Patreon and Substack keep up to thirty percent of every recurring payment. A self-hosted membership platform lets you collect the full amount, design your own tier logic, and gate exactly the content each plan unlocks—all inside the same CMS that runs your public site.

Why Your Membership Revenue Belongs on Your Domain

Third-party membership platforms solve the billing problem, but they extract a toll for doing it. Processing fees are just the start; the platform itself takes a percentage of every transaction, controls the subscriber relationship, and owns the storefront. If the service changes its terms, raises its cut, or shuts down, your recurring revenue disappears overnight along with the audience data you thought was yours.

A self-hosted membership system puts the machinery on your server. Subscription plans, payment processing, content gating, and member management all live inside your CMS. You choose the payment gateway, you set the pricing, and the funds land in your merchant account minus a standard card-processing fee—no platform surcharge on top. The subscriber database is yours. The email list is yours. The content-restriction rules are yours to change at any time without filing a support ticket with someone else's company.

Integration matters as much as revenue. Because the membership engine runs inside your CMS, a subscriber's plan level can unlock articles, downloads, forum areas, course modules, or any other resource on the same site. You are not duct-taping a paywall widget onto a blog—you are building a single system where content creation, access control, and billing all share the same database.

How the Membership System Works

Plans are organized in nested categories and displayed in list, grid, or pricing-table layouts. Each plan defines a price, a billing cycle (days, weeks, months, years, lifetime, or a fixed expiry date), and whether renewal is manual or automatic. Recurring plans support trial periods with a separate trial price and duration, and a “trial-unique” flag prevents the same subscriber from re-enrolling in a trial they have already used. Upgrade and downgrade rules let a Basic member move to Pro mid-cycle with prorated pricing.

The subscription form collects whatever data you need. Eighteen field types are available—text, dropdowns, checkboxes, file uploads, country/state selectors, and more—and each field can be assigned to specific plans, shown conditionally based on another field's value, or configured as a “custom fee field” that adjusts the price based on the subscriber's selection. Payment is handled by any of fifty-plus gateway plugins, from card processors to bank transfers to offline invoicing.

Once a subscription is active, the system assigns the subscriber to one or more CMS user groups. Those groups drive access control: gated articles, restricted menu items, protected download folders, or URL-level restrictions. When a subscription expires, the user is automatically removed from the privileged group and loses access—no manual intervention required. Drip-content scheduling releases articles on a staggered timeline after sign-up, so a

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twelve-week course can unlock one lesson per week without any cron trickery.

Feature Highlights

- Free, paid, recurring, lifetime, and fixed-expiry subscription plans
- Trial periods with trial-unique enforcement
- Upgrade and downgrade rules with prorated pricing
- 50+ payment gateways including card processors, bank transfers, and offline
- Content restriction by article, category, URL, menu item, or module
- Drip-content scheduling: release articles X days after sign-up
- Group and family memberships with member caps per plan
- 18 custom-field types with conditional display and custom-fee logic
- Coupon codes: fixed or percentage, per-plan, batch-generated, date-limited
- EU-compliant tax rules with per-country and per-state rate support
- PDF invoices generated and emailed automatically
- Members directory with opt-in display and search
- Newsletter integration with mailing-list and campaign platforms
- Downloadable member cards and subscription-limit caps per plan

The Revenue Arithmetic

Consider a modest community with one thousand paying members at ten dollars a month. On a platform that takes ten percent, you lose twelve thousand dollars a year before you count card-processing fees. At Patreon's higher tiers or Substack's standard cut, the number is worse. A self-hosted system reduces the take to the payment-gateway fee alone—typically two to three percent—meaning you keep an extra seven to eight thousand dollars a year on that same list. At five thousand members it is tens of thousands; at ten thousand it funds a full-time salary.

The savings compound with plan complexity. Upgrade and downgrade rules, family memberships, coupon campaigns, and tiered pricing tables are all built in. You do not pay extra for “advanced” plan logic or hit a feature wall that forces you to the next SaaS tier. The extension costs a fixed license fee, the gateway charges per transaction, and that is the entire cost model—flat and predictable regardless of how many subscribers you manage.

Who Uses This and How

Content creators gate premium articles, video libraries, or podcast archives behind a monthly plan. Free visitors see teasers; paying members unlock the full archive. Drip scheduling turns a course outline into a week-by-week learning path delivered automatically after each sign-up.

Professional associations sell annual memberships with fixed-expiry dates—everyone renews on the same calendar date regardless of when they joined. Member cards provide proof of affiliation, the members directory lets peers find each other, and group memberships allow a firm to register its entire staff under a single invoice.

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Nonprofits and clubs offer tiered supporter levels (Friend, Patron, Benefactor) with escalating perks: early event access, exclusive newsletters, board-meeting minutes. Coupon codes distribute scholarship rates, and the EU tax engine handles VAT for international supporters without manual calculations.

SaaS-adjacent operators sell access to a toolset, document library, or data feed that lives on their site. Recurring billing keeps revenue predictable, trial-unique enforcement prevents free-tier abuse, and URL-level restriction locks down entire sections of the site without restructuring content into special categories.

The Trade-Off

Self-hosting a membership platform means you handle payment-gateway contracts, PCI-adjacent responsibilities, and subscriber support. There is no built-in discovery marketplace—you drive sign-ups through your own marketing, SEO, and mailing list. Refund processing and failed-payment recovery are your workflows to manage. The return is full revenue retention, unlimited plan complexity, and a subscriber database that stays on your infrastructure under your terms—not someone else's.

Extension referenced in this article:

Membership Pro by Joomdonation?•?joomdonation.com

Membership and subscription extension for the CMS. Free, paid, recurring, lifetime, and fixed-expiry plans with trial periods and trial-unique enforcement. Upgrade/downgrade rules, 50+ payment gateways, content restriction by article, category, URL, or menu item, drip-content scheduling, group and family memberships, 18 custom-field types, coupon system, EU tax rules, PDF invoices, members directory, member cards, newsletter integration, and multilingual support. 201 reviews on the JED • $39.99 license.

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