

Welcome to the Membership Guys podcast. Kickass advice and tips for membership site owners.

Mike Morrison:

Hi everyone thanks for tuning in for another episode of the Membership Guys podcast, I'm your host Mike Morrison, one half of the Membership Guys and we are Membership Site experts. This is the show in which we talk all things membership. Just in case the dozen or so mentions of the word Membership or Membership website didn't quite get that message across.

We're joined on today's episode by Pat Flynn who a lot of you will know from SmartPassiveIncome.com an insanely popular blog and podcast centred around the world of online business.

Pat has just written and released his second book, "Will it Fly," which is about one of my favourite subjects, and that is idea validation. If you've listened to this podcast for a while, if you've been reading the blog you know that I bang the drum over and over about the importance of actually validating your idea for you membership site. Pat has written what is a fantastic book. I received it the day of launch, read it cover to cover, it's got some great exercises and a great process that you can go through in order to actually evaluate, research and prove your ideas before you actually roll out.

That's so, so important for membership site owners to do particularly given just how much of a time sync doing the actual creation and building side of a membership site is. The absolutely worse thing that can happen is you launch your membership site and nobody turns up because it was never a good idea in the first place.

I talked to Pat a little about his background and how the book came to be and we discussed various aspects of idea validation of researching and evaluating your potential business idea for your online business or your membership site. We're going to jump right now into my conversation with Pat Flynn.



I'm joined today by Pat Flynn the founder of smartpassiveincome which is a hugely successful blog and podcast on the subject of online business and he is the author of a brand new book Will it Fly, Pat, thanks so much for taking time out in the middle of all the launch craziness to join me today for the podcast.

Pat Flynn: Yeah, no worries, thanks for having me. It's interesting because this is the

first interview I've done after the launch and to hear you say "Author of Will

it Fly," after it's out it's really cool, it's actually real now, thank you.

Mike Morrison: You can tag that on your businesses cards now, you can wear a nice little

badge.

Pat Flynn: It's not just an ebook either, it's physical.

Mike Morrison: It's a real ... I've got it here, I'm touching it over here in the UK I have a copy

of the book.

Pat Flynn: That's so cool.

Mike Morrison: It's awesome. Obviously a lot of people will know you for

SmartPassiveIncome.com but for anyone who has been living under a rock can you give a little bit of a bio, a little info about you, your background and

how all of this came to be?

Pat Flynn: Absolutely, it's an interesting story. It starts after college when I went to

school for architecture, I got a great job in the architecture world and that's what I wanted to do of the rest of my life, I was planning on it until 2008 when I got laid off and got let go which was unfortunate and I didn't know what I was going to do at the time. I'm trying to make this story shorter than usual but what happened was I discovered this world of online business and I took some knowledge I had about this exam that I took while I was an

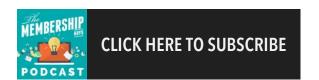
architect and I packaged it into a website and I packaged it into products and practise exams and stuff that people could buy to help them pass the exam.

My very first product launched in October of 2008 after I was let go and it did really well. I sold it for \$19.99, it was just an ebook and it generated \$7,908.55 that month of October 2008. That was completely life changing. It changed everything it changed what I believed I could do myself it changed my belief in online business and internet business because a lot of the people I researched at the time were very not the kind of people I would like to hang

around with.

They were scammers and snake oil salesmen, that sort of thing and here I was doing online business but doing it in a way that I felt was very honest and I was helping people out but not only that but I was getting these incredible notes of thank you's from people who I had helped pass that exam who had gotten then promoted or who had gotten raises as a result and it was just such a cool feeling and I wanted to share all of it, how it happened, how I built the whole thing, what I did wrong and everything and I turned that into a packaged website smartpassiveincome.com where I just blogged.

I've been blogging there since October 2008 and revealing as much information as I can about everything that I've done, everything that I am



doing. Now I kind of call myself the crash test dummy of online business where I put myself on the front line and I just smash myself into that brick wall to see if that thing that everybody talks about is working or not. I just report back to everybody to share what I did right, what I did wrong things that I would do differently.

Along the way I'm just helping as many people as I can with their own online businesses so they don't have to go through a major layoff or life changing moment to discover all these things that are possible out there.

Now I'm speaking, I'm an author now, I'm in this really cool leadership role in this space that I've never dreamt I would be in but I'm definitely owning it and I'm trying to make the best of it to help as many people as I can.

Mike Morrison:

It's such an awesome story and obviously from that position of being laid off which for that period of time, I'm sure plenty of our listeners will have either gone through it themselves or know somebody who has been put in that situation where all of a sudden your big life plan, the career for life is pulled away from you. You've obviously had to hustle quite quickly I would imagine to get that first product out.

Over the years through being this crash test dummy of online business, how has your approach to testing and trialling new ideas evolved from presumably what was; was it a rushed process initially? Was it a kind of we need to get something making money quickly for your first product?

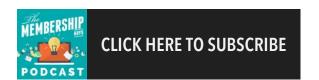
Pat Flynn:

Yeah, it kind of was, I didn't really have anything else. My wife, back then fiance, the timing of the layoff was "Perfect", I'm doing air quotes as I'm saying that because I had just proposed to my girlfriend, she said yes and then I was let got. I was like wow, this is crazy but she was beautifully supportive at the time and has continued to be supportive ever since.

Back then we both decided to move back in with our parents to save some money while I was doing this thing and trying to make it work and because there was no other option, I actually tried to get back into architecture, I felt like I did things that I wouldn't normally wouldn't do. I took risks that I wouldn't normally take and I took bold actions that were required for me to make it work. Was it rushed? It wasn't necessarily rushed but I definitely wanted to do it right.

My approach has changed over time because now that I have a lot more leeway and I have a lot more opportunities to try new things. Of course, since then a lot of new opportunities have come about for everybody. I've been trying to take it in a very smart way trying to make sure that I package it in a way that I can share that and others can benefit from that and that's really what Will it Fly has become. Through my own experience and a lot of other people's experiences who are featured in the book too who have validated their products before selling it, I've been able to see and put it all into something that would help people the most.

I've found over time by helping a lot of entrepreneurs and getting to know people who are just starting out, that one of the biggest fears that people have is just working on something that fails because it's that time that you put into it, it's your pride also. I know as somebody who has worked on stuff



a lot it doesn't feel good to fail. Having that confidence to know that that the thing that you're working on up front is key.

That's what I'm trying to do with Will it Fly here and hopefully people like it.

Mike Morrison:

I got my copy through this morning, read it cover to cover, really enjoyed it which is good, because had I not this might have been a very different conversation. It's a great, great book and its a topic that we're constantly banging the drum about to our own audience too, idea validation and actually evaluating that you have a good business idea, you have a workable business idea that's right for and that you're right for. We see so many membership sites fail whether it's people coming to us in a situation where they've invested so much time and money into their membership site and it's because they've ended up getting so occupied straightaway with figuring out which WordPress plugin to use. Whether to use lead pages or click funnels and they've just passed right past that point of actually researching their idea. Do you think that's more symptomatic of entrepreneurs in this day and age with the whole move towards a just ship it mentality or do you think that's kind of something that has always been there because it's more prevalent now because we hear more about it through social media and so on?

Pat Flynn:

I think it's a number of different things. For one, it is Seth Godin did made the phase just Shipit very famous and I believe that in a sense because you have to take action because if you don't take any action nothing's going to happen. A lot of times we have this perfectionist mentality, but sometimes you just have to ship, you can't be perfect, that's just kind of an excuse. On the other hand, if you just ship without doing any research behind it then you're going into grounds for you have no idea what is going to happen. It's nice to know upfront what is going to happen.

I also think a part of it is a lot of us are afraid to do this research up front, the purpose of the book or any validation is to know if it's going to work or not up front. I think a lot of us fear the answer that it's not going to work. We feel better about working on something when there's still a chance than knowing something is going to fail up front.

It's obvious when you think about it you'd want to know that it would fail up front so you can move on to something that would but I think it's human nature to take action on that hope and that's good but when you just rely on hope and you just rely on passion it can bite you in the butt later on. You have to have an ice blend of the two in terms of research and data and knowing and also that hope and passion.

Obviously if you build businesses just to build businesses and you don't have any passion for it and there's no energy then it's going to also fail.

Mike Morrison:

Definitely I think you also say that people who'll maybe have an idea they'll ask their fiance, they'll ask their brother, they'll ask their parents and they'll all say yes it's a great idea and then they'll just run with it but the process laid out Will it Fly, obviously that's been shaped from your own experiences from people you've seen in the world of online business from connexions and so on, you share a lot of great examples within the book too. For someone who is at square one, maybe they've just got that little acorn of an idea in their



mind, they haven't done anything with it yet, where do they start? What's sort of process should they be taking generally to see whether that is an idea that could work for them?

Pat Flynn: We're talking specifically to people who are building membership sites or

want to do that eventually, right? That's the primary audience?

Mike Morrison: Yeah sure membership sites or many kind of online business. Maybe that's

one of several potential ideas they've had, "Oh, maybe I can do membership

site, I could do coaching, I could do an online course."

Pat Flynn: What it comes down to is you want to get people to pay you for something

upfront. That's the only way you'll know if they'll pay for it later. That's what Tim Ferriss said in the "4-Hour Workweek," the only way to truly validate, to truly know if someone's going to pay you for something is to ask them to pay you for something. It's kind of weird because initially you're like, "What, you want people to pay for something that I haven't built yet?" That happens all

the time now.

You pay for events, you pay for an event before you go to it. Even beyond that, products from physical to digital we're paying for a lot of these things up front now. On Kickstarter, we're paying for ideas. They're for people who are building stuff who haven't yet built that thing the pledge that the things going to come out, you pay for the idea and you're going to eventually get it later if they reach that pledge amount. It's kind of the same thing what

you're doing here.

For example, if you are doing a coaching thing, the biggest way to validate that is to go out there and see if you can get just one customer because then you'll know that besides what some people other people do is they'll build out their whole platform, I talk about this in the book, they'll build out their websites and their business cards and their logo and everything else first but then they try to ask to get a customer and they can't. They've wasted all that time doing that fun stuff and it is fun stuff to create your logo and to build your brand, you have no right, I guess you do. You're doing it in the wrong order.

You want to get the business first before you have all that other stuff coming in. If you're doing a membership site, I'm just thinking off the top of my head here, if you can get for example, five paying customers to pay you up front and then you would put them into for example, a Facebook group and you work with them just in there and that's what they would get access to just to give them something up front but then you can work with them to build out your membership site from there.

That's cool because they get a say and you get to build it in the way that you don't have to guess works but you get to hear directly from your customer that it is going to work. You'll be able to provide them content, show pieces and bits and pieces of the membership site while they're in there. They've paid up front so they'll probably get a discount but more than that they get to help shape what the course becomes. If you can't get people to do that what makes you think that after you build the whole thing out that you're going to get people to come in?



That's kind of what the idea here is for that.

Mike Morrison:

Absolutely and I think where some people may go wrong with idea validation when they're researching their idea is they just trying to find out is this idea good? Is there a market and will people pay for it but a lot of it does come down to as you said, can you actually get people to pay you because if you can't communicate your idea and you can't actually get somebody to put their hands in the pocket, even if the idea itself is good or if your heart's not in it, probably one of the main things that stuck out for me from the book is actually starting with you. Not going into the idea but starting with looking at yourself and what you want to achieve and what you're vision is which again a lot of people don't even think that.

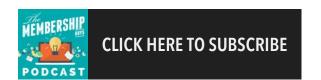
They'll look at something like a membership site which is kind of the Holy Grail for a lot of people when it comes to online business and they get attracted to that and you'll see all the seven figure launch and eight figure launch set up your membership site in two hours kind of stuff and they just get drawn to that when actually fundamentally it's kind of a non starter for them as a person as well.

Pat Flynn:

Right, it's so true, you have to see if can do it first but what's cool about the way I teach validation in the book, it's unlike what Tim Ferriss did in 2007, he kind of put validation on the map but he did it in a different way. He did it where you'd set up a landing page, you don't build the whole business out, you just set up the landing page and then you drive cold traffic to it and if you have an audience already you drive traffic to that page of that thing you're going to sell and you keep track of how many people click on that buy now button. That's how you would know and gauge whether this is something that people are interested in.

There are some problems with that, maybe the sales page doesn't do a good job. Even though that thing that they would want; there are a lot of variables that could go wrong, a lot of parts that could fail. The nice thing about the way you're supposed to do validation now is you actually talk to people have interactions with them and even if that idea doesn't work or even if they say it's good and they don't purchase, the best part of doing it this way is you can ask why. You can figure out what's wrong.

If for whatever reason you go through this process and you find out that it doesn't work you're going to at least have people that you can find out why so you can make the necessary changes instead of being blind to the results. That's really what this is all about, interaction with your target customers. You have your whole target market, you're taking a small sample of them and you're running your idea with them through a small evaluation, a small test if you will, kind of a small experiment. Once you get it fine tuned and figured out then you go big scale, full scale, knowing that it's already working. You have paying customers already, you're working with them to create it in a way that needs to be done, you're putting all your modules in your membership site that are supposed to be there. You're not doing what a lot of people do in software and in membership sites where you build it first and you think you know what modules you want in there but you're potentially wasting time or wasting everybody else's time.



If you can get customers in there first and work with them to create whatever it is that they need, not what you think they need, everybody is going to be happy, you're going to be happy, they're going to be happy, everybody wins.

Mike Morrison:

Definitely because I supposed the worst time is to ask someone what they want is after you've created it, after you think what they want. For somebody who has kind of skipped past this process; design your logo is fun, design your website is fun and even to someone non-techy setting up your WordPress plugins for your membership and doing all that sort of stuff that's almost the sexy side of making your idea, rolling it out. For someone who has skipped past that initial stage, they've spent months, they've invested money into a membership site to put all of the modules into their courses and then they've opened the doors and nobody comes. Can that be salvaged? Is there a way of retroactively do a bit of validation then pivoting from there or is that sort of thing where you write it off and then start fresh?

Pat Flynn:

There's always a way to go back and fix things, that's what I feel. I think if you're honest with everybody it'll be even better because they'll know that you're focused on providing them the best value. When you can take them or maybe just a small sample of your existing audience through that process it's going to be huge for everybody. That's what I would do, I wouldn't necessary send an email blast to everybody saying, "Hey guys, I screwed up, we're going to start over but don't worry you're going to stick around it'll be great eventually." You don't want to do that. Take a small sample maybe it's just five, ten of your power users, your most trusted users, the people that are the most active in your community for example or people you know who have gotten results from what you've taught them and have an honest conversation with them and just talk about, "I feel that we could go this way, what do you think about that?"

Those interactions and those real life conversations are going to tell you so much from the mouths of your existing customers and user base. No matter how many you have there's always people you can tap into. I think that's really where you would start if you have a business already.

You can also run surveys, I've run surveys, actually I ran a survey last year which provided a lot of information about what I was doing wrong based on the data and so I've actually made a lot of changes. That's where Will it Fly has come from and it's definitely going to be better for everybody but it wasn't in a direct way where I was saying, "I need to pivot because this isn't working." It was more, "Hey guys, what's working for you, what's not?" Then I'm making changes based on those results from there.

For sure and probably one of the biggest things about membership sites that Mike Morrison: once your members have joined, they're there they're in your community so

you've got that built in study group [crosstalk 00:20:05].

Pat Flynn: Totally. Utilise that. It's so great.

Mike Morrison: Something we hear a lot from your own audience and I'm sure it's something

you encounter is where they have so many ideas and they don't know which one they should go with, they don't know where to start and its not just a case of having that one idea that they can't pull the trigger on they can't even



narrow it down an idea to start with because there's just so much rattling around in their heads. What sort of advice would you give to people in that kind of situation where every other day there's a new shiny object. There's a new facebook for Pilates instructors that pops into their head.

Pat Flynn:

There are so many ideas out there that's why I didn't write a book about finding ideas, I wrote a book about how to test those ideas. Really where it starts if you have a tonne of them is to write them all down. Sometimes when you see them all on paper, immediately a few will either stand out to you or be obvious that they shouldn't even be there. Our brains they do a really great job of thinking of stuff but they don't do a great job of time management, thinking of stuff putting them in order and creating hierarchies.

That's why I talk about mind mapping quite a bit. That's where I would start. You would write down all these ideas that you have, then start to prune that tree if you will. Then one by one start with the one that's most exciting to you and mind map that out. See if you can turn it into something that makes sense. By mind mapping I mean writing down all the ideas you have related to that one thing. Starting to organise it into this thing that will eventually become this product or this membership site.

Then do it for another one and just see eventually you're going to find that one or two stand out to you more than the others. That's where you start to connect the dots between your ideas and what the market actually needs. We don't know even if we flush them out and figure out what this thing actually is, you won't know until you start talking about it with other people and then sharing it with the world if it's actually something that they want.

The market research is going to be really important to so going through your market map and find out all the different people and the products and the places that those places that those people already exist to see what's already being served. You might have come up with something that already exists or something that someone has already tried and you can see what else you can see what you can do better than what's already out there.

That's where I would start, it's just really about weeding it out but also talking to people. Even if you haven't done your mind map on your ideas, you're going to see really quickly whether or not they have legs or not or wings if you will. That's something that a lot of people struggle with, they don't want to talk about their ideas with other people because they're afraid of what other people might think but more importantly some people might think that other people might steal their ideas.

I talk about that in the book too, there are so many more benefits of speaking about your idea to other people than to keeping it secret. They're going to be able to poke holes in it, they're going to be able to turn it into something even better or give you confirmation that you should move on to the next steps and then actually keep continuing to validate it.

Mike Morrison:

Absolutely, and I love the way you talk about that in the book and you talk about having a conversation online with someone in line at Starbucks and just picking their brains and getting their honest feedback and honest input.



Pat Flynn: Totally, buy them a coffee, buy the person behind you coffee and then say,

"Hey, do you mind if I ask you a quick question about this business I'm trying to start?" More than likely they will say yes and give you some golden information. I've done that before. It's a little scary, this stranger and you're buying them coffee, it's a little bit weird but you know what, if you're going to be an entrepreneur you have to step out of your comfort zone and it's

good practise.

I don't know if you know who Noah Kagan is?

Mike Morrison: Yes, sure.

Pat Flynn: He came on my podcast once and he challenged all of my readers to go to

Starbucks and ask for a discount. Who does that? Well, he challenged everybody to do that because you have to things that are abnormal and make you uncomfortable a little bit in order to win an as an entrepreneur. That's really what it's about. It's about figuring out a way and it's not always going to be easy but, that was a cool exercise. I don't know if people in your

audience want to do that but the coffee challenge is what he calls it.

Mike Morrison: I got to say for some reason when I was reading that I was picturing this

Starbucks in Time's Square, we were just in New York over Christmas. I was picturing that and imagining the reception there may be a little different in

New York Starbucks ...

Pat Flynn: "Get out of here, what are doing, the line's so long, get out of here."

Mike Morrison: Exactly, I could imagine it probably goes down a little better in San Diego.

Pat Flynn: Hey you know what, if you get rejected that's part of the process too.

Mike Morrison: Lost my train of thought now.

Pat Flynn: My impression threw you off because it was so bad. They're pretty bad so.

Mike Morrison: I think one of the other stories in the book that I really kind of resonated with

me is when you talk about your interview with Andrew Warner from Mixergy and that question of whether you're playing big enough whether you're aiming big enough and the realisation that you had in asking yourself that question of whether you're playing small enough and focusing more on the niches and the idea from Kevin Kelly of having a thousand true fans. Is that something you see with your own audience when they talk about their business ideas, perhaps they are seeing all this talk of, as we said, the seven figure launch, the eight figure launch and they perhaps end up thinking too big or they're trying to boil the ocean. Do you think there's an aversion to

staying too small?

Pat Flynn: I think that people worry about being too small and I think that' why we try

to get into spaces that we know are very successful but oftentimes because we go too general, we have no chance. The smaller you get in your niche the more likely it is to become that expert that one that everybody talks about. You can start small, it doesn't mean you have to stay small. You continue to

grow outward and from there.



That interview with Andrew Warner was insane. There was so much lead up to do it and knowing that he's a crazy interviewer knew I was going to be in for some deep, tough questions and he started out right away with that. The LEED exam, nobody knows what that is except people that are in the architecture space that are taking that exam but to them, my website was the website to be on every single day and even though it's not the whole entire world, it was their world.

From there I was able to help out a lot of people but get them to spread the word about me. I could have, I didn't, I could have expanded into other exams in the architecture space but that was at that point I got laid off and smartpassive income became my next big project from there but I did have those opportunities. If you stay within a market, you can just start in a smaller area of that market and expand out from there.

There was a woman I featured, it was case study number three, Jennifer Barcelos who created NAMASTREAM in Willowfly who validated this software product for yoga instructors to have their yoga classes be streamed online and be available online in a library to their members. That actually did really well and I actually interviewed her again yesterday for a launch party for my book and she just told me that she now has people that aren't yoga instructors using her software. She has gym coaches and other health related coaches coming in there and using her software and even though she didn't have it for that specific purpose she's been able to expand out of it.

People in the yoga industry seem to know everybody else in the health space so they talk to each other and it becomes a solution that other people can use too. Thinking small isn't bad. If you're going to target somebody to validate with you want to target with the specific exact person who has that specified problem that you're building a solution for and that's where you should start.

Mike Morrison:

I suppose that brings it full circle back around to starting with you and what you want and what you want to achieve in your life and then looking at how your business idea fits with that. The kind of too big or too small is all kind of relative to how big or how small you want to be.

Pat, thank you so much for spending the time especially in your launch week for the book. I'm glad it's going really well for you. Can you let our listeners know where they can buy the book, find out more information maybe a little bit about the course that accompanies it as well that I haven't had a chance to check out.

Pat Flynn:

Yeah, thank you. The book can be found at Willitflybook.com, it's all you need to go there, Willitflybook.com. There's an accompanying course, a companion course a resource that you can use while you read along that has some bonus videos, some worksheets that you can download that I reference in the book. Also all of the links mentioned in the book, this was created for a number of reasons but one of the reasons is one of my biggest pet peeves is when I read books that tell me to click on links, I have to keep track of them, I have to remember, it's hard for me to find them all in one place.

I created a chapter by chapter companion course that has all the links for the chapter for the course that you're reading, clickable already for you. It's



really cool. There's a lot of people in in now. It's not a stand alone course but it's one that goes along with the book. The book references it and it references the book and so there's a lot of cool things that go along with that.

Mike Morrison:

Awesome. For any of our listeners who are still in that stage of rattling around their ideas or trying to turn that nugget of an idea into something tangible and figure out whether it's something worth pursuing or even if you have jumped into [inaudible 00:29:41] through WordPress plugins trying to pick themes, get a copy of this book, give it a read. Complete the exercises, check out the accompanying course, your business will thank you for it in the end.

Pat, thanks again so much for taking the time out to join us on the podcast I really enjoyed our conversation. Where other than Willitflybook.com can people get a bit more info, connect with you on social media and so on.

Pat Flynn:

Absolutely, you can check me out at Pat Flynn on most of the major social media platforms: Twitter, Instagram, Periscope. You can also find everything located at smartpassiveincome. Com

Mike Morrison:

Awesome. Pat thanks so much for joining us on the show and enjoy the rest of your day.

Pat Flynn:

Thank you for having me, I appreciate it.

Mike Morrison:

Thanks again to Pat for taking the time out of his very busy schedule and that's no joke this is literally the day after the book has launched so this is undoubtedly a crazy, crazy time right now for Pat and the team so thanks again for him for taking the time to share a bit of insight to share some of his expertise with us. I really hope you guys got a lot from that and particularly any of you that are sitting on an idea and you are thinking about starting a membership site and you're not quite sure where to start. I would definitely recommend you check out the book, Willitflybook.com, get yourself a copy, follow the process, complete the exercises and check out the companion course too because that whole process will help you to evaluate your idea to establish whether it's one that's worth pursuing. Be sure to check that out.

That's it for this episode of the Membership Guy's podcast. I hope you enjoyed it, thanks again for taking the time out to download and listen to the show. As always, if you enjoyed the show be sure to head over to Itunes.com and leave us a glowing five star review saying lots of nice things about the podcast. I'll be back next week, same bat time, same bat channel with another episode of The Membership Guys podcast.

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