



Callie: Welcome to episode eight of Behind the Membership, season two. In this episode, I'm talking with Mark Warner about his membership site, Teaching Packs. Now I particularly wanted to talk with Mark, because he has a very different model to what most people think of when they hear the word membership, offering a very low cost annual membership that doesn't even recur automatically. So we're talking about why Mark made that decision, and how it's enabled him to attract 15,000 teachers to his membership over the last five years, as well as completely transform his own life in the process. We're also talking about how Mark has spent 20 years building his audience, including an impressive three million Facebook page likes. How he uses reviews and free resources to attract new members, and why his members join for the content and stay for the content. Plus much more. So let's get started with today's show.

Announcer: Welcome to Behind the Membership with Callie Willows. Real people, real stories, real memberships.

Callie: Today I'm joined by Mark Warner from Teaching Ideas and Teaching Packs. Thank you so much for joining me on the show today, Mark. It's great to get a chance to talk with you.

Mark: Thanks very much for inviting me. I really enjoyed the first series, it was really great listening to other membership site owners. It's a real honour to be on series two. Thank you.

Callie: Awesome. Yeah, you were first on my list when I was drawing up the guests.

Mark: Fantastic.

Callie: I know this is your first podcast as well. So I'll be gentle, I promise.

Mark: Lovely.

Callie: To get us started then, could you tell us a little bit about your Teaching Packs membership? What it offers, who it's for, that kind of thing.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. As the name implies really, we're aimed at teachers, mainly primary school teachers, and we offer packs of teaching resources. Those packs can include hundreds of PDFs, which might be posters, activity sheets, things like eBooks. We also include in some packs audio recordings. So there are times tables quizzes, mental maths challenges, that kind of thing. They're all wrapped up into ZIP files, so teachers can log in. If they're teaching fractions, then they can download our fractions pack, and it could contain a huge amount of resources for them to use in their classroom. There's lots of other benefits as well, but it's mainly the teaching resources that teachers try and look for.

Callie: Awesome. I know you mentioned in the academy a couple of days ago that the site's just turned five years old now. You've had 15,000 people join in that time, which is an awesome achievement. Huge congratulations on that, and I hope you celebrated.

Mark: Thank you very much. Definitely the time has flown by, I couldn't believe it was five years. I'm incredibly grateful to all those members who have joined and supported, and I hope the site's been useful to them.

Callie: I'm sure it has, or you wouldn't have people keep coming on back. I'm curious though, what actually made you decide to start Teaching Packs in the first place?

Mark: Well, I've been publishing teaching resources online since 1998. You mentioned Teaching Ideas earlier, that was our first site, my first site really. I started that when I was training to be a teacher at university. I basically wanted a way of sharing teaching ideas and resources that I'd made when I was a student teacher. I posted those online, back in the days of dial up modems and magazine cover discs, that kind of thing. That really grew, it exploded. That website's now 20 years old, and it's still online. It gets millions of people visiting every year. Back in 2012, I was struggling a little, because it was growing. I wanted to put more time into it, but I was also a very busy primary school teacher. We had a young son, he was one years old at the time, and I was struggling to manage my time. Teaching Ideas is funded by adverts, but it wasn't bringing in enough money to actually support us.

So I was thinking of ways of growing another site potentially, and I saw a few other educational resource sites popping out that were following the membership model. I was always quite reluctant to charge teachers, because teachers don't generally claim the money back from their school. It comes out of their own pockets. They're not really doing it for fun, it's not a hobby site that they're joining. They're joining something to support their work. I was a little bit reluctant to charge them, but that seemed to be the way that other sites were going. It seemed to be a good way of me increasing my income slightly, so that I could dedicate more time to the websites.

It really took off, and fortunately I was able to give up my teaching job. Which I do really, really miss, but running the membership site is equally as rewarding. As you say, we're supporting thousands of teachers, and those teachers are working with children in classrooms all around the world. It's wonderful to know that the things I create in my mini office, here down in kent, are being used in classrooms with children of all

ages. In completely different parts of the world that I'll never, ever get to visit.

Callie: Yeah, that's incredible the amount of impact you're actually having there. How long after you started the membership did you actually end up quitting your job, in the end?

Mark: I was very fortunate. My school were very supportive, and I started doing five days a week. Did that for 10 years, and then I dropped down to four days a week. Then did three days a week. Then dropped down to three afternoons, so I was only popping into school three afternoons a week. Then I bit the bullet, and thought, "Yeah, I can probably do this full-time now." It took a while. It wasn't an immediate process. It was a long-term, gradual decline in my teaching hours.

Callie: Cool. So you mentioned there that you had the Teaching Ideas site for 20 years, initially. So when you first launched the Teaching Packs site, presumably you already had that audience there, waiting for this. Did you use what they were asking for, when you were developing the site?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. Teaching Ideas has always been very busy. It's had lots of contributions from teachers, but I've also had lots of feedback as well. So teachers are saying, "We need to teach this topic, can you make resources for that?" I had a huge list of content that I could create, and that list has just always grown bigger and bigger. We're very fortunate, we've been able to grow big social media followings as well. We've got a huge Facebook community, and teachers are always posting their comments in, and answering questions if I need any feedback about the site. Because they're always telling me what they'd like from me, I just don't have enough time to make it all sometimes.

Callie: Awesome. So you're obviously UK based, but it sounds like you've got members all over the world.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. We've got teachers in schools just down the road from me, but equally there are other teachers on the other

side of the planet. Those teachers have their own school curriculum, so we do have to try and adapt resources in many cases to fit those needs. There are also things like our Money Pack. We obviously create it in British pounds, but we've had to also do a euros version, a US dollars, euros ... I mentioned euros twice, Australian dollars, New Zealand dollars. We do try and adapt packs where it's possible. Also spelling, because American English, which is sometimes slightly different to British English. We create the concept first, and then try and adapt it as we need to for different audiences.

Callie: Cool. When you were starting the site, were you thinking that it was going to be this international site?

Mark: No. I knew that the Teaching Ideas site was popular around the world, but I just imagined myself in the classroom, what would I need as a UK primary school teacher? That was what I was focusing on when I created the site and the resources. We've got so many members around the world now. Lots in Australia, lots in Ireland, lots in America. I'm always blown away by that. It's just incredible the reach the internet has, obviously.

Callie: Yeah, I love that. So you've had the membership for five years now. What would you say has been your biggest challenge over that time?

Mark: Content. Content is always my biggest challenge, because there are gaps in the site that I don't have content for at the moment. If a teacher is teaching something about mountains, and there's nothing on my website, then for them, at that point in time, the membership isn't useful for them. I always want to fill those gaps, to make sure there's as much useful content for them. As I say, they're always asking me for new stuff. So creating that content, getting as much out there as I can, as possible, is the big challenge, and the curriculum's always changing. The government is always meddling in things. They're always moving the goalpost, adding things to the curriculum, taking things out. Again, that's happening all around the world. So I try and have to cater for that content in many different situations.

Callie: Yeah, not fun. Speaking of content there, how often are you actually releasing content into the membership?

Mark: As often as possible. We do standard packs, which are our biggest packs. They contain a huge amount of content, big eBooks, lots of posters, lots of worksheets. Last year I added another membership level, and that includes additional mini packs, which are smaller packs of resources. That don't have quite so much in, but hopefully are still as equally beneficial. They normally take about a week or two to create. So the big, instant packs might take three or four weeks, the mini packs might take one or two weeks. I try to create new resources every week. Every Sunday I announce something in my email list, to say, "Here's a new standard pack. Here's a new mini pack." If I haven't been able to finish a standard or a mini pack, then I'll make a free resource that anyone can access. So there's always new content going out to the community.

Callie: Are you creating all this content yourself?

Mark: Initially, yes, I started by doing everything myself. Over time, gradually, I've got extra help. My wife only works part-time, so she's able to help. She does lots of research for content, and she's started to make teaching resources. She's also a really good illustrator, so on some of our packs you might see some of her pictures. Over the past few years, I've been getting extra help from other people. I found a fantastic teacher on a site called PeoplePerHour, completely by chance. Over the past few years, she's been doing lots of research and content creation for me. I've also been outsourcing a bit more over the past six months. By getting graphic designers to help with the illustration, developers to help with some of the interactive teaching tools that we're adding now. A couple of months ago we also added a new VA to our team, so I've got somebody doing admin stuff for a few hours every week. Which really takes the load off, but the bulk of the content creation is mainly me.

Callie: Awesome. So if that content has been the ongoing challenge for you, what's made it all worth it? What's made running the membership worthwhile for you?

Mark: The feedback is just incredible. We get amazing comments, amazing emails every day. We have a review system on the sites, where teachers can post reviews of our packs, and we've got over a thousand five star reviews. Which is just amazing feedback from teachers, saying, "We use this with our children. It had such a great impact, the children loved it." That feedback is just incredible. It's just amazing to get those emails every day. We also have a gallery where teachers can take photos of their classroom displays. So if they put some of our photos up on their wall, then they can take a photo and send it to us, and we'll share it in our gallery.

Callie: Oh, I love that.

Mark: So seeing something that I've made on screen actually printed up on the wall, in a classroom, is just delightful.

Callie: Yeah, I love that. Just to touch on something you mentioned there. I really love the reviews that you have, because they're all public on your site, aren't they? So somebody coming along to the site can have a look at those reviews, see which packs you've got, and things like that.

Mark: Yeah, that's been a really big draw for the site. Because, as you say, if somebody isn't a member, then they can see feedback from people who have used it. Also, that review plugin hooks into Google. So if somebody searches for a topic on Google, then they'll see a little star rating next to the Teaching Packs link. Then that's an instant eye-catcher, and it brings people into the site. It's been wonderful.

Callie: Yeah. I mean, that's perfect social proof there for you.

Mark: Definitely. Absolutely. So it's how many reviews and the average rating. It's wonderful.

Callie: Awesome. Is that something that you found easy to set up? Is that just a WordPress plugin you're using for that?

Mark: Yeah, it's just a free WordPress plugin. I'm always worried that these free WordPress plugins are going to be abandoned at some point, but it seems to be going on. They seem to keep adding features to it. I'm desperate to pay some of these people, just to make sure things continue as they are. Yeah, that plugin has just been brilliant for bringing people in.

Callie: Awesome. One of the things I love about your site and your success, is that you've been able to actually achieve so much with a very low-cost site. Actually, I'd like to discuss that for a minute if that's okay, because it is quite a different model to what most of our listeners will be considering a membership. Your pricing is a low annual fee. Is it 15 to £25, depending on which option they go for?

Mark: Yeah, about that price. About £20.

Callie: Okay. That doesn't automatically recur each year either, does it?

Mark: No, that's right. Yeah, as I said at the beginning, I've always been reluctant to charge teachers, because I know it's coming out of their own pockets for their work. I didn't ever want to charge them a huge amount of money. Some of my competitors have very big sites, charging three, four times what I do. My low cost isn't a subscription model. I don't tie people into their subscriptions, because in a year's time their situations might be different. They might be teaching a different year group, they might be retiring. Unfortunately, there's quite a high turnover of teachers. So in a year's time, they may decide that teaching isn't for them. I don't tie them into these subscription commitments, which work out so well for others. That means I have to keep creating the content to get people to come back, because those automatic payments aren't there in my situation.

Callie: Yeah. So with that, if the payments aren't automatic, do you have a renewal system in place to get people to resubscribe at the end of their year?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. The site has renew reminders. A week before and a couple of days before the expiration date, they get some emails. Then if they want to log in and renew them, they can. If they want to wait a few months, or even a few years, then they can log in at any time and come back, and their renewal rate is slightly lower as well. So there's a bit more of an incentive. I've also got automation sequences in Active Campaign, that encourage people to pop back in. If they don't come back for a while, then there's an even bigger renewal discount. To try and tempt them back in, if they'd like to join.

Callie: Okay. You mentioned there that they do get a renewal discount after the first year anyway.

Mark: Yeah.

Callie: Have you found that effective for increasing that retention?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. It does tend to bring people back. That last, final discount I mentioned from Active Campaign, that's really a good one for bringing people back in as well, because it's the lowest price we can offer them.

Callie: When you decided on that price point, because obviously it is a much lower price than most people would charge, and I completely respect your reasons for doing that price. Was part of the reason that you were able to do that because you already had such a big audience from Teaching Ideas? That you knew you were going to get a volume of people in, to be able to make the numbers work.

Mark: Yeah, that was my initial hope. As I keep saying, I didn't want to charge teachers a huge amount, and we started at just £12. It was £12 for a year to join, but that was when we only had three resource packs on site. It was a bit of a trial to see, would this

actually work? Would people join? Very fortunately, we've got a very big Facebook audience, lots of people decided to join. Over time, we increased the content. We're now up to, I think, 80 something resource packs, and the price hasn't doubled. It's only just under double the amount we originally charged. So we're very lucky, because we can get so many teachers to join. We've got automatically a huge audience from Teaching Ideas and from Facebook, and our other social media accounts. Lots of people can join, which means we can charge a low amount, because we've got lots of people coming through the door.

Callie: Yeah. I love that attitude. That said then, with the low-cost, non-recurring structure, you're reliant on getting a steady stream of new members. So what's been working for you on the marketing front?

Mark: As I mentioned, Teaching Ideas has a huge audience anyway, and at the bottom of every page on Teaching Ideas there's a link to Teaching Packs. We also include lots of free samples. I post a selection of the content from Teaching Packs on Teaching Ideas, so teachers can see what is in each pack. They can download it for free on Teaching Ideas. Then if they like it, they can go to Teaching Packs and download the full pack. Facebook has just been amazing for me as well. I've been very fortunate, we've got three million people who like us on Facebook. So we've automatically got a very big reach there. Organic reach is always declining on Facebook. We're very lucky that if I post something on our Facebook account, it does go to tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands of people. That brings a lot of people to the site as well.

Callie: Awesome. So you mentioned there that you share some free resources from the membership. Has that been effective, do you think, for actually just really showcasing what's on offer?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. I've always given away lots of free materials. Sharing free stuff at the moment is a good way of bringing people to the site, just to have a look around. When people sign up to the free email newsletter, they automatically get free samples of

every single pack on the site. Just by giving your email address, then you can automatically download a sample of every pack. So you can see what's available, and if you like it then you can join.

Callie: Awesome. Then do you find you also get a lot of referrals from existing members too? As presumably a lot of teachers know other teachers, and talk with each other.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. There's lots of staffroom conversations about what resources are working well. There are lots of educational resource groups on social media. Teachers are always saying, "This site's got this really good resource. That site's really well-resourced. I enjoy doing that one." Also, as I mentioned, teachers put their posters up in their classroom, and in the corner of each poster there's my little logo. So quite often the teacher might say, "Oh, where did you get that from?" There's my logo automatically on the corner of the site, which brings new people back.

Callie: Cool. So you've constantly got that continual marketing, essentially.

Mark: Yeah.

Callie: Also, have you found that you actually enrol schools in the membership as well? Because presumably one market you could have is actually approaching schools to buy bulk memberships.

Mark: Yep. There's a discount on the site. So if schools want to join, and they sign up a certain number of people, then they get a 25% discount overall. That's not something I've promoted as heavily as I probably should have, because it seems to be the case that teachers tend to join up individually. Schools aren't always as keen to sign up, to certainly my resource site, in bulk in that way, unfortunately.

Callie: Is there anything you've tried when it comes to getting new members, that actually just hasn't worked for you? It's okay to say no.

Mark: Nothing that I can think of, really. No, I'm very lucky. I've already got these automatic audiences from different sites and different places, because I've worked 20 years to build this up. It hasn't come overnight, it's been a huge amount of work. No, I can't of anything that hasn't really worked. Social media reach is a constant worry, because Facebook is always pushing us to pay to share posts online. At the moment, things are still working well for me with Facebook. I'm trying different avenues as well. I'm trying Pinterest and Twitter and Instagram, but Facebook is the big audience for me.

Callie: Just to dive into that a little bit further, then. With the Facebook, so you mentioned you've got over three million page likes, I think you said there, which is incredible. Has that purely just been built up over time, as you've shared resources and things? You mentioned 20 years now you've had the blog going. Has that just all been organic growth there?

Mark: Yeah, it has mainly been organic. I think over the past 20 years, Facebook wasn't around 20 years ago, but I started my Facebook page, I've probably only paid them about £100. Just in trial boost posts and trial adverts. I never really got to grips with how it all worked, I couldn't see a huge reward for my efforts there. I've tried to share as much good content as I can on Facebook. I've read Gary Vaynerchuk books many, many years ago, with the old jab, jab, hook approach. So I've been trying to find and share lots of useful resources that I think my audience would like. Not just my own stuff, lots of content from other sites. Lots of things I've discovered on Pinterest, or other teaching blogs. That really resonated with the audience, and has really helped me to grow that audience, which has been very beneficial for me with the membership.

Callie: Awesome. So with the blog as well, presumably that's just all been organic growth over the years as well, and SEO and all of that fun stuff from back in the day.

Mark: Yeah, it's all just grown. Teaching Ideas was one of the first educational resource sites on the internet. There weren't many

people doing it back then, so it certainly got its foot in the door very early. It grew, with lots of teachers sharing their own resources for me. I was able to post those online, and then even use some of those in my own classroom when I was teaching. So it was a really fantastic, two-way thing. The audience it's got now is incredible.

Callie: As we mentioned before, you've not got the recurring annual membership. So you mention that you have, obviously, things in place to encourage people to renew, but what're you actually doing to make sure members stay engaged and happy with the site whilst their membership is current?

Mark: Well it's the content, mainly. That's the main draw. We do have a few other features. There is a community forum, there's a Facebook group. We've got a calendar of educational events, and a link directory, and membership discounts. So there are lots of things to encourage people to stay around. Unfortunately, the site's community isn't really very busy, because teachers tend to pop onto my site during their break times, before school, after school. Evenings and weekends even, so it's not the place they want to hang around, unfortunately.

I'm not saying it's not a fun place to be, but it's not somewhere that they would choose to do as part of a hobby. As another membership website might be, for example. So I've struggled with the community side of things. I know lots of people say, "People join for the content and stay for the community." It seems the other way round. Well not the other way round at all, unfortunately. They join for the content and stay for the content really. The community isn't a big part of my site, so keep pushing out that content is my main way of bringing people back and getting them to renew.

Callie: I think that's actually really good though, because your market, your teachers, presumably they join the site because they're time poor. You're helping them with that, with the content. So actually, if that's all they need to find value in the site and keep coming back, then that's brilliant.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely, and that was the intention of having the full packs of resources. With the other Teaching Ideas site, it's lots of resources dotted around in different subjects and topics. Whereas with Teaching Packs, you're teaching fractions, you download the fractions pack. It's got everything there ready to go. So it is that time saving, as you say.

Callie: After five years now, you must have a tonne of content on the site. How are you actually organising that, to make it easy for somebody to come in and find what they're needing?

Mark: That's a big struggle, and that's something I've had to adapt as time's gone by. As I said, it started with three packs, and that was easy to present on a single page. Now we've got packs covering all kind of topics, all kinds of subjects. I'm using Content Views Pro and FacetWP to filter, so you can search by pack. We also, last year, added a search engine, so you can search for individual resources as well. Using the plugin, FacetWP, you can type in your search criteria. Then you can say, "Do you want a poster for your classroom wall? Do you want an activity sheet? Do you want an audio challenge for those particular topics?" To help teachers really drill down through the thousands of resources we've got now. To find, hopefully, exactly what they need in that situation.

Callie: So you're making it really easy for people to find whatever they're needing at any time.

Mark: Yeah, we try our best. It's a big challenge. We're adding hundreds of resources all the time, so it's a big challenge managing that content and making it easy for people to find.

Callie: Yeah. I know one of the things that you do, and I can't remember if this is on the Teaching Packs site or the Teaching Ideas site, is you actually poll members over which packs they want to see next and things. Don't you?

Mark: Yeah. That was something we had on Teaching Packs, where teachers could choose the packs that we're making. I haven't done that for a little while actually, but I'm always running

surveys. We tend to incentivize those with membership giveaways. Where teachers, I ask them to tell us what topics they're teaching at the moment, what topics they're teaching over the next few weeks. Then I use different tools to work out which ones are the most popular. Then I try to focus on those topics, to help as many people as we can.

Callie: Awesome. So shifting gears a little bit now, let's talk about life as a membership site owner. What does a typical day or week look like for you now?

Mark: It depends on the day of the week, really. It depends how far I am within the creation of each pack. The day normally starts by taking the dog out, getting my legs stretched, because sitting on your bottom all day working on a membership site isn't good for you. So a bit of exercise, have a walk along the seafront. Actually plan my day in my head, so I know what I'm going to be doing. When it's time to sit down in front of the computer, then I normally focus on email first, any support requests from members. I've started using Help Scout recently. So dive straight into there. If anyone needs help with passwords or anyone's got any issues with resources, then I deal with those first. Then it's onto planning and content creation, making those resources. Making as much as I can, as quickly as I can. Then by the end of the week, if we've got a pack ready to publish, then I'll be spending time creating images to promote and planning social media posts. So that on a Sunday, when the email goes out, everything's ready to download for the teachers to use.

Callie: Awesome. How many hours do you think, roughly, you're spending on the membership a week?

Mark: I don't think I'd like to say. It's certainly not passive income. Well, I don't know really. It's a nine to five job probably, plus a few hours in the evenings. Plus quite a few hours at the weekends, because my audience are active on the site at weekends. They log in, Sunday's my busiest day, because that's when teachers are planning their lessons for the week. I need to be around and accessible on a Sunday, to help teachers who need to log in. If

they have trouble, then I need to try and help them as quickly as I can. Because if they can't get to the resources, then my site isn't useful to them that week, and that results in frustration for them. So it is a big job.

Callie: Teaching Ideas, Teaching Packs, is all that you do, isn't it? You don't have other businesses, other news?

Mark: No, this is it. I have tried a few other websites in the past. We had a teaching news blog, a teaching video gallery, teaching photos, that kind of thing. Over time I gradually condensed it down, because managing the membership site is difficult. Managing Teaching Ideas on top of that is a big challenge. I don't think I can manage anything else, especially not with two young children and a dog as well, and a lovely wife.

Callie: Yeah, I think that sounds like plenty. You mentioned before that you gradually put down your hours at your teaching job. Did you find that transition between teaching, where obviously you've got a lot of feedback all the time, you've got people around you and support, as well as obviously the children that you're teaching. Did you then find that quite a challenge, to then go to it being you sat in front of a computer?

Mark: Yeah, it's a very different environment. Teaching is incredibly social. You're always spending time with your colleagues, you're always in front of this group of 30 young, amazing people. I love that environment, it's fantastic, but it is completely exhausting. I'm very lucky now, with the job, that I can spend so much time at home. My children come home from school, or wherever they've been for their day, and I get to see them grow. I get to spend time with them. I don't have a separate office, so the door isn't ever locked. I've got a little boy sitting next to me playing Lego. My little daughter with a baby, saying, "Daddy, can you put this cardigan on the baby for me?" It is a constant struggle, sometimes a bit frustrating, but I do manage to spend so much time with my children and my family. That is such a blessing.

Callie: I love that. Overall then, what impact would you say having the membership site has had on your life, really?

Mark: It's completely transformed my life. Before I started it, I was struggling a little bit managing everything. I remember sitting down with my wife at Christmas, before we set up the site, and thinking what could I possibly do to juggle all these things I've got going on? The membership site grew, very fortunately, and I'm very lucky to be in the situation I'm in now. I'm master of my own time. I do have to support people, but then I've got a lot of time to ... I don't have a boss. I'm the boss. I can control when I work, when I want to work, and I do love doing it. I love getting the feedback from teachers. I love knowing that the stuff I create is being helpful to them, and to their children around the world. That's an amazing feeling.

Callie: Yeah, definitely. So is there anything you wish you'd known earlier, or that you'd do differently, if you were starting the membership over again?

Mark: Probably getting help from other people sooner. I've kind of spent the first 15 years doing everything on my own, thinking nobody else could do it. Then over the past five years, as I mentioned, all those people that I've been getting help from. It's really enabled me to create more content, to help more people more quickly. Taking much more off my plate, so I can plan the business now. I'm not just working on a pack, getting it out the door as quickly as possible. I'm actually planning packs that might not be published for a couple of months yet, but there's different bits of content created by different people. All that would be brought together in a few weeks time, to publish to the audience. So I think getting extra help earlier on would probably have helped me to serve my audience better at that time.

Callie: If somebody's thinking about starting a membership, what one piece of advice or tip would you give them?

Mark: Oh my goodness, that's a very good question. I think talk to your audience. I get so much wonderful feedback from my audience

via Facebook, via Teaching ideas, via email and reviews. Knowing exactly what they need, what they want, when they want it, has really helped me to direct the memberships to meet their needs. They're giving me a little bit of money out of their own pockets every year, so I want to make sure they get the best value possible. Following that feedback is the direction that I need to go every time.

Callie: I love that. Yeah, I love how much you listen to what the teachers are asking for, and you implement that. Because even the higher tier that you implemented recently, with the editable resources, that was all based on members asking for that, wasn't it really?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. The majority of content used to be just PDFs, which are obviously tricky to edit. We had feedback saying teachers wanted Word documents, PowerPoint documents. We started adding that last year, as part of their extra membership level.

Callie: Yeah, I love that. Yeah, I totally agree with you there. That actually listening to what your audience is telling you is so important, when you're first starting your membership especially, and on an ongoing basis as well. It's far too easy to think, "Well, this is what I think we should do," and then act on it.

Mark: "This is what I'd like to make."

Callie: Yeah. Yeah. One thing I wanted to go into there, you're creating a lot of content for the site. Obviously you've got a team now, but it is still majority you. Have you found it difficult to do things like take time away from the business, go on holiday, and things like that?

Mark: It can be tricky sometimes. I'm very lucky that with mobile technology now, if I have a problem then I can often answer it or deal with it on my mobile phone. We went to Disneyland a couple of years ago, when our little boy was younger. I didn't have many technical issues while we were away, but in the evenings I could sit down with my phone, reply to teachers, and it was really easy

to manage. So there's a lot you can do, fortunately, with mobile technology now, but it is a huge job. I do need to sit in front of the computer for the bulk of the week to get everything done.

Callie: Cool. As we wrap up then, I'd love to know what's next for Teaching Packs. What's the next 12 months or so got in store for you?

Mark: As I keep saying, content, content, content. I need to keep pushing as much as I can out the door, to fill those gaps that teachers need. We've also started, over the past few months, to add some interactive teaching tools. So things that teachers can use on an interactive whiteboard, like a classroom countdown timer, a stopwatch. We had a random pupil pick a tool, add it to the site a couple of weeks back. We're working on a classroom jukebox as well, which plays background music while children are working. So I want to develop that range of tools, because we've had some great feedback about that lately. I'm possibly thinking about changing membership plugins as well, which is a big challenge that I've been reluctant to try. I think it's possibly best for the future, because our membership plugin isn't really an active development anymore. So it might be better to switch to something that's a bit better supported.

Callie: Yeah. Definitely a huge task with the amount of members and resources you have, though.

Mark: Yes. I've got lots of short codes on the site that need manually changing. So that's going to be an immense job, which is what I'm putting off, but it needs to be done at some point I think.

Callie: Yeah. Are the kids old enough, to get them changing short codes for you?

Mark: Not sure, it'd be all gobbledygook. That's what short codes are sometimes as well.

Callie: Yeah. I love the idea of those tools, though. I think that's a great additional benefit. Are you going to be selling those separately, or is this included in the existing membership?

Mark: At the moment, they're all included in the existing membership. It's something I have thought about should I offer them free, or should I offer cut down versions free and then the full version within the membership? It's something I'm playing with. We've only got two online at the moment, so it's still early days.

Callie: Awesome. I mean, that all sounds great. I'm really looking forward to seeing how the membership continues to grow over the next year. It's been awesome watching over the last couple of years, or the last three years I think you've been in the academy now. I know that, for any academy members listening, you're probably a very familiar face. Because you have one of our most popular progress blogs in the community, where you've been updating that for years. The amount of people that we have say to us that they take a lot of inspiration from just what you do, and how active you are, how you're constantly working and improving on things. Yeah, so that's always been great to see.

Mark: Thank you. Yeah, the progress log is a lot of work as well, but it's a good way of me reviewing what I've actually achieved, what I hope I want to achieve. Sometimes I don't always achieve those goals I set myself, but it is a good way of reflecting on what I've done. So if you're not going to do it within the academy, I do recommend some kind of progress log. Even if it's just a text document somewhere, it's a really beneficial thing for you to do. I also have to say thank you to you and Mike. Because your support with the academy, in terms of technical things and just development things, ideas, boosting the site, has just been fantastic. So thank you both to you and the other academy members, too.

Callie: Well, thank you. It's been a pleasure talking with you. Before we wrap up then, if somebody wants to check out your site, where's the best place for them to do that?

Mark: Yeah. The membership site is teachingpacks.co.uk. If you want to follow on Facebook, we are @TeachingIdeas.

Callie: Awesome. Yeah, thank you so much for joining me today, Mark. It's been a pleasure talking with you. Always like hearing about what you're up to with Teaching Packs. I'm really looking forward to, as I said, watching it continue to grow in the future as well.

Mark: Thank you. Thanks for having me on the show.

Callie: That's it, folks. Thank you so much to Mark for joining me on today's show. I really love how Mark has been able to impact not just thousands of teachers with his membership site, but millions of students around the world as well. That really is amazing. Whilst the pricing structure Mark uses isn't for everyone, it does go to show that there are a lot of different ways that you can approach your membership site. For Mark, low cost and high volume was the best approach for his goals. If you'd like to pick up the transcript or show notes from this episode, then do head on over to themembershipguys.com/btm18. Don't forget to let me know your takeaways from this episode, over in the free membership mastermind Facebook group, at talkmemberships.com, too. Of course, check out Mark's site at teachingpacks.co.uk. Thank you once again to Mark, and thank you for listening. I'll be back next week with another episode.

Announcer: If you've enjoyed today's episode of Behind the Membership, we invite you to check out themembersiteacademy.com. The Member Site Academy is the essential resource for anyone at any stage of starting, growing, and running a membership website. So whether you're still figuring out what your idea's going to be, or whether your website is already up and running, and you're just looking for ways to grow it and attract new members. Then the Member Site Academy can help you to get to the next level. With our extensive course library, monthly training, exclusive member-only discounts, perks and tools, and a supportive, active community to help you along the way with feedback encouragement and advice. The Member Site Academy is the perfect place to be for anyone looking to start, manage, and grow

a successful membership website. So check it out, at membersiteacademy.com.