



A special report for  
copywriters and  
marketers by  
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***Revealed in This Report...***

- **The Death of the Membership Model!** Why print newsletters, online membership sites and other information-based continuity programs are seeing dropping numbers and possible collapse...
- **4 Major Problems:** Serious drawbacks of membership programs that customers are cluing into faster than businesses can find new people to sell to...
- **I Won't Sell It!** Why I rarely write copy for membership sites and inner circles...
- **You Can't Keep It Up Much Longer:** Why it's nearly impossible to satisfy people with monthly content using the "til death-do-us-part" mindset...
- **The Rebirth of Membership Programs:** A model that will last and how I'm applying it to my own information ventures...

***And much more...***

# The Collapse of the Inner Circle... And the Rebirth of Continuity Programs

I've been a member of many different "inner circles" over the years. Of course, I'm talking "paid" Inner Circles.

These include online and offline membership sites, print newsletters, email newsletters, CD-of-the-month, etc. Fees range from \$200 a year, to \$200 a month.

I've belonged to many marketing inner circles, health inner circles, **parenting** inner circles and entertainment membership clubs (e.g. [www.YourSpiritualCinemaCircle.com](http://www.YourSpiritualCinemaCircle.com) — a DVD-of-the-month club — which I'm still a happy member of).

I'm not going to start naming the ones I've left. But I've left quite a few. And I know I'm not alone. I've heard from different sources in the health newsletter publishing industry that they are seeing a major drop in subscriptions and an increase in cancellations.

Here's why I think this is happening — speaking both as a copywriter, marketer and (often dissatisfied) customer...

## Membership Programs Problem #1: The Bar Has Been Raised Higher Than Ever Before

In late 2007, it all of a sudden became fashionable to run a membership site (due in part to a big product launch that promoted the membership web site business model). The competition was already stiff; now it is harder than ever to succeed.

Not only are you competing with the "Dan

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### "I'm Going To Use This In My Niches"

"This is fantastic! In fact, I'm going to use this approach in my niches. I've always been a little hesitant to create a continuity program because I wondered if I could continue to bring my customers something new each month. I don't believe in selling fluff. When I buy something, I want to get my money's worth, and [this idea] is the key to making customers happy.

—Deb Holder

[www.debholder.com](http://www.debholder.com)  
[www.debt-free-mom.com](http://www.debt-free-mom.com)

### A Continual Battle to Keep Subscribers

**"Traditional membership sites include a continual battle to keep subscribers.** Here's a figure most people don't tell you about: the "average" subscriber will stay active for 3-4 months and then they'll cancel. What, you thought they'd join and stay with you forever? It simply doesn't happen that way. With more and more membership sites being launched, this figure is probably going to get worse. People simply don't have the time nor money to remain active members in many different programs."

—Jimmy D. Brown

[www.rebirthofthemembershipsite.com](http://www.rebirthofthemembershipsite.com)

"Loved the report. Very well thought out and put together! The reasons you cited are also some of the reasons why I originally made my Copywriters Toolkit membership site a one-time payment for lifetime access. Keep up the good work,

—John R.

[www.thecopywriters-toolkit.com](http://www.thecopywriters-toolkit.com)

Kennedys" and "Dr. Whitakers" of the world, you're also competing with an entire army of wannabe monthly content publishers. It almost doesn't matter what market you enter: there is usually an entrenched market leader and bunch of clones trying to do the same thing.

Let me share a story about a monthly membership I used to belong to. This fitness guru running it seems unaware that the bar has been raised in the membership niche.

I belonged to his expensive (for the health and fitness market) \$40/month membership. I received a 12-page newsletter (sometimes 8) and CD (30-60 minutes) each month. The quality was mediocre most of the time (occasionally a gem). This health guru dumped a lot of stuff on the page (e.g. what he ate for breakfast yesterday), in 12-point font, with PLENTY of white space. After 4-6 pages of that (which went quickly) he then filled the rest up with big pictures of himself doing exercises. I'm not against keeping it concise, but I am against fluff — and that's what I felt I was getting.

I actually attended one of his how-to seminars and he related his strategy. What a disappointment! He gets some of his content off free reprint article directories. As he described how he put together his newsletters, the word "lame" kept on recycling in my head.

How many other "gurus" are using similar practices to fill up their newsletters? Can you blame them? The demand to fill up 12-pages a month with high value content, plus a 60 minute CD is a hard game to win at.

But sometimes they pull it off, which only results in...

### Membership Programs Problem #2: Non-Relevant Content

I belonged to another more prestigious newsletter, which delivered good content. But I left for another reason: I didn't care for the content all the time. It was good, but not relevant to my life or needs. **For example:** A while back a doctor sent me an issue of his newsletter packed with

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information about Down syndrome. I don't have Down syndrome (and I suspect none of his subscribers do either). I don't know anybody with Down syndrome. None of my family suffers from it. It's of no value to me — outside of "intellectual entertainment."

I didn't want to pay for it. Much of the interest, yet general information it revealed I could have found for free through Google. The detailed cures, I didn't need.

That's just one example. I'm sure you can think of many times you've received information on subscription that you really didn't need.

Another marketing club I belonged to did an entire feature on marketing the Health Market. I was very interested as this was my market, but I couldn't help wondering how all the other members felt about it — who didn't work in the health market. Sure, the information shared was applicable to many markets, but when people are pressed for time, they want highly relevant information.

Another issue I have with most Inner Circles...

### **Membership Programs Problem #3: Redundant and Recycled**

Often times the information is really good — for a while — then it becomes redundant. Filler fluff as a colleague called it.

I was a devoted reader of one major marketing newsletter for years. But by year three I realized I was learning very little new information. The author was simply recycling the same lessons with different examples. It just wasn't worth the \$45/month and the 3 hours of absorption time it took to get through all of it.

Case in point, I've talked with the editor of one of the major copywriting newsletters... he explained that the big problem he faces is that he doesn't want to focus too much depth on any subject because then it might not interest enough of the readers. But if he doesn't focus enough, it delivers no new depth or value. And if you're not applying any depth, you quickly run out of topics to write about.

As another colleague said, a lot of these copywriting Inner Circles are great to join for 6-12 months. After that the "course" is over.

### **Membership Programs Problem #4: Some of the Free Stuff Is Better**

I'm already overloaded with FREE content via blogs and ezines which is often comparable to my paid subscriptions. Sure, the paid stuff ranks a little higher — but not much. With free distribution through email, people are giving away free what you once could only receive from a paid, print subscription.

You just have to think of it this way. If you're selling Grade 7 information on subscription, and your competitor goes, "Hey, I can give that away via email, and it won't cost me a dime."

Now people come to him to get the Grade 7 info for free, which you were selling to them. Now your competitor starts selling them Grade 10 info. He may not make as much money, but he's okay with that, because he's just stolen a big chunk of your market. He's making more money than he did before; and you're making less.

(That last point borders on another subject I'll be writing a report on one day: How expanding the free-line is going to better distribute wealth amongst entrepreneurs.

## **That's 4 Big Problems That Aren't Going Away**

Okay, so these are the big problems I see with most membership programs, offline or on, in the information market:

1. They aren't offering highly valuable content, every single month (or week).
2. Content is not always of interest or value to me in particular.
3. Content starts to recycle itself, wearing different disguises.
4. The content doesn't compete well enough with what I can get for free — to justify its price.

With these four problems in mind, let me explain...

## **Why I Rarely Write Copy for Membership Sites and Inner Circles**

As a copywriter, I've repeatedly refused to get involved in membership programs. I work on advances with royalties. I'm mostly interested in the royalties. I know most membership programs and newsletters are seeing cancellations after an average of 3-4 months. Newsletter insiders have told me that oftentimes people cancel soon after subscribing because the magalog (sales package) that sold them on it was better than the product itself.

I'm not interested in selling something that can't match or exceed the promised value.

I usually ask upfront to see an outline of what kind of content they plan on providing their members for the next 12 months. Usually it's a summary of basic introductory information, covering broad concepts. Examples in the health market might be: "Fasting" in January, "Lowering Your Cholesterol" in February, "Beating Diabetes" in March (even if you don't have diabetes)... as you can see it doesn't take long to exhaust the major items of interest.

## **How Long Can You Keep This Up?**

I just don't see how people expect to keep on delivering content, endlessly, on a monthly or weekly basis that will compete in the information-attention age we live in. Sure, ten

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years ago, before the internet, when people relied on ink and paper for all their "intellectual entertainment" — this was working. Now it's not working so well.

At least not in most cases. Not in the way it's been done.

I actually ran an Inner Circle in January 2006 for alternative health doctors to help them market their local clinic. I ran into all the above problems. I realized this wasn't what would bring them the most value. It wasn't what they needed. And it was very difficult to keep on delivering high-value content each month, without running into the usual problems of being redundant or going over the heads of the new members and too simplistic for the veterans.

I strongly believe that the #1 reason these membership programs persist as long as they do is because of the sense of community they create. But, even the sense of community is being usurped by the power of blogs, online videos, podcasts and forums (at no charge).

## **Service Based Continuity Programs**

All that said, I think there is a membership approach that will work. And works really well.

Before I jump into that... let me say that I'm not saying all "'til death do us part" membership programs are doomed to failure. Obviously, the telephone company and the cable company are going to keep going strong. They may change their technology, but the same service will be provided.

And it's in providing service that membership programs work very well. I learned this quickly working with doctors. Instead of giving them "how-to-fish" information each month, I'd make much more profit and have happier clients, just giving them the fish each month.

An example of this was writing a generic email each month that each doctor could then customize with their name and information and then distribute to their mailing lists. Every business needs continuous marketing collateral to keep in touch with their clients and prospects. When dealing with local businesses, this works wonderfully. You can sell a license to each area (which increases the scarcity and value of your offering).

Okay, so that's one way to adapt it for certain markets.

## **Where Traditional Membership Programs Still Work Really Well**

Another way that has long proven itself is offering entertainment on continuity. We are all familiar with book of the month clubs, DVD-of-the-month clubs (like [www.yourspiritualcinemacircle.com](http://www.yourspiritualcinemacircle.com)) and CD of the month clubs. Companies like Netflix have expanded the idea and allow people to actually choose the DVD they receive on a rental basis.

With entertainment, the extent of new content you come up with is limited only by your imagination. I think one day soon, we'll see TV programs sold on continuity.

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Especially with the fact that less and less people are watching TV commercials due to all the technology available to let them bypass the ads.

Providing physical products on continuity is also another approach that will not die out as long as the products are of quality. Supplement companies do this and it is a convenience for their customers.

## **Making Continuity Programs Work With Information Products**

Now, the third way continuity programs can work — as it applies to information marketing — is my favourite. After cancelling my membership to so many inner circles, I started to see an approach that was a win-win for both the business and the customer. It is, in fact, nothing new. Many people do it. But I'm predicting that it'll become the norm in a few years time.

AWAI's Six-Figure Copywriting Course ([www.6figurecopywriting.com](http://www.6figurecopywriting.com)) is a great example of this. It's a short-term membership program that lasts one year. You receive a lesson package each month for about \$40. Of course, you have the option to purchase the whole year's worth at a discount. But most people are more comfortable with the monthly billing. It allows them actually to do the assignments and absorb the information.

The great thing about this approach is that AWAI need not worry about exhausting their content. Instead, they want to pack as much as they can into the 12-month program. They assume the customer is starting at zero knowledge and they build her up.

They also offer a masters program for those who were already too advanced (or become too advanced). This way they offer material in a way that meets your needs, without asking you to surf through filler material.

## **As It Pertains to Coaching and Mastermind Groups...**

A good example of this, as it applies to coaching, is Shaune Clarke's Copywriting Coaching Program ([www.shauneclarke.com/copywritingcoach](http://www.shauneclarke.com/copywritingcoach)). Instead of offering coaching that goes on until the sun implodes on itself, the program only lasts 10 weeks. You can pay in four instalments.

Now, I'm not going to criticize mastermind programs. They are obviously proven to work. Yet, I'm sure many people don't stay for more than 3-4 years. And, all mastermind programs aren't created equal.

There are some Mastermind programs that I question... I was invited to join one program of 150 people (at \$1,000/month each). The main form of interaction (other than a tri-monthly conference at a hotel) was a monthly tele"conference". But with 150 people, it sounds much like a teleseminar to me. How are 150 people going to interact with the "guru" (who's receiving \$150,000/month), no less each other?

If people are receiving benefits from this, that's great. Some people need to be putting up \$1000 each month just to motivate themselves (like a gym membership). I just

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didn't think I would receive \$1000 of value back. I paid big money for the 4-day seminar and didn't receive 25% of that back in value (they were too busy trying to sell me on the coaching program).

Back to Shaune Clarke... He offers a 10-week coaching series. His teleconference line never has more than 8 participants. There was only five in my group. Plenty of time for interaction and involvement. After 10 weeks, the program is over. It's intense. You get a lot of value and content (which I won't go into here — you can visit his website at [www.shauneclarke.com/copywritingcoach](http://www.shauneclarke.com/copywritingcoach)). You walk away a changed copywriter and feeling like you received more than your money's worth. Nothing was diluted. You even sort of wish it was a little longer! (Much better than feeling it dragged on too long).

He then offers, if you are interested, another 6-week program to help with the promotion side of the business. Some newbies may need this, while other veterans don't. He didn't mix them and thus bring down the value of both programs.

**This Is Pretty Simple Stuff:  
Deliver High Value.  
Receive Multiple Payments.  
Attract New Customers.  
Repeat...**

I'd love to see more businesses doing this. It breaks the payments up. Sure you don't get to keep your customers' credit card charged for life... but the reality of it is... keeping them for life is very difficult anyways. It eventually just becomes easier to find new blood and let the old blood praise you virally for their experience with you.

**Have a Finishing Line:** With people dropping out in 3-4 months when there is no end in sight, you have to wonder if they would not hang around longer if they knew there was a finishing line. Especially if motivation is added to reach that line. Bill Glazer, with his online copywriting course, had a fantastic idea: offering a monetary award for completing the course.

**A New Hope:  
Fixed Term Membership Sites**

This type of fixed term membership system would work offline or online. It does work. We see it working. It allows you to make a high-value, laser-focused program that will last for a few months to a year. Then you can create other programs focusing on other needs that only specific customers would be interested in.

I'm sure many of the subscribers to the doctor's newsletter I mentioned earlier have family members who suffer from Down syndrome. If he promoted to them a special 3, 6 or 12 month course containing his latest findings on Down syndrome and how to help it, I bet the cancellation rate would only be a tenth of what his unfocused health publication receives.

**How I'm Planning to Use This Approach**

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I'm going to be applying this idea with my new site [www.ConstipationReliefForWomen.com](http://www.ConstipationReliefForWomen.com). Right now we offer a 90-day, 45-part bonus email series as part of the purchase. It's a coaching series that helps people actually use the information in the product we provide, plus give them more information as they go along. This naturally increases conversion, creates more satisfied customers, more success stories and less refunds (at the time of writing this we've had zero refunds). It's a very profitable approach all by itself (even without charging).

After the 90 days are over, we'll be offering them a weekly coaching program for some nominal fee. By 90 days they should be free of constipation (the goal of the product). But they could easily lapse back into that condition if they do not continue to adhere to guidelines Dr. Mauro gives. They still need coaching. So we'll offer to continue sending them a coaching email every week.

They'll also already have seen the value of the 90-day email series. Dr. Mauro has by that time become a part of their life. He's helped them avoid much suffering and risk of future disease. He's improved the quality of their life and acted as their own personal coach. I'm confident a large number of customers will signup for the weekly coaching.

Even if we charge only \$10/month (\$2.50 per email), and 100 customers sign up each month, we'll be increasing our revenue by \$1,000 a month. That's an extra \$12,000 of profit ADDED to our year end net.

And once the series of 52 additional emails are done... they are done. They'll continue to make us money in an evergreen manner. Of course, we might go back and improve them. We'll hire a designer to make a PDF version, add photos, create an online version and add audio too. All of that can be done by outsourcing. Won't take up any of my time.

### **The Future Trend of the Market: Quality, Focus and Speed**

I truly think this is the trend the market is heading towards. People demand quality, they demand focus and they demand that their time be respected (as well as their wallet). They are not interested in being sent diluted material each month that may or may not be what they need at the time.

There are certain markets where a broad scope of information will always be welcome. Of course, the price you can demand for it will drop. You'll also not be able to survive much competition.

Otherwise, I foresee fixed-term membership program becoming the norm. I'm applying these methods to my various projects and with my clients. I was actually thinking of creating a product out of it, but then Jimmy D. Brown beat me to it...

Jimmy D. Brown obviously realized the same thing as I have. He's also applied the same method over and over again to make himself quite wealthy. You can read more about his own story on his website.

He offers the well thought-out blueprint he's used himself. It's totally web-based and relies on a simple autoresponder program not a complicated, script-bloated membership site.

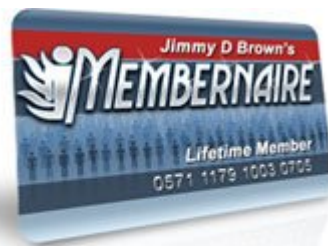
Of course, you could apply the same idea with a weekly MP3 or a printed course or CD or DVD by post.

The beauty of it is that it allows you to create a large product, piece-by-piece, which money-wise, attention-wise and implementation-wise, make it very desirable for your prospects.

As Jimmy D. Brown says...

"It is so easy to burn out by running your own membership site. You think going in that you'll never run out of ideas to write about. As one of the most creative and prolific writers you'll ever run across, let me tell you that I myself face this problem. Almost everyone does."

To read more about his blueprint for Fix-Term Membership Sites head over to...



**[www.RebirthoftheMembershipSite.com](http://www.RebirthoftheMembershipSite.com)**

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#### **About the Author**

John went full-time as a freelance copywriter in January of 2006. Prior to that, he wrote copy part-time, while struggling with other business ventures. He put together [RealityCopywriting.com](http://RealityCopywriting.com) to chronicle his journey into copywriting for the inspiration and education of others. He currently lives in Stratford, Ontario with his wife Nicole, son Jonah, and two cats, Astral and Arjuna.

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