

# What I've Learned: Jeff Ritter

## Social Media Innovator, Phoenix, AZ

Interview by Paul Ramee, Jr.



**Proponent member Jeff Ritter teaches at Raven Golf Club Phoenix, an OB Sports property and the headquarters of Jeff Ritter Golf. Known for his high-energy teaching style and multi-media skills, Jeff has reached a wide golf audience through appearances on outlets like ESPN, Golf Channel and Sirius XM Radio. Golf Digest voted Ritter one of its Best**

**Young Teachers in America. Meanwhile, his self-produced YouTube video content has yielded unsurpassed exposure for him in that medium. The slickly produced Jeff Ritter Golf iPhone app is one example among many of the initiatives Jeff has undertaken to build his teaching brand. This article continues our one-on-one interview series featuring a diversity of insights from accomplished Proponent Group members.**

**We often start by asking the interviewee what drew them to the golf profession. In this case it's simple, you're a second-generation PGA member, correct?**

That's right. My dad, Doug Ritter, was a club professional at Meadia Heights Golf Club in Lancaster, Penn. In 1997 he won the Bill Strausbaugh Award on the national level, which I remember very well.

**You must have spent plenty of time at Meadia Heights.**

I was around the club all the time. Looking back, I can see that I was into figuring out golf swings from a very early age. By the time I was 16, I had members asking me to look at their swings and get them straightened out. I was always watching golf swings on video—old VHS cassette tapes. I guess I fell in love with teaching at an early age. The guys on my high school team would come to me as well, and I'd give them golf lessons.

**Along with your father, who has influenced your style of teaching?**

After college, I worked for Dave Pelz and learned a great deal being around him. I also took lessons from Mike LaBauve and he ended up becoming a mentor to me. As I went forward in my career and ran into challenges, I would generally ask, "What would Mike do?" He's been an important person to me and a big supporter of my career.

**Why do you love teaching and did you ever consider the traditional club pro direction like your father?**

Once you get established in this field and attain some success, to me what you come to love are your actual students—and those moments when you're able to problem-solve successfully as you work with them. That's what really motivates me, the daily problem-solving aspect of teaching. People come to you with a problem or with certain goals and you have to help them resolve the problem or else chart a course to accomplish their goals.

**Explain how you built a global audience for yourself?**

I realized that plenty of golfers live outside populated areas and don't have much access to golf professionals, so I decided that I was going to try to push my message. About seven years ago, I began taking my message to the masses through the Internet.

**It sounds logical enough now but even seven years ago there was much less precedent for this kind of distribution of services by someone in a profession.**

Exactly how to go about it wasn't clear, but in general I did realize that the only thing holding me back was myself. I knew I had something of value. I also knew that I wanted to make it as big as possible and I wanted to get started. Once you switch your mental attitude and realize you have something of value you need to get it in front of people.

**"The industry is definitely hurting, but not for everyone. If you insist on sticking to old ways of doing things, there isn't much opportunity or upside. The way I see it, there are enough golfers for all of us, as long as you know how to leverage them."**

**- Jeff Ritter**



**How did you do that?**

In 2007 I posted a clip of my golf instruction. In one day it had 112 views. I was pleasantly surprised. It was at that point that I challenged myself to get more content posted.

**How did you build on that initial audience of 112 viewers?**

I started producing more short clips. When there was time between lessons I would get the camera out and tape segments. I stuck with that belief, that if you've got something of value the people will watch it. What I notice is that golf professionals are pretty reluctant to give anything away for free, but video and the Internet are a medium and a platform you can't ignore. Since

2007 I have had over four-and-a-half million viewers on my YouTube channel and a large portion of that audience came from outside the United States.

**How has that audience and that response translated to business activity for you?**

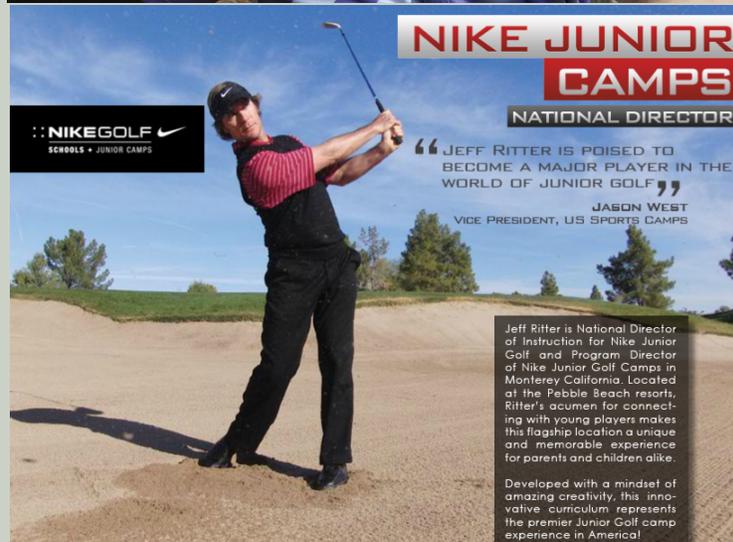
The viewers have driven so much business to me, it's hard to measure. I have touring professionals from Australia coming to take lessons. Recently I had three amateur golfers show up as new students—they each took a daily lesson from me over 30 days. Even more amazing, they had flown in from Korea! When I ask people how they heard of me, 100 percent of them say it was through YouTube.

**As you assess production values and the quality of the content, how have your YouTube videos evolved since you started doing them?**

Obviously, they have gotten better, mainly because I have done them more frequently. In general I've become more comfortable and articulate in front of the camera. Not long ago a production crew came to me. They were shooting footage for a golf instruction show that was going to air on television. Turns out I was one of four instructors they had selected to provide content. The other three had done their taping before me and each of them took a full day to capture their content. When it was my turn, we wrapped it up in one hour. That was a matter of experience and how much more comfortable I was in front of the camera than the other three instructors. Now every time they need some content that crew calls me exclusively.

**What do you think of the current state of the golf industry?**

The industry is definitely hurt-



ing, but not for everyone. If you insist on sticking to old ways of doing things, there isn't much opportunity or upside. The way I see it, there are enough golfers for all of us, as long as you know how to leverage them. You need to have passion and inspire people. You need to learn how to create content and you need to learn the power of branding yourself. We have to switch our mental attitude and absolutely not apologize for promoting ourselves.

**What mistakes did you make in the beginning with respect to content?**

I was pretty typical in that I didn't have the entrepreneur's mindset. I only saw the money going out, not the potential for money to come in. It takes an investment of time and money to create content. I had the mistaken idea that I couldn't afford to do that. It was actually the opposite: I couldn't afford not to create content.

**What do you think the consumer is looking for?**

Obviously, they are looking for value and if your message looks and feels like it is quality, then they will come back and view other content. Our consumer is very smart and has a lot of options. By using a diverse social media offering I have learned how to leverage a larger clientele, through an eBook, through an I-Phone App which returns me income on a daily basis. That platform has created "passive revenue" for me.

**What advice would you have for young instructors?**

Visit and watch as many of the great teachers as possible. Watch the really skilled instructors and don't concentrate on those that just create a high volume of students. Put yourself in a position to teach and look for positions that are part of an ingrained "learning environment."