



Gurjit Degun | May 08, 2017

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Social media according to The Body Coach: Joe Wicks shares his recipe for success

Joe Wicks has gone from boot-camp fitness instructor to bestselling entrepreneur almost overnight. The millennial heir to Jamie Oliver tells Gurjit Degun how he became a social media sensation quite by accident.

1



Joe Wicks is better known as The Body Coach to his 1.8 million Instagram followers, who usually see him clad in shorts and a tight T-shirt shouting: "That right there is lean in 15."

When he speaks to *Campaign*, before rushing off to shoot a TV show, he's a pared-back version of the loud thirty-something who posts 15-second video recipes,

exercise routines and body transformations – and calls broccoli "midget trees". Today, he looks relaxed in jeans and a (slightly less tight) T-shirt, although not without his trademark big curly hair.

"I feel like I've accidentally become a social media marketing expert, really not knowing what I was doing," he says. That "accident" has led to him selling two million books in just 18 months, and in the process becoming author of the fastest-selling weight-loss plan ever.

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The 31-year-old began his career as a personal trainer running a boot camp at Old Deer Park in Richmond, London. His first social media post was on Twitter. "I created a hashtag called #teamlean2013 and was just putting things out like: 'Who's going to the gym today?' Just little motivational stuff.

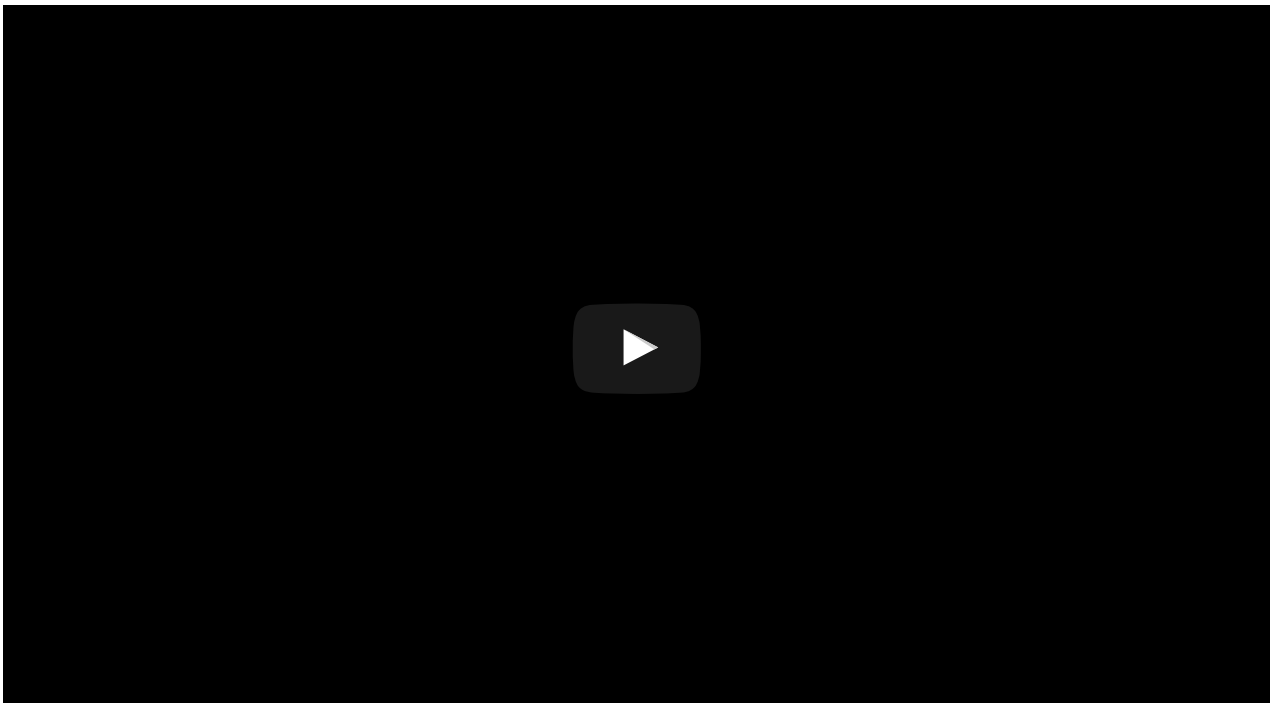
"It built up a bit of traction and then I was posting recipes of stuff I was eating, just observational stuff on my journey to getting lean. I probably had 10,000 followers." Today, on Twitter, he has more than 265,000.

Later in 2013, when Instagram launched video, Wicks was encouraged by a friend to use the platform. "I was reluctant to do it because I thought it was just girls posting selfies – I didn't really understand it," he explains.

But after looking into it and realising that people were posting video recipes, he decided to give it a go with the hashtag #leanin15 – the number referring to how many seconds the video lasts.

Wicks is quick to point out that he never intended to build a "massive" audience "or monetise it, or have a book deal and be on TV". He adds: "I never had an ambition to be like that – I just wanted to have a boot-camp business and expand it a little.

"I was driven by the idea of sharing recipes for someone who didn't know how to cook. That just evolved into every single day posting breakfast, lunch and dinner. I thought: 'Well, I'm making it anyway, so just record it and stick it on Instagram.'"



Joe Wicks 'The Body Coach' on harnessing social media

It's easy to understand how quickly a person can become absorbed in social media. "In the early days, I was obsessed," Wicks says. "In order to be good on social media, I was antisocial in real life."

He explains how, while out at dinner, his mind used to be distracted by his followers, so he would take bathroom breaks just to respond to messages. Wicks says he loved the sense of building a community and became addicted to helping people by giving them advice: "For me, Instagram was a platform that changed it all in terms of allowing me to create a personality and inspire people, and make a massive change."

As Wicks began to build momentum, he was able to monetise his social media reach by creating a digital product to help people lose fat. He believes it takes him between six and 12 weeks to convert followers into customers.

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The Shift, Shape and Sustain plan costs £147 and aims to transform the way people look in 90 days. It is tailored to each person, and includes a training and meal plan each month.

"It's basically simple recipes and short home workouts so it's all positive stuff," Wicks says. "There are so many diets out there that get away with promoting dust: just have dust and one meal a day and eat nothing."

"My message is about cooking healthy food, taking control. It's not like breaking scientific bloody research, it's about influencing behavioural change, and for long enough to see a result."

Users have a support coach they can speak to for advice and, if the plan is not working, the coach will alter the plan. "For example, if they're not burning fat, we can reduce the calories or increase certain things, and that's why the transformations are amazing and I really believe in it," Wicks says.

In the space of a year, interest in the plan catapulted from just one person signing up a day to an average of 100, prompting Wicks to set up an office in Richmond and take on 50 staff. That space features a gym with the latest equipment (including dumbbells branded with his expression "midget trees"), a running track in the middle of the office and a state-of-the-art kitchen.

Wicks, who had amassed shareholder funds of more than £250,000 by the end of the last financial year, has seen his brand grow exponentially.

— His next move is into podcasts. "I didn't even like podcasts until about a week ago when I started listening to *How I Built This*, which is about entrepreneurs and tech start-ups," he admits

Within the space of a year, Facebook "likes" for The Body Coach have increased from 150,000 to 2.5 million, while his Instagram following has also rocketed from 600,000 to 1.8 million. Meanwhile, Wicks' YouTube channel, which was launched almost a year ago, has grown from 30,000 subscribers to 300,000 and now attracts 1.4 million monthly page views.

Wicks believes the key to social media success is tailoring content to each platform. "They're all really valuable if you use them correctly. Things might bomb on Snapchat but be awesome on Facebook," he says. "You've got to learn and adapt. We observe and listen to everything. We know what to post, when and why, to get the maximum reach and engagements."

He commands the types of audience numbers brands covet but Wicks is adamant that he won't sell out: "I know in my heart of hearts that making a quick 50 grand or 100 grand now for something I don't believe in is really detrimental in the long term."

The only way he will work with a big brand is on his own terms. Only if he comes up with an idea he thinks a brand could sponsor will Wicks speak to advertisers.

"No-one can come in and tell me what my audience wants but me. They should trust I know what I'm doing," he says. "If we want to take money off a brand, we want it to be successful and give them a better return on their investment."

Brands that Wicks has worked with include Uncle Ben's, Philips and Microsoft.

To build on the success and avoid becoming "really boring, really quickly, and really irrelevant", Wicks wants to constantly innovate. His next move is into podcasts. "I didn't even like podcasts until about a week ago when I started listening to *How I Built This*, which is about entrepreneurs and tech start-ups," he admits.

As someone who has set ambitious goals for so many people, it is only fitting that he himself has one. "I want to do what Uber did to travel," Wicks concludes. "I want to create the same thing in health and fitness. I don't think there's anything like that for all your health, fitness, nutrition and wellbeing goals. So I'm thinking about how can I reach millions of people."

Wicks' tips for winning on social media

Authenticity

You've got to be authentic in what you're saying. That's a combination of passion and authenticity about adding value to people's lives.

Consistency

Growing a media platform takes ages but it builds trust and allows you to build engagement – so, if you do have a product, they'll just love it. You don't even have to stick it down their throats.

Tailored content

Understand that all platforms are different, not just in terms of audiences but

content. A 15-second video is wicked on Instagram but maybe won't do as well on Facebook. You can't just use the same content on different platforms.

Autonomy

Give influencers a little bit of autonomy and trust that they're not going to take money off you and do the dirty. They want to get the best results out of it because they want to work with you again. If they say they've got an idea and they believe it will get more reach than your idea, take a punt on them and let them do it, and it will pay off.

How brands can make a splash with influencers

Working with influencers helps brands get closer to consumers but it's a relationship that requires work and long-term investment, Adrien Koskas, general manager at L'Oréal Paris, explains.

Social media stars have managed to create a connection with their audience that is perhaps not possible through a TV ad – and, as Lee Bonniface, senior director of marketing at Canon Europe, says: "It's a really powerful marketing channel."

So what's the best way to work with influencers?

Create a good relationship

"For me, a good relationship with an influencer is a genuine endorsement for the product and the brand," Koskas says. "Before we work with any influencer, we have a chat with them about why they like the brand and the product. If there's none of that, it's never going to work and consumers are going to see it."

Bonniface adds that the audience is "very astute" and will be able to see through a message that the influencer does not believe in.

Take a long-term approach

Koskas advises marketers to take a long-term view of a relationship with an influencer, basing it on trust and sincerity. "It's not just a one-off but something you're building over time. The endorsement of your product will be much more credible," he says.

Let the influencer take control

"You can't control an influencer," Boniface says. "You have to be able to collaborate with them and you need to allow them to have a free rein to be able to take your brand out of your comfort zone, to take it into the area of relevance for the market they're addressing."

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