

Episode #9: Boost your sales with my simple marketing calendar (template included)

You're listening to the Tiny Course Empire podcast with Cindy Bidar. This is episode number 9, and today I want to tell you how I know what I'm going to be promoting--and even how I have a pretty good idea how much I'm going to earn--every single month of the year... and how you can do the same with just a simple marketing calendar.

I'll meet you on the other side of this lovely intro...

Hey guys, and welcome back to the Tiny Course Empire podcast.

Before we dig into today's topic, you'll find the show notes for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/9. I have a downloadable template on that page if you want to follow along and build out your own marketing calendar.

Also, I'd love for you to leave me a rating and review on Apple Podcasts, because it helps other people find the show. Based on the download numbers I'm seeing, we're doing a pretty good job of getting the word out, so I appreciate your help to keep the momentum going.

And of course, feel free to share with anyone you know who can use some practical and budget-friendly business-building advice.

And now... let's talk marketing calendars.

A few days ago a friend of mine emailed and asked if I follow a strict email schedule with all of my promotions. You guys, It's like she doesn't know me at all! Of COURSE I have a system.

In fact, just last week I sat down and in about 30 minutes I mapped out exactly what my marketing calendar is going to look like for the next 15 months--so all the way through the end of 2022.

And since it's a rinse-and-repeat system, I will literally spend about 30 minutes at the end of 2022 filling it out for 2023.

Now, let me tell you why I do this, because I know some of you are probably thinking, "But Cindy, I like to be able to just go with the flow, and react to whatever comes up."

Listen. That's fine, and this system leaves room for that, too. It's not so rigid that I have to say no to a great idea because I've already committed to emailing for something else next July 12. That's not at all what I'm doing here.

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What I am doing is making sure I have the big rocks in place so that I can easily see where other promotions can fit. And by big rocks, what I'm talking about is my own products and offers.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's start at the beginning and I'll walk you through how I plan my calendar, and how you can do the same for your tiny course business.

There are two things you have to know before we dive in. Thing number one is that this calendar is my email marketing system. Email makes up about 95% of my marketing strategy. I don't really use social--although I am experimenting with that as mentioned on last week's episode--but right now, it's mostly email, so you're going to hear me talk about subscribers and how many emails I send and some other details.

It doesn't really matter what marketing channels you use though, this same system will work whether you're using social media or email or I guess theoretically, even if you're going door to door in your neighborhood. It's completely channel agnostic, and will actually accommodate several different channels all at the same time.

But for me, it's email.

So that's thing one. Thing two that you need to know is that my personal tiny course empire includes dozens of courses and products. That may not be your model. Maybe you're just getting started and you only have one or two or three courses. Or maybe your tiny course model is different, and instead of creating multiple courses you prefer to focus on just two or three that you run live at different times of the year.

The point is, you don't have to be running a business that looks exactly like mine for this marketing calendar to work for you. You can and should take what I'm sharing here and use the pieces that work for you, adjust what needs adjusting to fit your business and your goals, and throw the rest away.

Now with those two caveats out of the way, it's time for a little story.

I want to take you way back about three years to the start of my course-based business. Before March of 2018, I was exclusively a service provider. I had a full client roster, and marketing wasn't ever high on my to-do list.

I didn't have room for more clients, and when I did have an opening, I found those spots pretty easy to fill just through word of mouth, so I wasn't doing much in the way of intentional marketing.

But I knew that changing business models meant I needed to really up my marketing game, which is why I started putting a lot more effort into email--both growing my list as well as building relationships with the subscribers I did have.

Those first few months were pretty rough. I didn't have a plan like, at ALL, so I'd often get to the last week of the month and I'd look at what we'd earned and think, "What the hell am I going to do to earn some money this week?"

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I had bills to pay, and no consistent income generation to make sure they were covered.

Seriously, if you could see my revenue from those first few months, it was all over the place. Some months were good, and some were really, really bad.

And that's not the only thing that was bad. I wasn't being consistent about email either. Because I didn't have a plan, I would often go days or even a week or more without emailing, which resulted in inconsistent sales, as you might expect.

Now, if you've been on my list for more than a couple of months, you know how rare it is for me to go even two days without sending an email, so a gap of an entire week was not a good thing. It certainly wasn't doing my profit margin any favors, that's for sure.

So with a lot of trial and error, I landed on a system that's been working for me for the past three years, and it's a simple four-week rotation of email promotions. I can map it out well ahead of time, as I said, and it lets me know from week to week exactly what I'm going to be promoting.

That helps in a lot of ways, but the big reason I do this is because it smooths out my cashflow. With this marketing calendar system in place, I can pretty easily predict what my income will be from month to month. I know how much new courses bring in when they launch, and while sometimes they do better and sometimes a little worse, on average I know if I follow my marketing calendar, we're going to stay right in the profitability sweet spot, which is right where I want to be.

It also keeps me on task with new course releases, and it makes writing email content much faster, because I always know what I'm emailing for this week or next week or next month.

And finally, it makes it super easy to say yes or no to other people and their calendars. If someone asks me to participate in a bundle, all I have to do is look at my marketing calendar and I will instantly know if I can fit it in or not.

If someone is having a launch or a sale, I can make plans to promote based on what I already have scheduled in my calendar.

Basically, having this plan in place makes it easier to run a profitable business, and I think that's something we all want, right?

So here's the basic framework, and like I said you can adjust this to meet your own needs. We'll talk more about how you can do that in a minute.

But the framework is this:

The first week of the month, I typically release a new course, and I spend the entire week promoting that.

The second week of the month is for affiliate offers or other promotions. Maybe it's a bundle I'm participating in, or a giveaway, or maybe it's someone else's product that I'm an affiliate for.

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The third week of the month I promote an older course or product of my own, and again, I spend the better part of a week promoting it.

The fourth week of the month is also for affiliate offers or other promotions.

So that's the framework. Those are the basic building blocks that I'm working with, and from there I just plug in the offers, starting with the first week of the month, which I already know is going to be whatever course I'm releasing that month.

From there, I break it down further into individual emails.

I like to spend six days promoting a new course, with seven or eight emails being sent out in that time.

Again, that's the first week of each month, and the launch promotion runs from Tuesday through Sunday.

The reason I chose that span, rather than Wednesday through Monday, or Thursday through Tuesday, is that it ends on the day that I typically get the highest email open rate.

When you're building out your own marketing calendar, you want to make sure you check that, because maybe your best open day is a Wednesday, so you want to take advantage of that.

If you look in your email platform, you should find open and click reports that will tell you.

The next thing I plug into my calendar is an older product promotion each month, and I do that the third week of the month. I like to leave a week between my own promotions, which leaves me room to share other things. I'll explain more about that in a minute.

For these older products, maybe it's a course or a toolkit that I bring back for a short sale. I usually email for those for four days but sometimes for six—typically Thursday through Sunday—and with five to six or as many as eight emails depending on if I start the campaign on a Tuesday or a Thursday.

I decide which older products to put on sale based on a few things.

First, I look at how well it sold previously. Some things do really well, and some are... we'll let's just say not everything is a winner. It's the winners I want to pull out again and again, because that's what my subscribers have told me they want.

So that's the first thing I look for is past performance.

I also don't want to repeat sales too often, so I usually wait at least six months before running a sale on the same product again. That leaves plenty of room for my list to grow and for new people to become subscribers, and it also leaves room for my subscribers to grow in their business. Maybe that really great course about building a membership site just wasn't a good fit for them six or eight months ago, but they might be ready for that step now.

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So I give it a few months or even as much as a year before I re-promote an older course.

Then the third thing I look at is what else is going on that month, and what product would be a good fit? Now, this isn't strictly necessary, and I don't always do this, but when I can, I like each month to have a theme, more or less.

If my new course is about list-building, for example, then I might promote an email template pack in the third week, because it's a good fit with the previous promotion, but again, it doesn't always work out that way.

So that's the first and third week of the month on my marketing calendar, then once I have those slots filled in, I look at the second and fourth weeks to see what's available to share with my subscribers, and what's a great fit for what else I've got going on that month.

Those are the weeks that I'm promoting other sellers. So for example, if I've got a list-building course in the first week of the month, and some email templates in the third week, I might reach out to Karon Thackston and ask for a coupon on [her Email Advantage course](#), so I can promote that. Or I might connect with Lynette from Thrive Anywhere to promote her email marketing planner. Or I might just write a short sequence of emails about how I use [Active Campaign](#).

Any of those would be a good fit with the theme of the month, but like I said, I don't always follow a theme. A lot of times I'm just not that organized, or the offers just don't align that well.

One other thing I do, is from time to time I have special sales going on. I need to make sure I get those in my plan well ahead of time so I can prepare for them.

I run four types of special offers through the year.

The first is a birthday sale, which happens the first week of February. Then I [have](#) a sale on [Six-Figure Systems](#) which we did for the first time this year, and which we plan to repeat annually. And we also have [a big sale in October](#), when we put a different course on sale each day for two weeks.

The last kind of special I like to run is a bundle sale. Because a lot of our courses fit well together, I sometimes bundle them for one low price.

This past summer, for example, I sold [a Course Creation Bundle](#) that included Tiny Course Empire, Quick and Easy Course Creation, and Sales Pages That Convert, all for just \$67 (the price has since gone up).

If you look at my marketing calendar, you'll see these bundle offers sprinkled throughout the year.

These four special offer types help keep me from getting bored with the new course old course routine, plus they give me an opportunity to test new things and they give my customers the chance to take advantage of the sales when it makes the most sense to them.

Which brings me to my next point, and that's this:

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Even with all of this planning--and I might know what I'm going to be emailing about the fourth week of July, even a year or more in advance... but none of this is written in stone.

It's completely flexible, right up until I hit the send button on that day's email.

I don't want you to think that mapping out this kind of system limits your options. It's the complete opposite of that. It actually gives you more flexibility because it lets you be proactive with your marketing rather than reactive.

When you know ahead of time what you'll be talking about--and again, my calendar focuses heavily on email, but it could easily be social media, blogging, YouTube, or any other content channel--when you know ahead of time what you'll be promoting, it makes it so much easier to create the content around that topic.

It also means that you'll be a lot less likely to get to the end of the month and realize that you now have to scramble to bring in enough money to pay the rent or make the car payment. That's not a fun place to be, and it's completely avoidable just by planning your marketing calendar ahead of time.

And if--like me--affiliate marketing is one of your income streams, planning ahead is a must. Because almost all sellers pay their affiliates a month or two or even three months after the sale is made, it's really important for me to keep these promotions on the calendar.

Otherwise, I might get to June and discover that my affiliate income is down by 50% or more, and it's all because I didn't do a good job of planning my promotions back in April. At that point, it's too late to do anything about it but just ride it out and do better going forward.

So planning ahead is a must if you're counting on affiliate commissions as a part of your overall revenue.

Ok, so that's what works for me as a rather prolific course creator.

One week to promote a new course, the next week to promote an affiliate or other offer, the third week for an older course or product or maybe a special sale of some kind, and the fourth week of the month for another affiliate offer.

Like I said, it's a simple cycle I can repeat month after month and year after year, with just a few special events tossed in to keep it interesting.

Obviously, I have lots of things to promote every month, whether it's something new I'm releasing, or something older I'm bringing back, or a bundle of products that all fit together to make a nice offer.

But I know that not everyone has dozens of courses to promote like I do, and you may not be creating a new course most months, so how can you adapt this schedule to your business?

Here's how you can work with this system and make it your own.

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You're going to start with the same basic building blocks by breaking down your month into those building blocks. That's going to work for you whether you email daily, like I do, or once a week, or somewhere in between. So the first thing is to start thinking in terms of weeks. Four weeks per month, 12 weeks per quarter, you get the idea.

The next thing is to look at your product release schedule. If you release a new course or product every month like I do, then you might want to work on a four-week cycle. If you launch a new course every quarter, you'll want to look at a 12 week cycle.

Then you need to plug in your launch dates.

I know that I release a new course the first week of every month, so that's easy. If you launch a new course every quarter, then decide when that's going to happen. Will it be the first day of the quarter, so January first, for example, or will it be somewhere in the middle? It doesn't matter so much when it happens, but you do need to plan for it, so mark that day down on your worksheet.

Then you can work backwards from that date, and block off the amount of time you need to promote your course.

If you're a daily emailer like me, and you're releasing a new course every month, you might only need a week to promote it. If you're a weekly emailer, and your course schedule is quarterly, you might take two or three weeks or even an entire month to promote it.

You'll want to look back and see what's worked best for you in the past, and then copy that plan.

If you don't have good data, or maybe you're brand new and you don't have any data at all, then you'll need to test it. Here's what I recommend if that's the case.

Generally speaking, the less frequent your course releases are, and the more you charge, the longer the marketing cycle needs to be.

That means that if you release a \$300 course once per quarter, you're going to want to spend more time marketing that than you would if you release a \$100 course every month.

Make sense?

The other thing you need to consider is how often do you want to email. You can't effectively market even a tiny course in one week if you only mail once a week. So you'll need to either increase the timeline, or increase the frequency of your emails during your promotional window.

I'm going to strongly recommend that during a promotional window you increase your email frequency if you're a once or twice a week emailer typically. I just don't think you can effectively promote a new course or a flash sale on an older course with just one or two emails per week.

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That's probably a discussion for another episode, so I'll leave it for you to consider for right now, but the formula still stands:

The less frequently you release or promote a product, and the more you charge, the longer your promotion window will be.

Alright, so moving on. You're going to kind of pencil those promotional weeks into your calendar plan, and see how it looks to you, then make any adjustments.

Remember, this isn't written in stone. You can always change it up if it's not working for you. The goal here is to build up to something you can just rinse and repeat month after month and year after year, but it's not going to start out that way.

Make sure you're giving yourself some grace here if it doesn't all come together seamlessly right from the get go, and you definitely have my permission to change it up and make it your own.

Now once you have those big promotional spaces blocked off and you feel good about how long you're going to give yourself to promote your main offers, you can look at what spaces are left, and decide how you're going to fill them in.

There are a few ways you can do this.

First, what about your older courses and products?

I know several people who love to create new products, but who forget or ignore the ones they released last year. I've been guilty of that in the past myself.

My very first course--and this was before I went down the tiny course path--was called The Funnel Advantage. It's all about how to create various types of funnels. It's six modules, lots of videos and templates and whatnot, and when I finally got it done, my business coach at the time asked me what I was going to do next.

I made the mistake of telling her I was going to start on my next course.

That was not the answer she was looking for, and she called me out on it by reminding me that I'd spent a lot of time creating that course, and now it was my job to promote it.

That's your job, too.

Bring out those older courses and products and re-promote them to your list. Remember that a large percentage of your email list--and again, this could be your social followers or your blog readers or whoever--but a large portion of them have either not seen that older course, or when you initially released it, it just wasn't the right time for them to buy.

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Re-promoting it puts it back in the spotlight, and reminds your community that it's available to them in case they forgot or got distracted or they just didn't need it at the time but now they do.

The next thing to look at as you fill out your calendar is any additional income streams you have. I know a lot of my listeners have multiple things going on, and it's easy to forget to promote them if you don't create a space for them in your marketing calendar.

Maybe you offer private coaching, or maybe you have a membership, or maybe you have a whole different--but related--business, like a printables shop on Etsy or a done-for-you content site or you're a part of a network marketing program, or maybe you're a freelancer or a service provider. Make sure you add in some promotions for those other income streams as well.

And what about affiliate promotions? If you're an affiliate for other people's courses or products, you can fill in your calendar with those offers where it's relevant, too.

Of course if you're doing any kind of group promotions, like with a bundle or a giveaway, you need to put those in your calendar too.

One more thing, and we talked about this before, but it really bears repeating. You have to keep track of your results so you can make changes and improvements over time.

My marketing calendar plan didn't come to me in a flash of lightning and it just worked. It's something I've been revising and improving for three years.

Maybe you'll find out that a week isn't long enough to promote your new course, and you'll need to stretch it out into two weeks. Or maybe you'll discover--like I did--that your community responds well to special events, and you'll want to repeat them. If that's the case, reserve a spot on your calendar for that birthday sale or for a special half off everything event.

Always take the time after a promotion, or maybe at the end of the month, to look back at your results. What worked that you want to repeat again? What didn't work that you want to cut from your schedule?

Keeping these kinds of questions in mind is what's going to help you build a marketing calendar that works for your business.

Now I want to hear from you. Do you have a repeatable marketing calendar you plan out in advance like I do? Or are you more of a spontaneous email marketer?

You'll find the show notes for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/9. Leave me a comment and tell me how you plan your own marketing, and if you'll be adapting my system to your business. I'd love to hear what's working for you, and what, if anything, you're looking forward to improving.

Have a terrific day everyone. I'll talk to you again next week.