



- Callie: On today's episode of Behind The Membership, I'm talking to Mark Asquith from Podcast Success Academy. Podcast Success Academy is just one of Mark's businesses. Today we're diving into how the membership fits into the larger ecosystem that he has, which also includes SaaS or Software as a Service and productized services as well. We're also talking about Mark's approach to freemium content and how he gives away a course that most people would charge thousands for, and the demarcation that he has between the freemium content and his paid membership. I actually love the way Mark has done this and his reasoning for doing so as well. And of course, we talk about much, much more too. So without further ado, let's dive in into this week's episode.
- Announcer: Welcome to Behind The Membership with Callie Willows. Real people, real stories, real memberships.
- Callie: My guest today is Mark Asquith from Rebel Base Media, founder of the awesome podcast hosting service Captivate, which you're listening to this on right now, alongside podcast websites and what we're most interested in today, the Podcast Success Academy. Welcome to the show, Mark. Thank you so much for joining me today.
- Mark: Hello, Callie. Good to see you and talk to you. It's been a while.
- Callie: It has. It has. I've wanted to interview for this for a couple of years now, but Mike's always had dibs on you for his podcast. I finally got you on board.
- Mark: Well, I know Mike does keep tempting me and baiting me with promises of drinks and whatever else, takeaways, but now COVID's scuppered all of that. We'll get back to it. But yes, it's a pleasure. It's good to chat.

Callie: Yeah, definitely. Now, one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you in particular is because while you have the membership side of your business, the Podcast Success Academy, you also have quite a few other recurring revenue streams that all kind of compliment each other. So could you maybe start off by giving us a bit of an overview of your overall business and the different components that you have there?

Mark: Yeah. It's an interesting setup. We run a company called Rebel Base Media, but we also run a number of other businesses that are sort of billed as loosely related via Rebel Base Media, but actually they're fully separate entities, fully separate teams and so on. The reason we do that is Rebel Base Media is our... Kieran and I, who is my co-founder as you know, you obviously know Kieran well, we like to tinker with things and we're always building things and kind of messing with ideas. We've got an audience in podcasting. That's something that I've spent... wow, six, seven, eight, nine, even longer years building, which is awful. So we've kind of got this audience. We use Rebel Base Media as this testing bed. We've got a studio in Sheffield, it's where the office is. We're very fortunate to be able to transfer, not necessarily users, but transfer goodwill and even things like cash investments from our other businesses. You can do that in a really tax neutral way.

So Rebel Based Media is our testing ground, it's our little experiment, and the academy lives underneath that. That's actually the Rebel Base Media product. But we also run these other businesses that are alongside that, so the original business podcast website, which is a WordPress managed service for podcasters, Podactivity, which is our startup in the interaction space in podcasting and Captivate, which is the main thing people know us for now, which is the host and analytics distribution platform. They're all very tightly linked, but they are all fully separate. There's a few different reasons for that one, but that's what we do. But the academy is something that I'm always fascinated by because it's always... memberships and SaaS, Software as a Service have got that much in common. They're almost indiscernible.

Callie: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Let's talk about the membership itself then. What is the Podcast Success Academy and what does it offer?

Mark: The Podcast Success Academy is a way to help people to understand the skills that no one told them that they needed to learn in order to be a successful podcaster. It's all the unseen stuff. Our backgrounds are very similar. You and I had our agencies and we worked on client services for a long time, we grew agencies, we built agencies, we've pivoted agencies, we've closed agencies and turned them into other things.

All that knowledge is still up here for me. My background is marketing and product dev and brand and product strategy. Podcasters don't know any of that stuff. I was fortunate just as you were, That's why The Membership Guys does well and Membership Academy does so well, is that you and Mike have got the coding, the marketing, the branding, the copywriting skills that you needed off the back of the agency, and I was in the same position.

But I also know a load of other people, designers, marketers, SEO experts, content creators, finance experts, anything and everything I came across in the agency days. So The Podcast Success Academy essentially teaches people how to do that. The goal is to take someone from being, really just getting started in podcasting up through launching right up to growing, and then obviously beyond that, allowing them to become what we call an audio influencer, someone that has got a strong audience, like you and I have, and known for the thing that they're known for and can do what we do. We're Rebel Base Media, which you say, "Here's my audience, here are the things that I do, which of these things resonates?" That's the ultimate is to take people through that.

So that's what the academy does. It's reasonably standard fare in terms of the content. We can talk about some of the tiers and how we set that up and why we set it up like we did, but there's nothing crazy about what we do. We don't do anything over and above what you guys do or what Scott's Bass Lessons does or any of the other wonderful memberships. It's all the same type of stuff. We've just positioned it slightly differently within our ecosystem.

Callie: So let's talk about them, because you do have those...kind of, the other sides of the business or the other businesses are more software-based, as you mentioned. So what made you decide to add to that more traditional membership element in there as well?

Mark: Well, what's funny actually, Callie, is that we... so podcast websites is very much a service business now. It didn't use to be, it used to be a little bit more of a platform. Now it's a service business. And we've got the academy, that's the educational membership, and we've got Captivate, that's pure SaaS, and we've got Podactivity that's kind of a little bit... it is SaaS, but it's more of a middleware. That's a wholly different thing, but what we actually started life as was podcast websites. I had the agency. We used to work with Adobe and Bosch, we did covers for Time Magazine and New York Time, all these weird and wonderful random things.

When I started podcasting, I started my DC Comic show back in 2012 or 2013 and built podcast websites. It was like, "Wait a second, we've got a WordPress based agency. Does it market in podcasting?" No one's really taking care of in WordPress. We'll just spin a relatively quick business. We did some affiliate partnerships with John from EO Fire, built that out, built an audience around it, did all right. But the thing that we also included was

two fold. We included backend podcast hosting, but it wasn't anything that anyone else could use except podcasts websites users.

And in order to aid in retention and actually build a community, we added what we called the academy and it was a tab inside WordPress on the left hand side, I've got the designs for it somewhere on my computer when we first did the UI for it. All these component pieces that we have now were really part of podcast websites. What we did in 2018 was we knew we wanted to build hosting and we knew we wanted to be taken more seriously as podcasting got bigger, but when you turn up at VaynerMedia or you turn up for some other conference or whatever it is you're turning up at and someone says, "Where do you come from? What's your company?" And you said podcasts websites, they just go, "Brilliant. You are a website designer." "No, no, no, actually." That was where Rebel Base Media came from, this ability to say, "Well, look, this is one facet of what we do, and Rebel Based Media is actually the slightly cooler name for it."

Now, to answer the question, so that's a bit of context, the academy actually existed inside podcast websites, we pulled it out and our strategy was that, "Look, we don't want someone to have to use podcast websites in order to be able to use Captivate, nor do we want someone to have to use Captivate in order to learn from us, nor do we want to bundle things together because bundling things together cheapens everything else." So we sort of exploded podcast websites out, kept that as it was, built Captivate and launched the academy. We very carefully rebranded everything. If you look on the Rebel Based Media site, we got a very specific set of branding for every product, completely separate color palette, but very similar insofar as certain shared elements. They all work together.

We created a membership really because it already existed as a way of building community, and really because we were already building a lot of the processes and a lot of the systems to measure success due to Captivate. We were building our funnels, we were building our measurement tests, we were building our content strategies. We were building all of these things and inevitably people kept asking, "How do I grow a show as well as start a show?" Which leads us through to what the academy is today. There was a number of different factors that led to the academy being built. But it stemmed from just already been there in podcast websites and wanting to have more of a community whilst also trying to parlay some of the knowledge from the old marketing days.

Callie: So really somebody can come to you either for all of their podcasting needs or they can just take the bits and pieces that they want, whether that's the training, whether it's the hosting, the website service and all those kinds of things?

Mark: Yeah. What's interesting about it is, and I know we'll get to the structure of the academy, is that we can give a lot more away for free in the academy because of that. Our very worst case with the academy is that it acts as a lead magnet for Captivate, and that serves 11, 12,000 podcasts. That is the very worst case is that it acts as a lead magnet, which is why we've got that flexibility to be able to have the kind of model that we've got through the academy and people enter. This is the fascinating thing with this model. People enter through different sections. They'll come through the academy and be like, "Wait a second, Captivate exists. This is brilliant. I'll use Captivate." Or they come through Captivate and they're like, "Wait a second, the academy exists. This is brilliant." Or they come through podcast websites or they come through whatever.

So the ecosystem, this idea of growing a business or a set of businesses horizontally, not just vertically, was fascinating to us. It took a lot of patience. There were people that we've still not launched them in the academy that we wanted to do three years ago, but that's all right. We'll get to that. I think patience was key. But yeah, our goal is to be a place that everyone can come to learn. If they end up buying, all well and good, you know.

Callie: You mentioned there the membership essentially being like a lead magnet for you, for things like Captivate, how are you structuring that? How are you working that?

Mark: So the academy was never intended to be a lead magnet. Our intent was to be able to help podcasters in a very distinct and different way, but not have Captivate suffer the attrition of the academy should someone decide that a membership is not for them and vice versa, not have the academy suffer the attrition if they decide to move hosts, which obviously they never do, ever. So the structure sort of came as a happy coincidence because in podcasting, we're very big on the education, you know, my Twitter is full of that sort of stuff. That's what I do. I speak all over the world, as you know, I obviously spoke at Retain about this very model. It's generally all about podcasting.

So we had to sort of create loads of content for Captivate. Content is one of our core marketing tenets. We have to create really good content. One of those pieces of content was, we need to be ranking, we need to be around for how to start a podcast. So we developed this really brilliant course.

This is what I talked about earlier about this flexibility in being able to give a lot more away than we sometimes see in other memberships. We were able to create this just absolute, ultimate 'How to Start Podcast' course. I talked about this in return how we titled it and came up with the title, very specifically created. So it's called the Podcast Launch Accelerator, which is a call back to my own podcast, so it ties into our brand. My show is the Podcast Accelerator... So The Podcast Launch Accelerator.

Through the user research, we were able to define some of the triggers that people needed. The tagline is 'How to launch a podcast, find your first 100 listeners and begin to cover your hosting costs in 20 days'. It's very specifically termed. But this freemium model that we've got came off the back of all that. We needed to create this course for Captivate, why not make it this free academy thing? Because then it's clearly not just a lead magnet for Captivate, which anyone with any sense, will just go, "That's a lead magnet for Captivate." Now they actually genuinely get a full four tier. It's got about 56, five to 10 minute videos. It's got an entire deep dive crib sheet, which a few people said is like blowing... not naming any names, but people that sell courses end in the number seven. It's blowing a lot of those away because it's just free and it's massive and it's designing, building, launching, post-launch, covering your costs, all the tech.

What they access to is this entire course- it's filmed right here in my studios as you see on the video as we're talking - I built the crib sheet myself, it's all of my knowledge on how to launch a podcast in a crib sheet, which everyone else would have to sell, which thankfully we don't have to. But they get access to the community. They get access to all the tools, the resources, all of the equipment tests that we do, everything. It's all included. Then obviously every now and again it recommends Captivate and it acts as a lead magnet as well, but it's not a lead magnet just because it's free. It's a freemium academy. This course is... the entire free tier is the best at what it does. You will not pay for a course that is better than that. That's on purpose so that people are just blown away by it. That's the structure. We landed on that freemium structure.

Now, what we then thought was, "Well, there's a real clear demarcation between starting a podcast and growing a podcast." No one knows how to grow a podcast, I'm telling you. Look at anyone, just literally Google podcast guru and pick a hundred of them, and I will almost guarantee that at least 85, 90% of them will teach you how to launch and then get really fluffy on the growth stuff, because they don't know, they've never done it. They've never ever done it. That's where we drew that demarcation. That's where the line is. You can have this stuff as much as you want, and obviously you get Captivate and all that stuff, the community exists. I'll talk about that in a second because that's a really clear thing as well.

But if you want to grow, then we've got this other stuff, which is the paid for tier. You don't have to use it. And Captivate has got all the tools that you need. It's got the single promo link, my Twitter, my content, my accelerator show. That's really, really good content for growing your podcast. But if you want this extra stuff, that's cool. It's not expensive. It's like 30 bucks a month or whatever. That was where we drew that line. That took a lot of research in how we term that and how we phrase it. There might be some changes coming up in the future. But it's a fascinating model. It is. It really is. People like it. I think people like that transparency of "all right, you're a host, but this other thing exists, and if I want

that, it's extra, but you're not pushing it down my throat." Whereas a lot of people would have to upsell something, you know.

Callie: Yeah, definitely. So I really like that you've got that really clear distinction there between the freemium being for the getting you launched, getting you started, getting your podcast up and running and then the paid tier being "okay, you've got it up and running, but how do you now grow it? How do you keep continuing that success?" I think that's a really clear boundary there between the two as well.

Mark: Yeah, it is. We even do that with our Facebook groups. We've got two Facebook groups. We've got the launch group, which again, is called the Podcast Launch Accelerator and it's got a few thousand members. It's not too dissimilar to what you do with your Facebook group. It's sort of top hot middle of the funnel kind of content. But I'm there every week. Every week, 4:00 PM UK, I'm there doing a podcast launch workshop. We talk podcast launch questions and it's just this office hours set up that we've got. But then if anyone says, "Well, what about marketing your podcasts?" I'll answer the question, but I'll not go too deep. I'll say, "Well, look, actually for anyone that uses one of our products, we have this other group, which is the growth group."

Again, a couple of thousand members. Every month, we'll do a deep dive mastermind on podcast growth. Again, it's all clearly marked. Now, that does act as a really good upsell from Captivate. Well, not an upsell, sorry, that's not true... It's an incentive for Captivate because we can say, "Look, access to the growth communities included with Captivate" because that is... it's almost like a paid group, if you like. You've got to be using our products and if you ever cancel our products, you're not allowed in the group. You physically have to be day-to-day using our products. Whereas the other group, the Launch Accelerator Group, that is a free for all, anyone can come in and ask their launch questions.

Now, what we've found that's interesting about that is that because we had added that demarcation between launch and growth, if you look at a great example, this might be someone like Scott from Scott's Bass Lessons, you can see if we do video that anyone can see, but you and I are doing this video now, Callie can see I've got a bass in the background, I'm terrible. Mike said he wanted to learn bass because it's easier than guitar. I can confirm that it is not because I am still terrible. But I'm a member of Scott's Bass Lessons. This is the way that we do things with Captivate, you would look at someone like Scott and say, "Well, wait a second." He theoretically could do something where I was beginning to play a bass to grade two, call it the knowledge level of grade two onwards is the paid stuff. You do that free up to an equivalent of grade two would be the free stuff. That's what we did.

We wanted, especially as well in podcasting, we had to have that clear demarcation because otherwise someone that would start a podcast would choose a free course that was not anywhere near as good. It wouldn't be. It wouldn't help them launch. They

wouldn't stick to podcasting. Or if they did, they'd sort of see some of our stuff and think, "Well, wait a sec, why did no one tell me about that?" We got one a while ago where someone had come on they'd bought this very popular podcasting course from a very popular set of people online. And they'd paid hundreds and hundreds of dollars for it. They flagged it to us and they were like, "These 10 modules that are vital to what I did to succeed, they've not even thought about them."

It was that ability to just really have that hard line where you say, "Look, anything prior to this line, it's free and I can give you the best version of that, that you will ever get," rather than "well, here's the watered down version. Pay for the full version." That sell is not as nice. Do you know what I mean by that?

Callie: Yes

Mark: It feels a bit yakky, doesn't it, to do that?

Callie: Yeah. So I would love to know then because you are giving a ton of stuff for free, but not only a ton of stuff for free, but a ton of stuff of, as you say, really high quality, could charge a lot of money for it, content for free. One of the things that I think a lot of business owners have an issue with, how much should I give away for free and things like that. But with memberships in particular, we see it because a lot of the time memberships are based around selling your content, selling your expertise. So has that ever been an issue for you or a concern for you where you are giving so much for free or has that always just been a bit of the bigger picture, as you say, for this is guiding people to success so that then they can make use of our other products and services?

Mark: That's an insightful question, that. So you'll know this coming from agency land... When I came out of agency land and I was used to being annoyed at spec work, especially for some of the bigger jobs, because we used to do a lot of brand work, you know. And brand work, worse than web work, is like do spec, do spec work, "How do you envisage this brand looking?" Well I envisage it to look how it will look after you've paid me for it. Like, shut up, get in the seat, you know. So I've got some strong thoughts on the right type of spec work.

So I guess when we came into the industry, it was like, "Well, we can't really give everything for free. This is valuable knowledge." But then something sort of happened a few years ago where I always kind of felt like a bit of impostery. I always felt like I had to compete with some of the big entrepreneurs, like the ones that you see online, the income reports and all that kind of stuff. And that's fine.

I always used to feel like I have to compete with them, but then a lot of them would come to me for advice on the podcast industry. I was like, "Wait a second. This is where I'm an expert." Yes, people call me an entrepreneur because I make money in different ways and have done since I was young, 23, Jesus. I don't ever want to see myself as an entrepreneur. I

don't see myself as that, I'm a small business owner. And now I'm very grateful to be classing myself as someone in the know in the podcast and industry. That took a lot of time to get my head around, and it happened in around... I guess around the same time that we started the Rebel Base Media reshape.

We set ourselves a deadline. We said, "In 2018, we've got a 15 month plan to take the old podcast websites business and build out into this Rebel Base Media ecosystem." It was a 15 month plan. We knew what the plan was, Captivate, Podactivity, the academy, the brand and community, everything. The free stuff came more naturally and we were able to move the line backwards on what we gave away for free when I realized all of that was what people wanted. That was the year that someone said, "Come and speak at Harvard," and I was like, "What? On podcasting? That's ridiculous. I'm not a surgeon. I ain't going to work for NASA. What do you need me there for?" And it was because they were interested in it and they saw me as someone that could really help.

The other thing that happened as well was that I kept coming up with these ideas. I came up with this seasonal podcasting idea. It was just something that I had an idea for and then blew up in the industry. People talked to me about that... and these are big people were like, "What is this?" Then I did this trailer idea and now everyone's doing it. We've now got people educated on my concept from three years ago, nothing wrong with that.

That's why I put it out there. They can just have it, it's not proprietary stuff. But that confidence from those three, four, five different validation points made me realize that myself and Kieran and the rest of the team, I'm never going to be short of ideas and ways to test the industry and ways to push the industry, so why not give more than everyone else away for free? Why not move that line up? Because everyone is...

Well, actually I'll rephrase this last bit. If we're going to beat down the competition, which frankly we all want to do, there's no point hiding behind the fact that in order for us to make money, someone else needs to not make money. That's how it is. It's an awful thing, but such is life, we're in business for that. And they're selling a specific thing. If I can give that away and prove that it's better than the thing that they've been sold, I can sell the other stuff, the stuff that's never going away, the stuff that will not change. It did take a heck of a lot of getting used to. I think when you realize... Like you or Mike, or you look at Scott or you look at any one of the thousand membership owners out there, they're all ahead of 90% of people that will ever buy their membership, and the other 10% are either the competitors coming to check it out to copy it, all of the tire kickers, they don't matter, it's all good. It is what it is.

I think by virtue of wanting to start a membership, you're already confident enough that you're good at what you do. I think maybe just realize that you're much further ahead than you think, and that's what allowed us to draw that line a lot further in.

Callie: Awesome. I love that approach. You mentioned your team a couple of times there. How big of a team do you actually have helping you and how many of those were actually involved in the membership side of things?

Mark: The membership is just me actually. Rach in our marketing team has helped me a little bit just basically on some of the messaging because that was tied in with Captivate, like the how to start a podcast content that we needed to do, but now I built the academy using your tutorials, using MemberPress, using some of the content... I'm fortunate enough to know WordPress well and be a lapsed WordPress dev and obviously know a web dev enough to be able to build some stuff out and tweak some of the stuff that Mike's added into MemberPress, make it work a little bit differently for podcasting. That's a very fortunate position that I've been in to have those coding skills. I do all the academy stuff, but Captivate's team is 12, we've got a team of 12 people. We've got a few people on the podcast website side, and then obviously Kieran and I on the founding side, but the academy has just been me really, which is weird. It's nice to be able to do that, actually.

Callie: Yeah, it's a little bit different to your day-to-day with Captivate and things, I would imagine. And so-

Mark: Yeah, it is. It is.

Callie: Sorry. So with the community elements, so you mentioned that you've got the two groups, the free group, and it sounds like rather than being a paid group just for the membership, it's a paid group for anybody that has access to one of your products, whether it's Captivate or podcast websites or the membership. Is it just you in there as well or do you have people helping out with the community side?

Mark: Well, do you know what? That's the bit that I do less of, and Sam and the team do that because it is largely hinged around Captivate. And remember, it has to be someone paying for the academy. The free tier doesn't get access to the growth group. That's a little bit different because a lot of the stuff that I do is stuff like this, where I'll chat to people.

I've got an expert session later with someone, I can't remember who it is, it's in my diary, where I'll go on and I talk about podcast growth or whatever in their community. So it makes it really difficult. I have to sort of pick my battles a little bit when it comes to the content and the time and stuff... So we've got better people than me in the group running that one.

Same on the launch community. My role in the launch community is very much being present on the Friday sessions and that face-to-face stuff, which I think is important for us. But we've got Sam and Danny and Ben and everyone else that's running the community over there. I do go in there. I do dip in there every couple of days and catch up on some comments and chime in on some fun things, but it tends to be run by other people. If I was doing it just through the academy, then I would just do it myself, but it is part of the wider ecosystem.

One of the other interesting, I guess, challenges with that is it does have to be running like the cohesion. For example, with that, if you've got someone that's saying something that might be an academy user, our strategy has to be if they're asking about top three ways to monetize your podcast, the strategy has to link to Captivate's content on monetization. It's like, "Well, we've got this ultimate blog post on how to monetize" as opposed to just "here's a resource from other people." That's a big and actually quite a difficult consideration is that cohesion in the paid stuff.

Callie: Yeah. What made you decide to have that combined community rather than just a community for the membership, for example?

Mark: It was for me, very important to give people the structure. And two things actually, so the structure of the course, the free tier, if you like, is very much modular, it's "go and do this thing. Here's the trailer format, here's all the supporting materials in the crib sheet. Go and do this thing." They needed a structured place to be able to get feedback on that. I didn't want to force them into paying for something just to help them to corroborate that their work was good on the free stuff, that felt unfair. The second thing is just really the old classic marketing tropes, know, like trust. No one really does that much of that when it comes down to it. A lot of online people don't do that. They want to automate everything. But for me, it's really important to stick by those old cliches because they work.

So what I'm talking about there is where I've got this presence promise. Again, it's one of those stupid alliterative... alliterative... It is, isn't it? Is it alliteration?... I'm not an English major. The alliteration on presence promise is that I will be there every Friday, and if I'm not there because I'm ill or if I'm on a holiday, one of the team will take my place. That was the other big reason for this free group was to make sure that people could get to know me and the way that I do business because if you do a podcast using Captivate, you will be exposed to a lot of our way of thinking, which might not gel so well with everyone.

We exist to help your podcast to grow, and if we tell you some things that are a little bit hard, that's our job. I don't want to go to the doctor and be told the easy truth. I want to be told the actual facts. That is a way of almost pre-filtering me to them so that they can come in my... love the launch course, get a pile of value. But do you know what, Mark, actually, I just want someone to lie to me and tell me that I can grow my podcast by tweeting once a

day. Some people do want that, but if they're getting to Captivate, migrate the show, move over, start asking for advice in the growth community, don't like what they hear because it's actual work, and then have to move out of Captivate, who's the bad guy? It's Captivate, which we don't want because we're not the bad guys in that. It acts as that filter. So that was a big part of it.

The other part of it as well was really to make sure that they knew that they were safe in the community. Safety online and making sure that they could... You know me. If someone's been an ass in our community, they get a third of a chance and if they don't stick to the rules and nice to everyone, they're out and they're never, ever getting back in. That was really important for me. And because part of my way of doing business, especially with the team is, I'm the stopper. I protect all the team, I protect all the customers. If anyone gets through the team and someone can't handle it because they're being a real tool, I'm the person that will stop that happening. It was really important to not only protect the team, but to let podcasters coming in... because you're sharing your voice, you're really making yourself vulnerable. It was really important to me to protect that ability to do that and to not let people feel silly.

A lot of podcasting communities are really tough because they... this is a real brand lesson for anyone wanting to start a good quality community, a membership. There's a lot of podcasting communities that are very, very keen on making you feel silly because to them, keeping things complicated gives them the power. We are the exact opposite. That was huge for us. The growth of the academy and the platforms is testament to that actually working.

Callie: Yeah. I love that approach. What would you say has actually been your biggest challenge with the membership overall, would you say?

Mark: I think the biggest challenge has been really understanding what people can action from the membership. So what I'm talking about there is, you can put as many expert workshops in as you want, as many resources and crib sheets, and you can break it down as much or as little as you want, you can go as macro or micro as you want with delivery of your content, but you're never going to hit everyone. You're never going to help everyone. And you're never going to help the people who don't know how to just do that first thing. That's going to be very tough to help that type of person unless you can genuinely guide them. That's been a real key is finding not only the three or four triggers that get people moving, and we've finally cracked them, we know what they are, but also triggering each of those three, four, five types of triggers in the five, six types of people that will come through the door.

You might have a range of different people. Everyone talks about avatars and personas, which is totally fine, but we might have theoretically 24, 30 different types of people because they come in and they're actually this personality type who struggles learning in

this way, but really doesn't want to get podcasting because of this thing. There might be someone that's exactly the same as them, but they're not not starting a podcast because of time, they're not starting a podcast because they're worried about hearing their own voice. Exactly the same person, but different triggers on just that one little bit. Figuring that out was the difficult thing. That took a lot of qualitative research, a lot of quantitative research through Captivate. It took a lot of intuition on my end and the team's end. Mine in particular because my job in the business is to think further forward. That's like my number one job. Having been to every major podcast conference since the dawn of podcast conferences, that's given me a deep intuition because I've been that person and continue to be that person.

That's the big thing, understanding how to get people to take action and then keep them taking it. Again, you and Mike do this really well. Again, Scott Devine does this very well with his Players Path. The other thing that I would say was a big challenge is... again, you and Scott do this well, and it's something that we do, I think pretty well through Captivate as well. Where we do this through Captivate, you guys do it through the memberships. What that is, is identifying the missing tools that are not the big tools that people need, but the bridging tools, the peripheral bits, the little tiny pieces. So as an example, over the shoulder, you see a metronome. I bought that last week because I was tired and tired and tired of being out of time. It took me 30 years to realize that I'm bad. So I bought a metronome. It's fine, it works, cost about a tenner. Scott's got one built into his website on his membership. He's also got a tuner. I've got a tuner down there somewhere. He's got a tuner built in.

He's built these bridging tools. You've done the very same thing with what you do with Memberoni. I said MemberPress earlier, didn't I? What a goon, with Memberoni. I talked to MemberPress this week about Podactivity. It's in my brain. You've got these bridging tools that make the bits that are generally either a pain in the ass or difficult. You bridge that gap for someone, and you do it for free as part of that membership. We do that as part of Captivate. We've got a single promotion link. We've got things like our... go on, what am I thinking of there? Things our repurposing stuff, things like our production calendar, default publish times, all these little bits of publishing tools that save people the heartache of having to sort it.

That was a big thing. Understanding what the triggers were to take action. It's like... you've seen those stupid videos on Twitter and so on, like TikTok, where you lose so much time watching them because they're amazing, where there is a granny on a motorbike and she puts the foot down and then hits a wall a second later. You've got to figure out how to put the foot down and how to move the wall. They're the two big things. I can't believe I just brought that up.

Callie: That's a great analogy though. I might steal that.

Mark: Yeah, do it.

Callie: So if those are the challenges then, what would you say has been the highlight or what makes the membership worth it for you?

Mark: Do you know what, there's the cliched bit and then there's a bit that pays your mortgage. I know you well enough and your audience well enough to know that we can be frank about it. And it's number one, it is the helping people. I have bad days, really bad days. There'll be some numpty online that annoys you or there's always a customer that thinks that because with Captivate, they're giving you 19 bucks a month, you've got to jump through hoops and you've got to do things you'd never do. You're like, "What are you talking about? Get in the seat." That can really flip you on your head and make you think, "What am I doing this for? I'll just get a job." I know everyone goes through that as a membership owner, as a product owner.

Now, that can be undone instantly by that email coming in from someone saying, "Holy crap, this course has just saved me 500 books and it's actually got me to launch." It's cliched, but it does really keep the willpower up, it really keeps you moving. That's very rewarding. The other thing is being able to pay the mortgage and pay people well. During lockdown, it was crap.

Lockdown was boring and it was, it was terrible for a lot of people. We lost all social elements of the business. We had to stop working together in the office. The ability to have enough cash in the bank to be able to send people 60 quid crate of beer every couple of weeks, and just stuff like that, that makes their lives... We've had people that have moved house and they've started work with us. They've progressed.

They've bought their first house. Being able to say to them, "Look, just have two weeks off. Don't worry about it. It's not from your holiday, and here is a bonus for moving in just because it's going to help you." Those things are really fulfilling because it's all the stuff that I wish someone had done for me instead of saying, "Get back to your desk. It's five past one, you've had your lunch." Shut up, Paul. He was a tool.

They're really rewarding bits. It's very cheesy, but I think the second that you realize that there are people relying on you and the membership or the product that you've created is not only helping you to pay your mortgage, but helping those people that rely on you, that is wild. That is a real cliched, but really genuine thing that happens. I know you and Mike obviously feel that every day. You'll see it in the forums and when you do your masterminds and your meetups and Retain, obviously it's like the ultimate. But it's just fascinating, isn't it? How you can have those bad days and suddenly get put back on track just from one or two little things.

Callie: Yeah, definitely, definitely. Is there anything that you wish you'd known earlier or that you'd do differently if you were starting again with the membership?

Mark: Yeah, I think I'd move that line of free, like I said, to where we've got it now. I'd done that earlier. That would've got some much more traction earlier. I also think that you... you and Mike certainly don't preach this, but a lot of people do well, it's always passive income and it's-

Callie: It's not.

Mark: No, it's not passive income. Is it easier than going out in the rain and building a house? In some ways. Is it easy? No, of course not. It's not passive. I think that's another thing that I'd tell myself as well. This would be the software side of me as well, is that the second that you've got stakeholders insofar as paying customers, the stakes are raised, you've got to turn up and you've got to deliver, but you've got to do more. The second you think you're doing too much stuff in the membership, you're probably just about doing enough.

A lot of people... and I've seen this countless times, I know you have, people that start memberships and they're like, "Yeah, it's 37 bucks a month and it's like, "Dogpreneur"- sorry if someone's got that, but it's not singling you out. I just made it up. If it's Dogpreneur and it's "We do one expert session every single month and we've got a forum that other people chip in and out of, but I'm not really there myself." That is not how to run a membership. That's how to lose a membership. That is the thing that I would tell myself early is just turn up three times as much as you think you need to. No doubt. That's huge.

Callie: So actually speaking about that then, how much time would you say the membership probably does take you on an average week?

Mark: For me, it's a little different because of Captivate and being very, very fortunate to be able to have the team running the community side and the social stuff. If I was to pull that back in house, it would be a full-time job. Granted, it would be a full-time job that I would probably do for an hour at night and go and... like this week, I've got to put some plasterboard on my bathroom. I would do that between the hours of 9:00 and 12:00. I would have the flexibility to do it when I want to, but there's no doubting that it's a full-time job. Does it have to be? No, it doesn't. But find me one membership owner that works less than full-time hours, but expects the membership to deliver full-time salaries. Everyone expects that. I can't find anyone that doesn't expect that. Regardless of them working 10 hours a week, they still expect 60 hours per week results. That does not map. Until you've scaled and you've got a decent team, you can't ever take your foot off.

Callie: Yeah. As we start to wrap up then, my final question, I think would be, where would you like the Podcast Success Academy to be in 12 month's time? What are your goals?

Mark: I think it's really about... I want this to be able to pay, and it doesn't right now for me because it's just I do it and I'm lucky to have Captivate. I want it to be able to pay for a small team's mortgages, their lifestyles, their entire livelihoods. I want someone to be working on that and them to be running a business how they want to run it with my steer. That's not me delegating, that's me genuinely saying, "This is something that you can own within this business ecosystem." Because one of my bigger goals is to help people that aren't entrepreneurial or don't know how to get started or worry about the risk of being an entrepreneur, is to help them to achieve that stuff because a lot of people want it, but are scared to take the leap and are scared and don't know what to do. I've always wanted to do that, wanted to do it in the agency, like set up a small agency with a young designer and a young dev and say, "I will help you, but this is your business." It's the same thing with this. That's what I want it to be.

I would normally give the cliche around just helping every podcaster it can, but that's inevitable. We shouldn't be turning up if that's not the case, but I'd love it to be paying like two or three young people that can run it and really learn from it and benefit podcasters as well. I'd love it to be just paying their lives and them have a really good life off it.

Callie: I really love that idea. It's almost that paying it forward, but still, as you say, overseeing it yourself, essentially.

Mark: That's a sign of getting old, Callie, and I'm like, "Yeah." Before, in my twenties, I was like, "Yeah, I want to be earning loads of money. I want to be retired by the time I get to 29. I want to have two Xboxes." But now it's like, "Yeah, I just want the youth of today to have a good life." Man, I'm getting old.

Callie: It's because we're all approaching 40 now as Mike likes to keep reminding me.

Mark: Don't even. Terrifies me. Terrifies me.

Callie: On that note though, before we go off down complaining about how old we are, if somebody wants to find out more about you, check out the membership and things that, where's the best place for them to do that?

Mark: Probably Twitter, actually. Just @MrAsquith on Twitter. I'm not one of those people that give loads of calls to action. If you go over there, you will find everything else and we can have a chat as well. So Just @MrAsquith on Twitter.

Callie: Awesome. I'm sure you'll be back at all the podcast conferences again once we are allowed out of the house as well.

Mark: Oh, I don't know. I've become much more introverted. I'm like, "No, no, no. I don't want to do the seeing people for 10 hours a day." But I know the second that I'll get an email from Virgin "You can now book flights," I'll be back on them. I'm looking forward to seeing you two in person again. It's been too long.

Callie: Yeah. It'd be lovely to catch up properly. I just want to thank you again for joining me today. Lots of really interesting insights there. I think we could have probably talked for a lot longer as well because I know you've got a lot of great information that you can share about podcasting memberships and business in general as well.

I just want to give a little shout out to Captivate as well while you're on here. This isn't a sponsored podcast or anything like that, but we do use Captivate ourselves for this podcast, and it's an awesome podcast host. If you're a podcaster, you want to start a podcast, then make sure you check out Captivate for your podcast as well.

With that said, thank you so much for joining me today, Mark. It has been an absolute pleasure to talk about how you're using your membership to support your customers and coach their success throughout your entire ecosystem, as you said as well.

Mark: Well, thank you very much. It's good to chat and get to see you. Like I said, it'd be nice to do it in person, but yeah, thank you very much. It's always a pleasure.

Callie: And we're done. Thank you so much for listening and thank you to Mark for joining me for this episode. While not everyone will want the kind of multi-business approach that Mark has. If you do, I think Mark and all he is doing at Rebel Base Media is a shining example of how you can create a cohesive ecosystem of what at first glance may seem quite disparate parts, and more importantly, do it in a way that has the best interest of potential customers at heart, rather than being a constant selling machine.

To find all Mark's links, download the transcript of this episode or get the show notes. Head to the membershipguys.com/btm46. Remember to hit subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts to be the first to hear when our next episode drops next week. For now though, it's bye for me.

Announcer: If you enjoyed this week's episode, we invite you to check out membershipacademy.com. The Membership Academy is the essential resource for anyone at any stage of starting, growing and running a membership website. Whether you're still trying to figure out what your idea's going to be or whether your website is already up and running and you're just looking for ways to grow it and attract new members, then the Membership Academy can help you to get to the next level. With our extensive course library, monthly training, exclusive member only discounts, perks and tools, and a supportive, active community to help you along the way with feedback, encouragement and advice, the Membership Academy is the perfect place to be for anyone looking to start, manage, grow a successful membership website. Check it out membershipacademy.com.