving across the country at the same time, I had a little one whose head was spinning with everything. And we searched so far and wide for the perfect kinds of books and tools that would help her, and I was really surprised to find that they didn't exist. And the more I looked, the more I realized that there was a very specific and unique solution for parents who were going through the same thing that I was going through. So essentially, I just felt that I had a relatable audience, because the kinds of things we were going through, children and parents had been going through forever, and of course they would continue to go through these things forever, and that they would appreciate a solutionoriented item to help their whole family get through these transitions.

Susan: It's so interesting that you say that, because all my guests talk about solving a problem with whatever product or service they offer. And once again,

here you are with your niche business that you're solving a problem that was out there, and there wasn't a solution, but now there is one. So that's incredible.

Renee: Thank you so much. I've learned in the seven years that I've had my business that it's also, and I'll talk about this a little bit later, it's so easy to have magazine editors and news people and website editors carry and talk about your product when they're solution-oriented, because this is exactly the kind of material that they're looking for. If you think about any magazine, what about "Real Simple" which is a magazine so many people look to for solutions. And so editors are always looking for solutions, and you're handing them the gold of what it is they need to fill their pages on their websites. So it really sort of goes hand-in-hand with getting the word out there.

Susan: Fantastic. So since this podcast is all about niche marketing ideas, let's start with a few of your favorites. What are some of the things that you truly love to do?

Renee: Well, I'm glad you asked, because my answers are definitely going to appeal to people who are trying to do their marketing on a shoestring budget. I am a small business, I am a startup, and I pride myself on being extremely creative because I don't have a bottomless bank account to do marketing. So one of the first things that I started off doing and I still continue to do, is I look for situations where I can barter for free advertising. I offer my books and my products as prizes or giveaways in exchange for exposure, which becomes so far-reaching that, truly, I feel that I get the biggest benefit out of the deal. One or two quick examples. When I was first starting out, and I had my "Look Who's Going to be a Big Sister" and "Look Who's Going to be a Big Brother" titles, I contacted a website called [mybabyconnection.com](http://mybabyconnection.com). And in exchange for providing my books as a prize in their quarterly drawing, I was able to arrange a free 12-month listing and a month-long product feature on their home page. For me, again, I think I donated something that had such a low out-of-pocket expense, and yet for a year that had an echo effect on my business.

Another example of bartering for free advertising is getting a local merchant in your town to create an event around your product or services, knowing, of course, that you can attend and help attract people. So, ultimately, they will advertise the event. They will send postcards. They will get the newspaper to cover the story.

And so, for a month leading up to the event, your product, your service will end up being a featured item in the newspaper. And so, of course, after the event, oftentimes, if it's a success, they will actually also place an order for what it is that you do and make you a regular vendor to their business, so sort of a twofold thing.

Those are my examples of bartering.

Another thing that I encourage people to do is to offer free samples, if you have a product, that is, anywhere that appears to have a connection to the topic of what you do. I also offer my "Big Brother" and "Big Sister" books to the waiting rooms of OB/GYN offices across the country, where second and thirdtime expectant mothers are sitting, waiting to be called to their appointments and will find them and peruse them. And ultimately, this has led to many retail sales directly to my website, which, of course, always brightens my day. And then the doctors' offices also like to offer us to put a flyer about our products in their mom packets, which again, is more free advertising to my target audience, for all three.

Maybe the last thing I would say is to always be available as a guest speaker at people's events or classes, where you will always get feedback and results immediately.

One example I'll give you is that I have another book, which is for children who are moving or relocating. And I have pitched, in many a weekly realestate agents' meeting, what it is that my book does and why it's such a wonderful gift to give to families who are moving with children.

And what ultimately happens is I get to listen in on the meetings, so I learn about my clients and what they need and what they're trying to do. I get to introduce myself personally. And then, once I'm gone, the newsletters that they send out internally in the company continue to promote my product. And I've gotten many group sales just by standing up in front of a meeting and introducing myself, and my product for two to three minutes.

Those are probably three of my shoestringbudget marketing ideas for your listeners.

Susan: And that's wonderful, because I love shoestring ideas, and the bartering. Knowing who your target audience is, I think that came out loud and clear, that once you determine where your target audience is and who else is interested in that same target audience, that's when you can approach them with your products or services and make these sort of joint ventures, these different strategic alliances. So I love it, absolutely love it.

Renee: Absolutely. You always have to ask yourself, all the time, "Who would care about what it is that I have to offer? Who are the people, where are they, and why would they care?" And if you can identify that, you have your audience.

Susan: Great questions. Absolutely wonderful questions. So, as you think about your business, Renee, what's something that you feel that you're most proud of?

Renee: That's a tough question. [laughs] I guess I would have to go back to the early days of my business, when I was considering whether or not to pursue a publisher for my books. And at a certain point early on, I had the opportunity to sell to a publisher. And slowly but surely, as our meetings went on, I started realizing that they were asking me, in many ways, to compromise the look, the

feel, and the quality of what it was I was creating. And at that point, I refused the deal and made the decision to protect my ideas and my vision about the products that I create. And to this day, I think I am probably most proud of that.

Susan: I bet that took a lot of courage to do that.

Renee: Well, it did, because I had to take elements of my past career, which was in marketing and as a television producer, and utilize those strengths of my role in a different business to delve into the world of selfpublishing. And I realized that, in a way, I had been training for selfpublishing all that time. In my past career, in the past I had been creating and selling other people's ideas and products, and now I was completely ready to sell and be passionate about my own idea. It was a little bit scary. It was financially a little bit scary. But my passion prevailed overall, and I felt that my background actually had a lot of application.

Susan: Fantastic. Have you made any mistakes putting your business together? I bet you have. Will you share one or two of them with us?

Renee: I've made plenty of mistakes.

Susan: I didn't want to make that assumption.

Renee: Oh, no. I mean, who hasn't made plenty of mistakes? But my mistakes probably kept me as one of the world's most sleepdeprived people for about two straight years. I really did learn the hard way that I must rely on and delegate to other people in order to grow my business. You really have to figure out what is and is not an efficient use of your time. In my case, being a small selfpublisher, I realized that it is not an efficient use of my time to be the person who ships orders or does all the research. If I'm not free to handle press opportunities, continue my writing, do the key trade shows for face time with my customers, then ultimately I'm shooting myself in the foot. Figuring out what it is you can break off into manageable pieces that you can still supervise, where you can delegate to other people, really identify the best use of your time, and I will say that that was a long, slow lesson for me.

Susan: Not only you, if it makes you feel any better. I had that exact same issue, because it is, it's tough to give up. You feel you have to do everything.

Renee: Yes.

Susan: And sometimes it's really almost like "I should be able to do it. I don't want to ask someone else to do it." Making that decision to delegate is a very, very big step.

Renee: Yes. And in addition to what you just said, the fact is this business, in my case, it's my third child. It's your baby. And you do feel that nobody's going to necessarily do it the way you do it, and it's a little bit intimidating to think that

you're trusting your baby with somebody who is just never going to be you. And that's a really tough lesson. The truth is, other people bring expertise from their past that you can even learn from them. But at the beginning, it's just very, very hard to give a little piece of your baby to another person. You have to become comfortable with that.

Susan: Yes. And it does take time, because, as you say, it is your baby. You want to nurture it. You want to grow it. And handing it off to someone else, and even when you do hand it off, I think there still has to be that accountability. You can't just hand it off and expect someone to do it the way you would do it, because I've made that mistake as well and find that I have to do the work again because someone didn't do what I wanted them to do.

Renee: Well, that's absolutely right. And in addition, you invest your time in training another person. And as we all know, life happens, and sometimes you'll find that you'll have someone you think is fantastic, and, for whatever their personal reasons are, it turns out they're not going to stay with you for 10 years. And there you are, back to having to find another person that you trust as much, and all that time you put into the training, thinking that you were going to be able to share the daily responsibility with somebody that you feel is really working to your standards. And so sometimes you really do have to take a step back in order to go forward. Or perhaps even maybe a hire that you didn't think was ultimately as good as you had hoped. There's the disappointment, and it's a little bit of a roller coaster, and you have to really roll with a lot of punches when you're a small business. I know that you know, too.

Susan: But it's so interesting that we have the same situations and some of the same mistakes, and not only the two of us, but many of the entrepreneurs, the nichepreneurs, who I've been speaking to have exactly the same. So it is inherent in running your own business, creating this baby. And as we say, it's ours, and nurturing it. So we're coming to the end of our time together, but I'd love you to share just one nugget of advice that you would give other nichepreneurs who would be listening to this interview.

Renee: Of course. Actually, if it's OK with you, could I give two small ones?

Susan: Oh, absolutely.

Renee: OK. I think my first one would be that people need to spend more time than they ever imagined formulating a solid business plan and a creating marketing plan that identifies how your product or service is distinctively different than your competition, even before you have your product in hand or your service to offer, because you will need to execute your plans simultaneously. And when the buzz starts to heat up, you do not want to be at your local Kinko's at three o'clock in the morning [laughs] trying to pedal backwards on a treadmill kind of thing. So I think the advance planning, in both your business and marketing plans, has to be really welldeveloped before you get out in the marketplace.

And my last one is, really, just a credo about how you conduct yourself. I've always felt that whatever you can do to be as generous as you possibly can with anyone who needs your help or expertise will come back to you 100 different ways. Donate your product to charities, schools, people in need. Help colleagues who approach you. Network wherever you go. Always do more than your fair share. Be positive. Be passionate. All these things are the important, intangible, and indirect ways of attracting growth and publicity for your business.

Susan: That's so wonderful. Yes. I can't endorse that enough. It's such a wonderful idea because, yes, the more you help others, it does come back to you. I thank you for sharing the wonderful ideas that you've shared with us on this podcast series.

Renee: It's a pleasure.

Susan: Let me ask, how do we get hold of you?

Renee: You can always reach me through my website, which is [www.buddingfamily.com](http://www.buddingfamily.com). Or you can email me directly, which is [renee@buddingfamily.com](mailto:renee@buddingfamily.com). And I would be delighted to answer any questions or help anybody who has some thoughts they want to clarify or need a push in the right direction.

Susan: And I would invite people to go to your website as well, just to see the incredible setup that you have for the media, because you really know how to handle the media. You've had incredible media coverage. And I think just to look at that aspect of your website is worth everybody's visit, to just go there and see what you've done and how you've done it. Congratulations on that.

Renee: Thank you.

Susan: So please, go and visit Renee's website at [buddingfamily.com](http://buddingfamily.com). And again, thank you for being my guest on this program.

Renee: Thank you for having me.

Susan: My challenge to all our listeners is to take one idea that you heard today and use it to help get rich in your niche. For more nichemarketing ideas and coaching services, please go to my website, [richesinniches.com](http://richesinniches.com), and read my blog. And until we meet again, this is Susan Friedmann, the Nichepreneur Coach.