

Boom in live video helping some creators make a living

August 8 2016, by Ryan Nakashima

Casey Cooper is one of the most famous drummers on the planet right now. He has a million followers on YouTube, and his flaming-sticks drumming cover of Ellie Goulding's "Burn" is insane.

But he'd just prefer you skip his recorded performances and instead catch him live—on streaming video, that is—because he can make more money that way.

Live video is fast emerging as a lucrative corner of the internet where artists can profit from fans who tip lavishly in order to rub virtual shoulders with their favorite broadcasters. Startups such as Ampli.fi and YouNow are helping foster a digital economy around [live video](#). Now, deep-pocketed tech goliaths like Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat are joining the party.

Different performers have different reasons for preferring live video. Cooper, 24, says fan tips can bring in much more than his hundreds of millions of views on YouTube, where copyright holders claim the ad revenue for use of their underlying songs.

Recording labels haven't reached into live performers' tip jars as they can't really replace downloads or streams of songs. A handful of sites including YouNow have registered to pay songwriting royalties, but the fee is minimal, according to the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers.

Cooper's first session on Ampli.fi, a musician-focused streaming service, netted him nearly \$100 in about an hour.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

"It's so powerful," says Cooper, who broadcast his live show from his home in Canton, Georgia. "People will say, 'Please, please, please just shout me out. Say my username.'"

Such intense fan interaction is one reason internet and media companies are jump-starting their live-video efforts. Facebook is spending tens of millions of dollars recruiting celebrities such as Kevin Hart and Gordon Ramsay for shows on its Facebook Live system. YouTube just announced the ability to go live from your mobile phone. And cable giant Comcast is among several companies that invested \$15 million in October in YouNow, a live-streaming service popular among teens.

How popular? Just ask Sandra Alvarez, a 14-year-old student from Los Angeles who says she used to spend \$50 a month—more than half her allowance—tipping broadcasters on YouNow. She would get notified whenever one went live; with some, she says, she would tune in "basically every time." Some services like upstart Live.me cultivate such devotion by rewarding Alvarez and other followers with daily dollops of digital currency that they can use to buy their favorites virtual gifts.

RECORDED LIVE

But live video isn't always easy to watch. Broadcasts on Twitter-owned Periscope are regularly over before many people even find out about them. Live video requires habits that feel like a return to the old days of broadcast TV.

So more companies are giving users a way to save and share

recordings—though at that point they're not really live anymore, of course.

Facebook Live stored its videos from the start. That allowed Candace Payne's giggling live selfie of trying on a Chewbacca mask to become an internet sensation with 160 million views since May, making it Facebook's most popular "live" video so far. Periscope is testing the ability to save videos longer than the customary 24 hours by adding a "save" hashtag to a stream title. YouNow is adding "Moments" for viewers to share snippets of streams.

TRANSLATING FAN ENERGY INTO \$\$\$

The big question is whether and how live video can turn into a real business. One revenue source is advertising. Twitter, for instance, will stream 10 Thursday Night Football games in the coming season and has already sold 60 percent of its ad spots. But the real prize could be tapping into the spontaneous urge for fans to support small-scale streamers with whom they feel an instant, real-time connection.

It's a little like tipping buskers, but with the convenience of credit cards and the distance of the internet.

Many fans will pay \$5 a month to get VIP status with an artist, says Ampli.fi founder Bart Decrem, a serial entrepreneur who sold a mobile game startup to Disney in 2010. That mostly just gets them a gold star beside their username in the chat room—though that boosts their chance of being noticed by the artist. "It's completely intangible," Decrem says. "That's the most powerful thing."

WEEKENDS AT BERNIE'S

Such intangible economics have helped 71-year-old Bernie Katzman and

his wife Mindy escape their workaday lives of teaching and nursing. From their home in Jacksonville, Florida, he plays keyboards and sings—his left hand on a Steinway, his right on a synthesizer. She chats and sometimes cooks healthy dishes. It's been nearly a year since their 22-year-old son introduced them to Twitch, an Amazon-owned streaming service that is mostly devoted to live playback of videogame battles.

"We thought (Twitch) was a neuromuscular issue," says Mindy, 51. "We had no idea what streaming even meant."

The Katzmans now have more than 190,000 followers, among them nearly 500 subscribers paying \$5 a month. Add in the tips, including \$5 a pop to guarantee that Bernie plays a song request, and it provides a healthy supplement to retirement income. Fans regularly send pictures of their pets and ask marriage advice, which the couple—now married 29 years—gladly provides. All told, it's a full-time job for both of them.

"This has been an unbelievable adventure," Bernie says. "We are pioneers in the field of streaming."

More information: At a Glance: Livestreaming apps beyond Facebook Live: [physorg.com/news389873911.html](https://phys.org/news389873911.html)

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