How to Learn Online Marketing for Free

You're listening to the Tiny Course Empire podcast with Cindy Bidar. This is episode number 10, and it's the first of a two-part series. Be sure to subscribe to the podcast so you don't miss next week's episode, because over these two weeks, I'm going to teach you how to get a master's degree level of online business training... for free.

Hey guys, and welcome back to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast. You'll find the show notes for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/10, and I have a downloadable worksheet for you that's going to help you make the most of the ideas we're covering today.

So you might know that I first came online back in about 2008, but you might not know that we were pretty broke at the time. I had a job that paid a decent salary, but we didn't have a whole lot to spare.

That's actually what started me down this path in the first place - I needed a side hustle to bring in some extra cash. So I really wasn't in a place where I could afford to buy courses and coaching to learn how to run an online business. I don't even know if such a thing existed at that time, to be honest.

I sure wasn't looking for it, because I couldn't afford it even if I did exist.

Instead, I had to get scrappy. I had to just figure stuff out on my own. And that's what I did.

I remember the first time I told my husband that I wanted to start a virtual assistant business, and he sat and listened to me tell him all about the services I wanted to offer and who I was going to work for and whatnot, and then he asked, "But what will you do if you have a client, and they want something you don't know how to do?"

I told him it didn't matter if I knew how to do something or not. If other people were doing it, then it was possible. If they figured it out, then so could I.

And a lot of the times, I was able to figure it out just by really studying what those other people were creating.

In the corporate world, it's called reverse engineering, and it's something I still do every single day in my business, and so can you.

Even though I have the money to buy courses and coaching today, a lot of times I'd rather just watch what other people are doing, and use it as the basis for my own strategies. Then later I buy the courses to get those extra nuggets of information I can't always see through the reverse engineering process.

I love working this way because it lets me follow a proven path, and over the years it's really helped to boost my confidence in what I can create. I think it will help you, too, so let's dig into how you can create your own success by following the clues others leave behind.

You can reverse engineer things in a couple of different ways, so the first thing you want to do is to decide if you want to follow either an overall strategy or a very specific one.

Start by thinking about something in your business that you want to improve. Maybe you want to get better at list building, or course creation, or podcasting, or graphic design. Pick something that's going to have the biggest impact on your business right now.

In other words, what's going to help you make more money or work fewer hours for the same amount of income? Those are the two areas where you can typically have the biggest impact.

And don't try to improve too many things at once, because that's going to just slow you down. Focus on just one or two things you really want to study and get good at, and then you can move onto the next thing and the next.

So when we talk about overall strategies versus specific strategies, here's what I mean by that.

An overall strategy is big picture stuff.

It might be an email marketing or a list-building strategy, and all the pieces that go into that. Or maybe it's a social media plan, and when you're going to post and how often, and how you're going to engage with your audience and what channels you're going to commit to and which ones you're going to ignore.

Or maybe the overall strategy you want to look at is traffic, and where someone focuses their energy - is it on ads or SEO or social media or maybe a combination.

You can see these are all big, overarching strategies that each drive a different aspect

of your business.

Then there are the specific strategies within those big, umbrella topics.

That might be how to sell in an email funnel, or how to get people to show up for a webinar after they register, or how to recapture a lost sale through an abandoned cart campaign.

Those are smaller goals that server the larger picture, if you will.

So the first thing you want to do is decide what exactly you want to learn and work on, and is it a big strategy or a specific one. If you downloaded the worksheet that goes with this episode, you can go ahead and write your answer on that sheet, or just jot it in a notebook or in your notes app.

Of course, if you're driving, don't do any of that. Just think about it for now. You can take notes later.

Ok, now that you know what you're focusing on, it's time to figure out who you want to learn from. I recommend you pick someone who's really crushing it in this space. Who's the go-to expert in your niche? Who's name always comes up in conversation when you talk with your business friends and colleagues? Who's the person who gets booked for every keynote at every conference? Who's ads are constantly in your Face-book feed?

That's the person you want to follow.

And keep it to just one or two people. Just like you don't want to tackle too many strategies at once, don't try to learn from too many people all at the same time either.

Not everyone's path is the same, and strategies are different from person to person, so if you try to deconstruct too many different ideas, you're going to end up confused and no further ahead than you are right now.

So pick one or two people who are doing what you want to do, and follow their path.

Then--and this is really simple you guys--just dig in and really pay attention. Honestly, paying attention and getting curious is really all there is to it.

Here's the thing though. You're going to have to slow WAY down for this--and I can't stress that enough. I mean slow WAY down.

I want you to think about it like this.

Think about someplace you drive to on a regular basis. Maybe it's to drop the kids at school or to go to your day job or maybe to your sisters house or whatever.

You know the route so well that you probably don't even pay attention. The next time you make that drive, if I asked you whether or not that taco place on the corner has margaritas on special, you would not be able to tell me. You'd be so focused on the destination and just getting there that you wouldn't be paying any attention to the journey--especially since it's one you've made many times.

Now imagine walking that same route. All of a sudden you've got a lot more time to read the signs and see what the specials are. Even though you've driven that same route maybe hundreds of times, just slowing down to walking speed changes how you see things--and how much you see.

It's the same way when you're deconstructing a marketing strategy.

You've probably opted in for hundreds of email lists, and by now when you spot something you want, whether it's a free chapter from a new book, or a webinar you want to attend, or a checklist you need, you just fill out the form and click, click, click, and then check your email.

You're focused on the destination, and the journey to get there is just flying by, unnoticed.

But if you slow down and pay attention, and you'll learn a lot about how successful business owners run things.

Years ago I used to work for a business coach, and part of my job was to help her clients get their webinar funnels set up. I was always shocked that many of them couldn't map out the flow of a webinar registration. Like, they couldn't say, ok, first, you put your name and email in a form on a page, and then you click the register button, and then you go to another page that has the details to join the call, and in the meantime you get an email with those same details.

Now, if you've never registered for a webinar before, that's all Greek, and I totally get that. But these students came to my client through a webinar, and they bought her program to teach them how to run webinars.

And even though that was the whole point of her program, a lot of them were so intent on reaching the goal - to watch the webinar - that they didn't pay any attention at all to the journey.

That's what you've got to do if you want to reverse engineer the success someone else has - you have to slow down enough to see the details. Pay attention to the journey, not just the goal.

And one more thing - Don't rely on your memory alone. You might think you'll remember the steps or the user flow, but I promise, you won't. Business and life move pretty fast, and by the time you sit down to build that funnel or create that slide deck or design that quiz, you might remember that you saw something cool you wanted to try, but you won't remember the details.

That's why I'm going to recommend you get a notes app like Evernote or OneNote, or use Google Drive or Dropbox or whatever your tool of choice is, but you're going to want it to be digital, so not a physical notebook.

Then, as you're paying attention, as you're walking the route as it were, you're going to want to take notes, and not just notes - take screenshots of interesting pages. Save the emails that you get. Copy the URLs if you think you might want to go back to that page later.

You can even--and this is my personal preference--fire up a screen recorder like Loom or Snagit, and record what you see on your screen.

Loom is an extension for the Chrome browser, and it will let you record what's happening in your browser for up to 5 minutes for free, which is usually plenty of time to capture a cool little strategy you want to try out. If you need longer recordings, I like Snagit. It's a paid app, but totally worth it. I use it every single day to take screenshots and to record quick videos. You could even open up a Zoom meeting and share your screen and record it that way if that's easier for you.

I have a bunch of different video recordings of strategies and processes that I found really interesting. I've recorded the new member onboarding processes of memberships that I joined and that I want to replicate. I've recorded webinar opt-in funnels I thought were unique or interesting, and all sorts of other things I want to go back and study so that I can apply them to my own business.

It's like a personal training library that I've curated just for me, and it didn't cost me a dime. All I had to do was slow down and pay attention to what the successful people in my market are doing.

And I know I told you to limit your input to one or two people, but it's useful to get in the habit of paying more attention no matter what you're doing. You never know

where you're going to spot a great idea or find a strategy you can use.

Years ago I opted in for Derek Halpern's list over at SocialTriggers.com, and something he did on his thank you page really caught my attention. He had a link right there on the page just for gmail users, and the link was coded so it would open up the welcome email he'd just sent, so new subscribers could find it in case it landed in the spam or promotions folder.

That strategy has always stuck with me, even all these years later, and that's just the kind of thing you might not notice if you're rushing through the process of registering for a free download or something.

The next step is to get really curious.

Ask yourself why this process or this strategy is set up the way it is. Why did the business owner choose to use that particular process?

Right now, if you go over to DigitalMarketer.com and sign up for their 1-page marketing blueprint which is right at the top of the home page, you'll see that the very next thing that happens is they ask you to complete a two question survey about your business.

First they want to know what your role is in your business. Are you the owner or a team member, and if so, what's your job?

Then they want to know how big your marketing team is.

Most people would skip right past these questions to get to the good stuff--the download they were promised. But if you get curious about it and ask yourself, "Why do they want to know this information?" you might decide they're using the info to better segment their list, which would be smart. In fact they as much as say that right on the page, that they're going to use the information to send more relevant information to you.

Now if I were going to use this strategy--and I might--then I'd want to ask different questions. I doubt very much that my subscribers are a part of a 10-person marketing team, so it wouldn't make sense to ask that, but I can still use this method, just with different questions.

I might ask what your business mode is, or what your most effective list-building strategy is, or if you prefer to read a blog post or listen to a podcast.

The point is, if I'd never seen that survey from Digital Marketer and been curious about why they are doing it, it might not have occurred to me to do something similar.

So that's the third step. Just get curious. Ask questions. Pay attention to what you see happening, and ask questions. Super easy.

Step four is to broaden your horizons a bit. Become a well-rounded student.

If you think back to your college days, you'll remember that no matter what you were there to learn--whether it was a degree in biology or math or journalism or computer technology--you also had to study lots of other things, too. You don't get a degree in biology by only studying biology. You also study math and music and writing, because all of that makes you better able to see the whole picture.

The same is true in online business, so don't limit your curiosity to just your direct competitors or people in your niche. Watch how leaders in other industries do things, too.

I've purchased courses I wasn't interested in just to see how the seller put together a course. I've opted into lists I had no interest in because I wanted to deconstruct the funnel they were using. I've joined Facebook groups dedicated to topics I don't care about, just to see how they get better group engagement.

There's a lot to learn out there, and from a wide variety of people who are all doing interesting and unique things, so don't limit your curiosity to the same old group of people you've always followed.

And don't leave out books and blogs and podcasts, as well as free webinars and other resources. There's a lot to be learned from the free content your competitors and others are producing.

But sometimes, the biggest lesson of all isn't in how to duplicate a successful strategy, but in how to avoid doing something that just doesn't ring true to you.

A couple of years ago I joined a well-known membership on a low-cost trial

Now, I will fully admit that I was curious about their set up. How were they organizing their membership? What was their onboarding process like? How were they engaging with their community?

But you guys, the cancelation process was ugly. I had to read and agree to a cancelation document that basically said I acknowledge the fact that I wasn't willing to do the

work to be successful in their program.

In other words, You're a total loser if you quit us.

The whole thing just left a really bad taste in my mouth. I may not have learned much from them about running an online business, and I didn't even discover anything new about the onboarding process or community engagement, but what I did learn was how NOT to annoy my members.

In my Six-Figure Systems membership, I make it a point to tell our members that they can cancel right from their dashboard if they pay by credit card, or through their Pay-Pal account if that's the payment method they use. There are even instructions--complete with screenshots--for how to do it on our FAQ page.

I don't ever want anyone to feel like I felt after being told I just wasn't trying hard enough to succeed.

So just because you see something you don't like doesn't mean it's useless.

Ask yourself what it is you don't like, and why you have that reaction, then work out a way to do it different--and better--than what others are doing.

And finally you guys--and this is the most important thing--but at some point you have to stop learning and start doing.

It doesn't pay to become a professional student, and it's easy for that to happen--and not just with this reverse engineering strategy, but with all things in this online business. It's easier to just keep learning, and it feels like you're doing all the right things, but it will only get you so far.

You have to take what you've learned and put it to work for you.

Decide which of the strategies you've studied will make their way into your business, then get to work putting them in place.

Now, it might be that some of them require a little technical know-how. Those are the tactics. The step-by-step stuff that actually puts that cool link back to gmail on your thank you page, or that creates a two-question survey so you can collect more information about your subscribers.

We'll talk about the tactics on next week's show. We're going to get a little techy, but I promise I'll make it easy. Be sure to subscribe to the show so you don't miss it.

In the meantime, you'll find the show notes for this episode and that worksheet I promised you over at TinyCourseEmpire.com/10. Leave me a comment there and tell me what the best strategy you've ever reverse engineered is. I can't wait to hear your answer. I'll post mine in the comments as well.

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