

S04 E08

BEHIND THE MEMBERSHIP

FELICIA LO
SCHOOL OF SWEET GEORGIA



Callie: On today's episode, I'm talking with Felicia Lo from School of SweetGeorgia, a membership site for fibre artists. While the School of SweetGeorgia is only a few years old, Felicia has a huge amount of experience in her market, starting her blog way back in 2004 and her physical business, SweetGeorgia Yarns in 2005. In this episode, we're talking about how Felicia is able to run the membership site alongside her brick and mortar business. And how having the two overlapping, but separate, sides of the business works well for her and gives her more flexibility and stability.

We also talk about how Felicia used Patreon for her initial idea validation, which gave her the incentive and accountability to create her full membership site. And we talk about the team she has helping her to keep both businesses thriving, plus how she focuses on YouTube for attracting new members, her plans for bringing guest teachers on board, and much, much more besides. This is a great episode. Felicia has lots to share. So let's get started.

Announcer: Welcome to Behind The Membership with Callie Willows. Real people, real stories, real memberships.

Callie: Today, I'm joined on the show by Felicia Lo from School of SweetGeorgia. Welcome Felicia. I'm so excited to have you on Behind the Membership and to chat with you about your membership site.

Felicia: Thank you so much, Callie.

Callie: To get us started, would you mind telling us a little bit about your membership first of all? So what kind of thing do you offer? Who's your audience? Tell us all about it.

Felicia: Yeah, so we have a membership site called the School of SweetGeorgia. And SweetGeorgia, it refers to a blog that I started writing. It's a knitting blog that I started writing back in 2004. And out of that knitting blog, all sorts of things happened. I talked a lot about my journey through knitting, learning how to dye, learning how to spin my own yarn, how to weave. and through all of that, I ended up starting a full on business where we make hand dyed yarn. And I started that in 2005. That's called SweetGeorgia.

So the school of SweetGeorgia is sort of a project that's come out of our main business, teaching people about how to do all these things, how to do the fibre arts. So we provide educational courses, workshops with myself and with other instructors. Teaching people how to do everything from card their own fleece, dye their own yarn, spin their own yarn, weave, make cloth. And eventually, it will sort of grow more and more into more course content about the fibre arts too.

Callie: Awesome. I love that. So it sounds like the yarns company came first. And the membership, did that grow from kind of questions you were getting from the audience and people wanting to know how to actually use the yarn better? Or was it just kind of a natural side product for you?

Felicia: It was something that actually grew out very, it took a long time for me to finally decide to do this. But basically, what happened was I started my business dyeing yarn in 2005. And then over time, I sort of was doing a lot of spinning, doing a lot of dyeing, and all these things. And I was approached by Craftsy in the U.S. which is a company that produces educational courses, also distributing them online. So I was invited to come out and teach a course for Craftsy back in 2012. And having that experience of going, and filming, and preparing a course, I taught spinning for hand dyed fibre. So it was putting colour on the fibre. And that was something that was done beforehand. And then I showed up in the studio to teach people basically how to use the colours that were in that fibre, how to make it into different kinds of yarn, different coloured yarn. And that entire process and seeing how it came together was so exciting for me and so inspiring, that it kind of just always stuck at the back of my mind.

And then I didn't really do anything about that for a couple of years. I have two young kids. So our kids are four and six and a half right now. So during this whole time, I've just been busy doing other things. Then in 2016, I also had the opportunity to write a book. So I authored a book for company called Interweave, and that was also about dyeing, and spinning, and knitting. And out of that book, I started to get more and more requests to go out and teach. To travel to teach. But with these kids at home, I really found it very difficult.

So originally, I was all in. I was like, "I'm going to travel. This is now my time. I'm going to get on the teaching circuit. I'm an author with courses to teach, and I'm going to start travelling around and doing all this." And I tried. I took my kids. My daughter was 10 months at the time. I took her to New York, and my son was three years old. Took them to New York with me, with my husband, with my husband's parents. And all of us went so that I could teach at this workshop at this conference in New York City. And that was like on my bucket list. Am I going to do this? I'm going to teach in person live these classes. And it was amazing. But at the same time in order to make all that happen and to bring my

whole family with me, and I'd be setting up in the hotel room for the conference room at 9:00 at night until 11:00 at night. And then taking care of my kids all night, and then waking up, and then teaching. And I was like, what am I doing? What am I doing? Why am I travelling everywhere to do all this teaching when there could be a better way? And that's when I started to think, I think filming what I'm teaching and putting that online is maybe way to do it.

Callie: So when did you actually start the membership site, your own membership site then?

Felicia: So I did the announcement that I was going to start building this school in May, 2017. And then I did the announcement. And as part of that announcement, I set up first on Patreon. And the idea with the Patreon was basically to test the idea, to see if there were people out there who were interested in something that I was going to be making. So I wasn't planning to deliver the course content through Patreon. But I was going to sort of set up a little bit of a community or a founding community where people who are interested could participate and sort of be a sounding board in some ways, that they could send me their ideas. I could incorporate their ideas into what I was planning. But also, that it just showed support for something that I was going to be creating.

So what I did for the Patreon was I recorded sort of regular progress reports, video progress reports for them. It was basically the first vlog I guess, because I was very nervous about being on camera, filming myself on camera, trying to figure out how to film yourself, how to set up all the equipment, how to edit it, how to make it look good and sound good, and all these things. So I was using that vlog on Patreon as sort of a testing ground with a safe community, people who had opted in to say that, "Okay, I'm willing to watch you learn how to put together a school."

So we did that for a number of months until I actually published my first course. And that first course we delivered through Teachable. So using their course delivery platform. And yeah, so then it converted those Patreon members into people who are buying the course. And then I made a second course that way, and then discovered that Teachable didn't necessarily have the things that I wanted longterm. So using that as a platform wasn't really the way that I was going to continue forward. So I then had to start building a membership site from the ground up, and I did that around 2018, and fully launched that in 2018. So the site's been running for almost two years now. Almost two years just on our own platform, on our own membership site.

Callie: It's quite an evolution there from the original Patreon to, is it WordPress you're on now?

Felicia: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Callie: So did the Patreon members essentially move with you through all of that as well?

Felicia: They did. Many of them did. Many of them were very, very supportive. And they followed me through to buying the first courses. And those people who bought the first courses when the membership site became available. Then I grandfathered in their courses and then offered them ongoing membership at the best rate possible. And many of them have continued on, and we just consider our founding members. Everyone that was a supporter

on the Patreon, we list on our website as well. Just to give them lots and lots appreciation for watching me fumble through this first couple of years and try to get started.

Callie: I love that. And I imagine actually having that Patreon, yes, it showed interest. But it also gave you some accountability I imagine. Because one of the issues that a lot of people have when starting a membership is you can get stuck for months just kind of thinking about things and stuff like that. Whereas if you've already got that audience watching essentially, I guess that kind of means you have to get started.

Felicia: Yeah, absolutely. So in all of these regular updates, in these vlog updates that I had to provide to Patreon I was like, "I better have something ready. I better get going." And yeah, absolutely. You can get paralysed looking at all of the different options for all the different ways that you could build your membership site. For sure.

Callie: So I'd love to know. You mentioned you started your blog, I think you said in 2004. So you've obviously got huge pedigree in this space. You've taught, you've done courses, you've written books. So at the time that you launched the membership, did you already have quite an established online audience, or had that not been a focus up to then in terms of building things like your email list?

Felicia: Yeah. So for SweetGeorgia as a business, we do have an email list that we've been working on since probably about 2009. I think that was probably my biggest mistake when I first started my blog in 2004 that I didn't have an email list. It seems crazy now, but that's one of the things that I should have done from the very beginning. That would have been really helpful. But yeah, we did have this platform to rely on. But at the same time, the audience for SweetGeorgia and the audience for the School of SweetGeorgia are slightly different. They're ever so slightly different in that SweetGeorgia, we're selling hand dyed yarn as supplies for what somebody is going to use to make a project. And while on the School of SweetGeorgia, we teach knitting and we teach you how to use that yarn. It's also a little bit broader because it explores more of that journey of taking fibre off a sheep, or harvesting it and then putting colour on it. So there's a whole journey, transition, transformation from when you take the raw materials of fibre to when you get the actual final cloth at the end.

So someone who's interested in buying yarn to make a knitting project is different from somebody who's interested in shearing a sheep, and then dyeing the fleece, and then spinning it into yarn, and then weaving with it afterwards. So I found that even though the audiences overlap, they're not identical.

Callie: So actually, it's quite interesting you mention that because it sounds like kind of that process you're teaching and the membership is quite involved and intricate kind of thing all that way from sharing the sheep to having that end product. So do you actually combine the membership on the yarn business at all? Or is it kind of, they are completely separate just with a few overlapping members?

Felicia: Well, they do have two separate websites. Back in 2013, I tried to redesign our website, and I really wanted to include education as part of that. But then I started to discover that we were going to provide more than just knitting lessons, and crochet lessons, and things like that. Because I felt like there was already a lot of that out there. There's a lot of

representation for knitters. There's not a whole lot of representation for people who are interested in learning how to dye. People who are interested in learning how to spin or weave. Not in a digital media online education kind of way. So that niche is very, very, very, very tiny. It's a very small subsection of this sort of fibre world. But at the same time, I feel super strongly about having that part of it represented as well.

Because I came from being a knitter. I started to knit when I was a kid in grade school. And I knit for up until probably after university. And only then discovered, oh, you can spin your own yarn. Oh, you can dye your own yarn. So I feel like there's a lot of knitters that I would like to introduce these other aspects of the fibre arts world to them so that they might understand there's more than ready-made yarn, that you could do it yourself.

Callie: I love that. And I imagine that having that, as you say, it's a small niche. But I imagine having that very specific niche helps you to stand out. And as you say, there are a lot of options for knitters out there these days. So it kind of gives you that little bit of an edge in the market, I would imagine.

Felicia: Yeah, I actually have listened to Mike's podcast about the niching down multiple times because I'm trying to convince myself of how I should be niching down. Because fibre arts is kind of a broad, umbrella category for a lot of different things. So I see that there's actually a number of people who are starting to build membership businesses around just one form of weaving, just one form of spinning, just one form of dyeing. So everybody's kind of breaking it down that way. Where I'm trying to build an umbrella membership site. So I'm always questioning, is this the right thing to do?

But I think that what has been really, really helpful is finding an audience that has the same philosophy as me in terms of this niche. In terms of the fact that we enjoy all of these crafts. And by enjoying all of these crafts, we share the same struggles in that we don't have enough time to do all of these things. That your hands are busy spinning. That means that you can't also be dyeing, can't also be weaving, but you're interested in all of those things. So I think my angle on this is more like helping people manage a lot of their time, a lot of their energy, productivity, feeling like they've created something, feeling satisfaction, getting them to the finish line. So that they feel that sense of accomplishment that they're wanting, but they feel distracted and scattered because there's so many crafts to be enjoying at the same time.

Callie: I think that's a great idea though. Because as you say, a lot of people I know who do various crafts, most of them don't just do one. There's kind of almost that shiny object syndrome when it's kind of like oh, but what about this? But that looks pretty. I would love to be crafty, but I'm really not. Cross stitch is about my limit kind of thing. But then you scroll through Instagram or Pinterest, and you see all these ideas and you're constantly like, "Maybe I could try that. Maybe I could do that."

Felicia: Yeah. Cross stitch. I mean, you think about it. If you did cross stitch with yarn that had been hand dyed, or if you did cross stitch and then, oh my gosh. So many different things that you could do. Spin your own yarn to then stitch into the fabric.

- Callie: I'd love to have sheep one day. So maybe. So really, from a lot of what you said, the hand dyeing is a huge part of what you teach and what you do with both the yarn business and the membership from the sound of it. So what would you say has actually been your biggest challenge with the membership site?
- Felicia: The biggest challenge is time, always time. There's never enough time. I could work on this all day long and not take breaks. I am really excited about this project. Absolutely.
- I think the biggest challenge with the time is the fact that I'm creating content myself. So I'm creating content to put inside the school as courses, and workshops, and things like that. I'm also creating content. I create content every Friday, for every Friday, for our YouTube channel. And that is to help sort of gather together that common audience, the community of people who are stuck with the same situation that I am. Where feeling very just in need of more time and wanting to make all the things all the time. So I'm making content for that. But then at the same time, I'm also running the main business, which we've had since 2005. And also, we have a team of people. So there's work to be done around that.
- And also, part of what I'm trying to do with this school is to not have it just be one voice, not have it all be me teaching. So I'm pulling together a team of instructors to help teach the courses as well. So all of that requires coordination, and planning, and producing, and all of that kind of stuff as well.
- Callie: So a lot of different things that you're working on then really. And yeah, definitely. So with the yarn side of things, is that a physical shop? Do you have a premises and things for that?
- Felicia: So yeah, that is a physical studio where we do the hand dyeing. We have a team of dyers who are helping to create those yarns. And the yarns get made physically, and then packaged, labelled. We wholesale to yarn stores all over the world. So they will go everywhere. They'll go to Europe, they'll go to South Africa, to Japan, to the states. And we're shipping here from Canada in Vancouver. That's where we work. Yeah, so there's all of that that's happening in sort of a physical space. We also as part of that physical production space, we have a retail storefront that's kind of tacked onto the front of that. And then many of us on the team, we work remotely from home doing a lot of digital work and content creation, editing, and all of that kind of stuff.
- Callie: But I imagine that that's quite a juxtaposition kind of having that big physical side to the business and then the membership side alongside as well.
- Felicia: Yeah. It's actually kind of a big thing that's happening right now for us is that in September, or hopefully by September, I just got the building permit yesterday. But we are going to be moving into a new space in a couple of months. Right now, it's going to be renovated and all this kind of stuff so that way we can house more of our team and more of the content creation together with the actual fibre production and the yarn production, and all that kind of stuff.
- Callie: Awesome.
- Felicia: There's going to be one big headquarters.

- Callie: A little more streamlined that way for you I would imagine. So what's been your favourite thing about having the membership site?
- Felicia: I think that my favourite thing is for sure flexibility and independence. I have this family at home where I want to be home to help take care of them and not be sort of watching the clock. And yeah, I worked when I was very young, in my early twenties. I worked in a job where people had scheduled breaks and they would check to see what time you could go on your break. And then 15 minutes was up and you had to be back for that time. If you were a minute late, other people were watching the clock for you and telling you. And it just seemed like the most miserable way to go through life. So now, there's freedom of time in some ways, but at the same time I work a lot. So there's a little bit of that.
- The other feeling that I think is amazing is the feeling that I'm actually growing something out of nothing. And that is something that's growing and building. For many, many years through through SweetGeorgia, we ran a subscription club, a monthly subscription club. And we would create a brand new colour every single month. And I had a brand new story written up every month. And I did a piece of teaching every month to go with that project and to explain what people could be doing. And so I was doing all this teaching on a monthly basis for nine years. And every time I made a subscription box, it was exclusive so we couldn't remake it or anything like that. So we'd make it one time, and then it would go out into the world, and then it would be gone. And it was devastating to think all that work that I'd put in for a month was in the hands of people who were enjoying it. But at the same time, the effort that I had put into it was in the wind.
- So when I'm making this membership site and I'm making content for the site, I feel very strongly like what I'm building is a library. I'm making an archive of content, of knowledge, that can be referred to over, and over, and over again. And that feeling of it growing and building over time is wonderful.
- Callie: Yeah, definitely. So do you still have that subscription box or is that something that's kind of gone by the wayside, now you have the membership?
- Felicia: We stopped the subscription box in order so that way we could reallocate people's time and my time away from teaching monthly, and then in order to do this. I feel like, I mean, people really, really like the subscription boxes. So it might be something that we bring back in the future in terms of making a quarterly one, but just for members. And tying it to something that's happening inside the school. Maybe it's a course or a workshop that's happening specifically in the school. And if you would like, the materials could be provided through some sort of a box or a kit, or something like that. But to go back to the way it was before, I don't feel like is the best use of everyone's time.
- Callie: Yeah. I really like the idea of tying in with the membership though, and kind of having it as almost that optional add-on if you want us to send you everything for this. Then yeah, I can imagine that working really well, although obviously more logistics for you.
- Felicia: Yeah.

Callie: Speaking of that then. So you are running quite a big or complex operation with the yarn business and the membership. So what does the team look like? You've mentioned a few times that you have a team. So what's that actually look like for you?

Felicia: So we have a production manager who helps sort of manage all of the orders coming in, what needs to actually get made, what yarns need to get made, what colours, all of that kind of stuff. So he sort of oversees everybody who's doing the dyeing work. Everybody who's doing any labelling and packaging. We have one of our team members, she's the assistant production manager. She also does QC, but she does so much more than that.

We also have a sales manager and a marketing manager. And I have someone who is helping do all of the, a lot of the video editing for the courses and things like that. Yeah, so we just kind of grew this team very, very organically.

We also as part of SweetGeorgia, we make, I guess the first kind of digital content, we make patterns. So we make knitting and crochet patterns to teach people what to do. So we have a design director for that as well. And then she oversees collaborations with other contracted designers.

Callie: So is the team predominantly for the yarn business, or is there crossover with the membership business as well and people working on both?

Felicia: Most of the people are for the yarn business. And then there's crossover for probably about three, three of our team members are working on the membership. Yeah. Yeah.

Callie: So let's change gears a little bit now. What has worked well for you when it comes to attracting new members to the membership?

Felicia: So I think what's actually been really helpful has been the YouTube channel. And it was something that I was so scared to do in the beginning. Because I knew that I had to do it. I know that our community is very, very visual. So a lot of stuff happens on Instagram, for sure. We started the Instagram account for the school. We have an Instagram account for SweetGeorgia. All of that stuff is very, very important. But Instagram doesn't have the stickiness I feel like, that YouTube has. So I was telling you before that I've done an audio podcast for SweetGeorgia. We did that for about four seasons. And audio is great because people are listening to your voice. They hear your voice over and over again, in a consistent schedule. So I made a consistent schedule where I would release new episodes every Tuesday or every other Tuesday. So I put the podcast on hold as well, so that I could focus on doing this YouTube content.

And the YouTube content that we make for every Friday, I make it a series called Taking Back Friday. So the whole idea is that all of the responsibilities and the demands of your life, they take over your life, and your day, and your schedule. And at the end of the day, when you're completely spent and exhausted, and you've given time to your work, and your family, and your home life, and cleaning the house, and everything. That last few minutes of the day, that's when you allow yourself to maybe sit and knit a little bit or make something. And by that time, you're depleted. There's nothing left. So the idea of taking back Friday was to carve out a part of your Friday day to focus on yourself and your own

making, as a way of self-care and taking care of your mental health, really. To take care of yourself. Our School of SweetGeorgia, we abbreviate as SOS, which is an international code for help. I need help. And it stands for save our souls. And I talk a lot about how making things and crafting, working with your hands, working with colour, it's a soul saving. It's a way to kind of soothe your soul. So a little bit about that.

So I make this content every Friday called Taking Back Friday to encourage people to carve out time out of their day for this kind of self-care that involves making things with your hands. So I think that making that YouTube content and then having this core message that I feel like resonates with people who are in a similar situation, that's brought the specific audience that we're needing.

Callie: Awesome. I love that idea of the taking back Fridays and the kind of the soul soothing essentially with that crafting. So what are you doing in terms of retention and keeping the existing members happy?

Felicia: So we have a community as part of our school. It's very active. So part of that is keeping myself involved in what's going on in the community, and answering people's questions as quickly as we can. We also have other girls in our team who also chime in, and they are helping to answer questions and things like that. So just keeping it really, really lively and things like that inside the community is helpful.

We also run they're called make alongs, which I guess is kind of like a challenge, that sort of idea. But make alongs are we all start a project at the same time. And maybe it's a mystery one where you don't know what the instructions are from week to week, or maybe it's a project that everybody knows, or maybe it's kind of like a theme. So everybody's going to make socks for this month or something like that. So we kind of have ongoing things like that happening in the community, which people go from month, to month, to month.

The other thing is I think you guys have talked about in previous episodes of this show, about how when you're learning something like this, it's not something that you can learn in a couple of days. It's not something you can master in a couple of days or even a couple of weeks, or months. So you need that length of time in order to fully explore some of these things. Some of the things that people have told me is that they watched all of the dyeing courses, and then it took them a year to get over the fear of starting and to gain the courage to actually go out and get all the materials and supplies to begin. So it does take a long time. So hopefully by providing support and encouragement all along the way, that's helping with the retention.

Callie: Awesome. So what are you actually giving members when they join the membership on a month to month basis? You've mentioned the community there and things like the make alongs. Are you providing a certain amount of content each month? How does that work?

Felicia: So we are aiming to provide two new workshops every month, two new workshops or courses. So they might be with me or with other instructors. Obviously with the global pandemic, things for 2020 did shift. So we had plans invite a bunch of guest instructors into our studio in Vancouver, and we were going to film everybody. And we had to quickly

pivot all of those workshops because we couldn't travel. So those are all being delivered via Zoom right now. So we're doing Zoom webinars where the instructor is delivering from their home, and we're doing it over video. There's obviously technical challenges with all of that, but that's kind of what we're doing just to maintain the amount of content that we were trying to put out every month.

Callie: Awesome. I love that idea of actually bringing the presenters to you to actually film those courses though, or those workshops in your own studio. I really like that idea.

Felicia: Yeah. People need to see it up close and in detail. Part of the thing is there's not a lot of places to go to learn some of these skills. So I found that when I needed to go out and meet some of these instructors in real life, you have to travel to a fibre arts festival or a fibre arts conference. And you're paying retreat fees, you're paying resort fees, you're paying for airfare, all of this kind of stuff. And I wanted to make this something that makes it very accessible for people to gain access to. People who are experts and people who are doing amazing work.

Callie: And is all the content you're creating only available in the membership, or do you offer separate courses, and workshops, and things like that too?

Felicia: We have a couple of workshops that we offer as free in the membership. So you can sign up for a free membership and then there'll be access to, I think it's five or six different little mini workshops. So they give people a taste of how we put together our videos, what kinds of things we might teach. What I sound like, what I look like, how I present, all of this kind of stuff, so that people get a glimpse into how it all looks.

I do a little bit of teaching on YouTube as well through the vlog. Just telling people about what I've done or why I've done it. But a lot of the how, I don't teach dyeing on YouTube. All of that stuff happens inside the school.

Callie: Awesome. So overall then, what impact would you say having the membership has had for your life and business so far?

Felicia: That's a good question. I think it's been huge. It's been huge. So one of the things that is something that probably a lot of people are going through with their various industries is that industries are changing. Everything is shifting. Everything is changing. Everything is changing so rapidly, and it's even more so now with the global pandemic and things that are happening through that.

The fibre arts, the needle arts yarn, crafts, that whole industry is going through some transition right now. And I wanted to create a business that is more diverse. One that is not just tied to an old traditional model of making things and selling things. So it was actually basically exactly this time last year I went through a very, very long sort of strategic planning session with myself to figure out what we're going to be doing for the next five, 10 years, and future. This is part of the future vision.

So the school is not just a project or a side project of the business that we have. It's so core and central to what our future is going to be like. So when you ask what the impact is like, the impact is that this thing that we're building is the thing that I'm going to be working on

for the next five or 10 years. It's going to be huge and hopefully help to provide a more balanced overall business creating just more diversity in the business and evening things out. So that way, yeah. Does that make sense, to just even things out and not have a lot of seasonal issues that come up with when you're in a manufacturing business and there's seasons. And things come, and interest comes, and interest goes, and all of that kind of stuff by having a membership site that kind of evens and smooths out our entire business.

Callie: Yeah. It gives you a stable base essentially, I would imagine.

Felicia: Yeah. Yeah.

Callie: So is the plan for it to always run alongside the physical business? So you run the two in parallel, or have you ever considered just focusing only on the membership? It sounds like the former, that you want to continue with both.

Felicia: I think that they work very well together. So when I started working on building the school, it was really, really important for me to focus 100% of my attention on building the school so I could just get it up and running. But the more and more I see the two of them together, I see where they overlap. I see where they're symbiotic. I see where they feed each other. So somebody who's coming to us at SweetGeorgia and buying yarn, they have questions very specifically about, "Well, I don't know what to make with this yarn. I don't know what to do with it. Or I love this yarn, but I want to make a sweater, but I don't have a pattern. How do I make it to my measurements? How do I make it fit me?" So there's a lot of education that we can provide to someone in that way.

So I see more and more course content that would help customers of SweetGeorgia, but at the same time develop some of those customers into people who are interested or fibre curious people who are interested in, "What can I do with this yarn if I weave with it, what can I do with this yarn if I used it for a tapestry. What can I do with all of these other things?" Sort of helping them broaden their perspective of what fibre is and what it could be. I feel like my job is to be the tour guide to show people, "Hey, there's this cool thing over here? Have you seen this? You could do this." And to just kind of open people up to the possibilities of things beyond just knitting with it.

Callie: Yeah. I love that. So actually, that leads me to another question about the membership itself and your members. So presumably as you mentioned, you've got different workshops and things like that in there. So how do you manage the fact that you presumably have people coming in at different levels of experience, wanting to create different things? How do you deal with kind of having a membership base that might have quite a lot of differences in where they are and what they're wanting to achieve?

Felicia: Yeah, absolutely. So for the dyeing courses specifically, because that was what my focus was. I started off with making a very, very fundamental course about dyeing. So the very, very, we call it dyeing intentional colours. So it's about not just randomly splashing colour on yarn and saying, "I dyed yarn." But basically understanding how to get different intensities of colour, how to mix colours, how to properly set colours, just the fundamental foundation of that. And then providing another more advanced course of different kinds of ways of applying that dye. Again, my perspective on dyeing, it's very intentional. It's

about knowing what happens when you pour an X amount of dye on X amount of yarn. It's not randomly splashing things. Where different dyers die in different ways, for sure. So I think that the people who come to me are looking for this particular kind of information.

Felicia: Because there's actually quite a large industry of people out there who are dyeing their own yarn and selling it, right? They're selling on Etsy, or they're selling in their own shops and things like that. So one of the biggest challenges with selling in that way is wanting to make repeatable results. It's a manufacturing process, basically. You need to figure out how can you recreate this colour consistently from batch, to batch, to batch, to batch. If somebody is going to come and buy something from you in October, and then they come back to you and they want to buy from you again in December, can you make the same yarn in the same way and make it look the same? That's a lot of what I'm sort of teaching people to do. So kind of starting from the foundation and then coming up with more advanced courses, and then more advanced courses.

And we're trying to do that in all of the different niches under our umbrella. So we did that with dyeing. We're starting to do that with spinning. And we're doing that with weaving, and we're starting to do that again with knitting. So we kind of at SweetGeorgia, we just assume that everybody knows how to knit, because that's why they would come to us. They would buy yarn. But we're starting to realise that a lot of people are coming into us because they would like to learn how to knit and they don't know what to do. And they would like to buy the yarn. So we're starting to teach knitting from the very beginning as well.

Callie: Awesome. So kind of catering right from that beginner journey there all the way through. So something you touched on there about people selling on Etsy and things like that. So is your membership more geared towards people who are perhaps looking at this as a business revenue for themselves, or is it more people that are hobby based essentially? They're creating their own crafts for their own sake.

Felicia: For the most part, people are creating their own crafts for their own sake. And they're just discovering it. They're just experimenting, playing with dyeing. You can experiment by just playing with Kool-Aid, and mixing up Kool-Aid, and pouring that on yarn and seeing if you like that. That's how I started to. I poured Kool-Aid on some yarn, wool yarn and microwave it. And then it comes out and it smells like candy, and it looks really fun. And if you get hooked on that, then the next step is well, what can I do next? What dyes should I use? Where do I go from here? So we're capturing people sort of at that point. But then also, people who've been dyeing for some time who are thinking about how do I put in a process? How do I set up my record keeping, how do I set up a system, and how do I set up a dye studio? And how do I do this in a way that is repeatable, and consistent, and reliable? So there's a lot of that.

So now I'm kind of at the point where I've been asked to provide content in this way helping people with setting up their Etsy stores, because that's how I started as well. Back in 2005, my first yarn went on Etsy as well.

So how do you set up an Etsy store? How do you sell, how do you market yourself? How do you differentiate yourself? So that's what I'm kind of thinking about right now is if we provide some course content around how to set up a professional practise in crafts.

Callie: Yeah. It almost feels like that could also be something that is a separate, additional kind of product or tier for those, if that's only a subset of the audience as well. So is there anything you wish you'd known earlier when you were creating the membership or that you'd do differently if you were starting again now?

Felicia: I think that if I were to do things differently, I would have had more confidence, I think that I would have done it sooner if I had known how awesome it was going to be. I would have done it sooner. And I wouldn't have been as scared, and I wouldn't have spent so much time waffling about stuff. I spent so much time waffling, and yet I still did Patreon and Teachable, and then had to go through the process of setting up my own site, and then changed themes last year. There's lots and lots of evolution. And I think evolution is okay. Evolution is not to be scared of. You just have to go through it. You have to start somewhere, and then just keep going. Yeah.

Callie: So I'd love to know actually the approach you took with Patreon, is that something that you would recommend that people with similar ideas actually try first of all?

Felicia: That's a good question. I have a number of friends who are on Patreon right now. And they're leading fantastic, very strong communities through Patreon. I think that it can be used for the delivery of content. It can be used to deliver membership levels, membership tiers. Patriot itself is growing in a way that is more trying to make themselves like a membership platform. So I think that there's a lot of features that they're providing to content creators that can be very, very helpful, if you don't want to start from scratch and make your own thing.

I just think that for what we wanted and what we wanted our brand to be like, it was really important to have our own space, have our own home base. Yeah. But I think that the way that I use Patreon was just as a testing ground to test the idea. And doing that without too much investment at the beginning could be something that if you're just seeing if your audience is out there, seeing if anybody's interested. That might be a good way to just attract interest. And then as long as you capture all of those people so that then you can bring them along with you as you evolve and transition to the next step of the journey. I think that everybody's going to understand that this is something that is going to grow and change. And if they're interested in you, if they're interested in your content, they will follow you wherever you go.

Callie: So as you say, it's good for that idea of validation. And then that enabled you to have that confidence I imagine to kind of grow the membership into what it is now. So last question then. I'd love to know. You've touched on this a little bit already, but I'd love to know what your goals are. Where would you like SweetGeorgia Yarns to be in 12 month's time?

Felicia: In a year's time, I would love for us to be well situated in our new studio space with the whole team working together in person. To be able to have all of our pieces functioning, so our production team functioning really well in their new studio, in their new dye space.

And to have that whole system running. To sort of have a regular schedule and routine for when guest instructors are coming in, how we're filming them.

For me to do less hands-on work of me actually physically holding the camera and filming everyone, but sort of me more managing other people who are going to help with filming and with the editing. Yeah, I think that I really, really, really want to help bring more experts to the school so that way we can showcase their knowledge and provide that in an accessible way to people who would otherwise not be able to ever meet these people. So yeah, I think that that's where I see us going over the next 12 months.

Callie: Awesome. I love that. And yeah, I do like that approach with the guest instructors. As you say, we're kind of moving more towards having that consistent guest content. And yeah, the consistency with them being filmed in your studio as well though. So you presumably have that consistency of quality as well then.

Felicia: Yes. Yes. Just the same set, and same cameras, and everything. So that way we develop a workflow and a system around how to create these videos. But also, in a way that it expresses who they are in the best possible way.

I think I got some of that idea actually from one of the podcast episodes that you did with Scott, from Scott's Bass Lessons, a couple of years ago, maybe. Yeah.

Callie: Awesome. So yeah, I think that's all of my questions. It's been great to hear more about what you're working on. And I do love that you kind of running this alongside that physical business. Because for so many people, starting the membership is so that they can get away from the other things that they're doing. So it's really refreshing that you're wanting these to work alongside each other. It's not an either or, or you want this to become the business so that you can close everything else down. So I really like that because yeah, for a lot of people, just having the membership is the end goal. And it seems too difficult to run two things side by side, but clearly it's working really well for you.

Felicia: No, I think that this is a great thing for just the community for SweetGeorgia, because it gives a place for the community to congregate. Our place. It's almost like having a clubhouse for people who are customers, or our followers, or our friends, a place for everybody to get together. And yeah. And enjoy our crafts together and not do them in isolation, but to do them together.

Callie: I really like that. I love something on your website as well that I noticed before. I think you mentioned crafternoons.

Felicia: Yep. Everybody gets on Zoom and then they sit together, they knit together.

Callie: I love that. I absolutely love that. So if someone wants to check out the membership then, where's the best place for them to do that?

Felicia: So the membership site is at schoolofsweetgeorgia.com. And then our other website is sweetgeorgiayarns.com.

Callie: Awesome. And I'll put both of those links below the interview. But thank you so much for talking to me today, Felicia. It's been great to hear more about the membership. And yeah, I'm really looking forward to seeing where the next year, the next two years take you.

Felicia: Thank you so much, Callie. This is actually one of my bucket list items. Actually, I didn't tell you, to be on the show. So thank you very much.

Callie: Well it's been a pleasure.

Callie: That's all folks. I hope you enjoyed this episode, and thank you once again to Felicia for sharing her time and experience. I particularly love Felicia's journey to creating the membership site. From starting her physical yarn business 15 years ago, to writing a book teaching in-person classes and even having a subscription box before creating the School of SweetGeorgia as it is today.

I also like that Felicia's longterm goal is to keep the membership running alongside her yarn business. So often, people start membership sites to a place for existing job or business or in search of the laptop lifestyle. So it's great to hear how Felicia manages the two and plans to continue to do so. And actually, how the physical infrastructure that she has allows her to do things like bring guest experts to her studio, to record classes for her membership.

If you'd like to check out Felicia's website, head to schoolofsweetgeorgia.com, or you can see her beautiful hand-dyed yarns at sweetgeorgiayarns.com. And if you'd a transcript or show notes for this episode, then head on over to themembershipguys.com/btm40 to download those. That's it from me for another week though. I'd love to hear your thoughts on the episode over at talkmemberships.com. Thank you for listening. Thank you Felicia. And I'll be back next week with another episode of Behind The Membership.