



**HOW TO MAKE**  
*your first*  
**COOURSE**  
**SALES**

**WITH A SOFT LAUNCH**

(I never want to see you  
put all your eggs in one basket!)



## YOUR FIRST COURSE SALES

Building an online teaching business entails both course creation and marketing activities. The most successful online teaching businesses will take first steps that avoid a hard break between the two: they'll work so that course creation and course sales overlap.

I know that's not always welcome news. I've heard again and again from students who believe that the separation between development and sales will let them work more efficiently, batching things up, concentrating on one challenge at a time.

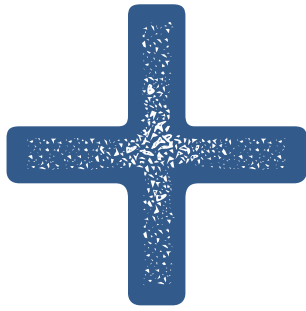
When you've got a big idea, your impulse can be to dig in and get your course created.

You believe that you'll figure out how to sell it once you get the creation work behind you! (And often that's appealing because many of us have a fear of selling.)

**BUT . . .** consider this: When you work instead so that development and sales overlap, taking smaller first steps, there is less risk to your pocketbook and morale (in the case of a disappointing launch). What's more, you'll create a course that best serves your customers.

Use this quick guide, to understand options and a process for making first course sales that could include any of these:

- > minimum viable product or MVP
- > beta product
- > soft launch



## **BENEFITS of starting with beta or MVP course and soft launch:**

When you have a first product that can be modified as well as a quicker, less-expensive launch you can:

- Test interest in your course
- Test performance of your course and success and satisfaction of your students
- Avoid disappointed students if your offer isn't in line with their expectations
- Identify improvement opportunities and make changes that let you build a course your customers really want
- Depending on course design, you might even be able to pivot during delivery if needed
- Develop a small group of fans—and testimonials
- Develop momentum for your course and the community around it

## **QUICK DEFINITIONS**

**SOFT LAUNCH.** Engage deeply with and develop a small group of interested prospects. Offer your course with lower cost or other incentives that will help you test your course viability and performance. With feedback from your students, you'll develop a next, refined, version for future launches.

**BETA OFFERING.** A beta product is a first “prototype” version of your course. It's offered with the understanding that it's not as complete as it will be in the future and that you expect feedback in return for a lower price.

**MVP OFFERING.** A minimum viable product is the most basic version of your course that you can offer. Perhaps it's a subset of the complete course you plan to offer in the future.

With an MVP, you start small and then observe market response and take cues from it for your next steps.

## CREATE A BETA OR MVP COURSE OFFERING

Developing your course offering—whether it’s a beta version, a minimum viable product or a complete signature course always begins with understanding your talents, audience needs, and the market.

### Observe Interest In Your Free Content

First steps for anyone who wants to build a profitable on-line teaching business include engaging with prospects, putting out first free content, and beginning to build an email list and social audiences.

You could put your free content out in blog posts, podcast episodes, live streams, or even as a guest on others’ platforms.

As you make your free content available, pay attention to the interest level people are having in your product:

- How many people are signing up?
- How much social “liking” are you seeing?
- What angles of your presented content are people especially interested in? And how does that relate to your offering--or how could you shape your offering to relate?
- Are you getting direct comments, questions, contact?



## DEVELOP A MINIMUM VIABLE PRODUCT

*an MVP is a slice of what you eventually hope to offer*

Given the interest you're seeing (and, of course, your talents and the market), determine a first small product you could create quickly and well that you believe they'd like.

This could be a course that:

- teaches first steps
- serves an expertise niche (i.e., beginning cake decorators or advanced cake decorators)
- covers just one of the many related topics you eventually want to cover (i.e., scrapbooking travel or scrapbooking everyday life or scrapbooking school)
- teaches a specific small project (i.e., how to make a simple quilted bag or how to make a wordmark logo with two fonts)

What's key is that this course has a limited scope and size. Your students can complete it relatively quickly, without a big investment of their own time and resources, and you can create it relatively quickly and affordably.

It's a first step for you that gets you engaging with your audience, discovering your best teaching style and tools, taking important first steps for your online teaching business.



### **pricing and your first students**

You don't need to offer this at a big discount or for free. It will naturally have a smaller price tag than the larger more comprehensive course you'll eventually offer because of its limited scope. Part of the point of

this approach is to test the market and find out whether your prospects see value in your offer.

When your students pay for the course, they've got skin in the game. They're invested and more likely to take action.

Put motivators in place to get these first students using your class—and giving you feedback on it.

### **IDEAS FOR INCENTIVES TO GET YOUR FIRST STUDENTS TO COURSE COMPLETION (& providing feedback)**

You'll need to understand what your students value to put incentives in place.

Here are some ideas:

- Offer coupons for future classes or related product for those who complete on time. For example those in your quilting class could receive coupons for fabric purchase.
- Offer a contest with prizes or recognition for those who complete on time
- Feature students who complete well on social media.

### **delivery of MVP**

See the discussion in the next section (on delivery of a beta product) and adjust for your MVP. Since the MVP is of a more limited scope, choose approaches that make it easy for your students to use and complete—and figure out how to incorporate enough interaction to get feedback from your students.

## EXAMPLE OF MVP & SOFT LAUNCH TO SOMEONE ELSE'S AUDIENCE

**THE PRODUCT.** The first scrapbooking class I sold was a minimum viable product. I'd written a book called "Get It Scrapped" and I'd been editing a column on design for a scrapbooking magazine. When it came to teaching my first class, I had SO many ideas for a big course.

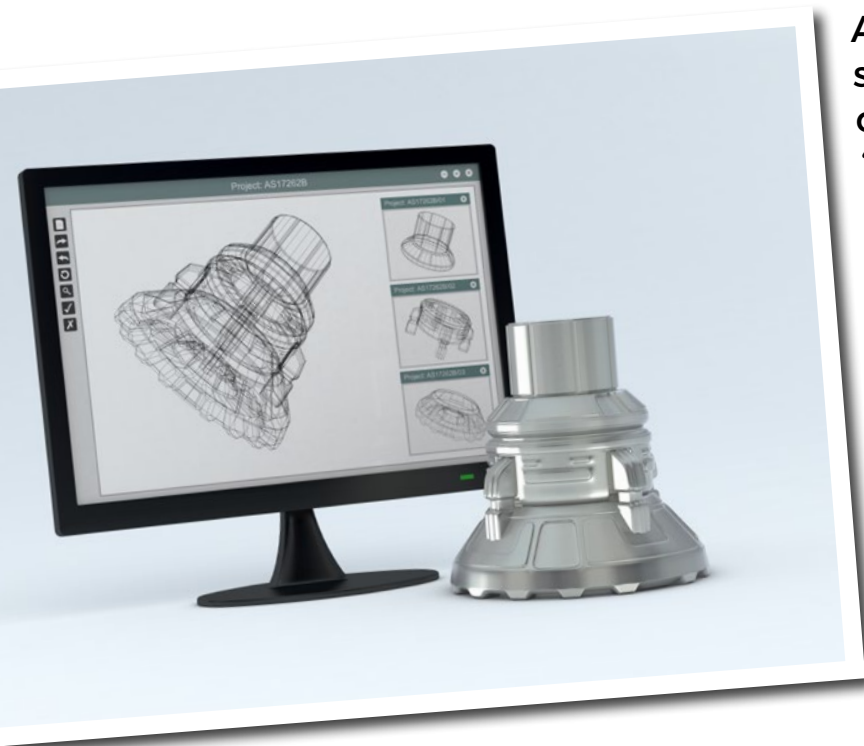
To get started, though, I made a course based on ONE CHAPTER in my book. The Chapter was "Get Events Scrapbooked" and the course was "Scrapbooking Events." It went well and I moved forward with several other courses, many built on chapters from my book.



**THE SOFT LAUNCH.** Because I was brand new to online teaching, I hadn't yet built an audience. I partnered with a scrapbooker who did have an audience. She promoted and hosted my first class for a 50% share in the sales. I sold plenty of classes and started my own audience building.

## DEVELOP A BETA PRODUCT

*a beta is a prototype of the course you eventually hope to offer*



A beta offering may be larger in scope than an MVP offering. This could be that first version of a “signature” course with multiple modules and lessons within those modules. Think of it as a prototype.

What makes it different from the complete non-beta offering you hope to eventually create is that you create it more quickly, letting students know this is the beta, and that you’re keeping it less complete because you want to be able to develop a

product that will truly serve them well. Of course, they will get the revised product when it’s ready.

### pricing and your beta students

A primary goal with the beta offering is to attract a small and engaged group of students who will complete the class and give you feedback.

As you decide what to charge (and whether to charge), do it to ensure your students have skin in the game.

You can ask your beta students to invest (and show that they have “skin” in the game) several ways:

- **require payment at “beta” price**

Offer the beta course at a significantly lower price than that you will eventually charge (and grandfather these students in for updates).



This beta offering can be a money-maker for you—and even give you the seed money for your next launch promotion.

- **offer beta for free but require an application for limited number of spots**

Announce your upcoming beta and make applications for limited number of spots available. This is work your students need to complete that shows serious intent. You want students who will participate and give you feedback.

- **either require lower priced payment or give the spots away BUT students will have opportunity to compete for a prize**

What can you offer to one or two serious and successful students that would get them motivated to complete the course well? This could be a full refund, an opportunity to be featured by you, no-cost coaching with you after the class, or something you know your students value.

### **determine and communicate feedback requirements, formats and timing**

Determine before class starts how you'll get feedback and engagement with your students so that you can revise and move forward. Be clear with your beta students about these engagement requirements. How often do you expect to engage with them and how do you expect to do it? Will it be one-on-one or in a group? Will it be in a forum or Facebook group? Will it be live on a webinar? Decide and make these requirements known.

Set specific dates for your students' work on the class to begin and complete. Define, also, what constitutes student success.

### **delivery of beta course**

Typically online courses have a combination of “on-demand” content, community, and live virtual events. The on-demand content might be videos, pdfs, audios that your students access at their own convenience.

With a beta you probably will not be creating all of the pieces as completely as you will for the final course. The point of the beta is to be able to revise and even pivot as you work with your students.

Your options for delivery:

- Pre-recorded or pre-developed videos, pdfs, and audios for students to download and consume at their convenience. Remember: this is what we often see in a complete non-beta course. You might do much less of this with your beta.
- Create content “just in time” for each scheduled lesson. This gives you the ability to be talking with your students and adjusting.
- Deliver content in live virtual lessons (i.e., on a webinar). Record the sessions and use them as a starting point for the non-beta version.
- Practice and implementation opportunities and assignments are important. While you’d have them completely ready in a non-beta course, you could be creating these right after feedback or live teaching sessions to best match what you see your students needing.
- Roadmaps are those pieces of your class that give students checklists, quick guides, worksheets and other materials that help them practice and implement. Anticipate what your students will need but be prepared to add and adjust as you move through the course with your beta participants.

## **EXAMPLE OF BETA COURSE SOFT LAUNCH:** The eCourse Blueprint Beta

**SOFT LAUNCH.** Fall 2015, I began building an audience and testing interest in a big, signature course for those who want to create and sell their own online courses. I offered a series of free webinars and had a small but engaged list of prospects.

In December, I let them know about my upcoming first version of the eCourse Blueprint--and I offered them a great discount. The offer was made via email, and 30 students purchased.

With that “seed” money, I ran advertisements and conducted a webinar launch event two weeks later. Thirty more students signed up at a slightly higher price and I had my first 60 students.

**BETA CREATION AND DELIVERY.** While I’d outlined much of the course before selling it, I hadn’t yet created it. By the second week in January, we were live with module 1. For the next eight weeks, I created the course content just in time for delivery to my students.

**REVISED COURSE AND FULL OFFER.** Just over a year later, I edited, reshaped and rerecorded all of the course lessons. A year of working with students in the beta version, showed me what was missing and how to modify for the right emphasis and sequencing. The course now sells for over \$500 more than the beta version did. Close to 200 students have enrolled so far, and I’m now ready to market the course with more focus than ever before.



## **SELL WITH A SOFT LAUNCH**

When you offer an MVP or beta product (which you will refine based on student feedback), you're overlapping the work of development and selling—even blurring the lines between the two.

Your start is with a limited launch of a product you plan to revise based on sales and student satisfaction and performance results.



### **always be building your email list and audience**

Work that must always be done is that of steadily building, growing and nurturing an email list and social audiences.

As you get ready to make this first offer, you may not yet have a large audience. Hopefully, though, you've got a small but engaged group. These might be people who watch your YouTube videos, read your blog posts, view your live streams, or chat in your free Facebook group.

Early on, you'll need to create a "lead magnet" that you offer in exchange for email addresses. Always be promoting that lead magnet in your social venues.

### **the "early bird" list**

Any kind of launch gives you the opportunity to be talking to your people more than usual—and inviting people to get on your mailing list, and especially onto an "early-bird" list that gets them first notice and larger benefits or discounts.

With a more extensive launch, you will probably budget promotional dollars for getting people into your launch event. With this soft launch, evaluate your budget and decide whether and how much to invest.

## **launch leaking**

In the weeks leading up to this soft launch, start doing what launch specialist Anne Samoilov calls “leaking.”

- Talk about what’s coming.
- Tell your people that your first beta version of a special course is coming.
- Let them know there will be a special opportunity for them to take part in what’s coming.
- Invite them to get on an “early-bird” list for first notice and the best offer.

**if you’ve got an engaged group on your list or in your audiences, simply make the offer.**

If those people reading your posts, watching your videos, and conversing with you online are especially engaged and sending you cues that they are interested in buying your class, then make them an offer.

- Via email would be best, but if you haven’t yet moved folks from YouTube or Instagram or Facebook or LinkedIn over to that list, use those venues.
- Keep the sales page simple. Perhaps use just a shopping cart/buy now button.
- Include urgency in the offer. Let people know that there is a very short time to take it, that they are grandfathered in on improvements, that it will not be offered again. Tell them whatever expiring aspects there are to this offer. Stress these expiring elements.

- Deliver the offer and reminders over 3 to 14 days, preferably with email. Be sure to let people know a couple of times on the day the offer expires.

### **if you need a little more oomph to build interest, run a {small} launch event**

A launch event is a party for your offer. It's a way to:

- Generate attention and excitement.
- Educate and create an awareness in your prospects of why they need your class.
- Offer discounts or bonuses.
- Expire those discounts or bonuses to create urgency.

Regular launch events can range from something simple like an email or blog series to a multi-day challenge. Frequently used launch approaches include:

- Email or blog series
- Blog hop
- Facebook live series
- Webinar
- Mini course
- Challenge (Multi Day)
- Summit

Remember: You make your offer during the event and follow-up with reminders for several days.

Remember: The point of the soft launch is to invest less time and money than you would in a full launch.

And so, figure out what you could offer as a launch event that:

- Minimizes expenses
- Minimizes time needed to create
- Could be developed for a bigger future launch

- Your people would be interested in
- Precedes the work students will do in your class

During the launch event, you will make a clear offer for your beta or MVP with a clear expiration date and time.

Small launch event possibilities are:

- A live stream or webinar that you could offer one or two times
- A blog or group “hop” in which your biz besties help you get the word out
- A short free lesson that sets people up to want the follow-on

Follow that launch event (in which you made your offer) with an email series:

- Keep the sales page simple. Perhaps use just a shopping cart/buy now button.
- Include urgency in the offer. Let people know that there is a very short time to take it, that they are grandfathered in on improvements, that it will not be offered again. Stress any expiring pieces to your offer.
- Deliver the offer and reminders over 3 to 14 days, preferably with email. Be sure to let people know a couple of times on the day the offer expires.

**leverage free avenues of promotion during your soft launch period.**

Create images and posts for all of your social media accounts that let people know:

- your beta launch is coming,
- your beta launch is here, and
- your beta launch is closing.

Be as “everywhere” as possible without spending significant ad dollars.

## **Put it to work for yourself!**

With first small products that enable testing and iterations that get bigger and bigger, you'll reduce risk, keep momentum going, and avoid big disappointments.

Take a look at your course plans and figure out how a beta or MVP offering could give you a quick way to sell a course that you'll expand or revise as you discover the results it yields.

## **Talk about it over in our Facebook Group: Prep School for Online Course Builders.**

I'd love to hear about what you're working on--and introduce you to the many course builders over in our community. [Click here to request access.](#) I'll get you in as soon as possible.

## **Look for my invite.**

As you home in on your course topic and a first MVP or beta offering, you'll be ready to create content and set up a classroom platform. Selling this first offering with a soft launch will give you pieces you can build out in subsequent, bigger launches.

All this is the work of creating and selling online courses.

Keep an eye out for an email from me with an invite to my free course-building master class: 6 Steps to Build a Profitable Online Teaching Business.

I'll be in touch soon! Be sure to let me know if you have any questions at <http://teachwhatyoudo.com/contact> .