

SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR



HOSTED BY ERIC TURNNESSEN, FOUNDER OF [membermouse™](#)

EP 120: How to Succeed When You Feel Overwhelmed with Stuart Goulden

"It's more important just to get started and to get something simple up -- don't worry about everything else -- even the design of your website, don't go too crazy about your theme. Primarily what you're doing is starting a business. You're starting a relationship with your audience. So the first and foremost thing to do is to put something out there, so that you can gauge and start that conversation with your audience and understand what they're looking for and deliver on that. Don't get bogged down in all these bells and whistles. That will always come later."

INTRO:

Welcome to Episode 120 of the Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast. Now, you might recognize the voice you just heard because it's... me!

You see, we switched things up a bit for this episode. An entrepreneur named Stuart Goulden reached out to me to do a writeup of MemberMouse for his company's "Meet the Maker" series. So, we decided to record this podcast episode and share it with you.

In this episode, we first learn about Stuart: who he is, his background in marketing, and his vision for the clients he works with.

Then, we turn the tables and Stuart interviews me about how and why I started MemberMouse, my journey as an entrepreneur, specifics about the MemberMouse platform, and how to overcome the biggest challenges, hurdles, and obstacles I see facing online entrepreneurs today. We also talk about the importance of community when it comes to building a membership or subscription business, and I share practical advice about how entrepreneurs can get out of their own way and makes positive steps towards success.

We had a great conversation and it was nice to switch up our usual format a bit. I hope you enjoy and benefit from this episode. As always, I'm your host Eric Turnnessen. And this is Episode 120 of the Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Eric: Hey Stuart. How's it going? Welcome to the show.

Stuart: It's good thank you. Thanks for having me.

Eric: Of course. This one's a little interesting. Not the typical way we come about doing a podcast episode. You actually reached out to me because you're looking to do a write-up on

MemberMouse for your audience. We decided to get on a call and answer those questions and here we are releasing it as a podcast episode. For our audience could you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you're doing?

Stuart: I'm based in the UK. I'm an actor by with about 15 year's experience. When I'm not working with clients I like to pursue my own ideas. I have a number of startups. I'm essentially taking what I do for other people, but trying to make it work for myself. I have a small side project called Surges you can find at surges.co. That's where I give really honest reviews of the marketing tools I use every day. That's accompanied by interviews with the people behind those, the makers, such as yourself, which is that we are using. A discussion and letting people know a bit more about you and what your inspiration was, some challenges and people that you've met along the way.

Eric: Cool. Given that you've been doing this for 15 years and you're a working marketer, working clients and also doing things for yourself, what are the things that in this world - the marketing world that you're finding most intriguing about marketing today?

Stuart: To be honest, I still have the same excitement that I had 15 years ago. You can never know too much in marketing. Things always change. There's so much to learn. I guess over the years I have tried to specialize more and now I've come to the realization that I'm really attracted to big change projects with interesting clients who are visionary in what they're trying to achieve. They're either trying to make better things or make things better. That's what's kept my levels up. Along with those clients we encounter new opportunities, new challenges every day. Surges is definitely a great way for me to keep abreast of the tools that are out there. That can really help me do more with less. I'm proudly an agency of one, but I rely on a lot of freelancers and a lot of tools to punch above my weight.

Eric: What is marketing to you?

Stuart: I guess it comes in all shapes and sizes really. I think it's sharing an idea, bringing people along for the ride and allowing them to tap into something that's bigger than the commodity that they're led by. It can be used in so many different ways. It doesn't have one definition.

Eric: What I am trying to get at is you said you had a real enthusiasm and passion for it 15 years ago. What specifically do you think it was that you were passionate and enthusiastic about?

Stuart: I think it's the crafting of incredibly original ideas that inherently hauled a lot of drama. I can really move people and I like to do that for positive means. Not just shifting really boring

products or creating evil. To really try and make a small dent in the world. I think marketing can play a role in that.

Eric: I'm hearing from you it's a lot about conversation, a lot about providing an experience to people that may influence their life in some way. Whether or not they buy a product at the end of that, neither here nor there at a certain level, of course, but really trying to do something that's going to create a shift in people in a positive way.

Stuart: Absolutely. I think good marketing can sell stuff, great marketing can do an awful lot more. I'm interested in both. I've picked up more experience and given a lot more thought into where I want to spend my time and direct my business. I think it's the latter that turns me on more.

Eric: I think today, in a world that is increasingly smaller in terms of the fact that we're all just so connected regardless of where we are - connected and disconnected at the same time. Marketing as a word doesn't really encompass everything that we're talking about, but we got to do something. It plays a really important role in bringing people together because this is what we would be doing if we all, in our small groups of friends, we all come together around common interests and we spend time together to experience that connection. I think marketing is attempting to do that, but at larger scales. It's kind of an art and a science because you want to have that, maintain that humanness that makes us want to do it in person, but at the same time you have to consider technical aspects because you're dealing with - you're delivering it over technical means.

Stuart: Absolutely. I think it's very symbolic of what it's like to be an entrepreneur in general. You have to appreciate both sides of that coin, be able to work with people, inspire people and work with people to further your cause. Also, you need to get stuck down into the details to really understand how things work and to roll your sleeves up from time to time.

Eric: Yeah, for sure. I appreciate you having this brief conversation with me. Now we will get into the questions you have for me about MemberMouse and everything like that. We'll just dive right into that.

Stuart: Thanks, Eric. I guess I'll start at the very top just for the benefit of people who don't know yourself and the rest of your team. Please introduce yourself.

Eric: Sure. Eric Turnessen, founder of MemberMouse. I started the company back in 2009 and my background in software engineering. The original impetus to start this product was because

I was running a website myself selling an eBook. I needed a membership site to go with that website. I didn't like any of the options out there, so I just built my own. That was basically how it started. From their people started using it, therefore feedback and therefore me adapting the software based on the needs of the people who are using it. Ten years later we're basically still doing the same thing, but on a much bigger scale. It's me - I don't do so much development these days, but then there's my CTO Ben Daughtry who's been with me for seven years and we have two software engineers who work on the product. Then we have a few people who work on our sales and marketing team and then we have a few people who work on our support team making sure our customers are taken care of. That's basically where we're at.

Stuart: That's good and are you all working in the same location?

Eric: No, it's all virtual. It's always a funny thing because Ben and I have been working together for seven years, but yet we've never actually met in person.

Stuart: Crazy.

Eric: It's really amazing that something like that can happen these days. There's really been no barriers to us working well together and producing what needs to be done, but yet we're not in the same place. There're no physical offices for MemberMouse. It's a virtual company.

Stuart: How would you describe MemberMouse to somebody who's perhaps a marketer or a community manager by profession, but hasn't come across you yet.

Eric: I'm not a big fan of elevator pitches because I like to understand who I'm talking to first. and then if MemberMouse is something that makes sense to them, then I'll tell them something about it. With that said, the kind of primary, or lowest-level way I can talk about MemberMouse is: it's a membership solution for WordPress that helps people deliver protected content. If you want to sell courses, if you want to sell training online, MemberMouse facilitates collecting payment for those things and making sure access is only granted to the appropriate people based on them having paid you. There's a ton of other things that it does, but that's the basics.

Stuart: You've mentioned that you're a software engineer. I'm probably at the other end of the technical spectrum. If I was to consider membership solution, I think the prospects of those costs scared me a little bit. I can really see the benefits of MemberMouse, but who's your target market?

Eric: We have two primary target markets. The first one are these internet marketers/entrepreneurs who are running very large membership sites. It's a large range, but I would say basically it's 5,000 active members to 100,000 active members. It's a big range. That number of 5,000 - and it's really less than 5,000, but essentially if there are a lot of membership solutions out there, and a lot of them will do well under a certain number of active members because once you reach a certain point at active membership, the strain on your software becomes higher. There's a lot more volume so there's a lot more things that the software needs to do to be reliable and scalable to facilitate making sure that there's no glitches. There're also certain tools from just the day-to-day business operations perspective that should be present in the software to assist in lowering support costs of your actual business. The bread and butter of MemberMouse are these larger businesses. These are the businesses that in the first six years of the company that I was personally working with of one-on-one basis and the problems that they were running into became features in the software that addressed those problems. That's one of the amazing things about MemberMouse is that it wasn't just some product that some marketing team decided "we see a need and we're going to release this." It was a product built by engineers who are working in marketing and then teamed up with people like yourself people who were on the front lines running businesses and giving us feedback. Then the result of that conversation became at the adoption of the software. We continue to be very strong with those markets. People who need enterprise-level software to run their businesses. Now, the other market is - I would say, 'beginner market.' There of course is a range here, but you know people who may not have a team of developers. This may be their first go-round. They maybe hadn't run a membership site of any kind before. This is an area where we're doing a lot more work these days because the needs of these people ... So, the needs of the other market, the 'experienced market' I would call it, is that they need a technical solution that does what they need it to do and does it in a reliable way. Now the needs of the 'beginner market' is actually a lot less technical centric. In a lot of ways, it could be mindset centric. It could be just general business concepts centric. It could be just motivational centric like, "Hey! Take action! Do something to get the ball rolling." Technology in that way plays less of a part and in the way that we're attempting to help that market is by making it easier and less daunting to get into and use our product.

Stuart: How do you satisfy those two completely different users?

Eric: One of the main benefits of MemberMouse is the fact that it can power a hundred-person membership site and it can power a hundred-thousand-person membership site. The benefit there is that when you start with MemberMouse you can grow with it very easily. You're not going to have to switch platforms at some point because you've outgrown it. We have a lot of people who come to us who have started out on competing products. Those products weren't

designed from a technical standpoint to withstand certain volumes. So, at a certain point, maybe around a thousand members, the holes and the cracks in the ships start getting enough pressure on them that the water starts leaking in and those pain points become enough that people have to switch. That switching is not ... and I think one of your questions has to do with migration. It's not it's not a fun thing to do. One of the great things about MemberMouse is that you can start and grow with MemberMouse. You're getting all the tools from day one that people running hugely successful online businesses are using. One of the ways that we're working to help these lower-level people - these beginners is by offering different non-technical resources. We have a lot of video guides. We do live office hours every other week so that people can come on and ask me questions of what they're running into. Of course, our support team is always there to answer questions. We do have some other things in the works right now. Still the fact of the matter is it's a WordPress plugin, which means that in order to use it at all you need to have a server. You need to have WordPress installed and then you can install MemberMouse. So even that can be a sticking point for certain people. Currently we're in talks with certain partners and companies to create something that's more of a - push button is a little bit overkill to say, but it's where you can get the entire environment set up very quickly so that it in a shorter period of time you're actually starting to configure the software and worrying less about the technical environment. So, that's something that we're working on.

Stuart: That's incredibly exciting. Some we will be fresh to communities, but we will have a great idea we will perhaps have a community that exists somewhere else on the internet or on a social following and they are trying to test something out. To be able to do that with a plug-in with very little effort is really appealing. MemberMouse does an awful lot. The feature list is pretty exhaustive. Is there anyone thing that you are really proud of that you think really sets you apart?

Eric: Yeah, I think that there's a number of them, but I think one of the biggest strengths of MemberMouse is its flexibility in terms of how you can put your content in front of your audience. We have different ways that you can price things. So, you can actually sell things at different price points. When you're determining if you're selling a course, for example, it's really easy to protect that content with MemberMouse and in addition to that, it's really easy to offer multiple price points for that same content. It has this nice way of fitting into whatever business strategy that you want to put forward. I think technology is best when it supports the creative aspects of whoever's trying to use it and doesn't force them through limitations to take a path that they may not otherwise have taken. That's one strong suit. The other strong suit that comes mind is our SmartTag technology, which is essentially a way that you can have a personalized conversation with your members within the membership site through the use of this proprietary language that we created where you can enter it right into the WordPress

content editor. One of the use cases of this is that you can dynamically show or hide content to somebody who's looking at a certain page based on their purchase history. For example, if somebody is logged into your membership site and you know they've bought one of your courses, you can detect that using SmartTags and choose to dynamically show them an advertisement for cross-sell course or an upsell course. It allows you to have this more personalized conversation with each member, which ultimately leads to higher lifetime customer value. It's doesn't require coding which is one of the most powerful aspects of it.

Stuart: I believe so. I came across MemberMouse at ATOMICON and I believe they use your service. Can you explain what they're doing with it? It's probably quite usual for a conference to be running a community on the sides. I think that would be interesting to find out a bit more.

Eric: Yeah, let me think about this for a second. I actually don't think it's that unusual in terms of what they're doing - that they're running a conference and also running their membership site because at its heart both of them are about community. When you're having a membership site you're tapping into that human need for people to belong to something. That's something that Andrew and Pete do really well. They use MemberMouse specifically because they deliver online courses. They call them shows. When you log into their backend it looks like Netflix, but for marketing content because they have all these different shows that you can click into and then there are multiple episodes within each show - relating to the topic of the show. For example, 'Monetizing a YouTube Channel,' 'Marketing Concepts in General,' 'ChatBox,' etc. They have all these things. MemberMouse facilitates protecting access to their membership area and making sure only those people who have paid them get access to the shows that they're producing. It's really easy thing to say - making sure people who have the appropriate access are the ones who've paid them, but MemberMouse facilitates that entire conversation. There's a lot of moving parts to actually. Integrating with different payment service providers like Stripe and PayPal. Making sure that you can accept payment from the people on your site and then making sure that if the payment goes through, that they get the appropriate access on your site. There's a lot of new at nuance to that scenario. That's something that MemberMouse does really well is maintaining the synchronization between payment and access. That's essentially what Andrew and Pete are doing. Then their live conferences are an extension of that. They did such a great job building their community within the membership site that people requested and we're asking to meet up in person.

Stuart: That's a really good story and it was a great conference as well. I mentioned that they seem the kind of guys with great creative ideas. Great with trying to help their clients and their community grow their businesses, but don't want to get bogged down in the manual tasks related with running a community and that is where you come in.

Eric: MemberMouse, once you get it configured and set up, it's pretty much good to go. Unless, you want to add strategic elements to it and use more of the functionality that's built into it. That's one of the other benefits of it. This benefit also becomes a curse, depending on who's at the helm. There's so much power in MemberMouse. There're so many things you can do with it. People running membership sites 80,000 plus members use it so, there's obviously a lot of stuff in there. If you're just getting started there's definitely a way that one could get overwhelmed thinking that I need to look at all this stuff that I can do, I need to do all this on day one. This is this is one of the biggest messages that I'm pounding into people these days, when I talk to new people. It's more important to get started, to get something simple up. Don't worry about everything else. Even the design of your website. Don't go too crazy about your theme. Don't go too crazy about diving deep into all these features of MemberMouse. Primarily, what you're doing is you're starting in business. You're starting a relationship with your audience so the first and foremost thing to do is to put something out there so that you can gauge and start a conversation with your audience and understand what they're looking for and deliver on that. Don't get bogged down with all these bells and whistles. That will always come later. I've heard many stories from customers of ours who have actually built multiple membership sites, that design is actually not a huge important factor in the success of the membership site. In fact, they've had more success with simpler themes than they have had with way more complex ones. It's just about where somebody's placing their focus. My advice to anybody just getting started with MemberMouse is, just deliver the bare minimum so that you can start that conversation with your customer. Ultimately, the customer is going to help you get to the next places that you want to go. That's the point.

Stuart: That is really good advice. I think we've all been there where we have idea diarrhea and we just want to build everything at once.

Eric: I ran into that problem when I started MemberMouse. I didn't even release something for a year-and-a-half because I was trying to do everything all at once. I did the same thing when I started MemberMouse.

Stuart: I think we've all done it. Apart from MemberMouse, which I am a big fan of, what is your favorite digital marketing tool? What else do you rely on?

Eric: On a day-to-day basis ... recognize my position at this time. I'm the "CEO" of MemberMouse and I say quote, unquote because over the lifespan of the business my role pretty much becomes whatever it needs to become. At this point in time, thankfully, I have a great team covering all the low-level items that I've played myself for a number of years. I did

support for two years. I did sales and marketing. At this point, my role is a little bit more higher level. If you ask my marketing team, they're going to give you different answers of the tools that they use, but for me personally, in terms of playing my role, it's a lot about communication and management and making sure that everybody's on the same page. So, Slack, Monday.com for project management you know I'm in and out of Freshdesk because Freshdesk is our support and ticketing system. If a ticket gets escalated then I'm going in there. What else? Gusto is a for managing payment of contractors and employees. Fogbugz is our ticketing system for maintaining our software. I work with are our development team going through things on that. I preface that with what I said because I don't actually, personally use a lot of the marketing software because that's not my world.

Stuart: How do people normally find out about MemberMouse? Obviously, I can be part of a community powered by MemberMouse, is there any other way that you've found is particularly popular.

Eric: I think the way that people find out about us is word-of-mouth. Either from existing customers who are using the software or our affiliate network. We have a thriving affiliate network. We really appreciate word-of-mouth referrals because we put a lot of focus and attention on the quality of the software. We understand that if somebody is looking for a solution it's more powerful to hear from somebody who is actually using it, or who has used it and can talk from an experiential standpoint. By necessity these days I think we're getting into more advertising. We actually haven't done much traditional advertising in the past, but we started to do a little bit of Facebook advertising. I'm really appreciating that because still with the Facebook advertising you can be very targeted with lookalike audiences. You can say, I want to talk to customers like these people who have already bought from me. Again, we really appreciate getting in front of qualified leads and having a very direct conversation with them. Not too much of the shotgun approach marketing.

Stuart: That's fantastic. I'm sure at this point people are really keen to find out more. Where would you send them?

Eric: The best place to go is our website membermouse.com and peruse around there. Or, attend one of the office hours that we do bi-weekly. You can find out about and register for by going to support.membermouse.com. Of course, our support team is available if there are any specific questions that people have - support@membermouse.com. For anybody to keep in mind who are thinking about going through process like this is, especially if they're close to the beginning, is that this is a journey. It's a long journey. I started this journey myself between 10 and 12 years ago and it's still unfolding. Patience is a very important tool in the beginning

because there's so much choice. These days in terms of picking solutions and implementing solutions it's like going to the supermarket and there's 20 different toothpastes. It's less important about the difference between the toothpastes and more about choosing one and brushing your teeth. It's very easy to get overwhelmed. It's very easy to get analysis paralysis. This this goes back earlier when I was saying we recognize this. More of my job is becoming about having conversations with people and helping from a mindset and a coaching perspective trying to get past certain hurdles that pretty much everybody runs into. It's all so easy to have obstacles come up within ourselves and think that those are reasons that we should stop doing what we're doing. Actually, in some cases that means we're going in the right direction. I find whenever I'm doing something new there's always a daunting aspect to it because it's new, but because I've done it enough, I recognize that and I just push through it. Ultimately, I have a good track record of getting to a success point with whatever I'm trying to do. Also, I think that success point, the realism of a success point is also valid and valuable. Andrew and Pete talk about this too. Especially, in a world where everybody's focused on likes and thumbs ups and all this stuff. One thing that they said, "don't think about a thousand likes. If you get ten likes on something that's great. That's ten people who actually heard what you were talking about." The valuable thing about this is recognizing that it is a journey. Tomorrow you're not going to be in the same place as somebody who's been doing it for eight years. If you if you constantly compare yourself to other people, it can get you into the situation where it demotivates you to such an extent that you decide to stop.

Stuart: Right. That's very good advice. Thank you. We chatted earlier that you have a Podcast. Can you explain what that is and where people can check it out?

Eric: Sure. It's called Subscription Entrepreneur. It's on iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher. You could also go to subscriptionentrepreneur.com. We interview people who are sometimes MemberMouse customers and sometimes not. It's a loose model. We just talked about what it's like to be an entrepreneur and the different things that you can run into. We get into tactics and certain conversations depending on guests. Like, Miles Beckler was one where we got super tactical and talked a lot about specifically how to do Facebook advertising. We had to guest where we talked about how to do a YouTube channel. We had a guest, David Sherry who started deathtostockphoto.com and grew that business to 1.5 million dollars. With him we talk more about you know how to differentiate yourself in this world right now where there's so much noise. How to find your voice. We just interviewed Robbie Kellman Baxter who's the author of the Membership Economy. That podcast will be coming out next week, April 2nd. You know, stuff like that. I like to have it be very loose because I like having conversations with people who inspire me and who've accomplished something. I feel like anybody who's gotten to a point of accomplishment, when they share their story, there's something to be learned

from that. I appreciate talking these people and I like to try and give them a platform where they can share those things so that hopefully other people can benefit from it.

Stuart: Interesting people doing interesting things. It turns into great brain food for the rest of us.

Eric: Exactly.

Stuart: Thank you Eric. That was really insightful. I would like to share it with people.

Eric: Thanks so much Stuart for joining me, sharing your thoughts and asking those great questions. I appreciate having the opportunity to answer questions like that. If people want to hear more from you and follow you, what are some good places that they can go to do that?

Stuart: You can find me on Twitter. It's @stugoulden. My agency is Like No Other. This interview is with Surge, which is Surges.co. If people want to reach out and say "hello" I'll be ready and waiting.

Eric: Great. Appreciate it Stuart. Thank you so much.

Stuart: Thanks for your time.

OUTRO:

That wraps things up for this episode of the Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast. Many thanks to Stuart for collaborating with me on this episode. I sincerely hope you enjoyed and received value from our conversation.

Be sure to visit SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/120 for the complete show notes of today's episode, links to the resources we mentioned, and a full transcript. If you enjoyed this episode, please subscribe to the podcast on iTunes, Google Play, or Stitcher.

Coming up next on the podcast, we interview the dynamic Matt Giovanisci. If you're not familiar with Matt, he's a seasoned online entrepreneur who is famous for his challenges and "impossible experiments": such as building a membership site in 14-days, creating and selling an online course in 7 days, and much more. He joins us to share his insights on online business, marketing, and his unique approach to content creation.

We'll see you then!