

Sunday, November 25, 2007

## **Digital Entrepreneurs - Jay Bhatti of Spock.com**

**Digital Entrepreneurs** are those entrepreneurs that embrace an idea and make it real using digital resources. Some of them create a new search engine, which lives only in a world of bits and bytes (eg. [Google](#) and [Yahoo](#)), others jump from a digital platform to the "real" world (like [Amazon](#), etc). Nowadays no one argues about the capacity of these entrepreneurs of creating real business (money!).

Let me introduce you to [Jay Bhatti](#), co-founder of [Spock.com](#). I met Jay just by chance, as I was registered to Spock and he contacted me to ask for suggestions on how to improve the website (he contacted all the power users). We did this interview for the Italian business magazine [7th Floor](#).

Even if it might seem obvious, the name of this "people" search engine has no relation whatsoever with **Star Trek**. When Jay and [Jaideep Singh](#) (co-founder of Spock with Jay) came up with the idea, Spock was supposed to mean "Single Point of Contact by Keyword" - which is the foundation of Spock today, the ability to search for anyone by keywords (tags).



**Spock.com** was thought to be a search engine for people (someone called it the **Who's Who 2.0**), with the aim to find any person in the world. The main difference with other search engines is that Spock acts as a "**meta-engine**", that supports itself on all the other existing websites, with a particular accent on social networking ones. But its main differentiating trait is that it itself becomes "social" because it allows users to add the information that characterizes a given person, and to vote on that added by others, thus judging the validity of it. So when you look up for someone, you'll find not only links to that person's profile on Wikipedia, LinkedIn, Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, etc, but also tags, news, relationships, photos and quotes **added and voted by other visitors**.

### **What is your dream for Spock.com?**

*I want Spock to become the number 1 search application in the world for People. When anyone in the world thinks of searching for people online, they should think of Spock first.*

*When anyone wants to search even within their own network of friends for the right person, they should go first to Spock.*

### **The business model in brief**

*Right now we are focused on developing the best user experience possible. Longer term, our business model is to display very rich and relevant ads and leads when people do a search on Spock. Very similar to the Google model where they capture intent based on your search.*

### **Where did you get the money for the start-up?**

*Our funding came from [Clearstone Venture Partners](#) and [Opus Capital](#). Two of the top consumer Venture Capitalists in Silicon Valley. We also have small investments from some notable people in the Valley who are advisers to Spock. **I think it is very important to get experienced advisers who have done several start-ups to help you through the process.***

### **The "garage" story behind Spock**

The garage story behind Spock is that Jay and Jaideep kept complaining about **how hard it was to find the right person**, even within their own networks, and how searching for people was so fragmented (across social networks, your address book, web documents, etc). They both quit their jobs and spent several months with no paycheck to finalize the vision and pitch to venture capitalists. During that time, Jay lived in Jaideep's Pool house for several months. So, its more of a "pool house" story than garage story. :-)

### **Follows Jay's advice for digital entrepreneurs willing to launch their own start-up:**

## **do's.**

**1. Move Fast** - The only things we regret so far is not moving faster. Its important as a start-up to move fast. From a development, marketing, to business development standpoint, it does you no good to move slow in todays digital world.

**2. Hire the Best** - This is the only place I recommend you take your time. Hire the best people possible. Make sure they are smart, motivated, and have the right attitude for your Company. Nothing is worse than hiring someone who you come to realize is not a good fit for your company. And nothing is more exciting when you hire really smart people who believe in your vision and can come up with even better ways of making the vision come true.

**3. Be Open** - We realized that the more open and transparent we were as a company to the outside world, the better the world responded. It's important that you share your vision with users and the Press. Make sure to say it every chance you get to anyone that will listen. It's important for you to set the vision and PR for your company. Don't let anyone else start defining what you are about.

## don't's.

**1. Do not be afraid of doing your own start-up.** We all feel fear when thinking about doing a start-up. I had it too. But once I committed to it, it was the best decision I made in my life. But make sure that whatever field you get into you absolutely love and are willing to spend your waking day doing nothing but focusing your energy on your start-up and the market you are trying to attack.

**2. Dont be afraid of criticism.** Doing a start-up is a very hard thing for some people to imagine. Think about what some people say "you are going to start a company with no funding that is going to try to beat Google at something!" I say that if you believe strongly enough in your vision and yourself, you should not let anyone make you believe you cant do something. Make would-be entrepreneurs have ruined great opportunities when they let the wrong people influence them.

**3. Dont ignore your users.** You are nothing without customers and users. Make sure you listen and treat EVERY user as if they were your only customer. I make it a point at Spock to respond to every user that same day with the proper answer to their questions. Best of all, a lot of product ideas that we implemented were the direct result of user feedback!

Mobility is in Spock's roadmap, but before taking it to mobile, they want to make the online experience amazing.

### **Why should I look for someone on Spock and not in, for example, [Wikipedia](#)?**

*Wikipedia only give you famous people. Spock will give you anyone you are looking for in the world!*

As I currently live in Italy, I asked Jay about their plans and plans & expectations for the Italian market and the rest of the World.

*Italian Market - We want to have language support at some point (on the drawing board) for Italy. But most importantly, I want every online user in Italy to think of Spock as the best people search site in the world, and the most open, and the most free. Global - Same thing. We plan to make language support a higher priority next year and want to make sure*

*that Spock is a global product that everyone in the world would have a need for.*

To help him in this mission, Jay has recruited ambassadors and evangelists (like [Andrey Golub](#) in Italy) from whom he expects that they keep being honest with him on how to improve the service and really working to make sure that Spock is correctly represented in their markets. Jay really enjoy working with otheir ambassadors from all round the world. Most of all, he likes the open conversations they have on how to make Spock **reach the potential they all think it has.**

### **Spock in brief**

- Spock birthdate: March 23, 2006
- Employees / age range: 25 employees, average age is 27
- Actual pageviews/unique users: over 1m+ unique and 15m+ page view per month (just in the first few months of launch with limited marketing)
- Target audience: anyone in the world who wants to search for people
- Pc, mac, linux or who cares as long as it does the job? They use all of them at Spock

### **Jay in brief**



- 34 years old, Born in Punjab India, interests outside of Spock include reading and playing sports. Check out his Spock profile:<http://www.spock.com/jay>

- He has no past start-up experience and he says that "*Nothing can prepare you for a start-up*"

- What digital apps/sites/services have changed your working experience for good? [Google Docs](#). *I think they have a real shot at beating [Microsoft Office](#).*

- Apart from Spock, which recent digital apps/sites/services would you bet on? *My bet would be on [kayak.com](#) and [thefind.com](#) - both are search sites that compile data and present it in a useful manner for users. One is travel related (kayak) the other is product related (thefind)*

- Digital entrepreneurs you admire? *I used to work at Microsoft and still have a lot of respect for what [Bill Gates](#) did for computing and his passion to make his vision come true.*

For more info, check out Jay's presentation on Web2.0 expo on intrudersTV [here](#)

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