



STAR GURU: Paltrow's Goop blog

By Kirsty Robinson

**W**HEN Gwyneth Paltrow unveiled her 'wellness' blog Goop in 2009, there were snorts of derision. Mainly, we couldn't believe this pampered superstar could have anything to say about diet, exercise and general health that was relevant to the average person.

Yet today the site – a mix of healthy recipes, anti-ageing treatments and tough workouts – is a force to be reckoned with. If Gwyneth recommends a diet supplement, it flies off the shelves. When she endorses a brand of exercise leggings, her millions of readers buy them.

And, in her wake, a legion of health bloggers have also found phenomenal success. The four women featured on this page might look as if they'd be more interested in the latest must-have handbag or designer shade of lipstick – but they run the four most popular blogs, packed with health and fitness information and, like Paltrow, use their own experiences of illness or healthy living.

Their influence is powerful: between them they command the attention of almost two million readers worldwide every single month.

'Bloggers hold a massive influence today thanks to the way most people now shop,' says Lysa Hardy, Chief Marketing Officer for health food chain Holland & Barrett. 'Customers go online before making a purchase, so bloggers can make or break a product.'

'The fact these are ordinary people makes all the difference, because if something really works for someone you trust, it's got to be worth considering for yourself.'



**Polly Noble, 32, was diagnosed with cervical cancer eight years ago. Her blog about complementary and alternative approaches to health and cancer treatment, Polly's Path to Health and Happiness – pollynoble.com – has 75,000 hits a month. She also runs a life-coaching service, theconsciouslifeguide.com.**

My cancer diagnosis came in 2005 when I was just 24. I had conventional treatment and felt well for about five years until in 2010 a small lump appeared in the side of my neck – the cancer had returned, and spread. When I was well, I had studied nutrition and the effects of certain foods on the body and felt strongly that my body could heal itself given the right environment. As I experimented with a new way of eating, I documented it in a blog.

I was basically saying: 'Hello world, I'm in this crappy situation but I'm choosing to do everything I can to be as healthy as possible and I'm going to share this with you here.'

The blog was a great outlet for me in many ways and the support I began to receive and continue to

# Move over Gwyneth... meet the new health-blog power players

Forget celebrity chat – normal women talking about real problems have got millions hooked

hear only fuels my desire to live the best life I can and help others too.

I wrote about pursuing natural treatments. I ate an alkaline plant-based diet, took up meditation and visualisation, increased my yoga sessions, had coffee enemas to aid detoxification and saw an acupuncturist.

I recorded what I ate and drank, and my experiences along the way, the ups and downs, the hopes, disappointments and discoveries. At first it was mostly friends commenting but my following grew quickly; people signed up for free recipes and began following me on social media.

I write every day. A typical post might be about the benefits of juicing, my latest recipe creation or an expert interview with someone else in my field whose work I respect and wish to share. I'm working on my next book and recently launched my online lifestyle coaching programme.

People want to feel better, to feel healthier and to be the best version of themselves that they can be but they don't always know how.

It doesn't have to be overwhelming: You just have to make one change – one upgrade a day – for example, switching from a heavy meat-based meal to something plant-based.

I'm passionate about inspiring others to take the steps to be as healthy and vibrant as they can be. Life is too short to be anything other. I feel a responsibility to always be honest and authentic because I do have setbacks every now and then, as cancer is unpredictable, and I'm thankful my followers are supportive.

There are ups and downs – thanks to a minor infection I've just had to spend time in hospital. I take a very holistic approach to my health, so I do have conventional treatment too.

While I'm not always the impeccable person in the picture on the website, I am looking after myself the best I can. And the blog means I can encourage others.



**Muireann Carey-Campbell, 32, lives in East London with her partner. Her fashion and fitness blog spikesandheels.com has 30,000 hits a month.**

The other day a woman I'd never met stopped me in the street and told me I'd inspired her to start running – and she's now running half marathons. It really hit me: There are a lot of people following what I say.

Four years ago I was a total couch potato. Never would I have thought I would one day be encouraging other people to exercise.

I'm not a natural athlete – the first time I went on a run I was overtaken by a pensioner – but I decided to get fit in 2010, and began blogging to stay motivated. Every week I wrote about my training, blisters and all.

As it went on I started to think about my body in a different way – it wasn't about weight loss, it was what my body was powering me to do and how awesome that made me feel. I think that resonated with women. Everything fitness-related aimed at women is pink, fluffy and obsessed with weight. My blog wasn't. I posted pictures of me red-faced and sweaty. It's what bettering yourself looks like.

Every time I was able to run a little further, I thought: 'My muscles are awesome, my heart and lungs are amazing.' I started to feel a bit like superwoman.

I think a lot of women hadn't heard anyone talk about fitness like this and every day I receive emails telling me how inspiring it is. I was – and still am – a fashion blogger before starting Spikes and Heels, and now I run both

as a full-time job. On the average day, first and foremost, I work out.

Then I write and go through promotional stuff. I research lots of new sportswear. I might have meetings with brands but I always remain impartial and let readers know if I've been given something to try.

I'm not willing to compromise my sense of style just because I work out. I'm usually coming from a workout or going to one and I might have three meetings in between: I don't have the energy to be carrying six different bags. My clothes have to work for both.

I wear crazy tights, I love colour and I'm no shrinking violet. If I'm lifting weights I want you to see me! Being strong is increasingly important to women. My aim is to get people enjoying exercise. The traditional message is that being active is a chore. I want to banish that idea.



**Rachel Brathen, 25, is known to 800,000 Instagram followers as @yoga\_girl. Born and raised in Sweden, she lives on the Caribbean island of Aruba with fiancé Dennis. They travel the world teaching yoga.**

Yoga Girl began as a snapshot taken on the beach 18 months ago, posted on Instagram. I teach yoga in Aruba, having moved there when I met Dennis in 2010, and I started posting pictures of the class on the seashore.

It wasn't a 'look at my great life' thing – I was actually having a rough time. So instead of writing 'It's a beautiful day in Aruba' or



## THE CANCER FIGHTER



some cliché, I posted a picture and wrote about what was really going on – my little sister in Sweden was having some problems and Dennis and I were going through a difficult patch.

The response was tremendous. I got about 1,000 likes. It showed me people want to hear about real life.

People often present an airbrushed image on social media, but my postings are the opposite. This week I posted a picture of myself looking like I wanted to kill the security guard at the airport as he'd just ripped all my dirty underwear out of my bag. I write about how I feel – that's what people connect with.

I'm trained in yoga and was vegan for seven years so I taught myself a lot about nutrition, but life goes up and down and right now I'm drinking a lot of wine, eating a lot of