



Punk Rock Drummer Danny Thompson Goes Online



When musician Danny Thompson took his music school virtual, it wasn't planned, but worked out far better than he expected. Tune in to his story.





Danny Thompson

James: James Schramko here. Welcome back to SuperFastBusiness.com. This is Episode 823. Today, we're talking about being a rock star and how that relates to business. I've got Danny Thompson here from [Punk Rock Business School](#). Great to have you on board.

Danny: Thanks, James. It's great to finally meet you. I've been listening to you for - I can't even remember how many years it is. But I can remember, specifically, where I was the first time that I heard one of your podcasts, and I was in a van touring around the UK, with my band, Face to Face. That's when I first started to really think about digital marketing.

And, you know, I had this business background from a retail world. But now I was a small business owner and a musician touring, and I realized I didn't know a lot about marketing. And I listened to a lot of early episodes of you and Timbo Reid together.

James: Wow.

Danny: Yeah, that's going way back.

James: Well, I think [FreedomOcean](#) would be about 10 years old. I guess I had a similar story to you, working in a big shop, essentially, Mercedes-Benz dealership, and then starting my own business online, but without the music part. I don't really play any instrument other than the Apple Mac, or the iPhone. But of course, I surf now, that's my new thing. It wasn't a thing back then.

And so you're touring around in the van, playing in the band, thinking, I could probably do something online. Of course, as you know now, that is a fierce journey to take. There's a lot of dead bodies on the side of the road for that pathway. But you somehow managed to emerge through. I wonder if you can tell us, let's go back to you working in the guitar shop, because I think that's a transition we can all relate to.

There'll be plenty of people listening to this who are currently working in a shop or have a job. So that's a good starting point. I was in that role, you're in that role, you started to become aware of this online thing. I'm just curious how that influenced your journey. And, of course, being a musician, there's usually quite a traditional path to that, like, playing gigs.

You referenced in a previous conversation you and I had about my son who plays guitar, and obviously, I talked about that a lot in my previous episodes. It's pretty sort of offline world. It's an analog world, it's hands on, hard work, often low pay, and I imagine the more band members you have, the more you have to cut the pie. Does the gig pay you any more if you have an extra band member or it's just like, you know, bad luck?

A drummer with a passion for business

Danny: Yeah, you know, there's a lot of things you could unpack there. The music industry, it really is a tough business to be in. And, you know, there's just so many different directions that people can go in. And, you know, I started playing drums when I was a kid, and I sort of fell into a little bit of success before I was even like, 20 years old, you know, not really any kind of financial music success, but I knew some of the right people and ended up interacting with some bigger name people, but I kind of just fell out of playing music, and I went to work for Guitar Center, which is a chain of music stores.

And at that time, this is going way back, this would have been 1990, there was 10 of those Guitar Center stores nationally in the United States. So I got in on the early ground floor and what came about from that was, as much as I loved playing music, what I realized is I also was really passionate about business, I just didn't know it, and I got real deep into it. You know, I loved digging into the numbers, and I loved just the concept of it. And that is where I learned how to sell.

And I know that's another thing that you and I have in common. The Guitar Center's original owner actually was a car guy. And that was one of the things we always used to get was, Oh god, you know, when you go to buy something at Guitar Center, it's kind of like buying a car. And there was some truth to that, that that's where it had it all started. But I rose through the ranks there. The company went up to a couple of hundred stores nationally and became a public company.

But real similar to things that you've talked about on the show so often. You know, it's 60 hours a week. It's six days a week. It's every Memorial Day and Labor Day or whatever the holidays are in Australia that everyone wants to have a barbecue.

James: Christmas eve.

Danny: Christmas was just crazy. I hated the holidays working in that kind of retail. And as I was progressing, and I moved around the country, and I certainly was learning a lot, but I still had this thing going on in my belly where I felt like I didn't really achieve maybe what I could have in music. And I knew I wanted to get out of retail. And I wasn't really at that point, you know, the internet was still really new.

That will never sell online...

We were all saying at Guitar Center meetings, we would joke about, yeah, no one's going to buy a \$2,000 Les Paul online, that's crazy. It'll never happen. And of course, now that's pretty much the only way somebody buys one. And I'm sure people have said the same thing about Carvana and all the car companies that are selling online.

James: Our state General Manager, he used to tell us that the internet was a fad, and we should just keep our focus. He was absolutely petrified of it. That's actually kind of what started piquing my interest in it. Why is this guy so scared of it? The other thing I noticed, customers coming into the showroom knew absolutely everything about not just the stuff we had now, but what was coming, when the manufacturer wouldn't tell us anything about what was coming. And it's like, they had more information than we did. So I'm wondering if you've had the same experience.

Danny: That was starting to be the case, I would say, closer to the timeframe that I was jumping out of the business. I think everyone was seeing the writing on the wall. We actually, I would say, three or four years before I jumped ship, which would have been 2008, we, as a company, purchased the largest online musical instrument retailer in the world, which was Musician's Friend at the time. So clearly, by then, the upper muckety mucks at the top of the company had realized what was going to be the future and where things would go.

The long-delayed escape from the cubicle

But for me, I knew I wanted to do something on my own. And I also still had this desire to play music. And I remember exactly when it hit me, we were at a corporate meeting, which, you know, were so common, and we had a distribution center, somewhere in the middle of the country.

And I was in the break room, and they had this huge mural on the wall. And it was like the view that you would have if you were playing music on stage, looking out at a huge crowd, thousands of people, and I literally kind of felt sick to my stomach, because there was always this little part of me that was like, I don't belong here, in this suit and tie thing, I really should be playing music, still. And that's what prompted me to open Music Factory, which is my music school.

We actually got it open in 2006, while I was still employed at my job. There wasn't really a conflict there. And about two years later, the company was going to move from the public world back into the private sector, which meant all of us who had stock options had to get paid out. And I thought, well, there's no better time than now to get out. And that's how I made that jump, you know, I escaped the cubicle.

And, you know, I had been playing some music again, just kind of on the side for fun, you know, I thought, if I could just get in a bar band, it'll be a cool thing to do, you know, once a month, play a social gig. And once I started doing it, I started kind of like moving up the ranks of local bands. And I started having people go, Hey, this band, they just got a record deal. They need a drummer, and I thought of you, and I always had to say no, because I was like, Well, I would love to do it. But even at that level, you know, the musicians in those bands, they're not really making very much money.

And I had a house in Laguna Beach, you know, two car payments, and a vintage Mustang, and a motorcycle. And, you know, I did what so many people do, which is, I overleveraged myself, because I thought that's what you did is like, I'm moving up in the corporate world, I got to drive a BMW, and all those kinds of things. And so starting my own business was a way that I thought, Well, maybe I could get out and I could play music. And that's what I eventually was able to do.

And about six months after I left my job, I got the audition in the band that I'm in now. And I rehearsed two times with them for six hours a day, two days, and then went and played a festival for about 20,000 people, and got to see that bouncing crowd for real for the first time. And the thing I always tried to impress upon people about that journey is that I was 40 years old when I finally had that happen to me in the music world.



So you know, if there's a something to take away from that, it's never too late to, like, make those changes and do something different in your life. It wasn't easy. That's for sure. I had to downsize the lifestyle dramatically, you know, and I'm not afraid to talk about those things, you know, I sold off my car, I bought a \$3,000 used pickup truck, you know, I eventually did have to file a bankruptcy. And for a while, I felt really bad about myself, you know, I felt like, man I took all these years to build all that up. And how did I end up here?

But the positive side of it was, real quickly, I realized I don't need any of those things to feel good about what I do in my life. And I started to enjoy playing music, doing things I wanted to do, and didn't have the stress of all that overhead or any of that type of thing anymore. So it was quite a journey to get to that point, that's for sure.

James: You know, it's a pretty interesting topic. A lot of people have to go through that, to get through to the other side. And I mentioned this on the [previous episode](#), where you can tell a younger person this stuff, but they're just going to go and do it anyway, because that's what you do.

A number of life and career parallels

We have some parallels, you know. Like, your timeline is strikingly similar to mine. I quit my job in 2008. I started my business in 2006. I ran it on the side for a while. So we had that in common.

Danny: During a financial meltdown.

James: It was really one of the catalysts. I'm like, Oh, here we go again, you know? And I started surfing in my 40s. So I really found my thing. You know, I started surfing at 42, which is a way, way later than most people here, it's about 40 years later than most people in my suburb start surfing. But once you know, like, you're standing in front of that stadium seeing it go, like it's me gliding down a nice, big wave, getting a 200-meter or 300-yard ride, it's hard to describe that feeling to an everyday person, you know?

It's one of those things, I'm sure being out in front of that stage would have been a feeling that you can't get in the suit and tie in the office, certainly not the same as when you're standing looking at a vinyl print of the same scene. But isn't it interesting that you're doing what you thought people do, and then you discovered what is right for you?

And I wonder if you found the same as me that when you don't focus on the money, it just seems to start flowing in every direction, because it's the byproduct of engaging in more passionate things more aligned to your skill and your joy, and people pick up on that. And then maybe that money comes as a byproduct, because you've got a thriving online business in a market where a lot of traditional businesses have been wiped out. Is that what's happening for you?

Danny: Yeah, so my digital marketing type kind of journey, to get back to that point of me being in the tour bus in England, this was when I would have to literally download the episodes at the hotel every night because I couldn't just have stuff on my phone back then.

James: Hotel internet is also very weak in the UK and Europe. I remember trying to do a webinar from Avignon. And the Mbps was like point one six, and it failed. So you know, I just hit record, and recorded to myself for an hour. And then I loaded it up over the next week to the membership on my journey. And I said, Sorry, guys, this is not happening.

Danny: Yeah, I would download 10 or 12 podcast episodes each night when we got to the hotel so that I would have that material to fill my brain. So I always kind of lived on these two sides of it where, yeah, I was on the tour bus and we were about to go play a show and do all the things that people think about, you know, that you do in a band. And most of it's not really true. We really don't live that way. Granted, we're all like 50 years old now in the band. So our backstage is like, you know, people want to get backstage and they come back and they look around and they're like, Oh, this is it, huh? Alright, we're out of here. You know, there's nothing going on.

But I would be consuming all this business material and marketing and that was my real introduction to digital marketing. And, you know, my thoughts then was to really just utilize the internet to do marketing for my brick and mortar business. You know, at that time, I really had no thought about an online business model or courses or coaching or any of those kind of things. But to fast forward, yeah, we had this big music school going, I would go out and tour for three or four months at a time, and I had partners at the school and the school would kind of run. It was a really nice balance of, you know, both worlds.

When your perspective dramatically changes

And, you know, I think it took me a long time to even get close to the type of money that I used to make in my old job, but it just really didn't matter. Doing what you want to do, and enjoying those things in life. And there was a little change after the 2008 crash in people's attitudes. And I think there'll be another change in people's attitudes now, which is a shock to the system, like we've all had in the last year, really makes you realize what's important.

And I think so often how we used to look at somebody who maybe would say, Yeah, I just, you know, I live in a van and I travel up and down the coast surfing all the greatest spots in the world. And there was an old me that would have said, Ah, he's kind of a loser, you know? And now I think so many of us look at that and go, Man, that guy's got it figured out. That's the life. You know, like, we really look at those things so dramatically different.

The forced switch to the online environment

But yeah, the coronavirus certainly impacted any kind of in-person service business. So our music school, we were doing 400 students a week, you know, band classes and all these great things. And, you know, we did so many cool events and things that really did depend on us being in person. And when that change happened, obviously, we were all forced to go to an online type of lesson environment. And within about a month, me and my partners were doing Zoom call meetings, going, you know what, this may be way, way better.

Then we started doing the financial side of it and going, How much more money could we potentially save, if we got rid of these buildings? What can we do to make the students engaged online? And it was a little scary to make the call. And I remember us being on a call, we had been in lockdown, it was kind of releasing a little bit and everyone was like, Alright, let's start doing some in-person karate classes and in-person lessons.

And in my mind, I was going, this is never going to happen. We're going to go through all this crazy stuff to try to get this started. And we're going to get shut down again. And I said, if we get shut down again, my vote is we never go back. We just make the jump, we commit to it. And that's what happened. A week before we were going to try to reopen, the shutdown happened again. And I said, that's it.

And a day later, I sent the email video message to all of our customers and said, This is where we're going with. And I think it's going to be great. And we just kind of leaned into it ever since. And it's been a really crazy learning experience. And I think a lot of businesses are going to, over the next years, really go through this where they thought it wouldn't work. They thought that people wouldn't stick around or that people wouldn't buy into it.

And I just kept telling myself, you know, what, five years ago when somebody said, we're going to sell cars online, and it's just going to get delivered to your house, everyone said it wouldn't work, you know? And now everybody does it. I really felt the same way with the music lesson world. This is where it's going. Five years from now, nobody's going to drive to some dingy, six by six, back room at the music store to do a guitar lesson with some dude. You know, that's how it was done for 100 years. So that part has been really exciting. And we're killing it online.

Lessons learned from taking the leap

James: What were some of the lessons you learned?

Danny: With respect to making this change in the online world? Well, a lot of it, I think, was, we kind of all had this limiting belief that people wouldn't be willing to do it, or that we couldn't provide a service that was at the same quality level. Everyone looked at it that way. Well, we can temporarily do lessons online as a stop gap, and then we'll come back to in person when it opens. Don't worry if it's not as good.

And we went the other direction which was, what do you do to make this actually better than what it was like in person? And I can confidently say to somebody on the phone right now, my guitar lesson right now online is better than anything happening in person before, you know? And that is one of my sales chops. It's another area that I always felt like I had a connection with you when I listen to your show, is that you talk a lot about the ability to sell.

And recently, you had been talking about people needing to still be able to have that skill of selling over the phone. And I'm just such an advocate for it. My sales skills, you know, I had to adapt a little bit and change up the pitch and figure out, I was so good at selling our music school before, how do I sell it online? It took me a little while. Now, I got it. It's so good.

James: It is a great skill. You know, as part of training with new salespeople, I used to make them argue for tails on a coin. I'd ask them to tell me why tails is better than heads. And then when they were done doing that, I'd flip it over. And I'd say right, now I want you to argue heads. Convince me why heads is better than tails. And what I was teaching them was the ability to have perspective.



And it's the kind of exercise you've had to do, where you take the one thing that you made your strength, and you take it away. And now you have to argue that it's better the other way. And I think we should always be looking at every possible viewpoint of our business. And that's how we innovate. The only way we can innovate is by letting go of something that we've been relying upon.

Now, as you were talking, I'm thinking about guys like Scott. [Scott Devine](#), with his bass guitars lessons. You know, he's been doing very, very well with the online stuff. So there are examples of people out there who have made this the thing and don't do the in-person lessons. So this is sort of another thing that I like to think about, like, one of the people we have to sell is ourselves.

And I imagine you had a few conversations with yourself about, you know, can we actually do this? Am I good enough? Will we find a way? Will people accept this? And then one way to do that is to benchmark off what's out there. Like, is anyone already doing it? How are they doing it? What are they doing well? What clues have they left for me? I mean, that's one of the reasons for this podcast.

Today, Danny, you're sharing the possibility that an artist, someone who is creative, someone who's got a passionate ability in something that was old world and unleveraged can now get leveraged. And you know, the music companies have been doing this with records, right, for a long time. Now the artists can get in on the act. And they can now control whatever they want.

I was watching a documentary about Billy Eilish making albums in her bedroom, and she got discovered by loading up a choreography track for her dance teacher on SoundCloud, according to the documentary, and then it just went viral. So we have the ability to control it. You've taken some traditional sales skills, some good old corporate training, turned it into this artistry.

So you've had to pivot. You had to turn off. I agree with you. I think we're not going back to how things were exactly how they were. I don't think the perspex screens are coming down at the shops. I think people will stand back a little bit further from each other when they're lining up for things now. I think we're more used to checking in and updating things than we used to do and sanitizing and so forth, which by the way, you know, every time I went to the Philippines, they're really good with that. We just never did it here. So it's happening elsewhere, it just wasn't happening here.

How Danny's online business works, and advice for the journey

So I'm wondering, what does your ecosystem look like for most of the digital business now? Like, what are you using? How does it work? What lessons have you learned that we can fast track someone who's on the same journey?

Danny: Sure. So I would say our business moving forward is kind of a combination of two things. One would be a live lesson experience, like you and I are having a live conversation right now. And the other side of our business moving forward, it'll be more what Scott's Bass has done, which is primarily prerecorded courses, and then the occasional live stream masterclass, and things like that. So we're kind of splitting in those two directions.

And again, if I have my way, a couple of years from now, we'll probably almost be all courses, and all in that online world. And I have some very specific reasons that I could go into why long term I'd like to transition there. But we're making this transition in steps. And the first step is, the online lesson environment, it does work okay for kids. You know, primarily our business was probably 60 percent kids and 40 percent adults.

Well, in the online environment, some of the younger kids can struggle a little bit. So we've changed our marketing. And our push is more towards older customers, adult customers who really thrive in the environment and can take advantage of the convenience factor and things like that. We just went all in, good cameras, HD cameras, multiple HD cameras, created a great look and sound experience, which is really easy to do.

But one of the key elements that we discovered, and this does work really well with kids, is what kids are mostly into now is gamers and YouTubers. They're not really into musicians, like we were growing up, unfortunately. And maybe that'll change at some point. So when a student logs on to a lesson with us, the environment that the teacher is in, their lighting, their whole thing, it's like they're interacting with a YouTuber, or a gamer, you know, they've got the colored lights and the whole thing.

So that's one element that we really kind of discovered is like, this actually is more engaging for the student than the old way. And then we just utilize some other really cool software technologies, ManyCam, which is almost like a mini TV studio on your computer. So you can do lower thirds, you know, so when the student logs in, their name is on the bottom of the screen, you can throw up emojis.

We stole a program idea from the public school districts called Seesaw, which is almost like a social media for the school kids, where their homework assignments and whatnot are posted in a journal, people can comment on it or like it, and the parents get to see all that. So we have kids, and then all the way up through 70-year-old guitar students that are making videos from home in their online lesson environment and posting it on our server.

So we're getting more engagement. They never would have done that before in the old way. So people are actually playing longer, practicing more and are more engaged in the online environment than they were when they drove to our school, which, that is the stuff I never would have thought that that would have ended up being the case - that they're playing more, practicing more than they used to. But when you think about it, it really makes sense.

James: It's great for the parent as well. Like, I used to take Jack to his music lessons. I'd have to drive there, you wait outside while he does it, and then you take him again. And you'd have to lug his amp, and the guitar sometimes, a little one, because you need different amps for all the different applications, I discovered. And then you need different sound effects. Like it gets up a bit.

But yeah, it's quite intensive on the parent if you're dealing with kids, because you got to factor that into the package. So if you can make it parent-friendly, then that surely opens up the available market to you. And of course, now you're not restricted to a geographic radius of like, what, 20 miles from your garage?

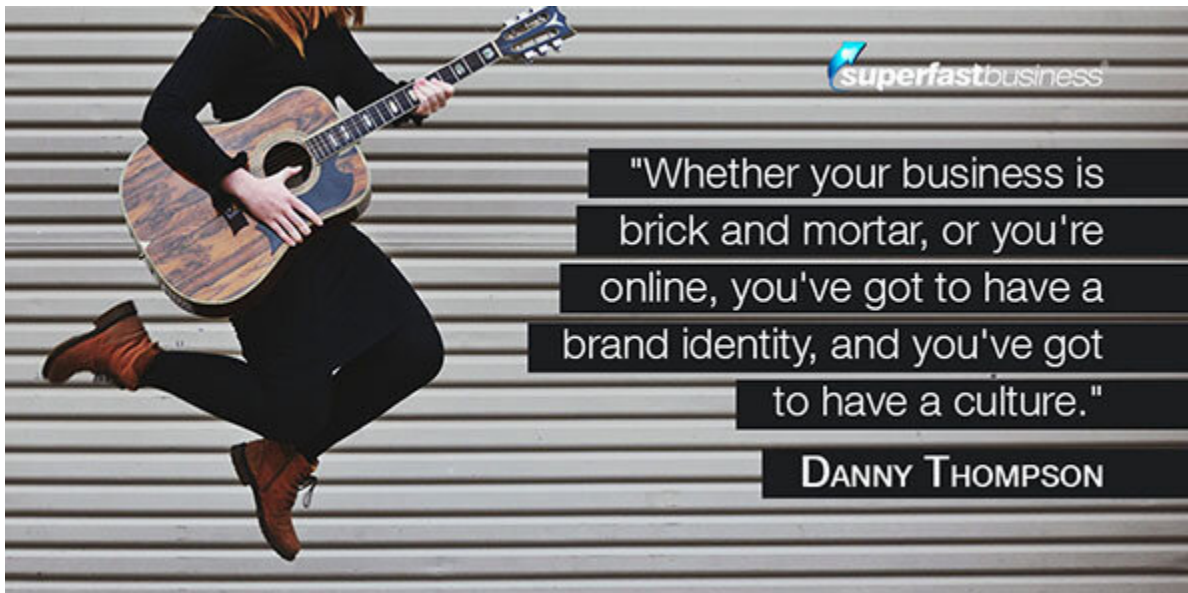
Danny: Right. Not even. In Orange County, most people don't want to even drive to the other side of town, Especially in Orange County, it's very provincial. If you're at Huntington Beach, you know, Surf City, USA person, you generally don't even want to leave Huntington Beach. If you're a Newport person, you stay there. Costa Mesa is its own thing. I wish I would have known that, when I first started all my SEO stuff on the website all those years ago, I would have done it a little bit differently.

But from a geographical standpoint, it just opens up so many other things, to where this whole thing is really able to go to. And then, you know, on the other side with what we have created with a course, primarily in the guitar course world, that can go hand in hand with music lessons online, and then ultimately go into the course world. And we created all of that on [10XPRO](#).

Standing out in a world of online teachers

James: Nice. And so this is really the big question, any music teacher now has access to the internet. So they all have the geographic border broken down. How are you building a moat around your business? And what are you teaching the people who come to you to learn about how to do this? Because clearly, you've climbed a mountain, and you're in a good place to advise these other teachers.

And you've described some of it, you've talked about technology, you've talked about software. Like, if I'm just a backyard music teacher, I'm already a bit intimidated by that. I'm thinking, well, this guy's on another level. What do you teach your teachers for them to be able to separate themselves from all the other teachers?



Danny: Well, I think the thing that doesn't really change is that whether your business is brick and mortar, or you're online, you've got to have a brand identity, and you've got to have a culture. So that's going to translate either way, the way that we deliver that culture.

So, you know, our brand identity, the Music Factory brand identity, was always outside of the box, compared to other brick and mortar music schools. You would go to their schools and they would look boring. And maybe there's a picture of a music note on the wall, and it was just very humdrum. Our school, you came in, we had artwork everywhere. We had a popcorn machine going, we had high-end coffee to give to the parents, because we know they didn't really want to hang out.

And we built it to the point where the parents couldn't wait to come hang out. And I knew I had struck it one day, I had a parent who owned a big marketing and branding agency who came and said, Your website and your brand is amazingly good. And I was like, All right, that's what I want to hear from somebody from that industry. And we just kind of always stepped outside of the box and took bold initiatives.

And I'd look at how everyone else did it, and then I go, Okay, we're going to do it totally different. We're going to take that leap, and understand that it's not going to be for everybody, and that's okay. And I think regardless of the technology, or however you want to deliver it, you've got to set yourself apart and have a company culture. And even if you're a solo teacher, you know, you've got to develop some type of brand that people want to be attracted to.

Our teachers, again, we did everything very different compared to other schools. Most in the music world out there, in that lesson world, most of the teachers are contractors, you know, it's just like hiring somebody to do your website. We didn't have the control over those teachers, if we did that. So everybody that worked for us is an employee. So we were able to say, this is how we teach lessons. This is how we deliver it, we do these four parts here, and we have this system. And creating all that, again, to come back to where I think everything falls, that gives me something to sell to a person when I talk to him on the phone, is I can say, here's the four pillars of our music lesson program.

And I know most of the time when they call someone else, they're just not going to get anything like that. So I think that those, you know, having a detailed program and having a very strong brand is really what set us apart. And we've been able to translate that into the online world. How we deliver it is different. We just had to figure out, Okay, we used to do this, and it was super cool. What do we do now that parents will still look at and go, wow, this is really cool.

And one of the things that we've done is, now our kids do their recitals kind of as an online. We bring them to a studio, we do a multi-camera recording shoot and record them with good audio, mix it and edit it and then present it as a live stream. The kid has never looked that good in their life or sounded that good. And dad can sit at home and watch it on the big screen and drink a beer instead of having to go down to the hall for a two-hour piano recital that they tolerated but they didn't really want to be there, you know?

James: Oh, I've been to those. You've got to watch all the other kids do their thing. I did it with my daughter's piano, my son's guitar. I remember he got up and he had the heaviest sound possible. He just thrashed out, I think it was The Ocean by Led Zeppelin. Just like, everyone just pushed back in their chair, it was so good.

But yeah, that sounds fantastic, you know, making the customer the hero, and the parent of course loves to see their kid performing. That's something every parent resonates with.

Danny: You know, when you mentioned, like, the individual kind of music teacher that's out there - and that's the bulk of the people that provide music lessons, it's solo individual teachers - hands down, there's never been an easier or better time to just create amazing online courses and memberships for music schools, or for a music teacher. And Scott's Bass, I mean, that is at another level of amazing.

You know, there's a drum instructor, mikeslessons.com, who started in that world, probably eight to 10 years ago. He was a real early adopter, built a huge YouTube following, and one day said, I'm going to see what happens if I go live and sell individual lessons for 99 cents a download. And I think he did 8000 downloads the first day. And he was like, All right, and he closed his school the next day.

So really, he was way ahead of the rest of us in the music lesson world. But, you know, I think a lot of those individual teachers feel like it's an insurmountable task to create something like that. And the reality is, you dig in and start doing it. And it's really not that difficult, at least not on the technical side. You know, it might take you a while to figure out how to sell it. But there's never been a better time to create something like that than now.

The technical side of the online endeavor

James: On the technical side, like, are you using the platform?

Danny: 10X?

James: Yes. [10XPRO](#).

Danny: Oh, yeah. So I do two different licenses with 10XPRO. So I use one for our guitar course, and then I'm building out and have built out in the past courses for other music teachers and music schools, and I do some coaching and things like that, on that side with them. Originally, it started on one of the other big platforms originally and then made the switch. I heard [John](#) on your show about 10 times before I finally looked at the website, and I was like, God, what was I waiting for?

James: You know, I put myself in that category too, because, you know, as recently as yesterday, I was going through stuff with John. And he's just brilliant. Like, I said, I want to do a challenge, is there a campaign builder for challenges? And he came back the next day, and he installed a campaign challenge funnel in my installation. Like, the service is off the charts.

Now, fair enough, I'm a partner. But I'm telling my customers, you need to do challenges. And I said to John, it'd be great if there's a campaign for challenges, just click one button, the whole thing's there. And it was there when I logged in the next day. I had my opt-in page, the thank you page, the bump upsell, the thank you for purchase page; it adds them to the lesson, or the challenge itself, it integrates with the autoresponder.

I do love the platform. But seriously, every time I go in there, and we use it, I'm just blown away with what it can do. My team just set up a book funnel. So we're giving away a copy of [my book](#), the digital version. We're upselling the print version with a bump for the audio version, and then the various segmentations and thank yous and whatever. I'm going to add in extra things.

But I was talking to Kory, my friend, [Kory Basaraba](#), he's helping with traffic campaigns, paid traffic campaigns. And when he says, Okay, offer this or do that, we can just log in and tick buttons and add boxes, and it's all there, and it does everything we want. So it's mind-blowing, how you can use it.

Danny: Yeah, I mean, you touched on a really great subject with 10X, and I feel this way about any of the other programs or anything that I use, and I really don't use a lot of software or things like that. I use [ActiveCampaign](#), I use [10XPRO](#), and the two things that those companies have in common is amazing service. And every time I'm sitting there on my laptop, trying to do something on 10X, I'm like, I wonder how I do this.

I just go to that little chat window, and somebody always - I mean, it works out because I'm usually working on it at night. I think from the time change difference of where the support staff is, it works great. You know, five minutes later, you know, within five minutes, somebody is on their chat with me and go, Hit this button, do this button. Let me look at that. Oh, yeah, you ticked the wrong box there, you're good to go. Done.

You know, and there's just so many companies where that isn't what you will get when you interact with them. And I've always loved ActiveCampaign for the same reason. I book a 30-minute support call any time I want, they just show you how to do stuff. It's great. I think that's tremendously important.

Who stuck it out with the switch?

James: Yeah, a good pairing. It's like strawberries and cream, those two. So do you still have all the people that were involved in your in-person venture? Are they still actively involved in the business?

Danny: As far as teachers and employees and whatnot?

James: Yeah.

Danny: They are now. Certainly, part of my desire, and you know, I love my employees, I have great people working for me. If there's another skill that helped me out that I took from the corporate retail world is primarily what I did was hire, and train, and mentor employees. And that's a subject matter that is very lacking in general in the small business world.

James: Massive chasm.

Danny: Yeah, they just don't have that experience to know how to hire somebody, what they're really looking for, and then even if they do get a good employee, they're generally really bad at leadership and mentoring employees.

And over the years, you know, thousands of employees at Guitar Center, I developed that skill to the point where I'll still get, there's people working for manufacturers that are artists, reps, and all kinds of things out there in that music world that are guys that worked for me at Guitar Center, that still when I'll see them at a trade show, or wherever, they'll say, Man, you were the guy that really got me on the right track, or you know, and that's such a rewarding experience to have that.

But it really has helped me in the small business world to build an incredible team. Now, that said, as much as I love them, part of the desire, and what's so attractive about building the big course business, is that it can primarily be me or me and a couple of people. And as much as I feel that I'm really good at hiring and training and mentoring those employees, if you've run a big team before, and I'm sure you can relate to this, it's kind of a thankless job to a certain extent. It's servant leadership.

You are there for them, and your team at the Mercedes-Benz dealership, you had to be there for them all the time. If they wanted to call you whenever, because their life was falling apart, you're there for them. And there's those times where I've come home and gone, Man, no one's ever even asked me how my day was or how I'm doing or am I struggling with anything in my life. When you're in charge, and you're the leader, people don't really think about that. And that's part of the gig.

And I think, you know, as I've gotten older, and I'm even more reclusive and more into the idea of just getting on my motorcycle with all my camping gear, and going to Sedona for four days, and not talking to anybody, that's way more attractive nowadays than it was when I was in my 20s. To do that, I'd like to separate myself more from the weight of employees, and leases on buildings, and all the stress that comes along with those things.

James: You know, when I quit my job, I said, I'm not going to have stocks, staff, and a team. You know, like, I wanted to keep it simple. But I ended up having a team. But I built it up to 65, it was like, pretty much the same size as the dealership, and then sold off some business units and they went with it, which was part of the reason I wanted to make sure I found the right buyer. I still don't have a facility, you know, I don't have stock.

The team I can live with, I've got a small team, a high-performance team. But you're so right, it's absolutely lacking. It's a huge responsibility. I know for every person you hire, they're putting food on the table, they're paying for kids' tuition, they've got their housing, the roof over their head, it's all really connected to that umbilical cord to your machine. If your machine fails, you're taking down a lot of people with it.

So it is a huge responsibility. You get a lot of power with that responsibility, but it is a responsibility. And these days, I like working with my partners and their teams. So I'm connected to a lot of people. But I've partitioned off some of that with a firewall. I love what you said about disconnecting, get on the motorbike, go away for a few days. I think we need time away from the business to make the business better.

It is counterintuitive, but I'm sure you learn the most about your business when you're not there. And you probably reflect on the most important things when you're not there, that you can then come back fresh, innovative, clear, and you can really take it in without being sort of dulled to it. If you're just bouncing around the business, you just get burnt out.

And you know, something that's so critical, you said this, and it's really not talked about much, but as the entrepreneur, or the founder, or the business head, it's a pretty small circle of praise and feedback. And I actually think that's what I offer with SuperFastBusiness, is a place where the business owner gets looked after for themselves.

When I take on a high-level client like a [SilverCircle](#) client or a partner, I often think, gosh, you know, I've never had this for me, or I'm offering them something that would be so helpful. They go from being the only person in their whole world who knows what they're going through to having someone to talk to, having someone to share.

And I think one day a product for me, or it's almost very similar to that with SilverCircle, is just someone to chat to. It's just a high-level chatline where you can talk to someone, bounce ideas, get a bit of a pat on the back when you need it, get a little bit of a confrontation when you need that, too, because let's face it, we can get away with a lot as the owner, if we want to slack off, or we want to convince ourselves of taking shortcuts, it's easy to justify.

We can justify crazy purchases, we can justify irrational maneuvers, we can just say, Oh, but Steve Jobs used to do that. Reality distortion machine. So it is a battle, that mindset challenge of running a business, and that's really what I built my business around.

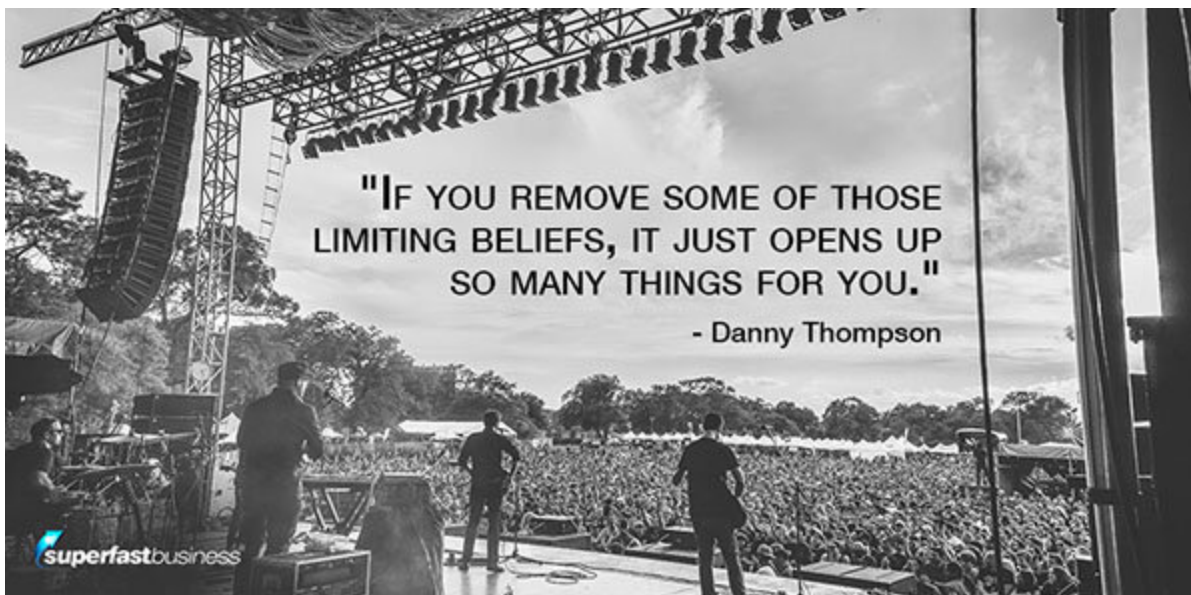
The kind of help you can turn to Danny for

Now, what I'd like you to talk about, Danny, is what can people come to you for help with in whatever variation? Feel free to mention your resources, your perfect kind of audience. Some of them will be listening to this podcast, like, Danny, you used to listen to [FreedomOcean](#) all those years ago.

Danny: You know, before I touch base on that, a story that I always like to tell people, and again, I think it's just, you know, maybe will motivate people to take some risk and realize they can accomplish so many more things than they ever have. But when I look back, there was a point in my life where I, you know, maybe I was 12 or 13 years old, maybe a little older, and there was one college radio station in my Chicago area that would play some of the punk rock bands that I wanted to listen to.

And I remember listening to these different bands. And this was in Chicago, everything cool seemed to happen on the west coast, it seems so far away. And all these years later, you know, I started playing music again. And when I decided I wanted to play drums in a band, I said, Man, if I could get back in a band that sounded kind of like the Foo Fighters, or I was really listening to Bad Religion at the time... And it was about a year later, I'm playing a huge festival, playing drums, big concert arena, I look over and standing on the side of the stage watching me is Dave Grohl from the Foo Fighters, Taylor, the drummer from the Foo Fighters, and one of my other favorite drummers from Bad Religion.

And I'm playing drums, going, don't drop a stick, don't drop a stick, and just thinking about how surreal my life is that way, that I'm standing in the catering line at a festival next to the people that I used to dream about, listening to their music. And it's real similar in the podcast world, how, you know, 10 years ago, when I was listening to you, or Timbo, I never would have thought I would talk to you guys, you know?



And I interviewed Timbo for my podcast the other day. And it's just, I think, if you remove some of those limiting beliefs, it just opens up so many things for you. So I hope some people take away some of my experience of, you know, being a 40-year-old guy and quitting his job to join a band, which certainly no parent would usually recommend that for their child, but it really did work out and, you know, so you can do more than you think you can.

But I primarily can really help certainly the music school owners, which is the group that I did a lot of coaching in the past with. So a lot of marketing consulting with them. Now, certainly any hiring, sales training, general marketing for small business owners, you know, I can do a lot with brick and mortar business owners, retail business owners, anybody really in that space.

My current podcast is Punk Rock Business School. And the whole idea with Punk Rock Business School is I just wanted to branch out from that music school niche and talk to other business owners that have kind of moved from the traditional brick and mortar model into utilizing digital courses, course creation, and I had a great guest on the other day, who's also a music school owner.

But she started that YouTube channel about two or three years ago, and just crushing it and driving all the traffic to her course and is making more from the courses now than she was making from three locations of a music school. And I think that world is really exciting, and I'm really excited in the YouTube space and where you can go with that business.

James: Tell us, what was the name of the artist, so we can look it up?

Danny: The YouTube channel for her is Lauren Bateman Guitar.

James: We have so many musicians listening to this podcast.

Danny: I know. You're getting the reputation for having all the band guys on.

James: I think there's at least a dozen of them in SuperFastBusiness. And they even meet together. Like, it's terrific. Probably Scott was a part of that. I mean, he came along and we did some great things together with his membership. But he's just so good. He's got to be good at whatever he does, because I don't even play bass guitar, but every time his video pops up in my Instagram feed in between surfboard channels, it's like, I listen to it, I watch it, it's so captivating.

And drums can do that for me too. I mean, my favorite band was Led Zeppelin. And, of course, John Bonham was a pretty famous drummer, and then the son went on, and plays with them from time to time.

What musicians can learn from SuperFastBusiness

Danny: There was two really important lessons that I took away from your show with some of your musicians. And, you know, being in the music teaching world, I will have 100 drum students for every one bass student. Bass seems like it's such a small instrument, and every music school owner you talk to, I've got four bass students for the whole school, you know.

And if Scott could take something like that, you know what I mean, and build it to that size... And then you also had the gentleman on, I can't remember his name, but the [gypsy jazz guitar course](#), I think myself and so many other people, right, because drumming wise for me, and this is such a weird thing because I'm a professional drummer, I make records, you know, I do it for a living, and I'm more apprehensive to make a drumming course than I am to make a course about marketing or something.

It's really a weird thing. I'm nervous about the scrutiny or something. But I'm primarily known as a punk rock drummer, I'm really a two and four rock drummer, like I'm more of a John Bonham, Tom Petty drummer than I am a punk drummer, but I was good at it. I was good at playing fast and precise. And even in my old age, and my extra 20 or 30 pounds I'm carrying, I can still blast through an hour and a half set and feel really good doing it.

But I thought, you know, I could make a great course about that style of drumming. And my initial thought in this, what everyone else does is, Oh, that's a small little group, there's not going to be enough customers. And it's really totally the opposite way of how I should think about it.

James: I mean, there's like six or seven different types of guitar people, like blues guitar, there's gypsy jazz guitar, I can't even remember some of the other ones. There's some obscure ones I've never heard of, but they're big. They've got books on Amazon. They've got their channels. They're getting heaps of viewers. We've got voice coaches, at least two of them.

Danny: Yeah, [John Henny](#), he just moved from LA down to my neck of the woods here. So we chat all the time.

James: Right. And he's also done the thing from studio to online and doing really well with it.

Danny: He sold his school, I believe.

James: Right, so he just had a fantastic innovation in his business. Him and I chat, I'll let him tell us about that. I won't spoil the thunder. But there's also other bass guitarists, like if you think bass guitars are a hard market and one guy is crushing it, I know several others who are crushing it as well. It's like, it's really fascinating. I think the world is big.

You don't need a huge audience, like I'm testimony to that. I think we still only have 9000 email subscribers at SuperFastBusiness. So I'm not a massive mega online guru. I've just got a persistent podcast, I have the best customers, and even if you have 500 or less than 1000 customers who pay for good products or services, you can still have a seven-figure profit. And it just blows my mind, the leverage you can get if you have good products and services.

The no-BS approach that's paid off big time

Danny: Would you attribute some of your success, you know, one of the things that I always have enjoyed about your show is you really just don't BS people. You know, kind of like the online guru world, the internet marketer world, you know, has a lot of that stuff, and you've always just been really straight to the point and kind of ahead of the game. You know, the [OwnTheRacecourse](#) type concept, I believe you were talking about that as far back as FreedomOcean.

James: Oh, from day one. I mean, I learned it in business before the online world. So of course I brought it here. And I agree with you, like, I'm like you, I don't like all the BS and the hoopla, like it drives me wild. I didn't get it when I came online. All these manipulate tactics. And when you get in a room with them, like, you know, you said you had the guys who you looked up to in your peer group, when I got into a room with some of these experts, and I heard what they were talking about, I was just disgusted. Like, they don't care at all about the customer.

It's like, I want to make money, what's hot? What can I sell? That's how they start. I'm like, well hang on a minute, what about who's out there with a problem that I can solve and give them some real value and help them out in their life, and maybe become a beneficiary by offering that value, and getting paid for it? Like, it was so selfish, and you try talking to these people or getting access to them, it's like, really wild.

It's like that saying, you know, don't ever meet your heroes, you'll be disappointed. I have been disappointed on a number of occasions from the people who preach from the highest echelons of being, you know, high standards and all of this stuff, and then you meet them, and they let you down, and they let everyone around them down. It's like, wow, if only the public knew.

But it seems in this world, the public do find out eventually, and the cracks are starting to show. So I'm playing the long game. And I don't mean to sound like Gary Vee when I say that. But I always came into this with a long-term view. And I'm not needing to make \$10 million a year. So I don't have to do all the crap that comes along with getting that, because my life would suck if I had to do a big once-a-year launch, or if I had to do live streams every day, I'd feel like a sellout to myself.

I don't care so much what other people think, but to myself, I'd be disappointed. Just want to serve, make some podcasts, do good work. The people I talk to and the results they get, that really gives me a buzz. I've got a guy I've been coaching for two years, he had no membership site when he started. Yesterday, I asked him where it's up to. He's doing \$61,000 a month. And he's had the best year ever, financially, family wise, time wise, leverage wise, it's like, everything he touches turns to gold, and I love that.

That's where I can feel that I'm doing something good. I like doing good work. It's as simple as that. And yeah, I'll never beat around the bush or get involved with stuff that I don't think is good for humans. That's really a filter. Is it good for humans? If it's not good for humans, I'm not doing it. I can tell you've got values as well, Danny, you've been very open with us.

You've shared some great insights for people on that journey. I love our little historical connection, your timeline and the fact that we've interacted via podcasts at least before. Thank you for using the platform well, [10XPRO](#). I mean that's how we met recently, John introduced us, in full disclosure, because you're an example of what can be done. And I want everyone to use the platform that well, and better. I'm learning everyday about this platform. I love it.

Where to go for more of Danny Thompson

Tell us, where can we go? Drop a website address for us or any resource you want, and then I do have one final question for you, because I think it'll be fun to ask after you do that.

Danny: Yeah, I think the best way to connect with me is just to tune into the podcast, [Punk Rock Business School](#). You know, it's on all the podcast servers and all that stuff. And I'll put all my contacts and everything as always mentioned on the show there. And that's a good place to get a feel for the topics that we're talking about.

And I did want to touch base on one last little thing that John and I actually talked about, and I think one of the areas that I'm trying to help people with is, for a lot of people when they hear about these courses and these online memberships that do massive numbers, it seems intimidating.

And one of the things that I talk to a lot of people about is, you know, it doesn't necessarily have to be that. What would \$5,000 a month from an online course business do to your lifestyle? If you're already paying your bills, and everything's fine, what would five grand a month or 10 grand a month, or for some people \$1,000 a month, you know, to be able to make that shift in your life to surf all the time, take motorcycle trips, ride bicycles. You know, for me, that's the motivation for the most part, is I just want to do what I like to do every day without really having to answer to anyone. And for me, that dollar figure is tremendously low.

You know, I interviewed Alex Bogusky on my show the other day, and, you know, he's mega loaded from the advertising world, but he's like, you know, I got peanut butter and jelly tastes, and that's how it's going to be. I don't really need to make any more money. I'm not going to change my lifestyle. And, you know, I still drive a used truck because I don't like spending money on the new car. I don't need that to feel good or to live the life that's fun and interesting and rewarding to me.

And I think the opportunity that the online course world or memberships open for people is to be able to live that kind of lifestyle and get out of that day-to-day grind that is just so miserable for so many of us. Alright, hit me with your last question.

Ever upstaged a customer?

James: Okay, so thinking back to the shop, right? You were selling equipment, you were a talented musician, you would have customers coming in wanting to test drive or try out the equipment. I'm just wondering, do you have any interesting memories or stories around when someone's asked you about something or perhaps you've demonstrated the equipment and they've had any reaction to it, because this is something that I can relate to, from being in the Mercedes-Benz dealership, because all the customers used to come in and some of them thought they could drive, but many of them really weren't very good drivers.

And sometimes, we would do track days. And the staff had been to so many track days and was so trained on the product that we were actually banned from recording the times or competing with the customers, because we would demolish them, like they would tap maybe three tenths of the potential of the vehicle. And we were doing the hot laps with just absolute precision with the driver trainers beside us with intercoms and helmets, like we'd get it down. And it was just an unfair contest. And often the customers were gobsmacked at how good we were.

Did you ever blow someone away at the drum kit or something in the shop?

Danny: I would say, you know, kind of from a similar mindset, I preferred to not really ever sit down and play, because most of the people weren't very good. And then, you know, it was that intimidation factor. You know, and I think we still apply that in what we do in teaching music today, is like, the goal is to really open it up to that person. And so anything that would intimidate them, I would try to stay away from.

I definitely would say, I had done it when I got the wrong customer who was pushing the buttons for too long that they were this good player and they were name droppers, you know, it was the old like, you know, Mick Jagger told me, you shouldn't drop names, kind of person. And then at that point, I had to sit down and go, Well, you know, you might want to do this, and then just do something that I knew would change their perspective a little bit.

The stories that I could tell you from Guitar Center could fill a three-hour podcast easily. It was the craziest thing. But, you know, a tragic event when the Waco Texas thing happened with David Koresh, they had him on the cover of Time magazine or something, and he was wearing a t-shirt, and we all knew, all the Guitar Center people knew, that it was actually a promotional anniversary t-shirt from Guitar Center.

But he was showing the back of the t-shirt, and we all recognized it, and we were so happy that they weren't showing the front that had our big logo on it. And just crazy connections. I had customers calling me collect from prison that were big name people that were having court cases that were on TV. And then later that day, I'd get a collect call, and they were getting music equipment. It was the weirdest, strangest group of customers that you could ever imagine.

And I was working in our Sherman Oaks store one day, which is kind of in the valley and in LA, and I come out from the back office and over at the main counter standing there buying guitar strings is Kurt Russell and David Hasselhoff.

James: What a combo.

Danny: And I was like, yep, this is Guitar Center in Los Angeles. You don't know who you're going to run into, you know, it's the funniest thing. They're just there like anyone else, you know, whatever.

James: Wow, yeah. I once sold a car to Russell Crowe.

Danny: Oh, nice.

James: I had lots of celebrities and interesting people at Mercedes-Benz. Well, Danny, I've got to let you go. You're probably going to get out and have a little play of an instrument or unwind for the evening.

Danny: I'm going to get a bike ride in here.

James: Yeah, go for it.

Danny: It's 90 degrees in March in California today. It's nuts.

James: I know. I'll be surfing, so it's sports all around. Thank you so much for sharing.

Danny: Thanks, James. I really appreciate it. It's an honor to be on and talk to you.

James: That's been heaps of fun. And I hope we get an update from you down the track of where you take this.

Danny: Absolutely. Thank you so much.

James: All right, that's Episode 823. We'll put up all the show notes. We'll link to Danny's stuff. And we hope to see you on the next episode.



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