

## So you want to be a real guitar hero?

By Mary A. C. Fallon • 05/16/2008



A simple technical test on the iTunes store last week shot an iVideosongs' ([DEMO 08](#)) podcast of a guitar tutorial to the top 10 of most-subscribed podcasts on iTunes.

The velocity of [iVideosongs'](#) viral growth since its January launch even surprises the Atlanta start-up's soft-spoken CEO Tim

Huffman, who was nominated for a Grammy 25 years ago for a Gospel song.

"It's been like riding a horse downhill in a good way - we're gaining speed," said Huffman. "We've had fantastic traffic on our site - doubling every month."

New online music lesson Web sites are not only drawing novice and veteran musicians, but fans looking for a different experience with favorite artists - one that offers a more intimate insight into how artists approach playing songs they wrote and performances closer to ones you'd experience in living rooms or nightclubs than stadiums or concert halls.

The iTunes traffic iVideosongs experienced is in response to its twist to online music lessons that differs somewhat from competitors, such as [Workshop Live](#) and the U.K.-based [Now Play It](#), because of the granular and visual way iVideosongs produces lessons.

The iVideosong Web site is a library of multi-camera, high-definition videos of master musicians talking about and playing some of their favorite songs - breaking songs down by chords and fingering techniques for musicians to follow. iVideosongs has attracted more than 100 notable artists from rock, folk, and country music. There's drummer D.J. Fontana, playing a half dozen of the 500 songs he recorded with Elvis Presley, talking about how Sun Records achieved its unique sound and Graham Nash

showing the fingering nuances of playing "Teach Your Children." The songs - played by song writers or other famous musicians - include titles from The Beatles, Rush, Eric Clapton, The Rolling Stones, Jackson Browne, Loggins & Messina, White Stripes, Jet, the GooGoo Dolls, Kim Richey, and many others.

While online competitors have lots of songs and other content, iVideosongs not only has free, basic tutorials but something new, "How to play a song completely and accurately from beginning to end," said Huffman, who got into instructional videos in 1997 with the popular Blues Guitar Explorer CD.

Competitor Now Play It, which launched seven months ago in the U.K., offers 700 videos including some by notable songwriters such as Paul McCartney demonstrating songs. In the next two months, Now Play It expects to launch in the U.S. It has shot videos of a number of U.S.-based artists such as Sean Lennon and Frank Black and is working with a variety of partners to broaden its network, said Ant Cauchi, NPI founder and CEO. NPI hasn't moved its library to iTunes, although its site was recently nominated for a U.S. Webby award and that will likely add to the word-of-mouth buzz that's building.

Meanwhile, Workshop Live's approach is to have about 50 music instructors, rather than artists, teach guitar and drum lessons so it doesn't attract an artist's fan base.

iVideosongs' viral marketing campaign expects to build this month with a featured channel on YouTube and in about a week a featured MySpace channel offering free tutorials while it reserves paid transactions for its own site. Later this year, iVideosongs plans on offering songs through five of the top online distributors, Huffman said.

With 54% of every U.S. household home to an active - albeit often beginning musician -and the "aspiring musician" marketplace hitting \$17.9 billion in 2007 (according to MusicTrades December issue), there is a lot of potential for the online music businesses. Digital sales of music represented 10% of the total worldwide music market in 2007, up from 6% in 2006, reports In-Stat. By 2012, digital music sales will represent 40% of all music purchased worldwide.

While musicians are the target for most online music businesses, iVideosongs' Huffman has been "pleasantly surprised" by the number of music fans who aren't players downloading songs to watch famous musicians point out fingering techniques, share stories, and perform.

"The market for this compelling, unique content is huge as fans want a different, more interactive experience with their favorite artist," Cauchi said in an email interview.

Besides using iTunes, partnerships with musical instrument companies such as PRS Guitars, Taylor Guitars, D'Addario, and Roland and associations with "air guitar" games GuitarHero and Rock Band are also helping iVideosongs build awareness, Huffman said. So far, NPI hasn't invested in marketing beyond its Web site and word-of-mouth, Cauchi said.

iVideosongs has had some sales in England, Canada, and Brazil, including enough traffic from Brazil to warrant beta-testing a Portuguese-language version. The company is also experimenting with a Mandarin version.

iVideosongs offers three kinds of music instruction content. Free tutorials designed to improve basic to advanced skills. Complete and accurate songs, instructed by professional music teachers for \$4.99. Complete and accurate songs, taught by the artists who wrote, performed, and produced them for \$9.99. iVideosongs splits revenues with artists. NPI has a similar fee structure based on U.K. pounds.

iVideosongs, which spent three years negotiating clearances for the songs it offers as video lessons, uses a watermark on its videos to protect against piracy and has also retained Greenburg-Traurig, the largest law firm in the music industry.

Private investors 18 months ago financed iVideosongs with \$3.3 million and last week the company began negotiating for series B private equity financing through Gilford Securities in New York, Huffman said.

PHOTO - Guitar legend Graham Nash plays for iVideosongs.