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You're listening to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast with Cindy Bidar. This is Episode Number 28, and today I'm going to do something a little bit different. I'm kicking off a six-week series that's going to walk you through the steps to launch and grow an online business, so grab a notebook, your favorite beverage, and let's dive in.

Welcome to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, a weekly show dedicated to helping you launch and grow your digital course business, even if you don't have a big team or a six-figure ads budget, we'll help you design smart systems, take consistent action, and achieve massive success on your own terms. Now, here's your host, Cindy Bidar.

Welcome back to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast. I'm your host Cindy Bidar. Like I said, Today, I'm starting something a little bit different. I'm kicking off a six-week series on starting an online business from scratch. Each week, I'm going to walk you through the systems you need to create a thriving business. You'll find show notes and recommended resources for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/28 as well as a downloadable roadmap that I created to help you navigate all six steps. One of the questions that I hear a lot inside my Six-Figure Systems Membership is, Where do I start? If you're new to the online business world, you've likely asked the same thing. I know I did when I was brand new, there are just so many things to do, and it seems like you're supposed to do them all at one time. Like they all have equal importance, like you're supposed to have an email list and you're supposed to be building a website and starting a blog and creating a product, and you're supposed to be all over social media, and you're supposed to know who your ideal client is, and you're supposed to hire a VA and when... You get the idea. The list is long and confusing and some things you can't even do without first completing something else. It's enough to make you just want to close up your laptop and go do something else instead of launch a business.

In fact, I heard that from a Six-Figure Systems member not too long ago, they looked at all the bits and pieces and the time and energy involved and thought, This is just too much, I'm never going to figure this all out and I will never get it all done. So why even bother? Maybe you can relate. So one of the resources that I created for members in Six-Figure Systems is The Six Steps to Six Figures Roadmap, and that's what this series of episodes is going to be based on. Now, I don't want to say that this is the only plan that works, or that you have to do these exact steps in this exact order, but this is a plan that will work if you follow it. Today is all about step one, which is building an email list. Next week we're going to

cover content marketing as a way to show off your expertise and drive traffic to your site, so if you're not already subscribed to the podcast, be sure to do that so you don't miss that episode, and if you're already rocking that list building part of your business, kudos to you. Stick with me though, because you might just pick up a tidbit or two that's going to make your list building job even easier.

So let's talk about that email list a minute and why it's number one on my list. Now, you might be saying, But Cindy, I don't even have a business yet. Why are you telling me to start an email list and I get it. I said the same thing for years. When I was a virtual assistant, I said, I don't need an email list because all of my clients come to me through referrals. And I said, I don't need an email list because I don't have any room for any more clients. And I said, I don't need an email list because I don't have anything to email them about anyway. Well, here's what happened with that. I missed out on opportunities to grow because I didn't have an email list, I couldn't participate in bundles or give aways because I didn't have a list. Other people would send traffic my way, maybe to read a blog post or something, and I had no way to stay in touch with those visitors or to build a relationship with them because I didn't have an email list. And finally, when I decided to make the move from service provider to course seller, I basically started from scratch.

I had a small list of just a couple of hundred people by that point, and I kept thinking, If only I'd made this more of a priority from the start, I'd have a much easier time of it. Right now, I don't want you to be saying the same thing, so starting an email list is the number one thing you should be focusing on as you're building your business. And one more thing, if right now you're thinking, I don't need a list because I have a big social following, then I just want to remind you of a hard truth, you're building your business on borrowed ground, and it can be taken away from you at any time for any reason, and you might just find you have no way to get it back. I've heard this story over and over and over again. I actually just heard it from another podcast this week, where his Facebook account was taken away from him because someone filed a complaint and he could not get it back. Not only that, but we've all known for a long time that organic reach on social media is dropping if you post something on Instagram or Facebook, what percentage of your followers actually see it? It's low, like really low. We're talking 5% or less. Even if you have a group in Facebook, your group members are not seeing everything you post, which is crazy, and that just makes email that much more important.

An email list is an asset you own and control, you get to say who sees the emails that you send out, not an algorithm that was built to serve another business owner's goals. Now, I'm going to step down off my soap box, I know I get a little bit

fired up about it, but that's because list building is such a critical part of owning a business. And listen, what we're doing here today is a kind of set it and forget it thing right? I mean, we're going to create a foundation, so you have it, you'll get your list provider set up and you'll create a lead magnet and create some sign-up forms in a landing page, and that's really it. The point is not for you to add a thousand people or even 100 people to your list before you move on to the next step, the point is to have that foundation in place so that as your business grows, so does your email list. You'll come back to this as we work through the rest of the series, and you'll be pointing people back to your mailing list to have them join, but you can't do that until you put the foundation in place. So this is the first step.

Alright, number one, you have to choose an email platform. You have a ton of options for email providers, and for the most part, they're all equally as good. People ask me all the time, which providers I recommend, and you really can't go wrong here, whichever one you choose will serve you well, as long as you choose one that is a known brand, right, don't go off brand, don't use like a WordPress plug-in that lets you send emails from your server or something like that. As long as you don't do that. So you choose one of the known providers, you're going to be all set now, if you already have an email list provider that's all set up, that's fantastic, you can skip this step. There is almost never a reason to change platforms, especially when you're just getting started, but if you don't already have an email platform set up, then here's what I suggest.

I have three that I recommend. The first one is active campaign. This is the service that I use and love, and I highly recommend it. I love it so much, I even created a course about how to use it, and I will link to that in the show notes. So Active Campaign is my number one choice. Convertkit comes in a really close second, either one of those, you cannot go wrong, and Mailerlite would be my third choice. Now again, as long as you go with a known brand, as long as you go with a known provider, you really can't go wrong here. Any of them are going to do a really good job for you. I do have an entire podcast episode about how to choose your tech stack, and I will link to that in the show notes, but in a nutshell, what you want to do when you are considering software to use, and in this case, when you're considering choosing an email platform, the first thing you want to do is you want to make sure that it's going to work with your other platforms. Now again, this is not going to be a problem as long as you're going with a known name, you're never going to run into a situation where AWeber doesn't work with your landing page builder or where Convertkit doesn't work with your shopping cart or any of that, the big names all work together, so you don't need to worry too much about that.

Just kind of double check, make sure that you're good to go with whatever other

software you're using, and that means in terms of your landing page builders, your shopping cart, maybe your membership site, whatever else you've got going on, you want to make sure that your email provider is going to talk to them. The next thing you want to do is you want to make sure that you like the way it works, get a trial account and start playing with it. Does it make sense to you? Can you find what you're looking for in the menus, can you easily set up an auto-responder and can you send an email, can you create a form, do you like using the platform. This is something that I just talked about the other day on a podcast interview, and it's really important because you have to like using the tools that you have, if you dread logging into your email platform, you're not going to want to do it, you're not going to want to send emails you're not going to want to work in that system. So make sure that you sign up for those trial accounts and see if you actually like the platform.

Number three, get clear about the pricing, there's a lot of platforms out there that will tell you that they're free for X number of subscribers, but there's typically a cap on how many emails you can send. So for example, Mailerlite is free for a thousand subscribers, and you can send up to 12000 emails a month. So what that means is if you have a thousand subscribers and you email them every week, that's 4000 or maybe 5000 emails in a month, so if you're going to mail them three times a week, you're going to run out of email sends, so you have to be aware of what their pricing structure really is. You don't want to think that you are good to go with your small list as you're growing it only to run out of email sends halfway through the month and have to upgrade anyway. So pay attention to things like caps and the number of subscribers, and pay attention to how much it's going to cost you after you reach that point, right. So some providers will say, We're free for a thousand subscribers and you can send unlimited emails maybe, but the pricing after you have to upgrade then is significantly more expensive than what you would pay another provider, so you have to kind of weigh that as well. And also be aware of other limitations on the account, so for example, Convertkit will give you a free account for, I think it's up to a thousand subscribers, but you can't create auto-responders, you can create a welcome email, which we're going to talk about in a little bit, but you can't create any follow-up emails that go out automatically, you're limited to sending broadcast emails. So if creating that kind of funnel or follow-up sequence is important to you, then you're not going to be able to use just the free Convertkit account. So just make sure that you understand what the terms and what the pricing is before you lock yourself into a specific platform.

And number four, you want to find out if it's well supported, and I'm not just talking about their customer service, but does the platform have a user community, do they have a knowledge base, can you get answers to your specific questions without relying on their support desk. You want to make sure that you

can get the help that you need, that you can create anything you need to create within that platform that if you run into a problem, you can get answers. So find out if it's well supported, then once you have chosen a platform, you're going to have to spend a little bit of time setting it up, and you only have to do this once, but you're going to have to do things like add your mailing address. This is to comply with the CanSpam Act, and every single email you send must have a physical address on it, so for safety reasons, I use a PO box, I don't put my home address on my emails, but there are some other services out there that allow you to use their address if you choose, so you don't have to have a PO box, you don't have to have that added expense, you can just use their physical mailing address. I think Convertkit is one of those. There may be others as well.

You're also going to need to connect to your email platform, to your form builder, this might involve creating what's called an API key, and again, your email platform is going to have more details about this that you can see. They're going to walk you through the process of doing that in most cases, and finally, you're probably going to need to create an email template. I like to use a branded template that has my logo on it and some boilerplate text in the footer. If you're on my email list and then you've seen it, that's a template that I created in Active Campaign, and every day when I send an email, I just choose that template, so my emails always look the same, so you're going to want to do that as well.

Then once you have all of those pieces in place, you're ready for step two, and that is to create your lead magnet. A lead magnet is the incentive that you offer to new subscribers in exchange for their email address. It's best if your lead magnet offers a solution to a problem that your audience is facing or it should make their lives better in some way. Now obviously, that problem or that life improvement needs to be closely related to what you do in your business, or you're going to fill your list with people who just aren't a good fit for you and who will never become your customers, you don't want to do that, so you want to make sure that that problem that you're solving is very closely related to what it is you sell. I have another episode that digs deeper into creating a lead magnet, and I'm going to link to that in the show notes, but the basics are this, your lead magnet has three primary jobs to do.

Number one, it needs to be quick to consume, so we're not talking about creating a page e-book, we're not talking about a webinar, we're not talking about a five-video sequence that drips out over time, none of that stuff. There's a place for that sort of lead magnet, but that's not what we're talking about here. We want to keep it really simple. We want people to be able to download it, glance through it, and put it to work. And that's the second thing. It needs to be actionable, it needs to give them something to do, something that's going to move them closer to their

goal, something that is going to help them solve that problem that they're facing, or help them improve their life in some way. And the third thing is, it needs to bring them one step closer to paying you, and that's what we were talking about just a minute ago. Needs to be related to what it is that you sell. It needs to be a step along that path to where they're going to be ready to pay you for that course that you sell, or for that coaching that you offer, or for that freelancing that you do, whatever it is that you do in your business. It needs to be closely related, so that they are coming one step closer to being ready to pay you.

So some ideas that you might work with when you're thinking about what kind of lead magnet to create, I particularly like things like checklists or worksheets or cheat sheets, or some kind of a resource guide, or maybe a planner or a template of some kind. All of these things are really quick to create, and they're really quick for your subscribers to consume and to take action on and to get value from. Now, I don't want you to spend a ton of time on this creating a lead magnet, like this should take you no more than a couple of hours at most. If it's taking you longer than that, you're probably overthinking it, so ask yourself, What will help my subscriber get past this one small problem right now. You're not trying to change their world or solve every problem they have, you're just helping them get past one small hurdle, keep that goal in mind and it's going to be much easier and much faster to create your lead magnet. Remember that you're going to be creating a lot of lead magnets over the course of your business. This is just the first one. So it doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be done. We're building the foundation here, not the entire skyscraper.

That brings us to step three, which is to give visitors a way to actually sign up to receive your lead magnet. That means creating an opt-in form and a landing page. An opt-in form is exactly what it says, it's a small box on your website with a place for a name and an email, and it has a subscribe button. When someone fills in the form and clicks the button, they get added to your list, and you send them your lead magnet. A landing page is just a larger version of your opt-in form, and it probably offers a few more details about what it is your offering. It has its own URL, so it's easy for you to share and that's important. You want to have a short link that you can easily share. In other words, instead of telling somebody to go to your site and click over to the blog and then scroll down to the bottom of the post to find a form, you can just say, go to the landing page, go to CindyBidar.com, free, or go to yoursite.com/checklist or whatever the URL is. You want it to be easy to say and easy for people to remember.

Now, I use Thrive Leads for opt-in forms and Thrive Architect for landing pages, but you can use whatever you're comfortable with. Most email platforms today even have a built-in landing page builder if you want to go that way, although I do think

it's better to have the page on your site rather than on your mailing list providers domain. The technical details of how to create a form or a landing page are going to depend on what tools you're using, so if you're not sure how to do it, check the knowledge base or the documentation for your form builder or your page builder beyond that though. The only other thing you have to do here is to tell your visitors what's in it for them. In other words, why do they need your lead magnet, how will it solve their problem or make their lives better in some way. This is the copy that you're putting on your form or on your opt-in page, on your landing page to entice people to give you their email address, and it's a lot harder to do in a small space than you might think, but focus on the benefits, what will they actually achieve by using your checklist or your resource guide.

So an example might be, say you offer a packing checklist for people who are traveling with their pets. It's definitely valuable, and as somebody who once forgot today along a leash on a trip with her dog, it's absolutely going to solve a problem or at least prevent one. Now, in your opt-in form, you could write a headline that says something like, Download your Travel Packing Checklist, that's what most people will write, and it does tell your subscribers what they're getting, but not why they need it or how it's going to help them a pet travel packing checklist. What am I going to do with that? But what if instead you write Pets Travel Safely with our Packing Checklist, or maybe Get the Stress-Free Pet Travel Checklist, either of those headlines are going to paint a better picture of why your visitor needs your lead magnet and how it's going to make their lives better in some way or solve a problem that they're having. So that's step three, create the opt-in form and your landing page, we're going to talk more about what you're going to do with those in just a minute, but first you have a welcome message to write.

And then step four, your welcome message is exactly what it claims to be, it's an email that welcomes new subscribers to your list and it delivers the goods. In other words, the lead magnet they asked for, this email should go out immediately whenever anyone subscribes, this is called an auto responder in most systems, or it might be a sequence or an automation, depending on the platform, but they all mean the same thing. It's an email that welcomes your new subscribers to your list, you don't have to be elaborate here, you don't have to write anything lengthy. In fact, it's better to keep it short and friendly. It needs to have two things though. First it needs to have the link to download or access your lead magnet, and don't attach that to the email, you can do that in some systems, but it's going to land your email right in the spam folder if you do. Instead, you're going to need to upload your lead magnet to the internet somewhere, and then put a link to it in your email. Now, I like to upload PDF files to my web host, but you can use Dropbox or Google Drive if that's easier, just make sure that you can get a direct link to it that anyone can access, they shouldn't have to log in to download a PDF.

The other thing your welcome email needs is information about what to expect from you, when will you say how often set the expectation in that first email? So they know exactly what to expect from you. Your welcome message can be a single message, it can be a single email, or it can be an entire series of emails that drip out over several days or even weeks. We're keeping it super simple today, but you can play with adding more emails to the welcome sequence if you like, once you get your foundation in place. Now you'll set this up in your email platform, and again, exactly how you do that will depend on the system you're using, but they'll have instructions for you to follow, and that's all there is to step four. It shouldn't take you more than a few minutes to write this, don't overthink it, just a couple of paragraphs and a link to your lead magnet.

And you're ready for Step Five, which is to commit to a regular email schedule. It doesn't matter if you have three subscribers, I want you to email them every single week. It doesn't even matter if you can't think of anything to write about, or if you're running short on time, or if you think nobody is paying attention, you need to get in the habit of emailing them, and you can email them more frequently if you like. You can email them every single day, but commit to once a week at a minimum, anything less than that, and people are going to begin to forget who you are and why they subscribed in the first place. Not only that, but you're going to lose momentum, you'll skip a week, and then you'll skip two weeks, and before you know it, it's been four months and you haven't emailed your list even once, and when you do finally send an email, you're going to get a flurry of unsubscribes, not because they don't like you, but because they've forgotten who you are, and that's de-motivating and it will make you not want to email them again. So don't set yourself up for that kind of stress. Commit to once a week, at a minimum, pick a day and make sure that you send your email every week on that day, whether it's Thursday or Saturday or Tuesday, none of that matters, just be consistent with it. And if you're worried about what you're going to email every week, I get it, that's a big concern if you're new to list building, but we're going to cover that in next week's episode, I promise if you're listening to that one, you will never run out of content ideas.

So now you've chosen an email platform and you've got that all set up and you've created your lead magnet and your opt-in form, and you've written a welcome email and you're emailing on a regular schedule. All that's left is to start telling people about your offer and getting them on your list. And that's what Step Six is all about. The most important thing here is to not be shy about it, you want your audience to see you in a lot of different places, and honestly, it's going to feel like you're being spammy, but trust me on this. Most of the people who need and want your lead magnet are not going to see all of these. You will think it's a lot because

you see them all, but your audience is only seeing a fraction of them, so the first thing you want to do is make your lead magnet a prominent part of your website. You can add your opt-in form in multiple places on your website, you can create a welcome that that's that kind of slide-in thing that comes down usually from the top when somebody visits your website, and it covers the whole page that's called a welcome mat, and that one honestly converts the best on my website. I use all of these on the website as a matter of fact, but that one converts the best.

You can also create what's called a hello bar, that's the narrow band across the top of your website that offers a lead magnet up there. You can create Exit Intent Pop-ups. An Exit Intent Pop-Up is a pop-up that only shows when someone's mouse cursor moves out of the view port or out of the window, so as if they're moving towards that back button, if you can imagine that they move towards that back button, and as soon as the mouse button leaves the view port and gets closer to that back button on their browser, then an Exit Intent Pop-Up comes up. You can also create a lead magnet at the bottom of all of your blog posts. I highly recommend what's called a content upgrade, so when somebody finishes reading your blog post, the next thing that they see to do is to opt in for your list for your lead magnet, you can also add that content upgrade right in the middle of your blog post, you can even do this automatically with a WordPress plugin called Ad Inserter.

I'll add that in the show notes as well as to Thrive Leads, which you can use to create all of these kinds of opt-in forms and even a couple of others. You can also put a sign-up form on other pages on your website, so you might put a sign-up form on your resources page or on your About page, or on your home page or on your start here page. Whatever pages you have, make sure that you are capturing your visitor's attention with an opt-in form on those pages.

Then the next thing you can do is update all of your most used social media channels. Now, you guys know I don't use social media for this, but if you are using social media for business, then you do want to make sure that all of your social followers know about your lead magnet and know where to get it. So that's going to mean putting the link in, things like your profile pages, you can change out your header graphics, if you've got a Facebook page or a Twitter profile or a LinkedIn profile or a Facebook group, all of those header graphics are good places to put a call to action to join your mailing list. You can use your Instagram Stories, you can use TikTok to promote your lead magnet, and aside from setting up those kind of set it and forget it things, you can also post about it frequently on social media. I would, if I were using social media to promote a lead magnet, I would write up, say, 10 or 15 different posts about it, why people want it, who it's for, what problems it solves, what the benefits are of getting it, and I would load those up into a post

scheduler like Meet Edgar or SocialBee or whatever platform you're using. And I would just rotate through them on a regular basis on whatever frequency makes sense for the platform that you're using. So that might mean I'm posting about it every day on Twitter, and once a week on Instagram, and three times a week on Facebook, maybe depending on how many people are following you on which platform and what frequency makes sense there. So make sure that you are definitely sharing about your lead magnet if you are active on social media.

Then think about where else you can add a link to that lead magnet, so that might mean adding a link to your landing page in your email signature if you're emailing a lot of potential clients, that's a really good place to have that link to your lead magnet. You can make it your main call to action whenever you appear in live streams or on interviews or if you're doing guest blogging or anything like that, make your leg, that main call to action when somebody says, Where can we find out more about you? Point them to that lead magnet. You can also ask your subscribers to share the email with a friend, so when you send out an email to your list like you're going to do every week, you can put a call to action in that email and say, Please forward this to a friend, if you know somebody who can use this information, those friends will then come back to your site and sign up if they find your information valuable. And most importantly, just keep emailing them, the best way to grow your list isn't about having the right tactic it's by creating a relationship with your subscribers, the more often you keep in touch and the more value you provide, the more subscribers you will have unless building just like with everything else in business. Consistency counts more than tactics, if you want to know more about how I grew my list in 2021, I covered eight ideas that are working for me right now, in episode Number Eight of this show, I'll put the link in the show notes.

So that's it. Just six steps to start building your email list. Step one, choose an email provider, and they are all equally as good, don't overthink this. Step two, create your lead magnet, make it something actionable, something people can quickly consume and something that leads them one step closer to paying you. Step three, build your opt-in forms and your landing page. Step four, create a welcome message that sets the expectation for how often you'll be in touch with your subscribers and that offers them the link to download the resource they opted in for. Step five, make a commitment to emailing at least weekly. And Step six, tell people about your offer and where they can get it. If you want to dig deeper into list building, I'd love to invite you to check out the Six Figure List Building System. It's my 10-lesson course that walks you through this entire process, plus it includes email templates, comparison charts, checklists and worksheets to take the overwhelm out of list building.

I'll have a link in the show notes and you can use promo code Podcast to save 40% at check out. Head over to TinyCourseEmpire.com/28 to find the show notes for this episode. All the resources we mentioned, and while you're there, you can download the Six Steps to Six Figures Roadmap that we're working on from this series. Finally, if you're enjoying the show, would you do me a favor and leave a rating and review over at Apple Podcast that helps other people find us, and of course, if you have a friend or a colleague who could use some help, getting their email list set up, go ahead and send them the direct link to this episode again, that's TinyCourseEmpire.com/28. On next week's show, we're going to cover the next step to building a six-figure business, and that's creating content, and I promise I'm going to make it easy. Be sure to hit the Subscribe button in your podcast app so you don't miss it. Have a terrific day and I will talk to you again next week.

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