5 Ideas to Take a Successful Membership to the Next Level

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Well, hello there. Welcome to Episode 175 of The Membership Guys Podcast. I’m your host, Mike Morrison. You are listening to the number one show for anyone who is looking to grow a seriously successful membership business. And you know, I say that, “Grow a seriously successful membership business.” And that is, of course, what we talk about each and every week, here on the show.

But, what happens after that? What happens when you have that successful membership business? You’ve got members coming in, they are engaged with your content. They’re taking part in the community. They’re sticking around. What next? What lies beyond having a successful membership business?

Now, for some people, all they want is for their membership to hit a certain point, and they’re happy continuously growing it, month on month, year on year. And they don’t need, they don’t want, they don’t aspire to anything beyond that. And you know what? That is 100 percent fine.

It’s okay. Don’t let anyone tell you that you’re doing something wrong if you’re just happily focusing on growing your membership as the main thing, the only thing that you do. But, if you’re wanting to take things to the next level, to push things even further, to do something more than simply increase your member numbers and your revenue, then today, I’m gonna give you some ideas to explore, to get to that next level.

So, first, I’m gonna talk about pretty simple one. This is what most people do when they want to ramp up their membership business. And that is, develop and offer book sales. So, these are additional products and services that you promote and you sell to your members. Usually, an up sale will be something that is positioned as the next level, the next step, the next stage, an enhancement for the membership.

So, we’re talking of things like coaching programs, annual retreats, paid masterminds, one on one coaching services, that sort of thing. Now, memberships are typically DIY, so, you provide training and resources. Members then use those training and resources, and the community support, to enable them to do whatever it was that they joined your membership to do, but to do it themselves. So, for a membership, a good up sale would be done with you or a done for you service or product.

So, as we said, coaching programs. Maybe things like web development services. Something like that. Whatever it is, that is that next level. Even next level in terms of the scope of what you’re helping people do, or in terms of the level of facilitation, the speed at which you can help someone get to where they want to go.

Now, often, these sorts of up sales are arranged in terms of your product offering in what is commonly called a value ladder. So, you have a whole range of different products that you offer. Down at the bottom of the ladder, that entry point, you have your cheaper, lower priced, lower ticket items. And then up top, you’ve got your big ticket, your expensive stuff, that’s usually a bit more exclusive. It’s usually more one on one, and so on.

So, you market Product A, that low level, entry level, low priced stuff, to your broad audience. Someone buys Product A, then you market Product B to them. They buy Product...
B, then you market Product C. And up the ladder you go. Now, that sounds pretty cold and cynical, right? But, it’s not as cold and cynical as I’ve made it sound there, although there are certainly people who take that approach.

That’s our strategy of having those entry level products, and then, essentially, having different levels that people can essentially buy their way up through, according to how much access they want, how much facilitation they want, how exclusive, how high level the actual training or the material or whatever is. It’s pretty common, and it works.

Personally, I prefer an alternative to that value ladder approach of up sale, up sale, up sale. And that is to create an ecosystem of products and services that are centered around your membership. So, your membership is at the heart of everything. You focus all your attention on bringing people into your membership, and then once in there, they are exposed to all of the other ways in which you can help them, or you can enhance what it is that they’ll be getting inside your membership.

So, it’s a little bit more of an ala carte approach, rather than the linear progression through a value ladder of up sales. So, you might have some of the things we talked about, in terms of coaching programs, masterminds, and so on. You may also have one of workshops, books, software, live events. But, instead of putting people through that series of starting with the low end, and then buying up and constantly be marketed the next thing, you just put everything out there. It’s all available. Here are all the various ways in which we can help you in a more personalized way, or a more hands on way, or a live and in person way. Or, how we can help you with a slightly different topic, so on and so on.

You’re not marketing 20 or 30 different things to your broader audience, you get them into your membership. Then, when they’re in their membership, then, that’s when things open up and they can pick and choose how else they might want to engage with you. What are the services? What are the products they may want to buy, if indeed, they want to buy anything at all. That’s effectively, the approach that we take. And with Member Sight Academy, all roads lead to the academy. That’s our main focus, always. That’s where our marketing [inaudible 00:05:21].

That’s where all of our strategy, all of our effort points towards. But, then, once you’re in there, once you’re a member, you’re gonna get first dibs on things like our accelerator program, which is a high level mastermind that we run. Now, if you’re listening and you are not an academy member, or maybe you’ve just joined in the last year or so, you might not have known that we even had a high level mastermind. That’s because it was offered to members first. They snatched up all the spots before it even went public, because they’re in there, at the heart of our ecosystem.

We also offer seats at our workshops, or our live mastermind days, to our members first. And quite often, they don’t hit public sale, because our members snap them up because they are in there at the heart of our ecosystem. And not only do they get first dibs, they also get the preferable rate in terms of ticket prices and so on, compared to what you would pay if you were a non member, if you were just buying publicly.
Same goes for our big conference that we’re doing next year, here in the U.K. Our members already know about that. But, if you’re listening, and you can actually find out more about our conference by going to retainlive.com. But again, you’ll see there on that page, academy members get their ticket cheaper. This is all about strengthening that ecosystem. So, in terms of ideas to take your membership to the next level, developing other products, having things like live events, writing books, that sort of thing. Having other stuff to offer to your audience, that they can use to either get to that next level, to enhance, to compliment, to accelerate what they’d be able to achieve with your membership alone. Very, very valid way of getting to that next level.

And the two main strategies you will take for that are either the value ladder approach, where it’s up sale, up sale, up sale, up sale, or our preferred approach of having an ecosystem where your membership is at the heart of everything. So, at a basic level, that’s something that you’re probably gonna want to explore. If you want to get to that next level with your membership and push things further beyond just increasing membership sales.

The next idea that you might want to explore, if you’re looking for ways of pushing your membership further is a strategy that I call “Teaching the Teachers.” Now, this isn’t necessarily something that’s going to apply to everyone. It’s not something everyone’s not going to be able to do. Because it is very topic, or very niched dependent, or niche dependent, depending on where you are in the world. But, let’s say your membership is successfully teaching people how to play piano. That’s pretty straightforward, right, in terms of a model. You have an expert teaching a skill to students, to end users.

But then, think about the fact that as a membership owner, who is teaching hundreds, or even thousands, of students, you’re probably wracking up an even greater wealth of knowledge about how to be an effective teacher. Likely, more knowledge than you could ever accumulate if you were just teaching local students because of the restrictions that you actually have logistically. That one to many element of the membership that allows you to reach far more people than you could ever reach one on one, equips you with more experience of dealing with a wider range, a larger number of students, than most people in your field would ever be able to do.

So, could you take that knowledge, that experience, and teach other piano teachers? Could the feedback that you get from your community help you to develop teaching techniques, that you could then pass on to other teachers? Does the fact that you’re teaching online help you gain insight into the teaching method as a whole, in terms of teaching piano, does it give you insights that you simply do not get when you’re just teaching students from your local area in your front room? How can you take that and productize it?

Could you teach those teachers how to actually do the stuff that doesn’t involve teaching? Could you teach them to build their business? Could you teach them how to market themselves? How to develop digital training materials? How to create worksheets and learning materials that look great, that are easier to follow? Could you teach them how to generate leads online, even if it’s still leads for their local teaching business? Can the stuff that you’re doing, to run your business, be adapted to a local business? A bricks and mortar business?
This all just requires you to think a little outside the box, and to really, really, drill into what skills are you developing? What skills outside of the skill that you’re teaching, could you then, impart onto others in your field? In corporate speak, this is kind of getting quite close to vertical integration, where you’re looking at all the different links in the chain, and finding ways to cater towards each of them.

And this strategy can also feed itself too. It becomes self feeding. You use your experience from your membership to help other teachers become better teachers. This gives you a community of fellow teachers that you could then potentially tap into, to come into your membership and teach your students. So, you’re helping teachers become better. Then, you know, okay, if I’ve helped 50 teachers become better piano teachers, then I have access to 50 of the best piano teachers in the world. Get them to come in and provide content to your members.

That makes your students better, which makes you better, because you’re getting feedback from them. You’re building on that wealth of experience that we’ve talked about before. That, then, gets passed onto your teachers who you’re teaching, which then gets passed into your membership, and on and on and on it goes.

Now, there’s a variety of different industries that this can work in. If you’re a business coach with your own signature program that, maybe, you’ve developed your own worksheets and exercises and training materials, and a syllabus for, and so on, not only could you have a membership where you’re taking business owners, so, those end users, through that program to develop and help their business, but you could also train other coaches on your system.

Maybe even, having an accreditation program, where those courses become certified in delivering your system, your program, to their clients. So, this approach, teaching the teachers, it works for anyone who’s developed something that they could call a signature methodology. So, anything that’s your IP. It’s your method, your particular way of doing things, that has an increased chance of results, versus just muddling through, or teaching the same old thing everyone else is teaching.

Another good example of an industry where this could work is in the fitness industry, too, with fitness instructors. If you’ve developed a workout, a diet, a training program, then, you can take it beyond teaching the end users, and teach the teachers. Things like CrossFit. Things like Bikram Yoga, all that sort of stuff ... This is me, bluffing my way through knowing what Bikram Yoga is. I heard it on a TV Show. But, I’m assuming somebody called Bikram, Mr. Bikram, Bikram Smith, came up with this.

But, I truly apologize if I’m offending anyone who invented Bikram Yoga or hot yoga. Or Zumba, or something like that. Someone would have come up with this at some point. And they’re not just teaching the people who are actually doing the exercise. They teach the people who teach the people. Could you do that? Could you teach your signature methodology to other fitness instructors?

In fact, one client that we worked with many moons ago, not only did that. She developed her own programs, and then she had accredited coaches who would go out there and
actually teach these, and teach classes based around those methodologies. But also, with our help, she went down the route of the next idea we’re gonna talk about, of taking your membership to the next level. And that is licensing your membership, itself.

So, again, if you’ve developed a signature system, a signature program or methodology, or, you’ve created a body of work that could quite easily be taken and delivered to the same effect to a different group of people other than your own audience, then you might consider licensing the use of your membership to other companies.

Now, quite often, when someone from a company, or maybe even a school or a local council, local authority, when they want their employees or their user base to have access to your material, they’ll just connect you and they’ll arrange some sort of group access or a corporate account for your membership, where there’s a single umbrella account that pays the bills, and then there’s a designated number of user accounts, individual users who can then access your membership underneath that umbrella.

And in fact, we have discussed in more detail, some options for facilitating that type of group membership previously on the show. However, you can go one step further. You can license your membership as a whole, to an entire company. So, this involves effectively, taking a copy of your existing membership and creating a duplicate version that would be privately accessed, just by that company’s employees.

So, the client that I mentioned who was a fitness instructor, she developed a popular training program. And after awhile, was approached by someone at a huge multi-national supermarket brand, who wanted their employees to have access to the membership materials as part of a company drive to help them improve their health and fitness. So, it was far too many people to just arrange a corporate account or a group account. So instead, what we did was, duplicate the entire membership. We pulled out some individual elements that they didn’t need or that weren’t appropriate for the type of environment we were creating.

Mostly the community, but also, things like up sales and cross sales into other products. And then, that tweaked version, that slightly customized version of that membership site was set up as a cold branded website on a totally separate domain. So, it still retains the instructor’s name, the instructor’s brand, the name of the program. But next to it, it had the logo of that company, as well. And on the login page, it had both logos. So, it was clear that this was a membership portal just for employees of that company. And the only people with access to that spun off version of the membership were people from that company.

She effectively ran both memberships, and whenever new content was added, it would be added in both places. So, of course, there was a little bit of extra admin work; However, the ongoing license fee from the company more than covered the cost of additional staff and additional resources to handle that. Her tech team remained responsible for updating the site, updating plug ins, and so on. So, she was still running both memberships from a logistical point of view, but obviously, things like marketing, things like retention, the community and all of that sort of stuff, they weren’t needed for the licensed version. So, there was very little work to do, to actually keep that licensed version of the membership running. And she was very handsomely rewarded on the financial front, as well.
Plus, because it was for a private company, it’s not like she was creating a competitor for herself. So, she wasn’t cannibalizing her own audience. And then, that license was reviewed and renewed on a year to year basis, for as long as both parties, both sides, were happy with it. And this worked so well that she went on to establish several similar licensing deals with other companies, too. Very little extra work for her; zero damage done to her main membership.

Her main membership, she just carried on running as usual, but because she was licensing out to private companies who were offering this almost as an intranet, as opposed to a product that they were then taking out to market and trying to sell, then it was win, win, win, win, right across the board.

Now, this can be a little more fiddly, a little trickier to do with the membership where there’s a lot of different components, and where often, you will have a community. But, if you’re already set up, you’ve got all the tech in place, you’ve got the content, and any new stuff you’re creating, you’d be creating anyway, then it doesn’t actually take that much to create that sort of duplicate, that licensed version of your membership. I think the hardest work is in actually attracting the type of people who want that sort of licensing arrangements in the first place. And of course, that is very much gonna be dependent on the nature of your membership itself.

It is, of course, easier to do with something like an online course, where the content is static. So, for example, WP101.com, they have a great course on how to use WordPress. So great, in fact, that we license it ourselves for use inside our membership. Made sense for us, rather than reinventing the wheel and recording a “How to Use WordPress” course, when a fantastic one already exists. And it’s a non issue that the videos are licensed, that they’re branded with WP101. In fact, I think that actually adds a positive element to it, because they’re a trusted entity.

So, this might be something you’d consider doing as a next level thing. Of course, this is dependent on whether or not your topic is the sort of thing that corporate groups might be interested in for their own staff or, you know, if it’s a school, whether it’s useful for their teachers, their employees, and so on.

I would say that if you haven’t already attracted requests for group access, so, umbrella accounts and that sort of thing, then it’s likely not as much scope, there’s not as much demand, for licensing opportunities for your membership. However, if you have got those sort of corporate accounts inside your membership already, then maybe that is something to dig deeper into.

I’d start by speaking to the people who have bought group access for their employees, for their company. Do some research. Have a conversation with them as to whether it’s something the would have a desire for. The information, the feedback that you get from them will help you to better determine whether this is an avenue worth going down.

The fifth idea for taking your membership to the next level that I want to talk about, is replicating your model. If you’ve built a successful membership, and you’ve proven the model in terms of the specific things that you’re doing for acquisition and retention, your
approach to teaching, to content creation, and so on, then why not explore opportunities to replicate that proven model for other topics?

Now, if you’re an expert in one specific area, one specific subject, chances are you might not have an equal level of expertise in another area, or enough expertise to feel confident, to start a membership that has you as the figure head, you as an expert in this totally other subject. However, maybe, you could partner up with someone else who is an expert. Your model, their experience. Your website, the way in which you set up the tech, the frequency with which you release content, the type of content, the nature and the structure of your community, the marketing strategies, the engagement tactics, all of that, that’s your model.

You could pair that up with someone else’s expertise. They bring the knowledge, you bring the platform. Or, perhaps, your current membership is one where the content is primarily provided by others. So, you have guest experts. You have guest shooters, creating workshops. You have a faculty of teachers that you employ to create courses and training material. So, if you replicated that, it wouldn’t matter that you’re not an expert, because your membership model is not one that revolves around you as the expert.

Same goes if you’ve got a membership that is purely resource-based. So, where all your members get, or effectively, worksheets, templates, maybe photographs, stock assets, design assets, and so on. These are things that you could very easily just pay someone else to create, for a completely different industry. So again, it’s not a model that is based on you as the figure head, you as the expert. And as such, it would be easier for you to replicate that and take that blueprint, take that template, into another industry, replicating a model that it’s working for you can pay dividends.

It’s something that Jared over at Drumeo.com has done very well. Drumeo is perhaps, the most successful drumming membership in the world, and it’s one that employs the faculty model that we talked about. Now, Jared is an absolute demon on the drums. He teaches drums. But, he also has a faculty of fantastic drumming instructors, too. So, he isn’t the be all and end all of Drumeo, and that gives him immense flexibility for being able to take the Drumeo model, and adapt it for other musical disciplines, which Jared has done. Jared proved the model, and then he replicated it into piano instruction, and into guitar instruction.

Now, of course, this isn’t as simple as just copying and pasting your business model into another niche; There are challenges that come with it, and what works in one market isn’t always necessarily guaranteed to work in another. In fact, this is something Jared discussed at length when he spoke to [Callie 00:22:43] as part of her Behind the Membership podcast series. If you haven’t heard the episode with Jared, or you haven’t listened to Behind the Membership, check it out. Go search for Behind the Membership in iTunes or in your podcast app. Seek out the episode with Jared from Drumeo, if this idea of replicating your model into another industry is one that intrigues you.

So there we have it, five ways, five ideas that you could explore if you’re looking for ways to take an already successful membership business to the next level. The first is creating an up sale-based value ladder. So, think about what those next stages are. What would help them more? What would help them get to where they
need to go quicker, faster, with more confidence, with greater facilitation and involvement from you? Think about what that value ladder is and how you can flesh that out for your membership.

Or, if you don’t like that progression-based approach of up sale, up sale, up sale, you can take the approach we take with Membership Academy and instead, develop a membership ecosystem. So, your membership is at the heart of everything, but you develop a suite, a range, of other ways in which you can help your members and compliment what they’re getting inside their membership.

This is something that’s worked very well for us. It’s something that I know Jim Schramko over at Superfast Business, he refers to this as the chocolate wheel, and that’s a strategy, that’s a model that’s worked well for him, as well. So, it’s something worth exploring yourself. So, those two ideas involve developing additional product and services that work as part of a wider product offering.

Idea Number Three is the teach the teachers strategy. What are the skills have you developed, through your role as a membership owner? As a community leader? As a teacher? Could you adapt those to help your peers? To help others in your industry? So, you almost become the experts expert. The teacher’s teacher. You become this lightning rod for others in your profession. And you’ve got a taste of that vertical integration where you’re teaching students, but you’re also teaching other people who are teaching other students. It’s a strategy that can work very, very well. As is, licensing your membership.

If you have the sort of membership that corporate entities, that associations, local councils, authorities, schools, all those sort of things where they might want to have group access to your materials, then think about the prospect of licensing the entirety of your site, or an adapted version of your site, exclusively for their use, that may very well be an idea that has legs for your business.

And then finally, if your membership is successful, if everything’s working like gangbusters, all your ducks are in a row, everything’s running smoothly, that means you’ve proven the model. And when you’ve proven that you have a model, an approach, a strategy that works for you within your market, the scope to take that proven model and then, adapt it for other related markets. It doesn’t matter that you’re not the expert. You can partner up with experts, or you can build a faculty of experts who will actually create the content. You just give the framework. You have the strategy. You have the underlying model that makes all of that work.

So, if your membership is already highly successful, and you’ve been wondering to yourself, “What now? What next? What more can I do, to expand my business beyond the success I’m already enjoying with my membership site?” Hopefully today’s episode has given you a little bit of food for thought. What I would definitely advise, however, is decide on what the anchor point of your business is going to be. Which basically means that, if everything started falling apart, if you could only salvage, if you could only have one element in your business, what would that be?
It might not be your membership. It might be that your high level coaching program is your anchor point. So, if you had to get rid of everything in your business, everything else, including your membership, would go away, and you want that coaching program. You want that big, live event, that big conference. You want that book that you’re writing to be the thing, and then everything else branches out from it. You need to have an anchor point, personally in my view. Because that’s your true north. That’s your north star. That’s the thing that informs the direction of all other things.

For us, the academy is our anchor point. If any of the other things in our membership ecosystem, started cannibalizing, started causing problems, started taking away from the academy, those other things would be shut down. And in fact, we’ve done that in the past. I mentioned our membership accelerator. We no longer offer that. It’s on ice. It’s on the shelf. It may come back in the future, but it started having a little bit of an effect onto how we run our membership and onto how we were able to turn up and serve our members. And because our membership, member site academy, is our anchor point, it is our true north, it’s the one thing that we protect, then we close down the accelerator, rather than allowing it to affect the membership.

So, as you seek that next level, as you explore new opportunities, as you expand on your product offering, you need to have that anchor point, and I’m guessing you’re gonna be like me, your membership will be that anchor point. So, always be mindful of that. Anything else you do, in the pursuit of that next level, if it starts to hurt your membership, pull it back.

Just my personal opinion. It is, of course, obviously, dependent on your own situation, your own priorities, but you know, that’s my two cents worth, or my two pennies worth, anyway. Anyway, let’s wrap things up there. Hopefully, you found this episode useful. As always, I love to hear from you guys. If you have, please do. If you feel so inclined, leave a nice shiny, five star review in the podcast app of your choice, whether it’s iTunes, Stitcher, Sound Cloud, wherever you’re listening to the show. If you enjoyed it, if you find this useful, please, do leave a nice shiny review, five stars only. Just saying, otherwise, I’d love to hear from you, of course, on all our social channels. You can hit me up on Twitter at membershipguys, or catch me inside our free Facebook group.

Just type membership mastermind into the Facebook app. That’ll take you to our group of over 10,000 membership site owners. Myself and Callie are in there. I would love to hear your thoughts on today’s episode, and what you’ve done to take your membership to that next level beyond simply growing the core membership. What have you done to expand your membership business? I’d love to hear from you.

That’s it for me this week. Thanks, as always, for joining me. I’ll be back again next week with another episode of The Membership Guys Podcast.