

SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR



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

Exploring The Framework Of Success with André Chaperon

“One of the things that fascinates me is less about tactics. In fact, it's nothing to do with tactics at all. Tactics change all the time. Tactics are painted as these sexy things. Whereas, when you're talking about strategy and systems thinking, it's far less sexy. So, it's easy for marketers to hype up the latest whatever. I've always been one to try and figure out frameworks in how I see things in the world and the work I do.”

INTRO:

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

If you're not familiar with André and his work, you're in for a real treat today.

You see, André is the creator of iconic marketing courses like Sphere of Influence and the Art of Email that have been used by the world's top entrepreneurs and marketers over the past 20 years.

But more than that, André is a profound thinker with a gift for helping people understand the systems and frameworks they need to succeed in business.

And that's what this episode is all about.

In our conversation, André & I have a deep and almost philosophical discussion about online marketing, audience attraction, and business building.

It was amazing to sit down with Andre and hear his thoughts about...

- What's changed & what's stayed the same with online marketing over the past 20 years
- Where André thinks marketing is headed in the next 5 years
- & The different tools and technology he uses to run his business

André rarely appears on podcasts and I'm truly grateful for the opportunity to share his wisdom with you.

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

Eric: Welcome to the show, André.

André: Thank you. It's an honor and pleasure to be here.

Eric: It's my pleasure. I'm so glad that we finally were able to get the time where we could sit and chat. I'm really excited to go through these items with you.

André: Yeah man. I think this was the first to happen ages ago, and just stuff got in the way, and so it's good that it's finally happening now.

Eric: Yeah. For sure. So, you have a very varied background. You've been doing things for 17 years in this world. So, to just start off, could we get a high-level view of who you are and what you do?

André: Who I am is just a normal dude I guess. An old guy that was born in South Africa, and I left in '99 just before Y2K, and we moved to the UK, immigrated there, and that's when I started things. And shortly after working in London, I lost my job, which was in 2003, and that's when this whole stuff, thing happened. That's when this whole world changed. So, that's kind of that weird very quick journey, but what I do is I like to give different perspectives and lenses on the world to the people that we serve.

So, we like to help them change worldviews and expand what they're capable of, and as within the context of that, help them in freedom and revenue. So, that's developed too loosely the two categories that we help people with.

Eric: I didn't actually expect that you would have described it that way, but that's really interesting how you say that it's about teaching people to put things into different perspectives. How do you come up with those unique perspectives yourself?

André: I don't know. I think it's partially because ... Perhaps I'm just wired in a certain way. I'm dyslexic, so I don't know if that plays any part in this. I have no idea, but I'm just really curious, and I like to understand the world, and because I feel that I don't fully understand, and who does anyway, right? But I'm very active in trying to unpack ideas, and learn new things.

So, in service of that I ended up figuring out a few different things along the way that I find interesting myself, and then that later trickles down into the marketing that I do, and then once that's gone through some version of iteration, when I feel that it's interesting enough and helpful enough for other people, that ends up in the work that we do, and the courses that we create, and that ultimately how we serve people.

Eric: Yeah. That's really, and that kind of dovetails into you were talking about you were kind of started this journey in 2003. And for anyone who's ever stumbled upon you and your work, your origin story is the stuff of internet marketing lore. You shut yourself away in a Las Vegas hotel room, you wrote an email series for an affiliate promotion, and spoiler alert, you earned \$70,000 in affiliate commissions in that one email series.

Can you walk us through what was going on for you before that happened? And then how your life in business evolved after you cracked the code so to speak?

André: Yeah. That's an interesting story, and there wasn't any moment per someone, that turning point. Things just happen gradually, but that was a really interesting story that has demonstrated a few things to me because I decided to do something on a bigger stage, up my game so to speak, and it was really just a validation that what I was doing and the concepts that I was doing work outside of that little version that I was operating within. So, low ticket price points.

That old story was about me saying yes to promote an affiliate product, and at time I was off to Vegas. My wife was working for Party Gaming at the time, the world's largest poker site at the time. And so, she was going anyway, and so I just thought I just tag along, and so nothing else to do than to lock myself in the room, and then just try and figure this out, and just write emails for the whole duration, and it had a happy ending, but I certainly wasn't expecting that.

Eric: Nice. Now, you've been doing something of that sort ever since that time, but that's 17 years. So, you've seen a lot of trends come and go over that time, and from your vantage point, what has changed since then and what has remained the same?

André: Well, for me the biggest change is the technology that we use, and when I started in 2003 and then 2004 and '05, WordPress barely existed. It wasn't a robust publishing platform like it is now. I mean, my first websites were hand coded. I think I was using Dreamweaver at the time. It was terrible and ugly. In fact, most of the internet was butt ugly.

So, whereas now when you look at most websites, they look amazing and beautiful, and so technology has certainly changed, and think god for that. Outside of that, the stuff that we do hasn't changed all that much. It's just we get to do it now with better technology, I guess so we can spend more of our time serving people.

Eric: And I know you have a number of courses that you offer people, but how much stuff is there really to teach people? Does it come down to looking for those new perspectives you talked about earlier?

André: One of the things that fascinates me is less about tactics. In fact, it's nothing to do with tactics at all. Tactics change all the time, and depending on what the context is, tactics can change almost daily. So, I've always been one to try and figure out frameworks in how I see things in the world and the work I do.

So, a large part of that is so the courses that we create are all framework driven that are heavy on strategy, and the tactics just becomes the component of execution where you've got to then do something. But it's less about the doing because anyone can figure out where the button is to click to do something. Going to Facebook and create an ad. So, the create an ad button.

Okay. So, maybe it's in a different place, but just figure it out, but it's the strategy and stuff that wraps everything together, that long term vision of how are you going to use that as a tool is more fascinating me, and that ends up in our products. So, the products aren't just how-to products.

Eric: I really resonate with that as a software engineer because I've said a number of times that being an architect is different than being an implementer. Pretty much any guy or girl who just gets out of school or some class when they learn how oh code can implement. You basically give them a design, and you just type in the code. I somewhat disparagingly often call that monkey work.

But to be an architect is about vision. You first need to understand the entire scope of the problem, and then come up with, like you say, a framework for how you're going to address that. You're not coding anything at this point, you're just trying to relate ideas and concepts together in an elegant way, and then the more experienced you are, you also take things into account at that point with regards to scalability. How is this thing going to evolve over time? Am I boxing myself in by doing it this way from doing something else five years later? Stuff like that.

André: Yeah, totally. I love speaking to people like you who have an engineering background because they definitely see the world differently. It's not just about the code, the tactics. Everything that we do is wrapped around systems thinking. So, we're always thinking that this whole thing is a system, and all the little things that we do are just parts within that system, and you can't necessarily just zoom in on a certain part, and think you can optimize that one little thing, and it's going to have this positive knock-on effect that's rarely the case.

So, it's about being able to zoom out and see this thing as a whole, and then figure out how you're going to make this whole system work and operate in the way that you wanted to.

Eric: Yeah. And I find too much of a focus on tactics is kind of like an addiction for people because it basically takes the focus off of you, and the fact that in order for there to be any success truly, there are things that you have to look in within yourself, the certain actions you take each day, how you organize things, your level of commitment, et cetera because tactics are going to even have anything meaningful impact.

André: Tactics are painted as the sexy things whereas when you're talking about strategy and systems thinking, it's far less sexy. So, it's easy for marketers to harp up the latest whatever was the main thing.

Eric: Right because people don't want to do the work essentially. We always want the quick fix whether it's in marketing or anything else. The quick fix is more attractive, but easy come, easy go, right? It's not really going to have that lasting impact. So, given that your products and the things that you're selling involve the work, how do you get over that hurdle in terms of pitching that to people and getting people to commit?

André: Well, that's part of our thing I guess, our USP, and in fact it's baked right into years ago when I first started to develop a thing that in our core sphere of influence, and it's all muddled on something that I learned from Jay Abraham called the Strategy of Preeminence, and the way that I understood that philosophy was essentially how I ended up building out my systems, and essentially it's you get to choose who you do business with. So, that's the first thing. When you zoom all the way out, that's the goal or the function of what we do as we get to choose who we do business with.

And then once you know that, it's like, "Okay. It's these sorts of people that think in these sorts of ways, and want to achieve a certain sort of thing, and part of that is going to be people that want to do the work or who invested in the journey." So, we get to choose who we do business with, and as a byproduct of that there's going to be a huge segment of people that we don't want to do business with purposefully.

We then engineer our funnels, and within that, we purposefully weed out people. So, if you're this sort of person that thinks this sort of way, well then what we have is not going to be for you. It's okay weird when people hear it for the first time because people are programmed to think everybody is your market. Why would you want to filter out anybody? You want to get them on your email list. You want them to try and sell them stuff.

So, the whole concept of kicking people out before they even get onto your email list so to speak. So, yeah that's a theme that's been with us for this whole time. So, we don't want to any kind do business with everybody, and enter their marketing space for example. We can only choose to do business with our little cohort of people. So, that's the name of our business, this tiny little business has arrived, so we get to purposefully choose to be small.

A small audience, a small business so to speak, and it's a different concept. It's radically different to what people have heard, and then we then ultimately those sorts of people are attracted to us because there's word of mouth going on in all of these things.

Eric: Yeah, for sure. And that approach to doing things to me, it just seems to make so much sense. It seems to be the way that nature operates in terms of how it selects things. I mean, it's very selective about each animal or organism has certain things that it will eat. It doesn't eat everything. I mean, humans are a different story I mean, but whatever.

But in general, there are qualify factors for what is consumed, and it makes sense that there would be a lot of benefits that come out of implementing that into the marketing strategy because the thing is, when you just try to go hog wild, and set the net really wide, and pull everybody in, you may get that short term reward of the fact of, "Oh look at all these people that signed up. But the fact is over time, if they're not the right people for you, they're going to cause all sorts of problems and you'll end up creating different things within your organization to handle these people, and then it just becomes this avalanche of things that one thing affects the other dominoes going over.

André: Yeah, totally. And that goes back to the whole systems thinking lens on the world is people are ingrained to think that certain things like, "I want my opt-in rate to be super, super high, then I'm attracting more people into our next, onto my email list, and then therefore I can then sell them stuff." But it doesn't work like that downstream because you don't get the customers that you want. You don't get great customers.

So, if you think about it zoomed out in a systems way, you can start off with, "How can I generate happy customers?" And then second, "How can I achieve that goal?" And then you'll find out that well, the answer is not to get every single person to opt into your email list, then it becomes brain dead easy. I mean, it's super clear. That's not the way to solve that problem.

Eric: So, let's say that we accept this idea that we want super qualified people through our funnels to make sure that we very upfront, and honest, and open about what we do, and who we're looking for, and who's not qualified. Now, once people get in, do you still have a way that you fine tune things after that point? Do you look at metrics? Do you look at other things to help you than go forward with the people who do end up coming through the door?

André: I certainly don't. I spend a lot of time staring at metrics and numbers. For me, the value that I kind of bring into the world on that next level is if I want to move those big levers, I can't be worried about all the little small things. I guess it's 80, 20, but it's probably even more than that. It's the 95, five.

So, I need to spend my time creating the best content I can possibly create, and it's less important for me to see, "Did I get 130 opt ins today compared to 96 the day before or something like that?" I can't affect something that's already happened. I can just do my work, put stuff out there, and know that in the long term, the business is going to be better off for example, and looking at a number now it's not going to necessarily change that.

Obviously, there are certain numbers that are important, but as soon as a rule I don't stare at spreadsheets, and-

Eric: You place a lot of faith in yourself, and what you offer. And then also are there soft things? Are you listening to feedback from the community and responding to that?

André: Yeah. Feedback loops are critically important. So, my biggest and most important feedback loop on my audience as they're coming and, and in fact every email that we ... Well, I say every email. Every email, somebody can click reply and it'll end up in our support desk, and ultimately if it needs to be responded by me, then it gets responded by me. But we're always asking people to hit reply or we're creating things within the copy that is prompting people to reply or respond, "Did you like this? Didn't you like this? Did this resonate with you? Didn't it?"

So, the feedback loop is constant, and every single day because there's a certain between 4:00 and 5:00 every single day, I go into Help Scout, which is where all of our emails go to, and the

ones that I'm supposed to be looking at there's a queue of them, and then I go inside there. So, every single day I'll end up having conversations with prospects, with customers, with various people, some that have never purchased anything, and they've just heard about me, and they got questions, and then we end up having this dialog, which is not scalable, but it's scalable for us because we get to connect with our audience, understand what they want, and what the needs are. And ultimately, we can serve that downstream by creating things that then answer those questions.

And many of our, we call them Superfans, which are customers that then buy everything. Start off with a conversation as a prospect that has hit reply on an email, and never, ever expected us to reply or certainly not for me to reply. So, yeah. I feel like it's so important.

Eric: It makes me think of what we were saying earlier about how when you go off in the wrong direction, it just domino effects continues to go in bad directions. That makes me think of today how bread is basically you look at the ingredients. So, there's like 40 ingredients, but really bread is three ingredients, right? And that is what bread is. And if you try to automate, automation is such a big topic today, and we're a little trying to automate everything including the conversations, right?

You have chat bots, and ways that people can help themselves through you create these whole funnels or automated sequences, which have their value. But in your situation, having those one on one conversations is creating that foundational bedrock of your relationship with those people, and it's also not only that with the individual, it's creating that bedrock of that relationship, which those people end up being Superfans probably a lot because of the fact they got such a personal connection, but secondly, you're also doing your market research. You're hearing from those people what they need, and therefore creating products down the stream.

So, just from that one thing that you're doing, the willingness to have the real time conversation with these people, you get those huge benefits whereas if you try to automate that, again you're going to have all these downstream problems. You're going to be disconnected and maybe the people will not have a strong relationship with you, which means they'll leave more readily.

André: Yeah, totally. And I love that analogy that you used with the loaf of bread. And if you want to unpack that even further, if you go down to your local supermarket and you pick up any cheap, like real cheap loaf of bread, and you read the ingredients, like you said there's a list of 20 things and you think, "What the hell? What's this for?" And then you go down the road, and there's this artisan bakery that everything is hand made.

Bread only has two or three ingredients, it costs four times the price, and there's a line out the door to buy bread the way it's meant to be made, right? And I guess it just goes back to that idea if you just care about those making the best through from those raw ingredients, the people will come and line up out the door for that.

Eric: Right. And if we unpack it even further, the whole reason there's all those ingredients in bread is because they started trying to industrialize the process, and people weren't getting the nutrients. So, rather than go back to the way things were, they were like, "Oh people are deficient in iron. Let's add iron. People are deficient in this. Let's add this."

So, essentially you end up with this comedy of errors, which is now just an accepted thing, and I'm sure that's all over the marketing world, this comedy of errors of systems and things that have come about because there was a wrong turn taken, and then you just ended up having to address and solve problems that were actually already solved if you just did it in a different way.

André: Yeah. Yeah, totally. And it makes our life easier in many ways when we look at out there at how everybody else is doing things in contracts because it creates contrast in the mind of the prospects. So, they see the world, they see all these flashy things, these tools or this harp, all these products that can do whizz bang everything, and then they come into our world and it's not like that. It's very different.

And then they'll start to see why, and then that story clicks in their mind, and then it just completely resonates with them. So, it makes life easier for us.

Eric: But there's a balance there, right? Because-

André: Sure.

Eric: ... you also said that some of the things that have changed in the 17 plus years you've been doing this is the technology. So, we want to take advantage of the technology, but also not throw the baby out with bath water. So, how do you personally kind of weed out things? Like look at new technologies, and services, and automation that come out, and proceed to determine, "Okay, yeah. This is something that makes sense for my business and I can use, and actually know this is just a fad, this is actually going to ruin some aspect of my business."

André: Well, my answer to that is probably going to be personal to me, and it may resonate with people. But for us and certainly for me is I want the fastest, most efficient website, and code matters to me, so I want the most efficient HTML code underneath the bonnet so to speak. So, we use WordPress, we then host it on a very fast hosting. The theme I use is very important to me, so because we choose to do a certain theme, that creates constraints, and there's certain things we can do, and certain things that we can't do, and then within that we've chosen to use MemberMouse, and then that creates some constraints that are good for us.

So, we can't be all things towards people because of the technology that we've chosen to use, and then as part of that there's also these human components like I mentioned just now is I'm the human answering many of the emails-

Eric: Right.

André: ... because that's important to me. There's tools out there that will automate the wazoo out of segmenting these things, particularly into spreadsheets, and that triggering all sorts of other automations. But then as you mentioned, there's that distance that you create because the technology is doing everything, and it's not necessarily doing it better than a human can do it. It scales that way, but then maybe you don't want to scale that size to the point where you're losing touch of reality, and one of the needs of the audience.

Eric: Now, if you look five years out or something like that, do you have a sense of where things are headed?

André: Well, I do and I don't. Because I can't control the future, I've always found that for us, if we just put our head down and just focus on doing the work, and don't focus too much on the things that we can't control, change isn't going to happen overnight. It happens over time. I'm not going to wake up tomorrow and everything is different, and it's like, "Oh shit. What am I going to do?"

So long as I am executing and doing the best work that I can, the future is going to come along and we're going to move with it, and things are going to reveal themselves, and we're going to pick what we choose to use, things that we want to ignore. I followed Peter Diamandis, and that guy is so far in the future. It's sometimes overwhelming to read how he sees the world just five years, 10 years, 20 years in front of us. So, I can't always translate that into things that I'm doing right now, so I just tend to just ... I know it's coming, but let me just focus on what I'm doing now.

Eric: And based on your pattern of operation, you're prepared for any eventuality because it's essentially it is to listen and to adapt?

André: Exactly. And change is a constant. Things change all the time, and this isn't about resisting change. It's about changing with change, with the current situation.

Eric: So, it's often said you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. You teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime, and it seems to be that the way that you're approaching your courses with the systems thinking and everything of this nature is just that. Processes versus tactics. How to look at and perceive things versus just giving somebody a shiny thing that may or may not work today.

So, when you're going to approach, creating a product or creating something new, sometimes it does start with a fish. You have to look at it and be like, "I want a fish. I want to be able to give people a fish." But then you have to figure out how do we teach somebody how to do that? So, what is your process of breaking that down and figuring it out?

André: I think it's difficult to conceptualize certain ideas or concept. So, one of the things that we do that we find very helpful, and it's how I think the most clearly is I'm always drawing

pictures. I'll sketch out mind maps. So, whenever I'm trying to wrap my head around a certain concept or idea, I'm drawing little pictures, and it helps me see everything as a visual, and then I'll start to draw the lines like this is that, and that's the optimum price that someone is coming in over here, and I can then plug it into where it fits into our main system as a whole, so our business.

And then, so how the translates to what we do is we also help please to understand these concepts using imagery. So, if you browse anywhere on our websites, there's else these weird drawings, and they're all hand drawn by me.

Eric: Great.

André: I'll just go into Notability, and I'll just sketch, and people seem to like these really rough sketches because it helps them-

Eric: They're like cave drawings.

André: Yes. It's my cave drawings. It helps them visualize, and then it's us explaining what that means, and then it's like, "Oh okay." So, you can hear all the cogs turning in their heads now. So, I guess that's part of it.

So, once we've gone up, we've drawn the picture, we've shown them something, they get it, that's our process of helping people fish because then they can see visually in their mind's eye how this fits into the bigger picture because sometimes conceptually when you say, "Well, think about this as a system and using systems thinking." It's complex and it's difficult to actually create some sort of mental structure out of that.

Eric: Right.

André: So, the picture for us help a lot.

Eric: Yeah. And the picture is a byproduct, but it's actually I imagine because this is a very similar process we go through when we're designing software, right? We draw models. And part of the benefit of doing this is this is an iterative process. The picture that they see on the website is probably not the first picture you drew, and what you're looking for is flow. Flow of something. In this case, I'm looking at your sphere of influence, flow of prospects.

But it could be the flow of anything, and these things flow through things, and then are influenced through the things that they flow through, and then they end up at a certain point with a result. The input and the outputs and what you're doing here is you're breaking down how that works, and cutting it down into areas that can have actions associated with them through the process of the input turning into the output.

André: Yes. And it's also actions that produce certain results, but the results is based on a different question that you asked. So, we help people ask better questions for example. So many people are focused on generating leads, as many leads as possible for example. And if they can do that in their minds, they're thinking, "I can then get many customers."

So, they'll be 1%, 2%, 5% of those leads will then turn to our customer. In their mind's eye, this is the business, right? Generate as many leads as possible, and metrics is going to play out, and customers are just going to magically appear. But once we help people to understand that the system works differently to that, and if you ask a different question, not how many leads can I get, it goes even further downstream than that.

It's if want to have a happy customer, well what does happy mean? Well, then you need to do certain things, and if you choose to do those certain things, it means you can't do other things. So, it creates constraints, which are good. So, then, "Okay. Happy means that. Well, therefore I'm okay with generating less customers because now they're happy customers, and the happy customers are going to have a higher LTV because ultimately they're going to want to buy everything."

And then you start to play that backwards, and again we always draw these little pictures to help people, and then at some point this all makes sense to the everybody.

Eric: So, you're starting with the best possible outcome for the person that you're trying to serve as opposed oh the best possible outcome for you?

André: Exactly.

Eric: But they can often end up being the same?

André: They can be the same, and again for us in our business, our metric is generating happy customers, and ultimately Superfans. For them, it could be different, and our product is the same products. That's the beauty of creating it where it's mapped to frameworks as opposed to this rigid step by step formula thing whereas then as soon as something changes in the world, which is always going to, then the whole thing just falls to pieces.

So, we would rather have our things be more robust, and even if it means that there's parts of the things that we teach that are maybe less crystal clear, it's slightly more conceptual that so long as you understand that this needs to happen, how you make that happen, you just need to figure that out. We're not necessarily going to paint that part of the component.

Eric: Right.

André: If you read any of the emails or stuff from Seth Godin, there is no tactics anywhere. It's just very conceptual. So, we aren't that conceptual, we go closer to where people need to be, but it's never going to be the step by step stuff.

Eric: But I think the how takes care of itself, and I know that we can often get stressed out about the how, but I think it's because we're trying to figure out the how to soon.

André: Yeah.

Eric: We're looking for the tactic that's going to solve our problem, but in the picture that you're painting, and by the way, everything that we're talking about here, this is an example of what you call empathy led marketing. Is that what we're talking about here?

André: Yes.

Eric: Okay.

André: Yeah.

Eric: So, basically by becoming empathetic with your customer, when you tune into somebody, the how kind of just manifests itself. Like if I see a dog, and I kind of tune into the dog's energy, I can sense did they want to be pet, did they want to eat, did they want me to leave them alone? So, the how, just the action that I take becomes kind of self-evident, and also, I would say what we've experienced in the membership space, we've seen this time and time again in the metrics that it's ultimately as the design of your website has nothing to do with your success.

But often what people end up fixating on when they first getting their site up is their theme, how it looks and everything before they've gone through this whole empathy led path the we're talking about, before they've asked themselves the questions, and even thinking about what their offer is. What are we offering to people? They're worried about what it's going to look like. How to collect money before they figure out what their offer is.

And the fact is, I've seen some of the most successful sites are super basic. I mean, in fact, your site, it's not flashy.

André: No.

Eric: But it does speak. Also, I think when you tune into what people really need, it allows your how to be something that's directly related to your personality because you're okay with being yourself. You're not looking for the answer from somebody else, and in your case, you just draw the pictures yourself and people end up really resonating with that, but that ended up being the most natural thing for you.

So, the how just figured itself, out.

André: Yeah. Totally. Our website, which has been through many iterations, is an extension of our beliefs, and the way that we choose to do business. It's clean, lots of white space because that's important to us, and then it comes through with how we do our work, and how we teach people, and you'll see that any videos is not of me, any audio is not of me, it's just written because written is how I express myself the most clearly, and it seems to have the most impact with people. That's the route I've chosen when I'm doing audio, it's the most I'm uncomfortable for me, so I don't do many of them.

But at the end of the day, it's getting the word out there helping to reach people and to serve people.

Eric: Well, I certainly appreciate you doing this. I'm enjoying very much having a conversation with you about this, and I resonate with everything you're saying at multiple levels, so this is great. I also relate to that. I prefer not to speak, I prefer not to be on video.

Something happened, I don't know, like a year and a half ago because I'm a software engineer. That was my first career and I started MemberMouse as the programmer, and built it, and then something happened where the business just started going in its own direction, and I had to jump from role to role. I had to play support, I had to do all these things.

Part of it was that empathetic understanding of what's being asked of me. Okay, I'm being asked more to have a voice, and to say things in this way, and writing is hard for me. It's easier for me to speak. It was just like, "Okay. Well, I just got to do this." And here we are.

André: Yeah. I can totally tell because you say that you're an engineer. That shines through MemberMouse. It's there without even knowing it's there. I'm not sure if that makes sense, but-

Eric: It made sense to me.

André: ... you can tell that ... Yeah. You can tell that's somebody that understands engineering is behind this thing. It's not just somebody that just decided to create a plugin.

Eric: And I want to talk to you about this because I think you would resonate with this. So, engineering, yes. And when I'm writing code, to me it's an art form. White space matters even though nobody is ever going to see it except for obviously the developers on my team, but I truly believe that if I organize my code well, and I name things appropriately, and I keep it all clean, and I have the appropriate spacing, that flows through to the user's experience even though there's no touch stone. There's nothing that they can see that would indicate why it comes through.

André: Well, it's how you do one thing is how you do everything, right? So, it starts with the code that nobody else can see other than you and your team, right? That ends up with the

interface and the usability that customers can see, and you can sense that there's something powerful underneath even though you can't actually see and touch it.

Eric: I imagine that there's things like that in your business as well because like you said, you pay attention to all the white space. It's very clear when you read one of your posts that there's a deliberate amount of space in between the paragraphs, and that space is different from the space between the lines within a paragraph. And the width of the page is unique. It's not a standard width.

It comes through that all those were intentional decisions, not just happenstance.

André: Yeah.

Eric: But yeah, this is cool. I'm interested to hear a little bit more about the role that MemberMouse plays in your business if you don't mind sharing that.

André: A bit of back story there because as you know, I've been doing this for a while, and in 2009 was when we started to sell courses. So, 2009 was when we started our first course. I was a full-time affiliate before that. So, I had to look around what platform can I use back then. So, I don't remember what the first one was. It may have been Wishlist Member. Wishlist Member was certainly one of the big ones, then at some point we went to DAP, D-A-P, and then to aMember, and one of them felt slow and buggy, the other one felt complicated. It had external code outside of the WordPress space.

The last one we used, which I do really like is aMember, but it's kind of unique, and it was also external to WordPress in terms of not being just a plugin. So, a few years ago we made the decision that we wanted to get off of VPS hosting. We didn't want to manage our own servers and all that stuff, we wanted to go with a dedicated hosting company that their only job is to make the fastest WordPress platform for hosting, and at that point it's like, "Shit. We can't use aMember even if we wanted to, we can't use DAP even if we wanted to." Which we didn't.

So, I don't remember how I found MemberMouse, but I did, and gave it a try, and it was just like love at first sight I guess. It didn't do everything at the time that I wanted, but it just felt so different to the others, and so we just went with it. It worked with what we needed it to work for, so yeah. We used ClickBank for a few specific reasons, but we kind of have to use ... Well, we, in quotes, have to use ClickBank, and my only concern early on was that you guys didn't have full support for ClickBank's IPN, and that was somewhat problematic.

So, a while back when you mentioned that you guys were going to fully support ClickBank's new IPN it was like, "Oh yeah. Thanks god."

Eric: Yeah.

André: Yeah. So, I can talk about the specifics.

Eric: I'd personally would be interested because not unlike how you run your business, one of the benefits we had in the very beginning of MemberMouse was we were fortunate enough, our first clientele were big people. They were doing lots of volume. And so, an essential part of evolving the software was the feedback loop from those clients saying, "Hey, this is what's really going to move the bar for us if we could do this thing." And of course, we fielded what we brought ourselves to, "Okay. Yeah. That's something that would be good for everybody." Or, "No. That's just a pet project for you. We're not going to do that." Right?

So, the feedback loop has been essential in making MemberMouse successful, in which case we as a team don't take full ownership for the benefit that it provides to people these days. I mean, we implemented things, and we had our own ideas about certain things, but a lot of the critical strategic elements have come from direct conversations with customers. So, in the spirit of that, I would love to hear how you're using it, and maybe some things that you would think that could better.

André: Yeah. I do have a small list of what I call my wish list, but before that, I guess one of the things that we really liked about it, in fact, I don't know if it's to help to demonstrate the idea, I use a tool called the Archive. So, this has nothing to do with the website memberships. It's a tool I use to manage internal info.

So, as I'm learning new things, it goes into what I call a PKN, which is my personal knowledge management system, and I use a software tool called the Archive, and the Archive is based on the Zettelkasten method, but it doesn't impose the Zettelkasten method on the user. It doesn't force you to behave in a certain way. It's literally a blank canvas and has the ability to do these things should you want to go as strict as you want with the Zettelkasten method or you just want to do it loosely.

And I felt that MemberMouse seemed to have a similar philosophy for us whereas the way that we build our buttons and our cart, we wanted to have control over all those elements and didn't want to use the templated versions. And the nice thing with MemberMouse is it allows us to do that. It's got all these little short codes and codes that allows some to completely ignore all the templates, and then just bold our functionality into how we want our website to look. And from using the other platforms, there's many others. They almost force you into behaving a certain way, and if you don't like it, well I'm sorry, that's the way it works.

So, that was in the very beginning because obviously there's certain tools needed to do a certain thing, otherwise we just can't use them, and I discovered that very early on that it was flexible enough that it allowed us to use the tool in a way that made sense to us and the way that we wanted to use it, and it didn't impose structure on us.

Eric: Yeah. And that's actually one of the criticisms that MemberMouse gets a lot is-

André: Oh?

Eric: Well, and it'll make sense to you why. There is a slightly higher learning curve with MemberMouse, and the thing is it comes down to the type of client we're looking for, right? When you go to build a software platform or anything, you can't be the one thing for everybody, and for us it was very important to have flexibility. Now, if you want to have flexibility implementation, you have to trade off on the click button, push button thing of the one thing that everybody needs, right? Because when you do the click button, well it's limiting because now everybody does the same thing.

But if you have flexibility, yeah there is a little bit more you need to learn to twist the knobs and to turn it. But to us, that trade off especially because of the clientele we were working with in the beginning, basically people are doing high volume. Flexibility is critical, and one of primary drawbacks of the solutions at the time was that you could get things set up well, but what happens in a year if you need to change something about your business? What happens if you need to add new things?

It as very important personally to me that the software not dictate business strategy. That was a fundamental focus. As a result of that, if we're not going to dictate business strategy, then we have to get people the tools, and we have to break it down into concepts, just like your picture. Okay, well how do we do that? What do the concepts look like? What are the pieces of this? And then that's where we came up with products, memberships and bundles. How does all this flow?

And yeah, it takes a little bit of getting used to that, and not everybody has the patience to do that, but the result is you could do anything with it.

André: Yeah, totally. And I guess because everybody is using the idea of memberships, bundles and products slightly differently, we chose to operate in a certain way. So, there's more than one way to achieve a certain result. So, what we ended up doing is we just use free memberships for everything. So, if a customer comes in, they get a free account if an account doesn't exist already, even though it's for our paid products, and then that goes to what we call our academy, and where they then we use your shortcuts to display if they're a member of this group, show them this button that then leads to the product that they purchased.

But every single person that has an account, essentially a free membership can access that academy page. So, in fact even if they are refunded all the products, and now they don't have any access to any bundles anymore, they still retain their free membership, so they can still log into the academy and then it's just blank words. Well, it's not blank, but there's no products for them to click. And in fact, we've got a little funny animated gift for them.

Eric: That's great. I love that.

André: But we can do that because of you tags. If they've got this, but haven't got that, then do this. If they haven't got any of these, then display this piece of code, which is the animated gif for something must have gone wrong. You only need to buy products.

Eric: I have a fondness the smart tags, and the place that came from was again how do we give the people the ability to have the conversation with a customer based on data about the customer, which is what you would do in real life. I would talk to knowing that you live in this place, and you went to this school, right? How do I do that without you having to program anything and do database look ups? And that's where the smart tags came from.

And for whatever reason, personality thing, I've always been interested in doing things like that. I remember when I was a consultant, I was doing a stint at British Airways headquarters where we were building a revenue analysis system for them, and there was a process where we would create reports. Basically, the management team would say, "Hey, we need this report." And then my team and I would go build this report, code it up in HTML, PHP, Java, whatever we were using. I forgot languages.

But I was like, "This is silly. They should be able to create their own reports." So, I built this custom XML language such that they could define their own reports to the point where it became this thing where the business guy would come up to my desk and be like, "Hey, we need a report for this." I'll be like, "Five minutes."

We kind of bonded over it. It was a funny thing how quickly it could get done because it used to take forever. But stuff like that really is ... That's why I love technology. How do you get what you need as quick as possible without the technology itself guiding what you're doing?

André: Yeah, exactly. And I think it's a fact that it allows us to serve our audience in a way the just makes the experience for them so much more better. There was a time when we were using MemberMouse where because of the RPN, it was still on the previous RPN. We couldn't have dedicated thank you pages for the different products. We had to have one thank you page no matter what products somebody purchased.

Although we made that work because it was generic, "Thanks for buying. Here's the button to go into the academy, and this is what you can expect. Go check your email and your login details." So, we made it as good as we could possibly could, but now where you've got the full integration support, we can have different landing pages for different products, so now we can have a congruent story on every single thank you page to do with the product they just purchased, and we just feel that it's even a better ... So, there's no gray area. It's for somebody that's just made a purchase, they have just given you \$500, which is no small amount of money.

Eric: Right.

André: And at no point are they wondering, "Is this a scam? Have I been scammed?" Everything just feels right.

Eric: Yeah. And that's the real benefit too because now you can enter in upsell sequences if you want, and you basically start the conversation immediately. "Hey, I know you just brought this. Welcome. Here's everything you need. Hey, here's some other stuff you might be interested in." Isn't technology ... Isn't that we're just trying to facilitate having conversations human to human with larger volumes, right? Because it is such a distributed world, and through technology we can connect with so many people.

But doesn't it all boil down to that human to human relationship? And if we can't have that conversation, then something feels off about that.

André: There needs to be a level of trust in the technology because we've used various systems before we got to MemberMouse that something happened, then it worked, and then you did the exact same thing again, then it didn't work, and it's frustrating because me as someone testing, well building out our system in the way that we wanted to operate, and then we know that it just doesn't work 100% of the time. There's some bugs along the way, and that's terrible, and there's that feeling that what if a customer goes through this and they don't actually get to ... Then what are they thinking?

Then they've got to find a support email, and email us that something went wrong whereas we've never had that issue or concern with MemberMouse. It's always felt so robust, so that's nice. So, then we can focus on making that experience as amazing as possible for our users.

Eric: That is what we work for to basically ... We have a full-time team. Every day we're working on that thing. Now, you will find in MemberMouse that we're not going to have the latest widgets and gadgets that every site has, every product has that does membership or otherwise, but a lot of that is because we choose to focus on core fundamental things. Reliability, scalability. What happens when we have a reporting sweep, and our CTO, he built those reports considering the fact that we can't control the environment in which WordPress runs.

We don't know what servers people are having, what server resources they have, CPU, database speeds, et cetera. So, what if they have a million members on a server that doesn't have a lot of resources? So, again people aren't going to see this and they're not going to know this, but there's a whole caching mechanism built in behind the reporting suite to facilitate delivering those reports efficiently on any system, and that stuff takes time. To develop, it took months to build that.

Ben and I are both former architects, so we're building stuff for the customers, but we also build it for us. If we don't believe in it, we don't build it. And so, a lot of times that means we can't cut corners, and so it takes longer. But the result is it's super reliable because that was the intention to make it that way.

André: Yeah. It certainly feels that way.

Eric: Specifically, more on the ClickBank side of things because I'm not a ClickBank user, and so I'm not 100% familiar with that whole world, and you've mentioned it was important for you to be able to use the custom landing pages based on what was purchased. Is there anything else about the integration that is super impactful?

André: Specific to ClickBank, I love now that we can bundle products together. Can take two bundles or two products, and then create an order button that includes both of them, and then apply like a coupon code for example. So, if somebody buys product A and B, they also get a discount, and the system then gives them access to those two products as if they purchased them individually. That didn't exist before, so I had to create extra bundles that then represented other things, and then member mouse has a constraint where is you can't apply two bundles coming in, so it was awkward to get around that without creating additional stuff.

So, we had to create additional bundles in logic inside of the back-end system to try and facilitate that, which was a bit of a pain, but it worked. But this current version is just so much more elegant. It's just saving us so much more time, and now it's easy just to bundle products together whereas before it was like, "Oh do I really have to bundle these two products together?"

Eric: Yeah. I'm not surprised you like that feature because that's in there because of you. Speaking of feedback loops, knowing that you are a ClickBank power user, we definitely consulted you to ask you what are the things that are missing. And because we don't use these systems every day, right? How can we know? So, everyone who uses ClickBank and gets benefit from that ability to be able to purchase multiple products at the same time through ClickBank, and have it automatically add the appropriate access rights, and MemberMouse has you to thank for that.

André: I've got to say, there's another feature. This is not specific to ClickBank, this is specific to MemberMouse. It's the developer's tools thing where you can create push notifications.

Eric: Yeah.

André: I've never seen that before, at least implemented in this way in any other membership software, and it can send an email to them external to an email that they'll get from our ESP. So, where it's upon purchase, it then adds them by the API to convert click for example, that you can send them these transactional emails as well. I send myself emails when there's a purchase or a refund, so I've been flagged privately. If anybody refunds a product, and then I can then jump on it, and then just reach out to a customer one on one and just ask them, "What was the issue?" And I just love the way that you've implemented that.

Eric: Well, yeah. I'm really glad that you're finding use in that. And again, of course you're using it to further your ability to have that one on one conversation with a customer. So, this has been great. I'm so glad that we got a chance to talk, and final thing is do you have any parting words of wisdom for our listeners that we haven't already covered yet?

André: No, I don't. But other than just spend the time to understand how to use MemberMouse for example. Just deep dive in for a few hours, and just figure out all the short codes, and then you can then relax and use the system to its full capabilities. And it's something that I do whenever I buy any tool. There's always a learning curve, and many times it's like, "Oh do I have to?" So, you'll just kind of scratch the surface, and just click some buttons, and get it working, but can never really understand the full impact of what that tool can actually do for you.

So, I'm always spending. It's like if I buy something new, I'll just spend an hour. I'll go watch videos, I'll download the help files, I'll go to YouTube, do some searches for tutorials, and just deep dive it for now about two hours, and then it's like, "Okay. I've got it now." And then you get to design whatever you want to design, and build it out. So, I guess that will be the only parting words to that.

Eric: Yeah. Well, I appreciate you sharing that for me, platform of experience. And where can our listeners learn more about you?

André: Everything is consolidated under the one brand, and the brand is Tiny Little Businesses. That's the plural, businesses. Yeah. Everything is there. Cool man. This has been great, Eric.

Eric: Yeah. Well, again, thank you so much André. I really appreciate it.

OUTRO:

Thank you so much for listening to my entire conversation with André. I hope you're walking away feeling excited and inspired about what's possible for your business this year. Many thanks to André for coming on the show and sharing so freely from his experience.

If you'd like to get links to all the resources we talked about in this episode, head on over to SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/192. 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!