

NEW APP PUTS PROPONENT MEMBER'S COACHING ON SMALL SCREENS

JEFF RITTER GOES MOBILE

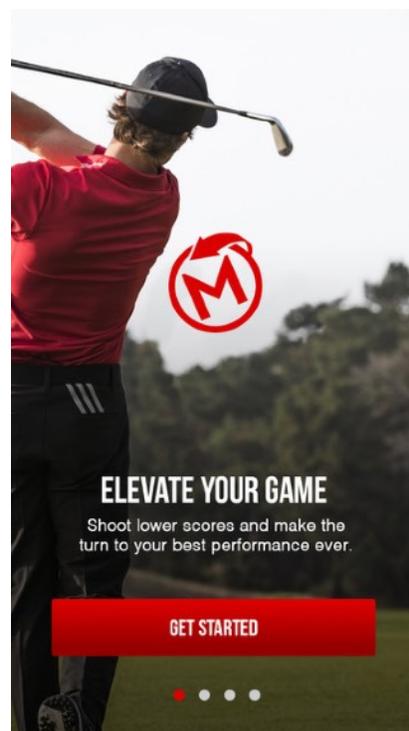
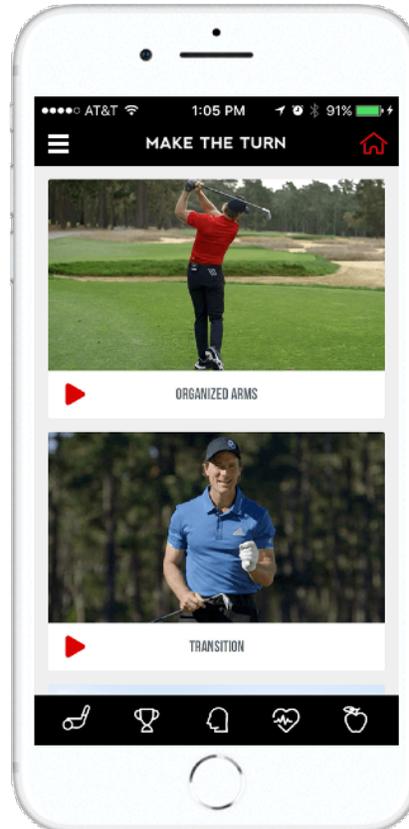
By David Gould, Staff Editor

Experts in social-media marketing have called 2014 “the year Facebook organic reach died.” Others peg 2014 as the peak year in a gradual process called The Great Organic Reach Decline, affecting anyone with a Facebook business account. But for nimble marketing agencies like L.A.-based Freestyle Studios, it signaled a major opportunity: If “organic” (translation: free) online marketing through the social-media platforms goes away, specialized content becomes harder to share and harder for people to find.

And for that matter, isn't the so-called “browser-based” way of viewing content fading anyway, in favor of content that comes all neat and clean and branded-up via mobile apps? Either way, there's change in the air. Which leads us to the news of Proponent Group member Jeff Ritter partnering with Freestyle Studios last year on a smartphone app that required a major financial investment to create and—now that it's up and running—gets “boosted” through paid Facebook advertising to the tune of \$20,000 a month, or more.

Impressive enough, but all the more so in light of the fact that Ritter paid nothing out of pocket to get all this to happen. Instead he agreed to a 50-50 revenue split with Freestyle, on a five-year deal based on continuous production and uploading of new content—video and podcasts alike—for app subscribers to consume. The agency actually sought Ritter out, based on his Make the Turn brand and strong presence in the golf-instruction category online. This led to a breakfast meeting in Los Angeles in which the basics of their agreement came together.

“Their message was, “We have a formula to take niche content from established providers and scale it up so it generates significant revenue,” recalls



Jeff Ritter's new Make The Turn app

Ritter. “I had actually produced my own golf app a long time ago, but it didn't really go anywhere. Then I put a lot of energy into building a Facebook business page with an audience of 25,000 people—which lost basically all its value when Facebook flipped the switch” on organic posts.”

He was certainly ready to go a different marketing route and now encourages his fellow Proponent members to consider something similar.

“My conclusion after a lot of years in this business is that job security doesn't come from being secure in your job—it's all based on having a strong personal brand,” he says. “The day could always come when management of the facility I'm at says they're sorry Jeff, but we want to go in a different direction—I'm determined to be out ahead of that problem.”

Golfers can download Ritter's “Make the Turn” app for free in order to see if the mix of continually refreshed content is to their liking. If so, they can pay \$4.99 a month or \$49.99 a year to have it available 24/7 on their mobile device. They also get access to a private Facebook page, which Ritter live-hosts for 30 minutes a day, fielding questions and sharing his views on relevant topics. His Make the Turn platform was already following a golf-lifestyle path, with content covering golf skills, physical fitness, nutrition and the mental/emotional topics that affect performance. “It's about improving your play on the course,” he explains, “but it's also about using the game of golf to build your life be the way you want it to be.”

It's not every successful golf coach who sets out to build his teaching business into a full-on lifestyle brand. Scroll through Butch Harmon's website and you won't see photos of him in a supermarket, selecting nutritious meal fixings—at mttperformance.com,

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Ritter's website, you'll indeed find Jeff in his trademark golf visor pushing a shopping cart through the produce section. That image illustrates the MTT blog post on "17 Weight Loss Tips for 2017."

The scaling-up aspect of his new deal is indeed compelling. "Of all the tens of millions of golfers in the world who speak English," he muses, "what if only a tiny fraction of them—say, 5,000 people—come to like what they get from this app and continue subscribing?" The math on that scenario shows \$150,000 in annual gross revenue coming Ritter's way, before he gives his first traditional golf lesson. "This is a new type of delivery model," he says, "but you don't change what you're doing or how you present your information. Hey, it's a particular type of golfer that responds to my approach, and most of those people don't live anywhere near where I teach. But they've all got smartphones in their pockets, and when they're only paying \$4.99 there's a good chance they'll feel they're getting value."

When his partners first told him they were intent on spending \$20,000 a month in Facebook ads to "push the app out" Ritter wondered if they had their heads on straight. The response, based on their work with other content partners in other categories, was that it was foolish not to make these expenditures. "They told me that when they spend \$20,000, they drive \$50,000 or more in new revenue," he says.

Jeff is looking forward to working with fellow Proponent members on guest appearances that will reach Make the Turn's audience and promote those coaches generally, or perhaps plug a new book, a training aid or a special event or series. Freestyle Studios brings the great advantage of broadcast-quality videography and high-tech editing gear manned by skilled professionals. "We got together a while back and did about four days of shooting, which was very challenging," he says. "But when it was over we had many months' worth of content."

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Make The Turn's app will cost \$4.99 monthly for weekly updated content.

NEW CONTENT WEEKLY
Videos, podcasts, and daily tips, updated every week.

GET STARTED

Ritter has certainly labored to build his skill set as a presenter on-camera, but insists that his secret lies on the cutting-room floor. As he tells it, for every smooth and punchy video spot he's produced, there are multiple outtakes spoiled by hesitation or fumbling. Controlling what gets tossed and what gets used has been his recipe for building a strong reputation in video production. He feels good about where Make the Turn is today, but continues pondering ways to improve it.

"I look at what Piers Ward and Andy Proudman put up on their Me & My Golf website and I'm envious of them," Ritter says. "Same with Adam Young, and what he's done with his brand, The Strike Plan. I feel I can succeed by holding myself to a pretty high standard, working hard at it and making sure what I put out there has consistency."

Having come up the learning curve on this new form of content partnership, Ritter believes he can offer valuable advice to Proponent Group members interested in something similar. "I invite anyone in the group to reach out if they have ideas, thoughts or questions," he says. "There's a lot we can do together to create value for the entire golf audience and for ourselves as coaches." **PG**