Buffer's Y Combinator Application

What is your company going to make?

Buffer is an application for Twitter which helps people Tweet consistently without spending all day on Twitter. All people do is put tweets into their Buffer, and the app schedules tweets for them during the day.

We have started development on two core features: detailed analytics and a "Buffer button" for blogs. We make the sharing easier, and we make measuring the impact of your social media efforts easier.

For each founder, please list: YC username; name; age; year of graduation, school, degree and subject for each degree; email address; personal url, github url, facebook id, twitter id; employer and title (if any). Put unfinished degrees in parens. List the main contact first. Separate founders with blank lines. Put an asterisk before the name of anyone not able to move to the Bay Area.

joelg87; Joel Gascoigne; 23; 2009; Warwick University; MEng Computing Systems; joel@bufferapp.com; http://joel.is; http://github.com/joelg; http://www.facebook.com/joelg; http://twitter.com/joelg87;

LeonW; Leonhard Widrich; 20; 2013; Warwick Business School; [BA Management]; leo@bufferapp.com , http://leostartsup.com; http://facebook.com/leonhard.widrich; http://twitter.com/LeoWid;

Please tell us in one or two sentences about the most impressive thing other than this startup that each founder has built or achieved.

Joel: After graduating I founded a startup rather than getting a job. It reached 6,000 users and gave me the first real lessons of building a startup. The many mistakes contributed to how I approached Buffer.

Leo: I offered the Business School to build a better feedback system and although they agreed to it beforehand, I was threatened to be kicked out after pushing an MVP live as sharing data in such an interactive way for students, was not acceptable.

Please tell us about the time you, Joelg87, most successfully hacked some (non-computer) system to your advantage.

I applied the 80/20 principle at University. There was an option where you could gain extra credit by doing more than the recommended load of work. I took Japanese as my extra class, and 3 of my 4 years it enabled me to finish with a mark of 76% although I averaged 70% in my classes.

Please tell us about an interesting project, preferably outside of class or work, that two or more of you created together. Include urls if possible.

There are no shared projects before Buffer.

How long have the founders known one another and how did you meet? Have any of the founders not met in person?

We met about 2 years ago at an entrepreneurs networking event and have bounced ideas off each other ever since.

Why did you pick this idea to work on? Do you have domain expertise in this area? How do you know people need what you're making?

- I wanted to solve my own problem and was frustrated with how other tools approached scheduling tweets.

- Leo created a small company providing a learning centre for newcomers to Twitter in Austria.

- We have 44 people paying for Buffer on a monthly subscription.

What's new about what you're making? What substitutes do people resort to because it doesn't exist yet (or they don't know about it)?

- Buffer erases two steps twitter users usually had to take to schedule tweets. The first one being setting the time of each individual tweet. The second one being to go to your account in Tweetdeck or Hootsuite in order to schedule from there. With Buffer all you do is hit the Buffer icon on the page you are reading to add more tweets.

- If users are currently not using Buffer, they would be using "normal tweet scheduling", such as SocialOomph, Hootsuite, Tweetdeck or any of the other about 10 similar services out there.

Who are your competitors, and who might become competitors? Who do you fear most?

- At the moment our competitors are the applications named above. In addition there are 3 more application, which are more closer to the nature of Buffer. They are Timely, Pluggio and 14blocks.

- Losing our focus on what the customer needs and focusing on whom we fear most is what we fear most.

What do you understand about your business that other companies in it just don't get?

One of our users sent us this: "I really appreciate the "human" quality of your company. We try for that in our own company too for the exact reason that those are the kinds of companies we like to deal with ourselves."

We understand making customers happy is the most important thing.

How do or will you make money? How much could you make? (We realize you can't know precisely, but give your best estimate.)

- We are making $280/mo

- We have a consistent conversion rate from free to paid plans of 4%

- We have a strong acquisition engine through planned referral and affiliate programmes

- We have been focused on building a great product and have not give much thought to how much we could make. At current growth rate, a monthly income in the tens of thousands of dollars seems very achievable.

If you've already started working on it, how long have you been working and how many lines of code (if applicable) have you written?

We have been working on Buffer since October 2010. We have a fully functioning product which we are shouting about.

If you're launched, what is your monthly growth rate (in users or revenue or both)?

We have 1500 users at the moment, of which 45 are paying. This gives us a monthly revenue of $280. Numbers of users is growing at 400% per month. Here is a chart:

If you have an online demo, what's the url? (Please don't password protect it; just use an obscure url.)

http://bufferapp.com

How will you get users? If your idea is the type that faces a chicken-and-egg problem in the sense that it won't be attractive to users till it has a lot of users (e.g. a marketplace, a dating site, an ad network), how will you overcome that?

We have 3 main sources to get users:

- Via blogposts (we write a lot of reviews about our own product and submit them for guestposting or ask for being reviewed)

- Planned referral programme

- Planned affiliate programme

If you're already incorporated, when were you? Who are the shareholders and what percent does each own? If you've had funding, how much, at what valuation(s)?

- We are not yet incorporated.

- We have had no funding.

If you're not incorporated yet, please list the percent of the company you plan to give each founder, and anyone else you plan to give stock to. (This question is as much for you as us.)

- Joel founded Buffer in October, and Leo came on board in January. Leo will have 30% over a 3 year period. We would like some advice on this.

If we fund you, which of the founders will commit to working exclusively (no school, no other jobs) on this project for the next year?

Both

Do any founders have other commitments between June and August 2011 inclusive?

Leo will finish his exams at beginning of June.

Do any founders have commitments in the future (e.g. finishing college, going to grad school), and if so what?

Leo is having a year out from University to work on Buffer until Summer of 2012. Continuation thereafter is optional.

Where do you live now, and where would the company be based after YC?

We both live in the UK, Birmingham at the moment. We plan on moving the company to the US, Silicon Valley after YC.

Please tell us something surprising or amusing that one of you has discovered. (The answer need not be related to your project.)

We managed to create a DoS attack on ourselves. We have a Chrome extension which lets people add tweets, and which shows people how many tweets are left in their Buffer too. To show the number, the extension polled the server every 5 seconds. After a few hundred people installed the extension, we found the server almost came to a halt. After some investigation, we thought we were under attack and even started banning some IPs, of our own users! Glad we weren't!