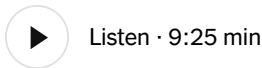


Justin Wolfers, Cable's Favorite Economist, Joins the Creator Economy

With his crisp breakdowns of President Trump's trade moves and distinctive Aussie accent, Mr. Wolfers has become a TV constant. Now he's starting his own media company.



By **Brian O'Keefe**

May 6, 2026

It was close to midnight at the end of Election Day in 2024 when Justin Wolfers suddenly realized what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. "I want to teach the world economics," he remembers thinking.

By most accounts, that was already his day job, as a professor of economics at the University of Michigan. Wolfers had recently co-written a highly successful introductory economics textbook with his life partner, Betsey Stevenson, a fellow professor at Michigan and a former member of the Council of Economic Advisers in the Obama administration.

If Kamala Harris had been elected president, Stevenson most likely would have had a role in the administration. Wolfers might have had a job in Washington, too. But Donald J. Trump's re-election took that off the table.

Wolfers's moment of clarity ultimately sent him down a road less traveled by academic economists: creating his own media company.

On Wednesday, Wolfers, 53, announced that he had founded Platypus Economics, an independent media start-up that aims to reach a mainstream audience. The name is a nod to his Australian roots, cheekily referring to the odd-looking mammal native to his birthplace. He's funding the business himself, using the income from his textbook sales.

A cable-TV darling

Wolfers wants to tap into the continued growth of the creator economy. The Interactive Advertising Bureau, a trade organization for the digital advertising industry, projected that ad spending on U.S. creators would hit \$37 billion in 2025, up from \$13.9 billion in 2021.

He also hopes to capitalize on the visibility he has gained since President Trump swept back into office last year and began waging trade battles around the globe.



Wolfers recording a trailer for Platypus Economics with the help of his son, Oliver, 13. Rosem Morton for The New York Times

After his election-night epiphany, Wolfers decided to expand his media presence. He felt a calling to put his skills to use in a new way. “I had a sense of what the next four years would involve,” Wolfers said. “And I thought that the political and social moment was partly a response to people not understanding economics.”

In early 2025, the likes of CNN, MS Now and the BBC started booking him regularly to explain — and often skewer, in entertaining fashion — the confusing tariff news coming out of the White House.

Before long, Wolfers was getting as many as 10 requests a week. His longish, dirty-blond hair, strong Aussie accent and propensity for one-liners, combined with a professor’s knack for breaking down complex economic concepts into digestible examples, made him a natural on camera, with an easy Crocodile Dundee-like appeal.

Wolfers was as surprised as he was flattered to be so in demand. “You have to remember my self-image is that I’m a nerdy Ph.D. economist, right?” he said. “It took me six months to realize, ‘Oh, that must imply you’re probably good at it.’”

Joining the creator economy

He was soon fielding calls from people who wanted to give him his own YouTube show — as an influencer from the center-left who could dissect the president’s economic policies. Tempted to accept the first offer he received, Wolfers instead went into deep research mode on the creator economy. In the end, he decided to create Platypus Economics.



Wolfers named Platypus Economics after a distinctive mammal native to Australia, where he grew up.
Rosem Morton for The New York Times

To get his content channels off the ground and build an audience, Wolfers is teaming up with Initial Digital, the digital media division of the Initial Group, an entertainment company that's backed by the private equity firm TPG.

Formerly called Silver Tribe Media, Initial Digital was acquired by the Initial Group in December. Its clients and projects include Oprah Winfrey but lean heavily toward sports, including Peyton Manning's Omaha Productions; the sports-talk maestro Colin Cowherd; and "Bussin' With the Boys," the podcast from the former N.F.L. players Will Compton and Taylor Lewan.

Initial Digital is looking to diversify its roster, however. Last June, the company hired Neal Carruth, a longtime NPR business journalist who had worked on "Planet Money" before jumping to an executive role at the Freakonomics Radio Network, and directed him to expand into new areas of content.

“Basically, they’re doing well with their jock division,” Wolfers said. “And they thought, ‘Let’s open a nerd division.’ They hired Neal to head it up. Then I called, and I’m a nerd, and so we started working together.”

Rather than give up equity, Wolfers said, he is paying Initial Digital an undisclosed monthly fee plus a cut of ad sales for its services, which include everything from providing creative guidance to optimizing his social channels.

Reaching a wider audience

While breaking down international trade dynamics may not be as sexy as, say, offering hot takes on the N.F.L. playoffs, Carruth believes that Wolfers has a chance to build a substantial following.

“We probably wouldn’t have agreed to work with Justin if we didn’t think that there was a pretty large potential audience for what he’s doing,” Carruth said.

Wolfers has always been a writer. (He is a former columnist and contributor to The New York Times.) And one of the new Platypus products is a Substack. But he hadn’t appreciated the power and potential of video on social media until recently, he said.

Before he began researching the creator business, for example, Wolfers wasn’t fully aware of the scale of YouTube’s streaming, which now regularly reaches a larger audience than the traditional television networks.

“The thing that blew me away the most was understanding the penetration of YouTube as part of how the public consumes information,” he said.



Wolfers in his home studio. Rosem Morton for The New York Times

Now, YouTube is central to his strategy for Platypus Economics, and Wolfers already has 60,000 subscribers to his channel. His first series for the platform is called “Diving In.” The idea is straightforward: Wolfers, sitting in his home office, picks a subject in the news and goes deep on it. Think of it as an Econ 101 lecture but with quick interstitial video clips, graphics and sound effects to keep things lively. In a recent example, Wolfers devoted 20 minutes to breaking down the \$1.5 trillion private lending market.

Wolfers grew up in Sydney, Australia, but has lived in the United States since arriving to get his Ph.D. at Harvard in the late '90s. He spent years climbing the academic world's greasy pole and burnishing his credentials.

“I was a bright young thing of my generation,” Wolfers said. “It’s all publish or perish. You know, I write the most complicated paper trying to prove to you that I’m better at math than you, it gets read by up to seven people, and then I earn the respect of my peers.”

Wolfers is comfortable switching his focus from the “high-prestige” aspects of being an academic economist to seek a wider audience. (He has no plans to leave his academic job at the University of Michigan, however.)

“Lots of words about economics have been typed,” he said. “Very few words about economics have been spoken. My tribe does not like a microphone, and almost no words of serious economic analysis are said in front of a video camera. Being the clown who laughs and tells jokes and tries to be entertaining on TV or on YouTube is low status, but it’s where people are. So if what you want to do is teach the world economics, that’s where you have to go.”

If his accent or the Platypus name helps brings in viewers, he’s fine with that as long as they stay for the economics lesson.

“I tell my team all the time not to try and make me cool for the kids,” Wolfers said. “I am a 53-year-old dad. I want to be a voice you can trust. And if you think you trust me because I tell you the truth, that’s fine. If you think you trust me because Aussies always tell the truth, that’s good, too. I don’t really care how you get there.”

Brian O'Keefe is the managing editor of DealBook, a newsletter from The New York Times that covers business, policy and culture — and the many ways they overlap.