

Publisher's Note

Contemporary Biographies in Communications & Media is a collection of twenty-nine biographical sketches of “living leaders” in the fields of communications and media. All of these articles come from the pages of *Current Biography*, the monthly magazine renowned for its unflinching accuracy, insightful selection, and the wide scope of influence of its subjects. These up-to-date profiles draw from a variety of sources and are an invaluable resource for researchers, teachers, students, and librarians. Students will gain a better understanding of the educational development and career pathways of the contemporary communications and media specialist to better prepare themselves for a career in these industries.

The geographical scope of *Contemporary Biographies in Communications & Media* is broad; selections span the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, covering numerous major geographical and cultural regions. All of the figures profiled are still working at one or more of their specialties, including writing, directing, leading major corporations, hosting television and radio programs, consulting, inventing, and publishing.

Articles in *Contemporary Biographies in Communications* range in length from 1,000 to 4,000 words and follow a standard format. All articles begin with ready-reference listings that include birth details and concise identifications. The article then generally divide into several parts, including Early

Life and Education, and Later Career, a core section that provides straightforward accounts of the periods in which the profiled subjects made their most significant contributions to the communications and media industries. Essays are supplemented by bibliographies, which provide starting points for further research.

As with other Salem Press biographical reference works, these articles combine breadth of coverage with a format that offers users quick access to the particular information needed. Articles are arranged alphabetically by last name. A general Bibliography offers a comprehensive list of works for students seeking out more information on a particular individual or subject, while a separate bibliography of Selected Works highlights the significant published works of the professionals profiled. A Profession Index lists the 58 professions covered in this volume and the individuals associated with each.

An appendix consisting of nine historical biographies culled from the Salem Press *Great Lives* series introduces readers to professionals in communications and media of historical significance integral to the work and research that revolutionized these industries.

The editors of Salem Press wish to extend their appreciation to all those involved in the development and production of this work; without their expert contribution, projects of this nature would not be possible. A list of contributors follows.

Abrams, Jonathan

Serial entrepreneur, software engineer

Born: 1970(?), Toronto, Ontario, Canada

When Jonathan Abrams founded the on-line social network Friendster, in 2002, he envisioned it as a safer, more appealing alternative to existing dating sites, one on which members would register, free of charge and by invitation only, to meet people through friends rather than total strangers. In designing the site, Abrams had in mind the concept of “six degrees of separation” (the theory that anyone on Earth can be linked to any other person anywhere in the world through a chain of acquaintances that has no more than five intermediaries); he aimed to give users access to the personal profiles of their friends, friends of friends, the friends of those people, and so on, thus making it possible for them to try to establish new personal or business relationships. By early 2003 Friendster’s membership was growing at a weekly rate of 20 percent; by the following July, the number of registered users had reached one million. In October 2003 Abrams declined a \$30 million acquisition offer from Google, choosing instead to try to build Friendster using venture capital. Around that time the demand for Friendster began to decline, partly because of server troubles and lack of innovation and partly because of increasing competition from rival social-networking sites. In 2004 Abrams stepped down as Friendster’s CEO while retaining the title of company chairman. Friendster attempted to attract more customers by offering an array of multi-media features, emulating competitor MySpace’s emphasis on music as a “community” focus. In 2005 Abrams lost his chairmanship as well as most of his equity in Friendster in a company recapitalization. He became co-owner of a San Francisco nightclub, Slide, in September 2006 and in late 2006 founded Socializr, a social event-planning and management Web site. Events management proved to be a difficult market, and Socializr was acquired by competitor Punchbowl in November 2010.

In January 2011 Abrams became cofounder and managing partner of Founders Den, a “co-working space” and private club for entrepreneurs. In mid-2012 he founded Nuzzel, a social news sharing site that integrates links-sharing among friends on Facebook and Twitter, among other sites; Nuzzel currently is in beta testing. Before launching Friendster, Abrams had started and later sold another company, called HotLinks; earlier, he worked in senior engineering roles at Bell-Northern Research, Nortel Networks, Netscape, and Bitfone.

In 2003 Abrams was named *Entertainment Weekly*’s “breakout star,” while *Time* listed Friendster as one of the “coolest inventions” of the year. In 2004 *Technology Review* named Abrams one of the world’s top young innovators. Also in that year he was listed among *Advertising Age* magazine’s entertainment marketers of the year and nominated in the software-designer category for the *Wired* Rave Awards.

Education and Early Career

Jonathan Abrams was born in about 1970 in Toronto, in the province of Ontario, Canada, and was raised in Thornhill, just north of Toronto. He told an interviewer for the Conference Guru Web site that his interest in computers and business began during his childhood. He attended McMaster University, in Hamilton, Ontario, where he majored in computer science. During summer breaks he worked in Ottawa, Canada’s capital, as an intern for Bell-Northern Research, a telecommunications-equipment manufacturer. He earned a B.S. degree with honors from McMaster in 1995. After his graduation Bell-Northern hired him to write telecommunications software. Later, after Bell-Northern

became Nortel Networks Corp., he worked on Internet software at the company's computing-technology laboratory. "After six months, I decided I wanted to move to where the action was, I wanted to move to where all the Internet stuff was being created. I was more interested in the Internet stuff than the telecom stuff," he told Kate Heartfield for the *Ottawa Citizen* (July 31, 2003). In 1996—at the height of the boom in Internet technology stocks—Abrams left Canada to accept a job as a senior software engineer at the Netscape Communications Corp. in Mountain View, California, in the heart of so-called Silicon Valley. "I wanted to be where I considered then to be the center of the universe," he told Todd Inoue for Metroactive, the on-line site of *Metro Silicon Valley* newspaper (October 9, 2003). His responsibilities at Netscape involved managing the company's Web browsers and working on projects to promote open standards for Internet protocols. In 1998, after less than two years with Netscape, he lost his job—apparently for economic reasons, not poor performance.

In 1999 Abrams launched a business of his own—HotLinks Network, an on-line bookmark and Web directory service that enabled users to share their preferred Web sites with others. "We're trying to recapture the original idea behind the Internet—to bring people together in a spirit of discovery," he told Jayson Matthews for *siliconvalley.internet.com* (November 6, 2000). He funded the \$2 million venture primarily with capital from an affiliate of CMGI, an investor in technology companies, and staffed it with former co-workers of his from Nortel. Along with many other Internet start-ups, his business (based in Mountain View) suffered during the dot-com downturn (the so-called dot-com bubble "officially" burst in 2000), and he was forced to reduce his payroll. "My greatest challenge was trying to run my first company in hyper-competitive 1999 with very limited business experience," Abrams told the Conference Guru interviewer, after admitting, "In many ways, I ended up in over my head. . . . Naturally, I made many mistakes, and while HotLinks was not a complete failure, it was a real disappointment for me to have had to lay off valued members of our team, and not provide a better outcome for the people who built the company with me." In 2001 Abrams sold HotLinks. Later that year he was hired to head the engineering group of Bitfone Corp., in Palo Alto, California, a fledgling wireless software company. Within nine months he found himself unemployed again, following Bitfone's merger with Digital Transit. He soon joined Ryze.com, a networking community, founded by Adrian Scott, whose members were categorized according to interests, location, and current and past employers.

At around that time Abrams broke up with his girlfriend of two years, and he began to explore the possibility of meeting single females through on-line dating sites. "But when I checked out these sites, I found that they were kind of anonymous and random and creepy, and I didn't find it very appealing," as he recalled to Robert Siegel for the National Public Radio (NPR) news magazine *All Things Considered* (July 10, 2003). "The other thing was that I noticed in real life, my friends preferred to meet people through their friends. So I kind of looked at those two things and thought it would be cool if there was a Web site where you could meet people through your friends online." As Abrams later explained to Jason Calacanis of the online program *This Week in Startups* (November 6, 2012), "I started coming up with the idea of: what if online, instead of being anonymous, instead of being Cyberdude307, I'd be Jonathan, and I'd bring the real-world social context that I had with me, online."

Inspired by the positive response he received from friends regarding his idea for an invitation-only on-line social network, Abrams left Ryze.com and, working from his apartment in Silicon Valley, created the software needed to launch the project. He decided against approaching venture capitalists for start-up funds; as he told Kate Heartfield, such investors "push you to spend a lot of money right away and in this economy,

that didn't seem wise. I thought it would be more impressive to raise a small amount of money and go further with it." He raised \$400,000 from friends and other investors, including Mark Pincus and Reid Hoffman, the founders of the networking sites Tribe and LinkedIn, respectively, whose combined investment was \$310,000, as reported by Victoria Murphy in *Forbes* magazine (December 8, 2003).

"I started coming up with the idea of: what if online, instead of being anonymous, instead of being Cyberdude307, I'd be Jonathan, and I'd bring the real-world social context that I had with me, online."

In August 2002, rather than actively promoting the service, Abrams tested Friendster by having 20 of his friends use it, in the hope that those people would invite 20 of their friends to join the site and the network would thus grow through word of mouth. "It was really like that old shampoo commercial where you tell two friends and then they tell two friends and so on," he told T. L. Stanley for *Advertising Age* (March 1, 2004). By the end of the year, although the site was still private, membership was growing at the rate of 4 percent to 7 percent daily, forcing Abrams to switch from a friend's server to a commercial server in January 2003.

Later Career

In March 2003 Abrams offered a free trial version of Friendster to the public. Within three months the number of members registered to the site was increasing by about 20 percent every week, reaching a peak of 1.75 million in October 2003. The company's main sources of revenue initially were advertisements at the site and the sale of Friendster merchandise (T-shirts, hats, and mugs). Although Abrams had ruled out asking registered users to pay a subscription fee for basic service, in August 2003 he instituted an \$8 per month charge for premium features, among them a chat room and a mechanism through which e-mail or instant messages could be sent to potential new friends outside the Friendster network. (By comparison, such online services as Match.com and Yahoo! Personals charged \$20 to \$25 monthly subscription fees.)

Friendster was approaching a million members by July 2003, when Abrams raised investments totaling \$1 million from Tim Koogle, who was then CEO of Yahoo! and a member of the Friendster board of directors; Peter Thiel, the former chief executive of PayPal; and Ram Shriram, the former vice president of business development of Amazon.com and a former member of the executive team at Netscape Communications. According to Matt Marshall, writing for the *San Jose Mercury News* (October 3, 2003) Abrams turned down a \$30 million acquisition offer from Google. He chose instead to accept venture-capital investments from Kleiner Perkins Caulfield & Byers and Benchmark Capital that totaled \$13 million and reportedly raised the value of Friendster to an estimated \$53 million, according to Ann Grimes in the *Wall Street Journal*. Abrams retained about a third of Friendster's stock but relinquished control over its board, which proved to be a costly error. He used the venture capital money to expand the company's staff and to purchase additional servers, routers, and other hardware to speed the network's processing time. The extra equipment had become vital with the surge in traffic, which had caused slowdowns. Contributing to that increase in usage was the registration at Friendster.com of imposters (commonly known as Fakesters), people posing as

fictitious characters (the cartoon character Homer Simpson, for example) or as well-known personages (the actor Kevin Bacon was a popular choice).

In October 2003 Friendster switched the site's architecture from Java to the open-source Web server Apache (which costs nothing and allows users to modify software to fit their particular needs) and to the programming language PHP, thus enabling the company to add more features. That month only 1.75 million of its 7 million registered users visited Friendster.com. In a conversation with Natalie Hanman for the London *Guardian* (April 28, 2005), Clay Shirky, a specialist on Internet technologies who teaches at New York University, attributed the decline in usage to a lack of technological innovation. In an attempt to make Friendster not merely a social networking site but also a for-profit company, Abrams had also agreed to step down from his chief-executive role; he was replaced by Tim Koogle in March 2004. Koogle served as interim CEO until June 2004, when Scott Sassa, a former NBC head of entertainment, assumed the position. Sassa intended to generate most of Friendster's revenue through advertising on the site. "Friendster's mass appeal, viral growth and stickiness will make it one of the brands that will redefine the media landscape," he stated in a press release, as quoted by Elizabeth Millard on the CRM Web site. Besides posting horoscopes and news headlines at the site, Sassa made promotional tie-in agreements with DreamWorks and Sony Pictures. In March 2005 Sassa offered members of Friendster, for a fee, the opportunity to create and update their own blogs.

While Friendster was attempting to appeal to a mass audience, similar social networking sites were having greater success targeting niche audiences. MySpace.com, for example, a social network (launched in October 2004) connected with the Los Angeles music scene, attracted 24.3 million unique visitors (visitors counted only once) in October 2005, according to ComScore Networks (on-line), while ComScore Media Metrix, a division of ComScore Networks, reported that Facebook.com (founded in February 2004), which quickly became especially popular among college students, attracted 9.5 million unique visitors in October 2005. According to ComScore Media Metrix, that same month Friendster drew only 1.4 million unique visitors. Another competitor, Orkut, was launched by Google in January 2004.

In May 2005 Friendster announced (without making its financial records public) that it expected its annual sales to total \$10 million. The next month Sassa resigned. He was succeeded by Taek Kwon, formerly the executive vice president of product and technology for Citysearch.com, who believed that the solution to Friendster's problems lay in enhancing the site. In October 2005 Friendster launched a redesigned site that offered new features including extra photo storage space, free blogs, photo slideshows, classifieds, movie and music reviews, and, thanks to a so-called distribution partnership with Grouper Networks, new file-sharing capabilities. In March 2006, in partnership with Pandora and its Music Genome Project, Friendster offered its members the capability of creating playlists containing their favorite music. Earlier, Stefanie Olsen had reported for CNET News.com (November 14, 2005) that Friendster had hired Montgomery & Co., an investment bank in Santa Monica, California, to find a buyer for the company. In August 2006, however, Friendster procured \$10 million in funding in a round led by DAG Ventures, and Kent Lindstrom became CEO. Yet domestically, once surpassed by MySpace (called by some a copycat site), it never succeeded in challenging its competitors' dominance. Gary Rivlin, writing for the *New York Times* (October 15, 2006), gave an account of Friendster's sinking fortunes, describing the site as "the iconic case of failure" and noting that it was receiving less than 2 percent of the number of domestic visitors to MySpace each month. According to Max Chafkin in *Inc.* (June 1, 2007), in March 2007, "Friendster fell to thirteenth place among social networks in the U.S. and saw its market share decline to 0.3 percent."

As early as spring 2004, however, the company had become aware that while it was slowing domestically, it was seeing dramatic growth in Asia, especially in the Philippines. Half the site's traffic was already originating in southeastern Asia. By the time Richard Kimber (formerly of Google) replaced Lindstrom as CEO in 2008, Friendster had received \$20 million in another round of funding (from IDG Ventures) and was strongly focused on Asia, where it had become the preeminent social networking site. In December 2009 Friendster was purchased by MOL Global, a Malaysian payment platform firm with which it was already partnering for its e-commerce operations. The purchase price was \$39.5 million (of which just \$26.4 million remained for shareholders after a variety of deductions). In June 2011 Friendster ended its social networking operations and became an online gaming site.

Abrams came to see his company's flameout, as Chafkin wrote, as "not simply a singular failure, but a systematic one" owing to the basic workings of the venture capital system. By Abrams's own account, he "brought on experienced investors to help Friendster fulfill its potential. But the all-star team was the curse of death." Frequent changes in management and direction left the company reeling. In all, as Abrams himself told interviewer Jason Calacanis of *This Week in Startups* (#303, November 6, 2012), "From the venture financing, in the fall of '03, to the company being sold in '09, the company went through six C.E.O.s in those six years. Six years, six C.E.O.s. ... Friendster was sold for, around, \$40 million, in '09. The Malaysian company that bought it, then, promptly sold the patents, that I'm the inventor of, to Facebook, for more than they paid to buy the company. Which was, like, the final chapter of the mismanagement of that company."

Abrams is co-owner of Slide—"San Francisco's first retro-ultralounge," according to *San Francisco* magazine (August 2007)—which opened on the site of a former Mason Street speakeasy in September 2006. By then Abrams had been working for some time on an event-planning and management Web site called Socializr, which launched in late 2006. Built by Abrams himself, Socializr—initially with "angel" funding from Rembrandt Ventures, David Samuel, and others and later with venture capital (\$1.5 million) from Rembrandt Ventures (September 2007)—improved on competitor Evite by tapping users' existing social networking presences and integrating music and videos. Despite attempting to stay "lean," Abrams was compelled to lay off staff in September 2009, "probably," as analyst Michael Arrington speculated, owing to "competitive pressure from Facebook and others" rather than from its ostensible rival Evite (TechCrunch, September 16, 2009). Socializr was acquired by competitor Punchbowl in November 2010.

Abrams moved on to other ventures. In January 2011 he became cofounder (with Jason Johnson, Michael Levit, and Zachary Bogue) and managing partner (with Bogue) of Founders Den, an invitation-only "curated, co-working space," in Abrams's words, and private club for "serial entrepreneurs" located in San Francisco's South of Market (SoMA) district. Coveted space at Founders Den typically is rented for relatively short terms by established entrepreneurs working on start-ups. In mid-2012 Abrams founded Nuzzel, a social news-sharing site that integrates friends' news links postings on Facebook and Twitter; Nuzzel, currently in beta testing, faces an array of competitors but has won praise from initially somewhat skeptical critics for its elegance, ease of use, and contextual features, such as friends' tweets on a given story and relevant links to other news aggregators. As with Abrams's other concepts, it draws on a given user's on-line circle of friends, in this case to gather links to news and stories presumably of interest to the user, keeping the user apprised of what friends are reading and sharing. Asked about the genesis of Nuzzel, Abrams told Ellen Lee, in an interview posted at the *San Francisco Chronicle's* on-line site SFGate (October 23, 2012), that "The idea of Nuzzel was to help manage the social overload" created by the on-line welter of "friends,"

“followers,” and ever-expanding networks of connections. “It’s not some sort of silly faddish thing,” he continued. “It’s a utility.” Abrams’s experience with Socializr led him to return to the development model he had used, by necessity, with Friendster: “[W]hen I had the idea for Nuzzel, I went back to basics. I built a prototype ... [to] see the reaction and see if this idea really had potential before I raised money and hired a team. That worked well with Friendster, and it’s why I decided to build something first.” Nuzzel went on to raise more than \$1.7 million in seed funding from investors and venture capital firms, including IDG Ventures, 500 Startups, Charles River Ventures, SoftTech VC, and Andreessen Horowitz.

Abrams has long been active in the Silicon Valley tech community. He is a mentor in Steve Blank’s entrepreneurship classes at Stanford and Berkeley, a top-rated mentor at the Founder Institute, and an advisor to AngelList and LeanLaunchLab. He was a long-time member of the advisory board of the Silicon Valley Association of Startup Entrepreneurs (SVASE), co-chair of the SDForum Venture Finance SIG, and moderator of the SVASE CTO Forum, and he has been a judge for the Business Association of Stanford Entrepreneurial Students (BASES) Entrepreneurs Challenge business plan contest; “bplan,” the UC Berkeley Startup Competition; the Stanford-Berkeley Innovators’ Challenge; the Intel Challenge; and Start-Up Chile.

Abrams is married and a father.

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Profession Index

Activist

Sakamoto, James Y.

Actor

Arnaz, Desi

Advertising Executive

Saatchi, Charles

Animator

Arriola, Gus

MacFarlane, Seth

Art Collector

Saatchi, Charles

Author

Haruka, Yōko

Bookseller

Guy, Thomas

Broadcast Journalist

Gruber, Lilli

Ruiz, Guñazú, Magdalena

Business Executive

Arnaz, Desi

Kaspersky, Eugene

Kaspersky, Natalya

Messier, Jean-Marie

Cartoonist

Arriola, Gus

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Langhart Cohen, Janet

Chef

Bourdain, Anthony

Communications Executive

Schwartz, Gil

Corporate Director

Baldauf, Sari

Courtroom Reporter

Deutsch, Linda

Cryptologist

Kaspersky, Eugene

Director

Ball, Alan

Chase, David

Editor

Bourdain, Anthony

Buckley, Priscilla L.

Fashion Magazine Director

Coddington, Grace