

The Ultimate Guide To Marketing Stacks For Beginners



Welcome to Peace of Mind

If you're reading this, you have probably hit *the wall* before.

What's the wall?

That feeling you get when you are excited about starting a new project...

A Blog...

An Agency...

An Online Course...

Anything where you get to *share your passion* with the world, and *get paid for it*.

You brain storm your idea, figure out your target market, and finally you are ready to LAUNCH!

Only....

What are the right tools to use?

Most people get paralyzed when it comes to picking the tools they are going to use for their project.

As a result, they get anxious, lose motivation to move forward, and even abandon their dream.

That's not going to happen to you.

Maybe you already have a project, and you're looking to add a new component to it...

Maybe you're stuck on the starting block, paralyzed in fear.

This guide will get you unstuck.

At the end of this guide, you will understand:

1. What is a marketing stack?

2. What are the core essentials to a successful marketing stack?
3. What are some cost effective and flexible ways to combine them together?
4. What method is right for *YOU*?

But before we talk about the solution, let's make sure we understand the problem at hand... the *marketing stack*.

What is a Marketing Stack?

Your business is built with tools, right?

You have a website (a tool to display information to visitors on the internet).

You send emails to your subscribers (a tool to engage your existing audience).

And hopefully, you collect payments online for your services.

Each one of these tools is part of your **Marketing Stack**: The complete tool kit you use to run your online marketing business.



What tools do I need in my Stack?

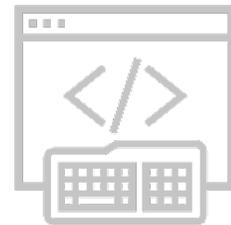
There are some core elements to every successful online business that we will cover in this guide. Prices can vary from free, to one-time fee, to recurring memberships.

Once you get a lay of the land of what different options there are, we will combine them into useful stacks for you. And as you review the list below, remember that you are **running a business**, so even if something requires a monthly fee, it doesn't even come close to the cost of running a brick and mortar business! With that said, let's get into it!

Website Theme

You want to impress people with your website, right? Then you need a good looking theme. Recommended themes are

- [Astra \(Free, premium options available\)](#)
- [Thrive Themes \(\\$228 per year\)](#)
- [Divi \(\\$249 Lifetime access\)](#)



Customer Relationship Manager (CRM)

It takes on average 7 interactions with someone before they trust you enough and are willing to open their wallet and buy. In order to be able to follow up with them and build that needed trust, you need a CRM. I'll be talking more about:



- [Mailerlite \(\\$420 per year\)](#)
- [Mailchimp \(\\$1,680 per year\)](#)
- [Convertkit \(\\$1,488 per year\)](#)
- [Kartra \(\\$1,788 per year\)](#)

Costs above assumes a list size of 12,500 contacts

Lead Generation

The best way to get leads INTO your CRM is with a tool specifically designed to entice readers to become subscribers, like:



- [Bloom \(Included with Divi pricing\)](#)
- [Thrive Leads \(Included with Thrive Themes Pricing\)](#)
- [Kartra \(\\$1,788 per year\)](#)

Page Builder

To build beautiful web pages into effective marketing *sales funnels*, you're going to want a professional page builder like:



- [Thrive Architect \(Included with Thrive Themes Pricing\)](#)
- [Divi \(Included with Divi Pricing\)](#)
- [Kartra \(\\$1,788 per year\)](#)

Shopping Cart

There is no point in building an online business if it's not able to generate profits, right? You will need a method to collect that payment! And most shopping cart platforms add additional incredible features like split testing, affiliate programs, and other things that make sure you maximize your income. I recommend



- [Thrivecart \(\\$595 one time fee\)](#)
- [Memberpress \(\\$249 per year\)](#)
- [Learndash \(\\$159 per year\)](#)
- [Kartra \(\\$1,788 per year\)](#)
- [Teachable \(\\$999 per year\)](#)

Content Restriction

If you are selling digital products (ebooks, online courses, membership access, etc), you need to make sure you can protect the content that you are selling access to. Otherwise, anyone would be able to share a link to your prized content and share it around the internet... not cool. My favorites are:



- [WP Fusion \(\\$247 per year\)](#)
- [Learndash \(\\$159 per year\)](#)
- [Memberpress \(\\$249 per year\)](#)
- [Kartra \(\\$1,788 per year\)](#)
- [Teachable \(\\$999 per year\)](#)

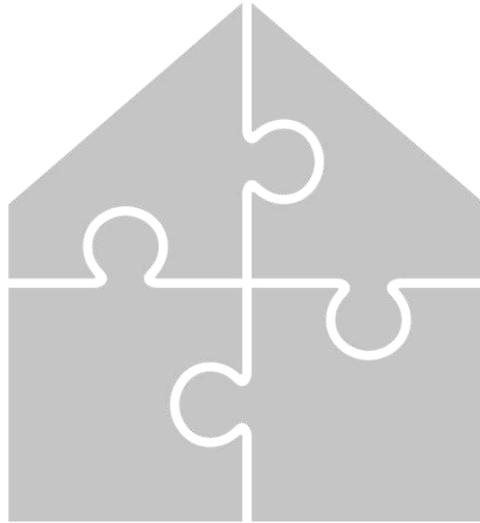
Learning Management System (LMS)

The online course industry has boomed recently, and well-designed and presented courses can command a premium charge to your audience. The following LMS tools help you impress your students with a great learning experience:



- [Learndash \(\\$159 per year\)](#)
- [Thrive Apprentice \(Included in Thrive Themes pricing\)](#)
- [WP Complete \(\\$89 per year\)](#)
- [Kartra \(\\$1,788 per year\)](#)
- [Teachable \(\\$999 per year\)](#)

Take a breath :) Before you start putting the pieces together... understand *this*



You might look at the list above and start feeling nervous and overwhelmed. Take a quick breath and relax.

Like I said before, this is a *stack*. And you don't build a stack all at once.

You build it one. block. at. a. time...

Same thing here.

The components of the stack are ordered this way for a reason. If you are just getting started, just get started with your website theme and start creating content (blog posts, videos, etc).

When you feel you have a handle on how your theme works and you're ready to tackle one more learning curve, add on the CRM.

Then just focus on learning how these two tools work together.

Slowly and over time, you can work your way up to having the full stack talking together, but that doesn't have to happen quickly.

People take years to get their entire stack humming nicely, and there is no problem with that!

But if you are an observant one, you might have noticed something funny about the list above. And that's the shortcut I'm about to tell you about.

The Kartra Shortcut



Did you notice one tool that kept showing up under almost every header? Yup, it's Kartra.

Kartra is a newer player on the scene, and its goal in life is to consolidate the tangled web of tools that you need to run a successful online business.

Essentially, it is a marketing tool in a box.

It isn't for everyone, and it can suffer at times from the jack-of-all trades, master of none problem.

But for those who admittedly want a shortcut and want to avoid as many headaches along the way as possible,

Kartra is a solid option included in this guide.

And for those that want to forge ahead and custom-tailor their stack for their specific needs, here are some stacks that I have personally used and recommend.

Summary of Excellent Marketing Stacks

Stack	1	2	3	4	5
Theme	Astra	Divi	Thrive Themes	Divi	Astra
CRM	Mailchimp	Mailerlite	Convertkit	Convertkit	Kartra
Lead Gen	Bloom	Bloom	Thrive Leads	Bloom	Kartra
Page Builder	Divi	Divi	Thrive Architect	Divi	Kartra
Shopping Cart	Learndash	Thrive Cart	Memberpress	Teachable	Kartra
Content Protection	Learndash	WP Fusion	Memberpress	Teachable	Kartra
LMS	Learndash	WP Complete	Thrive Apprentice	Teachable	Kartra
Total Cost	\$249 + \$1,868/yr	\$844 + \$756/yr	\$1,965/yr	\$249 + \$2,487/yr	\$1,788/yr



When deciding which stack you use, there are 3 factors you want to evaluate:

Simplicity

The ideal stack allows you to set it up and forget about it. You want the system to “just work,” so you can devote your time and energy to creating amazing content and marketing your brand. So simplicity is key.

Flexibility

The tools that reign supreme may not be the best 2 years from now. Does the stack you have now lock you into a particular company for the long haul, or do you have the ability to pivot and adjust over time as new opportunities arise?

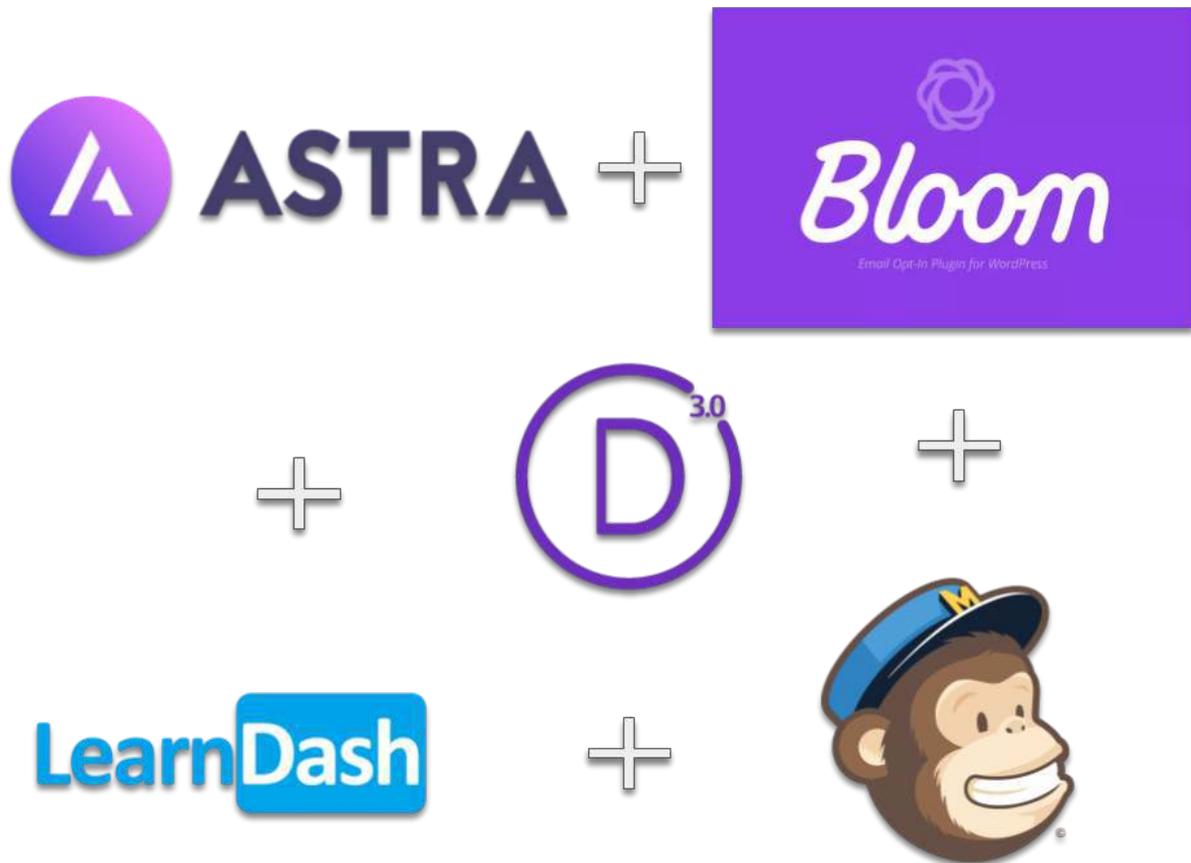
Cost

Cost is listed last for a reason. If you always look for the cheapest option, you may run into problems that commonly face the “budget options” out there: lack of support, poor development

speed, and clunky interfaces. But if you have 2 options that work equally well, picking the cheaper option could save you thousands of dollars over time.

Ok, so now comes the fun part, an explanation of each stack in a bit of detail. We will cover the general flow of the stack, as well as the pro's and con's with respect to simplicity, flexibility, and cost.

Stack #1: Astra + Bloom + MailChimp + LearnDash



How It Works

This is a stack dedicated to selling online courses. LearnDash is one of the most popular learning management systems on Wordpress, and this stack revolves around it.

Whenever you want to use LearnDash, I recommend Astra as your theme as it deeply integrates with LearnDash to make sure you have complete control over how your courses look.

Divi and Bloom is an all-around solid investment for page builders as it is a one-time fee for lifetime updates, and the development team is pushing out new features constantly.

Simplicity Rating: ☆☆☆

Flexibility Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Cost Rating: ☆☆

Pro's:

- LearnDash is a very scalable solution that can grow with you as you create more courses
- Free courses are great lead magnets that can quickly grow your list

Con's:

- Using 5 different tools can be overwhelming for beginners
- LearnDash is limited in its selling tools. Cannot do One Click Upsells, coupons, and other very helpful tools to increase your sales
- Rather pricey option for the limits on how you sell with LearnDash

Stack #2: Divi + Bloom + Mailerlite + ThriveCart + WPFusion + WPComplete



How It Works

This stack looks intimidating at first glance, but don't be afraid! The goal of this stack is to put you completely in the driver's seat. It is the ultimate dream of the do-it-yourself guys and gals.

The secret sauce of this stack is WP Fusion. This plug in connects Mailerlite & Thrivecart to your blog, allowing you to block content, add tags based on user behaviors, and a ton of other advanced marketing tricks.

The general flow would be:

- 1) Build a sales page using Divi Builder.
- 2) Add a Buy Now Button that links to a check out page in Thrive Cart

- 3) Upon successful purchase in ThriveCart, add a new user and give specific membership tag in Mailerlite
- 4) Using WPFusion, that tag can automatically create a new user in Wordpress and send log in credentials to them.
- 5) Using the tag added in Mailerlite upon purchase, you can lock and unlock specific pages that hold your course material or any other premium content.
- 6) To help your users track their progress through the course, you can use wpcomplete to track % of course complete, and other basic LMS functionality you'd want.

The downside of this method is if you like to push out a LOT of smaller courses, it can be difficult to keep it all organized. You are essentially building a course page by page and linking them together with WP Fusion.

It is very do-able once you get the hang of it, but technophobes beware!

Simplicity Rating: ★★★★★

Flexibility Rating:

Cost Rating:

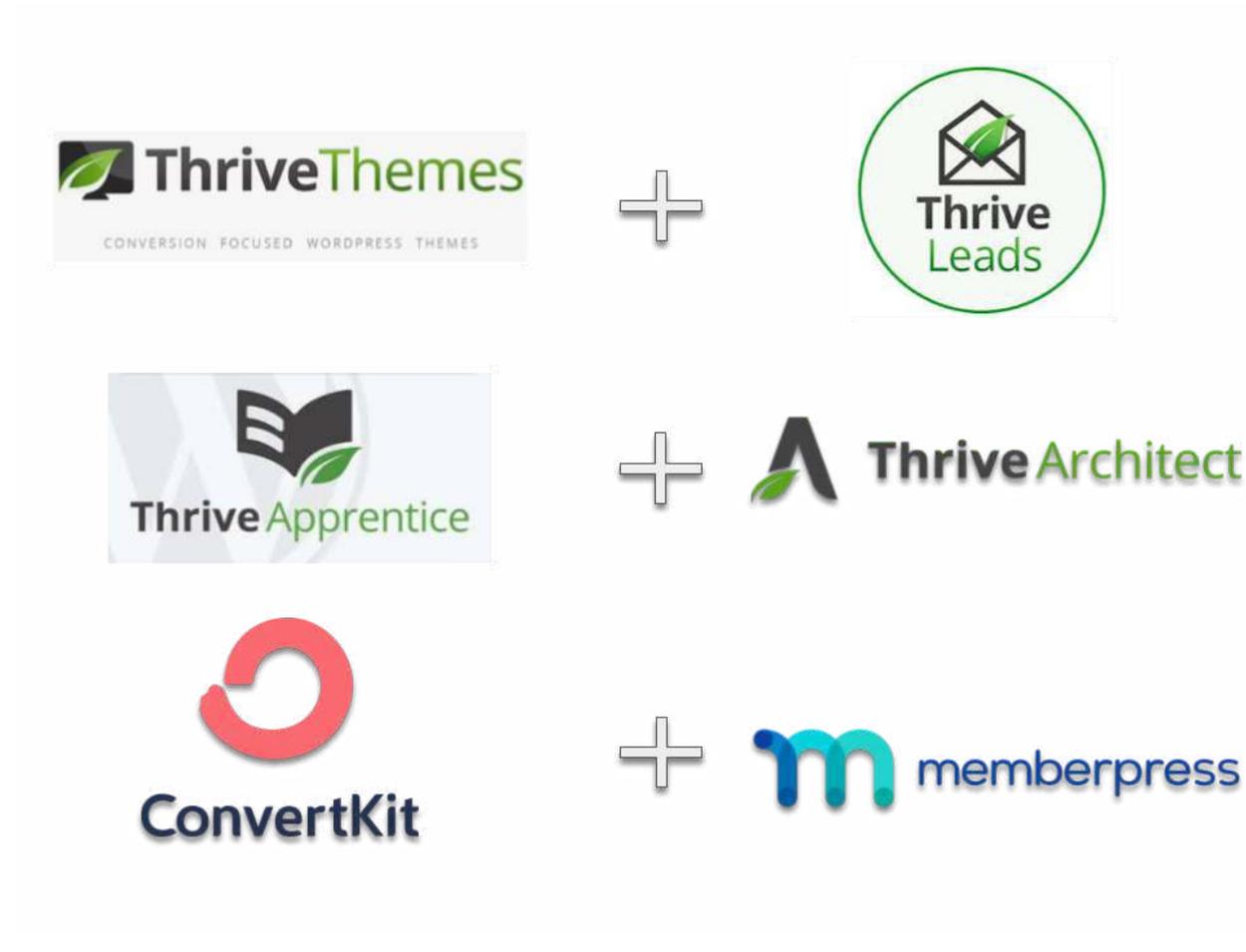
Pro's:

- Thrivecart is a great cart platform, allowing one click upsells, downsells, bundles, coupons, affiliate programs - all for a one-time fee. You can see the savings add up year over year
- Because all your pages will be built on your own website using your page builder, your users will have a very seamless experience. Your courses, blog posts, landing pages etc can all have a very consistent branding
- The cost of these tools can't be beat. Mailerlite is a powerful and cost effective CRM. It generally suffers from a small list of integrations, but WPFusion saves it and unlocks its potential

Con's:

- Using 6 different tools can be overwhelming for beginners
- Building out courses using WPFusion and WPComplete is fun, but can be overwhelming and requires more planning than a tool like Teachable or LearnDash
- You may find yourself fiddling with the tech more, and focusing on how to sell your products less. Not a good mix if you get bogged down in the details frequently

Stack #3: Thrive Suite + Convertkit + Memberpress



How It Works

This stack is dedicated to Thrive Themes, which is a strong company who builds conversion focused Wordpress themes and plugins.

To keep this stack simple, it uses the minimal additional tools outside of Thrive, which is content protection, shopping cart, and email. Here's how this one works:

1. Build content using Thrive Architect.
2. Sell memberships through Memberpress
3. Memberpress will unlock specific courses inside Thrive Apprentice

This is a relatively simple stack that allows you to sell both courses (with apprentice), or generic membership content using Memberpress. Think premium forums, pages, etc.

Simplicity Rating: ☆☆

Flexibility Rating: ☆

Cost Rating: ☆☆☆

Pro's:

- Thrive Themes tools work nicely together, kind of like how Apple products are well-integrated
- I really like the style of Thrive Apprentice - it creates very attractive courses easily
- Memberpress is a solid membership platform that is easy to set up and accept payments

Con's:

- Similar to Learndash, Memberpress is limited when it comes to selling functionality (no upsells/downsells)
- In general, I prefer the Divi Builder over Thrive Architect - I have found some finnick bugs in Architect that can be frustrating to overcome.
- This is the second most costly option as all of these tools are subscription-based and have no lifetime option

Stack #4: Divi + Convertkit + Teachable



How It Works

This is the first stack that includes a fully-hosted solution using Teachable.

Teachable is a great service that handles your video hosting, affiliate program, shopping cart, and LMS set up. It also allows you to create bundles and other useful ways of selling your courses.

The downside of Teachable is that it forces users to leave your site and go to a completely different domain. This is not a big deal for some, but there are serious SEO and marketing benefits of keeping users on your domain.

The workflow of this stack is pretty simple:

1. Direct users from your blog to Teachable

2. Build your sales page in Teachable
3. When courses are purchased in Teachable, create subscribers with specific tags in Convertkit

Simplicity Rating: ☆

Flexibility Rating: ☆☆☆

Cost Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Pro's:

- This is a very simple solution where all of your selling is done in Teachable's platform.
- There are few integration points needed, and Convertkit and Teachable have a strong native integration
- There is no need for a membership plugin for Wordpress, which can be some of the trickier plugins to get working nicely

Con's:

- Sending users off your site to Teachable reduces time on site of your own domain, reducing SEO
- Teachable is an expensive tool at \$1,000 per year and only supports the selling of courses. You can sell ebooks AS a course, but it is still a limited platform
- I dislike the sale page builder in Teachable. It is nowhere close to the usability of page builders like Divi, Thrive, or Kartra.

Stack #5: Astra+ Convertkit + Teachable



How It Works

This stack is the height of simplicity. Astra is a great free theme for a fast Wordpress blog, and Kartra handles literally everything else.

Your blog can embed kartra sign up forms, or direct link to Kartra landing pages. Similar to Teachable, Kartra is a hosted solution, so the same negatives around sending your visitors off your URL apply here.

But when it comes to simplicity, this stack is hard to beat.

Simplicity Rating:

Flexibility Rating: ☆

Cost Rating: ☆

Pro's:

- Simplicity - Kartra allows you to create entire funnels in a single click. That means Sales pages, email sequences, automations, tagging, checkout pages, etc all created for you and you get to customize as you want.
- Flexibility - Kartra allows you to sell memberships, courses, ebooks - anything digital. It also allows upsells and downsells.
- Analytics - Kartra's built in analytics platform is quite good - you can see the entire customer journey across every aspect of the platform (because it is all in one)

Con's:

- As a newer platform, Kartra is currently a jack of all trades, master of none. I think Divi's page builder is better. ThriveCart is a better shopping cart. But this is the price you pay for having everything under one roof. At the end of the day, it's your marketing message that will sell for you, not just the tools themselves.
- By having everything under one roof, I could see it be difficult to try to fully leave Kartra. If you dislike one aspect of the tool, it's not like the other stacks where you can drop just the membership aspect but keep the email platform and page builder. Once you're in, you're in.

My Recommendations:

We've covered a lot, but you may still be scratching your head on what is right for YOU.

Everyone has different flavors, but I think this advice will push you in the right direction.

If you just want to get up and running as fast as possible and have everything WORK - Start with Stack #5 - Kartra

If you are extremely cost-conscious and don't mind spending more time to make things work correctly together - Start with Stack #2 - Mailerlite + ThriveCart + WPFusion

If you have a big budget - Start with Stack #4 - Divi + Convertkit + Teachable

Wrap-up

I hope this guide has been helpful at guiding you down the path of building the right marketing stack for YOU.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to email me at john@incomemesh.com

Happy Converting!