



Mission Guide to Online Course Format Ideas



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Fantastic – you’re here. And you want some inspiration to make your next online course fabulous. It would be helpful if you had a list of ideas for making great courses which also helps reduce the workload involved in making the course.

That’s exactly what this Mission Guide is all about. You should read this along with the article about [online course formats](#) as that will give you lots of context for these ideas.

When you’re ready to get into action, when you want the deep dive, the genuine jewels and every last nugget of gold to start ditching trading time for money and building your product-based business, you’ll need to get yourself onto the [Pivot to Products](#) course or the [Productise Your Expertise](#) programme.

This Mission Guide will give you your route. The courses and programmes will get you to where you want to go.





Where are you starting from?

Which one of these fits your situation the best? Feel free to tick more than one.

- I already have more than one online course and I want ideas and tips to make the next ones brilliant
- I'm thinking about making an online course and I want to make it as good as I can
- I'm researching my options for making products from my expertise
- I have a specific idea for a course that I'm making at the moment
- I want to build products which are completely stand-alone and don't require any time input from me or commitments in my diary
- I'm happy to spend some time with a group of participants
- Courses are just one part of the product ecosystem I'm planning



A couple of notes

A couple of quick notes, depending on what you've ticked above.

Some of the ideas in this Mission Guide will not work for you if your desire is to build completely stand-alone products with no time input from you. That's fine, just ignore those and pick the ones about automation, outsourcing and making content creation easy.

Super important note. One of the things I've learnt over the years of helping people create product businesses is that making just one course or one product is not enough. The people who succeed at this create multiple products laser focused on the same audience. Read more about the importance of a product ecosystem [here](#).



Make life easier for yourself

Making an online course can be challenging. Online courses which are based on a series of videos can be especially challenging. Many people get stuck because they have to simultaneously learn all the skills of making good videos (and editing them) designing courses and marketing products.





Make life easier for yourself

I've seen many people start making this kind of course and then get stuck and fail. Here are some ideas to help you avoid getting stuck by making life easier for yourself by using different formats for your online course.

Online courses which are easier to create than your traditional video course format.

- Paid webinar - Simple and easy
- Just in time course - Make your course modules as you go along
- Mini email course - Works well as a trip wire product or lead magnet
- Small groups - Participatory workshop-based learning sessions
- Paid newsletter - With written, audio or video content delivered by email
- Live delivery workshops - Test your course idea by doing the first group live
- Membership - With drop-in learning sessions
- Cohort based programme - set a start date for a group of people who all begin at the same time and work together



Automated ideas for engagement

- Send course participants a weekly email with examples to bring the course to life. If you have an evergreen course, automate this through your course software or through your main email provider, so they get a sequence of emails throughout the course

- **Top tip** – make sure these emails go out at a different time of day to any nurture or sales emails you send, so people don't get three emails from you all at the same time

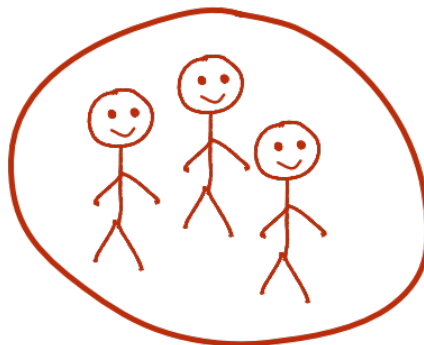
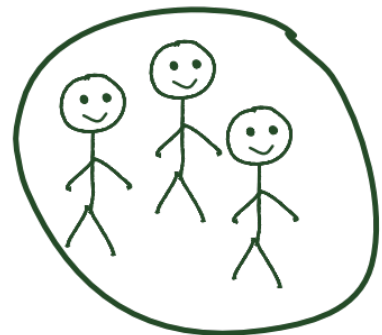
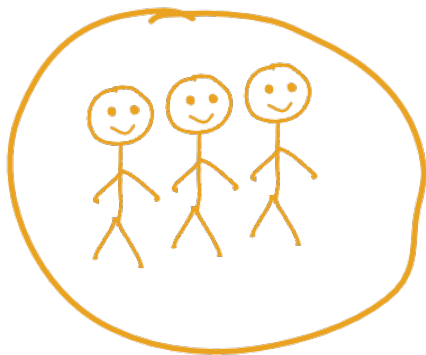
- **Top tip** – ask questions in these emails, and encourage people to respond. That gives you valuable information about how people find the course. You can use this information in your marketing and when you improve the course

- Add in a quick quiz, maybe just three questions in multiple choice to reaffirm to people that they're doing well in the course. This spurs them on to finish the course
- If quizzes in courses make you cringe because you feel they're not right for your audience, create a form with a box they can write in. Keep the number of characters they can put in the form fairly low (less than 1000). And ask a question. All of these questions come through to you, with the person's email address. You can choose to totally ignore the responses, or get your virtual assistant to review them and respond to anyone who is struggling or unhappy



Automated ideas for engagement

- Add in a survey part of the way through the course. Keep it brief and simple, but very focused on what they're enjoying or finding most useful. Everyone loves to have their opinion taken into account
- Split the group of your course participants into two or threes and get them to do an exercise together. Your virtual assistant could set this up for you and let people know which group they're in





Real time options for engagement

Including some kind of contact with you in the course means that you can usually charge more of a premium price and gives you valuable information from course participants that you can use in your marketing.

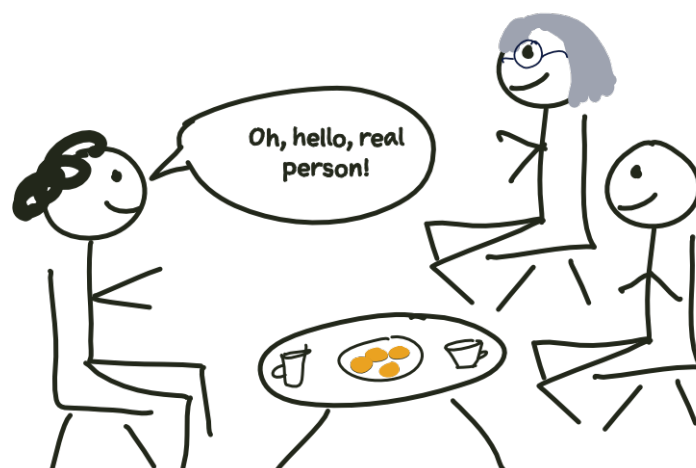
You can...

- Create a Slack or other forum type group for course participants so they can compare notes and chat to one another
- Facilitate this group by putting in questions, encouraging questions, checking milestones
- Include various worksheets, “homework” exercises or research topics in the course itself. Then ask people to contribute and share their work in the online group
- Live workshops held online – top tip – do one of these at the beginning of the course
- Ask people to share their homework in a live workshop (you don’t have to prepare anything for the session, bonus)



Real time options for engagement

- Ask Me Anything sessions
- Office hours – like an old school professor, you hold office hours once a week or once a month. You're on Zoom and people can pop in for a chat or to ask questions. I did this for a cohort programme once and people could book 30 mins with me on a Monday afternoon. Super popular and fun for me
- Run an in-depth session where you go deep on a particular part of the course. For example you might demonstrate how to do something, or do a "tear down" of something someone has created. Make it clear that this is optional for the people who especially want this
- Get everyone together in real life for a day or a weekend





Ideas for upsells

Upsells are additional products or components which you encourage people to buy after or at the same time as they buy your course. It's a great way to increase customer Life Time Value.

- Have another product ready to buy after people buy your course
 - Join a group
 - Advanced class
- Premium version with one to one access with you





Ideas for upsells

- Have a real life version of the course for a day or a weekend and charge extra for this
- A done for you premium version – maybe after doing your course, some people think “well, that’s great, but I don’t have time, could you just do this for me.” And they’re pretty much guaranteed to buy from you
- A tool or template which helps people to do something as part of the course.

Note – think carefully about this. Maybe it’s better to bundle these extras into the course, making a feature of them on the sales page, as otherwise you may risk people being unhappy to pay more during the course



Ideas for content that is not video based (or not much anyway)

Why not move away from the idea of courses having to be video based entirely? You don't have to make videos if you don't want to. Or you can just have a little smattering of video content to judiciously add in.

- Consider not making a video course at all
- What about a course which is just a series of emails over time? This works if you prefer writing to making videos
- Deliver your course as mostly written material, with little snippets of very short videos included
- Design a cohort based course or programme with regular online meetings. All the learning is delivered live, not recorded. This has the major advantage of not requiring you to make the videos before you know if the course will sell. Recommended when you're starting out



Ideas for content that is not video based (or not much anyway)

- An even more simple version of this – test the market for your course idea by offering a short live workshop. Record the workshop and sell that as your product.
- Create a cohort based programme where people get a video from you a week before a scheduled meet up of the participants. The video has some learning elements, a demonstration, or an experiment.
- It might also have some tasks they have to do before you all meet up. Then, in the meeting, everyone discusses what they've learnt, how they've applied it or what they've been thinking about.

You could have a lot of fun with this. And I can see participants loving this approach, especially if the content mentions them by name. Big bonus – you can safely create the video elements as you go along, so there's less work to do up front.



Products you might do which are not courses at all

- Offer the outcome your target market wants as a [productised service](#) instead of teaching them how to do it
- Write a workbook instead of a course (remember that workbooks can sell for hundreds, whereas you can't charge more than a few pounds for a regular book)
- Build a membership product with all the learning released month by month. Bonus – you don't have to do all the work up front, you just need to make the first couple of months of content before you launch
- Build a learning community with regular learning sessions and discussions. I've seen this done very well indeed where the workshops are done by the members of the community themselves who want to share knowledge. The recorded videos become part of a library of content. Bonus – you charge for monthly or annual membership so you have recurring income



My secret mission

In this Mission Guide, I've thrown lots of ideas at you. My purpose here is to challenge the idea that making an online course has to be a series of videos to be viewed in a linear fashion.

But my real mission is much wider than that. Maybe you'll adopt some of these ideas and your online course will be so much richer for it. Or these ideas will save you hundreds of hours of time and you'll ship your course so much faster.

That's all part of my real mission which is to get founders and business owners like you ditching their old way of working, rejecting the traditional business model of trading time for money and moving instead to creating product-based businesses.

Over the next few weeks, I'll be sending you some emails which go much wider than online courses. They'll be full of ideas, based on my years of building my own products and working with hundreds of successful businesses. And there will be some badly drawn pictures and the odd joke here and there.

And when you want help to get moving on this, you can join us on the next Productise Your Expertise programme. I run this three times a year, when a group of us get together for six months to work on creating products and building our audiences. We support one another to get over the finish line.

Check out when the next Productise Your Expertise group is going to get going [here](#).