



- Callie: It's time for season five episode seven of Behind the Membership and this week I'm talking with Sean Wilson from Sean Wilson Piano, a membership site for gospel pianists. Now, when Sean first decided to start a membership site back in 2017, he set a date and committed to just getting started rather than worrying about getting it perfect, tapping into a small list of existing buyers for his initial members. And now, four years later, Sean has a thriving membership site that's bringing him even more freedom and fulfilment than he could imagine. In this episode, then we're talking all about Sean's journey so far, including how he has recently overcome his subscription ceiling and gone from getting 40 new members a month to over 100 a month. We're also talking about how honing in on his unfair advantage has helped him to succeed, and how he found the perfect Community Manager, which has sent his engagement skyrocketing. Plus, of course, lots, lots more. So, let's dive in.
- Announcer: Welcome to Behind the Membership with Callie Willows, real people, real stories, real memberships.
- Callie: My guest today is Sean Wilson from Sean Wilson Piano. Welcome to the episode, Sean. I am really looking forward to talking with you about your membership.
- Sean: Thank you so much, Callie. It is actually a great honour for me to be here.
- Callie: No, I'm looking forward to talking to you. And it seems like a very long time since we met back at Retain in 2019. That seems ages ago now.
- Sean: Yes, the pandemic kind of stretches things out a little bit with the time.

Callie: It really, really does. But do you want to start off by telling us a little bit about your membership site? Who is it? Who's it for? What is it? What do you offer, that kind of thing.

Sean: Okay, sure. As you said, I'm Sean, and my membership site is named after me, Sean Wilson Piano. We are a piano instructional website, and we teach gospel musicians. So, that's the specific niche that I'm in, is gospel music. Now, as far as how we started, I think it's an interesting start for me because it started when my parents were taking me to church one day because they would take me to church to play for different events and choirs. And this one time, it was a last minute change. And they called and said, "Sean, we're not going to be doing the songs anymore, we're going to be doing different songs." And it wasn't songs that have sheet music because most musicians play by giving them music, and they read what they see on the sheet. But I didn't have the sheet music because I played by hearing. But the interesting thing is because they changed it at the last minute on the way to church, I'm having to listen on my headset, and try to figure out the song.

I would say that that would be the start of Sean Wilson Piano because by the time I got to church that day, I had to know all of the chords, I had to know everything, but I wasn't actually at the piano. And so, I didn't know at the time, that that skill, playing by ear and being able to pick things up was something that would benefit me later on. And so, it's just something that I took for granted. I didn't know that that was even something that was a unique angle that I could use to really position my-myself very well.

So, basically, I was on YouTube, and I was having a rough year. I had recently had a job loss, and the YouTube channel was doing pretty good. I just said, "It's going to be now or never." Because I had done a video that, and the video had taken off very well. It had done very well when I was basically, the same thing about the church, there was a person who would play the song and everyone was like, "How is he doing that? How was he playing what the other person's playing?" And so, I started my channel based on that. But I noticed over time, I did that, I think it was 2016 is when I started.

But then by 2017 I noticed something with the numbers, the numbers on analytics on my YouTube channel, they were starting to go down and I could see that it's like an individual talent. People start saying, "Okay, we've seen it before. Okay, we know you can." So, I said to myself, "Okay, it's now or never. I have to start something. I need to start a business, something." And I was trying to go between should I do a course, should I do a business? Am I meant to do a course or membership site? There's a guy Chris Lima, I think I found, and I saw some stuff from him and I tried to piece some stuff together and it just was like, "I don't know."

At any rate, I set a date and I said, "I'm starting." I told people, "I'm starting in May," and I literally found Membership Site Academy in April. So, when I started I didn't have the luxury of saying, "Let me go in and just wait until everything was perfect," because I had

given a date, I was committed to the date. And so, I had to start. So, with the help, by joining Membership Site Academy, I think it just gave me the foundation of what I needed. And I was able to start successfully. And that's basically how the membership site got started. We had a great start. And from there, it's just grown from there.

Callie: Awesome. So, that was 2017?

Sean: Yeah. It was May 21 when we launched. In fact, I actually didn't have the exact date. I had to look it up when you sent me the email for this, I said, I know it's 2017 in May, what's the exact date? So, as I found the exact date, and I realised, "Oh, my goodness, it's three days before my birthday, before the membership site's birthday." So I emailed my team and said, "We need to figure something out. Our birthday is coming up in three days." So, yeah, so that was a cool little find for me.

Callie: Awesome. Yeah, you need to celebrate those members' anniversaries.

Sean: Exactly.

Callie: So, it's been going for four years now. How's it been going?

Sean: It's been going great. I would say we've definitely had our challenges. When we first started there was a lot that I just didn't have because like I said, I had put a date out, so I didn't have a proper sales funnel, I didn't have a proper onboarding sequence. There's just so many things that a lot of other people it seemed when I was looking at that just they had those things, but because I had committed to a date, and because of that urgency was there for me, I was really just trying to make sure I had the content in place so that when they came in, there'd be something there. But over time, I will say that I think I maybe had overvalued content, the importance of it. It is important to keep giving content.

And there was something that you guys say all the time that "Members come for the content, but stay for the community", and that phrase didn't really register that deeply with me till maybe a couple years in when I realised that that's what people were really wanting. They really weren't caring about how much in terms of the amount, in terms of the numbers. They want to see themselves succeed, and that realisation for me just kind of changed everything. It changed my approach, it changed what I did, and how I pivoted from there. So, you know, I guess I can go into some details later. But that's basically overall it's been going well. I've really been enjoying it. I really enjoy being a membership site owner. This is like, this is where I'm supposed to be. It feels right for me. It just feels like this is where I'm supposed to be at.

Callie: Awesome. That's what we like to hear. And so, you mentioned that you'd already started the YouTube channel before you launched the membership, and that was kind of a driving factor in launching. Was that the only audience you had at the time, those YouTube

subscribers? Or had you been building a business and an audience teaching in other ways beforehand as well?

Sean: Yeah, that's a really great question. So, I didn't come from a business background. So, I came from a teaching background. So the teaching part, that was great for me. The talking in front of an audience and all of that, that was my background. I'd been doing it for 15 years prior to starting. So that was great, as far as that. But unfortunately, I didn't have a lot of business experience. However, there was a person I listened to. I think it was in 2015, a person named, I think it was Charlene Johnson. And she kept talking about the importance of building an email list.

So, luckily for me, when I did start the YouTube channel and I would release these file, I would use this programme called Gumroad. And what would happen is, I would just say, if you want the file you can purchase it at Gumroad. And it'd be minimal purchases, and I started saying, "If I can make it free, maybe I can get a lot of emails that way." So, believe it or not, I was building an email list, but without even really realising it, right? And so, that was so important because you guys talk about the importance of building an audience and how important it is to build an audience. But I didn't realise that's what I was doing because even though you have YouTube subscribers, it's not like you can directly email them, right?

So, by having a way to get them off YouTube and on an email list, I think was really great. And that helped to serve as basically the seed for when I started the membership because I basically sent an email out to all those subscribers. I think I had around maybe five or 6,000 emails on Gumroad. And a really great video and I would give something for free. I would get sometimes hundreds and hundreds of emails just from that. So, I used that as a seed to get started.

And then also, I transitioned later to a proper email service like ConvertKit. But Gumroad was great in getting started, and then currently as far as your question, as far as getting new members YouTube has been the primary way. It's been really good as far as consistency with YouTube.

Now, I will say that I hit a debt ceiling. I was so glad. This is just one of the best to me, just one of the best posts is when you guys released a thing on the debt ceiling because it just answered so many questions for me because I was getting... YouTube was giving me a great model for getting members. And in fact, I have it right here. So, up until maybe 2019 I was averaging maybe 40 members a month based on YouTube. So, right around when the pandemic hit I was getting 40 members a month but losing 40. So, yeah, I was even.

It wasn't growing, but I wasn't losing, but I was at my ceiling. That was the term that you guys used and it was that was really helpful when you broke it down that way. I don't know if you want me to talk about how I got over that or?

Callie: Yeah, that'd be awesome. Go for it.

Sean: Okay. So, what happened, well, during the pandemic helped us, at least for my membership it helped because a lot of musicians were home, they were forced to be home. They're online. So, I did see a little bit of an uptick there and an increase there due to the pandemic. But it was just a little, maybe it was getting from 40 to 50. It still wasn't that much it was kind of... So, basically I said, "Wait a minute, I need a proper sales funnel." So I have a guy, there's a guy in London that I hired for Facebook ads, but I didn't hire him just for ads, it's because his company also worked with just kind of analysing the entire process in terms of the funnel and how that's going. And we put a funnel on the homepage, put a lead magnet on it, connected it, made sure there was a funnel there, and let me just say this. I got him in November. By December, since from December until now I've had over 100 members every month.

Callie: Awesome.

Sean: And the ones except February and April, but those are in the 90s. So, basically, it's been amazing. And that was just having that funnel there, having that funnel in place, and of course, they're also doing some awareness as well. Where some of my YouTube videos, the high performing YouTube videos, they're making people aware of those videos. So, that's been really great. Ever since November I've had a net growth, whereas before, sometimes I would have more members losing than coming in. Some it'd be up. But now ever since the last, I'd say for the last six or seven months, it's been nothing but growth as far as the signups versus cancellations.

Callie: Awesome. Yeah, that's what we like to hear.

Sean: Yeah, I'm really excited about that. We're hoping to hit... He said, basically, even if I just continue what I'm doing I'll definitely hit 1,000 members by the end of the year because when we run a trial I usually hit about 150 to 200. So, I'm planning to run one next month, and then another one at the end. So, even with just those two, I should be able to hit my goal there. So yeah everything's been going really good.

Callie: Awesome. So, as we're on the topic of marketing then, you've got the YouTube channel, and you mentioned that you've run trials before as well. Are they special promotions to get a boost of members or is that something you have a permanent trial offer?

Sean: Yeah, I do have... Oh, that's a good question. Yeah, I have a dollar trial offer, and I will say this, and I know you're not telling me to keep bringing you guys up, but the thing is every time I have an issue or a problem I'm going on the site. I don't just log in every day, necessarily. But if there's something that I'm trying to do, I'm looking at Membership Site Academy, so I was looking at the pros and cons of the free trial versus the dollar trial. The dollar was definitely what I chose to do based on the information that I taught on the site,

and it's worked out well because once they have to enter their credit card information, it's already there. It makes it seamless if they want to stay.

I'm doing the dollar trial for seven days. It's been working out great. I felt 14 days was a little long for me. I kind of tease them with the content and by seven they're really in there and wanting it. They don't want to quit. So, seven days has worked well. But then we also have, and this is something that started with when I brought on my Facebook guy, Dan. So, he's also running a dollar trial as well as part of the sequence as far as the ongoing sales sequence that we have. So, that is there. But that's only available, and it's actually time sensitive. I'm using Thrive-

Callie: Ultimatum.

Sean: Ultimatum, thank you. I'm using Thrive Ultimatum to do that. So, it's basically dependent on whenever they hit that, yeah.

Callie: Awesome. And so, do you actually offer other products or services as well or is the membership everything that you're doing at the moment, essentially?

Sean: Yeah, people have asked me that. And I would love to branch out and offer different products, but right now, everything is just membership. But I'm starting to remove myself a little bit from it, and develop a team and all of that, so that I can have more time to do that. But that is something I think that's in the works for sure.

Callie: Awesome. And so with the membership itself then what are you actually providing to members every month? Are you providing specific songs? Are you providing training on, as you said, ear training, which that blows my mind, just the idea of being able to listen to something and then actually play it without music in front of you and things like that. I have no idea how you would even do that. And so, yeah, what are actually providing to members there?

Sean: Okay, so that's a good question. So basically, we would provide something called MIDI files, and that is basically, musically, it's just like a song file that a musician downloads to their computer. And when they click on that song file, a keyboard will pop up that plays the song, and they could learn it from the screen. They can slow the notes down, and they can learn the songs that way. So, that's actually what I initially started offering. But those take time to create because what's happening is if there's a pianist that does something that you want to hear or a song that you want to hear, I have to actually go on my piano and recreate that. That was what I call my unique selling point, or there's a really good book called Unfair Advantage. I don't know if you've read it.

Callie: Yes, yes, it's a great book.

Sean: And how to leverage your unfair advantages. When I was talking earlier about I started music when I was five. My dad played by ear, so I had some advantages that gave me that

ability to do that. However, it did take a lot of time. So, I try not to do them as often now. But when they come in, there is a space where they can get MIDI files. There's a separate section of the site called MIDI files. Then on top of that, we have what's called live trainings, and those are monthly live trainings. I've been doing monthly ever since I started, and it's funny. They appreciate the live trainings more than they do the MIDI files. Even though they come for the MIDI... And so, here's the thing that I was saying that again, that just reinforces what you guys say. They come because, oh, I can get all these files of all these top musicians. But when they come in, they really love what actually gets that emotion is the live trainings.

So I have the live trainings. I have a roadmap actually based on Memberoni and actually what it is, it's a beginner roadmap, and after that the level is competent, then after that it's intermediate, and after that it's advanced. And so, that's actually our biggest site feature. That's the thing that everyone talks about the most. We're the only gospel music website in the world, actually, that has a roadmap. So, it's really cool and when I'm on YouTube, it's a nice positioning offer because I can say a lot of the problem is because people are lacking foundation. Because I think the thing is, like you just mentioned about ear, music is vocabulary so my unique selling point, and the unique way I solve the problem is by focusing on vocabulary, right?

And so, I tell people, while everyone else is talking about ear and develop your own ear, I talk about develop your vocabulary. And I tie music to language, and I say, for instance, let's say I go to another country, and they're speaking the language, but I don't understand that language. Well, your ear can hear that language, right? You can hear the language just fine. But because you don't have their vocabulary, those words, you don't know the words, so your ear can't make sense of it.

So, this is the unique way that I deal with music that you can hear the music just fine. And in fact, your ear could probably tell you that something's not right with this song. But you lack the vocabulary. So, my specific point, and my specific solution is to build your vocabulary that will help your ear to identify it. So there's ear training involved. So, that's the specific way that I solve that problem, and it's very different than other teachers, and I believe it's actually helped my site growth because a lot of gospel music websites, but I think ours is doing very well because people, they really like that approach. They really like how it's done.

And so, basically, we have the ear training, we have courses, as well. I have an ear training course. I have a course on improvisation. I've got a community using IP board. So, we've got a lot of stuff in there. In terms of stuff, it's a lot. People actually said it's almost too much. Some people feel like it's just too much. So, yeah, we have a lot of content in there, for sure.

Callie: And so, you mentioned there a couple of times that the site is focused on gospel music. Has that always been your niche or did you make a decision to niche down to that market?

Sean: I kind of made a decision to niche down even though I can play different styles. The other styles were a lot more competitive. And then, that was my passion because... So, if you're thinking, maybe the type of gospel I mean is if you've watched the Sister Act 2. Like in the choirs, that kind of thing. That's a big market that was basically ignored. So the jazz market is huge. In fact, Simon Warner and I, we talk all the time, and we started at the same time. His channel is away over six figures, but my mine is just a smaller niche. It's not as big of a niche. So, it's really important for me to really just stake my claim in this niche because it is a smaller niche, but we're growing great.

But like I said, it is gospel specifically. I don't know, maybe I do have some people coming in for jazz and for other things because they like my emphasis on vocabulary as basically the way to solve all musical problems. So I tell them, you can come in as another, if you're on another genre as well and come in and just get the foundation for what you need, and then go on. And kind of like college, how you would have in some colleges, how you they focus on prerequisites first. I position it like that, but specifically, though gospel, as far as the genre.

Callie: Awesome. And so, what would you say has actually been your biggest challenge with the membership so far, then?

Sean: Yeah, that's a good one. Honestly, I think the biggest challenge for me is kind of getting out of not being so hard at myself. I don't know if any of your other guests have talked about this. But being a membership site owner isn't all up, there's downs as well. I'm only going to bring this up because I personally would love to hear challenges, so let me just say this. Like, for instance, there was a hole up until maybe last month, I found out that certain portion of memberships, a certain portion of people who would sign up weren't getting tagged in my ConvertKit properly. So they weren't getting my emails, and this was huge for me.

By the way, I haven't said, so I have a basic membership that's a \$27 membership, then I have a premium membership that's a \$38 membership. There's no difference between the two in terms of content. The only difference between the \$27 membership and the \$38 membership is the one on one coaching. And then, of course, I have annuals for both of those, which I did I think times nine or times 10, for both, so they get two months off. So those are the two memberships that I have. So basically, everyone who was coming in on the basic membership since last December wasn't getting tagged. I don't know why. No, actually, it was from January 1st. I don't know if it was something that happened, a change happened within ConvertKit or what. I don't know why it just changed like that, but they weren't getting tagged.

And it was also messing up my numbers because I would look at my numbers in ConvertKit and I'm saying, "I thought I had more members than this." I never figured it out. You could imagine my horror when I realised after doing some digging, after a guy says, "Hey, it's been a while and I'd love to get some emails from you." And I said, "I just sent an email yesterday." So I go, and I check, and it's like, "Oh, my goodness, I don't believe this." I wanted to kick myself. I was so hard on myself about this. And so, when you talk about challenges sometimes those things can happen. And now I have to figure out how to fix that problem, and not just wallow in self pity. You have to fix the problem and keep going.

So I sent out an email, and I said, "I am so sorry. I feel so bad." And not one person was upset or anything, but it was me, it was that self pressure you know. I think those kinds of things happen as far as membership sites, things happen like that where I'll make a mistake. And I just want to say I think that's one of those challenging things. Just not being super hard on myself with certain mistakes, and just realising that mistakes will happen, and that I need to be just a little bit easier on that. I think the members actually appreciate the honesty. They appreciate me getting out to them, acknowledging the problem, and also having a solution because obviously, I'm not just going to email them and say, "Oh, by the way, you guys aren't getting emails," and then that's it. No, I need to say, "Hey, no, you will get them from henceforth, but I did want to own up to the problem."

I think that's honestly been one of my biggest challenges is just being really in myself about not being too tough on myself because I tend to be a perfectionist and just allowing some mistakes to happen and just trying to fix things when I find out if there's any problems and just keep on moving. So I think that's been probably the biggest one for me in terms of that. I don't know if that makes any sense.

Callie: No, I think it does. And I think it is one of those things as you say. I mean, it's not unique to memberships. I think anybody in business, especially where there's tech involved, there is going to be things that go wrong. There's going to be things that don't work how you think they're going to work or things that you miss or things like that. And so, I think as you said there just having that acceptance that it doesn't mean that you have done something wrong, or you've failed at something, or anything like that. But as you say, it's how you deal with it that is important. And as you say, I think just actually being honest and saying, "Hey, I've noticed you haven't had emails, and I'm really sorry about that. But this is what we're going to do."

And as you said, just accepting that. And that's one of the things I personally love about a membership is because it is always evolving in that way. You have a lot of space with your members to make up for if something isn't quite perfect, or to improve things, to continually make their experience better. And yeah, for me, I think, yeah, totally with you there on that being one of the challenges in terms of being able to not take that on

yourself when things happen. But I do think memberships are great for actually being able to fix those issues as well.

Sean: Yeah, and I don't know how I got away from that. Because when I first started, it's kind of like, I knew I didn't know anything. And so, it's kind of like, okay, beta members you guys help me so I'm looking. I'm not being hard on myself because I know I don't know anything, and it's kind of like, "Let's do this together." And they're like, "Okay, Sean let's do it together." And so, that's why it was really encouraging for me when I went to Retain and you guys had Scott, and Drumeo Jared up there.

I remember this. I don't know why it made such a big impact on me. And you guys asked him, so how did you get to all your big numbers and Scott was like, "I don't know." He said, "I don't know. I don't remember. I honestly don't remember. I don't know what I'm doing," but just that kind of... Because I feel like, I thought it was just me, but I'm finding that actually is not like you can actually say, "These are the steps you have to." And so, I'm realising that just having this attitude of being willing to grow, being willing to listen, because they're the ones who are your members, they know what they want.

So, I'm thinking that they want MIDI files. I'm thinking they want this. I'm thinking they want more content. I'm thinking about this. But then I get to the live trainings, I get to the one on ones, and it's a totally different thing. And I'm like, okay, so I just need to allow myself to evolve because that's what it is. A membership is an evolving experience. Something really great for me just being able to go through that and how it evolves. It's just amazing to me because it helps you evolve as a person as well. It's really cool.

Callie: Yeah, I love that. And I'd love to actually go back to when you launched. So you mentioned that you had the idea, you put a date out there, and you just went for it knowing that it wasn't going to be perfect. You were doing the beta launch there. How did you find that? Was it just to your email list initially, and you got some initial people on board? Or did you stay open ever since then? How did you work that initial launch?

Sean: Yeah, the initial launch, no, that was all Membership Site Academy. Because I found Membership Site Academy the month before. And so, I was looking... Actually, it's funny too because I was within... So, I was testing out between Membership Site Academy and another guy. He was basically saying, you need to do the closed door model because you've got to have that sense of urgency in order to get them in. And then I went to the Membership Site Academy, and they had an alternate kind of a thing. They didn't flat out reject the closed but they said, "Here's some advantages to it, and here's some advantages to just having it open."

I felt it would've been in my membership's best interest to keep the doors open. So, as far as the beta launch, I just kind of sent out an email to my Gumroad list because they had been downloading files. I was very honest, I said, "I don't have a lot of content right now." I

said, "You guys would be coming in at \$10." I says, "And you're just coming into help." You know what? No, that's not what I did. I'm looking back to think, actually, no, here's what I did. Gumroad has the ability to kind of parse between members based... Not members... but between people who have bought based on price.

I did something. I said, "I don't want to email free. I don't want to email my free people." I only emailed people who had spent over a certain amount and I dropped it all the way down to 150 people. But I felt like these people had spent, they had invested. So, when I come and tell them I want them to be part of a beta, I figured it would be a no brainer, which it was. That worked out great. So I got them on, they helped. And then immediately after that, I did another one and said, okay, I think I had them on for a month. And immediately after that, I brought in and opened the doors officially. I started at \$15 and I got maybe almost 100 people just on the start.

Here's a neat thing about memberships that I was surprised. So that first, I think I started in May. By June, I was bringing in two grand. It blew my mind. I had two grand. And I'm like, "Oh, my goodness, this is my first month." I couldn't believe it. Just from just that first month when I didn't know what I was doing. And I was like, "Okay, there's something here. This is something that's really cool." So, yeah, so I don't know if that answers your question as far as that. But yeah, the doors have stayed open ever since then. And as far as revenue, obviously, it's gone up since then, almost doubling each year, actually, outside of last year, because you can't double forever.

It's been honestly very, very, very great for me, very rewarding for me as well because of the freedom. But not just the freedom and the flexibility to schedule the day, which I know a lot of people talk about that. But I think for me, it's just being able to do what I love, do what I have a passion about and to actually be providing the value for people to pay for that is something that to me, blows my mind because when I was in school, I think my first two years I was in a computer science major and the money was going to be pretty decent, but I didn't have that love for it.

When I would sit down in front of it and they would put me in these coding classes. I'm just like, "There's no way I could do that." I mean, I know the money is great, but I'm not doing this. So I went to something that I love, which is teaching, but as a result because I'm choosing the thing that I have a passion in, of course, the money goes down because... So now I'm choosing what I love, but you have to take the cut now in the income. So, what the membership site has done... That's a good way to put it because what the membership site has done is allow me to focus on what I'd love but not necessarily sacrifice the income and not only that, there's really no ceiling on that. I can keep going as far as how high I want to go and then whenever I'm satisfied and I can say this is where it is.

So, that's what I love about memberships is that I can focus on what I'm doing, focus on what I love, but still actually don't have to sacrifice like I would be when I was teaching. So, I think that's just something that's so amazing.

Callie: Yeah, as you say there's something quite special about being able to do what you love for a living, I think.

Sean: Oh, my goodness. Yeah, it's the joy. Yeah, because if I was doing a membership site on something I didn't love, I wouldn't love it. It wouldn't be the membership site itself. It's the fact that I'm doing something that I would do anyway explaining to people about music. And by the way, one of the reasons I really got into the membership site and just started thinking about that model is because the year before I started the membership site I had started some music classes in my city. There was a business owner I was really good friends with and he would always say to me, "Sean, you need to find out how to scale." He said, "When you're a music teacher and you're teaching one person at a time, you need to find out how to scale that because your income is tied to your time." So, I kept thinking about that.

I thought, not knowing about the online thing at the time I said, "Well, I know how I can scale. I'll do group class instead of teaching one person." I was on the right idea. So, instead of having one person, I got 15. I said, "Bring all your pianos in here," and they would all bring their pianos. And so, it was a way of multiply. But then I started to think I said, "Well, I just multiplied." Instead of having one income, multiply one student times 15, I have that. But wait a minute, if I take this online then the sky is the limit.

So, that's what started my journey to try to find something, and membership site is perfect for piano because you need the consistent. Nobody's going to say we want one piano class and then... Courses don't work as well for music. Everybody that's a musician knows that you have to have the continued training, you have to have the continued support, you have to have the community in order to grow as a musician. So, it's a perfect model for anyone who's in the creative space and in music and things like that to have a membership site. So I think that's really what really sold me on the idea that I would need some kind of recurring subscription base kind of a model.

Callie: Yeah, there's definitely a reason there's so many music-based memberships because it's perfect for them.

Sean: Oh, yeah, it's perfect because when I was a kid and doing lessons I would have to go weekly. It wasn't a, "Oh, we're going to take you to buy a piano book and send you on your way." I had to go weekly. And so, it would make sense for musicians to have that as a model, I think.

Callie: Definitely. And so, is there anything if you were to go back to the start, is there anything you wish you'd known earlier? Or that you'd do differently if you were starting again now?

Sean: Yeah, for sure. The community aspect is so important. It's just I was focused on what content do you guys use? I was basically using the community to tell me what content I should get instead of literally serving the community. So, there's a difference so now... I didn't mention this. As soon as I realised that from the live trainings that the community is where it's at because let me just explain the pain point for musicians that I'm able to articulate it so well now because I hear from them one on one. They're scared. They go on Instagram, and they go on Facebook, and they see all these amazing pianists. And then they go and they play themselves and they feel like they don't measure up. So they feel insecure.

They need a way and they need an environment to be able to grow without feeling judged. And they need to be able to grow and put their mistakes out there, which is a very difficult thing to do in a supportive community. That's what my membership site provides, not content. Content is second to that though. So for me, figuring that out, when I figured that out, I immediately went... If it's okay, can I talk about how I got my Community Manager or anything?

Callie: Yeah, yeah. Go for it.

Sean: So, when I found that out, I went on Facebook, and I started looking at all the music-based groups. I literally hand picked someone who I would see that was answering questions and she was just very nurturing with her questions, but still very thorough. And I said, "This is who I want as my person for my community," because we weren't having a lot of. The community was the thing I was struggling with the most. I had problems like most people, how do we get the community involved? They're not posting, all that. So, I approached her and thankfully she knew me. Because like I said, the market is small enough that when you reach a kind of a number on YouTube, then they know of you even if they haven't met you.

So, thankfully, that was the case. So, she already knew who I was. And she was like, "Sure, let me see what it is." I brought her on. Callie, let me tell you, oh, my goodness, bringing her on and telling her and just giving her some general things. I just need you to get them involved. Try to ask one question a week. Anyone who brings a welcome, anyone who tried to make a comment, try to just get... It's not that everything is her. But I knew that that would have an effect, and it did to the point where other people started commenting. I had to eventually tell her, and I paid her a little something. It wasn't even that much. Then I eventually told her, find four people like you, duplicate yourself.

She found four people like her, now she has a team. So, she manages the team of four, all coming from the community. I told her to find people like yourself, I meant people from within the community. So, I said the top posters, the people are really... Bring them in, and to this day we meet monthly. So these four people having them now. So now when one person responds, there's a lot. And it just exploded. And then we went even further than

that. I allowed them the freedom to say, "What do you think would be best to help increase engagement instead of me?" Because they're members so they would know. And they said, "We need to start challenges. That's what people are wanting right now." I said, "Okay."

I wish I could show you the numbers. I'll just say this, my average forum post would get maybe 100 to 200 views. They started a challenge. We put it out. I emailed the members. And this is a challenge where a member would play a song and they have to record themselves playing. All positive comments, you have to make positive comments if somebody posts. The first challenge 3,200 views, over 3000. The next challenge the week after that, another 3,000. Now we're in the middle of our third one. This one's approaching 4,000. I mean, this is just from me just relinquishing control and saying, "You guys know."

I want to say this. I had a motorcycle accident recently, so I was in the hospital. So, normally, if it had been two years ago, my membership would have been a ghost town. It was just as lively in there. You had other posts saying, "Let's help, Sean. Let's give him a get-well-soon thing." They're all putting their post on it. But it's all going because that team is there. And again, it wasn't even the cost for that versus what I'm gaining from it is just phenomenal. So having that team in place, and having her lead the team and she meets with them often. And they ask questions and they will provide different questions, they'll answer questions. I have people in there who are of various skill levels so that if somebody who's a beginner comes in there.

So, again, it hits that pain point that I was talking about where I was saying that musicians want to feel like they can put things out there, that they can release music and feel supported. So now when they release, and they're getting support. I had somebody say two days ago, they said, "There's no way I could leave this community." That was like, you could have given me a million dollars because that comment to me was like, that's what I was going for. And they said, "There's no way I can leave this place because we don't have this anywhere." So, I just think, again, so like you said, focusing on the community aspect of things because honestly even from the monthly live they could have told me in the monthly live, "Hey, could you do this?" So, I probably could have gotten away with far less content than I started with.

I think that that's how I would have done it. I probably would have focused more on the community from the beginning. And then let them because they do sell the community, they do sell for me. A lot of people come in and say, "Such and such told me about you." And so, I have a lot of word of mouth, that kind of thing.

Callie: Awesome. I love that. And yeah, it sounds like you've got an awesome community team that are helping you, which really does make all the difference when you can find that.

Sean: Oh, yeah. And find the right people for that. So yeah, that's been amazing. So, besides them, and the other another person I hired was a girl do intercom. It may seem like a strange hire, but the thing is I was answering my own intercom because I get a lot of intercom questions. I mean, all the time, and the members versus non-members. It is too much for me. So, I got a person, and I asked her. I said, "Would you help me with my intercom?" She actually volunteered, and I refused. I said, "No, I'm going to pay you."

And so, I pay her. Come to find out, she has a marketing degree, a couple books on Amazon on marketing. She's a marketer. And I'm like, "Oh, my goodness, how much better does it get?" So, the person who when you go to the chat bubble on the site, that's actually a person who's a marketing expert. I was like, "Oh, my goodness, this is amazing." So, it feels so good to have all those things in place, and it's just amazing. So, yeah, I wouldn't change much. What I would change as far as focus on community, for sure.

Callie: Awesome. I love that. And so as we start to wrap up, then what impact would you say having the membership has had for you overall?

Sean: Oh, wow, I think I mentioned before, it's given me a lot of freedom to just plan my day, a lot less worry because of the predictable nature of the revenue is just amazing. So, I don't worry about it as much. I do like just being able to just control the direction of where things are going. That feels good. I like the autonomy of that. So, it's been able to do that. Well, not obviously, I've been able to quit my job. In the first two years, I was still working full-time. And in fact, I had multiple jobs. I had four or five different little things, professor of this college over here, and teaching math over this school. Actually, I'm not a music teacher, I'm a math teacher, by the way.

Callie: Oh wow.

Sean: Yeah. So, I'm a math professor at two colleges. So, I actually gave those up. Actually, I told them, "If you have any online courses, we're good." I said, "But if you don't have any online courses, I'm not coming in to work anymore." One of the colleges said, "Oh, no, we want to keep you. We'll give you some online courses." So now I don't actually have to leave my home at all during the week.

Callie: That's perfect.

Sean: Now, during the weekend, I still have my playing stuff, and I like that because it keeps me in that genre. It keeps me fresh musically, and it keeps me being able to have that music there as far... And get out of the house. So, I keep that for the week, but during the week, it's all online, which means I can go where I want to go, I can do what I want to do. It's that freedom there, it's the membership site model, it's this online model, it's just amazing. So, I love it. I don't know, I can't say this enough. But I'm just so grateful that I found Membership Site Academy. And I know you're not making me say this, I don't know if I'm supposed to be saying this or not. But I'm just really grateful because I can have the desire

to want to do something, but the knowledge has to be there. I mean, I have the knowledge necessary to do that, right?

I remember when I initially went to... I was to you guy's sign up page? I was like, "I don't know, this is a little steep" But then when I started I was just like, "Why didn't I do this before?" Because the return on the investment is through the roof. I don't feel like there's any other service that's providing that level that you guys are providing and then with the community as well, I'm just glad I found you guys because, again, I started, like I said a month before. I joined Membership Academy a month before I started. And I used that to launch, I used that, and every time I've needed a problem. By the way, one of my promotions in June is raising my price. I'm going to be at... It's \$29. I already this week started looking up different things and there was a post in there about, okay, so now... So, it's perfect for that. It's everything involving memberships.

I know you guys aren't telling me to say this, but I hope I'm not in trouble. But just for me, that's having that wisdom there, and to be able to rely on, and not just you and Mike, but also other membership site owners. Also, those who are in my field as well, in the music field, and we can gain and share from each other. I think that is invaluable. And that's what I'm trying to provide as well for my group, other musicians that they can be connected, too, because they've said that's invaluable to us. That's why I tell so many people about Membership Site. I don't even ask how they feel about it. I've told so many people about you guys. They just said, "Man, Sean, your site looks great." And it's the content, everything. I said, yeah. I'm careful because I'm not trying to train my competitors. But there's some people who I just tell them, "Look, y'all need to go check out Membership Site Academy." So, yeah. But I'll stop for I get in too much trouble.

Callie: No, I mean, yeah, I really appreciate that because that's what we want. We want to be able to help people have that success with their membership. So, it means a lot to us to know that we've been able to play a small part in the journey for you.

Sean: Yeah, a big part. Thank you.

Callie: And so, last question then. I would love to know what your goals actually are. Where would you like the membership to be in 12 months?

Sean: Oh, man, that's a difficult question. Because I know that by the end of the year in terms of numbers where I would like to be and where I think is doable for me. But outside of that and I was thinking about that this morning.

Excuse me, I don't know if it's acceptable to say I don't know. [crosstalk 00:52:24]. I don't know if that's an acceptable answer. I feel like each year it's like things reveal, things just come to me, and I feel like I should be more planned at some level, but then it's just kind of

like I'm just along for the ride if that makes sense. I'm just along for the journey. It's just been amazing.

If I were to say anything as far as an advice or something, it's just kind of like that Unfair Advantage. That book is just so amazing, knowing my specific way of solving a certain problem because there's only one Sean. You can have somebody who has the exact same, they could be equally skilled as me. But they may have an entirely different approach. And that's fine, but I can only be an expert in how I solve a certain problem. And I just want to retain that core. I want to retain that as far as here is how I am solving the problems that musicians face, and whatever that reveals for future I just want to stay on that because I think that's what's going to really help me out because I think I have something now and I don't want to be able to make sure I've maintained that core, if that makes any sense.

Callie: Yeah, perfect sense. And so, if someone wants to check out your site or connect with you, where's the best place for them to do that?

Sean: On YouTube. Well, luckily for me, Sean Wilson Piano was the most generic blonde name I could think of at the time. And so, Sean Wilson Piano on YouTube, Sean Wilson Piano on Instagram, seanwilsonpiano.com, Sean Wilson Piano, Facebook.

Callie: Nice and easy.

Sean: Literally easy, but the spelling is going to be S-E-A-N W-I-L-S-O-N. I guess most of my content will be YouTube. That's my primary content right now, and I think we have just a little shy of 50,000 members right now, I think-

Callie: Awesome.

Sean: ... for YouTube. So, that's where I'm at, mostly, if someone wants to check out those videos.

Callie: Awesome. And I'll make sure to put those links below for anybody listening on the site as well. And so, yeah, I've loved talking with you today, Sean. I feel like there's lots more we could probably talk about as well, but we wanted to wrap it up there. But yeah, thank you so much for your time. It's been great hearing more about your journey and how things are going for you.

Sean: Thank you so much.

Callie: Big, big thank you once again to Sean for joining me for this episode. And thank you for listening, too. I love what Sean has created and his commitment to always improving and serving his members. If you'd like to get all of Sean's details, read the show notes, or download the transcript for this episode then please head on over to themembershipguys.com/btm51. That's it for this week folks. Please subscribe, review, join me again, same time, same place for another episode of Behind the Membership next week.

Announcer: If you enjoy 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 is 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, and grow a successful membership website. Check it out at membershipacademy.com.