

Tiny Course Empire Podcast Episode 94:

Creating your first digital product (Online Business Roadmap Step 4)

I've told the story before about my first course. It was a total flop, and it was all my fault.

I didn't have a good lead magnet to build on. I didn't know what my audience wanted. And I put way too much effort into it. I mean, I spent weeks on that course, and it was just bad.

My second attempt was much, much better. It was also much simpler. No videos. No course platform to set up and manage. No fancy graphics or design work. All it was was a series of checklists and worksheets for online business owners who wanted a better way to set up and manage their business.

That simple checklist pack has earned more than \$45,000 in the past five years. Not bad for a product I created in just a few days with nothing more than Microsoft Word.

All of this is why I recommend new business owners resist the urge to come out of the gate with a signature course or other huge product, and instead, keep it simple.

This is episode 94 of the Tiny Course Empire podcast, and today I want to talk to you about your first digital product. I'll share what my rules are for keeping it simple and relevant, how to choose your topic, and how to get it in the hands of your customers.

Grab a notebook and a pen and get ready to take notes, because this one has a few action steps for you to take. Don't worry though - we're going to keep it super simple.

Hey, it's Cindy, and thank you for spending a few minutes of your day with me. This is part four of our ongoing series on starting an online business from scratch.

So far, I've recommended that you begin by creating content in your niche, offering up a lead magnet for your new followers, and staying in touch with your email subscribers at least twice per week.

Tiny Course Empire Podcast Episode 94:

Creating your first digital product (Online Business Roadmap Step 4)

I'll link to the other episodes in the show notes, in case you missed any of them. As always, those show notes can be found at TinyCourseEmpire.com/94.

While you're there, be sure to download the Online Business Roadmap. This step-by-step plan will show you exactly what to focus on during this phase of your business, whether you're just starting out or you're ready to scale.

And if you want to make sure you don't miss any of this series on starting an online business from scratch, make sure you hit the subscribe button. New episodes drop every Thursday morning. Next week, we're talking about writing a simple sales page for your new product. I'll help you get past all the overwhelm and imposter syndrome that can come from writing a sales page, and I'll give you an easy, 3-part template to follow.

But that's next week. This week is all about creating a simple digital product.

Before we dive in, I do want to mention again that this series is not intended to be followed in real time. Yes, new lessons or episodes are dropping every week, but if you're still working on episode one and getting your content engine revved up, then that's perfectly ok. In fact, it's better than ok. It's the best possible thing you could be doing right now.

I always say that consistency is the most important trait any small business owner can have—well, it's the most important thing anyone who has goals of any kind can have. Consistency is what drives your success.

You can't publish six blog posts and expect it to have an impact on your traffic or your sales. You can't send four emails in a year and expect that to build a relationship with your subscribers. You have to show up week after week and month after month. That's how success is created.

So whatever step you're on in the process, whether you're working on emailing your list like we talked about last week, or you're still back there getting your content machine dialed in, keep it up. Work at it until it becomes second nature. Until you're confident and comfortable in your systems and your processes and your schedule. Then move on to the next step.

Strong, sustainable, profitable businesses are not built in a weekend. They're created over time, and that only happens when you put the work in. I know you know that, or you wouldn't be here listening to me, but I just want you to know that you're on the right path. Keep going. j

And when you're ready, here's how you're going to create your first digital product.

Three rules:

Before we start, I have three rules, or guidelines I recommend you follow. You probably remember I had three rules for your lead magnet, too. I find having guidelines like this makes decision making easier, as you'll see in a bit.

So here's my rules for creating your first digital product.

Keep it simple

Rule number one is to keep it simple. I told you in the intro to this episode that I did not follow this rule with my first product, and it was a total flop.

Now that in itself is not a bad thing. And it's certainly not an unavoidable thing. Even years later, I still have product launches that I think will do well and they just don't for whatever reason.

But the reason it mattered with that first product is because of the amount of time I wasted. I spent weeks writing and recording that course, and more weeks getting it all edited and set up on a course platform.

When it didn't sell, that could have been the end for me. That very easily could have turned into an excuse to stop creating. To tell myself that course creation just wasn't for me. Or that I didn't have what it takes to be a course creator. Not because no one bought it, but because of all the effort I'd put in without seeing any return on that investment.

It's a lot easier to recover from a failed launch when you've spent a week on it than when you've invested months or years on an idea.

So rule number one is to keep it simple. That means we're creating a simple, text-based product, we're offering access to it in the simplest way possible, and we're keeping the sales process simple, too.

What we're not doing is setting up a course platform with upsells and downsells and cross sells and timers and all kinds of other fancy stuff.

Simple is the name of the game here.

Work with what you have

And part of keeping it simple is to work with what you have.

That long-ago course of mine required me to not only learn how to create a course, but I also had to learn to record and edit video, I had to research how to deliver video content, and how to set up my course platform. I had to figure out the graphics.

It was a lot. Don't do that to yourself. Work with what you have.

You might be tempted at this point to go looking at new shopping carts or membership platforms, or to learn how to use Canva or to buy a new video camera, and to all of that I say, stop.

Work with what you have, and what you already know how to use.

Adding anything else in right now is just going to slow you down, and it will turn a simple project into a long-term effort.

Done is better than perfect

Finally, remember that done is always better than perfect.

You cannot sell what's sitting on your computer, still have finished because it's not as good as your vision was.

Here's the thing. No one else knows or cares how lofty your vision was for your product. If you don't quite hit the mark, the only one who will know is you.

It doesn't matter if you have typos in your content. It doesn't matter if your editing isn't up to AP standards. It doesn't matter if you could have included more, or made a better looking cover, or chosen a nicer layout.

Done is always better than perfect.

Remember that we're not carving anything into stone tablets these days. You can always—at any time—go back and fix that typo or update that product to add more. But you can't do that if it doesn't exist in the first place.

Get it done. Worry about perfecting it later.

What's your product going to be?

So those are the rules. Keep it simple. Work with what you have. And done is better than perfect.

Now that you know the rules, what exactly will you create for this first product? Personally, I'm a huge fan of things like

- toolkits
- checklists
- planners
- printables
- templates

Anything that's written—because I don't want you to get stuck trying to learn how to edit video, or organize content on a course platform, or anything like that. Those things will only slow you down at this point, and our goal here is to make the next best step, so that means we're keeping it simple.

It's a huge leap to go from just starting out to creating a video course or other big project. It will feel insurmountable to you. You'll procrastinate. You'll start and stop and get distracted by shiny objects.

By sticking with small, simple products, you'll become a finisher. You'll gain momentum, one small step at a time.

The same is true for your buyers. They need to build up that momentum, too. They need to take a tiny step, not dive into the deep end of the learning pool and hope that they can figure out how to swim.

They're not looking for the end-all-be-all training right now. They just need the next best step.

To figure out what that step is, and how you can help them, think about what the very next thing your email subscriber needs from you. If they've just downloaded a camera settings cheat sheet, they don't need a 17-module video course that covers everything you know about how to be a professional photographer. But they could probably use a really great guide to lighting, or some pro tips on better composition.

That's the kind of resource that helps them make progress without getting overwhelmed.

And here's where I know a lot of you are thinking, "But that's a blog post, not a product."

That's probably true. If you google it, you will find loads of blog posts about composing photos or getting your lighting just right.

In fact, it doesn't matter what your product is—even if it is that 17-module video course about how to become a professional photographer. Whatever you want to learn or be or do, you will find it for free on the internet somewhere. I've said for years that you could learn to be a heart surgeon with nothing more than Google and YouTube if you were really dedicated.

Where does that leave us as product creators then? Well, here's what I know.

People will pay for information because you offer them convenience. Even if they can find it for free, they'll pay for information because they trust you. Even if they can find 8 million results from a 3-second search in Google, they'll pay for information because you present it in a way that makes sense to them, in a way that those 8 million other options don't.

A few years ago a potential client asked me for a podcasting start up checklist. She wanted to know what equipment I recommended, and what she didn't have to worry about yet, and where to find someone to do voiceover work, that sort of thing.

So I wrote her a short checklist with a timeline—do this first, then that, then buy this. I gave her some questions to ask, things to think about, so she could make better decisions. It took me 20 minutes or so to write it and send it off to her. She thanked me, and then said, "You should sell this."

My response, of course, because I was brand new and all up in my own self-doubt, was to say, "It's nothing you couldn't have found on your own if you'd looked."

And she replied, "Yes, but now I don't have to. I would have paid for this."

The thing is, I already did all the research for her, so I made it convenient. I was someone she trusted to give her good advice. I wasn't recommending a microphone because I wanted the commission on the sale. She knew I was recommending it because it was good. And I gave her the information she needed in a simple format that made it easy for her to take action.

That's why she was willing to pay for information that can be found anywhere online, and that's why your community will pay you, too.

Not because you're holding secrets that can't be found anywhere else, but because you offer convenience and trust and a perspective and style that works for them.

Don't overthink this. Don't think your product doesn't have value just because it's simple. In some cases, it has more value because it IS simple.

One other consideration is, what format will your product take?

Remember that rule number two is to work with what you have, so I don't want you to spend time here learning new software. If you use and like Google Docs, that's a perfect choice for creating ebooks, worksheets, planners, checklists and basically anything written.

Microsoft Word or Apple Pages are other good options if you have them, use them, and like working with them. If you want to get a little fancy, you could use Canva or Designrr, but only if you're already familiar with them. Again, don't try to learn something new just to get this first product out there.

Done is your priority. Perfect you can work on later.

Which brings us to your next question...

How will you get it into the hands of your buyers?

For most things that are written - planners, checklists, templates, worksheets, that sort of thing - your best option is to save it as a PDF so your buyers can download it to their computer.

Now, with that said, there is a bit of hoop jumping that has to happen to make that work.

In the second episode of this series, we talked about how to deliver a PDF document to a new email subscriber. I'll link to that episode in the show notes, but the basic set up is that your PDF has to live on a cloud server somewhere, such as Dropbox or Google drive. Then you can create a publicly accessible link to the PDF, and send that to your subscriber in an email.

Super easy, not any techy concerns there.

But you can't do that for paid products—or I guess you CAN, but I don't recommend it. First, because it's more open to unauthorized access. It probably doesn't matter if a few random people come across your lead magnet and download it without subscribing to your list, but it does matter if people get free access to your paid products. You don't want that to happen.

The other reason not to use this method of delivery for a paid product is simple logistics. You have to have a way to move money from your buyer's account into yours, and then you have to have a way to move the PDF file from your account into theirs, and that's a bit more complicated than an opt-in offer is, mostly because there's money involved.

Here's what I recommend for your first digital product. I'm going to suggest that you sign up for a platform that handles sales and product delivery for you, without you having to worry about where the product is stored or how to get it into the hands of your buyer.

Two platforms that make this really easy are SendOwl and Warrior+. I'll link to both of them in the show notes for you.

Here's why I like platforms such as these though.

- Their fees are really reasonable. As of the time of this recording, SendOwl has a 3-month trial, then it's \$9 per month plus a 5% per order charge. Warrior+ doesn't have any up-front fees at all, but they do charge a per-transaction fee.
- They handle the delivery of the product. You can upload your PDF directly to SendOwl or Warrior+, and when your buyer completes their payment, it's delivered automatically. You don't have to do a thing.
- They connect to your email platform so you can better track who's purchased your products, or add buyers to your email list if that's your choice.
- SendOwl helps you handle sales tax and VAT, if that's a concern for you.

I do not recommend you sign up for a platform such as Teachable or Podia or even ThriveCart at this point. Those are all great platforms with thousands of happy users, but they come with a financial burden that's not necessary at this point in your business.

Teachable, for example, starts at \$39 per month, and that's just too costly for a small digital product like we're talking about here. Yes, they do have a free tier, but right now that tier is limited to just 10 customers, so that's not very helpful.

Then there's the learning curve. Unless you're already using one of these platforms, and you're super familiar with it, then this is an added step that's going to slow you down. There's time for this type of platform later, once your product suite grows, but for right now, start simply, keep your costs low, and you can keep your prices low as well. That lets you build confidence in yourself and status as someone who knows your stuff.

One other thing you will need for sure though, is a payment processor. Warrior+, SendOwl, and other platforms—including tools like Teachable and Kajabi and ThriveCart—act as a shopping cart. They are the customer facing piece of the online business puzzle, but they have to connect to a payment processor. That's the back-end infrastructure that makes it possible to transfer money from your buyer to you.

You're probably familiar with PayPal. That's probably the most common payment processor online today, and it's one that any selling platform will connect with. If you already have a PayPal account, you're good to go. Just follow the instructions in your platform for making the connection.

Another option is Stripe, which is a credit card processor. They handle transactions where your customer wants to pay with a Visa or MasterCard or American Express or some other credit card.

I don't want to get too far into the weeds on this, because it can get confusing. But here's what I recommend. Start with PayPal. That's more than adequate for most people, and it's common enough that any selling platform will connect to it—in fact it's the only one that some platforms use.

If for some reason you don't have or can't get a PayPal account—they are restricted in some countries, or maybe there's another reason you can't or won't have one, and that's fine—then you'll need to do some research into what other options are

Tiny Course Empire Podcast Episode 94:

Creating your first digital product (Online Business Roadmap Step 4)

available to you. There are for sure other payment processors out there that you can look at, such as Braintree, or Payoneer, or 2Checkout.

Just make sure that whatever payment processor you're using works with the selling platform you've chosen. For example, SendOwl works with PayPal, Stripe, and a few others, but they don't work with Braintree. Warrior+ only works with PayPal or Stripe. EJunkie—which is another option for selling digital downloads—has a much longer list of payment processors they connect with.

So here's your homework for this episode.

I want you to get out your lead magnet that you created in episode two of this series. Then ask yourself, what's the next best step for my subscribers after they have this resource in their hands. What do they need to do next?

That's the topic of your product.

So if you've given away an example weekly meal plan, the next thing your subscriber might do is plan their own meals for the coming week. Your paid product might be a planner they can use to keep track of plans, ingredients, and their grocery list.

If you've given away a packing checklist for traveling with young children, the next thing your subscriber is probably doing after packing is traveling. Your paid product might be a bundle of simple games they can play in the car.

If you've given away an SEO checklist for bloggers, the next thing they're going to be doing is writing blog posts. Your paid product might be a keyword research guide to help them choose the right keywords.

You get the idea. Think about what your subscribers are doing as they use your lead magnet, and what comes next. Then create your product around that activity.

Remember to keep it simple, use the tools you already have, and that done is better than perfect.

Tiny Course Empire Podcast Episode 94:

Creating your first digital product (Online Business Roadmap Step 4)

Once you have your product completed, you can decide which platform you'll use to sell it. I mentioned SendOwl and Warrior+ earlier because I have personal experience with both, but there are others as well.

Don't get ahead of yourself though. Create your product first, then find your sales platform. If you try to do it the other way around, you'll be less likely to get your product done.

And of course, if you need help, I'm here for you. Just click over to TinyCourseEmpire.com/94 and leave me a comment. Tell me what you're working on and where you're stuck, and I'll offer any advice and support I can.

And finally, could you do me a favor? If you have a friend or colleague who could use business-building advice, would you share the link to this series 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'll be back next week with a strategy you can use to get your sales page written, even if you think you're not a copywriter.

Have a terrific rest of your day, and I'll talk to you next week.