PLEASE NOTE: This is a machine transcription. Some punctuation and spelling weirdness are to be expected.

I get asked a lot about the tools that we use to run the business and I've blogged and I've podcasted about it before, but you know, technology just has a way of changing pretty fast so as we get close to the end of 2023 and as we're all planning amazing things for 2024 I thought it would be a good time to do a round up of the tools that we're using today, what made the cut to follow us into the new year and what changes we're planning on for 2024.

This is episode 102 of the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, and today we're talking all about the tools that keep an online business online.

Hey, it's Cindy, and thank you for spending a few minutes of your day with me. You'll find the show notes and the recommended resources, and there's a lot of them for this episode at tiny course empire dot com forward slash one zero two. While you're there, be sure to hit the subscribe button new episodes drop every Thursday morning, and next week we're going to talk about social proof. Everyone says how important it is, but what if you don't have any testimonials or social proof yet? We've got some ideas you can use, but that's next week.

This week is all about technology, What tools made the cut for 2024 which ones we are replacing, and some alternatives that you might want to try to. I don't want to just drop a random list of technology on you, so I've organized this list by type, starting with the high level stuff like website hosting and payment processors and then narrowing it down to the nitty gritty things like which microphone I use and which app I'm using for journaling and project planning. So let's go ahead and get started. First up, I want to talk about website hosting.

I continue to recommend that all small business owners have an online home that they own and that they control. It is not enough to have a Facebook page, or a group or an Instagram following, or a Tiktok account i don't care how many followers you have, You absolutely must have a home on the Internet that is yours. For me, that means a WordPress website that's my builder of choice. And that means that I have to have a website hosting account so that my site files have somewhere to live.

My current hosting plan is with a company called Liquid Web. We've used them for a couple of years i don't have any plans to change that in the near future. I like Liquid Web because they have a really good support. I can get a hold of them on

the phone, I can get them by chat, I can email, them whatever works for me. They're really quick to respond in most cases. They have a really good reasonable prices i have done some comparison shopping for other hosting accounts and I had to tell you this is really difficult to do it's a bit like shopping for a mattress.

No two stores really sell the same thing so it's really hard to compare what you're getting at one place versus what you're getting at another place. Website hosting is the same way and you add to that all of the technical details like the amount of RAM and the amount of bandwidth and it's just very confusing to compare website hosting plans across companies. But from what I can see from our research, Liquid Web offers very reasonable pricing for what you get with them and we've been happy with them for a couple of years now so we intend to stay.

That said, they are not without their downside as well. Recently they seem to have outsourced some of their phone support overseas. So it's not quite as good or quite as quick as it used to be. But other than that, I don't have any complaints about Liquid Web. Before we moved to Liquid Web, we were with a company called Momwebs, and Momwebs is really best for that kind of small, boutique, hand holding style of website hosting if you are brand new to business and you really don't understand website hosting and you really don't want to get into the weeds learning about things like C Panel and WHM and figuring out how to make the connections, Momwebs is your host to go with as far as I'm concerned they have really great pricing especially for the level of service that they offer and they are just so supportive, especially of new business owners.

They will spend as much time with you as you need to get your questions answered to get things up and running and to fix things when they are broken. They are on a first name basis with most of their clients and even former clients i am quite certain that I could contact Mom Web's hosting even today and they would know who I am and know my name and speak to me as if. You know, we're old friends, right? The cons of Momwebs is that there is no phone support and I know that there are several people that I know who really prioritize phone support they want to be able to pick up the phone and call somebody.

My husband is like that he wants to pick up the phone and call. I'm fine with email support in fact I would prefer to go through email or to go through chat rather than pick up the phone i'm not a phone person, but if you want priority support on the telephone, then Momwebs is probably not the host for you. But for us, it's Liquid Web. That's where we're at right now that's where we're staying for the foreseeable future i have no complaints with them and we're quite happy with our hosting

account there. Now, website files aren't just static files. Sometimes you need to offer downloadable documents or maybe you want to have a podcast, or maybe you want to upload video.

And for those things you need more specialized hosting you can't just upload video to your website host and expect it to play anywhere, because that you just won't have that amount of bandwidth so here's what we use in those Special Situations. For video, we use a company called Vimeo you will find them at vimeo.com We've used them for years. We continue to use them. They are a great alternative to something like YouTube, which is public, right so if you post a video on YouTube, there's a public link to it that anyone can watch. If you are creating course content or something that's private for your coaching clients or whatever, you might not want to host that Someplace like YouTube where, like I said, it's very public.

So instead you need a video hosting platform. For us, that's Vimeo. Other alternatives are things like Wistia for your course platform, which we'll talk about in a minute. Might have a video upload feature as well. Like I said, we've used Vimeo for years we're quite happy with them and they're quite cost effective as well i think they are if you pay annually, it's like 20$ a month for something like 120 videos, which is probably more than enough to at least get you started, at least get you up and running for quite a long time if you're creating courses or creating coaching programs.

We also use an audio host and this is for our podcast so what you are listening to right now is coming to you from a site called Libsyn. That's our audio host for podcasting they are a dedicated podcast host, which means they specialize in hosting audio content only. They also create what's called the RSS feeds for podcasts we don't use their RSS feed we'll talk about that shortly, but Libsyn is a very well-rounded very well respected audio hosting company and we are probably going to stick with them for the foreseeable future, mostly because it's really a pain to move.

Now with that said, we've also trialled an account with a company called Pod OPS we bought that when they were on Appsumo. We haven't used it much, but it does seem really solid but again, it's a pain to move a podcast we would have to move every single audio file and it's just kind of a technical, kind of a technical issue that I really don't want to deal with.

What we're paying for Libsyn is really reasonable it's like 15$ a, month and I'm quite happy to keep paying that and just stay right where I'm at so no changes on that front coming up anytime soon. The third type of hosting that you might need is for documents. These are things like PDF downloads or checklists or your lead magnets that you give away in exchange for an email address those kinds of things have to be hosted somewhere as well. In the past, we have used Amazon S3 to host these types of downloads.

We moved from them to our own server probably a year and a half, maybe two years ago. And we did that because the pricing of Amazon, while it was really inexpensive, was also not very transparent we never knew from month to month what our bill was going to be. And one month we got a really high bill and couldn't figure out why and they couldn't tell us why. So we were concerned that we were going to just continue to get higher and higher bills so at that time, we decided that we were going to move all of those downloadable assets to our own hosting account so we talked about Liquid Web where we are hosting all of our website files.

Liquid Web also hosts all of those PDF downloads that we talked about. Now, the reason we can do that is because we have a tool that protects access to that content. Obviously, if you are creating paid courses or paid coaching programs, you don't want the world at large to just be able to download all of your PDF or audio assets, right you don't want them to be able to grab a link and go download whatever they want because you want them to pay you for access to those assets.

So you have to be careful if you are hosting those kinds of things on your own website because Google and other search engines will index them and will share those links in the search results, and you don't want that to happen. So we were able to move all of our downloads into our website hosting account because our shopping cart actually protects those folders our shopping cart prevents Google or whoever from coming in and indexing those files so we don't have to worry that they're going to get loose out there on the Internet at large in a search, right? If you don't have a shopping cart that protects your content that way, then some alternatives that you might use include Dropbox or Google Drive or other cloud storage apps that allow for you to create a public link.

And the reason those work where just hosting on your own web hosting account might not is because Google and other search engines are not indexing the content that is posted in Dropbox or in Google Drive or inbox.com or whatever cloud storage app you happen to be using. Those apps are not indexed in the same

way that your website files are indexed. So that's what we're using for these other types of hosting, again, video, audio and document storage those three types of products or those three types of files need their own specialized hosting and we are using, like I said, Vimeo.

We're using Libsyn for the podcast and we are using our web hosting account for PDF downloads. Now once you have a web host and you have these other types of hostings all covered, in other words, you have some place for your site and for your content to live, then the next thing you need is a way to create those files, those website files. Now for me, that's always going to be WordPress. I have been a WordPress user since version 2 so way back in 2007 I don't see myself ever changing from WordPress to something else i can't see a world in which I won't use WordPress i just don't have any desire to learn a new site builder.

I don't have any desire to move things out of WordPress i don't ever want i don't want to say never i never want to say never I'm. It's possible it could happen, but I don't see that happening in the future. I don't see that ever changing for me now that said, the themes and the plug insurance that run my site do change, so the core WordPress is always going to be there as far as I can see i will always use that core site builder, but the theme might change in other words, the look of my site might change the plugins that let me customize the site might change.

What we're using right now on the site is on the main site so this is at cindybidar.com We use a theme called Astra which we purchased because I heard so many people talking about how fast it is and how lean it is. And site speed is pretty important when it comes to building website google has said that it's a ranking factor when it comes to SEO. In other words, if your site is really slow to load, it will rank lower than a site that is faster and it's also good for your customers you don't want them to have to sit and wait for your site to load for you know 5 seconds or 10 seconds or whatever you want your content to come up quickly for them so we had heard that Aster was really good for that and as far as I can tell they really are so that is the theme that we went with on the cindybidar.com site.

If you are a six figure systems member then you probably will know that we have a different theme on the OR on the access site so this is what you would see if you log into cindybidar dot com forward slash access to get to your course materials. On that site we are using a theme called Memberoni which was created by the team over at membershipacademy.com You have to be a member of Membership Academy to get access to that theme it's not available anywhere else.

It is not available for sale as a standalone. The only way to get it is to become a member of the Membership Academy, which is well worth the cost of admission as far as I'm concerned so if you are a member of 6 figure Systems, or if you have ever taken a course for me and you've wondered what it is we use to show off our courses and our membership and how we create all the menus and how we create all the landing pages in there, that's the theme that does it it's called Memberoni.

Now we do use another page builder as well. You will see this on our sales pages you'll see this on the home page on the main site at senddbr.com and that is Thrive Architect that's the page builder that we're using. And here is where we come to probably the first thing that's on the chopping block for 2024 We are looking at replacing Thrive Architect in favor of a tool called Elementor.

We haven't made that decision 100 % yet, but that's probably the direction that we are leaning. And the reason for that is because Thrive Themes or Thrive Architect has become increasingly difficult to use we've had some recent issues with their licensing where for whatever reason and they can't really seem to explain it to us but for whatever reason, the license gets disconnected and I will log in and try to make a change to a page or try to update something and the plugin will tell me that my license is not valid and I need to pay them again even though my license is valid and it's not due for several months yet, but for whatever reason it gets disconnected and then I have to fight with it to reconnect the licensing and it's just become a real pain in the neck so we're looking at changing that the other reason is their lead forms so we use two of their plugins we use Thrive Architect to build pages an we use Thrive leads to build opt in forms so if you go to for example the homepage on the site you'll see an opt in for the online business road map.

That opt in form is built with Thrive leads and what we've seen is that the Thrive leads forms are really slow to react you'll see that loading graphic for several seconds after you enter your username or after you enter your email and your first name to access whatever download is being offered. You'll see that loading graphic just spin and spin and spin and spin, sometimes for as much as 30 seconds, which is really annoying and really not a good look for us so we've decided that after our next year with Thrive Architect, we're going to look for something, look for an alternative for that like I said, it's most likely going to be a tool called Elementor we are still kind of investigating, but that's the way that we are leaning.

Other must have plugins and I could do an entire episode on just plugins for WordPress, but I'm going to keep this just to the must have ones for me otherwise we're going to be here all day talking about plugins. But there's three more that I use that I really could not run my business without. The first one is called Solid Backups and that's from a company called Solid WP. In the past we have used Updraft, Updraft Plus and Backup Buddy, but this is the current tool that we are using there's lots of different plug in options out there for WordPress.

It doesn't really matter which one you're using so much as long as you're using something reliable and as long as you are using something. If you have a website, you must have an automated backup system for that website there is no situation in which I will tell you it's OK not to be backing up your website. Years ago I used to work for a company called WP Security Lock and I would spend my days rebuilding websites that had been hacked and that did not have good backups.

And let me tell you, I cannot even imagine the amount of money that these people were spending to have their sites rebuilt when they had a failure, when they got hacked, when they, when their server went down, whatever happened and they lost all of their website files and then they had to come along and pay us to rebuild them it was very time and labor intensive and very expensive to do. And the solution to that is just to keep good backups and it's so easy to do it's so easy to install a plugin, install a reputable plugin like Updraft or Solid Backups and configure it so that it's backing U your site every day so that it is sending those backups someplace offsite so that you have them in case you get hacked or in case your server goes down.

If you've been following me for a while, then you may remember that about a year and a half ago we did have a catastrophic server failure. We lost all of our websites, we lost our shopping cart, we lost the websites, we lost everything in this server outage and we had an issue with the shopping cart where we didn't have good backups, but the websites we had backups of those were back up and running. Very quickly because we had backups so don't ignore this it is really important. I did another episode about that and I'm going to link to that in the show notes as well about making sure that you are protecting your online assets but it starts with having good backups.

I know I sound like I'm really ranting about this, but it is that important and I hope if you take nothing else away from this episode that it will be for you to go and install a backup plugin immediately if you don't already have one. The next must have plugin that we have is called Seriously Simple Podcasting. This is what allows me to

syndicate the podcast episodes through my website instead of through Libsyn so I talked about how I use libsyn to host my audio files, but the RSS feed actually comes from my website. I made that decision for a couple of different reasons mostly because I want people who are listening to the podcast maybe they're new to me i want them to come back to my website.

I don't want them to click through the links in the podcast episode and go to Libsyn. I want them to come to Cindy bidar.com So for that reason, we syndicate from cindybidar.com instead of through Libsyn's own website page or podcast pages that they allow you to build over there. And to do that we use a plugin called Seriously Simple Podcasting, which is really pretty seriously simple. The third plugin that we use that I can't imagine running my business without is called Post Gopher O many people ask me about this tool. If you go to the website, if you're reading any blog post on the website, you will see a big yellow button at the top i think it's yellow maybe it's ink now no, I think it's yellow.

Anyway, there's a big button at the top that says download a copy of this blog post to read later and it is the post Gopher plug in that allows you to do that it's the post Gopher plug in that creates that downloadable PDF that you can get just by entering your email address in the form that pops up. I cannot imagine not having that on my site even though when people told me years ago this goes back years we've had this on the site for probably three or four years now.

People came to me and said how come I can't download APDF of your blog post and I thought they were crazy i thought, well who wants to download APDF of a blog post? But I will tell you what lots of people do because I get opt insurance through that plug in every single day. So if you have a blog, if you have content on your website and you want to grow your email, list I highly recommend Post Go First. It does a really spectacular job. Now I said that I love WordPress i can't imagine a world where I wouldn't be using WordPress, just not even on my radar but if I was just starting out, if I was brand new, if I didn't have 16 years of experience with WordPress and I was looking to build a website, there is an alternative that I might investigate and that is called squarespace seems to have a much shorter learning curve than WordPress.

You have to keep in mind that tools that are really flexible and really powerful tend to have a much larger learning curve, and that is true with WordPress it can be really overwhelming to log into WordPress for the first time and try to figure out what you're supposed to do, or try to build a website that looks like you envision it

looking or even trying to install WordPress can be a bit overwhelming if you are not really into technology like I am.

So if that's you and you're brand new, then I would recommend that you check out Squarespace. I will say though that it is less flexible than WordPress is. There's not a lot of things that you can customize in there like you can on WordPress. You will be somewhat locked in with your content in other words, when you get it into Squarespace, it can be difficult to get it out. It's probably going to be more costly than WordPress to operate it because you have to pay them for using their software and you're paying them for hosting. And I don't have the numbers in front of me, but you can go to squarespace.com And look at their plans and see what it would cost you.

But with that said, it is probably more secure than WordPress because it's not open source one of the complaints that I hear about WordPress a lot is that it is insecure and I don't believe that it is insecure i don't believe that it is a security risk. I believe that there are people who make it a security risk by not doing the things that they should be doing to keep their website more secure.

But the fact remains that WordPress is open source, which means that anybody can go and download the core files for WordPress and open them up and read them. And what that means is that people with bad intentions can go and download the files for WordPress and open them up and read them and write software that then takes advantage of any potential vulnerabilities in the code. Which is why you will often see things like WordPress sites have been hacked. Now the other reason for that is because WordPress powers something like 35 % of the Internet, or some ridiculous number like that like a lot of websites are built on WordPress, so there is a whole lot of potential opportunity for hackers to get into websites right.

So they're more likely to focus on hacking a WordPress website than they are to focus on hacking something like Squarespace, where it's much more difficult to do and there's not as many potential victims out there. So because of that, Squarespace might feel a little bit more secure than WordPress, just because it's not open source and because there are not as many millions and millions of websites built on Squarespace as there are on WordPress. Squarespace also comes with its own hosting i said it's probably more expensive to run than a WordPress website. That's because it comes with its own hosting, so you can skip the whole Liquid web mom Webs talk we had earlier about what we're using for website hosting because Squarespace includes it all in one package.

Like I said, Squarespace is a good option If you are starting out now and you want something that you can get up and running really quickly without getting lost in the technology weeds and without struggling with themes and plugins and all of those things, I think Squarespace is a really good option. A website is a marketing tool for your small business, but it's not the only one. In fact, I have three other marketing tools that I use and I have more coming up in the new year.

So first up and I would say this is the most important of the entire bunch. That's email for me. That's Convertkit. I changed from Active Campaign just this year i sent an email about that recently if you're on my email, list you may have read it, but I changed from Active Campaign for a couple of reasons. Number one, Active Campaign dramatically increased my price my bill went from around 700$ a year to something like sixteen hundred dollars a year it was like a 233 % increase, which I thought was ridiculous i don't.

I don't appreciate services where I've been a customer for a long time. Just raising my price like that i think it's bad business. I was also increasingly frustrated with the email builder inside of active campaign it was buggy even after they made a big to do about how they were rebuilding it, they rebuilt it from the ground up and it was supposed to be so much better and I did not find it was better at all i thought it was worse as a matter of fact, so I wasn't happy with that either. So at the beginning of December we moved from Active Campaign into Convertkit and there's a lot to love about Convertkit number one.

I love the email builder it is so much easier to use than Active Campaigns was. The interface is much simpler than Active Campaigns interface. I will admit that I don't like the Visual Automation Builder in Convert Kit as much as I liked the one in Active Campaign the one in Active Campaign made more sense to me. The Visual Automation builder in Convert Kit, I just don't like it doesn't feel comfortable to me i think they could have done a better job on that, but that's really my only complaint with Convert Kit at this point. I will say it is more expensive than my former active campaign account so the account that I was paying 700$ a year for was significantly less expensive than what I am paying for convert kit now.

But Convert Kit is less expensive than what my bill would have been with Active Campaign had I stayed with them. The other thing that I like about Convertkit is that it integrates with all of the other tools that I'm using and this was really important to me it was probably the most important consideration when I was

looking for a new email platform. I'm using a shopping cart that needed to integrate with my email platform that was the number one concern it also needed to integrate with my Drive leads account with my website with all of the other tools that I'm using. So I had to check that out first and Convert Kit ticked all the boxes, so that's the one that we went with.

Some other ones that we considered, I considered Mail or Lite. The reason we did not go with Mail or Lite is because they limit the number of tags that you can have and that limitation was too small for me. We have more than 250 tags in our account and that's what we used to segment our customers that's what we used to keep track of who purchased what, who's a member, who's not a member, all of those things, what you know, what lead magnet they downloaded, what things they're interested in.

We do a lot of segmenting within our email account and I need all of those tags and Mailer light limits that number to 250 so that was a non starter for me. Some other platforms that we looked at were things like on Triport and Keep, but those were really overkill for what we needed so we landed on Convertkit. It's used by lots and lots and lots of different marketers who I respect, people like Pat Flynn and James Clear and you know, if it's good enough for Pat Flynn, it's really it's good enough for me, right? Another primary marketing channel that we have is this podcast we've been doing this podcast now for about 2 and a half years and I can, I intend to continue to publish episodes for the foreseeable future.

I am looking at some ways to improve what we're doing here and to give you even more value and to continue to grow the audience so I intend to continue with this podcast for as long as I intend to be online. Another marketing channel that we use is medium.com We added this in 2022 and I've will admit that I've kind of let it fade away recently. I'm still deciding if I want to ramp it back up or not medium has a lot of good features.

It accepts written content, audio and video content. It has a builtin audience it has some earning potential i make a few bucks every month on Medium and it seems to rank really well on Google or the content that you publish on Medium seems to rank really well on Google so those are all some pros for Medium if you don't have a really consistent content channel, I recommend checking them out i think they're a good alternative to posting A blog on your own website or maybe in addition to posting on your own website.

One of my goals for 2024 is to increase the amount of content that I am producing both on the free and on the paid channels. So coming in 2024 I'm looking at starting a sub stack account and also publishing maybe a book or two on Amazon on Kindle. Sub stack, if you're not familiar with it, is similar to Medium, but they have an emphasis on email. It also has a better revenue model than Medium does where you can choose to provide either free or paid content to your subscribers or both and your subscribers can then pay for individual subscriptions.

So the way Medium works is you go to medium.com and you pay 5$ a month, I believe it is and you get access to everything that's published on Medium, either the free content or the content that is behind a paywall so you can access my content, you can access Connie Greens content, you can access Jeff Herrings content, you can access everybody's content for one fee where on sub stack you can pick and choose who you want to get content from an you pay them and then the writer or the content creator decides how much they charge. There are content creators on sub stack that are charging 5$ a month or 10$ a month or whatever for their paid content. And then their subscribers get to choose whether or not that has enough value that they're willing to pay for that, or whether they just want to read the free content or whether they want to subscribe to someone else's So that's a platform that I'm going to be exploring more later this year and I will keep you posted on what I learned about it.

As for Kindle, there's been a book in my sub someday projects list for probably five years now and I think it's time to get that out there again, I'm going to keep you posted as that project evolves i don't have a lot of details on that yet, but I will definitely let you know how it goes. So those are the marketing channels and the purpose of marketing of course is to make sales. For that we need a way to get paid and that means having a shopping cart and a payment processor.

Now payment processors, these are two different things, payment processors and shopping carts, 2 completely different things. And that can be confusing so let me explain that a little bit before I tell you what we use and why we made those choices. So here's the difference. Shopping carts or checkout forms are customer facing. They're what your customer sees and what your customer interacts with. Payment processors are working behind the scenes to move money from your customer's account into your account. Now there's two different types of payment processors there are cash based payment processors and there are credit card based processors. Cash based processors are tools like PayPal where your customers have a PayPal account and they have money in that PayPal account and

you have a PayPal account and you probably have some money in your PayPal account.

And PayPal itself facilitates the transfer of money from your customer's account into your account when they make a purchase. The other kind is credit card processing and this is when a customer uses a credit card to make a payment and the credit card issuer then sends the money to your account and then they collect the money from your customer. Now the most common of these processors in the one that we use and that is called Stripe. So we're using PayPal and Stripe, so we've got PayPal on the site you can, if you're making a purchase from me, you can choose to pay through your PayPal account or you can choose to use a credit card and that goes through Stripe.

Now for us and every business is going to be a little bit different, but for us about 75 to 80 % of our payments are actually going through PayPal and probably 20 to 25 % come through Stripe so that's how it breaks down for us now maybe different for you, undoubtedly is different for you, but I find it interesting that about 75 % of people are using PayPal on our site now for our shopping cart and our checkout forms we use a tool called a member. And just like WordPress, I have used a member for years i first used a member with client work way back in 2008 or 2009 and I have been a fan ever since i don't anticipate changing that anytime soon.

Personally, i love a member because of its flexibility it can do just about anything that we need it to do, and if it can't do it, then the team at a member is always willing to customize it for whatever we need it to do. I told you that we moved from a active campaign into Convertkit recently. Well a member already had an integration with Convertkit which was perfect, but once I got in and started using it, I didn't have the fine grain control that I wanted. So I contacted a member and I told them what I wanted it to do and they said we can write a plugin for that and they did in about four days I had a brand new plugin and it works exactly the way I wanted it to work and it is totally seamless the connection between a member and Convertkit.

I've got a two way connection with them and it works perfectly. Another thing that they did for us if you are a six figure systems member, if you're AVIP member then you will see additional content that standard 6 figure systems members do not. And the way that works is a member created a custom plug in for us to connect it to our WordPress account in a very specific way and they make that all work behind the scenes. I've found a member to be really helpful working with them

they've been super flexible with us, Their prices are really reasonable, but they're not without their downsides as well.

So a couple of cons of a member things that I wish were a little bit different is they're a little bit more techie to use than some other solutions if you are not familiar with shopping carts and websites and hosting and all of those things, then a member can feel really overwhelming remember what I said about things that have a great deal of flexibility tend to also have a really steep learning curve well, a member is right up there it has a really steep learning curve. I'm lucky and then I've been using it for like I said, about 15 years. So I know it really well but if you're brand new and you're new to business, it can feel like a lot.

The other problem with a member is that it is self hosted, which means that you are responsible for it. Just like WordPress, it is a tool that you upload to your website or to your website hosting account, and you are responsible for maintaining it if it breaks, you are responsible for getting it fixed if it gets hacked, you are responsible for getting it cleaned up. I've never seen a member get hacked, but I suppose anything's possible now.

The developers, like I said, are really responsive and really quick to help out and very helpful to us. But there's a downside to that as well. They are located a long ways away they are on the other side of the world from me. I think the time difference, now that we've moved to Arizona, I think the time difference is probably about 12 hours, which means that support can be delayed if I open a support ticket with them in the afternoon where I am, I'm probably not going to hear back from them until the following morning. Now that has not ever been a real problem for me in the past and they do respond to urgent situations more quickly.

But if you know, like we talked about with the hosting, if getting somebody on the phone is important to you, then a member is probably not the best choice for you. Like I said, I've been using a member for years. I don't have any intention of changing that. But if I was just starting out today, just like with WordPress, I would probably make a different choice there are lots and lots and lots of shopping cart options out there now and one of the best ones that is around right now is called Thrive Cart.

That's probably what I would start with. The things that I like about Thrivecart is that it is a one time fee right now at the time of this recording, you can pay a single fee for Thrivecart and use it for life. And that is not a business model that I am always really supportive of because I worry about the active development i worry

that the developers are going to run out of funds to continue to develop the product if they are not charging a fee, You know, kind of a monthly or an annual fee for continued support.

But they seem to be making it work because they are continually improving Thrive Card, They are in active development and I highly recommend them. The other reason I like Thrive Card is because it appears to have a really easy learning curve. Now I will say I don't have a Thrive Card account, but I have talked to a lot of people who do an A lot of people who love it and they alltel me that it is very easy to learn and very easy to use.

The one downside with Thrive Cart is that it does not have true shopping cart ability, which means that you can't add lots and lots of different products to your cart and then check out with all of them all at once. That means it's probably not a good choice if you are a PLR seller or if you sell planners or digital downloads where people want to buy more than one item at a time.

So if that's you, Thrivecart probably is not a good option but I do highly recommend a member if that is your business model, which brings me to what we sell, which is content. I create a lot of content and a lot of graphics to go with that content. So let's talk about the tools that we're using to do that. The first tool that I use and recommend is Canva.

I use this for my slide decks i use it to create PDF documents. I also use it for all of my course graphics if you go to any of my sales pages an you see the mockups or the cover graphics, those are all created in Canva. And I love Canva for this because I have templates in there that I can just duplicate and then I replace the text in the photo and that makes it really quick and easy to create new graphics. I do use a paid Canva account, I think it's 120$ a year and I have found it to be worth every penny i don't have any plans to change that at all.

I also use deposit photos for stock photos if I can't find what I'm looking for inside Canva I have a deposit photos account. If you are interested in stock photos, keep an eye on app Sumo that is the best place to buy deposit photos Usually around Black Friday they have a special for deposit photos where you can buy like 100 photo credits for like 4030 or 40$ i don't remember exactly what the price is, but you can buy those credits they never expire and you can stock up on as many as you need so that's how we purchase stock photos and deposit photos.

I've got 4 or 500 stock photo credits there that I can just use whenever I need them. The other thing that I do is I create a lot of content i do a lot of writing and I use an app called Ulysses for that, which I really like because it keeps everything in one place all of my emails, all of my podcast episodes, all of my courses, they're all in Ulysses it makes it really easy for me to reference other content that I've written or to repurpose emails or whatever. And it is a Mac only app though, so if you're PC based, I recommend you check out Scrivener.

I've used that app as well and I highly recommend it. So those are all the things that you see as my subscriber or as my customer you see my website, you see the membership site, you see the content that I create, you listen to the podcast that I produce thank you for that. But there's also a lot that goes on behind the scenes so let's take a look at some of the tools that I'm using there. Now, I already talked about written content i talked about how I write that in Ulysses, and I format it in canvas so I can make it pretty so that you can download it and work through the workbooks and whatever.

But what about audio and video? Well, right now I am using a tool called Audacity to record this podcast when I am done, I will use Audacity to edit it. I also this year played with Descript, which is a really popular podcast editor. It's popular because what Descript does is it actually creates your transcript, or it generates A transcript as you are speaking and then you can go back and you can just edit the transcript and Descript will edit the audio file as you edit the transcript so in other words, if I misspeak, which I do a lot, if I misspeak, I can look for that section of the transcript and I can delete the words that I didn't want included, and Descript will edit the audio file to match the transcript edit that I just made.

So that's a really cool workflow it makes it really easy to record podcasts, but I didn't find that it was for me i didn't care for the audio output i didn't like the way it sounded. Plus I have a really good workflow in Audacity that just works for me. Now i will admit that I probably didn't use Descript enough to really learn the ropes of it i didn't really learn how it worked, so the sound of it that I didn't care for the kind of tinny way it made me sound could have totally been user error on my part.

Not saying that Descript was at fault there, but it was just easier for me to go back to Audacity so I don't use Descript anymore i've switched back to Audacity for podcast editing and recording. I most typically write out my script ahead of time. In other words, I completely write out everything that I'm going to say and when you hear me on the podcast or when you hear me in a course, I am just reading my script. But when that is not the case, then I need a tool to generate the transcripts

and for that we use a tool called nuda dot IO it's N o T A dot IO. They do a really good job of generating machine or AI transcripts, I guess you'd call it.

For video I use a tool called Camtasia again, this is something that I've used for years and years and years i don't have any intention of changing i don't do a lot of video editing, and my video editing needs are very basic i'm doing things like cutting out sections where I misspoke or I'm trimming the front or the back just to make the video a little bit shorter. Or maybe I am overlaying some words on the screen to explain things a little bit differently or a little bit better. Nothing super fancy, not doing any fancy transitions i'm not pulling in any, you know, B roll or doing anything like that i'm not a YouTube so I'm not doing any fancy video editing and for me Camtasia does a really good job of that.

They also have the these are Camtasia is from a company called Techsmith and Techsmith also makes a tool called Snagit that I use quite often. I use that for capturing screenshots and for doing quick video explainers so if a client or if a customer comes to me and says hey, can you show me how to do this thing on WordPress or can you show me how to do this thing on Canva i can fire up Snagit and do a quick little video screenshot or screenshot video i guess I should say that the other way and then send that off to them using this little tool that sits in my menu bar i find it quite useful i use Snagit probably at least once a day.

Another tool that I use for video is Zoom i use this for live calls and I use it for recording talking head video. We did briefly experiment with another tool for live video, another webinar platform that we ended up not liking because the quality just wasn't there zoom just does such a phenomenal job that we ended up deciding that we were going to keep this, even though the other one made big promises but just didn't really follow through it didn't really work for us so we ended up back with Zoom and I think that's probably where we're going to stay.

If you book a calendar appointment with me, if you book an appointment with me, then you are going to go through a tool called Traft TRAFFT which is what I use to book all of my appointments, which is what I use for all of my coaching clients who come to me and they need to book an appointment or people who purchase things like VIP days or strategy sessions with me, they will book appointments through Traft an alternative to that you may have heard of, maybe you use, is called Calendly.

I like Traft because it connects directly to my Google Calendar. It automatically puts my new appointments in my calendar for me it sends me notification it sends my customer notification of when their appointment is. It all works pretty seamlessly so that is what I'm using for calendar bookings. Two other tools that I use for project planning are Trello and Flolu. I'm using Trello for some checklists and some standard operating procedures. I will admit I don't use it as much as I used to when I first started 6 figure systems, I did a lot of Trello boards i created Trello boards to go with our courses, and those Trello boards were actually the boards that I was using in my business.

But as we've grown and as things have become a little bit more complicated and I've got more people involved, then I have slowly kind of moved that out of Trello and into a tool called Flolu, which is very similar to Basecamp. And that is what we use for project management that is the tool that my husband and I share. And that's how we organize all of our bigger projects so bigger things like course releases and membership, site upgrades and all of that stuff all runs through Flolu so that we can both keep track of what's going on. And then the last piece of the business app or business tool puzzle is the hardware that I'm using i get a lot of questions about what hardware I use.

This microphone for example, people ask me all the time, what microphone do you use this is an ATR two one oh oh USB mic and I've had three of these and I love how simple they are to use and how good they sound. And the price is right too they're right around 100 or maybe 100 and twenty hundred and dollars now I buy them on Amazon and they last for years and years and years, so I highly recommend the ATR twenty one hundred mic.

That microphone runs into a tool called a Focusrite Scarlett Solo Audio Interface. That is what connects the microphone to my computer. It's probably not strictly necessary, but it does make my audio sound a bit better it gives it a boost in volume so that I don't have to be right on top of the microphone to get a good audio volume. I'm also using a Logitech webcam. This is the same one that I've used for years, but honestly I could probably use an upgrade to something with a little bit better resolution i think this one is ten eighty P and they make webcams now with 4K or probably even 8K so one of the things that I'm going to be looking at it 20 in 2024 is upgrading my video set up, upgrading my video camera maybe to, you know, more expensive, something like a mirrorless camera or maybe even to my iPhone there are tools out there that will allow me to use my iPhone as my webcam, so that's something I'm going to explore as well.

I also use a MacBook Pro M1 with a an LG 32 inch monitor so I have a 16 inch MacBook Pro that I bought I think in 2021 and I use that when I'm on the go i use that when I'm sitting on the patio working, or when I'm sitting in the living room working or when I'm travelling when I'm at home in my in my office sitting at my desk i'm using it with an LG 32 inch monitor, which I absolutely love i have all of this screen real estate that I can use. I also use a notebook for things like brain dumps, conversations with myself, decision making, idea mapping i love to have a really good high quality notebook on my desk just for jotting those kinds of notes down i'm currently using a Loic Term nineteen seventeen a five notebook from Jet Pens and I just love it i just love these notebooks this is probably the fourth or fifth one i have.

I may have a notebook problem, just ask my husband. There's another one and route to me right now because I just collect all the colors so that's my favorite notebook right now. For digital notes I use a tool called Bare App which is for project planning i use it for coaching notes i use it for meeting notes i use it for ideas i'm learning about things that I'm studying, things that I'm researching. That is a Mac only app if you are on Windows, I would recommend that you use something like Evernote for those notes and I think that about wraps it up i think those are all of the tools and the apps that I'm using to run my business as of today, December twelfth twenty, three as I'm recording this and as well as kind of a sneak peek at what I've got on my radar for the coming year.

Now I would love to hear from you. Would you please click over to tiny course empire dot com forward slash one zero 02 and leave me a comment and tell me what tools you're using in your business and what you're planning to change up in the new year what platforms have captured your attention what are you changing to? And could you do me a favor? If you have a friend or a colleague who could use business building advice, would you share the link to this podcast with them it's a great way to grow our audience and I'd appreciate your support. All the episodes can be found at tinycourseempire.com That's it for me this week i will be back next week with my best tips for offering social proof when you don't have any testimonials yet.

Have a terrific rest of your day and I will talk to you all again next week.