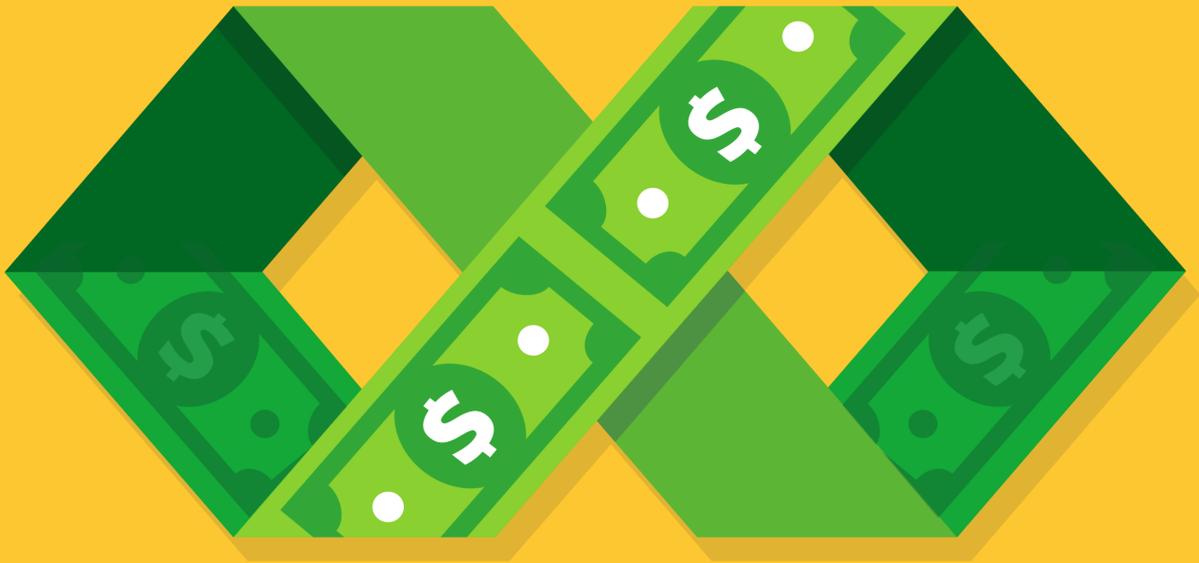


SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR



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

EP 154: Everything You Need To Know After Starting A Membership Site with Ali Jafarian

“Think about the vision casting that someone does going into launching a membership site. They've got that original or initial impetus like, "I'm going to pursue my passion. I'm going to make some money here. I'm going to launch this. My friends are going to know about it. They're going to tell their friends." You literally start vision casting. A lot of this is healthy if you're the type of person that wants to go and grab it and reach that desired angle. But, you cannot know what's going to happen when you really get in there and you do it and then you launch it. There's going to be change. Your ability to embrace that change, this is really important.”

INTRO:

You're listening to Ali Jafarian, my special guest on today's episode of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

If you're an avid listener of our show, you'll know that Ali was one of my very first guests back in 2018.

In that episode, we talked about everything online entrepreneurs need to know before starting their membership sites.

But here's the thing:

Starting your membership site is really only half the battle.

And truth be told... it may be the easier half.

Once you've launched your site, you now face the task of actually finding the people who want to be part of your community and pay for your content.

That's why today, Ali comes back on the show to complete the picture.

We have an in-depth discussion about what to do in the days, weeks, and months that come after your launch.

Over the past 7 years, Ali has helped hundreds of online entrepreneurs build, launch, and grow their membership sites.

And in this episode, he reveals the exact systems and strategies he uses to help his clients successfully navigate the post-launch stage and build an online business that lasts.

So, if you're wondering what to do after you launch your site, this episode is for you.

As always, I'm your host Eric Turnnessen and this is Episode 154 of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Eric: Welcome to the show, Ali.

Ali: Hello, Eric. Good to be back.

Eric: Yes. Good to be back. As we're leading up to having this conversation, I was thinking back to the time that I visited you out in Denver. Did you know the backstory? I think I told you like what happened the night before that I met up with you about how I got that Airbnb that was like a 420-friendly house, but I ended up having to bust out of there late at night and go sleep in the woods or something.

Ali: You did, I do remember.

Eric: People are going to want to know that story now.

Ali: That's great. So, you're talking about that? That could be a podcast episode.

Eric: Anyway, it was an ordeal, but it ended up really well. I'm not going to go through a whole thing, but the Airbnb was not good. It smelled like weed. Obviously, I don't smoke weed. So, it was a big issue for me. I ended up driving around that night, but I ended up landing in this beautiful parking lot on a lake in Evergreen, Washington. I slept in my car with my dog and it was amazing.

Ali: Coincidentally, my wife and her family who's visiting with us right now and my children just hiked that lake a couple hours ago. So, it's kind of a sweet spot for us here in Denver.

Eric: Full circle. Speaking of full circle, you've been on the show before. In fact, you were one of our very first guests on the podcast. The last time you were here, we talked about everything someone needs to know before they create a membership site. Today, what we're going to go and talk about is everything that comes after that, the stuff that actually goes into building a successful business online. So, before we get into that, let's just do a very brief introduction of who you are, so people get an understanding of that.

Ali: Sure. I'm a father, a husband and entrepreneur. I spent a lot of my time on MemberDev and a couple other businesses. We at MemberDev allow entrepreneurs to launch membership sites. We work very closely with your company and doing everything from start to finish in a sort of productized service workflow. That comes from years of doing deeper agency work where we would do complex builds for a variety of e-commerce membership needs, so.

Eric: Now if we were doing this correctly and I don't know if it's our production budget, but I'm envisioning the opening to the Star Wars episodes where like, this is episode two, and it has that scrolling text at the beginning with the Star Wars fanfare. It's like, "Last time we left the Empire, we had built a membership site." Now, okay, so what comes after launching the membership site after you finish the time and labor-intensive stage of actually building and launching the site? I think it's easy to fall into a sort of a trap in thinking that your work is "done". You've built it and now they just have to come, right?

Ali: You got it. Yeah. So, going into what comes next, right? So, the way we look at it is that when you launched it, now it's business time. In some ways, MemberDev and other tools or companies that assist in the building or the technical side of membership sites are crutches. They can be useful crutches, not in a negative connotation, but it's more that we're helping you do that faster. We're accelerating it.

A lot of our platform and process offering is very coached and guidance in the manner that were done for you, right? We're helping you do it, and that's just to accelerate the technical piece. So, you don't have to do it yourself. But once it's done, once it's ready, once it's launched, now you have to work, right? Because we don't typically engage, we have some method of engagement post-launch, but most of our work and our platform is designed for planning the build phase. So, it's time to launch, right after that, we're dealing with sales, marketing. These are the two core sweet spots. Your site is there, the doors have opened. Now, how do we get traffic? How do we get people in? How do we get customers? This just catapults a whole slew of things.

Eric: Yeah, it's like the metaphorical lemonade stand that we started as children. Getting the lemonade stand set up is only the first step. Now, how are you going to get people in the door? How are you going to handle your transactions? How are you going to get the word out? Actually, I use the MemberDev platform on my learnongfutea.com site, where I have an online course teaching people how to brew tea. I am a technical person, right? So, I have spent a lot of time in my career focusing on those technical aspects. So, for me, one of the biggest challenges is I can get caught up in a lot of things about the technical aspects. And then once I get it launched, I may struggle with some of the steps that I do next. Is that a common thing?

Ali: Absolutely, yup. It's really interesting, because we've done this so many times. We get to see people and their different personas, their different types, like you said, technical versus non-technical, introverts versus extroverts. What rises is that there's specific demographics that are actually excited for this. Those are the people that have backgrounds in marketing, online marketers, digital marketers, people have backgrounds in sale because you can imagine, they've been waiting. They're like, "Hey, I'm ready to sell, I'm ready to market. I'm ready to get this thing out and start driving growth." So, the second they go live, it's almost like, "Give me the keys. You guys are good, I'll holler at you later."

Whereas the technical folks like us, I happen to be more of the introvert, technical persona, we enjoy that phase. So, again and what we've sensed is that when we get to that phase like, "Oh,

shoot. Now, I got to do all this?" It's just not necessarily the most fun or even interesting for people who enjoy the technical side. So, that's been a really interesting observation in that some people are anxious, and others are like, "Oh." It catches them off guard like, "Oh, I thought that when this was ready, things would just start coming."

Eric: Well, that's in my mind, the distinction between the technical and the non-technical, people are comfortable with the technical side and people who are comfortable with more of the sales and marketing is it's a very different thing. With the technical side of things, it's like an input-output model. If you put a certain thing and you know exactly what you're going to get out. If there's a problem, it's very clear on how to fix the problem. Whereas it's a totally different nut to crack once you have your site live, because now there's more of a human element to it. You have to put something out there. You have to assess how people respond to it, and then make adjustments based on that.

Ali: Totally, man. There's a sense of overwhelming, right? That can either hit you if you're not prepared or going back to excitement like, "Okay, I'm ready for this." So, it is almost an A or B. It's very rarely we get someone to middle. They either grab it by the horns and go, or they don't, and they fall back.

Eric: Right. Now, I think one of the things that was very appreciated in the first podcast episode we did is you have a very good way of laying things out in terms of like a checklist of what things should be done and when. So, let's do that for this after launch scenario. So, in your experience, working with dozens and dozens of successful membership and subscription entrepreneurs, let's talk about what is the successful navigation of the after-launch phase look like?

Ali: Sure, great question. So, the first which should be hopefully obvious is a plan, right? So, it's up now, you want to have some method, usually a 6- to 12-month plan. We always encourage people to have a 12-month plan. Sometimes we'll give them a template for that and just explain, even at the highest level like, "Hey, you've got these stages to go through now." There's the brand new, got to get those first few users and customers in the door, then there's the slow growth like listening to feedback. And then there's acceleration where it's like, "Hey, we've got money coming in, we've got traction. Well, how do we get to the next level?"

So planning is essential. And then doing some self-awareness on yourself and your team and saying like, "Where are we strong?" So, in other words, if we're a team that can crank out content and we've got some engineering chops, then let's do that. Let's work on the product. Let's stay focused, and let's outsource the things we're not good at whether it's to be marketing or sales event. Where on the contrary, some people are like, "I'm really good at sales and marketing, that's my zone of genius. That's where I want to stay," then go do that and go find a developer or a team or someone to assist in the things related to the product and engineering side.

The other couple notes are staying really close to customers in that early, initial post launch. Watch what they do on your site, use some of the tools that help you gauge where they're spending their time and energy, get feedback and do it in a personalized way, right? Not to go full steam and say, "Hey, we got to get all these different tools and automotive," like actually have a dialogue and reach out to people, say, "Hey, I appreciate you signing up. I would love to get some early feedback. What could we do better? What would you like to see in the coming months?"

And then the last and most important point is consistency. So, I can't tell you how many people just of the first month or two, they just go out of the gate and then they just die for whatever reason. This is not just for membership sites. This is just a general business rule that I've learned and continue to share with everyone that I work with, is consistency will always pay off. In some way or form if you stay the course and you put out an ongoing and even extraordinary effort, you will see results.

Eric: Now, when you were talking about the 6- to 12-month plan, you kind of indicated that there were kind of these loosely defined phases of "Okay, you're just early on getting your trickle of customers, and then you have something beyond that." Can you just quickly tell me what those phases were again?

Ali: Yeah. I actually wrote a blog resource about this, which we can tell in the show notes, but to spitball and this can be interpreted different ways, but the easiest way to kind of segment them is that there's the early adoption, right? So just getting people to use it. Sometimes the mechanism there is giving it away for free, right? Just get some people in, get some usage out of it.

Then there's like the early sales phase. So, it's like okay, we've got some sales, some revenue coming in, low thousands a month, \$1,000, \$2,000, maybe up to about \$5,000 a month. We're like money's coming in. It's proven that people want this and it's valuable, but it's not full blown, where it's like, "Okay, I can build a team and build all these processes out," right?

Eric: Okay, before we get to the third stage, let's talk about the differences between those two stages. Because really, I think a lot of people, that's a big graveyard right there, right? Getting from early adoption to the \$3,000- to \$5,000-month mark. So, what are some of the best ways that you've seen that people can make it to that point where they're actually getting a consistent monthly revenue in their business?

Ali: Well, I think one of the mechanisms goes back to the point we just touched on, which is if you're close enough to these customers, not in a personal way. So, again, having a direct email, even spending time with them on the phone or Zoom, you're going to get out of them what they want to pay for, right? That can guide you and you'll remember these early customers, right? You'll know them by name. They'll come up in stories. They'll help you shape where the true value is because we all have plans and we all have elaborate pricing strategies, but none of

that matters until someone checks out and you get the notification that money just hit the bank.

These early users, early adopters, early customers are the ones who truly validate that whatever it is that you've decided to launch is worth paying for. So, that's my best suggestion is that just stay close, and then you'll have this small tribe of early customers. They'll get you into those low thousands a month, and then you have different set of decisions to navigate.

Eric: That's pretty clear. Okay, so now how do we increase? Once we get adept at having the conversation with our early customers and making adjustments based on that, what are the types of things that we should be looking at early on in terms of increasing the flow of people coming to us?

Ali: So, you reverse engineer it. You say, "Where did you guys come from, you guys and gals? How did you get here? How'd you hear about it?" You learn that and then you go do more of that, right? You do more of that until it doesn't work anymore. So, for example, let's say Instagram, let's say you've built up a following. You've got a few hundred people catching your stuff. You're like, "Oh, wow, five people that came here are people who followed me and commented on some stuff that I've instagrammed," right?

So, it's very clear now like, oh, whatever I'm doing there has been working. So, I'm either going to exponentially increase that organically or I'm going to tap into Facebook ads, so that I can get in front of more people like that on Instagram. That's the surefire way because it's low risk and it's proven. You've got the data to back that that worked.

Eric: Now, I think another thing to talk about is hurdles we throw in our own way, because I think a lot of times, we don't reach a goal that we're shooting for because of something we're tripping ourselves up. I think something that's very near and dear to your heart is the power and necessity of simplicity. Now, from your own experience as an entrepreneur and your direct experience working with clients. Why is that you stressed the importance of simplicity when it comes to building an online business?

Ali: Sure, yeah, this is a topic that I continue to be a student of. It slaps me in the face over and over again, because again, being a technician at heart, I'm wired to make it more complex. I think further. I'd say, "Oh, well, what about the future?" That's an exact example of what you don't want to do. So, the reason that it's dangerous is that the word 'complexity', especially related to online software businesses, hits everyone involved. So, it hits you as the owner of the business, the person running things. It hits your team in terms of other people who are contributing to the business and all the different efforts. It hits your customer.

So, for example, a very simple product or a very simple membership site is easy for me to create in vision. It's easy for my team to get behind and easy for the customer to sign up for. On the contrary, a more complex offer, a more complex membership site is the exact opposite. It's harder, takes longer. There's more scope to work against, to build it and deploy it, which hits

my team, and then inevitably hits the customer because now it's more complex to explain and to describe and to ultimately sell. That's it. The word in itself always introduces more. That's what its synonymous, complex is synonymous with more. You'll generally find when you've done that enough times that what you really want is less.

Eric: Right. I know me working with you has been good, because you've protected me from this. I'll get into that mindset and be like, "Hey, I know we were supposed to launch like yesterday, but let's just add these two more things," and you're like, "No."

Ali: Yeah, yeah. Well, now I am, right?

Eric: Now, you are. Yeah.

Ali: I used to be like, "Eric has a great idea. We should do this, this and this," and we'd feed off of each other, right? That's what you usually do until you sit back and realize that you want less. It actually goes deeper into Zen and Buddhist ideals, which is a whole another topic. But it's very relevant to this conversation is that if you introduce complexity, you're just introducing more. Most people will feed off that and they'll fuel your fire to do it. Whereas it takes a lot of discipline to say, "No, no, no, we don't need that. Let's just keep it like this."

Eric: Right. Following up on that, I mean, something I've heard you say before is get complex when you need it. So, I think there is a time when it's appropriate to start adding complexity, but can you elaborate more on that?

Ali: Yeah, absolutely. The simplest way that is easy to say in a statement and then I'll build upon it is that for anyone, membership site owner or retail shop owner, the business should tell you when you need complexity, so the business should tell you when you need more. The easiest way going back to one of our earlier topics is like the customers will validate that, right?

So, if your business is really simple and it's done well, but you're kind of at a roadblock, then generally the customers will say, "Hey, there's this other thing we want, and we're ready to pay for it." It's even better if you can get them to pay for it before you do it, right? Because now it's validated and the complexity that comes is backed by proof, right? So, it's like, "Okay, there's customer demand. There's more sales and revenue behind this, so we should go do it."

The other thing, which you'll see, especially if your membership site has features and has some technical components, is that you will hit bottleneck. This is how we've worked with a lot of people in the past that have come to us and say, "Hey, I had this really simple thing. It was going really well, but we need to get to level two now as opposed to staying on level one. To do that, we know we need these specific things done that have to be engineered." This is another example of when the business is telling you, so you're not making the assumption. You're literally hindered. Your growth, your sales, some aspect of getting more for the strategy is hindered by a technical component.

And then the other piece of this is being diligent about having some type of financial model. So, it's so easy to just assume that you need more or they're like symptoms of the business or like kind of nagging and saying, "Oh, you should do this, this, this." But we always encourage people put it on paper. In technical terms, that's a spreadsheet. Show what would happen if you did this. So, we add this new feature at X number of customers, if we bump them or offer them this additional thing, what would that look like financially. In that way, you have some logic, some method to the madness on why you would do that and what the return is. Because otherwise it's gut instinct, which can be helpful, but is not going to be concrete.

Eric: Good instinct and potentially, pet project.

Ali: You got it. Oh, yeah, absolutely, pet project. And then testing, so you hear this a lot today in all facets of business is like if you can test something and you can experiment, go do that first. It's not always easy, especially when you're talking about technology because you fall into the trap of "How much time is it going to take? How much it's going to cost?" But if there's a simple way to test something that introduces complexity, always test that first before just buying in and committing to it.

Eric: Got it. So, yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Now that we've kind of talked about when it makes sense to kind of get into "complexity," I mean, part of what's showing up here is that you need to have a certain level of awareness where you are on that spectrum of simple versus complex. So, how can people perceive this in themselves that they're doing this? What are some of the pitfalls that entrepreneurs who can get tempted by these sirens call of complexity and how can this completely derail somebody's momentum and potential success?

Ali: Oh, you just go down the wrong path. It's like the carrot or the magnet to say, "Hey, you should do this," is very easy to fall into for all the different reasons, right? You got customers ask about this. You've got some assumptions over here. You've got competitor pressure like, "Oh, they're doing this," but how we distill that and say put your guard rails up. We have this simple what we call a CRT framework, which is a nice diagram which we can add to the show notes. The CRT stands for a three-circle diagram, customer experience, revenue, and time savings.

So, you can imagine there's these three circles that all meet. It has a relationship where if something falls into one of these circles, then it's making an argument for complexity. So, for example, this specific thing would be so much better for our customers, great, there's some validation, or this other specific thing would be really good for revenue. And then the third circle is time saved. So, this specific thing would save us as a team a lot of time.

Now, if it falls into one of those, like I said, it validates consideration. If it falls into two of those, you should probably do that because you're killing two birds with one stone. If it falls into three, the dead center, it's a no brainer. The likelihood though of something falling into that third doesn't happen very much, especially as you scale. In the beginning, you will find things like, "Oh, this new feature would be good for customers. It could save us a lot of time. It's

actually going to give us some exponential revenue growth," but as you grow, that tends to happen less. And then you get hit with these decisions of "How do we do this? Which items do we go after?" Our guidance there is that where's the pain point.

So, for example, if cash is tight, then go do the things that drive revenue. If customer support is at all-time high, then you're like, "We should probably invest in things that are going to make our customers happy." And then the same thing with a time savings is if you find your team just overworked and exhausted, then say, "Hey, we got to automate some things or do some stuff around the business that are going to really take some work off of our team's plate."

Eric: I want to reference something that you talked about earlier about going to the customers, asking them questions, seeing what they're looking for, because you referenced in that that sometimes customers can be the thing that might introduce complexity and sometimes they might be the thing that can decrease complexity or bring simplicity to the situation.

Specifically, I've run into the situation with MemberMouse in a software product that in the early years, I got into too much of the people pleasing thing and thinking I needed to deliver more than was actually there. So, I would constantly have our development resources implement new things that were kind of things that people were asking for and I felt we needed to do to please the market, but turns out a lot of those things didn't need to be done. So, I feel like an important part especially with that dynamic is learning to set boundaries, and even what we referenced earlier and how our relationship has developed you.

When we worked together, you used to just say, "Oh, yeah, that's great idea. Let's do it." Now you have a more holistic vision of "Okay, we said that we wanted to get on this date. This is the budget from time and resources perspective. So, therefore, it doesn't fit right now to do that."

Ali: Yeah, this is great. Well, let's spend some time here. So, what's interesting, what I've sort of observed is that early in your career, you think you need to do more. That's just how you're wired, just like you said. I do the exact same thing. I would always get caught as a consultant and then building my own businesses, just doing so many things and then having these full featured products and experiences that could do everything.

I actually learned a little about this on a different podcast recently, where a lot of that underlying psychology comes from guilt. In other words, as creators, we feel guilt if we're not pleasing people, back to your point. This is psychology, right? We don't know better. We're not disciplined enough at that stage, in the early stage to say, "Nope, nope, this is okay. I can ignore that." And then as you move along, how some people do this is they like to use data as they start to mature.

For example, let's say we've got a spreadsheet or a place where we gather feedback. If something gets asked enough times, we commit to it, right? That's a system in itself. It's a logical way to say, "We're listening to you and you are the majority vote. So, we're going to do this because we feel like that validates the need." But as you've moved even further and

further, I'm not at the end yet, but I'm at a place now where I'm like, "I'm generally going to keep saying no until it feels like the only option is to say yes," right? So that's just a disciplinary thing and a mindset shift in running businesses even in life to say, "Just keep it simple."

Again, going back to all of our previous points, yields a lot of return if you buy into this, but you can only do that after going the complex route and letting all the other things consume you enough because then you've learned. You're like, "Okay, I don't want that anymore and this is a better path."

Eric: Right. Keeping it simple also directly ties to speed to market and speed to customer feedback. Like you were saying again how early on, it's really important to get the feedback of those early adopters, because any pain points or things that they like, you hear that and you will adapt the product or the service based on that. The longer you wait to get something out in front of those people, because you're making it more complex, the more you're actually pushing off the feedback that's going to help you go to the further stages.

So, let's talk about content versus product businesses. In your work with online entrepreneurs, you've said that most people are creating either content-based business or a product-based business. For our listeners, a content-based business would be something like an education site that teaches people how to play the guitar. The other approach is to create a product-based business, and this could be anything from selling physical products or a piece of software.

However, you mentioned that a lot of people come to you with an idea for both. For example, someone who wants to provide online guitar education, but also wants to create an app for their users. This person would then be building both a content and a product-based business at the same time. Now, you strongly advise against this, and why is that?

Ali: Yup. So, this goes right back to complexity. At the forefront, there's just more to do here. It's almost like a first-time entrepreneur saying, "I'm going to go do three businesses at once," instead of getting their feet wet and learning something about a certain industry or niche and then expanding upon it. Almost anyone in business will tell you to do that to start somewhere and then grow. Whereas it's very natural again, especially in the earlier phase to get that guilt and like, "No, no, no, I got to have the guitar training. It's got to have an app for progress tracking. It's got to have this. It's got to have forums where people can talk about it." Right? Because you start vision casting and again, the guilt sets in that you're not going to be good enough.

So again, in terms of the guidance and the coaching, just start with one or the other. A lot of times your persona and your strengths will lead you into what you're going to do. So, you're either more inclined to create the training, the content, and start there and grow it and then optimize it or vice versa. If you're an introvert, you want to build something, you want people to use it. And then in due time, you may find that you could complement that with content and other things that support the product.

Eric: So, if somebody starts with the content-based business or a product-based business based on their personal strengths, when would it be time to actually consider adding the other component to the business?

Ali: Exactly. So, this is the trickier part to navigate. To give you some examples, usually there's going to be strong demand from one side or the other. So, let's go back to the guitar example, if you've got this awesome library of training, just full with courses and lessons and most of this is video so content you can consume, you're either going to hear from your customers, your members are like, "Hey, we need more. We need to a better way to track this," or " We're looking for this thing to give us an edge." Again, they'll basically tell you what they want or vice versa.

To flip the script, you've got this really awesome software and you're kind of squeezed and optimized. A lot of your team's like, "We're not really moving the needle in terms of MRR, monthly revenue, recurring revenue. We're not really growing on target, but we've got all these voices from customers saying like, 'Hey, we don't know how to use this,' or 'We need better onboarding,' or 'We need these tools that involve content training,' etc." Especially if they're willing to pay for that.

So again, sticking to the theme here, the business will support and give you the demand for that. This kind of segues into well what have we seen here? So, what are examples of this? Because it's very common where we see people that want to do both. Now we're disciplined up to say no, because we had examples where we used to entertain that. And then you can imagine we're spending 6 to 12 months launching this massive content/product membership type property, and then the business owners are just like paralyzed when it's done because like, "Holy cow, what do I do with this? It's complex. How do I market this? How do I grow?", etc.

Whereas, on the contrary, one of our more successful clients who happens to do piano training as opposed to guitar, they are at a really good point now. They're proving out exactly, we're talking here, where they're like, "We've done the training, they've got the content." Now there's demand and validation to go build a side-by-side app that can give their customer base and even new customers a good tool to complement their content.

Eric: That's great, yeah. So, many times you want to make sure you're listening to the business to tell you when it's the right time to do something. This kind of leads to another kind of complimentary topic. It's about automating things in business. It's complimentary, because automation always sounds like a good idea. But in and of itself, from an implementation perspective, it brings complexity.

So, if you want to automate something, it requires effort to implement that, which may be in fact fall into one of those categories and pitfalls we talked about earlier, which could push out your launch, push out your timelines, not yield enough in revenue, not be satisfying your customers. May just be a pet project and a good idea, but not actually feed the business in any way. So, from your perspective, how do you decide what to automate and when?

Ali: Yeah, this is a great question. I'm extremely humble enough to know that I don't have all the answers here. In fact, I've had to navigate a lot of this in the last 12 to 18 months on a few key projects. It's interesting because we're in a tech software ecosystem where you can automate almost anything. We're at the disposal of tools like Zapier, which don't require an engineer, right? So that they're designed for non-technical folks to create automations and then you have traditional automation which is software engineering. So, writing code that does something that humans previously did and it does it in a more efficient way.

Now, deciding what, when, how to automate, a lot of this goes back to the CRT framework, at least that's how we look at it. It's like okay, if the time savings circle is on fire, we're just like, "Man, we are just sunk into these things," then it's pretty clear that you want-

Eric: Fire in a bad way.

Ali: Yeah, exactly. Sorry, in the red zone. Yeah, bad fire. Thanks for clarifying.

Eric: The house is burning down.

Ali: Totally, totally. So, that's when it's screaming, it's like it's time to automate. The other thing that is sort of a byproduct of automating for that circle is, especially if you're in a team environment, you boost morale. Because when you've got a specific task or set of tasks that your team's doing and it's both monotonous and it is time consuming, freeing that up, it's like a burden's lifted like, "Yes, I don't have to do that anymore." So, there's a little party excitement when that is relieved.

So, if it also is type of automation which happens to affect sales and revenue or the customer experience, then it's totally a win-win. So, a lot of times how we've looked at this and evaluated is that if something is super time consuming and it's also kind of bad for morale, meaning that it's not an enjoyable thing to do, that's an indication that it's time to automate. That makes sense?

Eric: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay, so let's talk about from your experience that you've seen automations versus a job being done by a human, are there things that you can categorically say... You can never say anything 100%. But over the course of working with a lot of clients, are there things that you can say happen most of the time where these things should absolutely be automated from day one, and these things should absolutely be done by a person?

Ali: Yeah, absolutely. So, some of the things that most of us are accustomed to or that you should automate are the expectation around a modern experience, specific to membership sites like getting confirmation of a purchase or even purchasing. There's enough tools now, including MemberMouse to make online transactions simple, right? Don't go figure that out and don't go write code or hire a developer to build a custom payment solution unless you absolutely have to, and there should be a really, really strong argument for that. Otherwise,

things like online payments, email, in terms of sending campaigns and then automating some of the new user onboarding and welcome series, these types of things should probably be automated from day one, hands down.

So the other key thing to recognize here and be aware of is that even though some of these things are default check, like yup, got to automate that, got to automate that, you also want to keep an eye on some of this stuff. In other words, still keep a human either in control or managing the automation before you just let it go and cruise control.

So, what I mean by that is even using tools like MemberMouse and Stripe where they interact really nicely to save you time on all the payments side of it online business, having alerts or having someone check weekly or monthly, like "Are things running?", because sometimes errors happen. I've seen this. I see this all the time. So, it's good to know that even though you're automating some of these trivial things, you still kind of want a human to check in on them, especially if they touch critical aspects of the business like revenue.

Eric: Right, that make sense. Okay, we've got through it. We had an outline and we did it. Just so people know like, I think people who have been listening to podcasts, they know like I bury in and out, going out, doing outlines, but specifically with this conversation, it's a little bit harder work for me to go with an outline, because you and I naturally talk and have dialogues all the time. We can talk for three hours about really engaging and interesting things to us. But the reason we stuck with an outline is because we wanted to give people this clear picture and stay on track and do it. So, we did it. That's done. Hopefully, people found that helpful, but now let's talk about something else.

You've been doing work with a platform now that you've built. This is in contrast to you used to do a lot of one-on-one client work, building sites essentially from scratch for your clients. Now you're moving more into this platform area. How is that experience different for you as a business owner, and what challenges you're facing? What things are you excited about going into this project?

Ali: Yeah, no, this is good. This is the good stuff. I'll just spit ball. What we're doing to reiterate for people, so they have proper context is as Eric said, we're going from a history of very complicated, expensive, long project cycles and requirements to more streamlined, proven, systematized platform type projects. Obviously, this naturally touches on some of the stuff we just discussed. So, we're throwing away complexity and we're trading it for simplicity.

With that though, it also speaks to the automation piece and looking at how we spend our time, but with that, it's actually interesting. There's a whole new set of challenges. There's some rewiring, especially for me, after being in the complex world for many years to embrace this simplification and then embrace systems. So, this is a point that I think a lot of entrepreneurs listening are going to start nodding like, "Yep, I'm either there," or "I'm about to get there," or "I'm past that and I've mastered that." But you get to a point where you want the clarity, and you're ready to systematize something to make it repeatable, to make it proven,

and then to run through the motions. So, it's a whole different game. It's a whole different challenge.

There's pros and cons of each, but you imagine you're going from the custom home builder to building factories that all look the same, right? So, a factory is simple. A custom home is not. A factory can be stood up and done by the same team over and over again. A custom home generally, you might pull in different people for their respective skills. So, it's been a paradigm shift. There's a part of me that still misses the complexity, and we actually still do occasionally take on something.

Eric: Well, I think another good word for that is there's more creativity too. There is more opportunity for creativity. This journey you're talking about, I mean, even though you're doing with software, this is a common story. People are trading time for money being consultants, and they get burnout on it. And then they want to help a larger audience because you can only help one person at a time or X number of people at a time. And then they want to create a business that's more scalable and the more-content based business. These trade-offs have to happen. If you want to teach something to somebody or help somebody with something at scale, you have to naturally fade out some of the flexibility that you get when you're dealing with somebody one on one and that's challenging to do, to figure out that balance.

Ali: Well said. You're spot on, Eric. A lot of what it comes down to... Sometimes there's the human or the entrepreneurial desire to say, "Well, I've been convinced," or "I'm confident that this simpler, repeatable path is more lucrative or more sane," whatever. But then there's the piece you just touched on, which is the impact side. This is the motion that becomes pretty obvious that, like you said, to reach people at scale and to make a bigger impact, you have to create something that is more systematized, more appealing. I'm reading a specific book now that's using Ray Kroc and McDonald's as the example.

While many people, especially educated people, might look at McDonald's for its flaws and especially like the quality of the food, what he did was actually very impressive because he was one of the first entrepreneurs to truly franchise and franchise at scale, and many people have copied him since. So, while McDonald's is known for burgers in the business world, people recognize and appreciate McDonald's for being the most successful model of a proven... Because it is a simple business. It's actually not a complex business.

You have a few things in the item, you can plug anyone into the business virtually to do most of these jobs. Instead of focusing on oh well, the negative side, that you focus on the positive like, "Wow, this is such a proven system." Believe me, it makes impact. There's some staggering fact that at one point, I forget the percentage, but a percentage of the food consumed in the world like McDonald's had a little chunk of that, just crazy.

Eric: Given the number of clients you're working with and kind of sticking with the theme of this episode, which is talking about what happens after launch, where do you find that you're

coaching the clients that you get up and running the most? What are some of the things that you feel would be most helpful to people listening who find themselves in this situation?

Ali: Sure. Yeah, fantastic question. We've actually sensed a lot more, like you said, even though we've simplified our offering and really created a platform just to make it more digestible, repeatable, there's a coaching element to this with almost everyone. Some people are at a higher acumen, some people are just getting started. But regardless, they're leaning on us. We're happy to give it some guidance, like you said, checklists, templates, playbooks. So, that it can be done in a better, more effective way that we've essentially proved out. I'm going to go back to some things we talked about, because these are really important, and I want to make sure these stick with people is that the consistency is huge. This isn't just for membership sites or business. This is for life.

If you're not consistent, then you're neglecting one of the most important attributes of reaching a goal or progression. It doesn't even have to be about a target. It's about just progression, micro habits. So, there's been some really awesome research lately from James Clear and other people in the industry, talking about the importance of habits and consistency plays right into that. So, we are creatures of habits. A lot of the stuff we do, 95% or more, is done subconsciously like waking up, brushing our teeth, eating breakfast, getting ready. Whereas it's the conscious decisions we make that really drive patterns in business growth and progression.

So, I would say that if there's anything and I try to get a pulse on this early on in the conversations with our customers to say, "Are you going to be consistent? Can you be held accountable?" So, one of the new things we're experimenting with ourselves right now are schedules. So, just like if you were to take college course curriculum, you got to show up, you got to take exams on certain days, and then you eventually have a grade that determines if you've consumed this and passed. So, we're doing something similar at least testing it right now, like from the start, we're mapping out a schedule or pre-defining these meeting dates when we're checking in and reviewing things. We're doing training calls.

And then we're mapping when the target launch date is because above all things, a schedule and keeping people accountable is one of the biggest obstacles from both our old world of doing really complicated projects and even our new world of doing simple projects. For some reason, humans don't like sticking to these schedules. So, that's an example of where we're spending some energy and where I would advise people, stay consistent and find a way to be accountable. Those two things will give you so much value in the long run.

Eric: That's good advice. Yeah, I mean, it made me think about what you're talking about consistency, a metaphor that has never occurred to me is that if you say want to have a goal of surviving, you eat food with a certain frequency. You don't eat it like haphazardly, like once a month or whatever. So, consistency is all about feeding the thing that you want to survive.

So, consistency is great, and it also has to be paired with an understanding of what you're trying to accomplish. Because obviously, if you eat consistently but you eat the wrong stuff, then you may not reach the goal that you're looking for. You'll end up reaching a goal. Consistent habit will lead to a goal and accomplishment, but if you're not necessarily clear about how it feeds it, then the goal that you reached may not be the one that you thought you were going for.

Ali: Absolutely, yeah. So, feeding the consistency, being open and persuadable. So, this is something new that's been on my radar recently from one of my business partners is like staying with a growth mindset, which means you're open to learning, almost always. And then being persuadable, not in the sense where like you could be sold, but where you could change your mind. I think this is really important for people who launch membership sites, especially for the first time. Because it's one thing, like you said, to be consistent and kind of have a plan, you should do that.

But then it's also equally important to say, "Hey, the plan could shift." I know this saying's been butchered everywhere. It's been used so many times. I love it. It's the Mike Tyson quote, "Everyone has a plan until you get punched in the mouth." That's so true, especially with these sites because think about the vision casting that someone does going into like launching a membership site. They've got that original or initial impetus like, "I'm going to pursue my passion. I'm going to make some money here. I'm going to launch this. My friends are going to know about. They're going to tell their friends." You literally start vision casting.

A lot of this is healthy if you're the type of person that wants to go and grab it and reach that desired angle, but you cannot know what's going to happen when you really get in there and you do it and then you launch it. So, that's why I'm making this point for people to be aware of and to reflect on is that there's going to be change. Your ability to embrace that change and use it in sort of a meaningful way or a way that you've learned from it instead of being like, "Oh, that's not what I planned," and then being derailed, this is really important. This goes into being really conscious about an open mindset, a growth mindset, and then being persuadable to say, "Hey, we can shift gears and go this way."

Eric: I appreciate you sharing your kind of meta-story about your business. Some things that I took away from that is we're talking about in the beginning for both of us, there was a sense of guilt about delivering certain features because we wanted people to like it. And then there was kind of a phase where it's just like, "Okay, I'm open to everybody and anybody who wants to use this."

Now, there comes to a phase where you're part of your business where you are actually setting a lot more boundary to say, "Actually, you know what? I know what my value is. I've been doing this long enough. If you want to work with me, I can get you there. I know that you need to commit to these things, right? Because I know if you don't commit to these things, then you're not going to succeed regardless of what I do." So, it's a totally different mindset that you've come to.

Ali: It is indeed. Thank you for recognizing that. So, some of that is getting to a place where we want to spend our time and energy with people that we know are serious and are intentional about doing this. So, there is a fairly selfish way there, but we see it as a better and optimistic light where it's like, "We're going to work with the people that want to work with us." We do a good job of vetting that. We have a new intake process which was inspired by some of your feedback, where we get people to answer some questions up front.

We get them to put a little work and say, "Here's my scope, here's the things I need to like." Have them take the initiative to put some effort in, and then we come in, and then we start creating value from the beginning. I say, "Great. Based on that, here's an estimate quote, but we're going to run through a demo with you. We're going to make sure you're clear on things. We're going to hold your hand and then kick this off with you."

Eric: I thought you're going to say, "We're going to hold your hand and then kick you out the door." You're on your own now.

Ali: Yeah, that'd be an interesting business. Yeah, I mean, like I said, I appreciate you recognizing that is that we have learned enough that we're able to narrow in basically the type of customers that we want to serve, and then it's a win win-again. So, there's a part of that where we have to elegantly discard or sort of reject people. That's fine because not only would it be bad for us to pursue working with them, but it's bad for them as well. We know that at this point. They're better served somewhere else in finding someone that wants to do the thing they want to do.

I would actually give you some praise as well on the MemberMouse side, because with the way that you've positioned your business and sort of evolved, that MemberMouse is a good fit for specific customers. There's some people that it's not a good fit for. I know that you probably intentionally have started to message that more, and you're reaching people who can really value it. Whereas there's some tools are just simpler and they're probably better for this specific demographic, but MemberMouse has a really, really valuable offering to specific people and is hence why we use it and why we've been using it for years.

Eric: Thank you for that. I recognize now that part of the reason why that happens is because that's basically like my personality and it's kind of like how I deal with people in my life now. It's basically, it doesn't happen like this. But essentially, if I meet somebody, it's like, "Oh, I'm either a right fit for you or I'm not." Because I've come more into who I am at this point in my life, and so there's not as much guilt about me trying to be who I should be for everybody. It's more about recognizing this is who I am. For those people who resonate with that, it's going to be great. For those people who don't, we should just recognize right now. This is going to be bad if we try to do certain things.

Ali: Yeah, you cut right in which I admire. I actually have followed suit in many ways. One, I think, because I'm an ENTJ in one of these aptitude tests. So, there's a side of me and I know that we have introverted tendencies, but think about the best way, I've heard it described as

warm candor, just telling someone, be like, "Look, we just don't have that much in common. So, we shouldn't continue this."

This goes into the dating world, the people that are in that world, but what I think about as you talk about this is... imagine if everyone did this, we'd be a really efficient culture and society but so much time is wasted on the opposite end where people just let a conversation drag on or just hang out with this group out of guilt or do the thing because they feel like there's a sense of commitment there. That's inefficiency at best.

I mean, not only are we wasting time, but it's not good energy. Will Smith actually coined this in a really good way. It's like hanging out with people that fuel your fire, not deplore it out. This is the good fire now we're talking about, and that's such a great way to look at it. It's like why would you spend time with the people that want to douse your fire when there's all these other people out there that could potentially flame your fire and make you the best version of yourself.

Eric: But I think a lot of the journey to get to the point where even recognize that that's the situation, I don't know if it can be avoided. Even if you and I 10 years ago, when we were starting our business, listen to a podcast like this and be like, "Okay, avoid the phase where I feel guilty about things." It doesn't matter. You'd still do it. It's a rite of passage. But I think what's helpful hearing from the past generations who have done the thing is at least you know it's part of the process and you know, "I'm in the right place. This is how people felt before me."

Also, there's a point where this stop. It transitions to something else." Just knowing, having a picture of the journey, because it's certainly not to say that if you are in any of these phases that have happened before, that you're in the wrong place. It actually means you're in the right place, and not to be discouraged. That's why so many people fail a business and a lot of things is because they don't recognize that the journey is what it is. It's not like I'm going to go hire MemberDev and Ali, they're going to build my site and then bank, like I don't need to do anything. That's not how it works.

Ali: That's such a powerful point there at the end, where you say, recognizing the journey for what it is. This goes into something maybe we talked about another time in terms of the four stages of consciousness. But there is accepting something and going with it and being with that, and then there's not accepting it, which is all the friction and all the resistance.

So, this is a philosophy that not only I've taken a lot of interest to as an entrepreneur but as a father and as a husband is that if I have my thoughts and ideals and things I value, that doesn't mean that I need to push these onto my children or my wife, for example. In other words, they have their own path and journey, like you said. For me to dictate that is a very different path and for me to facilitate that, right?

So, what it comes down to and this is something that we talk with some of our more mature, seasoned clients who are really digging in for some of the answers is like this method of

acceptance or letting things be, because it opens up a whole different mindset, a whole different shift in how you look at your business, how you look at your life. Because like you said, when you throw away resistance, you throw away friction, the world becomes simpler. It becomes more graceful and becomes more harmonious.

I can sense when we're having these conversations with people like you and some of our clients, it's a very different conversation than someone who's like, "Well, no, no, no. This is how it's supposed to be. This is why we're hiring you. This is what you're supposed to do." You can see the dialogue there is so different. The best way to summarize this, as I tell people now, especially with when we do occasionally do the larger, more custom complex projects I go, "Even though we say this is going to launch in six months, it's going to launch when it's ready to launch." The people who get that laugh, they're like, "Totally get it." The people who don't, like "No, no, this needs to launch in March." I'm like, "Okay, well, let's see if it happens in March. We can see how that plays out."

Eric: I'm going to add a slightly variant perspective on. You said something when we let go of resistance, the world becomes simpler. The way that I see it is that when we let go of resistance, we stop trying to control complexity, which ultimately leads to our lives being more simple and more stress free, but really the world isn't changing. The world is what it is. Things are complex and chaotic, etc, etc. If we go with the flow, that'll be an easier journey than if we resist it. When we go with the flow, sometimes that means we don't end up where we want to end up. So, you're talking about being a father, and in general, not pushing our ideals on other people.

I mean, really in being ourselves, we can 100% be ourselves and take ownership of what we know is right for us. But in holding space for other people, whether we're creating a company and having customers or whether being parents and having children, what we can do is create a container and make sure that the thing is supported, make sure that it is nourished, etc, etc. But how the things grow within the container is up to their own spirit. Just like if you have a garden, you plant the seed, you water it, you nourish it, but the plant grows according to its own thing. It's not something for us to control. It's the same in business.

Ali: I love that, and I actually have a garden. That's a place where I'm learning. That's so powerful. Absolutely.

Eric: Awesome. Well, I love where this ended up.

Ali: Yeah, this is how it should be. To speak to what we just spoke to, this is where it went. That's exactly where it should have went.

Eric: Exactly. So, as usual, appreciate you coming on. So, where can people go to learn more about you?

Ali: The best place to learn about me is thatwebdude.com. This is my personal blog. I'm intentional about writing once or twice a month. A lot of what you're going to get there are more topics like you and I have just discussed at the latter part of this episode, things on fatherhood, things on psychology, relationships, even a little bit of business sprinkled in here and there. That'd be a good place if you just want to go catch some stuff. Please do leave a comment. I love people who engage in that conversation. And then business wise, memberdev.com. We spoke a lot about what we're doing there. My team and I are doing some awesome stuff there. So, if you're anywhere remotely interested in launching, building, or growing membership site, just touch base with us. We're happy to have a conversation.

Eric: Yeah. I'll add to that, if you are interested in we've kind of referenced the simple platform that you've developed through your experience over the years, we've referenced in a number of times in this conversation, if people are MemberMouse customers or thinking about using MemberMouse and they want to get up and running as quickly as possible and then face all the challenges we just talked about this conversation if you go to membermouse.com/done-for-you. That will talk about the partnership that my company and all these companies have together to help you get the ball rolling as quickly as possible. So, yeah, check that out. But Ali, thank you so much for your time, and thanks for coming on.

Ali: Likewise, man. It's always a pleasure.

OUTRO:

Thank you so much for listening to this entire episode. I hope you learned a lot from Ali and now feel more confident about what you should do after you launch your site.

I'm so grateful Ali came on the show and would like to thank him for sharing so freely from his knowledge and experience.

To get links to all the resources we mentioned in this episode, head on over to SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/154.

There you'll also find the complete show notes and a downloadable transcript of our conversation.

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Thanks for being here and we'll see you next time!