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BOOK MARKETING: How Creating Membership Sites Is a Big Revenue Builder for Authors Interview with Joy Duling

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you'll learn proven strategies, tools, ideas and tips from the masters. Every week, I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books. Today, my special guest is a membership programs expert. Joy Duling and her team at membermagnetism.com have been supporting membership-based programs for more than 10 years. In that time, Joy's seen a lot of what works and what doesn't. In her workshop, she shares what's really important in how to do membership right so you can make money.

She's not someone who just talks the talk. Joy has launched her own membership program growing it from just a glimmer of an idea to annual revenues of \$1.3 million in just three years and has kept that program running successfully since 2012. I'm currently participating in one of Joy's workshops, and I just know learning the wealth of information she has to share, I knew that she'd be a great fit for this program. Joy, welcome to the show and thank you for being this week's special expert and mentor.

Joy Duling: Oh, it's my pleasure. Thank you for inviting me, Susan.

Susan Friedmann: Joy, being a membership program's expert is a great niche market which is something that's very near and dear to my heart. How did you get involved with that particular area?

Joy Duling: Well, would you be surprised if I said that I found it accidentally? I wish I could tell you that I planned to go into exactly the space, but when I started off in business, gosh, 12 years ago now, back in 2005, I had just left my state government job and I've taken the plunge into entrepreneurship like some of the people in your audience probably have that scary leap when you first start out, when you'll provide your services to whoever will be willing to pay you. I marketed myself as a virtual project manager and I worked with small businesses, I worked

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with non-profits, I worked with associations, I worked a little bit of everything.

Well then, a few years after I launched, the recession hit and you probably remember that from a few years back. I found during that time that my small businesses and my non-profits really started to pull back on what they were doing and the organizations that continue to hold steady and strong were the associations and the other member-based organizations and that was a real "Aha" moment for me, when all of a sudden I found that I was working with these organizations that had made themselves somewhat recession proof, not that they didn't feel some impact but of my span of clients, they were the ones that held on the strongest. It became an accidental niche. Now, I've absolutely grown to love that work. I think it's a wonderful niche to be involved in, but I found it accidentally.

Susan Friedmann: Some of the best niches are the ones that we find accidentally. Let's start at the beginning, Joy and let our listeners know exactly, so that we're all on the same page what we're talking about with regard to a membership program or even a membership site. What are these things exactly?

Joy Duling: It's very basic. Membership program or membership site is simply a website where you have protected the content, so only certain people can gain access to it. Presumably, these are people who are involved in your programs or they're paying you a membership fee in some way, but it's simply an access protected website. From a technology perspective, that's what you're looking at, but I think of membership programs, membership sites as the online equivalent to hosting your own private party. If you think about having your own party, you have to have a venue which in the membership space, it's like your website, you have your venue. You have to invite guests and those people online are your members.

You need stuff for the people to do when they come to your party. You need to keep your guests entertained. You need to have food and drink that they will enjoy. You need to be introducing them around to each other. You have to keep them happy and take care of their needs. The membership site is essentially the same thing. It's really a fitting analogy.

Susan Friedmann: I love that analogy. As you say, it is very fitting and you can just visualize that whole little theme there and it's [inaudible 00:05:07] little most,

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you're inviting them to the party. Yes, very nice. What is it about membership that makes it a good next step for authors to help build their author platform?

Joy Duling: Well, I think at some point, everyone gets to the place where they want to start creating leveraged income. They want to produce something that can be provided to more people at one time, or they're looking for something that's going to bring in reliable, consistent revenue every month. A membership platform is perfect opportunity to do that really, and it's one of those things that it can start small and simple and it could bring in just an extra \$500 a month, or you can scale it really big and turn it into much more. I guess you could say that it can be comparable to having that private party that's just your ... It's small, and intimate, just family and friends or you could throw a big bash that fills a football stadium. You can really turn it into what you want, but it's an ideal opportunity to pull together an audience that you're interested in having around you, showcasing your expertise, rallying them around whatever your cost or your philosophy or your teaching is from your book.

Susan Friedmann: I've heard the term continuity program. Is that the same thing?

Joy Duling: It really is. You can think of membership as a continuity program. When you're talking about a continuity program, you're talking about having some way that you make money beyond your book on an ongoing basis, so you're walking people into some structure to do that and a membership program is a perfect example of a continuity program.

Susan Friedmann: I know that I've wanted to do a membership site for many years. I'm embarrassed to say how many.

Joy Duling: You're not alone.

Susan Friedmann: I'm sure. If it makes so much sense to have one of these programs, why do people like myself find it so hard to get going and we'd think about it but we're not actually doing it?

Joy Duling: Well in my experience, it comes down to four problems and typically people have one or more of these concerns that really keeps them on defense. The first one is structure. They don't know what they're going to put into the membership program. They don't know what they're going to charge. They don't know, should they be giving stuff away for free? Should they have some stuff that's paid? Those sorts of questions

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keep them in that contemplation state. Technology is another biggie. That's probably the one I hear the most often, the technology around membership sites tends to make people a little nervous. They don't want to waste their time and money on technology that ultimately doesn't work or they think of themselves as a non-technical person, and when you start contemplating a membership site, all of a sudden you realized, you got to do something with the technology and that scares people away.

Marketing, people are afraid even if they build it, no one's going to come so they don't know how they're going to get people to join or it could be that they've even tried building a membership and no one joined or they just didn't get the results that they expected, so that part makes them nervous. Then, the fourth concern that I hear quite often is just the managing it all. If you're already running your business, you're an established author, maybe you're doing speaking engagements, you're not just sitting around twiddling your thumbs, you may wonder, "How am I possibly going to take on one more thing to do?"

Just managing a membership site can make people nervous. Those are the four things that really keep people on defense just thinking about it, and not actually doing it. Does that feel familiar to you, Susan?

Susan Friedmann:

Oh, and how? I'm like, "Okay." You're absolutely right. I've always been worrying about, "Well, what should I put in? I've got all this material, but how much of it would people actually pay for versus it give them?" Then as you said, the technology. There's so much out there. I'd love for you to touch on that very quickly. Do you have a favorite platform that you like to use?

Joy Duling:

The clients that I worked with tend to use lots of different systems. I usually start out asking people about what they want to do with their membership program and I will match them up with something that is going to be suitable and it's going to let them start where they want to start and then scale. I do have a favorite software. I have a couple of favorites, but the one that tends to be most popular for my clients is something that a lot of people have never even heard of especially in the entrepreneurial space.

It's called Wild Apricot, and it is really a software product that is completely focused on membership organization. It's for clubs, associations, social groups, those sorts of things but all they do is membership stuff. I find that they're pretty affordable and simple to get

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started with, but yet they can scale up to thousands of members. It can really be an all in one solution. If I'm pressed to say my favorite, that's probably it.

Susan Friedmann: It's interesting because I've heard you say that before and I looked them up because you're absolutely right, I've never heard of them and I've heard of so many of these other programs. Yes. If they focus only on clubs and associations, well, this is what you're forming. You're forming a club of people, so it's a great fit.

Joy Duling: Entrepreneurs don't tend to think about it that way, and authors are more entrepreneurial types so they probably don't run into Wild Apricot very often.

Susan Friedmann: Let's say someone decides that a membership site is the right move for them. What's the first thing that they need to do?

Joy Duling: Well, some people jump right into the technology and I'm telling you, that is not the best first thing to do because you really need to step back and create a plan for your membership site. You don't want to go into it willy-nilly, you don't want to throw something together. You really want to be thoughtful about designing your member experience, because that's really what this is all about. I'd like to say there are three things that you need for a successful membership program and you have to plan for all three. One being you need members who pay, you need members who play. Those are the ones who engage with you and do stuff that you want them to do in your membership and you need members who stay, so those are the ones who will stick around and actually pay the renewing membership fee.

If you have those three things, you'll have a successful membership program but a lot of people don't think about those three things when they go into it. I always encourage people, plan first and then your technology fits what you plan.

Susan Friedmann: What about people who hate technology or technophobes? What do you do with those?

Joy Duling: I tell people that the technology is the easy part, but no one ever believes me but I'm telling you, in today's day and age, the technology really is the easy part but if you are the type of person who literally, you turn on your computer and you face the blue screen of death that comes up, if you're that kind of person who is just afraid of technology

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and you really don't want to get into this, there are ways to get this done for you. That's one of the things my team does. We'll build this out for people, not only from people who are just not comfortable with the technology but some people are just too busy to deal with this. This is just not where they want to spend their time because their time is better spent being the expert in their business and talking to people about the subject of their book and doing consulting engagements, and things like that and not tinkering around with the technology. There are definitely ways to get this done for you.

Susan Friedmann: That brings up a couple of very interesting points. One is that time money ratio. How long does it take to make money here? Then, how much time do I actually have to devote to keeping this membership site up to date?

Joy Duling: Well, it varies. You can absolutely get a membership site up within a matter of a few weeks. That is not a problem at all. In fact, the startup launch program I have, we get people launch ready in four weeks and I completely believe that that is possible to do. Now, I generally tell people they should expect six to 12 months to really get traction and have a viable membership program. You want to be able to get out there, you got to get it known in your niche, you get someone to show members and get some social proof with testimonials and that's going to take you a little bit of time. You got to plan for that.

In terms of how long it's going to take you to manage the membership, I always say that you don't want to scale it larger or design it larger than what you have timed to manage. When you were designing your member experience upfront, people naturally have a tendency to want to throw in all of this stuff. They want to make their membership program super valuable, so they're going to put in these events and lots of content and every month, they're going to be doing this and that and the other thing, and they'll very quickly turn it into something that becomes a real headache to manage.

You don't want to do that, especially when you're starting out. If you keep it modest, if you focus on a core problem that your audience is having and creating a membership solution that addresses that problem, you'll keep it manageable for yourself. If you need help, you can hire virtual assistant who a couple hours a month can do some support for you and your membership program. A lot of it can be automated which is the whole reason why you use software. There's no reason for you to be messing around with renewal notices and welcome

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packets and things like that because that can all be automated for you. Automate, delegate and keep it manageable for yourself.

Susan Friedmann: Another thing is with regard to content and I know that going through your program, you talked about the fact of what people will actually pay for versus what they expect to be given for free. Can you touch on that, please?

Joy Duling: My first rule of thumb is always that what you give people for free is the what, and what they pay you for is the how. By that, I mean if someone is in a free webinar or a free level of membership, what you're really trying to do with that member is help them get to know you better and to confirm that you understand the problems they're facing. You understand what the solutions are, you know the path forward to get them out of the place where they're stuck and you're credible. You're getting results for other people. That's what you should be accomplishing in that free space. You want them to pay you for the stuff that you provide that actually creates the change that they want.

Here's an analogy because sometimes that's difficult for people to envision. If we go back to the party analogy, you're having your private party. The free level of engagement with you is like the people who are lined up outside the room behind the velvet cord and they can see what's going on in the room but they can't access it. They know people are inside, having a good time, there's food, there's drinks. There's stuff that they want to be part of happening, but they can't get inside.

Now if you are playing music and passing orders and doing all of this stuff for the people who are waiting in line, what incentive do they have to go into the room? What you want to be doing with the free people is helping them see that you know how to address their challenge areas, you have solutions, you're credible, you're throwing a great party and you want them to want to be a part of it. Free should be a temporary state. People should want to go the next step and actually become a paid member. Does that make sense?

Susan Friedmann: That makes a lot of sense. I always love this analogy. You're so good at them. That's excellent.

Joy Duling: Well, that's the best one I found. It really seems to resonate with people because when you started thinking about a private party, everyone has that experience so we know what that feels like and when you

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start thinking about your membership program that way, it makes it a little more concrete.

Susan Friedmann: I love talking about mistakes that people make in these different environments. Let's talk about mistakes people make when it comes to either creating a membership site or actually maintaining a site?

Joy Duling: First of all, I would say is that too many people go into a membership program with just one thought. What is it that I have that I can put into a membership site? I've written my book. I was creating my program. Can I repurpose that content, and put it up on a website and that will be my membership site? I say that really it's a big mistake because what you really want to be thinking about is what is the change that the member really wants to experience? Right now, we are in such information overload. You can go out and sit in webinars all day everyday on almost any topic you could imagine. With Google, you can Google for almost any topic that you can imagine. There's lots of information out there.

What people are really looking for are the resources that are going to help them actually make the change. You need to think about, "What is it that your members are searching for? What questions are they asking? What's the next step in their relationship with you? Designing that experience. It's a very different approach, not hard. It's just a twist on how people typically think about just going into it.

Susan Friedmann: You're so right in terms of what can people not get on the internet because there's so much available. I'm always going on Google and looking for things, but you're right, if I can't find it there, I could have pay for it in some form or other whether it's a book or as you say, a membership site or a program. Yeah. If members would like to learn more about your services and your different programs, how can they find you?

Joy Duling: I'm at membermagnetism.com, so that's my primary site. If someone's thinking about starting a membership program if they don't currently have one, there's a page there for startups. There's also a page there for people who have existing programs, but they're feeling stuck and they want to grow. A couple of different options there for people.

Susan Friedmann: If you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget of information, what would that be, Joy?

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Joy Duling:

I love that golden nugget. Membership programs are something that I'm pretty passionate about because I think it's one of the best ways to gather an audience, showcase expertise and rally people around a common cause but a lot of people get stuck in that [thinking 00:21:58] about it stage. I guess my golden nugget is that it doesn't have to be complicated, it doesn't have to be expensive and it doesn't have to be technologically difficult. If you are moving down the path where that's how it is feeling, it does not have to be that way. You just have to decide that you want to do it, you want to keep it simple, you want to do it in the most effective way. If that's what someone wants to do, I can show them the path to make that happen but I just don't over complicate it. That's my golden nugget.

Susan Friedmann:

Music to my ears. I love simplicity, so thank you. Thank you for sharing your wisdom, and thank you all for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview. I sincerely hope that it sparks some ideas you can use to some more books, here's wishing you much book marketing success.