

Finding Your Ideal Format

Membership Site DEVELOPMENT



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

Presented by Marty Marsh

Lesson 2

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Lesson Two: Finding Your Ideal Membership Site Format

In this lesson, we'll take several steps to help you decide on a format for your membership site. And this time, by "format", I mean the type of content management and delivery system that will work best for your particular Membership Site.

There are four basic technical formats you can use for your Membership Site:

1. Autoresponder-delivered Subscription Newsletter
2. A WordPress Subscription Blog (with Membership Site plug ins)
3. A Membership Site Script, installed on your own server
4. A Hosted Membership (a script run on your Membership Site platform host's server)

Let's take a closer look at each option, starting with the simplest...

1. Autoresponder-delivered Subscription Newsletter

REQUIREMENTS	BUDGET COST
<p>You Will Need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Autoresponder subscription • A Sales Page • A Post-payment opt-in page • Pre-loaded newsletters in your autoresponder series • An email account branded to instantly identify your product to your subscriber (E.G.: info@easyrailroader.com, easyrailroader@gmail.com) • Incredibly "priceless" content not generally available elsewhere • A strong, memorable name 	<p>Approximately \$19 a month (using a free autoresponder is possible, but not recommended)</p>

The key to your success will be in the consistent delivery of your newsletters — that’s why it’s crucial to have at least 3-6 months of content not only planned, but written and pre-loaded, ahead of time.

If you’re in an “evergreen” niche such as Model Railroad Prop Construction, this is done easily. However, if you’re in a niche that’s always in a state of flux, subject to hot trends or ever changing moods, you’ll need to be able to adapt — or completely change — your pre-written content and re-upload it periodically for new (and existing) members, based on the latest industry or niche developments.

You’ll want to avoid giving too much detail in your sales material, too, about specific upcoming subjects or topics. You’ll need to balance enticing tidbits of information with general subject matter, so that you’re able to adjust the actual content without scrapping the subject completely.

For example, “Month 3: Firefox Plugins that Save Time” is specific enough to appeal, but generic enough so that you can substitute newer and better plugins for the ones you originally planned to write about.

TIP: Research and consider offering an upsell of a hard-copy, print version of your newsletter delivered by mail. Compensate for its higher price by including bonuses such as an extra section not found in your digital newsletter and/or a branded “complimentary” binder to put all the newsletters in.

Delight members who sign up for the upsell further by letting them find index dividers already inserted for upcoming monthly content by subject or month.

The binder does require a budget for physical production and shipping — which should be built into your cost — but helps keep members subscribed. (No one wants an “incomplete” binder with only a few pages inside: It feels like an abandoned investment!)

This type of upgrade works best in **evergreen markets** where your content tends to be instructional and used repeatedly as a reference guide.

If you're confident you'll have an endless supply of new topics within your niche and new content, you can offer an **ongoing subscription**. If it's your first Membership Site or the subject has a clear beginning and end point, you might prefer to sign members up for a **fixed term** (for example, 12 monthly editions).

At the end of this term, you can either simply give them the option to renew their subscription and continue receiving your newsletters, or you can "grandfather" them into a Lifetime Membership, or you can finish this particular Membership completely and then offer them upsells to new Membership Sites or products more fitted to the expertise they've gained through the last 12 newsletters (especially if your Newsletter was designed to help them increase their income).

Again, you can adjust the Newsletter frequency to suit your schedule and your readers' needs: Monthly, bi-weekly, weekly... even daily, if you can handle that! (A great format for the latter is the "Daily Tip" format. This works particularly well for the **inspirational, personal development** or **motivational market**.)

You can also run multiple Newsletter Membership Sites to service different segments of your niche, once you've got the first one running on Autopilot and feel comfortable with the format!

So of all the Membership Site models, this is the one that comes closest to letting you run it on a shoestring: However, if you're concerned about download security or integrating certain payment processors, you may want to add a script such as DLGuard (more on that shortly).

2. WordPress Subscription Blog with Membership Site Plug Ins

Setting up your Membership Site as a blog remains one of the easiest ways to start out, especially if you're already comfortable with the ins and outs of WordPress.

You will need at least one Membership Site plug in, however, and yes, you can

set passwords and permissions for each page manually, particularly if it's a small Membership Site, and you can easily pre-populate content to be released chronologically... but a plug-in solves (among several other issues) the problem of how to handle **people joining on different days** and **progressing at different speeds**.

You don't want someone who only joined today (who is supposed to be receiving a daily lesson) to suddenly have access to all the content released for the member who joined two months ago! So your first action should be to get the aMember plug-in.

NOTE: From your Wordpress Dashboard, when logged in to your account, under Plugins in the left column, click on Add New, then type in the name "aMember" in the Search box, click Search Plugins, and it will return with a list of options for installing the plugin. Simply install as you would any other plug-in. You can do this kind of search for any plug-in you might hear about, or simply type in a keyword and see if a plug-in is available.

aMember is a basic necessity because you'll need it to help your Membership Site integrate with all your other scripts (affiliate management scripts, Help Desk scripts, additional forum access, payment processors, etc.) — something that other plug ins such as WishList reportedly miss the boat on.

The reason you may not want to use aMember as a stand-alone plug in? **It isn't capable of content protection** when you have members progressing at different speeds, with different level access permissions.

In fact, for security's sake, it's crucial to use a Membership script that doesn't depend on WordPress as its core, but is external (which eliminates most of the free plug-ins).

One other reason it's worth starting out with the aMember plug in: It will **help you retain members** by making it easy for them to use all your various member areas without having to create different log-ins and passwords for each one.

Ideally you should add a supporting plug-in such as Memberwing or Wishlist in

order to tailor content release and access to your Members' individual sign up dates and tier level (E.G.: Silver, Gold, Platinum or Lifetime memberships receiving different content access), among other tasks.

Both provide excellent customer support and video tutorials. Both provide a free trial. The plug-ins you choose will largely be dictated by the payment processor, affiliate system and Autoresponder **you currently subscribe to**, since both plug-ins integrate with certain plug-ins and not with others.

To give you a better feel for these plug-ins, check out the quick comparison overview on the next page.

As with any WordPress plug-in, installation is as simple as **dropping it into your plug ins folder** and then **activating it through your dashboard**. Of course, then you'll need to **configure** it.

aMember can be a little tricky or confusing to configure, requiring a learning curve (or the one-time services of a competent blog tech or VA), but both Memberwing and WishList are simple. (Once you've got aMember installed, however, it's reassuringly user-friendly.)

To keep your WordPress Membership Site running without a hitch, be sure to keep all your plug-ins (as well as WordPress itself) totally up to date! The three plug ins we've been examining are all fine-tuned and updated regularly and constantly by their creators, so get into the habit of logging onto your dashboard and checking for plug in updates at least every week, if you don't update content frequently.

HINT: The most common cause of sudden problems and failures on a WordPress Membership Site usually turns out to be **an outdated plug in**.

What Theme Should I Use?

Almost any theme can serve as a Membership Site, if you use the above plug-ins. The most crucial factor to keep in mind is navigation. Remember, your members really don't give a hoot how snazzy your theme is — all they want to do is access your content quickly, logically and easily.

Membership Site Plug-In Comparison

	aMember	Memberwing	Wishlist
Price	\$199.95	\$199-399, depending on options you choose and number of licenses	\$97 single license, \$297 multiple licenses
Free Trial	✓	✓	✓
Includes Theme(s)	x	x	Includes 2 Membership Site Themes with Multiple License option
Integrates with multiple scripts	x	✓	✓
iDevAffiliate	x	✓	x
Clickbank Integration	✓	✓	✓
Log in Redirection	✓	✓	x
Subscription length control	x	✓	✓
Membership Levels	Unlimited	4 Levels	Unlimited
Refund Policy	30 Days	14 Days	30 Days
Payment Processors Supported	PayPal 1Shopping Cart 2CheckOut Authorize.Net	PayPal 1Shopping Cart 2CheckOut	PayPal 1ShoppingCart QuickPayPro
Autoresponders Supported	x	Aweber MailChimp	Aweber AutoResponse Plus
Other integrations		eJunkie Paydotcom	
Sequential Content Delivery	✓	✓	Add-on, to be purchased separately
Optimized for Search Engines	x	✓	x
Use on Non-Wordpress Site	✓	x	x

Please Note: The information contained in this chart, and others, was accurate as of 7/14/11 and is subject to change. Please check the websites of each plug-in provider for their latest features and pricing.

With that in mind, stick to the simpler themes. Some of the easiest themes to manage “right out of the box” are iThemes. And recently I’ve discovered a new theme that is excellent for managing a membership site called OptimizePress. In fact, these lessons are being hosted on one of my OptimizePress sites right now.

WordPress Sales Pages

Some themes allow you to create Sales Pages within your blog; some don’t. OptimizePress integrates sales pages, squeeze pages, content delivery, and a blog. This is the reason I like it so much. It puts everything in one place and you never have to have a separate domain or subdomain for items like squeeze pages or sales pages.

If your theme is one that doesn’t easily include sales pages (that actually *look* like sales pages, that is) you may wish to check out <http://www.wp-sales-page.com>. This easy-to-use sales page creator allows you to have a sales page as part of your existing Wordpress site. This means you don’t have to create a separate domain or a subdomain. It just fits right in to your site easy-peasy.

3. A Membership Site Script, Installed On your own Server

Can you install AMember on your own server, and run it without WordPress?

Yes. You can integrate it not just with WordPress, but with Joomla too.

And, of course, when you install a script directly on your own website, the big advantage is that you’re not paying a monthly fee to a Membership Site Host.

The basic requirements for running pretty much any sort of script on your own site tend to be the same:

- Linux-based web hosting
- PHP vs. 5
- MySQL
- Server ability to run CRON jobs
- IonCube Loaders support

If you don’t know whether or not your web host supports the above, just ask

your web hosting support desk. If you do know that your system works on Linux, however, you can virtually take it for granted that you have MySQL databasing, CRON ability and IonCube loaders. (What won't work is Windows-based hosting.)

It's a good idea to talk to your web hosting support first anyway if you're planning to run a script — they are usually happy to let you know about any quirks or idiosyncrasies you need to be aware of, or any requirements you need to observe. They'll usually tell you if the script-based Membership software you're planning to use works well with their hosting.

Also check out any scripting tutorials from within your cPanel help or on your web host's main site.

Now, let's first take a look at two of the most frequently recommended, reliable options, and then we'll discuss your set up further...

EasyMember Pro

In addition to aMember, you might want to check out EasyMember Pro. It normally sells for around \$297 (can be as low as \$97 on special).

Once you've installed it, its admin log-in will remind you of log-ins you're already familiar with, like your WordPress blog or other Membership Sites you currently belong to.

Here is a quick overview of EasyMember Pro's basic features:

Able to allow both free and trial memberships	✓	
Able to integrate your existing Autoresponder	✓	
Able to allow multiple Membership levels (e.g. Bronze, Silver, Gold)	✓	
Allows payment processors PayPal, 2Checkout, Clickbank, Authorize.net	✓	
Needs separate Merchant Account with above payment processors		x
Allows Coupons	✓	

Before choosing a web host for this script, visit the EasyMember Pro FAQ page for a complete list of its idiosyncrasies and unique features.

SubHub

Although SubHub is better known for its hosted options (see #4, below), it also offers a **free website builder**, if you want to host your Membership Site on your own site (it even includes 40 site themes to choose from).

If your needs are really simple, you may wish to check this free option out.

DLGuard

This is another popular Membership Site script. It actually bills itself as “a complete sales management solution”, and its ability to handle the Membership Site format is just one of its many features. However, its overwhelming advantage is **security**. So if you’re concerned about people being able to steal your stuff, this is a good solution that will put your mind at ease.

Able to integrate your existing Autoresponder	✓	
Allows multiple Membership levels	✓	
Allows payment processor integration with PayPal, Clickbank, LinkPoint, 2Checkout, Authorize.Net, WorldPay, AlertPay, Ebay, PayDotCom, E-Gold, 1ShoppingCart, E-Bullion, Click2Sell, Mal’s E-Commerce, PagSeguro	✓	
Creates Download Page for you	✓	
Allows Coupons	✓	
Use your own custom script with it	✓	
Able to customize DLGuard Appearance	✓	
Exceptional tracking capabilities	✓	
Allows you to manage other websites remotely from one location	✓	
Allows multiple downloads from one page (E.G. additional bonuses, etc.)	✓	

No matter which script, software or plug in you choose; go with the “multiple license” option, if there is one and if you can fit it into your budget.

After all, once you’ve set up one successful membership site, you’re likely to want to add more!

4. Online-Hosted Membership Sites

If managing a Membership Site script on your own server and dealing with not only its installation but the integration of other scripts sounds like your idea of a nightmare, you do have one other option (besides the WordPress blog system and outsourcing to a programmer or VA).

And that is to pay a monthly fee to have your Membership Site hosted online by a company who will manage your content system and Membership functions for you.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to consider, before you take this step...

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up is usually done for you • User friendly, so you can customize and tailor • No "tech" hassles • Instant support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have to pay an ongoing fee every month • Some systems have limits as to the amount of content, members, emails, etc.

But let's assume your Membership Site immediately starts to make money for you: You may decide that the inconvenience of a monthly fee is far outweighed by the profits you're making and the time (and headaches) having someone else do all the behind-the-scenes techie stuff saves you.

NanaCast

This online content delivery system combines multi-functionality, incredible power and user friendliness.

If you're just firmly planning one simple Membership Site, the WordPress blog option is all you'll probably need: However, if you are planning to have multiple streams of income and systems (E.G., Membership Sites, forums, and digital products) Nanacast is ideally suited to the task.

Nanacast currently offers two levels, at \$97 and \$147 per month. (Most Membership Site owners pick the \$147 per month “Viral Premium” option.) Their Elite version is coming soon.

As they themselves like to put it: “No Programmers to hire. No scripts to install.”

SubHub (hosted)

SubHub bills itself as “a fully managed and hosted solution that includes content management, membership / subscription tools, a range of design templates, ad-serving, an online store, pay-per-view functionality, and your own forum and web stats.”

It’s among several lesser-known online content management and hosted Membership Site solutions. I mention it here because it’s particularly user-friendly, with a superbly navigable back end.

Among its advertised features.

	SubHub Pro	SubHub Max
Price	\$97 per month	\$97 per month
Free Trial	✓	n/a
Includes Themes	40 site themes included	\$997 (one-time professional design charge for custom template)
Bandwidth Allowed	15 GB	20 GB
Community Tools:		
• Forum	✓	✓
• Member profiles	✓	✓
• Member management	✓	✓
• Password protected areas	✓	✓
• Unlimited web pages and members	✓	✓
Multiple Membership levels	✓	✓
Allows automatic and recurring subscriptions	✓	✓
Payment Processor integration:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PayPal • Authorize.net • SagePay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PayPal • Authorize.net • SagePay
iDevAffiliate	✓	✓

And speaking of which...

iDevAffiliate

If you're heavily into managing your own affiliates, you can also choose to add this industry-standard, affiliate tracking software to your site.

One particular benefit it offers is "hours of video training" for your affiliates, as well as unlimited text ads, banners, text links; automatic linking codes and email links; extensive payout options (including pay per click, per lead or per sale — flat rate or percentage based); and the ability to integrate with "thousands" of other software or script products, including an impressive variety of payment processors.

Finally, this lesson on content format and management wouldn't be complete without a quick but comprehensive look at one other industry standard...

Can you run a membership site using only Clickbank? Yes, you can.

Clickbank now **allows you to add monthly subscriptions** to your payment options and, as always, it handles your affiliates, payment processing, cancellations and refunds. (You do have to provide your own affiliate resource page, if you want to make sure they have additional, custom materials such as articles written by or for you, graphics, buttons, banners, etc.)

Clickbank is ideal for simple membership sites but it does experience a higher refund rate, thanks to its own policies: And it does have **security issues** in areas such as affiliate link cloaking. Installing DLGuard is a wise precaution, if you're selling your memberships through Clickbank.

You can find more detailed information on their Recurring Billing and Subscriptions FAQ page.

Conclusion:

If you're not a "techie", don't let this section put you off. It's not here to teach you every single detail about every program or script, but to familiarize you and give you an overview on site and content set-up and management options available to you.

Follow the simple assignment below, and don't put this part off for "later". Remember, the sooner you dip your toe into this particular murky pond, the more quickly you'll find a depth where you feel, in the immortal words of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, "just right".

Your Weekly Assignment: Stepping Up the Heat

1. Look over your notes from the previous lesson's assignment. Has your decision about which model will fit you and your members changed, based on what you've read in today's lesson? If so, why? It's important to make formats fit your needs, not the other way around; and if you're feeling intimidated by script installation and site customization, remember these basic principles:

- Making and taking time to really read through tutorials and watch training videos can dispel a lot of set-up stress. Most people rush into trying out new software, and get themselves in a mess by not taking that crucial time to explore and read first.
- It's always easier than you expect, once you get started.
- There's always a hard bit, right before it gets easier, that makes a lie out of the previous statement. Ha!
- It's better to start simply than not start at all.
- It's better to start with the system you want to end up with, if you can possibly manage it, rather than change it all later.
- **You can always outsource** areas that are not your strengths

Your only other task this week is to **visit any linked sites in this lesson** that interest you, and **really explore their features, FAQs, help sections and training material**.

Talking to others who run Membership Sites and Googling feedback on the scripts or options that interest you would be a good extra level of research.

Do this, and you'll be all set and prepared for "Lesson Three: Setting your Membership Site Up – and Getting Started!"



This lesson contains a lot of technical information and you may be feeling quite overwhelmed with all the choices right now.

Relax.

If you need professional help in getting the technical aspect of your membership up and going, contact me to arrange a private consultation.

I will be happy to coach you through this decision, and can make recommendations — based on your needs — of people who can help you at rates you can afford.

Send an email to marty@martymarsh.com and put in the subject line:

Need Membership Site Technical Help

About Marty Marsh...

Marty 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.



Marty Marsh's 30 Day Membership Site is a division of
Marty Marsh Creative Enterprises
Seattle, WA USA

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