



Mike Morrison:

Hello there. This is episode 146 of the Membership Guys podcast. I'm your host, Mike Morrison. Welcome to the show that helps you to grow a successful, profitable, meaningful membership website. Today, we're talking all about group memberships, shared group memberships.

As your membership site grows, you will inevitably start getting requests from people who need a way of giving multiple different people access to your membership. This is a request that more commonly comes up within B2B memberships, business to business memberships. From time to time, it will crop up with B2C, business to consumer, memberships as well. Often with B2C memberships, you're looking at situations where you've got couples, where perhaps they both want to be able to access the site, but they don't necessarily want to have separate subscriptions. With B2B, again, this is where you more commonly get this kind of requirement. Often it's companies which have multiple staff or maybe smaller companies but where there's two or three partners or two or three directors, and they all want to be able to access the membership under one subscription too. Quite often, you'll also get one-man bands, solo entrepreneurs who want to be able to give access to their virtual assistant or maybe even their web designer if you have a technical type membership site. They want to give those guys access to your membership, often on a temporary basis but sometimes as a standing, recurring thing as well.

Today, I want to talk about three different options that you have for enabling people to share their membership amongst a group. The first option is just to let them share the one account. Now this is usually what most people will do, and in fact, the reality is there's already people in your membership, at least one person who is sharing their account with somebody else. If it's people from the same company, there's not really much you can do to actually police or control that because they'll be from the same location. Chances are they'll possibly be

using a shared IP. So you have no real way of knowing whether or not perhaps a company with two partners or two directors are already sharing one account for your membership. So if you're not getting this kind of request too often, then you may be inclined or you may be tempted to just tell people listen, just share the account. We're none the wiser. We're fine. You can just share logins or whatever.

But there are some issues you want to be aware of with this approach. First and foremost, quite a few membership plug-ins have controls in place that will restrict logins from multiple IPs or they'll restrict multiple, simultaneous logins. So that means if two people are logging in from different computers or different devices at the same time, some membership plug-ins, that will flag a little alarm bell, and they will lock out that member account. Same if somebody logs into their member account from too many different IPs, too many different locations within a given period of time. Again, a lot of membership plug-ins will shut that down. They will suspend the account, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently. So if your approach to requests for a shared membership is to advise or to encourage people to just share their logins, IP restrictions within your membership plug-in are definitely something you want to look into.

If you have a forum, so if you have a discussion group within your community, then there's possibly going to be problems there as well because usually your members will have a display name, so their name will actually show up alongside their posts. It can get real problematic, however, if you have different people posting as one identity. Same goes to attending things like your live member calls as well. If you've got all these different people that are all coming along under one person's name, then that's going to cause some issues.

There are major security problems with sharing passwords and sharing login details as well. So this certainly isn't a practise that you're going to want to encourage. Of course, you can't restrict what people can do once they're logged into the account in terms of actually managing that account. So there's a real risk of somebody hijacking someone else's account. It may be if a web designer is being given temporary access to your membership, there's nothing to stop them from changing email address, changing the password and effectively locking the main account holder out of their own account. There's nothing that you can do as a membership site owner to prevent that. Anybody accessing the account can cancel. They could upgrade. They could downgrade. They could go on a posting spree within your forum, posting all sorts of inappropriate or derogatory or argumentative stuff. There's not a lot you can do about it.

You're also going to have a similar kind of problem if multiple people are sharing an account and one of those leaves the company because again, they'll still have access to the account, and that means the account holder is going to need to change the passwords and this, that and the other. This may seem like the simplest approach, but in the long run, the potential for it to cause problems is huge. And it's not just problems for the account holder. It's problems for you as well because you've got no real way of policing who the account is being shared

with. You don't know if you give permission for that account to be shared whether somebody is literally just posting it publicly or posting on social media or amongst a group of friends and allowing any old person to come log in to their account or to use it for unscrupulous means. Someone may be sharing those login details to allow people to go in and download everything from your site and then do a runner. You don't want to encourage this kind of behaviour. So this is certainly one approach to enabling shared memberships across a group, but there's definite, definite pitfalls to just allowing people to share access to one account.

The second option is to require people sign up for separate memberships. So if somebody approaches you and says they want their partner, they want their business colleague, they want their web designer, their husband or wife to be able to access the membership, you can request that they sign up for separate memberships for each person. This is the simplest approach for everybody. It keeps everything separate and then if there's any problems, if someone needs to cancel or someone is leaving a company or what have you, then everything is separate. There's none of those risks that we talked about earlier.

However, even though it is the simplest and the cleanest way of doing it, your members possibly are not going to see it that way. Maybe they're going to think it's a little bit too much hassle to be able to have everybody sign up for separate accounts, especially if there's quite a few people in their company that they want to be able to access the membership. What I would certainly suggest is if you are telling people that they need to create separate memberships to access the site that you perhaps consider giving them some sort of discount for those on the account. This is kind of a middle ground because remember, again, if they wanted to, these guys could just share the account. They could go around you and not tell you that they want to have their business partner set up as a member and so on.

So this is kind of a middle ground. It enables you to avoid the potential hassles and the potential problems of letting everyone all log into one account while also sweetening the deal a little bit, acknowledging that it is a little bit of a hassle to have to sign up as separate subscriptions. So you're almost incentivizing people to do things by the book and do things properly. You're incentivizing them in a way to not try and do this all under the radar by just sharing their account. So give them some sort of discount, anywhere up to 40 to 50 percent even, depending on the particular situation, depending on how many people you're dealing with too.

What you do need to keep in mind, however, is if you are giving people a discount for these associated accounts, that that discount in most cases with your membership plug-in, it'll still be applied to that subscription, even if the original full-price paying member leaves. Think about how you're going to approach that, whether you want an agreement in place that if that person leaves, if the main account holder leaves, that anyone else who is associated with them, who has that discount then needs to re-sign up or maybe if you have

the ability to control this in your PIN provider, maybe you are able to go in and actually manually change this. Just something to keep in mind. So it's good to offer a discount if you are requiring multiple people in a company to sign up separately, but you just need to stay on top of that and make sure that you're not ending up out of pocket long term. So that's option number two. Require anyone who wants to have a shared membership amongst their company, amongst their group, require them to sign up as though they were all separate members, but incentivize those additional sign-ups with a little discount too.

It might not feel right to you to subsidise those additional accounts. However, remember in most cases, people want that additional account as a convenience. They can already access and watch the content and all that sort of stuff. It's just more convenient for them to have that group access to the membership, so you're almost recognising that by subsidising those additional memberships.

Third and final option is to utilise the corporate account features that some membership plug-ins do have. So there are membership plug-ins in the market that have specific functionality designed for the exact situation that we're talking about. Now these, predictably in the WordPress membership plug-in market, these all work in different ways. So some plug-ins will essentially group individual accounts under a single master account. Others have options for you to be able to essentially bulk sell seats, so bulk sell membership spots to an individual buyer. Of course, the different plug-ins have a variety of different options for customising this whole thing and controlling everything. But this sort of functionality gives you a great middle ground between enabling everyone to have their own individual access and having that companywide grouping, that companywide association. It also enables you to be able to tailor the pricing and do some cool stuff with that. This is going to be particularly useful if you have a membership where perhaps you're dealing with local authorities or large associations, and maybe you're doing some offline negotiation with those companies around special deals for bulk signing up their staff or their subsidiaries and stuff like that.

Now again, this isn't a widespread feature of most membership plug-ins. There's only a handful that actually have it, but plug-ins like MemberPress, Restrict Content Pro, Memberium, MemberMouse kind of has functionality for this, Paid Memberships Pro, those plug-ins, they'll have different options for enabling group companywide corporate access to membership. So if you're finding that you're getting more and more people asking you for this type of arrangement or perhaps an opportunity has opened up whereby you could potentially land quite a big deal for a large-scale companywide membership, then definitely look into those options because it's going to be so much less hassle than having everybody logging in to one single account or getting everybody to just sign up for separate memberships.

Those are your three options when it comes to group shared memberships. Let people log in to a single account. It's the most common approach people take. Probably one of the most problematic. Require people to sign up for separate

memberships. This is simplest for everybody, but it lacks some of that group cohesion that bigger companies may be looking for. Or finally, depending on your membership plug-in, you can tap into the purpose-built functionality designed for this exact kind of situation. Again, MemberPress, Restrict Content Pro, Memberium, MemberMouse and PM Pro, those are the options to take a look at if you want that kind of corporate account facility. So if you are getting this kind of request coming in, or if you're in an industry, you're in a space where there's potential opportunities for those sort of corporate deals, hopefully, this is giving you a good insight into what your main options are, and it's giving you a little bit of food for thought on the best way of approaching it.

That's it for me for this episode. I'll be back again next week, so be sure to join me for another instalment of the Membership Guys podcast.

