

Become A Blogger

Presents:



By: Leslie Samuel



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Introductions

[Intro by Guy Kawasaki, Gideon Shalwick, and Farnoosh Brock]

Hello, hello, hello and welcome to another episode of [Learning with Leslie](#), the podcast where you learn, I learn, we all learn about how to build an online business with a blog. No, I'm not talking about one of those blogs that will fall by the wayside when Google has a mood swing. I am talking about one that will thrive no matter what gets thrown at it.

I'm your host, Leslie Samuel, from becomeablogger.com where we're changing the world one blog at a time and as usual, I have another exciting episode for you today.

At the beginning of this month, I launched a membership site for my Biology blog and man, it has been a wild ride. I've learned so much about what it takes to do something like this. Last week, I posted an [interview with Leah Fisch](#) about how she does her membership site. I decided to take the same model, tweak it a bit and apply it to my monetization strategy for my Biology blog.

Well, there has been a lot of good and there has been some bad. But, all in all, it has been a great experience. So, I'm going to share with you thirteen things I learned from launching my membership site. That is what I'm going to be talking about today.

Yes indeed, as I mentioned I launched a membership site at the beginning of this month, just a few weeks ago. So, let's see. Today is the 19th so, I launched it maybe two and a half weeks ago and man, it has been interesting. That's what I want to get into in this episode because there has been a lot that has transpired so much that I learned so many valuable lessons that's going to help me, and I hope that by listening to this, it's going to help you.

No big announcements. One little bit of a change that I just want to announce because there might be something that you'll notice, if you are watching or listening to his podcast on your phone or even if you're on the blog listening to it, I have a new cover graphic, a new podcast

graphic for my podcast episodes. You can check that out. You can just come to the blog and go to the podcast page and you will see it. I just wanted something new, something fresh to spicing things up a little bit. Tell me what you think about it so, you can come back to either this episode or any of the episode. I don't care where you go.

Oh wait, all the other episodes aren't updated as yet. So, this is Episode 152, becomeablogger.com/episode152 and you'll see the new graphic and you can let me know what you think. It's at the bottom of the show notes.

What the Interactive Biology Membership Site Is and What I've Learned in the Process

All right so, I launched this membership site. First, let me tell you a little bit about what this membership site entails. One of the big things that I know is that people that come to my blog, my Biology blog are interested in Physiology and they are also interested in Anatomy. Yes, there are a number of other things that people come for but, those are the main topics because that's the content that I have been creating over the last few years.

So, when I did a survey a few weeks ago, no wait, I guess by now it's a few months ago, I think it was two months ago, to see what my audience was really struggling with, most of the topics that came up were related to Anatomy and Physiology.

So, I decided that that is what I was going to focus on for my membership site and the membership site goes like this, if you sign up for a membership, I started it at \$27 per month and now, it's \$47 a month, you get to come on weekly live webinars, live sessions where we go over one particular topic in Anatomy and Physiology and first, I do a little presentation about 30 minutes on the topic and then, we have Q and A.

Any questions you want to ask, you can ask them right there and hopefully, I know the answer and I can give you the answer and if not, I'll find out the answer and I'll bring it back to you. That's one of the main aspects.

Number two is there's a Facebook group and the members in the Facebook group, it's a private exclusive Facebook group that they get to be a part of so that, if they have question, they can ask me, they can ask each other, and we can all learn and grow with our Anatomy and Physiology. Doesn't that sound exciting? I think it sounds exciting.

I know what some of you are thinking right now, “Oh man, that is so boring.” Those of you that are thinking that, shame on you. Yes, that’s it [*laughs*]. No, I’m joking. You know what? Different strokes for different folks.

That’s kind of like the core of the membership site. You get to get beyond this live review sessions. We cover a topic. You ask your questions. And then, also you get to be a part of the Facebook group.

In this process, there are a lot of details in that and we’ll be fleshing out some of those in this episode but, in this process, I’ve learned a lot. So, what I’m going to do right now is just dive into the things that I have learned and hopefully, you get value from it.

#1: Don’t always assume people know what you’re talking about.

What do I mean by that? All right so, I decided to launch this membership site by doing the first session as a webinar which is what they all are but, doing that for free and inviting my audience to it.

Now, I had about 400 and something people sign up for the webinar which is pretty good but, when I sent out the invitation for the webinar, the number one complaint I got was, and this is funny to me but, it was very enlightening, the number one complaint was, “I live in X,Y,Z company. I am not able to come. When you reach in my area, please can you let me know.”

Here’s the thing. I said I was doing a webinar. A number of people had no idea what a webinar was. So, instead of saying, “A live webinar,” I could have said something like, “An online class,” or, “A workshop that you can attend from the comfort of your own home.”

What ended up happening was I had to send out a number of clarification emails because a number of points along the process, I had said things that my audience didn’t even understand what I was talking about. But, because I am so used to talking about webinars, I’m so used to talking about those types of things, I assumed incorrectly that incorrectly that everyone knows what they are.

So, if you are launching a membership site, not just a membership site, whatever content you are creating, whatever products you are creating, make sure you come down to the level of your audience and use words that they will understand. It’s important to think through who they are and to use the appropriate words for their level of understanding. That was the first lesson that I learned. It was funny to me to get those emails.

“I’m sorry I can’t come because I’m in China. I can’t come because I’m in Europe,” or wherever the case might be. It was just interesting for me.

That’s number one.

#2: Don’t be afraid to email often if you are providing value.

Number two is a big one for me personally and that is, if you are providing value, don’t be afraid to email your list often. I’m going to say that again. If you are providing value, don’t be afraid to email your list often.

This is something we get sick of. I get sick of a bunch of internet marketers sending me a bunch of emails and oftentimes, that makes me unsubscribe from their emails. But, what I have come to realize is that depending on your niche, a lot of people, especially outside of Internet Marketing, of course my blog is Biology so that’s way outside of Internet Marketing niches, they appreciate the emails that I am sending them because it’s something that is valuable to them.

Of course, there are going to be people in between that are going to get upset and that’s a part of the process. People are not going to always like what you do. But, what I found is the majority of the people on my email list, and I have an email list right now of about 19,000 people, majority of the people on my email list want me to email them. If I don’t email them then, they feel as if I’m not sending them a bunch of value. So, I was hesitant to do this but, every time I sent out an email, I got more thanks.

“Thank you for this and thank you and thank you. Thank you for the reminder. I forgot about the webinar but, now I remember because you sent this additional email.”

You want to make sure that you are giving them the value that they signed up for and if you have something that’s extremely valuable for them, don’t be afraid to send it to them.

#3: People outside of Internet Marketing don’t always understand marketing.

People outside of Internet Marketing, once again, and this is something that I love, they don’t always understand marketing, what do I mean by this? Okay, so whenever I send out an email to my list, it seems as if a ton of people think that I’m sending email to them personally, like I’m sending them an individual email.

As a result of that, I get a lot of responses. Was it yesterday or the day before? No, the day before. I sent out an email to give out a Study Guide that I created. I got like, I don't know, between 100 and 200 emails back from people talking to me, thanking me for the Study Guide and telling me different things, and asking me different things, thanking me for sending it to them individually, even though it's a part of an auto-responder, it's part of a broadcast message that I'm sending out to everyone that signs up. There are some leverage there but, there's also some transparency that you might need to take into consideration, letting people know, depending on the email that this is, or you're receiving this email because you signed up for this list or this resource and that kind of stuff.

But, it's kind of cool to see that people are not only finding value in the email but, they feel as if I am relating to them personally, which to a certain extent, I am but, I am not used to that type of response.

For example, when I said something to my Become a Blogger list because people on the Become a Blogger list, most of them, or many of them are on many lists and they are used to getting these automated messages so, they know that it's not something that I'm sending individually to them. So, it's just kind of neat to see that difference. It's one of the reasons why I'm so glad that I have a blog that's outside of teaching people Internet Marketing. That's tip number three.

#4: Be prepared for the unexpected.

Oh my word! Oh man, coming up to the launch of this membership site was probably the craziest time that I ever had when it comes to launching anything online. Number one, just before that, someone hacked into my server and caused a lot of damage. When I say, "caused a lot of damage," is it affected my Wordpress sites. It also affected my emails when I send out an email or when my system generates an email, it never gets received because of the fact that someone hacked into the server and was using it to send a bunch of SPAM email. So, my IP address got blocked.

What that basically means is that when an email comes from the server, that my blogs were hosted on, nobody ever received it. That's a huge issue because there are a number of things on the site. As a part of this, that depended on the emails being sent. That's how people get added to my list. That's how people were able to get into my membership and all that stuff. So, there were a ton of things and I had to do a lot of workarounds. I had to spend extra money to get people to come on live calls with me to try to fix things. Some of it got fixed. Others did not

get fixed. I had problems with the payment processing that I was using and then, I had to end up just using only Paypal.

It was headache after headache! I did not prepare for the launched webinar. This is crazy but, I didn't prepare for the launch webinar until 30 minutes before the webinar.

I say all of these to say unexpected things can and will happen. Just be prepared for it.

When they are happening, you can respond in different ways. You can freak out but, you know what? When it came down to it, I knew that freaking out would not accomplish anything so, I decided not to freak out and just believe that everything was going to work out.

I was prepared to simply send out emails from my Aweber, explaining the situation. I was prepared to add people to my membership manually when they signed up so, just sit there by the computer waiting for a payment to come through and then, just going in my system and adding them manually. There were so many things that I had to think through as to what I would do if things didn't work out.

Fortunately, by the end of it all, I was able to work it out and we did the launch and the launch went relatively well. So, be prepared for the unexpected. If you are launching something of value, unexpected things can happen, that's okay. If you make mistakes, that is okay. Admit to your mistakes. If there are technical difficulties, that's okay. Communicate those technical difficulties. People are generally very understanding if you are honest and upfront with it. That's number four. Be prepared for the unexpected.

#5: You don't need a lot of content to launch a membership site.

When I launched the membership site, there was a welcome video in the members' area. That is it. Nothing else. Because what I'm doing is I'm building the content as I go. So, I recorded the first webinar and I launched a membership site. The next day, we had that first webinar posted in the members' area. The next session, we recorded and then, we posted that in the members' area and I'm building this as I go.

I have a webinar tonight. I have not created the content for it as yet but, I will create the content for it and then, I'm going to make it happen and then, I'm going to add it to the members' area. Once again, you don't have to have everything done. You don't have to have a lot of content. This is a good way for you to build it, at least for me, it works for me, build it as I go.

The great thing is it does not take a ton of work because I've taught Anatomy. I've taught Physiology so, I have a lot of resources. I already put together from the classes that I teach. So, I'm just re[working some things, packaging them, and posting them in the members' area, doing the live sessions and building it as I go.

So, you don't need to have a lot of content to launch a membership site.

#6: You don't need to have everything figured out. Just the first week.

Secondly, which goes along with this one that we just spoke about is you don't need to have everything figure out. All you need to figure out really is the first week and that takes a huge load off of you. At least for me, it takes a huge load off me. I knew what I was going to do the first week. Beyond that, I don't really know. What I'm doing is I am getting their feedback and their input as to what they need and based on that, I plan the rest of the weeks. When I finish doing a webinar, I get their feedback.

What did you like about it? What didn't you like about it? What do you wish that I did better? Where can I improve? And, I'd get feedback from that and I use that to determine what I'm going to do next. So, you don't need to have everything figured out in advance. Just have the first phase figured out and for me, the first phase was the first week, and you move on from there based on customer feedback.

Let me recap, number one, don't always assume people know what you are talking about; number two, don't be afraid to email often if you are providing value; number three, people outside of Internet Marketing don't always understand marketing; number four, be prepared for the unexpected; number five, you don't need a lot of content to launch a membership site; and number six, you don't need to have everything figured out, just the first week or the first phase, whatever that phase is for you, whether it's a week, whether it's a month, just have the beginning figured out and then, use feedback to continue on.

#7: Sales copy doesn't have to be complicated -- What are the benefits?

You can spend a lot of money in copywriting and in the future, I might invest in having a professional copywriter go through my content and make sure that I am hitting everything that I need to hit to maximize the number of people that are actually purchasing.

But, for this initial phase, I tried to let it not be as complicated. I just focused on one main question. What are the benefits to someone who signs up for my membership site. That is it. What will they benefit? You want to be clear about that. That is something that can evolve. Actually, when I had my sales page, this was after the launch, I took it to my mastermind group and they looked at it and they just ripped it apart. There were some things that they absolutely hated. They told me about it and I made those changes.

You know what? Now, it's a little better. That's going to continue to happen, and I'm going to continue to make it better but, to launch, you don't have to have the most elaborate set up. Have something out there that you can start with, work with, continue to improve, and make it better.

"Continue to improve and make it better," that's like the same thing twice [*laughs*]. Anyhow, you get the point. All right, so sales copy does not have to be complicated, that's number seven.

#8: Get continuous feedback from your audience and make improvements.

This is something I have spoken about but, I want to mention this as a separate point because I think it's that important. Get continuous feedback from your audience and make improvements.

When I launched the site, I got a lot of great emails telling me how awesome it was and so on but, I got two emails that were... I mean, they just ripped me apart. One person said, "You know, you have a lot of potential but, this thing is just not good."

And then, they went on to elaborate on what about it that was not good. You know what? Some of the points, I didn't really care about because I wasn't trying to save the world. I'm trying to help people with something specific but, there were a few things that I thought were really valuable.

One of the persons that emailed me, very respectful, and had some great things to say. I want to tell you about some of the things that he said because I thought it was so valuable.

Number one, he said, "I feel as if you're not really letting us know. You're not defining what level the content is at." He said he was unclear as to whether it was for elementary students, secondary, graduate students, undergraduate students. He said I didn't make that clear so, it's

confusing as to whether this is going to be valuable for the person that is watching this webinar, or whatever the case might be, reading the sales copy.

When I read that, I was like, “Man, he is spot on! I really do need to work on that.” And, I started to work on that and I made that a little better, and I will continue to work on that. And, he gave me some other feedback but, that’s one of the things that really stood out to me. You can get these types of emails and be like, “You know what? I don’t care what you say. This is my program and I’m going to do it my way.”

No. You don’t want to do that. If the feedback is good feedback, use that feedback to make your program better. So, get continuous feedback from your audience and make improvements based on that feedback.

Another thing that happens as a result of that is they get to feel a part of the process and that’s always a good thing. That’s number eight.

Number nine, this is one of his main points were and I just said it--

#9: Make sure you are clear about who your target audience is, what they want and where to find them.

Just like he was mentioning, I needed to define what level my content is going to be at so that, people can be extremely clear about whether this is something for them or not for them.. All right because you don’t want the wrong people signing up. Yes, okay you might make some money off of them but, that’s not what your ultimate goal is. Yes, you want to make money but, your ultimate goal is to make sure that the people that are signing up are getting value from it. You are helping them out in some way.

So, you want to make sure that you are clear about who the target audience is and that you have that clarity in your sales copy, in your promotions, in your emails, and all that stuff.

What they want, this has to do with the continuous feedback, I did a survey in the beginning to find out what my audience was struggling with and that really helped. And also, I said, as a part of that and where to find them.

One of the biggest things that I learned from this process. I decided to start this membership site with a very specific topic, Anatomy and Physiology. It’s narrow. It’s not all of Biology even though that is where I want to go eventually but, I decided to start small and then, expand from there.

I'll be talking about that in some future episodes in terms of the plans that I have on how I want to implement those plans, in terms of involving multiple teachers, and building systems so that, eventually, I'm not the one that's creating the content. I'm the one that's building the business.

We'll talk about that in some later episodes.

But, what I realize is, okay so, I have a list of 19,000 people. Of course, everybody isn't going to be responsive. When I send an email, I probably get about 6000 people opening that email and a few thousand people taking some type of action.

The people that sign up to that list have signed up over the last few years. Many of those people signed up because they wanted to know about Anatomy and Physiology because they were in that class at that time. They are no longer in that class and no longer need Anatomy and Physiology tutoring or the Membership site that I am doing right now. And, that is okay.

But, I had an expectation in terms of how many people were going to sign up, and I got a lot of feedback from the people on my list saying, "Man, I love what you are doing and if I were still in Anatomy and Physiology, I would definitely be signing up."

So, my target audience for the membership site that I am doing right now is not as much the people on my list but, the people that are coming to my site right now. When I did the first part of the launch, targeting the people on my list, I got a decent number of sign-ups. I think I got like 50, 12, or 13 people signing up. But now, I need to focus on targeting the people that are coming to my site for the first time because more than likely, they are dealing with Anatomy and Physiology right now and they are going to be the ones who sign up, or a certain percentage of them are going to be the one to sign up.

So, make sure you know who your target audience is, what they want, where to find them. And, for me to find them is targeting the people that are coming to my site for the first time or they are relatively new to my site.

That's point number nine.

#10: Use the same content in multiple ways for optimum value.

So, we do this weekly sessions but, not only do we do these weekly sessions, I upload the video in the Members' area that they can watch or they can download. I convert it into an MP3 so that, they can listen to it in their car. I have the episodes transcribed and I post that in the members' area so that, they can download that and read along, if that's what they want to do, or if an individual... I have some deaf individuals that use my site. They might not get as much

value from the videos and the audios but, they might get more value from the transcripts, and that's fine.

You can use the same content in multiple ways to provide even more value. That is something that I highly recommend. That's number ten.

Number eleven, we got three more to go, since this 13 ways...

#11: Do not try to re-invent the wheel -- Use what's there.

I could have hired developers to come up with this elaborate membership site system or, I could have built a community on my site where people could interact and then, I'd have to deal with the technical difficulties there.

There are a bunch of different things I could do but, I decided to use systems that are already out there and already established that make it easier for me to still provide the value, to focus on the value and not as much on the technology aspects.

So, for example, I'm using [Digital Access Pass](#) which is a plugin that you can use for Wordpress. It manages the membership site. I'll be sharing more details about this in the future. It does a very good job. It manages most of what I need it to manage. And then, for the community aspect, I decided to just use a Facebook group.

That made life much easier. If you set up a forum, that can work but, that's much more tech to deal with and I wanted things to be as easy as possible, pretty much everybody is on Facebook these days and they understand the platform. There's nothing new for them to learn. There's no re-inventing of the wheel there. It's just using systems that are already there, already established. That makes things much easier.

So, don't try to re-invent the wheel. Use what's already there.

Number 12, so we only have two more and then, we're done!

#12: After the launch is when the REAL WORK begins.

Oh man! That is when the real work begins. The launch was hectic. And, I had to do a lot of things because it was in a short period of time. However, now is when I am thinking strategically. I am implementing things to make this go smoother, to get more opt ins, to get more sales and this is going to be a continual process.

I have to work on my sales pages. I need to work on my squeeze pages. I need to work on my copy so that, the content that I have on those pages, I need to work on conversion so that, a higher percentage of people that are visiting the site end up signing up for the membership site.

By the way, I call the membership site, “The Anatomy and Physiology Academy.” I hadn’t said that earlier but, now you know.

This is where the real work begins. I am excited to be able to go through this process and share with you all of the things that I am learning along this process. It’s going to apply not just to membership sites but, to monetizing your blog in general, whether you’re creating a membership site or creating products or even selling affiliate products. There are going to be lessons that I’m going to share that’s going to help you with all of that.

#13: Track everything.

I’m going to say that again, track everything. Track the number of people that are opting in. Track the number of people that are making purchases. Track where those people are coming from. For every link that I put, everywhere, wherever I put that link, so I have an eBook, a Study Guide that I give to my list, I have a link in the footer, I have a link on page 3, I have a link on page 61, and all of those links are trackable.

The way I do that is, if you do a Google Search for Google URL builder, it’s going to take you to the Google URL builder. You can put in the URL that you are going to be directing people to, you can give it a campaign name. So, for example, I have a campaign that’s called the footer of my eBook so that, when I go into Google Analytics now, because I use that tracking link that I got from the Google URL builder, I can see exactly how many people came from the footer link in my study guide.

I can see exactly what percentage of those people ended up purchasing or what percentage of those people opted in to my mailing list, or well, actually, they are already on my list if they got that but, you get the point.

Every link that I post, whether it’s a link in my navigation bar, whether it’s a link in my signature, in my email signature, in the eBook on Facebook, I now use the Google URL builder so that, I can track my campaigns and see exactly how each of them are performing.

That can then, in the future help me to make improvements. It can then, in the future, help me to get a good idea of what is working and what's not working, get rid of what's not working and focus on the things that are working well.

So, track everything.

Recap

Those are all the points. I'm going to recap one more time and then, do the outro and we're out of here.

1. Don't always assume people know what you're talking about.
2. Don't be afraid to email often if you are providing value.
3. People outside of Internet marketing don't always understand marketing (that can be a good thing).
4. Be prepared for the unexpected.
5. You don't need a lot of content to launch a membership site.
6. You don't need to have everything figured out. Just the first week.
7. Sales copy doesn't have to be complicated. Focus on the benefits.
8. Get continuous feedback from your audience and make improvements.
9. Make sure you are clear about who your target audience is, what they want and where to find them.
10. Use the same content in multiple ways for optimum value.
11. Don't try to reinvent the wheel – Use what's there.
12. After the launch is when the REAL work begins.
13. Track EVERYTHING!.

Outro

Those are some valuable lessons. I hope you got value from them. I know I did and I will continue to learn more and continue to share with you. Thank you so much for listening. I hope you are enjoying this podcast. If you are, hey do me a favor. Go to iTunes.

Becomeablogger.com/itunes and leave me an honest review. It helps to get me more exposure for the podcast so that, we can accomplish this goal of changing the world one blog at a time.

And, if you are trying to change the world, if you are trying to create content, inspire others, and even change the world, head on over to my free blogging course at freebloggingvideos.com.

Let me tell you what happens when you go there. You get to watch some videos. These videos, you're going to follow me as I show you exactly what I have done, or what steps I have taken to build my blogs into successful online businesses, how many others have done the same, and how you can do the same -- freebloggingvideos.com. It's free. It's actionable and it's awesome. That's all I got for you in this episode. We are 35 minutes in and I hope you got 35 minutes of value.

Until next time, Leslie Samuel from becomeablogger.com, changing the world one blog at a time. Take care and God bless!