EPISODE 216

Why Courses Flop
And How to Turn "Failure"
Into an Opportunity

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AMY PORTERFIELD: Well hey there. Welcome back to another episode of The Online Marketing Made Easy Podcast. I'm your host, Amy Porterfield, and today we are talking about why some courses flop and how to turn failure into opportunity.

I am the first to admit when I've made a mistake. I have made a lot along the way. In fact, I've made a lot of mistakes as it relates to creating courses and selling them online.

I can promise you this. I learn something new every single time. Inside of my private Facebook group for all of my students my students often ask me to troubleshoot their challenges with launching their courses.

They come to me feeling totally defeated because that's a natural feeling when you don't sell as many as you hoped you are going to sell during your promotion. Then I ask them a bunch of questions as to what they did and what they didn't do in terms of creating the course and promoting the course.

When I ask these questions I get a really good sense of their efforts and how the whole thing went down.

My students' questions and our valuable troubleshooting chats that we get to have when I do Facebook Live Q&As every single week in my group have inspired me to create this specific podcast episode for all of you.

As you likely know, the potential for creating and selling digital courses is bigger than ever. As a result, the stakes are high. That means you have to know what can make and break your course creation and course launch success.

Based on my experience with thousands of my students I've uncovered five core reasons why most courses flop. My goal is to help make sure that you don't make these same mistakes and to make sure that you know how to turn a flop into an opportunity in case it does happen along the way.

We're just going to pick ourselves up and keep moving forward.

It seems fitting to add that this episode is sponsored by my free masterclass, How to Confidently Create Your First Profitable Course in 60 Days. If you've been thinking about creating an online course, or if you've had a few flops along the way, I want to encourage you to sign up for my free masterclass at http://www.amyporterfield.com/courses. I'll make sure you know everything you need to know to hit it out of the park the first time or the next time you create a course.

Let's get to it!

Mistake #1 – Delivering What You Think Your Audience Wants

A lot of times, somewhere between connecting with your core audience and delivering your course content, something gets lost in translation. You start creating and you go further and further off course forgetting why you are creating your training in the first place, which is for your ideal customer avatar.

Your ICA (Ideal Customer Avatar) should be front and center the entire time you are building your course. In fact, I want you to give your avatar a name, the avatar you are writing your course for.

I want you to put a post-it on your computer with their name. Heck, you can even cut a picture out of a magazine and pretend that's them. I want you looking at that picture, looking at their name on that post-it every single day when you are creating your course because they need to be top of mind all the time.

A huge part of my course creation process is my validation blitz. It's all about reaching out to a number of potential students to learn more about their hopes, their fears, and what is holding them back.

This is a process I teach inside of my program, Courses That Convert. We start at the top with the validation blitz because it's that important. The big thing here is if you don't talk to your potential students before you actually create your course you are

likely creating a course that you will love but you're not too sure if anybody else is going to love it as well.

Learning about your avatar is the fuel of your course. I don't want you to lose sight of this as you begin building.

Here's how to turn this into an opportunity. Ask and listen. I know that the validation blitz is not the sexiest part of creating a course. If you're anything like me you love to create. You want to get your hands in there and move around the content and think of new formulas and strategies to teach and lay it all out in a framework.

That stuff is important. Or am I a nerd here and just exposed myself to sounding crazy? That stuff is really fun to me. However, slowing down and talking to people, getting really clear about what they need and want is not always easy so it doesn't always feel fun.

You have to do it so you've got to slow down, ask, and listen. When you learn something new about your avatar you keep those avatar notes nearby so that you truly are responding to the pain points and the desires that your ideal student wants and needs from you.

That means you are going to be creating content that converts and makes for raving fans and a whole lot of well-earned money.

I'm not going to lay out my whole validation blitz strategy here for your right now but I will say that you need to ask for strategic feedback as you're building your course.

First, beforehand, once you have a framework up you can run that framework by some potential students to get their feedback. What do they think? What do they need? What are their insights?

Once you draft the whole course I'd go back and ask some clarifying questions just to make sure you are on track. Getting consistent input from your audience will help you to create a training that is a must buy for your avatar.

I've done this many times and I've gotten on many Skype phone calls with my potential students just to make sure that I'm on the right track, even if you are in the outline process.

Remember I did an episode all about creating your course with post-it notes (it was a very popular episode, by the way), it was all about creating your course using a stack of post-it notes. People were raving about it. I got so many pictures of your post-it note strategies. I was over-the-moon excited about it.

Let's say you are in that process. Stop yourself for a moment and think if you have talked to potential students. Do you know you are on the right track? If not, finish your post-it note strategy then get on the phone with some potential students. They are out there and waiting to talk to you.

Now that you have your post-it note strategy all completed you can just move the post-it notes around if you learn something new that you didn't know before. It's not too late. You can still do this.

Mistake #2 – Skipping the Pre-Selling Opportunity

This one's a big one. For all of my Courses That Convert students, you know in the bonus section of your program I have an entire strategy laid out for you step by step by step all about preselling your course before you're finished creating it.

I used to not believe in this. I didn't love this process before. Then as I learned more about all of you I learned two things. You need to make money a little bit quicker than waiting 60 days to build out your entire course. You would also like to dip your toe in the water just to make sure your idea is going to float versus finishing the entire thing, selling it, and realizing something's wrong.

Preselling allows you to make some money up front but also allows you to do some validation beyond the validation blitz. There are some really cool opportunities here with the pre-sell campaign.

One more thing to throw in there, when you presell you move from courage to confidence. Here's what I mean by that. If you get your feet wet a little bit and do a mini launch with your presell, which is essentially what it is, a mini launch, you can just do a few things that you've seen in bigger launches from some of the gurus out there.

You might do just one webinar and no three-part video series or you might just put out a training video but it's not part of a huge campaign. You can do a smaller version of a launch because you're just getting your feet wet here.

That means if you have courage to do a mini launch, once you see some success with it that will turn into confidence so that you are ready for a bigger launch when you do the real promotion of the course.

I like moving from courage to confidence and I think this is one way to do so. Here's what's cool. This is Episode #216. In Episode #218 just two jumps away I have an entire episode about how to presell an online training course.

I'm going to walk you through the seven steps to presell. That way you can decide if this type of strategy is right for you. In just a few weeks I'll walk you through the whole pre-sell process.

Mistake #3 – Dabbling in Course Creation

I see this all the time. Some entrepreneurs have a great idea for a course. They continue to move forward in all the projects they're working on in their business and then here and there they might dabble with creating their outline and they might dabble with researching a platform for their online course. They might record a few videos but rarely do they even get to that point.

These are the people who don't succeed. Their course creation is more like a hobby than a true commitment to make it happen. These are the people who, when hit with a roadblock and things get a little sticky or complicated or exhausting (which they sometimes do with course creation), they just stop creating.

Building a successful online course isn't particularly hard or complicated but there are many moving pieces and potential failure points along the way. Most entrepreneurs approach their course creation as just another thing to do or thing to learn.

The thing is you can't treat course building as just another strategy, tactic, or system. Your course, even if it's your first course, is an immensely valuable and fragile asset that, when done right, can generate some serious money over the course of its lifetime.

Because of this you need to set aside the time to plan for it, build it, and market it. I have to admit, when I first started to map out my very first online course I didn't budget nearly enough time to create it.

I didn't make it a priority. I didn't put it on my calendar. I didn't work on it every single day as I should have. Once I got through that first course and saw how valuable online courses could be for my business my attitude about them completely changed.

Here's how to make this an opportunity. Be one of the few that commits. I love hearing stories from my students that made it across the finish line and got their course done and out to market.

How did they do it? Well, #1 they set a deadline. They declared it. They told people, "I am finishing my course by this date." They also got an accountability partner, someone else in my private Facebook group that kept them moving forward.

They also promised a beta version to the first few people that joined their program. I teach all about how to put a beta version of your program together so that you can get feedback as people go through it. I teach all about that inside of Courses That Convert.

They also made it a nonnegotiable. I'm not dabbling with course creation, I'm actually doing this and I'm launching it by this date and there are no excuses. This is what I'm doing.

I'm so passionate about the fact that you can't dabble and you've got to make a commitment because my entire business changed when I started to successfully create and sell online training courses.

My first one was a huge flop. I've talked about that many times to many of you. But, when I finally dusted myself off and got back up and did it again I'm so glad I did. Remember, 90% of my revenue comes from the sales of my online courses. It is a huge part of what I do.

That might change down the road but that's how it's been for many, many years and it is very sustaining. I want you to think about that because when my courses are being sold on evergreen that allows me to experiment with some new things and I've got some new ideas brewing inside me right now.

The great thing is, if they don't work out at least I can always fall back on the sale of my online courses. It's kind of cool, right?

Let's move on.

Mistake #4 – Jamming Everything Into Your Course

This is a big one. I get it. You've got knowledge. You want to share it. However, if you think about cramming 30 hours of content into one course and you think that's the right way to do it to serve your students I've got to stop you right there.

The thing is, five years ago you would have wanted to craft the perfect signature course where you throw everything into that course. That's how it used to be done. Nowadays you see all kinds of course: Deep dives, series courses, quick hits, and membership sites.

Gone are the days you had one shot to make the most comprehensive course ever. Things are different now. Of course you can still create a signature course. I do it all the time.

However, there are different ways to do it and I just want you to think about that. More importantly, I want you to think of this. Your audience is busy. If their problem is urgent they want to learn how to solve it in the most effective way possible.

They are saying to you to get them from Point A to Point B as fast as humanly possible. One thing I've been doing inside of my courses even more so is that it might be a signature course like Courses That Convert and Webinars That Convert. Those are two signature courses. They really cover a lot of ground.

However, my goal was to make the videos as short as possible and to give some cheat sheets and checklists to help you along the way if you get stuck. But I didn't want to just keep pouring more and more and more content into the course.

That's another reason I separated the courses. I could have had one massive program of how to create a course and launch it but that's a lot. That's heavy. I felt both topics were so independently important and you needed to do both right so I separated them.

I know you want to get from Point A to Point B as fast as humanly possible so I'm always looking for ways to make my videos shorter with the same amount of impact, if not more.

Your goal is not to throw everything in your course. In fact, you're doing yourself and your avatar a huge disservice. I want you to give them the most efficient and impactful steps inside of your course.

Make it clear but make it simple as well. Get them to the finish line quickly. How do you turn this into an opportunity? Decide what's truly relevant to your students and leave the rest out of your course.

Your job is to deliver zero fluff. #zerofluff. I think we need to make a thing of that because it's so important. This will take incredible restraint so I'm going to warn you right now that you may need to enlist a team member, a friend, or a colleague to help you.

In fact, I have a quick story for you about that. I've recently been putting this big B-School bonus together all about systematizing and organizing your online business. Inside this bonus it's a full-fledged course.

We've been doing tons of training videos around the bonus. There are two things: 1) We've made the videos so much shorter. My goal is ten minutes or less. Beyond that I was really stressed out one day with creating all of these videos and I reached my max.

I had been recording for four days total. I had a trip to New York coming up so I was rushing. I had to get this done. Chloe, my project director, stopped me and said, "Amy, you are putting way too much into this. This is overwhelming for you and your students."

I got so caught up in wanting to make it so good with no stone unturned that I was making it more difficult with way too many layers. It didn't need to be like that.

I had to step back, thanks to Chloe, and I needed to say to myself, "Okay, this is too complicated and my students are going to get lost in the weeds."

How could I make this concept way more easy to follow and easier to get through and (most important) easier to implement? Even I still do it after many, many successful courses. Make sure you have someone in your world that knows they can always call you out on it because it's so important.

Mistake #5 – Not Learning How to Teach

This one is near and dear to my heart. Being a world-class expert on your topic isn't the same as being a world-class teacher. In some cases they go hand in hand but most of the time they don't.

I've known many brilliant experts and marketers who have had so much value and insight to share with their tribes. The only problem was they had no idea how to connect with their students or how to present the material in a way that students would engage with and implement and, most importantly, get results from.

As a result, course engagement drops, results are nonexistent, and you end up spending more time processing refund requests than you do polishing your material. The best online courses are taught by the best online teachers.

You might be thinking, "Amy, I'm not a great teacher. I know my stuff. I know what I want to teach but I've never taught before."

Many of my students have never taught anything before, at least not this type of teaching. That's okay. I'm not being fair. You don't have to be a world-class teacher. I'm not a world-class teacher.

But I mean you need to really actually care about your ability to teach. I'm going to take this down a few notches and just say that you genuinely do need to pay attention to how you teach.

To make this actionable, what does it mean to be a really good teacher? Listen to your students'' wants and needs. It kind of takes it back to our very first mistake of creating a course that is perfect for what you think they need but you're not really sure.

First you want to listen to their wants and needs and second you want to remind yourself that you do not want to overwhelm them. Give them small wins. Pace with them. Know when they need to be challenged versus acknowledged.

A lot of this happens in the private Facebook groups that you create for your courses. That is your opportunity to make sure they are okay and moving forward. When you have a private Facebook group for your course, and a lot of people are saying they are stressed or overwhelmed, it is partly up to you to help them move through that stress.

Remind them that if they keep saying they are stressed they will always be stressed. You are going to do a little bit of mindset work with your students as well as give them some practical tools to help them move through some of that overwhelm.

Being a great teacher means being engaging and changing things up. Maybe throw in surprises to challenge them here or there. Do anything to keep them motivated.

We have a really cool thing inside of Webinars That Convert where when you first join I ask them to jump into the private Facebook group and name their "game on" song.

It is the song you play right before you go live on a webinar to shake it out and get the energy into your body. It is so fun because people actually go into the Facebook group and do it.

This is just one way to help them connect in the Facebook group and be a part of the content. You want to do things that engage them.

Give them a clear, organized path. Oh my gosh, this one is probably the most important to me. That's why I love this post-it note strategy that I talked about earlier in a former podcast episode.

I love it so much because it helps you get organized with all of your content. But you are creating a roadmap so please remember that. You could have every piece of content that's in your course free out there on the web. You have blog posts written about it, you've done podcast episodes about it. You may even have an eBook about it.

But it's all scattered in different places. What people are paying for is the roadmap. Tell them exactly what they need to do to get to the end game. When you have it all in one place with a roadmap that's worth paying for.

Remember that. When they get into your course it should be very clear where they start, what they do in the middle, and how they get to the finish line.

Finally, being a great teacher means you are open and honest. You are not the all-knowing. You are not the perfect one that everyone is aspiring to. You are the one that shows your mistakes, all your ugly warts that you might have had along the way. You are being open and honest with your students saying, "I was in your same situation," if that is true, and "I know how to move past it."

You have to share the mistakes and the misses, not the ones that will still make you cool, really get to the stuff that's true. Share with them where you went wrong but also where you were able to keep moving forward and what you did so they know they can relate to you as well.

Today more than ever your students are looking for a teacher they can relate to and that the teacher actually gets them. By you being more open and honest, which we

talked about a bunch on this show, they are going to make that connection with you in that way.

When they do and they have the connection with you, when you make a mistake, if something doesn't come out right in terms of an email or you link to something in your program and it's not linking correctly and they are having login issues they are more forgiving because they really, really like working with you.

This shows up in my business all the time. We are so far from perfect. We have broken links and people have login issues. One time my site went down and people are never mean to me about it.

They are almost like, "Oh no Amy, you've got a problem. I want to be the first to tell you. You've got to fix this so that everybody else doesn't get frustrated."

All of my students, if you're listening, I feel like you are always on my side and I am so, so lucky for that. I just wanted to put that out there.

Again, Mistake #5 is not learning how to teach or at least not caring enough about your teaching style that you spend a little time making sure it's going to resonate with your students.

I gave you a few tips and tricks to help you along the way. One more thing I want to add. One of the gals in my private Facebook group said, "I have a squeaky voice. I could never be a great teacher with my voice."

I want to remind you that being a great teacher does not mean you have an amazing voice or that you are a superstar on video. I don't care who you are, what you look like, or what you sound like. You can be a great teacher if you lead with compassion and integrity and you genuinely care about getting your students to the finish line with really big results.

If you keep that prize in mind you, my friend, are going to be just fine.

There you have it. I hope you found some value in these five core mistakes that so many of my students have made and I've even made some of these, of course. Now that you know what the mistakes are all about hopefully you can sidestep them and keep on moving forward to see some huge success with your course creation and launching your course online.

Don't forget that this episode is brought to you by my free masterclass all about creating an online course. If you've been struggling to create your course or if you're just not sure where to start then I want to encourage you to sign up for my free masterclass, How to Confidently Create Your First Profitable Course in 60 Days. All you need to do is go to http://www.amyporterfield.com/courses and you can grab your spot right away.

Also, if you've experienced any of these mistakes or if you've made big mistakes that I haven't mentioned here I want you to come over to Instagram. I'm @amyporterfield on Instagram and DM me. Let me know of the mistake that you made or let me know of your experience creating courses.

I want to hear from you. I am very active in my DMs on Instagram so reach out and let me know. Let's have a little chat.

I hope you have a wonderful day and I'll talk to you again soon. Bye for now.