TEACH

A GUIDE FOR CREATIVE PEOPLE

YOUR

WHO WANT TO TEACH ONLINE

PASSION

WRITTEN BY

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Teach Your Passion

A Guide For Creative People Who Want To Teach Online
V.1.2

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About

Life in the creative arts is a bit unbalanced.

When you are young, your passion and efforts are applauded. There is unbridled hope for what the future might bring and it seems like all of your teachers, classes, and schools know there is something exciting in store for you. As dedicated students we spend hours upon hours honing our skills and diving deep into our study all the while being unaware that our student days might in fact be our best.

Once we graduate and head out from the sheltered student enclave we are faced with a stark reality. We are one of many who excel at the same thing, there is little money to be made, and we have been ignoring the fact that making a living from practicing our art is very uncommon.

I wont go on, because you know this story. It is a story we all share.

Never before has our society had such access to on demand entertainment and never before have artists been so drowned out by the roar of global competition.

However, with our new set of challenges comes a new set of possibilities.

Exciting possibilities.

I created **theonlinemusicteacher.com** to share what I have learned about online education. How you can help people, build an audience, and earn an income. That income can supplement revenue from your existing teaching and your craft or it can provide a full time income.

It seems like we are always seeking someones permission to be successful. An academic position, illustrious reviews, recognition from institutions or individuals, they are the traditional gatekeepers of a career. Today we don't have to ask for permission anymore. We can create our own utopia, help people that resonate with us, and build our own audience.

My Story

I first picked up the guitar as an early teenager. It soon became an obsession.

From my first chords to my first performance, I found myself diving deeper and deeper into creative studies. I enrolled in a Bachelor of Music in Sydney Australia, and later found myself at Yale University completing a Masters and Doctorate. With degrees in hand and a confident mastery of my craft I felt poised for a successful performance career.

I am happy to say that I have performed around the world. China, Peru, Australia, USA, Sweden… I won't bore you with the shopping list, but I can confidently say I have experienced the life of a professional touring musician.

The problem is, I never made much of an income.

As a student it was completely fine to be poor. Even into my early thirties I was quite happy to live off pasta, rice, and tuna. The change came when I started to get a little older and I gained some responsibilities. You see, up until I was 31 I was more or less single and very healthy. Having no health insurance, subletting an apartment, and frugal dining wasn't a problem. As life moved on I gained some responsibilities, some wonderful (my wife) and some not so wonderful (hospital visits). I needed to find a way to earn an income that would provide security for my changing situation.

Free Time and Some Fresh Ideas

Six months after graduating from the grandeur of Yale, I found myself living in a friends attic.

With ample free time I started to write a scale book. It was a simple, albeit detailed, project and when I had completed it I put it online where I had been dabbling in writing a blog about classical guitar.

To my surprise I made some sales and a little trickle of money came in. Enough to buy lunch today, I thought.

With my interest piqued I went on to write another book, this time one on technique. It too started to get some attention and it was good enough that there were guitarists writing to me from different countries around the world with thanks and congratulations. Someone is using my technique book in Colombia? This is amazing!

Following on from the books I made a couple of basic youtube videos on specific techniques. I was continuing to help people with their guitar playing, even when I was asleep, and my audience started to grow.

An early turning point came when I decided to create a full course. It was a video course with downloads and worksheets and it was intended for newcomers to the classical guitar. This course took people on a path and helped them reach a goal. It was a major leap in how I helped people and I was receiving great feedback on the course.

This course was sold at a much higher price point compared to my books, so every time I had a new student purchase the course I was compensated with a substantial amount of money (substantial to someone who maintained a bank account of a few hundred dollars).

It was a mix of successfully helping people, receiving compensation, and slowly building an audience of people around the world who liked what I was doing. This mix has continued until today, and I continue to learn and refine my online teaching skills.

Currently I run two fully fledged schools with hundreds of students. One for guitar and one for swing dance (a collaboration with my wife and her dance partner). I have plans for more as I feel that I can help more people.

Rocket Science vs Perseverance

One of the next projects is Powis Academy. It is a way that I can help creative artists that were in a similar position after graduating. Lots of potential, but few opportunities.

I see online education as a truly viable way for artists to make a living within the boundaries of their craft. It not only is a better route than bartending or office work, it grows as you put in time and effort. With an attentive and trusting audience you can undertake a variety of ventures that is not restricted to education.

It may seem overwhelming at first. It might seem that you aren't equipped with the skills to undertake online education. Don't let the initial learning curve scare you off. Success with online education has more to do with perseverance than anything else.

This Book

Finally, this book is my way of helping you. It contains within it an idea, a realistic overview of what online education entails, and a healthy dose of inspiration.

It is free for all of those who want to read it, and I encourage you to pass it on.

I will consider myself successful if you take action and start helping people.

Serving an Audience

Creative artists have long developed a mindset that if they create something good enough, they will be rewarded with opportunities, notoriety, and money. If this did work at some point, it certainly doesn't now. We are going to look at how our role has changed and how we can make the most of it.

Record companies, galleries, performance venues… these have traditionally been the gatekeepers of artistic success. If you won enough competitions, or shook the right hands at the right time, you were "in". The unrestricted access of the internet has all but destroyed the gatekeeper roles that sat so prominently in the way of a "career". The gates are now open to anyone who has a computer. This is a blessing and a curse for the consumer as they now have unfettered access to a wide variety of creators but no curation from the gatekeepers. The quality control is absent.

With any creator able to call herself an expert, a professional, an artist, it is difficult for a casual admirer of the arts to discern good from bad upon first sight. This would appear to mean that commercial success depends more on the ability to market than to create quality materials.

But be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking marketing is the answer either.

The trap with thinking that marketing is your salvation is the same trap as thinking that if you just snap one *epic* photo, you will "make it", or if you just play a solo performance at Carnegie, your career will take off. It just doesn't work like that anymore.

These days it isn't about *you* anymore; it is about your audience. Your level of success depends on how well you *serve* that audience.

A servant?

That's right. Remember all of those history books in music, art, and dance? Your favorite artists before the mid 1800's were servants to the aristocracy. They were staff, and they were creative within the boundaries of their patron's desires. As time marched on toward the 20th century, artists and audiences became more obsessed with the idea of the virtuoso individual. Personal expression and a virtuosic skill level meant creators could become independently successful based on their skills.

In the 21st century, we have returned to a situation where we are in a role of service. In place of an aristocracy, we now have our tribes, our audience. You need to build your audience, understand them, and serve them.

This is the monumental shift that has been facilitated by the internet: the deluge of online materials; the race to the bottom mentality of artists that undercut each other to scrape by; the opportunistic companies like Spotify who take advantage of hopeful artists.

The point is that your content won't cut through the noise just by being good. There is too much content out there already and it won't stop growing anytime soon.

So what do you do?

Build an audience, understand your audience, and serve your audience.

Build, understand, and serve.

Build

Building an audience… seems like a big task, right? Well, it might not be as tough as you think.

When we think about numbers and the internet, things can get quite daunting. I remember when a few thousand views on YouTube was a lot; now a million is mundane. Five likes on a Facebook post? Quite an achievement in 2006 but practically a condemnation now. We are constantly bombarded with gigantic numbers, and therefore *building* one of these audiences that generates similar figures is hard to comprehend.

Good news. You don't need a legion of followers. Just 1,000.

The truth is that these giant numbers that accumulate online don't often mean very much. Numbers are inflated to serve advertisers and egos. I can tell you with confidence that a video with one million views has not been viewed in its entirety by one million people. Not even close. Even if some of those people did watch all the way to the end, did they take action? Did they make a change in their life based on their experience? Not likely. It is more likely that they were in their underpants, surfing the net and moved right on to the next piece of content. OMG kitties!

You and I are interested only in those that watch all the way to the end. The ones that are engaged, and will take action. If we are talking to an audience comprised of these engaged people, then an audience of one thousand is monumental.

I often like to think of giving a talk to one thousand people. Have you ever been in a hall that seats one thousand? It is quite a large space, a concert hall, and I would be overwhelmingly excited to have the attention of an audience that size.

So why 1,000? This number has become standardized by the online business community ever since Kevin Kelly presented his concept of 1,000 true fans. The essence of the concept is that 1,000 true fans can sustain a career. A true fan is someone who engages, purchases, and is disappointed when she doesn't hear from you. Essentially, it's your Mom.

The number of this audience is technically random, but 1,000 works out when you run hypothetical scenarios.

1,000 members with a monthly subscription of $10 = $10,000 per month, $120,000 per year.

1,000 purchasers of your $100 download or product that launches once a year $100 x 1000 = $100,000.

We are not talking about mega numbers here, but we are realistically looking at making a comfortable income as an artist. You and I both know that is no mean feat.

The number 1000 is also, perhaps most importantly, comprehensible. It is a goal we can visualize, and it is a goal we can achieve in a year or two.

As a creative artist it is highly likely that you already have a small audience of these "true fans". If not just your mother, then perhaps a current student, a colleague or friend. Whoever it is and regardless of the number of participants, your next job is to understand your audience.

Understand

When I first started teaching online, I made a mistake. In fact, I made thousands (that is why my projects have succeeded). One mistake that I made early on, a mistake that used up hundreds of hours, was to assume what my audience wanted.

I was teaching guitar, and I wrote some technique books. When I wrote them, I thought like a self centered four year old, and I wrote them thinking that everyone was just like me with the same needs and wants. The truth was, that I was at the top of the pyramid in terms of guitar study, and my needs were very specialized. They are not shared by my audience, and I wasn't serving them by creating this book. There may have been an audience out there for my book, but it wasn't my audience; so there were no sales, and I made no impact.

The quote that I love, which is often attributed to Einstein (perhaps incorrectly) is this:

Everybody is a Genius. But If You Judge a Fish by Its Ability to Climb a Tree, It Will Live Its Whole Life Believing that It is Stupid.

For the purposes of our discussion we can adapt this allegorical quote to this concept: we may create an amazing piece of content, but if our audience doesn't need it, it will be a failure.

At this point, I want to answer a few questions that will undoubtedly be arising.

Q : How do I understand an audience that I don't have yet?

A : At the outset, when you don't have an audience to monitor or field your questions you will need to develop a clear avatar, a clear idea of who exactly you are aiming to serve.

The clearer you are about your content's audience the more successful you will be in attracting that audience. If your avatar is fuzzy, you will not be attracting any specific audience or no audience at all.

We are not going to go in depth about building an avatar here, but in short, you need to be as specific as possible. Age, interests, income, experience, location, manner of talking, preferred method of consumption (video, audio, text), life experience, life goals… and this is just scratching the surface.

The clearer you can be about who you are targeting, the more likely that audience will resonate with what you offer.

Q : I have an audience, and I know for whom I want to create. Why do I need this?

A : If you have not made the time to truly understand your audience, you are making assumptions. These assumptions will inevitably lead to a disconnect between the problem your audience has and the solution you are providing.

This is the mistake that I made, and one that I think the vast majority of online creators make: broadcasting instead of listening.

Firstly, you may not know your audience as well as you think you do, and unless you have spent time in listening to their needs and wants, you are likely to be off the mark.

Secondly, your audience will change over time, and you need to be actively listening and observing how you can best serve them.

Q: Okay, how do I "listen" and "observe".

A: The language that you read in email responses, the pages visited on your website, the posts that receive comments on your site, the emails that are opened and the ones that are not, all of these little details are signals as to who your audience is and what they find important.

Don't be afraid to be personal either. I mean, the most obvious answer here could likely be the best… just ask! You can reach out through an email blast, or better, with a personal email or better still a phone call. These are people just like you, and the more personal you are, the better information you are going to get, and you will be establishing a relationship in the process.

Take the time to understand your future or present audience and you will know how to serve them.

Serve

Understanding that you are here to serve your audience is the real key. Serve, help, support, provide, guide, whatever word suits you best, but be clear that this is all for them, not you.

I think that the concept is simple enough but for us creatives it is a little jarring. Through our education we are often given encouragement and support via adulation and congratulation. The early part of our creative lives is all about us. **You** are so talented, **you** are so good, **you** work so hard, **you** deserve to be famous.

This pouring out of congratulations in our youth is a byproduct of last century when it was a marker of success to simply be good at your craft. Right now, however, it still feels good but accomplishes little. In fact, it will likely lead to frustration and disillusionment.

So, I implore you to frame everything you do through service. Help people, inspire people, guide people. Whatever it is, do it for your audience.

How Much Work Does it take to be a successful online educator?

The blunt answer to this question is : a lot.

It takes a sustained and focused effort to build and serve an audience online. However, as creatives we are going to benefit from the same caveat that helped us become proficient at our craft in the first place: passion.

Creative pursuits take immense amounts of time and dedication to master. To onlookers it may seem like we have a particular gift for hard work and that we arrived at our level of skill through sheer determination and focus. You and I know that while there is some truth to this, the larger factor at play is actually that we love what we do. We are passionate to the extent that it can sometimes border on obsession.

The same passion that you found in learning your craft needs to be present in teaching your craft. Otherwise, the work will quickly become a burden.

In my own projects, I find great joy in cultivating a community of passionate people who truly value what I do, and I also get satisfaction from solving problems and making improvements on a regular basis. Often I find that the joy and satisfaction that I feel closely resembles that which I experienced when learning my musical instrument in the first place. There are definitely times when I don't feel like answering emails, and definitely moments of stress and anxiety when I feel like I have made a mistake (sending out incorrect emails to thousands for example) but on the whole, these hurdles make up a small percentage of the whole experience.

In terms of time that I put into my work, it really is quite constant, and I am thinking about my projects seven days a week. In terms of time that I *have* to work (i.e. hours that are either scheduled or necessary to maintain the sites), I would say it varies from 2 to 10 hours a week.

Now that we have made a cursory overview of what is involved, let's take a deeper dive into the details.

Successful Business vs Part Time Hobby

It is absolutely imperative that you are clear from the outset whether you are going to create and run a business or dabble in online education as a hobby. A business requires an investment of time and money, of resources and education, and it puts the business as a priority over other aspects of your life. A hobby has little or no intention of making money and is flexible in its approach to investments (time, money and education). Both options are wonderful. It is the middle ground that can be treacherous.

If you are going to start an online education business, do not do it at half throttle. It will only cause you frustration.

My Story From Hobby to Business

When I stated teaching online, I was simply sharing my ideas and tips on a site that was not even intended for teaching. It was more a general interest site for classical guitar. I included blogs, reviews, articles, tips, tricks, etc.. It truly was a hobby as I was dedicated to my studies at the time. During that period of hobby blogging (around four years), I learned how to write and engage with an online community, although I had done almost nothing to stay in touch with any of them. I had no email list or social media presence. I was simply dabbling in my free time and getting a kick out of seeing people visit and comment on the site.

The turning point was when I was living in an attic. I had finished my studies for the Masters Degree and the coursework portion of my Doctorate, and I had disturbing amounts of free time on my hands. Instead of playing computer games or hanging out with friends, I got focused on a specific project: creating a scale book for classical guitar.

This scale book was quite detailed and took several weeks to complete. Dealing with lots of notes and layout issues, it was very comprehensive. When I had finished the scale book, I published it in PDF format and put it on my general guitar site, and it started to bring in a little trickle of revenue.

While on paper this little trickle seemed completely insubstantial, to me it was a life changing moment. I was earning money while I slept. I had put hard work in and I continued to benefit from that work in a passive fashion.

This was my first taste of passive income and my mind began to reel at the potential for more projects just like the scale book.

Moving forward, I wrote another PDF book on technique, started to dabble in video and created a dedicated site and email list just for my online teaching. Even though I was making moves in the right direction, this was still a hobby. I did things when I had the time, and I did everything as cheaply as possible. I wasn't willing to invest in a business just yet.

Finally, about two years later, I had built up a small following that enjoyed and benefited from my teaching. So I decided to write a course. This course had various multimedia with video, pdfs, notation, audio etc. and after a few hiccups it launched successfully. It was an incredible experience. I had created something valuable that helped people, and my audience was happy to pay for what I was offering.

From that point my online education hobby became a business. I made it a priority in my life, I invested in equipment, software, education (I took online courses myself to learn how to make videos) and I invested *a lot* of time. After I started running a business, things went from strength to strength, and I now run multiple online schools.

A Marathon of Passion

Building an online education business is not a sprint; it is a marathon.

The first question I get when people's interest is piqued by the concept of online education is "how long did it take you to create this?" and by "create this" I think they mean become a financially viable business. In my case the timeline was about six years. However, the first four of those years were completely unfocused on business building and could be better described as curious dabbling.

There are several components that take time to build. Audience, materials, infrastructure (website/software/payment processing), and a solid curriculum all take time. What takes even *more* time is the constant adjustments and experimentation that will eventually start to make your business tick. These adjustments are sometimes to tweak the operation or flow of your business, but more commonly, it is a process of understanding how to build and serve your audience. No two audiences are alike, so you can't just copy what you see working for other online educators. You will also need to have a good hard look at what you have to offer as a teacher, or in other words, you need to learn how to play to your strengths.

Oh, did I mention the MBA you need to learn on the fly?

Unless you have prior experience with business or marketing, you will probably be in the same position that I was… completely ignorant of how to run a proper business. This learning curve is not so much steep as it is detailed. There are just so many aspects that keep revealing themselves. Things like taxation, business structures, employment, wages, insurance, advertising costs and methods, and not to mention the constantly changing landscape of what is possible on the internet. It can seem overwhelming, but I am proof that it can be tackled one issue at a time until processes start to become refined.

As I said, it's a marathon, but what will fuel your perseverance is your passion. It is the only thing that will sustain the hard yards you are about to cover.

The key then to this process is making sure you embark on a path that *you* are passionate about. Don't do it for money, don't try and do what you think you *should* do, and definitely don't try and please everyone. Build your own personal utopia, something you would use and want to be a part of.

If you do this, then all of those pesky details will be part of a much larger and enjoyable journey.

The 4 Hour Work Week : Fact and Fiction

Tim Ferris wrote a popular book titled "The 4 Hour Work Week". I have read it. Several times. It peddles a fantasy that if you get all your systems set up correctly, you should only have to work a modicum of 4 hours each week, and the rest of the time is spent sitting on a beach sipping margaritas. The cover even depicts a palm tree framed beach sunset.

The book has some profound concepts in it, but I believe the reason it has been so popular is its misleading idea that there really could be only 4 hours of work in a week to keep a business going. Ferris does qualify himself on various podcasts that he is referring to work that is absolutely necessary. This kind of *necessary* work spans the 4 hours. The rest of the week could be spent however you like.

Here is the reality of the matter: "There are no shortcuts to any place worth going." - Beverly Sills

Yes, I agree that if you set things up with systems and automation and outsourced work that you could theoretically whittle your essential work time down to 4 hours, but in *reality,* you are working long hours every week for years before this becomes an option. And, if you are the kind of person who gets to the point where you can rest on your laurels, you probably wont want to because you are inherently driven by nature.

I will say, that after working on my projects full time for several years, I can uproot myself at almost any time. If I haven't scheduled any live meetings with students, I can switch off for a few days and no-one would be the wiser. It is a privileged position.

However…

Any online content that is left dormant will get submerged in the expansive waters of other websites jostling for attention. You need to maintain your site, address and respond to your audience, adapt to a changing online landscape, and essentially… keep your garden alive.

An Apologetic Conclusion

I feel I have battered you over the head by now with the stark realities of running an online education business. I do this because I don't want you to get surprised or frustrated by the challenge that lies in store.

In my most heartfelt opinion, the experience is overwhelmingly positive and rewarding. It will afford you time to create, to travel, to spend time with your loved ones. It can provide a full time income and then some. And, after the initial years of effort, it can be moderately low maintenance.

Fear

There are several key reasons why you might not take the leap into online teaching. Fear is a big one. In this chapter I will show you why your fears are misguided and mistakes are useful.

Lions, Tigers, Bears. Oh My!

Dating girls was always a daunting prospect for me when I was younger. Well, let me be more specific. I was petrified of asking girls out.

Rejection, embarrassment, humiliation… the usual fare. It wasn't until I was in my late twenties and living in New York when I had a bit of an awakening.

I was out with a group of new found friends with whom I didn't know too well. Among these new friends was a lovely woman whom I had never met before and with whom I had no real connections. Contrary to the more insular living situations I had been in before, New York City afforded an anonymity that was reassuring. Any kind of embarrassment or rejection would be suffered only once instead of potentially re-living it on a regular basis in a small community. The idea of hiding among 8 million other New Yorkers gave me some confidence.

After some nice conversation, I plucked up some courage and asked her out. She said, "yes" Then, the next day cancelled via text. I could make the story a little longer, but the story is not the point. The point is that after all those years of never asking out someone "cold", I realized that all the things I had been fearing were really not that bad. I wasn't shattered; my ego wasn't destroyed. It was fine. In fact, the feeling that remained was one of regret as I thought back to all the times I could have made the leap but didn't because I was afraid.

Fear is a funny thing in the modern world. We are still using primitive systems in our brain to decipher what we should be afraid of. Once it was fierce animals, and now it is an attentive audience. The infamous "flight or fight response", which could have helped us in the jungle, now makes us fearful of public speaking. Fear is also the number one reason you will not undertake online education.

Longwinded segue way? Yes. But performing in public, speaking in public, even asking someone out on a date are common experiences we share. Not so many have found out how un-threatening it is to teach online.

People Aren't Going To Like What I do

You're right. People are not going to like what you do. People are also going to love what you do. The vast majority that come across your work **simply won't care**.

You need to come to terms with this right now, and furthermore, you need to embrace it. If you try and please everybody, you are going to end up pleasing nobody.

Teach for yourself, teach for *your* audience and tend to that small group of people who love what you do. It is counter intuitive at first but you are going to be more successful if you embrace your faults and play to your strengths.

I'm Not Good Enough

This is doubtful. I do believe that you should have a strong proficiency in your craft and also have teaching experience but perhaps not as much as you think. It can be a very convenient excuse to get out of teaching online to simply deride ourselves and say that we are not an "expert".

I was once brought out to the Hamptons in Long Island NY to teach young children on a range of instruments. These were kids, and they were in the beginning stages of learning music. Teaching alongside me was an international conductor. A conductor! These kids didn't need high level performers to help them at their stage. They needed teachers who were good at teaching music to kids!

Tempting as it may be, bringing in a seasoned expert is not always going to be the best way to help someone. There can be giant gaps of understanding between an artist working at a professional level and a beginner, not to mention the fact that just because you are an expert in your field does not necessarily mean you are an effective teacher. It just doesn't work like that.

If you have little or no teaching experience, I would recommend getting yourself in amongst some beginners. You will find it surprising what kind of information helps them and what questions they ask. Moreover, you will start to understand your audience by observing the teaching process in a more objective manner.

What kind of questions are being asked? How are they phrased? Are your responses helpful? What order do these questions come in?

To put it bluntly, you only need to be a few steps ahead of someone else in order to help them. The more experience and knowledge you have to offer, the more effective you can be, but don't let fear get in your way by thinking that you are not good enough.

Mistakes and Failure

To make a mistake signifies that you are trying. You are taking a leap. To fail means that you have the opportunity to do it again and do it better. Both of these should be a positive sign rather than a negative.

Through the Powis Academy I am trying to help people like you navigate through unchartered waters. Around the world there are many other successful entrepreneurs passing on their advice too. However, there is always going to be ground you will have to cover yourself. With the right

attitude this foray into the dark will be the most powerful learning experience you will have, even though it might feel like aimless fumbling.

There is something exciting to me about making mistakes. You might find hidden treasure.

Through the process of trial and error, you will discover hidden secrets about yourself, your teaching, your audience and your craft. These hidden truths can *only* be found via mistakes. Perhaps it is a way to explain a fundamental concept, a series of exercises that teaches more effectively than others, or better yet a way of teaching that synchs with your personality.

If you haven't realized it yet, I am trying to turn the table on mistakes. They are not to be avoided but celebrated and observed with pride.

Reputation

Have you ever questioned your title? Painter, singer, guitarist, animator, writer… these titles fit quite well as a student because it takes up the majority of our time. After university, however, our time can be largely occupied by making a living. All of a sudden we draw into question if we are still an artist. If we look at our calendar it seems like we are more of a teacher, barista, waiter, bartender… It can make us do a double take at our own identity.

When I started making an impact online I wondered whether my friends and colleagues would think differently of me. I was hyper sensitive to any criticism and spent too much time checking stats on my website. What became evident over time is that, just like I mentioned before, most people just don't care. I could spend hours agonizing whether I said the "right" thing in a blog post and when I talked with colleagues, they either thought it was fine or had no idea what I was talking about.

Know that your identity is multifaceted, and it changes over time. To focus on just one aspect of your career, the one that makes you feel like an "artist", will take you down. The modern creative needs a diverse skill set and you can change hats depending on your given situation.

Nobody cares more about your reputation than you. Remember that.

Round Up

There are other facets of fear we could explore, but really it comes down to an understanding of what the real situation is. The fears you have about teaching online are largely unfounded. They are overwhelming and crippling at the beginning only to subside after several courageous months of lattes and laptop time.

Why not just skip that part and get to helping people?

Three Reasons why not to teach online

Fear and excuses make a handsome couple. Here are three of the most common excuses for not taking the leap into teaching online… followed by a passionate pep-talk.

1. "It's all been done before"

I will let you in on a little secret; when someone says "yes" to studying with you online, they are not saying yes to your product. They are saying yes to you.

Unless you are teaching something that is brand new to the world, like a new piece of software or an original artistic creation, then someone else has taught it before. And, at this point in the online teaching trend, it is very likely that someone is already teaching your topic right now in an online format.

At first, this is a negative. You might think that your place has already been taken, and if the existing teacher is successful it might also seem that there is no hope of building something to compete. This is simply not the case. In fact, the presence of other online teachers is a good thing, a wonderful thing, because it validates your topic. If other teachers are in the online space and they have an audience, it means there is an audience out there for you too. Furthermore, as they work to build their audience, they are being advocates for your craft being taught online. They are on your team.

Is it a matter of content then? Should you simply out-do everyone else with quality and quantity?

No, and no.

Quality is integral to your success, but you don't have to "out do" anyone. Nor do you have to imitate anyone that is experiencing success. And quantity? Quantity is actually a problem on the internet, not a solution.

The internet is so full of content these days, so full of *stuff*, that is can be a hard place to navigate. Especially if you are trying to learn something in a structured manner. So, assuming your content contains quality teaching, we must figure out why a student would choose you over someone else.

The answer is *you*. It is your personality, your teaching style, your way of communication, your demographic, your background. These aspects will be an influencing factor in why a student chooses your quality teaching over someone else.

Your unique qualities will attract a certain type of student and then you get the opportunity (privilege) of acquiring their trust and attention.

2. It's Too Complicated

Teaching online can be complex, but it doesn't have to be.

How much complexity do you really need to impart knowledge? Another way to say this is how fancy or flashy do you need to be to help someone learn?

One major misconception with online media is that it has to have a high production level in order to be effective. Moreover it seems that HD video is the go-to medium for education. Well, what if you could do a more effective job of teaching with simpler tools?

Plain old text is a time proven medium for educational purposes. Images, audio, text, guided activities, goal setting, challenges, and yes of course… video. I believe that a mixture of these different tools will be the most effective way to teach, but of course it will be different for everyone.

The point is that you need not be overwhelmed by the challenging task of mastering various pieces of hardware and software. You already have the tools at your disposal. You just need the creativity and courage to use them.

So that I don't leave you in the throws of imagination, here are some simple options to get you started.

- iPhone + iMovie + YouTube (Vimeo is better) for video courses
- Wordpress blog posts for text and images
- iPhone for creating images
- iPhone for recording audio
- A carefully structured set of emails that guide students through weekly tasks and challenges

I relied heavily on the iPhone here but any similar device will do. The reality is that we have more capabilities in our phone these days that many production companies had 40 years ago.

The real matter at hand is to *do* something. Make something. Stop stalling, stop finding excuses and start helping people. Once you have created an initial offering you can refine and improve. Procrastination produces nothing.

3. It Will Never Be The Same As Teaching Face To Face

I agree. It is different. But that doesn't mean it is better or worse. It simply means that we have different tools at our disposal, different possibilities to make an impact.

In my opinion, online teaching has far more potential to help people than one-to-one teaching. The fact that the student can re-visit material repeatedly is a game changer. In a traditional lesson there may be golden nuggets of information being communicated by the teacher but if the student is not ready… the information has no impact. With the ability to absorb concepts over time each student gets to learn comprehensively at her own pace.

In a perfect world all teachers would be prepared, organized, and have experience. As a fellow creative you and I know this is definitely not the case. Teaching is often a side-hustle in our field. A way to make extra income because our craft cannot pay the rent. This results in quite a bit of sub-par teaching.

To teach online, however, you need to have some structure and organization. The process of making the teaching materials will force the teacher to put thought and consideration into the process. So, already, we are ahead of a teacher who just "turns up" for some side cash.

Add to this the fact that a teacher can continuously update and refine materials and we have a teaching medium that is not only powerful but adaptive. Don't even get me started on the benefits of peer learning in online communities!

I can get very evangelical about online teaching, but I don't want to start promoting why it might be "better" than another model. Rather I want you to get curious about the immense possibilities that are afforded by multimedia and imagination.

Online education is in a nascent stage. You are primed as much as anyone else to forge new possibilities.

Got Excuses?

I am sure you have more excuses for not teaching online. It is not suitable for everyone, teachers or students. For those who do learn effectively with online education, there is a wonderful opportunity for you to help them, and you can start right now.

Don't please everyone

If you try and please everyone, you will end up pleasing no-one.

The internet is getting better and better at curating material for you. This is purely because of advertising. If you create something with a broad appeal, something that could apply to a large audience, you will make little to no impact. In the late 20th Century you might have received some attention with a broad message, but as we now have an inconceivably large amount of content competing for attention only the most focused of topics and initiatives will pierce through the roaring wall of noise between you and your audience.

Targeting a large audience is tempting. Logic tells you that if you could just get a *sliver* of the pie it would still be substantial. But if you can't actually reach anyone, or even pique their interest, because your message is too broad to compete, then the initial audience size is irrelevant. Reaching for the stars and landing on a cloud doesn't apply here. You will just keep staring at the stars in frustration wondering why your feet haven't even left the ground.

You need to drill down to a very specific level so that your content can seem personally created for one individual. People need this level of customization in order to take action. Building in this way from the outset will give you an advantage over the competition because you are not entering into the general fray. You are sidestepping the competition and reaching out directly to the audience you want to help.

Let's take the topic of photography for example:

1. Learn photography (too broad)
2. Learn Portrait Photography (still broad)
3. Actor Portraiture (somewhat focused)
4. Female Actor Portraiture (focused)
5. Female Actor Portraiture Editing (narrowly focused)
6. Female Actor Portraiture Editing with a focus on skin re-touching (hyper-focused)

The first focus is incredibly broad and unless you have a household name (or at least a prominent name in photography) then your site will be pitted against the rest of the entire industry, which is completely saturated.

As we move down the list, we are getting more and more specific about our educational offering and our content becomes increasingly appealing towards the targeted audience of portrait photographers who work in the theatre/film industry and have an interest in female skin re-touching. If that was your area of interest, wouldn't you dig a bit deeper to find out what that course had to offer?

How about another example, one with which I am very familiar:

1. Guitar Lessons
2. Beginner Guitar Lessons
3. Acoustic Beginner Guitar Lessons
4. Bluegrass Acoustic Beginner Guitar Lessons
5. Beginner Bluegrass Strumming Patterns for Acoustic Guitar

The same drilling down of specificity is present, and now I am appealing to my audience's stage of development in addition to a specific genre (bluegrass) and component of that genre (strumming).

Once again, if you were a beginner guitarist interested in bluegrass this would grab your attention. Furthermore, the specificity of "strumming patterns" gives the him a clear focus of what they are going to learn, which ties into results based learning.

If you are hesitating to drill too deeply, so deep that there will be nobody there, then consider two things:

Firstly, the internet is large, huge, gigantic. Every time I am on a plane, looking down on sprawling cities as they pass underneath, I try and record the magnitude of the world we live in (I always seem to forget the scope a day later). Several hundred million people are eligible to receive your message. And, out of all those people, don't you think there might be just 1,000 that are interested in learning about your specific topic? Yes.

Secondly, if in fact you are in a field where there is no-one currently serving your potential audience, then yes, feel free to go for a broader audience. With the proliferation of online teaching, a vacant space probably means that there is no audience available to build. However, there is always the off chance you have found a group of people that are not being served by anyone.

Drill Baby Drill

The first part of drilling down has to do with what you can offer. The second part has to do with who you are going to serve. Your niche audience.

To help your niche audience you need to understand them. You need to know what problems they have that you can solve. You need to know what kind of language they use so you can speak their language. You need to know *everything* about them. You need to build an avatar.

The Almighty Avatar

Avatar : A movie with blue people and a popular term used by online marketers to describe their target audience.

Perhaps the most important task to complete at the outset of your online teaching project is to define your avatar. By defining your avatar you will have a guide with which to create all of your materials to come. Without an avatar, you run the risk of creating content that is geared to the wrong audience and therefore leaving you with no one to teach.

Have you ever had the experience of coming across a product that seemed to be meant *just* for you? It solves a problem that you had at that very moment, and it makes all the sense in the world to purchase that product.

This is the experience we want to give to our avatars.

First and foremost we are here to solve problems for people. One problem might be how to learn guitar, another might be how to back focus on a DSLR, and another might be how to animate for children's books. Define the problem you are going to solve with your teaching **first.**

Secondly we need to get very, *very* specific about who has this problem.

- Age
- Gender
- Location
- Interests
- Education
- Experience
- Level of interest
- Income
- Spending habits
- Online habits
- Online social media usage
- Technology skills
- Preferred mode of communication
- Preferred mode of media consumption

And this, believe it or not, is just scratching the surface.

Depending on your craft, you might come up with some extremely unique aspects to define your avatar. For instance, classical guitarists usually use longer nails on their right hand to play the instrument. So, this rules out rock climbing as a sport. Too random? No, not really. When it comes to Facebook advertising, I can tell you not to advertise to anyone who does rock climbing as a sport, and it will save money from being wasted on the wrong audience.

Okay, that *is* quite specific, but how about emotional aspects? For instance in my wife's dance school, we thought about how people want to be connected, how they might be a bit "nerdy" and are looking for a supportive and welcoming community to join. This kind of delineation can guide both the language that we use and also the kind of content that we create for them.

Your challenge is to adapt this kind of specificity to your own audience. One way to quick start this process is to think of someone you already know that is a perfect fit.

If you can identify an ideal candidate that you already know, reverse engineer that person and find out why they are ideal. This technique of isolating an individual is also useful for writing emails. If you are writing an email to 1,000 people not only can it be daunting but it can be confusing to choose your language. Casual or formal? Detailed or succinct? By replacing 1,000 people with just one, you can save yourself the confusion and just write with that one person in mind.

Your initial foray into this process is critical, but it isn't over once it is done. You will need to constantly refine your understanding and familiarity with your avatar. Perhaps your avatar is a little different than you thought, or perhaps your avatar will change over time and you re-calibrate your focus and experiment with different approaches to creating content.

Listen to the language that your avatar uses, notice what material they consume on your website and what emails elicit an action. These are all signals and identifiers which can help you develop and refine your understanding.

The better you understand your avatar the better equipped you are to create something that is just for them. Remember, we are not creating for everyone, just a specific group of people who love what you do and need your help.

Relationships, Trust, and Attention

The internet has given us the world at our fingertips, but if you want to do anything meaningful you need to focus on relationships.

There are more ways than ever to reach out to people, but it seems like the easier it is to do, the less meaningful it is. Twitter, Facebook, blogs… they are great for broadcasting, but if you want to start building a relationship, you have to start listening.

Perhaps the biggest mistake made in social media is to broadcast without listening. Sure, you want to spread your message to the largest amount of people but *responding* to the one or two people who replied with a comment will be more powerful in the long run. Furthermore, you could start a conversation in the comments. Then follow up with a personal email. Maybe a few emails ensue…

As the personal nature of the interaction grows, so does the strength of the relationship. This relationship builds trust and attention, which are both key to success when teaching online. As you can also see, the time and effort increases substantially too.

"There are no shortcuts to any place worth going." - Beverly Sills

If you recall in our discussion on **Serving an Audience** you will remember that we are not trying to win the trust and attention of the masses but rather to engage a more manageable amount of 1000 true fans. The *only* way to do this is through relationship building that involves sincerity, respect, care and effort.

It is possible to hide behind modern technology, so you might want to do a reality check with your current approach and beliefs. Are we *really* more social now? Do we *really* have that many "friends"? To build a relationship with someone requires courage. The tools are all there. Skype, the phone, a coffee shop. These will be the most powerful and meaningful interactions you will ever have. Muster up the courage to come out from the safe world of social media and be present with someone, even if it is just for ten minutes.

Why not save yourself the next tweet and line up a video chat with a student? Imagine how powerful this could be when done regularly over the course of a year?

Trust

The internet is a scrappy place. Not only can anyone publish material online but there is never a guarantee that we know exactly with whom we are dealing. For this reason building trust as part of a relationship is crucial to online business.

Trust comes from fulfilling expectations on an ongoing basis. Keeping promises and remaining transparent. This takes time, patience, and generosity on your part.

Attention

Attention comes after trust, after you deliver quality with consistency. You earn trust and people pay attention. With this privilege you have the ability to deepen and strengthen relationships to a point where you have true fans. These are the people with whom you want to work; these are the people you will serve.

Perfectonism

It is tempting at the outset of your online endeavor to try and make things "perfect". Editing and re-editing every blemish, every hiccup, and every mistake. Perfection is crippling, and if you don't deal with it quickly, then you might give up. This would be a tragedy because you have the ability to help people.

I am a classical musician, and in our world the advent of recordings, more specifically *edited* recordings, has given rise to unrealistic expectations of perfection from performers. Much like the photoshopped images of men's and women's bodies in magazines that send ripples of doubt and unnecessary shame throughout the world, our perfectionism has prevented many musicians from presenting themselves to the public with confidence and individuality.

Don't let perfectionism hold you back from helping people with your teaching.

The funny thing is, and this really applies to any of the great artists that we admire, it is the courageously *imperfect* that make an impact.

It is the artists that allows their personality, their idiosyncrasies, and their quirks to shine through that we admire. It is counter intuitive, but if you allow your true self to shine though your work online, then people will be drawn to you. The right people. Your people.

Perfectionism seems to me to be an extension of the human need to please people. The truth is, however, that if you try and please everyone, you will end up pleasing no one.

When I was a youngster, living back in Sydney, I was having a tough night after bartending. A fellow co-worker was upset with me, for what, I have no idea. As I was going home on the train, one of the older bar tenders listened to my woes and rolled his eyes.

He said, "Simon, you are not going to like everyone in the world and not everyone is going to like you. So deal with it."

For an early 20 something, this was the beginning of a revelation to me, and I am still trying to remember that advice. Ten years later, in the early days of my online teaching, I was back in Sydney, and I randomly bumped into the same old friend. I told him how much that advice had meant to me over the years, and he smiled. He said, "Ok, then I have some more advice for you".

"About ten percent of people will love what you do, ten percent will hate it, and the rest simply don't care."

This was (again!) incredibly liberating for me and very applicable to my online teaching. I have passed on this advice to several people, and I would like to show you why this is so important to your online teaching.

Apart from liberating you and allowing you to create content that might feel less than perfect, this little breakdown of our global audience alerts us to the fact that there is a specific group of people with whom we actually *want* to work.

If you put yourself out on the internet as something that you're not, you are going to attract people who are not really *your* people. This means that your work is going to be a lot harder.

When I was studying, I would practice for long hours each day. I often received comments about my practice hours and people would say that I was "such a hard worker". But it didn't feel like hard work to me. In fact, it didn't feel like work at all. I was doing what I was passionate about and I would do more if I could!

If, however, I spent that same amount of time doing menial tasks (I think some sort of Sisyphean library cataloging task would be a good example) boy, would that be hard work.

The same goes for building your audience. If your audience comprises of people who are not a good fit, it becomes hard work because you have to be someone you are not.

So, we are coming to the clichéd conclusion of: Be yourself.

This somewhat millennial infused idea is true to a great extent online. It means that no one can imitate what you do, because they are not you. It means that no one will explain concepts the way you do, it means no one will resonate with *your* audience the way you do, and it means that all the work you have ahead of you (and there is a lot) will not feel like such hard work because you will find being *you* comes naturally once you give yourself permission.

Take action right now and write down three lists of:
• what you enjoy
• what you do well
• what people would pay for

These are the ingredients for a venn diagram. The overlapping components are what you should teach and how you should teach it.

The Hidden Benefits of Teaching Online

There are many attractive features to online teaching but there might be a few more gems that you don't know yet.

Your Audience Is Interested In You, Not Just Your Teaching

Once you have built an audience you have a group of people that trust you and that have given you their attention. This is a privileged position. From this place you have the ability to serve your audience in a multitude of ways not just through education.

It never ceases to amaze me when I see every artist lining up to go through the same door. Musicians want to be soloists, painters want to be on the walls of the MOMA, writers want to get a book deal.

These are attractive desires, ones that are bolstered by well meaning parents and the bottom line of educational institutions. But, if you look at it with any speck of objectivity, it is a fool's errand.

There are many doors to walk through in this world, so why try and cram through the same one as everyone else?

By building an online audience that you serve through education, you are building an audience that is interested in other things that you do. Your creations, your performances, your ideas. They will all be eagerly anticipated by your true fans, and that door will be wide open and under trafficked by others once you have built it.

Friendships

Without a doubt one of the most enjoyable aspects of running my online schools has been meeting people in "real life" and making new friendships. Meeting someone face to face underscores the reality of your online impact. It can become a little abstract while looking at email addresses and numbers, but when you sit down with someone whom you have helped, it is a powerful reminder of what online education can do.

Leading a Community & Making An Impact

In a world that is increasingly dominated by large corporations, you can make a meaningful and positive impact on people's lives through online teaching. Whether you realize it or not, running an online teaching site puts you in the position of a leader. In this leadership role, you can create a vision for others to achieve and guide them, inspire them, to make changes in their life.

Once you have set down this path, other opportunities will arise. You can branch out, expand, create a team, and ultimately help more people around the world.

Expanding Horizons

Right now you might only be envisioning a small and singular venture, but when you experience success, you will start thinking about how many opportunities there are for you to branch out.

What if you build a team? Have employees? Teach others to lead their own tribes?

Your initial point of focus is necessarily small. Over time as you reach more people you, will begin to understand your power to impact others' lives and new opportunities will become clear.

What is your vision?

Simplicity

When creating materials for online education, add what is necessary and nothing more. Bloated courses can become confusing and cumbersome. Long videos take a long time to watch and too much text is taxing.

Padding things out to make them seem substantial doesn't benefit anyone.

Keep it simple.

There is power is simplicity.

Creating Revenue from Online Education

Derek Sivers, the creator of CD Baby, writes in his book *Anything You Want* that your success is directly related to the amount of people that you help. I believe in this idea, and I feel that guiding your efforts with the aim to *help* first and foremost will result in a successful business.

After all, what businesses really do is solve problems.

There is a time and place to provide training and information for free. However, for the sake of your own sustainability and also the dedication of the student, you need to charge a fee for your tutelage. As a creative person I still suffer from the feeling of guilt whenever I charge for things. I wonder if this is a byproduct of the student mentality or simply being surrounded by low income colleagues for the better part of my life. Whatever the case, you need to charge for your service. Otherwise, you are not running a business.

There are several ways to generate revenue from online education, and they all have unique qualities. Some are more labor intensive, some are passive and some require ongoing attention. Any way you look at it, there is some serious work and dedication ahead, but the rewards are many.

Time For Money

This is the most common type of income that we are used to as creatives. One hour of teaching for one fee. This kind of teaching is intimate and often quite rewarding. In terms of a business model, it is redundant and wasteful.

If you are having a party and you want to notify all twenty guests that you will start one hour later, do you call them all personally, email individually, or email the group all at once?

All at once.

The personal call really is the most direct and intimate way of communicating but it is likely that your conversation will get tangential and involve other topics. It also takes a massive amount of time. The individual emails are a little pointless when you have the ability to bulk mail, save for the fact that you can personalize the interactions. And, finally, the option most of us would choose these days imparts the information succinctly to all of the group and takes far less time on your end.

This analogy is a little obvious, but there is a strong resemblance here to in-person lessons, Skype lessons, and video courses. Skype lessons are convenient and they are quite personal, but they will still be trading time for money with no element of leverage involved in the process.

I strongly believe that pre-recorded video courses can impart the same knowledge and the follow up interaction can be achieved through a group forum (which is also a leveraged format).

Time for money is the most obvious and familiar choice for us, but there is no ability to scale and no use of leveraged material.

Time For Money (groups)

One option to leverage the time for money model is to teach in groups. These days there are several software options that allow you to teach group video lessons. This brings the benefits of personal attention and includes leverage. But it is still time for money…

Passive Income

Passive income has become somewhat of a holy grail idea among online entrepreneurs. The idea is essentially that you put in some work, create something once, and it delivers ongoing revenue with little to no maintenance.

Examples of this type of income include:

• Website advertising (google ads)
• Affiliate marketing (advertising others' products on your site and getting a commission)
• Single product sales

There are more examples. However, I don't want to inundate you with options, and to be honest, we are only interested in one type of item here, single product sales.

The first two options (ads and affiliates) are tempting because they appear to require little work at the outset as you are not required to create anything of value. The problem with this is that you will need to build large amounts of traffic (difficult) and an audience that is inclined to support you through affiliate purchases… a lot of them. Add to this the fact that you are an intermediary in this process and don't have any say in ongoing changes in products or policies. So, if you haven't guessed already, I would not suggest going down this path. You are not actually building something of value, and it is not particularly lucrative.

Single product sales involve the creation of an item that is valuable and the sale of that item to a customer. A clear example for everyone might be a music album. This is something you have created, original content, and it is valuable to your audience. They purchase it once and after the sale has processed, you have little obligation to do any further work. Occassionally with single product sales, you might have to process refunds or respond to feedback/questions, but in general these items require little maintenance after you have created the item and set up an automated sales process.

If we apply this idea to online education, we could have products such as:

- Digital Guides (Ebooks, workbooks, method books, tutorials)
- Self guided courses (a course with no teacher interaction and a one time payment)
- Hardcopy Original Creations (artwork, audio recordings, creative writing that require postage)
- Digital Download Original Creations (artwork, audio recordings, creative writing that can be instantly downloaded)

The great benefit I see in these types of products is that they are small to moderate in size, require a short to medium amount of time to create (perhaps a single course might be the longest) and can be re-purposed further down the track.

If you are just starting out with online teaching, a small project will allow you to test what resonates with your audience, test what they are willing to pay, and then when you have learned from their response, you can re-calibrate your approach. It might be the case that you already have something in your body of work that could be made into a single product item. Often it just takes a little imagination to adapt it to the online format.

Furthermore, the creation of this item can be leveraged further down the track. For instance, if you created a beginner's guide you can then include that as part of a beginner package or a general membership once you have built up the foundations for your business. Don't forget that you could also chop up this product and repurpose the materials at a later date if it didn't work out the first time.

The passive nature of these items is also attractive. When I first started building my online guitar school, I created a scale book. This was the first item I ever had for sale and it has been selling ever since. It doesn't bring in a lot of money each month but it brings in regular income and served as an indicator several years ago that I had an audience.

So, if you are starting out, I would highly recommend creating a single product (or a few) at the outset. It keeps you agile, let's you learn from experience, and can provide a low maintenance form of passive income for years to come.

Active Courses

An active course involves you as a teacher for a finite amount of time and can be repeated as many times as you like. This is essentially the same as a course at a university that runs each semester. What is leveraged in this process is the course curriculum and materials. It also can have a flexible time frame and start dates, which is convenient if you have a calendar that has select openings to run a course.

Your course can mix leveraged components (videos, quizzes, worksheets, downloads) with your time and attention. Perhaps you will have a weekly group meeting or consult the students one on one.

In an educational sense, this can be a very powerful model as the teacher is present for the duration and there is a clear timeline to keep students motivated and on track.

The time commitment during the course can be heavy, and it is wise to set expectations with office hours or dedicated Q&A sessions with group calls. It also can require a large amount of pre-sale before the course launches. Finally, on the student end, having course dates that are set in stone might reduce sign ups as the course cannot be completed on their schedule.

Recurring Income (subscriptions)

Passive income and recurring income are usually the two most attractive options for online business. One requires little maintenance (passive) and the other brings in a constant stream of revenue (recurring). Recurring income is a strong model that can have dramatic results. You have probably noticed many companies and software providers changing to this model over the last decade (Adobe, Sibelius etc.). These are companies that once offered a single product for a fee and now have changed over to a monthly or annual subscription.

You need to be careful, however, to delineate between the services you normally pay for on a recurring basis and what you are going to offer. The companies I mentioned above are providing a Saas (software as a service) which usually involves your relying on that subscription to use a piece of software. What you are going to provide isn't like this. What you are offering is something that needs to serve the audience in an ongoing way with additions, interaction and updates on a regular basis. This is a big commitment, and if you don't commit, your customers will cancel.

It is important to make a decision then, whether you want to offer single product sales that give you the freedom to pause your work when you want or establish a regular line of work to serve your audience and warrant a recurring payment. The subscription model, if done properly, can has the benefits of sustained and reliable income as well as a larger revenue per customer over time.

Examples Of Recurring Payments (subscriptions)

The most obvious recurring payment is the membership model, but I feel this requires its own discussion so I will give two smaller examples before we get to the membership model.

Communities

Being in contact with a group of like minded people can be a powerful learning environment. As a leader of an online community, you could offer education through forum or Facebook group questions, run live group seminars, organize challenges etc.

Being a part of this community can therefore become a valuable feature and warrant a recurring subscription. As you can imagine, it would have to offer something unique and distinctly valuable to separate it from other free online social groups in order to attract subscribers.

Furthermore, you would need to sustain this group over time so it will be an ongoing investment of time and effort.

Personally I feel that a community can be a valuable asset as part of a larger membership, but it can stand on its own if done well.

Newsletters

There are examples of newsletters out there (prep dish for example) that provide valuable content every week that can sustain a subscription base. The equation here is quite simple. What you include in this regular newsletter has to be so valuable that people are excited and willing to pay for it on an ongoing basis.

Memberships and Schools

A membership site or an online school represents a multifaceted resource that can include features such as:

- video courses
- group coaching
- digital downloads
- forums
- newsletters
- podcasts
- member discounts
- multiple teachers

It really represents an amalgamation of everything we have discussed up till now and it can be a wonderfully effective learning environment. The membership model requires a huge investment in time and can have a steep learning curve. While it is true that you can start with very little to begin with and grow from a few seed products, make no mistake that if you want your membership to become valuable and successful over time, you should be prepared to make it a full time occupation.

As I run two online schools, I can tell you that the amount of work is massive, but the reward is even greater. I have created my own little island of like minded people who are dedicated and passionate. Furthermore, the community starts to develop friendships and loyalty just like the schools we were used to in our youth. The difference here is that we are all taking part in this community by choice and starting from a place of passion rather than mandatory placement.

If you are starting out, it is my personal opinion that should you want to aim for an online school or the membership model, start out with smaller projects first and lead up to a membership over time.

Conclusion

There are many ways to generate revenue from online education, and we have gone through some of the most common but by no means have we exhaustively examined all the options. I hope this discussion will spark some ideas and give you a general outline of where you should start or where you might want to end up.

As a musician, one of my least favorite aspects of learning repertoire was the fact that after hundreds of hours practicing one single piece, I could still lose a large chunk of my work if I took a break from that piece for a couple of weeks. The way I remedied this in music was to make recordings. It was a way for me to capture my efforts and allow me to enjoy those efforts years later.

I feel the same way about building online education materials. No matter how hard the work might be, I am happy knowing that I am building my castle brick by brick, that I am helping people in the process, and generating revenue to sustain my work in the process.

The Concept of Leverage

Traditionally, when we study with a teacher, we meet with them privately or in a group, pay them for their time and leave. This business model essentially trades time for money. The student pays $x for an hour of the teacher's time. If they want more, they pay more. This is a wasteful use of our time.

All artistic practices have core fundamentals that students need to learn. Repeating this to every student individually is also redundant and wasteful.

These two aspects of traditional teaching are redundant, and they are also limiting your ability to serve a larger audience.

Teaching online allows you to deliver your most refined lessons, your most focused advice, to a global audience. Students can then replay or re-visit your teaching for as long as it takes to sink in. This is a powerful tool. It means that once you have crystalized and structured your teaching, you can move on to further expand your materials while receiving ongoing income from the work you have already done. This is leverage.

The concept of leverage was a revelation to me, and it made me look at how I value my time in a whole new light. Firstly, it made me realize what I could do with the one and a half hours it takes me to travel to a student, teach them, and come home. Instead of trading my time for money, I could create a lesson that serves hundreds of people in that same time!

To be clear, I am not saying that teaching online can replace the one to one interaction of a student and teacher, but there are some elements that come up so often that it makes complete sense to deliver that information in a leveraged format rather than repeating yourself *ad infinitum*. Furthermore, I believe there are advantages that online teaching has that in person instruction does not. The ability to repeat and review information, the unlimited access (location and time), and the highly structured nature of the material. Leveraged content requires a certain amount of thought and planning that results in structure, and on top of that, students cannot change this structure through disruption or questioning.

If you want a clear example of leveraging that you have used in your own education, simply think of a text book. It is structured, designed, and duplicated for hundreds and thousands of students to use. The text book has been a pillar of education for over a century and now, with the added power of the internet, we can supercharge this experience with multimedia, community interaction, feedback, and unlimited updates.

I don't know about you, but this makes me excited to teach.

So What Can We Leverage?

I would put to you that anything that you can teach in front of a class, or privately without touching the person (adjustment and guidance in dance for example), you can leverage.

Lectures, lessons, and tutorials can be delivered through audio, video and text.
Quizzes, exams, and exercises can be delivered through an LMS (learning management system)
Articles, texts, and general information can be simply written online or in PDF format for printing.

What About Interaction?

Interaction through questions and answers is integral and useful to teaching.

Again I would posit that any situation where Skype would suffice, could be leveraged through pre-recorded video. If a live session really is required, you can use group calling software like ZOOM to work with 50+ students instead of just one.

To take that concept further you could conduct a webinar and interact with thousands of people.

And, once you have established a base community through your teaching, an online forum or private Facebook group can serve to leverage your written answers. In these cases multiple people will benefit from your answering an individual's question.

Finally, a slow but powerful form of interaction is to create your content, observe responses from your students and adapt that content over time to incorporate questions that commonly arise. If you are already an experienced teacher then you will most likely be incorporating common questions into your teachings. If you are new, then you have all the more reason to be attentive and adaptive to your students' needs and wants.

Where Do I Start?

The simplest way to start leveraging your material is to notice what material comes up repeatedly in your teaching. How to hold the guitar? How to prep a canvas? How to do a physical warmup? All of these are examples of material that can be easily leveraged. In my opinion, almost all forms of teaching can be leveraged and it is a creative process in itself to devise the most effective way to deliver your message.

The next time you teach, or even if you are practicing your craft alone, write down concepts that come up and see if you can crystalize your message into a succinct piece of content. If it is complicated, break it down, if it is simple… keep it simple.

Once it is ready, you can try the material out on a student or even a novice. Their feedback about clarity and comprehension will help you further refine the material. Start wth this process of mindful observation. From there, you will know where to put your leveraged efforts for teaching online.

Email Automation & the Autoresponder

One of the biggest draw cards for online business is the ability to leverage resources and scale the size of business as a whole. For instance, as an individual guitar teacher, I would struggle to maintain a studio of 50 students a week, but online I can easily manage an entire school of over 600. There are several elements that help the leveraging process and one of them is automation.

Automation allows you to delegate certain tasks to a piece of software that will take action when certain processes are "triggered". It can be a little bit of a mind bender to get your head around sometimes, but it is worth your time to understand and master.

Out Of The Office And Into Automation

The most common form of automation that you will come across has to do with email list management. More than likely you have been on the receiving end of email automation. The most basic form is the "out of office reply" that we sometimes receive when we reach out to someone. They set up an automation that told the email server to reply immediately with the out of office message when they were contacted within a certain time frame.

The out of office reply shows us the bare bones of what is going on here. We have the trigger, which is the incoming email, we have the amount of time the software waits to issue the reply (in this case it is immediately), and there is also an on/off switch that can be set to a timer (i.e. the amount of time you are out of the office) or toggled manually.

It is a cool and useful feature to be sure, but if you have never come across full blown email automation sequences… prepare to be shocked.

The Autoresponder Series

The next step up is not one reply email but several. This is referred to in marketing as an autoresponder. It is usually triggered by someone opting-in (signing up) to an email list or newsletter. This opt in can initiate a welcome email followed by an unlimited amount of automated emails at varying intervals.

This could serve under several guises: a weekly "tips & tricks" email, a course delivered by email, a sporadic series intended to maintain contact with your audience, a welcome series, which introduces your audience to your teaching over a period of time.

The time intervals can vary dramatically with a dusting of emails once every month or a deluge of emails multiple times a day. The application of an autoresponder series can be very broad, and it leverages the emails you have created. So, instead of crafting one email that is sent and consumed only once, your email will be received continuously over time.

Customizing The Autoresponder

The most immediate issue with the autoresponder is that it could become annoying and unwanted by the recipient. This then creates a negative connection to you rather than positive and you may deter a potential student.

Luckily there is a whole other level the we can get to with email automation that allows us to customize the recipient's experience.

This is also a level that starts to freak people out a little.

It's scary because we start to realize just how responsive the advertising world has become to individual needs and wants. We start to see how there is a very fine line between a customized message and overt manipulation. From here on, it is up to you to be ethical in your deployment of marketing techniques. All I will say is this… you reap what you sow.

1. **Tracking People**

Have you ever sent an email and you were desperate to know if the recipient had opened it yet? Well with email marketing you can do just that. Not only will you know if they opened the email, you will know:

- If they clicked on the link
- How many times they opened the email
- When they opened the email
- If they forwarded the email
- Where they were when they opened the email (approximately)
- If they didn't open the email
- What kind of device they used to read the email (phone/tablet/desktop)
- And quite a bit more…

The way this is done is with tracking pixels and cookies. This is a minuscule graphic in your email that reports back data to the email management system.

Freaked out or not, this is where we are with digital marketing. This kind of tracking happens on almost all websites and the most intricate and deep tracking happens by Facebook and Google who use that data for advertising purposes.

2. **Customizations Based on Tracking**

With multiple data points coming out of a single email send, we open up the opportunity to customize our communications with each recipient.

For example:

- If the recipient didn't open the email after ten days, we could re-send the email.

- If there was a click on a link inside the email that referred to a sales page, we could send them a follow up email about the product on that sales page.
- If the recipient has not opened any email for the past six months, we can choose to remove them from the email list (large email lists get expensive to maintain so this becomes a useful option over time)
- If the recipient clicks on a particular link in an email (let's say it's about a beginner's course), then we can "trigger" a whole new autoresponder that will send them emails about beginner materials rather than advanced…

These are just a few ideas, and to be honest, they are not that sophisticated.

3. Segmenting and Tagging

Another very powerful form of automation doesn't send any emails but rather sorts people on your email list into groups. This is powerful because an email in going to be more engaging if the content relates specifically to the person reading it.

Let's say someone clicks on a link in an email that pertains to a lesson on technique. You could then "tag" that person in your email management software with "interested in technique". It is kind of like updating the old roller decks of the 20th century. You are starting to build a unique profile for each customer although the process is automated and requires no work after the automation is set up. With this tag in place, you might create a segment of your email list to isolate just the people interested in technique and send them an email about technique.

Furthermore, you could segment based on geographical location, skill level, particular interests if they have visited sales pages on your site… the list is up to your imagination and insights.

4. If Not Then This

Lastly we come across a sophisticated tree of automated interactions that are based off of what the recipient does. If the recipient is an avid reader of your emails they can get more, and they can get emails on topics that interest them. If the recipient doesn't open many emails, perhaps you don't want to overload them or "spam" them, so you can only contact them once in a blue moon with the most important and useful of messages.

This can happen by setting up automation instructions that have two or more options based on an action.

For instance if email #1 is not opened, it will be re-sent one week later with a different subject line. If it *was* opened, email #2 will be sent three days after email #1 was opened.

This is a basic example, but this binary approach can be applied to a very sophisticated structure that funnels a lead down to a very specific and personalized set of communications.

Freaked out yet?

If this is new information to you, you might be slightly concerned. And rightfully so. I think this kind of technology and information could be easily abused.

What we want to do with this power is to provide the right education to the right person so that we can help them as effectively as possible. If you believe that you can make a positive impact on someone's life, that you can help them, then these tools will allow you to help them directly and quickly.

In summary, I would recommend studying and understanding these systems. If you don't, you will not survive the competitive online education marketplace, and you will not be reaching potential students.

I would also recommend taking time to develop an ethical approach to marketing using these amazing tools. Remember that we are always dealing with people, not numbers, and we should treat them with the same respect as if they were sitting across from us at a table.

Focus and Productivity

Paso por paso. Step by step.

This is what I always say to others when it comes to learning music, but I often forget to say it to myself.

Creating an online business and teaching curriculum can be overwhelming. It is easy to get scattered with your work time and even after a full day of work, it can feel like you have accomplished nothing. It takes time to build something of value but with the added demands of an adult life (as opposed to a student life), we now have to use focus to become productive.

Switch Off to Switch On

I feel like you know what I am going to say… but it doesn't hurt to hear it again.

Modern life is all about technology making things "easier" more accessible more connected and more social. That may be so, but when it comes to starting an online business, this can truly be destructive.

Perhaps one of the most powerful actions you can take to become more productive is to go offline.

Turn the wi-fi off, turn the phone off, set a goal for your time and work on that project alone.

It is simple but difficult. To help you be disciplined you can use a timer and a clear goal that is written down. To help you even more you can have someone hold you accountable.

Being Held Accountable

Discipline is a precious resource. Sometimes we need a little help to use it. Having a person or group hold you accountable can provide not only help but inspiration, motivation, and comfort.

The buzz word in online business is "mastermind". Groups of like minded online business owners form groups that meet on a regular basis to discuss struggles, set goals, and hold each other accountable. Personally, I have never taken part in a group like this, I would be happy to do so, but as of yet, I have not found a group that was exactly what I needed. After all, group meetings could potentially be as wasteful as they are productive.

What I have found to be very useful are one-to-one interactions. Occasionally I have reached out to online educators whom I admire, and they were more than willing to jump on Skype for a discussion. At the very least, these discussions act as a sounding board that forces you to articulate struggles and goals. At their best, these discussions can be motivating and also keep you focused on what matters most.

The integral factor in being held accountable is that the other person(s) actually care about your progress. In this regard you may find that it is not only other online business owners that could help but friends, family or colleagues that are willing to give you their time and attention.

Remember that these people aren't going to do any of the work for you. They just help you focus.

Choose Where To Put Pressure

Lying on a bed of nails will feel prickly, but stepping on a single nail will result in a tetanus shot. A very popular concept in business is the 80/20 rule (also known as the Pareto Principle). To sum it up rather quickly: You will receive 80 percent of your benefits from 20 percent of your efforts.

As a general sceptic of broad statements, I have been surprised how true this rule has been in my own experience. It translates quite easily into a variety of situations, and in terms of online business, you need to understand and observe what constitutes your 20%.

This could be applied to your avatar by understanding which demographic is resonating with your teaching.

18-24? 24-34? 35-44? 45-54? 55-65? 65+?

If you pinpoint which of these five age ranges most represent your avatar, then you could cater your writing to that demographic. You could also invest advertising dollars where it counts, or create teaching materials that help their specific problems.

Male? Female? Income ranges? Locations? Interests?

Your avatar can be whittled down to the most potent 20% and it will greatly influence your area of focus, which will result in greater productivity. This is but one of many scenarios that could be affected by a selective focus.

Once you have decided where to put pressure, then it is time to set some goals.

Good Goals

Good goals? Why not just goals?
A goal can be destructive too, that's why.

As a music teacher I see destructive goals set all the time. Usually with adult learners, a student will fall in love with a particular piece of music and set his heart on learning it within a certain timeframe. The problem is that these pieces are usually way out of the student's league. While the first few lessons on a coveted piece will bring the student immense pleasure, the following six months will bring him an increasing sense of frustration and failure.

A responsible teacher would step in right at the beginning and nip this destructive goal in the bud.

Sure, the student can play this piece… eventually, but for now we are going to focus on the next achievable goal that will lead on a long path toward the dream goal. While there may be a tinge of sadness at being rejected initially, the long term benefit of setting and achieving realistic short term goals will result in enthusiasm, a positive attitude, and most importantly perseverance.

Unless you are lucky enough to have a mentor (or study at Powis Academy!), you have to set good goals yourself. Realistic goals. Achievable goals. Set a timeframe and commit to completing them. You can, of course, have some flexibility and adjust your goals as things change, but you are going to need some discipline here to follow through.

One final point on goals. Make sure you write them down and have them visible. Verbalizing them is not enough. You need to write them down and re-visit them on a regular basis.

Try it right now: Three achievable goals for today, three for the week and three for the month.

Round Up

Focus and Productivity are closely aligned in the world of online business. If you can master focus you will enjoy more productivity. A virtuous cycle begins.

Dealing With Competition

Many aspects of online teaching are counter intuitive. One that I personally grapple with is the idea of competition.

If someone is teaching your topic online, they are in competition with you. Right? Well, it is not as simple as that and in the long run, these fellow teachers will likely be benefiting your business more than anything else.

Competitors are validation that there is an active audience for you to serve. Furthermore, they are actively involved in nurturing and growing your audience. Online education has enjoyed a surge of popularity since the early 2000's, and it is all to do with how students perceive online education (i.e. it is trustworthy, and it does work.)

Don't Copy

The endless stream of hurdles that you will face at the outset of online education might have you peeking over at other online teachers who are experiencing success. No matter how much you might be tempted, don't copy what they are doing.

Firstly, remember that students will be drawn to **you** rather than the information you impart. So if you try and imitate someone else, you will undoubtedly come off as a cheap imitation. Secondly, you are denying yourself the best weapon in your arsenal… your own voice!

There really are no quick fixes in this marathon, and I can tell you from experience that when your work is copied… it is quite obvious.

What To Do When Someone Copies You?

If you are successful, you will be copied. It is that simple.

In some ways it is a compliment, but it can be upsetting and sometimes border on plagiarism. With all of the benefits that come with freedom of access, plagiarism is an unfortunate byproduct of the online world. If there is outright copyright infringement, you should issue a DMCA notice to take down the materials in question. In the much more likely scenario that you can simply see that your ideas, presentations, sales copy, and even style has been ripped off, you will just have to console yourself with the fact that this particular competitor does not understand. They don't understand that they are losing their own voice and doing a poor imitation of yours.

Your Style Is Your Secret Weapon

Remind yourself again and again that your voice, your way of communicating, even the way you present yourself to the world, this is the real advantage you have in the competitive field of online education.

If we take as a given that you are delivering quality information, and you have put thought and effort into building your curriculum, then it really comes down to the connection between teacher and student. This connection will exist for some and not for others. Remember that no matter how hard you try you cannot please everyone!

The best thing you can do, and a way to deal with competition, is to double down on who you are. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? To what kind of person (avatar) do you appeal? If you can answer these questions, then you will not have to fight so hard to find students.

Those With The Most In Common, Fight

The last thing I will say on this topic, and it is yet another counter intuitive concept, is to be mindful of who we are competing with.

You share more in common with your competitors than with most other people in your life! They not only share a passion for your craft but they also want to teach online. They have a knack for technology and an entrepreneurial spirit. Logic tells me that our competitors should be our friends. So why isn't it so?

Maybe it just takes the courage of one to reach out and make the first connection.

Perseverance

I grew up in Australia. Like other countries the high schools would have a school motto. Some were bold, some were brave, and some were downright aggressive! My school had the stupidest motto of all. Or so I thought.

Every Monday morning the students would assemble in the main courtyard and essentially get an update for the week. We sat for 30 minutes in an uncomfortable cross-legged position (we used to stand but one kid passed out and cracked a tooth). With little to do but sit and listen to the drone of our school principal I would often focus on the large crest for our school. It comprised of a branch, some leaves and three oranges. Underneath it said "persevere".

Perhaps because I was so uncomfortable in that cross legged position for the entire time I grew to really dislike our motto. Persevere? Why not divide and conquer! Beat the competition! Be the BEST!

Twenty years later I cannot think of a single better word to guide a student.

The number one reason that you may not succeed in online teaching is perseverance. People give up. People expect quick and easy results. People rarely persevere.

If you are willing to commit to helping people, to building something of value, then you will succeed. It is a marathon of a project, and that is why we have to start from a place of passion rather than being incentivized by money.

Don't Believe People Who Boast

Social media has unleashed a tidal wave of lies. Like the misleading photoshop we witness in fashion, social media wants you to believe that your friends lives really are *that* good. They are having fun *all* the time, and traveling to exotic places every second weekend.

Online business has its share of posers too. People who launch their first course to find a six figure pot of gold. People who have 100,000 subscribers on their email list. Don't take the bait. The only overnight successes I have known were several years in the making.

Perseverance In Online Education

Perseverance in online education means not giving up if you are only broadcasting to an audience of one. It means that even if you are only making a trickle of income for the first several years, you still keep looking for better ways to help people. It also is a mindset that doesn't need external adulation to forge ahead, you need intrinsic motivation and belief in what you are doing.

If what you are doing is helping people, then it is worth doing. Persevere and you will find the success you are looking for.

Where do I start?

Good question.

In the beginning, the amount of tasks to complete can seem overwhelming. These tasks will multiply for several years, so my best advice is to enjoy the problem solving aspect of online business. It can be rewarding, and quite addictive, to conquer one small challenge after the other.

You are constructing something important. Focus on each building block as if it was crucial for the entire structure.

You are already armed with a certain skill set and chunks of knowledge. This might embolden you to skip a few steps, because you think they are obvious. In my experience, if there is a weak link anywhere in the chain, it will come back to haunt you. I encourage you to be thorough, comprehensive, and disciplined in the early stages.

But I haven't answered your question…

Where do you start? You start with a solid understanding of the concepts, and if you are at the end of this book then you are now familiar with them. These core concepts will guide everything you do and inform your choices.

The nitty gritty part that comes next is hard to navigate. This includes a broad swath of tasks like domains, hosting, LMS, images, audio, video, text, downloads, uploads, security, payment processing… the list goes on, and on, and on.

For this I have created courses at **theonlinemusicteacher.com** where I will take you through the tasks in a systematic process that builds a strong foundation for success, and helps you understand how each part will impact your business as a whole.

The next part of your journey is the technique. It is the means to an end, and that end is helping people.

The more people you help, the more successful you will be.

Persevere.