SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR

HOSTED BY ERIC TURNNESSEN, FOUNDER OF **membermouse™**

How Jordan Layman Built A Real Life Membership Community

"Some people only want access to a laser cutter because they know what they can do what a laser cutter and they're gonna come in and they're gonna do it. But most people come in with an idea or with some need that they're trying to fill, but with not really enough information to do it. So, then we provide them with the resources and the knowledge base and the support inherently within the community for them to accomplish their goal or their idea."

INTRO:

You're listening to Jordan Layman, my special guest on this episode of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Jordan is the co-founder of a business called Idea Fab Labs. They're a "maker space" that gives people access to high-tech tools and educational workshops — sort of like a gym for artists and creatives.

What's fascinating is that Jordan uses MemberMouse to manage an in-person facility. Instead of protecting pages and videos on a website, he's protecting access to laser cutters and 3D printers in a physical space.

In our conversation, Jordan shares some thought-provoking ideas about memberships, the sharing economy, and the power of a creative community. This is one of our most unique episodes to date and I can't wait for you to learn from Jordan.

One quick note before we get started:

Jordan has created a very custom application of MemberMouse. He was able to do this because of his background in web development. If you have a big idea that you want to bring to life — but don't have the same development experience — I recommend checking out a service called Codeable.

They can help you hire a pre-vetted WordPress developer for projects of any size. Whether you need a little help customizing a checkout flow or want to build the Netflix of your industry, they can help out. You can get more info about Codeable in the show notes for this episode at SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/182.

So without further ado, let's get to it!

I'm your host Eric Turnnessen and this is the Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Eric: Welcome to the show, Jordan!

Jordan: Thank you.

Eric: Thanks so much for joining us. Jordan, you are the co-founder of Idea Fab Labs. Can you tell us a little bit about what that is?

Jordan: Sure. So, Idea Fab Labs is a maker space. We have two facilities actually, but we started out as a place where people come to access high tech fabrication tools that they may not be able to afford.

Eric: And how did you and your business partner come up with this idea?

Jordan: It was pretty natural. We had access to a large space for a very affordable price. It was very dilapidated, and we had the opportunity to renovate it. And we sort of, while we were in the process of doing that, were tossing around a business model ideas and figuring out the direction we wanted to go with the space where we could do projects, do large scale art projects. And the maker space model sort of came out of the conversations and out of some of the research we did while we were fixing up the space.

Eric: So that wasn't your original is to have it be a space for a lot of people. Originally it was gonna be a space for you guys to do your art projects?

Jordan: Pretty much. We didn't say we wanna build a maker space. We said, here's this space, what should we do with it?

Eric: So where did the critical transition happen in terms of deciding to open it up to more people?

Jordan: I guess the most notable moment was when my business partner, his name is Erin Banwell, he showed me a TED Talk by Mitch Altman. And Mitch Altman is a technologist and a hacker, and he walks out onto the TED stage and he drops like 50 brass keys out onto the stage and he says something like, "Here's a key to our space, our hacker space. Come and participate." I don't remember what he said, it was something to that effect. I don't know, that hit me pretty well. And I said, "All right let's get everybody together. We'll create a space and people can come."

Erin had a laser cutter already, so we were sort of already leading toward this technology driven artist space. So that was maybe the affirming moment.

Eric: The way you describe it, it sounds like it might have come as a little bit of a surprise to you that that was something you were really interested in.

Jordan: Well, it's a radical idea to give people fairly open access to space. People pay a fee to get access, but then we give them a key and then they can come and go as they will. So that's a radical concept. I think it made sense at the time to do something that was a little different in, this was in Chico, California. So, we have two. Our two spaces are in Chico and in Santa Cruz, California. And there are spaces like ours all over the world, which is really fun to go and see how other spaces do their thing.

But I had never been to one of those spaces before, and so it was sort of like this is new, this is different, it's fascinating. And I'm already a very social person, so it just made a lot of sense to kind of explore that.

Eric: Awesome. And how is the business working out? Is the business model that you guys planned from the beginning what you're going with now? What's changed in terms of your approach once you actually got the doors open and people were coming in?

Jordan: I would say that in some ways the model has changed, but in a lot of ways we have changed and the people that come to the space change the space. So, we are still frequently exploring revenue streams. It's definitely an uncharted or lightly charted terrain. There are spaces like ours, there are notable spaces like ours that have had successful models. But everyone's doing something a little bit differently. They're focused more towards art or they're focused more towards maybe only educational programs for kids. So, there's a lot of fluctuation in what's actually happening in the different spaces like ours.

We tend to explore those things and get a feel for what's happening, do some research, and if it's working then we pursue it. If it's not working then maybe we'll pull back and put our energy towards something else to try and see if that's gonna work. So, it's a lot of exploration.

Eric: Yeah, and I'm looking at your membership site right now. Well now the inside of your membership site but your plans page where you outline what people can get if they pay a monthly fee. So, can you just give a brief overview of this in terms of what your approach is and how you're outlining your different plans for customers?

Jordan: Yes. So, there's some slight differences between the two facilities, but they're basically the same. What you have is three tiers of membership and we call them the Maker Space, the Fabrication Lab, and the Pro Memberships. So, people at the lowest level, the Maker Space level, they pay between 30 and 45 dollars per month. It's 30 in Chico, 45 in Santa Cruz. And they get access to the space and the internet and just general access to hand tools and computers. Then they get access to specific zones that we have. The facilities are broken up into zones.

So, at the lowest level you would get access to mostly things that are manual tools, not necessarily the more digital tools. That would be the electronic zone, the jewelry making zone,

the textiles and costume making zone, we have an audio zone in Santa Cruz that we're putting together, a vinyl cutting and printing zone. So, these are sort of basic utility things that you could walk up and use a soldering iron or something like that.

The next level would be the Fabrication Level which gives you access to the laser cutters that we have on site, which are definitely our most popular tools at both facilities hands down.

Eric: Perfect, well that's great for you 'cause that's your mid-tier price point.

Jordan: Right. And I think it would be a reasonable thing for us. The business model, rather, could be trimmed down to be only laser cutting, and that would be a successful business model. So that's something that we've explored and discovered as very viable.

Eric: Well, I wonder how much that would influence the community and the vibrancy of the community, though. Maybe if that changes, then that may have effects you can't predict.

Jordan: I think we could probably predict them, and they would be perceived as negative. So, if we had started that way, that would probably have been a good move and then slowly expand instead of trying to accommodate all these different interests. It's an observation.

So that's the second tier. And you get a certain amount of time that you can reserve these digital tools because a lot of them are one person one project at a time, they're in high demand, so then you get a certain amount of time you can say I get to use this tool per week.

At the Pro Level you get twice as much time, it goes from four hours per week to eight hours per week that you can reserve these tools. And you also get access to we have a large wood-milling machine. It's called a Shopbot CNC Router table. So, we have some of those and we also are starting to acquire some metal working equipment that's at the Pro Level. A water jet cutter, we have a Tormach CNC Mill for milling steel and aluminum.

Eric: That's awesome. And I love this model and idea of the sharing of resources. We had a tool library in Portland, Oregon where you could go rent tools. But I think for a lot of different reasons, these types of things where you're buying this equipment and hosting it in a space and people can use it and not everybody has to have their own laser cutter or their own video production tools. I really love this idea. And I hope that models like this are adopted more by people in cities.

Jordan: Yeah. I think you're gonna see it. It's happening a lot with the digital side of things like Uber and all these Airbnb, the sort of sharing economy. People are writing software to accommodate that. People are grasping the idea of sort of this shared, centralized experience, too. It's naturally going that way.

Eric: It's interesting because a lot of the complaint isn't the right word, but I can't think of a better one, that people have in running online membership sites in terms of the people up as

part of the community, their customers, is the lack of connection. So, the fact that you, in this space also the benefit you naturally get through how you're running it is you inherently are getting connection because people are physically there in the space interacting with each other.

Jordan: I would say that that is both the hardest to quantify and the most valuable asset or resource that we provide. Some people only want access to a laser cutter because they know what they can do what a laser cutter and they're gonna come in and they're gonna do it. But most people come in with an idea or with some need that they're trying to fill, but with not really enough information to do it. So, then we provide them with the resources and the knowledge base and the support inherently within the community for them to accomplish their goal or their idea. That meta-layer is actually the thing that makes us really valuable.

Eric: Yeah, for sure. Did those types of services where people offered additional training or something like that, are those parts part of your standard plans or are those add-ons or something like that in terms of how you're doing your pricing?

Jordan: They come in different forms. So, we offer safety and basic use to all members free with membership. So, if you come in and you want to use the laser cutter, for example, you must take an hour and forty-five-minute safety and basic use class. And you get your feet wet there. It's often not quite enough to have success with something elaborate because I'm not gonna show you how to use the software to design something. I'm just gonna show you how to take your design and put it into the machines.

Then, the next level is how do you get your cool thing finished? And so that's maybe through a class that we offer that we would charge for. Paid for with there's an instructor and we're gonna show you how to use Adobe Illustrator to make a living hinge model of a chair, or we're gonna teach you CorelDRAW for slotted puzzles with the laser cutter.

So those are things that we offer, we try to offer. It's something that has sort of fallen to the wayside in lieu of just kind of having to focus on certain things instead of being so spread thin. There's so many things going on and it's difficult sometimes to do all of the things that we could or people want us to do, and do them well. But built into the model is classes and workshops scenario that once we're all, once everything's really moving forward then that's a regular set of classes every week that people can participate in.

Eric: I wanna dive into that a little bit. But before we do, you're a MemberMouse customer, and you're using MemberMouse, and you're using it in a way that I think is unique because for one you're running a physical space. Can you talk a little bit about the ways how MemberMouse plays into your model?

Jordan: Well maybe I should give you little bit of background about me first. I have been a web developer for most of my life now. When we started this space, I was working full time at the University in Chico, CSU Chico. So, I've spent a lot of time with WordPress and when we were looking to build the website for this new membership community we were building, we did

some research and MemberMouse seemed like the tool that we decided was gonna fit our needs close enough. And I think if we had any idea what we were doing, we would've maybe gone with some gym software. I think it took about a year for us to realize that what we were building was a gym, just not for workout equipment.

I'm fairly comfortable. I don't usually go into the core files and hack stuff because then they get replaced, but I definitely feel comfortable butchering whatever I need to get it done in WordPress. So yeah, you guys have been an interesting fit because again it's not for a physical space, so we have little hacks for cash payments and we have hacks for... well it does work with bundles so we have lockers on site for rent, we just use the bundles for that.

A lot of the things, they kind of just a little bit of a skew, not even a hack. Just like, we're gonna use this thing for this instead of what you probably thought you built it for.

Eric: And talk about this facility access component.

Jordan: One of the cool things that we did was Maker Spaces are very similar to hacker spaces. It's hard to say what the difference other than maybe just a lean towards software and electronics hardware, so we have that feeling too. We took a raspberry pie and like a sprinkler enclosure box and an RFID reader and a keypad, and we put it outside by the door, and we got an electric strike lock. So, when you apply electricity to it, it unlocks the hinge so you can push the door open.

Eric: For people who don't know, a raspberry pi is not that delicious thing that you eat, it's a circuit board right?

Jordan: It's a credit card size computer. We installed all that outside and we ran an ethernet cable in and connected it to the network. And then we set up MemberMouse so when a new member, once they've completed that orientation and they've signed up, we will give them an access code and we will go in and put it in their custom fields in the backup of MemberMouse. Then I wrote a little API call so that the door, it goes into the website and downloads the new list of active users and then it will see if the user is active and it will go to their custom field and grab their code, and then if it gets a match it will open the door.

Eric: Well that's really cool. I've never heard of somebody using MemberMouse to open control physical access to a space through a keypad so props.

Jordan: Thanks. What we would do now because there was not a WordPress API when we built that, it was a couple years ago, so now what we would do is we would use the WordPress API to do the calls.

Eric: Right. But, of course, and this is kind of getting back to where I was thinking of going, as your business grows just like a lot of us have experience in growing businesses, there's a lot you

want to do, there's a lot your customers want you to do, there's a lot you could do, but there are only very few things you can actually accomplish given your resources.

Jordan: Should do?

Eric: Should do, yeah. Let's talk a little bit about that. What has this journey been like in terms of that, through that lens for you?

Jordan: Yeah, it's really easy to get distracted because the nature of the space is sort of playful. We encourage people to test, we encourage people to experiment, and there's sort of this doing art for art's sake, laser cutting something nifty up and just putting it up on the wall. It's really easy to just do something because you can. So that is something that you have to watch out for when running such an elaborate business because I can spend a lot of time helping people with their design problems, I spend a lot of time fixing equipment, cleaning up after people. There's a lot of that going on.

So lately my primary motivation has been to trim things down into a more streamline fashion and utilize the resources that I have. We have a volunteer program where we give people the highest level of membership for the lowest price with an additional four hours per week that they come and volunteer. So that's really great, and I'm learning how to better utilize those resources in a way that is beneficial for the space.

Eric: Yeah. It seems like you're looking at strategies to bring in additional resources so you can take care of ongoing items that need to be taken care of, and ultimately so you can free yourself to do what? Where are the opportunities that you see?

Jordan: Right. I have a degree in marketing, in web marketing. My efforts are most likely best spent in outreach and in marketing and communicating with other community organizations and having partnerships. And my business partner, Erin, he's really good at a lot of those things as well. He's also really good at facility management. We're gonna take this wall down and we're gonna move this zone over here, and solving several problems at once by shifting the space around.

The larger the community is, the more stable it is and the more income there is. So, the primary function is to just increase awareness of our existence and bring people in and make sure that they have a good experience. But then there's a lot of other ways that we can get resources.

Right now, Erin is focused on building installations for children's museums. So, we have this cool product that we didn't come up with it, but we saw a version of it and we made our own. It's this augmented reality sandbox. The software's open source and what it does is it uses a Microsoft Kinect to scan a sandbox, and then a projector in line with that to cast a topography onto the sand. And when you move the sand around it refreshes, so you can reform the topography of this sand in real time. And there's all sorts of fun little games that you can play and lessons that you can teach on this augmented reality sandbox. It's pretty cool.

He's been revising and iterating on this product, and he's been selling them. We sold one to the Monterrey Bay Aquarium recently, a couple schools, a couple children's museums. Got some other high-profile clients in the works right now. So, he's going hard on that right now, which is exciting. So, there's sort of a product element to what we can do. We can fabricate any of these things so we can easily produce products. There's an avenue there as well.

Eric: Nice. And what about, it seems like there would be a natural opportunity for some online based training where you could do a course. Be like, oh you're interested in 3-D printing? Go buy this course on our website and it'll show you everything you need to do, and then you can come into the shop and use our stuff or we could show you how to acquire your own or whatever. Has that come up at all? Do you think there could be a desire for that?

Jordan: Yeah, that's definitely come up in the past. We've filmed videos before. I think we just didn't quite get to the top of the mountain in most cases. Because it sounds easy.

Eric: No, I get it. It's not easy.

Jordan: There's a production level there. I think it's all about crossing off the boxes until you get to that point. Right now, it's adequate with the person who runs the 3-D printing zone showing you how to do it for an hour and a half and giving you resources that exist online. I think it is tempting in the long run to design all of our own curriculum. And filming that curriculum being executed and then either putting that on the website behind a pay wall or putting it on YouTube and doing it that way.

Eric: And also, I don't live in any of the places where you have locations. So, there's no way you could ever get revenue from me right now. But there are tons of people who are interested in all these different zones that you have, like 3-D printing, 3-D scanning, digital embroidery, or electronics, laser printing, screen printing, etc. So internationally, there's a market for training on these things. Internationally, there's a market for training on these things. There's already tons of people doing this on YouTube, showing you things, but everybody always has their own voice and it's valuable.

Jordan: I think it is valuable in the long room. So, if you would play it out, the very beneficial thing for us is it's a video of how to use our piece of equipment. Then if you are a member here, it's right at home. You're like okay, this helps me a lot. I'm paying money to be here, I wanna have success with the equipment, and here's a person that I just met showing me how to use this in this video. Great. But then we can maybe take that to the next step and say well, we don't care if you're a member or not, here's this video in case you have the same equipment. Then if you do land on our page searching, then it's an SEO game. Then we just try a little bit harder to get in front of more people.

Eric: As a entrepreneur, first of all did you decide to be an entrepreneur or did it just happen?

Jordan: Yeah, I think it's always been this way for me a little bit. Because I was trying to build website for people when I was like 13. Always have been my own boss, even if I had a boss for something else. So, it does seem pretty natural to me, I don't know if it was a decision. I guess it was a decision recently when I quit my job in Chico and I moved down to Santa Cruz to run this facility it was a decisions.

Eric: And how long ago was that?

Jordan: It's been two years. Just like the decision to open up a space where we give everyone a key, which is sort of a radical idea, we also started the space in Santa Cruz remotely. Both Erin and I were living in Chico and running the space there, and he had just had his first child, so we were pretty taxed but still decided to start the space in Santa Cruz, which is his hometown. We got our ducks in a row, but trying to start a business that is innovative, slightly radical in the ways that we're talking about without being there to do it is probably a little too crazy.

After about two years of hiring people, having it not work out for various different reasons, just not quite good enough, not the right leadership, not the right amount of investment from people. That was the thing that was like, okay, either we close the shop down or one of us has to go down there and run it because no one else can do it. There is no unicorn that can do this just because of the financial reasons after you spent two years trying to run the business and there is no capital left. Okay. So, I moved down here to do that.

It's been challenging because we didn't get as good of a running start as we could have if we had said in the beginning okay one of us is moving down there to do that with all the capital. That would've been a better move. But here we are.

Eric: Yeah, well who knows. Who knows. Because there's so many things where I look back that I'm like oh, I could've done that, I would've done that differently. But it's like one way or another you get there.

Jordan: It's been challenging in a good way, but it's great here. The people that are part of the community are amazing. We have just right around 140 members right now, and I've met all these people and I spend time with a lot of them. They're creative and they're curious and they're talented. People from all ages, it's really great. And Santa Cruz is not a bad place to live either.

Eric: No, it's not. So, what would you say at this point are your driving motivating factors in terms of the vision for your guys' company?

Jordan: I feel like I'm in the middle of answering that question because I just started asking it again. Like wait, what's going on here? What am I doing? What is my vision and how does that align with the space? So, I think what really has gotten me inspired and the direction I wanna take the space, it's a learning space. It's a place where people come to get access to the tools, but even when they're just using something they already know how to use, there's still this

constant learning iterative process of growing your craft or growing your knowledge. And then all the people around the tools that help, they're teaching.

So, I think we really have to focus on quantifying that. I like to play to games and I think people enjoy seeing their progress quantified, so we've discussed things like badge systems, certification for different things. Right now, there's no way, I have a list somewhere that says yes, you did the laser training so you're good. But what about if there's a pathway to accomplishing a higher level at each of the stations is one idea that I've been throwing around.

Eric: That sounds like a really cool idea.

Jordan: So now you're in the space and you have, like there's a staircase in front of you for every single zone and you can try to walk up that staircase. And this is something we would use your software for, right? We would say inside of the back panel of the membership account, we've kept track of these things and then when you're on your homepage inside of the system, you can see that and other people can see that if they wanna click on you.

Eric: I think that that's a really cool idea because it accomplishes a number of things. One, you have the benefit of the physical space and the people being there, the vibrancy of that so you might as well use it. People, especially people who are new, it's helpful for them to have a trajectory. Somewhere that oh, there's say five badges in this particular phase of getting to this point, right? There's a psychological motivating factor to that. Yes, it's helpful for them to be seeing that they've accomplished something, but also for their own benefit. It helps them to have guidance in terms of... not each step is a blind step. If you're doing one thing at a time, you don't get the benefit of what the bigger picture is and what that's going towards.

The really cool thing about your situation is when you do that, when you introduce something, anything, you just sit back and watch for a little bit and the community will show you and tell you very clearly how it's responding to it.

Jordan: Right. Another thing is it would give us these guide posts and constrain things like what classes do we offer? Okay, well the classes that we offer are relevant to people having the knowledge that they need to accomplish these tiers. So that also helps 'cause sometimes it's just... it's like anything, right? We could very easily try to be all things to all people, we know that that's not really a healthy way to run a business. So those sort of constraining guide posts sitting around the mission is really something I've discovered is really important.

Eric: Yeah. And going back to the idea of online training and stuff like that. One thing I would throw out there is the training can just be byproducts of what you're already doing anyway. It's almost as if hey, I'm already doing this, let me just set up a camera and record it. Not like I need to plan something specifically to film. I don't know how feel about that, but for me, my initial reaction to stuff like that is to be like oh, well the quality is not gonna be this and that and I start thinking about production aspects. But as a consumer of content, I actually appreciate stuff that's on the fly. I don't think that that should be a limitation.

Jordan: Yeah, I think that's good wisdom. Erin has taught me that in the past. I tend to be the same way. I'm like, well, it's not perfect so then no one's ever gonna see it. And he's like, well, it's okay and everyone's gonna see it and they're stoked.

Eric: Well you know the weird thing is you just three minutes ago or so stated the same lesson, but it's so weird how we learn the lessons in one area but we don't apply them to the other area. So, you said everything's an iterative process. Like if you think about maybe the first time you used one of these machines. The first thing you made with it wasn't amazing. You increase your skills by doing something over and over again and building a relationship with it, bringing your own nuances and aesthetics to it, which you can't do any other way than just trying it over and over again in different circumstances and practicing.

Jordan: There it is. Yeah. No, it's real. I just got a mid-level... well, I don't know. I'm not super versed in camera equipment, but I got a Canon DSLR at Costco. And yeah, I'm ready to use it, to set it up.

Eric: Nice. So, in that situation, it's probably good, then, that you went with MemberMouse and not gym software.

Jordan: There we go.

Eric: Because you don't wanna limit yourself to just be a gym also.

Jordan: Right, we're more than that. It's a little reductive when we say that, but it does help people understand. So, it has its moment, that sort of construct. Oh, we're like a gym but for creative tools. People do appreciate that. But you're right, we're more than that.

There's actually something I would like to mention, just to kind of add to everything, is that we're very art centric at our facilities. And that's because Erin has been an artist, a large-scale installation artist, and he does a lot of different kinds of art. So, from the very beginning, his goal was really to be able to make art in the space and to have other people participate in that. Inside of his motivation, really is where you can see the seeds of what we have now.

So, we have had a resident artist program. We call it the Idea Fab Lab's Tech Art Incubator program and he has been the coach for that from the beginning. We have this whole thread of bringing an artist in to the space, giving them access to the tools, showing them how to take their existing workflow and augment it with digital fabrication techniques, and they agree to make a whole art show of like 25-35 pieces. It's a really intense experience. So that really feels the community.

Eric: Yeah. Like you said, that all came about because of Erin's interest in part or for the most part. So literally, you could follow the same thing. If you find one person who's really into any one of these things and put them in the space and make them a mentor, you could have the

same thing happen, but for gear worker functional things or something. But that's one of the really cool things about having a company in general, I think, is we start it and the people who become part of our communities and throw out ideas, their excitement can ultimately inspire changes in direction in the entire thing. And then what you end up with, MemberMouse ten years later, Idea Fab Labs how many years is it? Six years later. It's not what you quote-unquote set out to do, but you basically entered into an agreement that hey, we're gonna put things together and we'll commit to maintaining the environment, but we're also gonna be responsive to what people want. And when you do that, it creates this vibrancy that you couldn't have planned to do.

Jordan: So, let me ask you a question about MemberMouse after ten years. What are some of the surprises along the way?

Eric: I think the most surprising thing for me as far as MemberMouse has been my involvement in it. I'm a software engineer by trade, I started out building the software. But now I have to be a quote-unquote CEO. And I still don't really know what that means. And I think that that's the right approach, by the way. I've learned that that's the right approach because as soon as you think you know what it means, then you kind of stop listening a little bit.

To me the biggest surprise is how I've had to evolve through the journey. Kind of like the Helmsman. I can't really stay in the same position for too long. If I stay somewhere for too long, I end up holding the company back. I started off as a developer, then I moved and I was handling thousands of support tickets, and then following that I had to get into finances and marketing and stuff like that. There comes a point where I get comfortable in a role because I've been playing it for so long, but I think the job of the leader is you constantly have to find people to replace you. I think you're talking about doing that, too, with the volunteers. You need to find that support so you can go and do the next thing that the community's asking for.

So that was a huge surprise for me because I didn't actually set out to start a company. It kind of just happened in a way.

Jordan: Yeah, I feel that. And I think I'm going through the same metamorphosis as well.

Eric: Yeah. Personally, I feel like going on an entrepreneurial journey is one of the most... it's just one of those tools that can really actually improve your life personally. If you're willing to enter into it fully and go along with it and not resist because in a way it's kind of like having a child. You birth something into the world and you've committed to taking care of it and no matter what you're not gonna leave it. So, when the challenges come, you work through it, and whenever you work through challenges you end up learning and becoming more.

That's across the board. Challenges are there, tests are there for us to learn through and grow from. If we're always comfortable, where's the good in that? You get tired of sitting on the beach for a month, right? And that's what tests are for. But the thing is about tests is, which is why you see the stats in businesses nine out of ten businesses fail, which is stats is anything,

people who get gym memberships and cancel, is because the tests come, and they always come in whatever we do, but there isn't that thing that keeps you locked in from running away from the tests. There isn't that commitment there. I think when you're truly an entrepreneur, you've committed to make your business a success.

For the longest time in MemberMouse, I only had a vision. Nothing was working out for like six years. There wasn't a lot of customers coming in, the revenue wasn't there, it wasn't profitable, I was still working jobs. But for whatever reason, and I have no idea why, I had a vision that it was gonna be successful and I just had to keep moving. So, it's interesting.

Jordan: Thanks for sharing that. Yeah, I see, as much as I feel like I've naturally come into this role that I'm in, it happened naturally and now I have to realize that there's different roles that I'm gonna go into that are maybe not natural for me, I see that the reasons why we started this, why we naturally found ourselves in this direction are because are seeking the rewards that come with this kind of a thing. That's having a large community surrounding us. That's the camaraderie. That's the shared experience of celebrating art and celebrating sort of like this... we get really excited when you make something and you make it better and then you make it better and you're like yes! Look at how much better this is than when it started and how satisfying that is. We're engineering nerds like that.

So, we're getting fulfilled by all the things that happen at the shop, so in order to keep that going and keep that experience and the rewards, we have to do these things to make sure that it can stay alive.

Eric: That's a beautiful guiding force to have, that it's about the community and everything because, well there's no reason that I need to give. It's a beautiful approach to take and have it be your guiding light. And I'm definitely honored that you guys are, through whatever process how you became a MemberMouse customer, whether accidentally or otherwise, I'm definitely honored that you're using it. 'Cause to me it's a little bit different, but to me it's also about community and helping people. I know that more today than I knew when I started. So, whenever I get to see that people are using the software to create things that actually are bringing joy into the world, I obviously can't take credit for it in any form, but it's just nice to be a part of it in some small way. So, I certainly appreciate you guys being a part of our community.

Jordan: Totally. It must be cool that you sort of have at least a little bit of a connection with all these different communities, most of them being digital. But you have sort of a hand in all the different things that are happening on the internet like that.

Eric: Yeah, for sure.

Jordan: I'm very excited that you guys contacted me. It's helped me to think about the space in a different way and to think about the website in a couple different ways. I'm also excited because now I have your ear and I can send you several suggestions I have for the software.

Eric: Of course, we would love that. We just released a new version of the software with some updates.

Jordan: Is that 2.2.9?

Eric: Yeah, 2.2.9. But we do have a lot of improvements that we have planned. Most of the stuff that we have been focused on has been back end support. Because this is the thing about MemberMouse. We have very large sites running on MemberMouse, hundreds of thousands of members. So, part of our selling point and why part of our success is that we're very reliable. People often come to us because they've used another platform and they've gotten to a point where the cracks in the hole of the ship start to leak water. So, we spend a lot of effort kind of in the back end, you can't really see. There's no UI influence of what we're doing. But we're doing security updates, we're doing performance updates, we're doing all sorts of things like keeping track of payment provider updates and API and PCI compliance stuff.

A lot of the stuff we do doesn't get to shine on the surface so much 'cause it's not like oh, look at this new feature. But we do it because we have all these customers who rely on the software who are large, and that's just essential to keep the business running. We run MemberMouse.com on our products, so we're in the same boat. But we have a whole series of things and projects in motion to actually improve things that you'll be able to visibly see and will have performance implications in terms of day to day operations. Stuff like bulk editing features on the data grids, being able to search the data grids so if you have a lot of products you can find a product more easily. All these stuff are on our list and coming.

Like we were talking about with you earlier, especially when you get successful, you wanna do all these things, but as soon as you set out to do them then somebody's got a fire that needs to be addressed. You need to take your resources on those things and go focus on this thing 'cause that's more pressing so you do that and you come back and it's just a juggling act.

Jordan: Where do you see your product going next as far as what you offer? Is it about the 100,000 users? How able are you to sort of serve people like us who have 300 people and 100,000 and…

Eric: Well, the thing that I've always appreciated about, and this has been one of the early benefits of MemberMouse that kind of happened by accident or just naturally, but in basically working closely with customers and getting feedback from real world scenarios and making improvements on the software based on that, if it works for 100,000 it works for one basically. And that's how I look at it.

And that's why our pricing is the way it is. And that's why the plans, there's really not much differentiation between the plans. We give the people on the starter plans the same tools that the experts have, it's just member limits that make the difference. 'Cause my philosophy is look,

you're getting all the same tools that these sites who are very successful are getting, therefore there's no excuse. If somebody's doing it then anybody can do it, that's basically the premise.

Now, it's interesting 'cause what it comes down to for us kind of the same thing it comes down to for you. You have a laser cutter, you have a 3-D printer, we have this crazy software; it comes down to training. This is what we're really focusing a lot on right now. Part of it is doing these podcasts. But providing more information to people, guidance.

Looking at it over the years, why haven't people been successful with MemberMouse? What is it? Is it our product? And the answer to that is pretty much no, it's not our product. The product works, that's why people who are very large can use it. Okay, then what is it? Why aren't people getting from zero to success? And it turns out it's for many reasons. Everybody comes to the game with a different set of tools. Some people just need motivation and coaching, hence podcasts, hence doing the live office hours, giving people an opportunity to have a conversation about whatever. Some people it's really the nuts and bolts of the software, hence doing more training.

So, there's a lot of different angles we're approaching it from WordPress is an interesting space to be in because you get our software, but then you can't just go from there. You gotta get a theme, you gotta get a hosting provider. Not everybody's equipped to do this. So, we have a number of things in motion to make it easier for people through guidance to use our software. That's, I think, a major area of our focus is in helping people just actually do something. You're a developer so you didn't necessarily have all those issues, but a lot of people do.

Jordan: Now, suddenly you're a business advisor instead of a software developer.

Eric: Yeah, well not suddenly. But yeah, a software engineer-

Jordan: Suddenly in that moment that you chose to use, for this to be your software product, now in order to have success and have people continue to be able to use your software, it's in your best interest to provide them with this advice.

Eric: Exactly. And actually, it's like every evolution that happens for me in the business. It's one that I rebel against initially. 'Cause it was clearly coming. Oh, people wanna have these conversations. I'm like, well I don't do conversations or something. I'm not a front of house guy, I'm a back-end guy. Or whatever my story was.

Jordan: You've come so far. Here we are having a conversation.

Eric: Exactly. So, I'm obviously very grateful for everything that's pushed me to get to this point because I'm happy where things are. And I appreciate the opportunities to talk to people and offer whatever perspective I have that could help. I feel very humble about my position. I don't feel like I'm this big person with a lot of experience to offer, but I have a little bit of experience and if it can help somebody then I'm happy to share it is basically where I'm at.

But yeah it seems like I'm doing a lot more of it. Shooting videos, I myself got a DSLR recently so we'll be shooting more videos and training probably. But also, there are some big moves that we are gonna be making in the product, too. So, it's more of a full picture for me because I have overarching perspective. There's many different strategic angles we're taking and partnerships with different companies that we've got in the works and different product improvements.

It's been a little bit challenging for two years and I don't think we're alone in this. I think a lot of companies have had certain challenges in the last two years for whatever reasons. But I get the sense that there's a corner that's gonna be turned, and I think what we're doing now is sewing all the seeds and then our harvest is gonna come in the next year, like all these projects. 'Cause the thing is you get to be a bigger company. Back in the day when I was a developer, if I had an idea I'd just bust it out in a weekend. Be like, oh this'll be cool, I'm gonna build this. But now, it doesn't work like that. Now I have to have a little bit more patience, there's more planning, I have to interface with different teams, and I have to get people's approval, we have to have multiple conversations, you have to assure that the…

Jordan: You gotta be really careful…

Eric: Yeah you have to assure that if you're gonna put money into it that you're gonna get ROI, that everybody wants it. It's just there's all these different tools and approaches that have come, and I used to think that they were burdens because I appreciated just being able to knock something out in the weekend. But when you have thousands of customers, you can't just be that cavalier about it. Push something out that doesn't work and blow people's sites up. So, you have to have a QA process and all this stuff.

Jordan: Yeah. Hey, you wanna talk some more about membership systems and hardware experience?

Eric: Yeah, go ahead.

Jordan: Remember I told you guys that we do these, we have an art residency program?

Eric: Yep.

Jordan: I started this new thing. It's an electronics systems concept where what we do is we bring these artists in, they build this gallery's worth of work, and then we culminate an exhibition. So that's an art show that people attend. And we've been fairly good at getting somewhere between 250 and 500 people to come to these events. And in the same sort of way that I was like well, it would be fun if we could play more games with all the people in the room.

So, I started designing, with other members at the shop, these installations. We built the installations so that we could understand the electronics enough to help the artists and work

with the artists to install some of these hardware systems into their art. 'Cause we really like to do technology combined with art. So, I've started developing this system where when everyone comes to the event, they actually sign up for a membership, but it's a different... it's not the same membership levels that we talked about earlier, they're separate.

People pay. They get an account on the website, and then they get given a talisman. And the talisman has an NFC chip in it. So then, we build these sculptures inside of the space that they can interact with. So, an example of one is it's a façade, and it has two little sockets where you can put your talisman into. One person can do one, another person can do another one. And when you both activate this installation, it has scrolling LED text and it goes and it gets your shared fortune and tells your shared fortune.

Eric: That's awesome. That's a really cool idea. I feel like that's another thing that could be a product of yours. Because just like the kind of ice breaking factor of that in terms of an event.

Jordan: Oh yeah. The long-term vision is to be able to expand this out to events, to larger events that other people are throwing and have this be a service that we provide. So, you have this account inside the website and when you... my goal was to be able to play the long game with this. So, you and I come to this event, we have our little token and we play this game, and it shows us our shared fortune and we laugh, it's a movie quote from some comedy series or sci-fi or whatever.

And then later, we come back to another art show, and somehow, we follow up. Like there's you and I and then there's the global we. And we follow up. We know that you and I have this shared thing. So maybe we come up to a box and we both put our talismans in and we go over and it takes a photo of us. And it does an augmented reality overlay of the photo that we can't actually see until the photo gets printed out. But then the caption is our shared quote from last time or from four times before.

So, these are the kind of membership community driven interactions that we're trying to do in physical space.

Eric: Yeah. And can also combine that with offline experience between the events. I feel like I've heard this being done in dating events where there's something like that where you're introduced. It's not as cool as what you're talking about. But you're introduced, but then you have the option of whether or not you want the people that you're introduced to to have access to you after the event. Something like that. So maybe having the option that there's some way they can connect on the membership site for those people that they actually met at the event.

Jordan: Perfect.

Eric: Which would be cool 'cause then that'll be great for them, but then also when there's a follow up, hey there's another event in between the times that you had those events, they may have-

Jordan: You can scroll through a list of all the quotes from the night and pick the ones that you remember were people that you want to connect with, something like that.

Eric: Anyway, obviously it's a really cool idea because whenever you automatically start brainstorming about how to improve it and use it, that just means that there's inspiration there, you know.

Jordan: Right. That kind of fun cloud based but physical interactive stuff that I'm fascinated by.

Eric: Yeah, well I am too. And I hope you stay in touch and let us know how you're doing with everything. And I certainly appreciate you taking time to come on the show and talk.

Jordan: Yeah, I appreciate it, too. It's been insightful and also wanna see you guys continue to be successful so thanks for all the support and all the nifty software.

Eric: Thank you. And just to end, where can our listeners learn more about you and your company?

Jordan: The easiest thing to do is to go to IdeaFabLabs.com. That's I-D-E-A-F-A-B-L-A-B-S.com and you can get to both of our facilities from there. And we're also on Facebook and on Instagram.

Eric: Awesome. And if I'm ever in Santa Cruz or Chico, I'm definitely gonna come by your space.

Jordan: Awesome.

Eric: Thanks Jordan.

Jordan: Cheers.

OUTRO:

Thank you so much for listening to my entire conversation with Jordan.

I hope you enjoyed it and are walking away with an expanded perspective about what you can create in your business.

Many thanks to Jordan for coming on the show and sharing so freely from his experience.

To get links to all the resources we talked about in this episode, you can head on over to SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/182.

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

If you enjoyed this episode and would like to hear more engaging interviews with successful

entrepreneurs, experts, and authors, be sure to subscribe to our podcast on iTunes, Spotify, Google Play, or Stitcher.

We have a growing library of engaging episodes with many more to come.

One last thing before we wrap up… If you're curious to see how another "maker space" uses MemberMouse to run their business, you can check out the Columbia Valley Maker Space at cvmakerspace.ca. It looks like they're up to some cool stuff!

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