Continuity Gold:

Getting Started With Membership Sites

Making Money With Membership Websites

You've probably heard how lucrative starting a membership site can be. Getting paid every month from members willing to pay your monthly fee for access to your websites content is an incredibly profitable method of generating recurring income.

With the many tools available on the Internet, even those with limited computer knowledge or skills can successfully build a membership website.

You don't need extensive HTML knowledge or any special skills to set up a website that can include protected areas, discussion boards, member-only blogs, a shopping cart and an auto responder, all of the elements of a successful, well managed site.

With your own community, you can develop credibility, build brand awareness and establish yourself as an authority in your niche.

Let's begin!

Choosing A Specific Focus And Theme

A membership topic or theme serves as the **basis of your entire community's platform.**

For example, if your membership website is focused on weight loss, all of the content, tools and resources offered to subscribers would be relevant to losing weight, or fitness training.

Topics for successful membership based websites vary, and it's likely that you can find a subscription community model for pretty well any topic imaginable.

However, when first creating your membership website it's important that you focus on overall profitability, rather than simply developing a subscription site around a topic or theme that you are personally interested in.

After all, you want to focus on a scalable community base that can consistently grow and maximize your overall income.

Evergreen markets are focused around topics that are unlikely to change and can stand the test of time, and by choosing an overall evergreen theme, you can focus on longevity.

After all, you want your membership site to continue to generate passive income for many years to come.

Another element to keep in mind is the overall size of your target audience and niche market.

- ✓ Will you be able to come up with fresh ideas for future updates to ensure that your website stays fresh?

- ✓ Is your market scalable with the potential for ongoing growth? Can you offer upgrade options to further maximize your income, or are products limited?

- ✓ Is your target audience able to solve their problems quickly (making it difficult to retain subscribers), or is your potential topic able to expand so that you can cater to a large-scale community?

These are just a couple of important questions to keep in mind when choosing your membership theme.

Then, take it one step further by identifying what you are good at, experienced with or could offer to a potential customer base.

- ✓ Are you experienced with a specific instrument?

- ✓ Are you trained in specific programs or software?

- ✓ Are you experienced with a specific sport?

- ✓ Are you knowledgeable regarding a specialized topic?

Consider creating an e-course, informational series, ebooks, reports or training guides and developing them around a membership website platform.

Keep in mind that themed membership sites are always much easier to manage and monetize than generic communities. You want a strict focus on your membership community, so that you can expand on the topics, yet retain an overall theme.

The more focused your website is, the easier it will be to tap into your niche market and determine exactly what your target audience is interested in, and subsequently, give it to them.

Once you have created a list of potential ideas, you need to evaluate the overall profitability of the market before going any further.

While it's first important to identify what you can personally bring to the table in terms of content development, or material, you also need to make sure that other people are willing to pay for access to this content.

You can do this by browsing through existing marketplaces like www.ClickBank.com to determine how many products are available, the communication and delivery channels that are being used, as well as the popularity of your potential niche.

Simply by evaluating existing membership sites, you will get a good idea of the different platforms available, as well as what other merchants are currently offering the same target audience that you will be catering to.

The idea is to create a reference file of existing subscription based sites that exist within your targeted markets.

The more thoroughly you evaluate existing models and successful websites, the easier it will be to create one of your own.

Note: Google Alerts is an exceptionally useful tool for locating hot topics and current trends that could serve as potential ideas for your membership site. You can access Google Alerts at http://www.Google.com/alerts

Building Blocks: Getting Started

When it comes to building your own membership website, you have quite a few different options in terms of exactly how it's structured and designed to run.

For starters, you could choose to create your subscription site based on the traditional format, where subscribers pay a monthly fee to access protected content or directories on your website.

However, there are other equally profitable models used by successful membership webmasters online, including autoresponder based memberships, and even coaching membership models that offer the opportunity for you to earn consistently just for helping those within your market.

Here are the more popular membership models:

Traditional Membership Platform
With a traditional membership website, your subscribers pay monthly for content releases and updates.

By far, this is the most common method of building a membership website, however it does require specific criteria in order to be successful.

Typically, traditional membership sites either offer a low trial price with the cost increasing once the trial is offer.

Example: $17 for 7 days, then $37 monthly, set on a fixed term rate, meaning that the monthly costs do not change, allowing a subscriber to be "locked in" to

your current price, even if you increase the costs in the future for new subscribers.

Coaching Membership Platform

Coaching websites offer clients coaching services for a set fee. It usually consist of a set amount of time and follow-ups.

With a coaching membership site clients will still have that, but they may also have access to forums to speak with other clients and ask public question of their coach and other experts. They may also have access to learning material that is specific to what that coach teaches.

With a coaching based membership site, lessons are accessible only to members of the site, with schedules being made available for all members in regards to meeting times, personal coaching sessions and more.

Coaching is available, but not limited to, Internet marketing, career, life, specialized skills coaching and even such subjects as parenting coaching. If you have a skill that you can coach others in you can form a membership site exclusively focused on that topic.

You need to be objective when analyzing your website, however. You need to be conscious and aware of the different types of members you are going to receive, and focus on ensuring that your content and material communicates directly to them.

Think about their skill levels (if you are selling courses, tutoring, coaching, etc).

Coaching based membership websites are extremely easy to set up because

unlike traditional membership websites where you'll need to develop and publish content prior to your website launch, with service based membership websites, you can update your website less frequently, creating content and resources as the site grows.

Email Based Memberships

With an autoresponder based membership offer, you are able to set up complete membership sites quickly, with very little start up costs, after all since the majority of the content will be delivered via email, you don't need a dedicated server, or expensive membership software.

You will also want to determine a delivery schedule, making sure to send out the newsletters on the same day each week, for consistency.

When it comes to frequency, the usual choices are daily, weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly.

When you are deciding what your publishing schedule will be for your website, keep in mind the kind of information you will be supplying to your membership and it's "dated importance".

If it is information that changes quickly and regularly, then you are going to need to consider RSS feed alerts, as well as a solid CMS (content management system) that will make it easier in developing, managing and organizing content.

Free Or Paid Platforms

Paid for membership sites are set up by businesses or individuals with the objective of making money by supplying hard to find information, access to specialized data or lists, or instruction in various fields.

Membership sites are owned and operated by people who either own the sites or who are hired by the site owners to monitor and administer them.

The topics for paid for membership sites are even more varied than the free sites and certainly more specialized.

With free memberships, the foundation is usually based on allowing free entry with the intention of selling a membership upgrade. Using teaser options like this, you initially attract a customer with a no obligation, no cost offer.

To gain access to limited information, a visitor to a free membership based website would require supplying an email address, choosing a user name and a password, and potentially verifying their subscription via email (after being added to a mailing list).

In order to gain full access to the site, the same subscriber would have to upgrade their free account to a more feature laden one.

The free membership module works well, especially if you are able to provide useful, relevant content snippets for free with the "meaty" stuff being available only to paid members.

On the flip side with paid membership websites, you are establishing your customer base upfront, and weeding out any freebie seekers from those who are more likely to subscribe on a monthly basis.

The topics for paid for membership sites are typically more varied than the free site model and certainly more specialized.

Membership Scripts & Software

In order to set up your membership site quickly and efficiently, you will want to look into the different membership scripts and software solutions that are available to you.

While there are many different options available online, you need to ensure that the script you use is powerful, scalable and flexible.

You need to be able to integrate this script into your website quickly and easily, and the software should allow you the freedom of setting up and managing your membership website so that it suits your needs and makes it easy to maintain.

With these programs, you are able to upload files, create a system and launch your site with very limited effort.

In fact, with some of the higher end membership scripts, the features extend beyond simple member registration and log in, to enabling you to offer One Time offers, Backend products, bonus specials and even introductory trials, if you are interested in capturing a visitor's information without requiring an immediate subscription.

Be sure to spend some time evaluating each membership script prior to purchasing.

You will want to make sure that the system is scalable and can grow as your membership site does, and that the developer fully supports their script and will be available to assist you should you need it.

Here are a few membership scripts that I highly recommend:

http://www.MemberGate.com

http://www.MemberSpeed.com

http://www.LaunchFormulaMarketing.com

http://www.s2member.com/

http://www.easymemberpro.com

http://www.DLGuard.com

If you aren't sure how to develop or design a membership website, consider using Wordpress as the CMS (Content Management System) to organize and manage your entire website.

With amember.com, you can purchase an add on module that will seemlessly integrate a membership script with a Wordpress blog, forming a bridge between the main (guest) area and the subscribers only content categories.

Wordpress membership scripts:

www.WPWishList.com

Features unlimited membership levels, flexible options, sequential content delivery, control viewed content, shopping cart integration and more.

www.MemberWing.com

With MemberWing, you can instantly set up a membership website using nothing more than Wordpress and this simple plugin.

http://www.s2member.com/

s2Member is a plugin for professional WordPress membership management, integrating seamlessly with User Roles & Capabilities for WordPress.

Making More Money From Every Subscriber

Savvy membership webmasters rarely rely on the subscription income alone when focusing on the membership model as a way of making money online.

Instead, they integrate a handful of extended options that will funnel in additional cash, from the same subscriber base.

For starters, adding in upsells, special offers or upgrade packages are great ways of enhancing your membership site while maximizing profit potential.

For example, you could consider setting up a membership site that offered various levels, starting with Bronze, then upgrading to Silver and finally Gold. Each level would gain access to extended content, special downloads or exclusive offers.

Another method of thoroughly monetizing membership websites is that rather than offer a front end system that is based on a recurring fee, you could instead, offer a flat rate access fee with upgrade options.

For example, your membership site could be priced at $97 entry fee (one time charge) with a monthly rate of $67. What this does is help in customer retention, because if a subscriber cancels their account, they would then have to resubscribe, paying $97 again before being given the monthly discount rate.

You should also consider using pressure tactics, such as time sensitive offers, or limited quantities or spots left within your membership community.

You could also consider offering coupon codes, with only a specific number available before expiring. This will motivate your visitors to take action and

subscribe before the offer ends.

Here are some other ways to further enhance your membership site:

Feature An Affiliate Program

You will also want to incorporate an affiliate program into your membership website, so that both visitors and subscribers are able to generate commissions from every referred sale they make.

When structuring your affiliate program, focus on offering a very appealing commission percentage; in order to recruit active affiliates who will help you jump-start your marketing campaigns.

Different companies pay different percentages and amounts for leads and sales. The differences paid for a sale can range from 75% down to 1% depending on the company and the product.

What you decide to pay your affiliates will depend entirely upon what you are selling and to whom you are selling it. A good idea would be to check what other companies selling a product comparable to yours is paying their affiliates.

However, how much you pay your Affiliates really depends on how much your product/service costs, its profit margin, how much you're willing to give up and what action you want to take place.

When running an affiliate program, you will want to make sure that your current membership script or software is able to effectively track all sales and leads, as well as provide detailed information to affiliates (including overall earnings, stats, payment dates, etc).

You could also actively join affiliate programs that are focused on your niche market yourself, and incorporate your affiliate links into a "Recommended Websites" page, so that you are able to maximize earnings by promoting third party products and related websites.

For example, if you run a membership based website focusing on golf training, you could feature affiliate products that include golf gear, advanced lessons, physical books and even video tutorials.

This way, you can maximize your income by featuring affiliate based tools, resources and materials that you are not offering yourself, without having to advertise competing membership websites.

Just make sure that the products or services you are recommending are relevant to your overall theme.

Sell Ad Space Within Your Members Center:
You could also consider offering advertising space within your members center, once your subscribers base has grown.

This way, you could monetize "un-used" space within your members center by allowing third party merchants to promote their products and services to your community.

If you run a members forum, you could also consider integrating promotional banners and allocated ad spaces that feature affiliate based products.

If you run a newsletter (and you should), you could also offer solo ad campaigns to advertisers who are interested in gaining exposure at affordable rates.

Just be sure to adjust your advertising prices as your community grows and your overall ad campaigns become more valuable.

List / Email Promotions:
Apart from allowing advertises to purchase email based advertisements, you could also monetize your subscriber mailing list by sending out promotional emails that showcase affiliate products, as well as your own special offers.

Consider creating a special bundle that features new content, relevant to your membership site, and making it available as an upgrade only to existing members.

Renewals: Recurring income is one of the best parts of running a membership website, and something that many other types of online businesses lack.

Just remember, while first time subscribers certainly breathe life into a membership website, renewals keep it alive.

Make sure to consistently remain active within your community and to do your best to provide high quality, exclusive material to your subscriber base on a regular basis.