

CASE STUDY

# YouTube Creator Stories: How Nicky Jam Found His Beat



“You’re exactly like my cousin.”

Nicky Jam gets comments like this on his YouTube videos a lot. After twenty years in the business, he’s learned how to create music—and an environment—that truly connects with fans. And he started it all on YouTube: no record deal and no studio contract.

Before he was Nicky Jam, Nick Rivera was born into a Dominican and Puerto Rican family in Massachusetts. At 10 years old, he and his family moved to Puerto Rico. That was when he heard Latin and Reggae music for the first time—and he was hooked.

In his early days, Nicky Jam had a dream of getting to 1M views on one of his videos. Today, his [YouTube channel](#) has over 4M subscribers, and his hit single “[El Perdon](#)” which features Enrique Iglesias and formed part of the YouTube Music Awards, has over 300M views. “El Perdon,” the most popular song on his channel, was the most-viewed video from the YouTube Music Awards and won Nicky Jam a Latin Grammy.

## Goals

- Have a life-long music career
- Make music that transcends boundaries and labels
- 1M views

## Approach

- Stayed independent early on
- Fan engagement a top priority

## Results

- 4M subscribers
- Winner of 2015 Latin Grammy for “El Perdon” single with Enrique Iglesias
- Winner of 2015 YouTube Music Award



## Nicky's not-so-secret strategy for making it big: his YouTube channel

Nicky Jam knew he wanted to maintain complete control of his music, his platform, and his persona. Everything. He started with his own YouTube channel in 2012 and as he saw more and more success, he stayed put. He didn't sign a record deal early on because he said he knew he "needed to focus on [his] channel."

Through YouTube alone, he's built up a massive fan base of 4M subscribers. According to a Nielsen study, from December 2014 to May 2015, more Hispanics aged 18–49 watched YouTube than any cable network in the U.S.,<sup>1</sup> so Nicky Jam's success on YouTube makes sense.

In 2015, Nicky Jam had a real "I've made it" moment when he was awarded a [YouTube Music Award](#). He was the only Latino to win an award and his face and name were displayed in Times Square, alongside some of today's hottest artists like Ed Sheeran.

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## Nicky Jam finds unique ways to build engagement and connect with fans

Nicky Jam built a very successful channel in his genre the old fashioned way: one fan at a time. As he grew, he "learned to keep in touch with the people." And in true Nicky Jam fashion, he did it in a way all his own— with fan contests. He hosts and promotes contests of all kinds: voice, improvisation, and even [look-alike](#).

When Nicky released his hit song "[Travesuras](#)," he launched a voice talent contest. The [winning video](#) has almost 3.5M views and the winner is currently recording a song to be released with Nicky Jam. Nicky and his brand manager (YT Rocket) also developed an improvisation contest called #ImproJam. More than 2,500 fans from Latin America and Europe posted [videos](#) of themselves freestyling. Nicky chose the finalists and hosted them on his channel and offered an award for the winner.

Since Nicky started these contests in April 2014, he's seen almost 200,000 new subscribers join his channel monthly.<sup>2</sup> The contests also helped his "Travesuras" video reach over 300M views.



Nicky Jam is a true pioneer in the music industry, getting his start on YouTube and using digital as his primary method for building an audience. This approach and his ongoing fan engagement has created a base of fans who feel like they know Nicky. He's their buddy, their brother, their cousin—that is, if their cousin hit it big and had his face in lights next to Ed Sheeran in Times Square.

## Sources

- 1 Google-commissioned Nielsen Study via Nielsen Media Impact, December 2014 – May 2015. Audience Reach among self-identifying Hispanic persons. Hispanic persons 18-49 for YouTube (total digital) compared to 124 U.S. cable networks individually (television only).
- 2 Internal YouTube data, 2015.