

# HOW TO HANDLE CLOSING DOWN YOUR MEMBERSHIP

A person in a blue shirt is holding a white sign with the word 'CLOSED' in large, raised, grey letters. The sign is hanging from a chain. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be an office or store interior.

Hey guys. Welcome to episode 71 of The Membership Guys Podcast. I'm your host, Mike Morrison. Thank you so much for downloading this episode and choosing to spend a little bit of your day with me. Hopefully I'll make it worth your while. If this is the first time tuning in, this is the show for proven practical tips and advice for building and growing a successful membership website. If that sounds like the sort of thing you're after, you are in the right place.

In this episode, I'm talking about something a little bit different. We usually talk about a variety of different things around how to plan out your membership, if you're still in that initial stage of putting things together, through to some of the tech stuff, the logistical stuff, of building, to launching, to growing it, running it, and so on.

I want to talk about what happens at the end of your journey, the end of your membership journey where you may need to consider or you may be thinking about closing down your membership. Obviously, we talk all the time about the fact that memberships are a marathon and not a sprint, and so when you're starting a membership, you need to do so with a long term view. Your membership is something which could go on for years and years, even decades at a time, and obviously it's always going to be changing, it's always going to be evolving, but it's not a fixed journey. There's not a natural end point where you set up a membership, you run it for five years, and then you move on to something else. A membership is something that you're going to want to be running on an on-going basis, so right now, perhaps the concept or the idea of closing your membership is one that hasn't even crossed your mind, but there may be circumstances that come up where you're faced with a decision about whether to close your membership and perhaps you decide that it's better to do so.

What happens? What do you actually do? How do you turn off your membership? What do you have to think about before you close your membership down? What you don't want to do is just pull the plug over night because that's going to do catastrophic damage to your reputation, to your business, to the trust that your members have in you, not to mention the potential problems that you're going to have from people who paid their hard earned money to access a membership that suddenly disappears. If you're thinking about closing your membership for whatever reason, definitely, definitely avoid the approach where you just pull the plug and disappear over night because that's not going to turn up very well for anyone involved.

If you are thinking about closing your membership, the first thing to question is why. Why do you need, or why do you feel that you need, to close your membership? Is the reason behind this decision a short term thing? Is it a case of maybe you just have some financial difficulties or



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there's stuff going on in your life right now, which means you're not able to focus on your membership site?

When stuff like that happens, it can seem like a hole that is going to take you forever to get out of, but before you make a decision about whether or not to close your membership because of circumstances that you're going through right now, think about what will happen when you come out with the other end. Pretty much all problems, all bad situations, have an expiry date, so how are you going to feel twelve months down the line when the short term issues that you're dealing with right now are over? How are you going to feel if you've closed your membership and you're having to start from scratch?

In that regards, are you going to regret closing your membership? If you are, then you can quite easily take a break from your membership without having to close it down. Maybe you bring in some additional resource to help with the day to day. Perhaps you simply communicate to your members that there are circumstances or situations that you're dealing with which mean that maybe you're not going to be as accessible for the next few months, but that you are going to be getting back on the horse and getting things back on track.

If you were to do that, no doubt you would lose some members who are perhaps not as sympathetic or whose own circumstances can't afford them the opportunity to be forgiving to deal with a membership when maybe they're not getting what they paid for for a few months, but even if you were to lose half of your members, you still aren't then having to start from scratch all over again when whatever you're dealing with right now is taken care of. Definitely dig deeper and explore the reasons why you're closing your membership. Is it something that you might regret? If so, or if you think it's something you might regret, then look at whether you can put something in place short term to help you get through whatever circumstances there are that are causing you to question the decision to continue running your membership.

It may just be that membership simply isn't what you hoped it was. Maybe you're not enjoying it whatsoever. Again, make some attempt or make some effort to try and reignite your passions. Maybe you can pivot. Maybe you can change what you're doing. Maybe it is just a case of needing to take a break away just to refresh yourself. It doesn't have to be some life-altering or life-impacting circumstances or issues that you're dealing with that give you reason for taking some time away from your membership. You might just be burned out. You might just be a little bit bored of the subject that your membership is based around, in which case, taking a few steps back, having a lighter level of involvement with your membership on a day to day basis, may give you the capacity to reignite your interest and find other ways of approaching your membership that are going to keep you excited.

Definitely ask yourself why you're closing your membership, but if it's a sort of situation where you know that a membership site is not something you're going to continue on with for whatever reason, the next question to ask yourself is, do you need to shut it down completely? First and foremost, could you hire somebody to run the membership for you? If you've got years worth of material, of discussions, of training, courses, resources, and all that sort of stuff in there, how much do you actually need to be involved yourself personally? Can you focus on expanding your team and hiring in people who can handle the day to day logistics, maybe people who can create content or who can bring in outside experts or other individuals to create content for you?

Maybe you just need to pivot. It might be a case of totally changing what your membership consists of, so all of the stuff you've created so far stays in place, but perhaps your updated or revised membership offering doesn't require quite as much of you, of your time, of your input. Maybe it doesn't require you to spend as much money or exert as much effort and energy into keeping that membership running, so it could just be a pivot in terms of what you're actually offering.



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Maybe that pivot is away from running a membership and instead is towards running an online course or turning what you created in your membership into a more traditional online course. In which case, again, you're not having to close things down or throw everything out. You're just taking the ingredients you've already got and mixing them up in a different way in order to create a product that serves the same audience, addresses the same problems, it just does so in a different way.

Maybe you can sell your membership. It's going to be tricky because often people will join a membership largely because of the person involved, particularly when you're dealing with online memberships that are built around your credibility, your authority, your personality, your expertise. Selling onto somebody who your audience have no connection with isn't always going to be a smooth transition, but again, if it's a choice between selling onto somebody else who will then take over and run the membership or closing the membership completely, then selling it may be the better option. Again, that's going to really depend on how important and how integral you are to your membership.

If you are running a membership with an exit in mind, perhaps you are planning to exit your business or to remove yourself as the bottleneck, as the main person, the main thing that makes your membership run, the main reason people join the membership, if you are planning to make sure that you have some sort of exit so your membership doesn't require you to be involved 24/7, then again this might be something to start thinking about now. How can you structure your membership, how can you create content, that makes it so you're not the key ingredient, not everything has to revolve around you, not everything has to flow through you?

There's different options to simply shutting down your membership. Expanding your team and reducing the actual work that you're responsible for by hiring other people and bringing in people to actually take care of things day to day could be an option. Pivoting away from a membership and into another form of online product is certainly something to consider, or selling up so your membership continues on. You just are no longer involved in it, but your audience has been serviced, they're getting what they paid for, and essentially, things don't really skip a beat other than you're no longer hanging around the place.

If, after all of that, you're still determined to close down your membership, what you need to do is put into place an exit plan. The first part of that is establishing a timeline. We've already said you don't just want to pull the plug, turn off the lights, and take your membership site offline overnight because that is going to cause you a world of problems. You need to decide when you're going to close the door in terms of new members being taken on, when you're going to stop any recurring or repeating payments from your existing members, and also when you're going to take your website offline completely.

These time periods need to be spread out. While you still have paying members, you still have a responsibility to those people. You need to make sure that there's a window of time during which your paying members can still log in, they can access what they paid for, and particularly if you have lifetime members or if you have members who have a paid an annual payment and perhaps they paid their annual renewal just two months ago that paid you for twelve months of access and then suddenly you're going to be closing your membership down, for those people. Also just for existing members, even if they are monthly.

You maybe want to think about whether you want to enable those members to download the material that your membership site contains. Ordinarily within your membership, you're probably not making your courses, videos, tutorials downloadable, but in light of you closing your membership, you might decide to actually add that option in. That then gets around any sort of complaints, particularly from lifetime members where they have an expectation of being able to



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access the material they paid for pretty much forever. If you give them the option of being able to download that material on to their own hard drive, you're still fulfilling that responsibility. Even though you don't have that same responsibility to members who are paying you month on month, giving them the ability to download material from your membership is certainly going to make the whole announcement and their whole acceptance of the fact this membership is going away a lot easier because you're not taking anything away from them, you're just telling them that they can download it and consume it somewhere other than on your membership site.

Of course that addresses the content side of things, but a large part of successful memberships will be when they have a thriving, active community. Even if your community's quite small or quite intimate, the more active members are going to be quite disappointed about the fact the community's being taken away. Something you might consider doing is simply setting up a free closed Facebook group that you then encourage the community to move to because you're giving them a new home, you're enabling them to stick together. You don't necessarily need to be involved in keeping the Facebook group running, but by setting one up as part of your exit plan, it just shows that you've actually thought about what happens to your community, what happens to your existing members, to these people who've invested time, money, and effort and energy into your membership.

If closing down your membership is definitely on the cards, make sure you have an exit plan. Make sure you know the timeline you're going to work to. Close the doors in terms of recruiting new members early on because it's not fair for you to be charging people to join a membership site when you know that this membership is going to go away in a few months time. Early on in that timeline, close the doors, make sure you're communicating to your existing members about what's going to happen, have a date at which you cancel any recurring subscriptions to make sure you're not continuing to take money from people for a membership that's not going to be here in a few months. Give your members a window during which they can still log in and download any material from the website. They can make sure they've got everything so that what they paid for doesn't just disappear overnight. Consider setting up some sort of alternative community in a Facebook group, LinkedIn group, Slack channel, or something else that basically just gives your active members in your community a new home to move to.

You might be thinking to yourself, "This all sounds like a lot of effort to take care of members of a website that won't be here in three, four, five, or six months time", but you need to remember that everything reflects on you. The way you conduct yourself, the way you interact with and serve your audience, your history online, all forms your reputation and your reputation sticks, especially in the days of social media, especially in the days of people being more likely to do extensive due diligence and extensive online research before they make a buying decision.

If you short change your members now, if you basically screw over people who've invested their time, their attention, their money, their efforts into your membership, if you screw those guys over now and then you resurface in a year's time when whatever you're dealing with right now is over, when you've decided on a new path, if you're closing your membership because you're changing direction, then if you sting people now, that's going to come back to bite you. You want to conduct yourself ethically, positively in order to ensure that you can continue a good relationship with your audience. If you're facing down the very real possibility of closing your membership or if you're toying with that decision right now, or maybe even if you're just someone who's pragmatic and likes to imagine and think and plan for all possible outcomes, then I do hope this episode has given you some useful food for thought on how you might be able to close your membership without burning bridges and without causing all sorts of problems for yourself.

That's it from me from this episode of The Membership Guys Podcast. I do hope you guys have found it useful. As always, please give me a shout on social media. You can get me on twitter @membershipguys, or in our free Facebook group for membership site owners,



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talkmemberships.com. Let us know what you thought of the episode. If you've dealt with this situation before or you're thinking about closing your membership, we'd like to hear from you. Of course, if you have any questions or comments on the episode, let us know too. We're always grateful for positive reviews on iTunes as well. If you get the chance to leave a review, give me a shout on social media, let me know that you have done so I can thank you personally.

Once again, thanks for downloading the latest installment of The Membership Guys Podcast. I'll be back again very soon with another episode.

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