

# DISCOVERING Your Ideal Membership Site Model



**30 Days to Your Own  
Money-Making Membership Site**

*Presented by Marty Marsh*

# Lesson 1

## Discovering Your Ideal Membership Site Model



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# Lesson One: Finding Your Ideal Membership Site Model

**R**unning a membership site is one of the most proven ways to cement yourself firmly at the top of your niche and create a steady, repeating stream of income. You can support and bolster your Membership Site with your other marketing efforts, and vice versa. A Membership Site makes a wonderful core around which to revolve your business.

The key to succeeding is very simple, as any of the top Membership Site owners will readily admit: It's all in the research and planning stage. Skimp on that, and you're playing Russian roulette with your dreams and goals.

This lesson will help you systematically brainstorm, research and plan your ideal Membership Site model.

(The word "model" can apply to two areas — the **type** of Membership Site you decide to set up, and the **technical format** in which you decide to install it. In our next lesson we'll talk about the technical stuff but, for now, let's settle on the type of Membership Site you want to work with first.)

At the end of the lesson, there will be a short assignment. Put the assignment to work for you, and you'll be a firm step closer to making your membership site dream a reality.

## **Step One: Brainstorming Your Ideal Membership Model**

Before you can decide which format is going to work best, you need to know what types of membership sites are out there.

Let's review seven of the most common models and bear in mind that any of these models will stand alone, of course, but you may find that you want to offer some kind of combination of these models.

Here they are, ranked roughly in order of difficulty, with the simplest model first:

### 1. Subscription Newsletter

Yes, this ranks as a Membership Site, providing it is an entity in its own right, and not just something you mail. The big difference is that your member ***needs to visit your site or a download page*** to access or download their monthly newsletter. In exchange for their monthly fee, through your downloads you grant them private access to your high value insider tips, information or instruction not normally found on the net.

***Advantages:*** Minimal interaction — all you have to do is focus on providing the content and ensure that it packs enough heat to make your members thank their lucky stars they signed up as they look forward to the next one (while they're stampeding to put your tips into practice).

***Disadvantages:*** The lack of actual interaction creates less loyalty than with the sort of Membership Site model where access to you is the sweet prize in the piñata. Plus, if your information isn't unique enough (I.E.: "priceless"), it may not be enough to hold them. (Your goal is to have your members saying, at the end of every issue: "I'm **so** glad I signed up for this!")

***Tips:*** The best time to offer your paid Newsletter **occurs immediately after customers have made a purchase from you**. This positions you perfectly to say: "Hey, look. You can have more of this wonderful information and for an incredibly low monthly investment too!"

This type of Membership Site also makes a wonderful downsell for pre-qualified prospects who really want to join your Exclusive Platinum Forum but can't afford it, as well as for those who *can* afford it but for some reason are timid about committing straight away to a larger monthly fee. It gives a good sampling of "try before you buy".

Point out to those who can't afford it that by choosing your high-value but low-cost weekly or monthly newsletter, they are, in fact, availing themselves of

your personal mentorship — and that when your high value content has helped them to a better position financially, they can “graduate” to your Platinum Forum or Mentorship Membership Site.

## **2. Service Based Membership Site**

With this model, you provide a regular, pre-specified output of your specialized services in exchange for a monthly fee.

For example, if you’re a writer, you can provide monthly PLR; if you’re a graphic designer, provide a monthly package of marketing graphics (WordPress Themes, eBook cover blanks, headers, buttons, etc.); if your specialty is audio equipment, you can provide a monthly package of high-quality sound clips. And so forth.

***Advantages:*** Again, minimal interaction... especially when you point out that your members are receiving your high value services for a fraction of your normal commissioned cost.

***Disadvantages:*** You have to come up with fresh content that isn’t repetitive month after month. If your services have a finite range (i.e. there are only so many blank eBook covers your Members could possibly need) this can make for a shorter Membership term before cancellation — but even if that happens, your ex-members often return solely to you for the type of services you offer when they’re becoming successful, to commission high ticket, one-on-one work. (You’ve set yourself up in their minds as being their best choice for that type of service, creating gratitude and loyalty with your monthly “club”.)

***Tips:*** Give your members incentive to keep coming back. If your services include content, always be one step ahead of them with the next “theme” (and that doesn’t just mean ‘WordPress Theme’). For example, if your niche is Internet marketing, predict hot new trends for them and show them how to be ahead of the herd.

## **3. Content Based Membership Site**

Rather than output such as graphics or sound clips your members can use, this

type of Membership Site model focuses on providing information. It's not quite a teaching site, and doesn't provide material they can re-sell or use on their own products: Instead, what this site model does offer is specialized, exclusive knowledge.

***Advantages:*** Many content site owners rely heavily on outsourcing to create the amount of content needed, and actually cite not having to create the content themselves as an advantage that makes for an automatic-pilot business. If you do outsource content creation, you will want to edit the material when it comes back to you for proper spelling, grammar and punctuation.

***Disadvantages:*** You have to constantly come up with fresh, original content and a fairly heavy load of it, too. They're not going to stay subscribed for one simple report.

And if you're on a shoestring budget and can't afford to outsource, you may find that creating that much original content is too difficult to keep up with month after month.

***Tips:*** Multimedia content should be considered, as well as written content. Present your content, not just in the learning style you've identified as predominant for your niche, but in multiple learning styles:

- MP3 files
- Transcripts of MP3s and interviews
- Videos
- Exclusive webinars

Reality: Outsourcing is usually a must, for this type of site.

#### **4. Teaching Blog Membership Site**

If you have a strong area of specialized expertise, then this Membership Site model may be tailor-made for you! With this model, you provide daily, weekly or monthly content in the format of lessons, with a different topic within your subject for each post.

***Advantages:*** The blog format is very easy to manage — providing you set it up to allow private member access from the beginning and integrate it with a payment provider. (We'll be talking more about payment provider integration in "Lesson Two: Finding your Ideal Format".)

You can "train" your members to ask questions through the comments section. Since the comments are public to other members, this actually cuts down on people sending you long private emails stuffed with too much personal detail or complaint — they tend to get to the point much more quickly (and stay on topic).

***Disadvantages:*** Providing daily content can be more nerve-wracking than weekly or monthly content... but it doesn't have to be! Think of it this way: What you are really doing is no more than you probably do right now with your own existing blogs — pre-loading posts for a week, two weeks, or a month at a time. Each post is pre-scheduled and then released to members by your WordPress Dashboard. As long as you've pre-populated your month with all the lessons, you don't have to do anything else until the next batch is scheduled for upload!

***Tips:*** You can consider increasing the "stickiness" by adding a private forum and encouraging your members to help each other through that vehicle, when they want to talk about more issues than just the daily, weekly or monthly lessons. (You will have to either hire moderators or be prepared to keep an eye on it yourself, after setting up some parameters.)

Consider a ***daily*** content model, if your information processing "flow" allows it. Accessing the daily, bite-sized but complete micro-lesson not only feels more manageable to members already suffering generally from online learning overwhelm, it also ingrains the habit of spending every day with you much more deeply. People "can't wait" for the next lesson and this positive feeling of activity does tend to cut down on the cancellation/refund rate.

The whole key to success with this model is to make sure the content is something your members are desperate to learn more about.

## 5. Mentoring/Coaching Membership Site

This is a great model for attracting goal-based members who are focused on a specific objective. If you have a particular skill you can share, or you have actually achieved the goal your members are still striving towards, seriously consider the Mentorship model.

**Advantages:** If you possess strong experience or accreditation in a particular area this one should be a natural for you. And by ‘accreditation’, that doesn’t necessarily mean “degrees”. If you’ve built up solid, working experience you can prove at the drop of a hat, or a good reputation in your niche, you’re ready to coach or mentor.

**Disadvantages:** You need to be able to set clear boundaries and define exactly how much interaction you will provide — and when. While you naturally want to delight your members with hands-on feedback and assistance, you need to be aware of the dangers of reactivity and rescuing; as well as being able to decide what you’re going to do about people who go off on tangents and require unnecessary “hand-holding”.

Also, the more involved and interactive you are, the more you may need to limit the size of your membership. This doesn’t have to be a drawback, however, because a genuinely exclusive, limited membership means significantly higher ticket prices.

**Tips:** Compulsively “needy” members can often be brought gently back to earth when you point them to your more expensive option. (“These tips should help, Daniel, but if you find you need more in-depth, one-on-one assistance, you may be happier with my Platinum coaching Lifetime Membership... \$2,497.00. It will provide you with...”)

Having different levels of mentorship allows you to make sure you are adequately compensated for those needing or wanting more interaction and content.

Mentoring options added to such models as Newsletter Membership Sites or Content Membership Sites make a logical and often-appreciated upsell.

## 6. Mastermind Forum Membership Site

This forum or message board model is often added to already-successful Membership Sites as a natural offshoot and overflow where active core members want to compare notes, ask each other for feedback or opinions and discuss common niche ventures.

***Advantages:*** Members quickly begin to look to other members for feedback and answers, rather than expecting constant one-on-one interaction from you on every single issue. This group is also focused on and serious about your niche, and they're keen to keep expanding their knowledge and competence. The biggest success you will ever have — and something that will boost your credibility ahead of all other techniques — is to help them succeed.

***Disadvantages:*** If not carefully set up, with common-sense rules and regular moderation, the forum can quickly degenerate into cliques and factions warring with each other. However, if you set it up right, you will prevent 97% of this sort of mayhem before you ever open it up.

***Tips:*** The super-strong "core" group that always seems to emerge in such forums can later be invited into your "Elite" group. In their eyes, the higher monthly subscription fee they'll pay is often outweighed by the status and prestige of being a member of your inner circle.

Also consider "grandfathering" members who loyally stay with you — this keeps them active in your forum to continue helping it run smoothly, as well as investing the forum with the credibility of their success. (Lifetime Memberships after 6 months are also another incentive — and this has factored in many a successful Membership Site owner's strategy for retaining those about to cancel.)

## 7. Social Facilitator Membership Sites

This model allows you to help connect people in a particular social group with like-minded individuals with the same hobby or interest (for example, gardening sites, dating sites). While the odd eBook or guide definitely does come

down the pipe, the focus is on the socializing, with many of these special-interest members getting together offline.

***Advantages:*** You have a ready-made source of resources — your members themselves. All you basically have to do is introduce them, and keep them on your site by providing common material all can access, as well as a highly-enjoyable place to hang out.

***Disadvantages:*** Social networks have carved a serious notch in social Membership Site clientele, but if you know how to offer the right incentives, it's still a viable model.

***Tips:*** To take off with a Social Membership site you need two ingredients: Exceptional content or connections that are perfectly targeted to your members... and high credibility. People sign up for a paid Social Membership site for the security, the feeling that they are safe letting their hair down and indulging in their favorite activities — whether that is learning how to create successful dates or learning the secrets of creating a new hybrid tea rose.



If you were to delve further into researching Membership Sites, you would discover two common facts:

- 1.** Most successful online entrepreneurs end up with multiple Membership Sites
- 2.** Many successful Membership Sites combine more than one of the above seven marketing models

Membership Sites **can be tailored** to almost any way of thinking, learning, operating.

Membership Sites **can grow with you** (as well as with your members).

Even if you're not planning to make your Membership Site your business core, Membership Sites are ideal add-ons to boost your business success. They need to be considered seriously as part of your long-term planning.

## **When Should You Start a Membership Site?**

You can start one, of course, whenever you like. Position and promote it properly, and it will take off. However, there are some **concrete clues** that will indicate that your people are ready and ripe for this business model... and that, if YOU don't provide it, they'll most likely be off somewhere else to get that need met.

Here's what you should be on the watch for...

### **10 Ways to Know Your Subscribers are Ripe for a Membership Site**

- 1.** They're asking focused questions
- 2.** You're hearing the same questions from more than one member
- 3.** Dealing with your email is taking more time than it used to
- 4.** You're inexplicably losing subscribers (and you know you've perfected every element of your business possible)
- 5.** You're seeing subscribers provide specific and detailed answers to other subscribers in your blog comments
- 6.** Your blog comment section is highly and consistently active
- 7.** Your subscribers are asking you for more material, especially when they go on tangents to your main topic
- 8.** You have more than 100 subscribers
- 9.** Your subscribers are forming their own niche groups
- 10.** You are already coaching or mentoring... or being asked if you would consider coaching or mentoring

If you have been able to say "yes" to more than two of the above points, your subscribers are ripe for a Membership Site. More than four and you're missing opportunities!

If you answered “yes” to #5 and #6, you are perfectly positioned for a forum or Mastermind Membership Site model.

If you answered “yes” to #9, you’re way overdue on creating your first Membership Site!

### **How to Make the Most of Your Assets**

It’s time to take stock of your assets, and we’re not just talking budget, but also:

- Interests
- Opportunities
- Skills
- Personality
- Style.

After we’ve done that, we’ll analyze your subscribers to see how well your assets align to their needs and communication preferences.

Deciding on your budget will be your easiest task. How much business capital do you have to work with? Can you run a Membership Site with no working capital at all?

Unlike many other aspects of online marketing, you probably can’t really plunge into a Membership Site venture with less than about \$300 US available for start-up — and that’s assuming you already have an Autoresponder subscription and Payment Processor (even if the latter is simply PayPal).

You can run a successful Membership Site using Clickbank, but even so, that’s a minimum of \$50 for your one-time Clickbank signup as a seller plus any applicable fees per sale.

So, no. **Unless you’re producing a simple monthly Subscription Newsletter**, you will need at least a small amount of capital to get started; and at least \$300 to get started in a way that won’t cause you extra work and hassle further down the road.

We'll be talking more about set up requirements in "Lesson Two: Finding Your Ideal Format", but for now, let's continue counting your other assets...

What aspects of your current niche or niche business do you enjoy the most? Why? What do you find easiest to deal with, in your current niche?

Taking the time to question yourself and analyze your answers can give you valuable clues on where to focus.

- Are you great on the techie side, but not so good with "people" skills?
- Do you love helping people, and find that you spend far too much time answering questions?
- Does interacting one on one irritate and annoy you?
- Are you shy? Outgoing? Impatient? Patient?
- Do you spend hours on forums, or is Twitter about all the interaction you can handle?
- Do you love writing content? Hate it? Find it terrifying?
- In which areas do you suffer from procrastination?

Asking yourself questions and analyzing your answers is a necessary start to understanding and deciding which Membership Site model will work the best for you.

I know you've heard it said, time and time again, not to focus on yourself, but instead, focus on your subscribers. It's true you have to analyze and research them thoroughly... but it's also a mistake to gloss over your own attributes and needs.

One last "test"...

You've read over the previous seven basic Membership Site models. Now skim over the list on the next page and stop at the end of each line. Pay attention to the feeling in your body, particularly within your trunk core. When you read the name of each model, how does it make you feel? Excited? Tense? Drained? Afraid? Impatient?

- 1. Subscription Newsletter Membership Site**
- 2. Service Based Membership Site**
- 3. Content Based Membership Site**
- 4. Teaching Blog Membership Site**
- 5. Mentorship/Coaching Membership Site**
- 6. Mastermind Forum Membership Site**
- 7. Social Facilitator Membership Site**

Paying literal attention to your “gut” feelings — your intuition — can help you tune in to how well a model is likely to sustain your interest.

Understand yourself first, and you will better understand your subscribers. After all, you’re both passionate members of the same niche!

### **Assessing Your Skills**

You don’t need to be an expert in every area of Membership Site management. In fact, assessing your skills will help you understand which areas you need to outsource or stay away from.

For example, if you’re a shy type who finds interacting with people nerve-racking in the extreme, you most likely won’t be attracted to a Social Facilitator Membership Site. If you’re a true techie, focused on the problems not on the people, a Teaching Blog Membership Site may appeal more to you.

If people naturally come to you with all their problems and frequently thank you for solving them, the Mentorship/Coaching Model is not only ideal for you but probably overdue. If you have a strong following who consistently leave comment after comment on your blog (frequently getting into disagreements), you’re over-ripe for some type of Forum added to your marketing portfolio.

If “simpler is better” describes you, producing a paid monthly Subscription Newsletter will most likely be your best bet.

But will that work for your subscribers?

## Identifying Your Subscribers

Once you've identified what will work for you and what you're most interested in, let's take a look at your subscribers.

If you have zero subscribers, it's probably not the time to start any sort of Membership Site unless you're already a bona-fide celebrity in your niche. If you really want to go for it, it's not impossible: However, thorough research, testing, shrewd promotion and targeted positioning will be key. (But that goes for any membership site, too!)

Identifying a lucrative niche is something you most likely have already done, and you probably already know all the traditional methods for discovering one:

- Google Adwords – keyword tool research
- Looking at competitor statistics, using Alexa and Quantcast
- Searching paying markets such as magazine.com and amazon.com to see what is selling
- Checking out Google Trends
- Making sure your keyword doesn't bring more than 100,000 Google search result returns (any more than that and your niche is too broad; you'll need to narrow your focus a bit.)
- Making sure your keyword doesn't return any less than 9,000 results

Add to those, two additional steps: Identifying...

1. Who would pay to join a membership site in your niche
2. What type of membership site would suit them best (we know by now what works for you... but is it ideal for your potential market?)

Your most essential step in achieving these goals will be one you cannot afford to skip — surveying your potential members.

But don't worry — this week's assignment will help you do just that!

## Surveying Your Market

You should already have a good idea of where your potential members like to hang out, so make sure you start trying to reach them in these areas. If your niche members enjoy chatting on Facebook, take out a Facebook ad and/or use a Facebook app like Poll Daddy to create your survey. If you have the budget for it, you can even take out a limited-time PPC (pay per click) ad to drive people to your survey, too.

Don't just stop at one area of approach: Cover every place you think potential members might hang out.

Create a survey using a free survey site such as , then invite your target potential members to participate via every method you know might reach them, including:

- Existing forums (check the guidelines and rules before posting!)
- Your own email list
- Facebook
- Twitter
- MySpace
- Yahoo Groups
- Other social networks
- Blogs (especially your own)
- PPC or Facebook Ads
- Ezine Ads (an inexpensive but highly responsive resource!)

If you have affiliates, get them to help you. If you think sharing a Membership Site would be to both your members' advantage and make both of you money, then approach potential joint venture (JV) partners about joining your venture.

Don't be afraid to be up front with your target members about your interest in them. Your survey should ask direct questions such as...

1. What problems are you having that you think a Membership Site might help you solve?

2. Do you prefer video content?\_\_\_ MP3?\_\_\_ Lessons?\_\_\_ A super-insider newsletter?
3. Is there anything you dislike about Membership Sites that you would love to see addressed?
4. What is the one thing that puts you off Membership Sites the most?
5. What three features or benefits would you think are worth paying a Membership fee?
6. Would you be interested in a special "Members Only" area?
7. How much would you be willing to pay for information about \_\_\_\_\_?

These questions are just general guidelines to give you an idea of what and how to ask. Do tailor your questions to your niche: The more specific you can make them, the better!

Some tips about creating surveys:

- Always try to end the survey on a positive note.
- Do offer multiple choice, radio button questions (they're easy to answer quickly).
- Try to really focus your questions to your ten most important questions. (Any more than ten, and not only do people get impatient, but it's easy to start repeating variations of your earlier questions).
- Include a freestyle question that allows them to share their thoughts with you. Often, this is where you get the most accurate information.
- Finish your questionnaire with a call to action. ("If you'd like more information or to be one of the first twenty to win a free trial membership, leave your first name and email address in the box below..").
- Offer a coupon or other incentive for people's time — and let them know you will greatly appreciate their response!
- Send a thank you letter and an unannounced gift (free report, free checklist, etc.) to those who responded with their email address. Use double opt-in, and let them know they're actually signing up for your list.

Giving out limited free trial memberships to your niche or list members is a great way to test your Membership Site out first. You could offer these trial memberships to core members of any mastermind group you belong to (making sure group guidelines and protocols are observed, of course).

**One last point:** Do make sure you let people know that the number of free “founder” memberships is limited — and cut them off when you reach the number you’ve publicly stated.

Use feedback from your “founder” group to tweak your Membership Site; then use their testimonials and affiliate services to help you promote your polished ready-to-launch version.

If you have promoted your survey diligently and wisely, but you are getting no to minimal response, you may wish to rethink your target market and try for another niche or another section of your niche. (And to put that into perspective, an 18% survey response is considered amazingly strong.)

Do the following assignments; don’t skip any of them, so you will be ready for “Lesson Two: Finding Your Ideal Format”...

**Your Weekly Action Assignment: Testing the Waters**

- 1.** Study the Membership Site models and think about what appeals to you enough to sustain your interest and enthusiasm over the long term... and what would best appeal to your members.
- 2.** Google “Paid Membership Sites”, using search terms such as “Membership Sites”, “Subscription Newsletters”, “Paid Forum”, etc.
- 3.** Analyze your skills and strengths, as well as your weaknesses.
- 4.** Decide how you are going to make the most of these. (For example, will you outsource your weak areas? Avoid formats that would force you to address them? Hire an assistant? Go with a format you feel comfortable with, doing most, if not all, of the work yourself?)
- 5.** Create a 10 question survey for your potential target members.

6. Sign up for a free account with Survey Monkey (or any other favorite survey provider site) and upload or input your survey.
7. If you feel comfortable at this stage, send out the survey to an initial test group you've identified. Then promote the survey to a wider audience.

Be sure to use the Checklist provided for this lesson to make sure you have covered all your bases. The checklist will help you focus and apply the material you've just learned in this lesson.

**In Lesson 2, we'll cover how to host your Membership Site, finding a content delivery and management system that works for you.**

## About Marty Marsh...

**M**arty Marsh, Soul Proprietor, has been happily and successfully self-employed since 1995 helping his clients discover their business and marketing strengths and then helping them apply those strengths toward creating a business that brings them both joy and profits.



Marty's expertise in the world of small business marketing is balanced by his ability to connect deeply with people on an intuitive level, so that he can assist his clients and students in deliberately creating the kind of business they want.

His marketing students and coaching clients say he has a gentle, yet persuasive manner when it comes to helping them learn and implement new concepts and ideas. As a business and marketing coach, Marty has the ability to recognize areas that need improvement and to capitalize on the strengths of solo-entrepreneurs so they can spend more time doing what they love to do. Marty's students see immediate results by applying the principles they learn.

As a long time small business owner, he knows first-hand the trials and tribulations, joys and triumphs of running a successful business. A life-long student, Marty has an insatiable appetite for learning as much as he can in this lifetime — and not just about marketing. He says he teaches the things he most needs to learn about himself.

Marty calls himself — and his clients — soul proprietors because they approach business as a means for helping people solve their problems and believe that marketing is all about creating relationships with real people and should be done with a high level of integrity and honesty.

For Marty, being self-employed is all about the freedom to create a livelihood by helping people solve their marketing and business problems and allows him to live his life from an RV while traveling around the United States.

You can learn more about Marty and how he can help you to discover your own business and marketing strengths at [martymarsh.com](http://martymarsh.com).



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