

Harry Jarman

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined down the line by Harry Jarman, founder and editor-in-chief of Gentleman's Journal, the leading UK lifestyle media brand for men. Harry launched the title in 2011 after spotting a gap in the market for a new luxury brand targeting timeless men's style. Operating in digital and print, the Notting Hill-based title has expanded with its own e-commerce website and a creative agency which builds campaigns for fashion brands. In 2019, Harry launched a Gentleman's Journal retail outlet in the heart of Mayfair. Harry, thank you for joining me.

Hi Paul, lovely to be here.

Well it's a great pleasure, obviously, as a subscriber and a reader and a huge fan of the magazine. I think you're doing a great job and it's a pleasure and a privilege to have you on.

Brilliant. No, it's an honour to be on as well.

Let's talk about the pandemic, if we can, I've got plenty of questions. I mean, how has the pandemic impacted on men's style? Have people been all dressed up with nowhere to go?

Right at the beginning, obviously there's those brands that were very much workwear, shirting brands, tailoring brands that obviously no one had to go and buy a new shirt because there was no one to impress. So I think they've had a hard year. There's obviously been booming markets like loungewear and things like that. But I also think all of these things are gonna come back very, very quickly and people like to dress up. So I think we're gonna return back to normal, but yeah, it's definitely changed the sort of the behaviour of men generally.

Well, I'm very interested in men's style because I suffer from physical hideousness, which is a medical condition where I always feel if I dress well that it helps mitigate that. I mean, tell us, how did Gentlemen's Journal's expansion plan change over the past 18 months?

We were very, very lucky in the sense that we were putting these into place in summer of 2019, we were changing the business and I think the brand has developed from being a magazine and now we sort of don't describe it as that in house, we describe it as a sort of platform. And we were putting those things in place of where we wanted the brand to go. So I mean, obviously the pandemic put a halt to a lot of those plans, but you know we were changing already, so it slightly gave us a bit more time. And obviously there were lots of things we could implement where we weren't having to work so hard on a lot of our clients. We were suddenly doing a lot of housekeeping internally and trying to make the business as strong as possible. So, there were definitely pros and cons.

You launched the brand after you found nowhere to promote the swimwear clothing brand that you'd started. I mean, could you tell us about the origin story? How did this whole thing come about?

God is a very long roundabout way, but I didn't really know what I wanted to do after I'd left school. So I went to go and work on private yachts in the Mediterranean, which was a lot of fun. And at that time there were these brands, swimwear brands, mens swimwear brands that were selling for ludicrous prices and you know, 300 pounds plus, but everyone seemed to be buying them who were holidaying in those areas. So I naively thought I was gonna go and start up an immense swimwear brand. So when I quit that job and came back to London, we tried to set up a factory in Seven Sisters in London and make everything in the UK. It turns out we are very good at making shoes and we're very good at making suits, but swimwear is a bit trickier and probably the UK, probably not the best place to go manufacture for that type of product. But at the time I was trying to get as much press as possible and I found it quite hard unless you were gonna go and spend a lot of money on advertising, again it was completely naive of me to think that setting up a magazine was a good idea, but yeah, we set it up to promote that. The swimwear brand is no longer and unfortunately died a quick death, but the magazine took over and then just grew and grew and grew.

Tell us, how did you grow it? And tell us about the magazine today.

Right at that beginning, it was that moment when social media was still new. And I think Instagram and platforms like that were really growing really, really fast. And it was before they had worked out quite how to monetise those platforms. So we were on the back of that just at the end of it before Facebook started to become a bit greedy and realise they've got to make money. So we grew an online platform first and we were publishing a few articles a week and I was getting friends and family to write pieces and then just growing those social platforms. And it wasn't much later

until we then went into print because we sort of realised that luxury and even still to this day, they still love print, but yeah at the beginning it was just regular content and playing around with social media and experimenting.

I'm fascinated with the print edition. Obviously I'm a paying subscriber and I love the brand, but you're gonna get most of you people clicking and looking online, but I like physically holding the magazine and having that curated experience. Do you think that's something unique to a fashion proposition? That everyone's saying print is dead, but you went from an online proposition into a hybrid one.

I don't think print's completely dead. I think it still has its place, I think not just fashion, but also anything that's trying to target a wealthy consumer, so luxury watches, cars, yachts, it is fashion as well. It still has its place. We look at print as a sort of door really. So all the content that we do produce and print, obviously it's behind a paywall on the website, but we work out how that will go digitally and how we can see that across. So putting together that addition is almost like coming up with a content schedule for online. So they tend to work really well together. And I also think where print succeeds over digital is it's a much more engaging product than say digital is. So when you're sitting there with your print magazine, you are relaxing or reading, you're really digesting that content and online there's so much noise and I'm a prime candidate for this. I always have about a million tabs open at the end of the week of articles that I wanted to read, work suddenly takes over and you don't manage to do it. So I think it still has its relevance. Digital is completely our main part of the business, but for targeting those high network consumers, it is still relevant and obviously subscribers are still growing as well. So it's part of what we offer as a package to subscribers, but it's an important part also.

Who is the typical Gentleman's Journal reader? Do you have someone in mind when you are imagining them sort of perusing the magazine?

Yeah. I think again with print obviously we have our subscribers and then we have a wealthy database that it goes to. So that's very much different online, the median age is 25 to 35 years old, they're guys that are very aspirational as well, they're wanting better themselves. They're probably on that career change where they're about to get that more senior job. So we've done quite a lot of research on our digital reader as well. So we see ourselves as very much taking them along a journey and obviously we're trying to attract them in their mid twenties. And then we hope they stay with us for as long as possible, but they're going through their own journey as well. And we're there to try and cover all the topics that we think are relevant to them.

How do you acquire readers?

A bit everywhere. So obviously the one thing that we feel like we've been clever with is trying to be really multi-platform. So we've got our own podcast that's growing, we've got email marketing, believe it or not, is still growing massively for us, social

media discovery, we have a marketing budget for that. But there's so many different funnels where we go and try and find people, and then it's also about telling them everything else we're offering, but really it is a mixture.

Tell us then what are the next steps then? Do you have any sort of medium long term plans to expand the brand? Will it end up in global domination?

Not quite yet, it's a really exciting time. I mean obviously the last two years have been interesting, but it's really allowed us to take stock of what we're good at and what perhaps wasn't working, we're in a bit of an expansion phase now, and the fact that we're about to go on a big hiring spree, the retail element for us is becoming front and centre. So when it comes to the actual media element, the strategy for there is just keep growing, keep doing what we're doing, keep growing and obviously we've got a much more growing US audience now, which is very exciting. And then here back in the UK, we are going to carry on growing the retail element. There will be a physical version of the gentleman journal in a shop format coming soon. So it's really expanding what we're doing and becoming much more than just a media brand.

I mean you must be incredibly excited about the progress you've made and what's to come. Do you see yourself as an entrepreneur, as an editor, as a chairman, as a publisher? I know it's not helpful to put labels on people, but what label do you put on yourself?

Entrepreneur is definitely that one, I've got an amazing team and Joe, our editor, he's really the guy that comes up with the direction and Johnny, our deputy editor. They're deciding on what they're gonna do on a monthly basis. And then everyone from the design, worked with me for an incredibly long time and I just let them sort of get on with it now. Obviously I have my input there, but really they're what I would call the proper editors. I would see myself as the entrepreneur and trying to develop the brand and taking their good work and trying to see what else we can do with it.

So what does a typical day look like for you, a typical week? Could you paint a picture for what you actually do moment to moment?

Completely different, unfortunately. I would love to be a bit more regular, but on a morning basis, there's certain things on Mondays and sort of midweek where we're going through the editorial plan, catching up on what we're doing. Obviously you mentioned that we have a big agency side, so there's a lot of brands that we're working with there, from luxury brands where we're creating their video content, their content strategies, we manage their social media. So that takes up a lot of my time. And then obviously just catching up with clients, there's various lunches and breakfasts through the week when we're taking what their plans are and working out how we can help them and plotting where we need to support them and on their various launches. So it's completely varied. So client management is a big part of it. And then obviously just checking in with the team and on the content production side of things.

What's your personal notion of style? Who are you influenced by and how do you propagate that amongst your colleagues? Because I read fashion magazines and sometimes I think the models look appalling and then other times my wife might think they look great. It is sometimes very much in the eye of the beholder, is it not?

Definitely. I think when we first started the magazine, at the time we thought men's magazines weren't really creating fashion content for what I would call real men and everyone has their own style, but there are a lot of guys who just like really good quality things and it doesn't have to be catwalk fashion. They just want to invest in the best and we don't sit there and say it's all gotta be super expensive. We don't see any problem with a man putting on a Unico jumper with a really nice, more expensive jacket. Our style is a bit more say normal, I dunno that's the right word, but certainly less about trends than our competitors and a bit more focused on quality and manufacturing and those things that last.

Tell us about where you're gonna take things then in the long term? I read that you want to create a Gentleman's Journal Townhouse, which will be both for retail and hospitality.

Yeah. So I mean, at the moment we're currently in the final sort of processes of doing a retail outlet, but yeah we see it as a brand now and we want people to read the content, sort of live the life that we're talking about, but also use it as a shopping destination. So yeah, the move into retail is both in a digital format and it will soon be physical format. As for the hospitality element, a lot of what we do over the course of the year, we partner with these brands to create these amazing events. And so obviously that is another element that we would like to bring into our physical element as well. So it's exciting. But we're trying to work out how that mix looks now and make sure that we get it right.

How do you talk to your readers and sort of get feedback from them as to what works and what doesn't? I know we discussed the demographics in terms of the quantity, the measurable stuff, but what about the subjective stuff about whether they think you're going in the right direction? It's tough, isn't it?

Yeah. I mean, obviously we get feedback from the stats on the website, so you know which articles do well and which don't, so that obviously plays a part in our editorial sort of direction. But again, Joe, the editor, he very much sort of creates a magazine for what he likes as well. And obviously then we take him to account the stats. So it's a bit of both. And there are certain topics that do really, really well online that you wouldn't expect. So, it's an interesting one to follow.

So what's the biggest challenge that you have in front of you at the moment? What's keeping you up at night?

Not too much is keeping me up at night at the moment. I think the biggest challenge right now is going back to a normal business. So come April, we're moving office and hiring like crazy to fill these positions. So the biggest challenge is getting that in place. And going back to some sort of normality, it's been a really hard couple of years because we're a creative company and it's really hard when you can't turn around someone on the next door desk when you're working from home and go, what about this? And you've had it similarly with your colleagues, everyone's a bit worn out now, Zoom. And I think that's actually what is probably causing a lot more burnout than working. It is just that people actually need that social interaction. So I think that the challenge now is expanding the team, going back into that workplace environment and executing all the plans we have for this year.

I read an article the other day that said a lot of people are what the article called languishing, where they're not depressed but neither have they got much to be pleased about because they're not going out meeting people. I mean, as you pointed out there, Zoom fatigue is a real thing, isn't it? I mean, by the end of the day, I'm more knackered from sitting working for my home office because it's back-to-back Zoom and it's odd, isn't it. If you're in a meeting in real life, if you sort of look down to sort of take some notes, then that's no problem. Whereas if you look down on Zoom, it looks like you're not paying attention. You can kind of see why these news anchors and correspondence, when they're doing the satellite stuff that they have to look at the camera and use this artifice, don't they? Cause if you don't, it just looks like you're not paying attention. And my team was telling me that it's actually more stressful in a zoom meeting, because you have to put as much effort into appearing engaged as well as being engaged.

I totally agree with you. And I think what's really interesting for us is obviously we moved back into our Monday morning meetings now, we're doing those back in person again and it just makes such a difference. But the other side is, when this pandemic started, everyone was really enjoying and relishing the time they got to spend at home. And now in my own business people are sitting there going okay, what is that hybrid model of a few days a week or so there's not gonna be one right or wrong answer. But I do think that the office is not dead. And I think people need it, but it just means that bosses are gonna be a bit more relaxed on what hours people are working, which I think now successful companies approve that they can carry on doing it. It is just a bit difficult and it takes a bit more energy and therefore there is probably a burnout element of it coming through as well.

It's tough. Cause everyone's learning this as they go, including me and including you. I was going to ask an interesting question. I often ask this because I'm fascinated. I've learned tons over the last sort of 25 years of being an entrepreneur with loads of ups and downs, painful lessons along the way. It's been largely great. But one of the biggest things I've learned is not just skills and what works and what doesn't, it is also about myself, cliché alert, but I've been on a journey of self discovery about what I'm good at and what I like doing and who the people I wanna be around. I was gonna put that question to

you, as well as the things you've learned externally, what have you learned about yourself along the way?

A huge amount. I mean, I get the shivers when I sort of think back to the early days because I think I was 23 when I started it and I was still young. I was still working out a lot about myself and there were probably times when I was hotheaded because I was determined to get these things done. And I would say I've definitely mellowed a lot from those early days of being out the coal face. But yeah, I was obviously very young back then, so I think there's been a sort of discovery in that way, but also when there were problems right at the beginning, you would tend to freak out. Now when a problem comes, you are just, okay, well let's work out how can we solve it? And it's a bit more of a calculator response. Which I think only just comes through experience, as you know you can't really do anything when these things happen, but yeah, definitely when I was younger, I was probably a bit more free spirited and wanted everything to be done last week. And I think nowadays I've got a bit more of an understanding that things can't happen that quickly and things take time and, and to be a slightly bit more relaxed about it.

It's weird. Because my friend, Bruce Daisley once said to me, he's written a book about the new workplace, *The Joy of Work*. He said to me that most entrepreneurs have a little angel on one shoulder sort of whispering in their ear that says you're hiring people for their energy, their enthusiasm, their creativity, their ideas, It's not about hours worked and all of that kind of thing. And then there's a little devil on the other shoulder that says they're here to do 37 hours a week and she got in eight minutes past nine then, and didn't say sorry and it's that whole, how do you reconcile the ghost of the eighteenth century mill owner? That's what he says, versus the Silicon valley billionaire entrepreneur.

I completely agree. And that literally sums up entrepreneurs' mindset on a daily basis, but I think the other side is also discovering good people and I think right at the beginning we had some great people, but also there were people that weren't. But the team that we have now in place, I've worked with them all for a long, long time. And that just makes your life's ten times easier. And I think it's when you've got those people that you can really rely on as we do now, it means you don't have that choice of the devil or the angel. You can be slightly more relaxed on it, but yeah I completely agree with him.

Do you have any media entrepreneur heroes? People you admire?

I mean there's lots of people in different ways, there've been some amazing guys who built huge businesses, I've actually just finished reading Bob Iger's book, which I thought was a fascinating story. There's lots of people that have given me lots of advice and I keep finding past ones that I never really knew about and I think that's why it's such an interesting industry, media, there's so many amazing characters in it. Probably and definitely in the sort of heyday of what you would call print magazines, there were definitely some really, really, really interesting characters. Nowadays the

entrepreneurs are a bit formulaic but nevertheless there's amazing people that have built amazing businesses.

So our American cousins call them teaching moments, but we call them mistakes. I've made quite a few along the way and I'm determined not to regret them but turn them into a positive life lesson. I suspect you're of the same mindset as me but could you share with our listeners some of the more painful moments along the way?

I mean mistakes, definitely we made some really, really big ones. This was like really apart from the swimming trunk enterprise, this was really my first time being an entrepreneur. So there's definitely money that we shouldn't have spent in certain areas. I think early on, I tried to listen to perhaps wiser and older people and I think it was good advice, but it wasn't really relevant to today. So we did everything that we should have done, and it was about putting in senior management and getting fancy offices and all the top equipment. But the one thing I think we realised about is we slightly lost our raw edge of being a startup and being a bit scrappy. And I think that was one of my mistakes is you've gotta follow. I know every entrepreneur says this, but if you don't think it's the right way, then just don't do it. And I think even if you've got a board and people sitting there around you telling you to do certain things, if you just don't think it's right for your business, then don't do it. And following our gut. And those times when I didn't, that was when things started to go a little bit wrong.

It's amazing because I do that as well. My dad said to me many years ago that often the seeds of what will go wrong are there at the very beginning of a relationship. And I've seen that myself in my own company where you hire someone and you're not quite sure, but you also think we need capacity, we need people, resources, things are behind, they can help. And actually marrying in haste, repent in leisure, It's the same with hiring, isn't it?

Definitely. I mean, hiring especially at the moment is just one of the hardest things and you never really know until that person's in place. But I read somewhere the other day that a CEO's job is 80% hiring. And just making sure that you are really getting those great people in. So yeah, it's definitely the most important bit at the moment.

It's weird because I think we've both come up from the doing of it to now the management of the doing of it. I often use the analogy of I used to lay bricks and be a bricklayer, but now I'm stood over a team of bricklayers and that's a different job entirely isn't it, in terms of managing it to put the right people on the right bit of the job and make sure that they're motivated and working hard and that everyone's sort of focused on going in a particular direction. There's lots of leadership books that aren't there, but I've never read one that sort of makes the idiot proof for me. I've just got to learn it as I go. How have you changed as a leader? How have you learned the job as you've gone along?

Firstly I missed those days of being slightly at the cold face and I would love to do that a little bit more, but in terms of my leadership, I'm quite hands off to be honest with you. I think I am, I'm sure my team might probably disagree actually but I'm definitely a bit more hands off and I think as long as that person in place is capable and can do the job well I try and let them get on with it. Again, it's just about hiring the right people and trust, but I try but then there are times that you do have to get really involved and you do have to suddenly go back to that cold face to work with that person to make sure that it is right. And I think especially with media businesses and content businesses, we are producing so much content, so many social posts and on a weekly basis there are times when things go wrong but also times when they go right. And I think from a leadership point of view, it's working out when those things are going really, really right, and letting people know about it as much as going wrong.

What's the best and the worst part of your job at the moment?

Oh God. The worst part right at the moment is the planning. We're doing a lot of planning for the whole year, really. So I've been doing that for the last two weeks nonstop and putting various proposals. I think the best part of the job is obviously, when a print issue comes out or when you do a really big feature online with someone very special. We do some really amazing events as well, so we partner with Wilderness Festival, we do a big event there and Canne Film Festival. And when you do those events and you pull it off and it all goes really, really well, it's very satisfying. And again it's satisfying when you get to interview that entrepreneur or that actor that you've been trying to get for a year or so. And the nitty gritty of planning is not so nice, but it definitely helps later on down the line.

I read that you've said the brand is focused on investment fashion and timeless fashion as opposed to fast fashion. How did that come about? Do you ever just sort of rock up to Weatherspoons on a Saturday morning wearing a tracksuit? Do you always look amazing or are there any off days?

No, definitely. What I mean by that is there's a lot of brands out there that might cost a lot more to buy, but they're gonna last a lifetime. And that's where we anti fast fashion and trying to actually get people to understand why that costs a certain amount of money. And if you look at take British British shoemakers, for example, they can cost 350 to 400 pounds and sometimes upwards, but then if you actually go and dissect what goes into that cost and the fact that product's gonna last you the whole of your life, rather than you buying a pair each year it actually then becomes very affordable. So obviously only certain people can afford these products, but when we're talking about timeless and investment, it's actually being able to sit there and make an investment in something that is gonna last you a long time, that's what I mean by that.

The old adage is that it's very expensive to be poor. And I remember when I had no money in my early twenties, that you buy the cheapest pair of shoes,

because that's all you can afford, but you're right in the long term because they wear out so quickly, you end up buying three or four pairs of shoes, which as I can now afford to buy decent pair, they would last longer. And it's actually a longer term investment that saves your money in the end.

Definitely, definitely. And those four pairs of shoes would probably add up to the same price as a good pair of English-made shoes.

When you're interviewing people to join you do you ask them about their fashion choices or do you have a particular way of going about hiring people?

Not at all, we don't sort of look at people and say, okay that person's not fashionable, and can't work for us.

Yeah because if I ever needed a job with you, I'd be worried about that straightaway.

It's about the interest in what we're writing about and fashion is a part of it, watches is a part of it, but so are cars. So we delve into a little bit of politics here and there, but then we also try not to become political or business is a huge part of what the Gentleman's Journal is. And I would say that's actually like our USP is we have a big, big focus on entrepreneurship and startups and I think that's a huge part of it. So those sides don't really have anything to do with fashion. You can have a certain style without having to be completely fashion obsessed. So we're looking for people who just have a real appreciation of the life that we're trying to portray.

I mean, it sounds to me that the journey has been incredible. Are you where you thought you would be at the beginning of this journey at this point? How does it differ if not?

Not, it differs a lot. I mean we very much started off just as a media thing and a media title, and now we're expanding into weird and wonderful places. Obviously the pandemic has sort of slightly put our plans behind it a little bit, but also now has probably put us in a stronger position to execute those plans. And we are looking at potentially doing new brands outside of the Gentleman's Journal. So is there a particular niche where it is currently not being served that we feel like we can use our knowledge of what we've done with the Gentleman's Journal and put it into that segment. So there's gonna be a bit more of that. And that's obviously where we're gonna be looking to expand through new brands. We've got one that we're about to launch imminently which will be really, really interesting. That's looking at a particular niche where we think we can do a better job on content and retail joined together. And I think that's a bit that really interests me at the moment is this joining of media and retail together, if you look at all the big retail companies there now becoming media brands. So I think that's really exciting. And I think we're gonna try and push to different segments where we feel like we can do a good job on both the retail and the media side.

What advice would you give to a young person starting out on their career that's listening to this and inspired by what you've achieved? Would you tell them not to bother, do something else? There's fewer jobs in media than there ever has been. Newsrooms have never been more empty, but on the other hand, there's more opportunities to make a name for yourself on social media, with podcasting and such.

Definitely. I think media in particular, I mean like, yes, there are less writing jobs. There's less journalistic jobs, but there's also massive growth in areas, creative solutions have big growth. There's a whole digital marketing side, SEO, social media, that's still growing. So it's just a different way. And I think obviously it's a shame that certain jobs are in decline, but there's definitely opportunity out there. I think just in general in reference to the beginning of your question, what advice would I give anyone thinking about doing it or becoming an entrepreneur? You've really got to want to do it. As you know, Paul there's gonna be some really, really low days and if you're not a hundred percent committed, then just don't do it. And you're probably better off working for a company, but if you really, really love it, if you can get past those low days, there's also incredibly rewarding days. I always love now talking to entrepreneurs that are successful and done it, you sort of have this sort of connection, you know about certain topics. You can tell each other sort of just by eye contact how tough it is and quite often there's that bond because you've been through the same amount of stuff as they have.

Harry, that was a hugely interesting conversation, obviously a massive fan of your magazine. I'm a paying subscriber. I wish you all the best of luck in the world. And thank you for your time today. I appreciate it.

Paul, thanks so much. And it was a real honour to be involved in this podcast, along with your esteemed other guests. So thanks again.