



## **Rear Window; Tabcorp's youth bookie has its own viral star**

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### **Body**

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Most of the attention around the government's gambling ad reforms is focused on what appears on TV. And look, no one likes settling in for Friday night footy and finding out their eight-year-old has memorised Sportsbet slogans.

Everyone knows there will be new some types of restrictions on advertising announced soon, covering both TV and online. But what about the entirely new generation of gambling content that slips through the cracks, and in fact, is not considered advertising at all?

Take Dabble, the self-described Millennial bookmaker that has taken a lot of the social usability of Facebook and mashed into a betting account. Customers place bets like any other bookie, but they also set up social media profiles and follow each other.

One way it rapidly grew was relying on real Facebook pages and automated chatbots to lure (mostly) men with free tips if they signed up for accounts.

Then there was ex-AFL player Heath Shaw who joined as an investor. He did wonderful things, like when he posted a video promoting Dabble in a male mental health Facebook group that discussed things such as depression, anxiety and suicide.

Red flags? Pish posh. Tabcorp sensed an opportunity. The ASX-listed wagering giant under now-ousted chief Adam Rytenskind was struggling with the youth market, so the company invested \$33 million into Dabble for a 20 per cent equity stake in 2022. Last year, Tabcorp's investor relations general manager Terry Couper joined Dabble's board.

Cashed-up - and with a new veneer of respectability - Dabble keeps growing.

Take the case of Benny Scarf, whose online videos have turned him into a star. In his videos, Scarf tells his "punnas" he'll place 5¢ for every Instagram follower he has on a "best bet" (being a short-priced favourite). At day 82, he's got more than 184,000 followers, so the clips show him flashing wads of \$100 bills, walking into his local TAB, and bantering while he puts down \$9000 punts, often on fringe country races on a weekday.

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Next he's watching the race in his living room, sometimes swinging a golf club, screaming at his runner to come home. He loses his marbles if he loses, and like the best viral videos, it's fun stuff! But yes, sure, make no mistake, it's promoting degenerate problem gambling.

It's made him into the industry's version of an influencer. In his recent video from the track, he's mobbed by strangers wanting selfies with him. One follower recently asked what everyone was thinking under a recent video: "Does anyone know how Benny is funding this?"

Would you believe he's getting money from Tabcorp's Dabble? It gives him a fee for all the followers who use the link in his bio, or by entering his name at sign-up.

It's affiliate marketing, and in some cases online bookmakers are known to share the losses of a customer with the person who referred them. Dabble did not return a request for comment, and neither did Scarf.

So, take a step back. An online bookmaker part-owned by Tabcorp is giving money to someone who films viral videos of himself spending thousands of dollars a day in a TAB. And because he doesn't explicitly promote a company in the video, well, it's not "advertising" is it? No legal disclaimers. Just a customer acquisition funnel strapped to Instagram's rocket algorithm.

One recommendation many skipped over in late Labor MP Peta Murphy's inquiry was banning "commissions being paid to staff or any third party involved in the referral" of gambling services. That would make the gambling influencer business less lucrative.

Last week, new Tabcorp boss Gillon McLachlan used this masthead to say all staff were being told to return to the office five days a week. Scarf reacted to the news, writing sarcastically: "Bad guys in turmoil."

Oh, Benny. If only everyone got to spend their office hours down at the TAB.

**Fortescue** puts words

in Rio's mouth

Grandiose claims are not uncommon for **Fortescue**'s Andrew "Twiggy" Forrest. But when his mining company announced a \$3 billion contract with German mining manufacturer Liebherr, it was someone else singing his praises.

"**Fortescue**'s partnership with Liebherr marks a turning point in the history of the mining industry," the release quoted Rio Tinto chief Jakob Stausholm as saying. And he didn't stop there, further praising the "foresight and courage" of "first mover **Fortescue**", with the consolation that "while we can't always be first, we can be fast followers".

If any Rio Tinto shareholder thinks their usually understated chief executive is sounding a lot like Forrest, well, they'd be right.

Turns out it was **Fortescue** operatives who drafted and suggested the quotes to Rio Tinto, which never approved them despite them being sent to journalists shortly after 7am yesterday.

The erroneous release was withdrawn 90 minutes later, with **Fortescue** telling journalists the quotes were "mistakenly included". But no hard feelings. Stausholm, who had indicated he was open to some public comment, instead wrote on **Fortescue**'s LinkedIn post later in the morning, lauding the company for a "significant" agreement that constituted a "bold step".

So, what do we make of this, besides the inadvisability of not getting exceedingly generous quotes duly signed off? Well, it's instructive in once more revealing the breadth of **Fortescue**'s ambition. Not only does it aim to mine without carbon emissions (the Liebherr trucks will not run on diesel), but it hopes for the broader industry's wholehearted praise and gratitude for leading the way.

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This is even as Forrest, in the same release, lashed said industry majors for their lack of leadership, lamenting with all the certainty of an Old Testament prophet how "the time of others persuading you that greenwashing is a better return to shareholders and your community is over".

Is this the best way to convince others to join Forrest's crusade? One may as well hope for the heavens to open and bestow a permanent halo atop Twiggy's forehead, a voice ringing out and proclaiming celestial approval of his mission. We wouldn't count on it, but hey, a man can dream.

PwC chairman sells

publishing business

New PwC chairman John Green has been a banker and a lawyer, as well as the proprietor and chairman of his own family-run publishing business.

All three careers are now drawing to a close, the last with the sale of the Green family's Pantera Press to Hardie Grant, due to be completed at the end of this month.

Prominent Pantera authors include political journalist Simon Benson, media entrepreneur Tim Duggan, and iconoclastic political activist Nyunggai Warren Mundine. And then, there was John Green himself, who as well as chairing the family business, has through it released a series of financial thrillers.

Some suggest an imagination not ill-placed in considering how, for example, wonky consultants could knowingly or inadvertently bring an organisation to its knees.

Consider the blurb for *The Trusted*, released in 2013 and focused on financial terrorists keen on destroying Wall Street "from the inside".

"What if the people we trust most are those we should trust least," the author asks. What indeed.

Green's author biography notes he stopped working as a banker two years before the global financial crisis, "enough of a lag so no one could accuse him of starting the whole mess". It also notes his status as an "aficionado" of "magic and mentalism".

We can't think why board recruiters don't regularly require such skills. Just think how familiarity with sleight of hand could have helped the previous members of PwC's governance board.

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