

THE APOTOMONK

GUIDE TO
THE BEST
PLATFORM
FOR
ONLINE
CLASSES



What is the best platform for online tai chi classes?



Whether you are teaching yoga to a few friends at home, running a local fitness class from your community centre or holding workshops for 100's of Gung-fu students, online platforms have emerged over the last few years as a necessary tool for 21st century teachers. The pandemic has reminded us of the unpredictability of life, but technology has given us the tools to remain flexible and available for our students.

Online teaching part 3: This series of 3 posts began in Part 1 by looking at the basic hardware needed to setup your recording studio. In Part 2 I focussed on essential software for filming and editing and in this final article, I am going to look at what you should be doing with all the content you create. If you haven't given it much thought, then now is the time to start to gather together what you have and make sure your students have access to it.

Of all the new platforms springing up each few months, I want to look at the good and bad of 4 leading platforms that have been around for a while. If you want to just jump straight to the results then scroll down to the Podia section, otherwise read on.



WHAT THIS PDF CONTAINS

THE WEB ARTICLE REVIEW OF 4 DIFFERENT TEACHING PLATFORMS

1. TEACHABLE
2. UDEMY
3. GUMROAD
4. PODIA

PLUS - ADDITIONAL RECAP SECTIONS AND A LIST OF **ITEMS TO CONSIDER** WHEN EVALUATING DIFFERENT PLATFORMS (SEE FINAL PAGES FOR THOSE THAT WANT ALL THE DETAILS)

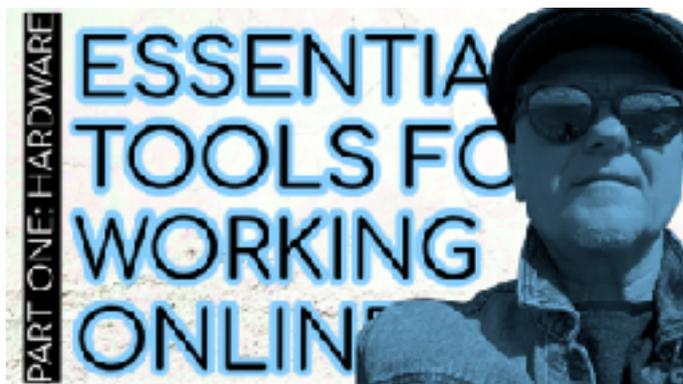
It forms part of a 3 part series on Teaching Online.

For more on Teaching Online [see this article](#).

Read part 1 [here on Hardware](#)

Read part 2 [here on Software](#)

Watch the accompanying series of videos on Youtube: **teapotmonk**



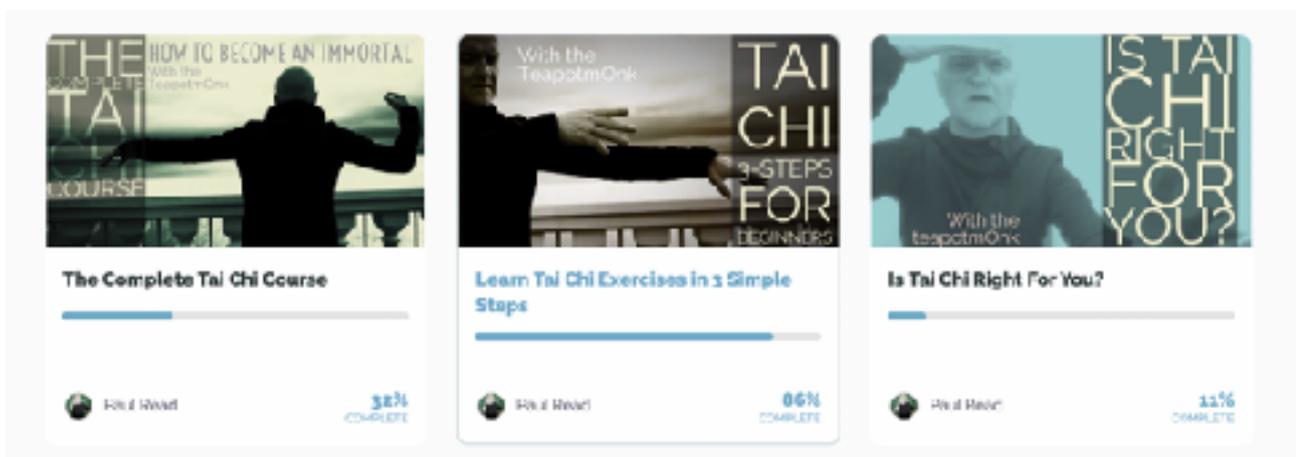
TEAPOTMONK

I've been teaching tai chi for over 30 years and online for since around 2015. The skills necessary to offer online classes are not difficult, but do require more than just aiming a camera at yourself and then uploading that video to Youtube. You can do a lot more with the technology that we now have and, the means by which people now access your material. To find out more check out all the articles at teapotmonk.com and keep an eye out for an new PDF to be released soon on Online Learning And Teaching for your class.

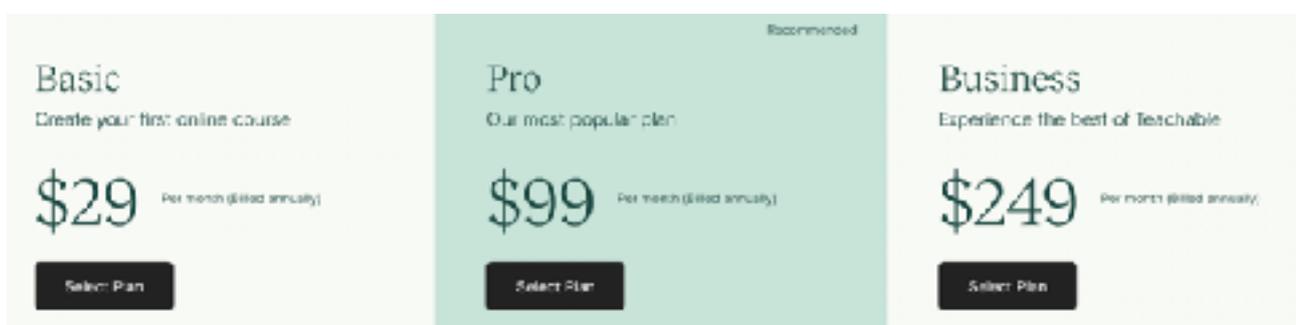


1 TEACHABLE: A GOOD START BUT...

Back in 2015 one newly released platform caught my eye, it was called Fedora - but would soon change its name to Teachable. Back then, they offered a free plan (though this has now been ditched). Free always sounds good, but the truth is that there is always a price, and in this case the commission on each sale was pretty high. But, the low entry point meant I could try out an idea without committing myself to a monthly or yearly fee. I hadn't taught online previously, and so wanted to dip my toe into the online world to see if there was sufficient interest for distant tai chi instruction.



One thing that concerned me was the absence of any marketing by the company to find you clients, so it would be up to me to bring my own customers to the platform. I had an email list, but it was relatively small. How many of these email subscribers would be prepared to pay for an online course? To find out, I ran a survey amongst them, and found - to my surprise - there was just enough to give it a try.



I began to plan out my first course. It was a challenging task on so much creative work, but, challenging and inspiring too. However, when I began to upload the videos to Teachable there

were teething problems. Uploads it took forever, and Teachable made a mess of VAT payments and taxes for anyone living outside the USA (often the case for those of us living outside the USA). Eventually they sorted it, but they kept changing the goalposts for those on the free plan. Workflows that initially were offered were removed and made exclusive to the paid plans (a practice many platforms still do), and customer support was slow and - not unsurprisingly - USA centric.

In the end, in order to keep the options I had, I succumbed to their pressure and shifted from free to the paid plan so I could still access free-coupons, drip fed courses, a custom domain, and retain access to students directly via emailing. \$30 a month was not excessively expensive, and at this price the sales commission was reduced down to 5% on each sale. But I needed to find more students and this was proving difficult at a time when many people still believed (and still do) that you cannot teach an art like Tai Chi online.

WHY I LEFT TEACHABLE

I left in 2017 because I grew tired of the platform; the ever-shifting levels and services within plans irritated me. I also needed to find new clients and so looked around at other platforms. I needed an established market place in which to sell my courses. Somewhere that pushed customers to me. The only real choice back then, was Udemy, so I set about creating some new shorter courses as I headed over to this new platform.

EXTRAS: WHAT DOES TEACHABLE WIN?

Early bird Platform designer
Great Course Structuring

QUICK REVIEW

- No free trial
- Just online courses
- Good quizzes with minimum grades to pass (Only on the \$99 month level Plan)
- Certificates within the system (\$99 level)
- Integration with 3rd party apps

TEACHABLE Q&A

1. Offers Course Structuring? - Yes. Very good.
2. Is all content downloadable? - Yes
3. Are there Drip fed options to release content over time? Yes, - paid plans only (but, as I said before, all plans are now paid plans)
5. Are there Previews - yes.

6. Are webinars built in? No
7. Is Live chat offered? Yes - but only on \$99 month plan
8. Are Memberships offered - Yes
9. How is the design? Good - but you cannot sell products - only courses.
10. Price - starts at \$29 (with 5% commission) rising- to \$249 (2% commission)

[Take a look at Teachable](#)



2. UDEMY: GOOD REACH...BUT A RACE TO THE BOTTOM



Udemy appeared to have just a few tai chi instructors on its books - now, of course it is over-populated. (See the screen grab below from their search bar.) Those that were already on Udemy offered two sorts of content: The first reasonably good material, but poorly presented. The second, had simply uploaded old DVD material and it showed. Active participation would not be incorporated for a few years yet.

Udemy did offer a lot of help in course construction and good resources for setting up an online course. I learnt a lot from their structuring guidelines and tested them out with a range of short courses. For a while, I was hopeful.



WHY I LEFT UDEMY

The main reason I left Udemy was that I always felt like it was the platform and not the course that they were selling. Udemy will promote any course as long as they can sell something. This is the same approach that Amazon employs with their online sales. Before purchasing, you are bombarded with "other people brought this course that is similar - but cheaper...". It works as a sales technique for the company, but not so good for the instructor, unless the algorithm suits your approach and you are ahead in the race to the bottom. Secondly, I offered a free taster course that was taken up by thousands, and as Udemy encourages reviews, I received a number that were strangely critical and that quickly pulled down your ranking and position in searches on the platform.) There was little you could do about this, and so eventually you are forced to remove the free courses.

Finally, in order to access the Udemy marketplace, you must agree to their participate in their course discount promotions. This meant that the average earnings on a course sale dropped to just a few dollars. Not so bad if you are selling hundred a day, but for most people this wasn't realistic. Of course you could always bring your own customers to the Udemy site and keep your prices high, but then why bring them to the site at all? I suddenly felt like returning to Teachable, but one thing stopped me. I realised that I could also be selling my books, my audiofiles, my PDFS and other digital content and I couldn't do that on Teachable. I wanted a place to be able to create a digital store. After all, this was the 21st century and I had a range of Tai Chi materials to distribute.

One company, caught my eye, I liked their approach, their charges and their sense of doing something different. I decided to move everything over to Gumroad.

THE UDEMY Q&A

1. Offers Course Structuring? - Yes. Very good.
2. Is all content downloadable? - No
3. Are there Drip fed options to release content over time? Yes, - but you cannot upload partial courses, the whole thing must be uploaded for evaluation and approval before going on sale.
4. If you wish to make use of the Udemy market place (if you didn't you may as well sell on your own website) then Udemy always discounts your course to get customers. On average I made between \$3 - \$4 a course sale (Priced at \$40)
5. Are there Previews - yes.
6. Are webinars built in? No
7. No access to customers emails. No Live chat.
8. Are Memberships offered - No
9. How is the design? Extremely limited
10. Price - free but.....

WHAT DOES IT WIN?

Best Course Design Assistance.

Biggest marketplace for finding customers

Best mobile and desktop applications.

[Take a look at Udemy](#)

3. GUMROAD: GREAT IDEAS BUT...



I have a soft spot for Gumroad. It is a great platform. It offers digital downloads that you can give-away for free, that you can sell or even that you can leave it to the customer to pay what they wish. It has a unique design - that is a little awkward and confusing for customers and creators - but you get used to it, eventually. It offers a lot for the little it charges you. There is even a free plan, but, as the paid plan is only \$10 a month I'd recommend going with that. You'll get drip fed courses, email scheduling, email workflows, sales pages and analytics. Gumroad deals with taxes and has a receptive and supportive help team. And as companies go, they are transparent, something I do appreciate.

The screenshot displays two pricing plans on the Gumroad website. The 'Getting started' plan is on the left, and the 'Creator' plan is on the right. Both plans include a list of features and a call-to-action button.

Plan	Price	Key Features
Getting started	Free	Unlimited products, Analytics and customer management, Limited posts and workflows, SD streaming, 5% + charge fee (3.5% + 30¢)
Creator	\$10 a month for less than 1,000 customers	Add your own CSS, Use your own domain, Unlimited posts and workflows, Unlimited HD streaming, 3.5% + 30¢ per charge only

WHY I LEFT GUMROAD

Despite bringing in staff from Teachable to work on Gumroad, and despite promoting their online course structuring, they never really delivered a usable product. Customers would complain about the confusing process of signing up, finding files, order of material and completion of files. Gumroad was fine for books and simple content, but as I predominantly sell courses through drip-fed time-separated until, I get despondent with the lack of good structure. Then, ideologically, it began to wind me up. Each week they promote a Gumroad success story - someone who is making a million a week despite only opening their Gumroad account 2 days ago. I found these distasteful given the vast number of Gumroad users earn just dollars each week, so an endless barrage of people parading their wealth and success in your inbox each week was not the motivating prod I needed. I wanted to know about those that were struggling

and getting by, or those that were moving forward gradually, realistically, in an achievable way. I wanted to people I could identify with, relate to and maybe even aspire to become. So, convinced there was still a better alternative, I went in search again.

THE GUMROAD RECAP

1. Offers Course Structuring? - Bad. Disorganised and little student engagement.
2. Is all content downloadable? - Yes
3. Are there Drip fed options to release content over time? Yes, - paid plans only
4. Codes - yes. Paid plans.
5. Are there Previews - No. On free plan courses limited by size and not drip fed.
6. Are webinars built in? No
7. Yes to email. Is Live chat offered? No.
8. Are Memberships offered - Yes on paid plan.
9. How is the design? Extremely limited.
10. Price - Free, but with limited content, ltd subscription offering, ltd drip fed content, and with commission of 8.5% + \$0.30 (USD) per sale. Paid is \$10 month (3.5% + \$0.30 (USD) per sale.

WHAT DOES IT WIN?

Best budget option.

Best for trying out for free (but remember the with commissions)

Most Transparent CEO

[Take a look at Gumroad](#)



4. PODIA : SO FAR SO GOOD



I did not want to lose the digital storefront idea - a place for courses and products. So I gave Podia a try. Podia had been on my radar a while. But there was no free plan and I wasn't sure if the monthly fee was something I wanted to after the Teachable experience. But as I looked at the details, I could see that it combined the best of Teachables course structuring, with the product sales from Gumroad.

I could even run a basic email package within the platform, set up workflows, link products and bundle them easily. I could create webinars or live feed sessions, offer levels of memberships for the more dedicated and even offer chat messaging on the platform.

What surprised me, was when I did the figures. It was cheaper than teachable and provided a digital online store. And as for Gumroad, yes it charged less each month but it took quite a lot in sales commissions. Podia, charging a relatively higher monthly fee, took nothing in sales commissions. At the end of the day, the difference was negligible with the sales I had, but I had a much better platform and a lot more tools to play with. I decided to try it out. Podia offer a 2 week - try everything for free - so I tentatively gave it a go.

Their help files, customer support and easy-to-use web-site tools were a relief after the previous platforms. I like the simplicity of the layout and I like the minimalist design. After the end of 2 weeks I signed up and was pretty impressed. But don't take my word for it - try it out. You can access the same trial using this the button below. No credit cards, details or nothing. Nada* Of course, I should add that I always feel excited with switching to a new program, so perhaps its best to ask me again in 6 months time.

6 MONTHS LATER WITH PODIA

If anything, Podia has grown on me. It seems to offer something new every month or so. And you feel part of the project as it releases these new updates and extra tools. The help staff are accessible, friendly and supportive and you don't wait long before someone has found an answer for you. Unlike Gumroad, it has a humbleness about its presentation and does not shove

get rich quick templates down your throat every week. They have an excellent Youtube help channel to share their knowledge and tips. Finally, they offer a lot - even in the basic package. If you are a teacher or a creative content provider considering an online platform to host your video work content and class material, to build a library of resources and to be able to offer webinars built-in as well as chat support for your students - all on the Mover basic package then I recommend Podia by far.

It works out about \$32 a month if you pay a year upfront (About £23 - which is crazily cheap for what you get)

Plan features

	Mover	Shaker	Earthquaker
	\$39/mo \$390/yr (Save \$78/yr)	\$79/mo \$790/yr (Save \$158/yr)	\$179/mo \$1790/yr (Save \$356/yr)
Core			
Unlimited everything ⓘ	✓	✓	✓
Zero transaction fees ⓘ	✓	✓	✓
Free migrations ⓘ	✓	✓	✓
7 days a week support ⓘ	✓	✓	✓
Daily live Q&As	✓	✓	✓

If, you want to go further, build memberships, create blog posts on the platform, affiliate marketing, embed items on your website - then check out the next level called the Shaker plan that works out at about \$65 a month (if you buy a year upfront.) As for the next level - unless you are part of a large team organisation then forget it. That's not really aimed at you or me.

**And full disclosure, if you use these links and later go-on to join Podia, then they pay me a small commission. But, just so we are clear, I'm recommending this platform because I genuinely believe it is the best platform for creative teachers out there. I've tried quite a few before now, I use it every day myself and believe it is the best out there. Check out the links and example pages below if you want to see how Podia works .*

PODIA RECAP

1. Offers Course Structuring? - Yes. Very good. Even comments on each class. Quizzes and certificates included.

2. Is all content downloadable? - Yes to digital goods, no to course videos. (See notes)
3. Are there Drip fed options to release content over time? Yes.
4. Coupons - yes.
5. Are there Previews and free courses - yes..
6. Are webinars built in? Yes
7. Email students and Is Live chat offered? Yes.
8. Are Memberships offered - Yes but only on Shaker Plan
9. Design - yes - it almost doubles as a web site, but at the moment is limited due to restricted SEO possibilities.
10. Price - Move Plan \$39 - however no commission on any sales
Shaker Plan - \$79 - however no commission on any sales.

Free 14 day trail

[Take it for a test drive here](#)

WHAT DOES IT WIN?

- Best Regularly Updated Platform
- Best minimal design
- Best Value for money

LINKS AND EXAMPLE PAGES

join here)'."/>

37 Step Tai Chi Short Form

The Simple Tai Chi form for all levels
Learn the most interesting (and adaptable) of all the Tai Chi forms in this new 12 month course: the Cheng Man-ch'ing 37 Step Form

Join as a stand-alone course or as part of the Academy.
1. Check out the [Academy](#) for additional training materials and discounts (see below or [join here](#))

**Cheng Man-ch'ing's
37 Step
Taichi
Form**

[Trial Podia](#)

Membership Academy example

<https://www.21stcenturytaichi.com/academy>

Podia site example

<https://www.21stcenturytaichi.com/>

Book download Example

<https://www.21stcenturytaichi.com/the-manual-of-bean-curd-boxing>

Free PDF download example

www.21stcenturytaichi.com/beginners-guide-to-tai-chi-free-pdf

Course example

<https://www.21stcenturytaichi.com/the-37-step-tai-chi-short-form>

So there you have it. If I can answer any other questions, then mail me and I'll do my best to answer.

EXTRA INFORMATION

ITEMS TO CONSIDER WHEN EVALUATING DIFFERENT PLATFORMS

1. Course Structuring

The ability to not just list courses, but organise them. Add different types of files to different sections and crucially, offer students a visual feedback for progress during the course.

2. Ability for students to download all content.

Initially this was an essential element, until I recognised that with 100s of video files in gigabyte sizes, a year course would require students to purchase an additional hard drive. I also discovered that downloading meant bandwidth issues and problems arose over what software would playback on what devices and with what OS. A lot of time was spent with individual customers trying to resolve these issues.

Having the platform handle the access, playback, storage and maintenance was my final choice and partly why I ended up with Podia.

3. Drip-fed content.

To be able to offer courses spread out over a year and give choices for both monthly payments or yearly was crucial in a time of hardship and a pandemic. This was also useful to stop students attempting to take on too much at one time. Avoiding information overload and employing **Enforced patience** was how one student defined it. Drip-fed is usually a paid for tool (though some platforms offer this in a limited way for free plans).

4. Codes and Discounts and Bundles

To be able to offer early-bird discounts or reduced prices for each item or course is an essential marketing tool. Not all platforms offered this, unless higher plans were chosen.

5. Trial sessions.

Unless you could offer free trials, you have to be able to offer previews so that potential students who do not know of you, can see how you teach and get a taste of the content you offer. Some offered previews, others didn't and still don't.

6. Webinars built in.

This was not something I initially valued, but over time, I have come to see it as a useful means to offer live broadcasts to students and have that broadcast streamed on the same platform.

7. Email built-in and live chat

Having used email programs like Mail Chimp and Mailerlite for years, I wasn't drawn to any platform that offered a mailing program, but it does make sense if that is where students registrar. Segmentations, filtering and drip fed mail are all useful tools with any teaching platform.

Live chat was not around at the beginning, but now is offered by Teachable and Podia. It means that students can message in real time - and you do not need to give out phone numbers of social media contact details.

8. Memberships.

Although I was not drawn to this initially, I was aware that for most visitors to the site/platform they are there to collect something for free and to disappear for ever. This is of course part of what you offer - as it's a taster of the content and an insight into you as a teacher. But having built large lists on both Teachable and Gumroad, with Podia I wanted to segment them further into those that wanted to stay around for regular content and those that didn't want anything else, but hadn't unsubscribed from mail outs. Memberships give you that option to build segments that are more serious about your content and are more keen to receive the latest that you are working on.

9. Design.

The ability to build a basic web site that would serve as more than just a shop front was something I had long considered, but had not found a good solution. Either the shop front was not able to offer the brand content I was looking to sell or its design structure was extremely

limited. Though Podia presents a minimalist concept, it enables a lot of customisation and play. Take a look at the links above for some ideas.

10 Price

This is a bit like mobile phone contracts. There are many variations that confuse the overall price. One thing to look out for is the commission on sales. If you eventually sell a lot this will really push up your monthly fee, even if you have chosen a relatively cheap plan.

Also look out for when payouts occur - it can be in the moment, weekly or monthly. This also might be important to you.

Finally, look for a year option rather than monthly payment as they tend to offer much better deals and will cut down substantially your monthly outgoings.

FINAL NOTES TO BEAR IN MIND

1. This article is not a complete site comparison. There are just too many differentials and the game is changing all the time. This week a podia update enabled web page designs that previously were unavailable and the same week Gumroad offered Apple Pay options. These changing conditions occur all the time so check out each platform for updates - as there will be plenty that I haven't covered here.

2. This is inevitably a subjective analysis. My needs have changed as I have developed a better idea of what I want. At the beginning I only wanted a place to host and structure classes. Later my needs changed as I explored other online offerings, such as digital downloads, live webinars and email all in the same package.

So start always by asking yourself what you want. And move on from there.

I hope this PDF has been of use and will be of assistance in choosing the right platform for your needs.

Need any further information? If I can help, [contact me here](#)

