

S04 E01

BEHIND THE MEMBERSHIP

WARREN MCPHERSON
PIANO LESSON WITH WARREN



Callie:

I'm finally back with season four of Behind the Membership. A little later in the year than originally planned, but hey, the world has been a little bit chaotic lately. I'm kicking off season four with an excellent episode though from the one and only Warren McPherson, all about his membership site Piano Lesson With Warren, a membership entirely focused on helping people to play gospel piano. Warren started off his business by selling low-cost courses and gradually transitioned to a membership model after realising it would be a better approach for him.

However, he quickly discovered a membership wasn't quite as simple as just putting everything behind a paywall and really began to focus on how he could improve his retention, as well as attract a continual stream of new members. In this episode, we're talking about how Warren made that course to membership transition and how the membership model has impacted his life as a result. We're also talking about why he wishes he'd grown his team earlier, how he has played the long game when it comes to audience growth, amassing an impressive 105,000 YouTube followers alone, and how he's tackling the challenge of retention, plus so, so much more. Let's dive in.

Announcer:

Welcome to Behind the Membership with Callie Willows. Real people, real stories, real memberships.

Callie:

Today, I'm joined on the show by Warren McPherson from Piano Lesson With Warren. Thank you so much for joining me on the show today, Warren. I'm really, really looking forward to talking with you about your membership.

Warren:

Thank you for having me. It's great.

Callie:

To get us started, could you tell us a little bit about the membership, what it offers, who it's for, that kind of thing?

Warren:

So Piano Lesson With Warren is a gospel music training membership. I basically cater to people who want to learn gospel Christian music and play for their church or play at home. So that's basically what we do. We teach piano lessons only and we teach only by ear. I don't do any form of notation teaching. It's all about being able to sit at the piano and just vibe.

Callie:

I love that and I love that you focus specifically on gospel piano as well. Music lessons, I think, are getting to be quite a crowded market online now. There's so many competing sites that I think having that kind of really specific niche helps you stand out quite a bit. Were you always so niche or did the gospel aspect come a bit later?

Warren:

Like probably most people, I started out doing everything because I started music professionally in college. That's what I have my degree in. I play multiple genres of music, jazz, pop, rock, blues. My degree's in classical piano performance so I can do that. I started out trying to please everybody. And then I keep hearing, what do they call it? The money's in the niches or something like that. But also, I realised that it was hard trying to create content for different people. And so I basically just sort of asked myself if there was one style of music that I would get up and play every day which one would it be? And gospel seemed like, "All right, going forward, that's what I'm going to do." The YouTube channel is just going to be all gospel music and everything. And it was an easy transition for me because I grew up in the church. I'm the music director, choir director for my church so it wasn't a hard transition. It definitely made life a lot easier.

Callie:

Awesome. It sounds like it's been much easier for you to kind of attract the audience you want that way as well, having that really specific focus.

Warren:

Yeah. I also realised that it was an underserved community. I mean you go on YouTube, you type in piano lessons, and just everything about pop, and jazz, and rock. Not a lot of people focusing specifically on gospel. Now, when we talk about gospel, I'm talking more about Southern style American gospel which is more bluesy, rootsy, African American descent. A little bit different than contemporary Christian music which is a huge thing nowadays. I just wanted to focus specifically on that, the Southern style gospel from the U.S.

Callie:

Awesome. So is it mainly people from churches that are joining or is it people wanting to play it at home? How does it work in terms of the audience?

Warren:

Surprisingly, which I've found out lately is that I'm attracting people from outside of the gospel community.

Callie:

Oh, wonderful.

Warren:

People coming from the classical world but they've always wanted to acquire that gospel sound and so some of them don't even go to church or play for a gospel church but they like the sound. It's not really jazz and it's not really blues. It's sort of a fusion of two in-between. So, a lot of people come for that specifically. So that's cool. But I would say the majority are gospel musicians or church musicians.

Callie:

How long ago did you launch the site now?

Warren:

I sold my first product online, January 2017. I stumbled on the YouTube about 2014, posted a few videos. And it was just mainly to promote myself locally as a piano teacher because I was teaching locally in homes. Created some videos, put on Facebook, YouTube just to promote myself locally and then I just stopped. Then I came back 2016 and saw that the YouTube channel had hundreds of views, lots of comments, people were asking for more videos. And I'll be like, "All right, let's see where this thing goes." And so that was 2016, I started to take the YouTube channel more seriously and then looking at other piano channels, see what they are doing, what I can incorporate. And then people started asking me, "Do you sell courses?" And I was like, "Huh, sell courses, how would that work? Is that a thing?" So I started looking into creating an online course and I shot this hour-long video talking about blues piano and teaching some blues piano techniques. And I sold that January 2017 for \$12.

Warren:

I had a website back then on Vistaprint. It wasn't a WordPress site and I sort of duct taped it with this payment system for downloaded files. And that's what I used and someone bought it. I made my first \$12 online I'm like, "This is awesome. This thing can work." So I kept following that rabbit hole and creating small courses that I would sell 12, \$15. And after about eight months of doing that, I'm like, "This is kind of exhausting, constantly trying to get the sales, get the sales." I didn't like that sort of car salesman aggressiveness. So I was following a few marketers online and I hear people talking about the membership model or the Netflix model. And I'm like, "What is that?"

Warren:

So I found this website called Yondo, they're a video hosting streaming platform. So I just threw all my videos up on that and called it a subscription. But it was difficult to run the two because every time I needed to add something or tweak something, they would charge me this insane cost to customise the website. And I was like, "There's got to be an easier solution." And the buddy who plays in my band, the guitarist is actually a website guy. And he says, "Just do a WordPress site." I had no idea what that was. So I spent three months binge watching YouTube video on how to create my own WordPress website, which I did. And that's when I started to transition to trying to do a membership on WordPress. But again, it was just me throwing up my videos behind a paywall and calling it a membership.

Warren:

So retention was terrible. It was just, I didn't know that membership was a lot more than that. And this was about 2018, but I was still sort of running, "Hey, if you don't want to download individual courses, you can play this flat fee and get all the videos here." And again, it was tough trying to sort of have two feet in different worlds trying to sell downloads, trying to push this whole membership thing, which I didn't really, really know how to sell. So the messaging on my website was again, trying to sell two different things. The other problem I had with that was at that point, I started selling courses for \$80, \$70. So the idea of selling a membership for \$20, I'm like financially, that doesn't make sense. And like I said, the retention was horrible because it was just me trying to sell them on, "Hey, all the courses are behind this paywall and that was it."

Warren:

So I started researching more about membership, membership and long and short I ended up stumbling on you guys. I actually found you guys through MemberPress. They send out their weekly newsletter. And one of the newsletters they sent out was, "Here are the best podcasts for membership sites." And I listened to all of them. And when I get to the Membership Guys and I'm like, "Oh, this dude is British." And after the first episode, I'm like, "I like this guy." So I binge-listened to Mike Morrison for two weeks. And there was a so much nuggets. And that's when I realised I was doing this whole membership thing very wrong. And yeah, that was about late 2019. And then I eventually joined the academy. So I never really set out to start a membership. It was just, again, a weird transition and because, created courses

individually, trying to structure that in a membership format now with a roadmap and all of that has been a challenge. So it's been a work in progress.

Callie:

Yeah. So it was kind of like that natural journey for you from courses to actually, "I've got quite a few of these now let's put them in a membership." And then growing from there. And do you still offer separate courses and products as well? Or is it entirely the membership now?

Warren:

I do. But having learned a lot more, especially through you guys about running a membership, I hired a copywriter to rework the entire messaging of my website. And actually he was the one that says, "Listen, you're offering DVDs, you're offering downloads, you're offering membership. It's too much. You need to pick one and let the entire messaging of your website sell that." So I was like the membership thing is what I want to roll with because it's just a lot, it makes more sense from a financial perspective. And also I offer more value that way. So he did the entire copywriting to make the messaging all about membership. Now I only market the membership. I still have a tab on the website that says download and DVDs and that's hosted in a sub domain once they click on that, it takes them to the store.

Warren:

But I also no longer update it. So it's just all the courses that has been there for about a year now, all the new courses that I create goes to the membership, those are not available for downloads. And eventually I will shut down that completely, but I'm slowly tapering it off as I grow the membership model.

Callie:

Yeah. And I think it makes sense to have that kind of period where yes, the focus is very much the membership, but these are the things that's still available for people if they're used to getting that from you already, or they just maybe want to test the waters first before kind of joining the membership as well. So one last thing then when it comes to the courses, when you started the membership, did you essentially start that by putting all of your existing courses into it? Or did you create content specifically for the membership?

Warren:

Yeah, it was just me offering the same downloadable materials in a course form. I use LearnDash and so I just chopped up the videos into lesson formats and I just put that into LearnDash, and that's what I called the membership at the time.

Callie:

Awesome. And so is the site always open? Do you run on a launch cycle? How do you work in terms of getting people in the doors?

Warren:

Yeah, it's always open year-round. People can come and go, there's repeats. Back when I was following Marie Forleo and Amy Porterfield, they do more of a once a year thing. And I was like that wouldn't work for my audience. My audience is a lot different because I'm teaching piano lessons. It's not like it's a business, I'm not teaching them a skill to go start a business. So people are going to be coming in at different time wanting different things. So the open model made a lot more sense so, I ran with that.

Callie:

Awesome. Final practical question then, I notice on your sales page you're offering different pricing tiers. So what made you decide to do that? And have you found that having those, I think it's three tiers, I notice that you have, has worked well for you?

Warren:

Yeah. Initially when I started the membership, I started with one tier \$20 a month and that was it. And it was actually one of Mike Morrison's podcasts that had got me thinking about multiple tiers. It's what they call price anchoring. So I was like, "Okay, I need to experiment with that." And after speaking on couple of my competitors, I realised that some of them were doing \$40 a month, \$37 a month. And I'm like, I'm doing 20 and I need to up the game because I sign up for some of their memberships just so I could see what they offer and I'm like in a lot of cases I'm offering more value. So I need to up my price. But then I know that a lot of my customers wouldn't be able to afford the \$37 a month, which is what we settle on now.

Warren:

So I did the 27 and a 37 and just basically separated my content. The 37 is the all access to get everything, the 27 certain contents you don't have access to, but I would still get people say they can't afford the 27 a month. So I said, "Okay, let's just shoot for \$10 a month. And you get just basic contents and so on." And then I decided to offer the annual version of each of those plans. So I basically I've six times and it works well so people, a lot of people sometime just who wants to test, they'll come in up the basic for \$10 and then they'll just keep upgrading until they reach all access when they see what they're missing. And so that's been a great idea and getting people through the door. I also offer a backend trial, \$1 for seven days, and that does not show in the websites. You'll only get pitched that in my email sequence. And so that has been great also to get people through the door and eventually they'll upgrade.

Callie:

Awesome. So, which is the most popular tier of your pricing then?

Warren:

It's the all access.

Callie:

It is.

Warren:

The all access pass.

Callie:

Awesome. But I love that you mentioned there that it is working for getting people kind of in, on that baseline and then upgrading as they kind of see everything else that's on offer as well.

Warren:

Yeah. Because additionally, I did a free trial and it was just the quality of people it was attracting was terrible. I would get 100 people sign up in one day, but only 10 converted. So I decided I need to put in an additional barrier just to make sure that people are not using bogus credit cards or something. So the \$1 works great in weeding out a lot of those people and also removing it from the website and just having it as a backend offer. Because if someone stick around long enough on my email list to go through that sequence to get pitched to that trial, then they're most likely a better candidate for conversion. So based on bare metrics, I use bare metrics to run all of the subscription metrics. We hover about sometimes 50 to 60% conversion with the trial.

Callie:

Awesome.

Warren:

That's not bad.

Callie:

Awesome. So that's the easy bit of out of the way then. Now, I would love to know what has been your biggest challenge with the membership so far?

Warren:

The biggest challenge continues to be retention for me. That has been a thorn in my side from the beginning. And the beginning of my retention was terrible because I didn't know how to run a

membership. I had no community, I had no roadmap. I had no onboarding strategy. There was no gamification, none of that stuff. So once I learned about those things to help with retention, my churn went down significantly. So now I have a roadmap that I'm constantly tweaking to make better because my membership is split up into three sections, beginner, intermediate and advance. So I try to create a roadmap for each of those skill level, which is difficult. And then we have a nice onboarding that walk people through what to do when they get started. All of that, getting them on the right path.

Warren:

I also offer now quizzes, a lot of the courses come with quizzes and assignment uploads. So after they finish the lesson, they play something based on the lesson, record themselves, just upload that audio file and then I'd take a listen to it and then I mark the lesson complete. So there's this nice tracking metrics tracking they can see how they're progressing. That is really helped people to stick around longer. I do a biweekly live coaching sessions that helped significantly. And I think it was January of this year I introduced a forum. I use IP.Board also with you guys and that's been great, but my churn still hovers around 15%. I've been trying to get it to the single digit, but it's hard. It's hard. The two reasons I get, because I have an exit survey, the two 90% reasons I get why people leave, "I don't have enough time and I don't have enough money."

Warren:

Again, a lot of the money problem is because I also have a huge audience from developing countries like Africa and South America. In fact, Nigeria is my second highest views country for my YouTube channel right behind the United States. So for those folks trying to fork out \$37 or \$27 US each month, it's difficult for them. So those people might come in for a month or two and then they leave. So as much as they would want to stay, they can't because of financial reasons. And then for the timewise, a lot of people, if they're not able to use the courses, they cancel. And so the old saying that, comes for the content, stay for the community. Doesn't really apply as much to my membership because I think people come for the content, stay for the content as it relates to my membership. And so the minute they're not able to use the content, they cancel. And so I'm brainstorming some additional ideas as to how can I keep them hooked, even if they're not using the content?

Callie:

If retention is the challenge, then what's been the highlight or your favourite thing about being a membership site owner?

Warren:

Favourite thing, the stability. Back then when I was selling just straight up downloadable courses and DVDs, watching that revenue drop to zero each month and then going out like the car sales man, trying to get people through the door, that's not my personality. I don't like that hustle. Right now the membership sells itself. I don't really have to do much promotion behind it. So having that constant stream of revenue coming in is definitely a game changer. Definitely made things easier for me. Also

with the membership model, I feel like I offer a lot more value because when you're learning piano, it's not just a string of information where, okay, you buy this course, you learn this. Then you come back and you buy another course.

Warren:

It's not like that, it's kind of like you need to be working on multiple courses simultaneously so you can see whole big picture of what to do. And the membership model helps that. The live Q&A sessions and live trainings and the form and the assignments and quizzes, all of that stuff really helps me to take students from point A to point B, opposed to selling straight downloads. It's just, they buy a course and they disappear into the abyss after that. I'm not able to offer as much value there. So those are my two top favourite things.

Callie:

Let's talk about tactics now, we've already talked about marketing a little bit and about your pricing tiers and kind of your backend trial, but what's working really well for you when it comes to kind of attracting people into your audience and then converting them into members, other than that?

Warren:

I would say that content marketing, content marketing has been my backbone of my membership because when I just started out, I didn't have money to run ads. I didn't know anything about running ads. So once I took the YouTube thing serious in 2016, I was able to build a pretty loyal following since then, right now the YouTube channel has a little over 100,000 subscribers and I have a Facebook group of over 20,000 members. And so I have a pretty stout audience and I'm very consistent in making sure that a video goes up every week, teaching something, talking about something. And in clear out, mentioned my membership, "If you want more content like this, blah, blah, blah, blah, the membership."

Warren:

And so that's where 98%, 99% of all my customers come from just organic, they sign up. So because of that, I don't really run ads. I may run ad doing like Black Friday if from doing some promotion or something, but I don't have any form of ads running. And I still get anywhere from 50 to 100 sign up each month.

Callie:

Awesome.

Warren:

And I do lose quite a bit of that through to churn, but still I get also a lot of people coming back based on bare metrics I get anywhere from 10 to 15 reactivation each month. So that's been good. That's how I get people through the door.

Callie:

Awesome. And so with your YouTube channel in particular, so you mentioned that's nearly 100,000, did you say?

Warren:

It's over 100,000 subs. And I think we just hit about 105,000 subscribers now, somewhere there.

Callie:

Awesome. Awesome. And I think because YouTube always seems to me, one of those things where it can be quite difficult to convert people from YouTube, because a lot of the time people are going to YouTube specifically to watch a free video or to learn something and they'll jump around and things like that. So do you think that having that specific mention in your videos about the membership, do you kind of have a call to action on the videos to kind of go to your site or download anything? How do you basically try and get those people to your site?

Warren:

Yeah. And that's one of the things I've worked on over the years is learning all the best tips and practises of being a YouTuber. You really have to build a community. That's the only time people are going to start, "So let me go check out his website." Because at first people don't know who you are, and you're just another talking head on YouTube, talking about piano. Because there's a lot of channels out there doing great, giving great content away for free. And so you're competing with that. And so really building this affinity and loyalty with your customers, the consistency of being on YouTube every Wednesday, I post just giving away free advice and content. So I feel like that's where it is. People have been with me, a lot of them since 2014, 2016, they've seen I've grown with them.

Warren:

And so at this point I know a lot of them by name, they know my name, they know where I live. They've seen my son, I have a 11-month-old son. They've seen him from birth now he's 11 trying and learning how to walk. So just that, just the affinity I feel like a lot of people trust me and trust what I have to offer. They've seen me prove time and time again, what I can offer them. So it's been a no brainer for them to go over there and sign up. So that's work. I've just been playing the long game and trying to convert because I still really don't know how to run a proper Facebook ads. That's really something, I think my next step, which is to work out to market to get the marketing side of things from a paid ad standpoint better.

Warren:

But for now I'm just really working on content marketing and continue to build that progress. So that's it. And I do make some call to actions in the video. I do promote. So every time I release a new course on the membership, I put together a one, two-minute trailer video and I'll upload that to YouTube and a lot of that pulled them over there. I try to get testimonial videos from students to upload over there. So I market over there heavily, but it's again, not in the form of paid ads.

Callie:

Awesome. And I love what you said there about playing the long game as well, because I think the more connected people are feeling with you before they join the membership, the more likely they are to stick around and things because they already have that relationship built up with you. Even if it takes them a little bit longer to join than if you were just selling something directly like a course or a download. So yeah, I totally agree with you there on the long game, is a great approach.

Warren:

Yeah, I'm really glad I started out that way. Because now I get a lot of people come to me and say like colleagues who were teachers, drummers, bass players, guitarist and they're going, "You know man, you killing it on YouTube. How do I get in there?" And I said, "You got to be ready. You got to be ready to set aside a year, post the video every week consistent for a year before you even consider to try to sell something, that's the only way people are going to listen to you. If you're not ready for that commitment, then don't even bother." Because like I said, because so many people are doing it now, that's the only way you're going to start getting seen and try to get into the YouTube algorithm. You got to be consistent and a lot of people don't have that follow through. It's been hard. Being consistent is tough, but-

Callie:

It really is.

Warren:

... I didn't have the money to throw behind the ads. So this was the way I did it.

Callie:

Yeah. And I think as you say consistency is king really. And so many people give up when they haven't seen hundreds of members in the first couple of months of doing something. But yeah, that consistency getting 50 to 100 members a month just through your content and what you're already doing without any hard-selling things. That's a great place to be in for a membership.

Warren:

Yeah. That's been good.

Callie:

And so you've already mentioned that retention is a challenge for you. So you've done some things to change that, but what are you actually focusing on specifically when it comes to trying to reduce that churn rate even further and keep members happy?

Warren:

Well, one of the things I find out to working great is the more I have refined that roadmap, the better I see retention is just that I currently have about 60 courses in the membership. So those are a lot of lessons. And so when someone comes in and they're all different levels, so people get overwhelmed, like where do I start? And so really being able to get them on that path and early to say, "Do this, do that, finish this course, then do that." I find that has been helpful in getting things done. I've been working also on some time management skills because they're going to allow these people think they need hours and hours in the day to dedicate to piano. And because they can't find that, they got five kids jobs, they say, "Well, I'm not using the membership." So trying to get them to sort of think differently about time. You don't need a huge amount of time each day. You just need to be consistent.

Warren:

That's where you'll see the progress, just do a little each day. So really explaining that. And I used to, I generally do this in the form of YouTube live streams where I talk about time management, talk about my structure because once I can get them to think differently about how to use the time, then they'll put into work. So basically the roadmap is where I continue to try to focus on and tweak, really getting people to see what they need to do. A, B, C, D. The other thing that has been a problem is once I started transitioning from the download DVD system to the membership, I realised that a lot of my courses were long, two, three-hour videos. When you chop it up into courses, you have this huge thing.

Warren:

And then people feel like, "Oh my God, I got to get through all of this?" So I've been focusing on smaller content, try to take topics and just focus on a specific part, courses that are a lot smaller. So when people are able to see that, they're going through the courses faster, that give them a sense of, "Okay, I'm making progress." They can see the point system. They can see the lessons tick. They can see the quizzes. So that that's been helpful. Another thing I've been thinking about implementing and COVID ruined this for me, COVID-19 but seeing that the forum is I have some activity over the forum, but it's not this huge thing for people. They don't just hang out there, chatting. They go there when they have questions. And so I've been thinking about what if I implement a more of an entertainment model.

Warren:

So you got courses, quizzes, assignments, community, and a once a month, it's like a concert basically, where I'd have to get a quartet. We set up cameras and we just live stream jamming. And then after that, a little Q&A where people can ask, "Hey, how did you do that? And what happened there?" So it's more

like entertainment. So for people who aren't able to take as much advantage of the courses, because they're not practising as much, they can stick around because, "Hey we have a live concert each month." But COVID hits and then social distance. And so that's something after COVID, I'm going to try to implement to see if that helps with churn.

Callie:

Really. I love the idea. I think that's an awesome idea if you can start doing that because yeah, that's that kind of lighter component. It's a different type of content over just learning. And I think it's always good if people can see somebody actually doing what they're learning as well. And yeah, I think that's a really great idea.

Warren:

Yeah. So that's the next big thing to try and implement.

Callie:

And so you've mentioned content a few times there. So are you regularly releasing new content into the membership? Do you have kind of a fixed structure and routine, or are you mainly kind of pointing to existing resources now?

Warren:

So the structure and routine has been a struggle for me. I've been hearing about content calendar for a year now. Every time I try it three to six months, I veer away from it. I try to release one to two new courses each month. And that goes alongside with my biweekly live coaching sessions. Each of those sessions are usually like an hour and a half. And I started off doing that as just a straight up Q&A people come ask questions and I'll demonstrate live on the piano, showing them how to solve the problems. And those were okay. But a lot of people weren't showing up. So I decided to make them into more coaching sessions where I pick a particular topic and I say, "This is what I'm going to teach this week."

Warren:

And a lot of people have been showing up more for those. So I'm running with that model, but also as it relates to the structure of my course, I offer song tutorial, breakdowns. That's where I take popular gospel songs and I show them how to play them. And then I offer courses. These are more like theory, ear training technique, isolated exercises and information. And then the song break down is where they get to see how all that comes together. So those are the two formats of my content alongside with the live trainings.

Callie:

Awesome. So you're putting out a fair amount each month. It's fair to say between the live calls and the content.

Warren:

Yeah. And the weekly YouTube videos. So a good 70% of my month is dedicated to just content creation.

Callie:

Okay. So that brings me nicely to my next question then, which was going to be kind of, what kind of tasks do you find you're focusing on, on a daily or weekly basis for the membership? Because you mentioned before, you've got more time now that the membership is the main focus, but it does sound like you're doing a lot of content creation in there as well.

Warren:

Yeah. So a typical day for me would be, I don't usually start working until noon. I go to bed late. I go to bed most nights at 1:00 AM, then I'll roll out of bed at nine and I spend the next three hours or so with my son, we'll go for walks, we'll hang out, we'll watch TV. And then at noon, that's when I'll start to work. I generally start with emails and social media because I just, I can't think straight until I do those things, I get distracted. So I'll jump into the emails and I have a VA that helps with that and a lot of the emails for me, but the ones that require my personalised response I'll deal with that. Responding to emails, the website, the forum, responding to messages there, I get a lot of YouTube messages and comments, Facebook messages, comments, Instagram messages, comments.

Warren:

So I'll spend an hour or two just doing all of that. And then I'll jump into content creation. So this involves transcriptions. So if I'm teaching a new song, put on my headphones, sit around the keyboard and I'll start to transcribe the chords, because again, my thing is all about playing by ear. So I will transcribe all the chords, all the chord progressions, stuff like that, and start working on the script of the course, the layout structure, what I want to do, how I'm going to do it. And if I have supplementary materials to create, then I'll start reaching out to my team. So I have a team of people that I work with. So the VA does a lot of my emails and content update for the website. She does some social media posts because I use MeetEdgar to do all my Facebook scheduling and stuff.

Warren:

So she handles all of that. She's from Jamaica. Then I have a guy from out of Columbia that does all my transcriptions. So when I sit and I play stuff on the keyboard, I record that in a forum called MIDI and I send those MIDI files to him and he convert them into beautiful scores, music scores, cheap music. So he's from out of Columbia. He does all of that for me. And then I have a guy from out of Baltimore that creates all my beats and backing tracks. Oftentimes I create tracks for the students to practise along to band tracks. And he create those for me. So, and I recently brought on a graphic design from out of Israel. It's a weird all my team are international and he does a lot of the graphics, starting to do some of the graphics for me, thumbnails for videos and stuff like that. So those are what I spend my days doing.

Callie:

Awesome. And so with your team, when did you start bringing people on board to help you? Did you kind of start growing that team as soon as you started the membership? Or is that something that you've gradually done?

Warren:

Well, that's one of the things I wish I did earlier bringing on help, but I was always convincing myself that I don't have enough money to hire people. Because I just always thought it was just going to be this huge amount of money to get people to do stuff. So for the longest time I was doing all of that myself, which was extremely tiring. The first person I brought on was actually a developer because my website is 30% customised. I've gone way beyond the standard operation of LearnDash and MemberPress, I've had him customise a lot of features because with my tiered plans, one of the things I offer with my all access pass plan is the ability for users to download three video lessons a month. And so I needed to make sure that after three videos, that button becomes inactive and the other memberships can't see that button and all that stuff.

Warren:

So I've had him done some crazy customization on that. I brought him on first and I realised he's from Pakistan. And so it wasn't that expensive to have him. And then the email thing was getting out of hand. So I brought on a VA from out of the Philippines and she was with me for a year, but then things didn't really work out. So I hired a VA from Jamaica, so she does a lot of that. And then the transcribing thing, I hate transcribing notations. It's just not something I find fun. So I found this guy from out of Columbia and I'm finding all these people from Upwork. That's what I use for contractors.

Warren:

So then once I realised that it's not that expensive to get these people because none of them work probably full time. It's more of as I need you basis, which is basically every week I need them. So it's a per job I hire them. My VA is more consistent, so I would consider her more like part-time. So that's when I started bringing on the team. That was about two years now since I got into the whole slow team building.

Callie:

Awesome. And so you mentioned that was something you wish you'd done earlier. Is there anything else you wish you'd done earlier or that you'd do differently if you were starting again?

Warren:

Yeah. I was doing a lot of things myself. I mean, I built my own website, which took three months and I thought it was this, "Oh, now I build my website, that's it." But the website was slow. It needed a lot of optimization, it needed constant maintenance. And I was trying to find YouTube videos to do all of this

myself. And there was a point where I think it was two years ago, I was running a Black Friday sale and the website was crashing every hour. It was a nightmare people trying to check out and check out page would freeze, just all kinds of stuff. And so that's one of the things I would never do again, try to build my own website. I wish I'd brought on help to do the website thing from early. So that's the first one.

Warren:

Now I work with some guys from out of Israel I believe, it's a company called FixRunner, but I think they're also have based in the US also. And they do all the website, maintain it, go in and clean it up each month to make sure everything's working nice, security. And so they do that now. And they also do any minor fixes that I need. And my developer that does the customization, I didn't know that it was possible to do all of that. I thought, "Well, this is what the plugin does. So there's nothing else I can do." And then I realised that, "Oh no, you can make the plugin do anything you want it to do with some custom codes." So I brought on the developer.

Warren:

I wish I brought on the guy to help with the score transcription. My VA should have been there from the get go because at one point I was spending three, four hours, emails, emails, emails, and I was exhausted trying to do all that email. So I wish I brought on a team earlier. And the last thing I wish I did earlier was to seek professional help in running a business. Like I said, when I started, I just threw a bunch of videos behind a paywall and call it a membership, which was terrible. So I wished I found like the Membership Guys when I was just starting out because I honestly felt I would have been further ahead had I known this because so many things I was not doing, or I was doing wrong, trying to run a membership. So I would have seek professional help long time ago. It's weird. Once I found Mike Morrison's podcast, I stopped following everybody else.

Warren:

I unsubscribed from email lists, all the gurus. I was like, "Don't need y'all anymore." Because I realised that running a membership and running an online business might seem very close, but they're not. Running an eCommerce store, selling digital downloads and running a membership requires very different marketing strategy, very different email strategy. Everything is different about that. And a lot of the gurus that I was following while they have very good information and they're very big-name people, the information they were giving me wasn't applicable to running a membership. And so I was just like, "How do I piece this together? It's like, "I don't know. I understand what you're saying, it sounds fabulous, but I don't know how to make it work for the membership." So yeah. I just, I stopped following everybody right now and just listen to you guys.

Callie:

I think that's such an important point though, about the, it's easy to kind of listen to all the online business stuff and things, but there are quite a lot of differences with memberships. So yes, you can kind

of find ways to make that work for you, but there is a lot of big differences as you said. And so overall then what impact would you say having the membership has had for you so far over the last few years?

Warren:

Wow. It's made life easier. There was a time I was working 12 hours a day. I was teaching locally. I teach in home piano and I was teaching six, seven students a day. Then after that, I'd go to band rehearsal. Then I'll have a gig in and out of a state. I'll have to drive two, three hours. It was very hassling. I had four different revenue stream, but it was all trading time for money. And so once the membership grew to the level where I was like, "I don't need to be doing any of this anymore." So once I quit that, I realised just how much more time I have in the day. So now I probably work five hours a day and just spend the rest of the day hanging out with my son or my wife watching TV and going for walks, hikes.

Warren:

And so I've regained a lot more time in terms of my life. And I realised that I'm offering a lot more value to thousands of people around the world. I'm really able to take people from point A to point B, which is a fulfilling feeling to know that I can be changing so many lives across the world while only working a few hours a day. So those are some huge impacts. So now I don't do anything else besides the business, the membership. I've quit the band this year and I was always going to quit, but COVID sped that up. For the COVID it was like, "All right, guys, I'm out, no more band for me." I quit teaching in home lessons from the last May because my son was born last July.

Warren:

So I wanted to spend the first four months just not even working really. So I quit all of that stuff. So the only thing that I do right now is the church. I'm still the music director there, which is a paid position, but that's also because being a membership site owner about gospel music, being in a church and still functioning in that capacity as the music director makes more sense because it definitely builds authority there. And so that's the sort of the only two things I do now alongside the membership.

Callie:

I love that. And I love that it's enabling you to spend so much time with your son, especially while he's so young and growing as well.

Warren:

My wife was able to quit her job two years ago.

Callie:

Oh awesome.

Warren:

Because we realised that revenue wise, she didn't need to continue working. So she quit two years ago, which was great because she was able to stay home for the entire pregnancy. Now she's able to stay home with the son. And now she's in the progress of thinking about starting a business on her own and that's a great idea. She was a nurse and I'm glad that she quit so she don't have to deal with none of this COVID-19 stuff. So that's awesome, now that she's thinking about creating her own business. So it's great that I was able to create something that gave us the financial freedom to make all the decisions. That's partly why now we're moving to Florida because I've always wanted to head back South but the fear that I'll have to go back, go there and try to start a new client base of students and find gigging opportunities with bands. Now the membership I can live anywhere so I get to go to Florida." So that's been great.

Callie:

Yeah, I really, I really love that. And so if someone is listening and thinking of starting a membership site, what's the one tip that you would give them to help them get started?

Warren:

Starting from scratch, especially if you don't have any experience in running a business or creating online courses and stuff like that. I would say, y'all just go sign up for the academy, sign up for the membership academy straight up, because it's going to save you years and years of stress. Had I known about this thing? Because I didn't know about you guys. Had I known that this platform existed. I would have dove right in because there was so much trial and error. And like I said, I spent months and weeks just trying to figure out some fairly simple stuff because I just didn't know that there were resources for it. And again, I convinced myself in the early days that I didn't have the money for this thing, not realising that these are investments. Investing in these things are going to give you the returns to grow your business a lot faster.

Warren:

So I would say just invest in getting that guidance and help. And then once you start to produce enough revenue, you can start thinking about building a team because that comes later. But first, just seek some professional help, stop following a million different gurus because not all of that information makes sense for membership. It just, it doesn't really work all of it for membership. So jump into the academy and just start doing the work. That would be my one thing.

Callie:

Well, I wasn't fishing for that, but thank you very much.

Warren:

Yeah. I mean, I know it's not just me trying to shout out the Membership Guys. I really think you guys have the best platform for membership site owners because I was searching on every podcast that had the word marketing in it. Even if it wasn't online, I was listening. And like I said, there's some great

podcasts out there, a lot of practical business tips, but when it comes to a membership, you really need specific hands-on information. Like for example, if you're driving a sports car and you need a mechanic, you're not just going to take it to any mechanic, you're going to take it to a mechanic that says we service sports cars. And so that's the thing. If you're creating a membership, follow people who are talking about memberships, so I really think it's the best.

Warren:

So like I said I don't know if you remember, but once when I joined the academy, one of the first courses I went through was the gamification. That alone took my churn down by 8%. That one course, because I didn't know that gamification was a thing, but just implementing that, I use myCred along with the LearnDash points and just people being able to see that point thing going up and see the lessons ticked off. Within two months I'm like, "Oh my God, this thing really works." And so just so much more other things. It's why I decided to add a forum to the website because I was trying to duct to get everybody it was just terrible. It didn't look like a forum that I even wanted to hang out in. So since there's so many courses that you guys offer that really helped with my progress about that, I need to dive into your Facebook course so I can start doing some remarketing.

Callie:

Yeah. Definitely. But I'm just glad we've been able to help you on the way. Because it's been awesome watching the site kind of improve and change and hearing how things are going for you. So-

Warren:

Thank you.

Callie:

... Final question now then. I'd love to know what your goals are. So where do you want Piano Lesson With Warren to be in the next 12 months' time? What's the big vision?

Warren:

Well, I always say I want to be the Scott's Bass Lessons of piano, because I've been following Scott for a minute and I'm like, he's doing some great things. At one point I was actually subscribed to his site just so I can learn how he does it because he has a huge, massive following. I'm like, "I didn't know that bass players could do this stuff." So yeah, I would love to be the versions of what Scott was able to create. I want to be the dominant figure as it relates to gospel piano in the online space. Even though I'm not the first to create a gospel piano website, there are others that have been online. There's one in particular that's been online about 15 years now and they're doing pretty good, but it's crazy because my YouTube channel now has surpassed theirs in terms of growth.

Warren:

So I want to have a pretty good platform. I also I'm thinking about adding some additional products. I would love to host a live event, but again, COVID ruined that. We were planning to do one next year around next March, April in collaboration with some other YouTubers in my niche that I know we've become good friends over the years. I've done some collaborations with them so I'm thinking about what if we create the retail version for piano lessons, but that's going to be once COVID dies down, that's something I want to jump on to see how that works. Also thinking about creating a app software because a lot of the topics in music and piano playing requires consistent practise and regiment testing and quizzing and the best way to create something like that is in a version of an app.

Warren:

So the one I want to do is create an ear training app, because my whole system is about learning how to play piano by ear. And so you really need to be constantly developing your ear with practising of intervals and a lot of clients, chord, progressions, quality of chord, just all those things to be able to hear and recognise. And so I believe putting that in an app format that allows people to ascend in their ear training progress would be great. So that's something I'll be looking into because I've never created an app before. So I know that's going to be a nightmare and take a lot of work, but I think it would be a good, another avenue to pull people into the membership. I plan to make it a low-end tiered app, something like five, 10 bucks in the app stores. So someone discover that from there that will eventually pull them to the membership. So that's it. And then just continue to grow and help people learn piano gospel music by ear.

Callie:

Awesome. So just a few plans in the pipeline then for you.

Warren:

Yeah. And honestly, wherever it takes after that, I'll go. One of the things I noticed with a lot of the other membership for music is that they do the instructor model where they have 10, 15 different peer instructors. I don't know if I want to head in that direction. I kind of like being the guru, but who knows? I might bring on a second in command to assist. Because one of the things that I'm finding is that I mentioned earlier that I do an assignment upload and I manually listen to those audio files and give feedback but I'm getting overwhelmed now. It's just like everybody's uploading assignments. This is way too much. So I'm thinking about hiring another expert who is a pretty good piano player to handle that side. So that's what I'm thinking about possibly doing but hopefully.

Callie:

Yeah. I think if you offer that kind of level of personal feedback, then that does come to a point where you either have to get some help with that or you have to reduce what you're offering to your members.

And I get the feeling from everything you've said, you're not particularly wanting to reduce what you're offering and giving to people.

Warren:

Yeah. I like if something is working and it's helping people to really achieve their goals, then it's not something I want to slash, I would rather expand the team to facilitate that because I really want to get people playing by ear. A lot of people have been trying to do this for years, especially people coming from the classical note reading background. They're like, "How is it that you can sit at the piano and just flow?" It's a skill and it's a skill that I've developed over a decade, but it can be developed in any person. You just need to do practical steps. And it's hard if you're coming from a background where you only read music to now trying to interpret all of that from a mental standpoint. But it's a process. And I believe we have a pretty good system now that help people with that and I just want to make it better. So I'm constantly tweaking and testing and trying new things to see what's working.

Callie:

Awesome. And so if somebody wants to check out your site, find out a little bit more about you, where's the best place for them to do that?

Warren:

So you could find me on pianolessonwithwarren.com, that's the website URL, but also Piano Lesson with Warren on all social platforms, mostly Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. I do have a Twitter, but I don't use it because I don't think my audience hangs out on Twitter. So that's the best place to find me.

Callie:

Awesome. And I'll put those links into the show note to make it really easy for people as well. So-

Warren:

Thank you.

Callie:

... Last thing I want to say though, is just, thank you so much for joining me today. It's been a pleasure talking with you. I feel like there's a lot more things that I kind of want to ask, but yeah, I'm really looking forward to continuing to watch your membership thrive over the next few months and years as well. It's yeah, it's really great seeing what you're doing.

Warren:

Thank you. It's definitely been a pleasure having me on and yeah, you guys know that you have a customer in me for life, so I'm always be hanging around.

Callie:

Well, thank you so much for joining me.

Callie:

That's it folks. Thank you once again to Warren for joining me for this episode and sharing all about his membership journey. If you want to check out what he's doing, then make sure to head on over to pianolessonwithwarren.com or check out the links in the show notes over at themembershipguys.com/btm33.

Callie:

I particularly love that the membership model has allowed Warren to work less and spend more time with his young son. And that is even allowed Warren's wife to leave her job, meaning that they all get more time together as a family and that they can move to a new state. Something that didn't seem like an easy move for them before the membership. At the end of the day, that flexibility and that ability to spend more time with family while still having financial stability, is really what having a membership site is all about.

So what was your biggest takeaway from this episode? Let me know over in the free Facebook group over at talkmemberships.com. And if you'd like to pick up the transcript or show notes, then head on over to themembershipguys.com/btm33.

Thanks once again to Warren and thank you for listening. Join me same time, same bat channel next week for another episode of Behind the Membership.