



SPI Podcast Session #156 – The Story Behind Abel James and the Success of Fat Burning Man

Show notes: www.smartpassiveincome.com/session156

This is the Smart Passive Income podcast with Pat Flynn, Session #156.

Intro: Welcome to the Smart Passive Income podcast, where it's all about working hard now so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. And now your host, who wants to be a background in the Walking Dead, Pat Flynn!

Pat: Hey, what's up everybody? Thank you again so much for joining me today. I'm so thankful that you're here and you're listening in, wherever you're at. I appreciate you so much.

I'm really excited about today's guest. His name is Abel James, somebody who I've been following for quite a while, and I got to know him really well at New Media Expo last year. I actually saw him run up on stage to collect his podcast award. He has an award-winning podcast called Fat Burning Man with Abel James, and that's his brand. He is in the health and fitness industry.

He's been doing some amazing things in this industry that is quite saturated, and he's been able to stand out, but more than that he's using transparent ways and authenticity, similar to how I run my business, to really stand out from everybody else out there from people who are just doing things that, at least for me, wouldn't let me sleep at night internally.

There's just a lot of scammy red-flag type things going on in the fitness industry and a lot of other industries, and we're starting to see this trend of people who are very transparent, very honest, open and up-front about things who are standing out, because that's honestly what people want nowadays.

I'm very happy to welcome Abel James here. You're going to find out a lot of things about him and how he got started. It's an amazing story, and also how he's been able to turn all of this into an upcoming book called *The Wild Diet* and his experience with writing that book. We talk about how he's been able to monetize his site through something unique, which a lot of us could probably benefit from, which are apps.



I know a few people, especially in the fitness industry, who are doing really well with apps. What I mean by apps is like iPhone applications or Android applications. I know this is going to be a big aha moment for a lot of you guys as well, so let's get right into the interview. Here is Abel James from FatBurningMan.com.

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Pat: Abel James, what's up? Welcome to the Smart Passive Income podcast. How are you today, man?

Abel: I'm awesome! Thanks for having me on, Pat.

Pat: Dude, this is so sweet. For those of you listening, Abel and I have met before at NMX last year. I watched him collect his prize on-stage as the top health & fitness podcast in the podcast awards, so congratulations on that.

Abel: Thanks man.

Pat: And now you're coming out with this book called *The Wild Diet*. I think a few of the listeners out there know who you are and what you've done. Your story is incredible. Could you start from the beginning for those who may not know who you are and how you came to be known as the Fat Burning Man?

Abel: It depends on where you catch me, but a lot of people know me from my podcast or online show, some people from YouTube, some people just from the blogosphere. I've been blogging about health for a while and writing about it, actually working as a consultant within the industry.

Right out of college I started working as a consultant with a lot of Fortune 500 companies. Some of them were chemical, others oil, others in food. I kind of figured out that they were one and the same a lot of the time, so for a while there I actually had to kind of not be too up-front with my online persona.

I had this dinky little blog called Honest Abe's Tips for years. It was like Abraham Lincoln was peeking out behind a notebook computer as the little icon, and no one read it and that was okay.

Pat: That was about health and fitness and stuff?



Abel: Yeah, exactly. But then with the Fat Burning Man thing, basically I kind of looked at what was out there and I realized that whenever I'm looking at any book, the first thing I do is flip it over and see, "Is this person for real? What do they look like? Do they walk the walk?" Whether it's health or business or whatever, you can kind of tell from what someone looks like if it's real or not.

We can talk about this more later, but a lot of books these days aren't written by the people whose names are on the front, and you kind of have to know what you're getting into, especially in the health industry.

I wanted to do what a lot of people aren't willing to do, which is just put yourself right out there, so I created this kind of ridiculous over-the-top Fat Burning Man thing. My thumbnail is a picture of me like Wolverine-looking with my shirt off walking through the woods.

Steve Kamb is a mutual friend of ours, and I think his thing, Nerd Fitness, is just so much fun. There's a lot of opportunity to bring positivity to such a negative industry, such a negative world, through just kind of putting yourself right out there.

Pat: That's definitely what Steve does, and he's at NerdFitness.com. I've been trying to get him on the show for a long time too, because his community is just huge fans of him and the brand, and they all wear his shirts and stuff. What's cool about Steve and about you too is you are very successful in a niche that is extremely competitive.

A lot of people come to me and they say, "Pat, I'm really interested in the health and fitness industry," and if people came to you and said the same thing, "Abel, I'm interested in health, nutrition, fitness, diet, and I want to get into the space. I want to build a brand," what would you say to them? Would you say, "No, it's kind of full already," or what would you say to those people?

Abel: No, I love it. Actually I don't think even you know this, Pat, but I've been following your blogs and your stuff for a long time. You're like scrappy and have this deep analytical mind that you really openly let people see, and I think that's so cool.

On my side it kind of appears as if that's not going on, but it totally is. Behind the scenes there was a lot of me kind of sitting back analyzing, "What does it look like right now?" When I started my podcast and that whole brand of Fat Burning Man, that was like four years ago and it was not cool to talk about health, and no one had heard of paleo.



Eating real food was something that something that was just not really talked about that much, but I could tell that people were started to get interested in this and that the pendulum was kind of swinging back towards people caring about their health, because things were just getting so bad.

If you look at where to start a business, and I started a lot – at the same time I actually started an online network for entrepreneurs, StartupJumper, that I never wound up monetizing but it was actually kind of a cool little experiment. I did a lot of different things.

Yes, health is so saturated, it's so cut-throat, people who are willing to advertise on porn sites and do all this other stuff like not writing their own books and gaming systems – you're kind of competing against it. This industry is ugly when you get to see its underbelly and the inside out, so yes, there's a lot of that. But at the same time I was looking at where I was coming from. What are the things that I can do better than what's out there?

Being a musician and someone who knows how to use a microphone and is certainly comfortable in front of one, I was just like obviously having some sort of multimedia experience where I talk about the truth in a way that no one else really does or is willing to was something that was not only a passion of mine – I've always been a health nut – but also kind of like a service that creates this thing that's so much bigger than you.

Then you have to do it and you have to keep doing it because you've built this community. It's this whole ecosystem and organism that you're responsible for, in the same way that people are wearing Steve's shirts around and just pioneering his cause. When you start to see that you're really affecting people it's a cool thing.

Pat: It is really cool. You stood out sort on the different platforms – multimedia like you said. You stood out because you were taking an honest approach, which is very similar to the approach I took in a back then sort of nasty industry called internet marketing, which is still fairly nasty as well.

You put your personality into it. I know this because I read your blog and I've listened to your show before and I love that. I think everybody should be doing that on their site, no matter what kind of business they have.



You said that you can tell, though, that there were signs that what you were going to talk about had life to it. What were those signs?

Abel: I was just talking to another mutual friend, Jaime Tardy, about this, about how within any movement – it doesn't matter if it's marketing on the internet or if it's the health industry or basically anything in-between – there are kind of these classes of people who come up at the same time.

I think you and I came up around the same time, and a lot of us became friends because we were coping with being scrappy and not seeing results, and talking through that and trying to get to something that's a little bit better.

I think for people who are out there listening and trying to figure out what to do, realize that me coming on and launching a podcast that goes straight up the charts and then dominates for a while wasn't me coming out of nowhere, you know what I mean? It was this carefully calculated and strategized appearance in a marketplace in a lot of ways that I knew was stacked against me, so you'd better do it right. You better figure out that marketplace of discovery.

We play in the Apple iTunes world of podcasts where you have to know how that works and why reviews matter and when you should ask for them and how to ask for them.

I kind of got into this in a totally weird way. I was the musician at the Austin internet marketing party.

Pat: No way!

Abel: Yeah, that was my foray into this, because I didn't even know that this crazy world existed. I was just a musician in Austin and also a consultant. That was my day job, but I wound up playing this party every month. It was a great party and all these people were millionaires, and I met a lot of them and kind of asked them about what they did.

I'm like, "I'm not so sure that I trust this stuff. What is going on here?" I just got so fascinated by that whole thing, and that in a lot of ways informed when I appeared in the health industry. I kind of knew what I was up against.

Pat: So you took a very carefully calculated approach to it. You decided to go on these other platforms, which didn't exist as well, so you knew how you were going to stand



out, but was there any point during this journey in the beginning when you were like, "I don't know if this is the right thing to do. This is totally brand new. I'm scared."

Abel: Dude! [laughing] Abel Bascom was the government consultant who shook hands and wore suits and gave keynotes and that sort of things. Abel James, if you Googled that, it was my musician persona, which I also needed to market in a totally different way.

When I used Abel James to take his shirt off and do these Wolverine photo shoots and stuff that popped up on Facebook, I was the laughing stock of basically every social circle I was ever in. There was so much of people saying, "You can't do that. What are you doing? Have you lost your mind? You should be institutionalized!"

I think at the beginning of any sort of entrepreneurial venture, certainly before you've proven yourself – which never actually happens, as it turns out – you're really subject to so much of that backlash and that dragging down and whatever comes from standing out.

But I realized that's the thing that gets people ahead, is being known for something, and I wanted mine to be positive – being known as the guy who talks about health in a truthful way and a very passionate way that's kind of on my own terms, because I hadn't seen that.

There were so many people who were monetizing like a snake eating its own tail, where you sell this book but your diet only works if you buy this fat blaster pill that goes along with it. I just wanted to be the opposite of that.

Pat: That's cool. So going into it you decided to do this podcast. Were there any other health podcasts around at the time?

Abel: Yeah, totally. Robb Wolf is someone who's behind a lot of the paleo work and well-known in the field, and he has a great podcast. He's been doing it for longer than I have, but that whole approach is basically he's a nerd like the rest of us, talking about biochemistry and science with really smart people who love the gym, the gym rat culture and the whole CrossFit side of things, so they're not afraid to use potty-mouth and drop F-bombs and stuff like that.



Then I saw on the other side – at least at the time – there were a lot of people who set up a microphone but not very intentionally. The sound wasn't good and they were just giggling and there were all these technical glitches, so it's not that high value.

For someone like me coming in there, I knew that if I could deliver something that was high value in an entertaining way that people could listen to, that was also me on my best behavior – a friend called me Captain America for that online Fat Burning Man persona, because if you meet me in person I'm a much darker multi-colored personality.

I've been in the arts for a long time so it's not always happy-go-lucky Abel or whatever, but I wanted to bring that to the marketplace because I saw that that's what it didn't have. It had Jillian Michaels at the top of the rankings and I wanted to just break that open and show that you could do that independently as well, without any sort of backscratching.

A big hack for me was a lot of people can't really get by and be that compelling without swearing, but I've had to be on my best behavior for a long time so I'm good at kind of switching that whole language when I need to.

Pat: That's great for the show because we don't do swearing on the show, or I edit it out and you know that because you listen.

Abel: Totally, and you do it so well, but a lot of other people can't. I even ask my own listeners. I'm just like, "Listen, do you want me to talk 100% authentic who I am, or do you want me to make sure that it's no swearing or whatever?" and they're like, "Abel, we listen to this with our kids." 90% of people said "No swearing" and I thought that was great.

Pat: I'm curious to know how many podcasts out there swear versus not swear.

Abel: It's hard for your guests not to swear.

Pat: That's why we have editing. So going into this space you're really dedicated to it and you're going full-strength and you decided how to stand out. At what point did you decide or did you ever figure out early on how you were going to monetize? All these other people who were in the space already were doing it in these sort of sleazy ways.



Did you ever at some point want to do what they were doing, just kind of mimicking or mirroring what they were doing in terms of monetization, or did you have plans moving into it or was it totally just, "Hey, I'm just going to put myself out there, build an audience and see what happens"?

Abel: It was totally the latter, and I wanted to let that kind of guide where it went after that. I knew I wouldn't be comfortable saying, "Hey, here's my diet book. By the way, my diet book only works if you take this pill," which is very profitable.

A lot of people don't realize that the reason that most diet books are out there are to sell product, consumables that people can buy every week or every month in the form of shakes, bars, pills, and other things like that. This is very well-known in the industry, and coming from the industry side as a consultant I saw the guts of it. I saw how all that worked and I saw that the consumers were a total afterthought, as were most of the products.

I kind of wanted to come out with clear intentions of saying, "I want to democratize the truth in health, essentially," not that I'm a guru. I'm just a normal guy trying to navigate this world like anyone else, but I think hopefully by finding the right people and talking to them and letting them share their own expertise and experience in the health world, other people can learn from that.

I was offered \$40,000 a month years ago to advertise on my show by a bunch of different places, and I turned that down. I turned down a \$500,000 book deal. I've turned down a lot of things to keep this high integrity and to keep it authentic. We can eventually get to how I monetize that if you want to.

Pat: We'll get there in a second, but I just want to say thank you for saying that. It's very much in alignment with how I approach things. I've gotten approached for 5-figure sponsorship deals, mid-5-figure range, and it just doesn't make sense if it's not going to help my audience or it's just not the right fit. This is why I love you, Abel. We align in our values in this so much.

When you started out, how did you get exposure? I think a lot of people can relate to figuring out ways to stand out, understanding a niche, whether it's competitive or not, and understanding what they could possibly do to make an impact and make noise in it, but then how do you actually make noise? How did you make noise when you first started out?



Abel: Anyone who's seen me on the internet, it's pretty obvious, right? I learned from Mark Sisson, who's behind the Primal Blueprint, who I'm very happy to say is a friend and in some ways a mentor. Whenever he was on media, and he would kind of joke about this with me, the media would want him to take his shirt off because he's a 60-year-old with a 6-pack. That gets a lot of clicks on the internet, unfortunately, and I learned this the hard way.

In the beginning I had this article, a good blog post, and I tested it with a bunch of different pictures and thumbnails. One of them was super artsy. I'm into photography. I'm not great at it but I really like setting things up and kind of communicating an idea, so it was this little cherry tomato on this big plate with a fork and knife. Then there was another one that was basically like this beautiful picture of kale.

Then the one that I was testing was basically a picture of me with my shirt off, with just blatant flagrant abs. So I measured the clicks that came in on that, because it sells. I wanted to see if that was actually true, and sure enough the picture of kale got like 2 clicks, the artsy picture with the cherry tomato got 4, and the picture of me with my shirt off got 122, and I was like, "Ah, okay." It took that. I needed proof and I also needed to look at myself and be like, "What can I stomach? What am I up against? What do I have that other people don't?"

I decided a good voice, whatever, good-looking man – there's plenty of that in the health industry – but what I have is no shame because I've been in performing groups making a fool of myself in front of thousands of people for years, so I'm used to people poking fun at me, so why not make a stupid name that's blatantly SEO-heavy and really memorable, like Fat Burning Man, and just run with it.

Pat: So what would you say would be the big lesson for everybody out there listening?

Abel: No shame. No, it's mostly about looking at what's out there and being willing to stick out. That's what it takes. You don't want to be copycat of someone else. You want to learn by deconstructing, like you do, Pat, on your blog of other systems, best practices, what's working. But you need to figure out what you come to the table with and why people will recognize you and what will resonate with people.

The truth of all of that is the more you get to know yourself and come to terms with that – like the reason that your blog and podcast blew up, Pat, isn't because they're awesome, it's because you're awesome. No matter what you do, once you nail that down, people start to respond to that.



It's really about cultivating your own inner thing, your own voice. I think 'voice' is probably a good way to describe it because it doesn't matter if you're writing or if you're talking on camera or having a podcast. It's about what are you communicating to people.

Pat: Right. You want people to fill in the blank – "So-and-so is awesome because _____" and whatever the blank is, and you want it to be positive and not bleh. You want people to know what that is when they come to your site and understand who you are and get to know you and your voice and your personality.

I want to dig a little bit deeper. In the beginning were there any specific strategies or was it just simply the image that kind of went viral type of thing? Were there guest posts?

Abel: Yeah. What I did that a lot of other people didn't do – and I would think that this would be a blatantly obvious strategy – but especially at the beginning when what I was after was credibility in the field, not monetizing it like a lot of other people, I was looking at how do we rise up in the rankings?

Take Kindle. There are Kindle people who read Kindle books, and then there's everybody else. There are people who listen to podcasts, and then there's everybody else. It's a very small tight-knit community, so the best way to get someone to listen to your podcast isn't by going to an average person and being like, "Hey, listen to my podcast." It's by getting podcast listeners to listen to your podcast.

I had a lot of people who had successful shows with tight-knit audiences that really resonated with what I was doing and what my audience would be interested in. I was very, very intentional, and I was probably on twice or maybe three times as many of other people's shows as my own.

When somebody hears your voice talking about something and they dig it, getting somebody who's already addicted to listening to 12 podcasts a week to listen to one more is a pretty easy sell.

Pat: I think that's smart and it's something you see all the time on YouTube. You see people who have audiences feature somebody else who wants to get in front of that audience, and then they kind of do an exchange. Then the other person goes on the



other video and you see these cross-promotions very, very much, especially in sort of the music industry and even health and fitness on YouTube.

It's not as intentional on podcasts. Podcasts, as we all know, are just sort of now going mainstream and there are huge opportunities to not only get more exposure, but build those incredible relationships with other podcasters. You have to be intentional with that, and it sounds like that's kind of what you were doing at the beginning.

Abel: Yeah, and I also kind of see all this as a career musician. You jam with people. It's not competitive, or at least you don't have to see it that way.

Pat: I love that word 'jam.' That's what we're doing right now. We're jamming.

Abel: We're totally jamming. We're riffing on each other, it's great, but that's what it is. Too many people I think have ego problems or whatever, and they don't want to have anything to do with other people who might be better than them or compared to them or doing this one thing that they're not doing or making more money. It's really just about what can we share with each other? What messages?

We all have gray areas. We all have our inner demons or whatever that we struggle with, but it's having compassion enough to accept people as they are, even your own guests on your show, and deciding not to throw them under the bus when you totally could. That's I think what's going to really differentiate this new kind of independent media platform that we have. It's basically the opposite of Bill O'Reilly. We treat each other well.

Pat: Yeah. So you're standing out and you have a platform and you have a voice that is unique, but you're also announcing that voice on other people's shows to make it even more obvious that you're somebody that's different.

Abel: Yeah, and it's cool coming onto a show like yours. It doesn't matter if people are interested in health. To hear this whole other side, this is great content for your show, which is in a different focus from mine but you still get this really cool organic thing that comes out of it. The cross-pollination is just beautiful.

That was another thing that I did. Health is our excuse to talk on my podcast, but we really talk about philosophy, about mindset and habits. If you look at the guts of what it is, it's really pretty close to a lot of lifestyle and business shows. It's just that the excuse



to get there and talk about things is usually health, so I think it's viewing things with that open mind.

I was also really willing to do things that a lot of other podcasters weren't, because they were always after getting the biggest names, people who can get them a huge subscriber base.

So that's one of the strategies, going on other people's shows and letting that cross-pollination happen, but another one for me I think was I realized that having my mom on the show was my second-most popular show. Gary Taubes I think was #1, and then there was my mom.

Pat: What did you talk about with your mom?

Abel: It was just real. She's a holistic healer and she loves food and she's had thyroid problems. We just joked about what I was like as the crazy little kid that grew up. It's just that a lot of people aren't willing to have their mom on the show, but they should be because that's the real you. You can't hide yourself when you're interviewing your mom.

Pat: That's so good. So you're building this audience, you're doing a lot of great things on the podcast and the blog, and then tell me the journey of monetization on your site. When did that sort of first enter your brain, but then actually come about?

Abel: Like I said before, I was intentional about getting credibility first, kind of like stature in the field, being recognized for something. Then monetizing it was difficult because basically I was making really easy money at that point in consulting, working like 10 hours a week and getting a paycheck that was good enough to keep doing it, even though it totally blew.

I was getting emails like, "Let's have a meeting about this meeting we're going to have next Tuesday," and compare that to, "Oh my god, Abel, I've been listening to your show for a month. I lost 40 pounds and totally turned my life around."

You get enough of those and you put those things next to each other and you're just like, "All right, I can't do this anymore. I've got to find a way to turn this into its own thing and be conscious about that," like conscious capitalism.



I kind of looked at what was out there. I saw all the different models for making money and I'm just like, "I can't really feel comfortable with that, but what can I do every day? What can I share with people?" Being someone who totally fell in love with food and cooking and feasting and that whole side of things – what we do every day revolves around food. What we're doing right now in-between these interviews is making cooking videos for people.

My book that's coming out is basically just like a cookbook that's encapsulated by memoirs from my life in stories. So storytelling and getting people to gather around a dinner table, I can get behind that. Getting good food into schools, things like that that really get me excited and feeling good, instead of being like, "Okay, gotta downshift into extracting money from the end consumer."

It's not about that. I want it to be like this organic thing, no pun intended, that basically people feel comfortable buying something that makes sense from me.

When I had a #1 podcast, coming out with something to make money that made sense was like, "What do we got? A world full of people who don't have quick easy meals but they do have cell phones, so let's make apps and ebooks that go directly on the phone, and videos that do that too, and monetize that way."

Selling apps is, like I said, within that same Apple marketplace. My listeners are Apple customers, and Apple customers are okay buying apps, especially really good ones. So we made really good apps and monetized that way and blew that up too.

Pat: When you say "We built apps," who's we?

Abel: I've been a programmer for a long time, but I think one of the important things to do as you kind of level-up, you learn what you like, you learn what you don't like, what sucks your energy and what you're good at, and my time isn't best spent anymore writing code.

When I first started doing the apps I'd partner up with people. Actually I partnered up with my buddy George to do [Caveman Feast](#), which was paleo recipes that he developed. I helped him out with editing it and formatting it and making sure that the pictures were all inline and the rest of that.



So I partnered with him and I also partnered with another guy who really likes being scrappy in the app marketplace named Andreas, who's also a friend of mine. We made a number of apps with our own content and with other people's published content.

Apple doesn't give you any access to your own listeners or subscriber base, at least not direct access, so one of the cool ways to get them to take that extra step and sign up for your direct list – basically that's why I did the apps is to have people listen to the show, which was directly linked to in the apps, so kind of like use the Apple marketplace there, people who aren't normally listening, getting them to do that.

Also about 11% of people who downloaded the app also signed up for our list, which we embedded directly into the app itself. That's a really cool thing where your different online properties start to populate each other and you're drawing from the different marketplaces to grow.

Pat: I've actually downloaded the Caveman Feast app. It's great. Thank you for that, it's helpful.

Abel: Thank you! We tried to play to our weaknesses. We can't compete against the Food Network and Martha Stewart in terms of sheer volume of content and professionalism and all this other stuff, but we can certainly beat them in the marketplace by making stuff that's real and super helpful and timely, and we beat them to it, making a really cool beautiful app that's not perfect but it's there and it's made with the end-consumer in mind.

Pat: How long did it take you to get your first app out there?

Abel: It only took a few weeks, actually. I guess the first one was a few months, just because we were going back and forth on a few things. It's not really much different from building a website. Once you build one, you can build a lot of them. You kind of have this template down, you have this code that runs behind it, you know how to use that code, you know what you can manipulate.

Interestingly enough, the first app that we made, the framework of it came from Andreas. He had this one blog about being a bicyclist in London, so he made this app that's basically photos and text on this on-the-go manual that you can have on our phone. If you're broken down on your bike and need to replace a tire or whatever, you can do it. You have instructions on the road.



Serving text and pictures works just fine as a bike manual, but also pretty well for a cooking app. So once you kind of learn how to navigate those waters, you start to see how things are similar and you can replicate them, and that's how you really build a business around all this.

Pat: I love that, and the apps look great. May I ask you, I'm just curious, how many downloads are we talking about here for these apps?

Abel: Caveman Feast was crazy. When I launched it I was actually filming for something else. I was in the middle of something else, and within the first hour it was the #1 food app. I didn't know how many downloads it was getting, and then by the end of the day it was #6 in the whole App Store, and Angry Birds was like #44 I think. Minecraft and Mickey Mouse and Caveman Feast – we're like, "Are you kidding me right now? What sort of volume is that?"

Pat: And this is a paid app, right?

Abel: Yes. I think it's \$3.99. We move it up and down with the seasons and when we're promoting it or whatever, but usually it's around \$3.99 for 200 recipes. Compare that to a cookbook and it's an awesome deal, but at the same time it's a small little indie. It doesn't cost us anything to make it really. It does once, and then you can replicate it.

I can't remember off the top of my head, but over 1,000 5-star reviews in the first 24 or 48 hours – reviews!

Pat: And reviews are like 10% of the downloads.

Abel: Right, downloads were well over 10,000. We hit over 100,000 in the first few months of that, which was just incredible to me. It's hard to conceptualize.

Pat: It got to #1 because you had this audience and trust that you built with them already?

Abel: Yeah, and George did too. It wasn't just me, it was this awesome cool thing, and also paleo especially then was just starting to be a thing. So what is going to be big? Within my own brand, paleo is problematic kind of because it's so easily abused now by other marketers who are selling sugary processed food under its name, that you don't want to be too attached to something like that.



But if you're looking at coming out with something that's very timely that might have a chance at really blowing up the charts, you have to look at who isn't there yet, what's about to be big, and then by deciding that, if your fan base is big enough and excited enough you actually help that be the next big thing.

It was kind of crazy. I had never seen a recipe app up that high. I'm looking at the top charts all the time because that's an avenue of discovery for me finding new cool apps or whatever, so to bring paleo out there in enough marketplaces – and it's not just me, it's a lot of people – but being wrapped up in something that's cutting edge like that is really cool, and I think people can really do that, even in a saturated marketplace like health. We found a way to do that.

It's going to be different three years from now. It's always changing, but as long as you kind of align yourself, like I said, with the right class – the reason that I was able to partner with George was because we were friends from like two years before that. We were just drinking at a bar, and it was either we were going to fight or we were going to become friends, and we looked in each other's eyes and decided to be friends.
[laughing]

But you can't have those magical partnerships that appear out of nowhere. You really have to nurture the right kind of thing, and then you can do great work together.

Pat: Thank you for that. I want to remind everybody of a previous episode of the [Smart Passive Income Podcast Episode 39](#) actually, way back over 100 episodes ago. This was a success story outside of the online business space, but it was about iPhone apps and this person named Mike Doonan.

He and his wife created a very niched application for his audience and his clients that was helping kids with speech. It's called [Speech With Milo](#). It's this little cartoon mouse and he's doing like 5 figures a month on that thing.

I was in the iPhone app industry, and I still am just because I have old apps that are on there and they're still making money, but my partner and I in that got in trying to serve everybody. We wanted to be the next iFart. That's really what we wanted to be. We didn't make any farting apps but we tried to create stupid silly apps. For a while they were doing okay, but then we just kind of left and are gone now and they're deep in the archives.



Abel: Flappy Bird syndrome.

Pat: Right, but that made so much money right at the beginning, and we weren't even close to that. The point here is you took the time to find a niche that you had passion and expertise in. It was very large and you found your space in it. You built this audience through trust with your podcast and your authenticity, and you built this authority. Then here you are coming out with an app for this very particular niche.

It's almost guaranteed – I don't want to say guaranteed, but it's set up to do great things when you approach it that way as opposed to how my partner and I did it. We didn't have any audience. We were just like, "Here's an app, world. Please like it." We were paying for ads for a little bit and it was really, really forceful to try to get the word out there.

If you have an audience and there's a specific solution that you can build – perhaps it's an app, perhaps it's a product, perhaps it's a membership site, whatever it is – that's your cue to go ahead and do that. It's going to be set up if you have that trust and authority.

Abel: I think that's really what it's about. For me it was kind of easy because all of my mojo in the online world is really tied up in the present. What that means is having a podcast and not having a book, not having another product that they could buy – basically if they want more from whatever we're doing, they'll buy it.

You do those things very intentionally and you do them at the right time. So then when I didn't have a hardcover book, that was the right thing to promote. Now it's pretty easy for me to go on media, having written a hardcover book, and talk about whatever. I have a book so it makes sense, and that's kind of like a timely thing.

Oddly enough – and we could talk about this more if you want to – after you get a book advance you don't make any money from your book. You go on this huge media tour or whatever selling this product that you don't make any money from. It's very fascinating how it all works.

Pat: Let's talk about the book. For those of you listening on April 8 when this comes out, the book came out yesterday, so congratulations in the future that it came out. I hope it does really well, and I'm sure people are going to check it out. We'll have the links in the Show Notes for you and all that good stuff.



Talk about the life of this book and how it came to be and all the stuff that you just mentioned. I know there's a lot of authors in the audience. It's a traditionally-published book.

Abel: It is this time.

Pat: Is this something you've always wanted to do or kind of somebody approached you with a deal?

Abel: This is so funny. Eventually I did put out some of my stuff, basically just blog posts that were really organized well as an ebook and I called it *The Wild Diet*. It started off before that as *Fat Burning Man*, this thing that was written only for men. I printed a bunch at Kinko's and gave it to friends and whenever I spoke or whatever, so it's kind of been this evolving thing.

I was actually at a mastermind in Florida for a bunch of health experts and they invited me to speak. I got up there and I talked about how stupid it was to get a book deal and to waste 2-4 years of your life slaving away for a publisher that doesn't care about you, where you're not making any money and was kind of like, "Who has time for that?" That's what I said in my speech.

I said, "Why don't you instead nurture your blog, start a podcast, make an app for \$5,000 to \$10,000 that can give you immediate access to your fans? Give them what they need. This whole charade is outdated. You don't need these dinosaur publishers anymore." [laughing]

So I get off-stage and I'm approached immediately by an agent, who wants desperately to prove me wrong, so I'm like, "Okay, whatever," and we put together a proposal for *The Wild Diet*. It has nothing to do with the book. I hope people realize that. It has nothing to do with the book.

Pat: What has nothing to do with the book?

Abel: The whole publishing thing. [laughing] There are definitely exceptions, but for whatever reason this avenue of basically having deals thrown at me – I didn't even have to go to New York. This agent set up like 18 calls in just a couple of days where I was being shopped around because it's this hot new diet book.



What that means is that they saw that we sold 100,000 apps and that I have a huge online following and that I haven't put out a hardcover book yet, so they're looking at the platform. They don't really care about the book that's in-between.

I really do appreciate my publisher, Avery, Random House and Penguin. They're all kind of the same thing now. While I was being shopped around and being influenced by a lot of other people who are writers, I was really introduced to this crazy world of people who don't write their own books, and I was encouraged not to write my own book by several people. They encouraged me to hire ghost writers and do this whole other thing, because basically they wanted to use my name and milk the audience to sell the book.

It's interesting and that's why I walked away from a \$500,000 book deal, because I wasn't comfortable signing my name when someone else would own my name from that point on, and be able to sell things under my name. That's what a lot of deals look like in media if you're an actor or a musician.

I was coming into this as a musician also, someone who really understands the publishing world from that perspective, so I don't really care how they operate or what their rules are. I wouldn't sign a piece of paper, and this is what I told my agent, where it didn't make sense.

I know if we want to really gather momentum and sell this book, we can make a lot more money if we keep 100% of it, right? There are a lot of bookstores out there, and I love bookstores but they're not doing too well. Books don't really sell there anymore, so the idea of using a publisher is bizarre today. For someone who has worked so hard to build up a loyal following, like a lot of us have, it can be an interesting vehicle to getting into places where you wouldn't otherwise play.

Like mostly I just can't be bothered to try to get into Barnes & Noble, even if I have two books in there, because we have a media company. I'm a musician and we do online shows. I don't care about printing books or distribution and all that stuff, so partnering with someone who specializes in that is really cool. I see it as a partnership, and you form a relationship with the people there.

Ultimately I walked away from the deal and they were like, "No, no, no, we really want this. Whatever you want." They helped me out, worked with my lawyer, and I even got rid of my agent and worked directly with a lawyer to craft a deal that would be okay for



me to sign, which is really unprecedented in the industry. A lot of people don't do that but it totally worked out and it's awesome, just for other authors.

A book advance is kind of a misnomer. You get some of it at the beginning, usually too late. They hack it up into a bunch of different pieces and the agent takes their cut, so all the sudden you're out of money and your book advance doesn't come until after you've published your book. It's a very interesting thing. Then you don't make any money from the book itself until after you make all of your advance back.

As someone who's an entrepreneur and runs a bunch of different businesses, it's like we were already doing like \$1 million in gross in revenue so that deal actually when you look at it doesn't make that much sense, and it's not so crazy to walk away from when you're approaching this kind of the way that we are at this point.

We're an established brand with a following that I really care about, and there's no way I would have ever let someone else write my book and put my name on it. I wanted to kind of see what would happen if I'd let that start to play out and my agent play with it – my ex-agent, I should say – just to see if that really happens.

Pat: Oh, it happens.

Abel: I just couldn't believe the amount that it was encouraged. It was so bizarre. But actually the dirty little joke that I haven't really told that many people is that I'm writing a book about writing this book. It's basically an expose of the publishing world and the media world. It's going to be called *Fire the Gatekeepers*, but I can't talk about it too much because I'll get in way too much trouble.

Pat: That's good. That's right up my alley because I've been approached by publishers too to do certain things, and have had deals on the table, and I've said no for a lot of the same reasons. They do encourage authors, especially those who have platforms like we do, just to get it out there as soon as possible.

Going back to the writing process, how long did it take you to write your book?

Abel: They gave me six weeks.

Pat: What? Were you able to finish it in that time?



Abel: [laughing] That's why I let the whole thing kind of play out to see what happened, because I was in the middle of – I don't even know what I was doing, but I was doing plenty of other things and pretty busy, doing 7 interviews a day regularly.

I was certainly doing that at the time and I was all booked up and I was just like, "You guys have got to be kidding me right now. You don't care at all?" but it's cool. Essentially that's why I fired my agent. She was proving herself to me, and it was absurd what was happening.

I decided to get in direct touch with the editor at the publisher, a wonderful woman named Megan, and we kind of just worked it out. After I walked away from this ridiculous deal where you get a half-million dollar advance to write a book in 6 weeks, I was like, "You've got to be kidding me." That's a big reason why I walked away.

So when I came back we just talked it out. She's like, "How long do you need?" and I'm like, "I would love this summer to write my book. Can I just hang out and actually write this thing, because this is absurd. I will never let this happen, and I really do want to write a book. I want to put out a good book that people care about and that they can give to each other for the holidays or whatever because it has great pumpkin pie in it, my mom's pumpkin pie." And it was just a good excuse to kind of go off the grid for a while, which we did.

She goes, "Yeah, you can have until August," so I took the whole summer to write it and finish it up. Then of course there are other rounds of editing and you go back and forth a little bit, but mostly I gave myself a couple of months.

What we did is kind of cool. It was last June and we'd been living in Austin for the past six years, and we sold everything. I sold my house, my cars, and downsized. We flew immediately to Fiji, then Australia, then lived in Bali for a little while, then just traveled around North America living in the woods and staying in National Parks.

That's why I haven't had a podcast in 6-8 months is because there isn't any internet in the woods yet, but they're working on it. So I'm coming back on the radar and letting this whole book thing kind of dictate a cycle of my business for a while, and it's been really cool.

It's not always easy. You really have to work with people. You have to partner with people. You have to nurture those relationships. For someone who's used to being a rebel in the online world, sometimes that can be hard to stomach.



Pat: That's awesome, Abel. Thank you for sharing all that. Where can people learn more about you and your book and all that good stuff?

Abel: The book itself is called *The Wild Diet* and that's at WildDietBook.com. We're giving away a bunch of cool stuff like cooking gear and even a drone and GoPros and other kind of adventure things, because it's a book of stories about great food and about getting outdoors and into nature. It really celebrates that, but if anything it's really about the cookbook, because the recipes are awesome.

So WildDietBook.com is where you can find that, and if you like podcasting, which you might, it's not hard to find me. FatBurningMan is what it's called.

Pat: Nice. Abel James, everybody. Abel, thank you so much for coming on and sharing all this and the amazing journey you've had. A lot of gold nuggets in here, and we look forward to seeing how your book does.

Abel: Thank you, Pat. You are one of a kind and I totally dig your show.

Pat: Thanks man. I appreciate that.

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I hope you enjoyed that interview with the Fat Burning Man himself, Abel James. You can find him again at FatBurningMan.com, and also check out his book, *The Wild Diet*, at wilddietbook.com.

It's definitely something I'm going to pick up because I've been doing a lot of cooking myself lately and I love a good story, especially when it's related to food, so again that's wilddietbook.com.

Thank you, Abel, for coming on and sharing all of that.

I'd also like to thank all of you for listening. If you'd like the links and the resources mentioned in this episode, head on over to SmartPassiveIncome.com/session156.

I'd also like to thank Ryan Moran, who was actually a guest on [Episode 144](#) of the SPI podcast. He's come on to sponsor this episode to help promote his own podcast, one of the only other ones I listen to, actually. It's great. It's called Freedom Fast Lane. If you



go to FreedomFastLane.com/pat or look up Freedom Fast Lane on iTunes, go ahead and check it out.

He talks not only about how to build a freedom-based business, but also how to turn those profits into passive income, so he goes a little bit deeper than me actually with what to do with a lot of those earnings. I highly recommend you check it out.

He blew a lot of people's minds when he came on in Episode 144, talking about building a million-dollar business in 12 months, and he revealed a lot of things that a lot of people were really excited about. I'm actually going to do a lot of what he talked about later this year as well. Again that's Ryan Moran from FreedomFastLane.com, so check him out. Look up Freedom Fast Lane on iTunes or go to FreedomFastLane.com/pat.

Thank you again to everybody who's listening in. Look out for next week's episode. Make sure to subscribe so you get it directly into your device. Next week we're talking with somebody who was really inspirational to me when I got started when I first saw him on a TED talk. His TED talk really affected me, and we do some fun things in that episode as well, including a little trip to Starbucks, which you'll hear more about next week.

Again, thank you all for listening in. This is SmartPassiveIncome.com/session156 for the notes, and I'll see you all next week. Thanks.

Outro: Thanks for listening to the Smart Passive Income podcast at www.SmartPassiveIncome.com.

Links and Resources Mentioned in This Episode:

[Fat Burning Man](#)

[Wild Diet book](#)

[Fat Burning Man podcast](#)

[Caveman Feast app](#)

[Smart Passive Income Episode 39: Changing Lives and Getting Paid with Niche iPhone Apps](#)

[Speech With Milo](#)

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