

Insider's Guide to Online Challenges

If you've been online for any length of time, you've probably seen ads promoting some type of challenge. Of course, there are the health and fitness challenges that have been around longer than the internet, but there are so many more challenge areas you can do. More recent topics we've seen crop up are meditation, blogging, branding and even journaling. As a marketer and business owner, creating your own challenge can be extremely rewarding.

What is an online Challenge?

Challenges are exceedingly popular events used to get people excited and engaged for a set period of time. They usually have a set start and end date and include a series of short lessons and activities guided by videos, pre-written content, or live events. They offer people participating a tangible, fun and motivating result, or reward for taking part.

The good thing is the types of topics that can be used for a challenge is unlimited. For example, week-long meditation challenges, a 30-day novel writing challenge, 7-day detox challenge or building your signature style challenges.

From the business owners' side, challenges are a terrific way to collect new leads, build your email list or upsell other products you have.

How Challenges Work

When a participant enrolls in a challenge, they receive a new lesson & encouragement every day or on set schedule. Often shorter than an online course, challenges are aimed to help students achieve a specific goal in a few short days.

Challenges work in different ways depending on the topic and format. It can be part of an email sequence, hosted on social media platforms, a video series, a webinar series, or some other form.

For a challenge, you can take a tiny segment of your overall product or services. Brainstorm three topics, takeaways, or positives from it. Which one could you teach someone who is brand new to the topic? Which one do you get the most questions about? Which one has the hugest pain point? How can you help them get a small when?

Now the interested person signs up for the challenge. Then each day or so they receive an email with your lesson, words of encouragement and the action they should take that day.

Or if it is a challenge being presented via video or social media, they log in to a specific site such as a private Facebook group or Zoom link. Then you present the live or prerecorded video with their action steps.

Subscribers often have worksheets, templates, PDFs, and other types of lessons they should complete for each day.

Each day of the challenge, participants make progress towards their goals. By the end of the challenge, hopefully they reach their goal.

This is when you, the challenge host, introduce your upsell product. You've proven you know your topic and how to reach the goals. You've shown them, through the challenge, that they are capable of reaching their goals and at this very moment, they are super motivated to do more. So, this is the perfect time to get them to buy your product or service to keep the momentum going.

Benefits of Challenges

Now that you know what challenges are and how they work, you might be wondering if they would be effective in helping your business. Let's take a look at the benefits of a challenge.

- They can help you grow your email list. You already know how important building your own email list is for the growth of your sales.
- Challenges help you build that “know, like and trust” factor that is important in building relationships, sales and getting repeat customers.
- They give potential new customers or clients a chance to see what it's like to work with you. This gives you both the opportunity to decide if working together is a good fit.
- They help build your position as an expert or an authority in your niche. By sharing your knowledge in a short challenge on a specific topic, you show that you have experience in what you are talking about.
- Hosting a challenge is highly effective as part of a launch for products or as a lead into your one-to-one coaching offers.
- Challenges help you dig deeper into understanding your ideal clients struggles and goals. As you work through the challenge together you can learn what they need, what keeps them from getting the answers they need or why they aren't reaching their goals.
- They put you in front of new people who have not heard of or worked with you in the past.
- They are a fantastic way to support your community for free. Challenges allow you to help those who might not otherwise be able to afford the answers they need.
- They work for almost any niche or type of business: health, financial, self-development, writing, coaching, artistic, crafts, family, relationships and more.

So, if you thought of creating a challenge wouldn't benefit your specific business, the benefits actually support challenges as a viable way to build your business.

Examples of Challenges

You see how a challenge can benefit businesses. But you might still be a little skeptical about using them in your own business. Let's look at some ways people in different niches are using challenges in their businesses.

Branding challenges are great for getting your logo, colors and all the little elements together for your business. You could host a 7 day build you brand elements challenge.

Or how about what Smart Passive Income is doing. He has an ongoing 5-day [BYOB \(Build Your Own Brand\) challenge](#) where he walks you through all the steps you need to get a website up and running.

Writing challenges often focus on a specific area of writing. For example, narrowing down your topic, finding time to write or one on improving your writing. Joe Bunting of The Write Practice has a [7 Day Creative Writing Challenge](#) designed to help you kickstart a daily habit of writing.

Creating content is often a problem for businesses. Creating a 30-day content challenge for more traffic can help a lot of others. Or how about a 7-day social media content challenge to get in the habit of posting every day on social media.

How about a visibility challenge? The Visibility Vixen hosts a [Comfy on Camera challenge](#) often. In this one she helps you get over the fear of tech and being on camera in a 5-day challenge.

Course creation challenges are popular right now. For example, Ellen Yin has a [Paid to Create](#) course challenge she offers throughout the year.

Fitness challenges are extremely popular. You could create a Move 20 Minutes a Day challenge, a yoga challenge. A notable example of a fitness challenge is Yoga with Adriene's [30-day yoga challenge](#). This launches the first day of January every year and is a perfect for both physical and mental boosts.

Along the same lines is the dieting challenges. Dieting is always on people's radar. Host a Keto challenge, lose the belly-fat challenge, 5-day juicing challenge, Intermittent fasting challenge. Lynn Terry of Traveling Low Carb hosts a [30-day Low Carb challenge](#) on Facebook several times a year.

How about hosting a 7-day productivity challenge for procrastinators? Or 30 days to get more stuff done challenge. These types of challenges get to the root of the audiences need and help them move through what's keeping them stuck.

Use these examples as a jumpstart for your own challenge ideas.

Paid Or Free?

Deciding whether to have your challenge be free or paid depends on what type of challenge it is, who it's for and why you are hosting it.

There are pros and cons of both.

Paid challenges work best for businesses that

- Have at least 500 engaged members in their social community
- Have 2000 or more on their email list
- And have a full 1:1 client service
- Higher level niches such as financial, investing who might want or need the challenge
- Focusing on people already in your niche who are ready to put in the time (and have the time) for a challenge they paid for
- It makes sense for your product, your funnel and strategy for your business

Free challenges are good for

- Smaller communities
- Businesses that have a small email list
- Are just starting out
- Building your authority
- Growing your email list
- Entry point for your services, products
- It makes sense with your product, funnel, and business strategy

What's included

The pieces you include in your challenge will be unique to the type of challenge. But some things will be essential to all challenges.

1. Content. This is essential. It can be written, video, audio, or some other form. The content is the meat of the challenge.
2. Video lessons. Some challenges work better than others if you use video to teach. These can be live or recorded. And they can be slides only, direct to camera or a combination of both.
3. Audio lessons. These are great for challenges like meditation, yoga, or this type of challenge.
4. Downloadable worksheets, workbooks, or planner pages help keep subscribers on track.
5. Emails. Automated emails should be sent each day of the challenge.
6. Blog posts. Schedule blog posts to be published every day of the challenge.

7. Q & A sessions. Use one day of the challenge to answer questions.
8. Bonuses. A big draw for any online challenge is the bonuses they get. Include ones that will help your participants take action and see some type of result. Some bonus options include:
 - checklists
 - eBooks
 - expert interviews
 - shoutouts on social media
 - giveaways, contests, rewards
 - membership or community
 - discounts or promotions on other products or services

Anything else that is necessary for your participants to take action and to learn from you should be included.

Length of your challenge

How many times have you participated in a challenge that lasted 30 days only to end up bored and losing interest after the first 7 days? The length of your challenge should be long enough to provide valuable lessons but not so long as they lose interest.

Most popular challenges seem to run 30 days or less, with many being just one week. Some can be done for 90 days but be careful not to overwhelm or run out of content. You also need to make sure their results can be doable in the time frame you are promising. For example, if you promise your challengers that they can lose twenty pounds in your 10-day challenge, it's probably not going to happen. Your participants will be disappointed and may lose faith in you, setting your business up for negative feedback and loss of sales.

Choosing your format & platform

Once you've determined how long your challenge is and the type of content you'll be sharing and how often, you need to choose your format and platform for sharing them.

This can happen in a variety of ways. The key is to choose the type that will work with best for your niche and followers. You need to determine where your potential subscribers spend time together and how they like to learn.

Your platforms can be:

- An automated email autoresponder
- Social media such as a private Facebook group
- Through an online seminar or course platform
- On YouTube
- Instagram either by doing IG lives each day, creating an IG account specifically for the challenge or delivering to them as part of your close friends.

- From your website and blog
- From Zoom or other video sharing software

You might choose to use a learning management system (LMS) to host your challenge. LMS is a software application or sometimes a web-based technology that allows educators to share, create and manage their various online learning courses. Some options are [Thinkific.com](https://www.thinkific.com/) or [LearnDash](https://www.learnDash.com/).

There are platforms specifically for teaching others such as [Challenge Hound](https://www.challengehound.com/) or [Mighty Networks](https://www.mightynetworks.com/) you can use to host your challenge.

Regardless of which LMS you choose, if you're goal is to build your email list, your challenge should have some form of email-based information included.

Creating the Content

One thing that stops a lot of businesses from hosting a challenge is the thought of creating more content. But there are ways to do it that can save time and be done quickly.

PLR: You can purchase private label rights content (PLR) which allows you to personalize and change the content to fit your audience, voice, topic and needs. This pre-written content is available in a variety of niches and topics.

You can personalize it by adding or taking away content. If you purchase a course, for example, take out a section of the course for your challenge. Then add your own stories and experiences.

Do it yourself. You already know your content so if you have the time and skills to create everything, it might be easiest and quickest for you to do the content creation yourself.

Outsource it. Hire someone to create the content for you. This can be a ghostwriter or writer who creates the main content, worksheets, and bonuses. You can find good writers by doing a Google search or from sites like Upwork.com or Fiverr.com.

Repurpose. If you've been in business for a while, you likely already have content you can reuse for your challenge. Blog posts, videos you've done, articles you've written can all be reused or reformatted to work in your challenge. Workshops, webinars, or previous trainings can be used in full or part in your challenges. Tweak any of the content so it pertains to what your challenge is about.

Curate content. Curated content just means adding your opinions, values, or ideas to other people's content. Use suitable content from others as a way to make a point, show what to do or not, or mistakes to avoid.

Record videos all in one day. Then spend a day editing and getting them ready to upload.

The same goes for any audio content.

When creating the content be sure to put yourself in your participant's shoes. What are they struggling with right now? What's their current mindset? What do they know or don't know?

Creating the content for challenges is about using what you have access to, so the process goes quickly and smoothly.

7 Steps to creating a successful challenge

Now that you know the basics of creating a challenge let's learn about the steps to creating a successful challenge.

Step 1: Set your challenge goals of what you want to achieve from the challenge.

- Are you trying to build your email list?
- Do you want to build the know, like, trust factor?
- Do you want to grow your community?
- Are you looking to sell your products or services?
- Who is your ideal participant?
- What is the target number of participants you want?
- What's your target conversion rate?
- When will you run the challenge?

Now set the goals for your challenge participants.

- What do you want them to learn, overcome, do, or accomplish during the challenge?
- Where should they be at the beginning of the challenge?
- What should they be accomplishing during the challenge?
- When the challenge is complete, what should they be able to do?

Step 2: Decide on your challenge topic. This might sound simple, but many people get stuck here.

Try this trick: list topics your knowledgeable about, list topics that are relevant to your current offers, and finally list topics your target audience is interested in. Then look for any overlap.

Choose a topic that helps your audience with a clear result and quick win.

Step 3: Create the elements for your challenge. This is the bits and pieces that make your challenge work. What will be the structure of the challenge? How long will it be?

Create a sign-up page, a thank you page, set up your emails. It also includes creating the content, bonuses, and workbooks. Take the time to outline your entire challenge and everything you will need (photos, graphics, emails, content, platform, worksheets, etc.) This way you can go back and see where you need to simplify and cut back.

You can also set up your community now. This can be Facebook group or some other platform.

Step 4: Choose your platform and tools. Will it be an automated email sequence? A private Facebook group? Is a webinar or course platform your best option? Have you considered hosting it on YouTube? Or on your own website?

Step 5: Promote, Promote, Promote. After you get everything ready, it's time to promote it. You can do this on the various platforms such as social media, your list, other people's groups, groups you belong to and many other ways.

Start promoting at least 10 days before the challenge begins.

Your promotion checklist should include:

- Landing page for opt-ins
- Blog post to announce the challenge with CTA
- Announce it to your email/newsletter list
- Posts to social media to your audience (be sure to ask for the shares)
- Doing a live video on Facebook or other event to announce the challenge.
- Social media ads to your blog post or video
- Email sequence to encourage your own list to join the challenge

Step 6: It's time to deliver your challenge. You are ready to send out your content, host the challenge and support your people to get results. Show up and have a fun time.

Step 7: Put out your offer. When you reach the end of your challenge, give your subscribers the next step in their journey. This is where you do your promoting of your one-to-one coaching package, a course, a group program or whatever you are offering.

Tips for success

1. Know why you are running this challenge. What's the incentive for you?
2. Make the challenge something your subscribers really want, tackling the biggest obstacle or fear.
3. Figure out who the challenge is for. Know who your customer will be.
4. Don't make the challenge too long or too short. It needs to be just the right length to hold attention while providing valuable information. And don't over promise and underdeliver.
5. Give yourself plenty of time to plan, prepare and create your content before you launch the challenge.
6. Give them a PDF companion guide to go along with the challenge.

7. Don't forget to grab testimonials after the challenge ends.
8. Decide if you will make the challenge available all at once or if you will "drip" your content daily.
9. Decide if you want to make the challenge evergreen where it's available 24/7 year-round or if it's a one-time challenge.

Templates and Tools

We've included a set of checklists, templates, and worksheets to help you quickly get started creating your challenge. These include:

- 15 Ways to Promote Your Online Challenges
- A quick action guide for your first online challenge
- Tools and Resources for Creating and Delivering your Online Challenge with links to the more popular ones
- A fill-in-the-blank challenge outline to help you determine what to include in your challenge
- A fill-in-the-blank challenge cheat sheet
- A Planning Your First Challenge Worksheet

Use these to keep you on track and to get your challenge launched smoothly.

What to Do Next

Now that you know why you should be hosting a challenge, it's time to take what you've learned and put it into action. Use the bonus templates, guides, and the worksheets along with this guide to implement all the steps and shortcuts to make your challenge a success.