



TECH STAR



Matt Tucker: Finding Success in Communication

[By Akbar Ali]

Conventional wisdom in the 21st century has only one answer to the perennial question: what is the key to universal success? Answer? Communication, of course. Enter Jive Software, a technology company dedicated to the ideas of collaboration, communication, and staying connected in an increasingly fragmented and long-distance global workplace. Co-founded by current Chief Technology Officer Matt Tucker in 2001, the Portland-based company has grown over the last six years from a fledgling upstart into a multi-million dollar Web 2.0 industry leader centered on the notion that social productivity is the cornerstone of business communication.

Jive describes itself as having been born out of a “painful” necessity: “it’s much easier to find people, updates, and answers on the internet than it is inside a company.” Making up for these widespread shortcomings has translated to big-time success for Jive and its founders, who push the idea of social productivity as not only product, but as strategy.

Despite having achieved so much before the age of 30, Tucker isn’t resting on his laurels just yet: he is dedicated to the notion that Jive products can be custom-suited for every client by emphasizing the importance of performance and scalability. Tucker’s goal is to ensure that no matter the size of your company or your ambitions, you can ensure your success through cutting-edge “social productivity.”

Tucker completed his formal education at the University of Iowa, where he received his bachelor’s of science degree in computer science. One of his classmates at college, Bill Lynch (Jive’s vice president of technology), who also studied computer science at Iowa, would go on to co-found Jive Software with Tucker in 2001.

In many ways, Jive Software is an extension of the techie duo’s visionary aspirations which first formed while they were college students. “The company grew out of Open Source work that we started while in college

at the University of Iowa,” he recounts.

Tucker also describes his techie college experience as being one that allowed for many opportunities for him to learn and innovate as an aspiring tech guru while still having time to partake in the traditional jocular college festivities.

“The Iowa computer science department was small enough that there were lots of ways for me to get involved, like being president of the ACM chapter and being the Nerd King in the homecoming parade. But I spent the majority of my spare time involved with side programming projects, which eventually evolved into Jive Software.”

He graduated just as the dot-com boom of the late nineties was leveling off and headed to San Francisco to work briefly with a tech company specializing in “workplace giving” called 4charity. It wasn’t long, however, before he realized that his professional ambitions lay elsewhere.

He reveals that, “Starting our own company was something Bill and I wanted very badly, and we pursued it in earnest in early 2001. With a measly \$70 investment intended for business cards, we managed to begin the business, and we have kept it profitable since day one.”

Though they were off to a promising start, thanks in large part to their technology expertise, there were other skills which Tucker and Lynch had to pick up (and quickly) in order to ensure the longevity of their dream. Like most competitive industries, the technology business is a temperamental and unpredictable realm — it can spot a bad idea long before it ever has a chance to come to fruition, snuffing it (and the founder’s dreams) in an instant.

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Yoga and running fill up my non-work time.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. I’m sure you meant to ask what music I’m currently streaming from the Internet? Lots of Sigur Ros and Paul Van Dyk lately.

Q. What was the last magazine you read?

A. I read blogs and other online content much more than magazines these days, but I do love the *New Yorker*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Battlestar Galatica*

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. *Donkeys.*



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Developing the company from its early stages into its present state has been a savory challenge which Tucker describes as one of his most memorable professional experiences.

“Growing our company from two young entrepreneurs to one with more than 80 employees has been an amazing process. I’ve learned so many unexpected lessons along the way (e.g., the pros and cons of various fluorescent lighting when doing an office build-out). Seeing our software used by millions of people around the web and the world has to be the single most gratifying part.”

Admittedly, it took a good bit of ingenuity and good old-fashioned bootstrapping by Tucker and Lynch to navigate the market and prove themselves against giants like Microsoft. But their efforts have paid off — and now: 15% of current Fortune 500 companies are Jive Software clients, with Sun Microsystems being their first major “land” and others from a wide variety of industries, including

Amazon, HBO, Nintendo, General Motors, and Intel, signing up for their services. Today, their client list includes more than 2,000 customers, both big and small, who swear by the power of Jive Software.

Tucker notes the influence of several colleagues throughout his early career, though he affirms that the greatest teachers he has had are his current colleagues at Jive.

“I work with so many amazing people at Jive Software that have taught me, and continue to teach me, an enormous amount. In college, I was an intern at Sun Microsystems on the Java Swing team. That experience was my first exposure to a smart, well-organized engineering team. I met Georges Saab at Sun, who recruited me to 4charity.com, and he has remained a friend and someone I turn to for advice on things like running effective engineering teams.”

Success in technology is a rare feat, though Tucker encourages aspiring techies to approach their dreams with a sense of

adventure and collaboration, and of course, not forgetting to have fun along the way.

“Choose the riskier path rather than the safer route. Even more importantly, surround yourself with people who you want to work with and who will challenge you — you’ll have more fun and have a better chance at success that way. Also, if you have an office keg of beer in the break room, don’t make the beer type a democratic decision because you could end up with a strong ale that’s too bitter for anyone to tolerate.”

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www.jivesoftware.com

Matt’s Blog
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