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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

It's Never Too Late to Start Your YouTube Career

From a 68-year-old fitness instructor to a 57-year-old music aficionado, a new generation of influencers is emerging on the streaming platform as the number of older YouTube users rise.



YouTube stardom isn't just for the young. Clockwise from top left: Margaret Manning, Wendy Ida, Angie Schmitt and Rick Beato all have their own YouTube channels. MARGARET MANNING; KARL PRESTON; ANGIE SCHMITT; RICK BEATO

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Rick Beato figured he was onto something when the first music video he posted online went viral and got 22 million views (it featured his young son Dylan showing off preternaturally perfect pitch). He was in his mid-fifties, with a long career behind him as a college professor and music producer. A millennial-age intern encouraged him to put himself in more videos and start a YouTube channel, but Mr. Beato wasn't sure.

"My first thought was, nobody's gonna watch an old, white-haired guy on YouTube," Mr. Beato recalls.

As of late July, Mr. Beato's "Everything Music" channel on YouTube totaled 194,179,360 video views. Since 2016 he has hosted and posted more than 700 videos made in his home studio, including the recent "[Top 20 Acoustic Guitar Intros of All Time](#)" (which has 7.9 million views) and 93 episodes of "[What Makes This Song Great?](#)," a series where he deconstructs rock classics such as Boston's "More Than a Feeling." He has 1.69 million YouTube subscribers, fans who "follow" him to see his latest videos in their feeds.

"This has been completely unexpected," Mr. Beato, 57, says of his third-act career as a YouTube star.



YouTube fame has been a youngster's game. The top earner on YouTube, according to Forbes, is Ryan Kaji, an eight-year-old who reviews toys. It's not quite "Ripley's Believe It or Not" that people over 50 are popular, but the emergence of older stars in a medium associated with digital-native young people is a relatively novel phenomenon, driven in part by a rising older audience.

YouTube viewership among people over 45 has risen 55% from the second half of 2019 to the first half of 2020, from 11% of all views on the platform to 17%, according to Pixability, a YouTube insights and advertising firm. More older professionals working from home computers hasn't hurt, and YouTube's app for smart TV devices makes watching videos on TV as easy as tuning in cable.

"A few years back, brands and agencies rarely came to us for YouTube campaigns targeting older demographics because there was an assumption YouTube didn't reach older folks," says Matt Duffy, chief marketing officer at Pixability, a YouTube insights and advertising firm. That's changed, he says.

The older viewers often discover kindred spirits creating content.

"We have the wisdom. We have so much to offer," says Wendy Ida, a 68-year grandmother of five whose [high-energy fitness channel on YouTube](#) has 2.4 million views. Ms. Ida was in corporate accounting for 20 years before she left an abusive marriage, moved to the West Coast, and lost 80 pounds, she explains. She began winning bodybuilding titles at 57, and by age 60 entered the Guinness Book of World Records twice, for performing the most burpees (squat thrusts) in a minute and as "oldest active fitness instructor (multiple disciplines)."

"My platform is trying to change the old attitude that when you get older you're perceived as less valuable, less active, going downhill. I'm blowing that out of the water," she says.



Videomakers who have been around the block feel they bring experience. "There's a lot of history in my channel. History of production, history of songwriting," says Mr. Beato, who named his children Dylan, Lennon and Layla.

Margaret Manning, 71, delivers wisdom on her "[Sixty and Me](#)" YouTube channel. It has accumulated 17 million views of more than 1,700 videos, including "[How To Let Go of Your Adult Children](#)." She'd been at [Microsoft](#) for 17 years. After a vacation injury, she felt weakened and started pondering her self-image.

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"I thought there must be other women going through this, trying to come to grips with having boundaries around your body, your health," she says. She started a [Facebook](#) group.

and “it just grew so fast,” then a website and the YouTube channel.

“In corporate America I think women get really beat up between the ages of 50 and 60. That’s where you start this invisibility consciousness—that no matter how much you’ve got to offer, you’re not taken seriously,” she says. “But the invisibility cloak has an on-off switch. You can open the cloak and say ‘Here I am, I’m gorgeous.’”



Angie Schmitt, a career graphic designer, says she was having a crisis over her 50th birthday. “I was looking for some information about what to do about my face, because if you grew up in the ‘70s like I did, I was a sun worshiper. Now I’ve got wrinkles and sunspots.” She started her “[Hot and Flashy](#)” YouTube channel with a focus on looking good as means of staying in the game. “I think women today aren’t willing to accept the destiny of fading into the background. Because in your brain you’re still 30, right?,” she says.

Building to nearly 750,000 subscribers and 97 million views has been a “seven year slog,” Ms. Schmitt says. Her video “[How To Look Good on Video Calls for Zoom FaceTime Skype](#),” posted in March, was her first viral sensation, with more than 3 million views.

The popularity can have rewards. YouTube places short commercials during some videos and compensates content creators. Earnings vary. Around \$10 per 1,000 views, or one cent per view, isn’t unusual. It can amount to the equivalent of a full-time job or nice retirement bump.



“I’m making my income from it, but it’s also just my life now,” Ms. Manning says.

Creators can add sponsors. Ms. Schmitt, as an influencer, does occasional sponsored videos for products she believes in, and she posts affiliate links, which earn her a commission if a viewer likes her necklace and clicks to buy it from a retailer.

Ms. Ida says the videos, aside from generating revenue, help drive her personal training business. Mr. Beato doesn’t get a lot of revenue from YouTube for his millions of views, because he uses music owned by record labels and artists, which alert YouTube and claim the compensation. That’s fair, he says. His YouTube channel contributes to a comfortable income by stimulating sales of his \$49 music book, \$199 ear training course, and merchandise. Yes, fans buy Rick Beato t-shirts.

“I actually get recognized all the time,” he says. “I was picking up a prescription for my kid, and the guy at the pharmacy window says ‘Oh my God, you’re Rick Beato.’”

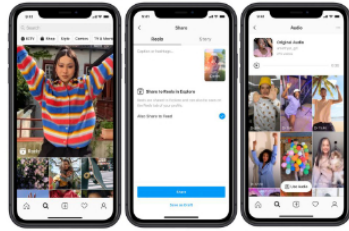
Celebrity is new territory for YouTube stars who began their careers in a time before everyone was a potential video entertainer. Ms. Schmitt wonders: “I’m gonna be 60 in two years. What’s the cutoff for when you’re not relevant anymore, for still having an audience that’s going to watch? Hopefully, the audience that I have now will come along.”

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