



The Overarching Theme Kit

Emilie Wapnick
Puttylike.com

Hey there multipotentialite!

Emilie here. Congrats on picking up The Overarching Theme Kit. As a coach, I've spent hundreds of hours brainstorming with my students to help them come up with overarching themes for their Renaissance Businesses. It sometimes takes a lot of digging, but once you arrive at the theme that is aligned with who you are in a holistic sense, it is a huge relief. It allows you to really make use of your gifts and thrive as an entrepreneur.



A few years ago, I published the [Renaissance Business guide](#). It continues to be a best-seller at Puttylike, and you are welcome to check it out. However, I wanted to create something quick and easy (as well as free and accessible to everyone): a kit that could provide a little boost to those who are struggling to find their overarching themes.

In this kit I'm going to take you through some of the exercises I do with my students. My hope is that by asking yourself the right questions, you will be able to come up with some good answers and gain insight into what makes you tick (which is often at the root of a good overarching theme).

Grab yourself a piece of paper and a pen or open a blank text file and let's get started!

Your pal and fellow multipotentialite,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emilie Wark". Below the signature, the text "PUTTYLIKE.COM" is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

Our Starting Point Together

Let me guess. You want to launch a business, but not just any business. You want a business that will provide you with variety and that will allow you to integrate several of your interests into your work. You want something that encompasses much of who you are and that is in line with your plural nature. You've made lists of *possible* businesses. You've come up with plenty of ideas, but they all feel too narrow and you worry that you will become bored or lose interest altogether.

Or maybe you already have a business, but you're bored and frustrated. Your current business omits huge parts of who you are. Maybe you've rebranded half a dozen times. Or maybe you run multiple businesses and feel scattered and overwhelmed because you're constantly splitting up your time and focus.

These are common multipotentialite problems and, unfortunately, the typical business advice just doesn't provide many good solutions to them. **We're simply counseled to "choose a niche," and stick with it.**

While this advice works fine for the singularly-focused individual, it is horrible advice for a multipotentialite. Multipotentialites require variety in order to be happy. They do their best work when they are drawing connections between disciplines, blending ideas from different fields, and are able to express their own unique mishmash of skills and passions.

The Alternative to the Niche Business

Thankfully, there is an alternative to the niche business. It's what I call a Renaissance Business: one business in which several subjects are integrated. To give you an idea of what I mean, let's take a look at a few examples of niche businesses alongside Renaissance Business counterparts:

Example #1: The Geographically-Inspired Jewelry Shop

Niche Business: A jewelry shop

Renaissance Business Alternative: Sha Hwang and Rachel Binx of meshu.io combine their love of architecture, maps, data visualizations, math, and jewelry to make custom jewelry that is inspired by places that their customers find meaningful. When the customer places an order, they submit a few locations that are meaningful to them. Sha and Rachel's team then plot a "meshu" (sort of like a map or path), and turn it into a necklace, earrings, cufflinks, or a ring.

Example #2: The Multidimensional Artist

Niche Business: An artist who works in one specific medium (i.e. a painter, a sculptor, or a performance artist).

Renaissance Business Alternative: [Dallas Clayton](#) is a children's author, illustrator, painter, and poet who tours the United States regularly to speak with and make art with children.

Example #3: The Surfing Therapist

Niche Business: A therapy center (or a surfing class)

Renaissance Business Alternative: [Ocean Therapy](#) is an emerging movement. It's therapy that takes place on surfboards, while the patient learns to surf. If you happen to be interested in becoming a therapist, but don't want to relegate your surfing addiction to the weekend, this might be a good option for you.

Can you see how each of these businesses is a composite of two or more subjects? Rather than being rooted in one discipline, Renaissance Businesses exist at the intersections of multiple fields.

The Pitfall of the Renaissance Business and How to Avoid it

While combining your multiple passions in one business can be hugely rewarding, there's a very real danger that you may confuse potential customers and turn them away. It is easy to create a multifaceted business that appears scattered and makes no sense. We do NOT want this to happen to you.

The secret to making your business make sense is to craft an overarching theme: one concept that brings your various topics together in a cohesive way.

Let's take a look at the dictionary definition of the words "overarching" and "theme":

Overarching: encompassing everything

Theme: a unifying or dominant idea, motif, etc., as in a work of art.

In my experience, overarching themes don't always "encompass everything," but they can encompass a heck of a lot! Certainly more than the typical niche business can. It's the unifying idea we need to nail down.

How To Craft an Overarching Theme

In *Renaissance Business* I go through three approaches for coming up with an overarching theme. I'll describe each briefly and then we'll jump into some exercises to get you going.

Approach #1: Find a Common Thread

The common thread approach involves having one core philosophy that your business stands for. This theme is like a common denominator, running through all of the topics in your business.

I was working with a student of mine the other day who is a newly certified personal trainer. Let's call him Kevin. Kevin wanted a business and website to promote his personal training service. We came up with the name Movement before Muscles, which connotes his main philosophy: that you need to learn how to move properly before you can safely practice more advanced forms of exercise.

It was a good enough title. But as we dug in and spoke about the different things he could blog about, we quickly realized that it was too limiting. With that name, Kevin would be stuck talking about little more than fitness.

So we dug a little deeper and realized that his approach to training was really about getting back to basics. In other words, **learning the fundamentals**. This is a far broader theme and it can be applied to many facets of life. He could write about habit-building, learning new skills, and interpersonal communication, all of which are interests of his.

Kevin's project is a work in progress, but here are some other Renaissance Businesses you might be familiar with that use the common thread approach. I've put what I believe to be their overarching theme in brackets.

- [Brain Pickings](#) (how to live a good life)
- [Riskology](#) (risk-taking)
- [The Art of Non-Conformity](#) (unconventional living)
- [Tim Ferriss](#) (Pareto principle)

Approach #2: Combine Two Unrelated Interests

The next approach to crafting an overarching theme involves smooshing together two of your interests that don't normally go together. Let's imagine a person who has the following interests:

- Technology
- Yoga
- Gluten-free baking
- Simplicity/minimalism
- Drawing
- Entrepreneurship
- Hiking
- Parenting
- Psychology
- Music
- Comedy
- Finances

Here are a few ways that you could smoosh these interests together:

- Technology help for yoga instructors (could involve setting up an online scheduling tool, video production for their business, website development, etc.)
- Financial advice for people who are interested in living simply
- Yoga for entrepreneurs
- Simplicity/mindfulness advice for parents

Here are a few existing businesses that combine two different subjects:

- [Nerd Fitness](#)
- [Marketing for Hippies](#)
- [Cheryl Dolan](#) uses her background in speech pathology to teach people how to be more present and deliver better presentations.
- [Toby Martini](#) teaches improv (yes, improv) to CEOs, management, and employees at corporations that are looking to improve their public speaking skills.

Approach #3: Use a Lens

We usually have several formats that we enjoy working in. In fact, many of our interests can be both a format and a subject (or a medium and a message, if you prefer). For example, photography can be a subject that you write about (framing techniques, lighting techniques, etc.) or it can be a (literal) lens through which you explore subjects as diverse as faces and architecture. Similarly you can write about the craft of writing, or you can write about relationships, health, or anything at all.

The lens approach involves taking a format that you enjoy working in and using it to explore multiple areas.

Here are some examples of people using the lens approach:

- [Hugh MacLeod](#) explores creativity, business, and the meaning of life through the lens of business card doodles.
- [Mark Powers](#) uses percussion as his lens to explore education, travel, community, and culture.
- [Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner](#) use economics as a lens to explore areas that economics doesn't usually touch -things like "cheating teachers, bizarre baby names, and crack-selling mama's boys" - on their radio show, Freakonomics, and in their books by the same name.
- [Ken Burns](#) explores everything from the history of baseball to jazz through the lens of documentary filmmaking (he also uses the common thread approach, as all of his films are related to American culture and history).
- At [Entheos Academy](#), you can learn about anything from health and wellness to optimizing your relationships through the lens of philosophy.
- Curating is the lens that Maria Popova uses to explore what it means to live a good life on [Brain Pickings](#) (she is another person who uses multiple overarching theme approaches).
- Many authors use writing as their lens and publish work in several genres. Names like Roald Dahl, Dodie Smith, Bill Bryson, Stephen King, Wally

Lamb, Wendy Wasserstein, Steve Martin, and Barbara Kingsolver come to mind.

Taking Action

Now that we've looked at three approaches to crafting an overarching theme, let's run through some exercises and see what we can come up with for your specific interests.

Step 1: Create Your Master List

Make a list of all of your passions and interests, past and present. Star or circle the ones that really pull at your heart right now.

Step 2: Try out the Common Thread Approach

For each starred item, answer these questions:

- What drew you to this area?
- Do you see any commonalities among your answers?

Then answer these additional questions:

- Which values are important to you?
- Are there any philosophies that you live by?
- Why do you think you do all of the things you do?
- Can you identify any hidden motivations or driving forces behind your choices?

Step 3: Try Combining Two Unrelated Interests

Is there knowledge related to one area of interest that could be helpful to an

audience related to a different interest of yours?

Randomly pair together your list items, filling in the blanks:

_____ for _____.
(interest #1) (audience related to interest #2)

You may end up with some silly sentences (e.g. scuba diving for business executives or juggling for historians), but keep at it. Sometimes the oddest pairings end up being the most lucrative business ideas (though probably not juggling for historians...).

Step 4: Try the Through-the-Lens Approach

Do you have one prominent identity or medium that you like working with or in? Take a look at your list. How could each item be a lens through which you explore multiple other subjects? Push yourself here. Artistic media like photography and writing are obvious, but what would happen if you looked at life through the lens of a philosopher or a parent?

Bonus Exercises

Here are some more exercises to help you come up with a multifaceted business idea. These aren't specifically about finding an overarching theme, but they're helpful nonetheless.

Who is Your Audience?

It's very important to know who you're helping with your business. Who would you like to work with? What sort of person is this, psychologically speaking? What needs and desires do they have? What issues do they care about?

Point A and Point B

Where is your audience member before they find your business? Describe them at point A. Where are they after working with you or interacting with your business for 6 months? Describe them at point B. This will help you figure out the benefits of your business, as well as the needs of your audience.

Mission Statement

Thanks to [Jonathan Mead](#) for sharing this exercise with me. Fill in the blanks:

I do _____ for _____, so they can _____.

Keep refining this statement. It will help you figure out your value, audience, and benefit(s).

What to Do if You're Still Stuck

Brainstorm with a friend. Preferably an open-minded, multipotentialite friend who gets it and won't try to force you into a box. If you're a member of the [Puttytribe](#), post in the forum or get some feedback at a huddle. If you aren't a puttypeep yet and you don't know any other multipotentialites, try connecting with some of the great people who comment on the blog at Puttylike.

When to Keep Searching and When to Move Forward

I'm of two minds. On the one hand, I believe that finding a perfect overarching theme takes time, reflection, and the development of one's self-knowledge. On the other hand, I am a big fan of NOT waiting for perfection to get started.

If you've spent a few weeks mulling over your various interests and still haven't

arrived at a theme that feels right, start anyway. Just start something. Call it a an experiment. Throw ideas around and see what feels right and what people respond to. You can change directions later. We're aiming for progress, not perfection.

What's Next?

Although it is often the most challenging part, finding an overarching theme is really only the first step to creating a Renaissance Business. Once you have your theme, you will need to "clothe" that theme with a name, tagline, design, and content. In other words, how are you going to communicate your theme? Which products and services are you going to create to bring value into the lives of your audience? What about the technical side of things? Which web host should you use? (I like [these guys](#).) Which strategies will you use to grow your business?

If you would like more information and a detailed look at the process of creating and launching a multifaceted business, I wrote [*Renaissance Business*](#) for you.



Renaissance Business is a guide to turning ALL of your interests into one digital business. It takes you step-by-step through the entire process of creating and launching a digital business, from figuring out your passions and crafting an overarching theme, to thinking up a title, tagline, and design, to growing and selling through your community.

Unlike most material on business, the RB approach takes a uniquely multipotentialite perspective. Instead of “overcoming” your desire to do many things, we’re going to use your multipotentiality as a foundation for your business. It’s what will set you apart and make your community thrive.

Learn more, read a sample chapter, and get your copy [here](#).

I wish you the best in ALL of your endeavors. Embrace your plurality, be the biggest, best multipotentialite you can be, and have fun smooshing!

Photos courtesy of [Azlan DuPree](#) and [Kim Love](#).

Thanks to all of the amazing examples that we got to learn from in this kit.

This kit contains affiliate links. However, I have not recommended products that I do not use and love myself.