

The
SHY BAIRNS
Guide To



Patreon

What Is Patreon?

Patreon is a membership platform for content creators. It allows users to create a subscription based service made up of different tiers that patrons can subscribe to in exchange for rewards.

Typically each tier will offer patrons a different reward, increasing in value with the price of the tier. Rewards can range from physical and digital content to Q&A sessions, workshops and tutorials. It is common for patrons to receive a new reward each month with the subscription payment, but rewards can also be set to a custom frequency.

Patreon offers three different plans for your membership scheme - Lite, Pro and Premium. All are free to use but each has an increasing percentage of your earnings that are deducted as payment, plus payment processing fees. Each plan also offers a different level of support for the creator with varying access to the built in features and tools.

There are currently over 200,000 creators using Patreon to fund their businesses and reach new audiences, and over 3 million active monthly patrons. The platform is becoming increasingly popular with freelance artists and collectives as a way of building an independent business with the freedom to control your income. While Patreon can be a very effective way to supplement your income with your freelance practice, there are some users who earn over £1,000,000 a year!

We've been commissioned by GUILD to create a resource about Patreon. In this resource we hope to share our experience of using the platform and to outline some starting points for anyone looking to set up a Patreon. As a group we have also conducted research into our own Patreon page, looking at the cost-benefit of our current membership scheme and the ways we can improve on this both financially and in terms of audience reach and engagement.

Shy Bairns on Patreon

Shy Bairns are a Manchester-based interdisciplinary collective specialising in creating DIY arts publications, Risograph printing, running public workshops and curating exhibitions. We are interested in the intersections of contemporary art and bookmaking, and the activation of projects within that space.





We set up our Patreon in 2018 to support us in the creation and presentation of an ambitious new work for Bloomberg New Contemporaries. At the time we were all in the final year of university and had very limited access to funding for the project outside of our artist fees. We were excited about the potential of the project and wanted to explore fundraising as a way to sustain a prolonged body of research and creation. We were also looking to the future, with the idea of raising funds to buy more equipment and create bigger works.

Our first series of tiers were a reflection of the audience we had and also our naivety in engaging with a wider audience. They included rewards such as Risograph posters, screenprinted tote bags, and a 'Spoons Tier' in which we would buy patrons a pint anytime they were in a Wetherspoons in exchange for their monthly subscription.

In 2020 we took a step-change as a group. Our practice had expanded over the last two years from primarily running workshops to now taking on larger-scale commission work, design projects, and curating our own shows. We were finally able to move to a larger studio and with this move, we decided to take our fundraising more seriously. 2020 was a pivotal year for us. Having explored many different avenues within our practice we concluded that our common goal was to one day open a book arts space and print workshop in Manchester. The space would be an opportunity for us to continue exploring our interest in the intersection of book making and contemporary art, as well as providing the Manchester arts community with open access to book binding, Risograph printing and more.

With this in mind we revamped our Patreon tiers to facilitate a more specific fundraising goal. We now offer a range of more sensible and perhaps financially sustainable rewards. We have a one-off sticker tier, a biannual print tier and a quarterly badge tier. We also started our monthly zine tier entitled Things We Liked This Month. The zine explores everything we did (or did not) like that month, and content ranges from film and exhibition reviews, craft tutorials and deep dives on Pinterest. The zine acts as an opportunity for us as a group to test new ideas, vent about things, or simply put something out there, as well as giving our audience an inside look at the inner workings of each Bairn.

Fundraising through Patreon has proved successful for us so far. We are currently able to cover the cost of our studio rent as well as the cost of printing our monthly zine. Any additional income is used to subsidise project budgets and artist fees where necessary, as well as allowing us to occasionally purchase new equipment. The most significant expense we've been able to cover using our Patreon income is the purchase of our Risograph printer, which now allows us print in-house and is also the first step towards the open-access print studio.

<p>One Off Sticker</p>  <p>£1 PER MONTH (+VAT)</p> <p>Join</p> <p>Get a Shy Bairns Get Nowt sticker for your laptop or phone or sticker album whatever and pledge your allegiance to bairns.</p> <p>This also gives you access to our locked posts on Patreon, which include updates, articles written by us, and vlogs of behind the scenes bairns content.</p>	<p>Biannual Print</p>  <p>£3.50 PER MONTH (+VAT)</p> <p>Join</p> <p>Every six months you will receive an exclusive risograph print designed by a member of Shy Bairns! This also gives you access to our locked posts here on Patreon.</p> <p>Show more</p>	<p>Quarterly Badge</p>  <p>£5 PER MONTH (+VAT)</p> <p>Join</p> <p>A chunky badge to add to your collection every four months! Each badge will be designed by one of Shy Bairns and risograph printed.</p> <p>This tier is possible thanks to our Patreon Show more</p>	<p>Zine A Month Package</p>  <p>£10 PER MONTH (+VAT)</p> <p>Join</p> <p>Every month we are going to make a zine exclusively for our Patreon supporters. This zine will be a collection of things we've seen and liked -- memes we've saved on our phones, exhibitions we've been to, telly we've liked etc etc etc. All Show more</p>
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Patreon Top Tips

The Patreon website has lots of useful articles about running a successful Patreon membership scheme. We've picked out the key information so you don't have to!

There are two reasons patrons sign-up

Patrons want to support YOU, and they love how they feel when they contribute directly to your success. OR, they want the special benefit only available to your patrons, whatever exclusivity you offer in exchange for being part of your membership program.

There are five categories of benefits that patrons love

Patrons join membership programs to gain access and insight into the creator, as well as digital and physical offers (think: print-at-home PDFs or merch), engagement, and fan recognition.

There are three types of benefits that perform best

Exclusive content, early access, and physical goods.

There are best practices when it comes to benefits

Offer exclusivity! Also, naming your tiers provides community among your patrons. Try to appeal to the masses and offer short-term and long-term benefits. Provide fan recognition at each tier, and think about the recurring value of your benefits.

Patreon offers specialist product features and tools

These tools can help you grow your business! For example, Lens is an exclusive mobile video experience for your patrons only, similar to Instagram Reels.

When pricing your benefits, use this simple equation

Pricing = Impact + Effort. The price of your benefit should represent the effort you put in AND the impact for the patron.

Think about your Patron earnings as a financial return

Financial return = (patron count X membership tier value) - cost to fulfil. Your financial return is the number of patrons you have in a given tier level, multiplied by the value of that tier level, minus how much it costs to fulfil the benefits of that tier level. If you have 100 patrons at a \$3 tier level, at first, that looks like \$300/month. But, consider how much work you're doing to fulfil the benefits associated with the \$3 tier level, and subtract that from \$300 to get your honest financial return.

Marketing is crucial to build your Patreon program

Since your fans are used to consuming your content "for free", it takes some educating to understand why you're adding this component. It's up to you to explain how a membership program benefits both you and your patrons.

Some marketing strategies are more effective than others

Bring your audience along for the ride, foster an emotional connection with them, and speak directly to them. Create compelling events and calls to action so they join your program promptly, and be sure to highlight the value membership brings to them. Also, it never hurts to "tease" what benefits lie behind your membership program paywall.

Social media is not the only driver for membership

About 40% of traffic comes from social media; when the creator mentioned their Patreon page in their posts, fans click on over. Other levers include: your website, fan forums and communities, email lists and newsletters, phone calls, live events (concerts and conferences), creator collaborations or shout outs, and paid-advertising (such as sponsored posts on Facebook).

Visual Artists on Patreon

We've put together some case studies of other visual artists on Patreon to examine how they use their tiers and what we can learn from their approach to fundraising.

Markus Magnusson

Animation and illustration - 693 patrons

Four tiers in total - three tiers are priced under £10, which is relatively accessible for patrons with a lower income. All of the rewards revolve around access to tutorials and the original files the artist uses so patrons can gain hands-on learning from the process. The highest tier is priced at £42.50 and offers patrons the opportunity to have personal feedback sessions on their own projects.

Tutorials are a great way to capitalising on the skills you already have as an artist, and could be one of the easier ways of generating income if running workshops or skill-sharing sessions are already part of your creative practice. It will also help you to create rewards that are unique to you and your niche specialisms within your artform. However, creating tutorial videos may require some initial set-up cost if you need additional equipment to get started, and may also take more time to get the format and feel just right for your audience before you can launch. They may also require more upkeep if you need to change your content regularly to keep it fresh. It's worth considering how much of your time and resources you can invest in your rewards to ensure they don't create a bigger drain later on.

Felix Cotgrave

Cartoon and moving picture - 3,132 patrons

Four tiers in total - two accessibly priced tiers under £5 and two more expensive tiers. Patrons with a lower income are given the opportunity to support the artist and people with more disposable income can also pledge at a higher rate. There is a significant increase in pricing between tiers, jumping from £1 at the lowest to £4.50, and then to £25.50 and then again to £59.50. However there is a sizeable difference in the rewards a patron would get for each tier, and the monetary value of the rewards and the artists time is reflect fairly in these prices.

The rewards are primarily based around exclusive additional or behind-the-scenes content. Allowing patrons to feel part of a wider project and to gain access to content that others won't see is a very effective way of building loyalty within an audience. The higher rewards also state that the patrons name will be credited on the work that's created using these funds. Giving public recognition to individual patrons is a good incentive for them and creates a feeling of community among your audience.

Fran Maneses

Illustration - 3,044 patrons

Four tiers, each with varying levels of financial accessibility. The £8.50 a month tier offers access to a monthly live drawing session where patrons can watch the artist create a piece of work or share a particular skill and ask questions in real time. Connecting with your patrons in person on a regular basis will help to build your audience base and provide a more personal connection that other artists on Patreon may not offer. The highest tier at £17 a month offers a Q&A session where patrons can ask advice — not only about illustration but also running a business, budgeting, social media use and more. Providing wider resources for your patrons that cover other aspects of a creative practice may help to attract a wider audience and ensure you capture a greater range of people who interact with your work.

TheLatestKate

Illustration - 1,101 patrons

Two tiers - one priced at £2 a month and the other at £8.50 a month. This artist offers digital content as a reward for the lowest tier, and physical content as a reward for the highest tier. Offering digital content (such as phone wallpapers) is a cost-effective way of managing the cost-benefit of a reward scheme. While creating physical prints can incur extra costs for printing, packaging and postage, as well as your own time, digital content can be shared at no cost and with an unlimited run. This may be a better option for those looking to maximise their Patreon profit.

Chibird

Comics and animation - 503 patrons

Three tiers - primarily offering enamel pin badges as a reward. There are differently priced tiers for US and international patrons which include the correct postage costs as part of the tier subscription. It is worth considering how many of your patrons will be based outside of your country, and whether reaching them will incur additional costs. If you have decided to expand your audience internationally, appraise what measures you can put in place to mitigate the impact of the extra costs on your profits.

It's worth noting that while there are many different kinds of creatives on Patreon (ranging from musicians, to gamers, to podcasters, to comedians) the Visual Arts community in particular still feels rather small. Patreon is still a growing platform and at the moment sits in the middle ground between underground and mainstream.

We've found it hard to identify other Patreon users who are similar to Shy Bairns (for example, have a book-arts based practice, who use Risograph printing, or have a multidisciplinary practice). While it may be tricky to find examples of other people on Patreon who do exactly what you do, it's also refreshing to know that you can take advantage of that. Having fewer competitors could mean more opportunities for success.

An Interview with a Patron

As part of our research and evaluation of our own Patreon, we conducted an interview with one of our patrons to gain some feedback on our rewards as well as the ways we can improve our output.

You signed up to our Patreon almost one year ago now (thank you!) — Can you let us know if you have enjoyed our content and what in particular you have found to be exciting and engaging each month?

It took a while to get postings from the Bairns going on Patreon but yes I have, very much. Love the cover and intro produced by a different Bairn per issue. Nice to see different styles and approach and reasoning behind the designs. The same with articles. I really enjoy reading about all your travels and discoveries as well as your experiences, especially in this last crazy 12 months. Articles from other artists are really interesting and I do admit to enjoying the regular interior design segments. I also liked the little touches, such as the seals on the envelopes, textures and the glow in the dark print. More of this please!

Is there anything you didn't like? (Please view this in terms of the structure of the zine, etc. above actual content)

The only thing is that sometimes I have trouble with printed colours. Sometimes I find it had to make out details on pictures/photos if printed in certain colours, for example yellow. Of course this is a personal issue dictated by my quality of eyesight.

How do you feel our pricing reflects the rewards in each of our four tiers?

As I'm not a member of any other Patreon type of "subscription/reward" programmes, unfortunately I have nothing to compare this to. However, regular zines, vlogs, tutorials and gifts are great.

Would you consider it best to keep 4 consistent tiers, including a lower, middle and higher reward, or to add new variations of tiers?

I am perfectly happy with the four tier pricing - £1, £4, £5 and £10. Adding too many tiers may make things confusing and it can cut down on extra work.

This year we aim to focus more on accessible ways of producing and sharing our work. Do you have any suggestions or concerns about our content? This may include physical work, social media presence and email updates.

Well I don't use any social media so that does not affect me. An e-version of the zines could be considered, although I get that you are about the printed articles which I like. Audio content could also be good, not necessarily going down the podcast route? But live vlogging maybe? Any exhibitions could also be shown online for those unable to attend?

We've recently started including tutorials within our Patreon email updates, exclusive to Patreon supporters. Do you see these as a useful tool to help educate others, particularly within a time of social distancing and remote working? Please share your thoughts.

Very much so. As you say limitations brought about by social restrictions make this an ideal way to communicate with your audience. Not only giving them an insight in to your processes it can be great for people to be interactive, trying something new and never thought of and maybe tapping into skills people didn't know they had. Getting people to share what they have done is good and to see what the people out there can come up with.

Is there anything new you wish to see from us going into 2021?

More vlogs. How about more looks around the studio, production of work processes, "this is the equipment we use", out and about where possible and exhibition prep/set ups etc?

On a scale of 1-10, how satisfied have you been as our Patreon member?

10.....no really 10, (though should it be 9.5 for yellow print, nah that's my problem) :) It's great to know that Patreon donations have gone to help fund studio space, website costs, equipment, exhibitions, workshops and day to day running of the Bairns as well as producing rewards in zines, badges and stickers etc.

Are there any improvements or final comments you'd like to make about Shy Bairns?

No, I think I covered everything. Well done Bairns and keep up the great work!

Evaluating our Patreon

As part of this commission for GUILD, we wanted to evaluate our use of Patreon, examine our rewards to ensure value for money, and decide as a group how to best utilise the platform for our needs.

Our Rewards

One Off Sticker

We outsource the printing of the stickers as this is something we're not able to do with the equipment we currently have, so there is an initial up-front cost for this reward. However, bulk-buying the stickers reduces the cost significantly. With our current audience the stickers also act as a form of advertising for us - our patrons put them on their laptops and phone cases, and images of our stickers are often widely shared on social media. We were aware that a one-off reward may mean that some patrons would cancel their pledge after a certain amount of time as they would no longer feel the benefit of the reward. However, as the cost of the tier is so low we have found that this is not actually the case, and patrons are happy to support us long term for this amount. This tier also gives patrons access to the posts we make on Patreon, so holds some longer-term benefits to the patrons.

Biannual Poster

The poster tier is our second most popular tier (after the monthly zine). The design of the poster is different to the sticker, badge and zine. Although posters are relatively quick to design and quick to print in-house, they feel like a more substantial reward compared to a badge or a sticker which may be discarded after a short time. We were aware that an influx of posters may not be a useful reward for patrons, so we wanted to strike the right balance of creating enough fresh content for patrons to feel they were getting good value for money. We were also aware that the monthly zine would take a good proportion of our time each month to create and print, and we wanted to reduce the necessary labour for other rewards as much as possible. This is one of our more highly subscribed tiers and considering the time and production costs versus the accessibility of the tier and the number of patrons, we decided not to alter this tier.

Quarterly Badge

We introduced a badge tier after we received feedback from patrons that suggested a mid-priced tier would provide a more accessible option for those unable to pledge to the monthly zine. We then purchased a badge maker using some of the financial reserves gained through Patreon. The design of the badge is usually created to match the cover of the zine that is produced in the same month. We have previously considered that these matching designs might discourage people from signing up to the badge tier for fear of feeling as though they're missing some of the context without having the zine to read alongside. Although we have not received feedback that reflects this, an individual design for the badge may help this reward to stand out amongst our tiers and feel like a unique product once the next zine has been published.

Monthly Zine

The monthly zine is our most popular tier as it also includes the rewards from all three of the other tiers. However it will always incur the biggest cost for us. It not only includes the cost of the paper, envelopes, and postage for the zine itself, but also any travel needed to pick up printing supplies and take the zines to the post office, the tubes of ink and masters we need to buy for the Risograph to keep our stock levels up, and the general maintenance of the Risograph. It's worth noting that at present we don't pay ourselves to design or print the zine. In an ideal world we'd pay for the time spent printing at least, if not the time to design as well.

Regardless of these costs, we established the monthly zine as more than a reward. It was an opportunity for us to have a form of constant creation and to be able to just put things out despite the other things that may slow us down (planning, meetings, admin, budgets). It was important to us that as we made more concrete decisions about what our practice would look like and where it would take us, we would still have a fun zine project at the heart of it all. Our patrons have responded very positively to the zine, and we have seen a month-on-month increase of our patrons, largely due to the images of the zine that are shared by our patrons when we publish a new issue.

In mid 2020 we were also been able to submit several issues of the zine to Warrington Contemporary Arts Festival Open 2020,

allowing us to participate in a festival that we previously would not have been involved with and helping to raise the profile of the group.

We agreed as a group that there were some ways we could reduce the production costs to allow the zine to be more financially sustainable. However, the benefit for us of having a space to develop our practice outweighed the costs we were putting in. While we must remain cautious that the profits gained from Patreon as a whole must be viable in helping us to reach our overall goal, the additional benefits of the producing zine have been substantial.

To reduce the cost of production as much as possible, we are now looking to bypass our current paper supplier and buy our paper stock directly from the source, which should reduce the cost. Using the financial reserves we have built up from Patreon we are also now able to buy paper in larger bulk quantities, again reducing the overall cost of the stock as well as removing some of the costs of transporting the stock to our studio.

New Tiers

Although our income from Patreon covers our core operating costs, we would like to increase our patron numbers and the income earned from them. To do this we can continue to market the tiers that we already have on offer, or we can add further tiers to encourage more of our audience to sign up.

From the research we have done into other Patreon users, it is evident that any new tiers would have to offer significantly different rewards with a greater level of participation and interaction for our audience.

We have previously considered running monthly live workshops sessions on book making, printing and editorial design. Our practice already involves a significant amount of workshop delivery so this would be relatively easy to achieve logistically as we already have the necessary equipment, as well as several workshop session plans that could be produced and delivered with little preparation. However, this would also require time to be set aside each month to prepare and deliver the sessions on top of creating the monthly zine, as well as ensuring our audience is big enough to have continual demand.

Alternatively, if we wanted to create a series of video tutorials we would expect to invest a significant amount of time to produce more detailed workshop sessions that covered a broader range of skills, as well as having to up-skill our digital production to create videos of sufficient quality.

We have also considered running a monthly or bi-monthly crit session. This could be achieved in a large group or with 1-1 sessions and could cover topics within any of our individual specialisms, ranging from editorial design and production, Adobe suite skills and Risograph set up and printing, to traditional book binding, curation and freelance business management. These sessions would allow us to build a stronger community through Patreon, allowing our patrons to interact with us and learn from each other. This would also be beneficial to us as a group as it would allow us the opportunity to share our works in progress with our audience to gain peer feedback. It would be possible to deliver these sessions with only two Shy Bairns members, allowing us to spread the workload evenly so that these can be delivered alongside the monthly zine.

We are also keen to introduce further accessibility measures to our Patreon rewards. The design of our monthly zine is already created in line with the guidance for clear and large print documents from the UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF). We are using a legible sans serif typeface at point size 14 to create clear print text, with further design considerations of the content later and colour contrast of the print to maximise legibility. However we would like to also produce audio description versions of the zine, either in the format of a spoken transcript of the texts or a more informal podcast-style conversation about each of the issues that could include further background information and anecdotes about the content.

Audio description versions of the zines would be relatively low cost to produce and would take little editing once the format is rehearsed and solidified. This would also be a new and exciting venture for us and would allow another level of interactivity between ourselves and our audience, which should hopefully boost engagement.

With thanks to GUILD and East Street Arts for this commission.

Shy Bairns are a Manchester-based interdisciplinary collective specialising in creating DIY arts publications, Risograph printing, running public workshops and curating exhibitions. We are interested in the intersections of contemporary art and bookmaking, and the activation of projects within that space.

Shy Bairns are Erin Blamire, George Gibson, Eleanor Haswell and Izzy Kroese.

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