



Bay of Plenty **TIMES**

Te Waiariki

Taking flight



Tauranga's ballooning population problem - and it's not people **P2**

Dancer Austin Taylor, 18, has 2.6 million followers on TikTok and created a dance that went viral with more than 52 million views.

Photo / Alex Cairns



'Blew up' overnight

How Tauranga teen dancer amassed millions of followers

Catherine Sylvester

What started as a bit of fun after dance class has quickly blossomed into a TikTok following of 2.6 million for Austin Taylor.

The Tauranga teen's social media profile "blew up" overnight after a dance he came up with in his kitchen went viral online.

His clip has attracted more than 52 million views on TikTok.

Taylor recorded it with friends after a dance class in February last year and it "blew up" overnight.

"I woke up to a million views and then it just took off from there.

"It was even more crazy when everyone started doing it," the 18-year-old says.

"It ended up with over 200,000 people using that sound and doing my dance to that."

Sounds, posts, likes and fol-

lowers – all terms today's teenagers are well-versed in. They can also be monetised by those skilled enough to tap into the current zeitgeist.

Within months of going viral, Taylor received paid offers from companies wanting him to post videos with sounds [music] they sent him. Sometimes they request he create a dance and other times he is given a dance to perform.

"I also get brand promos, which are a bit rarer, but they're also cool."

He had worked with Nike, JD Sports, Jay Jays, and local brands such as YouKnow Clothing.

"They send you clothes and if you wear them, you're reimbursed."

Recently, he has added modelling in photoshoots for brands to his repertoire.

"I didn't realise how many opportunities could come from social media but it's pretty much a job for me now," he says, adding he was still learning how to maximise it.

"Most jobs have a set pathway and this is sort of anything goes."

A stroke and lost vision

Just three years ago, Taylor's dreams could have been derailed when he had a stroke at age 16.

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Although making his mark on TikTok with his hip-dancing, Austin Taylor has years of experience in contemporary, jazz, ballet, and lyrical dance.
Photo / Amber Griffin

Tauranga's Tik Tok teen makes most of opportunity

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It occurred five minutes after leaving the stage at Baycourt during the Tauranga Performing Arts dance competition.

It left him without vision in one eye, and when he returned to the dance studio six months later, he had to learn how to move his body again.

"It took quite a while to adjust originally, but it doesn't affect me anymore," he says.

He had been dancing for more than a decade, with experience in jazz, contemporary, lyrical, ballet, and musical theatre with Dance Avenue, but the ex-Ōtumoetai College student has made his mark with hip-hop.

He's performed with Tauranga's Space Studios and was a member of its varsity crew, Outkasts, who won bronze at the Hip Hop International world dance championships in Arizona last year.

He is now with Auckland's Identity Dance Company [Idco].

Idco director Josh Cesan says, "I have been a choreographer/dancer and coach at the international level for over 10 years and can definitely say Austin is up there with some of the best dancers and performers we've ever had come to [our company]."

"He's humble, hardworking and immensely dedicated and that shows not only on the stage but with his international following."

Dancing for Disney

Earlier this year, Taylor saw a casting call on social media for Disney movie *Zombies 4*. Though only two days before the audition, he thought, "Why not?", and went for it.

After a stressful week, he learned he had made it. He moved into an Auckland apartment the studio arranged for him and work started the next day.

Describing the month of daily 9-to-5 rehearsals as "intense, incredible and so cool", Taylor says the choreographers were "super welcoming and amazing people to work with".

One of a core cast of 24, filming took 36 days of long hours on set with early starts requiring 3 or 4am wake-up calls.

With an infectious positive attitude, Taylor says it was initially a tricky adjustment – "It's not a teenager's schedule, is it?".

He adapted quickly and found catching the sunrise was an "incredible experience".

Grateful for every opportunity, Taylor particularly enjoyed the acting aspect of performing in the film and hopes to do more.

With *Zombies 4* on his resume, his social media success, and an invita-



Tauranga dancer Austin Taylor went viral on TikTok dancing to a clip from Coi Leray's song *Players*.
Photo / Tiktok

I woke up to a million views and then it just took off from there. It was even more crazy when everyone started doing it.

Austin Taylor



Right: Austin Taylor has been dancing for most of his life and has his sights set on continuing to earn his living from his talents.
Photo / Alisha Taylor

tion for his Idco crew to showcase at the World of Dance competition in Los Angeles later in the year, he plans to make the most of his career momentum.

"I'm in Los Angeles for all of August and will take a bunch of dance and acting classes, and look at agents."

The ultimate job?

"A massive dream is to be able to backup dance for an artist and once you've done that, it can help you move from job to job."

Despite his parents and two younger siblings missing him, opportunity knocks, and after a short break back home in Tauranga, the young man is heading back to Auckland. That is, until his next venture beckons.

Catherine Sylvester is a multimedia journalist at the *Bay of Plenty Times* and *Rotorua Daily Post*. She has a background in feature writing, radio and television, and has taught media at a tertiary level.



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