

What You Need To Know Before Creating A Membership Site

So you want to set up a membership website... That's awesome!

The membership site is, by far, one of the best business models in the online marketing world. For several reasons:

Recurring Monthly Income



Once you sell a membership, you continue to earn money from that member each and every month, for as long as he or she remains a member.

On average, it's about 5-7x more expensive to acquire a customer than to keep him/her. So keeping a customer as long as possible with a valuable membership site makes great business sense.

Increased Perceived Value

Selling a downloadable eBook is one thing... But selling access to a members area full of valuable content with an engaged community of likeminded folks has a WHOLE different vibe!

It's like the difference between watching a movie at home on Netflix with a bowl of microwavable popcorn, in your underwear, and going to a movie theatre with your good friends.

Both experiences contain the same advertised content (the movie, itself) but are *vastly* different in the value they bring to your life. **The nature of the experience even influences your perception of the content itself as being valuable or not.**

If you can create a thriving and engaged members area, the perceived value of your membership site will rise considerably. But unlike a crappy movie that you'll forget about if you had a good time with your friends, it goes without saying that you should only ever create extremely valuable products that solve REAL problems people have. *A good member's area won't make up for a poor product.*

Community and Exclusivity

People like to be part of a community, especially if it's an exclusive group of like-minded folks. It gives people the feeling that they're part of something special (and ideally, they are), and that they're making progress on their goals by surrounding themselves with others who share their passion for ...golf, or playing guitar, or training dogs, or internet marketing, or WHATEVER niche you happen to be in!



Freedom to Flow

Unlike an eBook or a 'finished' information product of some sort, a membership site allows you to continually 'pivot' as you learn more about your niche and as your niche changes and evolves. It's like the difference between a 'relationship' and 'relating'. One is static, fixed and bound to stagnate. The other is dynamic, aware, alive.

For instance, I have a video membership site on keyword research (www.SmartKeywordResearch.net). When Google made major updates to its search engine algorithm, all I had to do to make sure my members had the most current information on this topic was to add a few new videos and delete some

no-longer-relevant videos. Then all I had to do was to send an email to my members to let them know some important changes had taken place and they should log in to the members area to get updated. Simple, right?

If this were a packaged info product, all bundled up and zipped into a file, it would have been an enormous pain in the gluteus maximus to update my members. *After all, what was I going to do, send updated versions of the eBook to them EVERY time an important update came along...?*

As you can see, thanks to the openness and flexibility of the membership site model, you can update, change and improve the content of your product with minimal hassle.

So this business model is really an investment in your laziness! ;-)

Perfect Platform to Sell

Once a member is logged in to the members area, you can offer him or her *additional* products or services that complement your own and would be useful to them. You can market private coaching calls at a high rate (since you're already perceived as the expert), or promote affiliate products or market other products of your own. The possibilities are really only limited by your imagination...

You may even find that members keep asking the same kinds of questions and facing the same kinds of problems over and over.

Or they may even outright clamor for you to release a new product. **Clamoring customers = awesomesauce.** Talk about market research done for you!

Built in Psychological Triggers

Psychological triggers are important in shaping peoples' perception of you as an expert and in persuading them to buy from you. In fact, these triggers can often do all the 'persuading' FOR you.

2 of the most important triggers are social proof (#1) and authority (#2), and they're both built right in to the membership site model.



Think about it...people come and post comments in the members area, which proves to OTHER members that people use/like/get value out of your product. Social Proof - check.

Then you respond with helpful suggestions, tips and advice, which further establishes your authority in the niche. Authority - check.

It's a virtuous cycle that creates more engagement, more trust and more inclination to buy from you and take your recommendations. And if you provide "massive value", then *everybody wins*.

...You can probably think of many more reasons why a membership site is a great way to make money online.

What does a membership site 'look like'?

Here's the typical user flow:

- ==> Prospect sees sales page
- ==> Clicks buy button
- ==> Completes payment
- ==> Sees a 'thank you' page
- ==> Checks email and gets login info
- ==> Logs in
- ==> Views content available for the membership level he/she purchased

And here's a brief description of the pages your customer sees:

Sales Page - This is where you pitch your offer to the prospect. He or she either decides to purchase or not. If they decide to purchase, they'll click "buy now" or "add to cart" and then go to the purchase page.

Purchase Page - This is where they enter their credit card info or paypal info and pay.

Thank You Page - Once they've paid, they'll typically be sent to a thank you page. This is where you thank them for making the purchase, and let them know exactly how they can access the content.

A good membership plugin such as [Digital Access Pass](#) will automatically register new members once they've paid, and instantly send them login information via email.

So you'd probably have something like this on your 'thank you' page:

"...please check your email inbox for your login information to the

members area. All of the content is waiting for you in there.."

Members Login Page - Now the member goes to the login page, enters their login info, and is sent to the members area.

Members Area - This is where your new member accesses all the content he or she just paid for.

Let's say your sales page offers **Bronze**, **Silver** and **Gold** level memberships that are each a different price and contain different content. If somebody buys the silver level, **they will only be able to access the content you put in the silver level area**, but they will NOT be able to access the content in the gold level area. They also won't be able to see bronze.

However, you may decide that you want gold members to have access to all silver and bronze content as well. No problem, a good membership plugin will do this.

Content - Depending on the kind of content your membership website contains (video, audio, articles, downloads, etc.) you can organize your members area just like a cabinet and put things into their designated "drawers".

The way you want this to look is totally up to you. I prefer to use the [OptimizePress Wordpress Theme](#) for my clients and personal projects because it creates really nice looking members areas and is designed specifically with the online marketer in mind. **See a screenshot from one of my projects on the next page:**



Course Contents

Back To Members Area

Sixpack Success eBook

The Exercises

Minimalistic Protocols

Bonus Content

Audiobook Version

eReader Versions of eBook

Course Contents



[Sixpack Success eBook](#)

[0 comments](#)



[The Exercises](#)

[0 comments](#)



[Minimalistic Protocols](#)

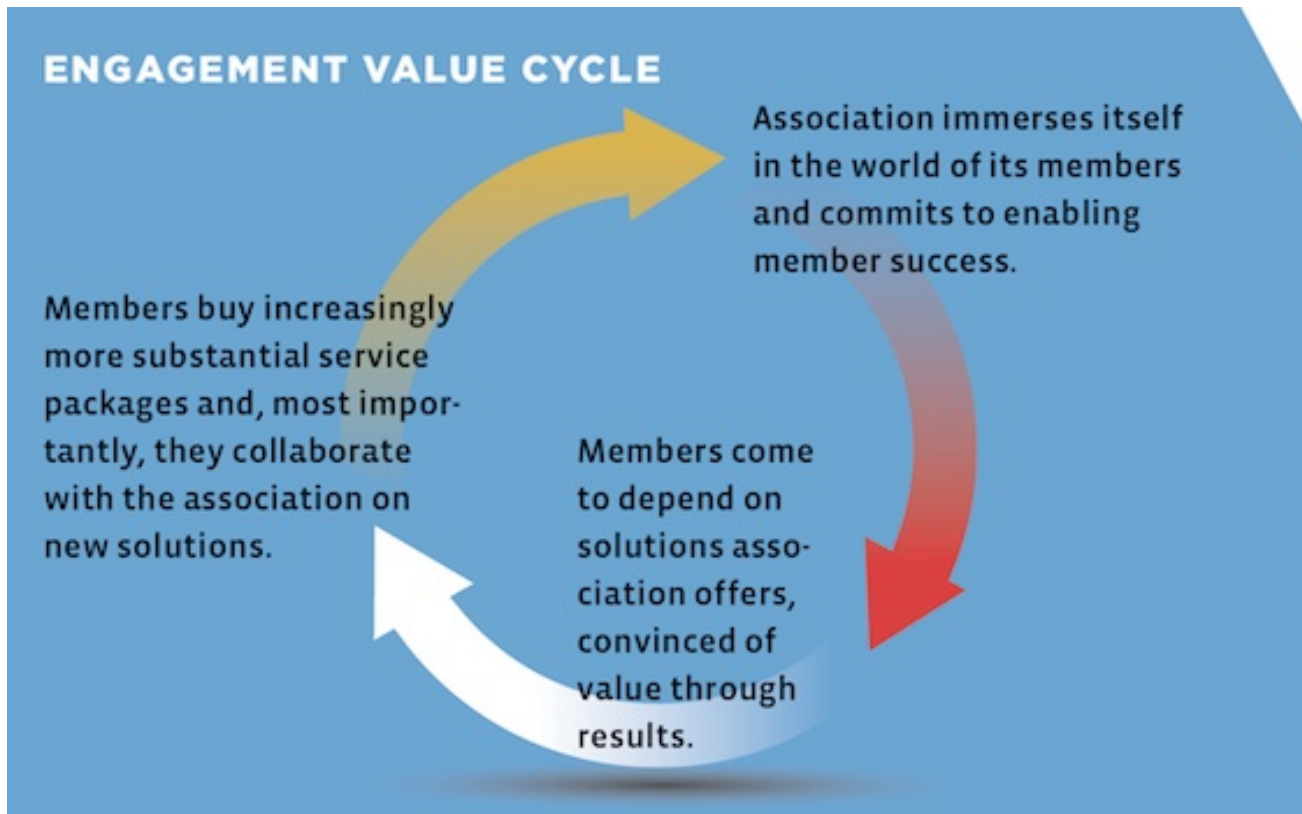
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(The members area is easily navigable, clean and intuitive)

Levels - A good piece of membership software allows you to set up multiple membership levels.

Lets say your membership site has a bronze membership, a silver membership and a gold membership. The bronze is the cheapest and only allows members to access the articles. The silver membership is more expensive and gives members access to the articles and audio files. The Gold membership is the most expensive and gives members access to the articles, audio files and videos. This is just an example; you can set it up any way you like.

Comments - You don't *have* to have comments enabled on your membership site. But... it's a good idea. **It allows members to voice their frustrations and feel like they're being heard. And they don't have to go out of their way to email you.**



It also improves discussion and **engagement** and will actually help you improve your product and learn a lot more about your market. Other times, your members will repeat *the same problems and concerns* over and over, and this will clue you in to the NEXT product you can create based on that very real (NOT imagined) demand.

Forum - You don't *have* to have a forum on your membership site. And depending on your niche and the kind of product you sell, it may not make sense anyway.

But if you want a forum, it's relatively easy to set one up and can help a lot in creating a community feel, improving engagement and extending average membership lifespans. (which equals more money for you).

A forum is also a great way to increase the perceived value of membership, especially if a lot of people are posting and you actively participate. As a matter fact, you can make the entire membership site just a forum! And depending on your niche it could do extremely well. For instance, a

paid membership forum in a hobby niche like “RC Airplanes” could make a lot of money.

Software You Will Need

Unless you have some very compelling reason not to, I suggest you use Wordpress for your membership site. Wordpress is incredibly adaptive and flexible and will let you do basically anything you can conjure up. Developers are focusing on Wordpress more and more these days and you can find plugins and themes that will let you do some really cool stuff on the cheap (or even free!)

You'll need:

Hosting - Could be Hostgator or Dreamhost or the host of your choice. Personally, I've used [Bluehost](#) since my first days online and I'm very happy with them. The support is excellent. **Click the pic below to check them out:**



Wordpress - The majority of hosting providers offer a one-click install of Wordpress. If your hosting company does NOT have a one-click Wordpress install option, just follow the instructions to install Wordpress [HERE](#) (...don't worry, it's simple!)



A Wordpress Theme - You can use whatever Wordpress theme you want. I've built membership sites with free and paid themes and it doesn't make too much of a difference so long as the theme has the functionality you want and looks good. I usually use [OptimizePress](#). **Click on the pic below to check it out:**



Membership Script:

There are a lot of membership plugins for Wordpress ...A lot!

So rather than write a long list and confuse the crap out of you, I'll give you 2 solid recommendations based on my experience "in the trenches".

One is free, one is paid.

Free Solution - S2Member

[S2Member](#) is a solid membership plugin and the basic version is free.

It integrates with Paypal, Clickbank and supports 4 membership levels, which covers the needs of a basic membership site. **Click on the pic to check it out:**



Unfortunately, there is a lot of functionality that would require you to upgrade to the Pro version. And if you're going to be spending money and looking for more flexibility, you may as well use DAP.

Paid Solution - Digital Access Pass

[Digital Access Pass](#) (affectionally nicknamed **DAP**) is the absolute BEST Wordpress membership plugin on the market today. Of course, there are others like Wishlist, Member Rocket and many more.

I've used most of the other solutions out there, and frankly, NONE of them hold a candle to DAP. For the simple reason that when you ask the question "can I do X, Y, and Z", the answer will almost always be a 'Yes' with DAP. You just can't say the same thing about the other guys...

Can I integrate with the auto responder of my choice? **Yes**

Do new members receive their login/pass via email after they purchase? **Yes**

Can I use the payment processor of my liking (Clickbank, Jvzoo, paypal, etc)?
Yes

Can I set up unlimited products and membership levels? **Yes**

Can I set up an in-house affiliate program or integrate with a 3rd party platform?
Yes

In short, DAP is powerful yet easy on your server resources. This is a good thing since site speed is so important.

I've had several clients insist on using a membership plugin he or she bought in the interest of saving money, only to have to buy DAP later anyway because they wanted to do something their plugin couldn't do.

However, DAP *is* a bit pricier than some of the other plugins and takes a bit of time and tinkering to figure out. Personally, I think it's worth the bit of extra effort and money. **[Click on the pic below to check out DAP:](#)**



The Ultimate Membership Site Combo

After a lot of trial and error with many plugins and many themes, I've discovered what I believe to be a winning combination for creating a beautiful, fluid membership site. This is such a powerful and simple combination that if my clients can afford it, I absolutely INSIST they use it. It is...

OptimizePress + Digital Access Pass

[OptimizePress](#) is a paid Wordpress theme specifically designed for internet marketing.

This doesn't mean your actual niche has to be 'internet marketing'. Your membership site can be about how to play guitar, or 'get six pack abs', or whatever.

OptimizePress allows you to:

- set up beautiful squeeze pages easily
- integrate with an autoresponder like Aweber
- set up sales pages easily
- set up launches and launch-style sales funnels (including 'evergreen' launches)
- set up attractive sales pages easily
- set up an attractive members area quickly

...and much more.

TONS of internet marketers use OptimizePress for the simple reason that it was specifically created for internet marketing!

The only thing OptimizePress lacks is a decent looking blog. Of course -- no

theme is perfect for EVERYTHING. OptimizePress isn't designed for blogging. **It's designed to help you get leads into your sales funnel and convert them into paying customers with as little technical know-how as possible!**

A Free Combo That Works Well... Free Theme + S2Member

You can create a membership site using almost any Wordpress theme. Simply go to your Wordpress Dashboard: (Dashboard → Appearance → Themes) and browse the themes until you find one you like. And don't worry, you can always change it later without losing any of your content. It's just "clothing".

As I mentioned earlier, a great free membership plugin is [S2Member](#). They also have a paid version with expanded functionality.

I used S2Member (the free version) when I first launched [my keyword research course](#). but after getting the paid version and still not getting the features I wanted, I migrated my site to DAP. That was a pain. But it was a good introduction to membership plugins and it's a solid piece of software that will do the trick if you're on a tight budget.

Of course, if you have some money to invest, [get DAP](#) from the get-go and save yourself the incredible hassle of migrating your membership stuff later.

The All-In-One Solution - Kajabi

I played with [Kajabi](#) out of curiosity but I've never launched a membership site using it. So I'll keep my commentary limited to what I've personally experienced. Kajabi is a hosted membership site solution that you pay for on an ongoing monthly basis.

The pages it produces look very similar to OptimizePress and the functions are similar as well. **The main benefit is that you don't need to install Wordpress or deal with hosting. In fact, you need virtually ZERO technical know-how. It's drag and drop simple.** But unless you make a lot of money with your membership site right from the start (or have money to invest) I don't think Kajabi is the ideal solution.

Their pricing starts at \$99/month. Eek!

Also, it really lacks the flexibility to let you customize things. I realize that's sort

of the point of Kajabi – to make you membership site a drag-and-drop affair. If that's what you're looking for, Kajabi might be perfect for you.

However, if you want to integrate with various payment processors and affiliate networks, utilize plugins, and do anything remotely 'custom', you'll wind up stuck with a membership platform that can't accommodate your needs.

That's why I say you're better off with Wordpress from the very beginning. This combo will give you a lot of room to grow and adapt. Whereas with a hosted solution, you're stuck with whatever functionality they offer and you can't expand using different plugins and themes. [Click on the fancy pic below to check out Kajabi:](#)



Payment Processing

You'll need a way to automatically collect payment from your members by charging their credit cards or online accounts. There are a buttload of payment processors that allow you to do this. Here are the 2 most common ones:

Paypal

Paypal allows you to set up recurring billing for your members. Their credit cards will get charged monthly and the money will get sent to you. *Sweetness*.

However, the free version of paypal (paypal standard) doesn't allow for recurring billing, so if you want to use Paypal for your membership site, you'll need to upgrade to a paid account.

However, **if you just want to use a membership area for product delivery, you CAN take 1-off payments with Paypal standard without having to upgrade to pro.**

Paypal integrates with both DAP and S2Member.



ClickBank

ClickBank is both a payment processor AND an affiliate network. You can set up recurring billing with Clickbank and also list your product in the Clickbank marketplace to attract affiliates.

I like Clickbank because it handles the payment processing and the affiliate marketing side of things and the only upfront fee is to list your product (\$50).

However, they do take a cut of all your sales...

You can use Clickbank with both DAP and S2Member.



Affiliate Networks

At some point you may wish to invite affiliates and JV partners to promote your membership site.

Of course, this is totally optional, but it is definitely a great way to potentially add a lot of income to your bottom line AND to build great relationships with the movers and shakers in your niche.

Again, there are a lot of affiliate networks but here are the main ones:

Clickbank - As I mentioned, [Clickbank](#) is both a payment processor and an affiliate network. Clickbank is free to join. You pay \$50 bucks to list your product and then pay 7.5% + \$1 on each sale. It's kind of steep but Clickbank makes marketing your information product so simple that you may find it's worth it.

You can also potentially get a lot of affiliates promoting your product *just by listing it on the Clickbank marketplace*. However, a lot of marketers prefer to keep their affiliate programs in-house, since the 7.5% + \$1 transaction fees can really add up over time. If you're a beginner, Clickbank is a great place to start.

Note: You do NOT need to sign up for the paid Clickbank 'platform' feature. Just go with the free DIY feature. It's really simple to set up.

Clickbank is pretty easy to work with even if you're a total n00b. The settings dashboard is clean and intuitive. And Clickbank is pretty much the gold standard for online affiliate networks.

It integrates with DAP and S2Member.

JVzoo - [Jvzoo](#) is becoming a very popular affiliate network. It's free to join and free to list your products. Like Clickbank, they take a cut of all sales.

The products in their marketplace are mostly for the internet marketing sphere but there's nothing preventing you from listing your 'how to raise chickens' video course there. :-)

Integrates with DAP, integrates with S2Member.

Digireresults - [Digireresults](#) is a really clean affiliate network that I'm using more and more these days. The set up is brain dead simple (we cavemen types appreciate that) and the user experience is great for your members.

It's free to join and list a product. Digireresults keeps a percentage of your sales.

Integrates with DAP. Does NOT integrate with S2Member.

WarriorPlus - [WarriorPlus](#) is specifically for launching WSOs (Warrior Special Offers). If you're in the internet marketing niche, launching a WSO with WarriorPlus is a great option that I've personally had success with.

Integrates with DAP. Does NOT integrate with S2Member.

Built in Affiliate Program - [Digital Access Pass](#) has its own built in affiliate program. It works like a charm. The only pitfall is that you have to manually pay affiliates via PayPal.

However, they do make it easy for you by generating a 'mass payments' file that you can simply upload to your Paypal account. Then you can pay your affiliates with the click of a button. So it's really not such a big pain in the butt as it seems, especially considering how much money can you save in fees to an affiliate network...

[So...What Should I Use?](#)

As a free option, I recommend [S2Member](#) + the free Wordpress theme of your choice.

If you have some money to invest, go with:

[OptimizePress](#) + [DAP](#)

Countless internet marketers use this exact combination. And why not? It works wonderfully. No reason to reinvent the wheel. Just focus on making a great product and figure out your marketing, and let the software and platforms that are *designed* to make your life easier do THEIR jobs!

Content Delivery

Amazon S3

If your membership site consists of nothing but articles, then there's no problem hosting them directly on your site. But if you're offering multimedia, as most membership sites do, you'll need some sort of content delivery network.

The one used by the majority of online marketers is [Amazon S3](#). S3 stands for Simple Storage Service. It's free to sign up and the usage costs basically amount to chump change. To give you a picture, I host about 20 videos on S3 for one of my membership sites. I have about 50 members. Granted, that isn't a lot of videos nor a lot of members but **the biggest monthly bill I ever got was for \$7.**

S3 is dirt cheap and allows you to deliver content at blazing speeds. Image files, audio, video, PDFs -- whatever you want. Basically, S3 is your own private, super-fast server for pennies on the dollar.

Video

Although you can put Youtube videos in your membership site, people will be able to share the links. Plus it will seem somehow 'cheap' because of the perception of Youtube as a *public* platform. **So Youtube is less than ideal...**

Luckily, S3 also has an additional, free service called [Amazon CloudFront](#). This service is really cool. It's the same as S3, but with more servers in key locations around the world. If you watch a video while you're in Thailand, for example, it will use a server somewhere in Southeast Asia to deliver the content rather than one in the United States or Europe. This makes your videos load faster for your members.

CloudFront also lets you use something called RTMP streaming, also known as 'true streaming'...

True streaming means that when you play a video, you'll be able to seek *anywhere* inside the video progress bar WITHOUT having to wait for the video to load, which is the case with the more common 'progressive download'. And you ONLY pay for what a person actually watches. You NEVER pay for portions

of a video that don't get watched. **So CloudFront actually turns out to be cheaper than S3!**

The downside with this 'true streaming' feature is that you need a video player plugin that supports it. And the only decent plugins to handle this are paid software.

If you just want to use the standard progressive download, there are free players that will handle it. A decent one is [Flowplayer for Wordpress](#).

EasyVideoSuite

The option that really blows me away and that I recommend to all my clients who need it and can afford it is [EasyVideoSuite](#) This is by far the best hosting, streaming, protection and delivery solution for video on the market but it's a tad pricey.

The launch of EasyVideoSuite had a lot of hype surrounding it so I was skeptical of its functionality in contrast with the over-the-top marketing. But when I finally bought it and tinkered with the features, I was very pleased. Particularly **the desktop app, which automatically converts your video files into a web and mobile friendly compressed format**, which completely eliminates the need to manually compress (and research HOW to compress) vids *correctly* using software such as Handbrake. It does other sweet 'stuff' but that's what sold me.

[Click on the pic below to check it out:](#)



Wrap Up

Now you know how to get started with creating your own membership site. Obviously, there's a lot that I didn't cover here, and you probably have some questions lingering in your mind. So head on over to [the download page](#) for this report and leave your questions and comments in the comments section and I'll do my best to help get you sorted. :-)

If You'd Rather Have Somebody Set It Up For You..

I set up membership websites professionally. If you like the cut of my jib and would like to explore the possibility of working together, please feel free to email me for a quote and to check my availability, at victor.dorfman@gmail.com.

You Might Not Know Who I Is...

I've been building membership websites for myself and for clients since my first days 'online' in 2009. **I've created several successful membership websites and I've collaborated with many big name internet marketers.**

I've worked and tinkered with just about every membership solution out there. I've also developed warm relationships with some of the developers of these various plugins and I often contact them directly with questions and support issues about their software.

Think of me as a liaison between the technical world of setting stuff up and the practical world of marketing. I've got one foot in each universe...

When I started it was all quiet on the Western Front but after a while, many people on the Warrior Forum were me sending PMs and messaging me on Skype to ask about membership sites and asking for quotes, that I realized I had a great opportunity to start a business. And now I do this full time. Life is awesome.

Yeah, Nice Resume Dude... But Who Are YOU?

Great question. And that's really the only question that matters in this life as far

I'm concerned.

I'm actually... a lot like you!

I'm human. I was born on planet earth (presumably). And I'm here trying to squeeze every last dewey drop of out of this brief, beautiful existence.

Ella and The Waterfall (A Near Death Experience)

By early 2012 I was already making a good living with Internet Marketing. I had a lucrative, ongoing contract with a US based company that had hired me to create an information product for them from scratch.

Then one day I decided I'd like to see the other side of the world, and bought a one-way ticket to Thailand. Since I was working remotely already, I didn't anticipate any problems. But 2 days after I bought my one-way flight, my client suddenly cut my contract to focus on their startup, which was starting to do extremely well.

I didn't have much money saved up after living in notoriously expensive Miami Beach (and spending like an idiot). I didn't know what the hell I was going to do but I was sick of the mundane, routine existence of life in one place, and so I flew to Thailand anyway.

2 weeks into my trip, my Macbook Pro melted down beyond all repair and I was forced to buy another one. I now had even less money.

I had to quickly find new clients. So I did. I had to hastily optimize my information products sales and affiliate income sources. So I did that too.

When life puts your ass to the fire, all of your latent intelligence and resourcefulness blooms. I was struggling and testing limits I didn't know I had, and I loved every minute of it.

Enter Ella

In the meantime, I'd been staying in a wonderful little guesthouse in Bangkok. One night I met a beautiful woman who was also a guest there, and we became

friends, lovers; walking the same path in the woods for this part of our journeys. Ella.

We spontaneously flew north of Bangkok to a city called Chiang Mai. It's where all the 'digital nomad' types seem to congregate, maybe you've heard of it.

Just outside of Chiang Mai is a waterfall reachable by taxi. Waterfalls are fucking cool, so we decided to go. We climbed carefully to the top of the waterfall and sat on a slab of ancient rock underneath the freezing water. It pummeled us with unrelenting force, like an endless barrage of blows. We felt nature's awesome power and unstoppable movement.

Instead of getting down via the safe(r) little forrest trail that we used to ascend the big, bubbling boulder, I decided to climb down along the edge of the actual running water. As soon I had put my hand on a rock to help me make the next step down, I realized the rock was wet and covered with a thin, slippery film. But my realization came too late.

I slipped. And then time froze...

I was sitting down, the same way you sit when you go down a slide in a playground. I knew I was about to go flying down this big ass waterfall and that there was absolutely nothing that could be done about it.

In that moment, I was so aware, so present. I knew I might die. Yet I didn't feel the least bit scared. I thought: I made this journey from my country to another land. I went through these amazing challenges that helped me grow. I met a woman that I shared so much love with that it could fill the entire universe a thousand times over (and it had). And I was living a life where I woke up overflowing with love and joy each and every day.

So the last thing I thought before I blacked out was "if this is the end...I'm ready. So be it. I'm ready!"

The next thing I know, I wake up in an ambulance. Ella was looking down at me with a look that seemed to say "you...don't do that!" I had hit my head a number of times, broken my nose, gashed open my jaw. And as a cherry on top, some kind of crazy water bugs had bitten the crap out of my head and neck while I was laying unconscious at the foot of the waterfall. The bites festered into nasty puss-filled wounds that took almost 3 weeks to heal!

The hospital bill further decimated my emaciated checking account even more. But it didn't matter. Nothing did.

I realized that day that there's nothing to ever be afraid of. Nothing at all. So long as you listen to your heart and go where it calls you, everything else falls into place. Life is abundant, your cup runneth over. And life has tremendous fragrance, and everybody around you can feel it...

Internet marketing is hard work but it can give you the freedom and time to follow your heart and your dreams. Don't wait a single moment more to get everything 'right' or 'perfect'. Do it now. Whatever you want to do, do that right now.

I could go on, but I think you feel me. :-)



To your success!

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