How To Set Up A Membership Site In 48 Hours Or Less

Introduction

Most internet marketers want to have a membership site (or ten) in their stable of websites. These sites can provide a recurring income stream so you get paid month after month. The problem most marketers have is they overthink the process.

They worry about the best member management script, what type of site to build, what template to use, how to protect the content and various other things. And it all adds up to seem like such an overwhelming task that they often don't get started, instead thinking they'll need to spend more time figuring out the "best" options.

In this report, we're going to go back to the basics. Forget all the fancy plugins, whether you should use WordPress or a static site, what template to choose and all that stuff. We're going to look at a simple system that with a little bit of effort could result in your new membership site being up and running - and taking orders - in as little as 48 hours.

Let's jump right in.

Niche / Market Selection

The first thing you're going to want to determine, before you even start thinking about registering domains, setting up delivery pages or any other such things, is what niche you want to target.

Some people have real trouble coming up with ideas for niches while others have so many that they can't decide on just one. Whether you fit into one of these groups or somewhere in between, you need to make sure that you're analyzing your niche ideas effectively. Membership sites do present a little different problem than other types of sites like those built for affiliate offers or Adsense.

The main thing you need to determine is whether or not people are interested in getting ongoing information about the niche. There may be plenty of interest in the topic, but if the market is satisfied once they have their solution and don't need anything further, it's going to be tough to sell people on joining a membership for it.

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Let's use buying a house as an example - buying a home that is, not investment property. If someone is in the market for a new home, they're going to be super interested in information about how to find the right house, how to get the best deal and so on. But once they buy a house, that interest is going to dry right up.

If you offered a membership about how to buy a home, you might be able to get a lot of people to sign up, but not many of them are going to stick around after they buy a house. This type of topic would be better suited to a one-time purchase of an infoproduct.

Now, you could get better results by changing it up slightly. Instead of focusing on buying a house, you could focus on home ownership. Buying a house could be one component, but things like home improvements, financing, insurance and various other things could be added as future content and that might have a much better member retention rate.

Give your niche selection some thought to make sure it's something that people will have a need for over time. That doesn't mean you have to come up with a topic that has a never-ending supply of information, however.

Fixed-Term Memberships

One of the easiest types of memberships to set up - and the one we're going to cover in the rest of this report - is a "fixed-term" membership or FTM. This simply means a membership that has a fixed length - 3, 6 or 12 months, for example.

When you select your niche, it can be a topic that has a finite amount of interest and/or information. Just plan your membership to run for that length of time. If it reasonably takes three months to cover the information, with one lesson per week, plan for a 3-month term. If it takes six months to cover everything, set it up for 6 months.

Making this decision up-front has two big benefits:

1. You know exactly how much content you'll need to produce. You won't have to worry about running out of ideas after the end of month three, because you can outline your content ahead of time, and only run the membership for as long as it takes to cover everything in your outline.

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2. Your members know exactly how long they're signing up for, which often helps to improve your retention rate. They aren't going to be paying indefinitely, so they will stick around for the fixed term to get all the information you're providing.

If you get to the end of the term and realize there's more to cover, or your members are asking for more information, you can always create a "202" level or advanced membership that picks up from there.

Once you have your niche selected, and you've outlined your content so you know how long your FTM is going to run, it's time to start setting it up to accept members.

Getting Ready To Accept Members

The first step to being ready to accept new members is to set up your website. If you've set up any other types of websites, the process is really no different:

1. Find and register a domain
2. Set up your web hosting
3. Set up your site
4. Connect your site with a payment processor like Paypal or Clickbank
5. Start promoting

The first two steps are pretty basic and we're not going to get into detail in this report. If you're not familiar with how to register a domain and connect it with web hosting, there are plenty of resources that can help you with that. Most domain registrars, such as GoDaddy and Namecheap can help you through this process.

Setting up your site is where the "rubber hits the road" so let's look at some of the important steps in this process.

Sign Up For An Autoresponder

Your fixed-term membership is going to be managed through an autoresponder service like Aweber or Mailchimp. When a new member joins, they're going to be taken to a customer capture page, where they can enter their name and email to sign up for the members' email list.

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Each new lesson, or each content update is going to get sent to them by email, via your autoresponder. The big advantage this gives you is that you don't have to manage the content or their access to it. Once you set it up the first time, it pretty much runs itself.

No matter when someone joins, they start on the first email, and receive each update on a pre-scheduled basis. Incidentally, this is another big advantage of a fixed-term membership. If you choose a good niche, one that is "evergreen" and the information doesn't change much over time, you can earn recurring income for months or years to come without any additional work on your part.

To manage all this, you will need to sign up with an autoresponder service. Our recommended services are Aweber.com and Mailchimp.com.

Aweber is probably the most effective, but it does have a monthly fee associated with it. It starts at $19.95 a month at the time of this writing, so it's not expensive, but if you're starting on a shoestring budget Mailchimp offers a free account for up to 2,000 leads and 12,000 monthly emails. By the time you reach those limits, you should be making plenty of money to upgrade to a paid service.

Just keep in mind that it's not that easy to switch from one service to another, so make sure you do your research first. Choose the best option for long-term growth, not just where you are today.

Write Sales Page

Copywriting is a skill that can take years to learn well. Many people are intimidated by that and feel like they aren't able to write a sales page that will convert browsers into customers.

Here's the thing - a basic sales page that is live on your site is infinitely better than the one that you're "working on" but isn't actually live.

Don't feel like you have to know how to "write copy" before you can write a sales page. If you're not sure where to start, spend a bit of time reading some of the sales pages that probably come through your inbox every day. But read them from the perspective of learning how they are structured, not whether the product they're selling is something you should buy.

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When you find a sales page that convinces you that the product is worth buying, you can model yours after it. Don't copy it, just use a similar structure and flow in your own.

Make a list of your target audience's biggest problems and the benefits your membership offers them - in other words, how it will solve their problems. If you give people a convincing reason to join, that's going to be a lot more effective than having the "perfect" sales page.

And keep this in mind - if your first shot at a sales page is awful, it can only get better. Over time you can tweak it and test new things, and maybe even pay a "real" copywriter to improve it for you once you start earning some profit from your site.

You can use your content outline to come up with the actual benefits you're going to offer your members. It isn't necessary to have the content written - you can write your sales page based on what you plan to include. Plus, writing the sales copy before the content can even help in some cases, by helping to clarify exactly what you're going to provide to your members before you start creating the content.

Set Up Your Payment Processor

The next step is to set up your payment processor and put an actual "buy" button on the sales page so people can join your membership. There are several options for payment processing that range from zero set up fees to $50 or so to get up and running.

The option that many people use when they're first getting started is Paypal. Paypal supports recurring billing and you can set up a fixed-term subscription with them. So you charge $x.xx to start and $x.xx per month for a set number of months. Paypal will take their fees out of the payments you receive from your members, but that's the only cost associated with it - you don't have to pay to set up your account in the first place.

Payment processors like Clickbank and e-Junkie are another option. These services have set up fees associated with them, so you'll have to spend a little bit up front to get your membership up and running. But the big advantage they offer is built-in affiliate programs.

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You can have other people promoting your membership and you don't have to worry about managing all the commission payments and other things that go along with running your own affiliate program. You can leave it all up to the marketplace.

Like we've already discussed with autoresponders, make sure you choose a payment method with a long-term view in mind. If you start with one, say Paypal, and then move to another one when you outgrow it or want the additional features, you're going to have to do one of two things:

1. Keep both systems in place and manage two different member databases
2. Try to move the members from the old system to the new one

In most cases, convincing people to change systems is difficult, so you're usually best to go with the first option. At least with a fixed-term membership, you'll only have to manage that "legacy" system until the last member works their way through the term of their subscription.

Setup Your Member Capture System

Once people join your membership, you need to have a way to get them signed up for the members' email list and deliver their first module. The best way to do this is to create a page with a standard opt-in box that will get them subscribed to the members' autoresponder series.

Use this page as the landing page after their payment is processed. Make it very clear on that page that they need to sign up for the email list in order to receive all the future content.

Whether or not you use a double opt-in for this list is up to you, but it's generally best not to. If they have to confirm their subscription, it adds another layer of complexity to the process where something could go wrong. They've already paid you after making the conscious decision to sign up, so there shouldn't be any problems with spam complaints or anything else that could cause problems with your autoresponder service.

Once they opt into the email list, forward them directly to the download page for the initial content they receive. Send a link via email as well, just to be safe - sometimes things don't go as expected and you want to do as much as you can to ensure they have a smooth experience when they first sign up.

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They'll be happier with their decision and you'll have fewer customer service issues to deal with.

As for downloading future content, the easiest way to manage this is to create a download page for each module and send a link to it with your autoresponder emails. You could just link directly to a PDF download or some other file, if that's how you deliver your content, but the problem with this is that it can raise red flags with some spam filters or even internet security software.

Rather than sending direct download links, link out to a page that has the download links on it.

This also lets you protect your content somewhat, so it won't easily get shared around with non-members. There are basically three levels of protection that you might want to implement:

1. Robots meta tag
2. Random filenames
3. Password protection

The first two should always be used because they really don't affect your members at all. Always use the robots meta tag to stop the search engines from indexing your download pages. You don't want non-members to be able to find your paid content with a simple search.

Here is the code you should use:

```
<meta name="robots" content="noindex, nofollow">
```

This will stop the search engines from indexing the page as well as following any links on it (which could result in the actual downloadable files getting indexed).

Random filenames refers to the names of the download page for each lesson. If you were to name the pages like this…

- lesson1-download.html
- lesson2-download.html
- lesson3-download.html
- etc.

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…it wouldn't be too hard for people to figure that out after two or three updates. They could just cancel their membership and access everything by guessing the page names.

Instead, make every page name unique in some way so there's no obvious pattern to it:

- lesson1-dload.html
- lsn2-Dnload.html
- Week3-Downloads.html
- etc.

Password protection is another layer of security but it does mean your members will have to know the login information in order to download the content. You can include this in the email that gets sent out to them, but just understand that inevitably you'll have to answer some support requests from people who lose the email, are trying to access it from another computer or various other things that might come up.

Scheduling Your Content

The nice thing about a fixed-term membership is that you can go live with it before you have all your content created. In fact, all you really need is the first module when you go live - as long as you get the next one queued up before the first member is scheduled to receive it, everything will be seamless to your members.

This is how you can have a site up and running in 48 hours - by creating the first lesson or two and starting to take on new members while you continue creating future content.

That's not to say you can start a membership without having your content mapped out, at least to some degree. If you launch something today with only a week or two of updates planned out, you could be in for a rough time if it turns out to be harder than you expect to continue creating content.

This is where creating an outline at the beginning will really help.

Ideally, you want to get 5 to 10 modules ready as quickly as possible, so you've got a bit of a buffer in case of anything unexpected. If you get sick for a few days

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or a sudden emergency comes up that takes all your time, you won't be under the gun to get the next content module written and queued up.

The most effective way to handle content creation is to do it in batches. Spend a week getting five modules created, for example. Queue them up and you can work on other things until it's time to create the next batch.

As long as you're always a step ahead of the earliest members, they won't know the difference.

Test It

Once everything is in place and ready to start accepting members, the last step before "going live" is to test the process from start to finish.

- ❑ Read your sales page again and make sure there aren't any glaring errors, typos, etc.
- ❑ Go through the order process yourself, or have a friend go through it for you. Make sure everything goes smoothly and you wind up on the customer capture page after the sale is processed.
- ❑ Opt into the members' email list and make sure you are redirected to the download page, and the welcome email arrives as it should.
- ❑ Test the download link for the first content module and make sure it works the way it should, whether it's a video, audio, PDF or zip file with multiple formats inside it.

Weird glitches will happen once in a while, and you can't eliminate them entirely but testing the process yourself before going live will help to ensure that you haven't made any errors when setting it up that are going to affect everyone who joins.

Spending a little more time testing things up front can save you a lot of time having to deal with customer service questions later on.

Once everything is tested and working, you're ready to start promoting your new membership and hopefully getting some new members!

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