

S04 E12

# BEHIND THE MEMBERSHIP

**KATIE WARDROBE**  
**MIDNIGHT MUSIC**



**Callie:** On our final episode of season four, I'm talking with Katie Wardrobe from Midnight Music, a membership specialising in helping music teachers with technology that has been open for around four years now. In this episode, Katie talks all about how her member base has actually grown during the current pandemic despite offering even more than normal for free, why she made the switch from offering courses to an all encompassing membership site and how the membership works alongside her in person workshops.

We also talk about the increased challenges when schools are paying for a teacher's membership. How Katie has started offering her previous member only webinars free each month, attracting thousands of attendees each time. How a content manager is keeping her free content on track and little touches that Katie makes like answering community questions by a video that really help to keep her members connected and making progress. And as always, we talk about much, much more too. So let's dive in for our final episode.

**Katie:** Welcome to Behind the Membership with Callie Willows, real people, real stories, real memberships.

**Callie:** Today, I'm talking with Katie Wardrobe from Midnight Music. It's great to have you on the show, Katie. I'm really looking forward to talking with you.

**Katie:** Thank you. It's so great to talk to you and see you in person.

**Callie:** Yes, yes. It feels like I know you already from the forum, so it's odd actually seeing you face to face for the first time to be honest.

Katie: Yeah, I feel that same way. And I actually wish that I could have more time to spend in the forums. That's the one and only place I really want to be other than in my own business and my own forums, but I do love spending time there. And I love reading about what other people are doing and all the training that you have to offer. So it's a very useful.

Callie: That's great to hear. So to get us started, could you tell us a little bit about your membership? What is it, who's it for that kind of thing?

Katie: So the people that I deal with are all music teachers and I have a membership, which is aimed at helping them use technology effectively in their teaching life and in their lessons and so on. And it's a great area to be in. It's something that teachers are not on the whole confident with, and I love to be able to help them with that. So the membership is all about training of maybe specific software programmes or devices, often it's device based. So iPad training, Chromebook training, just ideas for lessons generally.

And particularly with creating teaching resources or productivity tips and that side of things as well, which was an area, which I was surprised that they wanted to know about. But anytime I do things about productivity tips its very popular. So that's been, what do you say? It's essentially professional development for music teachers. And a lot of people hear me deal with music education and think that I'm dealing with students, but it's not actually that. It's all about the teachers and their professional development. So it's lots of fun. I love it.

Callie: I love that and how specific it is because it's not something that I would think of all as being a topic, to be honest with you.

Katie: Yeah.

Callie: I love how specific that is.

Katie: It's very much a niche within a niche. I've always thought that. And I said that along the way, and as I moved sort of into more online business, it became very much everyone was talking about their niche. What was your niche, and niching down to specific things and it is very much a niche within a niche because it's not only technology, it's music, education and technology, once that they're there to the other side, very specific.

Callie: And so what actually got you into that niche?

Katie: I really started out ... I was working for a software company sort of like an actual real job back in the day. And the part of the jobs that I really liked doing was the training of teachers and my job they entered and in the end, I sort of thought, what is it that I really love about that job? And it was the training of teachers, I was teaching teachers how to do things specifically with technology. And when that job ended, I thought, well, okay, from a financial point of view, I just need to replace my income that I had with that job with something, like do something myself. And so I worked to replace that by running workshops in schools for music teachers, particularly in this software.

So basically as software is the one that I was working for and they are a notation programme based in the UK actually, out of the UK. And I sort of worked to replace that

initially and was doing very specific training in that area, but it just broadened from there. And I realised there was this sort of need for general technology training, but specifically for the music teachers. So I kind of just fell into it. It was totally accidental. I did not pursue it at all. And I did not grow up using technology. I was a technophobe, I've said this in keynote speeches that I've delivered in the past and hated technology and just kind of had to learn everything on the job.

So I just stayed a couple of steps ahead of the training that I was doing all the time and that's worked fine over the years. But yeah, it was totally accidental and really started with me doing workshops in person for the teachers and that sort of morphed over time into other things like doing online courses and then that morphed again into having a membership community. So it's sort of just changed over the years naturally, natural progression really.

Callie: Awesome. And so do you actually have a music background as well then, or is all your background in the tech side of it?

Katie: Yes. No. And no, definitely more in the music side of things and not the tech at all. So I went through university typing my assignments on a typewriter. That's how technologically advanced I was at that time and probably showing my age a bit as well. But computers was not a thing at all for me growing up. So my background is definitely music education and I did a teaching degree, but I've never ended up teaching students in a school on a full time basis.

I've done a little bit of that here and there, but I just sort of went straight into doing teacher training and it's actually an area that I really love because I think a lot of the teachers have this thing where particularly with technology related stuff, they get told, well, of course you just do it this way and people don't explain it from the beginning and just break it down step by step. And there's this sense of, well, you should know better, or you should know this already, but if no one's ever explained it to you, it's very difficult to sort of learn how to do things. So that's what I like to do. Take it back to the basics.

Callie: And so how long ago did you actually launch the membership now?

Katie: The membership was 2016. I think it was, so about four years ago now. I can't believe it's been that long actually, because it really doesn't feel that long. So it's been great to have it, and it was a relief at the time to actually launch the membership because I was doing these online courses, which were ... how many can you do a year? That's what I was sitting there thinking, okay, well, I'll do this in May and I'll do this course in June and I'll do another course in July. And I could only physically do one live course at a time. And it wasn't very viable doing live courses all the time.

And in the end, switching to a membership made so much more sense than having everything in an asynchronous basis, sort of everything there is all the time. People can just take what they need in terms of training when it suits them. And that really suited me a lot better. So having that membership yeah, for four years now, it's just been a big shift in the way I've been running things and it's been so much more useful having things organised in that way.

Callie: And so do you offer other services and products as well still, or is it all the membership now?

Katie: I do, do quite a lot of workshops and presenting at conferences, but obviously in the last number of months, whatever, since March this year, nothing has been happening at all in any way, shape or form. And so in normal life when we're not sort of locked down and that sort of thing, I do go out and run workshops in schools, but things have really shifted over time. Most of my work was doing live workshops in person, full day workshops or half day workshops in schools and that was 10 years ago.

And then over time I started to add in these online courses and then things shifted again from there to having the membership. And really the membership is the bulk of what I do. It's probably 80% of my time, I guess. And then when we are able today in person with one another again, I'll probably go back to running workshops too, but they're a lot less ... a lot less than I used to do. I do love them though. And I think from the teacher's point of view, it is quite different. It's very different being in person. And I think it's good to have both options available for those that are close to me in Australia particularly then. It is a very different experience being in person, but online, I try to make that as close as possible to the personalised experiences being there in the room with them too. But yeah, it's good to have that mix, I think.

Callie: Definitely. And do you find that those workshops actually work to help you get members as well or is it quite a different audience between the two?

Katie: Yeah, I think they definitely help one another and really strictly one of the ... sort of the things I say on my sales page, even for the membership is that a whole year's worth of the membership is equivalent to say two days worth of in person training. If you were to pay for in person training, it's maybe two or \$300 for a single day, but if you pay that similar amount or just a bit more than that, you're going to get a whole year's worth of training. You get me on tape all the time and you get all of the courses all the time, whenever you want them.

And I do think they help one another, so people can often get a taste of what I do in an in person workshop and then they often want more. And so they'll go to the membership and conferences work the same way. So I often do those from a sort of a marketing point of view. I'll go and present at conferences. I am not making any money out of conferences at all and in fact, I pay to be there myself, but they also end up being a really useful thing because people see how I work and they maybe take a liking to the way I teach and then join the community after that. So they help each other, I think.

Callie: Awesome. And so I'd love to know actually with doing the workshops conferences and things, obviously you're over in Australia. So do you find that your membership is ... majority of your members are Australian or is it much more international than that?

Katie: It's very international and in fact it's so split between Australia and particularly the US. It's not just US but mainly US and UK and Canada. There's a massive split between the two, which is really good in certain respects and quite hard in certain respects as well. So the really good thing about it is that the pattern of the school years is opposite. We're at

opposite ends to one another. So here in Australia middle of the year, we are on a calendar year. We go from February through to December and in the States and UK, obviously it's sort of August, September through to May or June.

And that works really well because the pattern of purchasing for a teacher relies quite a bit, on the school year and where they are in the school year. So why it's good because in the past, when I was just doing in person workshops, I had a lot of downtime because they were Australian based obviously, and we have our summer break and nothing would happen over summer, pretty much from December through to mid January, there's just nothing going on, so it's a very dead time.

But now that time of year for the people in the US and the UK, they were still going, it's still going through. So it works really well from that point of view. The hardest thing I find is choosing if I do want to do live events which I do, do. I do a live webinar once a month and then interspersed with some other things. It's quite difficult to find a time that everyone's happy with. I mean, you would know this as well. I do tend to go for morning for me, which is 8:00 PM. US Eastern Standard Time seems to work quite well. I've kind of just stuck with it. And people know that everything I do is recorded, they can catch up later on if they can't attend live. Doesn't work so well for people in Europe. So I always apologise to them. It's like 4:00 AM, but I still have people getting up and joining me live 4:00 AM in the morning, which is amazing.

Callie: I was going to say, that's a huge testament to what you offer.

Katie: I know, I know. I actually say to them, what are you doing? Why are you online? You can catch up later on, but they want to be there live. So it's nice. I take it as a very big compliment.

Callie: So other than the live webinars each month then, what else do people get in the membership?

Katie: It's funny with the live webinars. I started out with them being a part of the membership and for members only. And I kind of started to discern a question, a frequently asked question time, or like you guys do, once a month, ask your questions. If you can't be there, post your question ahead of time. And I just found, I just wasn't getting much traction with it. It's just not something that works so well for my community. So I ended up ... because there wasn't a lot of questions being posted or asked live, I ended up thinking, well, I'll have a small training session during that live webinar and then open up for questions because if nobody asks anything or there's nothing going on, at least I'm doing something during the session and there's not like dead time with me just twiddling my thumbs live on here.

And so it's become more of a training session each month. And I decided to open it up to people beyond just the community probably a year ago or so. And particularly in the last few months with this the corona virus going on, teachers have been so desperate for help with technology that it's been a huge time for my business. And it a little bit weird to be profiting from this time or during well, out of this time, I feel slightly guilty about it because there's so much awful stuff going on, but it has been a really great time.

And so I've opened up these webinars to anybody that wants to attend and they're available. You just sign up and submit your email address, whatever. And that's been just so good for the business and my numbers for the free live webinars once a month has gone from 20 people or so I'd be happy with 20 people online. And now I'm getting 2000 or 3000 people coming along once a month and joining with the live webinars, which has been fabulous, just amazing. And it's so much better when you're delivering whatever you're delivering to thousands of people or hundreds of people, rather than just three people, which it was occasionally actual that, yeah.

Callie: So with offering those kind of free to the public now, are they free permanently or do they then go into the membership? You've got to be there live essentially to get it free.

Katie: Yeah. So I started doing them. So when I opened them up beyond the members, I said, okay, they're live. And then if you want to see the replay or access it beyond the day, then you will need to be a member to do that. And that was okay for a while, but I changed it simply because of the corona virus situation and the teachers were so desperate for help. And I thought, you know what do I care? It doesn't matter. It's just ... rather than locking it down, I thought, you know what I think now was the time to be quite generous with providing free information and training.

And so I've left some open. And in fact I'm using YouTube live with StreamYard and doing it that way. And I had started out making the YouTube videos privately listed and leaving them that way and then deleting them and then only having them in the membership afterwards. But I've now made them public. You can click the notification bell, if you want to know where the next one is and I've left them up live. And I think it's actually been a better approach in the end. None of the members are worried or upset about the fact that I'm now making it more open. They don't mind, they don't care at all.

So that was the only concern I had really in the back of my mind that it was a member perk and that it was going to be opened more, offered out more openly, but they've all been fine with it. And it's just done a lot for the business and people seeing the generosity of offering all this free training and stuff. So it's been a fabulous thing. Really, really good. Yeah. Very useful.

Callie: Awesome. And it's interesting, you mentioned that kind of business has been going well during the pandemic because as you said, I completely understand the feeling of guilt from it, but at the same time, you're offering something that people need right now.

Katie: Absolutely.

Callie: So it's great that you actually have that to help people. And when you say that it's been going well, is that because more music teachers in particular are having to find ways to work online now and therefore that need for that tech support is greater.?

Katie: Yes, huge, huge need. And it was literally, and within a couple of weeks it might be three or four week period back in February and March or so, where just suddenly all of the schools around the world just switched to online. And the ones in Asia was sort of ahead of the curve in China and so on. So I'm a member of a number of Facebook groups and a couple of

new Facebook groups popped up at this time, specifically set up for this all, Oh, my gosh, we have to all teach online situation. And for the music teachers, for all teachers around the world, no matter what subject area, it's really hard, really hard, but for the music teachers, there are extra challenges, all sorts of extra challenges just because of what they're teaching.

And at that time, I had to pivot instantly. I was in the middle of actually getting together a course, which I was about to launch, which was for Canva design tool, which I love. And I was making a course about creating teaching resources with Canva. And when all of this happened, I thought that is so far down the priority list it is not funny at the moment. And I just pivoted to doing some emergency webinars. And I actually ran ... I think I ran one webinar which had a big turnout to it. And it was about school closures, what to do in this school closure situation and how to pivot to online teaching.

And the teachers just have such a learning curve with how to use Zoom. How do you use Google meet? How does this work? Can we all sing and play together online at the same time around the world? No, it is not possible. You need to refocus. You need to think of other things. And for the teachers in the States, particularly they are working with band orchestra chorus. That is their main thing. And you cannot switch from doing that in person and transfer it to online, it just does not work. So you have to think of other ways to reproach their teaching essentially.

So I did emergency webinars around that. I do one, one week, and then I think the following week I did three, three in three days and they all had hundreds of people injecting and it was insane. And I just put the course on hold, put everything else on hold and just switched to that. And that was really a very useful thing. And I think that from a business point of view, that got a lot of attention and at a goodwill from everybody because I was offering so much content for free, and it just continued from there.

So I took that crowd with me from those emergency thing that I did through to the regular monthly webinars. And it's been going really well since then. Yeah, just really well. Pivoting quickly, I think is such okay depending on what's going on. And it's the first time really, there's been very specific event happening in the world where it's caused me to pivot like that. But yeah, it was a very good thing to do that quite quickly and to get onto what they needed the most at that time.

And they just needed to learn basic tech skills. It's funny because the two tech skills that they all needed to learn was how to run live webinar type situations, so conference calls with groups of kids. And the other thing was how to create videos, teaching videos that they can post asynchronous learning. So most of them have never used screen casting software before, never made videos with themselves on camera, massive learning curve, terrifying for about 80% of them. So I introduced them to Loom and Screencastify and a few other tools like that, but yeah, just a huge, huge learning curve. They've all had a massive ... it's all the things I wished they had known ahead of like before this time. And they've all been forced to learn so in a way it's been good from that point of view too.

Callie: And so do you have a community in the membership as well, or is it content based?

Katie: Yeah, I basically went with your setup of IP board Infusionsoft ... what's it called? Yes, that's correct. Isn't it? Yep. So forum and member ... I'm using the memberoni theme from you guys and that's been working really well. And the memberoni seems great because it's not ... you can set it up in such a way that it's easy for the teachers to find what they need, and the forum side of things it's super interesting. Teachers are not good at forums, generally speaking, bless them. They're not, they just have not had a lot of experience with forums at all. They are super comfortable on Facebook and that's about it.

So I really had to teach them how to use the forum and even now it's probably ... majority of the time it's them posting a question and only me answering. And in the early days, I really struggled with that. I really wanted to see that back and forth between the members themselves, but I've accepted that, you know what? That is just not their thing. They're just not going to be like that and that's okay. It's them posting a question, it's me answering and everyone else has the chance to see the answer. And occasionally other people join in the conversation, and that's okay. That's just the way it is. And it's fine.

It's actually helped me ... before having the community I was answering so many questions by email, and this was one of the great things about having your community is being able to parse the answer to things in a central place and then everyone can see the answer rather than you emailing it back to 17 people in different times. So it's a help from that point of view, but yeah it's been interesting. But the forum's good every day answering questions and I think they're quite happy. They get a bit nervous about posting in there, but I'm like, it's okay if you've got this question, everyone else has the same question or more than one people in end.

Callie: So pandemic aside then, do you normally have kind of quite a rigid content plan that you stick to? Do you have kind of a structure to what you're doing each month?

Katie: No, not really. In certain ways I do. Every year I think this is the year when that's going to be better and I will be different and every year just things happen and it's not ... it's just the same every year. I do tend to do things a little bit on the fly, but I think that's worked quite well in a way. So the example of the pandemic is that I was able to just go, okay, we're just focusing on that and I'll just churn out content around that for the moment.

But yeah, I do have a sort of a plan of in the next 12 months I would like to do this course and this course, and these other three things. I do try and get ahead with things like podcast, episodes. So I'll do batching where that's concerned. Having said that I've had a little break unplanned break recently, but things happen, that's okay. But yeah, I do like to do that. And I have to say I took on a content manager last year and that's been a fantastic thing.

So from an outward facing content point of view, all of that is really well planned and really well under control. She takes care of all of that. And I'm staying at, and she does a great job. So for the last 12 months, we actually had themes each month that we worked towards. And that was really good because it's kind of better having a limitation on what you're going to do for that month, rather than we can do anything we want let's limit it to a certain specific topic, and so that's been great.

So the podcast episodes and blog posts, which are written by a guest, I have guest writers to do those, have all been based on themes for the last 12 months or so. We're just at the end of that now, and now we're about to sort of work on what is the next 12 months, but content inside the community I tend to just, I get the sense of what's the next big thing that everybody needs, and then I'll do that. And that's how I've been working. And that's probably how it will continue if I'm realistic.

Callie: As you say, it's coming in handy at the moment, though, definitely being able to do that kind of quick change around.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I have to say I've been more productive in the last three or four months than I have over probably the previous two years or so. I've churned out so much stuff. It's not funny and that's been good for me because I can see that I can do it quickly when I need to, and you can just get the routine down and go methodically through and churn out videos and all that sort of thing, and it has been a really good time.

Callie: So what would you say has actually been your biggest challenge with the membership over the years then?

Katie: I think one of the things the teacher's not kind of getting what a forum is. That is a hard challenge or the idea of having a subscription that they have to sign up for. When they realise that the cost of the subscription, whether they pay monthly or annually is equivalent to paying for a conference attendance or a day or two of workshops, then it makes sense to them. And for many of them, it's the school that's paying, it's not coming out of their personal pockets. So that's a really big benefit I have for the type of business that I have.

And in some cases it doesn't even come out of their music budget. It comes out of the school's professional development budget or e-learning budget or IT budget or something like that. So it can be a good thing in that way, but the whole idea of that, yeah. It's just a different light when they've got to change from doing in person workshops to online learning. But I mean, with everything that's happened in the last few months, they're all a lot more aware of how online learning works.

And other than that really it's probably from my point of view, I have so much content that I would like to get out and create for the community members and it's so hard to find the time. I have big plans of let's do four new courses this year, all these smaller courses or whatever. And every time I try to do a brief short course, it never happens. It's always bigger than being here. And I like to do things thoroughly, which I'm known for and the teachers love. So that's just my thing, but yeah, getting that content out can be hard and putting aside the time and managing all the other things that go with it. So being in the community itself and answering questions and just being present and so on. So I guess it's just that juggling of all the things and planning.

Callie: So I'd love to touch on something you mentioned there then about a lot of the time it's the school's paying. So are you marketing the membership to the music teachers and then they're going to the schools and saying, I want to join this.

Katie: Yes.

Callie: Or are you actually kind of marketing to the schools themselves?

Katie: My market is teachers themselves, the music teachers tend to identify what they need to do for their own professional development and professional learning, and then they would take it to their school or their district, or it's different around the world. I find it's quite different in the States than it is to here in Australia for instance. Sometimes it might be ... for instance, in Australia at the private schools, the larger schools, we might have a director of music that has multiple staff working for them. And so it's quite good if they get interested in having multiple of their staff join the community and I have a special offer for that. So they can have three staff or more joining it at a lower rate, then it would be for individuals, but yes, it is out of that budget.

There are some people who are paying for it themselves because their school either just refuses to take that on as for whatever reason that is or sometimes they've spent their budget in a certain area and so that they are paying for it themselves with the credit card. But for the most part, it's the school that's covering it. So annual memberships are very useful or needed in addition to monthly ones. So the monthly ones are quite good because some people just want that taste and maybe, or the option of not committing for a full year, but annual memberships are easier for the schools to pay with ... to pay for, I should say.

It's easy for the teachers to take that to the school and say, right, we're committing to a whole year of access to this thing. And here's the cost rather than this is going to be a recurring monthly charge to the school credit card that doesn't fly so much. So the annual ones are quite a good option for them, too.

Callie: Awesome. Any finding that schools are actually quite happy as you say, paying online via credit card, or are you having to do things like purchase orders and all that fun stuff?

Katie: Oh, guys, yeah. It's painful, absolutely painful. And I have to say it's the, I'm so jealous sometimes of people who just have credit card purchases, I mean, or in the early days, a lot of people were running their online courses or memberships, it's just PayPal, like just PayPal. That was just not a thing for me ever. Just a few people do use PayPal, but it's not a thing with schools at all. Nowadays actually, it's really changed in the last probably two years or so.

In the early days, there was a lot of purchase orders and that creates so many headaches from a tech integration setup point of view. There's just no easy way to deal with that because you're not essentially getting money from them at the time of purchase. You're just getting information from them. They get access to the membership straight away, and then hopefully the school actually pays the bill at some point and there's a manual element to that process even now for us.

We use Ontraport as the sort of the system that we're running everything through, but there's still a manual element to the purchase order system. But the credit cards have shifted and in fact I was just looking at numbers today. The number of credit card

purchases far outweighs now the purchase orders. Thank goodness. So I think at some point in the near future, we may be able to get to the point of saying we only accept credit cards. It might be a couple of years down the track but it's much easier to deal with.

And the thing we've ... translating currencies and stuff I charge, even though I'm in Australia, I charge in US dollars because I just wanted to have one currency for everybody. And it just gets so complex if you're saying, okay, for US people this is the price, and for UK people this is the price, and Aussie's, this is the price. It's just how do you a sales page, which reflects that. And then you have to look at your website, having a dropdown menu where you choose your location. It's just too hard.

So it's US dollars and I've just stuck with that over the years. And it's throws the Aussie people off a lot. They're like, hang on hat. You're not allowed to do that. You're in Australia. You can't possibly. And I'm like, actually I can. And if you pay by credit card, it all gets taken care of. It's just easy. But yeah, it's super hard. It's really hard to have one system that works well for everybody.

Callie: Yeah. It really is. And so what's one of your favourite things about running the membership then?

Katie: I love seeing the teachers that have a go at technology and have success with it. I'm constantly saying to them, celebrate the success, even if it's a tiny one. If you worked out how to hook your laptop up to a data projector for the first time and it worked, let's celebrate, like that's awesome. That's a thing. Some people are still freaked out about that, that's a big thing for some teachers. And then there's the ones who are doing really complex things with technology. But it's all about levelling up from where you are. So I love the fact that through the community, I can see them doing some of those things and celebrating successes.

And at the moment I am running that course that I had to postpone. It's actually been running now for the last three weeks. And it's one that I've been doing as kind of like a do along with me type course. So rather than just having it there, sitting there, all of the modules available, I've actually drip fed the modules for this course over a period of time. And I've had a popup Facebook group to go with it and everybody's been sharing what they've been making in Canva for this course in the Facebook group.

And it's been so, so lovely to see the amazing things that teachers are doing and what they're learning and just seeing their progression from, I know nothing about graphic design or making stuff in this way, to oh, my gosh, I made an animation video that has stickers that move and I've made a promotional video for my next year's concert or whatever it is that they're doing. Just that day to day contact with the teachers and seeing what they're capable of achieving and small successes is fabulous. I love it.

Callie: Awesome. And you're making a big difference, not just to them, but to the people that teaching as well.

Katie: Yes, I think so. Yeah. They actually recognise that themselves they're like, they want to learn about the technology in order to make different types of lessons for their students,

or encourage different types of creativity with their students. And there are some students which it really just speaks to. Yeah, so it's been a really good thing in that regard too.

Callie: So what's working well for you when it comes to getting new members, do you think?

Katie: I think ultimately it's the things where people can see the way that I teach and see a demonstration of the types of things they would get inside the community, I guess. And that's not really conscious to them, but from my point of view, I think that's what it is. So the live webinars that I'm doing each month, I don't do a hard sell. I don't sit there for 20 minutes at the end of the webinar, doing a hard sell on the community. It gets mentioned throughout the session. I do talk about it at the end of each webinar. If you want more help from me and people who are in the membership are often on those sessions typing in the chat window and so on, so that's always a big help too.

But the live webinars have been really good and other things like that I've done a couple of five day challenges so just to sort of bring up awareness about the community itself and what I do, and I offer those for free and they were totally open. I had a lot of people joining in. So just building up that awareness of the business, I think is a really good thing, but the live webinars are really good. We've done other things like promotion. The promotions work well, but I always feel really hollow with those. So if we do a black Friday promotion where we reduce prices for three days, I don't ... we do it and we get members, but I don't love it so much.

I think it's better when it's content related for me. The course that I'm running at the moment because it's sort of an accidental thing that it worked quite well as a promotional thing for the community, because we were doing it at a certain time, drip feeding these modules. So there was sort of a soft deadline involved with joining up to the community. We actually had a standalone course, a purchase option for this as well for the first time. And that's been quite good. Both of those options have been quite good. So there was a kind of a deadline for people to join. And we were hoping we'd get maybe 100 people joining either the community or purchasing the standalone course and we ended up with more than 250 joining.

So that's been really good. And I'm sitting here thinking that is something we're definitely going to do in the future, more of that. So pick a course, pick dates to run it, and it will continue to be available after those dates. But there's a time where the modules are drip fed and everybody's doing the work at the same time. I think the teachers like that. They operate in the same way their students do. They like to do things as a group together, share what they're doing, share what they're learning, so that's been quite good. I think that's the way to go in the future then. Yeah, those promotions, I don't know they work, but I just don't love them. I feel like you can't just keep reducing prices. It isn't ... I don't know, it doesn't sit well so much with me.

Callie: Yeah. I agree with you. And it sounds like the course approach you've taken this worked really well though. So yeah as you say, it did seem to tap into how your members want to work as well.

Katie: Yeah, I think so, that's one thing I've learned. It's very individual to your own audience as to what will work and watching what other people do with their memberships is useful, but it just doesn't always work the same for someone else's membership. For my own one, particularly the teachers are very unique bunch of people. And so I see other people doing successful promotions and things, and I'm thinking, no, that's not going to work so well for me, but that's okay. I will just do the things that I know work for my group. And yeah, it's been quite good so far.

Callie: Something I noticed as well is that you actually reduced your price during the pandemic, didn't you?

Katie: Yes, I did.

Callie: Is that something you had concern from existing members about what made you make that decision?

Katie: No, it was quite easy to do from a justification point of view because almost every software company that deals with education in the entire world gave away their product, has been giving away their product for free or very low cost during this time. And so it kind of made sense to do that. And a number of my members were on the same price point. So when I first launched the membership, I started it at \$19 a month and 90 for an annual option as the very low entry rate.

And then over time, over have a couple of months later, we had a deadline. Okay, join now, otherwise it goes up to 29 and 90, and then it went up to 39, 390 and then 49 and 490. And it's been sitting at the price on the public facing sales page on the website for quite some time has been 49 a month 490 a year. But I never felt like that was the right price point for the teachers really. I think the 39 or 29 price point is the sweet spot, particularly the 29 price point.

And so most of the members anyway were around one of those, one or the other. And so we just decided yeah, I thought I can't make it free. Like all the big software companies are doing. They're like just, we're going to have a product for free for three months. Okay. I thought, no, but I can reduce it. So I made it 29, 290. And if people asked to what at a higher price point, they could have cost take that lower price. I wasn't really fast about that. And we'll just leave it at that for the moment and see what happens and it might go back up to 39, 390 at some point, but for the moment yeah, I think it's a good price point for the teachers really. And you really have to play around for that price point over time I think, to find out what works.

Callie: Yeah, definitely. And so if that's how you're kind of attracting new members, what are you focusing on when it comes to retention? How are you keeping those members coming back month after month?

Katie: Yeah, it's something I want to improve a bit more. We do things like we have the weekly sort of newsletter email that goes out just to members to say what's going on in the community each week. And that's been good. Every time that goes out I know when it goes out, for me, it's a Tuesday morning and I can instantly see results from that. I can see

people popping into comment or ask questions related to something that's gone on in the forum, so that works really well.

Something that I've been doing a lot in the last probably six months or so is that I use loom to video. I video welcome every single person who posts in the community. I started out doing it by email. I think like you were doing with the BombBomb emails sort of replying privately to their email address, but I've ended up doing it inside the forum. So I have the welcome thread. Every single person that says, "Hey, I'm new here and this is where I'm from and this is what I teach." I reply to every one of them with a video response.

And they're always so pleasantly surprised that I've done it, but for me, it's quicker and easier to just hit record on a video on talk than it is to type out some big response. So I've done that a lot and that's worked really well. And also in the forum itself, I actually create video responses for almost every reply that I do in the forum as well, and not every single one, but most of them where I think I need to sort of talk through what they've asked and the options for a solution and whatever I basically record, I just hit record on loom and to talk to the camera about what I think they should do or where they should go and I post that as an embedded video in the form shows up and it looks really ... and that was thanks to you actually, because when I was posting loom videos, initially it was just the link showing.

And I think you mentioned that you could go into your settings in IP board and change it so that you can post from the source and embed the video, so that's heaps better. I really wanted it showing for the teachers. I knew that they would play it more readily. So yeah, so that's been really good for retention too, but I think those things are working well, it's that personal touch, I think to a certain degree. And the other thing is content related really just making the new content when they know the Canva course was coming out. A lot of them are like great sticking around for that and so that will be the plan for the next little while.

I have a plan to do some micro-credentials inside the community and to introduce sort of smaller bite sized milestones that they can achieve and digital badges for rather than it only being a big long course that they finished and they get a certificate for it. We'll still have those, but to do these smaller bite sized bits of content where they're earning badges, I think that's going to be something that happens in the future too.

Callie: Yeah, that sounds really good. And I love that you're doing those video responses in the community because as you said, it's even more personal and more valuable to somebody than kind of just typing the answer out there as well.

Katie: Yeah. Yeah. Someone said the other day, "Oh, I was so shocked to hear my name when I played the video." And it was so funny because every one of them I do for that person. So I always say, "Hi Maria, how are you going? You know, well done. And thanks for your question." So it was funny that she was surprised to hear her name in the video.

Callie: So you mentioned that you had a content manager helping you now, do you have other team members as well? What does the actual business structure look like for you?

Katie: Yeah, the content manager, she came on probably the most recent out of the team. So we had to say team because it is a team now, but the first thing ... I started very early on just hiring kind of basic admin help. A couple of people from the Philippines did some great, great work early on, but I soon realised that for my particular business, I really needed someone based in Australia or the States to do customer support side of things. That was the hugest thing just get rid of that off my plate.

So I have Michelle who's based in Maine, in the States and she's awesome. And she takes care of all my customer support side of things. She does well, she's the first port of call with all the emails and she does all of them except the ones that I really need to do and she would just give me those. I don't see a lot of the emails that come into the inbox anymore, which is such a blessing. And she also helps people out who have logging issues for the community or billing issues or whatever it is. So I can't imagine not having her there just to take care of all of that.

So I have Diane who's the content manager and took her on just because the content is so huge. It's such a massive part of everything. And she has really taken on all of, particularly the front facing content. So everything that goes out on the website she's fantastic at organising it all on talking to guest writers and getting them. She just says to me, what are some ideas that you want them to write on? And I'm like, okay, here's a few things and then she will organise them all. She'll get draft copies from them and all of that.

So that's been fantastic, but I have also probably the person that stayed with me one of the longest is my friend Kat, who she and I met actually at Chris Ducker's Tropical Think Tank. The very first one that he ran and we were both at that event. And then we both went back the second year as well. And she at the time had her own online business going, but eventually morphed into she's become an online business manager. And so over time she ended up sort of saying to me, "How about I do this aspect of the business for you or with you?" And that's been great, it's more like project management, marketing side of things, like higher level stuff.

Planning, we'll just sit down and plan things together, that she's the person I can turn to when I'm like, "Okay, I just need someone to deal with all of this," and she will just go, "Okay, don't worry about it. I will fix it. I will find people to take care of it." And she interfaces between the bookkeeper and I, which is also a blessing. I'm just happy hand that over. And that I've very quickly, so that's the main three people that yeah, the two guest writers that I have just do sort of contract work.

And the only other thing I've taken on more recently is because the live webinars have become so huge. About four or five of them, I've had two to 3000 people sign up for them ahead of time. I realised that you cannot manage the chat window and run the webinar at the same time when you have that many people on, it's ridiculous thing. And I use chat roll, and actually it maxes out. I had to increase my account. We max out at 500 in chat roll window, and I have not bothered to increase beyond that because there's no way that you can keep up with the flow of conversation with more than that. So we have 500 at the maximum there and I've taken on someone each time to just ... I pay them to sit there and manage the chat window while I'm writing the webinar and that's been fantastic, really, really good.

Callie: Sounds good. So overall then what impact would you say having the membership has had on your life, your business so far?

Katie: I think it's been really good because it changed things from managing many things in my business, many individual things like lots of separate workshops and separate online courses and doing those things multiple times per year into one thing to worry about. And that was the biggest thing. Again, the second Tropical Think Tank event that I went to, James Shramco was there. And at that event, he got up and talked about memberships. And I think by the end of that event most of the people attending that event said, we're all starting memberships sites and that's his thing. And he convinced us that it really was the way to go for most of the people there. And many of us started membership sites after that event.

And it took maybe longer than some of the others who were there, but I did get there eventually. And it just made so much sense. So to have, rather than running my online courses at specific times of the year, if that time of year didn't work for the teachers in the States, it just didn't make sense. It would make sense for the teachers in Australia, but not the ones in the UK. And just to have them all in one place all at the same time, you help yourself when you need them.

And to have that one single place where people are asking me questions and I'm spending my time rather than jumping into my email inbox every day, answering questions, it's just not a good use of time. So it's streamlined things a lot. That was the main, the main difference I think. And the most steady income of course is a massive bonus. So I don't sit there over the Christmas break here thinking, oh my gosh, what am I going to do? It's a constant flow of income through the whole year really. There's a few good times which may get better, but pretty much it's steady the whole year round. So it's been much better from that regard.

Callie: Awesome. And so is there anything that you wish you'd known earlier when you were starting your membership?

Katie: Not really. I don't think there's much I would change about the way I've done things over time. Generally, with online business, even before having a membership, that thing that everybody, everybody says hire people before you think you need to hire people. And it's still so true and people who are starting out with online business probably won't do that because we all get there and go yeah, we wish we'd done it earlier. But taking someone on to do the customer support, to take care of the email inbox is just such a huge thing when you are at the point where you can't manage that yourself anymore, so that's probably the thing.

And then the other thing is, I guess, with regard to software and tools and things, there's just no one perfect solution for any of it. A couple of people I know have been through the route of starting out with one customer relation management system, like Infusionsoft or Ontraport or ActiveCampaign, and then switched through the next three or four of them trying to find the Nirvana solution, there is no solution that meets all the things, that's the perfect solution.

And once you're embedded in one, I started out with Ontraport before ActiveCampaign even existed, before many of the others existed. And to think about changing now out of that, it's just there's so many moving parts in that it would be such a massive job. I could do it, but it would be such a massive job. And there's just no one perfect solution. So I think you just got to get as much of far as you can, choose the one that seems the best for you at the time and just go with that. And the grass is not always greener on the other side.

Callie: Yeah. I'm totally with you on that. Totally with you.

Katie: I know. I've lost ... yeah. I have grey hairs because of all of those tools. There's no perfect solution for anything. Live webinar systems that's another one, we might go into that. Oh, my gosh.

Callie: If someone is listening, thinking of starting a membership site, what's one tip that you would give them to help them get started.

Katie: I think deciding whether a membership site is actually right for you and your business is a good place to start, which sounds strange, but it's not the right solution for everybody I don't think. I think I'm really lucky in that the people who are paying for my membership, like I said, it's not always their money that they're spending. I feel sometimes for those that have the memberships that are based on a hobby type situation where it's kind of that nice to have membership. So when times get tough, I would imagine that gets cut from the family budget. And so some scenarios you might not have the luxury of it being always a necessity.

And I've been really lucky in this time that everything's gone a bit crazy, but my membership has become more useful to people over this time. So deciding first of all, whether it's useful, it's a good thing. Yeah, getting advice about stuff is always good. And I think probably a lot of people who've been on your podcast have said the same thing, but having your website to go to your forum, your training section, for me has been so useful. So anytime anyone on my team, if we're thinking about doing anything new within my business, someone will say, "Yeah, we should go and research whether that's a good idea or research, how to do that properly." And I'm like, "Just go to the membership guys."

I'm like, we'll log in and see what training is available there. And inevitably there is the solution in there, or there's the overview or the training or the, whatever it is. So having one place to go for information is a good thing. When I started out, I really, I was following so many online entrepreneurs and listening to the podcasts of always different people. And it became overwhelming, too much information. And over time I've called who I listen to on podcasts. I've called which blogs I read, and I just pick the people I feel an affinity with and stick with that one place to get information. And I think that's a good thing to do.

Callie: Yeah. I think that's a great tip. Just that kind of simplifying the number of voices you're listening to as well because everybody's saying different things. So it's kind of pick the ones that you resonate with. Otherwise, you're going to go crazy trying to do everything.

Katie: Totally crazy. And in the online world, people have different styles of operating in the online world. I'm not that ... what's going on crush it rara kind of person. It's just doesn't sit

for me. It's not the right sort of thing. So I find the people that sit well with what I want to do and how I want to learn my information and that's worked well.

Callie: Last question, then I'd love to know what your goals are. Where would you like the membership to be in another 12 months time, say.

Katie: I think growing the numbers obviously is a really big part of it. The numbers are really good at the moment. We had a dip last year, I don't know for whatever reason. And the numbers have doubled since February because of everything that's gone on recently and was sort of sitting at around 750 members or so at the moment on a regular basis and that been fantastic. And I'd probably like to get up to 1000. That would be a great number to get up to as a regular thing.

People come and go and that's actually something I learned. I had to learn early on is that people are not going to be in your membership forever and that's okay. That's just the way your memberships are. It's not a personal thing. They just have to leave. My churn is actually apologised to me when they have to quit for a while. They're like, "I'm so sorry I have to go, but I just need to prioritise something else for a while." I'm like, "It's okay. It's fine. It's not a personal thing. Don't worry."

But getting people back, I've got a lot of people who do come back to the membership for whatever reason or joining, because there's a new course available. But getting the numbers up a bit would be fantastic. But other things that I want to do is I really want to organise the content inside the membership more, make it more streamlined and easy for people to navigate. The thing I've been testing out sort of new with this course that I've been running recently is the roadmap inside the membership theme, and that's worked so well.

And I know how I want to implement that in my main community now. So I'm going to sort of roll that out. So things are easier to navigate and just get that retention up a bit then. Yeah. And other content related things and that micro-credentials aspect I'd like to implement too. So that's all for the next 12 months, probably two years, really.

Callie: That all sounds great though. And so if someone wants to check out the membership, where's the best place for them to do that?

Katie: Main website is [midnightmusic.com.au](https://midnightmusic.com.au) and the membership page is on /join. So anyway, there's a link to that in the menu bar up the top of it. Yeah. They can check it out there and the free live webinars that I've been running recently are all on YouTube. So that's a great place to see the way I do things, I guess.

Callie: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for talking with me, Katie. I've loved hearing more about your membership and your journey and I'm so pleased that things are going so well for you as well.

Katie: Thank you so much and it's great chatting to you too.

Callie: That's all for this episode, folks. Thank you. Once again, to Katie for joining me. I love it that Katie has been able to continue growing her membership, despite it being a difficult

time right now, providing her audience with much needed help and support. And I really like how Katie has made use of webinars and challenges to keep bringing in new members over the years, as well, along with her newer approach of running a course live.

You can find Katie's website over at [midnightmusic.com.au](http://midnightmusic.com.au). And if you'd like to download the transcript from this episode, then head on over to the [membershipguys.com/btm44](http://membershipguys.com/btm44). This is also our final episode for season four. So thank you so much for listening and I hope you've enjoyed this season and be able to get some great ideas and inspiration for your own membership site. Let me know over at [talkmemberships.com](http://talkmemberships.com)

For now, though. That's all from me. I'll be back sometime in the future for season five I'm sure. And if you're a member of Membership Academy and you'd like to be considered as a guest for the next season, be sure to let me know. Bye for now, though. Thanks for listening and thank you to all my guests from season four.