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

Did you ever think that running an online business was going to cause you so many tech headaches? I mean, listen, I am a pretty techy person. I am not afraid to go mucking around in a PHP file or to write some new CSS to change a font or a background color. But even for me, it sometimes feels like the tech of running an online.

It's just a lot to manage. You know, we need an email marketing system and we need a course or a product delivery system, and we need customer support systems and maybe an affiliate program and maybe a community forum. We also need sales pages and shopping carts and video hosts and content marketing tools.

I mean, you get the idea right. It's really confusing to put it all together, especially if you're new, and really what you want to do is just sell that course you created. So somewhere along the way, a lot of smart people started looking at all of the pieces that have to fit together to run an online business.

And they said, "Hey, you know what? We can do all of these things and we can do them all with a single login and we can make it super easy for people and they did."

And there are more and more of these all-in-one solutions popping up every single week. On just about every one of my [Six-Figure Systems](#) calls at least one person will ask my opinion about this or that new and fabulous, all in one platform that promises to take care of everything.

Honestly, I've never heard of most of them. That's how many are cropping up, right? So while I can't give you specific advice about every single platform out there, I can help you decide if an all-in-one system is right for you at all, and if so, how to choose the one that you're going to use to run your business.

That's what we're going to talk about in today's episode of the Tiny Course Empire Podcast.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO START, GROW, AND SCALE YOUR ONLINE BUSINESS

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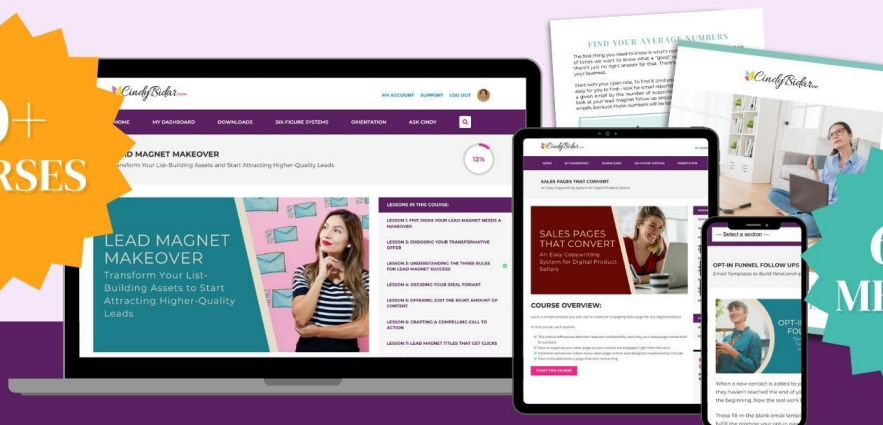
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Hey everyone, and thanks for joining me for episode 67 of the Tiny Course Empire Podcast. You'll find the show notes, transcript, and recommended resources for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/67. If you're new here, be sure to subscribe. I publish a new episode every Thursday and next week we are going to turn away from the digital tools for a little bit and we're going to talk about the analog tools that help me run my business. The list is small but mighty, and I definitely would not want to be without them. I'll share what I use along with how and why next week, but this week is all about technology, so let's go ahead and dig in.

First up I, I want to talk about what exactly is an all-in-one platform anyway.

What the heck are we even talking about here? Well, an all-in-one solution is a course or a sales platform that handles all or most of your online business systems. So it might include a shopping cart, it may allow you to build your sales pages right in that platform. It might allow your students to log in to access your courses or your digital products.

It might include email marketing, it might include a community forum. It might include your blog. It might have your help desk integrated with it. It's everything all under a single login.

And this is really appealing to a lot of people, especially if you are just getting started. You can look at these all-in-one systems and think, oh my goodness, I don't have to worry about how to connect my email platform to my course platform.

Or how to connect my sales page to my buy button, or how to connect my shopping cart to my course platform so my students get access. I don't have to troubleshoot any of that stuff. It's just all done for me, and that makes these things really, really appealing. That's the number one pro for using an all-in-one system like that.

I'll link to the episode where I talk about my setup. I did a whole episode of about it a few months ago, but my particular setup is I use [aMember](#) as my shopping cart and my affiliate program. I use Active Campaign to send emails. I use WordPress for my course delivery.

I use Invision Community for my forum for [Six-Figure Systems](#) members and all of that is a lot to connect. We have to take the responsibility of making sure that all of those systems are talking to one another, of making sure that when somebody makes a purchase in aMember, their account in WordPress has access to that product.

That when somebody makes a purchase that their account in [Active Campaign](#) gets tagged properly. There's a lot of moving pieces there. So the big pro, the big benefit of using an all in one system is you don't have to manage all of those little pieces. You don't have to make sure that it's all set up properly.

Along with that, there's no real techy stuff to worry about. A lot of these connections rely on what's called an API connection, and it's not super techy to do, but you have to go into your settings and grab that API key and connect it to another system and test it and make sure it's working. And for somebody who's just starting out and you've got all these other things to worry about, and you've got all these other things to do, handling that kind of connection can just feel overwhelming.

It's also easier and faster a lot of times to get support for an all-in-one system. What I mean by that is if I have a problem, say my [aMember](#) or shopping cart doesn't want to talk to WordPress for whatever reason, I can contact aMember and I can say, "Hey, you know, this is not, this is not working."

The guys at aMember are fabulous. I cannot say enough good things about them, but if it's not something that they can fix, then I'm left having to work with WordPress and find a developer who can troubleshoot that for me. Or if aMember is not talking properly to Active Campaign, aMember might come back to me and say, "We don't see anything wrong on our end, it's, it's not us," and that leaves me having to go to [Active Campaign](#).

So there's just a lot of back and forth when you're trying to troubleshoot something. Whereas with an all-in-one system, it's all under one roof. All of their support is under a single roof, and they have a team of developers who are handling all of their stuff. So theoretically, at least it should be much easier to get support and to get things fixed when they don't work.

Another reason to go with an all-in-one solution is because there's no confusing options. You get what you get. You are purchasing a package deal. You don't have to decide which shopping cart am I going to use, and then decide which course platform you're going to use and wonder, will it work with my shopping cart that I chose, or should I choose a different shopping cart?

Making those kinds of decisions can get really confusing, really fast. With an all-in-one system, you get what you get, it is a package deal.

An all-in-one system is also easier to budget for in a lot of ways. Now these are always hosted solutions. I've talked about this before. The difference between hosted and self-hosted hosted solutions means that someone else has this software on their server and you are renting the software from them, and that makes it easier to budget for.

It comes with cons of its own because you're making a monthly payment, but because it is a monthly payment and it's the same every single month, you can budget for it. Piecemeal systems like I run with [aMember](#), [Active Campaign](#), WordPress, the Invision Community. All of these pieces kind of connected together that can feel a little bit more difficult to budget for.

And you also have the server that you have to set up and manage and maintain as well. So all of that makes an all-in-one solution like Kajabi or Teachable or another one that, or some other ones that we will talk about in a few minutes. All of these pros, make these all in one solutions sound really good. But there are some downsides as well that you need to be aware of.

Number one is the cost. We talked about how these are all hosted solutions. You are renting these software and you will pay every single month or every single year

to use them. And they can be costly, they can be quite expensive. Kajabi, for example, at their high end is nearly $400 a month the last time I looked, that's pretty costly now.

If you are just starting out, you don't need that much power in Kajabi. I would never encourage you to buy their top tier system if you are, you know, if you're just getting started online. But those are the kinds of costs that you're going to be looking at. You're going to be looking at at least, I would say probably $50 a month and on up for a decent system.

And there's additional costs involved as well, and we're going to talk about those in a few minutes. So all in one systems can be quite costly to use. They also are very limited in how you can customize them because it's a package deal. Because you are renting space on someone else's server. You're renting the software, you don't have access to the things that you could really, really customize.

In other words, you don't have access to the code behind the software. You can't change the css, you can't change the php. You can't do any of that higher end. Customization that would allow you to really brand the platform to your business.

Now you can do things like change fonts and you can change colors, and you can add your logo and all of those things, but you can't really do any real deep customization with them because they're just not set up that way. You also have all of your eggs in one basket with an all in one system. All of your emails are in there, all of your products are in there, all of your customers are in there, all of your videos are in there. All of your product downloads are in there. Maybe even all of your blog posts or all of your podcasts and all of your sales pages are all in one place. And on the one hand it is useful because everything just connects, right? We talked about that. But on the other hand, it can be a little bit concerning, and I'll give you an example.

I use multiple different systems in my business. We talked about that. I use aMember, my shopping cart and my affiliate program. I use Active Campaign as my email platform. I use WordPress as my course delivery platform. If one of those systems fails, I can switch systems very, very quickly. So let's say for example, Active Campaign goes out of business tomorrow, I don't think that's going to happen, but let's just say they did. Let's say Active Campaign went out of business, and I can no longer email from Active Campaign. I can very, very quickly upload my email list to Convert Kit and connect aMember to Convert Kit and be back up and running within minutes.

Whereas if I was in an all in one system and the email portion of that system stopped working all of a sudden then I need to make the decision, am I going to stay with this all in one system or do I need to move everything? And if I have to move everything, that's a much, much bigger job than just moving a piece of it. It's, it's much more, um, labor intensive.

It's much more difficult to do, and it's much more stressful to deal with when that sort of thing happens and you're in an all in one. all in one systems are also harder to outsource just because they are, they maybe don't have as many people out there who are, who understand the platform, who use the platform, who are really good at the platform, especially since there are so many of these all-in-one systems popping up everywhere.

All of a sudden, you know, you might find some brand new thing that looks great and has a great price point and sounds fantastic on paper, but you may not be able to find anybody to help you manage it because it is so new and because it's just not as popular as some other piecemeal systems might be.

Now that's not going to be true if you're using something like [Teachable](#) or Kajabi or um, even Thrive Cart. There's a lot of people that work with these platforms. But with the new ones coming up all of the time, you're going to have a hard time finding people to help you with those particular systems just because they're new and they have fewer people who are experts in them.

So it can be more difficult to outsource if you are using an all-in-one platform, depending on which one you're using. They can also be more difficult to scale. Here's what I mean by that. Every system has limits. You pay for a certain number of email addresses in your Active Campaign account or in your Convert Kit account.

You pay for a certain amount of video airtime in Vimeo. You pay for a certain number of videos uploaded to a course platform. You pay for a certain number of students in a course. All of these systems have limits, and you can't really, in an all-in-one platform, adjust one limit without adjusting another limit.

So in other words, if you bump up against a subscriber limitation, you're only allowed to send 20,000 emails a month and you want to send 25,000, you need to bump the whole system up to the next level. You can't just increase your email limits. In most cases, you need to increase all of the limits, which adds to your costs.

So, all in one systems can just be a little bit more difficult to scale than systems that are pieced together. Now, that doesn't mean that all in one systems should not be

considered. I still think they are a good choice for a lot of people and there are a lot of good all-in-one platforms out there.

I've talked about these before. I particularly like Teachable as an all-in-one platform. I think they do a really, really spectacular job of helping people get their courses set up, of helping people get their systems set up. It's really easy to get logged in and get started with Teachable. They do a fantastic job with it.

I've also used Kajabi, and Kajabi does a really, really good job as well. There are things that I don't like about Kajabi. I don't like their affiliate platform. I think if you prioritize having affiliates in your business, I would look someplace else other than Kajabi because they just do such a terrible job with reporting for their affiliates. It's just not pleasant.

Thrive Cart is another good one. I have not used Thrive Cart as a seller, but I've used it as an affiliate and I've used it as a student and I'm really impressed with what they're able to do, especially with a one-time payment deal. Thrive cart's the exception when I talked about you're going to have a monthly payment, Thrive Cart's, the exception. Thrive Cart is an all-in-one platform that's fully hosted that has a one-time payment.

It's on the high side, I think it's around $700 or $800 right now. But it is a one-time investment. You don't have to pay them every single month, and you don't have additional add-on fees that we are going to talk about in just a minute. Circle is another one that is up and coming that I hear really good things about.

I have taken courses on Circle and it doesn't work the way my brain works. I don't particularly like it, but I know that a lot of people do like the way it works. Circle focuses on the community aspect of the course rather than the course itself. It does include at their professional level, um, the ability to host courses. But the community is the, is the main point of Circle.

So those are some, uh, all in one platforms that I think are worth considering. There are definitely other ones out there. There's Podia, and like I said, there's new ones coming up all of the time. I don't even know what they all are, but you will for sure see them if you spend any time at all hanging out with online business people.

So how do you choose which platform to use. If you think an all-in-one platform is right for you, how can you choose the right one to use? Because there are a lot of options out there.

The first thing that I would recommend is that you look at what platforms other people are using, what platforms are your competitors using?

What platforms are the people that you admire using? What platforms are the courses that you took and enjoyed built on?

And you might be saying to yourself, okay, but how do I know I can look? Somebody else's website. I can look at their courses, I can take their courses, but how do I know what platform it was built with?

There is a website that will help you figure that out and it is called builtwith.com. You enter a URL in there and it will tell you all of the technology behind that website. So that's really helpful.

So see what other platform or what platforms other people are using. The platforms that you have enjoyed, that look good to you, that worked for you as a student, or that are working for other people in your niche. Start with those.

The next thing you're going to want to do is take a test drive. Almost every single one of these platforms offers a trial period. I think Thrive Cart is the one that does not, but I do believe they have a, uh, they have a guarantee period. So either a trial period or a guarantee period. Most of them have that.

Take it for a test drive and make sure that you actually use it. Make sure that you upload a course, that you log in as a user, that you experience that platform from both the seller and the buyer point of view, and see how it works. Put it through its paces, and not only that, but connect with their customer support because you are going to need them eventually You're going to run into a problem and you want to make sure that they are quick to respond and that they offer real help and not copy and paste responses that don't do you any good.

I was using an all-in-one platform several years ago with a client's project and their support was just terrible. I even had a direct connection to the owner of the platform and I still could not get help for the problems that we ran into. And these are the kinds of things that are going to be revealed if you are taking a good, strong test drive. So that's the first step. Decide which platforms you might want to explore and then take them for a good solid test drive.

You want to watch out for all in one solutions that charge additional fees though, and we talked about this a little while ago. I mentioned that some programs, and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with this, I'm saying you just need to be aware of it. Some programs will charge you extra.

For example, if you want to have an affiliate program, Teachable does this. If you want to use their affiliate platform, then that is an additional charge every single month. I understand that not everybody wants an affiliate program, and if you do want an affiliate program, then you're probably have a plan for making some in making some money from it, so having that additional fee is not unreasonable, but you do need to be aware of it.

Some programs also include transaction fees, so not only are you paying for the right to use the software, and you're paying transaction fees through your payment processor, but you are also paying transaction fees to the platform.

So be aware of that. Those can really add up. They can be anywhere from 1% to three or four or 5% of every sale goes to the platform in addition to the fee that you're already paying them. So watch for that when you are signing up for any of these, uh, for any of these platform.

Two other fees that they sometimes charge that really gets under my skin is white label fees. A lot of these all in one platforms will essentially be advertising in your course or in your emails. There will be a little line at the bottom of the every email that says, you know, powered by Circle, or Powered by Teachable, or Powered by Kajabi. And if you want to get rid of that little line that says that you have to pay an additional fee to remove that.

Some platforms claim that they integrate with everything, but what they really mean is they integrate through Zapier. Now, Zapier is a wonderful automation service. I use it myself, but there is a cost to use Zapier and it's also, it also can be pretty techy to set up so by a platform saying, You know, maybe you're, maybe you're purchasing an all in one course platform, but they don't have email.

And they'll say, we integrate with all email platforms. All you have to do is use Zapier. So what that means is you have to set up a connection through Zapier, which is an automation platform, and you have to pay Zapier every time they make that connection. So every time someone. Purchases a course from you.

The course platform sends a notification to Zapier. Zapier sends a notification to your email platform to make that connection. That's all well and good, but you are also paying Zapier, so that's an additional fee that is something you have to budget for. So be aware that those additional fees do exist.

Make sure you are reading the terms of service and all of the features that are included and what is not included in what additional fees you may incur before you make a decision to go with an all-in-one platform like this. And that's true for any

platform, whether you're choosing all in one or not, you should be reading all of those details, reading all of those terms of service, and make sure that you know exactly what you are going to have to pay for every single month.

When you're choosing a platform, you want to make sure that you are matching your primary goal to the primary focus of the platform. I talked a little bit about, a little bit ago about Circle and how Circle's primary focus is community engagement. If that's not important to you, if you don't want a community, if you don't want to have to maintain a community, then circle is not the right fit for you.

Even though they do offer course host. Thrive Cart's primary focus is a shopping cart and affiliate program. If you are looking for a community focus, then Thrive Cart is probably not the choice that you want to make. So make sure that your primary goal with your business is matched to the primary focus of the platform that you choose.

And I want to caution you to avoid jumping on the latest shiny object. It's really tempting and we will see all of these new all in one platforms that claim to do everything, and they're probably really inexpensive because they're just starting out. But unless you're in the business of testing software, it's just not a good choice.

No matter how sweet that price is, no matter how tempting it might be, no matter how promising the sales page makes it sound and how many affiliates are promoting it, it's probably not a good choice for you unless you really, really enjoy learning new software. So don't jump on the latest shiny object just because they make big promises.

And that leads me into my next point, which is to consider their business model. Does the platform have enough revenue or a plan for finding it to continue to support the platform. I talked about Kajabi a little while ago and how Kajabi is a little pricey in my mind, but I can't fault them for that. They know what it costs to run their business, and they are earning the money to keep it going.

You can contrast this with an all-in-one platform that may sound great and sounds amazing and makes all kinds of promises, and then you look at it and they're charging something $7.95 a month, I'm talking about $7 and 95 cents a month. I've seen these platforms out there, or $10 a month or $15 a month, and they're giving you email and they're giving you, you know, video uploads and they're giving you, uh, an affiliate program and they're giving you all of these things that's not sustainable at that low price.

It sounds appealing when it launches. It sounds appealing to the budget minded entrepreneur who's just getting started, but that business model is not sustainable at that price, so consider their business model. Consider how they're making money. Consider if they are earning enough to sustain their product and to continue to support it, and to continue to develop it and continue to add new things.

If the price seems too low, too good to be true, it probably is. Find out if they have a roadmap for future updates. Are they going to continue to update the product? Are they going to continue to add new things, continue to make it better, continue to improve it?

They should have a public roadmap or should be able to tell you what they have plans for in the future.

And do they have a history of keeping the platform updated? You know, if they've been around a while, can you customers who say, yeah, this is great. They update it, they fix things when they break.

Or do you see a lot of people who are complaining about lack of updates or lack of support?

That can be a red flag. And ask yourself, will it grow with you? Can you see a point in the near future where you're going to have to move? Because moving from an all-in-one platform is a huge undertaking. And if you're going to choose an all-in-one platform like this, I would highly recommend that you choose one that you feel comfortable staying with for at least several years.

Because moving out, moving in and out of platforms like this, Takes a lot of work. As you create more courses, as you create more products, as you write more blog posts, as you have more customers, all of that just becomes more that you need to move and it can be a huge undertaking. So you want to make sure that before you go all in with a single platform, that it will grow with you and that you can see yourself using it for the next several years.

So clearly the decision to use an all-in-one platform is really not something that you want to take lightly. There's a lot of things to consider and I'd love to hear your thoughts on it. Do you use an all-in-one platform? Are you considering it? Have you moved to or from one in the past? Click over to TinyCourseEmpire.com/67 and share your thoughts with me in the comments. I really would like to hear your ideas about it.

While you're there, you can grab my online business roadmap, which is a free PDF download that gives you the steps to follow to launch your first online business, whatever platform you choose to use. I hope to see you there.

Have a great day everyone.

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