An Inspiration Guide for Membership Websites

+ BEST PRACTICES FOR LAUNCHING A MEMBERSHIP SITE
Introduction

Are you interested in launching your very own membership website? It’s a smart idea! Membership sites can be very lucrative and also provide a hub for people with similar interests.

Building a membership site could be an excellent idea during the COVID-19 pandemic as well. As more and more people are working from home or limiting their contact with others, many are turning to membership sites for networking, social interactions, and some semblance of “normal.”

In this in-depth guide, we’ll break down exactly what a membership site is, how to build one, how to find your niche and some excellent examples of membership sites that are popular today.

Membership websites can be very lucrative, whether you build sites for yourself or for clients.
What is a Membership Website?

A membership website is simply a website that utilizes content restriction, meaning that users will need to log into the site to use it and interact with other users. Specific content is usually protected behind a member login page, and in order to view this content, visitors will need to have an active membership account on the website itself.

Membership sites can have free and paid membership levels or even both. There can even be different levels of membership involved, complete with different access privileges and unique access rights.

So what’s so special about these websites? Well, the power of a membership site is in the membership itself. If your protected pages are particularly valuable or sought after by users, they will be willing to pay a membership fee to access them.

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You can easily charge users for recurring membership fees on a monthly, semi-yearly, or yearly basis. It’s simple enough, and running a membership site could be quite productive and lucrative.

The really awesome thing about membership models is that you can realistically put anything you want behind a login page. Your paywall can provide access to forums, chat rooms, educational guides, ebooks, games, and virtually any kind of content. The possibilities are limitless.
5 Reasons You Should Build a Membership Website

1. **Consistent revenue**: Memberships sites are like the gifts that keep on giving. Once you have a decent number of members, you will continue to receive income from their subscription every month.

2. **Range of applications and possibilities**: You can find a membership for unlimited amounts of services, including community support and instructional content.

3. **Opportunity to scale**: Membership sites are easy to launch with a simple foundation of members-only content, downloads, or community access. As your membership base grows, you can scale it to add more value.

4. **Loyal community**: The combination of free and paid content and the user experience leads to loyal subscribers. Members tend to stay committed to membership sites that have established trust and authority in the field. This means that you do not have to find new customers for every sales cycle or build complicated funnels.

5. **Website traffic**: With SEO, websites can be optimized to increase organic traffic. This will increase the number of website visitors and, ultimately, the number of conversions into members, without any significant effort.
Quick-Start Guide: How to Build a Membership Website in 10 Steps

Building a membership site isn’t very difficult, but it does take a little bit of time and know-how. Since 2010, we’ve been helping people build membership websites with Restrict Content Pro, so we know a thing or two about the process.

We’ll break down the basics, but be sure to check out our full step-by-step video tutorial to building a membership site for a more thorough lesson.

On a basic level, you can build a membership site by following these steps:

1. Find out your membership niche. (More on that in the next section.)
2. Consider the type of membership site you want to create. Most membership sites fall into the following types: Free-to-Paid, Paid, and Multiple Tiered Subscriptions.
3. Purchase a domain name, an SSL certificate for secure connections and transactions, and a web hosting account. We recommend a trusted hosting company like Nexcess that specializes in hosting WordPress sites. We recommend using WordPress, as it is quite simple to use once you get past the learning curve. You also don’t need to know a ton about coding or programming languages, though it may be wise to employ a freelance web designer or developer for the project.
4. Break down your core content into three sections and multiple subsections. (More on that in the next section.)

5. Integrate your website with user membership management plugin such as Restrict Content Pro. Restrict Content Pro makes it easy to build a custom membership site with multiple membership levels.

6. Utilize an aesthetically pleasing free WordPress theme. You definitely don't need to spend a bunch of money on premium themes, but that is also an option. We recommend Kadence Theme, which integrates with the Restrict Content Pro plugin, to get started.

7. Look into additional plugins to help you build your website. We recommend using Kadence Blocks, which is an excellent page builder set of WordPress blocks that makes crafting a website much easier. Kadence Blocks even comes with a design library to help you get started with your page layouts.

8. Set up your website and do beta testing to ensure everything is functioning well.

9. Launch your membership site.

10. Pick or create some free content that you can use to market your membership site. (More on that in the next section.)
Finding Your Member Niche

Finding your niche is a pretty important part of building a membership site. Your niche is essentially the market commercial sector that you have a lot of knowledge in, such as business or entertainment or fitness. It’s strongly recommended that you choose a niche that you’re an expert in, so that the content you provide for your site is valuable.

You can also break down your niche into something even more specific. There are probably a billion different health and fitness sites out there. Under that umbrella, there are probably a million vegan sites. But your specific niche can take it a step further and focus on vegan health while on a ketogenic diet. This is a very specific niche that could appeal to a lot of people, but it isn’t general enough to get lost in a sea of very similar sites.
What to Include in Your Membership Site

Your membership site should be rich with content, and that content should be divided into easy-to-navigate sections.

To start, create three different types of sections. You can whip out some notecards and a pen for this one. Now, consider all of the content you would like to offer via your membership site. If you're having trouble thinking of very specific content, think about the knowledge, expertise, and skills that you want to share with your membership base. Then, divide those ideas into three different sections. You can do this in so many ways, but it's important that the division makes sense.

Let's look at an example. Let's say you want to offer your membership base on your skills as a marketing specialist. You know a lot about leads, sales, conversions, graphic design, advertising, PPC, SEO, etc. It wouldn't make a lot of sense to separate all of these ideas into separate categories because they all fall under the same umbrella—marketing. So, you could split them up into courses instead. Course 1 could include the easier aspects of marketing, like the basic concepts and setting up social media accounts. Course 2 could include the more difficult parts of marketing, like PPC, SEO, etc., and so on.
Here are a few more ideas for how you can section off your content:

- Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced
- Forum, Chat, Blogs
- Leads, Sales, Delivering

From here, consider how you can break each of your three sections down into subsections, and subsections of those subsections, and so on.

**The Power of Free Content**

Giving away free content can reap some serious rewards. Content is king, and it provides you with the ability to build a base, keep that base, and pull in more viewers.

It may seem counterintuitive to give content away for free when you ultimately want to create a membership site when people will pay to access your valuable content. However, you can’t really convince people that your content is extremely valuable unless you give them a sample of it.

Most people aren’t interested in paying for a sample of something if they don’t even know what it is. Because of this, you’ll need to make some content available for free for marketing purposes. Free content is an excellent way to establish your brand as an industry frontrunner and expert. Plus, 45% of a business’s reputation is directly tied to what that business says—so you’ll need to say the right things with your free content.
You don’t have to make a massive volume of content free. You also shouldn’t make your most valuable content available for free, either. Think of content that will pique the interest of your target market.

Today’s consumer is much more protective of their money and more critical of the businesses they support. They’re more likely to do their research before putting money into any brand, especially a membership site. By putting free content out there that can help them, you’re establishing that you’re an expert in that specific problem and solution. You’re also connecting with your target market and making your brand appear to be more trustworthy.

When your membership site is ready to go, make sure to pick a few different types of content.
10 Excellent Examples of Membership Sites

Now it’s time for some membership site inspiration. Here are 10 excellent examples of membership sites.

1. uBloom

uBloom, founded by Flower Expert J Schwanke, provides over 600 step-by-step videos on flower-arranging. Originally designed for professional florists, now uBloom has evolved to be an educational resource for anyone that loves flowers or wants to arrange flowers.
Main Features:

As a 4th generation florist, getting access to J Schwanke's expertise on flowers is a unique opportunity. Powered by Restrict Content Pro, uBloom offers two membership options (monthly and annual) so members can access the entire uBloom premium video archive and learn at their own pace.

The uBloom membership model utilizes a great tactic of discounting the annual plan, so members get the most value for their membership. uBloom also offers free subscriptions to educators during the pandemic.
2. Training Beta

Love rock climbing? If so, Training Beta will likely be up your alley. We established earlier in this guide how important it is to find a specific niche that you’re a pro in, and this membership site is a great example of that. Launched by entrepreneur and rock-climbing enthusiast Neely Quinn, this site focuses on providing members with rock-climbing information and training via online video courses.
Main Features:

You get the best of both worlds with Training Beta. The writing is excellent and the language used is conversational and approachable, which is necessary for a membership site that seeks to educate its audience and pull in engagement.

The site has a ton of free blog content that is useful on its own, and non-membership can enjoy the unique content they provide. We’re getting very niche here—there are articles on Training Beta about very specific rock climbing scenarios, so both newbies and climbing vets will find value in that content.

The paid side of Training Beta involves training programs and coaching, which includes everything from bouldering training to injury rehab to Steve Bechtel programs. With a membership, you can access a ton of additional content like whitepages and guides in addition to courses.
3. Keto Connect

Keto can be a rough diet to take on, so it’s always helpful to have a resource available for everything related to keto, right down to community access. This is where Keto Connect comes in. This platform is dedicated to all things keto.
Main Features:

Keto Connect is a lifestyle membership site that explores everything related to keto, but it specifically focuses on free recipes, grocery guides, restaurant guides, and article-based content. You can actually get quite a lot with Keto Connect without having to pay a thing.

On the paid side of the site, you can join Keto Connect’s signature weight loss program call The Curve. This keto-based weight loss online program offers custom keto meal plans, essential training and support, practical resources, recipes, a full library of nutrition courses, ebooks, and 100% full access to exclusive Keto Connect content, updated weekly. You can also enjoy printable shopping guides, sweetener guides, and full community access and support with the Curve.
4. Pianu

Pianu’s philosophy is that absolutely anyone can learn to play the piano, and everyone deserves to have access to piano lessons. This membership site is essentially a gamified browser piano lesson platform.
**Main Features:**

Pianu offers multiple membership options, all of which are the same and based on saving money for multi-month, annual, or lifetime membership plans. With your membership, you can access all of the platform’s available courses. These courses are divided up between Beginner packs, Intermediate packs, and Advanced packs.

Pianu is a sort of “plug and play” style platform for learning to play the piano. If you have your own device, you can simply plug it into your computer to begin your lessons. Pianu also offers a virtual MIDI keyboard for members in case you lack a keyboard. With your membership, you’ll get to access hundreds of gamified song tutorials, complete piano courses, and individual tools to help you stay on track, like their badge system. It takes a lot of the guesswork out of learning the piano and presents piano education in a way that is accessible, game-like, and motivating.
5. Fizzle

Who doesn’t want to make a living doing something they love? Fizzle, a very popular membership site for entrepreneurs, focuses on helping individuals create online businesses that succeed.
Main Features:

Fizzle is a paid-only platform, and its members are able to access premium course content, group coaching webinars via live video, and a pretty active forum where members can mingle and network with one another. While Fizzle does offer some free content, most of it can be found via their social media channels and blog—not their actual website. The pricing is quite simple with only two “tiers,” one being a monthly plan and the other being a yearly plan with the same perks.

With a membership, you can access a wealth of success stories, guides, videos, courses, coaching, and more. The direct message and forum features are quite handy if you need to connect with others, especially if you’re looking for a business partner.
If you’re the type who loves to fly and travel, the pandemic probably has you feeling a bit down. Not to worry! Once the world is a little bit safer, you can use Scott’s Cheap Flights to find hidden gem fare at low prices for destinations around the globe.
Main Features:

Even if you don’t sign up for a premium account, you can access curated low-cost airfare opportunities through the platform. However, the selection is quite limited, while premium members get to enjoy the full scope of deals available.

The premium membership for Scott’s Cheap Flights include special premium-only deals, mistake fares, rare deals, and access to peak season flights. To use the premium features, you’ll need to make an account and sign up for a $49 per year membership. That’s pretty much the only open available and there are no tiers for members. However, you also get a free trial when you sign up.
7. AppSumo Plus

If you’re interested in building an ecommerce site along with a membership site, AppSumo Plus is an excellent example of how you can do this. This handy marketplace sells digital products like apps via time-sensitive countdown deals.
Main Features:

Anybody can use AppSumo and find these app deals, as the platform is public and a membership is not required for use. It’s the pinnacle of a free to paid membership model.

The more intensive fans of this platform can sign up for the AppSumo Plus membership for $99 per year, the only tier available. This membership will provide users with 10% off all AppSumo digital purchases and longer access to public deals. This is pretty handy, since the app deals are time-sensitive.

You’ll also get access to Kingsumo Giveaway Pro, a recurring email list that offers various giveaways from the site. Overall, AppSumo is an excellent example of a membership model and an e-commerce model coming together without the need to solely offer content to your members.
8. Magnetic Memory Method

Need to improve your wonky memory? Magnetic Memory Method may be able to help—whether or not you want to sign up for their premium membership program.
Main Features:

This website created by Anthony Metivier offers tons of free content, plus occasional products without the need to sign up for a paid membership. From a valuable blog to free videos to free courses to an entertaining podcast, the free perks are great.

This is a classic example of a membership site that invests in the free content it produces to pull in new members. The membership program is a successful one that targets a very specific niche with a powerful sales funnel and membership model.
9. Reflexion Yoga

People who enjoy yoga tend to spend quite a bit of time finding the best possible programs available. This is especially so in terms of the pandemic, and now yoga enthusiasts are scouring the new for video-based at-home yoga instruction. Reflexion Yoga is one popular platform that people are using.
Main Features:

Like many of the membership sites we’ve explored in this guide, Reflexion Yoga has two different payment plans—one for monthly subscribers, and another for yearly subscribers at a slight discount. Both plans offer full access to Reflexion Yoga’s online classes, programs, and exclusive content.

Members can enjoy unlimited streaming of yoga videos from any device with an internet connection, as well as more class variety in terms of one’s experience level and fitness goals. Plus, there’s no commitment, which is very attractive to potential members—the pricing plans are pay-as-you-go and can be canceled whenever the user chooses.
10. Pencil Kings

Some creative types make a career for themselves in the art world, while others shy away from the field and opt for something else. For the latter, Pencil Kings provides artist training and workshops in order to help artists rekindle their love for creating—without the need to go to an expensive university.
Main Features:

Pencil Kings offers a monthly or yearly plan. Both plans provide access to dedicated artist success coaches, monthly challenges, intensive training, live workshops, community access, and top-tier classes. The free content they offer is also pretty good, though all of their courses are behind a paywall.
The online world is at your fingertips, and you have unlimited opportunities available. Membership sites can be helpful for everyone, from individuals to small businesses and large corporations. They allow you to have a steady stream of income and provide a sustainable model that will keep the members and revenue rolling in.

You can make a membership site your primary or secondary source of income. In any case, it will be one of the most fulfilling things you do.

As always, the first step is the hardest. We’ve outlined the steps you need to take to get your website up and running. You can even build your membership site in less than 24 hours! It’s just a matter of beginning your journey. Once you have made a commitment and gotten started, the kinks start to work themselves out.

Now that you have learned how to build a membership site, you can create your first website and start selling. The business of your dreams is just a few clicks away. Are you ready?
Lock away your exclusive content. Give access to valued members.

Get Restrict Content Pro today, a full-featured, powerful membership solution for WordPress.