



Making the Leap from Products to Membership with John Tuggle

Callie: [00:00:00] Welcome to episode four of Behind the Membership. In this episode I'm talking with John Tuggle from Learning Guitar Now and John has actually had his online business for over 10 years now. And in this episode we're going to talk about how he went from selling DVDs books and courses to an online membership model. We also have a great discussion about some of the challenges in running a membership site including content creation and how to deal with ill health when you're running a membership. John has a huge amount of information to share, so let's dive straight in.

Callie: [00:00:43] Welcome John. And thanks for joining me on the show today. Your membership site is called Learning Guitar Now and it's for people who play blues guitar. Can you tell us a little bit more about the membership and what it offers, who it's for.

John: [00:00:55] Sure. Hi Callie. Thanks for having me on. My pleasure to be here. I've learned so much from you guys. Yes. So I run a site called Learning Guitar Now it's all about learning how to play blues guitar. So instead of focusing on beginner guitar you know all those different genres of guitar, I just focus on blues and slide guitar and been doing this for for a while now it's been almost 10 years I've been doing, you know, selling guitar lessons online. So it's been it's been really awesome doing the whole thing.

Callie: [00:01:27] 10 years that's an impressive innings.

John: [00:01:31] Thanks It's just been a lot, I've seen a lot of things come and go. It's been a lot of ups a lot of downs and a lot of good times and a lot of stressful times but overall I would never want to do anything else. It's so awesome running it.

Callie: [00:01:43] Awesome. So has the focus always been so niched down to like blues guitar

in particular or did that kind of evolve over time.

John: [00:01:53] It really has 'cos you know I've been teaching private lessons since I was around 20 or 21 years old. So for a long time. I got the idea to, I wanted to see how to teach more students because you can only have a certain amount of students when you teach private one on one. There is only so many hours a day. And then people work and people go to school. So I was like I'm going to write a guitar book and so back in 2006 I had that idea. And so I spent about you year putting this book together and I was going to sell books. So that was the initial plan and I launched it 2007 and it completely bombed. I didn't really sell any books. I think I sold, well I felt awesome because I sold one e-book on my site back in 2007 that's when Learning Guitar Now actually started. And it was an amazing feeling just to sell that book for like \$20. But you know I didn't sell another one. I didn't sell anything for like over a year after that so that was like a complete let down in the beginning. So that's kinda how it all started.

John: [00:03:06] And then I moved to video. And so when I started and I did the ebook it was all about beginner guitar, that's what the book was, it was only about beginners because I taught tonnes of beginner guitar lessons. That's what I thought people would want to see. And while that is true I've found that what I really had passion for was playing slide guitar. So when I decided to revamp the site and re put it out in 2008 January I said I'm just going to go all in for what exactly I want to do. And I didn't really see many people doing slide guitar out there like Duane Allman, Derek Trucks. So I made a DVD of how to play like Duane Allman, Derek Trucks style slide guitar.

John: [00:03:50] And that is what I'm really passionate about and that so happens what was really successful. So I was kind of like that's what I've always really enjoyed playing for many years. And then after a while I was like well forget what people say what people think I should do. I'm just going to do what I want to do, what I feel I'm passionate about. And that has led to me doing this thing for a living. Because if I would have stayed with beginner guitar videos. I mean I probably wouldn't be doing this right now. Because there's billions of guitar lessons for beginners and anyone can teach that. It's not really that difficult. So I felt like I had a niche of how, or my specific method of how to teach slide and blues guitar and that's kind of how it all came about.

Callie: [00:04:36] Awesome. Yeah I love that you've got that particular niche because as you said there's so many other guitar sites out there especially now and there probably would have been quite a lot back then as well. But having that kind of very particular style and and things really makes you stand out in the marketplace there and as you said, are you doing this full time now.

John: [00:04:56] When I first started in 2008, well I was doing it in 2008 I had a separate part time job but I was also teaching fifty kids a week - high schoolers, teenagers and some adults. So I had 50 private lessons and I also played in a wedding band. I played that every weekend. I mean I played in numerous bands at that point in time I only want to play in a band that's

going to bring in some money. so I did have the wedding band going, about 40 to 50 students a week. You know for years and then I had this other part time job that when I started the, you know when I relaunched Learning Guitar Now second time in January of 2008 I quit that other part time job and just did those three things. And then a year, lets say about six months into that I got rid of all the private lessons. And in 2010 about June or July. Somewhere in 2010 I quit that wedding band. And so I've been doing this all the time for seven years.

Callie: [00:05:59] That's awesome.

John: [00:06:00] It was fun. Like it was hard to transition out of teaching students and playing all those gigs because that was a significant, that was about half my income. So what I decided to do is say I will be done with doing this because I was just really tired and I don't have any free time on the weekends because I have to play almost every single you know Saturday sometimes Fridays and then there was practice involved and then I'm running the website from 7 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon then I'm teaching at like 4 to 7 or 7:30 at night. I'm tired. This is like too much I just want to do one thing now. And so I dropped those two things and I about doubled my sales after I did that. Because I had more time to focus on what I was doing.

John: [00:06:43] In the beginning it was like it was all about I need to create a lot of content because I mean having one DVD, I mean for most people I'm not going to sell thousands upon thousands. It's all about building a library of content people can buy. So that's where my main focus was. And I also had a lot of ideas. So I had like one DVD and I had like plans for my second DVD and third four five and six. And then I went to blues guitar and I was going to do one two three four five and six. And then I was going to do like, well I did these 'play like series' with lessons in the style of artists. And I was like well if I want to do all that I gotta have more time. And so that's kind of why I quit all that in 2010 and went all in completely. And so it's been going awesome ever since then.

Callie: [00:07:34] Awesome So you started with the DVDs and the individual courses. When did you bring the membership element into things.

John: [00:07:40] Well membership came in, lets see, I believe it was November of 2014. So about two and a half years now I've been doing the membership site. And the thing about doing DVDs and downloads was like I can have an amazing month if I came out with a new DVD. And then it would, sales could be you know kind of slow the next month, slower than what I need it to be. You always have like ups and downs but I was always like you know come out with a DVD or two and it would be great sales. But the next month would be like a I made half the amount I made last month. So it was so varied in sales we were doing, or when I did DVDs and downloads.

John: [00:08:25] So that was the idea with a membership site it was like the only way to really have a steady recurring income is to have recurring income that's guaranteed for the most part and start working on getting subscribers. So that was one of the ideas, that was

one of the main ideas behind it. Also I felt like you could learn better if you have a membership site because it's like when you learn guitar there's so many things you have to learn. So if you buy one DVD then how do you reference DVD 6 from DVD 3 and DVD 3 to DVD 4 and 4 to 1 and reference you have to have all of them. But then the user experience is awful. Because you have to pop in the DVD 3 then go to the DVD 6, pop it in, fast forward.

John: [00:09:15] Membership site you can go instantly to everything. And so that's kind of been my plan is to really you can just make the learning experience so awesome with online you just jump to any place any lesson anywhere. I thought that was a really sweet idea. I wanted to do it in 2008 but it really wasn't possible for me to put all that technology together it was just too much stuff to configure and it was kind of clunky back then.

Callie: [00:09:47] Yeah and I think with your kind of topic you need kind of a good amount of base courses as well to start that membership with I think in order to get the most value. Are you still selling the individual courses as well or is the focus entirely on the membership now.

John: [00:10:06] I mean I'm pretty much focused on the membership site but I still sell the courses as individual downloads. Not all of them but some of them, the most popular ones. I've tested it to where I just went membership only for three weeks or so and didn't really have any more people sign up than normal. So almost like, it seems now if I have a course that has a price and people can see like I can buy all these and it's going to cost thousands of dollars. I don't know at this point it seems like it's at some point I might remove the downloads but right now it seems like people it doesn't really matter to them. So I would say downloads are probably about 25 percent of my income now.

Callie: [00:10:51] OK so the membership still makes up the majority.

John: [00:10:54] Yeah it's a lot, a lot of the income coming in now is predominately membership. You know if I have like an off month it's nowhere near as low as it was in the past and that's because you keep getting the monthly members and so that's the main focus. If I need to make some quick money I can just release a download if I want. It's kind of nice having both options really right now. So until I get a certain amount of monthly members that I feel really really comfortable with I'll probably just keep selling downloads because right now like I tested it didn't have any impact in getting more members. I thought if I removed downloads that might be like double the members but it didn't really work like that. I got about the same amount so I was like well might as well keep selling the downloads and take the money.

Callie: [00:11:48] Yeah I think you're always going to have some people that prefer that just kind of one off payment downloadable content.

John: [00:11:53] I also found some people live out the country and they didn't really have the greatest Internet access but they can download the lessons but streaming them was harder. But I think in the future that's going to change because the lowest internet access is going to

be pretty decent. I think five 10 years from now you'll probably be able to stream probably 4k easy. Like over 4G whatever you want to call it however many years from now.

Callie: [00:12:24] Yeah it's going to be interesting to see how technology changes the future membership sites. I think definitely.

John: [00:12:30] Things are just so. I mean there's so many different things that you can do now because of technology. I mean I can record a three hour lesson and upload that thing in different segments and pieces and it can be brought to you in HD really quickly. You know back in 2009 it would take seven hours to upload one download and they would fail and then you'd have to start again. So now days it's just insane what you can do with the fiber and all that stuff people can get like video instantly on their phone or whatever. You know it's become it's everywhere now. So it's really awesome for membership site owners I think cos video was hard in 2008/2009.

Callie: [00:13:15] So is the amount, the majority of your content is that video based then that you're creating now.

John: [00:13:21] Yeah I pretty much do all video stuff. I used to write blog posts a pretty good amount. These days I find that people enjoy the videos more. I do think that blog posts are helpful but people just want to see the video really and you can supplement it with a blog post. I usually just do a lot of free lessons instead of like writing a piece. But I've moved all my written stuff that I want to do to the forum. And so if people have questions then I'll just write in the forum. You know answers to multiple questions about a course.

John: [00:13:57] And that's another thing about having the membership site. I have a forum available when people have a question about a course you can instantly answer them. And that can be searchable. And that's huge for me because I have people ask a lot of questions about all these technical things and concepts about lessons and so I find I get less and less e-mail now that more people ask questions in the forum because then it's just searchable. People ask all these questions and then when anyone joins they search the forum and they can find everything. And that's happened in the last year. So especially since I started using IPBoard more, it's just a really robust platform and the search is amazing

Callie: [00:15:30] Yeah and I think you know we get a lot of members on our site as well who actually do search, before they actually ask something and you know you don't necessarily get that a lot of the time with other kinds of forums where people actually proactively use the search.

John: [00:15:52] In the future it'll make my life so much more easier when you know there's just so many questions have been answered. To me it's just more content in the membership site that people really want to see because if people see other people asking questions and it's answered that makes them feel good about I think what they purchased. It's like oh I'll probably get some attention.

Callie: [00:16:18] Yes definitely. I think so and do you find that a lot of your members do make use of the community.

John: [00:16:24] They do. I think I can keep getting more people to use it. You know the more that I like ask questions about things the more I engage with people the more people use it. So it's always a trade off of like creating content versus trying to build the forum and trying to market the website and doing everything just takes a lot of time. So it's kind of choosing your battle but trying to have a plan that is you know every week I go through and do, is you know what I try to do. I'm not perfect. Sometimes I'll get into a course and I really want to get it going once I get wrapped into that it's hard to change brain sometimes but you really have to learn how to do it.

Callie: [00:17:04] Yeah, I tend to when I'm creating courses tend to block out kind of the week just for the course because I know once I'm in that zone of creating the content it's easier to just kind of stay in that and keep going.

John: [00:17:16] Yeah once you get into that mindset of creativity like I don't ever want to leave that because that's what brings in the most members I think. It's the new lessons and the new ideas about teaching that when I'm creating something I get really into it. It's you know if you go to something different then you can forget where you're at and it's hard to get back. So having some time carved out for just creating stuff and not having any interruptions seems to, that will happen more often because if I'm scouring the site you know watching people on the site or just the analytics can drive you insane after awhile if you look at them too much. But it's really exciting to see what's going on and what you're doing. You want to analyze it but then at the end of the day you've got to create something eventually I think that's what keeps members in there. They always want to see something new. Even if it's not like a tonne, that's what I've found. Even if it's not a tonne of content you're creating. It can be one five minute lesson but if it's new people are like, ah That's awesome.

Callie: [00:18:20] Yes definitely. And you mentioned before that you put out free lessons as well so are they from the courses that you're creating or are these lessons that you create separately.

John: [00:18:28] About half of them are just little tidbits from all the courses I've created and then the other half are from my video podcast. You know I'll put out usually once maybe twice a month depending on how much time I have. And those are just straight out free lessons not associated with any course and those have upgrades for the membership site.

John: [00:18:49] So if you're a member you'll get the tab, the music backing track and interactive video connected to the music as well. So you get all these extra features and that also helps bring in new members as well when I put out those little lessons and I advertise it like if you want all the extras then you can join the membership site. So I'll spend some time doing that every month. And that brings in more members as well.

Callie: [00:19:15] Yeah I love that approach of kind of having that little bit extra on your free content for your members I think that works really well. Especially with a topic like yours where you know you can give a lot of value for free and then you know there is extra stuff like the tabs and notations and things you can give to members without it being a whole extra extra thing.

John: [00:19:35] Yeah people really like the free lessons and it's not like it's a lesson that's like not, well I try to make them where they're good as possible and you're gonna learn like one specific thing. I'm not going to give you the backstory of everything. You know all you can learn the future all the connections to it. But you're gonna learn that one thing really well. And then like I said if you want the music, the backing track, jam along and stuff like that, join the membership site. Seems to be appealing to people you know you want to give out a free lesson that is really good. If you don't do one that's good the people are like who cares so it's got to be on the level of our record it the same way as I do my courses, three camera angles and all the audio set up, mic on the amp, lavelier, all the bells and whistles and what not. And it can take a whole day just to do one of those depending on how much I planned it out. But I think people really want to see quality. Even if it's free these days.

Callie: [00:20:36] Yeah definitely I think quality definitely makes you stand out now and especially with the kind of topic you're teaching where it is very hands on it's very visual. People need to see that actually they can learn from you. So I think that's where the free lessons approach comes in really well.

Callie: [00:20:52] What's been the biggest challenge you've actually had since you started your membership site then.

John: [00:20:56] I mean there's always a number of challenges I think when you go into some kind of venture like this. Sometimes it can be hard to get creative sometimes and you can't figure out what shall I make. And so you know that just happens. You know you can't be creative every day of the week. The biggest thing that's helped me is just not get frustrated and stop. Because with creative stuff you're trying to teach someone something you've got to create a lesson that's really good. You don't want to put something out there that's worthless. You know which is I'm just going to put it out because I didn't feel creative today and this is all I've got. Sometimes I'll just be like well I'm done I can't figure out anything more right now. So I'll come back to it. And usually I'll take a day off come back the next day and have tons of creativity. So I think being creative like it's not really something that you can just on demand like make happen just be no, not get so frustrated that I'm not really creative and just takes time to stop thinking about it. Often it'll bring out the creativity.

John: [00:22:01] Another thing that's been really difficult is well I had some physical challenges over the last few years I never had before so I didn't really understand how that would work. And so that was really hard to get used to.

[00:22:16] I had a sinus problem. So I ended up having sinus surgery. after you have sinus surgery it's hard to speak normal so I was like I can't make any lessons. Luckily I had the membership site already going so I was getting the recurring income. And that was really nice. The problem was taking medication being on random pills and what not for getting over the surgeries.

[00:22:43] It's like wow this is really hard to create content. I was like am I ever going to be able to do this. I eventually got back into it but it was a challenge which you don't really think about. You always think about I'm going to be healthy forever. Until something happens. So in the last three years I've had the surgery it took a year to completely get over. And then it also turned out I had some kind of a TMJ issue. The only thing I could do to help that was to get these Invisalign braces. So that was a challenge getting used to OK now I have to take these things out, record and put them back in because you're supposed to wear them like 22 hours a day. So I mean I think some of those personal things can come up. Physical things can come up and just having you know self-esteem about what I'm doing is good because you're going to get negative feedback sometimes and dealing with just dealing with all that in one can be difficult. I remember y'all talking about having this little sheet of paper with people that say good things about your membership site. That's what I found helps me as well.

[00:23:49] Someone writes a good review or has a good you know time or has really learned something from the lessons and they'll post it in the forum and that gives me the mindset to be like oh yeah that's why I'm doing this. Because everything else can like go to hell. But then you're like well that's why I started in the first place. If you have lower sales or you know things are just not going the way you want it to. Looking back at that and saying well like the mission is to teach people how to play guitar. And that's what I'm doing so we have to move forward. And having that kind of mindset really helps because everyone can have personal challenges. And everyone's going to have at some point some kind of physical challenge. You're going to have negative reviews. It doesn't really matter who you are there's someone who's not going to like you and they're going to tell it to the whole internet.

Callie: [00:24:39] Yeah I think and I think that's the thing you can have the best, the best membership site in the world. There's always going to be somebody that doesn't like it as you said. And yeah you are always sooner or later going to have some kind of issue whether it's something that comes up in your personal life an illness things like that. You know I think you're spot on that you know we're all going to have those challenges. And kind of finding a way to approach that.

Callie: [00:25:01] I do think you know for me personally having a membership site in some ways takes the pressure off those challenges because you do have the ongoing recurring income coming in anyway. Yes. You need to serve them and things but it's not quite the same as you know if you're out for a few months with illness and you're focused entirely on client work then you kind of you know you can't be out there hustling to get new clients and that tends to be a lot more stressful I think than when you have a membership.

John: [00:25:29] Yeah. You know I guess it's lucky I had all those sinus problems you know while I had, after I started the membership site. And so I was getting recurring revenue and new members signing up and I wasn't putting out as much content. And I think another thing is just being honest with members, hey I've had some issues. like I've been going to make some more content but you know things are a bit difficult right now. I think people appreciate honesty about what's going on with everything rather than like silence.

Callie: [00:25:59] Yeah definitely and I think yeah you're spot on there if you're honest with your members if things do come up then nine times out of ten or nine point nine times out of ten members are understanding and they're going to be fine with that.

John: [00:26:14] Yeah definitely.

Callie: [00:26:16] And I loved what you said about being creative as well because I find that as well if you try and push through when you're not actually feeling creative you just end up creating something that you know you don't want to put out anyway because you know it's not your best. Whereas if you actually just step away for a day and you do something else then you often find that the next day you come back to it and you know that light bulb's switched on.

John: [00:26:36] Yeah it's amazing how just like stopping and maybe going for a walk getting outside or just not, getting off the computer. When you run a membership site you can be glued on the computer like 24/7.

Callie: [00:26:48] Yes definitely. Definitely.

John: [00:26:51] Trying to see what's going on, worrying about sales and trying to figure out what you're going to do next. Because there's so many things to do you can just drive yourself crazy sometimes trying to analyze everything.

Callie: [00:27:04] Yes definitely. So if those are the kind of challenges what's been kind of the highlight or your favorite thing of running the membership site.

John: [00:27:12] Well I mean one of my favourite things is is creating a lot of the material. Not really doing the video but I love to write music and I've written songs and what not in the past. But now it's like, I'm not writing my own songs or anything but I get to get up every day and create a drum pattern and play bass and play piano and play guitar and create some music. And that's what I really enjoy doing that is putting stuff together that sounds cool. So that's one of the things I really enjoy doing. You know having that time and access because before I was doing all this for a living it was like I had to work, I always worked like random jobs and what not, played gigs and taught lessons but it's like you know never got the time to create music.

John: [00:28:01] So another thing is just like the recurring revenue is nice as well. Because

when you have things going on like, like I was telling you earlier I just bought a house recently. And so trying to find a house to buy takes a lot of time. So that gives me some more time. You know I'm not really structured where like a regular job I have to be okay Monday through Friday I have to go nine to five.

[00:28:23] Well to buy a house in Atlanta there's not a whole lot of houses out there so you have to be really aggressive. And it's helped so much to where I could be like ok Monday morning I can go look at houses and do all the stuff with realtors. So having time to do and then having time to just take breaks during the day because I'm like I've been doing this for so long, 10 years. You know I like to have things go the way I like them to as far as like during the day I don't want to be stuck doing nine to five Monday to Friday. I've never really got along well with doing that.

[00:29:03] So it's nice to just take a break to maybe go exercise in the middle of the day. Or you know go do something else or whatever you know you want to do, play guitar or whatever you want to do.

Callie: [00:29:13] Yeah I love that freedom that running a membership gives you in terms of just you know you can do what you want with your day you're not chained to your desk between 9:00 to 5:00.

John: [00:29:22] Yeah. I mean it takes a lot of work to get to this point. You know that guy Dave Ramsey has a good quote. He says If you live like no one else soon you can live like no one else. I think that's good for a membership site because in the beginning you're going to work all the time.

John: [00:29:44] You know I've got to a certain point where I can do what I want within reason as long as I've got everything set up right. But it gives you a lot more freedom than I think you'll ever have with any other type of business.

Callie: [00:29:57] Yeah yeah I definitely agree with that. So I'm going to shift gears now and let's talk about what you're doing to actually grow your membership then. And you know we've talked about the free lessons but in terms of getting people through the door and bringing in new members each month. What's one other thing that's worked really well for you.

John: [00:30:16] Well creating new premium content works really well. So if I come out with a new course you know I usually sell it as a download. But you can also join the membership site. So when I sell as a download I'll sell a pretty good amount of them but also get a ton of new members. So some people like to download. Some like the membership. More these days people are just joining the membership. So consistently creating new content that can be accessed in the membership site and promoting that to people can really get members. Because sometimes I come out with premium content that you can't buy as a download the only way to get is through the membership site. So that works well.

John: [00:31:02] So another thing is. Well one of the biggest challenges I guess you have is your retention of your members. So getting the old members to rejoin and promoting new stuff that you've, that I've created and then marketing to my previous members will get new members because you know if someone has joined they're probably not going to last forever but there might be something they want to see on down the line. And then having them on a newsletter is you know, I use ActiveCampaign and have them you know as a tag that says these people are not active. It helps extremely because you can target all these people who are not active anymore because they're more likely going to join because they joined before. And I find that happens a lot.

John: [00:31:50] And then also another thing that people I think like doing. I've seen happen in the past is they'll have a monthly membership and go ahead and convert to a yearly at some point in time.

[00:32:03] So that's the main things I've been working on. A lot of newsletter you know promotions in the free newsletter and promoting to the regular members who are active and then promoting to members who are not active. I think having the newsletter saves you because if I didn't have a newsletter segmenting all these different people down it would make it much more difficult to make money because without the newsletter how do I contact anyone who's a member.

Callie: [00:32:33] Yes.

[00:32:34] How do I tell them new stuffs out. They're not going to like go to Facebook and see everything you post. And that's the only way that I have found that, I think the only way to stay in business and keep going is to have a newsletter that's segmented. If you don't have a list of customers I mean that's terrible. That saves your business I think just a list of people who have bought and you know a list of people who have not bought.

Callie: [00:33:00] Yeah I think that's a great tip there with the newsletter front. And when you're, you were mentioning about the premium content when you release new content that that kind of brings a lot of people in. Are you essentially doing that as a mini launch each time you release a course or how are you doing that.

John: [00:33:16] Yeah well I've learned a couple of things from you guys I've tried in the last couple of months that has gotten a lot of new members. And so these days I've been creating courses that's say like two maybe three hours long and then I'll release it section by section. So instead of taking the course and putting the whole thing out, I'll take week one we're going to learn part one. And then I'll promote it to the all-access, the members. And then maybe I'll promote it to the non members as well or I could also promote that it's coming out but that you can start learning now to our free members. so many different ways I can promote it. So then it'll last for like four to five weeks of just adding a new lesson. I find it also helps with retention with current members because like, well I don't want to quit now I'm not

going to get that lessons that's coming out in three or four weeks. And so that can help that. And then at the end of it you know people that didn't really want to join I'll promote it to them to buy as a download and give them a discount. So that has really helped extremely. Just having that course that's just kind of drip fed over time over a month or so. I've been doing that for the last few months that's really worked really really well.

Callie: [00:34:34] Awesome. So you mentioned retention there as well and that helps with retention is there anything else in particular you focus on when it comes to retention and keeping people coming back month after month.

John: [00:34:45] Yeah I think the forum. Just trying to stay active in the forum. Answering people's questions. There's a couple of other things I want to do in the future just as like, I haven't had as much time. I want to allow people to have like they can post a video like once a month, I think you guys are doing that. I did it in past and it helps really well. You post a video or get some feedback, specific feedback like once a month or something. Post where you're playing at and then I'll give you a plan to move forward. I just didn't really want to jump into that too much and have perhaps too many members requesting that that I'd be so busy just figuring out what to tell them.

John: [00:35:25] I think most people just kind of want to browse around lurk for the most part on the forums. But there's certain people that want to get really involved. I think the more involved you get with something the more you get out of it. So if I get people involved then try to give them a plan to start with. That's another thing that I try to do is when people start I think it helps with retention if I've got an automation set up in active campaign for like two, two and a half months they're going to receive an email every you know couple of weeks or so that gives them like an action step to do. So if they have something complete they're more likely going to stay. I want to extend that even further and right when they join here is like five steps you can do to start. You know the goal is for someone to learn something. And so there are a lot of things you can do to get people to learn better. A lot of times if people are just left alone they'll just browse everything and be like OK. I'm done.

Callie: [00:36:29] Yeah You kind of almost have to teach people how to learn first of all.

John: [00:36:33] Yeah I didn't really know that it was such an issue. I've been playing since I was 16/17. So it's always been ingrained into me you know what to do. Some people just don't know what to do or even if they have a lesson in front of them. They don't see exactly what they should be doing next. So laying out all of those actions steps if you learn this now what do you do and how do you implement it. So there are certain things that I think helps people learn a lot better. So just keep trying to get people to do those and I just have to keep saying it over and over and over again it seems like.

Callie: [00:37:13] Yeah I think having those action steps is is a great approach to getting people kind of onboard and yeah using your site as you want them to to make progress which you know that's what it's all about really is helping them to achieve their goals as well.

John: [00:37:27] Yeah. Because if you join the site and you see all these lessons and you have no idea what to do your probably going quit at some point because you have no clue what's going on. So I think that's one of the things I want to continue to make even better is just giving a process and then that plan to just put into action. And when people start seeing results they want to stay. When people get really into it they start having more fun with the guitar you know it's not as much fun to have a guitar if you can't play it. But the better you get, the better you want to get.

Callie: [00:38:03] Yeah. I think that you know that combination of actually enjoying what you're doing and getting results from it is that's kind of the holy grail of membership sites really if you've got your members doing that.

John: [00:38:17] No matter what you're teaching if you get better at something it's more fun no matter what it is. And then having other people to tell about it. You know if you're getting better in this area you're going to say I just learned this or you know post a video of what you've done that kind of helps people as well.

Callie: [00:38:36] Yeah. So do you actually, talking of that and about people sharing their results. Do you actually use affiliates and things for your membership site. Or do you just promote the site yourself.

John: [00:38:47] I just promote it myself. Day one I decided I'm not going to have anyone promote my site ever. I don't know if I'll ever change that but so far the people that wanted to promote my site I didn't want them to promote. I decided just to say forget affiliate marketing because it became so like so crazy about how people just talk about. OK I never wanted someone to say go learn at Learning Guitar Now you'll start learning to play blues guitar in one day guaranteed no questions asked. All this like 24 hours you'll be playing like Clapton. It's complete nonsense. It can take years to do all that stuff. And for a lot of affiliate stuff that I saw was like people promoting different projects. That was like wasn't true. And then they buy like Google Adwords. All saying like don't know click here unless you don't want to be a better guitar. It's always like negative marketing I guess is what you call it. Don't Learning Guitar Now until you watch this first. I did what anyone ever saying that.

Callie: [00:40:07] Yeah I think it's good if you can control the message of what's being said. Because you know you don't want people coming in under false pretenses or expectations.

John: [00:40:18] There's a couple guys that do something very similar to what I do. But we don't make any money off each other but we promote each other randomly through e-mail and Twitter and Facebook just because we think what each others doing is cool. And so that kind of works out. Because I get emails like Yeah I got your info from this guy that runs this site. We're not making any money off each other non of them have affiliate sites set up to where you you can make money promoting their site and somehow that kind of seems better to me.

Callie: [00:40:51] I love that kind of organic promotion between each other.

Callie: [00:40:56] So let's talk about life as a membership site owner now. I know you mentioned before that you have a lot more freedom now in terms of when you do things. But what does a typical day look like for you what kind of things are you working on on a day to day week to week basis.

John: [00:41:12] Well normally I get up pretty early you know usually around 6:00 6:30 try to get some kind of stretching and just have a protein drink and just get into the mindset of like going to work. And then for the first hour or two just really pretty much analyze what's going on with the site and answer all the email. And see if there is anything you know if the whole sites blown up or something there's always seems like some issue happening. So just make sure everything's all right and then start working on Okay what do I want to teach you know. The first couple of hours is just kind of like getting into it and getting everything taken care of maintenance, maybe any kind of accounting that needs to happen. And then from then I will spend usually a couple of hours playing guitar or trying to work on something that I've been recording and putting it together because there are so many steps involved in recording a course. I usually have like five or six courses ready to start working on them.

[00:42:17] So I'll work on the steps involved in completing that course so I might for instance get up and say well I have the idea down but now lets write down the lessons. And at the end you want to be able to do this so I'm going to write a piece. And then I'll play the drum I'll record the drums and these days just computer drums I'm using sounds really awesome. Play the bass you know maybe play keyboard, piano, then play guitar parts then write what they're going to learn and then video myself doing it.

[00:42:49] So hopefully if I'm on a good day that can all happen in one day. But usually it may take a few tries. From there I'll send off what I do to some other guy that writes all the music out for me. I used to do it myself but it takes so much time. I found this guy his name's Levi Clay and he's in London. So I just send him my video and then he'll transcribe it and then you know a few days later he'll send it back and then I'll just look at it and if there's anything that needs to be changed we update it. And then now I've got a base of what I'm going to teach for the course and then I got to work backwards from there of creating all the lessons. I'll use Evernote to write down all the lessons and what I think I should go into them. And then print out all the materials that I'll have to teach and then from there I'll start recording each lesson and then after I get each lesson recorded it's all about editing audio and exporting and importing all the camera video files and syncing them up and replacing the audio with the edited audio. And then it's just video editing the whole thing.

Callie: [00:44:05] So apart from Levi then do you do everything yourself or do you have more help.

John: [00:44:09] No I've been doing everything myself. I've tried to find ways to make

everything go really quickly. I've always wanted to get a video editor but the way I've got it set up it's not really taking that long anymore. And also too sometimes there's things that I say that I'm not really sure if I want keep or not. And so it's helpful for me to just listen to the whole thing after I've done it and even beforehand I might say something here but then change it later and I might keep one or the other. So at this point I don't really know if I could get a video maybe a video editor to do some other tasks than what I'm talking about because I need to hear that it make sense overall. If it doesn't then I'll just cut that whole piece and I'll restructure some parts.

John: [00:44:56] So a lot of what I do is editing and recording and then analyzing the site and figuring out what to do next with all the marketing ideas. And then I keep doing that over and over again because it could take weeks to put together a course and finally get it out.

Callie: [00:45:15] And how far in advance do you tend to kind of plan and create your courses.

John: [00:45:19] It's usually a couple months. So right now I've got like three or four that are in the works and I've gotten to the point where I'm releasing one by week and we're on about the final week so I'll release something I finished three weeks ago this week to the members. The last piece. And then at the end of the week it'll become available as a download.

[00:45:43] So the rest of this week I got another piece that I'm working on and I should be able to get it going and then I'll start doing that whole process and then I'll start releasing it piece by piece here in a couple weeks. So usually I'm like usually a month ahead or things just kind of overlap one another.

Callie: [00:46:02] So aside from how it's kind of changed your day to day schedule and tasks, what impact would you say having a membership had on your life and business.

John: [00:46:20] Yeah it's completely changed my entire life. I mean I've never really worked a regular job ever. I did graduate with a business degree in college but then after that I went and played gigs all the time and taught lessons. And so it's hard to make enough money when you're teaching lessons and doing all part time jobs and what not. You just pretty much live pretty broke basically. Starting the website you know completely changed my life to where everything was like wow. I'm actually doing pretty well now. And then having the membership site it like gives me even more free time. I spent so much time just working on the computer creating the lessons that like I said I had the wear the Invsalign braces and what not, so it's given me a chance to get back in shape again. Because you can get out of shape just eating bad food and sitting at the computer and just not feel good anymore.

John: [00:47:24] So it's given me a lot of time just to not have to work as much and start exercising. I jog about six days a week I go to the gym probably three or four times a week. Another thing that's awesome it's like I can cook anything I want to eat. That may sound like kind of crazy but if you work at a job you're going to have to make your lunch and take it.

Now I can cook whenever I want in my kitchen. It can be extremely healthy and I found that it's healthier. I just feel better overall and you can take a, you know if things are going on that you want to do during the week you can just take a day or two off during the week as long I've got everything done and maybe you know go hiking or something and you know hang out with people. It's really awesome to have that much flexibility. I've had it for so long now that I probably have forgotten what it's like. I remember what it's like that you know you have to be somewhere all the time. And it's so awesome not to have to be anywhere.

Callie: [00:48:29] Yeah. Just that that freedom aspect and being your own boss essentially.

John: [00:48:34] Yeah because I mean I can just if it's a nice day and be like well I'm just not going to work today. And that doesn't really occur at any other job. I think it's worth all the time and effort it takes to get to that point where you're like I took a week off and went to the beach a couple months ago, you know it was kind of out of the blue because I felt like I needed a break. And it was like to get to the next level my brain just has got to stop. So I mean just doing things like that. It's just so nice to have the freedom and the ability during the day just to do whatever you think needs to be done.

Callie: [00:49:14] Yeah that that's absolutely my favorite thing to be honest.

John: [00:49:18] It's also nice not to have a boss telling you what to do because you know it's just not. It's so much easier. You know you just have to have a lot of discipline. If you have the discipline to get up every morning which I do and like get things going and have things in place and ready to roll you'll be fine. But if you find yourself getting up every morning and being like I don't want to work on the membership site you're probably in the wrong business because I'm in a situation where I get up at 6:00 and I'm like I can't wait to start working on it. So I like that feeling too. I enjoy what I do more than any other thing I could ever want to do. To me that's one of the best things you ever have because you're going to have to make money and you're going to have to work at something. So you might as well try to find something that you enjoy the most because you're going to spend years upon years working on something just forever.

Callie: [00:50:14] Yeah I think that's so important and yeah such a good point there about how you might as well be doing something you enjoy. But also I think what you said there as well about needing to have the discipline to actually sit down and work on things is important as well. And I think that's something where you know we see people going wrong as well where because you've got that flexibility sometimes it can be difficult to actually end up doing anything.

John: [00:50:39] Yeah. If you don't love what you do you'll probably end up in that spot because if I did something like how to teach people who want to train dogs that would not interest me at all. So I would not be motivated I would just want to make money that would be it. And it seems what brings success for people is finding something that they are really passionate about and would just not stop until they made it.

Callie: [00:51:07] Yeah.

John: [00:51:08] It's almost like that tunnel vision where it's like I can't even see failing because I love this so much. Whether that's crazy or not it seems like people that have that seem to make it work.

Callie: [00:51:19] Yeah it's definitely a common thread in success I think.

John: [00:51:22] You've got to be a little bit crazy to think that your idea will work. It seems like people talk about Steve Jobs and all these people who have brilliant ideas they're kind of nuts until they're successful. Oh they're geniuses now but it seems like just to have that mind set where I don't care what it takes I'm going to do everything I can to make this work. Having that initial mindset seems to really help. You know I think you have to have that mindset because people are going to tell you, I mean when I started people didn't say that's probably going to work. I don't think anyone said that's probably going to work. In 2007 I mean I had a failed book and you know trying to sell DVDs and videos on the internet was so bizarre in 2007 2008. And so just trying to go for it and say well this is what I believe I am on this earth to do and I want to move forward with this no matter what I'm going to make it work as hard as I can. That kind of meant everything.

Callie: [00:52:33] Yeah and it's awesome to see how that's evolved for you and how it has been successful for you and how you have managed to grow the site and things.

John: [00:52:41] There's been some difficult times through there there's been some awesome times. But overall you know if you enjoy what you do I mean that's a huge blessing to find. I know there's a lot of people that don't enjoy what they're doing. So I wake up every day grateful that I'm able to do what I do every day because I see people that are not doing what they want to do in life. Wow. I don't ever want to forget. That's always in the back of my mind when I wake up every day it's like well you want to keep doing this. That's a big motivator for me. Just keep moving forward.

Callie: [00:53:19] Yeah I think that's awesome. So going back to the beginning when you first created the membership if you could reset and start again what's one thing you would do differently.

John: [00:53:31] Honestly I wish I would have started the membership site earlier instead of waiting till 2014 because I had this fear that like OK. you know it's different because I would sell like high priced items like high price for my line of work. So maybe a hundred, people would spend maybe a hundred dollars on this one thing. A lot of people. And so to go from like a hundred, a hundred and fifty, two hundred dollars you know DVD bundles to 19.95 a month. I'm like I spent this many years creating all this stuff and now people are going to get it for 19.95. They're not going to buy anything else. So that was always the fear to do it. And also the technology was a little bit harder I think back in 2011. I almost did it 2012 but I

didn't really have the guts. I was like people are buying lots of DVDs, DVDs were 75 percent my income back then in 2012. So I was like well I just didn't have the guts to do it. I went to this conference and learned about all the different CMS that you could use and I wasn't even using WordPress to sell back then I was using something called X cart. It worked really well but it didn't have any kind of subscription thing for it. So I decided to go for Woocommerce back in 2013 and they didn't have any subscription with it.

[00:55:24] It seemed like the subscription stuff was just scattered. I think there was s2Member maybe or Wishlist member. They didn't really work well with selling DVDs downloads and subscriptions. So I was like well if I'm going to do this how am I even going to do it. I make all this money selling DVD and downloads am I just going to say stop all that and then do subscription only and I was very scared about doing that. So that's one of the things I wish I would've done it maybe in like 2013 but that's just kind of the way things worked out I wish I'd started a year and a half earlier or something.

[00:56:38] But other than that. I mean everything went pretty well when I launched back in 2014. I mean really what I wish is y'all you guys would have been around back in 2013. I would have had a better idea of what to do because the first year of running the membership site I had no clue. I was just trying to figure out what the heck's going because taking payments can be confusing if you're doing PayPal then there's failed payments and all this other stuff that can happen. And then custom accounts and all this what not. Trying to build a forum with bbPress. I think it was more difficult to back then and I wish I would have been more prepared to know what was going on because I had no clue I didn't know what to do about retention. I don't know like failed payments would be an issue. That's what I learned real quick. It's like wow failed credit card payments are a big thing.

Callie: [00:57:47] Yeah I always find it funny because it is something that people don't warn you about is failed payments.

John: [00:57:51] You learn to live with it. Work around things and figure out you know e-mails to send out and all this other kind of stuff. But there's a lot that goes on with it. So it would be nice being more prepared for it all but really there was not anything to learn from. You know you guys came at an awesome time because I think you started 2015.

Callie: [00:58:23] Yeah. Yes 2015.

John: [00:58:25] That's what I was looking for all these like you know different places I was trying to learn marketing and stuff from like how to market this membership site from.

Callie: [00:58:35] So what does the future hold then for Learning Guitar Now. What's next for you in the membership is it more of the same or do you have big plans for the future.

John: [00:58:44] Well it is kind of more of the same because that's what's been working. But I'd also like to take some chances with things. I would like to offer like only to members some

type of live one on one you know just very sparse. That if people just really have a problem then they can go you know purchase a live lesson. I don't want to spend too much time but some members really what that I want to make that option available to them. So adding that and then just kind of what I've been doing is kind of restructuring the content where before it was like I made a course and that was it. Now I'm thinking about the whole site as one I'm not just thinking well okay maybe this course is right now I will make this course. But how does it fit together with everything else I already have on there. So basically it's just kind of restructuring everything to make it make a little bit more sense. It's like a step one two three four you know and on and on and on instead of just like course course course. I still want to do a course like system but they are going to be courses that are like put into like steps. It'll be this course but this is like Step Three of this whole gigantic...basically just making it more concise putting things together in a more logical way.

John: [01:00:08] It's not really easy to get it right because I have 130 hours of material. You know it's a lot of material but it's a lot like to me it's all something that needs to be taught. It's unique. It's not like this is like this you know I have a lot of different courses I want to teach and I have a plan of how I want it to go together. I've had this plan ever since 2008 but I couldn't really put that together back then. So I think about you know the next two to five years I could probably be well well put together to where everything can be linked together somehow. And if you're on this section you'll instantly know that you should jump to this section maybe if you want to. I don't really know how it's exactly going to work but trying to get that into my brain. The problem I have is like if someone's going to join the site. They're not, everyone does not start out as like a beginner and everyone's not going to start out as an intermediate and everyone's not going to start out as advanced So you got to have like three different levels of I guess whatever ability there at and getting them into the right funnel is tricky.

Callie: [01:02:26] Yeah it is definitely possible but having kind of catering to the different kind of audience is the different levels. Definitely adds an extra complication in there.

John: [01:02:35] Yeah I mean because if you're an advanced person you don't want to like beginner blues guitar So trying to show people where to go and the right thing based on their level and also based on what do they want to learn. Which sounds hard as I'm talking about it.

Callie: [01:03:25] I've got no doubt you'll find the perfect way as you said it may just take a little bit of time and tweaking.

John: [01:03:30] Yeah I think that's what it what it is. It's just messing around with it and hearing what people have to say about it.

Callie: [01:05:38] I love you've shared some really great tips and advice through out there but if anybody is listening and thinking I'd really love to learn blues guitar where can they find out more about you and the membership.

John: [01:05:53] Yeah well all you have to do is go to learningguitarnow.com and if you want to learn about the membership site on the front page has all access pass is the name. It is the membership site. they can find out all we're all about it there. I also have YouTube channel Facebook Twitter all the usual social media things to go to but mostly go to learningguitarnow.com. You know you know any questions comments send me an email at info@learningguitarnow.com.

Callie: [01:06:25] Awesome. So thanks so much for joining me John and for sharing your journey with us sharing your advice and tips a lot of really valuable stuff there for us. It's been great having you on the show.

[01:06:37] Yeah I really enjoy it Callie. Thanks for having me on. And hopefully some people will get some ideas or inspirations from all the things that I've talked about.

[01:06:48] Thanks once again to John Tuggle for joining me on today's show. I hope you've enjoyed listening. And if you want to catch the show notes or any links mentioned in today's episode then please head on over to themembershipguys.com/BTM4. You can also find John on his membership over at learningguitarnow.com. If you found this episode helpful and there's anything else you'd like to discuss from the episode then please do head on over to our free Facebook group at talkmemberships.com and let me know. I would love to hear your thoughts. Thanks for listening and I will see you next time.

[01:07:28] If you've enjoyed today's episode of behind the membership we invite you to check out the membersiteacademy.com the Member Site Academy is the essential resource for anyone at any stage of starting growing and running a membership web site. So whether you're still figuring out what your idea is going to be or whether your website is already up and running and you're just looking for ways to grow it and attract new members then the Member Site Academy can help you to get to the next level. With our extensive course library, monthly training exclusive member only discounts perks and tools and a supportive active community to help you along the way with feedback encouragement and advice the Member Site Academy is the perfect place to be. For anyone looking to start manage and grow a successful membership web site so check it out.