

*Business Reimagined #68*

## The Future and Opportunity of Online Education with Danny Iny

For online courses to leap to mainstream, it has to transition to real education.

**BUSINESS  
REIMAGINED**

Danny Iny

Danny Iny is the founder of Mirasee, host of the Business Reimagined podcast, best-selling author of multiple books including *Engagement from Scratch!*, *The Audience Revolution*, and the first edition of *Teach and Grow Rich*. He is also creator of the acclaimed Audience Business Masterclass and Course Builder's Laboratory training programs, which have together graduated over 5,000 value-driven online entrepreneurs.



**Voiceover:** This is Business Re-imagined. Every week we talk with thought leaders and revolutionaries who are re-imagining the way business is done in their industries. Like today's guest, our own Danny Iny.

**Danny:** The role of education in our society is to do more than create illiteracy. It's about creating a fluency and these online courses that are for the most part a bunch of whether it's videos or audios or some text and a membership site with very little interactivity, very little support, they just don't deliver on that outcome.

**Voiceover:** This is Business Reimagined with Danny Iny. Today we bring you the second in a series of special business re-imagined episodes where we talk about the past, present, and future of online education. Danny is joined by Jim Hopkinson, the Director of Courses at Mirasee and they discuss where online education is now and where they both would like to see it go. The first step to that is legitimacy and a big part of it is a growing up of the industry, as Danny explains.

**Danny:** I definitely think there has been a growing up of the industry and with that comes from a mainstreaming. Five years ago, and it's a little longer than that, a lot of this industry was inspired by Tim Ferriss's *The 4-Hour Work Week*, which I believe was published in 2007. People kind of had this idea, oh my God, I don't have to be shackled to my job. I don't have to be beholden to my boss. I can make my own destiny, create my own income, it could be more, I could have more freedom. This captivated a lot of people's imagination and a lot of people tried to do it and some were successful and some were not, but when people were successful it was kind of like the teenager who's got the keys to the family car for the first time and it's like check me out, I can do whatever I want. Nobody can stop me. This is amazing.

It was that kind of vibe. You kind of had what you'd expect when people are like tasting a much more meaningful income and freedom for the first time, so people quit their jobs and they started traveling the world, they started essentially indulging in all the fantasies that people have about what life will be like if I won the lottery and could quit my job and that's great for a little while, but at some point people realize that while traveling the world is very nice and some people even enjoy it as an ongoing routine, it's not what most of us aspire to. My picture of success is being at home with my kids, it's not traveling the world or living out of a suitcase or anything like that. With that, I hate my boss, I hate my job, I want to quit, I want to go out on my own, there was a lot of, like the pendulum swinging in the opposite direction away from traditional management and organizational structures, like people thinking either I hate my boss or I hate the people who are reporting to me.

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That's a function of a lot of things, culture and organizations and people not being motivated and you kind of control who your boss is or who your employees are in most of the environments. The counter response was I don't want to have employees, I don't want to work with other people, total freedom. After people had their taste of that and enjoyed it for a little bit they realized that you know what, there's more to life than just making a little bit of money and I want to have a little more of an impact, I want to do something bigger, I want to build bigger things, and while technology has certainly augmented our ability to create things that are meaningful, working independently, working with certainly less human infrastructure, at some point there's a limit to how much you can accomplish all by yourself and you want to work with smart people and as you start realizing that, you also start realizing you know what?

Just because I didn't like my boss or I didn't like the person I worked with at my job six years ago, doesn't mean I don't like people. It doesn't mean I won't enjoy working with people and so there has been a growing up of the industry and in a lot of ways it's looking more like the real world of business, but with an infusion, at least in certain pockets of it, of this energy and vitality and sense of being driven by values that is sometimes lacking in the bigger corporate world. Now, does that mean it's mainstream? I don't know. It's funny. I get asked a lot, you know, have courses, have online courses gone mainstream? Is it the big thing now? The funny thing is that often when people ask me that, they're very much inside this world of online business and online entrepreneurship and what they really mean is as the fads and trends of online business go, is online courses like the hot new model?

In a lot of ways it is. There is a cyclicity within that world of online business, of different business models, and so courses have definitely come into that mainstream. If you're an online marketer, online entrepreneur, courses is probably at least somewhat top of mind for you but as for our courses or the idea of online independent entrepreneurship to create courses mainstream in the broader world, I think we're just starting to see it.

I had an interesting conversation with my wife the other day about a friend of hers who's starting to see a life coach and this whole area of coaching and of independent courses and of, I feel like we're starting to cross the stage from people who in the broader world not having heard of it to like they've heard of it, they know it exists, it's still a little bit on the fringes, it's gone from bleeding edge to kind of leading edge. It's not quite mainstream but it's getting there and it will be in the next few years.

**Jim:**

Yeah, I think we always have to remember, we live this stuff everyday and so we're kind of in our own internet marketing bubble and so when you're asking friends that are in your

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mastermind group or that you talk to online, where you think we are in the stage, it's very different from just your average person. I always say, people ask like, "What's a mastermind group? Why do you need that?" I always say like, "Well you probably have a bunch of friends that you could ask things like hey I'm thinking about quitting my job or I'm thinking about doing, should I move to a different city or something like that, but if you have a question like I'm wondering if I should change up my lead magnet or switch internet e-mail providers for my first impression incentive during my autoresponder drip campaign, there's not a lot of immediate friends that you can ask for advice like that. You do have to remember you're in this bubble sometimes.

**Danny:**

I had a really interesting conversation with our mutual friend Dorie Clark. We were talking about exactly this, how mainstream are our courses becoming and she said it's very analogous to podcasting. Podcasting is growing in popularity and becoming more and more known and clearly anyone who's listening to this interview knows what podcasting is because this is a podcast interview, but our other mutual friend Jordan Harbinger who runs the Art of Charm, which is a huge podcast, and talks about podcasting, one of the most common questions he gets is, "Oh, podcasts, can I get that on YouTube?"

**Jim:**

Wow.

**Danny:**

Most people don't even know. We're so in it we forget that most people don't even know what this is. I feel like that's very analogous to where courses are.

**Jim:**

Absolutely. I mean I fought through, I had a podcast for several years and I got out a little bit too soon and I think kind of the tipping point was when Apple put the podcast icon right on the home screen. I think that's kind of the default is having it on there to make it easier. You didn't have to teach people how to download your podcast anymore, people were starting to get that. Of course, now it gets to the point where it's kind of the cool thing and people have heard of it and I'll have people say to me, "Oh you do this and that, you should start a podcast." I was like, "Yes, I had one from 2007 to 2014 but that ship has passed and maybe I'll double back now that they're cool again."

**Danny:**

That's a really good analogue and you still hear this, "Oh that's really interesting, you should start a blog about it. Oh that's really interesting, you should have a podcast." We're not quite at the stage of, "Oh you're really good at this, you should teach a course," but I think we're a couple of years away.

**Jim:** I think that I still get the question when I'm telling people in online courses and some of the other stuff that I do, and I'll say tentatively, have you heard of Udemy? To some degree in terms of a marketplace, like everyone's heard of the iTunes store, everyone's heard of Amazon, so if you're like, you should do a podcast, everyone knows the iTunes store. If you say, "Oh you should do an eBook," everyone knows the Amazon Kindle, but if you're saying you should do an online course, for people that are looking in the marketplace, not everyone has really heard of Udemy, even though they're probably, along with Linda, one of the dominant players.

**Danny:** Yeah, they are the dominant players but it's just, it's not as mature marketplace.

**Jim:** Then we've seen on the other side of that, for people that want to self-host, not only is there not one or two dominant players, we actually had our content person write an article and found 400 different options for companies such as Teachable or Ruzuku, or Thinkific, or Zippy Courses, for people that want to self-host their online course. How do you see that side of the market filtering out eventually?

**Danny:** Most markets over time they see, it starts with very little options and then fragments and lots of people jump in. You have a ton of options, and then market leaders start to emerge and you're going to see a consolidation. That's probably what we're going to see and we can guess at who some of these players are going to be in the years ahead but for a market leader to emerge, the whole industry has to grow behind the sort of cottage industry that it's just not starting to grow past. For that to happen, eBooks have existed for a long time before Kindle, right? You can get a PDF, you can get Word documents, but it was never a great user experience until you could just get it on your Kindle, you could get it on your phone, you can read it right there on your device and it's a great experience. The quality of the experience, the quality of the outcome the people are paying to get on this platform has to get over a certain threshold and it happened with eBooks, it's kind of happened with podcasts to a certain extent.

We're not quite there with courses. That's very much what I wrote in my book *Teach and Grow Rich* about the first edition originally in September of 2015. It was about this distinction between information and education. The idea that a lot of these so called courses aren't really doing what courses are supposed to do. Something that we've been having a lot of conversations about internally at Mirasee lately are about the distinction between literacy and fluency. If you know nothing about something.



Let's say for example podcasting, you've never heard of podcasts, you don't know what it is, I can take half an hour over coffee and explain to you what a podcast is. Well it's kind of like a radio show that you get on your phone, except you get it kind of pre-recorded and you can listen to it when you want and you subscribe through the Apple iStore etc., you kind of go through a high level overview, and it can be high level or it can be more detailed, but once I've explained it to you, you kind of nod, you get it, you make the connections, the next time someone's talking about this you're going to know what they're talking about, so you're developing a literacy. Me giving you that overview doesn't empower you to then go and start your podcast. There's a whole different, not just level of detail that needs to be covered, but also level of fluency with those details. It's not the same to know how something is done then to be able to do it.

The role of information, whether it's eBooks, whether it's podcasts, whether it's all these mechanisms and media, has been to create literacy. It's been to inform. It's been to inspire. Those formats do those things very well. The role of education in our society is to do more than create a literacy, it's about creating a fluency. These online courses that are, for the most part, a bunch of whether it's videos or audios or some text and a membership site, with very little interactivity, very little support, they just don't deliver on that outcome. For that leap to mainstream to happen, and it's starting to happen because this is starting to show up in at least different pockets in the marketplace, but there has to be more of a transition to real education which involves a more experiential learning process that leads to better outcomes often with more support.

**Jim:**

Talk about those things. What do you think, say that someone out there that has an idea, everyone comes to them for either fashion advice or wellness advice and they feel like they can teach this, and everyone has that top level fluency, like everyone knows the concept of being able to shoot video. They can do it on their phone. Maybe they've even posted their video on YouTube, maybe they can kind of sit down with a friend and explain something, but to take it to that next level and be able to put together a course that can teach more than one person that can kind of scale, what are the type of elements of that education do you think is important for a new person?

**Danny:**

I would challenge that that average person you're describing has the fluency to do this. I mean a basic awareness of easily accessible media creation. Just because you've shot a video on your phone at one point doesn't mean you can create an educational video. It doesn't mean you know how to, let's put it as simply as that, if you want to put your phone on a tripod, point it at you, stand in front of it, you're going to deliver, you need to know how to frame the shot. You

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need to know how far away to stand from the camera. You need to have a way of starting the recording without being next to the camera or else you go to the camera, start the recording, stand in the right place, deliver your lesson, go back to the camera, stop it, and then trim the edges of the video, you know the start and the end.

None of that is particularly hard but all of that is stuff that you don't necessarily know how to do just because you've shot a video on your phone at one point when you were at a party or something. There's a whole different level of fluency that goes into it and fundamentally creating a good educational experience is much less about the mechanics of the video or the membership site or the hosting or fulfillment via e-mail or any of that stuff and much more about what you teach, when, in what order, how people practice and internalize what you're delivering to them, what the exercise and worksheets are going to be, all that stuff, and that's why when we teach our students how to do this we don't recommend they start with pre-recorded video because that requires that they develop that fluency in all the media stuff and they're going to end up with a video that A) your first video when you're learning how to do this isn't going to be that great, that's just how these things go, but you can't easily change a video without re-shooting the whole thing.

You can't get feedback from the person watching a video except for very indirectly. It's not like you can see their face as they're watching it. You don't hear what they're thinking in the moment because they're right in front of you and they can ask a question, either literally or virtually through a platform like Zoom for video conferencing. We always favor a live delivery initially so you can gather that feedback about what's working and what's not so that by the time it's justified for you to learn all the video stuff, what you're capturing on video is something that's worthwhile to be permanent.

**Jim:**

Do you think that's counter intuitive to people? That they're signing up for a course on how to create an online course and you would think, "Okay, they're going to teach me exactly how to use video, exactly how to upload it and everything and yet when we start out, it's more about the piloting process, it's more about talking to people in person and doing this with that co-creation and working with someone versus jumping right into the video. What kind of feedback have you gotten from our students around that topic?"

**Danny:**

The response has been very positive to that because it makes sense. When you stop and think about it, it tracks that this is what it makes sense for people to do. This is not, it is a methodology that I've developed and evolved and that I teach, but if you look at just about



anyone who's been successful with the course, often first they were unsuccessful with the course when they tried to start by shooting all the video, etc. and eventually they kind of stumbled onto this deliver it live, get feedback from people, eventually codify it and make it permanent, they eventually stumbled on to this process and we're just short cutting that process for everyone.

**Jim:**

That leads to my next question. Like you said throughout time there's been people that have these great ideas and they make a huge difference by getting it out there into the world and so a lot of beginners I think sometimes don't at first think about the getting it out there into the world part, so let me tell you a trend that I've seen that I think is kind of happening that even I wasn't aware of at first is, so I looked at originally how the iTunes store worked. When that first launched, not to say that anyone could get an app in there, but it was kind of a gold rush. It was a free for all, and you could have all of these different apps and people were charging more money, they were charging \$4.99 and \$9.99 and \$20 for all these apps, and then over time two things happened. The prices kind of came down and only the players that had strong marketing, mostly, rose to the top.

If you tried to do a weather app right now or some kind of chat app, if you look at the apps that people use, it's all the big boys. It's Facebook, it's Google, it's YouTube, Instagram, all of these things, sometimes owned by the same company, and I've seen the same thing kind of happen with Udemy, where anyone could get in a course there and now it's the most popular people and then you see that also with course creators that anyone can kind of create a course and make an amazing course but it's that marketing, getting the word out. What's kind of involved, if someone's new they've built a great course, what's involved in marketing it and getting that word out there?

**Danny:**

I would challenge, there's an implicit assumption in that question. It's a good question but I feel like we're mixing a couple of different phenomenon's. One phenomenon that is very real is that any market over time emerges, becomes as we said, it starts out very fragmented, then it consolidates and it gets harder for people to get into it. Just as it's going to be very hard for someone to introduce a new weather app and have it do well because they're already strong market leaders in that space in the app store, that is a phenomenon with any market. We aren't there with the online courses market. There will come a time when, for whatever it is you want to learn, there are good suppliers of courses. At that point it's going to be a lot harder. It won't be impossible. You can always break into a market but it won't be impossible to make your



name, but it'll be difficult because whatever the topic, there is already a number of good courses on it.

That is not the reality today. Obviously markets kind of move forward and different paces so it's not all industries all at once but for the most part the markets are wide open. Most targeted niches and topics there aren't any good courses that provide real transformation and education. They're often aren't any good, even, non "education courses" that there are even good information products that do this. The market is wide open. It will become more saturated over the next, depending on how you think about it and look at it, and which industry you're looking at, three to five to seven to 10 years, but right now is a great opportunity to get into it.

Now, when you're past that point, marketing is critical. For right now, for the nascent market stage, the rules around it are a little bit different. Marketing matters but in a very different way. I'm the first person to say marketing's important, I'm a marketer, that's what I do, and yet the better your product is over time, the less the marketing matters. Here's what I mean by that. When a new product is introduced, and it could be a course, it could be anything else, but let's stick with the course market. A new product is introduced, the only thing people have to go on when evaluating whether they should buy it or not, is the marketing. If Jim creates a new course tomorrow and it's whatever the topic, Jim's how to create your escape plan out of your corporate job course. If Jim promotes it and let's pretend I had a job and I did want to quit it, so I see this course being offered, then I can look at the marketing and from the marketing it looks good, or maybe it does, maybe it doesn't, depending on the quality of the marketing.

If I were to go on Facebook or reach out to a few friends and say, "Hey has anyone heard of this Jim Hopkinson guy? Has anyone taken his course? Is it any good?" Of course I'm not going to get any feedback because the course is new. There have been no people who have gone through it. The more people go through it, the more likely it is that when I reach out, I'm going to get good input as to the quality of the course. That's why in this world of internet marketing where most courses do not deliver the transformations they promise, you see a phenomenon where the first launch is huge because everyone in the space is a great marketer because it's the internet marketing world, so the first launch is huge, they make millions of dollars.

The second launch, if they have a second launch, is typically six to 12 months later and it's not quite as big but it's still pretty good and then you don't hear about that product again because they know from experience if there's a third launch, it's going to fall off the face of the earth. The results are terrible. It's because they know that these products are just not getting results. People are not getting all the way through, they're not committing to doing the work, the

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education's not delivered in a way that supports people, the support is just not there and so they don't get results. That's the trend you see in a lot of this internet marketing world where products are very affirmable and people hop from new product to new product to new product on an annual basis because they have no longevity.

On the other hand if your product is good and solid, and not to be too self-referential, but there's a reason why the course builders lab is coming out in its third version and has enrolled many thousands of students because we keep investing in and making it great. Then over time it gets more and more compelling and it does better and better. Now marketing will still matter, but it matters less and less because there's more and more momentum behind it. I feel like that's what a lot of people who are thinking about getting into this don't get. They're thinking, "Well I'm not a great marketer, I don't have a big platform, I can't compete." The reality is that you don't need to be a great marketer or have a great platform from the get go, all you need is to be able to get a small number of students and start working with them and delivering results. If you're putting the right energy and effort into it, the success you get with your students offsets the need for marketing as you go, so you still need marketing but it's less and less over time.

**Jim:**

Right, it's like when people ask, "How do I launch my book? What are the strategies?" It's kind of like, "Well step one, write a good book." Because if someone puts out some slick marketing and it's the latest, greatest thing and you buy it and then you read it, it's a terrible book, you're like, "Oh, you got me. I'm not going to do it again," but if you buy, "You got to read this guy Malcolm Gladwell," and you read the first book, you're like, "That was amazing," you're going to automatically, you don't even need the marketing after that, you're automatically going to read the other ones.

**Danny:**

Well and there's a second layer to that in that writing a book is a really good example because I'm on the tail end of writing the new version of mine. Writing a good book is a lot of work. It's not just about having a brilliant idea and putting time, locking yourself into a cabin or whatever, there's research, there's thinking, there's revisions, I've talked to dozens of experts. You know I'm an expert in this field, I've talked to dozens of experts because I want other perspectives. I want to refine my thinking. I've run drafts by literally hundreds of people and gotten a ton of feedback.

Yes that helps me refine the book and make it better but assuming you're bringing something meaningful to the table, those experts that you talk to and the people who've given drafts, all of

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them, not all of them but a large portion of them, one would hope if the content is good, feed into that evangelism process to spread the word and in much the same way, if you try to skip steps it's like how do I do a giant launch of my course that nobody's heard of and I've never built yet, it's a long shot but if you start small and if you attract a pilot group of students and you deliver great results for them, those are case students that you can build on. Those are people who will evangelize and it really is a fly wheel. You start with little turns but the little turns build momentum over time.

**Jim:**

Right, it's very much walk before you run. That's in getting the word out, so in creating the actual course, what are some of the things that people should be thinking about in terms of instead of, not the person that's going to turn on the camera and just talk, what are some other technology and considerations in terms of the design and opportunities there to make it a really good course that people will take and people will complete?

**Danny:**

There are two sides to that. There's the eventually and there's the first course, first pilot right now. In the eventually space there's some really interesting innovations happening with technology that we're just starting to scratch the surface of. You look at gamification, which adds all these game elements to help people better connect and engage with the subject matter and know when they're making progress and feel encouraged and that's a fantastic thing that we're just starting to scratch the surface of. Something else that is very nascent is meaningful student progress tracking and the correlate to that is that if you can meaningfully track how your students are doing, you can also intervene and help them when they need it, either manually because your system tells you, "Oh this student is stuck over here," or automatically with built in when this happens trigger this particular action or message or whatever. You can build really interesting sophisticated things and we're just starting to see the beginning of that.

That's relevant when you're looking to build a course at scale. If you're going to work with thousands of students that's very important. For your first course it really matters more that you focus on a topic that is narrow and specific and that people really want to learn and put it into the world and validate that people actually want to pay for it and it's not a long or difficult or complicated process. It requires, more than anything, a shift in focus and thinking to what do people want to learn, that is specific and discreet that I can deliver and then just getting it out there and starting to move forward, creating forward momentum.

**Jim:**

This has been great Danny, we're looking forward to 2017 and all the new course creators out there. For someone that's listening, and they're thinking about creating their first course or



improving on a course that they have, what's the top piece of advice or couple of things that you would tell them as they get started to do that?

**Danny:**

I would very much say that fortune favors the bold. We talked a little bit about trends and markets evolving and emerging and consolidating and this is not an opportunity that's going to be around forever. Three years, five years, 10 years from now, the landscape is going to look different, there are going to be a lot of people who have jumped into all the big topics where there's a need for a course, and all the small topics where there's a need for a course. Right now it's wide open. There's a lot of opportunity for impact to be made. There's a lot of opportunity for income in the process and that's going to create a lot of longevity.

The people who jump in and become known as the go to authorities on particular topics in the next couple of years are the people who are going to be the thought leaders in the coming decade so it's really a chance to make a difference, make an income, and grab your place in this new emerging market that is going to be driving society forward. That's something that I find really encouraging and inspiring. This is really the next step and it's going to propel and accelerate the development of our society in really exciting ways so who wouldn't want to be a part of it?

**Voiceover:**

That was Jim Hopkinson with Danny Iny discussing the future of online education. While the industry itself is experiencing growing pains, the future is incredibly bright, not just for course creators but also for eager students who, for the first time, have the opportunity to get amazing educations all at the tips of their fingers. Now is the time to start, so you can help shape a brighter future for yourself and for the world. This has been Business Re-imagined with Danny Iny. To learn more about us, go to [mirasee.com](http://mirasee.com).